Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

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The manifestation of the Supramental upon earth is no more a promise but a living fact, a reality.

It is at work here, and one day will come when the most blind, the most unconscious, even the most unwilling shall be obliged to recognise it.

THE MOTHER
MCW 15:96
We are in Book Two, The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds, following King Aswapati as he embarks on a great journey of exploration through all the planes of the universe. In the first section of this canto we read about the first experience he had when he ‘broke into another Space and Time’ and entered the universe of the subtle worlds. In this second section we shall read about the image of the ‘The World-Stair’ which gives the title to the canto.

There walled apart by its own innerness
In a mystical barrage of dynamic light
He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile
Erect like a mountain-chariot of the Gods
Motionless under an inscrutable sky.

Aswapati saw something which was protected by its quality of ‘innerness’: ‘walled apart by its own innerness’ and hidden away behind ‘a mystical barrage of dynamic light’. ‘Barrage’ is a French word meaning a dam or barrier. During the First World War this word came into English referring to the concerted firing of many big guns and cannons which made it impossible for soldiers to advance. Here Sri Aurobindo uses it to refer to a downpour of light which is not static but powerfully dynamic. What Aswapati sees beyond that barrier of light is ‘a lone immense high-curved world-pile’: a pile of worlds, which Sri Aurobindo likens to a mountain resembling a chariot. For certain festivals here in South India the images of the gods are taken out of their temple homes and carried in procession around the town, each in its own chariot. Those chariots are built to resemble gopurams, the towering gateways to temples, which have many levels rising up into the sky like mountains. Also here at certain times of year a very interesting effect appears in the evening sky: a high halo of glorious rainbow colours hangs over piled-up clouds,
moving slowly eastwards, lit up from behind by the setting sun. It always seems to me as if the gods are visiting, hiding behind their veils of brilliant light as their cloud-chariots move slowly forward. Here Sri Aurobindo gives the image of a high pile of worlds, level upon level, rising up like the levels of a mountain, or one of those mountain-shaped chariots in which the gods ride in procession. But this world-pile is ‘motionless’: unmoving. It is ‘erect’: standing upright ‘under an inscrutable sky’. ‘Inscrutable’ literally means ‘unreadable’: it is often used when referring to the expression on a person’s face; someone may put on an ‘inscrutable’ expression if they want to hide what they are thinking or feeling; or we may find it difficult to understand the facial expressions of people belonging to a different culture. Europeans used to describe Chinese and Japanese people as ‘inscrutable’ because they could not read their facial expressions easily and so could not understand what they were thinking or feeling. Here the sky above the world-pile is mysterious and unreadable – it is not clear what it holds or conceals or means.

As if from Matter’s plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable’s reign:
A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.

It is as if this ‘mountain chariot’ is standing on a ‘plinth’ or base. Sometimes a building or a statue will be placed upon a base; that base is called a ‘plinth’. Sri Aurobindo says that the world of matter forms a ‘plinth’ for level upon level of subtle worlds. The bottom of this plinth, this foundation, is ‘viewless’: it cannot be seen; and the top of the mountain is equally beyond the reach of sight. The poet refers to the ‘world-pile’ as ‘a carved sea of worlds’, as if it is made up of waves piled upon waves, tipped with foam: ‘foam-maned waves’. ‘Foam’ refers to the mass of white bubbles we see on the edge of breaking waves. A ‘mane’ is the long hair on the head of a lion or horse. When the weather is stormy and the sea is rough the waves may look like horses with flying white manes – we even call them ‘sea-horses’. The world-pile looks as if it is made up of waves upon waves, rising higher and higher – but these waves and this sea
are ‘motionless’, as if ‘carved’ – like a many-layered gopuram or a processional chariot for a god. The many levels of this ‘carved sea of worlds’ are ‘Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme’, ascending from level to level ‘towards breadths immeasurable’. The word ‘breadths’ is a noun connected with the adjective ‘broad’. We can measure how wide something is or how broad it is. As ‘width’ refers to how wide the thing is, similarly the noun from the adjective broad is ‘breadth’. As the sea of worlds rises higher and higher, it seems to be reaching broader and vaster levels which are ‘immeasurable’: they cannot be measured. The levels of this ‘world-pile’ are trying to ‘soar’ like a bird, rising higher and higher to reach ‘the Ineffable’s reign’: the transcendent realm beyond the universe which is ruled by ‘the Ineffable’ – the Inexpressible and Unknowable. Sri Aurobindo says, ‘A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown’. In the Indian tradition the number one hundred implies a certain level of completeness; we are supposed to live ‘a hundred years’ meaning a complete life. A hundred levels are lifting this mountain of subtle worlds up towards the Unknown, and its top is ‘viewless’ – it cannot be seen, just as the bottom of its material base cannot be seen.

So it towered up to heights intangible
And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast
As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live
Near to his dream of the Invisible.

‘Towered’ is a verb, meaning ‘to rise up like a high tower’. The ‘mountain-chariot’ of the ‘world-pile’ with its hundred levels ‘towered up to heights intangible’ – to heights that cannot be touched, or felt by the touch – ‘And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast’. On earth a tower reaches up into the sky, and unless it is covered by clouds or fog we can normally see the top of it; but Aswapati has moved into another Space and Time: this towering pile of worlds rises up not into the earthly sky but into the higher levels of the subtle universe. There the atmosphere is a ‘hushed conscious Vast’: an immense silent consciousness. Sri Aurobindo compares it to an earthly Gopuram: ‘a storeyed temple-tower’. A building may have more than one storey: ground floor, first floor, second floor and so on. Similarly the temple towers that we see here in South India have a huge gate that forms
the plinth above which many levels or storeys rise up and up. If you look carefully you will see that those layers represent worlds. Each level is a world: on each level the beings of that world are carved standing with their consorts and animal mounts and looking down at our world below. Human beings have built those towers to express their intuition of subtler worlds beyond our own, and their aspiration to rise up through them to reach the highest consciousness: they have been ‘Built by the aspiring soul of man to live / Near to his dream of the Invisible.’ Sri Aurobindo shows us that the towers of tall religious buildings erected by human beings are, consciously or unconsciously, images of the ‘world-pile’ of subtle planes of existence, invisible to us, which link our world of matter to the transcendent planes of ‘the Ineffable’s reign’.

Infinity calls to it as it dreams and climbs;
Its spire touches the apex of the world;
Mounting into great voiceless stillnesses
It marries the earth to screened eternities.

Here Sri Aurobindo changes the tense of the verbs from the past to the present. We can notice throughout the poem that when he uses the past tense he is following the story – in this case, what Aswapati saw and experienced. He uses the present tense to make a general statement with a wider application. Now he is making a general statement and has skilfully done it in such a way that it applies both to the ‘world pile’ of the subtle planes of existence and to the temple tower that human aspiration builds here on earth. ‘Infinity calls to it as it dreams and climbs’: the many levels of the tower correspond to dreams of higher and higher realities and planes of existence, trying to reach Infinity, the boundlessness that exerts its attraction on our souls. ‘Its spire touches the apex of the world;’ A ‘spire’ is the tall steeply-pointing structure at the top of a church-tower. There are several churches in Pondicherry which have such spires. ‘Apex’ means the highest point or summit. The topmost point of the world-pile touches ‘the apex of the world’: the very highest level of the manifested universe. As it rises up through the great voiceless stillness of silent realms, it ‘marries the earth to screened eternities’ creating a connecting link between our earth, our material plane of existence, and eternal realms which are ‘screened’ or veiled from us so that we cannot perceive them.
Amid the many systems of the One
Made by an interpreting creative joy
Alone it points us to our journey back
Out of our long self-loss in Nature’s deeps;
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms:
It is a brief compendium of the Vast.
This was the single stair to being’s goal.

‘The One’, the Divine, has created many ‘systems’: many universes and cosmoses made by his ‘interpreting creative joy’: a delight of creation which interprets and expresses the intention of the One in the form of many different systems. This ‘world-pile’ is one of those, the only one amongst them which can show us the way back ‘Out of our long self-loss in Nature’s deeps’. Our souls have plunged into the inconscience which forms the viewless base of the World-Stair. Through evolution we have risen up a little way and become partly conscious, able to recognise that we are lost in a state of ignorance and have forgotten where we have come from, who we are and why we are here. But there is a way ‘Out of our long self-loss’. We have to climb back up that world-stair from level to level, individually and as a species, through the process of evolution. That is our journey back, which in The Life Divine Sri Aurobindo refers to as ‘the human journey’.

In the last section of Book One, Canto Five, Aswapati saw ‘a golden ladder carrying the soul, / Tying with diamond threads the Spirit’s extremes.’ That ladder is ascending and descending between the ‘Spirit’s extremes’: the utter freedom, infinity and eternity of the Oneness beyond manifestation at one end and the inconscience of Matter at the other, uniting them and linking ‘creation to the Ineffable’. Now he has stepped into another Space and Time and is seeing that ladder in another way, as the ‘world-pile’, which ‘Planted on earth ... holds in it all realms:’ Matter is the base, the plinth, but this ‘carved sea of worlds’ holds all the planes of existence within it: ‘It is a brief compendium of the Vast.’ ‘Compendium’ is a word which we do not use much these days: it means a compressed version of something much bigger or longer, giving a brief outline of the whole. Aswapati

1. Savitri p.89
sees that this ‘compendium’ of the entire vast cosmos offers a way up and out of our lost state here in the ignorance: it is ‘the single stair’ to the goal of our individual existence and all existence.

A summary of the stages of the spirit,
Its copy of the cosmic hierarchies
Refashioned in our secret air of self
A subtle pattern of the universe.

A ‘summary’ is a text which gives a brief overview of a much longer one. M.P. Pandit has written a small book called ‘A Summary of Savitri’. Here Sri Aurobindo says that the ‘World-Stair’ which Aswapati is seeing gives a ‘summary’ or compact overview of all the planes of manifested existence, ‘the stages of the spirit’: the steps that the spirit has followed in the involution process down from the supreme state, creating one by one these realms and worlds in its descent to Matter, until it is absorbed in the Inconscient. Evolution must climb back up step by step through all these planes. He also says that it is a ‘copy of the cosmic hierarchies’: an image of all the different levels and powers of the universe. The word ‘hierarchy’ implies an order of command, with one highest authority at the top, which delegates power and responsibility in an ordered way – for example, in an army there is one supreme commander and beneath him are his generals, each of whom commands a section of the army and has other officers beneath him, who give orders through sergeants to the ordinary soldiers. The order of the universal planes forms a hierarchy, from Sachchidananda through Supermind and Overmind to the various Mind levels and Life levels down to the subtle physical and finally to gross physical Matter. That hierarchy has created a copy of itself in our inner consciousness, ‘our secret air of self’, so that it is possible for us human beings, deep within ourselves, to experience its different levels.

It is within, below, without, above.

That copy or representation of the entire universe is inside us, below us, outside and all around us, as well as above us.

Acting upon this visible Nature’s scheme
It wakens our earth-matter’s heavy doze
To think and feel and to react to joy;
It models in us our diviner parts,
Lifts mortal mind into a greater air,
Makes yearn this life of flesh to intangible aims,
Links the body’s death with immortality’s call:

Aswapati saw this ‘summary of the stages of the spirit’ veiled behind ‘a mystic barrage of dynamic light’; but it is always acting upon our world, and having an effect on ‘this visible Nature’s scheme’: our world is constantly being affected by influences from those other worlds. Their effect here is to waken up ‘our earth-matter’s heavy doze’ to greater consciousness and higher states. Matter as we know it here on earth is in a ‘doze’: a heavy sleepy state of unconsciousness. It needs to be stimulated by influences from subtler worlds to wake it up so that it can begin ‘To think and feel and to react to joy’. Human beings are not like ‘sea and sky and stone’¹; in us ‘earth-matter’ has woken up a little bit and developed the capacity to live; living matter has developed the capacity to think and to feel delight. That is the result of a pressure, an influence from higher subtler planes of existence: life planes and mind planes. Other higher possibilities are also exerting their influences on earth evolution, acting on human beings and modelling within us ‘our diviner parts’ – our higher spiritual capacities. We mortals have minds which seem to be dependent on our physical brains. What makes us aspire for higher states of being that are not focussed only on material needs? Influences from those subtle planes lift our mortal minds up ‘into a greater air’, so that they begin to perceive higher things, such as the beauty of nature, the beauty of art and music, and even things beyond that. The life-force in our physical bodies uses the senses to tell us about the material world around us; but the influence of the higher planes wakes us up to long for things that are beyond the reach of our senses, things that we cannot hear or taste or touch: ‘intangible aims’.

The influence of the higher subtler worlds links our awareness of death with a longing for immortality. All these influences wake up in us a sense that there must be higher possibilities, so that we no longer feel content simply to live the best we can from cradle to grave and wish for nothing more; they make us dream of a greater existence in the midst of higher things.

¹. Savitri p.129
Out of the swoon of the Inconscience
It labours towards a superconscient Light.

To ‘swoon’ means ‘to lose consciousness’: the blood runs away from your head and you fall unconscious. The influence of that ‘world-stair’ of higher planes of existence, that ‘copy of the cosmic hierarchies’, wakes up in our ‘earth-matter’ the urge to emerge from ‘the swoon of the Inconscience’, and move upwards ‘towards a superconscient Light’ far beyond the reach of our present consciousness.

If earth were all and this were not in her,
    Thought could not be nor life-delight’s response:
    Only material forms could then be her guests
    Driven by an inanimate world-force.

In the Indian system, earth is the representative of the material principle. ‘If earth were all’, if matter alone existed and the world-stair of higher possibilities were not in her, then in this material world there would be no possibility of thought or thinking beings; there could not even be any life to take delight in the material world. There would be only ‘sea and sky and stone’: a purely material world with no other possibilities. ‘Only material forms’, ‘Driven by an inanimate world-force’, could then be the guests of our Mother Earth. When astronomers, cosmolgists and physicists look out into the universe through their telescopes that is all that they can see at present: material forms ‘driven by an inanimate world-force’ of material energy.

    Earth by this golden superfluity
    Bore thinking man and more than man shall bear;
    This higher scheme of being is our cause
    And holds the key to our ascending fate;
    It calls out of our dense mortality
    The conscious spirit nursed in Matter’s house.

‘Superfluity’ means ‘more than necessary’; Earth has been given something much more than would be necessary for a purely material existence. Because of the golden superabundance provided by the subtler planes of existence earth has been able to give birth to ‘thinking man’; and evolution has not ended on earth: she will give birth to higher beings, who are ‘more than man’. ‘This higher
scheme of being is our cause’: without it we would not be here at all, and it ‘holds the key to our ascending fate’. We often think that the answer to what we are and why we are like this is to be found by studying our physical origins in the far distant past. But if we look back into the past we can only see the beginnings of our evolutionary emergence – not the cause or purpose of our existence. It is the series of higher planes, ‘This higher scheme’, which can really give the answer to why we are here, and what our ultimate destiny will be. It ‘holds the key to our ascending fate’. All those higher levels are calling to ‘The conscious spirit nursed in Matter’s house’: hidden within this dense material body is a conscious spirit; Matter is nursing that spirit and helping it to mature and become independent, and the higher levels of consciousness are calling it to evolve further and further.

The living symbol of these conscious planes,
Its influences and godheads of the unseen,
Its unthought logic of Reality’s acts
Arisen from the unspoken truth in things,
Have fixed our inner life’s slow-scaled degrees.

The ‘world pile’ that Aswapati sees is the ‘living symbol’ of the many planes of existence which are more conscious than our own. The influences and beings of those unseen planes have ‘Arisen from the unspoken truth in things’, the creative truth underlying the entire manifestation. They ‘Have fixed our inner life’s slow-scaled degrees’: the ascending steps of our developing inner life. Behind all this there is a logic which is not based on human reason, but the ‘unthought logic’ of the underlying Reality which is shaping the way that things happen. That logic expresses ‘the unspoken truth in things’. That is how the world-stair has come into existence, and its many levels have fixed the stages of our inner life. We cannot jump from one state of consciousness to another: we have to go up the stair, up the ladder of existence, step by step, however long it may take us.

Its steps are paces of the soul’s return
From the deep adventure of material birth,
A ladder of delivering ascent
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.
These are the steps by which our souls must return to their Origin from this ‘deep adventure of material birth’ which they have undertaken. They correspond to the rungs of the evolutionary ladder by which Nature evolves towards the divine life.

Once in the vigil of a deathless gaze
These grades had marked her giant downward plunge,
The wide and prone leap of a godhead’s fall.
Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.

These universal planes of existence, the steps by which the soul can climb back towards its origin, also correspond to the stages of the involution, Nature’s ‘giant downward plunge’ into the Inconscience. They have been manifested in the course of the ‘wide and prone leap’ of her fall from her divine state.

The great World-Mother by her sacrifice
Has made her soul the body of our state;
Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness
Divinity’s lapse from its own splendours wove
The many-patterned ground of all we are.

That ‘fall’ did not happen accidentally. This entire manifestation has come about through a conscious sacrifice of ‘The great World-Mother’. Her soul has become ‘the body of our state’. In her divinity, she has accepted the ‘sorrow and unconsciousness’ of material existence. Her ‘lapse’ or fall from her own splendid divine state has woven ‘The many-patterned ground of all we are’: the basis of this evolutionary creation. So what is Matter? It is a very dense expression of the soul of the Supreme Mother. Sri Aurobindo explains this great mystery:

An idol of self is our mortality.
Our earth is a fragment and a residue;
Her power is packed with the stuff of greater worlds
And steeped in their colour-lustres dimmed by her drowse;
An atavism of higher births is hers,
Her sleep is stirred by their buried memories
Recalling the lost spheres from which they fell.

‘Our mortality’ – our death-bound state – is ‘An idol of self’. An ‘idol’ is a material image which embodies a divine presence. Earlier,
Sri Aurobindo told us that our ‘earth-matter’ is in a ‘doze’: a heavy sleepy state. In the previous sentence he told us that Matter is the soul of the Supreme Mother, who in a splendid sacrifice has accepted ‘sorrow and unconsciousness’, in order to provide a ground for the material creation. Here he tells us that ‘Our earth is a fragment and a residue’: earth, the material principle, is a ‘fragment’, a part of something vaster, and ‘a residue’ – the remains of something, something left over. Then he explains further: ‘Her power is packed with the stuff of greater worlds’: this sleepy unconscious earth-matter contains within it traces of the substance of greater, higher and more conscious worlds; it is ‘steeped in their colour-lustres dimmed by her drowse’, soaked with, impregnated by, the wonderful colourful lights of those greater worlds, which here have become dim because of the sleepy unconscious state, the ‘drowse’ of matter. But the sleepy state of earth is ‘stirred by their buried memories / Recalling the lost spheres from which they fell’: memories of those higher states and worlds are packed into matter, and that is why earth can give birth to life and mind and spirit. This is possible because ‘An atavism of higher births is hers’. ‘Atavism’ means the expression of characteristics that belonged to distant forefathers. This earth-matter is a ‘fragment and a residue’ of higher states, earlier embodiments. The memories of those higher births are stirring her present sleepy state.

Unsatisfied forces in her bosom move;  
They are partners of her greater growing fate  
And her return to immortality;

The essence of all the higher planes has been crammed into earth, the symbol of the material principle. In the ‘bosom’, the heart, of material nature, ‘Unsatisfied forces’ from those higher worlds are moving. They are helping her to fulfil her greater destiny: ‘They are partners of her greater growing fate / And her return to immortality’. Because those forces are within matter, evolution happens: the material world cannot remain purely material because it contains within it ‘Unsatisfied forces’ of life and mind and even higher levels of consciousness.

They consent to share her doom of birth and death;  
They kindle partial gleams of the All and drive
Her blind laborious spirit to compose  
A meagre image of the mighty Whole.

Those forces ‘consent’, they agree to share the fate of earth: ‘her doom of birth and death’, of limitation and incapacity. Within her, they ‘kindle partial gleams of the All’; ‘To kindle’ means ‘to light a fire’. Within this material world, those forces from higher planes light up ‘partial gleams’ of the omnipresent Reality; and they keep driving the earth goddess so that she cannot rest. Whenever Sri Aurobindo shows her to us we see her toiling, struggling, in labour. Here he says that those impulses from the higher planes drive ‘Her blind laborious spirit to compose’ or put together ‘A meagre image of the mighty Whole’. ‘Meagre’ means small and insufficient. The blind hard-working spirit of the earth is being impelled by her ‘atavism of higher births’ to create a poor and imperfect image of the entire universe.

The calm and luminous Intimacy within  
Approves her work and guides the unseeing Power.  
His vast design accepts a puny start.

Within all this, the Supreme is also present as a ‘calm and luminous Intimacy’. Someone who is intimate with us knows our secrets, knows all about us. Within the earth is a calm Presence full of light, who knows everything about her. That is the one whose ‘gaze’ has watched ‘her giant downward plunge’, her sacrifice, and knows its purpose. He is giving his consent and approval to her work and constantly guiding her. So although she seems to be unconscious, although she seems to be blind, her ‘unseeing Power’ is guided by the ‘Intimacy within’. He has a ‘vast design’, an immense intention for the full evolution of the multiplicity; but he accepts a ‘puny start’. ‘Puny’ means ‘weak’, ‘without strength’. The state of the earth as we see it now is only a small, weak beginning of the fulfilment of the Supreme’s ‘vast design’.

An attempt, a drawing half-done is the world’s life;  
Its lines doubt their concealed significance,  
Its curves join not their high intended close.

This means that the life of the world as we know it, which strikes us as so imperfect and unsatisfactory, is just an attempt or a half-finished
drawing; it is imperfect because it is not finished. The lines of this sketch, this attempt, are not confident about their meaning, which is still ‘concealed’. Those curving lines are not yet complete, they have not yet joined ‘their high intended close’: so far, they have not reached the point where they are intended to end. The life of our world is like an unfinished work of art.

Yet some first image of greatness trembles there,
And when the ambiguous crowded parts have met
The many-toned unity to which they moved,
The Artist’s joy shall laugh at reason’s rules;
The divine intention suddenly shall be seen,
The end vindicate intuition’s sure technique.

Even as it is, even though it is only half complete, ‘some first image of greatness trembles there’. Even now we can get a first glimpse of the future beauty and glory of life. Sri Aurobindo says that when all the different parts of this work-in-progress reach the ‘many-toned unity’, the complex and many-coloured harmony towards which they are moving, then ‘The divine intention suddenly shall be seen’: we shall be able to see what the Artist was patiently working towards. The divine Artist himself will feel a great delight at the fulfilment of his work, and he will ‘laugh at reason’s rules’: at all the reasonable critics who were saying that he was doing everything wrong and contrary to the rules of art. He will be able to laugh, because the end-result of his work will ‘vindicate intuition’s sure technique’. The Artist has not been following the rules set by human reason; instead he has been guided by ‘intuition’, which has a much clearer feeling of how to achieve the wished-for effect. This is not obvious while the Artist is still at work, but when he has finished, his ‘divine intention suddenly shall be seen’, and everyone will understand that his ‘technique’, his way of doing it was justified. As long as the work is still in progress, it is ‘ambiguous’ – the meaning and significance of all its ‘crowded parts’ remain unclear. But when all of them have reached the ‘many-toned unity’ towards which he was moving them, he will feel the joy of fulfilled creation, and we shall suddenly understand what he was aiming at all the time. We shall have to admit that he was doing it just as it had to be done, and ‘intuition’s sure technique’ will be vindicated.
A graph shall be of many meeting worlds,
A cube and union-crystal of the gods;
A Mind shall think behind Nature’s mindless mask,
A conscious Vast fill the old dumb brute Space.

A ‘graph’ is a diagram from which we can draw information. Here Sri Aurobindo says that when the divine ‘Artist’s’ work is complete, it will indicate the connections between all these different worlds, ‘many meeting worlds’. It will be a ‘cube’, a perfect platonic form which symbolises manifestation, creation, and a ‘union-crystal of the gods’: a coming together in one crystal of all the powers of all the gods. Then we shall experience that behind the apparently ‘mindless mask’ of material Nature, a ‘Mind’ is at work; instead of looking out beyond our earth atmosphere and seeing empty Space, we shall realise that it is a ‘conscious Vast’ – an immense divine presence pervading and surrounding everything.

This faint and fluid sketch of soul called man
Shall stand out on the background of long Time
A glowing epitome of eternity,
A little point reveal the infinitudes.

Human beings are also part of the incomplete artwork of the Divine: now the human race appears in it as a ‘faint and fluid sketch of soul’, whose significance is also ambiguous and unclear. But when the work is finished, Man, humanity, will stand out clearly against ‘the background of long Time’ as a shining figure of outstanding importance: ‘A glowing epitome of eternity’. An ‘epitome’ is an example or summary in which all significant characteristics are gathered together and exemplified. In the final picture, humanity will be seen against the background of all the aeons of evolutionary time as ‘A glowing epitome of eternity’. This one ‘little point’, the human figure – will ‘reveal the infinitudes’: stand for, exemplify and reveal the significance of all the infinite infinities.

A Mystery’s process is the universe.
At first was laid a strange anomalous base,
A void, a cipher of some secret Whole,
Where zero held infinity in its sum
And All and Nothing were a single term,
An eternal negative, a matrix Nought:
Into its forms the Child is ever born
Who lives for ever in the vasts of God.

This is one of several places in the poem where Sri Aurobindo gives us a hint about his view of the universe, which he characterises as ‘A Mystery’s process’. It started, he says, with the laying of ‘a strange anomalous base’, a foundation that was self-contradictory: that base was a ‘void’, an emptiness, or a ‘cipher’, which is the Arabic zero sign; but this word has other meanings as well; for instance, it can refer to a secret sign, or a language made up of secret signs, a code. This ‘cipher’ indicates ‘some secret Whole’ in which ‘zero held infinity in its sum / And All and Nothing were a single term’. This ‘zero’ can be seen as empty or as full, packed full of potentiality; it can be read as ‘An eternal negative’ or as a ‘matrix Nought’: as a Nothingness or as an Emptiness which is a mother, which gives birth to many, many forms. Into the forms of that mysterious, anomalous ‘matrix Nought’ a ‘Child’ is born again and again and again – a child ‘Who lives for ever in the vasts of God’. This ‘Child’ makes us think of Hiranyagarbha or the Golden Embryo – the aspect of the Divine dwelling in the subtle worlds and dreaming up all the forms of the material world; but we also have the idea of God being born again and again in all the forms of the material universe.

A slow reversal’s movement then took place:
A gas belched out from some invisible Fire,
Of its dense rings were formed these million stars;
Upon earth’s new-born soil God’s tread was heard.
Across the thick smoke of earth’s ignorance
A Mind began to see and look at forms
And groped for knowledge in the nescient Night:

First ‘a strange anomalous base’ was laid. Next, ‘A slow reversal’s movement ... took place’. Something was turned inside out, and out of ‘some invisible Fire’ in the subtle worlds, ‘a gas belched out’. From the ‘dense rings’ of that gas or vapour ‘these million stars’ were formed. The next step is the formation of Matter as we know it: ‘earth’s new-born soil’. This does not necessarily refer to our planet, but perhaps rather to the element ‘earth’ – matter as such. Scientists
tell us that the atoms which constitute the material elements which make up our world were formed within stars; eventually these atoms aggregated around their mother stars to form planets such as our earth, on which life and consciousness could eventually emerge in physical forms: ‘Upon earth’s new-born soil God’s tread was heard’. In that primary state, earth is in a state of complete ignorance as if enveloped in thick smoke; but even in the midst of that Ignorance, the principle of ‘Mind’ ‘began to see and look at forms’. It began to grope ‘for knowledge in the nescient Night’. When we are in darkness and cannot see our way, we reach out our hands and try to find out where we are: we grope. If we are in a house we may grope for a light switch, a torch, or for matches and a candle. That ‘Mind’, emerging in the ‘nescient Night’ of material existence, began to grope, to feel around ‘for knowledge’ – for the light of consciousness. ‘Nescent’ means not-knowing, without knowledge.

Caught in a blind stone-grip Force worked its plan
And made in sleep this huge mechanical world,
That Matter might grow conscious of its soul
And like a busy midwife the life-power
Deliver the zero carrier of the All.

At the beginning of the universe, the creative conscious ‘Force’ could not move and act freely because there were only material forms: it was caught in the ‘blind stone-grip’ of Matter. But even in that state of deep sleep, it went on working out its plan. The result was ‘this huge mechanical world’ which seems like a machine because the laws of physics, of matter, seem to operate without consciousness. But that is only an appearance; in fact there is a plan and a purpose underlying all its movements and forces. Material energy drove the force of evolution so that ‘Matter might grow conscious of its soul’; so that ‘the life-power’, like ‘a busy midwife’ who helps mothers to deliver their babies, may help that mysterious ‘matrix Nought’, the ‘zero’ who was carrying within her ‘the All’, to safely deliver all the infinite possibilities and potentialities she was pregnant with.

Because eternal eyes turned on earth’s gulfs
The lucent clarity of a pure regard
And saw a shadow of the Unknowable

19
Mirrored in the Inconscient’s boundless sleep,  
Creation’s search for self began its stir.

This is really mysterious, isn’t it? How and why did Creation start? Sri Aurobindo says here that it was because ‘eternal eyes’ saw a possibility ‘Mirrored in the Inconscient’s boundless sleep’. Those eyes carry their own light and their own purity; they look with the ‘lucent clarity of a pure regard’ and see things as they really are. They looked into the deep dark places of the material world, ‘earth’s gulfs’, and saw there, as if in a mirror, ‘a shadow of the Unknowable’. The ‘Unknowable’ is the Supreme Reality in its ultimately mysterious and ineffable aspect. Because of this perception, by ‘eternal eyes’ of a shadowy reflection of the Supreme ‘mirrored’ in ‘earth’s gulfs’, in the boundless sleep of the Inconscient, ‘Creation’s search for self began its stir’. Perhaps we can say that this is how and why the evolutionary adventure began.

A spirit dreamed in the crude cosmic whirl,  
Mind flowed unknowing in the sap of life  
And Matter’s breasts suckled the divine Idea.

Nowadays we see amazingly beautiful images, photographed from the Hubble telescope, of the ‘cosmic whirl’. These are purely material forms, and in that sense ‘crude’, basic and undeveloped; but within all that, a spirit is dreaming; a conscious Vast is filling all that Space; and here on earth, where there are living forms, ‘Mind’ is already flowing ‘in the sap of life’. When life is able to produce sufficiently complex forms, then ‘Mind’ can reveal its presence; but long before that, the principle of Mind was already flowing, potentially, ‘in the sap of life’. To us, Matter seems to be totally nescient and inconscient; but in fact Matter is our mother and our nurse, and even before there were any living or conscious forms, it has been suckling and nourishing the ‘divine Idea’ which will grow up as the Golden Child.

A miracle of the Absolute was born;  
Infinity put on a finite soul,  
All ocean lived within a wandering drop,  
A time-made body housed the Illimitable.  
To live this Mystery out our souls came here.
The outcome of this ‘Mystery’s process’ is that ‘the Absolute’, the transcendent One, puts on a ‘finite soul’, in each of its multitude of individualities. In each of them the infinite and eternal Divine is present: ‘All ocean lived within a wandering drop’. Each soul is a ‘wandering drop’ but contains within it the vastness of the entire ocean. ‘A time-made body’, born in time, made out of matter, can house ‘the Illimitable’. That is why we are all here: ‘To live this Mystery out our souls came here.’ Our souls have accepted to be part of this Mystery and to follow it through its whole process from beginning to fulfilment. We have said “Yes, we will undertake this adventure”: this plunge into inconscience, this adventure of involution and evolution that is to be lived out in the material world.

End of Section 2

Section 3, lines 239-56

A Seer within who knows the ordered plan
Concealed behind our momentary steps,
Inspires our ascent to viewless heights
As once the abysmal leap to earth and life.

This is a general statement, not part of the story of King Aswapati. Sri Aurobindo says that within each of us there is a being who has a power of vision, a rishi or ‘Seer’, who has the knowledge of ‘the ordered plan’ that is hidden behind all the little steps that we take in life and all the things that we do from moment to moment in our lives. That being of vision and knowledge hidden within us is inspiring our ‘ascent’, our rise, to ‘viewless heights’, to heights that we cannot see as yet, just as it once inspired our souls to take ‘the abysmal leap to earth and life’. Our souls have dived down from the original state of Oneness, of pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss where they originated, to take part in the adventure of involution and evolution, to participate in ‘the ordered plan’ foreseen by that Seer within us. We read in the previous section about the ‘World-Mother’ taking this plunge; with her, all our souls have also plunged, inspired by the ‘Seer within’. We have taken this ‘leap’ into the abyss and landed up here in the material universe, not by chance, but as part of the ‘ordered plan’ which lies behind it. That is true for all of us, just as it is for Aswapati.
His call had reached the Traveller in Time.
Apart in an unfathomed loneliness,
He travelled in his mute and single strength
Bearing the burden of the world’s desire.

The call of that ‘Seer’ had ‘reached the Traveller in Time’. The ‘Traveller in Time’ is the Divine dwelling in the world, the Divine soul in each of us following the evolutionary journey. In Book One Canto Four, ‘The Secret Knowledge’, Sri Aurobindo tells us:

The Absolute, the Perfect, the Immune,
One who is in us as our secret self,
Our mask of imperfection has assumed,
He has made this tenement of flesh his own,
His image in the human measure cast
That to his divine measure we might rise; …
As one forgetting he searches for himself;
As if he had lost an inner light he seeks:
As a sojourner lingering amid alien scenes
He journeys to a home he knows no more.

There Sri Aurobindo refers to the inner Divine Presence in us as ‘the explorer and the mariner’, ‘the adventurer and cosmologist’ and ‘the sailor on the flow of Time’¹. Here it is Aswapati who embodies this ‘Traveller in Time’, carrying the Divine Presence within him on this inner journey through the planes and realms of universal existence. He is ‘apart’, separated from everything that is happening here in the human world, ‘in an unfathomed loneliness’. There seems to be no bottom, no end, to this loneliness; he is all alone. He is travelling in his own ‘mute’ – silent – and ‘single strength’, and he is carrying with him, Sri Aurobindo says, ‘the burden’, the load, of the desire of the world. In the first line of Book One Canto Three, when Sri Aurobindo introduces us to Aswapati, he says that Savitri has been born here in response to the ‘world’s desire’; Aswapati is the protagonist, the one who is representing that desire, that need and aspiration of the whole world.

¹. Savitri p.69
We could just take another look at what Sri Aurobindo says about Aswapati in his ‘Author’s Note’:

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

Sri Aurobindo calls him ‘the Lord of the Horse’ because that is the meaning of his name: ‘Aswa’ means ‘horse’ and ‘pati’ means ‘lord’, so he is the Horse Lord. In the Vedas, the Horse is a symbol for energy, and we can understand why: a beautiful horse is full of powerful life-energy. Sri Aurobindo calls him ‘the Lord of Tapasya’ and then explains what he means by Tapasya: ‘the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour’. ‘Tapasya’ means an effort to control and discipline our life energies, particularly directed towards a spiritual aim. Aswapati represents this aspect of humanity, the part that is concentrated in aspiration towards reaching a spiritual aim, the energy that helps us to rise from the mortal planes where we are now, to the immortal planes which are the goal of the human journey, the fulfilment of our evolution, the reason for which we have been inspired to leave our transcendent state and take the plunge towards earth and earthly life. Here in Book Two, we shall see Aswapati on his quest, starting from his base in gross earthly matter, entering the subtle worlds and seeing the World-Stair of all the ascending planes of existence. First he saw it revealed behind its ‘mystical barrage of dynamic light’; now, having understood its significance, he is about to start exploring it. With him he is carrying his great aspiration and aim: to find out how the world’s desire for perfection, for higher realisation, for ‘God, Light, Freedom, Immortality’\(^1\) can be fulfilled.

A formless Stillness called, a nameless Light.

Above him was the white immobile Ray,
Around him the eternal Silences.

On the threshold of his great ascent, Aswapati feels called by a ‘Stillness’, a calm, a silence that is ‘formless’, which has no shape, no limit, and a ‘Light’ for which he does not have a name. Above

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him he was aware of ‘the white immobile Ray’. This is the Ray that the Mother has symbolised in the inner chamber of Matrimandir. The entire universe of which we are a part is kept in existence by that single ‘immobile Ray’ of the Supreme Sun which gives birth to everything. Aswapati is aware of that white unmoving Ray above him; all around him are the ‘eternal Silences’.

No term was fixed to the high-pitched attempt;
World after world disclosed its guarded powers,
Heaven after heaven its deep beatitudes,
But still the invisible Magnet drew his soul.

‘No term’ means ‘no limit’, ‘no end’. As Aswapati embarks on his great ascent, he cannot see where it will end or how long his ‘high-pitched attempt’ will take. Setting out on this quest, he is setting his aim very high: a ‘high-pitched’ aim. As he ascended the ‘World-Pile’, one world after another revealed or ‘disclosed’ to him the powers which it is guarding, keeping secret. ‘Heaven after heaven’ disclosed or revealed ‘its deep beatitudes’, its own special states of bliss: each heaven represents a particular kind of delight. He does not rest in any of them, but continues onward. It is as if he is being drawn by a ‘Magnet’. Sri Ramakrishna used this image, saying that once we have felt the attraction of the Divine, we become like a needle or pin that is being drawn by a magnet: the nearer we approach the source of attraction the stronger its power over us grows. Aswapati’s soul is being drawn as if by an ‘invisible Magnet’ towards the goal that he has to reach.

Q. Doesn’t Sri Aurobindo say that the Supreme Divine Mother is the magnet?

Yes. It is in Book Three, Canto Two:

She is the Force, the inevitable Word,
The magnet of our difficult ascent,

p.314

So Aswapati continues. He cannot yet see where his quest will lead him:

A figure sole on Nature’s giant stair,
He mounted towards an indiscernible end
On the bare summit of created things.
All alone on the ‘giant stair’ of the planes of manifestation, Aswapati goes on moving upwards. The top of the stair is ‘indiscernible’: it cannot be seen, but it must be there somewhere – at the ‘summit’, the topmost height. He is aiming for ‘the bare summit of created things’: the highest level of manifestation.

This brings us to the end of Canto One of Book Two, the longest Book of the poem. It contains 15 cantos, several of which describe more than one step up the ladder of worlds. In Canto Two we shall follow Aswapati to the next step: the Kingdom of Subtle Matter.

End of Canto One

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Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri, on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the Truth.

This is Sri Aurobindo’s own “Gayatri”, modifying the traditional Gayatri of the Rigveda to express the new realisation of his Integral Yoga of Supermind or Divine Truth-Consciousness.

He has commented on the Vedic Gayatri as follows:
The power of Gayatri is the Light of the Divine Truth. It is a mantra of Knowledge.¹

In the Gayatri, the chosen formula of the ancient Vedic religion, the supreme light of the godhead Surya Savitri is invoked as the object of our desire, the deity who shall give his luminous impulsion to all our thoughts.²

It is the Sun in its highest light that is called upon in the great Gayatri Mantra to impel our thoughts.³

Do you know the meaning of the Gayatri mantra? It means: “We choose the Supreme Light of the divine Sun; we aspire that it may impel our minds.”

The Sun is the symbol of the divine Light that is coming down and Gayatri gives expression to the aspiration asking the divine Light to come down and give impulsion to all the activities of the mind.

In this Yoga also we want to bring down that divine Sun to govern not only the mind but the vital and physical being also.⁴

*About his own Gayatri, Sri Aurobindo wrote:*  

The Gayatri mantra is the mantra for bringing the Light of Truth into all the planes of the being.⁵

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1. *Letters on Yoga*, CWSA 29:325
3. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, CWSA 16:16
5. *Letters on Yoga*, CWSA 29:325
The earliest known version of *Savitri*, dating from 1916, is found in two old exercise books which contain Sri Aurobindo’s fair copy of work done on the poem in a small notebook. In that form, the poem has two parts which are not named. Sri Aurobindo referred to this in a letter of 1936:

*Savitri* was originally written many years ago before the Mother came as a narrative poem in two parts, Part I Earth and Part II Beyond (these two parts are still extant in the scheme) each of four books….\(^1\)

As this narrative poem grew into the revelatory epic we know today, Sri Aurobindo expanded it into three Parts. In 1946, he wrote in a letter:

In the new plan of the poem there is a second part consisting of five books: two of these, the Book of Birth and Quest and the Book of Love, have been completed and another, the Book of Fate, is almost complete. Two others, the Book of Yoga and the Book of Death, have still to be written, though a part needs only a thorough recasting. Finally, there is the third part consisting of four books, the Book of Eternal Night, the Book of the Dual Twilight, the Book of Everlasting Day and the Return to Earth, which have to be entirely recast and the third of them largely rewritten.\(^2\)

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1. CWSA 27:277
In the exercise books the two Parts were of similar length, with Book I (complete) containing 924 lines, and Book II (incomplete) containing 713. In the 1993 edition of *Savitri*, Parts One and Two (Books One to Eight) contain 18,757 lines, while Part Three (Books Nine to Twelve) has only 5,080. In the previous issue of *Invocation* we presented the material that appears in the first notebook of the earliest version and corresponds to the present Books One to Eight. Here we are presenting the remaining lines transcribed by Amal Kiran, which correspond to Part Three of the final version. His full transcription consists of 1770 lines in all, out of which roughly 931 full lines along with numerous short phrases have been traced in the final version. Of these 931 full lines, 21 appear in Part One (Books One to Three), 394 in Part Two (Books Four to Eight), and 516 in Part Three (Books Nine to Twelve). These lines are printed in bold in the text below.

[Part Three : Books Nine to Twelve]

[Book Nine Canto One]

925 So she was left alone in the huge wood
By Death the god confronted, holding still
Her husband’s corpse on her abandoned breast.
She measured not her loss with helpless thoughts,
She rose not up to face the dreadful god,
930 But over him she loved her soul leaned out
From a far stillness. There into some heaven
Of birth and silence lifted all that here
Is hope and sorrow and trembling passion, changed,
Losing their natures and what was once her heart
935 Became a hushed eternity of love.
Not in her body they grew. A strain delivered
Vibrant great chords of Force by Nature tuned
For her eternal music yet unheard
Which the stars dream of listening as they wheel.
940 So one day all our nature’s sins shall find
Their strong redemption; slain they shall ascend
Into the purity from which they erred,—
Discords redeemed to help a music large,
Transfigured, lifted up on fiery wings.
Her mortal being seized by dreadful hands
Felt the last agony of passionate change
That was its quivering into godhead. It grew
A high and lonely ecstasy of will
That left her like a mighty eagle poised
In the void: thought perished and her mind seemed slain.
But from a growing secrecy of light
The greater spirit in some world within
Griefless above her, yet herself, unveiled
Its frontal glories and miraculously
Outlined its body of power. Leaned from above
Ancient and strong as on a wind-free summit,
Calm, violent, fiery-footed, puissant-winged,
Over the abyss one brooded who was she.
Sole now that spirit turned its mastering gaze
On life and things as if inheriting
A work unfinished from her halting past
When yet the mind, a passionate learner, toiled
And the crude instruments were blindly moved.
And like a tree recovering from the wind
She raised her noble head. Fronting her eyes
Something stood there unearthly, sombre, grand,
A limitless denial of all being
That wore the wonder of a shape. The Form
Bore the deep pity of destroying gods
In its appalling eyes. Eternal Night
In the dire beauty of an immortal face
Pitying arose, receiving all that lives
Into its fathomless heart for ever. Its limbs
Were monuments of transience and beneath
Brows of unwearying calm large godlike lids
Silent beheld the writhing that is life.
The two opposed each other with their eyes,
Woman and universal god. They seemed
Two equal powers that stand unconquered, left
The last huge-purposed among trivial things,
Scanning each other in the eternal lists
Like vast antagonists before they meet
In world-wide combat to possess alone.
Then to her ears silencing earthly sounds,
Forbidding the heart-strings with its iron cry
Arose a sad and formidable voice
That seemed the whole adverse world’s. “Unclasp,” it said,
“Thy passionate influence and relax, O slave
Of Nature, thy grasp elemental. Wrap no more
This spirit’s body in the abandoned robe
That with its texture coarse concealed the gods.
Entomb thy passion in its living grave,
Confess thy days an error and endure
The inevitable end of hope and love.”

It ceased, she moved not, and it spoke again
Lowering its mighty key to human chords,
“Woman, thy husband suffers.” Sâvithrî
Renounced the lifeless body from her clasp.
Softly she laid it down on the smooth grass,
As oft she had laid her living husband’s head
When from their couch she rose in the white dawn
Called by her daily tasks. So now as called,
Unknowing to what work, because her spirit
Above watched flaming silent still, she rose,
Waiting whatever impulse should arise
Out of the eternal depths and cast its surge.
Then Death the King leaned boundless down, as leans
Night over tired lands, and as if freed
Out of a physical dream, leaving uncared for
His mind forsaken of that poor dead earth,
Another Suthyavân arose and stood
Between the mortal woman and the god.
He was or else he seemed a shape of light
Found shadowy to the feeling out of mind
Which missed the warmth of bright material suns.
Thus each sees what transcends his conscious touch
And dreams things greater than himself are dreams:
Therefore heaven’s shapes are distant to our view,—
The gleam of hopes we hardly dare believe,
Far luminous symbols of a truth unseen
Kept for a happier sense in higher worlds.
So now her senses, though rebuked, believed
The dead corpse real, this a silent shade.
Still for a while was that bright Suthyavân,

Between two realms he stood, not wavering,
But in a quiet strong expectancy
Like one who, sightless, listens for a command.
But now he moved away. Behind him Death
Went slowly like a shadowy herdsman dark

Behind some wanderer from his mournful herds.
And Sâvithrí followed her husband’s steps,
Planting her human feet where his had trod,
Into the silence of that other world.
At first they seemed to her still on earthly soil

To journey strangely with unhuman paces
Through a thick stress of woods. For though to her vision
Only were offered in a spaceless dream
The luminous spirit gliding stilly on
And the great shadow travelling behind,

Her senses felt a vague green world of trees
Surround them and in troubled branches knew
Uncertain treadings of a fitful wind,
Earth stood aloof yet near; it offered her
Its sweetness and its greenness mid a dream,

Its brilliance suave of well-loved vivid hues,
Sunlight arriving at its golden noon,
The birds’ calling or the sweet siege of cries:
She bore dim fragrances, far murmurs touched
But then the god grew mighty and remote

In alien spaces and the soul she loved
Lost its consenting nearness to her life.
They seemed to enlarge away, drawn by some great
Pale distance, from the warm control of earth
And her grown far. Now, now they would escape!

Then flaming from her body’s nest alarmed
Her violent spirit soared at Suthyavân,
As in a terror and a wrath divine
A winged she-eagle threatened in her young.
So with a rush of pinions and a cry
She crossed the borders of dividing sense.
Her trance knew not of sun or earth or world,
She knew not of herself or Sâvithrî;
All was one boundless grasp of unnamed force
And absolute possession,— quivering, seized
Its prey, joy, origin, Suthyavân alone.
But when her mind awoke once more in Time,
Compelled to shape the lineaments of things
And live in borders, the three moved together
Alone in a new world where souls were not,
But only living moods. A strange, still, weird
Country was round her, strange far skies above,
A doubting space where dreaming objects lived
Within themselves their one unchanging thought.
Weird was that road which like fear hastening
To that of which it had most terror, led
Phantasmal between those two conscious rocks
Sombre and high, gates brooding, whose stone thoughts
Lost their huge sense beyond in giant night.
Nearer they grew like dumb appalling jaws,
Waiting upon her road cruel and still,
The muzzle of a black enormous world.
And where the shadowy marches now he touched,
Turning arrested luminous Suthyavân
Looked back with wonderful eyes at Sâvithrî.
Then Death pealed forth his vast abysmal cry:
“Let not the dreadful goddess move thy soul,
Its time-born passion dreamed the strength of heaven,
To enlarge its vehement trespass into worlds
Helpless, where it shall perish like a thought
Safe only in its stumbling limits poor
Where he can crown himself mock sovereign.
Dare not beyond man’s faltering force, but waking
Tremble amid the silences immense
In which thy few weak chords of being die.
Impermanent creatures sorrowful foam of Time,
Your transient loves bind not the eternal gods.”
His dread voice ebbed in a consenting hush
Which grew intense, around, a wide and wordless
Whisper and sanction from the jaws of Night.

The woman answered not. Her naked soul
Stripped of its girdle of mortality
Against fixed destiny and the grooves of Law
Stood up in its sheer will, the primal force.

[Book Nine, Canto Two]
So like arrested thoughts upon a verge
Where light begins to cease, they stood; vast Night
Beyond desired her soul. Then Sâvîthrî
Compelled her foot towards the yawning mouth
And danger of the ageless waste. Moulding
Their grander motion on her human tread

They stirred. All as in dreams went gliding on.
So was the balance of the world reversed;
The mortal ruled, the god and spirit obeyed:
For she behind was leader of the march
And they in front were followers of her will.¹

They entered the dumb portals of the past,
They left the rock-gate’s doubting walls behind;
The twilit vestibules of a tenebrous world
Received them where they seemed to move and yet
Be still, nowhere advancing, yet to pass,
A dim procession in a picture dim,
Not conscious forms. Then huge and growing night
Cavernous, monstrous, in a strangling mass
Silent, devoured them like a lion’s throat,
The dumb spiritual agony of a dream.

The thought that strives in things failed there, unmade:
They ended, all their dream of living done,
Convinced at last that they had never been.
Huge darkness closed around her cage of sense
As round a bullock in the forest tied

By hunters closes in no empty night.

¹ Cf. lines 1111-14 here with Book 10, Canto 3, lines 673-76 (Savitri p.639)
She saw no more the dim tremendous god,
Her eyes had lost their luminous Suthyavân
But not for this her spirit failed. It knew
More deeply than the bounded senses can
1135 Which seek externally and find to lose,
Its object loved, as when on earth they lived
She felt him straying through the glades, the glades
A scene in her, their clefts her being’s vistas
Offering their secrets to his search and joy,
1140 Because whatever spot his cherished feet
Preferred, must be at once her soul embracing
His body, suffering his tread. Slow years—
Time vacant measured itself by anguish long,—
Like one who walks resisting a black dream
1145 Through an unreal darkness empty and drear
She lived in spite of death, stifled with void
As in a blindness of extinguished souls.
Then tardily a reluctant gleam drew near
Like promise of life to those who lie forgotten
1150 By Nature, cast into her naked night.
The black and writhing gloom widened its coils,—
For now it felt its giant reign attacked—
And suffered shrinking from the approach of hope:
But tyrannous still in its huge soulless strength
1155 Writhing and coiling ruled her struggling lids
Which slowly conquered back their brilliant right.
One felt once more the treading of a god
And out of the dumb darkness Suthyavân
Her husband grew into a luminous shade.
1160 Death missioned forth once more his lethal voice:
“Hast thou beheld thy source, O transient heart?
Knowing from what the dream thou art was made,
Still dost thou always hope to last and love?”
The woman answered not. Her spirit repelled
1165 The voice of Night that knew and Death that thought;
She knew the mighty sources of her life
And knew herself eternal without birth.
Then the dire god inflicting on her soul
The immortal calm of his tremendous gaze:

“Yet since no victory in heaven’s order is lost
And thou hadst strength to journey on unslain
Through the brute void which never shall forgive
The primal violence that fashioned thought
Forcing the immobile vast to suffer and live,

Thou hast a claim upon the living gods.

The gods who watch the earth with unmoved eyes
And lead its giant stumblings through the void,—
They gave to man the burden of his mind,
And forced on his unwilling heart their fires

He shall not quench, their storms he may not rule.

Troubling his transience with their infinite breath,
They gave him hunger that no food can fill.
He is the cattle of the shepherd gods.
Therefore he feels incurable unrest

Nor knows his cause nor wherefore he was born.
The gods who hope by him to live for ever,
They gave the wisdom that is mocked by Night,
They breathed the courage that is met by Death—

He planning travels still his obscure road,
Tireless his journey that foresees no goal.
Not easily shalt thou, O soul, prevail
Nor lay thy yoke upon eternal Death,
Nor yet thy ancient longing flame fulfilled
The hopes which shake the order of my worlds.

Yet since I am law and life and its rewards
Take from me natural boons which death-bound hearts
Can soar at.” But she spoke, she answered now:
“Why speakest thou of the order of thy worlds
And offerest boons of which thou art the lord?

All I can take in my own strength, O god,
For I have come who am your kindred birth.
Yet that thy words may not have breathed in vain
Since they are flames of the eternal Truth
I bind thee by its Will thou canst not break,

Not for my own joy but the soul I love,
To give on earth whatever Suthyavân,
My husband, waking from the forest’s charm
And from his long pure childhood’s solitude
Desired and had not for his beautiful life.”

Death swayed his dreadful brows in vast assent,
“I give indulgent to the dreams I break
Such close of life as transient men desire
To his blind father. Rich morns and fortunate eves
I give and the brief kingdom he has lost,

To see with gladness of his unsealed gaze
Bright forms of grandsons, beautiful, brave and wise,
And gather them into ungroping arms
And see again the cheerful light of earth.
For that this man desired. Back to thy world

Return swift-footed lest to slay thy life
The great laws thou hast violated, moved,
Open at last on thee their dreadful eyes.”
The woman answered, “Me thou shalt not slay,
Neither with seas nor with celestial flame;

They have no strength to make my being vain:
For in me the invincible goddess lives.
And neither can my mortal purpose fail,
Nor my immortal spirit be destroyed.
My soul exceeds the laws whose might thou vauntst.

My will too is a law, my strength a god
And trembles not before their awful gaze.
Out of thy shadow, give me back again
Into earth’s flowering spaces Suthyavân
In the sweet transiency of human limbs

To do with him my burning spirit’s will.
Else where thou leadst him me too thou shalt lead.
Long I pursued him through the tracts of Time,
Parted and found, breaking the bars of life.
Now I behind him seek whatever night

Or dawn tremendous.” And to her replied
A voice of puissance and tremendous scorn,
The almighty cry of universal Death.
“Frail creature with the courage that aspires,
Hast thou the wings or feet to tread my stars
Which I have made before thy thoughts were formed?
I, Death, created them out of my void
And all that lives within them I made for food
And Love and Strength and Wisdom for my prey.
I, Death, am god and Hunger is my name.

Mortal whose spirit is my wandering breath,
Whose transience was imagined by my smile,
Go clutching thy poor gains to thy hurt bosom
Scourged by my pangs. Turn yet before attempting
Forbidden luminous spaces thou perceive.

Lightnings unknown and from the wrath of God
Terrified flee like a forsaken deer
Sobbing and hunted by the shafts of heaven.”
And Sāvithrī made answer, scorn for scorn,
The mortal woman to the dreadful Lord:

“Who is this God, imagined by thy Night,
Contemptuously creating worlds disdained,
Who has anger and treads down high-aiming souls?
Not He who has built His temple in my heart.
The God I adore flames here within my breast,
He has wed me,— to His kiss I bore the worlds.

Who shall prohibit or hedge in His course,
The Wonderful, the Charioteer, the Swift?
Equal my strength behind my husband’s steps,
Whether I press the sword-paved courts of Hell
Or over luminous flowers in Heaven I walk.
The wings of Love have power to fan thy void,
The eyes of Love gaze starlike through the night,
The feet of Love tread naked all the worlds.”
But Death made answer to the human soul:

“O seeker of heaven, by thy earth obscured,
What is thy hope? to what dost thou aspire?
This only is thy keenest earthly joy
For a few more years to please thy faltering sense
With honey of physical longings and embrace

The brilliant idol of a fugitive hour.
And thou, what art thou, soul, thou glorious dream
Of brief emotions made and fluttering thoughts,
A dance of fireflies speeding through the night
Or dragon-wings upon the inconstant stream?

Wilt thou claim immortality, O heart,
Crying against the eternal witnesses
That thou and he are endless powers and last?
One endless watches the inconscient scene
Where all things perish, as the foam the stars.

One is for ever! There no Suthyavân
Changing was born and there no Sâvithrî
Claiming her ancient joy from grief. There Love
Came never with his fretful soul of tears.
No gaze, no heart that throbs, It needs no second
To aid Its being and to share Its joys,
But lives apart immortally alone.
If thou desirest immortality,
Be thou alone. Sufficient to thy days
Live in thyself. Forget the man thou lov’st;
Think him the wandering vision of a dream.”

But Sâvithrî replied for man to Death:
O Death who reasonest, I reason not;—
Reason that doubts and breaks and cannot build.
I am, I love, I will.” Death answered her:

“Know also! Knowing, thou shalt cease to love
And cease to will, delivered from thy heart.
Then shalt thou rest for ever and be still,
Consenting to the impermanence of things.”
But Sâvithrî replied for man to Death:

“When I have loved for ever, I shall know.
I know my being is a flame self-lit;
I know that knowledge is a vast embrace;
And man was born beneath the monstrous stars
Dowered with a mind and heart to conquer thee.

For one who lives in us, came masked by death.”
Death swayed his awful brows and ceased from speech;
Through the long fading night by her compelled,
Gliding half-seen on their unearthly path,
Phantasmal in the distance moved the three.
We learn from Nirodbaran that

Canto IV, Night, of the early version [a pre-1936 version – S.] served as The Book of Eternal Night. It was revised, lines were added and split into two Cantos. Then in the typescript further revising took place. Canto I, first called The Passage into the Void of Night, was changed into Towards the Black Void.¹

In the two cantos of Book Nine, 216 ‘echoing’ lines were identified, as well as many shorter phrases. In the final version the first canto of Book Nine, ‘Towards the Black Void’, has 372 lines in all. Amongst these, 98, more than one quarter, are found already foreshadowed in FFC, mostly in extended passages. The second canto, ‘The Journey in Eternal Night’, contains 118 such lines, as well as many isolated words or phrases, amongst its total of 482 lines.

In Book Ten of the final version, only 240 lines appearing in the first fair copy have been identified and the order of many of these have been changed from the earlier version. We learn from Nirodbaran that:

Book X, The Book of the Double Twilight, called only Twilight, Canto V in the earlier versions of which there are four or five, had no division into Cantos. From these early versions a fair number of lines have been taken and woven into a larger version. The old lines are now not always in their original form.²

[Book Ten, Canto One]

1320  But not for long the darkness’ reign endured.  
       For as they moved all widened, all grew pale.  
       The dismal twilight brightened now its hues  
       And soon the sorrow of the Night was dead.  
       Into a happy misty twilit world

1325  Surprised by a blind joy with gripping hands
       She slipped,—vague fields, vague hedges, rainy trees,

¹ Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, 3rd edition revised and enlarged, 1988, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, p.183
² Ibid. p.185
An air that dared not suffer too much light
And scenes dim-hearted in a drifting haze
Vague cattle white roamed glimmering through the mist;
Vague spirits wandered with a bodiless cry;
Vague melodies touched the soul and fled pursued
Into harmonious distances unseized
Wishing no goal for their delightful steps
Through vague ideal lands strayed happily
Or floated without footing or else paced
Led by a low far chanting as of gods
Forms and half-luminous powers. In this sweet chaos
A strange consistency of shapes prevailed;
A victory of initial light was born,
A spirit of purity and elusive presence
Of faery beauty and ungrasped delight
That sweeter seemed than any ecstasy
Earth or all-conquering heaven can quivering seize.
Their bold formations are too absolute;
Carved by an anguish of divine endeavour
They stand up sculptured on the eternal hills
Or quarried from the living rocks of God
Win immortality by perfect form.
They are too clear, too great. This only touched
The flying feet of exquisite desires,
Strange sweet beginnings of perfection, first
Happy imaginings of a heavenly world,
Which rest in a dim passion of pursuit
Thrilled with their first far joys that will not cease.
All in this world was shadowed forth, not limned,
Like shapes of colour in a tinted blur
Or fugitive landscapes of suggested forms,
A glimmering Eden full of faery gleams.
Here in its magic lanes that fled her feet,
Past vanishing hedges, hurrying hints of fields,
Assailed by sweetness of its voices dim,
Treading she found no end.
Then turned the god
And cried, “Into a void eternity
Escapes this world, for never has it lived.

1365 Shadowing out glories it shall never seize
It builds up images illusion feeds
With cloudy colours and aerial hues
To escape from the coarse cruelty of things.
Hope begets hope, the old bright vainness new,

1370 **Cloud gratifies happy cloud, phantom by phantom**
**Sweetly is chased.** O child of earth, behold
Thy infinite seeming of desires enjoyed!
**Vainly thou tormentest**, vain soul of man,
The **hour’s delight to reach infinity’s**

1375 **Long void and fill its gulfs. Chastise thy heart**
**With** noble **knowledge** and **unhood to see**
Thy nature raised into clear living heights,
The **Heaven-bird’s view from unimagined peaks.**
But if **thou give thy spirit to a dream**

1380 **Soon harsh necessity will smite thee awake.**
Coarse, fleeting are the happiest human things.
**Thy passion is a sensual want refined,**
Thy love **a hunger** and one day shall cease
**By bitter treason, or wrath with cruel wounds**

1385 **Separate, or thy unsatisfied will to others**
**Depart, when first love’s joy lies stripped and slain.**
**Purest delight began and it shall end.**
Then **shalt thou know thy heart no anchor swinging**
**Thy happy soul moored in eternal seas.**

1390 **How can the winging aeons clamp their flight**
To one, a helpless wanderer like thyself? Ah, cease!
**Vain are the cycles of thy brilliant mind.**
**Renounce, forgetting hope and joy and tears,**
**Thy passionate nature in the bosom profound**

1395 **Where Love lies slumbering on the breasts of peace.”**
And Sâvithrî replied to the dim god:
“Another language now thou usest, Death,
Melting thy speech into harmonious pain.
But I forbid thy voice to slay my soul.

1400 Allowed by Heaven and wonderful to man
Passion sweet fiery rhythms chants to Love,
And when the strains are hushed to high-winged souls,
Into empyreans vast its burning breath
Survives beyond, the core of heavenly suns,

1405 A flame for ever pure. Surely I know
One day I shall behold my great sweet world
Put off the dire disguises of the gods,
Unveil from terror and disrobe from sin.
One who has love and lover and beloved

1410 Is the sweet cause of all our bitter griefs.
From the bright vision of his soul a Child
Eternal built himself a wondrous field
And wove the measures of a marvellous dance.
There in its circles and its magic turns

1415 Attracted he arrives, repelled he flees.
Bearing a sweet new face that is the old
His bliss laughs to us or it calls concealed
Like a far-heard, unseen, entrancing flute
From moonlit branches in the throbbing woods

1420 Tempting our angry search and passionate pain.
In the wild devious promptings of his mind
He tastes the honey of tears and puts off joy,
Repenting, and has laughter and has wrath,
And both are a broken music of the soul

1425 That seeks out reconciled its heavenly rhyme.
He for my heart was always Suthyavân.
Has he not lain in wait for me through lives
Unnumbered, in the thickets of the world
Pursued me like a lion through the night

1430 And clasped me like a happy ruthless flame
And touched me like a soft persuading breeze,
Sometimes with wrath and sometimes with sweet peace
Desiring me since first the world began?
And if there is a happier greater God,

1435 Then let him wear the face of Suthyavân
And let his soul be one with him I love,
So let him seek me that I may desire;
Since one heart only beats within my breast

And one God sits there throned. Advance, O Death,
Beyond the phantom beauty of this world,
Of its vague citizens I am not one,
Nor has my heart consented to be foiled.
I cherish, god, the fire and not the dream.”

Here we may pause a moment to share what Amal Kiran has pointed out about the later evolution of this powerful line:

Originally, Sâvithrî declared to Yama:

Advance, O Death,
Beyond the phantom beauty of this world,
Of its vague citizens I am not one,
Nor has my heart consented to be foiled,
I cherish there the fire and not the dream.

A variant of the concluding line ran:

I cherish, god, the fire and not the dream.

A very impressive affirmation, this, artistically all the better for being self-contained by omission of the “there”, and it pierces to a fundamental posture of the soul militant and intransigent amidst a region of happy illusions. The state of the manuscript raises in one even the suspicion that Sri Aurobindo intended both the commas in the line to be omitted. The phrase would then take on a deeper colour according more directly with the speaker’s own divinely inspired nature; but one is not quite sure of the poet’s intention because of the small “g” left in the word “god” which is always applied to Death. Whatever be the case, we are in the presence of the mot juste in the self-contained version. In that fine form the line would be a credit to any poet, and nobody would think of any falling short until he saw how Sri Aurobindo suddenly brought what we may term the mot inevitable in the ultimate recension of the passage:
Advance, O Death,
Beyond the phantom beauty of this world;
For of its citizens I am not one.
I cherish God the Fire, not God the Dream.

The full potentiality of the penetrating revelatory idea is released, the expression acquires the utmost intensity, the rhythmic movement an absolute concentration. And in the closing phrase, with its capitalised “G” and the term “God” ringing out twice, the speaker’s soul at its profoundest is laid bare and startlingly suggests without the least veil that even in spirituality there can be a crucial choice between divine truths on which may hinge the entire destiny of man the evolutionary aspirant.¹

[Book Ten, Cantos Three and Four]

Lines from the following passage are found in both these cantos of the final version. Lines 1444-91 and 1495-1502 correspond to passages in Canto Four of the final version, while lines 1492-94 and 1503-67 correspond to material now found in Canto Three, particularly on pages 636-68.

So on they journeyed still through happy mists,
1445 And faster now all fled as if perturbed,
Escaping from the clearness of her soul.
Then Death cried high,—a vaguer, brighter form
He bore now like a night that smiles at dawn:
“Because thou hast the wisdom to transcend

1450 Both veil of forms and the contempt of forms,
Arise delivered by the seeing gods,
Rest in thy freedom satisfied alone
Nor seek for others’ joy they have not won:
Let each soul to its rapture be enough.

1455 Though thou art strong by the dread Goddess moved
Cease, mortal, to compel the deathless powers.
Highest wisdom find that guards its strength and knowledge
Unused, unspoken lest the world should perish

¹. *Mother India*, August 1981, p.426
By wisdom and be overthrown by power,
1460 Dragged like a ship by bound leviathan
Into the abyss of his stupendous seas.
For far too swift the aeons would stumble on
If strength were given to imperfect souls,
If veilless knowledge smote the unfit brain.
1465 Therefore God hid His face and seemed to err.
Aim not at dangerous swift-foot victories,
Sheltered by smallness only such steps desire
As earth can bear in her frail denser moulds.
If thou art strong with the dread Goddess filled,
1470 Use not thy strength like the wild Titan souls,
Touch not the ancient lines, the seated laws;
Respect the calm of great established things.”
But Sāvithrî replied to the vague god:
“What is the calm thou vauntest, O Lord, O Death?
1475 Is it not the dull-visioned tread inert
Of monstrous energies chained in a vast round
Soulless and stone-eyed with mechanic dreams?
What were earth’s ages if their grey restraint
Were never broken and glories sprang not forth
1480 Bursting their obscure seed nor man’s slow life
Leaped hurried into sudden splendid paths
By divine words and human gods revealed?
I trample on thy law with living feet
For to arise in freedom I was born.
1485 If I am mighty, let my force be unveiled
Equal companion of your dateless powers
Or else let my frustrated soul sink down
Unworthy of godhead in the original sleep.
I ask not, I demand, O gods of Time,
1490 My will immortal.” He replied, “Yet choose
Another turn than this that thou pursuest.
Art thou so strong and free? Then canst thou take
Thy pleasure upon wayside flowering fields
Yet falter not from thy proud journey’s goal.”¹

And Sâvithrî: “Even such my choice, O Death. 
What liberty has the soul which feels not freedom
Unless stripped bare and cannot kiss the bonds
The Lover winds around his playmate’s limbs,
Nor choose his tyranny crushed in his embrace,
Smiling in golden chains, most bound, most free?
To seize him better with her boundless heart
She accepts the circle of his limiting arms.”
“Prove yet thy absolute force to the wise gods
By choosing thy own joy; for self desire
And yet from self and its gross chain be free.
Know fear of bondage for thy last fine snare.
Show me thy strength and freedom from my laws.”
And Sâvithrî to Death: “Thus can I take
Who claim upon the flowering fields of life
My earthly pleasures, never mine but his,
Or mine for him. Fulfil on the sweet earth
Whatever once the living Suthyavân
Desired in his heart for Sâvithrî.”
Death bowed his sovereign head and made reply
“Long days I give of thy unwounded life,
Daughters of thy own seed in heart and mind,
Fair hero sons and sweetness undisturbed
Of union with thy husband dear and true
And thou shalt know in thy life’s house where love’s
Oneness shall reign of many gathered hearts
Felicity of thy surrounded eves
And happy service to the heart’s desired
And loving empire over all thou lov’st.
Win easily by love all fruits
Which hardly with great labour high-tasked souls
By difficult virtue ripen tilling earth.
Return, O woman, to thy conquered world.”
Void are thy words if lonely I return.”

1. From this line onwards up to line 1567 the passage corresponds to material now found in Book X, Canto 3, lines 551-637, pp.636-38
Then Death sent forth once more his angry cry
As chides a lion his escaping prey.
“What knowst thou of earth’s rich and changing life
Who thinkst that one man dead all joy must cease?
Hope not to be unhappy till the end!

For grief dies soon in the tired human heart
And other guests the vacant chambers fill.
Rich as a holiday painting on a floor
Traced for a moment’s beauty love was made.
Or if a voyager on the eternal trail,

Its objects fluent change in its embrace
Like waves to a swimmer upon infinite seas.”
But Sâvithrî replied to the vague god,
“Give me back Suthyavân, my only lord.
Thy thoughts are vacant to my soul that feels.”

Death answered her, “Try then thy soul, return.
Soon shalt thou find appeased that other men
On lavish earth have beauty, strength and truth.
And when thou hast half forgotten one of these
Shall wind himself around thy heart that needs

A fellow heart. Then Suthyavân shall fade,
A gentle memory pushed away from thee
By new love and thy children’s tender hands
Till thou shalt wonder if thou loved’st at all.
Such is the life earth’s travail has conceived

But Sâvithrî replied to eternal Death:
“Thou mockst the mind’s and body’s faltering search.
For what the immortal spirit shall achieve
I have discovered, nor such trials need.

For now at last I know beyond all doubt

The great stars burn with my undying fire
And for its fuel life and death were made.
Life only was my blind attempt to love;
Earth was its struggle, heaven its increase,
And when transcended both shall join and kiss

Casting their veils, a deathless birth is ours.
Earth shall seize all that heaven strives to give
Nor anything be lost the soul has seen.”
In the four cantos of Book Ten of the final version, we find a total of 168 lines already appearing or prefigured in the earliest known draft: 28 in Canto One, ‘The Dream Twilight of the Ideal’; 56 in Canto Two, ‘The Gospel of Death and Vanity of the Ideal’; 48 in Canto Three, ‘The Debate of Love and Death’, and 36 in Canto Four, ‘The Dream Twilight of the Earthly Real’. The final version of Book Ten has a total of 2385 lines in all, of which about 8% have been retained, unchanged or modified, from the earliest known period of the poem’s composition.

[Book Eleven]

In Amal Kiran’s transcript we find three groups of lines which correspond to the material of Book Eleven, The Book of Everlasting Day. Each of them relates to a different part of the final version of its single canto, ‘The Soul’s Choice and the Supreme Consummation’. The first is of 70 lines corresponding to the material of what are now the first and second sections of the canto, not always in the same order as they appear in FFC. Amongst them were found 21 ‘echoing’ lines and some shorter phrases.

[Sections 1 and 2]

But as she spoke the body of Death was changed. His darkness and his soul-destroying might

1570 Abolishing for ever and disclosing
The mystery of his high and violent deeds
Epiphanies of immortal life arose.
Her senses thrilled in a sweet rapturous world, Twilight and mist were ended. Perfect heaven

1575 Smiled down from undreamed sapphire, sincere gold
Of sunlight lavished strong riches on the eyes
That suffered without pain the absolute ray
And saw immortal clarities of form.
Perfected all the images of earth

1580 Were thoughts the senses could live in glad, unbound
The soul could use for freest joy of form;
Creations large of God’s victorious mind,
They dwelt like living scenes sublimely born
In a calm beauty of creative joy,
Orchards and valleys, gleaming lakes and hills,
Pastures and woodlands of celestial bliss
And villages and cities of delight
Where luminous lived the nations of the blest.

Above her rhythmic godheads whirled the spheres,
Around her melodies and enchantments flowed:
From the glad bosom of a griefless world
Songs thrilled of birds upon unfading boughs,
Music not with these striving steps of sound
Aspired, that labour from our human strings,
From every note claimed richer ecstasies
For a changed bliss that kept each sweetness old.
For ever faultless instruments were heard
And high-eyed chantings inexpressible,
Strains trembling with the secrets of the gods.

From marvellous flowers imperishably sweet
Immortal fragrance filled the unquivering air:
To live was sweetness and to breathe was song.
And on a sense made pure to seize all tones
And to feel on untired intensest things
Heaven’s subtleties of touch unwearying forced
More vivid raptures than the mind can bear.
What would be suffering here was mighty bliss.
Delivered from the limits of her mind,
Grey limping judgment dead, the sight unbarred
Entered the mysteries of the Artist’s craft.
She saw all Nature wonderful without fault.
These were the decorated doors of worlds
Nobler, yet as felicitously fair.
There every thought like a sweet radiant god
Climbed strong without endeavour to the sight
Of the All-blissful; feelings were waves of light,
Rose from each other in a tranquil surge.
Deep, candid, a sweet-natured wisdom grew
The bright beneficent sunlight of the soul,
Or sheer wild rounds inviolably pure
Swayed linked in moonlit revels of the heart
Knowing their riot for a dance of God.
Calm seers and poets heard the absolute thoughts
That now come travellers pale deformed with toil
From their large heavens to our clouded minds,
Spent in their journey, changed with broken wings,
Seized perfect words that here are frail sounds caught
By difficult rapture on a mortal tongue.
The strong who stumble and sin grew clear, great gods.
And where she stood in ever-flowering groves
Carolling thrilled response to united hearts
She saw the clasp which is denied to earth,
Felt a rapt candid passion of the soul
And viewed the unending joys of veilless love.
Then spoke the god, a figure sweet, august
And on his lips the smile that wear unmasked
The immortal secret helpers of the soul.

The ‘First Fair Copy’ proper ends here. About the rest of Amal Kiran’s transcription, he wrote in an ‘Editor’s Note’:

This month’s instalment consisting of a long passage and a short piece, is the last one of the earliest version of Savitri. But all of it cannot be called “first fair copy”. The long passage was found in the notebook from which Sri Aurobindo had transcribed what we have published so far. It is the closing speech of the Supreme and the conclusion of the narrative. … The short piece is part of the projected Epilogue. It is taken from the second of the two exercise books containing the first fair copy.¹

The first 73 lines of the longer passage correspond to the first part of the long speech of the Supreme in the 5th section as he grants to Savitri the boons she has asked for. The following 39 lines relate to the closing 6th section, which describes her return to earth.

¹. Mother India, February 1982, p.81
The following passage of 73 lines corresponds to 149 climactic lines at the centre of the Book, lines 972-1120 of the final version, from which 59 powerful ‘echoing’ lines are found already prefigured in the earliest known draft.

“Because thou hast rejected my great calm
I lay upon thy neck my mighty yoke
And hold thee without refuge from my will.
Now will I do by thee my glorious works
Giving thee for reward and punishment
Myself in thee a sweetness and a scourge.
Unsheltered by dividing walls [of mind],
Naked of ignorance’ protecting veil
And without covert from my radiant gods

Thou shalt be hunted through the world by love.
No form shall screen thee from divine desire,
Nowhere shalt thou escape my living eyes.
A vision shall compel thy coursing breath.
Thy heart shall drive thee on the wheel of time;

Thy mind shall urge thee through the flames of thought,
To meet me in the abyss and on the heights,
To feel me in the tempest and the calm
And love me in the noble and the vile,
In beautiful things and terrible desire.

My fiercest masks shall my attractions bring,
Music shall find thee in the voice of swords,
Beauty pursue thee through the core of flame.
The pains of hell shall be to thee my kiss,
The flowers of heaven persuade thee with my touch,

The [myriad] forces of my universe
Shall cry to thee the summons of my name.
Thou shalt know me in the rolling of the spheres,
Thou shalt meet me in the atoms of the whirl.
Delight shall drip down from my nectarous moon,

My fragrance seize thee in the jasmine’s snare,
My eye shall look upon thee from the sun.
Mirror of Nature’s secret spirit made,
Thou shalt not shrink from any brother soul
But live attracted helplessly to all,

Drawn to me on the bosom of thy friend
And forced to love me in thy enemy’s eyes.

Thou shalt drink down my sweetness unalloyed
And bear my ruthless beauty unabridged

Amid the world’s intolerable wrongs,

Mid the long discord and the clash of search,

Thou shalt discover the one and quivering note
And be the harp of all its melodies

And be my splendid wave in seas of love.

Insistent, careless of thy lonely right,

My creatures shall demand me from thy heart.

All that thou hast shall be for others’ bliss;

All that thou art shall to my hands belong.

I will pour delight from thee as from a jar
And whirl thee as my chariot through the ways

And use thee as my sword and as my lyre
And play on thee my minstrelsies of thought.

And when thou art vibrant with all ecstasies

And when thou liv’st one spirit with all things,

Men seeing thee shall feel my siege of joy,

And nearer draw to me because thou art.

Enamoured of thy spirit’s loveliness,

They shall embrace my body in thy soul,

Hear in thy life the beauty of my laugh,

Know thy thrilled bliss with which I made the world.

This thou shalt henceforth learn from every thought,

That conquering me thou art my captive made,

And who possess me are by me possessed.

For ever love, O beautiful slave of God.

Cast from the summits of thy visioned spirit,

Return to life with him thy soul desired,

In whom I lay in wait for thee at first,

Satisfied in him of oneness and convinced

And gather to thee myriad unities

With all my endless forms and divine souls.

From thy beginning in earth’s voiceless bosom
Through life and time and will and grief and death
I have led thee onward to the golden point,
From which another sweeter gyre shall start.”

Amongst these 73 lines transcribed by Amal Kiran from the notebook, we found 59 that have been retained, unchanged or slightly modified, in the final version. They are especially concentrated in the central part of the passage, where 51 successive lines follow close upon each other almost without alteration, except that in some cases their position and order vary from the latest version.

[Book Eleven – Section 6]

The measure of that subtle music ceased.

75
Down with a hurried swimming floating lapse
Through unseen worlds and bottomless spaces forced
Sank like a star the soul of Sâvithrî,
[...] mid a laughter of unearthly lyres,
She heard around her nameless voices cry

80
Triumphing, an innumerable sound
And bore the burden of infinity
And felt the stir of all ethereal space
Pursuing her in her fall implacably sweet.

A face was over her which seemed a youth’s

85
Crowned as with peacock plumes of gorgeous hue
Framing a sapphire, whose heart-disturbing smile
Insatiably attracted to delight.

Often it changed, though rapturously the same,
And seemed a woman’s dark and beautiful,

90
Turbulent in will and terrible in love,
A shadowy glory and a stormy depth,
Like a mooned night with drifting star-gemmed clouds.
Eyes in which Nature’s deaf ecstatic life,
Sprang from some Spirit’s passionate content,

95
Missioned her downwards to the whirling earth.
Like a bird held in a child’s satisfied hands,
Her spirit strove in an enamoured grasp
Admitting no release till Time should end.
Like a flower hidden in the heart of spring,
She kept within her strong embosoming soul
The soul of Sutyavân drawn down by her
Inextricably in that might lapse.
Invisible heavens in a thronging flight
Soared upward past [her] as she fell; then near
Came the immense attraction of the earth;
Till in the giddy proneness of the speed
Lost, overcome, sinking she disappeared
Into unconsciousness as in a pool,
Like one descending from a breathless height
Into the wonder of abysmal depths.
Above her closed the darkness of great wings
And she was buried in a Mother’s breast.

Amongst the 39 lines corresponding to the closing passage of Book Eleven we found that almost all of them closely match the final version, in which, however, 26 more lines have been added to complete the 65 lines of section 6.

[Book Twelve – Epilogue]

About this book, Nirodbaran reports:

About The Epilogue, except for a few additions, it almost reproduces the single old version.¹

This old version must however have been worked on by Sri Aurobindo at some early stage, for the Epilogue has been considerably expanded since the composition of this continuous passage of 21 lines found by Amal Kiran in the second of the two exercise books containing the fair copy. In the final version 15 of these lines now appear, slightly modified, in the first section of its single canto, ‘The Return to Earth’.

“I am the Madran, I am Sâvithrî,
Thy slave and lover, thy delight and friend,
Thy prone possessor, sister of thy soul
And mother of thy wants. O thou my world,
My god, O earth and heaven my arms embrace,

¹. Nirodbaran, Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo, p.183
Whose every limb my answering limbs desire,
Whose heart is key to all my heartbeats! This
I am and thou to me, O Suthyavân;
No gladness lost, but everything fulfilled
Divinely. Let us go through this new world
Which is the same, for it is given back
And it is known, a playing ground of God
Who hides himself in bird and beast and man
Sweetly to find Himself again by love,
By oneness, absolute in us for ever.
Now grief is dead and serene bliss remains.
Let us go back, for eve is in the skies.
[Thy father waits who will not eat of food
Unless he knows us seated at his side.]
Lo, all these beings in this wonderful world!
Let us give joy to all, for joy is ours!”

End of Transcript

Part Three of Savitri consists of Books Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve, which together make up 5080 lines in the final version. In the first fair copy, this material is covered in lines 925 to 1637, (713 lines in all), which make up its incomplete second Book. In addition, as mentioned above, Amal Kiran identified and transcribed from the early notebook 112 lines which foreshadow what has now become Book Eleven, and 21 lines from the second of the two exercise books which reappear almost unchanged in the first section of Book Twelve, thus giving a total of 846 lines from the earliest period of composition which correspond to Part Three of the final version. Of these, 216 lines now appear – unchanged or slightly modified – in Book Nine, 168 in Book Ten, 117 in Book Eleven and 15 in Book Twelve, adding up to 516 lines altogether which are echoed or retained in Part Three of the 1993 edition of Savitri – just over 10% of the total.

Conclusion
Introducing this material to the public for the first time in the August 1981 issue of Mother India, Amal Kiran described it as follows:
Here is no indication of a Part I called Earth and a Part II named Beyond. The work is simply entitled, Sāvithrī and consists of two Books without any headings. The first book, divided into paragraphs, deals with quest, love, fate and death; the second brings in the themes of night, twilight and day, the day-section unfinished. Of the epilogue we have only one stray passage scribbled on the last page of the brown exercise-book.

Of the 1770 lines transcribed by Amal Kiran, 938 – more than half – can still be traced in the completed poem of 23,873 lines, forming just under 4% of the whole. This surely justifies his remark in the introductory essay to the transcription:

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 … 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.¹

Making a detailed comparison between that first fair copy and the version which Sri Aurobindo left to us in December 1950 has been a fascinating exercise for this researcher, which we hope may be of interest also to other lovers and students of this text, which evolved over a period of more than 30 years from a narrative poem of medium length in 1916, into the mantric epic which the Mother has characterised as ‘The supreme revelation of Sri Aurobindo’s vision.’ It is remarkable to find that the overall scheme of the poem remained the same throughout this long period of successive revisions and expansion, and to discover that even in the earliest known period of its composition, so many inspired lines came to the poet which he found fit to be retained in the final masterpiece.

Concluded

¹. Mother India, August 1981, p.424
News of Savitri Bhavan
Construction of Sangam Hall

Construction of this long-planned element of the Savitri Bhavan complex was launched by a simple ‘first brick’ ceremony, held on November 24, 2015, the 20th anniversary of the Foundation Ceremony carried out by our beloved elder brother Nirodbaran in 1995.

It will be a circular air-conditioned hall, accessible from both the ground-floor and first-floor levels of the Main Building, containing stepped seating to accommodate at least 200 people, since it is 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 Memorial Lecture series. Multimedia facilities are also planned.
Construction is expected to be completed by December 2017 at an estimated total cost of ₹ 85 lakh

We are appealing to all well-wishers of Savitri Bhavan and all *Savitri*-lovers for generous support to this project

Will you help?

*Ongoing work February 24, 2016*
Calendar of Events
November 2015 to February 2016

Regular Weekly Activities:

Sundays  
10.30am-12noon *Savitri* Study Circle

Mondays  
7-8am Sanskrit Hymns Chanting  
3-4pm ‘*Yoga and the Evolution of Man*’, led by Dr. Jai Singh  
5-6pm ‘*The Upanishads*’, 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 Hymns 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 Hymns 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 *Full Moon Gatherings* in front of Sri Aurobindo’s statue on the Full Moon Day.
Special Events:

November:

1-30 Exhibitions: *Meditations on Savitri: Books 2 and 3*, paintings made by Huta under the guidance of the Mother

* Sri Aurobindo: A Life-Sketch in Photographs

* Glimpses of the Mother: Photos with texts


9 2 Films: *A New Birth – A Meeting of The Mother with Surendra Nath Jauhar*, followed by *Adoration of the Divine Mother:*

16 Film: *The Mother: Glimpses of Her Life and Four Aspects of The Mother*; a two-part video originally made in 1992 and re-edited in August 2015.

23 Film: *Meditations on Savitri Book 4: The Book of Birth and Quest*; film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

24 10.45am *Sangam Hall – First Brick Ceremony* to launch construction of this new element of the Savitri Bhavan Campus

30 Film: *Life of Sri Aurobindo*; screenplay by Lopa: pictures and texts about Sri Aurobindo and his work.

December:

7 Film: *The Mother on Sri Aurobindo*

14 Film: *The Mother on Auroville*: a talk by Dr. Alok Pandey in November 2014

21 Film: *Savitri, The Way of Love*: The first Dr. M.V.Nadkarni Memorial Lecture, given at Savitri Bhavan by Narad in March 2010

28 Film: *Meditations on Savitri, Book 5: The Book of Love*; film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music

January 2016:

During this month films of Aurovilians speaking to Narad about their life and work in Auroville were shown.

4 Film: *Chali* spoke about education and her early years in Auroville.

11 Film: *Noel Parent, Part 1*; about how he first came in contact with Sri Aurobindo’s writings and eventually came to Auroville.

18 Film: *Noel Parent, Part 2*; about his creative activities in Auroville.
18-31 Exhibition: *From Some Invisible Fire*: Paintings by Ashram Artist Priti Ghosh

21 Indian Classical recital: Kees van Boxtel played Bansuri accompanied by Soundarya Seraphina on Veena

25 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 6: The Book of Fate*; film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings, illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

28 Film: *The Integral Yoga*, produced by Sopanam, Auroville.

February: This month films were shown in celebration of the Golden Day, commemorating the Supramental Manifestation on February 29, 1956.

1 Film: *Interview with Aster Patel* who shared her memories about the descent of the supramental consciousness.

8 Film: *Journey to the Life Divine, Part 1*; a film made by the Department of Physical Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 2010

15 Film: *Journey to the Life Divine, Part 2*; a film about the lives and work of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother from November 1926 to the present day

15 Exhibition until March 2: *Adventures of a Soul and Other Visionary Paintings by Huta*, with titles and comments from the Mother

19 The 6th Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial lecture on ‘*Surrender in Savitri*’ was given by Mr. Jamshed Mavalwalla

21 Film: *The One Whom We Adore as The Mother*; an audio-visual presentation on the Mother’s life prepared by the Sri Aurobindo Archives in 2010

22 Film: *Interview with Shraddhavan*: Responses to questions about Auroville from a Russian TV crew in April 2013

27 Solo violin performance by Ladislav Brozman

27 Film: *The Golden Day 2012*: based on the celebration in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

28 *The Day of the Lord: February 29, 1956*: talk by Dr. Alok Pandey on the Supramental Manifestation

29 *Douze Prières et Méditations de la Mère*, jouées et mises en scène par Céline
Indian classical music played by Kees van Boxtel on Bansuri accompanied by Soundarya Seraphina and Aurovilian Jan; on the wall, paintings by Priti Ghosh

Mr. Jamshed Mavalwalla giving the 6th Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Lecture on February 19th, 2016
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

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

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

By Credit/Debit card transfer
Access www.auroville.com/donations and enter the amount you wish to offer. Amounts of INR 500 to INR 10,000 are accepted. Specify ‘Savitri Bhavan’ as the recipient. Please be aware that charges will be deducted from the amount before it enters our account, and that therefore the amount mentioned on our receipt will be less than the exact amount that you sent. This will be a consideration if you require tax relief on your offering.

By Cheque or DD
Cheques and DDs should be made payable to Auroville Unity Fund and sent to Savitri Bhavan at the address given below.
If you are offering Rs. 500 or less, please consider sending it by money-order or DD, since the charges for cashing out-station cheques have become very high. If you feel like sending a regular modest offering, it may be better to send it every three months rather than monthly, for the same reason.

If you live in India
To send your offering through Internet Banking or direct transfer, it should be sent to State Bank of India : Branch code No. 03160 : Current account no. 10237876031; For 100% tax exemption under section 35 (i) (iii) of the IT Act use Current account no. 31612623238.

If you 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