Vedic Period, Early and Later Vedic Period

Description

The Vedic Age marks Indiaâ??s foundational cultural period. This era spans from 1500 BC to 600 BC. Understanding this phase is essential for UPSC preparation. The period witnessed significant social and religious developments. Comprehensive knowledge of Vedic civilization is crucial preparation.

Timeline and Division of Vedic Age

The Two Major Phases

The Vedic Age divides into two distinct periods. Each phase shows unique characteristics and developments clearly. Understanding this division is important for examination purposes.

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Vedic Period Timeline

Period	Duration	Literary Sources	Geographical Extent
Early Vedic Age	1500-1000 BC	Rigveda	Punjab, Sapta Sindhu region
Later Vedic Age	1000-600 BC	Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda	Gangetic plains, expanded eastward

The Aryans: Origins and Arrival

Who Were the Aryans?

The term â??Aryanâ?• primarily denotes a language group. Max Muller clarified this linguistic classification scientifically clearly. Franz Bopp established connections with European languages in 1816.

Original Homeland: Multiple Theories

Scholars propose various regions as Aryan homeland originally. Multiple theories exist with supporting evidence for each. For UPSC, knowing major theories is essential.

Theories of Aryan Homeland

Region	Theorist	Supporting Evidence	Credibility
Central Asia	Max Muller	Linguistic connections	High

Region	Theorist	Supporting Evidence	Credibility
Tibet	Dayanand Saraswati	Geographic proximity	Moderate
Pamirs	Mayor	Central location theory	Moderate
Turkistan	Hurz Feld	Archaeological findings	Moderate
Bactria	J.C. Rod	Historical records	Moderate
Steppes	Brandstein	Pastoral evidence	High
Germany	Penka and Hert	European connections	Low
Hungary	Giles	Linguistic patterns	Low
Southern Russia	Nehring	Archaeological evidence	High
West Baltic	Mach	Geographic theory	Low
Arctic Region	B.G. Tilak	Zend Avesta similarities	Moderate
Russian Steppes	Prof. Belfy	Pastoral culture	High
Central India	Rajbali Pandey	Indigenous theory	Low
Kashmir	L.D. Kala	Regional evidence	Low
Sapta Sindhu	A.C. Das	Rigvedic references	Moderate
Himalaya Foothills	Pt. Laxmidhar Shastri	Geographic positioning	Low

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The Indigenous Theory

Ganganath Jha, A.C. Das, and Dr. Sampurnanand proposed. Aryans were indigenous people, not foreign invaders. They resided in Sapta-Sindhu region originally permanently.

This theory faces criticism from mainstream historians currently. Cultural differences between Harappans and Aryans are cited. Archaeological evidence doesnâ??t strongly support this theory yet.

Tilakâ??s Polar Theory

Lokmanya Tilak suggested the Polar region as homeland. Zend Avesta and Rigveda show peculiar similarities clearly. Religious and socio-economic terms match remarkably between texts.

Aryan Migration to India

Aryans came to India in several successive waves. The earliest wave appeared around 1500 BC approximately. Rigvedic people represent this first migration wave clearly.

Conflict with Indigenous Inhabitants

Indigenous Term	Rigvedic Reference	Interpretation	Outcome
Dasas/Dasyus	Frequently mentioned	Original inhabitants	Conquered by Aryans
Sambara	Defeated by Divodasa	Indigenous chief	Aryan victory

The term â??dasyuhatyaâ?• appears repeatedly in Rigveda. It means slaughter of the dasyus specifically. Aryan chiefs were soft toward dasas generally. They remained hostile toward dasyus throughout conflicts.

Important Aryan Tribes

Major Tribal Groups

Tribe Name	Significance	Mentioned In
Yadu	Major tribal confederation	Rigveda
Turvasu	Prominent tribe	Rigveda
Druhyu	Important group	Rigveda
Anu	Significant tribe	Rigveda
Puru	Major confederation	Rigveda
Kuru	Later Vedic importance	Later texts
Panchala	Kingdom formation	Later texts
Bharata	Most prominent tribe	Rigveda
Tritsu	Allied with Bharata	Rigveda

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The Battle of Ten Kings

This was the most important inter-tribal conflict. The battle involved multiple tribal confederations fighting together. It represents significant political development in Vedic period.

Early Vedic Age: Political Organization

The Tribal Chief â?? Rajan

The administrative machinery centered around the tribal chief. He was called â??rajanâ?• in Rigvedic terminology. His position was generally hereditary by succession.

Functions of the King

Function	Description	Significance
Protector	Protected the tribe (jana)	Primary duty
Military Leader	Led warriors in battles	Defense role
Cattle Guardian	Protected tribal cattle wealth	Economic function
Religious Head	Offered prayers to gods	Spiritual role

Tribal Assemblies

Several assemblies exercised deliberative, military, and religious functions. These institutions checked the kingâ??s absolute power significantly.

Important Assemblies

Assembly	Function	Composition	Womenâ??s Participation
Sabha	Important political body	Nobles, elders	Yes, in early period
Samiti	General assembly	Broader membership	Yes, in early period
Vidatha	Oldest assembly	All tribal members	Yes
Gana	Military functions	Warriors	Limited

Women attended sabha and vidatha in Rigvedic times. This shows relatively better status during this period.

Administrative Officials

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The king received assistance from various functionaries regularly.

Key Officials in Early Vedic Period

Official	Function	Importance
Purohita	Chief priest, advisor	Very high
Senani	Military commander	High
Vrajapati	Pasture ground authority	Moderate
Kulapas	Family heads	Administrative
Gramanis	Leaders of fighting groups	Military

Famous Priests

Vasishtha and Visvamitra were most prominent purohitas. They played major roles in Rigvedic period. Their rivalry is legendary in Vedic literature.

Revenue and Military

Kings received voluntary offerings called â??baliâ?• from people. No regular or standing army existed then. Militia was mustered during wartime only temporarily.

Military Organization

Unit	Function	Leadership
Vrata	Fighting group	Gramani
Gana	Military unit	Ganapati

Unit	Function	Leadership
Grama	Village militia	Gramani
Sardha	War band	Tribal leader

Non-Monarchical States

A few non-monarchical states (ganas) existed too. Their head was called Ganapati or Jyestha. These represented republican forms of governance early.

Early Vedic Society and Economy

Social Organization

Kinship formed the basis of social structure. Primary loyalty went to the tribe (jana). The term â??visâ?• also denoted tribe commonly.

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Social Units

Term	Meaning	Composition	Function
Jana	Tribe	Entire tribal group	Primary identity
Vis	Tribe/people	Tribal members	Social organization
Grama	Smaller unit	Fighting groups	Military/settlement
Kula	Family	Rare mention	Family unit
Griha	Household	Family members	Domestic unit

Family Structure

Family was a large joint patriarchal unit. The father headed the household with authority. Separate households hadnâ??t developed much yet clearly.

Birth of sons was desired repeatedly and constantly. This reflects patriarchal nature of society clearly.

The Purushasukta Theory

Purushasukta is a late hymn from Mandala X. It describes varna division from primeval creator.

Varna Division in Purushasukta

Varna	Body Part	First Mention	Significance
Brahmana	Mouth	Only in Purushasukta	Priestly class
Rajanya/Kshatriya	Arms	Purushasukta hymn	Warrior class
Vaishya	Thighs	Purushasukta hymn	Productive class

Varna	Body Part	First Mention	Significance
Shudra	Feet	Purushasukta hymn	Service class

This is the only Rigvedic hymn mentioning all. The names rajanya, vaishya, and shudra appear here.

Core Beliefs and Practices

Fundamental Concepts

Concept	Meaning	Significance
Dharma	Righteous duty	Moral foundation
Artha	Means of living	Economic pursuit
Moksha	Salvation	Spiritual goal
Karma	Progeny/action	Continuity
Mandir	House of worship	Religious space
Samsara	Reincarnation	Life cycle
Bhakti	Devotion	Spiritual practice
Maya	Illusion	Philosophical concept
Puja	Reverence	Worship method

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Marriage and Womenâ??s Status

The institution of marriage was well established already. Primitive practices like levirate survived alongside civilized customs. Widow remarriage was practiced during this period.

Womenâ??s status was relatively equal to men. They received Upanayana ceremony and Vedic education. Some women became seers composing Vedic hymns.

Marriage Practices

Practice	Description	Prevalence
Monogamy	Single spouse	Most common
Polygamy	Multiple wives	Known practice
Polyandry	Multiple husbands	Rare, known
Levirate	Widow to brother	Primitive survival
Widow Remarriage	Remarriage allowed	Practiced

Varna System Emergence

Varna originally meant color in Rigvedic terminology. Aryans were fair, indigenous people were dark-complexioned. Conquered dasas and dasyus became slaves and shudras.

Tribal society divided into three initial groups gradually. Warriors, priests, and common people formed divisions. The fourth varna (Shudra) appeared toward periodâ??s end.

Divisions based on occupation had started emerging. But this division wasnâ??t very sharp yet. Flexibility existed in occupational mobility during this time.

Economic Life: Occupation

Earliest life was mainly pastoral in nature. Agriculture remained a secondary occupation initially throughout. Aryans didnâ??t lead completely settled life yet.

Animals in Rigvedic Life

Animal	Importance	Uses	Mentions
Horse	Very high	Transport, warfare, rituals	Frequent
Cow	Extremely high	Wealth measure, dairy	176 times
Cattle	Very high	Wealth, dairy, plowing	Numerous

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The cow held supreme significance in society. War term â??gavisthiâ?• means â??search for cows.â?• Every context uses cow-related terms extensively clearly.

Agriculture in Rigveda

Rigvedic people possessed agricultural knowledge despite pastoral focus. Ploughshare is mentioned, though some consider it interpolation. Ploughshares were probably made of wood initially.

Agricultural Knowledge

Activity	Evidence	Development Level
Sowing	Mentioned	Known
Harvesting	Mentioned	Practiced
Threshing	Mentioned	Understood
Seasons	Known	Recognized

Crafts and Artisans

Multiple artisans are mentioned in Rigveda clearly.

Artisan Classes

Artisan	Craft	Products
Carpenter	Woodwork	Tools, furniture
Chariot-maker	Vehicle making	Chariots

Artisan	Craft	Products
Weaver	Textile	Cloth
Leather worker	Leather craft	Leather goods
Potter	Pottery	Earthenware

Metals Known

The term â??ayasâ?• indicated copper or bronze. Metal working was known during this period.

Metals in Rigveda

Metal	Rigvedic Term	Uses
Gold	Hiranya	Ornaments, gifts
Iron	Shyama (Krishna Ayas)	Tools (later period)
Copper	Ayas	Tools, implements

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Diet and Food Habits

Indo-Aryans venerated cows like ancient Iranians did. Yet they sacrificed bulls and cows at ceremonies. Sacrificial flesh was eaten by participants regularly.

Meat eating was exceptional, not daily practice. Milk was an important staple food item. Barley or wheat cakes supplemented the diet. Vegetables and fruits were also consumed regularly.

Beverages

Drink	Type	Use	Significance
Soma	Sacred drink	Ritual offering	Divine beverage
Sura	Beer-like alcohol	Social drinking	Common beverage

Soma juice was specially acceptable to gods. Elaborate ceremonial accompanied soma offering rituals always. Sama Veda provides appropriate chants for ceremonies.

Amusements and Recreation

Dancing and music were popular entertainment forms. Chariot-racing provided excitement and competition among nobles. Dicing or gambling was extremely prevalent throughout.

Gambling with dice is mentioned very frequently. Both Rigveda and later documents confirm this. The prevalence of gambling is beyond any doubt.

Geographical Knowledge: Rivers

Rigveda mentions numerous rivers by specific names.

Rivers in Rigveda

Rigvedic Name	Modern Name	Location
Gomati	Gomal	Afghanistan-Pakistan border
Krumi	Kurram	Pakistan
Kubha	Kabul	Afghanistan
Suvastu	Swat	Pakistan
Sindhu	Indus	Pakistan-India
Drishadvari	Ghaghar/Chitang	Haryana
Satudri	Sutlej	Punjab
Vipas	Beas	Punjab
Parushni	Ravi	Punjab
Asikni	Chenab	Punjab
Vitasta	Jhelum	Kashmir

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Word Frequency in Rigveda

Understanding word frequency reveals social priorities and values.

Important Terms and Their Mentions

Word	Times Mentioned	Significance
Indra	250	Supreme god
Pita (Father)	335	Patriarchal society
Ashva (Horse)	315	Importance in life
Jana (Tribe)	275	Tribal identity
Mata (Mother)	234	Respect for mothers
Gau (Cow)	176	Economic importance
Vish (People)	171	Social organization
Vidatha	122	Assembly importance
Krishi (Agriculture)	33	Secondary occupation
Sena (Army)	~20	Military organization
Brahmana	14	Priestly class emerging
Grama (Village)	13	Settlement pattern
Kshatriya	9	Warrior class
Sabha	8	Political assembly
Samiti	9	General assembly
Yamuna	3	River mention

Word	Times Mentioned	Significance
Rajya	1	Kingdom concept
Kulpa	1	Rare mention
Ganga	1	Eastern extent
Samudra	1	Ocean knowledge

Rigvedic Religion and Gods

Nature of Early Vedic Religion

Early Vedic religion was naturalistic in character. No temples or idols existed during this. Recitation of mantras was the prayer mode.

Sacrifices were offered for worldly gains primarily. Praja (children), Pasu (cattle), and Dhana (wealth) were. Spiritual upliftment wasnâ??t the primary sacrifice goal.

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Major Rigvedic Deities

Principal Gods

God	Domain	Hymns Dedicated	Significance	Epithets
Indra	Thunder, war	250	Most important	Ratheshtha, Jitendra, Somapa, Purandra, Varitrahan, Maghayam
Agni	Fire	200	Second most important	Intermediary between gods and humans
Varuna	Water, cosmic order	Moderate	Rita upholder	Cosmic order keeper
Soma	Plants	Several	Divine drink	Plant god
Yama	Death	Few	Death realm guardian	World of dead
Surya	Sun	10	Solar deity	Like Greek Helios
Savitri	Inspiration	Important	Gayatri Mantra deity	Divine inspirer
Pushan	Cattle, paths	Moderate	Road guardian	Herdsmen protector
Vishnu	Preservation	Few	Minor initially	Later prominence
Vayu	Wind	Moderate	Wind god	Air deity
Dyaus	Sky	Few	Father heaven	Sky father
Rudra	Diseases, archery	3	Anger bringer	Disease causer
Brihaspati	Wisdom	11	Divine teacher	Wisdom deity

Important Goddesses

Goddess	Domain	Significance
Aditi	Eternity	Mother of gods
Usha	Dawn	Morning goddess
Prithvi	Earth	Earth goddess
Aranyani	Forest	Forest deity

Other Divine Beings

Being	Role	Nature
Maruts	Storm spirits	Nature forces
Gandharvas	Divine musicians	Celestial beings
Ashvins	Healers	Divine physicians, surgical experts
Ribhus	Gnomes	Artisan spirits
Apsaras	Dancers	Mistresses of gods
Vishvadeva	Intermediate deities	Lesser gods

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Later Vedic Age: Expansion and Change

Timeline and Geographical Spread

Later Vedic Age extends from 1000 to 600 BC. Three later Vedas were composed during this. Brahmanas and early Upanishads also belong here.

Aryans expanded from Punjab over western Uttar Pradesh. Ganga-Yamuna doab was covered during this expansion. Southern penetration occurred many centuries later gradually.

Land Clearing and Settlement

Land was cleared initially by burning forests. Iron tools became common by 1000-800 BC. These tools facilitated agricultural expansion significantly eastward.

Ramayana partially unfolds the Aryan southern advent. This epic describes the expansion process vividly.

Later Vedic Political Organization

Changes in Tribal Assemblies

The vidatha completely disappeared during this period. Sabha and samiti continued but character changed significantly.

Women were no longer permitted in sabha. Nobles and Brahmanas now dominated these assemblies. Democratic character diminished considerably during this time.

Strengthening of Kingship

Formation of wider kingdoms made kings powerful. Tribal authority became territorial in nature gradually. The term â??rashtraâ?• (territory) first appears now.

Royal Titles by Region

Region	Royal Title	Meaning
Eastern	Samrat	Supreme ruler
Western	Suvrat	Western king
Northern	Virat	Northern ruler
Southern	Bhoja	Southern king
Middle Country	Raja	King

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Important Royal Rituals

Kings performed elaborate rituals for legitimacy and power.

Major Sacrifices

Ritual	Purpose	Duration	Significance
Rajasuya	Confer supreme power	Extended	Royal consecration
Asvamedha	Territorial control	Three days	Horse sacrifice
Vajapeya	Status elevation	17 days	Chariot race ritual

Revenue and Administration

Tax and tribute collection became common practice. A officer called sangrihitri probably collected these. Kings were assisted by various high functionaries.

Important Officials (Ratnins)

Official	Function	Alternative Title
Purohita	Chief priest	Rastragopa
Senani	Army commander	Military head
Vrajapati	Pasture land officer	Cattle manager
Jivagribha	Police officer	Law enforcement
Spasas/Dutas	Spies/messengers	Intelligence
Gramani	Village head	Local administrator

Official	Function	Alternative Title
Kulapati	Family head	Household leader
Madhyamasi	Dispute mediator	Arbitrator
Bhagadugha	Revenue collector	Tax officer
Sangrahitri	Treasurer	Finance minister
Mahishi	Chief queen	Royal consort
Suta	Charioteer	Court minstrel
Govikartana	Games keeper	Forest officer
Palagala	Messenger	Communication
Kshatri	Chamberlain	Palace official
Akshavapa	Accountant	Finance officer
Sthapati	Chief judge	Judicial head
Takshan	Carpenter	Artisan

Military Organization

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Kings still didnâ??t maintain standing armies regularly. Tribal units were mustered during wartime only. The king ate with his people (vis).

Important Later Vedic Kingdoms

Major Kingdoms and Their Locations

Kingdom	Modern Location	Significance
Gandhar	Rawalpindi, Peshawar	Northwestern frontier
Kekaya	Bank of Beas	Punjab region
Uttar Madra	Kashmir	Northern kingdom
Eastern Madra	Near Kangra	Hill region
Southern Madra	Near Amritsar	Punjab area
Kushinagar	Northern UP	Eastern expansion
Panchal	Bareilly, Badaun, Farrukhabad	Central doab
Kashi	Modern Varanasi	Sacred city
Koshal	Faizabad region	Gangetic plain

Later Vedic Economy

Agricultural Expansion

Aryans now lived sedentary lives permanently and regularly. Domesticated animals were raised on larger scale. Agriculture expanded significantly beyond earlier periodâ??s scope.

Major Crops

Crop	Type	Region	Importance
Barley	Cereal	Universal	Staple grain
Wheat	Cereal	Northern plains	Staple grain
Rice	Cereal	Mentioned	Not major yet
Sugar-cane	Cash crop	Various	New cultivation
Beans	Pulse	Various	Protein source
Sesame	Oil seed	Various	Oil production
Moong	Pulse	Various	Protein
Urad	Pulse	Various	Protein

Livestock and Animals

Cattle still constituted principal movable property wealth. Elephants were tamed during this period successfully.

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Private land possession gradually began crystallizing during this. This marked shift from communal to private ownership.

Crafts and Artisans

New arts and craftsmen emerged during this. Specialized occupations became more common and diverse.

Artisan Categories

Craft	Artisan	Products
Metallurgy	Smelters, ironsmiths	Metal tools
Woodwork	Carpenters	Furniture, structures
Textiles	Weavers	Cloth, garments
Leather	Leather workers	Leather goods
Jewelry	Jewellers	Ornaments
Dyeing	Dyers	Colored fabrics
Pottery	Potters	Earthenware

Pottery Types

Later Vedic Aryans used four pottery types.

Pottery Classification

Type	Period	Region	Users
Black and Red Ware	~600 BC	Koshala	Common people
Black Slipped Ware	Later Vedic	Various	General use
Painted Grey Ware (PGW)	Later Vedic	Upper Gangetic basin	Ritual/eating
Red Ware	Later Vedic	Various	Common use

Metals Known

Aryans knew copper/bronze (Lohitayas) and iron (Krishna ayas). They introduced PGW to northern India successfully. PGW consisted of bowls and dishes mainly.

Currency and Trade

Money lending was a lucrative trade profession. Interest on loans was moderately charged usually.

Currency Types

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Currency	Mentioned In	Material	Usage
Satamana	Shatapatha Brahmana	Gold	Specific weight piece
Nishka	Various texts	Gold	Popular currency
Suvarna	Later texts	Gold	Coin class
Krishnala	Later texts	Unknown	Coin class

Barter system continued despite metallic coins presence. The usurer was called Kusidin in texts.

Later Vedic Society

Varna System Crystallization

Society divided into four varnas completely now. Each varna was assigned specific duties clearly.

Four Varnas and Their Functions

Varna	Duty (Dharma)	Rights	Status
Brahmana	Rituals, teaching, studying	Gifts, respect	Highest
Rajanya/Kshatriya	Protection, governance, warfare	Power, tribute	Second
Vaishya	Agriculture, cattle-breeding, trade	Production rights	Third
Shudra	Service to upper varnas	Limited	Lowest

Dvija Status

The three higher varnas shared dvija status. They were entitled to upanayana (sacred thread). This ceremony used Vedic mantras for initiation.

Shudras were deprived of sacred thread ceremony. Disabilities on shudras began during this period.

Outcaste Groups

Outside caste system, two important groups stood.

Group	Description	Status
Vratyas	Outside mainstream	Marginal
Nishadas	Forest dwellers	Outcaste

Social Hierarchy

Aitareya Brahmana describes social hierarchy clearly vividly.

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Brahmanical View of Varnas

Varna	Description	Treatment
Brahmana	Livelihood seeker, gift acceptor	Removable at will
Vaishya	Tribute-paying	Meant for beating, oppression
Shudra	Servant of another	Worst position

Special Artisan Status

Certain artisans like rathakara (chariot-maker) enjoyed high. They were entitled to sacred thread ceremony. This shows occupational prestige variations existed clearly.

Family Structure Changes

Fatherâ??s power increased significantly during this period. He could even disinherit his son legally. Polygamy became prevalent among upper classes frequently.

Child-marriage instances also appeared during this time. The term â??Nagaraâ?• appears, showing town life.

Womenâ??s Status Decline

Women were generally given lower position now. Some women theologians participated in philosophical discussions still. Queens participated in coronation rituals occasionally too.

Ordinarily women were thought inferior to men. Their status had declined from Rigvedic period.

Marriage Types

Eight types of marriages were prevalent now.

Classification of Marriages

Type	Description	Approval Status	Varna Permission
Brahma	Dowered girl, same varna, Vedic rites	Approved	Brahmanas
Daiva	Daughter as sacrificial fee (dakshina)	Approved	Brahmanas
Arsa	Token bride-price (cow, bull)	Approved	Brahmanas
Prajapatya	No dowry or bride-price	Approved	Brahmanas
Gandharva	Mutual consent, clandestine, swayamvara	Limited approval	Various
Asura	Marriage by purchase	Disapproved	Lower varnas
Paisacha	Seduction while unconscious	Strongly disapproved	None
Rakshasa	Marriage by capture	Disapproved	Kshatriyas only

Inter-Varna Marriages

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Marriage Direction

Type	Direction	Approval	Offspring Status
Anuloma	Man marrying below varna	Sanctioned	Accepted
Pratiloma	Woman marrying below varna	Not sanctioned	Not accepted

Gotra System

The institution of gotra appeared in later Vedic. Literally, it means cow-pen for clan cattle.

Gotra exogamy was practiced strictly throughout society. No marriage within same gotra was permitted. This widened socio-political ties significantly among people.

Ashrama System

Four life stages werenâ??t well-established in early times.

Four Ashramas

Ashrama	Stage	Duties	Later Vedic Status
Brahmacharya	Student life	Study, celibacy	Well-established
Grihastha	Householder	Family, occupation	Well-established
Vanaprastha	Partial retirement	Contemplation	Mentioned
Sanyasa	Complete retirement	Renunciation	Not established

Only three ashramas mentioned in later Vedic texts. The fourth stage (sanyasa) wasnâ??t well-established yet. It only appears in Jabala Upanishad later.

Food and Diet

Staple diet was milk, ghee, vegetables, and fruit. Barley remained the principal grain throughout consistently. Wheat was rarely eaten during this period.

Cowâ??s beef had become taboo during this. This marks significant religious and cultural shift. Sura was favorite drink for both sexes.

Guests were never served purely vegetarian food. At least one non-vegetarian item was compulsory. This reflected hospitality norms of the time.

Dress and Ornaments

Clothes remained simple and practical during this. Two-piece clothing was normally worn by everyone.

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Clothing Items

Garment	Type	Usage
Uttariya	Upper garment	Covering upper body
Antariya	Lower garment	Covering lower body

No difference existed between male and female clothes. Both sexes used ornaments for personal adornment. Bangles were worn by privileged few only.

Personal Care Items

Item	Purpose	Users
Oil	Hair care	Common
Comb	Grooming	Universal
Mirror	Personal appearance	Available
Razors	Shaving	Men
Hair ointment	Grooming	Common
Cosmetics	Beauty	Women mainly
Shoes	Footwear	Used

Amusements and Entertainment

Music dominated entertainment during this period significantly.

Entertainment Forms

Type	Form	Popularity
Vocal Music	Singing	Very high
Instrumental Music	Veena, drum, flute, harp, cymbals	High
Dance	Various forms	Popular
Chariot-racing	Competition	Upper classes
Gambling	Dice games	Common

Education System

Education remained privilege of the few only. Only Brahmanas and Kshatriyas were allowed education. Womenâ??s education was discouraged during this period.

Study of Vedic literature was forbidden to women. Despite this, few gifted women scholars existed. Female teachers were also present during this time.

Subjects Taught

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Subject	Category	Importance
Veda	Religious	Highest
Itihas	History	High
Grammar	Language	Essential
Mathematics	Sciences	Important
Ethics	Moral science	Important
Dialectics	Philosophy	Advanced
Astronomy	Sciences	Important
Military Science	Warfare	Kshatriyas
Fine Arts	Cultural	Optional
Music	Cultural	Optional
Medical Science	Health	Specialized

Religion in Later Vedic Period

Shifting Divine Hierarchy

Earlier Rigvedic gods lost their former importance. Indra and Agni no longer dominated worship entirely.

New Divine Hierarchy

Deity	Domain	Status Change	New Role
Prajapati	Creation	Rose to supremacy	Creator god
Rudra	Animals	Became important	Animal lord

Deity	Domain	Status Change	New Role
Vishnu	Preservation	Gained importance	Preserver, protector
Pushan	Cattle	Assigned to Shudras	Shudra deity

Female Deities

Important goddesses during Later Vedic Age remained significant.

Major Goddesses

Goddess	Domain	Worship
Usha	Dawn	Morning prayers
Aditi	Eternity	Mother goddess
Prithvi	Earth	Earth worship
Aranyani	Forest	Forest deity
Saraswati	River/knowledge	River deity

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Changes in Worship Methods

Prayers continued to be recited during rituals. But they ceased to be dominant worship mode. Sacrifices became far more important than prayers.

Sacrifice Characteristics

Type	Nature	Participants	Importance
Public Sacrifices	Community rituals	Multiple priests	Very high
Domestic Sacrifices	Family rituals	Family members	Moderate

The Sacrificial System

Priests officiating at sacrifices were rewarded generously. They received dakshinas or gifts from patrons. The sacrificer was known as yajamana (yajna performer).

Success depended on magical power of words. Correct pronunciation of mantras was absolutely essential. Even small mistakes could nullify the sacrifice.

Chief Priests

Four main priests conducted elaborate sacrifices systematically.

Priestly Functions

Priest	Function	Recites From	Role

Hotri	Invoker	Rigveda	Hymn recitation
Adhvaryu	Executor	Yajurveda	Ritual performance
Udgatri	Singer	Samaveda	Chanting melodies
Brahma	Supervisor	All Vedas	Overall coordination

Chief priest received voluntary offerings (bali) from people. His role was crucial for ritual success.

Important Vedic Rituals

Multiple rituals marked different life stages and events.

Life-Cycle Rituals (Samskaras)

Ritual	Purpose	When Performed	Significance
Garbhadhana	Promote conception	Before pregnancy	Fertility rite
Pumsavana	Procure male child	During pregnancy	Son preference
Simantonnayana	Ensure child safety	Pregnancy	Protection
Jatakarma	Birth ceremony	Before umbilical cord cutting	Welcome newborn
Culakarma	Tonsure	Third year	Hair ritual
Upanayana	Initiation	Eighth year	Dvija status

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Royal Rituals

Ritual	Purpose	Duration	Outcome
Rajasuya	Supreme power	Extended	Royal authority
Asvamedha	Territorial control	Three days	Unquestioned dominion
Vajapeya	Status elevation	17 days	Raja to Samrat

Guest Treatment

The guest was known as â??goghnaâ?• literally. This means â??one fed on cattle meat.â?• This reflects hospitality norms involving meat consumption.

Vedic Literature: Comprehensive Overview

The Meaning of Veda

The word â??Vedaâ?• derives from Sanskrit â??Ved.â?• It means spiritual knowledge in Sanskrit terminology. Vedas represent best knowledge in Hindu eyes.

Division of Vedic Literature

Vast Aryan literature divides into two parts. Sruti and Smriti represent this fundamental division.

Sruti Literature

The Four Vedas

Four Vedas form the core of Sruti. They represent divine revelation to ancient seers.

The Four Vedas Overview

Veda	Primary Content	Hymns	Period	Significance
Rigveda	Hymns, prayers	1,028	Oldest	Most important
Samaveda	Musical chants	Mostly borrowed	Later	Ritual music
Yajurveda	Sacrificial formulas	Prose and verse	Later	Ritual procedures
Atharvaveda	Spells, charms	Various	Latest	Popular practices

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Rigveda contains references only to first three. This suggests Atharvaveda was composed later separately.

Three Periods of Vedic Literature

Vedic literature divides into three successive periods.

Literary Periods

Period	Composition	Nature	Focus
Mantra Period	Samhitas	Hymns, verses	Prayers, rituals
Brahmana Period	Brahmanas, Upanishads, Aranyakas	Prose, philosophy	Ritual explanation, philosophy
Sutra Period	Sutras	Aphorisms	Condensed rules

These three periods succeeded or overlapped each other.

Brahmanas: Ritual Explanation

Brahmanas are massive prose texts containing ritual. They explain meaning of hymns in detail. They provide precepts for hymn application systematically.

Functions of Brahmanas

Function	Content	Purpose
Speculation	Hymn meanings	Understanding
Precepts	Application rules	Ritual guidance

Function	Content	Purpose
Stories	Origin tales	Context
Secret Meanings	Mystical interpretations	Deeper knowledge
Life Stories	Vedic personalities	Historical context

Every Veda has its own Brahmanas attached.

Vedas and Their Brahmanas

Veda	Associated Brahmanas	Number
Rigveda	Aitareya, Kaushitaki	Two
Samaveda	Tandya, Jaiminiya	Two
Yajurveda	Taittiriya, Shatapatha	Two
Atharvaveda	Gopatha	One

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Aranyakas: Forest Treatises

Aranyakas are concluding parts of Brahmanas. They donâ??t emphasize rites, rituals, and sacrifices. They contain philosophy and mysticism instead primarily.

Aranyaka Characteristics

Aspect	Description	Focus
Literary Meaning	Jungle/forest	Hermitage location
Content	Moral science, philosophy	Spiritual
Subjects	Hermits, saints in forests	Forest dwellers
Emphasis	Meditation	Inner practices
Attitude	Protests yajna system	Reform

They deal with soul, universe origin, and creation. Problems of universe elements are discussed thoroughly.

Prominent Aranyakas

Name	Associated With	Significance
Aitareya Aranyaka	Rigveda	Important
Sankhyana Aranyaka	Rigveda	Notable
Taittiriya Aranyaka	Yajurveda	Significant
Maitrayani Aranyaka	Yajurveda	Important
Madhyandini Brihadaranyaka	Yajurveda	Major
Vajasaneyi Brihadaranyaka	Yajurveda	Major

Name	Associated With	Significance
Talavakara Aranyaka	Samaveda	Notable

Upanishads: Mystical Philosophy

Upanishads represent mystical philosophical writings culmination clearly. There are 108 Upanishads in total.

Meaning of Upanishad

Aspect	Description
Literary Meaning	Sitting near masterâ??s feet
Process	Guru offers knowledge to disciples
Nature	Combination of philosophy and metaphysics
Alternative Name	Vedanta (end of Vedas)

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Important Upanishads

Upanishad	Period	Form	Significance
Brihadaranyaka	Primitive	Prose	Most important
Chandogya	Primitive	Prose	Very important
Katha	Later	Poetic	Philosophical
Shvetashvatara	Later	Poetic	Theistic
Isha	Important	Verse	Concise
Prashna	Important	Questions	Dialogue format
Aitareya	Important	Prose	Creation theory
Taittiriya	Important	Prose	Joy doctrine
Kena	Important	Mixed	Brahman inquiry
Mundaka	Important	Verse	Two knowledges
Mandukya	Important	Concise	OM explanation
Kaushitaki	Important	Prose	Ritual knowledge

Core Upanishadic Philosophy

Concept	Teaching	Significance
Brahma	Ultimate reality	Only truth
Atman	Individual soul	Same as Brahma
Knowledge	Path to salvation	Liberation means
Satya Meva Jayate	Truth alone triumphs	From Mundaka Upanishad

â??Satya Meva Jayateâ?• is taken from Mundaka. This became Indiaâ??s national motto later significantly.

Smriti Literature

Smriti represents traditional knowledge and post-Vedic works. It includes vast classical Sanskrit literature comprehensively.

The Six Vedangas

Vedangas are auxiliary branches of Vedic study.

Six Vedangas Classification

Vedanga	Subject	Purpose
Kalpa	Ritual canon	Dharma shastras, legal codes
Jyotisha	Astronomy	Calendar, timing
Shiksha	Phonetics	Proper pronunciation
Chhanda	Metre	Poetic rhythm
Nirukta	Etymology	Word origins
Vyakarana	Grammar	Language structure

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Shad-Darshana: Six Philosophies

Six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy developed.

Six Philosophical Schools

Darshana	Founder	Period	Core Text	Main Theme
Nyaya	Gautama	6th century BC	Nyaya Sutra	Logical quest for God
Vaisheshika	Kanada	6th century BC	Vaisheshika Sutra	Atomic theory, categories
Sankhya	Kapila	6th century BC	Sankhya Sutra	Dualism, liberation
Yoga	Patanjali	2nd century BC	Yoga Sutra	Eight-fold path
Purva Mimamsa	Jaimini	4th century BC	Purva Mimamsa Sutra	Vedic interpretation
Vedanta (Uttara Mimamsa)	Vyasa	4th century BC	Brahma Sutra	Ultimate reality

Philosophical Themes

Philosophy	Key Teaching	Goal
Nyaya	Logic and reasoning	True knowledge of Divine
Vaisheshika	Material world categories	Happiness and liberation
Sankhya	Purusha and Prakriti	Eliminate suffering
Yoga	Mind control	Liberation through practice
Purva Mimamsa	Ritual importance	Vedic knowledge
Vedanta	Brahman realization	Liberation through devotion

Itihaasa: Epic Literature

Legendary and semi-legendary works form Itihaasa. Ramayana and Mahabharata are primary examples.

The Two Great Epics

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Epic	Composer	Verses	Books	Theme
Ramayana	Valmiki	24,000	Seven	Rama vs Ravana
Mahabharata	Vyasa	100,000	Eighteen	Pandavas vs Kauravas

Ramayana Details

Aspect	Details	Significance
Alternative Name	Adi Kavya	First poetry
Original Form	Prakrit ballads	Folk origin
Sanskrit Version	Augmented	Brahmanical character
Dating	Before 350 BC	Ancient composition
Final Form	Around 250 AD	Long development
Cultural Theme	Aryan vs non-Aryan	Civilizational conflict

Mahabharata Details

Aspect	Details	Significance
Verses	100,000	Bulkiest epic
Main Story	One-fourth only	Rest episodical
Content	Multiple subjects	Encyclopedia
Famous Section	Bhagavad Gita	Philosophical dialogue
Central Conflict	Pandavas vs Kauravas	Aryan internal war
Topics	Cosmology, statecraft, ethics	Comprehensive

Puranas: Mythological Texts

Puranas describe ancient legends with later additions. They represent corrupt form of Hinduism according. Eighteen Puranas exist in total currently.

The Eighteen Puranas

Number	Purana Name	Deity Focus
1	Brahma Purana	Brahma
2	Vishnu Purana	Vishnu
3	Shiva Purana	Shiva
4	Padma Purana	Vishnu
5	Shrimad Bhagavat Purana	Krishna
6	Agni Purana	Agni
7	Narad Purana	Narada
8	Markandeya Purana	Devi
9	Bhavishya Purana	Surya
10	Linga Purana	Shiva
11	Varaha Purana	Vishnu
12	Vamana Purana	Vishnu
13	Brahma Vaivarta Purana	Krishna
14	Skanda Purana	Kartikeya
15	Surya Purana	Surya
16	Matsya Purana	Vishnu
17	Garuda Purana	Vishnu
18	Brahmanda Purana	Brahma

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Upavedas: Auxiliary Sciences

Upavedas deal with practical knowledge and sciences.

Four Upavedas

Upaveda	Subject	Associated Veda	Focus
Ayurveda	Medicine	Atharvaveda	Health science
Dhanurveda	Archery	Yajurveda	Military science
Gandharva Veda	Music, dance	Samaveda	Performing arts
Sthapatya Veda	Architecture	Atharvaveda	Construction

Other Smriti Categories

Additional Classifications

Category	Content	Purpose
Tantras	Shakta/Shaivite writings	Sectarian practices
Agamas	Sectarian scriptures	Religious rituals
Upangas	Philosophical collections	Systematic thought

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