



Notes

4.5 CHANGES IN THE LATER VEDIC PHASE

During later Vedic phase, agriculture became the mainstay of the Vedic people. Many rituals were introduced to initiate the process of agriculture. It also speaks of ploughing with yokes of six and eight oxen. The buffalo had been domesticated for the agricultural purposes. This animal was extremely useful in ploughing the swampy land. The god Indra acquires a new epithet 'Lord of the Plough' in this period. The number and varieties of plant food increased. Apart from barley, people now cultivated wheat, rice, pulses, lentils, millet, sugarcane etc. The items of *dana* and *dakshina* included cooked rice. Thus with the beginning of food production agricultural produce began to be offered in the rituals. *Tila*, from which the first widely used vegetable food-oil was derived increasingly, came to be used in rituals.

The main factor in the expansion of the Aryan culture during the later Vedic period was the beginning of the use of iron around 1000 BC. The Rigvedic people knew of a metal called *ayas* which was either copper or bronze. In the later Vedic literature *ayas* was qualified with *shyama* or *krishna* meaning black to denote iron. Archaeology has shown that iron began to be used around 1000 BC which is also the period of later Vedic literature. The northern and eastern parts of India to which the Aryans later migrated receive more rainfall than the north-western part of India. As a result this region is covered with thick rain forests which could not be cleared by copper or stone tools used by Rigvedic people. The use of iron tools now helped people clear the dense rain forests particularly the huge stumps left after burning, in a more effective manner. Large tracts of forestland could be converted into cultivable pieces in relatively lesser time. The iron plough could turn the soil from deeper portions making it more fertile. This process seems to have begun during the later part of the Rigvedic period but the effect of iron tools and implements become evident only towards the end of the Later Vedic period.

There has been a continuous increase in the population during the later Vedic period due to the expansion of the economy based on agriculture. The increasing number and size of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) settlements in the *doab* area shows this. With the passage of time the Vedic people also acquired better knowledge of seasons, manuring and irrigation. All these developments resulted in the substantial enlargement of certain settlements such as Hastinapur and Kaushambi towards the end of the Later Vedic period. These settlements slowly began to acquire characteristics of towns. Such rudimentary towns inhabited mainly by the chiefs, princes, priests and artisans were supported by the peasants who could spare for them some part of their produce voluntarily or involuntarily.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 4.5

1. What was the main economic activity during the Later Vedic period?

2. What changes do we notice in the life of the Aryans with the increased importance of agriculture?

3. Who is known as the 'lord of the plough'?

4. Why is the *tila* ritually considered very important?
