Self – Realisation and Spiritual Elevation; a Soul - Journey of Savitri towards Spiritual Transformation as Reflected in the Poetic Work Savitri

Y. Aparna
Dayalbagh Educational Institute
E-mail: yaparna93@gmail.com

Abstract—It is often the most difficult path to travel within one’s soul and to attain the realisation of the purpose of birth. Man experiences an adventure to the transcendental regions of the universe once he rises above the physical frame of the body and shackles of its senses. The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo Ghose in the area of Spirituality has always hinted the need of transformation and elevation of spiritual consciousness in order to redirect the purpose of life and attain its true meaning. The Epic ‘Savitri’ of Aurobindo gives the most vivid picture of the transcendental experience that a man can undergo and attain an unexplainable level of bliss through yogic practice or meditation. The characters Aswapathy and Savitri reflect the need of awakening and spiritual practice if one desires to attain the supreme wisdom over the sinking problems of life and the ability to live a life of perfect control. The epic ‘Savitri’ lifts up the scope of literature and acts as a guide to the seekers who are clasped in the world of Matter, by introducing the world of spirituality and the journey of our soul.

“All is too little that the world can give: Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time And cannot fill the spirit’s thirst.”[1]

Man is always in the chase of power and is equally in chase for peace. Eventually, finding bliss in the material world is like chasing after a mirage. The world is a beautiful place to live in, but it cannot cater certain answers for a man who contemplates to perceive the Reality and purpose of life emerged from the creation. There comes a time in everybody’s life when one takes a pause to reflect on several questions beyond the physical matter can answer, but unfortunately, those questions are usually pushed into the box of mystery. In today’s life of rush and run, we often turn to God when exhausted with a burden of huge whirlpool of questions in mind. There begins the journey of self – realisation and spiritual elevation. To know the purpose of birth and attain the answers, one needs to look within and find one’s soul by the means of spiritual practice. In this context, we observe that Sri Aurobindo developed the work Savitri by taking the characters Savitri and her father the King Aswapathy whose soul undergoes a transcendental journey to inner layers of the soul and higher regions of the universe.

If we analyse the Book Three of Savitri, The Book of the Divine Mother in the context of self – realisation, we perceive that it explores the soul - journey of the King Aswapathy who does rigorous meditation in order to have a progeny. In this process, he travels to the higher regions of the universe and experiences unexplainable kind of bliss and fulfillment. His journey is a reflection of the fact that man can expand the faculty of spiritual consciousness once he withdraws his senses from the external or the material world. He transcends to the higher regions of the universe and perceives the fact that the physical world below the higher regions is a vanity fair and that it is a perfect beauty of deception where there is an unending cycle of pain and joy and pangs of misery. Aurobindo also expands the thought that we are all the part of God split into multiple spirit entities but we are unaware of the oneness with God. He shares that we very much belong to the fountain source, i.e. God and that we merge back into the form of God if we do spiritual practice. To experience the universal oneness, one needs to awaken one’s soul which is in the state of slumber. Man forgets the roots after his soul descends to the earth due to the powerful impact of the material world which clouds the spiritual wisdom in us.

“He has forgotten why he has come and whence; …His mass is buried in the animal mire.” [2]

Aswapathy, while travelling to the higher regions perceives the fact that the earth is in utter darkness which needs the light and presence of God who is in the form of disguise. He experiences a huge elevation of his wisdom while going higher and perceives the difference between earth and the regions above.

“The senses there were outlets of the soul; Even the youngest child – thought of the mind Incarnated some touch of highest things.”[1]

The description reflects a great difference between the working force of mind in material world and transcendental world. Due to the elevation of spiritual consciousness, man grows wiser in perceiving the Ultimate Reality.
inclination towards life changes when one experiences the glory of spiritual bliss. Here, we need to perceive the hint of Aurobindo that it is high time for us to start working on spiritual growth which improves our outlook towards life. It gifts us a sublime vision and wisdom to strike a balance in life which is clapsed between material desires and spiritual quest. Aswapathy is blessed by the presence of Mother Goddess and undergoes a deeper journey to find the Reality of the universe. He is startled by the glory of the creation above the earth and at the same time he becomes restless to even entertain the thought of getting back to the bottom earth which is full of dust and sin, ills and odds and fluctuating pangs of joy and pain. He expresses his grief to her that his desire is to attain eternal bliss and to dwell in it forever. He further requests the Mother to come down to the earth and uplift the entire mankind dwelling in confusion and sorrow. But the Mother Goddess explains him that the earth is not ready to bear the presence of God because it is in a state of absolute slumber and false joy created by Maya (False Reality).

“O Son of Strength who clinbest creation’s peaks, …What thou has won is thine, but ask no more.” [2]

However, she grants him a boon by saying that there will be a great soul which will descend into the family of Aswapathy as his daughter and that she will be the one to redefine the limitations of human faculties and abilities. The Mother reveals that his daughter will change the order of life and calculations of Time and Fate and that the next generation will give birth to Supermen with great spiritual wisdom.

“As yet thought only some high spirit’s dream Or a vexed illusion in man’s toiling mind, A new creation from the old shall rise, A knowledge inarticulate find speech, Beauty suppressed burst into paradise bloom, Pleasure and pain dive into absolute bliss.” [2]

We need to observe a fact that the character Savitri is the messenger of God and the incarnation of the Mother Goddess herself. Her purpose on the earth is higher than one can imagine. She marries Satyavan in spite of knowing the fact that he is moving closer to the gates of death in a year’s span. She challenges the frames of Time and Fate by pushing the limitations of a human soul towards higher abilities. Her purpose is not to merely save her husband Satyavan from the shackles of death but to raise the entire humanity into the spiritual height. If Aswapathy is the question, Savitri is the answer for the mankind and its problems. This desire of Savitri to expand the horizon of spiritual consciousness in a man is the very element that inspired Aurobindo when he read the epic Mahabharata. The idea that the power of yogic consciousness and meditation can change the rules of fate attracted him the most and he went on developing the idea through Savitri.

The purpose of the epic Savitri grows beyond a message. Aurobindo’s vivid description of the journey of Aswapathy and Savitri acts as a guide to the seekers of spiritual growth at various levels. It is a bell of reminder that we need to awaken our soul by doing spiritual practice in order to realise the purpose of birth. Savitri’s soul – journey is no different from our journey and her success of attaining bliss is undoubtedly our success of finding the path towards the God. “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.”[3]

Aswapathy’s soul – journey reminds us of the story of two birds that symbolically represent Jeevatma and Paramatma from SwetaswataraUpanishad where one is sitting on the higher branch of the tree that represents Paramatma. It is essentially free from all the material wants and desires. The other bird, i.e. the one representing Jeevatma is sitting on the lower branch of the tree which is stumbled to the physical desires and luxurious fruits etc. The bird on the higher branch feels pity to see the condition of the bird on the lower branch as her inclinations are spilled towards external arena and pleasures. The inclinations of the bird on the higher branch are directed inwards. The branches of the tree are a symbolic representation of earth and Heaven. We are made of the qualities of both Jeevatma and Paramatma which are but the split forms of the same soul. It splits because it gets contaminated while descending to the material world. Aswapathy realises and gets to witness his own shades while travelling upwards that his soul is split into two. One is experiencing the bliss of Heaven while the other one is stuck in the web of material world. His ambition is to merge them into one whole form of Supreme Consciousness. Aurobindo suggests that it should be the aim of every human being.

“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…” [2]

The last line clearly reflects the fact that although we are descended to the earth, there is always a connection with the higher world which can be explored, tamed, nourished and improved. This realisation can be called spiritual expansion where we know the purpose and destination of our life. After crossing several regions of the universe, Aswapathy feels the elements like time, darkness and the entire chaos of the world is submerged in the huge and vast region of bliss. He is free from all sorts of feelings except ecstasy that is growing higher.

“There is no more division’s endless scroll; …there was no cleavage between soul and soul, There was no barrier between world and God.” [2]

The soul – journey of Aswapathy ends in a note of wonderful adventure and he restores his soul back to the earth as it is the right place and platform for transcendental growth. In this
context, we need to observe that Aurobindo is among those Saints who never encouraged the life of renunciation or seclusion. He gives us a message which has a universal impact that we need to realise that earth is not our home forever and that we need to recognise and establish the link between soul and God through meditation so that we live a life of true purpose. We can sharpen and strengthen the spiritual growth very much by living the life of duties and responsibilities on the earth. To lead a life of spiritual wisdom and self-realisation is what is suggested by the poet which is far superior to the life of material wants. “Sri Aurobindo imparts a contemporary urgency to Aswathy’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” [4].

Aswathy is the voice of Aurobindo’s message to the contemporary world where man is consumed by the power of material world. It has a universal appeal and the poet’s suggestion to explore the purpose of our life is apt and worth the effort. Today, we witness the revival of yoga that is widespread all over the world which helps in acquiring the power of yogic consciousness.

The Book Seven, The Book of Yoga describes the soul – journey of Savitri who follows the Lord of Death, i.e. Yama in order to restore her husband’s life and also to explore the layers of the creation with her yogic power. On the way, she meets several great souls and messengers of God. She too like Aswathy observes the difference between two worlds, the one below and the one above. She expresses her wonder after witnessing the earth from above, that the mankind is stuck in the web of misery and that it is pitifully ignorant of this fact. She goes ahead and meets a woman called Madonna who is drowned in sorrow. After asked by Savitri, she explains that she is the part of Savitri herself. Here, the symbolic representation of sorrow reflected by Madonna is nothing but our own reflection. We are a unique mixture of joy, pain, sorrow and ego and all of them dominate and cloud the vision of spirituality.

After going ahead, Savitri hears some Voices which try to stop her journey and persuade her to believe that she already reached the highest point of the universe. However, Savitri was not convinced and continues to go higher. The Voice of the Mother Goddess comes to rescue her and to strengthen her purpose. “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…”[2]

The voices she hears again represent our very surroundings on the earth which constantly pull us down from spiritual growth. The above message of the Mother applies to the entire mankind. We perceive the message that we need to outgrow the deceptive forces like money, greed, ego etc. that try to convince that earth is the best place to live. To attain such spiritual wisdom is the need of the hour as the condition of man today is sinking deep in the pit of Maya.

Savitri’s journey towards self – realisation has a universal impact which reflects the journey of each individual surviving on the earth. Aurobindo chooses the form of poetry to spread the message of awakening. “In Savitri the problem is posed again and the possibility presented again, but in terms of poetry. The great spiritual drama unfolded in Savitri is thus really played in the theatre of the human soul, for Asuric power can be countered, mastered and transformed only by spiritual power…” [3]

Savitri is emerged out of the Supramental level of consciousness in the poet. He says that it produces the poetry of revelatory kind. He took fifty years of time to develop Savitri because of the revelations he got and its ever increasing superior quality. He gave it a reluctant closure only after the revelations from God stopped hitting him. He was a Seer poet who could see the journey of Savitri. The fourth canto The TripleSoulForces of Book Seven explores the nature of man and his problems. Savitri witnesses the problems of man from the higher region. She observes that man is dwelling in a great misconception that he is the emperor of the world who conquered all the fields of knowledge like Science, Astronomy, and Geology etc. This is again a reflection of man’s ego and gives a message that there is a superior form of knowledge that is beyond the perception of mankind.

“But still the cause of things is left in doubt, Their truth flees from pursuit into a void; When all has been explained nothing is known.”[2]

This kind of realisation by Savitri is a universal fact that we live in the bubble of small life at a microcosmic level of the huge creation. We spend all our life in absorbing and acquiring the knowledge of various fields but least do we realise that it all dissolves in the air and flies to the world of void and vacuum when we encounter the power of death. It is time for us to kindle the spiritual faculty that is lying dormant within us.

After going ahead, Savitri finds a region full of light and undergoes a celestial change. She meets her secret soul and all her melancholic burden seems to dissolve in the bright light. She realises that a human soul is deathless and that it is the mortal body alone that perishes. It is vividly described in the canto five, i.e. The Finding of the Soul. At the same time, she understands the purpose of mind and physical body. Aurobindo brings out the subtle difference between body, mind and soul. It is interesting to observe that his aim of describing the soul – journey of the characters is to only bring out the fact that our real home is Heaven and that our body is a tool through which we can rise above. It is important to develop the sense of detachment in order to attain the sense of Godliness.
“This is the appearance in the mortal front;
Our greater truth of being lies behind:
Our consciousness is cosmic and immense,
But only when we break through Matter’s wall
In that spiritual vastness can we stand
Where we can live the masters of our world,
And mind is only a means and body a tool.”[2]

The above lines from the canto are perhaps one of the most important ones from the epic. They hint us that our body acts as a shelter for the soul which is far superior from the body. It is immortal, powerful, wise and it reaches back to its original abode once it gets free from the body. The poet hints the fact that unless we develop a sense of detachment from the physical world and internalise our senses that are projected towards the external world, we cannot attain the state of bliss.

We need to perceive that human body is a momentary home for the soul which is originally immortal and wise. It reminds us of the work Gitanjali of Rabindranath Tagore who also shares that his body is a home for the soul and that he ought to keep it away from the dust and sin of the material world and its influence so that one day God comes to take him to His abode.

Through the levels of yogic practice of Aswapathy and Savitri, we get a vivid picture of what Aurobindo tries to share with the readers. First, we see that Aswapathy performs rigorous meditation to attain self realisation, then gradually his ambition rises to the level where he wants to witness the layers of consciousness in order to gain possession over the mysterious world. Finally, the purpose outgrows the level of individual victory and he aspires to spread the universal joy in order to transform the whole earth into a place of all – consciousness.

If we observe the conclusion of Savitri, it is enthralling to observe that both Aswapathy and Savitri express their desire to come back to the earth. The concluding part of Savitri again has a universal appeal. The challenge of Savitri to save Satyavan and to win over the power of death is only to experience the higher bliss and then eventually spread it on the earth which needs the push of awakening. The individual purpose grows to the universal purpose. It is apt to the present time where man is gradually taking a turn towards spiritual growth and yoga. Savitri taps our hidden potential and reminds us that there is so much more beyond this small life of constant uncertainty. It is important to prepare ourselves for the journey to the true home i.e. the Heaven. We are homeless in its true sense unless our soul finds its way back. It reminds us of Tagore who also shares that death is the gateway for higher consciousness but it is important to live a life of meaning while establishing a great bond with the God.

The epic Savitri shows the need of quest to find the origin of one’s soul and develop an undying thirst to meet the God. The earth is susceptible to dissolution, and to travel beyond the earth through meditation is but promoting our soul to a better and higher world. It is absolutely worthy to remember Rabindranath’s poetic work Crossing where he shares a similar idea that it is high time to start sailing towards the shore because the world we live in is a huge ocean of misery where we might sink.

In the mechanical world of growing scientific researches, the poetic work like Savitri comes as a whiff of fresh air bringing a gentle reminder of spiritual exercise that we need to do today. Because when our spiritual wisdom increases, our outlook towards the problems of life gets better which can solve several problems of the world. To establish harmony with the world around, it is important to establish harmony with oneself at the first place. Many of the world problems like greed, rage, violence etc. can be solved if each one of us strives for the internal growth. Reading such classic and timeless literature enhances the whole purpose of life.

REFERENCES