The Non-Brahmin Movement in India has passed through various stages of development and the classical experiences known to history. The genesis of the movement lies in the historical and ethnical aspects of mutual relations that subsisted between the Brahmins and Non-Brahmins. The disruptive caste system has not gone unchallenged. Several worthy sons of India like Jotiba Phule, Shri Shahu Maharaj and Rajaram Maharaj of Kolhapur; Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, have made vigorous attempts to free the Hindu society from this evil which degraded, segregated and devitalised the society.

Any study of the Non-Brahmin regeneration can be scientific and complete only with reference to the origins of the Caste System in India. Brahmin Non-Brahmin conflict in India is as old as the caste system itself. The Non-Brahmin Movement which emerged under the British rule; is not without specific background. During the past five to six thousand years, caste has been a persisting feature of the Indian society. Indian civilization has also been known as one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Communalism in India is the result not of any one single factor. There are various factors which have influenced the growing sense of communalism. Pre-British India, like other societies, did have its own politics; but post-British
politics is much influenced by the ancient traditional politics. Indians could mechanically imitate the social institutions of the west by substituting class for caste, by introducing inter-marriage, inter-dining and numerous other social changes, but these changes, in themselves, failed to create a healthy society.

Indian caste system and its study presents a very unique picture of the traditional politics. It is the pervasive importance of caste that, more than anything else, characterized India. Indian politics of the twentieth century is agitational politics. Indian politics today involves mass-communication, organisation of formal parties, ideological indoctrination, elections and civil-disobedience. But the present agitational politics of India has roots in the traditional politics of the pre-British India, which has been influenced for centuries, viz., since Rig-Veda period. Hence it would be worthwhile to understand the origins of the caste system and its march through ages to the twentieth century.

Origins of the Caste System

Social differences in the status of an individual or a group have existed in every country at all times in human
history. There may be different societies in different countries where caste exists in a rudimentary form, but nowhere outside India is caste the very basis of social survival. Muslims, Christians, Jains, Buddhists have all, in varying degrees, been influenced by caste. In India caste is the fundamental rhythm of the life itself. In Indian society caste penetrates every aspect of life, for example: food habits, conversations, prayers, mode of dressing, ornaments, the form of funerals, the frequency of sex etc. "'Caste' in its original form is known as 'CHATURVARNA' which is dynamic, liable to change the traits of the individual."¹ "One criterion which has been always applied to determine ones status in any society at any time is the traditional and customary importance attached to his birth and occupation. This functional differentiation, was embodied in 'Varnashrama Dharma' of the Vedic period in Indian history."²

Caste cannot be understood in isolation from Hinduism, because it is Hinduism that gives caste its form and

² B. P. Chibbar, From Caste to Class, (A Study of Indian Middle Classes), Associated Pub. House, New Delhi, 1968, p. 36.
sanctions. For example, there are certain beliefs held by almost all Hindus, and it is these that together morally underpin caste.

Samsara, (life) Karma (the repayment for an individual's deeds in his next life), Papa (sin), Punya (merit), Moksha (salvation) and Dharma (duty) are all concepts which intermix for the sustainance of caste. Karma and Dharma are the twin factors, for Karma proclaims that the Hindu is born into a particular caste because of his deeds in a previous life. Dharma demands that he should accept his condition without protest, performing the functions appropriate to it. For example Dharma of a lake is to stand still; or the Dharma of a shoe-maker is to make shoes. "Birth in a particular caste becomes therefore an index of a soul's progress towards God."

Caste is an endemic feature of Hindu life, and as it is known in India it is an exclusively Indian phenomenon. As the legend has it: all the people of the world belonged to one caste during the "first Age or KRITAYUGA. This caste was called Hansa; but through successive Ages separate castes came

into existence owing to the progressive degeneration and immorality of mankind. Remnants of the original caste, belonging to the first Yuga are found among the Brahmins, those of the second Age or Tretayuga among Kshatriyas, those of the third Age or Dvaparayuga among Vaishyas. The present Age the Kaliyuga has produced the Shudra and the still lower caste. **4**

The origin of the caste according to the Brahmical theory is given in the twelfth verse of 19th hymn in mandala X of the Rig-Veda. This hymn known as the Purusha Sukta says, the Brahmin was Purusha's mouth; the Rajanya (Kshatriya) his arms; the Vaishya, his thighs, and Shudra his feet. **5** Further, "the earliest mention of division in the Indian society refers to the distinction between autochthonous (indigenous) Dasa and immigrant Arya populations. Later tests specify a three-fold and then a four-fold division of society into Brahmana (Priestly) Rajanya or Kshatriya (Warrior - ruler) Vaishya (merchant) and Shudra (servant). The Varna formed a hierarchy marked by differing material and spiritual privileges." **6** There are

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knew no caste system and the social atmosphere of Rig-Veda was not in any way surcharged with the influence of Brahmins. This theory is advocated by Dr. Muir, Zimmer, Webber, Ragozin and later on Dr. Ghurye. Dr. Muir made the following comments on the subject:

"It will, I think, be found on investigation that not only the older hymns but the great bulk of the hymns, supplied on distinct evidence of the existence of a well-defined and developed caste system at the time when they were composed."\(^8\)

Zimmer defines the existence of caste in the Rig-Veda with greater force and maintains that Rig-Veda knew no caste. His argument can be summed up as follows. According to him:

"(1) Brahmins show that the Indians on the Indus were unbrahmanised and were free from caste distinctions.

(2) The Rig-Veda was the product of tribes living in the Indus region and the Punjab.

(3) Later on a part of these people, who wandered further or east, developed the peculiar institution of Caste."\(^9\)

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Dr. Zimmer's argument is based on the following observations of Dr. Muir in his book 'Original Sanskrit'.

"(1) The four castes appear only in Purusa-Sukta (a late hymn in the Rig-Veda).

(2) The term Varna is applied to Aryas who cover the three higher castes. In Rig-Veda Dasa-Varna is contrasted with Arya-Varna.

(3) The word Brahman rarely occurs in the Rig-Veda. What frequently occurs is the word 'Brahmana', Kshatriya occurs seldom. The words Rajanya, Vaisya and Shudra are also to be found in the Purusa-Sukta.

(4) The word Brahman denotes at first poet, sage and then officiating priest and still later a special class of priest."

Here the main argument of Muir and Zimmer is that the word Brahmana did not denote the 'Brahmin' in the early period of Rig-Veda. It is only towards the closing period of the Rig-Veda that the word Brahmana stood for the caste of the Brahmins. The Purusa-Sukta provides proof for such a belief. Ragozin also echoed the same views of Muir and Zimmer. Accordingly he stated: "Castes, as a firmly established institution, were not a feature of the Vedic period. Had they been, the fact must have transpired. ... in the Rig-Veda which faithfully reflects the state of society

prevailing at the time that the collection was formed and this is not the case except in one solitary and note-worthy instance, the 19th hymn of the tenth book (X-90) known as the Purusa hymn." He continues on (pp. 279-82) that although the caste and their names occur once in the course of entire Rig-Veda there is another distinction which recurs throughout the collection. ... that is into Aryas and Dasys.11

What Ragozin tries to prove is:

(1) Rig-veda represents no caste.
(2) The Purusa-Sukta speaks about four castes, but the hymn being of a latter date should not be considered as an evidence on the early period of Rig-Veda.
(3) The bulk of Rig-Veda represents only two divisions of the people: Aryas and Dasys.

Dr. Ghurye also reflects more or less the same views as expressed by Dr. Zimmer. Dr. Ghurye regards the caste as a "Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture cradled in the land of the Ganges and then transferred to other parts of India by Brahminic protectors."12

11 Vedic India, pp. 279-80.
This view, on the other hand has been challenged by some scholars. These scholars, rejected the thesis that Rig-Veda knew no caste. The foremost among them are Dr. Hauge, Kerm and Dr. Apte. Dr. Hauge wrote in his tract on the origin of Brahminism as follows:

"It has been of late asserted that the original parts of Vedas do not know the system of caste. But this conclusion was prematurely arrived at without sufficiently weighing the evidence. It is true, the caste system is not to be found in such a developed state; the duties enjoyed by several castes are not so clearly defined as in law books and Puranas. But nevertheless the system is already known in the earlier parts of the Vedas, or rather pre-supposed. The barriers only were not so insurmountable as in later times."

This view of Dr. Hauge is based on evidence of the Zend-Avesta, a sacred-book of the Iranians. On the basis of the similarity of traditions depicted in Avesta and the Rig-Veda, it was established that Indo-Aryans and Iranians came from a common stock of people. Like the Purusa-Sukta of the Rig-Veda the Zend-Avesta also speaks of the four divisions of mankind. Therefore, it can be concluded that a system like the caste, was certainly known to the Indo-Aryans even when they were staying with the Iranians.

13 The Origin of Brahminism, Poona, 1863, p.
Another opinion which supports that caste-system did exist during the Rig-Veda period is that of Dr. Apte. He took a slightly different view on this issue. In Dr. Apte’s opinion the non-mention of castes in Suktas other than the Purusa-Sukta does not mean the non-existence of caste system in the Rig-Veda. He concludes his article in the following words:

"To sum them, caste, in my opinion was not formulated in Rig-Vedic age. The Rig-Vedic Aryans came with the four-fold division into India. What happened in the long interval known as the Rig-Vedic age was that the Aryans absorbed into their fold large number of people (at various stages of culture) with whom they clashed or came into contact. Their fourth-class (and to some extent even the third) absorbed the largest proportion of these new accretions and in the process became degraded. The danger of this degradation spreading higher up led gradually to a hardening of caste distinctions, which in my opinion was really all that happened between the early and later (i.e. Purusa-Sukta) period of the Rig-Veda." 

Thus according to Dr. Apte:

(1) Caste is a product of the Aryan social system of the Pre-Vedic age.

14 Deccan College Bulletin, Poona, Nov. 1940, p.49.
(2) Aryas came to India not with three divisions but with four divisions of mankind. This he argues on the basis of internal evidence of the Rig-Veda and Zend-Avesta.

(3) It is the fourth class of the Aryas that absorbed the natives on a large scale and became degraded.

(4) This danger of absorption began to spread to higher classes too. This was checked by a hardening of the caste system.

(5) This happened between the period of the early hymns and Purusa-Sukta.

It is difficult to establish on the basis of these views that caste was not known in the Rig-Veda period. Scholars in the field like Dr. Haug, Dr. Apte who reject the theory of non-existence of caste and propound the view that caste existed in the Rig-Veda seem to take a more valid position than the first group of scholars. But to them it was a system without or with very little barriers between the castes. But it certainly points out that, caste system had already developed sufficiently in times of Rig-Veda. The Aryan culture as represented in the Rig-Veda centered around the cult of sacrifices based on the worship of Agni. Aryas were divided into various tribes and each tribe has its own priestly craft was an inevitable necessity in the sacrifice to please the Gods.
Scholars like Muir, Zimmer and others denied the existence of caste in the Rig-Veda. Their argument is that words like 'Brahmana', 'Kshatriya' and 'Vaisya' rarely occur in the Rig-Veda and even if they occur, they have no reference to any distinct group of people or castes, except in Purusa-Sukta. However, in the face of the internal evidence furnished by the Rig-Veda, this cannot be accepted. These scholars have failed obviously to mark the use of words like 'Braha', 'Brahan', 'Brahamal', 'Ksatr', 'Vis' and Vaisya in the Rig-Veda. Hence scholars like Hauge, Dutt and others, reject the theory of non-existence of castes.

The following pages seek to establish that the caste system was already developed sufficiently in the times of Rig-Veda. The system was not flexible but had raised enough barriers between the castes. The people who called themselves 'Aryas' had common culture but were divided into three classes - priests, rulers and commoners. The following passages point to the fact that castes as such did exist in the Rig-Vedic period itself.

Brahmanas

The Aryan culture, as represented in the Rig-Veda,
centred round the cult of sacrifice based on the worship of Agni (fire) and this society was divided into various tribes. Each tribe had its own priests. The priests were known by various names, viz., Brah, Braham and later on Brahmam. During the Rig-Veda period priest-hood was so common and well known that it had become a hereditary profession and as such they had formed a caste of their own during the earliest period of Rig-Veda. Besides, Rig-Veda points out that the ancestors of the priestly families had, since long, associated themselves with the worship of Agni and assumed the role of priests. They slowly developed into a class by themselves. Thus the formative period of organised priest-hood based on heredity is not Rig-Vedic in origin but pre-Rig-Vedic. The following account of the families of the priests who composed the hymns of the Rig-Veda show that priest-hood had become a hereditary profession by the time of the Rig-Veda.

**Angirasas**

Angirasas are highly respected members of the priestly community in the Rig-Veda. 'Angiras, the progenitor of the 'Angirasas' is an ancient Rishi whom his descendants mention as this ancient father. He is the first who enkindled

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15 Rig-Veda, 1. 31-17, 45.3; 139.9, VIII. 43.13.
Agni; therefore, Agni is Angiras. Angiras is mentioned in Rig-Veda along with Manu, Yayati, Bhrigu, Dadhyan Atharvan; Priya medha, Kanva and Atri.

"The sacrificial system of Angirasas is considered a standard one, worthy of emulation by other families of priests in the Rig-Veda. Brahaspati, the lord of prayer and the Purohita of the gods, is spoken of as the son of Angiras in the Rig-Veda. All this goes to prove that Angirasas were the priests highly honoured in the circle of the priests in Rig-Veda. They were priests who either initiated worship of Agni or became acquainted with fire-worship, the memory of which is preserved in the Rig-Veda.

Virupas, Navagvas and Dasagvas

These are either members of the Angiras family or branches of the Angirasas, in the Rig-Veda. In one hymn Virupas are mentioned along with Atgi. Priyamedha and

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16 Rig-Veda, VIII. 60.2, 74.11, 75.5, 85.5, 84.4, 102.17.
17 Rig-Veda, 1.31.1, 139.9, VIII. 43.13.
18 Shende: Angiras in the Vedic Literature (See for details) ABORI XXI, p.108.
19 Rig-Veda, 1.45.3.
Angiras and in another, they are called as Angirasas.\textsuperscript{20} The Navagvas and the Dasagavas are mentioned together in hymns.\textsuperscript{21} The Dasagvas and Navagvas helped Indra in searching the vows stolen away by the Panis.\textsuperscript{22} It seems obvious that Virupas, Navagvas and the Dasagvas were Angirasas of high repute whose hymns are found in the Rig-Veda.

\textbf{Atharvans, Bhrigus and Angirasas}

Atharvans are also priests of much antiquity who figure in the Zend-Avesta as a class of Angiras, an enkindler and the initiator of the cult of sacrifice.\textsuperscript{23} Atharvan pitrs are involved for favour along with the pitra of Angirasas, Navagvas and Bhrigus in the hymns.\textsuperscript{24}

Bhrigus are another kind of people who have played a significant role in the composition of the Rig-Veda. In all passages except one, it is in the plural.\textsuperscript{25} In the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Rig-Veda, VIII. 75.6.}
  \item \textbf{Rig-Veda, I. 62.4; III. 39.5; IV. 51.4; V.29.12; X.62.6.}
  \item \textbf{Rig-Veda, III. 39.5; V.29.12.}
  \item \textbf{Rig-Veda, I. 83.5; VI. 16.13; X. 21.5 & 92.10.}
  \item \textbf{Rig-Veda, I. 83.5; VI. 16.13; X. 21.5 & 92.10.}
  \item \textbf{Rahurkar, Ibid. p.216.}
\end{itemize}
Rig-Veda, Bhrgu is mentioned as an ancient priest who worshipped fire; like Angiras. In the hymns it is stated that fire was brought from heaven by Materisvan who handed it over to Bhrgu. The Rig-Veda speaks of Agni as a gift given to men by Bhrgu. "Their hymns are to be found mainly in mandalas ii, iii, b.iii, ix and x." Thus the Bhrgus are almost one with the great ancient fire-priests of Angirasas, about whom Mr. Shende makes the following remarks:

"Their leadership of the Brahama community, in all different periods was readily acknowledge by all. Their literary activities viz., hymns of the Rig-Veda; Atharveda and the epics are sufficient to prove their greatness, of course in all these attempts they are their associates viz., the Atharvans and the Bhrigus."

All these details show how these three priestly families were very closely associated in their priestly affairs right from pre-Vedic times. There were different tribes which existed in the Rig-Veda period, such as Bharadvajas

26 *Rig-Veda*, VIII. 43.13.
27 *Rig-Veda*, I.60.1; 93.6.
28 *Rig-Veda*, III. 2.4.
29 *Rig-Veda*, I.58.6; 127.7; 143.4; II-4.2; III 2-4; IV. 7.1; V.1. VI-II. p.109.
and Gautamas. "The Rig-Veda furnishes enough evidence of Bharadvajas being Angirasas. Bharadvajas, being the distinguished members of the Angiras branch express their highest regard for Angiras." The fourth mandala is ascribed to the Gautamas. The name Gautama is also mentioned in a number of hymns. "Ghrtsamadas are the authors of the second mandala in Rig-Veda. According to Anukarani Ghrtsamadas is a son of Sunahotra of the Angiras family; later on, he was adopted as son by Sunaka of the Bhrigu family." This adoption of Ghrtsamada who was Angirasa, shows that adoption was possible only within the priestly circle. In the hymns of the Rig-Veda the Ghrtsamadas are mentioned as the authors of the hymns. The fifth mandala belongs to Atri. In some hymns Atri is referred to as an ancient sage. The Atris are close to Kanvas. The eight mandala which is Kanva dominated finds place in a number of Atri hymns. Kaksivan was the son of Dirghatamas; Dirghatamas was the son of Bharadvaja; Bharadvaja was the son of

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30 Rig-Veda, 1. 112.13; X. 150.5; 181.2.
31 Rig-Veda, B.I. 16.5; 31.4.
33 Rig-Veda, II. 4.9; 19.8; 39.8; 41.18.
34 Rig-Veda, I. 45.3; V. 4.9; 22.1; 51.8-10; 72.1., VIII. 36.7.
Bhrahaspati who was Angiras. This line of descent establishes the view that Atris were Angirasas.\textsuperscript{35} Kanvas have no separate Mandala, but the largest number of hymns are attributed to them in the eighth Mandala; they are the authors of the first part of the first mandala also. The word Kanvas occurs both in singular and plural in the Rig-Veda. In one hymn — Agni is called the best of the Kanvas\textsuperscript{36} which indicates that like Angirasas the Kanvas were also associated with Agni from the early times. Kanvas are closely related to the Atris.

According to tradition, Visvamitras are the authors of the third mandala. Visvamitra is a seer who is mentioned in Rig-Veda.\textsuperscript{37} The authorship of the seventh mandala is ascribed to Vasishtha and his descendents. The word Vasishtha occurs both in singular and plural in the Rig-Veda.\textsuperscript{38} Vasishthas are specially associated with the worship of the God Varuna in the hymn.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Rig-Veda}, X. 143.1.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Rig-Veda}, X. 115.5.
\textsuperscript{37} III. 53.9; 12; \textit{Vedic Index}, Vol. II. p.310.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Rig-Veda}, B II. 18.21; 36.6.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Rig-Veda}, B II. 86.5; 96.3.
Thus it is these families that had a large share in the composition of the Rig-Veda. These families of hymn-writers are associated with one or more than one tribe, as their priests. Therefore, the collection of the Rig-Veda represents the collective activity of several minor and major family groups of priests. This genealogical sketch proves that all these priestly families who had made priesthood as their profession and were associated with various Aryan tribes in the Rig-Veda. Aryan life and religion were completely centred round the cult of sacrifice in the Veda. Besides it is to be noted that the members of priestly families speak about long-standing priestly traditions behind them and their families. The composition of Rig-Veda represents not the work of one generation but of many successive generations of members of particular priestly families. It can, therefore, be safely concluded that the priestly class of Brahmanas had already become more or less a caste in the Rig-Veda and was completely separated, both in its social standing and profession, from the rest of the people. This conclusion can also be further supported by the Gotra system of the Brahmans. It is because of the Gotra system that the Brahmans speak about their ancestors. It is to be noted that the poets have referred to the Saptarṣis (the seven sages) in some
of the hymns in Rig-Veda. All these facts seek to establish that the hymn-writing families discussed here are all Brahmin families. These priestly families and their members had already formed a separate caste of their own in the Rig-Veda.

The Word 'Brahman' in the Rig-Veda

The word 'Brahman' sometimes seems to denote the priest, the singer and the poet in the Rig-Veda. Would this go against the theory of the existence of caste in the Rig-Veda? It can be confirmed with some degree of accuracy that the word 'Brahman' under no circumstances denotes any other thing than priests in the Rig-Veda. In the hymns below the word 'Brahman' seems to denote prayer, at least superficially:

III. 53. 12. ... This prayer (Brahman) of Visvamitra protects the tribe of Bharatas.

V. 40.6. ... Atri with the fourth prayer (Brahman) discovered the Sun concealed by unholy darkness.

VI. 75.19. ... Prayer (Brahma) is my protecting armour (says Bharadvaja)

40 IV. 42.8; X. 82.2; 109.4; 130.7.
VII. 33.3. ... Indra protected Sudas in the battle of the ten kings through prayer (Brahman Vasistha).41

The word 'Brahman' in these passages denote not only prayer but more than a prayer. It is a prayer coupled with some kind of mystic power that could give the result, and is in the hands of the priests. What is to be noticed here is that the prayer and the priests are inseparably associated with the institution of sacrifice, and without the priest and the prayers, sacrifice in Rig-Veda was impossible. The prayer is, therefore, a power (weapon) in the hands of the priests alone. It is significant to note the word Brahman as prayer represents only the priest-power, and nothing else. Both the words 'Brahma' and 'Brahman' are used without distinction, to denote the prayer. This shows that both the words connote the same meaning in the Rig-Veda.

Along with these, the words 'Brahma' and 'Brahman' not only denote prayer in the above passage, but also denote the singer, the hymn-writer to invoke the Gods. There are some verses that can be mentioned in this context:

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41 Muirs (Vol.I): Translation is followed.
1.10.1 .. The singers sing thee, the hymns recite hymn the brahmans' O Satkramu, have raised thee up like a pole.

11.12.6 .. He (Indra) who is quicker of the sluggish, of the emancipated, of the suppliant brahman who praises him.

IX.113.6 .. O pure Soma; in the place where the Brahman uttering a metrical hymn is exalted at the Soma sacrifice through (the stone of) the crushing stone; producing pleasure with Soma; 0 Indu (Soma) flow from Indra.

X.107.6 .. They call him Rishi, him a Brahman revered and reciter of Utthas he knows the three forms of the brilliant (Agni) - the man who first worshipped with a largest.

In all these verses the 'Brahman' is he who sings, invokes, chants and praises. The conclusion, therefore, is that the word 'Brahman' means the priest, the singer or poet; all of which reflect the Rig-Veda. In some of these verses the famous tribes like Angirasas; Ghrtsmadas, Atris; Vasisthas are addressed as Brahmans. Verse IX. 112.1 speak about the various professions of the people. Accordingly these verses also point that Brahmans where those who were well-versed in the knowledge of the sacrifice, and hence they also boasted that they were Brahmans. Thus all these facts clearly establish the fact that caste was a well-established system in Rig-Vedic period.
Kshatriyas

What has been said in connection with the Brahmans can also be said about the Kshatriya, which was another important and prominent 'caste', the ruling class of ancient India. When it can be established that the words like 'brahma' 'brahman' and brahma - indicate the evidence in the Rig-Veda that words like 'Kshatra', 'Kshatriyas', Rajan and 'Rajanya' all indicate nothing but the ruling, royal class. The Kshatriyas were the noble men, rulers and as such, they were a well-defined class in the Rig-Veda. The terms used in the Rig-Veda to denote the so called Kshatriyas, were 'Kshatra' 'Kshatriya', 'Rajan' and 'Rajanya'. Various scholars have expressed contradictory opinions on this. Hence it would be useful to refer to some relevant verses before we reach a conclusion.

Kshatra: The authors of the Vedic index make the following observation in the Rig-Veda.

Kshatra, in the general sense of 'dominion' (rural) power, exercised by Gods and men, occurs frequently from the Rig-Veda onwards. The word is not found in the concrete sense of rulers in the Rig-Veda and later.\textsuperscript{42} It is

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difficult to agree with this view. The following verses prove that the statement of Vedic Index is not correct.

1.24.11. ... Varuna, stay thou here and be not angry steal not our life from us, O Thou wide ruler (Kshatra).

In this verse the word 'Kshatra' means ruler and is applied to Varuna; and in another verse:

1.25.5. ... When shall we bring, to be appeased, the hera of warrior-knight (Kshatra) for seeing Varuna?

In this verse Varuna's (the wind) power is indicated by the word 'Ksatra'. It obviously means the ruler's power.

IV.17.1. ... Great art thou, Indra; Yes; the earth; with gladness, and heaven confers thee high dominion.

Here the word 'Kshatra' means dominion, and this verse points that Indra's dominion is spread over the space including earth and heaven. In these verses, it is important to note that especially (1.24.11) and (1.25.5); Varuna's power, rule, might, dominion etc., are all referred to, by using the word Kshatr. He is the kind of both men and the Gods in the Veda.\(^4^3\) He is the monarch of the universe and

\(^4^3\) [Rig-Veda, 11.27.10, X. 132.4.](#)
as such is described as the sovereign ruler. 44

The Word Ksatriva

The word Ksatriva also points to the same idea which the word Kshatra does. Here various suggestions have been made by scholars. Some placed too much reliance on philosophy. This is what Mr. Muir wrote:

Kshatriya in the sense of a person belonging to a royal family, a noble, occurs only in a few places as (X.109.3)

But it can be pointed out that there are many passages where the word Kshatriya occurs in plural, where it denotes either members of the royal family or members of the royal class. The following verses speak for this:

(IV.12.3) Agni is master of sublime dominion; Agni is lord of strength and lofty riches.

Here Agni is mentioned as the ruler of a kingdom where wealth is in abundance. Therefore, 'Kshatriya' though applied to Agni, denotes a ruler.

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44 Rig-Veda, VIII. 42.1.
(VII.64.2) Come hither, 0 Kings, guardians of the great rta, lords of Rivers Kshatriyas (addressed to Mitra - Varuna).

In this passage, as it has been pointed out already, the Varuna (sometimes along with Mitra) is considered the universal monarch which he rules according to law (rta) of the universe. He is called Kshatriya (ruler) along with Mitra. Another passage which mentions the title of Kshatriyas clearly is the following:

• (V.11.104. Fever doth soma aid and guide the wicked or him who falsely claims the warrior's title.

This passage is very important, because it speaks for Kshatriyas and it does not allow to claim falsely the title of Kshatriyas. It is true that the commoners also fought in time of an emergency along with nobles and kings, in the Rig-Veda. The passage here rejects the claim to those who are not Kshatriyas to the title of Kshatriyas. It is clear, therefore, that the Kshatriyas had already attained high eminence in the society and its title was a matter of honour. In fact, the word Rajan is another important term applied to Kshatriyas in the Rig-Veda.

45 1.69.3; IV. 24.4; VI. 26.1; VII. 79.2.
1.08.7  : In your dwelling; or with prince (rajan)
or Brahman Ye Indra; Agni floty
ones rejoice you. Even from thence;
Ye mighty lords come hither and drink
libations of the flowing soma.

The poet says in this passage: O Indra and Agni
whether you are in the house of a Brahmana or rajan come
to us and drink the libation of Soma. The word 'rajan'
definitely points to the Kshatriya order here, though it
is difficult to say whether it denotes a king or a noble-
man. The word 'rajan' represents kings and nobleman who
are often referred to along with the Brahmanas as a second
order of the Vedic society. Further, the word 'rajan' is
taken to be different from Rajanya.

Rajanya - a verse in the hymn X.90 reads:

X.90.12  : The Brahman was his mouth; of both his
arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs
became the Vaisya; from his feet the
Sudra was produced.

In this verse all the orders (Varnas) of ancient
Indian society are mentioned. According to this passage
out of the mouth of Purusa (Creator) the Brahmana and from
his arms the rajanya are produced. Here the word 'rajanya'
is used to denote the second order known as the Kshatriya
caste of the Aryan society.
Regarding the Vaishyas, we find that the word 'Vis' or 'Vish' has been used in the Rig-Veda. The Vedic Index, expresses the view that

"In the latter period the sense of 'Vis' is definitely restricted in some cases to denote the third of the classes of the Vedic polity, the people or clansmen as opposed to the nobles (kshatra, kshatriya) and the priest (Brahman, Brahmana).46

According to this view the third class, the Vaisyas was denoted sometimes by the word 'Vis' in Brahmanical literature but not in Rig-Vedic literature. The view expressed in the Vedic Index seems unsound in the face of evidence to the contrary in the Rig-Veda. Even Dr.P.V. Kane's view that 'It generally means people' or group of people' seems unjustified in the face of some passages in the Rig-Veda.47 It is true that in some passages like Rig-Veda, III.34.2; IV.28.4; VI. 1.8; the word did mean the people. But this is not all the people; because there are other passages which are reproduced below, which make the meaning of the word 'people' more clear. In the following

46 Vol. II. p.309.
47 Dr.P.V.Kane, History of Dharma Sastra, Vol. II, Part-I, p.32.
passages the word Visah denotes the subject people of a king:

VI. 8.4 The mighty seized him in the bosom of the floods; the people waited on the king who should be praised.

IX. 7.5 When purified; he sits as king above the hosts among his folk; what time the sages bring him nigh.

In these passages the sages (Priests; the king; and his subjects are distinguished from each other.

X. 124.8 And they, like people (Visah) who elect the ruler, have in abhorrence turned away from vrtra.

In this passage, there is a discussion about the people electing a king. In that age of fierce struggle between the various Rig-Vedic people, the life of the king was always in danger, and in case of the death of a king or any such danger to the life of the king, the people probably elected someone of the royal family as a king.

IV. 50.8 To him the people (Visah) with free will pay homage to the king with whom the Brahman hath precedence.

Here again it cannot be denied that a clear distinction is marked between the common people, the king, and the Brahman. Not only this but the passage speaks as to how
Brahmans (Priests had already begun, even in that early period, to enjoy dominance and seek precedence in the society, including the kings). Further, the verse X.109.3, also puts forth the claim of 'Brahman' over the Kshatriyas, and when the Brahmans claim this, there is no doubt it is implied that Brahmanism was a dominant factor of traditional politics in the Rig-Vedic period.

Here the words Brahman, Kshatra and Visah in Rig-Veda, occurring in different passages, refer to the well-marked divisions of people in the Aryan society of Rig-Veda, and they also speak regarding their professions. This clearly establishes the fact that the Aryan social order was interwoven with these classes of men who are clearly distinguished throughout the period of Rig-Veda.

Sudras

Regarding Sudras, Dr. N.K. Dutt writes in his book as follows:

"There are, however, some grounds for believing that four-fold divisions of society can be traced to pre-Vedic times when Iranian and Indian branches of the Aryan race had not separated." 48

Dr. Dutt with the help of the Zend-Avestha, also adduces some references from the Rig-Veda for the justification of his view.

'The four-fold divisions of society was so well established in Rig-Veda... The known of the fourth lowest class except in Purusa-Sukta does not argue its non-existence.  

All these facts establish that caste system as much did exist in Rig-Vedic period, and it would be worthwhile to conclude that caste was a dominant feature in Rig-Veda itself. Further, it is also found in the Rig-Veda itself that a conflict also existed in that period regarding the non-Aryans in the Rig-Veda.

Non-Aryans in Rig-Veda

The people who composed the hymns, and worshipped in their sacrifice called themselves Aryas, but there are others like 'Dasas', 'Dasyus', 'Panis' and others who opposed the Aryans and their religion. Here are some of the passages which refer to the conflict between the Aryas and Dasas:

49 Ibid., p.35.
V. 34. 6  Indra, the terrible, tamer of every man (as Arya) leads away the Dasa at his will.

VI. 60. 6  They slay our Arya foes. Slay our Dasa foes.

X. 138. 3  In the mid-way of heaven the sun unyoked his car; the Arya found match to meet his Dasa foe.

1. 117. 21  Blasting away the Dasyu with your trumpet, ye gave spreading light unto the Arya.

6. 18. 3  Thou; thou alone; hast tamed the Dasyus, singly thou has subdued the people for the Arya.

These verses make it clear that there were people called 'Dasas and 'Dasyus' who were in conflict with the Aryas. The verses also point to the bitterness of Aryas towards Dasas; because very often they (Aryas) invoked the gods to destroy Dasas; and these conflicts besides religious are also political. It seems they were hated by the Aryas because they were against the religion of the Aryas. The conflict between Aryas and Dasus can also be illustrated from the Rig-Veda, to show as to how they were against each other:

1. 51. 8  Discern though well Aryas and Dasyus punishing the lawless (avarta) give then up to him who sacrifices (whose grass is strewn)

This makes it clear that the Aryas and Dasa-Dasyus
represented two different cults or religions. The Dasyus in the eyes of the hymn writers were guilty because they did not practice Rig-Vedic religious rites and opposed the gods of Aryas. The major crime of the Dasas to be called as lawless people was that they did not perform sacrifice and give gifts to the priests. Groups like Dasas, Dasyus, Panis, Kikatas followed a different mode of worship and hence they were called non-Aryas or non-Aryans. There are other references also to show that the conflict was based on colour prejudices too, as Dasa-Dasyu Varna contrasted with Arya-Varna in Rig-Veda. Indra consigned the base Dasa Varna to the cave (II.12.4) and having killed the Dasyus, he protected the Arya Varna (111.34.1). The word Varna here indicates colour in many places of the Rig-Veda and on that basis it is believed that the words Arya Varna and Dasa Varna indicate the white colour of the former and the black colour of the latter. Again on this point there are various opinions expressed by different writers like Dr.Ketkar, Mr.Iyengar in their works Maharashtra Jyanankosh and Life in Ancient India in the Age of the Mantras. But ultimately it is opined that there was a four-fold class structure in the Rig-Veda which

50 Rig-Veda, II.12.4; III. 34.1.
indicates the origin of the caste system. Further, it is possible to conclude that the first caste to emerge in the Rig-Vedic period was the class of priests, and further the process of priesthood has certainly, when the various mandalas were written by these priestly classes, established the influence of Brahmans on the caste system and assigning each to the various duties and functions. From this it can be concluded that the caste system is Brahminical in its nature and origin; and the Brahmana as the priest has processed this system in the age of Rig-Veda itself, because a lot of verses speak of what the Brahman did, how sacrifices took place, how gods were to be worshipped, and the mode of prayers etc. All this evidence also indicates the position which the Brahmans enjoyed in the Rig-Vedic period. In brief, they themselves were treated as Gods, or at least the self appointed one's. No wonder, as Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has very aptly put: "the law of Chaturvarnya prohibited the shudras from pursuing knowledge, from engaging in economic enterprises... with the result that they could never revolt and became ever reconciled to eternal servitude as an inescapable fate..."