

Savitri: A Beacon of Hope for Women in the Modern Age

Dr. Suneeta Upadhyay

Asst. Professor,
Dept. of English,
N. K. B. M. G. College, Chandausi

Abstract

Savitri, an epic poem by Sri Aurobindo, stands as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age. Drawing inspiration from ancient Indian mythology, Sri Aurobindo weaves a powerful narrative that portrays women as strong, independent, and capable individuals. Throughout history, women have often been marginalized and their contributions undervalued. However, Savitri challenges these societal norms and offers a transformative vision of womanhood that is empowering and inspiring. In order to understand the significance of Savitri as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age, it is important to first examine the prevailing discrimination and challenges faced by women in contemporary society.

I. Introduction

Savitri is a profound and magnificent work of literature written by Sri Aurobindo, a prominent Indian philosopher, yogi, and poet. Published in 1950, Savitri has been regarded as one of Aurobindo's most notable and influential works. This epic poem delves into the themes of love, spiritual awakening, and the quest for enlightenment. The story of Savitri revolves around the eponymous protagonist, a young woman who embodies strength, wisdom, and unwavering devotion. Throughout the poem, Savitri embarks on a journey to bring her husband, Satyavan, back to life from the clutches of death. In the modern age, women continue to face numerous challenges and discrimination in various aspects of their lives. They are often subjected to gender-based violence, limited educational opportunities, unequal pay and job opportunities, and restrictive societal norms. Moreover, women often face barriers in accessing leadership positions and are underrepresented in decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, Savitri presents a vision of womanhood that defies societal expectations and offers a sense of hope for women seeking empowerment and selffulfillment. Savitri not only challenges traditional gender roles but also celebrates the innate strength and resilience of women. The character of Savitri herself is portrayed as a courageous and determined woman who defies societal expectations and goes on a heroic journey to rescue her husband from the clutches of death ^(Brodbeck, 2013). Throughout the poem, Sri Aurobindo highlights Savitri's intellectual prowess, emotional depth, and spiritual wisdom. He presents her as a symbol of feminine power and showcases her ability to overcome obstacles through her unwavering determination and inner strength. Savitri serves as a powerful symbol of hope for women in the modern age, showing that they have the strength and potential to overcome societal limitations and shape their own destiny. Furthermore, Savitri also addresses the issue of patriarchal control and highlights the importance of women's agency and autonomy. Through Savitri's determination and unwavering spirit, Sri Aurobindo emphasizes the importance of women asserting their individuality and challenging oppressive norms that seek to restrict their freedom and autonomy. By depicting Savitri as a strong and independent woman, Sri Aurobindo encourages women to break free from societal expectations and take control of their own lives. Savitri also offers a critique of gender-based violence and the objectification of women. Sri Aurobindo portrays Savitri as a resilient and empowered woman who refuses to be victimized. She is not passive or submissive, but rather actively fights against injustice and oppression. Savitri's character serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring women to stand up against gender-based violence and demand equal rights and dignity. By emphasizing Savitri's agency and resilience, Sri Aurobindo challenges the notion that women are powerless victims and instead presents them as capable of creating change and standing up for themselves. Through his poem Savitri, Sri Aurobindo presents a vision of womanhood that defies societal expectations and offers a sense of hope for women in the modern age. In today's rapidly changing world, the significance of accurate weather forecasts cannot be overstated. Savitri's character in Sri Aurobindo's poem becomes a symbol of hope for women in the modern age. Her journey and transformation throughout the poem exemplify the potential for women to rise above societal limitations and shape their own destinies. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo's portrayal of Savitri as a symbol of feminine power and resilience challenges patriarchal control and highlights the importance of women's agency and autonomy in the face of oppressive norms. The character of Savitri can be seen as a reflection of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which emphasizes the evolution and involution of human

The Role of Women in "Savitri"

Aurobindo's *Savitri* offers a beacon of hope for women in the modern age by presenting a powerful, multifaceted female protagonist who defies societal expectations and challenges traditional gender roles. In a time when women faced numerous limitations and systemic oppression, Savitri stands as a symbolic representation of the strength and resilience that women possess. She not only displays exceptional courage and determination but also showcases her intelligence, wisdom, and spiritual prowess.

Savitri with a robust optimism and certitude reveals the spiritual truth of the future of humanity in a prophetic voice:

Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.

The greater destiny waits you in your front: (370)

Through Savitri's character, Aurobindo emphasizes the inherent capabilities and potential of women, urging them to break free from societal constraints and embrace their true worth. Savitri's character serves as a source of inspiration for women to lead lives of purpose, courage, and self-discovery. Savitri serves as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age by depicting a female protagonist who challenges societal norms and asserts her agency.

Nature shall live to manifest secret God,

The Spirit shall take up the human play,

This earthly life become the life divine. (710)

Deciphering the Character of Savitri: An In-depth Analysis

In order to truly understand the significance of Savitri as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age, it is important to delve into an in-depth analysis of the character herself. Savitri, as portrayed in Aurobindo's epic poem, embodies several qualities and characteristics that make her a beacon of hope for women. First and foremost, Savitri possesses unwavering determination and resilience. Despite facing immense challenges and obstacles, she never gives up on her quest to bring her husband back to life. She demonstrates the power of perseverance and shows that women are capable of overcoming even the most difficult circumstances. Furthermore, Savitri is depicted as a woman of immense wisdom and intelligence. She engages in deep philosophical and spiritual discussions with figures such as Death and the Divine Mother, showcasing her intellectual prowess and ability to navigate complex topics. Additionally, Savitri showcases her spiritual prowess throughout the poem. Through her unwavering faith and connection to the divine, she is able to tap into higher realms of consciousness and channel divine power. This is seen in her interactions with the Divine Mother, where she seeks guidance and eventually gains the power to defeat Death himself.

Societal Relevance of "Savitri" in the Modern Age

The relevance of "Savitri" in the modern age lies in its portrayal of a woman who defies societal norms and expectations. In today's society, women still face numerous challenges and constraints that limit their potential and hinder their progress. These challenges include gender inequality, glass ceilings, societal expectations of beauty, and the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. However, through the character of Savitri, Sri Aurobindo presents a powerful and inspiring alternative. Savitri challenges the notion that women are weak or inferior, and instead presents a female protagonist who is strong, intelligent, and capable of achieving great heights. Her unwavering determination and resilience serve as a reminder to women in the modern age that they have the power to overcome any obstacle and achieve their goals regardless of societal expectations or limitations. Moreover, Savitri's wisdom and intellect challenge the stereotypes and assumptions often placed on women. Her ability to engage in deep philosophical and spiritual discussions showcases the intellectual capabilities of women and serves as a reminder that women are not limited to traditional roles or expectations. Additionally, Savitri's spiritual prowess highlights the importance of inner growth and self-discovery in the modern age. In a world that often prioritizes material success and external achievements, the character of Savitri reminds us of the significance of inner transformation and spiritual development in finding true fulfillment and purpose.

Feminism and Equality: Insights from "Savitri"

"Savitri" offers valuable insights into the themes of feminism and equality. The character of Savitri challenges traditional gender roles and norms, highlighting the need for equality between men and women. She does not conform to societal expectations of being a submissive and obedient wife, but rather asserts her independence and fights for what she believes in. Through her courage, intelligence, and determination, Savitri breaks free from the constraints imposed on women at that time and establishes herself as an equal partner to her husband, Satyavan. She is not passive or weak, but rather takes charge of her own destiny and actively works towards the betterment of herself and those around her. Furthermore, Savitri's character embodies the idea that

women can have agency and make decisions for themselves. She does not rely on others to determine her fate or succumb to societal pressures, but rather follows her own path and exercises her autonomy. The portrayal of Savitri in Sri Aurobindo's epic challenges the notion of women as passive recipients of fate and instead presents them as powerful agents of change in their own lives. While "Savitri" was written in the early 20th century, its themes and messages remain relevant in the modern age. Women in today's society still face challenges and barriers to equality. They continue to fight against gender stereotypes and discrimination in various spheres of life, including the workplace, politics, and personal relationships. The character of Savitri serves as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age by showing that they can break free from societal constraints and achieve greatness. Nature shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine. (710)

Savitri with a robust optimism and certitude reveals the spiritual truth of the future of humanity in a prophetic voice:

Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.
The greater destiny waits you in your front: (370)

When the God of Death becomes furious and declares that he is the only the guardian, he is God, ultimately everybody comes to him for peace, for rest, Savitri replies that Love is greater than death. Death says that love is only the passion of flesh. He calls it "A sweet secretion from the erotic glands", "Flattering and torturing the burning nerves (Canto II Book X 618) " and claims that, "Not on earth can divine love be found.(619)" Savitri, countering every argument put before her by Death, says:

When unity is won, when strife is lost
And all is known and all is clasped by love
Who would turn back to ignorance and
pain? (633)
With great command, Savitri tells death:
...O Death;
My love is stronger than the bond of fate;
Our love is the heavenly seal of the
Supreme. (Canto III Book X 633)
She also says:
...love is the bright link 'twixt earth and
heaven.
Love is the far Transcendent's angel here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute. (Canto
III Book X 633)

As a poet somewhere describing Savitri, says in book 1:
A wide self-giving was her native act;
A magnanimity as of sea or sky. (Canto II
book I 15)

Impact of Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" on Contemporary Literature

Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" has had a significant impact on contemporary literature, particularly in the exploration of spirituality and self-discovery. His poetic masterpiece delves deep into the realms of consciousness and transformation, providing readers with a profound understanding of the human experience. Through the character of Savitri, Sri Aurobindo explores the journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening. The themes and concepts presented in "Savitri" have influenced numerous contemporary writers and poets who seek to explore the depths of human consciousness and the search for meaning in life. One example of the impact of "Savitri" on contemporary literature can be seen in the works of Rumi, a renowned Persian poet, and mystic. Rumi's poems often touch upon similar themes of spiritual transformation, self-discovery, and the search for divine love (Shanmugam, 2012). Another example is the poetry of Mary Oliver, an American poet known for her nature-inspired works. Oliver's poems often reflect a deep connection to the natural world and an exploration of the self within that context, mirroring the themes of interconnectedness and self-realization present in Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri."

Had her arduous journey to the world of Yama been only for own personal gain, she would have thankfully accepted Yama's offer of heavenly abode. But Savitri's concerns are greater:

Love in her was wider than the universe,

The whole world could take refuge in her
single heart. (Canto II book I 15)

She tells Yama that her mission is to conquer death in order to bring everlasting peace to earth. And ultimately, she emerges victorious in her mission when:

The frontiers of Ignorance shall recede,
.....

This earthly life become the life divine.

(Book XI 710)

Savitri's victory over death and revival of Satyavan—an embodiment of Prakriti, is symbolic of the union of the spirit and the creation itself.

Concluding Remarks: The Lasting Legacy of "Savitri"

In conclusion, Sri Aurobindo's "Savitri" serves as a beacon of hope for women in the modern age by challenging societal norms and showcasing the potential for women to break free from constraints and achieve greatness. Through the character of Savitri, Sri Aurobindo portrays a strong, independent, and determined woman who rises above societal expectations and fights for her own destiny and the well-being of her loved ones. The impact of "Savitri" extends beyond gender roles and serves as a source of inspiration for all individuals seeking self-discovery and spiritual growth. "Savitri" is a timeless work that has left a lasting legacy in the world of literature. It continues to inspire and influence contemporary writers who explore themes of spirituality, self-discovery, and the search for meaning in life.

References and work cited

- [1]. Shanmugam, J. (2012, February 1). Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: A confluence of Yoga, Science and Religion.
- [2]. Brodbeck, S. (2013, September 11). The Story of Sāvitrī in theMahābhārata: a Lineal Interpretation. <https://scite.ai/reports/10.1017/s1356186313000424>.
- [3]. Krishnamurti, J. Commentaries on Living. Ed. D. Rajgopal. Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1992.
- [4]. Mehta, Rohit. The Dialogue With Death: (Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, a Mystical Approach). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, Private Limited. 1972.
- [5]. Sri Aurobindo. Collected Poems: The Complete Poetical Works. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972.
- [6]. Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol. Fourth Rev. ed. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1993.
- [7]. Aurobindo, Sri. Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol. 1954. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 1997. Web.
Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. 1960. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.
- [8]. Dalal, Roshen. The Vedas: An Introduction to Hinduism's Sacred Texts. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2014. <<http://books.google.co.in>>. np.
- [9]. Mahabharata of Krishna-DwaipayanaVyasa. trans. Kisari Mohan Ganguli. n. d. 9 Dec. 2013<<http://bharatadesam.com/spiritual/mahabharata/index.php>>.
- [10]. Naik, M.K. A History of English Literature. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982. Print.
- [11]. Purani, A.B. Sri Aurobindo's Savitri: An Approach and a Study. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1986. Print.
- [12]. "Purusha" def. A Sanskrit English Dictionary. comp. M. Monier Williams. 1899. Ed. Pandit Ishwar Chandra. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2008.print.
- [13]. Yogananda, Paramahansa. God Talks with Arjuna: The Bhagwad Gita. Kolkata: Yogada Satsanga Society of India, 2002.