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SPEAK UP

LEGACY OF THE SHRAMANAS IN ANCIENT TIMES

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Rigveda (RV) is accepted as the oldest extant composition in the World. It contains references to Munis and Rishis. While the 'Rishis' belongs to the Vedic stream, the 'Munis' are accented as belonging to the Shraman stream. Rigveda (RV) also contains references to Lord Rishabhdev (Keshi) regarded as the 'Adishraman' by his followers. Srimad Bhagwat enunciates the story of Lord Rishabhdev in great detail. References are also available establishing Shramanic links with the world outside the present confines of the Indian sub-continent. The Indus script (or Harappan) has defied decoding so far but the objects found during the excavations give rise to a definite feeling that some of them, like the Kayotsarga figure/trident, etc. have a possible Shramanic origin. This raises the tantalizing question about the existence of the Shramans during pre-Vedic ancient times. It is an aspect of History which has not been fully explored and researched.

It would be interesting to locate all possible references connected with the Shramanic way of life, whether within the Indian boundaries or outside and to see if it is possible to account for the dark period of History through the available evidence according to the Shramanic system. Historic records of Sumerian and other concurrent civilizational streams in the 'Euphrates-Tigris' belt also have indications of Shramanic influences. There is no doubt that post-Rigveda, there has been a substantial effect of Shramanic philosophy on the Vedantic/Upanishadic writings. It is indebted to the Shramanic thought for the concept of Moksha and non-violence etc. Even Krishna in Gita has decried indulgence of the Vedic people in 'Karma-kanda' as in the 'Yagnas' with a view to secure heaven and the pleasures of life (Chap II, Slokas 42-46).

There is further evidence to show that the language, used in Rigveda is not 'Sanskrit' but an allied language 'the Chhandas'. Over a long period since Rigveda was first composed till the time it assumed its final form, there have been a lot of changes in content and the language. According to some Historians, the original language of Rigveda is closer to the language of the Zoroastrian 'Gathas' than Panini's Sanskrit. This poses an entirely different perspective to the language of different ethnic and regional groups in the Indo-European belt.

The pre-Vedic period in the Indian sub-continent with its extension up to the Middle East needs to be taken up for comprehensive research & study, collation, and analysis of all the relevant evidence (whether historical or mythological) to evolve, if possible, a plausible answer to the many unanswered questions and the grey areas of the subject history.

