

- The people of Neolithic Age used clothes made of cotton and wool.

### **Metal Age**

- The Neolithic period is followed by Chalcolithic (copper-stone) period when copper and bronze came to be used.
- The new technology of smelting metal ore and crafting metal artifacts is an important development in human civilization.
- The **Chalcolithic age is followed by Iron Age.**
- Iron is frequently **referred to in the Vedas.**
- The Iron Age of the southern peninsula is often related to Megalithic Burials. Megalith means Large Stone.
- The burial pits were covered with these stones. Such graves are extensively found in South India. Some of the important megalithic sites are Hallur and Maski in Karnataka, Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh and Adichchanallur in Tamil Nadu.
- Black and red pottery, iron artifacts such as hoes and sickles and small weapons were found in the burial pits.
- Vedic period corresponds to Iron Age.

## Vedic Period

Vedic Period started after the decline of Harappan Culture by 1500 B.C. They were Indo-Aryans and came from Iran. Initially they came to search for the fodder for the cattle and later spread in the north region.



### From where Aryans came?

Initially they would have come in small numbers through the passes in the north-western mountains. Their initial settlements were in the valleys of the north-west and the plains of the Punjab. Later, they moved into Indo-Gangetic plains.

As they were mainly cattle keeping people, they were mainly in search of pastures. By 6th century B.C., they occupied the whole of North India, which was referred to as Aryavarta. This period between 1500 B.C and 600 B.C may be divided into the Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic Period (1500 B.C -1000 B.C) and the Later Vedic Period (1000B.C - 600 B.C).

The literal meaning of '**Veda**' is '**to Know**'.

1. **Rig Veda:** The set of hymns sung in the praise of God.
2. **Yajur Veda:** The rules to be observed at the time of sacrifice.
3. **Sama Veda:** Contains chants to be sung at the time of
4. **Atharva Veda:** Details of rituals.

The **Rig Veda** is the earliest of the four Vedas and it consists of 1028 hymns. The hymns were sung **in praise of various gods**.

### Political Organization of Vedic Period

The basic unit of political organization was **kula or family**. Several families joined together on the basis of their kinship to form a village or grama. The leader of grama was known as **gramani**. A group of villages constituted a larger unit called **visu**. It was headed by vishayapati. The highest political unit was called **Jana** or tribe.

There were several tribal kingdoms during the Rig Vedic period such as Bharatas, Matsyas, Yadus and Purus. The head of the kingdom was called as rajan or king. The Rig Vedic polity was normally monarchical and the succession was **hereditary**.

**Vrajapati** enjoyed authority over large land and pasture ground. He led hands of the families called Kulapas or the heads of the fighting hordes called Gramani to battles.

The king was **assisted by purohita** or priest and senani or commander of the army in his administration. There were two popular bodies called the **Sabha and Samiti**. The former seems to have been a **council of elders** and the latter, a general assembly of the **entire people**.

The sabha functioned as a parliament for disposal of public business by debate and discussion. The Chief of the sabha was called sabhapati. The Samiti was the larger General Assembly of the people.

Sabha also seems to have functioned as a **court of justice**. It is said that "one who attends the sabha sits as a law court to dispense dharma (justice).

The administrative machinery of the Aryans in Rigvedic period worked with the tribal Chief in centre, because of his successful leadership in war. He was called Rajan. It seems that in the Rig Vedic period the **king's post had become hereditary**.

The Rajan (Rig Vedic King) was a kind of chief and he did not exercise unlimited power, for he had to reckon with the tribal organizations. We have traces of election of the king by the tribal assembly called the "samiti". The king was called protector of his tribe. Further several tribal or the clan based assemblies such as the "sabha, samiti, vidhata and gana" are mentioned in Rig Veda.

### **Social Life**

The Rig Vedic society was patriarchal. The basic unit of society was family or graham. The head of the family was known as grahapathi.

### **Condition of Women**

Monogamy was generally practiced while polygamy was prevalent among the royal and noble families. The wife took care of the household and participated in all the major ceremonies.

Women were given equal opportunities as men for their spiritual and intellectual development. There were women poets like Apala, Viswavara, Ghosa and Lopamudra during the Rig Vedic period.

Women could even attend the popular assemblies. There was no child marriage and the practice of sati was absent.

Both men and women wore upper and lower garments made of cotton and wool. A variety of ornaments were used by both men and women.

### **What they eat?**

Wheat and barley, milk and its products like curd and ghee, vegetables and fruits were the chief articles of food. The eating of cow's meat was prohibited since it was a sacred animal. Chariot racing, horse racing, dicing, music and dance were the favourite pastimes. The social divisions were not rigid during the Rig Vedic period as it was in the later Vedic period.

### **Social Organisation**

The Vedic literature is broadly divided into two categories viz. Shruti and Smriti.

Shruti is 'that which has been heard' and is canonical, consisting of revelation and unquestionable truth, and is considered eternal. Shruti describes the sacred texts comprising the central canon of Hinduism viz. Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, & Upanishads.

Smriti literally means 'that which is remembered, supplementary and may change over time'. It is authoritative only to the extent that it conforms to the bedrock of Shruti and it is entire body of the post Vedic Classical Sanskrit literature.

### **Literature**

First among Smritis is Manu Smriti.

Three older Vedas excluding Atharveda are called as 'Trey'.

Rigveda contains many hymns and Gayatri Mantra is one of them.

In Samaveda, 'Sama' means melody and it contains the Rhythmic compilation of Hymns of Rigveda. 'Yajus' means 'sacrificial formula' and Yajurveda is the book of sacrificial and ritual prayers. It contains the rituals of the Yajnas. It ranks next in sanctity and importance to the Rigveda. It contains 1549 hymns which are meant to be sung at the soma sacrifice by a special class of Brahmans.

Atharveda contains the magic spells, incorporates much of early traditions of healing and magic that are paralleled in other Indo-European literatures. It also mentions Dhanvantri as earliest medical person. Atharveda was not written by priestly class unlike other three Vedas.

The Brahmanas are the prose texts which explain the hymns in the Vedas, give explanation and applications and related stories of their origin. They also have some stories related to the certain persons related to the Vedic Text.

Aranyakas were written in forests and are concluding parts of the Brahmanas. Aranyakas don't lay much emphasis on rites, ritual and sacrifices but have philosophy and mysticism. Therefore, they have moral science and philosophy. It also provides the details of the Rishis who lived in jungles. They were studied and taught by men during their Vanprastha ashrama.

### **Upanishad**

Upanishads are also called Vedanta (the end of the Veda) firstly, because they denote the last phase of the Vedic period and secondly, because they reveal the final aim of the Veda. They are called Vedanta also because they were taught at the end to the disciples.

The Sanskrit term Upanishad derives from upa - (nearby), Ni - (at the proper place, down) and pad (to sit) thus meaning – 'sitting down near', implying sitting near a teacher to receive instruction.

The main motto of the Upanishads is 'Knowledge Awards Salvation'. More than 200 Upanishads are known, of which the first dozen or so, the oldest and most important, are variously referred to as the principal, main (mukhya) or old Upanishads.

Katha Upanishad contains dialogue between Yama and Nachiketa and it is about basic questions regarding Atma and Parmatma.

Many of the ideas of the Upanishads were later developed by the famous thinker Shankaracharya.

### **Economic Condition in Vedic Period**

The Rig Vedic Aryans were pastoral people and their main occupation was cattle rearing. Their wealth was estimated in terms of their cattle. When they permanently settled in North India they began to practice agriculture. With the knowledge and use of iron they were able to clear forests and bring more lands under cultivation. Carpentry was another important profession and the availability of wood from the forests cleared made the profession profitable. Carpenters produced chariots and ploughs. Workers in metal made a variety of articles with copper, bronze and iron.

Spinning was another important occupation and cotton and woolen fabrics were made. Goldsmiths were active in making ornaments. The potters made various kinds of vessels for domestic use.

### **Trade**

Trade was another important economic activity and rivers served as important means of transport. Trade was conducted on barter system. In the later times, gold coins called nishka were used as media of exchange in large transactions.

### **Religion**

The Rig Vedic Aryans worshiped the natural forces like earth, fire, wind, rain and thunder. There were also female gods like Aditi and Ushas. There were no temples and no idol worship during the early Vedic period. Prayers were offered to the gods in the expectation of rewards. Ghee, milk and grain were given as offerings. Elaborate rituals were followed during the worship.

### **Settlements in Rig Vedic Era**

During the Rig Vedic period, the Aryans were mostly confined to the Indus region. The Rig Veda refers to Saptasindhu or the land of seven rivers. This includes the five rivers of Punjab, namely Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej along with the Indus and Saraswathi. The political, social and cultural life of the Rig Vedic people can be traced from the hymns of the Rig Veda.