The Greatness of India and Its Culture

5. The Greatness of Indian Literature – 3

Veda and Vedanta

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"If it were asked by anyone what is this multitudinous, shifting, expanding, apparently amorphous or at all events multimorphous sea of religious thought, feeling, philosophy, spiritual experience we call Hinduism, what it is characteristically and essentially, we might answer in one word, the religion of Vedanta. And if it were asked what are the Hindus with their unique and persistent difference from all other races, we might again answer, the children of Vedanta. For at the root of all that we Hindus have done, thought and said through these thousands of years of our race-history, behind all we are and seek to be, there lies concealed, the fount of our philosophies, the bedrock of our religions, the kernel of our thought, the explanation of our ethics and society, the summary of our civilisation, the rivet of our nationality, this one marevellous inheritance of ours, the Vedanta. Nor is it only to Hindu streams that this great source has given of its life-giving waters. Buddhism, the teacher of one third of humanity, drank from its inspiration. Christianity, the offspring of Buddhism, derived its ethics and esoteric teaching at second-hand from the same source. Through Persia Vedanta put its stamp on Judaism, through Judaism, Christianity and Sufism on Islam, through Buddha on Confucianism…"[1]

I. The Veda and Vedanta

The notions generated by the European scholars of Veda and Vedanta are a stumbling block to the proper approach to Vedanta. "Under their influence we come to the Upanishads with a theory of their origin and in a spirit hostile to the sympathetic insight to which alone they will render up their secret. The very sense of the word Vedanta indicates clearly the aim of the seers who composed the Upanishads as well as the idea they entertained, – the true & correct idea, I believe, of their relations to the Veda. They were, they thought, recording a fulfilment of Vedic knowledge, giving shape to the culmination to which the sacred hymns pointed, and bringing out the inner and essenital meaning of the practical details of the Karmakanda. The word, Upanishad, itself meant, I would suggest, originally not a session of speculative inquirers (the ingenious & plausible German derivation) but an affirmation and arrangement of essential truths & principles. The sense, it would almost seem, was at first general but afterwards, by predominant practice, applied exclusively to the Brahmi Upanishad, in which we have the systematisation particularly of the Brahmavidya. In any case such a systematisation of Vedic Knowledge was what these Rishis thought themselves to be effecting. But the modern theory denies the claim and compels us to approach the Upanishads from a different standpoint and both to judge and to interpret them by the law of a mentality which is as far as the two poles asunder from the mentality of the writers. We shall therefore certainly fail to understand the workings of their minds even if we are right in our history.

But I am convinced that the claim was neither a pretence

nor an error. I believe the Vedas to hold a sense which neither mediaeval India nor modern Europe has grasped, but which was perfectly plain to the early Vedantic thinkers. Max Muller has understood one thing by the Vedic mantras, Sayana has understood another, Yaska had his own interpretations of their antique diction, but none of them understood what Yajnavalkya and Ajatashatru understood. We shall yet have to go back from the Nature-worship and henotheism of the Europeans, beyond the mythology and ceremonial of Sayana, beyond even the earlier intimations of Yaska and recover – nor is it the impossible task it seems – the knowledge of Yajnavalkya and Ajatashatru. It is because we do not understand the Vedas that three fourths of the Upanishads are a sealed book to us. Even of the little we think we can understand, much has been insecurely grasped and superficially comprehended, so that these sublimest of all Scriptures have become, latterly, more often a ground for philosophic wranglings than an illumination to the soul. For want of this key profound scholars have fumbled and for want of this guidance great thinkers gone astray, – Max Muller emitted his wonderful utterance about the babblings of humanity's nonage, Shankara left so much of his text unexplained or put it by as inferior truth for the ignorant, Vivekananda found himself compelled to admit his non-comprehension of the Vedantins' cosmological ideas & mention them doubtfully as curious speculations. It is only Veda that can give us a complete insight into Vedanta. Only when we thoroughly know the great Vedic ideas in their totality shall we be able entirely to appreciate the profound, harmonious and grandiose system of thought of our early forefathers. By ignoring the Vedas we lose all but a few rays of the glorious sun of Vedanta.

But whether this view is sound or unsound, whether we decide that the sense of those ancient writings was best known to the ancient Hindus or to the modern Europeans, to Yajnavalkya or to Max Muller, two things are certain that the Vedantic Rishis believed themselves to be in possession of the system of their Vedic predecessors and that they surely did not regard this system as merely a minute collection of ritual practices or merely an elaborate worship of material Nature-Powers. Minds that saw the world steadily as a whole, they did not repel that worship or disown that ritual. Surya was to them the god of the sun; Agni they regarded as the master of fire; but they were not – and this is the important point – simply the god of the sun and simply the master of fire. They were not even merely a Something behind both, unknown & vague, although deep, mighty and subtle; but because of the nature & origin of the sun, Surya was also a god of a higher moral & spiritual function & Agni possessed of diviner & less palpable masteries. I will cite the single example of the Isha Upanishad in support of my point. The bulk of this poem is occupied with the solution of problems which involve the most abstruse and ultimate questions of metaphysics, ethics and psychology; yet after a series of profound and noble pronouncements on these deep problems the Upanishad turns, suddenly, without any consciousness of descent, without any lowering of tone to appeal with passion and power not to some Supernal Power but to Surya, to Agni. Is it to the earthly Fire and the material Sun that the Rishi lifts his mighty song? Does he pray to Surya to give him the warmth of his beams or to drive away night from the sky? Does he entreat Agni to nourish the sacrificial fire or to receive for the gods on his flaming tongues the clarified butter and Soma-

juice? Not even for a moment, not even by allusion; but rather to Surya to remove – from the sight of his mind – the distracting brilliance which veils from mankind the highest truth and form of things, to enable him to realise his perefect identity with God and to Agni to put aside this siege of the devious attractions of ignorance and desire and raise our kind to that sublime felicity reserved for purified souls. It is for the fulfilment of the loftiest spiritual ends that he calls upon Surya; it is for support in the noblest moral victories that he appeals to Agni. This is not Helios Hyperion (*Greek : – the sun-god, conceived as a charioteer who drives daily from east to west across the sky.*) but another Vivusvān (*the Sun, luminous Master of Truth.*), master of this sun & its beams (that is also evident) but master too of the soul's illumination, sa no dhiyah prachodayat (*may he impel our thoughts*); this is not the limping blacksmith Hephaistos (*Greek : – the Greek god of fire, particularly the smithy fire, and of labour and craftsmanship; he is depicted as lame.*), but another Hiranyaretas (*"he of the golden seed", a post-Vedic name of the god of Fire.*), master no doubt of this fire and its helpful & consuming flames, but master also of purified & illuminated action and force, hota kavikratuh satyas chitrasravastamah* – agnih purvebhir rishibhir idyo nutanair uta**, the priest, the seer, the true, the full of rich inspirations, Agni adorable to the sages of the past, adorable to the great minds of today. Here is no lapse of a great philosophic mind into barbarous polytheistic superstition, no material and primitive Nature-worship extra

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** Priest of the offering whose will towards action is that of the seer, who is true, most rich in varied inspiration.* ***Rigveda 1.1.5***

*** The Flame adorable by the ancient sages is adorable too by the new.* ***Rigveda 1.1.2*** (Source: Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, Dec. 83. Pages 172-174)

ordinary intellectual compromise and vague henotheism. We are in the presence of an established system of spiritual knowledge and an ordered belief in which matter, mind and spirit are connected and coordinated by the common action of great divine powers. When we know according to what idea of cosmic principle Surya and Agni could be at once material gods and great spiritual helpers, we shall have some clue to the system of the early Vedantins and at the same time, as I believe, to the genuine significance and spiritual value of that ancient & eternal bedrock of Hinduism, the Vedas.

But European scholars have their own explanation of the development of this remarkable speculative system out of the superstitious ritual and unintelligent worship which is all they find in the Vedas and, since the utmost respect in intellectual matters ought to be paid to the king of the day even when we seek to persuade him to abdicate, I must deal with it before I close this introductory portion & pass to the methods & substance of the Upanishads. It is held that there was a development of religious thought from polytheism to henotheism and from henotheism to pantheism which we can trace to some extent in the Vedas themselves and of which the Upanishads are the culmination. Some, notably the Indian disciples of European scholarship – interpreting these ancient movements by the light of our very different modern intellectuality or pushed by the besetting Occidental impulse to search in our Indian origins for parallels to European history – even assert that the Upanishads represent a protestant and rationalistic movement away from the cumbrous ritual, the polytheistic superstition and the blind primitive religiosity of the Vedas and towards a final rationalistic culmination in the six Darshanas, in the agnosticism of Buddha, in the atheism

of Charvaka & in the loftiness of the modern Adwaita philosophy. It would almost seem as if this old Indian movement contains in itself at one & the same time the old philosophic movement of [the Greeks], Luther's Protestant reformation and the glories of modern free thought. These are indeed exhilarating notions and they have been attractively handled – some of them can be read, developed with great lucidity and charm in that remarkable compilation of European discoveries and fallacies, Mr. Romesh Chandra Dutt's History of Ancient Indian Civilisation. Nothing indeed can be more ingenious and inspiriting, nothing more satisfactory at once to the patriotic imagination and our natural human yearning for the reassuringly familiar. But are such ideas as sound as they are ingenious? are they as true as they are exhilarating? One may surely be permitted to entertain some doubt! I profess myself wholly unable to find any cry of revolutionary protest, any note of rationalism in the Upanishads. I can find something one might almost call rationalism in the Shankara's commentary – but an Indian rationalism entirely different in spirit from its European counterpart. But in the Upanishads the whole method is supra-rational; it is the method of intuition and revelation expressed in a language and with a substance that might be characterised rather as the language of mysticism than of rationality. These sages do not protest against polytheism; they affirm the gods. These spiritual Titans do not protest against ritual and ceremony, they insist on the necessity of ritual and ceremony. It is true that they deny emphatically the sufficiency of material sacrifices for the attainment of the highest; but where does the Rig veda itself assert any such efficacy? From this single circumstance no protestant movement against ritual and

sacrifice can be inferred, but at the most we can imagine rather than deduce a spiritual movement embracing while it exceeded ritual and sacrifice. But even this seems to me more than we can either infer or hazard without more light on the significance of early Vedic worship & the attitude on the subject of the Vedic Rishis. It is also true that certain scattered expressions have been caught at by Theistic minds as significant of a denial of polytheistic worship. I have heard the phrase, nedam yad idam upasate, not this to which men devote themselves, of the Kena Upanishad given this sense by reading the modern sense of upasana, worship, into the old Vedantic text. It can easily be shown from other passages in the Upanishads that upasate here has not the sense of religious worship, but quite another significance. We have enough to be proud of in our ancient thought & speculation without insisting on finding an exact anticipation of modern knowledge or modern thought & religion in these early Scriptures written thousands of years ago in the dim backwards of our history. This tendency will perhaps last as long as these ideas and conclusions keep their hold on the human mind.

The theory of a natural and progressive development of Pantheistic ideas is far more rational and probable than this adhyaropa of European ideas & history onto the writings of the ancient world. But that theory also I cannot accept. Because the clearly philosophical passages in the Vedas, – those that are recognised as such, – occur in the later hymns, – in which the language is nearest to modern Sanscrit, – it is generally supposed that such a development is proved. It is, however, at least possible that we do not find philosophical ideas in the more ancient hymns merely because we are not mentally prepared to find them there. Not understanding their obscure

and antique diction we interpret conjecturally with a confidence born of modern theories, led by our preconceived ideas to grasp only at what, we conceive, ought to be the primitive notions of a half-savage humanity. Any indications of more developed religious motives, if they exist, will from this method get no chance of revealing themselves & no quarter even if they insisted on lifting their luminous heads out of the waves of oblivion. In hymns with an almost modern diction, we have on the contrary no choice but to recognise their presence.

We cannot then say that there was no philosophy in the earlier & obscurer hymns unless we are sure that we have rightly interpreted their difficult language. But there are also certain positive considerations. The Vedantic thinkers positively believed that they were proceeding on a Vedic basis. They quote Vedic authority, appeal to Vedic ideas, evidently thinking themselves standing on the secure rock of Veda. Either, then, they were indulging in a disingenuous fiction, inconsistent with spiritual greatness & that frank honesty, arjavam, on which the nation prided itself, – either they were consciously innovating under a pretence of Vedic orthodoxy or else quite honestly they were reading their own notions into a text which meant something entirely different, as has often been done even by great & sincere intellects. The first suggestion – it has, I think, been made, – is inadmissible except on conclusive evidence; the second deserves consideration.

If it were only a matter of textual citation or a change of religious notions, there would be no great difficulty in accepting the theory of an unconscious intellectual fiction. But I find in the Upanishads abounding indications of a preexisting philosophical system, minute & careful at least & to my experience profound as well elaborate. Where is the

indication of any other than a Vedic origin for this well-appointed metaphysics, science, cosmology, psychology? Everywhere it is the text of the Veda that is alluded to or quoted, the knowledge of Veda that is presupposed. The study of Veda is throughout considered as the almost indispensable preliminary for the understanding of Vedanta. How came so colossal, persistent & all-pervading a mistake to have been committed by thinkers of so high a capacity? Or when, under what impulsion & by whom was this great & careful system originated & developed? Where shall we find any documents of that speculation, – its initial steps, its gradual clarifying, its stronger & more assured progress? The Upanishads are usually supposed themselves to be such documents. But the longer I study these profound compositions, the less I feel able to accept this common and very natural hypothesis. If we do not prejudge their more recondite ideas as absurd, if we try sympathetically to enter into the thoughts & beliefs of these Rishis, to understand what precise facts or experiences stand behind their peculiar language, especially if we can renew those experiences by the system they themselves used, the system of Yoga, – a method still open to us – it will, I think, very soon dawn upon our minds that these works are of a very different nature from the speculative experiments they are generally supposed to be. They represent neither a revolt nor a fresh departure. We shall find that we are standing at a goal, not assisting at a starting-point. The form of the Upanishads is the mould not of an initial speculation but of an ultimate thinking. It is a consummation, not a beginning, the soul of an existing body, not the breath of life for a body yet to come into being. Line after line, passage after passage indicates an unexpressed

metaphysical, scientific or psychological knowledge which the author thinks himself entitled to take for granted, just as a modern thinker addressing educated men on the ultimate generalisations of science takes for granted their knowledge of the more important data and ideas accepted by modern men. All this mass of thought so taken for granted must have had a previous existence and history. It is indeed possible that it was developed between the time of the Vedas and the appearance of these Vedantic compositions but left behind it no substantial literary trace of its passage and progress. But it is also possible that the Vedas themselves when properly understood, contain these beginnings or even most of the separate data of these early mental sciences. It is possible that the old teachers of Vedanta were acting quite rationally & understood their business better than we understand it for them when they expected a knowledge of Veda from their students, sometimes even insisting on the preliminary knowledge, not dogmatically, not by a blind tradition, but because **the Veda contained that basis of experimental knowledge upon which the generalisations of Vedanta were built.** There is a chance, a considerable chance – I must lay stress again and more strongly on a suggestion already hazarded, – that minds so much closer to the Vedas in time and in the possibility of spiritual affinity may have known better the meaning of their religion than the inhabitant of different surroundings and of another world of thought speculating millenniums afterwards in the light of possibly fanciful Greek and German analogies. So far as I have been able to study & to penetrate the meaning of the Rigvedic hymns, it seems to me that the Europeans are demonstrably wrong in laying so predominant a stress on the material aspects

of the Vedic gods. I find Varuna and Mitra to be mainly moral and not material powers; Surya, Agni, Indra have great psychical functions; even Sarasvati, in whom the scholars insist on seeing, wherever they can, an Aryan river, presents herself as a moral and intellectual agency, – "*Pavaka nah Sarasvati Vajebhir vajinivati, Yajnam Vashtu dhiyasvasuh. Chodayitri sunritanam Chetanti sumatinam, Yajnam dadhe Sarasvati prachetayati ketuna visva dhiyo virajati*. If we accept the plain meaning of the very plain & simple words italicised, we are in the presence not of personified natural phenomena, but of a great purifying strengthening and illuminating goddess.* But every word in the passage, pavaka, yajnam dadhe, maho arnas, ketuna, it seems to me, has a moral or intellectual significance. It would be easy to multiply passages of this kind. I am even prepared to suggest that the Vritras of the Veda (for the Sruti speaks not of a single Vritra but of many) are not – at least in many hymns – forces either of cloud or of drought, but Titans of quite another & higher order. The insight of Itihasa and Purana in these matters informed by old tradition seems to me often more corret than the conjectural scholarship of the Europeans. But there is an even more important truth than the high moral and spiritual significance of the Vedic gods and the Vedic religion which results to my mind from a more careful & unbiassed study of the Rigveda. We shall find that the moral functions assigned to these gods are arranged not on a haphazard, poetic or mythological basis, but in accordance with a careful, perhaps even a systematised introspective psychology and that at every step the details

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**Please see Appendix I for Sri Aurobindo's detailed commentaty on these three riks of Madhuchchhandas on Saraswati.*

suggested agree with the experiences of the practical psychology which has gone in India from time immemorial by the name of Yoga. The line** *Maho Arnas Sarasvati prachetayati ketuna dhiyo visva virajati* is to the Yogin a profound and at the same time lucid, accurate and simple statement of a considerable Yogic truth and most important Yogic experience. The psychological theory & principle involved, a theory unknown to Europe and obscured in later Hinduism, depends on a map of human psychology which is set forth in its grand lines in the Upanishads."[2]

"We have behind the Upanishads a profound system of psychology. We must find our way back into that system. We perceive indications of equally elaborate ideas about the processes underlying physical existence, human action and the subtle connections of mind, body and spirit. We must recover in their fullness these ideas and recreate, if possible, this ancient system of psychical mechanics & physics. We find also a cosmology, a system of gods and of worlds. We must know what were the precise origin and relations of this cosmology, on what experiences subjective or objective they rested for their justification. We shall then have mastered not only Vedantadarshana but Vedanta, not only the truth that Badarayana or Shankara arrived at but the revelation that Yajnavalkya & Ajatashatru saw. We may even be compensated for our descent by a double reward. By discovering the early Vedantic interpretation of Veda, we may pour out a great illumination on the meaning of Veda itself, – to be confirmed,

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** *This line has been translated by Sri Aurobindo thus:* "Saraswati awakens by the perceptive intelligence the ocean (or, flowing expanse) of Mahas and governs diversely all the movements (or, all the faculties) of the understanding."

possibly, by the larger & more perfect Nirukta which the future will move inevitably to discover. By recovering the realisations of Yajnavalkya & Ajatashatru, we shall recover perhaps the inspired thoughts of Vasishta and Viswamitra, of Ghora from whom perhaps Srikrishna heard the word of illumination, of Madhuchchhandas, Vamadeva and Atri. And we may even find ourself enriched in spiritual no less than in psychological knowledge; rejoice in the sense of being filled with wider & more potent knowledge & energy, with jnanam, with tapahshakti, & find ourselves strengthened & equipped for the swifter pursuit & mightier attainment of the One whom both Veda & Vedanta aspire to know & who is alone utterly worth possessing."[3]

The Universal nature of Brahman the Eternal is the beginning and end of the Vedanta. "…if it is not accepted, nothing the Vedanta says can have any value, as all its propositions either proceed from it or at least presuppose it; deprived of this central and highest truth, the Upanishads become what Mleccha scholars & philosophers think them to be, – a mass of incoherent though often sublime speculations; with this truth in your hand as a lamp to shed light on all the obscurest sayings of the Scriptures, you soon come to realise that the Upanishads are a grand harmonious and perfectly luminous whole, expressing in its various aspects the single and universal Truth; for under the myriad contradictions of phenomena (prapancha) there is one Truth and one only. All the Smritis, the Puranas, the Darshanas, the Dharmashastras, the writings of Shaktas, Shaivas, Vaishnavas, Sauras, as well as the whole of Buddhism and its Scriptures are merely so many explanations, comments and interpretations from different sides, of these various aspects of the one and only Truth.

This Truth is the sole foundation on which all religions can rest as on a sure and impregnable rock; – and more than a rock, for a rock may perish but this endures for ever. Therefore is the religion of the Aryas called the Sanatana Dharma, the Law Sempiternal. Nor are the Hindus in error when they declare the Sruti to be eternal and without beginning and the Rishis who composed the hymns to be only the witnesses who saw the truth and put it in human language; for this seeing was not mental sight, but spiritual. Therefore the Vedas are justly called Sruti or revelation. Of these the Rig, Yajur, Sama & Atharvan are the fertilising rain which gave the plant of the Truth nourishment and made it grow, the Brahamanas are the forest in which the plant is found, the Aranyakas are the soil in which it grows, the Upanishads are the plant itself, roots, stalk, leaves, calix and petals, and the flower which manifests itself once and for ever is the great saying SO AHAM – I AM HE which is the culmination of the Upanishads."[4]

"Veda and Vedanta are the inexhaustible fountains of Indian spirituality. With knowledge or without knowledge, every creed in India, sect, school of philosophy, outburst of religious life, great or petty, brilliant or obscure, draws its springs of life from these ancient and ever flowing waters. Conscious or unwitting each Indian religionist stirs to a vibration that reaches him from those far off ages. Darshana and Tantra and Purana, Shaivism &Vaishnaavism, orthodoxy & heresy are merely so many imperfect understandings of Vedic truth & misunderstandings of each other; they are eager half-illuminated attempts to bring some ray of that great calm & perfect light into our lives & make of the stray beam and illumination on our path or a finger laid on the secret & distant goal of our seeking. Our greatest modern minds are mere

tributaries of the old Rishis. Shankara, who seems to us a giant, had but a fragment of their knowledge. Buddha wandered away on a bypath in their universal kingdom. These compositions of an unknown antiquity are as the many breasts of the eternal Mother of Knowledge from which our succeeding ages have been fed & the imperishable life in us fostered. The Vedas hold more of that knowledge than the Vedanta, hold it more amply, practically and in detail; but they come to us in a language we have ceased to understand, a vocabulary which often, by the change of meaning to ancient terms, misleads most where it seems most easy & familiar, a scheme of symbols of which the key has been taken from us. Indians do not understand the Vedas at all; Europeans have systematised a gross misunderstanding of them. The old knowledge in the Vedas is to us, therefore, as a river wandering in dark caverns inaccessible to the common tread. It is in the Upanishads that the stream first emerges into open country. It is there that it is most accessible to us. But even this stream flows through obscure forest & difficult mountain reaches and we only have it for our use at favourable points where the forest thins or the mountain opens. It is there that men have built their little artificial cities of metaphysical thought and spiritual practice; in each of which the inhabitants pretend to control the whole river. They call their dwelling places Vedanta or Sankhya, Adwaita or Dwaita, Shaivism or Vaishnavism, with a hundred names beside and boast that theirs is the way & theirs is the knowledge. But, in reality, each of us can only command a little of the truth of the Sanatana Dharma, because none of us understands more than a little of the Upanishads."[5]

"It is now several thousands of years since men ceased to study Veda and Upanishad for the sake of Veda or

Upanishad. Ever since the human mind in India, more & more intellectualised, always increasingly addicted to the secondary process of knowledge by logic & intellectual ratiocination, increasingly drawn away from the true & primary processes of knowledge by experience and direct perception, began to dislocate & dismember the manysided harmony of ancient Vedic truth & parcel it out into schools of thought & systems of metaphysics, its preoccupation has been rather with the later opinions of Sutras & Bhashyas than with the early truth of Scripture. Veda & Vedanta ceased to be guides to knowledge & became merely mines & quarries from which convenient text might be extracted, regardless of context, to serve as weapons in the polemic disputes of metaphysicians. The inconvenient text were ignored or explained away by distortion of their sense or by depreciation of their value. Those that neither helped nor hindered the polemical purpose of the exegete were briefly paraphrased or often left in a twilit obscurity. For the language of the Vedantic writers ceased to be understood; their figures, symbols of thought, shades of expression became antique & unintelligible. Hence passages which, when once fathomed, reveal a depth of knowledge & delicacy of subtle thought almost miraculous in its wealth & quality, strike the casual reader today as a mass of childish, obscure & ignorant fancies characteristic of an unformed and immature thinking. **Rubbish & babblings of humanity's nonage an eminent Western scholar has termed them not knowing that it was not the text but his understanding of it that was rubbish & the babblings of ignorance.** Worst of all, the spiritual & psychological experiences of the Vedic seekers were largely lost to India as the obscurations of the Iron Age grew upon her, as her knowledge contracted, her

virtue dwindled & her old spiritual valiancy lost its daring & its nerve. Not altogether lost indeed for its sides of knowledge & practice still lived in cave & hermitage, its sides of feeling & emotion, narrowed by a more exclusive & self-abandoned fervour, remained, quickened even in the throbbing intensity of the Bhakti Marga and the violent inner joys of countless devotees. But even here it remained dim & obscure, shorn of its fullness, dimmed in its ancient and radiant purity. Yet we think, however it may be with the Vedas we have understood & possess the Upanishads! We have understood a few principal texts & even those imperfectly; but of the mass of the Upanishads we understand less than we do of the Egyptian hieroglyphics and of the knowledge these great writings hold enshrined we possess less than we do of the wisdom of the ancient Egyptians. Dabhram evapi twam vettha Brahmano rupam! (Little indeed dost thou know the form of the brahman.)

I have said that the increasing intellectualisation of the Indian mind has been responsible for this great national loss. Our forefathers who discovered or received Vedic truth, did not arrive at it either by intellectual speculation or by logical reasoning. They attained it by actual & tangible experience in the spirit, – by spiritual & psychological observation, as we may say, & what they thus experienced, they understood by the instrumentality of the intuitive reason. But a time came when men felt an imperative need to give an account to themselves & to others of this supreme & immemorial Vedic truth in the terms of logic, in the language of intellectual ratiocination. For the maintenance of the intuitive reason as the ordinary instrument of knowledge demands as its basis an iron moral & intellectual discipline, a colossal

disinterestedness of thinking, – otherwise the imagination and the wishes pollute the purity of its action, replace, dethrone it and wear flamboyantly its name & mask; Vedic knowledge begins to be lost & the practice of life & symbol based upon it are soon replaced by formalised action & unintelligent rite & ceremony. Without tapasya there can be no Veda. This was the course that the stream of thought followed among us, according to the sense of our Indian tradition. The capacity for tapasya belongs to the Golden Age of man's fresh virility; it fades as humanity ages & the cycle takes its way towards the years that are of Iron, and with tapasya, the basis, divine knowledge, the superstructure, also collapses or dwindles. The place of truth is then taken by superstition, irrational error that takes its stand upon the place where truth lies buried builds its tawdry & fantastic palace of pleasure upon those concealed & consecrated foundations, & even uses the ruins of old truth as stones for its irregular building. But such an usurpation can never endure. For, since the need of man's being is truth & light, the divine law, whose chief article it is that no just demand of the soul shall remain always unsatisfied, raises up Reason to clear away Superstition. Reason arrives as the Angel of the Lord, armed with her sword of doubt & denial (for it is the nature of intellectual Reason that beyond truth of objective appearance she cannot confidently & powerfully affirm anything, but must always remain with regard to fundamental truth agnostic and doubtful, her highest word of affirmation "probably", her lowest "perhaps"), – comes & cuts away whatever she can, often losing herself in a fury of negation, denying superstition indeed, but doubting & denying also even Truth because it has been a foundation for superstition or formed with some of its stone part of the

building. But at any rate she clears the field for sounder work; she makes tabula rasa for a more correct writing. The ancient Indian mind felt instinctively – I do not say it realised or argued consciously – the necessity, as the one way to avoid such a reign of negation, of stating to the intellectual reason so much of Vedic truth as could still be grasped and justifying it logically. The Six Darshanas were the result of this mighty labour. Buddhism, the inevitable rush of negation, came indeed but it was prevented from destroying spirituality as European negation destroyed it for a time in the eighteenth & nineteenth centuries by the immense & unshakeable hold the work of the philosophers had taken upon the Indian temperament."[6]

II. The Veda, Vedanta and the Development of Rationalistic Methods in Indian Spiritual Tradition

"…there is one of our great Indian spiritual activities which has developed progressively in the direction of rationalistic methods and given the responsibility for nine-tenths of its work in these supra-sensuous fields to the very organ, pronounced by the consensus of human opinion insufficient for such inquiries, – the intellect. It is in Darshana, in the path of metaphysics, that this paradoxical phenomenon has been permitted. It is true that our metaphysical thinkers, unlike the European, do not launch themselves into the full flood of metaphysical rationalism; they hug the coast. They admit the supreme authority of revelation, but only of verbal revelation, of the spoken Veda. But the sense and the bearing of the Vedic text has long been doubtful and warring philosophies have founded themselves on the sacred Word; how is doubt to be resolved, dispute to be decided? By appeal to other texts? But if there is still dissonance, not entire consonance? By the aptavakya, the word of the fit authority. If that fails or there is, here also, a conflict? By logic; the intellect is called in as the arbiter of the sense of the Sruti. The word of the adept, the aptavakya, is admitted; but different Masters seem to have taught different doctrines. Who or what is to decide? Let it be settled by logical argument. Once more the intellect is called in as supreme judge; neither the Sruti, nor aptavakya, but logical judgment becomes the real master of our knowledge. Psychological experience also is admitted in certain fields of the argument; but men have

different experiences, even different ultimate experiences. Adwaita asserts the pure self as an ultimate experience of consciousness; Buddhism denies it, holds it to be an illusion and goes beyond to the experience of psychological Nothingness. Yet again, logical argument is called in to decide the question. Therefore we find that our metaphysical method of arriving at the higher truth is practically, – though in theory this is subject to certain qualifications, – as much an intellectual & logical method as the method of European metaphysics or the method of scientific rationalism. Only, the Indian metaphysician admits certain data, values certain orders of evidence, which are ruled out of court as invalid or irrelevant by European thinkers. The scientific rationalist observes the sensible facts of life & Nature; these are the data on which alone he feels himself entitled to build his conclusions. The European metaphysician observes the general facts of sensible existence and adds to them the study of words, abstract concepts & categories which answer to no concrete existence, but are the general forms into which human thought has cast itself; these vast nebulae are the metaphysician's data. It is in this ethereal void that he disports himself in a grandiose freedom. The Indian thinker adds to the generalities of natural phenomenon and the abstractions of thought two other classes of evidence, the facts of psychological experience and the word of the revealed Scripture or of competent authorities. But he uses them sparingly & as a last resort. All that is really solid in our metaphysics (I except Patanjali's Yoga Shastra which stands by itself in the six Darshanas,) consists in its parts of logical inference and analogy; – we value in it not what it builds on revelation & experience, but its strenuous manner of justifying certain great assertions of Veda & high

experiences of spiritual seekers by the reason and by logical disputation. The method of Darshana, the way of Shankara and Buddha, although it works round and upon certain grand psychological experiences, Maya, Nirvana, is essentially speculative and logical, not intuitive and experiential.

How came this method to be substituted for the old Vedic tradition and what is its real validity? The question has a great practical importance; for every Indian thinker* who approaches these questions feels himself naturally impelled to be metaphysical in his method or his atmosphere and follow, with whatever modern variations, the path of Shankara, Buddha and the Sankhyas. The way of knowledge has become in India the way of metaphysical disquisition. Are we really bound to continue this tradition or is the more ancient method also the right method, to which humanity must eventually return; and, if so, what have we gained or lost by this more than millennial substitution of speculation for revelation and verbal logic for actual experience? The substitution itself has come about by a powerful general movement of humanity, simultaneous throughout the world, although it most thoroughly affected Greece and through Greece extended to the general temperament & thought of modern Europe. It cannot quite be said that Greece invented the intellect or the intellectual temperament, but it is certain that the Hellenic race first began the application of reason, inexorably, to the remoulding of thought & life in the temperament of intellectuality. Mankind can never be wholly rational, because our race is essentially built up of various

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**The only exception, to my knowledge, is Swami Vivekananda and even he has not entirely escaped the necessity of his environment.*

elements, none of which can be eliminated from its system of being. It is our nature to be physical, animal, emotional & sensational as well as intellectual and the coldest thinker or most inexorable rationalist cannot escape from the constitution of our common nature. But mankind, under the great impulse which overtook it at a certain stage of its conscious activity, felt the need of rationalising, as far as that could with safety be done, its other irrational members, the heart, the senses, the life-action, even the body. This tendency, pursued simultaneously by Graeco-Roman civilisation, by Confucian China, by philosophical & Post-Buddhistic India, combated in India by the vitality of Yoga and religion, in Europe by the great united floods of barbarism and Catholic Christianity, has finally triumphed and reached a pitch of success, an extent of victorious propagation which, in human movements, is usually the precursor of arrest and decay. **The movement of pure intellectualism has itself, indeed, no clear premonition of its own end. It hopes to conquer, to perpetualise itself, to bring under its sway the nations that are still exempt from its yoke or only imperfectly subdued to it; outwardly it seems to be on the point of success. It still holds the mind of Europe, although the soul of Europe begins to attempt uneasily an escape from its narrowing rigidity & dryness; it has seized on Mongolian Japan & is revivifying the traditional intellectualism of China by a flood of fresh ideas, by the inspiration of a new & wider horizon; it has touched already the Mahomedan world; the political subjugation of India has been followed by a pervasive Invasion of European intellectualism which is striving hard to substitute itself progressively for the ancient law & nature**

of our Indian temperament and being. But these manifestations, however overwhelming in appearance, however conclusive they seem of approaching victory, conceal the seeds of a profound revolution in the inverse sense. An outward conquest is often the means of an inward defeat. What is happening now, has happened before on a smaller scale and under less developed conditions. When the combined intellectuality of Greece and practical materialism of the Latins, supported by the conquering military force of the Roman Republic and Empire, came into contact with the old tradition of Asia, the result was the collapse of the politically victorious civilisation under the assault of an Oriental religion which in its tenets & methods not only exceeded but trampled alike on the vital force of the body & on the free play of the intellect, alike on Greece & on Rome. And it was from a part of Asia which underwent directly the Roman yoke, but persisted with the most deep-rooted perseverance in its spiritual traditions that the revanche proceeded; conquered Judaea took captive the victorious civilisation. Once more Europe, much more profoundly intellectualised, much more profoundly materialised in its intellectualism, throws itself upon Asia with a yet more supreme military force, compelling a yet more widespread political subjugation; once more a penetrating eye can discover the preparation of the same result obscurely outlining itself behind the deceptive appearances of the moment. The first effect on the West from this impingement of the mental atmosphere of Europe on the mental atmosphere of Asia and the breaking down of the walls that separated them has been

the revival of the invincible intuitionalism of the Aryan or Aryanised races. The philological tripartite division of the Old World into the Aryan, Semitic & Mongolian peoples, even if it be ethnologically untenable, does correspond roughly to real divisions in the cultural temperament of the human race, the result much less of original race than of historical formations & past influences. The Mongolian is predominantly intellectual, his lower nature is largely tamed & rationalised, the intuitive parts of his mind are slow and their beats tepid in their impulse; there is much less in his temperament to resist the intellectualising process of rationalism than in any other portion of humanity; in the Semite intellect is subordinated, he is intuitional, but intuitional through his lower members only, with as much of the higher activity as the heart & senses allow; the Aryan is intuitional either directly or through and by the heart and the intellect. The Aryan is therefore unfitted by his temperament to persevere in the relentless rationalising of our whole being; always there comes a time when he pauses, listens to a voice within that he has disregarded and, convinced by that inner daemon, departs from the paths hewn for him by the sceptical intellect with the same speed and enthusiasm with which he has followed their straight & level vistas. The very nations which are today the hope of a purely intellectual civilisation, hold in themselves that which can never remain satisfied with the pure reason, and this ineradicable betraying force is now being powerfully stimulated by the mental currents which for almost a century have been consciously or subconsciously reaching Europe with a slowly increasing

force from the East. Therefore, the repetition, no doubt in a very different form & to very different issues, of the miracle of Christianity is psychologically inevitable.

If indeed, as modern thought imagines, intellectual reason were the last & highest term of evolution, this consummation need not have been inevitable, or, if inevitable, it would have been deplorable; for perfection depends on the rule of our highest member over its inferior cohabitants. But our evolution is only the progressive unfolding of our nature and faculties, & in the list of those faculties reason does not hold the highest place; it is not even a separate and independent power, but a link, servant and intermediary. Its business, when it is allowed to rule, is to train the lower man so as to make him a fit vessel for an activity higher than its own. The animal is content to follow his impulses under the flashlight of instinct. If ever, as is likely, there was a time when man also was a supreme animal, he must have been guided by an instinct different, perhaps, in its special kind but as trustworthy as animal instinct & of the same essential nature. It was, then, the development in us of that reason which we see ill developed in the animal which deprived man of his sure animal instinct & compelled him to seek for a higher guide. Everything goes to show that he must have sought it at first in the lower intuition & revelation which works in the heart, the aesthetic impulses, the senses. Again, it is the insistent development of reason that has served to make him dissatisfied with these powerful, but still inferior guides. But not until reason, without lapsing back to the lower movements, yet becomes permanently dissatisfied with its own limitations, can it fulfil its work of preparation. For there is a faculty in us superior to the rational, there is that direct seeing & touch of things

which shows itself in the higher revelation & intuition & works obscurely, like a fire enveloped in smoke, in the phenomena of intellectual genius & unusual personality. **Beyond direct seeing there is a faculty of direct being, if I may so express it, which, if we can entirely reach & hold to it, makes us one with God, *brahmabhūta*, can reveal in this material life the perfection of Brahman as it is intended to be manifested in humanity, so that man on the human level, in the human cadre, becomes perfect as God is perfect.** The intellect itself cannot reach these heights. It can only discipline, chasten & prepare the lower members to receive & hold without harm or disintegration that higher force which has alone the power to raise us to the summits. In the intellectual ages of mankind, reason forgets these limitations; it tries to do a double work, to judge correctly all the knowledge which presents itself to the sensorium & its instruments and also to know things directly & in their essence. **The former is its legitimate work & deserves the name of Science; the latter is an illegitimate attempt to go beyond its sphere and conceals an error under the name of Metaphysics.** The Intellect can know & judge phenomena; by its labour in examining them it arrives, in spite of much presumption & error, at a considerable number of phenomenal certainties; but it cannot know & judge the essence of things; by attempting to examine that field, whether unaided or as the principal inquirer, it only arrives, if it is honest with itself, at this one truth, that it can be certain of nothing; – all the rest is appearance, asseveration or opinion. We can know things as they seem to be in the order of the physical Nature in which they live; by the reason we cannot be sure what anything is, in itself, in that order of realities of which physical

Nature is only the external seeming. Therefore the last refuge of reason, when it becomes conscious of its blunder, is to deny that such an order of realities exists at all, & to confine itself to the knowledge of material & phenomenal certainties. But such a restriction of knowledge brings with it a lowering, narrowing & petrifying of our humanity, because contrary to the whole nature and ineradicable tendency of our kind & sure therefore to falsify & slow down the springs of our action & being. Therefore Nature, mightier & wiser than the Scientist, compels man to revolt against the cold & debasing tyranny of a negative scepticism. She compels him back to the way to his Internal skies & compels him to recover, in whatever new terms, the promise of his Scriptures & his Gospels. She makes him listen again for some indirect echo, if not for the actual resonance of the eternal, immutable chant, the ever-rhythmic unwritten Veda.

The European attempt must, therefore, come to nought the moment it is brought face to face, as daily it is being brought more & more nearly face to face with its own inalienable insufficiency. The tradition of Asia will again impose itself on humanity, & it is probable that it will be again a country politically subject to Europe but more than any other tenacious of its spiritual temperament & tradition, which will be the instrument of the revanche. But the revelation that will conquer this time the forces of material nationalism must be one which includes the intellect in exceeding it, fulfils, not annuls it; for the conditions demand this greater consummation. In the Roman days the intellect was attacked before its constructive work had proceeded beyond the first insufficient paces; today the intellect has done its constructive work and the work must be

accepted. It is India alone that can satisfy this double claim of the human reason & the divine intelligence; & the new reconquest will differ as much and in the same way from the old as India differs from old Judaea.

It is true that in this country the reason has never fulfilled itself, triumphed & held undisputed sway to the same extent as in modern Europe. If we take in its general results in India the great intellectual movement of humanity, we see that it broke up & scattered about in fragments the ancient catholic tradition & knowledge, placed its stamp on much that yet remains, destroyed a great deal which it could not assimilate, left a little surviving under veils & in our remote & secret places. On the mental temperament of our people, the long struggle had a disastrous effect; for it has deprived all except the few of the higher supraintellectual inner life of our forefathers, it has made impossible any general resort to that discipline which gave them the use to a certain extent, at least, of the higher intuitive mentality, the satyadrishti, the direct sight, and has driven the many to be content rather with the irregular intuitions of the heart, the aesthetic faculties & the senses; we have kept those faculties which receive the actual touch of the higher truth obscurely, with the eyes of the intellect closed but lost those which receive them directly, with the eyes of the intellect open and luminously transmitting them to the mind imprisoned in matter. **We have therefore neither been able to organise the intellectual efficiency of the Europeans, nor retain the principles of inner greatness known to our forefathers.** Nevertheless, we still have among us important remnants of the old knowledge & discipline & we have firm hold in our schools of Yoga on the supreme means by which its lost parts can be recovered. The key of a

divine life upon earth lies, rusted indeed in an obscure corner of our mansion, used only by a few, but still it lies there & is still used. It has to be singled out from amid much waste matter, made fit for complete & general use and given freely to mankind. We have kept, fortunately, the intuitional temperament to which its use is easy & natural. **The failure of the intellect to assume complete sway and entirely rationalise our life, was a necessary condition for the preservation of that temperament, itself necessary for the appointed work & God-decreed life of our nation.** On the other hand, the indispensable work of Buddha and his predecessors & successors has not been entirely lost on our nation. Their great movement which denied, limiting itself in rationality, the capacity or the need of the human mind to know beyond the laws of phenomena, seized in metaphysical philosophy upon only so much as was necessary for conduct, sought to establish on pure logic & reason the few fundamental principles it needed and, feeling obscurely the necessity of completing itself by physical science, as soon as it entered that field, far outpaced the accomplishment of Europe or Arabia, ended in a defeat & collapse necessary for the final salvation of humanity. Its defeat necessitated in the divine scheme the later arrival in India of an intellectual & rationalistic civilisation, armed, organised, politically dominant, culturally aggressive, so that we might be forced, against our will & natural tendency, to hear from the rational intellect that which it was entitled to say to us & to perceive at last that the indirect & inferior intuition, great, divine & inspiring as it is in its more 'intense individual results, is still insufficient for humanity & that we must turn back to a higher guide & recover a lost & superior state. **When, without**

falling into the European error, we have recognised this truth, – and the logical & rationalistic capacity developed in us by Buddha & Shankara gives us the power to recognise it & the tendency, – we shall be ready both for our national survival and for that greater world-work for which, alone among the nations, we keep still the necessary materials and the necessary capacity. Children of the Rishis, not entirely disinherited, repositories of the Veda, still clinging to our trust, we alone can recover in our experience its half lost truths for the growing need of humanity. We have acquired, too, by our long philosophical discipline, the power of stating supra-intellectual knowledge in that language of the intellect on which the modern world insists as the proper vehicle of understanding and the first condition of acceptance.

We can see, from this point of view, the causes of the general substitution of the logical & speculative method for the intuitional & experiential; **it was an incident in the inevitable recurrence of one of those periods in which pure intellectuality dominates & which have for their function to refine & chasten the lower nature in the general mass of humanity. We can see what we have gained, – the power of ratiocination, the openness to the processes of reason, the ability to express intellectually – so far as that is possible – supra-intellectual knowledge & experience, the control of the lower members by the reason.** We can see, too, the natural limitations of the intellect & the inevitably inferior validity of the metaphysical method to the experiential in the attempt to grasp the truths of Veda, in that the certainty of these truths cannot be acquired either by speculation or logic. We can see how this inferiority has

worked for the obscuration or elimination of much that was potent, active & living in the more ancient knowledge; for the intellect tends to reject in its self-confidence what it cannot grasp & define, just as the heart tends to reject in its self-will what it does not desire or enjoy; yet **what the intellect cannot grasp & define, includes often the most valuable parts of experience and knowledge.**

The seeds of this movement of the intellect are contained in the Sanhitas & Upanishads themselves, although the movement itself is foreign to the Scriptures. The Sanhitas are Karmakanda; their object is not the enunciation of the general Truths of Brahman, but the practice of its particulars; they are the perfect monuments, sufficient to themselves, of especial moments, stages, movements in the progress of the individual towards his divine goal; they are instruments by thought & speech for the stabilisation of his increasing gains in light, force & joy; they are the praise & invocation of the gods who preside over particular functionings in our nature & in world-nature; they are statements of experience packed full of psychological detail and minute spiritual realisation, which confirm the seer & help the seeker. They are truth of experience & have therefore no room for speculation; they are ascertained truth & give therefore no room to doubt, debate & logical reasoning. But there are passages, rare seeds of the method pursued by the Upanishads, in which a general question is put and the suggestion of an answer offered. The Upanishads, on the contrary, are Jnanakanda; they have for their object the enunciation of the Truth of Brahman & the fundamental principles of Brahman's self-manifestation in universe. But with one remarkable exception they do not use, in order to arrive

at this truth, these principles, the method of logical reasoning. Unlike the Sanhitas, they admit, not so much of doubt, as of debate; they move by positive questioning and the positive answer to questioning. But, again, the answer to questioning does not move by logic either in its inception, in its process or in its consummation. When Yajnavalkya holds his grand debate with the Brahmavadins at the court of King Janaka, when the proud Balaki vails his pride to the superior knowledge of King Ajatashatru, it is not by the field of logic or with the arms of metaphysic disquisition that they encounter each other. The question one puts to another is not "What thinkest thou of this?" but "What dost thou know?" and he whose knowledge proves to be deeper than his adversary's, is the conqueror in the discussion. Nor has this superior knowledge been arrived at by a more just or a more brilliant speculation, but by deeper sight, by a more powerful concentration. He has arrived at it, tapas taptwa; that is the method laid down by Varuna to his son Bhrigu in the Taittiriya Upanishad; for, he adds, tapo Brahma, Tapas is Brahman. Tapas, in other words, is the dwelling of the soul on its object, by which Brahman originally created the world through vision – sa ikshata – saw Itself, that is to say, as world & what It saw, became, – the dwelling of the soul on its object whether, prospectively, in creative vision, outwardly realising, as the poet & the genius of action dwells, or, retrospectively, in perceptive vision of the thing created, inwardly realising, as the prophet dwells; tapas is the very foundation of the method of revelation & intuition. Therefore, as in the acquisition of knowledge, speculation & logic are not used, so also in the imparting of knowledge, disquisition and logic are not used.

The thing has been seen by the seer, he is the drashta &

to him Veda is drishti; it is spoken to the hearer & he sees, indirectly, through the medium of the word what the seer has seen by the self-vision, directly; to the hearer, Veda is Sruti. Yajnavalkya speaks his knowledge, his adversaries do not dispute it; they, too, see, being themselves habituated to these supreme processes, and the thing seen they silently & without debate acknowledge. If they are to dispute, since dispute is only a comparison of knowledge, of sight, of Veda, of drishti*, they must themselves first see farther, more profoundly, more subtly; and to see farther, they must first plunge into farther tapas, remain long constant in a farther dwelling of the soul on its object.

Still, just as in the Sanhitas there is the seed of the Upanishadic method, so in the Upanishads there is the seed of the later philosophical & intellectual method; we have, very occasionally, an obscure & casual preparation for the Darshanas. One passage, indeed a line, entirely typifies this secret bridging of the two methods; by a slight glance at it we can see how the mighty many-branching tree of the metaphysical philosophies burgeoned out from a very insignificant grain of tendency. Gautama in the Chhandogya, declares to his son Swetaketu the fundamental principle that all existence apparent to us here comes out of one anterior & ultimate existence, and he immediately notices the opposite appreciation, accepted as a starting point in the Aitareya, that existence originally emerges out of an original state of non-being, but only to reject it on the ground of a logical difficulty, "How could existence be created or create itself out of the

** The word for knowledge, vid, Veda, is the latin word for sight &, for the early Rishis, had probably not yet lost entirely all colour of its physical & more primitive meaning.*

non-existent"*, it is the earliest statement of the metaphysical principle common to all our positive & orthodox philosophies that nothing comes out of Nothing. The logic is large, axiomatic & elemental; we have a perception of logic rather than a process of logic or a generalisation from one perception & a priori exclusion of another as evidently impossible, not a logical demonstration of the impossibility. We are still within the four walls of the Upanishadic process, but stand already in the cadre of the doorway leading out into metaphysical disquisition. When we come to the sermons of Buddha, one knows not how many centuries later, and the formal foundation of the six orthodox philosophies we see, in spite of an immense logical & rationalistic development, that they proceed, initially, on this method of Gautama; they start from an act of logical discrimination, the acceptance of one statement of general perception & the rejection of another which seems to be inconsistent with the first or its contrary. All the ancient philosophies refer back to the Veda for the justification of the fundamental formulas in which they differ most obstinately & irreconcilably from each other. They are right in their positive claim; where they are wrong, where Shankara himself goes so hopelessly astray, is in founding on the same authority not only their own ultimate justification, but the confutation of their adversaries. **The Veda is not logical, does not really confute anything; its method is experiential, intuitional; its principle is to receive all experiences, all perceptions of truth about the Brahman, and either to place them side by side in order of**

**The language of the Sruti is remarkable, Asat ekam evadwitiyam, Non-Being one without a second, & shows that the old use of not-being differs essentially from our idea of nothingness.*

experience & occasional relation, as in the Sanhitas, or to arrange them in order of perception and fundamental relation, as in the Upanishads, putting each in its place, correcting misplacement & exaggeration, but not excluding, not destroying. This is admirably seen in the colloquy of Ajatashatru & the proud Balaki; Ajatashatru does not deny the experiences & perceptions of Balaki; he accepts them, denies only their claim to represent the ultimate truth, gives them their true character, puts them in their right place & leads up by this purificatory process to his own deeper knowledge. Harmony, synthesis is the law of the Veda, not discord & a disjection of the members of truth in order to replace the manysided reality of existence by a narrower logical symmetry. But the metaphysical philosophies are compelled by the law of their being to effect precisely this disjection. Veda can admit two propositions that are logically contradictory, so long as they are statements of fundamental experience & perception; it does not get rid of the contradiction by denying experience but seeks instead the higher truth in which the apparent contradiction is reconciled. Logic, by its very nature, is intolerant even of apparent contradiction; its method is verbal, ideative; it accepts words & thoughts as rigid & iron facts instead of what they really are, imperfect symbols & separate sidelights on truth. Being & Non-Being are ideas opposed to each other; therefore, in logic, one or the other must be excluded. The One cannot be at the same time the many; therefore, in logic, either the Many is an illusion, or Duality is the fundamental reality of things. Brahman is Nirguna, without qualities, beyond definition; therefore, to the rigid Adwaitins, the Saguna Brahman, the Infinite

Personality of God becomes a supreme myth of Maya, a basic & effective fact indeed, but basic & effective only in and of the grand cosmic illusion which It directs. Logic, the tyrant of the metaphysician, is satisfied by these abstract processes, but Truth is hurt & dismembered. Illusions of truth, dogmas of syllogism, take its place, and war upon each other, as indeed, so long as they live, they must go on warring for ever, since none can ever be established as undisputedly true, resting, as they do, on pure opinion of Smriti poured into the mould of Opinion, having, as they all have, a part only of Truth which they pretend vainly to be the whole.

We see, as a result, a progressive disjection of the fundamental truths of Veda, &, curiously enough, a disjection of the various parts of method which make up the totality of the Veda. **The totality of Vedantic knowledge consists of several processes; first, Vedanta, the direct perception of the fundamental reality out of which all emerges & to which all returns; secondly, Sankhya, the analysis, by the discriminating perception, of the fundamental principles of being & knowledge in which the Reality manifests itself as world, as subject, & as object; thirdly, Yoga, the psychological basis of experience, experiment, practical analysis, synthesis which verifies the discriminative analysis; fourthly, Vaisheshika, the physical analysis of the form or matter in which the manifesting world-energy is expressed & established to our outgoing perceptions; fifthly, Nyaya, the analysis of the processes of discrimination whether by the intellect or by higher functions; sixthly, Karma of Veda, the application of the knowledge acquired in formulas of life-action by which the individual & the community can ensure the highest**

phenomenal expression of the fundamental Reality of which their special nature is capable, – these six rank among other processes,...some of which are the foundation of Purana & Itihasa. The fundamental perception, separating, narrowed itself and became the Uttara Mimansa of Badarayana; the discriminative analysis, separating, narrowed itself and became Sankhya of Kapila; the psychological experimentation, separating, narrowed itself & became Yoga of Patanjali; the physical analysis, separating, narrowed itself and became Vaisheshika of Kanada; the analysis of discriminative processes, separating, narrowed itself and became Nyaya of Gautama; the application in formulas of life-action, separating, narrowed itself extremely & became the Purva Mimansa of Jaimini; yet each of the six arrogated to itself the functions & the sufficiency of the other five. Other parts of knowledge & process, ejected by the ever-narrowing tendency of logical exclusiveness, established themselves in other philosophies and branches of practice & knowledge and have come down to us, changed, often disfigured, in Shastra, in Purana, in legend & history, in different schools of Yoga.

The original method of all these differences was the method of Gautama in the episode of the Chhandogya, the exclusive affirmation of one's own seeing, the logical exclusion, by process of verbal & ideative distinction, of that which has [been] seen by others. We perceive very well this root of the evil in the grand example, supreme in its kind, of the Buddha. Unhelped by the conflicting philosophies of the schools, dissatisfied with the too rigorously materialised methods of the Yogins, he takes the right, the supreme step,

he retires into himself & gives his soul the charge of the Truth. Sa tapo atapyata. (*He concentrated himself in thought.*) He emerges from this concentration of soul, tapas taptwa, with the great illumination received in the ever-memorable night under the Bo tree. **What is this illumination of Buddha? It is the perception of the chain of Karma, of the impermanence of sanskaras, of the illusoriness of the mental ego, of the release into the motionless peace of Nirvana. There was nothing new in these things considered merely as tenets; they belong, in one form or another, to Vedanta; they cannot have been unknown to the philosophers of the age. What was new in them was their puissant revivification in a supreme soul and a great personality, their removal from the category of metaphysical dogmas & abstractions, into realities of life, concrete, human, vivid, which could once more be pursued by all, realised, practised and lived. It was this return to the sources, this puissant reconnection of Vedanta with ordinary life which was the secret of the Buddha's tremendous effectuality. New also was the particular connection & interlinking of all these central ideas in the thought of the Buddha, the singular cast given to them by his unique, yet universal temperament & the formulation in the mould of that temperament of a system of Vedantic ethics. Still, in his fundamental method, in his approach to truth & his handling of truth, Buddha had not, so far, gone beyond the method of the Vedantic Rishis; Yajnavalkya or Pippalada would have so sought in themselves for the truth, received illumination in the same fashion, equally cast that knowledge into well-linked formulae of experience which could be lived and practised. But**

Yajnavalkya or Pippalada would not have shot the iron bolt of logic on the knowledge they had gained and shut themselves in a prison of ratiocination to the experiences of others and to fresh vision. It was here that, owing, perhaps, to the very strenuousness of Buddha's search as well as to the limits of the question with which he had started, "How shall one escape from the pain & grief of the world," he turned from the ancient path and allowed the metaphysical & logical training of his past [to] lay its heavy hand upon him. He built up walls of logic; he shut himself up in a creed. Thus it came about that this great destroyer of the ego, sanctioned in his disciples the supreme act of intellectual egoism and this giant render of chains imposed on his Sangha, without positively intending it, deprecating it indeed, the bondage to a single personality & the chain of a specific formula of thought. The movement of the metaphysical philosophies, more purely intellectual, far less temperamental & personal than the Buddha's, yet followed the same limiting process. They obeyed not a personal illumination, but the logic of their starting point. Sankhya, for instance, proceeded on a discriminative analysis of the world, proceeded indeed to the last limit of that analysis and found that, fundamentally, Existence starts & maintains its manifestation of world on the basis, first, of the Unity of Nature, – the unity, the Yogin would say, of the energy of the Lord, – and, secondly, of the multiplicity of souls observing & reflecting the works of Nature, – the multiplicity, the Vedantin would say, of the individual souls, in which Brahman, the Lord, the one Supreme soul, puts Himself forth to enjoy the works of His energy. **Of these two fundamental principles the Sankhya**

metaphysician made a formula, an ultimate perception; he refused to go beyond; he built up a wall of logical disquisition to shelter himself from wider perceptions and a more complex experience. Such was the method of all these schools, the developed method of which we find so indistinct a seed in the Upanishads.

Still, it was from some fundamental experience or revelation that the metaphysicians started; the logical element intervened only as a second term of knowledge. Moreover, the method of the aphorism preserved the suggestive profundity of the intuition or revelatory experience & tended to maintain in the practice of knowledge the original closeness of the intellectual concept to that vision in the soul which thought can only translate very imperfectly to the reason. But about a thousand years later we find a new movement of the intellect in force, illustrated by the names of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, in which logic covers the whole field, leaving only a narrow corner to experience & intuition; but, for that very reason, the experience, the intuition assumes a character of much more eager intensity, exclusiveness, monotone of emphasis and steeps itself more fervently in the personality & temperament of the thinker. Hence a passion of dispute, an intolerance in logomachy which leaves far behind the measure of more ancient disputants. The battle is, finally, a civic strife between Vedantist & Vedantist; temporarily victorious over rival schools, they turn to rend each other; but the strife is still mainly about fundamental perceptions. The great question now is the fundamental unity or difference between the supreme soul & the individual or another, which would have astonished greatly the ancient Rishis, the question whether the world is false or real, – false, not only in its

appearance to the senses, but per se, in itself, in its essence & its being. **In the Mayavada of Shankara, Buddha, the rationalist, completes his work in India. He has led the reason to a great act of self-slaughter, the denial of existence to the world which alone it can study, more, the denial of Brahman in the world on the authority of that very Veda which spends so much time in affirming & elaborately explaining Brahman in the world. In other countries, in other ages, the Buddhistic agnostic train of thought led to a still more supreme suicide of reason for it came to the denial of its own power to know anything real & fundamental, came almost, like Buddhistic Nihilism, to deny the existence of anything real & fundamental. In India the farther advance after Shankara & his successors has been mechanical & practical rather than theoretic; it has led towards the final divorce of intellect from experience. The metaphysician, devoted to intellect, has abandoned experience in favour of the authority of departed Acharyas.** The schools of Yoga devoted to experience, have practised their psychological methods according to a fixed tradition without the harmonising touch, the generalising light; Sankhya dispensed with Yoga, Yoga divided itself from Sankhya. Thus has the spiritual life of India, by a misplaced & intolerant action of Intellect & its servant, rash-moving, light-winged, – the chameleon-hued phantasm Opinion, been shredded, parcelled out, narrowed into many streams & shallows, like the Oxus of the poet. Thus has it come down to our own age, ever narrowing more & more, shorn of its victorious streams, awaiting its return to a wider flood and a more grandiose motion."[7]

III. Why the Ancient Hindus Insisted on the Supreme Authority of Veda and Vedanta?

The Vedantic religion is able to reconcile the conflicting claims of Religion, Philosophy and Science by satisfying all their legitimate demands. The first important question in this respect is, "…how far does the Vedanta sanction the ordinary ideas of God as a Personal Active Being with definite qualities which is all the average religionist understands by the Divine Idea? Whether we regard him with the Jews as a God of Power and Might & Wrath and Justice, or with the Moslems as God the Judge and Governor and Manager of the world or with the early Christians as a God of Love, yet all agree in regarding Him as a Person, definable, imaginable, limited in His Nature by certain qualities though not limited in His Powers, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent & yet by a mysterious paradox quite separate from His creatures and His world. He creates, judges, punishes, rewards, favours, condemns, loves, hates, is pleased, is angry, for all the world like a man of unlimited powers, and is indeed a Superior Man, a shadow of man's soul thrown out on the huge background of the Universe. The intellectual and moral difficulties of this conception are well-known. An Omnipotent God of Love, in spite of all glosses, remains inconsistent with the anguish and misery, the red slaughter and colossal sum of torture and multitudinous suffering which pervades this world and is the condition of its continuance; an Omnipotent God of Justice who created & caused sin, yet punishes man for falling into the traps He has Himself set, is an infinite & huge

inconsistency, an insane contradiction in terms; a God of wrath, a jealous God, who favours & punishes according to His caprice, fumes over insults and preens Himself at the sound of praise is much lower than the better sort of men and, as an inferior, unworthy of the adoration of the saints. An omnipresent God cannot be separate from His world, an infinite God cannot be limited in Time or Space or qualities. Intellectually the whole concept becomes incredible. Science, Philosophy, the great creeds which have set Knowledge as the means of salvation, have always been charged with atheism because they deny these conceptions of the Divine Nature. Science and Philosophy & Knowledge take their revenge by undermining the faith of the believers in the ordinary religions through an exposure of the crude and semisavage nature of the ideas which religion has woven together into a bizarre texture of clumsy paradoxes and dignified with the name of God. They show triumphantly that the ordinary conceptions of God when analysed are incredible to the intellect, unsatisfactory and sometimes revolting to the moral sense and, if they succeed in one or two cases in satisfying the heart, succeed only by magnificently ignoring the claims of the reason. They find it an easy task to show that the attempts of theologians to reconcile the difficulties they have created are childish to the trained reason and can find no acceptance with any honest and candid intellect. Theology in vain denies the right of reason to speak in matters of spiritual truth, and demands that the incredible should be believed. Reason is too high a faculty to be with impunity denied its rights. In thus destroying the unsatisfactory intellectual conceptions with which it has been sought to bring the Eternal Being into the province of the reasoning powers, the core & essence of

popular religion which is true and necessary to humanity is discredited along with its imperfect coverings; materialism establishes itself for a while as the human creed and the intellect of man holds despotic empire for a while at the expense of his heart and his ethical instincts, until Nature revenges itself and saves the perishing soul of mankind by flooding the world with a religious belief which seeks to satisfy the heart and the ethical instincts only and mocks at and tramples upon the claims of the intellect. In this unnatural duel between faculties which should work harmoniously for our development, the internal peace and progress of the human self is marred & stunted. Much that has been gained is repeatedly being lost and has to be recovered with great difficulty and not always in its entirety.

If reason unaided could solve the enigma of the world, it would be a different matter. But the reason is able only to form at the best an intellectually possible or logically consistent conception of the Eternal in the Universe; it is not able to bring Him home to the human consciousness and relate the human soul to Him as it should be related if He exists. For nothing is more certain than this that if a universal & eternal Consciousness exists, the life and development of the human soul must be towards It and governed by the law of Its nature; and a philosophy which cannot determine these relations so as to bring light and help to humanity in its long road is merely an intellectual plaything and might just as well have been kept as a private amusement when minds of a ratiocinative turn meet in the lecture-room or the study. Philosophy can see clearly that the Universe can be explicable only in the terms of the Eternal Consciousness by which it exists. Either God is the material universe in which case the name is a mere

convenient abstraction like the materialist's "Nature", or He is the Self within the Universe. If the Self, then He is either transcendent and beyond phenomena and the phenomenal Universe can only be Maya, an imagination in the Universal Mind, or else He is involved in phenomena, Consciousness His soul, the Universe His form, Consciousness the witnessing and inspiring Force, the Universe the work or Energy of the Consciousness. But whichever of these possibilities be the truth, Knowledge is not complete if it stops with this single conception and does not proceed to the practical consequences of the conception. If the universe is Maya, what of the human soul? Is that also Maya, a phenomenon like the rest which disappears with the dissolution of the body or is it permanent and identical with the Eternal Consciousness? If permanent, why then has it confused itself with phenomena and how does it escape from the bondage of this confusion? On the other hand if He is involved in phenomena, what is the relation of the human consciousness to the Eternal? Are our souls parts of Him or manifestations or emanations? And if so do they return into Him at the dissolution of the body or do they persist? And if they persist, what is their ultimate goal? Do they remain by individuality separated from Him for ever even after the end of phenomena or are both the Universe and the individual soul eternal? Or is the individual soul only phenomenally different from the eternal, and the phenomenal difference terminable at the pleasure of the Eternal or by the will of the individual Ego? What are the present relations of the self to the Eternal? What are sin & virtue? pleasure & pain? What are we to do with our emotions, desires, imaginations? Has the Eternal Consciousness any direct action on the phenomenal Universe and, if so, how is He different

from the popular conception of God?

These are the questions which Philosophy has to answer, and in answering them the great difficulty it has to meet is its inability to find any better sanction for its conclusions than the play of speculative logic or to evolve anything better than a speculative system of metaphysics which may satisfy the argumentative faculty of the mind but cannot satisfy the reason of the heart or find its way to a mastery of that inner self in man which controls his life. **Religion, however imperfect, has the secret of that mastery; religion can conquer the natural instincts and desires of man, metaphysics can only convince him logically that they ought to be conquered – an immense difference. For this reason philosophy has never been able to satisfy any except the intellectual few and was even for a time relegated to oblivion by the imperious contempt of Science which thought that it had discovered a complete solution of the Universe, a truth and a law of life independent of religion and yet able to supersede religion in its peculiar province of reaching & regulating the sources of conduct and leading mankind in its evolution. But it has now become increasingly clear that Science has failed to substantiate its claims, and that a belief in evolution or the supremacy of physical laws or the subjection of the ephemeral individual to the interests of the slightly less ephemeral race is no substitute for a belief in Christ or Buddha, for the law of Divine Love or the trust in Divine Power & Providence. If Philosophy failed to be an ethical control or a spiritual force, Science has failed still more completely, and for a very simple reason – the intellect does not control the conduct. There is quite another**

mental force which controls it and which turns into motives of action only those intellectual conceptions of which it can be got to approve. We arrive therefore at this dilemma that Philosophy & Science can satisfy the reason but cannot satisfy the heart or get mastery of the source of conduct; while Religion which satisfies the heart and controls conduct, cannot in its average conceptions permanently satisfy the reason and thus exposes itself to gradual loss of empire over the mind.

A religion therefore which claims to be eternal, must not be content with satisfying the heart and imagination, it must answer to the satisfaction of the intellect the questions with which philosophy is preoccupied. A philosophy which professes to explain the world-problem once for all, must not be satisfied with logical consistency and comprehensiveness; it must like Science base its conclusions not merely on speculative logic, but on actual observation and its truths must always be capable of verification by experiment so that they may be not merely conceivable truth but ascertained truth; it must like religion seize on the heart & imagination and without sacrificing intellectual convincingness, comprehensiveness & accuracy impregnate with itself the springs of human activity; and it must have the power of bringing the human self into direct touch with the Eternal. **The Vedantic religion claims to be the eternal religion because it satisfies all these demands.** It is intellectually comprehensive in its explanation of all the problems that perplex the human mind; it brings the contradictions of the world into harmony by a single luminous law of being; it has developed in Yoga a process of spiritual experience by which its assertions can be tested and

confirmed; the law of being it has discovered seizes not only on the intellect but on the deepest emotions of man and calls into activity his highest ethical instincts; and its whole aim and end is to bring the individual self into a perfect and intimate union with the Eternal."[8]

"The ancient Hindus, therefore, insisted on Veda as the supreme authority, allowing Philosophy, Science & Religion only as subordinate helps to knowledge, because they perceived the danger of giving too unlicensed a freedom to these great but inferior powers. Religion, putting Veda away into a sacred oblivion, follows the impulses of the undisciplined heart, not purified, but full of the vital impulses, chittam pranair otam, and becomes spasmodic, ignorant, narrow, obscurantist, sectarian, cruel, violent. Philosophy acknowledging Veda in theory but relying instead on her own intellectual self-sufficiency, ends by living in words, a thing of vain disputations & exultant logic-splitting, abstract, unpractical and visionary. **Science, denying Veda altogether, arrogant & bigoted in her own conceit, makes man a materialist, a pashanda. For all her analytical knowledge she knows not that that in man which believes only in matter is the beast in him, – the beast so long & with such difficulty subdued & disciplined by Philosophy, Religion & Veda; she keeps telling him, "Thou, O brute body & nerve system, art Brahman," Annam vai Brahma, Prano vai Brahma, until his whole nature begins to believe it. One day, while she yet reigns, he is sure to rise, – the egoistic heartless lust of power & pleasure in man, – and demand that she shall be his servant with her knowledge, her sophistries, her organisation, her appliances, shall justify to him his selfishness, lusts & cruel impulses and**

arm them with engines of irresistible potency. Already the shadow of this terrible revival is cast upon the world; already Science is bowing her head to this tremendous demand. What the Hindus foresaw and dreaded and strove to organise their society against it, erecting barrier upon artificial barrier as their own knowledge & grasp upon Veda diminished, is now growing actual and imminent. The way to avoid it is not to deny the truth of Science, but to complete, correct and illuminate it. For the Veda also says with Science, Annam vai Brahma, prano vai Brahma; it acknowledges the animal, the Pashu in man & God as the Master of the Animal, the Pashupati; but by completing the knowledge and putting it in its right relations, it completes him also & liberates him, lifts the Pashu to the Pashupati and enables him to satisfy himself divinely by enjoying even in matter the supramaterial and replacing egoistic and selfish power by an universal mastery & helpfulness and egoistic & unsatisfying pleasures by a bliss in which he can become one with his fellows, a bliss divine & universal."[9]

IV. The Truth about Ancient Indian Civilisation – The Superficial Western Approach and a Deeper Understanding Look Into It

1. The Hindu Explanation of the World

"The Puranic account supposes us to have left behind the last Satya period, the age of harmony, and to be now in a period of enormous breakdown, disintegration and increasing confusion in which man is labouring forward towards a new harmony which will appear when the spirit of God descends again upon mankind in the form of the Avatara called Kalki, destroys all that is lawless, dark and confused and establishes the reign of the saints, the Sadhus, those, that is to say, – if we take the literal meaning of the word Sadhu, who are strivers after perfection. Translated, again, into modern language – more rationalistic but, again, let me say, not necessarily more accurate – this would mean that the civilisation by which we live is not the result of a recent hotfooted gallop forward from the condition of the Caribbee and Hottentot, but the detritus and uncertain reformation of a great era of knowledge, balance and adjustment which lives for us only in tradition but in a universal tradition, the Golden Age, the Saturnia regna, of the West, our Satyayuga or age of the recovered Veda. What then are these savage races, these epochs of barbarism, these Animistic, Totemistic, Naturalistic and superstitious beliefs, these mythologies, these propitiatory sacrifices, these crude conditions of society? Partly, the Hindu theory would say, the ignorant & fragmentary survival of

defaced & disintegrated beliefs & customs, originally deeper, simpler, truer than the modern, – even as a broken statue by Phidias or Praxiteles or a fragment of an Athenian dramatist is at once simpler & nobler or more beautiful and perfect than the best work of the moderns, – partly, a reeling back into the beast, an enormous movement of communal atavism brought about by worldwide destructive forces in whose workings both Nature and man have assisted. Animism is the obscure memory of an ancient discipline which put us into spiritual communion with intelligent beings and forces living behind the veil of gross matter sensible to our limited material organs. Nature-worship is another side of the same ancient truth. Fetishism remembers barbarously the great Vedic dogma that God is everywhere and God is all and that the inert stone & stock, things mindless & helpless & crude, are also He; in them, too, there is the intelligent Force that has built the Himalayas, filled with its flaming glories the sun and arranged the courses of the planets. The mythologies are ancient traditions, allegories & symbols. The savage and the cannibal are merely the human beast, man hurled down from his ascent and returning from the sattwic or intelligent state into the tamasic, crumbling into the animal and almost into the clod by that disintegration through inertia which to the Hindu idea is the ordinary road to disappearance into the vague & rough material of Nature out of which we were made. The ascent of man, according to this theory, is not a facile and an assured march; on the contrary, it is a steep, a strenuous effort, the ascent difficult, though the periods of attainment & rest yield to us ages of a golden joy, the descent frightfully easy. Even in such a descent something is preserved, unless indeed we are entirely cut off from the great centres of

civilisation, all energetic spirits withdrawn from our midst and we ourselves wholly occupied with immediate material needs. An advanced race, losing its intelligent classes and all its sources of intelligence and subjected to these conditions, would be in danger of descending to the same level as the Maori or the Basuto. On the other hand individuals of the most degraded race – a son of African cannibals, for instance – could under proper conditions develop the intellectual activity and high moral standard of the most civilised races. The spirit of man, according to the Vedic idea, is capable of everything wherever it is placed; it has an infinite capacity both for the highest and the lowest; but because he submits to the matter in which he dwells and matter is dominated by its surrounding contacts, therefore his progress is slow, uncertain and liable to these astounding relapses. Such is the Hindu explanation of the world and, so expressed, freed from the Puranic language & symbols which make it vivid & concrete to us, I can find nothing in it that is irrational. Western thought with its dogmatic materialism, its rigid insistence on its own hastily formed idea of evolution, its premature arrangements of the eras of earth, animal and man, may be impatient of it, but I see no reason why we Hindus, heirs of that ancient and wise tradition, should so long as there is no definite disproof rule it out of court in obedience to Western opinion. We can afford at least to suspend judgment. Modern research is yet in its infancy. We, a calm, experienced & thoughtful nation, always deep & leisurely thinkers, ought not to be carried away by its eager and immature conclusions."[10]

2. The Advanced Civilisation of the Vedic Age

"I will take this Puranic theory as a working hypothesis

and suppose at least that there was a great Vedic age of advanced civilisation broken afterwards by Time and circumstance and of which modern Hinduism presents us only some preserved, collected or redeveloped fragments; I shall suppose that the real meaning & justification of Purana, Tantra, Itihasa & Yoga can only be discovered by a rediscovery of their old foundation and harmonising secret in the true sense of the Veda, and in this light I shall proceed, awaiting its confirmation or refutation and standing always on the facts of Veda, Vedanta & Yoga. We need not understand by an advanced civilisation a culture or a society at all resembling what our modern notions conceive to be the only model of a civilised society – the modern European; neither need or indeed can we suppose it to have been at all on the model of the modern Hindu. It is probable that this ancient culture had none of those material conveniences on which we vaunt ourselves, – but it may have had others of a higher, possibly even a more potent kind. (Perfection of the memory and the non-accumulation of worthless books might have dispensed with the necessity of large libraries. Other means of receiving information and the habit of thinking for oneself might have prevented the growth of anything corresponding to the newspaper, – it is even possible that the men of those times would have looked down on that crude and vulgar organ. Possibly the power of telepathy organised – it seems to persist disorganised, – in some savage races, – might make the telegraph, even the wireless telegraph unnecessary.) The social customs of the time might seem strange or even immoral to our modern sanskaras, – just as, no doubt, many of ours will seem incredible and shocking to future ages. The organisation of Government may have been surprisingly different from

our own and yet not inconsistent with civilisation; there may have been a simple communism without over-government, large armies or wars of aggression, or even an entire absence of government, a human freedom & natural coordination such as Tolstoy & other European idealists have seen again in their dreams, – for it is at least conceivable that, given certain spiritual conditions which would constitute, in the language of religion, a kingdom of Heaven on earth or a government of God among men, the elaborate arrangements of modern administration, – whose whole basis is human depravity & the needs of an Iron Age, – would become unnecessary. The old tradition runs that in the Satyayuga there was neither the desire nor the need of modern devices; the organised arrangement of men's actions, duties and institutions by an external compulsion representing the community's collective will began in the Bronze Age with the institution of government in Kingship. The Vishnu Purana tells us, conformably with this idea, that Vishnu in the Satya incarnates as Yajna, that is to say as the divine Master in man to whom men offer up all their actions as a sacrifice, reserving nothing for an egoistic satisfaction, but in the Treta he descends [as] the Chakravarti Raja, the King & standing forward as sustainer of society's righteousness, its sword of justice & defence, its preserver of the dharma gathers a number of human communities under his unifying sway. But it is unnecessary to my present purpose to consider these speculations, for which much might be said and many indications collected. It is sufficient that an ancient society might differ in every respect from our modern communities and yet be called advanced if it possessed a deep, scientific and organised knowledge and if it synthetised in the light of large & cultured conceptions

all human institutions, relations and activities. This is all with which I am here and at present concerned. For I have only to inquire whether we have not at any rate some part of such a profound and organised knowledge in the surviving Upanishads and the still extant Sanhitas of the Veda; – written long afterwards, mostly in the Dwapara & Kali when, chiefly, men sought the aid of the written word & the material device to eke out their failing powers & their declining virility of mind & body, we need expect from them no picture of that ancient civilisation, nor even the whole of its knowledge, for the great mass of that knowledge has been lost to us with the other numberless Sanhitas of Veda. The whole of it we cannot reconstitute, since a great mass of Vedic material* has been lost to us, possibly beyond hope of recovery until Vishnu descends once more as the Varaha into the sea of oblivion and lifts up the lost Veda on his mighty tusks into the light of our waking consciousness and on to the firm soil of our externalised knowledge.

Not therefore the conception of semi-savages or half civilised philosophers, but the disjecta membra** of a profound spiritual culture, a high and complex Yogic discipline and a well-founded theory of our relations with the unseen is what we shall expect in Veda & Vedanta. It is here that Comparative Philology intervenes. For it professes to have fixed for the Vedas a meaning which will bring them well within the savage theory and for the Vedanta an ambiguous character,

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** Please see Appendix II for an extensive note on the Vedic Literature to get a feel for its vastness which is enough to bring home a sense of the stupendous creativity of the ancient Indian Culture even to its severest and most antagonistic critic.*

*** Scattered remains*

half of it barbarous foolishness and half of it sublime philosophy such as we might expect from a highly gifted nation emerging out of a very primitive culture into a premature and immature activity of the higher intellectual faculties. A worship of the personified Sun, Moon, Fire, Wind, Dawn, Sky and other natural phenomena by means of a system of animal sacrifices, this is the Veda; high religious thinking & profound Monistic ideas forcibly derived from Vedic Nature-worship marred by the crudest notions about physics, psychology, cosmology and material origins & relations generally and mixed up with a great mass of unintelligible mystical jargon, this is the Upanishads. If that be so, our preoccupation with these works is misplaced. We must put them away as lumber of the past, interesting records of the beginnings and crude origins of religion and philosophy but records only, not authorities for our thought or lamps for our steps in life. We must base ourself not on the Vedas and Upanishads, but, as for that matter many of us are well inclined to do, on Badarayana, Kapila, Shankara and Buddha, not on the ancient Rishis but on the modern philosophers and logicians.

Such an abandonment is only obligatory on us after we have fixed the precise scientific value of these philological conclusions, the view of this modern naturalistic interpretation of which so much is made. We are too apt in India to take the European sciences at their own valuation. The Europeans themselves are often more sceptical. In ethnology the evidence of philology is increasingly disregarded. The ethnologists tend to disregard altogether, for example, the philological distinction between Aryan and Dravidian with its accompanying corollary of an immigration from the sub-

Arctic regions or the regions of the Hindu-Kush and to affirm the existence of a single homogeneous Indo-Afghan race in immemorial occupation of the peninsula. Many great scientific thinkers deny the rank of a science to philology or are so much impressed by the failure of this branch of nineteenth-century inquiry that they doubt or deny even the possibility of a science of language. We need not therefore yield a servile assent to the conclusions of the philologists from any fear of being denounced as deniers of modern enlightenment and modern science; for we shall be in excellent company, supported by the authority of protagonists of that enlightenment and science."[11]

Appendix I

"Pavaka nah Saraswati, vajebhir vajinivati,
Yajnam vashtu dhiyavasuh.
Chodayitri sunritanam, chetanti sumatinam,
Yajnam dadhe Sarasvati.
Maho arnah Saraswati, prachetayati ketuna,
*Visva dhiyo vi rajati.**

On the strength of Sayana's commentary these lines would have to bear in English the following astounding significance. "Let the purifying goddess of Speech, equipped by means of food-offerings with a ritual full of food, desire (that is to say, upbear) the sacrifice, she who is the cause of wealth as a result of the ritual. Sender of pleasant & true sayings and explainer (of this sacrifice) to the performers of the ritual who have a good intelligence, the goddess of speech upholds the sacrifice. The river Saraswati makes known by her action (that is, her stream) much water, she (the Muse) illumines all the ideas of the sacrificer." Truly, whatever Saraswati may do for the sacrificer,– who does not appear at all in the lines except to the second sight of Sayana, – the great scholar does not succeed in illumining our ideas about the sense of the [Sukta]. The astonishing transition from the Muse to the river & the river to the Muse in a single rik is flagrantly impossible. How does Saraswati's thoughtful

*May purifying Saraswati with all the plenitude of her forms of plenty, rich in substance by the thought, desire our sacrifice. She, the impeller to happy truths, the awakener in consciousness to right mentalisings, Saraswati, upholds the sacrifice. Saraswati by the perception awakens in consciousness the great flood and illumines entirely all the thoughts. **Rigveda 1.3.10-12** (Source: Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, Dec. 83, Page 173)

provision of much water lead to her illumination of the sacrificer's evidently confused intellect? Why should dhiya in dhiyavasu mean ritual act, and dhiyo in visva dhiyo ideas? How can desire mean upbear, ritual act mean wealth or action mean a stream of water? What sense can we extract from arnah prachetayati in Sayana's extraordinary combination? If sunritanam expresses speech or thought, why should the parallel expression sumatinam in defiance of rhythm of sound & rhythm of sense, refer to the sacrificers? I have offered these criticisms not for any pleasure in carping at the great Southern scholar, but to establish by a clear, decisive & typical instance the defects which justify my total rejection of his once supreme authority in Vedic scholarship. Sayana is learned in ritualism, loaded with grammatical lore, a scholar of vast diligence and enormous erudition, but in his mentality literary perception & taste seem either to have been non-existent or else oppressed under the heavy weight of his learning. This and other defects common enough in men of vast learning whose very curiosity of erudition only leads them to prefer a strained to a simple explanation, the isolated suggestions of single words to a regard for the total form & coherence, & recondite, antiquarian or ceremonial allusions to a plain meaning, rend[er] his guidance less than useful in the higher matters of interpretation and far from safe in questions of verbal rendering."[12]

"The sense of the first two verses is clear enough when we know Saraswati to be that power of the Truth which we call inspiration. Inspiration from the Truth purifies by getting rid of all falsehood, for all sin according to the Indian idea is merely falsehood, wrongly inspired emotion, wrongly directed will and action. The central idea of life and ourselves from which we start is a falsehood and all else is falsified by it. **Truth**

comes to us as a light, a voice, compelling a change of thought, imposing a new discernment of ourselves and all around us. Truth of thought creates truth of vision and truth of vision forms in us truth of being, and out of truth of being (satyam) flows naturally truth of emotion, will and action. This is indeed the central notion of the Veda.

Saraswati, the inspiration, is full of her luminous plenitudes, rich in substance of thought. She upholds the Sacrifice, the offering of the mortal being's activities to the divine by awakening his consciousness so that it assumes right states of emotion and right movements of thought in accordance with the Truth from which she pours her illuminations and by impelling in it the rise of those truths which, according to the Vedic Rishis, liberate the life and being from falsehood, weakness and limitation and open to it the doors of the supreme felicity.

By this constant awakening and impulsion, summed up in the word, perception, *ketu*, often called the divine perception, *daivya ketu*, to distinguish it from the false mortal vision of things, – Saraswati brings into active consciousness in the human being the great flood or great movement, the Truth-consciousness itself, and illumines with it all our thoughts. We must remember that this truth-consciousness of the Vedic Rishis is a supra-mental plane, a level of the hill of being (*adreḥ sānu*) which is beyond our ordinary reach and to which we have to climb with difficulty. It is not part of our waking being, it is hidden from us in the sleep of the superconscient. We can then understand what Madhuchchhandas means when he says that Saraswati by the constant action of the inspiration awakens the Truth to consciousness in our thoughts."[13]

Appendix II
A Note On the Vedic Literature*

1. The Veda

The Veda, the earliest available collection of the most ancient body of knowledge, could have been composed any time between 75th millenium to 2nd millenium B.C. and were handed down orally for a very very long period of time before they were written down any time between 3500 B.C. to 1300 B.C. It is believed that in its original form Veda was one and it was Rishi Vedavyasa who divided it into four parts, namely Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sāmveda, and Atharvaveda. The entire collection of the Vedic mantras, divided in many ways and under various categories, is called "Samhitā". All the four Vedas are considered to be the breath of the Supreme Lord who alone is their author.

(i) Rigveda: It occupies a prominent place among the Vedas and consists of 10 books or Mandalas and 1017 hymns

*This note is based primarily on the information contained in the following four publications:

1. "**The Veda and Indian Culture**", Kireet Joshi (1991) Motilal Banarasi Dass, 41 U.A. Bunglow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi - 110007.

2. "**Glimpses of Vedic Literature**", Kireet Joshi (2001) Standard Publishers, G - 126/2, , Rajapuri Mainroad, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi - 110062.

3. "**Hindu Sastras and Sanskaras**", V.A.K. Ayer (2004), Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, K. M. Munshi Marg, Mumbai - 400007.

4. "**Hindu Sanskriti Anka**", Kalyan special issue, Year 24, Gita Press, Gorakhpura, U.P.

The Vedic literature in its core consists only of Mantra Samhitās (Vedas), Brahmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads. In its comprehensive sense it also includes the vast literature of Vedāngas, Itihāsa, Purānas, Upavedas, etc. It is in the latter sense that this vast literature is covered in this Appendix.

or Sūktas and 10,580 verses or Mantras. Vasistha, Vishwāmitra, Vāmdeva, Bhāradwāja, Atri, Madhuchhandas are some of the great seer poets (Rishis) who had received the sacred Mantras of this Veda. Six of the Mandalas or books are given each to the hymns of a single Rishi or a family of Rishis. In each of the Mandalas the sutras addressed to Agni are first collected together, followed by those of which Indra is the deity; the invocations of other gods, Brihaspati, Sūrya, the Ribhus, Ushā, etc., close the Mandalas. The whole ninth Mandala is given to a single God Soma. The first , eighth and tenth Mandalas are collection of Sūtras by various Rishis, but again the hymns of each seer are ordinarily placed together in the order of their deities.

During the course of their transmission from one teacher to the other, each Vedic Samhitā came to develop certain variations (Shākhās). Though each Samhitā remained substantially the same, the Shākhās came to be acknowledged and standardised over time. According to some sources, the total of Shākhās for all the four Veda Sāmhitās was 1131 but at present only 11 Shākhās are available. It is believed that at one time 21 Shakhas of Rigveda existed but at present only one is available. Similarly for Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda, out of the 101, 1000 and 9 Shākhās which existed at one time, only 5, 3 and 2 respectively are available at present.

In the matter of Vedic sacrifices, the Prayoga (operative) Mantras are taken from Rigveda which is meant for the Hotā, the priest who invokes the gods. Yajurveda is meant for Adhvaryu who offers oblation to the fire (assistant priest), Sāmaveda for Udgātā who sings songs in honour of the gods, and Atharvaveda for Brahmā who is in the overall charge of

sacrifice. The fourth priest (Brahmā) is supposed to be a specialist in all the four Vedas, including Atharvaveda. Rigveda, Sāmveda and Yajurveda are collectively called Vedatrayi. Atharvaveda is not included in this group even though it has a significant place in the Karmakanda of the Vedas.

The famous Gayatri Mantra composed by Rishi Vishwāmitra is from Rigveda. The Vedic Mantras are composed in various metres like Gāyatri, Ushnig, Anushtubh etc. Technically, all the mantras in the Veda which are in poetic metre Gayatri can be called Gāyatri mantras. However, when one is asked to recite the Gāyatri mantra, it is the famous Gāyatri mantra that is recited. The Rigvedic seers, the poets of spiritual sight (Drishti) and inspiration (Sruti) are the original founders of Sanatana Dharma and Indian spiritual culture.

(ii) Yajurveda: Mantras of Rigveda are all in poetic form, but Yajurveda is principally in prose. The word "Yajus" is derived from the root "yaj" which means to consecrate, to make sacred, to sacrifice. The mantras, of Yajurveda are devoted to acts of sacrifice. This Veda is fundamentally the secret science of the Divine Events, which can alter what is pre-planned or pre-destined by the power of human will, human action, Karma. Or in other words, the destined events can be prevented, modified or transformed by means of intense processes of inner sacrifice.

Yajurveda is classified into Shukla Yajurveda and Krishna Yajurveda. The Samhitā of Shukla Yajurveda, also known as Vājasaneyi, has 30 Adhyāyas (chapters) and 1975 Mantras. More than one third of these Mantras have been taken from Rigveda. The last chapter of Shukla Yajurveda is the famous Ishavasya Upanishad. There are only two extant Shākhās of Shukla Yajurveda. Krishna Yajurveda has 5 extant Shākhās.

The main difference between Krishna and Shukla is that in the former explanatory portions are included whereas the latter consists only of Mantras.

(iii) Samaveda: This Veda is the shortest of all the four Vedas and most of its hymns have been taken from Rigveda. Out of a total of 1875 Riks (Mantras) in this Samhitā, only 75 are independent. All the rest have been reproduced from the Rigveda. The Riks of Rigveda are transformed into songs of Sāma by appropriate addition of words or stobhas such as hā, u, ho, i, o, oh, on, etc. In the process of chanting or singing, the hymns are prolonged and repeated; some syllables are inserted, and there are prescriptions about various modulations. Symbols are provided to guide the length of pronounciation and modulation of the tune of the melody. Here one can find the beginning of the science of music that developed in India. Different Ragas of Indian music have emerged from the melodies of the Sāmaveda. Out of the 1000 Shākhās, this Veda has only 3 existing at present.

(iv) Atharvaveda: This Veda, which has been looked upon as the Veda of secret and occult knowledge, contains numerous Mantras common to the other three Vedas. It has 20 Kāndas (Sections) and about 6,000 Mantras out of which 1200 are common with those of the Rigveda. One sixth of the Atharvaveda is in prose and the rest is in poetry.

The Atharvaveda has two kinds of Mantras: (a) those relating to the cure of diseases and destruction of wild animals and adverse forces, and (b) those relating to the establishment of peace in the family and village as also those relating to health, wealth and protection from enemies. Apart from these there are also Mantras related to the nature of the Ultimate Reality, Time, human personality, Death and Immortality.

The Atharvaveda is believed to be the origin of Āyurveda. It attributes the diseases not only to physical causes but also, and more importantly, to psychological causes, including Karma and influence of adverse forces. A series of Mantras are related to practices designed to cure fever, nightmare, haemorrage, toothache, serpent bite and madness.

Four planets are believed to preside over the four Vedas: Jupiter or Guru over Rigveda; Venus or Sukra over Yajurveda; Mars or Mangal over Sāmaveda and Mercury or Buddha over Atharvaveda.

(v) The Veda and Human Life: The Veda looks upon human life as a battle field in which the powers and forces, not only of this apparent physical world but also of all the nether and supraphysical realms have an entry and interest. It is at best a journey through an unknown and ominus territory which is, at every step, beset with difficulties and opportunities resulting from the working of adverse and helpful powers and forces of various realms or worlds. In this battle of life, the Veda seeks to reveal to human beings how the various worlds are interrelated and how this (occult) knowledge can be used to produce desirable results. Although the Vedic vision is to lead man to the ultimate spiritual fulfillment, it does not teach an escape from life or its problems, but rather provides him an integral knowledge for the mastery of his physical existence on his way to the supreme fulfillment. It is in this light that the Atharvaveda's interest in the issues of human life and the earth can be rightly understood.

A very important hymn of the Atharvaveda is related to the earth. It is termed "prithvi sukta" and expresses sentiments related to the contemporary concern for environmental harmony. But unlike the surface views of present age on these

issues, this sukta goes deeper to the heart of the matter and states clearly that the harmony and stability of the physical consciousness and the earth is rooted in the superconscient characterised in the Veda by Satyam, Ritam and Brihad, the True, the Right and Vast.

(vi) Recitation of the Vedas: There are five ways of reciting the Vedas, namely, Mula, Pada, Karma, Jata and Ghana. In the first, Mantras are recited continuously; in the second they are split word by word; in the third, the Padas are joined as 1.2.2.3.3.4, etc. In the fourth the Padas are joined in textual order, then in reverse order and once again in textual order as 1.2, 2.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.2, 2.3, etc. In the last even more complicated combinations are used. All this is not mere verbal jugglery, the Mantras are believed to gain in their potency by so chanting.

2. Brāhmanas

In ancient times numerous works were composed to elucidate, explain, make precise the secret knowledge enshrined in the Veda Samhitās and to assist in the scrupulous observation of Vedic rituals for obtaining the desired results. Of these, the Brāhmanas are the most important, some even consider that the text of the Veda includes both the Samhitās and the Brāhmanas. For understanding the Mantra Samhitās, the study of Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads is considered to be essential. Even the study of Brahmasutras of Veda Vyāsa and Bhagvad Gita is considered very helpful and even necessary. Of all these, the Brāhmanas are considered closest in time to the Vedas. However, the Brāhmanas concentrate on Karmakānda of the Veda rather than the Jnānakānda. The latter is the subject matter of the vast literature of Āranyakas and Upanishads.

The Brāhmanas literature seems to have been very vast,

but a good deal of it has been lost. The appendices of Brāhmanas which are partly in prose and partly in verse are called Āranyakas. The name is very fitting since they were supposed to be taught and studied in forests (āranya). Some Upanishads are included in Āranyakas and therefore it is almost impossible to make a definite boundary line between the Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads which are closely related with one another.

The Brāhmanas were instructed simultaneously with the different recensions of the Vedas and thus each of the recensions (Shākhās) of the Veda came to have a separate Brāhmana. Each Samhitā of the Veda has also its own corresponding Āranyakas and Upanishads. Rigveda is connected with Aitareya and Kaushitaki Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads. Krishna Yajurveda is closely connected with the Taittiriya Brāhman, Āranyaka and Upanishad. Shukla Yajurveda is connected with Shatapatha Brahmana, a part of which is called the Brihadāranyaka Upanishad. Sāmaveda has several Brāhmanas and Chandogyopanishad is connected with it. The Atharvaveda is connected with Gopatha Brāhmana, Prashna Upanishad and Mundaka Upanishad. Among the host of lost Brāhmanas, about two dozen are considered most important. Some of these are Primgāyani, Āshvalayana, Gālav, Jhābālak, Charak, Shwetashavatara, Pārāshara and Talavakara Brāhamanas.

Although the bulk of the textual material in the Brāhmanas is related to the explication of rituals, it also contains many philosophical passages and the Brāhmanas reveal a great deal of inner meaning of the relationship between supreme divine Reality, gods and goddesses, Asuras and humans beings who are the agents of various kinds of

sacrifices. Elaborate explanations are given using formulas, parables and legends.

"According to the ritualistic tradition of the Veda, all rituals are imitations of the original processes of creation. Rituals are, therefore, expected to repeat the rhythms of the original creation and it is believed that the repetition of these rhythms reinforces all the works of universe and it is by these works that the past is led towards the future and the creation is constantly getting transformed into the new one. Whoever, therefore, sacrifices, contributes to the renewal of the universe, to the creation of the universe, to the transformation of the universe, even to the annulment of the bondage to the past and birth into the future."*

3. Āranyakas and Upanishads

Āranyaka literature is rather small as compared to the Brāhmana and Upanishadic literature. A good deal of it has perhaps been lost in the course of time and now only the following six Āranyakas, namely, Aitareya, Shānkhāyayna, Talavakara, Taittiriya, Brihadāranyaka and Maitrayaniya Āranyaka are available. The Āranyakas do not deal with the performance of sacrifices but with their esoteric meaning. Āranyakas and Upanishads are collectively called Vedānta and are concerned with the Jnānakānda of the Vedas. They stress meditation rather than ritual performance and lay down Upāsanas for the realisation of the Absolute.

The Muktopanishad mentions that the total number of Upanishads is 108 and they are derived from the four Vedas as follows: (i) Rigveda: 10, (ii) Shukla Yajurveda: 19, (iii) Krishna Yajurveda: 32, (iv) Sāmaveda: 16 and (v) Atharvaveda: 31

* K. Joshi, Glimpses of Vedic Literature, Op. Cit., Page 76

Upanishads. Out of these the following twelve are considered most important and are related to the four Vedas as follows: (i) Rigveda: Aitareya, Māndukya and Kaushitaki; (ii) Krishna Yajurveda: Taittiriya, Katha and Shwetāshvatara; (iii) Shukla Yajurveda: Brihadāranyaka and Isha; (iv) Sāmaveda: Kena and Chhāndogya; (v) Atharvaveda: Prashna and Manduka. Beside the 108 Upanishads mentioned in the Muktopanishad, there are many others which are connected with Puranas and Tantra. If the entire Upanishadic literature is taken into account, there are at least 250 Upanishads.

Upanishads are supreme avenues for entry into the secrets of the ultimate and even though their language and symbolism is posterior to the Vedas, they are very difficult to understand. They do not open their secrets to one without some spiritual experience and a good familiarity with the Veda. Upanishads dispense in their style with the expression of transitions of thought and the development of implied or derived notions out of it. Very often one single word or a sentence reposes on or is used to suggest a number of ideas implicit in the text but nowhere to be found explicitly stated. The words often suggest the reasoning which supports the conclusion but it is never conveyed to the surface intelligence. The hearer or seeker is supposed to proceed from light to light on the basis of his intuition and experience.

The difficulty of penetrating into the inner meaning of Upanishads has given rise, during the middle ages, to numerous commentaries on them by five great Āchāryas who differed sharply in their view of the philosophy of Upanishads which they narrowed down to their own limited understanding and experience. The secret of the Upanishads was expounded aphoristically by Bādarāyana (Rishi Vedavyāsa) in his

Brahmasutras which is regarded as the most authoritative work on Vedanta. The commentaries of the great Āchāryas which have given rise to five major schools, namely, Advaita or Monism of Shankarāchārya, Vishishtādvaita or Qualified Monism of Ramānujāchārya, Vishuddhādvaita or pure Monism of Vallabhāchārya, Dwaitādvaita or Dualism-non-Dualism of Nimbārkāchārya, and Dwaita or Dualism of Madhawāchārya are commentaries on the Brahmasutras. The Bhagvad Gita, which is considered to be one of the three highest Vedantic authorities, has also been interpreted differently by different Āchāryas and there have been a very large number of commentaries on the Bhagvad Gita. In fact, the copious commentary literature on the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and Bhagvad Gita is still continuing to develop in our own times.

4. The Vedāngas – the Limbs* of the Veda

In its comprehensive sense, the Vedic literature includes the Vedanga literature also which began to develop even before the Upanishads. Mundaka Upanishad mentions 6 Vedāngas as follows: (i) Shikshā, (ii) Kalpa, (iii) Vyākarana, (iv) Nirukta, (v) Chhanda, and (vi) Jyotish. Each Vedānga attempts to explain one aspect of the Veda.

(i) Shiksha: It deals with the science of Vedic Phonetics. It is concerned with the sound, letters, pronunciation and the teaching and learning of these. Each Veda has its own system of Shikshā. Sage Panini is the author of the famous Paniniya Shikshā, the most important work of this branch. A book

*According to Vedic tradition, Vyākarana is the mouth, Jyotish the eyes, Nirukta the ears, Sikshā the nose, Kalpa the hand, and Chhandas are the feet of the vedic Purusha.

called Shikshā Sangraha contains a collection of 32 systems of Shikshā related to different recensions of the four Vedas. The other important works on Shikshā are by Yājnavalkya , Vashistha, Kātyāyan, Pārāshar, Keshav, Nārada and others.

It is due to this Vedānga that the system of Vedic recitation has remained intact from the very ancient times to the present day. The development of this branch amply demonstrates the profundity and vastness of the research and meticulous and unsparing work that was undertaken in ancient India to standardise and ensure throughout the vast length and breadth of India the correct pronunciation of Vedic Mantras. A given Vedic Shākhā is recited in the same way all over the country by Vedapāthis belonging to that Shākhā. It is due to the degree of perfection attained by this branch that the Vedic Mantras are pronounced with the same intonation, speed and strength and force – even the same gestures of hand movements – in different parts of India. The reason behind such an excessive care given to the perfection of Sikshā lies in the belief, as reported in the ancient Indian Vedic lore, that even the slightest inexactitude in the pronunciation of Vedic Mantras may be very harmful and may even bring about a result exactly opposite of what was desired.

(ii) Kalpa: The entire Kalpa literature is in the form of Sūtras because it was composed aphoristically. The need to have a detailed and precise understanding of Karmakānda gave rise to the vast literature of Kalpasūtras. The followers of the different Shākhās of the Veda had to perform the Vedic rites in slightly different manner. The Kalpasūtras handle this task of explaining these small differences. There are two major divisions of Kalpa – Shrauta and Smārta. The Shrauta sūtras which pertain to the first are related to the Vedic Karmakānda

and the Grihyasūtras which pertain to the second (Smārta) are related to various rituals and Sanskāras related to the life of a house holder. There is another category of Kalpa Sūtra which is known as Shulbhasūtra and which is related to science of geometry and architecture connected with the construction of sacrificial altars, fire-vessels and other related structures.

The Shrautasūtras are of three kinds depending upon the kind of usage to which the Vedic Mantras are put. Thus there are Sutras relating to Hotru (performing) Prayoga, Adhwaryu (priestly) Prayoga and the Oudgatru (musical) Prayoga. The Shrautasūtras are also divided according to each Veda. Shānkhyāyana and Āshwalāyana pertain to Rigveda, Māshaka Lāhyāyana and Drāhyāyana belong to Sāmaveda; Vaitāna Sūtra is related to Atharvaveda and there are various other Sutras related to Shukla and Krishna Sākhās of Yajurveda.

The sacrificial priest needs to have appropriate knowledge of all the Shrautasūtras connected with the four Vedas. In some of the sacrifices, as many as 16 priests are required. Three different kinds of Agnikundas (fire-vessels) are required for various rituals described in Shrautasūtras. The Grihya Sūtras literature is also vast and divisible according to different Vedas. Shānkhāyāyana, Shāmbavya and Āshwalāyana Grihya Sūtra are related to Rigveda; Gomila and Khādra belong to Sāmaveda; Kaushika Grihya Sūtra to Atharvaveda and more than half a dozen others to Yajurveda.

(iii) Vyākarana: It is looked upon as the mouth of the Vedas and is a principal part of the six Vedāngas. According to ancient tradition, the first exponent of Vyākarana was creator Brahmā. He was followed by Brihaspati, Indra, Bhardwāj and many other ancient grammarians. Pānini who, according to Indian tradition, lived 2900 years before the

beginning of Vikram era (200 years after the Mahabharata war) is the most celebrated author of Vyākarana and composed this science in the form of Sūtras by the grace of Lord Maheshwara. His famous work consisting of eight chapters, and for that reason called Ashtādhyāyi, contains 3996 Sūtras which deal with the correct usage of Vedic works and contains exhaustive rules of grammer. Muni Kātyāyan wrote an important metrical commentary called Vārtika on Panini's Ashtādhyāyi. However, the most important and authoritative work on Pānini is the Mahābhāsya of Patanjali (between 2000 to 1200 B.C.) and its verdict is regarded as final whenever a difference of opinion arises in the interpretation of Pānini's Sūtras. There have been innumerable commentaries on this work of Patanjali. In the Sanskrit literature there are innumerable references to other important works on Vyākarana like Mahā Vyākarana, Aindra, Chandra, Shakatāyana, Sphotāyana, Poushkara, Saraswata, Kaumara, etc.

In the 16th century AD., the method of the study of grammer pronounced by Pānini began to be replaced by new traditions and in this the Siddhānta Kaumudi of Bhattoji Dikshit and Prakriyā Sarvara of Nārāyana Bhatta are the most important.

(iv) Nirukta: Nirukta is a kind of commentary on Nighantu which is a collection of the names of the Vedic gods and difficult words of the Veda. It is believed that the Nighantu was composed by Prajāpati Kashyap. There are many commentaries on Nighantu but the commentary of Yāska is considered to be the most important and has become one of the six Vedāngas. There were many ancient methods and systems of Vedic interpretation before Yāska. By the time of Yāska (10th to 8th Century B.C.) the original meaning of

many words had become obscure and there was no certainity of their meanings. There have been several commentaries on Nirukta such as those of Durgāchārya, Skanda Maheshwara and Vararuchi. There are also Vedic Koshas or lexicons other than Nirukta which are of great help in the interpretation of Vedic Mantras.

(v) Chhanda: The science dealing with the prosody of Vedic Mantras is called Chhanda Shāstra. Maharishi Pingals work Chhandovichiti is an important work on Vedic prosody. There have been several commentaries on this work. It takes into account not only Vedic Mantras but also others. There are mainly seven Vedic metres, namely, Gāyatri, Ushnik, Anushtubh, Brihati, Pankti, Trishtubh, and Jagati. According to Kātyāyana the highest number of Mantras in Rigveda are in Trishtubh (4,253), followed by Gāyatri (2,467), Jagati (1,350), Brihati (181). Although there are numerous metres in literature, only 50 metres are found in the Sanskrit literature. Maharishi Pingal's work is not the only work on Chhanda Shāstra, rather, there has been, even prior to his work, a continuous tradition of books on this Vedānga by great teachers such as Koshtuki, Yāska, Kashyapa and Māndavya.

(vi) Jyotish: By Jyotish here is meant both the sciences of astronomy and astrology. The importance of this Vedānga is obvious from the fact that it is considered to be the eyes of the Veda Purusha. The references to Jyotish Vigyān are found in Rigveda, Brāhmanas, Upanishads and Buddhist Jātakas. In Vishnu Purāna it is considered a part of 18 Vidyās – the Vidyās that were taught in the famous Taksha Shilā Vishwavidyālaya.

Astronomy is concerned with the positions of moon, planets and Sun and stars in the cosmos. This science was greatly developed in ancient India and observatories were

built to determine the relative position of celestial objects with great accuracy. The Jantar-Mantar in Delhi and Jaipur are the remnants of such relatively recent observatories.

Astrology is concerned with the study of deeper (not the deepest spiritual) nature and forces behind the appearances. It is an extremely intricate, complex and elaborate system in which the position and movements of Sun, Moon and Planets are used as hieroglyphs or symbols to get a peep or insight into the hidden nature, character and future of individuals and – though less accurately – even of collectivities. Given the place, the date and the time of a query or of the birth of an individual and the Lagna or the ascending sign of the zodiac – one of the twelve signs of the zodiac in which astrology divides the narrow belt of the sky through which the sun appears to move consecutively through the course of a year – at such a time, a horoscope or a birth chart may be easily cast for that nativity (individual) by any good astrologer with the help of an astrological calender (called Panchāng) which readily provides accurate information about Lagna and the position of the Planets, Sun and Moon. By the study of a horoscope, good Indian astrologers have been known since times immemorial, to acquire a deep insight into the nature and character of the native and make very surprising and often very accurate forecasts through the intuitive use of the very profound and elaborate rules and determinations and an astute balancing of often conflicting influences that must always be active at any given time, to a greater or lesser degree, in any birth-chart. It was very common in ancient India for the kings to have royal astrologers who helped them in the conduct of their affairs by providing them a peep into the future and accurate information on auspicious times for

various performances and for new ventures. On the birth of a royal child, the royal astrologers used to prepare an accurate birth-chart and brief the king on the nature, character and endowments of the child and what the future had in store for him/her. It is well known how the royal astrologers had made the accurate forecast about the future of child Siddhārtha (Lord Buddha) that he will be either a most mighty emperor (Chakravorty Samrāt) or a great divine Teacher.

The Sun-god is supposed to be the original author of Jyotish and others like sage Garga have followed him in writing on this Vedānga. Among the great astronomers and astrologers of India the name that stands out most is that of Varāhamihira. Jyotish has been an important factor in the development of some branches of mathematics like geometry and algebra. Bhāskarāchārya of 12th century A.D. is regarded as foremost among the mathematicians and astrologers of the middle ages. According to references in works attributed to Nārada, Kashyapa and Pārāsara, the names of the 18 Āchāryas who are regarded as the originators of the science of Jyotish are: Brahmā, Sūrya, Vashistha, Atri, Manu, Soma, Lomasa, Marichi, Angirā, Vyāsa, Nārada, Saunak, Bhrigu, Chyawan, Yavan, Garga, Kashyap and Pārāsara.

Among all the Siddhāntas (principals) which are available from the writings of the Āchāryas, Sūrya Siddhānta is considered to be the most important. Varāhamihira who speaks of 5 systems of Jyotish in his famous book Pancha Siddhāntikā also considers this to be the most important. Another important name in Indian Jyotish Shastra is that of Āryabhatta (500 A.D.).

5. The Upavedas:

These are four in number, namely, Āyurveda,

Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda and Arthashāstra corresponding respectively to Rig, Yajur, Sām and Atharva Vedas. Āyurveda as the name suggests, is related to the sustenance, protection and maintenance of long life. Dhanvantari is looked upon as the originator of Āyurveda. It is believed that besides Dhanvantari, treatises on this vast subject have also been composed by Brahmā, the Ashwini Kumārs – the twin gods from whom Dhanvantari is supposed to have received the basic knowledge of Āyurveda – Indra, Bhardwaja, Atri, Agnivesha and others. Subsequently Charak collected all this knowledge in his book called Charak Samhitā. This was followed by Sushruta and Vagbhatta Samhitās, the two other most important works available on Āyurveda. These three Samhitās are collectively called Brihat-Trayi. Āyurveda treats the whole man and not just the specific diseases. Pharmacology, Kāmasutra and the science of rejuvination is also part of Āyurveda. Sushruta has written on rejuvenation and Vātsāyana has written the Kāmashāstra. The object of writing on Kāmashāstra seems to have been not to encourage indulgence but to assist in the regulation of sex-life.

According to tradition, the originator of Dhanurveda – the science of archery in particular and warfare in general – is Lord Shankara himself. Among the ancients, the name of Vishwāmitra is most prominently associated with this Upaveda for which the most ancient works are not available. Some of the well known works are Dhanurvidhi, Drauna Vidyā and Dhanurveda Samhitā. There is also reference to the existence of Dhanurveda, Dhanu-Chandrodaya and Dhanus-Pradeep, the first two of these are supposed to have 60,000 Slokas each.

Gandharva Veda, originating from Sāmaveda, deals with music and dance. The most important work in Sanskrit on

music, dance and drama is the Nātya Shāstra of Bharat Muni which draws from earlier works by Nandikeshwara, Nārada and Hanumān. There are two Samhitās also on this Nātya Shāstra, namely, Dwādasha Sahasri and Shat Sahasri. Another important but much later work (A.D. 1300) is the Sangeet Ratnakar of Shārangadeva. Since this work, there has been a vast literature on music, dance and drama till the present day. Traditionally, the primary object of this science was spiritual, that is, to give expression to one's deepest emotions towards the divine.

The fourth Upaveda is the Arthaveda or Arthashāstra which deals with socio-economic and political systems and with the individual aquisition of material things and political power. Under this head, Nītishāstra, Shilpashāstra and famous sixty-four kalās (arts) and other physical and metaphysical subjects – Shastras and Tantras – are also included.

The names of the 64 Kalās depend on the classification adopted. The classification of the 64 Kalās are so numerous that their actual number, when all put together, runs at least into hundreds if not thousands. For example, Shukraniti, which lists 64 most important arts recognizes the existence of many more. In the later literature we find the description of 64 arts or Kalās that were expected to be cultivated by a cultured lady. These include, besides cooking and care of body, music, dancing, painting, garland-making, flower decoration, use and care of dress and ornaments, sewing, elementary carpentry, repair of household tools and articles, reading, writing, understanding of different languages, composing poems, understanding dramas, physical exercises, recreation and preparing toys for children, etc.

There are innumerable Tantras for worship of different

gods and for different objects. Pāshupata Tantra deals with the worship of Lord Pashupati (Shiva) and Panchratra Tantra by Nārada deals with the worship of Vishnu. This Tantra recognises four principles of Vishnu, namely, Vāsudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha in which Lord Vāsudeva is the Supreme. Worship of Vāsudeva by thought, word and deed is the goal of this Tantra.

Like the Kalās and Tantras, the number of Shāstras that must have existed in the past is also innumerable. In Mahābhārata Shānti Parva there is a reference to 300 Shāstras and seven Mahātantras. Some of most famous among the Shāstras are: Akshara Shāstra attributed to sage Vālmiki and dealing with numerals and sciences like arithmetic, geometry, etc., Sabda Shāstra dealing with sound and echoes of moving and non-moving objects; Lakshana Shāstra dealing with determination of deeper things on the basis of outer signs; Sakuna Shāstra determining the good and bad omens on the basis of the sounds of birds, works of human beings etc.; Vāstu Shāstra dealing with the science or art of buildings and houses especially pertaining to the aspect of auspiciousness and harmony of a structure with its surroundings and between its different parts; Shilpa Shāstra deals with various kinds of constructions and Vishwakarmā and Maya are famous names associated with this Shāstra; Supa Shastra dealing with the highly developed and the most elaborate science of cooking; Samudrika Shāstra dealing with the auspicious marks on the body of divine beings, and palmistry; Visha Shāstra dealing with various kinds of poisons and their antidotes; Chitrakarma Shāstra dealing with pictures and drawings; Malla Shāstra dealing with wrestling, gymnastics and other parts; Parakāyā Pravesh dealing with the entry into another body (abandoning

one's own worn-out body); Mahendrajāla dealing with the science of magic; Saudāmini Kalā by sage Matanga dealing with the attraction of phenomenon and objects by their shadows; Ashwa and Gaja Shastras dealing with the upkeep and breeding of horses and elephants, and many many more. Most of the original works are not available or traceable now and are perhaps lost to our age forever but the fact that they existed at some point of time in our past is a sufficient proof of the existence of a very great, profusely creative and an all encompassing spiritual culture in India.

The most famous work of Arthashastra is by Kautilya. The enunciations of Bhishma and Vidura of Mahābhārata age are prior to this work but most of the subsequent works on Arthashastra rely on Kautilya's work.

6. Mahābhārata – The Panchama Veda

The Mahābhārata is looked upon by some as the fifth Veda. Yājnavalkya in his Smriti gives the list of 14 Vidyās as follows: the four Vedas (including Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upanishads) and six Vedāngas as 10 Vidyās and the Dharma Shāstras, Purānas, Mimāmsā and Nyāya each as one Vidyā. Along with the vast literature of various Smritis and Dharma Sūtras, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyana are also included into the category of Dharma Shāstra. The four Upavedas are also looked by Yājnavalkya as part of the four Veda. Vishnupurāna counts the Upaveda as separate Vidyās and thus arrives at a count of 18 Vidyās.

In Indian tradition, though much historical material may be found in the Puranas, the Mahābhārata and the Vālmiki Rāmāyana alone are looked upon as Itihāsa. In the classification adopted here, the Mahabharata is separated from the Dharma Shāstra category and Mimāmsā and Nyaya are both counted

under the heading of Sad Darshana (six philosophical systems) to leave the total number of Vidyās (14 or 18) unaltered. The Bhagavad Gitā which is looked upon as the Bible of Hinduism and recognized as the foremost spiritual scripture in the world is a part of the great Māhābhārata. The Bhagavad Gita is the Vedantic work and wonderfully synthesizes the six philosophical systems. The Mahabharata is the epic of the soul and religious and ethical mind and social and political ideals and culture and life of India. It is said popularly of it and with a certain measure of truth that whatever is in Bhārata is in the Mahābhārata and whatever is not in the Mahābhārata is not in Bhārata.

7. Sad Darshana

The tradition of philosophy in India is very old. Based on the Veda several systems of philosophy flourished all of which always accept the authority of Veda and have been based on spiritual experience – as signified by the name Darshan (sight) as opposed to Western philosophical systems which are more or less purely mental. These systems are: Nyāya, Vaisheshika, Sānkhya, Yoga, Poorva (Karma) Mimāmsā and Uttara (Shāririka) Mimāmsa or Vedānta. Although the apparent differences among these philosophical systems are very great, attempts have been made to arrive at a synthesis of these systems because ultimately they all look up to the Vedas for their validity.

Nyāya which deals with the analysis of mental process of knowing was initiated by sage Gautam and Vātsāyana's is an important commentary on it. Vaisheshika Shastra which is supplementary to Nyāya was written by sage Kanāda. Sage Kapila is the author of Sānkhya which takes the whole existence as entirely subjective and by a separation of Purusha

(the witness soul) and Prakriti (the active nature) enables one to achieve liberation from all suffering. Yoga system is actually the practical side of Sānkhya. Sage Patanjali, famous the world over for his Yoga Sūtras, is the author of this. Control of body, mind and heart forms the subject matter of the eight-fold steps taught in this Shāstra. The authorship of Poorva Mimāmsā is attributed to sage Gemini and of Uttara Mimāmsā (Brahma Sutra) to sage Bādarāyana (Vyāsa). There have been copious commentaries and commentaries on commentaries on these philosophical systems and the literature continues to grow even in our own times.

8. Purānas

The word Purānā means old and the Purānas are so called because, although not as old as the Vedas, they are supposed to refer to the most ancient knowledge. According to tradition, Brahmā received the knowledge contained in the Purānas from the Supreme Lord. He transmitted it to his four mind-born sons who in turn transmitted it to sage Nārada. Vedavyāsa, who is credited with the authorship of 18 Purānas, received it from Nārada. The most important of these Purānas is Bhāgavata which has been considered by some Vaishnava Yogis like Sri Krishna Prem as the greatest of all the compositions (including Vedas, Upanishad and the Gitā) in Sanskrit language. According to Bhāgavata, the name of the 18 Purānas along with the number of Slokas contained by each (in bracket) are as follows: 1. Brahma Purāna (10,000), 2. Padma Purāna (55,000), Vishnu Purāna (23,000), 4. Shiva Purāna (24,000), 5. Bhāgavata Purāna (18,000), 6. Nārada Purāna (25,000), 7. Mārkandeya Purāna (9,000), 8. Agni Purāna (15,400), 9. Bhavishya Purāna (14,500), 10. Brahmavaivarta Purāna (18,000), 11. Linga Purāna (11,000),

12. Varāha Purāna (24,000), 13. Skanda Purāna (81,100), 14. Vāmana Purāna (10,000), 15. Kurma Purāna (17,000), 16. Matsya Purāna (24,000), 17. Garuda Purāna (19,000) and 18. Brahmānda Purāna (12,000). Thus there are altogether 4,10,000 Slokas in these 18 Purānas.

Besides these Purānas there are also innumerable Upapurānas. There are references to these in the Purānic literature. The names of the 29 Upapurānas are as follows: 1. Sanat Kumāra, 2. Narasimha, 3. Brihannāradiya, 4. Shivadharmottar, 5. Durvāsās, 6. Kāpila, 7. Mānava, 8. Ushnas, 9. Vāruna, 10. Āditya, 11. Kālikā, 12. Sāmba, 13. Nandikeshwar, 14. Saura, 15. Pārāsara, 16. Māheshwar, 17. Vāshistha, 18. Bhārgava, 19. Ādi, 20. Mudgal, 21. Kalki, 22. Devi, 23. Mahābhāgavat, 24. Devi Bhāgavat, 25. Vāyu, 26. Brihadhamottar, 27. Parānanda, 28. Pashupati and 29. Harivamsa which is also looked upon as an appendix or attachment to Mahābhārata. The 100,000 Slokas count of the Mahābhārata's length includes the Harivamsa too.

9. Dharma Shastras

The word "Dharma Shastra" is largely connected with the Smritis and all that is in conformity with the Vedas. The Dharma Shastra literature begins with the Dharma Sutras of Guatam, Budhāyan and Āpastambha belonging to a period between 7th to 4th century B.C. In due course, this literature flourished in countless Smritis. There may be over 100 Smritis but the foremost among them all is the one by Manu on which there have been countless commentaries. The other important Smritis are by Yājnavalkya, Vashistha, Pārāsara, Nārada, Kātyāyana etc. Some of the Smritis are in prose but there are many in poetic form also.

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