

**The Rig Veda
For
The First Time Reader**

PREFACE

Knowledge in society has two dimensions, depth in individuals, and spread across people and places and through time. The knowledge of most people is conditioned by their own subjective and objective experiences. But people of all climes and times have always recognized that beyond the limits of what they know or sense externally or internally, are vast areas of the unknown, to which they relate through faith in, or fear of, a higher power that appears to control everything, both known and unknown.

Every society and every age has always had a small number of people, seers and sages, who have been able to see far beyond the external physical world and deep into the internal world of thought, emotion and intuition, for a more integrated and complete understanding of all human experience. And they have found that subjective experience is inseparable from objective experience and that they are indeed the inseparable faces of the same coin. From this integrated understanding, they drew guidelines for people of every level of understanding, for handling their lives, which, in time, came to form their scriptures.

The Vedas too must have originated in much the same way, and come to occupy a place of centrality in the lives of the Indian people. Of course, this would be with features similar in many ways, to what has evolved in other cultures, but in many ways, uniquely different. One refrain for instance, that is common to many traditions, is the claim to a divine origin for their scriptures. That the scriptures were the word of God is affirmed as firmly by the Bible or the Koran as by the Vedas. Without being drawn into contentious argument over such statements, it seems reasonable and adequate for all practical purposes to interpret them to mean that their scriptures found first expression through the minds of seers and sages, which of course, in their humility, they attributed to divine inspiration, and described as the word of God.

The Rishis who thus articulated the Vedas, were obviously extraordinary men whose vision traversed the whole gamut of the inner world of man and the outer world of the cosmos. Seeing everything within a context of Infinity and Eternity, they articulated whatever they experienced as best as they could within the vocabulary limits of the language available to them, and possibly, adding sounds and words as they found necessary or appropriate. And what they saw or sensed and set into words, acquired the status of divine revelation for the Vedas, represented by the words “Drushti”, meaning “What was Seen”, and “Sruti”, meaning “What was Heard”. Their intuitive faculties did indeed give them a reach into the highest sources of inspiration, to perceive the highest truths, and

explain them very simply as the divine word heard by them. The world was described by them in terms of Nama and Roopa, or Name and Form. And while Forms were just too numerous, there were far too few Names available in the language to represent them. This resulted in their extensive resort to symbol and synonym, and metaphor and analogy to refer to the Forms, a feature of usage of the language that often went beyond the understanding of scholars of later times who were simply not attuned to the word usage and imagery of the ancient times. More often they misinterpreted them to refer to myths or just plain superstition.

There are however, several other remarkable features that make the Vedas unique among the world's scriptures. They are now widely recognized now as possibly mankind's oldest. Secondly, they are unquestionably, the most massive and incisive explorations of man in the fields of religion, philosophy and spirituality. And thirdly, they have come to us in one of the most scientific languages devised by man, namely Sanskrit. These claims to uniqueness are recognized by scholars from all over the world, men of enormous scholarship and impeccable credentials, and a sampling of what some of them have said in this regard is set out in Appendix - A. These features will of course, soon become evident to the reader himself as he starts getting glimpses into the Rig Veda presented in this book.

One extraordinary and unique aspect of whatever we have today of the Vedas, not to be found in any other culture, is that the texts retain their entirety, accuracy and authenticity, and form a living presence in the daily lives of the millions of India today, despite the fact that they have been entirely orally transmitted through the numerous generations of several millenia that have passed since the texts were composed. This is due to the establishment even then, of six supporting disciplines, namely, Siksha (Phonetics), Vyakarana (Grammar), Chandas (Poesy), Nirukta (Etymology), Kalpa (Ritual Procedure) and Jyotisha (Astronomy and Astrology). These disciplines, called the Vedangas, or limbs of the Vedas, were intended to provide the strict framework; the first four, providing rules for the composition of text, and the last two, the rules of procedure of rituals, and determining the auspicious place and time for their performance. Specifically for the Vedas, these disciplines were designed to ensure that the observance, propagation and preservation of sacred texts in their pristine purity would endure for all time, despite a completely oral mode of transmission. In particular, remarkable techniques of memorizing and reciting the texts, were designed and prescribed, so that even today, priests and scholars, who have been trained in this tradition, can pick on any word at any point in any large text, and recite it from memory from that point for hours !

These disciplines enabled adoption of an extraordinary inter-locking strategy to establish the above objective, a strategy operating at several levels, and across vast spans of time and distance. At the most basic level of this strategy, a strict grammatical structure of the language and the meter of the

compositions provided a rigid framework for the texts. Every work also carried inbuilt references to the authorship and size of each level of the component text. At the next level, highly developed teaching methods resting on highly scientific techniques for memorizing the texts were prescribed and followed, as indicated earlier, where recitation could never go wrong. The texts were embedded into strict rituals, resting on hope of rewards and fear of punishments, that commanded the unquestioning faith of the common people as a whole, and become part of the psyche of the people. And at the final level, successive generations of teachers and disciples carried the Vedas to different parts of India, and in the course of time, the processes of their observance, propagation and preservation got institutionalized into Sakhas or Schools, each with a large membership, and each of whom preserved and carried forward a particular Vedic rescension. The Muktikopanishad has it that at one time, there were 1180 Sakhas in existence, but only a handful survive today. Not counting several fragments that have been retrieved over the years, the following is a summary of the surviving complete Sakha-wise component texts, preserved by the large membership of each Sakha :

	RIG	YAJUR	SAMA	ATHARVA
Samhita	1	6	2	1
Brahmana	2	3	9	1
Aranyaka	2	3	-	-
Upanishad	3	6	3	2

It will be of special interest to the first time reader, to look, at the outset, at a few examples of how the lofty thought, spirit, form and words of the Vedas as they were composed over 6000 years ago, continue intact as a living tradition in our daily lives in India today. One verse, for instance, that is central to the prayers we offer today is the Gayathri Mantra that occurs in the Rig Veda (V-62-10), and is attributed to the Rishi Viswamitra The following is the Sanskrit text with a Roman transliteration and an English translation :

ॐ भूः ॐ भुवः ॐ सुवः	ōm bhū: ōm bhuvaḥ ōm suvaḥ
तत् सवितुः वरेण्यम्	tat savituh: varēṇyam
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि	bhargō dēvasya dhīmahi

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात्

dhiyō yō naḥ pracōdayāt

The Mantra is invoked in the first line of above text with the holy sound OM applied to Bhū, Bhuvah and Svah, respectively representing the gross Physical, the subtle Spiritual and the potential Causal planes of all existence. The Mantra itself then follows in the next three lines which translate as below :

We meditate upon the effulgence of that Divine Reality. May that Divine Being, the Sun, illuminate our intellect to realize That Reality.

The use of the plural “नः” meaning “our”, may be noted : the prayer is not for oneself, but on behalf of all.

To make the perspective complete, whenever today, anyone announces his identity to his elders, it is always typically in terms of his inheritance of this ancient tradition in the following words in Sanskrit which transliterate and translate as below :

अभिवाद्ये वैश्वामित्र, आघमर्षण, कौशिक, त्रय- आर्षेय प्रवरान्वित,
(कौशिक) गोत्रः (आपस्तम्ब) सूत्रः, (यजुः) शाखाध्यायी, श्री (—) शर्मा
नामाऽहं अस्मि भोः ।

abhivādayē vaiśvāmitra, āghamarṣaṇa, kauśika, traya-
ārṣeya pravarānvita, kauśika gōtra: āpastamba sūtra:, yaju:
śākhādhyāyī, śrī (— name) śarmā nāmāhaṃ asmi bhō:.

Bowing to you, Sir, I announce myself as belonging to the spiritual lineage of the three Sages Viswamitra, Akarshmana and Kausika, to the family lineage of the Kausika Gothra and to the religious disciplines of the Apasthamba Sutra of the Yajur Veda, and I bear the name (so-and-so).

The reader will now see the truth of the statement made earlier that the ancient tradition has a living presence in our daily lives today. Who then were the Rishis like those whose names appear as above, who founded this tradition, from whom we are descended, whose injunctions we follow, and who composed the hymns that we recite today ? And who was Vyasa who retrieved all the scattered remains of the thousands of those hymns composed by hundreds of such Rishis in remote antiquity, and compiled them into the single massive canon of the four Vedas, the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, on which the ancient Indian tradition is founded and has reached us today across the millenia ? And when did he accomplish this ?

All that we know today of these ancient Rishis is that they were quite a large number and lived in the 1000 years preceding Vyasa who himself lived towards the close of the Dvapara Yuga which ended in 3102 BC, the year that marked the start of the Kali Yuga. One important point to remember here is that the number of these ancient Rishis was large and their output was prolific. Thus typically, the Rig Veda alone as compiled by Vyasa, had 10028 hymns and are attributed to as many as 414 Rishis, whose names are recorded in the Anukramanis, the Indices embedded in the Veda text itself. The original composition of Rig Veda is considered to have occurred over a time span of 1000 years or more, preceding the time of their compilation by Vyasa at the time of the Mahabharata War, which itself is placed at around 3102 BC. This would place the composition of the Rig Veda, the oldest of the Vedas at around 4000 BC or perhaps much earlier, because of references in the Rig Veda itself, to earlier ancient Rishis. The above dating of the Mahabharata War, described in the great historic epic of the same name, and composed by Vyasa. rests on its own internal evidence, which is substantial and substantive.

Vyasa, is the great poet and visionary who not only compiled the four Vedas and 18 Puranas, but also wrote the Brahma Sutras, a monumental summary of all the Vedic texts, and also the Mahabharata epic, in the events of which, he was himself personally involved. This super—human feat gives him the status of a divine incarnation and he is indeed listed as one of the seven Chiranjeevis, or immortals of Indian tradition, and this is indeed true in the sense that he lives so vividly today even after 5000 years, in the lives the millions of India. He is said to have been born to the Sage Parasara through Satyavati, the daughter of a boatman, who later married the King Shantanu, from whom the Kauravas and Pandavas were descended. Vyasa was himself a direct witness to the momentous events of the Mahabharata war and this itself invests the epic with authenticity as a true history of those times. One cannot obviously dismiss Vyasa simply, as modern historians have done, as a fictional character, or at best a writer of fiction with his Mahabharata, at best a historical novel.

The word Veda means Knowledge or Wisdom, and hence the four Vedas constitute a vast compilation of Knowledge. The four Vedas present an interesting approach on the part of Vyasa, their compiler. It is important to consider that what he compiled was possibly a careful selection from a vast corpus of material that was still available in the oral traditions of his day. And in respect of the internal structure and content of whatever he compiled, the Rig Veda is seen to be set in the poetic form, the Yajur in the form of prose, the Atharva, a mix of prose and poetry, while the Sama Veda had its hymns set to music. Within each Veda again, one can see a progression of functional sequences, commencing with the basic authoritative texts in the Samhita, their ritualistic context in the Brahmanas, the rationale of text and ritual in the Aranyaka and ending with their ultimate philosophical import in the Upanishads. The Rig, Yajur and Sama traverse the progression from the early pastoral

adoration of the powers of Nature, through the personification of these powers as deities and gods and finally to the ultimate single undivided Reality into which all existence, subjective or objective, finally merge. The Atharva Veda alone stands apart, in that its mantras address the more common experiences of the common people – the world of distress and disease, the spirits that cause them, the charms that prevent them and the medicines that cure them.

The Rig Veda is comprised, as its name indicates, of Riks or hymns, of which there are 10028, not counting 11 supplementary hymns, spread over 10 Books called Mandalas, a name that is also applied to the stellar constellations. These are hymns of adoration of several deities personifying the physical powers of Nature, and yet at the same time, symbolizing the spiritual links that bind the human and the divine, and maintaining and sustaining all that exists as part of a single Reality. The sacrifices and the hymns that accompany them thus carry an appeal as much to the common man as to the initiate. Most of the hymns address the deities Indra (250), Agni (200) and Soma (100) while the rest address different deities like Varuna, the Asvin twins, Ushas and Aditi. The Rig Vedic text is composed in poetic form, set in as many as 15 different meters, but mainly in the Gayathri meter, comprised of 3 sections of 8 syllables each and that takes its name from the Gayathri Mantra, cited earlier. This is considered the most sacred Mantra of the Vedic canon, just as OM is considered to its most sacred sound, standing for the first manifestation of the Unmanifest.

The Sama Veda has 1875 verses, only 75 of them new, but the rest taken from the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda is set to music and the chanting of its verses is done by specially trained priests. The Yajur Veda has 1975 verses spread over 40 Chapters, and brings new deities like Prajapati, Vishnu and Rudra-Siva into prominence. One third of its verses are derived from the Rig Veda. The Yajur Veda provides the textual and physical basis of all the Vedic sacrifices or yajnas or ritualistic sacrifices. This Veda provides the framework of ritualistic practice of Hinduism which remains unchanged till the present day. The Atharva Veda lies possibly at the end of the Vedic chronology. It has 5977 verses, about one-fifth of them being derived from the Rig Veda. It deals with cures, charms and spells intended to alleviate distress and disease. The foregoing facts of course establish the Rig Veda is the oldest and also the source of much of the content of the other Vedas. Indeed, all the scriptural texts of later times recognize and proclaim all the Vedas as the ultimate source and infallible authority on which their own authority rests. It does seem amusing that modern scholars presume to question their authority or to pass judgment on their intent, content or value.

What then is the significance of the Vedas being regarded as a Sruti, a body of knowledge received from the divine source; specified indeed as having been received from Brahma himself, and transmitted through successive generations of seers; and from which all later scholars drew the authority for whatever elaborations or additions they proposed. It is possible that the Vedas, their massive size notwithstanding, were themselves but a brief summary of the

central truths of a much vaster storehouse of accumulated pre-existing knowledge, but also providing pointers to greater details that could be discovered in that storehouse, or elaborated, or perhaps discovered afresh by later generations of scholars. This seems indeed to be the case, when one sees that for centuries after Vyasa's compilations, vast clarifications and elaborations on the earlier formulations and fresh contributions, by scholars in every branch of knowledge, continued to pour into the mind-boggling Knowledge corpus. Considered in this light, we can readily see how the Vedangas, the six supporting Knowledge disciplines, were but the first logical clarifications and elaborations that flowed from the Vedas.

One of the greatest misconceptions that is widely prevalent is that the Vedas are primarily ritualistic in their intent and content. Even in its own day, the Vedic scholars seemed to be aware of possibilities of a degeneration of ritual if isolated from its true philosophical and spiritual intent. Indeed the Chandoyogya Upanishad has a charming verse, maybe allegorical, and possibly satirical, in intent, describing a novitiate Baka Dalbhya, instructing a pack of hungry dogs on chanting the following sloka :

ओं मदामों पिबामों देवो वरुणः प्रजापतिः
सवितान्नमिहा हरन्नपतेऽन्नमिहा हरो हरोमिति १।१२।१।४

“Om, May we eat, Om, May we drink, Oh Lord of Food, bring food to us ” !

At the outset, on this question of the place of ritual, we need to recognize that religion itself, whether considered rational or not, fulfils a deep human need. Be it remembered that rationality itself does not rest on absolute standards of any kind, but is necessarily relative to state of knowledge that prevails at any time. And at all times, the human mind recognizes that the individual is circumscribed by the state of knowledge that obtains in the circumstances of his brief existence. As a consequence, he has a fundamental need to relate to whatever lies beyond the reaches of his physical and cognitive faculties. As man gazes at the skies and the stars, he is filled with wonder and awe. Reflecting on what power has created and sustains the endless reaches of Creation, he settles on the word "God", for the name of that Power, and this sets him on the path of religion, where experience can be expressed only by special words and symbols. And when he finds that rewards and punishments in life come without rhyme or reason he becomes ready to attribute those to the dispensations of a higher power and to place his trust in any ritualistic prescription that placates that power.

No religion can therefore be free from symbolism, and ritual and prayer are just symbolic expressions. All religions have their share of prayer and ritual, and differences between them in this regard are only in form or degree. And the prayer is mostly in the form of the spoken word,

accompanied by a posture like bended knees, or a gesture like folded hands. The Vedic approach to prayer proceeds from a deep understanding of human psychology, where it prescribes a convergence of thought, word and action. When these three components do not act in concert, we have the beginnings of dishonest speech or thoughtless action. Therefore the Vedic prescription for prayer rests squarely on such a convergence, which implies that the involvement in prayer must be total. The Gayatri Mantra derives its timeless appeal and power from the convergence of its high thought, and the beautiful words by which its thought is articulated. The exceptional person can, of course, concentrate his mind on the spirit of the prayer, and may have no need for the word, gesture or posture components. But for the common individual, whose mind is given to wandering, these components are essential, because they compose his body, calm his mind and compel his attention. The offering of water, a leaf, a flower or a fruit to the deity of one's choice, while chanting the words and the faith with which the offering is made are thus what makes the prayer complete. This, says Krishna in the Gita (IX-26), is what makes the prayer acceptable to God.

There is yet another aspect to the true role and impact of ritual that is so obvious, that it is astonishing that it is not emphasized enough by scholars and historians. Why is it that the ritualistic Vedic tradition has had such a phenomenal hold on the minds of millions of people through vast periods of time ? Is there something in ritual itself that has this phenomenal power, that is seen in every culture ? The real reason would appear to be, that below the superficial mechanical aspects of observance of a ritual, is the deeper psychological comfort and reassurance that comes from the attendant faith in its power, that simply cannot be rationalized or articulated. Here then, is a power that goes deep into levels of consciousness of which we know little, and perhaps into the deeper levels of the unconscious of which we know nothing. A few persons of perception can understand these deeper levels, but the common mass of people can only vaguely sense them without understanding them. But it is precisely such a sensing, however vague, that is enough to account for its power and hold on everyone, whatever be the level of the person's understanding. The depth and detail of the Vedic ritual clearly point to a consciously devised structure that rests on the phenomenal power of faith. Dismissing blind faith is clearly an all too common blindness to the reality of its power. The Vedic prescriptions were clearly designed to cater to people, guided by faith, often propelled by fear or desire, while also clearly providing doors to higher knowledge and higher objectives. The design also aimed, not just the advancement of the individual seeker, but for an inclusive elevation of the human race. The following luminous words of Aurobindo point indeed to the awesome vision of the ancient seers in the composing and of Vyasa in the compilation of the Vedas :

“The whole mass of its litannies may be only a selection made by Veda Vyasa out of a more richly vocal Aryan past. Made by the colossal compiler, with his face turned towards the commencement of the Iron Age, (the Kali Yuga ?) towards the centuries of increasing twilight and final darkness, it is perhaps only the last testament of the Ages of Intuition, the luminous dawns of the Forefathers, to their descendents, to a human race already turning in spirit to the lower levels and the more easy and secure gains --- secure perhaps only in appearance --- of the physical life and of the intellect and the logical reason”

The ritualistic emphasis in the interpretation of the Vedas was last set, almost as a final seal, by the last ancient Vedic commentator, Sayana (1315-1389) and it is on this, that the first Western scholars rested their understanding, and that the Western colonists sought to use to subvert and discredit the Vedic teaching, for the purpose of establishing political control over the country. Specifically, the Yagna or sacrifice, occupied a position of centrality in the Vedic texts and also in the vast spread of ritualistic practice amongst the people. It is certainly inevitable that ritual should find widespread appeal and acceptance among the common people because it satisfied a basic psychological need on a very simple and effective physical basis of objects and actions and on the motives on which worship rested. But it is as important that the Yagna should be understood in its spiritual, philosophical and psychological dimensions as well. The progression of the Vedic texts from the Samhita, through the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, themselves emphasized this. And in more recent times, this was strongly re-emphasized by great Indian scholars like Swami Dayanand (1824-1883), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Aurobindo (1872-1950).

The Vedic civilization is now acknowledged as one of the most, if not the most ancient of the world’s civilizations, which greatly influenced all other contemporary or later societies. Modern scholarship, while acknowledging Sanskrit to a part of a common Indo-European heritage, has nevertheless, all but rejected the theory projected by the early Western historians, that the Indian civilization grew out of the Aryan invasion from the West around the first millenium before the Christian era. The evidence has been mounting that the Vedic civilization was indeed very much older and very Indian in its origin and growth. The evidence is growing that similar advanced ancient civilisations existed all around the world, discrediting the Western theories that the emergence of the human from the savage was a first and comparatively recent development. The evidence is growing that there were extensive trade linkages by land and sea in antiquity between India and the societies of the Middle East, the Mediterranean and indeed as far as Mexico and Peru, which carried to them, not only the arts and crafts and products, but also much of the advanced knowledge and wisdom of India. While the knowledge that was so passed on included the sciences of mathematics, astronomy and medicine, it also extended to the higher insights of religion, philosophy and spirituality that greatly influenced the thinkers and philosophers of those cultures and triggered the

onward growth of those ideas in those cultures. History has now ceased to be a shallow narrative of kings and queens, and wars and conquests, but has now become a study of man himself without reference to dividing lines of nation or race. The study of man has become a study of thought, because man everywhere is distinguished by his thinking faculty. And as of now, no older or more profound study of thought is known to exist than that of the Rig Veda.

The investigation of the age of the Vedas presents an interesting study of history, or rather how the writing of history was largely dictated by contemporary social or political factors rather than by an accurate presentation of the objective truth. How these factors operated in the reconstruction of ancient Indian History is broadly set out below. Over the centuries, the history of the earth itself was the subject of a long theological and impassioned debate by Christian scholars in the West. In one 17th century study based on a literal reading of the Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible, along with an interpretation of an astronomical reference in it of an autumnal equinox, James Ussher, the Anglican Archbishop of Armagh (in what is now Northern Ireland) postulated that the earth was created on the 23rd October, 4004 BC. This date was close to dates proposed earlier by other distinguished names like Sir Isaac Newton (who proposed 4000 BC) and Johannes Kepler, (who proposed 3992 BC), the famous astronomer, whose astronomy tables were used by Bishop Ussher, whose date was even quoted as an authority in the early St. James versions of the Bible. The Ussher chronology starting from 4004 BC would place the great Biblical Flood around 2448 BC and given a 1000 year period for the impact of the great floods to subside, that would place a possible founding of all new societies after 1400 BC. Much as this chronology came to be disregarded and even ridiculed from the 19th Century onwards, it did still have a considerable following among theologians and historians of that time, and in particular, historians tended to use it as a benchmark for their theories on the chronology of all societies, and for denying older chronologies claimed for other ancient ones.

Two important political factors seemed to be in play at that time. One was the drive for world domination through colonial expansion by Britain and Europe springing from the desire for economic power, a desire also conditioned by feelings of racial superiority and Christian fervour. One far reaching impetus came from the 'discovery' of Sanskrit by Sir William Jones (1786), a distinguished scholar and Judge of the High Court of Calcutta. He was one of the first Britishers who not only mastered the Sanskrit language, but found an extraordinary range of similarity to most of the European languages, that clearly pointed to a common linguistic heritage. The following table, typically, of the names of the numerals in the different Indo-European languages provides a quick look at these striking similarities.

THE NAMES OF THE NUMERALS IN NINE INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH	SANSKRIT	PERSIAN	GREEK	LATIN	LITHUANIAN	CELTIC	GOTHIC	GERMAN
ONE	EKA	YAK	ELS	UNUS	VINAS	ONE	AINS	EINS

TWO	DVA	DU	DUO	DUO	DVY	DAU	TWAI	ZWEI
THREE	TRI	SIH	TRELS	TRES	TRYS	TRI	THREIS	DREI
FOUR	CATUR	CHAHAR	TERSSARES	QUATTAR	KETURI	CETHIR	FIDWR	VIER
FIVE	PANCA	PANJ	PENTE	QUINQUE	PENKI	COIC	FIMF	FUNF
SIX	SHAT	SHASH	EZ	SEX	SZEZI	SE	SAIHS	SECHS
SEVEN	SAPTA	HAFT	EPTA	SEPTEM	SEPTYNI	SECHT	SIBUN	SIEBEN
EIGHT	ASHTAU	HASHT	OKTO	OCTO	ASZTUANI	OCHT	AHTAU	ACHT
NINE	NAVA	NUH	ENNEA	NOVEM	DEVYNI	NOI	NIUN	NEUN
TEN	DASHA	DAH	DEKA	DECEM	DESZIMT	DEICH	TAIHUN	ZEHN

Sir William Jones became recognized as the founder of the new discipline of comparative linguistics. His discovery gave a powerful impetus to an interest, especially in Europe, not only in the Sanskrit language itself, but in its implications of a possible common Indo-European cultural and racial heritage. Deeply divided by the politics of Europe, the Germans were then casting around for their own fulfilment as a people of racial superiority and a destiny as a strong nation. Their search found expression in high academic excellence, with one line of activity leading to their interest in the deep study of Sanskrit and a fascination with the culture of India. These studies starting from comparative linguistics went on the launch of the two new disciplines of Philology and Indology. At the same time it happened that the British who were directly involved in administering India, were increasingly realizing that their success in establishing British authority in India rested on a study of Sanskrit, the bedrock of Indian culture, in order to understand its extraordinary hold over the entire people. With such an understanding, they felt that they could then subvert that culture and supplant the Hindu with the Christian faith through an English education.

It was this extraordinary confluence of historical circumstance that led to a meeting in December 1854, at Oxford, of Lord Macaulay (1800-1859) with Max Muller (1823-1900) the German scholar, one of the rising stars of the time in the world of Sanskrit learning. Lord Macaulay who had shaped the beginnings of the British hold on India through the East India Company, now commissioned Max Muller to undertake a full-time study of Sanskrit that would be of help to the British for their purposes in India. This led Max Muller, to become one of the pioneers of Indological studies with his monumental work, The Sacred Books of the East, where he presented his translations of the Vedic corpus. Given the close correspondence of the Vedic language, Sanskrit, to the European languages, that had been observed by scholars at that time, and interpreting the Sanskrit word, Arya, to refer to a superior Aryan race, it was a short step for Max Muller and other scholars of the time to assume a superior Aryan origin and identity for Europe and propose the theory of an Aryan invasion, spreading out from the West towards the East and establishing the Vedic civilization in India by 1200 BC. Here then indeed was a complete theory that provided an Aryan identity and racial superiority that could be deeply satisfying to the German people who were yearning for such a higher identity, and that indeed, in later years, was to be embraced by the Nazi ideology.

Max Muller's conclusions were questioned by the great German scholar, Hermann Jacobi (1894) and the great nationalist Indian Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1893). They were Max Muller's contemporaries, and their work which was known to him, pointed to astronomical reference to an equinox in the Rig Veda itself that suggested a historical chronology for India that reached back as far as 4000 BC. Yet Max Muller's preference for a Vedic origin in the Aryan Invasion from the West in 1200 BC prevailed, perhaps because of the prevailing Western bias in favour of the Biblical evidence behind it, rather than the evidence of the Rig Veda, even though both referred to astronomical evidence in support of their respective chronologies. Muller's awesome authority as a scholar also tended to guide most scholars, and overshadow all other viewpoints for a very long time. But in his last book "Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, published in 1900, Muller himself did seem to sense a lack of finality in respect of the speculations on the age of origin of the Vedas, when he commented "Whatever may be the date of the Vedic hymns, whether 1500 or 15000 BC, they have their unique place and stand by themselves in the literature of the world". It is possible that he was disappointed that the British whose purposes he had served so well, denied him the Boden Chair for Sanskrit Studies at Oxford which he thought he deserved, and instead gave it to Sir Monier Monier-Williams. It would however be fair to Max Muller, in the light of his comments quoted above, and the great scholar that he was, to say that his higher academic instincts may have prevailed towards the end of his life.

It is also to be noted that the Western studies of Sanskrit and the Vedic texts of those times, remained for long, restricted to a superficial philological approach which lacked the sensitivity and sophistication of later times, with very little attention to any evidence in them of possible historical relevance. Their translations rested largely on the authority of Sayana's 14th. Century commentary of the Vedic texts, that was focussed on their ritualistic content and purpose. This was not easy for the Western mind to correctly understand and much less, interpret. And the mindset of those times, misled by literal understanding, led them quite readily to dismiss the ritualistic content that dominated the texts, as depriving the texts of all historical relevance. More importantly, the scholars who engaged in these studies had no moorings in the sciences, where the great advances of later times enabled later scholars, along with far greater mastery of the linguistic nuances of Sanskrit, to open whole new vistas and perspectives in which the texts could be better understood and interpreted.

The point of this narrative is simply that it suggests that it was not just a love of a genuine study of history or of human progress, but the shared objectives of Western Christian evangelism and the racially driven colonialism that would appear to have given birth to the theory of the Aryan invasion. Macaulay seemed indeed to achieve phenomenal success in establishing the theory through the country-wide system of English based education and administration that he established in India, to the point that even Indian historians accepted the theory, in denial of their own cultural moorings. The

Indian History Establishment, as it is called, even today suffers the basic weakness of inadequate familiarity with the spirit of the Vedic tradition and the subtle metaphoric nuances of the Sanskrit language in which it is clothed and is largely influenced by English translations and interpretations by Westerners or their methods. Those translations not only miss the spirit and subtlety of the original text but import distortions, unwitting or conscious, of interpretations that have great potential for damage to or distortion of correct understanding of history.

The Establishment therefore remains even today, largely wedded to the Aryan invasion theory, or modifications of it, though now for different political reasons. The vast socio-economic inequities into which the ancient Vedic tradition degenerated over the centuries, and characterize Indian society to this day, are under severe challenge by the disadvantaged classes, who are now being urged by the newly emerging political forces, to see their condition as the direct result of control and influence over their lives, by the Brahminical class upholding the elitist and exclusive Vedic ideology. By identifying this class with a foreign Aryan race, exploiting an indigenous population, history today is being shaped by class ideology of power politics, that is purely Marxist or plainly communal. In this era of vast socio-economic transition, the Indian History Establishment has little choice but to maintain the silence of the status quo, rather than stick their necks out and get silenced by the dominant political forces. Thus politics of today, as indeed of the past, finds advantage in shaping history to its purposes. These vast distortions that come in the way of man's adherence to or search for truth are best explained in the ancient texts as the work of the forces of darkness or as best expressed by the resolve of Satan in the words of Milton in Paradise Lost : "Till I in Man residing through the Race, His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect, And season him thy last and sweetest prey."

It must be clearly stated here that whatever has been stated above is not to detract from the enormous contribution of the British rulers, or Western scholars. We need to be generous enough to say that they were products of their times, and cannot be blamed entirely for the negative aspects of the compelling circumstances that shaped their lives, views and actions. The work of Max Muller and scholars like him is awesome in terms of the range and depth of their studies and presentations. Max Muller himself has been in fulsome praise of the Vedic contribution of India. In ringing words that reached deep into the minds of the West, he said, "If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which will deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant – I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively in the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal,

in fact, more truly a human life, not for this life only but a transfigured and eternal life – again I should point to India”.

Luckily the Vedic tradition does not depend on the indulgences of transient forces of time and circumstance, because the tradition lives deep in the psyche of millions of people and has shown its capacity to survive intact for so many millenia, despite the invasions and upheavals of the intervening times. But what is particularly encouraging is the emergence of a new generation of scholars, both from India and other countries of the world, of impeccable integrity, with far greater mastery of philological principles and linguistic nuances, rooted in true scientific attitude, and equipped with a phenomenal range of new and powerful scientific tools of such disparate disciplines as ecology, genetics, chemistry, mathematics, astronomy and computers, to unveil the vast truths that are embedded in the texts of the Vedic corpus. Some of these great developments are presented in detail in this book. The new understanding and visions, not constrained by political and religious biases, were triggered by a first generation of great scholars like Aurobindo Ghose and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. To these must be added the new contemporary generation of scholars, steeped in Indian culture and trained in the Sciences like K.D.Sethna, Subhash Kak, Georg Feuerstein, David Frawley, K.L.Kashyap, Narahari Achar, and Shrikant Talageri

Western contributions have been of inestimable value, also in quite another context. The British no doubt, contributed to the distortion of Indian history by establishing the theory that the Vedic civilization was established by the Aryan invasion of India, through the teaching of history in schools and universities in India and also building upon it through History Establishment of the country. But they also contributed to building the administrative structures for Archeological investigations, which, by a strange twist of circumstance unveiled the ancient civilization of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, which ultimately led to the demolition of the Aryan Invasion Theory. An even more valuable British contribution through the educational system was the opening of the approaches and methods of Science through the medium of the English language, that has enabled scholars in India, to not only to master all branches of modern knowledge but use them to correctly understand and interpret the Vedic texts and establish that India was the first to master of all branches of knowledge in the ancient world as well.

The excavations in the area of the Harappa civilization has thrown up impressive evidence that the area was indeed an integral part of the Vedic civilization that covered both the Indus-Saraswathi valley and the Gangetic valley, but survived largely in the latter, when the former area was overtaken by geological and ecological upheavals around 2000 BC. What survives today, through over 7 or 8 millenia, is very much the direct successor of the Vedic civilization which must have initially encompassed the Indo-Gangetic Plain, and gradually embraced the rest of the country. If today the Vedic tradition is a living

presence in the every day lives of its people, then we must certainly recognize that the Vedic texts have some power in them that compelled their unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Vedas by vast millions through these vast millenia. Our understanding of this central fact of Indian tradition and history, must surely begin with a study of the Rig Veda.

Taking the Rig Veda then as the first and oldest source, we may see at the very outset, the awe-inspiring perspective in which it emerges and presents itself. It presents all existence, in both its micro-cosmic and macro-cosmic aspects, as set in a single framework of a Consciousness, Time and Space ranging from the Consciousness within the transient existence of the individual to the Infinite and Eternal existence of a cosmos pervaded by a Supreme Consciousness. It traces the evolution of OM, the primeval sound of the Cosmos, into the letters, words and speech of the language, personified by Saraswati, the goddess of Speech. Names, and descriptions of events and experiences are shared by men, stars, powers and divinities. Indra and Vrtra at once personify respectively, the power of Nature that brings Rain and the forces of the Cloud that holds it back; or represent respectively the hold of Light and Darkness on the Mind. Saraswathi is at once a goddess and also a mighty river, conferring the gifts of learning and wealth. Vasishta and Arundati are not only the great sage and his wife, but also a pair of stars in the sky, symbolizing marital harmony, and at which newlyweds are required to gaze, to obtain the blessing of the same marital felicity. Time and distance are measured from the stars and scaled down to apply to men's structures and activities. The sacrifices are events of interactive exchanges between men and gods who place the powers of Nature at the service of mankind. All these are clothed in the Rig Veda in language, often simple and direct but more often metaphoric or symbolic, that can be obscure to all but those who know the nuances of the language or the ideas that it conveys.

One of the most incisive and insightful recent studies of the Vedas has been from Shrikant Talageri, a scholar of the highest order from Maharashtra. Proceeding entirely from a profound in-depth linguistic analysis of the vast corpus of both Vedas and the Puranas, he has thrown up a completely new scenario for the history of those times. Not resting merely with a complete refutation of the Aryan Invasion Theory and its projecting a Western origin for the Vedic civilization, he has literally reversed the direction of the West to East movement of that view of history. He has now presented a compelling body of internal evidence of the Vedic corpus through an interpretation of those texts at a level of sophistication not seen from scholars so far. He begins with building a logical internal chronology for the Vedas and linking the clear internal cross-references to events, also found in the text of the Puranas. He then proceeds to reconstruction of the history of the Vedic period, which involved not only a consolidation of the ancient culture in the Vedic heartland of the Punjab and the Gangetic valley, but a movement of large segments of its discordant elements who carried elements of the culture, language and knowledge through North-Western India into Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and beyond to Europe, thus

accounting for the common strands of an Indo-European language and knowledge heritage. Talageri's studies, resting mainly on an incisive linguistic analysis and understanding of the Vedic corpus, has provided a profound complementarity to the studies that are based on the Science-based disciplines, and has all but marked the end of the old Aryan Invasion Theory and its attendant founding of the Vedic civilization. In its place he has provided a new cohesive and logical picture of the Vedic Civilization being entirely indigenous to India, and also as a source of much of Vedic language and knowledge tradition that contributed much to the later civilizations of Iran, the middle East and Europe.