

Study of the Vedic Period

Economics And Politics

Raghavendra Sarangapurkar

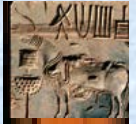


Abstract

- Economics and Politics of Vedic period were centered around physical activities and connected to cosmic beliefs (God-Nature).
- Focus was on individual prosperity and wealth within the larger goal of prosperity and wealth of the community.

Economics

- Primarily agrarian based-economy comprised of three sectors
 - Agriculture
 - Manufacturing
 - Blacksmith, Goldsmith, Food processing, Construction
 - Services
 - Hospitality, Health Care, Education, Priest services, Hotr
- No Single Currency
- Local Markets



Economics

- Labor Classification (RV 10.90.11-12)

ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासित् । बाहू राजन्यः कृतः ॥

ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः । पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥

- "The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced.

(Translated by Ralph Griffith)

- विश्(vish) is mentioned for all classes of workers in AV.
 - Traders, merchants, chariot makers, smiths, agriculture, home builders.
- YV categorizes skilled and unskilled labor (YV 18.48).



Economic Activity

- Major categories around which economic activity was observed
 - यज्ञ (yajna) – A ritual event to achieve a particular outcome
 - संस्कार (samskara) - Ceremonial events that occur in one's life
 - Wars between clans
 - Agriculture

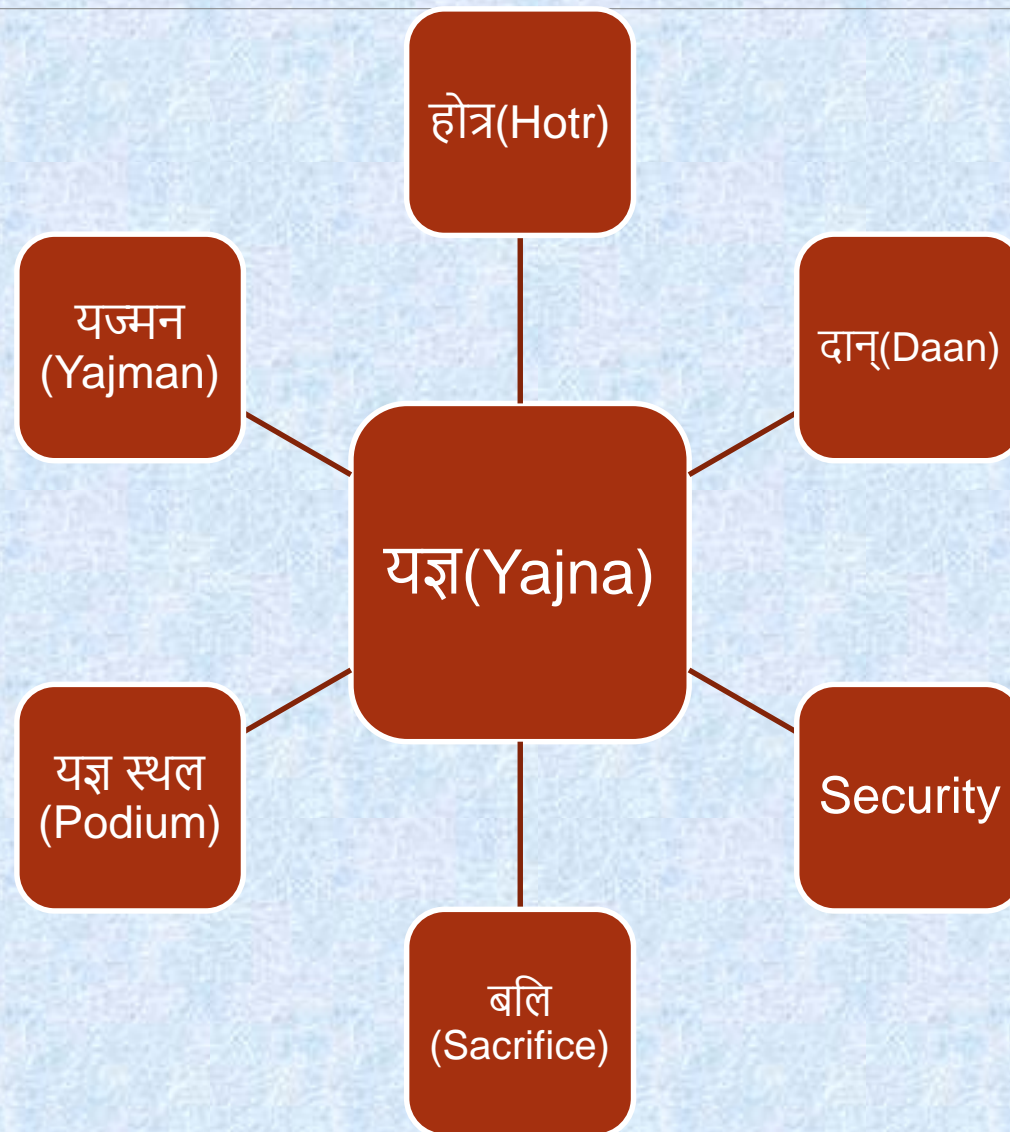
Currency

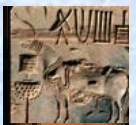
- Nishka (RV Sukta 1.126.2)
- Cows, Horses (RV Sukta 1.126.2)
- Gold (Swarna), Ratna
- Ornaments from Metals –
Copper, Tin, Mercury, Lead,
Zinc, Bronze



Examples of precious stones

यज्ञ(yajna)





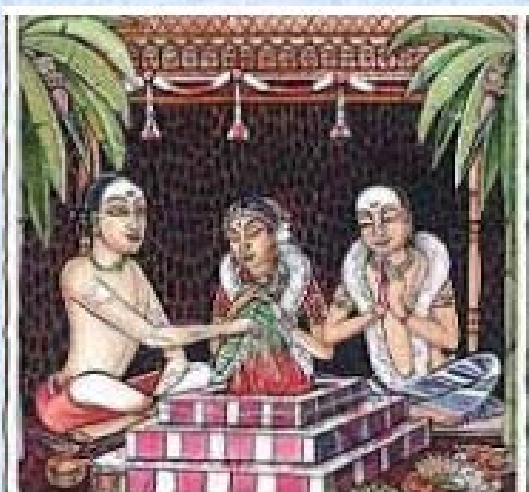
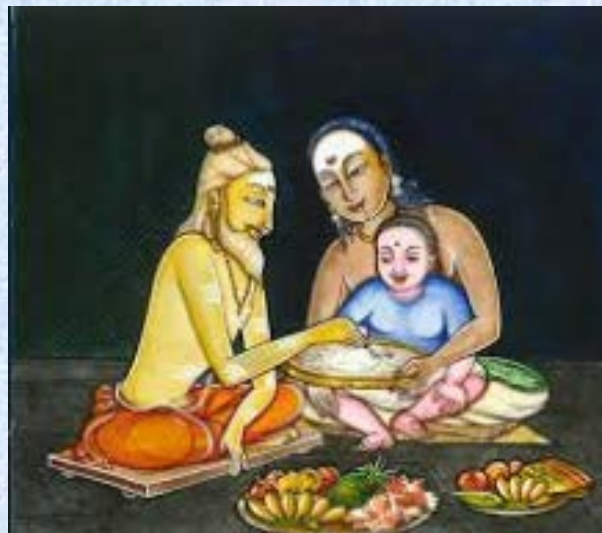
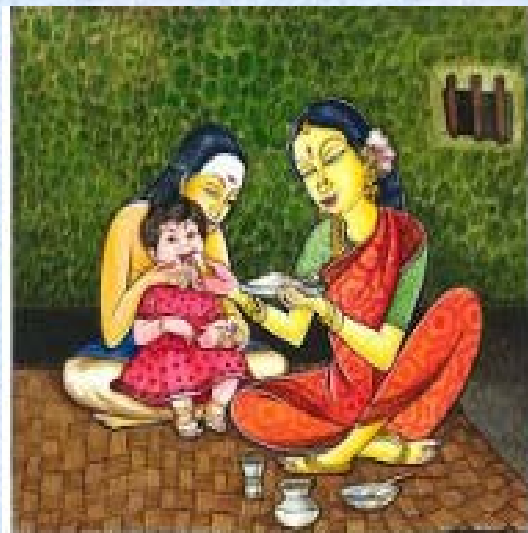
यज्ञ (yajna)

- To each God was attributed a certain aspect of prosperity.
- यज्ञ (yajna) was performed by individuals to attain their wishes, health and prosperity.
- यज्ञ (yajna) sometimes led to confrontations between
 - The performers
 - The stoppers (दस्यु Dasu, वृत्र Vrutra)
- Acts a market segment for suppliers, producers and services.
- Many economic transactions were undertaken for completing yajna.



संस्कार (samskara)

- संस्कार (samskaras) were associated with an individual from birth to death.
- Performing the mandatory Samskaras drove economic activity.

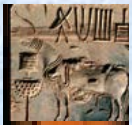


Agriculture

- A good harvest was the primary source of wealth (RV X.34.13).
- Society participated to ensure the profitability of agriculture which was seasonal.
- Detailed references to the agricultural system (RV IV.57 and AV III.17).
- Agricultural products were traded as commodities or bartered.
- Oxen and Horses were used for tilling.
- Veda (Brahmanas) have references to four stages of production;
(i) tilling the land (karṣaṇa), (ii) sowing of seeds (vapana),
(iii) harvesting the crop (lavana), (vi) threshing (mardana)

Industry

- Science and technology were developed.
- Manufacturing: Household utensils, transportation vehicles, weapons, jewelry.
- Mining for metals.
- Food processing technology (Ex. Ghee)
- Construction of residences and storage structures.



Services

- Different services were offered in society.
- People travelled to provide services
 - Hotr were invited from different places to perform yajna.
 - Physicians travelled to treat ailments and diseases.
 - Priests were invited to perform special rituals.
- Hospitality services to meet needs of travelers were significant.



Hospitality

- आतिथ्य(Hospitality) to अतिथि (guests) was considered very important.
- Gods were received as guests and offered oblations (RV 1.44.4, RV 2.4.1).
- References to several spoken languages (AV).
- References to far away lands and travel by sea (RV).
- Housing to accommodate travelers in the villages.

Health Care

- Health was given high priority.
- Physical & mental health issues were diagnosed (AV 8.4.22) and treated.
- Rivers, water streams, earth, rain, and wind (RV) had medicinal elements that give good health.
- Heavens believed to have powerful medicines [RV 10.59.9] and Gods were invoked to allow access to these medicines [RV 1.34.6]
- Medicinal herbs were procured and stored.
- Animal health and well being given importance (ex., RV 1.43.6) and they were significant in gaining wealth [ex., RV 5.76.5)

Education

- ब्रह्मचर्य was the initiation of the education process [AV 11.5, AV 11.6].
- A ब्रह्मचारिन् was disciplined, practices chastity and treated as a part of God (RV 10.109.9).
- Education perceived as an on-going process.
 - In addition to students, kings, आचार्य and others followed ब्रह्मचर्य to for knowledge and to gain strength.
- Schools were based on
 - Shruti and Smritis
 - Philosophy

Trade

- Designated trade routes were used for transportation of goods and services (healthcare, hotr). (AV 12.1.47)
“Thy many pathways for men to travel on the roads for chariots, and for wagons to pass through on which walk together good and evil men, my we be masters of those and drive out thief and foe”
 (Translated by Abhinash C.Bose)
- Trade routes were maintained and protected.
- Trade was through land and water (rivers, seas).
- Agricultural, animal and consumer products were traded.



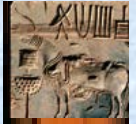
Political Structure

- राज्य (Kingdom) and राजा (King)
- Importance of Gods
 - इन्द्र Indra, अग्नि Agni, वायु Vayu, मरुत Maruta
- यज्ञ(yajna) – Wealth and Prosperity
- Trade
 - Trade Routes, Merchants, Transportation, Smiths
- Assembly and Council
- ग्रामसभा (Grama Sabha)
- ग्रामसमिति (Grama Samiti)
- Rights and Responsibilities



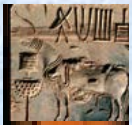
Kings

- Both hereditary and elected by the people or their representatives (AV 3.4-2).
- Administration with the help of functionaries
 - पुरोहितः (Purohita)
 - सेनानि(Senani)
- Wealth accumulation and distribution
- Protector of the tribe
- यज्ञ (yajna) – Offered prayers to Gods
 - Wealth, Prosperity, Power
- Kings relied on the wisdom of their council (AV 7.12).
- Assembly was where matters of importance were discussed.



ग्राम (Gramma) - Villages

- A group of families would constitute a village (ग्राम).
- कुलपति (Kulapati) was the head of the clan.
- ग्रामणी (Grāmaṇī) was the Village Officer.
- Villages had grama sabha(s) to discuss matters and take decisions.
- They were the channel for the king to reach out and communicate to the public.



Rights

- Both men and women's rights were recognized (AV 14.2).
- Every individual had the opportunity to attain his or her dreams through effort and the blessing of the divine.
- Women were encouraged to choose the husband of their choice (AV 6.60.3).

"Dhâtar (the creator) supports (didhhra) this earth, Dhâtar supports the heavens, and the sun. May Dhatar furnish this spinster with a husband after her own heart"

Translated by Maurice Bloomfield



Family

- Joint families and collective welfare was preferred (RV 1.105.9, AV 3.30)

Example: RV 07-082.1

“Grant us your strong protection, IndraVaruna,
our people, and our family, for sacrifice.

May we subdue in fight our evil-hearted foes,
him who attacks the man steadfast in lengthened rites”

Translated by Griffith

- Household responsibility was divided among all the family members.



Summary

- We find that a complex economic and political system existed.
- Banking system is not mentioned.
- Person to person interaction was prevalent and they understood the societal norms.
- Local body governance and centralized administration co-existed.
- Rituals were given high importance in the society.
- Social welfare was recognized in the society.



Vedic Period



Thank you

Economics And Politics