

**THE VEDA IN THE LIGHT
OF
SRI AUROBINDO**
(A Brief Introduction)

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PART ONE

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

Part One

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

Part One

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 subconscious, 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,

Part One

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 kavayani.*” 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 consciousness 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 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.

Part One

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

Part One

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 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

Part One

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

Part One

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 from 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*, *prithvi* and *antariksha*. There is a triple world between, the shining 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
Supermind 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

Part One

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.

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.

Part One

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-consciousness: *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 subconscious and

Part One

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 transparent, 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 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 pro-

Part One

fundities 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

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 Knowledge, – *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

Notes

- ¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, pp.34-7.
- ² Sri Aurobindo, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, Centenary Edition, p.4
- ³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, p.30
- 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.”
- ⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, Centenary Edition, p.44
- ⁶ *Rigveda*, I. 10.1,2
- ⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *India’s Rebirth*, pp.90, 94-5.

PART TWO*

Vedic Knowledge and Supermind in The Light of Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo made a very important statement in *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, in which he spoke of the immediate work of India. He said that there were three tasks that India had to accomplish.

The first task is to recover the ancient spiritual knowledge in its fullness, in its amplitude. And this means of course, basically, the recovery of the Veda, Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas and Tantras. This is, one might say, the basic stuff of what can be called the ancient spiritual knowledge of India. I underline the word “knowledge” because, usually, though this knowledge is contained in what are called Scriptures, Scriptures are sometimes regarded as revelations which were made once for all and have to be accepted unquestioningly. Therefore, philosophers do not accept them as bodies of knowledge. The

*A Transcript of a lecture given at Auroville

Part Two

Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, Tantra, Puranas are Scriptures; but they must still be considered as books of knowledge, because India does not regard them as revelations made for all times which cannot be repeated or which cannot be verified. According to the Vedic tradition, the faculty of revelation can be so developed that one can have a constant stream of revelations. Therefore, it is not something which comes once and for all: one can have repeated revelations, and revelations can be verified by revelations, and they can be experimented upon. What is more, they can be enlarged as in scientific knowledge – you can enlarge upon the knowledge; you can even overpass; you can have a new revelation, a new knowledge. So Sri Aurobindo has deliberately used the word, “ancient Indian spiritual knowledge.”

This has to be recovered. It has to be recovered because it has greatly been lost. Mother once wrote down a message for me in which She said: “India has or rather had the knowledge of the Spirit.” She wanted to underline that India could not take pride in having today a living knowledge of the Spirit. India has deviated a long way from the possession of that knowledge and therefore it has to be recovered. This is the first task.

As for the second task, Sri Aurobindo said that

India has to pour that knowledge into new modes of philosophical, scientific and critical knowledge. This is a very difficult task. In fact, it has been made easy because Sri Aurobindo himself wrote a huge philosophical work called *The Life Divine*, in which he has demonstrated how the ancient knowledge can be poured into philosophical modes of thinking, and how in modern times it can be presented in a modern fashion. He has even shown how we can advance from the past towards the new.

The third task, Sri Aurobindo has said, is to deal with the contemporary problems in a new manner, and to realise a spiritualised society. These are the three tasks, of which the last one, he said, is the most difficult task. And the proportion to which India can accomplish these three tasks – to that extent India will have fulfilled her mission. In fact Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have initiated the third task, and this great seat called Auroville is India's effort inviting the whole world to meet and attempt to create a spiritualised society.

But these last two tasks will depend very largely upon the recovery – the first task – the recovery of the ancient spiritual knowledge. It is a very difficult terrain. It is so complex, and it is buried under such a plethora of interpretations, that it is extremely

Part Two

difficult to penetrate into it; it is like a jungle. I, for instance, have been brought up in India right from childhood in the real Indian tradition; the Veda was my constant childhood friend – I had a home in which Veda was recited every day. And yet, in spite of this kind of upbringing, it was only when I came to Sri Aurobindo that I really entered into the real portals of Vedic knowledge. Till that time, all that I knew of the Veda and the Upanishads and the Gita and the Puranas was that they were a real dense forest, difficult to penetrate; it was difficult to walk, even one mile, into that big terrain. When we recited the mantras of the Veda, the hymns of the Veda, we understood a little, because sometimes the words were not so difficult and you could make out some meaning of them. But as far as penetrating into what we can call knowledge, it was a constant failure.

In fact, many of us who read the Western scholars interpreting the Veda found in their interpretations an echo of our own lack of understanding. The Western scholars came across this great body of Vedic knowledge in the early nineteenth century.

Perhaps many people may not know that vast corpus of the Veda itself. Apart from the interpretations of the Veda, which are also huge, the mere text of the Veda itself is very vast. What is

called Veda consists of four huge books: the first one is called Rig Veda; the second is called Yajur Veda; the third is called Sama Veda; and the fourth is called Atharva Veda. These are four huge volumes. Rig Veda is the biggest. It has ten chapters and totally it has ten thousand verses. The Rig Veda alone in a recent publication, the mere Sanskrit text along with the English translation has twelve volumes. The Atharva Veda is half of the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda is the shortest and the Yajur Veda is more than one fourth of the Rig Veda. Basically, the Rig Veda is regarded as the Veda, and Sri Aurobindo made a study of the Rig Veda in depth.

But when this study was made by the Western scholars in the nineteenth century, they found after studying the Vedas that they seemed to be the compositions of barbarians, naïve in their imagination, superstitious, materialist, seeking for wealth, progeny, cows and horses. Not understanding the real depth and not understanding the connections of ideas, they felt that the entire Vedic corpus was simply a bundle of worthless material, which may be studied for historical reasons to show to people what barbaric people of ancient times thought, conceived and imagined, but for no other purpose. In fact, Max Mueller, after interpreting the whole of the Veda, wrote a letter to his wife (I do not

quote exactly the words), – “I have now accomplished the task of translating the whole of the Rig Veda. And when people, even in India, will read my translation and understand what the Veda contains, they will find that there is nothing in it, and then they will easily turn to Christianity and embrace it.” This was the confidence with which he translated, and many others who came to translate and many of those who interpreted the Veda coincided in their interpretations. And many of the Indian scholars, who read these Western scholars also, dared not depart from their interpretation. Even a philosopher like Radhakrishnan while writing on the Veda in his book, *Indian Philosophy*, says, “Sri Aurobindo sees a great light and psychological truth in the Veda,” but he remarks: “But when we see that Western scholars do not agree with him, we also cannot agree with Sri Aurobindo.” This is the remark of a man like Radhakrishnan, who is supposed to be one of the foremost philosophers of India! You can see, therefore, how difficult it is for scholars to understand the Veda.

Now there is a history of the interpretation of the Veda, and this history has to be understood before we can appreciate how Sri Aurobindo penetrated through this great forest of the Vedic interpretations and brought out a great light out of the Vedic verses.

This interpretation starts with the Upanishads. The Upanishads claimed that what was written in their compositions were nothing but reaffirmation of the Veda. This is a very important point because the Upanishads are regarded by scholars all over the world of tremendous importance and full of light. On this there is no dispute, neither in the East nor in the West. Therefore, at least for the Upanishadic seers, the Vedas are books of knowledge.

When we come to the Bhagavad Gita, which is regarded to be the quintessence of the Veda, it also mentions that the Veda is a book of knowledge. The Puranas also claimed that Veda was a book of knowledge. Tantra also regards Veda as a book of knowledge. Indian schools of philosophy regard Veda as an authority, and it is a tradition in Indian philosophy that if your conclusions of philosophical thought do not coincide with what is in the Veda, then your conclusions are wrong.

In spite of this great tradition of the authoritativeness of the Veda, there came a long line of interpretation, starting with Yaska, one of the great interpreters of the Veda. And this line ended with a great scholar of the fourteenth century A.D. called Sayana. He was himself the Prime Minister of a state in south India and also a great Vedic scholar, and he

Part Two

had the possibility of employing a whole huge mass of scholars to assist him. And Sayana interpreted all the four Vedas. To study them requires a lifetime and therefore to differ from him would require further time. Therefore, after a long period, Sayana's interpretation ultimately became the standard interpretation of the Veda in India. And if you read Sayana's interpretation, then it would seem that the greatness of the Vedic Rishis and the claim that Vedic texts contain knowledge is a colossal fiction. If you read Sayana, you would be obliged to conclude that his own claim that Veda contains knowledge is a proposition that cannot be sustained. Sayana himself was a ritualist, who believed that the Vedas were written for ritualistic purposes. He revered the Veda; he was not like the Vedic interpreters of the modern time, the scholars of Western scholarship. He revered the Veda, he had respect for the Veda, but he believed that it was simply a book of rituals. In other words, these seemingly magical superstitions are not superstitions according to Sayana – these are magical mantras which can be recited, which can produce results in your life: results in terms of materialistic gains, progeny and wealth. Such was the meaning of the Veda according to Sayana. It was on the basis of Sayana that Vedic scholars of the West made their interpretations. They went one step further, and

whatever reverence there was in Sayana for the Veda was blotted out, and they tried to prove that the Vedas were important only from the point of view of primitive history, but of no further use of mankind in the future. It had no message.

Now Sri Aurobindo himself, when he came to study the Veda in the early stages of his life, without studying Veda properly, had felt that may be these modern interpretations were quite meaningful; may be they were quite valid. This was the climate of the modern Indians, and even now it is largely so. One of the last interpretations of the Veda was by a great scholar of the nineteenth century in India called Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati. He interpreted the Veda, criticising Sayana very severely and affirmed that the Veda is a book of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo himself has written a very illuminating essay on Dayananda. If one reads it, one can see what a great tribute Sri Aurobindo has paid to Dayananda.

And yet Sri Aurobindo does not coincide his own interpretation with the interpretation of Dayananda. When Sri Aurobindo turned to Veda seriously for the first time after coming to Pondicherry, he had already had three great realisations of his yoga. By that time, he had the realisation of the Brahmnic nirvana, under the guidance of the Maharashtrian Yogi called Lele.

Part Two

He had a further realisation of the universal Vasudeva – Krishna – in the Alipore jail. And he had already in the Alipore jail, also heard the voice of Vivekananda for fifteen days uninter-ruptedly where Sri Aurobindo was given the knowledge of the planes between the mind and the supermind. It was after this background that Sri Aurobindo had numerous experiences to which he had not a clue, either in Western psychology, that is, modern psychology or ancient psychology or anywhere. But these experiences were rising in his consciousness; as he says himself, he had particularly the experiences of what the Veda calls Ila, Saraswati, Sarama, Daksha. These are four female energies described in the Veda and, without knowing this; Sri Aurobindo had already had the experience of these energies. What were these powers, which were rising in his consciousness on their own? And then when he happened to read the Veda, with this background, he directly contacted and understood and found a confirmation of his own experiences in the Veda. This was the way in which the key of the Veda was found. It was found by his own personal experiences which *preceded* his understanding of the Veda. It is not as if these experiences came to him after reading the Veda and finding them in the Veda. It is not as if he found the confirmation later in his own

experiences. It is the other way round. He already had the experiences of these highest powers of consciousness and he found a clue to them in the Rig Veda. It is said in the Veda that only the seer can understand the words of the seer. This is the Vedic expression itself, *ninya vachamsi*, that is, secret words, *kavaye nivachanani*, are revealed only to the *kavi*, to the poet, to the seer. And this is confirmed in the case of Sri Aurobindo: the secret meaning of the Veda was revealed only to the seer, to Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo studied the Veda in depth; to cover such a huge mass of Vedic knowledge, within two or three years, is a Herculean labour! And he accomplished it within a short time, as if he dived into the Veda, collected all the treasures within a short time, brought the jewels and diamonds out and then began to express and put them before mankind. This was in 1914. That is to say, in 1910 he came to Pondicherry, and by 1914, within four years, he had attained such a mastery of the secret meaning of the Veda that he began to write a series of articles under the title *The Secret of the Veda*. If one reads *The Secret of the Veda*, one can see a masterly interpretation; it is a masterly interpretation because Sri Aurobindo found the proof of his own interpretation in the Veda itself. It is by internal evidence that he shows that the interpretation he has given follows clearly and

Part Two

obviously, luminously, from the Vedic verses themselves.

In the light of this, he says, the Upanishads also can be understood properly. In fact, although the Upanishads are famous for their knowledge, even today if one goes to scholars and ask them for an interpretation of the Upanishads, one will see that three-fourth of the Upanishads, even now, is a closed door. Even today, even those who praise the Upanishads to the sky, whether in the East or in the West, if one asks them questions, one really finds that they are absolutely out of their depth. They cannot explain! And it is quite obvious, because unless you understand the Veda and the secret of the Veda, the Upanishads cannot truly be understood. Fortunately, Sri Aurobindo has also written for us at least two great commentaries on two important Upanishads: Isha Upanishad and Kena Upanishad, and he translated eight Upanishads in totality. That is tremendous help for understanding the Upanishads properly.

Similarly, if one does not understand the Veda properly, one cannot properly understand the Bhagavad Gita. It is not a secret book like the Veda, it is not like the Upanishads, it is so pregnant with meaning. And yet the Bhagavad Gita, too, cannot be

understood properly if the Veda is not understood. In other words, the recovery of the ancient knowledge – Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita – cannot be achieved except in the light of what Sri Aurobindo has written on the Veda. That is why I consider Sri Aurobindo's *The Secret of the Veda* to be of the highest importance.

The Veda may be looked upon as the only document of ancient times available to the whole of humanity. That is, if you trace world history, and if you try to find out what was the earliest composition from the earliest stage of humanity, nothing is available to us today – except the Veda. This is the only document, the only composition that is available to humanity. There were of course many other traditions in ancient times, and there was certainly a great tradition of knowledge. There were traditions which you find in ancient Chaldea, ancient Persia, Egypt, Greece, but all these traditions have been lost. There is hardly anything available in the form of any text. There are ideas; there are mythologies. Even Greek mythology which is available is a later statement of the earlier Illeusian tradition. But as far as texts and their secret knowledge are concerned, these are lost.

If one wants to know the earliest thought of mankind, and if one wants the proof of that earliest

document of mankind, one has to turn to the Veda, because it is the only document available for the whole of humanity. Thus, if one wants to reconstruct even human history, and the thought of human history, all the nations have to turn to the Veda to get the description of the earliest thoughts of mankind, for which one has proof. And what a proof! We must remember that right from the beginning this Vedic text was so much revered in India (obviously because at that time it was considered to be a book of knowledge. Whatever one may say about it in modern times, it was known to the Vedic seer that it contained the supreme secret knowledge), that a tradition had developed that this knowledge should never be allowed to be lost. And a system was evolved in India so that one section of people of India had the obligation to memorise either all the four Vedas or at least one Veda. This has been the tradition. And not memorising in a haphazard manner. A very special system of memorising, singing, chanting the mantras of the hymns was evolved, where every syllable was measured, and its place was fixed absolutely. Fortunately, even today, in spite of great losses of many kinds, there are at least two thousand chanters, singers, who can recite the Veda exactly as it was recited five thousand years ago. I have myself, in one of the capacities of my

governmental work, made a survey in India, and we have a large number of singers of the Veda, in Andhra Pradesh particularly. The speciality of this method of singing is that it is sung in seven different ways, and all the seven ways should coincide, so there is no mistake occurring anywhere.

The last method, which is called the *ganapatha*, the method in which you first pronounce the first syllable, then you pronounce the second syllable, then you go back to the first syllable, and pronounce again the second, and then pronounce the third, then you go back again to the second, and then pronounce the first, and then again you go back to the second, and third, and fourth, and go back to the third, and second, and first, until you come to the end of a verse, which takes nearly from ten to fifteen minutes, even to recite one mantra like: *Agnimile purohitam yagnasya devamritvijam hotaram ratnadhatamam*. This is a simple verse, the very first verse of the Rig Veda. The recitation in this *ganapatha* takes at least fifteen minutes because of this method. And it is chanted, it is not only recited like prose, it is chanted. In fact, even the chanting is so wonderful. These repetitions are so beautiful and so marvellous that when you hear the chanting, you would like to go on hearing. And then the whole of Rig Veda, ten thousand verses! You can imagine what a tremendous

feat that is to recite and memorise in this way! And remembering both ways, and every word, as they move forward and backward, they have complete memory of it. It is a part of the training: right from the childhood at the age of four or five they start memorising. This is a part of their work. This is the reason why today we have an accurate text, about which there can be no question at all. If anybody has doubts about the text, you can just call a singer and ask him to recite in the *ganapatha*: every syllable is caught, even today, so that it is not left to the printer's mistakes. Printing came much later. In fact, throughout the history of India, it has been an oral tradition. That is why, as Sri Aurobindo says, today we have almost an accurate text of the Veda. Not only of the Veda, this is true also of the Brahmans, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads and many other scriptures. The same method was used. It is tremendous. What a prodigious memory these Brahmans developed!

In any case, there is no dispute about the fact that these Vedic texts are accurate. Whether we understand them or not is something else, but on this question there is no doubt that these are the most ancient texts available to mankind. If human history has to be written correctly, if the thought of human mind has to be written historically, there is no

recourse for mankind except to go back to the Veda. So the importance of the Veda is not only for India but also for the whole world. It is the world's earliest text available and therefore it tells us what the earliest man thought, what he conceived. If one wants to find out, one has got to go back to the Veda.

These texts may not be the most ancient of all because, as Sri Aurobindo says, it is very clear that the Vedas were preceded by a very great civilisation, a very powerful stage of civilisation. And it was only when that age was declining that the fragments of the knowledge of these Vedic seers were put together by a Rishi called Vyasa. In any case this is what the tradition says: there was a great Rishi called Vyasa, who knew the Vedas in their fullness and who made an anthology. These four Vedas are not the full text of all that was available as the Veda in that civilisation. But this is only an anthology, these are only selections, it is a miscellany. What we call Veda is therefore an imperfect statement of what was developed in that ancient time.

What must have been the civilisation at that time can only be imagined first when we understand the light that Sri Aurobindo had shed upon these texts, and secondly when we understand the poetic brilliance. One of the marks by which one can see

whether poetry is barbaric or naive or primitive or very developed is the metrical perfection. As Sri Aurobindo remarks, if you read the Veda simply, the rhythms of the Veda are like the chariots of the Gods. They have a perfect symmetrical form. And this is a remark of Sri Aurobindo, who is one of the greatest poets. It is his tribute to the Vedic rhythms. What we find in the Veda are perfect symmetrical forms. Even if one does not understand the meaning of the Vedas, even if one thinks that they are barbaric, at least the poetical form is not barbaric, that is certain. Barbarians could not have produced that kind of symmetrical perfection of rhythms throughout the Veda. It is lyrical in its sublimity; both lyricism and epic character are present. If one recites the Vedic verses, – actually one should enjoy reciting the Vedic verses – if one knows the Sanskrit language, and even if one does not know and simply listens, one will experience that the rhythms, the symmetrical forms, the sounds, the ringing of these Vedic verses are perfect. As Sri Aurobindo says, as you sing these Vedic verses, you feel as if you were flying with your wings. This is the kind of power that the Vedic verses possess.

Sri Aurobindo said that Vedic poetry is mantric poetry. And this is a very important point to be underlined: Vedic poetry is mantric poetry. What

does it mean? In fact Sri Aurobindo has explained the meaning of mantric poetry in his great book called *The Future Poetry*, and to understand the value of Vedic poetry, we must read this book. In brief, Sri Aurobindo has said: To arrive at mantra – the word mantra cannot be translated into English, but, let us say, what Sri Aurobindo calls the highest expression, poetical in character is mantra. And in India, mantra is that rhythmic expression which, when recited, produces a physical effect. If you say *tathastu*, in a mantric form, “Let it be so”, it will be so, physically. This is the Indian tradition: any mantric expression will produce physical effects. Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri* is entirely mantric in character. Sri Aurobindo had said in *The Future of Poetry* that future poetry will be mantric. The whole of *Savitri* is now available to us. It is mantric in character, and that is why *Savitri* is not merely poetry, it is effective force in action. And that is also true of the Vedic mantras. In brief, Sri Aurobindo said: The mantric poetry must satisfy three criteria: first, it must have the highest intensity of rhythm. In fact Sri Aurobindo has said that the one mark of poetry is rhythmic words. There is no poetry if there are no rhythmic words. Prose and poetry differ in this; in prose you may not have rhythmic words, but poetry is marked by rhythmic words. But merely rhythmic words are not enough;

Part Two

the mark of mantra is the highest intensity of rhythmic words. There are so many poems which are in rhythm, but that is not the highest poetry, that is not mantric. Mantric poetry must have the highest intensity of rhythmic expression. That is the first mark.

Second is highest intensity of style. What is style? It is the perfect correspondence between the mode of expression and the meaning of expression. What you want to say is conveyed exactly by the mode suitable to that meaning. The highest intensity of style is a second mark of mantric poetry.

And the third mark is the highest vision of the highest truth, the intensity of that vision. All poetry or all art is basically a perception. Where there is no perception, there is no poetry, no art, no sculpture. A deep perception. One goes on, deeply perceiving, until that perception produces an image. That is called a depth of perception. All art is nothing but a perception, perceived so deeply, so deeply, that what you are perceiving begins to take a form, an image. And if you can express that image, you are an artist. When the vision and experience of the highest truth, the widest truth, the most comprehensive truth not just anything like the experience of a beautiful moon or a sun is captured in your poetry, that is mantra.

And Sri Aurobindo has said that the entire corpus of the Veda is mantric poetry. If the very poetic form of the Veda has got this much of power (apart from its meaning), how could it be termed as primitive or barbaric at all? This is the first point that we have to make with regard to what Sri Aurobindo has said about the Veda. Vedic poetry is mantric poetry.

The second point I want to make is that Sri Aurobindo discovered that the Vedas have been written in a secret way. Outwardly it has one meaning, inwardly it has another meaning, although there is a parallelism between the two. And there was a reason behind it. The reason was that a secret knowledge had to be communicated, and if that communication falls into the hands of an uninitiated, he can misuse it, both for himself and the others. Fortunately, in modern times, some of the secrets of knowledge are very difficult to find. Even if you start learning, it takes twenty, thirty years to find out the secret of that knowledge. But once it is known, like atomic energy, or any other, even with the telephone, and Internet, you know how people can misuse all these instruments and what terrible effects it has already produced in our civilisation. This was known to the Vedic seers: if knowledge is given to an uninitiated, it can be very harmful to the people. Yet it had to be communicated. So they developed a

Part Two

secret code, and Sri Aurobindo calls it an algebraic code. If you do not know algebra and you read a book of algebra, what meaning can you make out of it? Unless the meaning of the figures and symbols is known to you, you cannot make out anything. The Veda is therefore algebraic in character. This is a second point I want to make. The Veda is difficult to understand. The meaning of it is secret. It is written in an algebraic form. You use the word “cow”. We all know what a cow is in the ordinary sense, but in the algebraic form, “cow” means “light”. And if you read the Veda throughout, wherever the word cow comes, you put the word light, it will fit in very well. But if you don’t put cow for light, it will look very bizarre. “The cow stands before a horse”: what is the luminous meaning in it? Nothing! But if you say: The horse is for Power, Energy, Shakti; the cow is Light. The cow and the horse together are a symbol for *Chit-Shakti*, which makes a tremendous meaning. Wherever these words come, do not use cow and horse, simply use the words light and power. It will make a very simple, luminous, obvious meaning. But if one does not know this, then everything looks bizarre, and it may look very primitive, and barbaric. This is the reason why many people, not knowing the algebra of Veda, have come to the conclusion that the Veda is barbaric and primitive. It is Sri

Aurobindo's tremendous insight (because of his own experiences) that he discovered this algebra of the Veda. His great book, *The Secret of the Veda* gives you the algebraic meanings of various words and terms which have been used in the Veda.

The third point I want to make is that this Veda contains a very deep knowledge of reality, of the world, and of the self. A triple knowledge: god-knowledge, world-knowledge, and soul-knowledge (self-knowledge). What is that knowledge, what is the content of that knowledge?

What is God? What is the ultimate reality? It is not the kind of god sitting in the seventh heaven with a long beard. In one of the first statements in the first chapter of the Rig Veda, we find a particular mantra which is very curious: *na nunamasti no shvah kastadveda yadad bhutam anyasya chittamabhi samcharenya mutadhitam vinashyati*. This Sanskrit couplet says: The ultimate reality is neither today nor tomorrow. Who knows that reality, which is wonderful? Why is it wonderful? It has motion – it is alone, there is no other but it has motion in another. Therefore it is *adbhutam*, wonderful. It has motion in another, and if you try to approach it through your intellectual thought, where you always distinguish between one and another, and divide the two, and

don't understand the mystery of one itself being another, if you apply that intellect on it, it vanishes. In other words, if you try to understand it intellectually, you will never grasp it, because it is wonderful. It does not follow the logic of the finite; it follows the logic of the infinite. The one that is many. As Sri Aurobindo says in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the ultimate reality is simple complex. It is simple-complex at the same time. It is one that is many, it is static that is dynamic. It is the same thing which is said in the Upanishad. In the Isha Upanishad the same idea is expressed: *tadejati tannaijati*, – “It moves, it moves not.” It is far, it is near. It is wonderful. This is the first starting point of the Vedic knowledge of reality, of God. And there are so many other verses to which I do not make reference here for the sake of brevity.

What is the world-knowledge of the Veda? They say that the physical world that we can see is only the outer fringe of the whole world. But even this world consists of three earths, not only one earth. Even the earth that we can see is not one earth. There are three earths. Then there is an intermediate world between earth and heaven. “Heaven” is a word which is used for “mind” in the algebraic language of the Veda. Wherever the word “heaven” comes in the Veda, one has to understand “mind”. Wherever the word *prithivi*, earth, comes, one has to understand it

to be the physical. The word *antariksha* is the algebraic term for intermediate world. So there are three worlds: the world of the physical, the world of the vital and the world of the mental. These are the first three, to which we have a normal access. But then it says: the Vedic seers took a long time in their search to find out *turiyam svid*. This is another word which is very important in Sanskrit, *turiyam svid*, “that fourth one”. *Turiyam svid* is again an algebraic term, “that fourth one”. There is a short story in the Rig Veda of a Rishi called Ayasya. The story is that there were nine Angirasa Rishis (Angirasa is a name of a clan). Nine Rishis were in search of the highest possible. They were searching, at last in their quest they came across a great man called Ayasya. They got his help in this search. These nine Angirasa seers became ten with Ayasya, and then with his help they found *turiyam svid*, they found “the fourth one” – the fourth reality. The three were the earth, the intermediate world, and heaven: body, life and mind. But with what did they discover the fourth one? *Saptadhi* is again another algebraic term, *Saptadhi*, – the seven headed-thought. A thought which has seven heads. That is, the mind has to be so wide as to become seven-headed. With the help of the seven-headed thought, Ayasya broke open the fourth world and with the opening of the fourth world he became

universal: *vishvam ajanayat*. He manifested the whole universality. This fourth is regarded as the most important discovery of the Vedic seers.

Sri Aurobindo afterwards told us that “this fourth” is the Supermind. *Turiyam svid* is the Supermind. The Vedic seers had discovered the Supermind. And beyond the Supermind, they discovered the triple reality which, in later times, came to be recognised as *Sat-Chit-Ananda*: Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. So, you now see that the world, as seen in Vedic times, consisted of these planes: the three highest Existence, Consciousness, Bliss. Then comes the supermind, and then come mind, life and matter. This was their world-knowledge. I must say that I am making a great injustice to the Veda by summarising so primitively and so briefly, so naively. But this is the basic formula, you might say, of the world-knowledge of the Veda.

What is soul-knowledge? According to the Rig Veda, this is one of the most secret knowledge. This soul is given an algebraic term in the Veda, it is called Agni. Agni is the mystic fire. Fire is that which you can see outside very easily but, inside, it is our inner self, our inner soul that which we call “psychic being” in Sri Aurobindo’s psychology. This psychic

being is our real inner inmost soul. And this was discovered after a long, long search. If you read the Vedic verses, you will find how much is said on Agni. This is so important that Sri Aurobindo himself wrote a full book where he collected and translated all the hymns addressed to the mystic Fire in the Rig Veda. And this is the most precious knowledge that we have, because Agni is the most profound secret of the Vedic knowledge, according to the Veda. In fact, the very first verse of the Veda starts with Agni. Without Agni, without fire, without the knowledge of the mystic Fire, you cannot enter into the portals of Vedic knowledge. You must know yourself very deeply, profoundly, to understand the world, and it is by rising from plane to plane that you rise to the Supreme and you discover this wonderful reality that has motion in another. This mystic Fire has been described variously in the Veda. There are many Agni mantras in other Vedas also, but it is to the knowledge available in the Rig Veda about the mystic Fire that Sri Aurobindo makes a reference when he describes the psychic being in *The Life Divine*. And he says: It is the flame that burns in the heart, which is inextinguishable, it is the conscience deeper than the conscience of the moralist. It is the Daemon of Socrates, it is that which turns always towards the truth and beauty and

Part Two

goodness, that which detects the truth from falsehood, unmistakably. That is our true soul which is within ourselves. Without illumining this Fire, you cannot enter into the deeper knowledge contained in the Veda. That is the importance of the mystic Fire. What you are internally is this Fire. And this Fire itself has an origin.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of the origin of the psychic being also. But in the Veda there is a very interesting story. Mother sometimes told that story. She said that a time came in the history of the world when the four emanations which had originated from the ultimate reality separated from the origin, and there came about a complete darkness. When that darkness came, the supreme Divine Mother went back to the Supreme Lord and said: An accident has occurred and there has come about a complete darkness. What is to be done? Then the Lord said: Create some other beings who will not separate themselves from the origin. And that was the origin of Gods. Gods were created. But when the gods saw darkness and when they were asked to go down into the darkness so that the light can come out of it, even they refused. They said: It is so dark, we shall not enter into it. It was then that the Gods saw in the Divine Mother, in Aditi (this is the Sanskrit name for Divine Mother) a special Light, something special, and they said: if

that can be brought down, then it can bring back light into this darkness. That Light is the mystic Fire. That is the origin of Agni. His origin is in the Supreme Divine Mother. In one of her talks Mother has said that when the Supreme Divine Mother saw the darkness, a tremendous Love oozed out of Her, and when that Love crystallised and fell upon the darkness, the psychic element which entered into the darkness. And all the psychic beings are nothing but evolutionary developments of this original psychic element which is nothing but Love of the Divine Mother. And that is why the psychic being automatically turns to the Divine Mother in an experience of Love. This is the Vedic truth told in algebraic form.

There is a very important mantra in the Rigveda and it is said that if you recite this mantra, you will be free from all sins. This is the promise given. It is called *aghamarshana mantra*. *Agha* means “sin”, *marshana* means “wiping out”, a mantra which can wipe out all the sins. And that mantra is very simple: *ritam cha satyam chabhiddhat tapaso dhyajayata tato ratryajayata tatah samudro arnavah*. Why is it called the mantra that can wipe out the sins? Because if you know the origin of all this, what is all this darkness and how darkness can be removed by the power of the Divine Love and by the mystic Fire, if

you know this, all sins can be wiped out. That is why it is called the mantra of wiping out the sins. It simply says: In the beginning there was *tapas*. (*Tapas* is nothing else but power of concentration, the power of concentration of the Supreme. There is first the Supreme which I have described earlier, that which is neither here nor there. That Supreme has a power of concentration.) From *tapas* comes out first, *ritam cha satyam*, – Truth and Right. In other words, out of the *Sat Chit Ananda*, by the power of *tapas* comes out Supermind. (*satyam, ritam, brihat* is the formula of the Supermind. This is what Sri Aurobindo has revealed in *The Life Divine* and also in his *Secret of the Veda*.) So from the power of *tapas*, comes out this great Supermind. Then, having brought out the Supermind, suddenly something happens: *tato ratryajayata*, from there arose the Night. A sudden jump – Supermind is the supreme Light, and suddenly there comes the night. In the night there is still some light because of the stars and the moon. But then it says: After the night, *tato samudro arnavah*, then came a complete ocean of darkness, not only night but a complete darkness. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the Inconscience. From the Supermind there was a descent, the separation from the origin. The night came and then came out a complete darkness. And then it says *samudradarnavadadhi*

samvatsaro ajayata, after this, out of this great darkness came *samvatsara*; *samvatsara* is an algebraic term for the mystic Fire. Agni was put here. And once Agni was put there, all the evolution came out. Then there is a description of Surya, Chandra, the sun, the moon, everything came out. It gives a description of the whole world thereafter. This is the fundamental psychic knowledge, the knowledge of the soul. Again I am doing a great injustice to the Veda because I am speaking as if it is so simple and so brief as that, but it is not so. There are hundreds and thousands of verses on this knowledge in the Veda. It is this psychic being which is presided over by *hamsa*; *hamsa* is another algebraic term. *Hamsa* means swan. Over this mystic Fire is a swan which is tied up, according to the Veda, in hundreds nets, and cannot flutter its wings. It is in bondage. But, in this bondage, there is a tremendous battle going on. What is this battle?

In the Veda you find the great story of the forces of Light and the forces of Darkness. The forces of Light are called the Gods. The forces of Darkness are called *Dasyus*, *Panis*, *Pishachas*, *Rakshasas*, *Asuras*. There is a great battle between the two. If you want to fight the battle, this battle can be fought, and it can be fought systematically. This is the yoga of the Veda: the mystic discipline by which the

Part Two

psychic being and the soul, which are caught in this great battle, can be liberated. The first step is the discovery of the mystic Fire within you. This is the first step in the mystic discipline of the Veda. Veda, Sri Aurobindo discovered, is a great book of Yoga. It is not any superstition or magic or any kind of barbaric mantras meant to get some gains here and there. It is a knowledge of the battle of Life. It is a revelation of the real nature of Life: suddenly, in harmony, disharmony comes about. Suddenly, when Rama is to be crowned, Kaikeyi happens to demand certain things overnight; Rama is thrown out and a great tragedy occurs; a battle takes place and only after the battle does the victory come. In human life, there are forces of Darkness and forces of Light which are described in detail in the Veda – what are the Gods; and the whole knowledge of the Gods, and how they can help. The Vedic seers found out the existence of the Gods, not as imaginations, or formations, or premonitions, but the real, objective existence of the Gods, and they found out the names of these Gods – the names, the meaning, the secret of each God – the function of each God. It is as if you are going to a Ministry, and you find out who the minister and the secretary is and who is the clerk and who is the cashier, what is the function of each one. Unless you know this, you can never succeed in a

Ministry. Similarly, in the Ministry of the world, you cannot succeed unless you know who are the Gods, and what are their functions.

Very briefly I shall give only a few clues. As you rise up and kindle your mystic Fire, the first one that comes in answer is Indra. Indra is a name of a God whom Sri Aurobindo describes algebraically as the God of the illumined mind. You, first of all, come into contact with the illumined mind. He descends, that is his nature – Agni always ascends, the fire always rises up in aspiration. In answer there is a descent of the illumined mind. This is the first God that comes to your help. But he is very powerful and he is able to fight tremendously with the demons. But then, that is not enough. You gain a lot, but that is not the end of the story, you still have to rise higher. And higher than Indra is *swah*: this is a very special word in the Veda. It is present in the Gayatri mantra.

*Om bhur bhuvah swah
tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dhimahi
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

Swah is constantly used in the Vedic lore. This *swah* is a light which has condensed itself by constant rising of the mystic Fire and the constant descent of Indra. It is a very beautiful world of Light.

You come across this world of Light. But even that is not the Supreme Light. It is only the medium Light. There is a very famous proposition made in the Veda to distinguish between darkness, the intermediate light, and the Supreme Light. It is said in the Chhandogya Upanishad that Ghora speaks one word to Krishna and gives him the Supreme Knowledge. That mantra he gives is as follows:

*udvayam tamasaspari svah pashyanta uttaram
devam devatra suryamaganma jyotiruttamam*

This is the mantra: we went beyond darkness and saw the intermediate Light which is *svah*, but then we did not stop there; we went further; we went to the Gods; we went to Surya, Suryam, we went to the Supreme Light, *jyotiruttamam*, (it is a *jyoti* which is *uttamam*, Supreme). *Swah* is an intermediate Light. The Supreme Light is *uttamam*, it is Surya, the sun. The sun, Sri Aurobindo says, is the symbol of the Supermind in the Veda. But before you enter into the Supermind, there are four Gods who stand as sentries. They will not allow you to enter into the sun, into the Supreme realm. You have to be qualified. Who are these four Gods? Varuna – Varuna is the God of Vastness. Unless you become very vast, you cannot enter into it. The narrow-minded can never enter into it. That is why Sri Aurobindo

constantly says: widen yourself. This is a Vedic knowledge: Unless you widen yourself fully, you cannot enter into the Supreme Supermind.

The second is Mitra. Varuna is always accompanied by Mitra. Mitra is the God of harmony. As long as you quarrel, you can never enter into that Light. That is certain. There must be harmony, a *tapasya* of harmony and vastness.

Then is Aryaman, Aryaman is the Lord of austerity. Great *tapasya*, the fullness of *tapasya* you must do, greatest effort, you must master the effort itself.

And then Bhaga, Bhaga is the God of enjoyment. Unless you know how to enjoy truly, you cannot enter into the Supermind. But enjoy truly, that is to say, usually a small joy is enough to make us dance and flutter and throw away all the energies. You should be able to contain the highest joy in yourself without shaking. In the Veda it is said that when the great Soma, the great nectar, falls into the unbaked jar, this jar breaks down. It is only when you are purified, thoroughly purified that your jar becomes baked, and if the joy falls into it, you can hold it. This capacity to hold the joy allows you to enter into the Supermind. This is also called the attainment of Immortality, *Amritam*. This was the great achieve-

ment of the Vedic Rishis. The soul which is tied into hundred nets – the swan which wants to fly, which cannot fly and has to battle – goes beyond Indra into *swah*, and goes beyond *swah* to Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman and Bhaga, enters into Surya. And then the highest is soma, the great delight, when that delight can be held in the body that is Immortality. This was the greatest achievement of the Vedic Rishis. Sri Aurobindo has written about this in a chapter called, “The Victory of the Fathers”. That was the Victory of the Vedic Rishis.

To hold the Supermind in the body was the highest achievement of the Vedic Rishis but Sri Aurobindo found that that was not enough. There is a distinction between the Veda and Sri Aurobindo’s discovery. There is one step farther – not one step farther. Mother told me that Sri Aurobindo is not a logical continuity of the past. It is not as if you continue what they were doing and then you get Sri Aurobindo’s path. No. It is something newly discovered. That is why Mother said: Sri Aurobindo does not belong to the past or to history. He is constantly fabricating the future. It was not known that apart from holding the Supreme Light in the body, there is also a possibility of the permeation of Light in the body. This was the new knowledge that Sri Aurobindo gave in his yoga. It is a permeation, a

penetration. It is only when there is a permeation of this light into the cells of the body that the human species can be turned into the supramental species. So, one can see how much one needs to know the Vedic yoga to understand Sri Aurobindo's yoga, and how much certainty and confirmation you get by reading the Vedic yoga. One will get many clues in the Veda, in large amplitude; and if Auroville is to be the cradle of this Superman, in which the light of the Supermind has to permeate into the cells of the body, then the Vedic knowledge, is indispensable.

Kireet Joshi

Kireet Joshi (b.1931) studied philosophy and law at the Bombay University. He was selected for I.A.S. in 1955 but in 1956 he resigned in order to devote himself to the study and practice of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at Pondicherry. He taught Philosophy and Psychology at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education at Pondicherry and participated in numerous educational experiments under the direct guidance of the Mother.

In 1976, Government of India invited him to be Educational Advisor in the Ministry of Education. In 1983, he was appointed Special Secretary to the Government of India, and held this post until 1988. He was Member-Secretary of Indian Council of Philosophical Research from 1981 to 1990. He was also Member-Secretary of Rashtriya Veda Vidya Pratishthan from 1987 to 1993. He was the Vice-Chairman of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, from 1987 to 1989.

From 1999 to 2004, he was the Chairman of Auroville Foundation. From 2000 to 2006, he was Chairman of Indian Council of Philosophical Research. From 2006 to 2008, he was Editorial

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He was also formally Educational Advisor to the Chief Minister of Gujarat (2008-2010). Currently he is at Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry, engaged in the tasks of research and guidance in themes related to 'Science and Spirituality' and 'Spiritual Education'.

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