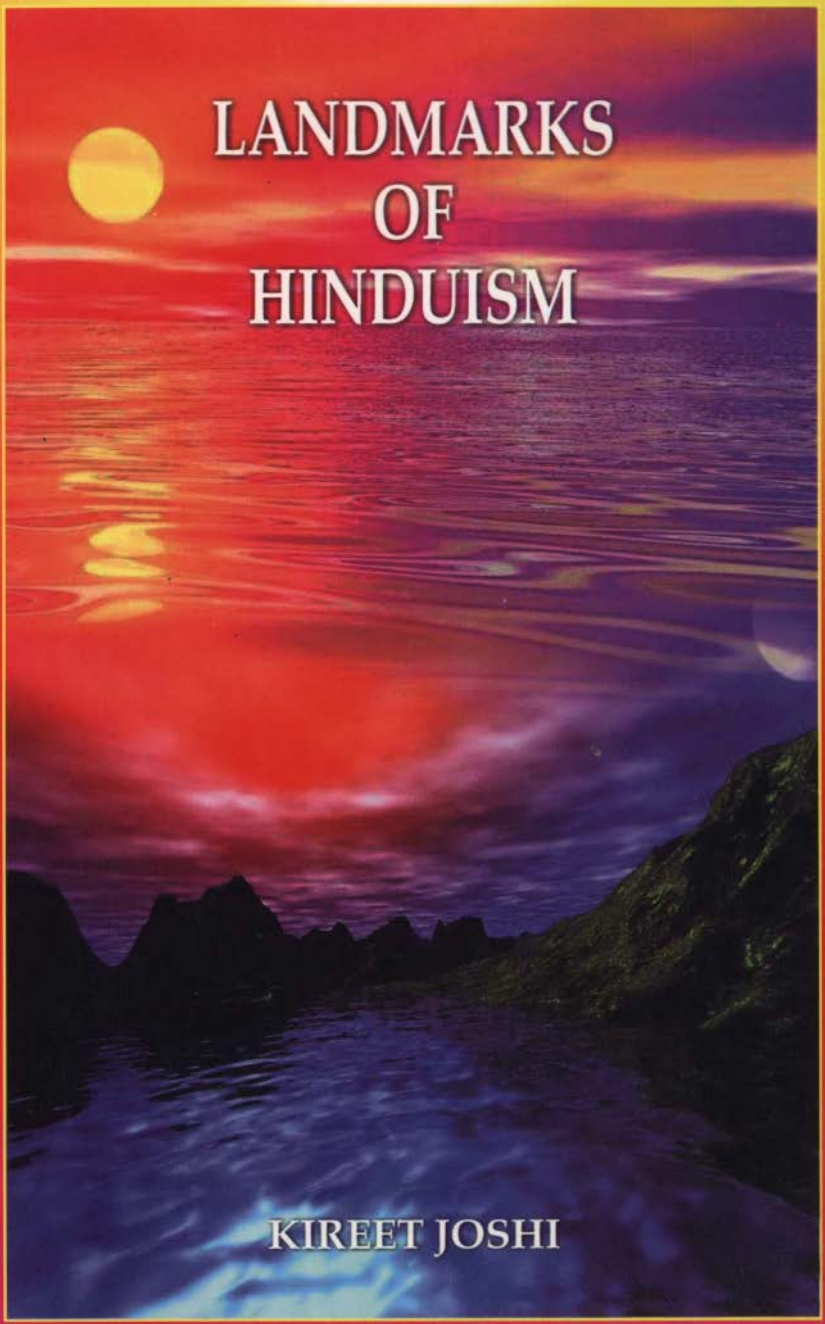
LANDMARKS OF HINDUISM



KIREET JOSHI

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THE MOTHER'S INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH
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Contents

1. Landmarks of Hinduism	9
2. Significant Features of Hinduism	37
3. The Veda in the Light of Sri Aurobindo	49
4. Elements of Poetics And Poetry in the Veda	71
5. Gods in the Vedas and Puranas	81
6. Vedas, Puranas and Thereafter	89
7. Vedic Tradition and Contemporary Crisis	103
8. Ancient Indian Wisdom and Contemporary Challenges	115
9. Yogic Science and Vedic Yoga	129

10. Vedic Ideals of Education and Their Contemporary Relevance 139

11. Bhagavadgita and Contemporary Crisis 157

12. Vedic Philosophy of Dharma 173

13. Concept of Dharma: Reflections on its Applications to Contemporary Process of Social Reconstruction 191

14. Indian Culture And Its Message 207

PREFACE

This is a collection of papers which were written at different times for different occasions. They present reflections on the theme of Hinduism and how the Vedic knowledge which is greatly revered by Hinduism contains valuable bases for new discoveries, and which are relevant to the needs of our own times. Inevitably, some important ideas will be found repeated, but it is hoped that they will serve as reiterations.

Hinduism is a non-dogmatic religion which acknowledges yogic science to be superior to religion. It has a capacity to renew itself and to invite adherents of other religions and even those who do not belong to any religion in a quest whereby religions can be united in a spirit of non-exclusivism. It is to the service of harmony that can be achieved by surpassing exclusivism that the papers collected in this book are dedicated.

New Delhi

Kireet Joshi

LANDMARKS OF HINDUISM

I. The Vedic Age

To understand the significance of the development of Hinduism, it is necessary to go back to the Veda, which can be regarded as the luminous seed of the huge *banyan* tree of what in course of time came to be known as Hinduism. (It may be noted that the ancient Indian Religion that was developed from the Veda was known as *Sanatana Dharma* or *Arya Dharma*. The word Hinduism came to be used at a later stage when foreigners referred to the religion practised by the people of India.)

In the eyes of the Rishis, who composed the Veda, the physical and the psychical worlds were a manifestation and twofold and diverse and yet connected and similar figures of cosmic godheads. The inner and outer life of man was a divine commerce with the gods, and behind it was the one Spirit or Being of which the gods were various names and personalities and powers, *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti.*[1] These godheads were not only masters of the physical Nature but were at the same time inward divine powers. Simultaneously, they were states and energies born in our psychic being. Godheads, *devas*, are declared to be the guardians of truth and immortality, the children of the Infinite, and each one of them to be in his origin and

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[1] *RV I.164.46*

his last reality the supreme Spirit putting in front one of his aspects.

In the Vedic vision, life of man was 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.

This building up the home of Truth here implies a getting of treasures, of the wealth, the booty given by the gods to the human warrior, and a journey and a sacrifice. The Vedic poets spoke of these things in a fixed system of images taken from Nature and from the surrounding life of the warlike, pastoral and agricultural Aryan peoples. And these images centred around the cult of Fire and the worship of the powers of living Nature and the institution of sacrifice. The Vedic poets used for their expression also a glowing web of myth and parable which expressed to the initiates a certain order of psychic experience and inner realities.

II. Inner Meaning of the Veda

Yaska has spoken of several schools of interpretation of the Vedas. He has declared that there is a triple knowledge and therefore a triple meaning of the Vedic hymns, a sacrificial or ritualistic knowledge, a knowledge of the gods, and finally a spiritual knowledge. He has also said that the last one is the true sense and when one gets it the others drop or are cut away. According to him, *`the Rishis saw the Truth, the true law of things, directly by an inner vision'*. He also said that *`the true sense of the Vedas can be recovered directly by meditation and tapasya'*. We also find that the Vedic Rishis themselves believed that their hymns contain a

secret knowledge and that the words of the Veda could only be known in their true meaning by one who was himself a seer or mystic; from others the hymns withhold their knowledge. For example, in *Rigveda (RV) IV.3.16*, the Rishi describes himself as one illumined expressing through his thought and speech words of guidance, `secret words' – *ninya vacamsi* -- `seer wisdoms that utter their inner meaning to the seer' – *kavyani kavaye nivacana.*[2]

It is, however, true that there was an external aspect of the Vedic religion and this aspect took its foundation on the mind of the physical man and provided means, symbols, rites, figures which were drawn from the most external things, such as heaven and earth, sun and moon and stars, dawn and day and night and rain, and wind and storm, oceans and rivers and forests, and other circumstances of the vast and mysterious surrounding life. But even on the external, the Vedic religion spoke of the highest Truth, Right, Law of which the gods were the guardians, of the necessity of a true knowledge and larger inner living according to this Truth and Right, as also of the home of immortality to which the soul of man could ascend by the power of truth and right being. In addition, the Vedic religion provided sufficient ground to draw even the common people in their ethical nature and to turn them towards some initial developments of their psychic being, and to conceive the idea of a knowledge and truth other than that of the physical life and to admit even a first conception of some greater spiritual Reality.

But the deeper and esoteric meaning of the Veda was reserved for the initiates, for those who were ready to

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[2] *See also Rigveda I. 164; Ibid, I. 164.46; Ibid, X.71.*

understand and practise the inner sense. It was the inner meaning, and the highest psychic and spiritual truth concealed by the outer sense, that gave the Vedic hymns the name by which they are still known, the *Veda*, the Book of Knowledge. Only in the light of this esoteric sense can we understand the full flowering of the Vedic religion in the Upanishads and in the long later developments of Indian spiritual seeking and experience.

The inner Vedic religion attributes psychic significance to the godheads in the cosmos. It conceives of a hierarchical order of the worlds, and an ascending stair of planes of being in the universe, *bhur*, *bhuvah*, and *swar*. Truth and Right (*satyam* and *ritam*), which have their home in the highest world of *swar*, sustain and govern all the levels of Nature. They are one in the essence but they take different forms in different levels of existence. For instance, there is in the Veda a series of outer physical light, another series of higher and inner light which is a vehicle of the mental, vital and psychic consciousness. Besides these, there is the highest inmost light of spiritual illumination. Surya, the Sun-god, was the lord of the physical Sun, but he is at the same time giver of the rays of Knowledge which illumines the mind. At the same time, he is also the soul of energy and the body of spiritual illumination.

All Vedic godheads have an outer as also as inner and inmost foundation, their known as well as secret Names. All of them are different powers of the one highest reality, *ekam sat*, *tat satyam*, *tad ekam*. Each of these gods is in himself a complete and separate cosmic personality of the one Existence. In their combination of the powers, they form the complete universal power, the cosmic whole. Each again, apart from his special function, is one godhead with others. Each holds in

himself the universal divinity, each god is all the other gods. This complex aspect of the Vedic teaching and worship has been given by European scholars the title 'henotheism'. Beyond, there is, according to the Vedas, triple Infinite, and in this Infinite, the godheads put on their highest nature and are Names of the one nameless Ineffable.

This teaching was applied to the inner life of man, and the application may be regarded as its greatest power. Consciousness of the godheads can be built, according to the Vedic teaching, within man, and affirmation of these powers leads to the conversion of human nature into universality of divine nature. Gods are the guardians and increasers of the Truth, the powers of the Immortal, the sons of the Infinite Mother, *Aditi*. Man arrives at immortality by calling the gods into himself by means of a connecting sacrifice, by surrender. This leads to the breaking of the limitations not only of his physical self but also of his mental and ordinary psychic nature.

The Veda describes various experiences which indicate a profound psychological and psychic discipline leading to the highest spiritual realisation of divine status. This discipline contains the nucleus of the later Indian Yoga, the fundamental idea of which was that of the journey from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. The Vedic Rishis speak of this as *ritasya panthah*, the path of the Truth. In one of the vivid descriptions of the spiritual realisation, Vamadeva records, "Vanished the darkness, shaken in its foundation; heaven shone out; upward rose the light of the divine Dawn; the sun entered the vast fields beholding the straight things and the crooked in mortals. Thereafter indeed they awoke and saw utterly; then indeed they held in them a bliss that is enjoyed in

heaven, *ratnam dharayanta dyubhaktam.* Let all the gods be in all our humans, let there be the truth of our thought, O Mitra, O Varuna."[3]

This is similar to another experience described by Parashara Shaktya, who declares, "Our fathers broke open the firm and strong places by their words, yea, the Angirasas broke open the hill by their cry; they made in us the path to the great heaven; they found the Day and *Swar* and vision and the Luminous Cows", *chakrur divo brhato gatum asme, ahah svar vividuh ketum usrah.*[4] He declares again, "They who entered into all things that bear right fruit formed a path towards the immortality; earth stood wide for them by the greatness and by the great Ones, the Mother *Aditi*, with her sons, came for the upholding."[5]

These and other statements give us the clue to what the Vedic Rishis meant by immortality. When the physical being is visited by the greatness of the infinite planes above and by the power of the great godheads, who reign on those planes, breaks its limits, opens out to the Light and is upheld in its new wideness by the infinite Consciousness, Mother *Aditi* and her sons, the divine powers of the supreme Deva – then one realises immortality.

Again, Veda makes a distinction between the state of Knowledge and the state of Ignorance (*cittim acittim cinavad vi vidvan*), and discovers the means by which ignorance can be overcome. Upholding the thought of the truth in all the principles of our being, the diffusion

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[3] *RV. IV. 1. 17*
[4] *RV. I. 71.2*
[5] *RV. I.72.9*

of Truth in all parts of our being, and the birth of activity of all the godheads – this is the quintessence of the means of attaining Knowledge, which results in immortality.[6]

We find the most characteristic ideas of Indian spirituality in their seed in the Veda though not in their full expression. There is, first, the idea of the one Existence, supra-cosmic, beyond the individual and the universe. There is also the idea of one God who presents to us various forms, names, powers, personalities of his godhead. There is, thirdly, the distinction between the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the greater truth of an immortal life opposed to the much falsehood and mortal existence. Fourthly, there is the idea of the discipline of an inward growth of man from the physical through the psychic to the spiritual existence. Finally, there is the idea and experience of the conquest of death, the secret of immortality. Throughout its long and uninterrupted history of the Vedic tradition, these ideas have remained constant up to the present day.

III. Vedic Age and Upanishads: Formation of the Spiritual Soul of India

The Vedic beginning was a high beginning, and it was secured in its results by a larger sublime efflorescence. This is what we find in the Upanishads, which have always been recognised in India as the crown and end of the Veda, Vedanta. While the Brahmanas concentrated on Vedic rituals, the Upanishads renewed the Vedic truth by extricating it from its cryptic symbols and casting it into the highest

[6] *See also RV. I.68.1-3.*

and the most direct and powerful language of intuition and experience. Indeed, this language was not the thing of the intellect, but still the intellect could take hold of its form, translate into its own more abstract terms and convert into the starting-point for an ever-widening and deepening philosophic speculation and the reason's long search after the Truth.

The Upanishads are records of deepest spiritual experience and documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light, power and largeness. Whether written in verse or cadenced prose, they are spiritual poems of unfailing inspiration, inevitable in phrase and wonderful in rhythm and expression. They are epic hymns of self-knowledge, and world-knowledge and God-knowledge. The imagery of the Upanishads is in large part developed from the type of imagery of the Veda. Ordinarily it prefers unveiled clarity of the directly illuminative image, but it frequently uses the same symbols in a way that is closely akin to the spirit of the older symbolism. The Upanishads are not any departure from the Vedic mind but a continuation and development and to a certain extent an enlarging transformation. They bring out into open expression what was held covered in the symbolic language of the Veda as a mystery and a secret. Ajataśatru's explanation of sleep and dream, passages of the Praśna Upanishad on the vital being and its motion are some of the examples of Upanishadic symbolism.

Along with the Veda, Upanishads rank as *Śruti*, since they embody revelations and intuitions of spiritual experience. The Upanishads have been acknowledged as the source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from them in India. They fertilised the mind and life of the people and kept India's soul

alive through the centuries. Like a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving water, they have never failed to give fresh illumination. It is even being said that Buddhism was only a restatement of one side of the Upanishadic experience, although it represented a new standpoint and provided fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning. Even in the thought of Pythagoras and Plato, one could rediscover the ideas of the Upanishads. Sufism has been found repeating the teaching of the Upanishads in another religious language. Even some of the modern thinkers of the East and the West seem to be absorbing the ideas of the Upanishads with living and intense receptiveness. And it may not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly any main philosophical idea which cannot find an authority or seed or indication in those ancient and antique writings. It has also been claimed that the larger generalisations of Science are constantly found to apply to the truth of the physical Nature those formulas which were discovered by the Upanishadic sages in their original, and largest meaning in the deeper truth of the Spirit.

The Upanishads are Vedanta, a book of knowledge, but knowledge understood not as a mere thinking but as a seeing with the soul and total living in it with the power of inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge. Through this process of knowledge by identity or intuition the seers of Upanishads came easily to see that the self in us is one with the universal self of all things and that this self again is the same as God and Brahman, the transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe as well as the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision.

The three great declarations of the ancient Vedanta are: *`I am He'*;[7] *`Thou art That, O Swetaketu'*;[8] *`All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman'*.[9]

The main conceptions of the Upanishads remained intact in parts at least in various philosophical systems, and efforts have been made from time to time to recombine them. *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Purva Mimamsa* and *Uttara Mimamsa* bear the imprint of the Upanishadic thought, and the last one, in particular, has as its basic text *Brahmasutra*, which was written by Badarayana, and in which the quintessence of the Upanishads was expounded aphoristically. *Brahmasutra* came to be commented upon by various *Acaryas*. This gave rise to at least five schools of Vedantic interpretation, viz., Advaita of Shankaracarya, Visistadvaita of Ramanujacarya, Shuddhadvaita of Vallabhacarya, Dvaitadvaita of Nimbarkacarya, and Dvaita of Madhwacarya. Bhagavadgita is also considered to be an exposition of the essence of the Upanishadic teaching. The commentary literature on the Upanishads, *Brahmasutra* and Bhagavadgita is continuing to develop even in our own times.

It is true that the Upanishads are concerned mainly with the inner vision and not directly with outward human action; yet, all the highest principles of ethics held out by Buddhism, Jainism and later Hinduism are products of the very life and significance of the truths to which they give expressive form and force. They even present the supreme ideal of spiritual action founded on the experience and principle of oneness with God as well as all living beings. It is for this reason that even when the life of the forms of the Vedic cult had passed away,

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[7] *Chhandogya Upanishad, 4.11.1*

[8] *Ibid, 6.8.7*

[9] *Ibid, 3.14.1*

the Upanishads remained alive and creative and could generate the great devotional religions and inspire the idea of Dharma embedded in the Indian psyche. In fact, the idea and practice of Dharma is a common thread unifying Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism.

By the time we came to the Upanishads, the original Vedic symbols had begun to lose their significance and to pass into obscurity. The earlier stage of culture represented an old poise between two extremes. On one side, there was the crude or half-trained naturalness of the outer physical man; on the other side, there was an inner and secret psychic and spiritual life of the initiates. But this poise was disturbed because of the necessity of a large-lined advance. In its developing cycle of civilisation, India was called for a more and more generalised intellectual, ethical and aesthetic evolution. This called for a new poise and a new balance. At this juncture, the Upanishads saved the ancient spiritual knowledge by immense effort, and the spiritual edifice created by the Upanishads guided, uplifted and penetrated into the wide and complex intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and social culture that came to be developed during the ages that followed the age of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

IV. Post-Vedic Age: Robust Intellectuality and Vitality

During the post-Vedic age, which extended right up to the decline of Buddhism, we see the rise of the great philosophies, many-sided epic literature, beginnings of arts and sciences, emergence of vigorous and complex societies, formation of large kingdoms and empires, manifold formative activities of all kinds and great systems of living and thinking. It was the birth time and youth of the seeking intellect, and a number of scientific or systematic bodies of intellectual knowledge came up

at an early stage. Actually, Vedangas had begun to develop even before the Upanishads. Mandukya Upanishad mentions six Vedangas: Shiksha (Phonetics); Kalpa (Rituology); Vyakarana (Grammar); Nirukta (Etymology); Chhandas (Metrics); and Jyotisha (Astronomy and Astrology). Each Vedanga takes up one aspect of the Veda and an attempt is made to explain it.

In due course, there developed a vast literature on these Vedangas, expounding various systems of phonetics, rituals of sacrifices and rules of conduct of various kinds such as those described in Shrautasutras, Grihyasutras and Dharmasutras, principles and details of Vedic etymology, grammatical subtleties, various forms, meters and styles of poetry, and several systems of astronomical and astrological knowledge. There developed also considerable literature of Pratisakhya, which dealt with the subtleties of grammar, meters and pronunciation pertaining to the Shakhas of the Vedas. Apart from the Vedangas, there developed four sciences, known as Upavedas, *viz.*, Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda and Arthaveda. Here, again, in due course, there developed a vast literature of expositions, commentaries and treatises.

Strong intellectuality of this period was inspired by the wide variety of spiritual experience and the synthetic turn so visible in the Vedas and the Upanishads. There was a conscious perception that spiritual experience is higher than religion and that what religion seeks can really be attained by the inner psychological discipline, which in due course, came to be developed into a Shastra, the Shastra of Yoga. It allowed intellectuality to become free from the crippling effects of religious dogma, and we find that the intellectual development became multisided. Materialistic atheism, agnosticism, and scepticism also developed. Indeed, this intellectuality

was austere and rich, robust and minute, powerful and delicate, massive in principle and curious in detail. The mere mass of the intellectual production during the period from Ashoka well into the Mohammedan epoch is something truly prodigious. This can be seen from the account which recent scholarship gives of it. And while evaluating this account, it must be noted that what has been dealt with so far of this ancient treasure is a fraction of what is still lying extant and what is extant is only a small percentage of what was once written and known. We also have to note that what was accomplished had for its aid the power of memory and the perishable palm-leaf. The colossal literature extended to various domains – philosophy and theology, religion and yoga, logic and rhetoric, grammar and linguistics, poetry and drama, medicine and astronomy besides the sciences. It dealt also with politics and society, music and dance, architecture and painting, all the sixty-four accomplishments, and various crafts and skills. It may be said that even such subjects as breeding and training of horses and elephants had their own shastras. Each domain of thought and life had a systematic body of knowledge, its art, its apparatus of technical terms, its copious literature.

During this period, India stood in the first rank in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, surgery and all other branches of physical knowledge which were practised in ancient times. In many directions, India had a priority of discovery. It is true that the harmony that was established between philosophical truth and truth of psychology and religion was not extended in the same degree to the truth of physical Nature. But from the beginning, starting from the thought of the Veda, the Indian mind has recognised that the same general laws and powers hold in the spiritual, the psychological and the physical existence.

Omnipresence of life was discovered, and there was affirmation of the evolution of the soul in Nature from the vegetable and the animal to the human form.

The philosophical mind started from the data of the spiritual experience, and it went back always in one form or the other to the profound truth of the Veda and 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. In the epic literature of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, we find a strong and free intellectual and ethical thinking; there is an incessant criticism of life by the intelligence and ethical reason. We find in it a multisided curiosity and desire to fix the norms of truth in all and an implicit or explicit assent to the spiritual truth. In the field of art, there was insistence upon life and its creativity, but still its highest achievement was always in the field of interpretation of the religio-philosophical mind. The whole tone of art during that period was coloured by the suggestion of the spiritual and the infinite.

The master ideas of the Vedas and the Upanishads governed the developing turn of imagination, its creative temperament and its significant forms in which it persistently interpreted its perception of self and things and life and universe. The sense of the infinite and the cosmic generated by the Vedic hymns is seen in a great part of the literature of the subsequent ages even as we see it in architecture, painting and sculpture. And as in the Veda, even so here, there is a tendency to see and render spiritual experience in images taken from the inner psychic plane or in physical images transmitted by the stress of a psychic significance and impression. The tendency to image the terrestrial life often magnified, as

in the Mahabharata and in the Ramayana, reflects the Vedic influence.

In the field of collective life, Indian society developed its communal coordination of the mundane life of interest and desire, *kama* and *artha*. But it governed its action always by a reference at every point to the moral and religious law, *dharma*, and never did it lose sight of spiritual liberation, *moksha*, as the highest motive and ultimate aim of the effort of life. At a still later stage, when there came about an immense development of the mundane intelligence and an emphatic stress of aesthetic, sensuous and hedonistic experience, there was a corresponding deepening of the intensities of psycho-religious experience. It may be said that every excess of emphasis on the splendour, richness, power and pleasures of life had its recoil and was balanced by a corresponding stress on spiritual asceticism. And throughout this development one can see the inner continuity with the Vedic and Vedantic origins.

It is true that at one time it seemed that a discontinuity would take place. Buddhism seemed to reject all spiritual continuity with the Vedic religion. It also seemed to be a sharp new beginning. But the ideal of *nirvana* came to be perceived as a negative and exclusive statement of the highest Vedantic spiritual experience. The eightfold path also came to be perceived as an austere sublimation of the Vedic notion of the Right, Truth, and Law, which was followed as the way to immortality. The strongest note of Mahayana Buddhism which laid stress on universal compassion and fellow-feeling was seen as an ethical application of the spiritual unity which is an essential idea of Vedanta. The Buddhistic theory of *karma* could have been supported from the utterances of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. Actually, the Vedic tradition absorbed

all that could be of Buddhism, but rejected its exclusive positions.

V. Purano-Tantric Age: Second Stage of Hinduism

We now come to the Purano-Tantric stage. There was a gradual fading out of the prominent Vedic forms and substitution of others. Symbol, ritual and ceremony were transformed; the lofty heights of the Vedic spiritual experience did not reappear as a predominant tendency, although there was farther widening and fathoming of psychic and spiritual experience. The Vedic pantheon gradually faded out altogether under the weight of the increasing importance of the great Trinity, *Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva*. A new pantheon appeared; its outward symbolic aspect expressed a deeper truth and larger range of experience, feeling and idea. The tradition of the Vedic sacrifice began to break down; the house of Fire was replaced by the temple. The devotional temple ritual came to replace, to a great extent, the karmic ritual of sacrifice. More precise conceptual forms of the two great deities, Vishnu and Shiva, came to replace the shifting mental images of the Vedic gods. The shaktis of Vishnu and Shiva also came to dominate the religious scene. These new concepts became stabilised in physical images, and these images were made the basis for both internal adoration and external worship.

The esoteric teachings of the Vedic hymns which centred on the psychic and spiritual discipline disappeared, although some of its truths reappeared in various new forms. These forms, as we see them in the Puranic and Tantric religion and yoga, were less lofty than the Vedic nucleus of spiritual experience, but they were wider, richer, complex and more suitable to the psycho-spiritual inner life.

The Purano-Tantric stage was marked by an effort to awaken the 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 highest spiritual truth. This effort required new instruments, new atmosphere and new fields of religious and spiritual experience. While the Vedic godheads were to the most 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. But the central spiritual truth remained the same in both the Vedic and the Purano-Tantric systems, the truth of the One in many aspects. As the Vedic godheads were forms of the Supreme, even so the Puranic Trinity was a triple form of the one supreme Godhead and Brahman; even the Shaktis were energies of the highest divine Being. But this truth was no longer reserved for the initiated few; it was now brought more and more powerfully, widely and intensely home to the general mind and feeling of the people.

Vedas and Puranas: Continuity and Change:

The system of the hierarchy of the worlds that we find in the Veda was more intricate than the system found in the Puranas. In the Veda, the highest worlds constitute the triple divine principle; infinity is their scope, bliss is their foundation. These three worlds are supported by the vast region of the Truth whence a divine Light radiates out towards our mentality in the three heavenly luminous worlds of *swar*, the domain of *Indra*. Below is the triple system in which we live. This triple system consists of three earths, three heavens, *dyaus*, and the connecting mid-region

(*antariksha*). In simpler terms, the triple lower world in which we live is the world of matter, life-force and pure mind. According to the Vedic idea, each principle can be modified by the subordinate manifestation of the others within it, and each world is divisible into several provinces. Into this framework, the Vedic Rishis placed all the complexities of the subtle vision and its fertile imagery. The Puranic system is a continuation of the Vedic system, but it is simpler. The Purana recognises seven principles of existence and the seven Puranic worlds correspond to them with sufficient precision, thus:

Principle	World
1. Pure Existence-*Sat*	World of the highest truth of being (*Satyaloka*)
2. Pure Consciousness -*Cit*	World of infinite Will or conscious force (*Tapoloka*)
3. Pure Bliss-*Ananda*	World of creative delight of existence (*Janaloka*)
4. Knowledge or Truth-*Vijnana*	World of the vastness (*Maharloka*)
5. Mind	World of light (*Swar*)
6. Life (nervous being)	World of various becomings (*Bhuvar*)
7. Matter	The material world (*Bhur*)

The Vedic interpretation of life as a movement of sacrifice and a battle continued in the Purano-Tantric tradition also. According to the Veda, the struggle of life is a warring of Gods and Titans, Gods and Giants, Indra and Python, Aryan and the Dasyu. In the Puranas and Tantras also life is conceived as a struggle and battle between Devas and Asuras, Devas and Rakshasas, armies of Gods and Goddesses and those of Asuric, Rakshasic and Paishacik adversaries. The Vedic goal of achieving immortality recurs also in the Puranas and Tantras, where we have symbolic story of the search after the nectar of immortality.

The Vedic idea of the divinity in man was popularised to an extraordinary extent during the Purano-Tantric stage; there was the development of the concept of *avatars*, of the occasional manifestations of the Divine in humanity; there was also the development of the idea of the Divine Presence, discoverable in the heart of every creature. New systems of yoga also developed, but the basis was the same, namely, secret of the power of concentration, of the method of concentration, and of the object of concentration. There was, however, a many-sided endeavour which opened the gates of Yoga on various levels and planes of consciousness. Many kinds of psycho-physical, inner vital, inner mental and psycho-spiritual methods came to be developed; but all of them had the common aim of realisation of the greater consciousness and a more or less complete union with the One Divine, or else merger of the individual soul in the Absolute. The Purano-Tantric system provided 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 supreme experience and highest or absolute status.

VI. Third Stage of Hinduism

After the Purano-Tantric stage, came the third stage of development of religion and spirituality in India. The first stage had consisted of the Vedic training of the physically minded man; the second stage took up man's outward life as also a deeper mental and psychical life, and brought man more directly into contact with the spirit and divinity within him. But now at the third stage, there was an attempt to take up man's whole mental, psychical and physical living so as to arrive at the first beginning of at least a generalised spiritual life. This is what we see in the emergence of great spiritual movement of the saints and *Bhaktas* after the decline of Buddhism and an increasing resort to various paths of yoga. During this stage, there was also the great problem of receiving Islam, and, two great attempts were made to arrive at a new synthesis; one from the side of the Muslims, and the other from the side of the Hindus. The former was exemplified in the attempt of Akbar to create a new religion called *Din-I-Ilahi*, and the latter was exemplified by the life and work of Guru Nanak. The work of Guru Nanak later gave rise to the astonishingly original and novel Sikh Khalsa movement. During this period, there was a tremendous churning of the spirit of India, and a great attempt was made to explore all aspects of human being and to develop them in such a way that they could all open up to the spiritual light and force. This attempt had not only an individual aspect but also a collective one. This was a remarkable attempt which could have revolutionised the collective life of India. But this was interrupted on account of several factors.

Among these factors was the fact of the exhaustion of the vital force as a result of a long march and effort from

the earliest times of Indian history. This exhaustion was also due to the fact that since the sixth century B.C., there entered a current of culture which negated the meaning and significance of cosmic life. It created confusion and disbalance resulting in excessive asceticism. It impoverished life and led to the neglect of social, economic and political conditions of the country. High ideals began to be exiled from active life, and rigidities of various kinds came to imprison the forms of life of individuals and collectivities. The exhaustion of vital force also coincided with the political instability and the coming of settlers from the West. Finally, the establishment of the British supremacy in India resulted in extreme impoverishment of the Spirit of India.

VII. Reawakening

The third stage of religious and spiritual development of India could not bear its natural fruit, although it has done much to prepare a great possibility for the future. The significance of the third stage lies in its message that the spiritualization of the collective life cannot be achieved if only the physical mind of the common man is trained as in the Vedic Age or even if a greater effort is made to train the psychic-emotional part of common man's nature, as was attempted in the Purano-Tantric Age. What is needed is to turn to spiritual reality the entirety of mental, psychical and physical living of the individual and the collectivity so as to divinise the entire human life and nature.

It is significant, therefore, that there arose from the middle of the 19th century a reassertion of the Indian spirit which is marked by three tendencies, namely, reaffirmation of the spiritual ideal, emphasis on dynamism and creative action, and insistence on collective forms of life. The reassertion came through the

works of the great personalities like Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, who filled India with a new vision and power both for the spiritual awakening and national prosperity. The new nationalist spirit was at once spiritual and social in character, and symbolised a new vibration.

It is significant also that in this reawakening, the Veda and the Upanishads were rediscovered. The esoteric teaching of the Vedas, which was confined only to initiates during the Vedic period, seems in the new light to be a store from which Hinduism can even now draw illumination and power of regeneration. The new light does not advocate a mere revival or prolongation of the Puranic system but points to something which the Vedic seers saw as the aim of human life and which the Vedantic sages cast into the clear and immortal forms of the luminous revelation. And yet it is not to the Vedic forms that Hinduism is called upon to return. The great message of modern India, coming through its accomplished Rishi, Sri Aurobindo, calls for the discovery of newer light and development of newer forms. Not to trace or retrace the old, but taking into account the treasures of the past and by liberating or developing new knowledge, even by hewing new paths, transcending the boundaries of religion into pure and integral spirituality or yoga, the renascent India is called upon to find original solutions to build up integral consciousness which can manifest divine consciousness potently in all fields of activity, scientific, philosophical, cultural, social, economic, political.

VIII. Spirit of Synthesis

Significance of the Veda is not confined merely to the fact that it is the world's first yet extant Scripture, but

that it is the earliest interpretation of Man and the Divine and the Universe as also that it is a sublime and powerful poetic creation. The utterances of the greatest seers, Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others touch the most extraordinary heights of mantric poetry. At the early stages of the Vedic tradition, the substance of Indian religion and spirituality came to be determined by the varieties of deepest psychic and spiritual experiences shared and expressed by hundreds of the Vedic seers. It can be seen that the post-Vedic and later spirituality of Indian people was contained in the Veda in seed or in the first expression.

The great force of intuition and inner experience, so evident in the Veda and the Upanishad, gave to the Indian mind the sense and reality of cosmic consciousness and cosmic vision. Perception of the One underlying reality, recognition of the perception of unity, as Vidya, and the necessity of the individual to lift himself from Avidya to Vidya – these are the connecting threads of Indian religion and spirituality, and these we see repeatedly emphasised in the Vedic teaching. At the same time, we have to note that even while admitting the One without a second, *ekam eva advitiyam*, there was no paralysing exclusion of multiplicity and life in the Veda and the Upanishad, and there was a clear admission of the duality of the One and the distinction of the Spirit and Nature; and there was room also for various trinities and a million aspects of that One, *tad ekam*. This has created in the Indian mind aversion to intolerant and mental exclusions, and even when it concentrates some-times on 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 object of

worship beyond the multitude of Godheads at the Unity of the Supreme. What is of special significance is that this synthetic turn is not limited to mystics or philosophic thinkers, but extends even to the popular mind, which has been permeated by the force of thoughts, images, traditions and cultural symbols not only of the Veda and Vedanta but also of the Purana and Tantra. There is in the Indian mind a pervasive synthetic monism, many-sided unitarianism, and large cosmic universalism.

This is not to deny the fact that there have emerged in the long course of Indian history tendencies, thoughts and even religious movements characterised by exclusivism. There have been exclusive claims and counter-claims and even quarrels and intolerance. But the efforts at synthesis have tended to prevail. Even in the field of philosophy, while trenchant positions are not absent, synthetic turn eventually predominates. In the field of Yoga, too, there have been specialisations and exclusive claims and counter-claims; claims of the path of knowledge have opposed the claims of the path of action and devotion and *vice-versa* but there have also been powerful systems of synthesis, such as those of the esoteric Veda, Upanishads, Gita and Tantra. Even in later times, in the movements of saints and *bhaktas* there is a marked turn towards synthesis, and even in our own times, in the yogic life of Sri Aurobindo and his integral yoga we have the latest effort and statement of the synthesis of yogic disciplines.

Catholicity of the Veda and the Upanishads has permitted remarkable changes in the forms of Indian religion and spiritual culture, even while maintaining the persistence of their spirit. And if we examine the changes that have occurred, we shall find in them a meaningful process of evolution and a certain

kind of logic. Right from the Vedic times, there has been a tendency in the Indian religion to provide suitable means for the individual and collective life to develop by graded steps and reach and experience truths of higher and spiritual existence. It was recognised that at the beginning not many could safely and successfully reach the heights, but the pioneering leaders did not accept the theory that many must necessarily remain for ever on the lower rungs of life and only a few could climb into the free air and light, but were moved by the spirit to regenerate all and the totality of physical life on the earth. It is true that this spirit was not at all times and in all its parts consciously aware of its own total significance. But the total drift of the manifold sides and rich variations of the forms, teachings and disciplines of Indian religion and spirituality indicate that the aim pursued was not only to raise to inaccessible heights the few elect, but to draw all human beings and all life and all the parts and planes of the human personality upward, to spiritualise life and in the end to divinise the human nature.

Indian spirituality as seen in the Veda, recognised both the spiritual and physical poles of existence, and sought the experience and realisation of higher planes of the Spirit even in the physical consciousness (*prithvi*). The legend of the Angirasa Rishis indicates the effort to discover the lost sun and herds of light in the caves of darkness, symbolising physical inconscience. It may even be said that the Yoga of the Veda seems to suggest that the discovery of the light in Surya Savitri is followed and completed by the discovery and uncovering of the light in the very depths of darkness of the Inconscient, *tamas*. Not the rejection of Matter and material life but realisation that Matter too is Spirit and that material life too can bear and manifest the spiritual light and bliss – this seems to be the basis of the Vedic teaching.

It is this unitive perception that could explain the drift of Indian religion and spirituality towards a wide and many-sided culture. It is true that on its more solitary summits, at least in its later periods, Indian spirituality tended to a spiritual exclusive-ness, which was, whatever its loftiness, quite excessive. Actually this exclusiveness imposed on Indian culture a certain impotence to deal effectively with the problems of human existence; consequently, there came about a general decline in science, philosophy, and all other domains of life. On the other hand, the previous training provided under the Vedic religion to the physical mind and under the post-Vedic and Purano-Tantric religion to the inner faculties had created favourable conditions for the growth and development of multisided religious and spiritual movements. These movements attempted to synthesise conflicting tendencies and to invite larger and larger sections of the society to possibilities of the multisided spiritual training and development. Even though there was a general arrest of these new developments, the Indian Renaissance has now provided fresh conditions, and the most conscious and potent expression of the new spirituality has declared the aim not of individual salvation but of collective salvation. It has rejected the exclusive solution of the problems of human life in the attainment of world-negating spirit; it has rather affirmed the possibility of the highest spiritualising of life on the earth.

The earliest preoccupation of India, as expressed in Veda, was the exploration of Spirit in Matter and of Matter in Spirit; the intermediate preoccupation was with the seeking and experimenting in a thousand ways of the soul's outermost and inmost experience marked by various conflicts and even exclusive affirmations and denials under an overarching tendency towards

multisided development of the spiritual, ethical, intellectual, aesthetic, vital and physical parts of the being and some kind of synthesis. The latest trend takes up the burden and treasure of the gains of the past and looks towards the future with some kind of basis of effective realisation where tasks of the establishment of the divine life on the earth for full participation by the entire human race could be under-taken.

Tasks of Renascent India:

While outlining these tasks, particularly, of the renascent India, Sri Aurobindo states:

"The recovery of the old spiritual knowledge and experience in all its splendour, depth and fullness is its first, most essential work; the flowing of this spirituality into new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge is the second; an original dealing with modern problems in the light of Indian spirit and the endeavour to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society is the third and most difficult. Its success on these three lines will be the measure of its help to the future of humanity."[10]

[10] *Sri Aurobindo: The Foundations of Indian Culture, Vol. 14, Centenary Edition, p. 409.*

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF HINDUISM
(as they have emerged through a historical process)

The significance of the history of the religion that gave no name to itself but which, in its later stages came to be called Hinduism, lies in the fact that it came to develop itself into a congregation of religions providing, at the same time, to each human being with his or her own method of inner experience. It began with the Vedas and developed various facets of spiritual experience, philosophical thought and systems responding to emotional and vital needs as also demands of the physical nature. It maintained a continuous thread uninterruptedly right up to the present day, and this religion succeeded in providing an example of a rich nursery of spiritual growth and flowering in a vast multiform school of the souls' disciplines of endeavour, and self-realisation.

Continuity and change have been a special feature of this religion which consciously opens up towards something that lies beyond religion and shows to the individuals and the collectivities how to liberate themselves from dogma, rituals, outward ceremonies so as to enter into the kingdom of the spirit and experience of the Infinite Reality in thousand different ways.

Like all great religions, Indian religion nourished in the mind a belief in a highest consciousness or state of existence, universal and transcendent of the universe, and it laid also upon the individual life the

need of self-preparation for development and experience. But the way in which this ancient religion developed provided a well-founded, well-explored, many-branching and always enlarging ways of knowledge and of spiritual or religious disciplines. However, the most distinctive element of Hinduism lies in the fact that through successive stages, it built up for larger and larger gradations of human consciousness an organisation of the individual and collective life, -- a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct, of mental and moral and vital development by which they could move each in one's own limits and according to one's own nature in such a way as to become eventually ready for the greater existence.

To understand Hinduism, one needs to understand the long and difficult course of its history and derive from it lessons of its significance. Why is it difficult to make out what Hinduism is? Where, it is asked, is its soul? Where is its mind and fixed thought? Where is the form of its body? How can there be a religion which has no rigid dogmas, no theological postulates, even no fixed theology, no credo, distinguishing it from antagonistic or rival religions? Again, it is asked, how can there be a religion which has no papal head, no governing ecclesiastic, no church, chapel or congregational system, no binding religious forms of any kind obligatory on all its adherents, no one administration and discipline? Still again, it is asked, how can Hinduism be called a religion when it allows even a kind of high-reaching atheism and agnosticism and permits all possible spiritual experiences, all kinds of religious adventures?

The answer to these questions lies in the fact that through its long history, Hinduism has provided, not only to the best minds or to elite, but to the larger and

larger masses of people such a subtle philosophical training and a wide spiritual culture that to the Hindu mind the least important part of its religion is its dogma; what matters to it is the religious spirit, not theological credo.

Let us, however, come to precisions.

The Hindu religious thinker has succeeded in spreading widely the idea that all the highest eternal verities are truths of the spirit, and that the supreme truths are fruits of the soul's inner experience rather than of logical reasoning or affirmations of credal statements.

A permanent flow of thought in India has constantly given a message that there are no true and false religions, but rather all religions are true in their own way and degree. Each religion is recognised as one of the thousand paths to the One Eternal, which can be formulated differently by different minds.

If we study the history of Hinduism, it will become clear that what has been emphasised most is the pursuit of the One eternal under whatever conception or whatever form, to attain to it by inner experience, to live in it in consciousness. One school or sect might consider the real self of man to be indivisible one with the universal Self or the Supreme Spirit. Another might regard man as one with divine in essence but different from him in Nature. The third might hold God, Nature and the individual Soul in man to be three eternally different powers of being. But for all of them the truth of Self is held with equal force; for even to the Indian dualists, God is the supreme Self and Reality in whom and by whom nature and man live, move and have their being. The Spirit, universal Nature, (whether called *Maya, Prakriti* or *Shakti*) and the soul in living beings,

Jiva, are the three truths which are universally admitted by all the religious sects and conflicting religious philosophies of Hinduism; they differ only in respect of relations between these three. Universal also is the admission that the discovery of the inner spiritual self in man, the divine soul in him, and some kind of living and uniting contact or absolute unity of the soul in man with God or supreme Self or eternal Brahman is the condition of spiritual perfection. It is open to the adherents to conceive and have experiences of the divine as an impersonal Absolute and Infinite or to approach and know and feel him as a transcendent and universal sempiternal Person; but whatever be our way of reaching Him, the one important truth of spiritual experience is that He is in the heart and centre of all existence and all existence is in Him and to find Him is the great self-finding. Differences of credal belief are to the Hindu mind nothing more than various ways of seeing the one Self and God in all.

In Hinduism, realisation is the one common endeavour; to open to the inner spirit, to live in the Infinite, to seek after and discover the eternal, to be in union with God, that is the common idea and aim of religion, that is the sense of spiritual salvation, that is the living truth that fulfils and releases. This dynamic following after the highest spiritual truth and the highest spiritual aim is the uniting bond of Hinduism, and, behind all its thousand arms, it is one common essence.

It must be emphasised that the history of Hindu spirituality and religion shows a remarkable spirit of experimentation and research, of an increasing subtlety, plasticity, sounding of depths, expansion of seeking. There have been systems of specialisation and also conflicting claims and counterclaims, but the supervening tendency has been to combine, assimilate,

harmonise and synthesise. Four great systems of synthesis in the history of Hinduism are clearly discernible, and they are represented by the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, and the Tantra. In modern times, Hinduism is passing through the fifth stage of synthesis, represented by a new synthesis which is in the making.

It is remarkable to notice how through various stages of historical development, Hinduism provided a subtle combination of firmness and spiritual order, on the one hand, and untrammelled spiritual freedom, on the other.

In the first place, there developed the recognition of ever-enlarging principles and authorised scriptures. Some of these scriptures like the Gita possessed a common and widespread authority, and others were peculiar to sects or schools; some like the Vedas were supposed to have an absolute, others a relative binding force. A great care, however, was taken to ensure freedom of interpretation, and this prevented any of those authoritative scriptures from being turned into an instrument of ecclesiastic tyranny, denial of human mind and spirit. Another instrument of order was the power of family and communal tradition, *kuladharma*, persistent but not immutable. The third instrument was the religious authority of Brahmins, who stood as priests and scholars, as custodians of observance, but much more as custodians of religious tradition. And fourthly, firmness and spiritual order were secured by the succession of Gurus or spiritual teachers. In due course of history, there developed institutions of *sanghas*, of a sort of divided pontifical authority by Shankaracharya, of the Sikh Khalsa, and the adoption of the congregational form of *samaj* by the modern reforming sects. But it is noteworthy that even in these attempts, the freedom and plasticity and living sincerity of the religious mind of India always prevented it from

initiating anything like the over-blown ecclesiastical order of despotic hierarchies.

The consequent result is that it is impossible to describe the Hindu spirituality and religion by any exclusive label. Even in its various forms, it cannot be described as monotheism or pantheism or deism or transcendentalism, although each of these is present in it in some tacit or pronounced way. Even the spiritual truths behind the primitive forms such as those of animism, fetishism, totemism have been allowed to play a role in its complex totality, although their external forms have been discouraged and are not applicable to those who lead an inner mental and spiritual life. It is this complexity that bewilders the foreign student when he tries to define Hinduism in terms and under criteria that are not born of the great Indian historical movements. But things become easier once it is grasped that the fundamental point of reference is not the outward form of any belief but the spirit behind and the justifying spiritual experience.

Hinduism is the worship of one Godhead as the All, for all in the universe is That; godheads are made out of that being. The Indian religion is not therefore pantheism, for beyond universality, it recognises supra-cosmic Eternal. Hindu polytheism is not popular paganism. In Hinduism, the worshipper of many gods still knows that all his divinities, forms, names, personalities are the powers of the One; his gods are energies of the one divine Force. Even the Indian image worship is not the idolatry of a barbaric or undeveloped mind, for even the most ignorant know that the image is the symbol and support and can be dispensed with it when its use is over.

All forms of religions in Hinduism turn irresistibly towards the fathomless truths of Vedanta. Hinduism is only distinguished from other creeds by its traditional

scriptures, cults and symbols; yet the significance of Hinduism lies in the way in which it has shaped itself to retain its essential character of a vast, many-sided, progressive and self-enlarging system of spiritual culture, at the summits of which are systems of Yoga and Syntheses of Yoga, of exploration, verification and acquisition of new knowledge.

Hinduism avoided the error of imposing a single dogmatic and inflexible rule on every man or woman regardless of the potentialities of his or her nature. It recognised the need to draw him gently upward and help him to grow steadily in religious and spiritual experience. Towards this end, every human nature, every characteristic turn of its action was given a place in the system; each was suitably surrounded with the spiritual idea and a religious influence, each provided with steps by which it might rise towards its own spiritual possibility and significance. The highest spiritual meaning was set on the summits of each evolving power of the human nature. It has, therefore, been said meaningfully that for a Hindu the whole of life is religion. No step can be taken in the inner or outer life without being reminded of the underlying truth of spiritual significance.

The enabling factor, which made this pervasive influence of religion and spirituality on every Hindu discipline, is idea of *adhikara*. Hinduism set up on its summit an extremely high-pitched spiritual call, a standard of conduct which can be considered to be absolute. But it did not go about its work with a summary rigidity. It recognised that in life there are infinite differences between one human being and another. Some are more inwardly evolved, others are less mature, many if not most are infant souls incapable of great steps and difficult efforts. Each one needs to be dealt with according to his or her

nature, and the station of his or her soul as also in keeping with the requisite need of each one to rise to the next higher stage. According to the *adhikara* or qualification that one possesses, a corresponding effort was laid down and demanded.

In practical effect, a gradation of three stages in the growing human consciousness came to be recognised and provided for:

(i) the first stage or level was that of the crude, ill-formed, still outward, still vital and physically minded;

(ii) the second was more developed and capable of a much stronger and deeper psycho-spiritual experience; and

(iii) the third was that of the ripest and most developed of all, ready for the spiritual heights, fit to receive or to climb towards the loftiest ultimate truth of spiritual reality.

It was to meet the need of the first stage or level that Hinduism created that mass of suggestive ceremonies and effective rituals and strict outward rule and injunction and pageant of attracting and compelling symbol. In the Vedic times, the outward ritual sacrifice and at a later period all the religious forms and ceremonies of temple worship, and constant festival were intended to serve this first stage. Many of these things may seem to the developed mind to belong to an ignorant or half awakened religionism, but they have their underlying truth and their psychic value and are indispensable in this stage for the development and difficult awakening of the soul that is shrouded in the ignorance of material Nature.

The bulk of people who belong to the second stage may start from these things and can get behind them. They are capable of understanding more clearly and consciously the truth of the conceptions of the intelligence, the aesthetic indications, the ethical values and all the other mediating directions which Hinduism took care to place behind its symbols. These intermediate truths vivify the outward forms of the system and those who can grasp them can go through these mental indices towards things that are beyond the mind and approach the profoundest truths of the spirit.

Religion and spirituality for people belonging to this second stage provided opulent material in the form of philosophic, psycho-spiritual, ethical, aesthetic and emotional forms of seeking. At this stage, there intervene the philosophical systems, the subtle illuminating debates and inquiries of the thinkers, the more passionate reaches of devotion, and austerer ideals of *dharma*.

The third stage, the loftiest stage of spiritual evolution, goes beyond all symbols and middle significances in order to arrive at the absolute and universal divine love, the beauty of All-beautiful, noblest *dharma* of unity with all beings, universal compassion and benevolence, the upsurge of the psychical being into the spiritual ecstasy. It is here that Hinduism provided various systems of Yoga so as to arrive at an identity with the self and spirit, or at a dwelling in or with God, at the practice of the divine law and at the highest spiritual universality in communication with transcendence.

The frame of Hinduism which provided to each individual the needed guidance, the required inspiration, and the needed law of development was constituted by a triple quartet.

Its first circle was that of four *purusharthas*, the synthesis and gradation of the fourfold objects of life, vital desire, and hedonistic enjoyment (*kama*), personal and communal interest (*artha*), moral right and law (*dharma*) and spiritual liberation (*moksha*).

Its second circle was the fourfold order of society, carefully graded and equipped with its fixed economic functions and its deeper cultural, ethical and spiritual significances. This order which came to be called *varna vyavastha* provided to the Brahmin the function and *dharma* of the pursuit of knowledge, to *kshatariya* the function and *dharma* of the pursuit of courage and heroism, to the *vaishya* the function and *dharma* of interchange, mutuality and economic sustenance of the society, and to the *shudra* the function and *dharma* of the pursuit of skill, labour and service.

The third circle of Hinduism was that of the fourfold scheme of the successive stages of life, those of the student, the householder, the forest recluse, and the free supra-social man. This frame which has been called *ashrama vyavastha* provided to the student, the function and *dharma* of study, discipline and restraint (*brahmacharya*); to the householder (*grihastha*) the function and *dharma* of marriage and multiple responsibilities of family and social relationships; to the forest recluse (*vanaprastha*) function and *dharma* of retirement from ordinary occupations so as to be engaged in reflection, contemplation and imparting of education to oneself and to others. For the free supra-social man, (*sanyasin*), the function and *dharma* was so large and free that one could arrive ultimately at the highest and perfect stage of consciousness and action.

It is true that this framework of Hinduism subsisted in its fine effectiveness during the later Vedic and heroic age of civilisation, and afterwards it crumbled slowly or

lost its completeness and order. But the tradition had some large effect throughout the whole period of cultural vigour. And later on, when the framework declined, something of the ancient and noble Aryan system still persisted. Even today when there is a need to build a new framework, the original conceptions that lay behind the ancient frame promise to play a major role and will probably impel new forms that will express the ancient spiritual aims as also those modern ideals which are striving to be actualised in the life of collectivities.

In is necessary to emphasise that the goal sought after by Hinduism encouraged and inspired multisided development of all aspects of human nature and all parts of the being. In order to reach this goal, Hinduism has permitted bold and adventurous experiments, and it has shown that the Infinite can only be reached in fullness if we have grown integrally. That is the reason why Hinduism underlined the value of life and insisted on its multisided training. Even the most extreme philosophies and religions which hold life to be ultimately meaningless, did not lose sight of the truth of the need of high level of intellectual or emotional or dynamic development before one can arrive at the Permanent and Absolute which is perceived as the denial of the temporal being. Lessons learnt from these extreme positions have been given their proper place and value.

It must be stated that the early Vedic religion did not deny life. Upanishads, too, did not deny life, but held that the world is a manifestation of the Eternal, of Brahman. They declared that all here is Brahman, all is in the Spirit and the Spirit is in all, that the self-existent Spirit has become all these things and creatures; life too is Brahman, the life-spirit, *vayu*, is the manifest and evidently *pratyaksha* Brahman. But they affirmed that the present way of existence of man is not the highest or

the whole. They underlined that the human being can be fulfilled and perfected when it grows out of the physical and mental ignorance into spiritual self-knowledge. Negative and pessimistic ideas in regard to life have been constantly combated by the Hindu mind. And at the present time, the most vital movements of Hindu thought and religion are moving again towards the synthesis of spirituality and life, which was an essential part of the ancient Indian ideal.

It is the life-affirming motivation that lies at the root of the best of what India attempted and achieved in various domains of life, -- spiritual, religious, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, scientific, technological, literary, economic, social, and political. Again, the Hindu emphasis on life developed the insistence whereby culture came to be shared by the whole nation in the common life. The entire aim of Hinduism was that the God-knowledge, soul-knowledge and world-knowledge should be spread increasingly among larger and larger sections of people and at each succeeding stage of history of Hinduism, we can notice how larger and larger sections of people came to be embraced in its ever-growing sweep.

In sum, it can be said that the whole sense of the striving of Hinduism has been to secure the development of spirituality in humanity in all its parts, to help the human being to become not only conscious of the eternal and infinite, but also to live in its power universalised, spiritualised and divinised. The aim has been not merely to bring individuals to states of integral perfection but also to help the entire humanity to find its fulfilment in the realisation of collective harmony and perfection.

THE VEDA IN THE LIGHT OF SRI AUROBINDO

I

The Veda or at least the Samhita of the Rigveda appears to be the earliest literary composition of humanity. There might have been earlier or contemporaneous compositions but they seem to have been lost in the tides and ebbs of time and we do not know what thoughts and aspirations they might have expressed. Considering, however, that there was, in the earlier stages, a remarkable tradition of mysteries, Orphic and Eleusinian in Greece, of occult lore and magic in Egypt and Chaldea, of Magi in Persia, and of the Rishis in India, there might have been in them something common but what could have been their contents, can probably be imagined only with the aid of the Veda, which is the only remnant of its kind of those early times.

How old is the Veda is not known and there are speculations and considerations, which supposed for it an almost enormous antiquity. However, the text of the Veda that we possess today seems to have remained uncorrupted for over two thousand years because an accurate text, accurate in every syllable, accurate in every accent, was a matter of supreme importance to Vedic ritualists. The sanctity of the text prevented such interpolations, alterations and modernising versions as have affected the text form of the Mahabharata.

There does not seem to be much doubt that the Samhita has substantially remained unaltered, after it

was arranged by the great sage and compiler Vyasa. Thanks to the fidelity of the ancient memorisers and their successors, who continue their tradition to the present day, we have a text, which does not call for the licentious labour of emendation. In the fixed tradition of the Veda, which extends in India over at least four thousand years, it has been held as authoritative and true in the Brahmans and the Upanishads, Tantra and Puranas, in the doctrines of great orthodox philosophical schools and in the teachings of famous saints and sages.

The very term Veda means *knowledge* and by *knowledge*, the tradition means the knowledge of the highest spiritual truth of which the human mind is capable. In contrast, the current interpretations of the Veda and those of modern western scholars lead us to the conclusion that the sublime sacred tradition of the Veda as the book of knowledge is a colossal fiction. According to them, the Vedic text contains nothing more than the naïve, superstitious fancies of the 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. They acknowledge, of course, occasional passages of some profound meaning but they are viewed as quite out of harmony with the general drift of the entire corpus. They want us to believe that the true foundation or starting-point of the later religions and philosophies is the Upanishad; and the Upanishad, in turn, is required to be conceived by us as a revolt of philosophical and speculative minds against the ritualistic materialism of the Vedas.

How are we to understand this contradiction? How can we escape or resolve this contradiction? As we turn the pages of the Vedic literature, we fall into various kinds of confusions, and although we might gain some

insights here and there, it is only in Sri Aurobindo that we find a clear statement of the problem and its solution. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo himself had, to begin with, accepted without examination, before himself reading the Veda, the conclusions of European scholarship both as to religious and historical as well as ethical sense of the Vedic hymns.

It was only after his arrival in Pondicherry in 1910 that in the course of his yogic experiences, his thoughts seriously turned to the Veda. We must remember that by the time he had arrived in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo had already been firmly established in two basic realisations of yoga, and had made a discovery as a basis of his third great realisation of the transition between the mind and the supermind and to the supermind itself.

The first realisation was that of the transcendental silent Brahman. He had attained to this realisation within three days of his concentration at Baroda, in 1907, when under the instruction of an adept, Lele, he could bring about utter silence of the mind.

His second major realisation had come to him when he was detained in Alipore jail in 1908 during the course of his trial under the charge of sedition. It was in the jail that the earlier realisation of the silent Brahman expanded into the realisation of the universal dynamic Divine, and he realised the dynamic presence and action of Sri Krishna Vasudeva everywhere. It was again in the same jail that Sri Aurobindo heard the voice of Swami Vivekananda for a fortnight and received the knowledge of planes of consciousness between the mind and the supermind.

After his acquittal from the jail, Sri Aurobindo continued the inner yogic development, which led him to leave Calcutta under the direct command of the Divine, and arrive at Pondicherry, after a short sojourn

at Chandernagore. At Chandernagore, Sri Aurobindo lived in deep meditation, where while in his descending process of Yoga, he had reached the last level of physical subconscient, in his ascending process, he had vision to the extreme Overmind border. At a certain stage of intensity, Sri Aurobindo found himself precipitated into the Supreme light. He had touched the Supermind.

After coming to Pondicherry, when he began to study the Veda, Sri Aurobindo discovered that the Supermind was a lost secret of the Veda. He found, in the Rigveda, many clues to his own experiences, and came to understand how the Vedic Rishis had opened the great passage, *mahas panthah*. He himself has given brief indications of his discovery of the secret of the Veda, and they are so interesting that we may refer to some of them here:

"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...

...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."[1]

There is a profound statement in one of the hymns of Vamadeva, where the poet speaks of secret words of knowledge that expressed their meaning only to the seer: "*ninya vacamsi nivacana kavaye kavyani.*" This statement appears to be illustrated strikingly when we see that the secret words of the Veda that were ignored by the priest, the ritualist, grammarian, pundit, historian and mythologist, revealed their secret to the seer-poet, Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo's experiences confirm the belief of the Vedic Rishis that their mantras were inspired from a higher hidden plane of conscious-ness and contained a secret knowledge and that the words of the Veda could only be known in their true meaning by one who is himself a seer or a mystic.

In one of the hymns of the Rigveda, the Vedic word is described (Rigveda X.71) as that which is supreme and the topmost height of speech, the best and the most faultless. It has been said that it is something that is hidden in secrecy and from there comes out and is manifested. It enters, we are told, into the truth-seers or rishis and it is found by following their track of the

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[1] *Sri Aurobindo: The Secret of the Veda, Centenary Edition, pp.34-7.*

speech. We are told that all cannot enter into its secret meaning. It is declared that those who do not know the inner sense are as men who though seeing, see not, hearing, hear not; only to one here and there, the Word desiring him, like a beautifully robed wife to a husband lays open her body. We are further told that others unable to drink steadily of the milk of the Word, the Vedic cow, move with it as one that gives no milk, to him the Word is a tree without flowers or fruits. All this seems to be confirmed in Sri Aurobindo's experience of the Vedic hymns. It seems, as though, as soon as Sri Aurobindo touched the Vedic Word, the inner and secret vibrations of that Word began to reveal its resonances with his spiritual experiences and that Word began to reveal its secret.

The hymns of the Veda possess, according to Sri Aurobindo, a finished metrical form, a constant subtlety and skill in the technique, great variations of style and poetical personality. They are not, he asserts, the works of rude, barbarous, and primitive craftsmen, but are the living breath of a supreme and conscious art, forming its creations in the puissant but well governed movement of a self-observing inspiration.

Vedic poetry is mantric poetry, and as Sri Aurobindo points out in his "The Future Poetry", the mantra is only possible when three highest intensities of speech meet and become indissolubly one, -- a highest intensity of rhythmic movement, a highest intensity of interwoven verbal form and thought-substance, of style, and a highest intensity of the soul's vision of truth. The Vedic poets are, in Sri Aurobindo's view, masters of a consummate technique and 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.

Sri Aurobindo discovered in the utterances of the greatest seers Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others, the most extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry. Sri Aurobindo concluded that 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 he found that all the future spirituality of Indian people was contained there in seed or in first expression.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Vedic Rishis had discovered secrets and powers of Nature, which were not those of the physical world but which could bring occult mastery over the physical world and physical things and to transmit and systematise that occult knowledge and power was also one of their serious occupations. Elaborating this point, he says:

"But all this could only be safely done by a difficult and careful training, discipline, purification of the nature; it could not be done by the ordinary man. If men entered into these things without a severe test and training it would be dangerous to themselves and others; this knowledge, these powers could be misused, misinterpreted, turned from truth to falsehood, from good to evil. A strict secrecy was therefore maintained, the knowledge handed down behind a veil from master to disciple. A veil of symbols was created behind which these mysteries could shelter,

formulas of speech also which could be understood by the initiated but were either not known by others or were taken by them in an outward sense which carefully covered their true meaning and secret."[2]

Sri Aurobindo proceeded, in due course, to study Brahmanas and the Upanishads, and various other interpretations of the Veda. He examined Vedic scholars, beginning from Yaska ending with Sayana, studied the mythological, legendary and historical elements, tested the modern theories and other reliance on comparative philology, studied Tilak's contributions, Swami Dayananda's interpretation as also the thesis put forward by Mr. Ayer. He finally came to frame a hypothesis on which he conducted his own inquiry. According to this hypothesis:

"The Veda has a double aspect and that the two, though closely related, must be kept apart. The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external Powers of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates and is more pervading, close-knit and coherent than the physical. The Veda is primarily intended to serve for spiritual enlightenment and self-culture."[3]

The task that Sri Aurobindo undertook was to restore the primary intention of the Veda, and in this task he welcomed each of the ancient and modern systems of

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[2] *Sri Aurobindo: Hymns to the Mystic Fire, Centenary Edition, p. 4*

[3] *Sri Aurobindo: The Secret of the Veda, Centenary Edition, p. 30*

interpretation and found in each of them an indispensable assistance. He found that Yaska and Sayana supplied the ritualistic framework of outward symbols and the large store of traditional significances and explanations. In the Upanishads, he found various clues to the psychological and philosophical ideas of the Vedic Rishis, and he underlined their method of spiritual experience and intuition. In European scholarship, he appreciated the critical method of comparative research, which when perfected, would be found capable of increasing immensely the materials available and, therefore, eventually, of giving a scientific certainty and firm intellectual basis. From Swami Dayananda, he received the clue to the linguistic secrets of the Rishis and the idea of the One Being with the Devas, expressing in numerous names and forms the many-sidedness of His unity.

II

According to the psychological theory, which Sri Aurobindo has presented in his "*The Secret of the Veda*" and "*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*", Veda recognises an Unknowable, Timeless, Unnameable behind and above all things, and not seizable by the studious pursuits of the mind. A clear enunciation of this view is to be found in the Rigveda, in the first Mandala, in the 170th Sukta, where Indra declares:

"It is not now, nor is It tomorrow; who knoweth That which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes."

Impersonally, it is That, -- the one existence, -- *tad ekam*, but to the pursuit of our personality it reveals

itself out of the secrecy of things as God or *deva*, the nameless that has many names.

The Supreme Reality is divine existence, builder of the worlds, lord and begetter of all beings, Male and Female, Being and Consciousness, Father and Mother of the worlds and their inhabitants. He is also their son, and ours; for he is the Divine Child born into the worlds, who manifests himself in the growth of the creature.

The Supreme Reality is a triple divine principle and the source of the Beatitude. That Reality, the *deva*, is the Friend and Lover of man, the pastoral Master of the Herds, who gives us the sweet milk and the clarified butter from the udder of the shinning cow of the infinitude, *Aditi*. This *deva* is to be found by the soul of man who soars as the Bird, -- the *Hamsa*, passes the shinning firmaments of physical and mental consciousness, climbs as a traveller and fighter beyond earth of body, and heaven of mind and ascends on the path of the Truth. When the soul discovers the Truth, it attains to the ambrosial wine of divine delight. By drinking that delight, *Soma*, which is drawn from the sevenfold waters of existence, or pressed out from the luminous plant of the hill of being and uplifted by its raptures, it attains to immortality.

The path to the truth and immortality has been built by the fathers, *pitarah*, and they, too, like the gods, help us in our journey. There are *Ribhus*, those ancient human beings, who had attained to the condition of godhead by power of knowledge and perfection in their works and they are invited to participate in our human journey to fashion for us the things of immortality even as they had fashioned for themselves.

Our life here is a battle in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest. This battle was fought by the human fathers, *pitaro manushyah*, the divine

Angirasas, and they had attained a great victory, which can come to us also by following the path that they have hewn for us. The *Angirasas* are the hill-breakers, the givers of the oblation, dwellers in the heat and light, slayers of the *Vritra*, conquerors of the foes. *Angirasas* seek the conquest of the world of *swar*, -- the fourth world of the Vedic knowledge.

The thought by which the *swar* is conquered is the seven-headed thought born form the Truth. It was discovered by *Ayasya*, the companion of the *navagvas*. The seven-headed thought of *Ayasya* enabled him to become universal, possessor of all the worlds of the soul, and by becoming universal, he manifested a certain fourth world, *turiyam svid janayad vishwa-janyah*. The conquest of the fourth world was the aim of the great work accomplished by the *Angirasa Rishis*. We, too, are called upon to make that conquest and like the *Angirasas*, we, too, can attain to the secret well of honey and pour out the bellowing fountains of sweetness in manifold streams. These streams are, indeed, those seven rivers poured down the hill by *Indra* after slaying *Vritra*, -- the streams of truth, the seven principles of consciousness in their divine fulfilment in the truth and bliss.

These seven principles explain the complex systems of the world, which we find both within and without, subjectively cognised and objectively sensed. It is a rising tier of earths and heavens. These seers often image them in a series of trios. There are three earths and three heavens. There is a triple world below consisting of heaven, earth, and intervening mid-region, -- *dyau, prthvi* and *antariksha*. There is a triple world between, the shinning heavens of the sun; and there is a triple world above, -- the supreme and rapturous abodes of the godheads.

In other words, there are seven worlds in principle, five in practice, three in their general groupings:

1. The Supreme *Sat-Chit-Ananda*	The Triple Divine worlds
2. The Link-world Supeprmind	The Truth, Right, Vast, manifested in *Swar*, with its three luminous heavens
3. The triple lower-world Pure Mind	Heaven (*Dyaus*, the three heavens)
Life-force	The Mid-Region (*Antarisksha*)
Matter	Earth (The Three Earths)

We draw from the life-world our vital being. We draw from the mind-world our mentality; we are ever in secret communication with them. We can consciously dwell in them. We can also rise into solar worlds of the Truth and enter into the portals of the Superconscient, cross the threshold of the Supreme. The divine doors can swing open to our ascending soul.

The human ascension provides significance to the life of man. Man can rise beyond mind and live in the home of the gods, Cosmic Powers who unyoke their horses in the world of the Supermind, the world of the Truth-consciousness. Man, who ascends to that Truth-Consciousness, strives no longer as a thinker but is victoriously the seer. He is no more *manishi*; he is a *rishi*. His will, life, thought, emotions, sense, act are all transformed into values of peace and truth and remain no longer an embarrassed or a helpless vehicle of mixed truth and falsehood. He follows a swift and conquering

straightness. He feeds no longer on broken fragments but is suckled by the teats of Infinity. He has to break through and pass out beyond our normal firmaments of earth and heaven and conquering firm possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Heights, he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of Immortality.

The secret of ascension is sacrifice. The Vedic sacrifice is symbolic in character. Just as we find in the Gita the word *yajña* used in symbolic sense for all actions, whether internal or external, even so, the Vedic *yajña* is psychological in character to indicate that all action is consecrated to the gods or to the Supreme. If *yajña* is the action consecrated to the gods, then the *yajamana*, the sacrificer, is the doer of the action. The offerings of *yajña* are principally *ghrita* and *soma*. *Ghrita*, which means clarified butter, indicates in its esoteric sense rich or warm brightness representing clarity of thought. *Soma* is the delight that is born from the purification of all the members of the being, widely spread out of the sieve of purification.[4]

The fruits of the offering are also symbolical, namely, cows, horses, gold, offspring, men, physical strength, victory in battle. Physical light is psychologically a symbol of divine knowledge. Cow and horse symbolise two companion ideas of light and energy – consciousness and force, -- *chit shakti*. Offsprings are symbolically flowers of new consciousness, while men and physical strength are symbolical of spiritual valour and courage.

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[4] *See the first Sukta of the ninth Mandala of the Rigveda, which speaks of the widespread sieve of purification. It states further: "He tastes not that delight who is unripe and whose body has not suffered in the heat of the fire; they alone are able to bear that and enjoy it who have been prepared by the flame."*

The gods to whom sacrifice is to be offered have psychological functions. To the Vedic seers they are living realities. They are not simple poetic personifications of abstract ideas; they are beings of the Supreme Being.

The first god to be invited to our human journey in our sacrifice is *Agni*, which symbolises the seven-tongued power of the soul, a force of God instinct with knowledge. *Agni* opens the way for the action of *Indra*, who symbolises the power of pure existence, self-manifested as the divine mind. As *Agni* rises upward from earth to heaven, so *Indra* is the light instinct with force, which descends from heaven to earth. *Indra* comes down to our world as the hero with shinning horses and slays darkness and division with his lightning, poured down in the life-giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, *Sarama*, symbolising intuition, the lost or hidden illuminations. He makes that Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality.

Surya is the sun, the master of the Supreme Truth, truth of being, truth of knowledge, truth of possession and act and movement and functioning. *Surya* is also *Savitri*, the creator or manifester of all things, and illuminations we seek are the herds of this Sun, who come to us in the track of *Usha*, who symbolises the divine dawn. These illuminations lead us up to the highest beatitude, which is symbolised by *Soma*.

But if the truth of *Surya* is to be established firmly in our mortal nature, there are four conditions that are indispensable: First, we have to establish *Varuna* who symbolises vast purity and clear wideness destructive of all sins and crooked falsehood. *Varuna* is always accompanied by *Mitra*, who symbolises the luminous power of love and comprehension, leading and forming into harmony our thoughts, acts and impulses. But this is not enough; we have to establish in us an immortal

puissance of clear, discerning aspiration symbolised by *Aryaman*. The last condition is that of happy spontaneity of the right enjoyment of all things dispelling the evil dream of sin and error and suffering. This condition is fulfilled by *Bhaga*.

There are many other gods as *Vayu*, the master of life-energy, *Brihaspati*, the power of the soul; *Ashwins*, the lords of bliss; *Vishnu*, the all-pervading godhead; and *Shiva* and *Rudra*, the mighty, who breaks down all defective formations and who is also the supreme healer.

There are also female energies, among whom *Aditi*, infinite mother of the gods, comes first, and there are five powers of truth-cosnciousness: *mahi* or *bharati* – vast word; *Ila*, the power of revelation; *Saraswati*, the power of inspiration; *Sarama*, the power of intuition, the hound of heaven, who descends into the cavern of the subcosncient and finds from there hidden illuminations; and *dakshina*, the power to discern rightly, to dispose the action and the offering and to distribute in the sacrifice to each godhead its portion. Each god, too, has his female energy.

In our ascension, we need to develop all the powers, symbolised by various godheads, so that we may attain to perfection. Perfection must be attained at all our levels, in the wideness of earth, our physical being and consciousness; in the full force of vital speed and action and enjoyment and nervous vibrations typified as the horse; in the perfect gladness of heart of emotion and a brilliant heat and clarity of mind throughout our intellectual and psychical being, in the coming of supramental light, which would transform all our existence; so comes the possession of truth, and by the truth admirable surge of the bliss and in the bliss infinite consciousness and absolute being.

Thus in the psychological theory, the Veda emerges as a great record of wisdom, already equipped with a profound psychological discipline. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"(Veda is) 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 trans-parent, of another and material sense but never losing sight even for a single moment of its high spiritual aim and tendency."[5]

III

The psychological theory was put forward by Sri Aurobindo as a hypothesis and the evidence that he adduced in his great book "*The Secret of the Veda*" establishes very clearly a *prima facie* case for the idea that the Vedic hymns are the symbolic gospel of the ancient Indian mystics and that their sense is spiritual and psychological. The soundness of the hypothesis comes out of the fact that the spiritual and psychological sense of the Veda clearly emerges from the language of the Veda itself. Sri Aurobindo showed that there are clear indications in the explicit language of the hymns which guide us to that sense. This was further supported by the interpretation of each important symbol and image and the right psychological functions of the gods. This was based on the internal evidence of the Vedic Suktas themselves. The sense discovered for each of the fixed terms of the Vedas is a firm and not a fluctuating sense founded on good philological foundation

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[5] *Sri Aurobindo: The Secret of the Veda, Centenary Edition, p.44*

and fitting naturally into the context wherever it occurs. The reason for this firmness lies in the fact that the language of the hymns is fixed and invariable. The Vedic language is like an algebraic language, and it has been scrupulously preserved. The Vedic diction consistently expresses either a formal creed and ritual or a traditional doctrine and constant experience. Indeed, if the hypothesis had to be thoroughly established, it would have been necessary to translate all the hymns of the Vedas and to show that the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo fits in naturally and easily in every context.

Sri Aurobindo had a plan to undertake this huge task but it could not be undertaken for want of time. In "*The Secret of the Veda*", the object that Sri Aurobindo had put forward was only to indicate the clue that he himself had received, the path and its principal turnings, the results that he had arrived at and the main indications by which the Veda itself helps us to arrive at them. But after completing "*The Secret of the Veda*", he undertook translation of all the *Agni Suktas* of the Rigveda and these translations establish his hypothesis on a very secure foundation.

More than foundational work has been accomplished and any researcher, who wants to undertake any further task, will find ample aid in Sri Aurobindo's "*The Secret of the Veda*" and "*Hymns to the Mystic Fire*".

It may be further mentioned that Sri Aurobindo wrote long commentaries on Ishopanishad and Kenopanishad. He translated also several other important Upanishads. These commentaries and translations show us the continuity between the Veda as Sri Aurobindo interpreted it and the Upanishads and suggests that the body of ideas and doctrines, which are found in the Upanishads, bore a more antique form of subsequent Indian thought and spiritual experience. This suggestion is further strengthened by what Sri

Aurobindo has written in his "*Foundation of Indian Culture*", on Indian religion and spirituality as also on the Veda, Upanishads and on the subsequent Indian literature.

Sri Aurobindo's "*Essays on the Gita*" helps us also in coming closer to the original sense of the Veda and, in that light, to a profounder sense of the Gita itself.

Sri Aurobindo looks upon the Veda as a record of Yogic experiences of our leading forefathers. He considers these experiences to serve as the seeds of the later developments of the Indian Yoga, including his own Integral Yoga. And when we study profundities of Integral Yoga and its relevance to our contemporary times, we cannot fail to appreciate the decisive presence and influence in it of the lofty and rich experiences of the Vedic Rishis. And we feel deeply grateful that by uncovering the inner sense of the Veda, Sri Aurobindo has made the Vedic fund of knowledge available to our present day humanity and has also shown how that fund of knowledge must be made alive if we are to solve the critical problems of our times.

In its scientific tradition, Yoga is an ever-progressive open book where ancient Rishis had handed over their riches of experience to the new Rishis for further enlargement and exploration. In the light of this, although Veda is regarded as authoritative, since spiritual experiences carry their own authority of veracity, the Veda is not the last word. The Vedic Rishis had themselves declared in the first Mandala itself: "*The priest of the Word climbs Thee like a ladder, O hundred powered; as one ascends from peak to peak, there is made clear the much that has still to be done.*"[6]

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[6] *Rigveda, I. 10.1,2*

In the Indian tradition, therefore, the experiences of past seers and sages have not only been verified and repeated but even intensified, enlarged, modified, even surpassed by the new seers and sages. It is recognised that the Divine is infinite and the unrolling of the Truth allows room for new discoveries, new statements and even new achievements. Sri Chaitanya and others, for example, developed an intensity of bhakti, which was absent in the Veda, and examples of this kind can be multiplied. Sri Aurobindo's own Integral Yoga marks a new development. Although in its integrality and synthesis, it absorbs all essential elements to be found in the Vedas and Upanishads and in the rest of Yogic traditions, which can contribute to the attainment of the new aim that has been envisaged, the central idea in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is to lead spiritual evolution to the next stage of the mutation of human species by bringing down the Supermind as the means of complete transformation of Nature. The idea of the Supermind, the Truth-consciousness, is there in the Rigveda, according to Sri Aurobindo's psychological theory of the Veda. For the Veda speaks of the discovery of the world of truth, right and the vast, *satyam*, *ritam* and *brihat*, which defines the nature of the Supermind. The idea of the Supermind is also present in the Upanishads when we see it in the conception of Being of Knwoledge, -- *vijnanamaya Purusha*, exceeding the mental, vital and physical being. But going beyond all this, Sri Aurobindo envisages the working of the supramental power not only as an influence on the physical being, giving it abnormal faculties, but as an entrance and permeation, changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical.

Sri Aurobindo did not learn the idea of the Supermind from the Veda and the Upanishads. What he

received about the Supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge. It was only afterwards that he found certain confirmatory revelations in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Nonetheless, to learn that the Supramental was discovered by the Vedic Rishis and that they had developed profound psychological discipline of the ascent of human consciousness and of the descent of the divine consciousness so as to facilitate the discovery of the Supermind must be considered to be of inestimable value.

In the development of knowledge, past gains give surer basis for the future development. The Vedic knowledge of the Supermind must, therefore, be regarded by the progressive humanity of today as a great boon and heritage which we must recover as a living aid in our forward march of evolution. This is, in any case, what we learn from what Sri Aurobindo has done in regard to the Veda, its psychological discipline, its discovery of the Supermind and many other important details of the Vedic Yoga.

Let me conclude by quoting from Sri Aurobindo what he wrote in his earliest manuscripts on the Veda:

"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...I believe that 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 and the world and among men... The Veda was the beginning of our spiritual knowledge; the Veda will remain its end. These compositions of an unknown antiquity are as the many breasts of eternal Mother of knowledge from which our succeeding ages have all

been fed. The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is therefore not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race. For I believe firmly that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return."[7]

[7] *Sri Aruobindo: India's Rebirth, pp. 90, 94-5.*

ELEMENTS OF POETICS AND POETRY IN THE VEDA

The very first thing that we may remark is that the Vedic Samhitas contain poetry of hundreds of poets, and even though they differ among themselves in style and power, they still share in common what may be called "algebraic notations", fund of images, figures, symbols, the adventurous climbing of the heights of visions and capability of infusing hue and colour, power and force, movement of rhythm and strength of substance in their poetry to such a great extent as to arrive at what may properly be called *mantric* power.

That Vedic poetry is mystic and symbolic can be noticed at once by taking a number of examples, even if we take them at random. And, if we realise that the Vedic poets composed their poems in words that were meant to be chanted and heard, we shall come to appreciate the metric mastery and sense of music of which they were capable. Even today, when we listen to the Vedic chants, we feel ourselves surcharged merely by the act of hearing with sublimity and purity of divine presence that begins to pervade not only our outer senses but also our inner mind and heart and deeper depths of our souls. And if we examine as to how this miracle has been created, we find that the Vedic poets had reached profound depths of poetics in regard to the word, -- its sound-value, its thought-value and its spiritual-value, as also in regard to rhythmic movement,

-- its metrical value, its creative value, and its inspirational value.

The Vedic poetics, we find, was based on the discovery of the secret of the cosmic creation where pulsations of manifestations follow vast but measured rhythms. The Vedic poetics discerns these rhythms and translates them in terms of the measurements of poetic meters, called *chhandas*. *Chhandas* are not, according to Vedic poetics, human creations derived from human conveniences of usage of words, their accents and their modulations. Even the words are to the Vedic poet not human in origin but are derived from sounds, -- potent sounds, -- which accompany original light and idea that are vibrant with the substance of Reality in its creative activity. The great meters of Vedic poetry, *Gayatri, Usnik, Anustup, Brihati, Pankti, Tristup,* and *Jagati,* each having specific number of syllables, represent vast rhythms of *rita*, which contain the occult power of universal and particular forms of harmony that abound the world of names and forms. It is this understanding of rhythms and meters that seems to have guided meticulous scruple that was insisted upon by the Vedic tradition in observance of different kinds of accents in pronunciation and in chanting of the hymns of the Vedas.

Rhythmic word, sound, music, metrical expressions, -- these are distinguishing features of poetry. But very often, these features are looked upon as mere aspects of technique of poetry and it is thought that if the technique is followed, we attain the right art of poetry. It is even thought that poetry is nothing but art of expression distinguishable from the art that is required in writing prose, even good prose. Unfortunately, it is not realised that poetry is not merely a matter of technique, that even prose can be poetic, if something that is essential to poetry, -- apart from technique, -- is

vibrantly present. The most important element in poetry, -- and this is what we find most prominently in the Veda and Upanishads, -- even in the prose elements of these great components – is fundamentally a quest. Just as philosophy is a quest, religion is a quest, science is a quest, or Yoga is a quest, poetry, too, is a quest, but it has its own technique and specific method and manner. All these pursuits have different methods of discovering the truth. Philosophy is the discovery of truth in intellectual conceptions or perceptions, arrived at by the method of ideation, ratiocination, and logical arrangement of thought-processes. Religion is devout pursuit of God through the method of worship, adoration, acceptance and practice of ethical and religious prescriptions. Science is a perception of processes of things, their mechanism and their synthetic idea arrived at by the method of observation and experimentation so as to facilitate repetition and verification and continued expansion. Poetry, too, is a quest of truth or feature of the truth which is inspired by inmost possible experience of any object, -- even a leaf or a stone or an event or Nature, or God or Spirit, provided that the experience is turned inward so as to create self-vision in the profounder depths of the inner being of the poet, which is thrown out in rhythmic movement by the discovery of the word or image or a figure or a symbol, which has, in its turn, the capacity of disclosing to the hearer the truth of that very experience, -- provided that it is not merely an outer imitation of outer features but an interpretative and creative revelation of its inmost truth.

Most importantly, however, vision of truth and pursuit of that vision are the most distinctive features of poetry. Vedic poetics, therefore, gives the highest place and name of *Kavi* to the one who attains the revealing sight, *drishti*, to the accompaniment of corresponding

hearing or *shruti*. *Kavi*, the poet, is compared to *Agni* (fire) because *Agni* has been conceived as *kavikratuh, satyah-chitra-shravastama*, the seer whose sight and will are identical and whose hearing is most inspired by multiple aspects of the truth. The highest perception of truth climbs from the physical to the vital, emotional, intellectual, intuitive, inspsired and comprehensive truth. The poet is the Rishi, when he sees the invisible and hears the inaudible; he is the *drashtā* when he sees the higher truth that lies beyond all narrowness in the wideness, in the *brihat* and in the highest ether of existence *parame vyomani*.[1]

The Vedic poet has sight behind the sight, and the ear behind the ear, -- *chakshushah chakshuh, shrotrasya shrotram*, and the poetic word, -- its sound, its music – is discovered by the poet somewhere in the high regions of Truth, beyond the limits of the poet's individuality. This is why it is regarded as *apaurusheya*, even though that word may have been coloured by the heart and the mind through which that original word travels before it is brought to the surface. As the Veda puts it, the rhythmic word or speech, the mantra, rises at once from the heart of the seer and from distant home of the Truth.

The word or speech which is born from the Truth combines three intensities, -- intensity of style, intensity of rhythm, and intensity of vision. And when these three intensities reach their climax and are combined together, the resultant is what the Veda calls *mantra*, the inevitable word or the expression that vibrates with the vision of the truth and which, when disclosed or heard by the hearer, can open up in him

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[1] *richo akshare parame vyoman yasmin deva adhi viśve niṣeduh*
yas tanna veda kim ṛchā karishyati ya it tad vidus ta ime samāsate.
Rigveda, I.164.39

the vibration of that vision and make it living and an upward ever-fresh movement.

It is for this reason that when we hear the Vedic poetry, the mantric poetry, we feel sparks of the hoof-beats of the white flame-horse *Dadhikravan*, galloping up the mountain of the gods or breath and hue of wing striking into wing of the irised broods of Thought flying over earth or up towards heaven.

The Vedic poet is the climber, and therefore, he is the *Arya* (the word *Arya* is derived from the root √*ri* to climb). The Vedic poet is thus the one who is in the midst of toil and battle of life. His poetry is, therefore, the poetry of life. And can there be poetry without life? Mere thought may be enough for philosophy, mere devotion may be enough for religion, mere observation may be enough for science, but poetry is a cry, a call, an aspiration that rises in the heat of life movement.

Another feature of poetry, -- and this is specially underlined in the Vedic poetics, -- is that it is creative expression of delight and beauty. Both Veda and Upanishads have discovered the inalienable delight of existence, celebrated as the elixir of immortality, the wine of *soma*, the drink which *Indra*, god of the divine mind, needs in order to nourish himself with strength and for emission of his shafts of lightning, flashes of illuminations. *Ashwins*, the physicians of the gods, are the special repositories of *Soma* and they carry with them bags of honey in their chariot so that they can heal the wounded, cure the sick and make the old young again. The Upanishads speak particularly of *ananda*, without which no creation is possible and nothing can be sustained. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* speaks of the knowledge of the Self, which opens the door to the self which is bliss, and points out that he who knows the Bliss and the Eternal, he fears not anything in this

world or elsewhere. The poet who celebrates the bliss of the self is, therefore, fearless victor.[2]

Beauty is but a form of bliss, and wherever there is depth of experience and of aesthesis which goes beyond personal reactions and passions of the mind, the poet is able to transform pain and sorrow and the most tragic and terrible and ugly things into forms of poetic beauty. Beauty is harmony of form, and although there can be and there are different views about harmony or what constitutes harmony, beauty always lies in the form that issues from bliss. The poet is always something more than a maker of beautiful words and phrases, more than a favoured child of fantasy and imagination, more than a careful fashioner of the idea and utterance and more than an effective thinker, moralist, dramatist, or story teller; for he is essentially a propounder of the eternal spirit of beauty and delight and shares that highest creative and self-expressive rapture which is close to the original ecstasy that is at the source of creation, the divine *ananda.*

Raso vai sah. He, the divine, is verily *rasa* which means a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotions and essential aesthesis, the source of pleasure in the pure and perfect sources of feelings. Following the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition, the ancient Indian critics defined the essence of poetry as *rasa,* and judged by this canon of criticism, this ancient poetry of the Veda and the Upanishad can really be regarded as an expression of inalienable *rasa* or joy that wells out from the spiritual self with its divine consciousness and knowledge and happier fountain of power. Indeed, the nearer the poet gets to the absolute

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[2] *yadā hyveaiṣa etasminn adriśye anātmye anirukte anilayane abhayam pratiṣṭham vindate atha so abhayam gato bhavati.*
Taittiriya Upanishad, II.7.

ananda, the greater becomes his joy in man and the universe and the greater is his receptivity to the creative spiritual emotions.

The Vedic poetics aims at becoming a vehicle of the voice of eternal things raising to a new significance and to a supremely satisfied joy in experience the events and emotions and transiences of life which can then be seen and sung as succession of signs, the changing of the steps of an eternal manifestation. Its object is to express the very self of man and the self of things and the self of Nature. And, finally, it aims at a creative and interpretative revelation of the infinite truth of existence and of the universal delight and beauty and of a greater spiritualised vision and power of life. All the Vedic poetry, whether in the Samhitas or in the Upanishads, provides ample fulfilment of these objectives. But since the poets of the Veda had a mentality other than ourselves and since their images of communication are of a peculiar kind, we have to appreciate that the cast of the Vedic vision is antique and therefore it gives a strange look to the substance intended to be communicated.

In order to enter into the heart of Vedic poetry, we need, first, to emphasise that for the Vedic poets, the physical and the psychical worlds were twofold and diverse and yet connected. For them, figures of cosmic godheads applied both to the inner and outer life of man; and they visualised human commerce with the divine, -- with the gods behind whom was the one Spirit or Being, of which the gods were names and personalities and powers. Secondly, the Vedic Rishis looked upon the life of man as a thing of mixed truth and falsehood. They aimed at utilising life as a field of battle where we rise from mixed light and darkness to the splendour of divine Truth, whose home is above in the Infinite but which can be built up here in the

human soul and life. To them, life was a climbing from mortality to immortality through a battle between the children of Light and the sons of Night. Thirdly, the Vedic Rishis spoke of these things in a fixed system of images taken from Nature and from the surrounding life of the warlike pastoral and agricultural Aryan people and centred around the cult of Fire and the worship of the powers of living Nature and the institution of sacrifice. But they looked upon these images as symbols, which had living and powerful suggestions and counterparts of inner things. Fourthly, it is also significant that in spite of the large number of poets whose poems are to be found in the Vedic Samhitas, they shared a fixed and yet variable body of images and a glowing web of myths and parables. And, fifthly, Vedic Rishis also took care to see that the inner meaning could be understood by those who had entered into a certain order of psychic experience and spiritual realities.

We may also note that the peculiar system of images and the complexity of its thought and symbolised experience which began in the Veda reappeared constantly in later Indian writings, in the Tantras and the Puranas, as also in the figures of the Vaishnava poets. It is also notable that a certain element of this tradition appears even in the modern poetry of Tagore. Just as the Vaishnava poetry of Bengal uses images and figures which to the devout mind communicate the love of the human soul for God, even though to the profane they may appear to be nothing but a sensuous and passionate love poetry, -- even so, the Vedic figures and symbols had deeper spiritual significance, while they appeared purely physical and ritualistic to those who had not yet entered into the inner sanctuary where the battle between the dark and luminous figures is being fought so as to arrive at the home of the Truth and the

home of immortality. The Vedic method, however, differs somewhat from the method of Vaishnava poetry in the fact that the Vedic imagery and symbolism constitute only a translucent veil so that it is easier to lift it and pass to the open revelation.

Both in regard to the substance and the poetic quality of the Veda, it would be extremely helpful to study the following passage from Sri Aurobindo, who is the latest interpreter of the Vedic Samhitas and who has discovered the secret of the Vedic symbolism and also the secret knowledge contained in these Samhitas:

"The Veda... 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 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 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."[3]

It is also significant that Sri Aurobindo has indicated in his great book on theory of poetry, *The Future Poetry*, how modern trends in poetry indicate the possibility in Eastern languages of a truer understanding of the Vedic idea and practice of *mantra* and even of the discovery of a new poetic creation that would embody a new *mantric* poetry. He has also suggested that, considering the past evolution of English poetry and considering the trends that are visible in greater poets like Whitman, Meredith, Carpenter, A.E. Yeats and Tagore, that language, too, may turn to the discovery of *mantric* poetry and even the expression of that poetry through the vehicle of the English language. It is also remarkable that Sri Aurobindo himself wrote his great epic *Savitri*, which is the longest poem in English literature, to embody and to give full expression to *mantric* poetry in which the Vedic poetics is fully illustrated. It is thus opportune that we ourselves who are students of the Vedic literature turn vigorously to the study of Vedic poetics and prepare the ground for the creation once more of *mantric* poetry in Sanskrit and other Indian languages.

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[3] *Sri Aurobindo: The Foundations of Indian Culture, Sri Aurobindo Library Edition, 1970, pp. 266-67*

GODS IN THE VEDAS AND PURANAS

History of Indian religion and spirituality has an inner continuity, even though forms and atmosphere have changed from time to time in the course of millennia. The Vedic beginning was so vast and so lofty, so comprehensive in its seed-form that the later developments could be considered to be growing forms necessitated by changing circumstances in terms of varying emphases on intellectuality, emotionality and sensuality as also by the boldness of experimental spirit that wanted to bring larger and larger sections of people, larger and larger gradations of people into the realm of experience of the secrets which were originally reserved only for the initiates.

The outer Vedic religion had behind it an esoteric synthesis of Yoga which had discovered the presence and operation of a number of godheads who were still cosmic expressions of the One Supreme, -- *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti.* The aim of the Vedic Yoga was to unite the human with the Supreme by the aid of the godheads and by purifying and perfecting human faculties so as to raise them up to the qualities and powers represented by the godheads. Perfectibility of the human being and attainment of immortality by enlarging the domains of human consciousness into the corresponding cosmic domains and even by reaching the transcendental Being through supreme experiences of love, joy, power, peace, knowledge and

ineffable Presence and Being was the special aim of this Yoga. This esoteric Yoga did not look upon godheads as mere powers of Physical Nature, even though their descriptions, which were meant for outer religious rituals, appear to give that impression. The gods were, to the Vedic initiates, psychological and spiritual powers, and their reality as living beings, with whom contacts can be made by means of secret words of invocation as also by means of sacrifice through processes of psychological purification, concentration and progressive self-offering.

It was this esoteric Yoga which was rediscovered by the Upanishads, and although they undertook and accomplished another synthesis of Yoga – that of different disciplines of knowledge, -- it retained close connection and knowledge of the Vedic gods and goddesses. *Agni*, *Vayu*, *Indra*, *Surya* and others were understood by the Upanishads as intimately as did the Vedic Rishis, and although they did not use profusion of symbolism, they did continue the system of symbolism, and today when we try to understand the secrets of the Vedas and Upanishads, we find that Vedas can be understood through Upanishads, and Upanishads can be best understood through the Vedas.

It is, however, argued that when we come to the post-Vedic age, and particularly the age of Puranas, the changes are so great and radical that one would be inclined to suggest some kind of discontinuity in the heritage derived from the Vedas. But a deeper study will show that there was no discontinuity or any radical departure from the original Vedic aim or concepts.

There was, no doubt, gradual fading out of the prominent Vedic forms and the substitution of others. There was a transformation of symbol in ritual and ceremony; there was even a development of novel

idea forms, which sprouted from the seed of the original thinking. In the Puranas we find a farther widening and fathoming of psychic and spiritual experience although it was less lofty than the Vedic experience. The Vedic gods rapidly lost their deep original significance; they even came to be overshadowed by the great Trinity, *Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva*; ultimately they faded altogether. A new pantheon appeared, which, in its outward symbolic aspect, expressed a deeper truth and larger range of religious experience, and intense feeling, a vaster idea. The Vedic sacrifice persisted to some extent, but 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. In the Veda, Vedic gods figured in the mantras conveying the mental shifting images; in the Puranas they yielded to more precise conceptual forms of the two great deities, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, and all their *Shaktis* and their offshoots.

It has been argued that the Trinity which became so dominant in the Puranas had minor importance in the Vedas. But while it is true that number of hymns addressed to *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* were fewer than those addressed to gods like *Agni* and *Indra*, it must be emphasised that they were not less significant or important. The functions assigned to them in the Vedas were much larger, more cosmic, even more overriding. And in the Puranas these functions came to be emphasised with overarching prominence.

The *Maruts* have been declared in the Vedas as children of *Rudra*, and they are not divinities superior to their fierce and Mighty father. But the number of hymns addressed to *Maruts* is much larger, and they are more constantly eminent in connection with other gods; but this is because the functions they fulfilled was of a

constant and immediate importance in the Vedic discipline. On the other hand, *Vishnu*, *Rudra*, *Brahmanaspati*, the Vedic originals of the later Puranic Triad *Vishnu-Shiva-Brahma*, provided the conditions of the Vedic work and stood themselves behind the more present and active gods, but are less close to it and in appearance less continually concerned with daily movements.

The Puranic understanding of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* has a direct link and dependence on the Vedic understanding of *Brahmanaspati*, *Rudra* and Vishnu. The Veda describes *Brahmanaspati* as the Creator by the Word. *Brahmanaspati* brings out light and physical cosmos out of the darkness of the inconscient ocean and speeds the forms of conscious beings upward to their supreme goal. It is from this creative aspect of *Brahmanaspati* that the later conception of *Brahma*, the Creator seems to have developed.

Both *Brahmanaspati* and *Rudra* are closely connected with each other in the Veda. The upward movement of *Brahmanaspati* needs a special uplifting force, and *Rudra* supplies this force. *Rudra* is named in the Veda the Mighty One of heaven. He is described as the One who leads the upward evolution of the conscious being; his force battles against all evil, smites the sinner and the enemy; intolerant of defect and stumbling, he is the most fierce among the gods. *Agni* is on the earth the child of this force of *Rudra* and *Vishwamitra* describes *Agni* in one hymn[1] as the One who becomes the child, *Kumara*, which is the prototype of the Puranic *Skanda*. The *Maruts* are vital forces which make light for themselves by violence, are *Rudra*'s

[1] *Rigveda, III.1.9-10.*

children. But we also learn that this violent and mighty *Rudra* who breaks down all defective forms and groupings of new life has also a benigner aspect. He is the supreme healer, although when he is opposed, he destroys; but when he is called on for aid, he heals all wounds and all evils and all sufferings. In his battle, the force that he wields is his gift, and ultimately, bestows final peace and joy. In these aspects of the Vedic god, we have all the primitive material necessary for the evolution of the Puranic *Shiva-Rudra*, the destroyer and healer, the auspicious and the terrible.

As far as *Vishnu* is concerned, we find that in the Veda, *Vishnu* supplies the necessary static elements in the formations of *Brahmanaspati*'s words and for the actions of *Rudra*'s force. These static elements are represented by Space, the ordered movement of the worlds, the ascending levels, and the highest goals. In one of the hymns[2], a prayer addressed to *Vishnu* cries out: "*O Vishnu, pace out in thy movement with an utter wideness.*" *Vishnu* is described as having taken three strides and having established all the worlds in the space created by the three strides. The supreme step of *Vishnu* is his highest seat and is the triple world of bliss and light, *paramam padam*, which the wise ones see extended in heaven like a shinning eye of vision[3]. It is this highest seat of *Vishnu* that is the goal of the Vedic journey. Here again, the Vedic *Vishnu* is the natural precursor and sufficient origin of the Puranic *Narayana*, preserver and Lord of Love.

In the Vedas we find only one universal *deva* of whom *Vishnu*, *Rudra*, *Brahmanaspati*, *Agni*, *Indra*, *Vayu*,

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[2] *Ibid., IV,18.11*

[3] *Rigveda, I.22.20*

Mitra, *Varuna*, are all alike forms and cosmic aspects. Each of them is in himself the holy *deva* and contains all the other gods. The supreme *deva* was left in the *Riks* vague and undefined and sometimes even spoken of in the neuter as That or as the one sole existent. In the Upanishads, we find the full emergence of the idea of this supreme and only *deva*; but gradually there came about the ritualistic importance of the other gods. And, again, under the strain of growing mythology there was progressive precision of the human and personal aspects of these gods; eventually, this led to their degradation and enthronement of the less used and more general names and forms, -- *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Rudra*, -- in the final Puranic formulation of the Hindu pantheon.

The new concepts of the gods and goddesses were stabilised in the *Purano-Tantric* stage in physical images, and they were made the basis for the internal adoration and for the external worship which replaced sacrifice. In the Vedic hymns, the psychic and spiritual mystic endeavour is clearly perceptible in the esoteric practice; but this disappeared into the less intensely luminous but more wide and rich and complex psycho-spiritual inner life of Puranic and Tantric religion and Yoga. Even then, it must be emphasised that the so-called henotheism of the Vedic ideas 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 were living forms and powers. The Vedic idea of divinity was popularised in the Puranas to an extraordinary extent; this resulted in the concept of the occasional manifestations of the Divine in humanity which founded the worship of the *avataras*; ultimately, further developed the idea of the Presence of the Divine in the heart of every creature which can be discovered by the process of Yoga.

The Vedic Yoga gave rise to various systems of Yoga, and all of them led or hoped to lead through many kinds of psycho-physical, inner vital, inner mental, and psycho-spiritual methods to the common aims of all Indian spirituality, -- a greater consciousness and a more or less complete union with the One and Divine or full emergence of the individual soul in the Absolute.

The Vedic idea of the battle between gods and their adversaries, *Vritra*, *Panis*, and *Dasyus* is retained in the *Purano-Tantric* system, although names are different and the stories and legends of their battles as also their victories are varied and described in great detail. The Vedic message of human life as a field of battle in which every individual is called upon to make a sacrifice for attaining victory and immortality is also retained in the Puranas and Tantras, which provided the people with a basis of generalised psycho-religious experience from which man could rise to the highest absolute status.

The *Purano-Tantric* stage is the second stage of the development of Indian religion and spirituality. The first stage was that of the Vedic age, which makes possible the preparation for the natural external man for spirituality; the second stage of Puranic and Tantric age takes up the outward life of the human being into a deeper mental and psychical living and brings human beings more directly into contact with the spirit and divinity within him. This stage was followed by the third stage which attempted to render the human being capable of taking up the whole mental, psychical, physical living into a first beginning at least of a generalised spiritual life. While much could be done during that stage, its progression was arrested because

of many factors. But it has done much to prepare a greater possibility in the future.

As India has awakened once again, it is the unaccomplished tasks of the third stage that are to be taken up and fulfilled. In this stage of reawakening, the recovery of the old spiritual knowledge is indispensable and a study of the Vedic and Puranic systems is an important aspect. An intensive programme of research will need to be centred on the way in which the spiritual wealth of the Vedic age and the Puranic age as also of the subsequent third age could be assimilated so as to fulfil the higher aims, not only of Indian religion and spirituality, but of all religion and spirituality as such, the highest aim of which is the spiritualising of life on the earth.

VEDAS, PURANAS AND THEREAFTER

-- Continuity and Change --

I

The Vedas stand out in Indian history as the Himalayas of spirituality and as the perennial source of multisided culture. The Vedic Samhitas bear witness to epical struggle and victory of the Vedic Rishis, and those Rishis are felt even today as the spirits who assist their offsprings as the new dawns repeat the old and lean forward in light to join the dawns of the future. And as we read the inner history of India, we find these great Rishis shaping and moulding new Rishis age after age and helping them to build the bridges between the past and future. Continuity and change mingle with each other in the great adventure of India which thus always remains at once ancient and new.

The secret of the unaging puissance of the Veda can be traced to the freshness with which the Rishis attempted to deal with the enigma of life and authenticity of knowledge that was discovered and applied for the solution of the perplexing paradoxes and contradictions of world-experience. These Rishis fathomed the deep waters of the three great oceans of consciousness, the ocean of dark inconscient in which darkness is shrouded in greater darkness, the ocean of the human consciousness, and the ocean of the superconscient, which is the goal of "the rivers of clarity and of the honeyed wave." A study of interrelationship of these three oceans enabled the Rishis to discover the

means by which one can overcome the life that is full of untruth and attain to truth and immortality. In a symbolic and poetic chant, Vamadeva says that a honeyed wave climbs up from the ocean and by means of this mounting wave, which is the *Soma* (*amshu*), one attains entirely to immortality; he further says that that wave or that elixir is a secret name of the clarity (*ghrita*); he further says that it is the tongue of the Gods and it is the nodus of immortality.[1]

Another great discovery of the Vedic Rishis was the secret of relationship between man and the cosmos. They discovered three earths of physical existence (*prithvi*) and three heavens of pure mind (*dyau*) and the intermediate Mid-region of life-force (*antariksha*); they discovered, at a still higher level, three luminous heavens of *Swar,* described variously in terms of the Truth, Right and Vast (*satyam, ritam, brihat*)), and the supreme triple divine worlds. They discovered that the path to immortality is the path of truth and that this path is built by man's expansion into cosmic consciousness and by his interchange with cosmic powers who enable him to reach the Supreme creative consciousness, mother *Aditi*, who is one with the original substance, the Supreme Triple Reality. As Rishi Parashara explains:

"Our fathers broke open the firm and strong places by their words, yea, the Angirasas broke open the hill by their cry; they made in us the path to the great heaven; they found the Day and Swar and vision of the luminous Cows."

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[1] समुद्राद् ऊर्मिः मधुमान् उदारद् उपांशुना सं अमृतत्वं आनट्।
घृतस्य नाम गुह्यं यद् अस्ति। जिह्वा देवानां अमृतस्य नाभिः।। *IV.58.1*

He adds that this path is the path which leads to immortality. "They who enter all things that bear right fruits form a path towards the immortality; earth stood wide for them by the greatness and by Great Ones, the mother Aditi with her sons came (or, manifested herself) for the upholding."[2]

The secret of the interchange between man and the cosmic powers, which are called *Devas* in the Vedas, is the inner sacrifice of limitations so that the required room is increasingly made in human consciousness for the formation and establishment of the cosmic consciousness and all that transcends the cosmic consciousness.

The conquest of immortality, the Vedic Rishis discovered, involved also a long and difficult battle with formidable powers, *Dasyus*, *Panis*, *Vritra*; and the courage and heroism required in this battle imparted to the Vedic Rishis intimate knowledge of the intricacies of the web of the world as also of the knowledge of inner means by which the entanglements of the web could be disentangled and hold of adverse forces can be loosened and annulled.

But the loftiest discovery was that of the One, the mysterious and the wonderful, the eternal, unbound by Time and Space and unseizable even by the highest flights of Thought. As Indra declares:

"It is not now, nor is It tomorrow, who knoweth That which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and action in the consciousness of another but when It is approached by the thought It vanishes."[3]

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[2] आ ये विश्वा स्वपत्यानि तस्थुः कृण्वानासो अमृतत्वाय गातुम्।
महना महद्भिः पृथ्वी वि तस्थे माता पुत्रैः अदितिर् धायसे वेः।। *I.72.9.*

[3] न नूनमस्ति नो श्वः कस्तद्वेद यदद्भुतम्।

The complexity and the richness of the knowledge of the One becomes increasingly evident when we try to understand the great statement of Rishi Dirghatamas: *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*, the One that is variously described by the wise. The One, *tad ekam*, which was described in the Vedas as triple Divine came to be expressed in one complex word in the Upanishad "*Sacchidananda*". A more detailed summary of the complexity of this One Reality was further articulated in intensely meaningful words, *Brahman*, *Purusha*, *Ishwara* with associated words: *Maya*, *Prakriti*, and *Shakti*. The Veda is replete with descriptions of this One Reality, and they invite us to transcend all superficial exercises of speculation so that by an act of meditative and experiential consciousness, we may try to enter into the inner mystery and wonder.

This subtle and complex concept of *tad ekam* lies at the root of the complex character of the Vedic Godheads which have been wholly misunderstood by those who ascribe to them only outer 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. Each again, apart from his special function, is the 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 to which a European scholar has given the sounding misnomer henotheism. But the Veda goes on to say that these Godheads put on their highest nature in the triple Infinite and are names of the One nameless Ineffable.

अन्यस्य चित्तमभि संचरेण्यमुताधीतं वि नश्यति।। *I.170.1*

II

These lofty heights of knowledge which we find in the Vedas serve as the elements of continuity, and we find them or some of them in the same or different terms in all the succeeding developments of Indian religion and spirituality. Upanishads which were nearest to the Vedas have been acknowledged as the crown and end of the Veda; that is indicated in their general name, Vedanta. In the stress of the seeking which can be discerned from such records as the Chhandogya and Brihadaranayaka, the truths held by the Vedic Rishis broke their barriers which were present in the earlier system of communication, and they swept through the highest minds of the nation and fertilised the soil of Indian culture for a constant and ever-increasing growth of spiritual consciousness and spiritual experience. And even when this turn was still evident, chiefly among the Kshatriyas and Brahmins, we find too among those who attained to the knowledge men like *Janashruti*, the wealthy *shudra* or *Satyakama Jabala*, son of a servant girl who knew not who was his father.

The Upanishads mark both continuity and change. The Vedantic seers renewed the Vedic truth by extricating it from its cryptic symbols and casting it into a higher and most direct and powerful language of inner intuition and inner experience. It is true that the language of the Upanishads 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 and abstract terms and convert into a starting-point for an ever-widening and deepening philosophical speculation and intellectual search after a truth original, supreme and ultimate. It was this Vedantic restatement of the Vedic knowledge that has served as the bedrock of continuity,

and the Indian development of religion and spirituality was guided, up-lifted and more and more penetrated and suffused by the Vedantic saving power of spirituality.

The next stage of Indian civilisation, the post-Vedic stage was marked by a new climate as a result of the efflorescence of intellectual search and rise of great philosophies, many-sided epic literature, beginning of art and science, and evolution of vigorous and complex society. Also there emerged Buddhism, which seemed to reject all spiritual continuity with the Vedic roots. And yet, Indian religion, after absorbing all that it could of Buddhism, preserved the full line of its own continuity casting back to the ancient Vedanta.

Indeed, there was still a great change, but this change moved forward not by any destruction of principle, but by a gradual fading of the prominent Vedic forms and the substitution by others. The psychic and spiritual endeavour of the Vedic hymns disappeared into intense luminosity, but there grew up at the same time more wide and rich and complex psycho-spiritual inner life of Puranic and Tantric religions and Yoga.

III

It has been said that Puranas existed in ancient times in the Vedic age itself, but it was only in the post-Vedic age that they were entirely developed and became the characteristic and the principal literary expression of the religious spirit and it is to this period that we must attribute, not indeed all the substance but the main bulk and the existing shape of the Puranic writings. Whatever may be our ultimate judgement on the significance of the Puranas, it can be observed that Puranas as also Tantras which belong to this age contain in themselves the highest spiritual and physical

truths derived from the lofty realisations of the Veda and the Upanishads. These truths are not broken up and expressed in opposition to each other as in the debates of the thinkers, but synthesised by a fusion, relation, or grouping in a way most congenial to the catholicity of the Indian mind and spirit. This is mostly done in a form which might carry something of it to the popular imagination and feeling by a legend, tale, symbol, epilogue, miracle and parable. This method is, after all, simply a prolongation of the method of the Vedas, in another form and with a temperamental change. The system of the Puranic symbolism is constructed in terms of physical images and observances each with its psychical significance. The geography of the Puranas is expressly explained in the Puranas themselves as a rich poetic figure; it is a symbolic geography of the inner psychical universe. As in the Vedas, so in the Puranas, the cosmogony which is expressed sometimes in terms proper to the physical universe has a spiritual and psychological meaning and basis. The rich and endless profusion of Puranic stories have produced enormous effect in training the mass mind to respond to a psycho-religious and psycho-spiritual appeal that prepared a capacity for highest things. Not all the Puranas contain high substance uniformly, but on the whole, the poetic method employed is justified by the richness and power of the creation. Some of the Puranas are, indeed, excellent both in substance and style. The Bhagavata, for instance, which is strongly affected by the learned and more ornate literary form of speech, is an extraordinary production, full of subtleties, rich and deep thought and beauty. It is in the Bhagavata that we get the culmination of the emotional and aesthetic religions of Bhakti. The aim of the Bhaktiyoga was to take and transmute the emotional, the sensuous, even the sensual motion of the being into a psychical form

and to utilise these elements for the attainment of the joy of God's love, delight and beauty. In later Puranas, we see development of the aesthetic and erotic symbol, and as in the Bhagavata, it is given its full power to manifest its entire spiritual and philosophic as well as its psychic sense and to remould into its own line of a shifting of the centre of the synthesis from knowledge to spiritual love and delight the earlier significance of the Vedanta. The perfect outcome of this evolution is to be found in the philosophy and religion of divine love promulgated by Sri Chaitanya.

It is true that the Vedic Gods rapidly lost in the Puranas their deep original significance. The great Trinity, *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva* came to dominate and gave rise to a new pantheon. It must, however, be remarked that the predominance of this Trinity was a result of the significance that was attached to these three Gods in the Veda. *Brahma* evidently developed out of *Brahmanaspati*, *Vishnu* was already recognised as the all-pervading Godhead and *Vishnu* has a close connection with *Rudra* or *Shiva*. It is true that in the Veda larger number of hymns were devoted to *Agni* and *Indra*, but the importance of the Vedic Gods should not be measured by the number of hymns devoted to them. In fact, *Agni* and *Indra* are not greater than *Vishnu* and *Rudra*. In the Veda, *Vishnu*, *Rudra* and *Brahmanaspati* provide the conditions of the Vedic work and assisted from behind the more present and active Gods. *Brahmanaspati* is the Creator by the word, and it is from this creative aspect of *Brahmanaspati* that the Puranic conception of *Brahma*, the Creator, arose. For the upward movement of *Brahmanaspati*'s formations, *Rudra* supplies the force; he is named in the Veda the mighty one of heaven, but he begins his work upon the earth and gives effect to the sacrifice on the

five planes of our ascent. He is the Violent One who leads the upward evolution of the conscious being, his force battles against evils, smites the sinner and the enemy. *Agni*, *Kumara*, prototype of the Puranic *Skanda*, is on earth the child of this force of *Rudra*. In these and many other aspects which are described in the Veda, we have all the materials necessary for the evolution of Puranic *Shiva-Rudra*, the Destroyer and Healer, the Auspicious and Terrible, the Master of the force that acts in the worlds and the Yogin who enjoys the supreme liberty and peace. While *Brahmanaspati*'s word creates and *Rurdra*'s force supplies the force, *Vishnu* provides the necessary static element. He supplies the ordered movement of the worlds and the highest goals. The Veda speaks of *Vishnu*'s three strides by which he establishes all the worlds. The Veda tells us that *Vishnu* pervades all these worlds and gives less or greater room to the actions and movements of the Gods. Here, again, the Vedic *Vishnu* is a natural precursor and sufficient origin of the Puranic *Narayana*, Preserver and Lord of Love.

In the Vedic religion, ritualistic sacrifice occupied the central place. In the Puranic tradition, 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 physical images of the two great deities, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, and their *Shaktis* and their offshoots were used to stabilise their psychological functions, and they were made the basis both for internal adoration and for their external worship. Here, again, it may be mentioned that image worship seems to have developed from the Vedic concept of how man takes the cosmic powers that are acting in the Universe upon himself, makes an image of

them in his own consciousness and endows that image with the life and power that the Supreme Being has breathed into His own Divine forms and world energies. It is for this reason that Indian image worship is not the idolatry of a barbaric or undeveloped mind, for even the most ignorant knows that the image is a symbol of support and can be set aside when its use is over.

A great contribution of the Puranas is the celebration of the inner presence of the Divine in the universe and in man. The Vedic concept of the sacrifice of *Purusha* which is one of the mysteries of the Vedic tradition, can be seen to be the precursor of the concept of the Divine *avatara* which has played a major role in the epical and Puranic literature of India. Here, too, we can see the continuity of the Veda in the Puranas.

IV

Inner significance of the Puranas can be appreciated when we realise that the Puranic religion was an effort, successful in a great measure, to open the general mind of the people to a higher and deeper range of inner truth, experience and feeling. It was a catholic attempt to draw towards the spiritual truth minds of all qualities and people of all classes. While much was lost of the profound psychic knowledge of the Vedic seers, much also of new knowledge was developed, untrodden ways were opened and a hundred gates discovered into the Infinite. Puranas attempted to lay hold on the inner vital and emotional nature, to awaken a more inner mind even in the common man, and to lead him through these things towards a higher spiritual truth. The Puranic system, along with the Tantric, was a wide, assured and many-sided endeavour. It can be said that it was 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.

Much of the adverse criticism of the Puranas emanates from the lack or neglect of the intention that lay behind the *Purano-Tantric* forms of worship and of the mythological method employed in the literary works. Much of this criticism has been concentrated on side-paths and aberrations which could hardly be avoided in this immensely audacious experimental widening of the basis of the culture. At the same time, it is easy to see how in the increasing ignorance of later times the more technical parts of the Puranic symbology inevitably lent themselves to much superstition and to crude physical ideas about spiritual and psychic things.

The Vedic system of different planes of existence and corresponding worlds remained fundamentally unaltered in the Puranas. The Puranas refer to the seven principles of existence and the seven worlds correspond to them with sufficient precision. The principle of pure existence, *sat*, corresponds to the world of highest truth of the being (*Satyaloka*); the principle of pure consciousness, *Chit*, corresponds to the world of infinite will or conscious force (*Tapoloka*); the principle of pure bliss *ananda*, corresponds to the world of creative delight of existence (*Jnanaloka*); the principle of Knowledge or Truth, *vijnana*, corresponds to the world of vastness (*Maharloka*); the principle of mind, which was *Dyau* in the Vedas corresponds to the Puranic world of light (*Swar*); the principle of life which in the Veda was the principle of *antariksha* corresponds to the world of various becoming (*Bhuvar*); and the principle of matter, *prithvi*, corresponds to the material world (*Bhur*). The

cosmic gradations in the Veda correspond with those in the Puranas although they were differently grouped, -- seven worlds in principle, five in practice, three in their general groupings.

Just as the Veda is concerned with the application of inner knowledge to the solution of the practical problems of life, even so, the Puranas aim at the exposition of the highest knowledge and they also aim at inspiring increasing number of people to apply that knowledge in fighting battles of life. As the Veda is an account of the inner battle of life with *Vritra*, *Vala* and *Panis*, even so Puranas give an account of the battle between Gods, Devas and their enemies, Asuras, Rakshasas and Pishachas. As the Veda speaks of immortality as the goal, even so Puranas speak of the conquest of the elixir of life and attainment of undying celestial joy.

In spite of the great change in the colour and climate, in the deeper and wider ranges of experience, there is a continuity between the Veda and the Puranas.

V

The great effort of the Puranas or the *Purano-Tantric* age covered all the time between the Vedic age and the decline of Buddhism. But this was not the last possibility of the evolution of religion in India. It appears that there is a hidden design in the development of Indian religion. It certainly aims to mediate between God and man, but it wants to train all aspects of man, all sections of human society, and all ranges of the potentialities so that God can manifest in all His aspects in man's physical life. The Vedic stage prepared the natural external man for spirituality. The second stage which covers the Puranic period 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 post-Puranic age aimed at rendering him capable of taking up his whole mental, psychical, physical living into a first beginning at least of a generalised spiritual life. This work had already begun, and this was signified by the outburst of philosophies, great spiritual movements of saints and bhaktas and an increasing resort to various paths of Yoga. But before this task could proceed further, there began unhappy decline of Indian culture and because of increasing collapse of general vitality and knowledge, it could not bear its natural fruit. But still the work which was done was extremely important and it has created a great possibility for the future. In the changing situation of today, once again the theme of continuity and change has become extremely important. We need to understand once again the inner heart and soul of the Veda, the inner heart and soul of the Puranas and Tantras, and also inner heart and soul of the post-Puranic age with its great movements of Bhakti and multisided Yoga. And we have to open ourselves to make the treasures of the past as our support for unfinished task of the integral divinisation of human life and nature. It seems that India's mission is to work out the widest and highest spiritualising of life on earth, even by going beyond all exclusive and limiting boundaries of religions or religionism, and it is in that direction that India can move forward, if it is to fulfil the mission of her deepest soul.

VEDIC TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY CRISIS

The Vedic tradition has a powerful message for contemporary humanity which is gripped with a crisis, the nature of which is difficult to be described in the ordinary and familiar terms of sociology, economics and polity. But this message can be discerned only if we consent to look upon the Vedic tradition not merely in its outer religious import but in its deeper pursuit of knowledge relating to what the Vedas call *Prithvi*, the earth, *Antariksha*, subtle levels of existence between matter and mind, *Dyau*, the plane of the higher mind, *Svah*, the world of light, and *Surya*, the world of everlasting day or of the supramental light, and still beyond, of the transcendental unity and oneness.

For Veda is essentially and esoterically a book of know-ledge, the knowledge that is terrestrial, supra-terrestrial and cosmic and supra-cosmic. It is only when the Vedic tradition is understood as a gradual expansion of what is contained in the Vedic seed of integral knowledge that we can get its right clues, and discover its power of renewal and its capacity to initiate discoveries of newer knowledge and newer solutions to the problems of individuals and of the collectivity. By declaring that the Vedas are limitless, -- *anantāh vedāh*, -- the Vedic tradition has liberated itself from the bondage of the written word contained in any particular book and kept itself open to new search and fresh accumulation of knowledge. Even the religious

tradition that has taken inspiration from the Veda has been able to declare that beyond any formulas of knowledge, beyond any creed or dogma, beyond rituals or ceremonies or prescribed acts, there is available to humanity a living knowledge that can be acquired and possessed through experiences and realisations which, in turn, can further be transcended and integrated by greater and larger experiences and realisations. That religious tradition, therefore, points to something beyond itself and gives its message of God, Light, Freedom, Bliss, and Immortality that can be realised by an ever-ascending movement of consciousness so that both the individual and the collectivity can liberate themselves from the circum-scribing limitations, bondage and imperfections. That knowledge has constantly expanded from the ancient times to the present day, and if we take the trouble to study this great line of development, we shall find in it the solution to the most essential part of the contemporary crisis.

The Vedic knowledge, -- its esoteric knowledge, -- can be looked upon as the most ancient body of yogic knowledge that was already a kind of a synthesis. The very word *Veda*, which is derived etymologically from the root √*vid* to know, describes the book as the book of Knowledge and it has been rightly looked upon as a norm and an authority even for the Upanishads which have been acknowledged as the highest summit of knowledge. The Veda is also regarded, and quite rightly, as the *karmakanda*, and although ritualists take this *karmakanda* in narrow sense of a systematic rituology, it is verily the gospel of works, which, in a later period, came to be formulated as the *karmayoga* of the Bhagavadgita. The Veda is also a book of prayers, of worship, of devotion, of secrets of self-surrender and self-sacrifice. This is also the right description of the

Veda. In effect, Veda is a synthesis, the earliest synthesis of Knowledge, Work and Devotion. It is this synthesis which has guided the development of later syntheses in the Vedic tradition; it is this synthesis which has enabled the religious trends and practices which developed over thousands of years to eschew exclusivism and to transcend conflicts of religions. It is, again, this synthesis which has enabled the unity of the human beings with the whole world, with the entire cosmos, and its visible and invisible powers, as also with the highest unity of truth-consciousness, *rita chita*, -- and even the sources of that unity, the One which came to be described by many names by enlightened *Rishis*, -- *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*. In the Veda, we find the secret of the unification of higher faculties of revelation, inspiration, intuition and discrimination with their corresponding cosmic godheads that are discoverable by the processes of evocation and sacrifices, which were in their esoteric aspects psychological in character. The Veda is, again, a gospel of human perfectibility, both in its individual and collective aspects. In the closing hymns of the Rigveda, we find two great messages, which are today even more relevant than in any other previous time. In its first message it exhorts the human being to become a mental being and yet not to remain limited to the powers of the mind and the intellect but to transcend them so as to grow into a luminous being possessing the faculties and powers of cosmic and transcendental knowledge. In simple, but striking words, it enjoins:

manurbhava janayā daivyam janam

"Be first Manu, the being of the mind, and then generate the divine being, the being of divine light."

In the last hymn, the Rigveda enjoins a gospel for a harmonious collective life, a life in which people would work together, would think together, would speak together, would agree together, -- all in harmony. Even today, humanity can hear those great and inspiring words: "*May you move together, may you speak together in one voice; may your thoughts be of one accord.*" And the climax of this message comes to us with its inspiring force of guidance: "*May your resolves be one; may your hearts feel alike, may your thinking be one; and thus may all of you live happily with thorough union.*"[1]

Upanishads continued the great synthesis of the Veda but also brought in sharp focus a synthesis of various disciplines of knowledge. They take us to the heart of intricate relationship of Ignorance and Knowledge, *avidyā* and *vidyā*, of the lower knowledge and the higher knowledge, *aparā vidyā* and *parā vidyā*. They speak to us of the golden lid that needs to be broken for the marshalling of the rays of the supreme knowledge of identity of the finite and the infinite, of the individual and the supreme, and where the oneness of the One without the second becomes manifest. They illumine the relationship between the knowledge that comes to us by opening our senses outward with the knowledge that is arrived at by turning inwards; they also describe the transition from the wakeful state to the dream state and to the sleep state that culminates in the fourth state, *turīya avasthā*. They reveal the secret of the unity of the non-being and the being and even their identity; and through their great declaration *tattvam asi*, -- *Thou art That*, reveal to us how the individual is one in essence with all that exists, and they also reveal to us the secret of life, death and immortality.

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[1] *Rigveda, X.191.4*

When we come to the Bhagavadgita, we find the quintessence of the Vedas and the Upanishads, and yet something much more, the unique synthesis of knowledge, works, Divine Love, formulated in such fullness so as to resolve the crisis of the representative Man entangled in a crisis of action. Even today, when we read the Gita, we find that our own contemporary crisis is similar to the crisis that was faced by Arjuna in a setting of *Kurukshetra*, the field of battle, which is also the battle of life. And the solution that the Bahgavadgita presents can very well be applied to our own crisis. The contemporary field of crisis presents alternative claims of right action, and we are bewildered, as was Arjuna, in deciding what exactly can be our right course of action. If Arjuna was a leader motivated by the aim of protecting and establishing the claims of right and justice, even so, each one of us is, if not a leader, yet a participating solider in the army of people who are filled with aspiration to uphold the noble causes of peace and unity. Each one of us is engaged in one way or the other in the battle where that aspiration is being combated by the forces that thwart the upward movement by which alone the crisis can be overcome. Just as Arjuna was besieged by doubts arising from the conflict of standards of action, even so, we too are confused as to what norm of action should guide us in the difficult battle in which we are engaged. And the solution that the Bhagavadgita gives us is a hint of the deepest secret through the help of which the necessary change can be so effected both in our inner consciousness and outer environment that our crisis can be resolved.

It may, however, be argued that the highest message of the Gita is relevant only to men like Arjuna or to the masterminds, the great spirits, and the god-knowers, god-doers, god-lovers, who can live in God and for God and do their work joyfully for Him in the world. This is

true, but at the same time, the Gita declares that all can, if they will, even to the lowest and sinful among men, enter into the path of Yoga. It has been contended that what is needed is the decisive turn; there must be an abiding faith in the Spirit, a sincere and insistent will to live in the Divine, to be in self one with Him and in Nature. For if there is hope for a human being, why should not there be hope for the humanity?

It may, again, be argued that the highest message of the Gita is relevant only to the crisis of the individual, but what we are confronting today is a greater and deeper crisis not merely for the individuals but for the entire collectivity of the human race. There is validity and force in this argument, but it can be replied that the Gita gives the central clue although in its cryptic end it is reticent about the implications of that clue. In any case, the Gita is not the last word of the Vedic tradition and the Vedic tradition has continuously striven to grow more and more on those lines by which larger and larger sections of people, more and more gradations of humanity can be embraced and uplifted. If we examine the tradition with deeper insight, we shall find that there were three distinct stages in the development of that tradition. The first stage belongs to the Vedic age proper; the second stage was marked by Purano-Tantric age, and the third stage was that of Bhakti age, which, on account of various factors, could not complete its full curve. It was arrested, and India plunged into a great period of decline. Still, when India became renascent in the 19th century, the threads of the third stage were taken up rapidly, and we are already in the next stage of development where we find a newly awakened endeavour capable of meeting the challenges not only of the country but even those of the crisis of the entire humanity.

In the Vedic age, while the loftiest spiritual experiences were reserved for the initiates, the external religion was provided for the unripe which, however, prepared the physical mind of the masses to turn to the deeper resources of knowledge. In the Purano-Tantric age, the heights of the Veda and the Upanishads were not surpassed but depths were further deepened and subtleties further subtilised and methods were discovered and developed whereby not only the physical mind but even the inner mind, inner vital, and larger subliminal consciousness of people was prepared. This enabled larger sections of people to enter into the possibility of a more generalised spiritual life. This is the reason why Indian masses of people have become accustomed to respond more readily to the spiritual aim and practice. When we come to the third stage, we find that the greatest leaders, the greatest saints and bhaktas developed a larger synthesis that could facilitate both the outer and inner life, not only of individuals but even of larger collectivities, to participate in a more generalised spiritual life. Indeed, spiritual solution is the true solution, and no human crisis of a great magnitude or of the kind that we are facing today can be met without taking recourse to that solution, although lesser solutions might seem to resolve temporarily a part of the problem or of the crisis at the physical, or vital or mental levels. But the question as to how larger humanity can be prepared and how spiritual solutions can be presented at the collective level has also been engaging the tradition, and we have in the renascent India a clearer diagnosis of the contemporary collective crisis and also a radical solution which can be applied, if so willed, on a very vast scale for the deliverance of humanity.

The renascent spirituality of India from Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami

Vivekananda and to Sri Aurobindo has two important concerns. The first concern is to stress dynamic spirituality as opposed to ascetic spirituality which limits itself only to the conquest of the spirit at the cost of the utility of the life. The second concern of this spirituality is not merely to provide paths of individual salvation but to build up paths of collective salvation. This spirit is manifest in one of the remarkable passages of Swami Vivekananda, where he writes as follows:

"I have lost all wish for my salvation, may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, -- and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom, there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death, nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols."

When we come to Sri Aurobindo, we have a radical turning and even a new departure towards collective realisation, collective liberation and collective perfection. In this new departure, there is a new synthesis based on a new discovery. This synthesis takes into account not only all the orthodox Vedantins of different schools and Tantra and the adherents of the theistic religions of the past and the present as also Buiddhism and Jainism and even the vast and catholic teachings of the Gita and the loftiest spiritual knowledge of the Veda and Upanishads, but also the new material that is flowing into the present day, including the potent though limited

revelations of modern knowledge and seeking. Basing itself on the past synthesis of the Veda, of the Upanishad, of the Gita, of the Tantras, the synthesis effected by Sri Aurobindo proposes to meet squarely the vast and all-embracing crisis of today's humanity. This synthesis recovers the Vedic knowledge of the Supermind, of the Vedic *satyam*, *ritam* and *brihat*, -- of the truth, the right and the vast, -- but what is new is that it scales the greater and greater heights of the Supermind; and, as Sri Aurobindo explains, this synthesis aims at the bringing down on the physical earth the supramental knowledge and power by means of which alone can the crisis of today be met and resolved. The Vedic method of ascent and descent, -- ascent to the higher levels of consciousness and descent of those levels of higher consciousness on lower levels of consciousness has been given by Sri Aurobindo a new direction and a new aim. As Sri Aurobindo points out, the object of his synthesis of Yoga is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth-consciousness here, a cosmic, not solely a supra-cosmic achievement.

The latest message of India, as expressed through Sri Aurobindo, is that of the application of the knowledge of the ascent to and descent of the supramental to the integrality of our life on the earth. The present crisis of humanity arises from the pervasive sweep and churning of all aspects of life in their simultaneous demands and their resultant conflicts. As Sri Aurobindo points out, humanity has, on the one hand, exhausted major potentialities of the Reason, its highest power, and on the other hand, the burning appetites of the subconscious have begun to arrive irresistibly on the surface. The curve of the human reason has essentially come to an end and it is found that the highest reason

cannot discover that light by which humanity can meet the invasion of the forces of the unreason and of the subconscient and the inconscient and build a world of peace and harmony. A stage has been reached where boundaries of human faculties have to be broken so that a new humanity or super-humanity can be built. The present crisis of humanity is, therefore, termed by Sri Aurobindo as "evolutionary crisis". If life has evolved in matter, and mind has evolved in life, it is now for the supermind to evolve in mind. It is this birth of the supermind that is necessitated by the contemporary crisis, and Sri Aurobindo has explained in his voluminous writings how the needed action of the supermind has not only been conceived but also experimented upon victoriously. If humanity consents to be spiritualised, says Sri Aurobindo, the supramental solution can now be given to the entire humanity.

The relevance of this great work is obvious. It invites us all to undertake the task of an inner exploration and inner and outer transformation. If we are developed, we are called upon to develop still further; if not yet sufficiently developed, the necessary help can come, if we so choose to receive it. And what is to be developed and received is not some new dogma or some ritualistic adherence to one belief or the other. The new message is the message of knowledge which can be experimented upon, verified and applied for the production of concrete results. India of today, however eclipsed it may be in many respects, and however formidable be its weakness and problems, -- still stands out with a Word and a Power, which can, if heard and utilised, deliver herself and humanity from the crisis through which they are passing today.

We seem to hear again that great message of the Veda:

manurbhava janayā daivyam janaṃ

And,

samgacchadvam samvadadhvam sam vo manāmsi jānatām

But we hear today this message with a greater potency and a greater uplifting force.

ANCIENT INDIAN WISDOM AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

What are the critical problems of today? And what could be relevance of ancient Indian wisdom in resolving our predicaments when the modern knowledge appears to have been so advanced? Since the last two centuries, humanity has taken a serious turn, and in its worst manifestation, two devastating wars have stormed the entire earth, and in its best manifestation, global aspiration to unite the peoples of the world has taken a concrete form. On its worst side, the survival of humanity on the earth has come under severest attack; on its best side, it has come to be realised that a new consciousness must seize humanity and change human nature so radically that the spirit of oneness and unity not only reigns as an idea and an aspiration but becomes embodied in human life like its living breath.

A significant fact is that the age of the Reason, which began and flourished in the West since the Renaissance and which has spread all over the world in varying degrees of preponderance, is now going to close. The questions which it had raised but failed to answer are now looming large before humanity with imperative pressure. What is truth and whether comprehensive truth can be known and known with certainty were the questions with which the Age of Reason began, and they have now come to be answered only in terms of probability and scepticism. The hope built up by the

Reason that humanity can be so rationally governed that liberty, equality and fraternity can be actualised in the life of humanity has now been demonstrably proved to be unrealisable, since rationality is unable to provide equality, even at the minimum level, without strangulating freedom, and fraternity does not find even an elbow room when Reason goes on constructing mechanising and dehumanising edifices. And yet it is not possible to remain reconciled with the failures of the powers of Reason and to forget the dreams of freedom, unity and brotherhood. The soul of humanity cries out to look for the means by which the ideals of progress can be actualised as urgently as possible.

At the root of all this, it is becoming clearer that we are not only at the turning point of a century or a millennium but at the turning point of a mutation of the human species. Man is a product of evolution, -- so has modern science declared; and having reached the acme of experimentation with the highest faculty of Reason, which distinguishes the human species from all other species, will not man press forward to a new step of evolution? Self-exceeding is the very nature of man, -- so has modern science concluded; will then man give up his distinctiveness and succumb to the limitations of gospels that counsel contentment within our imprisoning deficiencies? Great philosophers of evolution that have flourished during the last two centuries have declared that the *élan vital* will not cease to produce new varieties of human and superhuman species or the urge inherent in Space and Time is preparing the birth of Deity or God in the making or drive of ingression of higher powers of consciousness will continue to liberate corresponding powers imprisoned in man. Flying on the wings of speculation of leading philosophers like Bergson, Alexander and Whitehead, we also see scientists releasing tremendous

packets of energies from the atom and grappling with the biological cell to release from it secrets of immortality; and we begin to wonder whether while striving to put our foot on the Moon and to fly to Jupiter, we are not being called upon to return to ourselves, -- to something within our inmost being to find answers to the questions, which must be answered. The quest to find these answers has no more remained a pastime or a luxury of an idealist; asphyxiated by the narrow grooves in which we are required to be imprisoned, our call is a call of an imperative necessity.

There appear to be three alternatives before humanity today. The first possibility is to gravitate downwards towards the organisation of life that would keep humanity stagnant within the narrow circle of the satisfaction of animal wants, vital, desires and mental fashions supported by powerful means of communication and transmission and structures or super-structures built and sustained by ever-increasing processes of mechanisation. This possibility seems to be asserting itself more and more powerfully, since instruments like those of television and arts of music and cinema are producing incalculable impact on vital desires of increasing segments of humanity.

The second possibility is for the humanity to arrive at a better but not ideal organisation of life sustained by increasing circling of the powers of the Reason, somehow adjusted with demands of ethics and religion, accommodated by various compromises, which can easily be bombarded by the greater inrush of the downward pull of the gravitational pull of the powers of Unreason. This is the possibility towards which enlightened but not illumined leaders of humanity are striving to actualise, hoping that such a possibility will not only be actualised but will also sustain itself over a long period of time to come.

The third possibility is contained in the increasing realisation that neither of these two possibilities is worthy of the higher destiny of humanity or any one of them would or should eventually succeed. It envisages the rise of a new aspiration and a new awakening; it perceives that a great psychological revolution will break out that will push humanity beyond its borders of limitations and open up the gates of spiritual and supramental future. This possibility is still not widely understood or shared, but the speed with which humanity is rushing forward or downward will create the power of necessity to be liberated from the imprisoning walls where life-giving oxygen will be found suddenly depleted. It is when this situation will begin to be felt that with increasing pressure humanity will turn to a new quest.

From this brief review of the whole situation, we can formulate the following questions:

When the best possibilities confront the worst possibilities, what are the means by which the triumph of the best possibilities can be secured?

If it is a part of the nature of the human being to continuously cross the limitations of nature, is there evidence that the limitations that confront us even at the borders of our highest possible achievements can be crossed? In other words, do we have any assured knowledge of those faculties and powers, which, when developed, give us a basis for the future evolution of the human being that would open up the path for a better world order?

Do we have any body of knowledge with the aids of which we can build a path leading us from the present critical condition of the world towards a better and

smoother progress ensuring the needed perfectibility of the individual and collective life?

It will be seen that these questions are interrelated and demand a vast and strenuous effort of research. Fortunately, the supreme help that we can get in this task of research is the body of writings of Sri Aurobindo, who has left for us a synthetic body of knowledge that includes the best possible articulation of the sum total of humanity's quest from the most ancient times to the present day. With his vast mastery over some of the important Indian and international languages as also over the vast range of the relevant disciplines of knowledge, he has presented comprehensively the result of his studies of Indian and Western culture, social and political development of humanity, scholarly exegesis of the Veda, Upanishads, and the Gita as also of the religious, scientific and other secular literature that has bearing on the problems of human evolution and its future; he has given us basic clues to be found in the ancient Indian wisdom and in the theistic religious traditions and in the recovered sense of Buddhism, as also in the revelations of the modern knowledge to those answers which we need so urgently and imperatively. In fact, his writings have opened up the lines on which we can fruitfully pursue our question.

Speaking of the ancient Indian wisdom, Sri Aurobindo has said that the recovery of the knowledge contained in the Veda, Upanishads and in the Bhagavadgita is of capital importance and that this recovery should aim at utmost fullness and amplitude. He has further under-lined that this research should be accompanied by the development of new philosophical, scientific and critical knowledge in such a way that that ancient knowledge gets fully channelised and utilised for

the building up of the new knowledge that is required for breaking the boundaries of the present evolutionary moulds, which are imprisoning humanity into stagnancy or downward gravitation or else into horizontal but vain efforts at amelioration. He also suggested that a supreme effort will be required, particularly on the part of India, to build up a spiritualised society that would synthesise the best of the East and the West and which would undertake an original handling of our contemporary problems.

In a memorable passage, Sri Aurobindo has stated:

"India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light, illumine; what was wrong and wry in her old methods she can now rectify; the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freerer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge."[1]

The Veda is, as Sri Aurobindo has explained, a book of knowledge, -- not a collection of primitive aspirations and prayers of superstitious barbarians, as many modern commentators have attempted to portray it. It contains "truth of a science the modern world does not at all possess." Sri Aurobindo also discovered in the Vedic hymns the knowledge of the supermind, which he

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[1] *Sri Aurobindo: The Foundations of Indian Culture, Centenary Edition, Vol.14, p. 433.*

had arrived at independently in his own Yogic research and realisations, and in his great book, "*The Secret of the Veda*", Sri Aurobindo has described in detail the victory that the Rishis had attained in breaking limitations of human consciousness so as to create a sound foundation for the surpassing of the limits, -- a task which humanity needs today to undertake in order to solve its critical problems. When towards the end of the Rigveda, the future task of humanity is described, in brief but powerful words, "*manurbhava janaya daivyam janam*": (Be first the mental being in its perfection and then generate the divine being), it has behind it a vast body of experimentation with those faculties of inspiration, revelation, intuition and supramental discrimination that begin to operate when Reason is surpassed and faculties of true knowledge and comprehensive knowledge begin to operate. Crossing through the symbolism of *Sarasvati*, *Ila*, *Sarama* and *Daksha*, Sri Aurobindo has shown how Vedic Rishis had mastered the operations of supra-rational faculties so that when we read of them now at a time when we are obliged to transcend the limitations of the Reason, we can move on the right path with an assured body of knowledge, and we may not fall into those irrational and exaggerated claims that often dilute and mislead those who, without necessary ripeness and without perfecting the powers of the Reason, try to enter into the untrodden paths that lie beyond the borders of the Reason.

There is one faculty according to the Vedic knowledge, which can be singled out as the best aid that can facilitate our entrance into the higher realms of true and comprehensive knowledge. That faculty, intelligent mind, is described in various aspects of its operation, --

dhi, medha, mati, smriti, buddhi, manas, chitta, hrit, prajna. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

"In man as he is at present developed, the intelligent mind is the most important psychological faculty and it is with a view to the development of the intelligent mind to its highest purity and capacity that the hymns of the Veda are written."[2]

From this point of view, it can be said that the Veda is a science of the mind and the supermind, which lays down effective technologies by which man can carefully be trained, perfected and transported into the operations of the supermind.

The entire discipline of the Veda is an elaborate methodised effort in which various human powers can be intertwined, purified and developed, and they are symbolised under specific and discernible symbols of *Agni, Indra, Usha, Pushan, Surya, Savitri, Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Soma, Brihaspati,* and many others in a systematic manner. And in the hymns relating to the *Rihbus*, we have a summary of the entire process of perfection, which can be repeated in human beings. It is fortunate that humanity has this great treasure available to it precisely at the moment when the knowledge contained in it is needed.

There are, according to the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Gita, three important powers by the combined application of which, humanity can bring about the triumph of the favourable possibilities in their battle against the unfavourable. The first of them is the power

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[2] *Sri Aurobindo: Hymns to the Mystic Fire, Centenary Edition, Vol. 11, p. 443.*

of what may be called a king-idea or the seven-headed Thought or the power of the seven-rayed Thinker, *saptaguh*. Is it merely a legend when we are told that one can rise into higher plane of *swar* and rise also into the highest plane of Truth, symbolised by the Sun? A famous hymn of the Rigveda declares the passage from darkness to the supreme light, when it states: "*ud vayam tamasas pari swar pashyanta uttaram; devam devatra suryam aganma jyotir uttamam.*" (We, in our ascent, crossed over darkness and perceived the superior light of the realm of intermediate knowledge; and then the aspirants of the cosmic powers ascended still upwards and arrived at the abode of the sunlight, which is the light of the supreme knowledge.) Again, is it a mere legend when the Chhandogya Upanishad refers to this verse when it is said that Krishna, son of Devaki, attained to supreme knowledge, when Ghora, his teacher, pronounced to him that one Word, contained in that verse. In one sentence, the Veda declares that mere crossing the darkness is not enough, mere attainment of the intermediate light is not enough, but one must rise to the source of the supreme knowledge, the rays of which are multiple and constitute a vast complex multiplicity.

And when Vishwamitra, the great Rishi speaks of the necessity of uniting our intellect with that sunlight up to such a degree that the intellect not only contemplates the supreme knowledge but is also directed by it, -- we have only a summary statement of the methodised effort that is needed for the discipline of the intellect before it can act in the light of true knowledge and in the light of comprehensive knowledge. King-ideas are born of that comprehensive knowledge.

The second power, which is celebrated in the Veda is the power of the master-act, which is inspired by the highest knowledge and executed by the highest will. A

master-act is an expression of inextinguishable fire of aspiration, *Agni*, and as it is described in the very first hymn of the Rigveda, that fire of aspiration is *kavi kratu*, -- Seer-will, the substance of which is *satyascitrasravastamah*, the collectivity of the highest inspirations that express multiple aspects of the Truth. Action that is inspired by the fire of aspiration has still to pass through mental consciousness, and that consciousness, even when not confined to the surface and even when enlarged into greater widenesses needs to be disciplined by the power of Will, and this disciplined will can be made truth-bearing only when it becomes Goodwill. We find, therefore, in Yajurveda, which can be looked upon as the science of the knowledge of action and its right methodology, the famous hymn where mental consciousness is described in detail, and each of its powers is proposed to be united with Goodwill, *shivasankalpa*.

At a higher level, master-action is manifested only when it begins to burn with self-giving, which in the Vedic language, is called *yajna*.

In the Bhagavadgita, we have a most explicit statement of the assured knowledge that governs perfection of action, of *yajna* – the knowledge, which could deliver Arjuna, the greatest protagonist of action but gripped by a crisis in which dilemmas of action, inaction and wrong action confronted him and disabled him so completely that he was led to think of escaping from action altogether. We of the modern humanity are facing today a similar crisis, and each one of us is facing similar dilemmas in regard to action, and therefore, that ancient knowledge expounded with incomparable mastery is directly relevant. For each one of us is called upon to recognise what is favourable and what is

unfavourable to the future of humanity, and moreover we need to make a difficult choice that can be arrived at by the certainty about the rightness of the needed action. In the ultimate analysis, the master-act that is needed needs to be based upon heroism of the fire of the will, guided by the certainty of knowledge and strengthened by goodwill that would denude us of all our self-conceit, selfishness, and egoism.

The third power is connected with the knowledge of our inmost being and its real origin and its adherence to the support on which our inmost being is rooted. At its highest, it manifests as utter self-giving, adoration and prayer. And here, too, the Veda, the Upanishads and the Gita give us the profoundest message *"Know Thyself"*, which has been perceived as the fundamental need, if we are to relate ourselves properly with the world and with all that may be beyond ourselves and the world.

An important message of the ancient wisdom in regard to self-knowledge is that of bondage and liberation and immortality – a knowledge that is so secret and so precious that in order to be qualified even to enter into the portals of that knowledge, what is needed is, as the Kathopanishad clearly indicates, not only utter sincerity but such an earnestness that the seeker is prepared to surmount the highest possible temptations of pleasure, wealth, fame, and all that is normally considered by human beings as desirable, *preyas*. And yet, it is in the Veda, the Upanishads, the Gita and other records of ancient Indian wisdom that we find non-dogmatic accounts of explorations and a systematic body of repeatable and verifiable knowledge pertaining to this theme. The intricate knowledge of the concept of *Purusha* in its various poises at the levels of body, life, mind and beyond, both in its dynamic and

static aspects, and its relationship with still more difficult concepts of the *jiva*, and *atman* or Brahman is considered to be useful if the individual is to be liberated and is to be prepared for perfection. It is on the basis of this knowledge that, according to the ancient Indian wisdom, the harmony between the individual and the collectivity can be created and perfected. Examples of great Rishis and personalities like Rama and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha and a number of Siddhas illustrate what profundities of knowledge are required if we are not only to repeat what was achieved in the past but also if we are to recreate, with new knowledge, the perfect relationship between the individual and the collectivity, -- perfection in which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are reconciled with the perfections of the power of wisdom, heroism, harmony and skills in works, to which reference is made in the famous *Purusha Sukta* of the Rigveda. When the Rigveda closes with the call to join together and to commune together in harmony, -- *samgacchadhvam samvadadhvam*, the vision that has been placed before us is that of the perfectibility of the collective life.

In sum, it can be said that the ancient fund of knowledge that India possesses, which even Indians have largely lost or forgotten, needs to be explored with fresh eyes and with scientific rigour as also with unfailing powers of experimentation, so that the challenges that humanity faces today can be met effectively. It will be obvious that a mighty effort is required and we need to be awakened from the facile and soporific gospels that give us false assurances that humanity will somehow muddle through its difficulties and arrive at normal and happy routine of life. Considering the nature of challenges and the issues that have been raised by these challenges, we have to realise

that our crisis is an unprecedented crisis and that even ordinary people like ourselves have to share some mightiest efforts in order to surmount our present predicaments and various threats that are directly relevant to the issues of our survival and fulfilment.

We may hasten to add that while the importance of the ancient wisdom of India is to be underlined, we should not be blind to the need of exploring other systems of wisdom and even new knowledge. Ancient Indian wisdom has always counselled us to rise higher and higher and to be always more and more luminous, unfettered by the past and any dogmas or preconceived beliefs. In India, we speak of the Aryan spirit, and the Aryan spirit is not something narrow or communal or racial, but the spirit of the free man that wants to labour and work with wisdom and with one supreme motive of *loka sangrah*, the motive of preserving and creating solidarity and unity of the people.

YOGIC SCIENCE AND VEDIC YOGA

I

There is a larger perspective in the context of which the theme of Yoga stands out as a subject of great contemporary relevance. That larger perspective is that of the acute crisis through which humankind is passing today. This crisis has arisen, it seems, from the fact that, while on the one hand, it does not seem unlikely that we may succeed in creating a system of life, practically covering the whole globe, which can provide to human beings means and materials to satisfy hedonistic, selfish and egoistic wants on such a scale that, for quite a long indefinite period, humankind might remain chained to circles of lower life marked by hunger and satisfaction, strife and success, and perils of small and great disasters, and yet, on the other hand, the upward human aspiration to build individual and collective life on the basis of mutuality and harmony, of peace and concord, and ever-increasing perfectibility of our highest potentialities must continue to struggle without any sound promise of its eventual fulfilment. In other words, while there is an upward endeavour to break the vicious circle of our present vitalism or economic barbarism, this very endeavour has come to be partly discouraged by the scientist by his demand to provide physical proof of the supra-physical and partly blocked by the religionist by his refusal to look beyond dogma and the revealed word of the past, and has thus come to be rendered unequal to its tasks.

The vicious circle can be broken only if our upward endeavour can get unmixed positive support from science and only if the moral and spiritual foundations can be strengthened and made increasingly unshakable.

This is the real issue.

It has been contended that all true knowledge belongs to science and can be acquired only by scientific methods. Morality, it is argued, is a matter of emotional responses which are themselves relative and carry no authenticity of knowledge in their contents or in their foundations. As far as spirituality is concerned, it is argued that its claims in regard to its insights, intuitions, revelations and other allied operations of knowledge are at the best occasional flashes, somewhat like conjectures which may sometime hit the truth but which escape from any systematic scrutiny by means of criteria that can confidently be applied in any impartial search of validity of knowledge. It is, therefore, concluded that spirituality is a field of light and shadow where it is difficult to distinguish what really is light and what really is shadow.

Now it is true that morality is a field of relativities and that if its claims of knowledge of the good and the right are to have some secure foundation, it can find these foundations only in a field which is higher than morality, namely, the field of spirituality. But if spirituality itself is a field of uncertainties besieged by doubtful lights and shadows, we are thrown back into the vicious circle of vitalism which cannot be broken.

But is it true that spirituality is a field of uncertainties, of occasional flashes of light and of doubtful intuitions and revelations? It is here that the

claims of Yoga need to be taken into account. For Yoga claims to be, among many other things, a methodised quest of spiritual and eventually of integral knowledge which is found to have succeeded in arriving at certain stable states of consciousness and of plenary illumination and know-ledge of truths which can be verified both objectively and in personal experience by means of criteria which can be considered to be as sound as in any inquiry relating to validity of knowledge. In other words, Yoga claims to be a scientific discipline through which authentic knowledge can be gained in regard to any object, particularly, universal or transcendental, on which its methods are applied systematically and repeatedly.

It can at once be seen that if these claims of Yoga are valid, then we shall be able to have through Yogic methods that knowledge which, can possibly break vicious circle of the crisis of the present day and deliver us into new possibilities of a better humanity and a better world.

The next question, therefore, before us is whether the claims of Yoga are truly valid and whether they can be found to be sustainable. It has been contended that Yoga has discovered and perfected certain specific methods by application of which human consciousness can be so revolutionised that the ordinary functioning of the human body, human heart, and human mind can be united with superior faculties of knowledge and action, and ultimately the human being can become permanently united with the universal and transcendental states of consciousness and knowledge. It has been further contended that the Yogic science possesses assured data of the knowledge of methods and their processes of application as also of their corresponding

results. It has even further been contended that the efficacy of these methods and their results can be verified by everybody who is prepared to undergo the necessary preparation and training, and that the results obtained by others can be confirmed through one's own personal experience and can be utilised for producing relevant consequences and results. Finally, it is added that there is a long history of the development of this science of Yoga, and as in the case of the history of development of any science, one can trace a credible account of the old methods and old knowledge, of how they have gradually grown and developed by methods of confirmation, modifications and fresh developments resulting from new experiments and fresh acquisitions of knowledge. It is, therefore, concluded that Yoga provides a sound basis of a vast field of knowledge which can even now be studied and reacquired by the present humanity, and that without any need of falling into any trap of dogmatism, blind belief, superstition or even of half-knowledge and half-blindness, we can come to tap those resources of knowledge which can provide us the required guidance for the building up of a world illumined by ever-progressive knowledge and inspired by universal love.

These contentions and the conclusions to which they lead are so important that they deserve to be heard and noted with utmost seriousness, and they also deserve to be studied in full depth with all the required objectivity and even microscopic scruple so that whatever gates of knowledge that Yoga can open up before us are entered into, and we are enabled to ensure that no possibility or avenue of knowledge that we require to break the present crisis has been ignored or allowed to remain under clouds of our dogmatic refusal to inquire and to learn.

It is against this background that what is most relevant is to inquire whether there are authentic texts where we can find answers to the follows questions:

- What is Yoga?
- What are Yogic methods?
- How can Yogic methods be applied?
- What are the claims in respect of the results of the application of Yogic methods?
- Can these claims be verified?
- Have these claims been verified over a long period of history?
- What are the criteria of verification?
- Are these criteria sound and capable of ensuring validity of knowledge?

The best answers to these questions could, of course, be obtained by the study from the history of the development of Yogic science. And it is to this study that we may invite ourselves.

II

At the outset, it may be said that it is somewhat unfortunate that whenever we speak of Yoga today, we appear to be referring to that system of physical Yogic postures, which have been elaborately described in Hatha Yoga or else to that particular orthodox system of philosophy which has come to be known as the Yoga

philosophy and which has been attributed to *Patañjali*, - a system of Yoga which is also known as Rajayoga. It is even believed in some quarters that while there must have been rudimentary beginnings of Yoga in early stages of the Veda and the Upanishads, the real Yoga is that which has been spoken of in the Yoga Sutras of *Patañjali*.

Actually, as it would be clear to every serious student of the history of Yoga, *Patañjali*'s Yoga is only one of the specialised systems of yogic methods. As a matter of fact, every system of Indian philosophy was coupled with its corresponding system of yogic method. We have also to take into account the fact that the Bhagavadgita, which preceded the final crystallisation of Indian systems of philosophy, is itself looked upon as an authentic text of a synthesis of *jnanayoga*, *karmayoga*, and *bhaktiyoga*, and we have also to note the fact that the Bhagavadgita itself is proclaimed to be a digest of the Upanishads. We are thus led to a much earlier beginning of the science of Yoga, and considering that the Upanishads themselves are a recovery, continuation, enrichment and even a sort of culmination of the knowledge contained in the Veda, we would be quite justified in looking upon Veda as the earliest text available to mankind from which we can hope to trace a secure basis of a sound history of Yoga.

III

It may, however, be argued that the Veda presents a picture of primitive worshippers praying to gods representing natural forces such as fire, rain, wind, dawn, night, earth and sky, for wealth, food, oxen, horses, gold and other kinds of richness and victories. And if so, it may be further argued, how can Veda be regarded as a book of science of Yoga? But this

argument rests upon a certain line of Vedic interpretation which is neither conclusive nor in consonance with that Indian tradition which looks upon Veda literally as Veda, namely, as a book of knowledge. Not only do the Vedic Rishis themselves declare that their hymns contain secret knowledge, not only do the Upanishads refer to the Vedic declarations as an authority of their own discoveries of knowledge, but even in a later period, we have *Sankaracarya*'s view that the Vedas are mines of knowledge, knowledge of all the planes of consciousness, and that they fix the condition sand relations of the Divine with the human and the animal element in the being. Moreover, we have in recent times, the two great interpretations of the Veda which bring us to the deeper profundities of the Vedic knowledge. These are the interpretations of Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati and Sri Aurobindo. In particular, Sri Aurobindo's method of interpretation which has been illustrated at length in his "*The Secret of the Veda*" and "*The Hymns to the Mystic Fire*" gives us conclusive assurance and opens up before us a large body of Yoga contained in the hymns of the Rigveda even though the language of these hymns baffles us from time to time by its antique obscurity. As Sri Aurobindo points out:

"In the deep and mystic style of Dirghatamas Auchathya as in the melodious lucidity of Medhatithi Kanwa, in the puissant and energetic hymns of Vishwamitra, as in Vasistha's even harmonies we have the same firm foundation of knowledge and the same scrupulous adherence to the sacred conventions of the Initiates."[1]

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[1] *Sri Aurobindo: The Secret of the Veda, Centenary Edition, Vol. 10, p. 54*

It may still be argued that the Veda is centred on the institution of "sacrifice", *yajna*, and that Veda is rather *karmakanda* and not *jnanakanda*. In continuation of this argument, it may be contended that the Veda is a book of ritualistic materialism and that we need not look for any profound knowledge or for science such as that of Yoga. Now we may admit that the Veda is centred on the institution of "sacrifice", but we may question whether "sacrifice" is merely a matter of outer ritualism. There is no doubt that there is an exterior aspect of the Vedic hymns and that the Vedic hymns were used for ritualistic purposes; but a deeper study of Vedic ritualism would suggest that this ritualism was symbolic in character. Moreover, *karmakanda* went beyond mere ritualism and Veda, in one of its aspects, may be regarded as a gospel of *karmayoga* which was continued in the *karmayoga* of the Bhagavadgita where, too, significantly, we find that the concept of *yajna* is not only accepted but also shown to have a profounder psychological meaning by the help of which it could be declared that every action is *yajna*, provided it is done in the spirit of inner sacrifice to the cosmic and transcendental Reality. As in the Gita, *yajna* is Yoga, even so, in the Veda *yajna* can be so understood as to be Yoga.

There are, again, in the Veda a number of other terms which are used symbolically, and if we try to understand them in the light of Sri Aurobindo's interpretation, we would be able to enter into the heart of the methods of Vedic Yoga as also into the richness of the great results which were achieved by the Vedic Rishis by the application of these Vedic methods.

What exactly were the methods of Yoga and what were the results achieved by the Vedic Rishis should be a very important subject matter of a long and detailed

study. But there is no doubt that these methods were those of purification of our ordinary consciousness, methods of concentration of our consciousness on higher states of being and consciousness, methods of perfection by which the lower can be transcended into the corresponding higher realms of being, -- and these are again the same methods which we find repeated in the same way or in a more modified manner in subsequent developments in the Upanishads, the Gita and the rest. And we find in the Veda the affirmation of a hierarchy of infinitudes to which the normal existence of man even in its higher and widest flights is still a stranger. And this hierarchy of infinitudes is achieved in the Vedic Yoga by the transcendence of the lower triple being and our lower triple world, a transcendence which has been described by the Vedic seers as an exceeding or breaking beyond the two firmaments of heaven and earth.

Commenting on the basic nature of the methods and results of the Vedic Yoga, Sri Aurobindo refers to the Vedic movement of the ascent and the descent. As he points out:

"The link between the spiritual and the lower planes of the mental being is that which is called in the old Vedantic phraseology the *vijnana* and which we may term the Truth-plane or the ideal mind or the supermind where the One and Many meet and our being is freely open to the revealing light of the Divine Truth and the inspiration of the Divine Will and Knowledge. If we can break down the veil of the intellectual, emotional, sensational mind which our ordinary existence has built between us and the Divine, we can then take up through the Truth-mind all our mental, vital and physical experience and offer it up to the Spiritual – this was the secret or mystic sense of the old

Vedic `Sacrifice' – to be converted into the terms of infinite truth of Sacchidananda, and we can receive the powers and illuminations of the infinite Existence in forms of a Divine knowledge, will and delight to be imposed on our mentality, vitality, physical existence till the lower is transformed into the perfect vessel of the higher. This was the double Vedic movement of the descent and birth of the gods in the human creature and the ascent of the human powers that struggle towards the Divine knowledge, power and delight and climb into the godheads, the result of which was the possession of the One, the Infinite, the beatific existence, the union with God, the immortality."[2]

If we wish to study the history of science of Yoga, we shall have to begin with the theme of the Vedic Yoga. The scope of the history of Yoga is very vast, and it should cover not only the Indian history of yogic science but also the study of yogic methods and their results as we find in the esoteric core of a number of religions such as Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and even in systems like the Chinese Taoism. Our intention should be to bring to ourselves the treasures that are available in the records of yogic knowledge, so that our efforts result in a systematic and fruitful presentation of the aims of Yoga, methods of Yoga, and the criteria that emerge for testing the verities of yogic experiences and realisations.

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[2] *Sri Aurobindo: The Synthesis of Yoga, Vol. 20, Centenary Edition, pp. 399-400*

VEDIC IDEALS OF EDUCATION AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

I. Our Contemporary Search

The contemporary moment of human history is riddled with a number of dilemmas, and we find it extremely difficult to resolve them. We erect the ideal of truth, and our quest ends in probabilities filled with mixtures of truth and error; we erect the ideal of liberty; and our experiments oblige us to strangulate it in the interests of equality; we erect the ideal of equality and we find ourselves obliged to abandon it in the interests of liberty; we erect the ideals of peace and unity but we seem to be incapable of fraternity; we erect huge edifices of the victorious analysis of nature, but we find ourselves satiated but not satisfied; we construct marvellous machines and appliances in our rush to conquer space and time, but we find ourselves dwarfed and incapacitated to expand our inner boundaries; we are unable to discover equations of harmony between ourselves and the universe.

At this critical hour, we have started knocking at the doors of past experience and future possibilities. But we are still circumscribed in our search by our familiar categories of thought, and we may be surprised if we are suddenly asked to look for solutions or helpful clues in the Veda, which is the most ancient available record of human experience, composed in antique language, reflecting a mentality quite different from ours.

II. Vedic Knowledge

And yet, if we consider the Veda dispassionately, applying strict methods of research and interpretation, as has been done by Sri Aurobindo in his "*The Secret of the Veda*", we may find in that ancient record a profound book of wisdom, directly relevant to the central issues of our age, and we may hope to derive from it helpful light and guidance. For Veda is not a mere book of rituals and ceremonies, nor is it a record of primitive or barbaric expression of fear and propitiation of Nature-Forces. Veda is, in the first place, a book of consummate poetry, lyric in intensity and epic in elevation, surcharged with the force of rhythmic word, expressing high substance of thought and experience in inevitable style. It is, in other words, a *mantric* poetry. Secondly, Veda is an exploration of the human life at all the three levels of experience, -- at the most material level, at the intermediate vital and mental level, and at the highest level of spiritual and supramental domains. And, thirdly, the Veda provides well-defined and articulated methods of exploration and discoveries, as also appropriate methods of confirmation and verification. The Veda contains thus a science, and, as in all true science, the object is an assured method of personal discovery or living repetition and possession of past discovery and a working out of all the things.

Perhaps the most important discovery described in the Veda is that of *turiyam svid*, a certain fourth world, a world higher than the three worlds, *prithvi*, *antariksha*, and *dyau*, the worlds corresponding to our body, life and mind. In an important hymn, there is a reference to *Ayasya*, the companion of the *Navagas*, and we are told that *Ayasya* became by this discovery universal, embraced the births in all the worlds and manifested a fourth world or fourfold world, *turiyam svid janayad*

vishwa janyah.[1] According to the Veda, the fourth world is the luminous world of *swar*, world of unmixed truth, and if one can dwell in it, one can attain three perfections, perfection of thought and its victorious illuminations, perfection of action and its supreme puissances, and perfection of bliss and its highest spiritual ecstasies. It is by this triple perfection that the Vedic *Rishis* attained to the realisation of immortality.

The Vedic *Rishis* have described, in detail, the path by which that triple perfection and immortality can be achieved. In an impressive and clear statement, *Parashara* describes the path that Vedic Rishis followed:

दधन्नृतं धनयन्नस्य धीतिम्।
आद् इद् अर्यो दिविष्वोऽ३ विभृत्राः।।[2]

"They held the truth, they enriched its thought; then indeed, aspiring souls they, holding it in thought, bore it diffused in all their being."

This verse lays stress on the faculty of thought and suggests that thought should be upheld in the truth, and that this thought should vibrate in all the principles of our being.

In another illuminating passage, *Parashara* speaks of the path which leads to immortality:

आ ये विश्वा स्वपत्यानि तस्थुः कृण्वानासो अमृतत्वाय गातुम्।
महना महद्भिः पृथिवी वि तस्थे माता पुत्रैरदितिर्धायसे वेः।।[3]

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[1] *Rigveda, X.67.1.*
[2] *Rigveda, I.71.3.*
[3] *Rigveda, I.72.9.*

"They who entered into all things that bear right fruits formed a path towards immortality; earth stood wide for them by the greatness and by the Great Ones, mother *Aditi*, with her sons manifested herself for the upholding."

This is an extremely important statement, and it underlines the fact that the Vedic *Rishis* achieved their goal, not by escaping from life but by developing powers of our being, including the physical. It says, in effect, that in the highest stage of being, in the state of immortality, the physical being is visited by the greatness of the infinite planes and by the power of the great godheads who reign on those planes. At that stage, the physical being exceeds its limits, opens out to the Light, and is upheld in its new wideness by infinite consciousness (mother *Aditi*), and her sons, the divine Powers of the Supreme *Deva*.

There are further details of the path. There is, first, the emphasis on aspiration. This aspiration is the fire of our inmost being. It is the Vedic *Agni*. It is the *Agni* that enables us to struggle throughout the entire human journey. This *Agni* enables us to seek the help of illumined intelligence, represented by *Indra*. It is *Indra*, who can vanquish obstacles on our path. It is *Indra* who can reveal to us the secret existence of the Supreme Being, as he revealed it to *Agastya*:

न नूनमस्ति नो श्वः कस्तद्वेद यद् अद्भुतम्।
अन्यस्य चित्तमभि संचरेण्यमुताधीतं वि नश्यति।।[4]

"It is not now, nor is It tomorrow, who knoweth that which is Supreme and Wonderful? It has motion and

[4] *Rigveda, I.170.1.*

action in the consciousness of another, but when It is approached by the thought, It vanishes."

This supreme and wonderful Reality is referred to in the Veda as "*That One*", *tad ekam*, or as *ekam sad*. That Reality is, such as we find in the famous declaration of *Dirghatamas*, *ekam sad viprā ḥahudhā vadanti*,[5] that Real which is described variously by the wise. But this Supreme Reality and its supreme Light, which is symbolised by *Savitri* is guarded by four guardians, *Varuna*, *Mitra*, *Aryaman* and *Bhaga*. These four guardians have to be embraced and fulfilled. *Varuna* represents vastness and infinity of wideness; *Mitra* represents harmony; *Aryaman* represents austerity, *tapasya*, and *Bhaga* represents the divine enjoyment. The seeker has, therefore, to become as wide as the universe, and attain harmony in all relations of the inner and outer universe. The seeker has to attain mastery over passions by perseverance and the highest effort. The seeker has also to equip himself or herself to bear highest degrees of ecstasy. All this requires sacrifice of limitations, limitations of selfishness and of egoism. The body has to be trained and perfected, the dynamic energies are to be controlled and propelled under the guidance of clarified intelligence, and mind needs to be offered in an act of union with the Supreme Light.

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्।[6]

The Supreme Light is symbolised by the Sun, which is the very home of the Truth, the Right and the Vast (*satyam, ritam, brihat*). In that Supreme Light is contained the nectar, *Soma*. It is this nectar which is

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[5] *Rigveda, I.164.46*

[6] *Rigveda, 3.62.10*

brought to the seeker by the twin physicians, *Ashwins*. Enjoyment of the sweetness of the nectar of the light builds up immortality.

This goal and this path are described variously and repeatedly by hundreds of *Rishis* in terms of their authenticated and verified experiences and realisations. This is the core of the Vedic teaching. This, then, is the Vedic affirmation: "Human life is a journey, full of difficulties and obstacles, full of inferior truth mixed with error. This inferior existence we can rise from and attain to the unmixed truth, boundless freedom, and pure delight. This can be attained by burning aspiration, by developing illumined intelligence, by universality, by harmonisation, by purification and by the light that comes from austerity, restraint and self-sacrifice."

III. Vedic System of Education

The Vedic *Rishi* not only announced all this secret possibility of human life but also built up and perfected a system of education by means of which children and youths can systematically be trained and perfected. They sought to build the bridges between past and the future; they developed not only goals of education but also means and methods of education; they also became themselves teachers and gave example of their conduct by their deeds, by their very life of how to become ideal teachers.

The central pillar of the Vedic system of education was the *Brahmacharin*, the pupil who has resolved to impose on himself or herself the ideal and practice of *Brahmacharya*, which means not only continence, but also a constant burning aspiration for the knowledge of the Brahman. What was expected from the pupil was enthusiasm, *utsaha*, zeal to learn, to discover and to master. Pupils, like *Satyakama*, *Jabala*, used to search

out their own teachers and seek approval for admission to their *Gurukulas* from them. But teachers, too, used to pray for pupils. The *Rishi* in the *Taittiriya* Upanishad prays:

आमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।
विमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।
प्रमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।
दमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।
शमायन्तु ब्रह्मचारिणः स्वाहा।[7]

"May the Brahmacharins come unto me.
From here and there may the Brahmacharins come unto me.
May the Brahmacharins set forth unto me.
May the Brahmacharins have control over themselves.
May the Brahmacharins attain to peace of soul."

Along with the importance of the pupil was also the importance of the teacher. The teacher represented not only mature worldly and scholarly wisdom but also a high realisation. The teacher was the *Rishi*, who had *seen* the Reality. His task was to uplift the aspiration and knowledge latent in the pupil. The teacher furnished to the pupil the external word or *shruti* that is needed in the beginning and for a long time on the way. But it was recognised that the real teacher is the Supreme Brahman seated in the heart of the pupil, and sooner rather than later, the pupil must discover the inner teacher and inner guide.

The Vedic system of education worked on sound psychological principles and methods of education relevant to the teaching-learning processes. The most important idea was to aim at an all-round perfection.

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[7] *Taittiriya Upanishad, Shikshavalli, Chapater I.4.*

There was a concept of *shreshtha*, the best, of highly excellent.

The adage for physical education was:

शरीरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम्।

"A healthy and sound body is the instrument of the performance of the highest ideal."

The qualities aimed at in regard to the dynamic and vital energies and emotions were those of benevolence, beneficence, compassion, altruism, kindliness, as also those of courage, heroism, loyalty, continence, truth, honour, justice, faith, obedience. There was also insistence on the development of power to govern and direct, a fine modesty and yet a strong independence and noble pride. In regard to the mind, the idea was to encourage pursuit of learning and knowledge, openness to poetry, art and beauty, sharp and subtle intelligence, and, above all, wisdom. The ideal also included the development of educated capacity and skill in work. While there was an emphasis on the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness, there was also, in accordance with the need of nature, a constant pressure to open up higher faculties of spiritual knowledge and action.

Swadhyaya (self-study) was the cornerstone of the pupil's discipline and method of learning. The teacher had not any set method, but he employed every method that would be suitable for the awakening of the pupil's interest, capacity and faculty. It was understood that the profoundest truths, like *tad ekam*, were simple in formulation, but hard to practise and realise. Often the teacher left the pupil free to contemplate on one simple formula over a period of years, until the pupil, by means of *manana*, contemplation, *nididhyasana*, constant

dwelling, came to internalise the meaning of the formula and arrive at the realisation, *sakshatkara.* Often, the teacher communicated to the pupil in silence or through brief remarks or through dialogues. The teachers interwove their own lives with the lives of the pupils. Togetherness was the watchword of the teacher. He prays:

सह नाववतु।।
सह नौ भुनक्तु।।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै।।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै।।[8]

"Together may He protect us.
Together may He possess us.
Together may we make unto us strength and virility;
May our study be full to us of light and power.
May we never hate."

The pupil was expected to develop extraordinary memory, imagination and thought. The predominance of the oral tradition necessitated the cultivation of power of memory; the high content of philosophical and spiritual knowledge necessitated cultivation of subtlety and complexity of thought; the setting of the Ashrams and Gurukulas in the open forests necessitated cultivation of intimate communion with Nature and the power of inner harmony, imagination and spontaneous delight.

Another important element of the Vedic system of education was in respect of Time. To observe, follow and guide the rhythms of progress, to respect seasons of preparation and seasons of readiness, and seasons of flowering and fruition, to allow for patience and

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[8] *Taittiriya Upanishad, Brahmanandavalli, Chapter-II*

perseverance, to encourage increasing acceleration, to appreciate leisureliness and to promote quickness of action – all these were harmoniously blended so that each individual got the right measure of guidance, encouragement and inspiration from the teacher and the system.

The Vedic text was indeed the basic content of education. But this implied also a great emphasis on language, pronunciation, phonetics, etymology and grammar. Courses of study also included medicine and sciences and arts of various kinds. For the Vedic text contains profound psychology, astronomy, science and art of living. Study and practice of various crafts were incidental to the day-to-day life, since the pupils lived in the very home of the teacher. Living with the teacher provided a natural setting for sharing not only daily chores and duties, but also aspirations, trials of life, problems of conduct, and realisation of higher ideals and values. The *Gurukula* system provided to the teacher natural opportunities to teach through instruction, example and influence. Instruction had a role lesser than the living example of the inner life of the teacher. But more important than instruction or example was the influence of the teacher, emanating not from any arbitrary authority but from the nearness of the soul of the teacher to the soul of the pupil.

Overarching the entire *Gurukula* system was the air and atmosphere that chanted the vibration of aspiration:

असतो मा सद् गमय।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय।
मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमय।।[9]

[9] *Brihadaranayaka Upanishad, I.3.28*

"Lead me from falsehood to Truth.
Lead me from darkness to Light.
Lead me from death to Immortality."

This is a very brief outline of some of the salient features of the Vedic system of education; but it is obvious that there is a gulf of difference between that system and the system that obtains today in our schools, colleges and universities. Our objects are much more limited, our methods lack sound psychological foundations, and contents of education confine our students and teachers to a narrow range of facts and ideas presented almost entirely in an uninteresting manner. There is a deep cry in the soul of our country to redesign our system of education.

IV. Relevance of Vedic System of Education to Our Needs

(a) A major possession of our times is science, and there is a need to augment the importance that is given to it. The chief merit of science is its precision of knowledge derived from application of the methods of impartial observation, experimentation and verification. Science rejects dogma and unsupported authority. In the work of the scientists, there is perfection of purity and satisfaction, and even if there is any individual error or limitation, it will not matter, since in the collective progression of knowledge the error will get eliminated. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that the balance sheet of science is a mixed one, particularly because when science turns to apply its discoveries and inventions to life – situations, it tends to become a playing of forces over which it has little control. Modern commercialism, which is actually economic barbarism, derives much of its brutal sharpness from technology that science has provided to the society. There is,

therefore, a growing awareness that all is not well with science, particularly with technology, and things cannot be allowed to develop unchecked and unchallenged. It has been contended that science is knowledge, and knowledge is power, power for evil as much as for good. We have, therefore, the need to relate science with the dimension of values. It has now been acknowledged that unless human beings increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow. It has been suggested that there should be a synthesis of science and humanism and that science must advocate avoidance of cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, fear, lust for power, intolerance.

At the same time, there are no convincing answers to the deeper questions as to how science can be induced to avoid these undesirable things. What is the alchemy, it has been pertinently asked, by which human nature can be changed? This question becomes much more agonising when we realise that neither ethics nor religion does provide us with adequate answers. This has, therefore, brought us sharply to the theme of science and spirituality. But here, again, the two cannot easily harmonise with each other, if science continues to have its own dogma derived from exclusive materialism which assumes without questioning that physical senses are the only means of knowledge. On the other hand, spirituality tends also to be presented in the form of exclusive affirmations and negations of conflicting religions, or else, it is presented as a matter merely of sporadic or occasional ethereal experiences. It is only when spirituality becomes as wide and open as science and when it develops into an ever-increasing body of authentic knowledge and effective power of realisation and action that we can hope to arrive at a possible meeting-ground of science and spirituality.

But precisely here the Veda can come to our aid. For Veda is a systematic body of physical, psycho-physical, spiritual and supramental knowledge. It is a body of knowledge built up by accumulation of experiences and realisations derived from application of appropriate methods which were themselves determined by repeated and assured results. The Veda is an open book of an ever-widening and ever-integrating science of Yoga.

As in true science, so in Veda, there is no dogma. Vedic *Rishis* were explorers, they were seekers, they were questioners. The truths that they perceived and recorded were derived from illuminations which occurred to them at the intense point of friction of their questioning with reality. Truths once discovered were enlarged by subsequent discoveries, and, as the Veda itself declared, when the *Rishis* climb higher and higher, vaster and vaster ranges of truth begin to unfold themselves.

For this reason also Vedic knowledge has continued to expand in subsequent ages, even as it has continued to be confirmed. Upanishads themselves marked an advancement, in several respects, over the Veda, and that is why they have been known as Vedanta, culmination of the Veda. Again, the Gita is a confirmation of both the Veda and the Upanishad, but also an advancement, in some respects, over both of them. The same thing can be said about the Tantra, and many other yogic developments, such as we find in Sri Chaitanya, and even up to the present day, in the mighty yogic endeavour of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Like every science, Vedic science of Yoga has continued to develop, and it is in that background that we can confidently put forward the Vedic knowledge and Vedic

system of education as an extremely helpful aid to our contemporary need to relate science with spirituality. In the harmonisation of these two great movements we can hope to find the solution of the difficult problem of how to change human nature, the problem that seems to be so central for human survival and fulfilment.

(b) Apart from science, another important possession of our times is individualism. Modern science itself was a consequence of the revolt of individualism against authority. Individualism refuses to allow the collective to crush the individual; indeed, it admits rational and reasonable subordination of the individual to the collective good; but it admits it on the condition that the collective good includes the rational and reasonable good of the individual. Individualism goes farther. It seeks increasing affirmation of individual freedom, and it aims at the discovery of the deeper potentialities of the individual and his or her integral fulfilment. In education, individualism has given rise to the concepts of child-centred education, of individual differentiation, and of integral perfection for each individual on the lines appropriate to his or her temperament and law of being. These concepts advocate radical reforms in education and insist on individual freedom not only in choice of subjects but also in choice of teachers, pace and direction of progress.

Our contemporary need is to place the child in the centre of education, and for that reason to place the child in the centre of society itself. There is a dominant trend towards, what we might call, the sovereignty of the child. And corresponding to this sovereignty, we have also the concept of what has come to be called "learning society". This ideal of learning society is being reinforced

by an unprecedented explosion of knowledge and rapid rate of progress in all domains of life.

In this background, the question that arises is as to whether the Vedic system of education can meet our contemporary concern for the sovereignty of the child and the learning society. The question is what place Vedic system of education assigns to the learner and whether in that system there is flexibility to allow for individual freedom. The question also relates as to whether the Vedic system of education had any concept of society comparable to that of learning society.

The answer is not difficult to find. For, indeed, the pupil was looked upon as the central pillar of the Vedic system of education, and the *Gurukula* system was so devised that teachers could interweave their own life with the life of pupils. Again, teachers had freedom to suit the programmes of study for each pupil according to his or her own interests and pace of progress. The concept of *swabhava* and *swadharma* were developed under the pressure of the realisation that each individual has a deeper soul in him or her, which has its own unique path of fulfilment. In fact, the concept of the individual in the Vedic system is much deeper than what obtains in modern psychology. In the modern view, the individual is conceived as a body-life-mind-complex, and the highest ideal conceived for the individual is the utmost perfection of physical, vital and mental capacities. Equilibrium of the intellectual, aesthetic and ethical being was the Greek ideal and that is being put forward in our own time. But the Veda conceives of the individual as a pure entity suffused with knowledge and delight capable of guiding, controlling and integrating all the parts of the being. It looks upon the individual as an end in himself or herself because it finds purity and sacredness of the spiritual presence in the inmost depth of the individual. And the entire aim and method of

education conceived in the Vedic system is to bring forward that spiritual element and make it active as a guide of the growth of the body, life and mind as also of higher faculties of intuition, inspiration and discrimination. Divine fulfilment of each individual was the goal of the system of Vedic tradition.

Following the Vedic tradition of education, modern India has made bold attempts to resurrect the importance of individuality and human personality in education. Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati spoke of the ideal of *brahmacharya* as an indispensable instrument of individual perfection, and in the *Gurukula* system that he advocated, he underlined the importance of the individual and of the life of discipline, for both boys and girls, for attaining full development of personality. Swami Vivekananda spoke of man-making education and declared that every individual soul is potentially divine; and this is the ideal that has been greatly experimented upon in the educational endeavour initiated by Swami Vivekananda. Rabindra Nath Tagore created *Shanti Niketan* as a cradle of the creative development of personality in its harmonious relationship with universal Nature. In basic education, too, the emphasis on human personality and the harmony between hand, head and heart is unmistakably underlined. Sri Aurobindo gave the concept of integral personality as a harmony of four basic powers of the soul, -- knowledge, strength, harmony and skill, -- and, the integral system of education developed by the Mother has provided framework that would enable every individual to develop full potentialities of personality as also their spiritual transformation. These experiments need to be understood properly and we need to draw lessons from there to design a comprehensive process of learning and

teaching that can foster the manpower and woman-power that is urgently required at the present moment.

God, unity and freedom were the watchwords of the Vedic system; and to translate this trinity into progressive form of social system was also a part of the aim. This aim can very well harmonise with the concept of learning society. The Vedic *Rishis* looked upon different stages of life as specific levels of learning and preparation for the next level of learning and preparation. All life was in this view a process of perpetual education. Contrary to the rigid caste system that reigns today, the *Rishis* looked upon the society as a body consisting of individuals engaged in the processes of learning and teaching. In any case, the Vedic idea aimed at universal emancipation and upliftment of all. कृण्वन्तो विश्वमार्यम् was the call of the Vedic *Rishis*. Common action and common movement, perpetual harmony and perpetual togetherness – this is the social message that the Vedic *Rishis* have put forward in the field:

सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम्।
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे संजानाना उपासते।।
समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम्।
समानं मन्त्रमभि मन्त्रये वः समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि।।
समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः।
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति।।[10]

"Join together; speak one word; let your minds arrive at one knowledge even as the ancient gods arriving at one knowledge partake each of his own portion.

Common Mantra have all these, a common gathering to union, one mind common to all, they are together in

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[10] *Rigveda, X.191.2-4.*

one knowledge; I pronounce for you a common Mantra, I do sacrifice for you with a common offering.

One and common be your aspiration, united your hearts, common to you be your mind, -- so that close companionship may be yours."

(c) But more than all this and more than what the contemporary world demands consciously from life and education is also to be found in the Veda. Veda may be looked upon as the first book of evolution, in which we find the seeds of knowledge which are relevant to the next stage of evolution, of which we are now becoming conscious slowly under the pressure of crashing circumstances. The question here is not merely whether the human being can be changed, but the question here is whether the human being can be radically changed. The question here relates to the mutation of human species. As Sri Aurobindo points out, mankind is passing today through an evolutionary crisis, and in meeting this crisis, the knowledge contained in the Veda is of capital importance. If the present humanity is to be prepared for the next stage of evolution, and if for that purpose a new educational programme is to be envisaged, as we must, then the knowledge contained in the Veda and in the Vedic system of education will have to be viewed as directly relevant to our most important contemporary need.

Indeed, this subject is very vast, and one need not enter into it here any farther. But it is very clear that the Veda and Vedic system of education need to be looked into by us with open and fresh eyes, not merely as an interesting chapter of history, but as a treasure from which we can draw for our profit and for our advantage, so that we can build appropriately not only for the contemporary moment but also for the posterity.

BHAGAVADGITA AND CONTEMPORARY CRISIS

Bhagavadgita has this uniqueness that, unlike other great religious books of the world, it does not stand apart as a work by itself. It is given as an episode in an epic history of India and of a great war fought in it. This episode focuses on a critical moment in the soul of one of the leading personages of this epic history, Mahabharata. It is also a moment of the crowning action of his life, where he faces a work which is terrible, violent and sanguinary. And he is confronted with a critical choice when he must either recoil from it altogether or carry it through to its inexorable execution. The criticality of the situation forces this great leader, Arjuna, to raise some of the deepest questions that compel an answer at the deepest level. The answer that we find in the Bhagavadgita is, therefore, important not merely in the light of general philosophy or ethical doctrine, but it has also a bearing upon a practical crisis and the application of the highest knowledge to human life.

The reason why the Bhagavadgita reads almost as fresh and still in its real substance even today as ever is because it is directly connected with the questions of highest importance in human life and attempts to apply the most absolute and integral realisation to the outer actualities of man's life and action. The relevance of the Gita has been in a sense perennial right from the time it

first appeared or was written into the frame of the Mahabharata. But considering that humanity is passing today through a grim and unprecedented crisis, we are bound to look into this great book with fresh eyes and compelling concern. It has been said sometimes that all we need to do is to be found in the Gita today. This is, we must say, an exaggeration and if we took that view too literally, it would encourage the superstition of the book. The highest truth, we might say, is infinite and cannot be circumscribed in that manner. While approaching the Gita or any other similar great work, we must be ready to accept that Truth is everywhere and cannot be the sole monopoly of one single book. It will also be dogmatic to declare that the truth that this book gives is *the* supreme knowledge, while some similar books have missed it or only imperfectly grasped it. Our approach should be impartial and our concern should be to look for the actual living truths that the Gita or any other similar work contains, to extract from it what can help us or the world at large. As students of life and seekers of the science and art of life, we should avoid academic disputation or assertions of mere theological dogma.

An impartial study of the Gita will show that it contains a very rich and many-sided thought, it manifests a synthetic grasp of different aspects of the ethical and spiritual life, and that it takes us to some of the highest possible experiences of which human mind is capable. It can even be said that it contains most of the main clues of the secret of reconciliation of the supreme states of consciousness and dynamic demands of the battles of life in which we find ourselves all the time, but particularly, at critical moments.

The setting in which the teaching of the Gita emerges is typical. The setting is that the *Kurukshetra*, the field of battle, which is also the battle of life, the battle that

we face in our life, visibly or invisibly, in our own times. Arjuna, the leading hero of the battle, is the representative man of the great world struggle, and he typifies the human soul of action brought face to face through that action in its highest and most violent crisis. And the crisis itself is ridden with the problem of human life where all standards of action fail and where a new basis of the action must be found at any cost. As we all know, the crisis that gripped Arjuna can come upon any one of us, and if we examine the contemporary situation we can clearly see how we ourselves are gripped by that crisis. Perhaps the dimensions of our crisis are even deeper and vaster.

It has sometimes been suggested that the crisis of Arjuna arose because, confronted with his duty, he felt compulsion of emotions and ideas which induced him to escape from his duty and to take resort to the gospel of renunciation of worldly pursuits and actions. This is a misreading of Arjuna's crisis. It cannot be said that Arjuna did not know his duty as a *kshatriya* or as a warrior whose aim was to ensure the rule of the right and justice. But his crisis arose from the fact that he saw an inextricable clash of the various related conceptions of duty; one concept clashing with another concept; one level of perception clashing with another level of perception. In other words, Arjuna's crisis arose from the collapse of the whole intellectual and moral edifice erected by the human mind. Arjuna knew that his duty was to fight, but what happens when that duty becomes to his mind a terrible sin? He knew that he had right on his side, but that does not and cannot satisfy him because, as he argues, the justice of his legal claim does not justify him in supporting it by pitiless massacre destructive of the future of a nation. He feels that he must refrain from what his conscience abhors, though a thousand duties were shattered to pieces. And

yet, who knows or how to know whether one should follow one or the other, the first alternative or the second alternative? Is there, it is effectively asked, a possible compromise or a radical solution?

There are several possible answers, and we find them all presented during the course of the answer that Sri Krishna presents. One answer is that of the performance of the social duty imposed by the creed of the Aryan fighter. Another answer is that the spiritualised ethics, which insists on *ahimsa*, on non-injuring and non-killing. According to the argument of this answer, the battle, if it is to be fought at all, must be fought on the spiritual plane and by some kind of non-resistance or refusal of participation. It may also advocate participation in the battle by taking recourse to non-violence and to soul resistance. (Non-violence has been consider-ed by Sri Krishna as one of the divine gifts.[1]) It may be that the soul resistance does not succeed on the external plane and the force of injustice conquers; even then, the argument would be that the individual will still have preserved his virtue and vindicated by his example the highest ideals. In a third possible answer, one may advocate a more insistent extreme of the inner spiritual direction, passing beyond this struggle between social duty and an absolutist ethical ideal; one would then favour the ascetic turn which points to get away from life and all its aims and standards of action, declaring that not here in this world of dualities but somewhere in celestial or supra-cosmic stage, one can find an effective exit from the problem. The Gita rejects none of these things in their place; it insists on the performance of social duty, the following of the *dharma* for the man who has to take his share in the common action; it accepts *ahimsa* as a part of the highest spiritual-ethical ideal; it

[1] *Bhagavadgita, Chapter XVI.2*

recognises also the ascetic renunciation as an effective way, if not as a solution of the problem, yet as a way of coming out of the problem. But the Gita goes boldly beyond these conflicting positions. It justifies all life to the spirit, and asserts the compatibility of a complete human action and a complete spiritual life lived in re-union with the highest states of knowledge and consciousness.

Let us state clearly Arjuna's arguments.

In the first place, Arjuna argued that he would like to reject that aim of life which seeks enjoyment and happiness.

Secondly, he declared that he would reject the aim which seeks to attain victory and rule and power and government of men, -- the aim that was described in the Indian *dharma* for the *kshatriya*, the man of power and action.

Thirdly, he rejected the ethical element that was the main spring of the entire preparation for the war. His arguments in this connection could be summarised as follows:

(a) What exactly is "justice" involved in fighting the war that was about to commence? Was it not, he asked, interest of himself, his brothers, and of his party for possession, enjoyment and rule? And even if it be granted that these aims were justified, he raised the question as to what would be the means for securing that justice. Would it not mean, he asked, the sacrifice of the right maintenance of social and national life which in person of the kin of the race stood before him opposing him in the battlefield?

(b) Turning to another line of argument, Arjuna felt that even if happiness and life were desirable, they were so only if they were shared with all others, particularly with "our own people". But here, Arjuna argued, "our own people" are to be slain, and who would consent to slay them for the sake of all the earth and even for the kingdom of the three worlds?

(c) At this stage, Arjuna formulated even a more fundamental objection. He declared that slaughter is a heinous crime, in which there is no right and no justice. And further, the sin became graver when those who were to be slain were objects of love and reverence.

(d) Formulating this ethical argument further, Arjuna conceded that the sons of *Dhritarashtra* were guilty of grave offences, of sins of greed, and selfish passion, but he argued that they were overpowered by ignorance and they had no sense of guilt. On the other hand, would it be right, he asked in effect, to enter into a sinful act voluntarily with a clear knowledge that sin was to be committed?

(e) Once again, Arjuna brought in another ethical consideration. Even if a sin was to be committed, and even if that could be justified in one way or the other, how could it be justified if that leads to the destruction of family morality, social law, law of the nation? Arjuna declared that the family itself would be corrupted, race would be sallied, laws of race, morality, and family would be destroyed. And who would be responsible for these crimes? Indeed, those, in particular, who would enter into the war with the knowledge and sense of guilt and sin.

These arguments led Arjuna to declare that he would not fight.

The most salutary thing that Arjuna did was, however, to turn to Sri Krishna with deep humility for advice. Like a pupil, he sought from Sri Krishna some decisive word by which his confusion could be dispelled and he could be enabled to act in the right way. And Sri Krishna's help was unfailing.

Sri Krishna perceived clearly that behind the refusal of Arjuna was a mixture and confusion and that there was a tangled error of ideas and impulsions of the *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* ego. He also perceived that Arjuna was overcome by the fear of sin and its personal con-sequences and that his heart had recoiled from con-sequences and that his heart had recoiled from individual grief and suffering. Sri Krishna also detected that Arjuna's reasoning was an attempt to cover his egoistic impulses by self-deceptive specious pleas of right and virtue.

In the first brief reply, Sri Krishna referred to the highest ideas of the general Aryan culture in which Arjuna had been educated. In that context, Sri Krishna pointed out, "There is no greater good for a *kshatriya* than a righteous battle and if thou dost not this battle for the right, then thou hast abandoned they duty and virtue and thy glory and sin shall be thy portion."[2]
With reference to Arjuna's appeal to the consequences of action, Sri Krishna pointed out that if he (Arjuna) were to be slain in the battle, he would win Heaven and if he were to be victorious, he would enjoy the earth. "Therefore arise", asked Sri Krishna, "resolved upon battle."[3]

Sri Krishna was, however, aware that this answer would not satisfy Arjuna for he was thinking of the slaughter of the battle as a cause of sorrow and sin. Sri

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[2] *Bhagavadgita, Chapter II.31, 33.*

[3] *Bhagavadgita, Chapter II.37*

Krishna, therefore, asked Arjuna to rise to a higher and not sink to a lower ideal. In doing so, Sri Krishna distinguishes the path of renunciation which leads to inaction and that path of renunciation which leads to inner freedom even in the midst of performance of action. While admitting the effectivity of the first alternative, Sri Krishna explains why the latter is preferable. In that context, Sri Krishna told him:

"Know thyself, and source of thyself; help man and protect Right; do without fear or weakness or faltering thy work of battle in the world. Look not at thy own pleasure and gain and profit, but above and around, above at the shining summits and around on this world of battle and trial in which good and evil, progress and retrogression are locked in stern conflict. Destroy, when by destruction the world must advance but hate not which thou destroyest, neither grieve for those who perish. Know everywhere the one Self, know all to be immortal souls and the body to be but dust. Do thy work with a calm, strong and equal spirit; fight and fall nobly or conquering mightily. For this is the work that God and thy nature (*swabhava* and *swadharma*) have given to thee to accomplish."

This higher answer of Sri Krishna consists of three steps:

(a) Realise that one has the right to action but not to consequences; hence one should give up desire for the fruits of action;

(b) Realise, in a larger vision of the world, that even in regard to action, there is a mutual giving and receiving, and all action must be a part of one's sacrifice

to cosmic powers, who in return, sacrifice themselves for the production of action;

(c) Sacrifice done with knowledge is the highest sacrifice and that alone brings the perfect working.

It is at this stage that one begins to realise that one should do one's action, but not by impulsion of desire and ego-sense; one should discover the impersonal Will that is at work behind the universe, a Will that does not proceed from desire to acquire and possess, but which proceeds from inner fullness of being as an expression of inner unity.

The Will that proceeds from inner unity manifests unity in the outer world; the unity of the world is *lokasangrah*, holding together of the people.

The solution that Sri Krishna presents has three layers; at each layer, Sri Krishna presents a secret, a secret not of outward conduct or of any belief which can be easily but vainly practised by the ethical or religious mentality, but of a living transformation of consciousness attain-able by application of the truths of higher possibilities of psychology. The first secret, *guhyam rahasyam*, is to find out how the field of circumstances in which one is placed can be apprehended or comprehended and mastered. This secret is the knowledge of the distinction between the field of circumstances and the knower of the field, *kshetra* and *kshetrajña*. There is behind and above the field of circumstances the secret conscious-ness that can be experienced as a silent witness, *purusha* or as a transcendental immobility, *Brahman* or as the controlling and ruling giver of sanction and master, *anumanta* and *ishwara*. One of these experiences or all of them together can provide a sure basis of freedom from the tangles of the problems that the field of

circumstances and the battle of life present to us by means of an interplay of the three *gunas* of Nature, *sattwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. But at this level of experience, although there is here freedom *from* action and its problems, one does not yet have the key to the freedom *of* action, freedom *in* action and freedom to disentangle the knots from the problems and their gripping difficulties. For that we need to have a deeper secret, *guhyataram rahasyam*, the secret of the origin of Nature in a higher Nature, the origin of *apara prakriti* in the *parā prakriti*, where is also to be found the origin of multiple individualities which are the centres of the Supreme Self, *Purushottama*, who at once reconciles and synthesises the status of *Purusha*, *Brahman* and *Ishwara*. And the knowledge of this higher Nature not only librates us from the tangle of Nature, but gives us also the capacity to harmonise various threads of Nature which would even allow the transmission of the dynamic and creative action that would resolve the knots and problems of all our activities of life. This is the knowledge by which the cognitive, affective and conative powers of our psychology can be perfected and synthesis of *karmayoga*, *jñanayoga* and *bhaktiyoga* can be effected. But there is still a culmination of this deeper secret; there is still the deepest secret, *guhyatamam rahasyam*. This secret is that of the possibility of the transmutation of lower nature by higher nature, of the attainment of *sadharmyam*, where human law of action is substituted by the divine law of action. And the secret method is to move at a stage where all that one is or one has is reposed unconditionally in the hands and in the being of the Supreme, as a result of which all that flows through the individuality is the incorruptible breath of the Supreme which unites the Truth, Beauty and Goodness and constantly creates conditions suitable for the unity and harmony of the people, *lokasangraha*.

In terms of our dealings with action in the process of rising out of the human into the higher and highest planes, there are three great steps. In the first step, there is insistence on renunciation of desire and a perfect equality even when works are performed; but works have to be done as a sacrifice, *yajña.* In the second step, there is not only the renunciation of the desire of the fruits of actions but also the renunciation of the claim to be the doer of works in the realisation of the Self as the equal and the immutable principle and of all works as simply the operation of universal Force of the *prakriti.* In the last step, the Supreme Self is to be seen as the governor of *prakriti,* both lower and higher, of whom the individual self is a partial manifestation, by whom all works are directed, in a perfect transcendence through Nature. Here whole being has to be surrendered to the Supreme and the whole consciousness raised up to dwell in this divine consciousness so that the human soul may share in His Divine transcendence and act in a perfect spiritual liberty.

Sri Aurobindo sums up the entire core of the teaching in the following words:

"The first step is Karmayoga, the selfless sacrifice of works, and here the Gita's insistence is on action. The second is Jnanayoga, the self-realisation and knowledge of the true nature of the self and the world, and here the insistence is on knowledge; but the sacrifice of works continues and the path of Works becomes one with but does not disappear into the path of Knowledge. The last step is Bhaktiyoga, adoration and seeking of the supreme Self as the Divine Being, and here the insistence is on devotion; but the knowledge is not subordinated, only raised, vitalised and fulfilled, and still the sacrifice of works continues; the double path becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and

devotion. And the fruit of the sacrifice, the one fruit still placed before the seeker, is attained, union with the divine Being and oneness with the supreme divine Nature."[4]

The solution that is offered by the Gita can be found applicable also to the contemporary crisis, if not fully in all details, but still by employing all the clues that are given here. Whereas the *kshetra* of the Gita was the local field of a large but still local battle, the present world has become, since the outbreak of the First World War, a global field of global war, whether that War breaks out in world-wide physical configuration or it remains simmering in conditions of a cold war, or else burning in the minds of men, as it is today, with huge piles of nuclear warheads that have the potentiality of destroying the world many times again and again. The *kshetra* of today is also great battle with the entire nature and environment which is being constantly eroded and, as it is feared, which might endanger the survival of various species including the human species. Just as Arjuna was the lead personage of *kshetra* desirous of protecting and establishing the claims of the right and justice, even so, each one of us is, if not a leading personage, at least a participating solider in the army of men and women all over the world who are filled with aspiration to uphold the causes of survival, peace and unity, and also engaged in one way or the other in the battle to fulfil that aspiration.

Just as Arjuna felt gripped by the sense of crisis, we too feel gripped by a sense of crisis. We belong to that stage of human progress which stands today intellectually sceptical, morally weakened and spiritually bankrupt. We started with the Renaissance with the

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[4] *Sri Aurobindo: Collected Works, Vol. 13, Centenary Edition, p.35*

affirmation that Truth can be discovered by pure Reason and that truth can be known with certainty. After numerous experimentations, we are still debating the notion of the Truth and the only certainty we have is that all know-ledge is only probable in character. We began at that time with the idea that human life can be lived in harmony with effectivity and fruitfulness because both the individuals and the collectivity can be harmonised by the ethical and social principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. Today we find increasing force of the idea that morality is a matter of emotional responses and that there is no rational justification for one set of moral values against the other. Again, after various experimentations, we have found that when liberty is promoted, equality has to be sacrificed; and when equality is to be promoted, liberty requires to be strangulated; and fraternity has as yet no chance of flowering except in terms of Sovietic comradeship or capitalistic association of interests. As far as spirituality is concerned, while India had the knowledge but lost it and compounded this loss by neglecting Life and matter, in spite of the fact that for a long period it had cultivated to great heights material and cultural efflorescence, the West has the knowledge of matter and life, but in spite of having a powerful tradition of spirituality neglected spirit; as a result, there is today deplorable spiritual poverty or even bankruptcy. The total result is that of uncertainty, confusion and incapacity to answer the dilemmas of life. There is a collapse of the edifice of standards of action, and one does not know in what direction and how we should move forward.

Time has come when it is perfectly possible for humanity to develop a comprehensive and integral culture where both spirit and matter can join together and create a spiritualised society that can at last answer to the perennial aspiration of humanity expressed in

terms of a new earth and a new heaven, of the City of God and of the Kingdom of God on the earth. But precisely at this time, the crisis can be seen acutely in the fact that rational powers which can be a powerful lever to uplift humanity from its lower aims and pursuits to higher heights of ethical and spiritual objects, are today gripped by the currents of scepticism and disabling compromises that build up arguments against the upward effort to break the limitations of the modes and structures of life that have been built up. The major difficulty of the present modes and structures of life is the machinery of standardisation, mechanisation, and dehumanisation. A structure has been raised up in the services of the mental, vital, physical claims and urges and this structure has become so huge that it is unmanageable; it is a structure of great complexity meant to provide political, social, administrative, economic and cultural machinery; and its focus is on providing collective means for intellectual, sensational, aesthetic and material satisfactions. This system of civilisation has become too big for the limited mental capacity and understanding and for the still more limited spiritual and moral capacity; it has become a too dangerous servant of the blundering ego and its appetites.

At a time when an upward effort towards the ethical and spiritual perfection is both possible and imperative, just at that time, means have been made available readily to humanity for it to create and sustain machineries which can keep it arrested by the downward gravitational pull of animal desires and satisfactions.

What is needed is the transition of humanity from the pulls of lower nature towards the liberating powers of higher nature, the transition from *apara prakriti* to *para prakriti* to use the suggestive words of the Bhagavadgita. The solution that has been suggested

by the Bhagavadgita by means of which the needed transition can be effected is directly relevant to it. It is true that while the Bhagavadgita has described in full the path, it has only hinted at the perfect fulfilment and the secret of it. For, the fulfilment is, in any case, a method of experience and no teaching can express it. It cannot be described in a way that can really be understood when we have not yet entered into the portals of the effulgent transmuting experience. And yet, Gita's secret of dynamic, and not only static identity with the inner Presence, its highest mystery of absolute surrender to the Divine Guide, is the central secret. It is by pursuit of this secret that the needed change can be effected, and it is by the pursuit of this path that the crisis of humanity can be resolved.

Fortunately, what is needed is a decisive turn in humanity and even if the major changes that we expect can take a long time before fruition, if we are moved by the conviction that it is for the upward movement whereby human life can be transformed, we shall have contributed to the decisive beginning that is of capital importance. Fortunately, again, the aspiration to move upward seems to be gathering the force of burning fire, and both in the East and in the West, experiences of the new realms of spiritual and supramental manifestation seem to be breaking a new ground. Therefore, even though the path is difficult and obstacles are formidable, we need not fear to aspire and to work for the triumph of the Divine Will in securing for the earth a life of liberty suffused with the spirit of fraternity and designed for equal upliftment of all members of the human society.

At the same time, we need to underline the imperative need of constant effort of research in a constant enlargement of horizons of knowledge.

Knowledge is always power, and it is the constant journey of developing knowledge that will give us increasing powers to break our limitations which would enable us not only to survive but also to arrive at the highest goals that humanity can conceive.

We stand today at the head of a new age which is bound to be marked by a very vast synthesis. A mass of new material is flowing into us. We are required to assimilate the influences of the great theistic religions of India and similarly of the great theistic religions of the world; we have also to assimilate the recovered sense of the meaning of Buddhism. Relevance of Jainism has also to be underlined. We have to take into account the potent, though limited, revelations of modern knowledge and seeking. A fresh and widely embracing harmonisation of our gains in both intellectual and spiritual areas is the necessity of the future. In the task of this comprehensive harmonisation, the understanding of the Gita and its contemporary relevance is perhaps one of our major needs.

Let us recall a Vedic prayer which inspires discovery of new knowledge:

युगेयुगे विदथ्यं गृणद्भ्योऽग्ने रयिं यशसं धेहि नव्यसीम्।[5]

"Found for those who from age to age speak the word that is new, the word that is a discovery of knowledge, O Fire, their glorious treasure."

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[5] *Rigveda, VI.8.5.*

VEDIC PHILOSOPHY OF DHARMA

(*in brief and essential terms*)

I

अग्निर्हि देवाँ अमृतो दुवस्यत्यथा धर्माणि सनता न दूदुषत्।[1]

The immortal mystic fire of aspiration adores cosmic powers and beings so that the eternal principles of Dharma may not be violated.

The concepts of *Dharma* and *Karma* have been derived from some of the important discoveries which were made by the Vedic *Rishis*. We shall refer mainly to five of these discoveries.

1

Greatest of these discoveries was that of the fourth world as distinguished from the world of matter (*prithvi*), world of life (*antariksha*) and the world of mind (*dyau*). This fourth world was called "*turiyam svid*, the world of truth and of everlasting light. Three words describe this fourth world: *satyam*, *ritam*, *brihat*, truth, right and vast.

Modern knowledge acknowledges the existence of Matter, which we can sense through our sense-organs; it also accepts the existence of Life that pulsates in the universe through the process of association, growth and disintegration; it further admits Mind as the power and

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[1] *Rigveda III.3.1*

substance of Idea or Thought. But it has still not rediscovered the Vedic "fourth world" that is superior to idea and which can be described as Real-Idea, since it is regarded as capable of realising ideative concepts.

2

Going beyond the fourth world, the Vedic explorers discovered what they called *ekam sat*, the one Reality. It was described as wonderful since it combined in a very special way the "essence" and "power". Somewhat as in modern Physics we have the strange nature of ultimate constituent of Matter, which is, in one sense, of the nature of particle and, in another sense, of the nature of wave, even so, the Reality which was described by the Vedic seers was at once of the nature of essence (*vasu*) and energy or power (*ūrja*).

3

Vedic seers also discovered that energy moves forward from the essence or remains contained in essence in accordance with the Will that is inherent in essence. Essence is free to exercise the Will or to withhold the Will.

When the will-force is exercised, vibrations of energy emerge. These vibrations have rhythms; these rhythms have definite measures, regularities and uniformities; these measures and regularities came to be seen as expressions of regular law of cycles of life. The Vedic seers called them the eternal law of life. In Sanskrit, it was called *sanatana dharma*.

For *Dharma* means the law of life that holds together vibrations and rhythms of life and development within definite measures and regularities. *Sanatana Dharma* is the law of life that holds together in a systematic

manner and unfailingly the integrity and progression of all life in the universe.

The Vedic seers declared that it is by applying the knowledge of this *Dharma* that one can become a harmonious part of the unity of universal life.

4

Sanatana Dharma in its application to human life traces the path by which one could travel successfully to the fourth world and to the original Reality.

The question is as to how to effect this travel.

It is in answer to this question that the Vedic *Rishis* spoke of *Agni*, not the ritualistic fire, but the Mystic Fire which is described in the very first hymn of the Rigveda as the leader of the journey of life, Knower of the truth and one who can call down higher knowledge into the lower human world.

They also laid down that *Agni* is the upward aspiration which is seated in the heart of every living and thinking being, and that it is by kindling this aspiration that the human journey can be conducted on the right road.

They also discovered four conditions which have to be fulfilled for the attainment of the goal. These conditions are the cultivation of:

- Universal wideness;
- Universal friendliness;
- Intense power of austerity; and
- Capacity to bear the highest bliss.

In their own language, Vedic *Rishis* named these four conditions are related to *Varuṇa*, *Mitra*, *Aryaman* and *Bhaga*.

5

Three important methods were further developed by the Vedic seers as a part of the practice of *Sanatana Dharma*.

(a) Method of Meditative Concentration:

This implied the discovery that intellect is the most important element in human psychology and that if intellect can be concentrated on the light of the truth, the right and the vast, one can make an entry into the fourth world of everlasting light and of *sacchidananda*. Hence, the most important method which has become famous in the Vedic *Dharma* is the method of concentration and the formula that was given as an aid is called *Gāyatrī* mantra which is as follows:

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्।।[2]

"May we meditate on the supreme light of Truth so that our intellect be guided by it."

While meditation is one of the methods of concentration, contemplation is another. In meditation, an idea is developed and successive steps are marked by their corresponding experiences; in contemplation, the mind is fixed on a symbol that represents an idea, and the reality behind the idea is experienced by means of penetration through the symbol.

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[2] *Rigveda, III.62.10*

(b) Methods of Performance of Action with a view to exchange human energies with cosmic energies:

This method of exchange was called by the Vedic *Rishis* as the method of sacrifice or *yajña*. By sacrifice was not meant the sacrifice of animals but sacrifice of psychological limitations.

Sacrifice often indicates some kind of painful abdication or renunciation; and we are often told that one should sacrifice one's attachments, even though that may prove to be painful. But this idea of painful sacrifice is only valid at lower levels where we have not understood the secret of right action and the secret of the intention of the universal life. But when this secret is rightly understood, it is realised that the entire movement of life, entire rhythm of life, entire *dharma* of life, reduces itself to mutual self-giving of oneself to the universe and self-giving of the universe to each and every individual in return. With this realisation one is inspired to offer not only one's attachments but all that one is and one has. And the resultant is not pain but joy and ever-increasing joy.

All action, Vedic seers declared, which is done in the spirit of sacrifice or *yajña* is Right Action or *Karma*.

(c) Method of Dedicated offering of the body, life and mind to the practice of ideals:

This would mean a firm resolution to dedicate one's life to follow *dharma* and *karma* and to practise the principles of Truth and Harmony in each and every process of thinking, feeling and acting and in every vibration of the body. This method gradually matures in

the method of intense devotion or *bhakti* for the Supreme Reality.

It will be seen that the synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion was an ancient discovery of the Vedic *Rishis*, and it is this synthesis which has constantly been emphasised in all the developments of the Vedic tradition.

II

अनाश्रितः कर्मफलं कार्यं कर्म करोति यः।
स संन्यासी च योगी च न निरग्निर्न चाक्रियः।।[3]

"One who performs his right action, without having any attachment to its results, is the one who has truly renounced (the worldly bondage) and is yet master of action – not the one who has renounced fire or his own responsibilities of action."

Dharma is law of life.

But what is life? Life is pulsation, dynamism and growth. According to the Vedic view, the process of pulsation and dynamism is universal and it has rhythms with specific measures and regularities. These measures and regularities constitute the law of *Dharma*. It is when this law is observed and implemented that life grows and develops in the right direction.

Karma or Right Action is basically action that is determined by *Dharma*. Actions which are made without taking into account the principles of *Dharma* become distorted.

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[3] *Bhagavadgita, 6.1.*

The word *Dharma* is often used as if it were the same as religion. This is unfortunate, and this mistake should be avoided.

There is a great difference between *Dharma* and religion. *Dharma* is law of life and development, and it is based upon the knowledge of the underlying truths of the universe. Religion, on the other hand, is predominantly a system of beliefs and practices of rituals and ceremonies; religion also tends to become an institution which pervades the structure of the society. Each religion has its own set of doctrines and system of worship. But *Dharma* has no creed or systems of beliefs; it is based upon knowledge and can be practised and applied; it can be verified and tested. *Dharma* is the inner spirit of commitment to abide by the law of life and development.

Karma is connected with inner spirit of sacrifice and self-giving. Every action that is involved in inner renunciation of the sense of possession and attachment can rightly be called *Karma* or right action.

The greatest fear of human beings is that of disintegration; this fear impels them to acquire support of objects and relationships by means of which they try to overcome the process of disintegration. It is this acquisition of objects and relationships that creates attachments and sense of possession. Human beings are thus sustained by a net of objects and relationships, the strongest thread of which is the sense of attachment and possession. But, however, strong this net may be, it is built by ignorance of true Self. For when the true Self is realised, one finds that it does not need to have the fear of disintegration, since it is by its very nature permanent and indestructible. Renunciation of attachments and sense of possession is the means by which the true self is realised.

III

इदं शरीरं कौन्तेय क्षेत्रमित्यभिधीयते।
एतद्यो वेत्ति तं प्राहुः क्षेत्रज्ञ इति तद्विदः।।[4]

"O Son of Kunti, this physical life is called the field of circumstances and the one who knows it is called the knower of the field."

Two Things That Cannot Be Doubted:

The Indian idea of the application of *Dharma* and *Karma* begins with two things that cannot be doubted. There is, first, the experience of each individual as an observer who observes, experiences, acts and reacts. And there is, second, a field of circumstances in which the individual finds himself or herself and in which he or she works, learns, and struggles to arrive at mastery.

Circumstances are favourable, unfavourable or indifferent, depending generally upon how the individual looks upon them. Even a blooming garden may appear to be a desert, if one is depressed; on the other hand, everything may seem bright and friendly, if one is in a serene state of mind and heart. But often one finds oneself quite oppressed by circumstances and one seeks to change them or even to escape from them, if that were possible.

Formulas of Application:

The following ten formulas can be regarded as basic to the application of *Dharma* and *Karma* while dealing with life and circumstances. And if one abides by them,

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[4] *Bhagavadgita, 13.2.*

one can easily graduate to higher levels of maturity and dexterity in dealing with life and circumstances.

1

Do not allow circumstances to overpower you to such an extent that you cannot observe them with impartiality and objectivity.

2

Learn to observe your state of mind and heart and register your reactions to your circumstances.

3

When you are happy with your circumstances and when you find that your life is proceeding smoothly, avoid excitement.
Remember that happiness is enjoyed best and lasts longer when law of restraint is followed. This means that nothing is done in excess.

Speak only what is indispensable; think with quietude and seriousness; act with generosity and nobility; enjoy with increasing sense of detachment and renunciation of the sense of possession.

4

Even when circumstances are unfavourable, avoid sense of disappointment and depression.

Remember the wise maxim: *This will also pass.*

5

Do not try to escape from circumstances.

Take them as opportunities to learn and to grow.

Even difficulties are there to be overcome. At the end of the tunnel, there is light. If stones are metaphors for hardships in our lives, remember that even stones can teach useful sermons if we decide to confront hardships as experiences to learn from.

You can also arrive at a state where you can have a dialogue with stones.

6

Do not do anything merely to seek pleasure; but find pleasure in whatever you do or whatever you are required to do.

Concentrate on the work that you are engaged in and perform it as perfectly as possible, but take care that the work is completed at the needed hour.

7

Nothing gives greater happiness than the cultivation of your potential capacity in whatever you are best at: writing, painting, conversing, listening, or even contemplation in silence.

8

There is always something *in* you that is responsible for the circumstances in which you are situated.

If you want to change them, find out what vibrations there are in you that correspond to what you dislike or disapprove of in your circumstances.

Change your inner vibrations and you will see that the outer circumstances will gradually change.

Do not expect, however, immediate changes; both your inner vibrations and outer circumstances have the force of habit and they have the tendency to recur.
You are bound to succeed.

9

Devote some of your time everyday as a routine to think over yourself, in particular about:

1. Your natural inclinations and your highest aspirations.

2. The natural inclinations and the highest aspirations of the individuals around you.

3. The characteristics of your circumstances.

10

For any problem of life, there are temporary solutions, which can all serve as provisional solutions; but prepare yourself for what can be called permanent solutions, which alone can really be satisfying and durable.

Temporary solutions depend upon devices and their applications that can be conceived at various levels of our thinking and mental judgements.

They will inevitably present themselves in our journey of life, and they can all be utilised to uplift ourselves on a truer level of our being.

But when we are really uplifted, we shall find increasing quietude, control over our passions, inner harmony and serenity, and genuine humility that eliminates selfishness and egoism.

Two things will aid us in arriving at permanent solutions:

Goodwill and Fearlessness

Yajurveda expresses the aspiration for Goodwill in the following words:

सुषारथिरश्वानिव यन्मनुष्यान्नेनीयतेऽभीशुभिर्वाजिन इव।
हृत्प्रतिष्ठं यदजिरं जविष्ठं तन्मे मनः शिवसङ्कल्पमस्तु।।[5]

"Our mind is like a good charioteer driving mighty horses by means of reins. Mind leads men constantly while remaining unaging, most speedy and being established in the heart. Let that mind be filled with goodwill."

On *fearlessness*, we have the following Vedic hymn:

अभयं मित्रादभयममित्रादभयं ज्ञातादभयं पुरो यः।
अभयं नक्तमभयं दिवा नः सर्वा आशा मम मित्रं भवन्तु।।[6]

"(Let there be) fearlessness from the friend as also fearlessness from the enemy, fearlessness from the

[5] *Shukla Yajurveda, XXXIV.6*
[6] *Atharvaveda, 19.15.6*

known as also fearlessness from what is ahead. (Let there be) fearlessness in us during the night as also during the day; let everything in all the quarters of the world be friendly to me."

When In Crisis:

Crisis is a situation where a problem or a group of problems becomes extremely oppressive because its solution is urgent and imperative but seems to be almost impossible. In the life of individuals, as in that of nations or of the world, critical situations do arise and they constitute most important episodes of life during which radical changes occur or when desperate urge arises to escape rather than to confront the burdens of responsibility.

Greatest aid should, therefore, be provided to all those who are passing through a crisis.

The following preliminary advice relating to *Dharma* and *Karma* may perhaps be found in order:

1. The urge to escape from the problem should be discouraged; it should at the same time be emphasised that no crisis can be overcome by allowing the crisis to persist in the hope that it will disappear by lapse of time. This leads to escapist measures.
2. There are some who tend to become flippant and stoop to ignoble means to resolve the problem. Both these tendencies should be strictly eliminated.
3. The most important thing to be done is to remain utterly quiet and unshaken in the faith that the

right solution will open up if one sincerely aspires to get the needed help.

One should remember how Arjuna in his moment of crisis at the battlefield of Mahabharata approached Sri Krishna and asked for his advice. His humility led him to declare to Sri Krishna: "Rule over me", *shādhi mām.* In the moment of crisis, one must turn to the wisest advice that may be available in the given situation.

One must remain calm and aspire in the faith that the right solution will be found from within oneself or from the wisest who may be around us. It is equally important to prepare oneself to make whatever changes one is required to make in his personal attitudes, thoughts, feelings and activities.

Sacrifice of one's attachment to preferences and to egoism is needed to overcome crisis.

IV

यत्सानोः सानुमारुहद्भूर्यस्पष्ट कर्त्वम्।[7]

"As one ascends from peak to peak, there is made clear the much that has still to be done."

While the whole world is a vast system of universal rhythms of development, human life has its own specific rhythms for development, which are subordinate to the universal ones. The law of life that is observed in the development of human begins would constitute a special application of *Sanatana Dharma*, eternal law of life.

What distinguishes human beings from animals is that there is in him a conscious urge to exceed himself. It is rightly said that discontent with oneself is a

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[7] *Rigveda, I.10.2.*

distinguishing feature of the human being. At every stage of development, the human being ultimately aspires to cross the limitations of that stage and to climb upwards to the next higher stage of development.

Four Aims of Human Effort:

Normally, a human being has a composite personality expressing physical life (*annamaya*), vital life (*prāṇamaya*) and mental life (*manomaya*). How to harmonise rhythms of these three aspects and how to exceed them is the main domain of *dharma*.

Physical and vital life have to be developed gradually and should be regulated by the general principles of mental development. The principles of mental development are those of the pursuit of truth, harmony and goodness. These principles are the central core of *Dharma*.

At more advanced stages when the mental life begins to predominate, more rigorous methods of *Dharma* should be applied. Here, the laws that would govern the processes of crossing the limitations of ordinary manhood should be applied.

Mansmriti presents ten constituents of *Dharma* in one brief verse as follows:

धृतिः क्षमा दमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः।
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम्।।[8]

"Perseverance, forgiveness, discipline, non-covetousness, purity, control of senses, intellectual insight, knowledge, truthfulness, non-irritability – these are the ten characteristic constituents of *dharma*."

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[8] *Mansmriti, VI.92*

At a still later level, the aim should be not only perfection of the physical life, vital life and mental life but also attainment of the status of liberation (*moksha*) and perfection.

Three Levels of Human Life:

Without going into details, it may be said that methods of *dharma* are the methods of human ascent. Human ascent consists also of gradual crossing of limitations of *tamas* and *rajas* to reach *sattva*.

Life of *tamas* is a life of sloth, attachment to ignorance, mechanical routine and concern for maintenance of physical life.

The life of *rajas* is the life of desire and ambition, of struggle and competition, and of aggrandisement and increasing acquisition, possession, domination and enjoyment. It is the life of passion and drive and dynamism. At certain levels, the life of *rajas* tends to become even gigantic and titanic.

The life of *sattva* is marked by pursuits of knowledge and light, balance and harmony, purity and nobility, impartiality and universality. It has its spontaneous orientation towards self-control and self-knowledge and it tries to break down the limitations of egoism in order to become sympathetic to all beings and creatures of the world.

The development of the qualities of *sattva* is given the highest importance in *Dharma*.

Four Types of Human Beings:

It is also recognised that there are four deeper springs of human personality which emanate from the inmost recesses of the soul. These are impulsions towards knowledge, power, harmony and skill.

While all human beings have these four impulsions, only one of them normally predominates. Hence, there are four types of human beings, -- those who pursue knowledge, those who pursue power, those who pursue harmony, and those who pursue skill.

The original *Dharma* visualised that the laws of development of these four types cannot be identical. Each type has its own rhythms of development which should be perfected and transcended. At the highest level, one can integrate the qualities of all the four types; this integration would result in the perfection of integral personality.

Four Stages of Human Life:

Dharma also recognises that there are four main stages of development through which every human being normally passes; stage of childhood and studentship; stage of adulthood and life of responsibility of family life; stage of widening and heightening which require deeper reflection and selfless action beyond the confines of one's own family life; and the last stage is that of real maturity, renunciation, self-mastery and widest interest to serve the entire humanity and the world.

The result of this complex understanding of human life is that one should not impose the rhythms of development which are valid at one stage of development to another stage of development; that one should not impose rhythms of development which are reserved for one type of personality on another type of personality; and that one should not impose an effort which any individual at a given stage of development cannot bear and fulfil.

But four general principles of application can be discerned:

1. Everyone should devote himself or herself as a student engaged in the task of learning and growing;

2. Everyone should find out his or her own teacher, recognising that the mother and father are his or her first teachers and that one who has attained to higher levels of knowledge and realisation has yet to be sought after and his instructions should be followed and practised;

3. One should increasingly gain the knowledge of the secret meaning of life and also the art and science of living; and

4. One should recognise one's true nature to understand the right rhythms of development that are appropriate to oneself in order to live according to them and achieve further development towards one's true self.

The following three methods also can be applied generally to all at every level of development:

(a) To aspire with enthusiasm and burning zeal to grow and develop;

(b) To cross always the limitations of selfishness and egoism; and

(c) To develop higher and higher levels of sincerity to achieve peaks of excellence and perfection.

CONCEPT OF DHARMA: REFLECTIONS ON ITS APPLICATIONS TO CONTEMPORARY PROCESS OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

I

There is today a deep but painful search for the fundamental ideals of social reconstruction, which is being done under the influence of three principles of progress, which came to be formulated in the West under the interrelated concepts of *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity*, which, in turn, have been imprinted powerfully on humanity under the impress of the French Revolution. The history of modern West, as also of developing nations in the world, can be studied as an account of social, economic and political experimentation the aim of which has been to implement these three principles.

But in several ways, these principles seem to collide powerfully with some of the ancient Indian ideas that had shaped its social, economic and political structure. Again, that structure of ancient India passed through several stages, and in the declining period it gave rise to increasing rigidities, disabilities, distortions and mechanical absurdities, -- some of which were combated by a number of Saint-leaders, who had understood better the deeper spirit of the ancient social structure, as also by other leaders who, in our own times, have understood, adequately or inadequately, the inner meaning of the Western message of freedom, equality and brotherhood. But this combat has not been

successful and we are still in the midst of a battle which is not only bewildering and perplexing but is also ridden with confusions and blind prejudices and passions. India's progress is thus greatly obstructed and halted, and we cannot expect to advance further if we cannot resolve this battle to a successful conclusion. In this context, one of the central issues on which we shall be required to have great and fresh clarity is that of *Dharma* and its applications in the individual and collective life.

The current economic field, whether competitive or socialistic, is a field of the job market, which is being fed by human resources trained by educational factories providing courses and programmes not related directly to the needs of the job market nor to the demands of the fulfilment of intrinsic human ends. An individual who gets a bit of training in English literature finds a job in a pharmaceutical shop, and a scientist may get a job in a factory that produces spectacles. The relationship of training with work and the relationship of work with the deeper spirit of the individual are hardly taken into account. And yet, the Indian mind, consciously or subconsciously, wants to arrive at some meaningful connection between the process of education and preparation for a work that might truly express the individual's inmost nature and inmost means of fulfilment. There appears to be thus a great disequilibrium between the Indian cultural concepts of life, work and fulfilment and what the present structure proposes to the individual to expect from the field of work. Work, according to the deepest cultural ethos of India, is connected not merely with the processes and skills of a job, but also with a profound series of ideas and aspirations connected with *kartavyam karma*, the work that has to be done not optionally but inevitably as a part of the inmost fulfilment of *swabhava* and

swadharma, -- as a part of the expression of the inmost recesses of being to be executed according to the right law of development of the being. In other words, the inmost demand of Indian culture is to create a society in which every individual is trained for a work by performance of which one can attain, gradually and increasingly, highest fulfilment, -- cultural, ethical and spiritual.

On the other hand, many current ideas, practices and customs in India betray casteism, which has its own attitudes towards work, duties and responsibilities. Happily, casteism is being rejected by the growing enlightened opinion. This opinion is largely guided by the concept of individualism, – an offshoot of the modern principle of Liberty, -- which notices that casteism binds the individual to a small group, -- both in regard to relationship and function, -- while individualism liberates the individual from narrow loyalties and fixed grooves of accident of birth into larger universe of free growth and participation in larger ends of the society and even humanity. It also notices that while casteism imprisons the individual in a network of hierarchy, inequity, and perpetual social injustice, modern advocacy of a socialist structure of social equity is evidently superior, since it offers to the individual equal opportunity and equal dignity with everybody else as a human being. And socialistic equality, it is further noticed, if and when realised, would bring to every individual freedom from the tyranny of injustices that are inherent in hierarchies. It is also rightly seen that casteism is a great divisive force and its perpetuity imperils the spirit of unity, harmony and oneness.

This enlightened opinion has, however, not yet become so powerful as to root out casteism nor has it as

yet succeeded in developing an alternative structure which can not only provide individual freedom but also eliminate injustices of domineering individuals and groups that perpetuate themselves on the strength of their past history, accident of birth, and exploitation of the noble idea of individualism for wrong ends. Again, this enlightened opinion has not yet discovered or invented a social system in which equity is really enjoyed and not constantly endangered by increasing mechanisation, impersonalisation, and dehumanisation. And, still again, this enlightened opinion has not yet discovered the alchemy by which universal brotherhood can be rightly practised both in inner and outer life. This enlightened opinion, therefore, has yet to grow, and in this process of growth, secrets of the ancient Indian concepts of work in relation to *Dharma* may prove to be highly useful.

II

Casteism often tends to defend itself on the confusion it makes between itself and the ancient system of *chaturvarnya* and it arrogates to itself profounder ideas of *kartavyam karma*, *niyatam karma*, *sahajam karma*, *swabhavajam karma*, and even profounder ideas of *swabhava* and *swadharma*. It is by this false arrogation that it proposes to perpetuate and portray itself as the right expression of the Indian concept of *dharma* and *karma*. But it must be stressed that the caste system is quite different from the ancient *chaturvarnya* system and must be seen as the later disintegrated degeneration and gross meaningless parody of the ancient system.

The theory of the ancient system of *chaturvarnya* proceeded from the supposition that each individual has

his own peculiar inner nature, which is born from and reflects one element of the divine nature. It further supposed that the human being falls into four types of qualities and functions, *guṇa karma*. There is, first and highest, the personality of learning and thought and knowledge; next the personality of power and action, ruler, warrior, leader, administrator; third in the scale, the economic personality, the producer or the wealth-getter, the merchant, artisan and cultivator; and last, the personality of labour and menial service. The economic order of society was cast in the form and gradation of these four types; even ethical and psychical culture of the society came to be designed on the same pattern of the fourfold order, which created the framework of training each individual according to the predominant nature, *swabhava*, that the individual represented. But the deepest justification for this fourfold order was spiritual in character. The entire system emphasised that the intellectual, ethical and spiritual growth of the individual is the central need of the race, and that the individual and social life should be so organised that the work that the individual was expected to do was in consonance with the inmost nature, *swabhava*, which originated from a certain still deeper spiritual stuff and power. The rule and law of development of that inner nature, *dharma*, guided the development of the individual, and work that the individual performed was expected to be utilised as the material for self-experience and self-expression, and as a means of self-finding and self-realisation. The laws of the society and the laws of individual's development constituted a harmony and a complex of *dharma*. *Karma*, or action, was understood, not as a job to be performed merely for economic sustenance of the individual or the society but chiefly as the means of

inner growth of faculties, powers, personality and processes of knowing oneself and fulfilling oneself.

Karma came, therefore, to be understood as *niyatam karma*, action regulated by the process of self-development, *swabhava*, and the law of self-development, *swadharma*; *karma* or action came to be understood as *sahajam karma*, action that is born along with oneself, one's inmost self; *karma* came to be understood as *swabhavajam karma*, action born from one's deepest nature and one's self-becoming. On the other hand, *vikarma* came to be understood as an action opposed to one's nature and one's own law of self-development, -- opposed to *swabhava* and *swadharma*. And *akarma* came to mean a state that lies above work, the state that is not attached to work, a state similar to the lotus leaf, which can bear on its surface drops of water without yet becoming wet. For it was recognised that work has its ultimate origin in what the *Bhagavadgita* calls *Purushottama*, Supreme *Purusha*, who is at once *akshara* and *kshara*, the immobile and mobile, the one who remains *akarmi* – uplifted and untouched by action, -- even when manifesting, controlling and ruling the billions and trillions of forces of work. *Karma*, as understood in the *Bhagavadgita*, is an instrument of lifting the individual from the circle of ordinary qualities of dullness, feverish dynamism and of light and harmony, -- qualities of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*, -- by ever-increasing and progressive climbing so as to reach a simultaneous status of *akshara* and *kshara*, of immobility and mobility, -- but both free from the three qualities of *guṇas* of *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The ideal to be reached by *karma*, by action, is to be a channel entirely passive for the free and unobstructed passage of the divine will. All this and much more was implied when Sri Krishna announced that the fourfold order of the society was created divinely, on the basis of

quality and action, *guṇa* and *karma*. The implication was that the individual could work out the stair of development by utilising *guṇa* and *karma* to reach the divine source.

The guidance that we get from the *Bhagavadgita* on this important subject can be stated in the form of three propositions:

1. All actions must be determined from within man because each action has in it something his own, some characteristic principles and inborn power of his nature. That is the efficient power of his spirit, which creates the dynamic form of his soul in nature, and to express and perfect it by action, to make it effective in capacity and conduct and life is his work, his true *karma*. That points him to the right way of his inner and outer living and is the right starting point for farther development.

2. Secondly, there are broadly four types of nature, each with its characteristic function and ideal rule of work and character, and the type indicates man's proper field and should trace for him his just circle of function in his outer social existence.

3. And thirdly, whatever work a man does, if done according to the law of his being, the truth of his nature, can be turned Godwards and made an effective means of spiritual liberation and perfection.

It must not be thought that the fourfold order of the society was peculiar to India, although its cultural, ethical and spiritual character was unique. The fourfold order came to be evolved at a certain stage of social

evolution in other ancient and medieval societies with certain differences. It may also be noted that the old system everywhere broke down and gave place to a more fluid order. In India, this old system broke down and gave place to a confusion and complex social rigidity and economic immobility degenerating towards a chaos of castes. But still, no society can function without the fourfold order, since in every society there is the need of four functions and four types of individuals to fulfil those functions. Even if one could create a purely productive and commercial society such as modern times have attempted, even then, there would emerge thinkers moved to find the law and truth and guiding rule of the society, the captains and leaders utilising productive activity as an excuse for the satisfaction of their need of adventure and battle and leadership and dominance, the many typical purely productive and wealth-getting men, and finally, the average workers needing and provided with the modicum of labour and the reward of the labour. This shows that there is some inherent truth in the fourfold order, even though the framework in which this truth comes to be expressed may not be adequate, and, therefore, liable to disruption, distortion or degeneration.

We may, therefore, ask the question as to whether this concept of fourfold order has any meaning and utility for social reconstruction and whether it should be restudied and reformulated as an aid to the contemporary need to evolve a new social order. In any case, a study of this problem is necessitated by the fact that India has reached a stage of development where, on the one hand, the modern wave of liberty, equality and fraternity has already altered the framework of our economic, commercial and political life and yet, on the other, casteism still persists and seeks to perpetuate

itself by taking resort to the deeper concept of *dharma* and *karma*, which had led to the formation of the ancient system of *chaturvarnya*.

The advantages of the modern framework of society where every individual is expected to fulfil certain common obligations, which are not specific only to one particular type of people belonging to one sector of human activity but to all sectors of life and in all the main departments of human activities, are mainly the following: (i) this framework helps to promote greater solidarity, unity and fullness in the life of the community; (ii) it also promotes a more all-round development of the complete human being as opposed to the endless divisions and over-specialisation and the narrowing and artificial shackling of the life of the individual to which the Indian system eventually led.

On the other hand, the ancient system of *chaturvarnya* had achieved three important gains: First of all, it could make its chief aim to minimise the incidence of war. For this purpose, it limited the military obligation to the small class who by their birth, nature and tradition were marked out for this function and found in it their natural means of self-development through the flowering of the soul in the qualities of courage, disciplined force, strong helpfulness and chivalrous nobility for which the warrior's life pursued under the stress of a high ideal gives a field and opportunities. The rest of the community was in every way guarded from slaughter and outrage.

The second gain of that system was that life was elevated to pursuits, which were not strictly economical, although the economic activities of the *vaishya* were concentrated on personal prosperity and also of social prosperity. And although all the members of the society

could pursue wealth and collection and storing of wealth, one was encouraged in the case of *brahmins*, *kshatriyas* and *shudras* to keep the economic motive subordinate to those motives, which were appropriate to the function and type of qualities, which were recognised as uniquely their own. This also helped in their retaining *artha* and *kama* as important parts of the scheme of the *purushartha*, but it emphasised the overarching control of *dharma* and ultimate pursuit of *moksha*.

And the third gain of that system was the support and aid it gave to lift the culture from lower pulls of economic barbarism and vital philistinism to greater heights of rational, ethical and aesthetic culture as also to still higher heights of religious and spiritual culture.

III

Let us note the main stages through which the ancient system of *chaturvarnya* passed. According to the Indian theory, the *chaturvarnya* system was based upon the typal principle, and the typal principle is not suitable either to the periods of highest attainment of humanity or to the eras of its lowest possibility. It is neither the principle of the ideal age, the age of the perfected Truth, *satya yuga* or *kritayuga*, in which the human being moves according to some high and profound realisation of the divine possibility, nor of the iron age, the *kaliyuga*, in which the human being collapses towards the life of instincts, impulses, and desires with the reason degraded into a servant of the lower life. The typal order is the appropriate principle of the intermediate ages of the human cycle in which attempts are made to maintain some imperfect form of the true law, of *dharma*, by will-power and the force of

character in the *treta*, and by law, arrangement and fixed convention in the *dwapara*. Therefore, it is said that *Vishnu* is the king in the *treta*, but in the *dwapara*, he becomes the arranger and codifier of the knowledge and the law. In these intermediate ages, the principle of order may take refuge in a limited perfection, suppressing some elements to perfect others.

We may suggest that there was a stage where the framework of fourfold order had not got crystallised. There was also a period when there was a rivalry between *brahmins* and *kshatriyas* for supremacy. But when the fourfold order became crystallised and was practised with some kind of ideality, the important factors in determining the test of *varna* were the intellectual capacity of the individual, the turn of the temperament, ethical nature and spiritual stature. In *guṇa karma vibhagashah*, as the *Bhagavadgita* puts it, the test was based on quality and work. There had come about the erection of a rule of family living, a system of individual observance and self-training, a force of upbringing and education, which would bring out and formulate these essential things. The individual was carefully trained in the capacities, habits and attainments, and was habituated to the sense of honour and duty necessary for the discharge of his allotted function in life. The concerned individual was scrupulously equipped with the science of the things he had to do, the best way to succeed in it, and to attain to the highest rule and recognised perfection of its activities but by the capacities and inner nature.

In this stage, the great social ideals were built and a great emphasis was laid on the idea of social honour. The honour of the *brahmin* rested in purity, piety, high reverence for things of the mind and spirit and a

disinterested disposition, exclusive pursuit of learning and knowledge; the honour of a *kshatriya* lived in courage, chivalry, strength, self-restraint and self-mastery, nobility of character and the obligation of that nobility; the honour of the *vaishya* was maintained by rectitude of pooling mercantile vitality, sound production, order, liberality and philanthropy; the honour of the *shudra* consisted in obedience, subordination, faithful service, and disinterested attachment. This system was supported by the *ashram vyavastha*, and the idea of fourfold *purushartha*, that aimed at a regulated enjoyment of *artha* and *kama* under the guidance of *dharma* and ultimate seeking of spiritual liberation, *moksha*. *Ashram vyavastha* was based upon the psychological understanding of the needs of human personality that arise at different stages of life and it provided guidance to each as to how best to meet these needs so that the ultimate ends of spiritual life could be served on a sound foundation of progressive growth.

But these ideas and sense of honour gradually began to become a matter of convention. In the end, when the typal stage passed into the conventional stage fully, these noble things became a tradition in thought and on lips rather than a reality of life. At the conventional stage, the external supported the outward expressions of the spirit and outer form became more important than the ideal; the body or even the clothes came to be regarded as more important than the person. At first, the birth did not seem to have been of the first importance in the social order. But afterwards, the son of a *brahmin* came to be looked upon conventionally as a *brahmin;* birth and profession were together the double bond of the hereditary convention. The maintenance of psychological and ethical qualities passed from the first

place to a secondary or to even a quite tertiary importance. They even ceased to be indispensable, and they came to be dispensed with as an ornamental fiction. In the full economic period, the priest and the pundit bore the name of the *brahmin*; the retrograde and feudal baron flourished under the name of the *kshatriya*; the trader and the money-getter enriched himself under the name of *vaishya;* and the half-fed labourer and economic serf suffered under the name of *shudra.* Finally, even the economic basis began to disintegrate. Birth, family, custom, deformations, new accretions of meaningless or fanciful or religious sign and ritual became the important links in the system. The caste system of the iron age came in full swing. The whole system began to crumble, and what remained was a name, a shell which must either be dissolved by a new emphasis on individual perfectibility, or else it would continue to affect the entire society fatally with weakness and falsehood. That is the last and the present state of the caste system in India.

At this stage, it appears that the Western ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity can be utilised by India profitably, if we look into them with deeper understanding. They have come upon India in their imperfect formulations and in their unripe stages of experimentation. As such, they need to be formulated more adequately and experimented upon with greater wisdom, and that should be the task of all who are keen to clarify the confusion and rebuild the life of India on new lines, not by abandoning the rich and valuable heritage of the spiritual, ethical and cultural experience, not also by abandoning the lessons of *dharma* and *karma*, but by deriving deeper truths of that heritage and developing new knowledge and a new fund of wisdom.

The ideal of liberty is fundamentally the ideal of the individual self-determination and its message is consonant with the Indian idea to lift the individual from the bonds of mechanical necessities to the heights of spiritual freedom, individual integrality and individual fullness that can contain both the universal and transcendental reality. The ideal of equality is the idea of mutuality and harmony and its message is to restore sound equation between the individual and the individual and between the individual and collectivity. Its call is to awaken into us the vision of one underlying reality that can harmonise diversity into unity. It is consonant with the ancient Indian vision of *samam brahma*, one equal *brahman*, and it counsels us that when this vision is introduced practically into all aspects of our dynamic life, we can bring about the true reign of harmony. And the ideal of fraternity fulfils both liberty and equality, extracting them both from their antimonies, and it provides to both of them the alchemy of living realisation. Its message is none other than the Vedic message, which calls upon all to move together and to commune together in common partnership, comradeship and brotherhood, -- *samgacchadhvam samvadadhvam*. These three ideals are entirely capable of being harmonised with the Indian ethical and spiritual ideals, and they can be perfectly welcomed and embraced in the new fabric that is being woven for our social reconstruction.

On the other hand, the truths of *chaturvarnya* need to be distilled and they can even be further deepened, heightened and enriched. The hints and clues are already available in the Indian experience. The *Purusha Sukta*, which is often cited in support of the *chaturvarnya*, when rightly understood, gives us the underlying truth of the integrality of the four divine qualities. Its description of the creative Deity, from

whose mouth, arms, thighs and feet, the four orders are said to have sprung up, is not merely a poetical image. The Creator's body was to the Vedic poet more than an image; it expressed the divine reality. Human society for them was an attempt to express in life the cosmic *Purusha*. Man and cosmos are both symbols and expressions of the same hidden Reality. This image expresses the divine as the *integrality* of knowledge, power, harmony and skill. And although at that typal stage of human civilisation these four powers got developed, each somewhat independently of the others, they are not really independent of each other. The integrality of the Divine can be integrally expressed only when these four powers are developed in their combination and mutuality, and if this meaning is extracted and implemented properly, we can easily see in what new direction we can reconstruct the Indian society. The profound ideas of ethical and spiritual aims that lie at the root of *chaturvarnya* need not be given up; only the emphasis laid on the relative independence of four powers of personality will have to be brought into harmony with the demands of their integrality. Each individual will have to be developed and educated in such a way that, by taking advantage of predominance of knowledge, power, harmony or skill, each of these four powers can be balanced with others and all of them can be integrated. Creation of increasing number of individuals, embodying in themselves all the four powers of personality and all of them expressing the inmost integrality of perfection, their integral divinity, would avoid the necessity of social stratification and division of the society in castes or classes. The greater the perfection of the individual, the greater will be the need of the perfection of the society, and this cannot but culminate in the operation of the ideal law of social development, where both the individual and the society

grow from within and aid each other in their progressive growth towards increasing harmony and unity. And such a development would perfectly harmonise with the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The *Bhagavadgita*, too, seems to indicate the path of further development of *dharma* in some such direction, so that a greater *dharma*, even while abandoning all *dharmas*, can be arrived at in complete freedom and integrality of the divine's expression in the individual and in the society. Bringing out this clue from the *Bhagavadgita*, Sri Aurobindo concludes in his *Essays on the Gita* in these words:

"Then as we get beyond the limitation of the three Gunas, so also do we get beyond the division of the fourfold law and beyond the limitation of all distinctive Dharmas, *sarvadharmani parityajya*. The Spirit takes up the individual into the universal Swabhava, perfects and unifies the fourfold soul of nature in us and does its self-determined works according to the divine will and the accomplished power of the godhead in the creature.

...Our work should be according to the truth within us, it should not be an accommodation with outward and artificial standards: it must be a living and sincere expression of the soul and its inborn powers. For to follow out the living inmost truth of this soul in our present nature will help us eventually to arrive at the immortal truth of the same soul in the now superconscious supreme nature. There we can live in oneness with God and our true self and all beings and, perfected, become a faultless instrument of divine action in the freedom of the immortal Dharma."[1]

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[1] *Sri Aurobindo: Essays on the Gita, Centenary Edition, Vol. 13, p. 507.*

INDIAN CULTURE AND ITS MESSAGE

I

The exact dates of the antiquity of Indian history are difficult to determine, but the earliest records of this history are surprisingly available to us with almost the same precision as they were composed in those ancient times. And these records are voluminous and consist of four anthologies or collections. Their generic name is Veda, which literally means "*Book of Knowledge*". These four Vedas are: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. This is not an occasion to dwell upon the contents of these anthologies, but if we want to give a quintessential idea, it can be summed up by stating that it insists on the quest for the truth and for the comprehensive truth; it declares that the truth is discoverable, that discovery of that truth gives meaning to human life and that human life becomes truly purposive when truth is practiced in all circumstances of life, even though it may mean battles with untruth, falsehood, and ignorance.

This message goes farther and lays down that the first task of the human being is to become truly human. This, however, is only a transitional stage, since the ultimate destiny is to transcend all the limitations of untruth, bondage, incompetence and suffering. To rise from the human to the divine is, according to the Veda, the highest endeavour and it must be pursued, not arbitrarily or occasionally, but whole-heartedly and with the rigour of scientific discovery and invention that build knowledge upon knowledge. In one short sentence in

Sanskrit, Veda declares: "*manurbhava, janaya daivyam janam*" – become first the mental being and then become the divine being.

This is the message for the individual. The Veda also presents a collective ideal and enjoins upon all who want to listen to this message that they should strive to march together, to commune among themselves in harmony and arrive at a common mind and common understanding. Collective unity and collective harmony form, according to the Veda, the goal that humanity must endeavour to achieve.

History of India can best be understood, in its internal psychological aspects, as a great human effort to follow these two ideals of individual and collective perfection.

Consequently, a concept that grew up and upheld the march of Indian culture was that of Dharma which is mistranslated as religion. For Dharma really means the law of ascent, and it has three applications: perennial and for all; temporal for nations and smaller collectivities; and variable for each individual. Perennial law of ascent is determined by descent of the ideal of eternal perfection. This is called, in Sanskrit, Sanatana Dharma, since it is unchanging and it exercises relentless pressure of immortal reality. But there is also the law of the ascent determined by the aspiration of nationalities, collectivities and individuals. This law is temporal and variable. It varies according to the stages of free growth of aspiration. In Sanskrit it is called Rashtra Dharma and Swadharma. A subtle and complex relationship between that perennial and these temporal and variable movements has been the secret of the ethical and spiritual content of Indian culture. And it has been the underlying cause of the continuity of that culture, which historians have found to be astonishing and perplexing.

II

Broadly speaking, Indian culture has passed through three important stages, and now we are entering into the fourth stage. The first stage covers a long story from an indeterminable antiquity to 600 B.C., during which a balanced structure of society and human life was constructed under the ideals presented in the Veda. In the ancient Upanishads and in ever-living epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, we have glimpses of that society and its ideals, its heroism and its law of harmony and dharma. This was the stage when the people of India, covering the entire land from the Northern Himalayas to the Southern Indian Ocean, created one common culture.

The second period covers a long period, roughly, from 600 B.C. to 800 A.D., during which Buddhism arose, and, while the old still continued to live and even develop, new elements came to occupy the Indian experimentation. Great experiments were conducted in democracy and democratic monarchy, and the first imperial kingdom of India under the leadership of Chandragupta Maurya and his teacher and prime minister, Chanakya, came to be built up under the shock of the invasion of Alexander, the Great. Hinduism and Buddhism clashed and clasped each other, resulting in confusion and yet enrichment, impelling wider understanding and mutual assimilation. There came about hardening of certain institutions coupled with opulence and richness; Indian spirituality inspired and supported art, architecture, sculpture, literature, philosophy and various sciences and arts to such a degree that there was nothing in the cultural domains which was not attempted and was not brought up to a high level of achievement.

A few invasions from the North-West marked the chequered history of Northern India. This was a period of great tide but also from certain points of view a beginning of decline, although of a slow decline. The people of India had lived and created with untiring energy for nearly 4,000 years and had passed through infancy, early manhood and had even reached adulthood. Signs of exhaustion had begun to appear.

And this was followed by the third period during which invasions from North-West became frequent and a new force of Islam entered into India. Two great efforts were made to arrive at a harmony between the old and powerful Indian culture and the religion and power of Islam. These two great efforts, the one started by Guru Nanak and the other started by Akbar, reaffirmed the Indian tendency of synthesis and harmony. Once again, while this period was marked by political instability for several centuries until Akbar and some of his successors infused stability to a certain extent, it was clear that great leaders like Rana Pratap and Shivaji, through their unyielding spirit and battles were preparing for the reaffirmation of the old Indian values and images that had the power of revival and resurgence. The opulent and prosperous India did not suffer greatly; but in many ways there were serious signs of advancing decline. Sciences, which were developing with tremendous force and vitality, stopped suddenly in the thirteenth century to develop and grow; philosophical inquiry continued but not on original lines; and fresh vigour came to be infused in the country with development of a number of new languages derived from old classical tongues. Excessive religionism and outer ritualism and ceremonies of worship began to cloud the true spiritual motive that had been the inspiring force of the Indian vitality. Tendencies of irreligionism, selfishness and battles for small ends

began to multiply. As a result, during the 18th century and early 19th century, there came about a collapse of Indian culture, although not any total disintegration.

The spiritual lamp continued to burn even in the midst of darkness that grew darker when the British triumphed in establishing its rule. By the year 1857, however, the first Battle of Independence heralded the advent of the new age, and Indian spirituality reasserted itself.

India had begun to enter into its fourth stage of development. First of all, the Indian mind was obliged to reconsider its own past in the light of the new situation that was created by the influx of the European science, literature, critical thought and the Christian missionary work. Although the first reaction was that of imitation, there came about also in the next phase a reaffirmation of all that was Indian as also impulsion to fresh creativity in the field of spirituality, literature, poetry and art. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Tagore, on the one hand, and Dayananda, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, on the other, gave a new impetus not only to a new awakening but also to creation of new forms of culture on the basis of the original motive and power of the Indian spirituality.

The political struggle for freedom assumed a powerful figure of nationalism drawing its force of sustenance from the ancient religio-philosophical culture, and the idea of the national freedom came to be seen as an extension of the Indian goal of spiritual freedom. India came to be worshipped by millions of people as an eternal Mother India. Under the inspiring call of worship of Mother India, programmes of *swadeshi*, boycott, passive resistance and national education came to be developed, and the movement which had begun with the dominant minority turned into a mass movement, and India became free in 1947.

We are today passing through a new phase of cultural development that is filled with promise of actual renaissance that will, if properly inspired and guided, retain the ancient Indian spirituality as its soul but will also create a new body, new currents of life and expression and the powerful mentality capable of highest criticality as also of a new synthesis of the disciplines of knowledge of the East and the West, and of science and spirituality. The life and work of Sri Aurobindo, the foremost philosopher and mystic of our times, illustrate that promise and its progressive fulfilment.

III

Let us underline that the master-key of India has been its spirituality. This spirituality was not negligent of material development, creative arts and crafts, activities of productivity and prosperity, and robust intellectuality. But at a later stage, India neglected matter, and while it continued to heap the treasures of the spirit, it registered bankruptcy in terms of material prosperity, creative vitality and intellectual capabilities. From this great experience of Indian culture the major lesson that can be learnt is that exclusive pursuit of the spiritual motive is injurious to the highest purposes of culture. This lesson also teaches us not to give up spirituality but to develop greater spirituality, a more balanced and integral spirituality that accepts all life and transforms it for purposes of dynamic perfection.

Indian culture has also underlined certain other important messages that can be derived from her cultural experience. And first among them is the affirmation that the entire humanity is one united family, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, and in spite of various

divisions or differentiations, rigorous efforts should be made to ensure the realisation of actual human unity.

A second message imparted to us by the Indian ethos is that it is through the unity of humankind that economic problems will ultimately come to be resolved; for so long as there are national rivalries and asymmetrical relations among nations, there will always remain the fear of the outbreak of war, huge expenditure on national defence and public spending on manufacture and sale of weapons of destruction. One united family of the entire humanity alone can ensure lasting peace and consequently lasting prosperity of all the nations, rich or poor, whether advanced or backward.

The third message is that economic stability can rightly be ensured only when there is equitable sharing of production. Ancient Indian culture had built up a system of sharing of the food production as also of other aspects of prosperity, so that the emphasis in social and economic life was centred on providing work for all, suitable to each one's capabilities, interests and needs of the psychological growth, as also leisure to grow inwardly and to enjoy simple but rich life. India had also built up a remarkable structure and system to embody this ideal, and even though that structure and system may be difficult to revive, it may be possible to reaffirm the truths lying behind that structure and system and incorporate them in the new structures and systems that are now being attempted to be built up for the fulfilment of three progressive ideals of our times, namely, liberty, equality and fraternity.

A fourth message is that while modern idea of democracy has stirred the entire humanity to awaken each individual to develop himself or herself so as to arrive at powers of self-determination, the Indian experience shows that it is only through processes of integral education that higher powers of self-

determination can be fostered so as to unite the law of individual development and the law of social development for purposes of individual and collective perfection.

Fifthly, India perceives that humanity today stands arrested because of the imbalance between the structural hugeness and development of technology, on the one hand, and retrogression in the intellectual, ethical and spiritual abilities, on the other. It further perceives that this crisis has reached a point of climax, and it can be resolved not by increasing development of external paraphernalia but by inward perception of the inmost realities and by releasing the moral and spiritual forces.

Finally, the Indian message is that the time has come when a new psychology has to be created among the peoples so that various instruments of power, -- political, economic, social, cultural and religious, -- are utilised not for division, opposition and domination, but for the generation of unfailing goodwill and sincere collaboration.

We may also add that if India has to be of service to the future of humanity, three tasks have to be accomplished: firstly, the old spiritual knowledge contained in the Veda and the Upanishads has to be recovered in all its splendour, depth, and fullness. For, it is in that knowledge that we have the key to the solution of the contemporary problems of evolutionary crisis, which is at the root of the critical problems of social, political, economic and environmental complexities. The second task is to channelise its ancient spiritual knowledge in new forms of philosophy, literature, art, science and critical knowledge. The third task is to formulate a greater synthesis of a spiritualised society, -- a task which is most difficult and yet which is most urgent and imperative.

For accomplishing these three tasks, we, who belong to India, have to play the role of torchbearers and of standard bearers. India invites all her children to turn to her soul and power and to generate a new dynamo of action that would transform the entire world of confusion and disorder into a new world of clarity of wisdom and ideal order of harmony.