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INDO-ARYAN POLITY

DURING THE PERIOD
OF THE RIG VEDA

BY

PRAPHULLACHANDRA BASU, M.A., B.L.

*Professor of Economics, Mulhar College, Indore; Formerly Lecturer
in Economic History and Comparative Politics, Calcutta University*

ALLAHABAD
THE PIONEER PRESS

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INTRODUCTION.

The object of this book is to present a study of the Indo-Aryan organisation of political life and to relate it to the social organisation as well. A further attempt has been made to compare the different stages and institutions in the East with the corresponding stages and institutions in the West. The nature of the early Greek, Roman and Teutonic organisations has been so strikingly similar that the Science of Comparative Politics has been able to establish, almost beyond doubt, the growth of the elements in the Asiatic home of the Aryans before their march in the East and in the West.

The Polity of the Indo-Aryans, like that of the Aryan branches in the West, is very intimately connected with the institutions of family life. For this purpose it will be convenient to undertake a study of these before starting on a study of political institutions proper. But the Indo-Aryan family is not a



new thing to the modern world. The Aryan family in its earliest stages has been the same everywhere, in Greece, in Rome as well as in India. It is not our intention to go through all the details of family life, because that would not be for our immediate purpose which is to study the political aspect of Vedic life. Moreover, the Vedic family has been already studied by many authorities, and we can conveniently collect those aspects only which bear on our purpose.



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INDO-ARYAN POLITY DURING THE PERIOD OF THE RIG VEDA.

CHAPTER I.

PATRIARCHAL FAMILY.

It is certain that the earliest Indo-Aryan family as revealed in the Rig Veda was of the patriarchal type. The head of the family was its ruler and the strict principle of agnation was adhered to, except perhaps in the admission of the Putrika Putra.¹ This theory of agnation was of course the product of the exclusive worship of the dead ancestors by the direct lineal descendants, all cognates being liable to offer worship to their lineal ascendants and therefore excluded.²

The family was not only patriarchal and based on agnation but it was undivided as well. The father and the Grihapati are separately mentioned, showing that the father was not

¹ i, 124, 7; iii, 31, 1.

² Abundantly proved by Fustel de Coulanges in his book called *The Ancient City*.

necessarily the head of the family. His father or his elder brother would naturally be so. The joint family, therefore, must have been fairly big. This is also proved by the mention of numerous relations within the family folds which occur again and again in the Rig Veda, viz., Jnati, Jami, Sajata, Sabandhu, etc. Moreover, considering that in the earliest stages of the history of a nation, family is the only form of social association when the state has not grown, the disintegration of the family is less probable if the race wants to preserve its military skill and communal organisation. Both these are found in a very advanced state in the Rig Veda itself, so that from this side also the family can be proved to have been a big one.¹ To avoid traversing the same path which has been done by others, we shall here study only some of the institutions of the Aryan family which will help us to understand the polity.

The word Gotra as it occurs in the Rig Veda² has indeed been interpreted variously and, in

¹ For similar condition of the Græco-Roman Society, see Coulanges' *The Ancient City*.

² i, 51, 3; ii, 17, 1; x, 103, 7; etc.



view of the later use of the word to mean that family organisation corresponding to the Greek Phratry and Roman Cury, the attempt has not infrequently been to project the later idea into the passages occurring in the Rig Veda. The later meaning may have been a natural development but the original meaning was probably 'herd,' herd of cattle in particular. Wilson, however, translates it by clouds, which seems to be erroneous, the only relevant point being that Indra, in connection with whose name the word Gotra is always used in the Rig Veda, was associated with the clouds; but so was he associated with the release of the cattle of the Angirases from Pani. The fact, however, is quite clear that in the Rig Veda we cannot, in any way whatsoever, associate Gotra with the special family organisation of a later age, and this in spite of the striking similarity of such a conception of the family among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Evidence thus from Indian sources is absolutely wanting for Fustel de Coulanges' theory¹ as

¹ The Ancient City.



to the development of ideas about the Phratry and the Cury institutions existing in their inception at least at a time when the Aryans were still undispersed. Or the counter theory must be put forth that the Indo-Aryans started from the original Asiatic home, wherever that might have been, at a time when these institutions had not developed sufficiently to leave any permanent traces upon the social institutions of the Aryan families. But we must be as cautious in accepting this theory of the Phratry and Cury as in rejecting it, since we argue from the negative point of view only, *viz.*, want of evidence in ancient Indian literature, which, we know, has not come down to us in any complete form. The denial involves the further difficulty of explaining the origin and growth of the Gotra as a clan organisation during the Brahmana period, and Brahmanas we know always assume that they are merely explaining the Samhitas.

But though we cannot accept Gotra as a clan institution, that is, as a bond of relationship, we find ample evidence in the Rig Veda



of two facts, *viz.*, kinship and the patriarchal type of family organisation. The latter is a peculiar type found universally in all the Aryan branches of the human race. Angirasa as the original ancestor who established the worship of fire (Agni) is referred to very frequently and is also deified in the later portions of the Rig Veda.

Similar forms of kinship may be explained
as the result of the growth
Kinship. of similar institutions under

similar conditions of life, the stage of civilisation being substantially the same among the earliest Greeks, Romans and Hindus. The backward condition in this respect of the other Aryan branch, the Teutons, is of course easily explained by their too long contact with and too much assimilation of the habits of barbarians.

Pitri is a common name for father. Some
authorities derive it from
Father. the onomatopoetic syllable

pa. If this theory is correct, then the formation of 'pitri' must have been reached in the original home of the Aryans, since we find



'pater' among the Romans as well. But if the word be derived from the Sanskrit root 'pa,' to protect, then its meaning becomes more consistent. Because whatever might have been the origin of the word, the fact remains that Pitri meant primarily protector in Sanskrit as well as in Latin and Greek, whereas fatherhood was conveyed by an entirely different word janitri in Sanskrit, genitor in Latin and genetæ in Greek. So we see that the derivation of Pitri, pater, from root pa is very likely, but it is now hopeless to attempt to be positive for want of any materials bearing on the point.

The control of the father of the family (Grihapati)¹ over the members was carried in Greece and Rome to its logical extremes, and it required a series of revolutions before the bondage, for such it became, could be removed for giving free scope to the civic ideas that grew up with the later and wider conceptions connected with the gods of physical nature as they developed in the west.² In India we find no such revolution. The causes of this

¹ vi, 53, 2.

² Coulanges' The Ancient City.



seem to be mainly three. The omnipotence of the father was never carried to any excesses which might naturally, as in the west, recoil on itself. Secondly, the gods of physical nature were assimilated at an early date to the religious beliefs; or more properly the predominance of them in the Vedic religion existed without shaking the foundations of ancestor worship. Finally, civic ideas as distinguished from those relating to family did not grow consistently in India and the earliest development of castes and classes smoothed the whole machinery by removing any possible ground for friction.

So, we see the son in the family subordinate to the father in all respects; but the proper functions of each already assigned and neither attempting to extend his own jurisdiction at the cost of the other. During the period of the Rig Veda, it was harmony on the whole and we do not come across any passage which deliberately attempts to disillusion us on the point. The limited scope of our enquiry does not permit us to go later than the Vedic period or, it might have been possible to prove



that the early development of caste and classes mainly influenced the social structure of the Indo-Aryans. The later polity was particularly fortunate in being able to assimilate the organisation of the caste into the body politic—the village community of the Aryan race. The strength thus attained can be easily imagined from that of the post-Norman English polity when it was able, under William, the Henries and Edwards, to assimilate the clan organisation of the shires and hundreds as integral parts of the monarchical hegemony.¹ Thus only could England escape the decrepitude and inanition from which the mediæval European polity suffered so much, by assimilating strength and without dissipating energy in combating the clan institutions. Thus also, it seems probable, was the ancient Hindu polity saved and strengthened by assimilating the clan organisation into the later village community. Of the latter, however, traces there are even in the Vedic age, though not much in the Rig Veda Samhita.

¹ Jenks' *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages*, Ch. III.



CHAPTER II.

CASTE AND CLASSES.

The caste system in India is clearly recognised in the period of the Atharva Veda. Its origin is hopelessly lost or it grew so slowly that it was unnoticed in its inception. The Rig Veda of course recognises the Aryans as distinguished from the Dasyus, the non-Aryans, but further from this, it is not possible to assert with regard to the caste system in the Rig Veda. A later passage of the Rig Veda¹ speaks of the Brahmana, the Rajanya, the Vaishya and the Shudra, as issuing respectively out of the mouth, arms, thigh, and feet of Purusha. The distinction made here is curiously striking. It is practically the same as in the later Samhitas and the Brahmanas. But the inexplicable fact remains that it is the only passage in the Rig Veda and that too so short that it is not possible to attribute to it all the connotation that it involved later on. If the

¹ x, 90, 12.



perception of Rishi Narayana was correct, he must have seen the future of the different classes very correctly and his classification or order of importance of each class has been only too correct. In any case unless this passage be regarded as an interpolation of which there is not much probability, this proves that the caste as it developed later on must have grown very slowly, almost imperceptibly and the observant Rishi of the Purushasukta was only recording the trend of events that were moulding the social structure. As the passage occurs late in the literature, it cannot be said to be representative of the earlier period, so that it would be erroneous to say that the division into castes, except into Aryan and Dasyu, formed any part of the social polity of the Rig Veda period of the Aryans (the arguments of Zimmer and Muir are too well known to be discussed here).

The word Kshatriya, however, occurs in many passages of the Rig Veda, its usual meaning being royal or of divine authority. As a class

Kshatriya.

the Kshatriyas are recognised as warriors. In one passage¹ Agni is said to possess the kshatriya quality of strength. Another use of the word² clearly recognises the military order, Trasadasyu having twofold empire. The word Kshatriya is most probably intended to convey the idea of a military caste in v. 69, 1, or, as Wilson says, it means possessed of strength, thus referring to Indra. Again Mitra and Varuna are invoked³ as Kshatriyas, meaning, perhaps, sovereigns. These deities are elsewhere⁴ described as sitting down for the office of sovereignty, as in another passage⁵ Varuna is said to exercise supreme dominion (kshatra signified rule or dominion). The good government of a Kshatriya is spoken of in a later passage.⁶

In all the above passages the Kshatriyas are spoken of as the rulers, they being powerful and, as warriors, wielding kshatra or dominion.

¹ iv, 12, 3.

² iv, 42, 1.

³ vii, 64, 2.

⁴ viii, 25, 8.

⁵ i, 25, 10.

⁶ x, 109, 3.

But there are certain other passages¹ in which the people (vis) also are said to fight, the last passage calling them godless. Most of these mean, perhaps, the vulgar folk rebelling against the higher and ruling classes, since protection of deities against them is sought. The reference to non-Aryans is not warranted, as in that case the fact would most probably have been specifically mentioned. The doubt that is cast upon the fighting habits of the people arises from the invocation² to Indra for protection against the people and protection in combats thus distinguishing clearly the people from wars. A remarkable sukta³ comes towards the end of the Rig Veda, proving clearly the right of instituting sacrifices on the part of a Kshatriya. But experts consider the case of Devapi as exceptional. In any case this exception is curious, as by the time of the Rig Veda the priesthood as a hereditary class had already been consolidated. Another exception is Vishwamitra.⁴

¹ i, 69, 3; iv, 24, 4; vi, 26, 1; vii, 79, 2; viii, 96, 15.

² vi, 41, 5.

³ x, 98.

⁴ iii, 33, 8.



Purohita was the domestic priest in a later age. In the Rig Veda two passages¹ occur, the first not necessarily meaning -domestic priest since it refers to the two chief deity priests, Agni and Aditya. The second one explicitly refers to the most learned priests who take the foremost place. This evidently has its source in the institution of domestic priesthood which by this time must have been increasingly manifest.

The hereditary professional priesthood (communal) is seen practically from the very beginning of the Rig Veda period. Its position is entirely separate from that of the monarchy. The fact is somewhat puzzling in conception. A study of the earliest organisation of the other branches of the Aryan family reveals the fact that the original leader was the king, the priest and the head of the fighting host; and there is nothing to suppose that the particular branch that came to India began with a special polity or stepped lightly over some of the stages while retaining fully the wisdom

¹ x, 66, 13; x, 70 7.



derived from the experience of each. The latter fact is clear from the subsequent history of the race during which, in spite of the predominant influence of the priests (the Brahmins), there was no attempt on their part to become kings *de jure*, although they wielded, through their influence on the ruler, all the powers of the king. Any explanation, however, of this early separation of priesthood from kingship in India must be conjectural; there is no record previous to the Rig Veda and in the Rig Veda it is recognised as an established institution. Nor can it even be safely conjectured whether such a change took place in India or before the Aryan advent into India. But it seems only rational to say that the greatest probability should be attached to a change having been effected from the co-ordination of power in the one man to its separation into the priestly, military and monarchical. The denial of it would bring on the burden of proving that this one branch of the Aryan family, alone out of all others, began with a different system and yet ended with the same



separation of powers. On the other hand, we cannot assert in favour of it inasmuch as it is advisable to recognise the full value of the historical fact that the social polity begins earlier than the political organisation and that the extent of development in the former was much greater in the original home of the Aryans than the latter.

Whatever may have been the exact course of development in the pre-Brahmana. Vedic age, the hereditary class, professional already, receiving dakshina¹ for the services performed, existed in the Rig Veda period ; and it will be interesting to learn from the various passages in the Rig Veda what was the position, qualification and function of the Brahmana, as the priest was called. It is necessary, in this connection, to emphasise that the position of the Brahmana was very high, next, if next at all, to the Kshatriya only. In the post-Vedic age he was undoubtedly the superior, standing above all others.^a But in the Rig Veda his position

¹ i, 168, 7 ; vi, 27, '8 ; viii, 24, 29 ; viii, 39, 5 ; x, 62, 1 ; x,



seems to be equalled at least by the Kshatriya; and this is quite natural in a society when it was fighting its way to the south and the east among a powerful alien population. But his position could not have been ignored even then, since he invoked the deities who were supposed to fight for the Aryans against the Dasyus.

The first passage¹ in which the word Brahmana occurs seems literally to convey its etymological meaning. The four definite grades of speech (which have been variously interpreted) are known to the Brahmanas only, who are wise. Three of these are deposited in secret and indicate no meaning (*i.e.*, to the non-initiated or ordinary person). The fourth is spoken by men. The Brahmanas² again are called the progenitors, presenters of the Soma, which gives a glimpse of their function at the sacrifice. Perhaps they are also called observers of truth (second half of the same sloka) and they are invoked for protection. So that this class of men was looked upon as a superior

¹ i, 164, 45.

² vi, 75, 10.

order of beings capable of some of the godly functions, perhaps supposed to have acquired them by their professional contact with the deity. The Brahmanas, in their performance of sacrificial rites, had to chant mantras, sometimes throughout the night as in the case of the Atiratra rite¹ or throughout the year, perennial as it has been interpreted by some, perhaps during the sacrificial session, *Gavam Ayanam*.² They also practised penance throughout the year being observant of their vows.³ Rishi Vashistha's hymn on frogs is very illuminating as is shown above. They are described as worshippers who effuse Soma⁴ and Soma is supposed to pervade the Brahmanas.⁵ The Brahmanas are the friends of the Vedas⁶ "wandering at will in the meanings of the Veda." They are called learned because they possess the investigated Brahma consisting of knowledge, Shruti or divine lore, and thought and wisdom. There is, it seems, a

¹ vii, 103, 7.

² vii, 103, 8.

³ vii, 103, 1.

⁴ ix, 112, 1.

⁵ x, 26, 6.

⁶ x, 71, 8.

good deal of contempt for the ordinary people, ploughmen, who pursue agriculture. The contact with the Brahmanas in this lower world as of God in the upper is a necessity to become a Brahman or an offerer of libations¹ which function seems to be obligatory on all respectable householders. The Brahmanas are inferior to gods, sitting down to perform the work of the Hotri and support the ceremony approaching the sacrifice.² In the Purusha Sukta³ whose Rishi is Narayana, the mouth of Purusha became the Brahmana, which means that the latter was derived or born out of the former. This sloka, as has been mentioned previously, is important in connection with the caste organisation. This separate original birth is the foundation of the hereditary character of the Indian caste. The Brahmanas, it seems from a later passage,⁴ were in the habit of administering plants as medicines.

¹ x, 71, 9.

² x, 88, 19.

³ x, 90, 12.

⁴ x, 97, 22.



The Rajanya, the Vaishya and the Shudra
as different castes appear, as
Other castes. has been pointed out, in the
last Mandala¹ of the Rig Veda.

In later Samhitas and particularly in the Brahmanas, we find reference to some classes, called the outcastes, who could not be touched or with whom it would be derogatory to eat. But Chandala and Paulkasa do not even occur anywhere in the Rig Veda. Vrishala occurs indeed in the Rig Veda² and most probably means an outcaste. But the Vrishala here is not a class name but a general term conveying the idea of degradation attached to the irresponsible and wicked gamester of the hymn.

It is very uncertain whether tenants as a class existed in the time of the Rig Veda. The word Vesa occurs in two passages³ but its meaning is obscure and for want of further evidence it is impossible to posit their existence as a class, although their existence might have

¹ x, 90, 12.

² x, 34, 11.

³ ii, 13, 8; x, 49, 5.

been probable in scattered and individual isolation.

Physicians are widely recognised in the Rig Veda, though it is not clear whether there was any Physicians.

such class as in later days. They must have been held in very high respect since many gods Ashwins,¹ Varuna² and Rudra³ are frequently called physicians. In a later passage⁴ the Brahmanas are also said to administer plants with healing effect.

¹ i, 116, 16; i, 157, 6; viii, 18, 8; viii, 86, 1; x, 39, 2—5.

² i, 24, 9.

³ ii, 33, 4—7; vi, 50, 17; ix, 112, 1.

⁴ x, 97, 22.



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CHAPTER III.

THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY.

Turning to the settlement of the families on land we find that the Vedic Aryan lived in villages (Grama). Whether these villages were close to each other or were scattered far and wide and, if so, whether there were roads to connect them cannot be ascertained from the Rig Veda. But the universal practice of certain religious rites and the substantial unity in the development of Vedic life point to the probability that they used to live either close to one other or had means to go from one place to another. The universal habit of early migrations along the course of a river as in the case of the ancient Teutons along the Elbe and in the case of the modern Swiss people can be applied to the Indo-Aryans. They might have gone along the five rivers of the Punjab and there is evidence to support that they reached

Sindh and knew the ocean;¹ we also meet with reference to the treasures of the sea.² The story of Bhujyu, son of Tugra, is repeatedly mentioned in the Rig Veda. This colonisation along the rivers facilitated communication from village to village, and, from analogy in colonisation, we can easily imagine that for fear of being lost to the brother families the Vedic Aryan used to settle by the side of the river; just as the early settlers in Australia colonised along the coast only, those of North Canada along the rivers only. There is additional ground to suppose in the case of Vedic Aryans that they did not go to the interior. The non-Aryans were a powerful race and the frequent hymns of victories and prayers for protection against the Dasyus clearly prove that they were harassed by the latter. In such a case there was the least likelihood of their going in the interior to settle and breaking off all connection with the main settling places along the river.

¹ vii, 95, 2.

² i, 47, 6; vii, 6, 7; ix, 97, 44.

There was easy communication¹ between the settlements along the different rivers of the Punjab. Later on, of course with the pressure of population, they had to move to the east and south-east but then they did not start in scattered groups but formed continuous or at least connecting villages; where these were impossible owing to geographical features, they might have constructed roads to connect one village with another. All this expansion must have been after the period of the Rig Veda. And we do actually find reference to roads in the Chhandogya Upanishad.²

The existence of villages is beyond all doubt even in the Rig Veda period. The resplendent Agni is invoked as the protector of the people in villages.³ The mighty Rudra is propitiated in another sloka⁴ in order that all things in the village may be well nourished, and exempt from disease. The village is also referred to in various other passages in the Rig

¹ iii, 33.

² viii, 6, 2.

³ i, 44, 10.

⁴ i, 114, 1.

Veda.¹ The domestic animals also lived within the village. Of this the proof is clear. Cattle are spoken of as hastening to the village.² Vayu³ or Instinct⁴ is said to preside over certain animals and the rest are recognised as divided into those that are wild and those that are tame.⁵

The organisation of the village is very little known. But there was a village headman with scanty reference to his functions. He is called Gramani or leader of the grama. He is said to be the donor of a thousand cows and the prayer is that he, called the Manu, may never suffer wrong and may his liberality go spreading in glory with the Sun.⁶ In this hymn of Rishi Nabhanedhishtha the liberality of Raja Savarani is the subject; thus the leader seems to be identical in this case, at least, with the headman of the village. In another passage⁷ the head of the village goes in

¹ x, 146, 1; x, 149, 4.

² x, 149, 4.

³ According to Wilson.

⁴ According to Colebrooke.

⁵ x, 90, 8.

⁶ x, 62 11.

⁷ x, 107, 5.



front (at the sacrifice) bearing the dakshina of the priest. From this the communal character of some at least of the religious institutions is suggested and in these the headman represented the village. Moreover, this passage nullifies Zimmer's attempt to confine the functions of the Gramani to military ones only. In the days of the Brahmanas he seems to have occupied the same post in the village as the sheriff in the shire before Henry II, discharging both the civil and military functions. The actual working out of this system of village life and its relation to the broader life of the kingdom, so far as these can be discovered from the Rig Veda, will more properly come under the heading of Polity.





CHAPTER IV

FAMILY OWNERSHIP OF LAND.

Family ownership of land has been the subject of great discussion, but whatever may be the later development, there is no trace of it in the Rig Veda. Baden Powell¹ thinks that it is of later growth and that even then there was no community of ownership in the village but only ownership of the head of the family who had merely moral obligations to the other members. This, he explains, by the growth of *patria potestas* in post-Vedic India. The word *Daya* in Hindu Law clearly means inheritance and it occurs even in the Rig Veda,² but there it means only reward. But that they had property in some form is certain, for example we find mention of a father's property being divided by the sons in his old age.³ But these most probably referred to

¹ Indian Village Community.

² x, 114, 10.

³ i, 70, 10.



movables. There is no trace of the family as a land-owning corporation,¹ so that its growth later must have been post-Vedic. In fact the general impression from the Rig Veda is that the property of the family was not the property of the family but of the father. As to the exact nature of such property, we shall have occasion to deal with that later on.

It is equally uncertain whether women could hold any property for themselves. There is one obscure passage in III, 31, 5—7. The other passage² in the Rig Veda may be interpreted to refer to the property of men rather than that of their wives.

¹ Baden Powell: Indian Village Community.

² x, 34, 11.



CHAPTER V.

ECONOMIC CONCEPTS.

Concepts are always generalised terms and often abstractions. We should not, therefore, expect many of them in the earliest literature of any race. The Greeks and Romans had currency reforms but not much of economic abstractions during the early periods of their history. Later Greeks were famous for philosophic concepts and we find a few economic ones in Aristotle's Politics. The Teutons had none at all while on the Continent, or, if they had, Cæsar and Tacitus failed to notice them. But with the growth of wide economic activity concepts naturally grow. These, when found, are the surest and the truest guide to the economic achievement of a nation, since these invariably follow and never precede economic evolution.

Let us now look at the wealth of the
ancient Aryans and study
their conception of it. The

Wealth.

general term for wealth is Rayi.¹ The usual prayer to the gods is for wealth. Rayi must have included all valuable things, the possession of which would advance the material interests of the early man.² Ribhus are asked to give that wealth which they possess. This is said to consist of cattle, food, progeny, dwellings, and abundant sustenance.³ Men glorify Indra, the lord of riches, for the sake of obtaining sons, valiant grandsons and rain.⁴ Indra is propitiated so that the devotees may obtain that wealth which comprises cattle, horses, and food,⁵ these being the most important and most valuable possessions. There are also special uses of the word rayi standing for valuable things. This is helpful in understanding the things which were considered to be exceptionally valuable and therefore might be identified with rayi itself. Vira or hero is one of them, Vira of course standing for a son who is valiant, otherwise the prayer in general terms for

¹ i, 73, 1; ii, 21, 6; iii, 1, 19; iv, 36, 9.

² v, 4, 11.

³ iv, 34, 10.

⁴ vi, 31, 1.

⁵ viii, 6, 9.

a hero would be meaningless. Indra is asked to give desirous wealth, the source of great power and of numerous progeny.¹ The Maruts are propitiated so that the praisers may thereby daily enjoy the distinguished affluence consisting of valiant progeny.² The Dawns are prayed to for wealth, comprehending progeny.³ Horses were included in wealth, and as these formed one of the most important assets in war and in religious ceremonies, they are frequently spoken of specially as wealth or rayi. The Maruts are asked to bring wealth comprising horses.⁴ Cattle and food have been too frequently mentioned as rayi. Thus the wealth of the early Aryans consisted of progeny without which the domestic worship and the integrity of the family would be endangered. It consisted of horses without which it would be impossible to carry on war and all aggressions and defence against the non-Aryans. Cattle were also recognised as

¹ ii, 11, 13.

² ii, 30, 11.

³ iv, 1, 10.

⁴ v, 41, 5.



wealth, for without it the main industry, agriculture, would be difficult, and sustenance of life would be hopelessly reduced. Finally, food was included, by which of course they understood agricultural products mainly, because without this the very foundation of the social structure, the settlement on the Indian soil, would be destroyed. Thus it is true indeed that the conception of wealth is the index of the state of the society. The Aryans had gold, jewels, and ornaments, but these are not specifically mentioned as wealth. This fact would, apart from all other proofs, go to show that the system of exchange was not prevalent to any large extent, so that conversion of stock was not contemplated in the computation of one's wealth, and that the aggregate stock of the most useful things was recognised as such. This is so, not because gold was, volume for volume, less valued than cattle or horses or food, but because gold could not, in times of stress, satisfy those immediate needs of food and protection which, in a primitive race, naturally loomed large owing to the lack of



what Marshall would call the "telescopic faculty" of the mind in looking to, and making provisions for, the future.

In India besides cattle, progeny, horses and food there was another element which must be recognised as important. This is the right to land. Private property. The idea of private property is the last thing that a people develop, because it is directly the outcome of a series of abstract ideas. First there must be the idea of possession. It must be based on the conception of some abstract right based on prescription, which would condemn any intruder who comes in by the same right to squat and appropriate as the original man. This possession would thus develop into and confirm ownership. This is too much for a community which is just emerging out of a nomadic state and which, in the beginning, finds ample land for appropriation without any occasion for dispute. In Greece and Rome this conception of ownership of land developed very early. But that is due to the peculiar beliefs of their religion



which dominated their whole being. Ancestors had to be worshipped separately because they could not accept libations at the hands of one who was not of their blood. His presence would disturb their rest. Thus the family worships were separated from one another. The tombs also had, for the same reasons, been separated at an early stage. This spirit of exclusion naturally led to the belief that the family tomb must be well defined and be possessed by the family only. Thus one was excluded from the others. So that in Greece and Rome all the intervening stages of abstract theory of rights and possession were stepped over by their peculiar religious beliefs. This is further confirmed by the fact that, whereas the regular independent growth of ownership, being based on the individual's rights to the property, makes it disposable at his will, the ancient Græco-Roman property belonging to the family gods on whose behalf the family or its representative, the pater, was merely the trustee, was inalienable and indivisible; paters came and



went but the corporation, the family including the dead ancestors, the living members and those who would be born or adopted into it, remained intact. Destruction of the family only would lead to the alienation of its land.

Among the Teutons, on the contrary, this religious belief did not prevail. They, in their settlement on land, held it as belonging equally to all the social units which were families. They did not and could not consider a displacement from a settlement as sacrilegious, the only resentment was that which arose out of defeat. In all Teutonic settlements the communal 'mark' was the basis of the organisation of the village community. The land was theoretically shared by all with a tripartite division into culturable land, meadow land and waste; but no family could point to any particular plot of land which belonged to it permanently. It had only a share, the strips being distributed anew every year. In such circumstances the rights of ownership, in the case of Teutons, of the family, could not develop so long as the pressure of population and improvements in agriculture



did not bring in intensive culture of the soil. With intensive culture it would be discovered that an annual redistribution of strips would lead to the abandonment by the cultivating family of whatever improvements it might have made in the land. Therefore self-interest would generate solicitation for the same piece of land. Thus family ownership of land was established in Britain. But they had not as yet reached the further stage of individual ownership. This was not an indigenous growth but a foreign engrafting. The Normans brought the feudal idea of individual ownership and William made it subordinate to the ultimate authority of the king. The work was not difficult of achievement since Roman and Continental ideas were already remoulding English society and English institutions through the preaching of the Christian Church.

In India conditions were different. The elements of religious beliefs with which the Aryans separated from the Asiatic home were worship of the dead ancestors and worship of the gods of physical forces. The influence of



the new environment wrought its work and brought about, in the earliest stages, the predominance of the former in Greece and Rome and of the latter in India. Indra and Agni, Varuna, the Maruts, Ushas, the Ashwins, and all the Vishwadevas were deities presiding over some natural phenomena. It is not within our scope to trace this development in the changed environment. But we recognise the fact as established in the Rig Veda itself. The bifurcation of the original religion seems to have been complete. Most of the illustrations drawn by Fustel de Coulanges¹ from India in his comparisons of Græco-Roman and Indian institutions are drawn from the Laws of Manu, a much later work in India. Latter day India did develop her religion of ancestor worship; that was in the Pauranic age; but in the Rig Veda Angirasas and the pitris are not gods of the first rank.

Thus it is clear that the peculiar religious beliefs of the Aryans which developed exceptionally in Greece and Rome and which, by

¹ The Ancient City.



their ideas of exclusiveness, brought on the institution of private property in land were not the cause of private property in India. Nor can we say that anything like the Norman invasion and Christian Church accelerated the growth of private ownership of land in India as they did in Teutonic Britain. To what then is this early growth of private property due? The explanation must be more or less a theory since we cannot corroborate it by referring to any texts previous to the Rig Veda, and in the Rig Veda private property is so easily accepted that it shows only the earlier establishment of the institution in all its completeness. Yet we think the only reasonable and probable explanation lies in economic causes. If the Malthusian principle of population be combined with the Ricardian principle of intensive cultivation of the soil, the same results would follow as in India. The Aryans in India found a soil which was more fertile and less trying for them to live in. The extreme cold was not there nor were there present the enervating effects which are said to be the curse of India south of the Punjab.



The first settlement was effected by extirpating or displacing the non-Aryans. The land fell to the Aryans. The cultivation yielded fruits beyond all their previous experience. The spirit of adventure, which is the backbone of a conquering race, combined with abundance of food and a bracing climate, would give the greatest impetus to multiplication of the race. None of the Malthusian checks, either positive or preventive, except war, could have prevailed at that time. The fertile soil gave produce in abundance, so much so that its limits could never have been reached, at that early stage, by the increase of population. All these causes would combine to accelerate the growth of population. The fecundity of a race grows and becomes part of it, just as any other social or moral characteristic. Thus the Aryans began to grow in number. At the same time they were limited, as to further territorial expansion, on all sides by the mountains, the sea or the non-Aryans who were an active people. The capacity to multiply grew, whereas the extent of the territory could not be so increased. So,



in time there was felt the pressure of population ; and the people had to take recourse to less fertile lands and to the intensive culture of the soil. With time this pressure increased continuously, leading to adventures by sea and further expansion towards the south. It will be interesting to remember that exactly the same conditions led to the Teutonic difficulties in Germany when, being hemmed in by the powerful Roman armies on the south and the west, the Teutons had to force their way into the sea and settle in Norway, England and Iceland. In India the Aryan culture of the time of the Rig Veda was much superior to that of the Teutons in Frisia. The arts and crafts, the methods of agriculture and warfare, the construction of the chariot, the bow and arrow, and houses, all point to this. Simultaneously they point to something else. Agriculture or house building could not have developed so much during the nomadic state nor could the arts of navigation be developed without a sea. The assumption is irresistible that the Aryans had lived in India for a



considerable period before the composition of the Vedic hymns. If so, that confirms our theory of private property. Originally there was no economic pressure of population and no need of intensive culture. But with time this grew, and with intensive culture the ownership of land was gradually evolved. The rapidity of development along this line would exactly correspond to the severity of the pressure of population within, and that of the non-Aryans without, the Aryan settlement. It was only intensified by the development in agriculture failing to keep pace with the tremendous increase of population. To economise the energy of the race and to give it stimulus, the land had to be made the subject of private property, so that the certainty of effects would lead to the greatest improvements of agriculture that were possible with the known methods. Of course all these arguments did not appear to them. They were impelled by economic needs and adapted themselves to the changing environment. In doing so they gradually slipped from the state of communal ownership, if



ownership at all was there, to the state of family ownership, or, more properly, as we have already shown under Village Community, to that of individual ownership, the head of the family being the real owner. This process of disintegration with respect to the ownership of land must have had its reflex on other social ideas. Thus we find the son not a slave of the father, as in Greece and Rome, where he could be sold and where, in the beginning, he could hold no separate property. In the Rig Veda we cannot discover a single passage which would relegate to the son such a disreputable condition. Yet the Græco-Roman idea of the necessity of the son for the continuance of the family was maintained. The son's position thus was much better here than in the west. In all this we find traces of the working of the idea of ownership dissolving into many and attaching to the individual.

In such a state of society the land, the property, would be recognised as part of the wealth of the individual. We have abundant evidence of this in the Rig Veda.



Reknas meant inherited property or property in general; and it occurs many times in the Rig Veda.¹

¹ i, 31, 14; i, 121, 5; i, 158, 1; i, 162, 2; vi, 20, 7; vii, 4, 7; vii, 40, 2.



CHAPTER VI.

POLITY.

The polity of the Indo-Aryans, like their family, is not a new thing to the modern world. As already noticed, the nature of the ancient Greek, Roman and Teutonic organisations has been so strikingly similar that the science of Comparative Politics has been able to establish, almost beyond doubt, the growth of the elements in the Asiatic home of the Aryans. We have already seen that the Kshatriya or the fighting class had grown in the period of the Rig Veda. Its position was very high indeed, and as we shall presently see its occupation was pretty hard. The Brahmanas, as a priestly class, also came to be differentiated. There may have been exceptions but that does not vitiate the main theory. Purohitas were mainly recruited from their class, so that national or domestic, the Aryan had already confided his spiritual progress to the keeping of the Brahmanas. In other words, mediation was the first, as mediation

is the last word of Hindu spiritual growth so far as that is to be attained through the formal rites enjoined by the Shastras. The position cannot, indeed, be properly contemplated, from the modern viewpoint of philosophic abstraction. The Brahmanas, as their name implies, were in reality the depository of the knowledge of Brahma. It would be contradictory to historical science to say, as has been suggested by some very high authorities, that the whole institution originated in, or was based upon, an attempt on the part of the Brahman oligarchy to capture the highest posts of authority in social life by enslaving, and appealing to, the spiritual aspect—the most easily moved one—of human life.

The third class was the agricultural people, practically the whole population being included under this. Of course there are passages in the Rig Veda¹ where it is doubtful what exactly is the idea conveyed by the word Vis. The most consistent meaning can be gathered only

¹ iv, 4, 3; iv, 37, 1; v, 3, 5; vi, 21, 4; vi, 48, 8; vii, 56, 22; vii, 61, 3; vii, 70, 3; vii, 104, 18; x, 91, 2.

by interpreting it as settlement or dwelling. This also would be the etymological meaning. It may have been an after-growth or it may have been a simultaneous use of the term, but it has been used¹ for subjects of the king. In another passage² the subjects willingly pay homage to the prince. Mention is made of subjects choosing a king and yet they are spoken of as smitten with fear.³ Indra is propitiated in another passage⁴ to render the subject people payer of taxes. Elsewhere the same word has been used for people in general.⁵ In all these cases, it may be noted, Vis signifies the people, either general or as subjects, but not a settlement. The word has again been used in connection with the Arya people.⁶ In an obscure passage⁷ it seems to mean people in conjunction with the divine. With Dasa the word is similarly used.⁸ A significant use

¹ *E.g.*, in vi, 8, 4.

² iv, 50, 8.

³ x, 124, 8.

⁴ x, 173, 6.

⁵ *E.g.*, vi, i, 8; vi, 26, 1; viii, 71, 11.

⁶ x, 11, 4.

⁷ iii, 34, 2.

⁸ iv, 28, 4; vi, 25, 2.

of the word is found in the Rig Veda¹ where it means people and is clearly differentiated from all men (Jana), as well as sons, kinsmen and descendants. The opponents of the clan theory have discovered in this the demolition of the theory inasmuch as in that case Vis would have included descendants. The adherents of the theory equally urge that the distinction between Jana, the common people, and Vis, one's own people, contains the germ of the theory, Vis being all of the same gotra or clan. Sometimes it seems, among those obsessed with a theory, that the less the materials to be drawn upon the greater is the vigour with which their cause is urged. Even the brilliant Fustel de Coulanges² has not been able to escape from this defect. The fact in connection with our point is that from this single passage it is not at all possible to argue either for or against the theory of clan. The above passage read with another³ as meagre as itself has furnished a second series of

¹ ii, 26, 3.

² The Ancient City; the Origin of Property in Land.

³ x, 84, 4.



arguments in favour of the theory. A battle-cry is mentioned here as *Visam-Visam*. This is interpreted to signify that the army was divided into hosts after the different clans. It is not at all improbable but we are bound to say that, when we do so, we traverse by imagination and not by proved historical fact. Additional colour is lent to this theory by another reference¹ to battle as *Visoyudhmah*. It is evident that the whole argument, either in favour of the theory or against it, hangs upon the exact meaning of *Vis*, which has so many significations that it seems hopeless to attempt to bring them out with any degree of certainty. Finally, there is another use of *Vis*² where it is contrasted with both *Griha* (house) and *Jana* (all men). The only point that stands out clearly in the midst of all these divergent meanings of the word is that there was the bulk of the people, mostly agricultural, who were never confused with, and were, therefore, distinct from, the *Kshatriya* and the *Brahmana*.

¹ iv, 24, 4.

² x, 91, 2.

There was, moreover, another class of
Slaves. people, the slaves, whose
position, as gathered from
the later Samhitas, was similar to that of the
serfs in England just after the Norman con-
quest. Dasa is used for the non-Aryans as
also Dasyu. But Dasa equally refers to slaves
who were under the control of the Aryans.
The fact, perhaps, is that some of the con-
quered people were slain, others not exactly
conquered were allowed to live independently
while the prisoners of war who escaped
death were converted into slaves. In a very
early passage¹ the deity is asked to give,
among other things, troops of slaves. This
would not be a boon but a curse if it is inter-
preted to mean a body hostile to the Aryan.
The worshipper in another passage² alludes to
diligent service like a slave. Dasa as slave is
referred to again in the eighth Mandala.³ The
possession of slaves is compared to that of

¹ i, 92, 8.

² vii, 86, 7.

³ 56, 3.



numerous cattle, they being liable to be given away for the enjoyment of the donee.¹

These then are the different classes who were recognised within the pale of Aryan polity. The King and the royal household will be treated separately. But before that we should know something about the mass of non-Aryans who are called Dasa or Dasyu. A series of questions naturally arises as to their historic position, the principal points of their difference from the Aryans, their organisation and mode of life, their wealth and their civilisation.

These aborigines are repeatedly referred to in the Rig Veda either as

The non-Aryans.

Dasyu or as Dasa. There are other meanings of these two words, but we shall take only those passages where the words mean non-Aryans or aborigines. The earliest reference in the Rig Veda alludes to the Dasyus as contrasted with the Aryas.² Indra again attacks and slays with his thunderbolt

¹ x, 62, 10.

² i, 51, 8.



the Dasyus and the Simyus.¹ That the Dasyus and the Simyus were not Aryans is certain, but the doubt remains whether Dasyus and Simyus refer to different classes among the aborigines. This cannot, at this distant date, be ascertained. The next passage² on the point speaks of the thunderbolt armed with which Indra goes on destroying the cities of the Dasyus, *dasih purah*. This reference to their cities is significant. This shows that the Dasyus were not uncivilised altogether, but lived in organised bands and settled on territories perhaps of their own clearing. Even if *purah* be used for villages or hamlets, this proves the Dasyus' civilised life. They were not living in caves, as is suggested by some from meagre references, which most probably described their condition after their defeat at the hands of the Aryans.³ Further on, in the same book⁴ Ashwins are said to be destroying the Dasyu. Again Indra has let open the light to the Arya

¹ i, 100, 18.

² i, 103, 3.

³ See later, Civilisation of the aborigines.

⁴ i, 117, 21.

by crushing Vrita, the spider-like son of Danu. The hymn¹ sings on : the Dasyu has been set aside. The next sloka² honours those men who surpass all their rivals as the Aryas surpass the Dasyus. From this it is evident that the Aryans were in earnest competition with the Dasyus in the struggle and were winning almost everywhere. The hymn is born of confidence when Indra is again praised for having destroyed the Dasyus, thus protecting *Aryam varnam*.³ In a mood of sceptical distrust Rishi Bharadvāja questions the attribute and power of Indra, but only after reciting Indra's feat of quickly humbling the Dasyus.⁴ Agni is called on to expel the Dasyus from the dwelling.⁵ This may be a reference to an inroad by the non-Aryans within an Aryan settlement. The deity later on, in self-praise, recounts his exploits and says that he has not given the *nama* of the Aryas to the Dasyus.⁶

¹ ii, 11, 18.

² ii, 11, 19.

³ iii, 34, 9.

⁴ vi, 18, 3.

⁵ vii, 5, 6.

⁶ x, 49, 3.



The main difference between the Dasyu and the Aryan must have been one of religion. In the early stages of a nation's growth, particularly those of the Aryans, their religious notions pervade their whole being. Gods being thrust into every successful act as its cause and the belief being universal that the performance of religious rites, according to certain fixed unalterable rules only, would please the gods, the natural consequence is that the race continually fights against aliens even when there may not be any necessity for it. Caution is required that the rites, etc., are not contaminated by even an unconscious admixture of barbarian custom. The history of the Greeks¹ and Romans² abundantly proves this and there is no reason to suppose that things were otherwise in the case of the Indo-Aryans. In the Rig Veda the non-Aryans are repeatedly spoken of in derogation as to their religious rites, which differed from those of the Aryans. Thus the Dasyus are called *avrata*, i.e., without

¹ Wachsmuth : Historical Antiquities of the Greeks.

² Warde Fowler : Religious Experience of the Roman People.

ordinances (religious rites) and the prayer is to compel them to submit to the performer of sacrifices (the Aryan).¹ The *avrata* Dasyu is in another passage² asked to be consumed by the deity, as a wooden vessel is burnt by fire. The triumphant worshipper of the deity seeks again to shame the *avrata*, who has no observances.³ The same note of triumph forms the strains of another verse.⁴ The Dasyu has been described elsewhere⁵ as impious, perhaps meaning without devotion (*abrahmana*). A severe verse occurs in the Rig Veda⁶ in which the Dasyu is called *a-yajyu* (without sacrifice), *mridhra-vach* and other uncharitable names, and the main cause of offence on the part of the Dasyu seems to be that he does not perform sacrifices after the Aryan method. Parvata is asked to hurl the Dasyu down to the stern smiter,⁷ viz., death, the Dasyu who follows other and strange rites (*anya vrata*), who is

¹ i, 51, 8.

² i, 175, 3.

³ vi, 14, 3.

⁴ ix, 41, 2.

⁵ iv, 16, 9.

⁶ vii, 6, 3.

⁷ viii, 70, 11.

not a human being, or, it may mean, who is the enemy of man (*amanusham*), who does not offer sacrifices to the gods (*a-yajvan*) and finally who is not solicitous about the gods (*a-devayau*). The Dasyu is always spoken of as *a-karman*, i.e., without religious rites.¹

Some have cast doubts as to the historicity of the Dasyus, they being only a mythological race. Although many of the above passages are liable to this interpretation, others admittedly are not so. They are described in one passage² as *anas* (*anasodasyun amrinah*). Sayanaacharya explains *anasa* as *asya ruhita*m and *asya*, he says, stands for *sabdam*, so that the meaning would be voiceless, i.e., speaking a tongue not understood by the Aryans. The later use of the word *mlechchha* (root *mlechchh*, to speak rudely) with reference to barbarians would support this view. Sayana is a great authority but his meaning here seems somewhat farfetched. The more natural meaning of Muller is noseless (*a* = non, *nasa* = nose) in contrast to the

¹ x, 22, 8.

² v, 29, 10.

prominent nose of the Aryans. In any case this verse read with the other cited above goes to prove that Dasyu is not merely a super-human being or a myth but a person having physical features coming directly in contact with the Aryans as rival and enemy, and capable of being destroyed by them.

Another word that has also been used in the same sense occurs more frequently in the Rig Veda. But this word has also been used to mean so many other things that the unwary is apt to be confounded. We are not here concerned with the various uses of the term and so shall take up directly only those passages where Dasa does surely mean human beings. Indra, the subduer of all the formidable, the lord, conducts the Dasa at his pleasure.¹ Indra again is said to have rendered human enemies, whether Dasa or Arya, easy to be overcome.² This passage shows that the Aryas used to fight even among themselves, so that by this time they must have been well settled in the land to afford to have mutual warfare. The

¹ v, 34, 6.

² vi, 22, 10.

same idea is conveyed when Indra, the hero, is praised as having destroyed both classes of enemies, Dasa and Arya adversaries.¹ Again, the expression *hato vritranyarya hato dasani* must mean, in spite of the neuter gender used, Aryas and Dasas, the interpretation being *aryaih* and *dasaih kritani*, i.e., things done by them severally.² Indra and Varuna are jointly invoked to destroy the gods' enemies, whether Dasas or Aryas.³ The worshippers hope further that, with the aid of Indra, they may overcome and destroy in battle all those who propose to assail them, whether they may be Dasas, Aryas or enemies of the gods.⁴ Agni is praised for having defeated the strong men, Dasas and Vritras, like a resolute warrior overcoming those who are desirous of battle.⁵ With Manyu as an ally the worshippers express their confidence of overcoming the Dasa and the Arya.⁶

¹ vi, 33, 3.

² vi, 60, 6.

³ vii, 83, 1.

⁴ x, 38, 3.

⁵ x, 69, 6.

⁶ x, 83, 1.

The non-Aryans possessed cities or forts (purah may be interpreted either ways). Indra is said to have gone on destroying the Dasi purah.¹ The word purah may have meant fort, for in one passage² we find it described as ayasih, made of iron or, at least, of metal (ayas meaning metal). The combined effort of Indra and Agni is the subject of another verse³ which goes to overthrow ninety strongholds (purah), ruled over by the Dasas, *dasapatnih purah*. Indra's prowess is proclaimed again,⁴ where, exhilarated by the soma juice, he demolished the cities of the Dasas. In one passage⁵ the expression Dasir visah has led to the supposition that the non-Aryans also had their clan organisation. We have already discussed it and have only to say that this and the succeeding references prove conclusively that whatever may be the meaning of Vis in these passages, whether clan or people unrelated, the organisation on this

¹ i, 103, 3.

² ii, 20, 8.

³ iii, 12, 6.

⁴ iv, 32, 10.

⁵ ii, 11, 4.

point was the same among the Aryas and the Anaryas, since the same word is used in the case of both. The expression *viso dasirakrinoraprashastah*¹ is also similarly interpreted as meaning clan. Visah here has been usually translated by prajah, people or subject. Akrino means karmahinah, i.e., without religious rites or functions. Aprashastah means garhita, i.e., vicious. The expression is interpreted by earlier foreign authorities as referring to servile classes, slaves rather than free non-Aryans. But as the slaves were only those non-Aryans who were reduced in war the expression should also be equally applicable to the non-slave Dasas, even if in this particular passage the slaves only are meant. The word Vis has been interpreted also as standing for clan. In a third passage² *vishwa abhiyujō vishuchir aryaya visho ava tarirdasih*, explained by Sayana as *vishuchih sarvatra vartamanah*, would show that the Aryas were surrounded on all hands by the non-Aryans. Thus here Dasa cannot be rendered as the servile

¹ iv, 28. 4.

² vi, 25, 2.



classes as is done by Wilson and Colebrooke. The usual fight over Vis is found here as well.

Another distinguishing feature of the non-Aryans seems to be their black skin, *krishna tvach*. Indra punishes the aggressors by tearing off the black skin.¹ This seems to refer to flaying alive. The theory of black skin as a distinguishing feature is not vitiated by connecting with this passage, as has been done by some, the legendary asura named Krishna, the black, advancing with ten thousand followers to the banks of the Ansumati river, where he is said to have committed fearful devastation until Indra, with the Marutas, was sent against him by Brihaspati, when he was defeated by Indra and his skin stripped. The black skin is also referred to in a later passage of the Rig Veda.²

From the above description of the aborigines we can fairly expect that a people with such organisations, with cities or forts, knowing the use of iron or metal (ayas), should be prosperous materially. There are in fact some

¹ i, 130, 8.

² ix, 41, 1.



references to their wealth and these, though few in number, are scattered throughout the whole of the Rig Veda. The earliest mention¹ of their wealth is made when the deity is asked to slay every one of them and bestow upon the worshippers the wealth belonging to them, so that here the amount of wealth, whatever it might consist of, is coveted by the Aryas. If, as we have reason to believe, the condition of the Aryan at this time was one of material prosperity we are bound to say that the wealth of the non-Aryans also must have been very great, otherwise the worshippers could have asked for the destruction of the troublesome foes but would not have coveted their wealth. In another passage² the deity is said to have carried off the wealth of one of the aboriginal chiefs, after demolishing his cities. Again Indra is asked to cut off the foes as an old pruner cuts off the protruding branch of a creeper and humble the Dasa so that the worshippers may divide his accumulated

¹ i, 176, 4.

² iv, 30, 13.

treasure.¹ The passage is significant as a proof of the Dasa's wealth. The prayer is not so much for the destruction of the Dasa, but for his humiliation, so that palpably the object is his wealth, which is said to be accumulated. All this strongly suggests that the wealth of the Dasa was very great indeed.

So, we see that the aborigines of the Vedic age were also a progressive race or a combination of many races, that the contest with the Aryas was a severe one and that they possessed wealth and had cities or forts, in one case spoken of as made of *ayas*. But there are certain other passages which prove that the non-Aryans were dwellers of mountain caves, etc., so that their civilisation cannot be said to have advanced much. Here clearly there is a conflict between two sets of evidences. Two explanations seem justified, both of which may be true in different localities. There may have been different races among the non-Aryans themselves, some very advanced, others less so. The former may have been conquerors

¹ viii, 40, 6.

themselves and the rulers of the soil, as the Aryans were after supplanting them. The second explanation is that the dwellers in the caves were the civilised non-Aryans seeking refuge in natural fastnesses after their cities or habitats had been destroyed or occupied by the advancing Aryans. Both these seem to have been going on, otherwise the references to the wealth, power and civilisation of the non-Aryans discussed previously become inexplicable. The few passages, moreover, that occur in the Rig Veda, all refer to one Sambara, a non-Aryan chief, and can be easily interpreted as a dislodged chief or the son of a previously dislodged chief. In such a case dwelling in the mountain would be natural, *e.g.*, Indra discovered Sambara dwelling in the mountains for forty years.¹

We now pass on to the study of kingship in the period of the Rig Veda (Rajan). Thus
 Kingship. Prajapati prays to Indra to make him a king,
*kuvid mam gopam karase kuvid rajanam.*²

¹ ii, 12, 11 ; iv, 30, 14 ; vi, 2, 5.

² iii, 43, 5.



It seems on the whole to be a historical fact that government by the king was the normal polity of the early as also of the later Aryans in India. The consolidation of the power of the king during the period of settlement is quite natural, as is shown in the history of the early Teutons, the post-Conquest English. The Bretwaldas, Heptarchy, also point to the same fact. The history of the Basileus in the earliest Greek settlement also substantially supports this view. The theoretical argument in favour of the growth of kingship, in supersession of the clan organisations, is very ably presented by Jenks.¹ In India also we find that the same circumstances prevailed. The Aryans, in their march of conquest, had to meet, at every turn,² powerful bands of non-Aryans equally versed in many of the arts of civilisation known to the Aryans themselves. Continuous war followed, which must have led, as in the case of the early Teutons, to the growth of the royal power. In Continental

¹ Law and Politics in the Middle Ages, Ch. III.

² vi, 25, 2.



Europe the king had to overcome, in England, to assimilate the clan organisation with jarring interests and based on conjunction by birth rather than military efficiency. In India these obstacles did not, at any rate, exist to the extent that they did in Europe, for we hear so little of clans, and of these many allusions are, on the whole, not certain. Although there are references to Aryans fighting Aryans,¹ yet we are not certain whether one clan of Aryans fought with another, or merely the people of one place fought against those of another. Nor can we even suggest, without launching ourselves into conjectural absurdities, that these wars were fought for the king either to consolidate or to disrupt his powers as conflicting with those of the clan units. Of clan also we have only the variedly interpreted *Vis*, the war cry, *Visam-Visam*, and the word *Gotra* which has hopelessly lost its original meaning. Be that what it may have been, we come across the word *Rajan* which means the king or the person who rules. Whether the king was

¹ vi, 22, 2; vi, 33, 3; vi, 60, 6; vii, 83, 1; x, 38, 3.



elected or hereditary is another moot point. In the later Samhita days hereditary kingship seems to have been the prevalent institution, reference being made to some king reigning for forty generations. Perhaps there was some sort of election as well, which might have been confined to the election of the king from the members of the royal family. The legend, in the Nirukta,¹ of Devapi and Shantanu which forms the subject of one of the later hymns of the Rig Veda² refers to the practical deposition of the elder brother by the younger. But in this case the hereditary line was not disturbed and in fact the two brothers were reconciled by the subsequent ill-luck of Shantanu, and Devapi's assumption of the Brahmanic functions forms only an exception to the rule of the Brahmanana in religious ceremonies. But one passage in the Rig Veda³ is strongly suggestive. Varuna (who is merely the divine aspect of the king)⁴ is said to be sustained by the waters of his creation. The hymn

¹ ii, 10.

² x, 98.

³ x, 124, 8.

⁴ Macdonell: Vedic Mythology.

goes on: like subjects choosing a king, they, smitten with fear, fled from Vritra. The choice of a king by the people is clearly suggested. But the condition of free choice of the President of the United States of America or of the French Republic could not have existed. Otherwise why should they be smitten with fear? In any way that the choice of the king was known is certain; the uncertainty hangs about the how and the when of this election.

If we turn to the duty of the king, we find that this may be divided into two, *viz.*, his duty in war and his duty in times of peace. In connection with the non-Aryans we have seen that frequent battles ensued between the Aryans and the non-Aryans.¹ The growth of an early king out of the people or out of the priest or out of the patriarchs is undoubtedly due to war. Therefore efficiency in war, in leading, fighting, organising, or in propitiating the gods (in the case of the priest, of which there is very great probability) required that it must be shown and, in the beginning, maintained

¹ ii, 12, 11; iv, 26; 3; vi, 26, 5; vi, 33, 4; vii, 18; vii, 33: vii, 83, etc.

by personal prowess in the field. So that it is reasonable to assume that the chief function of the king in war was to lead the army. Specially is this probable in view of the fact that there was already the threefold differentiation of society into the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and the Vis. In times of war the only possible function of the king could have been the leading of the military party. Besides these offensive wars against the non-Aryans and hostile Aryans, the king also undertook the defence against aggression. The prayer for being made the protector or rather a monarch of men is found in one passage in the Rig Veda, *kuvid mam gopam karase janasya kuvid rajanam.*¹

In peace the king used to command the obedience of the people. He used to favour the able men² in his territory. Another important verse in the Rig Veda³ says: "the king abides prosperous in his own abode. The earth bears fruit for him at all

¹ iii, 43, 5.

² i, 67, 1.

³ iv, 50, 8.

seasons. His subjects willingly pay homage to him." Sometimes this obedience or payment was forced.¹

In the later Sutras we find reference to the function of the king as civil judge but in the Rig Veda there is no such mention. But his function as a criminal judge is hinted at in some passages. Varuna, the personified god representing the king, has spies for the determination of what is true from what is false.² 'The doers of good deeds are favoured, being recompensed ultimately for their acts.'³ The passage is obscure but considering the state of society we may well presume that certain criminal jurisdiction attached itself to the king. The spies of Varuna are specifically desired to praise to their master the acts of the worshippers.⁴ Yama also speaks of the spies of gods which wander upon earth and never close their eyes.⁵ All these passages refer to the gods, either Varuna specially or

¹ vii, 6, 5; ix, 7, 5.

² iv, 4, 3; vi, 67, 5.

³ vii, 61, 3.

⁴ vii, 87, 3.

⁵ x, 10, 8.



to gods in general, but the analogy seems to be applicable to the government of the king. Later on, we shall have occasion to refer to the laws and their administration. But here the king's function also seems partly to be the supervision of the criminal administration.

The king seems to have lived in a well built palace which must have had many elaborate arrangements. In one passage¹ it is said that sovereigns sit down in this substantial and elegant hall built with a thousand columns. Varuna again is said to have a vast comprehensive dwelling with a thousand doors.² Frequent reference is made to brilliant dress, perhaps, of the king. The earliest passage in the Rig Veda³ speaks of the gomatarah (*i.e.*, having for their mother the cow, whence the earth; it may mean king) embellishing themselves with ornaments, shining resplendent, in their persons, with brilliant decorations. All those round the son of Chedi are spoken of as wearing cuirasses of leather.⁴ The Maruts when

¹ ii, 41, 5.

² vii, 88, 5.

³ i, 85, 3.

⁴ viii, 5, 38.

decked with various ornaments look handsome and are compared with kings.¹ Lastly the king is supposed to be the landowner but of this there is no proof whatsoever in the Rig Veda, though ample evidence of it is found in later literature.

Another word *Svaraj*² also occurs in the Rig Veda which may be interpreted as self-ruler or king. But it has in all cases been used in connection with the gods and does not seem to require more than this passing notice.

Viraja seems to signify a title of royalty but its metaphorical use throughout the Rig Veda³ does not allow us to derive from it any useful knowledge about the king. The idea of monarch or sole ruler seems to be known in that age when the smaller kings among the Aryans were perhaps fighting among themselves. The fact that even in idea *Ekaraja* could be conceived suggests the movement of political events towards a unity under the supervision of the king. In the

¹ x, 78, 1.

² i, 36, 7; i, 51, 15; i, 61, 9.

³ i, 188, 5; ix, 96, 18; x, 166, 1.



Rig Veda¹ in connection with the god Indra, the word is used and that only once. But we may profitably remember that even in the days of the so-called Heptarchy the English were without a name for the holder of kingship. Bretwalda did not convey that nor could cynning serve the purpose. This view of the importance of the word will be manifest when we understand that the Rig Veda has already conceived of the superior ruler, the sovereign, having power greater than that of the king. Rishi Prajapati refers in a hymn to the universal sovereign, *samraj*.² The sun again is called *samraj*, since he measures the three worlds.³ Indra is also said to hold this position in another hymn.⁴ Rishi Bharadwaj tells Indra that Abhyarvartin, the son of Chayamana, is the opulent supreme sovereign, *samraj*, and has made presents to the Rishi.⁵ This reference is clearly to a king who, at least for the time, was the most powerful one and thus was entitled

¹ viii, 37, 3.

² iii, 55, 7.

³ iii, 56, 15.

⁴ iv, 21, 1.

⁵ vi, 27, 8.



to the high name. But this might have been the effect of the presents on the minds of the Rishi. In any case the term when applied to man was not an absurdity. The same use of it is also found in another verse of Sobhari¹ where he and his people seek the alliance of Trasadasyu for his protection.

The king was indeed a prominent person with regal paraphernalia and not merely the first among men. It is not exactly certain whether there was any body of men like the Teutonic *comitatus*, the personal followers, who were attached to him in war, plunder and in any new settlement. Considering the meagre references that we can expect from the hymns of the Rig Veda about all such matters we are bound to turn to the later period and seek for confirmation of any hint in the Rig Veda, as to some institution, in the prevailing practice in the later Samhitas. Thus only can we form any idea as to the household organisation of the king. Of course after the king his son must have been the most prominent man there,

¹ viii, 19, 32.



since either he was recognised as the future king or if the system of election was prevalent he was one of the best candidates for kingship. He was called Raja-putra.¹ To the people also, as to the other members of the royal household, he was an object of veneration; and going about like princes was different from going about like an ordinary man. It is uncertain whether he used to be surrounded by a body of retainers like his royal father, but in dress and personal bearing it is only reasonable to presume that he followed the king.

Among the people who formed the personal attendants of the king, men of high qualities and probably of high birth formed the majority. Though not exactly like the comitatus, still these formed a sort of united body following the king, as leaders perhaps in times of war. Most probably they were the associates of the king in peace as well. They must all have been of the Kshatriya class, most probably of the royal family and at all times must have formed a

¹ x, 40, 3.

distinct body of men and described by the word Rajan which otherwise means the king in the Rig Veda. Indeed this must have been the class which was in the mind of Rishi Narayana when in his famous Purusha Sukta he spoke of Rajanya as a class coming out of the arms of Purusha.¹ The deity Brahmanaspati is again asked in an earlier verse to concentrate his strength and slay foes, being associated with the regal attendants.² The high position of the Rajan is evident from Rishi Kutsa's hymn³ where the adorable Indra and Agni are said to delight either in his own house or in that of a Brahmana or in that of a Rajan, *yad brahmani rajani va*. Later on, in the Rig Veda the descendant of the great patriarch Angirasa, in his invocation to Indra, says that the worshippers, *i.e.*, the chiefs, may acquire riches.⁴ Then again the medicinal plants or herbs are said to congregate, for the extirpation of disease, etc., as the princes of the

¹ x, 90, 12.

² i, 40, 8.

³ i, 108, 7.

⁴ x, 42, 10.



ruling house assemble in the field of battle.¹ Here the word is used in the plural and from the comparison made with the plants, seems to indicate the equality of their position. From this the attempt has been made to prove that in some cases, instead of the king, all the members of the royal family used to rule together and the comparison is made with the Teutonic settlement described by Tacitus² where there is reference to such a case. Without denying the probability of such a fact, we consider it reasonable to state that the passing reference in one passage only does not warrant the presumption of such an institution. Zimmer seems to have projected his idea about the Teutonic polity into this verse and reads things too much in advance.

Apart from these nobles attending the king there was a body of retainers and dependents. Retainers and dependents. who were of much lower position and perhaps of lower birth. The word

¹ x, 97, 6.

² Annals ii, 88.

Ibha occurs several times in the Rig Veda¹ but the meaning of this word has been so widely interpreted that it would be unsafe to put much reliance on this alone. Sayana, for example, interprets it to mean "elephant" and he has been followed by some others. Yet proofs, besides this, of the king's retinue are not wanting in the Rig Veda. The word Vira literally means strong and heroic man. This word means most probably in some of the earliest passages² the sturdy attendants of a king or a chief. Elsewhere³ also this interpretation may be put on it. Finally the word is used in connection with Taranta⁴ who is called a Vira. But all these may mean merely a heroic person or persons and the only thing in favour of the interpretation is the later (post Rig Veda) practice of having such attendants of the king.

Besides his retinue the king assuredly had about him a body of dependents who are

¹ i, 84, 17 ; iv, 4, 1 ; ix, 57, 3.

² i, 18, 4 ; i, 114, 8.

³ iv, 29, 2 ; v, 20, 4.

⁴ v. 61, 5.

mentioned repeatedly in the Rig Veda. *Upasti*¹ means a servant who depends upon his master but who is not exactly a slave. According to both the interpretations² of this passage *upasti* is a servant but it is not exactly clear from the context whether the servant belonged usually to the king or to every man of importance. But even if it was so in the case of the latter, we can safely assert its existence in the case of the king, who must have possessed, in these matters of position and authority, what an ordinary non-royal man of importance did. The meaning of another word, *sti*, is very obscure and it is said that it signifies dependents whose position is lower than that of the Vis, prajah or the subjects, but better than that of the slaves. It occurs frequently in the Rig Veda³ but its meaning in this connection seems to be at least uncertain. *Stipa* similarly has been interpreted to mean the attendant on the king's person, i.e., the guard of his body. But its use in connection with

¹ x, 97, 23.

² by Sayana and by Mahidhara.

³ vii, 19, 11; x, 34; x, 148, 4.



the gods¹ seems to be incompatible with his dependent position.

We have seen previously that there was frequent warfare between the
Tribute.

Aryans and the non-Aryans as well as among the Aryans themselves. We do not know anything about treaties or other international relations such as we hear of even in the early days of Egypt (*e.g.*, in the reign of Thotmes III), Babylonia, Assyria, etc.² In most cases war continued till one party was totally crushed and became either slaves or subjects or fled away to the hills or other places of natural protection living like king Sambara.³ In most cases the terms of settlement were fixed at the cessation of hostilities. But there were other cases too when the humbled or the weak party used to pay tribute to the strong or the victor. This might have been paid either for protection or for non-molestation on the part of the strong. The word *bali* has been indeed frequently used

¹ vii, 6 i, 3; x, 69, 4.

² For ready reference, see Hall's *Ancient History of the Near East*. More authoritative ones are the books of Maspero, Breasted, etc.

³ ii. 12, 11; iv, 30, 14; vi, 26, 5.

to signify offerings to gods.¹ But *balihrit* cannot but have meant payment of tribute to the king. The mighty Agni first baffled the Asuras who were humbled and then made them tributaries (i.e., paying tributes) to Nahusha.² Most unequivocally again the dwellers of the Yamuna and the Tritsus got tribute of the heads of the horses from the Ajas, the Sighrus, the Yakshas, after Indra had killed Bheda in battle.³ All these are cases of payment on tribute from hostile tribes who by reduction in war were compelled to do so. But there seems to have been the practice of such payment from a friendly people or from one's own subjects even. There is one passage only in the Rig Veda⁴ but it is a very cogent proof of the fact. Indra is propitiated here to render the people payers of bali, *balihrit*.

Passing now to the other institutions of the Vedic polity we meet
 Vispati. first of all with *Vispati*, a word of very various interpretation, Zimmer

¹ v, 1, 10 ; viii, 100, 9.

² vii, 6, 5.

³ vii, 18, 19.

⁴ x, 176, 6.

interprets it in one passage¹ as the lord of the canton in which case the kingdom must have been divided into well organised units of smaller dimensions having a sort of independence resembling perhaps the self-governing units of a modern state. But Zimmer's theory based on the mere mention of the *Vispati* seems to be at least indecisive. In another and less ambiguous use² of the word it is supposed either to mean the lord of the dwelling in which case he must be taken as a subordinate of the king, if he had any political function, or to mean the king himself, if *Vis* is translated by *praja* or subjects. It seems that the proper interpretation of *Vispati* in this connection cannot be ascertained unless it is clear whether the kingdom of a ruler was big or small. If it was very big then these *Vispatis* must have had political functions and as such their position may be taken to have been more independent than mere governors of a province with probably the same functions.

¹ i, 37, 8.

² i, 12, 2; i, 26, 7; i, 164, 1; ii, 1, 8; iii, 2, 10; iii, 40, 3; vii, 39, 2; ix, 108, 10; x, 4, 4; x, 135, 1.

This assumption is reasonable in view of the fact that in later days¹ we come across Satapati, the lord of a hundred villages, who must have had primarily political function as an officer.² Moreover without such local units even in the Rig Veda period there could not have been any unity within the realm of the king. But this may be negatived by the suppositions (i) that the kingdoms were small, so that the king and the nobles were sufficient to carry on the government with perhaps the help of the *spashah* or the spy; or (ii) that the government was not organised enough in those early days. But the condition of the people, as evidenced from their system of agriculture, arts and crafts does not warrant the second supposition.

Even if such an organisation was not necessary for carrying on the administration in times of peace, it was certainly necessary in times of war. And its prevalence in war shows that the army was not so small as to be led directly

¹ Maitrayani Samhita, iv, 14, 12; Taittiriya Brahmana, ii, 8, 4, 2.

² He had judicial functions as well.



by the nobles and the king. This again would naturally presuppose a big state, which necessitated local governors or *Vispatis*.

However, in war even perhaps in migration the *Vrajapati* used to be attended by the *Kulapas*.¹ The *kulapas* were undoubtedly the heads of families so that the heads of families used to go to war under the leadership of the *Vrajapati*. The interpretation has been put on it by some according to which the *Vrajapati* is identified with the *Gramani*, so that the headman of the village was attended in war by the heads of families of the same village. Thus it would be the same as the division of the host according to the division of the curies in the Roman army of the early days. This interpretation seems to be very probable as it is impossible to deny the significance of the connection between the *Vrajapati* and the *Kulapas*. And who else could be their leader except the *Gramani* whom we find mentioned in the *Rig Veda*?² The other interpretation that it means merely a chieftain surrounded by

¹ x, 179, 2.

² x, 62, 11; x, 107, 5.



the heads of families is literally more correct. But the question arises who could be this chieftain? The proper explanation of this seems to be the identification of the *Gramani* with the *Vrajapati* in times of war. It may be remembered, by the way, that the word *Vrajapati* also establishes its connection (in its etymological meaning) with the house, so that he was the headman somewhere and the fact of his leading the *Kulapas* or the heads of families offers the irresistible temptation to identify him with the leader of the clan, families of the same stock. In such cases the *Gramani* was, in ordinary times, the representative head of the clan. But we have already referred to this discussion among experts, under Family.

The most important and the typically
The Assembly. Aryan institution was the
Assembly. In all the three

European branches of the Aryan race the Greeks, the Romans and the Teutons, the original political elements were the king, the council and the assembly;¹ out of these

¹ Freeman: Comparative Politics. Sidgwick: Development of European Polity.



have grown the various complex institutions of the present day by the process of, what Herbert Spencer would call, differentiation and integration.¹ The same three elements were prevalent among the Indo-Aryans. We have seen the king and we have also had occasion to know the council whose members the rajanya, the nobles, must have been. But in this latter case there is no recorded evidence to prove that there used to be actual deliberations of these nobles with the king. Still it would not be unreasonable to presume that the king was influenced by the opinions of those who by virtue of their birth and military skill surrounded him in times of peace and war. In connection with the Assembly also we shall have occasion to notice the probability of such an oligarchical body, which eventually superseded the assembly of the people.

Throughout the whole of the Rig Veda from the earliest Mandala down to the latest we find very frequent references to words meaning assembly. We shall take each of

¹ Herbert Spencer : Principles of Sociology, Vol. II, Part V, Chs. 3—4.

these words separately and try to discover the exact institution that was meant by its use. *Vidatha* is by far the most important word as it occurs so many times in the Rig Veda.¹ In all these passages the word seems to signify order, not actual assemblies. These help us only so far as we attempt to argue by analogy by referring to the etymological meaning; and we must not be unconscious about its uncertainty as a word positively standing for an assembly. But besides these, the word *Vidatha* has been used for assembly in three different senses, viz., (i) assembly for secular ends, (ii) assembly for religious ends and (iii) assembly for war. Unfortunately no record of the procedure or the transactions of the assembly is found in the Rig Veda but the scant references in quite a large number of verses² scattered throughout the Rig Veda confirm the existence of such institutions for secular purposes. The business of administration in those days was not an elaborate affair

¹ i, 31, 6; i, 117, 25; iii, 1, 18; iii, 27, 7; iv, 38, 4; vi, 8, 1; x, 85, 26; x, 92, 2.

² ii, 1, 4; ii, 27, 12; ii, 27, 17; iii, 38, 5—6; v, 63, 2; vii, 66, 10; viii, 39, 1; x, 12, 7.



and we cannot expect that the king with such limited duties would be performing many public acts requiring the sanction of the people. Perhaps those matters only were brought before the assembly which required the sanction or approval of the people because these were not already sanctioned by custom. Such departures could not have been very many in number. But the frequent occurrence of the word for secular purposes suggests that these assemblies met even when there was no such departure. In such cases the function of the assembly can only be a matter of guesswork. The formal meeting would presuppose a superior organisation and superior ideas of rules and method to what we are justified in asserting from a study of the Vedic civilisation. Nor can it be confidently asserted that the general body of the subjects was yet conversant, or was at all interested in being conversant, with the affairs of the state, beyond the protection of their hearth and fields.

The assembly for religious purposes¹ was evidently for worshipping the deity and in

¹ i, 60, 1 ; ii, 39, 1 ; iii, 1, 1,

this respect it is possible to say that it used to meet very regularly, *e.g.*, three times a day.¹ There is also reference of the assembly of the deities themselves.²

There are a few references to the *Vidatha* for purposes of war.³ The Maruts, for example, are said to sport in the assembly which evidently met for the demolition of the intruders or invaders.⁴ Again the Maruts are found propitiated in a *Vidatha* evidently assembled to make preparations for war.⁵

In one passage in the Rig Veda⁶ we find the word *Samgati* used for an assembly where Indra, Vayu and Brihaspati are invoked to join and thus be favourable.

Sabha is another important word, signifying assembly with which we often meet in the Rig Veda.⁷ But sometimes it is difficult to ascertain whether it means the assembly or the hall of assembly. The tendency is to

¹ ii, 4, 8.

² iii, 56, 8.

³ v, 59, 2.

⁴ i, 166, 2.

⁵ i, 167, 6.

⁶ x, 141, 4.

⁷ vi, 28, 6; viii, 4, 9; viii, 34, 6.

interpret it as assembly, since we find *Sabha-Saha*,¹ i.e., eminent in the assembly. In one passage Sabha has been used as the hall of dicing.² But the general use of the word is to denote an assembly for more serious matters. The actual deliberations must for ever remain unknown.

Only glimpses here and there come to us from passing references. Sometimes they assembled for general conversation about the welfare or use of cows³ which were of course an important part of their wealth. Then again there was an assembly for social intercourse as when it is said⁴ that the well born sacrificers met in assembly before the radiant fires (the fires here do not refer to the actual sacrifices). This passage has been further interpreted to limit the meaning of Sabha to an assembly of the well born or the oligarchs of ancient days, so that Sabha according to these authorities meant more properly the Council of the

¹ x, 71, 10.

² x, 34, 6.

³ vi, 28, 6.

⁴ vij, 1, 4.

Aryans as noticed in the European branches. This view of the meaning of Sabha is perhaps supported by the hymn¹ of Devātithi of the Kanwa family where it is said that the devotees of Indra being by his grace possessed of horses, of cars, of cattle and of goodly form, ever supplied with high class food and riches, entered an assembly. Further on, the assembly of priests is called Sabha.² Thus in these cases the constituents of the assembly (Sabha) so far as they have been explicitly mentioned were all Brahmans and Maghavans or rich patrons. So that the practically missing link of the western Council is thus furnished from the Rig Veda. The word of course cannot be limited in all cases to such an oligarchic association but in these passages it seems to be fair to assume that Sabha was an assembly of the aristocratic element, the priests and the nobles, with striking similarity to the earliest sitting, in England, of Lords, spiritual and temporal. Besides social intercourse and discussion about cows, etc., a third function is

¹ viii, 4, 9.

² x, 71, 10.

attributed to the Sabha from an obscure use of the word.¹ It is said that the purpose was debate and verbal contest. Of these we have of course many, rather too many, in later ages but their evidence in the Rig Veda is at least doubtful. It seems probable that sometimes the word is used to mean the fire in the place or the hall of the assembly.² The sons of Bharat sing of Agni as Sabhya and places it on the most frequented (*i.e.*, where people assembled) banks of the Drishadvati, Apaya and Sarswati rivers.³ Agni in this connection is also referred to as being placed in the midst (of the house perhaps) where all could worship him.⁴

Samiti is another word which occurs frequently in the Rig Veda even in the first Mandala.⁵ It is interpreted as the *assembly of the Vedic tribe*. As such it would be of utmost importance. But unfortunately the social organisation of the Vedic age does not warrant that meaning. In the Rig Veda it

¹ ii, 24, 13.

² v, 3, 11.

³ iii, 23, 4.

⁴ vii, 7, 5.

⁵ i, 95, 8.



would be absurd to attempt to be positive in the assertion of this meaning. We should not at the same time deny the validity of such an interpretation, we are simply without sufficient material about either the clan or the large co-ordination of clans, the tribe. Some authorities particularly Ludwig¹ consider that the distinction between Sabha and Samiti was that the former was the assembly of the Brahamans and Maghavans² whereas in the Samiti the Vis, prajah or people, assembled and the Brahamans and Maghavans were not excluded but could sit at their option. According to this view, therefore, the threefold organisation of the Aryans into the King, the Council and the Assembly was the same in the east as it was in the west. But the passages are of much less information with regard to these nice distinctions than we could desire. The probability is that there was such a distinction as in the west, but we cannot definitely say that it actually did exist in the period of the Rig Veda.

¹ Translation of the Rig Veda, 3, 253.

² vii, 1, 4; viii, 4, 9; x, 71, 10.

It seems that the king used to be present in the Samiti as this fact is alluded to in more than one passage in the Rig Veda.¹ But it is not certain whether he used to deliberate there or what was the significance of his presence. His position must have commanded very great respect and perhaps his explanation or request fell upon the assembly like command. No mention of dispute is anywhere found and although we find it mentioned in the Rig Veda (not in connection with the Samiti) that the king could be deposed² we cannot attribute that function to this assembly.

On a previous occasion we have discussed whether the king was hereditary or whether he was elected. Here we may mention that some authorities, for example Zimmer, attribute to the Samiti the function of electing the king. They base their arguments on Rishi Durvasa's hymn of which the deity is any inaugurated Raja.³ The king is consecrated here and is asked to come amongst "us" and be steady

¹ ix, 92, 6; x, 97, 6.

² x, 173, 2.

³ x, 173, also see x, 174.



and unvacillating. May all his subjects desire him for their king and may the kingdom never fall from him. The whole theory seems to be based upon the use of the first person plural so that it is the Samiti or it is on behalf of the Samiti that the Rishi calls on the Raja to be installed in office. This point of view is, however, vitiated by the use of the first person singular in the first half of the verse where the Rishi consecrates him. The consecration was undoubtedly the work of the purohita. Then, is it fair or reasonable to assume that the next words of welcome were uttered by or on behalf of the assembly? Or should these be taken as utterances of the same person, using the plural in honour of the high position of the priest? Both are anomalies. If the fact is that the purohita used the word in self glory why did he not do it with regard to the consecration? But it may be said in answer that the consecration was in fact a personal act in which he could not speak in the plural; whereas the king was the ruler of all persons and as such might be addressed by him in the plural.



This is the only possible explanation and this explanation goes in support of the opposite theory that the priest was speaking consciously or unconsciously on behalf of the assembly. But even then it is very doubtful whether we are entitled to say from this one sukta that the king was elected by the Samiti. After all it is made to depend upon the peculiar idiom in the verse which may have been a mistake. But considering the ceremony of consecration which evidently was public and the set method of initiating divine propitiation according to which the purohita speaks, may we not be justified in holding that the people assembled, although they did not choose actually, yet by that ceremony and recital of welcome, practically approved the succession of the king? This would accord with the Teutonic system of approval in assemblies by shouts and beating of the spears against the shield.¹ But Zimmer's further attempt to see in the Samiti the rule of oligarchy² seems to be unwarranted. Perhaps the choice of the king by the

¹ Referred to by both Caesar and Tacitus.

² From ix, 92, 6; x, 97, c.



comitatus or by the princeps is what he intends to read in the Vedic polity.

It was recognised that mutual understanding and concord were necessary for the king's successes. The Samiti and the king should act harmoniously. The triumphant king says¹: I seize upon your minds, your pious observances, your prowess in war. The hymn of Rishi Samvana addressing the assembly says: Meet together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike.² Again we find: Common be the prayer of this assembly, common the acquirement, common the purpose, associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer. I offer for you with a common libation.³ Common be your intention. Common be your hearts. Common be your thoughts, so that there may be a thorough union among you.⁴ These are the last three slokas of the last Sukta of the Rig Veda. Their vigour, earnestness and directness must have appealed

¹ x, 166, 4.

² x, 191, 2.

³ x, 191, 3.

⁴ x, 191, 4.



to the audience when this hymn was chanted in later days.

Turning now to the other parts of the

Police.

ancient statecraft we find very meagre and obscure references to the police system. The word Ugra as it is used in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad¹ means technically the man in authority from which Max Müller renders it into policeman. It occurs in the Rig Veda² only once where perhaps it does not mean anything beyond mighty or powerful man. Similarly the word Jivagribha, literally seizing alive, is interpreted as the policeman.³ This meaning of the word in this passage would have been acceptable only as a confirmation of other evidence but it does not seem to prove the existence of policeman by itself even if all allowance be made for the word Madhyamasi, mediator or arbiter, used in the next verse.⁴ Moreover, considering the state of the

¹ iv, 3, 37-38.

² vii, 38, 6.

³ x, 97, 11.

⁴ x, 97, 12.



society where there was no law,¹ and also considering the prevalence of the wergeld² such doubtful interpretations should be rejected.

The judicial organisation was very elaborate in the period of the Judicial organisation. Atharva Veda. In the Rig Veda we find only the *Madhyamasi*³ who was perhaps a man of influence to whom the disputing parties voluntarily, it seems, submitted their case for settlement. He was not an officer of the state, and most probably the parties were under no moral obligation even to submit to him. According to some authorities the Sabha used to perform some judicial functions but the proceedings of this body are hopelessly beyond human knowledge. If it did perform that work it would very closely resemble the Greek Apella.

Sapatha, in later samhitas, means oath from which it is clear that the practice of trial by oath existed in those days. The word,

¹ See later under Law.

² See later under Vairadaya.

³ x, 97, 12.



however, occurs in the Rig Veda only once, and there it means "curse."¹ It may have developed its meaning later on, but in the Rig Veda it does not mean anything else. On the other hand, there is one passage in the Rig Veda² where, though the word Sapatha is not used, yet a practice is described which, taken roundly, is the same thing as an oath. It runs thus: May I this day die if I am a spirit of ill, or if I have ever injured the life of any man. Therefore, as a part of the judicial organisation of the time we cannot say that oath was systematically practised. But its use in the later days and its mention in the above passage make it probable that the system had its genesis in the Rig Veda. This view will be in conformity with what we find later on in connection with the administration of justice. The later society had the *gramyavadin* (village judge), the *abhiprasnin* (defendant), the *jnatri* (witness) as also *prasna* (pleading), *dirya* (order) and *sapatha* as oath in judicial proceedings. We hear also of *vaira*

¹ x, 87, 15.

² vii, 104, 15.



in the Rig Veda¹ where *vaira deya* should literally mean that which should be paid in compensation. But its use as wergeld, as it was in later days, cannot be deduced from this one reference. In an earlier passage² the expression *sata-daya* is used in connection with Raka. It cannot possibly mean anything but one whose wergeld is one hundred (cows). The word *daya* in later Sanskrit, as perhaps it does in the Rig Veda, means liability and its technical use in Dharma Sutras or legal texts has made it 'legal liability.' From this it seems that wergeld was in practice in those early days. This view is corroborated by the organisation of society without sufficient criminal jurisdiction either of the king or of any central authority. From the analogy of the Teutonic system³ we know that wergeld prevailed as the successor of direct personal revenge, an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. In Europe this wergeld was part of the private revenge brought about and thus limited by

¹ v, 61, 8.

² ii, 32, 4.

³ Stubbs: Constitutional History of England, Vol. 1.



the interference of the king as the military leader, because such revenge always tended to weaken the strength of the clans joined together under the common leader. In later days it was one of the most important judicial functions of the king to assure the people that his might would compel the injured to accept the wer and the wrongdoer to pay it.¹ In fact this uncertainty of the realisation or acceptance of the wer was one of the greatest hindrances to social progress. At first the king was not powerful enough to take up the administration of justice except, perhaps, with regard to bootless crimes. He had necessarily to depend on the clan institutions; so we may say that the wergeld as part of private revenge precedes the authority of the king at a time when he is powerful enough as a military leader to stop indiscriminate revenge and also substitute the wer or commutation for even blood revenge, but when he is not strong enough to enforce or direct its actual currency. It is a period of transition

¹ Jenks: Law and Politics in the Middle Ages, Ch. IV.



when the king is only emerging into importance and the host in arms is only appreciating, by actual concrete results in the battlefield, the disastrous effects of indiscriminate or blood revenge among themselves. The same conditions prevailed in the Indo-Aryan society during the period of the Rig Veda. From the study of the king and his household organisation, the family and the assemblies, we may be certain that he was growing in power. Military necessities during the course of the settlement in India required that the hands of the king should be strengthened as much as possible by eliminating the cause of internal exhaustion through direct private revenge, if the race was to fight its way through an equally civilised non-Aryan settlement. But yet we do not find in the Rig Veda much trace of the criminal or civil jurisdiction of the king. The fact can only be explained by accepting that the king was not powerful enough or free enough to undertake all this but yet could enforce, by way of military discipline, the abrogation of direct revenge. This explanation seems to be

irresistible if we look to the later Samhita period when the wer was enforced by the king's courts. This is the natural result of the extension of the power and authority of the king. If our explanation is correct, we may see, even from only these two references,¹ that the wer, as compensation for private revenge, limiting indiscriminate and blood revenge, did exist in the period of the Rig Veda, and that this wer came under the jurisdiction of the king and was assimilated by the royal courts in later days even as was the case in Europe.²

Another practice of later days which is supposed to have been prevalent during the period of the Rig Veda is the ordeal, *divya*. But it seems that we cannot discover it in the Rig Veda although the attempt has been made to interpret two passages³ as referring to this practice. Dirghatamas in the earlier text can hardly be construed in this light without doing violence to the language.

¹ ii, 32, 4; v, 61, 8.

² Jenks as cited above.

³ i, 158, 4; iii, 53, 22.



From the above it will be abundantly clear that the judicial organisation did not grow much in the period of the Rig Veda. If we remember at the same time that theft and robbery were the only crimes mentioned and Madhyamasi, the only settler of disputes, we should not expect that *dharma*, i.e., law developed to any great extent. Yet the law or custom was recognised as is evident from the various references that are found in Rig Veda. Even in the first Mandala¹ we find *dharma* or law being upheld by Vishnu, the preserver. There were two substantive duties enjoined by law. For example, the priests were to dress soma ox, *ukshanam prishnim apachanta*;² the minor gods, Sadhyas, were to sacrifice with sacrifice.³ Intelligent people are asked in one hymn⁴ to offer to the powerful Vaishwanara precious things with holy rites, and it ends by saying : let no one violate the eternal law. In addressing Agni Rishi Kata speaks of its

¹ i, 22, 18.

² i, 164, 43.

³ i, 164, 50.

⁴ iii, 3, 1.



being first kindled according to law, *prathamā-nudharma*,¹ the self-revolving (days). The ceremonies addressed to the gods and the laws of man are mentioned as devoted to Indra.² Again, Agni, the divine purifier, is invoked as favouring the law of the worshippers.³ Mitra and Varuna are also mentioned as protecting *dharma* by their office.⁴ They are, on another occasion, called steady in the performance of their functions according to law.⁵ The word is, perhaps, used in the sense of civil law in connection with Madhyamasi, the mediator.⁶

The exact nature of the law at this time is obscure. That it meant some set rules or recognised customs, more or less widely known, is certain. Sir Henry Maine's admirable division of law in its earliest period of unconscious and spontaneous development is into (i) judgment, (ii) customary law, and (iii) code, i.e., authorised version of the law as embodied in

¹ iii, 17, 1.

² iii, 60, 6.

³ v, 26, 7.

⁴ v, 63, 7.

⁵ v, 72, 2.

⁶ x, 97, 12.



some declaration by the state.¹ Of isolated judgments based on the peculiar circumstances of each case, forming ultimately parts of the law, we do not at all hear in the early ages. The recognition of *dharma* as set rules or practices which were supposed to be protected by Vishnu and which bound even the gods and the priests is a clear proof that the period of isolated Themistes or even of Maine's Dike was long outgrown by the Aryan society as it is found in the Rig Veda. This fact is important, inasmuch as the conception of such order, method and harmony as is involved in that of law is the heritage of a nation at a very late stage of its early history. Religion was, as it was bound to be, the predominant element, and that is why the term *dharma* is used so often in the sense of rules or practices directing religious rites and ceremonies.

As punishment was not within the normal jurisdiction either of the king or of the priests the ancient law usually lay down duties to be performed. The punishment, where

¹ Ancient Law, Ch. I. See also Early Law and Custom.

referred to, was left, to the pleasure or displeasure of the gods.

But though the law with regard to civil

Debt.

matters seems to be so meagre or so scantily referred to, on the contrary civil relations do not appear to be so simple. Debts were frequently contracted and as frequently repaid. The divine Adityas are called the acquitters of the debts of the worshippers.¹ Sayana considers *rinani* in this connection to be real debts. Even if the word be metaphorically used, as is said by some, that would not vitiate the fact of the existence of debts in actual life. Varuna is propitiated in one hymn² and asked to discharge the debts (*rinani*) contracted by the worshipper and his progenitors. He wishes again to be independent of another for his livelihood. Just as in modern times, the ancient people used to gamble, and at dice betting seems to be the usual custom, as it is at cards to-day. Here also we find mention of the losing dicer being in debt. The

¹ ii, 27, 4.

² ii, 28 9.

gambler ever in fear, anxious for wealth, is referred to as going by night to the dwelling of others (to plunder).¹ This passage is significant from another point of view. Why should the gambler be so much distressed and so much in fear, why should he be so desperate as to contemplate theft, unless there were effective means by which the debts could be realised? From the other slokas of the hymn, it is to be seen that he did not care either for his wife, mother or his home, so that any harm to them would not have affected him much. The punishment must have been then corporal. This would support our theory about private revenge as the prevailing custom. He must pay or suffer punishment at the hands of the creditor. Perhaps he could be reduced to slavery as seems to be probable from a verse where it is mentioned that the father, mother, brothers of the debtor said that they did not know him (*i.e.*, recognise him as their relative) and asked the creditor to take him away bound, wherever he wished.² In an obscure

¹ x, 34, 10.

² x, 34, 4.



passage¹ perhaps the punishment is referred to as "held bound in ropes as the thief is held for stealing." But as in modern days punishment is not the only nor the principal incentive to the fulfilment of a contract, so also it seems to be the case in those days. The references to debts point to a practically universal practice ; and frequent default would not be favourable to a subsequent contraction of debt. In fact we have to assume that repayment of debt was as usual as it was contracted. In one hymn we actually find mention of such repayment, *rinani samni*, which means 'to pay off a debt.'² Attempt has been made to read into this verse details as to the repayment of the principal or the interest. But that does not seem to be reasonable ; the comparison with hearts and hoofs must be taken as merely metaphorical.

¹ vii, 86, 5.

² vii, 47, 17.