

**MODULE-2 SOCIAL-POLITICAL FORMATION IN
THE INDO- GANGETIC PLAINS
TOPIC- VEDIC SOCIETY**



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VEDIC SOCIETY AND ECONOMY



- Tribal society
- Social relations – based on kinship ties
- Tribe was referred as '**Jana**' & intra-tribal conflicts were frequent
- Rigveda – mentions 'battle of ten kings'- tribal conflicts
- Tribal conflicts- related to cattle raids, cattle thefts etc
- cattle- chief measure of wealth &
- the term used for war- *gavishti*- search for cows



- Chief of tribe- 'Raja' or '*Gopati*' '*Janasya Gopa*'- one who protect cow
- Kinship units- '*Gotra*'
- Measure of time- '*Godhuli*'(dusk), '*Samgava*'(morning)
- Daughter- '*duhitri*'- she who milks cows
- Hero- '*gojit*'- winner of cows'
- Wealthy person- '*gomat*'
- All terms derived from the root '*Gau*' means cow



- Rigveda- emphasizes the importance of cattle-wealth (*go*) is synonymous with wealth(*rayi*)
- A person rich in cattle- '*goman*' is considered wealthy-*maghavan* fit to be a member of *sabha*
- R.S.Sharma- many as 173 references to '*go*' & its derivatives in Rigveda & 21 mention about agriculture
- The Rigveda considered the cattle as the principal form of social wealth, agriculture though known & practised was secondary to cattle keeping in Rigvedic economy



- References to pastoral versus agricultural activities in vedic texts
- Numerous references in Rigveda to agriculture
- Cultivated field was 'kshetra
- 'krishi'- to the act of ploughing
- Plough- langala, sira
- Ploughshare- phala
- Furrow- sita
- Ploughed field datable to 11th c BC – found at Aligrama- Swat valley-textual evidence is here remarkably confirmed by the archaeologists spade
- Concluded that cattle rearing was of overwhelming importance agriculture was either a subsidiary activity or practised by non-Aryans



- Crop in general known as **sasya**
- Main cereals- barley **yava**
- Wheat- no mention in Rigveda
- **Vrihi**- Sanskrit means rice – denote crop in general
- Paddy cultivation seems to have taken root in Vedic culture with the spread of settlements in Ganga valley



- Later vedic times- witnessed significant changes in the material life along with the spread of vedic culture from Punjab to the east & the south-east ie in to the Ganga valley
- Later vedic- clear evidence of cultivation of 3 cereals- barley, wheat & paddy
- Most significant change- regular cultivation of rice – vrihi in later vedic text
- PGW- level in Hastinapura- remains of rice – paddy cultivation in doab area



- Society- fully sedentary society- oriented to agriculture with cattle-keeping as adjunct to the agrarian life
- Little evidence that iron ploughshare were regularly used
- Instance of iron ploughshare- excavations at Jakeheda in western UP
- Descriptions about ploughed land in vedic literature
- Spread of agriculture in Ganga valley-followed the clearance of the dense forests there by burning the forest



- Copper & iron implements, axes & adzes were used for cutting down the forest- references in later vedic literature
- Archaeological sites- specimens of iron & copper axes & adzes
- Introduction of iron technology- special feature of later vedic times
- Later vedic literature – syamayayas & krishnayayas- refer to iron
- Atranjikhhera & Noh- large number of iron tools & implements



- Implements- weapons for offensive & defensive purposes
- iron tools- 1000-900BC
- Majority manufactured after 800 BC
- Use of iron technology began to be regular & widespread after 750 BC
- Later vedic settlements was possibly instrumental in giving access to iron-ore deposits in Ganga valley
- But to what extent iron technology was employed for agricultural pursuits is open to doubt, especially because of the few specimens of iron ploughshare & other agricultural implements



- Primary unit of social life- family-**kula**
- **Patriarchal family**- father being head of family
- Rigveda – origin of 4 varnas- most distinctive feature of structure of traditional society
- **Purushasukta** in Rigveda- **Purusha**-
brahmana(mouth), rajanya(arms), vaisya(thighs),
sudra(feet)
- During the later vedic period this four fold division of society became more explicit in Dharmasastras
- They considered as the 4 unequal limbs of the society



- Concept of varna- hierarchical order with the Brahmas at the top & the sudras at the bottom
- Stated that varna status decided by birth & it was to maintained by endogamy & ritual purity
- Dharma or universal law was added to varna to establish a social law for the systematic functioning of the society
- Ritual status of each varna was decided, it did not prevent the non-Kshatriyas claiming kshatriya status
- Theoretical model of varna system was enforced only during the later vedic period



- Unequal distribution of the spoils of the war- basic reason for the emergence of the 4 fold division of the society
- But it had a link with the Aryan migrants & the indigenous people
- Concept of varna was closely tied up with the concept of Dharma in the sense of universal law
- Varna-dharma- the attempt to establish a social law or a systematic functioning of society which would ensure its well being



- It was stated that the society was made up of 4 orders & later a 5th one was added
- First 3 varnas- dwija / twice born & allowed to study vedas
- 5th- added later turned out to be untouchables
- Concept of varna assumed the characterization of status by birth, hierarchical ordering of social units, rule of endogamy & ritual purity & it clearly depicted the rigid social system



- Idea of pollution extending to social hierarchies, clearly defined & recognized specialties of labour & differentiation b/w occupations – made the basic elements of the concept of varna
- Ritual status & actual status in the terms of economic & political power were accorded to higher varnas
- Dharmasatras gave priority to the ritual status & the concern with the ritual status led to the theory of mixed varnas or varnasankara
- To vanasankara- a Brahmin marrying Vaisya women produce children called 'ambasatha' & Brahmin marrying Sudra women produce children called nishada



- Varna was adhered to strictly through birth itself
- Each varna had an independent entity with its own hierarchy based on either a tribal or occupational identity
- Manusmriti- a kingdom can prosper so long as the purity of varna is maintained
- Shantiparva in Mahabharatha- duties of social classes(Varnadharm) rests upon the state power (kshatradharma)



- Concept of varna- introduced in early Indian society- not as a racial segregation – but for setting out social categories
- Based on the accessibility to resources
- Kshatriyas had direct access to resources, brahmanas had indirect access in the form of Dana & Dakshina & enjoyed authority & power
- It was their necessity to distance those who provided labour, through an insistence on their ritual impurity
- Thus the concept of varna provided legitimation for the social & economic adjustments of the early society