



living veda

2024 | JAIPUR EDITION

Conference on
modern interpretations
of Veda in the light of
Sri Aurobindo



28 - 29 December 2024



Central Sanskrit University, Jaipur, IN

Gopalpura Bypass Rd, Triveni Nagar, Jaipur - 302018 RJ, IN

Conference Office:

Sri Aurobindo Society, Jaipur Branch

45 Surendrapal Colony, New Sanganer Road,
Jaipur - 302019, RJ, IN

SAKSHI Trust

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Theme Note

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Hindus, Indians, and those who know about India are usually aware that the Veda is ancient, holy, and the fountainhead of India, not just Hindu, culture and civilisation. But why? This remains a puzzle to most. Even practising Hindus and those interested in spirituality have only a vague idea of the value or importance of the Veda. The Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and later texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Srimad Bhagavatam are much better known.

Consequently, many modern or contemporary Hindus, though they may respect the Veda, have never actually read or studied it; more often they follow what we might term common Hinduism, or a sampradaya, or guru, looking for spiritual fulfilment. The Veda remains little understood, ignored and sometimes even reviled. This conference seeks to redress this lacuna in India's—and the world's self-understanding—by foregrounding the study of the Veda as an imperative of our times.

Its primary purpose is to address the contemporary relevance of the Veda, with particular reference to the various ways it was interpreted in the last 200 years, both in India and abroad. The more significant objective is to ask what lessons we might learn from this engagement in domains as varied as sustainability, good governance, and spiritual transformation.

The conference welcomes papers and presentations on all recent approaches and interpretations of the Veda. Its bedrock is the belief, after Sri Aurobindo, that in the Veda alone is a combination of knowledge, words, and works; here, the mantra is the thing itself.

It is, perhaps, an accident of history that Western Indologists' intense engagement with Vedic studies coincided with colonial ascendancy and the decay of traditional Indian culture. Their primary exposure to the Veda was through the ritualistic interpretation of the Rig Veda Samhita by Sayana and Karmakanda practices throughout the country. Although spiritual interpretations of the Veda were prevalent and available in a much older tradition consisting of Yaska, Shaunaka, Katyayana, Durgacharya, Ananda Tirtha, Bhaskara, and Raghavendra Tirth, to name a few authorities, Western scholars primarily ignored or were unaware of them. Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), who published the Rig Veda Samhita for the first time (1900) in human history, did so along with Sayana's commentary, thus providing the latter with a high academic acceptance value. Modern Vedic students and scholars, Western and Indian, have therefore mainly been brought up in the tradition regarding the Rig Veda Samhita primarily in the light of Sayana's Bhashya.

Thereafter, there have been two ways of regarding the Vedas in India: one is “back to the Vedas,” popularised by Swami Dayanada Saraswati (1824-1883), and the other is “away from (or away with) the Vedas,” as represented by Thomas Babington Macaulay and other modernisers. Both these approaches have one thing in common: both debated the authority, canonicity, and sanctity of the Vedas. Were the Vedas, in other words, the most authentic Hindu scriptures or were they to be rejected? Indeed, orthodoxy in the Hindu traditions (astika vs nastika) hinged on whether we accept the authority of the Vedas or not on whether we believe in God.

The Vedas, thus, were a site of legitimation even for those who rejected them. Indeed, Hinduism is “the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimising reference to the authority of the Veda.” (John E. Llewellyn “From Interpretation to Reform: Dayanand’s Reading of the Vedas, “Authority, Anxiety, and Canon: Essays in Vedic Interpretation ed. Laurie L. Patton (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994): 237.)

The first significant departure from Sayana in the modern period was Swami Dayananda Saraswati’s nine-volume commentary on the Veda, Rigvedadi-bhashya-bhumika and Satyarth Prakash (1875), a primer on monotheistic Sanatana Dharma. But it was Sri Aurobindo who provided the key to an integral or comprehensive understanding of the Veda by combining the critical, historical, and philological hermeneutics of Western Orientalists, with the commentaries of Yaska, Sayana, and other Indian Vedic scholars. He thus comes up with the most original way of decoding the most profound spiritual meanings of the verses. As Kapali Sastry explained, it was Sri Aurobindo who shows us a meaning beyond the Karmakanda level of the gross and ritualistic aspects of Vedic practice. In the Sanskrit Bhumika to his Siddhāñjana (1947), Sastry develops a far-reaching framework to reveal the secret meaning of the Veda, in contradistinction to the external, apparent word meanings, which are often seen in conventional, even transactional terms.

Following Sri Aurobindo and Kapali Sastry’s lead, Dr. R.L. Kashyap, well-known for his English translations of the Veda, also turned his attention to applying the same methodology to other areas of the Vedic corpus. He thus brought out in English spiritual and mystical interpretations of Taittiriya Samhita, belonging to the Krishna Yajur Veda division. This is a significant undertaking, pioneering and educative. In the 20th century, thanks to the direct experience and vision of Sri Aurobindo, the Siddhanjana and Bhumika publications in Sanskrit of T. V. Kapali Shastry, and the vision and intellectual grasp of R L Kashyap who translated all the Veda mantras with spiritual meanings in English, it is now possible to restore the Veda, finally in the 21st century CE, after 6000 years, to its original role and status. To work towards such a realisation is the ultimate purpose of our endeavours.

Our concern in this conference is not whether the Veda will be upheld as the supreme Hindu scripture. Instead, it is with the more fundamental question of the meaning of the Vedas, with the “secret” they contain, and with the relevance of that secret to our lives and times. That is why our inclination is toward Sri Aurobindo, who wrote his brilliant and gripping exegesis called The Secret of the Veda.

Sri Aurobindo firmly believed that the rediscovery and rejuvenation of India’s spiritual knowledge and practice should be the most critical work of the Indian Renaissance.

Using ‘The Secret of the Veda’ as its basis, this conference aims at a cartography of modern interpretations of the Veda, both Indian and Western, to arrive at a fuller understanding of the world’s introduction, engagement, and reinterpretation of the living Veda.

Topics and areas of study:

- The renaissance of India through Vedic way of life.
- Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vasishtha Ganapati Muni, T V Kapali Sastry, Pandit Madhusudan Oza, M P Pandit, A B Purani, Dayananda Saraswati, Anirban, R L Kashyap, David Frawley, Sayanacharya, Madhvacharya, and others.
- Enhancing human potentiality through Veda.
- The path of Veda, symbolism in Savitri and the Veda, unfolding of Vedic ideas in 'The Life Divine' 'Integral Yoga' in the light of the Vedas.

Convenors:

Sri Amod Kumar

Chairman, Sri Aurobindo Society State Committee, Rajasthan

Dr. Ajit Sabnis

Chairman, Sri Aurobindo Society State Committee, Karnataka

Sri Bindumadhav V Jahagirdar

Admin Officer, SAKSHI Trust

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