

The Vedic Age was between 1500 BC and 600 BC. This is the next major civilization that occurred in ancient India after the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization by 1400 BC. The Vedas were composed in this period and this gives this age the name. The Vedas are also the chief source of information about this era. The Vedic Age started with the coming of the Aryans or Indo-Aryans.

Vedic Period

- The disputed **Aryan invasion** idea is linked to determining the beginning of the Vedic era.
- According to this idea, **Dravidians** may have built the **Indus Valley or Harappan civilisation** in North India.
- By 1500 B.C., the towns of the **Harappan Culture** had declined.
- As a result, their economic and administrative systems gradually deteriorated. Around this time, speakers of the **Indo-Aryan language** Sanskrit arrived in northwestern India from the **Indo-Iranian area**.
- They would have come in small groups at first through the passages in the northern highlands.
- Their first settlements were in the northwestern lowlands and the Punjab plains. They later spread into the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- They were mostly looking for pastures because they were primarily a cattle keeping tribe.
- By the sixth century B.C., they had conquered all of North India, which was known as **Aryavarta**.
- This time period may be split into two parts: the Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic Period (1500 B.C - 1000 B.C) and the Later Vedic Period (1000 B.C - 600 B.C).

Origin of Aryans

- There are various competing theories as to where the Aryans originated. Several researchers have suggested various areas as the Aryans' ancestral home.

- The **Arctic area**, Germany, Central Asia, and southern Russia are among them. According to astronomical calculations, the Aryans arrived from the Arctic area, according to **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**.
- The notion of southern Russia, on the other hand, appears to be more plausible and commonly recognised by historians.
- From there, the Aryans spread over **Asia and Europe**.
- They arrived in India around 1500 B.C. and were known as Indo-Aryans. They spoke Sanskrit, an Indo-Aryan language.

Vedic Period - Historical Reconstruction

- The reconstruction of Vedic India's past is based on textual details.
- The **Rigveda** is by far the most ancient of the Vedic books that have survived, and it has numerous common Indo-Iranian features, both in language and content, that are not found in any other Vedic literature.
- Its development must have taken several centuries, and with the exception of the youngest volumes, it would have been completed by 1000 B.C.E.
- **Mantra language:** This period comprises the Atharvaveda's mantra and prose language (Paippalada and Shaunakiya), the Rigveda Khilani, the Samaveda Samhita (which contains around 75 mantras not found in the Rigveda), and the mantras of the Yajurveda.
- Many of these writings are based on the Rigveda, but have suffered alterations due to language changes and reinterpretation.
- **Samhita prose:** During this time, the collecting and codification of a Vedic canon begins. The total elimination of the injunctive is a significant language shift.
- This period includes the Brahmanas proper of the four Vedas, as well as the Aranyakas, the oldest Upanishads, and the oldest Srauta Sutras.
- **Sutra language:** This is the most recent layer of Vedic Sanskrit, dating from around 500 B.C.E., and includes the majority of the Srauta and Grhya Sutras, as well as certain Upanishads.
- **Epic and Paninian Sanskrit:** The language of the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics, as well as Paninian Sanskrit, are regarded post-Vedic and date from after 500 B.C.E.

- Only until the end of the Vedic period do historical documents appear, and they remain rare throughout the **Indian Middle Ages**.
- Language, cultural, and political upheavals herald the end of Vedic India.

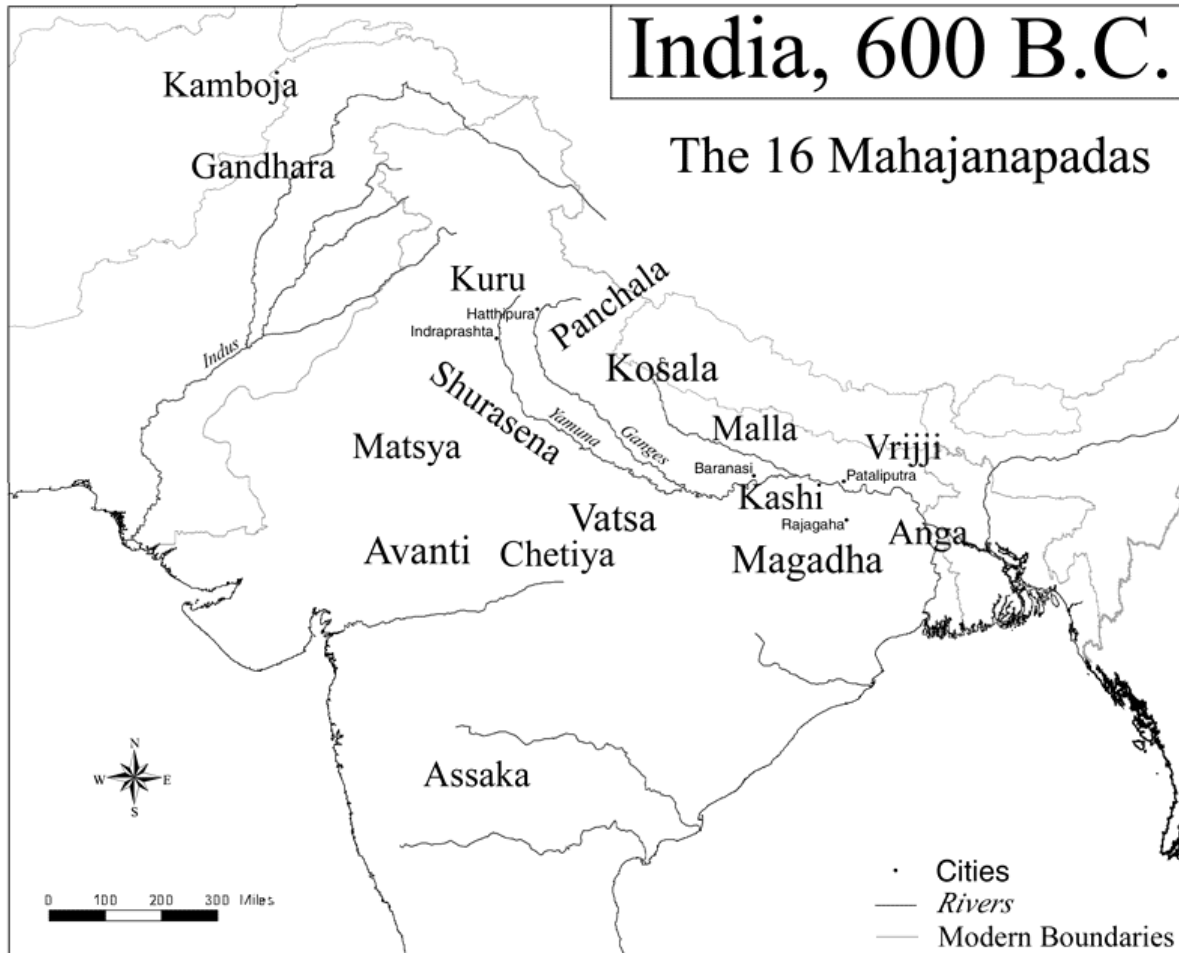
Rigvedic period (1500–1000 BCE)

- Throughout the **Rig Vedic period**, the Aryans were mostly limited to the Indus area. The Rig Veda mentions Saptasindhu, or the country of seven rivers.
- This includes the rivers **Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej** in Punjab, as well as the Indus and **Saraswathi** in India.
- The first stage is the Rigvedic period, also known as the Early Vedic period, and the second is the **Later Vedic period**.
- The creation of the **Rigvedic hymns** dates back to the Early Vedic period. This time period is thought to be between 1500 and 1000 BC.
- The later Vedic era takes place between 1000 and 600 BC.
- **RigVedic Aryans** have a lot in common with the Andronovo culture and the Mittani kingdoms as well as with early Iranians.
- The Andronovo culture is believed to be the site of the first horse-drawn chariots.

Rig Vedic Period - Political Organisation

- **The kula**, or family, was the primary political unit.
- Several families banded together to form a community, or grama, based on kinship.
- Grama's chieftain was referred to as gramani. Visu was a larger entity comprising many towns.
- Vishayapati was in command. The highest political unit was the Jana, or tribe.
- Various tribal kingdoms existed throughout the Rig Vedic period, including the **Bharatas, Matsyas, Yadus, and Purus**.
- The nation was ruled by the rajan, or king. The Rig Vedic polity was monarchical in nature, with hereditary succession.

- The **monarch** was assisted in his administration by purohita, or priest, and senani, or army commander. The **Sabha and the Samiti** were both well-liked bodies.
- The first looks to be an elders' council, while the second appears to be a general assembly of the entire people.



Rig Vedic Period - Social Life

- The **Rig Vedic civilization** was patriarchal. The family, or graham, was the primary social unit.
- The head of the family was known as grahpathi.
- Although monogamy was the norm, polygamy was common among royal and noble families.
- The woman was in control of the household and was present at all major ceremonies.

- Women were given the same opportunities for spiritual and intellectual growth as men.
- Women poets such as **Apala, Viswavara, Ghosa, and Lopamudra** lived throughout the Rig Vedic era.
- Women were permitted to take part in popular assemblies. There were no child marriages, and sati was unheard of.
- Both men and women wore cotton and woollen upper and lower clothing.
- Men and women both wore a variety of decorations. The major food components were wheat and barley, milk and its derivatives such as curd and ghee, vegetables and fruits.

Rig Vedic Period - Economic Condition

- The Rig Vedic Aryans were **pastoral, cattle rearing** people.
- After they permanently settled in North India they began agriculture.
- Carpenters produced chariots and ploughs.
- A variety of articles with copper, bronze and iron were made by workers.
- Spinning was an important occupation – cotton and woollen fabrics.
- Goldsmiths made ornaments.
- The potters made different kinds of vessels for domestic use.
- Trade was conducted by barter system in beginning but later shifted to use of gold coins called '**nishka**' for large transactions.
- Rivers acted as means of transport.

Rig Vedic Period - Religion

- The **Rig Vedic Aryans** venerated the earth, fire, wind, rain, and thunder.
- They created and worshipped gods out of these natural powers.
- Rig Vedic gods included **Prithvi (Earth), Agni (Fire), Vayu (Wind), Varuna (Rain), and Indra (Thunder)**.
- Indra was the most popular of the gods throughout the early Vedic period.
- Following Indra in importance came **Agni**, who was seen as a bridge between the gods and humanity.
- Varuna was created to maintain the natural order. Aditi and Ushas were female gods, for example.

- There were no temples or idol worship during the early Vedic period.

Worship of Rigvedic Aryans

- The **Rig-Vedic Aryans** worshipped natural forces while also believing in nature's essential oneness.
- They worshipped many gods not to frighten nature, but to gain her favour.
- Natural phenomena like the sky, thunder, rain, and air were supposed to be directed by their presiding deities, whereas natural calamities were thought to be an expression of their anger.
- The **Rig-Veda hymns** were principally performed to exalt and please the gods.
- Natural events were understood as the spiritual manifestations of countless gods.
- **Varuna, Indra, Mitra, and Dyus** were revered as deities for the sky's various manifestations.

Later Vedic Period (1000 BC – 600BC)

- The Aryans travelled considerably further east during the Later Vedic Period. The **Satapatha Brahmana** mentions Aryans spreading to the eastern Gangetic plains.
- **Later Vedic literature** mentions a number of tribal groups and kingdoms. During this historical period, the growth of large kingdoms was a key development.
- Later Vedic writings also mention three divisions of India: **Aryavarta** (northern India), **Madhyadesa** (middle India), and **Dakshinapatha** (east India) (southern India).
- During this time, two further collections were written: the **Yajur Veda Samhita** and the **Atharva Veda Samhita**.
- The hymns of the Yajur Veda are accompanied with ceremonies that depict the social structure of the civilization.

Later Vedic Period - Political Organisation

- Larger kingdoms by amalgamation formed ‘**Mahajanapadas or rashtras**’.
- Therefore, the power of king increased and he performed various rituals and sacrifices to make his position strong like Rajasuya (consecration ceremony), Asvamedha (horse sacrifice) and Vajpeya (chariot race).
- The kings assumed titles of Rajavisvajanan, Ahilabhuvanapathi(lord of all earth), Ektrat and Samrat (sole ruler).
- But, importance of the Samiti and the Sabha diminished.

Later Vedic Period - Economic Condition

- More land was put under cultivation by clearing forests. Knowledge of manure saw development.
- Hence, Agriculture became the chief occupation of people growing barley, rice and wheat.
- Industrial activity became specialized with metal work, leather work, carpentry and pottery advancement.
- Internal trade as well as foreign trade also became extensive (they traded with Babylon through sea).
- Hereditary merchants (vaniya) came into existence as a different class.
- Vaisyas indulged in trade and commerce organized themselves into guilds known as ‘**ganas**’.
- Coins: Besides ‘nishka’, ‘**satamana**’ – gold coins and ‘**krishnala**’ – silver coins were also used as a media of exchange.

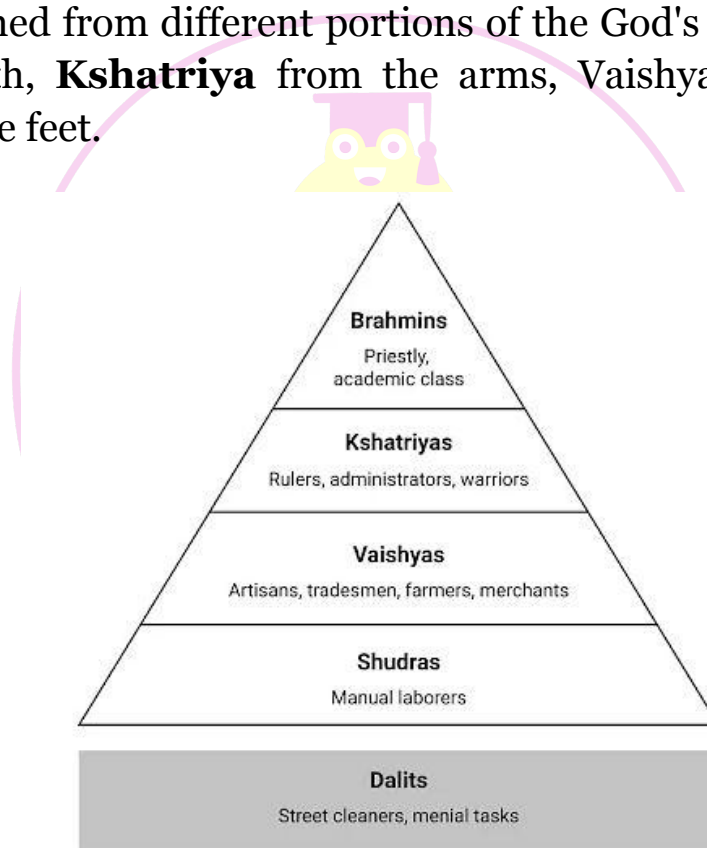
Later Vedic Period - Social Life

- The four divisions of society (**Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras**), or the Varna system, were fully formed during the Later Vedic era.
- The **Brahmin and Kshatriya** castes benefited more than the Vaisya and Shudra groups.
- A Brahmin was higher in status than a Kshatriya, yet Kshatriyas sometimes claimed dominance over Brahmins.
- Many sub-castes depending on work formed during this period.
- The father's dominance in the family developed during the Later Vedic period. The situation of women has not improved.

- They were still seen to be inferior and obedient to men.
- Women's political rights to participate in assemblies were also lost. Child marriages were becoming more common.

Varna system in Later Vedic period

- **Varna**, or colour, was originally used to distinguish between **Vedic and non-Vedic people**.
- **Varnas** were birth-based rather than profession-based in the later Vedic period.
- According to the 10th mandala of the Rigveda, known as 'purush sukta,' the varnas are formed from different portions of the God's body, such as Brahmin from the mouth, **Kshatriya** from the arms, Vaishya from the thighs, and Shudra from the feet.



- Brahmins were revered as the epitome of wisdom, endowed with precepts and sermons to be imparted to all Varnas of society.
- Priests, gurus, rishis, educators, and intellectuals comprised the **Brahmin community**.

- **Kshatriyas** were the warrior clan, kings, territorial rulers, administrators, and so on.
- Weaponry, warfare, penance, austerity, administration, moral behaviour, justice, and rule were all necessary Kshatriya talents.
- All **Kshatriyas** were sent to a **Brahmin's ashram** from an early age until they were completely equipped with the essential knowledge.
- The **Vaishya Varna** is made up of agriculturalists, traders, money lenders, and business people.
- **Vaishyas** are also twice-born and attend the Brahmins' ashram to study virtuous life principles and to avoid deliberate or inadvertent misbehaviour.
- The last Varna, **Shudras** is the foundation of a thriving economy, and they are regarded for their dutiful fulfilment of life's tasks.
- Because their behaviour appears to be more constrained, scholarly viewpoints on **Shudras** are the most diverse.

Later Vedic Period - Religion

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- Early Vedic gods such as **Indra and Agni** became obsolete.
- Prajapathi (the creator), Vishnu (the protector), and Rudra (the destroyer) rose to prominence during the Later Vedic era.
- Sacrifices remained important, and the ceremonies linked with them became increasingly complex.
- As sacrifices became more valued, prayers became less significant. The priesthood became a vocation, and it was passed down via families.
- The priestly elite devised and refined **sacrifice formulae**.
- As a result, towards the end of this period, there had been a substantial pushback against priestly power as well as **sacrifices and ceremonies**.
- These elaborate sacrifices played a significant role in the rise of Buddhism and Jainism.

Vedic Literature

- The term Veda means “superior knowledge” in Sanskrit.

- Four major Vedas constitute the vedic literature. They are – Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sam Veda, and Atharva Veda.
 1. **Rig Veda** – Earliest veda. Has 1028 hymns in praise Gods.
 2. **Yajur Veda** – Has details of rules to be followed during sacrifices.
 3. **Sam Veda** – Has a collection of songs. The origins of Indian music are traced to it.
 4. **Atharva Veda** – has a collection of spells and charms.
- Besides these Vedas, there were Brahmanas, Upanishads, Aryankas, and epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- **Brahmanas** – Prose about vedic hymns, rituals and philosophies.
- **Aryankas** – Deal with mysticism, rites and rituals.
- **Upanishads** – Philosophical texts dealing with soul, mysteries of nature.
- **Ramayana** was authored by Valmiki.
- **Mahabharata** was written by Ved Vyasa.

Role of women during Vedic Period

- The **Rig-Vedic civilization** was a free society. The Aryans clearly valued male children over female children.
- Females, on the other hand, were as liberated as their male counterparts.
- Boys and girls have equal access to **education**. Girls studied the Vedas as well as fine arts.
- During the **Vedic time**, women never followed purdha. They had complete control over who they hung out with.
- However, divorce was not an option for them. They had unlimited independence in the household and were regarded like Ardhanginis.
- Because a man without a woman was viewed as insufficient, the woman was recognised as having an equal part in social and religious life.
- In the later **Vedic period**, the family established a patrimonial (father's authority) arrangement, and women were often given a lesser position.
- Although few female theologians participated in intellectual debates and certain queens participated in coronation rites, women were typically seen as inferior and submissive to males.
- There are also references to Sati and child marriages. A daughter has been regarded as a cause of unhappiness by **Aitareya Brahmana**.