

## THE RELEVANCE OF THE VEDAS TO MODERN MAN

*Jeanine Miller*

WHAT MAKES A RELIGION ETERNAL, that is, ever relevant to the problems of each generation, is its answer to the eternal questions man asks throughout the ages. For age after age man has to face the same difficulties, to solve the same puzzles, to find a satisfactory answer to the great and fundamental questions of life's meaning and his place and function in the universe, of his conduct, of the meaning of death, the probings of the soul, of the Eternal he feels throbbing within his innermost depth, of God. Though their formulation may vary, these ever tax our mind and intuition and demand a solution that may satisfy the deepest yearnings of the soul.

Alone among all the ancient religions, the religion of India has survived to this day. The true name of what we in the West have mis-called "Hinduism" is *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal religion, a name which transcends all barriers of time and space, of age and locality. Dharma stands for the proper function, the inherent duty, the particular path or vocation in life, the essential truth of life as a whole and of each human life in particular, that which binds humans to their inner reality—religion. Sanatana Dharma, phoenix-like, shows us a history of cycles of dynamic activity—saint after saint being born, raising the people to new life and fresh awareness, invigorating them by teaching and example, bringing about moral and social regeneration, transforming the presentations of great truths to suit the times—and cycles of lethargic lapses, of sheer aridity when but spiritless rituals held ground. Its ever living source of life can be found in its mighty power of absorption, of assimilation, of inclusiveness, an ability to renew itself from within, to change its language according to circumstances, change the presentation of its gods, to absorb other gods, its capacity to cater for the needs of all by appealing to the loftiest intellect in its far reaching and abstruse philosophical speculations and to the simplest heart through its naive and yet moral and heroic tales. All this is summed up in words of Lord Krishna: "However men approach me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is mine" (Bhagavad Gita 4.11).

Within the history of Sanatana Dharma three main epochs or stages of unfoldment stand out: Vedism, Brahmanism, Hinduism. Each represents a variation upon the same theme: that Cosmic Harmony in which we live and move and have our being, which the ancient seers of Vedic days were privileged to vision and express through hymns that they left as a legacy to posterity.

There was a time when truth could be expressed in the language of myth, of poetry in terms of those primitive experiences of the soul when man lived in close communion with nature; this is now embodied for us in four collections of hymns of the Vedas; then a time came when those same truths needed the language of philosophy, when

**Jeanine Miller**, was born in China of French parents, brought up in Australia (because of the war) and was educated at university level. She became a member of the Theosophical Society in Sydney in 1956. She moved to England in 1962 for family reasons and started to learn Sanskrit alone while commuting to work. Her purpose was to go back to the oldest document of the Aryan rootrace, the *Rig Veda* and fathom out the esoteric meaning of the Vedas, all with a view to vindicating H. P. Blavatsky at the academic level. In 1979 she earned an M. Litt degree from the University of Durham for her thesis "*The Vision of the Cosmic Order in the Vedas*." She has written articles on the Vedas and lectured for the Theosophical Society on the subject all over England, Scotland, and Spain. She has written two books: the first with G. Feuerstein *A Reappraisal of Yoga, her share concerning the Vedas*; the second, alone: *The Vedas: Meditation, Harmony, Fulfilment, 1974*.

speculations and explanations resulting from a deeper probing of the soul became part of the spiritual heritage of the seekers of truth; now embodied in the Upanishads. Then came the age of the epics when great truths were enshrined in the language of stories of heroes and heroic deeds. ,

The time is now for the stern, colorless idiom of science, of intellect, of logic, of reason, no more true because of its striving after exactness than the other varieties. But throughout it all the great themes of righteousness or duty, of love or devotion, of truth in word, thought, and deed, of reward and punishment or cause and effect or action and reaction, of self-sacrifice, generosity, hospitality, remain the basic seeds of all civilizations, are present in all religions and are as fundamental and vital today as ever before. Without integrity, individual as well as group, without ideals, without vision, no civilization can endure, for these are the backbone of religion which itself is the molder of civilization. Vision is the great gift of the Vedas.

Hinduism is unique among all the religions in that it founded its philosophical and ethical tenets upon a cosmic vision, the vision of an eternal, universal Order, traceable, not to just one seer, but to generations of seers, to those famed patriarchs who were already celebrated in Vedic times as "our fathers" who "showed us the way," a vision scattered about in the four collections of hymns called the Vedas. They represent one of the primeval sources of that divine revelation—*brahma vidya*— which man received at the beginning of earthly evolution, to which may be traced all the roots of subsequent religious philosophies; they contain the very basis of the philosophy of the Upanishads which expound some of the more obscure Vedic verses and which themselves have permeated the thought of India for the past 2000 years and are now slowly conquering the Western world; more and more of the West's great thinkers evidence Vedantic influence. The extraordinary contemplation of the Indian sages by the banks of the Sarasvati, of the Ganga, and in the jungles, has not yet ceased to arouse the wonder and admiration and the speculation of our own hard-headed generations.

The vision which the Vedas give of the "cosmic order (*rita*) born of the all-blazing contemplative-exertion" (Rgv.X. 190.1) of the ONE, and of man's place therein, has stood the test of time, for none of our scientific discoveries, or philosophic speculations of the past 2000 years has been able to challenge or to oust it, but it grows in depth and grandeur in proportion as our understanding and view of life mature. For, in its depth of insight, that vision of Deity, as expressed both as the ONE (*ekam*) or THAT (*tat*) and through the infinite variety of Deity's manifestations, has never been surpassed; many more details may have been surveyed, but as in the case of the sages' conception of the Absolute, "whose shadow is death, whose shadow is immortality" (Rgv.X. 121.2), it has been more of a case of degradation of the loftiest inkling of the Divine that the human mind has been capable of, than of clarification or deepening of understanding.

There is implied in the Vedas, on the part of the Vedic sages, a knowledge of certain laws of the universe all embodied in and subservient to the one Law of harmony. The world order emerges as both static and dynamic; static, in the sense of the "established order" of life which nothing can alter—the rhythm of becoming, the motion of the planets, the recurrence of day and night, of the seasons, of growth, of diseases, etc.—dynamic, in the sense of that constant transformation to which all things are subjected, birth, growth, death, decay, the many appearances and disappearances of all things, all of which exemplify the law of change. Thus, in accordance with the ideal pattern, the blueprint of the cosmic order, the dynamic activity of the universe spells an ever rhythmic movement whose very constancy is itself the stability of the Cosmic Order. Motion and stability are united in the divine Harmony. "Firmly fixed are the foundations of Cosmic Order, shining in beauty, manifold are its beauteous forms" (Rgv.IV.23.9ab).

The Rishis thought of the origin of the universe in terms of a projection into manifestation through divine contemplation of that which lies latent within the One; an unfoldment from within without, where we observe three definite stages implying three world orders: the primordial or transcen-

dental level, the blueprint of all that is about to unfold; the intermediate level where the gods come into being and express the dynamics of the Cosmic Order; and the phenomenal level where man rules and disrupts the divine equilibrium. Ultimate *oneness* is a characteristic of the Rig Vedic vision disregarded by Western scholars. From this ONE differentiate the two poles of manifestation which we term positive-negative, spiritual-material, to which the Vedic sages gave other names and which they personified in Aditi and Daksa, and at a lower level, in Heaven and Earth, Father and Mother, from whose interaction the many gods and all other creatures are born.

One whole governs the moving and the stable, that which walks and flies, this variegated creation. (Rgv. 111.54.8cd.) That which is one has developed into the all.

(Rgv.VII.58.2d)

Born of old, the parents spreading around, co-dwell in one mansion in the womb of cosmic order. (Rgv.X.65.8ab)

In the "billowy deeps" of mother space, Aditi the infinite, the gods come into being "closely clasped, then from ye, as though from dancers, hot dust was whirled away" (Rgv.X.72.6). With the fiery mist and the dance of the heavenly bodies, as it were, the world is set going. Each god performs his task in accordance with the great law of harmony of which he is the very embodiment, all the gods' actions moving concertedly toward the one end of creating a harmonious world: "One-minded, one-intentioned, the devas move unerringly together to the one purposeful accomplishment" (Rgv.VI.915cd). Cosmic solidarity characterizes the Vedic pantheon—the wonder of the working in unison of all great intelligent, energizing principles behind all phenomena as they shape the ideal thought of the supreme Ordainer, the "pattern in the heavens." Here no degradation to our human level, to our human frailties, no anthropomorphization such as we later observe in the Hindu pantheon or the Greek or Roman, but the gods are represented as "Herdsmen of the Supreme-law, whose decrees are truth" (Rgv.V.63.lab) and "Law-abiding, born in law, sublime fosterers of law, haters of falsehood" (Rgv.VII.66.13).

Whereas the exclusive claim of monotheistic creeds to the exclusion of all other, conduces to separativeness and conflict, or as A. C. Bose says "carries the imperialistic challenge of one social group against all other groups" (*The Call of the Vedas p. 39*), the all-inclusive appeal of the Vedas stands in sharp contrast and is far more in tune with the demands of a world that is slowly emerging to global outlook and a better understanding of the need for tolerance and respect for one another's beliefs. In the Vedas all gods are revealed to be the various expressions of the one divine and nameless Essence. Many and varied in their form, appearance, and function, they are one in spirit, one in purpose: "One is the mighty godhood of the shining ones" (Rgv.III.551d). Each is worshipped according to time or need, each for his own specific influence or beneficence, or all are worshipped together or identified with one another or with their Essence, the Ultimate Reality, *tat sat*:

Him with fair wings, though only one in nature, inspired sages shape with songs in many figures. (Rgv.X. 114.5)

Reality is one, sages call it variously: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan. (Rgv.I.164.46cd)

The Seer beholds that Being, hidden in mystery, in whom all find one single home; in that all this unites; from that all issues forth; He omnipresent, is warp and woof in created things. (Yajurveda. 32.8)

These few verses, out of many more, evidence the Vedas' comprehensive view and understanding of the many expressions of the Divine, the One in the many; India has always been the land of unity in diversity, a conception which stems from the Vedic Rishis.

To the Supreme Order, all beings are shown as subservient, gods, planets, men, animals, plants, etc.; every action on the part of any creature that goes against it is disorder, strife, discord, and thus harmful, evil. The whole structure of life was deemed to be based on the bedrock of harmony:

Cosmic Order is the foundation that bears the earth; by law the sons of the infinite stand secure. (Rgv.X.85.1)

Vast truth, stern Order, consecration, self-offering, prayer, sacrifice, these uphold the earth. (Atharvaveda. XII. 1.1)

Where spiritual and ruling powers move together in unity that world will I know as holy, where move the shining ones and Agni the flame divine. (Yajurveda 20;25)

The great unitary vision of the Vedic sage made him capable of conceiving a oneness to which all aspects converged; all things working toward greater harmony of the whole so that whatever brought discord was "wrong" and in man's case "sin." At our human level the one law of harmony expresses itself as righteousness; hence the laying down of social and ethical norms for man to follow so that, as an individual and as a group, i.e., in society, man can endeavor to work toward the end of establishing on earth the ideal cosmic order.

The Vedic rishis firmly set man in the middle of this Order. He is capable of becoming an active co-worker with the agents of the cosmos, the gods, and can bring about in his own society the harmony that prevails in the "heavens." In the task of actualizing this at the phenomenal level, the gods and men are shown as closely linked and able to work together; man stands at a stage where conflict prevails, prior to the stage which the deva commands, where harmony has been achieved and the tension between the polarities that constitute the woof of the universe is resolved; but man has it in himself to become the true epitome of the Cosmic Order by uniting in himself the poles of manifestation and integrating himself in the harmony. The realization of the interdependence of all, hence that the sin of one is also the sin of all, whether ancestors or contemporaries, seems to have been prevalent in the Rig Vedic age: "Release us from our fathers' offences, from those that we ourselves have committed." (Rgv. VII.86.5a). It is only in this century that we have started to grasp the meaning of world interdependence and the fact that we are responsible to a certain degree for the welfare or misery of others. Cooperation and sharing are ideas which have only recently started to be taken seriously and to be implemented not only at the level of pure knowledge, as in the library world, but also in the economic world, and, let us hope, one day in the political world....

Man, since he is a vital part of the universe, if he would fulfill his destiny, his dharma, must

choose of his own free will to align himself consciously to the divine order and perform his true function which is to be the living link between heaven and earth: "Heaven is my father, my begetter; here is affinity, my kinship; this mighty Earth is my mother. Here between the two wide-spreading receptacles is the womb (of birth)..."(Rgv. 1.164.33) Alone the path of justice, harmony, truth can lead to felicity: "Sweet blows the breeze for one who lives by truth, rivers pour for him sweets." (Rgv.1.90.6). He is then a harmonized man, a man at peace; a sage. The closer we human beings approach this fundamental equilibrium, this *sattva*, the inherent harmony of all things, the more do we live in accordance with the essence of righteousness, the more do we become dynamic expressions of that truth which is the very breath of the Divine.

The last hymn of the Rig Veda collection is so appropriate to our modern world that it should be recited before every session of the United Nations:

Gather together, converse together. Your minds be of one accord... United be your counsel, united your assembly, united your spirit and thought. A single plan do I lay before you; a single oblation do I offer. United be your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be at one, that you may long together to be in unity and concord. (Rgv.X. 191.2-4).

Man's eternal call to freedom, his bursting forth from his bonds, are summed up in a beautiful hymn from the Atharvaveda: "Open yourself, create freespace; release the bound one from his bonds, like a new born child, freed from the womb, be free to move on every path." (Athv.VI.121.4).

For Vedic man the sacrificial ritual which was a vital part of his religious life was the symbolic re-enactment of the universal process of creation, the eternal rhythm of give and take, the circuit of offering, taking, and returning the gift, embodying in itself the idea of the descent of the spiritual life into the limitations of the material, but to reascend enriched by the experience. In this dramatic re-enactment there was built up an intimate relationship between terrestrial man and those divine agencies which man invoked as a co-participator in the divine drama, an interaction that mirrored the interplay between spirit and matter, heaven and earth, the eternal rhythm of the cosmic order.

We can learn a great deal even from what may appear superficially an archaic symbol.

The vision of cosmic integrity, of which human integrity is the mirror, is peculiar to the Vedas and was more or less lost sight of in subsequent ages when man alone became the proper study of mankind and his cosmic background and indeed very essence faded out of view.

*the power of the word, of vibrations, known in ancient India, has many surprises for us, and may be of incalculable help in our psychological development*

But more than this vision of cosmic integrity and man's place therein: the Vedas hold hidden within their invocations and their praises of the many colorful gods, certain profound secrets of the human soul which have only recently aroused the interest of Western man and caused him to embark upon further research with all the apparatus of modern science. They concern certain powers such as extra-sensory perception, divination, seership or clairvoyance, etc., powers latent in man which were already cultivated and were to be tabulated in the science of yoga which itself, in its lower form, hatha yoga, has only in the past fifty years become accepted as worthy of study and practice. The Vedas grant glimpses into the more recondite aspects of the psyche, and thereby offer a great field of research for any Jungian psychologist, for Jung provided an inestimable key which itself, in probing the depths of the unconscious, could fathom out some of the more obscure hints scattered throughout the collections. The science of color and sound and their interaction is nowadays slowly being rediscovered; a study of the Vedas reveals the knowledge of the Rishis as to the effect of vibrations on states of consciousness and the use of specific vibrations embodied in word-sounds and their rhythm in order to communicate with the devas, hence the knowledge of the language of the gods. Some of the Sanskrit words themselves give a clue: i.e., to "sing" (*arc*) meant also to "shine," so that in praising their gods from the depth of their hearts the bards were not only "voicing" but also

"shining forth" their devotion. "Sun-eyed" and "flame-tongued" like the gods, such are the "inspired" poets, the bards of the Vedas. The science of sound, of mantras, of the power of the word, of vibrations, known in ancient India, has many surprises for us, and may be of incalculable help in our psychological development.

Nature constantly transforms her pageant of lives, like her child Psyche its own projections; the very law underlying the cosmic order cannot allow anything to remain petrified in old forms; for this means death. That is why we cannot go back to the ancient gods, the ancient forms of rituals, the ancient molds. The mere idea would mean clinging to the forms of the past which must perforce fall away, like leaves from a tree, whereas the vital point in our evolution is the psyche that produced those forms and that is throbbing within us, *here* and *now*. That which in us ever creates from its ever living archetypal groundwork will mold new images more appropriate to the time, thus freeing itself from the old hold of past crystallized forms. But we can learn a great deal from the ancient mind, for that mind is still ours though we have sunk it deep behind our conceptual outlook; it is still the throbbing basis of our mind; we can learn from the ancient projections, the ancient modes of conceiving and approaching life, above all from the Vedic all comprehensive and dynamic vision; and herein lies the Vedas' fundamental relevance to modern man and their great lesson: that we are not only a link among many others, but a vital, creative factor in the vast cosmic drama, capable and indeed called upon to play a dynamic part in the world toward the building up of all into one harmonious whole, as in the heavens so on earth; therefore not to divorce ourselves, as we have done far too much, from our roots which lie embedded in a living fountain-source, our own psyche, there where our bond with Nature is at its strongest—for through the millennia Psyche has grown nurtured by those divine principles which are themselves the fashioners of Nature, and which Psyche projected and anthropomorphized into the figures of the gods; to cultivate that feeling of solidarity with Nature and all her creatures including men, hence respect for and love of her varied forms and a realization of her

livingness and sacredness, all of which the child still experiences until this gets atrophied through "education"; such solidarity is itself the great teacher of the oneness of all life, the interlinkedness of all creatures; therefore not to exploit Nature for baser selfish ends but in obeying her laws to become her real cherished lords and learn to marshal her resources for the good of the whole—all her children—and not for the base profit of the crafty few; therefore to develop a civilization where man's innate, creative faculties can blossom forth in concordance with his environment and with those great principles that govern that harmony, and not to the detriment of his own inner being as well as that of his great fostering Mother—Nature; where man himself can consciously and freely enter into full communion with those same divine principles responsible for all the forms of beauty in this world, and be inspired therefrom.

This is the essence of the message which modern man can reap from the Vedas; this message, as alive today as ever it was, vibrates with light and hope and greets us, across the gulf of thousands of years, with the sunshine of eternal youth and vigor, strong in its everlasting truth, giving purpose and a goal to human life, leaving us with the vision that all things move in accordance with the divine ordinances of the cosmic order which even man, the disruptor par excellence, has in the long run to turn back to, a harmony which our modern distressed world, is sorely in need of, to take as a mirror on which to model, act and rejuvenate itself, and go forward invigorated, as the original Aryans did, on the path of the Eternal.

The unrest and the widely spread dissatisfaction, so outstanding in a world that has prided itself on its material values, are pointers to the fact that man needs a comprehensive ideal that gives him a key to the understanding of the universe, of himself, and of his place in the world, that gives him a meaningful purpose and the means of achieving that purpose, that inspires and uplifts him. This the Vedas provide. As Carl Jung says, "Man can live amazing things if they make sense to him" (*Psychology and Religion*, 1977. p. 94). Without vision the people die, for vision is the food of the soul

which is as much in need of nourishment as the body. The Vedas touch one of the profoundest chords that can resound in the human heart for they reveal man's essential role in the world as an agent between the highest and lowest; they give that kind of message of creative living which only the supreme vision of Deity and Its cosmic Order can impart. This indeed has never been equaled.

But the Vedas are not easy to grasp. They need a key, perhaps several; the most important key was provided for us by that great, selfless, and still much maligned and misunderstood disciple, H. P. Blavatsky, especially in her *Secret Doctrine*. Without this key the Vedas may remain a more or less closed, occult book; without this key the present writer would never have been able to realize the magnitude of the Vedic vision, let alone reconstruct it from the hints scattered and concealed throughout the collections. It is also of the highest interest to note that the three objects of the Theosophical Society—universal brotherhood and knowledge and right use of the powers latent in man—find a fertile field of exploration in the Vedas: "For of one spirit are the gods with mortal man, co-sharers all of gracious gifts" (Rgv.VIII.27. 4ab) All "isms" and therefore all forms of sincere worship and all gods are facets which mirror one aspect or other of the One Reality beyond them.

When the world is at last becoming more global in its outlook when one part of the planet can no longer ignore the other part, when the past compartmentalization in the social and religious orders is found more and more useless and meaningless through the impact of inter-communication on a worldwide scale which brings home to everyone of us the necessity of harmonious relationship and understanding, the supreme vision of cosmic order of the Vedas, an order wherein all are seen as playing a vital role, assumes unprecedented importance. In this century when all mental frontiers are slowly disintegrating, the message of harmonious working together, of Cosmic integrity, of the Vedas can no longer be held in its Indian boundaries, in its orthodox chains, it has to burst its traditional bonds and spread over the face of the world, for therein lies the hope of

mankind, and the glory of that eternal cosmic harmony to which man must contribute if he is to integrate himself in the vast Order, that Order reflected in the hearts of all those gods and men "moving upon the two pathways, ways of the patriarchs and of gods and mortals" (Rgv.X.88.15) the path of out-going and in-going, of involution and evolution, that leads to ultimate victory, when man "liberated from the paths, verily a pillar of life, stands on firm foundations in the abode of the most High" (Rgv.X.5.6) and can merge with the solar splendor, or the *atman* of the Upanishads (cf. Rgv.VIII.101.14; 6.10). For the divine "herdsman, the unfaltering one,

clothed in diffusive and converging (forces), by the pathways approaching and withdrawing, journeys continuously within the worlds" (Rgv.1.164.31) and none, not the most materialistic of ages or peoples, will ever conquer that herdsman, whom the Rishis discovered as Agni the flame divine "crouched in the secret place" (Rgv.1.62.2), whom the Upanishadic sages called the *atman* hidden in the "cave" of the heart, "before whose majesty death itself is carried away" (Katha Up.1.2.25); for "that thou art, and that is truth, that is the divine Order, that is Brahman." Such identification is the eternally valid message of Sanatana Dharma. □

The more a Sufi listens to *Saut-e Sarmad*, the sound of the abstract, the more his consciousness becomes free from all the limitations of life. The soul floats above the physical and mental plane without any special effort on man's part, which shows its calm and peaceful state; a dreamy look comes into his eyes and his countenance becomes radiant, he experiences the unearthly joy and rapture of *Wajad*, or ecstasy. When ecstasy overwhelms him he is neither conscious of the physical existence nor of the mental. This is the heavenly wine, to which all Sufi poets refer, which is totally unlike the momentary intoxications of this mortal plane. A heavenly bliss then springs in the heart of a Sufi, his mind is purified from sin, his body from all impurities, and a pathway is opened for him towards the world unseen; he begins to receive inspirations, intuitions, impressions, and revelations without the least effort on his part. He is no longer dependent upon a book or a teacher, for divine wisdom, the light of the soul, the Holy Spirit, begins to shine upon him. As Sharif says, I by the light of soul realize that the beauty of the heavens and the grandeur of the earth are the echo of Thy magic flute.

From *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan, VOL. II* London: Barrie and Jenkins.