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CONSTITUTE OF RUGHVEDA: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

The Arrangement of the Rugveda Samhita, the total number of mantras is 10,462; thus the average number of mantras per hymn is ten. The seers of the hymns are thus called "mantra drstarah" (the seers of the mantras). The Interpretation of the Rugveda No uninterrupted reliable tradition of Vedic interpretation was handed down along with the Vedic mantras. The Vedic and post-Vedic literature having nearly fifty legends, forms the basis of the Aitihasika interpretation of certain hymns of the Rugveda. Commentators on the Rugveda, Geo-historical Elements in the Rugveda Rivers, Topography of Sindhu River System, Mountains and Economic-Historical Elements of the Rugveda are following Rugvedic mantras describe in this paper.



KEYWORDS: *Geo-historical Elements, Economic-Historical Elements, Rugvedic mantras.*

The Arrangement of the Rugveda Samhita

The Rugveda Samhita is rather a group of mantras visualised by several seers of that age. The Rugveda Samhita is a collection of 1,028 Suktas (hymns) divided into ten Mandalas (books). The number of mantras in a Suktas varies from just one (1-99) to 58 (IX-97). The total number of mantras is 10,462; thus the average number of mantras per hymn is ten. These hymns are seen by various seers.

The Rugveda Samhita is divided into eight Astakas, each Astaka consists of eight Adhyayas and each Adhyaya

consists of several Vargas. Each Anuvaka consists of a number of Suktas, and each Sukta contains different number of mantras. The Rsis are the composers of the various hymns of the Rugveda. For every sukta, the Anukramanis give the name. The seers of the hymns are thus called "mantra drstarah" (the seers of the mantras).

In the Rugveda, two to seven Mandalas are homogeneous in character as they present a collection of hymns belonging to a particular family. For example, the first group of first mandala consists of eleven hymns are related to Visvamitra Madhuchandas, of which, hymn first is addressed to Agni, second to Vayu, third to Asvins and Indra,

and the rest to Indra.

The language and the contents of the hymns attributed to different seers in the tenth mandala point out that it contains a good number of hymns of later origin. The only principle which connects the different hymns of the mandala is numerical. In this tenth mandala, a series of collections is arranged in the descending order of the number of hymns in each and extending from hymn 1 to 84. From hymn 85 to 191 single hymns are arranged in the descending order. Further, hymns of the Rugveda Sarhhita may be divided into two classes: religious and secular.

The hymns comprising dialogues between the River and Visvamitra (111-33), Sarama and Panis (X-108), Indra and Apala(VIII-91), Yama and Yarn! Hymns like the Puruṣa-Sukta (X-90) and Nasadlya-Sukta (X-29) help us to trace the Vedic cosmological and philosophical ideas. A couple of hymns (1-164 and VII-29) consists of riddles, largely connected with gods. The Jnana-Sukta (IX-71) declares the supreme importance of knowledge. Besides the religious and mythological details, those hymns reveal various facts of the life of the Vedic people.

The Interpretation of the Rugveda:

Difficulty in understanding the meaning of the Rugvedic mantras, arises mainly from the fact that the Vedic text contain number of rare obsolete and obscure words which are not met in a later language. The problem of Vedic interpretation is not of recent origin. When Yaska composed his Nirukta, the problem of Vedic interpretation was as intricate as it is today. Even prior to Yaska, the meaning of numerous Vedic words and passages has become so much obscure that some persons began to doubt seriously whether the Vedic mantras convey any sense at all. Yaska in this connection refers to the view point of Kautsa who boldly declares that the Vedic mantras convey no sense.

No uninterrupted reliable tradition of Vedic interpretation was handed down along with the Vedic mantras. The Yajnika school of Vedic exegesis which puts ritualistic interpretations on the Vedas, is the most ancient and predominant among all the existing schools of Vedic interpretations. VII-23; XI-29,31; XIII-9, etc.

The earliest attempt to put ritualistic interpretations on the Vedic mantras is discernible in the compilation of the Yajurveda in which a considerable number of mantras from the Rugveda had been adapted for sacrificial purpose. There is no doubt that the tradition of ritual application of Vedic mantras has proved both a boon and a bane of Vedic studies.

The Nairukta School

Nairuktas sought to interpret Vedic words on the basis of their derivative connection. It may be termed as Nairukta method of Vedic interpretation. The development of Nairukta method of Vedic interpretation is closely connected with the progress of grammatical and lexicographical studies in India. Therefore, Yaska in his Nirukta declares the science of etymology

The word Nirukta literally means 'explanation' or etymological interpretation of word. So Yaska's work is entitled as Nirukta which is an explanation of the Vedic words listed in the Nighantu. Since it is the only work of its kind available at present, the title Nirukta now means the Vedic commentary composed by Yaska. The Nirukta which consists of twelve chapters and an appendix, is the earliest systematic commentary on selected words, the mantras and the deities of the Rugveda.

The followers of the Aitihāsika school of Vedic mantras to be related to an Itihāsa i.e., a traditional account of ancient events, and interpret the concerned hymn or mantras accordingly. The earliest specimens of the Aitihāsika interpretation of Vedic mantras are seen in the Brahamaṇas. Several legends concerning the legendary interpretation of Vedic mantras are found in the Brahamaṇa portions of the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, Taittirīya Brahamaṇa, Satapatha Brahamaṇa, Aitareya Brahamaṇa, Jaiminīya Brahamaṇa and Pancavirīya Brahamaṇa. The Vedic and post-Vedic literature having nearly fifty legends, forms the basis of the Aitihāsika interpretation of certain hymns of the Rugveda.

The Parivrajaka School

The Parivrajaka school of Vedic interpretations referred to by Yaska, which provides a mystic interpretation of the Vedas. According to this school of exegesis, not only those Vedic mantras which are considered to be of philosophical importance both by ancient and modern scholars, but also the other Vedic mantras can be interpreted to conform to their mystic ideas. The followers of Parivrajaka school of Vedic exegesis give the mystic interpretation of Vedic deities and sacrifices also.

Naidana School

Elsewhere in his commentary Durgacarya employs the term Nidana in the sense of primary cause of Vedic mantras to explain Itihasa and thus makes Nidana as the basis of Itihasa. But Yaska mentions that Naidanah and Aitihasikah are separate and different in their approach. The Naidana system of Vedic interpretation is known in name only, and any definite specimen of this system of interpretation is not found.

In the field of Rugvedic studies a class of writing called Anukramanis or Vedic indices, occupy a very prominent place. They provide lists of the hymns, their seers, metres and the deities in the order in which they appear in the Rugveda Samhita. These Anukramanis were prepared with a view to preserving the original text of the Rugveda.

The Arsanukramani gives a list of the Rsis of the Rugveda. The Chandonukramani enumerates the metres in which the hymns of the Rugveda are. It also mentions the number in each Mandala of mantras in each metres as well as the aggregate in all metres. The Anuvakanukramani gives the initial words of each of the eighty-five Anuvakas, into which the Rugveda Samhita is divided and the number of hymns contained in these Anuvakas. It also states that the Rugveda contains 1017 suktas, 10,580 Rks, 153826 words and 432000 syllables. The Padanukramani gives an index of lines of the Rugveda. The Suktanukramani, which is not available, probably consisted only of the initial words (Pratikas) of the hymns.

Commentators on the Rugveda: Skandaswami:

The oldest commentary on the Rugveda is of Skandaswamin. Hariswami, in his commentary on Satapatha Brahmana states that Skandaswami was a his teacher. In the beginning of each hymn, he mentions the Rsi and Devata thereof, and substantiates by quoting the statements. In his commentary, he has followed the Yajnikas method of interpretation. Hence his commentary may be called Adhiyajnaparaka. He has also followed the path of the Nairuktas in the interpretation of certain mantras. Hence his commentary at times, has become Adhidaivataparaka. Skandaswami has frequently quoted the passages from the Brahmanas and the Aranyakas in support of his interpretation.

Verikata Madhava

The first writer who has given a complete commentary on the Rugveda, is Veikata Madhava. In his commentary he has followed Astaka division. Besides.

Geo-historical Elements in the Rugveda

The topographic map of Rugvedic India displays conspicuously the primary features of river basins and the adjoining mountains. On the basis of the Vedic references, it may be concluded that mountains had much less influence as compared to those of the rivers which were intimately associated with the Rugvedic Aryan activities and settlements.

Rivers:

Topography of Sindhu River System

The Rugveda is familiar with the whole of the Sindhu river system. Regional unity of the Rugvedic India was a great contribution of the rivers, which provided easy accessibility and convenient land to live upon. The Satapatha Brahmana refers to a set of seven rivers flowing westward. Those seven rivers flowing to the west were the Sindhu system.

Sindhu called Indus by virtue of its vastness, was the main river of the Rugvedic India. Keith and Macdonell, Vedic Index, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1995, Vols. even now, by a number of rivers discharging into it from east and west. The Nadhtuti Sukta in the Rugveda says that :

Sindhu:

The river Sindhu is frequently mentioned in the Rugveda. It is described as the mightiest river receiving huge volume of water from a number of tributaries. On the basis of its rapid and voluminous flow of water, the river has been mentioned as surpassing all moving bodies.

The Sindhu is the present Indus river. It is receiving the water from number of rivers. So, it is called sea (Sindhu). The main clue to the geography is provided by the river Sarasvati. Sarasvati is used in two forms. Firstly, as a river, in praise of which many suktas are found in the Rugveda. hymn in the Rugveda. It is described in superlatives. It is called 'NadltamM', "the best of the rivers."¹⁰ It was regarded as the seventh largest river of the Sapta-Sindhu region. Besides Rugveda, the later Vedic texts contain descriptions that are inconsistent with the above. Jaiminlya Upanisad Brahmana (IV-26-12) and the associated Srauta Sutras say that Sarasvati disappears in the desert lands at a place called 'Vinasana'. So, this is called weakling river 'Vinasana Sarasvati'.¹⁹ The Manusmrti informs that the Sarasvati had ceased to reach the sea by that time by disappearing at a place called 'Vinasana'. A study of maps reveals the existence of a dry-bed (Ghaggar) of a mighty river which appears to be the Rugvedic Sarasvati. The Sarasvati of the Rugvedic times may be identified with the present Saruti or Sarasvati which rises from the Siwalik hills in the Sirmur.²¹ Rugvedic Aryans develop their culture on the banks of the river Sarasvati. The Satapatha Brahmana reveals its sanctity and the importance narrating that the Aryan culture, i.e., fire worship, spread to eastern India from the banks of the Sarasvati.

The Apaya is mentioned between the Drsadvati and the Sarasvati. This river must have been the small tributary of the Sarasvati.

Sutudri:

Sutudri is associated with the Vipasa river. In the post-Vedic period, the name of this river appears transformed to Satadru 'flowing in a hundred channels'. Vipasa is freely mentioned twice in the Rugveda. Yaska tells in the Nirukta, that its earlier name was Urunjira.

Parusni:

Parusni is mentioned in the Nadlstuti and in the song of Sudas. It was an important river of the Rugvedic times. A mantra in the eighth mandala of the Rugveda, calls it a 'great stream. It is rolled down swiftly creating wool like waves vapour. It is identified with the present Ravi, which flows in the Punjab. During the Vedic times, this river probably discharged its water into the combined course of the Asikni and Vitasta, a few miles below Multan. In order, this river is mentioned after Parusni in the Nadistuti hymn.

This river is also mentioned along with Sindhu in a hymn of the eighth mandala of the the Rugveda. The Asiknl later came to be known as Candrabhaga, and now this name of the river is known as Chanab flowing in Panjab.

The river Marudvrdha is mentioned after Asiknl. Here, Marudvrdha is the proper name of a river like those of other rivers.

Vitasta:

Another river mentioned in the Nadistuti hymn is the Vitasta (RvX 75-5). It is the most westerly of the five rivers of the Punjab. The name was later corrupted to Bihat and its modern name outside Kashmir is Jhelam.

Susoma:

Susoma is mentioned soon after the Arjikiya in the Nadistuti hymn of the Rugveda. This is another river which is identified by Yaska with the Sindhu. This river is referred to in another hymn also. Susoma must be identified with the modern Sohan.

Trstama:

The Nadistuti hymn mentions this river Trstama. The Rasa is mentioned in another mantra also along with the western tributaries of the Sindhu.

Krumu and Mehatnu:

The Krumu is mentioned with the Kubha, in the Rugveda. This is identical with the modern Kurum. The river Mehatnu is mentioned along with the Krumu in the Nadistuti. Identification of this Mehatnu river with a river of modern age is difficult. This river is mentioned in the Nadistuti hymn and in the eighth mandala of the Rugveda. The river Suvastu is mentioned only once in the Rugveda. The word Suvastu, signifying "fair dwellings", indicates that there was an Rugvedic Aryan settlement along its banks.

Gauri:

The river Gauri is mentioned twice in the Rugveda. The other mantra describes Soma as growing in the valley of river Gauri. The Gauri river may be identified with modern Pafijakora which combines with Swat, flowing to the east, then joins the Kabul river.

Sarayu:

Sarayu is mentioned three times in the Rugveda. It is described as a mighty river with Sindhu and Sarasvati. Sarayu appears in another mantra with Rasa, Anitabha, Krumu and Kubha.

It says that "some rivers flow to the east from the white mountain". The rivers of this system are not many. The river Ganga is mentioned only once in the Rugveda, i.e., in the Nadistuti. Later Vedic works supply some clues to this river. It is mentioned with Yamuna. The doab of these two rivers was inhabited by honorable people.

Yamuna:

Yamuna is mentioned thrice in the Rugveda. Its banks were rich in kine and steeds.⁶⁴ The Aryan king Sudas defeated the non-Aryan King Bheda on the bank of Yamuna. Later, it has been respectfully associated with the Ganga.

Mountains

The mountains had much less influence as compared to the rivers which were intimately associated with the Rugvedic Aryan activities and the Aryan settlements.

Himavanta:

A common term 'Himavanta' or 'Himavat' is frequently used for a mountain. Himavanta in the Northern border region along the river Rasa, that flows to the ocean". This mountain is called 'Mahameru'. Soma-plant. Yaska said that it is the name of a mountain. Vedic texts mention that it is the native region of the people called Mujavants. The Rugvedic people used to obtain the Soma-plant regularly from this mountain. Such references in the Vedic texts make us understand that the Mujavan mountain lay to the north of the Rugvedic India. Later Vedic texts mention the names of mountains like Manor-Avasarpana, Trikakud Mainaka and Krauncha are laid to the Northern region. Vindhya, Paripatra mountain is said to form the southern boundary of Aryavarta, which is called Aryan land. These are not mentioned in the Rugveda Samhita.

Economic-Historical Elements of the Rugveda:

The Rgveda reveals that the people of that age were not solely devoted to religious rites and philosophical speculations. The Rgvedic people were pursued various occupations. Though economy was largely agricultural and pastoral, various industries were also resorted to.

Agriculture:

The main occupation of the people in the Rugvedic age was agriculture. Regarding this, the Rgveda clearly states: "Giving serious attention (to my advice), play not with dice; pursue agriculture; delight in wealth (so acquired); there, gambler, are cows; there is a wife; so has this (visible) sovereign Savitri declare to me.

The Agricultural Process:

The plough land was called Urvara or Ksetra. The plough - larigala, is mentioned only once in the Rugveda along with bullocks. Its synonym - Sira is also found in the agricultural hymn (IV-57).

The prayers for successful cultivation and the possession of cattle-wealth reveal the importance attached to Rugvedic people. The agricultural hymn describes the importance of agriculture, the worship of KṢetrapati, and prayer to Indra, abundance of crops and the fertility of the soil, and agricultural method are found in the Rugveda. May the oxen (draw) happily, the men (labour) happily; the plough furrow happily, may the traces bind happily; wield the goad happily.

Cattle-breeding:

The Rugveda classifies the animals in three types. The Rugveda mentions frequently few animals, like; Sirhhah (loin), RṢya (wild deer), the Gavya (Bos gavaes), MahiṢa (buffalo), Mrga (the deer), Sisumara (crocodile-like animal), etc.

Cattle-breeding forms an indispensable part of a farmer's life. The animal economy of the Rugvedic people was not commercialised. The Rugvedic economy was primarily based on the cow, but other animals also contributed their share. Some times oxen were used for meat. Hastinati (elephants) breeding was also known to the Rugvedic people. The Rugveda throws an abundant light on values of cows, the well-being of a herdsman and his safe return home with the cows and prayers to the gods protection of the cattles.

The wood work and metal work were the most important for the Rugvedic society. In the Rugvedic period 'Taksan' was referred to a carpenter class. chariots. Keith and Macdonell, Vedic Index, Vol. accessories, Soma vessel {camasa or dru or drona). The Rugveda mentions ships with hundred oars (aritrām), and furnished with wings or sails (patatrij). The Rugvedic references reveal that the Vedic carpenter had attained a high degree of competence in his trade.

The potter (Kulala) was mentioned first time in the Yajurveda. The Rugveda mentions cooking pot (Ukha), and water pot (Kumbha), but there is no mention of a specific name for Kulala. Following Rugvedic mantras describe:

Textiles:

The Rgveda contains more references to weavers and weaving. The traditions established by the Rgvedic people continued for a long time to come. The Vaya and Vayya two words indicate the weavers. In the Rugveda, several words indicate that the textile industry. In the Rugvedic period, wool was the chief raw material of the textile industry. The Sapta-Sindhu region is famous for wool. The textile production of vastm is mentioned at various places in the Rugveda. In the Rugvedic period, wearing was probably entrusted to women. Such Rugvedic references describe elements regarding textile industry as below:

"Two famous female weavers are said to extend, thread to complete the web of the sacrifice." "She, (wight) enwraps the extended (world) like (a woman) weaving a garment." "For a son, the (divine) mothers weave garments (of light)." "The seven milch cows approach the green-tinted soma which flows purified in a stream through the woollen fleece." "The sounding (soma) passes through the woollen fleece."

The Leather Industry:

The leather working was one of the occupations in the Rugvedic time. The Rugveda mentions Carmamna (tanner) and tanned leather. The word Carman means hide and Carmanya indicates leather-work. The Rugveda mentions various leather articles manufactured by Carmamna.

The Metal Industry:

The metal industry also developed in the Rugvedic period. Metal articles were made for domestic and ritual uses. The Karmara was considered as one of the most skilful workers in the Rgvedic society. He is said as smelting (dhma) the ore in the fire; hence he is called dhma (the smelter) He smelted ore with the help of fans or bellows made of bird feathers.

The smith used to prepare Datra or Srimi (side), Phala (plough-share)⁸⁹ for agricultural purpose. Asi denoting a sacrificial knife as well as a spear, used in war, Parasu (axe), Pavira (lance), arrows, Rsti (spears) and daggers, sharp-edged swords and sharp-pointed shafts, for war, also made by smith. He was supplying weapons of war. The smith was preparing other things for the protection of warriors in battle.

Means of Trade and Transportation:

Economically, the Rgvedic land was characterised by anomalous distribution of various products of human need. Such as the Sindhu and the Parusni valleys supplied horses, honey, wool, and garments.¹¹³ Such products were often transported from the various areas to the consumers. The Rgvedic people can be assessed from the Aryan conception of presiding deities of the three regions, i.e. lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere. Pusan is figured as the master of land transportation, Varuna as the guardian of navigation and Asvins as the rulers of the sea and air routes.

CONCLUSION:

In the Rugvedic period, transportation was carried through river-routes. The Rugveda mentions boat (nau) propelled with oars (aritra) and rower of a boat [aritri]. The water transportation as called (navya) navigable. Great importance attaches to one such unit called niska. When, however, in a hymn, the seer celebrates the receipt.

The exchange of commodities on the principle of barter seems to have been in vague, but cow had already come to be regarded as a unit of value. There might have been other recognized units of value. Great importance attaches to one such unit called niska. It meant originally a gold ornament of the shape of a necklace or a necklet. When, however, in a hymn, the seer celebrates the receipt of a hundred niskas with a hundred horses, as a gift, he could hardly be referring to a hundred necklets. So it probably came to be used as a sort of currency even during the Rgvedic age.

In fine the physiogeographic frame of the Rugveda finds out economic factors of Rugvedic India. Of course, there is nonavailability of systematic statistical information of the economic basis in different patterns. Yet the available details of the economy of Rgvedic people help us to visualise the economic systems in the regional units. As it is seen, the economic basis of Rgvedic India is mainly formed with three component organs i.e., Agriculture, cattle breeding and industrial occupations. The illustrations given above, show the fact that there was gradual transformation from pastoral to agricultural economy in the during the Rgvedic times.

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- 7) Ibid.
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