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## Quest for Spirituality and Devotion: A Study of the Bhakti Movement in Aurobindo

### Ghosh's *Savitri*

**Dr. RK. Sangsari Devi**

Associate Professor, Department of English,  
Dhanamanjuri College of Arts, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur

**Dr. Ningombam Andropov Singh**

, Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
Dhanamanjuri College of Arts, Dhanamanjuri University, Manipur

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#### ABSTRACT

The present paper examines Sri Aurobindo Ghosh's epic poem, *Savitri*, as an exemplary Bhakti literacy work that embodies the core principles of Bhakti poetry. Bhakti poetry emphasizes the importance of cultivating a deep sense of devotional and love for the divine. It involves surrendering one's ego, desires and promoting one's ego, desires and spiritual growth. The poem's emphasis on the importance of live, devotional and spiritual growth serves as a unique experience and part of our culture is philosophically expressed through the timeless story woven around the love between Savitri and Satyavan. Furthermore, this study explores the ways in which Savitri's devotion to her husband, Satyavan, provides a paradigm shifts in our understanding of the unique perspective on the nature of reality and the human condition to the ultimate cultivation of a deeper connection with the divine. The universality of the theme of love, devotion, and spirituality in the poem continues to resonate in today's time making it a timeless masterpiece of Bhakti poetry.



## **Introduction**

The idea of Bhakti is best expressed in the teaching of the Vedas. Bhakti generally means an intense devotion to God, to serve him and to immerse oneself in the divine experience and worship of the divine. Bhakti is a Sanskrit word and it means 'to serve' or 'to share' or 'to participate'. The term Bhakti can be traced to the Vedic period and its mention can also be traced in the Bhagvad Gita. Bhakti is considered one of the highest forms of respect and it can be considered as a medium for getting enlightenment and gaining knowledge. It involves a deep worship and devotion of individuals towards a supreme almighty, a God, who is portrayed as the ultimate reality, the source of all existence, and the foundation of the universe. Bhakti movement is considered as one of the most widespread socio-religious movement across India which transcended barriers of caste and class and brought about a change in the society.

As the traditional outlook of the Brahmanical framework was subdued, it fostered a new way of thinking and a new belief emerged. Bhakti movement fostered and emphasized on the development of regional languages and thoughts. The most significant of this movement was that it helped the common people to direct interaction with God and giving shape to the individual's sense of spirituality and identity. It gave them a sense of pride and thus, people irrespective of caste and creed could practice their worship for the chosen God. Bhakti Movement is mostly associated with love for one's own God and be one with it. It ushered in an egalitarian society where people got free from the clutches of the Brahmanical doctrines.

The caste system prevalent in ancient times divided the society into four groups. It starts with the Brahmans at the first hierarchy, then the Kshatriyas, then the Vaishyas and last of all, the Shudras who are considered as the low caste people. The very idea of caste system was challenged by the Bhakti movement. The introduction of Bhakti brought an immense change and development in the society. The movement was a chance for everyone to form a deep relationship with one's god and be selfless and seek salvation.

## **Discussion:**

The drive towards hard precision and devotion to worship God of one's own choice represents perhaps the most admirable break with traditional Brahminical doctrines and set new norms with the Bhakti Movement. The contrast between the ideals of the movement and that of the traditional and conventional norms offered to the contemporary society lies in the rise of shifting tonalities, their adoption of a new



approach and putting a new way of life. The movement orchestrated a whole new societal approach and a potential freedom of worship. It encouraged humane qualities, moral attitudes, freedom of thought and a sense of secularism. It was like holding the keys to salvation all by themselves which earlier was only under the influence of the Brahmanical power. The quest for salvation and spiritual growth fully materialized during this period.

Aurobindo Ghosh's (15<sup>th</sup> August 1872 to 5<sup>th</sup> December 1950) *Savitri* is an epic poem which is deeply rooted in spiritualism and devotion. Ghosh's *Savitri* is based on Savitri, a legendary Indian princess who saves her husband Satyavan from the clutches of Death. In this epic poem Ghosh tries to infuse his own spiritual and philosophical ideas and give emphasis to love and devotion. The very idea of spiritual and self-realisation is an integral part of this poem. It portrays the divine intervention and human quest leading to find triumph and victory in unending relentless act of devotion and love. The story of Savitri and Satyavan is all about love and dedication. It also highlights the devotion and ever growing love of Savitri for Satyavan — a love so strong that it can even conquer death.

Savitri is the daughter of King Aswapati, who performed all kind of austerities in order to get a child, and after a long wait of 18 years, he is finally blessed with a daughter who rises from the sacrificial flames and Goddess Savitri from mythology and the child was named Savitri. Eventually the child grows up to be a beauty embodied with certain godlike qualities and angelic aura. When she reaches maturity, her beauty and charismatic qualities attracted many Kings and Princes who were eager to be her suitor and admired her but they wouldn't dare to ask for her hand. Savitri had the power to choose her own husband and her father also bids her to seek her own love. She ventured with the quest of finding her true love and returning after two years, announces that she had chose Satyavan, son of Dyumatsena, the blind king of Shalwa. However, Savitri was warned by Narad, the wandering seer, by giving the prophecy that Satyavan won't live long and would die within a year even though he is righteous person endowed with every high quality. But, Savitri was adamant and was keen on marrying him. Her parents persuaded her to change her decision but she remained unmoved and eventually married Satyavan. This reflects Savitri's undeniable love for Satyavan. Even when she knows his condition that he will die within a year, she never backed away. The utter surrender to the divine will, death, and surrendering herself to fate is something which is true about devotion. Her love for Satyavan and courage can be seen in these lines,

“Even as the star than in its fiery passage.

Through the midnight sky adheres to its lower,



I will follow thee, O' Satyavan, my soul,

Through all the journey of thy fleeting life”

(Book 1, Canto 2, “The Birth of Savitri”. P.33)

The willingness to follow her love through the ups and downs of life can be seen in the above lines. She commits herself to follow him through the many phases of life and through all the uncertainties of life. Elements of Bhakti is thus, seen in Savitri's love for her husband Satyavan. It reflects the Bhakti tradition that emphasizes on loving devotion.

Another feature which captivates us is the will to surrender to the divine will and higher power. It can be seen that Savitri's deep love and devotion to Satyavan motivates her to surrender death. Her desire is so great that she feels she should follow Satyavan and transcend suffering and pain. Her surrender of her intellectual understanding and rational thinking is a sign of affection and love for Satyavan. She is fearless and brave to embrace the unknown, surrendering her desire and understanding. Savitri's love for Satyavan is unconditional, unwavering, and true. She puts his needs and well being above her own. The intensity of her love can be best seen when she follows him and decides to be with him even in the face of death. Her trust and passionate love is truly revealed through her acts. Losing oneself to be with the one you love and to be with him even in death is something that only few people can achieve. The ultimate yearning for Satyavan life is the only thing she tries to put forward and her love for him thus enable her to snatch him from the clutches of death. The way Savitri stood for Satyavan is worth mentioning when she says, “My heart is tied to thee, O Satyavan by threads of love and fate” (Book 1 Canto 2.). Her love for him is a transformative force that enables her to push herself to the edge. It highlights the depth of human emotion, spirituality and the true power of love.

The poem says that death, which is considered as something very dreadful and powerful, is easily conquered by Savitri through immense spiritual devotion and strength. Her love for Satyavan is not merely romantic attachment, but it is more of a higher level, a sublime state. It is a profound, pure and all-consuming devotion that enables and drives her to overcome all kinds of limitation and transcend the unattainable world beyond the physical realm even. Savitri's deep love for Satyavan is not a disembodied emotion but rather it is more of a physical and sensual presence. Her devotion makes her to pursuit the journey and to devote herself physically in attaining her love. Therefore, the very idea of the transformative potential of the Bhakti movement can be seen in Savitri's ardent love for Satyavan through her perilous journey.



### **Bhakti Movement and Equality.**

The emphasis on equality and the dissolution of social hierarchies can be seen in the poem *Savitri* too. To begin with, we can understand the princess's upbringing which is highly royal but she chooses to follow Satyavan, a prince from lower social background. The very thought of choosing someone different from her class signifies the idea of equality, which again is one of the features of the Bhakti Movement. She rejects the social distinctions and emphasizes on the importance of loving someone without any bias or any grudge. It is more about personal devotion, care and love. Throughout the narrative, the story of Savitri and Satyavan serves as a catalyst for the dissolution of the social hierarchies. Social divisions are transcended and a new way of understanding mutually is emphasized. Savitri and Satyavan are protected as one soul unified and brought together without the interference of social differences. The poet writes regarding this, "together they walked, a single soul in two bodies, with one heart and goal" (Book II, Canto IV, P.123)

The echoes of the Bhakti's ideal of oneness and togetherness can also best be seen here in the poem. The idea of self-surrender and devotion as exemplified in the poetry of bhakti poets such as Kabirdas, Sudras and Mirabai can be seen in the love and devotion of Savitri. An intense personal devotion is something that can be seen in her love for Satyavan which again is highly relatable to the Bhakti movement and its writings. The deep sense of surrender and devotion is an example of the intense love and nature of worship of the Bhakti literatures. The poem also offers the philosophical transcending and transforming oneself into something strong and spiritually powerful. Through her devotion and yogic qualities, she can access higher states of consciousness and a higher realm. She transcends the limited human sphere and follows Satyavan to another level of existence. Thus, bringing him back from death and be united with him again.

### **Conclusion:**

Through the discussion of Savitri, it is truly felt that the poem is a wonderful piece of literary work which emphasizes on the principles of allowing one-self to devotion and surrender for something higher. It is the exploration of the human condition, spirituality and mental progress. Savitri's journey is a testament of the human tendency and qualities to excel and overcome all kinds of trouble. It focuses on the human capacity to transcend, self-realization, endurance, and profound lasting love. It serves as a spiritual guidance that provides us with the vast realm of love and devotion.



In conclusion, *Savitri* stands as a monumental piece of work of literature that gives emphasis to the essence of Indian philosophy, spirituality and way of life. Its exploration and treatment of the human condition and its quest for a meaning and connection is noteworthy. The poem's emphasis on the importance of love devotion and spiritual enhancement serve and influences the human existence in its integrated and holistic manner.

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