CHAPTER - 8
CONCLUSION
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We have tried to explore the aspects of myth, culture and social dominance during the age of the Vedas and the Buddha. The Vedic period divided into early and later phases saw two distinct stages of evolution of myth and culture. There were various factors which played a role in the social formation during the Vedic age. The early Aryans living a pastoral life and depending on domestication of animals for their subsistence had little scope for evolving a sophisticated culture. Apart from the material condition, the geographical and religious factors too had certain say in this social set-up. The early Aryan social organisation was simple and largely egalitarian. Even the chief had to act according to the wishes of Vish. We find the presence of three varnas i.e. brahmana, kshatriya and vaishya in the initial stage but towards the end of the Rigvedic phase there appeared the fourth varna i.e. shudra. We also hear of dasas and dasyus who had animosity towards the Aryans.
However, the social hierarchy and social differentiation on the basis of birth or economic status had not yet appeared to vitiate the social milieu.

The archaeological excavation supported by the later vedic literature points out the expansion of Aryans culture around 1000 B.C. towards the eastern region, which apart from the material advancement, also led to the changes in social set up. As the society became sedentary due to emphasis on cultivation, there appeared several changes in its structural aspects. We find the concept of four varnas fully established during this period. A more significant change was that element of social hierarchy and social differentiation made its appearance which, however, need not be overemphasised. Duties of each varna were laid down and adherence to one's own duties was emphasised. But, there were very prospects of social mobility and upgradation. Even the members of higher varna went down in social hierarchy due to non-fulfilment of their social obligations. The brahmanas and the
kshatriyas, having certain hegemony over the vaishyas and shudras, had not yet acquired the caste status, nor had they become exploiters of the peasantry or the shudras. Moreover, as the new areas came under the hold of the Aryans several tribes were assimilated the Aryan social fold. As a result of acculturation of these tribes, the Aryan social set-up came to be consolidated and strengthened. However, there is very probability that the ruling chiefs of concerned-tribes might have been absorbed as the kshatriya while other groups performing different functions might have been absorbed into different varnas. This assimilating and absorbing approach of the Aryans helped in widening the social structure and outlook. However, in due course of time, such tendencies had a negative impact in so far as emergence of concept of sankirnajati or hinajati was concerned.

The emergences of vedic myth and culture was inextricably linked to the Aryan social set-up and social culture. The myths of the Aryans were in close conformity with nature. Although these myths have been explained differently by scholars, it is widely believed
now that this tradition of myth is closely connected with mythology of Indo-Europeans. Hence, combination of naturalistic, linguistic and comparative approaches have been adopted to have a wider view of the vedic mythology. In this regard, it is to be made very clear that vedic mythology was popular in character and not merely a priestly innovation. Further, this mythology was evolutionary in nature and acquired wider ramifications and connotations in due course of time. Thus, Indra, Varuna, Agni and Soma dominated the mythology of the Rigvedic period. But, their position was eclipsed during the later vedic phase when the importance of sacrifice brought prajapati to eminence. Moreover, Vishnu gradually acquired the significant position supported by Surya, Rudra etc. as minor gods. The Rigvedic sacrifice was simple but during the later vedic period its importance grew as found in the mention of sacrifices like Ashvamedha, Rajasurya, Vajapeya and domestic sacrifices, which, in turn, enhanced the position of the brahmana and projected priest as the repository of vedic sacrificial knowledge. There is considerable divergence in the ritual
of Rigveda and the Sutras, Samhitas of the Yajurveda or Atharvaveda, which shows the changing nature of rituals in due course of time. There were elements of taboo in the vedic society and culture, which further got complicated as the importance of sutra literature grew. The dominance of the brahmanical religion did not hamper the growth of the tribal and local cultures. In fact, the hegemony of the brahmanas and the vedic culture might have posed a serious challenge to them. But, the process of adoption-assertion also led to borrowing of the non-tribal mythological tradition like the concept of Rudra to the Aryan-mythology.

The four-fold division of the vedic-society at the end of the Rigvedic phase saw emergence of the four distinct social orders-brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. However, these orders did not acquire the character of a caste which was based on notion of birth. In the later vedic literature the brahmanas have been given uppermost position, which lead us to believe that they enjoyed hegemony over the other three classes. In the Rigvedic period, there is no
such element of dominance traceable as the institution of priesthood had not acquired a definite shape in the absence of a sedentary character of society. The differentiation among the kshatriyas, vaishyas or shudras had not yet taken a concrete shape. However, in the later vedic period the brahmanas and the kshatriyas came to acquire a significant position in the society. The increase in the importance of vedic sacrifices enabled the brahmana to be the custodian of the vedic knowledge. However, it is to be noted that not all the brahmanas were priest. In the same way as not all the kshatriyas belonged to the ruling class. Although there might have been occasions when the class interests of both groups might have clashed. However, we donot have instances of clashes between the two groups. On the other hand, both groups co-operated each other and acted in a harmonious way. They established their hegemony over the vaishyas and shudras, who were essential for the subsistence of the Mahajanapadas. However, this hegemony did not apply coercive means to exploit the vaishyas and shudra nor did it apply physical torture to
extract maximum benefits from the vaishyas. Instead, we find harmonious relationship with these social classes. Vaishyas, although given the dvija status, were not treated at par with the brahmanas and the kshatriyas. Although being economically well-off the vaishyas were yet to be given due respect and position in the social hierarchy. More pitiable condition, however, was of the shudras, who despite working as agricultural labourers or servants, were made subservient to the three upper social orders. Excluded from the upanayana and several other vedic sacrifices, they were certainly in a wretched condition. However, they were permitted to attend certain sacrifices. Moreover, asceticism was one of the ways to improve their position. They could also improve their position by acquiring vedic knowledge. We also find the mention of several other social groups, besides shudras, who lived the life of a hunter or fisherman and their condition too was not good.

After the vedic age, profound changes took place in the position of the different social orders as the social hierarchy and differentiation
got more strengthened and complicated. There was a reaction against the sacrificial religion of the brahmanas. Hence, the Upanishads began talking of Brahman, Atman etc. in order to come out of the brahmanical emphasis on the yajnas. This reaction against the dominant position of the brahmanas, however, came mainly from the kshatriyas and, to very lesser extent, from the vaishyas. This attack on the brahmanical privileges paved the way for the emergence of Buddhism, Jainism, Ajivikas and other religious sects during 600 B. C. In fact, the Upanishads were the handiwork of the brahmanas themselves to stem the tide of protest brewing among the kshatriya and vaishya communities. Despite all such endeavours, the north-western India still continued to be guided by brahmanical hegemony in alliance with the kshatriyas. On the other hand, eastern UP and Bihar saw maximum protest against the brahmanical order. It was for this reason that Buddhist and Jainism flourished in this area. The condition of the vaishyas improved as they were called annada. Similarly, shudras
made certain degree of improvement as Buddhism and Jainism were ready to admit them despite some reservations. However, new sects were unable to denounce this varna order as a whole.

There appeared significant changes in the myth and popular culture after the vedic age. Advancement was seen in both the 'lesser' and 'greater' traditions. The continuity of the vedic religion and culture was accompanied by advent of new religious sects. In the brahmanical religion, the Krishna worship was introduced in the Mathura region from where it made journey to other parts. The emergence and spread of certain aspects of vaishnavism marked this period. Shaivism too made certain advancement from its earlier aspect viz. Rudra. The worship of the lokapalas, nagas, gandharvas, apsaras etc.—aspects of the 'lesser' tradition seems to be an important development of the brahmanical religion during this period. However, more important than these developments were the emergence of new religious sects like Buddhism and Jainism. These new sects made certain departure against the established
socio-cultural norms of the earlier period. While they attacked *vedic* sacrifices and austensity of the *vedic* religion, they avoided from falling into philosophical speculations like the existence of god or soul. On the other hand, their emphasis on the ethical aspects, *ahimsa* etc. attracted common people. *Vaishyas*, being wary of their position in the *brahmanical* order, were greatly attracted towards these new sects. In this way, the age of the *Buddha* saw remarkable changes in the realm of myth and popular culture. However, the western India was unable to experience the same degree of revolutionary religious zeal as felt in eastern UP and Bihar.

It is to be noted that despite the presence of hegemony of the *brahmanas* and the *kshatriyas*, there were elements of cohesion and adjustments in the society. The law books highlight the need of the maintainance of this social harmony. The *Rigvedic* concept of *rit* referring of cosmic and moral order obliquely refers to the same orderliness in society. There is undenyng the fact that the *shudras* and the *vaishyas* were given unequal treatments in the *brahmanical* order.
of society. However, the caste hierarchy and social differentiation had not become dominant during our study period. The kshatriya consciousness or the brahmana consciousness was yet to acquire concrete shape. There was very probability of social upgradation either through asceticism or through acquiring knowledge. Even a vaishya or shudra could become a king during the hours of crisis. The system of slavery was known but it had not acquired the same connotation that it had in Greece; nor was the vedic economy dependent on slavery as was the classical Greece. In the smritis the brahmana is asked to use kindness towards the shudras. We are further said in the Manusmriti that distinction of Arya and Anarya is not determined by birth but by merits. Thus, the element of social mobility and social upgradation, although to a lesser extent, was very congenial for social harmony and adjustment.

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