Invocation

BHAVAN

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Lord, this morning Thou hast given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvellous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfilment of Thy sublime Work.

THE MOTHER

7 December 1950
Welcome and Introduction

With joy I welcome you all to this fourth Dr. M.V. Nadkarni lecture – some new faces, and many familiar ones, familiar from the days of Dr. Nadkarni’s own lectures here. It is a great honour for me to be invited to give the lecture this year, and a joy for all of the team here at Savitri Bhavan to participate in this annual tribute to him.

Savitri Bhavan has been blessed by the Divine Grace with three remarkable patrons. The first to grasp the significance of this project was our beloved elder brother Nirodbaran, who inspired us all when he laid the foundation stone of Savitri Bhavan on November 24 1995 and invoked the Presence and Blessing of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for this place and its mission – which at that time he envisioned more clearly than any of us. I believe that it was in the following year that Dr. Nadkarni came here for the first time and sat with us one Sunday morning under the teak trees – for at that time there was no building, not even the keet hut which came up a couple of years later. He shared with us then his love of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri, and the fascination which motivated him to share his explorations of it with whoever would listen to him wherever he happened to be. By then he had already initiated his series of regular Darshan Study Camps at the Beach Office in Pondicherry twice-yearly from 1989 onwards. From 1997 he started coming here after the close of those Study Camps to share a summary of the content with us here, and gradually more and more of his students would come along and share those sessions. It was in August 1999 that he gave the first official ‘Summary Session’ here in the garden, bringing a happy crowd of his students with
him. That became a regular event which continued twice a year up to March 2007 when he addressed us all here for the last time – at the same time inaugurating the use of this amphitheatre, then newly completed. Today again we commemorate those happy occasions, and that great Savitri-lover who gathered us all together here for what he regarded as sacred yagnas – consecrated worship of the mantric epic through reverential study, attempting to draw ever deeper towards the mystic kernel of the Master’s revelations. In grateful memory and celebration of all that he brought to us, I offer this sharing this afternoon. The third patron was of course Huta, who in 2001 handed over to our care the 472 Meditations on Savitri paintings which she had created under the Mother’s guidance from 1961-66, along with a lot of related materials. Her goodwill and support until her passing in November 2011 has formed a substantial base for the development of Savitri Bhavan.

There are three main points I would like to consider in this talk: first, the Traveller, Aswapati – who is he? Then a very brief look at the Worlds through which he passes on his quest; and lastly the significance of this journey in the poem, and for our attempts to enter into the vision of Sri Aurobindo, which he has revealed for us and the humanity of the future in his unique poetic masterwork. This talk has been subtitled ‘Part One of Savitri’. This is the part of the poem that Sri Aurobindo spent most time on composing and revising, and which underwent a huge enlargement from 1937-1944, in which the theme of the Aswapati’s Yoga and the Worlds and planes through which he travels expanded from 471 lines in January 1937, to over 10,000 in the final version. Today I shall not be discussing Cantos One and Two of Book One, the Book of Beginnings – the glorious overture to Sri Aurobindo’s symphonic epic; and Canto Four, ‘The Secret Knowledge’ will be mentioned only in passing. We shall stick to the main theme: the Traveller and the Worlds he passes through and conquers, closing with a final glance at the significance of this part of the poem for us, its readers.

In preparation for this talk, I have drawn on Sri Aurobindo’s own letters on Savitri, on some of the Mother’s comments, on Nirod-da’s invaluable memories recorded in his book Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, on two early versions of the poem: The ‘First Known
Draft’, from 1916, first made public in *Mother India* in instalments from August 1981 to February 1982; and the 1936-37 version also first published in *Mother India* from November 1982 to February 1983; and on the research on the poem done here at Savitri Bhavan over the last now almost 19 years in the Sunday morning *Savitri* Study Circle, using the revised edition of 1993. Another invaluable source of information about the process of the composition of *Savitri* is the work done by Richard Hartz of the Sri Aurobindo Archives in Pondicherry. Richard has been working on systematically arranging the vast number of Sri Aurobindo’s manuscripts, produced over the years as *Savitri* took its final form. He first shared insights gained from this work with us at Savitri Bhavan in a talk given in November 1998. He subsequently expanded on that talk in a series of fifty articles entitled *The Composition of Savitri* published in Mother India from October 1999 to November 2003. A summary of his findings appears in the ‘Note on the Text’ at the end of CWSA vol. 34.

1) The Traveller

First – who is this Traveller? Who is Aswapati? In his Author’s Note to the poem, Sri Aurobindo tells us:

> Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, [Savitri’s] human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes;

And he adds:

> .... the characters [in the poem] are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

(Sri Aurobindo, Author’s Note to *Savitri*)

Introducing Aswapati in the poem, Sri Aurobindo describes him like this:

> One in the front of the immemorial quest, Protagonist of the mysterious play
In which the Unknown pursues himself through forms
And limits his eternity by the hours
And the blind Void struggles to live and see,
A thinker and toiler in the ideal’s air, ...
His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality.
A pointing beam on earth’s uncertain roads,
His birth held up a symbol and a sign;
His human self like a translucent cloak
Covered the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world. p.22

Commenting on these lines and following ones, the Mother has said:

This is the description of the One through whom Savitri was born. Sri Aurobindo says that it is through the intermediary of somebody who did not belong to the earth but came from the higher and freer regions. ... This is the description of one of those who are not purely human, but whose origin is far higher, far greater, and whose existence is much longer than the existence of the earth. When these come upon earth, it is to help the whole of humanity to rise towards the highest Consciousness¹.

He is ‘The Lord of the Horse’. In the 1936-37 version of Part One, we find Sri Aurobindo referring to the sections dealing with Aswapati’s yoga and quest as ‘The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse’. In the Vedic imagery, the horse is a symbol of energy, usually vital energy. All of us have horses, but usually we are not in full control of them. Aswapati is the lord, the master of his energies, and can direct them to the fulfillment of his aims and aspirations. In a talk with disciples, Sri Aurobindo is reported to have said:

Aswapati, the father of Savitri, is the Lord of Energy. ... The birth of Savitri is a boon of the Supreme Goddess given to Aswapati. Aswapati is the Yogi who seeks the means to deliver the world out of ignorance.²

¹ About Savitri Part Three
² Talks with Sri Aurobindo January 3, 1939
In the poem he is also referred to as ‘that son of Force’ – indicating a vibhuti or avatar of Shakti – and when he finally comes face to face with the Supreme Mother in Canto Four of Book Three, she addresses him as ‘O Son of Strength’.

Is he Sri Aurobindo? It has become almost a commonplace of Savitri–commentary to say that the account of Aswaphati’s yoga, as shown in Part One of the poem can be seen as Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual autobiography. And just as devotees and Savitri-lovers identify the figure of Savitri with the Mother, Sri Aurobindo is identified with King Aswaphati – for what greater embodiment of that concentrated energy, that yogic aspiration to deliver the world, has there ever been than the Master himself? Nevertheless, I think that we need to be careful to avoid making this identification too literal. Once when I wrote ‘Aswaphati can be seen as Sri Aurobindo himself’ my beloved teacher Amal Kiran corrected me by adding the words ‘an aspect of’ before Sri Aurobindo’s name. Undoubtedly the yoga of Aswaphati must be based on and authenticated by Sri Aurobindo’s own experiences – as also on experiences of the Mother. And we should not forget that the whole poem – and not the description of a particular character only – is an expression of Sri Aurobindo’s vision and experience – according to the Mother ‘the supreme revelation’ of his vision and his message. Whatever is contained in this supreme revelation, this supreme achievement of spiritual poetry, is the product of Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness and based not on imagination but his own direct personal experiences. And there are many correspondences that could be noted between what is related of Aswaphati in the poem, and what Sri Aurobindo has revealed about his own sadhana and spiritual experiences. To do so would require a different talk than the one I plan to give today. However, so far as we can tell from what Sri Aurobindo has revealed about the course of his own sadhana, it did not follow exactly the orderly scheme he has shown for his Aswaphati. And In answer to a question along these lines, Sri Aurobindo has stated explicitly:

1 She has stated to Mona Sarkar and others that she found many of her own experiences, which she had never related to Sri Aurobindo, expressed in Savitri.
This incarnation is supposed to have taken place in far past times when the whole thing had to be opened, so as to “hew the ways of Immortality”. ... [T]he circumstances of this life have nothing to do with it.’ (10 November 1936)

In the Mahabharata telling of the legend of Satyavan and Savitri, Savitri’s father, King Aswapati is said to have worshipped the Goddess Savitri for 18 years, praying for 100 sons. At the end of that time, the Goddess blesses him and tells him that Brahma, the Creator, has granted him the boon of a single daughter, who will fulfil all his wishes. Can we see any parallel in Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri to this 18-years’ yagna mentioned in the legend? Possibly we can interpret these ‘years’ as marking steps in Aswapati’s quest. Let us now turn our attention to these stages.

2) The Stages of the Quest

In a letter to Amal Kiran, Sri Aurobindo has said that in his poem Aswapati’s yoga falls into three parts or stages:

First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as the individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother.

The first stage, his individual spiritual self-fulfilment, is described in the two cantos entitled ‘The Yoga of the King’, Cantos 3 and 5 of Book One. The first deals with ‘The Yoga of the Soul’s Release’. In it Aswapati is shown as having already reached a high level of soul development, at which his further fulfilment is aided by higher powers.

The cosmic Worker set his secret hand
To turn this frail mud-engine to heaven-use.

1 CWSA 27:276
2 CWSA 27:330
A Presence wrought behind the ambiguous screen:
It beat his soil to bear a Titan’s weight,
Refining half-hewn blocks of natural strength
It built his soul into a statued god.
The Craftsman of the magic stuff of self
Who labours at his high and difficult plan
In the wide workshop of the wonderful world,
Modelled in inward Time his rhythmic parts.
Then came the abrupt transcendent miracle: ...
A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time.
For him mind’s limiting firmament ceased above. ...
The conscious ends of being went rolling back:
The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent. ...
Freedom and empire called to him from on high; pp.24-26

The rest of the canto narrates how the powers of Wisdom – Saraswati, Ila, Sarama and Dakshina, the Vedic goddesses representing Inspiration, Revelation, Intuition and Discrimination¹ – illumine and transfigure this great yogi, bringing about a first transformation of his nature:

Thus came his soul’s release from Ignorance,
His mind and body’s first spiritual change.
A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,
A new world-knowledge broadened from within:
His daily thoughts looked up to the True and One,
His commonest doings welled from an inner Light. ...
One and harmonious by the Maker’s skill,
The human in him paced with the divine;
His acts betrayed not the interior flame.
This forged the greatness of his front to earth.
A genius heightened in his body’s cells
That knew the meaning of his fate-hedged works

¹ ... four goddesses representing the four faculties of the Ritam or Truth-consciousness, — Ila representing truth-vision or revelation, Saraswati truth-audition, inspiration, the divine word, Sarama intuition, Dakshina the separative intuitional discrimination. (Sri Aurobindo, The Secret of the Veda CWSA 15:73)
Akin to the march of unaccomplished Powers
Beyond life’s arc in spirit’s immensities.
Apart he lived in his mind’s solitude,
A demigod shaping the lives of men:
One soul’s ambition lifted up the race;
A Power worked, but none knew whence it came.
The universal strengths were linked with his;
Filling earth’s smallness with their boundless breadths,
He drew the energies that transmute an age.
Immeasurable by the common look,
He made great dreams a mould for coming things
And cast his deeds like bronze to front the years.
His walk through Time outstripped the human stride.
Lonely his days and splendid like the sun’s.

When we read these magnificent lines, we cannot help applying them to Sri Aurobindo himself.

But Aswapati has much further to go. As a result of this first realisation, he gains the Secret Knowledge which is revealed in Canto Four of Book One; and at the beginning of Canto Five ‘The Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness’, we are told:

This knowledge first he had of time-born men.

The essence of this Secret Knowledge is summarised in the first section of Canto Five, and as a result of it we are told that:

A Will, a hope immense now seized his heart,
And to discern the superhuman’s form
He raised his eyes to unseen spiritual heights,
Aspiring to bring down a greater world.

This is the motivation which uplifts Aswapati throughout the rest of his quest, right up to the end of Book Three:

The Ideal must be Nature’s common truth,
The body illumined with the indwelling God,
The heart and mind feel one with all that is,
A conscious soul live in a conscious world.
He gathers all his energies and all his being into a single upward movement of aspiration:

One-pointed to the immaculate Delight,
Questing for God as for a splendid prey,
He mounted burning like a cone of fire. pp.79-80

In response to this intense aspiration comes a tremendous descent:

As thus it rose, to meet him bare and pure
A strong Descent leaped down. A Might, a Flame,
A Beauty half-visible with deathless eyes,
A violent Ecstasy, a Sweetness dire,
Enveloped him with its stupendous limbs
And penetrated nerve and heart and brain
That thrilled and fainted with the epiphany:
His nature shuddered in the Unknown’s grasp.
In a moment shorter than death, longer than Time,
By a Power more ruthless than Love, happier than Heaven,
Taken sovereignly into eternal arms,
Haled and coerced by a stark absolute bliss,
In a whirlwind circuit of delight and force
Hurried into unimaginable depths,
Upborne into immeasurable heights,
It was torn out from its mortality
And underwent a new and bournless change. p.81

As a result of this second transformation, Aswapati gains a new knowledge and a new power. He gains mastery over that enigmatic secret nature that both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have referred to as ‘The Mother of Dreams’. During his time in Alipore jail Sri Aurobindo composed a beautiful and mysterious poem about her. She is the threshold guardian of the subtle worlds. With her collaboration, to Aswapati is revealed ‘a forefront of God’s thousandfold house’, ‘A magic porch of entry’, ‘A balcony and miraculous facade’, and for the first time he glimpses the hierarchy of the worlds.

Ascending and descending twixt life’s poles
The seried kingdoms of the graded Law
Plunged from the Everlasting into Time,

12
Then glad of a glory of multitudinous mind
And rich with life’s adventure and delight
And packed with the beauty of Matter’s shapes and hues
Climbed back from Time into undying Self,
Up a golden ladder carrying the soul,
Tying with diamond threads the Spirit’s extremes. pp.88-89

At the very top of this ladder he sees ‘A last high world ... where all worlds meet ...’ ‘All there discovered what it seeks for here’: it is the Truth-World, the Supramental World.

He is able to enter those subtle realms and start on his exploration of this hierarchy of worlds.

A voyager upon uncharted routes
Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown,
Adventuring across enormous realms,
He broke into another Space and Time. p.91

Thus closes Book One. The Traveller is about to enter on the next stage of his journey. As Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book.

3) The Worlds

We can gain some idea of Sri Aurobindo’s plan and intention for what later became Book Two, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, from some notes he wrote to Amal Kiran in 1937 and 1938. There he mentions:

In … the next series of sections there is a long passage describing Aswapati’s progress through the subtle physical, vital and mental worlds towards the Overmind.” (1.11.1938)

1 Mother India December 1982 p.771
It is the realisation of Godhead with which it will end.
(19.5.1937)¹

This ‘long passage’ eventually became the fifteen cantos of Book Two. Before we start to follow the course of this stage of Aswapati’s journey, let us ask ‘Where and what are these Worlds?’ Sri Aurobindo gives us an answer in his essay *The Doctrine of the Mystics*²:

They are here. Man draws from the life-world his vital being, from the mind-world his mentality; he is ever in secret communication with them; he can consciously enter into them, be born into them, if he will. Even into the solar worlds of the Truth he can rise, enter the portals of the Superconscient, cross the threshold of the Supreme. The divine doors shall swing open to his increasing soul.

And he continues:

The human ascension is possible because every being really holds in himself all that his outward vision perceives as if external to him.

We have subjective faculties hidden within us which correspond to all the tiers and strata of the objective cosmic system and these form for us so many planes of our possible existence.

This material life and our narrowly limited consciousness of the physical world are far from being the sole experience permitted to man. … If maternal Earth bore him and retains him in her arms, yet is Heaven also one of his parents. …

As he mounts thus to higher and ever higher planes of himself, new worlds open to his life and his vision and become the field of his experience and the home of his spirit. He lives in contact and union with their powers and godheads and remoulds himself in their image. Each ascent is thus a new birth of the soul.

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¹ *Mother India* January 1983 p.5
² *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* SABCL 11, pp. 24-25
This is the journey which Sri Aurobindo shows Aswapati pursuing, moving from the mortal to the immortal planes and conquering them on behalf of mankind: ‘as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness’.

In The Life Divine too Sri Aurobindo speaks about the supraphysical worlds, and in one place mentions:

... the co-existence of worlds of a descending involution with parallel worlds of an ascending evolution, ... created as an annexe to the descending world-order and a prepared support for the evolutionary terrestrial formations;¹

In Book Two, we find Aswapati exploring the worlds of evolution as well as the involutionary worlds. All these worlds share an important characteristic which distinguishes them from our own evolving material world: they are typal, they do not evolve. Sri Aurobindo mentions this in the following lines:

This earth is not alone our teacher and nurse;  
The powers of all the worlds have entrance here.  
In their own fields they follow the wheel of law  
And cherish the safety of a settled type;

Each plane and world has its own fixed law which the beings and powers of that world must obey and each power maintains its own ‘settled type’. But when they enter the earth atmosphere, all that is changed – they have to learn to live in an evolutionary manifestation, and that leads to a lot of confusion which affects us too, since we are under their influence:

On earth out of their changeless orbit thrown  
Their law is kept, lost their fixed form of things.  
Into a creative chaos they are cast  
Where all asks order but is driven by Chance;  
Strangers to earth-nature, they must learn earth’s ways,  
Aliens or opposites, they must unite:  
They work and battle and with pain agree:

¹ The Life Divine SABCL 18-19:606
These join, those part, all parts and joins anew,
But never can we know and truly live
Till all have found their divine harmony.  

Only then will the divine life in Matter become possible. That is the aim of Aswapati’s quest, so let us now attempt to follow the stages of his journey, in however brief and summary a fashion.

First, in Canto One ‘The World Stair’, Sri Aurobindo gives another view of this ordered hierarchy of worlds, this time as a towering mountain of planes:

Alone it points us to our journey back
Out of our long self-loss in Nature’s deeps;
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms:
It is a brief compendium of the Vast.
This was the single stair to being’s goal.
Its steps are paces of the soul’s return
From the deep adventure of material birth,
A ladder of delivering ascent
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.

He also reveals to us the true nature of ‘our earth-matter’:

Once in the vigil of a deathless gaze
These grades had marked her giant downward plunge,
The wide and prone leap of a godhead’s fall.
Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.
The great World-Mother by her sacrifice
Has made her soul the body of our state; ...
Our earth is a fragment and a residue;
Her power is packed with the stuff of greater worlds
And steeped in their colour-lustres dimmed by her drowse;

The first step above earth, the material principle, is the realm of subtle matter, which is also a world of forms, but of subtler and lovelier forms than those of our gross physical realms. There Matter and Soul meet in conscious union; it contains the ideal templates of all forms here, and provides the soul with the material of its subtler bodies.
After the falling of mortality’s cloak
Lightened is its weight to heighten its ascent;
Refined to the touch of finer environments
It drops old patterned palls of denser stuff,
Cancels the grip of earth’s descending pull
And bears the soul from world to higher world,
Till in the naked ether of the peaks
The spirit’s simplicity alone is left,
The eternal being’s first transparent robe.
But when it must come back to its mortal load
And the hard ensemble of earth’s experience,
Then its return resumes that heavier dress.

A heaven of creative truths above,
A cosmos of harmonious dreams between,
A chaos of dissolving forms below,
Out of its fall our denser Matter came.

This world, like our own, is a world of form, though ‘of lovelier forms than ours’ – and this can be a danger for those who enter there without sufficient purity and discrimination, for:

It lends beauty to the terror of the gulfs
And fascinating eyes to perilous Gods,
Invests with grace the demon and the snake.

‘Out of its fall our denser Matter came.’ It is the origin of our earth matter; and here too Sri Aurobindo gives us another intimate insight into the true nature of Matter and the material universe. But beautiful though it may appear, this limited world cannot retain Aswapati for long. He moves on further:

He left that fine material Paradise.
His destiny lay beyond in larger Space.

Above these worlds of form lie the Life planes. They are of tremendous importance for us, and Aswapati’s exploration of them covers 7 cantos (nos. 3-9, 121 pages, 4226 lines out of a total of 7101 for the whole of Book Two, more than half its total length). For here lie the origin and the remedy of the appalling problems of falsehood and error, wrong
and evil, that face us so poignantly in the world.

Life in its origin is a divine power, a great goddess:

... pure and bright from the Timeless was her birth, ...
Her moods are faces of the Infinite:
Beauty and happiness are her native right,
And endless Bliss is her eternal home.  

But this is not how we experience life. Aswapati is able to see the glorious kingdoms of griefless life in all their blissful variety and power, but he cannot enter there.

This world of bliss he saw and felt its call,
But found no way to enter into its joy;
Across the conscious gulf there was no bridge.
A darker air encircled still his soul
Tied to an image of unquiet life. ...
Although he once had felt the Eternal’s clasp,
Too near to suffering worlds his nature lived,
And where he stood were entrances of Night. ...
A dire duality is our way to be.  

The gracious great-winged angel of life has poured out all her beauty and creative joy onto this world of Matter – but all these gifts have been swallowed up in the darkness and inertia of the Inconscient. Life here is a prisoner of Matter: how can it ever become the divine life it is intended to be? That is the problem which Aswapati has set out to solve, and to do so he has to go down into the depths.

... he must follow her pace
Even from her faint and dim subconscious start:
So only can earth’s last salvation come.
For so only could he know the obscure cause
Of all that holds us back and baffles God
In the jail-delivery of the imprisoned soul.

Along swift paths of fall through dangerous gates
He chanced into a grey obscurity
Teeming with instincts from the mindless gulfs
That pushed to wear a form and win a place.
Life here was intimate with Death and Night
And ate Death’s food that she might breathe awhile; ... 
There far away from Truth and luminous thought 
He saw the original seat, the separate birth 
Of the dethroned, deformed and suffering Power.  pp.135-36

So after exploring the kingdoms and godheads of the little life and the greater life, he has to descend into the Night of Falsehood and Evil, face all their terrors and threats, swallowed up in all the horrors of Hell where ‘his only sunlight was his spirit’s flame.’

To the blank horror a calm Light replied:
Immutable, undying and unborn, 
Mighty and mute the Godhead in him woke 
And faced the pain and danger of the world. 
He mastered the tides of Nature with a look: 
He met with his bare spirit naked Hell.  p.219

Then could he see the hidden heart of Night:  p.220

He enters the world of Falsehood, faces the Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness:

He sounded the mystery dark and bottomless 
Of the enormous and unmeaning deeps 
Whence struggling life in a dead universe rose. 
There in the stark identity lost by mind 
He felt the sealed sense of the insensible world 
And a mute wisdom in the unknowing Night.  p.231

Finally he:

... stood on the last locked subconscient’s floor 
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts 
And built the world not knowing what it built. ... 
There in the slumber of the cosmic Will 
He saw the secret key of Nature’s change.

A light was with him, an invisible hand 
Was laid upon the error and the pain 
Till it became a quivering ecstasy, 
The shock of sweetness of an arm’s embrace. 
He saw in Night the Eternal’s shadowy veil,
Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,
In destruction felt creation’s hasty pace,
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain
And hell as a short cut to heaven’s gates. ...

Falsehood gave back to Truth her tortured shape.
Annulled were the tables of the law of Pain, ...

Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame;
The infernal Gleam died and could slay no more.
Hell split across its huge abrupt façade
As if a magic building were undone,
Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream.
Into being’s gap scooped out as empty Space
In which she had filled the place of absent God,
There poured a wide intimate and blissful Dawn;
Healed were all things that Time’s torn heart had made
And sorrow could live no more in Nature’s breast:
Division ceased to be, for God was there.
The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,
Matter and spirit mingled and were one.

Aswapati finds himself in the Paradise of the Life-Gods – at last he has found the way to enter the kingdoms of the griefless life:

Eternity drew close disguised as Love
And laid its hand upon the body of Time. ...
A giant drop of the Bliss unknowable
Overwhelmed his limbs and round his soul became
A fiery ocean of felicity;
He foundered drowned in sweet and burning vasts:
The dire delight that could shatter mortal flesh,
The rapture that the gods sustain he bore.
Immortal pleasure cleansed him in its waves
And turned his strength into undying power.
Immortality captured Time and carried Life.

This is an enormously important realisation, but the journey does not end there. Aswapati is not seeking personal liberation, but the way to transform earth-life into the life divine. Aswapati’s life-being has
been divinised. Now he moves on to the conquest of the Mind-worlds. This part of his exploration extends over the next 4 cantos (10-13) : two quite long ones, and two shorter ones, 1734 lines in all.

First he gains an overview of the whole range of the Mind-worlds :

... like a brilliant clambering of skies
Passing through clarity to an unseen Light
Large lucent realms of Mind from stillness shone.

But before passing on to those higher levels, he must explore the Kingdoms and Godheads of the Little Mind, where ‘the Golden Child began to think and see’. The Mind-power first shapes ‘a dwarf three-bodied trinity’ as her servant : this trinity or three-in-one consists of the physical mind, forever stooping to hammer fact and form, conservative and tamasic; the rajasic mind of Desire : ‘the hunchback rider of the red wild-ass’; and strongest and wisest of the three, Reason, armed with her lens and measuring rod and probe, trying to understand the earth and the stars, the objective universe around her.

Above this trinity which makes up the levels of our little mind, soar ‘Two sun-gaze Daemons witnessing all that is’ : ‘a huge high-winged
Life-Thought ... a power to uplift the laggard world’, and ‘A pure Thought-Mind ... luminous in a remote and empty air’.

Here Aswapati reaches ‘the limits of the labouring Power’, Sri Aurobindo tells us – that is, the limits of Mind labouring in the evolutionary manifestation under the domination of Matter. But beyond lie the unfettered realms of the Greater Mind – Mind acting freely on its own plane, free of the downward drag of earth.

Arriving into his ken a wonder space  
Of great and marvellous meetings called his steps, ...  
Under a blue veil of eternity  
The splendours of ideal Mind were seen  
Outstretched across the boundaries of things known.  
Origin of the little that we are,  
Instinct with the endless more that we must be,  
A prop of all that human strength enacts,  
Creator of hopes by earth unrealised,  
It spreads beyond the expanding universe;  
It wings beyond the boundaries of Dream,  
It overtops the ceiling of life’s soar.  

There  

The Thinker entered the immortals’ air  
And drank again his pure and mighty source.  

(We remember that in Book 1 Canto 3, Aswapati was described as ‘A thinker and toiler in the ideal’s air) and there:

In gleaming clarities of amethyst air  
The chainless and omnipotent Spirit of Mind  
Brooded on the blue lotus of the Idea.  

We may note that each of these planes has its distinctive light and distinctive hue: whereas in the higher realms of Life there are  

Illumined continents of violet peace,  
Oceans and rivers of the mirth of God  
And griefless countries under purple suns.  

here the atmosphere is a crystal clear light blue.
Above were bright ethereal skies of mind,
A packed and endless soar as if sky pressed sky
Buttressed against the Void on bastioned light;
The highest strove to neighbour eternity,
The largest widened into the infinite.
But though immortal, mighty and divine,
The first realms were close and kin to human mind;
Their deities shape our greater thinking’s roads,
A fragment of their puissance can be ours:
These breadths were not too broad for our souls to range,
These heights were not too high for human hope. pp.264-65

Here Sri Aurobindo reveals to us ‘a triple realm of ordered thought’ with three levels or steps leading up to it. There Aswapati encounters first the ‘Archmasons of the eternal Thaumaturge’ – the master-masons who mould and measure fragmented Space to create ‘this wide world-kindergarten of young souls’ which we inhabit, where

The infant spirit learns through mind and sense
To read the letters of the cosmic script
And study the body of the cosmic self
And search for the secret meaning of the whole. p. 266

Above them stands ‘a subtle archangel race’:

High architects of possibility
And engineers of the impossible,
Mathematicians of the infinitudes
And theoricians of unknowable truths,
They formulate enigma’s postulates
And join the unknown to the apparent worlds. p. 265

I think that these are the beings that the Mother calls the ‘Formateurs’ – the delegates of Divine Mind to create all the lower planes, including this material universe that we live in. The third and highest rank of these ‘Formateurs’ – after the Archmasons and the Architects – are ‘The Sovereign Kings of Thought’.

These dared to grasp with their thought Truth’s absolute;
By an abstract purity of godless sight,
By a percept nude, intolerant of forms,
They brought to Mind what Mind could never reach
And hoped to conquer Truth’s supernal base.

The Illimitable they measured with number’s rods
And traced the last formula of limited things,
In transparent systems bodied termless truths,
The Timeless made accountable to Time
And valued the incommensurable Supreme.
To park and hedge the ungrasped infinitudes
They erected absolute walls of thought and speech
And made a vacuum to hold the One. ...
Their titan labour made all knowledge one,
A mental algebra of the Spirit’s ways,
An abstract of the living Divinity.
Here the mind’s wisdom stopped; it felt complete;
For nothing more was left to think or know:
In a spiritual zero it sat throned
And took its vast silence for the Ineffable.

In this way, these ‘formateurs’ trap and contain and limit the Truth,
in order to create the forms of the universe. But :

Truth is wider, greater than her forms.
A thousand icons they have made of her
And find her in the idols they adore;
But she remains herself and infinite.

Aswapati moves on further, to ‘The Heavens of the Ideal’.

This relatively short and mysterious canto is one of the best-loved
of the whole poem because of the magical beauty of its imagery.
Ideals are our guiding stars, pointing us to higher realities, higher
possibilities, uplifting and refining our senses, our thoughts, our will.
So for Aswapati :

Always the Ideal beckoned from afar.
Awakened by the touch of the Unseen,
Deserting the boundary of things achieved,
Aspired the strong discoverer, tireless Thought,
Revealing at each step a luminous world.
It left known summits for the unknown peaks:
Impassioned, it sought the lone unrealised Truth,
It longed for the Light that knows not death and birth.  p. 277

He finds an ascending series of heavens:

Each stage of the soul’s remote ascent was built
Into a constant heaven felt always here.  p.277

And on either side of this glorious mounting stair of soul-levels

The heavens of the ideal Mind were seen p.277

On one side ‘the lovely kingdoms of the deathless Rose’, on the other
‘The mighty kingdoms of the deathless Flame’ : two kinds of ideal
which have been influential in our human lives – the ideal of delight in
beauty which draws our soul to discover and adore the All-Wonderful
in or behind all forms and experiences; and the ideal of the power of
the dedicated will.

Aswapati is able to move freely through all these heavenly kingdoms
and accepts their gifts, but does not remain in any of them, for all are
limited : each of them is ruled by a single master-idea and ideal. Each
of them presents itself as:

Perfection’s key, passport to Paradise.  p.281

Beyond them there are realms where these two great types of ideal
meet and join, and as he moves even higher Aswapati experiences
a level where:

... joined in a common greatness, light and bliss,
All high and beautiful and desirable powers
Forgetting their difference and their separate reign
Become a single multitudinous whole.  p.282

There:

Above the parting of the roads of Time,
Above the Silence and its thousandfold Word,
In the immutable and inviolate Truth
For ever united and inseparable,
The radiant children of Eternity dwell
On the wide spirit height where all are one.  p.282
In the Truth-world all apparently opposing or contradictory ideals are harmonised in oneness.

At last there came a bare indifferent sky
Where Silence listened to the cosmic Voice,
But answered nothing to a million calls;
The soul’s endless question met with no response.
An abrupt conclusion ended eager hopes,
A deep cessation in a mighty calm,
A finis-line on the last page of thought
And a margin and a blank of wordless peace.
There paused the climbing hierarchy of worlds.

Aswapati has reached the Self of Mind. Our dear elder brother Professor Arabinda Basu, who left this world just over a year ago, once spoke to us about this canto, saying:

“The Self of Mind” means the Self as it is on the plane of Mind. Self is everywhere, on all planes, down to the physical: the physical self. Sri Aurobindo also refers to the Mahamatma — an Upanishadic expression meaning ‘the Great Self’. Normally people think that the Great Self is the Self as such, Self in its essence. But no, it isn’t. The Great Self is the Self on the plane of Greatness – mahat, which in Sri Aurobindo’s language is the Supermind. And just as there is the Self in the Supermind, so also there is the Self in the Mind. There is a Self in the vital, and a Self in the physical. So in the course of his journey, Aswapati comes to the Mind plane and finds the Self there. ... This Self doesn’t take part in the work of Maya at all. It only witnesses, observes, watches – it doesn’t take any part in what it sees. ... Static, silent, quiet, uncreative – not only uncreative, but not even participating. Now Aswapati naturally cannot be satisfied with this Self of Mind. He has to know it, because it is part of the total reality; but even so, this is not what he wants. This is the Self that Aswapati comes across on the plane of Mind. Obviously he will have to go beyond it.¹

¹ *Invocation* 12:24-25
This Self of Mind is ‘The witness Lord of Nature’s myriad acts’. It is also ‘the Thinker’s secret base’. Reaching this plane, Aswapati feels at first a tremendous release:

There he could stay, the Self, the Silence won:
His soul had peace, it knew the cosmic Whole. p.284

After all the experience of the self is a great realisation, a liberation, a form of moksha. But then he is led to another perception:

Then suddenly a luminous finger fell
On all things seen or touched or heard or felt
And showed his mind that nothing could be known; ...
The sceptic Ray disrupted all that seems
And smote at the very roots of thought and sense. p.284

‘Thought and sense’ : the senses which give us data about the world around us, and thought which organises and interprets that data are the fundamental tools of mind. But he is shown that both the data and the interpretation of it are unreliable, even illusory. Mind cannot show us the world as it really is.

Shraddhavan and Mrs. Nadkarni on August 13, 2013
What it knew was an image in a broken glass,
What it saw was real but its sight untrue.  p.285

That must be reached from which all knowledge comes.  p.284

A greater Spirit than the Self of Mind
Must answer to the questioning of his soul.  p.287

In particular he is missing the Presence which gives meaning to all
the forms of our world:

Our sweet and mighty Mother was not there
Who gathers to her bosom her children’s lives,
Her clasp that takes the world into her arms
In the fathomless rapture of the Infinite,
The Bliss that is creation’s splendid grain
Or the white passion of God-ecstasy
That laughs in the blaze of the boundless heart of Love.  p.286-87

Though it is liberating, this plane does not contain the great
transforming Power that Aswapati is looking for in order to be able to
free our world from the grip of Ignorance. In that state it seemed as if:

To be was a prison, extinction the escape.  p.288

But Aswapati remains steadfast in his aspiration and his intention. And
in response to his seeking, he is shown another kind of escape – not
extinction, but a secret entrance into the World of Soul, the Psychic
World, the seat of the Mother as the Soul of the World. He is attracted
into that World of Soul by a mysterious sound, a call, an invitation:

He travelled led by a mysterious sound.
A murmur multitudinous and lone,
All sounds it was in turn, yet still the same.
A hidden call to unforeseen delight
In the summoning voice of one long-known, well-loved,
But nameless to the unremembering mind,
It led to rapture back the truant heart.  p.288-89

Led by that mysterious sound, he comes into the Soul-World, whose
power is ‘to reveal divinity’:

The intimacy of God was everywhere,
No veil was felt, no brute barrier inert,  
Distance could not divide, Time could not change. ...  
A constant touch of sweetness linked all hearts,  
The throb of one adoration’s single bliss  
In a rapt ether of undying love. ...  
A measureless secure eternity  
Of truth and beauty and good and joy made one.  
Here was the welling core of finite life;  
A formless spirit became the soul of form.  

All there was soul or made of sheer soul-stuff;  
A sky of soul covered a deep soul-ground.  
All here was known by a spiritual sense:  

There he sees the world where our souls rest between birth and death,  
absorbing the experiences of their last birth, and preparing the form  
of the next one. He travels on, ‘led by a pure interior light’, towards  
‘the source of all things human and divine’.  

There he beheld in their mighty union’s poise  
The figure of the deathless Two-in-One,  
A single being in two bodies clasped,  
A diarchy of two united souls,  
Seated absorbed in deep creative joy;  
Their trance of bliss sustained the mobile world.  
Behind them in a morning dusk One stood  
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable. ...  
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled  
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask; ...  
His spirit was made a vessel of her force;  
Mute in the fathomless passion of his will  
He outstretched to her his folded hands of prayer.  
Then in a sovereign answer to his heart  
A gesture came as of worlds thrown away,  
And from her raiment’s lustrous mystery raised  
One arm half-parted the eternal veil.  
A light appeared still and imperishable.  
Attracted to the large and luminous depths  
Of the ravishing enigma of her eyes,
He saw the mystic outline of a face.
Overwhelmed by her implacable light and bliss,
An atom of her illimitable self
Mastered by the honey and lightning of her power,
Tossed towards the shores of her ocean-ecstasy,
Drunk with a deep golden spiritual wine,
He cast from the rent stillness of his soul
A cry of adoration and desire
And the surrender of his boundless mind
And the self-giving of his silent heart.
He fell down at her feet unconscious, prone. pp. 295-96

Through this tremendous experience, Aswapati is enabled to enter ‘The Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge’, which I think we can interpret as the realms of the Overmind Gnosis.

As mentioned earlier, in a note of 1938, Sri Aurobindo wrote to Amal:

… there is a long passage describing Aswapati’s progress through the subtle physical, vital and mental worlds towards the Overmind. (1.11.1938)1

We have traced this progress, and now we have reached the last canto of Book Two. In the much shorter 1936-37 version of this material, all that we have studied today formed a section of ‘The Book of Beginnings’ provisionally entitled ‘The Ascent to Godhead’. About this section, Sri Aurobindo noted ‘it is the realisation of Godhead with which it will end’. I do not dare to say anything more about Canto 15 of Book Two of Savitri except to point out its closing lines:

Neighbour his being grew to Nature’s crests.
The primal Energy took him in its arms;
His brain was wrapped in overwhelming light,
An all-embracing knowledge seized his heart:
Thoughts rose in him no earthly mind can hold,
Mights played that never coursed through mortal nerves:
He scanned the secrets of the Overmind,
He bore the rapture of the Oversoul.
A borderer of the empire of the Sun,

1 Mother India December 1982 p.771
Attuned to the supernal harmonies,
He linked creation to the Eternal’s sphere,
His finite parts approached their absolutes,
His actions framed the movements of the Gods,
His will took up the reins of cosmic Force.

In the last line we can see an allusion to Aswapati’s name. From the Lord of Tapasya, who controls the physical, vital and mental energies of his own being to mount from the mortal to the immortal planes, he has become the master of the cosmic energies, imaged in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad as Dadhikravan, the mighty Horse of the Universe. Again we can find confirmation in one of Sri Aurobindo’s responses to Amal Kiran, who asked, “I suppose the Horse is Dadhikravan of the Vedas?”. The answer was: “Yes” (9.11.1936).

Thus closes this monumental Book Two – the longest in the poem. Let us remind ourselves again of what Sri Aurobindo has told us about it:

Aswapati’s Yoga falls into three parts. First, he is achieving his own spiritual self-fulfilment as the individual and this is described as the Yoga of the King [in Cantos 3 and 5 of Book One]. Next, he makes the ascent as a typical representative of the race to win the possibility of discovery and possession of all the planes of consciousness and this is described in the Second Book: but this too is as yet only an individual victory. Finally, he aspires no longer for himself but for all, for a universal realisation and new creation. That is described in the Book of the Divine Mother.

And in one of Sri Aurobindo’s notes about the 1936-37 version which I have quoted before, he has mentioned about the material which was to follow:

It is the realisation of Godhead with which it will end – after that the Unknowable Brahman, then the Purushottama and finally the Mother. (19.5.1937)

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1 Ibid.
2 CWSA 27:330
3 Mother India January 1983 p.5
This gives us some clues to help us in our exploration of the last stages of Aswapati’s quest which are described in Book Three, The Book of the Divine Mother.

4) Book Three

“The Unknowable Brahman, then the Purushottama and finally the Mother.” (19.5.1937) : three great states or realisations with which Sri Aurobindo evidently planned to culminate the material which eventually expanded to become the present Part One of Savitri.

In the poem as it has come to us, the first of the four cantos of Book Three has the title ‘The Pursuit of the Unknowable’; the second is called ‘The Adoration of the Divine Mother’; the fourth, ‘The Vision and the Boon’ is devoted to the long colloquy between the Supreme Mother and Aswapati, which concludes with her granting the Boon of the birth of Savitri as an emanation of herself to fulfil Aswapati’s aspiration of transformation for Earth and Men. So where, if anywhere, do we find ‘the Purushottama’ – and who or what is this ‘Supreme Person?’ In the Bhagavad Gita, this is the term used for the Supreme Being. When we turn to Sri Aurobindo’s Letters on Yoga we find some statements that cast light on what he might have meant when he used this term in the context of Savitri and Aswapati’s Quest.

For instance he refers to:

... the Gita’s teaching of the Purushottama and the Parashakti (Adya Shakti) who become the Jiva and uphold the universe. It is evident that Purushottama and Parashakti are both eternal and are inseparable and one in being; the Parashakti manifests the universe, manifests too the Divine in the universe as the Ishwara and Herself appears at His side as the Ishwari Shakti. Or, we may say, it is the Supreme Conscious Power of the Supreme that manifests or puts forth itself as Ishwara Ishwari, Atma Atma-shakti, Purusha Prakriti, Jiva Jagat.¹

¹ Letters on Yoga SABCL 22-23-24:39
In the light of this statement we might think of the Purushottama as the highest state of ‘The Two who are One and play in many worlds’ referred to in Book One, Canto 4, and ‘the deathless Two in One’ whom Aswapati sees in the Soul-World in Book Two Canto 14. In another letter, apparently in answer to a question relating to his book *The Mother*, we find the following statement:

These four Powers are the Mother’s cosmic Godheads, permanent in the world-play; they stand among the greater cosmic Godheads to whom allusion is made when it is said that the Mother as the Mahashakti of this triple world “stands there (in the overmind plane) above the Gods”. The Gods, as has already been said, are in origin and essence permanent Emanations of the Divine put forth from the Supreme by the Transcendent Mother, the Adya Shakti; in their cosmic action they are Powers and Personalities of the Divine each with his independent cosmic standing, function and work in the universe. They are not impersonal entities but cosmic Personalities, although they can and do ordinarily veil themselves behind the movement of impersonal forces. But while in the overmind and the triple world they appear as independent beings, they return in the supermind into the One and stand there united in a single harmonious action as multiple personalities of the One Person, the Divine Purushottama.  

Here it seems almost as if the term ‘Purushottama’ is used as equivalent to the Transcendent Mother, the Adya Shakti, the Supramental Shakti, Mother of all the Worlds. When we read of ‘the deathless Two in One’ in Book Two, Canto 14, we find the further lines:

Behind them in a morning dusk One stood  
Who brought them forth from the Unknowable.  
Ever disguised she awaits the seeking spirit;  
Watcher on the supreme unreachable peaks,  
Guide of the traveller of the unseen paths,  
She guards the austere approach to the Alone.  
At the beginning of each far-spread plane

1 *Letters on Yoga* SABCL 22-23-24:383
Pervading with her power the cosmic suns
She reigns, inspirer of its multiple works
And thinker of the symbol of its scene.
Above them all she stands supporting all,
The sole omnipotent Goddess ever-veiled
Of whom the world is the inscrutable mask; ...

This is the Mother who reveals herself to Aswapati as the Soul of the World and enables him to enter the Overmind Kingdoms of the Greater Knowledge. This is the One whose Presence he longs for in Book Three, and who is revealed to him in ‘The Adoration of the Divine Mother’.

This interpretation is confirmed in another letter from the Master:

This is what is termed the Adya Shakti; she is the Supreme Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her—the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.¹

In another letter Sri Aurobindo clarifies:

I do not know that there is anything like a Purushottama consciousness which the human being can attain or realise for himself; ... The Purushottama consciousness is the consciousness of the Supreme Being and man by loss of ego and realisation of his true essence can live in it.²

In his note of 1938, it seems that Sri Aurobindo was outlining the final stages of Aswapati’s Quest as he planned to show it in his poem: after the long passage through the Worlds of Gross and Subtle Matter, the Worlds of Life and Mind, the Psychic World, and the Overmind or Gnostic World, we find Aswapati in pursuit of the Unknowable in the first Canto of Book Three. He experiences it as a state of high liberation, the silent Unknowable Reality. But he is shown that this is only a partial expression of the Supreme:

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¹ Ibid:384
² Ibid. p.72
A high and blank negation is not all,
A huge extinction is not God’s last word,
Life’s ultimate sense, the close of being’s course,
The meaning of this great mysterious world.
In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power.
Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul
And in the ray reveal the parent sun:
It can make the world a vessel of Spirit’s force,
It can fashion in the clay God’s perfect shape.

This is the Power he has been questing for.

Even while he stood on being’s naked edge
And all the passion and seeking of his soul
Faced their extinction in some featureless Vast,
The Presence he yearned for suddenly drew close. ...  
The Power, the Light, the Bliss no word can speak
Imaged itself in a surprising beam
And built a golden passage to his heart
Touching through him all longing sentient things.

The Adya Shakti reveals herself to him. He knows that here is the ultimate solution he has been searching for. But how is he to attain the Grace of the Transcendent Mother, the Purushottama? It is to gain her Grace that he performs a tremendous last sacrifice of tapasya at the beginning of Canto Three:

Then lest a human cry should spoil the Truth
He tore desire up from its bleeding roots
And offered to the gods the vacant place.

And as a result:

A last and mightiest transformation came.
His soul was all in front like a great sea
Flooding the mind and body with its waves;
His being, spread to embrace the universe,
United the within and the without
To make of life a cosmic harmony,
An empire of the immanent Divine.
In this tremendous universality
Not only his soul-nature and mind-sense
Included every soul and mind in his,
But even the life of flesh and nerve was changed
And grew one flesh and nerve with all that lives;
He felt the joy of others as his joy,
He bore the grief of others as his grief; ...
Overpowered were form and memory’s limiting line;
The covering mind was seized and torn apart;
It was dissolved and now no more could be,
The one Consciousness that made the world was seen;
All now was luminosity and force.
Abolished in its last thin fainting trace
The circle of the little self was gone;
The separate being could no more be felt;
It disappeared and knew itself no more,
Lost in the spirit’s wide identity.
His nature grew a movement of the All,
Exploring itself to find that all was He,
His soul was a delegation of the All
That turned from itself to join the one Supreme.
Transcended was the human formula;
Man’s heart that had obscured the Inviolable
Assumed the mighty beating of a god’s;
His seeking mind ceased in the Truth that knows;
His life was a flow of the universal life.
He stood fulfilled on the world’s highest line
Awaiting the ascent beyond the world,
Awaiting the descent the world to save.

I think that here we are given the description of Aswapati realising himself as an eternal portion of the Purushottama and living in the Purushottama Consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The Purushottama consciousness is the consciousness of the Supreme Being and man by loss of ego and realisation of his true essence can live in it.¹

¹ Letters on Yoga SABCL 22-23-24:72
In this state Aswapati can enter into the House of the Spirit and experience the New Creation, and in this state he can at last meet the Transcendent Mother face to face, hear her speak, insist on his prayer, and win the boon of the birth of Savitri as her embodiment, to save Earth and Men from the grip of Ignorance and Death. His return to Earth with her promise and assurance marks the close of Part One of *Savitri* with these lines:

A god in the figure of the arisen beast, ...
The Lord of Life resumed his mighty rounds
In the scant field of the ambiguous globe.

From being ‘The Lord of the Horse’ in the sense of being in control of his own vital energies, we have seen Aswapati reaching the Overmind levels and taking up ‘the reins of Cosmic Force’; now he has gone beyond even that high realisation, until free from ego having realised his true essence, he can live in the Purushottama consciousness. Now he returns to the earth as ‘*The Lord of Life*’.

5) **The place and significance of Part One in the poem as a whole, and what it can mean for us and a future humanity**

If we look at the chronology of the composition of *Savitri* we find that Part One of the poem is the part which served Sri Aurobindo as a field of experimentation and was most revised and expanded by him over a period of 25 years. It is often stated that Sri Aurobindo spent more than 30 years on the composition of *Savitri*. This statement is based on the fact that the first known draft dates from 1916, and may be a fair copy of an even earlier version, while the last work that Sri Aurobindo did on the poem is definitely known to have taken place in mid-November 1950.

However, it appears that the work was not continuous throughout this 34 year period.

The first version of *Savitri* known to us today is dated October 1916. It consists of 1764 lines in all. This draft covers the course of the whole poem, opening with the dawn of the day that Satyavan must die and closing with the return to earth. The topic of Aswapati’s quest up to the Vision and the Boon is covered in 49 lines (lines 46-94); the Worlds are not mentioned at all. All the matter covered in Part One of
the final version is dealt with in the first 94 lines of this first known draft. The remaining 1670 lines deal with the birth and childhood of Savitri, her quest, the meeting with Satyavan, the return to the palace and Narad’s prophecy, life in the forest, the death of Satyavan, and the debate with Death, which is covered in lines corresponding to the present Books 9 and 10; then there is the encounter with the luminous Godhead, and his final sanction and prophecy, followed by the return to earth.

This indicates that Sri Aurobindo had the overall course of the poem in view from the very beginning. Moreover throughout this first known draft we find lines and passages here and there that are familiar from the final version, retained from this early draft.

But some of the most important parts of the final poem are not foreshadowed at all in this draft. Totally missing from it is what Sri Aurobindo later referred to as ‘The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse’: Aswapati’s quest, which now covers 2 long cantos of Book One, all the 15 cantos of Book Two, and the 4 cantos of Book Three. There is also no trace in it of Canto 4 of Book One, ‘The Secret Knowledge’. Although the episode of Narad’s visit to Aswapati’s palace and the prophecy of Satyavan’s demise is there as in the Mahabharata legend, Canto 2 of Book Six, ‘The Problem of Pain’ does not figure at all. Of Book 7, the Book of Yoga, we find only a first hint of what later became Canto 1. All the remaining 6 cantos of Book 7 were written from scratch apparently in 1947.

In 1931 Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter to Amal Kiran about Savitri:

There is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a “magnum opus” at all. Besides, it would have been a legend and not a symbol.¹

By that time (1931), clearly he had taken up Savitri again, with a fresh impetus and a new intention.

¹ CWSA 27:261
In October 1935 Sri Aurobindo started sending to Amal lines from his latest version, which Amal typed and returned to him. This work continued until early January 1937. This version does not cover the whole poem like the early draft, but only what later became Part One – the Part that we have explored in a summary way today. It consists of 1067 lines. Of these, 294 cover what has now become Cantos 3, 4 and 5 of Book One. At that time Sri Aurobindo was referring to this part as ‘The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse’, which in the final version has become ‘The Yoga of the King’. Another 447 lines of the 1936-37 version correspond to Cantos 2-9 in what is now Book Two, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, which at that time had not been planned. All the 1067 lines of this 1936-37 version were headed ‘The Book of Birth’ and divided into 4 sections, entitled ‘The Last Dawn’, ‘The Issue’, ‘The Ascent to Godhead – Unveiling’: a provisional title given by Sri Aurobindo to the first of several planned sections to be grouped under the heading ‘The Yoga of the Lord of the Horse’, and another section, simply numbered ‘4’ without any title being given. It is in this fourth section that the description of the Worlds begins. In early January 1937 he suspended the work, writing:

“I have been once more overwhelmed with correspondence, no time for poetry – so the Mind Worlds are still in a crude embryonic form and the Psychic World not yet begun … the whole thing has been lengthening out so much that I expect that I shall have to rearrange the earlier part of Savitri, turning the Book of Birth into a Book of Beginnings and lumping together in the second a Book of Birth and Quest.” (5.1.1937)

Then in 3 separate letters of 1938, Sri Aurobindo wrote to Amal:

I have done an enormous amount of work with Savitri. ... The fourth section, the Worlds, is undergoing transformation. The “Life” part is in a way finished, though I shall have to go over the ground perhaps some five or six times more to ensure perfection of detail. I am now starting a recasting of the “Mind” part of which I had only made a sort of basic

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1 Mother India February 1983 p.70
rough draft. I hope that this time the work will stand as more final and definitive.

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I have been kept too occupied with other things to make much headway with the poem – except that I have spoiled your beautiful neat copy of the “Worlds” under the oestrus of the restless urge for more and more perfection; but we are here for World-improvement, so I hope that is excusable.

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The “Worlds” have fallen into a state of manuscript chaos, corrections upon corrections, additions upon additions, rearrangements on rearrangements out of which perhaps some cosmic beauty will emerge!

In the chapter on Savitri in Nirodharan’s Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo we are told that work on the poem had to be suspended completely after Sri Aurobindo’s accident in November 1938, and was only resumed in mid-1940.

According to information gathered by Nirodharan and Amal Kiran and published in the same chapter of Nirod’s book Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo Part One seems to have reached more or less its present dimensions and form by 1944. What now constitutes Parts Two and Three existed in early drafts from before 1936, which were not taken up for completion and revision until after 1944.

In 1936 Sri Aurobindo had stated that he did not regard Savitri as something to be written and finished, but had used it as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one’s own yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative. But it seems that by the mid-1940s he had decided that it could not only be completed, but published. And then, in mid-1950

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1 CWSA 27:269
2 CWSA 27:269
3 CWSA 27:269
4 CWSA 27:272
according to Nirodbaran\textsuperscript{1}, Sri Aurobindo declared ‘My main work is being delayed!’ and mentioned that he wanted to complete Savitri.

The first lines of Savitri to be shared with the general public were some extracts from Book One, published with Sri Aurobindo’s permission by Amal in an article in the The Bombay Circle Annual in 1946. After that, Cantos began to be published by the Ashram in the form of fascicules. Sri Aurobindo went on revising even this material, right up to the publication of Part One as a single volume in 1950.

The composition of Parts Two and Three, partially based on pre-1936 versions, seems to have occupied the last years of Sri Aurobindo’s time in the body (approximately 1945-1950). The following letter of Sri Aurobindo to Amal in 1946 indicates this:

> There are now three books in the first part. The first, the Book of Beginnings, comprises five cantos which cover the same ground as what you typed but contains also much more that is new. The small passage about Aswapati and the other worlds has been replaced by a new book, the Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, in fourteen cantos\textsuperscript{2} with many thousand lines. There is also a third sufficiently long book, the Book of the Divine Mother.

In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga\textsuperscript{3} and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting.

\textsuperscript{1} Nirodbaran, Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. 1988, p.186
\textsuperscript{2} It seems as if a fifteenth canto was added later. Otherwise, Part One seems to have been considered complete by this time, although revisions continued right up to its publication in 1950.
\textsuperscript{3} In the original plan there was no Book of Yoga, and apparently all of the cantos are new (composed after the letter to Amal in 1946) except the first one, which is based on the first two cantos of an early draft of The Book of Death. The present Book of Death consists of the third canto of that same draft, with the addition of a few lines, 18 of them in a continuous, very significant passage, close to the end.
Finally, there is the third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth\(^1\), which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten\(^2,3\).

From all this, it seems that the time during which Part One received its huge expansion from 1,067 to 11,683 lines (its present dimension) occurred after January 1937, was suspended from the time of Sri Aurobindo’s accident in November 1938 until mid-1940, and then continued up to about the middle of 1944. It was not until after that, when Book Four was already completed, that Nirod began to act as Sri Aurobindo’s scribe\(^4\) for the later parts of the poem.

It is with these facts in mind that I have said that if we look at the chronology of the composition of *Savitri* we find that Part One of the poem – the Part that we have looked at today – is the part which served Sri Aurobindo as a field of experimentation and was most revised and expanded by him over a period of 25 years. And this has led me to wonder what inspired Sri Aurobindo to expend all this time and concentration on the theme of Aswapati’s quest – which did not form part of the original plan of the poem – and above all on the detailed depiction of the Worlds and Planes of the manifestation, covering, as I said, 10,008 lines in the final version, near to half the final text. This theme must have great significance in the revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision. In the letter to Amal of 1946 mentioned before, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

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1 It is well-known that the Epilogue was not given final revision by Sri Aurobindo, and is based on a pre-1936 version, lightly revised at a later stage.
2 Lines which now appear in these books were already there in the First Known Draft (FKD) of 1916, including quite a long passage which now appears in the early part of Book Eleven, and – perhaps more surprisingly – another longish passage corresponding to the sublime consenting speech of the Supreme which forms its climax. The present closing section of the Book of Everlasting Day also closely echoes the penultimate passage in FKD.
3 CWSA 27:279
4 Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* 3rd ed. 1988, p.183
Savitri has grown to an enormous length so that it is no longer quite the same thing as the poem you saw then. In the new form it will be a sort of poetic philosophy of the Spirit and of Life much profounder in its substance and vaster in its scope than was intended in the original poem. I am trying of course to keep it at a very high level of inspiration, but in so large a plan covering most subjects of philosophical thought and vision and many aspects of spiritual experience there is bound to be much variation of tone: but that is, I think, necessary for the richness and completeness of the treatment. (1946)¹

This is how Savitri has become ‘the supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision’, as the Mother has called it, his message, for which all his other writings are the preparation, the mantra for the transformation of the world.

We can be sure that Sri Aurobindo has not imagined all this, simply thought it up and put it into wonderful words. The experiences evoked in Savitri are those of Sri Aurobindo himself, and of the Mother – no one else. Here is the distilled essence of his own vast lived experience, expressed in detailed systematic descriptions of the realisations which have given Sri Aurobindo the capacity to provide us with a psychological map of the entire manifestation of which we are a part: a map that shows us, in an ordered series of revelations, and the most precise and deeply suggestive language possible, who and what we are, as individuals and as human beings, and what our connection and special role is in the universal Divine Plan.

It is mysterious to us because our minds have not been trained to understand this kind of communication. But through reading Savitri with devotion and aspiration to receive its message, we can develop our minds so that they become progressively more able to assimilate deeper and deeper levels of the vast Truth that is contained in this unique text – a beacon of the eternal light, created especially for our Age, to help modern human beings to gain some access to the eternal Vedic Truth and Light.

¹ CWSA 27:2790-80
In the darkest years of the Second World War, while the earth was passing through a huge crisis and convulsion, of which he and the Mother alone grasped the full significance, Sri Aurobindo was noting down for us, in these precise and powerful mantric lines, all that we need to know to be able to fulfil our role and reach our highest destiny. Sri Aurobindo was inspired, at the height of his poetic powers, to bequeath to humanity this unique shastra, to recall to us the forgotten knowledge coded in our depths, of the nature and significance of the many layers of the evolutionary manifestation our souls have accepted to inhabit, of our place in it, our current role as human beings, and the key to how we can contribute to Sri Aurobindo’s work – which is, as the Mother has told us: ‘By serving the Truth and enlightening mankind, to hasten the rule of the Divine’s Love upon Earth’¹ – thus bringing about a Divine Life here in the material universe, for Earth and Men.

All gratitude and reverence to Sri Aurobindo!

(A video-recording of this talk is available on request)

¹ MCW 13:45

The 5th Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture

Living with Savitri

will be given at Savitri Bhavan on August 13, 2014 by

Dr. Prema Nandakumar

Everyone is welcome
On “The Secret Knowledge”
by Dr. Larry Seidlitz

Larry Seidlitz became involved with Sri Aurobindo’s yoga as a college student in the USA in 1976, and with the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in 1981. After returning to school to complete his studies, he received his doctoral degree in Psychology from the University of Illinois in 1993, and worked as a researcher in psychology in the USA between 1993-2000. He was a resident of the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi, California between 2000-2004, after which he began working at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research in Pondicherry, facilitating online courses on Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teachings, (especially in Yoga Psychology). Since 2004 he has been the editor of Collaboration, a journal on Integral Yoga, and since March 2012 has also been working with the editorial team of Auroville Today.

Book 1, Canto 1 was on the symbolic meaning of the dawn – the progressive revelation of the Divine in Nature; Canto 2 laid out the difficult issue confronting Savitri – her newly wedded husband’s impending death; and Canto 3 backtracked in time to begin recounting the Yoga of King Aswapati, which led to Savitri’s birth and divine mission. In Canto 4, “The Secret Knowledge,” the narration changes tone and speaks not of King Aswapati directly, but of humanity more generally. This transition occurs in the first lines. Line one begins by referring to the King:

On a height he stood that looked towards greater heights. p. 46

But in the lines that follow the subject shifts.

Our early approaches to the Infinite
Are sunrise splendidours on a marvellous verge
While lingers yet unseen the glorious sun.

This subtle shift from “He” to “our” and “we” is important, because now Sri Aurobindo addresses the reader directly, and explains the mystery of our existence. It is as if the narrator suddenly interrupts the story in order to reveal a great secret. The first part of this secret is stated simply and directly in lines 14-17.

A deathbound littleness is not all we are:
Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
Await discovery in our summit selves;
Unmeasured breadths and depths of being are ours.

This apparent being that we are is not our whole being. Notice how he characterizes this apparent being, as ‘a deathbound littleness’. In stark contrast to this, parts of our being are vast and immortal. Moreover, these realms are accessible to us, they ‘await discovery’. The passage is simple, direct, and profound. If only we could become what we already in reality are. Although rarely experienced fully, sometimes we get intimations of these realms, sometimes we even get brief glimpses:

A shapeless memory lingers in us still
And sometimes, when our sight is turned within,
Earth’s ignorant veil is lifted from our eyes;
There is a short miraculous escape.

At such times, he says:

Our souls can visit in great lonely hours
Still regions of imperishable Light,
All-seeing eagle-peaks of silent Power
And moon-flame oceans of swift fathomless Bliss
And calm immensities of spirit space.

And then he pushes this a little further. He says,

In the unfolding process of the Self
Sometimes the inexpressible Mystery
Elects a human vessel of descent.

Here the author seems to be referring not only to Avatarhood, or to the Avatar King Aswapati, but to humanity more generally, as he continues to use the pronoun ‘we’ in the text that follows. He describes various experiences that may ensue. In one passage he says,

A greater Personality sometimes
Possesses us which yet we know is ours:
Or we adore the Master of our souls.
Then the small bodily ego thins and falls;
No more insisting on its separate self,
Losing the punctilio\(^1\) of its separate birth,
It leaves us one with Nature and with God.
In moments when the inner lamps are lit
And the life’s cherished guests are left outside,
Our spirit sits alone and speaks to its gullfs,
A wider consciousness opens then its doors;
Invading from spiritual silences
A ray of the timeless Glory stoops awhile
To commune with our seized illumined clay
And leaves its huge white stamp upon our lives.

This canto is interesting because these high, spiritual experiences are continually contrasted with the harsh realities of ignorant life on earth, ‘our deathbound littleness’. First he says,

But all is screened, subliminal, mystical;
It needs the intuitive heart, the inward turn,
It needs the power of a spiritual gaze.

These spiritual experiences do not come easily or to everyone, they require a strong, inward turning and concentration of the consciousness. Notice, incidentally, the style of these three lines: in the first line are three single word adjectives – ‘screened’, ‘subliminal’,

\(^1\) Punctilio = detailed formality
‘mystical’ – that describe the subtlety of these experiences that easily escape the inattentive person, in the way that the ‘s’ sounds in these words escape through your teeth; then in the second line are two two-word descriptors, ‘intuitive heart’ and ‘inward turn’ the first syllable in each starting with ‘in’; and then in the third line, completing the funnel, a single, strong and focused descriptor – ‘the power of a spiritual gaze’ – that can capture the experiences. Sri Aurobindo continues the passage by contrasting these spiritual experiences with our ordinary outlook:

Else to our waking mind’s small moment look
A goalless voyage seems our dubious course
Some Chance has settled or hazarded some Will,
Or a Necessity without aim or cause
Unwillingly compelled to emerge and be.
In this dense field where nothing is plain or sure,
Our very being seems to us questionable,
Our life is a vague experiment, the soul
A flickering light in a strange ignorant world,
The earth a brute mechanic accident,
A net of death in which by chance we live. pp. 49-50

The whole passage, and especially the last line, powerfully depicts the outward view of the apparent meaninglessness of life. He then contrasts this surface view with the view of the Gods.

Above the world the world-creators stand,
In the phenomenon see its mystic source.
These heed not the deceiving outward play,
They turn not to the moment’s busy tramp,
But listen with the still patience of the Unborn
For the slow footsteps of far Destiny
Approaching through huge distances of Time,
Unmarked by the eye that sees effect and cause,
Unheard mid the clamour of the human plane. p. 54

As the passage continues, the stark contrast is reinforced, focusing on the calm patience of the gods above and the struggle of the ignorant life below.
Above the illusion of the hopes that pass,
Behind the appearance and the overt act,
Behind this clock-work Chance and vague surmise,
Amid the wrestle of force, the trampling feet,
Across the cries of anguish and of joy,
Across the triumph, fighting and despair,
They watch the Bliss for which earth’s heart has cried
On the long road which cannot see its end
Winding undetected through the sceptic days
And to meet it guide the unheedful moving world. pp. 54-55

The passage helps give us a sense of a different dimension of time that is able to take into its wide scope the long process of evolution and the slow march of human progress. This is very useful when we are trying to understand the suffering and ignorance and evil in the world. How can God permit this? Is he really there after all? We are impatient, we want the suffering to end now, we don’t know how, or what’s behind it, but we want it finished. In the last lines of the passage the author says that the gods watch this slow unfolding of events and keep their eye on the goal, “the Bliss for which earth’s heart has cried,” “and to meet it guide the unheedful moving world.” They don’t just watch, they also guide the ignorant “moving world.”

What follows, in my opinion, is one of the most powerful passages of the poem, which is prophetic in its substance and tone.

Thus will the masked Transcendent mount his throne.
When darkness deepens strangling the earth’s breast
And mind’s corporeal mind is the only lamp,
As a thief’s in the night shall be the covert tread
Of one who steps unseen into his house.
A Voice ill-heard shall speak, the soul obey,
A Power into mind’s inner chamber steal,
A charm and sweetness open life’s closed doors
And beauty conquer the resisting world,
The Truth-Light capture Nature by surprise,
A stealth of God compel the heart to bliss
And earth grow unexpectedly divine.
In Matter shall be lit the spirit’s glow,
In body and body kindled the sacred birth;  
Night shall awake to the anthem of the stars,  
The days become a happy pilgrim march,  
Our will a force of the Eternal’s power,  
And thought the rays of a spiritual sun.  
A few shall see what none yet understands;  
God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep;  
For man shall not know the coming till its hour  
And belief shall be not till the work is done.

Here is now a very powerful and positive statement. Not only do the gods guide the unheedful world, the Transcendent is going to secretly step into his house, our world. God will capture Nature by surprise and compel the heart to bliss. Earth will grow unexpectedly divine. And most profoundly, not only in the higher consciousness, but “in Matter shall be lit the spirit’s glow/ In body and body kindled the sacred birth.” Back when Sri Aurobindo wrote this nobody else was talking about divinising the body, spirituality was something for the inner consciousness only. Then he adds this provocative line, “God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep.” It suggests that the change that is going to take place has little to do with our philosophies and psychologies, perhaps even little to do with our feeble attempts at sadhana. Something profound is taking place in the depths of matter, the transcendent is entering his house, a new type of being is just going to start growing up around us.

In the following pages, Sri Aurobindo further illuminates this secret knowledge. He explains that here in the ignorance we cannot see the full picture. We are fumbling in darkness and cannot see from where we have come or to where we are going. We have lost our Oneness with God, with the eternal, with the omniscient and omnipotent. Above, the Spirit watches the drama of creation, lives in its own stainless purity, but does not react to our plight out of pity or revulsion. Sri Aurobindo explains this aloofness. He says,

The immortal sees not as we vainly see.  
He looks on hidden aspects and screened powers,  
He knows the law and natural line of things.  
Undriven by a brief life’s will to act,
Unharassed by the spur of pity and fear,
He makes no haste to untie the cosmic knot
Or the world’s torn jarring heart to reconcile.
In Time he waits for the Eternal’s hour.

By itself, this might seem rather disappointing to the suffering human soul. Where is God’s mercy? Can He not lend a hand? Must this creation reach up to God’s height unaided? Must this suffering and misery continue until humanity slowly progresses unhelped to supermanhood? In the lines that follow, Sri Aurobindo gives the reassuring answer.

Yet a spiritual secret aid is there;
While a tardy Evolution’s coils wind on
And Nature hews her way through adamant
A divine intervention thrones above.
Alive in a dead rotating universe
We whirl not here upon a casual globe
Abandoned to a task beyond our force;
Even through the tangled anarchy called Fate
And through the bitterness of death and fall
An outstretched Hand is felt upon our lives.
It is near us in unnumbered bodies and births;
In its unslackening grasp it keeps for us safe
The one inevitable supreme result
No will can take away and no doom change,
The crown of conscious Immortality,
The godhead promised to our struggling souls
When first man’s heart dared death and suffered life.

These calm and distant Mights shall act at last.
Immovably ready for their destined task,
The ever-wise compassionate Brilliances
Await the sound of the Incarnate’s voice
To leap and bridge the chasms of Ignorance
And heal the hollow yearning gulfs of Life
And fill the abyss that is the universe.

He repeats in different words the positive statement of the prophetic passage read a few moments ago and hints at some further elements of
it. In particular, he indicates that the Divine has all along been guiding and helping and leading this difficult evolution. Further, he holds for us safe the crown of conscious immortality. And again he promises that God’s mercy and might will come down. The “Brilliances,” the gods of Light and Power and Bliss above the creation, await the Avatar, the Divine Incarnate, to call them down into the world. We almost get some sense here of the necessity of Avatarhood, of the Divine being born into a material body, in order to bring the higher spiritual Light down into the ignorance of life and matter.

In the sections that follow, Sri Aurobindo takes us still deeper into this mystery of a universe of pain and suffering created by a God of Love and Delight. How has this come to be? For what purpose? At the heart of the mystery is the fact that the Divine alone exists, all is He. Sri Aurobindo says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{All here where each thing seems its lonely self} \\
\text{Are figures of the sole transcendent One:} \\
\text{Only by him they are, his breath is their life;} \\
\text{An unseen Presence moulds the oblivious clay.}
\end{align*}
\]

p. 60

And later he says,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone} \\
\text{Has called out of the Silence his mute Force} \\
\text{Where she lay in the featureless and formless hush} \\
\text{Guarding from Time by her immobile sleep} \\
\text{The ineffable puissance of his solitude.} \\
\text{The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone} \\
\text{Has entered with his silence into space:} \\
\text{He has fashioned these countless persons of one self;} \\
\text{He has built a million figures of his power;} \\
\text{He lives in all, who lived in his Vast alone;} \\
\text{Space is himself and Time is only he.}
\end{align*}
\]

p. 67

This passage conveys the sense of an absolute Existence – infinite, timeless, silent, alone, holding all power motionless within itself – suddenly extending itself, throwing itself outward to become this infinite universe of innumerable beings and forces. It doesn’t create it in the sense of creating something outside itself – there is nothing
to create it out of other than itself – rather, it becomes this varied multiplicity. But although this is stated as having occurred at some moment in the past, this is for the convenience of our time-bound mind and language: the absolute is timeless, eternal, it didn’t cease to exist when the universe and its countless individuals came into being. It continues to exist, it transcends the universe. So really, the absolute exists simultaneously as the transcendent, as the universe, and as these myriad individuals in the universe.

In this section, Sri Aurobindo draws the distinction between the Soul and Nature, the Lord and his Shakti, his Force, the Divine Mother. Another aspect of this distinction is between the silent witness consciousness and the energy and movement in the universe, Purusha and Prakriti. These distinctions are related to this idea just mentioned of the One Absolute throwing itself out and becoming this varied multiplicity, yet still maintaining its transcendent status and looking out upon its creation, upon Nature, both from above it and from within it as the soul.

This is the knot that ties together the stars:
The Two who are one are the secret of all power,
The Two who are one are the might and right in things.
His soul, silent, supports the world and her,
His acts are her commandment’s registers.
Happy, inert, he lies beneath her feet:
His breast he offers for her cosmic dance
Of which our lives are the quivering theatre,
And none could bear but for his strength within,
Yet none would leave because of his delight.
His works, his thoughts have been devised by her,
His being is a mirror vast of hers:
Active, inspired by her he speaks and moves;
His deeds obey her heart’s unspoken demands:
Passive, he bears the impacts of the world
As if her touches shaping his soul and life:
His journey through the days is her sun-march;
He runs upon her roads; hers is his course.
A witness and student of her joy and dole,
A partner in her evil and her good,
He has consented to her passionate ways,
He is driven by her sweet and dreadful force.

The Divine has become this Nature but doesn’t cease to be himself. All energy and movement is Nature, and the Soul, the Divine within Nature, has consented to be driven by nature’s force. ‘Active, inspired by her he speaks and moves; / His deeds obey her heart’s unspoken demands; Passive, he bears the impacts of the world / As if her touches shaping his soul and life.’ Still, why has he consented to this, what is the purpose? There are some hints of this in this section:

He too wears a diminished godhead here;
He has forsaken his omnipotence,
His calm he has foregone and infinity.
He knows her only, he has forgotten himself;
To her he abandons all to make her great.
He hopes in her to find himself anew,
Incarnate, wedding his infinity’s peace
To her creative passion’s ecstasy.

The Divine has become this multiplicity. He has consented to become matter, to become this struggling, ignorant life in a material world for a purpose. What purpose? ‘He hopes in her to find himself anew, / Incarnate, wedding his infinity’s peace / To her creative passion’s ecstasy.’ In other words, as the Transcendent, he lives in his absolute Self alone. Universal, he throws himself out in an infinite, creative multiplicity as Nature. Individual, as the evolving soul in nature, he first consents to nature’s force and movement, forgets himself and identifies with her, hoping to find himself anew, to realize his divine Self as an individual incarnate in the world.

Being absolute, the Divine is not limited to living alone in his transcendent status; he can also live, at the same time, in countless individuals in varied relation with one another in the infinite diversity and beauty and ecstasy of Nature. He has come here for that. But he has not come simply to lose himself in the ignorance and suffering of Nature, cut off from his Transcendent and universal Self like we are at present. As an individual being living in Nature, he hopes to recover his lost divinity; he hopes to live here ‘incarnate’, and wed his infinity’s peace with nature’s creative passion.
The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,
The one who is in us as our secret self,
Our mask of imperfection has assumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh his own,
His image in the human measure cast
That to his divine measure we might rise;
Then in a figure of divinity
The maker shall recast us and impose
A plan of godhead on the mortal’s mould
Lifting our finite minds to his infinite,
Touching the moment with eternity.
This transfiguration is earth’s due to heaven:
A mutual debt binds man to the Supreme:
His nature we must put on as he put ours;
We are sons of God and must be even as he:
His human portion we must grow divine.
Our life is a paradox with God for key.

To practice Yoga with the object of uniting with the Divine is not a pretentious chimera; nor is it a great, idealistic aim suitable only for rare individuals: it is simply the conscious pursuit of the real purpose and goal of our existence here on earth. God has come down here on earth, has obscured his divinity and become this thinking clay not simply to eat tasty food, spin out philosophies, or help the homeless, but to recover his conscious divinity in individual beings here in this diverse, material world. This is earth’s due to heaven: ‘His nature we must put on as he put ours.’ But we cannot do this through our own power: ‘The maker shall recast us and impose / A plan of godhead on the mortal’s mould.’ We must surrender ourselves into the hands of the Divine Shakti so that she may achieve this divinisation in us. This is the secret of our existence, this is the secret knowledge.

In the last section of this long canto, Sri Aurobindo presents a long symbolic metaphor of the sailor on the flow of time, which represents the soul’s evolution in Nature. It illustrates how the soul gradually grows by gaining experience and venturing further and further out from its safe limits of sense and mind, until finally it sails out into the infinite. It begins like this:
This is the sailor on the flow of Time,
This is the World-Matter’s slow discoverer,
Who, launched into this small corporeal birth,
Has learned his craft in tiny bays of self,
But dares at last unplumbed infinitudes,
A voyager upon eternity’s seas.
In his world-adventure’s crude initial start
Behold him ignorant of his godhead’s force,
Timid initiate of its vast design.
An expert captain of a fragile craft,
A trafficker in small impermanent wares,
At first he hugs the shore and shuns the breadths,
Dares not to affront the far-off perilous main.

Afterwards he travels further out to distant shores, ‘Serves the world’s commerce in the riches of Time,’ and trades:

Rich bales, carved statuettes, hued canvasses,
And jewelled toys brought for an infant’s play
And perishable products of hard toil
And transient splendours won and lost by the days.

Later, he leaves the last lands, crosses the ultimate seas,

He turns to eternal things his symbol quest;
Life changes for him its time-constructed scenes,
Its images veiling infinity.

As he continues,

He crosses the boundaries of the unseen
And passes over the edge of mortal sight
To a new vision of himself and things.
He is a spirit in an unfinished world
That knows him not and cannot know itself:
The surface symbol of his goalless quest
Takes deeper meanings to his inner view;
His is a search of darkness for the light,
Of mortal life for immortality.

And finally, at the close of the canto, the purpose of life is again revealed.
There is a plan in the Mother’s deep world-whim,  
A purpose in her vast and random game.  
This ever she meant since the first dawn of life,  
This constant will she covered with her sport,  
To evoke a Person in the impersonal Void,  
With the Truth-Light strike earth’s massive roots of trance,  
Wake a dumb self in the inconscient depths  
And raise a lost Power from its python sleep  
That the eyes of the Timeless might look out from Time  
And the world manifest the unveiled Divine.  
For this he left his white infinity  
And laid on the spirit the burden of the flesh,  
That Godhead’s seed might flower in mindless Space.

pp. 72-73

Thus Sri Aurobindo presents us the secret knowledge, the meaning  
and purpose of our existence here on this difficult and perplexing  
earth. The Divine has manifested this world of ignorance within his  
greater Being in order that he might become a myriad conscious,  
divine individuals within the field of time and physical space,  
experiencing the adventure and joy of its infinite variations, relations,  
and progressive unfolding.

‘The Secret Knowledge’, Study Camp on Savitri Book One, Canto 4  
with delegates from the Ahmedabad and Baroda Sri Aurobindo Centres,  
24-30.08.2013
The English of *Savitri* (8)
*Book One, Canto Two, lines 186-278*
*by Shraddhavan*

Last time, we read the beautiful description of Savitri which we feel is also Sri Aurobindo’s description of the Mother, and reached the end of the first section of Canto Two. In that first section we saw Savitri as she awakes on the morning when Satyavan must die, remembering everything that has led up to this day. One of the things that Sri Aurobindo reminds us of is that it is in the beautiful forest setting of the Himalayan foothills that she first met Satyavan and that, living with him there, she grew, as he says, ‘*to the stature of her spirit*’. It is there that she has gone through all the first part of her yoga. Then he gave the description of her: he said that Love has come to her in the forest and that this power and principle of Love has found in her his perfect shrine. He gives a beautiful description of all the parts of her nature which allow Love to find in her ‘*his own eternity*’.

Now we shall continue, with the second section.

> Till then no mournful line had barred this ray.
> On the frail breast of this precarious earth,
> Since her orbed sight in its breath-fastened house,
> Opening in sympathy with happier stars
> Where life is not exposed to sorrowful change,
> Remembered beauty death-claimed lids ignore
> And wondered at this world of fragile forms
> Carried on canvas-strips of shimmering Time,
> The impunity of unborn Mights was hers.

These two sentences are difficult. ‘*Till then*’ means until that moment when she met Satyavan, until love came to her, hiding the shadow of death. until then, ‘*no mournful line had barred this ray*.’ ‘*Mournful*’ means unhappy, sad. The ray is Savitri herself. She has come into the human world as a ray of sunlight, a ray of the new light. Sometimes a
cloud comes across a sunray, like a bar, like ‘a mournful line’, a line of shadow, a line of sorrow. Until that moment no cloud, no shadow, had come across the glorious light that is Savitri. Since she first opened her eyes — ‘since her orbed sight...’: an orb is a sphere, a perfect round, and sometimes this word is used in poetry to indicate the eyes. ‘Since her orbed sight in its breath-fastened house’: the body is like a house and all of its parts are held tied together by the life-breath, the prana. Her sight, her power of vision, when she first, as a baby, opened her physical eyes, was still ‘in sympathy with happier stars’. Her power of vision was still remembering what it was like on those higher planes that she has come from. Now she is using her physical eyes, and she is not up there with those happier stars any more, she is here ‘on the frail breast of this precarious earth’. ‘Frail’ means ‘weak’, without much strength. Here on earth things are very perishable, things break easily, compared with those immortal worlds that are lit by happier stars than our sun. The earth is precarious, things here are not sure and certain. Things change. If something is precarious it means that there is a risk that at any moment we can lose it. Her sight remembered the beauty of those higher spheres, beauty that our ‘death-claimed lids ignore’. Here, the word ‘lids’ refers to the eyelids. It is a way of saying that our physical eyes are claimed by death: these earthly eyes of ours don’t know anything at all about the beauty of those higher worlds that Savitri has come from. In English the word ‘ignore’ normally means to not pay any attention. But here Sri Aurobindo is using the word ‘ignore’ – as he does in other places in his writings – in the French sense, which is connected with its original Latin meaning of ‘not knowing’. We have that meaning in ‘ignorance’, being ignorant of something. So her orbed sight remembers the beauty of those other worlds and ‘wonders’ – looks with wonder and surprise – ‘at this world of fragile forms’, this material world where all the forms break easily. To that heavenlier power of vision, it seems as if all these fragile material forms are just painted on strips of canvas like background scenery in a theatre. But these are strips of ‘shimmering Time’. Sri Aurobindo is emphasizing that if your power of vision is used to how things are on higher planes, everything here looks very fragile, very precarious and impermanent and even unreal. The image is of fragile shapes painted on canvas strips, like the scenery on a theatre stage; but these canvas strips are strips of time —
shimmering time, as if it is all an illusion, and will pass away with time. ‘Shimmering’ is a movement of light, like sunlight reflected from the dancing waves of the sea, or light moving on shining silk — there is something magical about light that is shimmering — perhaps like the magical light on the stage of a theatre. If you have ‘Impunity’ it means that you can’t be touched or harmed or punished. The beings of those higher planes are ‘unborn mights’ — immortal powers. They have not been born and they won’t die. When Savitri comes into the human world, she is born and becomes human and eventually she will have to leave again. Yet, from the very beginning of her life, when her eyes first opened here on earth, she had this impunity of the unborn mights, she was protected. Later on Sri Aurobindo tells us that something was guarding this missioned child, protecting her. But from the moment when she first meets Satyavan, some kind of sorrow can begin to enter her life.

We continue with the theme of the happiness she was always carrying with her:

Although she leaned to bear the human load,
Her walk kept still the measures of the gods.
Earth’s breath had failed to stain that brilliant glass:
Unsmeared with the dust of our mortal atmosphere
It still reflected heaven’s spiritual joy.

She has leaned down from her high world to help us to bear the heavy load that human souls have to carry, but her walk ‘kept still the measures of the gods’ : she still moved through life with that same free pace as the gods do, not weighed down by the material world, not weighed down by our human sorrows. ‘Earth’s breath’ — the atmosphere of earth — had not managed ‘to stain that brilliant glass’ — the glass of Savitri’s consciousness. It is like a beautiful mirror. Despite the polluted atmosphere of the earth, no stain had come on that glass. ‘Unsmeared’ — when something dirty falls on your dress it may make a smear. Her consciousness doesn’t have any dirty marks, any smears on it. It is still reflecting the ananda, the spiritual joy of heaven. She was always carrying that within her consciousness.

Almost they saw who lived within her light
Her playmate in the sempiternal spheres
Descended from its unattainable realms
In her attracting advent’s luminous wake,
The white-fire dragon-bird of endless bliss
Drifting with burning wings above her days:
Heaven’s tranquil shield guarded the missioned child.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that the people who were living around Savitri, living within her light, could almost see this wonderful dragon-bird. It is as if this creature is her vehicle in the higher planes. It was her playmate there ‘in the sempiternal spheres’, in the eternal worlds. When she came to earth, it followed her. It descended from those ‘unattainable realms’ where this wonderful creature lives, ‘In her attracting advent’s luminous wake.’ An advent is an arrival, a coming. Around Christmas time we count the days of Advent, the days of the approaching time of Christ’s birth on earth. Savitri has also come down on earth, and that advent of Savitri has attracted that dragon-bird, her playmate, to follow ‘in her luminous wake’. When a boat is going fast enough in water, you will see its track, its wake, behind and sometimes leaves or surface debris get caught up in the wake of the boat and are carried along with it. The bird comes down as if following in Savitri’s wake, and even now that she lives on earth it is drifting with burning, white-fire wings above her days. The presence of this ananda-bird is a shield of tranquillity, calm and peace, protecting Savitri as a child. She is a ‘missioned child’, she has been sent with a work to do, a mission, and this protection is keeping her safe from any sorrow or grief until the time comes for her to do her work.

A glowing orbit was her early term,
Years like gold raiment of the gods that pass;
Her youth sat throned in calm felicity.

The early part of her life, ‘her early term’ was like ‘A glowing orbit’. An ‘orbit’ is the track of a planet around its sun. Our earth-years reflect the time that it takes for our planet to go one orbit around our sun. The curve of Savitri’s life in those years was ‘glowing’ – warm and full of light; each year-long cycle as it passed was golden like the ‘raiment’, the clothes or robes that the gods wear. Through all those years of her youth she ‘sat throned’, on a throne like a princess, ‘in calm felicity’, tranquil happiness.
But joy cannot endure until the end:
There is a darkness in terrestrial things
That will not suffer long too glad a note.

Here on earth joy and happiness can’t last forever, ‘cannot endure until the end’. Why? Because there is ‘a darkness’ in things belonging to this earth life, ‘in terrestrial things’. That darkness does not allow things to stay too happy for too long. Here, the word ‘suffer’ means to allow; that darkness that is in terrestrial things will not allow ‘too glad’, too happy, a note for very long. Some kind of steady content may be allowed for a time, but that heavenly happiness which Savitri had will not be allowed to last for very long.

On her too closed the inescapable Hand:
The armed Immortal bore the snare of Time.

That Hand of darkness, which is ‘inescapable’, the hand that nobody here on earth can escape from, has closed on her. The ‘armed immortal’ is Savitri. She has come from those higher planes and has all their powers with her, but because she has accepted to be born as a human being she gets caught in this trap. A ‘snare’ is what hunters use to catch a small animal or a bird. Although Savitri is powerful and immortal in her essence and origin, having taken a human birth, having accepted to become a human being, she too is caught in ‘the snare of Time’.

One dealt with her who meets the burdened great.
Assigner of the ordeal and the path
Who chooses in this holocaust of the soul
Death, fall and sorrow as the spirit’s goads,
The dubious godhead with his torch of pain
Lit up the chasm of the unfinished world
And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.

Sri Aurobindo is telling us something very interesting in this sentence here. He says that there is a Power who meets great beings when they come to earth, the ones who come with a burden, a responsibility, a mission to fulfil. That Power must now deal with Savitri. That being, that ‘One’, assigns or sets ‘the ordeal’, the painful difficult test, and the path that each of those great beings must follow. Sri Aurobindo
says that when those great beings come to our earth it is a ‘holocaust’; a holocaust is a sacrifice, especially a fire sacrifice, a burnt offering. Coming to this earth for them is a tremendous sacrifice, a painful test. In this process, that Power or Being chooses all these painful things — ‘death, fall, and sorrow’ — ‘as the spirit’s goads’. Goads are the sticks used to poke an animal to make it go faster, the bullock or the elephant. Elephant drivers use big metal goads to make the elephant go faster. Death, fall and sorrow are goads for these burdened great beings, to drive them to their mission. That One, that ‘dubious godhead’, a being which is divine in a strange way, lifts up its ‘torch of pain’, using suffering like a light. It uses pain as a light to reveal ‘the chasm’, the deep pit, ‘of the unfinished world’, ‘And called her to fill with her vast self the abyss.’ It means that with this pain of the death of Satyavan, which concerns her directly, personally, the Being shows Savitri all the pain and all the things that still need to change in this world which is ‘unfinished’ not yet complete, not yet the divine world it is meant to become. He calls her and shows her: “Come, this is your task; this is what you have to do.”

Amal Kiran asked Sri Aurobindo about this Being. He wrote:

Who is ‘One’ here? Is it Love, the godhead mentioned before? If not, does this ‘dubious godhead with his torch of pain’ correspond to the ‘stone-still figure of high and god-like Pain’ spoken of a little earlier? Or is it Time whose ‘snare’ occurs in the last line of the preceding passage?

Sri Aurobindo replied:

Love? It is not Love who meets the burdened great and governs the fate of men! Nor is it Pain. Time also does not do these things — it only provides the field and movement of events. If I had wanted to give a name, I would have done it, but it has purposely to be left nameless because it is indefinable. He may use Love or Pain or Time or any of these powers but is not any of them. You can call him the Master of Evolution, if you like.

*Savitri* p.770
August and pitiless in his calm outlook,
Heightening the Eternal’s dreadful strategy,
He measured the difficulty with the might
And dug more deep the gulf that all must cross.

There is something majestic, ‘august’, about this Being. The spelling of this word is the same as that of the eighth month of the year, but the pronunciation is different, the stress is on the second syllable, instead of on the first. The month August is named after the first Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. They called him Augustus because he was majestic, imperial. His birth month was given this name and added to the Roman calendar. The quality which they felt he had was described by that word ‘august’. This godhead is like that: he is august, regal; he is like a great emperor; he is pitiless, he feels no weak sympathy for the suffering of those beings to whom he must assign to their task. Instead he has a ‘calm outlook’ on all that must be. He makes things more difficult for Savitri because she has come with more power, more strength. Sri Aurobindo says that he heightens ‘the Eternal’s dreadful strategy’. A strategy is a technique for getting something done. The Eternal has a strategy for getting his evolutionary process completed. Some aspects of that strategy seem very dreadful to us — that he uses death, sorrow and fall as goads. ‘Dreadful’ is an adjective for something that we dread, that we fear; we fear it, it repels us. ‘Fall’ here means the fall from our high true self. That is the Eternal’s dreadful strategy: all of us have to cross this ordeal, this test, of death, fall, sorrow. But for Savitri, this godhead heightens the strategy, intensifies it, makes it more difficult: ‘He measured the difficulty with the might’. Since she has more might, more power, he makes the task more difficult for her.

Assailing her divinest elements,
He made her heart kin to the striving human heart
And forced her strength to its appointed road.

What is he doing? He is testing, attacking, ‘assailing’ the most divine parts of her. In that way, he makes her heart somewhat close to our struggling human hearts; and he forces her strength to this road that has been assigned to her, the road that she has to follow in order to fulfil her mission.
For this she had accepted mortal breath;
To wrestle with the Shadow she had come
And must confront the riddle of man’s birth
And life’s brief struggle in dumb Matter’s night.

This is why she has accepted to become human. She has come here to wrestle with that darkness in terrestrial things that will not allow too glad a note. In order to do that, she has to face, to ‘confront’ this riddle, the mystery of our human birth, the struggle of life here in this world of matter.

Whether to bear with Ignorance and death
Or hew the ways of Immortality,
To win or lose the godlike game for man,
Was her soul’s issue thrown with Destiny’s dice.

This canto is called ‘The Issue’. What is the issue, what is the problem, what is the choice here? Savitri has to decide whether she is just going to accept, ‘to bear with’ ignorance and death, or whether she going to ‘hew the ways of immortality’. When an adventurer is going to be passing through a thick jungle, he takes along a big knife to hew, to cut his way through and create a path for himself, a way where he can pass. Savitri has to create a new possibility for human beings, to conquer death and make it easier for human beings to achieve immortality. She has come here to win or maybe to lose this ‘godlike game’. There is a kind of wager, a bet. This is the issue that her soul has accepted: “Go and try. Can you do it?” The result, the outcome, is going to be decided by a throw of the dice — just as in the dice-games described in the Mahabharata, where everything hangs on one dice-throw. Destiny has made or given the dice that are to be thrown in this game. Who will be the winner; who will lose? In any case, Savitri has not taken on this contest for her own sake, she is not playing for herself — she is playing on behalf of the whole human race, ‘To win or lose the godlike game for man’.

But not to submit and suffer was she born;
To lead, to deliver was her glorious part.
Here was no fabric of terrestrial make
Fit for a day’s use by busy careless Powers.
Just accepting, suffering, enduring — Savitri is not born for that. She is born for the glorious role of a leader, a deliverer, a liberator. She is not made up of ordinary earth elements. ‘Fabric’ is cloth. Fabric made of the usual earthly elements is just fit for ‘a day’s use’, a very short time, by the ‘busy careless Powers’ who run the universe. Her fabric is not like that. In the next sentence Sri Aurobindo develops his image of that fabric which is fit for a day’s use by busy careless powers. They don’t care; they just use the little being that is made out of earth materials. When they have finished with it they just throw it away.

An image fluttering on the screen of Fate,
Half-animated for a passing show,
Or a castaway on the ocean of Desire
Flung to the eddies in a ruthless sport
And tossed along the gulfs of Circumstance,
A creature born to bend beneath the yoke,
A chattel and a plaything of Time’s lords,
Or one more pawn who comes destined to be pushed
One slow move forward on a measureless board
In the chess-play of the earth-soul with Doom,—
Such is the human figure drawn by Time.

In this sentence Sri Aurobindo gives four symbolic pictures of our ordinary human life. First, ‘An image fluttering on the screen of Fate’: it is as if there is a cinema screen or perhaps one of those cloth screens they use for shadow puppet plays. We can show an image for a short time; it is not fully real, it is just ‘fluttering on the screen of Fate’. ‘Half-animated for a passing show’, it moves a little bit; it gives the illusion of reality, it is part of a performance or a play. We are like puppets, or figures in a cartoon-film, hardly existing, not really alive.

Then, ‘A castaway’: someone who is travelling on a ship and falls overboard into the sea. Or sometimes a castaway is thrown out on purpose, as a punishment. If you are thrown out like that, there you are in ‘the ocean of Desire’, tossed this way and that by the waves of vital impulses — ‘Flung to the eddies in a ruthless sport’. That sounds as if somebody has really been thrown off the ship on purpose, in order to make fun of his desperate state. ‘Eddies’ are whirlpools; in the ocean of Desire there are whirlpools that catch hold of you
and carry you round and round and down to your doom, or toss you along in these gulfs, these deep stretches of sea, where you cannot do anything according to your own will, you are just driven by circumstances. Then:

A creature born to bend beneath the yoke
A chattel and a plaything of Time’s lords …

Usually, it is an animal that must ‘bend beneath the yoke’: we put a yoke on the bullock and he must pull the plough or the cart. But in the past, slaves had to do that kind of work. In normal mortal existence we are slaves, ‘the cattle of the gods’ says the Upanishad. Here Sri Aurobindo uses the word ‘chattel’. A chattel is a possession, something that belongs to you. You have your goods and your chattels — all your belongings. So, if we are the playthings of the lords of Time, we are their slaves, we belong to them, they can use our little being however they like.

The last image is from the game of chess. A human being may be ‘just one more pawn’ — the smallest piece in the chess game. There are the king and the queen, two bishops, two knights, two castles, or sometimes elephants, but the pawn is the smallest little piece. They are considered to be quite disposable, not so valuable or important. They can move only one square at a time. So in one whole lifetime, maybe you get pushed only ‘one slow move forward’. Our earthly chess board has eight squares this way and eight squares that way, but this is ‘a measureless board’. It is so huge, there are so many squares and the poor little pawn only gets moved one slow move forward on that measureless board ‘in the chess play of the earth-soul with Doom’. The earth-soul is trying to evolve, trying to become what it is destined to be. But the dark power of Doom, disaster, is always opposing it: “Off with this pawn!” — slowing things down as much as it can.

Of all these four images, Sri Aurobindo says ‘Such is the human figure drawn by Time.’ Our human appearance in time is of something helpless, useless, without much value or significance, and without any power at all. But Savitri is different:

A conscious frame was here, a self-born Force.
A force, a power from the higher planes, has taken birth here by its own choice; and it has gathered all the elements that were needed, so that even something in the body, the ‘frame’, is conscious, so that Savitri is not subject to that play of circumstance. She is not ‘a chattel and plaything of Time’s lords’. She is ‘a self-born Force’, ‘a conscious frame’.

In this enigma of the dusk of God,
This slow and strange uneasy compromise
Of limiting Nature with a limitless Soul,
Where all must move between an ordered Chance
And an uncaring blind Necessity,
Too high the fire spiritual dare not blaze.

This is speaking about the world we live in, this place which is a kind of mystery, a riddle, an ‘enigma’. An enigma is something mysterious, a puzzle that we don’t know how to solve. This world is an enigma because here we live in a ‘dusk of God’. Dusk is the time when light and dark are equally balanced, between night and day. This world that we live in is a twilight world, where light and dark are mixed. It is also a ‘slow and strange uneasy compromise / Of limiting nature with a limitless soul.’ Each of us here has in us, and there is present in the whole creation, a divine soul, a limitless soul which has all the consciousness, all the power, all the bliss. But here, in the material world, at the present stage of evolution, ‘in this dusk of God’, that limitless soul has to ‘compromise’. The limitless Soul accepts compromise with limiting Nature. It allows itself to be limited by the limits that Nature has reached in its upward movement. There is a conflict between the soul and nature, and their compromise is an uneasy one, a strange one, but slowly it changes. Here, everything ‘must move between an ordered Chance / And an uncaring, blind Necessity’. These are the rules of the game that have been set for this manifestation. Necessity says “It has to be like this.” One aspect of uncaring, blind Necessity in our world is, for example, the laws of physics. We can’t change those. Matter has certain rules. Eventually, perhaps, even those will change, but for the time being there is this uncaring, blind Necessity: the law of gravity, the law of entropy, all these laws which govern Matter. That is one kind of necessity. There are other kinds of necessity that we feel, things that
we have to accept because we do not have the power to change them. So that is one aspect, the aspect of Necessity. But we also see that things are not predictable. Despite the fact that there is this uncaring blind necessity which seems to determine everything, things are not predictable. There is always some new element coming in; we call it Chance. Our world seems to be governed by a balance between ‘an ordered Chance’ and ‘an uncaring blind Necessity’. These two together create the conditions and limitations under which the soul has to live in nature — at the moment. Under these conditions, ‘the spiritual fire’, the fire of aspiration and upward effort, does not dare to flame up too high, it has to stay within limits. Sri Aurobindo says that under these conditions ‘Too high the fire spiritual dare not blaze’. A limit is set, even to spiritual aspiration. We can aspire, which is the sacred fire of the soul for progress, light and truth. But that aspiration, that fire, doesn’t dare to blaze up too high because of the conditions of limiting Nature. Why?

If once it met the intense original Flame,  
An answering touch might shatter all measures made  
And earth sink down with the weight of the Infinite.

If that aspiration, the spiritual fire in us, would flame too high and really meet ‘the intense original Flame,’ the flame of divine energy on the highest levels of consciousness, and if there were a response, then that might ‘shatter’ — break in pieces — ‘all measures made’. In the manifestation, we are living by ‘measures’. There are limits: there are forms, there are shapes, there is the unrolling of time in years and days. All these things have been put there — measured, limited — and if there were a too-soon and too-powerful influx from above, then all our structures might get broken and this whole earth might sink down ‘with the weight of the Infinite’. The Infinite is beyond all measures, all limits, all forms. This is a very powerful image, a poetic way of saying things that Mother and Sri Aurobindo have told us. There is a play going on, and this play must take its time. But Mother was always striving to remould the measures and the laws. If there was a contact with that ‘intense original Flame’ and there was an immense descent, that might be too much for the earth. It might get shattered, sink down beneath the weight of all this Infinite. There is no limit to the Infinite, so its weight must be immense. This is not a
metaphor, because our earth, our whole world, depends on measures and if the measures are shattered, we are lost. Our poor little world — what would happen to it! Earlier we read that it is frail and precarious.

A gaol is this immense material world:
Across each road stands armed a stone-eyed Law,
At every gate the huge dim sentinels pace.

‘Gaol’ — this is the old original spelling of the word ‘jail’. Sri Aurobindo uses this older spelling two or three other times in the poem and he also uses the spelling ‘jail’ in one place. It is one of the illogical spellings in English; it is not at all phonetic. I remember when I was a student of English Language in University my professor telling us that in this word the pronunciation comes from one dialect of old French and the spelling comes from a different old French dialect. Many words in English that have to do with law and legalities come from French, from the time when England was conquered and ruled by the Normans from northern France. So, both the pronunciation and the spelling come from 11th or 12th century French. This spelling ‘gaol’ is now less in use but both spellings are correct.

This material world, not only our earth but the whole universe, is a prison. If we try to escape, some kind of law is standing on every road, trying to prevent our escape. And that law has eyes of stone, it has no feelings, no sympathy nor compassion for us. It just holds its place: “I am the Law!” At every gate where we might go out, ‘the huge dim sentinels pace’. A sentinel is a guard. At the gate they walk up and down and there is no chance to get past them.

A grey tribunal of the Ignorance,
An Inquisition of the priests of Night
In judgment sit on the adventurer soul,
And the dual tables and the Karmic norm
Restrain the Titan in us and the God:
Pain with its lash, joy with its silver bribe
Guard the Wheel’s circling immobility.

A tribunal is a court where there are three judges. The poet is saying that there is a court like that: ‘a grey tribunal of the ignorance / An Inquisition of the priests of the night...’. An Inquisition was a special
kind of tribunal which used to question people about their religious beliefs. They had to find out if you believe the right thing. If you didn’t, then you would get terribly punished. *The priests of Night / In judgment sit on the adventurer soul*. The soul is adventurous, it wants to progress, it wants to break out of these limits, to have new and higher experiences. But these forces are always challenging it. It is allowed to break out if it is strong enough, but first it must become highly developed. They are there to check: ‘How far have you gone?’ ‘What is your power?’ There is something in nature, in the whole set-up of this enigma that we live in, which is there to keep human beings within certain measures. So there are the dual tables. *Tables* here means stone tablets with the law written on them. The law that we live under is the law of duality. If we go for the good, we somehow always fall into the bad because the two things are always linked together. If we strive for pleasure, the pain will come after some time. Hot and cold, north and south, this whole world is based on these dual tables, the law of duality. And then, ‘the karmic norm’: you know what karma is — it is the theory that what we have done in the past determines our present and our future. There is something like that; what we do has consequences. For the physical being it is quite absolute: if you put your finger into the fire, you will get burned, if you go out in the rain you will get wet unless you take precautions. There is this kind of law that whatever you do, think, feel goes out from you. Mother says it goes out and all around the universe and comes back to you. Whatever you send out comes back. This applies to our physical being, our vital being and our mental being before it is fully developed. It doesn’t really apply to the soul. Sri Aurobindo says that as far as karma is concerned, out of all the possible consequences that our past actions might have accumulated for us, the soul makes its choice of the things that it wants to face in this life for its further progress. That is another view of karma. But until we are living in our soul, there is this action of karma which tries to keep everybody more or less at the same level. You are not allowed to become too good, not allowed to become too bad, either. The ‘dual tables’, that law of dualities, and ‘the karmic norm’ — a norm is a fixed standard that everybody should more or less fit into, a sort of average standard — these things restrain, they hold back the god in us, that aspiring soul; but they also prevent us
There is a certain amount of restraint being exercised all the time. This wheel of karma, the wheel of works that is always going on in the world, is kept moving round and round. There is pain lashing us with a whip to make us go the way it wants; and the other thing that makes us go around with the wheel is joy. Sri Aurobindo says it is like ‘a silver bribe.’ A bribe is an incentive, some payment you give to make someone do something. These words remind us of an incident in the story of Jesus Christ. His close disciple, Judas, took thirty pieces of silver from the authorities to betray his master. But even if we don’t know that story, we can understand the image: the joy we are given in our lives is not a golden bribe, it is not very, very valuable, it is only silver, but still we follow that bribe. The joy that we take is sometimes like that, a bribe to make us betray our highest impulses. These two things together, the pain and the joy, guard the wheel going round and round but never really moving forward. It is circling, but it doesn’t move forward.

A bond is put on the high-climbing mind,
A seal on the too large wide-open heart;
Death stays the journeying discoverer, Life.

There is something in our mind that would always like to go for progress, always higher and higher, better and better; but a limit is set, ‘a bond’: it is tied. Sometimes the heart would like to open very wide in sympathy, especially in Auroville we are given this idea of human unity, to feel one with the whole of humanity; but there are so many things that prevent that. And that is even a kind of protection until our soul is developed enough. It is dangerous for us to open the heart too wide. So there is ‘a seal’. Something is put on the heart that keeps it closed. Life is always journeying, trying to discover new possibilities, but it can only go so far. Death comes. Life journeys a certain distance, but sooner or later death is there and says “Now you cannot go any further.”

Thus is the throne of the Inconscient safe
While the tardy coilings of the aeons pass
And the Animal browses in the sacred fence
And the gold Hawk can cross the skies no more.
The throne is the seat the king sits on, and if his throne, his rule, is taken away, he is not the king any more. The Inconscient rules so much in our world, through matter, through our subconscious. Sri Aurobindo has shown us the way that its rule is kept safe, protected by ‘the dual tables and the karmic norm’ and all these laws that prevent us from moving forward too quickly. This has gone on for a long time. The throne of the Inconscient is being kept safe like this ‘While the tardy coilings of the aeons pass’. ‘Aeons’ are very long stretches of time. In India, we speak about ‘kalpas’, ‘manvantaras’. These are long, long stretches of time but they seem to go round in circles, in cycles: ‘tardy coilings’. ‘Tardy’ means slow, taking too long; and it can also mean ‘late’; something moves too slowly or comes too late. ‘Coilings’ suggests that time is moving in cycles, in a circular or spiral movement, round and round. The immense stretches of time through which evolution is happening make us feel as if it is all taking too long. The rule of the Inconscient is being drawn out too long.

As long as that is the way things are, we here in our bodies are mostly animals. We are like animals that are tied in an enclosure waiting to be sacrificed, like the Vedic sacrifice. Because the animal body is kept there, the ‘gold Hawk’, the symbol of the soul, cannot fly any more; it can’t cross the skies and get back to its home. The hawk is a hunting bird, of course, a very strong bird. Sometimes it has lovely golden colours. As long as the throne of the Inconscient is kept safe by the laws of duality and karma, the soul cannot fly up into the skies, the higher levels of consciousness. We shall stop there for today. Next time we shall read about how ‘one stood up and lit the limitless flame’.

(to be continued)
## News of Savitri Bhavan

### Calendar of Events,

**March to October 2013**

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### Regular Weekly Activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sundays</td>
<td>10.30-12 noon</td>
<td>Savitri Study Circle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mondays</td>
<td>3-4pm</td>
<td><em>Yoga and the Evolution of Man</em>, led by Dr. Jai Singh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5-6pm</td>
<td><em>The Integral Yoga in Savitri</em>, led by Dr. Ananda Reddy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesdays</td>
<td>9-10.30am</td>
<td><em>Sounds of Savitri</em>—practice for pronunciation and rhythm led by Patricia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3-4pm</td>
<td><em>Yoga and the Evolution of Man</em>, led by Dr. Jai Singh</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-5pm</td>
<td><em>L’ Agenda de Mère</em>—listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5-6pm</td>
<td><em>Savitri</em> study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5.45-7.15pm</td>
<td>OM Choir</td>
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<td>Wednesdays</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.30-5.30pm</td>
<td><em>Mudra-chi</em>, led by Anandi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5.30-6.30pm</td>
<td><em>Reading The Life Divine</em>, led by Shraddhavan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursdays</td>
<td>4-5pm</td>
<td>The English of <em>Savitri</em>, led by Shraddhavan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fridays</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi</td>
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</tbody>
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### Monthly Activities:

*Full Moon Gathering* in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue on the Full Moon Day.
Special Events:
April:

1  The Mother on Sri Aurobindo: an early film from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.


21  Celebrating Earth Day at Savitri Bhavan: The Yoga of the Earth – film with the Mother’s comments on passages from the beginning of Savitri illustrated by Huta.

22  A New Birth: an Interview of The Mother with Surendranath Jauhar on 11.05.1967 – film from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi Branch.

‘Krishna’s Flute: the Lure of the Divine’ a programme of poetry and music, 07.03.2013
Meditations on Savitri Book 1 Canto 2 – The Issue: film by Manohar of paintings by Huta, illustrating passages from Savitri read by the Mother, and accompanied by her own organ music.

May:
6
Four Chapters of Sri Aurobindo Ashram: film made in the Ashram in 1952.
13
Auroville, Exploring Alternatives: film made by a TV team from Korea exploring Auroville’s experiments in ecological farming, organic food and renewable energies.
20
The Mother and Flowers: video of a talk by Richard Pearson from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
27
Meditations on Savitri Book One Canto 3 – The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Soul’s Release, film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from Savitri read by the Mother accompanied by her own organ music.

June
24
Meditations on Savitri Book One Canto 4 – The Secret Knowledge Part I: film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from Savitri read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

July:
1-31
Exhibition: Meditations on Savitri Books 8 – 12: 108 paintings by Huta, made under the guidance of the Mother.
1:
A Company of Voices – CONSPIRAIRE in Concert. ‘Conspirare’ is a choir from Austin, Texas, USA. ‘Con-spirare’ means ‘to breathe together’. Their performance shows creative and vivid choral work.
8
Choir and virtual choirs: film of several pieces of choir work by Eric Whitacre (born 1970) and Ola Gjeilo (born 1978).
15
OM The Divine Name (1): film on OM and the OM Choirs.
22
OM The Divine Name (2)
Meditations on Savitri Book One Canto 4 – The Secret Knowledge, Part II: film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from Savitri read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

Well Being: Pranayama Workshop by J.V. Avadhanulu

August:


5 Aswapati & Sri Aurobindo in ‘Savitri’: video of a talk by Georges van Vrekhem.


13 The Traveller and The Worlds – Part One of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri: the fourth Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture, given by Shraddhan.

19 Pictures of Sri Aurobindo’s Poems, Parts 1& 2: film by Manohar of paintings and recitations by Huta.
The Secret Knowledge: members of Baroda and Ahmedabad branches of Sri Aurobindo Society of Gujarat participated in a week-long Study Camp led by Shraddhavan.

Musical Offering by Mohan Mistry and his students, in the amphitheatre at Savitri Bhavan.

24-30

September
2
Alexandra David-Neel 1911-24: feature film about the first European woman to reach Lhasa in Tibet.
9
Three films on Buddhism: Alan Watts on Zen; a video talk of the Dalai Lama on Buddhism; Religion, Science and Zen: Master Thich Nhat Hanh on the here and now, mindfulness and understanding.
12-16
Well Being – Pranayama Workshop by J.V.Aavadhanulu
20-22
Health and Happiness Retreat by J.V.Aavadhanulu
30
Meditations on Savitri Book Two, Cantos 1 to 4: film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from Savitri read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

October:
7
14
‘Amal Kiran – a clear ray’: film clips from various occasions.
Diversity of Life, Unity of Spirit and Evolutionary Crisis: videoed talks by Professor Arabinda Basu (1917-2012).

Meditations on Savitri Book Two, Cantos 5 and 6: film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from Savitri read by The Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
The Dream of Savitri Bhavan

We dream of an environment in Auroville

that will breathe the atmosphere of Savitri

that will welcome Savitri lovers from every corner of the world

that will be an inspiring centre of Savitri studies

that will house all kinds of materials and activities to enrich our understanding and enjoyment of Sri Aurobindo’s revelatory epic

that will be the abode of Savitri, the Truth that has come from the Sun

We welcome support from everyone who feels that the vibration of Savitri will help to manifest a better tomorrow.
HOW TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF SAVITRI BHAVAN

Savitri Bhavan is mainly dependent on donations, and all financial help from well-wishers is most welcome. Please consider in what way you can help the dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality.

Savitri Bhavan is a project of SAIIER (Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research) 100% exemption is now again available for offerings from Indian tax-payers under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT Act.

By credit card through PayPal on the internet. Access www.auroville.com/donations and enter the amount you wish to offer. Amounts of INR 500 to INR 10,000 are accepted. Specify ‘Savitri Bhavan’ as the recipient.

- Cheques and DDs should be payable to Auroville Unity Fund (SAIER) and sent to the address given below.

- If you have an Auroville Financial Service account, you can transfer an offering to account no. 240001, mentioning “Savitri Bhavan” as the purpose.

- If you live in India

If you would like to send your offering through Internet Banking or direct transfer, it should be sent to State Bank of India : Branch code No. 03160 : Current account no. 10237876031; or (if you wish to avail of 100% tax exemption for Social Sciences Research) to current account no. 31612623238. If you do send an offering in this way, please inform us at the time of sending, so that we can check up with the bank and acknowledge receipt as soon as possible.

If you are offering Rs. 500 or less, please consider sending it by money-order or DD, since the charges for cashing out-station cheques have become very high. If you feel like sending a regular modest offering, it may be better to send it every three months rather than monthly, for the same reason.

- If you live Abroad

To send your offering by SWIFT Transfer, please use the following code:

    SWIFT Code : SBININBB474
    State Bank of India, Branch Code 03160
    Auroville International Township Branch
    Kuilapalayam Auroville 605101 INDIA
    Auroville Unity Fund Foreign Account no. 10237876508

    Purpose “SAVITRI BHAVAN”

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Savitri is a Mantra for the transformation of the world

The Mother