

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Vedas

The **Vedas** (/ˈveɪdəz, ˈviː-/^[4] **Sanskrit**: वेदः *vedaḥ*, "[knowledge](#)") are a large body of [religious texts](#) originating in [ancient India](#). Composed in [Vedic Sanskrit](#), the texts constitute the oldest layer of [Sanskrit literature](#) and the oldest [scriptures](#) of [Hinduism](#).^{[5][6]}

There are four Vedas: the [Rigveda](#), the [Yajurveda](#), the [Samaveda](#) and the [Atharvaveda](#).^{[7][8]} Each Veda has four subdivisions – the [Samhitas](#) ([mantras](#) and [benedictions](#)), the [Aranyakas](#) (text on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices and symbolic-sacrifices), the [Brahmanas](#) (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices), and the [Upanishads](#) (texts discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).^{[7][9][10]} Some scholars add a fifth category – the [Upasanas](#) (worship).^{[11][12]} The texts of the Upanishads discuss ideas akin to the heterodox *sramana*-traditions.^[13]

Vedas are [śruti](#) ("what is heard"),^[14] distinguishing them from other religious texts, which are called [smṛti](#) ("what is remembered"). Hindus consider the Vedas to be [apauruṣeya](#), which means

"not of a man, superhuman"^[15] and "impersonal, authorless,"^{[16][17][18]} revelations of sacred sounds and texts heard by ancient [sages](#) after intense meditation.^{[19][20]}

The Vedas have been orally transmitted since the 2nd millennium BCE with the help of elaborate [mnemonic techniques](#).^{[21][22][23]} The mantras, the oldest part of the Vedas, are recited in the modern age for their phonology rather than the semantics, and are considered to be "primordial rhythms of creation", preceding the forms to which they refer.^[24] By reciting them the cosmos is regenerated, "by enlivening and nourishing the forms of creation at their base."^[24]

The various [Indian philosophies](#) and [Hindu denominations](#) have taken differing positions on the Vedas; schools of Indian philosophy which acknowledge the primal authority of the Vedas are classified as "orthodox" ([āstika](#)).^[note 2] Other [śramaṇa](#) traditions, such as [Lokayata](#), [Carvaka](#), [Ajivika](#), [Buddhism](#) and [Jainism](#), which did not regard the Vedas as authorities, are referred to as "heterodox" or "non-orthodox" ([nāstika](#)) schools.^{[13][25]}



The [Sanskrit](#) word *véda* "knowledge, wisdom" is derived from the root *vid-* "to know". This is reconstructed as being derived from the [Proto-Indo-European](#) root **ǵeid-*, meaning "see" or "know."^[26]

The noun is from [Proto-Indo-European](#) **ǵeidos*, cognate to [Greek](#) (Ϝ)εἶδος "aspect", "form" . This is not to be confused with the homonymous 1st and 3rd person singular perfect tense *véda*, cognate to Greek (Ϝ)οῖδα (*w*)*oida* "I know". Root cognates are Greek [ιδέα](#), [English](#) [wit](#), etc., [Latin](#) *videō* "I see", German *wissen* "to know" etc.^[27]

The Sanskrit term *veda* as a common noun means "knowledge".^[28] The term in some contexts, such as hymn 10.93.11 of the *Rigveda*, means "obtaining or finding wealth, property",^[29] while in some others it means "a bunch of grass together" as in a broom or for [ritual fire](#).^[30]

Vedas are called *Marai* or *Vaymoli* in parts of South India. Marai literally means "hidden, a secret, mystery". But the Tamil [Naan Marai](#) mentioned in [Tholkappiam](#) isn't Sanskrit Vedas.^{[31][32]} In some parts of [South India](#) (e.g. the [Iyengar](#) communities), the word *veda* is used in the [Tamil](#) writings of the [Alvar](#) saints. Such writings include the [Divya Prabandham](#) (aka [Tiruvaymoli](#)).^[33]

Vedic Sanskrit corpus

The term "Vedic texts" is used in two distinct meanings:

1. Texts composed in [Vedic Sanskrit](#) during the [Vedic period](#) ([Iron Age India](#))
2. Any text considered as "connected to the Vedas" or a "corollary of the Vedas"^[34]

The corpus of [Vedic Sanskrit](#) texts includes:

- The [Samhitas](#) (Sanskrit *saṃhitā*, "collection"), are collections of metric texts ("[mantras](#)"). There are four "Vedic" Samhitas: the [Rig-Veda](#), [Yajur-Veda](#), [Sama-Veda](#) and [Atharva-Veda](#), most of which are available in several [recensions](#) (*śākhā*). In some contexts, the term *Veda* is used to refer only to these Samhitas, the collection of mantras. This is the oldest layer of Vedic texts, which were composed between circa 1500-1200 BCE (Rig Veda

book 2-9),^[note 1] and 1200-900 BCE for the other *Samhitas*. The *Samhitas* contain invocations to deities like [Indra](#) and [Agni](#), "to secure their benediction for success in battles or for welfare of the cln."^[35] The complete corpus of Vedic mantras as collected in [Bloomfield's Vedic Concordance](#) (1907) consists of some 89,000 [padas](#) ([metrical feet](#)), of which 72,000 occur in the four *Samhitas*.^[36]

- The [Brahmanas](#) are prose texts that comment and explain the solemn rituals as well as expound on their meaning and many connected themes. Each of the *Brahmanas* is associated with one of the *Samhitas* or its recensions.^{[37][38]} The oldest dated to about 900 BCE, while the youngest *Brahmanas* (such as the [Shatapatha Brahmana](#)), were complete by about 700 BCE.^{[39][40]} The *Brahmanas* may either form separate texts or can be partly integrated into the text of the *Samhitas*. They may also include the *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*.
- The [Aranyakas](#), "wilderness texts" or "forest treaties", were composed by people who meditated in the woods as recluses and are the third part of the Vedas. The texts contain discussions and interpretations of ceremonies, from ritualistic to symbolic meta-ritualistic points of view.^[41] It is frequently read in secondary literature.

- Older [Mukhya Upanishads](#) ([Brhadāranyaka](#), [Chandogya](#), [Katha](#), [Kena](#), [Aitareya](#), and others),^{[42][1]} composed between 800 BCE and the end of the Vedic period.^[43] The [Upanishads](#) are largely philosophical works, some in dialogue form. They are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought and its diverse traditions.^{[44][45]} Of the Vedic corpus, they alone are widely known, and the central ideas of the Upanishads are still influential in Hinduism.^{[44][46]}
- The texts considered "Vedic" in the sense of "corollaries of the Vedas" are less clearly defined, and may include numerous post-Vedic texts such as the later [Upanishads](#) and the [Sutra literature](#), such as [Shrauta Sutras](#) and [Gryha Sutras](#), which are smṛiti texts. Together, the Vedas and these Sutras form part of the Vedic Sanskrit corpus.^{[1][note 3][note 4]}

While production of Brahmanas and Aranyakas ceased with the end of the Vedic period, additional Upanishads were composed after the end of the Vedic period.^[47] The [Brahmanas](#), [Aranyakas](#), and [Upanishads](#), among other things, interpret and discuss the [Samhitas](#) in philosophical and metaphorical ways to explore abstract concepts such as the Absolute ([Brahman](#)), and the soul or the self ([Atman](#)), introducing [Vedanta](#) philosophy, one of the major trends of later [Hinduism](#). In other parts, they show evolution of ideas, such as from actual sacrifice to symbolic sacrifice, and of spirituality in the Upanishads. This has inspired later Hindu scholars such as [Adi Shankara](#) to classify each Veda into *karma-kanda* (कर्म खण्ड,

action/sacrificial ritual-related sections, the *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas*); and *jnana-kanda* (ज्ञान खण्ड, knowledge/spirituality-related sections, mainly the Upanishads').^{[48][49][50][51][52][note 5]}

Śruti and smṛti

Vedas are *śruti* "what is heard"),^[53] distinguishing them from other religious texts, which are called *smṛti* ("what is remembered"). This indigenous system of categorization was adopted by [Max Müller](#) and, while it is subject to some debate, it is still widely used. As Axel Michaels explains:

These classifications are often not tenable for linguistic and formal reasons: There is not only *one* collection at any one time, but rather several handed down in separate Vedic schools; Upaniṣads [...] are sometimes not to be distinguished from *Āraṇyakas* [...]; *Brāhmaṇas* contain older strata of language attributed to the *Samhitās*; there are various dialects and locally prominent traditions of the Vedic schools. Nevertheless, it is advisable to stick to the division adopted by Max Müller because it follows the Indian tradition, conveys the historical sequence fairly accurately, and underlies the current editions, translations, and monographs on Vedic literature."^[42]

Authorship

Hindus consider the Vedas to be *apauruseya*, which means "not of a man, superhuman"^[15] and "impersonal, authorless."^{[16][17][18]} The Vedas, for orthodox Indian theologians, are considered revelations seen by ancient [sages](#) after intense meditation, and texts that have been more carefully preserved since ancient times.^{[19][20]} In the Hindu Epic *Mahabharata*, the creation of

Vedas is credited to [Brahma](#).^[54] The Vedic hymns themselves assert that they were skillfully created by [Rishis](#) (sages), after inspired creativity, just as a carpenter builds a chariot.^{[20][note 6]}

The oldest part of the Rig Veda *Samhita* was orally composed in north-western India ([Punjab](#)) between c. 1500 and 1200 BC,^[note 1] while book 10 of the Rig Veda, and the other Samhitas were composed between 1200-900 BCE more eastward, between the Yamuna and the Ganges, the heartland of [Aryavarta](#) and the [Kuru Kingdom](#) (c. 1200 – c. 900 BCE).^{[56][2][57][58][59]} The "circum-Vedic" texts, as well as the [redaction](#) of the Samhitas, date to c. 1000–500 BCE.

According to tradition, [Vyasa](#) is the compiler of the Vedas, who arranged the four kinds of *mantras* into four *Samhitas* (Collections).^{[60][61]}

Chronology, transmission and interpretation

See also: [Vedic period](#)

Chronology

The Vedas are among the [oldest sacred texts](#).^{[62][63]} The bulk of the Rigveda Samhita was composed in the northwestern region (Punjab) of the [Indian subcontinent](#), most likely between c. 1500 and 1200 BC,^{[2][56][64]} although a wider approximation of c. 1700–1100 BC has also been given.^{[65][66][note 1]} The other three Samhitas are considered to date from the time of the [Kuru Kingdom](#), approximately c. 1200–900 BCE.^[1] The "circum-Vedic" texts, as well as the [redaction](#) of the Samhitas, date to c. 1000–500 BCE, resulting in a [Vedic period](#), spanning the mid 2nd to mid 1st millennium BCE, or the [Late Bronze Age](#) and the [Iron Age](#).^[note 7] The Vedic period reaches its peak only after the composition of the mantra texts, with the establishment of the various [shakhas](#) all over Northern India which annotated the mantra [samhitas](#) with [Brahmana](#) discussions of their meaning, and reaches its end in the age

of [Buddha](#) and [Panini](#) and the rise of the [Mahajanapadas](#) (archaeologically, [Northern Black Polished Ware](#)). Michael Witzel gives a time span of c. 1500 to c. 500–400 BCE. Witzel makes special reference to the Near Eastern [Mitanni material](#) of the 14th century BCE, the only epigraphic record of Indo-Aryan contemporary to the Rigvedic period. He gives 150 BCE ([Patañjali](#)) as a [terminus ante quem](#) for all Vedic Sanskrit literature, and 1200 BCE (the early [Iron Age](#)) as [terminus post quem](#) for the Atharvaveda.^[67]

Transmission

The Vedas were orally transmitted since their composition in the [Vedic period](#) for several millennia.^{[68][21][69]} The authoritative transmission^[70] of the Vedas is by an [oral tradition](#) in a [sampradaya](#) from father to son or from teacher (*guru*) to student (*shishya*),^{[69][71][22][72][21]} believed to be initiated by the Vedic [rishis](#) who heard the [primordial sounds](#).^[73] Only this tradition, embodied by a living teacher, can teach the correct pronunciation of the sounds and explain hidden meanings, in a way the "dead and entombed manuscript" cannot do.^{[71][note 8]} As Leela Prasad states, "According to [Shankara](#), the "correct tradition" (*sampradaya*) has as much authority as the written Shastra," explaining that the tradition "bears the authority to clarify and provide direction in the application of knowledge."^[74]

The emphasis in this transmission^[note 9] is on the "proper articulation and pronunciation of the Vedic sounds," as prescribed in the [Shiksha](#),^[76] the [Vedanga](#) (Vedic study) of sound as uttered in a Vedic recitation,^{[77][78]} mastering the texts "literally forward and backward in fully acoustic fashion."^[79] Houben and Rath note that the Vedic textual tradition cannot simply be characterized as oral, "since it also depends significantly on a memory culture."^[80] The Vedas were preserved with precision with the help of elaborate [mnemonic techniques](#),^{[21][22][23]} such as memorizing the texts in eleven different modes of recitation (*pathas*),^[70] using the alphabet as

a [mnemotechnical device](#),^{[81][82][note 10]} "matching physical movements (such as nodding the head)^[disputed – discuss] with particular sounds and chanting in a group"^[83] and visualizing sounds by using [mudras](#) (hand signs).^[84] This provided an additional visual confirmation, and also an alternate means to check the reading integrity by the audience, in addition to the audible means.^[85] Houben and Rath note that a strong "memory culture" existed in ancient India when texts were transmitted orally, before the advent of writing in the early first millennium CE.^[82] According to [Staal](#), criticising the [Goody](#)-Watt hypothesis "according to which literacy is more reliable than orality,"^[86] this tradition of oral transmission "is closely related to Indian forms of science," and "by far the more remarkable" than the relatively recent tradition of written transmission.^[note 11]

While according to Mookerji [understanding the meaning](#) (*vedarthajnana*^[89] or [artha-bodha](#)^{[90][note 12]}) of the words of the Vedas was part of the [Vedic learning](#),^[90] Holdrege and other Indologists^[91] have noted that in the transmission of the *Samhitas* the emphasis is on the phonology of the sounds (*śabda*) and not on the meaning (*artha*) of the mantras.^{[91][92][71]} Already at the end of the Vedic period their original meaning had become obscure for "ordinary people,"^{[92][note 13]} and [niruktas](#), etymological compendia, were developed to preserve and clarify the original meaning of many Sanskrit words.^{[92][94]} According to Staal, as referenced by Holdrege, though the mantras may have a discursive meaning, when the mantras are recited in the Vedic rituals "they are disengaged from their original context and are employed in ways that have little or nothing to do with their meaning."^{[91][note 14]} The words of the mantras are "themselves sacred,"^[95] and "do not constitute [linguistic utterances](#)."^[24] Instead, as Klostermaier notes, in their application in Vedic rituals they become [magical](#) sounds, "means to an end."^[note 15] Holdrege notes that there are scarce commentaries on the meaning of the mantras, in contrast

to the number of commentaries on the Brahmanas and Upanishads, but states that the lack of emphasis on the "discursive meaning does not necessarily imply that they are meaningless."^[96] In the Brahmanical perspective, the sounds have their own meaning, mantras are considered as "primordial rhythms of creation", preceding the forms to which they refer.^[24] By reciting them the cosmos is regenerated, "by enlivening and nourishing the forms of creation at their base. As long as the purity of the sounds is preserved, the recitation of the *mantras* will be efficacious, irrespective of whether their discursive meaning is understood by human beings."^{[24][note 16]} Frazier further notes that "later Vedic texts sought deeper understanding of the reasons the rituals worked," which indicates that the Brahmin communities considered study to be a "process of understanding."^[97]

A literary tradition is traceable in post-Vedic times, after the rise of [Buddhism](#) in the [Maurya period](#),^[note 17] perhaps earliest in the [Kanva](#) recension of the Yajurveda about the 1st century BCE; however oral tradition of transmission remained active.^[68] [Jack Goody](#) has argued for an earlier literary tradition, concluding that the Vedas bear hallmarks of a literate culture along with oral transmission,^{[99][100]} but Goody's views have been strongly criticised by Falk, Lopez Jr., and Staal, though they have also found some support.^{[101][102]}

The Vedas were written down only after 500 BCE,^{[103][68][21]} but only the orally transmitted texts are regarded as authoritative, given the emphasis on the exact pronunciation of the sounds.^[70] Witzel suggests that attempts to write down the Vedic texts towards the end of 1st millennium BCE were unsuccessful, resulting in *smṛiti* rules explicitly forbidding the writing down of the Vedas.^[68] Due to the ephemeral nature of the manuscript material (birch bark or palm leaves), surviving manuscripts rarely surpass an age of a few hundred years.^[104] The [Sampurnanand Sanskrit University](#) has a Rigveda manuscript from the 14th

century;^[105] however, there are a number of older Veda manuscripts in [Nepal](#) that are dated from the 11th century onwards.^[106]

Vedic learning

Main article: [Svādhyāya](#)

The Vedas, Vedic rituals and its ancillary sciences called the [Vedangas](#), were part of the curriculum at ancient universities such as at [Taxila](#), [Nalanda](#) and [Vikramashila](#).^{[107][108][109][110]} According to Deshpande, "the tradition of the [Sanskrit grammarians](#) also contributed significantly to the preservation and interpretation of Vedic texts."^[111] [Yāska](#) (4th c. BCE^[112]) wrote the [Nirukta](#), which reflects the concerns about the loss of meaning of the mantras,^[note 13] while [Pāṇinis](#) (4th c. BCE) [Aṣṭādhyāyī](#) is the most important surviving text of the Vyākaraṇa traditions. [Mīmamsa](#) scholar [Sayanas](#) (14th c. CE) major *Vedartha Prakasha*^[note 18] is a rare^[113] commentary on the Vedas, which is also referred to by contemporary scholars.^[114]

Yaska and Sayana, reflecting an ancient understanding, state that the Veda can be interpreted in three ways, giving "the truth about [gods](#), [dharma](#) and [parabrahman](#)."^{[115][116][note 19]} The *pūrva-kāṇḍa* (or *karma-kanda*), the part of the Veda dealing with ritual, gives knowledge of *dharma*, "which brings us satisfaction." The *uttara-kanda* (or [jnana-kanda](#)),^[note 20] the part of the Veda dealing with the knowledge of the absolute, gives knowledge of *Parabrahma*, "which fulfills all of our desires."^[117] According to Holdrege, for the exponents of *karma-kandha* the Veda is to be "inscribed in the minds and hearts of men" by memorization and recitation, while for the exponents of the *jnana-kanda* and meditation the Vedas express a transcendental reality which can be approached with mystical means.^[118]

Holdrege notes that in Vedic learning "priority has been given to recitation over interpretation" of the Samhitas.^[113] Galewicz states that Sayana, a Mimamsa scholar,^{[119][120][121]} "thinks of the Veda as something to be trained and mastered to be put into practical ritual use," noticing that "it is not the meaning of the mantras that is most essential [...] but rather the perfect mastering of their sound form."^[122] According to Galewicz, Sayana saw the purpose (*artha*) of the Veda as the "artha of carrying out sacrifice," giving precedence to the *Yajurveda*.^[119] For Sayana, whether the mantras had meaning depended on the context of their practical usage.^[122] This conception of the Veda, as a repertoire to be mastered and performed, takes precedence over the internal meaning or "autonomous message of the hymns."^[123] Most Śrauta rituals are not performed in the modern era, and those that are, are rare.^[124]

Mookerji notes that the Rigveda, and Sayana's commentary, contain passages criticizing as fruitless mere recitation of the *Ṛik* (words) without understanding their inner meaning or essence, the knowledge of *dharma* and *Parabrahman*.^[125] Mookerji concludes that in the Rigvedic education of the mantras "the contemplation and comprehension of their meaning was considered as more important and vital to education than their mere mechanical repetition and correct pronunciation."^[126] Mookerji refers to Sayana as stating that "the mastery of texts, *akshara-praptī*, is followed by artha-bodha, perception of their meaning."^{[90][note 12]} Mookerji explains that the Vedic knowledge was first perceived by the *rishis* and *munis*. Only the perfect language of the Vedas, as in contrast to ordinary speech, can reveal these truths, which were preserved by committing them to memory.^[128] According to Mookerji, while these truths are imparted to the student by the memorized texts,^[129] "the realization of Truth" and the knowledge of paramatman as revealed to the *rishis* is the real aim of Vedic learning, and not the mere recitation of texts.^[130] The supreme knowledge of the Absolute, para Brahman-jnana, the

knowledge of *rta* and *satya*, can be obtained by taking vows of silence and obedience^[131] sense-restraint, *dhyana*, the practice of *tapas* (austerities),^[116] and discussing the *Vedanta*.^{[131][note 21]}

Vedic schools or recensions

Main article: [Shakha](#)

The four Vedas were transmitted in various *śākhās* (branches, schools).^{[133][134]} Each school likely represented an ancient community of a particular area, or kingdom.^[134] Each school followed its own canon. Multiple recensions are known for each of the Vedas.^[133] Thus, states Witzel as well as Renou, in the 2nd millennium BCE, there was likely no canon of one broadly accepted Vedic texts, no Vedic “Scripture”, but only a canon of various texts accepted by each school. Some of these texts have survived, most lost or yet to be found. Rigveda that survives in modern times, for example, is in only one extremely well preserved school of Śākalya, from a region called *Videha*, in modern north *Bihar*, south of *Nepal*.^[135] The Vedic canon in its entirety consists of texts from all the various Vedic schools taken together.^[134]

Each of the four Vedas were shared by the numerous schools, but revised, interpolated and adapted locally, in and after the Vedic period, giving rise to various recensions of the text. Some texts were revised into the modern era, raising significant debate on parts of the text which are believed to have been corrupted at a later date.^{[136][137]} The Vedas each have an Index or *Anukramani*, the principal work of this kind being the general Index or *Sarvānukramaṇī*.^{[138][139]}

Prodigious energy was expended by ancient Indian culture in ensuring that these texts were transmitted from generation to generation with inordinate fidelity.^[140] For example, memorization of the sacred *Vedas* included up to eleven *forms of recitation* of the same text. The

texts were subsequently "proof-read" by comparing the different recited versions. Forms of recitation included the *jaṭā-pāṭha* (literally "mesh recitation") in which every two adjacent words in the text were first recited in their original order, then repeated in the reverse order, and finally repeated in the original order.^[141] That these methods have been effective, is attested to by the preservation of the most ancient Indian religious text, the *Rigveda*, as redacted into a single text during the *Brahmana* period, without any variant readings within that school.^[141]

The Vedas were orally transmitted by memorization for many generations and was written down for the first time around 1200 BCE.^{[142][143]} However, all printed editions of the Vedas that survive in the modern times are likely the version existing in about the 16th century AD.^[144]

1. Rigveda (RV)
2. Yajurveda (YV, with the main division TS vs. VS)
3. Samaveda (SV)
4. Atharvaveda (AV)

Of these, the first three were the principal original division, also called "*trayī vidyā*"; that is, "the triple science" of reciting hymns (Rigveda), performing sacrifices (Yajurveda), and chanting songs (Samaveda).^{[146][147]} The Rig Veda most likely was composed between c. 1500 and 1200.^[note 1] Witzel notes that it is the Vedic period itself, where incipient lists divide the Vedic texts into three (*trayī*) or four branches: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.^[134]

Each Veda has been subclassified into four major text types – the Samhitas (mantras and benedictions), the Aranyakas (text on rituals, ceremonies such as newborn baby's rites of passage, coming of age, marriages, retirement and cremation, sacrifices and symbolic sacrifices), the Brahmanas (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices), and the Upanishads (text

discussing meditation, philosophy and spiritual knowledge).^{[7][9][10]} The [Upasanas](#) (short ritual worship-related sections) are considered by some scholars^{[11][12]} as the fifth part. [Witzel](#) notes that the rituals, rites and ceremonies described in these ancient texts reconstruct to a large degree the Indo-European marriage rituals observed in a region spanning the Indian subcontinent, Persia and the European area, and some greater details are found in the Vedic era texts such as the [Grhya Sūtras](#).^[148]

Only one version of the Rigveda is known to have survived into the modern era.^[135] Several different versions of the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda are known, and many different versions of the Yajur Veda have been found in different parts of South Asia.^[149]

The texts of the Upanishads discuss ideas akin to the heterodox *sramana*-traditions.^[13]

Rigveda

The [Rigveda Samhita](#) is the oldest extant [Indic](#) text.^[151] It is a collection of 1,028 [Vedic Sanskrit hymns](#) and 10,600 verses in all, organized into ten books (Sanskrit: *mandalas*).^[152] The hymns are dedicated to [Rigvedic deities](#).^[153]

The books were composed by poets from different priestly groups over a period of several centuries between c. 1500 and 1200 BC,^[note 1] (the early [Vedic period](#)) in the [Punjab \(Sapta Sindhu\)](#) region of the northwest [Indian subcontinent](#). According to Michael Witzel, the initial codification of the *Rigveda* took place at the end of the Rigvedic period at ca. 1200 BCE, in the early [Kuru](#) kingdom.^[154]

The Rigveda is structured based on clear principles. The Veda begins with a small book addressed to Agni, Indra, [Soma](#) and other gods, all arranged according to decreasing total number of hymns in each deity collection; for each deity series, the hymns progress from longer

to shorter ones, but the number of hymns per book increases. Finally, the meter too is systematically arranged from jagati and tristubh to anustubh and gayatri as the text progresses.^[134]

The rituals became increasingly complex over time, and the king's association with them strengthened both the position of the Brahmans and the kings.^[155] The [Rajasuya](#) rituals, performed with the coronation of a king, "set in motion [...] cyclical regenerations of the universe."^[156] In terms of substance, the nature of hymns shift from praise of deities in early books to [Nasadiya Sukta](#) with questions such as, "what is the origin of the universe?, do even gods know the answer?",^[150] the virtue of [Dāna](#) (charity) in society,^[157] and other metaphysical issues in its hymns.^[note 22]

There are similarities between the mythology, rituals and linguistics in Rigveda and those found in ancient central Asia, Iranian and Hindukush (Afghanistan) regions.^[158]

Samaveda

Main article: [Samaveda](#)

The [Samaveda Samhita](#)^[159] consists of 1549 stanzas, taken almost entirely (except for 75 mantras) from the Rigveda.^{[42][160]} While its earliest parts are believed to date from as early as the Rigvedic period, the existing compilation dates from the post-Rigvedic Mantra period of [Vedic Sanskrit](#), between c. 1200 and 1000 BCE or "slightly later," roughly contemporary with the [Atharvaveda](#) and the [Yajurveda](#).^[160]

The Samaveda samhita has two major parts. The first part includes four melody collections (gāna, गान) and the second part three verse "books" (ārcika, आर्चिक).^[160] A melody in the song books corresponds to a verse in the *arcika* books. Just as in the Rigveda, the early sections of

Samaveda typically begin with hymns to Agni and Indra but shift to the abstract. Their meters shift also in a descending order. The songs in the later sections of the Samaveda have the least deviation from the hymns derived from the Rigveda.^[160]

In the Samaveda, some of the Rigvedic verses are repeated.^[161] Including repetitions, there are a total of 1875 verses numbered in the Samaveda recension translated by Griffith.^[162] Two major recensions have survived, the Kauthuma/Ranayaniya and the Jaiminiya. Its purpose was liturgical, and they were the repertoire of the *udgātr* or "singer" priests.^[163]

Yajurveda

Main article: [Yajurveda](#)

The [Yajurveda Samhita](#) consists of prose mantras.^[164] It is a compilation of ritual offering formulas that were said by a priest while an individual performed ritual actions such as those before the [yajna](#) fire.^[164] The core text of the Yajurveda falls within the classical Mantra period of [Vedic Sanskrit](#) at the end of the 2nd millennium BCE - younger than the [Rigveda](#), and roughly contemporary with the [Atharvaveda](#), the Rigvedic [Khilani](#), and the [Sāmaveda](#).^[165] Witzel dates the Yajurveda [hymns](#) to the early Indian [Iron Age](#), after c. 1200 and before 800 BCE.^[166] corresponding to the early [Kuru Kingdom](#).^[167]

The earliest and most ancient layer of Yajurveda [samhita](#) includes about 1,875 verses, that are distinct yet borrow and build upon the foundation of verses in [Rigveda](#).^[168] Unlike the Samaveda which is almost entirely based on Rigveda mantras and structured as songs, the Yajurveda samhitas are in prose and linguistically, they are different from earlier Vedic texts.^[169] The Yajur

Veda has been the primary source of information about sacrifices during Vedic times and associated rituals.^[170]

There are two major groups of texts in this Veda: the "Black" (*Krishna*) and the "White" (*Shukla*). The term "black" implies "the un-arranged, motley collection" of verses in Yajurveda, in contrast to the "white" (well arranged) Yajurveda.^[171] The White Yajurveda separates the Samhita from its Brahmana (the [Shatapatha Brahmana](#)), the Black Yajurveda intersperses the Samhita with Brahmana commentary. Of the Black Yajurveda, texts from four major schools have survived (Maitrayani, Katha, Kapisthala-Katha, Taittiriya), while of the White Yajurveda, two (Kanva and Madhyandina).^{[172][173]} The youngest layer of Yajurveda text is not related to rituals nor sacrifice, it includes the largest collection of primary Upanishads, influential to various schools of [Hindu philosophy](#).^{[174][175]}

Atharvaveda

Main article: [Atharvaveda](#)

The [Artharvaveda Samhita](#) is the text 'belonging to the [Atharvan](#) and [Angirasa](#) poets. It has about 760 hymns, and about 160 of the hymns are in common with the Rigveda.^[176] Most of the verses are metrical, but some sections are in prose.^[176] Two different versions of the text – the *Paippalāda* and the *Śaunakīya* – have survived into the modern times.^{[176][177]} The Atharvaveda was not considered as a Veda in the Vedic era, and was accepted as a Veda in late 1st millennium BCE.^{[178][179]} It was compiled last,^[180] probably around 900 BCE, although some of its material may go back to the time of the Rigveda,^[181] or earlier.^[176]

The Atharvaveda is sometimes called the "Veda of magical formulas",^[182] an epithet declared to be incorrect by other scholars.^[183] The [Samhita](#) layer of the text likely represents a developing 2nd millennium BCE tradition of magico-religious rites to address superstitious anxiety, spells to

remove maladies believed to be caused by demons, and herbs- and nature-derived potions as medicine.^{[184][185]} The text, states Kenneth Zysk, is one of oldest surviving record of the evolutionary practices in religious medicine and reveals the "earliest forms of folk healing of Indo-European antiquity".^[186] Many books of the Atharvaveda Samhita are dedicated to rituals without magic, such as to philosophical speculations and to [theosophy](#).^[183]

The Atharva veda has been a primary source for information about Vedic culture, the customs and beliefs, the aspirations and frustrations of everyday Vedic life, as well as those associated with kings and governance. The text also includes hymns dealing with the two major rituals of passage – [marriage](#) and [cremation](#). The Atharva Veda also dedicates significant portion of the text asking the meaning of a ritual.^[187]

Brahmanas

Further information: [Brahmanas](#)

The Brahmanas are commentaries, explanation of proper methods and meaning of Vedic Samhita rituals in the four Vedas.^[37] They also incorporate myths, legends and in some cases philosophy.^{[37][38]} Each regional Vedic [shakha](#) (school) has its own operating manual-like Brahmana text, most of which have been lost.^[188] A total of 19 Brahmana texts have survived into modern times: two associated with the [Rigveda](#), six with the [Yajurveda](#), ten with the [Samaveda](#) and one with the [Atharvaveda](#). The oldest dated to about 900 BCE, while the youngest Brahmanas (such as the [Shatapatha Brahmana](#)), were complete by about 700 BCE.^{[39][40]} According to [Jan Gonda](#), the final codification of the Brahmanas took place in pre-Buddhist times (ca. 600 BCE).^[189]

The substance of the Brahmana text varies with each Veda. For example, the first chapter of the Chandogya Brahmana, one of the oldest Brahmanas, includes eight ritual *suktas* (hymns) for the

ceremony of marriage and rituals at the birth of a child.^{[190][191]} The first hymn is a recitation that accompanies offering a [Yajna](#) oblation to *Agni* (fire) on the occasion of a marriage, and the hymn prays for prosperity of the couple getting married.^{[190][192]} The second hymn wishes for their long life, kind relatives, and a numerous progeny.^[190] The third hymn is a mutual marriage pledge, between the bride and groom, by which the two bind themselves to each other. The sixth through last hymns of the first chapter in Chandogya Brahmana are ritual celebrations on the birth of a child and wishes for health, wealth, and prosperity with a profusion of cows and [artha](#).^[190] However, these verses are incomplete expositions, and their complete context emerges only with the Samhita layer of text.^[193]

Aranyakas and Upanishads

Further information: [Vedanta](#), [Upanishads](#), and [Aranyakas](#)

The Aranyakas layer of the Vedas include rituals, discussion of symbolic meta-rituals, as well as philosophical speculations.^{[12][41]}

Aranyakas, however, neither are homogeneous in content nor in structure.^[41] They are a medley of instructions and ideas, and some include chapters of Upanishads within them. Two theories have been proposed on the origin of the word *Aranyakas*. One theory holds that these texts were meant to be studied in a forest, while the other holds that the name came from these being the manuals of allegorical interpretation of sacrifices, for those in [Vanaprastha](#) (retired, forest-dwelling) stage of their life, according to the historic age-based [Ashrama](#) system of human life.^[194]

The Upanishads reflect the last composed layer of texts in the Vedas. They are commonly referred to as [Vedānta](#), variously interpreted to mean either the "last chapters, parts of the Vedas" or "the object, the highest purpose of the Veda".^[195] The central concern of the Upanishads are

the connections "between parts of the human organism and cosmic realities."^[196] The Upanishads intend to create a hierarchy of connected and dependent realities, evoking a sense of unity of "the separate elements of the world and of human experience [compressing] them into a single form."^[197] The concepts of [Brahman](#), the Ultimate Reality from which everything arises, and [Ātman](#), the essence of the individual, are central ideas in the [Upanishads](#),^{[198][199]} and knowing the correspondence between Ātman and Brahman as "the fundamental principle which shapes the world" permits the creation of an integrative vision of the whole.^{[197][199]} The Upanishads are the foundation of Hindu philosophical thought and its diverse traditions,^{[44][200]} and of the Vedic corpus, they alone are widely known, and the central ideas of the Upanishads have influenced the diverse traditions of Hinduism.^{[44][201]}

Aranyakas are sometimes identified as *karma-kanda* (ritualistic section), while the Upanishads are identified as *jnana-kanda* (spirituality section).^{[49][50][51][note 5]} In an alternate classification, the early part of Vedas are called [Samhitas](#) and the commentary are called the [Brahmanas](#) which together are identified as the ceremonial *karma-kanda*, while *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* are referred to as the *jnana-kanda*.^[52]

Post-Vedic literature

Vedanga

Main article: [Vedanga](#)

The Vedangas developed towards the end of the vedic period, around or after the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. These auxiliary fields of Vedic studies emerged because the language of the Vedas, composed centuries earlier, became too archaic to the people of that time.^[202] The

Vedangas were sciences that focused on helping understand and interpret the Vedas that had been composed many centuries earlier.^[202]

The six subjects of Vedanga are phonetics (*Śikṣā*), poetic meter (*Chandas*), grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*), etymology and linguistics (*Nirukta*), rituals and rites of passage (*Kalpa*), time keeping and astronomy (*Jyotiṣa*).^{[203][204][205]}

Vedangas developed as ancillary studies for the Vedas, but its insights into meters, structure of sound and language, grammar, linguistic analysis and other subjects influenced post-Vedic studies, arts, culture and various schools of [Hindu philosophy](#).^{[206][207][208]} The Kalpa Vedanga studies, for example, gave rise to the Dharma-sutras, which later expanded into Dharma-shastras.^{[202][209]}

Parisista

Main article: [Parisista](#)

Parīṣiṣṭa "supplement, appendix" is the term applied to various ancillary works of Vedic literature, dealing mainly with details of ritual and elaborations of the texts logically and chronologically prior to them: the [Samhitas](#), [Brahmanas](#), [Aranyakas](#) and [Sutras](#). Naturally classified with the Veda to which each pertains, Parisista works exist for each of the four Vedas. However, only the literature associated with the [Atharvaveda](#) is extensive.

- The *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Parīṣiṣṭa* is a very late text associated with the [Rigveda](#) canon.
- The *Gobhila Gṛhya Parīṣiṣṭa* is a short metrical text of two chapters, with 113 and 95 verses respectively.

- The *Kāṭiya Pariśiṣṭas*, ascribed to [Kātyāyana](#), consist of 18 works enumerated self-referentially in the fifth of the series (the [Charanavyūha](#)) and the *Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra Pariśiṣṭa*.
- The *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* has 3 *pariśiṣṭas* The *Āpastamba Hautra Pariśiṣṭa*, which is also found as the second *praśna* of the *Satyasādhya Śrauta Sūtra*, the *Vārāha Śrauta Sūtra Pariśiṣṭa*
- For the Atharvaveda, there are 79 works, collected as 72 distinctly named *pariśiṣṭas*.^[210]

Upaveda

The term **upaveda** ("applied knowledge") is used in traditional literature to designate the subjects of certain technical works.^{[211][212]} Lists of what subjects are included in this class differ among sources. The [Charanavyūha](#) mentions four Upavedas:^[213]

- [Archery](#) ([Dhanurveda](#)), associated with the Yajurveda
- Architecture ([Sthapatyaveda](#)), associated with the RigVeda.
- Music and [sacred dance](#) ([Gāndharvaveda](#)), associated with the Samaveda
- Medicine ([Āyurveda](#)), associated with the Atharvaveda.^{[214][215]}

"Fifth" and other Vedas

Some post-Vedic texts, including the [Mahabharata](#), the [Natyasastra](#)^[216] and certain [Puranas](#), refer to themselves as the "[fifth Veda](#)".^[217] The earliest reference to such a "fifth Veda" is found in the [Chandogya Upanishad](#) in hymn 7.1.2.^[218]

Let drama and dance (Nāṭya, नाट्य) be the fifth vedic scripture. Combined with an epic story, tending to virtue, wealth, joy and spiritual freedom, it must contain the significance of every scripture, and forward every art. Thus, from all the Vedas, [Brahma](#) framed the Nāṭya Veda. From the Rig Veda he drew forth the words, from the Sama Veda the melody, from the Yajur Veda gesture, and from the Atharva Veda the sentiment.

— *First chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra, Abhinaya Darpana* ^{[219][220]}

"[Divya Prabandha](#)", for example Tiruvaymoli, is a term for canonical [Tamil](#) texts considered as Vernacular Veda by some South Indian Hindus. ^{[32][33]}

Other texts such as the [Bhagavad Gita](#) or the [Vedanta Sutras](#) are considered *shruti* or "Vedic" by some [Hindu denominations](#) but not universally within Hinduism. The [Bhakti movement](#), and [Gaudiya Vaishnavism](#) in particular extended the term *veda* to include the [Sanskrit Epics](#) and Vaishnavite devotional texts such as the [Pancaratra](#). ^[221]

Puranas

Main article: [Puranas](#)

The *Puranas* is a vast genre of encyclopedic Indian literature about a wide range of topics particularly myths, legends and other traditional lore. ^[222] Several of these texts are named after major [Hindu](#) deities such as Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. ^{[223][224]} There are 18 *Maha Puranas* (Great Puranas) and 18 *Upa Puranas* (Minor Puranas), with over 400,000 verses. ^[222]

The Puranas have been influential in the [Hindu](#) culture. ^{[225][226]} They are considered *Vaidika* (congruent with Vedic literature). ^[227] The [Bhagavata Purana](#) has been among the most celebrated and popular text in the Puranic genre, and is of [non-dualistic](#) tenor. ^{[228][229]} The Puranic literature wove with the [Bhakti movement](#) in India, and

both [Dvaita](#) and [Advaita](#) scholars have commented on the underlying Vedanta themes in the *Maha Puranas*.^[230]

The study of Sanskrit in the West began in the 17th century. In the early 19th century, [Arthur Schopenhauer](#) drew attention to Vedic texts, specifically the Upanishads. The importance of Vedic Sanskrit for [Indo-European studies](#) was also recognized in the early 19th century. English translations of the Samhitas were published in the later 19th century, in the *Sacred Books of the East* series edited by [Müller](#) between 1879 and 1910.^[238] [Ralph T. H. Griffith](#) also presented English translations of the four Samhitas, published 1889 to 1899.

Rigveda manuscripts were selected for inscription in UNESCO's [Memory of the World Register](#) in 2007.^[239]

Early Vedic Age : Origin, Social Life, Economic Life, Culture and Religion

Early Vedic Age : Origin, Social Life, Economic Life, Culture and Religion!

After the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization, another glorious civilization flourished in India. The people who were responsible for the evolution of this civilization called themselves Aryas or Aryans.

Arya' literally means the man of 'noble character', and the "free-born". They belonged to the group of people known as Indo-Europeans. They entered into India from the north-west.

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Although the Rig Veda deals with devotional work of religious nature, yet it gives a vivid picture of the early Vedic civilization. The Vedic Civilization is best understood from the social life, political organisation, economic life and religious beliefs.

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They spoke the Indo-European languages from which modern languages like Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek, Celtic, Gothic have developed. Originally, the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the area east of the Alps, known as Eurasia.

European Origin:

The early Aryans were familiar with certain animals such as goats, dogs, pigs, cows, horses etc. and also with the trees like pine, maple, oak, willow, birch etc. which are found in Europe. This led to Prof. Giles to suggest the European origin of the Aryans. It is generally believed that they migrated to India and other parts of Asia from Europe.

It is difficult to locate the exact part of Europe where the Aryans originally lived before they migrated elsewhere. According to Giles, Balkan countries were the original home of the Aryans. The flora and fauna and the animals with which the early Aryans were familiar could be found in the Balkan countries at that time.

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Prof. Hist believes that the Aryans migrated from Lithuania Europe into Caucasus and from there they entered into Iran. Again from Iran they entered into Punjab. This view is proved by the discovery of Boghaz Koi inscription and the Tel-El- Amarna Letters in Western Asia.

Migration from Southern Russia:

Some historians held the view that the Aryans entered into India from the region of South Russia. Brandenstein has suggested that the Aryans migrated to India from Kirghiz steppes in Russia. The great Philologist, Schrader accepts South Russia as the original home of Aryans from where they migrated to different areas.

Indian Origin:

Some historians held the view that Aryans belonged to India. The Rig Veda refers to 'Sapta Sindhu' land (of seven rivers) which was the name of Punjab. Subsequently it was called "Panchanada" (land of five rivers). The flora and fauna with which the Aryans were familiar are not found in Punjab. Again the fertility of Punjab must have attracted immigration. From the linguistic view point Greek and Latin belong to Aryan group of Languages. These considerations led the historians to believe that Aryans do not originally belong to India.

From linguistic study it is proved that the Aryans migrated from Europe or Asia to India. For example 'Pater' and 'Mater' in Latin, "Father" and "Mother" of English resemble with 'Pitru' and 'Matru' of Sanskrit. So the historians generally accepted the view that Aryans migrated from Europe or Asia to India.

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The Aryans first appeared in Iran on their way to India, where the Indo-Iranians lived for a long time. From Rig Veda, which is the earliest specimen of Indo-European language we know about the Aryans. The Rig Veda consists of ten mandalas or books. It is a collection of prayers offered to Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuna and other gods by various families of poets or sages.

Rig Veda has many things in common with 'Avesta' of Iran. The 'Rig Veda' and 'Avesta' use the same names for several gods and even for several classes. Some Aryan names engraved in the Kassite inscriptions of 1600 B.C. and the Mittani inscriptions of the fourteenth century B.C. found in Iraq proves that from Iran a branch of the Aryans moved towards the west.

Home of the Aryans in India:

The Aryans appeared in India a little earlier than 1500 B.C. The earliest Aryans settled down in eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, and fringes of Uttar Pradesh. The Rig-Veda mentioned the names of some rivers of Afghanistan such as the river Kubha, and the river Indus and its five branches. The earliest settlements of Aryans were confined to the valleys of the river Sindh and its tributaries and of the Saraswati and the Drishadvati.

Though they were confined mainly in Punjab, yet their outer settlements reached to the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna. They named that region Madhya Desa. Gradually they occupied the whole of Uttarapatha, the loan between Himalayas and the Vindhya and from the western seas to the east were called as Aryavarta.

The Vedas:

The Vedas form the oldest literary works of the Aryans and occupy a very distinguished place in the history of the world literature. Vedas have been looked upon as the revealed words of God by millions of Hindus. In course of many centuries Vedas had grown up and was orally handed down from generation to generation. The Vedas were probably authored during 1800 BC and 600 BC. It consists of three successive classes of literary production.

These three classes are:

(i) The Samhitas or Mantras—these are collections of hymns, prayers, charms, litanies, sacrificial formulas.

(ii) The Brahmanas—a kind of Primitive theology and philosophy of Brahmanas.

(iii) The Aranyakas and Upanishads—they are partly included in the Brahmanas or attached thereto and partly exist as separate work. They contain philosophical meditations of the hermits and ascetics on soul, God, world & man.

There are four Samhitas which are different from one another.

These are:

(i) The Rigveda Samhita:

A collection of hymns. It has ten mandalas with a total of 1028 ‘Suktas’ or ‘stutis’ for the worship of gods like Indra, Surya, Agni, Yama, Varuna Ashwini, Usha etc.

(ii) Samaveda Samhita:

A collection of songs mostly taken from Rig Veda. It contained 1549 stutis. A special class of priests known as “Udgator” were to recite its hymns.

(iii) Yajur Veda Samhita:

A collection of sacrificial formula. It has 40 mandals. There are two distinct forms of Yajur Veda namely. “Sukla Yajur Veda” and “Krishna Yajur Veda”. The “Sukla Yajur Veda” contains the genesis while the “Krishna Yajur Veda” describes the “Vasya” or the philosophy.

(iv) Atharva Veda Samhita:

A collection of songs and spells. It has twenty mandalas with 731 'stutis'. It deals with magic, hypnotism, enslavement through mantra. It is regarded on a lower level than the other three Vedas. These four samhitas formed the basis of four Vedas.

Every work belonging to the second and third classes of Vedic literature viz, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads, is attached to one or another of these samhitas and is said to belong to that particular Veda.

The Authorship of the Vedic Literature:

The Hindus have a belief that the hymns were merely revealed to the sages and not composed by them. For this Vedas are called "apaurusheya" (not made by man) and "ritya" (existing in all eternity). The 'Rishis' to whom they are ascribed are known as Mantradrasta'. (Who received the mantra by sight directly from the Supreme Creator).

Vedangas:

Besides the Vedas, there is another class of works whose authorship is ascribed to human beings. They are known as Sutras or Vedangas. There are six vedangas. They are six subjects. These are siksha (pronunciation), chhandas (metre) Jyotisha (astronomy), Kalpa (ritual), Vyakarana (grammar), Ninukta (explanation of words).

Indian Culture in the Rig Vedic Age:

Although the Rig Veda deals with devotional work of religious nature, yet it gives a vivid picture of the early Vedic civilization. The Vedic Civilization is best understood from the social life, political organisation, economic life and religious beliefs.

1. Political Organisation

2. Administrative Divisions:

The lowest unit of the Rig-Vedic society was the patriarchal family. A number of families bound together by ties of blood formed a clan, several clans formed a district, and a number of districts composed a tribe, the highest political unit. From the Rig Veda we come to know about some administrative units termed as 'grama', 'vis', and the 'jana'.

The 'grama' consisted of several families. It was under a headman known as 'gramani'. During war or battle he used to lead the soldiers from his village. He attended the meetings of the 'Sabha' and 'Samiti'. Several villagers formed a 'vis'. It was placed under a 'visapati'. He was a military leader.

A group of 'vishes' formed a 'jana'(tribe) whose members were bound together by real or supposed ties of kinship. 'Gopa' was the head of one 'jana'. Rig Veda mentions about various tribes such as Bharatas, Matsyas, Krivis, Tritsus. But the tribes which acquired great importance are the Purus, Trigvasas, Yadus, Aus and Drahyus. Several janas formed a 'janapada' or 'kingdom'. The 'Rajan' or the king was the head of the Janapada.

3. Form of Government:

Monarchy was the normal form of Government. Kingship was hereditary. But there was a sort of hierarchy in some states, several members of the royal family exercising the power in common. There were references of democratic form of government and their chiefs were elected by the assembled people.

4. The King:

The kingdom was small in extent. The king enjoyed a position of pre-eminence in the tribe. Kingship was hereditary. He was anointed by the priest as king in the 'Abhishka' Ceremony. He wore gorgeous robes and lived in a splendid palace, gaily decorated than a common building. The king had the duty to protect the life and property of his people. He was required to be 'Indra' in valour, 'Mitra' in kindness and 'varuna' in virtues.

The sacred duty of the king was the protection of the tribes and the territory and maintenance of priests for the performance of sacrifices. Maintenance of law and order was his principal duty. He maintained justice with the help of Purohitas. He collected tributes known as "Bali" in kind from his subjects.

5. Officials:

In the work of administration the king was assisted by a number of functionaries like the Purohita (priest), the senani (general) the Gramani (village headman) and the spsa (spies). Purohita was the most important officer of the state.

6. The Army:

The army was mainly consisting of Patti (infantry) and Rathins (chariots). The weapons used by the soldiers were bows, arrows, swords, axes and spears. These weapons were made up of irons. The soldiers were organised into units known as Sardha, Vrata and gana.

7. Popular Assemblies:

The Rig Veda mentions the names of two popular assemblies known as Sabha and Samiti. Though the king enjoyed substantial power yet he was not an autocrat. In the work of

administration he consulted these two bodies and act according to their decision. Sabha was a select body of elders. The head of the sabha was known as 'Sabhapati'.

The Sabha advised the king on administration. It also functioned as a court of law and tried the cases of criminals and punished them. The Samiti was the most popular assembly and included common people. The head of Samiti was known as 'Pati' The Samiti mainly dealt with the political business of the state. It also used to elect the king. In the early Vedic Age the Sabha and Samiti had a commendable role to play as the political organisation of the aryaans.

8. Social Life:

Family:

The family was regarded as the social and political unit. It was the nucleus of the social life of the early Aryans. The father was the head of the family and he was known as "grihapati". The Aryans had joint families. The father had great authority over the children. Though the father was kind and affectionate yet at times he became cruel towards his children. From Rig-Veda we come to know about a father who blinded his son for his extravagance.

9. Position of Women:

In the early Vedic age women enjoyed an honored place in the society. The wife was the mistress of the household and authority over the slaves. In all religious ceremonies she participated with her husband. Prada system was not prevalent in the society. Sati system was also not prevalent in the Vedic society.

The education of girls was not neglected. The Rig-Veda mentions the names of some learned ladies like Viswavara, Apala and Ghosa who composed mantras and attained the rank of Rishis.

The girls were married after attaining puberty. The practice of 'Swayamvara' was also prevalent in the society. Monogamy was the general Practice.

Polygamy was, of course, practiced and it was confined only to Kings and chiefs. Remarriage of widows was permitted. The women were not independent persons in the eye of the law. They had to remain under the protecting care of their male relations.

Dress and Ornaments:

The Aryans wore dresses made from cotton, wool and deer skin. The garments consisted of three parts—an undergarment called 'nivi', a garment called 'Vasa' or 'Paridhan' and a mantle known as 'adhivasa', 'atka' 'dropi'. The garments were also embroidered with gold. Both men and women wore gold ornaments.

The women used ear-rings, neck-lace, bangles, anklets. These ornaments were sometimes studded with precious stones. Both men and women oiled and combed their hair which was plaited or braided. The men kept beard and moustache but sometimes also shaved them.

Food and Drink:

The Aryans ate both vegetable and animal foods. Rice, barley, bean and sesamum formed the staple food. They also ate bread, cake, milk, ghee, butter, and curd together with fruits. Fish, birds, goats, rams, bulls and horses were slaughtered for their food. Slaughter of cow was prohibited. They also drank intoxicating liquor, known as sura, a brandy made from corn and barley and the juice of soma plant.

Amusements:

Rig Vedic people spent their leisure time in various amusements like gambling, war—dancing, chariot racing, hunting, boxing, dancing and music. Women displayed their skill in dancing and music. Three types of musical instruments like percussion, string and wind were used by the singers.

Morality:

The morals of women were of high standard. But the standard of morality of men was not very praiseworthy. Polygamy was practiced by men. Great respect and affection was shown to guests. The people hated seduction and adultery. There was a class of women known as hetairai and dancing girls whose morality was probably not above reproach.

Education:

In the Rig-Vedic age great importance was given to education. There were Gurukulas which imparted education to the disciples after their sacred-thread ceremony. Entire instruction was given orally. The Vedic education aimed at proper development of mind and body. The disciples were taught about ethics, art of warfare, art of metal and concept of Brahma and philosophy, and basic sciences like agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts.

Caste System:

In the early Vedic age there was no caste system. Member of same family took to different arts, crafts and trades. People could change their occupation according to their needs or talents. There was hardly any restriction in intermarriage, change of occupation. There, was no restriction on taking of food cooked by the sudras. A late hymn of the Rig-Veda known as Purushasukta refers to four castes. But many scholars reject the theory that caste system existed in Rig Vedic

age. According to them Purushasukta is a late hymen and caste system was never rigid and hereditary.

10. Economic Life:

The Village:

In the Rig Vedic Age people lived in villages. The houses were made of wood and bamboo. They had thatched roof and clay floors. The hymns of Rig-Veda refer to Pura. It seems that Puras were fortified places and served as places of refuge during danger of invasion.

There was absence of word nagara (city) in the hymns of Rig-Veda. Gramani was the chief of the village. He looked after the affairs of the village, both civil and military. There was another officer known as Vrajapati who led Kulapas or heads of families to battle.

Agriculture:

Reference in Rig-Veda shows, that agriculture was the principal occupation of the people. They ploughed the field by means of a pair of oxen. Rig-Veda even mentions that twenty four oxen were attached to a plough share at the same time to plough the land. The ploughed land was known as Urvara or Kshetra. Water was supplied into the fields by means of irrigation canal. Use of manure was known to them. Barley and wheat were mainly cultivated. Cotton and oil seeds were also grown. Rice was perhaps not extensively cultivated. Agriculture was their main source of income.

11. Domestication of animals:

Besides agriculture, cattle breeding were another means of living. There are prayers in the Vedas for Gosu (cattle). Cows were held in great respect. Cows were symbols of wealth and prosperity

of the Aryans. Sometimes cow was the medium of exchange. The Aryans had also domesticated animals like horse, draught OX, dog, goat, sheep, buffalo and donkey.

Occupation:

Apart from agriculture and animal husbandry Aryans had also other occupation. Weaving was the most important occupation. We learnt about weavers of wool and cotton together with the workers in the subsidiary industries of dying and embroidery. The carpenters built houses, chariots, wagons and supplied household utensils and furniture.

Then there were blacksmiths who supplied various necessities of life, from fine needles and razors to the sickles, ploughshares, spears and swords. The gold smiths made ornaments like earrings, bangles, necklaces, bands etc. The leather-workers made bow-strings and casks for holding liquor. The physicians cured diseases. The priests performed sacrifices and composed hymns and taught them to the disciples.

Trade and Commerce:

There were trade and maritime activity. Sometimes traders made journey to distant lands for larger profits in trade. There was probably commercial intercourse with Babylon and other countries in Western Asia. The principal media of trade was barter. Cow was used as unit of value. Gradually pieces of gold called “mishka” were used as means of exchange. Trade and commerce was regulated and managed by a group of people called “Pani”.

12. Transport and Communication:

The chief means of transport by land were rathas (Chariots) and wagons drawn by horses and oxen. Riding on horseback was also in vogue. Travelling was common though roads were haunted by taskara (highway men) and forests were infested by wild animals.

Religious Condition:

The religious life of the Aryans was simple and plain. They worshipped various manifestations of nature such as the sun, the moon, the sky, the Dawn, the thunder, the wind and the Air. Vedic hymns were composed in praise of nature. Rigveda mentions that thirty three gods and goddesses were worshipped by the Aryans.

These divinities were placed under three categories namely:

(1) the terrestrial gods such as Prithvi, Agni, Brihaspati (Prayer), and Soma,

(2) The atmospheric gods, such as, Indra, Rudra (Probably lightning), Maruts, Vayu (wind) and Parjanya and

(3) celestial gods such as Dyaus (the sky), Varuna (vault of Heaven), Ushas (dawn), Asvins (probably twilight and morning stars) and Surya, Mitra, Savitri and Vishnu all associated with the most glorious phenomenon of nature, viz., the sun.

Among the vedic gods, Indra occupied the chief place, was given the largest number of hymns—about one fourth of the total number of hymns in the Rig Veda Samhita. He was also known as Purandara and the destroyer of forts. He was also the god of rain. Varuna was regarded as the god of truth and moral order. He was conceived as the omniscient ruler of the cosmic waters. Maruta was the god of storm. He helped Indra in scattering away the demons. Usha was the goddess of dawn.

Prithvi was regarded as the goddess of grain and of procreation. Agni was second in importance only to Indra. He acted as the coordinator among all deities. He conveyed to the gods the oblations offered by the devotees. He received special homage by the people as no sacrifice could be performed without offering to him. Vishnu was worshipped as the god of three worlds. Surya was regarded as the destroyer of darkness. Apart from these deities, others like Savitri, Saraswati, Brihaspati and Prajnya were also worshipped.

Mode of Worship:

The mode of worship was simple. The Vedic worship meant primarily only oblation and prayer. A great value was attached to the hymns. The Aryans chanted hymns to appease the various divinities. Yajna or sacrifice was another mode to appease the gods and goddesses. They offered milk, ghee, grains, wine, fruits etc. as offering into fire.

Animals like horses, buffaloes, rams, bulls, and even cows were also sometimes sacrificed. The process of sacrifice was simple. Every Aryan family took part in the offering of prayers and performing of fire-sacrifice. There was no priestly class for performing these religious sites. No shrine or temple was built. Image worship was unknown in those days.

The theory of reincarnation or rebirth was not completely formed. The Rig Vedic hymns had no consistent theory regarding life after death. The Rig Vedic idea of life after death was very vague. The soul departed to "Land of fathers", pitralok was received by Yama and rewarded or punished according to its deeds. So the conception of rebirth was there.

The doctrine of transmigration of soul was not properly developed. In spite of worshipping various deities the Vedic age saw the prevalence of monotheism. The hymns of Rig-Veda,

Mandal x, 82 express the belief that God is one although. He bears many names. The idea of single supreme power governing and controlling the universe seems to have emerged. The spiritual life of Vedic Aryans was simple. They worshipped nature through prayer and sacrifice which later on formed the basis of Hindu religion.

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Later Vedic Period: Politics, Social and Economic

The period that followed Rig Vedic Age is known as Later Vedic Age.

This age witnessed the composition of three later Veda Samhitas namely, the Samveda Samhita, the Yajurveda Samhita, the Atharvaveda Samhita as well as Brahmanas and the Upanishads of all the four Vedas and later on the two great epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

All these later Vedic texts were compiled in the Upper Gangetic basin in 1000—600 B.C. During the period represented by Later Samhitas the Aryans covered the whole of Northern India, from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas.



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The Aryans of Vedic age had reached the highest stage of civilization. This age had excelled in every walks of life. All the valuable things in man's life—philosophy, religion, science and code of conduct were all developed in the Vedic age.

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The spread of Aryans over the whole of India completed before 400 B.C. Of the new kingdoms in the east, the most important were Kurus, Panchalas, Kasis, Kosalas and Videhas.

Gradually the Aryans moved towards South India. It is believed that their southern movement began during the period of Brahmana literature, about 1000 B.C. and went on steadily till they reached the southernmost extremity of the Peninsula in or sometime before fourth century B.C.

The great grammarian Katya Yana who flourished in the fourth century B.C had knowledge about the countries of south such as Pandya, Chola and Kerala. But the Aryan colonization in the South was not as complete as in the north. With the progress of the Aryans in Northern India, their centre of civilization was shifted towards east. The territory between Saraswati and Ganga was the seat of Aryan civilization.

Political Organisation:

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Rise of Big States:

With the progress of Aryan settlements in the eastern and southern part of India, the small tribal states of Rig Vedic period replaced by powerful states. Many famous tribes of Rig Vedic period like Bharatas, Parus, Tritsus and Turvasas passed into oblivion and new tribes like the Kurus and

Panchalas rose into prominence. The land of the Yamuna and Ganga in the east which became the new home of the Aryans rose into prominence.

Growth of Imperialism:

With the emergence of big kingdoms in the Later Vedic Age the struggle for supremacy among different states was of frequent occurrence. The ideal of Sarbabhauma or universal empire loomed large in the political horizon of ancient India. The sacrifices like Rajasuya and Asvamedha were performed to signify the imperial sway of monarchs over the rivals. These rituals impressed the people with the increasing power and prestige of the king. The Rig Vedic title of “Rajan” was replaced by the impressive titles like Samrat, Ekkrat, Virat, Bhoja etc. These titles marked the growth of imperialism and feudal ideas.

Origin of Kingship:

There were two theories regarding the origin of kingship. The Aitareya Brahmana explained the rational theory of election by common consent of origin of kingship. Side by side the Taittiriya Brahman explained the divine origin of kingship. It explained how Indra, “though occupying a low rank among the gods, was created their king by Prajapati.”

Growth of Royal Power:

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The king had absolute power. He became the master of all subjects. He realized taxes like “bali”, “sulka” and “bhaga”. The Satapatha Brahmana described the king to be infallible and immune from all punishment. The sabha of the Rig Vedic Period died. The king sought the aid and

support of the Samiti on matters like war, peace and fiscal policies. There are references to the Samiti sometimes electing or re-electing a king.

The authority of the government in the later Vedic period was perhaps more democratic in the sense that the authority of the leaders of Aryan tribes was recognized by the king. However in spite of the existence of the popular assemblies the powers of the king went on increasing due to the growth of large territorial states and the evolution of an official hierarchy.

Administrative Machinery:

The growth of the royal power was largely reflected in the enlarged outrage of the king. In the work of administration the king was assisted by a group of officers who were known as Ratnins (Jewels). They included the Bhagadugha (collector of taxes), the Suta (charioteer), the Akshavapa (superintendent of gambling), the kshattri (chamberlain), the Govikartana (king's companion in the chase), the Palogala (courtier) the Takshan (Carpenter), the Rathakara (Chariot marker) in addition to the ecclesiastical and military officials like the Purohita (chaplain) the senani (general), and the Gramani (leader of host or of the village).

In the Later Vedic Period Gramani was both a civil and military officer Gramani was the medium through which the royal power was exercised in the village. According to Frasn Upanishada Adhikrita was the village officer and was lowest in the rank. The king administered justice. Occasionally he delegated his judicial power to Adhyakshas. In the villages, Gramyavadin (Village judge) and Sabha (court) decided the cases. Punishments for crimes were severe.

The father was the head of the property of the family. In case of inheritance of property the law of primogeniture was applied. By this rule the eldest son would inherit the property of the deceased father. Neither the women nor the sudras had any right to property.

Social Condition:

Changes of far greater significance were gradually taking place in their society.

Caste Society:

Most important change was the evolution of caste system. Various sub castes evolved in addition to the traditional four-castes. The Brahmanas and Kshatriyas emerged as the two leading castes out of the general mass of population, known as vaisyas. The vaisyas were superior to the sudras but their position was steadily deteriorating. The Aitaraya Brahmana clearly indicates the absolute dependence of vaisyas on the two higher classes. The Sudras were held in great contempt.

The Brahmanas of the later Vedic age were the intellectual and priestly class. The Brahmanas retained a high standard of excellence and knew the details of the rituals. The kshatriyas were the fighting class in the society. War, conquest, administration of the kingdom was the principal duties of this class. By their superior learning some kshatriyas raised themselves to the status of a Brahmana. They composed hymns and performed sacrifices and also challenged the supremacy of Brahmanas.

Two Kshatriya kings Janak and Viswamitra attained the status of Rishi. For a long time the kshatriyas resisted the supremacy of the Brahmanas and claimed that the priest was only a follower of the king. Vaisyas were engaged in trade, industry and agriculture, and animal

husbandry. They are debarred from the privileges which were enjoyed by the Brahmanas and kshatriyas. However the richer people among the vaisyas known as Sresthin were highly honored in the royal court.

The condition of the Sudras was very miserable. They had to serve the other three castes. They were untouchables. They had no right to approach the sacred fire, i.e., perform sacrifice, or to read the sacred texts. They were further denied the rite of burning the dead body. The structure of the caste system became hereditary.

Education:

A vast mass of vedic literature as well as a highly developed intellectual life speaks abundantly about a well planned system of education in the later Vedic Period. The students had to learn Vedas, Upanishad, grammar prosody, law, arithmetic and language.

After the Upanayana or sacred thread ceremony and initiation to studies the students were sent to the Gurukula for their education. They had to live in the house of the teacher (guru) and lead the chaste life of a Brahmacharin whose principal duties were study and service to the teacher. The students received free boarding and lodging at the house of the Guru. At the completion of their study they paid fees (guru-dakshina) to the teachers.

Position of women:

The women lost their high position which they had in the Rig Vedic Age. They were deprived of their right to the Upanayana ceremony and all their sacraments, excluding marriage, were performed without recitation of Vedic mantras. Polygamy prevailed in the society. Many of the religious ceremonies, formerly practiced by the wife, were now performed by the priests. She

was not allowed to attend the political assemblies. Birth of a daughter became undesirable—for she was regarded as a source of misery. The custom of child marriage and dowry crept in. The women lost their honored position in the society.

Food and Dress:

In the later Vedic age rice became staple food of the people. Gradually the practice of eating meat was declined. Killing of cow was looked with disfavor. Wool was used in addition to cotton.

Economic Condition:

Like political and social conditions, the economic condition of the Aryans of the later Vedic period also underwent significant changes. Due to the emergence of caste system various occupations also appeared.

Agriculture:

The Aryans of the later Vedic period lived in the villages. In the villages small peasant owners of land were replaced by big landlords who secured possession of entire villages. Agriculture was the principal occupation of the people. Improved method of tilling the land by deep ploughing, manuring and sowing with better seeds were known to the Aryans. More lands were brought under cultivation.

The cultivator yielded two harvests a year. Varieties of crops like rice, barley, wheat, maize and oil seeds were raised. But the cultivator was not free from trouble. Dangers of insects and damage of crops through hail-storm very badly affected the land of kurus and compelled many people to migrate.

Trade and Commerce:

With the growth of civilization, the volume of trade and commerce had increased by leaps and bounds. Both inland and overseas trades were developed. Inland trade was carried on with the Kiratas inhabiting the mountains. They exchanged the herbs for clothes, nattresses and skins. The people became familiar with the navigation of the seas. Regular coinage was not started.

The coins which were in circulation were “Nishka”, “Satamana” and “Krishnala”. The unit value of goods was a gold bar called “nishka” weighing three hundred and twenty ratis, which was also the weight of a satamana. A ‘Krishnala’ weighed one rati, i.e. 1.8 grams. There was a class of merchants called ‘Pani’ who controlled the trade. References to “ganas” or corporations and the “sreshthins” clearly speak of the formation of guilds or corporations for facilitating trade and commerce. Usuary and money lending was also practiced in this period.

Occupation:

The emergence of caste system brought varieties of means of livelihood. There are references about money lenders, chariot makers, dyers, weavers, barbers, goldsmiths, iron smiths, washer men, bow makers, carpenters, musicians etc. The art of writing probably developed in this period. The use of silver was increased and ornaments were made out of it.

House Building and Transport:

The house had many rooms with a special place for ‘Grahapatha’ fire which was kept continuously burning. Houses were made of wood. The Taittiriya Aranyakas refer about a special type of house known as ‘Dhandhani’ (treasure house). The Atharvaveda mentions about ‘Patninam Sadan’ (women’s apartment).

The means of transport and communication developed with the growth of trade and commerce. Regarding means of transport mention may be made of wagons drawn by oxen, chariots for war and sport and rough vehicle known as 'bipatha' for transport of goods. Elephants and horses were also used. Ships and boats were also used as means of transport.

Religious Condition:

During the later Vedic period the religious spirit underwent a great change. Religion was overshadowed with rites and rituals. New gods and goddesses emerged during this period.

New Gods:

The Rig Vedic gods, Varun, Indra, Agni, Surya, Usha etc. lost their charm. The people worshipped them with less zeal. New gods like Siva, Rupa, Vishnu, Brahma etc. appeared in the religious firmament of the Later Vedic Period. The grandeur of the Rigvedic gods passed into oblivion, though we find in Atharvaveda the omniscience of Varuna or the beneficence of the Earth goddess.

Certain less important duties of the Rigvedic Period now became popular with the Common People. One of them was Rudra who already bore the epithet of Siva. Very soon Rudra came to be worshipped as 'Mahadeva' (great god) and the lord of animate beings (Pasupati).

Vishnu, the preserver rose into Prominence during this period. He occupied the place of Varuna, as the most sublime among the celestials. To attain his "Paramapada" (highest step) became the goal of the rishis. The worship of vasudeva was also started. He was regarded as Krishna Vasudev, the incarnation of Vishnu. Semi divinities like Apsara, Nagas, Gandharbas,

Vidyadharas etc. also came into being. This age also witnessed the beginning of the worship of Durga and Ganesh.

Rituals and Sacrifices:

During this period the rites and ceremonies of Vedic religion were elaborated and became complex. In the Rig Vedic age Yanjas were a simple affair which every householder could do. But in the later Vedic age sacrifice became an important thing in worship. Now the priestly class devoted their energy to find out the hidden and mystic meaning of the rites and ceremonies.

People had a firm belief that gods must submit to the sacrifice if properly performed. Vedic hymns were regarded as charms to be used in sacrifice. The belief that gods were satisfied by Yanjas led to a rise in the number, variety of sacrifices which were prescribed for every householder. In fact every Aryan performed a number of sacrifices under the supervision of the Brahmana priest.

Morality and Duty:

The Later Vedic Period prescribed a code of righteous conduct. The Brahmins had spread the belief that, “man is born with certain rinas or debts” which he must repay in his life. He has to repay the debts to his gods, to the rishis, to the munis, to men, to the ancestors and to the lower creatures. And he redeem himself from these debts, if he worships the gods and performs Yajnas study Vedas, performs funeral ceremonies and Sraddha, etc. One should perform all these duties with selflessness. The first requisite of a good life were prayers and good works. One should restrain himself from the sins like theft, adultery, and murder.

Religious Philosophy:

The Later Vedic age witnessed the emergence of a new intellectual thought. The people thought deeply about the problems of creation, life and death and arrived at the conclusion that there is one 'Brahma' (one Unchanging Principle) beyond the universe—the creator and controller of the whole order.

It is the universal soul or the Absolute “that dwelleth in everything that guideth all beings within, the Inward guide, Immortal.” After the death of a person his soul passes into another body and again into another and this process continues till it can be liberated from all its imperfections and merged in the Universal Soul. This is the doctrine of transmigration of souls.

The Aryans had also faith in the doctrine of Karma. It lays down that all actions, good or bad, reap their proper fruits. Souls have to be born again and again and bear the fruits of the actions (Karma) of their previous lives. There is also doctrine of 'Moksha'. It is a state of birth-lessness and deathlessness at a point when a soul is liberated from the cycle of births and deaths and mingled into the universal soul.” It was essential for a man to attain moksha. All these are embodied in the Upanishad which were composed in the Later Vedic Period.

Ascetic Life:

The later Vedic Aryans developed the concept of ascetic ideal of life as the rites and ceremonies were not the only means of attaining success in this world or bliss in heaven. So there developed the ideas of Tapas and Brahmacharya (celibacy) leading to the same or even more important results. Tapa means meditation, accompanying by physical tortures.

An ascetic person renounced the worldly life and retired to the solitude and exercised all the ascetic practices with the belief that they would not only obtain heaven, but also develop,

“mystic, extra-ordinary and superhuman faculties.” This asceticism was widely practiced in the Epic age.

The Aryans of Vedic age had reached the highest stage of civilization. This age had excelled in every walks of life. All the valuable things in man’s life—philosophy, religion, science and code of conduct were all developed in the Vedic age. In fact Aryans served as the torch-bearers of Indian civilization throughout the ages.

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The Epic Age in India

In this article we will discuss about:- 1. Historical Importance of Epics 2. Political Condition of Epics 3. Social Condition 4. Economic Condition 5. Religious Condition.

Historical Importance of Epics:

It is very difficult to say as to what extent the events narrated in the epics are historical facts. The facts and fictions have been so inter-linked in the narration that one has to be very careful in separating the two.

It cannot be denied that through these epics contain a good deal of mythology and legends they throw a flood of light on the post-Vedic society. From these two epics we are also able to form an idea about the expansion of the Aryans.

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For example the story of Ramayana clearly indicates the Aryan expansion into South India and also hints at the use of military force in this process. The epic also makes it clear that the Dravidian culture was also equally superior.

Ravana's behaviour with Sita when she was under his control at Lanka was more civilized than the behaviour of Laxman to Shurpanakha. Ramayana also gives us genealogies which, if supplemented by those in the Puranas, help us to form some idea about the early history of the Hindu period.

According to V.A. Smith, **“The poem (the Ramayana) seems to me to be essentially a work of imagination probably founded on vague traditions of the kingdom of Kosala and its capital Ayodhya.”** However it is difficult to accept this view of Smith.

No doubt Ramayana is a literary work full of imagination, yet its characters are historical figures. The different characters reflect the different traits developed by the Aryans during this period. According to Dr. R.C. Majumdar, the Ramayana points out the expansion of Aryan culture over Deccan and South India.

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The Mahabharata shows that by that time the whole of India was Aryanised. It also provides us information regarding the various states existing at that time. In the Mahabharata all the Indian princes are shown as taking part in the great struggle.

While the kings of Magadha, Kashi, Kosala, Panchalas, Yadavas, Chedi and Matsya were the allies of the Pandavas, the rulers of Pragjyotish, the Kirtas, the Sakas, Yavanas, Sindhus, Kaikeyes, Bhojas and Dakshinapatha were on the side of the Kaurvas.

Vincent Smith discredits the story of Mahabharata also on the ground that it was impossible for the distant tribes of the south and east to take part in a local war between the chiefs of Hastinapur and Indraprastha. This contention of Smith can be refuted by pointing out that a war spreads like wild fire and a local incident may assume the shape of a great war.

Both the wars of the present centuries which engulfed almost the entire world started on local issues. The two epics may not be historical works about it cannot be denied that the two Epics are very helpful in understanding the social, economic and cultural condition of people at that time.

Political Condition of Epics:

The life of the Epics tells us that the Aryans were no longer divided into small clans or tribes, and powerful states like Panchalas, Pandus, Kosalas, Kashih had come into existence. The rulers of these states assumed the title of Samarats and lived in big cities.

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These empires possessed considerable territories as compared to the kingdoms in the Vedic age. These kingdoms were mostly ruled by monarchs, but republics also existed side by side.

Usually there were two types of republics—Gana (individual Republic) and Samghatagana (Confederation of Republics). There is a reference in Mahabharata suggesting that Lord Krishna was elected as the President of the Samghata-gana comprising of the republics of Yadavas, Kukuras, Bhojas, Andhakas, and Virishnis.

Though the rulers enjoyed extensive powers, often they consulted the people. We have as an instance of their being consulted when Rama was made Yuvaraja and when Rama had been exiled and Dashratha had died.

In the absence of both Rama and Bharata the people suggested the election of another king. The king was expected to act according to the prevailing religion and customs. In fact, Dharma constituted a serious check on the authority of the king.

Another check on the authority of the king was exercised by the Mantri Parishad. The Sabha (Assembly of the people) also restricted the authority of the king. It may be noted that in matter of war and peace the king was free to take independent decisions. He usually consulted his allies and friendly kingdoms before embarking on wars.

General Administration:

The king stood at the head of the general administration and carried on the same with the assistance of Ministers and other officials. Some of the prominent officials who assisted the king included, Mantri, Purohita, Chamupati, Duarpala, Karagaradhikari, Yuvraja, Nagar Adhyaksha, Duarpala, Sabhr. Adhyaksha, Dandapala, Dharma Adhyakasha.

However, the will of the king was supreme and he carried on the administration for the general good and happiness of the people.

The village or the grama was the smallest unit of administration and was headed by an official designated as a gramini. Similarly there were other officials who looked after the administration of ten villages, twenty villages, hundred village; and one thousand villi.

These officials were responsible for the collection of taxes and worked under the strict supervision of the superior officers. However, they were ultimately responsible to the king.

The taxes were generally not very oppressive and the people got an adequate return for what they paid to the government. A separate department of Finance existed over which the king exercised personal supervision. He saw to it that the expenditure did not exceed the income and a large cash reserve was always maintained in the Treasury.

Social Condition of Epics:

1. Caste System:

The picture of the society depicted by Epics is identical to the one depicted by the Brahmanas and the Sutras. The caste system was in vogue and the society was divided in more castes than four original castes. This number increased primarily due to the non-absorption of the aborigines into the Aryan fold.

However, the caste system had not yet become very rigid. We get references in Mahabharata where Brahmanas like Dronacharya, Kripa and Asvathama fought.

Similarly, we get a reference that Valmiki, a hunter became a Brahm Rishi. Again Parshurama, a Brahmin became Kshatrya by vocation. Another note-worthy thing about the Epic society is that the Brahmanas did not enjoy supreme position and the Kshatriyas dominated.

Whenever there was difference between the priest and the ruler it was the former who had to yield. In this regard it may be noted that during the Vedic period, the priest enjoyed higher position than the king.

2. The Position of Women:

The women occupied high position in the Epic society. The ladies of the upper classes were particularly given complete freedom regarding the choice of their husbands. The practice of Swyamvra or maiden choice was quite common. Contests of various types were held at the time of the marriage and the woman married only that person who won that contest.

The marriages of Sita and Darupati clearly bear out this practice. The prominent position of the women is also admitted by Mahabharata which describes woman as “half the man. his truest friend, a perpetual spring of virtue, pleasure and wealth— A sweetly speaking wife is a companion in solitude, a father in advice, and a rest in passing through life’s wilderness.”

During the Epic period we find both polygamy (one husband having more than one wives), and Polyandry (one wife having more than one husbands) being practiced. While the king Dasharatha had three wives, Draupati had five Pandavas as her husbands.

The women took part in the philosophical discussions with men. This is testified by the discussion between Yajnavalkya and Gargi and as a well as with his wife at the court of king Janaka of Videha.

According to Dr. R C. Majumdar. **“These two instances eloquently learning and mental equipment of women in ancient India, to which it would be difficult to find a parallel in the history of the world.”** Widow re-marriage was not practiced and we do not find any mention of it in the two Epics.

The early marriage was also not in practice but towards the close of the Epic age it began to be practiced. This is proved by the early marriage of Abhimanyu. The system of Sati was also in existence in Punjab towards the close of the Epic period. This is proved by Madri burning herself on the pyre of her husband

3. Food and Dress:

In the Epic period we find a transition from meat eating to vegetarianism. Though the people still took meat but slowly they were developing attitude of hate towards it. The impression which earlier existed that the meat-eater were supposed to be vigorous not only in body but also in mind was also fading away.

The intoxicating drink Sura was taken during the Epic period but by and large people had started condemning it and its consumption was not considered good.

In the beginning of the Epic period the art of cutting and sewing clothes was not known to the people. Both males and females used dresses which did not need any stitching. The dress consisted of two oblong pieces of cloth, one of which was tied around loins and the other around body.

Whenever men appeared in public they used turban. While the young people used coloured turbans, the old people wore white turbans. The female dress also consisted of oblong piece of

cloth. The lower piece of the cloth was like the modern sari. They also used utlarya for covering the head.

While the married women used coloured uttarya, the widows used white one. Coloured powder was used in the line of parting of hair. The clothes meant for daily use were made of cotton. Silk clothes were also known and were usually used on special occasions.

The Kshatriya's kept hairs on their head while Brahmanas shaved their heads as well as their chins. The people of the Epic age had great love for ornaments. Both gold and silver ornaments were used. People also used jewels and pearls.

4. System of Education:

A highly developed system of education prevailed in Epic age. Education was imparted free of charge, and the teachers did not receive any regular salary. They mainly lived on the free gifts and presents. Under the system of education great emphasis was laid on the development of character, mental faculties as well as physical development of the students. Education in the villages and towns was provided in schools.

In distant forests Parishads existed where three or four teachers imparted education in religion and philosophy. Sanskrit was the spoken language at least in the beginning of the Epic age. Towards the close of the Epic age Prakrit gained popularity.

During the Epic period Sanskrit grammar made much progress. People also studied philosophy and rhetoric's. Training was also imparted in music and dancing was considered to be an essential qualification for the girls.

The science of astronomy had also progressed a great deal during the Epic period. The twelve Rashis into which the zodiac were divided were known to the people of the Epic age. They could notice the movements of moon amongst the twenty seven nakshatras. The people of the Epic age, however, did not know about diurnal and annual motion of the Sun.

Economic Condition of Epics:

Agriculture continued to be the main occupation of the people in the epic age and made further progress. On the testimony of Mahabharata we can say that the lands of Kosala, Vatsa, Matsya etc. were very fertile. People knew about irrigation and used manures to increase the fertility of their lands.

The private ownership of the land was recognised and the state claimed one sixth to one-tenth of the produce as its share. In return for this the state not only provided irrigation facilities but also helped the indebted peasants. During this period sugarcane and indigo, two technical crops, were also cultivated.

Cattle breeding was given special attention and was one of the most important means of income for the people. The cow was the most popular animal which the people domesticated. The other animals domesticated at that time were horses and elephants which were in much demand for the army.

Both internal and external trade flourished during the epic period. Most of the businessmen lived in cities. The merchantmen were organised in guilds which were controlled by the Mahajanas. The growth of a large number of cities or 'nagars' as testified by the epics further shows that the commercial activities were on the increase.

Each city had a number of guilds, each guild managing a particular craft. Money had come to be established as a standard of value during the epic period, though exchange by barter was also carried on.

Cotton manufactures occupied the first place in industry. Silk and woolen clothes were also manufactured. People also knew about the manufacture of mixed cloth and the art of interlacing. The allied arts like dyeing also made considerable progress.

Fast colours were produced by the people. People also knew about the use of minerals. The minerals were excavated and worked upon by the artisans. During the epic period India produced gold, precious stones and pearls in abundance.

Religious Condition of Epics:

Far reaching changes took place in the religion of the people during the Epic period. The Vedic god and goddesses receded to the background and new gods and goddesses began to be worshipped. Important' god and goddesses of the Epic age were Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Ganesh, Lakshmi and Parvati. By this time the people had also given up the nature worship. However, they still continued to worship Surya.

Though the people of the Epic age believed in violence, yet the principle of Ahimsa was gaining popularity. Instead of offering animals to the various idols, flour began to be offered. It has been recorded in the Mahabharata that hundreds of kings who had been kept at the fort of Giribraj for the purpose of sacrifice were protected at the instance of Lord Krishna.

The doctrines of karma and devotion were gaining popularity. According to the doctrine of karma it was believed that the present life of man is the effect of his previous life and his acts in the present life will shape his next life.

Yajanas continued to be performed during the Epic age and were considered an important part of religion. People believed in the observance of fasts as a means for the purification of body and soul. The yoga and the sankhya system—salvation by works and reason— were both known.

Lord Krishna tried to reconcile these two systems in the Bhagavad-Gita. People believed in the theory of punarjanama or re-birth after death. They also performed shraddhas.