

The Aryans

Dr. Arati B. Nadgouda

Dept. of History, Devchand college, Arjunnagar

Introduction

The people who first used the Vedas as their sacred text, who first spoke the Sanskrit language and worshipped a particular group of deities led by Indra, called themselves Arya.

The Rig-Veda is the main source of our information about the early Aryans. The Source is extremely defective. In essence, the Rig-Veda is a hymn book.

At first, the Aryans stayed in the Indus plain, dispossessing the inhabitants whom they found there. Their penetration eastwards came later. The geographical allusions in the Rig-Veda point to a stage when Aryans were living mainly in the watershed between the Indus and the Ganges system. They were more familiar with the western region than with the Gangetic plain.

Original Home of the Aryans

The original home of the Aryans is a matter of great controversy. However, it is desirable to refer to some of the important theories regarding the original home of the Aryans. The most important theory which held the field for a long time was that the Aryans originally lived in Central Asia. The late Bal Gangadhar Tilak was of the opinion that the original home of the Aryans was the Arctic region. According to A. C. Dass, the original home of the Aryans was the Sapt-Sindhu or Punjab. According to Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the original home of the Aryans was Tibet.

If the Aryan occupied the north of India by a policy of conquest that was not so in the case of south India. Our knowledge of the epics tells us that the Rishis or sages played important part in this matter. As a matter of fact, Aryans penetration into the Deccan was carried out under the leadership of the sages such as Agastya.

Political Organization of the Rig-Veda Aryans

The basis of the political and social organization of the Rig-Vedic Aryans was the patriarchal family. The larger units of association were described as 'grama', 'vis' and 'jana'. Sometimes we hear of even 'janas'. But the exact relation between the above units is nowhere stated and sometimes the words are used almost synonymously. 'Grama' however appears to be a smaller unit than the 'vis' or the 'jana'.

Monarchy was the prevailing type of government among the Rig- Vedic tribes. But we also get references to names which are applied in later years to non-monarchical communities. Thus we have there 'gana' with 'ganapati' at its head.

The Rig- Vedic state ('rashtra') was normally ruled by a potentate styled as 'rajan'(king), who was "without rivals and a destroyer of rivals." Kingship appears to be hereditary. Thus the Purus and Tritsus, the two most famous of the Rig-Vedic clans had as their rulers dynasties of princes. Elective monarchies were perhaps not altogether unknown,

though there is no clear reference to it in Rig-Veda. In addition to the title 'rajan' we also come across the word 'samrat' which later meant a paramount ruler. But in Rig-Veda, however, there is no trace of territorial rulership of the later type. But it is significant that even in Rig-Veda we meet with the idea of universal monarch.

The 'rajan' occupied a place of honour in the tribe. He used to be formally consecrated to kingship and was marked out from the rest of the people by his shining robes and the splendid palace where he lived.

The primary duty of the king was the protection of the tribe and their territory. He fought against external enemies. Spies were employed to watch over the conduct of the people who were punished when they misbehaved.

The king thought lord of the tribe, did not govern without the consent of his people. The important business was usually carried on in a popular assembly called 'samiti' which was attended by princes as well as people. There is also reference to 'sabha', which was probably the Council of Elders.

Social Life

Family was the unit of political and social structure in the Rig- Vedic period. The members of a family lived in one and the same house built, probably, of wood and reeds. Every house contained a fireplace in addition to sitting-room and apartments for ladies. The head of the family was called 'grihapati'.

The family being patriarchal, people naturally prayed for male issues, though daughters once born were treated with the same kindness and consideration. The education of girls was not neglected. They were married when they attained full development. Marriages took place for love as also for money. Ordinarily a man had one wife; but polygamy was practised though not polyandry. Widows could remarry. But women were not independent persons in the eyes of laws and had to look up to their male relations for aid and support. In the house, the wife was treated as the queen of the house and the religious functions of the household were not complete without her participation. There is no evidence regarding seclusion of women; on the contrary they attended festive occasions "decked, shining forth with sun beams".

Dress and adornment received special attention. The clothes were made of cotton, deer skin and wool and were of different hues. Garments were frequently embroidered with gold. The use of golden ornaments and floral wreaths was common, especially on festive occasions. The hair was worn long and combed, and both men and women wore turbans.

The food of the Vedic household consisted mainly of parched grain, cakes, milk, curd and butter and various Vegetables and fruits. Use of animal food was common especially on occasions like marriages. There is reference to exhilarating drinks such as 'soma' and 'suri'.

The favorite amusements of the Vedic people consisted of racing, hunting and was-dance. The chariot-race was extremely popular; so was hunting. Their game included the lion, the elephant, the wild boar, the buffalo and the deer. Dicing was another favourite pastime. There is also reference to other forms of amusements such as boxing, music and dancing.

Women especially loved to show their skill in music and dancing to the accompaniment of lutes and cymbals. The singers loved to dwell on the joys of life.

Economic Life

The Rig-Vedic Aryans lived in villages. No doubt, we find mention of 'purs'; but in all probability they referred to ramparts or forts rather than to cities and towns. It is significant that Rig- Veda makes no mention of individual cities like Kampila which appears in later texts.

We have a few details regarding the organisation of the village. 'Gramani', the village official looked after the affairs of the village, both civil and military. 'Vrajapati' (probably identical with the 'gramini') led to battle the various 'kulapas' or heads of families.

Agriculture was the principal occupation of the people, Arable land in the village was owned by individuals or families; but grass land was in all probability, held in common. Cultivated fields were often watered by irrigation-canal. The use of manure was known. The grains grown were probably rice and barley. Rearing of cattle was also equally important. The cow was held in much esteem and veneration and milk formed an important item of diet. The 'gopa' led daily the herds of cattle to the pasture lands in the village. The draught – ox, the horse, the dog, the sheep and the goat were other important and useful animals common at that times.

Art and Sciences

The art of poetry was in full bloom. This is proved by the splendid collection of hymns known as Rik-Samhita which consists of hymns in praise of different gods. Very fine specimens of lyrical poetry are to be found among Rig-Vedic hymns.

Relations between Aryans and Dravidians

The relations between the Aryans and the Dravidians with whom they came in conflict were mostly hostile. But there must have been also intercourse of a different type. Aryans possessed many captured slaves who made possible the beginnings of mixed population. There are also references in Rig-Veda to alliances with Dravidian forces in wars between Aryan tribes. The languages of Rig-Veda contains numerous words and forms which must be accepted as Dravidian in their origin. Thus, a beginning had already been made during this period towards the fusion of the two main cultures-a process which continues down to the present day.

References

1. V.D. Mahajan, "Ancient India", New Delhi, 1968
2. D.D.Kosambi, " An Introduction to the study of Indian History", Bombay,1956.
3. S.N. Sen, " Ancient Indian History and Civilization", New Delhi, !988.
4. Acharya Keshattivar, "Ancient Indian History"(Marathi) Nagpur,1963.
5. N.K .Dutt, " Aryanization of India", 1925.
6. V.G. Childe, " The Aryans: The study of Indo European origins", 1926.

7. B.C. Law, “ Tribes in Ancient India”, 1943.
8. A.C.Das, “Rigvedic India”, Vol-I, 1921.
9. U.N. Ghosal, “ Studies in Indian History and Culture”, 1965.
10. D.R. Bhandarkar, “ Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture”, 1947