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The Character of Aswapathy as Nature's Prayerful Rhythm in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.4.01

Abstract

The present article studies the character of Aswapathy in Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri*. In this grand epic, Aswapathy has been presented as the divine seeker of nature. In his spiritual pursuit he ascends higher and higher to discover the secret energies of nature. It is in this voyage in the realms of Nature that he comes across the creative Power of the Supreme and at once knows that it is she who alone can transform this darkness into light. He has also a certain perception that even this flawed material human race can become flawless.

Keywords- Yoga of Ascent, Purusha, Nature, Aesthetics of life, Homo Sapiens

Aswapathy is an enormously great protagonist of *Savitri*, the grand tale of the triumph of love over death. He in the *Mahabharata* has been shown as a childless king. He performs *tapasaya* for the boon of a child and he is blessed with a girl child Savitri. In Sri Aurobindo's majestic epic *Savitri*, Aswapathy's desire is not confined to the attainment of an offspring but to replace this earthly life with the divine life. In the words of A. B. Purani, "Aswapathy represents the aspiring human soul down the millennium of evolution in his search for truth of himself, of the world and of God" (*Aurobindo's Savitri – An Approach and a Study*, 5). Professor Iyengar also believes that Aswapathy is the human soul restless for the deliverance of humanity. He writes:

Aswapathy is what Homo Sapiens to be in the highest flights of his imaginative striving and in his noblest aspirations and speculations. . . . Aswapathy being both himself and the world, and his prolonged tapas having for its aim, not his salvation alone nor that particularly, but rather the releasing of humanity and the world from the revolving chariot wheel of frustration and taking them to far heights of the Life Divine. (*Indian Writing In English*, 194-95)

Man generally forgets himself. The discovery of self is of paramount significance. Since time immemorial man is trying to solve the conundrum of life and its evolution. From where it started? When it started? Who is the controller? What is the purpose of the creation? These questions are eternal and ever recurring. Aswapathy is also faced with such questions. He is also eager to find answers to these questions. He tries to realize the truth about Nature, God,

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Cosmos and Man by establishing a soulful link with Nature by Yoga. But such aspirations are not easy to achieve and it demands a Herculean effort. Aswapathy is no ordinary piece of mortal dust. He as Sri Aurobindo says is the 'Lord of the Horse' as well as 'Lord of Tapasaya' in his note. A. B. Purani says:

The name suggests an affinity to Vedic symbolism. In the Veda, Ashwa, the horse, is the symbol of life-energy or vital-power. Ashwa plus paty, Lord, would mean the "Lord of life." In the poem King Ashwapaty is the symbol of the aspiring soul of man as manifested in life on earth. (*Aurobindo's Savitri – An Approach and a Study*, 5)

Sri Aurobindo has embodied Aswapathy as an ideal thinker who strived hard to achieve the divine. He is a glowing beam that fills the darkness with divinity and his birth is a symbol of the resurgence of the divine on the earth. He is paying back 'God's debt to earth and man.'

His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
 Into our province of ephemeral sight,
 A colonist from immortality. (*Savitri*, 21)

In order to satisfy his craving and eagerness, Aswapathy performs the Yoga of Ascent. Sri Aurobindo describes Aswapathy's yoga through a complex but not a complicated cosmology. Aswapathy in his expedition embarks on to travel around the world and perceive what it is. He surveys how it is build up. He observes it rising step by step, plane after plane of consciousness. He escalates on the flight of stairs and he passes through every stage enriching and developing his consciousness. The elevation he attains is an ascent from ignorance to knowledge. Man begins from the gloomiest sleep of ignorance. Then he starts to awake and moves towards a broad and profound consciousness. In this manner Aswapathy moves forward and ascends from a purely physical life and consciousness to the next step where the powerful consciousness and the energies of Nature make its appearance and he comes across 'a world unseen unknown by outward mind'

Aswapathy continues to move upward and crosses beyond thought to the shoreless infinite. Now he is able to have a clear picture of the last glimmer of the vanishing stars. He overwhelmed sight is now beholding the realms of peace where thoughts and words are silent. Then Aswapathy starts realizing the goal of his Yoga of ascent. He is bestowed with spiritual power and vision and with this he starts gradually to expel the darkness of Nature's ignorance as a sculptor who carves the image of a beautiful deity out of rock hard stone. A transfiguration of mystic depth starts taking place in the world which marks the beginning of a 'happier cosmic'.

Aswapathy continues to move ahead and now he is able to behold the light of knowledge. Ignorance begins to drop its solid and dark layer. Now his soul is released from the darkness of ignorance. Now that Aswapathy's soul is free from earthly bondages, he is ready to receive the secret knowledge of Nature. The truth that human mind could not perceive reveals itself.

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The knowledge his expedition imparts him is becomes the crux of this great epic. Aswapathy has realised these heights through the discovery of self, through listening the voice of his soul. Man remains unaware of the eternality of self that is hidden to him and needs to be explored. Though apparently it appears that Man is trivial and unimportant but his potent self lead him to divinity and immortal light.

Aswapathy starts getting answer regarding evolution of life to the questions. This corporeal world as it appears from a detached perspective, is preside over by chance, but Aswapathy by dint of his spiritual power witnesses the presence of some divine authority having control over worldly affairs. This divine authority exists all the time but it seems to perish with its mortal frame. But its manifestation can be observed in the moments of revelation. It is beyond time and space.

Aswapathy the divine seeker of nature receives the truth about Nature. Aswapathy realises the truth about Nature's role in the great drama of existence. Nature carries the 'clay images of unborn gods' and is the divine worker in the cosmos. Aswapathy gets the light about the dual appearance of the Divine One who manifests itself as dawn and darkness, realization and unawareness, delight and ache:

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, (*Savitri*, 61)

The cosmos is interplay between the *Purusha*, the soul and the *Prakriti*, the nature. They are not two but one in the great drama of the creation of the universe. In the process of the creation the *Purusha* has 'forgotten himself' and allows *Prakriti* to do what she likes:

He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;

To her he has abandoned all to make her great. (*Savitri*, 62)

It is the force of the *Purusha* that serves as the foundation for the creation of the whole universe. The *Prakriti* acts as the saviour for the *Purusha* and the 'He is carried by her from night to deathless light.' The *Purusha* voluntarily plays the second fiddle and is contented to be inert. He unites himself with the *Prakriti* and becomes what she wishes him to. And when the *Purusha* remembers himself *Prakriti* reveals herself as his spiritual companion.

Aswapathy after receiving the secret knowledge of Nature, Aswapathy rises above the earthly bounds and gets into the secret chambers of Nature. Here he finds the eternal testimony of truth and the secrets of Nature are unfolded to him. The Book of Being, the Sacred Law everything comes to his knowledge including Nature's correspondence with the soul.

Aswapathy was able to rescue the outline of the saving clause of the dark agreement which rules all. This agreement has been prepared by Material Nature's sleep.

The great Mother mutely exploits the sanction of Infinity to the creation of various manifestations of joy and pain. She accepts indomitably the execution of will to explore the

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unexplored world and the will to live under the reign of death. The mortal body of Aswapathy has an unquenchable thirst for divine rapture which manifests itself through the soul. The mystery of God's solemn agreement with unconscious night is revealed through the mystery of birth in human form. The mystery of creation lost its obscure meaning and became quite clear to him. The mighty page of life was lit by a greater light. This experience of the divine working fills Aswapathy's heart with great hope. He has an aspiration to bring down some divine power to the earth and replace the mortal world with a diviner and spiritual world. He has a desire to see the entire change in the life on earth where mortal man should learn about immortality. He is able to visualize the possibility of a conscious soul living in a conscious world. He beholds the spiritual heights like the peaks of mountains and while standing firm on matter's base. At this point he looks on the rest of the worlds as an incomplete and imperfect manifestation of his own spiritual self. This realization makes him look on human achievements as infinite and imperfect as well as incapable of the appreciating the earnest dreams of man.

Aswapathy has risen into another realm that is far beyond the reach of ordinary beings. His yoga of ascent has made his consciousness and his individual self enormously cosmic.

Bearing the burden of the world's desire, Aswapathy continues his journey. He aspires to uncover the summits of Nature. He prolongs his expedition to explore the secrets of Nature and reaches to the world of subtle matter which is full of fantasy, symmetry and grace. Here every movement is normal, chaste and plain. But the human soul of Aswapathy is not satisfied and it aims to reach a deeper spiritual perfection. His destiny is beyond this larger space:

Aswapathy is now near to solve the great riddle of the relation between Man and Nature. The cosmos seems to be a vast electric ocean. Man is the witness of this material world and he has seen his personal vision as an impersonal fact. He also witnesses that in the middle of all the material objects as well as happenings of the ultimate force which is concealed breaks mutely and a life is born that follows a matter's law.

Aswapathy moves to the kingdom of the higher vital plane where he finds a possibility of the self finding. Here he finds Nature in her eternal journey from Inconscient to the unknown:

Her high procession moves from stage to stage,
A progress leap from sight to greater sight,
A process march from form to ampler form,
A caravan of the inexhaustible. (*Savitri*, 177)

The *Prakriti* wants to remain attached to the *Purusha* all the time. Her labour is a passion for her but it also causes pain. With both rapture and pang and in her heart she has no way but to work ceaselessly. Her mighty heart desists from suspending her action because she together with the *Purusha* has to discharge the duty of creation.

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Nature continues her work of creation regardless of the condition and circumstance. Even nescient, null, her sleep creates a world and when most unseen, she works with her utmost capacity. Aswapathy moves to the kingdom of the higher vital plane where he finds a possibility of self finding. Here he finds a possibility of self finding. Here he finds Nature in her eternal journey from inconscient to the unknown.

Aswapathy finds *Prakriti* working incessantly for her eternal lover, the *Purusha*. In her eternal journey through the veil of ignorance she is regardless of the vastness and splendour of the world:

The *Prakriti* woos his large-eyed wandering thoughts to dwell in figures of her million-impulsed Force just to attract her veiled companion and keep him close to her breast in her world-cloak Her wish is to cajole him with his small gifts. The *Prakriti* wants to remain attached to the *Purusha* all the time. Nature has a vision of her greatness and she has a keen desire for perfection. But effort to fulfill this desire invites pain, “A rapture and pang, her glory and her curse” (*Savitri* 178). A.B. Purani writes:

The secret energies of Nature act in such a way in this ignorant world that by their own action, sometimes by their very strong action, they put off or render impossible the very attainment of their objective. (*Aurobindo's Savitri – An Approach and a Study*, 185)

On this vital plane, the inertia of the Nescience haunts the masteries of Nature. The course of birth and death is only an episode and the human Spirit is move from birth to birth and even after surrendering the body the spirit can continue to act.

Aswapathy gets an insight about the human progress made in various fields. He keeps himself busy in invention, production, interchange, economic progress, etc. This breed of growth and advancement never leads to the final end of perfection. So such mode of development is always provisional. One system was pursued by the other and the process goes on but there is no end. It treats parts as wholes. And, in the enormous imperfect bustle of this vital plane, life looks quite aimless and empty, full of contraries and impelled by necessity:

There quivers still within her breast and ours

A glory that was once and is no more,

Or there calls to us from some unfulfilled beyond

A greatness yet unreached by the halting world. (*Savitri* 178)

After passing through The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life, The World of Falsehood, The Paradise of the Life-God, The Heavens of the Ideal, he reaches The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge. Aswapathy continues to ascend one after other spiritual heights of aspiration as the leader and representative of his race. The world-stair is not one world but all possible worlds, and ahead of the concept of space and time; the centre is everywhere, the circumference is nowhere. The whole arc of occult experience between the poles of superconscience and inconscience has enabled him to rise above all knowledge:

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For Aswapathy himself, the whole arc of occult experience between the poles of superconscience and inconscience has already been covered in its entirety, and he is beyond all knowledge, all experiences.

But what about the rest of mankind? What he aspires for is not a personal solution but a universal realisation and a new creation. And so he continues his quest for this eventual solution, and his endeavour does not go futile.

He is advised to be content with what he has been awarded but he urges for more for the earth or the race as a whole. Aswapathy pleads before the Divine Mother:

How shall I rest content with mortal days
And the dull measure of terrestrial things,
I who have seen behind the cosmic mask
The glory and the beauty of thy face?
Hard is the doom to which thou bindst thy sons!
How long shall our spirits battle with the Night
And bear defeat and the brute yoke of Death,
We who are vessels of a deathless Force
And builders of the godhead of the race? (*Savitri*, 341)

And the Mother gives her consenting voice:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry.
One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power. ...
A seed shall be sown in Death's tremendous hour, (*Savitri*, 346)

Thus Savitri comes into the world, not merely to meet with a childless King's desire for issue, but also to fulfil the great aspiration of Aswapathy to see a divine life on the earth.

Aswapathy's childless state symbolises the spiritual barrenness of the human race that results in the failure to lead a life in a significant manner. The earth is distressed and pained to see the collapse of the spirituality and it becomes obvious in Aswapathy's aspiration and call forth the divine intervention of Savitri's birth – "A world's desire compelled her mortal birth". (*Savitri*, 22)

She comes to face and defeat Death, to bring to earth her absolute and final deliverance from mortality and ignorance. Sri Aurobindo talks about physical immortality as well as the immortality of pure consciousness and the immortality of the psychic being.

According to Indian myth Nature is the creative force of God. The universe is the interplay of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. Sri Aurobindo used the term *Purusha* and *Prakriti* quite often in his compositions. I will like to write some words about their cradle. These words come from the six systems of Indian philosophy which are meant to facilitate a knowledge seeker in achieving the true knowledge. The third of these systems is *Sankhya*. The word *Sankhya* means 'related to number'. The *Sankhya* philosophy edifies that the real knowledge about an object can be obtained only after achieving knowledge about its component.

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Regarding the process of the evolution of the universe *Sankhya* philosophy, *Sankhya* found 25 fundamental categories as the origin. For this research I need to explore only the first two. *Purusha* is the cosmic spirit, the basic essential underlying truth of consciousness within. *Prakriti* is nature or primal substance at the base of the entire creation. Sri Aurobindo has presented this idea in many of his works. He asserts in *The Life Divine*:

In the philosophy of the Sankhyas we find developed most thoroughly the metaphysical idea of Purusha-Prakriti. These two are eternally separate entities, but in relation to each other. Prakriti is Nature-power, an executive Power, it is Energy apart from Consciousness; for Consciousness belongs to the Purusha, Prakriti without Purusha is inert, mechanical, inconscient. (*The Life Divine*, 63-64)

Purusha and *Prakriti* are the twofold manifestation of one reality working out for one common purpose through the visible antagonism:

The Sankhya also asserts the eternal coexistence of Prakriti and Purusha, Nature and Conscious-Soul, and the alternative states of rest or equilibrium of Prakriti and movement or disturbance of equilibrium. (*The Life Divine*, 90)

Yoga which means to yoke or join in the sense of unification symbolizes the union of the soul with the immortal being. Yogis perform yoga in order to seek union with the supreme. The manifestation of the divine is epitomized in two aspects- *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. This Supreme force is to be shrouded from the sight of the individual but through a force of ignorance it acts on the individual. The *Purusha* is itself divine but it acts on the surface in the force of Nature as Aurobindo writes in *Letters on Yoga*: 'it is the individual apparent being imperfect with her imperfection'. (284) It is necessary for the *Purusha* to take part in the evolutionary process through creating as it were the individual psychic being as its representative. This individual psychic being takes on the imperfections of Nature and evolves to the point of regaining its full psychic and reuniting with the self. This takes place in the state of duality. This is the reality that is present on all planes of its beings, the plane here beings, the psychic, the mental, the vital and the physical *Purushas*.

The study of the character of Aswapathy brings to light that realisation of eternal existence is immortality. Immortality as a realization can be divided into two- realisation of knowledge and that of *Prakriti* and realisation of knowledge is the realisation of immortality of *Purusha*. The Existence of Brahman is divided into *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are united inseparably, though they appear to be contradictory and reverse to each other. Purusha is shapeless and is the realisation of Pure Consciousness. Contrary to this Prakriti has shape. *Purusha* is inclined towards formlessness while *Prakriti* is inclined towards form. *Purusha* is formless and immutable, eternal and beyond time. The course of time is also perpetual. Nobody knows when it terminates.

Then the desire to be immortal may take refuge either in the formless or in form. The source of shape or form is its giver. *Prakriti* carries dual existence. The transformation of forms is called *gun. aviks. obha* in the Sankhya system of philosophy. In the mystic

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philosophy, *Purusha* is ahead of qualities, perpetual and everlasting. *Prakriti* is *apara-* and agitated with qualities. *Nirgun Purusha* and the play of qualified *Prakriti* – these two make creation possible. Chaste quality is *para-shakti*. *Purusha* and *Prakriti* as complete existence can never be separated. Their relation is the relation of love. The ecstasy of *Purusha* is the love of *Prakriti* and the expression of their delight is called creation.

This concept of *Prakriti* and *Purusha* finds ample manifestation *Savitri*. Aswapathy and Satyavan are the *Purusha*. *Savitri* is the *Prakriti*. She is the pivotal character in the epic.

Aswapathy's flight is an attempt of a *Purusha* to ascend. It is an exertion to search for self. No doubt there is rigour in it. Aswapathy's endeavour is to be immortal and for this he wants to bring down *Savitri* on the earth. His efforts require immense power and he has the power. Aswa or horse is the symbol of power. Aswapathy signifies power.

There are three parts of Aswapathy's yoga. The first is for the attainment of self-knowledge and is called 'The *Yoga of the King*'. The second is to attain cosmic knowledge. The third is accomplishment. The secret of a *yogic* life is contained in it.

What is the need for Aswapathy to perform the Yoga? The absolute power has come down to the earth accepting the reality of death. But Aswapathy's desires are otherwise. He aspires for light in absolute nescience. This is why Aswapathy desires for the advent of *Savitri*. He symbolises the divine aspiration. He is not an ordinary man rather he belongs to a transcendental level. To some extent Aswapathy yoga pronounces a limit to our capacity. Apart from the three central characters there are two more that are unseen ones- *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. The effort made by Aswapathy is the labour of the absolute *Purusha*. Aswapathy is not an ordinary seeker. He is a pioneer, a forerunner. His endeavour is comic. The radiance of some divine force can be evidently noticed in his expedition. Matter can be identified with consciousness in his efforts. Aswapathy has an awareness of the Infinite. He is utterly aloof from ego. Ordinary beings can also acquire such an insight, but they cannot go beyond the ego-sense. Aswapathy's consciousness is the consciousness of the Higher mind. Ordinary minds remain busy with sumptuous and aesthetic matter, but the feeling of generality is not obvious to it. Matter is observed by ordinary beings, but the ideal is incomprehensible to them.

To cut the long short, Aswapathy has some aspirations and desires. He has pursued a path of light that continuously leads him upward. This is a divine path. His worldly life is lighted up by an awe-inspiring prominence. An ocean of desire is manifested in him. This is the life of Aswapathy. Those who so become are chosen. Intuition is their essence. The emergence of the Divine is not something implausible in each of us. He is present in all of us.

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