CHAPTER V

A TRUE INTERPRETATION

OF THE VEDAS:

NEED FOR A NEW SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE
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Need for a New Science of Language

V.1. Introduction

According to Sri Aurobindo, "a hypothesis of the sense of Veda must always proceed, to be sure and sound, from a basis that clearly emerges in the language of the Veda itself." But the Veda 'with its obscure and antique' language abounds in unique philological difficulties which create obstacles for the interpreters to fix the sense of the hymns. On the other hand Sri Aurobindo strongly holds: "No interpretation of the Veda can be sound which does not rest on a sound and secure philological basis...". The first thing necessary to proceed in this light is to understand the nature of the language through which the Rṣis have expressed the hymns. The language of the Veda in a higher sense is symbolic by its nature. The mantras of the Veda are but spiritual experiences of the Rṣis, the seers. These experiences are presented symbolically through words charged with spiritual and occult power. It is perhaps only through symbols and images that the supra-sensuous and suprarational phenomena can be expressed more suggestively than

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1 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 32
2 Ibid., p. 45
3 A Rṣi is called seer (draṣṭā) as he has seen the mantra (मन्त्रो मन्त्रद्वाय). He also possessed a super-natural faculty of hearing by which he could hear the mantra. So he was called Kavi, the hearer of the Truth (कवि सत्यावल). Sri Aurobindo says "The Rishi was not the individual composer of the hymn, but the seer of an eternal truth and an impersonal knowledge". (SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 8)
the language manipulated by mind. Since the Vedic mantras are ‘inspired from higher hidden planes of consciousness’ and convey the great universal, eternal and impersonal Truth which the ancient seers received in their illumined minds, therefore, the language of the Veda is not an intellectual composition but “...a rhythm heard, a divine word that came vibrating out of the infinite to the inner audience of the man who had previously made himself fit for the impersonal knowledge”.4 The man referred to here is no other than a Ṛṣi and there were as many Ṛsis to whom the mantra of the Veda were revealed. These Ṛsis, the seers of the Vedic mantras, devoted to a life of spirit, discovered certain line of development beyond the range of ordinary perception by means of their strength of discipline and achieved an all total inner progress. Whatever they achieved by their tapasyā,5 they cast them into a veiled language which they called ‘Mantra’. Therefore the Vedic mantras have their

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4 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 8

5 The mantras or the rks, as Yāskācārya observes in his Nirukta (2.11), reveal themselves to the Ṛṣis in tapas, not in any other way. In the words of Yāskācārya, “the mantra came to the Ṛṣis who were doing tapas, therefore they became Ṛsis, in that lies the ṛshihood of the Ṛsis.” तद्वित्तम् तपस्यामानन् ब्रह्मवर्धनम् अत्यन्तर्थित् । तत्तौपभवन् । तत्स्योऽभवन् । तात्त्विकम् । Taittiriya Aranyaka II. 9 also has a similar passage like this.
source in the soul of the Rsis. They are inspired words; words of power and light and illumination. A mantra, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, “is a power and light that comes from the overmind inspiration or from very high plane of intuition.” So mantra is an inspired and intuitive utterance and at the same time rhythmic. It is an inspired and revealed seeing. It came out of the “realization of some inmost truth of God and self and man and Nature and cosmos and life and thing and thought and experience and deed.” In another significant passage Sri Aurobindo says that mantra “is a direct and most heightened rhythmic Word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with the sight and the presence of the very self, the inmost reality of things and with its truth and with the divine soul-forms of it, the godheads which are born from the living Truth. Or, let us say, it is a

6 The Rgveda itself declares that the mantras reveal themselves to the one who is a seer.

7 Another name for mantra is āk which has come from the root ṛc, meaning ‘to shine’, ‘to gleam’. So āk means a word of illumination. This illumination is another characteristic of the ākṣ. Sri Aurobindo considers āk as “a power of Realisation in the illuminating mind.” (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 310). Elsewhere he remarks that a āk “brings with it illumination” (SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 467) and “lights up the mind with the rays of knowledge.” (SABCL, Vol.13, p. 310)

8 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol.12, p. 168

9 Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 199
supreme rhythmic language which seizes, holds upon all that is finite and brings into each the light and voice of its own infinite."\textsuperscript{10}

It "is the Word that carries the godhead in it, or the Power of the godhead, can bring it into the consciousness and fix there it and its workings, awaken there the thrill of the infinite, the force of something absolute, perpetuate the miracle of the supreme utterance."\textsuperscript{11} In order to have a proper understanding of this highest power of speech, the Vedic mantras and each word therein have to be understood in its true esoteric sense. This can never be done unless and until the interpretation of the Veda is done on the basis of a true investigation of the language in which the mantras are recorded. Because the Vedic Rṣis had another level of perception and a ‘word’ to them was far more dynamic and much more suggestive than the fixed sense of it. It is not that they had different meanings but they had multi-coloured dynamic suggestions that gives life and colour to the Vedas. These are ‘the profound and pregnant seed words of the Truth’. They cannot be understood by any one who is not possessed by a seer’s vision (ārṣadṛṣṭi).\textsuperscript{12} Because the Rṣis who received the mantras were not only great spiritual masters but also great occultists. “Whatever has been experienced or understood by the seer ascending to a higher plane of consciousness through tapas, has been presented not in an ordinary way directly, plainly and literally but in an extraordinary way and suggestively, not of course, deliberately but as a

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 200

\textsuperscript{11}Sri Aurobindo Archives and Research, April 1979, p. 19

\textsuperscript{12}Śaunaka in his Bṛhaddevatā (8:129) says, “The mantra is not perceptible to one who is not a Rṣi.” न प्रत्यक्षानवीणामातस्त नन्तः। Yāskacārya too, in his Nirukta (13:12) says that anyone who is not a Rṣi and who has not undergone any tapasyā cannot have the direct understanding of the Vedic mantras, न हि एवु प्रत्यक्षामात अनुष्ठानं अतपसः।
prerequisite of proper co-ordination between the experience and its verbal representation." The seer used inner means to produce both inner and outer results. Therefore, the Vedic hymns in their import have a double significance, one outer, the other inner. Sri Aurobindo admires the Vedic-experience in following words: "We are in the presence of a great scripture of the mystics with a double significance, one exoteric; the other esoteric, the symbols themselves have a meaning which makes them a part of the esoteric significance, an element in the secret teaching and knowledge." This is the reason for which the Vedic mantras are difficult to interpret.

V.2. Attempts at Interpretation the Vedas

Several attempts have been made to fix the sense of the Vedic Words yet each one is different in its method and findings. In the history of Vedic interpretations the Brähmaṇas and the Upaniṣads are said to be the first attempts made to reveal the sense of the Vedic texts. But the Brähmaṇas preserve the ritualistic significance of the Vedic hymns and the Upaniṣads revive the esoteric significance of them. The Brähmaṇas take up the task of conserving the forms and preserving the details of the Vedic ritual, of the myths, as well as of the traditions. But their effort obscures the truth rather than reveals it. Whereas the Upaniṣads seek to recover the 'lost knowledge' of the Veda by 'meditation and spiritual experience'. For the Upaniṣadic thinkers the Vedic mantras were means for realization of the truth of the spirit. They did not attempt to discover, through their realization, the verbal truth of the mantras. As a result the

13 Satayprakash Singh, Vedic Symbolism, p. 7
14 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 11, p. 8
true primal etymological sense was neglected and the accurate significance of the text was missed by them. Next to the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaṇiṣads is the place of Nirukta of Yāskācārya. It belongs to the period of the Brāhmaṇas.\textsuperscript{15} Pāṇini mentioned about Nirukta and it was also known to Kātyāyana and Patañjali.\textsuperscript{16} It is the earliest attempt 'at preserving and interpreting' the Veda outside of the Upaṇiṣads. It is said to be the first treatise which offers some systematic method towards interpreting the Rgveda. Besides the derivation and etymology it gives complete or partial explanations of about six hundred mantras of the Rgveda. But the explanation found there is so much obsessed with etymological problems that it often misses the central thought or theme of the hymns and becomes an arduous exercise in futility. The reason might be, by the time Nirukta came to be compiled much of the significance of the ṛks was already forgotten. During that time also there was much uncertainty with regard to the meaning of the ṛks as the original meaning of most of the words had been lost. It is evident from the language of Yāska that by the time he wrote Nirukta the Sanskrit language had come to a stage, which was practically free from Vedic peculiarities and had assumed a character almost identical with the classical Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{17} Yāska was good as a lexicographer but he appears to

\textsuperscript{15} The actual date of Yāska, the author of Nirukta is not yet clear. But all scholars unanimously agree that he lived in an age not later than 500 B.C. (see Laksman Sarup, Nirukta and Nighaṇṭu, p. 54)

\textsuperscript{16} On the basis of Pāṇini's rule Yāskādibhyo gotre (2.4.63) it is generally accepted that Yāska preceded Pāṇini. However, there is still controversy among the scholars whether Yāska mentioned by Pāṇini and Yāska, the author of Nirukta are same or different. (For detail see Yāska's Nirukta, by Bishnupada Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 1-6)

\textsuperscript{17} For a detail information about the language of the Nirukta see, Mantrini Prasad, Language of the Nirukta, D.K., Publishing House, Delhi, 1975.
be was a poor etymologist. He borrowed his etymological notions from the popular etymologies as well as from the Brāhmaṇas and other sources such as tradition, folklore, grammarians and so on. Hence these etymologies are phonologically loose and philologically unscientific. Hence Yāska’s interpretation of Vedic words does not provide any light to the esoteric sense of the Vedic mantras. Sri Aurobindo observes that Yāska, as a lexicographer, provides some help in interpreting the Veda. Though some of the senses given by Yāska ‘can be confirmed as possible senses by a sound philology’, yet he is not much convincing.18

Even before Yāska there were many schools of Vedic interpretation. Yāska himself cites the names of Ādhitva, Ādhyātma, Ākhyaśāvaneśa, Naidāna, Purvayājñika, Yajñika, Parivrājaka, Vaiyakaraṇa and Nairukta. Besides these schools Yāska mentions names of sixteen grammarians and etymologists who left enduring impact upon the tradition of Vedic

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18 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 17
19 Nirukta, 13:9
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 2:16
22 Ibid., 6:9
23 Ibid., 7:23
24 Ibid., 5:2
25 Ibid., 4:11
26 Ibid., 1:12
27 Ibid., 2:16
interpretation. This is a long tradition of Nighantus and Niruktas.

Next to Yāska comes the name of Rgvedabhāṣya of Skandasvāmī (6th century A.D). He commented upon the 1st Astaka of the Rgveda. In this commentary Skandasvāmī explains every word of the verse in the same order as it occurs in the mantra and supports his evidences with the help of Nirukta, grammar, internal evidence and so on. This commentary, though incomplete, throws considerable light upon some of the obscure passages of the Rgveda.

Nārāyaṇa and Udgītha are two other commentators of Rgveda whose names come with the name of Skandasvāmī in Rgarthadīpikā of Venkaṭamādhava. Here Venkaṭamādhava says –

स्कन्दस्वामी नारायण उद्गीथ इति ते क्रमात्।
चक्रः सहैकृत्य ऋग्माण्यं पदवाक्यार्थगोचरम्।

These words of Venkaṭamādhava reveal that Skandasvāmī, Nārāyaṇa and Udgītha – all of them wrote the one commentary together. The commentary of the 1st Astaka of the Rgveda is available in the name of Skandasvāmī. A commentary on the tenth mandala of the Rgveda from fourth hymn to the second verse of the thirty-fourth hymn is available in

28 Āgriyāṇa, Audumbarāyāṇa, Aupamanyava, Aurnavābha, Kāṭhakya, Kautsa, Krauṣṭuki, Gārgya, Gālava, Carmaśīras, Taitiki, Vārṣyāyi, Śatabalāksya Maudgalya, Śākaṭāyana, Śakapūṇi, Śhautāṭhīvi. (For detail see: Yāska’s Nirukta, Bishnupada Bhattacharya, pp. 62-90)
29 Edited by C.K. Raja and published by Adyar Library and Research Institute, 1939.
30 Edited in four volumes by, L. Sarup, Lahore, 1939
31 Rgarthadīpikā, Vol. 1, p. 135
the name of Udgītha.32 No commentary of Nārāyaṇa is available yet. After Udgītha came Mādhava Bhaṭṭa who commented on the first Aṣṭaka of the Rgveda. His commentary is known as Rgvedavyākhyā.33 After him comes the name of Rgarthadīpikā of Veṅkaṭamādhava. This is a commentary on the whole of the Rgveda. In this commentary Veṅkaṭamādhava tries to reveal very briefly the meaning of all mantras of the Rgveda following the Yajñika tradition and supports the view that ‘Rgveda verses are interlinked with the sacrificial concepts and corollaries’.

Long after the above-mentioned commentators, Mādhava Vidyāranya34, popularly known as Śāyaṇa (1315-1387 A.D.35) writes his famous commentary. The Indian tradition of Vedic interpretation reaches its acme in the commentary of Śāyaṇa. It is this commentary that has gained the widest popularity and considerably influenced both Western and Eastern scholars in their understanding of the scripture. Śāyaṇa, in his Bhāṣya,36 takes Brāhmaṇas as his basis. He profusely quotes from Brāhmaṇas as well as Nighaṇṭu and Nirukta. He derives most of his materials from Mādhavabhaṭṭa, Veṅkaṭamādhava and his other predecessors. For the derivation of the words and their accentuation Pāṇini’s rules proved a great help to him. But his overemphasis on

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32 Edited By Vishva Bandhu under the title - Rgabhāṣya of Udgīthācārya, Lahore, 1935
33 Edited by C.K. Raja, Adyar Library, Madras; 1939
34 There is a controversy whether Mādhava and Śāyaṇa were same or different. On the relationship between Mādhava and Śāyaṇa, see Baladev Upadhyaya’s Ācārya Śāyaṇa aur Mādhava.
35 Aufrecht, Catalogue Catalogorum, p. 711
36 The commentary of Śāyaṇa is simply named by him as Rgabhāṣya. Rgveda with the commentary of Śāyaṇa is published in four-volumes by Vaidik Samsodhan Maṇḍal, Poona.
ritualism marred the beauty of thought and strangulated the inherent sublimity of the Vedic Riks. So the interpretation is full of inconsistencies and forced sense of ritualism throwing the text into a narrow exoteric mould... The deeper meaning and symbolism of the great scripture is lost here. The meaning given to the Vedic words, here, is often vague and there is no consistency in the connotation attached to the words. For example the word \( rta \) (ऋत) is translated to mean sacrifice, water, truth, gone, happy home, hymn of praise or prayer etc. He describes the gods in their outer form without any deeper sense and the stories of old kings and Rsis are accepted by him either with hesitation or they are given an alternative sense keeping in view the Puranic anecdotes. Hence the hymns lose their wealth of subtlety, suggestions and internal sense and esoteric significance in this commentary. Yet it is an indispensable work of erudition. It abounds in ‘numerous references, mentions of ancient authorities, traditions, lexicons, legends, alternative meanings, suggestions and other possible senses of words, verses and hymns, elucidation of accents and points, grammar and construction of sentences’. “Hence suffice it to say that its superb usefulness deserves to be admired with gratitude for its general helpfulness in considering the Mantras, Pada Pāṭha, derivations of word-forms, syntax of sentences.”37

Sri Aurobindo says – “At every step we are obliged to differ from it, but at every step we are obliged to use it. It is a necessary springing board, or a stair that we have to use for entrance, though we must leave it behind if we wish to pass forwards into the penetralia.”38

38 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 21
After Sāyaṇa there was a long gap in the field of Vedic interpretation. The interest in Vedic studies again grew more and more when many missionaries and administrators came from the West during British rule in India and got acquaintance with the wisdom of the East. Rudolf Roth (1821-1895) was the first and foremost to write on the Vedic thoughts. Next to him comes the name of Max Muller (1823-1904) who edited and translated the whole of the \textit{Rgveda}. Besides him H.H.Wilson's effort for the translation of entire \textit{Rgveda} on the basis of Sāyaṇa's \textit{Bhāṣya} in six volumes is still commendable. After him R.T.H Griffith did the translation of the whole of the \textit{Rgveda} which was published in two volumes in 1889. Apart from these scholars, Grassmann, Bothlingk, Geldner, Pischel, Bergaigne, Oldenberg, Ludder, Macdonnel, Luduig, Kaegie, Zimmermann, Benfey, Weber, Hillebrandt, Keith and many others contributed immensely to the Vedic interpretation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} In the year 1846, he published \textit{Zur-Literature und Geschichte des weds}. This book is on the literature and the history of the \textit{Veda}. The English translation of this book was published from Calcutta in the year 1880.
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{Rgveda}, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, was edited by Max Muller and was published in six different volumes in the series of 'Sacred Books of the East' in between the year 1849-73.
\item \textsuperscript{41} These Volumes were published between the year 1925-28, from Poona.
\item \textsuperscript{42} The second Edition of this was published from Benaras in the year 1896, and a third in the year 1926.
\item \textsuperscript{43} For more details see: \textit{A History of Indian Literature}, M. Winternitz, Vol. 1, Section 1; 'A companion to Sanskrit Literature by S.C Benarji, Appendix II.
\end{itemize}
The efforts and findings of the European Scholars prove that they draw both their inspiration and sustenance from Sāyana.44 As a result the *Veda* suffered most at their hands as they treated it ‘as the primitive work of a primitive people engaged in propitiatory rites to imaginary and anthropomorphic Nature-gods’. The European mind is more insistent in finding out or magnifying the references of history and sociology, costume and convention in the *Veda*. It does not make even the least attempt to unravel its symbolic or psychological significance. As a result the true sense of the Vedic hymns remained neglected. Sri Aurobindo observes: “The ancient scripture was delivered over to a scholarship laborious, bold in speculation, ingenious in its own flights of fancy, conscientious – according to its own lights, but ill-fitted to understand the method of the old mystic poets... The result has been of a double character, on the one side the beginnings of a more minute, thorough and careful as well as a freer handling of the problems of Vedic interpretations, on the other hand a final exaggeration of its apparent material sense and the complete obscuration of its true and inner secret.”45 The European mind was unable to understand the ideas hidden in the Vedic figures and parables. “What it found in Sayana and

44 Some of the European *Veda* Researchers, of course, did not care for the interpretation of Sāyana as to be any authority on the *Veda*. The pioneer of this anti-Sāyana school was Rodulf Roth. In the preface to his Sanskrit Woterbuch (which was first published in 7 volumes from St. Petersburg between the years 1852-75) he makes the following remarks: “...we do not believe... that Sayana better understood the expression of the Veda than any European exegete; on the contrary we believe that a conscientious European exegete may understand the Veda much more correctly and better than Sayana... we constantly hold that the writings of Sayana and of the other commentator must not be an authority to the exegete, but merely one of the means of which he has to avail himself in the accomplishment of his task.”

In the Brahmanas it has developed in the light of modern theories and modern knowledge; by ingenious deductions from the comparative method applied to philology, mythology and history by large amplifications of the existing data with the aid of ingenious speculation, by unification of the scattered indications available it has built up a complete theory of Vedic mythology, Vedic history, Vedic civilization which fascinates by its detail and thoroughness and conceals by its apparent sureness of method the fact that this imposing edifice has been founded, for the most part, on the sands of conjecture."46

Apart from the European scholars there are many Indian scholars who attempted to interpret the Vedas from different viewpoint. For example there are: historical interpretation of the Veda by Abinash Chandra Das47, geographical interpretation by Umesh Chandra Vidyaratna48, astronomical interpretation by Bal Gangadhar Tilak49 and scientific interpretation by T. Paramasiva Aiyar50.

46 Ibid.

47 Rigvedic India which was first published in the year 1920, from Calcutta and Rigvedic Culture which was published from Calcutta in 1935 as an extension of Rigvedic India are the two books where Abinasha Chandra Das gives a historical interpretation of the Veda.

48 Rigveda Samhita by Umesh Chandra Vidyaratna was first published from Calcutta. This book is the introduction to his complete commentary on the Veda which he wanted to publish in several volumes along with the commentaries of Sāyaṇa, Uvvaṭa, Mahidhara, R.C. Dutta etc. In this introductory part he has clearly mentioned about his new way of interpreting the Veda.

49 The Arctic Home of the Veda, published from Poona in 1903, and Vedic Chronology and Vedarīga Jyotisha, published from Poona in 1925, are the two books where Bal Gangadhar Tilak interprets the Veda on the basis of Astronomical facts.

50 The Riks, published from Bangalore in 1911 records T. Paramasiva Aiyar's views on the Veda.
B.G.Tilak accepts the general conclusions of the European interpreters. He examines the concept of the Vedic Dawn, the figure of the Vedic cows, as well as the astronomical data of the hymns in a unique way. His findings were same like Jacobi. Both of them are, respectively, of the view that Vedic civilization extended from 5000 B.C. to 3000 B.C. and from 4500 B.C. to 2500 B.C. Tilak bases his conclusions on passages from the Taittiriya Samhitā (VII.4.8) and the Tāndya Brāhmaṇa (V.9). He comes to the conclusion that the Aryans descended originally from the Arctic regions in the glacial period. But as Sri Aurobindo points out, "there is nothing in the Veda, as there is nothing in the present ethnological features of the country to prove that this descent took place near to the time of the Vedic hymns or was the slow penetration of a small body of fair-skinned barbarians into a civilized Dravidian peninsula."

T.Paramasiva Aiyar attempts to project the Rgveda as a "figurative representation of the geological phenomena belonging to the new birth of our planet after its long continued glacial death in the same period of terrestrial evolution." The explanations of both Tilak and Aiyar are bold and original but they do not reveal the significance of the Vedas themselves. Yet according to Sri Aurobindo, they are 'far more consistent and probable' than the interpretation of the Western Vedic scholars.

The remarkable attempt of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Ārya·Samāj, was to re-establish the Veda as 'a living

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51 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 24
52 Ibid., p. 29
religious scripture'. This was in fact the governing idea behind Dayananda’s interpretation of the *Veda*. According to him the teaching of *Veda* is ‘monotheistic’ and ‘the Vedic gods are different descriptive names of the one Deity;’ and ‘by a true understanding of the *Vedas* we could arrive at all the scientific truths which have been discovered by modern research.’ He concludes, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, that “there must inevitably be in the Veda a larger part of cosmology, the law of creation and of cosmos.” He asserts that the *Veda* contains the secret of creation and the laws governing the physical universe. In this manner *Veda* is considered by him to be an ‘infallible scripture’ and ‘a book of divine Truth’. Sri Aurobindo appreciates Dayananda’s interpretation and says, “In the matter of Vedic interpretation I am convinced that whatever may be the final complete interpretation, Dayananda will be honoured as the first discoverer of the right clues.”

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53 The English translation of Swami Dayananda Saraswati’s commentary on the *Vedas* was first published in 1974 from *Sarvadeshika Arya Pratinidhi Sabha*, New Delhi. The translation is done by Acharya Dharmadeva Vidya Martanda. The entire commentary on the *Veda* was planned to be published in 12 different volumes.

54 Sri Aurobindo, *SABCL.*, Vol. 10, p. 29


V.3. Sri Aurobindo’s Interpretation of the Veda

Though all the above mentioned interpretations of the Veda are quite familiar in the field of Vedic studies yet they do not provide the right clues to enter into the secret chamber of the Veda. Even when one seeks help from the ancient Indian scholarship with regard to the Veda, one feels compelled to make reservations. Neither Yāska nor even Sāyaṇa is of any help in seeking the esoteric sense of the Vedic hymn. One or two examples may bring clarity to the above points:

In the verse 1.2.7 of the Rgveda there is a phrase which reads धिवाय चूतारी साधना. Straightforwardly ध्व ि means ‘pure intellect’, the word चूत has come from the root चू meaning ‘to make something shine’. So the plain and simple meaning of धिवाय चूतारी will be ‘enlightened intellect’. But Sāyaṇa, in his interpretation, goes far from the straightforward meaning and confuses by taking ध्व as a synonym of karma or action of showering, चूत as rain or water and says that धिवाय चूतारी means “the rains that pour water”. Elsewhere he translates the phrase अमृतस्य वाणी (which should convey to all the essence of the Veda) as the “the current of water”. This simple phrase can be translated as “the message of immortality”. But one does not find any right sense of the phrase in Sāyaṇa’s interpretation. The European scholars and many Indian scholars of the modern times followed the footprint of Sāyaṇa and carried the Veda into a world of confusion. They all realized that Veda has everything to do only with the ritual. As a result Veda had to suffer terrible injustice in the

58 See Sāyaṇa on Rgveda, 1.2.7
hand of these ritualistic interpreters. The reason behind this might be, as Sri Aurobindo observes:

a. "...in the earlier days of classical erudition the ritualistic view of the Veda was already dominant, the original sense of the words, the lines, the allusions, the clue to the structure of the thought had been long lost or obscured; nor was there in the erudite that intuition or that spiritual experience which might have partly recovered the lost secret".59

b. The 'fanciful and lawless' methods of "mere ingenuity used by the old etymologists down even to the nineteenth century..."60

With this Sri Aurobindo comes to a point where he says: "The real character of the Veda can best be understood by taking it anywhere and rendering it straightforwardly according to its own phrases and images".61

But to approach the Veda and study it in the above light is not an easy task because, according to Sri Aurobindo, there are two major difficulties in interpreting the Veda straightforwardly. There is the philological difficulty of studying a language whose symbol and character have undergone many modifications with the passage of time. All language is after all a sound-symbol to which the mind of the race alludes a certain meaning. The word 'horse-power' carries an entirely different meaning for a physicist than for a grammarian. The symbols

59 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 16
60 Ibid., p. 17
61 Ibid., Vol., 14, p. 194
change, evolve and even interchange themselves as the mind of the race changes. The Sanskrit of today is not the Sanskrit of yesterday. It is true that the Vedic rks have been wonderfully preserved down the generations through the oral tradition, but what has been preserved is the sound symbol and not the sense symbol. That is one reason why the Vedas have lent themselves to different interpretations in different ages of humanity.

The second difficulty has been the psychological. Both philology and psychology are so closely linked that it is difficult to separate them. The Veda abounds in such terms which invite both philology and psychology to get into their senses. As Sri Aurobindo explains that one should seek the sense of Veda in the language of the Veda itself.\textsuperscript{62} Therefore, the first thing to be done, 'is to determine whether there is, apart from figure and symbol, in the clear language of the hymns a sufficient kernel of psychological notions,' and then to find the right psychological sense of the symbols and images and the psychological functions of gods should be the next step. Lastly, "a firm and not a fluctuating sense; founded on good philological justification and fitting naturally into the context, wherever it occurs, must be found for each of the fixed terms of the Veda."\textsuperscript{63}

Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the Veda is based mainly on these principles. Beyond this it is his yogic experience and visualization of the same images as Vedic seers came across thousands of years ago through which he saw the possibility of recovering the entire lore of the Veda.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., Vol. 10, p. 32
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
S.p.Singh observes: “It is from such experiences that accrues his (Sri Aurobindo’s) interpretation of the Veda as well as, to a certain extent, his philosophical system as a whole. While on the one hand he forges out his philosophical doctrines by putting those experiences into the fire of different disciplines of knowledge, such as history, sociology, philosophy, sciences and the rest, he, on the other, develops his view of the Veda by putting those experiences to the test of the psychology of the origin and growth of idea and language.”

By pursuing the Vedic study, Sri Aurobindo discovered that ‘a considerable body of psychological thought and experience lying neglected’ in the hymns of the Veda. The importance of this element increased when he found that ‘the Mantras of the Veda illuminated with a clear and exact light of psychological experiences of his own for which he had found no sufficient explanation either in European psychology or in the teachings of the Yoga or of Vedanta’. Further these hymns also ‘shed light on obscure passages and ideas of the Upanishads to which, previously he could attach no exact meaning and gave at the same time a new sense to match in the Purana’. It is obvious that in the Veda there is an admixture of natural images and psychological terms. On the one hand there is in it descriptions of dawn, sunrise, starry sky, night, mountains, clouds, rain, river, horses, cows etc., and, on the other, these descriptions are equally well couched in such terms as: ध्या, दीयणा, मनीषा, ऋग्भ, प्रबोध, चित्ति, अचित्ति, अद्व्या, आनन, मनन, मन्, चक्त्वस्, विग्र, क्रतु, विपरित्य, कवि, श्रव, दक्ष and the rest. There are gods and goddesses

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64 Vedic Symbolism, p. 57
65 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 37
like अग्नि, सोम, सूर्य, उषस्, etc., also number of such deities as श्रद्धा, मन्तु, गी, ज्ञान, बुहस्यति, वाक् and the like.

These are some key-words giving clues to the esoteric sense of the Veda. For example: The Rgveda begins with an invocation to Agni. Here Agni has been addressed as 'hotā' – the priest, "Kavikratuh" – whose will towards action is that of the seer, "gopām ṛtasya" – the guardian of the Truth and so on and so forth. The Rṣi here praises Agni to do good for him. Now who is this god Agni that the Vedic Rṣi addresses him with such a language? What is the Truth that he guards? What good he brings for the invoker? Is it gold and horses and cattle that he brings or is it something that is divine?

According to Sri Aurobindo it is certainly not the sacrificial fire or any material flame or principle of physical heat and light that is capable of these functions. So there is a mystic symbolism which lies hidden in these hymns to which, as Sri Aurobindo observes, "the fire, the sacrifice, the priest are only outward figures of a deeper teaching and yet figures which it was thought necessary to maintain and to hold constantly in front." 66

Similarly the above words are symbolic by their character and a psychological interpretation can alone reveal the hidden sense of those words. One such important expression that has been used in the first hymn is 'svae damae'. 67 The straight forward meaning of this expression is 'in ones own house'. When it is used for Agni, Sāyana interprets it as

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66 Ibid., p. 60
67 See Rgveda, 1.1.8
'in the fire-room of the Vedic house-holder'. But Sri Aurobindo after having examined many mantras comes to a point where he finds that 'Ṛtam', 'Brhat' and 'Svarī damam' are similar in expression. Therefore, he says that the Truth, the Vast and Agni's own home are identical. Agni in the Veda has been frequently spoken of as being born in the truth, dwelling in the wide or vast.

Sri Aurobindo observes: "Sayana gives to the words dhī, ṛtam, etc., very variable significances. Ṛtam, which is almost the key-word of any psychological or spiritual interpretation, is rendered by him sometimes as: 'truth', more often 'sacrifice', occasionally in the sense of water. The psychological interpretation gives it invariably the sense of Truth. Dhī is rendered by Sayana variously as 'thought', 'prayer', 'action', 'food', etc. The psychological interpretation gives it consistently the sense of thought or understanding. And so with the other fixed terms of the Veda."68 Invariability or consistency has been another great characteristic feature of the Vedic language. "The language of the hymns," Sri Aurobindo says, "is a language fixed and invariable;"69 Further he remarks: "...if the language of the Vedic Rishis were free and variable, if their ideas were evidently in a state of flux, shifting and uncertain, a convenient license and incoherence in the sense we attach to their terminology and relation we find between their ideas, might be justified or tolerated. But the hymns themselves on the very face of them bear exactly the contrary testimony. We have the right therefore to demand the same fidelity and scrupulousness in the interpreter as in the

68 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL., Vol. 10, p. 37
69 Ibid., p. 32
original he interprets."\(^{70}\) So incoherency and uncertainty in the interpretation will, not only, mislead but also will be obstacles in discovering the right relations between the terminology of the Vedic Rsis and their ideas.

Besides the words which give at once wealth of psychological significance to their context, 'the Veda is full of others to which it is possible to give either an external and material or an internal and psychological value.' For example the words such as 'rāye, rayī, rādhas, ratna, may mean either merely material prosperity and riches or internal felicity and plenitude.' There are words like vāja which frequently occur in a context in which every other word has a psychological significance. In this case to take one particular word in its external sense is to distort the totality of the thought. So Sri Aurobindo suggests that in such cases the psychological import should be accepted.\(^{71}\) In the Vedic sacrifice also the Yajamāna, the Purohita, the offering such as ghrta, soma etc., the fruits of offering such as cows, horses, gold, offspring, men, physical strength, victory in battle, all these are symbolic in their character and can be understood only by accepting the psychological import of them. 'Another all important feature of Vedic symbolism is the system of the worlds and the functions of the gods.' The Vedic worlds such as the Earth, antarikṣa or middle region and Heaven (dyau) etc. are, according to Sri Aurobindo, identical with the psychological planes of consciousness.\(^{72}\) The gods, in the Veda, are described as 'Children of

\(^{70}\) Ibid., p. 33

\(^{71}\) Ibid., p. 38

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 43
Light', 'Sons of Aditi', 'Of Infinity'. They are 'names, powers and personalities of the universal godhead' representing the psychological states of consciousness experienced by the Ṛṣis. All these have to be understood on a right psychological and spiritual basis.

So the words like ṛtam, dhī etc., the Vedic sacrifice and its other features, the Vedic worlds and gods, all these play important roles in the symbolic interpretation of the Veda.

V.4. The Language of the Vedic Age

The ṛks of the Veda are very powerful and have a double significance. The key words like ṛtam, dhī etc., employed by the Vedic seers, according to Sri Aurobido, are also key-stones to the esoteric structure of the Vedic doctrine. It is by 'constantly and consistently' giving to such key-words their 'ordinary, natural and straightforward meaning', and their master sense that "the whole Rigveda reveals itself as a body of doctrine and practice, esoteric, occult, spiritual such as might have been given by the mystics in any ancient country..."  

The Ṛṣis in order to mask the meaning of the key-words, such as truth, thought, sacrifice, resorted to the device of fixing double meanings. They were great symbolists and could see all physical things including their outer selves as symbols of inner truths. As such, most of the Vedic words need a psychological and symbolic interpretation. It is, therefore, in the language of the Veda itself that the true sense has to be sought. There is sufficient psychological content in the language itself.

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73 Ibid., Vol. 11, p. 8
that supports the esoteric interpretation. But because the language of the
Veda is antique and many of its passages are obscure, the difficulties in
the psychological interpretation can only be met by a satisfactory
philological justification. This interpretation necessitates the acceptance
of several new senses of many fixed terms of the Veda. These new senses
must also have a philological basis which will account not only for the
new sense but also explain the many meanings of the same term. The
use of a double meaning for key words also is important in this regard.
There is in the Veda a deliberate employment of the "multi-significance"
of Sanskrit roots. This device is used by the Rsis 'to pack as much
meaning as possible into a single word'. "For instance", says Sri
Aurobindo, "the word äsVa, usually signifying a horse, is used as a
figure of the Prana, the nervous energy, the vital breath, the half-mental,
half-material dynamism which links mind and matter. Its root is
capable, among other senses, of the ideas of impulsion, force, possession,
enjoyment, and we find all these meanings united in this figure of the
Steed of Life to indicate the essential tendencies of the Pranic energy."74
It all shows that the Aryan tongue was not conventional; the words were
not mere symbols of meanings, not sophisticated, artificial and rigid.
They were more alive and close to the sense, pliable and free in their
transitions of meaning, suggestive and capable of conveying rich
psychological conceptions not understood by the vulgar and the
uninitiated and the profane. The Aryan speech was capable of such
cryptic and psychological use, which in its popular usage was
simultaneously plain, simple, precise and physical or down to earth in

74 Ibid., p. 46
its meaning. It is only later that it becomes conventional, sophisticated and classical.

Language in its outward manifestation is evolutionary in its growth. In addition it has a psychological element because of which it is 'more free, flexible and consciously self-adaptive' than any physical organism. There are laws and processes which govern the growth of a language even as mental phenomena are governed by laws and processes. In their beginnings language-sounds did not express ideas; they were only 'the vocal equivalents of certain general sensations and sense-values and emotion values'. Each word had a general character or quality called *guna* in Sanskrit. This *guna* was capable of great many applications and significances. And the word shared the *guna* and its results with many kindred sounds which resulted in the birth of several word-clans and word-families which shared and started life in communal system. "The early history of language was a development from this communal life of words to a system of individual property in one or more intellectual significances. The principle of partition was at first fluid, then increased in rigidity, until word families and finally single words were able to start life on their own account. The last stage of the entirely natural growth of language comes when the life of the word is entirely subjected to the life of the idea which it represents. For in the first state of language the word is as living or even a more living force than its idea; sound determines sense. In its last state the positions have been reversed; the idea becomes all important, the sound secondary."75 Another feature of the early language is that it expressed

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75 *Ibid.*, p. 49
a small stock of common ideas such as light, motion, substance force, etc. Afterwards there is seen a gradual progress in the variety of ideas also in the precision of ideas. Sri Aurobindo observes that this "progression is from the general to the particular, from the vague to the precise, from the physical to the mental, from the concrete to the abstract, from the expression of an abundant variety of sensation about similar things to the expression of precise difference between similar things, feelings and actions."76

As such, knowledge of this past history of language helps considerably in the interpretation of the *Veda*, knowledge especially of the laws under which the relations of sound and sense formed themselves, as well as a study of word-families, helps to restore the past history of the words. From this it is possible: to account for the meanings of the words in the earlier stages; to establish the mutual relations of different significances; to explain how these different significances came to be attached to the same word; to restore lost significances and senses of words and to follow the various stages of language development. This provides a solid and reliable foundation on which one can work with confidence while dealing with the vocables of the Vedic language.77

This does not mean that a Vedic word had a particular sense or significance at one time and the same sense and significance can be applied to the actual text of the *Veda*. Rather it has to be understood, as Sri Aurobindo states, by this 'a sound sense and a clear possibility of its being the right sense for the Veda' can be established. This can be seen,  

76 Ibid.  
77 Ibid., p. 50
by a thorough examination of the Vedic mantras that such sense actually illuminates the context wherever it is used and the contextual sense is precisely that to which the history of the word leads.

Another remarkable feature of the language in its inception, as mentioned earlier, is that a single word was capable of different meanings and also many words could be used to represent a single idea. Afterwards this capacity of the word slowly diminished. To this process Sanskrit has been an exception for it always had and retained its wealth of synonyms. It also has an extraordinary capacity for rhetorical devices.

"Vedic Sanskrit", as Sri Aurobindo observes, "represents a still earlier stratum in the development of language. Even in its outward features it is less fixed than any classical tongue; it abounds in a variety of forms and inflexions; it is fluid and vague, yet richly subtle in its use of cases and tenses. And on its psychological side it has not yet

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78 There is a big difference between the Vedic and Classical Sanskrit. Phonetically the Vedic Sanskrit has / (ə) and lḥ (ḷḥ) which are not present in the Classical Sanskrit. The replacement of r by l is another aspect of Vedic Sanskrit. In case of Sandhi also there are some differences. The Vedic iy and uv are replaced by Y and V in Classical Sanskrit. For example Veda has the word tanvovas Classical Sanskrit uses tanvas. In Classical Sanskrit the wealth of forms prevalent in the Vedic language is considerably reduced. Even many words of the Veda are no longer used in the Classical Sanskrit. For example words quite usual in the Rgveda like urviyd (2.3.5; 5.28.1; 6.6.4; 10.45.8) meaning 'widely', 'śīm' (1.36.1, 44.13.3, 6.1.1, 8.40.8) meaning everywhere', 'all around', 'from every side', ūkvan (3.13.5) meaning 'men who have light', are not found to be used in the Classical period. Vedic Sanskrit uses a variety of infinitives ending with tum, tave, tavai, ase, dhyai etc., but Classical Sanskrit has retained the one ending with tum. The position of prepositions (upasargas) in Vedic language is quite free, whereas in Classical Sanskrit the prefix stands immediately before the verbal form with which it is compounded. For example in the mantra आ नो मन्त्र जय जय जय जय (Rgveda 1.89.1) the prefix a is used in the beginning and yantu with which it has to be prefixed is used after three words. In Classical Sanskrit this is not possible at all. Similarly in the case of conjugation, declension, compound too there is much difference between the Vedic and Classical Sanskrit. The above examples are given for the sake of illustration only.
crystalised, is not entirely hardened into the rigid forms of intellectual precision. The word for the Vedic Rishi is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas. It carries within it the memory of its roots, is still conscient of its own history. 79 With this observation Sri Aurobindo further says that the language of the Ṛṣis was governed by this ancient psychology of the Word. An example may bring clarity to the above observation of Sri Aurobindo. When in English one uses the word ‘wolf’ or ‘cow’, it means simply the animal designated. There is no reason, except the immemorial custom of the language, that why a particular sound should be used to express a particular animal. Apart from this one cannot even use that word for any other sense or purpose except by an artificial device of style. But when the Vedic Ṛṣis wanted to express the idea of ‘wolf’ he came out with the word Vṛka, which means ‘tearer’. Therefore, this word among its other applications of the sense; also means ‘a wolf’. Similarly, the word Dhenu means fosterer, nourisher and therefore it means cow. It is always seen that the original and general sense predominates. This is the primary sense. The derived and particular sense of the word is secondary. This feature of the language helped the fashioners of hymns of the Veda “to use these common words with a great pliability, sometimes putting forward the image of the wolf or the cow, sometimes using it to colour the more general sense, sometimes keeping it merely as a conventional figure for the psychological conception on which his

79 Sri Aurobindo, SABCL, Vol. 10, p. 51
mind was dwelling, sometimes losing sight of the image altogether."\textsuperscript{80} It is in the light of this psychology of the old language that the Vedic figures and symbols have to be understood. So, too, the words like \textit{soma} and \textit{ghṛta} have to be understood. The different partitions made by the thought between many senses of the same word were much less separative in the past. For example: "In English 'fleet' meaning a number of ships and 'fleet' meaning swift are two different words; when we use 'fleet' in the first sense we do not think of the swiftness of the ship's motion, nor when we use it in the second, do we recall the image of ships gliding rapidly over the ocean. But this was precisely what was apt to occur in the Vedic use of language. \textit{Bhaga}, enjoyment, and \textit{bhāga}, share, were for the Vedic mind not different words, but one word which had developed two different uses. Therefore, it was easy for the \textit{Ṛśis} to employ it in one of the two senses with the other at the back of the mind colouring its overt connotation or even to use it equally in both senses at a time by a sort of figure of cumulative significance."\textsuperscript{81} The word \textit{canas} which means 'food' and 'enjoyment' and pleasure' also was used by the \textit{Ṛśis} to suggest to the ordinary 'mind only the food given at the sacrifice to the gods, but for the initiated it meant \textit{Ananda}, the joy of the divine bliss, thus suggesting the Soma-wine.' Similarly, \textit{Agni} meant both fire as well as 'force, brilliance, illumined energy' – 'the \textit{Purohita} of the human sacrifice. Likewise, the names of the many gods carried their own significance and recalled the one supreme Being fundamental to all existence. "But in the later ages the very device used by the Rishi turned against the preservation of knowledge. For language changed its

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}
character, rejected its earlier pliability, shed off old familiar senses; the word contracted and shrunk into its outer and concrete significance."\textsuperscript{82}

However, to restore the original sense of the Vedic words it is very much necessary to resort to a new science of language free from all conjectures and indefiniteness. The Vedic words themselves can provide the solution to the problems of Vedic Interpretation as well as the formation of a new science of language. Once this is done the original sense of the \textit{Veda} can be restored as well as the racial division into Aryan and Dravidian will also be proved false and baseless.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 53