

# Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)  
Supplementary Study Material

Module 3: Vedic Period

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# The Early Vedic Phase

## Arrival of the Indo-Aryans

- ✓ The Indo-Iranians, comprising the Indo-Aryans and Iranians, moved towards India from two areas of Central Asia. The first area is archaeologically called the Andronovo culture which covered almost the whole of Central Asia during the second millennium BC. The second is archaeologically called the Bactria– Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) and dated 1900– 1500 BC.
- ✓ This cultural zone extended over south Central Asia, and included Bactria or Balkh covering Afghanistan, and Margiana covering Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- ✓ Bactria is well known in the Indian tradition. It is called Bahlika, which means an outside country coterminous with modern Balkh. The earliest Aryans lived in the geographical area covered by eastern Afghanistan, the North-West Frontier Province, Punjab, and the fringes of western UP.
- ✓ The Sarasvati, is called *naditama* or the best of rivers in the *Rig Veda*. It is identified with the Ghaggar–Hakra channel in Haryana and Rajasthan, but its Rig Vedic description shows it to be the Avestan river Harakhwati or the present Helmand river in south Afghanistan from where the name Sarasvati was transferred to India.
- ✓ The entire region in which the Aryans first settled in the Indian subcontinent is called the Land of the Seven Rivers.
- ✓ *Rig Veda*- It consists of ten *mandalas* or books, of which books II to VII form the earliest parts. Books I and X seem to have been the latest additions. The *Rig Veda* has many things in common with the *Avesta*, which is the oldest text in the Iranian language.
- ✓ The Indo-European language is found in an inscription of about 2200 BC from Iraq. Specimens occur in Hittite inscriptions in Anatolia (Turkey) from the nineteenth to the seventeenth centuries BC. They also figure in the Mycenaean inscriptions of Greece around 1400 BC.
- ✓ Aryan names appear in Kassite inscriptions of about 1600 BC from Iraq and in Mitanni inscriptions of the fourteenth century BC from Syria. The term *dasyuhatyā*, slaughter of the *dasyus*, is repeatedly used in the *Rig Veda*.

## Tribal Conflicts

- ✓ The Indo-Aryans were engaged in two types of conflicts. First, they fought with the pre-Aryans, and secondly, they fought amongst themselves.
- ✓ According to tradition, the Aryans were divided into five tribes called *panchajana*

## Cattle Rearing and Agriculture

- ✓ Agriculture was also well known to the pre-Aryans who lived in the area associated with the Vedic people, but was perhaps used primarily to produce fodder.
- ✓ The terms for war in the *Rig Veda* is *gavishthi* or search for cows, and cow seems to have been the most important form of wealth.
- ✓ A site called Bhagwanpura in Haryana and three other sites in Punjab have yielded Painted Grey Ware along with 'late Harappan' pottery. The date assigned to the Bhagwanpura finds ranges from 1600 to 1000 BC which also roughly corresponds to the period of the *Rig Veda*.

## Tribal Chieftdom

- ✓ The administrative machinery of the Aryans in the Rig Vedic period functioned with the tribal chief, for his successful leadership in war, at the centre. He was called *rajan*. The election of the king by the tribal assembly called the *samiti*. The king was called the protector of his tribe. Even women attended the *sabha* and *vidatha* in Rig Vedic times. The *sabha* and the *samiti* mattered a great deal in early Vedic times. Next in rank to the king was the *senani* or the head of the army.
- ✓ The officer who enjoyed authority over a large stretch of land or pasture ground was called *vrajapati*. He led to battle the heads of the families called *kulapas*, or heads of the fighting hordes called *gramanis*. Initially the *gramani* was just the head of a small tribal kin-based fighting unit called *grama*.

## Tribe and Family

- ✓ The people's primary loyalty was to the tribe, which was called *jana*. The term *jana* occurs at about 275 places in the *Rig Veda*, and the term *janapada* or territory is not used even once. Another important term which stands for tribe in the *Rig Veda* is *vis*, which is mentioned 170 times in that text. Probably the *vis* was divided into *gramas* or smaller tribal units

## Social Differentiation

- ✓ The factor that contributed most to the creation of social divisions was the conquest of the indigenous inhabitants by the Indo-Aryans.

## Rig Vedic Gods

- ✓ Indra played the role of a warlord, leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons, and has 250 hymns devoted to him.
- ✓ The second position is held by Agni (fire god) to whom 200 hymns are devoted.
- ✓ The third important position is occupied by Varuna who personified water.
- ✓ Soma was considered to be the god of plants, and an intoxicating drink is named after him.
- ✓ The Maruts personify the storm.
- ✓ Many hymns are devoted to the river Sarasvati, who was considered an important goddess.
- ✓ There are some women divinities too, such as Aditi, and Usha who represented the appearance of the dawn

# The Later Vedic Phase: Transition to State and Social Orders

## Expansion in the Later Vedic Period (c. 1000–500 BC)

- The collections of Vedic hymns or mantras are known as the Samhitas. The *Rig Veda Samhita* is the oldest Vedic text.
- The *Yajur Veda* contains not only hymns but also rituals to accompany their recitation, the latter reflecting the social and political milieu of the time.
- The *Atharva Veda* contains charms and spells to ward off evils and diseases, its contents throwing light on the beliefs and practices of the non- Aryans.

## Use of Iron

- As a pure metal, iron was first made in Mesopotamia in 5000 BC, and later in Anatolia in the third millennium BC. Up to 1200 BC, iron was valued as a precious metal in western Asia and used as presents by rulers.
- In India, pure iron at some sites in Rajasthan in the copper– stone age has been reported and also in Karnataka towards the end of that phase.
- Iron can thus be placed in the second half of the second millennium BC. Iron implements buried with dead bodies have been discovered in substantial numbers. They have also been found in Baluchistan. At about the same time, iron was used in eastern Punjab, western UP, MP, and Rajasthan.

## Agriculture

- Ploughing was done with a wooden ploughshare, which could function in the light soil of the upper Gangetic plains.

## Arts and Crafts

- The Vedic people were familiar with copper from the very outset. Numerous copper tools of the pre-1000 BC period found in western UP and Bihar might suggest the existence of coppersmiths in non-Vedic societies.
- The Vedic people may have used the copper mines of Khetri in Rajasthan. The later Vedic people were acquainted with four types of pottery—black-and-red ware, black-slipped ware, Painted Grey Ware, and red-ware.

## Social Organization

- All the three higher varnas shared one common feature: they were entitled to *upanayana* or investiture with the sacred thread according to the Vedic mantras. *Upanayana* heralded the beginning of education in the Vedas.