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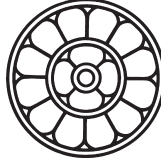
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Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXVIII

No. 8

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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NOTE:

- S — *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*
M — *Collected Works of the Mother, 2nd Edition*
E — *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* by A. B. Purani, 2000 Edition
H — *The Hindu*, Chennai

(For ‘S’ and ‘M’ references, the volume number is followed by the page number.)

THE REVEALED VEDA

**THE PERFECT SUBSTANCE AND EXPRESSION OF
ETERNAL TRUTH**

. . . Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas, not only so but he has shown me a new Science of Philology showing the process & origins of human speech so that a new Nirukta can be formed & the new interpretation of the Veda based upon it. He has also shown me the meaning of all in the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to reexplain the whole Vedanta & Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises out of it & is one everywhere. In this way it will be proved that India is the centre of the religious life of the world & its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma. . . .

(S36: 178)

The Veda is our oldest extant human document and the Veda, from one point of view, is a great compilation of practical hints about Yoga. (S12: 18)

In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but Veda — the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and a guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge which all thought strives after — yasmin vijñate sarvam vijñatam. I believe that Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatan Dharma; I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism, — but a veil has to be drawn aside, a curtain has to be lifted. I believe it to be knowable and discoverable. I believe the future of India and the world to depend on its discovery and on its application, not to the renunciation of life, but to life in the world and among men. (S12: 62)

Among the ancient documents held by the ancients to be deep mines of profound and fertile truth but to us forgetful and blind of their meaning the Veda & Upanishads rank among the very highest. (S12: 381)

O soul of India, hide thyself no longer with the darkened Pandits of the Kaliyuga in the kitchen & the chapel, veil not thyself with the soulless rite, the obsolete law and the unblessed money of the dakshina; but seek in thy soul, ask of God and recover thy true Brahminhood & Kshatriyahood with the eternal Veda; restore the hidden truth of the Vedic sacrifice, return to the fulfilment of an older & mightier Vedanta. (S12: 471)

The Law is for the bound & those whose eyes are sealed; if they walk not by it, they will stumble; but thou who art free in Krishna or hast seen his living light, walk holding the hand of thy Friend & by the lamp of eternal Veda. (S12: 472)

The Vedanta is God's lamp to lead thee out of this night of bondage & egoism; but when the light of Veda has dawned in thy soul, then even that divine lamp thou needest not, for now thou canst walk freely & surely in a high & eternal sunlight. (S12: 472)

. . . in India, if religion has changed immensely its form and temperament, the religious spirit has been really eternal, the principle of spiritual discipline is the same as in the earliest times, the fundamental spiritual truths have been preserved and even enriched in their contents and the very forms can all be traced back through their mutations to the seed of the Veda. (S13: 136)

The new dawns, treading the eternal path of the Truth, follow it to the goal of the dawns that have gone before, — how many, who shall say?

For this knowledge was not first discovered in the comparatively late antiquity that gave us the Upanishads which we now possess. It is already there in the dateless verses of the Rig Veda, and the Vedic sages speak of it as the discovery of yet more ancient seers besides whom they themselves were new and modern. Emerging from the periods of eclipse and the nights of ignorance which overtake humanity, we assume always that we are instituting a new knowledge. In reality, we are continually rediscovering the knowledge and repeating the achievement of the ages that have gone before us . . . (S13: 182)

The Vedic Rishi also invokes the Dawn, “O goddess and human”; the gods in the Veda are constantly addressed as “men”, the same words are traditionally applied to indicate men and immortals. The immanence of the immortal principle in man, the descent of the gods into the workings of mortality was almost the fundamental idea of the mystics. (S13: 217)

And the ancient poets of the Veda and Upanishads claimed to be uttering the Mantra because always it was this inmost and almost occult truth of things which they strove to see and hear and speak and because they believed themselves to be using or finding its innate soul rhythms and the sacrificial speech of it cast up by the divine Agni, the sacred Fire in the heart of man. The Mantra in other words is a direct and most heightened, an intensest and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the Godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a supreme rhythmic language which seizes hold upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite.

(S26: 218)

The Veda speaks in one of its symbolic hints of the fountain of eternal Truth round which stand the illumined powers of thought and life. There under the eyes of delight and the face of imperishable beauty of the Mother of creation and bride of the eternal Spirit they lead their immortal dance. The poet visits that marvellous source in his superconscient mind and brings to us some strain or some vision of her face and works. To find the way into that circle with the waking self is to be the seer-poet and discover the highest power of the inspired word, the Mantra.

(S26: 240)

A CLEARER IDEA OF THE WORK

Reading in Pondicherry

I began my yoga in 1904 without a guru; in 1908 I received important help from a Mahratta yogi and discovered the foundations of my sadhana; but from that time till the Mother came to India I received no spiritual help from anyone else. My sadhana before and afterwards was not founded upon books but upon personal experiences that crowded on me from within. But in the jail I had the Gita and the Upanishads with me, practised the yoga of the Gita and meditated with the help of the Upanishads; these were the only books from which I found guidance; the Veda which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my sadhana. I sometimes turned to the Gita for light when there was a question or a difficulty and usually received help or an answer from it . . . It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence . . . The voice spoke only on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject. (S36: 98-99)

Veda gave confirmatory revelations regarding the Supermind

“. . . it is only the very highest supramental Force . . . that can victoriously handle the physical Nature . . .” [p. 2 of The Mother]. Is this idea to be found anywhere in the Upanishads or Vedas? What is there in this Force which can deal with Matter, and why cannot other forces do it — for example the occult vital forces that are used to produce kāya siddhi in Hathayoga?

The physical Nature does not mean the body alone but the phrase includes the transformation of the whole physical mind, vital, material nature — not by imposing siddhis on them, but by creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the supramental being in a new evolution. I am not aware that this has been done by any Hathayogic or other process. Mental or vital occult power can only bring siddhis of the higher plane into the individual life — like the Sannyasi who could take any poison without harm, but he died of a poison after all when he forgot to observe the conditions of the siddhi. The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties, but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical. I did not learn the idea from Veda or Upanishad, and I do not know if there is anything of

the kind there. What I received about the Supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanishad and Veda. (S35: 108-09)

A correction

[*A biographer's version: "In Baroda after making a comparative study of all literatures, history, etc., he began to realise the importance of the Veda."*
Sri Aurobindo's correction:]

No. Started study of V. at Pondicherry. (S36: 44)

The Arya

In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, those published since in book form, the Isha Upanishad, the Essays on the Gita, and others not yet published, the Life Divine, the Synthesis of Yoga, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture, the true meaning of the Vedas, the progress of human society, the nature and evolution of poetry, the possibility of the unification of the human race. At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance. (S36: 9)

Philosophy

. . . As to Indian Philosophy . . . I made no study of it, but knew the general ideas of the Vedanta philosophies, I knew practically nothing of the others except what I had read in Max Muller and in other general accounts. The basic idea of the Self caught me when I was in England. I tried to realise what the Self might be. The first Indian writings that took hold of me were the Upanishads and these raised in me a strong enthusiasm and I tried later to translate some of them. The other strong intellectual influence [that] came in India in early life were the sayings of Ramakrishna and the writings and speeches of Vivekananda, but this was a first introduction to Indian spiritual experience and not as philosophy. They did not, however, carry me to the practice of Yoga: their influence was purely mental.

My philosophy was formed first by the study of the Upanishads and the Gita; the Veda came later. They were the basis of my first practice of Yoga; I tried to

realise what I read in my spiritual experience and succeeded; in fact I was never satisfied till experience came and it was on this experience that later on I founded my philosophy, not on ideas by themselves. I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocination or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others. The other source of my philosophy was the knowledge that flowed from above when I sat in meditation, especially from the plane of the Higher Mind when I reached that level; they [*the ideas from the Higher Mind*] came down in a mighty flood which swelled into a sea of direct Knowledge always translating itself into experience, or they were intuitions starting from experience and leading to other intuitions and a corresponding experience. This source was exceedingly catholic and many-sided and all sorts of ideas came in which might have belonged to conflicting philosophies but they were here reconciled in a large synthetic whole. (S36: 112-13)

To re-explain the Veda and Vedanta in the ancient sense

The question about the siddhi is a little difficult to answer precisely. There are four parts of the siddhi, roughly, moral, mental, physical & *practical*. Starting from December 1908 the moral has taken me three years and a half and may now be considered complete. The mental has taken two years of regular sadhana and for the present purpose may be considered complete; the physical is backward and nearing completion only in the immunity from disease — which I am now attempting successfully to perfect & test by exposure to abnormal conditions. The physical also does not matter so much for practical purposes, as the moral, mental and a certain number of practical siddhis are sufficient. It is these practical siddhis that alone cause delay. I have had first to prove to myself their existence and utility, secondly to develop them in myself so as to be working forces, thirdly to make them actually effective for life & impart them to others. The development will, I think, be complete in another two months, but the application to life & the formation of my helpers will take some time — for the reason that I shall then have a greater force of opposition to surmount than in the purely educative exercises I have hitherto practised. The full application to life will, I think, take three years more, but it is only for a year of that time (if so long) that I expect to need outside assistance. I believe that I may have to stay in French India for another year. I presume that is what the question about my future means. But on this point also I cannot speak with certainty. If, however, it refers to my future work, that is a big question & does not yet admit of a full answer. I may say briefly that I have been given a religious & philosophical mission, to re-explain the Veda & Vedanta (Upanishads) in the ancient sense which I have recovered by actual experience in Yoga and to popularise the new system of Yoga (new in arrangement & object) which has been revealed to me & which, as I progress, I am imparting to the young men staying with me & to

others in Pondicherry; I have also to spread certain ideas about God & life by literary work, speech & practice, to try & bring about certain social changes &, finally, to do a certain work for my country, in particular, as soon as the means are put in my hands. All this to be done by God's help only & not to be begun till things & myself are ready. (S36: 173-74)

The future sadhan

My future sadhan is for life, practical knowledge & shakti, — not the essential knowledge or shakti in itself which I have got already — but knowledge & shakti established in the same physical self & directed to my work in life. I am now getting a clearer idea of that work & I may as well impart something of that idea to you; since you look to me as the centre, you should know what is likely to radiate out of that centre.

1. To reexplain the Sanatana Dharma to the human intellect in all its parts, from a new standpoint. This work is already beginning, & three parts of it are being clearly worked out. Sri Krishna has shown me the true meaning of the Vedas, not only so but he has shown me a new Science of Philology showing the process & origins of human speech so that a new Nirukta can be formed & the new interpretation of the Veda based upon it. He has also shown me the meaning of all in the Upanishads that is not understood either by Indians or Europeans. I have therefore to reexplain the whole Vedanta & Veda in such a way that it will be seen how all religion arises out of it & is one everywhere. In this way it will be proved that India is the centre of the religious life of the world & its destined saviour through the Sanatana Dharma.

2. On the basis of Vedic knowledge to establish a Yogic sadhana which will not only liberate the soul, but prepare a perfect humanity & help in the restoration of the Satyayuga. That work has to begin now but will not be complete till the end of the Kali.

3. India being the centre, to work for her restoration to her proper place in the world; but this restoration must be effected as a part of the above work and by means of Yoga applied to human means & instruments, not otherwise.

4. A perfect humanity being intended society will have to be remodelled so as to be fit to contain that perfection.

You must remember that I have not given you the whole Yogic sadhana. What I have given you is only the beginning. You have to get rid of ahankara & desire & surrender yourself to God, in order that the rest may come. You speak of printing Yoga & its Objects. But remember that what I have sent you is only the first part which gives the path, not the objects or the circumstances. If you print it, print it as the first of a series, with the subtitle, the Path. I am now busy with an explanation of the Isha Upanishad in twelve chapters; I am at the eleventh now and will finish in a

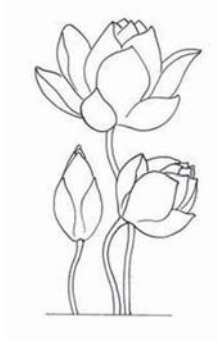
few days. Afterwards I shall begin the second part of the series & send it to you when finished.

I have also begun, but on a very small scale the second part of my work which will consist in making men for the new age by imparting whatever siddhi I get to those who are chosen. From this point of view our little colony here is a sort of seed plot & a laboratory. The things I work out in it, are then extended outside. Here the work is progressing at last on definite lines and with a certain steadiness, not very rapid; but still definite results are forming. I should be glad to have from you clearer knowledge of the results you speak of over there; for my drishti is not yet sufficiently free from obstruction for me to know all that I need to know at this stage.

(S36: 177-79)

Serious work on the Veda

I need some extra money badly now for materials for the work I have now seriously entered on in connection with the Veda and the Sanscrit language. In that same connection will you please make a serious effort this time to get hold of Dutt's Bengali translation of the Rigveda & send it to me — or any translation for that matter which gives the European version. (S36: 188)



THE SECRET OF THE VEDA

The Problem and Its Solution

[This article, the opening chapter of *The Secret of the Veda*, appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Arya* on 15 August 1914.]

Is there at all or is there still a secret of the Veda?

According to current conceptions the heart of that ancient mystery has been plucked out and revealed to the gaze of all, or rather no real secret ever existed. The hymns of the Veda are the sacrificial compositions of a primitive and still barbarous race written around a system of ceremonial and propitiatory rites, addressed to personified Powers of Nature and replete with a confused mass of half-formed myth and crude astronomical allegories yet in the making. Only in the later hymns do we perceive the first appearance of deeper psychological and moral ideas — borrowed, some think, from the hostile Dravidians, the “robbers” and “Veda-haters” freely cursed in the hymns themselves, — and, however acquired, the first seed of the later Vedantic speculations. This modern theory is in accord with the received idea of a rapid human evolution from the quite recent savage; it is supported by an imposing apparatus of critical research and upheld by a number of Sciences, unhappily still young and still largely conjectural in their methods and shifting in their results, — Comparative Philology, Comparative Mythology and the Science of Comparative Religion.

It is my object in these chapters to suggest a new view of the ancient problem. I do not propose to use a negative and destructive method directed against the received solutions, but simply to present, positively and constructively, a larger and, in some sort, a complementary hypothesis built upon broader foundations, — a hypothesis which, in addition, may shed light on one or two important problems in the history of ancient thought and cult left very insufficiently solved by the ordinary theories.

We have in the Rig Veda, — the true and only Veda in the estimation of European scholars, — a body of sacrificial hymns couched in a very ancient language which presents a number of almost insoluble difficulties. It is full of ancient forms and words which do not appear in later speech and have often to be fixed in some doubtful sense by intelligent conjecture; a mass even of the words that it has in common with classical Sanskrit seem to bear or at least to admit another significance than in the later literary tongue; and a multitude of its vocables, especially the most common, those which are most vital to the sense, are capable of a surprising number of unconnected significances which may give, according to our preference in selection, quite different complexions to whole passages, whole hymns and even to

the whole thought of the Veda. In the course of several thousands of years there have been at least three considerable attempts, entirely differing from each other in their methods and results, to fix the sense of these ancient litanies. One of these is prehistoric in time and exists only by fragments in the Brahmanas and Upanishads; but we possess in its entirety the traditional interpretation of the Indian scholar Sayana and we have in our own day the interpretation constructed after an immense labour of comparison and conjecture by modern European scholarship. Both of them present one characteristic in common, the extraordinary incoherence and poverty of sense which their results stamp upon the ancient hymns. The separate lines can be given, whether naturally or by force of conjecture, a good sense or a sense that hangs together; the diction that results, if garish in style, if loaded with otiose and decorative epithets, if developing extraordinarily little of meaning in an amazing mass of gaudy figure and verbiage, can be made to run into intelligible sentences; but when we come to read the hymns as a whole we seem to be in the presence of men who, unlike the early writers of other races, were incapable of coherent and natural expression or of connected thought. Except in the briefer and simpler hymns, the language tends to be either obscure or artificial; the thoughts are either unconnected or have to be forced and beaten by the interpreter into a whole. The scholar in dealing with his text is obliged to substitute for interpretation a process almost of fabrication. We feel that he is not so much revealing the sense as hammering and forging rebellious material into some sort of shape and consistency.

Yet these obscure and barbarous compositions have had the most splendid good fortune in all literary history. They have been the reputed source not only of some of the world's richest and profoundest religions, but of some of its subtlest metaphysical philosophies. In the fixed tradition of thousands of years they have been revered as the origin and standard of all that can be held as authoritative and true in Brahmana and Upanishad, in Tantra and Purana, in the doctrines of great philosophical schools and in the teachings of famous saints and sages. The name borne by them was Veda, the knowledge, — the received name for the highest spiritual truth of which the human mind is capable. But if we accept the current interpretations, whether Sayana's or the modern theory, the whole of this sublime and sacred reputation is a colossal fiction. The hymns are, on the contrary, nothing more than the naive superstitious fancies of untaught and materialistic barbarians concerned only with the most external gains and enjoyments and ignorant of all but the most elementary moral notions or religious aspirations. Nor do occasional passages, quite out of harmony with their general spirit, destroy this total impression. The true foundation or starting-point of the later religions and philosophies is the Upanishads, which have then to be conceived as a revolt of philosophical and speculative minds against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas.

But this conception, supported by misleading European parallels, really explains nothing. Such profound and ultimate thoughts, such systems of subtle and elaborate

psychology as are found in the substance of the Upanishads, do not spring out of a previous void. The human mind in its progress marches from knowledge to knowledge, or it renews and enlarges previous knowledge that has been obscured and overlaid, or it seizes on old imperfect clues and is led by them to new discoveries. The thought of the Upanishads supposes great origins anterior to itself, and these in the ordinary theories are lacking. The hypothesis, invented to fill the gap, that these ideas were borrowed by barbarous Aryan invaders from the civilised Dravidians, is a conjecture supported only by other conjectures. It is indeed coming to be doubted whether the whole story of an Aryan invasion through the Punjab is not a myth of the philologists.

Now, in ancient Europe the schools of intellectual philosophy were preceded by the secret doctrines of the mystics; Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries prepared the rich soil of mentality out of which sprang Pythagoras and Plato. A similar starting-point is at least probable for the later march of thought in India. Much indeed of the forms and symbols of thought which we find in the Upanishads, much of the substance of the Brahmanas supposes a period in India in which thought took the form or the veil of secret teachings such as those of the Greek mysteries.

Another hiatus left by the received theories is the gulf that divides the material worship of external Nature-Powers in the Veda from the developed religion of the Greeks and from the psychological and spiritual ideas we find attached to the functions of the Gods in the Upanishads and Puranas. We may accept for the present the theory that the earliest fully intelligent form of human religion is necessarily, — since man on earth begins from the external and proceeds to the internal, — a worship of outward Nature-Powers invested with the consciousness and the personality that he finds in his own being.

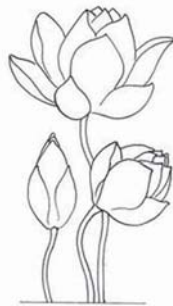
Agni in the Veda is avowedly Fire; Surya is the Sun, Parjanya the Raincloud, Usha the Dawn; and if the material origin or function of some other Gods is less trenchantly clear, it is easy to render the obscure precise by philological inferences or ingenious speculation. But when we come to the worship of the Greeks not much later in date than the Veda, according to modern ideas of chronology, we find a significant change. The material attributes of the Gods are effaced or have become subordinate to psychological conceptions. The impetuous God of Fire has been converted into a lame God of Labour; Apollo, the Sun, presides over poetical and prophetic inspiration; Athene, who may plausibly be identified as in origin a Dawn-Goddess, has lost all memory of her material functions and is the wise, strong and pure Goddess of Knowledge; and there are other deities also, Gods of War, Love, Beauty, whose material functions have disappeared if they ever existed. It is not enough to say that this change was inevitable with the progress of human civilisation: the process also of the change demands inquiry and elucidation. We see the same revolution effected in the Puranas partly by the substitution of other divine names and figures, but also in part by the same obscure process that we observe in the

evolution of Greek mythology. The river Saraswati has become the Muse and Goddess of Learning; Vishnu and Rudra of the Vedas are now the supreme Godhead, members of a divine Triad and expressive separately of conservative and destructive process in the cosmos. In the Isha Upanishad we find an appeal to Surya as a God of revelatory knowledge by whose action we can arrive at the highest truth. This, too, is his function in the sacred Vedic formula of the Gayatri which was for thousands of years repeated by every Brahmin in his daily meditation; and we may note that this formula is a verse from the Rig Veda, from a hymn of the Rishi Vishwamitra. In the same Upanishad, Agni is invoked for purely moral functions as the purifier from sin, the leader of the soul by the good path to the divine Bliss, and he seems to be identified with the power of the will and responsible for human actions. In other Upanishads the Gods are clearly the symbols of sense-functions in man. Soma, the plant which yielded the mystic wine for the Vedic sacrifice, has become not only the God of the moon, but manifests himself as mind in the human being. These evolutions suppose some period, posterior to the early material worship or superior Pantheistic Animism attributed to the Vedas and prior to the developed Puranic mythology, in which the gods became invested with deeper psychological functions, a period which may well have been the Age of the Mysteries. As things stand, a gap is left or else has been created by our exclusive preoccupation with the naturalistic element in the religion of the Vedic Rishis.

I suggest that the gulf is of our own creation and does not really exist in the ancient sacred writings. The hypothesis I propose is that the Rig Veda is itself the one considerable document that remains to us from the early period of human thought of which the historic Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries were the failing remnants, when the spiritual and psychological knowledge of the race was concealed, for reasons now difficult to determine, in a veil of concrete and material figures and symbols which protected the sense from the profane and revealed it to the initiated. One of the leading principles of the mystics was the sacredness and secrecy of self-knowledge and the true knowledge of the Gods. This wisdom was, they thought, unfit, perhaps even dangerous to the ordinary human mind or in any case liable to perversion and misuse and loss of virtue if revealed to vulgar and unpurified spirits. Hence they favoured the existence of an outer worship, effective but imperfect, for the profane, an inner discipline for the initiate, and clothed their language in words and images which had, equally, a spiritual sense for the elect, a concrete sense for the mass of ordinary worshippers. The Vedic hymns were conceived and constructed on this principle. Their formulas and ceremonies are, overtly, the details of an outward ritual devised for the Pantheistic Nature-Worship which was then the common religion, covertly the sacred words, the effective symbols of a spiritual experience and knowledge and a psychological discipline of self-culture which were then the highest achievement of the human race. The ritual system recognised by Sayana may, in its externalities, stand; the naturalistic sense discovered by European scholar-

ship may, in its general conceptions, be accepted; but behind them there is always the true and still hidden secret of the Veda, — the secret words, *nīnyā vacāmsi*, which were spoken for the purified in soul and the awakened in knowledge. To disengage this less obvious but more important sense by fixing the import of Vedic terms, the sense of Vedic symbols and the psychological functions of the Gods is thus a difficult but necessary task, for which these chapters and the translations that accompany them are only a preparation.

The hypothesis, if it proves to be valid, will have three advantages. It will elucidate simply and effectively the parts of the Upanishads that remain yet unintelligible or ill-understood as well as much of the origins of the Puranas. It will explain and justify rationally the whole ancient tradition of India; for it will be found that, in sober truth, the Vedānta, Purana, Tantra, the philosophical schools and the great Indian religions do go back in their source to Vedic origins. We can see there in their original seed or in their early or even primitive forms the fundamental conceptions of later Indian thought. Thus a natural starting-point will be provided for a sounder study of Comparative Religion in the Indian field. Instead of wandering amid insecure speculations or having to account for impossible conversions and unexplained transitions we shall have a clue to a natural and progressive development satisfying to the reason. Incidentally, some light may be thrown on the obscurities of early cult and myth in other ancient nations. Finally, the incoherencies of the Vedic texts will at once be explained and disappear. They exist in appearance only, because the real thread of the sense is to be found in an inner meaning. That thread found, the hymns appear as logical and organic wholes and the expression, though alien in type to our modern ways of thinking and speaking, becomes, in its own style, just and precise and sins rather by economy of phrase than by excess, by over-pregnancy rather than by poverty of sense. The Veda ceases to be merely an interesting remnant of barbarism and takes rank among the most important of the world's early Scriptures. (S15: 3-9)



A RETROSPECT OF VEDIC THEORY

[A portion of the second chapter of *The Secret of the Veda* which appeared in the second issue of the *Arya*]

Veda, then, is the creation of an age anterior to our intellectual philosophies. In that original epoch thought proceeded by other methods than those of our logical reasoning and speech accepted modes of expression which in our modern habits would be inadmissible. The wisest then depended on inner experience and the suggestions of the intuitive mind for all knowledge that ranged beyond mankind's ordinary perceptions and daily activities. Their aim was illumination, not logical conviction, their ideal the inspired seer, not the accurate reasoner. Indian tradition has faithfully preserved this account of the origin of the Vedas. The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymn, but the seer (*draṣṭā*) of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge. The language of Veda itself is *Śruti*, a rhythm not composed by the intellect but heard, a divine Word that came vibrating out of the Infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge. The words themselves, *dr̥ṣṭi* and *śruti*, sight and hearing, are Vedic expressions; these and cognate words signify, in the esoteric terminology of the hymns, revelatory knowledge and the contents of inspiration.

In the Vedic idea of the revelation there is no suggestion of the miraculous or the supernatural. The Rishi who employed these faculties, had acquired them by a progressive self-culture. Knowledge itself was a travelling and a reaching, or a finding and a winning; the revelation came only at the end, the light was the prize of a final victory. There is continually in the Veda this image of the journey, the soul's march on the path of Truth. On that path, as it advances, it also ascends; new vistas of power and light open to its aspiration; it wins by a heroic effort its enlarged spiritual possessions.

From the historical point of view the Rig Veda may be regarded as a record of a great advance made by humanity by special means at a certain period of its collective progress. In its esoteric, as well as its exoteric significance, it is the Book of Works, of the inner and the outer sacrifice; it is the spirit's hymn of battle and victory as it discovers and climbs to planes of thought and experience inaccessible to the natural or animal man, man's praise of the divine Light, Power and Grace at work in the mortal. It is far, therefore, from being an attempt to set down the results of intellectual or imaginative speculation, nor does it consist of the dogmas of a primitive religion. Only, out of the sameness of experience and out of the impersonality of the knowledge received, there arise a fixed body of conceptions constantly repeated and a fixed symbolic language which, perhaps, in that early human speech,

was the inevitable form of these conceptions because alone capable by its combined concreteness and power of mystic suggestion of expressing that which for the ordinary mind of the race was inexpressible. We have, at any rate, the same notions repeated from hymn to hymn with the same constant terms and figures and frequently in the same phrases with an entire indifference to any search for poetical originality or any demand for novelty of thought and freshness of language. No pursuit of aesthetic grace, richness or beauty induces these mystic poets to vary the consecrated form which had become for them a sort of divine algebra transmitting the eternal formulae of the Knowledge to the continuous succession of the initiates.

The hymns possess indeed a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in their technique, great variations of style and poetical personality; they are not the work of rude, barbarous and primitive craftsmen, but the living breath of a supreme and conscious Art forming its creations in the puissant but well-governed movement of a self-observing inspiration. Still, all these high gifts have deliberately been exercised within one unvarying framework and always with the same materials. For the art of expression was to the Rishis only a means, not an aim; their principal preoccupation was strenuously practical, almost utilitarian, in the highest sense of utility. The hymn was to the Rishi who composed it a means of spiritual progress for himself and for others. It rose out of his soul, it became a power of his mind, it was the vehicle of his self-expression in some important or even critical moment of his life's inner history. It helped him to express the god in him, to destroy the devourer, the expresser of evil; it became a weapon in the hands of the Aryan striver after perfection, it flashed forth like Indra's lightning against the Coverer on the slopes, the Wolf on the path, the Robber by the streams.

The invariable fixity of Vedic thought when taken in conjunction with its depth, richness and subtlety, gives rise to some interesting speculations. For we may reasonably argue that such a fixed form and substance would not easily be possible in the beginnings of thought and psychological experience or even during their early progress and unfolding. We may therefore surmise that our actual Sanhita represents the close of a period, not its commencement, nor even some of its successive stages. It is even possible that its most ancient hymns are a comparatively modern development or version of a more ancient¹ lyric evangel couched in the freer and more pliable forms of a still earlier human speech. Or the whole voluminous mass of its litanies may be only a selection by Veda Vyasa out of a more richly vocal Aryan past. Made, according to the common belief, by Krishna of the Isle, the great traditional sage, the colossal compiler (Vyasa), with his face turned towards the commencement of the Iron Age, towards the centuries of increasing twilight and final darkness, it is perhaps only the last testament of the Ages of Intuition, the

1. The Veda itself speaks constantly of "ancient" and "modern" Rishis, (*pūrvah . . . nūtanah*), the former remote enough to be regarded as a kind of demigods, the first founders of knowledge.

luminous Dawns of the Forefathers, to their descendants, to a human race already turning in spirit towards the lower levels and the more easy and secure gains — secure perhaps only in appearance — of the physical life and of the intellect and the logical reason.

But these are only speculations and inferences. Certain it is that the old tradition of a progressive obscuration and loss of the Veda as the law of the human cycle has been fully justified by the event. The obscuration had already proceeded far before the opening of the next great age of Indian spirituality, the Vedantic, which struggled to preserve or recover what it yet could of the ancient knowledge. It could hardly have been otherwise. For the system of the Vedic mystics was founded upon experiences difficult to ordinary mankind and proceeded by the aid of faculties which in most of us are rudimentary and imperfectly developed and, when active at all, are mixed and irregular in their operation. Once the first intensity of the search after truth had passed, periods of fatigue and relaxation were bound to intervene in which the old truths would be partially lost. Nor once lost, could they easily be recovered by scrutinising the sense of the ancient hymns; for those hymns were couched in a language that was deliberately ambiguous.

A tongue unintelligible to us may be correctly understood once a clue has been found; a diction that is deliberately ambiguous, holds its secret much more obstinately and successfully, for it is full of lures and of indications that mislead. Therefore when the Indian mind turned again to review the sense of Veda, the task was difficult and the success only partial. One source of light still existed, the traditional knowledge handed down among those who memorised and explained the Vedic text or had charge of the Vedic ritual, — two functions that had originally been one; for in the early days the priest was also the teacher and seer. But the clearness of this light was already obscured. Even Purohiths of repute performed the rites with a very imperfect knowledge of the power and the sense of the sacred words which they repeated. For the material aspects of Vedic worship had grown like a thick crust over the inner knowledge and were stifling what they had once served to protect. The Veda was already a mass of myth and ritual. The power had begun to disappear out of the symbolic ceremony; the light had departed from the mystic parable and left only a surface of apparent grotesqueness and naivete.

The Brahmanas and the Upanishads are the record of a powerful revival which took the sacred text and ritual as a starting-point for a new statement of spiritual thought and experience. This movement had two complementary aspects, one, the conservation of the forms, another the revelation of the soul of Veda, — the first represented by the Brahmanas,² the second by the Upanishads.

2. Necessarily, these and other appreciations in the chapter are brief and summary views of certain main tendencies. The Brahmanas for instance have their philosophical passages.

The Brahmanas labour to fix and preserve the minutiae of the Vedic ceremony, the conditions of their material effectuality, the symbolic sense and purpose of their different parts, movements, implements, the significance of texts important in the ritual, the drift of obscure allusions, the memory of ancient myths and traditions. Many of their legends are evidently posterior to the hymns, invented to explain passages which were no longer understood; others may have been part of the apparatus of original myth and parable employed by the ancient symbolists or memories of the actual historical circumstances surrounding the composition of the hymns. Oral tradition is always a light that obscures; a new symbolism working upon an old that is half lost, is likely to overgrow rather than reveal it; therefore the Brahmanas, though full of interesting hints, help us very little in our research; nor are they a safe guide to the meaning of separate texts when they attempt an exact and verbal interpretation.

The Rishis of the Upanishads followed another method. They sought to recover the lost or waning knowledge by meditation and spiritual experience and they used the text of the ancient mantras as a prop or an authority for their own intuitions and perceptions; or else the Vedic Word was a seed of thought and vision by which they recovered old truths in new forms. What they found, they expressed in other terms more intelligible to the age in which they lived. In a certain sense their handling of the texts was not disinterested; it was not governed by the scholar's scrupulous desire to arrive at the exact intention of the words and the precise thought of the sentences in their actual framing. They were seekers of a higher than verbal truth and used words merely as suggestions for the illumination towards which they were striving. They knew not or they neglected the etymological sense and employed often a method of symbolic interpretation of component sounds in which it is very difficult to follow them. For this reason, while the Upanishads are invaluable for the light they shed on the principal ideas and on the psychological system of the ancient Rishis, they help us as little as the Brahmanas in determining the accurate sense of the texts which they quote. Their real work was to found Vedanta rather than to interpret Veda.

For this great movement resulted in a new and more permanently powerful statement of thought and spirituality, Veda culminating in Vedanta. And it held in itself two strong tendencies which worked towards the disintegration of the old Vedic thought and culture. First, it tended to subordinate more and more completely the outward ritual, the material utility of the mantra and the sacrifice to a more purely spiritual aim and intention. The balance, the synthesis preserved by the old Mystics between the external and the internal, the material and the spiritual life was displaced and disorganised. A new balance, a new synthesis was established, leaning finally towards asceticism and renunciation, and maintained itself until it was in its turn displaced and disorganised by the exaggeration of its own tendencies in Buddhism. The sacrifice, the symbolic ritual became more and more a useless survival and even

an encumbrance; yet, as so often happens, by the very fact of becoming mechanical and ineffective the importance of everything that was most external in them came to be exaggerated and their minutiae irrationally enforced by that part of the national mind which still clung to them. A sharp practical division came into being, effective though never entirely recognised in theory, between Veda and Vedanta, a distinction which might be expressed in the formula, “the Veda for the priests, the Vedanta for the sages.”

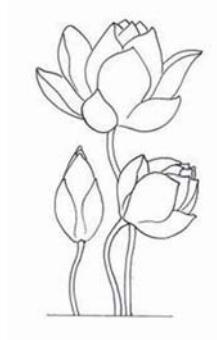
The second tendency of the Vedantic movement was to disencumber itself progressively of the symbolic language, the veil of concrete myth and poetic figure, in which the Mystics had shrouded their thought and to substitute a clearer statement and more philosophical language. The complete evolution of this tendency rendered obsolete the utility not only of the Vedic ritual but of the Vedic text. Upanishads, increasingly clear and direct in their language, became the fountainhead of the highest Indian thought and replaced the inspired verses of Vasishtha and Vishwamitra.³ The Vedas, becoming less and less the indispensable basis of education, were no longer studied with the same zeal and intelligence; their symbolic language, ceasing to be used, lost the remnant of its inner sense to new generations whose whole manner of thought was different from that of the Vedic forefathers. The Ages of Intuition were passing away into the first dawn of the Age of Reason.

Buddhism completed the revolution and left of the externalities of the ancient world only some venerable pomps and some mechanical usages. It sought to abolish the Vedic sacrifice and to bring into use the popular vernacular in place of the literary tongue. And although the consummation of its work was delayed for several centuries by the revival of Hinduism in the Puranic religions, the Veda itself benefited little by this respite. In order to combat the popularity of the new religion it was necessary to put forward instead of venerable but unintelligible texts Scriptures written in an easy form of a more modern Sanskrit. For the mass of the nation the Puranas pushed aside the Veda and the forms of new religious systems took the place of the ancient ceremonies. As the Veda had passed from the sage to the priest, so now it began to pass from the hands of the priest into the hands of the scholar. And in that keeping it suffered the last mutilation of its sense and the last diminution of its true dignity and sanctity.

Not that the dealings of Indian scholarship with the hymns, beginning from the pre-Christian centuries, have been altogether a record of loss. Rather it is to the scrupulous diligence and conservative tradition of the Pandits that we owe the preservation of Veda at all after its secret had been lost and the hymns themselves had ceased in practice to be a living Scripture. And even for the recovery of the lost

3. Again this expresses the main tendency and is subject to qualification. The Vedas are also quoted as authorities; but as a whole it is the Upanishads that become the Book of Knowledge, the Veda being rather the Book of Works.

secret the two millenniums of scholastic orthodoxy have left us some invaluable aids, a text determined scrupulously to its very accentuation, the important lexicon of Yaska and Sayana's great commentary which in spite of its many and often startling imperfections remains still for the scholar an indispensable first step towards the formation of a sound Vedic learning. (S15: 10-17)



FOUNDATIONS OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

[From Chapter IV of *The Secret of the Veda*]

. . . [The object of these brief and summary chapters] is only to indicate for those who care to follow the clue I have myself received, the path and its principal turnings, — the results I have arrived at and the main indications by which the Veda itself helps us to arrive at them. And, first, it seems to me advisable to explain the genesis of the theory in my own mind so that the reader may the better understand the line I have taken or, if he chooses, check any prepossessions or personal preferences which may have influenced or limited the right application of reasoning to this difficult problem.

Like the majority of educated Indians I had passively accepted without examination, before myself reading the Veda, the conclusions of European Scholarship both as to the religious and as to the historical and ethnical sense of the ancient hymns. In consequence, following again the ordinary line taken by modernised Hindu opinion, I regarded the Upanishads as the most ancient source of Indian thought and religion, the true Veda, the first Book of Knowledge. The Rig Veda in the modern translations which were all I knew of this profound Scripture, represented for me an important document of our national history, but seemed of small value or importance for the history of thought or for a living spiritual experience.

My first contact with Vedic thought came indirectly while pursuing certain lines of self-development in the way of Indian Yoga, which, without my knowing it, were spontaneously converging towards the ancient and now unfrequented paths followed by our forefathers. At this time there began to arise in my mind an arrangement of symbolic names attached to certain psychological experiences which had begun to regularise themselves; and among them there came the figures of three female energies, Ila, Saraswati, Sarama, representing severally three out of the four faculties of the intuitive reason, — revelation, inspiration and intuition. Two of these names were not well known to me as names of Vedic goddesses, but were connected rather with the current Hindu religion or with old Puranic legend, Saraswati, goddess of learning and Ila, mother of the Lunar dynasty. But Sarama was familiar enough. I was unable, however, to establish any connection between the figure that rose in my mind and the Vedic hound of heaven, who was associated in my memory with the Argive Helen and represented only an image of the physical Dawn entering in its pursuit of the vanished herds of Light into the cave of the Powers of darkness. When once the clue is found, the clue of the physical Light imaging the subjective, it is easy to see that the hound of heaven may be the intuition entering into the dark caverns of the subconscious mind to prepare the delivery and out-flashing of the

bright illuminations of knowledge which have there been imprisoned. But the clue was wanting and I was obliged to suppose an identity of name without any identity of the symbol.

It was my stay in Southern India which first seriously turned my thoughts to the Veda. Two observations that were forced on my mind, gave a serious shock to my second-hand belief in the racial division between Northern Aryans and Southern Dravidians. The distinction had always rested for me on a supposed difference between the physical types of Aryan and Dravidian and a more definite incompatibility between the northern Sanskritic and the southern non-Sanskritic tongues. I knew indeed of the later theories which suppose that a single homogeneous race, Dravidian or Indo-Afghan, inhabits the Indian peninsula; but hitherto I had not attached much importance to these speculations. I could not, however, be long in Southern India without being impressed by the general recurrence of northern or "Aryan" types in the Tamil race. Wherever I turned, I seemed to recognise with a startling distinctness, not only among the Brahmins but in all castes and classes, the old familiar faces, features, figures of my friends of Maharashtra, Gujerat, Hindustan, even, though this similarity was less widely spread, of my own province Bengal. The impression I received was as if an army of all the tribes of the North had descended on the South and submerged any previous populations that may have occupied it. A general impression of a Southern type survived, but it was impossible to fix it rigidly while studying the physiognomy of individuals. And in the end I could not but perceive that whatever admixtures might have taken place, whatever regional differences might have been evolved, there remains, behind all variations, a unity of physical as well as of cultural type¹ throughout India. For the rest, this is a conclusion to which ethnological speculation² itself has an increasing tendency.

But what then of the sharp distinction between Aryan and Dravidian races created by the philologists? It disappears. If at all an Aryan invasion is admitted, we have either to suppose that it flooded India and determined the physical type of the people, with whatever modifications, or that it was the incursion of small bands of a less civilised race who melted away into the original population. We have then to suppose that entering a vast peninsula occupied by a civilised people, builders of great cities, extensive traders, not without mental and spiritual culture, they were yet able to impose on them their own language, religion, ideas and manners. Such a miracle would be just possible if the invaders possessed a very highly organised language, a greater force of creative mind and a more dynamic religious form and spirit.

1. I prefer not to use the term race, for race is a thing much more obscure and difficult to determine than is usually imagined. In dealing with it the trenchant distinctions current in the popular mind are wholly out of place.

2. Always supposing that ethnological speculations have at all any validity. The only firm basis of ethnology is the theory of the hereditary invariability of the human skull which is now being challenged. If it disappears, the whole science disappears with it.

And there was always the difference of language to support the theory of a meeting of races. But here also my preconceived ideas were disturbed and confounded. For on examining the vocables of the Tamil language, in appearance so foreign to the Sanskritic form and character, I yet found myself continually guided by words or by families of words supposed to be pure Tamil in establishing new relations between Sanskrit and its distant sister, Latin, and occasionally, between the Greek and the Sanskrit. Sometimes the Tamil vocable not only suggested the connection, but proved the missing link in a family of connected words. And it was through this Dravidian language that I came first to perceive what seems to me now the true law, origins and, as it were, the embryology of the Aryan tongues. I was unable to pursue my examination far enough to establish any definite conclusion, but it certainly seems to me that the original connection between the Dravidian and Aryan tongues was far closer and more extensive than is usually supposed and the possibility suggests itself that they may even have been two divergent families derived from one lost primitive tongue. If so, the sole remaining evidence of an Aryan invasion of Dravidian India would be the indications to be found in the Vedic hymns.

It was, therefore, with a double interest that for the first time I took up the Veda in the original, though without any immediate intention of a close or serious study. It did not take long to see that the Vedic indications of a racial division between Aryans and Dasyus and the identification of the latter with the indigenous Indians were of a far flimsier character than I had supposed. But far more interesting to me was the discovery of a considerable body of profound psychological thought and experience lying neglected in these ancient hymns. And the importance of this element increased in my eyes when I found, first, that the mantras of the Veda illuminated with a clear and exact light psychological experiences of my own for which I had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teachings of Yoga or of Vedanta, so far as I was acquainted with them, and, secondly, that they shed light on obscure passages and ideas of the Upanishads to which, previously, I could attach no exact meaning and gave at the same time a new sense to much in the Puranas.

I was helped in arriving at this result by my fortunate ignorance of the commentary of Sayana. For I was left free to attribute their natural psychological significance to many ordinary and current words of the Veda, such as *dhī*, thought or understanding, *manas*, mind, *mati*, thought, feeling or mental state, *manīṣā*, intellect, *ṛtam*, truth; to give their exact shades of sense to *kavi*, seer, *manīṣī*, thinker, *vipra*, *vipaścīt*, enlightened in mind, and a number of similar words; and to hazard a psychological sense, justified by more extensive study, for words like *dakṣa* which for Sayana means strength and *śravas* which he renders as wealth, food or fame. The psychological theory of the Veda rests upon our right to concede their natural significance to these vocables.

Sayana gives to the words *dhī*, *ṛtam*, etc., very variable significances. *Ṛtam*,

which is almost the key-word of any psychological or spiritual interpretation, is rendered by him sometimes as “truth”, more often “sacrifice”, occasionally in the sense of water. The psychological interpretation gives it invariably the sense of Truth. *Dhī* is rendered by Sayana variously “thought”, “prayer”, “action”, “food”, etc. The psychological interpretation gives it consistently the sense of thought or understanding. And so with the other fixed terms of Veda. Moreover, Sayana’s tendency, is to obliterate all fine shades and distinctions between words and to give them their vaguest general significance. All epithets conveying ideas of mental activity mean for him simply “intelligent”, all words suggesting various ideas of force, and the Veda overflows with them, are reduced to the broad idea of strength. I found myself on the contrary impressed by the great importance of fixing and preserving the right shade of meaning and precise association to be given to different words, however close they may be to each other in their general sense. I do not see indeed why we should suppose that the Vedic Rishis, unlike all other masters of poetic style, used words pell-mell and indiscriminately without feeling their just associations and giving them their right and exact force in the verbal combination.

By following this principle I found that without departing from the simple natural and straightforward sense of words and clauses an extraordinarily large body not only of separate verses but of entire passages came at once into evidence which entirely altered the whole character of the Veda. For this Scripture then appeared to have a constant vein of the richest gold of thought and spiritual experience running all through it and appearing sometimes in small streaks, sometimes in larger bands, in the majority of its hymns. Moreover, besides the words that in their plain and ordinary sense give at once a wealth of psychological significance to their context, the Veda is full of others to which it is possible to give either an external and material or an internal and psychological value according to our conception of the general purport of Veda. For instance such words as *rāye*, *rayi*, *rādhas*, *ratna*, may mean either merely material prosperity and riches or internal felicity and plenitude applying itself equally to the subjective and the objective world; *dhana*, *vāja*, *poṣa* may mean either objective wealth, plenty and increase or all possessions internal or external, their plenitude and their growth in the life of the individual. *Rāye* is used in the Upanishads, in a quotation from the Rig Veda, to mean spiritual felicity; why should it be incapable of bearing that sense in the original text? *Vāja* occurs frequently in a context in which every other word has a psychological significance and the mention of physical plenty comes in with a violent jar of incoherency into the homogeneous totality of the thought. Commonsense, therefore, demands that the use of these words with a psychological import should be admitted in the Veda.

But if this is done consistently, not only whole verses and passages, but whole hymns assume at once the psychological complexion. On one condition this transformation is frequently complete, leaving no word or phrase unaffected, — the

condition that we should admit the symbolic character of the Vedic sacrifice. We find in the Gita the word *yajña*, sacrifice, used in a symbolic sense for all action, whether internal or external, that is consecrated to the gods or to the Supreme. Was such symbolic use of the word born of a later philosophical intellectuality, or was it inherent in the Vedic idea of sacrifice? I found that in the Veda itself there were hymns in which the idea of the *yajña* or of the victim is openly symbolical, others in which the veil is quite transparent. The question then arose whether these were later compositions developing an incipient symbolism out of old superstitious practices or rather the occasional plainer statement of a sense which is in most hymns more or less carefully veiled by the figure. If there were no constant recurrence of psychological passages in the Veda, the former explanation would, no doubt, have to be accepted. But on the contrary whole hymns took naturally a psychological sense proceeding with a perfect and luminous coherency from verse to verse, where the only points of obscurity were the mention of the sacrifice or of the offering or sometimes of the officiating priest, who might be either a man or a god. If these words could be interpreted symbolically, I found always that the progression of thought became more perfect, more luminous, more coherent and the sense of the hymn in its entirety was victoriously completed. I felt therefore justified by every canon of sound criticism in pursuing my hypothesis farther and including in it the symbolic sense of the Vedic ritual.

Nevertheless here intervenes the first real difficulty of the psychological interpretation. Hitherto I had been proceeding by a perfectly straightforward and natural method of interpretation based on the surface meaning of the words and sentences. Now I came to an element in which the surface meaning had, in a sense, to be overridden, and this is a process in which every critical and conscientious mind must find itself beset by continual scruples. Nor can one always be sure, even with the utmost care, of having hit on the right clue and the just interpretation.

The Vedic sacrifice consists of three features, — omitting for the moment the god and the mantra, — the persons who offer, the offering and the fruits of the offering. If the *yajña* is the action consecrated to the gods, I could not but take the *yajamāna*, the giver of the sacrifice, as the doer of the action. *Yajña* is works, internal or external, the *yajamāna* must be the soul or the personality as the doer. But there were also the officiating priests, *hotā*, *ṛtvij*, *purohita*, *brahmā*, *adhvaryu* etc. What was their part in the symbolism? For if we once suppose a symbolic sense for the sacrifice, we must suppose also a symbolic value for each feature of the ceremony. I found that the gods were continually spoken of as priests of the offering and in many passages it was undisguisedly a non-human power or energy which presided over the sacrifice. I perceived also that throughout Veda the elements of our personality are themselves continually personified. I had only to apply this rule inversely and to suppose that the person of the priest in the external figure represented in the internal activities figured a non-human power or energy or an element of our

personality. It remained to fix the psychological sense of the different priestly offices. Here I found that the Veda itself presented a clue by its philological indications and insinuations, such as the use of the word *purohita* in its separated form with the sense of the representative “put in front” and a frequent reference to the god Agni who symbolises the divine Will or Force in humanity that takes up the action in all consecration of works.

The offerings were more difficult to understand. Even if the Soma-wine by the context in which it occurred, its use and effect and the philological indication of its synonyms, suggested its own interpretation, what could possibly be indicated by the “ghritam”, the clarified butter in the sacrifice? And yet the word as used in the Veda was constantly insisting on its own symbolical significance. What for instance could be made of clarified butter dropping from heaven or dripping from the horses of Indra or dripping from the mind? Obviously, this was grotesque nonsense, if the sense of *ghṛta* as clarified butter was anything more than a symbol used with great looseness, so that often the external sense was wholly or partly put aside in the mind of the thinker. It was possible of course to vary conveniently the sense of the words, to take *ghṛta* sometimes as butter and sometimes as water and *manas* sometimes as the mind, sometimes as food or a cake. But I found that *ghṛta* was constantly used in connection with the thought or the mind, that heaven in Veda was a symbol of the mind, that Indra represented the illuminated mentality and his two horses double energies of that mentality and even that the Veda sometimes speaks plainly of offering the intellect (*manīṣā*) as purified *ghṛta* to the gods, *ghṛtaṁ na pūtaṁ manīṣām*.³ The word *ghṛta* counts also among its philological significances the sense of a rich or warm brightness. It was by this concurrence of indications that I felt justified in fixing a certain psychological significance for the figure of the clarified butter. And I found the same rule and the same method applicable to other features of the sacrifice.

The fruits of the offering were in appearance purely material — cows, horses, gold, offspring, men, physical strength, victory in battle. Here the difficulty thickened. But I had already found that the Vedic cow was an exceedingly enigmatical animal and came from no earthly herd. The word *go* means both cow and light and in a number of passages evidently meant light even while putting forward the image of the cow. This is clear enough when we have to do with the cows of the sun — the Homeric kine of Helios — and the cows of the Dawn. Psychologically, the physical Light might well be used as a symbol of knowledge and especially of the divine knowledge. But how could this mere possibility be tested and established? I found that passages occurred in which all the surrounding context was psychological and only the image of the cow interfered with its obtrusive material suggestion. Indra is invoked as the maker of perfect forms to drink the wine of Soma; drinking he becomes full of ecstasy and a “giver of cows”; then we can attain to his most intimate

3. See *Rig Veda I.110.6 and III.2.1*. — Ed.

or his most ultimate right thinkings, then we question him and his clear discernment brings us our highest good. It is obvious that in such a passage these cows cannot be material herds nor would the giving of physical Light carry any sense in the context. In one instance at least the psychological symbolism of the Vedic cow was established with certainty to my mind. I then applied it to other passages in which the word occurred and always I saw that it resulted in the best sense and the greatest possible coherency in the context.

The cow and horse, *go* and *aśva*, are constantly associated. Usha, the Dawn, is described as *gomatī aśvavatī*; Dawn gives to the sacrificer horses and cows. As applied to the physical dawn *gomatī* means accompanied by or bringing the rays of light and is an image of the dawn of illumination in the human mind. Therefore *aśvavatī* also cannot refer merely to the physical steed; it must have a psychological significance as well. A study of the Vedic horse led me to the conclusion that *go* and *aśva* represent the two companion ideas of Light and Energy, Consciousness and Force, which to the Vedic and Vedantic mind were the double or twin aspect of all the activities of existence.

It was apparent, therefore, that the two chief fruits of the Vedic sacrifice, wealth of cows and wealth of horses, were symbolic of richness of mental illumination and abundance of vital energy. It followed that the other fruits continually associated with these two chief results of the Vedic karma must also be capable of a psychological significance. It remained only to fix their exact purport.

Another all-important feature of Vedic symbolism is the system of the worlds and the functions of the gods. I found the clue to the symbolism of the worlds in the Vedic conception of the *vyāhṛtis*, the three symbolic words of the mantra, “OM Bhur Bhuvah Swah”, and in the connection of the fourth Vyahriti, Mahas, with the psychological term “Ritam”. The Rishis speak of three cosmic divisions, Earth, the Antariksha or middle region and Heaven (Dyaus); but there is also a greater Heaven (Brihad Dyau) called also the Wide World, the Vast (Brihat), and typified sometimes as the Great Water, Maho Arnas. This “Brihat” is again described as “Ritam Brihat” or in a triple term “Satyam Ritam Brihat”. And as the three worlds correspond to the Vyahritis, so this fourth world of the Vastness and the Truth seems to correspond to the fourth Vyahriti mentioned in the Upanishads, Mahas. In the Puranic formula the four are completed by three others, Jana, Tapas and Satya, the three supreme worlds of the Hindu cosmology. In the Veda also we have three supreme worlds whose names are not given. But in the Vedantic and Puranic system the seven worlds correspond to seven psychological principles or forms of existence, Sat, Chit, Ananda, Vijnana, Manas, Prana and Anna. Now Vijnana, the central principle, the principle of Mahas, the great world, is the Truth of things, identical with the Vedic Ritam which is the principle of Brihat, the Vast, and while in the Puranic system Mahas is followed in the ascending order by Jana, the world of Ananda, of the divine Bliss, in the Veda also Ritam, the Truth, leads upward to Mayas, Bliss. We may, therefore, be fairly sure that the two systems are identical and that both depend on the same

idea of seven principles of subjective consciousness formulating themselves in seven objective worlds. On this principle I was able to identify the Vedic worlds with the corresponding psychological planes of consciousness and the whole Vedic system became clear to my mind.

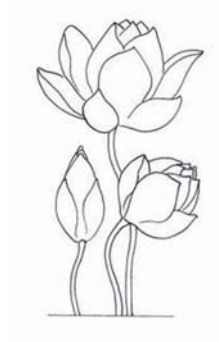
With so much established the rest followed naturally and inevitably. I had already seen that the central idea of the Vedic Rishis was the transition of the human soul from a state of death to a state of immortality by the exchange of the Falsehood for the Truth, of divided and limited being for integrality and infinity. Death is the mortal state of Matter with Mind and Life involved in it; Immortality is a state of infinite being, consciousness and bliss. Man rises beyond the two firmaments, Rodasi, Heaven and Earth, mind and body, to the infinity of the Truth, Mahas, and so to the divine Bliss. This is the "great passage" discovered by the Ancestors, the ancient Rishis.

The gods I found to be described as children of Light, sons of Aditi, of Infinity; and without exception they are described as increasing man, bringing him light, pouring on him the fullness of the waters, the abundance of the heavens, increasing the truth in him, building up the divine worlds, leading him against all attacks to the great goal, the integral felicity, the perfect bliss. Their separate functions emerged by means of their activities, their epithets, the psychological sense of the legends connected with them, the indications of the Upanishads and Puranas, the occasional side-lights from Greek myth. On the other hand the demons who opposed them, are all powers of division and limitation, Coverers, Tearers, Devourers, Confiners, Dualisers, Obstructers, as their names indicate, powers that work against the free and unified integrality of the being. These Vritras, Panis, Atris, Rakshasas, Sambara, Vala, Namuchi, are not Dravidian kings and gods, as the modern mind with its exaggerated historic sense would like them to be; they represent a more antique idea better suited to the religious and ethical preoccupations of our forefathers. They represent the struggle between the powers of the higher Good and the lower desire, and this conception of the Rig Veda and the same opposition of good and evil otherwise expressed, with less psychological subtlety, with more ethical directness in the scriptures of the Zoroastrians, our ancient neighbours and kindred, proceeded probably from a common original discipline of the Aryan culture.

Finally, I found that the systematic symbolism of the Veda was extended to the legends related of the gods and of their dealings with the ancient seers. Some of these myths, if not all, may have had, in all probability had, a naturalistic and astronomical origin; but, if so, their original sense had been supplemented by a psychological symbolism. Once the sense of the Vedic symbols is known, the spiritual intention of these legends becomes apparent and inevitable. Every element of the Veda is inextricably bound up with every other and the very nature of these compositions compels us, once we have adopted a principle of interpretation, to carry it to its farthest rational limits. Their materials have been skilfully welded

together by firm hands and any inconsistency in our handling of them shatters the whole fabric of their sense and their coherent thinking.

Thus there emerged in my mind, revealing itself as it were out of the ancient verses, a Veda which was throughout the Scripture of a great and antique religion already equipped with a profound psychological discipline, — a Scripture not confused in thought or primitive in its substance, not a medley of heterogeneous or barbarous elements, but one, complete and self-conscious in its purpose and in its purport, veiled indeed by the cover, sometimes thick, sometimes transparent, of another and material sense, but never losing sight even for a single moment of its high spiritual aim and tendency. (S15: 35-47)



A SUBLIME CREATION

The first formative period of Indian civilisation

If we would understand the essential spirit of Indian civilisation, we must go back to its first formative period, the early epoch of the Veda and the Upanishads, its heroic creative seed-time. (S20: 169)

Seeking the spiritual truth of existence

A remarkable feature of the Indian mind was a close attention to the things of life, a disposition to observe minutely its salient facts, to systematise and to found in each department of it a science, Shastra, well-founded scheme and rule. That is at least a good beginning of the scientific tendency and not the sign of a culture capable only of unsubstantial metaphysics.

It is perfectly true that Indian science came abruptly to a halt somewhere about the thirteenth century and a period of darkness and inactivity prevented it from proceeding forward or sharing at once in the vast modern development of scientific knowledge. But this was not due to any increase or intolerance of the metaphysical tendency calling the national mind away from physical nature. It was part of a general cessation of new intellectual activity, for philosophy too ceased to develop almost at the same time. The last great original attempts at spiritual philosophy are dated only a century or two later than the names of the last great original scientists. It is true also that Indian metaphysics did not attempt, as modern philosophy has attempted without success, to read the truth of existence principally by the light of the truths of physical Nature. This ancient wisdom founded itself rather upon an inner experimental psychology and a profound psychic science, India's special strength, — but study of mind too and of our inner forces is surely study of nature, — in which her success was greater than in physical knowledge. This she could not but do, since it was the spiritual truth of existence for which she was seeking; nor is any really great and enduring philosophy possible except on this basis. It is true also that the harmony she established in her culture between philosophical truth and truth of psychology and religion was not extended in the same degree to the truth of physical Nature; physical Science had not then arrived at the great universal generalisations which would have made and are now making that synthesis entirely possible. Nevertheless from the beginning, from as early as the thought of the Vedas, the Indian mind had recognised that the same general laws and powers hold in the spiritual, the psychological and the physical existence. It discovered too the omnipresence of life, affirmed the evolution of the soul in Nature from the vegetable and

the animal to the human form, asserted on the basis of philosophic intuition and spiritual and psychological experience many of the truths which modern Science is reaffirming from its own side of the approach to knowledge. These things too were not the results of a barren and empty metaphysics, not the inventions of bovine navel-gazing dreamers. (S20: 124-25)

The manifold approach to the Eternal and Infinite

The Infinite is full of many infinities and each of these infinities is itself the very Eternal. And here in the limitations of the cosmos God manifests himself and fulfils himself in the world in many ways, but each is the way of the Eternal. For in each finite we can discover and through all things as his forms and symbols we can approach the Infinite; all cosmic powers are manifestations, all forces are forces of the One. The gods behind the workings of Nature are to be seen and adored as powers, names and personalities of the one Godhead. An infinite Conscious-Force, executive Energy, Will or Law, Maya, Prakriti, Shakti or Karma, is behind all happenings, whether to us they seem good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, fortunate or adverse. The Infinite creates and is Brahma; it preserves and is Vishnu; it destroys or takes to itself and is Rudra or Shiva. The supreme Energy beneficent in upholding and protection is or else formulates itself as the Mother of the worlds, Luxmi or Durga. Or beneficent even in the mask of destruction, it is Chandi or it is Kali, the dark Mother. The One Godhead manifests himself in the form of his qualities in various names and godheads. The God of divine love of the Vaishnava, the God of divine power of the Shakta appear as two different godheads; but in truth they are the one infinite Deity in different figures.¹ One may approach the Supreme through any of these names and forms, with knowledge or in ignorance; for through them and beyond them we can proceed at last to the supreme experience. (S20: 194-95)

The deeper truths reserved for the initiates

The deeper truth . . . was reserved for the initiates, for those who were ready to understand and practise the inner sense, the esoteric meaning hidden in the Vedic scripture. For the Veda is full of words which, as the Rishis themselves express it, are secret words that give their inner meaning only to the seer, *kavaye nivacanā niṅyā vacāmsi*. This is a feature of the ancient sacred hymns which grew obscure to later ages; it became a dead tradition and has been entirely ignored by modern scholarship in its laborious attempt to read the hieroglyph of the Vedic symbols.

1. This explanation of Indian polytheism is not a modern invention created to meet Western reproaches; it is to be found explicitly stated in the Gita; it is, still earlier, the sense of the Upanishads; it was clearly stated in so many words in the first ancient days by the “primitive” poets (in truth the profound mystics) of the Veda.

Yet its recognition is essential to a right understanding of almost all the ancient religions; for mostly they started on their upward curve through an esoteric element of which the key was not given to all. In all or most there was a surface cult for the common physical man who was held yet unfit for the psychic and spiritual life and an inner secret of the Mysteries carefully disguised by symbols whose sense was opened only to the initiates. This was the origin of the later distinction between the Shudra, the undeveloped physical-minded man, and the twice-born, those who were capable of entering into the second birth by initiation and to whom alone the Vedic education could be given without danger. This too actuated the later prohibition of any reading or teaching of the Veda by the Shudra. It was this inner meaning, it was the higher psychic and spiritual truths concealed by the outer sense, that gave to these hymns the name by which they are still known, the Veda, the Book of Knowledge. Only by penetrating into the esoteric sense of this worship can we understand the full flowering of the Vedic religion in the Upanishads and in the long later evolution of Indian spiritual seeking and experience. For it is all there in its luminous seed, preshadowed or even prefigured in the verses of the early seers. The persistent notion which through every change ascribed the foundation of all our culture to the Rishis, whatever its fabulous forms and mythical ascriptions, contains a real truth and veils a sound historic tradition. It reflects the fact of a true initiation and an unbroken continuity between this great primitive past and the ripper but hardly greater spiritual development of our historic culture.

This inner Vedic religion started with an extension of the psychic significance of the godheads in the Cosmos. Its primary notion was that of a hierarchy of worlds, an ascending stair of planes of being in the universe. It saw a mounting scale of the worlds corresponding to a similar mounting scale of planes or degrees or levels of consciousness in the nature of man. A Truth, Right and Law sustains and governs all these levels of Nature; one in essence, it takes in them different but cognate forms. There is for instance the series of the outer physical light, another higher and inner light which is the vehicle of the mental, vital and psychic consciousness and a highest inmost light of spiritual illumination. Surya, the Sun-God, was the lord of the physical Sun; but he is at the same time to the Vedic seer-poet the giver of the rays of knowledge which illumine the mind and he is too the soul and energy and body of the spiritual illumination. And in all these powers he is a luminous form of the one and infinite Godhead. All the Vedic godheads have this outer and this inner and inmost function, their known and their secret Names. All are in their external character powers of physical Nature; all have in their inner meaning a psychic function and psychological ascriptions; all too are various powers of some one highest Reality, *ekam sat*, the one infinite Existence. This hardly knowable Supreme is called often in the Veda "That Truth" or "That One", *tat satyam, tad ekam*. This complex character of the Vedic godheads assumes forms which have been wholly misunderstood by those who ascribe to them only their outward physical significance. Each of these

gods is in himself a complete and separate cosmic personality of the one Existence and in their combination of powers they form the complete universal power, the cosmic whole, *vaiśvadevyam*. Each again, apart from his special function, is one godhead with the others; each holds in himself the universal divinity, each god is all the other gods. This is the aspect of the Vedic teaching and worship to which a European scholar, mistaking entirely its significance because he read it in the dim and poor light of European religious experience, has given the sounding misnomer, henotheism. Beyond, in the triple Infinite, these godheads put on their highest nature and are names of the one nameless Ineffable. (S20: 200-02)

A sublime and powerful poetic creation

The Veda thus understood stands out, apart from its interest as the world's first yet extant Scripture, its earliest interpretation of man and the Divine and the universe, as a remarkable, a sublime and powerful poetic creation. It is in its form and speech no barbaric production. The Vedic poets are masters of a consummate technique, their rhythms are carved like chariots of the gods and borne on divine and ample wings of sound, and are at once concentrated and wide-waved, great in movement and subtle in modulation, their speech lyric by intensity and epic by elevation, an utterance of great power, pure and bold and grand in outline, a speech direct and brief in impact, full to overflowing in sense and suggestion so that each verse exists at once as a strong and sufficient thing in itself and takes its place as a large step between what came before and what comes after. A sacred and hieratic tradition faithfully followed gave them both their form and substance, but this substance consisted of the deepest psychic and spiritual experiences of which the human soul is capable and the forms seldom or never degenerate into a convention, because what they are intended to convey was lived in himself by each poet and made new to his own mind in expression by the subtleties or sublimities of his individual vision. The utterances of the greatest seers, Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others, touch the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry and there are poems like the Hymn of Creation that move in a powerful clarity on the summits of thought on which the Upanishads lived constantly with a more sustained breathing. The mind of ancient India did not err when it traced back all its philosophy, religion and essential things of its culture to these seer-poets, for all the future spirituality of her people is contained there in seed or in first expression. (S20: 326-27)

Master ideas that governed the mind of India

It is one great importance of a right understanding of the Vedic hymns as a form of sacred literature that it helps us to see the original shaping not only of the master

ideas that governed the mind of India, but of its characteristic types of spiritual experience, its turn of imagination, its creative temperament and the kind of significant forms in which it persistently interpreted its sight of self and things and life and the universe. It is in a great part of the literature the same turn of inspiration and self-expression that we see in the architecture, painting and sculpture. Its first character is a constant sense of the infinite, the cosmic, and of things as seen in or affected by the cosmic vision, set in or against the amplitude of the one and infinite; its second peculiarity is a tendency to see and render its spiritual experience in a great richness of images taken from the inner psychic plane or in physical images transmuted by the stress of a psychic significance and impression and line and idea colour; and its third tendency is to image the terrestrial life often magnified, as in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, or else subtilised in the transparencies of a larger atmosphere, attended by a greater than the terrestrial meaning or at any rate presented against the background of the spiritual and psychic worlds and not alone in its own separate figure. The spiritual, the infinite is near and real and the gods are real and the worlds beyond not so much beyond as immanent in our own existence. That which to the Western mind is myth and imagination is here an actuality and a strand of the life of our inner being, what is there beautiful poetic idea and philosophic speculation is here a thing constantly realised and present to the experience. It is this turn of the Indian mind, its spiritual sincerity and psychic positivism, that makes the Veda and Upanishads and the later religious and religio-philosophic poetry so powerful in inspiration and intimate and living in expression and image, and it has its less absorbing but still very sensible effect on the working of the poetic idea and imagination even in the more secular literature. (S20: 327-28)

A continuity in the creations of the Indian mind

The early mind of India in the magnificent youth of the nation, when a fathomless spiritual insight was at work, a subtle intuitive vision and a deep, clear and greatly outlined intellectual and ethical thinking and heroic action and creation which founded and traced the plan and made the permanent structure of her unique culture and civilisation, is represented by four of the supreme productions of her genius, the Veda, the Upanishads and the two vast epics, and each of them is of a kind, a form and an intention not easily paralleled in any other literature. The two first are the visible foundation of her spiritual and religious being, the others a large creative interpretation of her greatest period of life, of the ideas that informed and the ideals that governed it and the figures in which she saw man and Nature and God and the powers of the universe. The Veda gave us the first types and figures of these things as seen and formed by an imaged spiritual intuition and psychological and religious experience; the Upanishads constantly breaking through and beyond form and symbol and image without entirely abandoning them, since always they come in as

accompaniment or undertone, reveal in a unique kind of poetry the ultimate and unsurpassable truths of self and God and man and the world and its principles and powers in their most essential, their profoundest and most intimate and their most ample realities, — highest mysteries and clarities vividly seen in an irresistible, an unvalled perception that has got through the intuitive and psychological to the sheer spiritual vision. And after that we have powerful and beautiful developments of the intellect and the life and of ideal, ethical, aesthetic, psychic, emotional and sensuous and physical knowledge and idea and vision and experience of which the epics are the early record and the rest of the literature the continuation; but the foundation remains the same throughout, and whatever new and often larger types and significant figures replace the old or intervene to add and modify and alter the whole ensemble, are in their essential build and character transmutations and extensions of the original vision and first spiritual experience and never an unconnected departure. There is a persistence, a continuity of the Indian mind in its literary creation in spite of great changes as consistent as that which we find in painting and sculpture. (S20: 317-18)

The real character of the Veda

The real character of the Veda can best be understood by taking it anywhere and rendering it straightforwardly according to its own phrases and images. A famous German scholar rating from his high pedestal of superior intelligence the silly persons who find sublimity in the Veda, tells us that it is full of childish, silly, even monstrous conceptions, that it is tedious, low, commonplace, that it represents human nature on a low level of selfishness and worldliness and that only here and there are a few rare sentiments that come from the depths of the soul. It may be made so if we put our own mental conceptions into the words of the Rishis, but if we read them as they are without any such false translation into what we think early barbarians ought to have said and thought, we shall find instead a sacred poetry sublime and powerful in its words and images, though with another kind of language and imagination than we now prefer and appreciate, deep and subtle in its psychological experience and stirred by a moved soul of vision and utterance. Hear rather the word itself of the Veda.

States upon states are born, covering over covering² awakens to knowledge: in the lap of the mother he wholly sees. They have called to him, getting a wide knowledge, they guard sleeplessly the strength, they have entered into the strong city. The peoples born on earth increase the luminous (force) of the son of the White Mother; he has gold on his neck, he is large of speech, he is

2. Or, "the coverer of the coverer".

as if by (the power of) this honey wine a seeker of plenty. He is like pleasant and desirable milk, he is a thing unaccompanied and is with the two who are companions and is as a heat that is the belly of plenty and is invincible and an overcomer of many. Play, O Ray, and manifest thyself.³

Or again in the succeeding hymn, —

Those (flames) of thee, the forceful (godhead), that move not and are increased and puissant, unclinging the hostility and crookedness of one who has another law. O Fire, we choose thee for our priest and the means of effectuation of our strength and in the sacrifices bringing the food of thy pleasure we call thee by the word. . . . O god of perfect works, may we be for the felicity, for the truth, revelling with the rays, revelling with the heroes.

And finally let us take the bulk of the third hymn that follows couched in the ordinary symbols of the sacrifice, —

As the Manu we set thee in thy place, as the Manu we kindle thee: O Fire, O Angiras, as the Manu sacrifice to the gods for him who desires the godheads. O Fire, well pleased thou art kindled in the human being and the ladles go to thee continually. . . . Thee all the gods with one pleasure (in thee) made their messenger and serving thee, O seer, (men) in the sacrifices adore the god. Let the mortal adore the divine Fire with sacrifice to the godheads. Kindled, flame forth, O Bright One. Sit in the seat of Truth, sit in the seat of peace.⁴

That, whatever interpretation we choose to put on its images, is a mystic and symbolic poetry and that is the real Veda. (S20: 321-23)

Vedic hymns — a spontaneous welling up from the psychic

“If knowledge is the widest power of the consciousness and its function is to free and illumine, yet love is the deepest and most intense and its privilege is to be the key to the most profound and secret recesses of the Divine Mystery. Man, because he is a mental being, is prone to give the highest importance to the thinking mind and its reason and will and to its way of approach and effectuation of Truth and, even, he is inclined to hold that there is no other. The heart with its emotions and incalculable movements is to the eye of his

3. Literally, “become towards us”.

4. I have translated these passages with as close a literalness as the English language will admit. Let the reader compare the original and judge whether this is not the sense of the verses.

intellect an obscure, uncertain and often a perilous and misleading power which needs to be kept in control by the reason and the mental will and intelligence. And yet there is in the heart or behind it a profounder mystic light which, if not what we call intuition, — for that, though not of the mind, yet descends through the mind, — has yet a direct touch upon Truth and is nearer to the Divine than the human intellect in its pride of knowledge. According to the ancient teaching the seat of the immanent Divine, the hidden Purusha, is in the mystic heart, — the secret heart-cave, hṛdaye guhāyām, as the Upanishads put it, — and, according to the experience of many Yogins, it is from its depths that there comes the voice or the breath of the inner oracle.”

Sri Aurobindo (S23: 149-50)

What is this mystic light?

It is love.

. . . Is there a relation between this mystic light and intuition?

It is not intuition. It is knowledge through love, light through love, understanding through love. Sri Aurobindo says that it is not intuition, for intuition belongs to the intellect — at least in its expression, the expression of intuition is intellectual. While this is a kind of direct knowledge almost by identity, which comes from love.

And “the inner oracle”?

The oracle? That is the power of divination, of foresight, of understanding symbols, and that is in the psychic being. Prophets, for example, do not prophesy with the mind, it is through a *direct* contact, beyond emotions and sentiments. Sri Aurobindo even says that the Vedas, particularly, were not written with the mind and through the head. The form of the hymn welled up spontaneously from the psychic being, along with the words. (M8: 187)

Vedic hymns not written with the mind

True aspiration does not come from the head; even when it is formulated by a thought, it springs up like a flame from the heart. I do not know if you have read the articles Sri Aurobindo has written on the Vedas. He explains somewhere that these hymns were not written with the mind; they were not, as one thinks, prayers, but the expression of an aspiration which was an impulse, like a flame coming from the heart (though it is not the “heart” but the psychological centre of the being, to use the exact words). They were not “thought out”, words were not set to experiences,

the experience came wholly formulated with the precise, exact, inevitable words — they could not be changed. This is the very nature of aspiration: you do not seek to formulate it, it springs up from you like a ready flame. And if there are words (sometimes there aren't any), they cannot be changed: you cannot replace one word by another, every word is just the right one. When the aspiration is formulated, this is done categorically, absolutely, without any possibility of change. And it is always something that springs up and gives itself . . . (M4: 136)

Veda unintelligible to our minds

The Veda is the creation of an early intuitive and symbolical mentality to which the later mind of man, strongly intellectualised and governed on the one side by reasoning idea and abstract conception, on the other hand by the facts of life and matter accepted as they present themselves to the senses and positive intelligence without seeking in them for any divine or mystic significance, indulging the imagination as a play of the aesthetic fancy rather than as an opener of the doors of truth and only trusting to its suggestions when they are confirmed by the logical reason or by physical experience, aware only of carefully intellectualised intuitions and recalcitrant for the most part to any others, has grown a total stranger. It is not surprising therefore that the Veda should have become unintelligible to our minds except in its most outward shell of language, and that even very imperfectly known owing to the obstacle of an antique and ill-understood diction, and that the most inadequate interpretations should be made which reduce this great creation of the young and splendid mind of humanity to a botched and defaced scrawl, an incoherent hotch-potch of the absurdities of a primitive imagination perplexing what would be otherwise the quite plain, flat and common record of a naturalistic religion which mirrored only and could only minister to the crude and materialistic desires of a barbaric life mind. The Veda became to the later scholastic and ritualistic idea of Indian priests and pundits nothing better than a book of mythology and sacrificial ceremonies; European scholars seeking in it for what was alone to them of any rational interest, the history, myths and popular religious notions of a primitive people, have done yet worse wrong to the Veda and by insisting on a wholly external rendering still farther stripped it of its spiritual interest and its poetic greatness and beauty.

But this was not what it was to the Vedic Rishis themselves or to the great seers and thinkers who came after them and developed out of their pregnant and luminous intuitions their own wonderful structures of thought and speech built upon an unexampled spiritual revelation and experience. The Veda was to these early seers the Word discovering the Truth and clothing in image and symbol the mystic significances of life. It was a divine discovery and unveiling of the potencies of the word, of its mysterious revealing and creative capacity, not the word of the logical

and reasoning or the aesthetic intelligence, but the intuitive and inspired rhythmic utterance, the mantra. Image and myth were freely used, not as an imaginative indulgence, but as living parables and symbols of things that were very real to their speakers and could not otherwise find their own intimate and native shape in utterance, and the imagination itself was a priest of greater realities than those that meet and hold the eye and mind limited by the external suggestions of life and the physical existence. This was their idea of the sacred poet, a mind visited by some highest light and its forms of idea and word, a seer and hearer of the Truth, *kavayaḥ satyaśrutah*. The poets of the Vedic verse certainly did not regard their function as it is represented by modern scholars, they did not look on themselves as a sort of superior medicine-men and makers of hymn and incantation to a robust and barbarous tribe, but as seers and thinkers, *ṛṣi*, *dhīra*. These singers believed that they were in possession of a high, mystic and hidden truth, claimed to be the bearers of a speech acceptable to a divine knowledge, and expressly so speak of their utterances, as secret words which declare their whole significance only to the seer, *kavaye nivacanā ninyā vacāmsi*. And to those who came after them the Veda was a book of knowledge, and even of the supreme knowledge, a revelation, a great utterance of eternal and impersonal truth as it had been seen and heard in the inner experience of inspired and semi-divine thinkers. The smallest circumstances of the sacrifice around which the hymns were written were intended to carry a symbolic and psychological power of significance, as was well known to the writers of the ancient Brahmanas. The sacred verses, each by itself held to be full of a divine meaning, were taken by the thinkers of the Upanishads as the profound and pregnant seed-words of the truth they sought and the highest authority they could give for their own sublime utterances was a supporting citation from their predecessors with the formula, *tad eṣā ṛcābhyuktā*, “This is that word which was spoken by the Rig Veda.” Western scholars choose to imagine that the successors of the Vedic Rishis were in error, that, except for some later hymns, they put a false and non-existent meaning into the old verses and that they themselves, divided from the Rishis not only by ages of time but by many gulfs and separating seas of an intellectualised mentality, know infinitely better. But mere common sense ought to tell us that those who were so much nearer in both ways to the original poets had a better chance of holding at least the essential truth of the matter and suggests at least the strong probability that the Veda was really what it professes to be, the seeking for a mystic knowledge, the first form of the constant attempt of the Indian mind, to which it has always been faithful, to look beyond the appearances of the physical world and through its own inner experiences to the godheads, powers, self-existence of the One of whom the sages speak variously — the famous phrase in which the Veda utters its own central secret, *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*. (S20: 319-21)

A form of symbolic or figurative imagery

The character of Vedic poetry . . . need not surprise or baffle us when we see what will be evident from a comparative study of Asiatic literature, that though distinguished by its theory and treatment of the Word, its peculiar system of images and the complexity of its thought and symbolised experience, it is in fact the beginning of a form of symbolic or figurative imagery for the poetic expression of spiritual experience which reappears constantly in later Indian writing, the figures of the Tantras and Puranas, the figures of the Vaishnava poets, — one might add even a certain element in the modern poetry of Tagore, — and has its kindred movements in certain Chinese poets and in the images of the Sufis. The poet has to express a spiritual and psychical knowledge and experience and he cannot do it altogether or mainly in the more abstract language of the philosophical thinker, for he has to bring out, not the naked idea of it, but as vividly as possible its very life and most intimate touches. He has to reveal in one way or another a whole world within him and the quite inner and spiritual significances of the world around him and also, it may well be, godheads, powers, visions and experiences of planes of consciousness other than the one with which our normal minds are familiar. He uses or starts with the images taken from his own normal and outward life and that of humanity and from visible Nature, and though they do not of themselves actually express, yet obliges them to express by implication or to figure the spiritual and psychic idea and experience. He takes them selecting freely his notation of images according to his insight or imagination and transmutes them into instruments of another significance and at the same time pours a direct spiritual meaning into the Nature and life to which they belong, applies outward figures to inner things and brings out their latent and inner spiritual or psychic significance into life's outward figures and circumstances. Or an outward figure nearest to the inward experience, its material counterpart, is taken throughout and used with such realism and consistency that while it indicates to those who possess it the spiritual experience, it means only the external thing to others, — just as the Vaishnava poetry of Bengal makes to the devout mind a physical and emotional image or suggestion of the love of the human soul for God, but to the profane is nothing but a sensuous and passionate love poetry hung conventionally round the traditional human-divine personalities of Krishna and Radha. The two methods may meet together, the fixed system of outward images be used as the body of the poetry, while freedom is often taken to pass their first limits, to treat them only as initial suggestions and transmute subtly or even cast them aside or subdue into a secondary strain or carry them out of themselves so that the translucent veil they offer to our minds lifts from or passes into the open revelation. The last is the method of the Veda and it varies according to the passion and stress of the sight in the poet or the exaltation of his utterance.

The poets of the Veda had another mentality than ours, their use of their images

is of a peculiar kind and an antique cast of vision gives a strange outline to their substance. The physical and the psychical worlds were to their eyes a manifestation and a twofold and diverse and yet connected and similar figure of cosmic godheads, the inner and outer life of man a divine commerce with the gods, and behind was the one spirit or being of which the gods were names and personalities and powers. These godheads were at once masters of physical Nature and its principles and forms their godheads and their bodies and inward divine powers with their corresponding states and energies born in our psychic being because they are the soul powers of the cosmos, the guardians of truth and immortality, the children of the Infinite, and each of them too is in his origin and his last reality the supreme Spirit putting in front one of his aspects. The life of man was to these seers a thing of mixed truth and falsehood, a movement from mortality to immortality, from mixed light and darkness to the splendour of a divine Truth whose home is above in the Infinite but which can be built up here in man's soul and life, a battle between the children of light and the sons of Night, a getting of treasure, of the wealth, the booty given by the gods to the human warrior, and a journey and a sacrifice; and of these things they spoke in a fixed system of images taken from Nature and from the surrounding life of the war-like, pastoral and agricultural Aryan peoples and centred round the cult of Fire and the worship of the powers of living Nature and the institution of sacrifice. The details of outward existence and of the sacrifice were in their life and practice symbols, and in their poetry not dead symbols or artificial metaphors, but living and powerful suggestions and counterparts of inner things. And they used too for their expression a fixed and yet variable body of other images and a glowing web of myth and parable, images that became parables, parables that became myths and myths that remained always images, and yet all these things were to them, in a way that can only be understood by those who have entered into a certain order of psychic experience, actual realities. The physical melted its shades into the lustres of the psychic, the psychic deepened into the light of the spiritual and there was no sharp dividing line in the transition, but a natural blending and intershading of their suggestions and colours. It is evident that a poetry of this kind, written by men with this kind of vision or imagination, cannot either be interpreted or judged by the standards of a reason and taste observant only of the canons of the physical existence. The invocation "Play, O Ray, and become towards us" is at once a suggestion of the leaping up and radiant play of the potent sacrificial flame on the physical altar and of a similar psychical phenomenon, the manifestation of the saving flame of a divine power and light within us. The Western critic sneers at the bold and reckless and to him monstrous image in which Indra son of earth and heaven is said to create his own father and mother; but if we remember that Indra is the supreme spirit in one of its eternal and constant aspects, creator of earth and heaven, born as a cosmic godhead between the mental and physical worlds and recreating their powers in man, we shall see that the image is not only a powerful

but in fact a true and revealing figure, and in the Vedic technique it does not matter that it outrages the physical imagination since it expresses a greater actuality as no other figure could have done with the same awakening aptness and vivid poetical force. The Bull and Cow of the Veda, the shining herds of the Sun lying hidden in the cave are strange enough creatures to the physical mind, but they do not belong to the earth and in their own plane they are at once images and actual things and full of life and significance. It is in this way that throughout we must interpret and receive the Vedic poetry according to its own spirit and vision and the psychically natural, even if to us strange and supranatural, truth of its ideas and figures.

(S20: 323-26)

Mystical language

The mystical language has always this disadvantage that it readily becomes obscure, meaningless or even misleading to those who have not the secret and to posterity a riddle. . . . the gods in the Veda are constantly addressed as “men”, the same words are traditionally applied to indicate men and immortals. The immanence of the immortal principle in man, the descent of the gods into the workings of mortality was almost the fundamental idea of the mystics. (S13: 217)

Vedic and Upanishadic imagery

The imagery of the Upanishads is in large part developed from the type of imagery of the Veda and though very ordinarily it prefers an unveiled clarity of directly illuminative image, not unoften also it uses the same symbols in a way that is closely akin to the spirit and to the less technical part of the method of the older symbolism. It is to a great extent this element no longer seizable by our way of thinking that has baffled certain Western scholars and made them cry out that these scriptures are a mixture of the sublimest philosophical speculations with the first awkward stammerings of the child mind of humanity. The Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret. It begins by taking up the imagery and the ritual symbols of the Veda and the Brahmanas and turning them in such a way as to bring out an inner and a mystic sense which will serve as a sort of psychical starting-point for its own more highly evolved and more purely spiritual philosophy. There are a number of passages especially in the prose Upanishads which are entirely of this kind and deal, in a manner recondite, obscure and even unintelligible to the modern understanding, with the psychic sense of ideas then current in the Vedic religious mind, the distinction between the three kinds of Veda, the three worlds

and other similar subjects; but, leading as they do in the thought of the Upanishads to deepest spiritual truths, these passages cannot be dismissed as childish aberrations of the intelligence void of sense or of any discoverable bearing on the higher thought in which they culminate. On the contrary we find that they have a deep enough significance once we can get inside their symbolic meaning. That appears in a psycho-physical passing upward into a psycho-spiritual knowledge for which we would now use more intellectual, less concrete and imaged terms, but which is still valid for those who practise Yoga and rediscover the secrets of our psycho-physical and psycho-spiritual being. Typical passages of this kind of peculiar expression of psychic truths are Ajatashatru's explanation of sleep and dream or the passages of the Prasna Upanishad on the vital principle and its motions, or those in which the Vedic idea of the struggle between the Gods and the demons is taken up and given its spiritual significance and the Vedic godheads more openly than in Rik and Saman characterised and invoked in their inner function and spiritual power.

I may cite as an example of this development of Vedic idea and image a passage of the Taittiriya in which Indra plainly appears as the power and godhead of the divine mind:

He who is the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he who was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal, — may Indra satisfy me through the intelligence. O God, may I become a vessel of the Immortal. May my body be full of vision and my tongue of sweetness, may I hear the much and vast with my ears. For thou art the sheath of Brahman covered over and hidden by the intelligence.

And a kindred passage may also be cited from the Isha in which Surya the Sun-God is invoked as the godhead of knowledge whose supreme form of effulgence is the oneness of the Spirit and his rays dispersed here on the mental level are the shining diffusion of the thought mind and conceal his own infinite supramental truth, the body and self of this Sun, the truth of the spirit and the Eternal:

The face of the Truth is covered with a golden lid: O fostering Sun, that uncover for the law of the truth, for sight. O fosterer, O sole Rishi, O controlling Yama, O Surya, O son of the Father of creatures, marshal and mass thy rays: the Lustre that is thy most blessed form of all, that I see, He who is this, this Purusha, He am I.

The kinship in difference of these passages with the imagery and style of the Veda is evident and the last indeed paraphrases or translates into a later and more open style a Vedic verse of the Atris:

Hidden by your truth is the Truth that is constant for ever where they unyoke the horses of the Sun. There the ten thousands stand together, That is the One: I have seen the supreme Godhead of the embodied gods.

This Vedic and Vedantic imagery is foreign to our present mentality which does not believe in the living truth of the symbol, because the revealing imagination intimidated by the intellect has no longer the courage to accept, identify itself with and boldly embody a psychic and spiritual vision; but it is certainly very far from being a childish or a primitive and barbarous mysticism; this vivid, living, luminously poetic intuitive language is rather the natural expression of a highly evolved spiritual culture. (S20: 334-36)

Early language of the mystics

In the Veda, in the early language of the Mystics generally, the names of the elements or primary principles of Substance were used with a clearly symbolic significance. The symbol of water is thus used constantly in the Rig Veda. It is said that in the beginning was the inconscient Ocean out of which the One was born by the vastness of His energy; but it is clear from the language of the hymn that no physical ocean is meant, but rather the unformed chaos of inconscient being in which the Divine, the Godhead lay concealed in a darkness enveloped by greater darkness. The seven active principles of existence are similarly spoken of as rivers or waters; we hear of the seven rivers, the great water, the four superior rivers, in a context which shows their symbolic significance. We see this image fixed in the Puranic mythus of Vishnu sleeping on the serpent Infinite in the milky ocean. But even as early as the Rig Veda, ether is the highest symbol of the Infinite, the *apeiron* of the Greeks; water is that of the same Infinite in its aspect as the original substance; fire is the creative power, the active energy of the Infinite; air, the life-principle, is spoken of as that which brings down fire out of the ethereal heavens into the earth. Yet these were not merely symbols. The Vedic Mystics held, it is clear, a close connection and effective parallelism to exist between psychical and physical activities, between the action of Light, for instance, and the phenomena of mental illumination; fire was to them at once the luminous divine energy, the Seer-Will of the universal Godhead active and creative of all things, and the physical principle creative of the substantial forms of the universe, burning secretly in all life. (S13: 223-24)

Cosmic universalism of Vedic scriptures

The Indian mind . . . is averse to intolerant mental exclusions; for a great force of intuition and inner experience had given it from the beginning that towards which the mind of the West is only now reaching with much fumbling and difficulty, —

the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic vision. Even when it sees the One without a second, it still admits his duality of Spirit and Nature; it leaves room for his many trinities and million aspects. Even when it concentrates on a single limiting aspect of the Divinity and seems to see nothing but that, it still keeps instinctively at the back of its consciousness the sense of the All and the idea of the One. Even when it distributes its worship among many objects, it looks at the same time through the objects of its worship and sees beyond the multitude of godheads the unity of the Supreme. This synthetic turn is not peculiar to the mystics or to a small literate class or to philosophic thinkers nourished on the high sublimities of the Veda and Vedanta. It permeates the popular mind nourished on the thoughts, images, traditions and cultural symbols of the Purana and Tantra; for these things are only concrete representations or living figures of the synthetic monism, the many-sided unitarianism, the large cosmic universalism of the Vedic scriptures. (S20: 191-92)

The Veda and the Greeks

As to the Eleusinian mysteries, . . . they were connected with the same mystic knowledge as was held in India by the Vedic Rishis. Demeter and Persephone were goddesses worshipped by the Greeks; Demeter is the Earth-Mother and Persephone was the goddess of the Harvest, but in the mystic symbols Persephone represented the earth consciousness buried in the Ignorance and emerging into the Divine Light. The Eleusinian mysteries were instituted as an outward symbol of this secret knowledge. (S29: 420)

Greek and Indian seers

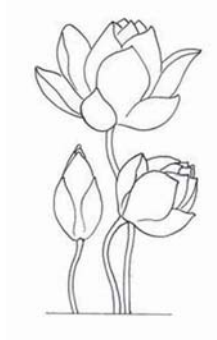
Each one names Him according to his pleasure, says the Greek seer, and He accepts all names and yet accepts none, not even the highest name of Zeus. "He consents and yet at the same time does not consent to be called by the name of Zeus." So too said Indian Dirghatamas of old in his long hymn of the divine Mysteries in the Rig Veda, "One existent the sages call by many names." Though He assumes all these forms, says the Upanishad, He has no form that the vision can seize, He whose name is a mighty splendour. We see again how close are the thoughts of the Greek and very often even his expressions and images to the sense and style of the Vedic and Vedantic sages. (S13: 229)

The Eternal, the Infinite

First comes the idea of the One Existence of the Veda to whom sages give different names, the One without a second of the Upanishads who is all that is and beyond all that is, the Permanent of the Buddhists, the Absolute of the Illusionists, the supreme

God or Purusha of the Theists who holds in his power the soul and Nature, — in a word the Eternal, the Infinite. This is the first common foundation; but it can be and is expressed in an endless variety of formulas by the human intelligence. To discover and closely approach and enter into whatever kind or degree of unity with this Permanent, this Infinite, this Eternal, is the highest height and last effort of its spiritual experience. That is the first universal *credo* of the religious mind of India.

(S20: 193-94)



SOME ASPECTS

Drishti

Drishti is the faculty by which the ancient Rishis saw the truth of Veda, the direct vision of the truth without the need of observation of the object, reasoning, evidence, imagination, memory or any other of the faculties of the intellect. It is as when a man sees an object and knows what it is, even if, sometimes, he cannot put a name on it; it is pratyakshadarsana of the satyam. (S10: 17)

Rtam

And of all true moral good and real evil this may be said that the one tends towards some supreme Right, the *rtam* of the Vedic Rishis, the highest law of a highest Truth of our being and that Truth is the door of the spirit's Ananda, its beatific nature, the other is a missing or perversion of the Right and the Truth and exposes us to its opposite, to false delight or suffering. And even in the perplexed steps of life some reflection of this identity must emerge. (S13: 372)

Oceans — above and below

Again we return towards an ancient truth already known to the Vedic sages, — the idea of an inconscient or subconscious ocean of being, the ocean of the heart of things out of which the worlds form themselves. But the Veda posits also a governing and originating Superconscient which accounts for the appearance of a hidden consciousness and knowledge pervading the operations of Evolution and which constitutes the self-acting Law and Truth behind them. (S13: 173)

The Flame

It is something I have felt very, very clearly and which one cannot feel so long as the physical ego is there, because the physical ego has the sense of its own importance and that disappears entirely with the physical ego. And when it disappears one has the precise perception that the intervention or the manifestation of the true vibration does not depend on egos or individualities — human or national individualities or even those of Nature: animals, plants, etc. It depends on a certain play of the cells and Matter in which some agglomerates are particularly favourable to the transformation — not “transformation”, but substitution, to be precise: the substitution of the vibration of Truth for the vibration of Falsehood. And this phenomenon can

be quite independent of any groupings or individualities — it may be one piece here, one piece there, one thing here, one thing there — and it always corresponds to a certain quality of vibration that brings about an expansion — a receptive expansion. Then the phenomenon can take place.

Unfortunately, as I said at the beginning, all words belong to the world of appearances.

(*Silence*)

And this has been my experience all this time, with a vision and a conviction — the conviction of experience: the two vibrations are like that (*gesture indicating superimposition and infiltration*), all the time. All the time, all the time.

Perhaps the feeling of wonder comes when the amount of infiltration is great enough to become perceptible. But I have the impression — and a very acute impression — that this phenomenon is taking place all the time, all the time, everywhere (*gesture indicating dots of infiltration*), in a minute, infinitesimal way; and in certain circumstances, certain conditions which are visible, visible to that vision — it is a kind of luminous expansion, I cannot explain — there, the mass of infiltration is great enough to give the impression of a miracle. But otherwise it is something that occurs all the time, all the time, ceaselessly, in the world (*same gesture of dots*), like an infinitesimal quantity of Falsehood being replaced by Light, Falsehood being replaced by Light . . . constantly.

And this vibration — which I feel and see — gives an impression of fire. This is what the Vedic Rishis must have translated as the “Flame” — in the human consciousness, in man, in Matter they always spoke of a Flame. It is in fact a vibration which has the intensity of a higher fire. (M10: 191-92)

True aspiration

True aspiration is always psychic in its origin. It is “Agni rising from the earth”, as the Veda says, “towards its own home”. The Agni there is the “fire of aspiration”. It takes mental or vital forms which may be imperfect and therefore there may be imperfection in the aspiration itself. But even behind these imperfect forms there is something that is burning. Once one has awakened this fire it is impossible for him to rest satisfied with the ordinary life. (E: 418)

Agni and the psychic flame

Has the psychic flame any correspondence to the Vedic Agni? They seem to have more or less the same leading qualities.

Yes, these are two names for the same thing. (M16: 204)

Hiranyagarbha and Virat

Hiranyagarbha refers to the universal subjective, while the Virat is the universal objective. In the Rigveda there is only one reference to Hiranyagarbha.

(A disciple reads out hymn 121, mandala 10)

Here Hiranyagarbha is a God. He is a creator.

Q. There is a hymn (Rigveda II:12), which is similar in wording and conception but which refers to Indra.

Yes, there are several hymns in which various Gods like Agni, Indra, etc., are spoken of as creators. But it is not the same thing as what I call the “Supermind as a creator”. The word in the old philosophy which can convey the idea of the Supermind as a creator is *prajñā*, the Knower. He creates out of himself. Prajna is spoken of as superconscious because it is above the ordinary mental consciousness and ordinarily one enters it in Samadhi, unless one brings it down into the ordinary consciousness. The Supermind also is superconscious but that is because it has not yet been attained. Hiranyagarbha is equivalent to Taijas, while Prajna is prior to that. . . .

(On two references to Hiranyagarbha in the Sāmaveda:) Both of these are not clear in their meaning of Hiranyagarbha. Besides they are quite different in their sense from the Hiranyagarbha of the Rigveda. (E: 742-43)

The fourfold Being

In him the fourfold Being bore its crown
 That wears the mystery of a nameless Name,
 The universe writing its tremendous sense
 In the inexhaustible meaning of a word.
 In him the architect of the visible world,
 At once the art and artist of his works,
 Spirit and seer and thinker of things seen,
 Virat, who lights his camp-fires in the suns
 And the star-entangled ether is his hold,
 Expressed himself with Matter for his speech:
 Objects are his letters, forces are his words,
 Events are the crowded history of his life,
 And sea and land are the pages for his tale.

Matter is his means and his spiritual sign;
He hangs the thought upon a lash's lift,
In the current of the blood makes flow the soul.
His is the dumb will of atom and of clod;
A Will that without sense or motive acts,
An Intelligence needing not to think or plan,
The world creates itself invincibly;
For its body is the body of the Lord
And in its heart stands Virat, King of Kings.
In him shadows his form the Golden Child
Who in the Sun-capped Vast cradles his birth:
Hiranyagarbha, author of thoughts and dreams,
Who sees the invisible and hears the sounds
That never visited a mortal ear,
Discoverer of unthought realities
Truer to Truth than all we have ever known,
He is the leader on the inner roads;
A seer, he has entered the forbidden realms;
A magician with the omnipotent wand of thought,
He builds the secret uncreated worlds.
Armed with the golden speech, the diamond eye,
His is the vision and the prophecy:
Imagist casting the formless into shape,
Traveller and hewer of the unseen paths,
He is the carrier of the hidden fire,
He is the voice of the Ineffable,
He is the invisible hunter of the light,
The Angel of mysterious ecstasies,
The conqueror of the kingdoms of the soul.
A third spirit stood behind, their hidden cause,
A mass of superconscience closed in light,
Creator of things in his all-knowing sleep.
All from his stillness came as grows a tree;
He is our seed and core, our head and base.
All light is but a flash from his closed eyes:
An all-wise Truth is mystic in his heart,
The omniscient Ray is shut behind his lids:
He is the Wisdom that comes not by thought,
His wordless silence brings the immortal word.
He sleeps in the atom and the burning star,
He sleeps in man and god and beast and stone:

Because he is there the Inconscient does its work,
Because he is there the world forgets to die.
He is the centre of the circle of God,
He the circumference of Nature's run.
His slumber is an Almightyness in things,
Awake, he is the Eternal and Supreme.
Above was the brooding bliss of the Infinite,
Its omniscient and omnipotent repose,
Its immobile silence absolute and alone.
All powers were woven in countless concords here.
The bliss that made the world in his body lived,
Love and delight were the head of the sweet form.
In the alluring meshes of their snare
Recaptured, the proud blissful members held
All joys outrunners of the panting heart
And fugitive from life's outstripped desire.
Whatever vision has escaped the eye,
Whatever happiness comes in dream and trance,
The nectar spilled by love with trembling hands,
The joy the cup of Nature cannot hold,
Had crowded to the beauty of his face,
Were waiting in the honey of his laugh.
Things hidden by the silence of the hours,
The ideas that find no voice on living lips,
The soul's pregnant meeting with infinity
Had come to birth in him and taken fire:
The secret whisper of the flower and star
Revealed its meaning in his fathomless look.
His lips curved eloquent like a rose of dawn;
His smile that played with the wonder of the mind
And stayed in the heart when it had left his mouth
Glimmered with the radiance of the morning star
Gemming the wide discovery of heaven.
His gaze was the regard of eternity;
The spirit of its sweet and calm intent
Was a wise home of gladness and divulged
The light of the ages in the mirth of the hours,
A sun of wisdom in a miracled grove.
In the orchestral largeness of his mind
All contrary seekings their close kinship knew,
Rich-hearted, wonderful to each other met

In the mutual marvelling of their myriad notes
 And dwelt like brothers of one family
 Who had found their common and mysterious home.
 As from the harp of some ecstatic god
 There springs a harmony of lyric bliss
 Striving to leave no heavenly joy unsung,
 Such was the life in that embodied Light.
 He seemed the wideness of a boundless sky,
 He seemed the passion of a sorrowless earth,
 He seemed the burning of a world-wide sun.
 Two looked upon each other, Soul saw Soul.

(S34: 680-83)

Powers of the One

When I spoke of the lesser gods I meant the smaller gods who represent the principle of harmony in nature. In them you find not the straight, but the free movement towards the Light. They go from Light to Light. . . .

By the greater Gods I meant the Gods who preside over the universal manifestation. They are, really speaking, what the Veda calls “powers of the One”.
 (E: 484)

Partial and relative concepts

All our concepts of Him are partial and relative; “He is named according to the pleasure of each.” This is nothing more nor less than the truth proclaimed by the Vedas, “One existent the sages call by many names.” Brahman is willing to be called Vishnu, and yet he is not willing, because he is also Brahma and Maheshwara and all the gods and the world and all principles and all that is, and yet not any of these things, *neti neti*. As men approach him, so he accepts them. (S13: 242)

Puruṣa

. . . those who approach the plane of the Gods through the impersonal attitude without stopping at Sachchidananda-consciousness arrive, when they have passed beyond the mental consciousness, to a plane where they see the Gods in forms which resemble the human form. That is, perhaps, the reason why in the Veda we find the name *puruṣa* given to the Gods. (E: 494)

The Sun in the Physical

... I think the Vedic Rishis found out a great truth when they spoke of the Sun in the physical as one with the highest Sun. After all, the physical is as much a manifestation of the Higher Force as anything else and I do not understand why we should not expect in it similar powers. (E: 467)

Panis

God does not hesitate to strike or smite. He often behaves in a manner which to the ordinary mind may appear to be cruel. But the attitude is quite different. Thus, in the Vedas, the Panis steal the cows of Heaven — the Sun — and conceal them in the caves. When the Panis are conquered the cows are released and rise heavenward.

(E: 356)

Veda and ‘Aryan’

For in the Veda the Aryan peoples are those who had accepted a particular type of self-culture, of inward and outward practice, of ideality, of aspiration. The Aryan gods were the supraphysical powers who assisted the mortal in his struggle towards the nature of the godhead. All the highest aspirations of the early human race, its noblest religious temper, its most idealistic velleities of thought are summed up in this single vocable. (S13: 441)

Vedic sense of ‘Asuras’

On the higher plane there are no Asuras — there the Truth prevails. There are ‘Asuras’ there in the Vedic sense, — beings with divine powers. (E: 479)

Vedic and Puranic ‘Asura’

Pure Power is called Asura. It is the Vedic Asura and not the Puranic Asura. In the Veda ‘Asura’ is a title applied to all the gods — in many places Indra is called Asura. It was later that the derivation from Sura was found and A-sura became the titan. Originally, ‘Asura’ indicates the highest Puissance. It is perhaps in the tenth Mandala that it is used in the Puranic sense. (E: 472)

Ritualists and scholiasts

... But the Veda has been obscured by the ritualists and the scholiasts. Therefore we showed in a series of articles, initially only as yet, the way of writing of the Vedic mystics, their system of symbols and the truths they figure. (S13: 108)

Strange interpretations

How the devil do they find out all these things from the Rigveda — nomadic existence, gambling, crossing of the rivers, etc.? I find that the fight between the Tritsus and Sudansahs in the eighth mandala is not a battle at all; it is something symbolic.

(E: 720)

Intermediate gradations

. . . they [the old paths] recognised no intermediate gradations. From Mind they jumped to the Parabrahman; for them the Superconscient was the Brahman only. But the stages that you find in the Vedas and in the Upanishads after the Mind are left behind, all become lost. (E: 125)

Three earths

There are seven earths mentioned in Indian mythology; also according to the Veda there are three earths. (E: 196)

Mystic experience

The third and the fourth Mandalas contain many subtle suggestions about the symbolism of the Veda. The hymns of Dirghatamas in the first Mandala are clearly mystic. The experience of the Rishis is common in general principles but it varies in detail. These details are hard to fix because you do not find any parallel to them in other hymns. And so, sometimes you become helpless. The general idea of the functions of Agni is the same. He is *kavi-kratu* — “one with a seer-will” or “one possessed of the seer-will”. You have also to see the connection of Agni with Satya, the Truth. . . . In the Brahmanas there are many hints that suggest the symbolism in the Veda. Yama, probably, is the Truth working on the physical aspect of the universe. The words *dhī*, *ṛtam*, *satyam*, *brhat* are among the important words for Vedic interpretation. *Trīṇi rocanā* when applied to *sva* refers to the three divisions of *sva*. When it refers to three heavens, it means the heavens of the mental, vital and physical fulfilment. When each of these is fulfilled, it is called ‘heaven’ and its fulfilment is by the highest Truth. . . . In V.12 the Rishi does not want the mixture of Truth and falsehood but wants only the Truth. Agni’s own home is full of joy: Ananda is the *pratiṣṭhā* — basis of the Divine Will.

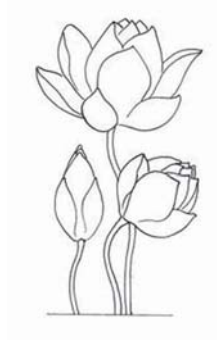
In Mandala 1.95.1 there is mention of the ‘child’ that is One — that child is Agni. He is called “the son of two mothers” of different colours — of Day and Night, i.e. of Knowledge and Ignorance. *Svarthe* means “by the right path”. *Anyānyā*

“to each other” — alternately; *hari*, “full of coloured light”; *svadhāvān* “having the law of its own being”; *śukra*, “white, shining white”; *suvarcas*, “full of bright light”; *daśa yuvatayah* (1.95.2) “Ten young women bear the child — *garbha* — by Twashtri”.

(E: 368)

Soma

The Soma wine was the symbol of the divine or spiritual Ananda. This wine was however symbolic and cannot be exactly equated with the nectar or ambrosia of the Greeks which were the food and drink of the gods and sustained their immortality; but outwardly there is some resemblance. (S29: 420)



VEDIC CONTINUITY

Indian religion kept its Vedic and Vedantic origins

Indian religion followed this line of evolution and kept its inner continuity with its Vedic and Vedantic origins; but it changed entirely its mental contents and colour and its outward basis. It did not effectuate this change through any protestant revolt or revolution or with any idea of an iconoclastic reformation. A continuous development of its organic life took place, a natural transformation brought out latent motives or else gave to already established motive-ideas a more predominant place or effective form. At one time indeed it seemed as if a discontinuity and a sharp new beginning were needed and would take place. Buddhism seemed to reject all spiritual continuity with the Vedic religion. But this was after all less in reality than in appearance. The Buddhist ideal of Nirvana was no more than a sharply negative and exclusive statement of the highest Vedantic spiritual experience. The ethical system of the eightfold path taken as the way to release was an austere sublimation of the Vedic notion of the Right, Truth and Law followed as the way to immortality, *ṛtasya panthāḥ*. The strongest note of Mahayana Buddhism, its stress on universal compassion and fellow-feeling, was an ethical application of the spiritual unity which is the essential idea of Vedanta.¹ The most characteristic tenets of the new discipline, Nirvana and Karma, could have been supported from the utterances of the Brahmanas and Upanishads. Buddhism could easily have claimed for itself a Vedic origin and the claim would have been no less valid than the Vedic ascription of the Sankhya philosophy and discipline with which it had some points of intimate alliance. But what hurt Buddhism and determined in the end its rejection, was not its denial of a Vedic origin or authority, but the exclusive trenchancy of its intellectual, ethical and spiritual positions. A result of an intense stress of the union of logical reason with the spiritualised mind — for it was by an intense spiritual search supported on a clear and hard rational thinking that it was born as a separate religion, — its trenchant affirmations and still more exclusive negations could not be made sufficiently compatible with the native flexibility, many-sided susceptibility and rich synthetic turn of the Indian religious consciousness; it was a high creed but not plastic enough to hold the heart of the people. Indian religion absorbed all that it could of Buddhism, but rejected its exclusive positions and preserved the full line of its own continuity, casting back to the ancient Vedanta. (S20: 207-08)

1. Buddha himself does not seem to have preached his tenets as a novel revolutionary creed, but as the old Aryan way, the true form of the eternal religion.

Gradual fading of prominent Vedic forms

This lasting line of change moved forward not by any destruction of principle, but by a gradual fading out of the prominent Vedic forms and the substitution of others. There was a transformation of symbol and ritual and ceremony or a substitution of new kindred figures, an emergence of things that are only hints in the original system, a development of novel idea-forms from the seed of the original thinking. And especially there was a farther widening and fathoming of psychic and spiritual experience. The Vedic gods rapidly lost their deep original significance. At first they kept their hold by their outer cosmic sense but were overshadowed by the great Trinity, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, and afterwards faded altogether. A new pantheon appeared which in its outward symbolic aspects expressed a deeper truth and larger range of religious experience, an intenser feeling, a vaster idea. The Vedic sacrifice persisted only in broken and lessening fragments. The house of Fire was replaced by the temple; the karmic ritual of sacrifice was transformed into the devotional temple ritual; the vague and shifting mental images of the Vedic gods figured in the mantras yielded to more precise conceptual forms of the two great deities, Vishnu and Shiva, and of their Shaktis and their offshoots. These new concepts stabilised in physical images which were made the basis both for internal adoration and for the external worship which replaced sacrifice. The psychic and spiritual mystic endeavour which was the inner sense of the Vedic hymns, disappeared into the less intensely luminous but more wide and rich and complex psycho-spiritual inner life of Puranic and Tantric religion and Yoga. (S20: 208-09)

From the Vedic to the Vedantic

This high beginning was secured in its results by a larger sublime efflorescence. The Upanishads have always been recognised in India as the crown and end of Veda; that is indicated in their general name, Vedanta. And they are in fact a large crowning outcome of the Vedic discipline and experience. The time in which the Vedantic truth was wholly seen and the Upanishads took shape, was, as we can discern from such records as the Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka, an epoch of immense and strenuous seeking, an intense and ardent seed-time of the Spirit. In the stress of that seeking the truths held by the initiates but kept back from ordinary men broke their barriers, swept through the higher mind of the nation and fertilised the soil of Indian culture for a constant and ever increasing growth of spiritual consciousness and spiritual experience. This turn was not as yet universal; it was chiefly men of the higher classes, Kshatriyas and Brahmins trained in the Vedic system of education, no longer content with an external truth and the works of the outer sacrifice, who began everywhere to seek for the highest word of revealing experience from the sages who possessed the knowledge of the One. But we find

too among those who attained to the knowledge and became great teachers men of inferior or doubtful birth like Janashruti, the wealthy Shudra, or Satyakama Jabali, son of a servant-girl who knew not who was his father. The work that was done in this period became the firm bedrock of Indian spirituality in later ages and from it gush still the life-giving waters of a perennial and never failing inspiration. This period, this activity, this grand achievement created the whole difference between the evolution of Indian civilisation and the quite different curve of other cultures.

For a time had come when the original Vedic symbols must lose their significance and pass into an obscurity that became impenetrable, as did the inner teaching of the Mysteries in other countries. The old poise of culture between two extremes with a bridge of religious cult and symbolism to unite them, the crude or half-trained naturalness of the outer physical man on one side of the line, and on the other an inner and secret psychic and spiritual life for the initiates could no longer suffice as the basis of our spiritual progress. The human race in its cycle of civilisation needed a large-lined advance; it called for a more and more generalised intellectual, ethical and aesthetic evolution to help it to grow into the light. This turn had to come in India as in other lands. But the danger was that the greater spiritual truth already gained might be lost in the lesser confident half-light of the acute but unilluminated intellect or stifled within the narrow limits of the self-sufficient logical reason. That was what actually happened in the West, Greece leading the way. The old knowledge was prolonged in a less inspired, less dynamic and more intellectual form by the Pythagoreans, by the Stoics, by Plato and the Neo-Platonists; but still in spite of them and in spite of the only half-illuminated spiritual wave which swept over Europe from Asia in an ill-understood Christianity, the whole real trend of Western civilisation has been intellectual, rational, secular and even materialistic, and it keeps this character to the present day. Its general aim has been a strong or a fine culture of the vital and physical man by the power of an intellectualised ethics, aesthesis and reason, not the leading up of our lower members into the supreme light and power of the spirit. The ancient spiritual knowledge and the spiritual tendency it had created were saved in India from this collapse by the immense effort of the age of the Upanishads. The Vedantic seers renewed the Vedic truth by extricating it from its cryptic symbols and casting it into a highest and most direct and powerful language of intuition and inner experience. It was not the language of the intellect, but still it wore a form which the intellect could take hold of, translate into its own more abstract terms and convert into a starting-point for an ever widening and deepening philosophic speculation and the reason's long search after a Truth original, supreme and ultimate. There was in India as in the West a great upbuilding of a high, wide and complex intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and social culture. But left in Europe to its own resources, combated rather than helped by obscure religious emotion and dogma, here it was guided, uplifted and more and more penetrated and suffused by a great saving power of spirituality and a vast stimulating and tolerant light of wisdom from a highest ether of knowledge. (S20: 203-05)

Plainer language in the Upanishads

The Upanishads came after the Vedas and they put in plainer language the same Truth that was in them. In the Vedas the language is symbolic. (E: 641)

A high outburst of the intelligence working upon life

The second or post-Vedic age of Indian civilisation was distinguished by the rise of the great philosophies, by a copious, vivid, many-thoughted, many-sided epic literature, by the beginnings of art and science, by the evolution of a vigorous and complex society, by the formation of large kingdoms and empires, by manifold formative activities of all kinds and great systems of living and thinking. Here as elsewhere, in Greece, Rome, Persia, China, this was the age of a high outburst of the intelligence working upon life and the things of the mind to discover their reason and their right way and bring out a broad and noble fullness of human existence. But in India this effort never lost sight of the spiritual motive, never missed the touch of the religious sense. It was a birth time and youth of the seeking intellect and, as in Greece, philosophy was the main instrument by which it laboured to solve the problems of life and the world. Science too developed, but it came second only as an auxiliary power. It was through profound and subtle philosophies that the intellect of India attempted to analyse by the reason and logical faculty what had formerly been approached with a much more living force through intuition and the soul's experience. But the philosophic mind started from the data these mightier powers had discovered and was faithful to its parent Light; it went back always in one form or another to the profound truths of the Upanishads which kept their place as the highest authority in these matters. There was a constant admission that spiritual experience is a greater thing and its light a truer if more incalculable guide than the clarities of the reasoning intelligence. (S20: 205-06)

Two trends

The same governing force kept its hold on all the other activities of the Indian mind and Indian life. The epic literature is full almost to excess of a strong and free intellectual and ethical thinking; there is an incessant criticism of life by the intelligence and the ethical reason, an arresting curiosity and desire to fix the norm of truth in all possible fields. But in the background and coming constantly to the front there is too a constant religious sense and an implicit or avowed assent to the spiritual truths which remained the unshakable basis of the culture. These truths suffused with their higher light secular thought and action or stood above to remind them that they were only steps towards a goal. Art in India, contrary to a common idea, dwelt much upon life; but still its highest achievement was always in the field

of the interpretation of the religio-philosophical mind and its whole tone was coloured by a suggestion of the spiritual and the infinite. Indian society developed with an unsurpassed organising ability, stable effectiveness, practical insight its communal coordination of the mundane life of interest and desire, *kāma*, *artha*; it governed always its action by a reference at every point to the moral and religious law, the Dharma: but it never lost sight of spiritual liberation as our highest point and the ultimate aim of the effort of Life. In later times when there was a still stronger secular tendency of intellectual culture, there came in an immense development of the mundane intelligence, an opulent political and social evolution, an emphatic stressing of aesthetic, sensuous and hedonistic experience. But this effort too always strove to keep itself within the ancient frame and not to lose the special stamp of the Indian cultural idea. The enlarged secular turn was compensated by a deepening of the intensities of psycho-religious experience. New religious or mystic forms and disciplines attempted to seize not only the soul and the intellect, but the emotions, the senses, the vital and the aesthetic nature of man and turn them into stuff of the spiritual life. And every excess of emphasis on the splendour and richness and power and pleasures of life had its recoil and was balanced by a corresponding potent stress on spiritual asceticism as the higher way. The two trends, on one side an extreme of the richness of life experience, on the other an extreme and pure rigorous intensity of the spiritual life, accompanied each other; their interaction, whatever loss there might be of the earlier deep harmony and large synthesis, yet by their double pull preserved something still of the balance of Indian culture.

(S20: 206-07)

The Purano-Tantric stage

The Purano-Tantric stage of the religion was once decried by European critics and Indian reformers as a base and ignorant degradation of an earlier and purer religion. It was rather an effort, successful in a great measure, to open the general mind of the people to a higher and deeper range of inner truth and experience and feeling. Much of the adverse criticism once heard proceeded from a total ignorance of the sense and intention of this worship. Much of this criticism has been uselessly concentrated on side-paths and aberrations which could hardly be avoided in this immensely audacious experimental widening of the basis of the culture. For there was a catholic attempt to draw towards the spiritual truth minds of all qualities and people of all classes. Much was lost of the profound psychic knowledge of the Vedic seers, but much also of new knowledge was developed, untrodden ways were opened and a hundred gates discovered into the Infinite. If we try to see the essential sense and aim of this development and the intrinsic value of its forms and means and symbols, we shall find that this evolution followed upon the early Vedic form very much for the same reason as Catholic Christianity replaced the mysteries

and sacrifices of the early Pagan religions. For in both cases the outward basis of the early religion spoke to the outward physical mind of the people and took that as the starting-point of its appeal. But the new evolution tried to awaken a more inner mind even in the common man, to lay hold on his inner vital and emotional nature, to support all by an awakening of the soul and to lead him through these things towards a highest spiritual truth. It attempted in fact to bring the mass into the temple of the spirit rather than leave them in the outer precincts. The outward physical sense was satisfied through its aesthetic turn by a picturesque temple worship, by numerous ceremonies, by the use of physical images; but these were given a psycho-emotional sense and direction that was open to the heart and imagination of the ordinary man and not reserved for the deeper sight of the elect or the strenuous tapasya of the initiates. The secret initiation remained but was now a condition for the passage from the surface psycho-emotional and religious to a profounder psychic-spiritual truth and experience.

Nothing essential was touched in its core by this new orientation; but the instruments, atmosphere, field of religious experience underwent a considerable change. The Vedic godheads were to the mass of their worshippers divine powers who presided over the workings of the outward life of the physical cosmos; the Puranic Trinity had even for the multitude a predominant psycho-religious and spiritual significance. Its more external significances, for instance the functions of cosmic creation, preservation and destruction, were only a dependent fringe of these profundities that alone touched the heart of its mystery. The central spiritual truth remained in both systems the same, the truth of the One in many aspects. The Trinity is a triple form of the one supreme Godhead and Brahman; the Shaktis are energies of the one Energy of the highest divine Being. But this greatest religious truth was no longer reserved for the initiated few; it was now more and more brought powerfully, widely and intensely home to the general mind and feeling of the people. Even the so-called henotheism of the Vedic idea was prolonged and heightened in the larger and simpler worship of Vishnu or Shiva as the one universal and highest Godhead of whom all others are living forms and powers. The idea of the Divinity in man was popularised to an extraordinary extent, not only the occasional manifestation of the Divine in humanity which founded the worship of the Avataras, but the Presence discoverable in the heart of every creature. The systems of Yoga developed themselves on the same common basis. All led or hoped to lead through many kinds of psycho-physical, inner vital, inner mental and psycho-spiritual methods to the common aim of all Indian spirituality, a greater consciousness and a more or less complete union with the One and Divine or else an immergence of the individual soul in the Absolute. The Purano-Tantric system was a wide, assured and many-sided endeavour, unparalleled in its power, insight, amplitude, to provide the race with a basis of generalised psycho-religious experience from which man could rise through knowledge, works or love or through any other fundamental power of his

nature to some established supreme experience and highest absolute status.

(S20: 209-11)

Towards a widest and highest spiritualising of life on earth

This great effort and achievement which covered all the time between the Vedic age and the decline of Buddhism, was still not the last possibility of religious evolution open to Indian culture. The Vedic training of the physically-minded man made the development possible. But in its turn this raising of the basis of religion to the inner mind and life and psychic nature, this training and bringing out of the psychic man ought to make possible a still larger development and support a greater spiritual movement as the leading power of life. The first stage makes possible the preparation of the natural external man for spirituality; the second takes up his outward life into a deeper mental and psychical living and brings him more directly into contact with the spirit and divinity within him; the third should render him capable of taking up his whole mental, psychical, physical living into a first beginning at least of a generalised spiritual life. This endeavour has manifested itself in the evolution of Indian spirituality and is the significance of the latest philosophies, the great spiritual movements of the saints and bhaktas and an increasing resort to the various paths of Yoga. But unhappily it synchronised with a decline of Indian culture and an increasing collapse of its general power and knowledge, and in these surroundings it could not bear its natural fruit; but at the same time it has done much to prepare such a possibility in the future. If Indian culture is to survive and keep its spiritual basis and innate character, it is in this direction, and not in a mere revival or prolongation of the Puranic system, that its evolution must turn, rising so towards the fulfilment of that which the Vedic seers saw as the aim of man and his life thousands of years ago and the Vedantic sages cast into the clear and immortal forms of their luminous revelation.

Even the psychic-emotional part of man's nature is not the inmost door to religious feeling, nor is his inner mind the highest witness to spiritual experience. There is behind the first the inmost soul of man, in that deepest secret heart, *hṛdaye guhāyām*, in which the ancient seers saw the very tabernacle of the indwelling Godhead and there is above the second a luminous highest mind directly open to a truth of the Spirit to which man's normal nature has as yet only an occasional and momentary access. Religious evolution, spiritual experience can find their true native road only when they open to these hidden powers and make them their support for a lasting change, a divinisation of human life and nature. An effort of this kind was the very force behind the most luminous and vivid of the later movements of India's vast religious cycle. It is the secret of the most powerful forms of Vaishnavism and Tantra and Yoga. The labour of ascent from our half-animal human nature into the fresh purity of the spiritual consciousness needed to be followed and supplemented

by a descent of the light and force of the spirit into man's members and the attempt to transform human into divine nature.

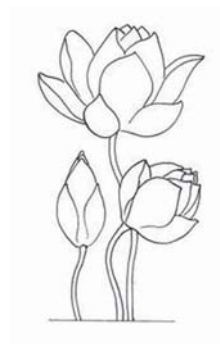
But it could not find its complete way or its fruit because it synchronised with a decline of the life force in India and a lowering of power and knowledge in her general civilisation and culture. Nevertheless here lies the destined force of her survival and renewal, this is the dynamic meaning of her future. A widest and highest spiritualising of life on earth is the last vision of all that vast and unexampled seeking and experiment in a thousand ways of the soul's outermost and innermost experience which is the unique character of her past; this in the end is the mission for which she was born and the meaning of her existence. (S20: 211-13)

Largest freedom of interpretation

Of these scriptures some like the Gita possessed a common and widespread authority, others were peculiar to sects or schools: some like the Vedas were supposed to have an absolute, others a relative binding force. But the very largest freedom of interpretation was allowed, and this prevented any of these authoritative books from being turned into an instrument of ecclesiastical tyranny or a denial of freedom to the human mind and spirit. (S20: 188-89)

Symbolic treatment in the Veda

. . . the Gita only opens out the way to our Yoga and philosophy. Among the Upanishads only the Taittiriya has some general idea of the higher terms. The Veda treats symbolically the same subject. (E: 110)



APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

A REVIEW OF THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE ARYA

(From *THE HINDU*, 24 AUGUST 1914)

“ARYA”

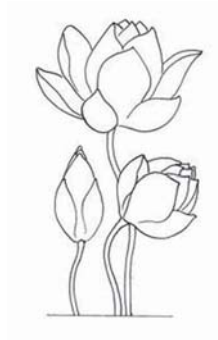
We have received the first number of the new philosophical monthly, the “Arya,” published at Pondicherry under the editorship of the eminent Bengalee scholar, journalist and thinker, now living in seclusion, Mr. Aurobindo Ghose, aided by two French persons whose names are given as M. Paul and Mirra Richard. The review has both a speculative and a practical aim. On the former side, its object is to make “a systematic study of the highest problems of existence” and “to form a vast synthesis of knowledge, oriental and occidental.” On the latter side, it seeks to accomplish “a unification of intellectual and scientific discipline with those (?) of Intuitive experience.” These objects of the Review are certainly most praiseworthy, and also conceived in a broad and cosmopolitan spirit. The name of Mr. Aurobindo Ghose is a guarantee for solid thinking and brilliant writing. We were also told in the “scheme” or prospectus of the Review, circulated some months back, that the writings with which Mr. Ghose has resolved to bring fresh enlightenment and inspiration to humanity regarding higher thoughts and things, as “the results of five years of study and meditation” in his retirement at Pondicherry. The contents of the first number just to hand, so varied and so solid, indicate in ample measure what splendid fruit is borne by Mr. Ghose’s intellectual and spiritual endeavour, and justify the expectations already raised regarding the value and importance of the treasures of thought and truth which he is resolved to place before his fellowmen for their instruction and delight. In almost every case, we have here presented to us the introductory portions or chapters of what purports to be a large work of concatenated thought or research, and the reader is called on to follow the author’s lead from month to month so as to make a systematic and exhaustive study of his subject. The most noteworthy in many respects of the subjects taken up for treatment in the first number of the Review just to hand is that which is called, “The secret of the Veda.” Of all the subjects treated in this issue, this is decidedly the one in which our people are likely to be most interested, and so we make no apology for dwelling at some length on the views held and expressed by Mr. Ghose. By the “Veda,” Mr. Ghose means the Rig-Veda, and he here gives his interpretation of it differing, both

from the traditional interpretation of the Hindu sages and scholars of the past, and “the interpretation constructed after an immense labour of comparison and conjecture by Modern European scholarship.” According to Mr. Ghose, “both of them have one characteristic in common, the extraordinary incoherence and the poverty of sense which their results stamp upon the ancient hymns.” It is hard, however, to reconcile this view with the perfectly accurate statement of fact made by Mr. Ghose that “in the fixed (Indian) tradition of thousands of years they have been revered as the *origin* and *standard* of *all* that can be held as authoritative and true in Brahmana and Upanishad, in Tantra and Purana, in the doctrines of great philosophical schools and in the teachings of famous saints and sages.” This last statement perfectly justifies, in our view, the great veneration in which the Rig-Veda has been held in India. Sankara, in his Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras, speaks of “the vast mass of holy texts known as the Rig-Veda, &c., the mine of all knowledge, consisting of manifold divisions, the cause of the distinction of all the different classes and conditions of gods, animals, and men.” The Rig-Veda has always, in regard both to its sense and its value, commanded the highest esteem, — and that not only from its sacrificial importance, but also on account of its declarations regarding the nature of Reality or Existence. The Upanishads and the systems of Vedanta founded on them do not themselves give any support to Mr. Ghose’s idea that they are to be regarded as “a revolt of philosophical and speculative minds against the *ritualistic materialism* of the Vedas.” It is only the Purva-Mimamsa school that proclaims a system which can be stigmatised as “the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas.” To Indian Vedantins of all schools the Karma-Kanda is the indispensable stepping-stone to the attainment of the knowledge of the Atman, and the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad (II, 4, 10) also says, — “The Rig-Veda, &c., have been breathed forth from that great Being (*i.e.*, God).” Sayana has given an interpretation of the Rig-Veda in perfect accordance with these views and with the immemorial tradition which existed in his time. When Mr. Ghose speaks of “at least *three* considerable attempts, entirely differing from each other in their methods and results, to fix the sense of these ancient litanies,” he refers — as he avows himself — to the interpretations of them first by the Brahmanas and Upanishads, secondly by Sayana, and thirdly by Modern Western scholars. But, so far at least as the two former are concerned, there is no justification for his pronouncement that they “entirely differ from each other.” They are, in fact, in entire accord with each other. They attach the same value and significance to the hymns of the Rig-Veda, — the one to which we have made reference above. If, on the contrary, Mr. Ghose had made reference to the interpretations of the Purva-Mimamsa school as “differing” from that of the Vedantins, the statement would have been in accordance with the fact. For the latter entirely dissent from the former in their view that the Vedas teach only a purely “ritualistic materialism.” Again, while we hold that Mr. Ghose’s attempt to give another philosophic interpretation of the Rig-Veda by adopting entirely new and modern methods is assured of a

warm welcome from all quarters, in India at least, orthodox Hindu scholars will not admit that he is the first to enter on this fresh field of adventure and exploration. For, in the *first* place, Sankara, Ramanuja and others have quoted passages from various parts of the Rig-Veda to confirm the tenets or interpretations of their own schools of Vedanta. It is well-known that hymns such as the Nasadiya-Sukta and Purusha-Sukta have been accepted as referring to other than sacrificial matters, and so the Veda in its entirety has not been understood as being nothing but “a body of sacrificial hymns,” as Mr. Ghose thinks. *Secondly*, Anandathirtha has already given an Adhyatmic interpretation of a fairly large fraction of the Rig-Veda. Quite recently, the late Dewan Bahadur Ragoonatha Rao made a similar attempt and, we trust, with some success at least. Nor is it to be supposed that the philosophic (Adhyatmic) interpretation of the Veda should necessarily be accepted as proving that it has no ritualistic value or significance. Other parts of our sacred literature have also similarly been accepted as having a double significance. For example, the Puranas and Itihasas, or at least parts of them, are often admitted as having both a literal and an allegorical significance. They are also recognised as having a third and still higher function, *viz.*, that of settling doubts or disputes regarding the true import of the Upanishads. Lastly, while most of us can follow with approval Mr. Ghose’s idea that the “origins” of many of the ideas contained in the Upanishads can be traced to the hymns of the Rig-Veda, it does not follow that knowledge of which no origin can be traced to previous sources must necessarily be disregarded or discarded. This will land us in the fault known to logicians as *Anavastha or regresses ad infinitum*. Where also, we may be permitted to ask, does Mr. Ghose purpose to search for the origins of “the religion of the Vedic Rishis” — as contained in the Rig-Veda — of which he speaks in enthusiastic phrase as having its foundation in “a spiritual experience and knowledge and psychological discipline of self-culture which were then the highest achievement of the human race.” Mr. Ghose’s translation of and commentary on two selected hymns of the Rig-Veda (I 4 and I 170) are remarkable, indeed, as specimens of what we have a right to expect from the dedication of his potent gift of imagination and his solid learning to the task of interpreting the great work. Mr. Ghose is generous enough to grant that “the ritual system recognised by Sayana may, in its externalities, stand,” — as it has, indeed, stood for centuries on centuries. If so, there is no need to be hard on Sayana and to stigmatise his work as “unreliable” — especially because it only embodies the tradition handed down from antiquity to him and to the many learned pundits with whose aid and cooperation he produced his monumental works of Vedic interpretation. We have no space for an extended critical review of the rest of the contributions to be found in this number. Mr. Ghose’s other articles — and they take up the major part of the issue — are the first chapter of a projected work of his on “The Life Divine”, an introduction to another work on “The Synthesis of Yoga,” and a new translation of the Isa-Upanishad. Every one of these contributions deserves close study, and all challenge careful scrutiny and

considerable criticism from scholars and thinkers. The two articles contributed by M. Paul Richard — the French colleague of Mr. Ghose — are also worth attentive study. The second of them consists of two chapters of the author's work on "The Eternal Wisdom," and it is interesting to note how extracts can be pieced together from authors of widely different times and climes so as to form a consistent whole. (TH)

[Our thanks to *The Hindu*, Chennai, for tracing out and sending us this article. — Ed.]



APPENDIX II

INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDA

[Published in *The Hindu* on 27 August 1914, this is Sri Aurobindo's reply to the review in *The Hindu* on 24 August 1914 of the inaugural issue of the *Arya*.]

MR. AUROBINDO GHOSE writes to us from Pondicherry: —

While thanking you for the generous appreciation in your review of the "Arya", may I also crave the indulgence of your columns, — if indeed you can spare so much space at such a time when the whole world is absorbed in the gigantic homicidal conflict convulsing Europe, — for an answer to your criticisms on my "Secret of the Veda", or rather to an explanation of my standpoint which the deficiencies of my expression and the brief and summary character of my article in the "Arya" have led you, in some respects, to misconceive?

Surely, I have nowhere said that "knowledge of which no origin can be traced to previous sources must necessarily be disregarded or discarded"! That would be indeed a monstrous proposition! My point was that such knowledge, when it expressed a developed philosophy and psychology, stood in need of historical explanation, — a very different matter. If we accept the European idea of an evolving knowledge in humanity, — and it is on that basis that my argument proceeded — we must find the source of the Brahmavada either in an extraneous origin such as a previous Dravidian culture — a theory which I cannot admit, since I regard the so-called Aryans and Dravidians as one homogeneous race — or in a previous development, of which the records have either been lost or are to be found in the Veda itself. I cannot see how this argument involves a *regressus ad infinitum* except in so far as the whole idea of evolution and progressive causality lies open to that objection. As to the origins of the Vedic religion, that is a question which cannot be solved at present for lack of data. It does not follow that it had no origins or in other words that humanity was not prepared by a progressive spiritual experience for the Revelation.

Again, I certainly did not intend to express my own idea in the description of the Upanishads as a revolt of philosophic minds against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas. If I held that view, I could not regard the earlier Sruti as an inspired scripture or the Upanishads as Vedanta and I would not have troubled myself about the secret of the Veda. It is a view held by European scholars and I accepted it as the logical consequence, if the ordinary interpretations of the hymns, whether Indian or European, are to be maintained. If the Vedic hymns are, as represented by Western scholarship,

the ritualistic compositions of joyous and lusty barbarians the Upanishads “have then to be conceived as a revolt . . . against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas.” From both premiss and conclusion I have dissented and I have finally described, not only the Upanishads, but all later forms, as a development from the Vedic religion and not a revolt against its tenets.

Our Indian doctrine avoids the difficulty in another way, by interpreting the Veda as a book of ritual hymns and revering it as a book of knowledge. It puts together two ancient truths without reconciling them effectively. In my view, that reconciliation can only be effected by seeing even in the exterior aspect of the hymns not a ritualistic materialism, but a symbolic ritualism. No doubt the karmakanda was regarded as an indispensable stepping-stone to the knowledge of the Atman. That was an article of religious faith, and as an article of faith I do not dispute its soundness. But it becomes valid for the intellect — and in an intellectual inquiry I must proceed by intellectual means, — only if the karmakanda is so interpreted as to show how its performance assists, prepares or brings about the higher knowledge. Otherwise, however much the Veda may be revered in theory, it will be treated in practice as neither indispensable nor helpful and will come in the end to be practically set aside — as has actually happened.

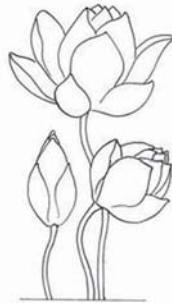
I am aware that some hymns of the Veda are interpreted in a sense other than the ritualistic; even the European scholars admit higher religious and spiritual ideas in the “later hymns” of the Vedas. I am aware also that separate texts are quoted in support of philosophical doctrines. My point was that such exceptional passages do not alter the general tone and purport given to the hymns in the actual interpretations we possess. With those interpretations, we cannot use the Rig Veda as a whole, as the Upanishads can be used as a whole, as the basis of a high spiritual philosophy. Now, it is to the interpretation of the Veda as a whole and to its general character that I have addressed myself.

I quite acknowledge that there has always been a side-stream of tendency making for the adhyatmic interpretation of the Veda even as a whole. It would be strange if in a nation so spiritually minded such attempts had been entirely lacking. But still these are side-currents and have not received general recognition. For the Indian intellect in general, there are only two interpretations, Sayana’s and the European. Addressing myself to that general opinion, it is with these two that I am practically concerned.

I am still of the opinion that the method and results of the early Vedantins differed entirely from the method and results of Sayana, for reasons I shall give in the second and third numbers of “Arya”. Practically, not in theory, what is the result of Sayana’s commentary? What is the general impression it leaves on the mind? Is it the impression of “Veda”, a great Revelation, a book of highest knowledge? Is it not rather that which the European scholars received and from which their theories started, a picture of primitive worshippers praying to friendly gods, friendly but of

a doubtful temper, gods of fire, rain, wind, dawn, night, earth and sky, for wealth, food, oxen, horses, gold, the slaughter of their enemies, even of their critics, victory in battle, the plunder of the conquered? And if so, how can such hymns be an indispensable preparation for the Brahmavidya? Unless, indeed, it is a preparation by contraries, by exhaustion or dedication of the most materialistic and egoistic tendencies, somewhat as the grim old Hebrew Pentateuch may be described as a preparation for the mild evangel of Christ. My position is that they were indispensable not by a mechanical virtue in the sacrifice, but because the experiences to which they are the key and which were symbolised by the ritual, are necessary to an integral knowledge and realisation of Brahman in the universe and prepare the knowledge and realisation of the transcendent Brahman. They are, to paraphrase Shankara's description, mines of all knowledge, knowledge on all the planes of consciousness, and do fix the conditions and relations of the divine, the human and the animal element in the being.

I do not claim that mine is the first attempt to give an adhyatmic interpretation of the Veda. It is an attempt — the first or the hundredth matters little — to give the esoteric and psychological sense of the Veda based throughout on the most modern method of critical research. Its interpretation of Vedic vocables is based on a re-examination of a large part of the field of comparative Philology and a reconstruction on a new basis which I have some hope will bring us nearer to a true science of Language. This I propose to develop in another work, the "Origins of Aryan Speech". I hope also to lead up to a recovery of the sense of the ancient spiritual conceptions of which old symbol and myth give us the indications and which I believe to have been at one time a common culture covering a great part of the globe with India, perhaps, as a centre. In its relation to this methodical attempt lies the only originality of the "Secret of the Veda". (S15: 593-96)



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