Invocation

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The Beauty of the Future

Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world of the beauty of the future that must be realised.

He came to give not a hope but a certitude of the splendour towards which the world moves. The world is not an unfortunate accident, it is a marvel which moves towards its expression. The world needs the certitude of the beauty of the future. And Sri Aurobindo has given that assurance.

THE MOTHER
27 November 1971
MCW 13:15
In Grateful Memory

Shri Kireet Joshi (1931 to 2014)

As this issue was in preparation, we were saddened to learn of the passing of this great scholar and educator, devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, a dear friend of Auroville and of Savitri Bhavan. The photo below shows him in the year 2000 when he was Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, along with his guest Shri Murali Manohar Joshi, then HRD Minister of the Government of India and as such in charge of Auroville affairs. Soon afterwards, as the result of Kireet-bhai’s efforts, a Parliamentary Commission was appointed to investigate the possibility of a sizeable GOI grant to Auroville for the purpose of providing Educational Infrastructure. This grant was approved, and Savitri Bhavan was one of the first projects to benefit from it: construction of the Main Building was financed through HRD Ministry from 2005 to 2008, and the completed structure was inaugurated by Dr. Karan Singh in March 2008. We can never be grateful enough to Kireet-bhai for this initiative, which has also benefitted many other educational projects in Auroville.
Kireet-bhai studied philosophy and law and was selected for the IAS in 1955, but the following year resigned in order to join the Ashram, where he served at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education (SAICE). He became its first Registrar in 1958 and was a teacher of philosophy and psychology to the students of the Higher Course for many years. Under the guidance of the Mother he was involved in several educational initiatives there, especially the launching of the Free Progress system. In 1976, after the Mother’s passing, the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, deeply appreciative of the work being done at the Ashram School, asked Kireet-bhai to take up the post of Advisor in the Ministry of Education. When he moved to Delhi to take up this position, he was also made a member of the Central Advisory Board of Education, and of the University Grants Commission. In 1983 was appointed Special Secretary to the Government of India, and held this post until 1988. In this capacity he organized many programmes related to various aspects of higher education, youth services, language development and UNESCO affairs. In all these positions he was able to spread awareness of the unique educational insights of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, and in 1988 he was instrumental in the establishment of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Educational Research (SAIIER) at Auroville. He was a great friend and supporter of Auroville from its very inception, and served as Chairman of the Auroville Foundation from 1999 to 2004. From 2008-2009 he served as Education Advisor to the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Narendra Modi, now Prime Minister of India. On his passing the Prime Minister gave the following message: “Saddened by demise of Shri Kireet Joshi. He will be remembered as a fine scholar and educationist, devoted to the principles of Sri Aurobindo.” He also referred to the key role that Kireet-bhai had played in setting up the Children’s University and Institute of Teacher Education in that State.

Kireet-bhai returned to live in the Ashram in June 2010, staying in the Ashram’s Care Home. Despite failing health, he continued to guide students and researchers, particularly on the topic of Science and Spirituality viewed in the light of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s teachings.
He left his body from the Ashram Nursing home on Sunday September 14th in early hours of the morning.

This great teacher and scholar will continue to live in the grateful hearts of his many students and the memories of all those who have been influenced by his dedicated service to the work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother over six decades.

**Professor Arabinda Basu (1918 to 2012)**

Professor Arabinda Basu, known to many as ‘Arindam-da’ was born into a cultured Bengali family in 1918 and was named after Sri Aurobindo at the request of an uncle.

In 1938, he sent a letter to Sri Aurobindo through Dilip Kumar Roy, enclosing a photograph; in return he received a Blessings Packet from the Mother, and he felt her help even before opening the envelope. From April 1941 onwards, he visited the Ashram for almost every Darshan. There Dilip Kumar Roy introduced him to Nirodbaran, who became his channel of communication with Sri Aurobindo.

In 1943 he wrote to Sri Aurobindo, asking to permission to become an inmate of the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo replied, “I’ve shown your letter to the Mother. We both agree that you should see a little more of life before settling here.” These words convinced him that one day he would become a member of the Ashram.

After this, he received Sri Aurobindo’s encouragement to pursue an academic career. After completing studies under various professors, including Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Gopinath Bhattacharya, he joined the Benares Hindu University’s Department of Philosophy, and continued to study further with Mahamahapadhyaya Gopinath Kaviraj.

At Benares he met the American Sanskritist Dr. Judith Tyberg, who later visited the Ashram. Sri Aurobindo gave her the name ‘Jyotipriya’. When she returned to her home state of California she founded the East-West Cultural Centre in Los Angeles where
many young people were introduced to Sri Aurobindo’s vision and teachings.

In 1952 Arindam-da was invited to become the Spalding Lecturer in Indian Philosophy and Religion at the School of Oriental Studies at the University of Durham in the UK, where he continued to teach for the next 15 years.

On a visit to the Ashram in 1967 he asked the Mother whether he could return to India permanently. She expressed her consent. He asked her when he should return, and she replied, “Preferably next year”. In January 1968 he returned permanently to India, becoming a member of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and teaching at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education. He was one of the few people selected by the Mother to come to Auroville and give talks here. His charming refined nature and scrupulous scholarship made him one of the best-loved speakers on Sri Aurobindo’s vision and teachings, and he was often invited to give lectures around India and abroad. He also became editor of the yearly journal _Gavesana_ published by the Ashram.

Arindam-da was a member of the National Organising Committee for the Sri Aurobindo Centenary Celebrations in 1972, and after the Centenary he served for a time as Professor of Sri Aurobindo Studies at Benares Hindu University.

In 1999 he was awarded the Sri Aurobindo Purashkar by the Sri Aurobindo Bhavan of Kolkata; and when the Auro Ratna award was initiated by the Overman Foundation, Professor Basu became the first recipient of the Award, which was presented to him in August 2010. The following year an anthology of his articles, mainly based on lectures, was compiled and edited by Dr. Indrani Sanyal and published by the Department of Sri Aurobindo Studies at Jadavpur University in Kolkata, which he had helped to establish.

In Pondicherry he used to give regular _Savitri_ classes in his home, which Nirodbaran also attended. The two men were friends and often used to visit the developing Savitri Bhavan together, after the foundation stone had been laid by Nirod-da on November 24, 1994. Arindam-da also gave five memorable talks at Savitri Bhavan. On August 9, 1998 he and Nirod-da
inaugurated the thatched shelter which was the first structure erected on the site. On that occasion Arindam-da spoke on a single line from Savitri, ‘A god come down and greater by the fall’; the text of his talk was then published in the second issue of the recently-launched journal Invocation: Study Notes on Savitri in February 1999.

On February 14, 1999 he spoke again in the hut, this time on Canto One of Book Three of Savitri, ‘The Pursuit of the Unknowable’. A transcript of this talk is being published in this current issue of Invocation for the first time.

In September 1999, in the newly-inaugurated First Phase Building, then being used as a multi-purpose building, which now houses the Reading Room and Digital Library, he spoke on Canto Fourteen of Book Two of the poem, ‘The World Soul’. This talk was published in the Invocation no. 12 of August 2001. Again in August 2006, in the partly completed Main Building, he spoke on the topic ‘The Object of the Integral Yoga’. The text of that talk was published in Invocation no. 26 of February 2007.

Arindam-da’s last talk at Savitri Bhavan was given in the Main Hall in April 2009, when he shared reminiscences of his long relationship with Sri Aurobindo. On that occasion he shared with us a letter which he had received from Sri Aurobindo in the 1940s and which had remained unpublished. He told us:

Once in Calcutta I heard certain people discussing the Mother. They had doubts about why the Mother was here at all: she was not Indian, nothing was known about her sadhana, etc. etc. Why is she here? There was a certain amount of scepticism about it. So I wrote to Sri Aurobindo, “I have heard this about the Mother, observations and enquiries. What do you have to say?” He gave me this message:

‘The Mother is not a disciple of Sri Aurobindo. She has had the same experience and realisation as myself. The Mother’s sadhana started when she was very young. When she was twelve or thirteen every evening many teachers came to her and taught her the various spiritual disciplines.
Among them was a dark Asiatic figure. When we first met she immediately recognised me as that dark Asiatic figure whom she used to see a long time ago. That she should come here and work with me for a common goal was, as it were, a divine dispensation. The Mother was an adept of the Buddhist yoga and the yoga of the Bhagavad Gita before she came to India. Her yoga was moving towards a grand synthesis. After this it was natural that she should come here. She has helped and is helping to give a concrete form to my yoga. This would not have been possible without her cooperation. One of the two great steps in the yoga is to take refuge in the Mother."

This is Sri Aurobindo’s message. It was dictated to Nirodharan. Nirodharan read it back to Sri Aurobindo, and he said, “Send it to Arindam.” So this is it.

That was not his last visit. Although from that year onwards he became increasingly frail, still he visited Savitri Bhavan on several occasions, and told us that he was always happy to come here.

In May 2012 he was admitted to the Ashram Nursing Home, where he passed away on July 3rd, just 19 days before his 94th birthday. Those who knew him and benefitted from the sharing of his wide and deep understanding of Sri Aurobindo’s writings will remember him with gratitude and affection; and his presence as a link with the earlier days of the Ashram will be sadly missed. We can take some words he spoke at Savitri Bhavan on August 6, 2006 as his enduring message to us all:

Children of the Mother! We are, as followers of Sri Aurobindo, asked to do one single thing: seek and realise the Divine. Seek the Divine first – all else will be added to it. This is my understanding, at the moment, of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy and yoga: the Divine first, the Divine second, the Divine last.
The Unknowable: 
words of Sri Aurobindo

Divine union for the ascetic schools was union with the featureless Brahman, the Unknowable beyond existence.¹

The mind spiritualises itself by shedding all its own activities and formations and reducing everything to a pure Existence, *sad-ātman*, from which all things and activities proceed and which supports everything. When it wants to go still beyond, it negates yet further and arrives at an *asat*, which is the negation of all this existence and yet something inconceivable to mind, speech or defining experience. It is the silent Unknowable, the Turiya or featureless and relationless Absolute of the monistic Vedantins, the Shunyam of the nihilistic Buddhists, the Tao or omnipresent and transcendent Nihil of the Chinese, the indefinable and ineffable Permanent of the Mahayana. Many Christian mystics also speak of the necessity of a complete ignorance in order to get the supreme experience and speak too of the divine Darkness — they mean the shedding of all mental knowledge, making a blank of the mind and engulfing it in the Unmanifest, the *param avyaktam*. All this is the mind’s way of approaching the Supreme — for beyond the *avyaktam*, *tamasah parastāt*, is the Supreme, the Purushottama of the Gita, the Para Purusha of the Upanishads. It is ādityavarṇa in contrast to the darkness of the Unmanifest; it is a metaphor, but not a mere metaphor, for it is a symbol also, a symbol visually seen by the *sūkṣma drṣṭi*, the subtle vision, and not merely a symbol, but, as one might say, a fact of spiritual experience.²

As for ultimate Truth, I suppose both the Victorian agnostic and, let us say, the Indian Vedantin may agree that it is veiled but there. Both

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¹ Letters on Yoga, SABCL 22-23-24 p.104
² Ibid. p.64
speak of it as the Unknowable; the only difference is that the Vedantin says it is unknowable by the mind and inexpressible by speech, but still attainable by something deeper or higher than the mental perception, while even mind can reflect and speech express the thousand aspects it presents to the mind’s outward and inward experience.¹

One can have the experience of Nirvana at the summit of the mind or anywhere in those planes that are now superconscient to the mind; the mind spiritualised by the ascent into Self has the sense of laya, dissolution of itself, its thoughts, movements, Sanskaras into a superconscient Silence and Infinity which it is unable to grasp,—the Unknowable. But this would bring or lead to some form of Nirvana, only if one makes Nirvana the goal, if one is tied to the mind and accepts its dissolution into the Infinite as one’s own dissolution or if one has not the capacity to reorganise experience on a higher than the mental plane. But otherwise what was superconscient becomes conscient, one begins to possess or else be the instrument of the dynamis of the higher planes and there is a movement, not of liberation into Nirvana, but of liberation and transformation. However high one goes, one can always return, unless one has the will not to do so.²

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¹. Ibid. 190
². Ibid. 1139
Children of the Mother, today I would like to read with you the first canto of *Savitri*, Book Three, *The Book of The Divine Mother*, which is called *The Pursuit of the Unknowable*.

One may ask, why pursue the Unknowable at all? So before taking up *Savitri*, I would like to read part of a sentence from *The Life Divine*, which we may regard as the prose counterpart of *Savitri*. Referring to the pursuit and realization of the Unknowable Sri Aurobindo says:

> It corresponds to a truth of existence, a state of conscious realisation which stands at the very summit of our possibility. In practice also the ascetic spirit is an indispensable element in human perfection and even its separate affirmation cannot be avoided so long as the race has not at the other end liberated its intellect and its vital habits from subjection to an always insistent animalism.

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, which is a practical counterpart of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says

> No one who has not passed through this liberation can be entirely free from the mind and its meshes.

So the pursuit of the Unknowable is an indispensable element of the Integral Yoga. It may surprise many people to learn that Sri Aurobindo should give such a tribute to the pursuit of the Unknowable, the realization of the Transcendent, and also the ascetic spirit.

Talking of asceticism, let us remember that it does not necessarily mean austere hard living, denying oneself of all the good things of life. Asceticism primarily means a denial of the reality of the world.

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1  SABCL 18:24  
2  CWSA 23-24:293
But in so far as the practical aspect is concerned, Sri Aurobindo himself is on record as saying, ‘Both the Mother and I have gone through extreme bareness of life at one time of our existence.’ So although we are trying to practice Integral Yoga and are supposed to be pursuing the transformation of Nature in the world, we cannot but go through this experience of the Unknowable. That is the very basis, the foundation of the rest of the Yoga. We shall see why we really want it: again I go back to *The Life Divine*:

> Not in this world of the dualities can there be our kingdom of heaven, but ... beyond all manifestations in some ineffable Nirvana or where all separate experience is lost in the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence.¹

Everything is completely lost in that realization. And this is ‘at the very summit of our possibility’. So let us not ignore it; let us not say that we do not want it. There are many people in the Ashram and the Yoga who pooh-pooh this idea, but once Sri Aurobindo came down like a ton of bricks as it were, if I may say so about him, saying ‘Realization of the Self? You think it is a small thing? You cannot have anything unless you realize the Self.’ But the Self itself is an aspect of the Unknowable. So we have to go beyond the realization of the Self; and this is because as long as we live in the Ignorance we cannot have the kingdom of Knowledge, which is the foundation of the kingdom of heaven on earth. You will see that the very first lines of the canto say this:

> All is too little that the world can give:  
> Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time  
> And cannot fill the spirit’s sacred thirst.

We live in a world of duality, of ignorance, of failure, of frustration, a little pleasure tinged with pain. And therefore:

> Although of One these forms of greatness are  
> And by its breath of grace our lives abide,  
> Although more near to us than nearness’ self,  
> It is some utter truth of what we are;

¹ SABCL 18 : 23
So if we really want to know the complete and uttermost truth of our being, of what we are, we have to go to the Unknowable. Sri Aurobindo is quite clear on this, ‘It is some utter truth of what we are.’ If we want to know what we are totally, completely, we would have to go to the Unknowable – and then extend the realization. As we shall see later, he says that we need not linger in this realization forever. Not only does he say that we need to come out of it, but also that before we have got it, we cannot come out of it.

Hidden by its own works, it seemed far-off,
Impenetrable, occult, voiceless, obscure.

‘Voiceless,’ Sri Aurobindo always describes this transcendent Unknowable as silent. It has no expression. It does not manifest. It is aloof, cut off from everything. It has no relation, no feature, no quality. So it is ‘Impenetrable, occult, voiceless, obscure.’

The Presence was lost by which all things have charm,
The Glory lacked of which they are dim signs.
The world lived on made empty of its Cause,
Like love when the beloved’s face is gone.

It is the world’s Cause and yet it is not here. In fact it has not gone, it is always here – we have to get there. Why is it so?

The labour to know seemed a vain strife of Mind;

From *The Life Divine* we learn that when the mind tries to reach the ultimate Reality, it comes to a stage when it has to shed all its predilections, preconceptions, pre-notions, and be absolutely open, a blank. Only then can it be filled by the realization. But again mind has got its own difficulty, its defect, its shortcoming – namely, that it is not capable of knowing the ultimate Reality in its fullness, in its entirety, comprehensively. Yet we have to go through this experience. Why is it that the mind cannot hold onto the world when the Unknowable is realised? – for the simple reason that mind is not capable of remaining in that Reality. It does not have that strength, that power. So it dissolves.

Any of you who have read anything about western mysticism, particularly Christian mysticism, may know the phrase, ‘the dark night of the soul’: St. John of the Cross, Hilton and many other great mystics
have spoken of ‘the dark night of the soul’. Actually this means the dark night in the mental soul, of the soul in the mind. This happens because, at the moment, our only way to approach reality is through the mind. We are mental beings. That is the highest organized organ of knowledge in us. So the approach to the ultimate Reality also has to be made through the mind. We have not gone beyond mind yet. But when the mind suddenly touches that Reality, it cannot retain its existence. It dissolves. And therefore nothing is known except a very sheer experience that there is Something. This is why it is called ‘the dark night of the soul’. That Reality Itself seems dark because you do not know what it is, and your state, as a seeker, is also dark because you do not know where to go from there. This is what he is talking about: Mind really cannot reach there.

The labour to know seemed a vain strife of Mind;
All knowledge ended in the Unknowable:

This is referring to mental knowledge, let us remember that. Later Sri Aurobindo will say that there is a knowledge which is one with the Unknowable, by which the Unknowable knows itself, and that if we can get into that level of consciousness, we can know the Unknowable. That seems like a paradox: if it is Unknowable, how can it be known? The Unknowable can be known in the way that the Unknowable knows itself. That self-knowledge of the Unknowable lies beyond the mind. There are several different levels beyond what we know as mind, up to the Supermind. But the true gnostic consciousness, the Supermind, is the knowledge which the Unknowable has of itself. To experience that we have to go beyond the mind, reach the supermind, get hold of the knowledge of the Unknowable, by which we can know the Unknowable. Sri Aurobindo says in another passage in The Life Divine, that the Unknowable is not utterly unknowable. So whenever he uses this term, the Unknowable, he means unknowable to the mind, even the spiritualized mind.

There is such a thing in Sri Aurobindo’s psychology as spiritualized mind. Mind in its approach to the spirit, to the Self, to the pure consciousness, can become so utterly capable of receiving the spirit in it, that the mind itself becomes spiritualized. But it still remains mind. It still has its own difficulties, defects, and shortcomings which mean that although it can in some way know the Self, it cannot know
it completely. This is a great thought in Sri Aurobindo. You may know the Self, but not know it completely and comprehensively – integrally, is his favourite word; and for the Yoga of Knowledge, the integral Knowledge, Supermind is the basis and foundation. All this is about the mind knowing the Unknowable or not knowing the Unknowable. It is not that it really cannot be known at all.

All knowledge ended in the Unknowable:
The effort to rule seemed a vain pride of Will;

Whatever you may try to do, in this state it seems ‘a vain pride of Will’ which has no significance, no value.

A trivial achievement scorned by Time,
All power retired into the Omnipotent.

I draw your attention to the word ‘retired.’ It does not say that power got dissolved: it ‘retired’, it withdrew; when you retire you may not be active, but you still exist. All powers are contained in the Unknowable but ‘retired’, in abeyance, in a state of non-activity which can always become active when required, because the Unknowable is constantly formulating itself. Here is another sentence from *The Life Divine*:

When we come to the end of whatever path, the universe appears as only a symbol or an appearance of an unknowable Reality which translates itself here into different systems of values, physical values, vital and sensational values, intellectual, ideal and spiritual values.¹

Everything in the universe is a representation or an expression of the ultimate Reality, the Unknowable. You must have heard of the word OM, a mystic symbol, the great Word. Sri Aurobindo says somewhere that Existence carries in itself ‘the Word of God’. This ‘Word of God’ is the expression of the Unknowable. This corresponds to some extent to the concept in Western thought, both Greek and Christian, of the Logos, which is both reason and knowledge, God’s own knowledge of himself, which is not dependent upon the mind. We have to make a distinction between what is Unknowable to the mind and the Unknowable which is not utterly and completely unknowable. By

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¹ SABCL 18:12
what can it be known? We shall have to see that later, for it does not appear in this canto.

A cave of darkness guards the eternal Light.
A silence settled on his striving heart;
Absolved from the voices of the world’s desire,
He turned to the Ineffable’s timeless call.

This ‘he’ is Aswapati.

A Being intimate and unnameable,
A wide compelling ecstasy and peace
Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,
Approached and faded from his soul’s pursuit

Aswapati felt that Being but he could not quite know it. He could not get hold of it. He could not possess it. As he approached it, it faded away and became, as it were, nothing.

As if for ever luring him beyond.

Beyond the world, beyond the base of the world, which is God, and beyond God to the unknown, to the Unknowable, beyond all expression, all manifestation, all existence, all activity.

Near, it retreated; far, it called him still.
Nothing could satisfy but its delight:
Its absence left the greatest actions dull,

Whatever great actions he undertook, they all seemed to be dull in comparison to the Unknowable.

Its presence made the smallest seem divine.

This is again a paradox. When that presence was felt, everything that had seemed to the mind as dull, every little trifle seemed to be Divine, because It is everywhere, omnipresent, ubiquitous.

When it was there, the heart’s abyss was filled;
But when the uplifting Deity withdrew,
Existence lost its aim in the Inane.

In the vacuum, in the nothingness: ‘the Inane’ – this is the ‘apraketam salilam’, the Inconscient.
The order of the immemorial planes,
The godlike fullness of the instruments
Were turned to props for an impermanent scene.
But who that mightiness was he knew not yet.

All our instruments of knowledge, feeling, enjoyment, all our activities, powers of energy, they all seemed to be reduced to nothing. And yet, the Unknowable is not a Nihil, a nullity. We shall see later that it is a Reality which fills everything, every nook and cranny, of our own being and the world’s existence.

Impalpable, yet filling all that is,
It fills all, everything, every nook and cranny of our own being and of the world; and yet it is ‘Impalpable,’ untouchable, ungraspable.

It made and blotted out a million worlds
And took and lost a thousand shapes and names.

Everything that has shape has been formed by That, and then again completely rejected, negated, reduced to nothing, made null and void. This is the Unknowable again.

It wore the guise of an indiscernible Vast,
It is ‘indiscernable’: it cannot be discriminated, cannot be distinguished, cannot be known.

Or was a subtle kernel in the soul:
Here is the paradox again: that Reality is still in the very core of our soul; and that is why it is possible to realize it.

A mystic closeness shut it sweetly in:
It seemed sometimes a figment or a robe
And seemed sometimes his own colossal shade.

Earlier we read that ‘A cave of darkness guards the eternal Light.’ So even this Light was a shade of the Unknowable, it cloaks it, screens it, veils it.

A giant doubt overshadowed his advance.

Each time that Aswapati is taking a step, he is troubled by ‘doubt’: ‘Where am I going? Am I going the right direction?’ And yet he continues pursuing the Unknowable.
Across a neutral all-supporting Void
Whose blankness nursed his lone immortal spirit,
Allured towards some recondite Supreme,

‘A neutral all-supporting Void’: The Void is an interesting and important metaphysical concept. It would take many lectures to be able to explain it even in brief. But when the Reality decides to manifest itself in Name and Form, in Multiplicity, in Ignorance even, a Void is created, because the Unknowable sacrifices itself. It ceases to be what it is, as it were, and that creates a Void. It is in that Void that Creation actually takes place. So in a sense we are living in a Void, an emptiness that is full of the fullness. This is the shunya.

Allured towards some recondite Supreme,
Aided, coerced by enigmatic Powers,
Aspiring and half-sinking and upborne,
Invincibly he ascended without pause.

He cannot stop, he cannot make a halt. He continues pressing forward ‘Invincibly he ascended without pause’, going up towards the Unknowable.

Always a signless vague Immensity
Brooded, without approach, beyond response,
Condemning finite things to nothingness,
Fronting him with the incommensurable.

This universe is made up of ‘finite things’; but as you approach the Unknowable, ‘the incommensurable’, compared with That everything in the universe seems to be worth nothing, without value or significance, without any real existence.

Then to the ascent there came a mighty term.
A height was reached where nothing made could live,
He reaches a point where he cannot go any further, a height where nothing that has been created could continue to exist.

A line where every hope and search must cease
Neared some intolerant bare Reality,

‘Intolerant.’ It seems as if the ultimate Reality which is the Unknowable does not tolerate the world, but rejects it. Sometimes it
seems that it does not even know that it is there. Why? It is a negative reality which negates, rejects everything out of its own consciousness and expunges everything out of its own being.

A zero formed pregnant with boundless change.
On a dizzy verge where all disguises fail
And human mind must abdicate in Light
Or die like a moth in the naked blaze of Truth,
He stood compelled to a tremendous choice.

At this height, human mind must ‘abdicate’; it must admit that it is powerless, and stand aside. So what is Aswapati going to do? Turn back to the world, or forge ahead to the Unknowable? This is ‘a tremendous choice.’

All he had been and all towards which he grew
Must now be left behind or else transform
Into a self of That which has no name.

This is a choice. He must leave behind all his achievements and his aspirations and his efforts, to sink into the Unknowable; or follow the tug in his heart which says ‘No, I must love the world, must go back, because God loves the world and must transform it’: it must be transformed ‘Into a self of That which has no name’: the world has to become a self of the Unknowable.

Alone and fronting an intangible Force
Which offered nothing to the grasp of Thought,
His spirit faced the adventure of the Inane.

This refers to Aswapati. It says, ‘His spirit faced the adventure of the Inane.’ Namely, the adventure of what God really wants to be done, here in the world, namely, to manifest himself fully, to fulfil himself as Sri Aurobindo puts it. So Aswapati is in two minds so to speak. Should he forge ahead to the Unknowable or come back into the world and transform it. You will find that if you do not go through the experience of the Unknowable, you cannot do anything for the world at all, because there is the secret, there at the core is there is the key to all true change. So ‘His spirit faced the adventure of the Inane.’

Abandoned by the worlds of Form he strove.
A fruitful world-wide Ignorance foundered here;
Thought’s long far-circling journey touched its close
And ineffective paused the actor Will.
The symbol modes of being helped no more,
He makes a choice, but he does not get any help.

The structures Nescience builds collapsing failed,
‘Nescience’: ignorance.

The structures Nescience builds collapsing failed,
And even the spirit that holds the universe
Fainted in luminous insufficiency.
‘The spirit that holds the universe’: this is the cosmic Purusha, a
manifestation of the Unknowable in relation to the world, but not the
ultimate Reality itself.

In an abysmal lapse of all things built
Transcending every perishable support
And joining at last its mighty origin,
The separate self must melt or be reborn
Into a Truth beyond the mind’s appeal.

Either you lose yourself, sink into the abyss, or you must be ‘reborn
Into a Truth beyond the mind’s appeal’: beyond even the higher levels
of consciousness joining mind to the supermind.

All glory of outline, sweetness of harmony,
Rejected like a grace of trivial notes,
Expunged from Being’s silence nude, austere,
Died into a fine and blissful Nothingness.
The Demiurges lost their names and forms,
The great schemed worlds that they had planned and wrought
Passed, taken and abolished one by one.

The more he approaches the Unknowable, the more the world appears
to be dissolved, reduced to ‘blissful Nothingness’. ‘The Demiurges’
are the gods who shape the world. So even the gods cannot keep up
the world, even they dissolve, the Unknowable will not support their
existence.

The universe removed its coloured veil,
What is that ‘coloured veil’? – the maya, the illusion, the delusion that convinces us that the world is real by and in itself, which it is not.

The universe removed its coloured veil,
And at the unimaginable end
Of the huge riddle of created things
Appeared the far-seen Godhead of the whole,
His feet firm-based on Life’s stupendous wings,
Omnipotent, a lonely seer of Time,
Inward, inscrutable, with diamond gaze.

Here again we find the Unknowable in another different aspect. This is the Cosmic Being, the Divine as God, sustaining the world and bringing it into existence by looking at the world ‘with diamond gaze.’ ‘Diamond’ is a symbol of the very highest level of consciousness.

Attracted by the unfathomable regard
The unsolved slow cycles to their fount returned
To rise again from that invisible sea.

All the cycles of perpetual time return to the Origin as if they were nothing and yet ‘rise again’ from that ‘invisible sea’ where everything is already contained, waiting to evolve. This ‘invisible sea’ is what Sri Aurobindo calls metaphysically the Inconscient. The Veda calls it the apraketam salilam, which means ‘the unconscious waters’. These waters are the symbol of that unformed something from which the world will be formed and shaped. In all mystical disciplines you will find water is a symbol of that. The Old Testament says that ‘the Spirit of God brooded over the waters’ as he undertook the process of Creation. These are the waters out of which the world will be shaped and formed.

All from his puissance born was now undone;
Nothing remained the cosmic Mind conceives.

There is a ‘cosmic Mind’, the Mind which shapes and pervades the entire universe. Even everything conceived by that universal Mind, everything that is born from the power of the Cosmic Godhead, that also is ‘undone’, nothing remains of it.

Eternity prepared to fade and seemed
A hue and imposition on the Void,
I mentioned the ‘Void’ earlier: before the Supreme Reality says, ‘I am going to manifest’ a Void is created, because in that Reality, the world cannot come into being. The world is a world of duality, the Reality is One. The world is a world of ignorance, the Reality is Knowledge. So there is a Void created between the Reality and that which needs to be manifested. That is referred to also in the Tantric disciplines as shunyam mahashunya – the great Void – as if Reality has negated itself. Then in the negated Reality, the world comes into being. It is also found in Christian mysticism. This is a truth. Whatever theology may say, the experience of mystics affirms this fact.

Space was the fluttering of a dream that sank
Before its ending into Nothing’s deeps.

This nothingness comes over and over again. The Unknowable is Nothing, and at the other end, as it were, the world is also Nothing.

The spirit that dies not and the Godhead’s self
Seemed myths projected from the Unknowable;

Our self and God, the Divine who creates the world, manifests the world in his own being, sustains it and helps it evolve – both of them seem to be shadows of the Unknowable, mere ‘myths’, not realities.

From It all sprang, in It is called to cease.

But what That was, no thought nor sight could tell.
Only a formless Form of self was left,
A tenuous ghost of something that had been,
The last experience of a lapping wave
Before it sinks into a bournless sea, —
As if it kept even on the brink of Nought
Its bare feeling of the ocean whence it came.

This is a beautiful image: the wave rises up and then sinks back into the ocean and disappears. As it sinks, before it disappears completely, it still carries with it the experience of its separate existence. But then everything has gone, lost; it is the same with the world also. But for a moment before it totally disappears it still keeps a bare sense of the vast ocean of existence from which it sprang, from which it came into existence.
A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space.
An Everlastingness cut off from Time;

That infinite vastness has no connection with Space and Time at all.

A strange sublime inalterable Peace
Silent rejected from it world and soul.
A stark companionless Reality
Answered at last to his soul’s passionate search:
Passionless, wordless, absorbed in its fathomless hush,
Keeping the mystery none would ever pierce,
It brooded inscrutable and intangible
Facing him with its dumb tremendous calm.

This ‘Reality’ has no companion, it is ‘companionless’. This is what is called in the Tantric tradition asahaya, meaning that there is nobody with it; it is alone and sole, aloof. This is what Aswapati discovers facing him, as he is being impelled to ascend to the Unknowable. And yet he is pulled back. The Unknowable itself says, ‘No, there is something else to do’, which will come in the next canto, because he has to come back to the world and help in its transformation. He cannot leave it in the lurch. But what now seems to have ‘Answered at last to his soul’s passionate search’ is

Passionless, wordless, absorbed in its fathomless hush,
Keeping the mystery none would ever pierce,
It brooded inscrutable and intangible
Facing him with its dumb tremendous calm.

It had no kinship with the universe:
There was no act, no movement in its Vast:
Life’s question met by its silence died on her lips,

Another beautiful poetic line: ‘Life’s question met by its silence died on her lips’. These lines stand out, the luminous ones. Life could not even question in the face of this ‘fathomless hush’ and ‘dumb tremendous calm’ which seems to have no connection at all with the universe.

The world’s effort ceased convicted of ignorance
Finding no sanction of supernal Light:
There was no mind there with its need to know,
There was no heart there with its need to love.
All person perished in its namelessness.

The individual self, the individual nature have all ‘perished’ in that ‘namelessness.’

There was no second, it had no partner or peer;
It was ‘companionless’:
Only itself was real to itself.

This is the supreme Reality and this realization as we read earlier in *The Life Divine*, ‘lies at the very summit of our possibility’.

A pure existence safe from thought and mood,
A consciousness of unshared immortal bliss,

There is existence, consciousness, and ‘immortal bliss’, but it is ‘unshared’. There is no one to share this bliss:

It dwelt aloof in its bare infinite,
‘Aloof’ – distant and apart, ‘companionless’; nobody is with It; there is no existence other than That.

It dwelt aloof in its bare infinite,
One and unique, unutterably sole.

But then, although It is beyond all universal existence, there comes again an affirmation of Being.

A Being formless, featureless and mute
That knew itself by its own timeless self,
Aware for ever in its motionless depths,
Uncreating, uncreated and unborn,

That Being is ‘unceated’, it is ‘Uncreating.’ It does not manifest itself. And it is eternal: ‘unborn’.

The One by whom all live, who lives by none,

That One does not depend on anything for its existence. In *The Life Divine* we find the sentence: ‘World lives by That; That does not live by the world.’ Here the same truth is poetically expressed, ‘The One by whom all live, who lives by none’.
An immeasurable luminous secrecy
Guarded by the veils of the Unmanifest,

There is ‘An immeasurable luminous secrecy’ that is full of light, full of knowledge, full of awareness, and that is being guarded by ‘the veils of the Unmanifest’. That secret is being guarded, we cannot know what it is, because it is ‘Unmanifest’ – it is not being revealed by any name or form that we could grasp. That ‘immeasurable luminous secrecy’:

Above the changing cosmic interlude
Abode supreme, immutably the same,

It always remains ‘immutably the same’: the supreme Reality. What would have the power to change anything, from where and what does all this come from, we shall have to see in another canto.

Above the changing cosmic interlude
Abode supreme, immutably the same,
A silent Cause occult, impenetrable, —
Infinite, eternal, unthinkable, alone.

This is the Unknowable. But before you ask why we should at all engage in the pursuit of this great Reality, we have already seen from The Life Divine that this is the liberation you must have first before it is possible to go any further. Over and over again, Sri Aurobindo mentions the Unknowable in many places – in The Philosophy of the Upanishads, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga and elsewhere. To those who think that it is not necessary to pursue the Unknowable, the warning is given that unless you go through this experience, you will never be able to free yourself from the meshes of matter. Remaining bound in the meshes of matter would mean that you continue to identify yourself with the matter of your physical body. There is a whole school of philosophy in India called dehaatmavadi, which held that the Self is the body; there are also the pranaatmavadi, who see the Self as prana, vital force; and manasa atmavadi: those who think that Mind is the Self. In the Taittiriya Upanishad, we shall find the experience of the Self ascending from one level to the next, one after the other: consciousness must rise from level to level and reach Vijnana, which is in Sri Aurobindo’s language the supermind. That is a key too: Delight is known as the Brahman.
But here the Unknowable is beyond delight. It is something which is inscrutable, mysterious, ineffable. And yet Sri Aurobindo says that the Unmanifest and Unknowable formulates itself in various ways and forms and faces and qualities, in many systems of values – physical, vital, mental, moral, aesthetic, and to crown them all, spiritual. But when the spiritual level is reached, what is still lacking? What is the gap that still has to be filled? Mind’s realization of the Supreme is incomplete; it is not total, not comprehensive, not all-encompassing. ‘Integral’ is a favourite word of Sri Aurobindo. An integral knowledge of the Reality is the one single basis and foundation of the integral fulfilment of God in life. Does God want to fulfil himself in the world? Sri Aurobindo never tires of saying that the purpose of God in the world, the intention of the Divine in the world, is the fulfilment of the Supreme in the world. And this would mean manifesting something here on the basis of Matter – which cannot be done in any other world, because the possibility is not there. What the Divine has wanted to do is to remain in the spiritual, remain in the Unknowable, remain in the Unmanifest, and yet become Matter, manifest in the material universe, and eventually fulfil himself as the material Divine. Matter also will be transformed and ‘Even the body shall remember God’.

1. Savitri p. 707
The English of *Savitri*

*Book One, Canto Three: The Yoga of the King*

*The Yoga of the Soul’s Release*

We have read the first two cantos which, taken together, form an overture or introduction to the great symphony of Sri Aurobindo’s epic. In the first section of the first canto, Sri Aurobindo shows us the hour before sunrise, and then the arrival of the Dawn. In the second section he shows us Savitri waking up in the early morning and her feelings as she wakes up on what is, as she alone knows, the day when Satyavan must die. In the second canto Sri Aurobindo introduces us to Savitri. First of all, he tells us about her memories as she wakes up: the most important memory is of her meeting with Satyavan, the moment when ‘Love came to her hiding the shadow, Death’. We read the wonderful passage where Sri Aurobindo describes for us the qualities in Savitri that make her the ideal vessel, the ideal shrine for love, love in its highest form – spiritual love. Then in the second part of the canto he tells us about her mission, ‘The Issue’, the problem which she has been born to face. At the end of the canto he tells us that she fulfils her mission. It is a tremendous challenge, but she has the power and stands up and performs the great act which changes everything.

The rest of Part One of the poem, covering Cantos 3, 4 and 5 of Book One, all the fifteen cantos of Book Two, and the four cantos of Book Three is concerned with her father, King Aswapati. How has Savitri come into the world? Why has she come? She has come because of the tremendous effort of tapasya, of spiritual endeavour, on the part of this King, Aswapati. In this first canto about King Aswapati, Sri Aurobindo is going to tell us about the first stage of his yoga: ‘The Yoga of the Soul’s Release’. The whole story begins when King Aswapati can become free in his soul. This is told in Canto 3, ‘The Yoga of the King: the Yoga of the Soul’s Release’. Canto 4 is called ‘The Secret Knowledge’; in it Sri Aurobindo shares with us the knowledge which comes to the king as a result of the liberation of his soul. This Secret Knowledge lies at the basis of the whole poem.
and of Sri Aurobindo’s vision. It is not yet the full revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision but it gives the basis, the foundation. The second step of King Aswapati’s Yoga, after his soul is liberated and he has gained the secret knowledge, is told in Canto 5, which is called ‘The Yoga of the King: the Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness’. When one great soul becomes free, what is the kind of action that he can undertake? As a result of another step in his tapasya and another realisation, King Aswapati is able to master subtle Nature, to such an extent that he can enter into the subtle worlds and make the great journey through all the planes of consciousness which is described in Book Two, showing all the different levels, the different worlds that he travels through.

In a letter Sri Aurobindo has told us that what is described here in Book One can be seen as the spiritual path of a great individual:

As to the title of the three cantos about the Yoga of the King, I intended the repetition of the word ‘Yoga’ to bring out and emphasise the fact that this part of Aswapathy’s spiritual development consisted of two Yogic movements, one a psycho-spiritual transformation and the other a greater spiritual transformation with an ascent to a supreme power. … In the second of these three cantos there is a pause between the two movements and a description of the secret knowledge to which he is led and of which the results are described in the last canto, but there is no description of the Yoga itself or of the steps by which this knowledge came. … Aswapathy’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. 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.

(1946)

In Book Two Sri Aurobindo shows King Aswapati ascending through all the planes and worlds as a representative of the human race. And then finally, in order to find what he is seeking, he has to go beyond
even all those worlds. At last, in Book Three he is blessed with the vision of the Supreme Divine Mother and she grants him the boon that he has been seeking: she promises that she will send an emanation of herself to be born on earth to help the evolutionary upward movement and bring about the great transformation that he has been seeking.

That is why here at the beginning of Book One Canto Three Sri Aurobindo says, ‘A world’s desire compelled her mortal birth’. ‘Her birth’ is the birth of Savitri. Savitri has been born as a human embodiment of the Supreme Divine Mother in response to the desire and aspiration of the whole world, embodied in one person, King Aswapati, who becomes her human father.

The Mother has commented on this passage. She says that it shows King Aswapati as one of those great beings who come to the earth with a special mission. Nirod-da has told us that this part of Savitri is the autobiography of Sri Aurobindo. Of course we can see Sri Aurobindo everywhere in Savitri, but perhaps we can say that, in some way, the depiction of King Aswapati is Sri Aurobindo’s self-portrait.

A world’s desire compelled her mortal birth.
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,
Brought down to earth’s dumb need her radiant power.

‘Her radiant power’ – Savitri’s power is shining; it is radiating, spreading out, like rays of the sun. Who has brought that power, that wonderful sun-like power? Who has brought it down to earth? It has come because of the whole world’s blind aspiration for help; but the work of bringing her down has been done by one person: ‘One’ who is ‘in the front of the immemorial quest’. What is a quest? It is a search, also a kind of journey: when we are searching for something we travel, at least inwardly if not outwardly. The Vedas speak about the human journey. This journey, this seeking for divine fulfilment has been going on for ages and ages and ages; it is ‘immemorial’:
nobody can remember how long it has been going on, it goes back such a long time. If we make a picture of this quest, it is something like the upward pointing triangle in Sri Aurobindo’s symbol: There is ‘One’ at the front of the quest, and as that One moves forward then more and more and more beings follow. Sri Aurobindo says that the one who at that time was leading the quest, the one at the very top of the triangle, was the ‘protagonist’. A ‘protagonist’ is the person who carries out a particular action. He can also be a representative who is acting on behalf of other people. Arjuna was the protagonist of humanity at the time of the Gita. Sri Krishna was guiding him, and so that guidance comes to all of us. King Aswapati is a protagonist ‘of the mysterious play’, this play or game in which the Unknown is pursuing himself. In one of his aphorisms, Sri Aurobindo has said that it is like a game of hide and seek. There is only One, but this one supreme consciousness has divided himself into many, many individual beings: he hides himself in these forms and then in each form he is trying to find himself again. This is the mysterious play in which the Unknown pursues himself, running after himself as if in a game of hide and seek. He is looking for himself in all the forms of the universe. That One is of course eternal, but here in the manifestation he limits his eternity; he cuts it up into hours and minutes and seconds. Through all this game of hiding and seeking, some blind unconscious nothingness is trying to become conscious: ‘the blind Void struggles to live and see’. That is the mystery of the evolutionary process. This One whom Sri Aurobindo is telling us about here, the one who at that far distant time was the protagonist at the front of the quest, was a ‘thinker’ and a ‘toiler’. He worked hard in the ‘air’, the atmosphere, of the ‘ideal’. The ideal is almost the highest level of our mind. It is where we have our images of how things should be. That is where he was concentrated; that was his centre; that is what he was occupied with. This being ‘Brought down to earth’s dumb need her radiant power’ – the power of Savitri. Earth is ‘dumb,’ she cannot speak, she cannot express her need; but the need is there and it becomes more and more conscious in human beings. A great being like Aswapati can sense the need of the earth. It is in answer to his aspiration on behalf of the whole world that Savitri is born.
His was a spirit that stooped from larger spheres
Into our province of ephemeral sight,
A colonist from immortality.

This being is not an evolutionary being like us, developing up from the Unconscious. His spirit has come from much higher worlds and it has ‘stooped’, it has come down. We ‘stoop’ or bend down to pick something from the floor. It is also the word that we use when a big bird of prey like an eagle or kite sees something below that it wants: it will ‘stoop’, meaning that it quickly comes down and seizes its prey. ‘Stoop’ is the technical word for the coming down of a bird of prey; ‘swoop’ is the movement. A really great soul is needed for this work; he comes from larger spheres. He has come from ‘larger spheres’ into our ‘province’. A ‘province’ is just a part of a country. Sri Aurobindo is saying that this material world here is a province of the universe, a part of the manifestation, not the whole of it; it is a ‘province of ephemeral sight’ – a place where things are seen only for a short time; ‘ephemeral’ means ‘lasting only a short time’, ‘quickly passing’. Here on earth everything is subject to time, nothing lasts long. And we ignorant beings do not see things properly, steadily; we do not have the power of a permanent vision. That One comes as a ‘colonist’: ‘A colonist from immortality.’ A colonist is a person who goes out from his home country to establish a colony somewhere else. In principle, it should be a place that is not at all developed or civilized. That is what the ancient Greeks did. In the old city-states of ancient Greece, every seven years they would select some young people, give them a boat and some supplies and send them out to find a suitable place to start a new city. That would be a colony of the mother state where they had been born. This happened when the earth was much less populated than now. That is how the Greeks spread their civilization all around the Mediterranean. When this great being came down from his larger spheres into ‘our earthly province of ephemeral sight’, he came in order to establish something of those larger spheres here on earth.

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.
King Aswapati’s birth is like a torch-light in the darkness, a ‘pointing
beam’ showing us which way to go on our uncertain roads of earth
as we follow the great human journey. A great soul is like a light that
others can follow. ‘His birth held up a symbol and a sign’: when a
great being like Aswapati takes a human birth, it is a symbol of the
divine presence in all the forms and appearances of the manifestation,
and a sign of the soul in each human being which has the capacity to
turn towards a diviner future. He had a human body like everybody
else and a human nature, but his ‘human self’ was not thick and dark
like the human nature which is veiling our inner light; his human self
was ‘translucent’, Sri Aurobindo says. ‘Translucent’ means it allows
the light to shine through. For example, most glass is ‘transparent’
– we can see through it; but frosted glass is translucent: you cannot
see clearly through it, but it allows light to pass through. ‘His human
self’ is covering ‘the All-Wise who leads the unseeing world’. This
‘All-Wise’ is the universal Guru, the teacher, the guide, the helper
who is leading the whole unseeing world towards its higher destiny.
When we read these words, we cannot help associating them with Sri
Aurobindo and what Sri Aurobindo represents for us.

Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time
And paying here God’s debt to earth and man
A greater sonship was his divine right.

‘Affiliated’ – this is a word which we find in business and legal contexts
and literally it means ‘like brothers’: two units, two businesses or two
institutions can be closely connected as if they belong to the same
family. King Aswapati is ‘affiliated’, closely related ‘to cosmic Space
and Time’: to those larger universal spheres that he has come from.
He has come here on earth to pay ‘God’s debt to earth and man’. God
owes us a debt. Sri Aurobindo tells us in several places in this poem
that there is a mutual debt binding god and humanity. God’s debt is
that he has created all this and put us in this situation, and he has to
get us out of it! On the other hand, we owe him a debt because he has
created us to carry out the purpose of evolution. We have to pay our
debt to him and he has to help us; that is his debt to us. Sri Aurobindo
says that for Aswapati ‘a greater sonship was his divine right.’ He
was not just a son of man, a human being; he was also a son of God,
a divine being with a divine right. He has come here, to suffer ‘the
indignity of mortal life”, Sri Aurobindo says, for a purpose: to help to pay the debt of God to man by uplifting the human race, helping it to move forward to its true destiny.

Although consenting to mortal ignorance,
His knowledge shared the Light ineffable.

He is carrying knowledge with him. He has come here and become human, so the knowledge within him has consented, accepted to be ignorant the way we human beings are; but behind, there is a knowledge that shares ‘the Light ineffable’. Light is consciousness. His knowledge shared that consciousness which is ‘ineffable’ – beyond all expression.

A strength of the original Permanence
Entangled in the moment and its flow,
He kept the vision of the Vasts behind:
A power was in him from the Unknowable.

This is continuing the same idea. What is Aswapati? He is a Power, a strength that has come from ‘the original Permanence’. Something that is ‘permanent’ does not change. Behind all the changing appearances of the world, there is an original unchanging ‘Permanence’ that remains always the same. It is always there, always the same. Out of that original Permanence a power has come, even though here on the earth he is ‘entangled’, he is tied up in time and the flow of time. When you are in strong wind, your hair gets ‘entangled’, all tangled up, and you cannot comb it easily; or if you go deep into the forest you may get tripped up and caught amongst creepers so that you cannot move: you get ‘entangled’. Aswapati has come here into this entanglement of Time, but he still keeps somewhere within him the vision of those ‘Vasts’, of the cosmic space and time which he has come from, because there is this power in him from ‘the original Permanence’, ‘from the Unknowable’. ‘Unknowable’ means beyond all our capacity of knowing. Beyond what is just unknown there is something Unknowable. Sri Aurobindo often uses this word ‘the Unknowable’ to mean That which is beyond all comprehension, ever-mysterious. When we say ‘knowledge’ we mean some power that uses

1 p. 313, line 137
our mind to get hold of something. Or we have some experience and we say “I know it is like that”. But this knowing of ours is something very partial. Our knowledge is always changing, we forget things, there are so many things that we do not know. With these instruments of mind, life and body, there are things that we cannot know. But within us there are parts that are not limited by that ignorance. They can know, if they can get themselves free from the human ignorance. But perhaps beyond the highest that can be known by us there is still some great mystery, the Unknowable that is forever beyond total comprehension.

An archivist of the symbols of the Beyond,
A treasurer of superhuman dreams,
He bore the stamp of mighty memories
And shed their grandiose ray on human life.
His days were a long growth to the Supreme.

An ‘archivist’ is somebody who takes care of archives, somebody who collects all the records, all the information, putting them in order and making them accessible. ‘An archivist of the symbols of the Beyond,’ somehow King Aswapati is collecting in his consciousness all these different ‘symbols of the Beyond’, the Reality that lies beyond the forms, the symbols. In fact everything is a symbol of something that lies beyond it, but not all of us can see it in that way. Aswapati sees that all these different forms are symbols of what lies beyond the form. And he is ‘a treasurer of superhuman dreams’; he is also collecting and holding in himself the dreams that are beyond anything that we human beings can dream – great ideas, wonderful concepts. He carries ‘the stamp of mighty memories’. There are wonderful memories that he can remember from all this collecting and treasuring, and from the larger spheres he has come from. These memories have left their ‘stamp’; they have left their mark, on his consciousness and on his nature. That knowledge from beyond, that ‘stamp of mighty memories’ is radiating out and is having its effect on the world around him as he sheds ‘their grandiose ray’ – the memories are radiating a wonderful light, a light that greatens and heightens everything. In this world ‘his days were a long growth to the Supreme’. Each day he is growing nearer and nearer to the Supreme Origin; he is the protagonist of the human journey, of the unfolding of the divine Purpose in the world.
A skyward being nourishing its roots
On sustenance from occult spiritual founts
Climbed through white rays to meet an unseen Sun.

The image is of a plant growing: the being that is this One has been growing upwards towards the sky, towards the higher levels of consciousness. It is nourishing its roots not in our material earth, but getting its ‘sustenance’, its food, its nourishment, from hidden ‘spiritual founts’, sources of spiritual energy. A plant has its roots in the earth and it draws up physical water in order to grow; but his being is getting its food, its nourishment, from somewhere else; his being is climbing up through ‘white rays’, rays of light that are pure, ‘white’. A plant needs sunlight, it grows towards the light; in the same way, Aswapati’s being is growing up towards ‘an unseen Sun’ – some divine Presence, a source of Light and Energy which cannot be seen yet. Plants depend on sunlight in order to grow. But the sunlight which is nourishing his being is of a different kind from our physical sun. Our material sun is a symbol, a sign, of the Supreme and ultimate source of all Light, all Consciousness, all Energy, all Life, all Matter – everything.

His soul lived as eternity’s delegate,
His mind was like a fire assailing heaven,
His will a hunter in the trails of light.

These are different parts of his being. First, his soul: ‘His soul lived as eternity’s delegate’. A delegate is somebody who is sent by someone or an organisation that he must represent. The eternal has told the soul of this One, ‘Go and represent me in the world’, and that it what it is doing, that is how it is living – as a representative of eternity in time. Then his mind: ‘His mind was like a fire assailing heaven’. This One has, in his mind, such a great power of aspiration that it is like a fire. ‘To assail’ means ‘to attack’ – his mind is always trying to conquer heaven, the higher levels of consciousness. And then the will: his will was like ‘a hunter in the trails of light’ – always searching for the light, wherever it can be found; just as a hunter who wants to catch an animal will always follow its tracks, its ‘trails’, his will is always looking for the light— he will always follow the signs that lead him towards the right and the true action.
An ocean impulse lifted every breath;
Each action left the footprints of a god,
Each moment was a beat of puissant wings.

The soul, the mind, the will have been described and now the life force, the prana. We have such a small life force, but he is carrying ‘an ocean impulse’, something vast and strong like an ocean. Behind his every breath, in and out, there is that ocean of energy. His actions too leave that mark. Many of the actions that we do have no significance at all; their mark is gone very quickly. His actions leave a permanent mark like ‘the footprints of a god’. Every moment of his life is like the beating of the powerful wings of some great bird of light.

The little plot of our mortality
Touched by this tenant from the heights became
A playground of the living Infinite.

‘The little plot of our mortality’ – this little piece of land where we human beings live; he has come down from the heights, he has touched this little plot, he lives here as a ‘tenant’ for some time. A ‘tenant’ lives in a house that does not belong to him: he stays there for some time. Our little plot is touched by ‘this tenant from the heights’ and in his presence, by his presence, all this human life becomes ‘a playground of the living Infinite’, a play of the divine with himself in the world. Now Sri Aurobindo tells us how something like this is possible.

This bodily appearance is not all;
The form deceives, the person is a mask;
Hid deep in man celestial powers can dwell.

Maybe this is not so difficult to understand. ‘This bodily appearance’, the physical appearance we present to the outside world, is not all there is to us. The form is deceptive; it does not show what is hidden within. He says, ‘the person’ – the personality that we think of when we say ‘Oh, I know him: he is like this, he is like that’ – that is just a ‘mask’, a mask which is being worn by some presence within. Hidden deep in every human being, he says, ‘celestial powers’, heavenly powers, divine powers ‘can dwell’. This is the first thing. So when we are talking to somebody we should always try to show respect because the divine is in each one.
His fragile ship conveys through the sea of years
An incognito of the Imperishable.

‘An incognito’ – when an important person, a member of a royal family or a big film star, wants to travel privately and quietly, to be able to move around without everybody knowing who they are, they will travel giving a different name; perhaps they use a disguise, they wear dark glasses so they are not instantly recognizable – ‘incognito’. It means that somebody is travelling unrecognizably; we cannot recognize him, under another name and maybe a different appearance.

‘His fragile ship’: this means the human being. Our body, says Sri Aurobindo, is like a ship travelling through time on the sea of years. It is not a very strong robust ship; it is a ‘fragile ship’ which can break easily if the storms are too strong. Each ship is carrying the ‘Imperishable’, the one who cannot die, the one who is always young and not affected by age. This ‘Imperishable’ travels through the material universe ‘incognito’, wearing all the many different disguises of the world.

A spirit that is a flame of God abides,
A fiery portion of the Wonderful,
Artist of his own beauty and delight,
Immortal in our mortal poverty.

‘Abides’ means ‘dwells’, ‘remains’, ‘stays’. Within us there is a living spirit, a spirit which is like ‘a flame of God’, like a little candle flame of that great sun of divine presence, ‘A fiery portion of the Wonderful’. A ‘portion’ is a part or a share. That spirit who is abiding within the body is the ‘Artist of his own beauty and delight’. He is enjoying and he is shaping; the spirit is a flame inside us that shapes our lives from within. That spirit is immortal but it ‘abides’, it lives, ‘in our mortal poverty’, in all the limitations and smallness of our mortal nature. We are ‘mortal’, born to die, but Sri Aurobindo is telling us that there is something ‘immortal’ in each one.

This sculptor of the forms of the Infinite,
This screened unrecognised Inhabitant,
Initiate of his own veiled mysteries,
Hides in a small dumb seed his cosmic thought.
This spirit that is ‘immortal in our mortal poverty’ is described by Sri Aurobindo as an ‘artist’ and a ‘sculptor’: he not only paints or makes music or poetry but also creates forms: ‘This sculptor of the forms of the Infinite’. The Infinite is without limits but this individualized spirit creates ‘forms of the Infinite’. He is the ‘Inhabitant’ who is abiding, living within each one of us. But he is ‘screened’, hidden, disguised, he is ‘incognito’ so we do not see him, we do not recognise him. He is an ‘Initiate’ – someone who has a secret knowledge that is not easily accessible to other people. This inhabiting spirit has a secret inner knowledge of ‘his own veiled mysteries’, of the mysterious ways in which he can work; and he knows how to hide ‘in a small dumb seed his cosmic thought’: in some very small form which is ‘dumb’, which cannot speak, cannot express itself, he hides his whole universal idea, ‘his cosmic thought’, so that it is contained in that seed. Eventually the seed will sprout, it will grow. It will reveal all the possibilities that were in the ‘cosmic thought’ which the immortal spirit put into it when it was first formed.

In the mute strength of the occult Idea
Determining predestined shape and act,
Passenger from life to life, from scale to scale,
Changing his imaged self from form to form,
He regards the icon growing by his gaze
And in the worm foresees the coming god.

This sculptor, this inhabiting spirit within, uses the silent strength – ‘mute’ means silent, not giving any sound – of the hidden ‘Idea’: of that ‘cosmic thought’, that first idea he had when forming that little seed; he uses ‘the mute strength of the occult Idea’ to determine ‘predestined shape and act’. ‘Predestined’ implies that things are settled in advance – that our lives and actions are decided for us. It is not a very popular idea nowadays, we like to feel that we have choice. But still, most people believe in cause and effect, we feel that our choices determine certain consequences. The idea of determinism says that things and people are shaped by what happens to them and what experiences they pass through, that these things will have effects in the future. Cause and effect: cause determines what will happen, effect. Sri Aurobindo says that that sculptor spirit determines in advance the form he wants his seed to develop into and the course of development that he wants it to
take. He lives within that seed himself; he is a passenger in that ‘fragile ship’. This passenger develops from one shape to another shape, from one life to life, from tiny to bigger and bigger, ‘from scale to scale’. He changes the shape that he has imaged for himself. He changes it from one form to another form. A human sculptor uses hands and tools to create his forms. This artist spirit uses his power of vision to shape the progressive forms of his creations. He is always watching; seeing all that is happening. That look of his, that ‘gaze’, helps the seed to grow. Sri Aurobindo calls the form an ‘icon’ : an image of a god or divine being. This icon is changing and changing, but all the changes that it goes through are determined, shaped, by the gaze of the artist spirit dwelling within it: the ‘Artist of his own beauty and delight’. Through the whole process of evolution he watches that individual seed growing. When it is only a worm, an insect or an amoeba he knows that in the full course of its development it will become a divinity: ‘In the worm he foresees the coming god’.

At last the traveller in the paths of Time Arrives on the frontiers of eternity. In the transient symbol of humanity draped, He feels his substance of undying self And loses his kinship to mortality.

Through these different forms, Sri Aurobindo says that the traveller is ‘in the paths of Time’, travelling the sea of years. In his journey the traveller finally comes to where the sea of time joins eternity. He arrives on the ‘frontiers’, the border lines, of eternity. He is still covered by the form. He is ‘draped’. If I put a cloth over my head, I have ‘draped’ myself. He is draped in the form of human being, a form which is ‘a transient symbol’. A symbol is a shape which has a deeper meaning. Sri Aurobindo says that the form of humanity is a symbol which comes and goes; it is ‘transient’, passing. But even though ‘the traveller in time’ is wearing that human form draped over him like a cloak, a disguise, within ‘he feels his substance of undying self’: he no longer feels himself to be mortal in the way that we do. ‘He loses his kinship to mortality.’ He recognizes himself as the immortal being which is independent and no longer limited by the state of ‘mortality’ which means being subject to death.
A beam of the Eternal smites his heart,
His thought stretches into infinitude;
All in him turns to spirit vastnesses.

This is the experience at that moment when the ‘traveller in the paths of Time’ reaches ‘the frontiers of eternity’ and ‘feels his substance of undying self’. It is as if a wonderful sunbeam, a beam of eternal light, ‘a beam of the Eternal smites his heart’. ‘His thought stretches’, his mind widens and widens until it is absolutely limitless and everything in him experiences the vastnesses of the spirit. ‘To smite’ means to strike, to hit hard. You can smite somebody with a sword, but this is a strong ray of light coming from the eternal and striking ‘his heart’, the centre of his being.

His soul breaks out to join the Oversoul,
His life is oceanted by that superlife.

Sri Aurobindo is describing what happens to different parts of the being: the heart feels a beam of eternal light striking it, the mind widens, everything widens and becomes vast. His soul, this little flame of God, breaks out of its coverings, its disguises, and unites with its origin, ‘the Oversoul’, the central being above. His life changes too. Our life force is so limited that in comparison with the great ocean of life, what we carry in ourselves and what comes into and out of us is like a small pool or even a puddle. But if our soul breaks out and our limits dissolve we can experience the whole life force of that ocean of ‘superlife’. Then the life-force in us is no longer just the ordinary vital prana: it becomes the higher life, the ‘superlife’.

He has drunk from the breasts of the Mother of the worlds;
A topless Supernature fills his frame:
She adopts his spirit’s everlasting ground
As the security of her changing world
And shapes the figure of her unborn mights.

This is the experience that being has: he suddenly realizes that all the time he has been drinking ‘from the breasts of the Mother of the worlds’. She is feeding all of us all the time. That is where we are all taking our nourishment from, but we do not realize it. The experience of that being is the sudden realization that ‘He has drunk from the
breasts of the Mother of the worlds’. Along with that realization he finds that he is not bound any more by this limited separative Nature which we mortals are experiencing. Instead, ‘A topless Supernature fills his frame’: the whole limitless divine nature of many, many higher planes ‘fills his frame’, that means the frame of the body, the framework of the body. That ‘Supernature’ has no limits, it is ‘topless’. Then ‘the Mother of the worlds’, the great creative Mother, seeing that this being is ready, takes his spirit as the basis and the foundation for the changes that she wants to bring into the world. Because his spirit has become conscious and stabilized in its own sense of immortality, then all the parts of his nature can change and in that individual being she can show ‘the figure’, the image, ‘of her unborn mights’: all the powers that have not yet been manifested, something of the future that she wants to bring about.

Immortally she conceives herself in him,
In the creature the unveiled Creatrix works:
Her face is seen through his face, her eyes through his eyes;
Her being is his through a vast identity.

‘She conceives herself in him’. The Mother of the worlds prepares to give birth to all her unborn mights in that one individual in an immortal form. ‘In the creature’, the human being, ‘the Creatrix’ (This is the feminine form of the word ‘creator’, the Mother, the creative Mother.) works ‘unveiled’. She is working all the time, of course, in all of us; but it is only when this moment comes that she can work ‘unveiled’, showing her work. ‘Her face’, the face of the Mighty Mother, ‘is seen through his face, her eyes through his eyes’, and there is an identification: ‘Her being is his through a vast identity’, a vast oneness: Spirit and Supernature become one.

Then is revealed in man the overt Divine.
A static Oneness and dynamic Power
Descend in him, the integral Godhead’s seals;
His soul and body take that splendid stamp.

When something like that happens, the Divine is ‘revealed in man’. ‘Overt’, means openly: not hidden, not occult or covert. This ‘overt Divine’ has two aspects: there is the aspect of ‘static Oneness’, unchanging immutable Oneness supporting everything; and, on the
other side, the aspect of ‘dynamic Power’ acting. These two, the Oneness and the Power, come down into the individual and these are the ‘seals’ of ‘the integral Godhead’. A king or any important person has a seal for fixing his stamp. We have our rubber stamps. It is something like that, but a king used to have a beautiful golden seal. When the ruler puts his seal, it leaves his special mark to indicate that he has given his sanction. So these two things, the oneness and the dynamic power together, are the ‘seals’, the marks and signs of the ‘integral Godhead’. That realised individual then embodies the Divine integrally: ‘His soul and his body take that splendid stamp.’ This is the goal of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga: the soul and the body shall be marked by these divine seals and the whole nature shall be transformed to become a channel for the Divine Force and Action.

A long dim preparation is man’s life,
A circle of toil and hope and war and peace
Tracked out by Life on Matter’s obscure ground.

Sometimes we feel that we are just going round in circles: ‘toil’, hard effort, ‘hope’, conflict, and times of peace – it just goes round and round and round. But Sri Aurobindo says that this human life is a preparation. It is ‘a long dim preparation’: there is not much light in it or on it, so we do not see where we are going; we do not understand that we are being prepared through our lives. This ‘circle’ is being trodden out ‘by Life’ on the obscure dark inert basis of Matter. Sometimes we feel – Sri Aurobindo has described it – that Life is tied to ‘Matter’s binding posts’; that Matter goes round and round in circles, like an animal tied to a post. But still, it is a ‘preparation’.

In his climb to a peak no feet have ever trod,
He seeks through a penumbra shot with flame
A veiled reality half-known, ever missed,
A search for something or someone never found,
Cult of an ideal never made real here,
An endless spiral of ascent and fall
Until at last is reached the giant point
Through which his Glory shines for whom we were made
And we break into the infinity of God.

1. *Savitri* p. 20, line 346
This is a description of the individual human seeker. All of us human beings are taking part, whether we know it or not, in this human journey. Here Sri Aurobindo says it is a climb towards ‘a peak’ which nobody has yet succeeded in climbing. No feet have stood on the top of that mountain, but we are all climbing that mountain somehow. We are searching for something and that is making us climb. What are we searching for? We are searching for ‘A veiled reality, half known, ever missed’. We do not really know what it is that we are searching for, but something in us is missing it and so we are continually travelling on, looking for it. We are in this mist, a vague ‘penumbra’ – a kind of twilight, and occasionally a flame is seen in this dusky mist, this twilight. We see this occasional flash of some kind of light and we think ‘Oh, this way!’ or ‘Oh, that way!’ We are always seeking for this ‘veiled reality, half known, ever missed’. We are searching for something or someone, we do not really know what it is, we have not found it yet, we keep on looking. We are worshipping something: ‘Cult’, means worship; we are longing for ‘an ideal never made real here’. We have a sense that things should be better than they are, more ideal, more perfect, and that search for something better and more perfect keeps us always moving forwards. I think this is something where all human beings could find their common ground, if we realized that we are all searching for something. We are all following after different flames and flashes of light according to our nature or our experience or what comes up to us. But what we share is that longing for something. We do not know what it is. It is our future drawing us towards it. So ‘this long dim preparation’ is ‘an endless spiral’. It is not just a circle, it goes up and sometimes it comes down again. Sometimes we seem to regress, to go backwards: we do not keep going forward steadily. We fall back, but the preparation, the spiral goes on and on until ‘At last is reached the giant point .... ’ A point is something without dimension, tiny, infinitely small; but here Sri Aurobindo says ‘the giant point’: it is such a huge important point because that is where the glory of the Supreme, the ‘one for whom we were made’, is shining through. When we reach that point we break out of this penumbra and this seeking: ‘we break into the infinity of God.’
Across our nature’s border line we escape
Into Supernature’s arc of living light.

An ‘arc’ is part of the circumference of a circle. From this lower hemisphere where we are now, through that ‘giant point’, we break out of the ‘border line’ of our nature and escape ‘Into Supernature’s arc of living light’: into the higher nature, which has a new kind of border line or horizon, an ‘arc of living light’.

This now was witnessed in that son of Force;
In him that high transition laid its base.

Sri Aurobindo has been telling us what happens in general. Now he tells us that this whole process of reaching ‘the giant point’ and escaping into Supernature ‘was witnessed’, was seen, ‘in that son of Force’ – Aswapati. He refers to Aswapati as a ‘son of Force’: Aswapati belongs to the line of great dynamic souls, sons of Shakti, sons of the Supreme Mother. ‘In him, that high transition’, that passage from human nature to Supernature, ‘laid its base’: a foundation is prepared in him, as the protagonist, the representative of the world’s desire, the One in the front of the immemorial quest.

Original and supernal Immanence
Of which all Nature’s process is the art,
The cosmic Worker set his secret hand
To turn this frail mud-engine to heaven-use.

‘Immanence’ means a presence dwelling within. Within all this manifestation, within all this Matter, there is something dwelling; it is the ‘Original and supernal Immanence’. All this has been given birth to by that indwelling spirit. All Nature’s processes are the art of that artist. That ‘cosmic Worker’ is the one who is shaping the whole universe from within. In King Aswapati ‘The cosmic Worker set his secret hand / To turn this frail mud-engine’ – that is, the human body, this little engine made of matter with all its springs working – ‘to heaven use’. If the ‘cosmic Worker’ takes up this ‘frail mud-engine’, this fragile and perishable human body, it can be made fit for use by the higher powers.

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.

That Immanence is a ‘Presence’ at work. ‘Wrought’ is part of a verb of which only a couple of parts are still in use today. ‘Wrought’ is the past tense; here it is active: the Presence worked secretly on Aswapati’s being. Often the word is used as a participle, as an adjective: we speak of ‘wrought’ iron, iron that has been worked on and shaped. The Presence is working, shaping, ‘behind the ambiguous screen’, the screen of appearances. If something is ‘ambiguous’ we cannot be sure what it means. It might mean this or that, or something else, and because it could have more than one meaning, we are not sure what it means. We do not know what this screen of appearances means – unless we can see behind. Behind the screen of ambiguous appearances that Presence is working. Like a blacksmith shaping wrought iron, it is beating, hammering ‘his soil’, the substance of his body, until it is strong enough to bear the weight of something very, very powerful like a ‘Titan’ – a very big and powerful superhuman being. In Aswapati’s nature there are some ‘blocks of natural strength’ but they are only ‘half-hewn’. When a sculptor is going to make a sculpture he takes a block of rock that has come off the hillside, from the quarry; it is only very roughly cut, ‘half-hewn’. ‘To hew’ means to cut strongly: we hew wood, we hew our way through the jungle, and we hew rocks also. So, the nature is ‘half-hewn’, some natural strength is there through the process of development; but that indwelling Presence, that cosmic Worker, starts refining those blocks of natural strength, working on them, chiselling and polishing to make them perfect, like a sculptor making a statue out of marble, until King Aswapati’s soul has been built 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.

A sculptor is a ‘craftsman’: he has the skills to make and shape things. This divine ‘Craftsman’ is not using clay, wood, stone or metal. He is using ‘the magic stuff of self’, the subtle stuff of which everything is made. That Craftsman is labouring ‘at his high
and difficult plan / In the wide workshop of the wonderful world’. He wants to make an amazing sculpture, an amazing creation as large as the universe. He has got such a complex vision of what he wants to do, a ‘high and difficult plan’. He is working at that plan and this whole world is his workshop. To prepare this particular Aswapati figure, the Craftsman is modelling. When he is preparing a big sculpture a sculptor will make a model, shaping it in clay before he casts it in bronze or sculpts it in stone. So, ‘in inward time’ this Craftsman is shaping, modelling, what Aswapati should be. All those beautiful ‘rhythmic parts’ and features will make such a lovely ‘statued god’ when he has finished. He keeps on working at it.

Then came the abrupt transcendent miracle:
The masked immaculate Grandeur could outline,
At travail in the occult womb of life,
His dreamed magnificence of things to be.

Then a moment comes when the statue is really finished. Suddenly there is this miraculous moment: ‘Abrupt’ indicates that it happens suddenly; and ‘transcendent’ means that it is beyond all limits; the moment when that Craftsman, that Presence, that ‘masked immaculate Grandeur’ – stainlessly pure but ‘masked’, working ‘incognito’, in disguise – is able to outline ‘his dreamed magnificence of things to be’. At last he can create in Aswapati an outline of how he wants things to be in the world in future. That ‘Grandeur’ has been ‘At travail’; ‘travail’ means work, hard painful work, but especially it means the work of painful labour to bring out something that has not been visible before. It is the verb we use for the labour of a woman giving birth; or in other places Sri Aurobindo uses it for the world: he says that this world is ‘in travail’ of its future greatness. Painful effort has been going on ‘in the occult womb of life’: life has been secretly preparing new things within her, preparing to give birth; now suddenly this thing that the Lord has been dreaming of can emerge: how wonderful it is!

A crown of the architecture of the worlds,
A mystery of married Earth and Heaven
Annexed divinity to the mortal scheme.
A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time.
So this wonderful thing that he has realized is like ‘a crown’, the ultimate highest achievement of ‘the architecture of the worlds’: ‘A mystery of married earth and Heaven’ – perhaps we can say a union of matter and spirit, which connects ‘divinity to the mortal scheme’. Something that we add on is an ‘annexe’. Sometimes a country will take over or ‘annex’ another nearby country, making them one. This ‘mystery of married earth and heaven’ makes a connection, a oneness, between the divine scheme and the scheme of things here in the material world. Aswapati has been made into the connecting link. ‘A Seer was born, a shining Guest of Time’. A ‘Seer’ is a rishi, one who has a high power of vision, a prophet, a highly-developed being who no longer belongs in time, he is living here as a guest. King Aswapati is this rishi, this ‘shining Guest of Time’.

For him mind’s limiting firmament ceased above.

When the cosmic Worker has done his work, Aswapati is no longer limited by the human mind, which for us is like a ‘limiting firmament’. A firmament implies something that is fixed, immovable. For us mind is like that – something we cannot get out of or go beyond. But now Aswapati is released from that limitation. There is no longer any limit for him; everything opens up.

This is a very special moment, a very special moment for King Aswapati individually and, Sri Aurobindo says, a special moment for the earth. This Seer, this Rishi, is born. It does not mean that he comes into the human body; it means a second birth, a birth of new consciousness, as ‘a shining Guest of Time’. What is this birth? ‘Mind’s limiting firmament ceased above’. If we try to look into ourselves and see the upper limit of our mind, we may feel that there is some kind of a lid there. For King Aswapati now that limit, that ‘firmament’ is gone. ‘Firmament’ is a word used in the Bible and in poetry for ‘sky’. So this limiting sky, this lid, has ‘ceased’, it is just not there anymore for him. Then come two very mysterious lines:

In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day
A gap was rent in the all-concealing vault;
The conscious ends of being went rolling back:
The landmarks of the little person fell,
The island ego joined its continent.
The second line is easier to understand: ‘A gap was rent’, torn, in this ‘vault’ – a curved roof or ceiling. Here the ‘vault’ is the ‘limiting firmament’, that closed sky or lid of mind, which conceals the truth that lies beyond. A gap is torn open in that. This happens, Sri Aurobindo says, ‘In the griffin forefront of the Night and Day’. A ‘griffin’ is a symbolic animal in ancient Greek mythology. It has the body of a lion with the wings of a huge bird, and a very strong beak like an eagle. So it is a combination of a lion and a very powerful bird of prey. The lion is king of all the beasts; it represents royalty and power on earth. In the same way an eagle represents power in the sky. The griffin can move between heaven and earth, wherever it needs to go. In the ancient Greek tradition griffins were the vehicles of the Goddess of Necessity, the Goddess of Fate, pulling her car as she moved. The griffin is moving forward carrying everything that is fixed in our world of ‘night and day’, our world of dualities, all these things that are determined. But here what happens is that as the griffin moves forward, the vault is torn open. It moves into a completely different dimension. For King Aswapati, ‘the conscious ends of being went rolling back’. No more limits: ‘the landmarks of the little person fell’. All of us have our little personalities with some sticking points here and there that are our landmarks; if somebody crosses our border we may get upset about it. But for him, all those little personal limitations are gone. Normally, ego is like a small island cut off from the infinity of things. With this experience, ego suddenly connects to ‘its continent’, the huge land mass, the huge solid state that it belongs to. It is no longer a separate island, but part of a much larger whole.

Overpassed was this world of rigid limiting forms:
Life’s barriers opened into the Unknown.

He passes over, beyond this world, this world of matter with its fixed forms that are limited and limiting. For him the barriers of the life that we experience here just open up into something much vaster containing all that is still unknown to us.

Abolished were conception’s covenants
And, striking off subjection’s rigorous clause,
Annull ed the soul’s treaty with Nature’s nescience.
‘Conception’s covenants’ were abolished. A ‘covenant’ is a kind of agreement. There is a kind of agreement among human beings about the way that we think. But for Aswapati now this accepted way of thinking just gets ‘abolished’, wiped out, it is no longer exists, it does not apply. Sri Aurobindo says that as long as we are evolving in the ego, the soul has a kind of agreement, a ‘treaty’ with the ‘nescience’, the unconsciousness of Nature. As governments have treaties between them, the soul has a ‘treaty’ with Nature. According to the conditions of that treaty, the soul agrees to be subject to the way that Nature works. But now for Aswapati that treaty with the ignorance, with the not-knowing of Nature, has been ‘annulled’, cancelled. The soul becomes master of Nature instead of subject to Nature. During most of the evolutionary process, the soul just accepts: “Oh, that is the way Nature is doing things. I have to go along with that.” When we reach this point where the higher forces pour in, that is all changed. The soul becomes master over Nature.

All the grey inhibitions were torn off
And broken the intellect’s hard and lustrous lid;
Truth unpartitioned found immense sky-room;
An empyrean vision saw and knew;
The bounded mind became a boundless light,
The finite self mated with infinity.

‘All the grey inhibitions’ – an ‘inhibition’ is something that holds you back. Perhaps you would like to do something, but you feel: “Oh people will be upset. I have been taught that I must not do this thing.” There are inhibitions that hold us back. Sometimes they even hold back the soul. So here Sri Aurobindo describes ‘inhibitions’, things that hold us back. He says they are ‘grey’, as if they form a dark veil or skin, a covering that is limiting the soul, holding it back. For Aswapati now, all these things are just torn off. And that hard, shining lid, ‘the intellect’s hard and lustrous lid’ – the Upanishads even say it is a golden lid – this gets broken. As long as we are limited by this lid we cannot grasp the Truth, because Truth is so vast. We can only get a little bit of truth into our minds, and we put it into the shape of words, of concepts and ideas and we hold on to those and we say: “That is the truth.” It is only when this experience happens and all those limits are gone that we can experience ‘Truth unpartitioned’, Truth no longer
separated and divided, but vast and unlimited. We use a partition to divide one room into two, or a country gets partitioned, divided. ‘Truth unpartitioned’ has no more divisions; it finds ‘immense sky-room’: there is no longer any limit to the infinite extent of Truth. This is a very strong, absolutely overpowering experience, the experience of the spiritual realisation. Everything that is familiar – all the landmarks of the little person – are gone. Instead there is ‘an empyrean vision’. The ‘empyrean’ is the sky, the heavenly sky. Now Aswapati has a power of vision like the sky must have, he can see everything in a single gaze. ‘The bounded mind became a boundless light’. There are no more boundaries, no more limits. ‘The finite self’, this little limited self, ‘mated with infinity’ – it is another way of saying ‘The island ego joined its continent’. The ‘finite self’ is not dissolved, it is still there, but it experiences its close connection with the infinite.

His march now soared into an eagle’s flight.
Out of apprenticeship to Ignorance
Wisdom upraised him to her master craft
And made him an archmason of the soul,
A builder of the Immortal’s secret house,
An aspirant to supernal Timelessness:

Aswapati has been marching forward on the human journey, but at this point his march becomes ‘an eagle’s flight’. Eagles have powerful wings and can fly very high. It is said that the eagle can even look directly at the sun without damaging its eyes. I do not know if it is physically true, but for us the eagle is an especially inspiring bird because it can fly so high and can look straight into the sun. So off he goes, soaring up into the heights like an eagle. So far, he has been apprenticed to Ignorance. What is an apprentice? For example, if his family wants a boy to become a mason, his family will arrange for him to work with a mason, to be apprenticed to a mason, in order to learn that craft. Aswapati has been an apprentice of Ignorance. Ignorance has been teaching him, showing him, helping him to grow. But now Wisdom comes, takes him away from Ignorance, raises him up and makes him into a master craftsman. When you have finished your apprenticeship you can become a master craftsman. Wisdom lifts him up and makes him ‘an archmason of the soul’. An ‘archmason’ is not just an ordinary mason but one of the most skilful masons of all.
Of course, Aswapati is not building houses, he is building the soul. He is building ‘the Immortal’s secret house’. That is what all of us eventually have to do, we have to help build the Immortal’s secret house so that the immortal presence can be expressed here, even in the body. An ‘aspirant’ is somebody who aspires. So there he is, aspiring beyond all this world of limiting forms to what is beyond, to what is ‘supernal’, above, and timeless, beyond time and space.

Freedom and empire called to him from on high;
Above mind’s twilight and life’s star-led night
There gleamed the dawn of a spiritual day.

‘Freedom and empire’ – swaraj and samraj – are two of the goals of Yoga: swaraj means ‘self-rule’: the yogi is in full control of himself, he is free from all domination by nature and her impulses. As a consequence of being free in himself, he is able to rule nature: like a great ruler, he will have the power to control a vast empire. This is the great achievement that is calling Aswapati to go even higher. Our state of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, is like ‘twilight’, the half light between day and night. Sri Aurobindo says our mind is like ‘twilight’, a mixture of light and darkness. There is a kind of consciousness in life, but he says that life is darker even than twilight, it is like a night with some stars, some stars that are giving a little light and guiding which way to go. But beyond the twilight and the night there is the possibility of a new dawn, the sunrise of ‘a spiritual day’, a full consciousness. When the dawn starts to come there is a very soft beautiful light, a gleam, which grows brighter as the sun rises. This is the great possibility that King Aswapati sees a glimpse of now.

(to be continued)
News from Savitri Bhavan

Sharing Sweet Memories of Professor Arabinda Basu
On July 20, 2014 a gathering was held at Savitri Bhavan in memory of Professor Arabinda Basu (1918 to 2012), in the presence of his son Robert and his assistant Mousumi Mukherjee, as well as about 60 others. Dr. Aster Patel gave a talk, entitled *Sri Aurobindo ... the Transition of our Times*. For the occasion a small film about Arindam-da, as he was known to many in the Ashram and around the world, was prepared with photographs and film clips from the Savitri Bhavan archives. To know more about him, please see the article on pages 6-9 of this issue.

Savitri Immersion Camp : The Book of the Divine Mother
The recording of Arindam-da’s talk on ‘*The Pursuit of the Unknowable*’ which is published on pages 12-27 of this issue came to light in the course of research for the film about him, just in

*Dr. Aster Patel speaking on July 20, 2014*
time to become part of the materials shared with participants of the Immersion Camp on The Book of the Divine Mother which was held at Savitri Bhavan from August 6 to 12 this year. There were 24 participants in all, half from Auroville and Pondicherry, the others from further afield. Two group study sessions led by Shraddhavan were held each morning; in the afternoons, the participants were able to explore study materials that had been prepared for them and films were shown in the evenings.

Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lectures
It had been planned to hold the 5th annual Dr. MV Nadkarni Memorial Lecture the day after the end of the Camp, on August 13. Unfortunately Mrs. Nadkarni was not able to return to India in time to be with us on that date, and it was decided to postpone the talk until just before the February Darshan. Dr. Prema Nandakumar has kindly agreed to give her talk ‘Living with Savitri’ on Thursday February 19, 2015. For details please see the announcement on page 9. The four earlier lectures in this series are available from Savitri Bhavan both as booklets and as DVDs; the films can also be viewed on the website savitribhavan.org
November 24
November 24 is an important date in the world’s history, and especially for the followers of Sri Aurobindo because, as the Mother has said:

The 24th November is called the day of Victory in remembrance of a very important spiritual event which took place in 1926.¹

That important spiritual event was of course Sri Aurobindo’s Siddhi, the coming down of the Krishna Consciousness into his physical being and thus into the physical substance of the world which, he has said, gave the certitude that it would be possible to bring the Supramental down into matter, the essential precondition for establishing a divine life upon earth. In order to concentrate on that great work he withdrew into seclusion, and handed the care of the disciples over to the Mother. This is why November 24 became one of the annual Darshan days, and is considered to be the birthday of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

It is also a significant date in the history of Savitri Bhavan, for it marks several important events:

Twenty years ago, on November 24 1994, Shri Suresh Dey, then Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, invited a number of Aurovilians to a gathering where he proposed the formation of a Savitri Study Circle in Auroville. The Auroville Savitri Study Circle has met every Sunday morning since then and the group continues in full vigour today, with an ever-increasing number of participants. Out of its gatherings, and with the efforts of its members, assisted by many well-wishers from around the world, the whole Savitri Bhavan complex as it now stands has emerged, with its growing facilities and programme of activities. Next year on this date we shall be remembering the Foundation Day on November 24, 1995 when our beloved elder brother Nirod-da laid the foundation stone for the complex and invoked the Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the project.

The following year, on November 24 1996, our architect Helmut presented us with the Master Plan and the first model of the future complex, which have guided its development up to now, and continue

¹ MCW 13:106
to do so for future growth. The first brick ceremony for the Hall was held on November 24 2003, and it was opened the following year, in 2004.

**Savitri Bhavan website**

On November 24 2013 the website *savitribhavan.org* was launched. Since then it has been developed considerably and new materials are being added regularly. As well as information about Savitri Bhavan and its activities it is also possible to access videos of Shraddhavan’s weekly ‘*English of Savitri*’ classes, from the beginning of Book Three onwards. A new video is uploaded each week. Videos of the first four Dr. Nadkarni memorial lectures can be accessed too. Readers may also appreciate the ‘*Flower of the Month*’ feature, where photographs of plants flowering in the Savitri Bhavan gardens are shown along with their spiritual significances as given by the Mother and their botanical and common names. Audio recordings of Shraddhavan’s readings of *Savitri* and of Book One of *The Life Divine* are also available.

**Another *Savitri* website**

Recently another website has come up at [http://savitri.net.in](http://savitri.net.in). This has been launched by our friend Dr. Raja Marathe. (Readers may remember his letter published in *Invocation* no. 38). He has told us that he tried unsuccessfully to read *Savitri* for 20 years; but when he started reading the text while listening to Shraddhavan’s recorded reading, he was able to read the whole book with appreciation in just a few months time. He concludes that listening to the reading while following the text may be very helpful to other aspiring *Savitri*-lovers, and has created this website to assist them. On it the entire text of the poem is linked with the recorded reading, sentence-wise, in such a way that one can hear the reading of each sentence repeated as many times as wished. This website was launched only recently, but already a lot of enthusiastic feedback has been received. Readers may like to try it out for themselves. A link to it is provided on the Savitri Bhavan website *savitribhavan.org*.

**English of *Savitri* and *Savitrisabdamrut***

While edited transcripts of the *English of Savitri* classes are being serialised in *Invocation*, Shri Kirit Thakkar has been translating them into Gujarati; his translations have been published in book form under the title *Savitrisabdamrut* and the appearance of the 4th
volume is announced elsewhere in this issue. This volume completes his translations of the sessions dealing with the whole of Book One.

This pioneering effort in Gujarati has inspired us at Savitri Bhavan to prepare to publish all these texts in the original English, covering the whole of Book One, The Book of Beginnings, as a single hard cover volume as well as in e-book format. This book is expected to become available early in 2015.

Invocation – by e-mail and by post
Thanks to all of our readers who responded to our request in the previous issue, by indicating their preference for receiving hard or soft copies of the journal. As a result, we have been able to reduce the number of copies printed by half, with a considerable saving. However we are happy to continue sending hard copies by post to everyone who lets us know that they would like to receive Invocation in this form in future.

We are also happy to receive your feedback and suggestions, as well as your offerings in support of the work here. You may contact us at the address given on the inside of the cover, by e-mail to savitribhavan@auroville.org.in, or via the website www/savitribhavan.org. And of course all our readers are most welcome to visit us whenever you are in the area, and to make yourselves known to us in person.

‘The Destined Meeting’, an offering in mime by Drupad in the early morning on March 29 2014, 100th anniversary of the first physical meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother
1) Regular Weekly Activities:

**Sun.** 10.30-12 noon *Savitri* Study Circle

**Mon.** 3-4pm ‘Yoga and the Evolution of Man’, led by Dr. Jai Singh  
5-6pm ‘The Integral Yoga in Savitri’, led by Dr. Ananda Reddy

**Tues.** 3-4pm ‘Yoga and the Evolution of Man’, led by Dr. Jai Singh  
4-5pm *L’ Agenda de Mère*: listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi  
4.45-5.45pm ‘Mudra-chi’, led by Anandi resumed Aug. 5  
5-6pm *Savitri* study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan  
5.45-7.15pm OM Choir

**Wed.** 9-12 Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi  
5.30-6.30pm Reading *The Life Divine*, led by Shraddhavan

**Thur.** 4-5pm The English of *Savitri*, led by Shraddhavan

**Fri.** 3-4pm ‘Yoga and the Evolution of Man’, led by Dr. Jai Singh  
4-5pm *L’ Agenda de Mère* – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi

**Sat.** 4-5pm *L’ Agenda de Mère* – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi  
5-6.30pm *Satsang* led by Ashesh Joshi

2) Monthly Activity:

*Full Moon Gatherings* in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue

3) Special Events:

**April:**  
1-30 Exhibition: *Meditations on Savitri, Book One.*  
7 Film: *The Journey of Love*: video of a talk by Dr. Alok Pandey  
9 Newcomer Programme arranged by Auroville Entry Service  
14 Film: *Sri Aurobindo’s Uttarpara Speech*: video of a talk by Shraddhavan  
21 Film: *Journey to the Life Divine: Part Two*  
28 Film: *Meditations on Savitri, Book Five: The Book of Love.*
May:
1-31 Exhibition: ‘Meditations on Savitri, Book One: The Book of Beginnings
9 Orientation session for visitors from China given by Ashesh Joshi

June:
30 Film: Meditations on Savitri, Book Six: The Book of Fate

July:
15-31 Exhibition: Meditations on Savitri, Books Two and Three
7 Film: Planet Earth 01: From Pole to Pole & Eye in the Sky.
14 Film: Towards a Sustainable Future: Auroville, 36 years of Research
20 Sharing Sweet Memories of Professor Arabinda Basu
21 Film: Interspecies Communication by Anna Breytenbach
23-27 Integral Well Being Retreat led by JV Avadhanalu
28 Film: Meditations on Savitri, Book Seven: The Book of Yoga

August:
1-31 Exhibition: Meditations on Savitri, Books Two and Three
1-31 Exhibition: Sri Aurobindo: A Life-sketch in Photographs
6-12 Savitri Immersion Camp: Book Three: The Book of The Divine Mother
22-24 Well Being Retreat led by JV Avadhanalu
22 Visit of 75 students from MAM School of Architecture, Trichrapalli
23 Visit of 65 students from Indira Gandhi Women’s College, Tindivanam
25 Film: Meditations on Savitri, Books Eight and Nine
27 Newcomer programme organised by the Auroville Entry Service

September
1-31 Exhibition: Meditations on Savitri, Books Two and Three
1-31 Exhibition: Sri Aurobindo: A Life-sketch in Photographs
5-7 Pranayama workshop led by JV Avadhanalu
29 Film: Meditations on Savitri, Book Ten: The Book of Double Twilight
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.
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 how to help the dream of Savitri Bhavan to become a reality.

By Credit/Debit card transfer
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. Please be aware that charges will be deducted from the amount before it enters our account, and that therefore the amount mentioned on our receipt will be less than the exact amount that you sent. This will be a consideration if you require tax relief on your offering.

By Cheque or DD
Cheques and DDs should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund and sent to Savitri Bhavan at the address given below. 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 in India
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; For 100% tax exemption under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT Act use Current account no. 31612623238.

If you live Abroad
To send your offering by SWIFT Transfer, please use the following code:

SWIFT (IFSC) Code : SBININBB474
State Bank of India, Branch Code 0003160
Auroville International Township Branch
Kuilapalayam Auroville 605101 INDIA
Auroville Unity Fund Foreign Account no. 10237876508
Purpose “SAVITRI BHAVAN”
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Savitri Bhavan is a unit of SAIIER
(Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research)
Savitri is a Mantra for the transformation of the world

The Mother