



Sri Aurobindo on the Hindu Scriptures

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Synopsis:

Aurobindo edited the Journal **Arya** from 1914 to 1921. **The Secret of Veda** was given the place of honour in it. Every chapter of **The Life Divine** was headed by a few epigraphs from the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. Sri Aurobindo was able to see the link between Veda and Upanishad on the one hand, and on the other, between the Vedic world of dynamic symbolism and his own inner world of aspiration and spiritual effort. Aurobindo edited the Journal **Arya** from 1914 to 1921. **The Secret of Veda** was given the place of honour in it. Sri Aurobindo's aim in his **Essays on the Gita** was not to add one more scholastic study or doctrinal tract to the existing Himalayan heap, but to discover and present the essential message from the surely local and temporal. Sri Aurobindo has set forth in his **Essay**, the ancient and perennial and forever pertinent wisdom of the Gita.

Keywords: Veda, Upanishad, Gita, synthesis, Rishi, tapasya, symbolism

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Introduction

Sri Aurobindo edited the Journal **Arya** from 1914 to 1921. **The Secret of Veda** was given the place of honour in it. Every chapter of **The Life Divine** was headed by a few epigraphs from the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. In the outset itself, Sri Aurobindo refutes the false Aryan-Dravidian theory connected by the British. He states the language of the hymns clearly point to a particular worship or spiritual culture as the distinguishing sign of the Aryan – a worship of Light of the Powers of Light and a Self-discipline based on the culture of the "Truth? And the aspiration to Immortality – Ritam and Amritam. There is no reliable indication of any racial difference (SABCL, Vol 10, p35).

Sri Aurobindo studied the Veda in the original. The results were interesting:

... far more interesting to me was the discovery of a considerable body of profound. Psychological thought and experience reflected in these ancient hymns. And the importance of this element increased in my eyes when I found, first, that the mantras of the Veda, illuminated with a clear and exact light psychological experiences of my own for such I found psychology or in the teachings of Yoga or of Ve-

onobscure passages and ideas of the Upanishads to which, previously, I could attain no exact meaning and gave at the same time a new sense to much in the Puranas. (SABCL, Vol.10, p.36-37).

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar states that Sri Aurobindo was able to see the link between Veda and Upanishad on the one hand, and on the other, between the Vedic world of dynamic symbolism and his own inner world of aspiration and spiritual effort (451).

Sri Aurobindo was not able to discover any evidence of Aryan – Dasyu confrontation in the Vedas.

Over the period of time, the Brahmanas or scattered passages in the Upanishads could not reflect the Lights of the Veda.

The Brahmanas labour to fix and preserve the minutiae of the Vedic ceremony... The Rishis of the Upanishads ... used the text of ancient mantras as a prop or an authority for their own intuitions and perceptions, or else the Vedic word was a seed of thought and vision by which they recovered old truths in new forms

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The ritual portion (Karma Kanda) was defined by the Brahmanas and Janana Kanda by the Upanishads. In order to understand the Veda, Yaska's Nirukta and Sayana's Bhashya were composed, Sayana emphasized on ritualistic interpretation. In the modern period Tilak and Swami Dayananda sought to revive the message of the Veda/ Sri Aurobindo, through tapasya, sought to unlock the hidden spiritual treasures of the Veda:

The Veda has a double aspect ... the two though closely related, must be kept apart. The Rishis arranged the substance of their thought in a system of parallelism by which the same deities were at once internal and external power of universal Nature, and they managed its expression through a system of double values by which the same language served for their worship in both aspects. But the psychological sense predominates... The Veda is primarily intended to serve for spiritual enlightenment and self-culture (SABCL, Vol `10, p 30).

When the Veda speaks of Yajna, of horse and cow, of dawn and night beyond the physical images lies the symbol meaning. Yajna could also mean conservation, ghita (butter) could also mean dedicated thought, cow and horse could also mean consciousness and force, or light and energy. The Vedic rishis wanted a total transformation by Yajna—by giving up falsehood and incurring the bliss of immortality.

Sri Aurobindo states:

Our sacrifice is the offering of all our gains and works to the powers of the higher existence. The whole world is a dumb and helpless sacrifice in which the soul is bound as a victim self-offered to unseen Gods. The liberating word must be found, the illuminating hymn must be framed in the heart and mind of man and his life must be turned into a conscious and voluntary offering in which the soul is no longer the victim, but master of the sacrifice, ... The image of this sacrifice is sometimes that of a journey or voyage... it has to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will. It has to cross as in a ship the waters of existence ... its aim is to arrive at the far off ocean of light and infinity. (SABCL, Vol 11, p 27, 28)

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Veda is not narrow or sectarian but a dynamic, intuitive one:

So understood the Rig Veda ceases to be an obscure, confused and barbarous hymeneal, it becomes the high – aspiring song of Humanity, its chants are episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in its immortal ascension (SABCL, Vol 11, p 34,35)

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar succinctly explains the Himalayan efforts of Sri Aurobindo to unlock the meaning of the Veda. When Sri Aurobindo was engaged in availing the thrust of the Veda's meaning, he had to find the clues to the prescribed outer action or sacrifice, and their exact implications for the inner sacrifice or consecration in other words to discover the numerous correspondences between the cosmic system or the outer universe and the microcosmic world of the individual human entity. Sri Aurobindo found it sometimes convenient to work backwards from Purana to Upanishad and Upanishad to Veda. Like tracking a known river to its mountainous source, and having done so, he was able to return, refreshed from the primordial fount, to clarify and purify the lower reaches where the river of the Indian spiritual tradition had overspread itself or broken off into a wondering trivial streams cost itself in the desert sands of dead formation and enslaving of superstitious, Sri Aurobindo thus traced the origins of the Puranic and Vedantic Seven-fold cosmic scheme (Satyaloka, Tapoloka, Janaloka, Maharloka, Seven Psychological principles or states of existence (Sat Chit-Ananda-Vijnana-many Prana-anna) to the Vedic threefold division – Sat Chit-ananda and above Dyausantarilesa-prithi; below, and the link world of supermind or Brihad-dyau of Satyanritan-brihat (Truth-Right-Vast) (454).

The Microcosm is the macrocosm. The same law supported the universe without. Sri Aurobindo states:

For as the Gods have built the series of the cosmic worlds, even so they labour to build up the series of ordered states and ascending degrees in man's consciousness from the mortal condition to the crowning immortality



... pure thought and feeling are man's sky, his heaven; this whole vitalistic existence of emotion, passion, affections of which desire is the pivot, forms for him a mid-world, body and natural living awe his earth. ... he has to break through and out beyond these firmaments of earth and heaven; conquering first possession of the solar worlds, entering on to his highest Height he has to learn how to dwell in the triple principle of immortality. (SABCL, Vol 11, p 25, 26)).

During the first year of the *Arya* along with "Secret of the Veda" 'Selected Hymns' also appeared. A few more appeared in subsequent issues. An enlarged edition of **Hymns to the Mystic Fire** also appeared in 1952. These included Hymns from all the ten mandalas. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar states "Everywhere he has brought his intuitive mind to dispel the obscurity in symbolism or clear up the ambiguity in phrasing." (457). The Rig Veda is highly rich in symbols. Sri Aurobindo's insights are astonishing.

In the *Arya* in 1914-15 and 1915-16 Sri Aurobindo's commentaries on the Isha and Kena Upanishads appeared R.S.Mugali states that Sri Aurobindo "might have obtained in this Upanishad the thought seed which later grew up to the vast tree of his perfect life-vision" and become the Life Divine (Iyengar, 460). The Isha has eighteen stanzas. In Aurobindo states that the central idea of the Upanishad is a reconciliation and harmony of fundamental opposites, the conscious word and phenomenal nature, renunciation and enjoyment, action in nature and the soul's freedom, the one stable Brahmin and the multiple movement, the state of Being and the dynamics of Becoming, the active word and the indifferent Akshara Brahman, Vidya and Avidya birth and non-birth, works and knowledge. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar states that aa, " this is for habitation of the world, it is only through the awakening of the consciousness of such constant Divine participation that the individual can escape from the bondage of egoistic desire. To renounce the prison house of the Ego is to gain sovereignty of the universe to remove wisely is to live a hundred years have, nor feel the burden or taint of action. To move out of ego's cabinning categories is to be able to see the one

in everything and everything in the One and live the truth that the microcosm is the macrocosm (460). Sachchidananda is the Lord. He is both impersonal infinite existence and self-aware and self-blissful.

The Isha Upanishad affirms life. It denies neither spirit nor matter.

The Kena is longer than the Isha. The Kena deals with the issue of consciousness. It explains the stair of consciousness. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar states, The Life we live, the thoughts we think, the words we speak are not the highest possible they are conclude and perverse formations which however, contain the infinitely purer and nobler possibilities, and our aspiration and action should be directed to the realization consciousness a getting away from here". (462). In this context Sri Aurobindo states:

The language of the Upanishad makes it strikingly clear that it is no metaphysical abstraction, no void silence, no indeterminate Absolute attach is offered to the soul that aspires, but rather the absolute of all that is possessed by it herein the relative world of its sojourning. All here in the mental is a growing light, consciousness and life, all these in the supramental is an infinite life, light and consciousness. That which is here shadowed, is there found, the incomplete here is there the fulfilled. The Beyond is not an annulation, but a transformation of all that we have herein our world of forms, it is Sovran mind of this mind, secret life of this life the absolute severe which supports and justifies our limited senses.

It is not by abandoning life on earth ... it is here, ihaiva in this moral life and body that immortality must be won, here in this lower Brahmen and by this embodied soul that the Higher must be known and possessed. (SABCL, Vol 12, p 161, 162, 207).

The Gita has earned primary in Sri Aurobindorian thought. The Gita is a grand synthesis. Sri Aurobindo states:

The Gita starts from this Vedantic Synthesis and upon the basis of its essential ideas builds another harmony of the three great means and



powers, love, knowledge and works, through which the soul of man can directly approach and cast itself into the Eternal. (SABCL, Vol 13, p 7).

Sri Aurobindo began **Essays on the Gita** in the Arya in August 1916 and came to an end in July 1920.

Conclusion

The Gita holds an important place in the spiritual literature of India. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar observes: "Sri Aurobindo's aim in his **Essays on the Gita** was not to add one more scholastic study or doctrinal tract to the existing Himalayan heap, but to discover and present the essential message from the surely local and temporal... Sri Aurobindo has set forth in his **Essay**, the ancient and perennial and forever pertinent wisdom of the Gita, "the living message it still brings for man the external sector and discoverer to guide him through present circuits and possible sleeper ascent of his life up to the luminous heights of this spirit." (SABCL, Vol 11, p 552).

In the Gita, the teacher is a divine personality. The pupil is his corrode and Kisman. Krishna and Arjuna are compared to Nara and Narayana and the two birds in the Rig Veda (7.164.21).

Sri Aurobindo states:

Arjuna and Krishna, this human and this divine, stand together not as seers in the peaceful heritage of meditation, but as fighter and holder of the reins in the clamorous field, in the midst of the hurting shafts, in the chariot of battle (SABCL, Vol 13, p 16).

K.R.Srinivasan Iyengar states: The drama of the Arjuna Krishna dialectic stems from the eighteenth chapter of the Gita and comprises three high Arches of wide-glancing. But in the Gita's integral vision, the three Arches - Works, knowledge, love - make a single bridge of Transcendence and Realization, for it leads the puzzled Arjuna (and all such Naras) from irresolution to determination, from bewilderment to enlightenment, from distraction to love and surrender. The quality of works will be a function of the knowledge sustaining them and whom knowledge is lifted by an absolute love, works-knowledge - love

become a triune blaze of realization (464).

Sri Aurobindo explains coherently the concept of Avatar and the significance of word Krishna's message:

... there are two aspects of the divine birth, one is a descent, the birth of God in humanity, the Godhead manifesting itself in the human form and nature, the external Avatar, the other is an ascent, the birth of man into the Godhead, man rising into the divine nature and consciousness. (SABCL, Vol 13, p 140)

The **Essays on the Gita** was first published in book form in 1922. It is the most widely read of Sri Aurobindo's major prose works.

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