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## FOLK-CULTURE IN VEDIC LITERATURE

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Research Papers

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## FOLK-CULTURE IN VEDIC LITERATURE

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### Abstract

*During Vedic period, Vedic society followed a specimen folk-environment; where physical to socio-cultural environment have been dealt very promptly. Each of the four Vedas consists of the metrical [Mantra](#) or Samhita and the prose [Brahmana](#) gives direction of the ceremonies at which the Mantras were to be used and explanations of the legends connected with the Mantras and rituals. Both these portions are termed [shruti](#) (which was passed on to consecutive generations orally instead of any hand written documentation). Each of the four Vedas seems to have passed to numerous Shakhas or schools, giving rise to various recessions of the text. Within the all mantras of Vedic literature, multi-dimensional socio-economic-cultural and also physical outlook have been reflected and through the proper analysis of different mantra (hymns or chants) we can find out a folk-environment of Vedic-time*

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**Keywords :** folk-environment, Vedas, Shakhas

### INTRODUCTION:

The Vedas are considered the earliest literary record of Indo-Aryan civilization, and the most sacred books of India. They are the original scriptures of Hindu teachings, and contain spiritual knowledge encompassing all aspects of our life. The ancient texts of the Veda reflect a symbolic world in which ritual, notably sacrifice performed by a priest for a patron, was central to the thriving of the community (Flood, 2003) Vedic literature with its philosophical maxims has stood the test of time and is the highest religious authority for all sections of Hindus in particular and for mankind in general. The word Veda means 'knowledge'- the best of all knowledge in Hindu eyes (Avari, 2007) and it manifests the language of the gods in human speech. The laws of the Vedas regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs of the Hindus to the present day. The Veda is intimately connected with Vedic ritual and its

primary function is a one (Flood, 1996). All the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death etc. owe their allegiance to the Vedic ritual. They draw forth the thought of successive generation of thinkers, and so contain within it the different strata of thought. Each Veda consists of four parts – the Samhitas (hymns), the Brahmanas (rituals), the Aranyakas (theologies) and the Upanishads (philosophies). The collection of mantras or hymns is called the Samhita. The Brahmanas are ritualistic texts and include precepts and religious duties. Each Veda has several Brahmanas attached to it. The Upanishads form the concluding portions of the Veda and therefore called the “Vedanta” or the end of the Veda and contains the essence of Vedic teachings. The Upanishads and the Aranyakas are the concluding portions of the Brahmanas, which discuss philosophical problems. The Aranyakas (forest texts) intend to serve as objects of meditation for ascetics who live in forests and deal

with mysticism and symbolism. Although the Vedas are seldom read or understood today, even by the devout, they no doubt form the bedrock of the universal religion or "Sanatana Dharma" that all Hindus follow. The Vedas have guided our religious direction for ages and will continue to do so for generations to come. And they will forever remain the most comprehensive and universal of all ancient scriptures. In post-Vedic times, Veda was extended to include the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Mittal and Thursby, 2006).

**OBJECTIVE:**

To find out the proper folk rituals, sciences, rules, folk-myths, and as total folk culture.

**DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY:**

Stage I: At the initial or pre-stage of the writing of this book I studied Rik Veda; edited by Abdul Aziz Al Aman, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda; translated and edited by Sri Bijan Behari Goswami in detail to know all the mantras, sukta etc. And from the Vedic Mantra I searched different aspects of geography in point-wise. To fulfill the whole knowledge and to search the geographical aspect I cultivated different journals, books, and Internet website articles like: The Practical Sanskrit Dictionary of V.S. Apte (Ed.), India: The Ancient Past of B. Avari (2007), Hymns of Atharva-Veda: The Sacred Book of the East part Forty-two of M. Bloom and F.M. Muller (1897), The Geography of Rig Vedic India. M. L. Bhargava (1964), The Yajur Veda of D. Chand, (1992), Exploration in Applied Geography of M. Chatterjee, H.M. Misra and A.K. Dutta (Eds.), Prachin Bharote Nari of R. Chottopadhyay and P. Bhattacharya, The-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity of G. Erdosy, The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism of G. Flood (Ed.), An Introduction to Hinduism of G. Flood, Sama Veda, A History of Indian literature: Veda and Upanishads of J. Gonda (Ed.), The Rig Veda : Complete of R.T.H. Griffith and etc. During the preparatory stage of literature survey author surveyed more information from the e-books, E-Vedas, different maps of Vedic society.

Stage II: After reading possible all the theoretical explanations I prepared different relevant tables, maps, and structured the point-wise explanations. During preparation I got the scientific help from the different experts in this field. During framing I used photoshop to prepare the map. Actually this book is mainly based on theoretical survey.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS:**

**GAMES:** Dice playing (53 round-wooden coins

or "guties") was the only prestigious game in Vedic society. In this game, often players lose their wealth, even kept their wives as bondage to continue to be a part of this game. People generally refused any loans to the people addicted to this game. Even father-in-law and mother-in-law don't like them. For dice gamer, keeping his wife as a debt was common, this scene is described in lines in Rig Veda like: "...this glorious wife did not express apathy anytime to me...but only for the dice desire I rejected this beloved wife" (RV210|34|1). Women do not like this game because through this they might be sold to opponent player (RV2 10|34|3).

**ARTS:** Vedic people followed the tradition of idol worship; idol of God Indra proves this. To prepare it they used the tiger's fur as the beard of his face and used the fur of lion for the hair of Indra (SYV 19|92). Vedic people were the artist, as they could bring out similarity in different shapes, as for example they compared the shape of coconut with the skull of human (KYV 2|4|9). Agriculture or crop production method was an economic art in Vedic society. Folk people knew the art of agriculture. '...farmers may arrange the plough... farmers were hard worker...O farmer; apply the plough...after the cultivation, plant seed...our crops will yield... after ripening, harvest it...comes to us'(KYV 4|2|5). To build houses during Vedic period people skillfully construct the basement (foundation) of the house (AV 3|3|2|1).

**RITUALS:** Un-married females bearing child could be traced in Vedic society (RV2 8|46|21). Adulteress prevailed in society, for instance '...as a female is engaged in adulterous... like that depraved female moves to paramour' (RV2 10|34|5, 10|34|6). Adoption of son prevailed in Vedic society. But in most cases, after reaching his young stage, the son moved to his real parents. So, they believed that '...though the adopted son is delightful yet it could never be mine or taken as one's own child' (RV2 7|4|8). In Veda, the act of washing one's hand significant as his own purification (SYV 19|36). People of Vedic society carried the concept of munificent and want to see their child as a munificent norm (KYV 2|3|4). Ashyamedha Yagna was conducted by Brahmmanas (SYV 17|77). Salutation was the traditional folk rituals and people believed that with this sins can be removed and God would be appeased (RV2 6|51|8). Salutation to God for example salutation to Sun (Hindu God) was the folk culture in Vedic society. Vedic people prayed for a life of 100 years. Their average life-span

could automatically higher enough compare to present. So it could be very safely concluded that the environmental status during Vedic time was comparatively more favorable to human health. Owl was indicated baleful in Vedic society (RV2 10|165|4). Banquet (Macchya) was the part of this sacrificial festival and mass of people enjoy meal together (SYV 18|6). Sudrah-husband did not like the fact of his wife's status as the seller of slash (SYV 23|30). Abstinence from food was the part of Sacrifice (KYV 1|6|7). Vedic farmers were enlightened about the relation between rain and growth and this was the livelihood for most of the people (KYV 1|7|2). Vedic younger's are sensitive about their parents and most them would like to keep their parents with them (RV 1|7|8). Earth was demarcated as mother and people wanted to be eco-friendly and desired mother earth as loving mother instead of violent mistress (KYV 1|8|15). Lotus-garland was used for priest (KYV 1|8|18). Vedic people were so analytical about the reflection or significance of colour in respect of uses of resources or items. For instance, greedy persons collected the whitish animal for wind god (Bayu devata). Warriors and suicide cases was prevalent in the society (KYV 2|2|2). People maintained their cast and creed and expressed their desire to do friendship within their own caste's male or female (KYV 2|3|9). About the priests, Vedic folk shared an image that they will not be lire, will not take meat and will not indulge in physical relationship (KYV 2|5|5). In Vedic society, the son inherits his entire father's wealth (KYV. 2|6|1), this proves a male dominated society (KYV 2|6|1). In this society if farmers are more profitable from agriculture then priest take away domesticated animals (KYV 4|2|5). This proves the high societal status of 'jajamana'. In society, the position of father was higher (KYV 7|2|7). About the birth of child Vedic people mainly desired for the birth of male child and for this they expected a son from their wife (AV 3|5|3|3). People were aggressive about the killing of tiger and they expressed that at first they will hit its eye and face if tiger and then they will destroy the knell of tiger (AV 4|1|3|1). Females kept long hair up to two hands during Vedic time (AV 6|13|7|7). A life of 100 years for male was prayed to God (AV 6|13|8|1,6|13|8|2). The behavior towards the wife of enemy was cruel. For the enemy's wife, people wanted that she would be an unproductive lady (AV 7|3|3|4). Even Unproductive wife was tried to several ways as a cure (AV 7|2|2|1). Annaprasana (the Hindu ritual of a child been feed rice for the

first time) was a tradition in Vedic society (AV 7|5|1|9). Crow was considered as an ill-omen (AV 7|6|2|2).

**MEDICAL LIFE:** Modern artificial leg surgery was known to them as well. Ashathya (Ficus-renigiosa) and Palash (Butea- monosterna ) tree were demarcated as sacred medical trees (RV2 10|97|5). People believed in Ayurvedic medicinal concept. Medical treatment was conducted by Brahmana and they themselves were the doctors, for instance '...the Brahmanas who treated us with root...' (SYV 12|96, KYV 8|2|6). Different trees (Sal, Palmyra, and Tamal) were used for medicinal purposes. Like 'O medicinal; The superior Sal, palmer and Tamal trees move to your nearby for our benefit' (SYV 12|101). Liquor was used as medicine (SYV 19|33). The traditional science in Veda was so strong viz. the relation between the gradual increases of the pain related to tuberculosis and the increases of chandrakala (one by 16th part of the Moon's orb) from the bright fort-night or suklah-pakshya (KYV 2|3|5). For medical treatment tree root was used (KYV 4|2|6). Different folk medicines based on auyrveda (herb, creep) were used to reduce diseases in Vedic medical life. In Veda, hydropath treatment was practiced. To reduce the diseases among cow and to add the nutrients among them salt water was preferred (AV 1|1|4|1). To reduce or to fight against the Leprosy ( Kusta) a very specific ayurvedic treatment had evolved - at the place of Kusta a mixture coating should be applied, made by the dust of vringaraj (wedelia caleudulacea), haridra (tepmaric), indrabaruni, and nilica (AV 1|5|2|1). But before this the place needs to be smeared with cow's urine till the area gets back to the original colour (AV 1|5|2|1). To cure fever (like; yaikahik, dyahik, fever marked by shivering, jalajar, belajar), an iron axe needs to be warned on fire and then it should be dipped in warm water which is then sprinkled on patient's body (AV 1|5|4|1). In context of our traditional medicinal treatment, even now we are maintaining these processes, though slightly in different way like: we apply the warm napkin (becomes hot after dipped in hot water) instead of sprinkling. To reduce the acne and excessive urine diseases AtharvaVeda believed on use of the manjusir (AV 2|1|3|1). For long life Veda advised to wear a breslate made of the part of jangir tree (AV 2|1|4|1). The application of tree was very prominent in Vedic treatment. To reduce the 'brahmma-female non-Aryan' concept from among the female a folk solution was given in Veda like; the affected person has to wear or tie up

bits of ten trees joined together ( ex. palash, jammu or the rose apple, odumbor, kampil, laksha or lac, hirannya) (AV 2|2|4|1). To increase power, energy, life-expectancy and the nutritional level, people have to tie up the moni (or an amulet usually worn on the arm) of the part of palash tree (AV 3|1|5|2). To cure tuberculosis, leprosy, people can use the moni of horn of deer and can also drink water with deer horn and people have to bath with water prepared in specific manner, that is, a strong fire is lit at one end of the horn which would pass through it to reach the water placed on the other end which in turn is used to bath the patient (AV 3|2|2|1). Pimple was a problem and to reduce it Veda offers a remedy of smearing it with cow-urine (AV 6|6|3|6) or can use the dust of conch (AV 6|9|1|1). Birds like; pigeons, crows and syans were also treated (AV 6|8|4|4). For the treatment of 'Baatrog' (a kind of blood poisoning) pimpoli named medicine was used (AV 6|11|4|1). Toxicology treatment was practiced and soil of termite hill with water will be used as coating and also for drinking it (AV 6|10|3|4). Asathya tree (Indian figtree) was used for preparing medicine for leprosy patient (AV 19|5|6|9). Tuberculosis ('Jakkhya'), bilious fever or 'pittajar' (AV 6|2|3|4), worm patient (AV 2|5|5|1), winter-fever (KYV 2|5|2), piles (SYV 12|97, KYV 2|3|5), eye diseases (KYV 2|3|8), masalnucus were some of the dominant diseases in Vedic society (RV11|122|9, SYV 12|85). 'Bishuchika' disease was a folk disease in Vedic villages (SYV 19|20).

**FUNERAL ENVIRONMENT:** The system of burning of dead body prevailed in Vedic society (RV2 10|16|1) where the accomplishment of the ceremony by burning the dead-body called 'Agnibatta' and while the funeral conducted without burning the dead-body called 'Anagnibatta' (SYV 19|60).

**SACRED FAITH:** Asathya (Indian fig tree), palash (dutea monosperma), Somālata were the sacred trees and herbs in Vedic society. They believed that osathi-debotas (a medical god) belonged in Asathya and palash tree (KYV 4|2|6) and snakes would be found around Sandal tree ('Chandan') for this tree was the sacred tree to them (KYV 4|2|8) so they worshipped snakes. Elephants were considered as good omen for warfare so people covered the journey to the war-field seat on the elephant (AV 5|1|1|1).

#### **AUTHOR'S ANNOTATION AND CONCLUSION:**

Indian civilization has its roots in an ancient heritage, in that pattern of culture which is sometimes called archaic or semi-primitive,

sometimes also pre- or non modern. The political organization of Rig Veda times cannot be followed in isolation from the material and social life of the people who evolved it. Chariot-makers play an important part in the social organization of Vedic times, but we have no idea of the material of which the chariots were made; their metal flittings, if any, have not been discovered so far. The Rig Vedic people knew the use of the metal called ayes, but whether it was copper or bronze cannot be said. It is through that they used bronze, and this may be expected in view of the use of this metal on a large scale in Persia from about 1200 B.C. onwards. The colour of ayas is described as reddish, it seems to have been copper. It seems that their arrows were made of copper (ayamukham), and on the whole in spite of their possession of horse their tools and weapons would not enable them to form large empires, leading to developed state organization. The Rig Vedic people were a semi-nomadic people more in the pastoral stage, and without the knowledge of iron did not practice effective plough cultivation. They probably used (vrka) made of stone and shares (sira) made of wood. Cattle rearing was a more important source of livelihood than agriculture, and cattle and bullocks formed their most valued possessions. The influence of cattle-rearing is writ large upon their social and military organization. Thus people who lived with their cows under the same cowshed came to belong to the same 'gotra', which did not indicate descent from the same ancestor in the age of the Rig Veda. Cattle formed the main bone of contention in tribal wars; the word for fight came to be known as gavisihī a search for cows. Because of their living in the semi-nomadic stage and constantly engaged in fighting for the sake of cows they had to be mobile. This naturally prevented them from forming stable kingdoms and at the same time did not allow their social relations. The predominance of the tribal life is indicated by the frequent use of two terms jana (used total 27 items) and vis/clan (used total 170 items) in the Rig Veda come across the term pancajanah in the sense of five tribes. The Vedic jana was the highest social unit. It is suggested that the vis was divided into gramas, but this division was not widely prevalent because grama figures only 13 times in the Rig Veda. In this period grama is not ordinarily used in the sense of village but in that of small tribal fighting. The land of the seven rivers, covering the area of the Punjab and parts of western U.P., was held by small tribal principalities, five of whom are known by the name of pancajanah. Although the

term rajan is used for the Rig Vedic chiefs, the nature of the Rig Vedic king ship was basically the same as chief ship. It was not a territorial monarchy in which all the inhabitants of territory, rich or poor, high or low, regard the monarch as the symbol of authority over the country to which they belong. The Rig Vedic chiefs fought for cows and not for territory. The terms for territory are not common in that text. Although the term jana is used 275 times, the term janapada is not used even once. The term rajya occurs only once, and the word rastra figures 10 times in all. The term grama occurs 13 times in the Rig Veda, but not in the sense of village. It meant a tribal unit mobilized for fighting, so that the vrajapati, who was in charge of the pasture grounds held in common by the tribe and who naturally led family headsto battle for capturing cows, became later identical with the gramani. Several passages in the Rig Veda advise the king to give special attention and protection to the brahmana or priest, so that everything goes well with him and he wins the riches of his enemies and his kinsmen. But these pious wishes do not necessarily indicate royal dependence on priestly support; the days of priestly domination were yet to come. But constant wars added to the power of the tribal chief, who consequently commanded the services of a large number of slaves (dasas). Out of the spoil of war the rajans offered to the priests' rich and varied presents consisting of cows, horses, chariots, blocks of gold and beautifully dressed women slaves. On their part the priests developed the system of a formal consecration and composed laudatory hymns called danastuti. Senant, evidence for a regular standing army supported by the taxes collected by the king is lacking. The term sena is mentioned 20 times in the Rig Veda, but it seems to have been an ad hoc institution mobilized out of the tribesmen whenever occasion demanded it. Military functions were the main concern of the Vedic assemblies, attended by members of the tribe. Tribal assemblies as the sabha, samiti, gana and vidatha played an important part in the life of the early Vedic people. The political system deducible from a study of the Rig Veda does not measure up to the definition of the state. At best it was a tribal chieftainship, without the halo of monarchy, lacking in firm territorial basis, and devoid of taxation, standing army and permanent public officials, which all constitute the essential ingredients of the state in both the ancient Indian and modern sense.

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