

VEDIC CIVILIZATION

PART-1

DR. MD. NEYAZ HUSSAIN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR & HOD
PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
MAHARAJA COLLEGE
VKSU, ARA (BIHAR)

INTRODUCTION

With the decline of Indus Valley Civilization or Harappan Culture by 1500 BCE a new civilization arose. Around this period the speakers of Indo-Aryan language, Sanskrit, entered the North-West India from the Indo-Iranian region. The advent of Aryans opened a new chapter in the history of ancient India. It marked the end of the pre-and proto-historic period.. Literature produced during this period gave us valuable information regarding the *polity, economy, society and the religious set up* of the Aryans. North India, especially the Gangetic Valley, was the cradle of the Vedic Culture, known largely from the vast Vedic literature. Vedic literature has been traditionally held sacred, for it is believed to have a divine source and is the oldest scriptures of Hinduism.

The Vedas are considered eternal. The various sages (Rishis) composed them and were transmitted orally from generation to generation. The Vedas were not committed to writing until very late. The Vedic texts may be divided into two broad chronological strata:

(1) The early Vedic (c. 1500 – 1000 BCE) when most of the hymns of Rig Veda were composed

(2) The later Vedic (c. 1000 – 600 BCE) which belong to the remaining Vedas and their branches.

The two periods correspond to the two phases of Aryan expansion in India. The discovery of the *Painted Grey ware (PGW)* from the sites in the Indo-Ganges divide, upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab has provided the valuable archaeological materials to supplement, corroborate, check and verify the literary data in the Vedic literature, especially the later Vedic texts.

ORIGINAL HOME OF THE ARYANS

- In India, the founders of the Vedic culture were the Aryans, probably an immigrant people. They arrived in India between c.2000 and 1500 BCE. It has long been a matter of controversy as to what region the Indo-Europeans inhabited before the arrival of one or more of their branches to India.
- The earliest Aryans lived in the geographical area covered by eastern Afghanistan, Punjab and fringes of western Uttar Pradesh.
- Some rivers of Afghanistan such as the river *Kubha*, and the river *Sindhu and its five branches* are mentioned in the Rig Veda. Another river mentioned is the Saraswathi, now lost in

ORIGINAL HOME OF THE ARYANS

the sands of Rajasthan. The whole region in which the Aryans first settled in India is called Saptasindhu, the land of the Seven Rivers.

- Many scholars such as *Ganganath Jha*, *D.S. Trivedi*, *L.D.Kalla* etc., tried to prove that the Vedic Aryans were neither foreigners nor did they migrate into India, but were the indigenous people, who regarded Sapta Sindhu as their original home.
- *Bal Gangadhar Tilak's view:-* He suggested the Polar region as the original home of the Aryans on astronomical calculations.
- Different scholars have identified different regions as the original home of the Aryans. They include Arctic region, Germany, Central Asia, Central Europe, Hungary, Scandinavia etc.

ORIGINAL HOME OF THE ARYANS

- ***Majority View*** :-The Indo-Europeans emerged from the region between the Caspian Sea and the Southern Russian steppes. From there they migrated to far off places in search of pastured lands to graze their cattle. It has been proved that the Aryans before entering India stayed for a long time in Central Asia, but by second millennium BCE they migrated to North India through the passes of Hindukush, i.e., Khyber, Bolan and Gomal.

VEDIC LITERATURE

The Vedas are the most important source of information about the Vedic Aryans.

The Vedas are the oldest literature of the Indo-Aryan and perhaps the literary works in the whole group of Indo-European languages.

➤ The term Vedic literature means the four Vedas in their Samhitas and the Allied Literature based on or derived from the Vedas.

➤ The word Veda comes from the root '*vid*' which means to know. In other words the *term Veda signifies superior knowledge.*

➤ The Vedas are four in number viz, (i) Rig Veda (ii) Sama Veda (iii) Yajur Veda (iv) Atharva Veda.

➤ Rig Veda is thought to be the most ancient and most sacred text. It is also the best source of information on the daily life of the early Vedic Aryans; their struggles, and aspirations, their religion and philosophical ideas.

➤ The Brahmanas (Explains Vedic text, rituals)

➤ The Upanishads (deals with the mysteries of creation , essence of life)

➤ The Puranas (Simplify the Vedas)

➤ Epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata)

Collectively these Vedic literature gives information about political, social , religious, and economic life of the Aryans in India.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

- Many tribes (janas) led by rajans
- Each jana had many villages(gramas)
- Each grama had many families
- Gramani(village headman) was leader of each grama
- Rajan(the ablest and strongest) was elected by people. He fought with the enemies, ruled according to the wishes of the tribe , assisted by many officials like *purohita* and *senani*. He had no absolute power and had to act as per wishes of the people in Rig Vedic period.
- Sabha (a small assembly and only important members of tribe were its members). Advised and guided the king
- Samiti- large assembly, opinion on important matters given by any member
- Women took part in political activities

SOCIAL LIFE

- Joint family system in villages
- Grihpati (eldest living male member) was the head of the family. In family matters his decision was final.
- Women had important place in society
- Monogamy-only one wife
- Women have right to education
- Women scholars (Gargi, Maitreyi) composed Rig Vedic hymns
- Wife had important place in religious ceremonies
- Women had right to choose husband (swayamwara)
- No evidence of child marriage
- Remarriage of widows permitted

SOCIAL LIFE

- They had simple nutritious food
- Wheat, barley, maize, vegetables, fruits, milk, milk products
- Fond of honey and intoxicating drinks- soma and sura
- They use meat occasionally
- Dress-used unstitched piece of cloth like dhoti, wore turban, use ornaments of gold, silver, precious stones
- Recreation:- Outdoor activities like chariot racing, hunting; enjoyed music and dance . Indoor activities like dice and gambling

(To be continued)