



Research Article

ISSN: 3006-4959 (E)

King Makers of the Vedic Age: Their Evolution and Influence in Modern Governance

Dr. Smriti Sarkar^{1*}

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, Gobardanga Hindu College, West Bengal, India

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution and influence of the king makers or electors, known as Ratnins, in Vedic society, as depicted in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, eleven Ratnins are identified, categorized as *rājāno rājakrit* (dynastic) and *arājāno rājakrit* (non-dynastic). The *Taittareya Brāhmaṇa* mentions twelve Ratnins, while the Atharva-Veda highlights five, including key figures such as the Sūta (bard) and Rathakāra (charioteer). These king makers played crucial roles in society, particularly during the Rājasūya sacrifice, where they received jewels in exchange for their service. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* identifies an expanded group of eleven Ratnins, including the Senānī, Purohita, Mahiṣī, and others, reflecting their growing importance over time. This paper examines their evolving roles in Vedic governance and their lasting impact on modern political systems.

Keywords

Ratnins, Senānī, Govikartana, Saṃgrahitā, Pālāgala.

1. Introduction

The political system was greatly improved during the Vedic period. During that time, the duties of Sabhā and Samiti, the selection of a king, the duties of the king, governance, taxation, etc., were understood as signs of the progress of a state. Among the different systems of government, the state system of government is mentioned in all the Vedas. Evidence

of the ruling system and rulers of the time is found through the mention of Virāt (Vairājya), Samrāt (Samrājya), Rājā, Rājya, Svarāt (Svarājya), Janarājā (Janarājya), etc., in the *R̥gveda* and *Atharva-veda*¹. The *R̥gveda* and *Atharva-veda* mentioned the election of a king by the people². An *Atharva-vedic* mantra was uttered in a chorus for the election of a

¹ *Atharva-veda*, 14.1.43, 4.1.5, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 8.4.186

² *R̥gveda*, 10.173.1-6, *Atharva-veda*, 3.4.1-7

*Corresponding author: sruti089@gmail.com

Received: 21 May 2024; Accepted: 11 October 2024; Published: 30 October 2024



Copyright: © The Author(s), 2024. Published by Siksha O Anusandhan. This is an **Open Access** article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

king³. After the regular election of the king, he was consecrated. The Rājasūya and Vājapeya sacrifices were performed for the election of the king. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentioned the significance of Rājasūya for the king, *rājā vai rājasuyeneṣṭā bhavati. samrāt vājapeyena*.⁴ That is how the king got a special position in society. Some eminent persons were mentioned during the Rājasūya Sacrifice. The *Atharva-veda* states that the king needed many accomplished people to run the kingdom smoothly⁵. The duty of the king is to seek the assistance of knowledgeable and accomplished individuals in various matters for the proper functioning of the kingdom⁶. Later, in the Mauryān period, Kautilya compares the two-wheeled vehicle to the protection of state equality. Here, Kautilya illustrates the point through a beautiful analogy where one wheel of the vehicle represents the king and the other wheel represents the king's assistants. That is, the administration of the kingdom is not carried out by the king alone. So, the king needed the support and favor of people from all sections of society. The role of various representatives of society can be observed in the Ratna Havimsi ceremony, which belongs to Rājasūya. The importance of these Ratnins is mentioned in *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, “yasya vā etānyojasvini bhavanti tadarāstram ojasvī bhavati”⁷. These eminent persons of society are known as Rājakrit or Ratnin. The words Rājakrit and Ratnin are used both for the administration of kingdoms and as an adjunct (helper) to the king. Only five Rājakritas are found in Atharvaveda such as Rathakāra, Kārmāra, Sūta, Grāmaṇī and Rājagana⁸. The numbers increased in later *Brāhmaṇa* texts. There are eleven king makers or electors mentioned in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*⁹. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions two categories of king makers, namely rājāno rājakrit and arājāno

rājakrit, i.e., dynastic and non-dynastic. The *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* mentions twelve Ratnins in society¹⁰.

Literature Review

Many discussions on the ancient officials in the Vedic period can be found in various texts, among them -

A) Sharma, R.N. (1977), *Culture and Civilization Revealed in the Śrautasūtras*, Delhi: Nag Publishers.

In this book, the author has provided research information on social, economic, political, state governance, religious systems, etc. Among these, Political Life is an important chapter where duties of the king, kingship, and king officials (Ratnins) are discussed in detail.

B) Dvivedi, Kapil Dev (2009), *Vedo mein Rājñiti Shāstra*, Gyanpur: Visvabharati Anusandhan Parisad.

This book presents a nice discussion about the different administrators of the state, such as the official financial system and state security. Among them, the eleventh chapter highlights the important responsibilities of the various state administrators. Two types of officials are seen as Rājāno Rājkrit and Arājāno Rājkrit.

C) Altekar (2013), Ananta Sadashiva, *Prāchin Bhāratiya Shāsan-paddhati*, Varanasi: Vishvavidyalay Prakashan.

This book details the state governance in a total of 18 chapters. Here, in ancient times, from the Vedic era to *Dharmashāstra*, Mauryān era and the post-Mauryān era, the rule system is discussed. Among these, the eighth chapter discusses the ministerial circle of the Vedic era, and the author introduces the topic of Ratnins. The author specifically

³ *Atharva-veda*, 20.54.1

⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.1.1.13

⁵ *Atharva -veda*, 7.5.3

⁶ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, 3.7.1

⁷ Ibid

⁸ *Atharva-veda*, 7.5.3

⁹ *ekadasha ratnāni, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.1-13.

¹⁰ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.7.31

mentions the highly respected position of Ratnins during the Vedic period. According to the author, it is very difficult to determine the exclusive function of Ratnins at that time¹¹.

When discussing the Ratnins, he specifically mentions the Mahishi and priests as royal officials. The names Senānī, Suta, Grāmaṇī, Samahartā, and Bhāgdugha are mentioned as departmental heads. The divisions Akṣavāpa and Pālāgala were notable among the courtly class. Later, the Puraṇa and Dharmashāstras specifically mention the positions, designations, and duties of the Mantris (ministers). Subsequently, a detailed description was given on how the cabinet was formed.

As there is currently no king, I have not mentioned in my article the Ratnins associated with the royal family such as Mahishi, etc. I have highlighted in my article the officials who are most needed in finance and governance today, then, and now, from today's perspective.

2. Methods

The present article is quite scientific and has been written following proper modern methods. It begins with a summary, followed by key points, introduction, literature review, research method, research objectives (ancient and modern, etc.), importance, conclusion, references (notes at the end), and a bibliography. The bibliography follows the guidelines of MLA 7th edition and includes primary and secondary reference texts. English, Bengali, and Sanskrit language texts were used as sources, with quotations in English diacritical marks. Websites and computer tools were utilized to collect data using modern methods. Secondary sources include various texts on Vedic political systems and modern a, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Mahābhārata* were also consulted.

3. Result and Discussion

Based on the above information, the possible identity of the officials of the state during the Vedic period is given below. The officials who were directly involved in the economic and administrative systems during the Vedic period are also studied in this article.

A) Position of king makers in Vedic Period:

Among the officials, we can only mention five officials here such as Senānī, Govikartana, Saṃgrahitā, Pālāgala, and Bhāgdugha. These officials are well known to us. Thus, the current article will focus on the significance of the Ratnins during the Vedic period, who played a crucial role in assisting both the king and society.

i) Senānī:

A king had to keep an official army to protect his subjects and his kingdom. In the earliest period of the Indian history, the king had to lead the army on the battle field.

Senānī was known as one of important officials of the king, the leader of the army. He was the chief of the army and responsible for commanding the military. Senā (army) and Senānī (commanding officer) were necessary in the Vedic period to stabilize the kingdom and protect it from outer and internal attacks by enemies. The soldiers were under a special post holder. These superiors were called Senānī. So, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* referred to the King having to give oblation to the Senānī at first¹². Among the Ratnins, Senānī was the foremost. He also assisted the king during war. The 9th mandala of Rigveda mentions the position of the deity Soma as a king and he was accompanied by Senā and Senānī in war. It is mentioned that the army (Senā) marched behind the Senānī enthusiastically¹³. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, this official is called Senāpati, *prithivyai Rājasūyah senāpatih*¹⁴. He is also

¹¹ Altekar, A.S., *Prāchin Bhāratiya Shāsan -pad-dhati*, p.118

¹² *senāyā vai senānīranikam. ekaṃ ratnaṃ yat Senānīh*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.1.1

¹³ *R̥gveda*, 1.9.9.

¹⁴ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VIII. 23.

referred to in the Śatarudriya¹⁵. In *Yayurveda*, Senānī was represented as the deity Rudra¹⁶. The duties of Senānī or Rāstranetā (commanding officer) are mentioned in *Rgveda*¹⁷. The *Rgvedic* mantra, *yo vā senānirmahato gaṇasya*,¹⁸ represents Senānī as a noble hero. We find the description of killing and defeating the enemy in the Atharva-vedic mantras¹⁹. During the ancient period, different categories of soldiers were mentioned. Among them, Bhu-senā (military), Antariksha - senā (air force), Jala- senā (navy) and Patharakṣaka - senā (infantry) are mentioned in *Yajurveda*²⁰. *Śrautasūtras* mentioned chariot -fighters, elephant -fighters, horse – fighters and infantry formed the main portion of the army²¹

Thus, Senānī is presented as one of the highest officers in the state. The preservation of the peace of the kingdom depended upon them.

ii) Govikartana:

In the Vedic period, the officer of the forest department was called Govikartana. The Govikartana is found among the eleven jewels in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*²². *Kathaka Saṃhitā*²³ mentioned them as Gobaccha in place of Govikartana. The term Gobaccha is explained as an eliminator of cows by Sa-yana. The word 'गो' is used here to mean animals. Hence, the two words Govikartana and Gobaccha are used in the sense of slayers of wild animals and protectors of the forest. Thus, Govikartana may be translated as a hunter or slayer of cows. This meaning is not considered correct as their names are

associated with the king, so it is understood that they were placed in a special position during that time. Dr. Kashi Prasad Jaiswal interprets them as Araṇyapāl (Master of the Forest)²⁴. In the *Yajurveda*, both the words Vanap and Dāvap are used to refer to Araṇyapati (Master of the Forest). In the Rudradhyāya of *Yajurveda*, the god Rudra is saluted as the lord of the forest. Here the mantras for him, *Aranyakam pataye namaḥ*, *vanānām pataye namaḥ*²⁵ i.e., they were designated as Araṇyapati and Vanspati here. From the above information, it can be inferred that the Govikartana enjoyed an eminent position at that time.

iii) Pālāgala :

Pālāgala is associated with the labor and skilled class during the Vedic period. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the name of Pālāgala is mentioned among the eleventh Ratnins²⁶. Here, Pālāgala is depicted here as wearing a red turban, bow, arrow and a shield. The Dūtakarma of Pālāgala is also described in this *Brāhmaṇa*. Here, Dr. Kashi Prasad Jaiswal referred to them as distinguished correspondents(couriers)²⁷. In the *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra*, the meaning of Dūtaduhitā has been taken in the sense of Pālāgali. Thus, it is seeming that Pālāgala represents a normal Dūta, i.e., courier, and Pālāgali was the name of the daughter of his during that period.

iv) Saṃgrahitā:

Saṃgrahitā was the term used for the treasurer during the Vedic period. Some eminent scholars

¹⁵ *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā*, XVI.17, *Taittiriya Saṃhitā*, IV.5.2.1

¹⁶ *namaste rudra manyava utota ishava namaḥ*. *Bāhubhyam uta te namaḥ*, *Yajurveda*, 17.16,

¹⁷ *asyedeva shavasa susāntam vivtisvhad brajeṇa vritramitra*, *Rgveda* 1.61.10

¹⁸ *Rgveda*, 7.20.5, 10.34.12.

¹⁹ *imaṃ sangrāmaṃ saṃjitya yathālokaṃ vitisthadvam*, *Atharva-veda*, 11.9.26

²⁰ *Yajurveda*, 16 .54

²¹ *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra*, XV.3

²² *Govikartasya*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.1.10

²³ *Gobacchasya cha grihe*, *Kathaka Saṃhitā*, 15.4.

²⁴ Jayaswal, K.P., *Hindu Polity*, P. 203.

²⁵ *Yajurveda*, 16.18, 20.

²⁶ *pālāgalasya grihān*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.1.11

²⁷ *Ibid*, P. 203.

identified them as special post holders in the finance department. During the inauguration, the king had to obtain permission from them mainly. Samgrahitā was found in the later *Samhitā*²⁸ and *Brāhmaṇas*²⁹. A mantra of the Yajurveda refers to an authority called Samgrahitā³⁰. Sayana mentioned in his commentary of *Taittiriya Samhitā* as Kośādhakṣya. According to Jawasval, they were referred to as Nidhipati or the master of the treasury. In the course of time, they came to be known as Samgrahitā (rural official) during the Mauryan Period³¹. In the Ashokan Period, they were known as Rājuka³². Rājukas means a revenue administrator i.e., during Ashokan reign they were given increased judicial powers in the settlement of disputes. He is of the opinion that in economics it has been called 'Samāhartā'³³.

ν) Bhāgdugha:

Bhāgdugha was an official of the government, tasked with collecting various forms of revenue such as land tax and money. The term Bhāgdugha typically refers to an individual who gathers these resources in a deliberate and methodical manner, demonstrating patience and attention to detail. Some *Samhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa* texts such as *Taittiriya Samhitā*, *Kathaka Samhitā*, *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, *Bhāgdugha* count among the Ratnins³⁴. Sayana has considered them as a 'tax collecting officers in the verses of *Taittiriya Samhitā* and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. Dr. Kashiprasad Jaiswal has considered him as 'the collector of revenue'³⁵

B) Position of these officials in Modern Governance:

This article previously discussed the importance

of certain ancient officials. It also discusses their current roles, positions, significance, and responsibilities in the present situation.

In modern times, the commander-in-chief of the National army is similar to the position of the Senānī. Nowadays, we can refer to Govikartana as heads of the forest department or forest officers, while the word 'Pālāgala' represents a courier or messenger. 'Samgrahitā' is identified as the main treasurer. According to R.S. Sharma, the word 'Bhāgdugha' is variously translated as 'dealer of portions' or 'distribution of food', now known as a tax collector.

5. Conclusions

The king makers represented both the upper classes of society and the common people in the Vedic Period. The number of Ratnis or Rājakritas indicates that the Vedic division had the highest number of incumbents belonging to the Vedic age. Samgrahitā, Bhāgdugha, and Akshavāpa, etc., are said to be possessions associated with accounting. Thus, the financial system of the state was prosperous in all aspects. As a result, the number of Vaiśyas and officials was higher in society.

Based on the aforementioned portrayal of king makers, it is evident that individuals such as Senānī, Govikartana, Pālāgala, Samgrahitā and Bhāgdugha are currently depicted as authoritative figures. Although these specific names are not found exactly today, their position and role exist today under different names. In contemporary society, the leader of the National army holds a comparable role to that of the Senānī. Currently, individuals in charge of the forest department or forest officers can

²⁸ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.8.9.2, *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, 3.6.5

²⁹ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, 1.7.3.5, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 2.25.6

³⁰ *Yajurveda*, 16

³¹ *Arthaśāstra*, 2.5

³² Ibid, P. 134

³³ *Kautilya Arthaśāstra*, p. 297, 503

³⁴ *Taittiriya Samhitā*, 1.8.9.2, *Kathaka Samhitā*, 15.4, *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, 2.6.5

³⁵ *Hindu Polity*, p. 202

be referred to as Govikartana, while Pālāgala signifies a courier or messenger. The title of 'Saṃgrahitā' is attributed to the primary treasurer. The term 'Bhāgadugha' is now recognized as a tax collector.

References

Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Ed. & Trans (Hindi) with the Commentary of Vedārtha-prakāśa of Sāyaṇācārya, Sudhakar Malaviya (1983), Vol.II, Prachyabharati Series-15, Varanasi: Tara Printing Works.

Āpastamba-Śrauta-Sūtra, Ed. & Trans (Eng), G.U. Thite (2004), Vol. I&II, Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation.

Āśwalāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra, Ed. with the Commentary of Gārgya Nārāyana, Amar Kumar Chattopadhyay (1989), Bibliotheca Indica Series 49.1864-74, rpt., Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.

Bhattacharya, Sukumari (1986), *Literature in the Vedic age*, Vol.II, Bagchi Indological Series 4, Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company.

Gonda, Jan (1977), *The Ritual Sūtra*, Vol.I, Fasc.2, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Macdonell, A.A and Kieth. A. B. (1912, 1st ed., London.), *Vedic Index Names and Subjects*, Vol. I, (Rpt. 1958, 1967, 1982, 1995, 2007), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd.

Manu-Smṛiti (1932), Ganganath Jha, Kolakata: Asiatic Society.

Therefore, the significance of these officials extends beyond the Vedic era to contemporary society.

Jayaswal, K.P. (1943), *Hindu Polity (A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times)*, Part I&II, Bangalore: The Bangalore Printing co. & LTD.

Ramgopal (1983), *India of Vedic Kalpa Sūtra*, 2nd ed., Delhi: MLBD

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Mādhyandina), Ed. with the extracts from commentary, Albrecht Weber (1964), Varanasi: CSS Office.

Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra, Ed. & Trans (Eng.), W. Caland (1980), 1953.rpt., Delhi: MLBD.

Suryakanta (2012), *Vaidika Kośa*, Krishnadas Sanskrit Series – 232, Varanasi: Chaoukhaba Krishnadas Academy.

Tripathi, Jataved(2013), *Embodied of Nation in the Vedas*, Delhi: Vidyanidhi Prakashan.

Thite, G.U. (1975), *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-Texts*, Poona: University of Poona. <https://www.jagranjosh.com>, last modified on 12.08.2024, at 9 p.m.