

BOOK REVIEW :

SRI AUROBINDO'S "SAVITRI"

LECTURES ON SAVITRI

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Price: Rs. 7.50

Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* crowned a multi-dimensional career, for the Sage of Pondicherry had also been politician, professor, journalist, yogin, philosopher, translator and poet. A lifetime's experiences in the realms of yoga and philosophy were imbedded in this long poem in blank verse. Because of the superb imagination that had conceived the poem and executed it on such a vast canvas, *Savitri* has been termed a 'cosmic' epic, an even more ambitious venture in philosophical poetry than Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. It has taken some time to bring the poem to the common reader. Nevertheless, a growing band of readers are attesting to the fact that *Savitri* is a unique poem worthy of being studied with sustained attention.

However, the poem itself, with its 23,000 lines of blank verse, has been an arduous task for readers. How to follow this long poem, with its labyrinthine arguments and occult descriptions? Sri Aurobindo comprehended many worlds; and *Savitri* is his testament. No wonder the poem is difficult. But some ardent disciples who had closely watched the growth of the epic and discussed with Sri Aurobindo the poem's significances, have since tried to interpret it on the lines the Master

had approved. Foremost amongst the disciples to wrestle thus with *Savitri* was certainly A. B. Purani. In fact, till he passed away two years ago, he took classes regularly in the Aurobindo Ashram, and expounded the epic with painstaking and persuasive clarity. He also toured widely in the West, lecturing to audiences about *Savitri* and its place in world literature. Three of the lectures he delivered in the United States in August 1962 have now been brought together in this slim volume. We miss the majestic physical presence of the lecturer, who used to mesmerise his audiences by his dramatic delivery. Yet even the cold print does bring to our mind's eye Purani the dedicated exponent of his Master's message.

These lectures are an introductory preview for the study of the epic. Sri Aurobindo chose the 'Savitri Upakhyaana' in the *Mahabharata* as his 'fable'. He has retained Vyasa's tale but added many insights—yogic, philosophic, spiritual, mystical—to the characters and the action. Thus Aswapathy doing tapasya for eighteen years to gain an heir becomes the spearhead of humanity's aspiration that asks for the descent of the Supreme into earth-nature. Savitri the girl-heroine of Vyasa is here an incarnation, the divine's answer to humanity's call. She fights the God of Death,—or Ignorance or Nescience,—to win for humanity the gift of eternal blissful life. Purani ex-

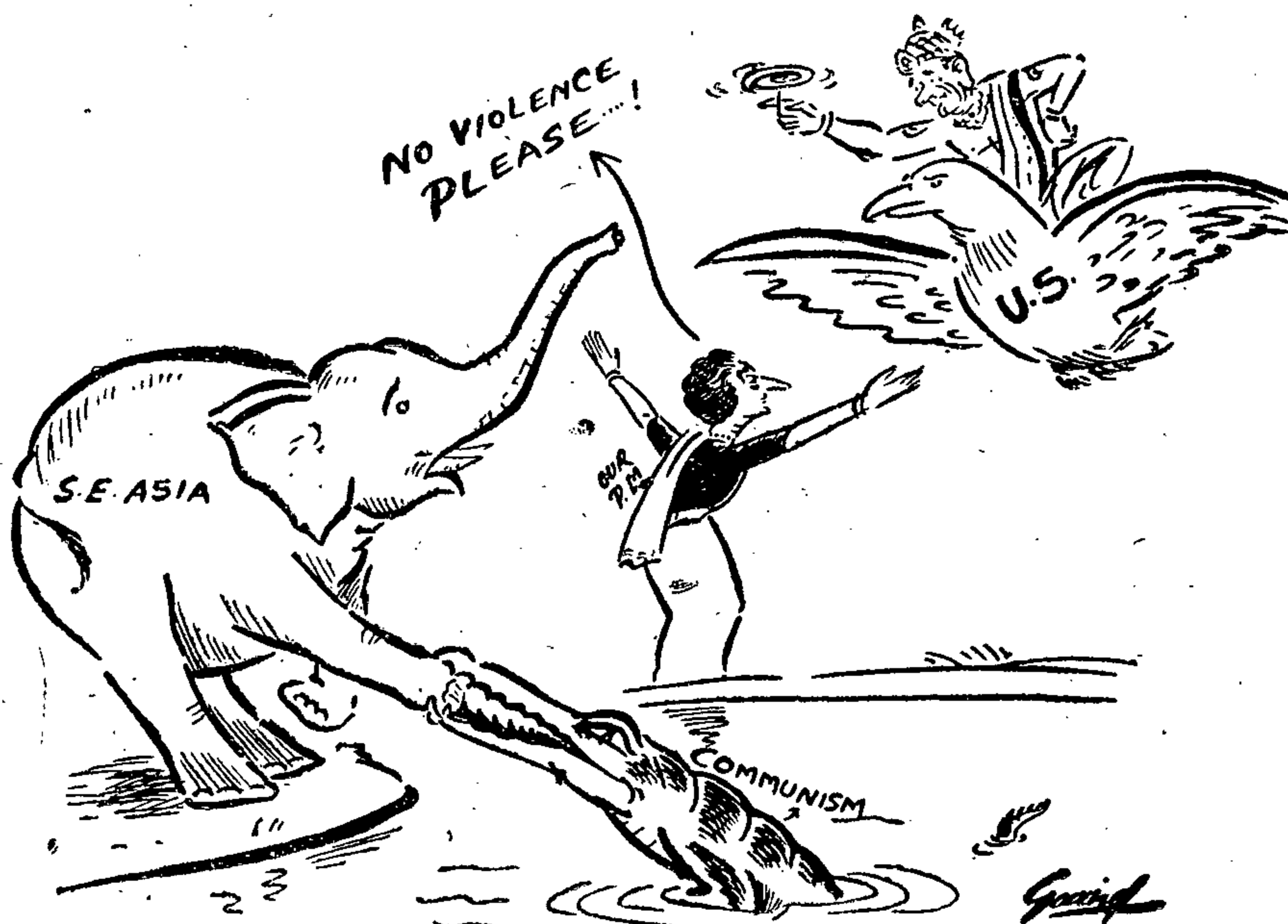
plains how Sri Aurobindo made the legend a symbol for describing the cosmic story of man's aspiration, God's answer, and the avatar's victory. He takes some of the vital portions in the epic—the Yoga of Aswapathy, the Problem of Pain, and the Yoga of Savitri—for detailed examination. For example, here is Purani lighting up the yoga of Aswapathy in a few conversational sentences:

"So here Aswapathy expanding, saw that there were levels of consciousness which he was passing through, and the universe was himself. World knowledge or universal knowledge he got from around himself and God-knowledge from above. These are the first three books of *Savitri*, roughly. The first five cantos in the first book is Self-Knowledge, knowledge of the self, independent of mind, life and body. A divine entity, possible of realization by evoking faculties which are dormant in men now. Second, when the self is realised the self is found to be, not limited to the egoistic unit, or egoistic constitution in which it happens to function, but it is as wide as the cosmos. Thirdly, there is a possibility of overcoming or breaking the limit of manifested universe, or the universe as it is now functioning; there is a universe that can be invoked into many manifestations—a potential universe that can be brought down here—Truth consciousness, institutional consciousness, inspirational consciousness, a revelatory power over mind, supermind where one can open the human consciousness to the high level and bring them down. That is the potential in us that is waiting for manifestation here. Aswapathy realized this and carried the aspiration of the human consciousness to the supreme House of the Spirit and brought back Savitri's birth as a boon."

If we could digest the passage quoted above, we should really have caught the still centre of the Aurobindonian philosophy. Appropriate quotations are strewn through the lectures. The immediate listeners must have been thrilled by the vibrating voice of Purani reciting the illustrative passages.

This is a much-needed book and will be a great help to teachers, students and readers of *Savitri*. The publishers have also included the questions put by members of the audience and Purani's replies. This adds to the value of the book, and makes it a welcome companion to Purani's earlier treatise, *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Approach and a Study*.

—PREMA NANDAKUMAR



INDIRA WARNS AGAINST DESPATCH OF MORE U.S. TROOPS TO VIETNAM—NEWS

Savitri by Sri Aurobindo â€” his major poetic work, an epic in blank verse. In Savitri, a legend from the Mahabharata becomes the symbol of the human soulâ€™s spiritual destiny. In poetic language, Sri Aurobindo describes his vision of existence and explores the reason for ignorance, darkness, suffering and pain, the purpose of life on earth and the prospect of a glorious future for humanity. The writing of the epic extended over much of the later part of his life. Author's note Author's biography About Savitri. Table of contents. Letters on Savitri. Introduction Part 1 Part 2 Part 3 Part 4 Part 5 Part 6. The Mother reading Savitri. Book I Book II Book III Book IV Book V Book VI Book VII Book VIII Book IX Book X Book XI. Misc. Contact us. Home. This website was inaugurated on Aug 15, 2000 with permission of the Copyright Department of Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. You know, before writing Savitri Sri Aurobindo said to me, I am impelled to launch on a new adventure; I was hesitant in the beginning, but now I am decided. Still, I do not know how far I shall succeed. I pray for help.