

VEDIC ROOTS OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT

Dr. Tumpa Jana

Assistant Professor, Narajole Raj College, Narajole, India

Abstract: This paper explores the economic dimensions embedded within the Four Vedas—Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda - through a textual and analytical study of selected mantras. The study highlights various aspects of Vedic economic life, including agricultural production, cattle wealth, trade, labour specialization, navigation, wealth accumulation, economic ethics, and social welfare. Particular attention has been given to concepts such as productive labour, resource management, commercial exchange, debt repayment, and collective prosperity, which reveal an advanced socio-economic consciousness in Vedic society. The paper further examines how religious practices were closely interconnected with material well-being and economic organization. By analyzing economic references scattered throughout the Vedic hymns, the study attempts to demonstrate that the Vedas preserve some of the earliest foundations of Indian economic thought and provide valuable insights into the socio-economic structure of ancient India.

Introduction

The Four Vedas—Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda—occupy a distinguished position as the earliest repositories of knowledge in Indian civilization. Although the Vedas are generally regarded as the foundation of religious and spiritual literature, they also provide a vivid picture of the economic life of ancient Indian society. Various aspects of agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, crafts, medicine, wealth, navigation, administrative organization, and occupational division of labour are found scattered throughout the Vedic hymns.

The economic foundation of Vedic society primarily rested upon agriculture and cattle-rearing. Consequently, repeated prayers were offered to the deities for food, fertile land, cows, horses, and material prosperity. At the same time, references to merchants, carpenters, chariot-makers, physicians, householders, and military leaders indicate the gradual development of specialization of labour and economic organization within society. Mentions of river routes, maritime journeys, and the exchange of goods further suggest the existence of an early system of trade and commerce. Likewise, references to institutions such as the Sabhā, Samiti, the king, and the Grāmaṇī (village chief) provide evidence of the growth of social and political administration.

Thus, beneath the religious and liturgical framework of the Vedic hymns, one can discern the reflection of a well-structured economic system in ancient India. Therefore, Vedic literature holds immense significance as an authentic and valuable source for the study of the history of Indian economic thought.

Rigveda

The hymns of the Rigveda provide a vivid reflection of the economic and social life of the Vedic age. Alongside religious worship and ritualistic practices, the text contains numerous references to agriculture, cattle-rearing, trade, crafts, medicine, navigation, wealth, administration, and occupational division of labour, thereby revealing the existence of a well-organized economic system. Food, land, cattle, and wealth were regarded as the principal means of livelihood, and repeated prayers were offered to various deities for prosperity, nourishment, and social welfare. Hence, the Rigvedic hymns are not merely religious compositions; they also serve as valuable records of the economic realities of the Vedic period.

Agriculture constituted the principal foundation of the Vedic economy. The mantra “अक्षैर्मा दीव्यः कृषिमित् कृषस्व वित्ते रमस्व बहुमन्यमानः”¹ advises people to abandon gambling and engage in agriculture, thereby establishing farming as a stable and honourable occupation. Similarly, the mantras “सीरा युगा तनुध्वं कृते योनौ वपतेह बीजम्”, “शुनं नः फाला अभि भूमिं कृशन्तु”, “शुनं वाहाः शुनं नरः”, and “शुनासीरा विमां वाचं जुषेथाम्”² contain prayers for successful ploughing, sowing of seeds, and agricultural prosperity. In the mantra “सीता नः सुभगा भव”³, the earth is personified as a benevolent goddess, while “उर्वरापते मधुमन्तमूर्मि धेनुरिव पयो अस्मासु धुक्व”⁴ compares fertile land to a nourishing cow. These references clearly indicate that agricultural production formed the backbone of the Vedic economy.

The importance of food grains is also emphasized in several hymns. In “अन्नपतेऽन्नस्य नो देहि”⁵, direct prayers are offered for food. The mantra “ऊर्जं नो धेहि द्विपदे चतुष्पदे”⁶ seeks nourishment for both humans and animals. References to barley appear in “यवं वृकेण चर्षणीः”⁷, while “करम्भ ओषधे भव”⁸ suggests the preparation of food substances. The mantra “पुरोडाशं नो अन्धसः”⁹ refers to sacrificial food offerings. These passages demonstrate that food production and grain cultivation were essential pillars of economic stability.

Cattle-rearing constituted another major component of the Vedic economy. Cows were regarded as the chief symbols of wealth and prosperity. The mantras “गावो भगो गाव इन्द्रो मे अच्छान्” and “गावः सोमस्य प्रथमस्य भक्षः”¹⁰ glorify the importance of cows. In “यूयं गावो मेदयथा कृशं चित्”¹¹, cows are praised for their nourishing qualities. The mantra “दुहामश्विभ्यां पयो अच्येयम्”¹² extols the milk of the inviolable cow, while “मा गामनागामदितिं वधिष्ट”¹³ condemns cow slaughter. These references reveal that cattle possessed both economic and religious significance in Vedic society.

The importance of horses is likewise noteworthy. In “अश्वस्य शीर्षा”¹⁴, the power and grandeur of the horse are celebrated. The mantra “मा नो अश्वा अनमीवास ईषत”¹⁵ prays for the health and well-being of horses. Horses served as important means of warfare, transportation, and trade. Other animals are also mentioned in mantras such as “अजा इव पश्वः”¹⁶, “ऊर्णावती युवतिः”¹⁷, and “वृषभश्चर्षणीनाम्”¹⁸. Thus, animal husbandry played a significant role not only in food and dairy production but also in the broader economic structure.

¹ Rgveda 10.34.13

² Rgveda 4.57.5

³ Rgveda 4.57.6

⁴ Rgveda 4.57.8

⁵ Rgveda 1.187.10

⁶ Rgveda 1.187.9

⁷ Rgveda 1.117.21

⁸ Rgveda 3.52.7

⁹ Rgveda 1.162.3

¹⁰ Rgveda 6.28.1

¹¹ Rgveda 6.28.6

¹² Rgveda 1.164.27

¹³ Rgveda 8.101.15

¹⁴ Rgveda 1.163.2

¹⁵ Rgveda 1.162.21

¹⁶ Rgveda 1.162.2

¹⁷ Rgveda 10.26.6

¹⁸ Rgveda 4.58.3

The Rigveda also reflects the considerable development of crafts and industries. The mantra “तक्षाणं विश्वरूपम्”¹⁹ refers to carpentry and craftsmanship. “सूचीभिः शिष्यन्तु” (Rgveda 10.85.7) suggests the existence of sewing practices. The weaving industry is indicated in “तन्तुं तन्वन्” (Rgveda 10.130.1). Leatherwork is reflected in “चर्मणा पृथिवीं दधे” (Rgveda 5.85.5), while “वपा तक्षति” (Rgveda 10.72.2) points to carving or metal craftsmanship. Particularly significant is the mantra “रथकारो अश्वकारः”²⁰, which mentions chariot-makers and horse-trainers. These examples demonstrate that occupational crafts and industries had attained an organized form in Vedic society.

The concept of occupational specialization and social organization is also clearly visible in the Rigveda. The mantra “कारुरहं ततो भिषक्” (Rgveda 9.112.3) refers to poets, physicians, and other professionals. Medical knowledge is reflected in “भिषजा भेषजेभिः” (Rgveda 1.116.16). References to priests and sacrificial functions occur in “पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य” and “होता नो अध्वरस्य” (Rgveda 1.12.1). Intellectual and literary activities are emphasized in “गायत्रेण प्रति मिमीते अर्कम्” (Rgveda 1.164.24), “छन्दोभिर्यज्ञमायतन्” (Rgveda 9.97.9). These references indicate that knowledge-based professions enjoyed considerable prestige in Vedic society.

Important information regarding trade and wealth is also found in the Rigveda. The mantra “इन्द्रमहं वणिजं चोदयामि” (Rgveda 3.15.1) refers to merchants and commercial activity. In “शुनं नो अस्तु प्रपणो विक्रयश्च” (Rgveda 4.24.9), prayers are offered for successful buying and selling. The desire for wealth and prosperity is expressed in “द्रविणोदा द्रविणसस्पतिः” (Rgveda 1.15.7), “भगं धियं उदव ददानः”²¹, and “रयिं नः चित्रमश्विनम्” (Rgveda 1.46.2). These passages suggest that wealth was regarded as a major indicator of social prestige and economic stability.

Navigation and transportation systems had also developed considerably during the Vedic age. The mantras “नावा मतीनां यातं पाराय” (Rgveda 1.46.7), “शतारित्रां नावम्” (Rgveda 1.116.3), and “अरित्रं वां दिवः पृथु” (Rgveda 1.116.4) refer to boats, navigation, and riverine transport. These references indicate that water-based trade and communication formed an important component of the Vedic economy. Rivers served as important channels connecting different settlements and facilitating the exchange of goods.

The Rigveda also presents clear evidence of political and administrative organization. The mantra “सभा च मा समितिश्च” (Rgveda 10.34.6) refers to the ‘Sabhā’ and ‘Samiti’, institutions associated with political deliberation and governance. References to rulers and administrative officers occur in “राजानं चर्षणीनाम्” (Rgveda 8.70.1), “सम्राजं चर्षणीनाम्” (Rgveda 1.126.2), “ग्रामणीः” (Rgveda 10.62.11), and “सेनानीर्नः” (Rgveda 9.96.6). Family-based economic organization is reflected in “गृहपतिश्च नो दमे” (Rgveda 7.15.2) and “दम्पती समनसा” (Rgveda 1.185.1). Furthermore, concerns regarding theft and protection of property appear in “स्तेनासो ये च तस्कराः” (Rgveda 7.104.24) and “मा वः स्तेन ईशत” (Rgveda 1.42.2). These references demonstrate that the protection of wealth and social security were considered important aspects of Vedic economic life.

Thus, the hymns of the Rigveda contain multidimensional discussions on agriculture, cattle-rearing, food production, crafts, trade, transportation, medicine, administration, and wealth. Beneath their religious framework, these hymns reflect a realistic picture of life and reveal the existence of a well-organized

¹⁹ Rgveda 10.81.3

²⁰ Rgveda 9.112.2

²¹ Rgveda 7.41.2

economic structure in Vedic society. Therefore, the Rigveda occupies a position of great importance as one of the earliest and most valuable sources for the study of ancient Indian economic thought.

Yajurveda

The mantras of the Yajurveda present a realistic and vivid reflection of the economic consciousness of Vedic society. Alongside religious rituals and sacrificial practices, the text expresses deep concern for daily life, an agriculture-based economy, cattle-rearing, trade, wealth, gold, strength, and social prosperity. Food, cows, horses, land, and wealth were regarded as indispensable elements of human livelihood, and therefore repeated prayers were offered to the deities for prosperity, nourishment, and abundance. Within these hymns, the foundational principles of ancient Indian economic thought are clearly reflected.

Food and nourishment were conceived as the primary sources of life and vitality. In the mantra “ऊर्जं च मे यज्ञेन कल्पताम्”²² (Yajurveda 18.11), a prayer is offered for ‘ūrjā’ or nourishing energy. Here, the term ‘ūrjā’ signifies not merely food, but also vitality and productive power. The mantra “ईषं च मे” (Yajurveda 18.9) seeks food and the means of sustenance. Similarly, “ऊर्जं नो धेहि द्विपदे चतुष्पदे”²³ prays for nourishment for both humans and animals, while “ऊर्जं चित्रावस्तम्”²⁴ expresses the desire for abundant and varied prosperity. In “मयि देवा द्रविणमा यजन्ताम्” (Yajurveda 7.46) and “अस्मासु द्रविणं धत्”²⁵, prayers are offered to the gods for wealth and the means of livelihood. These references clearly demonstrate that food production and nourishment were regarded as the principal foundations of economic stability.

The agricultural basis of society is also prominently reflected in the Yajurveda. The mantra “माता भूमिः” (Yajurveda 12.12) personifies the earth as a mother. This is not merely a poetic metaphor but a profound recognition of agrarian life. In “पृथिवीं दद” (Yajurveda 12.29), prayers are offered for the stability and fertility of the earth. The mantra “सुम्नायनी पृथिवी” (Yajurveda 12.63) describes the earth as benevolent and auspicious. The importance of forest and tree resources is reflected in “ये वृक्षाणाम्” (Yajurveda 8.37), while “कृष्यै त्वा” (Yajurveda 18.45) directly indicates agricultural activity. These references reveal that land, trees, and agricultural production constituted the primary basis of economic life.

The importance of cattle-rearing is likewise strongly reflected in the economic thought of the Yajurveda. Cows were regarded as the foremost symbols of wealth and prosperity. In “गव्यं नः” (Yajurveda 13.44), prayers are offered for cattle wealth. “गोभिः संनद्धम्” (Yajurveda 13.40) expresses the desire for prosperity enriched with cows, while “गवां पोषेण” (Yajurveda 8.28) prays for the nourishment and increase of cattle. The mantra “बहु गोधनम्” (Yajurveda 17.84) seeks abundant cattle wealth, and “गावः पिबन्तु” (Yajurveda 18.39) expresses the desire for milk-yielding cows. Likewise, “सा नो पयस्वती दुहाम्”²⁶ invokes the image of a cow overflowing with milk. Cows were sources of milk, clarified butter, and curd, and they also played a vital role in agriculture and sacrificial rituals. Thus, cattle wealth represented one of the chief indicators of economic power in Vedic society.

²² Yajurveda 18.11

²³ Yajurveda 11.83

²⁴ Yajurveda 11.62

²⁵ Yajurveda 17.68

²⁶ Yajurveda 18.24

The significance of horses is equally noteworthy. The mantra “वाजिनीवती” (Yajurveda 8.16) praises horse-rich prosperity, while “अश्ववतीः” (Yajurveda 8.76) refers to wealth accompanied by horses. In “अश्वस्य धावतः” (Yajurveda 6.16), the speed and strength of the horse are glorified. The mantra “वाजश्च मे” (Yajurveda 18.13) expresses the desire for strength and vigorous prosperity. In Vedic society, horses served as important means of warfare, transportation, and commercial communication. Consequently, horse wealth symbolized both political authority and economic strength.

The aspiration for wealth is deeply reflected in numerous mantras. In “रायस्पोषेण सं सृज” (Yajurveda 18.37), prayers are offered for prosperity and material abundance. “रायस्पोषमस्मासु धेहि”²⁷ seeks the establishment of wealth and nourishment among the people, while “रायस्पोषाय त्वा” (Yajurveda 4.9) invokes the growth of prosperity. The mantra “द्रविणं च मे” (Yajurveda 18.10) contains a direct prayer for wealth. In “बृहस्पतिर्नः परिपातु पश्चात्”²⁸, protection and welfare are sought from Brhaspati, while “विश्वतो नः सुविताय”²⁹ (Yajurveda 22.29) prays for well-being and prosperity from all directions. The mantra “सहस्रपोषं दधातु” (Yajurveda 17.46) expresses the aspiration for thousandfold prosperity. Through terms such as ‘rāyi’, ‘draviṇa’, and ‘poṣa’, these hymns reveal the concepts of wealth, property, and economic power.

The importance of gold and precious metals is also significant. In “चन्द्रं रायिं सुवर्णम्” (Yajurveda 4.24), gold is presented as a symbol of splendour and prosperity. The mantra “हिरण्यं च मे” (Yajurveda 18.19) directly prays for gold, while the expression “हिरण्यवर्णाः” (Yajurveda 34.21) reflects the brilliance and magnificence associated with it. Gold served as a major medium of ornamentation, sacrificial utility, and accumulation of wealth. These references indicate the development of a metal-based economic consciousness.

Commercial mentality and trade activities are likewise evident in the Yajurveda. The mantra “इन्द्रमहं वणिजं चोदयामि” (Yajurveda 9.50) contains a significant reference to merchants and commerce. In “धनेन धनमिच्छमानः” (Yajurveda 10.32), the desire to acquire further wealth through existing wealth is clearly expressed. The mantra “शुनं नो अस्तु प्रपणो विक्रयश्च”³⁰ prays for successful buying and selling, while “शुनं नो अस्तु चरित्रम्”³¹ seeks safety and success in commercial journeys. These references clearly indicate that exchange, trade, and mercantile activities formed important aspects of the Vedic economy.

Special importance was also attached to strength, vigour, and efficiency. In “बलं च मे” (Yajurveda 18.15), prayers are offered for physical strength, while “सहश्च मे” (Yajurveda 18.14) seeks endurance and resilience. The mantra “ओजो मे” (Yajurveda 18.22) invokes vital energy, and “वीर्यं च मे” (Yajurveda 18.37) expresses the desire for courage and productive capacity. Labour power was indispensable in agriculture, cattle-rearing, and social life; therefore, strength and efficiency were regarded as essential foundations of economic prosperity.

Thus, the mantras of the Yajurveda reflect multidimensional ideas relating to food, agriculture, land, cattle, horses, wealth, gold, trade, strength, and social prosperity. Beneath the religious framework of these hymns,

²⁷ Yajurveda 17.36

²⁸ Yajurveda 4.37

²⁹ Yajurveda 22.29

³⁰ Yajurveda 30.22

³¹ Yajurveda 30.23

one can clearly perceive the production system of an agrarian society, the concept of wealth, commercial mentality, and the aspiration for a prosperous life. Consequently, the Yajurveda occupies a distinguished place as an authentic and valuable source for the study of ancient Indian economic thought.

Samaveda

Agriculture, cattle-rearing, and wealth-centered social organization constituted some of the principal foundations of the economic life of the Vedic age. Numerous mantras of the Samaveda reflect not only religious worship but also the practical struggles of human life, including concerns for food production, cattle wealth, horses, gold, strength, security, and social prosperity. The economic consciousness reflected in these hymns is not merely materialistic; rather, it is intimately connected with religion, society, and collective welfare. Consequently, repeated prayers were offered to the deities for food, wealth, cattle, and happiness.

Food was conceived as the primary basis of human existence. In the mantra “अन्ने स्वर्भवो मयः”³², it is declared that happiness, joy, and welfare reside in food itself. Here, food is regarded not merely as sustenance but as the principal force sustaining life. Again, in “अन्नं ओ भूमसि पर घृतमयम्”³³, food is described as nourishing like clarified butter (*ghṛta*), thereby emphasizing its purity and nutritive value. The mantra “अन्नस्य नो देहि” (Sāmaveda 873) contains a direct prayer for food, while “अन्नम् बहु कृणुहि” (Sāmaveda 901) expresses the desire for abundant grain production. These references clearly indicate that food supply formed the central basis of economic security. The conception of food in the Samaveda thus reflects the agrarian realities of Vedic society.

The relationship between nature and agrarian economy was extremely profound. In “यथा न वसवस्कृतिः” (Sāmaveda 836), aspirations for fertility and agricultural prosperity are expressed. The mantra “पर्जन्यो वृष्टिमावहत्”³⁴ invokes the rain-god for sufficient rainfall, recognizing that agricultural production was impossible without rain. In “शं नो भूमिः” (Sāmaveda 943), prayers are offered for the earth to become auspicious and fertile. The mantra “द्यौः पिता पृथिवी माता”³⁵ personifies heaven and earth as father and mother, reflecting a deep awareness of nature-dependent agricultural life. Likewise, “सुक्षेत्रिया सुगातुया” (Sāmaveda 1512) expresses the desire for fertile fields and a prosperous life. These prayers demonstrate that agriculture formed the backbone of the economic structure and that favourable natural conditions were essential for production.

Cattle-rearing was likewise an indispensable aspect of economic life. Cows, in particular, were regarded as the foremost symbols of wealth and prosperity. In “गवां पोषम्” (Sāmaveda 1284), prayers are offered for the nourishment and increase of cattle. The term ‘poṣa’ signifies not merely numerical growth but also health and productive capacity. The mantra “गोमद् रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 865) seeks wealth enriched with cows, while “अग्ने रयीं नः” (Sāmaveda 1257) invokes Agni for wealth and cattle. In “गोभिरश्वैः समनक्त” (Sāmaveda 1093), the aspiration for a life enriched with cows and horses is expressed. Similarly, “गोमन्तं नः कृधि” (Sāmaveda 1379) prays for cattle-filled prosperity, while “गावो भगो गाव इन्द्रः”³⁶ identifies cows with

³² Sāmaveda 825

³³ Sāmaveda 829

³⁴ Sāmaveda 972

³⁵ Sāmaveda 1246

³⁶ Sāmaveda 1463

fortune and abundance. This cattle-centered outlook clearly indicates that cows constituted one of the chief measures of economic strength.

The importance of horses is also particularly significant. In “अश्ववतीः” (Sāmaveda 301), prosperity associated with horses is praised. The mantra “अश्विनं रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 865) prays for wealth accompanied by horses, while “अश्वस्य भूरेः” (Sāmaveda 1432) glorifies the strength and speed of the horse. In “अश्ववत् धनम्” (Sāmaveda 1784), horse-rich wealth is presented as a symbol of prosperity. Likewise, “अश्वान् नो धेहि” (Sāmaveda 1808) contains a prayer for horses. Horses possessed immense importance in warfare, transportation, and commercial communication; consequently, they symbolized both political power and economic prosperity.

A deep aspiration for wealth is reflected throughout numerous mantras. In “वयं स्याम पतयो रयीणाम्” (Sāmaveda 1880), the desire to become masters of wealth is expressed. The mantra “रयीं नः चित्रमश्विनम्”³⁷ seeks splendid and prosperous riches, while “सहस्रिणं रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 631) reflects the aspiration for thousandfold wealth. “बहु नो रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 987) prays for abundant prosperity. Likewise, “रयीं धेहि” (Sāmaveda 1124), “रयीं सुवीरम्” (Sāmaveda 1560), “चित्रं रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 1748), and “बृहन्तं रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 1358) portray wealth as the principal source of strength, prestige, and prosperity. These hymns reveal the realistic economic aspirations of Vedic society.

References to gold (*hiranya*) also indicate economic advancement. In “हिरण्यम्” (Sāmaveda 991), gold is identified as a valuable form of wealth. The mantra “हिरण्यपाणिः” (Sāmaveda 1263) suggests a state of affluence associated with gold, while “हिरण्यदा” (Sāmaveda 1684) praises the giver of gold and wealth. The expression “हिरण्यवर्णाः” (Sāmaveda 1796) symbolically represents the brilliance and splendour of gold. These references indicate that the concept of metal-based wealth accumulation had already developed during the Vedic age.

Great importance was also attached to strength, vigour, and productive capacity. In “बलम् नो देहि” (Sāmaveda 752), prayers are offered for strength, while “सहः कृणुहि” (Sāmaveda 1312) seeks endurance and power. The mantra “शवः पृतनासहम्” (Sāmaveda 1466) invokes victorious strength capable of overcoming enemies. In “वीरवत् पत्यमानम्” (Sāmaveda 1721), the aspiration for heroic offspring and a powerful society is expressed, while “सुवीर्यं दधातु” (Sāmaveda 1598) prays for strength and productive energy. These references demonstrate that labour power and productive efficiency were regarded as essential foundations of economic prosperity.

The idea of collective welfare also occupies an important place in the Samaveda. In “विश्वानि देव सवितः” (Sāmaveda 974), universal well-being is invoked. The mantra “स्वस्ति न इन्द्रः” (Sāmaveda 1873) prays for peace and security within society. Likewise, “शं नः करति” (Sāmaveda 1499) and “भद्रं नो अपि वातय” (Sāmaveda 1505) express aspirations for collective happiness and welfare. These references suggest that economic prosperity was not merely individualistic but was rooted in clan-based and community-oriented consciousness.

³⁷ Sāmaveda 865

The close relationship between religion and economic life is also clearly evident. In “सोम रयीं दधातु नः” (Sāmaveda 592), “अस्मभ्यं सहस्रिणं रयीम्”³⁸, “इन्द्रो नो धनमाभरत्” (Sāmaveda 1088), “मघवद्भ्यो रयीम्” (Sāmaveda 1588), and “राधो दधातु” (Sāmaveda 1642), wealth, food, and prosperity are sought through sacrificial worship and Soma rituals. The belief that the gods would bestow wealth, cattle, and prosperity upon those who pleased them reveals the intimate relationship between religion and economic life.

Concerns regarding security and protection of property were likewise highly significant. In “पाहि नो अग्ने” (Sāmaveda 1045), “त्रायस्व नः” (Sāmaveda 1198), “द्विषो जहि” (Sāmaveda 1482), “अरित्रान् नुद” (Sāmaveda 1574), and “रक्षा नो गृहम्” (Sāmaveda 1668), prayers are offered for protection against enemies, safeguarding of wealth, and security of the household. Economic stability was thus considered inseparable from the protection of property and social order.

Thus, the mantras of the Samaveda present a vivid and multidimensional picture of Vedic economic life through their discussions of food, agriculture, cattle, horses, gold, wealth, strength, security, and social welfare. Beneath the religious framework of these hymns lies a profound reflection of the production system of an agrarian society, its concept of wealth, social stability, and aspiration for prosperity. Consequently, the Samaveda occupies a distinguished position as a valuable and authentic source for the study of the early history of Indian economic thought.

Atharvaveda

The mantras of the Atharvaveda present a clear and multidimensional reflection of the economic thought of Vedic society. Alongside religious worship, the text discusses various aspects of practical life, including wealth, agriculture, cattle-rearing, trade, debt, preservation of property, social prosperity, and economic ethics. Prosperity and material well-being were regarded as essential elements of human life, and therefore repeated prayers were offered to the deities for wealth, food, cattle, and security. These hymns clearly reveal important foundations of ancient Indian economic thought.

Prosperity and wealth are presented as among the foremost aspirations of human life. In the mantras “अथा वयं भगवन्तः स्याम”³⁹, “जेदेतारि भगवन्तः स्याम”⁴⁰, “तव श्रियमुपनुद्मसि” (Atharvaveda 7.37.10), “वसु स्वर्हि तस्या भर”⁴¹, and “वसुमान् भूयासं वसु मयि धेहि”⁴², prayers are offered for prosperity and wealth. Here, the terms *bhaga*, *vasu*, and *śrī* symbolize fortune, riches, and abundance. In “अस्मासु द्रविणानि धत्त” (Atharvaveda 7.82.1), the gods are invoked to bestow auspicious wealth, while “आसाम् सर्ववीरा भवाम् सर्ववेदसः” (Atharvaveda 19.41.6) expresses the aspiration to become masters of all forms of wealth. The mantra “उत नः नग्ना वोषती” (Atharvaveda 1.10.4) condemns poverty and miserliness, whereas “गुणा च भगवत्तमः” (Atharvaveda 2.2.2) identifies prosperity and fortune as among the highest qualities of human life. These references demonstrate that wealth was regarded as a principal basis of social prestige and secure living.

³⁸ Sāmaveda 631

³⁹ Atharvaveda 7.13.10

⁴⁰ Atharvaveda 3.16.4

⁴¹ Atharvaveda 20.43.1

⁴² Atharvaveda 16.1.4

The importance of food and nourishment is likewise strongly emphasized. In “अनू दर्श मा कृष्टिः प्रजया च धनेन च”⁴³, the aspiration for a life enriched with progeny and wealth is expressed. The mantra “ऊर्जस्वती पयसा पिन्वमाना”⁴⁴ invokes nourishing and life-sustaining food. In “धनं धान्यं पशुं बहुपुत्रलाभम्”⁴⁵, the desire for wealth, grain, cattle, and numerous offspring is clearly reflected. Similarly, “धाता दधातु नो रयीम्” (Atharvaveda 7.17.1) and “धाता विश्वा वार्या दधातु” (Atharvaveda 7.17.3) contain prayers for food and material prosperity. These references indicate that food production and nourishment were regarded as the principal foundations of economic stability.

The importance of cattle-rearing is reflected in many dimensions. In “प्रजया पशुभिर्धनेन” (Atharvaveda 8.1.4), prayers are offered for progeny, cattle wealth, and prosperity. The mantra “समः समन्तो युवास्य गोप्यग्रेः”⁴⁶ describes a prosperous condition enriched with cows and horses. In “रायस्पोषं नः सचताम्” (Atharvaveda 9.4.22), “रायस्पोषेण सं सृज” (Atharvaveda 6.81.2), “रायस्पोषं यजमानाय धेहि” (Atharvaveda 17.52.1), and “रायस्पोषेण सचामहे”⁴⁷, prayers are offered for cattle wealth and economic nourishment. The term *rāyispoṣa* symbolizes wealth, livestock, and productive prosperity. In “सा न आयुष्मती प्रजा रायस्पोषेण सं सृज”⁴⁸, long life, progeny, and cattle wealth are invoked together as integrated forms of prosperity. Likewise, “रयीं दधातु चेतनिम्” (Atharvaveda 19.4.1), “रायश्च पोषश्च संचर” (Atharvaveda 1.93.3), “रायश्च पोषश्च नः सचताम्”⁴⁹, “रायस्पोषं वः पुष्यामि” (Atharvaveda 8.5.2), and “रायस्पोषं सचामहे” (Atharvaveda 3.15.8) further reveal the close relationship between cattle wealth and economic prosperity.

The significance of gold and precious metals is also noteworthy. In “हिरण्यवर्णा सुभगा हिरण्यकशीपुरी” (Atharvaveda 5.7.10), “हिरण्यवर्णैर्द्रविणैः” (Atharvaveda 6.123.2), “शतं निष्कान्” (Atharvaveda 20.127.2), “शत निष्का हिरण्ययाः” (Atharvaveda 20.137.5), “हिरण्य निष्का एते” (Atharvaveda 7.99.1), and “पञ्च रुक्माः” (Atharvaveda 1.15.25), references are made to gold, ornaments, and metal-based wealth. Gold functioned as a symbol of prosperity, social prestige, and valuable property. The mantra “विशुर्द्रविणः सुभगा” (Atharvaveda 20.45.2) invokes supreme prosperity and abundance. These references indicate that the consciousness of metal-based wealth had already attained a considerable level of development in Vedic society.

Important discussions concerning debt and economic morality are also found in the Atharvaveda. The mantra “अनृणा अस्मिन् अनृणाः परस्मिन्”⁵⁰ expresses the desire to remain free from debt both in this world and in the next. In “अपमित्य धान्यं यज्जग्ध्वा” (Atharvaveda 6.117.2), “अपमित्यमप्रतितं यदस्मि”⁵¹, “इदमहम् अनृणो भवामि”⁵², and “इहैव सनतः प्रददाम्” (Atharvaveda 6.117.3), the ethics of borrowing and repayment are discussed. Likewise, “यददीव्यन् ऋणमहं कृणोमि” (Atharvaveda 6.117.1), “यथा कल्पं यथा शमं ऋणं संनयामसि” (Atharvaveda 19.50.1), and “यथैव देवो देवतेभ्यः” (Atharvaveda 6.117.2) portray repayment of

⁴³ Atharvaveda 7.81.3

⁴⁴ Atharvaveda 20.84.2

⁴⁵ Atharvaveda 19.37.10

⁴⁶ Atharvaveda 7.81.4

⁴⁷ Atharvaveda 3.15.8

⁴⁸ Atharvaveda 3.10.3

⁴⁹ Atharvaveda 9.4.22

⁵⁰ Atharvaveda 6.117.3

⁵¹ Atharvaveda 6.117.1

⁵² Atharvaveda 6.117.3

debt as a moral obligation. These references demonstrate that economic honesty and repayment of loans were elevated to the level of religious duty in Vedic society.

References to trade and commercial activities are equally significant. In “इन्द्रमहं वणिजं चोदयामि”⁵³, merchants are encouraged in their commercial pursuits. The mantra “इमां श्रियं शतसेयाय देवीम्” (Atharvaveda 3.15.2) expresses the aspiration for hundredfold profit through trade. In “येन धनेन प्रपणं चरामि” (Atharvaveda 3.15.5), the desire for the growth of commercial capital is articulated, while “प्रतिपणः फलिनं मा कृणोतु”⁵⁴ prays for successful transactions and profitable sales. “यच्च बर्हेलं विपणते”⁵⁵ refers directly to buying and selling of goods. Likewise, “शुनं नो अस्तु चरित्रं च”⁵⁶ and “शुनं नो अस्तु प्रपणो विक्रयश्च”⁵⁷ invoke prosperous trade and beneficial exchange. In “धनेन देवा धनमिच्छमानः” (Atharvaveda 3.15.5), “येन धनेन प्रपणं चरामि”⁵⁸ (Atharvaveda 3.15.5), and “ते मा युवन् यथा क्रीत्वा धनमहराणि” (Atharvaveda 3.15.2), one finds clear ideas relating to capital investment and profit-making. These references indicate that exchange and commercial activities had attained an organized form within society.

There also existed a profound consciousness regarding preservation and ethical use of wealth. In “शतहस्त समाहर सहस्रहस्त संकिर”⁵⁹ the ideal of earning with a hundred hands and distributing with a thousand hands is proclaimed. This reflects not merely accumulation of wealth but also a principle of social distribution. The mantra “निधिं श्रेयिष्ठं परि ददा एकम्” (Atharvaveda 12.3.46) advocates the use of wealth for noble purposes, while “सत्याय च तपसे देवताभ्यः” (Atharvaveda 12.3.48) emphasizes expenditure of wealth in truth, austerity, and righteous action. Thus, the use of wealth was closely associated with morality and social welfare.

Concepts relating to measurement, production, and economic regulation are also reflected in the Atharvaveda. The mantra “इदं मात्रा मीयमाना मिता च” (Atharvaveda 11.1.6) refers to accurate measurement, indicating the importance of commercial justice and economic discipline. In “यद् कुष्टे यद् वधे” (Atharvaveda 12.2.36), wealth acquired through agriculture and crafts is mentioned. Likewise, “कतिविस्तृता ता वि योजन”⁶⁰ and “पञ्च रुक्माः” (Atharvaveda 1.15.25) reflect concepts of measurement and valuation.

Thus, the mantras of the Atharvaveda present a broad and realistic picture of food, wealth, cattle, gold, debt, trade, production, social distribution, and economic ethics. Beneath the religious framework of these hymns lies a vivid portrayal of practical economic life, systems of production, concepts of wealth, and ideals of social welfare. Consequently, the Atharvaveda occupies a position of great importance as an authentic and valuable source for the study of the history of ancient Indian economic thought.

Conclusion

A critical examination of the economic ideas reflected in the Four Vedas clearly reveals that Vedic society was not merely dependent upon religious rituals and spiritual practices; rather, beneath its religious

⁵³ Atharvaveda 3.15.1

⁵⁴ Atharvaveda 3.15.4

⁵⁵ Atharvaveda 12.2.36

⁵⁶ Atharvaveda 3.15.4

⁵⁷ Atharvaveda 3.15.4

⁵⁸ Atharvaveda 3.15.5

⁵⁹ Atharvaveda 3.24.5

⁶⁰ Atharvaveda 20.126.20

framework there existed a well-organized and realistic economic system. The Rigveda presents valuable evidence regarding agriculture, cattle-rearing, trade, navigation, crafts, and administrative organization, thereby reflecting the daily struggles and economic consciousness of Vedic people. The Samaveda particularly emphasizes sacrificial economic activities, social cooperation, and the concept of distribution of wealth. In the Yajurveda, the practical dimensions of economic life are reflected through references to sacrificial materials, land, cattle wealth, duties, and social obligations. The Atharvaveda presents a more realistic and life-oriented picture of medicine, household life, land, agriculture, wealth, trade, and social security.

The overall discussion demonstrates that an agrarian economy formed the principal foundation of Vedic society, while cattle wealth functioned as the chief indicator of prosperity and economic strength. At the same time, the existence of occupational specialization, crafts, commercial exchange, and administrative organization establishes Vedic society as one possessing a developed economic structure. The economic realities reflected beneath the religious hymns of the Four Vedas provide valuable insight into the origin and development of ancient Indian economic thought. Therefore, the Four Vedas are not merely repositories of spiritual wisdom; they also constitute invaluable documents for the study of the economic history and social thought of ancient India.

References

1. Dev, V. L. (2007). Vedic gods and some hymns. Indian Book Centre.
2. Dikshita, Bhaṭṭoji. Siddhāntakaumudī. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
3. Goyal, D. Śuklayajurvedasamhitā. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
4. Gupta, M. Bhāṣāviśeṣaṇam. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
5. Kāthakasamhitā. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
6. Mishra, C. (Ed.). Śuklayajurvedakāṇvasamhitā (Uttarārdhaḥ). Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
7. Mishra, G. Vaidikaṁ vedetaraṁ ca bhāratīyasamskṛtiḥ. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
8. Mishra, Y. K. (Ed.). Vājasaneyiprātiśākhyaṁ. Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
9. Pandeya, U. C. Vaidikavyākaraṇam. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
10. Rai, R. K. Mūlasamskṛtauddharaṇāni. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
11. Sharma, M. R. Vaidikanibandhāvalī. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
12. Sharma, U. (Ed.). Niruktam. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
13. Shastri, A. A. (Trans.). Vaidikavyākaraṇam. Motilal Banarsidass.
14. Shastri, C. Vyākaraṇacandrodayaḥ (Kṛt-taddhitaprakaraṇam). Motilal Banarsidass.
15. Shastri, G. (1999). Atharvavedīyasūktāni. Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.
16. Singh, A. P. Vaidikī sūktasaṅgrahaḥ. Motilal Banarsidass.
17. Śuklayajurvedasamhitā (Uvvaṭabhāṣyasahitam). Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.