

**Vaiśya** denotes a man, not so much of the people, as of the subject class, distinct from the ruling noble (**Kṣatriya**) and the **Brāhmaṇa**, the higher strata of the Āryan community on the one side, and from the aboriginal **Sūdra** on the other. The name is first found in the **Puruṣa-sūkta** ('hymn of man') in the **Rigveda**,<sup>1</sup> and then frequently from the **Atharvaveda**<sup>2</sup> onwards,<sup>3</sup> sometimes in the form of **Viśya**.<sup>4</sup>

The **Vaiśya** plays singularly little part in Vedic literature, which has much to say of **Kṣatriya** and **Brahmin**. His characteristics are admirably summed up in the **Aitareya Brāhmaṇa**<sup>5</sup> in the adjectives *anyasya bali-kṛt*, 'tributary to another'; *anyasyādya*, 'to be lived upon by another'; and *yathākāmajyeyah*, 'to be oppressed at will.' He was unquestionably taxed by the king (**Rājan**), who no doubt assigned to his retinue the right of support by the people, so that the **Kṣatriyas** grew more and more to depend on the services rendered to them by the **Vaiśyas**. But the **Vaiśya** was not a slave: he could not be killed by the king or anyone else without the slayer incurring risk and the payment of a wergeld (**Vaira**), which even in the **Brahmin** books extends to 100 cows for a **Vaiśya**. Moreover, though the **Vaiśya** could be expelled by the king at pleasure, he cannot be said to have been without property in his land. **Hopkins**<sup>6</sup> thinks it is absurd to suppose that he could really be a landowner when he was subject to removal at will, but this is to ignore the fact that normally the king could not remove the landowner, and that kings were ultimately dependent on the people, as the tales of exiled kings show.

On the other hand, **Hopkins**<sup>7</sup> is clearly right in holding that the **Vaiśya** was really an agriculturist, and that Vedic society was not merely a landholding aristocracy, superimposed upon an agricultural aboriginal stock, as **Baden Powell**<sup>8</sup> urged. Without ignoring the possibility that the **Dravidians** were agriculturists, there is no reason to deny that the **Āryans** were

<sup>1</sup> x. 90, 12.

<sup>2</sup> v. 17, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā*, xxx. 5, etc.

See *Varṇa*.

<sup>4</sup> *Av. vi. 13, 1*; *vājasaneyi Saṃhitā*, xviii. 48, etc.

<sup>5</sup> vii. 29. Cf. *Muir, Sanskrit Texts*, 1<sup>st</sup>, 439.

<sup>6</sup> *India, Old and New*, 222 et seq.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, 210 et seq.

<sup>8</sup> *Indian Village Community*, 190 et seq.

