

Contextualizing Savitri :

Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra

A Supplement to *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo – Mantra, Metrics and Meaning* 2008

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Savitri is a *mantric* transmission of the experiences of Yoga written by Sri Aurobindo which, through reading rhythmically aloud, encourages purification and transformation of the mind, vital and physical consciousness by the Divine Shakti. The structure and process of *Savitri* therefore belong to the traditions of Tantric Hinduism and Buddhism, with deeper roots in Raja Yoga and the Rg Veda, and as such form a central aspect of Sri Aurobindo's synthesis of Yoga. This lecture is an attempt to situate *Savitri* in the context of these traditions.

Contextualizing *Savitri* : Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra

In all of these comparative studies, we realize that there are identities and differences that together constitute the reality of the things. And when we speak about *sutra* and *tantra* and the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo, we won't see that these things are all the same. And we won't see that they are all different. We will see that there are identities and differences which constitute their essential nature. If we don't recognize that, then we won't really know what any of them are. This is a contribution of the French school of philosophy known as deconstruction, which is based on fundamental Hegelian concepts, and Sri Aurobindo certainly recognized the validity of that methodology and applied it himself early on, as did Heidegger, at about the same time in fact – the former in his interpretations of the ancient Sanskrit and the latter in his interpretations of the ancient Greek wisdom.

So, when we look at *The Future Poetry* originally written in 1920, and a supplement to that text that Sri Aurobindo wrote in the 'Forties' titled *On Quantitative Meter*, - which are not so much about the future poetry in fact but all about *mantra*, - we find definitions of *mantra* throughout these works, which have been combined in a recent edition of *The Future Poetry* (1997). There are references to English poetics and prosody in this book, and people find it easy to categorize the work as such and put it on the shelf, because when they try to read it they realize that they don't understand what he is talking about. This is therefore not a very much read or understood work of Sri Aurobindo, just as *Savitri* is not widely read or understood, because this is *tantric* teaching.

We know that in both Hinduism and Buddhism it is common to be on the path of *sutra* teachings for a considerable period of time before being ready to enter into the *tantric* teachings. Anyone who has studied a school of Yoga in Hinduism or Buddhism has probably realized something like that; there is a secret teaching that depends on transmission usually by the *guru* through *mantra*, which is essential, but it usually doesn't happen at the beginning of the practice. It is understood that first the individual needs to work on purification and to discover the difference between Purusha (Self) and Prakriti (Nature-force), in order to achieve a certain degree of liberation of the Self, and then it is possible to receive the *yoga mantra* transmission.

Sri Aurobindo defines *mantra* like this: "The Mantra is a direct and most heightened, and intensest, and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things" (1997, p. 218). And further, in order to qualify the special energy that such expression requires, and to distinguish it from what we normally consider poetry to be, he says: "The Mantra, poetic expression of the deepest spiritual reality, is only possible when three highest intensities of poetic speech meet and become indissolubly one, a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought substance, style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. ...But it is only at a certain highest level of the fused intensities that the Mantra becomes possible" (1997, p.19).

The 'things' that *mantras* speak about, by the way, are not the everyday things that the mind is most familiar with. When he says that the inmost reality of things is transmitted in a most vivid and real way, he is speaking about things that we would normally not know anything about. This is a fact of *tantric* spirituality which is understood in all of the traditions. You cannot access the content of that consciousness without a direct transmission by someone who dwells in that spiritual consciousness. The human being who dwells in the Overmind consciousness has a view and an energy that is the essence of the transmission. It's that view and that energy that is received. This idea of *mantra* is not an abstract concept. It is a certain energy of consciousness that we are capable of realizing but it is not by

any means easy to generate. Only someone who has practiced for a long time and achieved that realization, or *siddhi*, really knows anything about it.

Nowadays, a lot of things are being published in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, secret teachings that are being translated and commented on, quite plentifully, which is quite different from when I was a student back in the 'Sixties'. Then there were only the few texts by Evans-Wentz. For example, now you can get the *Kalachakra Tantra* (1999), and *The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra* (1997) by the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, and other texts such as this *Vajrayogini Tantra* by Geshe Kalsang Gyatso (1991), which is a secret Vajrayana teaching, in which you will find hundreds of pages of *mantras* in Sanskrit and English. In the Vajrayogini *tantra*, you will read: “*Om namo bhagavate vajra varahi bam, hum, hum, phat.*” Now, *Bhagavate vajra varahi* can also be read in Hindu *tantra*. Varahi is a mother goddess and there are many temples in India from around the 9th Century with the goddess/statue of the Divine Mother who has the head of a boar with tusks. In south Indian Hindu *tantra*, and in Kashmiri Hindu *tantra*, and in Tibetan Buddhist *tantra*, she is the Divine Mother, she is the Shakti, and she has many names. Another *mantra* in this tradition, and there are many that we may recognize as being related to the Vedic deities, says: *Om agniye ahdiba ahdiba ambisha ambisha maha shriye ...om ah hum.*

Om agniye, O fire... This is the phrase with which the ‘hymns to the mystic fire’ often begin, of which hundreds were translated by Sri Aurobindo from the Rg Veda, which became the foundation of his Yoga, his cosmology, and his psychology of spiritual transformation. And *mahashriye* is of course none other than Mahalakshmi, Sri Shakti of the south Indian *Lakshmi Tantra*. These are the deities, the principles, the powers and qualities of existence, that Sri Aurobindo has written thousands of lines of *mantric* English poetry to convey to us, of which we would otherwise probably never become directly aware unless we seriously followed the teachings of one of these *tantric* traditions.

Now if we don't read the Vedic *mantras* translated by Sri Aurobindo in a spirit of sacrifice, of offering ourselves to the flame of purification, to the gods, then we aren't likely to hear anything meaningful in them. The form of that early Sanskrit is hardly understood by anyone today, in the first place, and it is extremely mystical. Similarly, these Tibetanized Sanskrit *mantras* and translations quoted above can be somehow understood in the context of Sri Aurobindo's translations and commentaries of *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, but otherwise you would need to have a substantial practice on the visualizations, symbols, and texts with a Lama, before you would experience the fruition of these teachings, especially since we don't know the Sanskrit and Tibetan language, and the translations of course aren't *mantric*. And yet these teachings are given to anyone who wants them by many Lamas. For example, let us read a translation of the *Om agniye mantra* above: “O deity who eats what is burned in the fire/ King of Rishis and Lord of the spirits/ together with the hosts of fire deities from the southeast/ to you I make offerings, praises, and prostrations/ please enjoy this sacrifice that I offer you!” We can read the same thing, or something quite similar, in Sri Aurobindo's translations of the Rg Veda, but he has done something unique. He is a *mantra guru* who had the gift of transmitting *mantric* teachings in English. And this is extraordinary. For example, let us listen to a few verses of this hymn, rendered in that highest intensity of rhythmic speech that he said characterizes *mantra*:

1. O Fire, thou art set here in all as the Priest of the call in the sacrifice; set by the gods in the human being.
2. Offer worship with thy rapturous tongues in the rite of the Path to the great Ones. Bring the gods to us, do them sacrifice.
3. O ordainer of works, mighty of will, by thy revealing light in the sacrifice thou knowest the

- tracks of the gods and their highways.
4. Now has the Bringer of the Treasure with his horses of swiftness aspired to thee for a twofold bliss; he has sacrificed in the sacrifices to the king of sacrifice.
 5. O Fire, for the Servant of Heaven who presses the wine, for Bharadwaja the giver of the offering, the multitude of these desirable things!
 6. Thou art the Immortal messenger; lend ear to the laud of the seer and bring the Divine People.
 7. Men deeply meditating aspire to thee that the godheads may come to them; mortals they aspire to the god in the sacrifice.
 8. Bring into sacrifice thy perfect sight and thy will; rich are thy gifts and in thee is the joy of all who desire.
 9. Thou art the Priest of the call set here in thinking man, his carrier with mouth of flame wiser in knowledge than he. O Fire, sacrifice to the people of heaven.
 10. Come, O Fire, for the advent; voiced by the word, come for the gift of the oblation: sit, the Priest of our invocation, on the grass of the altar.
 11. O Angiras, we make thee to grow by our fuel and our offering of the clarity; flame into a vast light, O ever-youthful Fire.
 12. O God, O Fire, thou illumineest towards us a wide light of inspired knowledge and the vastness of a perfect force. ...

Rg Veda, Mandala Six, Sukta 16, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, p. 276-278

At some point he stopped translating and commenting on the scriptures and concentrated on transmitting the spiritual knowledge in English. Most of his written works are not translations and commentaries; they are original yogic formulations from that consciousness which is the goal, and they have the power to illumine. The conventional meaning of *mantra* is 'word of power'. And as I often point out, Sri Aurobindo's writings are sound-based; he is writing as if he were speaking, or chanting, and he is conveying a knowledge that was originally the product of an oral tradition. Savitri, in the Veda, is a goddess of illumined speech, and Surya Savitri is the truth-force and truth-consciousness that creates the planes of this lower world of mind, life, and body through the inspired Word.

The definition of *mantra* that I read from Sri Aurobindo above, is difficult for anyone to understand, and maybe most difficult for people who are working in the Sanskrit tradition. If you are working in that tradition you are probably not going to think that *mantra* is this. (This is in fact a subject of on-going research and debate in our institution, concerning Vedic speech and Sanskrit.) Sri Aurobindo explains that if the word is *mantra*, you will see the reality at the same time that, or within a short time after, you hear it. It is not an intellectual content for the mind. He also says, in a longer explanatory comment on language and meaning, "The words which we use in our speech seem to be, if we look only at their external formation, mere physical sounds which a device of the mind has made to represent certain objects and ideas and perceptions, (i.e. the *representational* use of language) - a machinery nervous perhaps in origin, but developed for a constantly finer and more intricate use by the growing intelligence; but if we look at them (ie. words, language) in their inmost psychological and not solely at their more external aspect, we shall see that what constitutes speech and gives it its life and appeal and significance is a subtle conscious force which informs and is the soul of the body of sound: it is a superconscious Nature-force raising its material out of our subconsciousness but growingly conscious in its operations in the human mind that develops itself in one fundamental way and yet variously in language. It is this force, this Shakti to which the old Vedic thinkers gave the name of Vak, the goddess of creative speech."

Surya Savitri. Ishwara Shakti. Surya (Lord of Light) represents Ishwara (Supreme Self), and Savitri

(Creative Word) represents Shakti (Divine Force). The original creative power of idea, truth, force, form, and eventually body, life, and mind that are created in the descent from that highest plane of Consciousness-force (which is present in this room although we are normally not aware of it) becomes evolutionary form and process in time and space. This is Sri Aurobindo's cosmology. Creation is a process of descent from the timeless, infinite energy of Being, and its evolutionary becoming in forms in time and space. And this is also the process of Yoga. Sri Aurobindo teaches that in spiritual development, it is not just a process from below upward but there is also a corresponding descent from above which responds to the fire of Agni that is generated from below. The idea of *pashyanti vak* is the idea of the creative word in Vedic Sanskrit. And it was Sri Aurobindo's endeavor to create a language that can transmit truths from this plane of consciousness and force above mind, which is not familiar to the ordinary practical and logical mind, and which he called Overmind. One of the basic techniques that he used for this purpose, as he explained in detail in *The Future Poetry*, is quantitative meter, which allows the poet to achieve those highest intensities of language that we heard about earlier.

The biggest mistake that people make in reading *Savitri* is to read it silently and try to understand it, which we do because of the mental habit of reading with the eye and making mental associations in order to understand something, which is a method we have learned over a few hundred years of intellectual conditioning. But Sri Aurobindo has explained that each metric unit of a line of *mantric* poetry has sound-weight, and the weight carries the meaning of the phrase. But we can only perceive this through hearing the phrases which carry the meaning rhythmically to the hearer. As he says, "the eye can't get it". If that meaning is spiritual and is conveyed through hundreds of lines, which are designed to convey certain truths and experiences rhythmically through sound units that carry optimal meaning, when we understand it, it is because we have heard it, and not because we have thought about it and figured it out. The technique that we have learned for reading and understanding text is not going to work with *Savitri*.

So let us look for a moment at this rhythmic structure of *Savitri*. It has been called iambic pentameter but it could as well be called anapestic or dactylic pentameter, but even this does not describe the metric structure. And he has explained that if we scan the lines for these traditional structures we will miss the actual rhythm. Each line is generally either three or four quantitative feet long. For example, listen to these four lines:

A leisure/ in the labour/ of the worlds/
A pause/ in the joy/ and anguish/ of the search/
Restored/ the stress/ of Nature/ to God's calm/,
A vast/ unanimity/ ended life's debate/.

We can hear the weight in each of the metric units of each of these lines which carries the meaning, and we can hear that the units in each line follow the pattern 3/4/4/3. And we can notice here, and in many instances on every page, that a phrase like 'ended life's debate' is a single unit because of the meaning as well as the sound weight: it is life's debate that is ended; these terms cannot be separated if we are to understand their meaning. These lines are from Book One, Canto Three, p. 32, which is a section on the realization of the traditional goal of *sutra yoga*, the detachment and liberation of Purusha from Prakriti. When we hear them in the context of the whole section they will have another dynamis, which we will notice in a striking way. And this will also demonstrate how a section of a Canto, which is clearly demarcated by Sri Aurobindo, is the complete and concentrated transmission of a theme or principle or experience and can be taken as such, with a completeness and totality in itself that is not dependent on the whole Canto or Book for its meaning and power. The section is the *mantra*.

In the field of Hindu and Buddhist Yoga it is widely recognized that there is a methodology which comes down to two streams of practice: *sutra* and *tantra*. We are probably familiar with the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (see for example the recent, excellent translations and commentaries by Edwin Bryant, 2009). And if we read Sri Aurobindo's *Synthesis of Yoga*, we will find that he has incorporated quite thoroughly the *yoga sutra* teachings of Patanjali, or Raja Yoga. For example, in the fourth part of the *Synthesis* there are the teachings about *samata*, *mukti*, *samyama*, *samadhi*, purification, meditation, renunciation, surrender, liberation, etc. which are common terms in *yoga sutra* teachings. And only toward the end of the book does he speak about the essential role of Shakti in the transformation of mind, life, and body. But then, after writing the *Synthesis*, he writes *Savitri* for twenty-five years, and it is very different. It is a continuous invocation of the divine Shakti.

If we look into some of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, for example the writings of Lama Yeshe, who established centers and taught in the USA in the 'Eighties', or the works by the Dalai Lama cited above, we get a clear definition of the differences and relations between *sutra* and *tantra*. A characteristic summary of these terms has been given by Lama Yeshe, who writes in his *Introduction to Tantra, The Transformation of Desire* (1987), "Before we can board the lightning vehicle of Tantra, we have to understand why it is both necessary and possible to abandon our ordinary limited view of ourselves and to generate in its place the enlightened self identity of a fully evolved being. ...By generating the prerequisite renunciation, *bodhichitta* and wisdom, and by delving into the clear nature of our mind, we create the space in which true self transformation can take place. Yet it is not enough merely to know why such transformation is necessary and possible. We must also generate the strength and confidence that will enable us to follow this radical approach to fulfillment" (p.83).

The processes of silencing and emptying the thought mind and vital impulses through meditation that are mentioned here have the same focus, objectives, and practices as Raja Yoga. And to answer the question as to why it is necessary to do this, which is always a fundamental task of *sutra*, we may recall Sri Aurobindo's definition of the "two liberations" in *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1970 ed.), which also indicates the subsequent or complementary movement of *tantra*: "This inferior action of Nature in which we live has certain essential qualitative modes which constitute the whole basis of its inferiority. The constant effect of these modes on the soul in its natural powers of mind, life and body is a discordant and divided experience, a strife of opposites, *dwandwa*, a motion in all its experience and an oscillation between or a mixture of constant pairs of contraries, of combining positives and negatives, dualities. A complete liberation from the ego and will of desire must bring with it a superiority to the qualitative modes of the inferior Nature, *traigunyatitya*, a release from this mixed and discordant experience, a cessation or solution of the dual action of Nature. ...A liberation from Nature in a quiescent bliss of the spirit is the first form of release. A farther liberation of the Nature into divine quality and spiritual power of world-experience fills the supreme calm with the supreme kinetic bliss of knowledge, power, joy, and mastery. A divine unity of supreme spirit and its supreme nature is the integral liberation" (1970, p. 655-656).

"The first necessity is some fundamental poise of the soul both in its essential nature and its natural being regarding and meeting the things, impacts and workings of Nature. This poise we shall arrive at by growing into a perfect equality, *samata*. Its importance can hardly be exaggerated; for it is the sign of our having passed beyond the egoistic determinations of our nature, of our having conquered our enslaved response to the dualities, of our having transcended the shifting turmoil of the *gunas*, of our having entered into the calm and peace of liberation ...To divinize the perfected nature, we have to call in the divine Power, or Shakti, to replace our limited human energy so that this may be shaped into the

image of and filled with the force of greater infinite energy, *daivi prakriti, bhagavat shakti*” (1970, p. 655-666).

Now we could as well present many pages of text from Tibetan *sutra* teachings as well as from the Raja Yoga *sutras* to demonstrate how identical these sayings of Sri Aurobindo are to the general content and style of what is known traditionally as *yoga sutra*. But what characterizes the essential teaching of the schools of *tantra* may be compressed briefly into three terms: *guru yoga, mantra, and shakti*. The Vajrayana school of Tibetan Buddhism has preserved this tradition for a thousand years since it first migrated from the Hindu schools of *tantra* such as Sri Vidya and the Swatantra Trika into Tibet. And it is because this teaching has been re-energized and given such extreme importance by Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri* that we must recognize it as a fundamental branch of his synthesis of Yoga, and as the primary importance of his extraordinary poetic creation.

The most striking examples of this meaning and power of *Savitri* may be found at the beginning of the book, in Cantos Three and Five of Book One. Canto Three is a full exposition of the Raja Yogi’s experience of the liberation of Purusha, and Canto Five is a full exposition of the Raja Yogi’s union with the Divine Mother, and the descent and transformation of his mind, life, and body by the Divine Shakti. The liberation of Purusha, the identification with the Absolute, and the descent of the divine Shakti are repeated in numerous Cantos throughout *Savitri* in such a prominent way that this may be recognized as the fundamental intention of the *mantra guru*: to make this teaching, invocation, and transmission possible to those who approach it as his, Sri Aurobindo’s, *mantra* of spiritual transformation. It is these Cantos and incantations of power that make possible a vivid perception of the meaning of liberation, and that bring into the concrete experiential range of the hearer and seer of this embodiment of conscious-force, not a concept but the actual energy of transformation. If these lines are expressed with that highest three-fold intensity that the *mantra* requires, then the hearer is united with the *guru*, with the *mantra*, and with the Goddess-energy, each of which is united in the embodiment of force whose name is *Savitri*.

This is the traditional structure of *tantra* in fact. As explained by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *guru yoga*, the devotee visualizes the deity, the Lama as a vessel of the deity, and the *mantra* mediates the union of the three. Another fundamental structure of *tantra* is that its goal is liberation and transformation through the death experience, which of course is the ultimate theme of *Savitri*. As explained by Lama Yeshe: “The sutra and tantra teaching diagnose the problems of cyclic existence in different ways, and also offer different solutions to these problems. According to sutra, the root of samsaric suffering is ego-grasping: the wrong view that holds onto a mistaken belief in a self-existent “I”, or ego-identity. The antidote for this ignorant conception is found by cultivating a completely opposite view. Instead of ignorantly assenting to our instinctive belief in self-existence, we are taught how to generate an insight into emptiness (in Raja Yoga the liberation of Purusha, *mukti*): the total negation of all notions of independent self-existence. ... While the lightning path of tantra does not deny what sutra has to say, it offers a different, more radical approach to the problems of our life. According to these more advanced teachings, all difficulties are rooted in our ordinary uncontrolled experiences of death and what happens after death. ... The cure for such uncontrollably recurring confusion is a type of meditation in which we transform our ordinary experiences of death, bardo, and rebirth into the enlightened experience of a Buddha. The tantric antidote, therefore, is not something that is the opposite of the problem – the way that the wisdom of emptiness is the opposite of the ignorance of ego-grasping – but rather something that is similar to it. ... This ordinary rebirth experience can be transformed by the skilled practitioner in the same way that death and bardo were transformed. Instead of moving from the bardo to the next life under the force of insecurity and

grasping, ignorantly falling into unconsciousness, the well-trained followers of tantra can choose their rebirth consciously” (1987, p. 103-104,113).

This of course is precisely what happens in the last major section and ultimate thematic teaching of *Savitri* when the goddess who unites with the mortal soul, consciously passes through death in order to make the transformation of death possible. And this theme of sacrifice for the sake of humanity, which recurs periodically in *Savitri* with great force, is another typical aspect of the structure of *tantra*. As stated emphatically by the Lama, “...there is absolutely no way for us to reap the immeasurable benefits of tantra if our motivation is centered on our own welfare alone. The only type of person for whom tantra can work is someone who is primarily concerned with benefitting others and sees the tantric path as the quickest and most powerful way of accomplishing this altruistic aim” (1987, p. 14). To conquer death and win immortality, and thereby to gain the leverage necessary to bring about an evolutionary leap in the destiny of the human being, is the motive force and aim of the personified yogic consciousness in *Savitri*. And it is this mythological and spiritual purpose of existence itself, as stated in another, south Indian, tantric tradition, that of Narayana and Narayani in the *Lakshmi Tantra*, that is recalled in these powerful lines of *Savitri* that convey the trance-vision of cosmic purpose:

A glimpse was caught of things for ever unknown:
The letters stood out of the unmoving Word:
In the immutable nameless Origin
Was seen emerging as from fathomless seas
The trail of the Ideas that made the world,
And, sown in the black earth of Nature’s trance,
The seed of the Spirit’s blind and huge desire
From which the tree of cosmos was conceived
And spread its magic arms through a dream of space.
Immense realities took on a shape:
There looked out from the shadow of the Unknown
The bodiless Namelessness that saw God born
And tries to gain from the mortal’s mind and soul
A deathless body and a divine name.

Savitri, Book One, Canto Three, p. 40

In addition to the context of Sutra, Mantra, and Tantra, which I believe can make this work of Sri Aurobindo more accessible to readers with respect to his actual intention, it is equally important to emphasize the allegorical context. Allegorical interpretation originated with the Catholic theologian Origenos, who was a contemporary of St. Augustine, and they both studied under the great mystic Plotinus. According to this school of literary and scriptural interpretation, the sacred or inspired text has to be understood as conveying a veiled meaning that is revealed by the inner understanding and identification of the reader with the symbols and language through which it is conveyed. A textbook definition of allegory says that allegory is a hermeneutic of how our minds extract the true meaning in a symbolic story, and the allegorical mode is defined as controlled indirectness and double meaning. But it is more than this. When the allegory is conveyed with *mantric* force, it is a direct transmission of the mystery, and therefore we don’t need to perform an intellectual exercise of interpretation. We see and hear the difference and the sameness, the Word and the Truth. We separate the mystery from the narrative by an act of identification with the substance and meaning that are conveyed to us directly.

But what is true here, as in allegory in general, is that the literary form arouses a response to different levels of meaning, and through this aroused awareness cultural and spiritual values are imparted and affirmed. Thus, the allegorical level of literary creation is said to impart the values of an elite which thereby ensures the continuation of the highest aims of humanity and culture. When Savitri, the goddess of illumined speech, descends and unites with the mortal, we feel the descent and are united and energized by its word of power, to rise to the heights of spiritual realization and the possibilities of a divine transformation of life and death.

Finally, let us try to hear and see the *mantras* of descent, liberation, and the cosmic duality of Purusha and Prakriti, the Sanatana Dharma.

The Mantra of the descent of the Divine Shakti

In a divine retreat from mortal thought,
In a prodigious gesture of soul-sight,
His being towered into pathless heights,
Naked of its vesture of humanity.
As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
His nature shuddered in the Unknown's grasp.
In a moment shorter than death, longer than Time,
By a Power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and boundless change.
An Omniscient knowing without sight or thought,
An indecipherable Omnipotence,
A mystic Form that could contain the worlds,
Yet make one human breast its passionate shrine,
Drew him out of his seeking loneliness
Into the magnitudes of God's embrace.
As when a timeless Eye annuls the hours
Abolishing the agent and the act,
So now his spirit shone out wide, blank, pure:
His wakened mind became an empty slate
On which the Universal and Sole could write.
All that represses our fallen consciousness
Was taken from him like a forgotten load:
A fire that seemed the body of a god

Consumed the limiting figures of the past
And made large room for a new self to live.
Eternity's contact broke the moulds of sense.
A greater Force than the earthly held his limbs,
Huge workings bared his undiscovered sheaths,
Strange energies wrought and screened tremendous hands
Unwound the triple cord of mind and freed
The heavenly wideness of a Godhead's gaze.
As through a dress the wearer's shape is seen,
There reached through forms to the hidden absolute
A cosmic feeling and transcendent sight.
Increased and heightened were the instruments.
Illusion lost her aggrandising lens;
As from her failing hand the measures fell,
Atomic looked the things that loomed so large.
The little ego's ring could join no more;
In the enormous spaces of the self
The body now seemed only a wandering shell,
His mind the many-frescoed outer court
Of an imperishable Inhabitant:
His spirit breathed a superhuman air.
The imprisoned deity rent its magic fence.
As with a sound of thunder and of seas,
Vast barriers crashed around the huge escape.
Immutably coeval with the world,
Circle and end of every hope and toil
Inexorably drawn round thought and act,
The fixed immovable peripheries
Effaced themselves beneath the Incarnate's tread.
The dire velamen and the bottomless crypt
Between which life and thought for ever move,
Forbidden still to cross the dim dread bounds,
The guardian darknesses mute and formidable,
Empowered to circumscribe the wingless spirit
In the boundaries of Mind and Ignorance,
Protecting no more a dual eternity
Vanished rescinding their enormous role:
Once figure of creation's vain ellipse,
The expanding zero lost its giant curve.
The old adamantite vetoes stood no more:
Overpowered were earth and Nature's obsolete rule;
The python coils of the restricting Law
Could not restrain the swift arisen God:
Abolished were the scripts of destiny.
There was no small death-hunted creature more,
No fragile form of being to preserve
From an all-swallowing Immensity.
The great hammer-beats of a pent-up world-heart

Burst open the narrow dams that keep us safe
Against the forces of the universe.
The soul and cosmos faced as equal powers.
A boundless being in a measureless Time
Invaded Nature with the infinite;
He saw unpathed, unwall'd, his titan scope.

Savitri, Book One, Canto Five, p. 80-83

The Mantra of Liberation

Ever his consciousness and vision grew;
They took an ampler sweep, a loftier flight;
He passed the border marked for Matter's rule
And passed the zone where thought replaces life.
Out of this world of signs suddenly he came
Into a silent self where world was not
And looked beyond into a nameless vast.
These symbol figures lost their right to live,
All tokens dropped our sense can recognise;
There the heart beat no more at body's touch,
There the eyes gazed no more on beauty's shape.
In rare and lucent intervals of hush
Into a signless region he could soar
Packed with the deep contents of formlessness
Where world was into a single being rapt
And all was known by the light of identity
And Spirit was its own self-evidence.
The Supreme's gaze looked out through human eyes
And saw all things and creatures as itself
And knew all thought and word as its own voice.
There unity is too close for search and clasp
And love is a yearning of the One for the One,
And beauty is a sweet difference of the Same
And oneness is the soul of multitude.
There all the truths unite in a single Truth,
And all ideas rejoin Reality.
There knowing herself by her own termless self,
Wisdom supernal, wordless, absolute
Sat unaccompanied in the eternal Calm,
All-seeing, motionless, sovereign and alone.
There knowledge needs not words to embody Idea;
Idea, seeking a house in boundlessness,
Weary of its homeless immortality,
Asks not in thought's carved brilliant cell to rest
Whose single window's clipped outlook on things
Sees only a little arc of God's vast sky.

The boundless with the boundless there consorts;
While there, one can be wider than the world;
While there, one is one's own infinity.
His centre was no more in earthly mind;
A power of seeing silence filled his limbs:
Caught by a voiceless white epiphany
Into a vision that surpasses forms,
Into a living that surpasses life,
He neared the still consciousness sustaining all.
The voice that only by speech can move the mind
Became a silent knowledge in the soul;
The strength that only in action feels its truth
Was lodged now in a mute omnipotent peace.
A leisure in the labour of the worlds,
A pause in the joy and anguish of the search
Restored the stress of Nature to God's calm.
A vast unanimity ended life's debate.
The war of thoughts that fathers the universe,
The clash of forces struggling to prevail
In the tremendous shock that lights a star
As in the building of a grain of dust,
The grooves that turn their dumb ellipse in space
Ploughed by the seeking of the world's desire,
The long regurgitations of Time's flood,
The torment edging the dire force of lust
That wakes kinetic in earth's dullard slime
And carves a personality out of mud,
The sorrow by which Nature's hunger is fed,
The oestrus which creates with fire of pain,
The fate that punishes virtue with defeat,
The tragedy that destroys long happiness,
The weeping of Love, the quarrel of the Gods,
Ceased in a truth which lives in its own light.
His soul stood free, a witness and a king.
Absorbed no more in the moment-ridden flux
Where mind incessantly drifts as on a raft
Hurried from phenomenon to phenomenon,
He abode at rest in indivisible Time.
As if a story long written but acted now,
In his present he held his future and his past,
Felt in the seconds the uncounted years
And saw the hours like dots upon a page.
An aspect of the unknown Reality
Altered the meaning of the cosmic scene.
This huge material universe became
A small result of a stupendous force:
Overtaking the moment the eternal Ray
Illumined That which never yet was made.

Thought lay down in a mighty voicelessness;
The toiling Thinker widened and grew still,
Wisdom transcendent touched his quivering heart:
His soul could sail beyond thought's luminous bar;
Mind screened no more the shoreless infinite.
Across a void retreating sky he glimpsed
Through a last glimmer and drift of vanishing stars
The superconscient realms of motionless Peace
Where judgment ceases and the word is mute
And the Unconceived lies pathless and alone.
There came not form or any mounting voice;
There only were Silence and the Absolute.
Out of that stillness mind new-born arose
And woke to truths once inexpressible,
And forms appeared, dumbly significant,
A seeing thought, a self-revealing voice.
He knew the source from which his spirit came:
Movement was married to the immobile Vast;
He plunged his roots into the Infinite,
He based his life upon eternity.

Savitri, Book One, Canto Three, p. 31-34

The Mantra of Purusha and Prakriti

All here where each thing seems its lonely self
Are figures of the sole transcendent One:
Only by him they are, his breath is their life;
An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.
A playmate in the mighty Mother's game,
One came upon the dubious whirling globe
To hide from her pursuit in force and form.
A secret spirit in the Inconscient's sleep,
A shapeless Energy, a voiceless Word,
He was here before the elements could emerge,
Before there was light of mind or life could breathe.
Accomplice of her cosmic huge pretence,
His semblances he turns to real shapes
And makes the symbol equal with the truth:
He gives to his timeless thoughts a form in Time.
He is the substance, he the self of things;
She has forged from him her works of skill and might:
She wraps him in the magic of her moods
And makes of his myriad truths her countless dreams.
The Master of being has come down to her,
An immortal child born in the fugitive years.
In objects wrought, in the persons she conceives,

Dreaming she chases her idea of him,
And catches here a look and there a gest:
Ever he repeats in them his ceaseless births.
He is the Maker and the world he made,
He is the vision and he is the Seer;
He is himself the actor and the act,
He is himself the knower and the known,
He is himself the dreamer and the dream.
There are Two who are One and play in many worlds;
In Knowledge and Ignorance they have spoken and met
And light and darkness are their eyes' interchange;
Our pleasure and pain are their wrestle and embrace,
Our deeds, our hopes are intimate to their tale;
They are married secretly in our thought and life.
The universe is an endless masquerade:
For nothing here is utterly what it seems;
It is a dream-fact vision of a truth
Which but for the dream would not be wholly true,
A phenomenon stands out significant
Against dim backgrounds of eternity;
We accept its face and pass by all it means;
A part is seen, we take it for the whole.
Thus have they made their play with us for roles:
Author and actor with himself as scene,
He moves there as the Soul, as Nature she.
Here on the earth where we must fill our parts,
We know not how shall run the drama's course;
Our uttered sentences veil in their thought.
Her mighty plan she holds back from our sight:
She has concealed her glory and her bliss
And disguised the Love and Wisdom in her heart;
Of all the marvel and beauty that are hers,
Only a darkened little we can feel.
He too wears a diminished godhead here;
He has forsaken his omnipotence,
His calm he has foregone and infinity.
He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all to make her great.
He hopes in her to find himself anew,
Incarnate, wedding his infinity's peace
To her creative passion's ecstasy.
Although possessor of the earth and heavens,
He leaves to her the cosmic management
And watches all, the Witness of her scene.
A supernumerary on her stage,
He speaks no words or hides behind the wings.
He takes birth in her world, waits on her will,
Divines her enigmatic gesture's sense,

The fluctuating chance turns of her mood,
Works out her meanings she seems not to know
And serves her secret purpose in long Time.
As one too great for him he worships her;
He adores her as his regent of desire,
He yields to her as the mover of his will,
He burns the incense of his nights and days
Offering his life, a splendour of sacrifice.
A rapt solicitor for her love and grace,
His bliss in her to him is his whole world:
He grows through her in all his being's powers;
He reads by her God's hidden aim in things.
Or, a courtier in her countless retinue,
Content to be with her and feel her near
He makes the most of the little that she gives
And all she does drapes with his own delight.
A glance can make his whole day wonderful,
A word from her lips with happiness wings the hours.
He leans on her for all he does and is:
He builds on her largesses his proud fortunate days
And trails his peacock-plumaged joy of life
And suns in the glory of her passing smile.
In a thousand ways he serves her royal needs;
He makes the hours pivot around her will,
Makes all reflect her whims; all is their play:
This whole wide world is only he and she.

Savitri, Book One, Canto four, p. 60-63

(Based on a series of lectures on Yoga Sutra, Yoga Mantra, and Yoga Tantra presented in 2012.)