THE DAWN ETERNAL

THE SECRET OF INDIA'S EVOLUTION

SISIRKUMAR MITRA

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
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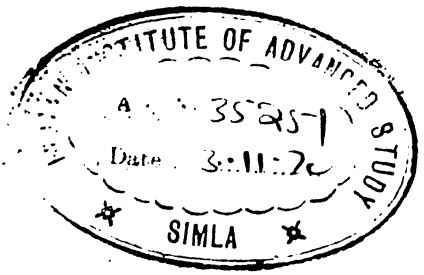

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AN OFFERING

TO THE LIGHT

DAWNING OVER THE WORLD

'USHA, the ancient Dawn, is the first in the eternal succession of the Dawns that are coming.' This significant Vedic utterance enshrines the secret of man's historic evolution. The inner and, therefore, the truer meaning of history is the story of man's pilgrimage from the ancient Dawn towards the High Noon of his future. The 'infinite rays' of this Dawn are indeed the waves of an endless tide of the Light flowing since 'the most distant yesterdays to the most distant tomorrows' working on and preparing man all down the ages for his ultimate destiny—a higher than his present mental life on earth.

Dawn symbolises the first phase of the Light with whose vision man started on his great adventure; it symbolises also the outbreak of other states on the way. 'States upon states are born, covering over covering awakens to knowledge: in the lap of the Mother he wholly sees.' Thus does he grow as the Light grows in him. With every advance man becomes more and more ready for the complete manifestation on earth of that heavenly Light.

This pilgrimage of man sees its end when he is ready for the ultimate Dawn to burst on his con-

sciousness and develop there into the Everlasting Day, the Sun of Truth making earth His permanent abode, and man His conscious vessel living for ever in the truth and light of His immortal perfection. But Dawn does not stop with this great Fuifilment. It is an eternal phenomenon of the Light of the Supreme Consciousness. When man becomes a gnostic being, he passes from his human to a divine cycle with newer dawns on his consciousness for greater and yet greater fulfilments in the divine order of infinite progression. The pilgrimage therefore is an endless march which the soul in evolution has to ceaselessly pursue beckoned by the inspiring voice of the Aitareya Brahmana: *Charaiveti*, 'March on'.

The role the East played in the spiritual history of man has in it a deep significance for his future as well. The Age of Mysteries through which humanity passed—different countries in different periods—may be characterised as the seed-time of its historic development. In it the Mystics visioned the Light, the Dawn Eternal. This Age in India was the age of the Vedic Rishis attaining to the supreme vision, the knowledge of the True, the Right, the Vast.

The Age of the Spirit, the longest chapter in the book, seeks on the basis of Sri Aurobindo's revelatory writings on the Veda to give an idea of the unique achievement of the ancient Fathers, to study what

place it occupies in the historic evolution of India, how in it is found the very root of India's culture and civilisation, and last but most important, the mighty possibilities of man's future progress to which it points.

Sri Aurobindo's insight into the Vedic and Vedantic period of Indian history has led him to characterise it as the Age of the Spirit. The Rishi of our day has revisioned the Light that is now waiting beyond our horizon to dawn upon man's consciousness in time. He has affirmed with the force of his first-hand knowledge that this dawn will surpass all previous dawns in the splendours of its noontide glory. As the book deals with the broad question of Man's destiny from the standpoint of India's inner evolution, in the light of the Master's momentous revelations, it has ventured to assume the title *The Dawn Eternal.*

Chapter One is an attempt to present the outstanding features of Indian history against their geographical and cultural background; to show how history and geography conspire to produce the marvels which mark India out as an arresting phenomenon in the world; how her Spirit has triumphed over Time; how she exists in history, as a creative Power of God, as the Mother-Force, to serve a divine purpose.

Chapter Two tells the story of a proto-Indian civilisation which is neither a beginning nor an end

but only a phase—a most significant phase all the same—of a long and continued endeavour of the early Indians to build life with its many-sided richness, colour and variety,—a proof of how life was lived and regarded at that time, of how in its fuller development the ancients recognised the legitimacy of man's urge to grow into a wholeness which is the secret of his continued progress towards a greater and fuller life. The Sindhu-Valley culture is indeed a shining expression of the Aryan Dawn amid the primeval mists of the world.

The Appendix gives an outline of how the Ideal of Dharma that governed and upheld the social and political institutions of ancient India owed its origin and growth to the spiritual bent of her mind, the bent that grew out of the Light visioned by the Vedic Fathers; how, even after the Dharma had lost its hold on society and dwindled, that Light Eternal has sustained, right down the ages, the essential life-line of her culture; how it has inspired her resurgence in modern times when the Master-Seer has revisioned the Ancient Truth and revealed it for the larger liberation of the human race. Chapter Three, as said above, deals with this discovery and revelation. The Age of the Spirit, the subject-matter of this chapter, is followed by the Age of the Dharma, as Sri Aurobindo named it, the social and psychological basis of which has been given in the Appendix.

In this humble attempt I could do little but reflect a ray of the mass of light thrown on the subject by the Master. If with a mind free and open to the Truth in things, any of my readers care to turn inward, they will glimpse a view of the Real that is India at her immortal core and that is all humanity in its essence. For further exploration of this intimate and interesting realm of research, ampler material has been laid at the disposal of the world by the prodigal hands of the Master.

I am deeply grateful to Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta, the eminent and versatile scholar, a life-long disciple and an authentic exponent of Sri Aurobindo, for his close and thorough look into this book, as well as to other friends for their appreciative encouragement. Portions of these chapters appeared in *Mother India*, a monthly review of culture, to whose editor my grateful acknowledgements are also due for leave to reproduce them. These portions have been thoroughly revised and enlarged for publication in book form. Chapter One formed the inaugural address delivered at the History Association of the Annamalai University in September, 1952.

S. M.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA[1]

ANCIENT Indian writers spoke of their country as a land abounding in all things that could be on earth, created by Nature and man. And this they said simply to express their feeling inspired by the stupendous size of their motherland, her immense natural wealth, her diverse physical features, the marvellous achievements of her creative genius, and above all, by the concept of the Mother in which India is hailed by her children as their beloved object of adoration, as an embodiment of a benevolent power of God sustaining her own millions and of the world's by her inexhaustible resources, both material and spiritual. Indeed, India possesses in herself everything that can beautify and enrich the body and soul of the earth. Travellers and pilgrims from other lands have marvelled at the vastness and variety of her form, the uniqueness and profundity of her thought.

Moreover, there is the other and more important reason why through the ages India has been held to be

[1] By this is meant the India of the ages with her culture and civilisation and not the political India of the present day. The geographical names have been used in their original Sanskrit form.

a country which has a deep meaning for the future of all humanity. In the very dawn of her history there came to her seers the vision that India was a Truth-Idea of exceptional significance. It is this vision which has been ever at work as the basic motivating force behind everything the race has done to express its soul through the manifold activities of its creative life.

'One of the oldest races and greatest civilisations on this earth,' in the words of Sri Aurobindo, 'the most indomitable in vitality, the most fecund in greatness, the deepest in life, the most wonderful in potentiality,' India is equally supreme in her epic quest for those eternal values whose discovery and devoted pursuit by her children have given its character to their mind and which constitute India's outstanding contribution to the spiritual advancement of the human race. From this inward tendency of their mind Indians have derived much of their strength and genius as a race.

'Each nation', says Sri Aurobindo, 'is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies. India is the Bharata Shakti, the living energy of a great spiritual conception, and fidelity to it is the very principle of her existence. For by its virtue alone she has been one of the immortal nations; this alone has been the secret of her amazing persistence and perpetual force of survival and revival....India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual

up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *dharma*. This achievement, this victory over unconscious matter developes its lines, enlarges its scope, elevates its levels until the increasing manifestation of the sattwic or spiritual portion of the vehicle of mind enables the individual mental being in man to identify himself with the pure spiritual consciousness beyond Mind. India's social system is built upon this conception; her philosophy formulates it; her religion is an aspiration to the spiritual consciousness and its fruits; her art and literature have the same upward look; her whole dharma or law of being is founded upon it. Progress she admits, but this spiritual progress, not the externally self-unfolding process of an always more and more prosperous and efficient material civilisation. It is her founding of life upon this exalted conception and her urge towards the spiritual and the eternal that constitute the distinct value of her civilisation. And it is her fidelity, with whatever human shortcomings, to this highest ideal that has made her people a nation apart in the human world.'[1]

The culture of India is thus the expression of her soul, the flowering of her aspirations devoutly cherished in the depths of her being; it is a response, as well, to the stimulus of a combination of external factors in the land itself in which it is pre-eminently rich. The roots of India's history and culture—and the two are one—lie

[1] *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, pp. 5-6

hidden in her very soil, in her physical formation. Many are the ideas, grand and glorious, that are associated with the land that is India, the field of those activities to which her children have been impelled by their inner urge no less than by the Force that has embodied herself in India in order to work out a mighty purpose of evolutionary Nature. And as her sages have declared, to work for this purpose individually and collectively on a world-wide scale is the mission of India, her raison d'être in history.

This accounts for the diversity of her life and culture, a diversity making for her many-sided strength and richness, necessary for the carrying on of her work assigned to her by Providence. Down the ages has gone ringing the call of the early Fathers of the race: 'The Infinite is One, all else are His manifestations. Man to realise this has to become conscious of his divinity, grow into His perfection, be one with the One as well as with the Many.'

This is the central ideal that has inspired India's culture, the message she has for humanity. How India even in her physical form has ever responded to this call by providing the necessary conditions for her children to make their multiform cultural endeavours from which has resulted the very fabric of her history is a subject of refreshing interest, worth more than a cursory study, not only for the day but for many an unborn tomorrow.

Here is a country which found its soul almost when its histroy began. Here is a people who even in those dim days strove by the light of that soul to illumine

every form of its creation, every phase of its individual and collective life. It is this inwardness of India's evolution which is the true meaning of her history, the meaning also of her aims and aspirations. To grasp it we have to understand the truth of the manysidedness of her racial life as also the truth of her varied physical configuration, since these are visioned by her seers as the many facets of the One, diverse manifestations of the basic integrity of her soul, which expressing itself in her life, culture, and even in her physical form, has shaped and sustained the historical development of India. Integrity thrives best in diversity which is Nature's way of progress.

Mystic Himalaya

The face of India reflects the lavishness and abandon with which Nature has showered her bounties upon her, —a fact not without its bearing on the evolution of India's history and culture. Her geographical divisions have each its own story to tell. And what a romance there is about every one of them! She has on her north heaven-kissing Himalaya with ranges stretching over a length of 1600 miles and an average width of 250, having spurs thrown southward at both ends. The most rugged region on the earth's surface, it has a large number of heights at least forty of which exceed 24000 feet, the topmost in the world—Mount Everest—being 29000[1]. An out-

[1] This height was determined in 1852 by a Bengali named Radhanath Sikdar who was then the Chief Computer of the

standing characteristic of India's physiography, 'this mountain continent' stands in all its majestic splendour as her eternal sentinel, a silent and solemn witness to the chequered march of her history, a formidable natural barrier to any large-scale aggression from outside, though there are passes in it, not easy enough but nonetheless joining the country to its neighbours on the northeast and northwest. It is through these narrow defiles that foreign incursions of from the Greeks to the Mongols disturbed the tranquillity of India quite a number of times. Maybe, they were intended by Nature to keep the country ever on the alert or to rouse it to activity when it lapsed into lethargy or, what was but too natural, got absorbed in spiritual contemplation, and neglected the secular obligations of life. A standing temptation to plunder and conquest, these passes made possible India's commercial and cultural intercourse with countries beyond her borders: and side by side with her commodities, travelled her ideas from very early times to various parts of Europe and Asia. These defiles therefore are sacred to the memory of those cultural ambassadors of India who hazarded the perilous journey across the rugged mountains in order to carry the torch of their country's lore to distant lands; sacred alike to the memory of the devout pilgrims from abroad who cheerfully underwent similar hardships to be able to visit the

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Survey Department of the Government of India. In the absence of any local name, the peak was named after Sir George Everest, the then Surveyor General of India.

holy places of India and sit at the feet of her wise men for the invaluable knowledge, of which they were then the sole custodians.

From time immemorial Himalaya has been the abode of those seekers who, when the call comes to them, shake off all worldly attractions and go into its secluded retreats in order to contemplate on the One, the Infinite and the Eternal. The mystic calm that pervades its atmosphere and dominates its peaks, valleys, woods and caverns has always its subtle touch on the soul of man in quest of the Supreme. Indians feel that the influence of this region permeates the whole country. The veneration in which Himalaya is held by our people shows how deeply it has stamped itself on their consciousness. For its snowy expanses, vast lakes, lofty peaks, and numerous beauty spots that capture the imagination, Himalaya is pictured in ancient Indian literature as the very heart of the universe, the home of gods and goddesses. According to the Vishnu Purana, Brahma, the creator, has in this region his throne which is shaped like the seed-vessel of a lotus. There is another legend in which Himalaya is regarded as a god whose daughter Parvati practised severe penaces in order to be accepted by Shiva as his spouse. The story describes how her wish was fulfilled.

A solemn spectacle of Nature deep in meditation—this is Himalaya, even to the outer eye. In occult knowledge, it stands for the ascending hill of existence on the peak of which one can meet the Divine. The Rigveda

assigns to Mujavant—a peak of Himalaya—the birth-place of Indra, the King of the gods of Mind, who symbolises the spiritual mind in its upward quest that starts growing towards the Divine from this peak where it has had its first contact with Him. It is significant that the Rigveda regards the same peak as the source of Soma, the symbol of divine bliss, attainable by man when he has risen to a higher level of consciousness. In the Gita, where Sri Krishna speaks of himself as the origin of the greatest quality of every form of manifestation in the universe, he says, "Among the mountain-ranges I am Himalaya."

Himalaya is indeed a great force in the growth of India's spirituality and culture; for from this lofty home of countless seers, saints and seekers have flowed thought-currents of Truth, vision and experience carrying with them into the atmosphere below something of the fire and serenity of their soul, inspiring, enriching and elevating the vast field of spiritual culture that India has been from end to end.

Even in the farthest corners of south India, the Hindu regards Himalaya as a devotee views the temple of his deity. Himalaya is the meeting-ground of all the monastic orders of India. To its far-famed but not easily accessible holy places devotees from all parts of India flock in their thousands, regardless of the risks and rigours of the journey. Himalaya and its peaks are for man an irresistible lure of the unknown; its heights with their majestic calm and mystic solutudes are as

much a call to the religious spirit in man as its peaks are a challenge to his spirit of daring and adventure. This abode of snows—that is the literal sense of Himalaya's name—is no less a romance to the anthropologists many of whom have, on the basis of positive proofs, declared it to be 'the cradle of man' where he evolved into his 'modern' form—a fact whose bearing on India's history is equally important.

Himalaya has always been a perennial source of inspiration to the artists of India. The styles of India's architecture, particularly of its sacred form, the symbolic modes of her sculptural figuration, have, many of them, derived from the ideas in which this king of mountains is visualised. Mention may be made of the works of two master-painters of India. In one of his Himalayan studies, Nandalal Basu presents a snowy range with its peaks as the profile of a face which is of Shiva absorbed in meditation. Here the greatest artist of modern India pours out his heart's devotion in a worshipful vision of Girisha, the Lord of mountains, which is the title of the picture. A critic characterised this picture as an expression of the soul of Himalaya. Into some of his typical sketches of Himalaya Promodakumar Chattopadhayaya throws a suggestion of the mystic calm that lends a solemnity to its secluded regions. Something of the peace felt in Himalaya is caught in his fine pictures by Nicholas Roerich, the famous Russian artist and explorer, who lived in Himalaya and had wonderful experiences. In course of describing

them, he has spoken of the strange phenomena of light which he often witnessed and for which obviously he called Himalaya an 'abode of light', a fitting culmination, without doubt, of his consciousness which read in Himalaya 'the symbol of ascent'.

No less indebted is India's Muse to this holy mountain. There are few poets of classical India who were not moved by its unique grandeur, or by its subtle appeals. Calling it '*devatatma Himalaya*' (god-souled Himalaya) Kalidasa, the greatest of them, devotes almost the whole of the First Canto of his famous epic *Kumara Sambhava* (The Birth of the War-God) to a delineation of Himalaya. Space not permitting the beautiful quotation in full, only the first two sentences of the opening lines are given below from a free rendering from Sanskrit by Sri Aurobindo:

> 'A God concealed in mountain majesty,
> Embodied to our cloudy physical sight
> In dizzy summits and green-gloried slopes,
> Measuring the earth in an enormous ease,
> Immense Himaloy dwells and in the moan
> Of western waters and in eastern floods
> Plunges his hidden spurs. Such is his strength
> High-piled or thousand-crested is his look
> That with the scaling greatness of his peaks
> He seems to uplift to heaven our prostrate soil.'

To another poet it is Eternal Himalaya which rises tier upon tier, to look, as it were, into the mysteries of heaven.

The wonder, beauty and sublimity of Himalaya have found their exquisite expression in the poetry of modern India's greatest poet Rabindranath Tagore.

Thus does this wonderful mountain figure in the historic and cultural development of India.

The climate of the country also is very considerably determined by the position and shape of Himalaya. It shelters the country from the cold northern winds, rendering it warmer and more tropical than it might otherwise have been. The valuable forest and water-power resources of Himalaya are a fecund source of India's material prosperity. The towering pines that cover wide stretches of its regions supply a valuable variety of timber whose by-products are equally important. And the waters that take their rise in it carry its rich elements down the plains fertilising them into a natural source of the once proverbial wealth of the country. It is one of these rivers, the Sindhu (Indus), that has given India her modern name—India, Hindusthan or Hind. 'Geographically India owes everything to the Himalayas,' says K.M. Munshi, an eminent Indian scholar.

In the western portion of the Himalayan range, close to each other, rise two principal rivers, the Sindhu and the Brahmaputra, the former with its tributaries turning southward through the Punhab, and the latter bursting through the main axis of the range at the northeastern angle, and entering the provinces of Assam and Bengal. The system of the Sindhu along with the region watered by it is important for what it has contributed to the

growth of India both historically and materially. Its frequent mention in the Rigveda, the earliest spiritual literature of India and the world, and its association with the religious and cultural movements of the early Aryas are proof enough of its bearing on the progress and expansion of ancient India. Recent excavations have brought to light relics of several well-built cities of more than five thousand years old, provided with the most modern amenities. They show to what a high degree of culture Indians attained in those early days whose complete history has yet to be written. The valley of the Sindhu and its adjoining regions have, it is believed, considerably changed in their climate from the time when these cities were flourishing ones. They were certainly not as dry as they are today. Nevertheless, they are even now rich enough in their yield of wheat which is their principal crop and which is one of the best varieties in the world. The Brahmaputra valley in Assam, though quite rich, has not developed to any appreciable extent. The river is rather abrupt in its course and there is often a waste marshy belt on either side, but near-by flat lands are very fertile, and farther away are the gentle slopes of the hills where tea grows in plenty. It is not on this river however that Assam depends for its water supply. Assam's rainfall is phenomenal; in Cherrapunji, it is as much as 500 inches per year. Ancient Sanskrit literature mentions Pragjyotish —the old name of Assam—as a powerful and civilised region, the centre of movements and events that led to

racial and cultural intermingling of no small importance to Indian history. Famous all the world over, its silk is its most important cottage industry.

Creative Plains of Plenty

But Assam and the Panjab are two extremities of the Sindhu-Ganga plain extending over a flat region about 2000 miles long and 300 miles broad, gradually narrowing down to 90 miles in its eastern extremity. The whole plain is watered by the river-systems of the Sindhu, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The Sindhu and the Brahmaputra run each a course of about 1700 miles, and the Ganga a little over 1500. The principal geological factor responsible for the wonderful fertility of this plain is that it had once been a sea-bed and when large-scale upheavals had pushed back the sea, there remained the basins of the great rivers, silted up by the alluvium accumulating for thousands of years.

These basins gradually formed into their present shape and became one of the most fertile regions of the earth producing in abundance what man needs for food and clothing. And the surplus constitutes India's foreign trade—another source of her fabulous wealth in the past. This productivity is even more remarkable in the lower regions of the east where besides the rivers which water most of them, rainfall is the heaviest, and rice and jute grow in plenty. But the rainfall begins to decrease as we go westward till it becomes as scanty as

not even three inches a year in the upper Sindh, consequently affecting the climate which from a tolerably mild one in the east changes to extreme heat and cold in the northwest, and to desert dryness in the west. The desert of Rajputana, though part of the sea-bed which formed the Sindhu-Ganga plain, remained arid and barren, no freshwater stream flowing through it. Yet, in later days it became the habitation of a sturdy warlike people who had a large share in the development of India's history.

Thus is set by Nature the stage on which has been enacted a great part of the drama of India's history. It is a tract which has a romance of its own, a meaning and a purpose which reveal themselves as scene after scene of human activity is unrolled in the unending scroll of Time. It is these activities, the great endeavours of the people inhabiting this plain, that give richness, colour and variety to their existence and help them to grow towards the fulfilment of their destiny as a nation in a future even greater than their glorious past. For, this is the deeper aim of evolutionary Nature in whatever man has done in history. In India she made this region so highly favourable to a life of peace and contentment that there might grow here a race with sufficient leisure and inclination to apply itself with vigour and intensity to the attainment of the higher ends of life through the development of their many-sided potentialities. And we know how this intention of Nature is fulfilled in that a large part of the Indian civilisation is the creation

of people mothered by the rivers of this region, the rivers which are also the mothers of much of India's material prosperity. Men of this region have always lived a life of opulence and plenty. And from their continued creative efforts through the ages have resulted a rich output of cultural achievements and a consequent enrichment and expansion of human progress.

Here arose empires, kingdoms and republics administered by wise and benevolent rulers who built their states into ideal organisations of service of the people for their all-round advancement. Here were those famous centres of learning where pursuit of knowledge was exalted to or culminated in a devoted quest for the supreme values of life in the Spirit. This is the land hallowed by the lives and teachings of those Incarnations of God, of God-men and God-lovers, of saints and sages, who gave away without stint the priceless treasures of heaven they brought down for the spiritual uplift of mankind. Here lived seers who have revealed their vision of the Truth in the greatest and oldest mystic poetry of the world; thinkers and philosophers who founded famous schools of thought which have ever remained master-creations of the Indian mind; makers of the law who formulated religious and social systems which for millenniums have been governing the life of the Indian people; political idealists who envisaged a perfect form of corporate life. And what these masters produced are those monumental works in Sanskrit and its many derivates,—indisputably the largest literature

imaginable for a single country in the world. They are an everlasting tribute to the amazing creative genius of those masters, the stream of whose activities flowed freely over a long stretch of more than four thousand years. And does not every work of theirs testify to their robust spirituality and virile mind?

Here, on these plains, stand even to this day the capital cities of ancient India which, along with towns and cities on the banks of the Sindhu and the Ganga and their tributaries, trace their origin far back to a hoary past, cities which may not now retain their pristine grandeur, but which still bear unmistakable signs and suggestions of their magnificent past. Here as we move east, west or north-west, we come across monuments, relics and antiquities—only a very small part of what would have been there, had proper excavations been done in all the sites—all reminiscent of the unbelievably intense and stupendous artistic efforts of the people inspired by the religious fervour of their soul. Here have met and mingled races, clans and tribes into an ocean oneness of humanity only to make up the homogeneous whole of a common nation which India is today. Here has taken place the grand synthesis of ideas and cultures under the dynamic influence of India's all-embracing soul. It is in this region that battles were fought and old regimes changed, giving place to new. It was here again that after more than four millenniums of continual cultural activity India became exhausted and, cut off from her primal life-current, fell a prey to foreign ag-

gressors who ruled over her political destiny for more than six hundred years: yet, this decline in her collective life did not appreciably affect her creative genius which has continued to express itself in newer forms and we find it today perhaps no less active than in her great past.

The Sindhu-Ganga plain is the most populous region in India. In ancient inscriptions and literature parts of it are called by various names of which *Brahmavarta*, *Aryavarta*, and *Uttarapatha* are more prominent. Each of these significant names has behind it a history. The first is derived from the belief of the ancients that the gods used to be present there at the sacrifices offered in their honour. The second refers to the existence in it of the Aryas who made it the base of operations in their campaigns to bring the whole of northern India under the unifying discipline of Aryan culture. The third implies the northern path of the Aryas. In fact, all the three and a few others indicate the regions which, one after another, became the seats of the Aryas in their eastward march. The Sindhu-Ganga plain is the natural nursery of Indian history. Where in the whole world is there such a vast area of 300,000 sq. miles, so rich and so culturally creative almost in every part of it, and maintaining that creativity for so many thousands of years?

The most important river in this plain is the Ganga which figures so prominently in the religious consciousness of Hindu India. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* has some very weighty words to say about this holy river.

'No river on the surface of the globe can compare with the Ganga in sanctity. And there is not a river in the world which has influenced humanity or contributed to the growth of material civilisation or of social ethics to such an extent as the Ganga. The wealth of India has accumulated in her valley; and profound ideas of spiritual philosophy, conceived on its shady banks, have winged their way far and wide for the guidance of the world.' It may be mentioned that for its aseptic property the water of the Ganga can be and is preserved for a long time for drinking purposes as well as for religious ceremonies in places faraway from the river itself. Other medicinal qualities are also attributed to this water. These may be among the reasons why the Hindus look upon the Ganga with so much veneration. Legends trace its origin to heaven from where, according to a symbolic interpretation, it was brought down as a purifying stream of Knowledge for the liberation of man from his impure life in ignorance. The Ganga as well as many other rivers of India is associated with the myths and legends of the regions in which they are regarded as gods and goddesses, may be, because of the immense benefit they confer on man. If Egypt is the gift of the Nile, North India is the gift of the Ganga.

Dry yet Creative Peninsula

Peninsular India, which is as old as the earth's crust itself and which has never been under the sea, is a three-

sided tableland composed of old, hard, crystalline rocks, a sharp contrast with the alluvial Sindhu-Ganga plain in the whole length and breadth of which, as is cryptically said, not a single pebble can be found. Its southern fringe is covered with a belt of dense jungles and low hills through which runs Vindhya consisting of a couple of parallel ranges that extend from the western extremity of Bengal to the gulf of Cambay. Vindhya has no height above 4000 feet. The two other sides of the peninsular part of India are known as the Western and Eastern Ghats. The former—mentioned in Sanskrit literature as Malaya and Sahya in its southern and northern parts respectively—rise abruptly from the sea and have an average height of 3000 feet. They are replete with forest wealth, and their watersheds have made possible the development of hydro-electric stations contributing to the industrial development of the neighbouring areas. The Eastern Ghats—called Mahendra in Sanskrit—occupy a more inland position leaving broad level tracts between them and the shore. These tracts, like the comparatively narrow ones on the west, are rich in alluvium and are therefore agriculturally most important. The tableland itself abounds in mineral deposits which more than make up for its lack of general fertility.

The rivers of Peninsular India are not without their bearing on the life and history of its people. Some of them are natural frontiers of the regions watered by them. The Narmada and the Godavari are famous in Sanskrit literature for the hermitages of sages that stood on their

banks. The Godavari, the Krishna and the Kaveri are sources of some of the most fertile regions in India. The doab of the Krishna and the Tungabhadra has witnessed many a conflict between the powers of the Dekkan and of south India. In her great past south India had many of her capital cities along the banks of these rivers.

The Indian monsoon starts from the southwest coast of the Peninsula early in May. It is caused by the rain-bearing winds from the Indian Ocean, which grow in density as they reach the Bay of Bengal, when they pour themselves in torrents in Burmah, Assam and Bengal. Thrown back by towering Himalaya, they bring rain to the whole of northern India—another gift of Himalaya to India. In September cold winds from the north-east cause some rain in south India. Indian monsoon covers a period of about three months. There are droughts and dry months, rather trying for the people. It has to be seen if the total rainfall and the rivers in spate, when properly controlled, can considerably obviate these difficulties. Hence the dam and the hydro-electric installations of today.

Most of the Peninsular India is therefore a region of effort, where man has to exert himself to the utmost to produce whatever the soil can yield. Yet, in spite of its chronic water problem and other untoward conditions, the Dekkan plateau has always been the habitation of men whose achievements have added much to India's glory. The beginnings of their material culture go back

to times of which history tries in vain to have any idea. Some evidence however is available from the palaeolithic and neolithic finds unearthed in various parts of this region which is also interspersed with early Iron age sites—facts of very great importance to the study of early man in India. Archaeologists believe that systematic investigations are sure to throw much light on the primitive stages of man's individual and collective development in south India during those dim days of the past. Whatever of it we have so far had is enough to support the view that the South started progressing very early, if not earlier than the North and that it has never been less creative than its neighbour on the other side of Vindhya. Indeed the South has a greater claim to admiration since it has to work against odds which the North has rarely to face. In fact, the people of the South as well as of the drier parts of the North have proved all through their history that it is not always true that an enervating climate is a bar to cultural progress. In constant fight with an unrelenting Nature, they have to their credit a most glorious record of unbroken creative activity over the long period of their history. The character of their achievements does not very much differ from that of the North's. It is practically the same story over again.

The South too has its long roll of saints and sages, thinkers and philosophers, artists and scientists, builders of empires, makers of epochs, who have all added so many brilliant pages to the history of India. It is, how-

ever, the monuments of the South which strike the traveller most. The massive temples with their wide surroundings which in their great days were known as temple-towns accommodating colleges, hospitals, market-places, rest houses and other public institutions, are really a most impressive evidence of the amazing skill of the southerners in the art and science of architecture and town-planning. Indeed, what designs! What vastnesses of conception! What gigantic strength by which they erected these magnificent Houses for the Powers of the Cosmic Spirit!

It is in the South that temples were for the first time cut out of rocks with no trace of them left on the site now except the temples that the visitor sees without realising that the ground he is treading was once the base of a hill. These sacred buildings, decorated with figures of gods and goddesses sculptured on their walls, enshrine beautiful images of deities that attract thousands of devotees from various parts of India even today. The South's mastery of the pictorial art is evident in the excellent frescoes, another marvel of India'a aesthetic genius. The South is sanctified by a long line of saints who sang from the depths of their soul the holy Name of God and proclaimed Him to all, irrespective of caste or creed. It is also the birthplace of those acknowledged exponents of Indian thought, the founders of new schools of religious idealism, whose contribution to the development of India's philosophical literature can never be overestimated. Besides, the South played a most

prominent part in the dissemination of Indian ideas in the islands of southeast Asia.

All these are only a few of the glorious achievements of Peninsular India which, because of its being girt by the seas on the east and the west and by the Vindhya and the Satpura ranges on the north and because of its lack of natural wealth and fertility of the North, was comparatively immune from foreign invasions, a fact which gave its people ample opportunity of cultivating the arts of peace, or developing their cultural life to the point of these creations of wonder and beauty. The diffusion of Aryan ideas by the early missionaries from the North where the Aryas had their first settlements is a movement of very great importance in the history of India. It is a movement whose story has yet to be told in its proper perspective. There is no doubt however that it started as early as the Vedic time[1] and continued during the Ramayana age till we find in the Mahabharata marked evidences of a cultural and racial systhesis between the North and the South. South India did not take long to be fully imbued with the Vedic ideas and with the spirit of all the traditions that sprang from the ancient ideals. Its old name, Dakshinapatha, found in Sanskrit literature and meaning the southern path of the Aryas,

[1] The Aitareya Brahmana mentions that the Andhras were the sons of Visvamitra, which may apparently mean that they were equals of Aryas. It is possible that this cultural, maybe also racial, equality existed from very early times with local variations in customs and habits.

indicates that it was within the ambit of Aryan influence in quite early times. In later days these links with the North were further strengthened when the wide, deep and resistless appeal of the Epics and the Puranas, particularly of the Bhagavata, inflamed and enthralled the mind and heart of the southerners and thus established for ever Aryan culture in the Peninsula which, however, preserved, as it does even to this day, many of its own customs, manners and institutions along with that puissance of its mind which characterises its own version of the Epics, specially of the Ramayana. The famous Tamil classics, some of which are of an immense historical value, are another glowing example of the individuality and intellectual vigour of the South. Politically, almost all of it was included in the empire of Ashoka in the third century B.C. Thus the integration of the whole country, the North and the South, has ever remained a vivid fact in the national consciousness of the people of India and this vividness is made all the more so as we recall what Swami Vivekananda, that godlike son of the Mother, sitting on the last point of Bharatavarsha at Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin) meditated upon. He visioned the Past, Present and Future of India, the whole of the country's self in a sublimated unity of purpose and life. "My India! My India!" rang out his heart in an impassioned voice. He thought of India as the heart and body of the Aryan soul, with Hinduism—the consciousness of the Spirit—as the central principle of its being. He saw her organically,

synthetically and spiritually one. And this vision was the mainspring of all that he did for his motherland.

Nature's Bounties

Covering an area of 1,623,015 sq. miles, India has the peculiar phenomenon of having almost the same length, about 2000 miles, from north to south, as the breadth from east to west. Her coast line is about 4000 miles in length, and is washed by the two embracing arms of the Indian Ocean—the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Roughly speaking, India is thirteen times as large as the British Isles, but only half the size of U.S.A., or five-sixths the size of Europe. Her land area is 3.4 per cent of the surface of the globe, but her population is a fifth of the world's. For the variety of her flora and fauna she has no equal in the world; at least, no country of equal extent has such a variety. India has 17,000 species of flowering plants belonging to 174 natural orders. She has a fourth of the world's bovine stock, and her jungle area, an immense source of the country's wealth, is nearly 30,000 sq. miles. She is no less remarkable for her mineral resources. She is the world's main source of mica and is possessed of perhaps the world's largest reserve of high-grade iron-ore. And there are still very many sources of minerals untapped in the country.

Races, Languages, Religions

Equally varied is the human content of India. But this diversity is not so distinct and sharp as it is made out to be by the orthodox scientist. No theory of race-origins has had universal acceptance. The one, however, that is held in common by most ethnological thinkers is that all members of the human species are fundamentally alike. In the long course of man's physical evolution there have doubtless been changes in the surface traits, such as, pigmentation, shape of hair, nose, face and head, formation of eye, and certain biochemical changes in the blood. These are caused by the force of variation due to which every offspring is sure to have some traits, both in his mental and physical make-up, which are different from those of their parents, and have often been new. If in India today we find a number of different types, it does not follow that these types have not been evolved here, but are the result of early migrations. This is not to say that India has had no strain of foreign blood in her population. There has certainly been such intermingling of blood in the course of her long history.

It is well known that from early times India's fabulous wealth and the priceless treasures of her thought have attracted people from outside who came in the wake of the conquerors and plunderers. Likewise many foreigners came in times of peace for merchandise as much as for ideas and ideals. Many of these settled in

India, adopting, more or less, the manners and customs, sometimes the religion of the people; and, when their numbers were small, they were gradually absorbed by her population. Broadly distinguished, such foreign elements were the Greek, Iranian, Mongolian, Scythian, Hun, Semetic and some even of what constitutes the modern European. How far the characteristic features of these types are present in the human mass of India is a problem yet to be solved.

The existence in India, however, of various ethnic types does suggest that as in other aspects of her life and culture, so in her human aspect too, she should present an interesting heterogeneity such as would indicate the likelihood of the evolution on this soil, one day, of one race, one world, representing the pith of human culture and the broadest and highest outlook and ideal governing the collective life of mankind.

The vast population of India is, as it were, a mosaic of peoples, each with some traits of its own. There are the tall fair Kashmiri and the enterprising Panjabi in the north, the artistic Bengali, Assamese, and Oriya in the east, the intellectually alert Andhra, Tamilian, Malayali and Kannadiga in the south, and the hardy Maratha, the chivalrous Rajput and the business-minded Gujarati and Sindhi in the west, with a great block of virile Hindi-speaking people in the centre, and the even more virile and sturdy tribes of the Himalaya and other adjacent frontier regions. Each of these has its own language and its distinctive mode of dress. These sartorial, lin-

guistic and physical varieties—rich, powerful and interesting elements in the nation-body—are the result of a long process of growth in those regions and also of intermingling under conditions, not always congenial.

India represents the three primary divisions of mankind—the Caucasian or the white type, with its subdivisions of blonde and dark, the Mongolian or the yellow type, and the Ethiopean or the black type; the first two make up the bulk of the population of India proper and the last are the inhabitants of the Andaman Isles. The physical features of these peoples have led ethnologists to trace them to some types which embody these common features. This, let us repeat, may not always mean that these types belong to markedly different branches of the human family having, in every case, their origins outside India. But we shall come to this point again in the next chapter. We shall now see how peoples of particular regions are generally classified as belonging to racial entities which in early days took on certain characteristics distinguishing them from others.

In Kashmir, the Panjab and Rajputana can be seen the Indo-Aryan type with tall stature, fair complexion, dark eyes, plentiful hair on the face, and narrow, prominent nose. Most of the higher sections of north India belong to this type. The bulk of the south India population is composed of the Dravidian type. But the term Dravidian does not at all mean any ethnic type. The loose use of this term has been responsible for much confusion in the understanding of things south Indian.

An eminent scholar of south India holds, and rightly, that 'Dravidian' is essentially a linguistic term and is used in regard to a group of languages. Ethnology has not yet been able to give an exact idea of the race-origin of the peoples of south India. For want of a more appropriate term the word Dravidian has gained currency. The Dravidian type has short stature, dark complexion, plentiful hair, long head and broad nose, inhabiting almost the whole of Peninsular India south of the Vindhya ranges. The Turko-Iranian type is found in N.W. Frontier, Baluchistan and the regions to the west of the Sindhu, having a stature above the medium, complexion fair, head broad, nose long and narrow. East of the Sindhu, Gujarat and western India represent the Scytho-Dravidian type, comprising the Indianised Sakas or Scythians who were an Alpine race of western Asia and ruled in western India for more than two hundred years in the early centuries of the present era. Most of the east Panjab, U.P. and Bihar are inhabited by the Aryo-Dravidian or Hindusthani type with long head, complexion varying from brown to black, and nose from medium to broad and stature below the average. It is said to be a mixture of the Indo-Aryans with the Dravidians. The Mongoloid type is found in Burmah, Assam and the sub-Himalayan tract. It has broad head, dark, yellowish complexion, scanty hair on the face, short stature, flat face and oblique eyelids. This type is attributed to Mongolian invasions of those regions from Tibet and China. The outstanding characteristics of a

type which is tentatively called the *Bengali* type, found in Bengal and Orissa, are broad head, dark complexion, plentiful hair on the face, medium stature, medium nose with a tendency to broadness. It was called Mongolo-Dravidian—a blend of those elements. There is reason to think, however, that it is an Alpine type which is spread along the west coast from Gujarat to Coorg, and also from Banaras to Bihar, and markedly in Bengal. Thus there exists between Bombay and Bengal a kind of racial affinity which is also traced between the Bengalis and Malayalis on the west coast, both of them bearing striking physical resemblances. These resemblances may also be attributed to another less known fact that migrations of brahmanas had twice taken place from Bengal to the South, once during the height of Buddhist influence and another when the country suffered the aggression of Islam.

These human groups apart, there are the aboriginal peoples of India who have never developed a written language of their own, whose economic life has been the simplest, who have made no progress in agriculture and handicrafts. Yet they are well ahead of their more civilised countrymen in the sturdiness of their natural health and of their moral qualities; moreover, they have begun to respond to the progressive forces of the country. A Bhill of the Aravalli or Satpura hills, a Sontal of the Sontal Parganas, a Munda of Chhota Nagpur, a Gond of the Central Provinces, a Toda of the Nilgiris, a Garo or a Khasia of Assam still keeps, more or less, to primitive

life in forest areas. He is ordinarily a truthful man and has a well-regulated but simple social existence. None of these tribes can be called prehistoric, though they were in India before the Dravidians. They, even the most primitive amongst them like the Veddas of Ceylon, belong to the species known to anthropology as the Homo Sapiens. Of these the Todas alone have regular features. All the others have, more or less, irregular facial formations. There is no beauty whatsoever in their eyes and lips and nose. The tribes of eastern India show Mongolian characteristics in their faces, while the Gonds are absolutely free from such peculiarities as slanting eyes and flat noses. In their religious life they propitiate evil spirits. They are intensely fond of dancing in a rhythmic undulating movement. The Mundas have adopted the title of Adi-vasis—meaning original inhabitants—a title that well describes most of these people. Besides these tribes leading a more or less settled life, there are still many other aboriginal peoples who are absolute nomads, ever on the move.

The diversity of ethnic types in India, each of which is named after certain early immigrant groups, indicates how in the chemistry of racial intermingling, original types were lost or modified and new or partly new ones emerged, and how this process contributed to a rich and strong composition of India's human material. But it is not that in early days men moved into India from outside only; in the country itself there have been many such movements from one region to another, apart from

the original expansion of racial groups, with the result that one may meet with people of an obviously Indo-Aryan or an obviously Dravidian type in any part of India and in any caste. Indians of higher castes, particularly the brahmanas, generally show a tendency to have fairer skins and lighter hair than the average, which is ascribed to a larger strain of Aryan blood. Nevertheless, "this admixture of races" says C.E.M. Joad, "has had important effects on India's past history and present outlook. The first of these is a sense of fundamental unity far more vivid and persistent than can be accounted for by the circumstances of propinquity in the same geographical area. Europeans live together in a geographical area whose size is not very different from that of India. But as the wars which have disgraced European history in the past and the quarrels and rivalries that enfeeble the League of Nations in the present only too clearly show that the inhabitants of Europe are very far from being imbued with the sense of unity which distinguishes the inhabitants of India. We cannot, in short, speak of a "European" with the same appropriateness as we can speak of an "Indian", who, in spite of differences of colour, caste and creed, looks upon all other Indians as his fellow-countrymen and upon India as his home."

Says Sir J. Sarkar, the eminent Indian historian, in his *India through the Ages*: "The Indian people of today are no doubt a composite ethnical product; but whatever their different constituent elements may have been

in origin, they have all acquired a common Indian stamp, and have all been contributing to a common culture and building up a common type of traditions, thought and literature. Even Sir Herbert Risley, who is so sceptical about the Indians' claim to be considered as one people, has been forced to admit that 'Beneath the manifold diversity of physical and social type, languages, custom and religion, which strikes the observer in India, there can still be discerned a certain 'underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin.' There is in fact an Indian character, a general Indian personality, which we cannot resolve into its component elements.' " (*People of India*).

The diversity of racial elements in the population of this vast country, the natural geographical regions promoting the growth of small but free units of collective life, and the necessity of easier media of expression than classical ones, have been among the most formative factors in the development of local dialects and languages of India, in whose current and existing forms can be traced influences of several foreign languages too. The Census Report of 1931 makes the bold statement that India has more than two hundred languages; but this is far from the truth. No doubt we have here all the four great families of human speech, but their derivates, forming the written languages of India, would not number more than a dozen. It is the spoken dialects, allied mostly to the written ones, that look like making a comparatively large number but never more than what they

are elsewhere, in proportion to the population. Besid many of the points that differentiate these dialects slight variations in the forms of verbs and in intonati Diversity in language exists in many countries, m markedly, in the United States, Soviet Union, Germa Switzerland and Great Britain where English is spo in about forty dialects. That it should exist in a country like India is only natural; and as a matter fact, it has not prevented her growth into a nation her political progress.

In her vast area India has about a dozen languages these are closely allied to one another. They fall un two groups—the Indo-Aryan family of languages of North and the Dravidian languages of the South. Indo-Aryan family—Hindi, Urdu, Sindhi, Gujar Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya—derive from Sans and he who knows one of them finds it easy to learn others. The Dravidian languages are different, but e of them contains fifty per cent or more words of p Sanskrit or of Sanskrit origin. Their four broad gro are Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Malayalam. Telegu the language of the people of the Andhra State; Ta that of the eastern coast from Madras to the of the Indian Peninsula. It is the richest of the Dr dian languages and the oldest of all modern Inc languages. Its literature is of an extraordinary qua and richness and goes back to the early centuries of Christian era. There is a view that Tamil and Sans have a common origin. Kannada is spoken in the sou

western part of India. It is also an old language possessing a considerable literature of its own. Malayalam, probably a branch of old Tamil, is the language of the southwestern coast. Brahui, the language of Central Baluchistan, is regarded as the northernmost of the Dravidian languages.

The languages of the North also have each its own literature. In the history of their development can be traced various influences acting and reacting on one another. It is a subject of absorbing interest—this comparative study of the growth of the Indian languages, both of the South and the North. In the North Hindi with slight variations is more widely spoken than any other major language of India and it is understood by an even wider number. Bengali is another language which, mainly because of the international recognition of Tagore's unique poetry, has been acclaimed as one of the progressive languages of the world. Its rapid rise to its present richness, grace, flexibility and vigour, is indeed a phenomenon in itself in the literary world. No wonder that every country in Europe should have some nationals learning this language and the Swedish Academy Library has the largest Bengali section outside Bengal.

Though not a spoken language now, Sanskrit, the mother of most of the languages of India, is equally popular as a cultural language both in the North and in the South. It is indeed the very fount and foundation of Indian culture. Sanskrit literature enshrines in its vast range practically the whole story of India's magnificent past and is, therefore, along with Pali—the first popular

form of Sanskrit—in which most of the early Buddhist texts and inscriptions were written, an authentic source of her history. Eminent Indians who plead for a correct appraisement of the culture and civilisation of India adduce convincing evidences of the incomparable greatness of the Sanskrit language, and urge upon their countrymen to give more importance to its study, not only because it is the repository of the world's highest knowledge and finest literature, but also because it is the most perfect language characterised by ancient sages as *Devabhasha* (the language of the gods), or better still, as the medium of God's own words—the Vedas, the Revealed Scriptures. The cultivation of the language, by itself, has an exalting influence on the mind and heart—a blessing of a rare value. W. C. Taylor says that Sanskrit is a language of unrivalled richness and variety. It is the parent of all those dialects that Europe has finally called classical. W. Bopp holds that Sanskrit was at one time the only language of the civilised world. Fredrich Schlegel declares that it is the greatest language of the world, the most wonderful and perfect; justly is it called *Samskrita*, that is to say, perfect and finished. To Sir William Jones, Sanskrit is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin, more exquisitely refined than either. Says Sri Aurobindo: "Sanskrit, as has been universally recognised by those competent to form a judgment, is one of the most magnificent, the most perfect and wonderfully sufficient literary instruments developed by the human mind, at once majes-

tic and sweet and flexible, strong and clearly-formed and full and vibrant and subtle, and its quality and character would be of itself a sufficient evidence of the character and quality of the race whose mind it expressed and the culture of which it was the reflecting medium." Many prominent thinkers of India today believe that without a knowledge of Sanskrit nothing of India's past achievements can be understood in their deeper and therefore truer implications, and that a revival of this language may strengthen the cultural unity of India and help bring about a new resurgence.

Now a word about English. This remarkable language, already international, has rendered signal service to the cause of India's unity, her nationalism and her independence, and occupies, in her everyday-life, a place of importance, perhaps no whit less great than did Sanskrit or Pali, each in its own day. Vivekananda made it the vehicle of his luminous thoughts and world-shaking ideas, charged with Indian spirituality. Rabindranath and Radhakrishnan owe to it their international fame, the one as 'the inspired singer of the New Dawn', and the other as a brilliant exponent of Indian philosophy. Abstruse ideas of Indian thought, occult and esoteric symbology of the Vedas and other Indian scriptures, too difficult for explanation or translation into a foreign tongue, have found wonderfully exact translation and revealing exposition in English at the hands of Sri Aurobindo who has enriched the language also by his own matchless contributions in prose and poetry, embodying

his supreme experiences in the ways of the Spirit. If English is the greatest gift of England to India, India's greatest gift to English, and through it, to the world is Sri Aurobindo's masterpiece, *The LifeDivine* and his sublime epic *Savitri*, through which he has sent forth his divine message to humanity

Yet another phenomenon of diversity in Indian life is its religious aspect. It is significant that India represents all the major religions of the world. The many sects of Hinduism which is the religion of nearly two-thirds of India's population do not divide their followers into such rival camps or hostile groups as have disfigured the history of other religions. Every Hindu, whatever his sect, believes in the Veda as the supreme source of all Indian religious and spiritual ideas. It is this faith that unites them into a confraternity which has always proved to be a powerful cohesive force in the social life of the country. The Hindu worships many gods but he regards them not as separate entities but as aspects of the One, any one of which he seizes upon as the deity of his heart because that suits his temperament or culture or capacity or answers to his soul's need. This unlimited freedom of worship that Hinduism allows to its adherents is a striking proof of its breadth of outlook, universality and tolerance. Hinduism does not impose any fixed set of rules or dogmas on its followers. It not only permits but encourages every individual to follow his own line of spiritual development, respecting at the same time the right of others to follow theirs. It is this cosmopolitan

outlook of Hinduism that accounts for the various sects, schools and communities which have grown up within its broad sphere.

Hinduism is not a mere religious system. It embraces the whole life of man, because religion, for the Hindus, is a way of life, by following which, one can grow towards a greater life, a perfection of wholeness composed of the perfection of every part of one's being. Hinduism, therefore, embodies along with its cults and rites, mythologies and philosophies, laws, institutions and customs which form the fabric of family, social and collective life. But in its present form, encrusted with various excrescences, its core and pith, ever so deep, has gone deeper down, beyond an easy reach of the common run. No wonder they should be far from its highest ideals. Nevertheless, the key to the highest spiritual destiny of man is there.

Islam claims the next largest number of followers. It also has sects, two of which are more popular than the others. Its fundamental teachings are not foreign to, but are found also, in Hinduism, as in any other religion. The ideas of India's Vedanta in Sufism, the higher spiritual thought and mystic experience of Islam, supply a common platform for Indianism and Islam. Impartial history will testify to the fact that in the past relations between Hindus and Muslims in India bore unmistakable signs of mutual understanding and toleration and that there were regions, as in Bengal, where a fellowship of these two faiths was developing as a result of this under-

standing. This is how religions and cultures can thrive side by side and weld peoples into a unity of broadened outlook and ideal. There are also the Buddhists, the founder of whose faith is one of the ten Avatars—Incarnations of God—of Hinduism. Over a million people follow Jainism preached by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha. It is worthy of note that the Jains have all their religious rites and ceremonies performed by Hindu priests. The Cross of the Christ is borne by a section of Indians whose forefathers adopted Christianity when European missionaries started preaching it, long before Europe had any political footing in India. The Indian Christians are as much a part of the total religious life of the country as the Muslims or the adherents of any other faith. It may be mentioned that the Hindus regard the Christ as an incarnation of God. A great Swami of the Ramakrishna Order has clearly stated this attitude of the Hindus towards Christianity. The Sikhs of the Panjab still show their exemplary devotion to the *Adi Granth*, 'the First Sacred Book', their Bible, which they worship in place of their Master who founded their faith in the fifteenth century. Then there are a hundred thousand Parsis, the descendants of the Persians, the first batch of whom left their country in the eighth century and settled in India, refusing to be converted to Islam which the Muslim conquerors of Persia were then forcibly imposing on them. They are fire-worshippers in accordance with the ancient Aryan tradition and have much in their cult that resembles Vedic ideas which in a remote past were commonly shared

by the Iranians, the early fathers of the present Persians, and the Aryas of India.

This diversity in the religious life of India is not without its bearing on the future of religion in this country. The essential truth of every cult is one and the same and as this is realised by the followers of different religions, there will grow with that the basis of the new religion of the future, the Religion of the Spirit, through which man will realise his divine destiny.

Levers of Progress and Unity

An epitome of the world, India presents the colourful picture, as of a kaleidoscopic kind—physical, racial, linguistic and religious. The place and importance of each of these aspects of Indian life as also their meaning and purpose, become defined, not in what each as an isolated phenomenon is, but in the whole that India is. This integral significance of India's diversity takes the depth and extension of its proper connotation from the very fact of the manysidedness of her life and culture, because it is that which is the very basis of her greatness and glory, her richness and strength. Even her geography and the natural divisions of the country, at least as they existed in the past, have had their particular contribution to make in the growth and evolution of India as a whole.

Separated by mountain and ocean, India had long centuries of peace and security during which she occupied herself with cultural pursuits of various kinds and built

up a distinct type of civilisation, a culture which was the natural flowering of her soul, her schools of art, her social and religious institutions which have served as the foundation of all later developments of the race. In very early times, the North and the South, separated by Vindhya, evolved each its own type of culture; and a synthesis of the two, the latter assimilating the ideas of the former in which its own got interfused, forms the fabric of what for more than three thousand years flourished as the civilisation of India.

Then there are the smaller territorial units in these two larger divisions, which are created by nature—by rivers, hills and forests—in such a way that each of them developed its own political and social existence, its own distinctive ways of life, its own customs, manners and traditions, and above all, its own way of expressing its creative soul. The great ideals of India to which every such unit owed its willing allegiance used always to influence and guide these regional endeavours so that their fruits invariably became part of the cultural achievements of the whole country. A distinctiveness would be there, perhaps, in every such local note, but that was only to increase the richness and fullness of the symphony, not to mar the total effect of its music. This is what makes up the grandeur and profundity of Indian culture. Some of these units specialised in art and architecture, some in literature, some in statecraft, and some again in military science, and there were a number of others which excelled in more than one of these; but all showed in whatever

they did, their innate tendency to regard the spiritual motive in them as the one governing principle of every expression of their creative soul.

It is this attitude of Indians which gives meaning and purpose to the efforts they made in the past and make even today to realise those highest ideals of the race in which alone, they know, lies their own and their country's true progress and advancement. In this long and almost unbroken history of their cultural striving Indians have shown that it is not always true that civilisation thrives only in certain favourable climatic zones. India has not been hampered by her belonging to any particular zone. She had been in her past one of the most progressive countries of the world. And this she was able to be, as much on the snowy heights of Kashmir and Nepal as on the dry plateau of the Dekkan or in the humid river valleys of the North. The reason was that in all her higher pursuits she was impelled by the irresistible urge of her soul, the urge to discover and preserve the Truth—'the Truth that preserves the world'. No outer impediment could stop the adventure of the soul into the boundless heavens of the Spirit. That is why Indian culture is so deeply rooted in and sustained by the inward bent of the racial mind.

The peoples of these natural units of India owed much of their progress to the comparative smallness of their regions and to the freedom they were always allowed in following their own line of development,—a freedom which was largely Nature's gift to them. From their

natural setting they derived much of their character, habit and trend of culture. These, again, in their turn, had to their credit the marvellous creations of the Heroic Age, when the foundation was laid for India's vast and unique civilisation. What is most striking in these local expressions is that they almost immediately assimilated themselves to the general trend of the country's culture, making it richer and more durable. This cultural unity of India was at work long before the rise of Buddhism. A proper history has yet to be written about the contribution of these smaller units to the larger stream of Indian civilisation. In the smallness and intensity of these socio-political centres of ancient Indian life lay the primary source of their strength and their amazing vitality.

History has amply shown that smaller and more compact collectivities tend naturally towards a solidarity, and that this solidarity imparts a vigour to their life and infuses it into every part of the organism and helps the whole system to grow and expand, and, in God's own time, to bear flower and fruit. Says Sri Aurobindo: 'The active and stimulating participation of all or most in the full vigour of the common life, which was the great advantage of the small but free earlier communities, is much more difficult in a larger aggregate and is at first impossible.' Large states and empires have always lacked this intensity of life, and because of the very hugeness of their size, seem also to lack that fullness of energy which is the characteristic of the small compact

states; these are too large to feel their vitality evenly active in every part of their big body. Besides, cultural endeavours find better scope in smaller units where individual talent receives readier recognition. This digression into the region of political science is to show that such empires as that of the Mauryas in India and the Romans in Europe cannot claim even a very samll fraction of the wonderful cultural achievements of the Greek city-states, the city-states of medieval Italy and the small states and republics of ancient India which had flourished in pre-Buddha times and continued almost to the last days of Hindu rule in India. Some of them grew in natural regions, in the river-valleys of the Sindhu-Ganga plain, in the hilly areas of western India, in central Indian forest uplands, and also in the naturally advantageous parts of the South. To these and to other smaller states of the past may roughly be traced the origin of the present-day peoples or 'sub-nations' of India, if they may be so called: the Gujaratis, the Marathis, the Panjabis, the Rajputs, the Bengalis, the Oriyas, the Tamilians and the Andhras. Each of these evolved out of one or more of the early smaller states, some being mothered by the natural regions that they inhabited in those days. And we know how remarkable was the role every one of them played in building up the glory that is India. Of course, for the bigger empires, one can always say that they constitute an important step in the growth of the human race towards its ultimate unity.

With the march of time bringing with it changes in the political life of the country necessitating readjustments of its inside territorial frontiers, these smaller units could not all of them retain their natural geographical boundaries. Bigger states and kingdoms and, later, empires arose, and with them arose strong tendencies towards larger and larger organisations whose need began to be felt when the country was faced with the threat of aggressions from without and when many of the smaller states became so absorbed in their individuality and local patriotism that they forgot the political interests of the country as a whole, and, owing to mutual rivalries, were unable to unite against any foreign invasion, which however did not affect the common cultural life India enjoyed all through her history. Yet from very early times the idea of an all-India empire had been there, and had also taken some form, of which undoubted evidences are available. It may however be remembered that behind these endeavours there was no imperialistic motive in the modern sense of the term. The need for the country's political unity was certainly one of the reasons, but this unity was needed not only for its own sake but also for the sake of strengthening the cultural unity of the race, the bedrock of its life and progress. That is why India's history throughout has been marked by a constant effort to unite all diverse units into a single political whole under a central authority so that India might be politically as well as culturally one.

Growth of Integrity

The vision of India's oneness and territorial integrity came to her sages and seers almost at the very dawn of her history. Sanskrit literature preserves significant evidence of how this concept influenced the thoughts of those early fathers of the race. We find in them dim but definite beginnings of India's national consciousness, the love and adoration of her children for the Mother that India was and has ever been, the Infinite and Compassionate Mother of man, for that is how India has always been worshipped by her children as also by those of her devotees from outside who realised or sensed the secret meaning of her existence in history. In those early days when communications and transport were scanty, Indians conjured up a glorious picture of their vast and mighty land. The very name of their country, Bharatavarsha (land of the Bharatas),—a single and common name for the whole of India, current all through the millenniums of her history—suggests the vividness of this picture in the mind and imagination of the people. The origin of the name is traced to the glorious House of the Bharatas of the Rigveda who played a most important part in the arynaisation of India. Reaffirming this immemorial tradition of the geographical unity of India, the Vishnu Purana, one of the oldest of the Puranas, says that the country which lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bharata, for there dwell the descendants of Bharata. But the origin

of the word may also be traced to King Bharata, son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala of the Puranas,—may be a Puranic adaptation of the Vedic Bharata,—who was a *chakravarti* (sovereign) ruler and is said to have brought India under a unified political system. In the Satapatha Brahmana the word is associated with fire, symbolising Aryan culture which marched along the courses of rivers and valleys disseminating its light. Bharata is thus a most significant word implying the integrity of the country both of its state and culture. Etymologically it means the children of Bharata signifying 'nourishers and fosterers.'

There are prayers in the Rigveda addressed to the principal rivers of north India, which indicate how the fertile land between them is their bounteous gift to man. There are other prayers too in later Sanskrit literature in which the seven chief rivers of India are invoked together. These are reverently uttered by every Hindu as he has his daily ablutions—for his morning baths are such—and the rivers are implored to conjoin in the water he uses. And how can the Hindu think of the rivers without thinking of the country passed through and watered by them? The sacred cities of India—of the North and of the South—are equally immortalised in hymns which are also part of the daily adoration of the Hindu. Each one of these hymns is associated with the life and activity of God-men and God-lovers by the touch of whose feet those cities were blessed. Nor are the rocks and mountains of India forgotten in this ado-

ration of the country of whose physical formation they are the 'ribs and backbone'.

And this is not all. Pilgrimage, another sacred institution of the Hindu, has ever served to accentuate and objectify this conception of India's integrity, giving it, through personal touch and experience, a still more intimate form. Every principal faith or sect of the Hindus has its holy places spread over the length and breadth of the country. Significantly enough, there is a holy city at each extreme point in the four directions of India. Pious devotees, as they visit them, passing through others in between, realise more concretely the oneness of their country, the singleness of its entity. And as they meet and mix with fellow-pilgrims from other parts and local people, they feel a sense of comradeship fostered by common faith and common ideals. Religious fairs like the Kumbh and Kurukshetra also play their part to the same end.

The Buddhist holy places, no less popular among the Hindus, are yet another means through which the wholeness of India has stamped itself on the consciousness of her children. There is scarcely a region, either in the North or the South, which does not have at least one Asokan pillar or some other monument, eightyfour thousand of which were erected in different parts of the country by that most humane of emperors for the moral uplift of his subjects. The cultural unity of India at this period—the third century B.C.—becomes evident from the fact that one language and one script, in which the edicts of Asoka were inscribed on those pillars, were used, or at

least understood, by the common people all over India, for whom the edicts were expressly meant.

According to the Tantrik conception, the fifty-one sacred centres of Shakti-worship in India, covering the entire length and breadth of the country, from Jwalamukhi in Himalaya to Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin) on the southern sea, from Hingraj in the west to Kamrup (Assam) in the east, embody and symbolise the fifty-one aspects of the divine Shakti and represent in the experience of the Tantrik mystics the integrality of India as the Mother-Force of the world.

Vision of the Mother

In rapturous strains have the poets of India sung of their great Mother-Land, one and indivisible, of her entrancing beauty, her invincible power, her immeasurable wealth and her deep inner significance. The earliest song of this kind is that of the Atharvaveda which, in language at once fervent and striking, speaks of the Mother-country as the "the land of the brave and the pious, of heroism and enterprise, of trade and commerce, of art and science, of greatness and virtue, of countless herbs and plants; the land girt by the ocean, and fertilised by rivers like the Sindhu, and rich in grain and foodstuffs; the land where our forefathers lived and worked, where the titans succumbed to the gods; the land which boasts of the highest mountain and the most beautiful forests; the land of sacrificial rites and sacred pleasures, of valour and renown, pat-

riotism and self-sacrifice, of virtue and kindness." These words suggest a depth and intensity of feeling and show how true, profound and comprehensive was the conception the ancients had of their country's many-sided magnitude, how grand to them were its various aspects which constituted, in their totality, the Mother of their worship.

Of particular note is the reference in it to the victory of the gods over the demons, which is symbolic of the Vedic story that the forces of Light are ever at war with the forces of Darkness so that man may be liberated from his subjection to the latter and the Kingdom of God established on earth as the crown of that victory. This idea which has behind it an even deeper truth comes to be more expressly represented in the repeated mention in the Puranas—the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagavata Purana in particular—which declare Bharatavarsha as the country where gods are eager to be born for the greater blessing of their final liberation. Indeed, in their birth in man and in man attaining his divine perfection envisaged by the Vedic seers lies their supreme liberation from their typal state. The liberation of the gods, who are typal beings, is possible if they choose to accept human birth and pass through the cycle of evolution of which earth alone is the divinely-created field.

In her sublime age of the Spirit the seers of India visioned this truth round which has grown the tradition of the spiritual quest that has been the high privilege of India to foster through the ages, thus making it the holy land not only for man but also for the gods whose descent there-

in so many times has made it all the more sacred for the eventual and full manifestation of God's own Light in man. This is the meaning of the gods' desire to be born in India. And this is why the Aryas have always regarded their country as *devabhumi* (the land of gods) and as *swargadapi gariyashi* (greater even than heaven).

The epics of India, read in every Hindu home, are not without their beautiful descriptions of the various regions of the country and moving references to the sanctity and holiness of its integrity. The very name of the Mahabharata comes from that of the early father after whom the country is called. The Ramayana contains brilliant and charming accounts of the many regions—forests and mountains—in which Rama passed his years of exile. Classical Sanskrit literature has in it eloquent references to the glory that is India. Kalidasa's lines in his *Meghaduta* and other works on the wonder and beauty with which India is so gorgeously robed are ever memorable words of the king of poets depicting what to him his country is. In his *Kavyamimansa*, a famous work on the theory of poetics, Rajasekhara, himself a noted dramatist of the ninth century A.C., gives a vivid description of the geographical features of India and makes suggestive references to her seasons, and the winds, the birds, the flowers, the influences and the effects peculiar to each. He also says that the way classical poets had laid these natural facts and considerations under contribution passed virtually into one of the poetical conventions of their day. Speaking generally of the later and even of the more mo-

dern times, one might say that these factors, separately or collectively, cannot but have their constant natural impact on the general trend of thought and action of the land.

In modern times the greatest singers of Bengal were also the mighty voices of the New Dawn that burst upon India in the beginning of this century through a resurgence of her soul into fresh cultural and patriotic endeavours whose fruits are modern India's multiform contribution to the sum-total of human culture. The songs of the new awakening that these poets composed stirred their countrymen into an impassioned striving to win back their country's freedom and re-install the Mother in her temple. Indeed every one of them had a vision of the Mother which expressed itself in fiery words of faith and love, worship and dedication, courage and determination; and the Eternal Mother, so invoked, revealed herself once more to the spiritual sight of her children.

In one of his finest national songs, Rabindranath Tagore invokes in his inimitable language the Dispenser and Guide of India's Destiny. In another he visualises his motherland as a country of incomparable beauty, an English rendering of which done in the same rhythm and rhyme-scheme by Dilip Kumar Roy is given below:

"Heart-charmer of the universe!
O thou earth, bright with pure beams of the sun!
Our ancestors' Mother and Nurse!

The first dawn broke out in thy sky of love,
The first hymn rang out in thy mystic grove,
Thy sylvan arbours first proclaimed to man
The lore of light and parables of stars.

O blessed Beauty, whose bounty sleeplessly
Feeds here and in far climes all who call to thee:
Whose rivers ripple forth, a liquid grace,
Thy breasts' inviolate milk no earth-touch mars!

The billows of blue oceans lave thy feet,
Winds quiver athrill thy green robe's hem to greet,
The brow of thy Himaloy, kissed by sky,
Gleams out, sun-crowned, a white that knows no scars."

In his famous and most popular national songs Dwijendralal Roy, the celebrated poet and playwright, brings out in bolder relief India's spiritual heritage against the background of her wonderful physical beauty. The extracts quoted below from one such, rendered into English by Sri Aurobindo read what the poet's soul must have read in the soul of his motherland:

"India, my India, where first human eyes awoke to heavenly light,
All Asia's holy place of pilgrimage, great Motherland of might!
World-mother, first giver to humankind of philosophy and sacred lore,

Knowledge thou gav'st to man, God-love, works, art,
religion's open door.

* * *

Before us still there floats the ideal of those splendid days
of gold:
A new world in our vision wakes, Love's India we shall
rise to mould."

Then there is the sublime song, the inspired Word of dynamic nationalism, seen, heard and uttered by that great seer of modern India, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. It is this song that 'converted a whole people in a single day to the religion of patriotism.' We give below Sri Aurobindo's soul-stirring translation of it:

BANDE MATARAM

"Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.
Glory of moonlight dreams,
Over thy branches and lordly streams,
Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!

Mother, I kiss thy feet,
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
When the swords flash out in twice seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,
To thee I call, Mother and Lord!
Thou who savest, arise and save!
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave
Back from plain and sea
And shook herself free.

Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
Thou the love divine, the awe
In our hearts that conquers death.
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
Every image made divine
In our temples is but thine.

Thou art Durga, Lady and Queen,
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother, lend thine ear.

Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue, O candid-fair
In thy soul, with jewelled hair
And thy glorious smile divine,
Loveliest of all earthly lands,
Showering wealth from well-stored hands!
Mother, mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee,
Mother great and free. "

The most striking idea in this song is that India with all her earthly and heavenly riches is shown here as the Mother, the divine Shakti, who sustains and nourishes her children both materially and spiritually. This hymn, sung and sanctified by scores of martyrs, is the true national anthem of India. In it the country is not merely the temple of the Mother but the Mother herself whom her children worship with all the passion of their heart. And when they do so, they worship the Power that shapes the destiny of India and guides her development through the ages, and this unending development and ever-expanding process forms the chequered story of India's unique achievements in the inner as in the outer court of life. This is how India's history becomes indissolubly bound up with her geography—a fact of which a glimpse was caught by the late British Prime Minister, J. Ramsay MacDonald when he said: "The Hindu, from his traditions and his religion, regards India not only as a political

unit naturally the subject of one sovereignty, but as the outward embodiment, as the temple,—nay, even as the goddess mother—of his spiritual culture. India and Hinduism are organically related as body and soul." (R. K. Mookerji in his *The Fundamental Unity of India.*) When an objection was taken to *Vande Mataram* being made the national anthem of India on the ground of its being associated with image-worship, Sri Aurobindo remarked that by Durga was meant Mother India herself with all her light and strength, her greatness and glory.

This concept of the Indian mind in which the homeland is adored as the Mother is rooted in the truth perceived by the ancients that all creation is the manifestation of the supreme Energy and that India is, at least in the present cycle of evolution, a special manifestation in as much as she is not only a beautiful and bountiful Mother lavishing upon her children all that they need for their material well-being and aesthetic and intellectual growth, but bestowing upon all mankind, since the dawn of human culture, the inestimable treasures of the Spirit, which have nourished the soul of many a nation and are still the only hope and haven of this distracted world. In the midst of the gloom that envelopes the world today, India shows the path of Light, the path of man's liberation from his present imperfect life in Ignorance into the truth, bliss and perfection of a divine Life. Not only this. The cult of Shakti—divine Force—sees in the shapely form of India, so markedly singular, a conscious physical formation of Shakti, presiding over the destiny of the land and pre-

paring her for participation in the coming age of the Spirit when man will live a godlike life as the next higher stage of his evolution.

Even when Indians admire the matchless beauty of their country, the romance it outwardly is, they feel within them a kind of inner relationship not only with its material embodiment but also with her soul; and as the feeling deepens the externals fade away, and in their place emerges before their mind's eye, much more vividly, an idea, a dynamic concept, of which the land with all its charms becomes a symbol, an image, an object, as it were, of their love and veneration. Nothing indeed can more infallibly develop in us an abiding sense of our fellowship with others, with all, belonging to a common land of birth than when we are blessed with this exalting experience. And does not this sense invariably prove real enough as a wholesome and a strengthening factor in our collective life? In fact, this is its very bedrock. The physical merges itself in the ideal, and the ideal fulfils itself in the real, reconciling the apparent contradictions into a harmony, a multiple oneness built up of India's human, cultural and geographical factors. It is a force, an energy, inherent in its soil and pervading its space, that works this transforming miracle. India is that Force, that Spirit which makes its mystic appeal to the inmost being of her children. Sri Aurobindo once said that India had never been to him what was merely suggested by her outer vestures, attractive and gorgeous though they were. She was to him the Mother, the Eternal and Infinite Mother. The truth of

India is revealed to those who respond to this appeal and so all the more easily know and grasp the secret, the supreme secret of her spiritual motherhood. To this vision of the Mother, India calls her children who realise in it their oneness that is for ever.

Towards a Larger Harmony

The unity of India has yet another deep meaning, outwardly veiled, as it is, by her diversity. Why is it that so many diverse races, cultures, languages, religions, temperaments—a formidable array of incompatibles—should meet here? Why is it that in her outer form she should be literally a veritable world having, in and about her, every feature that Nature can furnish on earth?

None of the ways of Nature are without a purpose. Ages ago her children discovered the truth of India's physical oneness and worshipped her as the beating heart of the world, the creative centre from which one day would go forth not only the message of unity of all existence but along with it the supreme force to make that oneness a concrete fact in the life of mankind.

The manysidedness of her racial and cultural life is there as the source of her strength by which she has built a grand synthesis, as amazing as fruitful. One of the mighty efforts that has characterised India's history throughout has been to evolve this synthesis of peoples, of ideas, of religions, and of various other trends and tendencies, even sharply contradictory ones, whose exis-

tence in the cultural and collective life of the country seems to have been intended by Nature with a view to evolve their underlying unity and organise around it the larger well-being of India and the world. And has not history a glowing story to tell of her success in this effort? The truth is too plain to be missed even by foreigners. Says C.E.M. Joad: "Whatever the reason, it is a fact that India's special gift to mankind has been the ability and willingness of Indians to effect a synthesis of many different elements, both of thoughts and of peoples: to create in fact a Unity out of diversity.' In his *Oxford History of India* Vincent Smith hits upon the same idea: 'India beyond all doubt possesses a deep underlying fundamental unity, far more profound than that produced either by geographical isolation or by physical suzereignty. This unity transcends the innumerable diversities of blood, colour, language, dress, manners, and sect."

And this unity in the corporate life of the country has been sustained among other things by the wholehearted allegiance of the people to common cultural, social and religious ideals and also by their inherent conviction that India is the temple of the Mother and that all who dwell in that temple are the children of the same Mother, which is only a symbolic way of saying that India being an embodiment of the Shakti, the Creative Energy of the Supreme, all her children as part of that Energy are one in the Mother that India is. This is the psychological secret of Indian unity in the growth of which the innate spirituality of the race has been a great sustaining and shaping force.

While speaking of the diversity of India, Sir Frederic Whyte points out her unity which to him is the greatest of all contradictions in India, yet so greatly a reality, and so powerful that even the Mussalman world in India has to confess that it has been deeply affected by coming within its influence. But this unity, as it is, cannot be the last word of India's collective existence. Neither is it a dynamic fact in her whole being today, and it is not for this alone that India has stood through the ages. The secret of her being the play-field of multitudinous forces, favourable and unfavourable, of concord and discord, lies in the truth of a larger synthesis, a grander harmony which it is for India to discover and establish and proclaim to the world as the sole remedy for all evils that afflict mankind today, the one solution of all the perplexing problems that beset its collective life. India is indeed a vast workshop of evolutionary Nature where things are being moulded and patterned for the new world of Tomorrow, the world of a new Light and a new Harmony, that will emerge out of its present chaos and darkness.

Unity has been working so far as an underlying force secretly holding together the multiplying diversities of the cultural life. Being an epitome of the earth, India possesses multifarious elements obscurely seeking a complex harmony through a tangled interaction which, to a superficial view, appears as a picturesque disorder or even a mess and a chaos belying the fundamental unity. But that India lives on while Egypt and Babylon, Greece and Rome have waned and faded out of existence testifies

to the organic unity of her manifold life, which, if secret today, will emerge tomorrow, not only as an accomplished unity of cultural elements, but as the all-harmonising unity of the Spirit, triumphing over all division and separating barrier.

The Vedic seers had the vision of the truth of this unity and harmony of the Spirit. The Seer of today has had it again, now in all the fullness of its significance for the future of India as well as for the future of mankind. The whole history of India has been, we may repeat, a process through which this ancient vision, this world-shaping historic force has motived all the glorious expressions of her opulent creative life fitting her, stage by stage, for the reception of the Light that has been revealed today by the Master of the race. No human power but the power of this Light alone can bring about the Harmony that is for ever. And India will lead humanity towards this 'divine event'. This is the meaning of India's history, the inmost implication of the vastness and variety of her life and culture.

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CHAPTER TWO

MOST ANCIENT INDIA

THE starting-point of India's history has yet to be traced out. Where the story of India should begin is still an open question. Newer approaches to this problem suggest themselves as newer facts about the origin of the earliest cultures and races of the country emerge into view. It is not possible with the present range of our knowledge to be in any way dogmatic, far less, definitive about the beginnings of man and his culture in India, and without this no story of the country can be considered complete. The point where the prehistoric stage ends and history begins cannot be fixed; it has many a time proved illusory and has sharply receded as fresh archaeological finds have added centuries to the age of the culture concerned. Yet a reference to the first glimmerings of the dawn of man's life and culture in the country need not be ruled out as a thing apart.

Early Man in India

It is now generally believed that early man existed in the Himalayan regions. Some large flakes from the Siwalik foothills are said to be among the oldest specimens of his handiwork. Geologists are inclined to the

view that Himalaya has much to do with the emergence of the early man whose origin in south India is held by some anthropologists to be quite a possibility. In the South, however, no human remains of the early paleolithic period have so far been found; whereas the Siwalik regions have yielded fossils of anthropoids which show perceptible evolutionary tendencies towards man. Some of these are regarded as more in the human than in the prehuman stage of evolution, which fact points to something definitive of man having started there his growth towards his 'modern' form. Joseph Barell suggests that Man and Himalaya arose simultaneously over a million years ago. More remarkable however are the human remains recently discovered in Baroda by Prof. H.D. Sankalia. These remains, particularly those of the skulls, compare well with the modern Europoid. They belong to a doliocephalic race and are said to be of the 'Microlithic Man.'

The shrinking of the forests caused by geological upheavals was among the reasons why man's arboreal ancestors had to face living on the ground, and out of sheer necessity, develop those parts of his body which now distinguish him from his apelike ancestors. His creative ability was called into play for the first time when possibly for hunting purposes he began to flake stone into a shape which improved in quality and variety as his needs increased and his brain developed.

The earliest tools of the Old Stone Age in India are dated, with some probability, somewhere around four

hundred thousand years ago when India had already attained most of her important physical features. On a conservative estimate based on geochronology—a surer method than that of archaeology—Prof. F.E. Zeuner holds that man has been in India for 250,000 years and that even at the beginning of this period he had already attained technical perfection in the manufacture of stoneaxe etc. Throughout this period and for many hundred thousand years afterwards man was dependent for his precarious existence mostly on hunting and food-gathering. It may be he was then just forming into tiny groups of families or small tribes, following the kind of animals he killed for food over great tracts of the country, his other occupation being to chip off flakes from blocks of stone and work them into tools, such as, hand-axes, cores or cleavers. Relics of these made of quartzite have been found in the Rawalpindi region, in central India and in the Upper Narmada Valley. In valleys of the Soan and Sindhu evidences have been unearthed of this industry of the early man. This flake-culture had more or less a parallel evolution in South Africa, Palestine and Western Europe.

When a tool is made into a convenient size by chipping away from a block of stone, it is called core-culture by archaeologists. Regions in south and central India have yielded abundant remains of tools evolved by this culture. Some of them show an improvement and look like the hand-axe, a number of which have been found in the Kurnool area of Andhra State. The possibility of con-

stant interaction between the Madras and the Soan industries has been suggested by Stuart Piggott. In the Billa Surgam caves in Kurnool have been discovered implements like bone-tools along with bones of a variety of animals, which are held to indicate a period just before that when man made some beginnings in the domestication of animals. Though very few stone tools have been found here, yet the use of a stone flake is traced in a number of bones. The absence of even a single skull in these finds is accounted for by the possible practice of some religious or magical rite by the men dwelling in those caves.

Man's first resort to caves as his dwelling is believed to have been occasioned by the onset of the cold Glacial period. But we know next to nothing about this phase of his living. More cave-dwellings of the early man of the type of Altamira or Tuc d'andoulent must de discovered so that an idea may be formed of his cave-life in India. Even the evidences of the Old Stone Age, mentioned above, are not enough, neither are they clearly defined to indicate the life and the kind of people who are the makers of the palaeolithic tools and implements that are seen today. The absence of human remains, due probably to the destructibility of the climate and the soil, is an even greater hindrance to any speculation about it. It is likely that most of the early men were nomad hunters whose articles of daily use were perhaps made of impermanent substances. Nothing of a definite nature is yet known as to what final form the products

of the early Stone Age industries took in later times. Some finds from Kurnool, the Dekkan and Bombay showing a new type of tool with a slender blade along with some of the finds of the Sindhu Valley, such as pebble tools and scrapers, are ascribed to this period.

When and how the Old Stone Age gave place to the New is beyond the present range of our knowledge of the early man in India; but relics of the period of transition from the former to the latter have been found in various parts of the country in almost all the districts of south India as well as in regions in Gujarat, the Panjab and the Vindhya hills. Because of their smallness these tools are called microliths which consist of blades, scrapers, points and scores with some improvement on the palaeolithic flakes and cores. The mesolithic man was still in the hunting stage.

The neolithic man distinguishes himself by his decidedly polished tools and by his use of not only quartzite but fine-grained trap and a number of other varieties of stones. Relics of the Neolithic Age have been found in various parts of the south, central and western India. Funerary monuments are among the most important finds of this age. While paleolithic men left their dead in forests, the neolithians buried them and erected tombs. In the Kolar district of south India alone there have been excavated as many as fiftyfour such tombs together with piles of tools and pottery. Some of these tools found in the graves along with iron things are taken to imply that the Neolithic period continued to the Iron Age and

early historic periods, as palaeolithic industry in some parts had continued to later ages. Earthen mounds carrying terracotta coffins found near Madras city are assigned to this period.

Mention may be made here of the neolithic celts and other cutting instruments of various kinds and sizes, which are pointed, rounded and polished, and which show a distinct improvement in craftsmanship. While like the palaeolithians the neolithians used natural rock shelters, they also constructed for themselves dwellings, perhaps, huts 'of wattle and thatches, daubed with clay.' They knew how to make a fire, and the art of cooking. Besides fishing and hunting, they tended flocks of domesticated animals and also began the cultivation of land. They are presumed to be worshippers of spirits of nature as embodied in trees and stones. They covered their body with leaves, barks of trees, and skins. They developed the art of pottery and invented the wheel. For their stone weapons they chose the tough trap, but used other materials of various colours for things of domestic use. Traces of the artistic efforts of the neolithians such as 'cup-marks' and 'riddle-drawings' have been found in the caves of the Vindhya and Kaimur hills and in the Hosangabad district, which resemble the Spanish drawings of the same period. A recent opinion holds that these drawings are of a much later date.

We have yet to know when first the neolithic man learnt to use metals. There is a view that gold was the earliest

metal to be discovered by him, but rarely did he use it. Copper, however, was the metal he easily found in various parts of north India, from Rajputana to Bengal, where hoards of axes, swords, daggers, harpoons and rings have been found, belonging to the early age of metals in India. In south India stone was directly superseded by iron. But in the North the age of Copper was followed by an age of Bronze.

Early Settled Life

The excavations started in the twenties by Sir Aurel Stein in south Baluchistan brought to light the fact that in the Bronze Age Makran and certain adjacent tracts were inhabited by settled peasant communities. These explorations were followed soon after by the epoch-making discoveries in Sindhu and the Panjab. A number of dams and terraces built in stone for purposes of irrigation, and a huge barrage to serve as a reservoir of water have been discovered in Baluchistan. Surface finds from sites about the Bolan Pass include fragments of painted alabaster cups. Evidences have been brought to light of the existence in this area of a group of villages with houses made of mud or mid-bricks. Similar settlements have been traced in Rakshan and at Nundara where mud-brick walls and dwelling structures have been found. The white plaster on the stone and brick walls at Nundara and its red-painted bowls and other vessels of domestic pottery deserve mention.

At Amri in Sindh and in Nal Valley in south Baluchistan are noticed works of painted pottery and a number of other burial articles. A Nal cemetery has yielded two hoards of copper implements—an instance of the continuity of the Copper Age. Distinct contact with the Sindhu Valley culture has been traced in the pottery of the above-named regions.

Stone vessels and their pottery imitations from Kulli in Baluchistan show some development in craftsmanship. But more striking are baked-clay figures of women and of cattle. The clay-figures are supposed to be household deities which resemble Hindu clay-figure deities popular even today in the rural areas of India. The faces of other female figurines do not seem to have received much attention but their hair-dressing—the same as that of a bronze dancing girl of the Sindhu Valley art—and the ornaments show how much care the artist bestowed on them. The bangles on the wrists and arms remind one that these have always been a favourite with Indian girls. Some kind of garment—may be *sari*—is also indicated. Fragments of clay carts of the Sindhu Valley type have also been found in Kulli and other neighbouring areas, in one of which a group of vessels carved out of soft stone shows some connection with the Sindhu Valley culture. From the same area have been excavated a large number of bronze and copper objects as also a bronze mirror with a human figure of the type of the above-mentioned clay figurine. Similar mirrors have also been found at Mohenjo-daro. These connections

and resemblances are attributed to the trade that the Sindhu Valley had with those regions. There is some similarity between the Kulli finds and those of Elam and Mesopotamia.

In the valley of the Zhob river in north Baluchistan have been found remains of a number of rural settlements along with works of superbly painted pottery and stylized figures of animals and clay figurines of women which are regarded as a 'grim embodiment of the mother-goddess who is also the guardian of the dead.' Evidences of contact of this valley with the Sindhu culture has been traced in many of its relics.

Most of these sites in Baluchistan are a hundred and twenty miles or so from Mohenjo-daro. They belong to a stage more or less analogous to the Sindhu Valley culture. Their evolution may roughly be assigned to the fifth millennium B.C.

That Long Travail

We would make a digression here to consider the immense gulf of time that separates the dim beginnings of that early culture from the crude work of the primitive savage whose sole preoccupation was the satisfaction of animal needs. We know nothing of him except that he took hundreds and thousands of years to accomplish the flaking of stone into shapes and to learn how to polish them, and then another long long period of thousands of years to fashion those tools into artifacts of convenient

size. Why should man take such an unconscionable length of time in order to develop such meagre capacities?

To begin with, the early man had to pass through a very long period in which each part of his body developed in accordance with the pressure of the environment. And along with his limbs his brain also expanded, enabling him to fight all adverse circumstances. He could stand cold, face climatic severities, fight ferocious animals, all because he had, and because Nature provided him with, a body strong enough for these purposes. But as this body became more human in form and function, and as his brain grew to its present size and structure he lost that natural strength and protective instinct and also much of his capacity for endurance. But he had his brain, imagination and intuition to make up for his bodily shortcomings. It took him a long long time, millenniums on millenniums on end, to reach his present stage of mechanical and industrial civilisation, a development from the flint handaxe to the atom bomb, from the early village and city republics to the mammoth empires and unions of today, through the various phases of his mental growth.

Recent advances in biology raise the question whether the brain moved into larger and larger action and thereby quickened in man his creative power or its slow movement compelled Nature to take a saltus by swiftly evolving a new type out of the already physically developed man through the alteration of the 'chromosome number' and therefore of the constituent 'gene' elements which are

believed to be specific and new character-bearers. This newly emerged being is the mental man who created cultures, built civilisations, made history. There is therefore the view that the 'modern' man has in this way emerged from the type whose fossils have been discovered in the Siwalik foothills of Himalaya.

There are also thinkers who hold that the way in which man's past — his primitive past, in particular, — is appraised and dated does not seem to be the right one and that the evolution of the Old Stone Age savagedom towards civilisation may not be a continuous process of growth and expansion of man's brain and other faculties into what they are today. It is quite possible, and there are ancient traditions which support the view that it took man different periods to rise to peaks of culture but, maybe, due to some aberrations or the onset of glaciation, he fell from those peaks only to be the aboriginals as they are found in various regions of the earth even today. The high standard of morality that some of these tribes still possess may be the remnant of their past achievements, a testimony to which is suggested by the anthropologist that primitive societies passed through a stage when man was simple and truthful and lived a corporate life of mutuality and cooperation the like of which he has not had since then. The bowels of the earth or perhaps the beds of the seas may contain relics of these unknown stages in the cycle of civilisation represented, for instance, by the Satya Yuga of the ancient Indian tradition and by Lemuria and Atlantis.

Mention may be made here of the primitive races—maybe, evolved out of the tribal communities—which are said to have developed non-rational capacities such as instinctive insight, occult knowledge and immediate perception of the forces of physical Nature. These races might be the precursors of the Age of the Mysteries when out of their intuitive powers grew the esoteric cults at those well-known centres where the oldest and greatest civilisations of the world envolved: and in this evolution those cults played no inconsiderable part. Taoism in China goes back to a time of which no visible record is available. So also do the beginnings of the Vedic mysticism in India, of the mystic doctrines in early Egypt and Chaldea. The origin of the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries of ancient Greece also belongs to such a dim past. It seems this Age dawned simultaneously or near about the same period at every such centre, since all those cultures, except the Greek, were almost contemporaneous. In these facts may lie some explanation of the long travail of man towards civilised existence. He did expand in his powers, though they were inner and not so much mental, and by these powers, laid the foundations of a higher life, which with the growth of mind, took the form of a larger culture and of those later developments that are now history.

The civilisation of today is what man has attained to after millenniums of hard striving; but it also shows signs of how man after having gone very far indeed in developing his mind and intellect is now showing himself

in his collective life to be little more than the savage, whose sole object of existence is to aggrandise his collective-ego and produce more and more deadly weapons for the service of that ego. And when once the conflict breaks out, he knows no law but the law of the jungle, no fine sentiment but the urge of his brute instincts. This is not to say that modern civilisation has nothing in it of real value to man. It does posit many things that indicate man's progress: and the most important part of it is that he has, through it, arrived at a stage in his evolution which is to prepare him for the next higher one.

Eminent Indian scholars give much historical importance to what the Puranas say about the royal dynasties that ruled in India millenniums before the Christ: some of these are held to be even pre-Vedic. But very little is known of their reigns, their exact dates and their actual achievements. Researches are being carried on to discover these details as well as their connection with historical events and periods. But dates of ancient Indian history are hard to fix; hitherto accepted dates of these periods and events may have to be revised in the light of startling finds which withstanding destructibility of Indian soil and climate are waiting in various parts of the country their hour of self-revelation to the archaeologist's eye.

A Splendid Urban Civilisation

One such discovery was made in the early twenties of the present era by R.D.Banerji, a Government Archaeo-

logical officer. While excavating a Buddhist stupa and monastery in the region called Mohenjo-daro in the Larkana district of Sindh, Banerji came upon some burnt bricks of a peculiar size which he knew could not belong to the period when the stupa had been built. These bricks, as shown by later excavations, had been dug out from lower strata of the earth where had lain the ruins of a vast city at least three thousand years older than the Buddhist monastery. At the instance of Banerji the Archaeological Survey of India undertook extensive operations in the regions with the result that there came to light conclusive evidence in the form of relics and antiquities pointing to the existence there of a big city, characteristic of an urban civilisation, with well-built dwelling-houses, roads and drains, public baths and meeting-places, holy sanctuaries and halls of worship, shops and bazaars, and various signs of other amenities that a visitor cannot but take as remains of an advanced culture and of a progressive community-life, even in the modern sense of the term.

But Sindh is not the only site of this culture. In Harappa in the Montgomery district of the Panjab—about three hundred miles from Mohenjo-daro—have also been unearthed similar antiquities which are part of the same culture as that of the Sindhu Valley. The absolute uniformity in the products of these two cities can be explained, says an authority, by the possible currency in both of these cities of a common commercial code and a standard technique of production which

could control the size of bricks, the capacity and type of pots and the system of weights and measures. Not only in their products, but in their plan and layout also, these two cities are strikingly similar. The climate of Sindh when this culture was being evolved was certainly not as dry and trying as it is today. The water-supply was adequate and also the vegetation. The Sindhu apart, there was another river, the Mihran, by which also the region was watered, and a heavier rainfall from the south-west monsoon is suggested by the elaborate drainage system of the city and by the use of kiln-burnt bricks for the exposed parts of the ancient buildings, and sun-dried ones for their unexposed parts. That the arid deserts of today were green forests in those days is suggested in the explored seals by the figures of animals, which live only in dense forests.

Before the excavations, the site had on it a number of mounds from which it derived its name Mohenjo-daro, meaning, in Sindhi, 'mound of the dead', where hovered, so ran a local tradition, the spirits of those whose bodily remains lay beneath the mounds. Anyway, a spirit is certainly there prevailing in the atmosphere, the spirit of a most ancient civilisztion, which an understanding visitor will most likely feel. These mounds which today represent the city cover a square mile. As the diggings started, one by one, there were uncovered as many as seven strata of remains lying hidden under those mounds for the past thousands of years. The first three strata belong to the Late period, the next three to the Inter-

mediate period, and the last stratum to the Early period. It is believed that yet more strata of even earlier periods could have been brought to light had not the water-level come up much higher than at the time when the culture began.

According to stratigraphic calculations as done in other countries, it would seem that the period which should ordinarily be taken by the culture to grow and develop through the seven strata should be at least one thousand years. But archaeologists hesitate to accept this in view of the fact that the region was frequently subjected to heavy floods which did not allow the culture of a stratum to last for any considerable length of time, and which was also ultimately responsible for the destruction of the whole civilisation. That this is a possibility is supported by the homogeneous character of the relics found in all the seven strata, though some deterioration is noticed in the masonry work in the last stratum.

Even a cursory survey of the remains of the city will convince the visitor that the builders of it must have meticulously followed an excellent system of town-planning. There is no doubt that the construction of the city was supervised by competent civil engineers. The whole conception and execution, the design, content and utility cannot but be attributed to master-builders and to men highly skilled in the art and science of architecture. Mohenjo-daro is said to be the earliest city in the world built according to plan, in which the first thing that strikes the visitor is the order of the streets which, varying

from 9 feet to 34 feet in width, ran in straight lines and, at almost regular intervals, crossed by others at right angles, divided the city into square or rectangular blocks. Indeed the bold parallels of the avenues are as straight as the mason's line could make them. All were aligned from east to west or from north to south, evidently to allow the prevailing winds from the north or south to ventilate the small streets and by-lanes also running at right angles.

These streets were flanked by flat-roofed dwelling houses built of burnt brick of various sizes. Wedge-shaped bricks were used in wells. There was one well in every house and one for the public on the roadside after every two houses. The buildings were plain and seem to have been meant only to serve utility and meet the needs of comfort rather than of beauty. There was not much of art so far as their decoration was concerned, though decorative motifs were not absent. The brick-laying of the walls of the houses was in the usual 'English Bond' method, in alternate headers and stretchers, the masons never forgetting to use a half-brick to break the joints. The private houses were quite commodious, each having good-sized rooms, a bath-room, covered drains connected with the main street-drain, and an open brick-paved courtyard surrounded by chambers. There was the kitchen in a sheltered corner of the courtyard as well as the porter's lodge and tenements. The thickness of most walls of the houses at Mohenjo-daro and also the stair-ways suggest that they were two or more stories in height. The ground-floor of a small house averaged 27 by 20 feet,

and that of a large one about double this area. There were also even larger houses whose layout indicates that they could be converted into a series of flats for occupation by separate families.

At Harappa has been excavated a great structure which seems to have been planned to meet the needs of processional ceremonies, religious or secular. It had ceremonial terraces and a processional way leading up from a ramp of flight of steps to the actual gateways, the terraces being provided with guard-rooms at the outer angles. The Great Granary is another large building at Harappa. Measuring 169 feet, it consists of two blocks with an aisle, 23 feet wide, between them. Each block has six halls, alternating regularly with five corridors, and each hall is further partitioned into four narrow divisions. The blocks of fourteen small houses are said to be Harappa's workmens' quarters.

At Mohenjo-daro again, there is a large building some 230 by 78 feet, planned as a single architectural unit, which is surmised to be a communal establishment or 'college' of some sort, a 'priest-college', as an archaeologist calls it. Its plan is not like the normal house-plan of Mohenjo-daro. Another exceptionally-planned structure is a square hall about 80 feet each way with its roof supported on twenty rectangular pillars of brickwork. It might have served the purpose of an Assembly Hall. But the most remarkable building of Monenjo-daro is the Great Public Bath, or Tank, 40 feet long by 29 feet wide, and sunk 8 feet below the floor level. Its beautifully-made

walls are paved with brick and polished with cement which even today appear sound and watertight. At one side a flight of wide shallow steps leads into it, and above and on the same side the remains of a wall with entrances and windows mark the enclosure, used most probably by people who visited it for religious purposes. Tiny little chambers range round the other two sides, evidently for bathers to change, and in one of the central ones is a deep circular well the water from which used to supply the tank. That well is as sound today, and supplying water from the same source, as it did in that long past. The tank floor slopes towards one corner where it opens into the great corbel-vaulted drain over six feet high and with a manhole for cleaning purposes. This was for filling and emptying the Bath,—a noteworthy piece of engineering. This Swimming Bath would do credit to a modern seaside hotel. Arrangements attached to it are taken to be for a hot-air bath, and there is distinct 'evidence of a hypocaustic system of heating.'

The drainage system of Mohenjo-daro has been declared by authorities as the most complete ancient system as yet discovered. Every street, sometimes even small lanes, would have brick-lined drains. Into the main ones would run the drains of the houses. They were made of bricks cemented with mud-mortar mixed with lime or gypsum to make it water-tight. In order to prevent water from escaping into the sub-soil there was a brick-lined pit at every point where one drain entered another from a higher level. There were large manhole covers on the

drains, placed in such a way that they could be easily lifted when the drains required cleaning. The drainage system is proof enough of the care the municipal authorities took of the health of the people. And this is said to be without paralel in the civilised world of the time.

Some idea of the arts and crafts of this culture may be had from the engraved seals, figurines, amulets and pottery which have highly realistic animal figures on them. Horned bulls, squirrels and monkeys are vivid enough to attract attention. The bull, the buffalo and the bison, as engraved on the seals, are remarkable for their naturalism as also for their drawing and execution. The circular group of monkeys—a gay company—sitting with their arms on each others' waists are surely the forbears of what of the same species we see today. Among the bronzes may be mentioned the figure of a dancing girl whose ease and naturalness of posture are striking. Works of sculpture, not many, include a steatite male draped in a shawl with eyes half-closed and in yoga posture. But the most interesting pieces are those found in Harappa. The famous sandstone torso of a man shows the mature rendering of the human form and also its stylistic affinity to Indian sculpture of a later date. Another is a dancing figure, probably of Shiva Nataraja, 'in which the head has been affixed separately with metal pegs, the arms and legs are also designed to be in more than one piece similarly held together, and nipples are inlaid in some sort of plaster.' The workmanship and technique in both these specimens are decidedly of an advanced type.

Pottery was an important craft of the Sindhu Valley culture. And there was nothing primitive in it. The specimens discovered belong to a highly developed stage of that art and indicate a long course of previous training. A very curious kind of jar has been found which is ornamented on the outside with knobs in rows set closely together. A number of miniature vessels, some of them less than half an inch high, attract the visitor not only for their size but also for their beautiful workmanship. It has been suggested that they used to hold rare and costly scented oils. Jars, big or small, were made of clay, as pottery was made of faience. The glazed pots found here are probably the earliest known specimens of glazed work in the ancient world.

Quaint ivory combs, daintly-carved pomade pots were apparently in common use in those days. Relics have also been found of various kinds of jewellery—necklaces, ear-rings, pendants, nose-studs, rings, bangles etc.—made of gold, silver, copper and semi-precious stones. The nose-ring, with a gold chain put round the ear, is still in use, though outmoded and fast vanishing out of fashion, among certain sections of the Sindhi and Bengali ladies. Sindhu Valley ladies painted their eyes with antimony and used copper mirrors and double-sided ivory combs. Cornelian was skilfully bored to form beads for girdles. Marbles, balls and dice were used for games. Terra-cotta toys and dolls remind us of the gay children of the Sindhu Valley. These toys represent various animals, birds, reptiles, men and

women; some were pottery utensils for girls. Even mechanical toys, such as horned bulls the heads of which could be moved by strings were commonly used by children. It is curious that a whistle, found after five thousand years, has kept the exact form and sounds quite all right when blown. The little clay-cart recalls the Sanskrit play of that title.

The Sindhu Valley people had intercourse with various parts of India as with outside countries. The discovery of specimens of their crafts at Sumer and Babylon, Ur and Kish, are taken to mean that they had trade relations with those regions. There is a view that during this period there were colonies of Indian merchants in Sumerian towns where they established 'factories' and worshipped in their traditional way. But this trade of India with those countries seems to be a one-track enterprise, since no notable relic of other countries has so far been found in the Sindhu Valley. But the Sindhu traders had to get copper from Rajputana, amethyst from the Dekkan, rare stones from the Nilgiri Hills, deodar wood from the Himalayan forests, jadeite from the Pamirs and neighbouring regions, and gold from Kolar in south India or from Persia. Cotton, unknown to the western world until two or three thousand years later, was another singular feature of the Sindhu Valley civilisation. It must have been an important commercial commodity, besides being used for fabrics for the local people. Wheat and rice whose specimens have been found among the ruins, were the staple

food of the people, and being local products, were likely exports to other countries. This wheat is of a remarkable kind, the best found in the world, as shown by researches in plant-genetics. It is called bread wheat, most important for its food value, having the largest number of chromosome-pairs. This is another proof of the advanced nature of the material culture of the Sindhu Valley. Weights, a large number of which have been found in both the cities as also at many other neighbouring sites, are evidence of the commercial advancement of the people who had their own system of grading weights so as to have the ratio of sixteen for every unit, to which may be traced the origin of the modern Indian coinage of sixteen annas to one rupee. The exactness of their system of measurement is indicated by the relic of a scale of 1.32 inches probably rising to a 'foot' of 13.2 inches.

The existence of caravansarais on the trade routes of the Sindhu Valley is taken to be a fact. But more interesting are the specially-made large rooms found at several street-corners, which are supposed to have been used as restaurants and rest-houses. The waterways also were fully utilised and there is representational evidence of boats used on them for traffic.

An idea of the religious life of the people may be had from a careful study of the seals and figures. But as the seals are yet to be deciphered, it is not possible to form an exact idea of the origin and development of the cults that seem to have been prevalent in the Sindhu Valley.

One thing may however be remembered that just as the culture itself is Indian in origin, these cults also are essentially Indian in conception, and since they grew in India, they are wholly and entirely Indian. That the ancient spiritual discipline of Yoga was in practice is evident from the figure of a yogi already referred to. Some form of Shaivism (worship of Shiva) may be ascribed to the worship offered to a male deity figured on a seal, with three faces and three eyes, seated cross-legged on a throne having an elephant and a tiger on the right and a rhinoceros and a buffalo on the left, and two horned deer standing under the throne. The deity is identified by some scholars as the Vedic Rudra, and by others as Shiva. A third view regards it as Mahayogi, (great yogi), mainly because of its particular yoga posture. In any case, Shiva need not be taken as a non-Aryan god. In *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo says that it is a wrong view, popularised by European scholars, that the conception of Shiva in the Puranic theogonies was borrowed from the Dravidians. Vishnu, Rudra and Brahmanaspati are the Vedic originals of the later Puranic Triad, Vishnu-Shiva-Brahma.

There are again the female terra-cotta figurines with girdles, head-dress and other ornaments, which are taken to be those of the Mother-Goddess, the like of which are found in various countries of western Asia including Mesopotamia, Egypt and Asia Minor. But what is most interesting is that they are even today worshipped under many Indian names as popular deities

in small village shrines in various parts of India, both north and south. The female figure on a seal fighting with a lion is that of Durga, an aspect of the supreme Shakti as described in the famous Tantrik scripture *Chandi*.

This Mother-cult traces its origin to a remote past. The Tantrik texts mention it as a basic form of religious worship which was first evolved in India and then spread to countries on her three sides, east, west and north, each acquiring a particular name. Evidences are accumulating of the expansion of Indian culture in her neighbouring countries including Egypt and Mesopotamia. An idea of the Divine Mother is found in the Rigveda too; although the Tantrik texts refer to a common source of this cult, from which it has been adopted both by the Veda and the Tantras. One of the Upanishads is held to be the origin of the Tantrik cults comprising five forms of worship including the Mother-cult.

Animal worship was another part of the religion of the Sindhu Valley, as suggested by the figures of animals some of which are mythical and some are vehicles of Vedic gods, the goat of Agni, the elephant of Indra, the buffalo of Yama. Snake, bird, bull and buffalo, found in the Sindhu Valley seals, are different Vedic symbols of the Sun. In later mythology the bull is the vehicle of Shiva, and the lion that of Durga. The pipal tree on several seals indicates the practice of tree-worship. The Vedas regard this tree as the tree of Eternity, and

the Buddhist texts as the tree of Wisdom. Tree-worship is also connected with Sun-worship. The prayerful attitude of the Naga worshippers reflects the devotional temperament of the people. The Swastika on some of the seals is significant of the Sun-cult which must have had its adherents in the Sindhu Valley.

The view is now gaining ground more and more widely that like the Mother-cult, the Sun-cult also originated in India. From the god Mitra—the god of Light and Harmony in the Rigveda, which is much older than it passes for—might have derived the cult called Mithraism which was prevalent in various parts of the western world including pre-Christian Europe. The so-called phallus, evidences of whose worship have been found in the Sindhu Valley, is the symbol of the Sun. Shiva Linga—as it is called in India—is the *Jyotir Linga* or Light symbol. It has nothing to do with sex-worship as European scholarship has erroneously tried to make out. The Shiva Linga of the Tantras is said to have derived its shape from the Vedic *yupa*, a symbol of the Sun and a prototype of the Buddhist stupa and some upper structures of ancient Indian temple architecture. Maybe, its association with the Sun, the primal source of heat and energy that sustain life, is responsible for the misreading of procreative ideas into it. The word *linga* also means image or icon. It is however quite possible that the Sindhu Valley culture shows some variation from the original culture of the land, although its derivation from the latter is quite a possi-

bility. Very likely some primitive cults influenced by or interfused with Vedic ideas took new forms in Sindhu culture. R.P. Chanda, the famous archaeologist, is of the opinion that 'the religion of the Vedic Rishis who were worshippers of Indra, Varuna, Agni, and other gods, was accepted by the kings and the people of the Sindhu Valley.' Harappa has been identified by some scholars with Hari-Yupia of the Rigveda.

All that has been said so far about this once-flourishing civilisation is mostly based on the material evidence made available by archaeological excavations. But the study of these antiquities cannot be said to be complete so long as the scripts on the seals remain unread. It is believed that they conceal many inscriptions whose decipherment would throw a flood of light on ancient Indian culture and help open a new chapter in her history. Scholars are at work to find out the meaning of the script. Some of them are of the opinion that unless bilingual inscriptions in this script and in any other known script is discovered, the decipherment of the Sindhu Valley script is very remote. There is a suggestion that the Tantrik science of script might help in the solution of this problem. A scholar has shown how this esoteric code explains the principles of the Sindhu Valley script. In fact, he has identified some letters of the Sindhu Valley script with Tantrik ones as also with Egyptian hieroglyphics which, he has also shown, are derived from India. Indeed the similarity between these scripts is striking. There is no doubt however that the

script originated in India. It is quite possible for it to be the script of the Aryas, and as is held by a scholar, the earliest known form of the Brahmi alphabet. Early in 1952 Dr. Pran Nath, Head of the Department of Indo-Sumerian Studies, Banaras Hindu University, announced to the Press that his department had now succeeded in finding the phonetic values of the Sindhu Valley Script and had prepared a table of Sindhu epigraphy giving the phonetic value after each sign of the script. With the help of this table the inscriptions of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa could be read by any one knowing Sanskrit. So read, 'the inscriptions have been found to contain Vedic language, religion and culture',—a view that opens up immense possibilities and proves so many things including the Vedic origin of the Sindhu Valley culture and its definite Aryan character. To the Sindhu script may also be traced the origin of Brahmi, and the symbols and legends on punch-marked coins may be its earliest variants. Brahmi, we may mention, was the script that was current for many centuries not only in north India but also in various parts of central Asia which had a large number of Indian settlements. Pictographic in origin, the script of the Sindhu Valley took on a standardised form and is remarkable for its clarity, and for extent and variety of its signs.

Opinions may differ as to the exact nature of the religion or the meaning of the script of the Sindhu Valley, but there can be no doubt that the homogeneous cha-

racter of the finds of the region 'extending from the Makran coast to Kathiawad and northwards to the Himalayan foothills—a huge irregular triangle, with sides measuring 950 by 700 by 550 miles'—does point to the existence there of a highly civilised, peaceful and prosperous community, a well-organised corporate life, an excellent municapal administration. It must have been an equally efficient state, a flourishing kingdom, maybe, a theocracy, as some archaeologists are inclined to believe, though every such ancient state need not be so and the individual character of the Sindhu Valley culture precludes that possibility as in the case of others. We do not know the name of this kingdom. It is however clear that its influence spread far and wide in contemporary kingdoms outside India.

In India itself areas of the Ganga valley in the east are believed to have been within this kingdom and particularly within the orbit of its culture. Its immediate eastern frontier stands extended to the dried-up bed of the Saraswati in the Bikanir division of Rajasthan, where antiquities have been found of the same age. In Ghazipur and the Banaras districts have been found pictographs, cornelian beads, and other objects of the same type as those of the Sindhu Valley whose influence is also traced in relics from various sites in Uttar Pradesh in the Ganga basin. Terra-cottas found at Buxar and Patna in Bihar are mistaken for Sindhu Valley finds. A stylistic similarity is noticed between many post-Sindhu-Valley but pre-Mauryan terra-cotta figurines

and Maurya sculpture, notably animal figures as the elephant and the bull, discovered mainly in the Ganga Valley on the one hand and the Sindhu Valley figures in stone, bronze and terra-cotta on the other. How much of the later developments of ancient Indian art is indebted to the expansion of the arts and crafts of the Sindhu Valley has yet to be studied and assessed. Further explorations might bring to light new facts about the originality of this culture and the extent of its influence. This however is clear that for many centuries, even after the destruction of its original home in Sindh and the Panjab, the artistic tradition of this culture continued to be followed in various parts of north India, from the Panjab to Bengal,—a view which is supported by Sir John Marshall, an authority on the subject.

What strikes us today is the amazing capacity of those who evolved this culture and gave it such a finished form as might challenge the sense of superiority of the twentieth-century *Homo Sapiens* who claims to his credit the onward march of progress achieved during these five thousand years, simply on the ground that long before this the Sindhu Valley culture had already reached the zenith of its glory. Indeed the comforts and amenities of civilised existence that this culture provided in that remote past are not enjoyed in all cities of the world even today. Says Sir John Marshall: "One thing that stands out clear and unmistakable both at Mohenjodaro and Harappa is that the civilisation hitherto revealed at these two places is not an incipient civilisation,

but one already age-old and stereotyped on Indian soil, with many millennia of human endeavour behind it. Thus India must henceforth be recognised, along with Persia, Mesopotamia and Egypt, as one of the most important areas where the civilising processes were initiated and developed." Further on he says, "The Panjab and Sindh, if not other parts of India as well, were enjoying an advanced and singularly uniform civilisation of their own, closely akin but in some respects even superior to that of contemporary Mesopotamia and Egypt." If 3500 B.C. is the period when this civilisation was already in a flourishing state, it must have taken, as archaeologists believe, at least one thousand years of anterior development during which many parts of the vast area comprising, in particular, the Panjab, Sindh and Baluchistan had started giving expression to their creative capacities and growing towards the stage when the culture took its highly advanced form.

Who Are Its Builders?

But who are the builders of this civilisation? What kind of people were they? Whom do they resemble racially?—are among the questions, answeres to which would give some idea of the nature of the culture and its indigenous character. The only basis of the attempts so far made to trace the ethnic origins of these early civilised peoples of India has been the skeletal remains and skulls found among the ruins. And Proto-Australoid,

Mediterranean Alpinoid and Mongoloid are the four racial types so far ascertained from the remains. We have already said in Chapter One that these types form elements of India's population even today and that their foreign appellations do not necessarily mean that they migrated to India from outside. It is quite possible that they have been in the country for thousands of years and had even been there long before the Sindhu Valley culture started developing. The populous cities and towns in the large areas which were under the direct influence of this culture must have had in them humans of various types. And as the culture took a long time to reach its finished form, these humans, particularly the dominant type among them, must have been there for many centuries so as to be able to lay the foundation and then build on it those fine works that formed the fabric of the Sindhu Valley civilisation.

The view that it was the creation of the Dravidians does not seem to be any longer tenable. Their funerary custom of burying their dead differed from that of the Sindhu people who used to cremate their dead. Besides, the Dravidian type is a mixed one, and cannot be spoken of as having any distinctive character of its own. This, however, is more or less true in respect of almost all racial types. If it is accepted, as some scholars hold, that the Dravidians invaded India from the west, it has also to be remembered that they had enough intermingling of blood with the local aboriginals to become thorough natives of the soil, at least, in the period of the Sindhu

Valley culture. Besides, the cranial evidence is too scanty to justify any definitive conclusion with regard to the division of the racial elements in the population of the Sindhu Valley; neither is it always dependable. The Dravidian, let us repeat, has never been an ethnic type. In fact, Arya also is not, strictly speaking, any such. These two names stand for languages and cultures and apply to peoples who speak those languages or adopt those cultures. "Ethnically", says Prof. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, "what we call the Dravidians and the Aryas are one", —a very important statement by an eminent South Indian scholar, which points to India being the land where had been living from very early times the ancestors of those who evolved the cultures, Aryan and Dravidian. And out of his unsurpassable knowledge of men and affairs comes this pronouncement from Sri Aurobindo: 'The Philologists have split up, on the strength of linguistic differences the Indian nationality into the northern Indian race and the southern Dravidian, but sound observation shows a single type with minor variations pervading the whole of India from Cape Comorin to Afghanisthan.'

The Vedic influence in the Sindhu Valley culture, as already pointed out, may be taken to indicate that there were among the builders of the Sindhu culture people who already had contact with the Aryan culture, a fact which not only opens up a new phase of the Sindhu culture but points to the earliest efforts of India to bring about a kind of synthesis in the religious life of the people. Thus Indians in that remote past had shown an innate

tendency of their racial being, which, as their later history proves, has been a remarkable characteristic of all their creative strivings through the ages. The gods and goddesses of the Sindhu Valley had direct or indirect affinities with the Vedic ones. Whether the former derived from the latter or vice versa brings us to the question of the antiquity of the Aryas in India. All controversy over it would for ever be set at rest if it could be established that the Aryas had evolved their culture in India before or about the time of the Sindhu Valley culture. This is not to say that they were the only people living in India at that time and that it was they alone who created the Sindhu culture. It is quite probable that people or peoples with different cultures who might have migrated to those regions long ago or had been living there became racially and culturally united with those following the Aryan culture. There is also the other possibility that, as racial distinctions did not then exist so markedly, it was culture that separated the one community from the other and erected those barriers between them which seemed to be the cause of all those struggles and conflicts—if they are at all facts and not only symbols—that are described in the Rigveda. This distinction came particularly to be always between the Arya and unArya in culture, the Aryan followers of Light and unAryan Dasas and Dasyus, sons of Darkness. But in its psychological meaning this conflict symbolises a great truth of human existence seen and revealed by the Vedic Mystics, in which case the question of Aryan and non-Aryan does not arise. Anyway, it is not

correct to call the Dasas and Dasyus Dravidians and noseless. The Sanskrit term, used in that sense, means literally 'mouthless', and figuratively 'speechless'. An Indian scholar has shown them as no human beings at all but as ugly-looking evil spirits that the Vedic Aryas fought in the occult world,—a view which comes very near to the esoteric implication of the Vedic symbols. Besides, says Sri Aurobindo, 'even if the Vedic word *anasa* is taken to mean 'noseless', as has been done by European and Indian scholars, it is wholly inapplicable to the Dravidian races; for the southern nose can give as good an account of itself as any 'Aryan' proboscis of the North.'

That the Aryas were not always in enmity with those who did not follow their culture is evident from the battle between the Vedic King Sudas and the ten kings, in which on either side there were both Aryas and unAryas. It seemed that in those days racial differences were not so rigid but were fluid enough to be resolved by Vedic culture in proportion as it influenced those communities which with the growth and expansion of Vedic ideas among them developed into a cultural type. It is not improbable that this culture-type retained some of its old non-Vedic ideas, not separatively to maintain its distinctivenss but as remnants of a partly-assimilated new way of life. There is also the other possibility, as suggested by a scholar, that the non-Vedic communities adopted Vedic ideas but gave to them their own stamp. This might explain the view that the Vedic god Rudra became Shiva, Vedic Aditi became the Mother-goddess under

different names, Vedic Mitra took so many forms of popular worship. The religious element in the Sindhu Valley culture might have much to do with one such movement of cultural interfusion through which two or more cultures met and mingled and grew into the Sindhu culture in whose body can be seen the principal symbols and, through them, the religious ideals of the Vedic culture. It may be that this movement was not always a silent one. Some conflict of ideals was quite possible. Image-worship, for example, might have little or no place among the Vedic Aryas, whereas it was part of the religious life of the Sindhu people. There is a suggestion that image-worship in India had its origin in the Sindhu valley; although the gods worshipped there had their originals in the Veda. Needless to add that a high esoteric culture must, of necesity, remain confined to small groups of advanced souls, the common run following easier cults of worship. That this was the fact in the Vedic age is borne out by internal evidences in the Vedas themselves. While the mystics were voyaging into the vasts of God, the laity were occupied with exoteric forms of worship and sacrifice.

European scholarship has in the main tried to show that sometime during the second millennium B.C.—different dates have been suggested by different scholars—the Aryas migrated to India from south Russia or central Europe or Iran or central Asia. These views are generally based on linguistic evidences which are not always dependable, though there is much truth in what is said as proof of the linguistic relationship of the Aryas with

the archaic elements in the cultures and languages of those regions. And it is this that gives rise to the opposite question whether Aryan culture spread to those and other regions from some outside country, an instance of which is furnished by the inscriptions of the Hittite capital of the fourteenth century B.C., invoking specifically Rigvedic deities. These Hittites ruled over a greater part of Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine between 2000 and 1200 B.C. And their real name, according to inscriptions, was Khatti, a corruption of Kshatri or Kshatriya, the warrior-caste of India. These are among the facts that are held by some scholars as pointing to an anterior period of the Rigveda which must have at that time originated much earlier to have its culture spread from India to those regions. The fifteenth century Tel-el-Amarna letters of the same region mention four Mittani kings whose names are distinctly Aryan. Hall suggests Aryan affinity of these Mittani kings. But more interesting are the four cuneiform tablets found there containing expressions in pure Sanskrit which refer to chariot racing. The name of a certain Palestinian king was Subandhu, a distinctly Indian name. Myres speaks of Aryan settlements about Lake Van in Armenia. In '*Antiquities of India*' Thomas Maurice says that originally Celtic priests called Druids were the brahmanas from India who spread themselves widely through the northern regions even to Siberia itself. Evidences are available today that Indian scholars existed in Iran, Greece and in various regions in between when in the

fifth century B.C. the Achaemenian empire touched the borders of India and Greece. In the third century B.C. there were Buddhist communities in Alexandria and Palestine, and the Bhagavatas, followers of a Krishna-cult, near Lake Van. From about the same time and for centuries large numbers of Indian scholars lived in various parts of Central Asia, China and south-east Asia. There is reason to believe that these were not isolated instances but the continuity of an ancient tradition of India built up by the long line of her cultural ambassadors who from very early times had been carrying to distant lands the torch of their country's lore. And they used, more often than not, to settle in those places.

While the possibility is there that before the emergence of the 'modern man' migrations had taken place in various parts of the world and that India, then linked to some of them by land-bridges, had been affected by these movements, it is also the belief of many scholars, European and Indian, that India has been the scene of human activity from very early times and that she is the cradle not only of man but also of his culture. Sir Arthur Keith, the eminent authority on anthropology, holds that evolution of human groups has always been local, that is to say, confined to particular regions, and that migrations, whatever they might be, had taken place before man attained his 'modern' form. Keith regards the northern frontiers of India as the 'cradle-land of humanity.' This view is supported by other scholars including Max-Muller, Harry Johnston and H. G. Wells. Max-

Muller remarks that India's historical records, as available in her ancient literature, can supply the missing link between ape and man. Ancient Indian cosmogony and later Pauranic theory of ten incarnations from Matsya (fish), the first form of life in water at an early stage of creation, to Kalki, the maker of the future civilisation, have in them much truth to the recognition of which modern science is tending, however slowly.

Early Aryan Dawns

There are material evidences that in earlier times the Himalayan regions and the river valleys of the Panjab were inhabited by man. The view is gaining ground that the Aryas are among the descendants of these peoples, and it is they who built their civilisation in the Land of Seven Rivers which comes to be frequently mentioned in the Rigveda. It was probably here—also called *Brahmarshi-desha*, the land where lived the Seers of the supreme Truth,—that the Rigvedic Hymns were written by Aryan Mystics. But the homeland of the Aryas appears to have extended beyond the present northern frontiers of India. A recent theory, developed out of Vedic, Avestan and archaeological sources, is that the region Airyana, as mentioned in the book Vendidad of the Avesta, comprised the whole of north-western India including part of eastern Iran, and Baluchistan in the south—the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and Rajasthan being its southern boundary. This is the region, most notable

in history, which is believed to be the scene of activity of the early Aryas in four successive periods; Bactrian, Sindhu Valley, Vedic and Avestan are the four cultures that flourished at different centres of that region during the period from 5000 to 800 B.C. The chronological order of these cultures can be finally determined when further finds and researches bring to light definite evidence on the point. But the possibility is tending to be a fact that these cultures were the creations of the same type of people generally known as the Aryas. And this type, it would be well to note, is more cultural than ethnic.

Another Indian scholar holds on the basis of Pauranic sources that the original home of the Indo-Aryans was Madhyadesa (Mid-India) between Ayodhya and Pratisthana (Allahabad), from where they expanded towards east, south and west. 'The Aryas did not only expand inside India and occupied the whole of the Uttarapatha (N.W.India) but they crossed the N. W. passes of India and occupied the countries now covered by Afghanisthan, Central Asia, Persia and Western Asia up to the Mediterranean Sea.'

We have already pointed out the affinities of the Sindhu with the Vedic culture. These affinities are likely to be the result of the influences of the latter on the former. There is no doubt however that the Vedic culture was purer, simpler and more spiritual. The Aryan character of the Bactrian culture is known from its influences, direct or indirect, on the cultures of Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. There are scholars who hold

that the Aryas were the builders of Egyptian civilisation. Herodotus referred to the Aryan customs of the Egyptians. Aryan inspiration is traced in many of the cultural achievements of ancient Egypt. Many gods and goddesses of Egypt are said to have been adaptations from the Aryan ones. Sanskrit roots of ancient Egyptian words are not uncommon. The root-meaning (to give) in Egyptian of the Egyptian Sun-God *Ra* is the same as the meaning of the same Sanskrit root. *Ka*, the surname of many Pharaohs, is derived from *Khnumu*, the Egyptian god of creation with a goat's head: *Ka* is also the surname of Daksha of Hindu mythology, who is also a god of creation having a goat's head. The name of the river Nile is derived from almost the same Sanskrit word meaning 'blue' which, according to Rawlinson, is also the meaning in Egyptian of the word Nile. Sir Flinders Petrie, the famous British Egyptologist, believes, on the basis of positive archaeological evidence, that an Indian colony existed in Egypt about 500 B.C. All these resemblances as also those pointed out below do suggest possibilities of Aryan intermingling.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky, the famous Theosophist, says that Babylonian civilisation was imported from India and the importers were Brahminical Hindus. About 1800 B.C. the Kassites, a branch of the Indo-Aryans and speaking an Aryan tongue, were in possession of Babylon. They worshipped the Vedic god Indra-Bhaga and the Sun-god Surya. Hall says the Sumerians were decidedly Indian in type. Waddel

maintains that the Sumerians were Aryans and that their names can be identified in the Vedas and the Puranas. These views lend further support to the theory that the Aryas migrated from India to those countries. A recent corroboration of this view comes from Dr. Kalidas Nag, the eminent historical scholar, who in 1951 visited the Middle Eastern countries and Turkey and found ample archaeological proofs preserved in the museums of those countries, which bear out the authenticity of much of the evidences cited above. The positive and unmistakable character of these proofs leads him 'to discard the old theory of Aryan migration into India' and to hold 'that the Aryan trail definitely began from India and the East and that it gradually moved to the West.'

As regards the Aryas of the Avesta, we may mention that while the separation of the Avestan Aryas from the Vedic Aryas might be due to social or religious differences, their cultures did not differ much from each other. There is abundant evidence of how the archaic Vedic Sanskrit continued in the Avesta with slight variations. The name Avesta is derived from Upastha, another name of the Veda. Ahura Mazda, the supreme Avestan deity, has his origin, Ahura, in Asura (powerful) of the Rigveda (a god of power, as Rudra), Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, and Mazda, in the Sanskrit word *Mahat* (great). The *yajat* (god) of the Avesta is the *Yajatra* of the Veda meaning one who sacrifices or to whom the sacrifice is made (god or priest). Indra, Vayu, Mitra and Nasatya of the Rigveda continue in the Avesta almost in the same forms.

But these are only a few out of many points of significant similarity between the Iranian Avesta and the Indian Veda.

That early man arose in the region of Airyana has already been shown. And scholars always suggest that he must have continued to grow there till his emergence into the 'modern' man. The recent finds of human remains in northern Iran, said to be about 75,000 years old and probably the oldest of their kind ever found, support the above suggestion. It seems 'modern' man existed even before a more subhuman species, such as the 50,000-year-old Neanderthal man. Langdon says that it is far more likely that the Aryas of India are the oldest representatives of the Indo-Germanic race.

The extreme antiquity of the Rigveda is indicated, according to some scholars, by the geographical facts it contains about the surrounding regions of Sapta-Sindhu, the land of seven rivers, where originated the Veda and of which the Aryas were the autochthons. The Sindhu and the Saraswati are the most important rivers of India in the Vedic age. The Sindhu Valley culture shows its link with the Vedic culture. Recent excavations over an extensive area of the dried-up bed of the ancient river Saraswati in the Bikanir division have unearthed relics of the Sindhu Valley culture.

These two rivers had on their banks and in their valleys not only magnificent cities but also beautiful hermitages of seers and sages in forest-solitudes not far from urban life, both in touch with each other; the cities draw-

ing their spiritual sustenance from the contemplatives of the quiet ashramas, who used to give to kings and rulers their wise counsel and guidance sought for in a spirit of earnestness and humility in times of weal as in woe.

Thus, in ancient India, city-life grew under the exalting influence of selfless sages who were always available for advice and direction in the affairs of the State as well as for inspiring man to higher pursuits. The Vedas and later Indian literature abound with descriptions of such centres of secular and spiritual activities flourishing side by side, tracing their origin to those dim days of India's past whose history has yet to be written. But even earlier than the days of these urban cultures was her quest for the Truth Eternal, of the story of which there would never perhaps be any visible record.

The Rigveda has in it nothing which may mean that the propounders and followers of its culture migrated from any foreign country; on the other hand we find in it material which supports the fact that the Vedic Indians regarded Sapta-Sindhu as their original home. Besides, Vedic scholarship represented by Yaska (ninth century B.C. or earlier), the Mimansakas and Sayana have never suspected anything like the so-called Aryan invasion and a struggle between the Aryas and the Dravidians, notwithstanding the more or less exoteric character of their interpretations. Swami Vivekananda is absolutely emphatic on this point. Says he: "And what your European Pandits say about the Aryas swooping down from some foreign land, snatching away the lands of the aborigines, and

settling in India by exterminating them, are all pure nonsense, foolish talk! Strange, that our Indian scholars, too, say amen to them; and all these monstrous lies are being taught to our boys! This is very bad, indeed.... In what Veda, in what *Sukta* do you find that the Aryas came into India from a foreign country?...There is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryas ever came from anywhere outside of India."

The eminent Indian scholar B. G. Tilak has shown on the basis of astronomical evidences that the hymns of the Rigveda were composed in the period between 6000 and 2500 B. C. G. Basu's researches on scientific lines into ancient Indian historical tradition, as available in the Puranas, assign the date of the Rigveda to early fourth millennium B.C., which is also taken as the latest date by T. V. Kapali Sastri, the eminent Vedic scholar and author of a Sanskrit commentary on the Rigveda based on Sri Aurobindo's new esoteric exegesis of the symbols of the Riks. When in one of his letters[1] Sri Aurobindo says that Hindu culture is at least five millenniums old, he evidently means that the Rigveda—the basic Scripture of Hindu culture—is as old as that, if not older. In *The Secret of the Veda* Sri Aurobindo says that the Rigveda

1 "As for Hindu culture, it is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like five millenniums at least and is going to carry on much longer and has accumulated quite enough power to survive."

(Sri Aurobindo's letter dated the 11th October, 1946, published in the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* of March 26th, 1954.)

represents a later period of the the 'great Ages of Intuition, the luminous dawns of the forefathers' whose beginning and development trace back to earlier times. Whatever of the rays of these earlier 'Dawns' were still gleaming in their consciousness, the Vedic Rishis acknowledge when they say in some of the hymns that they repeat only what they still know of the inspired words of their ancient Fathers. The Rigveda often speaks of 'ancient' and 'modern' Rishis (*purvah, nutanah*), the former remote enough, says Sri Aurobindo, to be regarded as a kind of demigods, the first founders of knowledge. This view of the extreme antiquity of the Veda is from one to whose inner vision came the secret significance of the Vedic symbolism while he was absorbed in its profound study and research. And has he not, as his writings indicate, actually realised and revealed the supreme truths of man's ascension to higher and yet higher states of consciousness envisaged in the Rigveda?

The Rigveda is universally regarded as the oldest religious scripture of the world. This, taken with what Sri Aurobindo says about it, points to those remote ages in which there had started and developed in India the unprecedented and unparallelled spiritual quests of man, whose fruits were those golden visions of the supernal Light of which today we know only a fragment. That the glorious land of the Panjab was the principal seat of these elevating activities admits of no doubt, as also the fact that the Rigveda was a continuity of immemorial tradition of man's search for truth in India.

It is this which leads the writer of India's story to peep into her most ancient past, and with whatever glimpses he can have of it, try to discover the growth of the halting, unsure and staggering steps of its primitive life to the more and more confident, firm and rhythmic footfalls of its history. An attempt has, therefore, been made to study the movements of the early man in India, to give a brief account of how he made his first efforts to develop into a community, and then to branch out into a corporate life in rural as well as in urban surroundings, all of his own making. These creations were, doubtless, the marked steps of the growth of his capacities. The study takes the line of a rather longish survey of the Sindhu Valley civilisation, mainly because it is an outstanding phenomenon suggesting vast possibilities of solid historical value.

A study of this civilisation claims precedence over that of the Vedic not only because it has distinct relationships with the latter but, in particular, for a better appraisal of those relationships in the light of the material evidences of its earlier phases thrown up by the exploration of its sites extending over hundreds of miles. The Vedic 'Dawns' belong to far distant ages, though racially there does not seem to be much difference between the people of the Sindhu Valley and those of the Vedic times who either were autochthons of those regions of north India or must have been living there for a very long time before the cultures already mentioned were evolved.

All this, however, is external to the central idea of what the real history of the period stands for. This idea

in the Vedic age, in particular, cannot be fully grasped by a mere intellectual scholarship which has erred, and erred grievously whenever it has tried to interpret the Veda, simply because intellectual equipment, however efficient, is too meagre for the effort. Naturally enough, it has missed the inmost meaning of the wonderfully profound truths revealed by the ancient Fathers.

It is deplorable that Indian scholarship, despite its natural grasp and intimate feeling of the language, its infinite capacity of acuteness, labour, inference and soundness of judgment, which Sri Aurobindo in another context attributes to it, has hardly fared any better than western scholarship. It has with great labour sought to prove that the Aryas were immigrants into India from outside and that the Vedas are nothing more than a body of rules for rituals, chants for invoking gods and forces of Nature—a bit of an improvement no doubt on the views of European scholars who see in the Rigveda only 'the babblings of humanity in its infancy'. Yet Indian scholarship with its remarkable capacities has its value only when it is reinforced by an intuitive insight, the highest order of which has helped in the revealing studies of the Vedas by Sri Aurobindo.

It is a singular piece of good fortune for the future of the world that the Master-Seer of the race has, at this propitious hour of dawn after millenniums of oblivion and darkness, opened to the awakening eye of man the golden gate of the treasure-house of those splendours of the Infinite where waits, for its divine descent on earth,

man's new heaven of Freedom, Harmony and Perfection that are for ever.

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THE AGE OF THE SPIRIT[1]

IF man is a progressive being, his history must have in it a principle of organic growth which evolves with whatever progress he makes in his earthly adventure. All the facts, events and movements that are woven by history into the story of man's development through the ages are so many steps of his onward march, milestones, as it were, in his glorious pilgrimage. The various forms of culture produced by a race or people thus come into the pageant of history not as so many isolated factors pieced together, but as harmonious expressions of the soul of the race, the outer articulations of its inner ethos all tending towards the fulfilment of Nature's intention—the advancement and perfection of the race as a whole.

History therefore is a continuous process through which the faculties of man flower into greater and grander possibilities. And this process has its stages at each of which man takes to those activities that give him the

[1] Unless othewise mentioned, the quotations in this article are from Sri Aurobindo's writings acknowledged at the end of the chapter. The hymns of the Veda and the meanings of the Sanskrit terms used in the chapter are all his renderings.

varied experiences he needs for his growth towards the ultimate goal of his individual and collective existence.

These activities and experiences, while sustaining his life, mind, heart and soul, promote their expansion and development for larger and wider fulfilments of the future. Each such stage, however, is generally found to have one particular idea that governs most of its activities through which a particular part of man's being is helped into its fruition. And as in this way man progresses, he gathers strength by which to reach the goal of his adventure, the vision of which came to him almost at the very outset of his journey, as if by some pre-arranged divine dispensation.

But the historic development of mankind is too complex a phenomenon to allow of any clear division into separate periods which may be presented against a common background. That history is fundamentally the working out of a 'predetermined Plan' or a 'creative Idea' is even more difficult to discover in what external epochs appear to the student of human affairs. But a deeper view of things vouchsafed to the seers reads in history a hidden purpose for whose accomplishment evolutionary Nature is ever at work, leading man from age to age that he may rise to the summit of his earthly possibilities individually as well as collectively. History reflects this integral vision when it studies all the efforts and achievements of man as a manifold organic progression; and the vision finds its wider meaning in history when the latter depicts the story

of how man as a race moves forward in his chequered march to that goal.

A perfect order of collective life—and no perfect order of life can be anything but a life lived in the Spirit—is the secret aim inherent in the evolution of humanity. Perfection of the individual completes itself in the coming into being of a perfect community. The core of all human progress is an inner preparation of the whole being of man for the great end of his social existence.

The Seer sees in this progress several broad stages through which man passes in order to be fully developed in every part and plane of his being with a view to become ready for the highest point of his evolution on earth. The story of man is therefore the story of his upward endeavours by which he prepares himself for his divine destiny.

The first of these stages is the symbolic stage when came to the vision of man truths of the highest kind, truths about God, man and universe, which no mind could conceive, comprehend or express. It was the golden gates of man's intuitive faculty that swung open for the descending splendours of heaven to burst through and illumine his consciousness. In order that these truth-visions might not be distorted, misused or otherwise profaned, the Seers preserved them inviolate in symbolic figures, the key to which could be seized and turned only by adepts and initiates.

In India the age of Symbols began when the earliest and most luminous of the spiritual dawns radiated its

golden rays on the intuitive horizon of the Vedic Seers who saw in them the infinite glories of the Supreme and His supernal Light which were to come down upon earth and new-create man into a divine perfection, or rather, manifest the divinity already in him, because that is his ultimate destiny for the attainment of which Nature in him has been in ceaseless travail. It is to these early Fathers of Knowledge that the race is indebted for the profoundest truth-visions that have ever come to any mortal in known history. And intuition was the particular faculty of human consciousness that received its fruition in this period. This is the first touch of the Spirit on the mind of India by which she began in that great dawn to open to the Light and develop the intuitive bent of her mind, her inborn spirituality.

If Indian history is to discharge its highest function it must show how that ancient vision of man's perfection has ever been the motivating force behind whatever Indians have done from early times to build up their culture and civilisation, and how by these efforts they have grown in their readiness for the realisation of that vision in the life of the race.

Strangely enough, millions in India have for ages been uttering the mystic Word of the Veda, the Sacred Book of Knowledge, as the very name implies, without understanding its deeper significance, not to speak of the bearing it has on their own future and on the future of the human race as a whole.

The Vedic Paradox

Sanskrit literature, both sacred and secular, has down the ages used a very significant term for the Veda—*Shruti*, meaning 'Revealed Scripture'. It is from this word that has sprung the traditional belief in the Veda as the only authentic source of all that is of value in Indian culture, the source of its religious, philosophical and spiritual ideas, of its aesthetic, social and political thought, of even deep scientific and mathematical concepts. The Brahmanas—a later Vedic literature—are the first to use this term. The Upanishads continued it. The Puranas, the Tantras and the later classical works used no other words in speaking of it than this most profound and expressive one.

Yet there have always existed, almost from the time of the Veda itself, a class of commentators to whom the Veda was only a book of myths and rituals. This however does not discount the truth-value of the Veda, but betrays the natural tendency of the spiritually undeveloped mind which, sadly in ignorance, clings to secular values more than any other and cannot look beneath the surface meaning of things. It is the seeing of this kind which is largely responsible for the Veda being known to India as nothing but a text containing hymns for the worship of Nature-Gods, and to the world as 'an obscure, confused and barbarous hymnal'; and all the more so, because man today has lost his original intuitive faculty which was in constant touch with a higher light, and

because his mind, mainly governed by reason, accepts as facts of life only the things that are cognisable by his senses and rejects or discounts what is beyond their grasp.

In India, as elsewhere, man's religious sense showed its first dawn in a worship of the forces and powers of the physical world, and these early phases continued to remain confined to those forms owing perhaps to his natural instinct of conservation born of long association or to the incapacity of the masses to go further. But this was a stage, a crude beginning of man's career on earth, when he had not yet fully developed his human faculties. With the growth of his intuitive faculty—and this had been long before his mind developed sufficient sharpness for the intricacies of its movement—man began to open more and more to the higher and psychological actions and influences of these powers, their deeper and esoteric meanings, and to the perception of how they responded to the prayer of man's soul whose helper they really are when it seeks to liberate itself from the powers of darkness and evil into the light and freedom of the Spirit.

This idea developed in India into a system of mystic symbology in that the forces of Nature and many other things of daily life were used by the Vedic seers as symbols of their mystic experiences. But it was only for the initiates that a teaching of this kind could be meant. The laity did not, because they could not, ordinarily surpass the ritualistic stage which might have been a little more

advanced than the purely propitiatory ceremonials of the earlier beginnings of the Vedic cult whose origins are shrouded in a misty past.

The ritualistic stage had its exponents too, even during the time of the Rigveda itself,—a period of intense spiritual activity in human history extending over the even more brilliant centuries of the Upanishads when the mind, heart and soul of India were stirred to their inmost depths by the force of a passionate quest for the Infinite, which led to a wider dissemination of the Vedic truths among those who sincerely sought them. But the tendency of the generality of people was, as always naturally, towards the external forms of religion. The Vedas were therefore followed by the Brahmanas which upheld the ritualistic school, satisfying the religious needs of the masses. The zeal for spiritual knowledge which had characterised the previous period receded again to smaller circles of illumined souls which kept burning within them the fire of the ancient vision, striving all the time to reaffirm it to the higher mind of the race, so that it might remain preserved in its memory and help in the growth of spirituality which was again to inspire and motivate all the movements of Indian life and culture in later ages.

There is then the other way in which the Vedic idea continued in the religious consciousness of India. It was through the mystical potency of the Word of the Veda, of the *mantras*—inspired hymns—of which the *Gayatri* —the morning and evening prayer—has ever been the

most popular, whose chanting has enshrined in the hearts and minds of the people the sanctity and supremacy of the Veda governing their life from start to finish. And, as in the past, it dominated all aspects of their life, in particular the religious, so does it even in the present, though there is the inevitable qualitative difference.

When, however, the mystics became more mystical, more indrawn, therefore more inaccessible, and the laity more inclined to externalism, the ritualists took the field and usurped the function of Vedic scholarship with the result that the ancient lore found itself cut in two, the first part as a scripture of Works, comprising the Vedas, and the second of Knowledge, embodied in the Upanishads. This approach was strongly criticised in the Upanishads and the Gita,—an evidence of the spiritual tendency of the periods of these two authorities of Indian thought. Even most of the ritualistic commentators never forgot to acknowledge that the Veda did allow of a spiritual interpretation, though that for them was not its sole meaning.

The most notable writer on the Veda in ancient times was Yaska, who, according to tradition, lived about 1,000 B.C. and compiled the first Vedic grammar on more or less scientific lines, using etymology as one of his bases. He speaks of several schools of Vedic exegesis, ritualistic, mythological, grammatical, logical and spiritual. He himself knew the Veda as embodying three kinds of knowledge, a sacrificial knowledge, a knowledge

of the gods, and a spiritual knowledge. The hymns, he says, admit of this triple meaning. Yaska's declaration that 'the Rishi saw the truth, the true law of things, directly by an inner vision' shows on the one hand that the esoteric significance of the Vedic symbolism was not completely lost at the time; whereas, on the other, the confession of Yaska that he did not know even in his time the meaning of more than four hundred words of the Riks, hymns, indicates that the inner sense of the Vedic truths had already begun to fade in the consciousness of the later generations of the ancients. What remained and grew in influence was the exoteric interpretation of the Riks, which emphasised the sacrifices and all that they meant to the lay people.

Centuries had elapsed after Yaska when arose the Mimansakas who compiled the sacrificial rules and pointed out how important they were for the proper performance of the Vedic rites. In the fourteenth century there appeared in the field of Vedic scholarship the great figure Sayanacharya whose commentary on traditional lines is now regarded as the only authority on the Veda. Sayana's work, which he completed in collaboration with other scholars of his time, is so much dominated by his exclusive acceptance of the ritualistic formula that it renders more obscure the suggestiveness of even the external sense of the ancient Scripture, not to speak of its inner and real significance. 'It also renders the ancient reverence for the Veda, its sacred authority, its divine reputation incomprehensible to the reason or

only explicable as a blind and unquestioning tradition of faith starting from an original error.'

Sayana does not seem to be so indifferent to the historic and mythological elements in the *Shruti* as to its spiritual, philosophic or psychological interpretations. He accepts the inner meaning of a number of Vedic terms but he does not always follow it up. Once, following this line he mentions Vritra as the Coverer who holds back from man the objects of his desire and his aspirations; but when he interprets the word, he calls him simply the enemy of man or the physical cloud-demon who holds back the waters and has therefore to be pierced by the Rain-giver. This is only an external sense on which as also on the ritualistic conception Sayana builds his whole exegesis which has too an element in it of naturalistic interpretation in that it identifies the Vedic gods with personifications of Nature-Powers, such as the Sun, Moon, Heaven, Earth, Wind, Rain and Storm. European scholarship has taken its cue from this approach and has in its own way developed a theory of naturalistic interpretation which also has sadly influenced and misdirected the mind of modern India. The result is that the Veda is generally referred to as a book of hymns and sacrifices to the godheads of Nature, and in India with this view is associated the belief of the Hindus that the Veda is a revealed scripture. This belief, however, is something more than an instance of how a conservative people clings to an old tradition. Implanted in its memory right at the beginning of its history, the tradition is pre-

served by the race which perhaps has never fully known what it really means. Nevertheless, the deep-rooted belief in the revelatory character of the Veda has served a purpose of Nature who has been patiently preparing the mind and soul of man for an understanding of the essential truth of the Veda when it is re-visioned and re-presented in its own true light by the Master-Seer of the race. And does not this truth show also the path by which man can grow into his divine destiny? The fact, however, is there that for thousands of years India has remained ignorant of the real teachings of the Veda; although they were indirectly influencing the race through the Upanishads, the Gita, the Puranas and the Tantras, all of which are more or less elaborations of the Vedic ideas in more intellectual and understandable terms. But this does not solve the problem. Whatever of the Veda is known to Indians today or to the world, is always from the commentary of Sayana, whittled down by European scholarship from a yet more materialistic standpoint. In modern works on Indian history starting from this standpoint, casual references to the high spirituality shown by Indians through the ages are explained by the uplifting tone of the spiritual fervour of the Upanishads, the Veda being mentioned only as a 'Book' in which the godheads of Nature are propitiated for whatever they could do for the material well-being of man.

Why should the Knowledge of the Veda remain hidden from man for such a long stretch of time? Why is it that he should be deprived of such sublime world-moving

truths? This brings us to the problem of man's readiness for them which he acquires through progressive stages of conscious activity in the long history of his development whose psychology has been outlined in the beginning of the chapter. The Vedic truths are not for the ordinary seeker to discover, far less to understand and realise. And the time must also come in the cycle of man's progress when only the secret of a newer and diviner perfection, as envisaged in the Veda, can be revealed to him. And, above all, the Seer must come to whom will open the golden door of that Home of Light in which dwell the immortals shining in the eternal radiance of the Supreme.

The Veda is verily a Revealed Scripture of mystic symbols concealing within them the highest truths of man's ascension to the luminous heavens of the Spirit. But who is to vindicate this in this age of Iron? In one of the hymns of the Rigveda the Seer describes himself as one illumined, expressing through his thought and speech words of guidance, 'secret words', 'seer-wisdoms that utter their meaning to the seer'. Another Rishi speaks of the Riks of the Veda as existing in 'a supreme ether imperishable and immutable in which all the gods are seated', and he adds, 'one who knows not That, what shall he do with the Rik?' That is why the Vedic Rishis—the inspired Mystics—reserved the secret Knowledge of the Riks for the initiates shielding it from profanation, misuse or misinterpretation. They veiled the Knowledge in concrete and material figures and symbols

and passed it only to the accepted seekers who had made themselves ready for it by going through systematic discipline and training. Thus arose the system of Vedic symbology with a double significance. 'These symbols centred around the idea and forms of the sacrifice; for sacrifice was the universal and central institution of the prevailing cult. The hymns were written round this institution and were understood by the vulgar as ritual chants in praise of Nature-gods, Indra, Agni, Surya Savitri, Varuna, Mitra, and Bhaga, the Aswins, Ribhus, Maruts, Rudra, Vishnu, Saraswati, with the object of provoking by the sacrifice the gifts of the gods,—cows, horses, gold and other forms of wealth of a pastoral people, victory over enemies, safety in travel, sons, servants, prosperity, every kind of material good fortune. But behind this mask of primitive and materialistic naturalism, lay another and esoteric cult which would reveal itself if we once penetrated the meaning of the Vedic symbols.'

The Rishis knew that the Word of the Veda came from the topmost height of speech from where, hidden in secrecy, it passed into the truth-seers and could be found only by following the track of their speech through an inner seeing and hearing—the Rishis are also called 'hearers'—which the seeker of the secret knowledge, unless he was a born one, had to develop by meditation and tapsya, as Yaska reiterates. Says Sri Aurobindo: 'To enter into the very heart of the mystic doctrine, we must ourselves have trod the ancient paths

and renewed the lost discipline, the forgotten experience.' The Seer must therefore come who would follow the path of the ancient Illuminates, rediscover the mystic lore in its original inner sense and reveal it to man at that great hour of the world when Nature will be ready to take her next evolutionary *saltus* and evolve out of the present mental man a higner supramental being.

The Truths Re-visioned

Sri Aurobindo started his Vedic studies under circumstances which were, as his whole life was, peculiar to himself. While deep in his yogic contemplations he was regularly having certain spiritual experiences through which there used to arise in his mind a number of symbolic names which, on reading the Veda later, he could easily identify with its gods. 'The Veda', he says, 'which I first began to read long afterwards in Pondicherry rather confirmed what experiences I already had than was any guide to my sadhana.'[1] This is how he found the clue to the figures and symbols of the Veda. As an instance, he cites Sarama who, according to Sayana, is just a heavenly hound, but who was seen by Sri Aurobindo as the Vedic hound of heaven representing an image of the physical Dawn entering in its pursuit of the vanished herds of Light into the cave of the powers of Darkness. With the physical Light taken as a subjective

[1] Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, p. 44

phenomenon, the hound of heaven is the intuition entering into the dark caverns of the subconscious mind 'to prepare the delivery and out-flashing of the bright illuminations of knowledge which have there been imprisoned'. Thus the Vedic terms, particularly the names, came to him as identities of symbols, and a new world of Light came into the possession of the Seer whose revelatory discoveries and whose phraseology are freely drawn upon here as the very basis of and clue to a new approach to the story of India for which the profound Scripture, the Rigveda, now proves to be the most important document, important alike for the history of human thought and of the spiritual evolution of the human race. It is impossible within our scope to give an adequate idea of the vast literature comprising his esoteric exposition of the Veda which the Master has given to mankind for its spiritual illumination. A very bare outline touching on the fundamentals of Vedic thought as reconstructed by him is attempted here so that the motivating force—for that is the central meaning of the Vedic vision of man's future—behind all the endeavours of India throughout her history, may be understood.

As Sri Aurobindo pursued his Vedic study from his own standpoint, the Veda appeared to him to be 'a constant vein of richest gold of thought and spiritual experience running all through it.' The whole wealth of its inner meaning came to him as his natural inheritance. Sri Aurobindo found that often the exoteric sense is itself a part of the esoteric. *Go*, for instance,

means both cow and light, the latter being its psychological sense; *dhi* also is variously rendered as thought, prayer, action, food, etc., thought being its psychological sense. There are images whose esoteric implications are quite clear. For instance, when in certain passages it is said that a son is born, what is implied is the image of some inner birth, 'the sonhood of the birth of knowledge, the inspired hearing of the truth', as suggested in the hymns to the Dawn. Similarly, natural phenomena used as figures for inner facts and other external things generally connected with sacrifices, are meant to symbolise forces and phases of the inner world. *Ghrita* means clarified butter, but also luminous thought; *Soma* means the wine of the moon-plant, but also delight; *madhu* is honey and also sweetness. 'Horse' is the symbol of strength and power as the twin of 'cow', the light. In the vision of the Mystics who represented the intuitive and symbolic mentality of the age 'the physical melted its shades into the lustres of the psychic, the psychic deepened into the light of the spiritual and there was no sharp dividing line in the transition, but a natural blending and intershading of their suggestions and colours.' The invocation 'Play, O Ray, and manifest in us' is at once a suggestion of the leaping up and radiant play of the potent sacrificial flame on the physical altar and of a similar psychical phenomenon, the manifestation of the saving flame of a divine power and light within us.

The Vedic Seers took the life of man as the field of their quest. And since theirs was a whole view, they

knew that this life belongs not only to earth but also to heaven. Thus were they able to make the right approach to the problem, the problem of discovering the harmony between the two poles of existence which in the integral vision of the Seers were fundamentally one. The seeking after and the realisation of God should certainly be the chief concern of the spiritual aspirant. But unless and until the fruits of these endeavours are equated with what his life means for man, the problem of life remains unsolved. That is why in those early days of the magnificent youth of the nation, when 'a subtle intuitive vision and fathomless spiritual insight was at work', the inspired Mystics voyaging into the vasts of God discovered how He embraces both the hemispheres of existence, heaven and earth, and promotes between them a constant commerce of their forces, heaven seeking to descend on earth, and earth aspiring to ascend to heaven, so that the marriage might take place of these two powers for the growth on earth of a larger life of harmony in the Spirit.

In the depth and intensity of their vision the Seers saw in man the mighty summit of earth and in the gods powers of the Infinite Consciousness, both bound by the unseen light of a heavenly Glory whose sole aim is to manifest on earth and evolve out of man a new being, its own immortal embodiment. Man indeed is of heaven even as gods are of the earth. Thus did the life of man unveil its secret significance to these Mystics who discovered in it 'a thing of mixed truth and falsehood, a movement from mortality to immortality, from mixed

light and darkness to the splendour of a divine Truth whose home is above in the Infinite but which can be built up here in man's soul and life.' To be able to achieve this supreme end of his life man must cleave through the barriers he has himself erected in and around him by his subjection to the dark forces, particularly of death and falsehood. He must rise beyond death to immortality, turn from falsehood to the truth, battle with and conquer the powers of Darkness. And this he can do only by constant communion with the divine powers, and with their aid, by a building of the godheads within him, a formation of the universality of the divine nature. Indeed, the gods who are children of Infinity, were born in the Truth and the Truth was their home, but they descended into the lower planes and had in each plane their appropriate functions, their mental, vital and physical cosmic motions, and all these so that they could increase the Truth in man by the Truth and lead him to felicity and immortality.

Immortality then is what his life on earth is meant for, but man attains it only when he is able to break beyond the limitations not only of the physical, but also of his mental and psychical being into the highest native plane of the Truth where exist in all their heavenly plenitude the glories of immortality and infinity. Thus came to man the vision of the highest aim of his life almost when he started on his earthly adventure. The Vedic Rishi therefore voices in those early days the inmost aspiration of man's soul when he says:

> 'That which is immortal in mortals and possessed of the truth, is a god and established inwardly as an energy working out in our divine powers....Become high-uplifted, O Strength, pierce all veils, manifest in us the things of the Godhead.[1]

Truth, Light and Immortality were to the Seers the highest treasures that heaven could offer to man and it is the attainment of these that they emphasised as the consummation of man's endeavour on earth. There is a Truth deeper and higher than the truth of outward existence, a Light greater and higher than the light of human understanding, which comes by revelation and inspiration, an immortality towards which the soul of man has to rise. It is for man to find his way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and immortality, to be born into the Truth, to grow in it, and live in it for ever. To do this is to unite with the Godhead and to pass from mortality to immortality.

This higher world of Truth was known to the Vedic Mystics as having below it the world of inferior truth, which is derived from the higher but mixed with falsehood and error, yet nonetheless a field for the growth of the human warrior who must be ever struggling to overcome the forces of Evil so that the luminous home of the Divine Truth can be built up on earth, the home of the Truth, the Right, the Vast, *satyam*, *ritam*, *brihat*, where all is Truth-conscious, *ritachit*, all is in eternal harmony. There are

[1] Rigveda IV. 2. 1, IV. 4. 5.

many worlds in between up to the triple heavens and their lights but this is the world of the highest light—the world of the Sun of Truth, the Great Heaven, the path to which —called the path of the gods—it is for man to discover by an inner striving.

But when man awakes from his sleep—the ignorance—of a desire-driven existence and begins to open to the light of his soul and makes the endeavour to live always in that light, he finds himself confronted by the powers of Darkness which had their sway over him so long and which are spoken of in the Veda under various names as Vritra (cover of the light), Vala (withholder of the light) and Panis (traffickers in sense-mind), the Dasyus, the Rakshasas, and their kings, the powers of Falsehood, Division and Darkness, who always assail man but more vehemently whenever they find him truly responding to the call of the Spirit.

The deepest meaning of man's life is a battle between the powers of Light and Truth who call man to their heavens, and their opposing powers, those of Darkness and Falsehood, who obstruct all possibility of divine existence and divine action. All these latter have to be overcome and their domination over man and earth overthrown.

In order that the gods may win a decisive victory in this battle and that on earth may be established a permanent reign of the Divine, man must seek the aid of the gods, the gods who are the guardians and increasers of the Truth and who alone can destroy the opposition of the adverse forces and clear for man the path to immortality.

To the Vedic Seers these gods were living realities, and the vicissitudes of the human soul a cosmic struggle, not merely of principles and tendencies but of the Cosmic Powers which support and embody them. These are the Gods and the Demons. On the world-stage and in the individual soul the same poignant drama with the same actors is enacted.

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

The Yoga done by the Vedic seekers opened them to the way of the Truth by which they grew in the law of the Truth and became themselves the possessors of its

solar splendours, 'masters of the Truth-Light who make the Truth grow by the Truth'. They saw the higher worlds, and worlds beyond them, the gods, and gods beyond them, and knew that these are to descend upon earth and make of it a new heaven. Therefore, they declared:

'A perfect path of the Truth has come into being for our journey to the other shore beyond the darkness.'[1]

'Beholding the higher Light beyond the darkness we come to the divine Sun in the Godhead, to the highest Light of all.'[2]

Almost similar testaments—evidently echoes of the Veda—are found in the Upanishads, the profoundest creation of the spiritual mind of a later Vedic India.

The Secret Revealed

The Yoga of the Veda is symbolised in the idea of sacrifice by performing which the aspirant seeks to be led into the world of the gods, to have their benediction and companionship in his labour to conquer all opposition and achieve the goal. But was it only an outer ritual? It could not be, at least not exclusively so; because no externalia, however gorgeously and meticulously done, can vouchsafe to man such sublime visions of the Spirit, bring about such revolutionary inner change in the life and soul of man. What then is the deeper significance

[1] RV. I. 46. 11 [2] RV. I. 50. 10

of this sacrifice? The whole of the Rigveda is nothing if not a sublime Song of humanity through which is invoked the aid of the gods in the ceaseless ascension of man's soul towards the immortal bliss of an infinite existence. Its chants are, as it were, episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in that heavenward ascension. But what is that infinite existence? and how is the ascension to it to be made? Answers to these are hidden in the figures and symbols the Mystics used for what they saw, heard and realised.

The hymns therefore centre round the most significant symbol of sacrifice—the symbol at once of a giving and a worship, of a battle and a journey. The battle rages in the inner world of man, as it does in the outer, between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness. And sacrifice is the means by which man seeks to aspire to the gods for their help in his struggle against the forces that oppose his upward endeavours. But it is an inward means, an inner offering to the Godhead of all man is and all he has, so that all the riches of the divine Truth and Light may come into his possession, descend into his life and become elements of his inner birth into the Truth. This would imply the development in him of the right thinking, the right understanding and the right action of that higher Truth.

The sacrifice is also a journey, a pilgrimage, a travel towards the home of the Truth, the Sun-world, the home of the gods born in the Truth. Man, as he takes to this path, is opposed by the dark forces, to overcome which

he calls in the aid of the gods, making to them all those offerings which in the Veda symbolise the dedication of inner powers and potentialities to the Lords of the Truth. From a yet larger view, 'the Vedic sacrifice is psychologically a symbol of cosmic and individual activity become self-conscious, enlightened and aware of its goal.'

The whole process of the universe is in its very nature a sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary. 'Self-fulfilment by self-immolation, to grow by giving, is the universal law.' From Matter evolves the plant, from the plant the animal, from the animal man, from man by the same continued process of self-giving and in response to the same divine impulsion will evolve godlike superman with infinite powers and possibilities. In its deepest sense the Sacrifice—the Sanskrit term for which, *yajna* originally meant God—is the sacrifice of the Supreme by which He looses himself forth in his creation in order to prepare it for a greater manifestation which will come about when man —so far the highest point of creation—becomes fully conscious of the Divine and His Will in him, and offers himself wholly and entirely to the Divine so that He may fulfil His Will in his life. This would mean the return of the Divine in man to his unveiled splendour in the Home of the Vast Truth. It is, as it were, the double process of involution and evolution continuously going on in the earth-consciousness. The Spirit becomes involved in matter and manifests in it the powers possible to its conditions, waiting for the hour when its constant presence would prepare the earth for the emergence

of its own force of Truth and Light through which earth, rather man, would evolve into a perfect type of gnostic being. Sacrifice is that inner process by which man grows in readiness for that "divine event". When man aspires for the Light, he does so because he is impelled to it by the Will of the Divine in him, the mounting flame of Agni.

In this sacrifice Agni is the god who is first to be invoked, since it is he who is the path-finder and the leader of the sacrifice. Physically, Agni is the god of sacrificial flame, the fire found in the external phenomena of Nature. Psychologically, the Lord of Fire represents knowledge and a blazing power, light and fiery force, the *tapas* of later terminology. He is the force of the universal Godhead, a conscious force or Will instinct with knowledge, the nature of the *tapas* that pervades the world and is behind all its workings. He is the seer, *kavi*, the supreme mover of thought, *prathamo manota*, the mover too of speech and the Word, *upavakta jananam*, the power in the heart that works, *hridisthita kratum*, the impeller of action and movement, the divine guide of man in the act of sacrifice of which he is the priest who calls and brings the gods and gives to them the offering. Therefore does the Rishi invoke the Divine Flame as the sacrificer, the luminous seer:

> 'O Seer, we kindle thee in thy light and thy vastness in the march of our sacrifice who carriest the offerings on their journey.'[1]

[1] RV. V. 26. 3

'O Flame, O Purifier, bring to us by thy tongue of rapture, O god, the gods and offer to them sacrifice.'[1]

'Come, O Will, with all the godheads for the giving of the oblation; thee we accept as the priest of the offering.'[2]

'O Flame, thou burnest high and increasest the divine laws and art the conqueror of a thousandfold riches; thou art the messenger of the gods who has the word.'[3]

All these functions cannot be predicated of the god of physical fire, but they are all just attributes of the conscient divine Will in man and the universe, awakening in man when he makes the inner sacrifice in response to which Agni who knows the way to the home of the Truth leads his human worshipper to that home. This is how Agni mediates between God and man and fashions gods in the mortals.

One of the two most important of the Vedic deities, the other being Indra, Agni is called the beginning and the end. He is the Will that is Knowledge, and it is he who initiates the upward effort of the mortal towards Immortality: to this divine consciousness that is one with divine power, man attains as the foundation of immortal existence. When, therefore, the sacrifice is properly made, that is to say, when we have made of ourselves a complete offering at the altar of Agni, the universal

[1] RV. V. 26. 1 [2] RV. V. 26. 4 [3] RV. V. 26. 6

Will, Agni takes form in us awakening in us the Divine Will illumined with divine knowledge and 'Born, the Flame shines out slaying the Destroyers, yea, he smites the Darkness with the Light and he finds the shining Herds and those Waters and the luminous world.' Here the Destroyers are the dark forces, the Herds are the trooping rays of the divine Sun, the luminous Consciousness, whom the Destroyers shut up in the dark caves—nether regions—of man's being; the Waters are the outpouring of the luminous movement and impulse of the divine or supramental existence, and the luminous world is *Swar*, the world of divine solar light to which the human aspirant has to ascend and which is revealed by the release of the shining herds from the dark cave and the consequent uprising of the divine Sun, the Infinite Truth. Thus does Agni liberate man from ignorance and falsehood into the knowledge and light of the Infinite Truth. 'O Seeing Flame, thou carriest man of the crooked ways into the abiding truth and knowledge.'

When Agni the sacrificial Flame begins to burn on the altar of the soul as the power of the Will, a force of God, the upward movement to heaven starts, the ascent of the soul to the splendours of the Infinite begins. This is one end of life on earth, from where the journey is initiated. At the other end shines the bright god Indra who is the power of pure existence self-manifested as the Divine Mind. He is invoked to come down into our world as 'the Hero with the shining horses—symbolising

consciousness in the form of force—who slays darkness and division with his lightnings, pours down the life-giving heavenly waters, finds in the trace of the hound, Intuition, the lost or hidden iluminations, makes the Sun of Truth mount high in the heaven of our mentality.' The Rishi therefore declares:

> 'He with his shining companions won the field, won the sun, won the waters.'[1]
>
> 'O Hero, thou didst conquer the cow, thou didst conquer the Soma; thou didst loose forth to their overflowing the seven rivers.'[2]

The Vedic gods foster and increase man in all his substance and possessions. They continually enlarge him towards the unbounded plenitude of the vast Truth-Consciousness, upholding him in his struggle and labour so that he may reach, fully grown, the supreme goal of his existence. Indra is the greatest of these divine companions of man, whose help and strength man needs so much, in order that he might be able to retain and enjoy to his full the riches that his heavenly ascension —the upsoaring flame of Agni in him—brings to man. Indra is indeed the Lord of Heaven with the mythical thunderbolt as his weapon, to whom also the external sacrifice is made and who is known as such in the myths and legends of India. But psychologically he is the Lord of Heaven's Light, the radiant bringer of it to man, his thunderbolt symbolising the outflashings of

[1] RV. I. 100. 18 [2] RV. I. 32. 12

divine illuminations which open the mentality of man to the Light of Truth. The Rishi therefore invokes him:

> 'Come to our Soma-offerings, O Soma-drinker, drink of the Soma-wine; the intoxication of thy rapture gives indeed the Light.' [1]
>
> 'Then may we know somewhat of Thy uttermost right thinkings. Show not beyond us, come.' [2]
>
> 'Come, O Indra, impelled by the mind, driven forward by the illumined thinker, to my soul-thoughts.... [3]
>
> 'Come with the forceful speed, O Lord of bright horses.' [4]

Soma is delight, the wine of God, whose physical form—a juice of the plant of the same name—is variously spoken of in the Vedic hymns, all symbolising the divine intoxication, which its rise produces, particularly in Indra who is sustained by his ecstasy in his labour to conquer the forces that obstruct the awakening of man to his divine destiny. And Indra conquers when he breaks up the caves of man's subconscience and releases the cows of light and illumination which are shut there by the Panis, the Lords of lower sense activity. Indra then illumines the planes of man's consciousness with the splendour of the Swar, the world of the sun of Truth, which is the abode of Indra, who with his seeing knowledge fashions right thought-formations in the mind

[1] RV. I. 4. 2
[2] RV. I. 4. 3
[3] RV. I. 3. 5
[4] RV. I. 3. 6

of man and opens him to the truth and light of a supramental existence.

But the Soma—delight—is concealed in the growths of the earth, in the waters of existence, from where it has to be pressed out and distilled into its original essence and purity, and in that form, offered to the Lord of Heaven who would then liberate his human worshipper into the vastness of the highest Beatitude. Thus does Indra reciprocate to earth its offering of Soma. That is how the mind of man receives its inflow of the Ananda of the Immortals from the supramental consciousness through the *Ritam*, the Truth.

In this work of Indra in the aspiring soul of man the Maruts are his shining collaborators, the Maruts who represent the progressive illumination of human mentality. They are the thought-gods, the powers of will and nervous or vital force, that impel thought and speech and with Indra battle for the foundation on earth of heavenly glories. Physically the Maruts are the powers of wind, storm and rain, the elements of Nature, which symbolise forces that help new-make the imperfect mentality of man enabling it to rise from its subconscious base into its superconscient summits. Therefore chants the Rishi:

> 'To you I come with this obeisance, by perfect Word I seek right mentality. Take delight, O Maruts, in the things of knowledge...'[1]

[1] RV. I. 171. 1

'O Maruts, upward all our days by the will towards Victory.'[1]

The Maruts are also powers of Vayu, the Lord of Life, whose force pervades all material existence and whose force is a condition of all its activities. If Indra is the master of mental force, Vayu is the master of nervous or vital force; and their union is necessary for the effective movement of thought and action. They are therefore invited to come in one common chariot and drink together of the wine of the Ananda which brings with it the divinising energies. The Rishi therefore hymns:

'With Indra for thy charioteer, come, O Vayu, in the car of happy light to the drinking of the Soma wine.'[2]

The chariot symbolises movement of energy and it is a glad movement of already-illumined vital energies that is invoked in the form of Vayu.

After Indra, the Maruts and Vayu have worked together in human consciousness awakening it to the bliss and truth of heaven which again they bring down and establish on earth, Varuna and Mitra have to be invoked to act on human mentality so as to perfect the intellect and widen it into larger ranges. Varuna in the Veda is always characterised as a power of wideness and purity. 'He is also *rishadasa*, destroyer of the enemy, of all that tries to injure the inner growth of man. Mitra, a power like Varuna of the Light and Truth, especially represents Love,

[1] RV. I. 171. 3

[2] RV. IV. 48. 2

Joy and Harmony, the foundations of Vedic beatitude. He works with the purity of Varuna and imparts that purity to the intellect which then becomes free from all discords and confusions.' He is thus the harmoniser, of whose divine being Love is the very essence. He is the divine friend, a kingly helper of men and immortals, the most beloved of the gods, as the Veda so often speaks of him. Mitra brings within the reach of man the enjoyment of the divine felicity derived from pure possession and sinless pleasure in all things founded upon the unfailing touch of the Truth and Right in the freedom of a large universality.

Equally supreme among the Vedic deities is Varuna, 'the ethereal, oceanic, infinite King of wide being, wide knowledge and wide might, a manifestation of the one God's active omniscience and omnipotence, a mighty guardian of the Truth.' He is often invoked in the Veda as the finder of the Path, the Path that leads to new truths, new powers, new worlds, higher realisations. He holds in himself all the heights which the seeker is to climb in order to reach the summit of his quest. The entire universe is sustained and led forward by the single and perfect movement of Mitra-Varuna, the Light and the Purity, the Harmony and the Infinity. It is the rain of heaven—the streams of the Truth, waters that have knowledge—which these two Godheads pour down, upholding the physical existence in its fruits and the celestial in its herding radiances of illumination. They thus create in man a force full of divine knowledge and a wide being

which they guard and increase. Therefore the Rishi declares:

'You uphold earth and heaven, O Mitra King and King Varuna, by your greatness; you increase the growths of earth, you nourish the shining herds of heaven, you pour forth the rain of its waters, O swift in strength.'[1]

'O Mitra and Varuna illumined in consciousness, by the Law, by the knowledge of the Mighty One you guard the workings; by the Truth you govern widely all the world of our becoming; you set the sun in heaven, a chariot of various splendour.'[2]

All the strengths of heaven that new-make man into the highest plenitude of his being find on earth their desired fulfilment when on the horizon of the seeker's consciousness rises in his supernal glory the godhead of Light, Surya. This light is that of the Truth described in the Rigveda as the True, the Right, the Vast. It is the luminous supramental heaven of Swar—'vast Swar, the great Truth'—concealed beyond our heaven and our earth. Yet as Surya, the Sun, 'that Truth', dwells lost in the darkness, withheld from man in the secret cave of his subconscient. But this Truth, which is the Vast, dwells manifest and free only on the supramental plane where existence, will, knowledge and joy move in a rapturous and boundless infinity and are not limited and hedged in as in this many-walled existence of the mind,

[1] RV. V. 62. 3 [2] RV. V. 63. 7

life and body which form the lower being of man. With the aid of the gods man must break beyond the two enclosing firmaments of the mental and physical and ascend to that divine existence free and large in its unbounded range. That is where roam freely the luminous herds of the Sun, the seat and house of the Truth, the gods' own home. Such is the world of the sun of the Vedic worship, the paradise of light to which the Fathers aspired:

> 'O Sun, thou all-seeing Intelligence, may we, living creatures, behold thee bringing to us the great Light, blazing out on us for vision upon vision of the beatitude, ascending to the bliss in the vast mass of thy strength above!'[1]

Created in man by the divine Mind, Indra, and taught by Varuna who is divine Purity and Wideness, the Maruts the Life-powers in man, the purifying storm-gods, battle for the knowledge of the Truth, the vision of the Light of the solar world. And this they do that man may enjoy the riches of heaven. But Surya 'has not only the far-seeing eye of knowledge born of the gods'; he is also 'the speaker of the supreme word, the impeller of the illumined and illuminating thought', the thought that creates. It is in this aspect that Surya Savitri is invoked in the Gayatri, the chosen formula of the ancient Vedic religion. When man rises to the vision of Surya, the God of Light awakes in him and he sees all the worlds of

[1] RV. X. 37. 8

divine Light as the bodies of the Infinite Aditi, the Mother of the gods; and this new-seeing of all things in the Divine Mother remoulds all the parts of his being into the perfect harmony of a new creation. The function of Surya is to prepare that new birth, that new creation for man.

But the golden Light of Surya cannot suddenly burst on the human consciousness without Dawn's first releasing the radiances of the sun on the night of human ignorance which envelops man's mental, vital and physical consciousness. Dawn, the daughter of heaven, is imaged as the bride of the luminous Lord of Beatitude, who, when she rises, unveils the splendours of her bosom, reveals her shining limbs and makes the sun ascend upon the upclimbing tier of the worlds. Dawn is also imaged as the awakener who is full of the Truth by the illuminations of heaven, who comes uttering words of truth. 'She finds speech for every thinker'. It is she who creates the Path for mortals by her light. The Rishi therefore hymns:

> 'Thou art there for strength and knowledge and great impulsion, thou art our movement to the goal, thou makest us set forth on the journey.
>
> 'O Dawn divine, shine out on us immortal, in thy chariot of bliss, uttering the words of Truth.'[1]

But Dawn comes only after Night. Indeed Night holds hidden in her bosom her luminous sister. 'This

[1] RV. III. 61. 2

life of our ignorance taught by the gods in their veiled human working prepares the birth of the divine Dawn so that, sped forth, she may manifest the creation of the luminous creator.' For the divine Dawn is the force and face of Aditi, by whose light the gods are born in man in their true forms. Dawn is often invoked to come with all 'the splendours of heaven, with all the bountiful companies of its gods and seers, the shining herds of its thought companioned, as they are, by the burning rays of the Sun of gnosis.' She is indeed, as the Rishi says,

> 'Dawn of the luminous journey, Dawn queen of truth, large with the Truth, how wide is the gleam from her rosy limbs,—Dawn divine who brings with her the heaven of light.'[1]

By invoking her the Rishi seeks to be reborn into the Light, into Knowledge. It is this divine birth that is aspired after when the Rishi prays to be awakened 'in the sonhood of the birth of knowledge, in the inspired hearing of the Truth.'

Dawn is, therefore, the illumination of the Truth rising upon the mentality of man to bring the day of full consciousness into the darkness or the half-lit night of his being. The Rishi, when he sees 'the wide-shining of this Dawn', followed by the continuous splendour of the all-illumining Light bursts forth:

> 'Arise, O Souls, arise! Strength has come, darkness has passed away—the Light is arriving!'[2]

[1] RV. V. 80. 1

[2] RV. I. 113. 16

When this Light of heaven descends on earth and becomes permanently established in its consciousness, the earth changes into heaven, for that is its destiny. As in the outer world, so in the inner, Dawn is a continuous phenomenon, and the Dawn that came to the vision of the Vedic Mystics is 'the first of the eternal succession of the Dawns that are coming.' This is how Dawn fulfils the ancient mornings in their future glory, the great Yesterday in a greater Tomorrow.

A significant figure in Vedic mysticism is the perpetual conflict between Gods and Titans, the powers of the Light and Truth and those of Darkness and Falsehood. The Light is that of the illumined Infinite Consciousness of Aditi, the Mother of the gods whose powers befriend man in his struggle towards the summit of his being. And the darkness is that of the darkened finite consciousness of Diti, the Mother of the Titans who dwell in the obscure regions of man's being and obstruct the rays of the dawn entering into them when the soul of man aspires for Light.

In cosmic creation Aditi is the undivided unity of things and Diti is the separative duality, the cause of all division. It is the sons of Diti who dominate the earth. And they rule by dualising the consciousness of egoistic man. Knowledge, Force and Delight are the powers of the Godhead which are to be brought down to earth for the divine life to be built with them. In human activity Knowledge corresponds to thought and its formations; Force to will and its works; Delight to love

and its harmonisings. These are the faint reflections of the working of the gods in the life of man. But the sons of Diti pervert knowledge into the duality of truth and falsehood, force into that of strength and weakness, love into that of desire and hatred: and through the play of these opposites they sway the life of man, creating all those confusions that afflict him. But these perverted forms of the original powers of God that are meant to new-make man into His image have to be exalted into their divine originals, these crooked movements of the separative consciousness have to be replaced by the straight ones of the truth-conscious mind. Man, therefore, must master these powers in their heavenly form and bring them down into his being, into every activity of his life on earth. And this endeavour means his travelling on the path of the Truth, following the straight and perfect leading of the gods, the children of Aditi, a leading which will ultimately enable him to transcend the limitations of mind and body, to enjoy the beatific immortality, to grow into the epiphany of the gods, and build in his human existence the universal formations of the higher and divine creation. Man grows in his strength to achieve these as he is more and more able to meet and cleave through the resistance of the opposing powers of Diti, whose work in terrestrial evolution is no less important, in that without it there would have been no struggle, and, therefore, no victory, no spiritual riches. It is by his capacity for struggle that man increases in his strength and grows towards the

victory; and by victory he wins the heavenly riches that are for ever.

In a deeper psychological sense, Diti and Aditi are one in the all-pervading Force of the Truth, even as Night and Dawn are one in the all-revealing Light of the Truth; and they have each their part to play in the movement of cosmic creation towards its divine destiny. The Maruts who represent the forces of thought are in fact the sons of Diti described as assisting Indra by their functioning in the thought-world of man which they prepare for Indra to build in its perfect formation. Besides, Diti, creator of the things of the earth, has also to be possessed so that earth may be restored to its heavenly truth. An Upanishad declares this as a condition for the attainment of immortality.

How do the gods help man in his striving to reach the goal? The Vedic Riks explicitly declare that there is a greater heaven where shines eternally the Truth, the base of a triple Infinity, the Truth in which are born the gods and in which also they have their home. It is a creative power of this Truth having inherent in it Infinite Being, Infinite Light and Infinite Bliss, that motives creation, and always remains behind it upbearing its labour to grow in readiness for the manifestation in it of the light and power of the Truth. The cosmic order through which this subtle working takes place is formed by three successive planes, Heaven, Air and Earth, which symbolise the mental, vital and physical principles that constitute man and that have also each

their worlds above the earth, from which they act on human life; and it is only when they are called down into it that they can act with a direct and unveiled potency. It is these principles on earth that have to be purified, perfected, and prepared for the Manifestation of the Light. Therefore do the gods in response to man's prayer descend from their heavenly home into these planes and work in them so that the latter may be exalted into their—the gods'—radiance and strength.

Each god has his appropriate functioning and motion in each plane, though this functioning is not restricted to one plane; and being of the same Truth, each god contains in him all the other gods. Generally, Indra works in Heaven, in mind; Varuna, Mitra and the Maruts, in Air, in life; Agni, in earth, in matter: but all of them ever seek to lift the mortals beyond themselves, beyond earth and sky, to the higher heaven of Truth, the Swar, the Sun-world, Agni the Divine Flame figuring most prominently in this effort of the gods. If the dynamics of the Truth is not explicitly stated in the Veda, it is because the gods work with the power of the Most-High, in unison with the consciousness of the Supreme. They are the children of the Light, and to the Light they lead their human worshipper. There is yet another purpose for which the gods come down to work in mortals. The worlds above the earth in which the gods live and move, have everything in them which the gods need, Truth, Light, Immortality and eternal Ananda. But these worlds being typal have no growth, no evolution. Earth having

'a deeper power than Heaven', the power to evolve into higher forms of consciousness, is sought by the gods in order to be relieved of their typal existence into the ever-growing progress of a larger and richer life that she alone so gloriously offers.

What the Rishis achieved

What actually were the achievements of the inspired Mystics? Were they nothing more than their seeing golden visions of the Truth or having experiences of its working in the life and soul of man? By themselves, these are enough for the Seers to be regarded as immortal spiritual uplifters of the human race. But what in fact did they do to lay the foundation of a Yoga by which man as a race could rise to his perfection, a perfect living in the Truth? It is clear from what the Rishi says after he saw the advent of the Dawn that the power came to earth to help man develop his capacity to receive the Light at the great hour of its descent on earth, that the knowledge, too, of the Truth was revealed to enable man to chase away the darkness of his Ignorance. But the most glorious of these all was the assurance given by the ancient Fathers that the Light that would change man into a divine being was in the process of descending on earth. This was symbolised by the Dawn which the Mystics saw as the prelude to the everlasting Day when the Sun of Truth would shine for ever on the consciousness of man. Here is the joyous cry of the Rishi:

> 'We have crossed to the other shore of this darkness, Dawn is breaking forth and she creates and forms the births of knowledge.'[1]

And the fact that this Dawn—the discovery of the Light—had been already achieved by the Forefathers is so often proclaimed in utterances like:

> 'Our fathers found out the hidden light, by the truth in their thoughts they brought to birth the Dawn.'[2]

That these Mystics did attain to the blissful heaven of Truth and rise into a state of spiritual and supramental illumination is evident from the whole trend of Vedic mysticism, in which are found positive references to the Fathers who first discovered the Light and possessed the Thought and the Word and travelled to the secret worlds of the luminous Bliss. That there were a number of them who by this illumination were raised to a divine status is equally clear from some of the hymns. The seven Angirasa Rishis, for instance, who were the founders of Vedic knowledge, are described as 'personalities of the Light and the Voice and the Flame', *divya*, divine, who had descended from heaven and whose ascent to it the Veda chants as their victory by which they opened the path for the earth to travel to heaven. The Rishi declares:

> 'Our fathers broke open the firm and strong places by their words, yea, the Angirasas broke open the hill by their cry; they made in us the path to the

[1] RV. I. 92. 6

[2] RV. VII. 76. 4

great heaven; they found the Day and *Swar* and vision and the luminous Cows.'[1]

This path, the Rishi continues, is the path that leads to immortality.

The great Rishi Vamadeva often refers to 'the victorious attainment of the cow of Light', how 'the human fathers went forward to the possession of the Truth', how 'the souls opened by the divine word.' And when he declared 'Heaven shone out' he implied the manifestation of the three luminous worlds of Swar. But it is in a most plain and emphatic language that the Rishi reveals his own seerhood:

> 'All these are sacred words that I have uttered to thee who knowest, O Agni, O Disposer, words of leading, words of seer-knowledge that express their meaning to the seer,—I have spoken them illumined in my words and my thinkings.'[2]

Another victory of great importance is the hold of Rishi Agastya over Matter where lie the roots of Desire. Here are the words of a disciple:

> 'Agastya digging with spades, desiring offspring, the child and strength, he, the forceful Rishi, nourished both the colours (or either colour), reached in the gods the true blessings.'[3]

Here, offspring symbolises whatever comes into being as the crown of one's sadhana, child the new transformed personality, and the colours the human and the divine,

[1] RV. 71. 2 [2] RV. IV. 3. 16 [3] RV. I. 179. 6

both of which the Rishi developed in himself. And all these done and achieved, the Rishi rose into the Godhead and possessed the supreme Bliss and Beauty of the Truth.

The Vedic Mystics called the One Existence the Deva, the supreme Godhead. He is the Blissful One, the goal of the upward movement of the gods. Each of the gods is a manifestation, an aspect, a personality of the Deva. As such, each may look to us different, but each in himself is all the Deva, and under him are subsumed the other ones. There are hymns that unequivocally declare this. Yet the One, the supreme Godhead is many a time mentioned as such by the Msytics. 'The One that exists sages affirm variously' is the note in a number of Riks. 'This One becomes the All'. 'The real essence of the gods is is one.' 'All the gods form the body of this World-Soul.' But the excelsior cry of the Rishi is:

> 'There is a Permanent, a Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun unyokes his horses. The ten hundreds (of his rays) came together—That One. I saw the most glorious of the Forms of the Gods.'[1]

The Truth that hides the Permanent is of course an inferior Truth, and the Rishi breaks through it by the impetuosity of his soul's quest and arrives at the supreme Light, 'the fairest form of the Sun',—an experience repeated in the Upanishads only in other terms. This is

[1] RV. V. 62. 1

another victory added to the solar glories with which the spiritual endeavour of India was crowned in that magnificent past of the race. They are far from the truth who say that the Veda is polytheistic. Even henotheism is not the right term for the Vedic mysticism. The Seers visioned the Supreme in his infinite powers. They also saw the gods as aspects and personalities of the Supreme, who are ever at work to chase away the darkness of the earth and establish there a permanent reign of the Light. Not only this. It was their vivid perception that all the labour of the gods to this end is upborne by the power and will of the Supreme.

In order that the Light may descend upon the earth and manifest there, there must precede an ascent of human consciousness into the heavens of the Spirit, a free, direct communication with the superconscient planes of existence. One of the most glorious achievements of the early Fathers was that they made possible this ascension by themselves ascending to those heavenly peaks from where they visioned the dawns of Light. 'I have arisen,' asseverates the Rishi, 'from the earth to the mid-world, I have arisen from the mid-world to heaven, from the level of the firmament of heaven I have gone to the Sun-world, the Light.'[1] 'Beholding the higher Light beyond the darkness we came to the divine Sun in the Godhead, to the highest Light of all.'[2]

But the early Fathers did not rest content with mere

[1] Yajurveda 17. 67

[2] RV. 1. 50. 10

declaration of their sublime visions and experiences, neither did they propound only the mystic doctrine based on those experiences showing the path to the realisation by man of his divine destiny. There is an even greater meaning in all that they uttered out of the depth and intensity of their soul, intoxicated by the wine of the supreme Beatitude. However rich, varied and powerful their contributions to the spiritual make-up of India's soul, the one basic, essential and of far-reaching import was the *élan* they gave to her soul by sowing in the already fertilised race-consciousness the fire-seeds of her undying quest of the Divine, of the ever-increasing flame of Agni. In fact, it is the visions and realisations of these inspired Mystics that for the first time activated the soul of India to become what it has always been, to grow and deepen in its longing for the Spirit, the longing that motived all its later expressions in which is perceived the ancient idea implanted in its mind and heart by the Ancestors of the race. These early Founders of Indian civilisation were impelled by the Shakti that India is to voice however symbolically what the inner being of the race seeks for its fulfilment in a larger life in the Spirit. The soul of India is a consciousness growing out of the first touch of the Spirit which it had from the vision the Rishis saw of the Truth, the Truth that liberates. And did not these visions encompass heaven and earth in the unity and infinity of that creative power of God which is ever at work to bring into birth 'a new heaven and a new earth', a perfect order of life?

When did India start on this quest? The Rishis of the Rigveda affirm and reaffirm time and again that there were earlier Dawns that had visited their former Forefathers. Indeed the truths revealed in the Veda cannot be sudden flashings on the intuitive mind of man. There must have been long and continuous periods of intense spiritual striving before the seers were vouchsafed these visions and realisations out of which were evolved the mystic doctrines whose origins may be traced to those dim days of antiquity when the artificialities and complexities of the modern civilisation were not, when life was simple enough for free movement and expression, and mind, unsophisticated and fresh, was open to the intuitive planes of consciousness with which the 'Forefathers' readily began to have direct communications. Mystic experience holds that almost immediately after man's emergence into his 'modern' form 'the ephiphany was disclosed'.

The Age of Mysteries may be said to have their inchoate beginning in that early stage of man's earthly career, of which no record exists. The myths and legends of the world are distorted and confused annals of those 'early dawns' when man opened his eye of intuition towards the rays of the Light, first, perhaps in the sights and sounds of physical nature, and then, in the deeper truths that these phenomena symbolised.

It is not possible to ascribe any specific date to the Veda. In its present form, as already said, it is only a fragment belonging to the later ages of Intuition, most of

the hymns of the earlier ones having been lost or forgotten. And even the real meaning of the existing Riks remained unknown for thousands of years, though they indirectly influenced the growth of India's spiritual and religious thought all through her long history. Behind these Riks lie thousands of years during which the questing soul of man in India had contact with the luminous worlds of the Light, the higher heavens of the Truth. And with this vision man started on his journey. Maybe, when the neolithians were making fire by rubbing together pieces of wood or stone, there were contemporary groups of human beings who were illumined in their consciousness by the light of heaven.

There is truth in the traditional belief that the Veda is undatable, since nobody can say when the truths were first seen. The Veda is a 'Book of Knowledge' which came to the Seers over a long course of time beginning with the first rays of the Light that had fallen on the intuitive gaze of man. There may be some truth in the suggestion made by some Indian scholars on the basis of astronomical evidence that the Vedic age had three epochs in it. The first epoch covering two thousand years from about 6,000 B.C. saw its earliest beginnings when the mystic doctrines were known but not exactly in the same form as the Rigvedic Riks: the second was for about 1,500 years from 4,000 B.C. when these Riks were composed in which could be traced at least two different periods one subsequent to the other: to the last epoch are attributed the three later Vedas. But these dates, as said before, are tentative:

orthodox opinion pushes back the date of the second epoch much earlier than that of the first.

When the historian of India tries to fix a date for this period he must remember that this hitherto-unknown but very long period of intense spiritual activity contains in it the seed of all later developments in the history of the country, and that it is a secret which will remain a secret so long as we do not understand the meaning of India's soul, the meaning of her purpose in history, the meaning that was given to her by the ancient Fathers for revelation in the future, when the time for it would come.

India enshrines in her soul the vision that her Seers saw of man's divine destiny, the 'divine race' for whose 'creation' they invoked the gods. This is the Ideal for which she stands; its flowering in the manifold expressions of her life forms the fabric of her historic development. The history of India is a process every stage of which is only an aspect of the adventure of India's soul through the ages, a step in her onward march. And by her creative activities in each epoch she has been enriched in her being, receiving from them a series of new experiences which increased her strength, the capacity and readiness for the great hour of the world when she would recover her ancient vision, declare it to the world and become the leader of man's evolution. Thus will the Rishi of the past fulfil himself in the Rishi of the future, the Dawn of yesterday in the 'everlasting day' of Tomorrow.

Who were the Rishis?

But who were these Rishis? What place did they occupy in the cultural life of the people? What was the kind of life they led? are among the questions that the pragmatic modern mind may ask. Next to nothing will be said of them if we merely state that they were the Aryans who founded Aryan civilisation. Ethnic appellations are not enough to indicate the character, nature and tendencies of a people. It is its culture that shows what a people really is. The culture of the Aryas, at least as it was in those early days, had already had its basic foundations laid on the intrinsic values that the race had by then made its own. And it is these values that have ever been the bedrock of all later achievements of its creative endeavours, every one of which was in the main motivated by these values so that they might find their sublimest forms in the perfect culture of the future.

The quest for the Infinite has always been the one dominant passion of the Indian mind. The result of it was the growth of an intuitive insight through which the seekers mastered the truths of God, life and the universe. It is out of these truths that the ancients evolved the social, political and cultural patterns of the fabric of Indian civilisation. It is these truths again that held before man his path to perfection, the crowning end of his human journey. An Arya was one who was a seeker, a traveller of this path and who, by whatever progress he had made, would invariably develop both in his inner

and outer life certain characteristics that marked him out as one who belonged to that particular culture which carried in it the seed-soul of future dawns of consciousness. But it was something much more than refinement. It was the growth of man into a new consciousness, almost a new nature, which led him to regard God as the sole truth of life and to build his life into the glory of that truth, the divine centre of his life. Knowledge, therefore, was the aim of the Aryan seeker and knowledge was also the means by which he attained to higher states of superconscient existence. And this knowledge is that by which man becomes what he knows. And when he knows the Truth, he becomes the Truth. Fundamentally, all India's history is a history of her children living this ideal or striving to live up to it and translating its realisation into both their individual and collective life.

The Vedic Rishis are the earliest propounders of this supreme goal of human existence. What they aspired for was not merely an inner mastery but also a mastery of the outer conditions of life which were necessary, they knew, for solving the problems of life. There was therefore an all-out effort to achieve that end; the Rishis were all aflame with the fire of Agni by which they intensified the aspiring will in man to grow and mount upward and win all that Agni could give him in his effort to overcome all opposition and attain to a larger life, a higher consciousness, a diviner perfection. The prayer therefore goes forth from the Rishi:

'When, O Mitra, you have your far-voyaging vision and we are the illumined seers, may we arrive in the effort of our journey to a self-empire spread out widely open and governing its multitudes.'[1]

Here the original word for self-empire is *swarajya* which goes with the other word *samrajya*, meaning respectively perfect empire within and perfect empire without, rule of our inner being and mastery of our environments and circumstances,—the ideal of the Vedic sages. These early Fathers have repeatedly said that this ideal becomes real in man's life when he ascends beyond his finite, half-lit mentality to the luminous Truth of his being, the supramental infinities on the spiritual plane of his existence. An Arya is one who is a seeker after this mastery, this perfection; this is the intrinsic significance of the word. The Vedic Rishis and their followers were Aryas in this sense. The culture that evolved out of this basic idea is the Aryan culture; it acquired its ethnic association as its adherents increased and the whole people—the children of Bharata—adopted it. And this adoption used to be symbolically expressed as a consecration to Agni, the Divine Flame representing the aspiring will in man, the centre of all his upward endeavours. It has been suggested in the previous chapter that the so-called Aryas and Dravidians are most likely original settlers in India derived from one common stock. Culturally also they appear to have been one for

[1] RV. V. 66. 6

a long time, from at least the beginning of the first millennium B.C., if not earlier, as the Agastya tradition is believed to be of Vedic origin. In the Vedic literature the Aryas are sometimes mentioned as worshippers of Agni, and this not because they followed the fire-cult as an end in itself, but as a first step or a gateway to a vaster life.

The Vedic Rishis were the inspired inaugurators of the age of the Spirit in India when Aryan culture was born in the light that dawned on the heart and soul of the Mystics and illumined them to be the earliest builders of Indian civilisation. This age, so far as the Vedic beginnings in it are concerned, cannot however be said to be the starting-point of India's spiritual history. The Rigvedic Rishis, as said before, often refer to earlier Fathers who were the original Seers of the truths revealed by them, the Vedic Rishis, tracing their lineage as well as the line of their inner development to their remote Ancestors whom they regarded as the true initiators of the adventure of India's soul. This line of inward growth and fulfilment followed a mystic path and had therefore a hidden meaning which could be understood only by mystic experience.

Each of these lines started with a type of spiritual victory by a particular Rishi who was naturally recognised as its founder. And consequently, the lines that were followed by others would often go by the names of the founder-Rishis representing each a particular spiritual achievement in a particular line. It may be that

many of the Vedic Rishis bore the names of these earlier creators of these spiritual lines, to whose achievements the race owes all the mighty beginnings of its unique spirituality. This granted, the nomenclature follows as a natural corollary.

But what do these names signify? And what bearings have they on the evolution of Vedic mysticism? It is difficult, if not impossible, with the scanty evidence so far available on this point, to give any comprehensive answer to questions like these. Yet there are revealing suggestions in the very etymology of the names, when of course they are taken in their esoteric sense. In fact, these names also are symbols as are the Vedic gods, forces of Nature and sacrificial objects. The seven Angiras Rishis, for instance, are often referred to as born in Agni, therefore flaming powers of Agni, forces of Light, which is the root meaning of the word. And we know from the Rigvedic hymns that these Rishis discovered the Light, made the sun shine, and ascended to the heaven of the Truth: and there are quite a number of Rishis who attained to such semi-divine states. So the name of this house or family or group of the Rishis as that of others pursuing other lines was clearly derived from their spiritual achievement, or the achievement peculiar to the line of their house.

Incidentally, many of the Rishis belonged to a collective spiritual line. Very many hymns are chanted in the first person plural,—which shows that the Rishis, probably of the same house, took to the same line of

spiritual seeking. Of course, there are evidences of a Rishi-father handing on to his son or disciple the whole or part of the Vedic lore of which he was in custody or which was his own work. In this way knowledge in ancient India was transmitted from generation to generation and preserved in the memory of the race, for it was an oral method which was then mostly in use, and deliberately chosen too, lest the sanctity of the Word should suffer desecration in publicity, lest its occult force should lose in value through indiscriminate use. It was believed that *Shruti* or Veda should appeal to the ear, through the ear to the heart and to the deeper and wider parts of the being and not to the eye, and was not therefore to be reduced to writing;—always to be kept white, in the whiteness of purity and not in black and white. The Mahabharata condemns to hell those who would write the Veda.

The name of the great sage Parashara means 'the supreme overcomer', that of Gotama 'most full of light'; Vasistha is 'the most shining one'; Viswamitra, 'the friend of all' or 'all-loving'. Dirghatamas is one who was 'long in darkness', in the night of the soul before his emergence into the full blaze of the solar light of the Truth, which the hymns so gloriously proclaim. Bharadwaja is one who holds in him 'the substance, the essence of the Truth'. 'He who has the flaming body' is called Bhrigu. Vamadeva is 'the god of delight'. The name of almost every Rishi of the Veda indicates in this way the spiritual content of its owner; and may be taken

to point to what that particular Rishi stands for in the world of Vedic mysticism, what he conquered and achieved to become the Illuminate, the Master of the Truth. The etymology is therefore a clue to their appropriate designations.

These Seers of the Light, Seers as well of its dawn on human consciousness, did each represent in their spiritual life a particular ray, knowledge or vision of the Light, which they made their own and by which they were liberated into the world of the Truth where they had the full vision of the Truth in all its supernal glory. But these new Dawns are imagined in the Veda as those that repeat the old and lean forward to join the Dawn of the future. The phenomenon of this undeviating solemnity of the Dawn is sustained by the movement of the gods towards a greater manifestation in the future. And in this movement the Rishis also offer their contribution, the Rishis who live liberated in the immortal light of the supramental Sun. In the high heaven of the Supermind they are always ready with the power of their illumination to help the seekers of the earth in their effort to know the Truth, and to overcome the forces that oppose his seeking. The great Rishis of the Veda in this way further the cause of man's spiritual progress. The seven sages, the Angirasas, whose ascension to the heaven of the Truth is gloriously hymned in the Veda, 'are waiting there still and always, ready to chant the word, to rend the cavern, to find the lost herds, to recover the hidden sun.' And this they do not only to help forward the

march of man towards the goal of his terrestrial journey, but also to preserve for the future of the race all their unique masteries, all their wonderful truth-visions. An idea of the Vedic Rishis in heaven is symbolically suggested by the traditional belief of the Hindus that the seven stars comprising the constellation called the Great Bear represent the seven greatest Rishis of the Rigveda.

Mention may be made here of the fact that the Vedic Rishis included quite a number of women called *Rishikas* and *Brahmavadinis*—knowers of Brahman—of whom nineteen are mentioned in the Rigveda by their names, and four in the Samaveda—an evidence of the summit of culture reached by the women of the age.

There was then the other way—kept alive by tradition—in which the ancient visions were sought to be preserved. In Vedic times as in all early societies the family was the basic unit of collective life. And it was always an expansive factor in the growth of the group mainly through blood relationship. The families of the Vedic age of which the Rishis were the heads expanded in lineage each from a common father who was an illumined Rishi.

The institution of *gotra* owes its origin to this concept in which the name of the Rishi, the original ancestor, is held to be the *gotra* of all those who from generation to generation would be the descendants of this Rishi, the idea being that these descendants would follow the line of spiritual development initiated by the Rishi, would

adhere to that particular Rishi's vision of the Light, follow his way to its realisation, and thereby preserve the vision for those who would follow in the future. Scholars have suggested various meanings for the term *gotra*, one of which, more popular than others, traces its origin to the common cowshed used in Vedic times by several families, probably related to one another by blood. But the logic of facts cannot admit an interpretation of this type of a term intimately associated with the inspired Mystics of the Veda. It might be the exoteric meaning, but the esoteric signifies the protecting or guarding of the Light, taking the word *go* for 'light', as has been done all through the exegesis followed here; the root of the Sanskrit verb *trai* signifies 'to protect'. It is interesting to find the word *gotra* in Druidic hymns used in the sense of 'womb of light', pointing to the common Aryan origin of the Druidic and Vedic cults, as shown in the previous chapter.

Thus the Hindus today can trace their geneology to one or other of the Vedic Rishis, meaning thereby that they are each to be the preservers of the vision of the Rishis who were their early ancestors. This is how there has developed in India one of the oldest of her traditions which exists even to this day and which, though its deeper significance is lost or obscured, enshrines nonetheless the benediction of the ancient Sages for the moral and spiritual welfare of the race. One of its aims might be to help the race keep up the sacred remembrance of its early Fathers so that some day in its memory might

be rekindled the fire of their liberating force, from which would burst a new Dawn for its redemption.

However seemingly unimportant at the present day, the *gotra* tradition does suggest something of what the early Fathers really wanted, and therefore what they really were,—the greatest benefactors of the race. A descendant, deriving his *gotra*-name from a Vedic Rishi, seeking the Light in the right way, may not take long to contact the Rishi in the high heaven of the Truth and receive from him whatever help he needs in his spiritual endeavour. But the *gotra*-idea need not be taken in any rigid sense. From a larger standpoint, it may mean the early guardians of the Light forming a confraternity of the Vedic Rishis whose one aim was to bring about the inner regeneration of the human race and perpetuating the spirit and force of that regeneration in their successors. This is evident from the fact that though eight of the greater Rigvedic Rishis are regarded as the earliest ancestors of all the brahmanas in India, some of them are also held to be the common spiritual ancestors of the people of other castes who have gained that right through their discipleship to the brahmanas,—another proof of how the ancients wanted all the units and elements of society to imbibe and follow the Vedic ideals and grow under its exalting influence.

The *gotra* rules suggest yet another purpose, that of strengthening the society towards a larger development. These rules, generally of endogamy and exogamy, regulate even today all marriage connections among the Hindus.

By forbidding marriage between persons belonging to the same *gotra*, they have extended from the beginning the pale of the Hindu society to various tribal and clannish communities. It is said that this prohibition was also based on eugenic and psychological grounds. From the *gotra*-rules again have derived a number of social customs one of which was the marriage that was permitted in ancient times betweeen a brahmana or kshatriya with a woman of other castes who might not always be an Arya. These marriages might have caused some diminution in the so-called purity of blood of the Hindus, though this claim of purity is today exploded as a myth. But there is no doubt that they enriched the social and cultural life of the people beyond perhaps what their originators could then imagine. And all these may be traced directly or indirectly to the institution of *gotra* that took its birth in Vedic times.

The growth of the *gotra*-tradition has yet to be studied in its proper perspective and results. While many of the Vedic Rishis continue to this day as the original source of many *gotra*-names, there are others who do not. These breaks may be due to the extinction of the line or to new names adopted in place of the old, when perhaps the ancient vision was re-affirmed by some later descendant in a newer meaning suitable to his age. There have also been occasions, as already pointed out, when the names of the Vedic Mystics were adopted by their descendants; and not infrequently did this happen in ancient India, creating so much confusion of names

in her history that its chronology becomes difficult of reconstruction. In the social, cultural and spiritual life of India the *gotra* idea does play an important part. It will have sufficiently justified itself if it only reminds the race of its early Fathers, the founders of its culture and civilisation. They are indeed immortal links between the present and the past speaking across the centuries the creative Word of Light which sustains the present and waits its hour of future glory in the race.

In the quiet seclusion of their hermitages in forests or on the banks of rivers, maybe in cities as well, these Mystics were immersed in inward contemplation, opening themselves to the world of the supreme gods, the Home of the Vast Truth. One of their great discoveries was that that world is a perfect counterpart and prototype of this imperfect earth for whose perfection they laboured with all the light and fire of their soul. Indeed it is to this silent travail that these builders of the race dedicated themselves, making it their occupation and preoccupation every moment of their life. First the vision, then its individual realisation, and last but never the least, an ardent and concentrated longing for its fulfilment in the life of the race. This was their one absorbing concern.

The Rishis had their disciples who lived with them, and these would often include their own sons and daughters. They would instruct these seekers in the methods of Vedic discipline, giving them the necessary training without which the Veda could not be understood. To

the Rishis, as already said, life was a field for the growth of man into a greater life, a diviner perfection. They therefore participated in all its activities, trying all the time to expose these activities to the Light for the infiltration of its rays into every one of them that they might be exalted to their purer forms. This is how India received her first baptism in spirituality which has ever since been the inherent tendency of the race. And this spirituality, we may repeat, was never a negative or exclusive one. It embraced all life.

Many of the Rishis were married and led a family life and often their wives were as spiritually great as themselves. As the Veda and later literatures give only *gotra* names, the women-seers cannot be distinguished in their relationships. Of the few known, mention may be made of Arundhati, wife of Vasistha, one of the greatest Rishis, and Lopamudra, wife of Rishi Agastya. What is striking in the latter instance is that both husband and wife were engaged in a common spiritual pursuit the problems of which they discussed in a colloquy given in the Rigveda. And this cannot be a stray instance of the kind. There were families, many of whose members were equally advanced in the ways of the Spirit. A sister—herself a seer—of the great Rishi Agastya, composed hymns in collaboration with her two sons who also were seers. There can be no more positive proof of the intense spiritual activity of India in that period, whose centres were the homes of the Rishis—homes 'redolent of the perfume of paradise.'

The Ritual of Sacrifice

If the Veda is the creation of a symbolic mentality, and if its language is mainly that of symbols, then it ceases to be so authentic a source of history as it has so far been regarded. The modern approach to it, missing its inner significance, sees in it nothing but what its surface meaning offers to the pragmatic mind. The result is a somewhat halting account of the life and culture of the people of the period; halting because mere literary evidence—the only source for the history of the period—is not accepted as entirely valid by the so-called scientific historiographers. As, however, the symbols could not be mere airy, intangible creations of imagination, but must have, for the very purpose they were to serve, some realistic basis in fact and phenomenon, the Rigveda and the three other Vedas do contain evidences which might be taken to indicate the condition of life prevailing in the period. But the writer who believes in the esoteric meaning of the Veda must sift his materials carefully and use such of them as may be in accord with that which is the truly central meaning of this Revealed Scripture. He may make definite statements or draw suggestive conclusions but only when he stands on the solid ground of their authenticity. But the value of the symbols lies not so much in what they outwardly are as in what they suggest as acceptable evidence of fact. It may be remembered that the subject of study here is the creations of a former mentality, far

different and away from the modern, and we may avoid putting into them our own mental conception.

In order to have an idea of the people of the Vedic age, our first study should be to perceive their inclination and scan the governing principle of their life. That they were spiritual is clearly proved by the high-aspiring inward adventures of the saints, sages and seers, the makers of the epoch, the earliest master-creators of India's culture. That they were religious too is testified by the main preoccupations of the ordinary people with rites and ceremonies through which they invoked the benedictions of the gods representing the forces of Nature, to whom they prayed for their all-round well-being, secular and spiritual, which the Vedic hymns, as generally interpreted, mean. Nevertheless, that the people of the time were mainly absorbed in the thought of these religious ceremonies is proof enough of the general spiritual atmosphere of the age,—a fact of great importance which must be in the mind of those who make the attempt to discover the inner, and therefore, the real significance of the various activities in this period and of the bearing they have on the history of India. It will be found that this spirituality was as all-embracing as it was integralising. It included all the various phases of life, all its movements and expressions, and sought to re-integrate them to what they are intended to be in the divine order of things. It is true that the far-voyaging visions of the inspired Mystics or the inward endeavours of their initiates cannot be equated with the simple religious rites of the ordinary people of the age;

but the fact is there that the people as a whole followed the Aryan ideals and were occupied every moment of their life with preparations for and the performance of the most important of the religious ceremonies of the age—the Sacrifice, *yajna*, through which they chanted their prayers and aspirations to the gods. Broadly viewed, the incalculably vast qualitative difference apart, it is sacrifice all the same in both the cases—one, subjective, carried out in the plenitude of the Spirit; the other, objective, matter mingling with spirit, seeking the aid of the gods or their contact for whatever purpose it might be. And no wonder the age is called the age of the Spirit.

But before going further let us make a digression to see where the Vedic people lived, that is to say, the regions which witnessed these great religious performances. It is not so much the land that is important as the rivers on the banks of which they flourished. There are mentioned about twentyfive rivers which covered the vast plain bounded on the west by the river Kubha (west of the Sindhu) and on the east by the river Sarayu in Ayodhya, —then the most fertile land in India. The hymns in the Rigveda describe the natural scenery of both these extremities of Vedic India. The mention of rivers as the physiography of the country shows the greatness of their importance. On their banks and in their valleys were enacted most of the scenes of the human soul expressing itself in subjective and objective activities. There, in secluded retreats or hermitages away from the activities of ordinary life, the Rishis were engaged in their contem-

plative pursuits. In the cities and villages the laity were occupied with their daily round of duties, all centring in the sacrifices, one or other of which had to be performed every day.

A look into the esoteric meaning of the Sacrifice has already been attempted. The laity of the Vedic age regarded the meticulous performance of the Sacrifice in its exoteric forms as the be-all and end-all of their life. In fact, it was the very pivot of their existence. This great institution in its various forms and the uplifting ideas they symbolically suggested of the Truth, the Right, the Vast, of which the gods were the guardians, trained the physical man to develop his ethical nature, to grow in his religious sense, to turn towards some initial development of his inner or psychic being, to receive a first touch of some great spiritual reality, to quicken into fire the divine spark in him.

This is the inherent aim in all early religious endeavours of man. He started with the physical in order ultimately to grasp the supraphysical. As his love and adoration of the wonders of nature increased, he began to perceive in them, however faintly, the power and presence of Something else which he learnt to call God or the Eternal Mother in things.

The anthropologist is not wholly correct when he ascribes these dawns of man's religious sense to fear and dread of the grim aspects of Nature, which, in his view, compelled the primitive man to propitiate the forces of Nature. Some crude beginning of this kind there might

have been in primitive societies and even in them Nature's intention was to prepare man to grow to a higher stage in which he might find for himself some idea of the reality behind appearances—the hidden Motive Power in natural phenomena.

The life of the people of the Vedic age was directed to the one ritual, the Sacrifice. The Rishi voices the people's heart when he declares:

> 'Let us gather fuel for it, let us prepare for it offerings, let us make ourselves conscious of the joinings of its times and seasons. It shall so perfect our thoughts that they shall extend our being and create for us a larger life.'

The hymn is full of an inner sense. But also its external meaning like that of a number of others shows how keen and careful the people were about the proper arrangement and preparation for the *yajna*. Yes, the fuel had to be gathered, the oblations procured, the altar made ready; so on and so forth. And what a stock of fuel for the perennial food of the fire! What a variety of offerings! What a geometrically-desigend construction of the altar! all requiring constant, careful, devoted attention. In fact there was nothing that was done by them the whole day which did not have some direct or indirect connection with the particular ritual sacred to that day.

The Sacrifice, however, had many forms each of which began with invocations to Agni, the God of Fire, because it is he who would reach the offerings to the other gods. There were sacrifices held in particular seasons, and

those at particular religious ceremonies associated with birth, initiation, marriage etc. And not a day would pass that did not witness the celebration of a ritual. Some would take a day for its performance, some a fortnight, some a month, and some the whole of a year. There was for every important phase of life a *yajna*, specially meant for its full flowering and fulfilment. And these phases were those through which the human sacrificer was inwardly led forward and helped to grow into the wholeness of his being. The performance of the various rites connected with a sacrifice had bearing on the growth of man's being; and when properly done it did exalt the being to spiritual perceptions. Constant rememberance of the gods and the care to see that every form of offering was as perfect and pure as possible had certainly their elevating effect on the heart and soul of the sacrificer. And these were not confined to the religious and moral spheres of man's activity. There were rites which promoted the growth of a larger social sense. Then there was the chanting of the *mantras*—the inspired hymns—for which necessary training was given, and which when properly done was sure to exert an uplifting effect on the chanter.

All these influences would silently work their way into the being of the sacrificer even when he would be making material offerings at the altar. The very idea that one should give his best to the gods and that as often as one can is by itself a force which can never fail to sublimate the being. The sacrificer may not always be conscious of this inner growth but it is for this that his soul would

impel him to make the sacrifice a perfect one. Of this urge of his soul he may not be aware, yet the secret psychology of it would be working in him, because it is the Will of the Godhead that man should be raised to higher levels of his being through whatever he could easily do.

The deeper meaning is that it is the sacrifice of the Supreme in his creation by which He seeks to lift up his creation into his own Glory. That is why the whole life is called a sacrifice. But whose sacrifice is this? of God or of man? Of God to the mystic, of man to the householder; but the vision of the mystic is the true truth which never fails, and the householder profits by it without knowing its inner implication. 'In Vedic times meditation, worship and sacrifice were the means by which some connection or contact with the Unseen was sought to be extablished and maintained. The sacrifice was symbolic in its ritual and the symbols were supposed to have an occult power to create a relation between the unseen powers worshipped and the worshipper; by it they were called in to preside over and help all the action and life of the human being.'

Agni is one of the greatest of the gods both in the inner and the ritualistic sense. A cosmic Force, Agni is the Cause of Light, Heat, Cloud and Rain, of Rain the cause of food, of Food which sustains life. He pervades everywhere and is most visibly expressed as the Sun. He is verily the root of life. The householder must therefore worship him as the great deity of the household and worship him everyday by offering his best oblations.

Thus arose the most important of Vedic sacrifices—the Agnihotra. What is remarkable about it is that the oblation here need not necessarily be any material object. Only reverence—*sraddha*—would do. 'I offer as sacrifice my reverence'—is the burden of the mantra for this particular ritual,—a fact which shows its inner nature even when performed without particular reference to its esoteric meaning. The fire of this sacrifice would never be extinguished; it was a sacred emblem and would remain burning with the family fire, fed by the daily offering at the sacrifice, its inner sense being that the seeker must never cease to aspire, and it is by his ceaseless aspiring and self-giving to the Flame-god that he is sustained and fostered.

After completing his education the student in the Vedic age would return home, marry and become a householder whose first duty on entering upon that life would be to light the sacrificial fire and go through the necessary rites to be the worshipper of Agni—an *ahitagni*. To keep this fire ever-burning is an obligation of his domestic life. One of the vows an *ahitagni* had to take was that he would never in his life tell an untruth. Every home was thus a temple in which would burn the sacred fire and round which would centre all the activities of the household.

The other equally important sacrifice was the *Soma-yajna* in which Soma is addressed as *Madhu*, the drink of immortality, which gives strength to the gods, and greatness to earth. A hymn declares that the Soma is not something to be drunk. Another says: 'He cannot be

drunk by a materialist.' A third one, 'Some can drink Him but cannot decrease him by such drink.' For it is a drink of supreme knowledge, a draught of immortality. Thus this Rigvedic sacrifice was something more than mere worship of any godhead of material Nature.

There were then the five great *yajnas* of the post-Rigvedic times. Through the first—the *Deva-yajna*—the householder would make sacrifices to the Gods to whom he owes his life and everything else: through the second —the *Pitri-yajna*—he would pray to the early Fathers of the race: the third—the *Brahma-yajna*—was performed by the study and teaching of the Veda and meditation on the *mantras*: through the fourth—the *Bhuta-yajna*—the householder would make offerings to all created beings with which he feels or realises his oneness: the last—the *Nri-yajna*—is one by which he would show his veneration for all his fellowmen 'in a spirit of universal brotherhood,' which he would practically demonstrate by keeping his door ever open to all and sundry as part of his daily religious duty. The all-embracing character of these fivefold sacrifices which among others formed their scheme of life, evolved in the age and followed in subsequent ones, was evidence enough of how the people were taught to fulfil the larger obligations of life with a view to growing and expanding into a capacity for the realisation of yet higher ideals. As for the householders, so also for the kings, there were specific sacrifices celebrated in a royal manner. It may be remembered that these sacrifices along with a number of others had been governing the religious life of

ancient India for more than two thousand years before the coming of the Buddha, though in later days they tended to be more and more external in their aim as in their performance. But the *mantras* never ceased to exert their influence, helping more than anything else to keep alive the inherent spiritual tendency of the Indian people. The institution of sacrifice continued in the post-Buddha times and even today there can be no religious ceremony of the Hindus, specially of the brahmanas and kshatriyas, in which a particular form of *yajna* appropriate to the occasion is not to be performed.

The institution of sacrifice however is too vast a question to be discussed here in all its details. Just those aspects of it have been touched upon that concerned the daily life of the people of the times. While its religious value was immense, it was not without its social and cultural importance for the age which witnessed its elaboration into a most effective means of developing into their fullness both the inner and outer fields of life's activities. Most of these sacrifices could not be performed without the aid and presence of the kinsmen of the performer. In the last one, the famous *Nri-yajna* sacrifice, the householder was required to be the host to all his fellowmen whom he must worship—for that is the spirit in which the guest in India is always treated. '*Atithi Sarvodevamayoh*'—the guest contains all the gods. The cultural value of these sacred ceremonies lay in the disciplines which the householders, the priests and all those who were to officiate at the ceremonial were required to follow in order to prepare

themselves for the right observance of the rules that govern the performance of the sacrifices.

Culture in the Vedas

But what was the nature of this training and how was it imparted so as to equip the student with whatever as a householder he needed for the fulfilment of the obligations of life, which could be done in no better way than through the sacrifices so wisely planned by the early founders of the Indian civilisation?

Education in Vedic times was indissolubly bound up with the study, correct chanting and recitation of the Rigveda, contemplation on its sacred *mantras* (numbering 1028) which comprise more than ten thousand verses. From the Vedic times in ancient India and down the ages, the teachers were always the saints, sages and seers who were the sole custodians of the highest spiritual knowledge. In the Rigvedic time the Rishis—the inspired Seers—were the educators, which in itself is proof of the spiritual character of the training imparted to the youth of the race. And nothing but spiritual could be the culture that was evolved by this education. The contact that the learners —the seekers—had with their Illumined Teachers could never fail to have something at least of the spirit-touch, at any rate an exalting influence and effect on them, and infuse that influence into the very atmosphere of the age.

A remarkable point about the culture of the age is the fact that fathers of families are mentioned in the Vedas

and the Upanishads as teachers of their sons though there were not wanting renowned masters of knowledge and their homes to take charge of the education of the youths. This shows that the high standard of culture prevailing in this age was not the close preserve or exclusive privilege of the Rishis alone but that even outside their circles there were distinguished elements of the laity able to maintain the same high standard—a proof at once of the pervasive character of the culture as well as of the receptive capacity of the people that followed it. In the Brahmanas we find no reference to father-teachers.

The learners would pass the long term of their studentship as members of their teachers' home, and their relations with their teachers were always those of love and veneration. These teachers were men who possessed the highest wisdom for the attainment of which the young seekers would come to them. Knowledge supreme, growth of consciousness and development of personality were the cardinal aims of Vedic education; study and intellectual pursuits were as auxiliaries, and were not given so much importance at the initial stage of the student's training. The Rigveda contains accounts of students who started their career by rendering material service through physical work to their *gurus*—Masters—with all devotion and sincerity. This might be a form of austerity—*brahmacharya*—which has always been regarded in India as the first necessary means for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. It was also practised as an aid to the growth of self-discipline and humility and a spirit of dedication. The *gurus'*

ways with the disciples would always be silent and subtle, therefore all the more effectively communicative, because they were prompted by love, sympathy, understanding, and above all, by their incomparable spiritual illumination and power. The personal influence of these teachers on their disciples and their personal care of the latter—always a small number—are other oustanding features of ancient Indian education. The mention in the Rigveda of the word *brahmacharin*—the old Indian Sanskrit term for the student—shows that the age had already assimilated the great ideal of studentship.

Nor in this age was neglected the education of the women. The fact that among the Seers were women, called *Rishikas*, who composed hymns shows how culturally advanced were the women of the age. A hymn 'refers to young maidens completing their education as *brahmacharinis* and then gaining husbands in whom they are merged like rivers in oceans.' Another expresses the hope on behalf of every bride at the time of her marriage that she would in due course be able to command the attention of the Assembly by her powers of speech and persuasion. These presuppose a previous training the maidens had in order to acquire competence for the kind of work they would have to do in the future.

But the culture of the age had an even earlier phase in yet remoter times when the seekers had first started on their quest and followed it up through courses of discipline till they were vouchsafed the knowledge of the eternal truths that they chanted in the hymns embodied

in the Rigveda. These hymns contain, as already shown, some of the highest spiritual knowledge ever revealed to man. In order that they might not be lost, methods were evolved by which the hymns could be aquired, conserved and transmitted to posterity. These methods included forms of inner discipline, too, the practice of which was as necessary for the understanding of the Veda as for its recitation. Indeed it was the combination of these two—the latter based mainly on a thorough knowledge of the rules of correct enunciation and pronunciation of the texts and rules of grammar, phonetics, metrics etc. A complete mastery of these rules often produced inspired singers of the sacred texts. These rules again were largely responsible for the fact that the Rigvedic Sanskrit is perfected in grammatical mechanism and has a greater variety of forms than even classical Sanskrit which took its finished form at least three thousand years later,—another instance of the varied cultural activities of the age.

The study of the Rigveda for its literary value as poetry was no less a part of the education of the age. And what a poetry it is! The mantras, as the hymns are called, are the inspired utterances of souls having direct visions of secret Truths. They are a sacred, sublime and powerful poetic creation of the master-singers of that glorious age of the Spirit. These seer-poets were masters as well of a consummate technique by which 'they carved their rhythms like the chariots of the gods, borne on divine and ample wings of sound, great in movement and subtle in modulation!' Lyric in intensity, epic by elevation,

their speech is utterance of power, pure in quality and bold and grandiose in outline. It is speech direct and brief in impact, profound and far-reaching in effect, packed and full to overflowing in sense and suggestion, bodying forth the deepest psychic and spiritual experiences of the human soul surcharged with the Spirit. The hymns cited before are a few of these marvels of poetic creation, unexampled revelations of inmost truths. The utterances of the greatest Seers, Vishvamitra, Vamadeva, Dirghatamas and many others, touch extraordinary heights and amplitudes of a sublime and mystic poetry and there are poems like 'the Hymn of Creation that move in a powerful clarity on the summits of thought on which the Upanishads lived constantly with a more sustained breathing.' Here is the beginning of the Hymn of Creation:

> 'Then existence was not nor non-existence, the midworld was not nor the Ether nor what is beyond. What covered all? Where was it? in whose refuge? what was that ocean dense and deep? Death was not nor immortality nor the knowledge of day and night. That One lived without breath by his self-law, there was nothing else nor aught beyond it. In the beginning Darkness was hidden by darkness, all this was an ocean of inconscience. When universal being was concealed by fragmentation, then by the greatness of its energy That One was born. That moved at first as desire within, which was the primal seed of mind. The seers of Truth discovered the building of being in non-being by will in the heart and

by the thought; their ray was extended horizontally; but what was there below, what was there above? There were Casters of the seed, there were Greatnesses; there was self-law below, there was will above.'[1]

A typical example of Vedic poetry! It gives in finest poetical form the Vedic theory of cosmogony, the basis of all such theories in later Indian thought. The study and appreciation of a poetry of this kind can never fail to uplift and inspire the mind, heart and soul of man. And nothing reflects the spirit of the age so well as these poetical utterances of the Vedic Master-singers inspired by their vision of the boundless splendours of the Infinite.

The education of the Rigvedic times did not neglect training for the material pursuits of life. In fact, as said before, there was no such compartmentalism in the scheme of ancient Indian culture. If the Sacrifice and its concomitant ceremonies were to be properly performed, then the various things required for and associated with them must be done as perfectly as possible. These as also the daily necessaries of life could not be produced by lay or unskilled men. Mention of artisans and craftsmen, physicians and other professionals is proof of the training that they must have had under an organised system. The figures on the sacrificial altar required a knowledge of geometry, and the fixing of dates and times for the sacrifices, of astronomy. Both of these must have been cultivated and have their origin in the

[1] RV. X. 129. 1-5

Rigvedic period. The hymns of the Rigveda point to the mastery the Rishis had of the laws and forces of physical phenomena. And what is more, they made the far greater discovery—unique from any point of view—that 'the same laws and powers hold in spiritual, psychical and physical being of man. They also discovered the omnipresence of life, affirmed the evolution of soul in Nature from the vegetable and the animal to the human form, stated on the basis of philosophic intuition and spiritual and psychological experience many of the truths which modern knowledge is reaffirming from the other side as it passes from the study of physical nature to the study of life and mind'. Thus from the very beginning of her civilized life India was familiar with most of the fundamental principles of Science.

The Rigvedic period is also noted for several institutions, associated with sacrificial celebrations, that deserve mention as evidence of its cultural activity. The *Brahmana-samgha* was an assembly in which learned scholars discussed by the conference method the contributions made by them towards the advancement of knowledge. The *Vidatha* was also an assembly of the learned. The *Satra*, however, was a more popular institution, somewhat like the Greek Olympian games minus the atheletics. It was, as it were, a national festival attended by all classes of people including thinkers, philosophers and Rishis, who gave discourses on cultural and spiritual subjects. There were also poets who recited from their works, singers who sang the Vedic hymns. It was a kind of reli-

gious and philosophical congress and the householder who would convene it would extend his hospitality to all not only during the period of its session but throughout the year till the next *Satra* was held. All these institutions indicate how highly developed the Rigvedic culture was; what keen interest the people had in the higher values of life.

While the Rigveda is the oldest of the scriptures containing the whole system of mystic doctrines, the three other Vedas—Sama, Yajur and Atharva—arranged presumably in the chronological order of their composition, follow in the main the Rigvedic tradition,—most of their verses being a repetition of the hymns of the Rigveda. Each of the Vedas, however, was intended to serve a particular purpose and has its place in the evolution of Indian culture. The Samaveda, most of whose hymns are taken from the Rigveda, was meant to teach the melodies of Vedic hymns, which were not to be sung to any tune, but a particular melody was sung upon a particular hymn to which the melody owes its origin, the idea being that the Rishis heard the mantras as much as they saw them, and this hearing gave them the particular rhythm and music appropriate to the hymns. They had, therefore, to be chanted in the melody indicated by the rhythm and music heard by the Rishis. This also is the origin of the basic principle of Indian music. There are authorities on Indian music who believe that the three *svaras* of the Samaveda are the source of the seven *svaras* by which the gamut is measured in modern Indian music. The students

of the Veda had to go through this training for the correct chanting of the Veda. The Yajurveda is mainly a book of prayers to be uttered in connection with sacrificial rites which also are described in it. The *Krishna* (black) part of it, the other part being *Sukla* (white), gives the rules of the sacrifices in prose. And this is the earliest prose literature of India out of which evolved 'the literary masterpieces of the Upanishads'. The Yajurveda furnishes a more elaborate form of the scheme of life prevailing in Vedic times, which includes the various social and religious obligations. It gives detailed descriptions of the royal sacrifices.

Culturally, the Yajurveda is even more important. Subjects like phonetics, metrics, grammar etc., which, in the Rigvedic times, arose out of a need for correct pronunciation and recitation of the hymns and the proper performance of the sacrifices, were elaborated into a system called the *Vedangas*, the limbs of the Veda. A study of the Vedangas was considered indispensable for an understanding of the Vedas. The Yajurveda refers to several secular sciences and practical arts which originated in the sacrificial rites of the Rigvedic times and are detailed here in more objective terms. The ground for the *yajna* had to be measured; the altar and the platform to be built; the seasons and moments to be ascertained. The capacity to do all these in the right way had to be acquired through a systematic training, adequate opportunities for which were there in Vedic India humming with the religious activities of a unique order. The

Yajurveda makes the sweeping declaration that Vedic knowledge was open to all classes of people.

The Atharvaveda has an importance all its own for the student of India's cultural evolution. While it contains many things which are not in the Rigveda, it gives in broader outlines clues to the system of education and to other aspects of culture that were prevalent in the Vedic age. Even more remarkable is the trend of its thought which affirms the essential idea of Vedic philosophy that life is nothing if its divine possibilities do not come into flower on the stem of immortality. Whatever attention the Atharvaveda gives to the ordinary life, to its ills and trials, is meant to help man find contentment in his day-to-day existence that he may grow in the quiet strength of his soul and strive for the attainment of what is for him his supreme good. In his material pursuits man must have the satisfaction of reaching those summits from here he may be led forward to his growth and fulfilment in a greater life of the Spirit. Here are two prayers of 'a son of Earth' in the Atharvan:

> 'Lavish on me her (Earth's) manifold treasure, her secret riches...'[1]
>
> '(Earth), who has her heart of immortality covered up by the Truth in the supreme ether, may she establish for us light and power in that most high kingdom...'[2]

[1] Atharvaveda XII. 1. 44
[2] Atharvaveda XII. 1. 8

It can be seen at once that in the first prayer the son of Earth aims at earthly treasures, though these also may be symbols of inner truths, his second prayer mounts up to the ethereal heights of Light and Truth and Immortality. In other words, he wants to be in Heaven on earth,—an idea which is almost Rigvedic in more direct and less symbolic terms. The Atharvan shows a marked change from the symbolism of the Rigveda to terms of the mind in touch with its intuitive plane, of which the Upanishads are a splendid creation.

It is unfortunate that the sublime truths of the Atharvaveda have been missed by Western scholarship which regards it only as 'a book of magicals spells' 'concerned with primitive ideas of witchcraft'. It does contain something of the kind, but for what purpose can only be guessed at. Maybe a particular class of people needed them. But these spells included a number of prayers for the all-round welfare of the householder and also quite a number whose aims are noble, high and uplifting. Who would miss a note of utter sincerity, a passionate intensity of soul in the inspiring hymns in which the householder prays for reconciliation of enemies, harmony in social life, unity everywhere? The Atharvan has in it a good number of hymns which are highly spiritual in their intention. Here is one such:

> 'Himself desireless, steadfast, immortal, self-existent, happy in the happy sap of things, lessened nowhere in status, he knows the Self that is

steadfast, undecaying, eternally young, and fears not Death.'[1]

This is the Ideal Man envisaged in the Atharvaveda which calls upon man to remain ever poised and settled in the consciousness of the Divine and to make that alone his base and support.

The Atharvaveda aims at awakening man to a vision of his birthright, to his godlike strength by which he could attain that birthright and divinise his actions and achievements. This great Veda seeks to bring down from heaven into the earth-life the vibrations of the Life Immortal. That is why it repeats with equal emphasis the Rigvedic trinity of *satyam*, *ritam*, *brihat*, the True, the Right, the Vast, pointing thereby to the highest Light, the most luminous Truth, as the supreme goal of man.

There are, besides, other facts that add to the cultural importance of the Atharvaveda. It prescribes numerous medicines for various ailments, and mentions those that require surgical treatment. This is regarded as the earliest system of Indian medicine and surgery. The Atharvan also anticipates the later Griha Sutras, the rules of domestic rites to be observed at birth, marriage or death. What, however, is even more striking is the elaboration of the rules that governed the education of the period, the rules that constituted the most significant institution of *brahmacharya*, the bedrock of Hindu

[1] Atharvaveda X. 4. 8. 44

life and culture, that continued almost in the same form and in the same spirit through the long ages of India's past, serving as the dynamic source of all her strength and manhood from which flowered those marvellous creations that are the golden glories of her history. The Atharvan gives a comprehensive list of rites and ceremonies that the neophyte—the beginner—has to go through before he becomes a student—a *brahmachari*—in the right sense of the term. The initiation into this stage of life starts with the ceremony of *upanayana* performed by the chosen teacher. The student is now called *dvija* or twice-born, this being his second spiritual birth into a new life of quest for the higher values through the practice of self-restraint and penance and by consecration to a life of discipline during his term of studentship as a member of his teacher's home. The Atharvan mentions the practice of *brahmacharya* by girls also. It contains one of the earliest expressions of patriotic sentiments in which the motherland is adored for her bounteous gifts to her children and for her outstanding achievements.

The Atharvaveda refers to the expansion of the Aryas and of Aryan culture further east from the Sindhu regions towards the regions of the Ganga and the Yamuna, though the mention of these rivers in the Rigveda shows that Aryan influence must have spread to those regions in the earlier age.

As already said, the three Vedas are more or less echoes of the Rigveda which admits of both mystic and ritualistic

interpretations. The Sama and Yajur arose out of the practical needs of worship which called for the growth of priesthood and its necessary texts. In them could be discerned a tendency to regard rituals and sacrifices as more important than anything else. And this tendency became more defined in the later works called the Brahmanas which deal with what is characterised as the 'science of sacrifice', even as the Yajurveda is called the 'Book of Prayer'. Thus each Veda has its Brahmanas embodying practical directions for the performance of sacrifices, and philosophical expositions of the real nature of things. They also contain elaborations of Vedic legends, allegories, theories of cosmogony, the legend of the Flood which may be traced to earlier traditions and need not be of the Semitic origin as some European writers try to show. Each of these Brahmanas has in it also an Aranyaka portion which, as the word implies was studied and contemplated upon by sages in their forest-retreats. The Aranyakas are, some of them, parts of the Brahmanas and some, of the older Upanishads, in which as also in the later ones can be observed a marked tendency towards mysticism and thought. As they signalise a turning-point in the cultural and spiritual evolution of India, they will be taken up later in the present study. The Brahmanas and in a way the Aranyakas contain materials of historical value. References are found in them to institutions of the nature of 'assemblies, academies, literary or religious guilds serving as Schools of Vedic learning' whose work was to collect,

conserve and comment upon the Vedic lores and transmit them to successive generations through competent teachers and pupils. The general system of learning was a continuation of the Vedic one of the previous times, though the emphasis was more on the externalia of sacrifice and therefore on the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedic literature. These assemblies which were held at the houses of eminent teachers were attended also by kings and nobles—the kshatriyas—who were then not only well-versed in the Veda but were many of them masters of the highest spiritual knowledge.

While describing the celebration of various sacrifices including royal ones, the Brahmanas narrate the dynastic geneologies of kings along with other relevant information about them. The Rigvedic tribes are shown here in their new formations evolved under the acknowledged leadership of the Kuru-Panchalas who are given great prominence in the texts which regard them as the best representatives of the then Vedic culture. The Kuru-Panchalas belonging generally to the Ganga-Yamuna doab—the famous *Brahmavarta*—founded a confederate kingdom notable for its cultural progress and material prosperity.

One of the oldest Brahmanas describes a sacrificial ceremony called *Vratyastoma* through which a class of people called Vratyas were admitted to the community of the brahmanas. The Vratyas are believed to be Aryas who would not perform certain Vedic rites including the Upanayana, the other view about them being that they were a powerful civilised community of eastern India

who came under the Vedic influence during this period. The royal sacrifice, Asvamedha, is regarded by some scholars as a Vratya ceremony performed by unAryan kings for admission to the Aryan fold. That there was a ceremony for aryanising unAryan peoples indicates a notable aspect of the process by which Vedic ideas were being disseminated over different parts of the country. The process might be the practical carrying-out of the call of *charaiveti* (march on) so beautifully depicted in the Aitareya Brahmana, the call that must have inspired the victorious campaigns the Aryan leaders undertook in order to bring the whole country under the exalting influence of Vedic ideals.

Life in Vedic Times

The cultural and religious life of the Vedic age marks an advanced stage which would have been impossible had not its social life been equally progressive. The Rigvedic society was patriarchal and the family was its unit. Marriages were mostly monogamous; freedom of choice was permitted. The Wedding Hymn and a number of marriage rules of the Vedic age are still followed by the Hindus of today. Vedic marriage, like the Hindu marriage of today, is indissoluble by human agency. Indeed, marriage has ever been held by the Hindus as a sacrament. The wife was the husband's partner in religious ceremonies. There were sacrifices which the husband could not perform without the companionship

of his wife. Widow remarriage, though rare, and love marriages were not unknown.

The social fabric did not know any sharp division into castes of the laterday, but the existence then of some form of it is suggested by the Purusha-sukta of the Rigveda which significantly posits that brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras—the four principal castes—have been created respectively from the head, the breast or the arms, the thighs, and the feet of the Creator. There is a deep truth in this symbolic expression which will be shown later. Anyway, the four castes did exist in the Rigvedic times but in broad, fluid divisions, since no rigid distinction could be made in that age when the influence of Aryan culture was spreading fast among other tribes and communities, absorbing them within the expanding scope of the Vedic society. Mention may be made here of the five tribes of people who offered sacrifice to Agni and participated in the Soma-sacrifice. They included at least two who had not been adherents of Aryan ideals before. In the Rigvedic Battle of the Ten Kings the Aryans had a number of unAryan tribes as their equals and allies.

The Rigvedic priesthood was not hereditary. Women enjoyed much freedom and were highly cultured. Quite a number of seers were women who composed hymns. The famous *Devi-Sukta* of the Rigveda is the work of the woman-Rishi Vak, the daughter of the great Rishi Ambhrin, who expresses therein her realisation of identity with Universal Consciousness. The well-known *Ratri-*

Sukta is believed to be composed by another woman-Rishi named Ratri. It may be noted that both these Suktas are most popular among the Tantrikas, the followers of the Mother-cult. Sarparajni composed a famous Agni hymn and presided over many sacrifices. Apala got skin disease and her husband deserted her but she was not to be daunted. She got cured by worshipping Indra and became a bigger Rishi than her husband. That women took part in military activities is evident from the example of Visvapala who was a great general who lost a foot in a battle and got the Aswins to fix an iron leg and again went to war. The wife of Rishi Mudgala was a great charioteer.

That the people in Vedic times lived in plenty is indicated in the gorgeous manner in which sacrifices were performed. Great store was set by hospitality. In fact, there were sacrifices—*Dana-yajnas* (large offerings made to the gods and in their name given away)—especially meant for the cultivation of this natural tendency of the Indian heart. There is a verse in the Rigveda called *Danastuti* in praise of munificence.

Vedic society in later times saw the system of caste more defined than before. The brahmanas were engaged in the study and propagation of the Vedic ideals, as embodied among others in the sacrificial rites and ceremonials; the kshatriyas, in the protection of the country and maintenance of peace; the vaishyas, in agriculture and trade; the shudras, in rendering service to all. The relative position of the brahmanas and the kshatriyas in

society was not yet a fixed one. The kshatriyas that were seers or rishis, had the same status as the brahmanas. Indeed, some of them, as in the Upanishads, were even teachers of brahmanas. There were kshatriya kings who were seers possessing the highest wisdom. And these are not rare or isolated instances of the fluidity of the caste-system. The Satapatha Brahmana gives the shudra a place in the Soma sacrifice. Satyakama Jabala and Janashruti were certainly not the only ones who, though shudra, the former, besides, being of questionable birth, were admitted to the study of the Upanishads under famous teachers of the age. Satyakama later became a great teacher of spiritual knowledge and had a large number of disciples including brahmanas and King Janaka. Mahidasa, the author of the Aitareya Brahmana, had a shudra mother. The Rishi Kuvasha Ailusha was born of a shudra maid-servant. There were some reactionary views that try to justify severity of treatment towards the shudras, and this, maybe, because they had been admitted to the Aryan fold from unAryan tribes. The marriage customs were almost the same as in the Rigvedic times. The brahmanas and kshatriyas married women of other castes.

The economic life of the Rigvedic people centred round agriculture which was in a very developed state. Mainly pastoral, they valued cows and bullocks as their best possession. Sanctity was attached to the cows, as one of their appellations means 'not to be killed'. The people knew hunting with all its tricks many of which

are followed even now. Crafts in wood, metal including gold, leather and weaving were in their highly evolved forms, which show their wide popularity and patronage. The Rigveda alludes to golden cups. Commercially the Rigvedic people were no less advanced. They had trade relations and through them cultural intercourse with many distant lands and with lands beyond the seas. The principle of barter served as a sort of currency. Milk, rice, barley and their various products and preparations were the food of the people, which also included meat generally of sacrificed animals. Two garments and one under-garment comprised the dress of the people. Both men and women used to adorn themselves with ornaments and jewellery. The Atharvaveda furnishes details of the occupations and of the economic life of the people of the later period. In the Brahmanas are found classifications of agricultural operations. The mention in them of a large number of commercial manufacturers, merchant-princes and of bodies like the trade-guilds, indicates a remarkable industrial development of the period. Gold, silver and copper were in extensive use.

The construction of sacrificial altars, palaces and dwelling houses, mentioned in the Rigveda, suggests a knowledge of the building art. The Rigveda refers to the worship, before building a house, of a god called *Vastospati*, the guardian deity of the homestead. To this a writer on the subject traces the origin of *Vastuvidya*—the Indian science of architecture, whose application

especially for sacrificial purposes is given more prominence in the Yajurveda. The Atharvaveda gives some idea of town-planning, and the suggestions in it for the construction of dwelling houses show how progressive the people of the age were. The Brahmanas use the word *silpa* to mean sculpture, singing, dancing and music. The people of the age indulged in drinking spiritous liquors and also in gambling which however was condemned. Dancing and music were cultivated by both sexes, which, along with chariot-racing, horse-racing and dicing were among the amusements of the Vedic people. The Rigvedic term *sabha* is interpreted by some sholars to mean a kind of social club where some administrative business also was transacted. Men of position are described as coming to the *sabha* in pomp and splendour.

It is quite possible that in their daily life as in their religious and cultural life, the Rigvedic people had many things in common with the builders of the Sindhu Valley culture, an idea of which is given in the previous chapter. The view is gaining ground that these two cultures are not separate and apart; the points of similarity between them are coming more and more to light.

Rigvedic culture is also remarkable for its polity. How the unit of the family—*kula*—evolved into a state is difficult to say. But the terms in the Rigveda like *grama* or *janman* (village), *vis* (group of villages), *jana* (a group of *visas*), and *rastra* (country or state) imply the stages of this growth and point to the importance of each of

these stages in the process of the earliest political development of India. There was the title of *kulapati* for the head of the family or a number of families forming a village, that of *vispati* for the head of canton or a group of villages, that of *janaraj* or king for the head of a *jana*. But as capacity and personal worth counted more in those days than hereditary rights, a *kulapati* or a *vispati* could be a *janaraj* provided he possessed the requisite qualities of leadership. There are instances of *janarajas* chosen by the people through their *kulapatis* and *vispatis* who had considerable voice in such elections.

Rigvedic India spread over a large area divided into a number of tribal principalities each of which was a political unit generally ruled by a king. The oldest form of India's collective life grew in natural surroundings and in fertile regions mothered by the vast river-systems of northern India. Thus had the Vedic kings their territories on the banks of the Sindhu, the Saraswati, the Yamuna, and other rivers. The extent of these states however was undergoing changes through the impact of forces then working for political and cultural expansion. And this was not infrequent in those formative days of India's history when the political as well as the cultural integrity of the country was far from what Nature intended it to be.

Monarchy then was the normal form of government in Vedic times. But it was a constitutional monarchy not always hereditary as already pointed out. Rigvedic kings had as their advisers both in religious and political

matters some of the most leading spiritual figures of the age. Vasistha and Vishvamitra, greatest among the Rishis, held such positions. This is the origin of the glorious tradition in India of wise selfless sages serving as ministers and advisers of kings throughout her ancient history. Kingship in Vedic times had to depend much on the love and loyalty of the people. A Rigvedic hymn says: 'May all the people bestow their love on you, so that you may not lose your kingdom.' There was besides a ritual of *Anumati* which is interpreted to mean that the king had to seek the approval of the people. These facts reflect the democratic tendency of the Vedic people, which is believed to have continued throughout the Vedic period. The terms *gana* (people) and *ganapati* or *jyestha* (elder or people's headman) also suggest non-monarchical institutions of the age. This tendency was more marked in the popularity of the institutions like the *sabha* and the *samiti*.

The *sabha*, as already said, was a popular assembly of elders, a kind of meeting-place where men would gather mainly for purposes of social intercourse. But it also transacted those items of administration which would come up for disposal. Generally associated with village-life, it played its part as a centre of unity, the basis of progressive and prosperous collective life. The *samiti* however was a more powerful body in that it exercised greater influence over the administration of the country and acted as a healthy check on the power of the king. It was, as it were, the Central Assembly for the whole

State, whose membership was open to the aristocracy of the land. A king would find his job difficult, if not imposible, if he could not carry the *samiti* along with him. Political power in the Rigvedic times was synonimous with domination of the *samiti*. The Vedic age witnessed the whole country studded with *sabhas* and *samitis*. And these assemblies had women also as their members. In the last hymn of the Rigveda, a king makes a most solemn exhortation to the members of the *samiti* to have always among them a spirit of harmony and concord.

In later Vedic literature the king is found to be more powerful in his authority, and stronger in his position, and this was due to the need the people felt of one who would protect the country and build it up into a progressive state. There were therefore *ekratas*, sole paramount sovereigns ruling over large regions. A number of terms designate each a particular form of kingship that ruled during this period over larger territories created out of the old smaller ones through conquest and expansion. There were also confederacies the most famous of which was that of the Kuru-Panchalas already mentioned. It is no longer the west which had its heyday during the Rigvedic times but the middle and eastern regions of the country that were now prominent centres of political and cultural activity. Kosala, Kasi and Videha comprise most of the regions which did not take long to extend farther east to Magadha and Anga whose unAryan elements started to worship Agni in accordance with Vedic ideals

Kingship in this period was both hereditary and non-hereditary. There were kings, elected by the people's representatives who could as well expel or depose them when they violated *dharma*, 'the sacred law that sustains the universe', regarded in ancient India as the higher authority every king must acknowledge and which, as a Brahmana says, 'is indeed the ruler.' The Atharvaveda says: 'May the people choose you for their ruler.' 'Here is the king appointed for the people's government', declares a Brahmana. The *sabha* and the *samiti* functioned in this period as they had done in the Rigvedic. When a king prays: 'May *samiti* and *sabha*, the two daughters of Prajapati, concurrently aid me', he points not only to their importance but also to the fact that they owe their origin to the same divine source from which he derives his power and authority. It also suggests the extreme antiquity of these two popular institutions. The *samiti* continues in this period also to be more powerful than the *sabha*. The Atharvan characterises the *samiti* as the source of the king's stability. The Vedic Samiti, an Indian scholar holds, was a sovereign assembly of the whole people (*vis*). It may be compared to the Greek Agora, Roman Comitia or German folk-moot, but whereas no discussion was permitted in the latter assemblies of Europe, the Vedic Samiti was a deliberative body where speeches were delivered and debates took place.

The period witnessed the performance of various royal sacrifices, coronations and consecrations of kings, in all

of which the king would be declared the protector of the people. The Satapatha Brahmana describes the intellectual qualifications of the kings. There were in this period several non-monarchical states of which mention may be made of the *Vairajya* States of the Uttaramadras and Uttarakurus whose people were called *Virats*. The republican character of these states is evident from the fact that there 'citizens and not kings are expressly consecrated for rulership', the term *Virat* meaning 'devoid of a king'.

The States of the Vedic age had each its own military organisation for purposes of both defence and territorial expansion in which smaller states with their tribal rivalries got merged in consonance with Nature's labour in those times to build larger and larger human collectivities for the immediate purpose of strengthening the corporate life of the people, and the ultimate one of unifying the whole race. This process in Vedic India was not always a violent one. Confederacies and alliances were not rare. Tribal allegiances however did not allow these larger States to be still larger, perhaps because their size was self-sufficient and compact enough for the growth of a healthy political and cultural life. Evidences in the Vedic texts show that in their strength of arms and heroism, the Vedic people were not at all unequal to the needs of the age when in her youth India was seeing golden visions of her future, preparing for that long adventure of her soul which began well with her victory over the forces that opposed her onward march.

The Vedantic Resurgence[1]

THERE is no gainsaying the fact that the Veda is the authentic source of almost all the basic ideas of Indian culture. And where they are not fully developed, their seeds are perceptible in the Veda in some form or other waiting for a favourable moment of sprouting. Of these early beginnings the most significant is the growth of India's spiritual tendency, promoted by what the Vedic Seers had achieved in the early days of her history. And it is this tendency that has always motived the manifold expressions of her creative genius. In fact, this inward inclination has given its character to the racial mind of India. All her religious aspirations, her Godward endeavours had their birth in the thoughts and rituals of the Vedic Aryans who laid also the foundations of India's social and political life and indicated the broad lines of its development. The art and literature of India are no less Vedic in their origin. The Vedic vision of the gods as powers and personalities of the One has ever been behind the aesthetic and literary achievements of India. The Veda is verily the source of the myths and legends out of which have evolved the Epics and the Puranas. But the most remarkable line of this continuity is found

[1] Mainly based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo. Unless otherwise mentioned, the translations of the Upanishadic verses are his. Use has also been made of the writings of Nolini Kanta Gupta, an authentic exponent of the Master's thought.

in the Upanishads—a part of the Vedic literature—which are called the Vedanta, the crown and end of Veda.

As pointed out before, it was a latter-day idea that cut Vedic literature in two parts, one of works, and the other of knowledge, the former comprising the Vedas and the Brahmanas as books of rituals and the latter the Upanishads as books of knowledge. European scholarship has on this basis chosen to hold that the Upanishads are an independent creation of India's speculative genius having very little to do with the Veda. There are, however, scholars, Indian and European, who are of the opinion that the source of the Upanishads may be traced in the secret explanations of the rituals and the allegories and speculations thereon that the Brahmanas and Aranyakas contain.

But neither of the views seems to be any longer tenable in the light of Sri Aurobindo's exposition that the Veda is a Book of Knowledge whose symbols conceal the highest truths about God, man and the universe. From this angle of vision, a careful and comparative study of the Upanishads will show that Vedanta—as its name implies—is the very end of the Veda, the flowering and culmination of its mystic doctrines in larger terms of a mind still continuing to be intuitive but at the same time showing the first signs of a conscious tendency to be an instrument of the intellect, influenced and activated by higher vital impulses.

In this tendency of the Indian mind was implicit a purpose of Nature whose aim in evolution was to prepare

man for a higher life through the growth and expansion of his inherent potentialities. He had already had his intuitive faculty opened, the results of which were those early dawns of Light on his consciousness that are symbolised in the Hymns of the Rigveda. The time had now come for the intuitive mind—quite apart from the pure intuitive faculty which has little to do with mind—to open to the Light and become the medium of those illuminations, thereby developing and strengthening the intuitive basis of man's mind and life, which alone can assimilate higher truths so necessary for the expansion of the racial consciousness.

A comprehension of this psychological process is called for here because of the bearing it has on the present study which seeks to survey India's evolution against the background of the forces that have sustained and advanced that evolution. Not merely the isolated peak-points but also the entire area of this progress has to be brought into relief so that a complete picture may be envisaged.

The early phase of the Vedic life was governed not so much by the mind as by the intuition. And it was not a faint dawn of intuition that the inspired Mystics saw and felt. They were rather utterly intuitive in their voyages into the vasts of God by which they won the Solar Glories and those tremendous powers of heaven which automati cally formed the line of and paved the way for India's development towards the greater Glories of the Future. It has been shown before how these achievements of the early Fathers influenced in those early days the growth

of India's inner being, although the masses were engrossed in their rituals which, however, were not without their subjective contribution to the progressive building up of the racial consciousness.

The next period of the Brahmanas and the Aranyakas saw the emphasis on the rituals laid with an exclusive attachment to their formalistic performance. Naturally therefore it created an atmosphere of externalism. As a consequence, an unrest started growing within and along with it, an urge to aspire for light and freedom, the light by which to know the Truth, and the freedom by which to strive unhampered for that knowledge. This temporary set-back gave a fillip to a renewed activity of India's soul through a fresh search for the ultimate end of existence, guided by the light of the Vedic truths. What, however, is even more significant is that the visions the Vedantic Seers had, were expressed in terms understandable at least by the higher mind of the race so that they might be reaffirmed to its consciousness and stand there as the perennial source of that spiritual strength by which alone the race could grow towards its highest destiny. But how was this growth to be ensured? The mystic doctrines as revealed through the Vedic symbols had been known only to the initiates whose circle was already too small to serve the expanding need of the hour. Besides, in their inmost significance, they are even more difficult to understand. But the power of the mantra—the inspired Word of the Veda—did never die; and how ever small their number, the Masters of the Knowledge

kept the Ancient Light burning in the soul of the nation. This light aflame in their hearts, the seekers in various parts of the country rose equal to the need of the country at the time, and with all the intensity of their soul sought to have the vision of the Truth, of all that it meant for the regeneration of man, for his ascension to a higher life in the Spirit, not as a liberation from this earth but as its reconciliation with heaven. Vedanta implies the knowledge that India achieved as a result of these endeavours which reflect a resurgence of her soul, the spring-time of her spirituality.

The Upanishads therefore represent a turning-point in the evolution of Indian history. The significant future of that evolution can be read aright and understood only when it is followed and studied with the vision of its integral scope, comprising within it the whole life of the race, all its movements and expressions, each of which has its place no less than its necessity, in the total progress that India has ever made and has still to make in her history through all her success and failure, rise and fall, victory and defeat.

Taking its start with an intuitive seeing of the heavenly Light, the soul of India now entered on a chequered career of its adventure in order to go through the experiences it needed for its enrichment and preparation for the more luminous Dawn of the Future. From the unbounded heavens of the Spirit the soul of this ancient land turned towards the earth and the things of the earth, not to be bound and enmeshed by them but to infuse into them the

light of heaven, and to complete and perfect its own development by whatever contributions the earth had to offer to it. For, indeed, the soul needs the strength of the earth so as to be fit for a higher manifestaion, a diviner perfection. And mind being the principle at the top of man's being and easily open to higher influences was the first to be touched by the Spirit and made stronger by the Spirit's power of direct understanding—intuition—so that it might prove its fit instrument in the future. Therefore impelled by her soul, the mind of India broke into a vigorous quest for the Spirit, the inmost self of things. The Upanishads are a graphic record of this quest and its gains.

But how comes it that the Upanishads reflect the Vedic vision? In what relation do the former stand to the latter? Answers to these questions can be found in the abundant evidences of Vedic ideas continuing in the Upanishads. In fact, some of the basic teachings of Vedanta are distinct echoes of the Vedic lore.

The Upanishads are no mere philosophical speculations, though they are spiritual philosophy of the highest kind, because everything said in them is based on actual spiritual experience. That is why they are more than philosophy, at least as it is commonly understood. The masteries in the ways of the Spirit, revealed in these sacred texts, have their roots deep in the mystic realisations of the Vedic Seers, who are often referred to and their utterances (Riks) quoted by the Rishis in almost all the major Upanishads. And this they did not only out of reverence for

the ancient Fathers but also as a corroboration of their own perception of the truths, as a reaffirmation of those truths from their own experience. It was therefore only to be expected that, as seekers of the truth, they should acknowledge their indebtedness to the Vedic Seers.

Often would the Vedantic Seers draw inspiration from the doctrines of their Forefathers, and by their standards and precedents measure and verify their own intuitions and experiences. And when the inspiration was direct from the Veda they would straightway acknowledge the source while recording the conclusions of their discourses. The Vedic Riks in the Upanishadic doctrine of the Mystic Honey is an instance in point. Another is furnished by the Katha Upanishad when it speaks of 'the Goal that all the Vedas glorify.' The Rishis of the Upanishads would often begin the exposition of their truth-visions with a recitation of the Vedic mantras. Besides, very many principal Vedantic ideas seem to have derived from the Veda. The whole of a Rigvedic mantra is quoted in the Mundaka Upanishad when it speaks of the individual soul and the universal soul, the lower and the higher being. The Isha Upanishad concludes with a Rigvedic mantra. Indeed, there is no limit to the numerous hymns quoted in the Upanishads from the Veda. And where there is no verbatim quotation, there is such a harmony of thought and word as makes one hear the same rhythm of their heart-beat, perceive the same trend of their inner vision. The famous Upanishadic declaration:

'I have known the Supreme Person, the One whose light shines from beyond the darkness...'[1] is familiar to us all. But do we know that it is an echo of a Vedic mantra? That mantra is:

> 'Beholding the higher Light beyond the darkness we come to the divine Sun in the Godhead, to the highest Light of all.'[2]

When the Upanishad declares that 'the Supreme manifests himself to the heart and the mind and the higher intelligence', it only reiterates almost similar Vedic ideas, one of which is that 'the Seers by the will in the heart and by the thought (discovered)', and the other:

> 'For Indra the Ancient Master, they polished and sharpened their thoughts with the heart, the mind and the intelligence',

this showing the psychological personality of that godhead of the Divine Mind.

Many of the Vedic gods are found in the Upanishads, though not exactly in the same status. Some of the Vedic symbols too are given Vedantic forms, and these symbols as such lend themselves to an interpretation not far from their esoteric sense. The great symbol of sacrifice is freely used in the Upanishads both in its inner and outer significance. That the Vaishvanara Vidya—the knowledge of the Universal Being—of the Chhandogya

[1] Svetasvatara Up. III. 8
[2] RV. I. 50. 10

Upanishad is directly inspired by the Rigveda is evident from the Rigvedic Hymns addressed to Agni Vaishvanara. This is pointed out by T.V. Kapali Sastry. Sri Aurobindo has shown that the fifteenth and the sixteenth verses of the Isha Upanishad are just reproductions in its own language of the first Rik of the sixty-second Hymn in the fifth Mandala of the Rigveda. The Vedic passage runs:

> 'There is a Truth covered by a Truth where they unyoke the horses of the Sun; the ten hundreds stood together, there was That One; I saw the greatest (best, most glorious) of the embodied gods.'[1]

The following passage in the Upanishad maintains the central symbol of the Sun (of Truth) but makes no secret of the sense:

> 'The face of the Truth is covered with a golden lid. O Pushan, that remove for the vision of the law of Truth. O Pushan (fosterer), sole Seer, O Yama, O Sun, O Child of the Father of beings, marshal and gather together thy rays; I see the Light which is that fairest (most auspicious) form of thee; he who is, this Purusha, He am I.'

The 'golden lid' is meant to be the same as the inferior covering truth, *ritam*, spoken of in the Vedic verse; 'the greatest of the embodied Gods' is equivalent to 'that fairest form' of the Sun, it is the supreme Light which is other and greater than all outer lights; the greatest

[1] RV. V. 62. 1

formula of the Upanishad, 'He am I', corresponds to 'That One,' *tad ekam*, of the Rigvedic verse; the standing together of the ten hundreds (the rays of the Sun) is reproduced in the prayer to the Sun to marshal and mass his rays so that the supreme form may be seen. The Sun in both the passages, constantly mentioned in the Veda and frequently in the Upanishad, is the Godhead of the supreme Truth and Knowledge.

The following passage in the Taittiriya Upanishad furnishes another striking example of this development of Vedic idea and image. In it Indra plainly appears as the power and godhead of the divine mind:

> 'He who is the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal,—may Indra satisfy me through the intelligence. O God, may I become a vessel of the Immortal. May my body be full of vision and my tongue of sweetness, may I bear the much and vast with my ears. For thou art the sheath of Brahman covered over and hidden by the Intelligence.'

The Chhandogya Upanishad opens with the lines:

> 'OM is the syllable (the Imperishable One); one should follow after it as the upward song (move ment); for with OM one sings (goes) upwards...'

Now OM is the sacred Vedic syllable that sums up the essential and pervading idea of the Upanishad, which, says Sri Aurobindo, records the results of the long travel of seeking by which the first founders and pioneers of Vedantism attempted to recover the secret and true sense

of the Veda in an age when it had been largely submerged in ceremonialism and formalism.

Quite a large number of words and phrases are used in the Vedas and the Upanishads in the same particular meanings, connotations and implications. *Paramam padam, paramebyomni, parame parakat, parame parardhe, uttar or uttama sadhastha* and so on, are equally interspersed in Veda and Upanishad. European scholarship and its Indian counterparts hold that these phrases as well as words like *satyam* (the True), *ritam* (the Right), *brihat* (the Vast), *amritam* (Immortality), *dhi* (Thought), *jyoti* (Light) are used in the Rigveda in their naturalistic meanings, and that it is the makers of the Upanishads who have first read into them their spiritual meanings. That this view is wrong is evident from what has been said before about the inner truth and significance of the Vedic teaching. Another point to note is that an apt, profuse, consistent and repeated use of these and so many other Vedic terms by the Upanishads in elucidation of their truths, would not certainly have been possible, unless they conveyed the experiences of the Upanishadic Rishis. They can in no sense be said to be mere transplantations from the Veda. The fact remains that these eternal verities were re-visioned by the Vedantic Seers and restated in terms of the intuitive intelligence for a fresh illumination of the racial mind. 'The Upanishads are not a revolutionary departure from the Vedic mind and its temperament and fundamental ideas, but a continuation and a development and, to a certain extent, an

enlarging transformation in the sense of bringing out into open expression all that was held covered in the symbolic Vedic speech as a mystery and a secret.'

The Upanishads then are as much a Revealed Scripture as the Rigveda. Creations of an intuitive mind, they cannot be grasped by the mere intellect. They are a radiation of the Light that dawned on the questing soul; they are not a mere body of instructions given to the mind. Into their world of light he alone has the right to enter who has already had an inner leaning to the ideas of the Vedic and Vedantic Seers, a sincere aspiration for, or better still, some personal experience of, the truths embodied in them. So equipped, the earnest seeker, while studying the Upanishads, will proceed from light to light, confirming his intuitions and verifying his experiences. But he would never even think of submitting the ideas to the judgement of logical reason the half-lit mind.

The Upanishads represent the finest flowering of the age of the Spirit. In them is found the soul of India reborn in a mighty endeavour to know the Truth, to master its secret significance for man's life. The results of these endeavours are recorded in that supreme work of the Indian mind, the highest self-expression of its genius.

The Upanishads are a poetry of the sublimest kind the greatest creation of thought and word sprung from the deepest spiritual experiences. 'Documents of revelatory and intuitive philosophy of an inexhaustible light power and largeness', the Upanishads are universally

admitted as the profoundest of religious scriptures in the whole world. Here is no religion that starts and ends with a cult or is limited to an religio-ethical aspiration: it is the spiritual fervour of the soul that rises to an infinite discovery of God, of Self, of our highest and whole reality of spirit and being and speaks out of an ecstatic fullness of luminous knowledge, a victorious fulfilment of experience, the bliss of a perfect realisation.

Neither is its philosophy an abstract intellectual speculation about Truth or a structure of logical intelligence, but Truth seen, felt, lived and held by the inmost mind and soul; a ringing paean of discovery and possession. 'Here the intuitive mind and intuitive psychological experience of the Vedic Seers passes into a supreme culmination in which the Spirit, as is said in a phrase of the Katha Upanishad, discloses its very body, reveals the very word of its self-expression and discovers to the mind vibration of rhythms which repeating themselves within in the spiritual hearing seem to build up the soul and set it satisfied and complete on the heights of self-knowledge.'

This fact has been ignored, or rather overlooked, by foreign translators of the Upanishads and not a few Indian scholars, who have sought to bring out the intellectual sense of the Upanishads without feeling the life of thought and vision and the ecstasy of spiritual experience embodied in the verses, and have thus unhappily missed the fullness of their revelation, a revelation not to the intellect alone, but to the soul and the

whole being. That is why the Upanishads are no fabric of intellectual thought or phrase, but *Shruti*, or soul listening to the Oversoul, spiritual audience, an inspired Scripture.

Seer-wisdoms, says the Veda, utter their inner meaning to the seer. The inner significance of the principal Vedantic ideas too can be perceived only by those who are fit for it, who possess the power of intuitive seeing. The ideas themselves may to some extent be readily seized by the intellect, as has been done by the modern mind, but their deeper sense eludes it unless the mind chooses to overpass itself into higher lights. Herein lies the sad failure of the interpretations of the Vedanta by modern scholars, Indian and European, whose works on Indian philosophy seek elaborately to satisfy the mere intellect and do not seem to have thought of making an attempt to get at the profound implications of the Upanishadic teachings. Besides, most of them betray a rooted bias in favour of the old commentaries one or the other of which they follow as the basis and support of their exposition. Many of them doubt if Vedanta is anything more than intellectual thought. While what they understand of it may not be entirely incorrect, the whole meaning even of that aspect of Vedanta as well as of those that are implicit in the symbols, images and the mystic sciences of the Upanishads cannot be fully comprehended by intellect alone, because, essentially and in their origin, they are truths of the spiritual evolution or subjective growth of man, of the inmost meaning of existence, which

the modern mind has yet to perceive and recognise as the governing principle of Indian culture, the true fountain-head of which is the Upanishads.

There is again the fact to be noted that the Vedantic Seers, like their Vedic Ancestors, had their knowledge of the Truth by intuitive and spiritual experience, and expressed it in terms of 'subtle reasoning' that can be followed only by those who have the 'subtle vision'. Their way was not the logical process of thinking but of direct contact and identity with the object of knowledge. The Vedantic Seers did not think in order to know, but went beyond thought to direct vision and knowledge by identity. That is why the question put to one seeker by another was, 'What dost thou know?' not 'What dost thou think?' nor 'To what conclusion has thy reasoning arrived?' Nowhere in the Upanishads do we find any trace of logical reasoning urged in support of the truths of Vedanta. Intuition, the sages seem to have held, must be measured and verified by a more perfect intuition; logical reasoning could never be its judge. When scholars speak of debates or discussions in the Upanishads, they take an erroneous view of them. Wherever there was an appearance of a controversy, it is not by discussion, by dialectics or logical reasoning that it proceeded, but by a comparison of intuitions and experiences in which the less luminous would give way to the more luminous. And it was out of their direct intuitive seeing that the Vedantic Seers formulated the three great declarations of the Upanishads, 'I am He',

'Thou art That', 'All this is Brahman, this Self is Brahman'.

It must also be remembered in this connection that some of the earlier major Upanishads do not explicitly state their leading ideas; they employ suggestive words, leaving suggestions to be caught by adepts, and guarding them from the profane touch of the mere intellect. There are also gaps and transitions in the movement of their interpretative thought; in some the development of ideas is left incomplete and is completed in others. All these can be grasped, filled up and linked only by those who have understood the inner significance of those movements.

All the four Vedas have Upanishads appended to them. Some of them are included in the Brahmana or Aranyaka sections of the respective Vedas. Isha, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Aitareya, Kausitaki, Taittiriya, Kena, Katha, Svetasvatara, Mundaka, Mandukya and Prashna, are the twelve principal Upanishads, of which the Isha belongs to the Samhita of the Yajurveda, and the next five to the Brahmanas. Except the last three which are of a later period, all are dated around the second millennium B.C., one of the bases of this view being, according to some scholars, the date of the Bharata War about 1500 B.C. and the association of Krishna with it, who also is a figure in the Chhandogya Upanishad. Some of the Upanishads are in prose, some in verse, and some in mixed prose and verse. A later Upanishad mentions the names of as many as one hundred and eight

Upanishads. About two hundred of them actually exist today. This is because the ancient Upanishads acquired such importance that later thinkers followed their method of expressing spiritual experiences and called these texts Upanishads.

The theme of the Upanishads is called *Brahma Vidya* or *Atma Vidya*, the Science of the Self. They are a gospel of inner illumination. The word Upanishad means inner knowledge, that which enters into the final truth and settles in it. They preserve the visions the ancient Seers had of the Reality, of 'the Bright Immortal'. They also say how what they saw they realised in their own life and consciousness. The Upanishads are also called *sarva-vidya-pratistha*, the foundation of all arts and sciences, but *Vedanta*, the final development and expansion of Vedic wisdom, is the most accepted of its appellations. The Upanishads therefore are a book of knowledge, but knowledge in the profounder Indian sense of the word, *jnana*. 'Not a mere thinking and considering by intelligence, the pursuit and grasping of a mental form of truth by the intellectual mind, but a seeing of it (Truth) with the soul and a total living in it with the power of the inner being, a spiritual seizing by a kind of identification with the object of knowledge is *jnana*.' And this kind of direct knowledge can be made complete by an integral knowing of the self. It was therefore the Self that the Vedantic sages sought to know, to live in and to be one with by identity. And through this endeavour they came easily to see that the self in us is one with the universal self of all things

and this self again is the same as God and Brahman, the transcendent Being or Existence, and they beheld, felt, lived in the inmost truth of all things in the universe and the inmost truth of man's inner and outer existence by the light of this one and unifying vision. Thus the Upanishads are 'epic hymns of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and God-knowledge', the repository of all wisdom.

The Upanishads regard man as a spirit veiled in the works of energy, but moving towards self-discovery. The essential divinity of man is emphasised in them with a cogency and a conviction that is as inspiring as rare in the spiritual record of the world. This intensity of conviction bespeaks the directness with which the Seers saw the One Reality and felt its presence within them, in all, in everything. The verse has been quoted before in which the Rishi declares that he has seen the Supreme Person whose light shines from beyond the darkness. To know Him seems indeed to have been the one dominating passion of Indian life in that creative epoch, spiritually the most widely fruitful, in the whole course of her history, when in her soul she was fired with an ardent aspiration to be led

> 'from non-being to true being,
> from the darkness to the light,
> from death to immortality.'[1]

That the Supreme heard this cry of India's soul is testified by her spiritual achievements recorded in the

[1] Brihadaranyaka Up. I. 3. 28

Upanishads, of which a few prominent ones will be touched upon here along with the lines of their later developments.

Man lives his ordinary life in ignorance of what he really is, of what his life really means for him. Knowledge is the only means by which he can liberate himself from his bondage to this ignorance. And this knowledge comes to him when he is able to exceed his outward, apparent, natural self and realise the inmost reality of his being, the divine self, and then rise into the light of its Glory in heaven. It is the dawn on his consciousness of this supernal illumination that inspired the Rishi in the Isha Upanishad to declare:

> 'O Illumining Sun, the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He am I.'

When Svetaketu, a seeking soul, was told by his Rishi father 'Thou art That', he was vouchsafed the knowledge of his self. And to this knowledge he was led by a method of subtle reasoning which also conveyed to him the truth that the ultimate essence of everything is that self. This Self is also the Transcendent Brahman, the luminous Sun of Truth as well as 'the Purusha, the inner Self', who is the heart of all creatures, of everything. He is 'the one Godhead secret in all beings, all-pervading, the inner Self of all', says the Svetasvatara. And this One by self-energising and self-projecting becomes the Many. Says the Mundaka:

> 'By energism of Consciousness (*Tapas*) Brahman is massed; from that Matter is born and from

Matter Life and Mind and the worlds and the law of immortality in work.'

The Isha repeats this in its psychological way:

'It is He that has gone abroad—That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.'

In yet clearer terms the truth is stated in the Taittiriya:

'He desired, 'May I be many', He concentrated in Tapas, by Tapas he created the world; creating, he entered into it; entering he became the existent and the beyond-existence, he became the expressed and the unexpressed, he became knowledge and ignorance, he became the truth and the falsehood: he became the truth, even all this whatsoever that is. 'That Truth' they call him.'

'All this is Brahman' is the burden of the Upanishads. The One is also the Many. But in what relation does the One stand to the Many? The One is pre-eminently real, but 'The Others', the Many are not unreal. Unity is the eternal truth of things and diversity is a play of that Unity, because creation is a self-projection of Brahman into conditions of Space and Time. Creation is not a making but a becoming in terms and forms of conscious existence. Brahman is the One Self of all and the Many are the becomings of the One Being. And both the Self and the becomings are Brahman. The

inmost reality of man is the divine Self. To become conscious of it and to grow into it, into its perfection and transcendence is the greatness of which man alone of all terrestrial beings is capable. The Upanishads say that to know Brahman is to become Brahman. '*Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati*'.

To know Brahman, also say the Upanishads, is to become immortal. Immortality is not survival of death. It is the finding of our true self of eternal being and bliss beyond the dual symbols of birth and death. It is the absolute life of the soul as opposed to the transient and mutable life in the body. To rise out of the mortal world of limitation and bondage into the world of largeness and freedom, out of the finite into the infinite world is what Vedanta calls immortality. It is to ascend out of earthly joy and sorrow into a transcendent Beatitude that is for ever.

What then is the true nature of Brahman? How is It to be seen, felt and experienced? The Upanishads are one in calling It *Ananda*, Delight. Says the Kena:

> 'The name of that is the Delight; as the Delight we must worship and seek after It.'

'That Delight', *Tadvanam*, is how Brahman is called. *Vana* is the Vedic word for delight or delightful, and *Tadvanam* means therefore the transcendent Delight, the all-blissful Ananda of which the Taittiriya speaks as the highest Brahman

> 'from which all existences are born, by which all existences live and increase and into which all exis-

tences arrive in their passing out of death and birth.'

This idea of the Infinite as Ananda which pervades the universe through Its immanence in it is an echo of the Vedic idea of everything as full of delight, of *madhu*. Here is an exquisite Rigvedic Hymn on it, which is repeated in the early Upanishads including the Brihadaranyaka:

'Sweet blow the winds, sweet flow the waters,
Sweet be to us the growths of the soil.
Sweet is night, and dawn, full of sweetness earth's bound:
Sweet be to us Heaven our Father.
May the lordly woods be full of sweetness to us
And full of sweetness the Sun:
Sweet be to us the Herds of Light.'[1]

Madhu Vidya, the esoteric science of the Mystic Honey, of the Brihadaranyaka, teaches that everything in and every part of creation is Honey to the whole and the whole is Honey to every part of it. Because this Honey, the secret delight, abides in the whole creation, in every part and particle of it, the earth becomes enjoyable. Delight is the root-principle of all existence. It is, as the Upanishad says, the basis of the Waters, the Fire, the Wind, the Sound, the Quarters, the Moon, the Lightning, the Thunder, the Space, the Law, the Truth, the Mankind, and at last, the Self, the crown of these all.

[1] Translated by Nolini Kanta Gupta.

Delight is indeed the essential nature of Self, and it is by this delight hidden in the Self that the world-existence is sustained and led to its goal. Even pain and grief are perverse terms of Ananda which they veil here and for which they prepare the lower existence: all suffering in the evolution is a preparation of strength and bliss. Ananda is also the secret basis of all worldly attachments. And this he means when the great sage Yajnavalkya says:

> 'Verily, the husband is dear not for the sake of the husband but for the sake of the Self.
>
> 'Verily, the wife is dear not for the sake of the wife but for the sake of the Self.
>
> 'Verily, sons are dear not for the sake of the sons but for the sake of the Self.'

This Vedic and Vedantic teaching that delight is the essence of creation is unique in the philosophy of the world. It is diametrically opposed to the theory that postulates sorrow and suffering as the root and constituent of existence. Some distant echoes of it may be traced in a few of the ancient mystery cults, but they are there rather as significant suggestions than any definite basis of a spiritual life and practice. This teaching of the universal delight of existence cuts right across all illusionistic and pessimistic creeds and, if rightly applied in life, can be the foundation of a sovereignly beatific existence for man on earth.

There is then the other, more comprehensive Vedantic term for Self—Sachchidananda. It constitutes the

superconscious existence of man, the higher hemisphere of this being, having its lower formation on the earth. *Sat* is the pure, infinite undivided essence of our being, the divine counterpart of what we know as Matter; the essentiality of *sat* is *chit*, consciousness, the divine counterpart of what we know as life; the essentiality of *chit* is *ananda*, the eternal bliss of pure existence, the divine counterpart of the lower emotional and sensational being. The higher divine Sachchidananda is linked to the lower mortal existence by the supra-mental Knowledge-Will—the Vijnana of the Upanishads—which supports and secretly guides the confused activities of Mind, Life and Body, compelling and ensuring the right arrangement of the universe. This is called in the Veda the True, the Right, the Vast. It is ever at work in the earth-consciousness preparing it for the manifestation in it of its own Light so that the lower principles of earth—the dark figures and perverse vibrations of the Infinite Existence, Consciousness and Bliss—may be transformed into their original divine counterparts and man may attain his perfection in a godlike life as the crown and glory of his terrestrial evolution. This, in short, is the meaning of the play of the Supreme in creation. This is also what the Vedic Rishis mean when they invoke the higher divine powers to descend on earth and illumine and enrich earthly existence.

'Guard for us the finite and lavish the Infinite.'

The Upanishads do not reject life but accept it as a field for man to grow into an immortal existence. It is

here, *ihaiva*, in this mortal life and body that immortality must be won, here in this lower Brahman and by this embodied soul that the Higher must be known and possessed. The Upanishad declares: *Atra Brahma samasnute*, 'Even here one tastes God, in this human body.' And this mastery implies also a divine capacity for enjoyment, which, to be true, must be free from any attachment and desire that subject man to ego and its offshoots, discord and suffering. The ego therefore has to be transcended in order to realise the one Self in us and in all and thus possess the whole universe in one cosmic consciousness. There is no need then to possess physically. Neither have we to desire in order to enjoy, for we shall have then the infinite free delight inherent in all things. Says the Taittiriya:

> 'He who knows the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinity that is Brahman shall enjoy with all-wise Brahman all objects of desire.'

The Upanishads speak of *jyoti*, the light. It is the light of the Sun of Truth. It may also be the light of the Atman, the Self of the Transcendent Truth. The Brihadaranyaka uses a system of imagery to point out how man grows towards that Light, how the mere physical being becomes the illumined soul. The Sun is the primary light by which man lives and moves, the Sun who presides over our waking consciousness and has his seat in the eye symbolising sense-perception with which man begins his earthly journey. But this Sun sets leaving him to develop into the next stage when the Moon

rises bringing to him the light of intelligence. Then the Moon vanishes giving place to the Fire that kindles the light of ardent aspiration in the heart, through which man contacts the source of knowledge and inspiration. There is then the yet higher stage which is attained when the Fire, as the Upanishad says, is quieted and silenced, and man is then 'within the immediate vicinity of the Truth' and hears the Word that leads and guides. This also is not the end. Covered by a luminous clothing, the Word of revelation is not the ultimate Light. The last veil disappears when the consciousness rises into that utter silence and absolute calm where no other lights distract. Then is seen the Atman in its own body; 'we stand face to face with the source of all light, the self of the Light, the light of the Self. We are that Light, and we become that Light.'

The Upanishads reveal several *vidyas*, esoteric sciences, which show the integral character of Vedantic teachings. By pursuing these the seeker grows in knowledge. One of these—the science of the Mystic Honey—we have already alluded to. Another—a most significant one —is *Prana Vidya*. But Prana is not mere life-force but a Conscious Power. Says the Upanishad: 'What is Consciousness is life, and what is Life is Consciousness.' Prana is defined in many ways, one of which identifies it with Brahman. Prana vidya is also called Brahma vidya, since Prana is the living Breath of the Purusha, the mighty pulsation of the Creative Consciousness. This science aims at not the Beyond but at the growth

of the individual into the universal life. True existence is that Life which proceeds from the Self-existent who is luminously aware of Himself and is full of His own delight. When we attain to that Life we become immortal. Our present life is only 'hunger that is death.'

The Upanishads point to the heart as the Path to this immortal life. It is from the heart that the quest starts and grows and advances to find its fulfilment, because it is in its occult depths that the Divine dwells. It is this secret heart behind the external heart, the seat of emotions, that opens into the 'deepest delights', into the 'brightest luminosities'. The Yoga therefore begins with concentration which, as it deepens, brings to the seeker many good results but these cannot take him to the summit of his quest. Personal effort and self-discipline are needed to prepare him but there must also be something in the inner being, some inscrutable call and receptivity, without which the highest realisation is not possible. Says the Katha:

> 'The Self is not to be won by eloquent teaching, nor by brain power, nor by much learning....
> Not with the mind has man the power to get God, nor through speech, nor by the eye,' the Mundaka adding: 'nor can self-discipline reach Him, nor the most strenuous deeds'.

There is an 'inner intuition' which the seeker must develop within him in order to be 'chosen by the Being'; and to be chosen by Him is 'to win Him', because then, as the Katha says, 'to him this Self bares His body.' To put in the language of the Gita:

'They see the Self in the Self by the Self.'

This occult phenomenon is explained as the descent of the Divine Grace on the aspiring soul. There is no language in which to express this inner preparedness. Of course, initiation by an illumined teacher is in itself a most powerful influence that can work miracles; but the disciple must be worthy of it that it may act on him fully and effectively. This inner preparedness may be the intensity of an inner awakening or of the soul's aspiration and its readiness to receive the Light and assimilate it for its growth and evolution. But it is of a nature peculiar only to advanced seekers. Whatever may be the state of consciousness under which alone the Light dawns, the fact is there that all cannot have it. Yet the Upanishads repeatedly assert that perfectibility is the ultimate destiny of all.

The Upanishads give accounts of souls who for these occult reasons were vouchsafed the Knowledge by which they rose to a higher consciousness. The two most striking are furnished by Nachiketas and Satyakama. When in response to Yama's offering of all the treasures of the earth, Nachiketas said:

> 'I know of treasure that is not for ever; for not by things unstable shall one attain That One which is stable.'

Yama found that nothing short of the knowledge of Brahman would satisfy this determined seeker. He therefore revealed to Nachiketas the knowledge of Brahman and declared:

'Thou shalt know Him for the Bright Immortal, yea, for the Bright Immortal.'

'Thus did Nachiketas', says the Upanishad, 'with Death for his teacher win God-knowledge.'

Nachiketas represents the decisive attitude of a true spiritual aspirant,—a shining example of the intense spiritual seeking of the age. Another is Satyakama Jabala who having received initiation from his Guru went out to tend the Guru's four hundred cows saying to himself that he would not return until he could bring back a thousand. While he was wandering with the cows in the forest, the initiation to which he was true, opened to Satyakama an occult vision in which he saw and felt the omnipresence of God; everything appeared to him bathed in celestial light, and he perceived everywhere the Glory that is Brahman. Indeed, all nature bared its secret self to the high-aspiring soul of Satyakama, who by the Atman in him knew and saw the Atman in all. When this experience ripened into realisation, the cows had already become a thousand. He therefore returned to his teacher who greeted him: 'Friend, you shine like one who knows Brahman.' Thus it was his initiation from the Guru, grown by his receptivity and not any external learning, that gave Satyakama the supreme realisation,—an instance of how seekers were taught in that age.

The Brihadaranyaka and the Chhandogya contain a large number of names associated with spiritual activities of a unique kind that characterise the age, one of the most important in India's, nay, in the world's history. There

were kings and nobles, saints and sages, God-seeking souls including those of low and unknown parentage, who, stirred into a passionate search for the highest word of revealing experience, enthusiastically participated in these activities, records of which are found in those bigger and older Upanishads—invaluable documents of India's spiritual history. We read in these pages glowing and inspiring accounts of how Satyakama who knew not his father's name visioned Brahman everywhere and taught this knowledge to brahmanas and kings; how the cart-driver Raikva sitting under his cart instructed a king in the science of the Spirit; how the simple and poor Usasti while visiting a sacrificial ceremony revealed the secret of sacrifice to the performer; how the great Sage Yajnavalkya, militant for truth, took to himself with both hands, without attachment, worldly possessions and spiritual riches, and how at last he left all his wealth behind to wander forth as a homeless ascetic; how Krishna son of Devaki heard a single word of Rishi Ghora and knew at once the Eternal; how ideal kings ruled over vast kingdoms and yet were masters of the highest spiritual knowledge and how they revealed to brahmana seekers those esoteric sciences of which they were then exclusive possessors; how seekers would wander about the country from end to end in search of knowledge from any one who might carry in himself the thought of light and the word of revelation, how among them there would be often men of advanced knowledge who would take part in learned gatherings on their itinerary and give them the benefit of their experincee, learning and wisdom.

In this picture of India seeking through her higher mind to reach the summit of her spiritual quest, Yajnavalkya and Janaka come so often and almost always together, the one as the foremost Seer of the time and the other as the foremost of its Sage-Kings. Their coming together is a sign of the prevailing tendency of the age when kings and commoners were engaged in the same pursuit of the Truth. But it also means something else. In recognition of Yajnavalkya's unexampled mastery of spiritual knowledge Janaka made to him a gift of 1,000 cows each of whose horns was hung with five pieces of gold. This rich gift was not at all embrassing to the Rishi who promptly asked his pupils to take them home to his hermitage which was large enough to accommodate this huge cattle population,—a proof of the earthly prosperity of the hermitages of the time, a proof also of the general prosperity of the community life. On another occasion Janaka after receiving instruction from Yajnavalkya took leave of him with these words: 'I make an offering to you of myself and the whole of my kingdom for your service,' as a grateful recompense for the enlightenment he received from his Guru. The Rishi, then at the height of his greatness and fame, declined the offer with an easy abandon. Permeated by powerful consciousness of the Infinite Bliss of the Divine, giver and receiver knew no difference between 'haves' and 'have-nots', the infinite containing and surpassing all finite. And this was the Ideal for which the age stood.

There were women too among the seekers of the age.

On the eve of his taking to the life of a wandering ascetic, Yajnavalkya wanted to divide his property between his two wives one of whom, Maitreyi, in reply to her husband's proposal, made the famous pronouncement: 'What shall I do with that which will not bring me immortality?' Pleased with the reply, the great Sage initiated her into the ways of the Spirit and Maitreyi had her realisation of Brahman and became a spiritual teacher. Another famous woman seeker was Gargi whose persistent questionings evoked from Yajnavalkya the finest definition of the nature of Brahman, whereupon Gargi declared: 'None of us can win the debate against the great Sage. He is the master of spiritual knowledge.' And this was in an assembly at the court of King Janaka, which was, as such gatherings usually were, attended by women seekers also.

An idea of the regions hallowed by these activities may be had from their names found in the two earlier Upanishads. The Chhandogya seems to be more western in its origin, while the Brihadaranyaka more eastern. But as both of them mention many names of the same sages and seekers, it may be assumed that these regions were open to free intercourse between them so far as consultation on spiritual matters was concerned. King Janaka of Videha in the east often invited brahmana scholars of the western Kuru-Panchalas, 'then known for its abundance of learned men'. The north and the middle countries, particularly the land of the Kuru-Panchalas, were also associated with such activities in which figured with equal prominence the greatest forest university of India

of the time, Naimisharanya, famous for its sacrificial celebrations.

It is interesting that Vedic sacrifices afforded in most cases occasions for philosophical discussions that characterise the period. An Indian scholar holds that Vedantic influence extended eastward even beyond Videha. Some of the esoteric doctrines of the Chhandogya Upanishad, known only to the kings, had their origin in Videha but had fuller development in Anga (modern districts of Bhagalpur and Monghyr in Bihar) and Vanga (most parts of north and east Bengal). Thus there prevailed almost all over northern India an atmosphere of intense inner activity, ardent seeking, vigorous movements of souls, all bent on one pursuit—the knowledge of the Self. Mention of the east as a prominent centre of these activities signifies the eastward expansion of Aryan culture.

Ashramas of sages, homes of illumined teachers, cottages of humble God-knowers, courts of kings and sacrificial assemblies, pulsated with upheavings of the soul, the stir of spiritual enquiry, the ardour of passionate aspiration for the highest knowledge. The Upanishads are, as it were, the self-recordings or reflexes of these movements. Kings like Janaka would often invite to his court eminent sages in order to hear them compare notes, speak of new knowledge revealed by their intuitions. And such assemblies would often bc associated with sacrifices arranged by him and other kings of the time to celebrate special occasions when the attending sages and scholars were lavishly honoured with rich gifts. A remarkable fact

about these assemblies was that kings would never fail to take an active part in their deliberations, and many of the attending seekers came only to hear what solutions the seer-kings offered to particular problems of spiritual life.

Many of these kings—kshatriya teachers of spiritual wisdom—had brahmanas as their disciples. Yajnavalkya, when a seeker in his early days, sat at the feet of King Janaka who gave him new knowledge. So did Ajatashatru, king of Kashi, to brahmana Balaki, Pravahana Jaivali, king of the Panchalas, to Svetaketu and his father, King Asvapati Kaikeya to the five brahmanas who became his disciples. For their unexampled mastery of esoteric knowledge, some of these kings became brahmanas. King Janaka was called *brahmistha*, settled in divine knowledge. These are not stray cases. They point to the spiritual character of India's life and thought that prevailed in the splendid age of the Spirit, a picture of which is the Chhandogya Upanishad called by Sri Aurobindo 'the summary history of one of the greatest and most interesting ages of human thought.' This Upanishad starts with the Vedic syllable OM and narrates the endeavours made by the seekers to discover and realise its significance. Endeavours, yes, but of what a resolute nature, on what a vast scale, crowned by what colossal achievements!

Much interest attaches to the fact that many of these kings possessed the knowledge of such esoteric sciences as the secret meaning of Gayatri and Udgitha (two most important of the Vedic doctrines), the science of the

Five Fires, of the Uuniversal Self, of the oneness of Brahman and Self, etc., which were not known even to the great brahmana teachers of the age. This is one of the reasons why these teachers as well as seeking souls from far and near used to assemble at kings' courts which were open to all who were in quest of the truth.

But why was it that kings only should be in exclusive possession of those spiritual sciences? The Upanishads say that the body of secret knowledge called the Veda was revealed by God first to Brahma the Creator who gave it to Prajapati the Lord of Creation. From Prajapati it came to the gods and seers whom it made immortal. Shankaracharya quotes an age-old tradition which says that this ancient knowledge was lost with the dissolution of the last cycle of creation. Commanded by Brahma the seers did tapasya and recovered it. The Chhandogya adds that Prajapati gave this knowledge to Manu, the first traditional king of India, from whom it came to be the common possession of all. But how? Here the Gita completes the answer by declaring that Manu passed this Yoga on to his son, King Ikshvaku, who again transmitted it to the king who came after, and in this way from generation to generation the kings of India came to possess this Yoga (Knowledge) that they might preserve and desseminate it among those who were fit for it. That is why it is called *Raja vidya* or *Raja Yoga*, the knowledge or Yoga of the kings.

These facts may throw some light on the origin of the mystic doctrines in earlier civilisations and on the long

travail of man to peer into and possess them. The exact period of the beginning of the Age of the Mysteries has been suggested to be contemporaneous with those earlier cultures which are now lost. The Knowledge the kings of the Upanishads speak of has its roots in the Veda which belongs to the Age of the Mysteries in India. This Knowledge had also its dawns in other parts of the world where by its light secret truths were mastered by seekers. While in other countries the true significance of these inner teachings passed into obscurity and oblivion, in India it was saved from this fate by the immense effort of the age of the Upanishads which presented the Vedic truths as simplest expressions of intuition and experience, but yet in a form intellectually and philosophically justifiable. 'The result was a great upbuilding of an intellectual, aesthetic, ethical and social culture guided, uplifted and more and more penetrated and suffused by the saving power of spirituality.'

Thus did the Upanishads reinforce the spiritual tendency of the race by a fresh and vigorous search for the higher values, which flowered into those marvellous creations of the Indian mind, a free and natural interweaving of which stands as the many-hued texture of India's civilisation. In the West the early thinkers of Greece tried to keep alight the lamp of the mystic lore but their approach being more through the mind, the forms of culture that sprang from it became 'intellectual, rational, secular and even materialistic—creations of intellectualised ethics, aesthesis and reason.' In the East, particularly in

India culture took on its spiritual character because of her peculiar outlook on life from which it derived all its strength and vitality. India grew in the ways of the Spirit and yet lived her life fully. Her seers discovered the harmony between life and God, earth and heaven, and on the basis of that discovery formulated a scheme of life that was to prepare man for the ultimate goal of his existence.

There are scholars who hold that in the Upanishads can be traced the origin of the pessimistic and otherwordly ideas that, according to them, have influenced the development of India's thought and coloured her attitude to life. This view seems tinged with a bit of exaggeration. While a tendency to an exclusive pursuit of the spiritual Ideal is markedly observable in some of the later Upanishads, the earlier ones emphasise the values of life and the need of harmonising them with the great end of human existence envisaged by the Vedic and Vedantic Seers. In answer to the question 'Who is the greatest among the knowers of Brahman?' the Mundaka says: 'He who plays with the Self, rejoices in the Self and at the same time does all actions, is the best of the God-knowers.' This is the same as the Gita's ideal of the Yoga of Divine Works. The invocatory verse in the same Upanishad says: 'Let us fully enjoy and live our allotted days with firm limbs and strong body.' The Isha declares: 'Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years.' These are certainly not utterances of an otherworldly mind.

But the most significant are the worlds of the teacher in the Taittiriya which he addresses to his disciple on the termination of his studies. They are almost the same as the Convocation Addresses to students of modern universities. They ring with ardent notes of love and sympathy, envisage a broad outlook on life, a large vision of its ideal,—living in God while living in the world. The teacher commands the disciple to go forth into the world with truth and *dharma* as his ideals. Great as a householder, greater as a benefactor, he should repay the obligations of life, the obligations to gods and ancestors, to parents and guests, regarding all as gods. It should also be his duty to maintain the continuity of the line of his fathers. Pure in thought, pure in action, he should always behave as a knower of Brahman, as one who follows dharma. He should be bounteous in his gifts, the greatest of which is the gift of knowledge. He should therefore spread knowledge as widely as he can, teaching the sacred lore to others. 'This is the message. This is the advice. This is the knowledge. This is the command. Thus should you live and act in life.' There could be no nobler affirmation of the ideal of education, of the ideal of life. And it was this ideal for which the age stood in the history of India.

Knowledge of Brahman, it must be noted, was then the supreme end of education. To know Him, the Rishis declared, was to know all, to have integral knowledge. And was this not only a continuation of the Vedic teachings, a larger renewal of the dominant spirit of the

Age of the Mysteries in India? Mention may be made here of the subjects studied in this age which, according to the Chhandogya, covered the whole range of the Vedic literature, all the arts and sciences including music, military and medical knowledge.

The Upanishads are not merely 'a greater efflorescence of the great Vedic beginning.' They have been 'the acknowledged source of numerous profound philosophies and religions that flowed from it in India like her great rivers from their Himalayan cradle fertilising the mind and life of the people and kept its soul alive through the long procession of the centuries, constantly returned to for light, never failing to give fresh illumination, a fountain of inexhaustible life-giving waters.'

Mention has already been made that the *vidyas*—the esoteric sciences—of the Upanishads enshrine some fundamental scientific ideas, and that they are there not only in their seed-forms but often in their flowering. Vedantic mysticism comprises all this in a vastness and sublimity that human spirit has ever reached. Thus the Vedantic idea of Matter is a far deeper truth than what modern science is faintly suggesting today. 'Matter is massed energy' is undoubtedly a great discovery of science. But science has not so far been able to explain the why of it. It is only Vedanta which has done this by its categorical declaration that all is Brahman, all his creation is the creation of his energy. Sir John Woodroff, the eminent exponent of Indian Tantrik thought, says: 'My own conviction is that an examination of Indian Vedantic

doctrines shows that it is, in most important respects, in conformity with the most advanced scientific and philosophic thought of the West, and that where this is not so, it is science which will go to Vedanta and not the reverse.' Sir John Stewart-Wallace says: 'In Vedanta you have one of the greatest syntheses of modern thought. It is a synthesis of modern science, philosophy and religion.' To Sri Aurobindo Vedantic thought is like 'a many-mansioned city.'

There is no aspect of Indian thought which is not founded in Vedantic ideas. Every religious or philosophical school has some basis in the doctrines of the Upanishads. What, for instance, Rishi Ghora in the Chhandogya taught to Krishna became the essential principle of the teachings of the Gita. The quotation from the Rigveda at the end of Ghora's words shows that he revealed to Krishna the Vedic discipline of going beyond the Darkness and rising into the supreme Solar Light, that is to say, into the consciousness of the Immutable, the Ever Stable, the Source of Life. When one has this soul-ascension, everything one does, the daily occupations of life, all become part of the sacrifice, an offering to the Divine—its affirmation and expression. Such a condition brings about the right orientation of the being which consists in *tapas* (organised energy), generosity, rectitude and truthfulness. These are echoed in the Gita almost in the same terms. Even Buddhism derived many of its fundamental ideas from the Vedanta which it restated in fresh terms of intellectual definition and reasoning and carried in

that changed form over all Asia and westwards towards Europe.

There is evidence that Pythagoras came into contact with Indian scholars either in India or in Persia. To this is attributed the resemblance of his ideas to the Sankhyan and the Vedantic doctrines of India whose influence on Plato is also acknowledged by competent authorities. Emerson says that it was in Egypt and on his eastern pilgrimages that Plato imbibed the Indian (Vedantic) idea of one Deity in which all things exist. Plato's use of the simile of the charioteer and horses looks like a repetition of a similar simile of the Katha Upanishad. Inspiration from Vedanta is perceptible in the thought of the Gnostics and the Neo-Platonists. This is traced to the Indian scholars who were in Alexandria, Syria and Palestine at the time when these schools were developing there. The origin of the Gnostic idea of the plurality of heavens and spiritual worlds is traced to the Upanishads. Plotinus, the founder of the Neo-Platonist School, is said to have been imbued with Vedantic ideas, of which he had a deep knowledge, says Erdmann. He is believed to have got these ideas from his teacher Ammonius Saccas, the famous Alexandrian philosopher who had direct intercourse with Indian scholars. He had an appellation which is taken to be one for a yogi. Plotinus's ideas of the One Reality, the Ineffable Absolute, and of the world as an outflow of the Divine are entirely Vedantic. In speaking of the Reality Plotinus almost repeats the *neti, neti* (He is not this, not this) of the Upanishads.

Sufism restates Vedantic ideas in its own way. The inspired utterance 'I am the Truth' of the famous Sufi mystic Mansur who visited India, is only an echo of 'So'ham' (I am That) of the Upanishads. The Chinese Taoist idea of the Reality is almost the same as that of the Brahman of the Upanishads. Tao is the cosmic Self —the 'Atman' of the Upanishads—and the individual self is one with It. History assigns India's contact with China to the first century A.C., and Taoism is at least five hundred years older. But the Tantras speak of the existence of this contact in much earlier times.

German metaphysical thought is no less indebted to Vedanta whose influence is unmistakable in the writings of Schiller, Goethe, Herder, Schlegels, Humboldt. The Upanishads, says Schopenhauer, 'are the solace of my life, they will be the solace of my death. They are the fruit of the highest human knowledge and wisdom. They contain superhuman conceptions whose originators can hardly be regarded as mere men.' Deussen says that these conceptions are unequalled in India or perhaps anywhere else in the world. Wagner the master-musician tried to interpret Nordic mythology in the light of Vedanta. A German poet of the same name but of a later time has a poem entitled 'Tattvamasi', 'Thou art That', the famous declaration of the Upanishads.

Amiel's insistence on 'Brahmanising souls' is not a stray instance of Vedantic influence in France. About the middle of the seventeenth century the French traveller

Bernier carried to France a manuscript translation of the Upanishads in Persian by the famous Mughal Prince-philosopher Dara Shukoh. It was this translation from which the Upanishads were for the first time rendered into European languages. The recent utterances of the eminent French Indologist Prof. Renou indicate that Vedantic influence in France is much deeper and wider today. This influence started in America with Emerson's famous essays most of which are nothing but Vedanta in English garb. Thoreau was no less imbued with it. So was also Carlyle. But this is only a very bare outline of a vast subject.

That Vedanta today is a world-idea is testified by the recent publication *Vedanta for the Western World*, edited by Christopher Isherwood. In the growth of this idea in modern times the most outstanding contribution is that of Swami Vivekananda who proclaimed to the world the message of Vedanta and conquered the hearts of millions of his country with the result that the spiritual sons of India are now spread over the entire globe. 'Go back to your Upanishads, the shining, the strengthening, the bright philosophy' was the call upon his countrymen of this mighty awakener of souls. The study of the truth and nature of the Upanishads, as dealt with here, is inspired by the writings of Sri Aurobindo in whose thought shines the light of Vedanta as he has re-visioned and re-revealed it for the illumination of man who by that light will go beyond the Darkness of Ignorance to the Solar Glory, the liberating knowledge of the Truth.

The world-wide influence of Vedantic ideas has a significance for the future of the human race. The Upanishads again and again emphasise that the inmost truth of man is his divinity and his life is given him that he may grow into it and become perfect. The reaffirmation today of this central teaching of the Upanishads by the Masters of the race is the sign that the hour is come when man must prepare himself for a larger life in the Spirit. The call of Vedanta, 'Arise, awake, stop not till the goal is reached', is the call of India's soul echoing down the ages in the ear of the present and the future, echoing more insistently now as the future has to be greater than the past. Schopenhauer was indeed prophetic when he said: 'The Upanishads will bring about a revolution in thought more extensive and more powerful than that which was witnessed by the Renaissance of Greek literature.'

And this is among the reasons why one cannot say that the curtain was rung down over the Age of the Spirit indicating its close after the Vedantic Seers had made known the immortal truths about the essential divinity of man. The Upanishads themselves are the record of spiritual experiences not of a particular period but of a long travel of seeking which never stopped but took new paths, new forms in later ages when conditions of life changed into more definite patterns, social, political and cultural, that took shape in those external structures devised and erected for the proper organisation of India's collective existence.

And these outer forms of her life and culture have always reflected the inherent spiritual tendency of the Indian mind. In fact, there has never been any movement in India but was inspired by a spiritual thought. The heavenward adventures of the Vedic and Vedantic Mystics are the earliest and the most glorious on record. In their vision of the Light was born the soul of India, its inward urge and impulsion which expressed itself in all her strivings down the ages to enrich and exalt her life and culture more and more with her gains in the world of the Spirit. Historically assessed, they are the rich legacy of the ancient Fathers of the race, the first to see and reveal the Dawn of this Light. It is this Light that has ever been the secret force in India's evolution. While it made her 'dawn's victorious opening' in the Past when the rest of the world was asleep in ignorance, it sustained the life-line of her civilisation through her long and chequered history, and motived all her great movements which gave her soul and being the experiences they needed to grow in readiness for the greater Future —a Future big with the destiny of the entire world.

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THE SOCIAL BASIS OF INDIA'S EVOLUTION[1]

IN a deeper and truer sense, the culture of India is a way of life, intended to prepare man for a greater life. Both individual and collectivity seek to achieve that aim through this culture. But each depends on the other for its growth, the latter on the former more than the former on the latter. Therefore in the social orders and institutions every facility was given for man to develop and grow in readiness for the ultimate end of life. The collectivity also took effective forms in order that they might conduce to the progress of the individual. And this collectivity too had its ultimate end in the realisation of a perfect Society, a perfect State. But neither of them could be a reality until the individuals comprising them attained their perfection. This is the intrinsic truth of man's social existence which is destined to be 'the Lila of the greater self in humanity, a conscious communal soul and body of Virat, the universal Spirit.' That is why the spiritual mind of India regarded people in the mass as a life-body of Brahman in the *samasti*, the collectivity, the collective Narayana, even as it

[1] Mainly based on Sri Aurobindo's writings.

regarded the individual as Brahman in the *vyasti*, the separate Jiva, the individual Narayana.

The story of India's political development begins with the smaller territorial units that originated in her dim past in the physical setting of the country,—so important to its history. These early forms were created by nature—by rivers, hills and forests. Each of these developed into its own political and social existence, its own distinctive ways of life, its own customs and manners, its own way of expressing its creative soul, but all owing allegiance to, and inpired by, the common ideals of the country. Much of the progress of these units was due to the comparative compactness of the regions and to the freedom they always had to follow their own line of development,—a freedom which was largely Nature's gift to them. It is the marvellous achievements of these units in the Heroic Age that formed the bedrock of India's vast and unique civilisation, some aspects of which are being studied here as essential factors in the evolution of India.

The political character of these territories was that they were autonomous bodies, ready when necessary to acknowledge a paramount authority, a *chakravarti-raja*, who, in strict terms of Indian polity, is the servant of the people, and the preserver of the Dharma. Monarchy was, no doubt, an important political institution, but centralisation was not the aim. In all Indian social and political theories it is the individual who is regarded as the principal factor, because it is he who has the initiative and can take

the lead as pioneer and precursor. So in order that he may grow and develop to the best of his potentialities, and contribute to the enrichment of the cultural life of the country, freedom for him naturally becomes a thing of the first importance. This is how in ancient India the individual character of the smaller political units—the *janapadas*—as well as that of every single citizen played its part in pushing forward the general progress of the country. Each such group or unit was a free participant in the opulent life of the large whole of India, having spiritual, cultural and political ideals which were fundamentally the same for all the constituent groups. The central State in India emerged out of this larger collective life both as a necessity and as a natural development. The administration of this State was strengthened, among other factors, by representative assemblies for the deliberation of matters of common concern to the whole empire. And its growth was but a spontaneous outcome of the governing principle of the race: unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

The beginnings of the State in India may be traced to the Vedic times when the unit of corporate existence starting with the family (*griha or kula*) went on enlarging itself through the village (*grama*), the clan (*vis*), the people (*jana*) till it embraced the whole country (*rashtra*). More definitive forms emerged with the growth and expansion of the State idea, as a result of which there arose the *janapada*, a larger region inhabited by a community, which gradually developed into a *janapadarajya*, a terri-

torial State and then into *mahajanapadarajya*, a larger territorial state, with the central authority vested either in a king or in a popular assembly, the *sabha* and the *samiti* of the Vedic age, or both, the latter always, like the Dharma in later times, limiting the powers and prerogatives of the former. It was this system which formed the framework and the mainspring of the mechanism of the State that evolved later in ancient India. And what is remarkable about it is that notwithstanding the changes made at different epochs in the shape and character of these political structures, the prototype of the smaller unit in the form of villages ever remained the constant and vital factor as the foundation for their growth and progress, a proof of the individualistic bent of India's political being. Will Durant, the eminent American thinker and historian, holds that the village community of ancient India is the origin of all forms of self-government and democracy that have ever been evolved in various other parts of the world. Sir Charles Metcalfe, in his evidence before a Parliamentary Committee in 1832, stated that these little village republics of India which saved her culture and soul from the disintegrating forces of political revolution retained their full municipal vigour even up to the eighteenth century until they were swept away by the onrush of British imperialism and overcentralised administration.

If monarchy was the general order of the ancient Indian political system it existed or could exist only by its recognition and acceptance of a greater sovereign than the

king—'the Dharma the religious, ethical, social, political, juridic and customary law organically governing the life of the people. This impersonal authority was considered sacred and eternal in its spirit and the totality of its body, always characteristically the same, the changes organically and spontaneously brought about in its actual form by the evolution of the society being constantly incorporated in it, regional, family and other customs forming a sort of attendant and subordinate body capable of change only from within,—and with the Dharma no secular authority had any right of autocratic interference. ...The king was only the guardian, executor and servant of the Dharma, charged to see to its observance and to prevent offences, serious irregularities and breaches. He himself was bound the first to obey it and observe the rigorous rule it laid on his personal life and action and on the province, powers and duties of his regal authority and office.'[1]

But the king was not always the ruler of the country. From very early times India knew what people's government was. The existence of quite a number of republics and oligarchies points to the democratic bent of the Indian mind for the growth of which ample opportunities were provided by the freedom every individual had to follow his own particular line of self-development according to his capacity and *swadharma* (the self-law of the being). And this freedom was ensured to him by the social

1 Sri Aurobindo: *The Foundation of Indian Culture*, pp.372-73

organisation evolved to promote the well-being of the individual as well as the collectivity. Society in ancient India had thus a greater influence over its constituents than the State over its citizens. In fact, it was their allegiance to the ideal of Dharma that united the people more than the political boundaries of the regions they inhabited. How this social theory translated itself into a cohesive force in the collective life of ancient India sustaining her through millenniums should be studied for a correct perspective of India's evolution in history.

The essential idea in India's social thinking centres round the importance of the individual or the smaller unit in the development of the larger collective life. The other feature that distinguishes it is its system of gradation and hierarchy in the social and political order of corporate existence. Individuals are not everyone of them the same. They belong by nature to four fundamental types common to any human collectivity. The law-makers of ancient India had this grasp of the psychological make-up of man in accordance with which they subdivided society into interdependent and co-operative groups for the general upkeep and progress of society as a whole. At the base was the shudra, the undeveloped man, not yet fit for the next higher degree of the scale, not having any marked intellect or creative power, capable only of unskilled labour and menial service; next higher in the scale is the vaishya, the economic man, producer and wealth-getter, the merchant, the artisan and the cultivator: the kshatriya is the next higher type, the man of power

and action, ruler, warrior, leader, administrator: the highest type is the brahman, the man of learning and thought and knowledge.

What made this system so effective and enduring was its ordered gradation of man in conformity with his nature and capacity, the psychological ideas that governed, it, the ethical and spiritual contents that the thinkers and builders of society poured into those forms with a view to their natural efflorescence. Indeed, their constant aim was to guide man so that he might grow intellectually, morally and spiritually. And society, as a system of relations, was to them the necessary field for this growth. In his community-life man must be provided with suitable opportunities to fulfil these relations and serve society and in return derive from it the necessary help for his own development which, whatever his caste, was to prepare him for the supreme illumination of his consciousness, the highest ideal of brahmanhood, to which man is destined in his terrestrial evolution.

The place of man in his social life was determined by his capacity, temperament and nature. Birth was the first test, heredity also counted. But birth was not the sole determinant of caste. The powers of mind, heart and soul were other determinants. Thus, there were kshatriya kings who excelled in spiritual knowledge, and even wrote a number of the Upanishads. Visvamitra's attaining Brahmanhood is certainly not a solitary instance. Besides, the system was elastic and adaptable, knowing no rigidity in its working for many centuries after its introduction

in the Vedic age. Satyakama's example shows how broad and liberal it was in the age of the Upanishads. The later ages of the Epics supply abundant evidences of its elasticity. Marriages of princes and men of birth and distinction with women of an inferior status were frequent and their issues held respectable position in society. Some were leaders and heroic souls. Vashishta, Narada, Vyasa, Kripa, Drona, Karna and many others of questionable parentage were raised to the position of a brahman or a kshatriya for their superior learning or valour. All this was in accord with the teaching of the Gita which says that it is not one's birth but one's action and spiritual attainment that determine his *varna* (caste). It is this idea that guided the social development of India in the past, and it proved its worth as a cohesive force in the collective life for many centuries.

Then there are the four aims of life for whose harmonious pursuit and fulfilment the social organisation provided congenial opportunities. The first is *kama*, desire and enjoyment; the second, *artha*, material and economic resources, the third, *dharma*, the ethical conduct and right law of the individual and social life; and lastly, *moksha*, spiritual liberation. Here also the ancient Indian social thinkers showed their deep insight into human nature when they discovered these fundamental motives of life and prescribed legitimate means for their fulfilment, stage by stage, up to the highest which prepares for the ultimate liberation from darkness into light. The highest aim, however, has always been an ascent and liberation into

higher and higher states in the world of the Spirit, which have to be approached through a disciplined fruition of the essential inclinations of man. Moksha is here the crown of all endeavours as Brahmanhood is the crown of the caste-order.

The four ashramas—stages of life—were another logical order providing for the harmonious development, elevation and progress of the body, mind, life and soul of man. The four natural periods into which life was divided were each a stage through which the cultural idea of living was meant to be worked out. The first period was of *brahmacharya*, when man was the student; the second was of *garhastha*, when he was the householder; the third, of *vanaprastha*, when he was the recluse or forest-dweller; and the last was that of *parivrajaka*, when he was the supersocial man.

In the sylvan retreats of the teachers who were often sages or realised souls, the student used to have his training in various arts and sciences, in the four aims of life, all founded in the Vedic formulae of spiritual knowledge. Here the real objective was an inner preparation of character and knowledge. In later days educational activities shifted to cities where more importance was given to instruction and training of intelligence. In the second stage the householder made a practical use of the knowledge and sought to fulfil the first three motives of life, which done, he would be ready for the third stage when he would retire to the forest in quest of the truth of the Spirit. Free from any social obligations he would

live his days in devoted pursuit of the supreme object of life, giving his knowledge to the young whom he would gather round him for its preservation. It was under these great teachers that the youthful seekers of ancient India had their training in the higher values of life. In the last stage, he would break every remaining tie and wander over the world, all alone, with nothing but the Universal Spirit to commune with, making his soul ready for eternity. This stage was not binding on all; because few could reach it. The majority never went beyond the first two stages, a fair number came up to the forest stage. But the scheme was intended to serve and promote an integral growth and development of human faculties towards their consummation in the Spirit. Here also all the stages converge towards the last and the highest.

This order and gradation at the base of India's social structure has ever been one of the most potent forces in her corporate life which remained for more than four thousand years a source of strength and vitality to the whole race, giving it whatever security it needed for peace and progress. This is indeed an outstanding phenomenon for all time, certainly without a parallel in the whole history of mankind, this social organism so enduring in its vitality, so efficient in its working, so rich in its results. And all this because it was based on principles fundamental to the nature of man, and, in particular, to the peculiar genius of the people; self-acting from within, it hardly needed much of an external authority for control. Indian culture is a natural growth of this excellent

social idea in which State and Society existed as components of the common polity, co-operating for the all-round well-being of its constituent individuals and of the composite whole. Their main concern was to see that every individual had the fullest possible scope for developing and utilising his potentialities.

The principle that governed the working out of this idea was the Dharma, alike of the king or the ruler and of the citizen or the individual. The Dharma is the ideal rule of living as expounded by the ancient law-makers, which was enjoined as much upon the king, but with greater strictness because of his greater responsibility, as upon the people, whose highest well-being and progress lay in the faithful discharge of the prescribed obligations of life. All through those glorious centuries of India's history when she rose to splendid heights in every sphere of her social, cultural and political life it was this Dharma that functioned as the shaping and sustaining force in the collective life of the race, and there were in every epoch monarchs and leaders who were keenly conscious of their position as the responsible keepers of the Dharma.

What was this Dharma? It was neither creed nor cult, as popularised by western scholars. Dharma is a religious law of action demanded by the deepest law of our nature. It is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the right law of functioning of our life in all its parts. It is fixed in its essence, but develops in the consciousness of man and evolves through stages. Indeed, there are gradations of spiritual and ethical ascension in the search for the highest law of

our nature. All men cannot follow in all things one common and invariable rule. Each type of nature must therefore have its own rule for its perfection. At the same time there must be some wise and understandable standard of perfection and rule of life by following which, in due relation to his own nature, the individual may rise towards the greater law and the deeper truth of his being, which is universal. 'This was the Dharma, special for the special person, stage of development, pursuit of life or individual field of action, but universal too in the broad lines which all ought to pursue.'

When the individual performs his duties to God, to his family, country, and the State in the right spirit and to the best of his ability, he may be said to have lived the true ideal of his life: when the king provides the citizen with the best possible opportunities for his growth and development and looks to the observance of the Dharma by the citizens, he may be said to have followed his own Dharma. The individual, however, had, implicit in his Dharma, an even greater ideal to realise. It was to strive for the expansion of his mind, heart and soul: of the mind through the pursuit of culture; of heart through the cultivation of kindness, philanthropy and sympathy; of the soul through the practice, in proportion to his inner capacity, of the disciplines whose psychological processes and results are tested and verified ones and are envisaged in the *sadhanas* of the various schools of spiritual thought.

These ideals lost much of their pristine force and greatness and became merely intellectual, cut off from a living

faith in them, when Indian civilisation grew in richness and complexity and the old straightness and simplicity and the undefiled intuitions of the old days gave place to the complicated maze of mind-made interpretations and reasoning. Society was anchored to fixed ideas of religion. Birth, and not conduct and capacity began to determine man's position in society. The whole social system turned rigid, ceased to be healthy and vigorous, and when in the trail of foreign incursions, society was threatened, its leaders with a view to preserving its purity, as they then conceived it, closely circumscribed and tightened it to the stiffness of a cast-iron frame. The soundest artery of life-giving blood to the race began to atrophy and sap it. Yet, thanks to the broader spirit at work in the country, it still showed its assimilative power by absorbing large numbers of foreigners, Greeks, Sakas and Hunas. But much more remarkable is the fact that, despite all drawbacks, India was able to achieve the great things for which she stands famous in history. How? The only answer is, by the dynamism of her innate spirituality.

It is then the spiritual aim of Indian culture that distinguishes it and invests it with its unique character. And it is in the practice of religion that this aim is more marked and immediate. The mind of India seems to have taken its first religious turn at almost the very dawn of her history. To her ancient seers came the vision of the One Infinite who is beyond all mental and physical appearances and yet who is immanent in them as soul,

nature and life; the eternal transcendent Divinity is universally present. The thought of India has always regarded life as a movement of the Eternal in time, of the Universal in the individual, of the Infinite in the finite, of the Divine in man. Her seers declared that man can become not only conscious of the Eternal and the Infinite, but can live in the power of that Consciousness and universalise, spiritualise, divinise himself by that Force. They held that the aim of man's life was to grow by an inner and outer experience till he could live in God, realise his Spirit, become divine in knowledge, in will and in the joy of being.

This is the deeper intention, the dominant motive of all the creative strivings of India, the truth, more markedly, of all her religious endeavours, the one universal credo of Indian religion. This was the Ideal to be sought by all according to the degree of their capacity, to be lived, to be made the governing idea of thought, life and action. Its origin traces back to the Rigveda which speaks of the One Infinite as *Satyam*, *Ritam*, *Vrihat*, the True, the Right, the Vast.

The concept of the Dharma derives its basic implication from the *Ritam* of the Rigveda which means that the Vast Truth is attainable by man only when he follows the right way that connects the individual soul with its godhead. And as souls have each a particular line of evolution, the way varies from individual to individual. Every soul has its own Dharma by which to seek union with a particular aspect of the Vast,—for that is the

purpose of its embodied existence. This is how the inner development of man proceeds. The being—the soul—fulfils itself in becoming. Man is given his life that he may achieve this secret aim of his evolution. And his dharma is his guide to his goal.

The manifestation of the One is His self-deployment, His Lila, in the Many. The One only exists, sages call it by various names. Many is therefore the multi-aspected form of the One. The dharma of the collectivity is to strive for a perfect form, as the dharma of the individual is to strive for his own perfection. It is a continuous growth of the Spirit in man towards the establishment on earth of its unveiled light which would in time new-make man into truth-conscious individuals forming the perfect society of the future.

Spirituality is indeed the keynote of the Indian mind. 'The master-idea', says Sri Aurobindo, 'that has governed the life, culture, social ideas of the Indian people has been the seeking of man for his true spiritual self and the use of life as a frame and means for that discovery and for man's ascent from the ignorant and natural into the spiritual existence.' To this great endeavour Indians were first impelled when on the vision of the Vedic Seers there dawned the creative Light of the Supreme pointing to its future manifestation on earth.

That glorious age of the Spirit marked the birth of India's soul. Born in the light that knows no fading, it remained ever luminous, ever turned towards God. It was her intuition in this age that grew as advanced souls

rose into the unwalled heavens of the Vast. The age[1] that followed saw the rules of the Dharma formulated to help the mind of India develop on the lines of her inborn spirituality, keeping in view the Ancient Vision that has always acted as the guiding-star of the race towards its high destiny in the future. That heroic period of India's evolution reached its pinnacle when Sri Krishna revealed to the chosen representative of the Aryan race the secret meaning of the Dharma, declaring the Dharma of the race as greater than the dharma of the *kula* or family. Indeed Dharma figures as the very centre and soul of everything that is said and done in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the latter promulgating for the first time the spiritual background of India's national consciousness—a reaffirmation of the spiritual Ideal of the nation to realise which it has ever been its sole dharma.

The sweeping flood of Buddhism was the next swell of India's soul, in which the Dharma in other terms played its part. 'The King of kings is Dharma,' said the Buddha echoing almost a similar utterance in the Atharvaveda. The pursuit of this ideal gave the country a further round of experiences to pass through on the way to its future fulfilment. This invigoration of the mind expressed itself in the formulation of rules of conduct on which Buddhism was largely based. The ethical ideas,

[1] For some details about the cultural and political endeavours of India in this and subsequent epochs studied from their psychological bearing on India's historical evolution, see the first two chapters of the writer's book *The Vision of India*.

so developed, being constructions of the mind, were not long to be rigid enough to obstruct the free flow of the spiritual fervour of India's soul along the destined line of her evolution.

The next form it took was the propagation, all over the land, of the Puranas and the Tantras giving rise to Vaishnavism and Tantrikism—those fine flowerings of Indian spirituality to which the contribution of the Mahayana School of Buddhism, inspired by the Yoga and the Bhakti cult of the Bhagavat Gita, was not inconsiderable. The harmonious activation of the mind, heart and soul of India was behind the many-sided cultural endeavours of this period resulting in those marvellous creations which for their classical excellence are India's glory for all time. In this art, as in all truly Indian art, shines the light of heaven. An experience of the things of life was what India had in this period.

India's evolution was now to start on a new cycle and enter upon a new age of the Spirit which was to break out of the gains and experiences of the previous ages into a fresh resurgence of her soul. But the lead given did not take the country far. Whatever the progress, it quickened the spiritual consciousness of the race and its creative genius, never extinct, brightened up in beautiful forms of art and literature. The call of the Spirit stirred into being a galaxy of saints and mystics, both in the North and in the South, that illumine the otherwise dark pages of India's medieval history.

The modern age dawned in India with the pretty violent impact of the West upon what degenerated into an inert and decadent life. A new force began to raise its head and work in the heart and mind of an ancient people. This force—the force of Reason—broke through all incrustations and turned inward to look for whatever hidden truth there might be in the inner being of the race. This led to the finding of India's soul. The result was a splendid awakening with vigorous movements, intrinsically spiritual in origin and inspiration.

Indeed in every epoch of Indian history this upsurge of the Spirit in man, his vision of its light, has given a tremendous impetus to cultural, social and political endeavours whose fruits are among the imperishable achievements of India. Swami Vivekananda said that every movement in India had behind it a new stir of her soul. That is why all her thought, poetry, art, polity, even material life, were luminous with the light of the Spirit, with the glow of an ardent aspiration of the soul.

And a spirituality that inspired and motived all these creations of the human mind could not certainly be a world-negating doctrine. It was a dynamic force all through the great epochs of Indian history. And there are enough signs of its existence in the Indian mind even today, although, for various untoward conditions, its expression is not as clear as it could have been, had India been more cautious in her imitation or assimilation of extraneous ideas and ideals. Yet the efforts of India's soul down the ages are an indication and a promise of

the far greater glory that is waiting to burst upon her and the world around.

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This is that great hour of the world when the Master-Seer comes, the hour when man must be ready for a new saltus in his evolution, for a new heaven on earth, or rather, the new heaven into which the earth will be reborn with the descent into it of the Light seen and revealed by the Master. This is going to be the crowning fulfilment of the Ancient Dawn, of the great Yesterday in a yet greater Tomorrow.

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