



Sports And Entertainments In The R̥gvedic Period

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Abstract :

The main scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas. These Vedas are four in number namely R̥gveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. In the Vedas various aspects of the society of that time such as social, economic, political and various other issues are emerged here. R̥gveda Samhita is the oldest text of vedic literature. Among other things, the social issues of the people of the society at that time have emerged very well in R̥gveda. The social life of Aryans in the R̥gvedic age was as simple as it was sacred. Their simple life style is reflected in their recreational activities, in their games, sports and Entertainment also. In early India, games and sports were very much concerned about the development of their physique and for the offence and defence. Also games were considered a kind of recreation which played a vital role in the development of man's personality. The winning a race was essential to the Aryans for getting the women of their choice. It was one of their favourite amusement like races of horse, races of chariots etc; the other being the throwing of dice. The first mandala of R̥gveda contains descriptions of the Horse races and Chariot races. The 34th hymn of the tenth Mandala of the R̥gveda describes the game of dice. The dice playing inspires a gambler for the enjoyment of victory. But in pathetic words the disappointed gambler has reached to the climax when he has been forsaken by all as father, mother, brother etc. He is helplessly devoid of sense to check himself to refrain from impulsive gambling: The mind of a gambler is tossed up and down with hope and despair. But the king bow down to the dice with great reverence. Therefore the amusements of the R̥gvedic period were dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, chariot-racing, gambling with dice, dicing and Hunting.

Keywords : Sports, R̥gvedic age, Chariot race, dice-playing, weapons of vṛtra, Olympic.

Introduction : The main scriptures of Hinduism are the Vedas. These Vedas are four in number namely R̥gveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. In the Vedas various aspects of the society of that time such as social, economic, political and various other issues are emerged here. R̥gveda Samhita is the oldest text of vedic literature. Among other things, the social issues of the people of the society at that time have emerged very well in R̥gveda. The Vedic culture was enriched by the original tastes and achievement of Aryans and every facet of this culture drew the attention of the world to it. It can be say, the sun of Indian civilization rose towards meridian from the horizon with the beginning of the Vedic culture. The social life of Aryans in the R̥gvedic age was as simple as it was sacred. Their simple lifestyle is reflected in their recreational activities, in their games, sports and Entertainment also. In early India, games and sports were very much concerned about the development of their physique and for the offence and defence. Also games were considered a kind of recreation which played a vital role in the development of man's personality.

Sports, Games and Entertainments in the R̥gvedic Era : Chariot racing has been praised in various hymn of the R̥gveda. The winning a race was essential to the Aryans for getting the women of their choice. It was one of their favourite amusement like races of horse, races of chariots etc; the other being the throwing of dice. A wooden pole termed kār̥sma interpreted by Sāyaṇa in R̥gveda (1/116/7) is to indicate the goal for chariot race as one of the favourite amusements. Rishi says in the first mandala of the R̥gveda,

*'yubam narā stubate pajriyāya kakshībate aradataṃ purandhim.
Kārotarācchaphādasvasya vṛṇaḥ śataṃ kumbhā asincataṃ surāyāḥ.'*ⁱ

There is a reference to horse race in the R̥gveda(1/116/17) where the gods ran a race to win over Sūrya. The deity savitṛ wished to give his daughter Sūryain marriage. All gods assembled for desire by marrying her. It was settled that they would race up to the Āditya and the one who would twin, will get Sūrya. The gods ran the race and the Aśvins won. They asked Sūryato get into their chariot. So the wining of a race as sports is a target in view of getting a daughter among the Aryans.

*'ā bā ratham duhitā suryasya karṣhmebātiṣṭad jayanti.
Viśve devā anvamanyanta hṛdbhiḥ samu śriyā nāsatyā sacethe.'*ⁱⁱ

The other amusement is dice-playing to inspire a person for the enjoyment of victory in the R̥gveda(10/34/01).

The Ṛgveda (1/119/5) confirms the victory of chariot race for the Aśvīnas to win Sūrya. Therefore the Vedic Aryans enjoyed amusements in the race for horse chariot. Told by the Sage Kakshibat in the hym 'Aswinou' -

*'ā bā ratham purumāyam manojubam jīraśvam yajniyam jibase hube.
sahasraketum baninam śatadvasum śrustībanam baribodhamabhi prayah'.ⁱⁱⁱ
'yuborasvinā bapuse yubāyujam ratham bānī yemutarasya śardhyam.
ā vām patitvam sakhyāya jagmuṣī yoṣāvṛṇīta jenyā yubām patī'.^{iv}*

The name of one swift mere is preserved as Viśpalā in the Ṛgveda (1/116/15) where upon it is noted that a broken leg was replaced by the Aśvīnas in a race. To ran a race for horse was treated as game during the Vedic period. Rishi expressed in Ṛgveda,

*'caritram hi verivācchedi parṇam ājā khelasya paritakmyāyām.
Sadyo jaṅghām āyasīm viśpalayāi dhane hite sartave pratyadhattam'.^v*

The hymn of the Ṛgveda (10/34) called 'aksasūkta' is the lamentation of a disappointed gambler presumably the sad soliloquy of the seer poet himself, recollecting his pass life. This hymn is treated to be the soliloquy of a repentant sinner having lost all happiness of life by means of this irresistible attraction to dice playing. In this hymn the disappointed gambler finds a new way of earning for his livelihood in agriculture which was treated to be the most honorable occupation among the early Aryans. The first stanza of the hymn is to be the praise of victory dice-playing. The stanzas like 7, 9 and 12 also bear the testimony of praise to gambling. But the stanzas 3 and 4 of such a hymn are clearly censurable. The defeated gambler reaches the highest disgrace being lost all sympathy of his kith and kin, who forsake him in utter distress. Rishi says in verse number four,

*'anye jayam pari mṛśatyasya yasyāgrdhadvedane vajya akṣhaḥ.
Pitā matā bhrātra enamāhurna jānīmo nayatā baddhametaṃ'.^{vi}*

The introduction of aksasūkta in the collection of Ṛgveda indicates an example of a well thought didactic for social welfare and also a warning against the evils of the dice-playing to be ever memorable of the revelation. The dice playing is all destroying. The dice playing inspires a gambler for the enjoyment of victory. But in pathetic words the disappointed gambler has reached to the climax when he has been forsaken by all as father, mother, brother etc. Nobody has grace on him. The severe attraction of gambling cannot be resisted and therefore the disappointed gambler is tossed between good and evil thoughts. He is helplessly devoid of sense to check himself to refrain from impulsive gambling: The mind of a gambler is tossed up and down with hope and despair. But the king bow down to the dice with great reverence.

Soma was the famous plant which was used for the preparation of the libation of soma made at the Vedic sacrifice. The plant was prepared for use by being pounded with either stone or pounder. The pounding with stone was the normal method of procedure as usual one in the Ṛgveda. The process of pressing the soma was one of the method as practiced at sports in the Vedas. Making and drinking somaras was one of the entertainment of the vedic period. The demon of drought, the great enemies of Indra are pierced and crushed by the discharge of Indra's Thunderbolt in the Ṛgveda (1/32). The clouds are considered as mountains as well cities or fortresses of the Asuras in the Ṛgveda (2/14/6)^{vii}, (8/17/14)^{viii} etc. There appears a dint of mighty god by destroying completely all the weapons of vṛtra caused the water to flow down. All such are devoured in delight of vitals to livings beings. The mighty work is a seed of sports related to a vivid encounter of Indra in the Ṛgveda (8/96) for accomplishment in flowing down the rivers through conquest of water occupied by the dasyus.

The marriage procession proceeds past the spectators. At the presence of the inmates, relatives and even the spectators assembled, some magic formulas and charms are employed for the healing of various diseases. All such sorts of activity reflect the performance of magical charms prevailing as practices to games etcetera during the Aryan period. The clasping of the hand of a bride by the bridegroom in reciting mantras and for prayer to gods to retain long life, good health etcetera is also a form of facets.

Conclusion : Indian sports and games have its glorious history from the Vedic period. In the AtharvaVeda there were some well-defined values saying, duty is in my right hand and the fruits of Victory in my left which bears the same sentiment as the tradition Olympic oath. The founders of Olympic idea had India very much in mind when they were deciding on the various disciplines. There is an amazing link between Greece and India which stretches back to ancient India. The zest for chariot-racing and wrestling are common to both the countries. Most traditional games of India were transmitted to foreign countries where they were developed further. In ancient India there was a glorious history of sports and games. But now a days the tradition of sports and games, mainly outdoor games, is ebbing when the other countries are developing about the games and sports. And that is, tradition of ebbing of outdoor games, harmful to human being. The young generations of our country are rare interested to outdoor games and sports. Most of them are addicted to other amusements like T.V, Computer games, mobile games etcetera so they are physically and mentally unfit than the human being of ancient period. So it is very important to retain the tradition of sports and games for mastership development.

List of Abbreviations :

1. Ed.- Editor
2. ed. – Edition
3. Enl. – Enlarge
4. Vol. – Volume
5. Rpt. Reprint
6. 1st – First
7. 2nd – Second
8. 3rd – Third

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ⁱ Rig-Veda – 1/116/7

ⁱⁱ Rig-Veda – 1/116/17

ⁱⁱⁱ Rigveda – 1/119/1

^{iv} Rigveda – 1/119/5

^v Rig-Veda – 1/116/15

^{vi} Rig-Veda – 10/34/4

^{vii} ‘adharyabaḥ yaḥ satam śamvarasya puraḥ bibheda.
Aśmanā iva pūrvīḥ varcināḥ śatam indraḥ sahasram avapat bhatat.’

^{viii} ‘vāspasate dhruvā sthunaṃsatram somyanām.
drapso bhettā purām śaśvatīnāmindro munīnām sakhā.’