

## A TRANSCENDENTAL JOURNEY OF ASWAPATHY AND SAVITRI IN AUROBINDO'S *SAVITRI* : A STUDY

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### **Abstract:**

*Man grows beyond the identity of physical and social being when his inclinations turn inwards in order to question the origin of his existence. Eventually, human body is believed and sometimes experienced to be a replica and a microcosm of the entire Universe which is a macrocosm. He breaks the shackles of the ruling factors of Time, Fate and Death when his soul experiences a transcendental journey that tastes a unique level of bliss and touches the state of ecstasy. The paper attempts to show Sri Aurobindo's revelation of the soul journey of Aswapathy and Savitri from the epic Savitri who surpass and challenge the ruling factors by redefining the definition of death. The characters expand the human limitations by exercising on their spiritual faculties which hint us that it is time for us to awaken, surcharge and practice spiritual ascendance. It is a guide to the spiritual seekers who are dwelling in a distasteful experience of surviving in the material world.*

**Key Words:** Transcendental, Bliss, Soul Journey, Ecstasy, Spiritual Faculty, Fate.

All is too little that the world can give:  
Its power and knowledge are gifts of Time  
And cannot fill the spirit's sacred thirst. (Ghose 305, 3.1.1-3)

Man is a colossus of knowledge and a relentless researcher of every possible thing that crosses his mind. But by the end of the day, he is drowned by some unresolved issues that question the origin of his very existence in the world. He begins to contemplate the purpose and meaning of his life. In this process, he realises that there are certain questions that cannot be answered by the areas of knowledge that rule the material world. There comes a phase in everybody's life when one takes a pause to reflect on the progress of one's life by stretching the thoughts beyond the frames of Matter but unfortunately, they are pushed into the box of mystery. To fetch the answers for the origin of soul, one needs to travel inwards by internalising one's senses that are usually spilled outwards. There begins the transcendental journey of the soul. In this context, we observe that Sri Aurobindo developed the epic *Savitri* which reveals the transcendental journey of the King Aswapathy and his daughter Savitri to the inner regions of their soul eventually reaching the higher regions of the universe.

If we analyse the Book Three of *Savitri*, *The Book of the Divine Mother*, we perceive that it explores the transcendental journey of Aswapathy who performs rigorous meditation in order to have progeny. In this process, he reaches to the heights of creation which gifts him enlightenment and unexplainable bliss of a unique level. His experience hints us that a human being possesses the faculty of spiritual consciousness that has all the answers of life, provided we realise its hidden potential and make an endeavor to kindle the spiritual energy. Our soul is in the state of slumber but it is awakened gradually when we withdraw our senses from the external world that dwells in chaos and is enveloped by dust and sin.

To release himself from the pangs of joy and sorrow, Aswapathy ascends to the higher regions to conquer the eternal bliss far from the material world which is dwelling in the knowledge of falsehood. It is not projected towards the Reality. He observes that it is a perfect deception of beauty. As he reaches above,

he realises the purpose of his birth and experiences the sense of universal oneness with the creation. He realises that his soul is but a split form of the very fountain source i.e. God. Aswapathy is reminded of the fact that man forgets the purpose and power of his soul when it descends to the earth, due to the powerful impact of the material world and its gush of generated emotions. "He has forgotten why he has come and whence; / ... His mass is buried in the animal fire." (Ghose 337, 3.4.106-109)

While travelling to the higher regions, Aswapathy well perceives the fact that the material world below is a vanity fair and that it is full of misery and is in utter darkness which needs the presence of God who is in the form of disguise. He experiences that rising above the physical frame of the body and its senses invites transcendental journey which is nothing but finding the path way to real home.

In an abysmal lapse of all things built  
Transcending every perishable support  
And joining at last its mighty origin,  
The separate self must melt or be reborn  
Into a Truth beyond the mind's appeal. (Ghose 307, 3.1.82-86)

Aswapathy realises that to join the True self, one must merge in the God by dissolving oneself and his identity of self. It is then one can experience that man is only a split form of the God Himself who is our source of origin. It reminds us of the poem of Sant Kabir.

Prem gali ati sankari, tamein do na samai  
Jab main tha tab hari nahi, ab hari mai naahi

The street of love is very narrow, two can't pass through it at the same time. When I was, there was no God (hari), now there is God but I am not. (Dabas)

The path of transcendence is challenging and Aswapathy soars higher and higher in order to attain self-realisation and to spread the awareness of awakening to the entire mankind. He meets the Divine Mother and requests her come down to the earth to enlighten the mankind for which she refuses as it is not yet ready to bear the power of God. "O Son of Strength who climbest creation's peaks, / ... What thou has won is thine, do not ask for more." (Ghose 335, 3.4.37-40)

However, the Mother grants him a boon that a great soul will be born as her messenger in the form of his daughter who will redefine the definition of human limitations and conquers the powers of Fate and Death. As he goes higher, he enters the region of Wisdom where the power of mind multiplies to a great extent. Aswapathy's transcendental journey is perceived to be divided in three levels. First, it is his desire to understand the purpose of his birth, secondly, to conquer the levels and all the planes of consciousness in the universe. Thirdly, it is to spread the awareness of awakening and bliss of its achievement in the entire mankind living on the earth. At this point of time, he realises that the purpose of his transcendental journey grows beyond the individual desire. His soul spreads like a sea and all sorts of pain and sufferings transform into a huge bundle of joy.

A last and mightiest transformation came.  
His soul was all in front like a great sea  
Flooding the mind and body with its waves;  
His being, spread to embrace the universe,  
United the within and without  
To make of life a cosmic harmony  
An empire of the immanent Divine. (Ghose 318, 3.3.54-60)

Here, we have to observe that the rule of feelings and emotions are limited to the region of material world alone where we live and desire to continue living due to the ignorance and greed that cloud our wisdom which tries to hint that the earth is not our true home. Aswapathy's journey can be a universal experience provided we are inclined towards spiritual development. He witnesses various stages and levels of creation that are attuned to one common string of Truth i.e. God. "Apart at peace above creation's

stir, / Immersed in the eternal altitudes... / Companioned only by the all seeing One.” (Pandit 128)

Aswapathy experiences the bliss of unity but he requests the Divine Mother to explain why the earth is sinking in sorrow and the reason behind man's unconquerable feelings. Soon his soul is split into two so that he can see the difference between the world below and the world above. “Two beings he was, one wide and one free above, / One struggling, bound, intense, its portion here. / A tie between them still could bridge two worlds...” (Ghose 331, 3.3.524-526)

It is enthralling to observe that the condition of Aswapathy reminds us of the story from *Swetaswatara Upanishad* where two birds symbolically represent *Jeevatma* and *Paramatma*. The bird sitting on the higher branch of the tree is free from all sorts of desires and is not identified with any object. On the other hand, the bird sitting on the lower branch craves for fruits, comforts and its greed increases with every passing day. This story reminds us of the fact that our inner soul is inherently free from any sort of desire and craving. The external senses of our body are our true enemies which grip us to stumble and push us towards the downfall. We perceive that the soul tends to split into two because it gets contaminated while descending to the material world. Our task is to merge them into one which then undergoes beautiful metamorphoses and attains Supramental level of consciousness. Aurobindo suggests that every human being should aim at exercising on inner consciousness.

As Aswapathy attains the realisation, he goes higher and finds himself in the region of vastness and light where the elements of Time and Darkness are submerged in its vastness. It is vast and blissful. The feelings of bliss, harmony, happiness which were incomplete on the earth seem to take their complete evolution in this region. He tastes a unique height of spiritual ecstasy which is static and seems to be eternal. He tastes the glory of Eternal Truth and feels free from all the burdens of the world below. His soul is one and is merged with the Supreme Being.

...Thrilled with the hidden Transcendent's joy and peace,

There is no more division's endless scroll;

...there was no cleavage between soul and soul,

There was no barrier between world and God. (Ghose 319, 3.3.71-75)

Aswapathy's journey ends in a note of wonderful adventure and he is returned back to the earth with a different level of joy as he attained the knowledge of the purpose of his life. He is glowing with spiritual wisdom. Aswapathy's return to the earth is a message that we are on the right platform to begin our spiritual journey. Sri Aurobindo is among those Saints who never encouraged the concept of renunciation from the physical world. The purpose of the epic *Savitri* is to mainly show that it is time for us to work on spiritual growth, to sharpen it and strengthen it while leading our life of duties. “Sri Aurobindo imparts a contemporary urgency to Aswapathy's spiritual quest, ordeal and discovery by identifying him as modern man in search of the soul. Ours is the world at the hour before earth awakes, still conditioned by mental stupor and spiritual recalcitrance that resist the onset of the pure light.” (Naik 66)

The Book Seven, *The Book of the Yoga* describes the journey of Savitri who follows the God of Death, i.e. Yama to the higher regions of the universe in order to save the life of her husband Satyavan from the shackles of death. On the way to the higher regions, she too experiences the split forms of her soul like how her father Aswapathy did. It was a moment of realisation for Savitri that the world is in dire need for the golden touch of God. She gets to meet the Goddess Madonna who is sinking in sorrow. When asked, she reveals her identity as a part of Savitri's personality itself. She is a symbolic representation of our own shade called 'sorrow'. Savitri realises that a human being is nothing but a unique mix of joy, sorrow, ego and desire which clasps his soul between the material world and the transcendental world and keeps it hidden and non-existent until we awaken our consciousness.

After going ahead, Savitri further hears some Voices that try to stop her and convince her that it is the highest region where she arrived and that there has no more soul - journey to undergo. However, she outgrows them and goes higher to touch the summits of the creation. These Voices represent our own

voices of distraction that try to nip our spiritual growth. She is strong willed and focused.

But I must pass leaving the ended search,  
Truth's rounded outcome firm, immutable,  
And this harmonic building of world fact,  
This ordered knowledge of apparent things.

Here I can stay not, for I seek my soul. (Pandit 637)

The canto two, *The Parable of Search for the Soul* reminds us of the journey from the book *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan where the pilgrim struggles to overcome all the hindrances. The Mother Goddess reminds Savitri of her purpose and gives her unfailing strength and unconquerable will. "Remember why thou camest. Find out thy soul; seek God's meaning in thy depths. Change mortal nature into the divine, open God's door and enter into communion with Him..." (Pandit 442)

Perhaps the above lines say it all. It reflects the universal impact. It is an apt piece of advice for anybody who is inclined towards spiritual growth. Although it is observed that the characters Aswapathy and Savitri are celestial, extracted from the epic *Mahabharata*, it is not the quality that we are devoid of or do not possess. We are all emerged from the same source of Divine Being just as how all the rays of Sun belong to the Sun and possess the same amount of energy. The spiritual transformation in Savitri that can alter the working force of time and fate is something that intrigued Aurobindo the most and he kept expanding the transcendental journey of them with every detail he got from the revelations of God. The journey is a reflection of the fact that the faculties of knowledge, intellect and even religion are narrowed down to one common point called spiritual practice that takes us to the God who dwells above all.

The canto five, *The Finding of the Soul* describes her ascent and destination to the Heaven. She attains the level of complete realisation and bliss. If we observe further, the last cantos of the epic hint us that our body is only a tool of spiritual growth which acts as a shelter for soul and that the earth is only a platform to reach the Heaven. It reflects the need of developing the sense of detachment in order to attain the sense of attachment with the God.

This is the appearance in the mortal front;  
Our greater truth of being lies behind:  
But only when we break through Matter's wall  
In that spiritual vastness can we stand  
Where we can live the masters of the world,  
And mind is only a means and body a tool. (Pandit 183)

The above lines are perhaps one of the most important ones from the canto. Having realised the true purpose of life, Aswapathy undergoes the entire journey. The purpose is not ceased at the individual victory, but it grows to be a desire for universal victory. Aurobindo, one of the greatest Seer poets gifted us the revelation of the journey which redirects our lives for a better purpose. The epic also reminds of Rabindranath Tagore's works *Gitanjali*, *Fruit Gathering* and *Crossing* that highlight the need of spiritual quest and undying thirst to meet the God. It is apt to the present time where the world is taking a gradual turn towards yoga and meditation which is nothing but promoting our soul to the higher world.

In the world of growing scientific research, the epic *Savitri* seems to be no lesser than the adventure of Alice from the book *Alice in the Wonderland* by Lewis Carol. Nevertheless, it is a whiff of fresh air in the busy world full of chaos, rush and run. Aurobindo taps us with the reminder bell that we are capable of much higher achievement in life and the world we live in is a bubble which is susceptible to dissolution at any spur of moment.

It is essential to withdraw our senses that are projected outwards in order to save ourselves from the doom of death which enters without knocking. The transcendental journey of Aswapathy and Savitri rules out the fear of death who is always an unwelcomed guest. Their journey is a mirror of our own capabilities and shows that the elements like death and fate can be altered like how Savitri alters for Satyavan, if we can



awaken our soul and undergo the transcendental journey very much by living on the earth. We perceive that spiritual journey of soul gives us an experience where we need not undergo the pain of sudden death which shakes the soul while it is in its state of slumber.

Reading such piece of timeless literature enhances the purpose of our life. The journey of Aswapathy and Savitri may not necessarily give us a sense of familiarity but they undoubtedly offer us an exercise of self-analysis and progress further taking us to the path of spiritual growth. "If Aswapathy is aspiration, Savitri is both the Response and the resulting Transformation at once the individual transformation of an elected person and the promise of the total transformation of earth and earth nature." (Iyengar 200)

The questions and quest of Aswapathy are something everybody experiences during the battle with our own inferior self that constantly pulls us down to the dig mire of greed and ego. At some or the other point of time, we undergo the phase of restlessness and suffocation to survive in the material world. We begin to turn towards God and eventually transcend ourselves from the material world. Aswapathy is the voice of every man's feelings and Savitri is the answer who proves that human body, mind and spirit do not have to continue the life of suffering and her journey mirrors the future of our own life if we desire to progress ahead.

It is interesting to observe the lines from canto four of Book Seven for which M.P. Pandit, a great author and researcher gave the title *I am Unevolved God*.

Although I live in Time besieged by Death,  
Precarious owner of my body and soul  
Housed on a little speck amid the stars,  
For me and my use the universe was made.  
Immortal spirit in the perishing clay,  
I am God still unevolved in human form;  
Even if he is not, he becomes in me. (Pandit 43)

The above lines give the crystal clarity of the purpose of human existence, its origin and aim. The confidence in Savitri that she is the speck of God comes from the spiritual knowledge and growing wisdom which is a message to the mankind that our origin is from the greatest Supreme source who is the architect of all the elements including death and fate. To awaken the transcendental energy is to attain the realisation of Ultimate Reality.

Sri Aurobindo takes the epic *Savitri* to its zenith without even realising the great distance he travelled with it. To understand the journey of the characters, the reader undoubtedly must be inclined towards spiritual elevation. Since the writer is in an exalted and expanded state of consciousness, the reader too should be in the same temperament. It acts as a guide to the seekers while it seems to be a complex poem to those who desire to extract mere pleasure out of reading it. It is beyond the understanding of a common man who is not familiar with the spiritual experience and ecstasy. Aurobindo shares, "The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening." (Tyagi 61)

Aurobindo could visualise the journey of the characters because he himself was a *Rishi* and a Seer poet. A reader can only wonder at the mighty task the characters have undertaken. If their transcendental journey feels far from an experiential task, it is doubtless to say that it at least showcases the most powerful capacity of mankind which is unaware of its own level. It lays a huge impact both on the seekers of yogic path and on those who are still unaware of the human capabilities.

Thus man in his little house made of earth's dust  
Grew towards an unseen heaven of thought and dream  
Looking into the vast vistas of his mind

On a small globe dotting infinity.  
At last climbing a long and narrow stair  
He stood alone on a high roof of things  
And saw the light of a spiritual sun. (Ghose 486, 7.2.433-449)

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