

Rishi

The word `rishi` has evolved from the root `rish`, which means `to move`, `to push`, `to thrust`.¹

More common interpretation of the term rishi means mantra-drashta or the perceiver of mantras or hymns.

Pandit Madhusudan Ojha has explained the term in his two books, *Maharshikulavaibhavam* and *Adhibhautikadhyaya*.

In *Maharshikulavaibhavam*, Ojhaji has given different interpretations of the term *rishi*. The first interpretation is based on its characteristics. The term was first used to denote the basic materials from which the process of Creation began. All beings come into existence through prana or life. But mula-prana, or the basic source of life, is bereft of life. The term rishi is used in this context. In *Shatapatha Brahmana*, it is explained that rishi itself is the innate material from which the Creation began.

Those who perceived this process are also called rishis. The very first stirring in the ``undifferentiated, limitless, formless ocean of supraphysical energy`` is rishi and those who discovered these forces were named after them.²

They are also the ones who articulated this knowledge of Veda Vijnana in the form of hymns which became the Vedas. Hence, rishis are referred to as the mantra-drashtas. The Vedas thus came from rishis.

The great Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo has explained the term in simpler but profound words: "The thing has been seen by the seer, he is the drashta and to him Veda is drishti; it is spoken to the hearer & he sees, indirectly, through the medium of the word what the seer has seen by the self-vision, directly; to the hearer, Veda is śruti."³

In a letter written to his brother, the great Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo has given a more detailed interpretation. The rishi, he wrote, "was at once sage, poet, priest, scientist, prophet, educator, scholar and legislator. He composed a song, and it became one of the sacred hymns of the people; he emerged from rapt communion with God to utter some puissant sentence, which in after ages became the germ of mighty philosophies; he conducted a sacrifice, and kings and peoples rose on its seven flaming tongues to wealth and greatness; he formulated an observant aphorism, and it was made the foundation of some future science, ethical, practical or physical; he gave a decision in a dispute and his verdict was seed of a great code or legislative theory...He himself was the master of all learning and all arts and all sciences. The rishis won their knowledge by meditation working through inspiration to intuition. Austere concentration of the faculties stilled the waywardness of the reason and set free for its work the inner, unerring vision which is above reason, as reason is itself above sight; this again worked by intuitive flashes, one inspired stroke of insight quivering out close upon the

¹ Excerpts from Before the Beginning and after the End, Rishi Kumar Mishra, Rupa & Co.,2000.

² ibid

³ The Upanishads-I: Isha Upanishad, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication.

other, till the whole formed a logical chain; yet a logic not coldly thought out nor the logic of argument but the logic of continuous and consistent inspiration.⁴

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⁴ The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo :Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, Volume 36, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications.