

Invocation

Savitri

B H A V A N

Study notes No. 51

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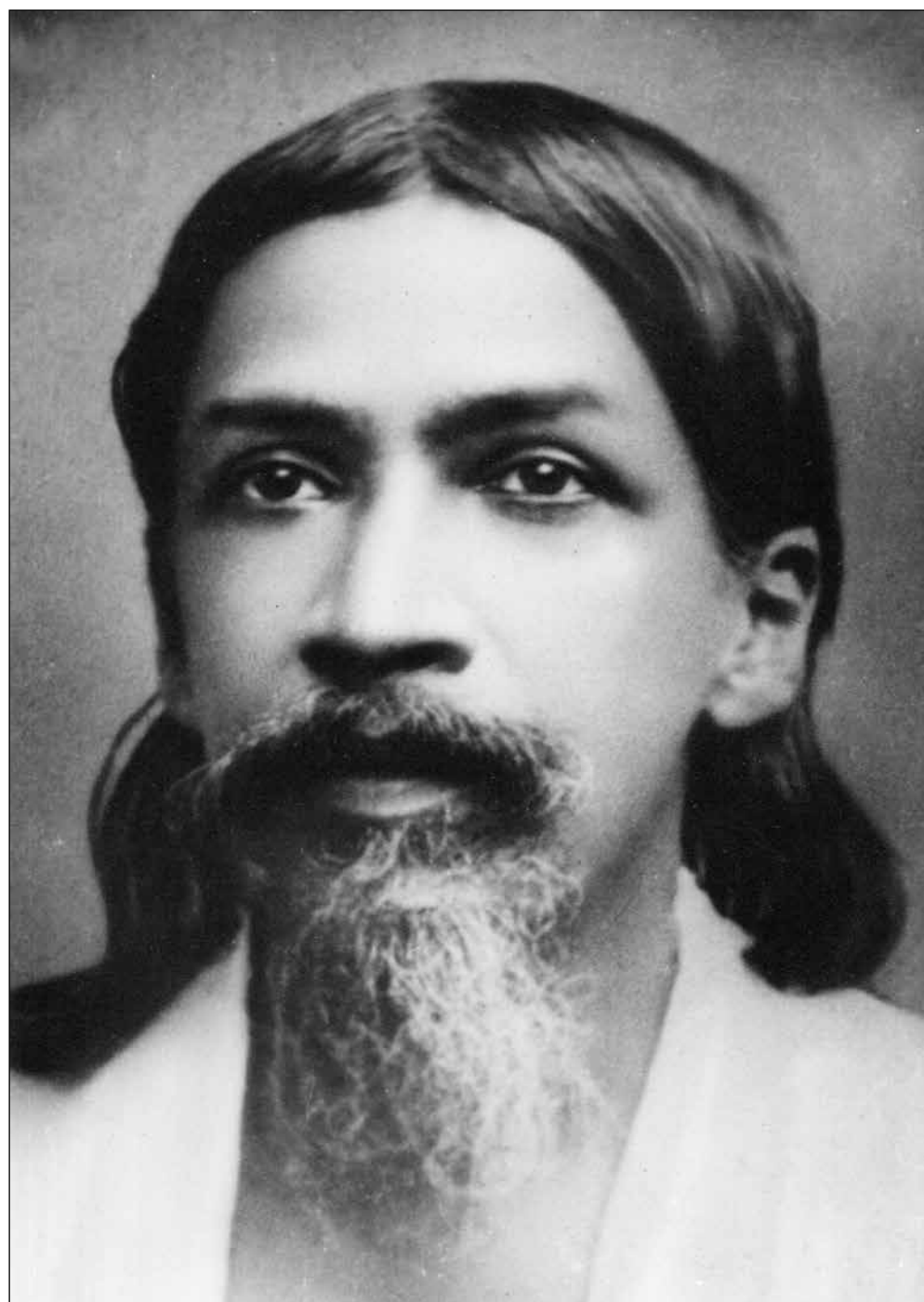
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Sri Aurobindo came to tell the world of the beauty of the future that must be realised.

He came to give not a hope but a certitude of the splendour towards which the world moves. The world is not an unfortunate accident, it is a marvel which moves towards its expression.

The world needs the certitude of the beauty of the future. And Sri Aurobindo has given that assurance.

THE MOTHER
27 November 1971
(MCW 13 p.15)



The English of *Savitri*

Book Two, Canto Five:

The Godheads of the Little Life

Section 1 and Section 2

By Shraddhavan

In the previous canto, Sri Aurobindo described to us *The Kingdoms of the Little Life* and told us about the emergence of living forms in Matter. In this canto he shows King Aswapati transitioning from the surface realm of Life into its inner realms in order to discover the powers and divinities that are hidden there.

As *The Traveller of the Worlds* exploring the planes of cosmic existence, Aswapati moved upwards on the World Stair from its base on Earth to the Kingdom of Subtle Matter which underlies and supports the material universe, and then journeyed on into the realms of Life.

Canto Three, *The Glory and the Fall of Life* closed with a poignant description of how the ‘*gracious great-winged Angel*’ of Life, wishing to pour her wonderful gifts of heavenly beauty and bliss onto the newly-formed Earth, was swallowed up by the inertia and unconsciousness of Matter so that ‘*all her glory into littleness turned / And all her sweetness into a maimed desire*’. The canto ended with these lines:

To feed death with her works is here life’s doom.
So veiled was her immortality that she seemed,
Inflicting consciousness on unconscious things,
An episode in an eternal death,
A myth of being that must for ever cease.
Such was the evil mystery of her change.¹

In Canto Four, *The Kingdoms of the Little Life*, Sri Aurobindo showed us three stages of the emergence of living material forms in the course of earthly evolution: first we saw primitive short-lived creatures

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The Mother in *Savitri*

The 10th Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture

will be given at Savitri Bhavan
on Tuesday February 19, 2020
5.30 -6.30 pm

by
Dr. Alok Pandey

As usual, transport will be provided from Pondicherry
and light refreshments will be offered at Savitri Bhavan
Everyone is welcome

struggling to survive dominated by the inertia and unconsciousness of material substance; then more complex and dynamic life-forms developed as the rich and varied creatures of the '*animal creation*' which included beings with human-like bodies but lacking human consciousness; and finally, in the last section of the canto, he described the first tentative appearance of Mind in living forms. In addition to the involutory and evolutionary planes constituting the upward and downward steps of the World Stair, there is a concentric arrangement of worlds and planes inner and outer; while in Canto Four we saw Aswapati witnessing the emergence of different shapes and forms of living beings on the physical surface of the world, in Canto Five we shall see him looking inward from the surface shapes and forms to explore the subtler inner realms lying behind and within them, and becoming aware of the beings who live there.

A fixed and narrow power with rigid forms,
He saw the empire of the little life,
An unhappy corner in eternity.

It lived upon the margin of the Idea
Protected by Ignorance as in a shell.

Aswapati sees '*the empire of the little life*', the realm of lower life-forms and movements, as '*An unhappy corner in eternity*' far removed from the blissful higher levels of Life which were revealed to him in Canto Three. The '*little life*' appears to be '*A fixed and narrow power with rigid forms*', narrow in scope and lacking in flexibility, situated on '*the margin of the Idea*', as if on the outermost edge of the creative conception which has given rise to the manifestation. That realm exists '*Protected by Ignorance*', like a soft-bodied creature which needs to hide inside a hard '*shell*' to feel safe. '*Ignorance*' is the state into which Life emerges as it begins to escape from total domination by the inconscience of Matter. That life is limited, restricted, subject to error and falsehood, because it cannot see the whole, of which it is a tiny part. '*Idea*' with a capital 'I' refers to the original creative conception which has brought the Universe into existence.

Then, hoping to learn the secret of this world
He peered across its scanty fringe of sight,
To disengage from its surface-clear obscurity
The Force that moved it and the Idea that made,
Imposing smallness on the Infinite,
The ruling spirit of its littleness,
The divine law that gave it right to be,
Its claim on Nature and its need in Time.

Aswapati wants to understand '*the secret of this world*', this realm of life: what is its place in the cosmic scheme? What gives it the right to exist? In order to discover this hidden secret, he has to '*peer*' or make a concentrated effort to see beyond the '*scanty fringe of sight*' which is offered to his gaze. 'To peer' means 'to make an effort to see'. The word '*scanty*' means 'insufficient', 'not enough'. The possibilities of vision in that world are very limited and cover only the edge of it, like a '*fringe*' on the border of a shawl.

In that world one can only see a short distance. It seems to be clear only on the surface, the rest is obscure, difficult to make out; but Aswapati wants '*To disengage*' or separate its hidden meaning from that '*surface-clear obscurity*'. He wants to discover the

Force that is driving and motivating that realm and the creative ‘*Idea*’ that has brought it into existence, imposing this ‘*smallness*’ and ‘*littleness*’ on ‘*the Infinite*’. In order for this particular realm to have been manifested in the midst of all infinite possibility, a certain selection must have been made; this smallness must have been defined in some way. Why? How? What is ‘*The ruling spirit*’ of this ‘*littleness*’? What is ‘*The divine law*’ which has given it the right to exist? What is ‘*Its claim on Nature*’? What ‘*need in Time*’ justifies the existence of this ‘*unhappy corner in eternity*’? Nothing can exist in the manifestation unless there is some justification for it, some divine law that sanctions it. That is what King Aswapati wants to understand now: What is the purpose of this realm? Why is there a need for this strange, limited world? What gives it its right to claim the possibility of expression – its ‘*claim on Nature*’? Why has Nature agreed that it has a right to be manifested? What Divine intention is supporting this world?

He plunged his gaze into the siege of mist
That held this ill-lit straitened continent
Ringed with the skies and seas of ignorance
And kept it safe from Truth and Self and Light.

Aswapati has a very great power of Concentration and Vision: he concentrates his gaze, his will to see, and looks into the mist which is surrounding that world preventing anything from entering or leaving it. That world is under ‘*siege*’. This is a term from warfare. In the Second World War, the Nazi armies surrounded Petrograd (St. Petersburg), the capital city of Russia, so that no supplies could be taken into it. The siege lasted for 900 days, causing unbelievable hardship to the people trapped inside. Similarly the realm of the Little Life is surrounded and under attack by darkness and confusion which keep it always ‘*ill-lit*’, dim, and ‘*straitened*’: narrowly restricted. It is like a continent that is ‘*Ringed*’, surrounded on all sides, by ‘*the skies and seas of ignorance*’ which are keeping it cut off from ‘*Truth*’, from the vastness of the infinite ‘*Self*’, and from the ‘*Light*’ of full consciousness.

As when a searchlight stabs the Night’s blind breast
And dwellings and trees and figures of men appear
As if revealed to an eye in Nothingness,

All lurking things were torn out of their veils
And held up in his vision's sun-white blaze.

This is what happens when Aswapati focuses his power of vision to penetrate the dark mist surrounding '*the empire of the little life*'. It is as if he is pointing a bright searchlight into the night. Suddenly everything that was concealed in the darkness is lit up and becomes visible: '*dwellings and trees and figures of men appear / As if revealed to an eye in Nothingness*'. All the things which were hiding, '*lurking*', in the darkness – houses, trees, people – are uncovered, as if they were veiled, but now their veils have been torn away and they are held up into the blazing sunlight of Aswapati's consciousness so that he can see them all clearly. This is what he sees:

A busy restless uncouth populace
Teemed in their dusky unnoted thousands there.

Thousands and thousands of '*dusky*' dark-hued beings are teeming there, like ants or termites, constantly in movement – '*busy*' and '*restless*'. They are the '*uncouth populace*' which inhabits that realm. '*Uncouth*' means 'rude', 'ill-mannered', 'rough and brutal', 'uneducated', 'uncivilised'. The beings of that realm are like that.

In a mist of secrecy wrapping the world-scene
The little deities of Time's nether act
Who work remote from Heaven's controlling eye,
Plotted, unknown to the creatures whom they move,
The small conspiracies of this petty reign
Amused with the small contrivings, the brief hopes
And little eager steps and little ways
And reptile wallowings in the dark and dust,
And the crouch and ignominy of creeping life.

Sri Aurobindo refers to the beings swarming there as '*The little deities of Time's nether act*': little divinities working away in the lower levels of existence. Like termites they live underground, in the dark depths, far away from '*Heaven's controlling eye*', unnoticed by the higher godheads and not directly controlled by the divine will. Hidden out of sight they keep themselves occupied and amused by influencing other beings who are unaware of the mischief they are plotting and contriving in their petty way.

Q: Are all these worlds within us?

The poet does not tell us about that in this general description we are reading now; but further on, on page 153, he tells us:

Wherever are soulless minds and guideless lives
And in a small body self is all that counts,
Wherever love and light and largeness lack,
These crooked fashioners take up their task.

And '*Here too*', he says, '*these godlings drive our human hearts*'. That is why he is telling us about them: it is important for us to know about these '*little deities of Time's nether act*' – its act on the lower levels; '*nether*' means low or lower; The Netherlands: the low-lying country.

Q: Are these vital beings or true gods?

Sri Aurobindo is going to tell us on the next page what these little deities are.

These beings '*of Time's nether act*' work in the mist of secrecy and ignorance wrapping the world scene. Secretly, unseen, unnoticed, they move and influence the creatures of the world of Little Life with their '*small conspiracies*'. The rule of this whole world is '*petty*': small and mean. There is nothing grandiose or mighty about it, nothing noble. Those swarming beings have fun with their tricks, their '*small contrivings*', like practical jokers who will set up a booby trap so that when you open the door something falls on your head or covers you with water – they are mischievous and are amused by that kind of thing. The Mother has recounted some instances of their mischief. For example, Sri Aurobindo used to concentrate while walking back and forth through his rooms. In each room he had at least one clock so that he could keep track of the time. Once he noticed that one of the clocks had stopped. When he moved on to the next room, he saw that the clock there had stopped too, and it was the same in the next room and the next. Then Sri Aurobindo said aloud, "This is a bad joke!" and all the clocks started again. Some small beings had been amusing themselves with '*their small contrivings*'. The Mother has explained that you can get some of them on your side and then they can be helpful: they used to tug at her sari to warn her that the milk was about to boil over. But this

is the way that these small beings live: occupied with their '*brief hopes / And little eager steps and little ways*', all on a very small scale. Also belonging to that nether plane are '*reptile wallowings in the dark and dust*', beings that enjoy rolling in the mud as perhaps the dinosaurs used to do, and delight in '*the crouch and ignominy of creeping life*'. When you crouch, you make yourself as small as possible and try to pass by unseen, crouching down. These creeping lower forms of life are not erect and noble. '*Ignominy*' means 'shame' really. The beings there indulge in behaviour that we would find disgusting and shameful.

A trepidant and motley multitude,
A strange pell-mell of magic artisans,
Was seen moulding the plastic clay of life,
An elfin brood, an elemental kind.

Aswapati sees '*A trepidant and motley multitude*', thousands and thousands of these small beings. They are '*motley*', meaning that they take on many different forms and colours. The word '*motley*' is used particularly of colours. In the Middle Ages the kings and nobles used to keep jesters in their courts, people whose job was to be amusing, entertaining people. Some of them wore distinctive clothes made up of many coloured patches – '*motley*', meaning '*mixed*', '*varied*'. Here it seems that not only the clothes of these beings are mixed and discordant, but also their shapes and forms. Also they are '*trepidant*': agitated, restless, constantly in movement. They are '*A strange pell-mell of magic artisans*'. '*Artisans*' are craftsmen, people who make things. These beings make magic of a petty kind. The expression '*pell-mell*' suggests a jostling and disorderly crowd, all rushing around and bumping into one other.

Aswapati sees this multitude of magic artisans '*moulding the plastic clay of life*', shaping living substance into varied shapes. The poet calls them '*An elfin brood*'. We have often come across this word '*brood*' and the adjectives '*broody*' and '*brooding*' which are connected with it. The broody hen or mother bird sits on her eggs, warming them until they are ready to hatch. The chicks which emerge are her '*brood*', her children or offspring. Reptiles also lay eggs, so we can speak of a dragon's brood: the offspring of a dragon. The poet refers to these small mischievous beings as '*An elfin*

brood'. Elves are small fairy-like beings. Then he says that they are '*an elemental kind*'. The word '*elemental*' is used in occultism for spirits which are connected with one or other of the five 'elements' or primary forms of substance: earth, water, fire, air, ether.

Astonished by the unaccustomed glow,
As if immanent in the shadows started up
Imps with wry limbs and carved beast visages,
Sprite-prompters goblin-wizened or faery-small,
And genii fairer but unsouled and poor
And fallen beings, their heavenly portion lost,
And errant divinities trapped in Time's dust.

When the glow of King Aswapati's sun-white vision shines on them like a searchlight, those elemental beings are '*Astonished by the unaccustomed glow*': that unusual bright light invading their native darkness. They become suddenly visible, as if they had been a part of the shadows and now emerge from them. The poet refers to several different kinds of these beings: '*Imps*', sprites, goblins, fairies, *genii* or genies, djinns and other soulless beings. '*Imps*' are small mischievous beings, small devils '*with wry limbs*' – '*wry*' means 'twisted' or 'crooked' – and '*carved beast visages*'. This image recalls the medieval cathedrals in Europe built of stone. Rainwater is drained from their roofs through the mouths of intricately carved monsters called 'gargoyles', grotesque sculptures of grinning or grimacing figures. Sprites are also mischievous or even evil. They are crooked and ugly like goblins: mean and spiteful beings who live underground; their skin is dark, rough and '*wizened*': wrinkled. The sprites whisper suggestions, not only to the beings of that realm but to us too, prompting mean and petty ideas, envies and jealousies and cruelties. Those '*Sprite-prompters*' may look ugly like goblins, but some are more attractive and '*faery-small*': pretty little beings with wings like moths or butterflies. Sri Aurobindo uses the word '*faery*' several times in the poem, always with this older spelling which is more poetic than the 'fairies' that appear in fairy-tales. 'Faerie' is also the land where the fays or fairies live. The word 'genie' comes from an old Latin word meaning a spirit, but it also reminds us of the djinns, the vital spirits who appear in the 'Arabian Nights' stories, who may be trapped by magicians in bottles or lamps. They can

appear more beautiful but they have no souls. They are poor because they do not have any higher qualities. And there are other beings there: '*fallen beings*' that have come from higher worlds and who have lost their divine qualities – '*their heavenly portion*' – in this '*empire of the little life*'. Some of them are even '*errant divinities*': divine beings who have lost their way. '*Errant*' means '*wandering*' or '*lost*'; these divinities have lost their way and become trapped in the dust of Time.

Ignorant and dangerous wills but armed with power,
Half-animal, half-god their mood, their shape.
Out of the greyness of a dim background
Their whispers come, an inarticulate force,
Awake in mind an echoing thought or word,
To their sting of impulse the heart's sanction draw,
And in that little Nature do their work
And fill its powers and creatures with unease.

All these different kinds of elemental spirits are '*Ignorant and dangerous wills*', but they have some '*power*'. In their mood, their attitude and their form they are mixed: '*Half-animal, half-god*'. '*Out of the greyness of a dim background*' – the background of ignorance and half-consciousness which prevails in that realm – '*Their whispers come*' to us. They are '*inarticulate*': they do not speak clearly, but the '*force*' of their suggestions awakens in us some thought or word repeating – '*echoing*' – those suggestions and stimulates a response in our hearts to '*sanction*', to accept and agree with '*their sting of impulse*' which makes us leap into action as if we have been stung by a bee or wasp. In the '*little Nature*' of our lower ignorant levels they '*do their work*' and spread their petty ugliness and meanness all around, so that there is no peace and rest in their atmosphere, only '*unease*': an unhappy and restless state. There is no peace in that realm because of these myriads of magic artisans always poking and pressing, whispering their ugly suggestions.

Its seed of joy they curse with sorrow's fruit,
Put out with error's breath its scanty lights
And turn its surface truths to falsehood's ends,
Its small emotions spur, its passions drive

To the abyss or through the bog and mire:
Or else with a goad of hard dry lusts they prick,
While jogs on devious ways that nowhere lead
Life's cart finding no issue from ignorance.

There is a '*seed of joy*' in that life world, but those mean little beings put a bad spell, a '*curse*' on it, and spoil it so that it will not yield joy but only sorrow. There are some little lights of consciousness but they are '*scanty lights*', dim and insufficient, and through the actions of those twisted beings whatever little truth-light appears gets quenched by error and falsehood; as if blowing out a candle, they '*Put out with error's breath its scanty lights*'. There may be some small candle-lights of consciousness in that ignorant world, but they just blow them out. There may be some '*surface truths*' there, but because of all the mischief going on, those surface truths only lead to falsehood, or are used for falsehood. Those '*Ignorant and dangerous wills*' drive the small emotions of that little life-realm '*To the abyss*': to the deep, dark gulf of evil, '*or through the bog and mire*'. A '*bog*' is a place where the ground is so soft and muddy that anyone who steps there gets sucked down into the mud. '*Mire*' is wet, sticky earth which also is dangerous to step on. Horse-riders use a '*spur*', a sharp piece of metal on the heels of their boots to force their steed to move faster. A '*goad*' is the sharp stick used to drive bullocks or elephants. Those ugly beings make goads out of '*hard, dry lusts*' to keep pricking their victims onwards, but despite their pricking and goading the cart of life only jogs slowly on its way, round and round '*on devious ways*' – on misleading tracks which lead nowhere. There seems to be no way out of that ignorant state. Life's cart goes jogging on, driven on by these pricks and goads but '*finding no issue*'. An '*issue*' is a way out, an exit: that little life provides no way out of its ignorant state.

To sport with good and evil is their law;
Luring to failure and meaningless success,
All models they corrupt, all measures cheat,
Make knowledge a poison, virtue a pattern dull
And lead the endless cycles of desire
Through semblances of sad or happy chance
To an inescapable fatality.

Those mischievous beings do not care about truth and right: they make a game out of ‘*good and evil*’. That is the ‘*law*’ of their being. They attract us ‘*to failure*’ or maybe to ‘*success*’ but a success which has no value, no meaning. Where there are ‘*models*’ and ‘*measures*’ which should be followed, they ‘*corrupt*’ and distort them so they are no longer reliable. They turn even knowledge into ‘*a poison*’ and make ‘*virtue*’, good and correct behaviour, seem boring: ‘*a pattern dull*’. In this way they ‘*lead the endless cycles of desire*’. Desires always go in cycles. You are attracted by something. You get it or you do not get it. You may have some momentary satisfaction. Then you get bored with it and dissatisfaction comes, and then you are attracted by something else. Those beings lead our desires round and round in circles, through ‘*semblances*’, appearances, of misfortune or even good fortune, ‘*sad or happy chance*’, ‘*To an inescapable fatality*’: a fatal end.

Q: Can these beings be transformed?

We suppose that eventually, by the action of the Divine Grace bringing about the rule of the Divine Love over the whole universe, everything is going to return to its true face and figure; then maybe they will become like the Ganas, the servants of Lord Shiva we see depicted in many Indian temples. Savitri experiences a transformation like that in Book Seven, Canto Five after she has the realisation of the Supreme Mother. There is a descent and a transformation of all the levels of her being and there the poet speaks of ‘*A romp of little gods*’.¹ That makes me think about the Ganas we see in Indian temples.

Q: Chance is also luck?

‘Chance’ refers to happenings that seem random and unpredictable, without any obvious cause.

Q: Can we protect ourselves against these mischievous beings?

1. *In the narrow nether centre’s petty parts
Its childish game of daily dwarf desires
Was changed into a sweet and boisterous play,
A romp of little gods with life in Time. (Savitri p. 530)*

If we notice their action or influence on us and can offer it to the Mother and ask for her protection, that is good. The important thing is not to be controlled and driven by them.

All by their influence is enacted there.
Nor there alone is their empire or their role:
Wherever are soulless minds and guideless lives
And in a small body self is all that counts,
Wherever love and light and largeness lack,
These crooked fashioners take up their task.

In those Kingdoms of the Little Life everything is ‘enacted’ or carried out according to the influence of these ignorant and dangerous wills. But now the poet says that this does happen not only there: ‘*Nor there alone*’, not only in the Kingdoms of the Little Life is the empire that they rule ‘*or their role*’, the role that they play, the work that they do. ‘*These crooked fashioners take up their task*’ wherever in the universe there are ‘*soulless minds*’, minds that are not lit by the light of the soul, and lives that are not guided by some higher influence, lives that are just lived in the ignorance, and wherever ‘*in a small body self is all that counts*’ – self-interest is the first thing that we become motivated by in our development; all that counts, everything that matters, everything that is important is only ‘I’ – me-me-I-I-what I need – and ‘my’ needs and desires which are dominated by the body. ‘*Wherever love and light and largeness lack*’: where they are missing and are not there, they are lacking. When we lack something, we do not have it; we need it but we do not have it. Wherever there is no love, no light, there is no ‘*largeness*’, no larger view – no larger ideal, wherever these things are missing, ‘*These crooked fashioners take up their task*’, these lower beings set to work. They are ‘*fashioners*’, beings who make and create things, form things. To ‘fashion’ means ‘to shape’, ‘to give a form to something’; a potter fashions pots out of clay, or a metal-worker fashions shapes out of copper or steel. In a similar way these beings are shaping things out of vital substance; but the things that they fashion are ‘*crooked*’: not straight, not perfect; not as they should be, but distorted, spoiled. In the Veda the word ‘*crooked*’ implies what is evil and false. These ‘*fashioners*’ make

things crooked, awry, distorted, twisted, perverted, and they can work unhindered wherever there are '*soulless minds and guideless lives*'. They just whisper their suggestions in our ears; our hearts, or the subconscious, respond, and we follow.

To all half-conscious worlds they extend their reign.
Here too these godlings drive our human hearts,
Our nature's twilight is their lurking-place:
Here too the darkened primitive heart obeys
The veiled suggestions of a hidden Mind
That dogs our knowledge with misleading light
And stands between us and the Truth that saves.

The poet calls these small deities '*godlings*'. When we put the 'ling' ending on a word it makes it small. Can you think of any such word? Siblings, yes these are children of the same family. Small trees that are just sprouting we call 'seedlings', baby geese are called 'goslings'. The beings whom Aswapati discovers in the subtle realm of the little life are small deities, but their reign extends '*To all half-conscious worlds*': that is, to all worlds which are not fully conscious, which are ruled to some extent by ignorance, including our own world, which lives in the grip of Ignorance and Death. '*Here too these godlings drive our human hearts*'. They can do so because we live in '*twilight*': a half-conscious state where light is mixed with the darkness which gives them places to hide. There they can lurk, they can hide. The tiger lurks in the bushes or long grass until some deer come close and he can jump out on them. Similarly those crooked godlings lurk in the shadows of the lower nature, watching and waiting for any opportunity to exercise some control over our hearts. '*The darkened primitive heart*': the heart that has not been touched by love and light and largeness easily '*obeys*' '*The veiled suggestions of a hidden Mind*'. Supporting these little godlings there is '*a hidden Mind*': a consciousness that sends suggestions through them to us. We do not see the suggestions coming because they are '*veiled*', disguised and hidden. They come into the twilight, the darker parts of our nature, and then from there they come up into our mind or our body or our heart.

Here is a first hint that King Aswapati is going to have to find the origin of those '*veiled suggestions*'. He will have to find the

'hidden Mind' which is dogging *'our knowledge with misleading light'*. 'To dog' someone or something is a nice verb in English. If you have a good and well-trained dog he will always keep close to you, following at your heels, like a shadow. If something is dogging you, it will always be following you like a faithful dog, you will not be able to get away from it. That hostile *'hidden Mind'* is always following whatever little partial knowledge we manage to acquire in this twilight world of ignorance, casting its misleading suggestions on us and blocking the one true light that will lead us onwards and upwards. It *'stands between us and the Truth that saves'*, so that everything we think and do is overshadowed by its *'misleading light'*.

Q: Do these negative entities still have a place in the evolution? If so, what would their role be?

Further on in the canto Sri Aurobindo is going to explain the place that this realm or level of existence has in evolution as an inevitable consequence of the fact that this world we live in has evolved out of the Inconscient which is dominated by separation and limitation. As a result whatever individual formations arise out of complete unconsciousness into ignorance are necessarily shadowed and have only small and limited wills. There is some principle which makes use of that fact to bring about what we recognise as evil and falsehood and crookedness.

It takes King Aswapati several cantos to explore these realms: now we are in Canto Five. In Canto Six, he takes us to The Kingdoms of the Greater Life, which are more beautiful and powerful, but nevertheless this defect is still there too and seems inescapable. So Aswapati sets out to find the root of this distortion. To follow him, we too shall have to spend some time treading that downward path. He descends deep into the Night and eventually enters The World of Falsehood, where he discovers The Mother of Evil and the Sons of Darkness who are supporting and influencing the little mischievous beings that have their effect on our lives and play with us like puppets. After making and surviving that dangerous downward journey Aswapati has an astonishing and liberating experience which enables him to see the Divine everywhere and in everything. He finds *'the secret key of Nature's change'*: the key to the transformation of Nature.

Then he is cast up into the blissful ‘*Paradise of the Life Gods*’, but he remains there only a very short time because he is looking for something else. It is the riddle of this world: Why? Why did there have to be this perversion, this distortion, this crookedness? There is a small but very illuminating book by Sri Aurobindo with that title *The Riddle of this World*, which addresses this riddle, and perhaps answers your question in a satisfying way.

The next lines also refer to that ‘*hidden Mind*’ and its effect on us:

It speaks to us with the voices of the Night:
Our darkened lives to greater darkness move;
Our seekings listen to calamitous hopes.
A structure of unseeing thoughts is built
And reason used by an irrational Force.

Those suggestions come and speak ‘*to us with the voices of the Night*’. Because we are still in the twilight; we are influenced by the night as well as by the day. If we listen to the voices of the Night and follow them, ‘*Our darkened lives*’ move towards a ‘*greater darkness*’. It is in the nature of human beings to seek, to search for something, but if we listen to those suggestions, if we follow those misleading lights ‘*Our seekings listen to calamitous hopes*’. ‘*Calamitous*’ is an adjective derived from the noun ‘*calamity*’ which means ‘the worst thing that can happen’: something dreadful. We think we are moving towards the light and that we shall gain something valuable which we want very much; but those suggestions, those ‘*calamitous hopes*’ lead us far astray from what we really wanted. They lead us towards calamity, towards doom. To encourage us to take those wrong steps, that ‘*hidden Mind*’ builds up for us a mental ‘*structure*’, a convincing thought formation, but those thoughts are ‘*unseeing*’: blind or very short-sighted. We do not see where they are really leading us; as a result, our Reason, which is supposed to be the light of our mind, gets ‘*used by an irrational Force*’. If we observe ourselves and the people around us we can see this kind of thing happening all the time: instead of taking reason as a clear light, as the guide of our way, we use it in an irrational way: to justify our calamitous hopes, our desires, and our wrong impulses.

Q: Here ‘*Force*’ is written with a capital letter.

Yes. I think that here the poet is referring to that '*hidden Mind*' which is behind the calamitous '*irrational Force*' which is deliberately leading us away from the highest light of our intelligence, so that instead of using our power of reason to protect ourselves against the '*misleading suggestions*' of that '*hidden Mind*' we allow it to be used by the '*irrational Force*'.

Q: Darkness to greater darkness, light to greater light.

Yes, here we are in a twilight world. We have to move one way or the other: we can choose to move towards the light, an ever-greater light, but it can happen that we fall back into the darkness. If we listen to those calamitous hopes, those dire suggestions, they drive us into greater darkness. So how does this come about? Sri Aurobindo tells us:

This earth is not alone our teacher and nurse;
The powers of all the worlds have entrance here.
In their own fields they follow the wheel of law
And cherish the safety of a settled type;
On earth out of their changeless orbit thrown
Their law is kept, lost their fixed form of things.

This is one of the places in the poem where Sri Aurobindo tells us about our earth – that is to say, the material universe that we live in, dominated by the material principle. We feel that we human beings are children of earth, that our home, the planet Earth, is our mother earth. But here he reminds us that the physical world is not our only '*teacher and nurse*' who nourishes and cares for us, feeds us and helps to grow: '*The powers of all the worlds have entrance here*'. In Canto One of Book Two we read about the World Stair of ascending levels of cosmic existence, and learned that these are steps by which our souls rise up towards divinity. He also told us that those steps, those '*degrees*' were brought into existence by an immense sacrifice: the huge descent of the great World Mother. He explained that earth, the Material principle, was the last level to be manifested and that earth-matter is a '*residue*' consisting of a concentration of the principles of all the other planes. So '*the powers of all the worlds have entrance here*': They are allowed access to our world. At the end of the last canto we read that those worlds are typical. They are '*fixed to eternity of changeless type*'. We cannot imagine what that is like: change,

progress and growth are so much a part of our experience that we cannot really imagine a world where everything is fixed. In our world a dynamic play of growth and development is going on constantly. In a typical world there is no progress, nothing develops. If any of the beings of those worlds want to know the joy of progress, they have to come here and participate in the earth-life. '*In their own fields*' those powers from other worlds '*follow the wheel of law*', the law of those worlds and their place in the universe, and they '*cherish*', cling onto, love and value '*the safety of a settled type*': they stick to the type that they belong to, the particular type which belongs to that world or level. But if they come into our world, they are thrown out of that familiar '*settled type*'. This is a world of development and change; they are no longer fixed to that type. Their actual law of being is kept because none of us can lose the law of our being. '*Their law is kept*' but the '*fixed form of things*' in which that law was worked out in their native plane is lost.

Q: So here on Earth each type is in a different form than in their typical world?

Yes. You know what types are. Those are fixed forms in their own world but the power and law which has created those typical worlds, the power which is behind them, can enter here also. Their fixed forms are lost, but they keep the law of their nature, the law of littleness or the law of the little beings which he is describing, which belongs to one or other level of these Kingdoms of Little Life. Some are more dominated by the physical, others more purely vital in the lower way, influenced a little, lightened a little, by some kind of vital mind – but they cannot be anything other than that. That fixed way of their working keeps a kind of harmony in their own level, but here on earth all that is lost. So what happens?

Into a creative chaos they are cast
Where all asks order but is driven by Chance;
Strangers to earth-nature, they must learn earth's ways,
Aliens or opposites, they must unite:
They work and battle and with pain agree:
These join, those part, all parts and joins anew,
But never can we know and truly live
Till all have found their divine harmony.

As soon as they come into the earth consciousness they are thrown, 'cast', '*Into a creative chaos*'.

Q: How does something creative come out of chaos?

It seems to be a law of our world that order emerges from chaos. Starting from apparent randomness, order appears. The extent to which we can discover and establish order defines the creative process. That seems to be the law of earth, the '*creative chaos*' that leads to an ever-changing and progressing evolution. In our world everything is seeking for order even though it '*is driven by Chance*' – by what seem to be random forces coming from all sides. Powers that come into our world from another plane are '*Strangers to earth-nature*' but if they come into the earth's orbit they have to '*learn earth's ways*'. They are different from each other too. They are '*Aliens*': some are life forces; some are mind forces. They come from many different worlds. Here they all come together. Once they come here, they have to unite eventually. They have to submit to the earth's law of oneness and harmony. How is this going to happen? It is going to happen through clash and conflict. So '*They work and battle*' and sometimes they come together in alliances. They agree with difficulty, with struggle.

Q: Like us here in Auroville?

Exactly. This sounds like Auroville, doesn't it? '*Creative chaos*'. All these diverse natures and tendencies come together and join and then separate again: '*all parts and joins anew*'. That is what is happening here on earth. That is the evolutionary process in fact. '*But never can we know and truly live / Till all have found their divine harmony*'. All these forces and powers have to find '*their divine harmony*'. And of course in our individual selves, we are carrying powers and forces of all these levels, or we are influenced by them, so we have to find out how to harmonise all these different powers and possibilities and influences within ourselves.

Our life's uncertain way winds circling on,
Our mind's unquiet search asks always light,
Till they have learned their secret in their source,
In the light of the Timeless and its spaceless home,
In the joy of the Eternal sole and one.

This is the way our life goes on, our individual lives and the life of the human race in general, not in a straight line, but winding around and around. Sri Aurobindo says that it follows a spiral path, ‘*circling on*’ but also rising and falling. We may seem to come back to some state we have experienced before, but perhaps we have reached a slightly higher level. At the same time our mind keeps restlessly searching. One of the reasons it is so difficult for us to quieten the mind is that the very nature of the human mind is to keep searching for more and more light, more and more knowledge and a more and more complete picture of things. It is always asking for more light, until all the different powers and possibilities and influences within us ‘*have learned their secret in their source*’. The source is the One, the Eternal, the Timeless, the Infinite. All these elements have to learn the secret of themselves by contact with their source until they emerge into ‘*the light of the Timeless and its spaceless home*’, into ‘*the joy of the Eternal sole and one*’. Only then can all these divergent and conflicting movements find their divine harmony.

Q: What does ‘*sole*’ mean here?

‘*Sole*’ means ‘alone’. Here it refers to the oneness of the Supreme, as opposed to the One expressing himself as the Many and all the play of their numberless forms and relationships. ‘*The Eternal sole and one*’ ‘The One without a second’, the only ultimate reality: ‘*The Absolute, the Perfect, the Alone.*’¹

Q: Once these powers start harassing us does that open them to the possibility of evolution?

Well, at least they are drawn into this creative chaos as powers and that means they are active here. If they are in our consciousness they can be lifted up into the light. I think that is part of what we are supposed to do, part of the transformative evolutionary process. And that is true even for the higher powers. In India they say that if the gods want to progress they have to incarnate here on earth, and the Mother reminds us that only here can we progress. Once we leave the body and enter other worlds we may do some assimilation, we may make some choices for our future, but the real progress of the soul happens here on earth.

1. *Savitri* p.67

But now the Light supreme is far away:
Our conscious life obeys the Inconscient's laws;
To ignorant purposes and blind desires
Our hearts are moved by an ambiguous force;
Even our mind's conquests wear a battered crown.

For now we are still in the process of development in this twilight zone '*far away*' from the '*supreme*' '*Light*'. We have some kind of conscious life but it is dominated by the laws of matter and of the Inconscient. And here '*Our hearts*', which are typically the centre of the higher life movements, get moved '*To ignorant purposes and blind desires*'. They get '*moved by an ambiguous force*'. When something is '*ambiguous*' its significance is unclear: it could mean this or that or many other things; it is not clear. Sri Aurobindo sometimes uses this adjective for the earth itself: '*the dumb bosom of the ambiguous earth*'.¹ We do not know what the earth means and we do not know in which direction it is taking us. Our hearts get moved by '*an ambiguous force*'. We may think it is taking us towards the light while really it is driving us in another direction. And if we leave the heart and the life being behind to some extent and live more in our minds, we may conquer some kind of knowledge, some kind of light, but those conquests of the mind are 'battered crowns', which have been won with great difficulty and are imperfect, damaged, incomplete.

Q: The prefix '*ambi*' means what?

It means two or dual. If you are ambidextrous you can use your right hand and your left hand equally well. If you feel ambivalent about something you are not sure whether it is good or bad; you have difficulty in deciding about it because you are wavering between two different possibilities.

A slowly changing order binds our will.
This is our doom until our souls are free.
A mighty Hand then rolls mind's firmaments back,
Infinity takes up the finite's acts
And Nature steps into the eternal Light.
Then only ends this dream of nether life.

1. *Savitri* p.5

'A slowly changing order binds our will'. It means that willpower cannot take us very far beyond our present level of evolution. The evolutionary order, the whole manifestation, is moving forward slowly and our will, our possibilities of willing, are limited by where we stand in that order.

Q: Is this will collective or personal?

It is individual, but naturally it gets influenced by the collective milieu we are moving in. But the collective cannot progress unless enough individuals move forward. He says *'This is our doom'*: we are bound by our evolutionary level *'until our souls are free'*. So that is the best reason for taking up yoga: to become free. When by aspiration and effort and grace we achieve liberation it is as if *'A mighty Hand'* is rolling back the *'firmaments'*, the fixed skies of mind. *'Firmaments'* are the firm foundations of the universe: the word usually refers to heaven and earth. These are fixed; everything else in between changes. The sky of mind is a fixed firmament, but when the soul becomes free these firm boundaries are rolled back, and we are connected with our infinite source. Then *'Infinity takes up the finite's acts'*. Then *'Infinity'* can act through the liberated individual and *'Nature steps into the eternal Light'*. When that liberation comes, *'Then only ends this dream'*, this bad dream *'of nether life'*, the lower levels of life. The Upanishads speak of a lid above the mind: in order to have real knowledge, real freedom, that lid has to be removed. Even though it is a golden shining lid it still has to be removed. In the next section Sri Aurobindo will tell us how all this has come about.

Q: Could you explain how Sri Aurobindo speaks about *Swadharna*, the birth of the soul and the wheel of law?

Here he is referring to the *swadharna* of the powers of all the worlds. I cannot give you a reference right now. As for the beings that are currently in control of The Kingdoms of the Little Life, I do not think they come to earth because they want to progress or to be liberated. They come because it is fun for them to manipulate us. And there is a response here, so they have a lot of fun drawing on our energies; whenever there is a drama or a big fight they have a lot of fun. Wherever there is a lot of sexuality they thrive on that. Wherever love and light and largeness lack they find their food and

their possibilities for enjoyment. So the poet seems to say that all this will change only when more conscious beings, or a more conscious development, a soul development, a soul liberation, allows the higher light to pour down: the light of the timeless and the joy of the eternal. I feel that when the limited, distorted, perverted delight that we are familiar with here on earth gets exposed to the true divine delight, that must act like magic. The true delight is really transformative.

Q: When we connect with the psychic being then the mind's firmament rolls back so to speak?

He does not say exactly that: he says it happens when our souls are free. That means much more than just a contact with the psychic being. It means a real liberation. The psychic being does of course bring the '*light of the Timeless*' and it helps us in the struggle to offer up the lower nature for transformation, but according to my understanding the psychic contact by itself is not enough to achieve full liberation; the spiritual realisation is also needed. As I understand it, Sri Aurobindo says that both the psychic realisation and the spiritual realisation are needed before the supramental transformation that would really transform the whole of the nature can take place. We need the psychic realisation and the spiritual realisation. Both are indispensable. You can read about this in the Mother's book *On Education*, in the section on 'Psychic and Spiritual Education'. There she explains the difference between the psychic and the spiritual realisations.

End of Section 1

An Introduction to *Savitri*

To assist people who are just beginning to explore Sri Aurobindo's mantric epic, the Savitri Bhavan team has compiled an introductory booklet containing statements about the poem from Sri Aurobindo himself and from the Mother, a brief account of the composition of the poem, summaries of all the 49 cantos making up the twelve books of the epic, and a reading list of publications which may be helpful to students and researchers. Paperback, 68 pages, ISBN 978-93-82474-28-9, Rs. 125

Section 2, lines 116-321

At the outset of this enigmatic world
Which seems at once an enormous brute machine
And a slow unmasking of the spirit in things,
In this revolving chamber without walls
In which God sits impassive everywhere
As if unknown to himself and by us unseen
In a miracle of inconscient secrecy,
Yet is all here his action and his will.
In this whirl and sprawl through infinite vacancy
The Spirit became Matter and lay in the whirl,
A body sleeping without sense or soul.

Sri Aurobindo is going to give us an idea about how '*this enigmatic world*' which we live in has come into existence and developed. This world is an enigma, a puzzle, a riddle which is difficult to understand especially because we see it in contradictory ways. It seems, as many philosophies have described it, to be '*an enormous brute machine*' which goes on and on under its own brute force. Another way to look at it is to see it as '*a slow unmasking of the spirit in things*'. We can think of evolution like this: as an evolving process of more and more complicated and complex forms becoming more conscious. It is as if the Spirit is slowly removing its mask and revealing itself to us. Then he calls it a '*a revolving chamber without walls*' as if the whole universe is a vast spherical room which is constantly revolving, cycling, whirling, but it has no walls, there are no limits to it. God is sitting within '*this revolving chamber*', occupying every part of it, '*impassive*': not seeming to have any feelings or emotions about it. There is a vast equality, an impassivity. He sits there '*As if unknown to himself*', as if he does not know who or what he is; and we cannot see him. His existence in the material universe seems to be '*a miracle of inconscient secrecy*'. Secretly he is occupying this apparently inconscient world, this world of matter without consciousness, yet everything here depends on '*his action and his will*'. If we look out into the universe with the wonderful instruments that have now been invented we can see '*this whirl and sprawl through infinite vacancy*'. There are no boundaries to this '*revolving chamber*'. In it '*The spirit became matter and lay in the*

whirl' like '*A body sleeping*', insentient: '*without sense or soul*': a purely material manifestation.

A mass phenomenon of visible shapes
Supported by the silence of the Void
Appeared in the eternal Consciousness
And seemed an outward and insensible world.
There was none there to see and none to feel;
Only the miraculous Inconscient,
A subtle wizard skilled, was at its task.

This physical universe seems to be full of '*visible shapes*' bigger or smaller. They are floating supported by space, by the emptiness, '*the silence of the Void*'. He says that this manifestation '*Appeared in the eternal Consciousness*'. The eternal Consciousness must have become aware of this appearance that '*seemed an outward and insensible world*': purely material, without living senses. In that condition, at the outset of this world, there were no conscious beings: '*There was none there to see and none to feel*'. There was only '*the miraculous Inconscient*', acting like a skilful '*wizard*' or magician, doing its work. Inconscient Matter was organising itself first into primitive particles and then into more complex forms, and eventually forming visible shapes. All this seems to have gone on without any apparent conscious intention.

Inventing ways for magical results,
Managing creation's marvellous device,
Marking mechanically dumb wisdom's points,
Using the unthought inevitable Idea,
It did the works of God's intelligence
Or wrought the will of some supreme Unknown.

The inconscient was doing all this, managing and organising this marvellous dance of tiny little particles which the creation consists of, '*Mechanically*', without consciousness, '*marking*' certain essential '*points*' that had been indicated by a '*dumb wisdom*' – without any words or intention – '*Using the unthought inevitable Idea*'. There must have been a conception, an idea of some kind, but an '*unthought ... Idea*' which had an inevitability about it, which was self-fulfilling. All this apparently unconscious process was doing the works of '*God's intelligence*'. That is one way we can

look at it. If we do not want to think of it like that, we can say that it was carrying out the will of some '*supreme Unknown*'. '*Wrought*' here means 'worked out'.

Still consciousness was hidden in Nature's womb,
Unfelt was the Bliss whose rapture dreamed the worlds.
Being was an inert substance driven by Force.
At first was only an etheric Space:
Its huge vibrations circled round and round
Housing some unconceived initiative:
Upheld by a supreme original Breath
Expansion and contraction's mystic act
Created touch and friction in the void,
Into abstract emptiness brought clash and clasp:
Parent of an expanding universe
In a matrix of disintegrating force,
By spending it conserved an endless sum.

Only the inconscient was at its work. Consciousness was still hidden in the womb of nature. Nature's evolution had not yet given birth to consciousness in the material world. '*Being*', Existence, was manifest only as '*an inert substance driven by Force*', with no senses to feel and enjoy the '*Bliss whose rapture dreamed the worlds*' into existence. In the Indian view, these are the three fundamentals in reverse order. First Existence, then Consciousness, then Bliss, *Ananda*. '*At the outset*', the beginning of this world, '*Being*' seems to have been manifested as an '*inert substance*' that could not move but was being '*driven by*' physical energy, a physical '*Force*'. Inherent in pure Existence are Consciousness and Bliss. At this stage there is apparently no conscious being to feel Bliss, yet if Bliss had not been there this world could never have been dreamed into existence. Then the poet enumerates the steps of manifestation in the traditional order. '*At first*', we are told, there was an '*etheric Space*'. Ether is the subtlest of the five elements. It cannot be detected with our physical senses and in fact our physicists, unable to detect it, have declared that it does not exist; but Sri Aurobindo refers to it repeatedly in the poem. In the original '*etheric Space*' huge vibrations were circling round and round. Some versions say that these were the reverberations of the original sound 'OM'. Here Sri Aurobindo

seems to say that they expressed an *'initiative'*, a will of some kind: an *'unconceived initiative'*, not a mental intention. There was also a *'Breath'*. This is the second element: air or *Prana*, which is breathed in and out. The universe also seems to expand and contract, and this movement of expansion and contraction leads to friction: first the friction, then the embrace, clash and then clasp. These are Sri Aurobindo's words. The ancient Greek poet Homer and some of the old Greek thinkers and poets who have followed him described a very similar scenario: at first there was just a limitless ocean of darkness: Night. In that Night, a breath or wind arose causing movements which led to friction and then the birth or the beginning of Eros, of Love, the beginning of gravitational attraction. *'Into abstract emptiness'* these movements brought *'clash'* or friction, and *'clasp'*. These movements gave birth to an expanding universe that was held, contained within a *'matrix'*, a womb, *'of disintegrating force'*. This explanation seems to resemble the modern idea that all matter and material forces are subject to *'entropy'*, to loss of energy, and are therefore disintegrating. That is how our modern physicists describe this process. But they also say that while spending or using up energy this matrix still manages to conserve *'an endless sum'*. They assert that Matter cannot be created or destroyed. It does not become more or less.

On the hearth of Space it kindled a viewless Fire
That, scattering worlds as one might scatter seeds,
Whirled out the luminous order of the stars.
An ocean of electric Energy
Formlessly formed its strange wave-particles
Constructing by their dance this solid scheme,
Its mightiness in the atom shut to rest;
Masses were forged or feigned and visible shapes;
Light flung the photon's swift revealing spark
And showed, in the minuteness of its flash
Imaged, this cosmos of apparent things.
Thus has been made this real impossible world,
An obvious miracle or convincing show.

After Ether and Air comes Fire. The poet says that the first form of Fire was invisible, *'viewless'*, an energy or heat perhaps. Vibration

'kindled' an invisible fire on 'the hearth of Space'; 'to kindle' means 'to start a fire' and a 'hearth' is the base of a furnace or fireplace. This fire scattered worlds 'as one might scatter seeds'. In this way Existence has 'whirled out the luminous order of the stars.' We are told that it is in the stars, those visible fires, that all the elements of Matter have been brought into existence in succession, from the simplest to the most complex. Thus the whole universe has become 'An ocean of electric Energy' with all the atoms and subatomic particles and everything in it. We do not know what forms they have taken, but they appear to us as waves, particles, particle-waves, wave-particles. We do not know which they are, but somehow by their dance reacting with our sense perceptions they build up for us 'this solid scheme' which we perceive as the material world around us. In the view of physicists electricity or electric energy is basically a steady flow of electrons, which are subatomic particles. All matter is made up of atoms which in turn contain these electrons in constant motion, a 'dance'. The tremendous 'mightiness' of the electrons, the 'ocean of electric Energy' is thus 'shut to rest' in the 'atom'. In this way masses of all kinds were 'forged', created, or maybe only 'feigned', presented as an illusion. Visible shapes and light appeared. Nowadays the physicists tell us that light exists as minute particles called photons. Swift revealing sparks of these minute energetic particles revealed an image of our universe: 'this cosmos of apparent things': this world which seems so real to us.

Sri Aurobindo gives us this wonderfully poetic evocation of a process which seems to correspond to the theories of modern physicists and cosmologists – but then seems to cast doubt upon them by adding:

Or so it seems to man's audacious mind
Who seats his thought as the arbiter of truth,
His personal vision as impersonal fact,
As witnesses of an objective world
His erring sense and his instruments' artifice.

This is a picture of how this world has been made which is so miraculous, so 'impossible': 'An obvious miracle'. The existence of our universe is indeed miraculous, but a confirmed sceptic may say that it is all only an illusion and a 'convincing show'. These are ways in which 'man's audacious mind' tries to understand the universe.

(Continued on p.35)



Savitri around the World

A project of Auroville International and Savitri Bhavan celebrating the Centenary of the Mother's final arrival in Pondicherry on April 24, 1920 and remembering the Mother's words:

***“Savitri is a mantra
for the transformation of the World”***

This is the second edition of a project originally held in February 2018 to celebrate Auroville's 50th Anniversary. For the first edition 460 readers representing 101 countries provided video recordings of *Savitri* passages assigned to them. These recordings were assembled to create a continuous reading, starting in India at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, where the poem was written from 1916 to 1950, moving around the country and then travelling westward with the sun through Central and Western Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, Oceania, East and South East Asia, before returning to India and ending in Auroville, the City of the Dawn. The corresponding *Savitri* text was added in the form of subtitles to each filmed reading, along with the reader's name and country. The final product, lasting 35 hours, was screened in Savitri Bhavan's Sangam Hall from 6am IST on Monday 19.02.2018 onwards. The whole event was also simultaneously live-streamed on YouTube so that it could be viewed all around the world. **A second edition** is now in preparation for release in April 2020 to commemorate the Mother's final arrival in India on April 24, 1920. It is intended that this second edition will be posted permanently on YouTube, so that it can be accessed by all according to their convenience.



At the request of Auroville's Working Committee, on June 11, 2019 Savitri Bhavan hosted the visit of a group of leading industrialists who had been motivated by Dr. Sarat Kumar Acharya (ex-Chief Managing Director of the Neyveli Lignite Corporation) to gain a deeper awareness of the Lives, Work and Vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. A slide show was prepared on this theme and shown to the visitors, followed by a Question and Answer session and an informal tea at which they interacted with Aurovilians.



On August 22 Dr. Alok Pandey held the closing session of his post-Darshan Savitri Study Camp in the Sangam Hall with a talk entitled 'The End of Death', based on the last canto of Book Ten of Sri Aurobindo's epic. This illuminating talk was very well attended and much appreciated.



On the same evening, Ashram artist Hufreesh Chopra Dumasia inaugurated an exhibition of her recent paintings 'Inner Journey' which remained on view in Savitri Bhavan's Square Hall up to September 7.



On April 20 twenty teachers of the Jaipuria School of Lucknow visited Savitri Bhavan and shared information about their unique educational institution. At their request Shradhavan gave a talk and answered questions on 'Psychic Education' based on the vision and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Meditations on Savitri

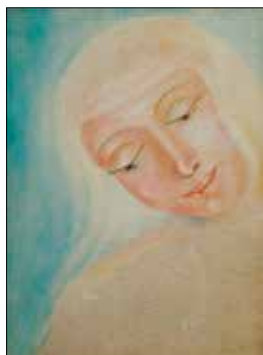
The work of illustrating the whole of Sri Aurobindo's epic *Savitri* through paintings was given to Huta by the Mother in December 1961 after teaching her the technique of painting with oil colours on canvas since 1956. The Mother gave the name '*Meditations on Savitri*' to this project, and published Huta's first efforts in a series of four illustrated books from 1962 to 1966. The Mother then decided to hold an exhibition of the full series of 472 paintings to be held in the Ashram in February in 1967. As preparation for that exhibition she asked Huta to retouch or repaint many of the paintings according to her instructions. Now the Havyavahana Trust, created by Huta in 1994 to take care of all her work, has brought out a handsome set of four volumes showing the final versions of all the Savitri paintings created by Huta under the Mother's guidance from 1961 to 1967. A fifth volume, containing the sketches made by the Mother to assist Huta during this work, is under preparation for publication in 2019.



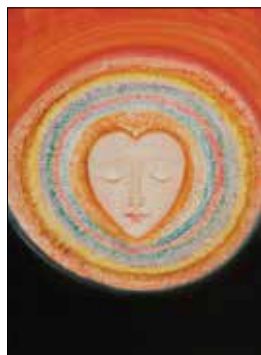
Volume One [ISBN 978-81-87372-34-9, price Rs.1000] contains all the paintings of Book One.



Volume Two [ISBN 978-81-87372-38-7, price Rs.1250] contains the paintings of Books Two and Three.



Volume Three [ISBN 978-81-87372-39-4, price Rs.1250] contains the paintings of Books Four to Seven.



Volume Four [ISBN 978-81-87372-40-0, price Rs.1250] contains the paintings of Books Eight to Twelve.

(Continued from p.30)

The poet is pointing out how daring we are, how ‘*audacious*’ or even impudent we human beings are: how do we dare to think that we can understand all this with our puny minds? But we are convinced that our thought can be ‘*the arbiter of truth.*’ An arbiter is someone appointed to decide what is right and true, if there is a dispute of some kind. We accord our reason that authority, rely on it as ‘*an arbiter of truth*’ and on our personal perceptions and understanding as ‘*impersonal fact*’. We really believe in the information that our senses give us. We trust our senses ‘*As witnesses of an objective world*’, although it is extremely doubtful whether the world around us exists in the way that we perceive it through our senses. We are utterly convinced that the world is the way our senses perceive it to be. But Sri Aurobindo tells us that our senses are ‘*erring*’, mistaken and giving us misleading information. Our instruments are organs which convey sense impressions to our brain. But those instruments are quite unreliable. We do not see things as they really are.

Q: What is the meaning of ‘*artifice*’?

It can mean simply ‘skilful craftsmanship’ but more often ‘trickery’: producing something which is worthless or unreal, ‘artificial’. We can compare the three words ‘natural’ which suggests something true and spontaneous; ‘art’ which at its best refers to something man-made but which conveys some truth; and ‘artifice’ or ‘artificial’ which implies something which is not genuine but false, a misleading pretence.

Thus must he work life’s tangible riddle out
In a doubtful light, by error seize on Truth
And slowly part the visage and the veil.
Or else, forlorn of faith in mind and sense,
His knowledge a bright body of ignorance,
He sees in all things strangely fashioned here
The unwelcome jest of a deceiving Force,
A parable of Maya and her might.

Sri Aurobindo is saying that we human beings have to make use of our imperfect senses, reason and thought-power to try to understand the ‘*tangible riddle*’ of life in the material world, this mystery which we touch and taste and smell and hear. The light that we have, our ability to understand, our consciousness, is ‘*doubtful*’ and unreliable. Nevertheless, even if we make mistakes we have to go

on trying to '*seize on Truth*' as best as we can and '*slowly part the visage and the veil*' learning to distinguish the difference between the two: the '*visage*' or face of the Truth and the outer appearances which '*veil*' it. If we do not do that because we think that we cannot place any trust at all in what our minds and senses tell us, if we remain '*forlorn of faith in mind and sense*' then we risk ending up not really knowing anything. Whatever we might think we know would seem to us like '*a bright body of ignorance*', of not-knowing, and we would tend to interpret all the things that we see '*strangely fashioned here*' as '*The unwelcome jest of a deceiving Force*' a practical joke being played on us by '*a deceiving Force*', '*Maya*', the power of illusion, which is deliberately misleading us, or presenting us with a '*parable*' or teaching example. The theory of Maya, which tells us that everything we experience in this universe is nothing but an illusion which we should do our best to escape from, has been very influential in the history of Indian thought and still remains so to a certain extent.

Q: And '*forlorn*'?

It means 'lost' or 'forsaken'. If we are '*forlorn of faith in mind and sense*', if we have lost faith in our own perceptions and understanding, we are really lost: what can we trust then?

Q: Here he says '*by error seize on Truth*'. Does it mean that by making mistakes we can reach the truth?

Yes, we start by error but somehow we do manage to seize on something that at least temporarily serves as a guiding truth leading us to another truth and another one.

Q: Does this mean error of the mind?

Yes, this is the general inadequacy of human consciousness. Mind cannot grasp the true and the real entirely; and yet at this stage in our evolution we have to use whatever means are available to us. But we should not delude ourselves into thinking that the explanations that our minds come up with are definitive permanent truths. They may sound quite convincing and correspond to some of the statements that are made by our physicists and cosmologists and so on, but our understanding and theirs may be no more than parables or ways of looking at things.

Q: Who is this ‘*Parent of an expanding universe*’?¹

If we go back to the beginning of this Section and look again at the first passage, it seems that it is Spirit.

In lines 116-165 Sri Aurobindo seems to endorse something like our current human understanding of the birth of the material universe, but then he says, ‘*Or so it seems to man’s audacious mind*’, as if this is only one possible, and perhaps rather unreliable, explanation of how we come to be here. Then he says that we human beings have to work things out with our minds and senses. In this way, by trial and error we may slowly gain some knowledge and understanding.

This vast perpetual motion caught and held
In the mysterious and unchanging change
Of the persistent movement we call Time
And ever renewing its recurrent beat,
These mobile rounds that stereotype a flux,
These static objects in the cosmic dance
That are but Energy’s self-repeating whorls
Prolonged by the spirit of the brooding Void,
Awaited life and sense and waking Mind.
A little the Dreamer changed his pose of stone.

The material universe is a ‘*vast perpetual motion*’ that goes on and on and seems to be ‘*caught and held*’ in ‘*the mysterious and unchanging change / Of the persistent movement we call Time*’. Time is something really very puzzling to us and to our scientists. We perceive time as unfolding, ‘*persistent*’ but ever-changing ‘*movement*’. There seems to be a kind of rhythm in it. We experience the rhythms of day and night. There are also the rhythms of the planets orbiting the sun and of the movement of our galaxy. There is some kind of a pulse as if time is being measured. We can observe these ‘*mobile rounds*’, these circular movements, and they seem to be creating a stereotype, a certain fixed order in the flow of time. Then there are all these ‘*static objects*’, which take part ‘*in this cosmic dance*’. What are these things? They seem to be only repetitive movements of energy, ‘*Energy’s self-repeating whorls*’. The word ‘whorl’ comes from the same old Anglo-Saxon root as the word ‘whirl’ and refers to the

1. *Savitri* p. 155, line 150

circular or spiral forms found in shells or our ears. All these things, these movements, these beats and objects seem to be brought into existence by repetitive circling or spiral movements of energy or force. They seem to be '*Prolonged*': a continuation by '*the spirit of the brooding Void*', the emptiness of space, which nevertheless gives birth to things. Like a bird sitting on her eggs until they hatch, Spirit is '*brooding*' on emptiness. All this in the material universe is waiting for the manifestation of life and senses and then even the waking up of the mind. What seems to be happening is that the one who is dreaming the universe has moved a little bit; he must have remained fixed in his posture like a '*stone*' for eons and eons of cosmic time. But now something new happens.

So far in this Section we have been reading about how the material universe might have come into existence. Now Sri Aurobindo is going to tell us something about the emergence of the first life forms.

But when the Inconscient's scrupulous work was done
And Chance coerced by fixed immutable laws,
A scene was set for Nature's conscious play.
Then stirred the Spirit's mute immobile sleep;
The Force concealed broke dumbly, slowly out.
A dream of living woke in Matter's heart,
A will to live moved the Inconscient's dust,
A freak of living startled vacant Time,
Ephemeral in a blank eternity,
Infinitesimal in a dead Infinite.

That material dreaming went on for so long. The Inconscient was at work scrupulously, doing detailed, careful work. Perhaps the work was being done by pure '*Chance*' at first, randomly; but then a stage came when '*Chance*' was '*coerced by fixed immutable laws*', when certain fixed habits were established and became the unchangeable '*laws of Nature*' which our physicists have described, such as the laws of Thermodynamics; '*To coerce*' means to '*to compel*'. When these laws of nature appeared they prepared the way for a new stage: '*Nature's ... play*' was no longer solely determined by the unconscious dreaming of matter and material force. Some consciousness could come into action. The dreamer moves a little more, and the Force and Energy concealed in the '*mute immobile*

sleep’ of Spirit begins to break out, *‘dumbly*’, without any sound, and *‘slowly*’. It was the beginning of the emergence of life in matter. *‘A dream of living woke in Matter’s heart*’ and *‘A will to live moved the Inconscient’s dust*’, moving all those particles of matter. A *‘freak*’ is something abnormal. In the unconsciousness of the material universe, the first appearance of Life was really a freak, something totally abnormal and unexpected. *‘A freak of living startled vacant Time*’. That first appearance of Life was very short-lived, *‘Ephemeral*’: just for a moment there was a first stirring of life which was *‘Ephemeral in a blank eternity*’ and *‘Infinitesimal*’: indescribably small in the *‘Infinite*’ of non-living matter which gives no sign of life and seems to be totally dead.

Q: How can the *‘Infinite*’ be dead?

There is no life yet. There is just the first tiny movement of living, or a will to live. If something comes alive for a moment it is just a freak which quickly disappears again. It is ephemeral. Also it is something incredibly tiny in this vast non-living material universe, this infinity in which there appears to be no life.

Q: There is no life in the Infinite?

The potentiality for life must have been already there but it seems that it was not expressed until this moment.

A subtler breath quickened dead Matter’s forms;
The world’s set rhythm changed to a conscious cry;
A serpent Power twinned the insensible Force.
Islands of living dotted lifeless Space
And germs of living formed in formless air.

The appearance of Life brings in *‘A subtler breath*’, a breath of life, a *Prana* quite different from whatever atmosphere had been there before. That new kind of breath *‘quickened dead Matter’s forms*’: it brought life into material forms which had until then been lifeless. If something *‘quickens*’ it begins to move more quickly, it wakes up and lives. The original material forms had no power of independent movement; they were totally inert and could only move if pushed by some force. But the first living forms began to move. With the coming of Life something changes: the fixed *‘rhythm changed to a conscious cry*’. There is a sound; living things make conscious

cries. The '*serpent Power*' of life-energy emerges and becomes the twin of '*insensible*' material '*Force*'. As a result, something truly miraculous happens: here and there in that vast '*lifeless Space*' little '*Islands of living*' appear, and '*germs of living*', minute invisible seeds of living organisms begin to form in that '*formless air*'.

A Life was born that followed Matter's law,
Ignorant of the motives of its steps;
Ever inconstant, yet for ever the same,
It repeated the paradox that gave it birth:
Its restless and unstable stabilities
Recurred incessantly in the flow of Time
And purposeful movements in unthinking forms
Betrayed the heavings of an imprisoned Will.

'*A life was born*', a life that followed the law of Matter. We read about this in the previous canto, in Canto Four, about how the first living forms had to follow the rule of inert unconscious matter. This life that follows the laws of matter is '*Ignorant of the motives of its steps*'. It moves without knowing why. Its movements are '*Ever inconstant, yet for ever the same*': restless and unstable, but repetitive. Its life repeats '*the paradox that gave it birth*': the self-contradictory miracle or mystery that gave birth to mobile and conscious living forms out of inert matter. It is something mysterious, paradoxical, and contradictory. The poet says some things are stable and remain stable but there is a kind of restlessness about this life and even its '*stabilities*' are '*unstable*': they do not remain, but they recur, repeating themselves again and again '*in the flow of Time*'; '*incessantly*' means 'continuously without any break'. This life shows '*purposeful movements*' appearing in '*unthinking forms*': The appearance of '*purposeful movements*' in these first forms of life '*Betrayed*' or revealed the hidden presence of a Will '*imprisoned*' within them and heaving, moving with difficulty in its efforts to escape and emerge.

If we can imagine those first living forms that emerged, most probably in the sea, they came into existence and went out of existence again, and similar or different ones were coming and going without stopping, in the flow of time. Those primitive life organisms showed purposeful movements. Even in the single cell, protozoa can

feel something. They can feel if the water is too salty for them, or if food is nearby they can put out a pseudopodium and grab it in. These are very purposeful movements in unthinking forms. It is not that the little forms are deciding what they have to do. They act instinctively. The poet tells us that those movements which happen without any individual thinking or willing them are an indication that within those primitive creatures a Will is imprisoned. Those movements express the efforts of that imprisoned Will to assert itself. We read the description in the previous canto of how Aswapati saw these first living creatures. They looked so useless and primitive that anyone might wonder what good could ever come of these slimes and moulds; but Sri Aurobindo said that Aswapati with his spiritual vision could see how important these tiny little primitive creatures were as a basis for future developments the earth depends upon. We might look at them and think “What are these things? Is their existence worthwhile at all?” But Aswapati sees them as essential stages in the development of complex life.

Then Sri Aurobindo goes on to describe another stage in the development of life:

Q: Is there a parallel theme between ‘*the persistent movement we call Time*’ on line 181 and the ‘*Recurred incessantly in the flow of Time*’ on line 209?

This ‘*persistent movement we call Time*’ is mysterious and persists apparently without end; yet the flow of Time and what it carries with it changes constantly as new things and possibilities develop and manifest. Within the flow of time, these little creatures, these ‘*unstable stabilities*’ recur: they appear again and again.

Waking and sleep lay locked in mutual arms;
Helpless and indistinct came pleasure and pain
Trembling with the first faint thrills of a World-Soul.
A strength of life that could not cry or move,
Yet broke into beauty signing some deep delight:
An inarticulate sensibility,
Throbs of the heart of an unknowing world,
Ran through its somnolent torpor and there stirred
A vague uncertain thrill, a wandering beat,
A dim unclosing as of secret eyes.

Infant self-feeling grew and birth was born.
A godhead woke but lay with dreaming limbs;
Her house refused to open its sealed doors.

Life here is in a state that is half awake and half asleep. The states of sleep and waking, consciousness and unconsciousness are interlocked as if in a close embrace. Into that state of half-awakeness and half-asleepness come '*indistinct*' sensations of '*pleasure and pain*'. They quiver with life, a trembling that signals the first faint thrills of a World-Soul. There is a Soul and there is a Will behind which that soul is manifesting in these first faint thrills. Within that early life there is a strength, a first life-force. It cannot yet move or make any sound, but still it '*broke into beauty signing some deep delight*.' I think the poet might be referring to the emergence of the first flowers: they could not make any sound, they could not move, but they expressed the indwelling World-Soul in forms of beauty, the first manifestations of '*some deep delight*' flowing within all the forms of the world. The poet refers to this state as an '*inarticulate sensibility*': a capacity to feel sensations and emotions which is '*inarticulate*', unable to express itself in speech. Heart-throbs of an '*unknowing world*', a world which had no mental capacity, ran through the '*torpor*' or deep sleepiness of that state – '*somnolent*' also suggests sleepiness or drowsiness – stirring '*A vague uncertain thrill*', '*a wandering beat*', '*A dim unclosing as of secret eyes*': first faint signs of an awakening life. '*Infant self-feeling grew*': a beginning of self-awareness. '*Birth was born*', as the first living beings appeared. '*A godhead*', a divine being, the goddess of Life, is waking up; but at first she does not move. Like us in the morning when we like to lie awake for a while '*with dreaming limbs*', she does not move. '*Her house refused to open her sealed doors*': the closed house of the body is reluctant to wake up to awareness of the world around her.

Insentient to our eyes that only see
The form, the act and not the imprisoned God,
Life hid in her pulse occult of growth and power
A consciousness with mute stifled beats of sense,
A mind suppressed that knew not yet of thought,
An inert spirit that could only be.

To our eyes, these first forms of early life still dominated by matter would seem to be *'Insentient'*: it would seem as if they have no capacity to feel sensations, to see, hear, taste or smell – but it would seem like that because our eyes only see the outsides of things, their forms and acts and behaviour. They do not see *'the imprisoned God'*, the presence of the Divine locked up in those simple forms. Even at that first primary stage of development Life holds hidden within it *'A consciousness'* which is dimly feeling the world around *'with mute stifled beats of sense'*. Whatever subtle senses the plants or the primitive animals have, we do not perceive them because they are *'mute'* – they do not utter any sound, and they are *'stifled'*. Something that is *'stifled'* is under a cover and cannot be seen or heard or grow freely. The typical movement of Life is a *'pulse'*: this is the word we use for the throb of blood circulating through our bodies, driven by the heart; but in plants sap rises in a similar movement by capillary action, and there is a *'pulse'*, a regular repetitive movement in it. The simplest single-celled life forms of animals move around with pulsations. This pulse represents growth and the dynamic power of the life-force, *Prana*. Within these simple movements Life hides *'A consciousness'*, a suppressed *'mind'* which has not yet learned to think, and a spirit which is *'inert'*, unmoving, unable to move: It can *'only be'*; it can only exist.

At first she raised no voice, no motion dared:
 Charged with world-power, instinct with living force,
 Only she clung with her roots to the safe earth,
 Thrilled dumbly to the shocks of ray and breeze
 And put out tendril fingers of desire;

'She' here is Life: the life goddess, the dynamic creative force of Nature. When she first starts to emerge in material forms she does not raise any voice. She does not make any sound. She does not dare to move, even though she is *'Charged with world-power'*, and *'instinct with living force'*.

We have the noun *'instinct'* which refers to the innate knowledge that animals and plants have to guide them, but here the word is used as an adjective meaning *'full of'*. The Life goddess is full of all world-power, full of living force, but still at this stage she is clinging *'with her roots to the safe earth'*. We can say that this is the stage

of plants, the vegetal stage of evolving life; plants do not move from place to place. But the poet is telling us that they have great sensitivity. The plants thrill. They feel and respond to the ‘*shocks*’, the impressions of sunlight and of wind, feeling the warmth of the sun and the movement of the breeze, and they ‘*put out tendrils fingers of desire*’. Nowadays we have time-lapse photography which enables us to see how plants move. Wonderful films have been made which show how these plants which we think of as ‘*insentient*’ are in fact feeling around and finding little cracks or crevices to hold on to and pull themselves up – so amazing! The feelers they put out are called ‘*tendrils*’.

The strength in her yearning for sun and light
Felt not the embrace that made her breathe and live;
Absorbed she dreamed content with beauty and hue.

The Life-force in plants seems to have a strong ‘*yearning*’, a longing ‘*for sun and light*’ and yet not to consciously feel the embrace of Spirit which enables her to ‘*breathe and live*’. She is as if in a dream state, ‘*Absorbed*’, withdrawn within. The ‘*world-power*’ she is charged with has the capacity to do much more, but for the moment she remains satisfied with expressing herself through the beauty of forms and colours that are the characteristic of the plant world. But after a long time a new stage comes:

At last the charmed Immensity looked forth:
Astir, vibrant, hungering, she groped for mind;
Then slowly sense quivered and thought peered out;
She forced the reluctant mould to grow aware.

‘*At last the charmed Immensity looked forth*’. This life spirit, who is a great and powerful goddess, an ‘*Immensity*’, has been ‘*charmed*’, as if some magician has put a spell on her to keep her asleep and unable to wake up. But now at last she does wake. She opens her eyes, looks around her and starts to move.

Q: What does ‘*Astir*’ mean?

It means ‘*stirring*’, ‘*moving*’. She began to wake up, to vibrate, to feel desire, ‘*hungering*’, and ‘*groped for mind*’, searching for some new capacity. In response to the pressure of that hunger and longing ‘*sense quivered and thought peered out*’: a new level of conscious

awareness emerged: sense perception and the beginnings of thought. 'To peer out' means 'to look out as if from behind a curtain or veil'. When we 'peer' we are trying to see. Now thought looks out at the world. In this way, the awakening Life-urge '*forced the reluctant mould to grow aware*'. The '*mould*' is the physical form, which by its nature does not readily move. It is only when the life-force comes in that the physical world starts to move; and now it is not simply moving, it is becoming conscious, becoming aware. The senses are the means by which physical forms grow aware of the world around them.

The magic was chiselled of a conscious form;
Its tranced vibrations rhythm'd a quick response,
And luminous stirrings prompted brain and nerve,
Awoke in Matter spirit's identity
And in a body lit the miracle
Of the heart's love and the soul's witness gaze.

In this way '*The magic was chiselled of a conscious form*'. Chiselling is what a mason or a sculptor does: he has a rough block of stone out of which he shapes a beautiful statue. Out of unconscious matter the Life-goddess miraculously shapes a form which is not only beautiful but conscious, one which is living and breathing and senses the world around it, and in which mind is beginning to awaken and become aware: a powerful magic! Before, it was as if living forms were in a state of deep trance, indrawn and unresponsive; but now they begin to give '*a quick response*'. I think I spoke about this word '*quick*' earlier. Here it means 'living', and these living responses are rhythmic with the pulse of life. There are '*luminous stirrings*', movements which bring light and prompt the brain and nerves. In the theatre, a prompter sits below the stage to 'prompt' the actors, reminding them what to say or do in case they forget. These '*luminous stirrings*' are encouraging the brain and nerves to awaken and become aware. They are causing '*spirit's identity*' to awake in Matter, in the physical forms, so that in material bodies '*the heart's love and the soul's witness gaze*' are miraculously kindled. Our heart has a physical form and a location within the body and it is really amazing that we can feel emotions there, that this physical organ can vibrate with divine feelings and perceptions.

Q: What is meant by '*the soul's witness gaze*'?

It is as if the soul is not active but only watches, observes, gazing, seeing everything that is going on simply as a witness. It is the role of the *Purusha*.

Impelled by an unseen Will there could break out
Fragments of some vast impulse to become
And vivid glimpses of a secret self,
And the doubtful seeds and force of shapes to be
Awoke from the unconscious swoon of things.

This waking up process is being driven by, '*impelled by*', '*an unseen Will*' which is not individual but cosmic, '*a vast impulse to become*'; but it is expressed at first in the form of small '*Fragments*', '*vivid glimpses*' and '*doubtful seeds*' of things and shapes that will become clearer in time as they awake from the general '*unconscious swoon of things*'. 'To swoon' means 'to lose consciousness', 'to faint'.

Q: Is there any difference between 'compelled' and 'impelled'?

If you are compelled to do something, it suggests that a strong force other than your own will or inclination is obliging you to do it. But you may feel impelled to act by your own will or feelings. In this case '*an unseen Will*' is causing the emergence of '*Fragments*' of its own '*vast impulse to become*' along with '*vivid glimpses*' of '*a secret self*' still hidden within. There is something that wants to manifest itself, '*a vast impulse to become*', but at this stage it does so only in fragmentary ways here and there and only in glimpses. These '*glimpses*' are '*vivid*', strong and colourful but only momentary. It is as if seeds of future possibilities are being scattered, but they are '*doubtful*': it is not sure whether those seeds will sprout and grow. They represent the force of '*shapes to be*', forms which do not yet exist but may exist in the future. All these first beginnings of things are waking up '*from the unconscious swoon*' of Matter into the early stages of life.

An animal creation crept and ran
And flew and called between the earth and sky,
Hunted by death but hoping still to live
And glad to breathe if only for a while.

As a result of this awakening ‘*An animal creation*’ appears. This succession parallels the development we read about in the previous canto. Here it is as if the poet is showing us the more inner side of this evolution. Animals of all kinds appear ‘*between the earth and sky*’, creeping on all fours or on the ground like snakes, running, or flying like birds or insects, and calling: the animals and birds have their distinctive voices. They are all being ‘*Hunted by death*’, in one way or another, like ourselves; but they also have a strong life impulse: they do their best to survive, and are ‘*glad to breathe*’, if only for a short time. And then comes the next step:

Then man was moulded from the original brute.
A thinking mind had come to lift life’s moods,
The keen-edged tool of a Nature mixed and vague,
An intelligence half-witness, half-machine.

The human race was ‘*moulded*’, or shaped, ‘*from the original brute*’. The word ‘*brute*’ can mean simply an animal, but it also can suggest a primitive pre-human or unrefined being. ‘*Man*’ should have ‘*A thinking mind*’ which can lift the ‘*moods*’, and impulses of life to a higher level. That early ‘*thinking mind*’ he calls a ‘*keen-edged tool*’: a tool or instrument with a sharp blade. Mind is like a knife because it cuts, dissects, analyses and separates things. But this first thinking mind is the ‘*tool of a Nature*’ that is still ‘*mixed and vague*’, unclear. This mind is ‘*An intelligence half-witness, half-machine*’: it has some power of conscious observation and understanding, but part of it remains dominated by mechanical responses to the experiences or impulses given by Nature.

This seeming driver of her wheel of works
Missioned to motive and record her drift
And fix its law on her inconstant powers,
This master-spring of a delicate enginery,
Aspired to enlighten its user and refine
Lifting to a vision of the indwelling Power
The absorbed mechanic’s crude initiative:
He raised his eyes; Heaven-light mirrored a Face.

This intelligence seems to be ‘*the driver*’ of Nature’s ‘*wheel of works*’: the action of nature. Its mission is ‘*to motive*’, to give a

direction or aim to her action, to record Nature's '*drift*': to notice and remember the movements of Nature, to fix the law of mind on Nature's '*inconstant powers*', her wayward shifting and unreliable aspects. This is the task that has been assigned to this mind-power. At this stage Nature is still '*mixed and vague*': it has no particular direction; but the Will behind wants to give it a direction. It does that through the mind. This intelligence is introduced as the '*master-spring of a delicate enginery*'. If we think of the natural being as a kind of machine moved by the mind, then this intelligence is the '*master-spring*' which controls its action. Its purpose is '*to enlighten its user*': to refine and bring more light, more purity, more accuracy to the consciousness of the one who is using the engine, who is at first just a '*mechanic*', totally absorbed in the crude automatic movements of his life. The '*absorbed mechanic*' is man in his primitive early state. This '*intelligence*' impels him to lift up his eyes to receive '*a vision of the indwelling Power*' which is his higher self. When he does so, he sees '*a Face*' '*mirrored*' in heavenly light – the Face of his own true being.

Q: Is this '*mechanic*' Man?

Yes. And '*she*' is Nature.

Amazed at the works wrought in her mystic sleep,
She looked upon the world that she had made:
Wondering now seized the great automaton;
She paused to understand her self and aim,
Pondering she learned to act by conscious rule,
A visioned measure guided her rhythmic steps;
Thought bordered her instincts with a frame of will
And lit with the idea her blinded urge.

When Nature looks through the human consciousness upon the world that she has made, she experiences a sense of amazement. She, '*the great automaton*', '*Prakriti*' we may say, has worked at first mechanically. Now she begins to wonder, which is not something that an '*automaton*', a robot or a machine can do. She pauses and tries to understand who and what she is, and her aim, her purpose. This is done through Nature's human creation. In human minds she ponders, she thinks things over and tries to understand the world around and the human condition, and so

she learns ‘*to act by conscious rule*’: establishing the right way to respond to the world. ‘*A visioned measure guided her rhythmic steps*’: there is a sense of moderating, doing things within a certain measure on the basis of some vision, some forethought. Vision begins to guide the purely ‘*rhythmic steps*’ of life, and the power of thought gives a border, limiting her instincts, giving them a frame of will. Ideas cast light to guide the blind urges of life. There are all these unconscious and semiconscious urges, the driving of the ‘*unseen Will*’, but with the coming of mind these begin to get lit up by some idea of what they are, where they have come from, where they are going to. Even now we are still subject to blind urges, but some light of thought is available to guide us.

Q: Can you explain this line: ‘*Amazed at the works wrought in her mystic sleep*’?

It is only when there is some conscious awareness and a mind that looks around at an objective world that Nature in us can be amazed at all the wonderful things that she has done ‘*in her mystic sleep*’, before mental consciousness awoke. Now we look around at the universe and discover that it is amazing. The more we look at it the more amazed we feel to see how it has all been arranged so perfectly and minutely. How could all this be done without conscious awareness? With mind we look around at the works of nature, at everything that she has done in her unconscious state, which must have been a ‘*mystic sleep*’. It must have been guided by a great and powerful consciousness to have achieved all that minute perfection. That is the sense of wonder we feel when we look at the world around us: how could all this come about? On every scale, from the unimaginably vast to the infinitesimal subatomic level, the precision and perfection of it all is just astonishing. So then mind pauses in amazement. When we human beings do this, we do not realise that Nature is becoming aware, through us, of her own work. We tend to feel that we are cut off from Nature, that Nature is one thing and human consciousness is another; but if we realise that we are products of Nature then we can understand that it is through us and our minds and our explorations that Nature begins to become conscious of all that she has ‘*wrought*’, worked out and created, in her ‘*mystic sleep*’.

On her mass of impulses, her reflex acts,
On the Inconscient's pushed or guided drift
And mystery of unthinking accurate steps
She stuck the specious image of a self,
A living idol of disfigured spirit;
On Matter's acts she imposed a patterned law;
She made a thinking body from chemic cells
And moulded a being out of a driven force.

The Life-force has given rise to a '*mass of impulses*', of unconscious reflex actions; '*pushed or guided*' by '*the Inconscient*' they drift one way or another without thought or intention, but nevertheless the steps they take are precise, '*accurate*' and appropriate: '*unthinking accurate steps*'. Now, with the emergence of mind, she adds to this '*mystery*' another element: '*the specious image of a self*', '*A living idol of disfigured spirit*': the emergence of an apparently independent individual. Nature has '*imposed a patterned law*' on Matter and produced not only a body, a physical form, but one that has the power of thought: '*a thinking body*' made up of chemical elements. She has '*moulded a being out of a driven force*': starting from material energy, she has produced a conscious being. But this being is still imperfect: though it seems to be an independent entity, a '*self*', it remains only '*a specious image*', a misleading appearance. This '*living idol*' gives only a '*disfigured*' expression of '*spirit*'. But although these beings are incomplete and imperfect, they do bring a higher vision to Nature:

To be what she was not inflamed her hope:
She turned her dream towards some high Unknown;
A breath was felt below of One supreme.

This is aspiration: Nature is inspired to hope for something beyond her present state: '*To be what she was not*', something more than she is at present. She turns her dream upwards, '*towards some high Unknown*', and there comes a response: '*A breath was felt below of One supreme*'.

An opening looked up to spheres above
And coloured shadows limned on mortal ground
The passing figures of immortal things;

There is an upward look: ‘*An opening looked up to spheres above*’, to higher worlds. And from there it is as if ‘*coloured shadows*’ come down: in this material world which is subject to death those shadowy images outline on our ‘*mortal ground*’ ‘*The passing figures of immortal things*’. With this new development Nature drives us human beings to turn our aspiration, our vision higher, to get glimpses of higher possibilities.

Q: What does ‘*limned*’ mean?

It means ‘to outline’, to draw as if with a pencil or a pointer.

Q: What is the difference between the Life goddess and Nature?

Life and Nature are both aspects of *Shakti*, the creative power; there is a subtle shift in emphasis between them in line 260 when the poet mentions Mind as the tool of a Nature that is mixed and vague.

A quick celestial flash could sometimes come:
The illumined soul-ray fell on heart and flesh
And touched with semblances of ideal light
The stuff of which our earthly dreams are made.

These more developed beings were even able to receive a ray of light coming from above. This ray comes not from the life-consciousness nor the mind, but from the soul. It falls on the heart and the body. The heart is just a physical organ but the life-force fills it with the possibility of feeling, of emotion, making it ready to receive a touch from the ‘*illumined soul-ray*’. It touches ‘*with semblances of ideal light*’ the material ‘*stuff*’ or substance ‘*of which our earthly dreams are made*’. The poet is going to give us some examples of the way in which that higher soul light touches ‘*our earthly dreams*’. First, it touches us with Love:

A fragile human love that could not last,
Ego’s moth-wings to lift the seraph soul,
Appeared, a surface glamour of brief date
Extinguished by a scanty breath of Time;

I think these are amongst the most beautiful lines in *Savitri*. ‘*A fragile human love that could not last*’: Our human love is ‘*fragile*’; it easily gets bruised and broken, even destroyed. It is the product of the ego, which is only a ‘*specious image of a self*’ and an ‘*idol of disfigured spirit*’. Sri Aurobindo likens our egoistic human love to the delicate

wings of a moth, a night-butterfly, which get very easily damaged. The love of the ego is fragile like that. But it is really trying to lift up the soul, which is not so weak and easily torn. The soul is not like a moth, but a very powerful angel, a '*seraph*' belonging to the highest of the nine orders of angels, the divine messengers who bring communications from the Lord into our human world. The seraphs or seraphim are described in the Hebrew Bible as each having six powerful wings. But at the early stage of human development which the poet is describing now, that first '*fragile human love*' is weak and '*could not last*' for a long time. It is only '*a surface glamour*' whose life span is '*brief*'; so it can easily be '*Extinguished*', blown out like a birthday candle by '*a scanty breath of Time*'. But still it is something precious and beautiful, a reflection of the '*ideal light*' of an '*illuminated soul-ray*', the first appearance of love in the physical world.

The second sign of the higher light is Joy:

Joy that forgot mortality for a while
Came, a rare visitor who left betimes,
And made all things seem beautiful for an hour,
Hopes that soon fade to drab realities
And passions that crumble to ashes while they blaze
Kindled the common earth with their brief flame.

When we are in a state of pure joy we forget our mortality, we forget that we have to die. Like Love, Joy too comes but very rarely, and leaves quickly and soon – '*betimes*'. This is a Shakespearean word, meaning 'quickly' or 'soon'. But Joy does have the power to make everything seem beautiful '*for an hour*', for a short time. Hope is another of those rare uplifting divine visitors. When we have hope, we have courage, we have faith, we can attempt great things. But our earthly hopes soon fade away; they lose their bright strength and fade into '*drab realities*'. '*Drab*' means 'colourless', 'dull', without interest, without charm. '*Passions*', intense feelings, kindle flames of interest and enthusiasm and bright intentions in our '*common earth*', but those fires very quickly burn away to nothing: they are '*passions that crumble to ashes while they blaze*.' A '*blaze*' is a big bright hot fire, but it may soon consume all its fuel and only dusty ashes are left behind. These short-lived '*semblances of ideal light*' '*Kindled*' by the '*soul-ray*' have lighted a fire in our '*common earth*':

in the clay of our body, they light us up just for a little while with their brief flame.

In much of our being we have other parts that do not belong to the plane which is being described here; but it is only because this plane of existence has evolved here in the material universe that we can be sitting here at all and reading these words. Otherwise we would not be able to do it. So we are a little bit beyond this stage, but the poet is telling us about an early stage of humanity before the full development of mind. This is about vital mind, the life mind, the mind of desire and enthusiasm and impulse. It is one of the many interesting passages we find in *Savitri* which cast light on various aspects of our human nature.

A creature insignificant and small
Visited, uplifted by an unknown Power,
Man laboured on his little patch of earth
For means to last, to enjoy, to suffer and die.

This refers to the ordinary life of human beings: ‘*A creature insignificant and small*’ but occasionally ‘*Visited ... by an unknown Power*’. And when that unknown power comes we get ‘*uplifted*’. But most of the time we are just here labouring. ‘Labouring’ in English means ‘working hard’ but because it is Sri Aurobindo and because he knew French so well, we hear at the same time the French word ‘labourer’ which means ‘to plough’. Each of us has a ‘*little patch of earth*’ which we have to plough, trying to make something grow. The first thing that the farmer tries to do is to grow food: all the efforts that we make are for means to prolong our life a little bit, to get enjoyment if we can – to achieve something worthwhile if possible. But anyway lasting also means suffering, and eventually we will die. Our mortality is built in. That is the outer expression; but on the occult plane, on the plane of the godheads, there is something else:

A spirit that perished not with the body and breath
Was there like a shadow of the Unmanifest
And stood behind the little personal form
But claimed not yet this earthly embodiment.

These are very suggestive lines: humans are there or human-like beings. Behind the ‘*little personal form*’ stands ‘*A spirit*’, a spirit that does not die; it does not perish when the body dies, when the

'breath' leaves the body. It is *'there like a shadow of the Unmanifest'*, a shadow of what will be in the future. It is standing *'behind the little personal form'* but it has not yet entered it. It has not yet claimed it. It is controlling it at a distance, not from within but from behind.

These lines remind me of something I experienced when I was looking after my nephew when he was a small baby, just learning to sit up and move his limbs. I saw him sitting on the ground and learning to use his arms and hands to pick up the toys around him. He would practise picking up and putting down one toy. When he could do that reliably, then he left that toy and practiced picking up and putting down another. It was like watching someone learning to manipulate a crane. Then I saw that there was a consciousness, which had not yet fully entered the body and taken possession of it, but was preparing to do so. At this stage of development there is some distance between the consciousness, the spirit that belongs to this body, and the body itself. The spirit will eventually claim this *'earthly embodiment'* in order to take full control of it. At this stage it is just supporting the embodiment from behind. The spirit, which is not mortal, which does not perish with the body and breath, is standing behind the little personal form, supporting it and helping it to develop. Then Sri Aurobindo tells us more about this spirit:

Assenting to Nature's long slow-moving toil,
Watching the works of his own Ignorance,
Unknown, unfelt the mighty Witness lives
And nothing shows the Glory that is here.

To start with this Spirit is simply a witness. It just accepts the *'long slow-moving toil'* of Nature and watches what is happening: *'the works of his own Ignorance'*. It is just watching and saying "Yes" to all this labour, all this hard and difficult evolutionary work of Nature. We are not aware of Him. That *'mighty Witness'* remains *'Unknown, unfelt'* for it shows nothing of the *'Glory'* which is there. That *'mighty Witness'* is upholding the work of Nature with its steady gaze:

A Wisdom governing the mystic world,
A Silence listening to the cry of Life,
It sees the hurrying crowd of moments stream
Towards the still greatness of a distant hour.

This is about the *Purusha* behind: ‘*A Wisdom governing*’ this world, which is ‘*mystic*’ and mysterious. He is ‘*A Silence listening to the cry*’ and noise of Life. He is the silent observer, seeing all the movements and moments in time, ‘*the hurrying crowd of moments*’ streaming by like a river. They are all flowing in one direction: ‘*Towards the still greatness of a distant hour*’: still, silent, vast, significant – the hour, still very far away, when everything will become conscious, fulfilled and Divine.

End of Section 2

Savitri Shabdarnrut ***Volume 9***

Gujarati translation by Shri Kirit Thakkar of Shraddhavan’s English of Savitri talks on Sri Aurobindo’s epic *Savitri* covering Cantos 1-4 of Book Two – The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds.

As usual, the volume includes the original lines of *Savitri* along with Shri Pujalalji’s verse translation of them and translation in prose by Shri Kirit Thakkar, followed by the Gujarati translation of Shraddhavan’s explanations.

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Also available from Savitri Bhavan, SABDA and Sri Aurobindo Memorial Trust, Sri Aurobindo Nivas, Vadodara 1, Phone (0265) 2418978 as well as at all leading Sri Aurobindo Centres in Gujarat.

Calendar of Events

April – September 2019

Regular weekly activities:

- Sundays 10.30am-12 noon: *Savitri Study Circle*
- Mondays 3-4pm: *Psychic Awakening*, led by Dr. Jai Singh
4.45-5.45pm: *Meditation with Hymns of the Rig Veda translated by Sri Aurobindo*, led by Nishtha
- Tuesdays 9am-12 noon: *Introduction to Integral Yoga*, led by Ashesh Joshi
3-4pm: *Psychic Awakening*, led by Dr. Jai Singh
4-5pm: *L'Agenda de Mère* – Listening to The Mother's recorded talks with Gangalakshmi
4.45-5.45pm: *Mudra Chi* – a body prayer in Tai-chi form based on the Mother's Mudras, led by Anandi
5-6pm: *Let us learn Savitri together*, in Tamil, led by Buvana
5.45-7.15pm: *OM Choir*
- Wednesdays 5.30-6.30pm: *Essays on the Gita*, led by Shraddhavan
- Thursdays 4-5pm: *The English of Savitri*, led by Shraddhavan
- Fridays 3-4pm: *Exploring the Bhagavad Gita*, led by Dr. Jai Singh
4-5pm: *L'Agenda de Mère* – Listening to The Mother's recorded talks with Gangalakshmi
- Saturdays 4-5pm: *L'Agenda de Mère* – Listening to The Mother's recorded talks with Gangalakshmi
5-6.30pm *Satsang* led by Ashesh Joshi

Monthly Activity:

Full Moon Gatherings in front of Sri Aurobindo's statue

Exhibitions:

1. *Sri Aurobindo: A life-sketch in photographs*, in the upper corridor.
2. *Glimpses of the Mother*, texts and photographs, in the Square Hall.
3. *Meditations on Savitri*: the entire series of 472 paintings created by the Mother with Huta from 1961-67 is now on display in the extended Picture Gallery.
4. *Inner Journey*: an exhibition of recent paintings by Ashram artist Hufreesh Chopra Dumasia, from 22nd August to 7th September 2019, in the Square Hall.

Special Events:

April:

- 1 Film: *Our Gratitude* – A musical offering composed for the centenary of the first meeting of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in 1914.
- 8 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 1 Canto 4: The Secret Knowledge, Part 1* – A meditative film by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 10 Presentation: *Nicholas Roerich in Ladakh* – Slide show of paintings by Russian Thinker and Artist *Nicholas Roerich*, with explanations by Dr. Alexander Pereverzev.
- 15 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book 1 Canto 4: The Secret Knowledge, Part 2* – ‘The Secret Knowledge’ in *Savitri* is also called Sri Aurobindo’s Upanishad.
- 20 Teachers of the Jaipuria School of Lucknow visited Savitri Bhavan and shared information about their unique educational institution. At their request Shradhdhavan gave a talk and answered questions on ‘Psychic Education’ based on the vision and writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.
- 22 Film: *Journey to the Life Divine* – This film, created in the Ashram, shows the lives of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother from their childhood onwards and their work for a new step in evolution towards a divine life upon earth.

June:

- 11 A group of 13 major industrialists visited Savitri Bhavan at the invitation of the Working Committee of the Auroville Foundation. A 15-minute film on the Lives, Work and Vision of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo was prepared for the occasion by members of the Savitri Bhavan team and shown to the delegates, followed first by a question and answer session and then by an informal tea during which the visitors interacted with Aurovilians.
- 24 Film: *The Connected Universe: featuring the work of Nassim Hamein*. Nassim Hamein’s lifelong search was presented in a fascinating film about the mystery and beauty of nature in outer space and the universe as well as within the human body.

July:

- 1 Film: *The Traveller and The Worlds, Part One of Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri*: the Dr. M.V. Nadkarni Memorial Lecture given by Shradhdhavan on August 13, 2013.

- 8 Film: *Meditations on Savitri* – Book 1 Canto 5 – These films were made by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 8 Orientation Session on Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s vision of human unity was shared by Shraddhavan with a group of graduate students from the California Institute of Integral Studies, with readings from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Human Cycle*.
- 13 On the 99th Birthday of senior Aurovilian Sri S. Mahalingam, who has translated many writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo into Tamil, to mark the beginning of his centenary year, his Tamil translation of *Aims and Ideals of Auroville* was released at a special function attended by many of his admirers and ex-students.
- 15 *Meditations on Savitri – Book 2: The Traveller of the Worlds Cantos 1-4*: film made by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 18 *Quest for the Heart of Asia: The Roerich Central Asian Expedition*: In 1925-28, the well-known Russian artist and thinker Nicholas Roerich traversed Ladakh, Turkestan, Siberia, Mongolia and Tibet creating on the way a rich artistic legacy which was examined in this slide-show with explanations by Dr. Alexander Pereverzev.
- 20 *Facing Mental Challenges on the Spiritual Path: Anger*. This was the fourth of a series of talks by Dr. Alok Pandey of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram sponsored by Santé – the Auroville Institute for Integral Health.
- 22 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book Two: The Traveller of the Worlds, Cantos 5&6*: film made by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.
- 29 Film: *Meditations on Savitri – Book Two: The Traveller of the Worlds, Cantos 7&9*: film made by Manohar of Huta’s paintings illustrating passages from *Savitri* read by the Mother and accompanied by her own organ music.

August:

- 5 Film: *Life of Sri Aurobindo* – A screenplay by Lopa featuring pictures and texts about Sri Aurobindo’s life and work with voice contributions of friends from the San Francisco Bay Area.
- 12 *Sri Aurobindo and His Dreams for the Future of Mankind* – a film created by the team of Auroville Press about Sri Aurobindo’s message

on India's Independence Day, August 15, 1947, and the five dreams mentioned by him.

- 19 Film: *Nirod-da - an Inspiration: Honouring the memory of Nirodbaran*. Nirodbaran (1903-2006) was one of Sri Aurobindo's closest disciples, as well as a much-loved patron of Savitri Bhavan. This film was created by the Gnostic Centre, New Delhi.
- 22 Talk: '*The End of Death*': the concluding session of Dr. Alok Pandey's August post-darshan *Savitri* Study Camp.
- 26 *Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga: Evolution Fast-forward Part 2: Psychology, Cosmology, Transformation Practice*. Film by Sopanam, Auroville.

September:

- 2 *Evolution Fast-Forward, Part 3 – Parts of the Being & Planes of Consciousness as mapped by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother*, Film by Sopanam, Auroville.
- 9 *Diversity of Life, Unity of Spirit; Waking the Sleeping Soul of Humanity; The Issue of Poverty*: Three video-talks by Professor Arabinda Basu (1917-2012), scholar and teacher of Sri Aurobindo's yoga.
- 16 *Integral Knowledge*: in this film M.P. Pandit (1919-1993) spoke about the Mother's objectives of Perfect Consciousness, Integral Knowledge and Power to be brought upon earth.
- 23 *Aging and Immortality*: in this video-talk M.P. Pandit reflected on the Indian tradition, organised around the existence of the soul and aspiration for God.
- 30 *Perfect Health*: in this film M.P. Pandit brings us more awareness of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's perception of the nervous envelope and the subtle physical body which register every impact.

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.

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is a Mantra
for the transformation
of the world

The Mother