The Greatness of India and Its Culture

4. The Greatness of Indian Literature – 2

The Secret of the Veda

Price : Rs. 15/-

Contents

I. How to Recover the Perfect Truth of the Veda 3

II. Sri Aurobindo's Translation of the Veda: The Difficulties and Complexities of the Task 11

III. An Outline of Main Vedic System and Thought 19

1. The Ancient Mystic Adoration – Some Images 19
2. The Vedic System 21
3. The Doctrine of the Mystics 25

IV. The Vedic Godheads 38

1. Agni, The Divine Will 39
2. The Vedic Gods – A Parable of Human Life Rising Towards the Godhead 40

V. The Vedic Symbolism: The Angiras Legend 41

VI. A Revival of Hindu Intellectual Faith in the Veda – An Inevitable Movement of the Near Future 49

I. How to Recover the Perfect Truth of the Veda

"Perfection of knowledge is the right condition for perfection of nature and efficiency of life. The perfect truth of the Veda is the fundamental knowledge, the right relations with the Truth of things, on which alone according to our ideas, all other knowledge can receive the true orientation needed by humanity. 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 and is actually at the present day, in the impulses of its vanguard, tending more and more, but vaguely and blindly, to return. If we can set our feet on the path, not vaguely and blindly, but in the full light that streamed so brilliantly and grandiosely on the inner sight of our distant forefathers, our speed will be more rapid and our arrival more triumphant."[1]

"The perfect truth of the Veda, where it is now hidden, can only be recovered by the same means by which it was originally possessed. Revelation and experience are the doors of the Spirit. It cannot be attained either by logical reasoning or by scholastic investigation, – na pravachanena, na bahunāsrutena … na tarkenaishā matir apaneyā. "Not by explanation of texts nor by much learning" … "not by logic is this realization attainable." Logical reasoning and scholastic research can only be aids useful for confirming to the intellect what has already been acquired by revelation and spiritual experience. This limitation, this necessity are the inexorable results of the very nature of Veda.

It is ordinarily assumed by the rationalistic modern mind, itself accustomed to arrive at its intellectual results either by speculation or observation, the metaphysical method or the scientific, that the sublime general ideas of the Upanishads, which are apparently of a metaphysical nature, must have been the result of active metaphysical speculation emerging out of an attempt to elevate and intellectualise the primitively imaginative and sensational religious concepts of the Veda. I hold this theory to be an error caused by the reading of our own modern mental processes into the very different mentality of the Vedic Rishis. The higher mental processes of the ancient world were not intellectual, but intuitive. Those inner operations, the most brilliant, the most effective, the most obscure, are our grandest and most powerful sources of knowledge, but to the logical reason, have a very obscure meaning and doubtful validity. Revelation, inspiration, intuition, intuitive discrimination, were the capital processes of ancient enquiry. To the logical reason of modern men revelation is a chimera, inspiration only a rapid intellectual selection of thoughts or words, intuition a swift and obscure process of reasoning, intuitive discrimination a brilliant and felicitous method of guessing. But to the Vedic mind they were not only real and familiar, but valid processes; our Indian ancients held them to be the supreme means of arriving at truth, and, if any Vedic Rishi had composed, after the manner of Kant, a Critique of Veda, he would have made the ideas underlying the ancient words drishti, sruti, smriti, ketu, the principal substance of his critique; indeed, unless these ideas are appreciated, it is impossible to understand how the old Rishis arrived so early in human history at results which, whether accepted or questioned, excite the surprise and admiration even of the self-confident modern intellect. I shall

try to show at a later stage what I hold to be, in the light of the psychological experience of Yoga, the exact processes involved in these ancient terms and their practical and philosophical justification. But, whatever the validity attached to them or the lack of validity, it is only by reproducing the Vedic processes and recovering the original starting point that we can recover also whatever is, to the intellect, hopelessly obscure in the Veda and Vedanta. If we know of the existence of a buried treasure, but have no proper clue to its exact whereabouts, there are small chances of our enjoying those ancient riches; but if we have a clue, however cryptic, left behind them by the original possessors, the whole problem is then to recover the process of their cryptogram, set ourselves at the proper spot and arrive at their secret cache by repeating the very paces trod out by them in their lost centuries.

All processes of intellectual discovery feel the necessity of reposing upon some means of confirmation and verification which will safeguard their results, deliver us from the persistent questioning of intellectual doubt & satisfy, however in-completely, its demand for a perfectly safe standing-ground, for the greatest amount of surety. Each therefore has a double movement, one swift, direct, fruitful, but unsafe, the other more deliberate and certain. The direct process of metaphysics is speculation, its confirmatory process is reasoning under strict rules of verbal logic; the direct process of science is hypothesis, its confirmatory process is proof by physical experiment or by some kind of sensational evidence or demonstration. The method of Veda may be said to have in the same way a double movement; the revelatory processes are its direct method, experience by the mind and body is the confirmatory process. The relation between them cannot, indeed, be precisely the same as in the

intellectual methods of metaphysics & science; for the revelatory processes are supposed to be self-illumining and self-justifying. The very nature of revelation is to be a supra-intellectual activity occurring on the plane of that self-existent, self-viewing Truth, independent of our searching & finding, the presumed existence of which is the sole justification for the long labour of the intellect to arrive at truth. In Veda drishti & sruti illumine & convey, the intellect has only to receive & understand. Experience by the mind & body is necessary not for confirmation, but for realization in the lower plane of consciousness on which we mental and physical beings live. We see a truth self-existent above this plane, self-existent in the satyam ritam brihat of the Veda, the True, the Right, the Vast which is the reality behind phenomena, but we have to actualize it on the levels on which we live, levels of imperfection & uncertainty, striving & seeking; otherwise it does not become serviceable to us; it remains merely a truth seen and does not become a truth lived. But when we moderns attempt to repeat the Vedic revelatory processes, experience by the mind and body becomes an indispensable confirmatory process, even a necessary preliminary process for their acquisition; for the use of these supreme instruments of intuitive & revelatory knowledge is naturally attended, for those to whom the intellect is and has always been the chief and ordinary mental organ, by dangers and difficulties which did not to the same extent pursue the knowledge of the ancient Rishis. To them it was natural in its possession, easily purified in its use; to us it is a difficult acquisition, hampered in its use by the interference of the lower movements. Experience is, for us, indispensable; we may not be certain of excluding by its means all false sight and false intuition, but we can correct much that has been imperfectly seen and confirm beyond the

possibility of all intellectual scepticism that which does clearly come down to us as illumination from our Higher self to be confirmed in life & experience, constantly and regularly, by our lower instruments.

We have, for instance, the remarkable passages in the Isha Upanishad about the sunless worlds, the luminous lid concealing Truth, the marshalling & concentration of the rays of Surya & his goodliest form of all, that form which, once seen, leads direct to the supreme realization of oneness, So'ham asmi. Our intellect sees in these expressions a brilliant poetry, but no determinable philosophical sense; yet no one can follow thoughtfully the succession of the phrases without feeling that the Seer of the Upanishad did not really intend to lead up to the direct clarity of his supreme philosophical statement by a flight of vague poetical images; he has a more serious meaning, detailed, definite, precise, pregnant, in the carefully arranged procession of these splendid images. How are we to discover it? Using the scholastic method we may hunt for a clue in the other Upanishads; we may find it or imagine we have found it and by the aid of speculative inference and a liberal dose of fancy we may construct a brilliant or even a plausible theory of the Rishi's meaning. Or, without any such clue, by the aid of a clear intelligence and putting together of the ascertainable ideas of Veda or Vedanta, we may fix a meaning which will adequately explain the text, fit into the course of the argument and, in addition, justify itself by shedding light on other passages where there is a reference to the Sun, to its rays or to its revelatory function. These means, however, can only conduct us to plausible hypothesis, a twilight certainty, or at most a convincing probability. Nor, in this passage at least, will the metaphysical methods of Shankara at all assist us; for it is a question not of metaphysical

logic but of the meaning of an ancient symbol, the connotation of certain antique figures. On the other hand, if we have been able to revive by Yoga the old methods used by the ancients themselves, we may, either in the ordinary course of our experiment or guided by the suggestion of the Upanishad, arrive at the actual experiences on which, in Vedic times, the use of this symbol and these figures was founded. We may perceive in our own selves the interposition of the golden vessel, the action of the rays, their disposition, their concentration; we may have the vision of the goodliest form of all, tejo yat te rupam kalyanatamam, and know, by luminous experience, the link between that vision and the realization of the supreme Vedantic truth, So'ham asmi. We shall then be certain of our knowledge, our unity with the one & only existence. If the ancient ideas of our psychology are correct, by process of revelation and intuition we could have arrived at the same results; the old Rishis, accustomed to use that process habitually and follow its progressive action with as much surety and confidence as we follow the steps of a logician, would have needed nothing more for certainty, though much more for realization; but we, habitually intellectual, pursued into the higher processes, when we can arrive at them, by those more brilliant and specious movements of the intellect which ape their luminosity & certainty, could not feel entirely safe & even, one might say, ought not to feel entirely safe against the possibility of error. The confirmation of experience is needed for our intellectual security.

This method, by which, as I hold, the meaning of Veda can alone be entirely recovered, is, then, a process of psychological experiment and spiritual experience aided by the higher intuitive or revelatory faculties, – the vijnana of Hindu psychology, – of which mankind has not yet, indeed, anything but a fitful and disordered use, but which are capable

of being, within certain limits, educated and put into action even in our present transitional & unsatisfactory stage of evolution. It differs from the method by which the ancient Rishis received Vedic truth, – revelation confirmed by experience, – only by the side of approach which must be for us from below, not from above, and the weight of the emphasis which must rest for a mentality preponderatingly intellectual and only subordinately intuitional, on experience more than on intuition. For the rest, the common consent of humanity has agreed that only by higher than intellectual faculties can the truths of a supra-human or supra-sensuous order, if at all they exists, be really known. Religion, except in ethical & rationalistic creeds like Buddhism and Confucianism which have put aside all such questionings as outside the human domain, has always insisted that revelation is the indispensable angel and intermediary and the intellect at best only its servant, assistant and pupil. Science & rationalism have virtually agreed to this distinction; they have accepted the idea that all knowledge, which does not reach us through the doors of the senses and, on its arrival, submit its pretensions to the judgment of the reason, is incapable of solution by the intellect; but they add that, for this very reason, precisely because the senses are our only doors of experience and the reason our only safe counselor, the questions raised by religion and metaphysics are utterly vain and insoluble; they relate either to the unknowable or the non-existent; either the material only exists, or, if there is any other existence, the material only can be known and therefore alone exists for the purview of humanity. As man marches upon the dust and is circumscribed by the pressure of the terrestrial atmosphere, so also his thought moves only in the material ether and is circumscribed within the laws & results of material form and motion.

Recently we see, even in Europe or chiefly in Europe, – for Asia is too busy imitating Europe of yesterday to perceive whither Europe of today is tending, – a revolt against this arbitrary denial of the rarest parts of human experience. The existence of the supra-sensuous & the infinite is reconquering belief and, at the same time, it is coming again to be admitted that there are faculties of intuitive & supra-rational knowledge which answer in the domain of Consciousness to these supra-sensuous facts of the domain of Being. The belief & the admission go together rationally. For to every order of facts in Nature there should be in the same Nature, inevitably, a corresponding order of faculties in knowledge by which they can be comprehended; if we have no certain knowledge of the facts, it is because we have not as yet the clear and steady use of the faculties.

In three of the external aids by which Veda has been perpetuated in India, religion, Yoga, the guru-parampara, this fundamental principle is amply admitted. Religion starts from revelation; it rests upon spiritual and moral experience. Yoga, admitting the truth of verbal revelation, the word of God & the word of the Master, yet starts from experience and rises, as a result of experimental development by fixed methods, to the use of intuitive and revelatory knowledge. The Guru-parampara starts with the word of the Guru, accepted as the knowledge of one who has seen, and proceeds to personal mastery by the experience of the disciple who may indeed go beyond his master & even modify his knowledge, but is not allowed disown his starting-point."[2]

II. Sri Aurobindo's Translation of the Veda: The Difficulties and Complexities of the Task

"To translate the Veda is to border upon an attempt at the impossible. For while a literal English rendering of the hymns of the ancient Illuminates would be a falsification of their sense and spirit, a version which aimed at bringing all the real thought to the surface would be an interpretation rather than a translation. I have essayed a sort of middle path, – a free and plastic form which shall follow the turns of the original and yet admit a certain number of interpretative devices sufficient for the light of the Vedic truth to gleam out from its veil of symbol and image.

The Veda is a book of esoteric symbols, almost of spiritual formulae, which masks itself as a collection of ritual poems. The inner sense is psychological, universal, impersonal; the ostensible significance and the figures which were meant to reveal to the initiates what they concealed from the ignorant, are to all appearance crudely concrete, intimately personal, loosely occasional and allusive. To this lax outer garb the Vedic poets are sometimes careful to give a clear and coherent form quite other than the strenuous inner soul of their meaning; their language then becomes a cunningly woven mask for hidden truths. More often they are negligent of the disguise which they use, and when they thus rise above their instrument, a literal and external translation gives either a bizarre, unconnected sequence of sentences or a form of thought and speech strange and remote to the uninitiated intelligence. It is only when the figures and symbols are made to suggest their

concealed equivalents that there emerges out of the obscurity a transparent and well-linked though close and subtle sequence of spiritual, psychological and religious ideas. It is this method of suggestion that I have attempted.

It would have been possible to present a literal version on condition of following it up by pages of commentary charged with the real sense of the words and the hidden message of the thought. But this would be a cumbrous method useful only to the scholar and the careful student. Some form of the sense was needed which would compel only so much pause of the intelligence over its object as would be required by any mystic and figurative poetry. To bring about such a form it is not enough to translate the Sanskrit word into the English; the significant name, the conventional figure, the symbolic image have also frequently to be rendered.

If the images preferred by the ancient sages had been such as the modern mind could easily grasp, if the symbols of the sacrifice were still familiar to us and the names of the Vedic gods still carried their old psychological significance, – as the Greek or Latin names of classical deities, Aphrodite or Ares, Venus or Minerva, still bear their sense for a cultured European, – the device of an interpretative translation could have been avoided. But India followed another curve of literary and religious development than the culture of the West. Other names of Gods have replaced the Vedic names or else these have remained but with only an external and diminished significance; the Vedic ritual, well-nigh obsolete, has lost its profound symbolic meaning; the pastoral, martial and rural images of the early Aryan poets sound remote, inappropriate, or, if natural and beautiful, yet void of the old deeper significance to the imagination of their descendants.

Confronted with the stately hymns of the ancient dawn, we are conscious of a blank incomprehension. And we leave them as a prey to the ingenuity of the scholar who gropes for forced meanings amid obscurities and incongruities where the ancients bathed their souls in harmony and light.

A few examples will show what the gulf is and how it was created. When we write in a recognised and conventional imagery, "Laxmi and Saraswati refuse to dwell under one roof", the European reader may need a note or a translation of the phrase into its plain unfigured thought, "Wealth and Learning seldom go together", before he can understand, but every Indian already possesses the sense of the phrase. But if another culture and religion had replaced the Puranic and Brahminical and the old books and the Sanskrit language had ceased to be read and understood, this now familiar phrase would have been as meaningless in India as in Europe. Some infallible commentator or ingenious scholar might have been proving to our entire satisfaction that Laxmi was the Dawn and Saraswati the Night or that they were two irreconcilable chemical substances – or one knows not what else! It is something of this kind that has overtaken the ancient clarities of the Veda; the sense is dead and only the obscurity of a forgotten poetic form remains. Therefore when we read "Sarama by the path of the Truth discovers the herds", the mind is stopped and baffled by an unfamiliar language. It has to be translated to us, like the phrase about Saraswati to the European, into a plainer and less figured thought, "Intuition by the way of the Truth arrives at the hidden illuminations." Lacking the clue, we wander into ingenuities about the Dawn and the Sun or even imagine in Sarama, the hound of heaven, a mythological personification of some prehistoric embassy

to Dravidian nations for the recovery of plundered cattle!

And the whole of the Veda is conceived in such images. The resultant obscurity and confusion for our intelligence is appalling and it will be at once evident how useless would be any translation of the hymns which did not strive at the same time to be an interpretation. "Dawn and Night," runs an impressive Vedic verse, "two sisters of different forms but of one mind, suckle the same divine Child." We understand nothing. Dawn and Night are of different forms, but why of one mind? And who is the child? If it is Agni, the fire, what are we to understand by Dawn and Night suckling alternately an infant fire? But the Vedic poet is not thinking of the physical night, the physical dawn or the physical fire. He is thinking of the alternations in his own spiritual experience, its constant rhythm of periods of a sublime and golden illumination and other periods of obscuration or relapse into normal unillumined consciousness and he confesses the growth of the infant strength of the divine life within him through all these alternations and even by the very force of their regular vicissitude. For in both states there works, hidden or manifest, the same divine intention and the same high-reaching labour. Thus an image which to the Vedic mind was clear, luminous, subtle, profound, striking, comes to us void of sense or poor and incoherent in sense and therefore affects us as inflated and pretentious, the ornament of an inapt and bungling literary craftsmanship.

So too when the seer of the house of Atri cries high to Agni, "O Agni, O Priest of the offering, loose from us the cords," he is using not only a natural, but a richly-laden image. He is thinking of the triple cord of mind, nerves and body by which the soul is bound as a victim in the great world-

sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Purusha; he is thinking of the force of the divine Will already awakened and at work within him, a fiery and irresistible godhead that shall uplift his oppressed divinity and cleave asunder the cords of its bondage; he is thinking of the might of that growing Strength and inner Flame which receiving all that he has to offer carries it to its own distant and difficult home, to the high-seated Truth, to the Far, to the Secret, to the Supreme. All these associations are lost to us; our minds are obsessed by ideas of a ritual sacrifice and a material cord. We imagine perhaps the son of Atri bound as a victim in an ancient barbaric sacrifice, crying to the god of Fire for a physical deliverance!

A little later the seer sings of the increasing Flame, "Agni shines wide with vast Light and makes all things manifest by his greatness." What are we to understand? Shall we suppose that the singer released from his bonds, one knows not how, is admiring tranquilly the great blaze of the sacrificial fire which was to have devoured him and wonder at the rapid transitions of the primitive mind? It is only when we discover that the "vast Light" was a fixed phrase in the language of the Mystics for a wide, free and luminous consciousness beyond mind, that we seize the true burden of the Rik. The seer is hymning his release from the triple cord of mind, nerves and body and the uprising of the knowledge and will within him to a plane of consciousness where the real truth of all things transcendent of their apparent truth becomes at length manifest in a vast illumination.

But how are we to bring home this profound, natural and inner sense to the minds of others in a translation? It cannot be done unless we translate interpretatively, "O Will, O Priest of our sacrifice, loose from us the cords of our

bondage" and "this Flame shines out with the vast Light of the Truth and makes all things manifest by its greatness." The reader will then at least be able to seize the spiritual nature of the cord, the light, the flame; he will feel something of the sense and spirit of this ancient chant.

The method I have employed will be clear from these instances. I have sometimes thrown aside the image, but not so as to demolish the whole structure of the outer symbol or to substitute a commentary for a translation. It would have been an undesirable violence to strip from the richly jewelled garb of the Vedic thought its splendid ornaments or to replace it by a coarse garment of common speech. But I have endeavoured to make it everywhere as transparent as possible.

I have rendered the significant names of the Gods, Kings, Rishis by their half-concealed significances, – otherwise the mask would have remained impenetrable; where the image was unessential, I have sometimes sacrificed it for its psychological equivalent; where it influenced the colour of the surrounding words, I have sought for some phrase which would keep the figure and yet bring out its whole complexity of sense. Sometimes I have even used a double translation. Thus for the Vedic word which means at once light or ray and cow, I have given according to the circumstances "Light", "the radiances", "the shining herds", "the radiant kine", "Light, mother of the herds". Soma, the ambrosial wine of the Veda, has been rendered "wine of delight" or "wine of immortality".

The Vedic language as a whole is a powerful and remarkable instrument, terse, knotted, virile, packed, and in its turns careful rather to follow the natural flight of the thought

in the mind than to achieve the smooth and careful constructions and the clear transitions of a logical and rhetorical syntax. But translated without modification into English such a language would become harsh, abrupt and obscure, a dead and heavy movement with nothing in it of the morning vigour and puissant stride of the original. I have therefore preferred to throw it in translation into a mould more plastic and natural to the English tongue, using the constructions and devices of transition which best suit a modern speech while preserving the logic of the original thought; and I have never hesitated to reject the bald dictionary equivalent of the Vedic word for an ampler phrase in the English where that was necessary to bring out the full sense and associations. Throughout I have kept my eye fixed on my primary object – to make the inner sense of the Veda seizable by the cultured intelligence of today."[3]

But even the most cultured intelligence of today can expect only to seize the general trend and surface suggestions of the Vedic hymns. "More would be hardly possible. To enter into the very heart of the mystic doctrine, we must ourselves have trod the ancient paths and renewed the lost discipline, the forgotten experience. And which of us can hope to do that with any depth or living power? Who in this Age of Iron shall have the strength to recover the light of the Forefathers or soar above the two enclosing firmaments of mind and body into their luminous empyrean of the infinite Truth? The Rishis sought to conceal their knowledge from the unfit, believing perhaps that the corruption of the best might lead to the worst and fearing to give the potent wine of

the Soma to the child and the weakling. But whether their spirits still move among us looking for the rare Aryan soul in a mortality that is content to leave the radiant herds of the Sun for ever imprisoned in the darkling cave of the Lords of the sense-life or whether they await in their luminous world the hour when the Maruts shall again drive abroad and the Hound of Heaven shall once again speed down to us from beyond the rivers of Paradise and the seals of the heavenly waters shall be broken and the caverns shall be rent and the immortalising wine shall be pressed out in the body of man by the electric thunderstones, their secret remains safe to them. Small is the chance that in an age which blinds our eyes with the transient glories of the outward life and deafens our ears with the victorious trumpets of a material and mechanical knowledge many shall cast more than the eye of an intellectual and imaginative curiosity on the passwords of their ancient discipline or seek to penetrate into the heart of their radiant mysteries. The secret of the Veda, even when it has been unveiled, remains still a secret."[4]

III. An Outline of Main Vedic System and Thought

1. The Ancient Mystic Adoration – Some Images

"The Veda possesses the high spiritual substance of the Upanishads, but lacks their phraseology; it is an inspired knowledge as yet insufficiently equipped with intellectual and philosophical terms. We find a language of poets and illuminates to whom all experience is real, vivid, sensible, even concrete, not yet of thinkers and systematisers to whom the realities of the mind and soul have become abstractions. Yet a system, a doctrine there is; but its structure is supple, its terms are concrete, the cast of its thought is practical and experimental, but in the accomplished type of an old and sure experience, not of one that is crude and uncertain because yet in the making. Here we have the ancient psychological science and the art of spiritual living of which the Upanishads are the philosophical outcome and modification and Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga the late intellectual result and logical dogma. But like all life, like all science that is still vital, it is free from the armoured rigidities of the reasoning intellect; in spite of its established symbols and sacred formulae it is still large, free, flexible, fluid, supple and subtle. It has the movement of life and the large breath of the soul. And while the later philosophies are books of Knowledge and make liberation the one supreme good, the Veda is a Book of Works and the hope for which it spurns our present bonds and littleness is perfection, self-achievement, immortality.

The doctrine of the Mystics recognises an Unknowable, Timeless and Unnameable behind and above all things and not seizable by the studious pursuit of the mind. Impersonally, it is That, the One Existence; to the pursuit of our personality it reveals itself out of the secrecy of things as the God or Deva, – nameless though he has many names, immeasurable and beyond description, though he holds in himself all description of name and knowledge and all measures of form and substance, force and activity.

The Deva or Godhead is both the original cause and the final result. Divine Existent, builder of the worlds, lord and begetter of all things, 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. He is Rudra and Vishnu, Prajapati and Hiranyagarbha, Surya, Agni, Indra, Vayu, Soma, Brihaspati, – Varuna and Mitra and Bhaga and Aryaman, all the gods. He is the wise, mighty and liberating Son born from our works and our sacrifice, the Hero in our warfare and Seer of our knowledge, the White Steed in the front of our days who gallops towards the upper Ocean.

The soul of man soars as the Bird, the Hansa, past the shining firmaments of physical and mental consciousness, climbs as the traveller and fighter beyond earth of body and heaven of mind by the ascending path of the Truth to find this Godhead waiting for us, leaning down to us from the secrecy of the highest supreme where it is seated in the triple divine Principle and the source of the Beatitude. The Deva is indeed, whether attracting and exalted there or here helpful to us in the person of the greater Gods, always 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 shining Cow of the infinitude. He is the source and outpourer of the ambrosial Wine of divine delight and we drink it drawn from the sevenfold waters of existence or pressed out from the luminous plant on the hill of being and uplifted by its raptures we become immortal.

Such are some of the images of this ancient mystic adoration."[5]

2. The Vedic System

A few principal details of the Vedic System according to Sri Aurobindo are as follows:

"(1) Vedic religion is based on an elaborate psychology and cosmology of which the keyword is the great Vedic formula OM, Bhur Bhuvah Swah; the three vyahritis and the Pranava. The three Vyahritis are the three lower principles of Matter, Life and Mind, Annam, Prana and Manas of the Vedanta. OM is Brahman or Sacchidananda of whom these three are the expressions in the phenomenal world. OM and the vyahrities are connected by an intermediate principle, Mahas, Vijnanam of the Vedanta, ideal Truth which has arranged the lower worlds and on which amidst all their confusions they rest.

(2) Corresponding roughly to the vyahrities are three worlds, Bhurloka (Prana-Annam, the material world), Bhuvarloka (Prana-Manas, the lower subjective world), Swarloka (Manas-Buddhi, the higher subjective world). These are the tribhuvana of Hinduism.

(3) Corresponding to Mahas is Maharloka or Mahi Dyaus, the great heavens (pure Buddhi or Vijnana, the ideal

world). The Pranava in its three essentialities rules over the three supreme worlds, the Satya-loka (divine being), Tapoloka (divine Awareness and Force), Ananda-loka (divine Bliss) of the Puranas, which constitute Amritam, immortality or the true kingdom of heaven of the Vedic religion. These are the Vedic sapta dhamani and the seven different movements of consciousness to which they correspond are the sapta sindhu of the hymns.

(4) According to the Vedanta, man has five koshas or sheaths of existence, the material (Annamaya), vital (Pranamaya), mental (Manomaya) which together make up the aparardha or lower half of our conscious-being; the ideal (vijnanamaya) which [links] the lower to the parardha or higher half; the divine or Anandamaya in which the divine existence (Amrita) is concentrated for communion with our lower human being. These are the pancha kshitis, [five] earths or rather dwelling places of the Veda. But in Yoga we speak usually of the five koshas but the sapta bhumis, seven not five. The Veda also speaks of sapta dhamani.

(5) In each of the seven strata of consciousness all the other six work under the law of the stratum which houses them. This means seven sub-strata in each; in the three vyahritis there are therefore thrice seven, trih saptani.

(6) Man, although living here in Bhu, belongs to Swar and Bhuvar. He is manu, the Thinker, – the soul in him is the manomayah pranasarira neta of the Upanishad, "the mental captain and guide of life and body". He has to become vijnanamaya (mahan) and anandamaya, to become in a word immortal, divine in all his laws of being, (vrata and dharman). By rising to Mahas in himself he enters into direct touch with ideal Truth, gets truth of knowledge by drishti, sruti and

smriti, the three grand ideal processes, and by that knowledge truth of being, truth of action (satyadharma), truth of bliss (satyaradhas) constituting amritam, swarajyam and samrajyam, immortality, self rule and mastery of the world. It is this evolution which the Vedic hymns are intended to assist.

(7) In his progress man is helped by the gods, resisted by the Asuras and Rakshasas. For the worlds behind have their own inhabitants, who, the whole universe being inextricably one, affect and are affected by the activities of mankind. The Bhuvar is the great place of struggle in which forces work behind the visible movements we see here and determine all our actions and fortunes. Swar is man's resting place but not his final or highest habitation which is Vishnu's highest footing, Vishnoh paramam padam, high in the supreme parardha.

(8) The 33 great gods belong to the higher worlds but rest in Swar and work at once in all the strata of consciousness, for the world is always one in its complexity. They are masters of the mental functions, masters also of the vital and material. Agni, for instance, governs the actions of the fiery elements in Nature and in man, but is also the vehicle of pure tapas, tu, tuvis or divine force. They are therefore mankind's greatest helpers.

(9) But in order that they may help, it is necessary to reinforce them in these lower worlds, which are not their own, by self-surrender, by sacrifice, by a share in all man's action, strength, being and bliss, and by this mutual help man's being physical, vital, mental, spiritual is kept in a state of perfect and ever increasing force, energy and joy favourable to the development of immortality. This is the process of Yajna, called often Yoga when applied exclusively to the subjective movements and adhwara when applied to the objective. The

Vritras, Panis etc. of the Bhuvarloka who are constantly preventing man's growth and throwing back his development, have to be attacked and slain by the gods, for they are not entirely immortal. The sacrifice is largely a battle between evolutionary and reactionary powers.

(10) A symbolic system of external sacrifice in which every movement is careful[ly] designed and coordinated to signify the subjective facts of the internal Yajna, aids the spiritual aspirant by moulding his material sheath into harmony with his internal life and by mastering his external surroundings so that there too the conditions and forces may be all favourable to his growth.

(11) The Yajna has two parts, mantra and tantra – subjective and objective; in the outer sacrifice the mantra is the Vedic hymn and the tantra the oblation; in the inner the mantra is the meditation or the sacred formula, the tantra the putting forth of the power generated by mantra to bring about some successful spiritual, intellectual, vital or mental activity of which the gods have their share.

(12) The mantra consists of gayatra, brahma and arka, the formulation of thought into rhythmic speech to bring about a spiritual force or result, the filling of the soul (brahma) with the idea and name of the god of the mantra, the use of the mantra for effectuation of the external object or the activity desired.

(13) The tantra is composed of neshtra, savanam, potra and hotra, the intensifying of the vasu or material (internal or external) so as to prepare it for activity, the production of it in a usable form, the purification of it from all defects and the offering of it to the god or for action.

(14) The Veda proper is karmakanda, not jnanakanda; its aim is not moksha, but divine fulfilment in this life and the next. Therefore the Vedic Rishis accepted plenty and fullness of physical, vital and mental being, power, and joy as the pratistha or foundation of immortality and did not reject it as an obstacle to salvation. It is supposed that in the Kaliyuga this is no longer possible, or possible only by direct selfsurrender to the Supreme Deity. Therefore the complexity of the Vedic system has been removed from the domain of our religious practice and in its place there has been increasingly substituted the worship of the Supreme Deity through Love.

(15) The world being one in all its parts every being in it contains the universe in himself. Especially do the great gods contain all the others and their activities in [themselves], so that Agni, Varuna, Indra, all of them are in reality one sole-existent deity in many forms. Man too is He, but he has to fulfil himself here as man, yet divine (that being his vrata and dharma) through the puissant means provided for him [by] the Veda."[6]

3. The Doctrine of the Mystics

"….Man dwells in the bosom of the Earth-Mother and is aware of this world of mortality only; but there is a superconscient high beyond where the divine worlds are seated in a luminous secrecy; there is a subconscient or inconscient below his surface waking impressions and from that pregnant Night the worlds as he sees them are born. And these other worlds between the luminous upper and the tenebrous lower ocean? They are here. Man draws from the life-world his vital being, from the mind-world his mentality; he is ever in secret

communication with them; he can consciously enter into them, be born into them, if he will. Even into the solar worlds of the Truth he can rise, enter the portals of the Superconscient, cross the threshold of the Supreme. The divine doors shall swing open to his increasing soul.

This human ascension is possible because every being really holds in himself all that his outward vision perceives as if external to him. We have subjective faculties hidden in us which correspond to all the tiers and strata of the objective cosmic system and these form for us so many planes of our possible existence. This material life and our narrowly limited consciousness of the physical world are far from being the sole experience permitted to man, – be he a thousand times the Son of Earth. If maternal Earth bore him and retains him in her arms, yet is Heaven also one of his parents and has a claim on his being. It is open to him to become awake to profounder depths and higher heights within and such awakening is his intended progress. And as he mounts thus to higher and ever higher planes of himself, new worlds open to his life and his vision and become the field of his experience and the home of his spirit. He lives in contact and union with their powers and godheads and remoulds himself in their image. Each ascent is thus a new birth of the soul, and the Veda calls the worlds "births" as well as seats and dwelling-places.

For as the Gods have built the series of the cosmic worlds, even so they labour to build up the same series of ordered states and ascending degrees in man's consciousness from the mortal condition to the crowning immortality. They raise him from the limited material state of being in which our lowest manhood dwells contented and subject to the

Lords of Division, give him a life rich and abundant with the many and rapid shocks and impulsions from the dynamic worlds of Life and Desire where the Gods battle with the demons and raise him yet higher from those troubled rapidities and intensities into the steadfast purity and clarity of the high mental existence. For pure thought and feeling are man's sky, his heaven; this whole vitalistic existence of emotion, passions, affections of which desire is the pivot, forms for him a mid-world; body and material living are his earth.

But pure thought and pure psychic state are not the highest height of the human ascension. The home of the Gods is an absolute Truth which lives in solar glories beyond mind. Man ascending thither strives no longer as the thinker but is victoriously the seer; he is no longer this mental creature but a divine being. His will, life, thought, emotion, sense, act are all transformed into values of an all-puissant Truth and remain no longer an embarrassed or a helpless tangle of mixed truth and falsehood. He moves lamely no more in our narrow and grudging limits but ranges in the unobstructed Vast; toils and zigzags no longer amid these crookednesses, but follows a swift and conquering straightness; feeds no longer on broken fragments, but is suckled by the teats of Infinity. Therefore he has to break through and out beyond these firmaments of earth and heaven; conquering firm possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Height he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of Immortality.

This contrast of the mortality we are and the immortal condition to which we can aspire is the key of the Vedic thought and practice. Veda is the earliest gospel we have of man's immortality and these ancient stanzas conceal the

primitive discipline of its inspired discoverers…."[7]

"Our normal life and consciousness are a dark or at best a starlit Night. Dawn comes by the arising of the Sun of that higher Truth and with Dawn there comes the effective sacrifice. By the sacrifice the Dawn itself and the lost Sun are constantly conquered out of the returning Night and the luminous herds rescued from the darkling cave of the Panis; by the sacrifice the rain of the abundance of heaven is poured out for us and the sevenfold waters of the higher existence descend impetuously upon our earth because the coils of the obscuring Python, the all-enfolding and all-withholding Vritra, have been cloven asunder by the God-Mind's flashing lightnings; in the sacrifice the Soma wine is distilled and uplifts us on the stream of its immortalising ecstasy to the highest heavens.

Our sacrifice is the offering of all our gains and works to the powers of the higher existence. The whole world is a dumb and helpless sacrifice in which the soul is bound as a victim self-offered to unseen Gods. The liberating Word must be found, the illuminating hymn must be framed in the heart and mind of man and his life must be turned into a conscious and voluntary offering in which the soul is no longer the victim, but the master of the sacrifice. By right sacrifice and by the all-creative and all-expressive Word that shall arise out of his depths as a sublime hymn to the Gods man can achieve all things. He shall conquer his perfection; Nature shall come to him as a willing and longing bride; he shall become her seer and rule her as her King.

By the hymn of prayer and God-attraction, by the hymn of praise and God-affirmation, by the hymn of God-

attainment and self-expression man can house in himself the Gods, build in this gated house of his being the living image of their deity, grow into divine births, form within himself vast and luminous worlds for his soul to inhabit. By the word of the Truth the all-engendering Surya creates; by that rhythm Brahmanaspati evokes the worlds and Twashtri fashions them; finding the all-puissant Word in his intuitive heart, shaping it in his mind the human thinker, the mortal creature can create in himself all the forms, all the states and conditions he desires and, achieving, can conquer for himself all wealth of being, light, strength and enjoyment. He builds up his integral being and aids his gods to destroy the evil armies; the hosts of his spiritual enemies are slain who have divided, torn and afflicted his nature.

The image of this sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or voyage; for it travels, it ascends; it has a goal – the vastness, the true existence the light the felicity – and it is called upon to discover and keep the good, the straight and the happy path to the goal, the arduous, yet joyful road of the Truth. It has to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will, from plateau to plateau as of a mountain, it has to cross as in a ship the waters of existence, traverse its rivers, overcome their deep pits and rapid currents; its aim is to arrive at the far-off ocean of light and infinity.

And this is no easy or peaceful march; it is for long seasons a fierce and relentless battle. Constantly the Aryan man has to labour and to fight and conquer; he must be a tireless toiler and traveller and a stern warrior, he must force open and storm and sack city after city, win kingdom after kingdom, overthrow and tread down ruthlessly enemy after enemy. His whole progress is a warring of Gods and Titans, Gods and

Giants, Indra and the Python, Aryan and Dasyu. Aryan adversaries even he has to face in the open field; for old friends and helpers turn into enemies; the kings of Aryan states he would conquer and overpass join themselves to the Dasyus and are leagued against him in supreme battle to prevent his free and utter passing on.

But the Dasyu is the natural enemy. These dividers, plunderers, harmful powers, these Danavas, sons of the Mother of division, are spoken of by the Rishis under many general appellations. There are Rakshasas; there are Eaters and Devourers, Wolves and Tearers; there are hurters and haters; there are dualisers; there are confiners or censurers. But we are given also many specific names. Vritra, the Serpent, is the grand Adversary; for he obstructs with his coils of darkness all possibility of divine existence and divine action. And even when Vritra is slain by the light, fiercer enemies arise out of him. Shushna afflicts us with his impure and ineffective force, Namuchi fights man by his weaknesses, and others too assail, each with his proper evil. Then there are Vala and the Panis, miser traffickers in the sense-life, stealers and concealers of the higher Light and its illuminations which they can only darken and misuse, – an impious host who are jealous of their store and will not offer sacrifice to the Gods. These and other personalities – they are much more than personifications – of our ignorance, evil, weakness and many limitations make constant war upon man; they encircle him from near or they shoot their arrows at him from afar or even dwell in his gated house in the place of the Gods and with their shapeless stammering mouths and their insufficient breath of force mar his self-expression. They must be expelled, overpowered, slain, thrust down into their nether darkness

by the aid of the mighty and helpful deities.

The Vedic deities are names, powers, personalities of the universal Godhead and they represent each some essential puissance of the Divine Being. They manifest the cosmos and are manifest in it. Children of Light, Sons of the Infinite, they recognise in the soul of man their brother and ally and desire to help and increase him by themselves increasing in him so as to possess his world with their light, strength and beauty. The Gods call man to a divine companionship and alliance; they attract and uplift him to their luminous fraternity, invite his aid and offer theirs against the Sons of Darkness and Division. Man in return calls the Gods to his sacrifice, offers to them his swiftnesses and his strengths, his clarities and his sweetnesses, – milk and butter of the shining Cow, distilled juices of the Plant of Joy, the Horse of the Sacrifice, the cake and the wine, the grain for the God-Mind's radiant coursers. He receives them into his being and their gifts into his life, increases them by the hymn and the wine and forms perfectly – as a smith forges iron, says the Veda – their great and luminous godheads.

All this Vedic imagery is easy to understand when once we have the key, but it must not be mistaken for mere imagery. The Gods are not simply poetical personifications of abstract ideas or of psychological and physical functions of Nature. To the Vedic seers they are living realities; the vicissitudes of the human soul represent a cosmic struggle not merely of principles and tendencies but of the cosmic Powers which support and embody them. These are the Gods and the Demons. On the world-stage and in the individual soul the same real drama with the same personages is enacted.

To what gods shall the sacrifice be offered? Who shall

be invoked to manifest and protect in the human being this increasing godhead?

Agni first, for without him the sacrificial flame cannot burn on the altar of the soul. That flame of Agni is the seven-tongued power of the Will, a Force of God instinct with knowledge. This conscious and forceful will is the immortal guest in our mortality, a pure priest and a divine worker, the mediator between earth and heaven. It carries what we offer to the higher Powers and brings back in return their force and light and joy into our humanity.

Indra, the Puissant next, who is the power of pure Existence self-manifested as the Divine Mind. As Agni is one pole of Force instinct with knowledge that sends its current upward from earth to heaven, so Indra is the other pole of Light instinct with force which descends from heaven to earth. He comes down into our world as the Hero with the shining horses and slays darkness and division with his lightnings, pours down the life-giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, Intuition, the lost or hidden illuminations, makes the Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality.

Surya, the Sun, is the master of that supreme Truth, – truth of being, truth of knowledge, truth of process and act and movement and functioning. He is therefore the creator or rather the manifester of all things – for creation is outbringing, expression by the Truth and Will – and the father, fosterer, enlightener of our souls. The illuminations we seek are the herds of this Sun who comes to us in the track of the divine Dawn and releases and reveals in us night-hidden world after world up to the highest Beatitude.

Of that beatitude Soma is the representative deity. The

wine of his ecstasy is concealed in the growths of earth, in the waters of existence; even here in our physical being are his immortalising juices and they have to be pressed out and offered to all the gods; for in that strength these shall increase and conquer.

Each of these primary deities has others associated with him who fulfil functions that arise from his own. For if the truth of Surya is to be established firmly in our mortal nature, there are previous conditions that are indispensable; a vast purity and clear wideness destructive of all sin and crooked falsehood, – and this is Varuna; a luminous power of love and comprehension leading and forming into harmony all our thoughts, acts and impulses, – this is Mitra; an immortal puissance of clear-discerning aspiration and endeavour, – this is Aryaman; a happy spontaneity of the right enjoyment of all things dispelling the evil dream of sin and error and suffering, – this is Bhaga. These four are powers of the Truth of Surya.

For the whole bliss of Soma to be established perfectly in our nature a happy and enlightened and unmaimed condition of mind, vitality and body are necessary. This condition is given to us by the twin Ashwins; wedded to the daughter of Light, drinkers of honey, bringers of perfect satisfactions, healers of maim and malady they occupy our parts of knowledge and parts of action and prepare our mental, vital and physical being for an easy and victorious ascension.

Indra, the Divine Mind, as the shaper of mental forms has for his assistants, his artisans, the Ribhus, human powers who by the work of sacrifice and their brilliant ascension to

the high dwelling-place of the Sun have attained to immortality and help mankind to repeat their achievement. They shape by the mind Indra's horses, the Ashwins' chariot, the weapons of the Gods, all the means of the journey and the battle. But as giver of the Light of truth and as Vritra-slayer Indra is aided by the Maruts, who are powers of will and nervous or vital Force that have attained to the light of thought and the voice of self-expression. They are behind all thought and speech as its impellers and they battle towards the Light, Truth and Bliss of the supreme Consciousness.

There are also female energies; for the Deva is both Male and Female and the gods also are either activising souls or passively executive and methodizing energies. Aditi, infinite Mother of the gods, comes first; and there are besides five powers of the Truth-consciousness, – Mahi or Bharati, the vast Word that brings us all things out of the divine source; Ila, the strong primal word of the Truth who gives us its active vision; Saraswati, its streaming current and the word of its inspiration; Sarama, the Intuition, hound of heaven who descends into the cavern of the subconscient and finds there the concealed illuminations; Dakshina, whose function is to discern rightly, dispose the action and the offering and distribute in the sacrifice to each godhead its portion. Each god, too, has his female energy.

All this action and struggle and ascension is supported by Heaven our Father and Earth our Mother, Parents of the Gods, who sustain respectively the purely mental and psychic and the physical consciousness. Their large and free scope is the condition of our achievement. Vayu, Master of life, links them together by the mid-air, the region of vital force. And there are other deities, – Parjanya, giver of the rain of heaven;

Dadhikravan, the divine war-horse, a power of Agni; the mystic Dragon of the Foundations; Trita Aptya* who on the third plane of existence consummates our triple being; and more besides.

The development of all these godheads is necessary to our perfection. And that perfection must be attained on 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 vibration, typified as the Horse which must be brought forward to upbear our endeavour; in the perfect gladness of the heart of emotion and a brilliant heat and clarity of the mind throughout our intellectual and psychical being; in the coming of the supramental Light, the Dawn and the Sun and the shining Mother of the herds, to transform all our existence; for so comes to us the possession of the Truth, by the Truth the admirable surge of the Bliss, in the Bliss infinite Consciousness of absolute being.

Three great Gods, origin of the Puranic Trinity, largest puissances of the supreme Godhead, make possible this development and upward evolution; they support in its grand lines and fundamental energies all these complexities of the cosmos. Brahmanaspati is the Creator; by the word, by his cry he creates, – that is to say, he expresses, he brings out all existence and conscious knowledge and movement of life and eventual forms from the darkness of the Inconscient. Rudra, the Violent and Merciful, the Mighty One, presides over the struggle of life to affirm itself; he is the armed, wrathful and beneficent Power of God who lifts forcibly the creation

---

* *The Third or Triple, apparently the purusa of the mental plane; in the tradition he is a Rishi, in the Veda he seems rather to be a god. (SABCL 30, Page. 354)*

upward, smites all that opposes, scourges all that errs and resists, heals all that is wounded and suffers and complains and submits. Vishnu of the vast pervading motion holds in his triple stride all these worlds; it is he that makes a wide room for the action of Indra in our limited mortality; it is by him and with him that we rise into his highest seats where we find waiting for us the Friend, the Beloved, the Beatific Godhead.

Our earth shaped out of the dark inconscient ocean of existence lifts its high formations and ascending peaks heavenward; heaven of mind has its own formations, clouds that give out their lightnings and their waters of life; the streams of the clarity and the honey ascend out of the subconscient ocean below and seek the superconscient ocean above; and from above that ocean sends downward its rivers of the light and truth and bliss even into our physical being. Thus in images of physical Nature the Vedic poets sing the hymn of our spiritual ascension.

That ascension has already been effected by the Ancients, the human forefathers, and the spirits of these great Ancestors still assist their offspring; for the new dawns repeat the old and lean forward in light to join the dawns of the future. Kanwa, Kutsa, Atri, Kakshiwan, Gotama, Shunahshepa have become types of certain spiritual victories which tend to be constantly repeated in the experience of humanity. The seven sages, the Angirasas, are waiting still and always, ready to chant the word, to rend the cavern, to find the lost herds, to recover the hidden Sun. Thus the soul is a battlefield full of helpers and hurters, friends and enemies. All this lives, teems, is personal, is conscious, is active. We create for ourselves by the sacrifice and by the word shining seers, heroes to fight for us, children

of our works. The Rishis and the Gods find for us our luminous herds; the Ribhus fashion by the mind the chariots of the gods and their horses and their shining weapons. Our life is a horse that neighing and galloping bears us onward and upward; its forces are swift-hooved steeds, the liberated powers of the mind are wide-winging birds; this mental being or this soul is the upsoaring Swan or the Falcon that breaks out from a hundred iron walls and wrests from the jealous guardians of felicity the wine of the Soma. Every shining godward Thought that arises from the secret abysses of the heart is a priest and a creator and chants a divine hymn of luminous realisation and puissant fulfilment. We seek for the shining gold of the Truth; we lust after a heavenly treasure.

The soul of man is a world full of beings, a kingdom in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest, a house where the gods are our guests and which the demons strive to possess; the fullness of its energies and wideness of its being make a seat of sacrifice spread, arranged and purified for a celestial session.

Such are some of the principal images of the Veda and a very brief and insufficient outline of the teaching of the Forefathers. So understood the Rig Veda ceases to be an obscure, confused and barbarous hymnal; it becomes the high-aspiring Song of Humanity; its chants are episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in its immortal ascension.

This at least; what more there may be in the Veda of ancient science, lost knowledge, old psycho-physical tradition remains yet to be discovered."[8]

IV. The Vedic Godheads

All the Vedic godheads have their outer and their inner and inmost function, their known and their secret Names. "All are in their external character powers of physical Nature; all have in their inner meaning a psychic function and psychological ascriptions; all too are various powers of some one highest Reality, *ekaṁ sat*, the one infinite Existence. This hardly knowable Supreme is called often in the Veda "That Truth" or "That One", *tat satyam, tad ekam*. This complex character of the Vedic godheads assumes forms which have been wholly misunderstood by those who ascribe to them only their outward physical significance. Each of these gods is in himself a complete and separate cosmic personality of the one Existence and in their combination of powers they form the complete universal power, the cosmic whole, *vaiśvadevyam*. Each again, apart from his special function, is one godhead with the others; each holds in himself the universal divinity, each god is all the other gods. This is the aspect of the Vedic teaching and worship to which a European scholar, mistaking entirely its significance because he read it in the dim and poor light of European religious experience, has given the sounding misnomer, henotheism. Beyond, in the triple Infinite, these godheads put on their highest nature and are names of the one nameless Ineffable."[9]

Surya and Agni are two of the most important Vedic godheads, the one representing the supreme Truth and its illumination, the other the divine Will raising, purifying and perfecting human action. Indra represents the luminous mind. Thus Surya represent the divine Light and Agni represents

the divine Force, Power or Will-in-Consciousness, which helped by Indra leads man towards Surya.

1. Agni, The Divine Will

"...as there is in and behind all the falsehoods of our material mind and reason a Light that prepares by this twilight the full dawn of the Truth in man, so there is in and behind all our errors, sins and stumblings a secret Will, tending towards Love and Harmony, which knows where it is going and prepares and combines our crooked branchings towards the straight path which will be the final result of their toil and seeking. The emergence of this Will and that Light is the condition of immortality."[10]

"The essentiality of the divine Will is that in it Consciousness and Energy, Knowledge and Force are one. It knows all manifestations, all things that take birth in the worlds. It is Jatavedas, that which has right knowledge of all births. It knows them in the law of their being, in their relation to other births, in their aim and method, in their process and goal, in their unity with all and their difference from all. It is this divine Will that conducts the universe; it is one with all the things that it combines and its being, its knowledge, its action are inseparable from each other. What it is, it knows; what it knows, that it does and becomes."[11]

"This Will is Agni. Agni is in the Rig Veda…the flame of the Divine Will or Force of Consciousness working in the worlds. He is described as the immortal in mortals, the leader of the journey, the divine Horse that bears us on the road, the "son of crookedness" who himself knows and is the straightness and the Truth. Concealed and hard to seize in the workings of this world because they are all falsified by desire and egoism, he uses them to transcend them and emerges as

the universal in Man or universal Power, Agni Vaishwanara, who contains in himself all the gods and all the worlds, upholds all the universal workings and finally fulfils the godhead, the Immortality. He is the worker of the divine Work."[12]

2. The Vedic Gods – A Parable of Human Life Rising Towards the Godhead

"Life is the condition from which the Will and the Light emerge. It is said in the Veda that Vayu or Matarishwan, the Life-principle, is he who brings down Agni from Surya in the high and far-off supreme world. Life calls down the divine Will from the Truth-consciousness into the realm of mind and body to prepare here, in Life, its own manifestation. Agni, enjoying and devouring the things of Life, generates the Maruts, nervous forces of Life that become forces of thought; they, upheld by Agni, prepare the action of Indra, the luminous Mind, who is for our life-powers their Rishi or finder of the Truth and Right. Indra slays Vritra, the Coverer, dispels the darkness, causes Surya to rise upon our being and go abroad over its whole field with rays of the Truth. Surya is the Creator or manifester, Savitri, who manifests in this mortal world the world or state of immortality, dispels the evil dream of egoism, sin and suffering and transforms Life into the Immortality, the good, the beatitude. The Vedic gods are parable of human life emerging, mounting, lifting itself towards the Godhead."[13]

V. The Vedic Symbolism: The Angiras Legend

"….the Angiras legend and the Vritra mythus are the two principal parables of the Veda; they occur and recur everywhere; they run through the hymns as two closely connected threads of symbolic imagery, and around them all the rest of the Vedic symbolism is woven. Not that they are its central ideas, but they are two main pillars of this ancient structure. When we determine their sense, we have determined the sense of the whole Rik Sanhita. If Vritra and the waters symbolise the cloud and the rain and the gushing forth of the seven rivers of the Punjab and if the Angirases are the bringers of the physical dawn, then the Veda is a symbolism of natural phenomena personified in the figure of gods and Rishis and maleficent demons. If Vritra and Vala are Dravidian gods and the Panis and Vritras human enemies, then the Veda is a poetical and legendary account of the invasion of Dravidian India by Nature-worshipping barbarians. If on the other hand this is a symbolism of the struggle between spiritual powers of Light and Darkness, Truth and Falsehood, Knowledge and Ignorance, Death and Immortality, then that is the real sense of the whole Veda.

We have concluded that the Angiras Rishis are bringers of the Dawn, rescuers of the Sun out of the darkness, but that this Dawn, Sun, Darkness are figures used with a spiritual significance. The central conception of the Veda is the conquest of the Truth out of the darkness of Ignorance and by the conquest of the Truth the conquest also of Immortality. For the Vedic Ritam is a spiritual as well as a psychological

conception. It is the true being, the true consciousness, the true delight of existence beyond this earth of body, this mid-region of vital force, this ordinary sky or heaven of mind. We have to cross beyond all these planes in order to arrive at the higher plane of that superconscient Truth which is the own home of the gods and the foundation of Immortality. This is the world of Swar, to which the Angirases have found the path for their posterity.

The Angirases are at once the divine seers who assist in the cosmic and human workings of the gods and their earthly representatives, the ancient fathers who first found the wisdom of which the Vedic hymns are a chant and memory and renewal in experience. The seven divine Angirases are sons or powers of Agni, powers of the Seer-Will, the flame of divine Force instinct with divine knowledge which is kindled for the victory. The Bhrigus have found this Flame secret in the growths of the earthly existence, but the Angirases kindle it on the altar of sacrifice and maintain the sacrifice through the periods of the sacrificial year symbolising the periods of the divine labour by which the Sun of Truth is recovered out of the darkness. Those who sacrifice for nine months of this year are Navagwas, seers of the nine cows or nine rays, who institute the search for the herds of the Sun and the march of Indra to battle with the Panis. Those who sacrifice for ten months are the Dashagwas, seers of the ten rays who enter with Indra into the cave of the Panis and recover the lost herds.

The sacrifice is the giving by man of what he possesses in his being to the higher or divine nature and its fruit is the farther enrichment of his manhood by the lavish bounty of the gods. The wealth thus gained constitutes a state of spiritual

riches, prosperity, felicity which is itself a power for the journey and a force of battle. For the sacrifice is a journey, a progression; the sacrifice itself travels led by Agni up the divine path to the gods and of this journey the ascent of the Angiras fathers to the divine world of Swar is the type. Their journey of the sacrifice is also a battle, for it is opposed by Panis, Vritras and other powers of evil and falsehood, and of this warfare the conflict of Indra and the Angirases with the Panis is a principal episode.

The principal features of sacrifice are the kindling of the divine flame, the offering of the ghṛta and the Soma wine and the chanting of the sacred word. By the hymn and the offering the gods are increased; they are said to be born, created or manifested in man and by their increase and greatness here they increase the earth and heaven, that is to say, the physical and mental existence to their utmost capacity and, exceeding these, create in their turn the higher worlds or planes. The higher existence is the divine, the infinite of which the shining Cow, the infinite Mother, Aditi, is the symbol; the lower is subject to her dark form Diti. The object of the sacrifice is to win the higher or divine being and possess with it and make subject to its law and truth the lower or human existence. The ghṛta of the sacrifice is the yield of the shining Cow; it is the clarity or brightness of the solar light in the human mentality. The Soma is the immortal delight of existence secret in the waters and the plant and pressed out for drinking by gods and men. The word is the inspired speech expressing the thought-illumination of the Truth which rises out of the soul, formed in the heart, shaped by the mind. Agni growing by the ghṛta, Indra forceful with the luminous strength and joy

of the Soma and increased by the Word, aid the Angirases to recover the herds of the Sun.

Brihaspati is the Master of the creative Word. If Agni is the supreme Angiras, the flame from whom the Angirases are born, Brihaspati is the one Angiras with the seven mouths, the seven rays of the illuminative thought and the seven words which express it, of whom these seers are the powers of utterance. It is the complete thought of the Truth, the seven-headed, which wins the fourth or divine world for man by winning for him the complete spiritual wealth, object of the sacrifice. Therefore Agni, Indra, Brihaspati, Soma are all described as winners of the herds of the Sun and destroyers of the Dasyus who conceal and withhold them from man. Saraswati, who is the stream of the Word or inspiration of the Truth, is also a Dasyu-slayer and winner of the shining herds; and they are discovered by Sarama, forerunner of Indra, who is a solar or dawn goddess and seems to symbolise the intuitive power of the Truth. Usha, the Dawn, is at once herself a worker in the great victory and in her full advent its luminous result.

Usha is the divine Dawn, for the Sun that arises by her coming is the Sun of the superconscient Truth; the day he brings is the day of the true life in the true knowledge, the night he dispels is the night of the ignorance which yet conceals the dawn in its bosom. Usha herself is the Truth, sūnṛtā, and the mother of Truths. These truths of the divine Dawn are called her cows, her shining herds; while the forces of the Truth that accompany them and occupy the Life are called her horses. Around this symbol of the cows and horses much of the Vedic symbolism turns; for these are the chief elements

of the riches sought by man from the gods. The cows of the Dawn have been stolen and concealed by the demons, the lords of darkness in their nether cave of the secret subconscient. They are the illuminations of knowledge, the thoughts of the Truth, gāvo matayaḥ, which have to be delivered out of their imprisonment. Their release is the upsurging of the powers of the divine Dawn.

It is also the recovery of the Sun that was lying in the darkness; for it is said that the Sun, "that Truth", was the thing found by Indra and the Angirases in the cave of the Panis. By the rending of that cave the herds of the divine dawn which are the rays of the Sun of Truth ascend the hill of being and the Sun itself ascends to the luminous upper ocean of the divine existence, led over it by the thinkers like a ship over the waters, till it reaches its farther shore.

The Panis who conceal the herds, the masters of the nether cavern, are a class of Dasyus who are in the Vedic symbolism set in opposition to the Aryan gods and Aryan seers and workers. The Aryan is he who does the work of sacrifice, finds the sacred word of illumination, desires the Gods and increases them and is increased by them into the largeness of the true existence; he is the warrior of the light and the traveller to the Truth. The Dasyu is the undivine being who does no sacrifice, amasses a wealth he cannot rightly use because he cannot speak the word or mentalise the superconscient Truth, hates the Word, the gods and the sacrifice and gives nothing of himself to the higher existences but robs and withholds his wealth from the Aryan. He is the thief, the enemy, the wolf, the devourer, the divider, the obstructor, the confiner. The Dasyus are powers of darkness

and ignorance who oppose the seeker of truth and immortality. The gods are the powers of Light, the children of Infinity, forms and personalities of the one Godhead who by their help and by their growth and human workings in man raise him to the truth and the immortality.

Thus the interpretation of the Angiras myth gives us the key to the whole secret of the Veda. For if the cows and horses lost by the Aryans and recovered for them by the gods, the cows and horses of which Indra is the lord and giver and indeed himself the Cow and Horse, are not physical cattle, if these elements of the wealth sought by the sacrifice are symbols of a spiritual riches, so also must be its other elements which are always associated with them, sons, men, gold, treasure, etc. If the Cow of which the ghṛta is the yield is not a physical cow but the shining Mother, then the ghṛta itself which is found in the waters and is said to be triply secreted by the Panis in the Cow, is no physical offering, nor the honey-wine of Soma either which is also said to exist in the rivers and to rise in a honeyed wave from the ocean and to flow streaming up to the gods. And if these, then also the other offerings of the sacrifice must be symbolic; the outer sacrifice itself can be nothing but the symbol of an inner giving. And if the Angiras Rishis are also in part symbolic or are, like the gods, semi-divine workers and helpers in the sacrifice, so also must be the Bhrigus, Atharvans, Ushana and Kutsa and others who are associated with them in their work. If the Angiras legend and the story of the struggle with the Dasyus is a parable, so also should be the other legendary stories we find in the Rig Veda of the help given by the Gods to the Rishis against the demons; for these also are related in similar terms

and constantly classed by the Vedic poets along with the Angiras story as on the same footing.

Similarly if these Dasyus who refuse the gift and the sacrifice, and hate the Word and the gods and with whom the Aryans are constantly at war, these Vritras, Panis and others, are not human enemies but powers of darkness, falsehood and evil, then the whole idea of the Aryan wars and kings and nations begins to take upon itself the aspect of spiritual symbol and apologue. Whether they are entirely so or only partly, cannot be decided except by a more detailed examination which is not our present object. Our object is only to see whether there is a prima facie case for the idea with which we started that the Vedic hymns are the symbolic gospel of the ancient Indian mystics and their sense spiritual and psychological. Such a prima facie case we have established; for there is already sufficient ground for seriously approaching the Veda from this standpoint and interpreting it in detail as such a lyric symbolism.

Still, to make our case entirely firm it will be well to examine the other companion legend of Vritra and the waters which we have seen to be closely connected with that of the Angirases and the Light. In the first place Indra the Vritra-slayer is along with Agni one of the two chief gods of the Vedic Pantheon and if his character and functions can be properly established, we shall have the general type of the Aryan gods fixed firmly. Secondly, the Maruts, his companions, singers of the sacred chant, are the strongest point of the naturalistic theory of Vedic worship; they are undoubtedly storm-gods and no other of the greater Vedic deities, Agni or the Ashwins or Varuna and Mitra or Twashtri

and the goddesses or even Surya the Sun or Usha the Dawn have such a pronounced physical character. If then these storm-gods can be shown to have a psychological character and symbolism, then there can be no farther doubt about the profounder sense of the Vedic religion and ritual. Finally, if Vritra and his associated demons, Shushna, Namuchi and the rest appear when closely scrutinized to be Dasyus in the spiritual sense and if the meaning of the heavenly waters he obstructs be more thoroughly investigated, then the consideration of the stories of the Rishis and the gods and demons as parables can be proceeded with from a sure starting-point and the symbolism of the Vedic worlds brought nearer to a satisfactory interpretation."[14]

VI. A Revival of Hindu Intellectual Faith in the Veda – An Inevitable Movement of the Near Future

"The Vedas are the early roots of Indian religion, of Indian civilisation; but they have for a long time past ceased to be their present foundation or their intellectual substance. It is rather the Upanishads & the Puranas that are the living Scriptures of mediaeval and modern Hinduism. But if, as we contend, the Upanishads & the Puranas only give us in other language, later symbols, altered forms of thought the same religious truths that we find differently stated in the Rigveda, this shifting of the immediate point of derivation will make no real difference. The waters we drink are the same whether drawn at their clear mountain sources or on their banks in the anchorite's forest or from ghats among the faery temples and fantastic domes of some sacred city. The Hindu's belief remains to him unshaken.

But in the last century a new scholarship has invaded the country, the scholarship of aggressive & victorious Europe, which for the first time denies the intimate connection and the substantial identity of the Vedas & the later Scriptures. We ourselves have made distinctions of Jnanakanda & Karmakanda, Sruti & Smriti but we have never doubted that all these are branches of a single stock. But our new Western Pandits & authorities tell us that we are in error. All of us from ancient Yajnavalkya to the modern Vaidika have been making a huge millennial mistake. European scholarship applying for the first time the test of a correct philology to these obscure writings has corrected the mistake. It has

discovered that the Vedas are of an entirely different character from the rest of our Hindu development. For [o]ur development has been Pantheistic or transcendental, philosophical, mystic, devotional, sombre, secretive[,] centred in the giant names of the Indian Trinity, disengaging itself from sacrifice, moving towards asceticism. The Vedas are naturalistic, realistic, ritualistic[,] semi-barbarous, a sacrificial worship of material Nature-powers, heno-theistic at their highest, Pagan, joyous and self-indulgent. Brahma & Shiva do not exist for the Veda; Vishnu & Rudra are minor, younger & unimportant deities. Many more discoveries of a startling nature, but now familiar to the most ignorant have been successfully imposed on our intellects. The Vedas, it seems, were not revealed to great & ancient Rishis, but composed by the priests of a small invading Aryan race of agriculturists & warriors, akin to the Greeks & Persians[,] who encamped, some fifteen hundred years before Christ, in the Panjab.

With the acceptance of these modern opinions Hinduism ought by this time to have been as dead among educated men as the religion of the Greeks & Romans. It should at best have become a religio Pagana, a superstition of ignorant villagers. It is, on the contrary, stronger & more alive, fecund & creative than it had been for the previous three centuries. To a certain extent this unexpected result may be traced to the high opinion in which even European opinion has been compelled to hold the Vedanta philosophy, the Bhagavat Gita and some of the speculations – as the Europeans think them or, as we hold, the revealed truths of the Upanishads. But although intellectually we are accustomed in obedience to Western criticism to base ourselves on the Upanishads & Gita and put aside Purana and Veda as mere mythology & mere

ritual, yet in practice we live by the religion of the Puranas & Tantras even more profoundly & intimately than we live by & realise the truths of the Upanishads. In heart & soul we still worship Krishna and Kali and believe in the truth of their existence. Nevertheless this divorce between the heart & the intellect, this illicit compromise between faith & reason cannot be enduring. If Purana & Veda cannot be rehabilitated, it is yet possible that our religion driven out of the soul into the intellect may wither away into the dry intellectuality of European philosophy or the dead formality & lifeless clarity of European Theism. It behoves us therefore to test our faith by a careful examination into the meaning of Purana & Veda and into the foundation of that truth which our intellect seeks to deny [but] our living spiritual experience continues to find in their conceptions. We must discover why it is that while our intellects accept only the truth of Vedanta, our spiritual experiences confirm equally or even more powerfully the truth of Purana. A revival of Hindu intellectual faith in the totality of the spiritual aspects of our religion, whether Vedic, Vedantic, Tantric or Puranic, I believe to be an inevitable movement of the near future."[15]

List of References:

1. *A & R, Dec. 1985 Page 168,*
2. *CWSA 17, Pages 551-57,*
3. *CWSA 15, Pages 363-68,*
4. *CWSA 15, Pages 368-69,*
5. *CWSA 15, Pages 370-71*
6. *A & R, April 1984 Page 25-28,*
7. *CWSA 15, Pages 373-75,*
8. *CWSA 15, Pages 376-84,*
9. *CWSA 20, Pages 201-02,*
10. *CWSA 17, Page 77,*
11. *CWSA 17, Page 80,*
12. *CWSA 17, Pages 77-78,*
13. *CWSA 17, Page 78,*
14. *CWSA 15, Pages 241-47,*
15. *A & R, Dec. 1984, Pages 133-35*

A & R : Sri Aurobindo, Archives and Research

CWSA : Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo

(All the quotations from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are copyright of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry - 605 002)

RNI NO. RAJENG/2002/9480

Name of the Publisher: Peoples awakening and Service organisation

Name of the Printer : Peoples awakening and Service organisation

Name of the Owner : Peoples awakening and Service organisation

Printed at : Sri Aurobindo Divine Life Press
Seth Rambilasrai Kothi, Khetan Mohalla
Jhunjhunu - 333 001, Rajasthan

Published at : Mira Ambica Bhawan, Khetan Mohalla,
Jhunjhunu - 333 001, Rajasthan
email: sadlecjjn@rediffmail.com

Editor : Anjana Dharnidharka