

---

# Decoding the Misconceptions about the Vedas: Reassessing European Scholarship and Re-evaluating Interpretive Frameworks

Aditya Dev<sup>1</sup>, Vishvendra S. Poonia<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali

<sup>2</sup>Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee

Email: adityadev.iisermohali@gmail.com, vishvendra@ece.iitr.ac.in

---

April 9, 2023

ॐ सह नावतु |  
सह नौ भुनक्तु |  
सह वीर्यं करवावहै |  
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

The study of Vedas has been an ongoing endeavor for centuries with various interpretations made to understand their essence. A commentary by Sri Aurobindo on Rigveda discussed in his book 'The Secret of the Veda' is considered to provide a deeper understanding of the teachings of the Vedas in a contemporary context, as it removes difficulties posed by the ancient form of Sanskrit and interpretations done over different times and contexts. This recomprehension of the Vedas aims to change the perception of the Vedas from being a collection of nonsensical hymns to a more insightful and profound collection of teachings, drawing upon the works of modern scholars of Sanskrit. In this text, we aim to encapsulate the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo in a chapter form so that it becomes accessible to the general audience.

## 1 Introduction

Sri Aurobindo was a prominent philosopher and spiritual figure in India who lived from 1872 to 1950.

He saw the Vedas as a collection of mystical hymns and rituals and a source of deep spiritual knowledge and insight. He believed that the Vedas contained a highly evolved and sophisticated system of 'intuitive' insights that went beyond the external rituals and ceremonies and touched upon the inner essence of human existence and the ultimate nature of reality. In his view, the Vedas were not simply a primitive and outdated collection of beliefs, but rather a timeless source of wisdom relevant to the people of all ages and cultures. He saw the Vedas as expressing a spiritual truth that was universal and eternal, transcending the limitations of time, culture, and language. Aurobindo specially emphasized the integral nature of Vedic knowledge in that it integrated life's physical, mental, and spiritual aspects. He saw the Vedic view of life as encompassing not only the individual but also the entire cosmos and as providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the ultimate purpose and destiny of human existence.

He had deep insights on the philology of Sanskrit and greatly appreciated ancient India's linguistic and cultural heritage. He believed that a thorough study of Sanskrit was essential for a complete understanding of Indian philosophy and spirituality. In his view, Sanskrit was not just a language, but a medium of spiritual expression and a key to unlocking the deeper truths contained within the ancient Indian scriptures.

He saw Sanskrit as an integral part of the Vedic tradition and a means for accessing the knowledge and wisdom contained within the Vedas. Aurobindo was critical of the British colonial and European approach to Sanskrit, which he saw as being limited and reductionist. He argued that the European view of Sanskrit was limited to a narrow focus on its grammar and vocabulary and ignored its rich spiritual and philosophical dimensions. He believed that a deeper understanding of Sanskrit could contribute to a better understanding of the Indian spiritual tradition and help revitalize Indian cultural and spiritual heritage and encouraged a revival of Sanskrit study and saw it as an essential means for accessing the more profound truths contained within Vedas.

Āchārya Sāyana was a 14th-century Indian scholar and commentator on the Vedas. His most distinguished work is his commentary on Vedas – “Vedārtha Prakāsha”, translated as “the meaning of the Vedas made manifest”. Sāyana’s commentary explains the meaning and significance of the hymns and rituals contained within Vedas. It has been widely used as a reference work by scholars and students of Hinduism for millennia. Sāyana’s commentary is known for its clarity and precision and is considered one of the most influential works on the Vedas. However, despite its popularity, Sāyana’s interpretation of the Vedas has been the subject of much criticism and debate, especially in recent times. One of the key criticisms of Sāyana’s work is that he approached the Vedas from a purely ritualistic and naturalist perspectives and ignored their deeper spiritual and philosophical significance. Sāyana’s commentary was primarily based on the linguistic analysis of the Sanskrit text and focused on the meaning of individual words and phrases rather than on the underlying spiritual truth of the hymns. This also reflects in the European translations based mainly on Sāyana’s work. Aurobindo was a critic of Sāyana’s interpretation of the Vedas. Aurobindo argued that Sāyana’s approach, albeit highly erudite and detailed, was limited and narrow and failed to capture the deeper spiritual and philosophical significance of the Vedas. He believed that Sāyana’s interpretation was overly focused on the external form of the Vedas and ignored their inner essence and spiritual import.

Aurobindo believed that one could only understand the deeper truth of the Vedas through a ‘spiritual’ approach that went beyond the linguistic and grammatical analysis of the text. He argued that the

true meaning of the Vedas could only be apprehended through intuition, contemplation, and spiritual realization and that this deeper understanding was essential for a complete and authentic interpretation of the Vedas.

## 2 An Overview of the Vedas

In the following section, we give an overview of the Rigveda to get an idea of the textual structure of the Vedas. The Rigveda is a collection of hymns composed by multiple Rishis. Despite the different personalities and styles of these Rishis, their hymns express a unified spiritual experience and use a common language. Within a single hymn, there may be variations in style and complexity of thought, but this does not detract from the unity of spiritual experience expressed in the Rigveda. This unity is further emphasized by the fact that the hymns were not written by a single author or group of authors, but rather were compiled over a period of several centuries by different sages and poets. The Rigveda thus represents the collective spiritual heritage of ancient India.

The arrangement of the hymns in the Rigveda is also noteworthy. Six of the mandalas are dedicated to the hymns of a single rishi or family of rishis. For example, the second Mandala is devoted chiefly to the hymns of Rishi Gritsamada, the third and seventh to Vishwāmītra and Vasishtha respectively, the fourth to Vāmdeva and the sixth to Bhāradwāja. The hymns of the house of Atri are located in the fifth mandala. The division of the Rigveda into ten Mandalas is based on the number of hymns contained in each book, with the first and tenth Mandalas having the largest number of hymns. Each Mandala is further divided into several sections called Anuvākas that contain a varying number of hymns [1].

Within each mandala, the hymns are arranged in a specific order. The suktas addressed to Agni are collected first, followed by those addressed to Indra. Invocations of other gods, such as Brihaspati, Surya, Ribhus, and Usha are placed at the end of each Mandala. The entire ninth book is dedicated entirely to the god Soma. The first, eighth, and tenth Mandalas are collections of Suktas by various Rishis. However, the hymns of each rishi are generally grouped together according to their deities, starting with Agni, followed by Indra, and then the other gods. For example, the first Mandala opens with ten hymns by Madhuchchandas, the son of Vishwamitra, and an

eleventh attributed to Jetri, the son of Madhuchhandas. This last hymn is essentially the same as the ten preceding hymns, and they all can be taken together as a single block of hymns.

### 3 The ‘Psychological Theory’ of Sri Aurobindo

Aurobindo argues that the essence of the Veda is integrated to the language of the Veda itself i.e. clear clues are laid out in the way the hymns are written. Otherwise, we run into the risk of creating a system based on our own tastes and imaginings as opposed to uncovering the true intent of the figures chosen by the Rishis. Therefore, before constructing a hypothesis from the Veda, it is essential to clearly identify the symbols and figures used in the language and gain an understanding of their true meaning and essence.

Aside from unraveling what the figures and symbols mean, our first task should be to find out if the language of the hymns has enough psychological ideas for us to think that the Vedas must mean more than just what it says on the surface. As a result, based on the internal evidence of the Suktas, we must determine the meaning of each image and symbol as well as the proper psychological role for each Devatā. Each of the fixed phrases of the Veda must have a solid, not a shifting, sense that is supported by philological justification<sup>1</sup> and fits smoothly into the context wherever it appears.

If, after a thorough analysis, it turns out that the explanations we have come up with clear up parts that were previously unclear and make connections where there was once confusion, a translation of the hymns can be used to show how these interpretations fit naturally and seamlessly into any context. If the hymns convey an overall sense that is clear and interconnected and the subsequent verses demonstrate a logical progression of related concepts, then this further supports the validity of our interpretations.

For example, Sāyana gives different meanings to the words *dhī*, *ṛtam* etc. in the Vedas. However, his interpretations are not consistent and may be vague at times. For example, *ṛtam* is translated by Sāyana as the “truth”, “sacrifice”, and “water”, depending on the context. On the contrary, a psychological interpretation consistently gives *ṛtam* the meaning of

truth. Similarly, Sāyana translates *dhī* as “thought”, “prayer”, “action”, and “food” but a psychological interpretation consistently gives *dhī* the meaning of “thought” or “understanding”. Furthermore, Sāyana ignores the fine nuances and distinctions between words and assigns them ambiguous meanings. For instance, he translates words that convey ideas of mental activity as simply “intelligent” and reduces words that suggest various ideas of force to the broad idea of strength. However, Sri Aurobindo believes that it is essential to preserve the precise associations and meanings of different words, regardless of how closely related they may be in their broad sense. He argues that the Vedic Rishis, like other poetic masters, carefully selected and used words with their intended meanings in verbal combinations.

Aurobindo discovered that if he adhered to certain rules, he could get a cogent meaning to a considerable number of verses and even whole sections of the Veda without altering their simple, direct, and natural meanings. This led to a profound transformation of the Vedas, as many hymns were suddenly rendered clear, revealing new insights. This pattern was observed frequently across the majority of hymns, with instances of clarity emerging in both small clusters and extended sections.

There are some words in the Vedas that have a clear psychological meaning, but there are also many others that can have both an external, material meaning and an internal, psychological meaning, depending on how we understand the general meaning of the Vedas. For example, words like *rāye*, *rayi*, *rādhas*, *ratna* etc. can refer to either material wealth or internal happiness, which applies equally to the subjective and objective worlds. Similarly, words like *dhana*, *vāja*, and *posā* may refer to external wealth, or to all possessions, both internal and external, and their abundance in an individual’s life. Sri Aurobindo argues that even words like *rāye*, which in the Upanishads refers to spiritual happiness, could also bear that same meaning in the original text of the Vedas. By adopting this interpretative approach to the Vedas, we can gain even deeper spiritual insights from the ancient hymns.

### 4 Philological Method of Veda

The interpretation of the Vedas by Sāyana and later European scholars mostly highlights the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas, while the later seem to dis-

<sup>1</sup>Philological Method of interpreting vedas shall be discussed in Section 4

tort the meaning as well. Sri Aurobindo digs deep into the philology of ancient Sanskrit to decode the real essence of the Veda, and thus comes up with ‘psychological’ interpretation. There are two particular difficulties in the psychological interpretation that only a compelling philological justification can resolve. These are: i) a number of fixed technical terms in the Vedas need to be interpreted in new ways. These new translations should pass one test: they should work in every situation, make the meaning clearer, and free us from having to give different meanings to the same word in a book. However, this test is insufficient. ii) We require a philological foundation that explains how a single word came to have so many meanings, including the new meaning as well as the psychological interpretation, ancient grammarians, and, if applicable, later Sanskrit meanings. But unless we discover a more scientific method than what we currently know, it will be difficult to accomplish this. A thorough understanding of the historical and cultural context in which the word was used is necessary to achieve this level of philological accuracy. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, historians, and anthropologists may be required to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the word’s evolution.

Secondly, as Aurobindo argues, the theory of the psychological interpretation depends often on the use of multiple meanings for important words – the key words of the secret teaching, which can have more than one meaning. This “multi-significance” of Sanskrit roots is used on purpose to pack as much information as possible into a single word which makes the problem of psychological interpretation seem even harder [1]. For example, the word “ashva” which usually means “horse” also stands for ‘prāna’, which is nervous energy, vital breath, and half-mental, half-material energy that connects the mind and matter. The root of the word also means things like force, ownership, enjoyment, and movement. All of these meanings are put together in the *Steed of Life* to show how Prānic energy works. Such a use of language would not be possible if ancient tongue obeyed the same conventions as our modern speech. It is possible, however, that the ancient language of the Vedic Rishis allowed words to have more life and freedom in their meaning than our modern use of speech. This would explain why such devices didn’t seem strange or impossible to their employers.

Modern science affirms the existence of universal

laws and the process of evolution as the fundamental principles governing the history of all physical things. In the same way, Aurobindo establishes that no matter what the deeper nature of speech is, it is like an organism. And has gone through a terrestrial evolution as a human language. It does have a constant psychological element which makes it more free, flexible, and able to change on its own. Its secret is harder to figure out, and its parts can only be broken down with less direct and more subtle methods. However, just as laws and processes govern physical phenomena, they also play a role in mental phenomena. Therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that the development of language was also subject to such laws and processes. With the right approach and sufficient data, these laws and processes can be discovered. And in Aurobindo’s view, the Sanskrit language provides necessary clues and a promising basis for investigation. The problem with philology that prevented it from achieving a satisfactory result was that it only focused on the external appearance of languages, such as the physical parts of speech and the connections between words in similar languages, without looking at the origins, elements, and other obscure processes. This approach only led to obvious and superficial results. To truly understand language, we need to penetrate deeper into its hidden past and possibilities. By looking at the earlier forms of human speech and delving into their development, we can discover the secrets and possibilities that are concealed beneath the surface. Aurobindo argues that this approach can lead to a genuine science of language.

Sri Aurobindo, through his insight into the languages, came to the conclusion that words are not artificial creations but rather living growths of sound based on certain seed-sounds. These seed-sounds turn into primitive root words that have many descendants. These descendants form groups, tribes, clans, families, and other select groups that share a psychological history. The development of language was primarily due to the association of certain general meanings or utilities with articulate sounds by the nervous mind of the primitive man. This process was governed by simple and definite psychological laws and was entirely natural, not artificial. Initially, language sounds were not used to express ideas, but rather certain general sensations and emotional values. The creation of speech was not the result of intellectual processes, but rather the product of nerves. Sri Aurobindo uses the Vedic symbols of Agni and

Vayu to illustrate that these vital and sensational activities led to the development of the mind, on which the intellect of Man built itself through human sense associations and sense reactions. Over time, language has naturally changed so that it can be used for intellectual purposes. In the past, language was used to express ideas in a vague and imprecise way, but now it uses fixed symbols that have clear intellectual meaning. The original meaning of words did not refer to any precise idea but rather had a general character or quality that could have multiple applications and implications. Language initially developed as a communal system in which words had a shared pool of meanings, and every word had equal access to those meanings. Over time, language evolved into a system of individual ownership, where words had specific intellectual implications and belonged to certain families or clans. The process of partitioning became increasingly strict, allowing families and individual words to develop independently. The final stage of language development occurs when the meaning of a word is solely determined by the concept it represents, with the sound of the word being secondary. This progression from communal to individual ownership and from sound determining sense to the idea being paramount is a natural evolution in the growth of language. Sri Aurobindo claims that in the early days of language, there were only a few words for things like light, motion, touch, substance, extension, force, speed, and so on. Over time, ideas became more specific and varied. They went from being general to being specific, from being vague to being precise, from being physical to being mental, from being concrete to being abstract, and from expressing different feelings about similar things to expressing clear differences between similar things, feelings, and actions. This progression occurred through the association of ideas, which followed recurrent and fixed natural laws of development shaped by the environments and experiences of the people who spoke the language. These laws can be seen as procedures that have developed as an ingrained part of human behaviour in response to the demands of their environment and are thus considered natural laws. Sri Aurobindo explains that the history of language can provide valuable insights into the meaning and development of individual words. By studying the rules that govern how sound and meaning are related in Sanskrit as well as the word families in great detail, it becomes possible to understand why words have

certain meanings and how those meanings changed over time. Also, by using the laws of association that governed the development of the ancient languages, it is possible to restore the hidden meaning of words and the meanings of words that are similar. However, it should be noted that just because one Vedic word may have had a particular meaning at one point does not mean that this meaning can apply to the actual Vedic text. Nevertheless, figuring out the meaning of a word based on its history often sheds light on how it is used in the text, and the meaning that the situation calls for is often the same meaning that the word's history leads to. This provides a sufficient basis for moral, if not absolute, certainty. Another interesting thing about language when it was young is that a single word could have a huge number of different meanings, and a huge number of words could be used to represent a single idea. However, as the need for precision and economy grew, the number of words for the same idea decreased. The Sanskrit language was an exception, as it had an abundance of synonyms, making it highly suitable for rhetorical devices such as double sense. Despite this, the Sanskrit language never quite got to the end of this process because it broke up into the Prakrit dialects too early. Compared to classical languages, the language of Vedic Sanskrit is from an earlier time in the history of languages. It is fluid and adaptable, with many different forms and inflections that use different cases and tenses. The psychological side of the language has not yet hardened into rigid forms of intellectual precision. The words still carries within it, the memory of its roots and is still conscious of its own history. This ancient psychology of language was reflected in the Rishis' use of language. For instance, as Auribindo mentions in his text [1], the word "vrika" meant the tearer and therefore, among other applications of the sense, a wolf; "dhenu" meant the fosterer, nourisher, and therefore a cow. However, while the original and general sense predominated, the derived and particular sense was secondary. This permitted the author of the hymn to manipulate ordinary language in a highly versatile manner, employing descriptions of wolves or cows at times to enhance the more generalized meaning, and at other times to serve as a conventional metaphor for the psychological ideas he was contemplating.

The partitions made by the mind between different senses of the same word were much less separative than in modern speech. For example, "fleet" mean-

ing a number of ships, and “fleet” meaning swift, are two different words in English. But in Vedic language, “*bhag*” meant enjoyment and sharing and was not considered different words but one word that had developed two different uses. The Rishis could use it in one of the two senses while keeping the other in the back of their minds, colouring its overt connotation or even using it equally in both senses at the same time. “Chanas” meant food but also enjoyment and pleasure which allowed the rishi to suggest different meanings to the secular and initiated minds. For the secular mind, the term referred to food offered during a religious offering to deities while to those with deeper understanding, it denoted the experience of divine bliss (*Ananda*) permeating the material consciousness. Additionally, it evoked the notion of Soma, a divine beverage associated with both divine sustenance and the experience of divine joy in Vedic tradition.

Sri Aurobindo says that the Vedic hymns depend heavily on language to get their message across. Ancient mystics used this tool to help them with their spiritual practices. He gives the example of the word “Agni” to elucidate this further. To the ordinary worshiper, “Agni” may have simply meant the god of Vedic fire, the principle of heat and light in physical nature, or a superhuman personage. However, the deeper meaning of Agni is the light within that lifts the veil on the lamp of consciousness. The names of the gods in Vedic hymns serve as reminders that they are not personal names, but rather epithets, important names, and descriptions of the one universal Deva. The verse below from Rig Veda summarizes the preceding discussion.

इन्द्रम् मित्रं वरुणम् अग्निम् आहुर् अथो दिव्यः स सुपर्णो गरुत्मान् |  
एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्त्य् अग्निं यमम् मातरिश्वानम् आहुः ||

– RigVeda (1.164.46)

**Translation:** “They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garuda.”  
“The truth is one, but the sages (or learned ones) call it by many names; they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.”

But as time went on, the language changed and the tool that the Rishis had used to pass on their knowledge began to work against them. Language stopped being as flexible as it used to be and got rid of old, familiar meanings. The word was reduced to its outer and concrete meaning and *the sweet wine of*

*Ananda was forgotten in the physical offering.* The letter lived on when the spirit was forgotten and the symbol, the body of the doctrine, remained, but the soul of knowledge had fled from its coverings.

## 5 Method of Interpretation applied to the hymns dedicated to ‘Agni’

In this analysis, we will utilize the method we have previously discussed to examine the structure and content of the initial hymns in the Vedas devoted to Agni. As noted previously, the initial hymn serves as an introduction to the notion of truth and are followed by the second and third sutkas that invoke additional deities such as Indra. Therefore, the hymns dedicated to Agni are of fundamental importance for the psychological interpretation of the Vedas. The hymns dedicated to Agni also highlight the importance of fire in Vedic rituals and symbolize the transformative power of knowledge.

The psychological meaning of the Hymn to Agni emerges with significant intensity and clarity in the fifth through eighth verses [1].

*Agnir hotā kavikratuḥ, satyaś citraśravastamaḥ;  
devo devebhir ā gamat.  
Yad aṅga dāśuṣe tvam, agne bhadraṁ kariṣyasi;  
tavet tat satyam aṅgiraḥ.  
Upa tvāgne dive dive, doṣāvastar dhiyā vayam;  
namo bharanta emasi.  
Rājantam adhvarāṅāmī, gopām ṛtasya dīdivim  
vardhamānamī sve dame*

The passage above presents a set of terms that are undeniably associated with a psychological meaning, lending this sense to the entire context. Sāyana, on the other hand, insists on a purely ritualistic meaning, and it is interesting to see how he justifies this interpretation. In the first phrase, the term “kavi” is employed which denotes a seer. Even if we assume that “kratu” refers to the work of sacrifice, we can still understand the phrase as referring to Agni as the priest, whose work is that of the seer. This turn of phrase immediately imparts a symbolic quality to the sacrifice and thus indicates towards a deeper meaning of the Vedas. Sāyana finds himself compelled to address this difficulty and thus discards the sense of “seer” for “kavi”, providing it with an alternative and unconventional meaning. He then elucidates that

Agni is “satya”, or true, because he brings about the true fruit of the sacrifice. Sāyana defined “Śravas” as “fame” which causes incoherency in the translation. It would have been more appropriate to interpret the word as “wealth” to avoid this issue. The resulting translation is: “Agni, the priest who is active in the ritual and true in its fruit, for he possesses the most varied wealth, let him come, a god among the gods”. For the sixth Rik, the commentator gives a strange, abrupt structure, which breaks up the flow of the verse. The verse is translated as: “That good, which you will bring for the giver, that belongs to you. This is true, O Angiras”, This is a fact that can’t be questioned, since if Agni helps the giver get rich, the giver will offer more sacrifices to Agni. In this way, the good of the sacrificer becomes the good of the god. To render this verse more clearly and simply, it would be preferable to translate it as follows: “The good that you will do for the giver is your truth, O Angiras.” This translation provides a clearer understanding of the epithet “satya”, meaning “true”, when applied to the god of the sacrificial fire, Agni. The truth of Agni is that He undoubtedly returns good fortune to the giver of the sacrifice. The seventh verse presents little challenge to the ritualistic interpretation except for the peculiar phrase “we come bearing the prostration”. Sāyana’s explanation is that “bearing” here means “doing”, and he translates the verse as “To you we come, day by day, with the thought of performing prostration, both at night and during the day”. In the eighth verse, Sāyana takes the word “ṛtasya” to mean “truth” and interprets it as the true fruit of the ritual. He translates the verse as “To you, shining one, the protector of sacrifices, who always manifests their truth (i.e., their inevitable fruit), increasing in your own abode”. However, it would be clearer and more appropriate to interpret “ṛtam” as “sacrifice” and to translate the verse as “To you shining forth in the sacrifices, protector of the rite, ever luminous, increasing in your own abode”. The commentator explains that the “own house” of Agni refers to the place of sacrifice, which is often called “the house of Agni” in Sanskrit.

The previous passage suggests that by manipulating the words of a text, one can create a purely ritualistic interpretation that lacks ‘psychological’ significance. However, such interpretations often have flaws and appear artificial. Instead, one should seek to understand the full psychological meaning of the text. For instance, the term “Kratu” in Sanskrit

denotes work or action, particularly in the context of the sacrificial ceremony, but it also conveys the idea of power or strength (similar to the Greek word “kratos”) that is instrumental in producing action. From a psychological perspective, this effective power of action is associated with the will. Additionally, the term can also refer to the mind or intellect, and according to Sayana, it can be interpreted as thought or knowledge. Similarly, “śravas” can mean hearing or fame; its second meaning, “fame,” derives from the first meaning, but it also suggests revealed knowledge that comes through inspiration, which is a vital component of the Vedic concept of truth, or “Ritam”. The word “namas” can also be interpreted psychologically as an act of inward submission to the deity, rather than solely physical prostration. Therefore, it is important to look beyond ritualistic interpretations and uncover the psychological depth and meaning of these texts.

Therefore, it is important to look beyond ritualistic interpretations and uncover the psychological depth and meaning of the text and following this, we get this translation of the four verses as [1]:

“May Agni, priest of the offering, whose will towards action is that of the seer, who is true, most rich in varied inspiration, come, a god with the gods.”

“The good that thou wilt create for the giver, that is that truth of thee, O Angiras.”

“To thee day by day, O Agni, in the night and in the light we by the thought come bearing our submission

—  
To thee who shinest out from the sacrifices (or, who governest the sacrifices), guardian of the Truth and its illumination, increasing in thy own home.”

The translation of the Vedic text under examination suffers from the fact that it employs a single word to represent both “satyam” and “ṛtam,” whereas the Vedic understanding recognises a distinction between the precise meanings of the two words, as seen in the trio ‘satyam ṛtam bṛhat’. This leads to questions about the nature of the god Agni, to whom the text is addressed, and the functions and symbolism attributed to him. Agni is described as the guardian of truth, whose will is that of a seer possessed of divine wisdom, and who creates good for the giver who submits to him in sacrifice. However, the sacrificial fire or any material flame cannot perform these functions, indicating that we are dealing with a mystic symbol-

ism in which the fire, sacrifice, and priest serve as outward figures of a deeper teaching.

The early Vedic teachings of Upanishads express the concept of truth using formulas from the Vedic hymns, including the phrase “satyam ṛtam bṛhat” which signifies the truth, the right, and the vast. This truth is considered a path leading to felicity and immortality. The same concept appears to be present in both the Vedas and Vedanta literature.

The concept of truth in Vedic philosophy is based on its divine essence, which differs from subjective perceptions of reality. This divine truth is called *satyam* and it regulates the right activity of the mind and body. It is universal and directly originates from the infinite. The faculties of direct vision of truth, direct hearing of its word, and direct discrimination of right enable individuals to possess truth-consciousness. One possessing this truth-consciousness or being receptive to these faculties is considered a ‘Rishi’ or ‘kavi’ or a sage or seer. This view of truth applies to the opening hymn of the Rigveda.

In the Vedas, Agni represents both force and light. The gods have established Agni as the immortal in mortals, the divine power in man, and the energy of fulfilment through which they do their work in him. This work is symbolized by the sacrifice. Agni can be understood psychologically as the divine will that is perfectly inspired by divine wisdom and is one with it. He is the active or effective power of the truth-consciousness, known as *kavikratuḥ*. Agni embodies the truth in his existence and possesses both the truth of being and the right action. From *ṛtam*, a fullness of richly luminous and varied inspirations proceeds that gives the capacity for doing perfect work. Agni is the priest of the sacrifice, and people call on him because he has the power to apply the truth to the work that the sacrifice stands for. The importance of the sacrificial fire in the outward ritual corresponds to the importance of this inward force of unified light and power in the inward ritual by which there is communication and interchange between the mortal and the immortal. The gods in the Vedas are seen as universal powers of nature personified, and in an inner sense, as universal powers of nature in her subjective activities such as will and mind. The sacrifice is a sign of the constant giving of the human self to the divine and the constant descent of the divine into the human, which allows mortals to become immortal.

In the Vedic sacrificial system, the goal of the hu-

man being is to achieve *perfection* which is seen as a state of perfect happiness or bliss that is based on truth and righteousness. It is also termed as self-realization or discovering one’s true nature and relationship with the absolute truth. It represents emancipation from the Sansāra or freedom from the cycle of birth and death as well as the eternal experience of divine bliss.

As a part of the sacrifice ritual, oblations are given to the gods who are seen as the personified universal forces of nature. Through this offering, the human being can convert these powers into their true or divine nature and attain immortality. The essence of this truth is the nature of Agni, a God in human beings; in this sense, we may understand the verse that follows, namely “The good (happiness) which thou wilt create for the giver, that is that truth of thee, O Agni” [1]. The happiness that is created for the giver in this state is the truth of Agni. ‘Bhadram’ is described as anything good, auspicious or happy but in the Vedas, it is used in a special sense as the opposite of the evil dream and false consciousness of that which is not the Ritam, the truth. Bhadram is therefore equivalent to *suvitam*, right going which means all good and felicity belong to the state of the truth – the Ritam. In this way, each section of the Vedas illuminates the others when it is properly understood. We only notice an incoherence in it when we are deceived by its veils of the language.

The next verse highlights the crucial aspect of a successful sacrifice. It requires constant submission, adoration, and self-surrender to the divine will and wisdom represented by Agni. The terms “night” and “day” are symbolic in the Rigveda, and they represent all states of consciousness, clear or obscure. The idea is that there must be a continuous reference of all activities to divine control. Agni is the guardian of truth in humanity and defends it from the powers of darkness. He is the constant illumination that burns even in unclear and besieged states of the mind. These ideas are reiterated throughout the hymns to Agni in the Rigveda. Agni is described in the final verse as “growing in his own home.” The meaning of the phrase “own home” in reference to Agni cannot be reduced to the fire room of a Vedic household. To better comprehend this term, we must search the Vedas for another definition, which is found in the 75th hymn of the initial Mandala.

*Yajā no mitrāvarunā, yajā devān ṛtam bṛhat;  
agne yakṣi svamī damam.*



“Sacrifice for us to Mitra and Varuna, sacrifice to the gods, to the truth, to the vast; O Agni, sacrifice to thy own home [1].” The words “ṛtam bṛhat” and “svam damam” in this passage seem to represent the ultimate goal of the sacrifice. This is in line with the Vedic tradition, which often describes the sacrifice as a journey towards the gods, while humans are seen as travellers moving towards truth, light, and happiness. It’s clear, therefore, that the Truth, the Vast, and Agni’s own home are one and the same. Agni and other gods are often said to be born in truth and to dwell in the vast. In this passage, it can be understood that Agni, the divine will and power within humans, grows and expands in the consciousness of truth, where false limitations are broken down and the limitless is embraced.

In summary, the four opening hymns of the Rigveda provide a glimpse into the primary concepts of the Vedic Rishis. These ideas include the idea of a divine truth consciousness that goes beyond the limits of the mortal mind, the invocation of the gods as powers of the truth to lift man out of falsehood, the attainment of an immortal state of perfect goodness and happiness through this truth, and the inner offering of oneself to the divine as a way to reach this fulfillment. All other aspects of Vedic thought surrounding spirituality revolve around these central ideas.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we have examined different interpretations of the Vedas offered by Sāyanacharya and European scholars which have led to considerable ambiguity surrounding the true sense and significance of these texts. Subsequently, we introduced and discussed Sri Aurobindo’s exposition of the Vedas, as outlined in his work “The Secret of the Veda,” which offers a comprehensive and contextually relevant explication of the hymns of the Rigveda. We scrutinized the method of ‘psychological theory’ and ‘philological approach’ of interpreting the Vedas, as applied to the initial hymns of the Rigveda that are dedicated to Agni. This elucidation led to a more coherent interpretation of the verses beyond their ritualistic and symbolic connotations, culminating into a deeper comprehension of the underlying concepts and themes of the Vedas as discussed in the last section of the article. This work can be a valuable resource for learners wishing to become acquainted with the

Vedas. The *scientific* interpretation of the Vedas propounded by Sri Aurobindo can also help bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and modern knowledge, allowing for a greater understanding of the cultural and historical significance of these ancient texts as well as the cultural and spiritual heritage of India.

समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः ।  
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति ॥

– RigVeda (10.191.4)

## Acknowledgements

The authors express their gratitude to the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) division, Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India for supporting this work through IKS Bhartiya Gyan Samvahini - 2 program.

## References

- [1] *The Secret of the Veda*. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Publication Department, 2003.