



FACULTY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES

COURSE: B.A.LL.B. 1st Semester

SUBJECT: HISTORY - I

SUBJECT CODE: BAL 102

NAME OF FACULTY: Dr. Sadhna Trivedi

Lecture-8



Social, Economic, Political and Religious Life during Rig Vedic and Later Vedic Period

Social Condition:

Changes of far greater significance were gradually taking place in their society.

Caste Society:

Most important change was the evolution of caste system. Various sub castes evolved in addition to the traditional four-castes. The Brahmanas and Kshatriyas emerged as the two leading castes out of the general mass of population, known as vaisyas. The vaisyas were superior to the sudras but their position was steadily deteriorating. The Aitaraya Brahmana clearly indicates the absolute dependence of vaisyas on the two higher classes. The Sudras were held in great contempt.

The Brahmanas of the later Vedic age were the intellectual and priestly class. The Brahmanas retained a high standard of excellence and knew the details of the rituals. The kshatriyas were the fighting class in the society. War, conquest, administration of the kingdom was the principal duties of this class. By their superior learning some kshatriyas raised themselves to the status of a Brahmana. They composed hymns and performed sacrifices and also challenged the supremacy of Brahmanas.

Two Kshatriya kings Janak and Viswamitra attained the status of Rishi. For a long time the kshatriyas resisted the supremacy of the Brahmanas and claimed that the priest was only a follower of the king. Vaisyas were engaged in trade, industry and agriculture, and animal husbandry. They are debarred from the privileges which were enjoyed by the Brahmanas and kshatriyas. However the richer people among the vaisyas known as Sresthin were highly honored in the royal court.

The condition of the Sudras was very miserable. They had to serve the other three castes. They were untouchables. They had no right to approach the sacred fire, i.e., perform sacrifice, or to read the sacred texts. They were further denied the rite of burning the dead body. The structure of the caste system became hereditary.

Education:

A vast mass of vedic literature as well as a highly developed intellectual life speaks abundantly about a well planned system of education in the later Vedic Period. The students had to learn Vedas, Upanishad, grammar prosody, law, arithmetic and language.

After the Upanayana or sacred thread ceremony and initiation to studies the students were sent to the Gurukula for their education. They had to live in the house of the teacher (guru) and lead the chaste life of a Brahmacharin whose principal duties were study and service to the teacher. The students received free boarding and lodging at the house of the Guru. At the completion of their study they paid fees (guru-dakshina) to the teachers.

Position of women:

The women lost their high position which they had in the Rig Vedic Age. They were deprived of their right to the Upanayana ceremony and all their sacraments, excluding marriage, were performed without recitation of Vedic mantras. Polygamy prevailed in the society. Many of the religious ceremonies, formerly practiced by the wife, were now performed by the priests. She was not allowed to attend the political assemblies. Birth of a daughter became undesirable—for she was regarded as a source of misery. The custom of child marriage and dowry crept in. The women lost their honored position in the society.

Food and Dress:

In the later Vedic age rice became staple food of the people. Gradually the practice of eating meat was declined. Killing of cow was looked with disfavor. Wool was used in addition to cotton.

Economic Condition:

Like political and social conditions, the economic condition of the Aryans of the later Vedic period also underwent significant changes. Due to the emergence of caste system various occupations also appeared.

Agriculture:

The Aryans of the later Vedic period lived in the villages. In the villages small peasant owners of land were replaced by big landlords who secured possession of entire villages. Agriculture was the principal occupation of the people. Improved method of

tilling the land by deep ploughing, manuring and sowing with better seeds were known to the Aryans. More lands were brought under cultivation.

The cultivator yielded two harvests a year. Varieties of crops like rice, barley, wheat, maize and oil seeds were raised. But the cultivator was not free from trouble. Dangers of insects and damage of crops through hail-storm very badly affected the land of kuru and compelled many people to migrate.

Trade and Commerce:

With the growth of civilization, the volume of trade and commerce had increased by leaps and bounds. Both inland and overseas trades were developed. Inland trade was carried on with the Kiratas inhabiting the mountains. They exchanged the herbs for clothes, nattresses and skins. The people became familiar with the navigation of the seas. Regular coinage was not started.

The coins which were in circulation were "Nishka", "Satamana" and "Krishnala". The unit value of goods was a gold bar called "nishka" weighing three hundred and twenty ratis, which was also the weight of a satamana. A 'Krishnala' weighed one rati, i.e. 1.8 grams. There was a class of merchants called 'Pani' who controlled the trade. References to "ganas" or corporations and the "sreshthins" clearly speak of the formation of guilds or corporations for facilitating trade and commerce. Usuary and money lending was also practiced in this period.

Occupation:

The emergence of caste system brought varieties of means of livelihood. There are references about money lenders, chariot makers, dyers, weavers, barbers, goldsmiths, iron smiths, washer men, bow makers, carpenters, musicians etc. The art of writing probably developed in this period. The use of silver was increased and ornaments were made out of it.

House Building and Transport:

The house had many rooms with a special place for 'Grahapatha' fire which was kept continuously burning. Houses were made of wood. The Taittiriya Aranyakas refer about a special type of house known as 'Dhandhani' (treasure house). The Atharvaveda mentions about 'Patninam Sadan' (women's apartment).

The means of transport and communication developed with the growth of trade and commerce. Regarding means of transport mention may be made of wagons drawn by oxen, chariots for war and sport and rough vehicle known as 'bipatha' for transport of goods. Elephants and horses were also used. Ships and boats were also used as means of transport.

Religious Condition:

During the later Vedic period the religious spirit underwent a great change. Religion was overshadowed with rites and rituals. New gods and goddesses emerged during this period.

New Gods:

The Rig Vedic gods, Varun, Indra, Agni, Surya, Usha etc. lost their charm. The people worshipped them with less zeal. New gods like Siva, Rupa, Vishnu, Brahma etc. appeared in the religious firmament of the Later Vedic Period. The grandeur of the Rigvedic gods passed into oblivion, though we find in Atharvaveda the omniscience of Varuna or the beneficence of the Earth goddess.

Certain less important duties of the Rigvedic Period now became popular with the Common People. One of them was Rudra who already bore the epithet of Siva. Very soon Rudra came to be worshipped as 'Mahadeva' (great god) and the lord of animate beings (Pasupati).

Vishnu, the preserver rose into Prominence during this period. He occupied the place of Varuna, as the most sublime among the celestials. To attain his "Paramapada" (highest step) became the goal of the rishis. The worship of vasudeva was also started. He was regarded as Krishna Vasudev, the incarnation of Vishnu. Semi divinities like Apsara, Nagas, Gandharbas, Vidyadharas etc. also came into being. This age also witnessed the beginning of the worship of Durga and Ganesh.

Rituals and Sacrifices:

During this period the rites and ceremonies of Vedic religion were elaborated and became complex. In the Rig Vedic age Yanjas were a simple affair which every householder could do. But in the later Vedic age sacrifice became an important thing in worship. Now the priestly class devoted their energy to find out the hidden and mystic meaning of the rites and ceremonies.

People had a firm belief that gods must submit to the sacrifice if properly performed. Vedic hymns were regarded as charms to be used in sacrifice. The belief that gods were satisfied by Yanjas led to a rise in the number, variety of sacrifices which were prescribed for every householder. In fact every Aryan performed a number of sacrifices under the supervision of the Brahmana priest.

Morality and Duty:

The Later Vedic Period prescribed a code of righteous conduct. The Brahmins had spread the belief that, “man is born with certain rinas or debts” which he must repay in his life. He has to repay the debts to his gods, to the rishis, to the munis, to men, to the ancestors and to the lower creatures. And he redeem himself from these debts, if he worships the gods and performs Yajnas study Vedas, performs funeral ceremonies and Sraddha, etc. One should perform all these duties with selflessness. The first requisite of a good life were prayers and good works. One should restrain himself from the sins like theft, adultery, and murder.

MCQ

1.The famous Gayatri mantra is addressed to which of the following vedic goddess?

- [A] Aditi
- [B] Saraswati
- [C] Savitri
- [D] Laxmi

2.Who among the following was the most important divinity during the early Vedic era?

- [A] Agni
- [B] Indra
- [C] Vayu
- [D] Varuna

3.Which among the following was referred to as Bhuvan Chakshu in Early vedic era?

- [A] Earth
- [B] Fire
- [C] Water
- [D] Moon

4.Which of the following deities were associated with the ‘Rig Vedic Period’ ?

- 1.Purandara
- 2.Varuna
- 3.Savitri

Usha

Choose the correct option:

[A] 1 and 2

[B] 1, 2 and 3

[C] 1, 3 and 4

[D] 1, 2, 3 and 4

5. Which of the following term is used for a “school” of learning and teaching the branches of Vedas?

[A] Shakha

[B] Charna

[C] Ratha

[D] Yajna

