

When the Harappan Urban Civilization in India around 1750 A.D. was declining, it was getting transformed into rural civilization. Around 1500 A.D., a group of people called Indo Arya or Arya entered India. What role did they play in Indian History? Let us discuss about their special features and diverse culture.

Rig Veda and Vedic Literature

What is Veda? The word 'Veda' is derived from word 'vid'. Its meaning is to know. Vedic Age includes Rig Veda and the social, cultural, political, religious and economic matters mentioned in it. Vedic Literature includes two types of books: Mantra and Brahman. There are four Vedas but according to our time-period, the discussion will be only on Rig Veda.

The most important source of knowing Vedic History is Rig Veda. It is divided in 10 chapters or mandalas. It consists of 1028 suktas. The book in poetic form sketches various situations of India of the period of Veda. The Rig Veda must have been written in 1200 B.C.

Who were the Aryans connected to Vedic Age? Till the 19th century they were known as a dynasty or a people. But the many researches, done in the second half of the 20th century, proved that Aryan is not a word signifying people but it is a linguistic term. It means that such a group of people who spoke Indo-European language. The Latin and Greek languages originated from it. In all these languages there is a lot of similarity. Hence their sound (phonetic) and meaning are almost the same.

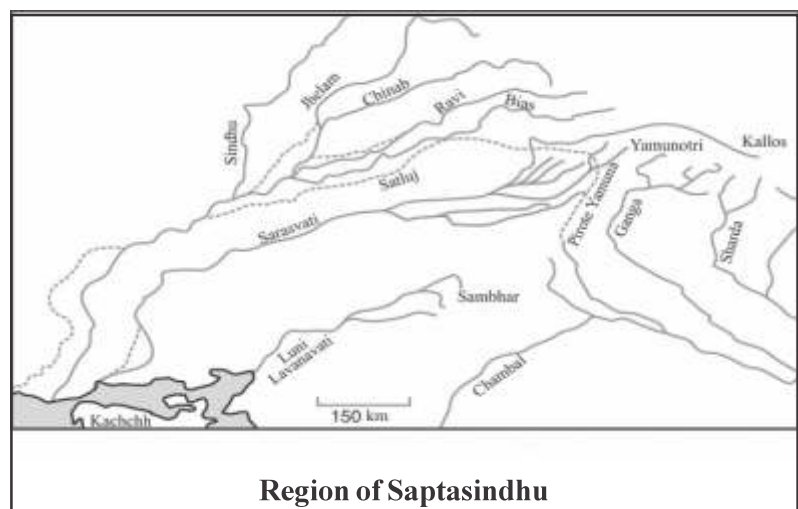
Migration of Aryans

There has been the archeological base that the Aryans, originally from Eurasia of South Russia, lived around 4000 B.C. in the meadows of Russia and Steppes. This people, as they were cattle herders, migrated because of want of fodder. They came from Central Asia in different groups around 1500 B.C. and entered India through Khaiber-Ghat of the Hindukush mountain range. They reared horses and cows. Horses and cows were integral part of their culture. The earthen vessels too were an important part of their identity. Their migration from Central Asia to South Asia was confirmed by the earthen vessels. Among the many beliefs regarding who Aryans were, Lokmanya Tilak and Dayanand Sarasvati propounded that they came down from North Pole and Tibet.

These people who arrived in India, entered India after migrating for years. They came in contact with other people of India. Consequently, the Aryan Vedic Sanskrit language became the main language of entire North India. Its best expression is Vedic Literature.

Vedic Aryans and their Geographical Area

As shown in Rig Veda, the Vedic Aryan lived in a region called



Saptasindhu (region of seven rivers). The seven rivers are: Sindhu, Bias, Ravi, Chinab, Satluj and Sarasvati. They were also familiar with the Kumbha river of Afghanistan. The people of the Rig Vedic period resided here. They fought battles and migrated in search of pastures. Gradually they proceeded towards East and by the end of Vedic period, i.e., approximately 1000 B.C., settled around Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The Customs of Vedic Period

The basic unit of Aryan society in Vedic Period was family. The society was patriarchal. But the position of women was important. There was monogamy. The woman got married at a mature age. Family was a part of a tribe, which was called Visha or Vansha. Jan was the biggest Societal unit. The people of the same Vansha remained combined by blood relation. There is no mention of Varna or Caste system. It was an equitable society. The profession did not depend on birth. Different members living in the same family practiced different professions. The Aryans were fair, tall and stout. The form of state was tribal. The king during Rig Vedic Period was called 'Rajanya'. Women enjoyed a respectable position in the society. They took part in political activities. They had the right to study. They gave their opinions freely. Women, such as Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Gargie and Maitree contributed in the composition of the verses (ruchas) of Rig Veda.

State Organization in Vedic Period

There seem to be tribal type state organization during Vedic Age. Being Cattle Herders, the social system was mobile, so also was the political system. However, they had primordial political organization like Gana and Vidath in Vedic Age. Besides this, they had important political organizations like 'Sabha' and 'Samiti'. In 'Sabha' mostly the elders sat (like present Rajyasabha) and made judgements, where as 'Samiti' (like present Loksabha) included the entire group of people. They specially elected the king in it. In Sabha and Samiti, discussions were held on the planning of war, distribution of things acquired in war, justice and matters related to religion. Women too joined in this political organizations and played an important role in political system. The office of king was not hereditary. Elections were held in Samiti. The king was called Rajanya. The responsibility of the priest was to give advice and suggestions to the king. To help the king in routine matters they used to have leaders like Senani (commander-in-chief), Kulap (head of family) and Gramani (mukhiya of village). The information is available in the Rig Veda about it. The social status of the chariot maker was high because war was their important political work and chariot was indispensable. People donated gifts as tax, which mentioned as 'bali' in Rig Veda. It was a voluntary contribution. Thus in the initial Vedic period political system was simple, in which women had an important place and participation of the people was connected with the state system.

The Religious and Spiritual Rituals of Vedic Age

Rig Veda discusses the religious life of Vedic Age. The form of society was tribal and patriarchal. Due to which there is not much mention of goddesses. Instead of it there are natural gods or gods related to nature. Many prayers are seen in the Rig Veda. Indra, Varun, Mitra, Agni, Vidhyut, Nasatya, Pushan, Yam and Soma are included among gods. There is also the mention of goddesses such as Usha and Aditi.

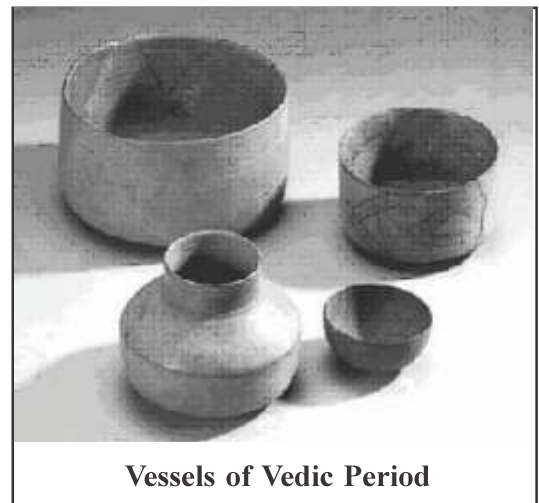
Indra was their main god. He was worshipped as god of rain and war. The name of Indra is mentioned the most in Rig Veda. Pavan is a god associated with Indra. Rain and wind were important aspects of their lives. Agni is their another important god. They believed that Agni was the link between God and man.

Therefore his cultural attribute is yajna. They believed that Indra is propitiated by the yajna and sends rain. Agni is the medium to reach Indra. Varun is believed to be the manager of the globe. He was known as rut. The god named Pushan was the god of animal herdsman. In the life of the caravan people, he had an important place. Drinking somarasa as a beverage was a cultural tradition.

There are suktas in Rig Veda to call all the gods. The work of the offerings, rituals of worship and work of yajna were performed by Brahmanas. They mostly gave donation and contributions for the purpose of posterity, increase in animal wealth and long life. Idol worship and temples during Vedic Age were absent.

Economics of Vedic Period

The Aryans of Rig Vedic Period were pastoral. They reared cow, buffalo, sheep-goats and horses to get milk, flesh and skin. Cow and horse were of great importance to them. Many words have originated from 'go' (cow). Rich person was called gomati. Daughter was called Dauhitaa meaning one milking cow. For the war the word was used, 'Gaveshna' meaning to search for cows. Most of the wars were fought for the animals. Cow was called 'Kamada' meaning, one fulfilling all the desires. In order to increase the number of animals many prayers are offered. All these matters indicate the intimate relation of the Aryans of Rig Vedic Period with the animal rearing.



Vessels of Vedic Period

The economy does not seem to be agriculture oriented for the people who were engaged in animal rearing and living nomadic life. There is hardly any archeological base for agriculture. However, through some references, we get information that they knew agriculture. The remains of food habits indicate that they used barley in their diet and hence knew to cultivate.

The economy lacked agriculture orientation. Animal husbandry seems to be their main work. However they knew hunting, carpentry, weaving and melting of metals. Through giving and taking of things they must have generated a market of barter system. Cow was considered the most important in barter system. There is a mention that 'Rajanya' gave Brahman-priests gifts of cows and horses. These gifts were given during special religious performances.

The advent of this new people on the border of North-West India is a most significant event in Indian culture. These pastors, coming from Eurasia (Approximately 1500 B.C.) entered India and spread themselves in the region of Sapatasindhu. Gradually, after this period they proceeded towards the rivers of the Ganga and the Yamuna. They came in contact with original Indians and gave rise to a new culture. We call it Aryan Culture. Aryan culture is being developed into great and huge Indian culture till today.

Post Vedic India

The period from 1000 B.C. to 600 B.C. is recognized as Post Vedic Period. In order to know the history of this time we have Rig Veda as well as other three Vedas: Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda.

Besides this the books of Brahmana, Aranyakas and Ramayana and Mahabharata are available.

In the Post Vedic period, the revolution of agriculture is seen. Its influence can be seen on the Indian society. The Post Vedic Period society was different from Vedic Period society. The post Vedic period society was divided in Varna system. There were Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The first two Varnas, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas possessed privileges and had their control over the other two. Vaishyas and Shudras were engaged in production-work, however their social status was low. The modern historians connect it to the event of the discovery of Iron in India and the subsequent economic system and social system.

The Brahmana Varna was engaged in religion, education and rituals. The Kshatriyas were involved in administration and state system. The Vaishya Varna was involved in agriculture, trade-commerce and animal husbandry, whereas, the Varna of Shudras were in the artisans category.

The importance of birth-origin, the primary unit of family, increased socially. The society was patriarchic. Many prayers found in the Vedas for acquiring son, indicate that the importance of male child had increased. Polygamy too came into existence. Compared to Vedic Period, in Post Vedic period, there was a change in the status of women. It was a joint family and the head of the family made all the decisions.

The student went to the teacher and acquired education. The students were imparted knowledge in Veda History, Purana and Physical Education.

The importance of land increased in Post Vedic Period, which can be clearly seen in Ramayana and Mahabharata. The importance of agriculture increased due to the discovery of iron. Gradually the Aryans moved from West to East. The Aryans migration towards East can be seen in Mahabharata. Ramayana, on the other hand, indicates that the Aryans migrated towards South. The importance of Sabha and Samiti diminished. The election for the king stopped and descendants became kings. Atharva Veda, shows the integration of the cultures of Aryan and Non-Aryans. Initially Aryans had conflicts with Non-Aryans, but some of the rituals of the Aryans were adopted by the Non-Aryans and many cultural values of the Non-Aryans were accepted by the Aryans. The mentions of superstitions, magic, vaidakshastra, medicines, etc. in Atharava Veda, indicate that the Aryans had accepted the customs of Non-Aryans.

In the post Vedic Period the importance of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva increased instead of Indra, Varuna and such other Vedic gods. The tradition of yajnas developed extremely. The smaller household yajnas were replaced by huge highly ritualistic yajnas. The tradition of 'Ashvamegha' increased and along with it the custom of offering of animal sacrifices too increased. The development in agriculture gave rise to urbanization. Trade and commerce got an impetus. In the sixth century B.C. many cities came into existence. This urbanization is well described in Buddhist literature. 16 Mahajanpadas, which are called original states, emerged. Gradually central state system originated. The king's greed for land increased due to increased importance of land. In future, it contributed in the emergence of state and its development.

The Post Vedic India is different from Vedic India. The nomadic life of the Aryans came at rest and they were stabilized. Economic system, social system and state system changed radically. Trade and commerce developed. Due to the discovery of iron, agriculture developed immeasurably and subsequently handicraft and art too developed. The culture of the black shining vessels of north was implemented. Many such towns have

been found in North India. With the discovery of iron and the implementation of these vessels, many cities developed. Consequently at the descent of the sixth century B.C. the second urbanization came in to existence.

EXERCISE

1. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (1) Describe the social situation as depicted in Rig Veda.
- (2) Give information about Vedic Religion.
- (3) Explain the political condition of the Vedic Period India.
- (4) Describe the cultural condition of the Vedic Period India.
- (5) Explain the Post Vedic Social condition of India.

2. Answer briefly :

- (1) Name the four Vedas.
- (2) Give information about the discovery of iron and explain its importance.
- (3) Explain the Post Vedic State System.
- (4) Discuss the status of women in Post Vedic India.
- (5) Give an idea of Post Vedic India's Economic System.

3. Choose the correct option from the given alternatives and give answers :

- (1) How many sukta are there in Rig Veda?
(A) 1000 (B) 1015 (C) 1028 (D) 1017
- (2) Where did the Aryans live in India in the beginning?
(A) Saptasindhu (B) Punjab (C) Uttar Pradesh (D) Bengal
- (3) What is believed about the original region of the Aryans?
(A) Eurasia (B) Central Asia (C) Iran (D) Bharat
- (4) In which Veda, is integration of Aryan and Non-Aryan found?
(A) Rig Veda (B) Sama Veda (C) Yajur Veda (D) Atharva Veda
- (5) What is the possible region of present India, mentioned in Rig Veda as Saptasindhu?
(A) West Bengal (B) Bihar (C) Punjab (D) Andhra Pradesh

