

Primary Literatures:

श्री अरविन्द घोष

Śri Aurobindo Ghose

Vedic Hermeneutics

HVUS.06.008 HISTORY OF INDIAN THOUGHT, RELIGION, & CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

COURSE SESSION 5A



Bhikshuni Lozang Trinlae, PhD - 2019

Vedic Literature Categories

- ▶ Deshpande, Madhav, "Language and Testimony in Classical Indian Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/language-india/>>.:
 - ▶ The Vedic scriptural texts (1500–500 BCE) consist of the **four ancient collections**, i.e.,
 - ▶ the *R̥gveda*, the *Sāmaveda* [*liturgical harmony/song (sāman)*], the *Yajurveda* [*ceremony rites*], and the *Atharvaveda* [*daily life rites*].
 - ▶ The next layer of Vedic texts, the *Brāhmaṇas*, consists of **prose ritual commentaries** that offer procedures, justifications, and explanations.
 - ▶ The last two categories of Vedic literature are the *Āraṇyakas*, “Forest Texts”, and
 - ▶ the *Upaniṣads*, “Secret Mystical Doctrines”.



Sri Aurobindo – who?

https://sriurobindoashram.org/sriurobindo/life_sketch./php

- ▶ Brief reminder about Sri Aurobindo [1872-1950]:
 - ▶ Born in Kolkata (Calcutta), West Bengal
 - ▶ Went to King's College Cambridge
 - ▶ Returned to India in 1893 to work in govt
 - ▶ Becomes political activist for independence; starts daily paper *Bande Mataram*
 - ▶ Retires to take up spiritual life in 1910; starts religion writing in 1914



Sri Aurobindo Interpretation of the Vedas

- ▶ Forward to Aurobindo's English translation of the R̥g Veda (1st book)

Sri Aurobindo Ghose. *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*. Sixth impression. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust 1998, 1998. [Forward: *The Doctrine of the Mystics* pp1-35; 1st edition 1946].

- ▶ Page 2: **Western projections onto Vedas as primitive** (*Secrets of the Veda*, p. 25):

- ▶ **“The modern theory of the Veda starts with the conception, for which Sayana is responsible, of the Vedas as the hymnal of an early, primitive and largely barbaric society crude in its moral and religious conceptions, rude in its social structure and entirely childlike in its outlook upon the world that environed it. The ritualism which Sayana accepted as part of a divine knowledge and as endowed with a mysterious efficacy, European scholarship accepted as an elaboration of the old savage propitiatory sacrifices offered to imaginary superhuman personalities who might be benevolent or malevolent according as they were worshipped or neglected.”**



Sri Aurobindo

Foreward to *Hymns of the Mystic Fire*

p.6: Hermeneutics for Reading the Vedas (Yaksa):

- ▶ *Ritualistic* interpretation
- ▶ *Historical/mythological* interpretation
- ▶ *Philological* interpretation
- ▶ ***Spiritual*** interpretation

“the last is the true sense and when one gets it the others drop or are cut away.”



Sri Aurobindo

Foreward to *Hymns of the Mystic Fire*

p.6-7: Hermeneutics for Reading the Vedas (Aurobindo referencing commentator Yaksa):

- ▶ **Spiritual interpretation:** “**The Rishis saw the truth, the true law of things, directly by an inner vision;** afterwards the knowledge and the inner sense of the Veda were almost lost and the Rishis who still knew had to save it by **handing it down through initiation to disciples** and at a last stage outward and mental means had to be used for finding the sense such as Nirukta and other Vedangas. But even then, he says, “**the true sense of the Veda can be recovered directly by meditation** and tapasya [purification]”, those who can use these means need no outward aids for this knowledge.”



Sri Aurobindo

Foreward to *Hymns of the Mystic Fire*

p.9-10: **Hermeneutic CODING** for Reading the Vedas:

KEY-WORD	OUTER	INNER
Ṛitaṃ	Truth, sacrifice, water food, one gone forth	Truth/divine insight
Agni	Fire deity	“born in & expanding the truth/insight”
Go	Cow	radiance
Aśva	Horse	Spiritual Power
Svar (savitr)	Sun-world	Higher light & truth
Vṛtras	Serpent demon/enemy	Obstructions of light & truth



Sri Aurobindo

Foreward to *Hymns of the Mystic Fire*

p.16: **Secret meaning/esoteric sense of** the Vedas:

But what then is the secret meaning, the esoteric sense, which emerges by this way of understanding the Veda? It is what we would expect from the nature of the seeking of the mystics everywhere. It is also, as we should expect from the actual course of the development of Indian culture, an early form of the spiritual truth which found its culmination in the Upanishads; the secret knowledge of the Veda is the seed which is evolved later on into the **Vedanta**. **The thought around which all is centered is the seeking after Truth, Light, Immortality**. 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 has to rise. We have to find our way to that, to get into touch with this Truth and Immortality, *sapanta rtam amrtam*, to be born into the Truth, to grow in it, to ascend in spirit into the world of Truth and to live in it. To do so is to unite ourselves with the Godhead and to pass from mortality into immortality. **This is the first and the central teaching of the Vedic mystics.**



Sri Aurobindo: *Doctrine of the Mystics*

7 Principles of Existence + 7 Puranic Worlds

	EXISTENCE PRINCIPLE	PURANIC WORLD
divine	Pure existence - Sat	World of highest truth of being – Satya-loka
	Pure consciousness - Chit	World of infinite will or conscious force – Tapar-loka
	Pure Bliss – Ananda	World of creative delight of existence – Janar (godly)-loka
mundane	Knowledge or Truth –Vijnana	World of Vastness – Mahar-loka
	Mind	World of light – Svar
	Life (“nervous being”)	World of various becoming (Bhūvar)
	Matter	The material world (Bhūr)



Sri Aurobindo: *Doctrine of the Mystics*

7 Principles of Existence + 7 Puranic Worlds

EXISTENCE PRINCIPLE	PURANIC WORLD
1. Pure existence: Sat-Chit-Ananda	Triple divine worlds: Satyaloka + Tapaloka + Janaloka
2. Link-World of Supermind	The true, the right, vast (Svar), with 3 luminous heavens
3. Triple Lower World:	
Pure mind	Dyaus heaven – 3 heavens
Life force	Mid-region (Antarīkṣa)
Matter	Earth (3 earth realms)

