

VEDIC CIVILIZATION

PART-2

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ECONOMY

- The Rig Vedic Aryans were pastoral people and their main occupation was cattle rearing.
- The Rig Veda refers to the practice of *ploughing*, sowing of seeds on the furrows, seasons, harvesting and threshing. With the knowledge and use of iron they were able to clear forests and bring more lands under cultivation.
- The main cereal produced by the people was *Yava* or barley.
- Wheat was the staple food.
- Weaving seemed domestic craft, by women.
- They knew the use of metals like *gold, copper, bronze, silver* etc.
- Trade was practiced on *barter system*. In the later times, gold coins called Niskha were used as media of exchange in transactions.

RELIGION

The religion of the early Vedic people was more simple, realistic and less ritualistic. The Rig Vedic Aryans worshipped the natural forces like earth, fire, wind, rain and thunder. They personified these natural forces into many gods and worshipped them. Their number is stated to have been 33.

▪ ***Indra*** was the most popular of all the early Vedic gods, who is called ***Purandara*** or breaker of forts, played the role of warlord, leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons. He shared some of the characteristics of the Greek god Zeus. Nearly three-fourths of the hymns of Rig Veda (250) have been devoted to him.

▪ ***Agni*** (Fire God) held the second position to whom 200 hymns are devoted. Fire played a significant part in the life of primitive people because of its use in burning forest, cooking etc.

RELIGION

Agni was worshipped as the god of priests and the intermediary between the devotees and god.

- *Varuna* was next only to Indra in popularity. He was the upholder of the physical and moral order.

- *Surya* (the Sun) *Savitri* (the deity to whom the famous Gayatri mantra is addressed) and *Pushan* (Guardian of roads, herdsman and cattle) were the other deities.

- *Soma* was considered to be the god of plants and an intoxicating drink was named after him. The Rig Veda has large number of hymns, which explain the methods of preparation of this drink from plants.

- The *Maruts* personify the storm

RELIGION

▪ *Female goddesses* like *Prithvi* (Earth), *Aditi* (Mother of God), *Ushas* (dawn) and *Arayani* (goddess of forest) were worshipped.

Thus there were a large number of gods representing the different forces of nature in one form or other. Vedic people worshipped many gods to gain their favours. They thought that the gods might be satisfied by offering food and drink in order to get boons from them and avert evils that they were capable of doing them. They offered prayers and sacrifices to get in return pasu (cattle), praja (children), health and wealth (sampada). In the Rig Veda a triple classification of Vedic gods has been hinted. The corresponding three orders are i) Terrestrial (Prithvisthan) ii) Aerial or Intermediate (Madhyasthan) iii) Celestial (Dyusthana).

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

The history of the later Vedic period is mainly based on the Vedic texts which were compiled after the age of the Rig Veda. The Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda, the Brahmanas and a few Upanishads were compiled during the later Vedic age, extending from c.1000 to 600 BCE.

▪ *Wider knowledge of Indian geography:-* mention the 'two seas' the Arabian and the Indian Ocean. The Vindhya Mountains are indirectly referred to. Aryans expanded from Punjab over the whole of Uttar Pradesh covered by the Ganga-Yamuna doab.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

- Towards the end of the later Vedic period around 600 BCE, the Vedic people moved further east to Kosala in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in north Bihar.
- Transition from a semi-nomadic life to settled agriculture accompanied by constant fights. They used river irrigation and also started to clear the Jungle wherever it was possible.
- The Rig Veda mentions iron in texts which date back to the eleventh century BCE. This correlates very well with recent archaeological research which dates the first use of iron in north western India to the same age.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

CHANGES IN POLITY:- This period saw revolutionary changes in the Vedic polity. Aryans dominated the entire Gangetic basin and the fertile alluvial deposits were at their disposal. This brought substantial changes in their economic position and political setup. Many Jana tribes were amalgamated to form *Janapadas or Rashtras* in the later Vedic period. The Turvasas and the Krivis became the Panchala group. Finally the Kurus and Panchalas were amalgamated and became Kuru-Panchala group. Thus the later Vedic period provided a solid background for the emergence of the famous sixteen Janapadas of the Sixth Century BCE.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

- The royal power increased due to the amalgamation of tribes and increase in the size of kingdoms. Tribal authority tended to become territorial.
- *The king* performed various rituals and sacrifices to strengthen his position. They included *Rajasuya, Asvamedha and Vajapeya*. Later Vedic literature contains discussions on the origins of kingship. The kingship evolved more monarchical and hereditary in nature.
- The tribal assemblies like *Vidhata, Sabha, Samiti*, though present, came to be dominated by the nobles and Brahmins.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

- Large number of new officers appointed like bhagalugha (Collector of taxes), sangrahitri (treasurer), Suta (Chronicler) etc.
- Tribal polity was replaced by organized monarchy.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

CHANGES IN SOCIETY

- The social institutions were developed in a clear and visible manner.
- Later Vedic society came to be divided into four varnas called the Brahmans, Rajanyas or Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras.
- **Brahmans:-** emerged supreme and overtook the kshatriyas in the caste hierarchy, for they were responsible for investing divinity to the king. Claimed political and social privileges, were exempted from punishments and taxation.
- **Kshatriyas:-** constituted the warrior class. They were the protectors of the people and the king was chosen among them.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

- **Vaisyas:-** devoted themselves to trade, agriculture and various crafts. They were the tax-paying class.
 - **Sudras:-** the bulk of the population and attended to agriculture and other crafts
 - **Marriage:-** between the members of the same gotra was not permitted.
 - **Women:-** lost their political rights of attending assemblies.
 - **Child marriages** also came into vogue.
 - Restrictions were placed on inter dining between classes.
- Vedic social system transformed from a class divided tribal society into a Varna divided society.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

CHANGES IN ECONOMY

- Tremendous improvements in the agricultural sector
- The Satapatha Brahmana refers to six, eight, twelve and even twenty-four oxen were used to draw or drag plough. It also refers to the ploughing festivals.
- Use of iron implements became common in Punjab, Western UP and Rajasthan by 800 BCE.
- Surplus agricultural produce promoted trade and commerce mainly based on barter system
- Coins came into use only around 600 BCE. Nishka, Satamana and Krishnala were used as medium of exchange.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

CHANGES IN RELIGION

- Substantial changes in the realm of religion and mode of worship due to socio-economic changes that occurred during later vedic period
- Different types of sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies came into existence.
- Priests received fabulous rewards for performing sacrifices.
- Upanishads dealt with much philosophical speculations during this period.

CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

(1000 BCE – 600 BCE)

- Ashrama system:- Had taken its roots and gained strength. This was meant to regulate the life of the people based on Varna dharma. They are the Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa.
 - New gods:- Like Prajapati, Vishnu and Rudra emerged and their importance grew at the cost of Indra and Varuna. The cult of Rudra evolved from a Harappan cult (Pasupati Mahadeva) and hence it was a non-Aryan influence.
- Thus Vedic religion transformed from the simple polytheism to highly ritualistic and speculative one.

SUMMARY

In conclusion we can say that Rig vedic period tribal polity, pastoral economy, class divided society and the simple and polytheistic religion was transformed into organized monarchy, agrarian economy, caste divided society and the sacrificial ritual dominated religion in the later Vedic period. We can see towards the end of the Vedic period beginning of a strong reaction against priestly domination, rituals and cults, especially in the land of the Panchalas and Videha around 600 BCE. The rise of new religions like Buddhism and Jainism was the direct result of this socio-economic problem. Their emergence should be seen in the light of socio-economic changes of the Later Vedic Period.