Savitri Bhavan Research Activities (2016-17)

Introduction

The Research Activities undertaken at Savitri Bhavan aim to support the Bhavan’s central objective, which is to foster the values on which a true and lasting human unity can be founded by making available materials, facilities and assistance to aid a deeper and more widespread understanding of the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, which underlie the aims and ideals of Auroville.

The Research Activities of Savitri Bhavan cover three main aspects: Research Projects, Learning Materials, and Outreach Activities.

Research Projects

1. **Savitri Study Circle:** This is the central on-going research project around which all the other activities of Savitri Bhavan have developed over the last 20 years, since its inception in November 1994. Increasing numbers of Aurovilians are participating regularly in this study, along with members of the Ashram and visitors from all over India and abroad, some of whom come once or twice, as long as they are in the area, while others attend regularly, or join the group for several months at a time during annual visits to Auroville and Pondicherry. During the winter of 2016-17 attendance rose to about 100 participants and in January 2017 the Savitri Study Circle met for the first time in the newly completed Sangam Hall, under construction since December 2015. The reading of *Savitri* begun in May 2012 was completed on February 26th, 2017, and a new cycle of reading and study was launched the following Sunday, March 5th, 2017.

2. **The Life Divine:** An increase in regular attendance has also been experienced in the group studying Sri Aurobindo’s major philosophical work *The Life Divine*, which was launched in December 2008. In February 2017 thirty-five regular members embarked on the final chapter of the book, and expect to complete the reading in December 2017. An article on this study-pilgrimage was published in the *Sri Aurobindo Pathamandir Annual* of 2016. The participants are experiencing an inspiring intensification of their understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s unique world-view through this regular shared study.

3. **Towards a Bibliography of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri:** This too is an on-going project, aiming to provide a comprehensive bibliography of a wide range of *Savitri*-related materials for the assistance of readers, students and researchers, by maintaining up-to-date listings of all editions, translations and recordings of Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, as well as *Savitri* studies, published and un-published, in book and non-book form, and other *Savitri*-related materials. The list of all known *Savitri*-related materials available has been maintained up to March 31st 2017, and in December 2016 an introductory reading list entitled “Exploring Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* – A Legend and a Symbol: An Introductory Reading List” was produced for free distribution to students and researchers and also posted on the Savitri Bhavan website.

4. **The English of Savitri, Volume 3:** From May 2016 work was taken up on editing transcripts of the *English of Savitri* sessions covering Book Seven: “The Book of Yoga”. In March 2017 the full text for this third volume of the *English of Savitri* series of publications was sent for final copy-editing. It is expected that the book will be published in July 2017.

5. **“The Mother’s work on Savitri with some of her children”:** This short research project extended over 3 months from July to September 2016 and culminated in a presentation at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research on October 8th, 2016.
6. **The Spiritual Significances of Flowers:** This on-going research project focuses on the spiritual names and significances given by the Mother to flowers presented to her by disciples. Many such flowers are growing in the gardens around Savitri Bhavan, and during 2016-17 for the third year running a photograph of one such flower was published as the ‘Flower of the Month’ on the Savitri Bhavan website (www.savitribhavan.org), along with the Mother’s comments and details about the plant. The photographs were taken by a young Aurovilian member of our team, Suresh Nagamani; the texts were researched by Dhanalakshmi and edited for publication by Shraddhavan.

7. **La Science de Vivre – advice from the Mother:** In the course of 2016-17 researcher Beatrice Baldacchino continued her study of the Mother’s *Entretiens* (talks in French to young people of the Ashram) by perusing the Mother’s *Entretiens* of 1954, noting the passages which contain the Mother’s advice on various aspects of ‘How to Live’. She has found that these fall into two main categories: practical matters, such as eating, sleeping, dreaming, studying and so on; and more psychological indications about the planes and parts of the being, and how to harmonise them and become more aware of the inner being. The passages identified have been referenced for future compilation under topic-headings in French as well as English, with a view to eventual publication. Beatrice intends to continue her study with further volumes of the *Entretiens*.

### Learning Materials

This work involves the preparation, collection, and conservation of study aids to support the Outreach Activities and Research Projects of the Bhavan, and to assist students and researchers elsewhere on request.

1. **The Reading Room Collection:** This is a reference collection of book and non-book materials to support study and understanding of the life and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, their vision and teachings, and the knowledge underlying the aims and ideals of Auroville. It is open to the general interested public from 9am to 5pm daily Monday to Saturday throughout the year. During 2016-17, 43 new volumes were added to the collection, while 71 journal issues were received and perused for *Savitri*-related articles to be added to the bibliographical list being maintained and prepared for sharing with researchers.

2. **The Digital Library:** This is a collection of audio and video recordings relating to *Savitri*, the lives, work and vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and to Auroville, for individual computer access. The collection was steadily enlarged throughout the year, and was utilised by interested visitors and Aurovilians.

3. **The Huta D. Hindocha Collection:** The core of this unique collection is the series of 472 oil paintings created by the young disciple Huta under the Mother’s direct guidance from 1961 to 1967, illustrating selected passages from Sri Aurobindo’s epic and named by the Mother *Meditations on Savitri*. The collection was entrusted to Savitri Bhavan by the artist in 2001 along with a mass of related materials. During the year of 2016-17 two exhibitions of paintings from this series were held, and conservation work was continued on the many documents and additional paintings which make up the collection. Assistance was also given to the Havyavahana Trust – established by Huta to publish the treasures which she received from the Mother – in preparing three books by Huta for publication.

4. **Savitri Bhavan Archive:** This is the centralised collection where digital records of all the activities of Savitri Bhavan are gathered in the form of documents, Excel files, photo files and audio and video recordings. It is administered by Dhanalakshmi, who supplies relevant materials for use in our publications or as otherwise required.

5. **Audio-visual Archive:** This is an extensive collection of music and film recordings for use by individuals and groups, managed by Margrit Mala.
6. **House of Mother’s Agenda:** This is another collection of Learning Materials and Outreach Activities which has been housed at Savitri Bhavan since 2006, run by GangaLakshmi.

**Outreach**

The Outreach Activities of Savitri Bhavan expanded significantly during 2016-17. Regular classes and courses increased to 18, and increased attendance was experience for most of these. Also the numbers of student groups and visitors from the general public increased noticeably. Details of regular activities, special events, workshops and seminars held or hosted and visiting student groups are provided in the Annexure to this report.

**Reflections**

The most satisfying as well as most challenging aspect of the work of Savitri Bhavan for all the team-members is responding to the questions put to us about the vision and teachings of Sri Aurobindo which underlie not only the work of Savitri Bhavan but the very existence of Auroville itself. The appreciation of those we interact with, whether face to face, through our publications and website, or by e-mail, makes us feel that we are on the right track while at the same time challenges us to fulfil the purpose of the Bhavan with increasing purity and perfection.