

TOPIC – RIG-VEDIC AGE AND LATER VEDIC AGE

ONLINE CLASS FOR FYUGP 1ST SEMESTER STUDENTS

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Vedic Period (1500 BCE to 500 BCE)

- **Early Vedic Period: 1500 BCE to 1000 BCE**
- **Later Vedic Period: 1000 BCE to 500 BCE**

The Vedic Age

- **The Period when Aryans first settled in India is known as Early Vedic Period i.e. between 1500- 1000 BC.**
- **The period between 1000 to 500 BC when Aryans developed and started using Iron and other metals is called as the Later Vedic Period**

Theories regarding original home of the Aryans

- **Central Asia:** Max Muller
- **Tibet:** Dayanand Saraswati
- **Arctic Region:** B.G. Tilak

Aryan Migration

- Aryans were Cattle Rearing people
- Believed to come from Central Asia



Language used by Aryans

Sanskrit



- Written language used by the Aryans

The Vedic Period



- Most of what we know about the early Aryan period comes from the Vedas
- Vedas
 - Sacred writings, Epic poems, hymns, magic spells
 - Passed on by oral tradition
 - Provide details about Aryan history and society

Literary Sources:

- The Vedic texts are divided into two broad groups namely:**
 - a) Early Vedic Texts (1500-1000 BC) – Rig Veda**
 - b) Later Vedic Texts (1000-500 BC)-**
Other three Vedas and their Branches (Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads etc.)
- Vedic literature was written in Sanskrit.**
- The term ‘Veda’ is derived from Sanskrit word ‘Vid’ which means knowledge.**
- Vedic Literature is divided into two parts: Shruti and Smriti.**
 - Shruti was given by Gods to Sages and they passed that knowledge orally. And Smriti was composed by Rishis/Sages**

- **The Vedic Literature can be classified into the following categories:**
- **1. Four Vedas: Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda and their Samhitas (hymns & prayers).**
- **2. The Brahmanas (prose texts that explain the meaning of the hymns) attached to each Samhita.**
- **3. The Aranyakas (forest books).**
- **4. The Upanishads (philosophical thoughts of Sages)**

- **Four Vedas:**

- a) Rig Veda: It is the oldest religious text in the world. Hence called as 'the first testament of mankind.' It was composed during Early Vedic period. It contains hymns dedicated by sages to the Gods. It contains the famous 'Gayatri Mantra.'
- b) Sama Veda: 'Sama' means 'sweet song/ melody'. These hymns are sung by the priests at the time of sacrifice.
- c) Yajur Veda : It deals with rituals and hymns recited during performing Yajnas.
- d) Atharva Veda: It deals with magic and charm

- **The Bramhanas:** These were written in prose after the Vedas.

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- **The Aranyakas:** These are known as 'forest books' written for the guidance of hermits and the students living in forests. It is the concluding part of the Bramhanas.
- **The Upanishads:** They are philosophical thoughts of sages on Soul, God, Ultimate truth, Karma, Moksha & Maya. It's the foundation on which the Later Vedic Literature rests.

Administrative Machinery of Aryans

- Tribal chief was in the centre. He was called rajan.
- Although his post was hereditary, we have also some traces of election by the tribal assembly called the samiti. The king was called the protector of his tribe. He protected its cattle, fought its wars and offered prayers to gods on its behalf.
- • Several tribal assemblies, such as sabha, samiti, vidatha, and gana mentioned in the Rig Veda exercised deliberative, military and religious functions. Even women attended the sabha and vidatha in Rig Vedic times. But from the political point of view important were the sabha and samiti
- • In the day-to-day administration, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The most important functionary seems to have been the purohita. The two priests who played a major part in the time of Rig Veda were Vasishtha and Visvamitra. The next important functionary seems to be the senani. Princes received from the people voluntary offering called bali.

Administrative Machinery of Aryans

- There were cases of theft and burglary, and especially we hear of the theft of cows.
- Spies were employed to keep an eye on such unsocial activities. The officer who enjoyed authority over the pasture ground was called vrajapati. He led to the heads of the families called Kulapas or the heads of the fighting hordes called gramanis to battle.
- The king did not maintain any regular or standing army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups called vrata, gana, grama, sardha.

- **Comparative Study of Early & Later Vedic Society:**

Early Vedic Society	Later Vedic Society
Joint Family System was seen	Joint Family System wasn't seen
Women enjoyed equal status	Status of Women reduced
Rigid Caste System was seen	Rigid Caste System wasn't seen
Gurukul system of Education was seen	Gurukul system of education was further continued and enlarged

Comparative Study of Early & Later Vedic Economy

Early Vedic Society	Later Vedic Society
Domestication of animals was primary occupation and Agriculture was secondary occupation	Agriculture was primary occupation and domestication of animals was secondary occupation
Cattle was important source of wealth	Land was important source of wealth
Many were engaged in trade and commerce	Traders' guilds had formed and with use of coins & better transport facility led to growth in trade and commerce.
Occupations included weaving, carpentry, pottery, crafts in gold and silver etc	Besides other occupations, some new occupations included physicians, musicians etc

- **POSITION OF WOMEN:**

- **Early (Rig) Vedic Age**

- • Women were treated equal with men
- • They took part in all social and religious functions and gatherings. They could offer sacrifices with husbands.
- • They were given education
- • They had freedom to choose their husbands
- • Monogamy was usually practiced, however polygamy was also seen.
- • Widows were allowed to re-marry
- • Child marriage, Sati, Purdah didn't exist.
- • Women scholars existed who composed hymns and knew all sacred scriptures.

CASTE SYSTEM Early (Rig) Vedic Age Later Vedic Age

- • Early Vedic society was divided into four varnas(orders): a) Brahmins: who explained vedic texts and performed religious ceremonies b) Kshatriyas: warriors, nobles & ruling class c) Vaisyas: common people engaged in trade, agriculture and industry. d) Shudras: servants and laborers, they didn't own any property/land.
- • Society had mobility. Food cooked by Shudras wasn't banned. There were no restrictions on inter-marriages or change of occupation.
- • Later society was also divided into the four varnas similar to early Vedic age.
- • Culture of sacrifice increased so Brahmins enjoyed powers and privileges that of Kshatriyas.
- • These privileges and powers weren't enjoyed by Vaisyas & Shudras.
- • New varnas like chariot makers, tanners, carpenters, smiths, fishermen came into existence.
- • Membership of Varna became hereditary.
- • Life of Shudras was miserable during later vedic period. They were called as 'untouchables' weren't allowed to learn sacred texts, perform sacrifices and were forced to stay outside the village

POSITION OF WOMEN: Later Vedic Age

- Status of Women reduced
- They took part in all social and religious functions and gatherings.
- • Few women received education of high order.
- • Widows weren't allowed to re-marry.
- • Polygamy was more common especially in higher sections of the society. The discourses of women are preserved in Upanishads.

Education System

- Gurukul System of Education existed during the Early Vedic period.
- • It was at the basic level.
- • Pupils lived in Gurukuls.
- • Gurukul System of Education had become well established during Later Vedic period.
- • Pupil stayed with Guru for mental, physical and spiritual development.
- • They learnt Vedic Literature, Mathematics, Law, Astronomy, Astrology, Logic & Ethics.
- • No fees were charged, but pupils voluntarily paid contribution known as Gurudakshina when they completed their education.
- • Children belonging to rich & poor had to stay together.
- • To run the Gurukula pupils had to perform various duties like gathering fuel, begged alms (bhiksha) from neighbouring villages, working in fields attached to Gurukula

Economic Life

- They stayed in villages.
- They prayed for good rain, good harvest, good health and large herds of cattle.
- Agriculture was primary occupation.
- Barley/ Yava was the only grain known.
- Domestication of animals was secondary occupation.
- Cattle formed important dana (gift) made to priests.
 - Gomat: was the term used for wealthy person who owned many cattle (cows and bulls.)
- Other animals domesticated included dog, sheep, ox, goat and horse.
- In addition to Barley/Yava new crop Vrihi/Rice was popular.
 - Other crops like wheat, millet/ bajra and sugarcane were also produced by them during Later Vedic period.
- Domestication of animals was also seen in Later Vedic period.

Crafts

- They were engaged in weaving clothes.
- • Metal workers made weapons, implements and ornaments.
- • AYAS (metal) mentioned in Rig Veda was Copper or Bronze.
- • Iron was used in large quantities during later Vedic period.
- • Crafts such as leather- working, making of jewellery and chariot- making developed during this period.

Trade and Industry

- They traded clothes & leather goods.
- • Barter system was practiced.
- • Cow was the standard unit of value.
- • They used horses and bullocks to carry goods.
- • They also transported goods through inland rivers.
- • Many changes were seen in trade and commerce.
- • Nishka & Satmana (coins) were used as units of value.
- • Ships were used & inland maritime trade flourished.
- • Guilds were formed which controlled prices and ensures quality of goods.

DIET

- Cows were sacrificed at marriages and other important occasions.
- Bulls were also sacrificed.
- Milk
- cakes
- barley
- wheat
- vegetables and fruits

DRINKS

- **SOMA AND SURA (intoxicating liquor)**
- Soma juice was considered to be particularly acceptable to the gods and was offered with elaborate with ceremonial.
- Sama Veda provides chants appropriate for the ceremonies.

AMUSEMENTS

- **Dancing**
- **Music**
- **Chariot-racing**
- **Dicing**
- **Gambling**

Early Vedic Religion

- Believed in one Supreme God
- • Did not believe in idol worship
- • Worshipped the forces of nature as the manifestation of one Supreme God
- • Vedic Gods have been classified into 3 categories - Terrestrial, Atmospheric and Celestial
- • Indra, Agni, Varuna, Surya, Rudra, Yama, Soma, Marut, Dyaus, Vayu and Prajanaya. Prithvi, Saraswati, Usha, aditi were female deities. They were not given the same position as male Gods.
- • People did not worship for spiritual reasons but for the welfare of Praja & Pashu
- • Recitation of prayers, chanting of Vedic hymns and sacrifices or yajnas were an important part of the worship.

Rig Vedic Gods

- Indra - He was the most important divinity. He played the role of a warlord, leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons. 250 hymns are devoted to him in the Rig Veda. He was associated with thunder and storm and is addressed by various names: Ratheshtha, Jitendra Somapa, Purandra, Varitrahan and Maghayam
- • Agni - He was the second important divinity. He was intermediary between Gods and men. 200 hymns of the Rig Veda are devoted to him.
- • Varuna - He was the upholder of Rita or cosmic order or natural order. He personified water.
- • Soma - He was considered to be the God of plants. An intoxicant drink was also called soma.
- • Yama - He was the guardian of the world of dead.
- • Surya - Similar to that of the Greek God Helios

Rig Vedic Gods

- The famous Gayatri mantra is addressed to Savitri
- • Pusan Lord of jungle path, main function was that of guarding of roads, herdsman and cattle. Vishnu A relatively minor God at that time.
- • Vayu - Wind God
- • Dyaus - Father of Heaven
- • Aditi - Goddess of Eternity
- • Maruts - Storm Spirits
- • Gandharvas - Divine Musicians
- • Ashvins - Healers of diseases and experts in surgical art
- • Ribhus - Gnomes
- • Apsaras - Mistresses of Gods
- • Rudra - An archer of God, whose anger brought disease
- • Vishvadeva - Intermediate Deities
- • Aranyani - Goddess of Forest
- • Usha - Goddess of Dawn
- • Prithvi - Goddess of Earth

Political Organization

- In later Vedic times, the vidatha completely disappeared. The sabha and samiti continued to hold the ground, but their character changed. Women were no longer permitted to sit in the sabha, and it was now dominated by nobles and Brahmanas.
- The formation of wider kingdoms made the king more powerful. Tribal authority tended to become territorial. The term rashtra, which indicates territory, first appears in this period. The King performed the rajasuya sacrifice, which was supposed to confer supreme power to him. He performed the asvamedha, which meant unquestioned control over an area in which the royal house ran uninterrupted. He also performed the vajapeya or the chariot race, in which the royal chariot was made to win the race against his kinsmen.
- During this period collection of taxes and tributes, the king officer called sangrihitri. Even in later Vedic times the king did not possess a standing army. Tribal units were mustered in times of war, and, according to one ritual for success in war, the king had to eat along with his people from the same plate

Currency

- A gold piece of specific weight called Satamana is mentioned in Sathapatha- Brahmana.
- Nishka was the popular currency.
- Suvarna and Krishnala were two other classes of coins of circulation.
- Barter system will continued in spite of the presence of metallic coins.
- Money-lending was a lucrative trade and the interest on loan was moderately charged.
- The usurer is mentioned as Kusidin.

Types of Marriages

- Eight types of marriage were prevalent in the later Vedic age. Of these, four (Brahman, Daiva, Arsa and Prajapati) were generally approved and were permissible to Brahmans. These were religious marriages and were indissoluble.
- • Anuloma Marriage: Marriage of a man below his varna was called Anuloma. It was sanctioned by the sacred texts.
- • Pratiloma Marriage: Pratiloma marriage was the marriage of a girl or women to one lower than her own varna. It was not sanctioned by the sacred texts.

Eight types of Marriages

- **Brahma:** Considered the most ideal and honorable type of marriage. It is performed between a boy and a girl of the same varna.
- **Daiva:** A religious ceremony or ritual. The father of the girl donates her to a priest as part of his dakshina.
- **Prajapatya:** A marriage that takes place without a dowry
- **Asura:** It involves a bridegroom providing wealth or a bride price to the bride's father in exchange of marrying her.
- **Gandharva:** A secret marriage between a bride and groom. For example, the marriage of Dushyanta and Shakuntala.
- **Rakshasa:** A marriage that takes place by abduction
- **Arsha :** It is a type of marriage where a man gives his daughter to a sage or rishi in exchange for one or two pairs of cattle.

Paisacha: A marriage where the bride is stolen while sleeping or for any other reason

Gotra System

- The institution of gotra appeared in later Vedic times.
- Literally, it means the cow- pen or the place where cattle belonging to the whole clan are kept.
- The gotra has been regarded as a mechanism for widening the socio-political ties, as new relationships were forged between hitherto unrelated people.
- People began to practise gotra exogamy.
- No marriage could take place between persons belonging to the same gotra or having the same ancestor.