

### Vedic Period

#### Arrival of Aryans

- Aryans originally lived in the **Steppes region**. Later they moved to central Asia and then came to Punjab region of India around 1500 BC.
- With the advent of Aryans begins the history of Vedic Period (1500 BC-600 BC)
- Vedic period is divided into **Early Vedic or Rigvedic (1500 BC-1000 BC)** & **Later Vedic (1000 BC- 600 BC)**
- Aryans names appear in **Hittite inscription (Anatolia)**, **Kassite inscription (Iraq)** & **Mittani inscription (Syria)**.
- An Iranian text, **Zend Avesta**, talks about names of Aryan Gods like **Indra, Varuna**

#### Rig Vedic Phase (1500 BC- 1000 BC)

- Mains source of information about this age is the **Rig Veda** (10 Mandalas and 1028 Hymns).
- Mandalas/ Chapters from 2 to 8 are called **Saptarishi Manadals** as these are composed by the seven great sages.
- Mandalas 2 to 7 form the earliest portions of the Rigveda while 1 and 10 were latest additions.
- 10th Mandala has the famous **Purush Sukta** that describes cosmic creation (Adi Purush) along with 4-fold Varna System.
- 3rd Mandala, composed by Vishwamitra, contains **Gayatri Mahamantra** addressed to Goddess Savitri.
- Early Vedic people or Aryans settled in the land of seven rivers, called **Sapt Sindhu** à Sindhu (Indus), Vitasta (Jhelum), Asikani (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Bipasa (Beas), Satudri (Satluj), and Saraswati (Ghagghar).
- Their region covered present day parts of Afghanistan, Punjab and Haryana.
- **Sindhu (Indus) is the most mentioned** and **Saraswati is the most regarded (holy river)**.
- Saraswati Valley was called **Brhmavarta**.
- No mention of Himalayas or Ganges

### Society

- Rig Vedic communities comprised of populations called '**janas**' along with several non-aryan '**janas**'.
- Society was divided into Aryans and Non-aryans, non-aryans were called '**Dasas**' and '**Dasyus**'. Aryans were soft towards Dasa & hostile towards Dasyus.
- It was an **egalitarian society**, social differentials were not sharp.
- **Slaves** were used for domestic purpose & not for agriculture.
- The 4-fold Varna order and rigid caste-system was not yet completely developed.
- The term Varna used in Rigveda with reference to only Aryans & Dasa having respectively fair & dark complexion.
- Rig Vedic society was **patrilineal** and birth of a son was sought after.
- **Ghosha, Sikta, Nivavari, and Apala** were female sages of the time and contributed to the composition of Rig Veda.
- **Child Marriage and Sati were absent** and a special widow-remarriage, called '**Niyoga**' (levirate), was prevalent. This was done to increase the population of the '**Jana**'.
- Played gambling, Chariot race was famous.
- Two Drinks – **Soma & Sura** – Soma was sanctioned by religion & was drunk at sacrifices. Sura was disapproved by priests.
- A wealthy person was known as **gomat** and the daughter called **duhtri** which means one who milks the cow.

### Political System

- Janas' were headed by a '**Rajana**' who was assisted by Purohit, Gramani and Senani and popular bodies like '**Sabha**', '**Samiti**', '**Vidhata**', '**Gana**' and '**Sardha**'.
- Sabha had few chiefs while Samiti was larger body.
- Vidhata was the oldest.

- ‘Janas’ were further divided into ‘Vis’ and ‘Vis’ in turn was divided into many ‘Kul’ or ‘kutumb’; kul has ‘Griha’ as its unit and ‘Kulapa’ as its head while the ‘Griha’ was headed by ‘Grihapati’ or ‘Dampati’.
- ‘Gauṇ’ was the place where cattle were kept and ‘Gavishthi’ was quest or war for cows.
- Group of ‘Kulas’ made a ‘Gram’ and ‘Gram’ was headed by ‘Gramani’.
- **Vajrapati** – Authority over a large land was leader of kulupa & graminis.
- ‘Rajana’ ruled over his people (jana) and not over any specified area of land and hence, was called their protector (gopa janasya or gopati janasya).
- There were few non-monarchical states, whose head was Ganapati or Jyestha.
- ‘Rajana’ had no standing army and bureaucracy too was absent. Military functions were performed by tribal groups called – **Vrat, gana, grama, sardha.**
- The “**Battle of Ten Kings**” was fought on the banks of Ravi river for protection of wealth i.e. cow and cattle and was won by ‘**Rajana Sudas**’ of Bharat Jana (tribe).

### Economy

- Rigvedic societ was **pastoral & Agriculture** was secondary occupation. Cattle was main form of the wealth;
- Agriculture production was for **consumption only**. They had better **knowledge of agriculture**. Rigveda mentions about wooden ploughshare.
- ‘Yava’ was the common name for any grain.
- ‘Bali’ was voluntary gift from producers to the ‘Rajana’.
- **Neither tax was imposed** nor treasury was maintained.
- Currency or coins are not reported; a **gold piece ‘niska’** finds mention but has more ornamental value than currency.
- **Barter system** was prevalent & cows were the most favoured medium of exchange.
- **Copper tools** of this era are reported from Punjab and Haryana.
- ‘Ayas’ is the common name used for any metal. Gold was called Hiranya.

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- **Iron was not known** to them
- **Pottery type:** Ochre Colored Pottery and Painted Grey Ware (PGW).
- Aryan introduced **spoked wheels**.
- **Horse** played significant role in their life.
- They Didn't live in cities.
- **Economic activities** – Hunting, carpentry, tanning, weaving, chariot-making, metal smeltry etc.

### Religious Aspect

- **Rig Vedic hymns** ('sukti') are praises for Gods and Goddesses and the deity is **anthropomorphic** i.e. in human form. Yet, idol worship was not practiced.
- Simple, short and less ritualistic worship and sacrifices were practiced mainly for '**praja**' and '**pashu**' i.e. increasing population, protecting cattle, birth of male child and against disease.
- Households performed the rituals themselves and any expert priest was not required.
- Chanting of mantras was an important part of the ritual.
- Magic and Omen were not prevalent.
- The gods were categorised into three spheres namely, terrestrial, atmospheric or mid-sphere and cosmic or celestial sphere.
- Important gods of Rigvedic time were **Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama and Soma**.
- Vishnu was minor god during Rigvedic period.
- Maharshi **Vasistha & Vishwamitra** were important priests.

### Later Vedic Phase (1000 BC- 600 BC)

- Sources of Information about this phase are: **Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda**.
- Rig Veda Oldest surviving text.
- Hymns are dedicated to several deities mostly to Indra.
- Themes: Life, death, creation, sacrifice and 'soma'(godly pleasure)

### Sam Veda

- Earliest book on music (Sama = Melody; ragas & raginis)
- Poetic text, derived from Rig Veda.

### Yajur Veda

- Sacrifices and rituals, composed both in prose and poetry.
- Two related samhitas: Shukla and Krishna

### Atharva Veda

- Magic, omen, agriculture, industry/craft, cattle rearing, cure for disease; composed by Non-Aryans

### Other sources:

- **Brahmanas** – The Detailed commentaries/ explanations on the Vedas.
- **Aranyakas (forest books)**- Explains metaphysics & symbolism of sacrifice.
- **Upanishads** or books on philosophy or deeper knowledge about ‘aatma’, ‘brahma’ etc. They are antiritualistic
- Aryans became generally familiar with the major portion of the **Gangetic valley** where they gradually settled. Western Ganga-Valley was called ‘Aryavarta’
- **Arabian Sea** and the **Indian Ocean**, Several Himalayan **peaks** and **Vindhya** mountains (indirectly) are mentioned.

### Society

- Visible 4-fold varna system and appearance of several ‘jaatis’ or castes made the social system complex.
- Untouchability appeared; women’s position degraded as they no longer got formal education.
- Gotra was the place where cattle resided together with ‘janas’ and later developed into an identity for the ‘janas’.
- Nishad, Chandala and Shabar were the untouchables mentioned. Guests were called ‘Goghna’ (cow-killer).
- ‘Niyoga’ too was considered a negative activity.
- Male members of upper three varnas were called ‘dvija’ or twice born. Only these were entitled to ‘Upanayan’ i.e. wearing the sacred thread.
- Women like Gargi and Maitreyi accomplished in the knowledge arena; Gargi outwitted Yajnavalkya in a philosophical discourse.
- Sati and Child Marriage were still largely absent.

- Institution of Gotra & practice of gotra exogamy appeared.

#### 4-fold 'ashram' (stages) for 4 'purusharthas' (goals):

- **Brahmacharya** (Celibate Student) for knowledge i.e. **Dharma**.
- **Grihastha** (Householder) for wealth and progeny i.e. 'artha' and 'kama'.
- **Vanaprastha** (hermit in retreat) for **spiritual wisdom**.
- **Sanyasa** (Renunciation) for liberation i.e. **Mukti/Moksha**.

#### Political System

- 'Janas' evolved to become '**Janapadas**'; **Hastinapur** and **Indraprastha** were capitals of Kuru 'janapada'.
- Frequent battles among these 'janapadas' were fought for territory.
- Authority of the '**rajana**' became more evident and a support staff called '**ratnin**'; they were 12 jewels of the king, worked for 'rajana'.
- Chiefship became hereditary.
- Still, there was no standing army.
- '**Rajana**' started various sacrifices like '**Rajsuya**' (coronation), '**Ashwamedh**' (to become ruler of all directions i.e. 'Chakravarti') and '**Vajpeya**' (revitalization to the aging 'rajana').
- Dependence on '**Sabha**' and '**Samiti**' reduced.
- women were not allowed to attend these assemblies.
- Vidhata completely disappeared.
- Term '**Rashtra**', indicating territory first appeared in this period.
- '**Rajana**' assumed titles like Samrat, Ektrat, Sarvbhumi, Virat.

#### Economy

- **Iron (krishna/shyama ayas)** was discovered and use of fire for clearing forest for cultivation increased.
- **Agriculture of multiple crops** put limitation on nomadic nature; cattle rearing continued.
- Wheat, Barley, Rice, Beans, Moong Urad and Sesamum were cultivated.
- Surplus produce led to **Bali and Bhaga (1/6th or 1/12th)** i.e. customary contributions (minor taxes) to the Kings treasury.

- Treasurer was called ‘**Samgrahitri**’ and ‘**Bhagdukha**’ collected the taxes and Vaishya were only taxpayers.
- ‘**Shataman Krishnala**’ are believed to be coins used but has no archaeological backing; there is reference to money lending (Shatapatha Brahmana describes a usurer as ‘**kusidin**’).
- Various arts and crafts like smelting, smithery or carpentry, weaving, leather-working, jewellery- making, dyeing and pottery-making, glass hoards and bangles also find mention.
- Commerce and trade are indicated by mention of sea voyages.
- **Pottery type:** Painted Grey Ware (PGW).

### Religious Aspect

- **Varun and Indra**, the most important Gods of Rig Vedic age, lost prominence in later Vedic phase.
- **Prajapati or Adipurush** became the Supreme God in later Vedic phase.
- Rudra was merged into Shiva who appeared for the first time.
- **Rituals, sacrifices and requirement of supervising priest** (Purohita) made religious life complex.
- Few **instances of idol worship** are reported. **Magic and Omen** entered the socio-religious life.
- At the end of later Vedic phase Upanishadik philosophers made efforts to simplify the religious practices.
- Few Kshatriyas, in Later Vedic phase, like **Janak** and **Vishwamitra** succeeded in knowing the supreme i.e. ‘**Brahma**’.
- Dharma meant one’s duties to oneself and to others but Rita was the fundamental law that governed the working of Shrishti (Universe).

### Vedic Texts

**Vedic texts are broadly categorised into two parts, namely, ‘shruti’ and ‘smriti’.**

### Shruti

- Shrutis’ are the texts ‘that is heard’ or product of ‘Godly revelation’ to the great sages (rishis) while in meditation (‘dhyaan’).

- The four Vedas and Samhitas are included in the ‘shrutis’.

### Smriti

- ‘Smritis’ on the other hand are those that are recollected by normal humans.
- The detailed commentaries/ explanations on the Vedas (Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads), 6 Vedangas and 4 Upavedas make the smritis.

### Upanishads:

- The upanishada indicates knowledge acquired by sitting close to the teacher.
- They are also known as **Vedantas**, having the **truth** about human life and path to ‘moksha’.
- A collection of over 200 Upanishads are known but out of these **108 are called ‘muktikas’**.
- **Mundaka Upanishada** contains the famous phrase ‘**Satyameva Jayate**’.

### Officers and their profile in Vedic period:

- **Vrajapati**: Officer-in-charge of pasture land
- **Jivagribha**: Police official
- **Kshatri**: Chamberlain
- **Senani**: Supreme commander-in-chief
- **Sthapati**: Chief Judge
- **Gramani**: Head of the village;
- **Bhagadugha**: Revenue collector
- **Kulapati**: Head of the family
- **Mahishi**: Chief Queen
- **Spasas**: Spies & Messengers;
- **Suta**: Charioteer
- **Madhyamasi**: Dispute resolving;
- **Takshan**: Carpenter
- **Palagala**: Messenger;
- **Sanghrahriti**: Treasurer
- **Govikartana**: Keeper of forests & games
- **Akshavapa**: Accountant;
- **Purohita**: Priest of highest order.