

## CHAPTER 2

# The Vedic Period

### SYLLABUS

#### The Vedic Period

Sources: *Vedas and Epics (brief mention); Iron Artifacts and Pottery.*

Brief comparative study of Early and Later Vedic society and economy.

Scholars and historians refer to the period when Aryans first settled in India as the *Early Vedic Period* (i.e., 1500–1000 BC). Between 1000 BC to 500 BC when iron had come to be used, it is believed that Aryans followed the course of the rivers and settled along the valley of the Yamuna and the Ganga. The iron tools helped them to clear the forests. They moved in the eastward and the south-eastward directions. Aryans, so far nomadic in nature, gradually settled in the Gangetic valley. This period is known as the *Later Vedic Age*. (1000 BC to 500 BC). The culture of the period is referred to as the *Vedic culture* because it was based on the *Vedic texts*.

### SOURCES

#### A. LITERARY SOURCES

The Vedic texts may be divided into two broad chronological groups: the Early Vedic texts (1500–1000 BC) when most of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* were composed; and the Later Vedic texts (1000–500 BC) to which belong the remaining Vedas and their branches (*Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads*, etc.) The two periods correspond to the two phases of Aryan expansion in India.



The Vedic literature was written in Sanskrit. The term, 'Veda' has been derived from the Sanskrit word, 'vid' which means knowledge.

Vedic literature is divided into two parts, namely the *Shruti* and the *Smriti*. It is believed that the *Shruti* was revealed to the sages by God and they passed on that knowledge orally from generation to generation. On the other hand, *Smriti* literature was composed by the Rishis.

The Vedic literature can be classified into the following categories:

- (i) The four Vedas, i.e., the Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva Vedas and their Samhitas.
- (ii) The Brahmanas attached to each Samhita
- (iii) The Aranyakas
- (iv) The Upanishads.

#### 1. THE VEDAS

**(i) The Rig Veda:** It is the oldest religious text in the world and is, therefore, known as 'the first testament of mankind'. It is divided into 10 mandalas. It is said to have been composed during the *Early Vedic Period*. The hymns are dedicated by the sages to Gods. They were passed on orally from teachers to their disciples. The Rig Vedic hymns are the authentic sources of knowledge of the life of people of the time. Much of the Indian philosophy is based on the Rig Veda. It also contains the famous '*Gayatri mantra*'.

**(ii) The Sama Veda:** The term, 'Sama' means 'Sweet Song' or 'the melody'. In this Veda, some of the hymns are borrowed from the Rig Veda. The hymns in Sama Veda were meant to be sung at the time of the sacrifice by the priests.

**(iii) The Yajur Veda:** It deals with hymns recited during the performance of Yajnas. The hymns in this Veda throw light on the social and religious life of the Aryans.

**(iv) The Atharva Veda:** The hymns contained in this Veda deal with magic and charm. Most of the hymns are taken from the Rig Veda. Besides the powers of spirits, the hymns deal with *gyan* (knowledge), *karma* (action) and *upasana* (invocation). Some hymns also deal with medicines for the treatment of various diseases.

### THE BRAHMANAS

Written after the Vedas as their simple commentary, the Brahmanas are in prose. They explain the social and religious importance of rituals as well as the value of sacrifices. The Brahmanas are of great historical value. Each Veda has several Brahmanas.

### The Aranyakas

They are known as 'forest books' written for the guidance of the hermits and the students living in forests. They form the concluding part of the Brahmanas. Their main themes are mysticism and philosophy.

### The Upanishads

They are philosophical commentaries on the Vedas. The doctrines such as *Karma*, *Moksha* and *Maya* are explained in detail. The Upanishads form the basic source of Indian philosophy. Composed by different sages, they are said to form the foundation on which later additions to Vedic Literature rest. The most famous of these Upanishads are *Chandogya Upanishad*, *Kena*

*Upanishad*, *Aitareya Upanishad* and *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

### ALLIED VEDIC LITERATURE

**(i) The Vedangas:** They deal with the ways in which the Vedas ought to be chanted; and are thus important in the understanding of the Vedas. The six Vedangas deal with pronunciation, grammar, etymology, metrics, rituals and astronomy.

**(ii) The Sutras:** They are divided into three groups: the *Srautasutras*, which deal with *yajna* and sacrifices; the *Grihyasutras* or *Smartasutras*, which deal with the ceremonies connected with family life; and the *Dharmasutras*, which provide rules of conduct for the various classes of people and the various stages in their life.

**(iii) The Upavedas:** As the name suggests, they are subsidiary Vedas. They are four in number. *Ayurveda* deals with Indian system of medicine; the *Dhanurveda*, describes the art of warfare; *Gandharvaveda* describes the art of music and *Shilpaveda* deals with art and architecture.

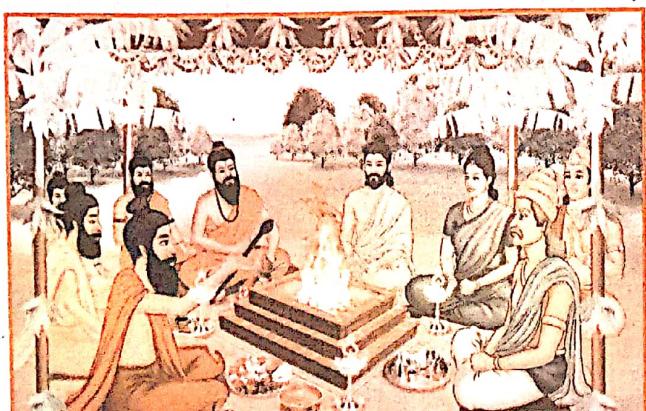
**(iv) Darshanas:** There are six schools of Indian philosophy known as *Shad-Darshanas*. They include — *Nyaya*, *Darshana*, *Vaisesika*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Purva Mimamsa* and *Uttar Mimamsa*. They all propagate the virtues of life and are opposed to external rituals.

**(v) The Dharmashastras:** The law-books called the *Dharmasutras* and the *Smritis* together with their commentaries, are called *Dharmashastras*. They lay down the duties for different classes of people as well as for kings and their officials. *Manusmriti* gives the description of Hindu code of law including the *Varnas* (the Castes) and the *Ashramas*.

**(vi) The Ashtadhyayi:** It is a treatise on Sanskrit grammar by Panini. Information is given about the roots of the words and the context in which they were used in Vedic literature.

### The Importance of the Vedas

- (i) Vedas are the storehouse of knowledge about the Vedic Age. The social, economic, political and religious aspects of the life of the people is reflected in the Vedic literature.
- (ii) Although religious in nature, the Vedas are a valuable source of information on



Sages Performing Yajna

various subjects like music, medicine, history, philosophy, grammar, metrics, astronomy, art and architecture.

- (iii) The information contained in the Vedas is all the more important in the absence of any other material remains for giving a glimpse of the Vedic Age.

## 2. THE EPICS

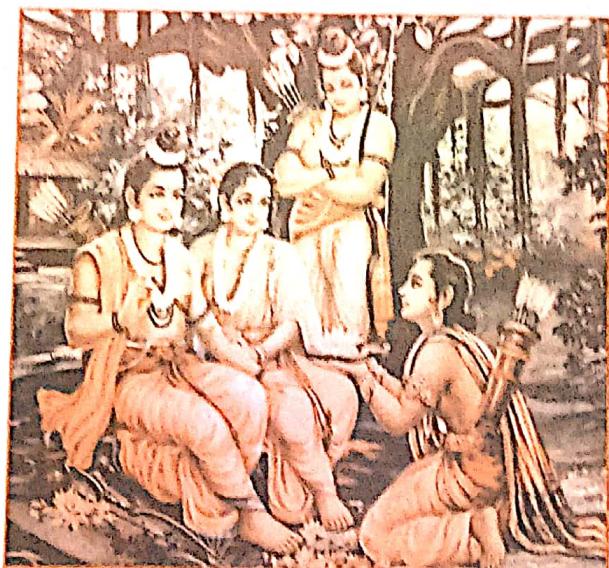
The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are important epics.

**Ramayana:** The *Ramayana* was originally composed in Sanskrit. The Sanskrit version is said to be the work of *Maharishi Valmiki*.

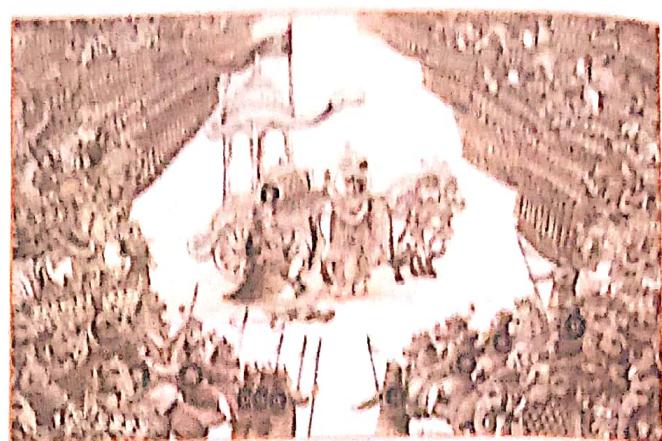
The story of *Ramayana* revolves around Rama and the abduction of his wife Sita by a demon king, Ravana. The battle between Rama and Ravana; duty, devotion and love shown by the brothers is told in detail.

Rama was the eldest of the four sons of Dashratha, the ruler of Ayodhya, who had three queens. Rama was the son of the eldest queen, Kaushalya and was the heir-apparent to the throne. After Rama was married to Sita, he was to be installed as the king. At this juncture, King Dashratha's other queen Kaikeyi reminded him of the promise he had made earlier to grant her a wish. Kaikeyi wanted her son Bharata to be the king and Rama to be sent into exile for fourteen years. Rama along with his wife Sita and brother, Lakshmana went to the forest.

In disguise of a sanyasi, Ravana, the demon king, abducted Sita and took her to Lanka.



A scene from the Ramayana.



A scene from the Mahabharata. Lord Krishna gave Arjuna a discourse which is compiled in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Rama took the help of Sugriva and Hanuman. They crossed the ocean and defeated Ravana. Rama then, along with Sita and Lakshmana proceeded home having completed the fourteen years' exile. He was crowned the king.

**Mahabharata:** Believed to be the work of sage Vyasa, *Mahabharata* is written in Sanskrit language. Originally, it was called *Jaya* or the

**Mahabharata:** The king of Hastinapur Dhritarashtra had 100 sons known as *Kauravas*. Dhritarashtra's brother Pandu who had died earlier, had five sons, known as *Pandavas*.

In course of time, Dhritarashtra named the eldest Pandava — Yudhisthira his successor. This angered Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. It became the cause of enmity and jealousy between the cousins.

Once during a game of dice, Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava lost his kingdom as well as Draupadi to Duryodhana. In accordance with the terms of agreement, the Pandavas had to go into exile.

After the completion of the exile, the Pandavas asked the Kauravas to return their kingdom but Duryodhana refused to give anything. So the war, known as the *Mahabharata*, followed. Arjuna, a Pandava was reluctant to fight. Krishna ultimately gave him a discourse and prevailed upon him to do his duty. This discourse at the battlefield is compiled in the form of *Bhagavad Gita*. It forms a part of the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* war lasted for 18 days. In the war, all the Kaurava brothers were killed and Yudhisthira became the ruler of Hastinapur.

collection dealing with victory. Subsequently it came to be known as *Bharata*, because it contains the stories of the descendants of one of the earliest Vedic tribes called *Bharata*. The final compilation came to be known as *Mahabharata*.

The *Bhagwad Gita*, which forms a part of the *Mahabharata*, is one of the most popular religious texts considered sacred by many people in India. The interests of the self might conflict with duty and whenever there is such a conflict the *Bhagwad Gita* gives the answer. That is the secret of the undying popularity of this religious text. It teaches that the Soul is immortal.

### The Importance of the Epics

- (i) The Epics serve as the main source of information on the political institutions and the social and cultural organisation of the Epic Age.
- (ii) They provide information on various Aryan Kingdoms, their armies and the weapons they used. The Kshatriyas were entrusted with the defence of their kingdoms and they believed that death on the battlefield was the noblest act in the life of a warrior.
- (iii) The Epics are considered as the finest literary works of the ancient period and are acclaimed for their literary and philosophical value.
- (iv) They reveal the high ideals of family life of the Aryans.
- (v) The great heroes, depicted in the Epics, are the embodiment of high moral principles, and made a significant impact on successive generations.



Iron Implements

- (vi) The *Bhagwad Gita* elaborates the Karma philosophy and the immortality of the soul.

### B. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES

The available archaeological sources of the period include iron implements and tools and remains of pottery.

**1. Iron Artifacts:** The discovery of iron marks an important stage in the march of civilisation in the world.

In India, the Iron Age began in 1000 BC. It is believed that the Rig Vedic people knew of a metal called *ayas*, which was either copper or bronze. In the Later Vedic literature, however *ayas* was qualified with *Shyama* or *Krishna* meaning black to denote iron. Archaeology has revealed that iron began to be used around 1000 BC which is also the period of Later Vedic literature. Iron was a harder metal than copper and bronze. It was cheap and available in plenty. It was used in the following areas:

(i) **Agriculture:** When the Aryans migrated to the northern and eastern parts of India, they found that the area received more rainfall than the north-western part of India. Consequently, this region was covered with thick rain forests which could not be cleared by copper or stone tools used by the Early Vedic people. But by using the iron tools they were able to clear the dense rain forests and convert forestland into cultivable land in a relatively lesser time.

With the use of iron plough-heads, sickles and hoes, they could bring vast tracts of land under cultivation. Gradually, the Vedic people acquired better knowledge of seasons, manuring and irrigation. This resulted in the substantial enlargement of settlements like *Hastinapur* and *Kaushambi* towards the end of the Later Vedic period. The production of more rice, wheat, barley, vegetables and fruits not only improved the standard of living of the peasants but also enabled them to spare some part of their produce for the chiefs, princes, priests and artisans.

(ii) **Occupation:** The use of iron gave rise to new trades by providing durable implements like saws, chisels, hammers, nails and tongs.

## \*ORIGIN OF THE ARYANS

The origin of the Aryans as well as the background of the people who settled in India is full of controversies. Some historians believe that Aryans were the natives of India. Others like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, after the study of *Rig Veda* and *Zend Avesta*, concluded that the original home of the Aryans was the Arctic region. A.C. Das, a historian tried to prove that the original home of the Aryans was India. According to him, they lived in the *Sapta Sindhu* (Punjab) and migrated to other parts of India. Swami Dayanand Saraswati believed that Tibet was the home of the Aryans.

Professor Max Mueller, the German scholar, believed that the Aryans came to India from Central Asia. He gave two reasons in support of this theory. The first wave of migrations from the Steppes, Central Asia had started around 1500 BC. The Aryans bore strong resemblance to bands of warlike people of Central Asia. The Central Asian theory holds the origin of Romans, Celts, Indians, Greeks and Persians from the same stock.

Many historians agree with the Central Asian Theory of Max Mueller. Their reasons for accepting the theory are:

1. In ancient times, the land in Asia Minor was fertile which made it suitable for agriculture and domestication of animals.
2. The stone inscriptions discovered in Asia Minor prove that the Aryan gods like Indra and Varuna, were worshipped in ancient times.
3. The flora and fauna and objects referred to in the Rig Veda were found in Asia Minor.
4. Asia Minor is equidistance from Europe and India.
5. Biologists noticed the genetic traits (DNA) of the Steppe people of Central Asia and found similar traits in 35 per cent of the people in north India. Thus, they concluded that the Indo-Aryans migrated from Central Asia to India.

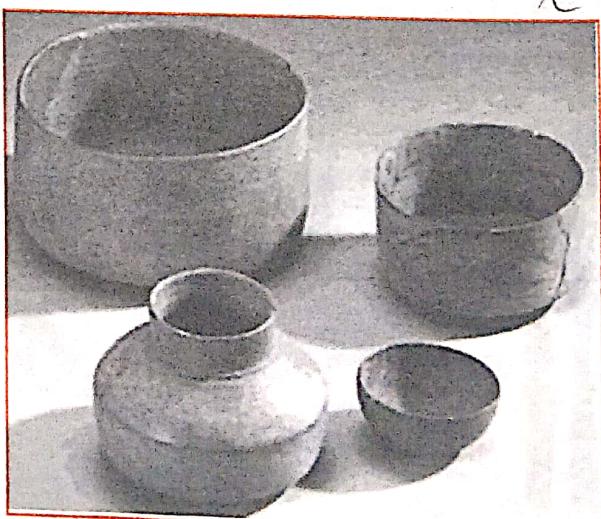
However, the issue of the origin of the Aryans is still being disputed.

This gave rise to occupations such as weaving, spinning, carpentry, tanning and tool-making.

(iii) **Defence:** Because of its durability and easy availability, iron was extensively used in making weapons like swords, armours and shields.

**2. Pottery:** Pottery forms an important source of information. The Grey Ware (GW) and the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) pottery discovered at different sites in Punjab and Haryana is believed to belong to the Rig Vedic Aryans. The important sites include Bhagwanpura (Kurukshestra), Dadheri (Ludhiana), Katpalan and Nagar (Jallandhar). These cultures are regarded as Rig Vedic because they belong to the same period and same region as mentioned in the Rig Veda. However, in the Ganga-Yamuna doab, the earliest iron objects are generally associated with PGW. Here, a number of sites associated with the prolific use of iron have been discovered. The PGW Culture corresponds to the Later Vedic period. The PGW is a very fine, smooth and even-coloured pottery. It was made out of well-worked, high quality clay with geometric patterns painted on it in black. Floral patterns and sun symbols are seen in some cases. The pottery includes open-mouthed bowls and dishes.

The PGW phase was followed by the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) phase, the beginning of which goes back to 700 BC. This



PGW Pottery

\* This is additional information.

pottery was glossy and shining. It is believed that the use of this pottery was made by the people who dominated the economic and social life of the period.

### EARLY SETTLEMENTS

On the basis of the names of the rivers and mountains mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, it is believed that the Aryans entered India from Afghanistan and settled in the valley of the Kabul river and the Punjab. They called this north-western part of India, *Sapta Sindhu* or the land of seven rivers—namely Sindhu (Indus), Ravi, Beas, Satluj, Jhelum, Chenab and Saraswati. This region covers the present areas of eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, and parts of Western Uttar Pradesh. Later this region was named *Brahmavarta* or the 'land of the Gods' because the composition of *Rig Veda* took place here on the banks of river Saraswati, which they considered most sacred.

The region provided conditions for stable agriculture. The act of moving from place to place with herds of animals ceased to have the pre-eminence it had enjoyed in early days. This fact too was responsible for the evolution of a new culture.

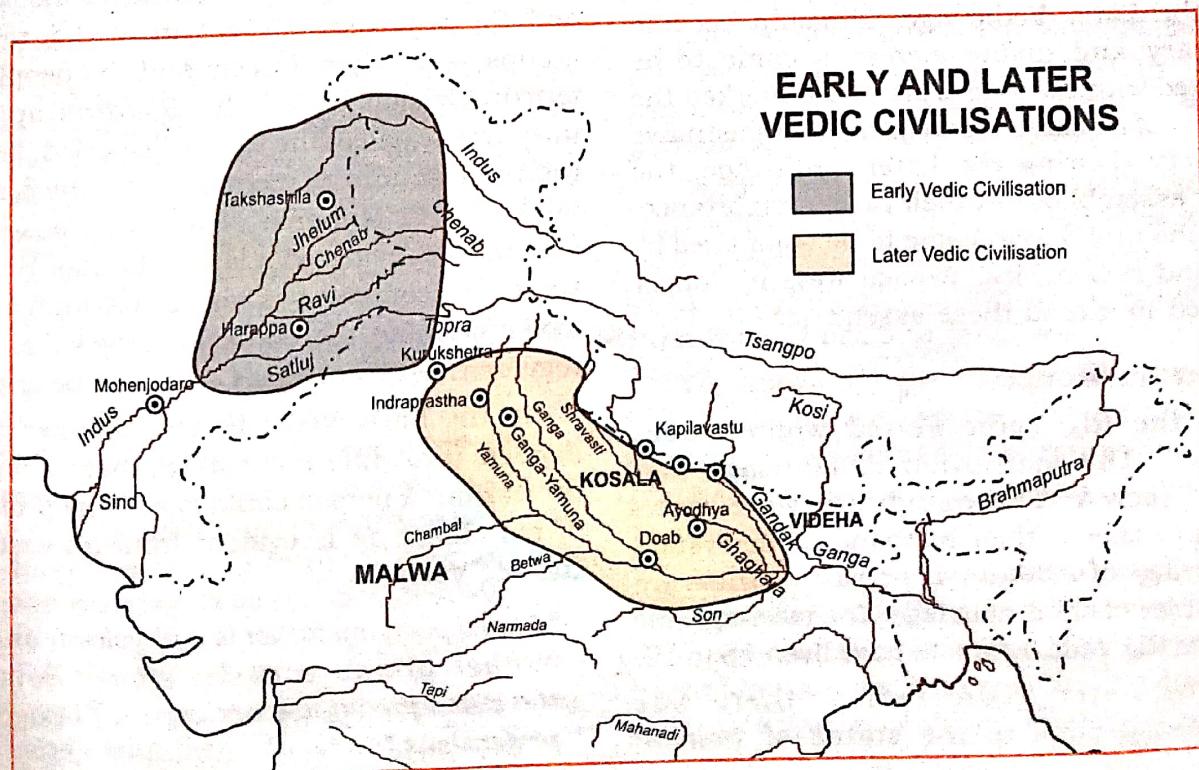
### SOCIETY SOCIAL ORGANISATION

In the Rig Vedic time or the Early Vedic Period, the Aryans lived in villages. The family was the fundamental unit of the society. It was patriarchal. This means that the oldest male member of the family was its head. He was called *Grihapati* or *Kulapati*. After the death of *Grihapati* the responsibility shifted to his eldest son. Marriages took place after the boy and the girl attained maturity. Monogamy was the usual norm of marriage though at times the chiefs practiced polygamy.

Several families lived in a *grama* or village. Several villages formed a *Visha*. Many *Vishas* formed a *Jana*. The head of the village was called *Gramini*, that of *Visha*, *Vishapati*. *Rajan* or king was the head of a *Jana*.

The kings governed with the help of ministers. The important officers included the *Gramini*, the *Purohita* and the *Senani*. The *Senani* was the commander of the army and the *Purohita* performed religious ceremonies. The administration of the villages was carried out by the *Gramini*.

The king did not maintain any regular army. However, in times of war, he used to organise tribal groups to perform military functions.





The Varnas

During the Rig Vedic time, the tribe elected a leader of its own. He was not as powerful as the one in the Later Vedic Period.

In the Rig Vedic Period, three popular assemblies known as the *Sabha*, the *Samiti* and the *Vidatha* advised the king.

The *Vidatha* was the earliest assembly which used to perform all kinds of functions—economic, military, religious and social. Women actively participated in the deliberations in the *Vidatha*. The *Samiti* was the assembly of the people and the *Sabha* was the council of elders. The *Sabha* performed advisory and judicial functions. The *Samiti* was called to session on special occasions.

In the Later Vedic Age, kingship became hereditary and divine elements came to be associated with the king. This period marked the beginning of a taxation system and administrative machinery. During the Later Vedic Age, the popular assemblies lost their earlier importance. The *Sabha* and *Samiti* came to be dominated by chiefs and rich nobles. Women were no longer permitted to attend these assemblies.

#### POSITION OF WOMEN

During the Rig Vedic Period women were respected. The institution of marriage had become sacred. The daughters were given freedom to choose their husbands. The system of remarriage of widows was prevalent. There are no examples of child-marriage. The marriageable age in the Rig Veda seems to have been 16 to 17.

In the Later Vedic Period, there was significant decline in the status of women.

Their participation in *yajnas* was not considered necessary. They did not enjoy the right to property. The freedom to choose husbands by women was curtailed.

#### CLASS DIVISIONS

Though the caste system is not mentioned in the Rig Veda but the fact remains that there was some kind of class division in the society. The early Aryans called the local inhabitants *Dasyus* and did not mix with them. It is said that during this period, the tribal chiefs and the priests acquired a large share of the booty and grew at the cost of their kinmen. This resulted in social inequalities and the tribal society got divided into three groups — warriors, priests and the people. The fourth division called the *Shudras* appeared towards the end of the Rig Vedic period, because the word 'shudra' is mentioned for the first time in the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda, which is usually considered a later addition. However, since the economy was mainly pastoral and not food producing, there was no scope for collecting regular tributes or taxes from the people.

In the Early Vedic Period, the society was divided into different classes based on their profession. A person could adopt any profession of his choice as is evident from an excerpt of the Rig Veda:

*"I am a poet, my father is a physician and my mother grinds corn on stone. Being of the same family, we are engaged in different professions."*

People followed different professions which became hereditary in course of time. This resulted in the division of society into occupational classes. Gradually, this took the form of caste and the present caste system emerged. In the Later Vedic Period, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras became four distinct castes or Varnas.

The Brahmins or the priests performed religious rituals. The Kshatriyas participated in wars. The Vaishyas engaged in business and looked after agriculture as well as industry. The Shudras served the upper classes.

As stated earlier, during the Later Vedic Age, the caste system became rigid. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas enjoyed many privileges. The priests came to be considered as gods on earth and the Kshatriyas also increased their power and came to be regarded as the ruling class. All the three higher varnas were entitled to upanayana or investiture with the sacred thread according to the Vedic mantras. Inter-caste marriage was not prevalent.

### **The Four Ashramas**

In the Early Vedic Period, man grew up according to the family traditions. However, in the Later



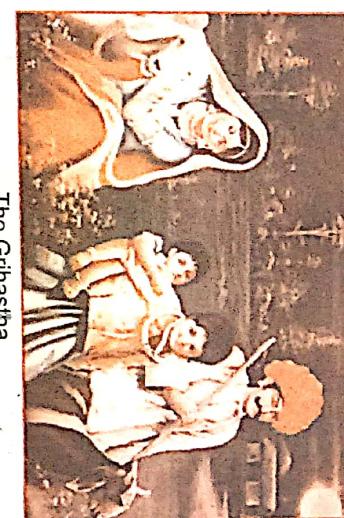
The Vanaprastha



The Brahmacharya



The Sanyasa



The Grihastha

Vedic Period, the whole lifespan of an Aryan came to be divided into four periods. The four stages of life are known as four *ashramas*, each of 25 years duration. The four ashramas are *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*.

The *Brahmacharya Ashrama* lasted up to the age of 25 years. During this period, the pupil was expected to acquire knowledge in the *gurukul* and observe strict discipline.

During the period of the *Grihastha Ashrama*, man was supposed to marry and raise a family. As a householder, he was to take responsibility of maintaining his family. This period lasted from the age of 25 to 50 years.

The third stage was *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. It lasted from the age of 50 to 75 years. During this period man was expected to retire from worldly life and acquire spiritual and philosophical knowledge.

The last stage lasting from the age of 75 to 100 years was the *Sanyasa Ashrama*. This was the period of renunciation. Man had to leave everything forever and go into meditation in order to attain *moksha* or salvation.

### **Educator**

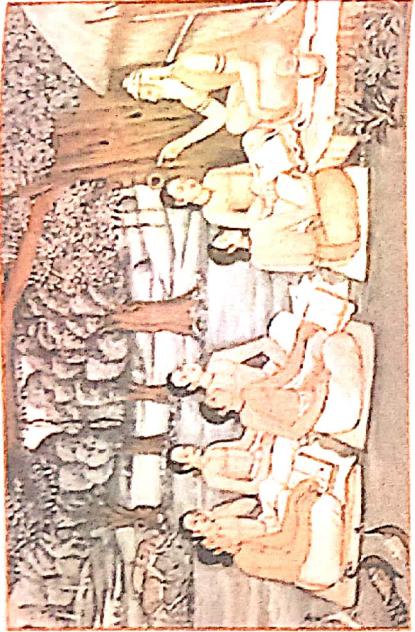
Education was imparted through private *gurukuls*. The residence of the *guru* called the *gurukul*, meaning the family of the *guru*, had become the most sacred institution. The *gurukuls* were often located on the outskirts of the city and even in forests. The students lived there. The guru treated his students like his own children. The student was required to do household chores for his teacher. He had to get up early in the morning, take a bath and chant the Vedic mantras. Most of the teaching was done orally. At the completion of the education, a student used to give *guru dakshina* — a gift to his teacher.

The *gurus* were greatly respected and revered. The main object of education was to bring about physical, mental and spiritual development of the pupils. The subjects of study included the Vedas, Puranas, Grammat, Mathematics, Ethics, Logic and Military Science.

Two women teachers named *Maitreyi* and *Gangi* were considered gifted and were greatly respected.

### **Food, Dress And Amusements**

The main cereal produced by the Rig Vedic people was barley. Wheat and rice were not known to them. However, in Later Vedic times, there is evidence of using rice (*brihi*). Cows were domesticated and milk and milk products like



**The Gurukul**

curd, butter, ghee, etc. were used. *Soma*, a kind of intoxicating drink, was consumed during festivals and religious ceremonies.

The clothes worn were simple. They consisted of an undergarment, called *Mai* or *dhoti*, an upper piece called *Vasa* or shirt. An overgarment was known as *Adhvaya*, a loose piece of cloth. Men wore turbans. There were customs of wearing animal skins. Some of the *sadhus* (hermits) wore deer skin known as *Mrighchal*. Men kept long hair. Ornaments were worn by both men and women. The ornaments were made of gold, silver, ivory and precious stones. Some of the common items of jewellery were earrings, rings, anklets, bracelets, necklaces, etc.

The main means of amusement in both the Vedic periods were chariot-races, horse-races, dancing, singing and hunting. The chief musical instruments were the drum, flute, mridang and lute. People participated in competitive sports, festivals and gambling.

### **Religious Beliefs**

The people in the Vedic age worshipped forces of nature. They personified these natural forces and looked upon them as living beings to whom they gave human or animal attributes. A large number of gods are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The most important among these gods was *Indra*, to whom 250 hymns are devoted in the Rig Veda. He is also known as the *Purandara* (or breaker of forts) and *Jitendra* (a winner). He is considered as the Rain God, who is responsible for bringing rainfall.



**Anusment — Chariot-racing**

The second position is held by Agni, the Fire God (Agni). He is regarded as an intermediary between gods and men, for he consumes the sacrificial offerings and carries them to the gods in the form of smoke. The third position is occupied by Varuna, the god of waters, clouds, oceans and rivers. He determines the path for all stars in heaven. Varuna is regarded as the upholder of natural or cosmic order.

There were many other Vedic gods like Vayu (the god of wind), Surya (Sun god), Yama (Lord of the dead), Rudra (god of storms); etc. Some goddesses were also worshipped. The most important female goddess was Usha, the goddess of dawn. Other important female deities were: Prithvi, a personification of the earth; Aditi, the great mother of gods; Ratri, the spirit of the night; Aranyani, the Lady of the forest; Dishana, the goddess of vegetation.

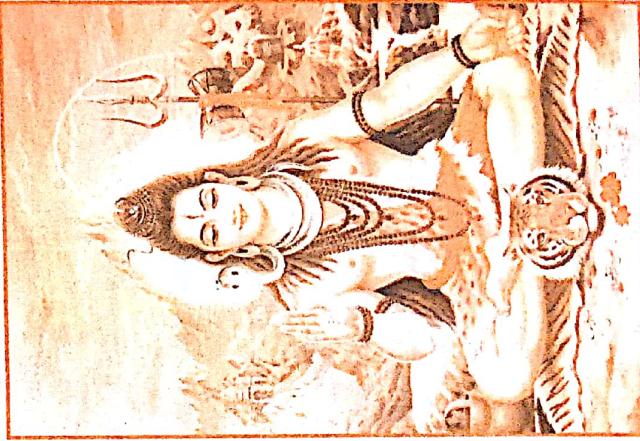
All these gods were invoked and propitiated at yajnas or sacrifices, organised by the chiefs and performed by the priests. The Gods invoked in the sacrifices supposedly rewarded the sacrificers with success in wars, progeny, increase in cattle and long life. It also increased the income of the priests through dana and dakshina.

Changes which occurred in the material life of the people towards the end of the Early Vedic age,



The *yajna* rituals involved construction of altars (*vedi*) and fireplaces (*agni*) in a variety of shapes such as isosceles triangles, symmetric trapezia, and rectangles. The *subasutras* describe steps towards construction of these figures with prescribed sizes. The sides of these figures follow the Pythagorean relation, i.e.  $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$ , and  $5^2 + 12^2 = 13^2$ . Such combinations are called Pythagorean triples. There are references to the Pythagoras equation in the *Baudhayana Sulbasutra* proving that Indians used these long before Pythagoras. India preceded the West in which other discoveries? How much of our ancient knowledge do we utilise in our daily lives?

caused many changes in their attitude towards gods and goddesses. Continuous interactions with the local non-Aryan population also led to these changes. Thus, in the Later Vedic age, Prajapati, the creator or Brahma, became the supreme god and Indra and Agni lost their former significance. Vishnu came to be regarded as the preserver and protector of the people and Shiva, as destroyer of the universe.



Shiva



Vishnu



Brahma

In the later Vedic Age with religious evolution, simplicity of nature worship was lost and the frequency and number of the *yajnas* increased. Rituals and sacrifices (*yajnas*) became a daily routine. Besides, the *yajnas* performed by kings, the common people performed small *yajnas*, during which milk, ghee, grains and fruits were offered to the deities. The rich people and businessmen conducted bigger sacrifices. During such *yajnas* *purohitas* received gold, expensive clothes and large number of cows as gifts (*Dakshina*). Giving *dakshina* was also a ritual and a pious duty. Ritualism gained strong roots and even a small deviation while performing certain worship was considered a sin.

The Brahmins were responsible for bringing about many innovations and evolving new doctrines. More emphasis was laid on penance called *tapasya* which became ritualistic. The new doctrines included the doctrine of *karma* (action), *dharma* (duty) and *moksha* (salvation). The belief in rebirth gained roots. Consequently, all these innovations strengthened the position of Brahmins. The Brahmins were said to have

divine powers. No ritual or religious celebration would commence without the presence of the Brahmins.

### ECONOMY

The Rig Vedic economy was primarily pastoral. For Aryans cattle was synonymous with wealth; a wealthy person was called *gomat*. *Gopa* and *gopati* were epithets given to the king. In the Rig Veda, *Godhuli* is used as a term for a measure of time. Distance is called *gavayuti* and a daughter is called *duhitr* or the one who milks the cows.

Compared to the linguistic evidence for cattle rearing in the Rig Veda, agricultural activities find very few references. Apart from '*yava*' or barley, no other grains are mentioned. There are references to fire being used for burning the forest cover and the practice of shifting cultivation. Further, the area received low rainfall and the major rivers mentioned in the Rig Veda, were known to change their courses frequently. In these conditions, the alluvial lands near the rivers could not be cultivated on a permanent basis.

A Comparison: Early Vedic Age and Later Vedic Age

Basis of Comparison	Early Vedic Age	Later Vedic Age
Society	Family was the basic unit. Women enjoyed equal rights. Rigid caste system did not prevail. Gurukul system of education. Food included milk, barley, fruits, vegetables and meat. Worship of nature and natural phenomena prevailed. Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Surya, etc. were worshipped. Absence of temples and idols. Hymns were chanted in the open. Worship of forefathers and belief in life after death prevailed.	Joint Family System prevailed. Significant decline in status of women. The caste system was becoming rigid. Gurukul system was further enlarged. Consumption of meat was reduced. Rice became staple cereal.  Religion became more complex.  Brahma; Rama and Krishna as incarnations of Vishnu and Shiva came to be worshipped. Brahmins introduced many rituals and made their position secure. Faith in superstitions and spells. New principles like penance, doctrines of Karma, Dharma and Moksha developed.
Economy	In the beginning the main occupation was domestication of animals and agriculture was secondary. Cattle was the important source of wealth. Many engaged in trade and commerce. Dyeing, embroidery, carpentry, weaving, pottery, crafts in gold and iron were important occupations.	Agriculture became the chief occupation while domestication of animals also continued.  Land was the important source of wealth. Traders guilds had come up and trade had become very important. Besides occupations of earlier period, many new occupations like physicians, musicians, and many other professions emerged.

Major changes in the economy took place during the Later Vedic phase. Importance of agriculture grew during this phase. The growth of agriculture in the Later Vedic period was made possible by the availability of vast tracts of fertile alluvial lands of the Ganga-Yamuna doab and the middle Ganga valley. Both archaeological and literary sources depict the introduction of rice as the staple diet of the people. The Vedic texts mention *Vrihi*, *Tandula* and *Sali*, denoting rice. The Later Vedic texts also refer to oxen yoked to the plough, suggesting the prevalence of plough cultivation. Towards the end of this period iron ploughshares and metal tools were used and a variety of crops were cultivated.

The craftsmen mentioned in the Vedic texts include leather workers (*charmakaras*), wheelwrights (*rathakaras*), blacksmiths and

potters (*kulala*), and carpenters (*taksan*). However, none of these groups were considered as of low status. Weaving seems to have been a domestic craft. Wool, obtained from sheep, was the most common raw material. Cotton is not mentioned.

**Trade:** During the Later Vedic phase agricultural surplus led to trade, giving rise to markets from which developed towns and cities. Thus, trade became the pivot around which the whole town and city life moved. Although the Aryans had introduced coins, barter system was still dominant in trade with other countries.

**Occupations:** Besides agriculture and trade, other important occupations included domestication of animals, crafts in various metals, carpentry, pottery, fishery, etc. Women were engaged in spinning, weaving, knitting and dyeing.

## EXERCISES

### I. Multiple-Choice Questions

A. Choose the correct answers to the questions from the given options.

1. Which of the following is not a category of the Vedic Literature?  
(a) The Aranyakas  
(b) The Upanishads  
(c) The Early Vedic Texts  
(d) The Brahmanas attached to each Sanhita
2. Which of the following is known as 'the first testament of mankind'?  
(a) Sama Veda  
(b) Rig Veda  
(c) Yajur Veda  
(d) Atharva Veda
3. The use of iron gave rise to new occupations, which one of the following is NOT one of them?  
(a) farming  
(b) tool-making  
(c) pottery  
(d) shipping.
4. What is referred to as PGW or Painted Grey Ware pottery?  
(a) Rugged grey pottery  
(b) Very fine, smooth and even-coloured pottery  
(c) Bead-encrusted black pottery  
(d) All of the above.
5. 'Vidatha' the assembly did NOT perform which of the following functions?  
(a) Economic  
(b) Social  
(c) Religious  
(d) Administrative
6. What was the life expectancy of a person in the Vedic Age (Hint: the four ashramas)?  
(a) 25 years  
(b) 50 years  
(c) 75 years  
(d) 100 years
7. Family, the fundamental unit of society, was patriarchal and was headed by  
(a) Vishapati  
(b) Purohita  
(c) Grihapati  
(d) Gramini

B. Read the two statements given below and select the option that shows the correct relationship between (A) and (B).

1. (A) The period between 1500-1000 BC when the Aryans settled in India is known as the Early Vedic Period.

- (B) During this period, following the course of rivers the Aryans settled in the Gangetic Valley.

(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

2. (A) Iron began to be used in India during the period of Later Vedic Age.  
(B) Iron was a harder metal than copper and bronze.

(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

3. (A) In the Rig Vedic Age, family was the fundamental unit of the society and patriarchal in form.  
(B) After the death of the oldest male member, the eldest son used to take over the responsibility.

(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

4. (A) In the Early Vedic Age, the King did not maintain any regular army.  
(B) In times of war, he used to organise tribal groups to perform military functions.

(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

5. (A) During the Early Vedic period, the society was divided into different classes based on their profession.  
(B) During the Later Vedic Age, the caste system became quite rigid.

(a) (B) contradicts (A) (b) (B) is the reason for (A)  
(c) (A) is true but (B) is false (d) (A) and (B) are independent of each other.

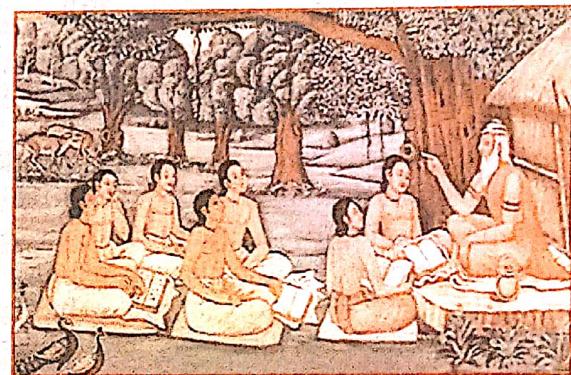
## **II. Short Answer Questions**

- Short Notes**

  1. Name the two categories of Early Vedic Literature. Why was the Early Vedic Literature known as *Shruti*?
  2. Name the four Vedas and mention what does each deal with.
  3. What are the Upanishads? Name any two Upanishads.
  4. What are the Dharmashastras?
  5. Name the epics written during the later Vedic period.
  6. What is known as *Bhagwad Gita*?
  7. Mention the importance of the Epics as a source of information about the Aryans.
  8. Which battle is known as the *Mahabharata*? For how long was this battle fought?
  9. State the role of iron in the development of agriculture during the Vedic Age.
  10. Give two features of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) Pottery.
  11. How did trade become a pivot around which the life of the people revolved?
  12. State the difference in the position of women between the Early Vedic and Later Vedic Age.
  13. State briefly the change that occurred in the position of the Brahmins in the Later Vedic Age.
  14. State two important changes that took place in the society in the process of its transition from the Early Vedic Period to the Later Vedic Period.

### III. Structured Questions

1. With reference to the sources of information about the Vedic Age, write short notes on the following:
  - (a) The Vedas
  - (b) The Epics
  - (c) Role of Iron Implements
2. With reference to the Society during the Vedic Age, answer the following questions:
  - (a) Explain briefly the class divisions that existed in the society.
  - (b) State the position of women in the Vedic period.
  - (c) Explain the four stages in the life of an Aryan.
3. With reference to economic organisation of the people in the Vedic Period, answer the following questions:
  - (a) State the methods used by the Aryans in agriculture.
  - (b) Why was domestication of animals important to the Aryans?
  - (c) How was trade managed during this period?
4. With reference to the picture given on the right, answer the following questions:
  - (a) Identify this ancient education system. Persons belonging to which ashrama of life attended this?
  - (b) Describe briefly the life in this ancient education institution.
  - (c) What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of studying in this educational setup?



### IV. Thinking Skills

1. The Vedic knowledge was passed on orally from generation to generation until they were written down many centuries later. Why were these texts not put to writing for such a long period? Give reasons to support your answer.
2. The Early Vedic Age can be defined as a period when women were given equal rights with men. Justify this statement with examples.
3. The Vedic Age laid the foundation of Indian culture and civilisation. Do you agree with this viewpoint? Give reasons to support your answer.
4. You have been asked to select an epic for a musical to be held on your school's annual day celebration. Which epic would you choose? Give reasons to support your choice.
5. Write a play based on the life and times of the Rig Vedic Period. How much of it would be relevant in the Later Vedic Period?

