

Notes of Chapter : 7

The Vedas and Vedic Culture :

- The word 'Veda' comes from the Sanskrit term vid which means 'knowledge'.
- There are four Vedas, namely, the Rig Veda, the Yajur veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda. They are the most ancient texts of India, and indeed among the most ancient in the world.
- The Vedas consist of thousands of hymns, which are prayers in the form of poems and songs, that were recited orally. Hymns were composed in the Sapta Sindhava region.
- It is difficult to determine when the Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, was written. Experts suggest it was composed between the 5th and 2nd millennium BCE.
- Vedas have been memorised through strict training and passed on orally with almost no changes.
- The Vedic hymns were composed by rishis (male seers or sages) and rishikas (female ones) in an early form of the Sanskrit language.
- They were written in poetic form for many deities (gods or goddesses), such as Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Saraswati, Ushas and many more.
- Together with the seers, these deities maintained ritam, which means truth and order in human life and in the 'cosmos'. The early rishis and rishikas saw those gods and goddesses as one, not separate beings.
- In this worldview, values like 'Truth' were especially important as it was often another name for God.
- The last mantras (verses) of the Rig Veda also emphasised the importance of unity among people.
- In 2008, UNESCO recognised Vedic chanting as 'a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity'.

Vedic Society :

- Early Vedic society was organised in different janas or 'clans' that is, larger groups of people.
- The Rig Veda alone lists over 30 such janas. For instance, the Bharatas, the Purus, the Kurus, the Yadus and the Turvashas, etc. Each clan was associated with a particular region of the North-West part of the sub-continent.
- There is not much information about how janas governed their society. The Vedas only mentioned words like raja (a king or ruler), sabha and samiti, both of which refer to a collective gathering or assembly.
- It is assumed through this information that, raja or samiti were involved in governing the vedic society.
- Many professions are mentioned in the Vedic texts, such as agriculturist, weaver, potter, builder, carpenter, healer, dancer, barber, priest, etc.

Vedic Schools of Thought :

- Vedic culture developed many rituals (yajna, often read as yagya) which aimed towards various deities (gods or goddesses) for individual or collective benefit and well-being.

- Daily rituals were generally in the form of prayers and offerings to Agni, the deity associated with fire. The rituals became more and more complex with time.
- A group of texts known as Upanishads expanded the Vedic concepts. It introduced new concepts, such as rebirth (taking birth again and again) and karma (our actions or their results).
- According to one school of thought, generally known as Vedanta, everything ranging from human life, nature and the universe is one divine essence called brahman or tat ('that').
- The Upanishads also introduced the concept of atman or self. It is the divine essence that is found in every being, but is ultimately one with brahman. It follows that everything in this world is connected and interdependent.
- This explains a common prayer that begins with sarve bhavantu sukhinah, or "May all creatures be happy", and wish them all to be free from disease and sorrow.
- Early in the 1st millennium BCE, several more schools of thought grew out of the Vedas. One of them was Yoga.
- Yoga developed methods intended to achieve the realisation of brahman in one's consciousness. Together, these schools of thought became the foundations for what we call 'Hinduism' today.

Buddhism :

- Buddhism emerged as a distinct school of thought rejecting Vedic authority.
- About two-and-a-half millenniums ago, a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama was born in Lumbini (today in Nepal). There are different conclusions by scholars regarding the precise year of his birth.
- Siddhartha Gautama grew up living a protected life in the palace. One day, at the age of 29 , he moved out to take a round of the city in a chariot.
- For the first time in his life, he came across an old man, a sick man and a dead body. He also saw an ascetic, who appeared to be happy and at peace. After this experience, Siddhartha decided to give up his palace life, leaving behind his wife and son.
- He travelled on foot as an ascetic, and met other ascetics and scholars. He searched for the root cause of suffering in human life. After meditating for many days under a pipal tree at Bodh Gaya (today in Bihar), he attained enlightenment.
- He realized that avidya (ignorance) and attachment are the source of human suffering and gave a method to remove these two causes. Siddhartha then came to be known as the 'Buddha', which means the 'enlightened' or 'awakened' one.
- The Buddha started teaching what he had realized. This included the idea of ahimsa, which is generally translated as 'non-violence', but originally means 'non-hurting' or 'non-injuring'.
- The Buddha founded the Sangha, a community of bhikshus or monks (and, later bhikhunis or nuns).
- They dedicated themselves to practicing and spreading his teachings. His influence greatly impacted India and Asia.



This stone panel, some 800 years old, shows the Buddha teaching

Jainism :

- Jainism is another important school of thought that became widespread at the same time as Buddhism. However, its roots are believed to be much older than Buddhism.
- Just like Siddhartha Gautama, Prince Vardhamana was born into a royal family in the early 6th century BCE. His birthplace was near the city of Vaishali, in modern-day Bihar.
- At the age of 30, he decided to leave his home and go in search of spiritual knowledge. He practised an ascetic discipline and, after 12 years, achieved 'infinite knowledge' or supreme wisdom.
- He became known as Mahavira, or 'great hero', and started preaching what he had realised.
- Jain teachings include ahimsa, anekantavada and aparigraha. These ideas, which are also important in Buddhism and Vedantic thought, are central to Indian culture.
- Jainism also insists on the interconnectedness and interdependence of all creatures, from humans to invisible organisms. They support each other and cannot live without one another.



A traditional painting of Mahavira

- The word 'Jain' or jaina comes from Sanskrit word 'jina' which means 'conqueror'. This does not refer to the territory or enemies, but to conquer ignorance and attachments, so as to reach enlightenment.
- Similarities Between Buddhism and Jainism
- In both Buddhism and Jainism, ahimsa means much more than refraining from physical violence against a person or an animal. It also means refraining from violence in thought, such as having ill feelings towards anyone.
- In both Buddhism and Jainism, monks and sometimes nuns too, began travelling across the land to spread their respective teachings far and wide.
- Some of them created new monasteries in faraway places, while others led ascetic lives in rock cut caves. Archaeological findings have revealed many traces of those monasteries.
- Buddhism and Jainism also shared some common concepts, such as dharma, karma, rebirth, the search for an end to suffering and ignorance, and many important values.



Caves cut into the rock at Ellora (Maharashtra) between the 6th and the 10th centuries CE. Some of the caves are Hindu, others are Buddhist and Jain.

Charvaka School of Thought :

Charvaka school (sometimes also 'Lokayata'), believed that this material world is the only thing that exists. Therefore, there can be no life after death.

This school does not seem to have gained much popularity and it disappeared with time.

Folk and Tribal Roots :

India has rich 'oral traditions', that is, teachings or practices transmitted through everyday practice, without written texts. These include many folk traditions passed down by common people and tribal traditions passed down by tribes.

Meaning of Tribe

- A tribe is a group of families or clans sharing a tradition of common descent, a culture and a language. They live as a close-knit community under a chief and hold no private property.
- Tribes were simply different janas (groups of people) who lived in particular places, like forests or mountains.
- The Constitution of India uses the terms 'tribes' and 'tribal communities' in English, and 'janjati' in Hindi.
- According to official figures, in 2011 India had 705 tribes. They are spread over most states, amounting to a population of about 104 million people. This is more than the populations of Australia and the United Kingdom together.
- In the 19th century, anthropologists often described tribes as 'primitive' or 'inferior' to civilised people. With deeper studies of tribal communities and their rich and complex cultures, these biased judgments have mostly been rejected.

Interactions Between Belief Systems :

- There has been a constant interaction between folk and tribal traditions and major schools of thought. Deities, concepts, legends and rituals have been exchanged freely between these traditions.
- For example, Jagannath, worshipped in Puri (Odisha), is believed to have been a tribal deity. This is also the case with the mother-goddess worshipped across India.
- Some tribes adopted Hindu deities a long time ago and have their own versions of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. There have been records from India's North-Eastern states to Tamil Nadu.
- Long interactions between these belief systems have led to mixing of ideas. In this way, folk and tribal beliefs and practices also contribute to India's cultural roots.

Similarities between Folk, Tribal and Hindu Belief Systems :

- Interactions have occurred among folk, tribal and Hindu belief systems for a long time because they share many similar concepts. In all three, elements of nature such as mountains, rivers, trees, plants, animals, and some stones are regarded as sacred because there is consciousness behind all of them.
- Tribes generally worship many deities associated with these natural elements. For instance, the Toda tribes of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu consider over thirty peaks of this mountain range as residences of a god or a goddess. These peaks are so sacred to the Todas that they avoid pointing to them with a finger.
- Despite the multiple deities, many tribal groups have a concept of a higher divinity or supreme being, similar to Hinduism.
- For example, several tribes of Arunachal Pradesh worship Donyipolo, a combined form of the Sun and the Moon who later rose to the higher status of a supreme god.
- In parts of central India, the god Khandoba holds a similar higher status. In Eastern India, the Munda and Santhal tribals worship Singbonga, a supreme deity who created the world.

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS /ANSWERS to be written in notebook.

Chapter 7 India's Cultural Roots

Class 6 Social Science

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The Big Questions

1. What are the Vedas? What is their message?

Answer : The Vedas are ancient texts of India, consisting of four collections: Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sāma Veda, and Atharva Veda. They contain hymns composed by rishis and rishikas, addressing deities and emphasizing values like Truth and unity among people.

2. What new schools of thought emerged in India in the 1st millennium BCE? What are their core principles?

Answer: New schools of thought that emerged in the 1st millennium BCE include Vedanta, Yoga, Buddhism, and Jainism. Their core principles are interconnectedness, karma, rebirth, ahimsa (non-violence), and spiritual realization.

3. What is the contribution of folk and tribal traditions to Indian culture?

Answer: Folk and tribal traditions have enriched Indian culture through their unique deities, rituals, and oral traditions. They have interacted with mainstream Hinduism, contributing elements such as the worship of natural elements and deities like Jagannath.

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Let's Explore

Do you know the term for a society where people select their leaders? How do you think people can benefit from such a situation? What could happen if they live under leaders that they did not choose? (Hint: Think back to what you're learning in the theme 'Governance and Democracy'!) Write your thoughts in a paragraph of 100–150 words.

Answer: The term for a society where people select their leaders is "democracy." In a democracy, people benefit by having the power to choose leaders who represent their interests and values. This system encourages accountability, as leaders must respond to the needs and concerns of their constituents to remain in power. If people live under leaders they did not choose, they may feel disconnected from the government, leading to dissatisfaction and potential unrest.

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Think About It

Have you heard or read any other story that conveyed an important message? What values did it teach you?

Answer: Yes, I have read many stories that teach important lessons. One such story is "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." In this story, a young shepherd boy tricks the villagers by pretending that a wolf is attacking his sheep, even though there is no wolf. He does this several times. But when a real wolf shows up and he calls for help, the villagers don't believe him, and the wolf attacks his sheep. This story teaches that honesty is important and that lying can have serious consequences. It shows that when you lie, people might not trust you anymore, even when you're telling the truth. The lesson is about being truthful and how your actions can affect trust with others.

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→ Discuss the way the Buddha is depicted in the above panel.

Answer: The Buddha is depicted in a stone panel that dates back around 1,800 years, showing him teaching. The depiction emphasizes his role as a teacher and spiritual guide,

surrounded by followers who are attentive to his teachings. This visual representation highlights the Buddha's serene and enlightened demeanour, symbolizing wisdom, peace, and compassion

→ **Can you name some states of India or some other countries where Buddhism is a major religion even today? Try to plot these on a world map.**

Answer: States in India: Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh (Union Territory), Maharashtra (regions like Nagpur), Himachal Pradesh (Dharamshala)

Countries: Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Vietnam, South Korea

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Observe the above panel (from a Jain temple in New Delhi). What is striking about it? What messages does it carry?

Answer

- The panel depicts a lion and a cow drinking water together from the same container. This is striking because these are natural enemies, and yet they are shown in harmony.
- The panel shows that even natural enemies can live together peacefully if they are treated with compassion and respect.
- The image represents the interconnection of all living beings and the importance of living in harmony with nature.

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Questions, activities and projects

1. If you were Nachiketa, what questions would you like to ask Yama? Write them down in 100-150 words.

Answer

I would like to ask Yama, the god of death, the following questions if I was Nachiketa:

- What happens after the death of a body?
- What is soul?
- What happens to the soul after death?
- Will the soul also die with death, if not where will it go?
- Will the soul take rebirth in the form of another body?

2. Explain a few central ideas of Buddhism. Briefly comment upon them.

Answer: The central ideas of Buddhism are as follows:

- **Buddhism was started by Siddhartha Gautam (Gautam Buddha).**
- **It evolved during 500 BCE and did not accept the concepts and principles of the Vedas.**
- **Buddhism believes that ignorance and attachment are the source of human suffering. Their teachings were based on removing these two causes of Sufferings ignorance and attachment.**

3. Discuss in class the quotation of the Buddha which begins with “Not by water is one made pure, though many people may bathe here [in sacred rivers]” to make sure that its meaning has been understood by all.

Answer: This quotation from the Buddha emphasizes that true purity and spiritual cleanliness do not come from external rituals, such as bathing in sacred rivers, but from internal virtues and actions. It teaches that inner qualities like truthfulness, compassion, and ethical behavior are what truly purify a person. Discussing this in class can help students understand that spiritual practices should focus on personal growth and moral integrity rather than mere ritualistic activities.

4. Explain a few central ideas of Jainism. Briefly comment upon them.

Answer: Jainism emphasizes three main principles: ahimsa (non-violence), anekāntavāda (many-sidedness), and aparigraha (non-attachment). Ahimsa advocates for complete non-violence towards all living beings, reflecting a deep respect for life. Anekāntavāda teaches that truth and reality are complex and can be perceived from different perspectives, encouraging tolerance and understanding. Aparigraha promotes detachment from material possessions and desires, fostering a simple and content life.

5. Consider and discuss in class André Beteille’s thought (see page 122).

Answer: Andre Beteille is an Indian sociologist:

- As per his thoughts, since ancient times, thousands of castes and tribes had a great influence on the religious beliefs of Hinduism.
- Each tribe used to follow their own religion influenced by Hinduism. Similarly, as per his views, Hinduism as a religion was also influenced by tribal religious customs and traditions.
- Finally, we could decipher from his views that Hinduism as a religion evolved through the beliefs, customs, and traditions of different castes and tribes of ancient India.

6. Make a list of popular gods and goddesses in your region and the festivals they are associated with.

Answer: Lord Rama: Celebrated during Ram Navami, marking his birth, and Diwali, celebrating his return to Ayodhya.

- Lord Krishna: Celebrated during Janmashtami, marking his birth, and Holi, commemorating various legends associated with him.
- Goddess Durga: Worshipped during Navratri, a nine-day festival celebrating her different forms.
- Lord Shiva: Celebrated during Mahashivratri, dedicated to his worship.
- Goddess Saraswati: Celebrated during Vasant Panchami, marking the arrival of spring and honoring her as the goddess of knowledge.

7. As a class activity, list two or three tribal groups from your region or State. Document some of their art and belief systems.

Answer: Gonds, Bhils, Santhal, Munda, and the Great Andamanese Tribes:

- The Great Andamanese Tribes are an indigenous people of the Great Andaman Archipelago in the Andaman Islands.
All living things are believed to be endowed with power that affects the human being. The art form depicts the culture and tradition.
- Bhil art is known for its simplicity and use of vibrant colours. The art form is practiced on the walls, floors, and clothes. Similarly, students could give details of tribal groups from their region.

True or false (do it in book)

1. The Vedic hymns were written on palm-leaf manuscripts. False
2. The Vedas are India's oldest texts. True
3. The Vedic statement ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti reflects a belief in the unity of cosmic powers. True
4. Buddhism is older than the Vedas. False
5. Jainism emerged as a branch of Buddhism. False
6. Both Buddhism and Jainism advocated for peaceful coexistence and the avoidance of harm to all living beings. True
7. Tribal belief systems are limited to belief in spirits and minor deities. False
