

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 Manandalas** 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.

MANIDHANA EYAM FREE IAS ACADEMY – TNPSC - PRELIMINARY EXAM
UNIT – IV – HISTORY & CULTURE OF INDIA

- ‘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.

- **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.