

CHAPTER THREE: VARIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF THE VEDA AND THEIR DISTINCT IMPLICATIONS

My interest in the Vedas comes from the fact that the Vedas are the first text of mankind to begin with. Further, through doing philosophy, it appears to me that everything whatsoever is between two points- the Vedas and Moksha. This is to say that everything is rooted in the Vedas for man and all human activities are eventually directed towards Moksha. One can easily identify these two points.

Vedas are experiences of Rishikas and Rishis. Experiences here mean trans-sensory knowledge experience elaborated as “yogaj” in yogasutra later composed by Maharishi Patanjali. In other words, Vedas are essentially knowledge texts.

But here, we have a problem. Hardly anything is said in straight and simple manner and indeed the ancient Acharyas had good reasons to do so and be so. A look on this shall easily amount to a treatise itself, and hence, let me leave it here.

Let us say, fundamentally the Vedas have two phases or even faces; first, the philosophical and two, the Ritualistic. What is philosophical is ‘silent and deep’, but the ritualistic aspect is ‘loud and peripheral’. Naturally, the ritualistic part is bound to be popular, bound to have variations, and also bound to be generating oppositions. This apart, there are different schools looking at Vedas in different manners also.

On a normal course, all scholars who approach Vedas are bound to fall into one of these and many times, a compromise of both, which, often times becomes some kind of semblance. As we go into various manners in which the Vedas are looked at, we will have to feel and go through all these difficulties and problems.

The purpose of studying Vedas should be reinventing the Vedopanishadic knowledge in present times or in any different times, and certainly not to make attempts to make a go back

in time. As already seen, the Vedic suktas are compressed units of volumes of knowledge, the knowledge obtained by the Rishikas and Rishis through Yogaj. It is such knowledge that one ought to reinvent through varying space and time. With time Veda were also got divided into two categories, namely Karma Kanda and Jnanakanda. What is popular now is only the Karma Kanda where sacrifices are done for certain objectives. Thus with time, this has become superficial as commonly people have lost its real meanings and significance and what is available are the rituals. Maharishi Jaimini has written about this in his Mimamsa Sutra, making a ritualistic interpretation of the Veda. Sayanacharya too followed the same tenet but in a less rigorous manner, given the Vijayanagara context.

It was because of the Mimamsaka School of philosophy that ritualism of Veda became popular and from that period people started focusing more on the use of Vedic mantras as only in ritualism. The division of Karma kand and Jnana kand was made much later on. The Rishikas and Rishis didn't intend to make these divisions. This becomes obvious. Originally and essentially the Vedas are great knowledge texts, but on common mundane level this got astray and to remain focused.

For all practical reasons, a distinction between Vedas as a philosophical or knowledge text and Vedas as an assemblage of varying rituals. Obviously, most takers would go for the rituals but it always remained the case that the 'select' few went for the knowledge of the Vedas. Both are there and both go functional from time to time and space to space demonstrating the intense dynamism of the Vedas. For us, the ritualistic vedas really is not matter at all, but, we shall also not ignore both the karmakanda and the karmakandis alike. Jaimini to Shankara through Sayana under the umbrella of Badarayana shall ever remain a challenge to everyone, to which, Sri Aurobindo also became a subject.

There are scholars who believe that the classification of Vedas into Jnanakanda and Karmakanda are interpretation of Veda. But this is unrealistic and very peripheral. Some wants to say that the Upanishads are forming Jnanakanda of the Vedas. This is also reductionistic. It appears that Badarayana's Brahmasutra is looked at with each one's convenience and indeed this makes Badarayana very dynamic and very rigid at one and the same time. The only sensible approach to Badarayana should be through Shankaracharya's

Bhashya of Brahmasutra. In all, with all kinds of efforts from all kinds of scholars, I may say that the Vedas are ever open to interpretations to mean any kind of interpretation and never making any interpretation authentic and complete with always open ended conclusions.

We don't see the amount of Vaada in the Veda as we see in Vedanta. The aim of Veda is the transcendental quest rather than intellectual quest. One could speculate about the ultimate reality intellectually from a finite mind but it shall not touch the transcendental. One cannot touch the spiritual side from intellect alone. One needs to develop the soul strength for that, according to Sri Aurobindo.

If we have to talk about Comparative Philology, Comparative Mythology and Comparative Religion, we observe that these are not sciences in the strict sense but merely speculations. The study of the Veda has definitely opened its gateways for these fields but with these mere speculations we cannot reach the essence of the Veda. We cannot jump from logic to the revelations of the Veda. These acts are used only as a tool to know about Veda.

One of the reasons why Comparative Philology does not reach the essence of the Veda is because it only deals with the etymology of the words or only deals with language. Thus touching merely the surface of the Veda and it does not deal with anthropology, sociology and archeology in the popular manner. It alone cannot give us the inner sense of the Veda.

Sri Aurobindo believes that it is quite difficult to know exactly what these concepts meant then with all the possible changes they have undergone through throughout the time.

“For Philology has failed to discover the principles on which language was constructed or rather was organically developed, and on the other hand it has preserved a sufficient amount of the old spirit of mere fantasy and ingenuity and is full of precisely such brilliances of hazardous inference.” (1)

Many have attempted to study the Veda in the past. Yaska too has come up with the Nirukta. Nirukta can be accepted because it is the one of the six vedangas and the most important one. But there is more to the Veda than mere etymologies. Yaska has divided the uncommon words in two categories, one which is in sight known as Pratyaksha and another out of sight known as Paroksha.

“Moreover, there is a peculiar extension of it in the Vedic use, a deliberate employment of the “multi-significance” of Sanskrit roots in order to pack as much meaning as possible into a single word, which at first sight enhances the difficulty of the problem to an extraordinary degree. For instance, the word, asva, usually signifying a horse, is used as a figure of the Prana, the nervous energy, the vital breath, the half-mental, half-material dynamism which links mind and matter. Its root is capable, among other senses, of the ideas of impulsion, force, possession, enjoyment, and we find all these meanings united in this figure of the steed of Life to indicate the essential tendencies of the Pranic energy.”(2)

The Goddesses represents feminine energies and powers latent within us which we need to awaken. Same as what Sri Aurobindo experienced the Goddess Illa, Saraswati, Sarama.

“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, Illa, Saraswati, Sarama, representing severally three out of the four faculties of the intuitive reason,—revelation, inspiration and intuition. Two of these names were not well known to me as names of Vedic goddesses, but were connected rather with the current Hindu religion or with old Puranic legend, Saraswati, goddess of learning and Illa, mother of the Lunar dynasty. But Sarama was familiar enough. I was unable, however, to establish any connection between the figure that rose in my mind and the Vedic hound of heaven, who was associated in my memory with the Argive Helen and represented only an image of the physical Dawn entering in its pursuit of the vanished herds of Light into the cave of the Powers of darkness. When once the clue is found, the clue

of the physical Light imaging the subjective, it is easy to see that the hound of heaven may be the intuition entering into the dark caverns of the subconscious mind to prepare the delivery and out-flashing of the bright illuminations of knowledge which have there been imprisoned. But the clue was wanting and I was obliged to suppose an identity of name without any identity of the symbol.” (3)

Sri Aurobindo is desperately trying to decipher the Veda. He goes to Yaskacharya’s Nirukta for etymological expeditions: and slowly gets involved with some kind of mysticism with symbols. Treating Vedic expressions as symbolic, there develops a new paradigm at once; it suddenly becomes possible to make infinite interpretations given multiple spaces and time, see how Aurobindo goes on.

“The Waters (Apas) are the primary form of the Goddess, as fire or light is that of the God. The Vedic Goddess is not primarily women. They are Waters, flowing movements of consciousness and its creative energy, of which the female is the manifestation in the human world. They are the free flowing stream of the mind that ever purifies and clears itself. They are the pure mind clarified by its own free flow. Indra, the spiritual Man, by his truth perception opens out their channels. These are the Waters, the flowing movement that is everywhere in all things, which, if we open up our minds to them, purify our thoughts in their unceasing flow. Varuna, the king of Heaven and Lord of the ocean abides in the waters as their clarity that discriminates the truth from the falsehood, the eternal from the transient. In them is the Soma, the honey-wine of bliss. In the free flowing Goddesses, the Goddesses of the free flow of the mind, are all Gods, the Universal Gods which are the Divine principles of being, pervasive everywhere.” (4)

The entire battle between Indra and the Vrtra, is symbolic of battle of consciousness, where the flow of waters or seven rivers is symbolic of creative powers. It is the Vrtra obstructing the flow of creative energies, thus Indra defeats Vrtra and frees the seven rivers or powers.

“Indra’s association with existence, on the one hand, and with the supernal consciousness, on the other, is also vindicative of close correspondence between existence and consciousness. Killing of Vrtra by him is followed mostly by the emergence of dawn, rising of the sun and flow of water. While the dawn and the sun stand for varying shades of consciousness, the

stream of water is symbolic of the process of creation. Vrtra, on the other hand, represents the main obstruction in that process. As is evident from the derivative meaning of it, the word Vrtra signifies curvature in movement which in its absolute form is completely obstructive of progress. In terms of the modern physicist, he is the principle of the black hole absorbing even light inside it and thus creating darkness in the creation. The physical black hole, indeed, seems to be a result of the operation of that principle. But fundamentally from the seer's viewpoint, Vrtra is the principle of consciousness in bringing dynamics to pure existence. Moreover, if Vrtra stands for the darkness of the inconscience, dawn, sun and fire represent the light of consciousness.” (5)

Here various Gods depict psychological powers within man which needs to be invoked through a battle with the dark forces in man.

“The four gods Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman and Bhaga are of the nature of Light and have one united action that of perfecting in us the one indivisible Truth. They jointly build up in the seeker the divine state of perfect perfection by the coordination and integration of their respective contributing individual essential elements.” (6)

“The word mitra, according to Dayananda is derived from the root nimida, for him Mitra stands for friendliness, love, and harmony, whereas Varuna embodies majesty and purity. In Sri Aurobindo's view “the name Mitra comes from a root which meant originally to contain with compression and so to embrace and has given us the ordinary Sanskrit word for friend, mitra as well as the archaic vedic word for bliss, mayas.” If the word Varuna signifies infinity and purity, the word mitra symbolizes light and harmony. If Varuna provides the pure and vast framework of divinity Mitra fills it with the content of ‘beauty and perfection.’” (7)

The Rig Vedic period is said to be during existence of River Saraswati. Thus in the hymns we see the mention of oceans a lot of times. God Varuna is said to be the God of Waters. Also if we look at Saraswati. It may mean Goddess Saraswati of River Saraswati. We observe the multilayeredness of the Rig Veda. There is the mention of the seven rivers, which Indra sets

free from the Dasyus. Here the ocean is also referred to as Soma. Also there is mention of ship in the hymns, which is used to reach this ocean. The ship is the Vak or word.

“We have references to rivers flowing to the sea, to the Earth being bounded by several seas, to travel on and across the sea, and to the images in Vedic mythology of an oceanic cosmos. The main Vedic myth is of Indra who releases the seven rivers to flow into the sea. Hence Indra is frequently referred to as the sea. Varuna, a main Vedic God, is specifically the God of the sea. Varuna, a main Vedic God, is specifically the God of the sea. Soma is commonly referred to as the ocean, as he is watery God. Agni, the God of fire, has an oceanic form. Even the Sun as the source of the Cosmic Waters is compared to the ocean. Other specific ocean and water deities exist. The Gods are compared to ships and their saving action said to be like a ship. There is perhaps not a single Vedic God or group of Gods that is not somewhere related to the ocean or ships. In addition, the Vedic sages and ancestor figures are often saved from across the sea or descend from ocean Gods like Varuna.” (8)

Agni is the messenger who was present before and even now. Gods in the Vedas are Godheads of the supreme truth. This truth is hidden by darkness, with the help of all the Godheads the truth is released by slaying the obstructers of the truth is released by slaying the obstructers of the truth. Thus through these metaphors psychological functions in us is described which hinders us from seeing this truth. Even though we cannot see our mind but our mind exists. In the same way, even though if now we are not able to see the truth, the truth still exists. The seers were the experiencers of this truth. Each God-head is praiseworthy, for they help us reach the truth. Just like there is a world inside us but here the world are different planes of consciousness. But we are only aware of one world. Agni is the messenger between these worlds. We also see the presence of Agni in the seven rivers, which are the flowing streams of consciousness.

“According to a naturalistic interpretation Varuna is identified with the Night and Mitra with the Day, whereas Aryaman and Bhaga are distinguished as the sun, and the Ribhus made out of the former’s rays. Also, Mitra is sometimes identified with Agni. Agni, the divine conscious force encompasses and embodies all the other godheads-the powers and puissances of light and knowledge, strength and action, glory and greatness. When the world is rescued

from its tortuous ways and liberated out of its ignorant nature, then Agni, the deity of will and energy is revealed as Mitra, the godhead of love and harmony.” (9)

Agni can adopt multiple God-head’s role but its main task is to purify the inner being of man so that Godhead’s can reveal the truth. With the help of clarified butter Agni is intensified. Here ghrta stands for clarified dhi or clarified mind.

When we talk about the parallelism in the Veda we find the Godhead outside is also the Godhead within in the forms of energies.

“The rivers in the Veda, according to Sri Auroindo, symbolize the streams of consciousness- the sevenfold waters of Truth flowing down from the Supreme Being. They represent the seven cosmic principles or the seven planes of existence which become enriched in Agni. Having discovered Agni in the waters, the seven rivers increase by him; whereas he himself increases in the obstructed Vast. He makes his home in the Truths, and helps the seekers to attain Immortality. He is described by the Rishis and helps the seekers to attain Immortality. He is described by the Rishis as adbhuta, wonderful, as one who has an amazing, indomitable will, adbhuta-Kratu, and as one who knows the supreme and wonderful.” (10)

Though we can imagine Sanskrit of that time and now would have been so different. Even if we talk about the time of the Veda and that of Yaska’s Sanskrit would have been different even then. Earlier it was through the Yogaj the Rishis could understand the mantras directly but now one has to take help of the Nighantu and Nirukta. So it is this Nirukta that also compliments Vyakarana.

“But when Yaska tries to present derivations of different words and bring out their derivative meanings, he employs his grammatical fancy to a resultly of which the interpretations presented, though proving themselves astounding to the intellect often remains unacceptable, because of their obscurity and farfetchedness. It is for this reason that Sri Aurobindo finds it difficult to accept the interpretation of Yaska on all counts observations of Yaska, and his profound attachment to traditionalism does not allow him to bring out the psychological theory embedded in the Samhitas are fundamentally concerned with the Karmakanda, that is

to say, with works; and by works he understands the niceties of the Vedic sacrifice. Similarly, the result prayed for are accepted in their ordinary sense; as result of this, the Vedic seer is presented as asking for materialistic gains, the objects that are claimed as the aim of the sacrifices being position and strength, power and prosperity, child and cattle, gold and again, victory and destruction of the foes.”(11)

According to Yaska it is very necessary to understand the meanings of the words in the Veda. Thus, it is important to know what is been written in the Veda what does it signify merely reciting the Veda without knowing its actual meaning is useless. Thus Yaska provided nirukta for some uncommon words used in the Veda. Nirukta itself means to know clearly. As to understand the Veda we have Vedangas, the six limbs to know the Veda. Thus, Niruktas forms an important part of it. We also see various other scholars referring to Yaska’s Nirukta. Out of these six vedangas, vyakarana is more closely related to Nirukta. Though the scope of Vyakarana is wider than that of Nirukta. Thus the Nirukta of Yaska is not limited to studying the etymologies of uncommon words but also the usage of words throughout time. For this Yaska also refers to different scholars who were there before him. But whose names have been lost with time. Thus, words do have different meaning in different eras. Thus the etymologist may be acquainted with the rules of grammar but he cannot control the way in which it is been used. Vedangas was made for the protection of the Vedas.

The Vedangas are obviously created subsequently with the objectives of providing assistance in one’s approach to the Vedas. Now to what extent such assistances can be of help shall not be certain, it shall totally depend on what one may be looking for in the Vedas. On a final analysis, whatever may be help from Vedangas, the Vedas keeps remaining as unexplored for all time to come, for the simple reason that man and his society keeps evolving and every point in time the Vedas shall ever be new.

The Veda that has gone through eras one can imagine the Vedas we have today would be so different from the Vedas of that original time period. It must have gone through great mutilation especially by the European scholars. Even though the European scholars found the Vedas to be barbaric we cannot blame them for it because the Vedas is written in coded form. It contains codes and symbols and is double edged. Thus if one tries to read it plainly it will

definitely seem meaningless. That is the whole point of making it symbolic because the knowledge should not be misused. Thus there lies a secret, revealed only to the seers, that also differently to different ones.

Regarding the nature of reality it is *Sat Chit Ananda* where Sat pervades all. Thus without the sat the other two cannot exist. Same is being said by Yaska.

“The self of the Universe, it is asserted, is comprised of three elements,- Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. The two expressions ‘Sat’ meaning ‘existence’ and ‘satya’ meaning ‘truth’ are extremely significant because they bring out the interdependence of the two. Truth pervades all existent entities, and consequently the name ‘Satya’ is given to it Yaska in his Nirukta makes it clear that where there is no Truth, there is no existence, and where there is no existence, there is no Truth.”(12)

Even the contemporary philosophers like Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore have written profoundly on Truth. Gandhi considered *truth* equivalent to God and Tagore considering *Truth* equivalent to Beauty. Thus ultimately what we have is the notion of ‘Sat Chit Ananda’. But one requires spiritual eye to understand this level of Truth.

The essence of the spiritual interpretation is the same as its psychological implication in us. Same is what even Sri Aurobindo portrayed. Thus all these deities of the Rig Veda have a psychological function to perform in us. That is mostly helping us on the upward march of our spiritual quest. Thus they need to be ignited in us through sacrifice and tapas. Thus we have the story of Dasyus and Indra being its slayer. Thus Indra the thunderbolt and also means senses in us. Thus here the demons have to be destroyed, only then we can know the truth. Thus the meanings and its significance is knit. Only if we break through the meanings with the spiritual eye we can know the truth. Thus the spiritual interpretation remains the upward conquest and battle for the truth.

Indra is the demon slayer with the help of other Gods like Vayu and Maruts. He slays the demon with the help of his Vajra. Thus setting the streams of consciousness free and

unveiling the truth obstructed by these demons. Thus Indra is the Vritra Slayer. Indra's role has also been compared to that of other God's from western mythologies.

“The Vritra-battle bears a close resemblance with the thunder-battle in several other mythologies. The description and role of Indra is similar to Donar-Thor of Teutons; Indra's Vajra is similar to Thor's hammer his weapon of lightning as well as the thunder- wedges of Iranian Mithra and the Greek Zeus. Indra is extolled in the Veda as the one who cleaves the resisting rocks-rocks that imprison the cows, and liberates the celestial rivers.” (13)

If true sense of the Veda is acquired by tapasya or sacrifice then one doesn't need the scriptural knowledge. There is a difference between reading the Veda and knowing about the knowledge in the Veda.

So what we have in these different implications of the Veda is that they all represent the one truth-ekasatya. It is the same, if we observe all different texts to understand the Veda. Nothing will contradict one another; they will only complement one another. Here we see nature of reality also is dissolving in one truth. Just like a river merging into an Ocean, it becomes one with it. Thus the river cannot separate itself from the ocean which is not possible and there is no going back for the river.

The interpretation provided by Sayana can be useful in some places only. Each scholar has their own interpretation of these Sanskrit words. If we talk about the word '*Ritam*', for Yaska it means one thing, for Sayana it has its own meaning.

“Sayana gives a variety of significances to *Ritam* which is greater than that of Yaska, but which, in fact, increases the uncertainty and confusion in the mind of the student.”(14)

To understand the Veda, the method of Sri Aurobindo is to understand it as a whole in totality. If we try to understand it word by word it will not make any sense as and perhaps

Sayana does this. The same word can have different meanings in different hymns if seen scrupulously.

Sayanacharya's interpretation is more inclined towards ritualism but he does not deny the transcendental aspect of it.

“gobhih adrim airayat”

go:cow,water (sayana),ray of knowledge

adri:cloud, force of ignorance

airayat:destroy

Translation 1: (Indra) destroys the forces of ignorance with the knowledge

Translation 2: (Indra) charged the clouds with water (Sayana)

Translation 3 :(Indra) smashed the hill for getting the cows (Griffith)

Translation 1 is the esoteric interpretation. It is difficult to understand the translation 3. Supposedly the cows are hidden in the caves by robbers. By smashing the hill, even the cows are destroyed along with the hill. Translation 2 is acceptable but where is the wisdom in it?”
(15)

Sayana's interpretation doesn't make sense in some places. Griffith's interpretation is misleading and is taken by its face value and not by its symbolism.

“Admitting “Double meaning” and even “multi-meaning” of some words in the Sanskrit language one has to observe that in a work of fixed form like the Veda even with double meaning the sense made out must be consistent. It cannot be that the Rishis employed the same word in so many different senses. If they intended to convey some sense they would see to it that the words used carried only two senses and not sixteen. If they created the hymn under inspiration and not intellectually then there is all the more reason to expect cogent meaning of the words that came to them. It is the nature of higher faculties to satisfy completely the requirements of the lower faculties.”(16)

Perhaps it is futile to look for any so called ‘meanings’ in Vedas. Let us say that the Vedic suktas are constantly becoming and they keep evolving from time to time and context to context. So they are all meanings and not few meanings.

What differentiates humans from animals is humans can act freely by choice. To this Sri Aurobindo calls humans as half-god who are on their way to become full God. Initially humans don’t realize we are aiming to become full God but gradually our very existence is all about it, from the lower reality raises the higher reality. This is the Vedantic truth, which could be achieved through tapas.

“We, now, who are predominantly mental must first become inwardly aware of our inner being and its secret workings and remain no longer a slave of our lower nature. An ‘inconscious physical individualisation’ is the first covert appearance of the involved creative consciousness in Matter. It is in the formed existences that the force works out the forms of individual beings. With the emergence of human mind there appears self-consciousness intelligence though limited and imperfect. Evidently this is not the highest truth of the evolutionary process; only a free and plenary intuitive consciousness that has the direct vision of the truth can help the individual to participate in the working of the universal consciousness force. The transition is marked by a progressive conscious participation of the higher truth with the lower.” (17)

There is a sequence to the scriptures starting from the Riks, Upanishads, Aranyakas, Brahmanas, Gita and Puranas. Thus one should not mix the characters that of Puranas with the Veda. Because it has gone through time and also one should not relate Puranic characters to the Veda which most of the early interpreters have done. The results are quite misleading.

The different types of interpretation given by different acharyas on Brahman works in harmony in each other but they are mere opinions of these thinkers. One can generate a lot of discourse on it. But Bhagavada Geeta works in a simple way as it shows us the different path rather than wasting time on the speculation of the nature of reality. According to Sri Aurobindo the hindrance that is there between us and our true reality is that of ego.

“Not being satisfied with any one of these theories Swami Dayananda, the founder of the Arya Samaj projects a new view, which seeks to reestablish the Veda as a living religious scripture. Swami Dayananda himself a great Sanskrit scholar, knows that the language of Sanskrit abounds in multi-meaning words and that by taking advantage of the competence of the roots to signify multiple senses it is possible to interpret the Veda in diverse manners. Dayanad’s interpretation of the Hymns is governed by the belief that the Veda represent an assemblage of religious, ethical and scientific truths; he expresses the opinion that by a true understanding of the sense of the Veda it is possible to arrive at all the scientific truths, that are being discovered by modern research, as also those that are likely to be deciphered in future.”(18)

Another problem in understanding the Veda today is we try to understand it in English. For the mantras there can never be an exact translation because English language has smaller vocabulary compared to that of Sanskrit. In English the mantras might not be effective but in Sanskrit they do have an effect. That is the whole point of mantra recitation it has an effect on the speaker.

In symbolic interpretation we see that whatever these symbols denote to an internal process in us. Thus the external symbol runs parallel to the inner symbol. If we know the exact meanings of the symbols, we can just replace the outer meanings with its real significance. Then the entire Rik will make sense and not seem barbarous.

“It follows that the whole problem of the interpretation of Veda still remains an open field in which any contribution that can throw light upon the problem should be welcome.”(19)

The Rishis in their spiritual discipline were the seers and hearers of the mantra. Thus, they were hearers of the truth. The Veda as it is written by the seers is also understood only by the seers like in case of Sri Aurobindo. Even Sri Aurobindo was able to confirm his mystic experience in the veda.

The Veda contains knowledge which could satisfy our certitude of truth. Since Veda contains knowledge of Jnana Kanda and Karma Kanda. Thus assimilation of both these types of

knowledge make the Veda. It is us who has made this division. Surely the rishis and the rishikas would have not seen these two as separate. Thus both are of importance, thus we cannot discard one for another as here both are essential.

“Sri Aurobindo considers the Vedic Mantra produced in the dawn of human civilization as the best specimen of Poetic Art, because as he says, it is an invocation to Truth and a prayer to have spiritual intelligence, so that man can move forward in his Godward march. Thus, in all the Vedic deities Sri Aurobindo traces diverse aspects of the same Truth and affirms that when Truth establishes its empire on earth a new light glows,- a divine touch energises all tissues and cells,- and human feelings experience celestial thrill: It is in such a situation that the human journey gets its fulfillment. Sri Aurobindo consequently, maintains that the future Poetry is to take the form of Mantra, so that it can directly communicate with Truth and bring it down on this mortal region through the music of sound and melody of sense.”(20)

What differentiates Vedic poetry from the ordinary poetry is the Vedic poetry or the mantras of the Vedas are powerful. As it is said they are the experience of the truth by the Rishis which makes the Vedic poetry extra ordinary. As agni in the Veda acts as a bridge to the other worlds, in the same way these Vedas are the glimpses experienced by the seers. So what we are dealing here is knowledge of the ungraspable by ordinary intellect.

Yaska too acknowledges that the meaning of the mantra is revealed to the rishis who are bathed in tapas. Thus there is no other way than penance.

“Swami Dayananda approaches the Veda from a different angle and considers the Vedic literature as a storehouse of religious, ethical and scientific truths: it is said that the Veda are to retain their relevance for all time to come. It is further asserted that the Gods are but different forms, powers and personalities of the one Deva, and consequently, when the same God is called by different names, what is really intended is to project the many-sidedness of his unity.”(21)

The interpretation provided by R.T.H.Griffith is rather discouraging than encouraging:

“Thus the Rgveda is not only the beginning but also one of the paramount expressions of both the religious tradition and the literary tradition, combining these two roles in a text that displays great variety, skill, and beauty. Surely it deserves a modern English translation that makes these riches available to a wider audience. Yet it does not have one; the only readily available complete English translation, the nineteenth-century product of R.T.H.Griffith, conceals rather than reveals the wonders of the Rgveda and would (properly) discourage any sensitive reader from further pursuit of the text.” (22)

This is what Sri Aurobindo has to say about The Rig Veda:

“We have in the Rig Veda,-the true and only Veda in the estimation of European scholars, - a body of sacrificial hymns couched in a very ancient language which presents a number of almost insoluble difficulties. It is full of ancient forms and words which do not appear in later speech and have often to be fixed in some doubtful sense by intelligent conjecture; a mass even of the words that it has in common with classical Sanskrit seem to bear or at least to admit another significance than in the later literary tongue; and a multitude of its vocables, especially the most common, those which are most vital to the sense, are capable of a surprising number of unconnected significances which may give, according to our preference in selection, quite different complexions to whole passages, whole hymns and even to the whole thought of the Veda.” (23)

European Scholars who have failed to understand the double sidedness of the Vedas have ended up interpreting it to be meaningless and merely ritualistic. The problem that occurred due to this is many people trying to penetrate the Vedas, end up accepting commentaries by these scholars, which doesn't even touch the surface meaning of the Vedas. That is why it utterly becomes important in today's times for a more precise and depth interpretation of the Vedas, latest we have is of Sri Aurobindo's.

European scholars really had made a mess of Bhartiya texts. Their problems are many. Let me attempt to list some.

1. They hardly can be free from the clutches of Semitic tradition of fear of punishment and promises of rewards, heaven and hell.
2. They won't understand the man centeredness in Bhartiya knowledge tradition.
3. They bring Sanskrit translations to English where similar terminologies represent entirely different concepts.
4. They treat Vedas as religious texts but they are merely knowledge texts.
5. Their method of philosophizing is speculative and they shall never understand the Bhartiya experiential method through Yogaj.
6. They don't have Yoga philosophy, they don't have Rishikas and Rishis and they go by periphery alone.
7. Even they failed to come to terms with the Greek philosophy from where the Europeans try to begin their philosophical crusade.

The kind of Vedas understood by European Scholars is good for rejection. Because we can analyze from our level what Vedas have to offer to us and the entire humanity. That is to know what makes Vedas the Vedas because they provide glimpses of the truth.

One thing observed by Sri Aurobindo is that the way seers used to use vocabulary, their words made more sense than we could imagine. The words we know now are restricted to one or two sense. But their usage of words could have several meanings of which they took great advantage of. Only when we know all the possible meanings of the words can we make sense of the exact meaning and in what sense did the rishis tried to use that particular word only a seer can understand. That is the difference between seers and scholars.

There are different ways to look at the Veda, be it Philological, Psychological or Historical. Thus, Veda cannot be understood from only one way but a synthesis of all these three ways. Only then we get to study or know the essence of the Veda. The study of Veda from one angle will lead only to the surface knowledge of it. Thus, all the three aspects should be known to get till the secret of it. The Rig Veda has to be understood as a whole and not in parts.

“Finally, when it was proposed in 1949 to bring out The secret of the Veda as a book, Sri Aurobindo dictated in reply:

The Publication of the Secret of the Veda as it is does not enter into my intention. It was published in a great hurry and at a time when I had not studied the Rig Veda as a whole as well as I have since done. Whole chapters will have to be rewritten or written otherwise and a considerable labour gone through; moreover it was never finished and considerable additions in order to make it complete are indispensable.” (24)

Sri Aurobindo interpreted few hymns from the Rig Veda and not the entire Rig Veda. Thus he was going to revise the whole work but couldn't find possible time for it. This remains another reason why the secret even if revealed yet remains veiled.

What is the secret in the Veda? That can be known only if we know the Vedas from the core and not the surface. Experiential knowledge of the ultimate truth helps too. Why is Veda veiled? It contains knowledge which should not go in the wrong hands and also one should become capable to know that kind of knowledge. Why should one study the Vedas? Vedas are of perilous value and the most ancient text about true knowledge.

The dynamism with the Vedas is their nature of “constantly pacing up” with a constantly evolving phenomenal cosmos. Without realizing this, no one ever is going to know what the Vedas are. Can we not say that knowing Veda is not trying to know Veda? Maybe it is something like what the later Ludwig Wittgenstein said, “To know the meaning of language is to know the use of language” in his use theory of meaning. Here, if you find respect towards Vedas, then you know the meaning of Vedas and the secret of Vedas.

The hymns of the Veda are esoteric is hence proved by the hymns itself. Sri Aurobindo's mystics experience confirms it. Even Yaska accepts the layered knowledge of the Veda.

Yaska's contribution is mainly in the language studies of the Veda trying to find the etymology of the words. Different personalities have adopted a method to interpret the Vedas according to their interests, where Yaska's major study revolves around philology and Sri Aurobindo's revolves around psychology.

According to Yaska Vedic Mantras cannot be experienced by non-seers without tapas. Sri Aurobindo was able to achieve it through tapas. Tapas play a vital role in sacrifices too. Tapas make us prepare one for being able to know the truth.

"It has become necessary to say that human sacrifice was never there in the vedic sacrifices. In yajurveda are to be noted the names of the several castes and several classes of those that are enjoined in the purusha medha and their deities. We stop here to avoid prolixity. It is a vulgar version that human sacrifice for Gods is enjoined in the vedas. The ancient rishis have the divine eye, are endowed with spirituality; let it not be falsely propagated that these our ancients were gross-sighted, devoted to external sacrifice and addicted to human sacrifice for Gods." (25)

"Thus the mantras themselves reveal the common origin, common self and common object of the Gods. The differentiation among the Gods is differentiation of name, function and personality. That is why the ancients comprehended the characteristics marks of the Gods from the mantras and described them. Even the weapons, vehicles and hues indicate the particular deities. This truth is known from the 29th hymn of the Eighth Book. The vehicles are dealt with in the nirukta-nighantu. Similarly the characteristic marks of the deities are to be found in the hymns themselves." (26)

As the word Mitra suggests friend, Varuna is always accompanied by Mitra. Here different deities have different tasks to do which also implies to the psychological implications in us. Deities have different standpoints according to different Upanishads. Agni has been recognized as an important one along with Indra and Surya.

There can be several methods and approaches to the Veda according to the temperament dealing with it. Even in the past we have seen different approaches. What Maharishi Sri Aurobindo propounds is a fresh interpretation inclining with their experience. It touches the core and yet is veiled. That is the magnanimity and beauty of the Veda. It is open to those who become capable through austerities to know that kind of truth. Major interest lies in what we are trying to gain from the Veda. Ultimately we do get what we are looking for. If we penetrate the triad approaches to know them that is philological, historical and psychological. All three approaches are of importance. Different scholars have touched different levels of the Veda. There is a difference between reading the Veda and experiencing the truth in the Veda. Same was acknowledged by Yaska. One requires performing austerities for it, to become capable like Sri Aurobindo.

According to Yaskacharya the knowledge in the Vedas is threefold. It reveals three kinds of knowledge, firstly knowledge of the self, knowledge of the deities and knowledge about the self which makes the Vedas layered. The knowledge is revealed only to the seers, and through upadesha it is being known to others. The difference between revelation of this knowledge to the seers and common man itself proves that there is a secret in the Veda.

“Thus it is seen how Yaska though faithfully presenting the different schools of interpretations affirms the threefold knowledge from the hymn and drives at the supremacy of the spiritual interpretation. This goes to strengthen the position of the esoteric interpretation.”
(27)

Yaska too acknowledges psychological interpretation in some of the mantras. And in some mantras he has taken the themes at the face value deriving only the surface meaning of it for example in terms of the war between Indra and Vrtra.

What is of importance is to understand the true meaning of the Vedas, mugging up the Vedas, appreciating the Vedas, acknowledging its importance and value goes on. But all this is futile if we fail to understand the real meaning of the Vedas.

The way to reach the truth is by truth and truth consciousness; same is being accepted by Sri Aurobindo. Here we see absolute joy is the result of truth consciousness. Sat is the means and ananda is the goal.

The Vedas are symbolic with the psychological interpretation of Sri Aurobindo we come to know the double aspect of the Veda.

“If we follow the line shown by Sri Aurobindo, there is surely a double advantage. The incongruent prattle foisted on the mantras vanishes. And difficulties and ambiguities in many of the mantras are resolved. This is a negative gain. And positively it is this: we gain in knowledge of the spiritual eminence of the seers, the mystic vision embedded in the hymns, the true character of Gods devah. Certain unintelligible portions found in the Upanishads become clear. And lastly, we find justification for the authoritative statements made in the respective texts that the vedas are the root of the puranas, historical legends, tantras and other scriptures and the elaboration of the substance of the vedas their main function. Thus the conclusion regarding the vedas, following from the viewpoint of Western scholars, vitiated by false conjectures and without basis are to be rightly rejected. The argument that Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual psychological interpretation of the Vedas cannot be allowed to stand as it is opposed to the conclusions of lifelong scholars of vedic study has now been met.” (28)

“Every outward ritual has a corresponding internal yajna occurring in the subtle body of the human performer of the yajna.”(29)

Swami Vasudevanandaji (Garudeshwara) also wrote following the Rig Vedic Style of composition.

There is also a dichotomy with Sri Aurobindo. Fundamentally, he is European trained thinker with European methods and European categories. On the other hand, later in his life, he becomes a very serious sanatani, a hard core Hindu and Bhartiya. Even if he doesn’t want, in most of his philosophical journeys, the stamp of European method of philosophy shall have its impact.

This may make him vulnerable to many expositions at times. At this point, to understand Sri Aurobindo, one has to be completely empathetic to him to be in pace with him. It must be possible for one to eliminate the overwhelming European influence from what Sri Aurobindo to get in touch with the Maharishi Aurobindo that we are looking for and that we want to interact with.

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