PRESERVING SRI AUROBINDO'S EPIC

AUTHORS NINA JETHWA, BARBIE DAILEY . COLLECTION CARE **RICHARD HARTZ**. EDITOR ARCHIVES & RESEARCH LIBRARY, SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

Javitri

'The epics of the soul most inwardly seen as they will be by an intuitive poetry, are his [a poet's] greatest possible subject.' ¹ Sri Aurobindo

A POETIC PHILOSOPHY Javitri OF THE SPIRIT AND OF LIFE

Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol is Sri Aurobindo's greatest literary achievement, an epic poem in the English language nearing twenty-four thousand lines of blank verse.

Inspired by the tale of Savitri and Satyavan in the ancient Sanskrit epic, Mahabharata, Sri Aurobindo retells the legend in an original way, charging it with his own spiritual vision. Through *Savitri* the author reveals 'from the highest pinnacle and the largest field of vision the destiny of the human spirit and the presence and ways and purpose of the Divinity in man and the universe'.²

> Avendenig hand ofference and dight , with gold panel and of alcocat his

> > buil restand me " recurred along

I mensage from the unknown immostal yes

Down built to rour of magnifications

instants visitor the godherd came "

of a greatness of spinitual down

In colors' hiriggets offenter earne,

file lines of a significant on the

topship a recordete beart adolin

instat share dighting cartis procherd an

Ari Anobudos



SRI AUROBINDO

'Aurobindo (then Aravind Acroyd) Ghose came up from St Paul's in 1890 At Kings's he was a scholar, and Prizeman, and in 1892 was placed in the 1st Class of the Classical Tripos.'

'His gifts of spirit and of intellect had plainly been of the loftiest quality, and to this was added the romance of a unique career. Some would say that his position, among the great men produced by the new India of this century, is equalled only by that of Gandhi and Tagore.'

Extract: Kings College 1951 Annual Report, Cambridge University

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Photography: Henri Cartier-Bresson

Vaintoi Part-I-The Book of Begenningo \$15 The Symbol Dawn It was the hoar before the Jobs awake Across the patt of the devine Event forcloading opensid of Night, alors mashile upon Lilace' marge nsie & son flore of the the known Abysm of the unlodied Infinite The father less goto occupies the world, Cradled the cosmic draws of egnorant force a moved creature slowly kindling the suns, all things in its somman belist . teros the vain enormous trance of Space formless stupor without mind or life A shedow spinning through & ourless thost of she wheeld abandoned on the hollow gulfs, raetful of her spint and her fate. The imposeive spice was neutral on fig still. Then a block pressure grand towards chotant change Along love live of hortating hue the compressure tempting a desert heart whiled the for min of life's obseure slapp. I consent to see and fee soon in the unsounded How bon within the darkeen's aid white heart of Thme - dead wormoved to la Wills oblivion that succeeds the fall Blalled the crowded tablets ofthe pase-And all that was destroyed must be rebuild for doll and ewour labourd or tone more . At just a hait that hardly daved to be Sil to nights forton indeference A slow the next for a new former, A slow three loss gostures dies officed, the nove that of the transforming touch Persueled the most block que take And beinty and wor do to bot the fields of god.

SAVITRI MANUSCRIPT Facsimile of an unpublished version of the opening of Book I, Canto I, version 43 of 55.

THE COLLECTION

The *Savitri* manuscripts form a part of the larger collection of Sri Aurobindo's manuscripts preserved at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Southern India. The manuscripts and typescripts of *Savitri* amount to almost eight thousand pages dating from 1916 to the 1940s, when Sri Aurobindo was residing in the small coastal town of Pondicherry. The collection includes the author's hardbound and softbound notebooks, small perforated chit-pads, loose sheets, fascicles and correspondence in various paper types and media. The manuscripts are in longterm storage and are presently being rehoused, emerging momentarily to reveal in their splendour the remarkable journey of the poet-seer.





1916 : AN EARLY DRAFT

This exquisite little notebook of page size 10.5 x 16.8cm, was first used by Sri Aurobindo for aphoristic writings, parts of which were published in the Arya in May 1915. The drafts of *Savitri* are likely to be the very first drafts of the poem, the first draft dated 8th and 9th August 1916.

SUSTAINABLE PRESERVATION

PRESERVATION IN THE TROPICS are cless nend wakes

PROTECTIVE HOUSING AND REMEDIAL CONSERVATION



Minor repairs are carried out to prevent loss of text and imminent fragmentation. The image below



Left: Acid free, buffered self-assembly storage box made from 350lbs handmade cotton rag

Preserving manuscripts in tropical climates presents a considerable challenge. To create and maintain favourable environmental conditions in order to slow down complex ageing processes in paper and ink is the primary focus. The Savitri manuscripts have been exposed to high, fluctuating humidity and soaring temperatures and show varying degrees of accelerated ageing. Pages containing mechanical pulp are intensely discoloured and brittle. Beautiful watermarked script takes on impressionist hues with extensive water damage. Many manuscripts from later periods however remain well preserved.



Above : An early Savitri manuscript interleaved with buffered tissue and housed in an acid free, buffered manuscript folder made from 100% cotton rag at the Ashram handmade paper mill.

illustrates the repair of a small fracture with Japanese tissue and methyl-cellulose.





A tradition of hand papermaking in India and the availability of virgin textile off-cuts from the local textile industry provide an indigenous and sustainable source of raw material for protective preservation housing.

MONITORING GASEOUS POLLUTANTS



Sample results of a 27 day monitoring period from 26 April to 23 May 2016



PRESERVATION BUILDING



08/25 08/26/18 12:00:00 AM GMT+05:30 Temperature, deg C : Avg 18.4, Max 19.8, Min 17.6

Relative Humidity % : Avg 47, Max 51, Min 44% (+/- 3%) Fire Safety : Overnight HVAC shutdown 10pm-4am

One of the greatest risks to collections in long-term, airconditioned storage in developing nations is interrupted power supply. When collections are insufficiently buffered against potential rapid changes in climate this can lead to damage. Building design, generator backups, engineering support and layers of housing are essential. The graph above shows temperature and RH readings for the month of August 2018 in the Ashram's archival vault. Ashram collections.

A new climate-controlled archive storage facility was constructed in 2005 within the framework of an existing heritage building. The old archival store from the 1970s, marked on the drawing as 'Work Room', was converted into a climatecontrolled workspace for digitisation, rehousing and remedial conservation of the

REFERENCES

1. Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, An Approach and a Study, A B Purani, 2nd Edition, 1956, p.61 2. The Future Poetry, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo , Volume 26, 1997, p. 286 3. UCL Institute for Sustainable Heritage, August 2016 Report : Gaseous pollutant monitoring of archival storage at Archives and Research Library, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

ARCHIVES & RESEARCH LIBRARY SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM, PONDICHERRY, INDIA archives@sriaurobindoashram.org

With the help of UCL Institute for Sustainable Heritage, levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and ozone are being monitored in the archival store. Initial results indicate levels below threshold limits according to BSI PAS 198:2012 for pollutant-paper interactions during long-term storage.³

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

704528

For the kind assistance and support of : British Library, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation des Collections, Paris, University College London Institute for Sustainable Heritage