

# INDUSTRY IN THE ṚGVEDIC AGE

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**Abstract:** The oldest book of the Aryans is the Veda. The Veda is divided into four parts i.e. Ṛgveda , Sāmaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. Among them, Ṛgveda is the most ancient. Although the Aryans were familiar with farming in the Rgvedic era, farmers were considered to be hailing from a backward class in the social structure. Apart from farming and animal husbandry Aryans were accustomed to various forms of technology. Various industries such as carpentry, pottery, metal industry, textile weaving industry, leather industry etc. paved for their economic structure. In the Ṛgveda , the mention of carpenters, weavers, leather artists etc. are found. Considering the trend of the industries popular in the ancient era and the evolution of industry across time and civilization my interest in the industry of Vedic era developed. Although the Vedic period was a time of spiritual speculation, the ancient traditions of popular industries were flowing in this era. The industries however took a slower pace during the Ṛgvedic period.

**Key Words:** Industry, Textile, Carpentry, Pottery, Metal industry.

Vedic culture is one of the ancient civilizations of this world. Ṛgveda is the earliest literature. According to the Ṛgveda agriculture and industry were simultaneously important as professions. I will try to highlight the industrial works in the archaic age of the Ṛgveda in this article. From the beginning of the history of pre-Vedic era, the tradition of various industries continued which was passed into the Vedic era. In every age people invented something for their sustenance and living. The advance social system of these nations depended on their economic prosperity which included expansion of industry, the Ṛgvedic era is no exception in this regard.

**Textile Weaving Industry:-** Like any other industry, textile weaving industry too, developed from some basic human needs. In the beginning of civilization people felt the need to cover their bodies in order to protect their dignity as well as to ward off the wrath of nature. Though people used barks of tree, animal skin to cover their body at first, gradually cotton and silk became the raw material for textile weaving. The need for making dress compelled people to invent weaving tools. Clothes of different varieties were worn by people as revealed through the archaeological relics of Indus (Sindhu) Valley and its contemporary civilizations. Since then, this journey of textile weaving passed the test of time, leading people to opulence and development. The reference of the textile industry is found in the Vedas. Scholars hold that the expansion of textile industry occurred in later Vedic period, though the mention of knitting fabric is seen in the Ṛgveda<sup>1</sup>. The references of the weaving artists were always working in order to make the long out stretched fiber together<sup>2</sup>.

There is also mention of the perfectly created clothes in the context of concentration<sup>3</sup>. It is found in the Ṛgvedic period that the Aryans were skilled in making fine decorative clothes. The reference of Varundeva well decorated in beautiful clothes is also found in the Ṛgveda<sup>4</sup>.

Clothes made of cotton and wool are mentioned in the Ṛgveda. Dresses made of cotton are Adhivāsa, peśśas, vādhūya etc. Adhivāsa was used to cover the upper part of body<sup>5</sup>. Peśśas, a beautifully decorated golden ornament was usually worn by female dancers of that time. Vādhūya is a kind of bridal apparel<sup>6</sup>.

In ancient time lots of sheep and goat wool were easily available in the Gandhar region (Modern Peshwar)<sup>7</sup>.

A special type of artistically designed woolen cloth is mentioned in the Ṛgveda. Perhaps it was made of fleece. Vedic Aryan used to wear vāsas during winter<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Ṛgveda 2/38/4

<sup>2</sup>Ṛgveda 2/3/6

<sup>3</sup>Ṛgveda 5/19/15

<sup>4</sup>Ṛgveda 5/48/5

<sup>5</sup>Ṛgveda 1/140/9, 1/162/16, 10/5/4

<sup>6</sup>Ṛgveda 10/85/34 cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - ii, P. 286

<sup>7</sup>Ṛgveda 1/126/7

<sup>8</sup>Ṛgveda 1/34/1, cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - ii, P. 291, 292

Śāmulya<sup>9</sup>, another type of woolen cloth was worn at night. There is mention of a type of waist belt called mekhalā in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa of the Ṛgveda. This mekhalā was made by straws or reeds. It was used to be worn by the sacrificer's wife during the sacrificial work<sup>10</sup>.

## **ART OF POTTERY:**

In the Ṛgvedic era, the developed art of pottery can only be known through the information provided by historians and the ancient literature of Ṛgveda. There are numerous references of pitchers in the Ṛgveda<sup>11</sup>. This pitcher was made by clay.

Apart from this, there is a mention of Kumbha or pots. As a sacrificial utensil kumbha was used in the rituals as well as for household purpose<sup>12</sup>. The mention of hundred kumbhas is found in few places of the Ṛgveda<sup>13</sup>. The reference of sthālī is found in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa<sup>14</sup>. This sthālī was a cooking pot made by clay. It seems that Vedic Aryans used to have many pots made of soil which are not specifically mentioned in the Ṛgveda. But many kinds of clay utensils and toys are observed in the pre-Vedic Indus valley and other contemporary civilizations. The purodāśā was prepared on clay discs (kapālas) and offered to various deities<sup>15</sup>.

Hugo Vinklar discovered a number of clay plates from the city Boghajkoi in Asia Minor. These clay plates were inscribed as treaty between two kings<sup>16</sup>. Clay pots were usually painted in red and black. These were found chiefly in Bharatpur of West Bengal (1700 B.C. – 795 B.C.) in the Sohagaura region of Uttarpradesh (1670 – 1225 B.C.) and Norher region of Uttarpradesh (1500 – 1270 B.C.). All these places at that time

<sup>9</sup> Ṛgveda 10/85/29

<sup>10</sup> Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1/11/7

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ṛgveda 1/117/12, 3/32/15, 4/27/5, 10/32/9

<sup>12</sup> Ṛgveda 7/33/13 cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - i, P. 163

<sup>13</sup> Ṛgveda 1/116/7, 1/117/6

<sup>14</sup> Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1/11/8, Cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - ii, P. 487

<sup>15</sup> Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1/3/11

<sup>16</sup> Veder Parichay, Jogiraj Basu, P - 172

witnessed an abundance of pottery art<sup>17</sup>. All the pots were made with the help of potter's wheel.

### **LEATHER INDUSTRY:**

Various usages of leather attracted the Aryans to the leather industry. Even for animal hunting, the bow needed string made of leather. The ropes that were tied to the mouth of horse were actually made of animal leather<sup>18</sup>. The Vedic Aryans used leather pots in the house. Before using the leather as a pot, they used to treat the leather through various processes. Soma, were kept in the skin pots<sup>19</sup>, another mantra suggests that honey too was kept in these leather containers<sup>20</sup>.

The Ṛbhus, son Sudhanvan, superior men, with their skillful work made their elderly parents young. Not only that, but also they carved out a cow from a hide; and sent the mother to join with her calf again<sup>21</sup>. Nāsatyas, the Áśvins, from Cyavāna, who had become old, removed his covering (aged skin) like a garment and made him a youth again<sup>22</sup>. The Ṛbhus, says the Ṛgveda, fashioned the smooth-rolling chariot, working with their know-how; they fashioned the two fallow bays that convey Indra and bring bullish goods<sup>23</sup>. There is also the mention of the Ṛbhus making a new horse from a horse in the Ṛgveda<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Irfan Habib & Vijoy Kumar Thakur, Vaidik Sabhyata, P. 86

<sup>18</sup> Ṛgveda 4/22/8

<sup>19</sup> Ṛgveda 9/66/29

<sup>20</sup> Ṛgveda 8/5/19

<sup>21</sup> Ṛgveda 1/110/8

<sup>22</sup> Ṛgveda 1/116/10

<sup>23</sup> Ṛgveda 1/111/1

<sup>24</sup> Ṛgveda 1/161/7

**Art of Carpentry:** In the Ṛgvedic era, the artistry reached its pinnacle. The people who were employed in this industry could acquire dignified places in the Society.

Mentions of chariots, various sacrificial utensils such as juhū, upābhṛt, camas, sphya, sruvā etc. and boats are seen in the Ṛgveda. Chariot-making was considered an important profession. The chariot-makers were called rathakāra and they had some specific duties in sacrificial rituals. Chariot is always known an important high-speed transport vehicle on the road. The chariot was also used in the battlefield. It has been prayed to Indra that he may send a chariot to his worshiper to gain wealth.

The weapons of war are kept in the chariot. The two brown coloured horses of Indra were always involved in drawing his chariot and such a reference is found more than once in the Ṛgveda<sup>25</sup>. Indra did not only have two horse driven chariot, he also had chariots driven by six, eight or ten horses. This reference too, is available in the Ṛgveda<sup>26</sup>.

Chariots were made in different sizes according to the number of the persons they carried. Generally, there were two seats in war chariots for the driver and the warrior. Aśvins chariot had three seats, since they were two and needed a driver<sup>27</sup>. A big chariot could carry seven to eight people. The largest chariot of Agni carried thirty-three gods together at his own will which made them happy<sup>28</sup>.

The Vedic Aryans did not just build chariots but they knew that the chariot could even cross the sea. It seems that Vedic Aryans knew to build the flying chariot because it is not possible to cross the sea with ordinary horse drawn chariot. The wheels free of erosion have been referred to in the Ṛgveda<sup>29</sup>. Since, the land did not touch the chariot's wheels; it was not prone to any erosion. Mentions of flying chariots and also the one that rolled on the ground are found in the Ṛgveda. The Aryans had the knowledge of crafting wooden boats too. They could make the exterior of the boat, and the wooden deck and helm of it as well.

<sup>25</sup> Ṛgveda 1/7/2, 1/84/3

<sup>26</sup> Ṛgveda 2/18/4

<sup>27</sup> Ṛgveda 1/34/9, 1/47/2

<sup>28</sup> Ṛgveda 3/6/9

<sup>29</sup> Ṛgveda 1/164/14

The use of word 'nau' was made in the sense of ship or boat. There were no ships at that time but there were big boats. The big boat was called the 'sairabati nau' in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa<sup>30</sup>. These large boats were needed to cross the big rivers. Reference of small boats is noticed in the Ṛgveda. Small boat or raft was called 'dyumna'<sup>31</sup>. Mentions of 'nau' are found in many places of the Ṛgveda nāva's references are found in Ṛgveda as well<sup>32</sup>. Tugra left his son Bhujyu in the sea. The two Aśvins with a hundred-oared boat rescued Bhujyu and he was carried to his house. The two Aśvins used a wing consorted boat to rescue Bhujyu<sup>33</sup>.

There is a reference of spoon or ladle in the Ṛgveda(1/20/6). Skilled artisans used to make spoons and ladles for use in the sacrifices. The spoon called 'Camasa' had a handle that was connected to the square-shaped wooden pot. These spoons were used to hold the juice of Soma in the sacrifice. The mention of 'Sruj' or ladle is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>34</sup>. This sruj was of various kinds like juhū, upābhṛt, dhruvā and so on and so forth. Apart from different types of ladles, there were also mortar, pestle, sphya (wooden axe) etc. used in the sacrificial work. And the pāśā that was made of wood is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>35</sup>. From all these mentions of artistic works in the Ṛgvedic age the Aryans' skill and expertise in carpentry can be known.

**METAL INDUSTRY:** In the metallurgical industry gold, iron, copper have been mentioned in Ṛgveda mainly.

**Use of Iron:** Historians contend that the use of iron was unknown to the Aryans during the Ṛgvedic age. Iron material was found sporadically from 3000 to 1365 B.C. The circulation of iron goods is not unrealistic or unusual. In fact, the metallic city mentioned in the Ṛgveda had references to the metallic fortress and there is no difficulty in understanding that it was of iron. This cannot be said that all the cities had castle made of iron at that time. However, the cities and the castles built by iron were

<sup>30</sup>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 3/29/5

<sup>31</sup> Ṛgveda 8/19/14 cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - ii, P. 382

<sup>32</sup> Ṛgveda 1/97/8

<sup>33</sup> Ṛgveda 1/182/5

<sup>34</sup> Ṛgveda 1/142/1

<sup>35</sup> Ṛgveda 1/41/9

very strong. The fort was the best shelter to be saved from the attack of exterior rival force. That is why kings used to build iron fort and cities for safety. They thought that it was safe to confront the enemy from the iron-built castle. In one place of the Ṛgveda , the river Goddess Sarasvatī is mentioned along with the iron-built city<sup>36</sup>.

She has flowed forth with surge, with her nourishment - Sarasvatī is a buttress, a metal fortress . Thrusting forward all the other waters with her greatness, the river drives like a lady charioteer. [Translation Jamison & Brereton, OP.cit. page 1003]

Another mantra addresses the fire God to build a city of iron to protect human beings<sup>37</sup>. From this mantra, we get a clear idea of the iron built city of that era.

It is known that the thunder of Indra was made of iron<sup>38</sup>. Indra's thunder was very sharp and had prominence. The mention of eight angles of thunder was found in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa<sup>39</sup>.

The reference of the shank is found in the Ṛgveda . Iron shank was used to replace the imputed limbs. The valiant woman Viśpalā, the wife of Khela, broke her thighs in war to assist her husband and was unable to move .Her broken limbs were amputated by the divine surgeons the Aśvins duo and they used an iron shank to give her iron legs. Viśpalā was able to move and she could again participate in the war<sup>40</sup>

The reference of iron helmet is found in the Veda.It seems this iron helmet was used for war . The soldiers used to wear this iron helmet in the time of war<sup>41</sup>.

In the pre-Vedic era, fire was used as a tool to clean forests. But in the Vedic period axe was an important tool to clean forests. However, it is true that the use of iron was not too much in vogue at that time. Because high melting point was needed for iron-usage.

<sup>36</sup> Ṛgveda7/95/1

<sup>37</sup> Ṛgveda 7/15/14

<sup>38</sup> Ṛgveda 1/80/12, 1/52/8

<sup>39</sup>Aitareya Brahmana 2/6/1

<sup>40</sup> Ṛgveda 1/116/15

<sup>41</sup> Ṛgveda 4/37/4



**USE OF GOLD:** From very ancient period, dignity of gold was very high. The use of this precious metal is observed in the Ṛgveda. Reference of making gold ornaments is found therein. At that time men and women used to wear gold ornaments especially at the wedding ceremony. The Aryan women used to wear gold ornaments on the chest and these were called 'rukma'. The reference of 'rukma' is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>42</sup>. The gold ornaments that were used to worn in the ear was called 'karṇaśobhanā'<sup>43</sup>. The mention of talisman is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>44</sup>. There is no clear mention for what the Aryans used to make golden talisman.

The reference of golden helmet is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>45</sup>. The Reference of gold made of āyudha is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>46</sup>. Āyudha means weapons, it is understood from the mention of this āyudha, various weapons were made of gold at that time, even there is reference of the golden wings<sup>47</sup> for this reason the wings, of the duck were cut and the golden wings used to set up by surgery at that time so that there was no difficulty for the ducks to roam.

The mention of Gold made chariot is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>48</sup>. When the horse is attached to the chariot a golden stick on the shoulders of the horse was applied which is called 'śāmyā'<sup>49</sup>. The Sun God Savitṛ used to travel in golden chariot. At that time use of gold was random and receiving ten pitchers of gold from Indra is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>50</sup>.

**Use of Copper:** In the Vedic period, the metal copper is not new because random use of copper in the Indus Civilization is noticed. The mention of 'gharma' pot is found in the Ṛgveda<sup>51</sup>. It is told in the Vedic literature that this gharma pot was made of copper. These gharma containers held hot melted ghee and hot milk was kept there too (cf. Vedic index). There is mention of the copper made costume wear of Prajāpati deity in

<sup>42</sup> Ṛgveda 5/57/5, Ṛgveda 5/56/13 cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - ii, P. 224

<sup>43</sup> Ṛgveda 8/78/3, cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - i, P. 140

<sup>44</sup> Ṛgveda 4/53/2

<sup>45</sup> Ṛgveda 5/54/11

<sup>46</sup> Ṛgveda 1/42/6

<sup>47</sup> Ṛgveda 4/45/4

<sup>48</sup> Ṛgveda 4/1/8, 4/44/5, 5/57/1

<sup>49</sup> Ṛgveda 1/35/4

<sup>50</sup> Ṛgveda 4/31/19

<sup>51</sup> Ṛgveda 5/30/15, 1/112/7, 4/55/6 cf. Vedic index name and subject. Vol. - i, P. 249



the Ṛgveda<sup>52</sup>. Aryans used copper made shields and armours in the Ṛgveda<sup>53</sup>. These armours were reticulated. Also it is known that copper was made to use for various war equipment.

**Conclusion:** During the search of industry practice such as Metal industry, Textile industry, Carpentry, Pottery, Leather industry we also come to know about the use of iron, gold and copper at the Ṛgvedic time. The extensive use of gold in the metal industry is known from the Ṛgvedic literature. The discussion on Textile industry has shown the remarkable craft of artists in the textile weaving. There is no doubt that, the carpentry reached the peak of progress in the era of Ṛgveda. The mention of some imaginary goods is found in the description of Vedic Seers. At places they have mentioned the gold made duck wings, gold made hand, and automatic chariots running without horses. Horse and cow made of skin have been mentioned at some places. Imaginary boats drawn by the horse have been described by Vedic Seers. In spite of being chiefly mystic in spirit, the Vedic age carried the tradition of industry. We can get a good idea about that from the ancient literature of the Ṛgveda. So the modern concept – agriculture is the base and industry is the future of human civilization had been sprouted in the Ṛgvedic era.

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<sup>52</sup> Ṛgveda 4/53/2

<sup>53</sup> Ṛgveda 1/140/10, 4/34/9

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