

11th History Lesson 15 Notes in English

15] Early India: The Chalcolithic, Megalithic, Iron Age and Vedic Cultures

Introduction

- A conventional view of the timeline of Indian history would simply shift its themes from the **Indus Civilization** through **the Vedic Culture** to the Age of the **Mahajanapadas**.
- But, if we consider the time after the decline of the Indus Civilization, covering from c. 2000 BCE to 600 BCE and the space stretching from **Kashmir to Kanyakumari** and **Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat**, it is clear that diverse cultures and people who spoke different languages lived in ancient India.
- This chapter focuses on **the Late Harappan, Chalcolithic, Iron Age and Vedic Cultures** and **the Aryans**, except for the Indus Civilization which was covered in the previous lesson.
- Essentially, it deals with the history of India from about 3000 BCE, up to the emergence of the Mahajanapadas, with a focus on social and economic changes.

Sources

- The history of India, after the decline of the Indus Civilization around 1900 BCE, is characterised by the presence of **nomadic microlith-using hunter-gatherers** and **pastoral, semi-sedentary** and **sedentary agro-pastoral communities** of the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Iron Ages and Vedic Cultures.
- We have two main types of sources for this long span of time (c. 3000 to 600 BCE) in Indian history.
- One source is the archaeological sites and material culture including pottery, plant remains and metal objects.
- The other is **Vedic literature**. There are no written documents for this period, since the Vedic texts were transmitted orally.
- At this point of time, people had not developed a script in India, except the symbols of the Indus script which are yet to be deciphered.
- Correlating the archaeological cultures and the information related to various groups of people from the Vedic texts is not an easy task.
- There are various theories on the identity of the originators of the Indus Civilization, and various other archaeological cultures.
- We are dealing with diverse cultures and communities with different modes of living in this space-time unit.
- The Early Vedic culture is correlated with some of the Chalcolithic cultures of India, while the Later Vedic culture is correlated with **the Painted Grey Ware Culture of the Iron Age in North India**.
- Unlike the age of Indus Civilization, when the urban sites and farming cultures were in a limited area, we notice cultural, agricultural and technological expansion and developments

in many parts of India in this period accompanied by the growth of craft production and population.

- A strong cultural foundation was laid across India during this period, which finally culminated in **the Early Historic period**.
- The extensive foundations for the village settlements of India were laid during this period.

Literature of the Vedic Age

- **The Vedas** (Vid = to know, Vidya) are one of the earliest known texts to have been composed in India.
- The language of the Vedas is described as **Vedic Sanskrit**.
- The Vedas are four: **Rig is the oldest**, and the others being **Yajur, Sama and Atharva**. The Vedic texts were memorized and orally transmitted by Brahmins from generation to generation.
- They were written down in the later period, after the introduction of writing.
- The earliest known written **manuscripts of the Vedas** date to the 10-11th century CE.
- They contain information about the polity, society, religion and philosophy, and hence they are a source for writing history.
- The main collections of Vedic hymns are called **samhitas**.
- The Rig Vedic- samhita is the earliest text. The Rig Veda is dated to between 1500 and 1000 BCE.
- The Rig Veda contains 10 books. Books 2 to 7 are the earliest and the Books 1, 8, 9 and 10 are assigned to a later period.
- Samhitas are ritualistic texts, and they explain the social and religious importance of rituals.
- Each samhita has added texts called **brahmanas**, which have commentaries on the hymns and rituals.
- Each **brahmana** has an **aranyaka** (forest text) and an **upanishad**.
- **The aranyakas** contain mystical ritual instructions to be undertaken in secret by the sages who live in the forests.
- Upanishads deal with philosophical enquiries.
- The Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas are dated to a slightly later period.
- The samhitas of the Sama, Yajur and Atharva Vedas, and the brahmanas, aranyakas and upanishads attached to the Vedas are the Late Vedic texts.
- The Sama Veda was composed in musical notes which are considered to constitute the basis of Indian music.
- The Yajur Veda has rituals and hymns. The Atharva Veda contains charms and magical spells.

Zend Avesta

- The Zend Avesta is a Persian/Iranian text of **Zoroastrianism**.

- This book speaks about the lands and gods of the people speaking the Indo-Iranian languages.
- It has references to the regions of northern and north-western parts of India. It has terms which show linguistic similarity with the Vedas.
- This text is an indirect evidence that the early home of the Aryans was outside the Indian subcontinent.

Pre-Aryan, Late Harappan and Chalcolithic Cultures of India

- **The Pre-Harappan cultures** are the earliest Chalcolithic cultures of India, and they are found in the time before the beginning of the mature phase of the Harappan culture, and continued to exist in the later period.
- The other Chalcolithic cultures of India are more or less contemporary to this phase of Harappan culture and they continued even after its decline.
- Unlike the mature urban phase of the **Harappan civilization**, Chalcolithic cultures were pastoral and based on farming, generally rural in nature.
- They used copper and stone blades and pottery and also low grade iron in the later period.
- Their settlements were **sedentary or semi-sedentary**.
- In the north- western and western regions of India, the early farming cultures are associated with the **Chalcolithic cultures** rather than **the Neolithic cultures**.
- The Chalcolithic people also began to domesticate animals in addition to **agriculture**. They had cattle, sheep, pigs and goats and buffaloes.
- Evidence has been found of turtles and fowls in their settlements.
- The houses were made of stone, mud bricks, mud and perishable wooden materials, and built on a stone foundation.
- **Silos** (well prepared pits) meant for storage of grains have also been found.
- The walls were made with bamboo frames. People used black and red ware and black on red ware pottery.
- These sites have produced a large quantity of copper objects.
- They used copper objects such as flat axes, bangles, rings, antimony rods, knives, blades, socket-less axes, barbed and tanged arrow heads, choppers and chisels.

Ochre Coloured Pottery Ware Culture

- Ochre Coloured Pottery Ware culture is found in **northern India** dating to the Chalcolithic period.



Ochre Coloured Potsherds

- The OCP pottery has red slip and appears ochre in colour (the ochre colour comes off when the pottery is touched) and hence, it is called **Ochre Coloured Pottery**.
- It has black painted designs.
- The OCP comes in the form of jars, storage jars, bowls, and basins.
- The OCP culture dates to 2600- 1200 BCE and is found in **the Indo- Gangetic plain** and may have had some associations with early Vedic culture.
- The OCP culture is seen as an impoverished Harappan culture and some scholars see it as unrelated to the Harappan culture.
- The OCP sites produced copper figures and objects and therefore it is also known as "**copper hoard culture**."
- It is a rural culture and has evidence of the cultivation of rice, barley, and legumes.
- They also had **pastoralism** with evidence of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses, and dogs.
- The villages had wattle-and-daub houses. They used copper and terracotta ornaments. Animal figurines have also been found.

Chalcolithic Cultures of South India

- The southern part of India has not produced cultural evidence of a full- fledged chalcolithic culture.
- **Perforated** and **spouted vessels** have been found in some sites.
- **Copper bronze** tools like chisels and flat axes occur at these sites. Stone tools continued to be used in this area.
- Black on red ware pottery is found. These people survived through animal rearing and agriculture.
- Millets, pulses and horse gram were cultivated, and fruits, leaves and tubers were collected.

Iron Age in North India

- **The Iron Age in North India** coincides with the painted **Grey Ware culture**. The painted grey ware is dated to from. 1100 to 800 BCE.

- More than 1000 sites have been identified with painted grey ware pottery in northern India, with a major concentration in **the Ganga-Yamuna valley**.
- These ceramics succeeded **the Black and Red Ware Culture** in the eastern Ganga valley and Central India.
- The pottery was fine grey in colour with painted geometric designs. The painted grey ware laid the foundation of the early political formations.



- It correlates with the **Kuru-Panchala** kingdom known from the Vedic texts.
- **The Painted Grey Ware cultural** phase is followed by Northern Black Polished Ware culture (NBPW), which is associated with the **Mahajanapada and Mauryan periods**.
- The Painted Grey ware sites reveal the development of agriculture and pastoralism, and the settlements of this period grew in dimension.
- They show a large scale population increase in the northern part of India.
- **The Iron Age in North India** was coeval with Painted Greyware Culture, and in South India it was associated with **Megalithic burial mounds**.

Megalithic/ Iron Age in Tamilnadu

- The burial system followed by the people of **Neolithic period** continued into the **Megalithic period**.
- A circular tomb using big stone slabs built upon the place of burial is known as a **megalith**.
- Such megaliths have been found in many parts of **Tamilnadu**.
- The **urn burial system** was another type of practice and is evidenced in **Adichanallur** (present **Thoothukudi** district).
- Black-ware is peculiar to burial sites in Tamilnadu.
- Interestingly, black-ware is found mostly in burial mounds and not in human habitations.

- In a majority of urn burials, the use of stone is almost non-existent.
- However, urn burials are grouped under megalithic because the materials - the pottery, iron objects, beads of semi-precious stones kept in them - are identical to those found in the stone burials.
- The end of Megalithic burial practice is assigned to third-second centuries CE.
- During this period **Brahmi writing** akin to **Ashokan Brahmi** has been discovered in **Kodumanal** (Erode District).
- There is also evidence of the megalithic tradition continuing into later centuries. During the Sangam period people still remembered urn burials.
- The four primitive hero-stones with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, datable to third to second centuries BCE found in the upper part of **the Vaigai valley**, support the authenticity of the hero stone tradition described in the Sangam Tamil literature in the context of cattle raids.
- Scholars infer, based on such evidence, that some of the Sangam poems could be assigned to the early first century BCE or a little earlier.
- The tradition of erecting hero stones in memory of dead warrior-heroes is considered to be an extension of **the menhir type** of megalithic tradition.
- Menhirs, upright monumental stones, and dolmens made of big slabs or boulders are megalithic tombs found in Tamilnadu.
- Black and red ware, along with partial human remains and iron objects, were unearthed recently at **Vadamalkunda in Krishnagiri, Tamilnadu**.
- A few stone slabs were also found at the site.
- A centuries-old menhir at **Singaripalayam** excavated near Kundadam in Tiruppur district points to the existence of an ancient settlement along the banks of River Upper.

Megalithic Sites in Tamilnadu

Adichanallur

- Adichanallur, 22 km from **Tirunelveli**, is located in Thoothukudi district.
- In 1876, a German ethnologist and naturalist, **Andrew Jagor** conducted an excavation at **Adichanallur**.
- He carried with him samples of backed earthenware, utensils of all sizes and shapes, a considerable number of iron weapons and implements, and great quantities of bones and skulls.
- These are now housed in a **Berlin Museum**.
- The then district Collector of Tirunelveli **A.J. Stuart** and the famous linguist **Bishop Robert Caldwell** visited Adichanallur subsequently, found it was a quartz site.
- Quarrying was immediately banned and archaeological excavation commenced under the supervision of **Alexander Rea**.
- Rea prepared a comprehensive account of his findings, illustrated by photographs, and was published in the annual report of the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**, 1902–03.

- Nearly a hundred years later, the ASI carried out another excavation and brought out more information. The report is awaited.
- The burial mound at Adichanallur yielded the following:



Burial Site-Adichanallur

- Urns and pottery of various kinds in large numbers.
- Iron implements, including spades and weapons (daggers, swords, spears and arrows).
- Some stone beads and a few gold ornaments „
- Bronze objects representing the domestic animals such as buffalo, goat or sheep and cock, and wild animals like tiger, antelope and elephant.
- Traces of cloth and wood.
- The engraving of animals on bronze and on ornaments is indicative of the primitive workmanship. (Caldwell could stumble upon a copper bangle during his inspection at the site.)
- The people were evidently skilful in moulding pottery, in casting or brassing metals, in weaving and in working stone and wood.
- The presence of husks of rice and millet indicates domestication of these grains. Iron weapons were used for both war, and for animal sacrifices.
- The discovery of sacrificial implements prompted Caldwell to conclude that the people of Adichanallur were not adherents of Vedic religion.



Dolmen-Mallachandram

Menhir -
Kumarikalpalayam- TirupurTamil Brahmi inscription on a hero
stone-Puliman Kombai

Paiyampalli

- Paiyampalli is a village in Tirupathur taluk, Vellore district.

- **The Archaeological Survey of India** carried out an excavation in the 1960s and unearthed black and red ware pottery in this megalithic site.
- A large number of urn burials were also found in this region.
- The date of this culture, based on radio carbon dating, is 1000 BCE.

Kodumanal

- Kodumanal, 40 km from **Erode**, is located on **the northern bank of Noyyal river**, a tributary of the Cauvery.
- A series of excavations were carried out during the 1980s and 1990s. The most recent was in 2012.
- In habitation trenches and megalithic burials of Kodumanal, the goods unearthed included pots, weapons, tools, ornaments, and beads, particularly carnelian, akin to those found at **Mohenjodaro**.
- Since carnelian was not known to this region in ancient times, it may have been brought to Kodumanal from outside.



Burial Site - Kodumanal

- In **the Sangam work Pathitirupathu**, a place called **Kodumanam** belonging to the Chera king, is praised for gemstones and therefore some archaeologists argue that Kodumanam is the ancient name of Kodumanal.
- **Hoard of Roman coins** have been discovered and it is believed that this is a result of the export of gemstones to the Roman world, resulting in return a huge inflow of gold from the latter into the region.
- Conches and bangles, remnants of furnaces, a kiln floor filled with ash soot, and potsherds with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are other finds in the site.
- Pit burials, urn burials and chamber tombs of different types excavated at Kodumanal and the names inscribed on potsherds may indicate habitation by multi-ethnic groups.
- The graffiti etched on potsherds give a lot of information about the people and their activities.
- A menhir found at a burial site is assigned to the **Megalithic period**.
- According to **Y. Subbarayalu**, **Kodumanal** is coeval the Sangam anthologies (second century BCE to second century CE).

The Aryans and Rig Vedic Society

- So far we have considered the **Late Harappan Cultures, Chalcolithic and Painted Grey ware Cultures**.
- Let us now turn to the evidence from the Vedic texts, which, unlike the archaeological evidence that tell us only about the material culture, throw light on the ethnic and cultural identities of people.
- Because of the references found in the Vedas, the Aryan question is one of the important issues concerning the early history of India.

The Aryans

- The attempt to write a history of India began when **the Europeans colonised India**.
- They compiled the archaeological and literary sources, as well as oral traditions.
- Certain notions, for example **the Aryans**, were developed and used in the colonial context, when many parts of **Asia and Africa** were under the influence of the **European powers**.
- The concept of race was widely prevalent at that time to classify and categorize people.
- Some of the views reflect the racist ideas of colonial times.
- **The Aryan theory** was linked to the blue-eyed white race and its connection with Europeans.
- **Nazis** used the Aryan concept for their political agenda, ultimately leading to the Holocaust.
- The recent studies have established that the word Aryan does not denote race, but only refers to the original speakers of **Indo-Aryan languages**.
- **Philologists** study language in oral and written forms of languages based on historical evidence.
- They use etymology, comparative linguistics, literary criticism, history, and linguistics in their studies.
- Though the Rig Veda is in Sanskrit, about 300 words of the Munda and Dravidian languages have been identified in it, suggesting cultural mix with earlier inhabitants.
- From the Vedas it is evident that Aryans used domesticated horses and chariots.
- Their chariots had spoked wheels and they used bows and arrows.
- They practiced **agriculture and pastoralism**.
- They buried and also cremated the dead. The cult of fire and the use of soma drink were prevalent among the speakers of the Indo- Aryan languages.
- The home of **Indo-Europeans and Indo-Aryans** is still a matter of debate.
- Many scholars are of the view that the Aryans came to India as migrants from Central Asia.
- It is also believed that several waves of Indo- Aryan migration might have happened. There are several factors which support this hypothesis.
- The traits of the culture of Aryans cover Eastern Europe and Central Asia which is geographically interlinked with India and West Asia and Europe.
- One of the accepted areas of the Aryan home is **Eastern Europe- Central Asia, north of the Black Sea**.

- **The Bactria-Margina Archaeological Complex** is closely related to Aryan culture dated to 1900 BCE–1500 BCE.
- Ceramics of South Central Asian archaeological sites resemble those found in the Swat valley.
- References to the names of Indo- Europeans languages are found in an inscription dated to 2200 BCE discovered in modern Iraq.
- Anatolian inscriptions of 1900-1700 BCE and **Kassite** inscriptions of 1600 BCE (Iraq) and **Mittani** inscriptions of 1400 BCE (Syria), **Bhogaz Goi** inscriptions referring to names similar to the Vedic gods (1400 BCE) have the common features of the Indo-European languages, but no such inscriptions are found in India.
- The term **asva** and several other terms in Rig Veda have common roots in various Indo-Aryan languages.
- In the Rig Veda, the term asva (horse) occurs 215 times and **vrishabha** (bull) 170 times.
- Tiger and rhinoceros, which are tropical animals, are not mentioned in the Rig Veda. There is no trace of the urban way of life in the Rig Veda.
- Hence, the identity of Aryans is not correlated with the Harappan culture, where there is no evidence for horse.
- Nowadays, DNA studies are also used for understanding ancient migrations.
- **M17 a genetic marker (DNA)** is said to have been found among the speakers of Indo-Europeans.

Rig Vedic Culture

- Rig Vedic Samhita is the earliest text that relates to the Early Vedic period. The Early Vedic culture is placed between 1500 BCE and 1000 BCE.
- The political, social and economic aspects of life of this period are reflected in the Rig Vedic hymns.

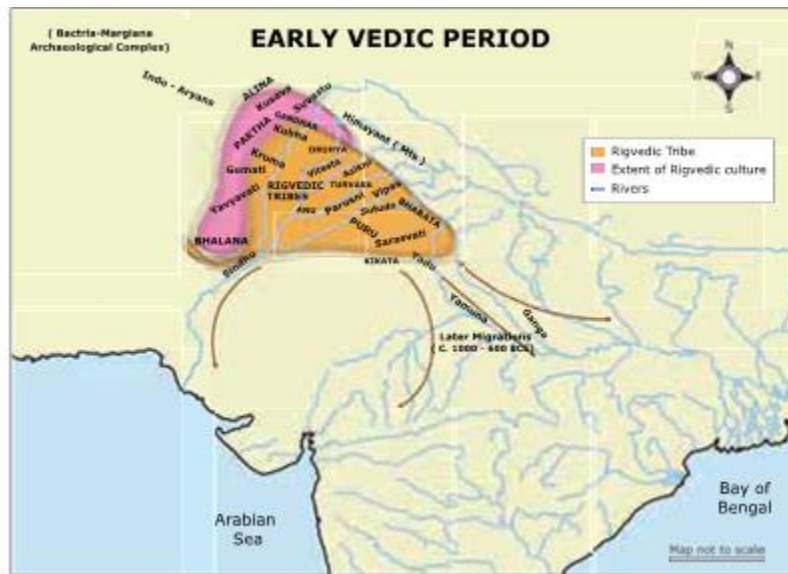
Geography

- In the Indian subcontinent, the early Aryans lived in the area of eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan, Punjab and fringes of Western Uttar Pradesh.

Dasas and Dasyus

- The Rig Vedas speak about not only the Aryans, but also about the non-Aryan people, whom the Aryans encountered in India.
- When the Rig Vedic people moved into India they came into conflict with people whom they referred to as **Dasyus or Dasas**.
- Evidently the Aryans differentiated themselves from the dark native people who had different cultural practices, and sought to maintain their distinction.
- The Rig Veda has references to several other groups. **Simyu and Kikata** are grouped with the dasyus.

- **Sambara son of Kulitara** is mentioned as a chief with 90 forts or settlements.
- **Varchin** was another chief with many troops.
- The Rig Veda mentions the defeat of a chief called **Sambara** by Divodasa of the Bharata clan.



Polity and Political Clashes

- The concept of polity developed in the Rig Vedic time.
- Various units of habitation and divisions such as the janas, vis, gana, grama and kula are referred to in the Rig Veda.
- **The Vedas** speak about the Aryans and their enemies and the battles they fought with them.
- The battles were fought more for cattle and material wealth and the war booty acquired was shared.
- They not only fought with the non-Aryans, but also fought among themselves. They invoked the support of the gods in their battles.
- They strongly believed that prayers, sacrifices and rituals could offer support in their mundane life.
- The god Indra is called **Purandara**, which means destroyer of settlements, which were perhaps fenced or planned townships.

The term Jana means tribe.

- The Bharatas and Tritsu were the ruling Aryan clans who were supported by Vasishta, the priest.
- The region of India was named Bharata Varsha after the tribe of Bharatas.
- The Bharata clan was opposed by ten chiefs and five out of them were Aryans.
- This battle was known as **the Battle of Ten Kings**.
- The battle took place on the banks of the river Paurushni, identified with the river Ravi.

- In this battle, Sudas won and he became important leading to the dominance of Bharata clan.
- The Purus were one of the defeated clans. **The Purus and Bharatas** formed an alliance and later they formed Kuru clan.
- Later the Kurus allied with Panchalas and established their control over the Upper Ganga Valley.

Social Divisions

- The Vedic people distinguished themselves from the non-Aryan people. Varna was the term used by Aryans to refer to colour and category.
- The Rig Veda refers to **Arya varna and Dasa varna**.
- **The Dasas and Dasyus** were conquered and treated as slaves.
- They came to be considered sudras in the later period. Social classes were classified as warriors, priests and common people.
- **Sudras** as a category of people appeared at the end of the Rig Vedic period.
- Slavery was common and slaves were given as gifts to the priests, but there is no reference to wage labour.
- Horse-drawn chariots and bronze objects were possessed by a few, suggesting social distinction.
- Vedic society was largely egalitarian initially, and social distinctions emerged later.
- According to **the Purusha Sukta** of the Rig Veda the various **varnas** emerged thus: **Brahmanas** from the mouth, **the kshatriya** from the arms, **the vaisya** from the thighs and **the sudra** from the feet of **Purusha**, when he was sacrificed.
- These social divisions are considered to have arisen towards the end of the early Vedic period.
- Various professional groups such as warriors, priests, cattle-keepers, farmers, barbers are also mentioned.
- Panis were itinerant traders or perhaps caravan traders. **Panis** are also seen as enemies in some verses.

Tribe and Family

- Kinship was the basis of the social structure of Rig Vedic society. People were identified with specific clans and the clans formed **the tribe or jana**.
- The term jana occurs in the Rig Veda 21 times but **janapada** does not occur even once.
- The term vis, which refers to the common people, occurs 170 times and they lived in gramas (villages).
- The family (griha) was the main social unit within the tribe. It was headed by the **grihapati** and his wife was known as **sapatni**.
- And the family at that point of time was perhaps a joint family.

Women

- Women had a respectable position but it is not possible to generalise about this.
- Society was essentially patriarchal with a preference for male children and cattle.
- The birth of a son was preferred perhaps because of the martial nature of the society, which required male members for their clashes to establish dominance over the territories.
- Having ten sons was considered as a blessing.
- Women attended assemblies and offered sacrifices.
- Marriage was common but primitive practices were also continued.
- **Polyandry** seems to have existed, and widow remarriage was also known.
- People married at the age of 16–17, according to scholars, and there is little evidence of child marriage.

Economy: Agriculture

- Archaeological evidence points to the development of agriculture among the Rig Vedic people.
- **The ploughshare** is mentioned in the Rig Vedas.
- The field was known as **kshetra** and the term **krishi** referred to ploughing.
- The terms **langla and sura** referred to plough and the term **sita** meant the furrow created by ploughing.
- Water for irrigation was probably drawn from wells by cattle- driven water-lifts using pulleys.
- They had knowledge of different seasons, sowing, harvesting and thrashing.
- They cultivated barley (**yavam**) and wheat (**godhuma**).

Pastoralism

- **Cattle rearing** was an important economic activity for the Aryans, although they practiced agriculture.
- Cattle were considered wealth.
- The term for war in the Rig Veda was **gavishthi** which means search for cows (which is the contemporary term (**goshti**) for factions as well).
- The donations to the priests were mainly cows and women slaves but not land, which reveals the importance of **pastoralism**.
- There was no private property in land.

Craft Production

- The Rig Veda mentions artisans such as carpenters, chariot-makers, weavers and leather-workers.
- Copper metallurgy was one of the important developments of this period.
- The term **ayas** in the Rig Veda refers to copper and bronze.

- **Karmara, smith**, is mentioned in the Rig Veda.
- Likewise, there are references to **siri or yarn**, indicating spinning which was done by women and to carpenters, **takshan**.
- Weaving of clothes of wool is also referred to and obviously it was necessary in the cold weather.
- Some of the crafts were fulltime crafts, involving specialists.

Trade, Exchange and Redistribution

- Trading activities were limited though traders were present during the Early Vedic period.
- **Panis** are referred to as traders and they were perhaps **caravan traders**. The word pan means barter, which was a mode of exchange.
- Nishka was a gold or silver ornament used in barter. A priest received 100 horses and 100 nishka as fee for sacrifices.
- **The danas and dakshinas** offered to people were means of redistributing resources.
- The dakshina was both a fee for a specific service and also a means of distributing wealth.
- The distribution of cows helped spread pastoral activities and economic production.

Transport

- Bullock carts, horses and horse-drawn chariots were used for transport. There are references to the sea (**samudra**) and boats (**nau**).
- Boats driven by 100 oars are mentioned.

Polity and Administration

- The polity of the Rig Vedic period was that of a tribal society. The chief of the tribe was the main political head and he was called **rajan**.
- The kings lived in multi- pillared palaces. They offered gifts of cattle, chariots and horse ornaments and gold to the priests.
- Rajan was a hereditary chief. He was perhaps elected by the assembly called **samiti**.
- The main duty of the king was to protect the tribe.
- He protected wealth, fought wars, and offered prayers on behalf of gods.
- The king had authority over the territory and people. Vedic society was militaristic. Bows, daggers, axes and lances were the main weapons of war.
- Tributes and booty collected from war were redistributed by the king. There are also references to gift of **dasas or slaves**.
- **The king Trasadasyu**, the chief of the Purus, gave away 50 women as a gift. The chief was known as **gopa or gopati** which means, chief of cattle.
- The assemblies called **sabha, samiti, vidhata and gana** are mentioned in the Rig Veda. Sabha was the assembly of elders or the elites, samiti was an assembly of people, and vidhata was the assembly of tribe.
- They performed military and religious functions. Women attended the sabhas and vidhatas.

- The king sought the support of the samiti and sabha for his activities. There are debates about the exact nature of these assemblies and functions.
- Most of our understanding of the conditions of Vedic society depends upon the interpretations of various terms. Sometimes it is hard to reconstruct the original meaning.
- **The purohita or priest** offered advice to the king. Vedic priests advised the kings, inspired them and praised their deeds.
- In turn they received rewards for their services. **Senani** was the chief of army.
- There is no evidence of tax collecting officers. Perhaps people made voluntary contribution called **bali** to the king.
- Some scholars say that bali was an imposed tax, and not voluntary. There is no reference to the administration of justice.
- The officer who controlled the territory was called **Vrajapati**. He helped the **kulapas** or **heads** of fighting groups called **gramini**.
- Gramini was the head of the village and fighting unit.

Vedic Religion and Rituals

- Religion and rituals played an important role in Vedic society.
- In the Rig Veda, the natural forces sun, moon, rivers, mountains and rains were defined as divinities.
- The religion was **naturalistic and polytheistic**.
- **Indra** was the most important god and he was called **Purandara**.
- **Agni** was seen as intermediary between god and people.
- **Surya** was a god who removed darkness.
- **Ushas** was the goddess of dawn.
- **Aditi, Prithvi and Sinivali** are other goddesses.
- **Varuna**, the god of water was next in importance. This god was the upholder of natural order.
- Soma was the god of plants and the drink was named after him.
- **Soma drink** was part of the ritual and the preparation of this intoxicating drink is explained in many hymns.
- **Maruts** was the god of strength.
- Interestingly there are few references to **Rudra or Siva**.
- Rituals were adopted as a solution to many issues and the problems of day- to-day life and thus the priests had an important role in the society.

Characteristics of Society

- In the early Vedic period lineage and tribes constituted society, and the king had limited power.
- The various tribal groups of **Aryans and non-Aryans** fought to control the territories.
- Social divisions did not take deep root, although the concept of varna and Aryan identities existed.

- **Pastoralism** was predominant and cattle centred clashes were common, although agriculture did play an important role.
- The archaeological sites suggest different types of craft production including metal, carpentry, pottery and clothes.

Later Vedic Culture

- The Later Vedic culture is dated to the period between 1000 BCE and 700–600 BCE.
- **The Painted Grey Ware Culture** of the Iron Age, which has been identified by archaeologists at many excavated sites, is associated with the Later Vedic culture.
- This period witnessed political, social, economic complexity and developments.

The Late Vedic Texts

- The Later Vedic texts were composed after **the Rig Veda Samhitas**.
- The Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas were composed after the Rig Veda.

Eastward Expansion of the Aryans

- The Aryan speakers expanded from **the Punjab to Western Uttar Pradesh** in the **Ganga Yamuna doab** in the Later Vedic period.
- The history of ancient India was thus marked by the movement of cultures, and interactions and battles among various groups for territories and resources.
- It has been suggested that while the Aryans migrated to the region of eastern part of the Ganga valley, the Indo-Iranians migrated from the region of Iran to the region of Punjab.
- The later Vedic texts speak about the region of **Kuru Panchala** which falls in the **Indo-Gangetic divide** and **the Upper Ganga Valley**.
- The area mentioned as the south- eastern boundary of the Aryans in Rig Veda is listed in **Aitreya Brahmana** as the midland, which indicates the movement of Aryans into the Ganga valley in the Later Vedic period.
- Perhaps this expansion was induced by the need for water and land resources, fresh, less occupied territories and population pressures.
- **The Kurus, Panchalas, Vashas and Ushinaras** are the tribes of this period. References to **the Saraswati and Dhristavati** rivers occur in the later Vedic texts also.
- Around 1000 BCE, the Vedic Aryans moved towards **Kosala** region in eastern Uttar Pradesh and **Videha** in North Bihar, where the Vedic people encountered the local people following Chalcolithic material culture.
- In the Upper Ganga valley, the Vedas acquired **Munda** words indicating that Munda speaking-people lived in the Ganga valley.
- The region of **Kosala and Videha** were the easternmost territories of the Aryan expansion during this period.
- By the end of the Vedic period Panchala and Videha were **Aryanised**.
- The area beyond this region in the east was seen as an alien territory.

- In the Atharva Veda, the people of **Anga and Magadha** (Bihar) were seen as enemies.
- Similarly, the **Pundras of Bengal and the Andhras** were seen as outside the Aryan identity in the **Aitreya Brahmana**.
- This suggests that these regions were not influenced by **Aryan culture**.
- What we gather is that the process of Aryanization gradually spread from the north-west to the south-east mainly into the Ganga Valley.

Later Vedic Culture and Iron

- Iron was an important metal used for implements in this period. It was called **syama-ayas** or **krishna-ayas** or the dark metal.
- Iron is believed to have played an important role in the conversion of the forests of the Ganga Valley into agricultural lands.
- By the end of Vedic period, the knowledge of iron had reached eastern **Uttar Pradesh and Videha**.
- Earlier it was believed that iron originated around 700 BCE, but recent research dates the beginning of iron to around 1200 BCE or even earlier.
- The early views gave excessive emphasis to iron to **the colonization** of the Ganga Valley, but new scholarship argues that iron was not the only factor behind the expansion of the population.

Settlements and territories

- With the intensification of agriculture, the Later Vedic people led a settled life leading to formation of territorial units.
- The term **janapada**, referring to territory, is found in the Brahmanas dated to ca. 800 BCE.
- There are more than 1000 sites of painted **Grey Ware culture** in this area, suggesting that new settlements came up and the **Upper Ganga Valley** was densely populated.
- People lived either in mud-brick houses or houses with wattle and daub walls.
- The foundations for the towns must have emerged during the later Vedic period. This was a period of intense interactions.
- The term nagara, referring to commercial quarters, is found in the later Vedic texts. However, large towns appeared only at the end of the Vedic period.
- The sites of **Hastinapura and Kausambi** are considered proto urban (urban-like) settlements.
- The material culture of this period shows more diversity and is an improvement over the Early Vedic period.
- It can be surmised that there was surplus production to support various classes such as chiefs, princes and priests.

Political Organization

- In the **Early Vedic Age tribal polities** were dominant. The king was elected by assemblies.

- In the Later Vedic period the assemblies became less important and the power of the king increased.
- The influence of assembly called **vidhata** disappeared, while samiti and sabha continued in the period.
- The development of large kingdoms reduced the power of the assemblies. **The Rajan** was the leader who led the army in the battle.
- The concepts of **Samrat/Samrajya** developed and they suggest the increase in the power and ambition of the king.
- The legitimization of kingship became important with the performance of various sacrifices such as **vajapeya and rajasuya**.
- The king developed more control over the territory, people and resources.
- Purohita, which means '**one who places the king in the forefront**', became important in the establishment of polity and kingship.

Monarchy developed

- **The Rajan** became the controller of the social order. **Srauta** sacrifices (sacrifices to achieve some benefits) were carried out to control the resources.
- The kings presented cows, horses, chariots, gold, clothes and female slaves to the priest.
- **The Aitreya Brahmana** says that king has to provide 1000 pieces of gold and cattle to the Brahmana who anoints him.
- Thus the priest became important in the formation of polity and royalty.
- The terms such as **rashtra**, to denote a territory, and **rajya**, meaning sovereign power appeared.
- The king received voluntary or compulsory contribution called **bali** from the people (vis).
- Such voluntary contributions became tributes.
- **The Mahabharata** offers clues to historical development and is suggestive of the power struggle to control the territories.
- **The Ramayana** too is suggestive of the Aryan expansion and the encounters with native people in the forest.
- The territorial formations and the development of lineages became stronger during the Later Vedic period.
- **Romila Thapar** characterises the developments in the first millennium BCE as the movement from lineage to state.
- The development of state level political organization emerged only after 500 BCE, and **the Later Vedic society** was therefore in transition.
- Several lineages became more territorial and settled in the Later Vedic Age. This is evidenced by the term **janapada**, as we saw earlier.
- The mid-first millennium BCE had political organisations such as **rajya and ganasanghas** (oligarchies) and these institutions developed in the later Vedic period.
- Lineage is a group of people descended from a common ancestor.



- As we saw earlier, the clans of **Bharatas** and **Purus** combined to form the **Kurus**, and along with the **Panchalas** they occupied the central part of the **Ganga-Yamuna doab**. **Panchala territory** was in north-western Uttar Pradesh.
- The **Kuru-Panchalas** became one major ethnic group and **Hastinapur** became their capital.
- The war between the **Kauravas** and **Pandavas** was the theme of the Mahabharata and both of them belonged to the clan of Kurus.
- Traditions say that Hastinapur was flooded and the Kuru clan moved to Kausambi near Allahabad.
- Sacrifices and rituals gained importance in the Later Vedic society. The king became more independent.
- Rituals dominated kingship, and this increased the power and influence of the **Rajanyas** and the **Brahmanas**, while distancing the king from the vis.
- The **Asvamedha-yaga** involved letting a horse loose into areas where it moved freely; this was an assertion that the authority of the king was recognized, and a battle ensued when the horse was challenged.
- The vajapeya ritual involved a chariot race. Such innovative modes of rituals helped to increase the power of the king.
- The formation of social, distinctions became prominent.

Social Organization

- The social transformation in the Later Vedic Period is much more clearly reflected in the references in the Vedic texts.
- The social divisions of varna became more established. Teaching was seen as the occupation of the Brahmanas.

- The wives of Brahmanas and cows were given important status. **Rajanya** refers to **kshatriyas** and they were the warriors and rulers who received bali as tax.
- Striking changes took place in **the Varna System**.
- There was an increase in the privileges of the two higher classes, **the Brahmanas** and **the Kshatriyas** at the cost of **the Vaisyas** and **Sudras**.
- In the Panchavimsa Brahmana, the Kshatriya is placed first, higher than the Brahmana but in the Satapatha Brahmana, the Brahmana is placed higher than Kshatriya.
- In later Vedic society the importance of the **purohita** (priest) is stressed, as mentioned in the Vedic texts.
- The Kshatriyas challenged Brahmanical supremacy and their exclusive privilege of entering the asramas, a regulated four stage life namely brahmacharya, grihasta, vanaprastha and sanyasa.
- The outcome of this was the birth of **Jainism, Buddhism and Ajivakam**.
- The system of four Varnas had taken deep root and became rigid in the course of time.
- The popularity of rituals helped the Brahmanas to attain power.
- Brahmanas became important and the kings supported them, although they had conflicts with **Rajanyas**, the warrior nobles.
- The concept of **dvija** (twice-born) developed and **the upanayana** (sacred thread) was limited to the upper sections of the society.
- This ceremony marked the initiation for education.
- The fourth varna was denied this privilege and **the Gayatri mantra** could not be recited by the Sudras.
- Women were also denied upanayana and Gayatri mantra. The king asserted his authority over the three varnas.
- **The Aitreya Brahmana** refers to the Brahmana as the seeker of support and he could be removed by king from his position.
- Certain craft groups managed to attain higher status. For example, the Rathakaras, the chariot makers, had the right to wear the sacred thread.
- Vaisya referred to the common people. They were involved in agriculture, cattle breeding and artisans.
- Later they became traders. Vaisyas paid tax to the kings. Some social groups were placed in ranking even below the Sudras.
- However, cross varna marriages did happen. The idea of **gotra** emerged in the later Vedic period.
- Gotra literally meant '**cowpen**' and it referred to a group of people from a common ancestor.
- Persons of the same gotra were considered as brothers and sisters and could not therefore intermarry.
- Several unilineal descent groups existed with common ancestors. Several related clans formed the tribe.

- The household became more structured, which means it became more organised. The family was an important social unit.
- The family was patriarchal with **patrilineal descent**. The relations within the family were hierarchical.
- **Polygyny** (taking many wives) was prevalent. Several household rituals were also developed for the welfare of the family.
- The married man with his wife was **the yajamana**.
- The concept of **asramas**, referring to various stage of life, was not well established in this time.
- While **brahmacharya, grihasta and vanaprastha** are mentioned, **sanyasa** had not developed.

Women

- The status of women declined as the society became more structured and the patriarchal family became more important.
- In the family the father was the head.
- **The right of primogeniture** was strong.
- Though women had participated in **rituals in the Rig Vedic period**, they were excluded in the **later Vedic period**.
- Daughters are spoken of as a source of trouble.
- Their work was to look after the cattle, milking animals and fetching water.

Economy

- The economic activities of this period were quite diversified.
- **Agriculture, pastoralism, craft production and trade contributed** to the economic development.

Agriculture

- Agricultural activities increased during the Late Vedic period.
- **The Satapatha Brahmana** mentions rituals related to ploughing undertaken by the kings.
- This suggests the importance given to cultivation by the rulers, and the shift to agriculture to support the increasing population.
- The god **Balarama** is depicted with a plough, which suggests the importance of cultivation.
- The Vedic people cultivated barley and rice, and wheat. Wheat was the staple food of Punjab region.
- The Vedic people began to use rice in **the Ganga- Yamuna doab**. The use of rice, rather than wheat, is noticed in the Vedic rituals.

Pastoralism

- Pastoralism continued to be important. Cattle were considered sacred. They became part of exchange and redistribution.
- The offering of cattle as part of **dakshina continued**. **Pastoralism** supplemented agriculture.

Craft Production

- **Arts and crafts proliferated** during the Later Vedic age and craft specialization took deep roots, when compared to early Vedic period, since more occupational groups are mentioned in this period.
- Evidence of iron work is noticed from about 1200 BCE. **Metals** such as copper, tin, gold, bronze and lead are mentioned.
- These metals were smelted and worked by specialized groups.
- The copper objects were used for making weapons for war and hunting.
- **Weaving** was undertaken by women. Leatherwork, pottery and carpentry were well known.
- Terms such as **kulala** referring to potters and **urna sutra** referring to wool appear.
- Bow makers, rope makers, arrow makers, hide dressers, stone breakers, physicians, goldsmiths and astrologers are some of the specialized professional groups mentioned in the texts.
- Professions such as physicians, washerman, hunters, boatman, astrologer and cook are mentioned.
- References to the elephant are often found in the Atharva Veda, along with the elephant keeper.
- The increase in references to such groups indicates a society in transformation.
- The performers of Vedic sacrifices were also a type of service providers.
- The priest played an important role in legitimizing the role of king through various rituals. **Wealth** was measured in terms of cattle and animals.
- There is a mention of offerings of 20 camels, 100 gold necklaces, 300 horses and 10,000 cows as **dakshina**.

Trade and Exchange

- Trade and exchange had developed in the Later Vedic age.
- The material culture found in the archaeological sites reveals the movement of commodities and materials.
- Specialised **caravan traders** existed. No evidence of coins has been found and therefore barter must have been the medium of exchange.
- The introduction of coins took place after about 600 BCE.

Religious Faith and Belief System

- During the Later Vedic period the upper **Ganga Doab** was the centre of the Aryan culture.
- This region is described as **the land of Kuru-Panchalas**. The Vedic gods Agni and Indra lost their importance.

- **Prajapati** became the main deity. Rudra, the god of rituals, identified with Siva, became important.
- **The Satapatha Brahmana** lists the names of Rudra as Pasunampatih, Sarva, Bhava and Bahikas.
- **Vishnu** was conceived as the protector of people. There is no reference to Vishnu's incarnations. Each varna had its own deities.

Rituals

- Rituals became important in society. It was believed that rituals and sacrifices could solve many problems.
- The rituals became more complex, required more resources, and took longer time.
- This indirectly reflects the demand for rituals and the formation of elite groups who could spend more resources on rituals and sacrifices.
- The correct performance of rituals was stressed.
- Stress was laid on paying **dakshina**. Numerous rituals were prescribed for solving all kinds of day to day problems.
- The resort to rituals and sacrifices as a solution for problems led to the view that material wealth could achieve anything.
- The ideas in **the Upanishads** argue against such a view, and stress the importance of realising the atman or inner self.
- Such degeneration of rituals and the material-oriented nature of the priests created dissension and led to the **development of heterodox** faiths such as **Buddhism** and **Jainism** which emphasized correct human behaviour and discipline.

Philosophy and Education

- The disciplines of **philosophy, literature and science developed** in this period.
- Various branches of learning such as literature, grammar, mathematics, ethics and astronomy developed.
- **Education** was limited to males. Teacher-pupil relationship was cultivated through person-oriented training.
- The development of Vedic texts and the importance given to pronunciation, grammar and oral transmission suggest training in utterances and memorization, as part of the **Vedic system of education**.
- The development of various types of texts could be considered as developing solutions for certain mundane issues and a quest for knowledge.
- **Araynakas** are concerned with priests who were in the forests.
- **Upanishads** (which means to sit nearby) texts with philosophical enquiries, were composed during this period.
- They were also referred to as **Vedanta**, since they were attached as the last part of the Vedic texts.

Satyameva Jayate is from Mudaka Upanishad.

- They lay stress on **knowledge and the realization** of the self or atman and Brahman (the Supreme Being), meditation, cycle of birth and death.
- They convey the ideas of karma, and good conduct, self-restraint, mercy and generosity as virtues.
- Despite the ritual dominated aspects of Vedic life, some seers were in pursuit of knowledge and virtuous conduct.

Other aspects of Life

- **The Late Vedic culture** has evidence of music and fine arts. Music instruments such as lute, flute and drum are referred to in the texts.
- With the **development of cultivation and pastoralism**, different types of food and drinks made of grains, milk and ghee and plants were consumed.
- Evidence of the use of silk and ornaments of metal, gold and copper is found.
- Metal mirrors were also used.
- **The archaeological sites** have uncovered beads and ornaments and the fabrication of glass beads was also developed in the later part of the Vedic period.

Characteristics of Later Vedic Society

- Later Vedic period is marked by lineages of clans, and small kingdoms developed in many parts of **the Ganga valley**, leading to the development of the state after 600 BCE.
- The idea of **janapada and rashtra** as territorial units had developed.
- The raja wielded much power and the social divisions began to strike deep roots.
- **The varna system** had developed well and **Sudra** identity became more marked during this period.

Indus Civilization

- After the decline of **the Indus Civilization** numerous cultures developed across north India.
- Copper, followed by iron, came to be widely used. Iron helped to expand areas of cultivation leading to agrarian surplus.
- As this facilitated feeding of more number of people there were greater instances of in-migration and population growth.
- **The Late Harappan cultures** suggest that some of the groups moved into eastern direction, after the decline of the Indus Civilization.
- **The Chalcolithic culture**, including the OCP cultures, flourished in different parts of India.
- People belonging to these cultures began to engage in pastoral as well as agricultural activities.
- The Aryans migrated to India around 1500 BCE. The Vedic texts form an important source of this period.

- Horses and iron are associated with the Aryans. The Rig Veda, the earliest text in Sanskrit, portrays the society and culture of the early Vedic period.
- The early Vedic culture was characterized by pastoral as well as agricultural practices.
- People worshiped nature in the form of deities such as **Agni, Varuna and Surya**.
- The Later Vedic period for which Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas are the source, evolved into a complex and rigid society.
- The four-fold division of the society, namely, **Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya** and **Sudra**, became well established in this period.
- Social groups of the Later Vedic societies were organised into chiefdoms.

MORE TO KNOW:

- **Dara Shukoh, the Mughal prince**, translated the Upanishads into Persian in 1657, much before the colonial scholars developed any interest in ancient Indian literature.