Invocation

BHAVAN

Study notes No. 43
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Never for an instant vacillate in the belief that the mighty work of change taken up by Sri Aurobindo is going to culminate in success. For that indeed is a fact: there is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand.... The transformation is going to be: nothing will ever stop it, nothing will frustrate the decree of the Omnipotent.

Cast away all diffidence and weakness and resolve to endure bravely awhile before the great day arrives when the long battle turns into an everlasting victory.

THE MOTHER
MCW 13:21
The Earliest Known Draft of *Savitri*

*Full text with a commentary*

**Introduction**

It is well-known that Nirodbaran, who joined the Ashram in the early 1930’s, not only had a unique correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, but was chosen by the Mother as one of his attendants after his accident in 1938, and later became his scribe for the later stages of the composition of *Savitri*. In his book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* there is a chapter on *Savitri*. In it he writes:

The earliest extant draft of *Savitri* is in an exercise book that came from Madras to Pondicherry evidently in the early years of Sri Aurobindo’s stay in Pondicherry, years in which his habit of writing the English *e* like the Greek persisted. This copy appears to have been made from some version already with him, which is lost to us. The draft exists in two sections. The first, comprising Book I and a few pages of Book II are in ink which has become brown now. The second is in light greenish-blue ink. Some corrections in this ink occur in the first section. Both the sections have been revised in places in darker blue ink with a thicker nib. The revisions are clear in some places, but unclear and inconclusive in others. Book I is complete, Book II unfinished. The spelling of the three chief characters is: Savithri, Uswapathy, Suthyavan.¹

The ‘Note on the Text’ provided by the editors of the 1993 edition of the Sri Aurobindo’s epic, states:

The opening of the first known version is dated “August 8th 9th / 1916”. Further dates occur later on in the draft. From the death of Satyavan to the end of Savitri’s debate with Death, the

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¹ *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* by Nirodbaran, 3rd edition revised and enlarged, 1988, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, pp. 173-74
manuscript is marked every few pages with dates from a three-day period, 17-19 October. After this, the consecutive narration breaks off and the notebook contains only disconnected passages. Some of these are sketches for the conclusion of the poem. Most of them go back over what was already written. They represent the beginning of the long process of rewriting which was to continue until 1950. This earliest surviving manuscript of Savitri shows every sign of being the first draft.

A slightly enlarged fair copy of this draft appeared in the Ashram journal *Mother India* from August 1981 to February 1982 under the title *Sri Aurobindo’s First Fair Copy of His Earliest Version of Savitri*. It has recently been made available in digital format by The Overman Foundation of Kolkata.

The *Mother India* series opened with an introductory essay by the editor, Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna). He described how, in late 1968, Nirodbaran showed him two old exercise-books which had been found among Sri Aurobindo’s papers; from the handwriting in them, they appeared to date back to Sri Aurobindo’s early days in Pondicherry and were found to contain work on an earlier version of *Savitri* than any known at that time. Amal continues:

Since the time of Nirodbaran’s discovery other drafts of the same version have surfaced. One of them mostly precedes the matter in the exercise-books, occupies a large portion of a small notebook and bears at its beginning the date “August 8th/ 9th/ 1916” and towards its end “Nov. 9”. The exercise-books carry a fair copy of the contents of the notebook.

He adds:

To get an idea of how far the poem has moved from its beginning to its final shape across nearly half of the poet’s life … until it counted 23,803\(^2\) lines, we cannot but consider as a document of extreme literary interest what can be termed the first fair copy by Sri Aurobindo of the earliest draft now extant.

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1. See https://overmanfoundation.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/sri-aurobindos-earliest-draft-of-savitri-1916/
2. 23,873 in the 1993 edition – S.
Amal Kiran made a transcript of this ‘first fair copy’, producing the text which was later serialised in *Mother India* from August 1981 up to January 1982, with the addition of two more related passages in the issue of February 1982. He concluded his introductory essay as follows:

As it has not been possible for anyone yet to set forth the exact relation of the two earliest versions or between the first fair copy and the versions following it, the transcript I have made will have to serve at the moment, for good or ill, the critical reader, the literary historian and the studious disciple with its aim to place at their disposal as authentically and completely as possible what for all practical purposes may be designated, the *Ur-Savitri*.¹

**Similarities and differences between the two versions**

The ‘First Fair Copy’ consists of 1637 lines, to which Amal Kiran added in his transcription two further passages, the first of 112 lines found in the notebook, the second of 21 lines from the second exercise book. Together, in a total of 1770 lines, they cover almost the whole Tale of Satyavan and Savitri, starting from the dawn of the day on which Suthyavan must die and ending with the return of Savithri and Suthyavan to earth, which in the final version is described in the first section of Book Twelve, The Epilogue. The narration covers the same sequence as the final version we are familiar with today, beginning with the dawn and a description of Savithri waking; then Uswapathy’s tapasya culminating in his prayer to the Goddess Sâvithrî who grants him the boon of a daughter; the birth, growth and quest of Savithri, her meeting with Suthyavan; her return to Madra to inform her father that she has found her life’s companion, the arrival of Narad and his prophecy; Savithri’s determination to marry Suthyavan; the fulfilment of her wish, when her parents accompany her to the forest hermitage and hand her over to Suthyavan’s parents; her request to his mother to be allowed to accompany him to the forest on the fated day, his death in the forest, followed by the journey through the worlds of Night and Twilight to the world of Day. The first fair copy ends with a description of the fourfold godhead which now appears in the second

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section of Book Eleven. Amongst the lines added by Amal Kiran is a passage giving the response of the Supreme to Savithri’s demand for the return of Suthyavan to earth, and another which corresponds to the last section of the final version of Book Eleven. Amal Kiran also transcribed some lines from the second exercise-book which now appear almost unchanged in the first section of Book Twelve – the Epilogue. His transcript thus covers almost the whole course of the poem which Sri Aurobindo left us in 1950.

A first difference which Amal Kiran noted between the two versions was the title. While the final version of Savitri is sub-titled ‘A Legend and a Symbol’, the version found in the notebook and exercise books was entitled, ‘Sāvithrī: A Tale and a Vision.’ The change in the subtitle of the poem corresponds to the momentous change that came about in Sri Aurobindo’s conception of his poem between 1916 and 1931, when he wrote to Amal Kiran:

As to Savitri, there is a previous draft, the result of the many retouchings of which somebody told you; but in that form it would not have been a magnum opus at all. Besides, it would have been only a legend and not a symbol. I therefore started recasting the whole thing; only the best passages and lines of the old draft will remain, altered so as to fit into the new frame.¹

19 September 1931

The other most obvious difference between the two versions is in size. The Savitri to which Sri Aurobindo gave his ‘seal of incomplete completeness’, as Nirodbaran has put it, in mid-November 1950, contains almost 24,000 lines. Amal Kiran’s transcript of the early draft consists of only 1,770. And yet, as described above, the latter covers almost the whole course of the final version, from the dawning of the day when Satyavan must die to the return of Savitri and Satyavan to earth on the same day, described in the same sequence. In the early draft however, only the slightest hint is given in a few lines of Aswapati’s quest, which in the final version covers more than 10,000 lines and over 300 pages; and there is no trace at all in it of Savitri’s yoga, described in Book Seven of the competed version which, we are told, Sri Aurobindo added in the late 1940s. An important part of

¹. CWSA 27:261
Book Eleven – the prophecy of what Savitri’s realisation will mean for the future of the earth – is also missing, although, as we shall see, other significant passages from this Book have been retained in its final form from the very earliest known version. Apart from these gaps, it is possible to connect most of the text of the early version to the final one.

In another letter to Amal Kiran in 1936, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The poem was originally written from a lower level, a mixture perhaps of the inner mind, psychic, poetic intelligence, sublimised vital, afterwards with the Higher Mind, often illumined and intuitivised, intervening. Most of the stuff of the first book is new or else the old so altered as to be no more what it was; the best of the old has sometimes been kept almost intact because it had already the higher inspiration.

3 November 1936

When reading through the transcription, I was struck by a surprising number of phrases and lines in this ‘First Fair Copy’ which were familiar from the 1993 edition of the epic which we are using for our regular Savitri studies at Savitri Bhavan. This prompted me to undertake a line by line comparison of the two versions. I found that more than half of the 1770 lines transcribed by Amal Kiran have been retained and reused by Sri Aurobindo in the course of his many revisions between 1916 and 1950, and can still be traced in the completed poem of 23,873 lines, forming almost 4% of the whole.

The earliest extant draft was divided into two Books. Book 1, containing lines 1-924, was later expanded to form Parts One and Two of the final version of Savitri, Part One consisting of Books One, Two and Three, and Part Two containing Books Four to Eight. Book 2 of the earlier version corresponds to Part Three of the final version, Books Nine to Twelve. Here we are presenting the full text of Amal Kiran’s transcript in two instalments, corresponding to the two Books. Some notes have been added in italics to indicate correspondences between this first known version of Sri Aurobindo’s mantric epic and its ultimate form. Lines from that early text which were traced in the

1. CWSA 27: 274-75.
Lines 1-98 correspond to Part One of the final version, comprising Books One, Two and Three. The first 26 lines parallel the first section of Canto of Book One, ‘The Symbol Dawn’. Amongst them one phrase and two complete lines are still to be found in the poem as it stands today.

[Canto 1, Section 1]
In a huge forest where the listening Night
Heard lonely voices and in the large hush
Was conscious of the sigh and tread of things
That have no sound for the rich heart of day,—

For now her phantom tribes were not abroad,
The panther’s eyes glared not, the tiger slept
Prone in his lair of jungle or deep grass,—
Startling the wide-browed dreamer Dawn arose.
Lain in her darker thoughtful sister’s robe
She pushed away the loving cloak that sealed
To rest her brilliant and imperious eyes
And waved the dim kind guardian from her side.
Raised were the wonderful lids that open heaven.
Vague for a while with sleep lightened her gaze.
Smiling the ever-youthful goddess rose,
Voluptuous in a purity divine,
Cast free her drifting robe of magic light,
And pressed her rosy fingers delicately
Upon the flushed cheek of the pallid world.

Flocking upon the ruddy verge her locks
Made splendid clots of morning gold, wind-lifted
To enrich the hues of space; and lucid limbs
Of secret spiritual beauty formed
Glimmered divinity through every veil
Once she half-looked behind for her great sun,
Then thoughtful turned to her immortal work.

[Canto One, Section 2]
Five line from this passage appear slightly modified in the final version

And Sâvithrî woke also in a world
That opened joyful eyes to life again
And rapturous heard the voices and the stir

Of morning. Not to joy she rose; for fear
Awoke with her and trembled at the dawn.

Sighing she laid her hand upon her bosom,
Nor knew why the close lingering ache was there,
So quiet, so old, so natural to its place,

Till memory came opening like a bud
Her strong sleep-shrouded soul. She gazed within
And saw the dumb white statue of pain erect
Within its temple waiting like a god

Daily oblation of her unwept tears.

Then all the cruelty of thought returned,
And lifting up wide beautiful heavy eyes
She gazed upon the bright and careless Dawn.

This was the day when Suthyavân must die.

Thus we see that in the final version of Book One, Canto One, 7 1/2 lines have been retained from what Amal Kiran called ‘the first fair copy’ of the poem. That early version contains no material corresponding to the other four cantos of Book One, nor to the fifteen cantos of Book Two, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. It continues with 55 lines describing Uswapathy’s tapasya, including a few which are still found in Book Three of the final version:

Daughter of silence, Sâvithrî: her birth
Was like a glorious dawn long planned in heaven,
By obscure earth resisted long. Three years
Her father lived in vigils and in fasts
Like a still mind that gathers in its rays,
Hushing the waves of sense to a wide sleep.
Forced to look upward through its transient veils
Life in his members sank controlled and awed
By the strong gaze of immortality.
He dwelt among the hastening multitudes
Companioned only by his wide-winged spirit

Seated within in an eternal calm.
Plunged from this fretful surface into depths
Of being where the thought sinks large and pale
Like a tired god into mysterious seas,
Repressing speech and wasteful act he held

Man’s hidden strength safe from life’s troubled hands
And Nature motionless in a silent soul.
Thus all himself he made an offering pure
Held up by silence priestlike to the skies
And cast it at the burning Mother’s feet—

Heart of truth’s mighty musings in far heavens
On things withdrawn, immortal Sâvithrî,
The goddess born of sacrificial fire
Who rises chanting from an unseen sun.
So rose she upon seven flaming tongues,

Uplifted the world’s vast rhythms in her limbs,
A body of music and an anthemed voice
Heard in the spaces that become the soul
Of God-rapt listeners. “Ask,” she cried, “the hope
For the blind light that strives concealed on earth
With death and the original darkness; I give
For earth, to help the patient mother’s life.
That to enlarge and with divine attempt
Amply new-sky, planting a tent of God
In desert space thy immortal kind was born.”

He asked for children beautiful and bold,
Eyed like the dawn and rapid like the seas,
Wise as the Flame that broods within the world.
“A flower from its burning heart profound,
In one I give thee all,” the Word replied,
“I give thee more than all that thou hast prayed, 
Ray of my suns, a daughter. The ages dumb 
Intended long her fiery birth.” She hushed, 
Music that ceases in the ear of trance 
Casting eternal cadences behind, 
And vanished into her intenser skies 
As disappears a flame in endless light, 
Immortally extinguished. Then released 
His soul drew back into the speed and noise 
Of the vast business of created things 
Out of its rapt abysm. He resumed 
His burden and was strong for daily deeds, 
Wise with the thoughts that skim the fathomless surge 
Of Nature and wing back to hidden shores.

Lines 1-98 cover the dawn on the day when Satyavan must die, 
Savitri’s awakening on that morning, the tapasya of King Aswapati 
which leads to the promise of her birth from the Goddess Savitri, 
and his return to earthly life. Only 21 of these 98 lines are retained 
or echoed amongst the 11,683 lines of Part One of the final version. 
Many more such lines appear in its Parts Two and Three. This reflects 
what we know about the way in which the poem was composed. Sri 
Aurobindo is known to have given much more revision to Part One, 
expanding it again and again between the earliest version and the 
final one, even making changes after portions had been published in 
fascicule form in the mid-1940s, right up to the final proofs of the 1950 
edition. On the other hand it seems that it was only in 1945, after he 
had decided that the poem could be completed and published, that he 
took up Part Two – apparently after a gap of two decades or more. 
Parts Two and Three were then completed comparatively rapidly, 
with the addition of large amounts of new material, but partly on 
the base of early versions from the 1920s. In these two Parts we find 
many more lines from the ‘first fair copy’ appearing.

[Part Two : Books Four To Eight
Book Four, Cantos 1 and 2]

Now turned the year upon its cycle sweet
And the cool happy winter ceased in spring
Rich with the instinct of God’s sensuous love
Revealed in beauty. Over all the land
The proud asoca bloomed in crimson fire,
The kingshook blushed upon her bridal boughs,

The mango-blossom fed the liquid voice
Of the love-maddened cuckoo and the bee
Murmured in fragrance. Then a child was born
Who looked upon the world with tranquil eyes.
They named her Sâvithrî because her birth

Sprang from that power. They said, “A flame is born
Of sacrifice, a silence in the noise
Of earthly things reveals the secret Thought,
Love armed with strength comes down to help the world.”
Reared sweetly by her father’s bright-eyed queens

She grew like a young tree in silent bliss
Self-gathered that receives the shocks of earth
With wordless passion. Bathed in another light,
Firm, quivering inwardly with mystic rain,
Proud of the ravishing storm’s immense assault

The tree in other calms and tempests lives.
The shadowy touches of these outward things
It only knows as shapes of powers within.
Through a soft quiet joy her childhood moved

Like a small bird that with rich-coloured breast
Sings to himself upon a pleasant bough.
Escaping from this sweet serious bud a strong
And radiant woman flowered. Deep slumbrous fire
Was in the long-fringed glories of her eyes,
Behind her brows there sat a noble soul

Of vision that looked forth on earth through light
And like a nectarous moon her passionate heart
Loved all and spoke no word. Thus as she grew
Like a young palm-tree lonely by a lake,
Her name was heard upon the wondering earth,

The sons of kings beheld her from afar.
But none dared seize her glory; all forbore
To embrace a flame too searching for clay-bound hearts
Earth fashions for her daily uses small.
Sealed up in vessels of a coarser make
By brief-lived duller warmths inured, they shrink
From souls too swift and great; only they bear
The trivial grosser touches of the world,
Seize not its hidden fearless energies,
Clasp not its raptures that desire the strong.

[Book Four, Canto Three]

Therefore the gods are few in mortal forms.
But on a morn when summer still was young
And the last cuckoo cried among the leaves,
While Uswapathy listened to the morn,
Out of the shadows of the white alcoves
Came Sâvithrô to his side burning in silence
Like a young torch of incense and of flames.
She bore her body like the sob of bliss
Of earth’s mute adoration towards heaven
Awakened in beauty’s living form. He saw,
Pensive, her sweetness woven of golden fire,
Carved like a nectar-cup for thirsty gods.
Then took the father on his knees the child;
Lifting her face he gazed down questioning
Into the wonder of her long veiled eyes,
Deep pools of thought and love as yet unstirred,
That marvelled still at life and saw things far.
There conscious of pure brooding depths he spoke,—
Those sister queens so willed who passionate watched
Their nursling with a tremulous delight,
Enamoured of her firm tender ways and words,
Her laughter, music of tranquillity,
Her lustrous eyes waking in sweet large night,
Her limbs that were linked poems made of gold
And her slim moonbeam feet. “O child,” he said,
“Though sixteen years have ripened in thy brow
Thy life dreams still, shut in its own pure bud
Unburst by winds and ardent light. Fragrant
Thou bloomest like a lone forgotten flower
No hand has plucked to lay before the god.
The heavens perhaps guard thee for some great soul
Or too proud-missioned from a divine dawn
Thy light repels the common sons of men.
Go forth and bear the torch of a sweet quest,
Thy heart. For somewhere surely arrived on earth
Waiting unknown thy perfect comrade lives
Kept for thee by the recompensing gods.
Bird of the spaces, soul, I set thee free;
Venture into the world and find thy mate
Winging across far lands.” She went, obeying,

Like one who understands a form of words,
But waits to see their secret meaning dawn.

[Book Four; Canto Four]
Her chariot rolled not among cities thronged,
Nor sought the clamorous markets of the land,
Nor sojourned in the palaces of kings;
But through green musing woods, past rough-browed hills,
Over wind-trod pastures and in happy groves
Glided its course like a swift lonely hope
Aware of a sweet mystery withheld
Among its dreams. Still were there remnants left
Of old primaeval spaces where one heard
The sweet and dumbly murmuring voice of earth
In the great passion of her sun-kissed trance
And quieted the all-seeking mind could feel
The unwearied clasp of her mute, patient love
And know for a soul the mother of our forms.
Vague-hearted, listening to a murmur long,
Rhythm of an immenser wordless thought
That gathers in the silence behind life
Like one who waits some sudden revealing stroke,
Through such bright scenes, her kindred spaces, led
By the veiled guardians of her deathless past,
She saw her road in her instinctive mind.
There the king-sages from their labour done
Lived happily with birds and beasts and dawn
And evening, watched with the bright constant stars,
Seeking the soul of things with boundless love,
Pale hermits with the tiger-skin for robe.

Others with wives and children who grew built
Among these silent mighty influences
Into the towers of manhood they must be,
Unripe for burdens yet and wars, lived sparingly
On the raw forest-fruits, kindled the flame

And chanted morn and eve the mystic’s hymn.
They dwelt like spirits from Time’s dull yoke released,
Once more as infants pure, their radiant thoughts
Expecting silence. Mid these haunts of peace
Welcomed by the great mild ascetics, sweetly

Cherished by the calm bright-eyed women pure,
Resting on plains or among mountains large
Through hushed tranquillity of forest nights
And when the first cries of the woodland woke,
Watching high dawn break through the giant hills,

Swift-wheeled she journeyed; so far-roaming came
By river-banks and spaces lapped in gold
Into the country of the Shalwa kings
And on its borders solitary and grand
Saw woodland verges trodden by wild deer

And wandered over by the peacock herds.

[Book Five, Canto One]

Cool-perfumed and with pleasure-burdened feet
The morning breezes faltered among flowers;
Light flooded heaven’s regions, all the land
Life flooded. On green earth, in sapphire skies

The free hare bounded and the shrill kite wheeled;
Doves cooed untiring in the easeful shade,
The snow-white cranes toiled clanging through the air
And flame-winged wild-drakes swam in silvery pools.

Her chariot journeyed echoing through a wide
Uncultured earth strewn with deep glades divine
That screened their sheltered murmurs from the sun.
Primaeval peace was there and in its bosom
Held undisturbed wild life of birds and beasts:
Man the artificer had not arrived,
Nor formal labour claimed for dull great cares
Fields tenanted by sunlight and the rain
And pastures of the free life of the earth.

[Book Five, Canto Two]
But now to a Nature more remote, self-hidden
From all but its own vision deep and wild,
Attracted by the forest’s sombre call
Her chariot hastened, skirting prouder glades
Where the green stragglers lingered in the light
Behind immenser seas of foliage, rear
Of a tremendous solitude of trees.
Here in a lifting of the vast secrecy
Where plunged a narrow cleft, a track ran hewn
To screened infinities from a farewell space
Of sunlight, she beheld kingly youth
Magnificent in the morning of his force,
Clad in a rough robe sewn of forest bark,
Taming a wild horse to his gentle hand.
Still by its inner musings sealed from life,
Aware of Nature, vague as yet to man,
Her wandering gaze the splendid beast admired,
Not yet the master creature. Then it woke.
Half-turned to her over its tangled mane
She saw, she knew, as if oft seen before,
Eyes and a face rich, noble, high and swift
Like the gods’ morning. She cried out like a bird
Who hears her mate upon a distant bough
And by her musical bidding seized and stillled,
Hooves trampling fast and crashing chariot ceased,
The unwilling horses pawing yet for speed.
But Suthyavân who heard the liquid voice
Wedding the summer air stood marvelling:
Himself, his task, his victory forgot,
He left the rapid creature to its will.
It seemed to him vaguely as if the sweet call
Were to the chariot-horses of his life
Turning their speed towards a glorious goal.
He came, they met, wide wondering eyes gazed close
Into bright eyes and deep, their comrade orbs.
Touched by the warning finger of sweet love
The soul can recognise its answering soul

Across dividing Time. Upon life’s ways
Absorbed wrapped traveller, turning, it recovers
Familiar splendours in an unknown face
And thrills again to the old immortal love
Wearing a new sweet body for delight.

But the mind only thinks, “Behold the one
For whom my life has waited long unfilled!
Behold the sudden sovereign of my days.”
Love dwells in us like an unopened flower.
Roaming in his charmed sleep mid thoughts and things

The child-god is at play; but through it all
He lingers for the touch that he shall know
And when it comes, wakes blindly to a voice,
A look, a smile, the meaning of a face.
He seizes on some sign of outward charm

To guide him by the groping mind obscured,
Desires the image for the godhead’s sake
And takes the body for the sculptured soul.
Her heart unveiled, his now to meet her turned.
Attracted as in heaven star by star

They wondered at each other and rejoiced.

[Book Five, Canto Three]
First Suthyavân: “Who art thou, virgin bright?
My mind might dream perhaps and my heart fear,
Risen on a morning of the gods thou drivest
Thy horses from the Thunderer’s luminous worlds.

For they have wandered in the silent hours
And lingered in the slumbrous noonday woods
And know that gods from heaven walk abroad.
If such thou art, pause once before thou fade
Like a bright thought too glorious for our hold.

But if thy heart was made for human love,
My eyes grow glad to know and my bosom rejoices
That mortal sweetness smiles between thy lids,
Thy heart can beat beneath a human gaze,
This golden body dally with fatigue
And the sweet taste and joy of earthly food
Attract thee. From thy journey cease; come down.
Close is my father’s woodland hermitage.
There follow me. Though rude and poor our life,
The woods are round it and the heavens above
Look down at a rich secrecy and hush.
The forest gods have taken it in their arms
And brightly apparelled it in green and gold.”
And the girl, musing, “I am Sâvithrî,
Princess of Madra. Who art thou? what name
Musical on earth? What trunk of ancient kings
Has flowered in thee upon its happy branch?
Why is thy dwelling in the pathless wood
Far from the deeds thy glorious youth demands?”
And he: “King Dyumathsen in Shalwa reigned
Through all the tract that from beyond these tops
Turns looking back towards the southern heavens.
But the bright gods recalled the gifts they gave,
Took from his eyes their glad and helping ray
And led the uncertain goddess from his side.
He sojourns in the deep and solemn woods.
Son of that king, I, Suthyavân, have lived
In their huge vital murmur kin to me,
Nursed by their vastness; Chitrâshwa too they name me;
For the early child-god took my hand to limn
The bright and bounding swiftnesses that stray
Wind-maned in our pastures. So my mind approached
Before I lived in its wide natural haunts
The dumb great animal consciousness of earth
Now grown so close. Gold princess Sâvithrî,
High is my life and happy I find my state
Possessing royally the earth and skies;
But I have seen thee; these seem not enough:
New rich deep things felicitous I desire;
And heaven and earth are in a moment changed.
O, if thou art the source, draw nearer yet
Down on this sward disdaining not our soil,
For here are spaces emerald to thy tread,
Descend, O happiness. Let thy golden feet
Enrich the rough floors on whose earth we dwell.”

She said: “My heart turns to my father’s house
And yet will stay here on this forest verge.
Now of more wandering it has no need.”
Down came she with a soft, bright, faltering haste,
Her gleaming feet upon the green-gold sward,
And like pale brilliant wandering moths her hands
Claimed from the sylvan verge’s sunlit arms
Bright comrades of the summer and the breeze
And twined a natural garland deep and pure
Fit for their love. This with glad unshamed eyes

Upraised in hands that trembled with delight
Lingering around the neck of him she chose,
She hung,—such the fair symbol of those days,—
Upon his bosom coveted by her love.
Nor with that equal bond ceased satisfied
Her heart, but as before a sudden god
She bowed down to his feet and touched the hem
Of his coarse raiment with her worshipping hands.
He took them in his own; the sweet first touch
Of all their closeness through long intimate years

Feeling each other for the soul behind,
Joined them for bliss upon his bosom. They parted,
She to her father’s rich and sculptured halls,
He to the cottage rude she hoped for, thatched
With leaves, built of hewn forest-boughs, where lingered
In toil and penury of their fallen state
His parents bearing patiently their days.
Thus were they wedded and the knot was bound.

[Book Six]
Attracted by the golden summer earth
Nârad the heavenly sage from Paradise
Came harping through the quivering lustrous air.
Rapturous and drunken with the wine of God
He poured upon the world his mighty chant
Casting the harmonies of his heaven-born voice
Unwearied. By the sweetness of his song

Earth the dumb sufferer was awhile appeased
And all heaven’s kindled regions shook, alight
With his heart’s ceaseless joy. **He sang the name**
Of Vishnu and the secret of the stars
And the beginnings of the conscious world.

He hymned Delight and Love that knows not death:
He sang the rapture of the Heart divine
That calls our spirits and of discords healed
And pleasure that shall die in a white bliss
And sin delivered from itself by love

And immortality surprising earth.

**And as he sang, the demons wept with joy:**
They dreamed of the defeat for which they hope
When with their chosen dreadful labour done
They shall return to him who sent them forth.

So harping, singing came the man divine
To men obscured on earth. The glory down
**Like a persistent streak of lightning fell,**
Nearing, until the rapt eyes of the sage
**Looked forth from luminous cloud and, strangely limned,**
**His face, a beautiful mask of antique joy,**
Appeared from light, descending where arose
King Uswapathy’s palace to the winds
In Madra, flowering up in delicate stone.
There welcomed by the strong and thoughtful king

Who ceased from common life and care and sat
Inclining to the high and rhythmic voice,
Seated on sacred grass the heavenly seer
Spoke of the toils of men and what the gods
Strive for on earth, and joy that throbs behind

The marvel and the mystery of pain.
**He sang to him of the lotus heart of love**
With all its thousand luminous buds of truth
That quivering sleeps veiled by apparent things.
It trembles at every touch, it strives to wake
And one day it shall hear a blissful voice
And in the garden of the spouse shall bloom
When she is seized by her discovered lord.
Even as he sang, came with a voice of hooves
As of her swift heart hastening, Sâvithrî.

Changed with the halo of her love she came,
Her radiant tread glimmering across the floor,
A happy wonder in her fathomless eyes.
And happily her stately head she bowed
Before her father and her shining gaze

Saw like a rose of wonder and adored
Sweetness and glory of that Son of Heaven.
But Nârad casting on her from his eyes
Celestial the unwounded light of heaven
Griefless, “From what wild border, Sâvithrî,
Turns back thy wheels’ far quest with wonderful earth
Satisfied, singing of sweet haste to bliss
As one who brings hushed treasure for his soul,
Rapt burdens and rich secrets from some shrine
Where sits a godhead mystic in the stone?
What divine floods bathed pure thy pilgrim limbs
And burdened heart? or as from marvellous lands,
Verges of wonder and horizons strange,
Landscapes of mystery, rivers of delight,
Flew once the Bird who from the flaming kings
Of pain ravished the ambrosia for the gods,
Exultantly—so fleest thou bright-winged back
Rejoicing with some flushed and heavenly fruit
Seized in the dangerous woodlands of desire?
Such light is seen beneath thy mortal lids.”

Then Uswapathy, “An unknown face one seeks
Among the indifferent visages of earth,
Known to the secret sense our clay conceals:
And when it opens, even such light can dawn!
For we are seekers of our hidden suns.

To find its own lord since to her through earth
He came not yet, this sweetness ventured forth.
Now she brings back her dedicated soul.
Reveal, my child, the name thy heart has learned.”
Shining she answered, “Suthyavân, an exile
475 In the huge and desolate forests, is my lord.
**My father, I have chosen, this is done.”**
And Uswapathy wordless for a space
Answered his child, “What thou hast chosen and done,
The silent god within thee shall approve.
480 In the rich commerce of this mystic world
Where all things given wonderfully return,
Life for its offering, bare of every claim
The heart has prostrated before the adored
Satisfied with its privilege to love.
485 Dimly it knows, descended from the skies,
Its sweet lost fortune by that gift restored,
Deep price at which the costly worlds were born
Self-giving the great merchandise of God.”
Sâvithrî answered not. Her happy eyes
490 Hooded with light from an immortal source
And finding hidden glories on the earth
Smiled at thought whispering, confident of bliss.
But Nârad now, the seer, lifted his voice
That sang the first thoughts of the new-born gods,
495 Turning on her the rapt celestial eyes
**Bare to whose gaze Time toils, his unseen works**
**Detected:** “Wilder-sweet thy curves, O life,
Following the stream of Time through the unknown
**Than sealed thought dreams of!** Wandering soul, thy wings
500 Strike hidden goals. A **god’s tremendous touch**
**Seems pain unbearable to mortal nerves,**
But high that agony climbs, the flower of flame
In whose fierce seed is the sweet tree of heaven.
Endurance first the ethereal kings trod out
505 Pacing the measures of the dateless road;
Serene rose next equality from the stars
Weaving her vast and rhythmmed walk; thrilling
Their large third rapturous stride discovered bliss.
But blind and swift the great-maned life of earth
Alarmed by grief swerved from their dreadful path.
She dulled the pang to her children, heeding not
In the fond passion of her mother mind
That they who toil self-given into the hands
Of her great sorrows and arise grow gods,
Possessors of the eternal joys unseen,
The master souls who are for ever glad.
By pain there works a spirit from the clod;
By pain eternal Night gave forth the suns;
By pain the wise Immortals knew and chose
The leaders of the dark and mighty march,
The swift and radiant who shall help the world.
From sojourn in some high preparing skies,
From rapture in the worlds of flame and light
Obscured they come, down on the yearning earth,
Conscious of their lost heavens. Soul who hast lived
Guarded in thy sweet happy heavenly self
From life’s great hands,—but now the gods have touched,—
Awake by sorrow, daughter of the sun.”
But high the King cried back to the bright seer,
“Ominous thy thoughts are, Nârad, to our hearts
Which only ask brief joy for their brief life.
Flame not too high beyond the mortal’s ken.
What soul aspires to grief or uncompelled
Would taste of torture? If from joy to joy
Chanting man climbed, then might we grow to gods.
Too endless is the sad and stern ascent,
Too slippery and precipitous the path.
Rather if the thought silent in the wise
That knows its wisdom vain to help mankind
Close not thy lips, our blinded will succour,
That it may see the pitfall and the escape.
Because to our footsteps light has been denied,
Like children travelling to an unseen goal
In night-hung paths in forest or morass
We fearfully retrace some happy steps,
We call to each other at some doubtful bend
Guarding from winds some flickering torch of hope.
We wander. If the mist could once be rent,—
Chased never by the reason’s pallid light,—
Which from the first was settled round our way,
The dire immortal bows that ring our walk
Stringless would fall and Fate to Will be bound.
O Will is God concealed and Fate his bride.
But now in her immense and passionate mind
Shaping unruly the cycles of the stars,
With thoughts eternal, violent, large of pace,
She takes the little centuries in her stride
And holds him hooded in her mighty hands.
She knows without him all her strength were vain.
Two powers toil and meet in every field,
She clasps him bound lest he desert her arms,
She hides him in her breast to guide the suns.”
But Nârad still with that celestial gaze:
“Why vainly must thou ask for light in front?

Safe doors cry opening, but the doomed pass on.
None can renounce the chain his soul desires
Until a will eternal has been done.
Man by his nature to great grief is drawn;
For a mysterious Power compels his steps
And Life is stronger than the trembling mind.”
With troubled heart King Uswapathy heard;
He reined his rearing thoughts to make reply:
“Still must man seek for light and quest in front,
Chained to his passion on the labouring earth.
Yearning to clasp an enemy of her heart
Is cruellest grief for woman’s subject life,
A bitter thing to love! Or two may cling
United yet some natural fault in him
Turn even their close daily tenderness
A cherished suffering and a tortured joy.
Which of these swords shall pierce my child, O sage?”
But Nârad smiling with immortal lips:
“Fear not such coarser trembling shall be struck
From spirits who are harps the gods have made.

Gentle as the soft bud the spring desires,
Pure like a stream that kisses lonely banks,
Like a hill high-gazing where a fruited grove
Has made a murmuring nest for southern winds,
Calm and delightful is young Suthyavân.

The Happy in their sweet ether have not hearts
More wide and blissful than this forest boy’s.
His nature deep and true lives with the god
In common things and that large-eyed communion
Has learned by which man’s veilless mind wakes free,

Griefless, uplifted; its wonderful domains
Grow luminous fields thronged with the tread of gods.

Alas, if death into the elements
From which his gracious envelope was built,
Shatter this vase before it breathe its sweets,

As if earth could not keep a divine thing!

In one brief year when this bright hour flies back
Through Time, the shrouded night surrounds his soul.”
In haste the father cried aloud, “O girl,
Around a fated head thy wings have flown.

Mount, mount thy car and travelling through the lands
Choose one more happy for thy fruitful couch.
Let not the obscure hand seal up too soon
The sweet perennial fountain of thy joys.
Not with this boy thy virgin life shall flower,

But Sâvithrî replied with steadfast eyes
That saw the forest verge and Suthyavân;
“Once I have chosen, once the garland fell.
Whether for death or life, for joy or tears,
Two hearts have joined and shall not be divorced
By human wills or by the gods’ strong hands.”

So spoke she from her sweet and violent1 soul
Awakened to dangerous earth; but Uswapathy

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1. This evocative phrase is found in Book Three, Canto Four of the final version, where the Supreme Mother promises Aswapati: A sweet and violent heart of ardent calms
Moved by the passions of the gods shall come. (p. 346)
This is one of only a very few instances where a phrase or line from the first fair copy has been taken out of its original context and used in different one.
Made answer to her from the father’s heart:
“My daughter, who in this frail world belongs
To whom? **Who is the husband? who the child?**
Are they not shadows in thy dreaming mind?
The body thou hast loved, dissolved, is given,
Lost in the brute unchanging stuff of worlds,
To indifferent mighty Nature who shall make it
Crude matter for the joy of others’ lives.
**But for our souls, upon the wheel of God**
**For ever turning they arrive and go**
Vain atoms in the whirling cycles vain,
**Married and sundered in the magic round**
**Of the great Dancer of the boundless dance.**
Thy emotions are but sweet and dying notes
In his wild music changed compellingly
**From hour to hour.** To cry to an unseized bliss
Is the music’s meaning. Caught, the rhythm fades,
The sense has fled! only coarse-fibred joys
Are given us that abase with useless pain.
Sated the lax heart loathes its old desires;
**Love dies before the lover.** None belongs
Even to his nearest, but all to one far Self
Constant, alone and hushed who cares for none.
O child, obey not then thy clamorous heart’s
Insistence, thinking thy desires divine.
**Live by a calmer law.** Strengthen thy life
By work and thought, give succour to thy soul,
With rich utilities help others’ days,
So shalt thou greaten to abiding peace.”
**But Sâvithrî replied with steadfast eyes,—**
Calm now her heart and tender like the moon.
**“Now have I known my glad reality**
**Beyond my body in another’s being;**
I have perceived the changeless soul of Love.
**How then shall I desire a lonely good,**
**Or slay, aspiring to white vacant peace,**
The hope divine with which my soul leaped forth
**From flame eternal, rapture of one vast Heart**
And tireless of the sweet abysms of Time
Deep possibility always to love?

This, this is first, last joy, against whose throb
The riches of a thousand fortunate years
Feel poverty. What to me are death and life
And other men and children and my days,
Since only for my soul in Suthyaṅān

I treasure the rich occasion of my birth
And sunlight and the emerald ways he treads,—
If for a year, that year is all my life.
Once only can the die for ever fall
And, being thrown, no god can alter more

Its endless moment. Once the word leaps forth
And being spoken sounds immortally
For ever in the memory of Time.
Only once can my heart of woman choose.
For what my heart has seen, my lips can speak

That only and my servant body do.
This is the yoke that God has laid on me
And on the road He traced my life must run.”
She spoke and Nārad smiled and rising high
Sprang like a fire into his roseate heavens

Chanting the anthem of triumphant love.

Almost all the lines above relate to Canto One of Book Six. Only lines 496-503 and the last two (679-80) correspond to Canto Two of the final version of Savitri.

[Book Seven, Canto One]

So was it as the heart of Sâvithrî
Tender and adamant decreed. Her father
Journeying with brilliant squadrons and a voice
Immense of chariots bore her from her bowers

Of golden beauty to the rude bare hut
Of Dyumathṣena in the dim-souled huge
Inhuman forest far from cheerful sound
Of man’s blithe converse mid his crowded days.
Leaving behind their glittering companies

The king and his two queens with thorns assailed
And stumbling feet on the faint gloomy path
Reached the rough-hewn ascetic hut and gave
Their cherished nurseling to the blind old king
And that poor labour-worn and ageing queen

695 To be their daughter and their servant there
Through the hard strenuous days. With tearful eyes
And a dull burden on their hearts they blessed
The brief-lived husband of her fatal choice,
Then went back to their life of vacant pomp

700 Empty of her. There for one year she dwelt
With Suthyavân and with his parents sole
In the tremendous wood amid the cry
Of crickets and the tiger’s nightly roar,
Defenceless to the forest’s whisper vast

705 And sunlight and the moonlight and the rain.
For now the grief she had trod down seized on her;
And though she served all diligently, nor spared
Strict labour with the broom and jar and well
And gentle personal tending and the piled fire

710 Of altar and kitchen, no task to others allowed
Her woman’s strength might do, not with these things
Her heart was, but with love and secret pain
She dwelt like a dumb priest with hidden gods.
Her spirit like a sea of living fire

715 Possessed her lover, clinging—one vast embrace
Around its threatened mate. Her quivering passion
Intolerant of the poverty of Time
Strove to expend whole centuries in a day.
Ever her mind remembered Nârad’s date

720 And, trembling sad accountant of its riches,
Reckoned the insufficient dawns between.
So feeding sorrow and terror with her heart
She lived in dread expectancy: or else
Fled from it vainly into abysms of bliss

725 To meet worse after-sorrow; for then she felt
Each day a golden page torn cruelly out
From her too slender account of joy. She uttered
No moan, but by her natural silence helped
Lived lonely in the secret clutch of tears.

Often she yearned to cry, “O Suthyavân,
O lover of my soul, give more, give more
Of love while yet thou canst to her thou lovst;
For soon we part and who shall know how long
Before the great wheel in its monstrous round
Restore us to ourselves?” For well she knew
She must not clutch that happiness to die
With him and follow seizing on his robe,
Travelling our other countries, voyagers glad
Into the sweet or terrible beyond,

Since that poor king and queen would need her long
To help the empty remnant of their life.
Strong she pressed back the cry into her soul
And dwelt within silent, unhelped, alone.
And still she knew that only surface seas
Were spume to these loud winds; a greater spirit
Calm-winged and watching all to every pain
Assented largely in its strength and joy.
Nor would she once have given tortured days
Half hell, half heaven, of terror and delight
For all the griefless bliss that Time could give
Without him. Suthyavân with the dim answer
Of our thought-blinded hearts perceived her clasp
Of love and anguish round him, vaguely knew
Some doom behind, and what his days could spare
From labour in the forest hewing wood
With his strong arm or gathering sacred grass
Or hunting food in the far sylvan glades
Or service to his father’s sightless life
He gave to her and strove to increase brief time
With lavish softness of heart-seeking words
And all the inadequate signs that love must use.
All was too little for her dreadful need.
Yet grew they into each other ever more
Until it seemed no power could rend apart
Since even the body’s walls might not divide.
For when he wandered in the forest, still
Her conscious spirit walked with his and knew
His actions as if in herself he moved.
He, less aware, thrilled with her from afar.

770 Grief, fear became the food of mighty love.
Tortured more fiercely, more her soul dilated
Till measureless it grew in strength divine,
An anvil for the blows of Fate and Time,
Unslayable like the gods. Last grief became

775 Calm, dull-eyed, resolute as if awaiting
Some unknown issue of its fiery struggle,
Some deed in which it might for ever cease
Victorious over itself and death and tears.

Fast the days fled. The rains rushed by; autumn

780 Hastened his pace serene; winter and dew
Their glories moist or cold ended too soon;
Spring bounded by armed with the cuckoo’s plaint,
Piercing her heart with beauty of his flowers.
Then summer like a stately king came in

785 In opulent purple and in burning gold.
She hated not his mornings and his eves,
But rather besought that they would linger out
Their careless glories, though he seemed to her
Indifferent doom in heartless splendour clad

790 Who hid with his bright hands the death of joy.
Swiftly the fated day came striding on.

In Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, Nirodharan tells us:

There was no Book of Yoga in the original scheme of the poem.
One old version called Book III, Death, has been changed into
The Book of Yoga. It was enormously expanded and named
Canto I. All the rest of the six Cantos were totally new and
dictated. ... Apparently all these Cantos except the first one
are entirely new. I could get no trace of any old versions from
which they could have been developed. 1

So when in Book Seven, The Book of Yoga, we find 68 lines from the
‘first fair copy’, all but one of them appear in the first canto, which was

1. Nirodharan, Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, 3rd ed. rev. and enl. 1988, p. 182
based on a very early version of the poem, while the other six cantos were composed by Sri Aurobindo in 1947-48, creating a completely new element that was not included in any of the earlier versions of the poem. It is surprising to find the single line 705 from the early version echoed in the second line of Book Seven Canto Six, where ‘And sunlight and the moonlight and the rain’ has been transmuted to ‘In the sunlight and the moonlight and the dark’. This is another of the very few phrases or lines from the first fair copy which have been moved out of their original context to appear elsewhere.

[Book Eight]

We learn from Nirodbaran’s account that

The Book of Death contains three old versions, all called Canto III; the final version is constructed from one of these ...

In the 1993 edition of Savitri a footnote at the beginning of Book Eight tells us that what now forms The Book of Death was taken from Canto Three of an early version of Savitri, which was slightly revised ‘at a late stage’, when a number of new lines were added. Nirodbaran has also informed us that this Book, along with Book Twelve, The Epilogue, remained without final revision by Sri Aurobindo. So here, uniquely, the majority of the lines of its single canto ‘Death in the Forest’ are found already in the first fair copy, and remain either unchanged or only slightly modified. Out of the 177 lines of the final version of this canto, 135 appear in the earliest known version, and only 42 new lines have been added.

Now it was here in this great golden dawn
By her yet sleeping husband lain she gazed
Into her past like one about to die

795

Looks back upon the sunlit fields of life
Where he too ran and sported with the rest,
Lifting his head above the huge dark stream
Before he plunges down. She lived again

800

The whole year in a swift and eddying race

Of memories. Then she arose and service done

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid. p. 266
Bowed down to the great goddess simply carved
By Suthyavân upon a forest-stone.
What prayer she breathed, her soul and Doorga knew.
Perhaps she felt in the dim forest huge

The infinite mother watching over her child,
Perhaps the shrouded Voice spoke some still word.
At last she came to the pale mother queen
And spoke: “For one full year that I have served
Thee and the aged king and my dear lord

I have not gone into the silences
Of this great forest that enringed my thoughts
With mystery nor in its green miracles
Wandered, but this small clearing was my world.
Now has a strong desire seized all my heart
To go with Suthyavân holding his hand
Into the life that he has loved and touch
Herbs he has trod and know the forest flowers
And hear at ease the birds and scurrying life
That starts and ceases, rich far rustle of boughs
And all the mystic whispering of woods.
Release me now and let my heart have rest.”
She answered, “Do as thy wise mind decrees,
O calm child-sovereign with the eyes that rule.
I hold thee a strong goddess who has come
Pitying our barren days, so dost thou serve
Even as a slave might, so art thou beyond
All that thou doest, all our minds conceive
Like the strong sun that serves earth from above.”
So the doomed husband and the wife who knew
Went with linked hands into that solemn world
Together. Suthyavân walked full of joy
Because she moved beside him through the green.
He showed her all the forest’s riches, flowers
Innumerable of every colour and hue
And soft thick clinging creepers green and red
And strange rich-plumaged birds, to every cry
That haunted sweetly distant boughs, replied
With the shrill singer’s name more sweetly called.
He spoke of all the things he loved: they were
His boyhood’s comrades and his playfellows,
Coevals and companions of his life
Here in this world whose every mood he knew.
Their thoughts which for the common mind are blank,
He shared, to every wild emotion felt
An answer. Deeply she listened, but to hear
The voice that soon would cease from tender words
And treasure its sweet cadences beloved
For lonely memory. Little dwelt her mind
Upon their sense; of death, not life she thought.
Love in her bosom hurt with the jagged edges
Of anguish moaned at every step with pain
Crying, “Now, now perhaps his voice will hush
For ever.” Even by some vague touch oppressed
Sometimes her eyes looked round as if their orbs
Might see the dim and dreadful god approach.
But Suthyavân had paused. He meant to finish
His labour here that happy, linked, uncaring
They two might wander free in the green deep
Primeval mystery of the forest’s heart.
Wordless but near she watched, no turn to lose
Of the bright face and body which she loved.
Her life was now in seconds, not in hours
And every moment she economised
Like a pale merchant leaned above his store,
The miser of his poor remaining gold.
But Suthyavân wielded a joyous axe.
He sang high snatches of a sage’s chant
That pealed of conquered death and demons slain,
And sometimes paused to cry to her sweet speech
Of love or mockery tenderer than love.
She like a pantheress leaped upon his words
And carried them into her cavern heart.
But as he worked, his doom upon him came.
The violent and hungry hounds of pain
Travelled through his body biting as they passed
Silently and all his suffering breath besieged
Strove to rend life’s strong heart-cords and be free.
Then helped, as if a beast had left its prey,
A moment in a wave of rich relief

Reborn to strength and happy ease he stood,
Rejoicing, and resumed his confident toil
But with less seeing strokes. Now the great woodsman
Hewed at him, and his labour ceased. Lifting
His arm he flung away the poignant axe

Far from him like an instrument of pain:
She came to him in silent anguish and clasped,
And he cried to her, “Sâvithrî, a pang
Cleaves through my head and breast as if the axe
Were piercing there and not the living branch.

Such agony rends me as the tree must feel
When it is sundered. Let me lay my head
Upon thy lap and guard me with thy hands.
Perhaps because thou touchest, death may pass.”

Then Sâvithrî sat under branches wide,

Cool, green against the sun; not the hurt tree
Which his keen axe had cloven, that she shunned,—
But leaned beneath a fortunate kingly trunk
She guarded him in her bosom and strove to soothe
His anguished brow and body with her hands.

All grief and fear were dead within her now
And a great calm had fallen. The wish to lessen
His suffering, the impulse that opposes pain
Was the one mortal feeling left. It passed;
Griefless and strong she waited like the gods.

But now his sweet familiar hue was changed
Into a tarnished greyness and his eyes
Dimmed over, forsaken of the clear light she loved.
Only the dull and physical mind was left,
Vacant of the bright spirit’s luminous gaze.

But once before it faded wholly back
He cried out in a clinging last despair,
“Sâvithrî, Sâvithrî, O Sâvithrî,
Lean down, my soul, and kiss me while I die.”
And even as her pallid lips pressed his,
He failed, losing last sweetness of response;
His cheek pressed down her golden arm. She sought
His mouth still with her living mouth, as if
She could persuade his soul back with her kiss;
Then grew aware they were no more alone.

Something had come there conscious, vast and dire.
Near her she felt a silent shade immense
Chilling the noon with darkness for its back.
She knew that visible Death was standing there
And Suthyavân had passed from her embrace.

Here ends Book 1 of the ‘First Fair Copy’ which has 924 lines. Of these, a total of 415 lines appear unchanged or modified in Part One (21 lines) and Part Two (394) of the final version.

The end of Book Eight also closes Part Two of the final version of the poem which consists of Books Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight. In the first fair copy, this material is covered in lines 99 to 924: 826 lines in all. Of these 826 lines just under half (394) have been traced unchanged or in modified form amongst the 7074 lines of Part Two of the final version.

Part Three of the final version contains Books Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve –5080 lines in all. Some of this material is prefigured in Book 2 of the ‘First Fair Copy’, which contains 713 lines altogether. When making his transcription Amal Kiran added 112 lines which he found in the notebook that correspond to materials now in Book Eleven, as well as 21 from the second exercise book which now appear almost unchanged in the present Book Twelve. We shall be presenting these materials in our next issue.
We are embarking upon the second Book of Savitri, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds. The Traveller of the Worlds is the rishi-king Aswapati. In Book One we read about his great aspiration to find a power that would be able to bring down the wonderful spiritual realities which he experienced on higher planes and establish them in the material world. He was looking for a highest power of transformation that would be able to achieve that. In response to his intense aspiration he was shown that this physical world is not the only world, that there are subtle worlds; and as he advances on the path not only can he see those subtle worlds, he can enter into them; he is even given power over the nature of those subtle realms, so that he can achieve things there. The very last sentence of Canto Five of Book One tells us:

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

Aswapati has become able to enter a Space and Time that is different from those that we experience here in the material universe, a subtle Space and Time. In this way he becomes ‘A voyager upon uncharted routes’: there are no maps for the journey that he is embarking upon now: it has never been ‘charted’. In the great days of the exploration of the earth explorers and mariners went into new territory and prepared charts, drew maps of what they had found, so that those who came after them could find their way more easily. But the one who goes first is always travelling on ‘uncharted routes’. So Aswapati does not know what he is going to find on his journey, he is facing the ‘Unknown’, facing danger that he cannot foresee, which is ‘viewless’: he has no view of the dangers that may be lurking there in the ‘Unknown’. He
is setting off on an enormous adventure of exploration, ‘Adventuring across enormous realms’ in a much vaster Space and Time than those of our limited material universe. Now we shall begin to follow the Traveller of the Worlds on the journey which Sri Aurobindo has depicted in the fifteen cantos of Book Two, giving us a map of the subtle planes and worlds of existence which lie beyond the material universe that we inhabit, which our human scientists have begun to give us some glimpses. He will show us how those subtle planes and worlds are connected to each other and how they influence our lives here in the human world. But first he gives to us and to Aswapati a vast overview of the many levels of the manifestation.

Alone he moved watched by the infinity
Around him and the Unknowable above.
All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,
All could be known the mind has never grasped;
All could be done no mortal will can dare.
A limitless movement filled a limitless peace.

Aswapati is all alone, moving in that other Space and Time; he feels that he is being watched, by all the ‘infinity’, all the limitlessness of the new Space and Time which is surrounding him, and by an ‘Unknowable’ reality that is above. In some way, Aswapati can know this new Space and Time that he has moved into but above that ‘infinity’ lies the ‘Unknowable’. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the ‘Unknown’ is not ‘Unknowable’: many things are unknown to us and we can gradually expand what we know, we can expand our knowledge and our sense of identity and know many new things directly or indirectly, but beyond everything that can be seen and experienced lies a Reality that will be forever mysterious: the Unknowable Aswapati feels that mysterious something or someone watching him as he is moving there in that vast Space and, because he himself has reached such a high level of consciousness, he is able to see everything ‘that shuns the mortal eye’. To ‘shun’, means to turn away from, to reject or to avoid. There are certain things that we ‘shun’. We try to shun pain; we do not want to experience it. Here the poet says there are many things that avoid being seen by the ‘mortal eye’. This word ‘mortal’ means ‘subject to death’. Here in this material world everything is ‘mortal’, subject to death; but very often we use the word as meaning simply
‘human’. Now Aswapati has entered a state where ‘All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye’, so that he can see many things which hide themselves from our physical eyes; and he becomes able to know all that ‘the mind has never grasped’. To ‘grasp’ means to ‘catch hold of’, to ‘seize’. Our minds are always trying to grasp things, to know and understand them, but in the vaster subtle universe there are many things that cannot be grasped by the mind, they have to be known in another way. Now Aswapati is experiencing great new possibilities, seeing what our deathbound eyes cannot see, knowing that the human mind has never grasped, and he also feels a new power in him so that ‘all could be done...’ that ‘... no mortal will can dare’.

Courage is needed to do anything which seems at the limit of our capacities, and human beings do use their will-power to respond to challenges that demand great courage; yet however courageous the human will may be, there are certain things which we just do not have the strength to dare with our limited capacities; but Aswapati feels that he has moved into a Space and Time where ‘all could be done no mortal will can dare’. His experience is of ‘a limitless movement’: there is no end to what is moving there, but at the same time there is ‘a limitless peace’ – the movement and the peace are both endless.

In a profound existence beyond earth’s
Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams
Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul,
In an immaterial substance linked to ours
In a deep oneness of all things that are,
The universe of the Unknown arose.

Aswapati is experiencing ‘a profound existence beyond earth’s’; he has entered a kind of existence that is quite different from the life which we experience here on our material earth. That existence is ‘profound’, which means ‘deep’, unlike the surface life we normally live. Yet that ‘profound existence’ is connected to us, it is ‘Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams’. A ‘parent’ is a mother or a father, somebody who gives birth to a child; ‘our ideas and dreams’ are born from that ‘profound existence’; or if it is not exactly their ‘parent’, their origin, at least it is their ‘kin’. ‘Kin’ are relations, cousins or uncles and aunts, people who are related to you. That ‘profound existence beyond earth’s’ is ‘parent or kin to our ideas and dreams’. We do not live in a
purely material world. Although we live in a world that is dominated by matter nevertheless all kinds of non-material movements come to us from beyond the material universe and give rise to ‘ideas and dreams’ here. If we were living in a purely material universe, we could not have ‘ideas and dreams’ at all; they come to us from other realms. And in that ‘profound existence’ beyond our earth and the whole material universe, ‘Space’ is not just an immense emptiness, but a ‘vast experiment of the soul’. The cosmic soul and spirit, instead of holding all its possibilities hidden within itself, projects itself out to create a world, a universe, a manifestation, spread out in Space and in Time and individualised in uncountable individual forms. All its deep possibilities get spread out, projected. ‘Space is a vast experiment’, as if the cosmic soul wants to try out what will happen: “If I do this, if I spread myself out like this, allow all my different possibilities to interact independently in Space and Time instead of holding them within myself, what will happen?”

In that ‘profound existence’ there is ‘substance’ just as there is here. Here our substance is what we call Matter: inanimate matter like rock or sand, or living matter, physical substances of different kinds. There the ‘substance’ is ‘immaterial’, which means ‘not made of matter’. But that ‘immaterial substance’ is linked to our substance, it is connected with it in ‘a deep oneness of all things that are’. Everything is interconnected even here in our material universe, but here we feel the division and the separateness more; there in that ‘profound existence’ and that soul-space which Aswapati is experiencing, he sees ‘the universe of the Unknown’, rising up like a great mountain.

A self-creation without end or pause
Revealed the grandeurs of the Infinite:
It flung into the hazards of its play
A million moods, a myriad energies,
The world-shapes that are fancies of its Truth
And the formulas of the freedom of its Force.

Where there is existence there is always a corresponding creative conscious force. Within that ‘profound existence’ expressing itself in an ‘immaterial substance’ its Force reveals itself in a ‘self-creation’, proceeding out of itself without any end or even a pause: endlessly,
new forms, new movements, new possibilities are emerging which ‘revealed the grandeurs of the Infinite’ in magnificent beauty and power. Aswapati could see that the creative Force ‘flung into the hazards of its play / A million moods, a myriad energies’. To ‘fling’ means to ‘throw’ powerfully, energetically. ‘Hazard’ suggests danger, chance, and risk of the unexpected: you throw the dice, and do not know what is going to come up. There is a great game going on, this ‘experiment of the soul’, and being thrown into this ‘experiment’ are ‘a million’ different ‘moods’. When he says ‘a million’ the poet does not mean only one million, but an uncountable number of ‘moods’ or states of consciousness. We have different moods: some days we are in a good mood and feel happy and generous, on other days or at other times we feel bad and snap angrily at everybody, or we feel sad and depressed. In nature so many different moods can be experienced and seen: ‘a million moods, a myriad energies’. A ‘myriad’ means ‘so many that they cannot be counted’. In the subtle universe innumerable energies and forces and movements are all thrown out to interact, to play amongst themselves, and the consequences are unforeseen, they are matter of hazard, of chance.

Some of these ‘energies’ or these ‘moods’ even form themselves into worlds; ‘world-shapes that are fancies of its Truth’ – the Truth of that Existence and its Force. When we feel like doing something or eating something or experiencing something just like that, for no special reason, because of some spontaneous urge, we say ‘It is just a fancy’. In this ‘self-creation’ there are urges like that, there are ‘fancies’ that come up spontaneously – but they are the ‘fancies’ of the infinite Truth of that Existence and its creative Force, which take the form of entire worlds within that universe. Fancies are unpredictable, but there also are ‘formulas’. Scientists refer to ‘formulas’ which are like recipes for describing the way that different substances combine in ways that are predictable: ‘fancies’ are unpredictable, ‘formulas’ guide things in predictable directions. The creative Force is absolutely free to fulfil all its ‘fancies’, but it may choose to follow certain ‘formulas’.

    It poured into the Ever-stable’s flux
    A bacchic rapture and revel of Ideas,
    A passion and motion of everlastingness.
‘It’ – the ‘Force’ – ‘poured into the Ever-stable’s flux’: ‘flux’ means ‘a flow’. Like a river or sea it may come and go, it may be stronger or less strong, but it flows. Sri Aurobindo tells us that everything in our universe is moving – nothing is standing still, everything is flowing and changing; but all that movement can only happen because it is contained and supported by an eternal stability which does not move: the ‘Ever-stable’. Into that flow of the Ever-stable, the creative force is constantly pouring ‘A bacchic rapture and revel of Ideas’: formations, ideas, conceptions that can become realities. ‘Rapture’ is intense delight; in Greek and Roman mythology that feeling of intense delight, which in India we call ananda, and connect with soma, is attributed to the god of wine. The Greeks called him Dionysus, and believed that he had given their ancestors the gift of grape-vines. It is interesting that the Mother has given the spiritual significance of ‘Ananda’ to grapes, from which wine is made. The Romans called that god Bacchus. Here we have the adjective ‘bacchic’ which is based on his name. He was represented in paintings and sculptures leading a procession of animals, wood spirits and human beings, who all seem to be intoxicated, drunk, carried away with divine ‘rapture’: ‘a bacchic rapture and revel’. A ‘revel’ refers to a group of people who are happily celebrating, dancing and singing, enjoying a wonderful party and having delicious food and things to drink. Here it refers to the abundant creative ‘Ideas’ which are full of delight as they are poured into the universal ‘flux’ or flow where they play and interact and change. ‘Passion’ refers to intense feelings and emotion. Together all this revelry of ideas and feelings is poured into ‘The Ever-stable’s flux’ by the creative Force, forming an intense movement: ‘a motion of everlastingness’. There is no end to all this: everlasting and ever new, all these creative ideas pour into the flow.

There rose unborn into the Unchanging’s surge
Thoughts that abide in their deathless consequence,
Words that immortal last though fallen mute,
Acts that brought out from Silence its dumb sense,
Lines that convey the inexpressible.

The ‘Unchanging’s surge’: the word ‘surge’ suggests an ocean, with its powerful waves rising and falling. It is another way of expressing the flow of the ‘Ever-stable’, the permanent, the ‘Unchanging’,
which is vast like a limitless ocean. Into that flow, that Ocean, the Force is pouring its multitude of creative Ideas, and up out of the ocean rise up ‘Thoughts’ and ‘Words’ and ‘Acts’ and ‘Lines’. Because they have originated from the Truth of the Ever-Stable, the Unchanging, these Thoughts ‘abide in their deathless consequence’. Our thoughts come and go and usually they do not have much consequence, but because these Thoughts are ‘unborn’ they also do not die: they have a permanent existence. ‘To abide’ means to remain, to last, to stay: they ‘abide in their deathless consequence’. Words are spoken, we hear them for a moment, but then they fall ‘mute’ or silent; but the effect of the unborn Words that emerge from the ‘Unchanging’s surge’ still last, still endure, ‘immortal’ even when they can no longer be heard. Also emerging from that surge are ‘Acts that brought out from Silence its dumb sense’. They are actions and deeds that express deep significances held in the eternal Silence from which all possibilities and all actions emerge; they bring some of the infinite possibilities of the Silence out from that infinite potentiality: ‘sense’ here means significance or meaning; the significances and meanings held within the Silence do not get expressed verbally, in words or thoughts, but in ‘Acts’ that speak for themselves. And then the poet speaks of ‘Lines that convey’ or communicate ‘the inexpressible’. There are things in the Silence which do not get expressed in thoughts, or words or actions, but instead through ‘lines’. This is a word with a double meaning. If we take this line out of its context and read it by itself: ‘Lines that convey the inexpressible’ then we can apply it to this poem itself and say that it is full of lines of poetry ‘that convey the inexpressible’. But in the context, I believe that he is referring to lines that are seen. A great artist can draw or paint, sculpt or carve lines that convey a very deep and moving or illuminating suggestion of something that cannot be expressed in any other way. Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo speaks about this being the true mission of art: that in a line, in a form, some deep divine truth may be conveyed, communicated, or hinted at, which can never be fully expressed because it lies beyond all expression: it is ‘inexpressible’.

The Eternal’s stillness saw in unmoved joy
His universal Power at work display
In plots of pain and dramas of delight
The wonder and beauty of her will to be.

Aswapati perceives the ‘stillness’ of the Eternal, the Ever-stable and Unchanging, and at the same time the dynamic action of his Force, his universal creative Power. The Eternal in his ‘stillness’ is watching, observing, enjoying, supporting, sanctioning his Power at work. He is ‘unmoved’ but he is delighting, he is feeling joy as he sees his own dynamic Power displaying all the wonderful things that she can do, ‘the wonder and beauty of her will to be’. She displays them as if in ‘dramas’ – plays: ‘dramas of delight’ and ‘plots of pain’. A drama has a story, a ‘plot’; some plots involve pain and are not what we would call delightful, but Sri Aurobindo tells us that indifference, pain and joy are all disguises of the one delight of the Eternal. Whatever his ‘universal Power’ displays, he watches it in ‘unmoved joy’.

All, even pain, was the soul’s pleasure here;
Here all experience was a single plan,
The thousandfold expression of the One.

For the soul, here in this universe of the ‘Unknown’, everything – ‘even pain’ – is a delight, and ‘all experience’ is part of one ‘single plan’: ‘the thousandfold expression of the One’. The ‘plan’ on which that universe is built is that it should express the uncountable thousands and millions of varied and contrasting aspects of the ‘One’, the supreme Origin. This ‘universal Power’, is the Shakti, the conscious Force of the Eternal, the Mother. It is her task to create and display all this ‘thousandfold expression of the One’.

In the next line Sri Aurobindo turns back to Aswapati again:

All came at once into his single view;
Nothing escaped his vast intuitive sight,
Nothing drew near he could not feel as kin:
He was one spirit with that immensity.

Aswapati has been able to enter the subtle universe by a transformation, described in Canto Five of Book One, which has brought about the expansion of his experience of self, so that he is no longer limited to the indirect knowledge of the mind, but it is able to know directly with consciousness through identification. This means that when
he enters into this subtle universe, he can see it all at once, in one ‘single view’. He can see all its possibilities and everything that is going on there: ‘Nothing escaped his vast intuitive sight’. This is the highest level of intuition, which can see everything at one and the same time. In that universe are space and time, though of a different kind than what we know here; so different experiences are possible, there are movements of forces and beings, but ‘Nothing drew near he could not feel as kin’: Aswapati felt connected, related to everything that approached him. We have come across this word ‘kin’ before, meaning people and things and movements that feel close because they are a part of one’s own larger self. Everything there felt familiar to Aswapati because he was identified with it all, ‘He was one spirit with that immensity’ – with the vastness of that subtle universe.

Images in a supernal consciousness
Embodying the Unborn who never dies,
The structured visions of the cosmic Self
Alive with the touch of being’s eternity
Looked at him like form-bound spiritual thoughts
Figuring the movements of the Ineffable.

He sees ‘images’, which have been formed ‘in a supernal consciousness’, a consciousness on a very high level; those ‘images’ embody, they provide expressive forms, shapes, bodies, to ‘the Unborn who never dies’, the Supreme, the Immortal. These ‘images’ are ‘structured visions of the cosmic Self’: the universal Self of that universe envisions things and what it sees comes into existence as structures, as forms, which are full of life because they are touched by the eternity of being, of existence. Those ‘images’, those ‘structured visions’, those living forms ‘looked at him’ and he can look at them. They look ‘at him like form-bound spiritual thoughts’. Each of them is a spiritual thought that has taken on a shape, it has limited itself within a form in order to give a figure to or express ‘the movements of the Ineffable’. The ‘Ineffable’ can never be expressed fully, but those ‘images’, those ‘structured visions’, those ‘spiritual thoughts’ accept to be limited in a form in order to symbolize, express, give an expressive figure or representation to ‘the movements of the Ineffable’.
Aspects of being donned world-outline; forms
That open moving doors on things divine,
Became familiar to his hourly sight;
The symbols of the Spirit’s reality,
The living bodies of the Bodiless
Grew near to him, his daily associates.

There are ‘aspects of being’: pure existence is limitless in its
potentialities but certain aspects of it ‘donned world-outline’. ‘To
don’, it is a word that we use for putting on clothes; we ‘don’ a suit or
da dress. Some aspects of the infinite and eternal pure existence accept
to be outlined in the forms of a world, as if covering their limitlessness
with some clothes in order to be seen: they take on ‘world-outline’. Such forms, which ‘open moving doors on things divine, / Became
familiar to his hourly sight’. Again and again he is seeing wonderful
forms that reveal something divine, as if opening up a door, and this is
happening all the time, this is becoming ‘familiar to his hourly sight’.
These are all ‘symbols of the Spirit’s reality,’ and ‘living bodies of
the Bodiless’: of the transcendent existence that is beyond all form,
unlimited by any body, ‘the Bodiless’, the Transcendent. These beings
‘grew near’ to Aswapati and became ‘his daily associates’: he became
able to contact them and communicate with them on a regular basis;
this now becomes his daily living experience.

The exhaustless seeings of the unsleeping Mind,
Letterings of its contact with the invisible,
Surrounded him with countless pointing signs;
The voices of a thousand realms of Life
Missioned to him her mighty messages.

One of those ‘aspects of being’ is Mind, another is Life. Aswapati
becomes aware of a vast ‘unsleeping Mind’ which is always awake
and always seeing new forms, forces and possibilities. The power of
creative vision is a capacity of the Mind. What that Mind sees, the
‘seeings’ of that ‘unsleeping Mind’, can never be exhausted, they are
endless, they go on and on and on and on. They are all ‘Letterings’:
each of these ‘seeings’ is like a letter or a series of letters which
express the ‘contact’ which that unsleeping cosmic Mind has ‘with the
invisible’. Its ‘contact with the invisible’ gets expressed, written down
we could say, interpreted in ‘seeings’. Those ‘seeings’ surrounded Aswapati, ‘with countless pointing signs’: each of those ‘seeings’ is pointing in a different direction, indicating a way to go, something to be explored, some creative possibility of ‘the invisible’ which gets expressed in forms and movements that can be seen. He also becomes aware of ‘The voices of a thousand realms of Life’. The Life-power has a thousand different realms or aspects and each of them has a distinct voice, each of which is expressing, missioning, sending out, a mighty Message, which he hears.

Perhaps I should point out that everywhere in Savitri Sri Aurobindo is describing psychological states and experiences. The lines describe what is being experienced at a particular moment or in a particular state. That is important to remember. Sometimes we quote a particular line and say, “Sri Aurobindo says this”; but in Savitri whatever he describes relates to the state or experience which is being described at that passage. What we are being shown here relates to Aswapati’s experience when he first enters into the new Space and Time of the subtle universe. It is an entire creation which we do not normally experience because it lies behind all the physical appearances of our material world. Here when we are told that Aswapati was surrounded by ‘the exhaustless seeings of the unsleeping Mind’ which he experiences as ‘countless pointing signs’, this refers to the cosmic mind of the whole subtle universe which he has entered into. There the contacts of that Mind with the invisible are expressed in concrete visions which point out new possibilities to him; Life in that universe has a thousand realms and aspects, each of which conveys a particular mighty message to him.

Q: What part of Aswapati is having these experiences?

I think it must be what could be called his central being. In Book One, Canto Five we read how, as a result of his great aspiration, he experienced the liberation of the soul, so that his soul was no longer identified with nature and became free to have its own experiences. He experienced a transforming descent which affected his whole being, even down to the physical; as a result, he was given in his central consciousness a mastery over the subtle nature, which enabled him to enter into the subtle universe. Later we shall see that this is
not the whole story. When we reach the last sentence of this section, we shall be told that this experience is incomplete – something very important is missing from it. But nevertheless this subtle universe with all its many varied worlds offers Aswapati a vast field of experience of the subtle realities that underlie what we experience here in the material world.

So whether Aswapati in his physical body was walking up and down like Sri Aurobindo, or whether he was sitting in meditation, or what he was doing, we do not know; we are clearly told everywhere that he was aware: his central consciousness is having all these adventures and experiences, and from time to time Sri Aurobindo reminds that Aswapati is aware of his body in different ways, which change according to which plane of existence or which level of consciousness he is exploring at that particular stage of his journey. When all the instrumental being is integrated and harmonized around the soul centre, the integral consciousness of the individual can participate in the experience.

We may remember too what Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter¹, that here in Book Two it is no longer a matter of only an individual experience: Aswapati has been led to undertake this journey as a representative of the aspiration of the whole human race.

The heaven-hints that invade our earthly lives,
The dire imaginations dreamed by Hell,
Which if enacted and experienced here
Our dulled capacity soon would cease to feel
Or our mortal frailty could not long endure,
Were set in their sublime proportions there.

The intensity of what can be experienced there in the subtle worlds is much greater than what we could possibly experience or bear in our physical bodies; and it covers the whole range of experience from the ‘heaven-hints’ that sometimes ‘invade our earthly lives’. At some special moments, as Sri Aurobindo described in the first section of Canto 4 of Book One, human beings to get hints of wonderful, high, blissful experiences. In the ‘profound existence beyond earth’s’

¹. CWSA 27:30
which Aswapati has now entered, those same experiences ‘were set in their sublime proportions’. Here we get only little hints; there those same experiences were experienced directly, fully, to their highest extent. This is true not only for the ‘heaven-hints’ but also for those ‘imaginations’ that are ‘dreamed by Hell’, that come from the lowest perverted, distorted levels of consciousness where all kinds of terrible things are imagined. We get hints of those too in our life here, but if they were acted out – ‘enacted’ – if they were acted out ‘and experienced here’ the ‘dulled capacity’ of our physical being would soon stop feeling it: it would not be able to take in the intensity of those experiences; and our mortal weakness would not be able to endure them long, it would become unconscious or die. But there, these things are ‘set in their sublime proportions’ and are experienced to their full extent and range, their full power and intensity.

There lived out in their self-born atmosphere,
They resumed their topless pitch and native power;
Their fortifying stress upon the soul
Bit deep into the ground of consciousness
The passion and purity of their extremes,
The absoluteness of their single cry
And the sovereign sweetness or violent poetry
Of their beautiful or terrible delight.

There, in that world, these experiences, whether ‘heaven-hints’ or ‘dire imaginations’, were ‘lived out in their self-born atmosphere’, not limited by our material perceptions. There, ‘they resumed’, they took on again ‘their topless pitch’: there seems to be no end to their intensity and their natural in-born power. ‘Pitch’ is a word that is applied to degrees of loudness or intensity of sounds. This expression ‘topless pitch’ suggests the limitless intensity experienced in the subtle worlds.

These intense experiences exercise a ‘fortifying stress upon the soul’. They make a strong impression, whether delightful or painful; and that ‘stress’ that impression, that pressure on the soul, is ‘fortifying’: it makes the soul stronger. Whether they are blissful or terrible, the soul grows stronger from these experiences which, he says, ‘Bit deep into the ground of consciousness’. Artists use acid to ‘etch’, drawing an image on a metal plate, ‘the ground’, using needles of different sizes:
the acid bites into the metal to create fine or thicker lines to produce the image, which will then be covered with ink and used to print to make printed copies of it. If they want to show something very delicate and fine, they will use the acid sparingly, but if they want to make a very deep impression, they use more acid. The intense impressions which Aswapati is experiencing are like acid, burning very strong permanent marks on ‘the ground’ of Aswapati’s consciousness, marking it with ‘the passion and purity of their extremes’. Each of those extreme impressions is like a ‘single cry’, each expressing its own ‘absoluteness’, whether it is the experience of overwhelmingly powerful ‘sovereign sweetness’, or ‘violent poetry / Of their beautiful or terrible delight’. All of these experiences, whether beautiful or terrible, bring about or cause delight of one kind or another to the soul, nourishing it and helping it to grow stronger. In The Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo gives the example of traditional Indian aesthetics, which classifies the many different rasas or flavours that can be expressed in art, in drama, in music, in poetry, and recognises that even dreadful and terrifying rasas can give us delight of a certain kind. Similarly for the soul each of these experiences has its own unique taste and makes its own unique impression on the soul. It may be beautiful, it may be terrible, but each of them gives a unique kind of delight and nourishes the soul in its growth.

All thought can know or widest sight perceive
And all that thought and sight can never know,
All things occult and rare, remote and strange
Were near to heart’s contact, felt by spirit-sense.

I think I do not have to explain these lines, it is very clear. Does anybody want anything to be explained?

Q: What is meant by ‘spirit-sense’?

Just as we have physical senses through which we experience the material world around us, the spirit in its own way has senses with which it experiences the subtle contact of things.

This sentence refers to different ways of knowing: knowledge may come through thought, or by sight, and other things can be known by the heart’s feeling, and yet other things can be ‘felt by spirit-sense’.
These are different ways of perceiving and knowing things, and in that subtle universe Aswapati feels that he is offered an unlimited range of things to experience and know, and many possible ways of experiencing and knowing them.

Asking for entry at his nature’s gates
They crowded the widened spaces of his mind,
His self-discovery’s flaming witnesses,
Offering their marvel and their multitude.

He feels that a multitude of marvellous experiences are clamouring to enter his individual awareness and become part of him. They are ‘Asking for entry at his nature’s gates’. I remember that in one of the Upanishads it is said that our individual nature has nineteen gates, nineteen different openings by which we perceive things in one way or another, gates which open up our individual being to whatever experiences are around. Aswapati’s mind has become very, very vast, but all these experiences are also so many, so unlimited, that they crowd into his mind, where they act as ‘witnesses’. A witness is a person who has seen something which he can tell about: ‘bear witness to’; or it may be a sign of some kind which shows or indicates something. The experiences which are coming to Aswapati are ‘witnesses’ or signs of the extent and variety of his own self-discovery. He is discovering himself through all these different experiences, which offer him ‘their marvel and their multitude’: all the wonder and multiplicity of these endless experiences and possibilities.

These now became new portions of himself,
The figures of his spirit’s greater life,
The moving scenery of his large time-walk
Or the embroidered tissue of his sense:
These took the place of intimate human things
And moved as close companions of his thoughts,
Or were his soul’s natural environment.

Here we are shown the different ways in which these varied possibilities become a part of his self-experience as ‘new portions himself’, as if some door in himself has opened up, some new part of himself has been experienced; they may come as ‘figures’, the beings and forms and images that indicate different aspects of ‘his spirit’s
greater life’ as it greatens and widens; or they may come as ‘the moving scenery’ which surrounds him as he moves through time and space; or as ‘the embroidered tissue of his sense’. Sri Aurobindo often speaks of our senses as a net, a net which catches our sense impressions from the objects we encounter, as a fisherman catches fish and holds them. Here he uses the word ‘tissue’, like a fine piece of cloth on which these marvellous experiences appear like embroidery on the beautiful richly decorated fabric of the subtle sense experiences that he is having in the realms of the subtle universe. These new portions of himself, these ‘figures of his spirit’s greater life’, this new moving scenery as he explores that new space and time, these new subtle sense impressions, all ‘took the place of intimate human things / And moved as close companions of his thoughts’. These marvels replaced the close human experiences; they are communicating with him in his thoughts, or becoming the ‘natural environment’, the natural surroundings, of ‘his soul’. Now he is not occupied with the physical world but with this new world of subtle sense experience. It is a completely different kind of richly enlarged and intensified living.

Tireless the heart’s adventure of delight,
Endless the kingdoms of the Spirit’s bliss,
Unnumbered tones struck from one harmony’s strings;
Each to its wide-winged universal poise,
Its fathomless feeling of the All in one,
Brought notes of some perfection yet unseen,
Its single retreat into Truth’s secrecies,
Its happy sideline on the Infinite.

This is a great adventure like one of those romance poems of the Middle Ages in which the hero moves from one exciting episode to another: ‘Tireless the heart’s adventure of delight’ – there is no end to all these different ‘kingdoms’ which he can explore. All of them are ‘kingdoms of the Spirit’s bliss’ and each of them is like a ‘tone’ or note in music: ‘Unnumbered tones struck from one harmony’s strings’. All are part of one harmony but each has its own special note to contribute. Each of them ‘brought notes of some perfection yet unseen’ adding something unique to that ‘wide-winged universal poise, / Its fathomless feeling of the All in one’. It is as if each of these notes feels the oneness in everything and feels the oneness in
all the other notes, but each one ‘brought notes of some perfection yet unseen’. Each has its own individual, unique contribution to make, each has its own way of being connected to the ‘secrecies’ of the one Truth, its own path leading inwards to that vast Truth of Oneness, and each casts its own special ‘sidelight’ on the ‘Infinite’, its own unique viewpoint, its way of seeing and expressing the limitlessness that is beyond full expression.

All was found there the Unique has dreamed and made
Tinging with ceaseless rapture and surprise
And an opulent beauty of passionate difference
The recurring beat that moments God in Time.

The One, ‘the Unique’ has brought this Creation into existence, and everything that He has ‘dreamed and made’ is to be found there. Each of his creations is contributing its own special tinge, its special colour or flavour, its own special kind of ‘rapture and surprise’, to this ‘opulent beauty’, this rich luxuriant ‘beauty of passionate difference’. Each thing is unique in its own way, and all together are giving this ‘ceaseless rapture and surprise’ and this ‘opulent beauty’ to ‘the recurring beat that moments God in Time’. When the Eternal and the Infinite extends himself in Space and Time, he manifests himself in an infinite succession of moments, something like a heartbeat, the movement of ‘God in Time’, and every one of those moments is tinged with ‘ceaseless rapture and surprise’ and ‘an opulent beauty of passionate difference’.

The word ‘moment’ is of course normally used as a noun, but here it is most beautifully used as a verb. I have mentioned it before, but it is worth mentioning again now at the beginning of our exploration of Book Two, that one of the wonderful gifts that the English language offers to the poet is the possibility of using almost any word as any part of speech. So here the word ‘moment’, normally a noun, is used as a verb. I have mentioned before the very memorable line of the English master-poet Shakespeare where the king is very angry with his nephew and says, “But me no buts and uncle me no uncles.” ‘But’ is normally just a simple conjunction like ‘and’, linking two parts of a sentence; but in this case it is used as a verb in the imperative tense, and then again as a plural noun, ‘but me no buts’; then comes and ‘uncle
only was missing the sole timeless Word
That carries eternity in its lonely sound,
The Idea self-luminous key to all ideas,
The integer of the Spirit’s perfect sum
That equates the unequal All to the equal One,
The single sign interpreting every sign,
The absolute index to the Absolute.

In spite of all this opulent universal richness and all the powerful experiences it has to offer, something is missing, something very important: ‘the sole timeless Word / That carries eternity in its lonely sound’. This is perhaps the sound which we symbolize by the syllable ‘OM’, the origin of all other vibrations. That ‘timeless Word’ is expressing a timeless ‘Idea’, which in itself is the ‘key to all ideas’: it is the one original ‘Idea’ which has given birth to all possible ideas, and which, if caught, makes all other ideas understandable in themselves and in their relationships. That Word and that Idea express ‘The integer of the Spirit’s perfect sum’. An ‘integer’ is a whole number. When all the different expressions of the Spirit are added together, they sum up to a whole number, which ‘equates’ – makes an ‘equals’ sign – between ‘the unequal All’, the ‘All’ which is full of difference and variety, and ‘the equal One’, forever indivisible and unchanging. There is one ‘sole timeless Word / That carries eternity in its lonely sound’; there is one single Idea that is the ‘key to all ideas’; there is an ‘integer’, a whole number which brings all the variousness and differences of the universe together into ‘the Spirit’s perfect sum’; there is one ‘single sign’ which gives the meaning of all the other signs, all the symbolic forms, beings and movements that make up
the manifestation, and it is the ‘index to the Absolute’. Our ‘index’ finger is the one we use to point to things; an ‘index’ can be anything that is used as a pointer, an indication or a guide. The word ‘index’ is also used for the alphabetical list of topics in a scholarly book, where we can find the page number of whatever topic we need to know about. The ‘Absolute’ is beyond all relativities, but Sri Aurobindo seems to say here that there exists a clue, a Word, an Idea, a linking sign which reveals how each of the innumerable relativities in the manifestation is connected ‘to the Absolute’, the Transcendent. But that ‘index’ is missing from the opulence and beauty of the subtle universe which Aswapati has now entered, just as it cannot be found here in our material world. To find it he will have to go further, beyond the boundaries of the manifestation. He will eventually find it in Book Three. Meanwhile we shall continue to follow him in his quest, which will lead him through all the planes of cosmic existence.

End of Section 1
News of Savitri Bhavan
Appeal for Sangam Hall

November 24, 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of Savitri Bhavan, the day when our revered elder brother Nirodbaran laid the foundation stone. On that day he invoked the Blessings and Presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for the project and said:

I congratulate those lovers of Sri Aurobindo’s immortal epic Savitri who have conceived the idea of having a building here, the Savitri Bhavan. It is a pioneer attempt, started here before anywhere else, so far as I know.

This Savitri Bhavan project, now in its infant stage, is, if I may say so, a twin to the Matrimandir. The Matrimandir is much farther developed and already showing some of its future glory; this new project has a great potential and will be growing up to an extent we cannot easily foresee. I consider myself fortunate to have been asked to lay its foundation stone.¹

The following year, on the same date, architect Helmut presented us with his master-plan and model, according to which Savitri Bhavan has been developing ever since. The first phase building was inaugurated by Nirodbaran on August 8, 1999. On that occasion he said:

I am very happy to see that a large number of people have responded to the invitation from these wonderful workers, very sincere people who have done their best so that, as we can see, in a very short time the Savitri Bhavan is coming up. And there is no doubt about it that the Savitri Bhavan will go on growing, and soon we shall all be very happy to receive again another invitation in four or five years time.²

¹ Nirodbaran’s message when laying the foundation stone of Savitri Bhavan on November 24, 1995.
² Nirodbaran’s inaugural address on August 8, 1999 when opening the first permanent building of the Savitri Bhavan complex.
In fact, that invitation came in November 2004, when the Square Hall was opened. That day was almost the last on which Nirod-da was able to visit Savitri Bhavan. But his invocation of the Presence and Blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went on having its effect, which can still be felt today. The Main Building was inaugurated on 29 March 2008, just one month after the installation of the statue of Sri Aurobindo, gifted to Auroville by the Auroville Foundation, at the entrance.

Only one element remains for completion of the Main Building: the Sangam Hall, intended to host larger gatherings for Savitri reading and study, as well as the OM Choir and talks by guest-speakers such as the annual Dr. M.V. Nadkarni lectures. It is now planned to celebrate Savitri Bhavan’s 20th anniversary by inaugurating construction of this Hall, with the aim of completing it by November 2017.

We are appealing to all Savitri-lovers, and all well-wishers of Savitri Bhavan, for your generous support to this project.
Description:
A circular air-conditioned hall, accessible from ground floor and first floor levels, with stepped seating to accommodate about 200 people.

Construction is planned in three main stages:
1. Raw structure (c. 9 months, Rs. 45 lakh)     Target completion date August 2016
2. Finishing       (c. 9 months, Rs. 40 lakh)           May 2017
3. Equipment installation (c. 6 months, Rs. 40 lakh) November 2017

An amount of Rs. 40,00,000.- has already been deposited with the Auroville Finance Service earmarked for this construction. Funding is being sought for the remaining amount required. For guidance on how to give your support, please see the inside back cover of this issue.
Savitri Bhavan Master Plan
Calendar of Events
April 2015 to October 2015

Regular Weekly Activities:

Sundays 10.30-12 noon Savitri Study Circle

Mondays 7-8am Sanskrit Chanting
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

Tuesdays 9am-12.30pm Workshop on Integral Yoga, led by Ashesh Joshi
3-4pm ‘Yoga and the Evolution of Man’, led by Dr.Jai Singh
4-5pm L’Agenda de Mère: listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
5-6pm Savitri study in Tamil, led by Sudarshan
5.45-7.15pm OM Choir

Wednesdays 7-8am Sanskrit Chanting
5.30-6.30pm Reading The Life Divine, led by Shraddhavan

Thursdays 4-5pm The English of Savitri, led by Shraddhavan

Fridays 7-8am Sanskrit chanting
3-4pm ‘Yoga and the Evolution of Man’, led by Dr.Jai Singh
4-5pm L’Agenda de Mère – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
5.30-6.30pm Meditations with Hymns to Mystic Fire by Sri Aurobindo led by Nishta

Saturdays 3-5pm Integral Yoga sharing circle led by Manoj
4-5pm L’Agenda de Mère – listening to recordings with Gangalakshmi
5-6.30pm Satsang led by Ashesh Joshi
Monthly Activities: Full Moon Gatherings in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue every month on the Full Moon Day.

Special Events:

April: Three exhibitions: Meditations on Savitri : Books Eight to Twelve – 104 paintings made by Huta under the Mother’s guidance.
Sri Aurobindo : A Life-Sketch in Photographs
Transformation – installation by Adil Writer, Auroville artist
6 Film: Journey to the Life Divine – Part I
20 Film: Journey to the Life Divine – Part 2
25 Workshop by Alice Watson for Beginners in English
27 Film: Meditations on Savitri – Book 1: Canto 4: The Secret Knowledge, Part 2

May: Two Exhibitions continued : Sri Aurobindo : A Life-Sketch in Photographs; Transformation, installation by Adil Writer
1-31 Workshop by Alice Watson for Beginners in English
2 Savitri reading in Adil’s art work Transformation
8, 22 Workshop on Integral Healing by Dr.Geeta Auropremi
30

June: Exhibition continued: Sri Aurobindo : A Life-Sketch in Photographs
1-31 World Yoga Day – Asanas led by Monica and Workshop on Yoga by Ashesh Joshi
22 Film: Living with Savitri – Video of the 5th Dr.M.V.Nadkarni Memorial Lecture given by Dr. Prema Nandakumar at Savitri Bhavan on Feb.19, 2015.
29 Film: Meditations on Savitri : Book One Canto 5: The Yoga of the King: The Yoga of the Spirit’s Freedom and Greatness.
July:
1-31 Two Exhibitions: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 1: The Book of Beginnings; Sri Aurobindo: A Life-Sketch in Photographs* continued.

6 Film: *Planet Earth – The Future – Into the Wilderness*

13 Film: *OM Choir Auroville January 2015, with Narad at Savitri Bhavan*

20 Film: *Our Gratitude –* Musical offering composed by Shoba-di Mitra for the centenary of the first meeting of The Mother’s and Sri Aurobindo, performed by members of the Ashram Music Department in the Savitri Bhavan amphitheatre.

27 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 2: Cantos 1-4.*

August:
1-31 Three Exhibitions continued: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 1: The Book of Beginnings; Sri Aurobindo: A Life-Sketch in Photographs* and *Glimpses of The Mother: Photos with the texts.*

3 Film: *The Traveller and the Worlds – Part One of Savitri: 4th Dr. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture, given in August 2013 by Shraddhavan.*

10 Film: *Sri Aurobindo – A Life Divine*

17 Film: *Love and Death – a narrative poem by Sri Aurobindo: Film by Manohar of paintings by Priti Gosh, with reading by Cristof Pitoeff and music by Sunil.*

24 Film: *Journey of Love: 3rd Dr.Nadkarni Memorial Lecture given by Dr.Alok Pandey in 2012.*

31 Film: *Meditations on Savitri Book 2, Cantos 5 and 6*

November 24, 2015

Inauguration Ceremony for construction of the new SANGAM HALL
September:
1-31 Three Exhibitions continuing: Meditations on Savitri – Book 1: The Book of Beginnings; Sri Aurobindo : A Life-Sketch in Photographs and Glimpses of The Mother.
7 Film: Nirod-da: An inspiration – honouring the memory of Nirodbaran.
14 Film: A New Experiment in Education – Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education.
21 Film: Meditations on Savitri – Book 2: Cantos 7 to 15

October:
1-31 Two Exhibitions continuing: Sri Aurobindo : A Life-Sketch in Photographs and Glimpses of The Mother.
12 Film: Sri Aurobindo’s The Mother Part 1: Chapters 1-5. By the Audio-Visual Section of the Department of Physical Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram.
15 New Exhibition : Meditations on Savitri, Book Two : The Traveller of the Worlds and Book Three : The Book of the Divine Mother – 110 paintings made by Huta under the guidance of the Mother.
19 Film: Sri Aurobindo’s The Mother Part 2: Chapter 6 presenting the Four Great Aspects.
26 Film: Meditations on Savitri, Book 3 Cantos 1-4

The 6th Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture

Surrender in Savitri

will be given at Savitri Bhavan on Friday February 19, 2016, 4-5 pm by

Mr. Jamshed Mavalwalla

Refreshments will be served and transport will be available from behind the Ashram from 2.30 pm onwards

Everyone is welcome
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](http://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 send an offering in this way, please inform us at the time of sending, so that we can check up with the bank and acknowledge receipt as soon as possible.

**If you 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