

**THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF WORLD CULTURE**

Post Box No. 402, 6, B.P. Wadia Road, Basavanagudi,  
Bangalore - 560 004. Telephone : 6678581

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**INVOCATION TO THE YET-UNRISEN SUN**

*by*  
**Shraddhavan**

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## FOREWORD

Shraddhavan received her Sanskrit name from the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in June 1972. After graduating in English Language and Literature at the Bristol University in England, she had travelled extensively in Europe, Asia and Australia before choosing to join the Auroville International Project in 1970. She is in charge of "Savitri Bhavan", a centre focussing on Sri Aurobindo studies.

2. It was our good fortune that Shraddhavan delivered the Prof. N.A. Nikam Memorial Lecture under the auspices of our Institute on 2 November 1999, choosing as her theme Sri Aurobindo's revelatory epic "Savitri". She has highlighted how Sri Aurobindo has brought out that the story of Savitri as recited in the Mahabharata is not a mere legend, and has a profound symbolic content of perennial interest and value. One is reminded of the ancient parable where a father told his sons before his death to look for the treasures he had hidden in his farm land. The sons expectantly dug the land thoroughly and were disappointed that they could find no gold in the shape of coins. Very soon, however, they found that their digging had resulted in a bumper crop, even more precious than the precious metal! In like manner, if we dig deep into the Savitri legend, we are sure to get an insight into the "yet-unrisen sun" as prophesied by Sri Aurobindo and as so eloquently brought out by Shraddhavan in her speech with commendable lyrical charm.

3. We are happy to be able to issue the text of Shraddhavan's inspiring lecture as a "Transaction" of the Institute, with a view to securing wider dissemination among interested aspirants.

Bangalore  
3 January 2000

K.R. Ramachandran  
President, IWC

**INVOCATION TO THE YET-UNRISEN SUN**  
**SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI –**  
**KEYNOTE FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM**

Professor N.A. Nikam Memorial Lecture  
at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore  
on Tuesday November 2, 1999

**by Shraddhavan**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour for me to be asked to speak to you this evening, at such a worthy institution, and in memory of such a distinguished figure as Professor Nikam. I know that far more eminent speakers than myself have given this memorial lecture in the past, such as Professor Manoj Das, Dr. Mangesh V. Nadkarni, and Sraddhalu Ranade, and I cannot pretend to be worthy to follow in their footsteps - so perhaps I should say a few words about my background, to justify my presence here before you this evening.

As you mentioned, Sir, I studied English Language and Literature. But some time after that, feeling very deeply discouraged at the state of the world and full of longing that there should be real social change, apparently "by chance" ... these things seem to happen by chance, but it was not at all by chance ... one Sunday afternoon in April 1969 I came to know the name and something of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. I was in London at the time. And what I heard that afternoon seemed to me to open a door, so that I didn't have to be a rebel any more, I didn't anymore have to run around the world wondering what on earth to do about all the dreadful things that I saw. I felt that a path had opened up for me, and that if I would follow it faithfully I would be enabled to do everything possible towards the fulfillment of my aims. And again, apparently "by chance", circumstances brought me to Auroville, which was in its very beginning stages in those days. As you know, Auroville was founded by the Mother in February 1968, so when I came there in November 1970 it was still quite a pioneering venture, depending very much on the Presence and Guidance of the Mother. And she had founded that international township project as a place where people from all cultures and backgrounds who wished for a really radical change in the world, could come to work for that change, according to the ideals and vision of Sri Aurobindo. The Mother gave me work in education, and that is the field I have been involved in ever since. Recently our project of Savitri Bhavan has come up, with the aspiration that there should be in Auroville a place that really breathes the atmosphere of Savitri ... which, as I hope to show this evening, is far more than just the title of a book.

The title chosen for tonight's talk refers to the new millennium. We are now less than two months away from a date that seems to carry so much significance, such a load of both hopes and anxieties : January 1st, 2000 - the beginning of a new period of one thousand years. Speaking personally, I can say that I have had a sense of anticipation about this day from my very childhood. I have a clear remembrance of myself, at the age of about 8 or 9, realising that this significant date lay in the foreseeable future, and calculating how old I would be when it came and wondering whether I would live to see it, and what the world would look like in the year 2000. Surely some of you must also have experienced that sense of anticipation.

Of course this date is purely conventional. If we were using another calendar, starting from another historical point, we would not be approaching the year 2000 at all, but the year 1480, or 5653, for example. As it is, we are supposed to be counting from the birth of Christ

- an event now believed to have happened 6 or 7 years earlier or later. So this date is really arbitrary. But our teacher the Mother has told us that although these things may be conventional, when a convention is shared by a large enough number of people it does have real power and significance - for the real significances are always psychological. They have far more to do with inner realities than with mere material "facts". So the fact that a very large proportion of the world population is looking forward to the start of a new millennium, a new thousand- year period in the history of mankind, creates the climate and possibility for real change.

And however we look at it - whether our nature and circumstances lead us to look forward to this turning-point, and all it brings, with hope or with deep concern... most probably a mixture of the two... any sensitive thinking person looking at the present state of the world cannot help but feel the need for a very great change. Unless there is really radical change, it does not seem as if we can look forward to another 1000 years of existence for the human race, or even the earth. This perception has been growing among informed people, and gradually it is becoming more and more clear that this change will have to be, essentially, primarily, a psychological one. All the other changes - the social, political, economic and environmental changes the world needs so urgently for every human being to have the possibility to live a truly human life - are no longer dependent on technological change, or the discovery of new material resources. The resources, the technologies are there to ensure a poverty-free life for everyone on this planet - but it seems as if we are all locked into old outdated patterns of attitude and behavior which go on perpetuating old problems, or replicating them even if temporary remedies get implemented. And yet the change required in human psychology seems so radical, so profound and widespread, that we have difficulty in believing that it is possible. How could a change of such magnitude come about? What is going to help us - all of us human beings - to change all the old habits of perception, of thought, of behavior, that keep the world going the way it is going?

In *Savitri Sri* Aurobindo gives us his prophecy. In fact there are several prophetic passages in different contexts, but I would like to read out to you just one of them. It occurs on page 55.

*Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.  
When darkness deepens strangling the earth's breast  
And Man's corporeal mind is the only lamp,  
As a thief's in the night shall be the covert tread  
Of one who steps unseen into his house.  
A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,  
A Power into mind's inner chamber steal,  
A charm and sweetness open life's closed doors  
And beauty conquer the resisting world,  
The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,  
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss  
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.  
That charm, that sweetness, that beauty that have the power to  
overcome all the resistances of our Nature, so that everything can  
suddenly change, is, I believe, the power of Savitri.*

How can I say such a thing ? Isn't Savitri just a legendary figure, or a fictional character ? Let me read what Sri Aurobindo himself has written in his "Author's Note" to his poem.

*"The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But the legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle..."*

I am sure all of you must be familiar with the traditional legend. But as Sri Aurobindo points out here, it has a symbolic content, and that is what he is most concerned to bring out in his own version. You know perhaps that one of the many fields on which Sri Aurobindo has cast new light, is that of Vedic studies. He has gone against all the trends of European-inspired scholarship and criticism, to say that the Vedas are not the naturalistic hymns of an animistic worshipping people, but really the expression of a profound esoteric psychological knowledge. That knowledge was expressed in a way that would have an outward meaning for people who were not yet ready to grasp the inner significance: there is always an inner and an outer significance. So too the tale of Savitri, that charming and even moving legend, also has a deep symbolic meaning.

*"Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance,"*

Satyavan : the name means 'One who possesses Truth' - but he has descended, he is in the grip, the control of all the forces of this world of death and ignorance.

*"Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save,"*

But, says Sri Aurobindo:

*"Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life"*

So I think I'm not unjustified in saying that there is a being, a force, whom we can name Savitri. And by looking a little bit at her name, and at what Sri Aurobindo says about her in the poem, I'd like to bring out something about the qualities of that being, and how she can help us to change.

My attention was attracted recently to a few lines in Book Four, Canto 2, which refer to Savitri's name. They come at the point in the story where Sri Aurobindo is telling how, after her father Aswapati has done a tremendous *tapasya*, as a result Savitri has been born and she is growing up in his kingdom. And there only her immediate circle, the very few people in the palace know about her:

*Earth nursed unconscious still the inhabiting flame.*

Savitri has come as an emanation of the Supreme Mother. She is there like a flame, inhabiting the heart of the earth, bringing with her all kinds of wonderful qualities, but nobody knows about her yet. Nevertheless:

*A growing sense of something new and rare  
and beautiful stole across the heart of Time.  
Then a faint whisper of her touched the soil,  
The eye of the great world discovered her  
And wonder lifted up its bardic voice.*

People began to spread her name abroad. And then come these three lines :

*A key to a Light still kept in being's cave  
The sun-word of an ancient mystery's sense  
Her name ran murmuring on the lips of men.*

These lines refer to the symbolic sense of Savitri's name. The name 'Savitri' in itself is a *mantra*, a key to a light that is still kept secret in the dark cave of being, waiting for its hour to emerge. Sri Aurobindo refers to Savitri's name as "sun-word", for Savitri is "the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun..." the power of inspired and creative speech which can bring the illumination of the supreme Truth. This sun-word belongs to or carries the meaning of "an ancient mystery", a body of ancient esoteric knowledge that is only accessible to initiates.

As I mentioned a moment ago, in his writings about the Vedas, Sri Aurobindo has shown how the images in those ancient hymns and slokas always had a dual significance : an outer meaning that was accessible to the surface understanding, and an inner, esoteric and psychological sense which revealed itself to the vision of an inner knowledge and experience. In this symbology the Sun represents the full light of Divine Consciousness.

There is a legend which appears not only in the Vedas but in several other ancient traditions, about the wonderful herds, the golden cattle belonging to the Sun-God, being stolen by the powers of darkness, dragged backwards and hidden in a dark cave. In the Vedic version it is very clear that these cattle, these cows are rays of light, of knowledge, of divine consciousness. The Sun is the full divine consciousness and the rays, his cows, are his wealth, his powers. If these get swallowed up in darkness, then darkness covers the whole earth - there is no light. Somehow we have to get back that light of the Sun, that divine knowledge. The ancient rishis had the concept of the ever-returning dawn : again and again the Dawn-goddess brings back some of that light, one dawn following another, each dawn not just the beginning of a new earthly day, but the advent of some new light of knowledge and power. And Savitri's name is a key to a Light, a power of the Sun, the Divine Consciousness, that is still hidden in the dark cave of existence, which has yet to emerge and be revealed.

In Sanskrit the Sun has many names: Surya, Ravi, Pushan, Dinakara, etc. And each of them is connected with a particular aspect of function of the Sun, and often with a particular time of the day. Savitar, from whom Savitri gains her name, is the Sun that has not yet risen above the horizon, and it derives from a root syllable that implies the function of setting things in motion, creating, producing anew, or impelling. Since Vedic times Savitar has been invoked each morning before sunrise by countless worshippers, with the Gayatri *mantra*, attributed to rishi Vishwamitra :

*Tat savitur varenyam  
bhargo devasya dhimahi  
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

*Let us meditate on that most excellent  
light of the divine Sun,  
that it may illumine our minds.*

Sri Aurobindo has given his own Gayatri mantra :

*Tat savitur varam rupam  
jyotih parasya dhimahi  
yannah satyena dipayet.*

*Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri, on the Light of the*

Supreme,

*Which shall illumine us with the truth.*

In a recent talk at Savitri Bhavan, R. Y. Deshpande pointed out:

*"Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri mantra invokes the Divine light into all the parts and planes of our being. That is how Sri Aurobindo defines Gayatri - as the Word of the Supreme, coming and descending and establishing itself in us, in all the parts of our being.*

*This Gayatri mantra is slightly different from the traditional one of Vishwamitra, where the invocation is for the illumination of our intuition, of our perception, of our understanding of things. In Sri Aurobindo's mantra, the emphasis is on the auspicious form - varam rupam. The entire emphasis in Sri Aurobindo's yoga is to deal with form rather than with intuition, however high. In Sri Aurobindo's version, it is not just our minds which are going to be illumined, it is our whole being.*

*Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri mantra consists of 3 times 8 syllables - 24 syllables in all, whereas the original Gayatri mantra of Viswamitra has only 23. I feel this is pretty significant, that this fulfilment of one more completing symbol has been added by Sri Aurobindo. In this sense a new realm of light is opened out in Sri Aurobindo's Gayatri.'*

Sri Aurobindo's relation to the wisdom of the Vedic seers can be likened to a sculptor who starts to work on a block of stone, chipping away until finally a beautiful figure stands there. When the figure is complete, admiring bystanders ask "How did you know she was inside?" "Because I saw her there", he replies.

Sri Aurobindo has re-enunciated, re-expressed an eternal wisdom, bringing to light concepts that could be said to have been latent in the ancient spiritual knowledge of India. I would like to draw attention to two of these in particular.

First, the new spiritual significance he has given to the concept of evolution. The idea of the recurring dawns and the new light and the new knowledge and the ongoing play of the divine consciousness in the world, has always been there in India. It has been repeated over and over and over again that "All this is a habitation for the Lord". This is the great knowledge, the great light that India has to share with the world. But in the past there has perhaps been more emphasis on the idea that the Lord is playing here - the idea of *maya*, of *lila*. Sri Aurobindo has suggested that this play, this Lila, has a purpose, a direction; that our inner and outer evolution represents the unfolding in time of ever-new possibilities of consciousness, of action, of energy. And that is a very positive message for us today : it allows us to look forward to the future with the feeling that the story is not yet finished, the unfolding is still going on; that all these new developments which are often rather frightening to us may in fact be the unfolding of new possibilities - of experience, of learning, and ultimately of expression. The succession of dawns told of by the Rishi is now seen to be leading towards the fulfilment of a divine purpose : the full emergence and self-rediscovery of the Divine out of what seems to be its very opposite: unconscious Matter. Evolution is not complete, and all the imperfections we see in the world all around us are there because the drama is not yet over, we are still in a transitional stage.

The second aspect I would like to emphasise is the importance Sri Aurobindo has given to the Divine Mother, in his retelling of this ancient legend. In the traditional tale, when Aswapati performed his *tapasya*, his prayer was directed to Brahma. Moreover, in most languages, the Sun is masculine; and the Vedic Savitar is the name of a Sun-god. But in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, the supreme being whom King Aswapati contacts at the culmination of

all his long *tapasya* is the supreme Divine Mother. Sri Aurobindo's wonderful line "*The sun from whom we kindle all our suns*" refers to the Supreme Divine Mother; the Ishwari, who is an equal power with the Lord. She is his expressive force, his manifesting force, but she not inferior, she is an equal power with the Lord, she is also the Supreme. And it is she who accepts to incarnate as Savitri, in answer to Aswapati's prayer voicing all the longings of the earth, to urge the earth-evolution forward towards its destined and intended fulfilment : the total manifestation of the Divine in what seems to be just the opposite of Him ... all the darkness and unconsciousness which seems to be just the opposite of everything that we could imagine as Divine. He has chosen, for his own reasons, to incarnate in the form of unconscious matter; and then out of that, starting from that base, to evolve, to flower, maybe in forms that would not have been possible in any other way. And he does that, through the action of the Supreme Divine Mother. It is she, who in response to Aswapati's prayer, accepts to incarnate as a human woman upon earth, as Savitri.

I would like to read to you one of the many beautiful passages where Sri Aurobindo evokes the presence of the Supreme Mother.

*At the head she stands of birth and toil and fate,  
In their slow rounds the cycles turn to her call;  
Alone her hands can change Time's dragon base.  
She is the Force, the inevitable Word,  
The magnet of our difficult ascent,  
The Sun from which we kindle all our suns,  
The Light that leans from the unrealized Vasts,  
The joy that beckons from the impossible,  
The Might of all that never yet came down.  
All Nature dumbly calls to her alone To heal with her feet the aching throb  
of life And break the seals on the dim soul of man And kindle her fire in the  
closed heart of things.  
All here shall be one day her sweetness' home,  
All contraries prepare her harmony;  
Towards her our knowledge climbs, our passion gropes;  
In her miraculous rapture we shall dwell,  
Her clasp shall turn to ecstasy our pain.  
Our self shall be one self with all through her.  
In her confirmed because transformed in her,  
Our life shall find in its fulfilled response  
Above, the boundless hushed beatitudes,  
Below, the wonder of the embrace divine. (p. 314-15)*

As you all know, the tale of Savitri culminates in a debate with Yama, the Lord of Death, that regulator of the cosmos, the force that keeps everything in its place according to the natural Law, the inevitable forces of Karma and Dharma. Through her capacity of inspired speech - remember that Sri Aurobindo characterises Savitri as the goddess of inspired speech ~ she is able to win from him the return to life of her young husband Satyavan - who, Sri Aurobindo tells us, represents the Soul of Man, "*carrying the divine truth of being within itself, but descended into the grip of death and ignorance*" This applies to all of us - each of us carries within us the divine truth of being, but here we all are in the grip of death and ignorance, and we need the power of Savitri, the incarnation of the Divine Mother, to help and save us, to bring us light.



In Sri Aurobindo's version, through Savitri's truth-knowledge and power of truth-speaking, this regulatory power of Death changes his aspect completely. At the beginning it is Yama who takes Satyavan's life away and draws his soul out of his body; but as the dialogue between them goes on, it is as if Savitri is revealing to Death himself ever higher levels of his being - so that finally this regulating power of Death is revealed as an aspect of the Supreme Lord. And in that supreme form he offers Savitri the eternal spiritual peace of total immersion and extinction in Brahman, for herself and for Satyavan.

Let us see what he says, and how she responds:

*“Choose, spirit, thy supreme choice not given again;  
For now from my highest being looks at thee  
The nameless formless peace where all things rest.  
In a happy vast sublime cessation know, - An immense extinction in eternity,  
A point that disappears in the infinite, - Felicity of the extinguished flame,  
Last sinking of a wave in a boundless sea,  
End of the trouble of thy wandering thoughts,  
Close of the journeying of thy pilgrim soul..”*

I think this sounds irresistible. If we were offered such peace, wouldn't we rush to accept it? But Savitri, who so far has not asked for anything, who has only aspired for the return to life of Satyavan, now asks for four boons. What are they? First of all she asks for that peace, that calm, *"For the magnificent soul of man on earth"*.

*Thy peace, O Lord, a boon within to keep  
Amid the roar and ruin of wild Time  
For the magnificent soul of man on earth.  
Thy claim, O Lord, that bears thy hands of joy.*

Secondly she asks for:

*Thy oneness, Lord, in many approaching hearts,  
My sweet infinity of thy numberless souls.*

We may know intellectually that we are connected with everyone else and to all the rest of the universe - but we don't usually experience things that way. If we could only experience that oneness, surely our whole life and attitude and behavior would change completely.

The third boon she asks for is energy, dynamism :

*Thy energy, Lord, to seize on woman and man,  
To take all things and creatures in their grief  
And gather them into a mother's arms.*

And last of all she asks:

*Thy embrace which rends the living knot of pain,  
Thy joy, O Lord, in which all creatures breathe,  
Thy magic flowing waters of deep love,  
Thy sweetness give to me for earth and men."*

And the response is :

*“O beautiful body of the incarnate Word,  
Thy thoughts are mine, I have spoken with thy voice.*

*My will is thine, what thou hast chosen I choose;  
AH thou hast asked I give to earth and men. (p. 696-98)*

Those of us who are devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother believe that as a result of their efforts and *tapasya*, these boons have in fact been granted "*for earth and men*". The seed of these wonderful things has been planted '*in human time*'. And now the future will toil to express it. He says in one place :

*This was a seed cast into endless Time.  
A Word is spoken or a Light is shown,  
A moment sees, the ages toil to express, (p. 315)*

Things aren't done in a flash, but the change will surely come. Like the glory of the Symbol Dawn described in the first canto of *Savitri*, the seed of these wonderful boons has been planted in the hours of human time, and it is sure to grow into a marvellous blossom.

But how soon this new Light, this yet-unrisen Sun, can emerge fully, to fulfill our hopes for a brighter future - a future bright beyond even our rosier imaginings, and bright for all mankind and the whole earth - does depend, partly at least, on us human individuals. If we really want to collaborate, to help it to come as soon as possible, one way of doing so, is to invoke the new Light by calling the presence and power of Savitri.

Reading *Savitri*, immersing ourselves again in the atmosphere of this mantric poem, which is also the atmosphere of "*the calm delight that weds one soul to all*", the dynamic energy and the supreme sweetness of Savitri, the human incarnation of the Supreme Divine Mother, is one very effective, very powerful way of calling into ourselves and into the world that Sun, that new and utterly convincing Truth, which is still just below the horizon preparing to rise and illumine us all with its glorious Light, its Energy, its overwhelming Delight and Sweetness.