

Vedic Religion and Vedic Law: Universal in Bharata

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Abstract

In this note the author proposes that Vedic religion and its allied *Asvamedha* sacrifice was universal in India until about a millennium after the time of the Buddha.

A study of the Gupta dynasty suggests that the early monarchs in this dynasty (circa 300 BCE [1]) were fully Veda-guided emperors who maintained the sanctity of governance and extended its domain via the *Asvamedha* sacrifice. This leads us to enquire as to what led to the decline of this structure of government. Whereas we do not answer this question in this note, we do note that contemporaneously with the early Guptas was the spread of the teachings of the Buddha.

One can consider several teachings of the Buddha, for example in the *Dhammapada*, which directly or indirectly refer to the Vedic structure of society [2]. While innocuously providing an “external” appraisal as a goad to self-effort towards enlightenment, they thereby might have served to undermine the thus-far close-knit Vedic fabric. Since religion and rule, the two topmost (in terms of importance to society-as-a-whole) occupations in the Vedic structure were tightly intertwined, with the rulers being patrons and students of the religious teachers, the weakening of both might have resulted. Whereas the Buddha’s aim was ostensibly to induce enlightenment, as his teachings got morphed with time, and then became codified and hardened, a literal impression likely spread, unraveling the social fabric.

Further investigation along these lines is needed and will be taken up in future work.

References

- [1] Arthur Llewellyn Basham. *A cultural history of India*. Oxford University Press New Delhi, 1975.
- [2] Thomas Byron. *The dhammapada: The sayings of the Buddha*. Random House, 2010.