

# W.B.Yeats and Purohit Swami: An Interface



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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to investigate the interface between W. B.Yeats and Purohit Swami who went to England in 1931 and lived there for five years. Purohit Swami introduced *The Upanishads* and Hindu lore to Yeats. Yeats found support for his thoughts from this knowledge. This may be seen in *A Vision* (1937) and in his long poem *Supernatural Songs*.

During his stay Purohit Swami wrote five books which were published in England. Yeats was associated with these books in one way or the other. The five books which Purohit Swami wrote include *An Indian Monk* (1932), *The Holy Mountain* (1934), *The Geeta* (1935), *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937), and *Aphorisms of Yoga* (1938).

It is noteworthy that *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937) which is a translation of *The Upanishads* was co-authored by Yeats. For all these books Yeats either wrote Introduction or Preface. During his last years Yeats became deeply interested in Indian philosophy and lore. In several of his poems the influence of Indian philosophy and lore is visible. This paper sincerely highlights this fact with illustrations from Yeats' work.

## Introduction

**“We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry”.** - W.B. Yeats

**You were** silly like us; your gift survived it all: The Parish of rich women, physical decay, Yourself, Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.

- W.H. Auden (1907– 73), 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats'. (1940)

A literary artist does not work in isolation. He substantially draws from the social, cultural, political, religious and philosophical milieu. And eventually makes his contribution to these areas of society.

In the poems of his later years, say 1931 onwards, Yeats' poems have references to Vedanta and Indian philosophy. One may wonder about the source of this influence on poems and plays of Yeats. The credit for introducing Indian philosophy and *Vedanta* to Yeats goes to an Indian monk name Purohit Swami.

It is pertinent to know a little more about Purohit Swami before going into the detailed study of Yeats' poetry that bears influence of *Vedanta* and Indian philosophy.

It is on record that Yeats met Purohit Swami in 1931. The meeting took place at the house of Sturge Moore. Purohit Swami went to England in 1931 with a mission to 'interpret the esoteric phase of Indian life to the West', on the instruction of his master Sri Hamsa. Yeats was attracted towards Purohit Swami. They became friends. Their friendship lasted till Yeats died. Purohit Swami lived in Europe for five years and wrote five books. The two even lived together for sometime. Yeats held Purohit Swami in very high esteem. Yeats himself wrote:

“.....I have of late I think come to some coherent grasp of reality and whether that will make me write or cease to write I do not know. I have learned a good deal from the Swami who suddenly makes all wisdom if you ask him the right question.....”<sup>1</sup>

Before coming to England on his holy mission, Purohit Swami had worked as a school teacher and also with a business firm. He was an educated man with a university degree. He had also qualified in law. Due to his interest in spirituality he studied religious books and spent time with saints. Eventually he renounced the world including his family-wife and children and became a mendicant.