



PMP 2023-24

(PRELIMS MASTER PROGRAM)

**Ancient, Medieval, Art and
Culture- 03**

(Vedic Era)

Prelims Master Program (2023-24): Ancient, Medieval, Art and Culture
Handout 3: Vedic Era

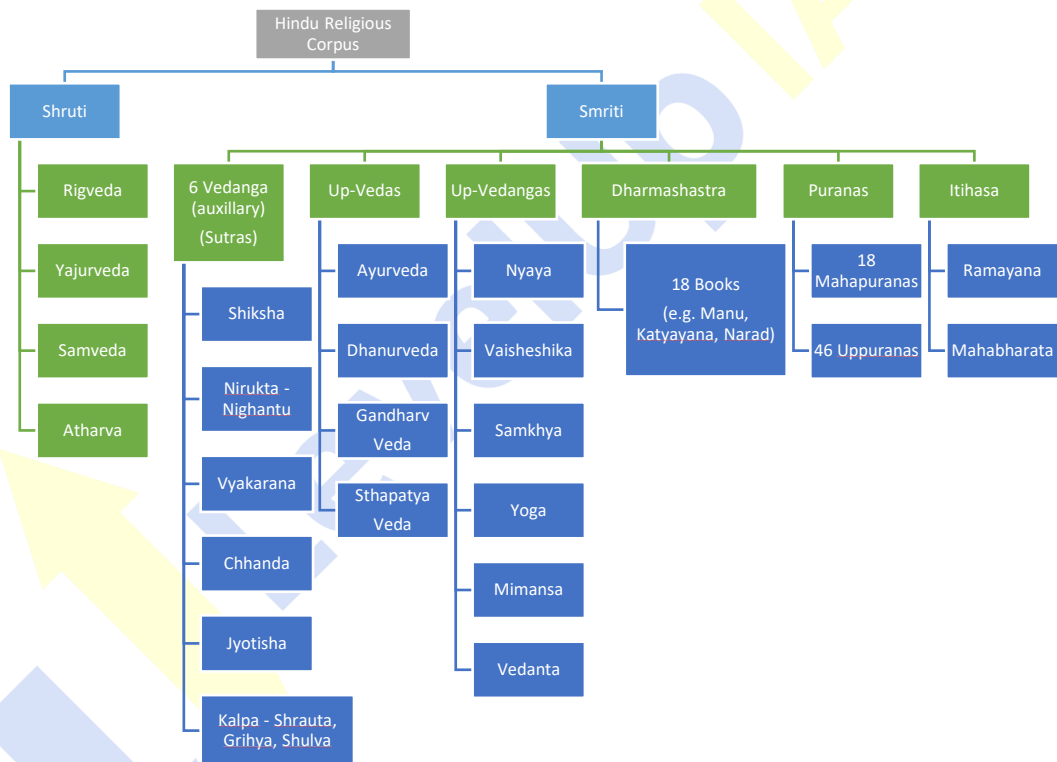
Part I – Vedic Literature

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः
(Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions)

- **Rigveda**

What are Vedas? Vedas are the religious books dealing ceremonies, sacrifices, and rituals of the Vedic Aryans. Through them we try to scan their history of India for the period of 1500-600 BCE.

The **corpus of Vedic, Later Vedic and Post-Vedic literature** consists primarily of the



Language:

What this language was called in Vedic times is not known, but after it was **stereotyped in the fourth century BC by Panini**, the great grammarian of India, it came to be called Samskrta (**Sanskrit**), meaning a synthesised or refined language, as opposed to Prakrta (Prakrit), the language of commoners.

Dating:

There are no dateable events in Vedic literature, and the dates of the texts themselves are uncertain. A major problem in dating Vedic literature is that, for all its immense volume, it was **entirely composed and transmitted orally**, and was not written down for very many centuries.

Why Dating of Vedas is difficult? It is **not known** when these works were **first written**.

- (a) Initially **script** was not known.
- (b) Even after the art of writing was acquired, the Vedas were **not written down for many centuries**. The **priestly class stoutly opposed** the transcription of the Vedas. Thus, for well over two thousand years, the voluminous Vedic literature was transmitted entirely by word of mouth.
- (c) Whenever it was written, the writing material didn't last long
 - The oldest surviving manuscript, a fragmentary Pali text on birch bark found in a monastery in Taxila, is not much older than the fifth century AD, which is also the approximate date of the oldest extant Sanskrit manuscript on birch bark.

Oral Preservation: An astounding feat of mnemonic ingenuity and discipline, preserved in its original form by generations of Brahmin scholars.

Authors of Rigveda:

- Compilation by Veda-Vyasa
- Author: Who were the Vedic poets?
 - Six: 2-7 are called family/clan-books, each attributed to a different sage, and were presumably composed by them and their descendants over several generations.
 - Gritsamada, Vishvamitra, Vamadeva, Atri, Bharadvaja, and Vasishtha
 - Not all these sages were Brahmins—the entire third book of the Rig-veda, for instance, was composed by the family of Visvamitra, a Kshatriya.
 - Four: 1, 8, 9, 10 — are compilations of hymns by diverse sages.
- How do we know the names?
 - The information about the sages and their patrons is found in the Rig-veda itself, in **dana-stutis**, hymns in praise of the munificence of patrons.
- **Female – Brahnavadinis**
 - Vak Ambhrini, Lopamudra, Vishwawara, Sikta, Ghosha, (*also Gargi and Maitreyi*)
 - Lopamudra was wife of Agastya: one hymn in Rigveda
 - Maitreyi was wife of Yajnavalkya: 10 hymns in Rigveda
 - Ghosha: two Suktas in 10th Mandala – total of 14 hymns

Content:

The term **veda** means **knowledge**—the Vedas are books of knowledge, not knowledge in the common sense of the term, but sacred knowledge, such as of hymns, chants, rituals and magical formulas. They are **liturgical works meant for the use of priests, not for general edification**.

Rigveda Samhita (Rik-Veda):

- **Oldest** and the **most sacred** of the four Vedas
- It is a book of **hymns/mantras** to be recited in worship of natural forces and gods.
- Nearly **half** the Rig-vedic hymns are addressed to just **three deities, Indra, Agni and Soma**.

Samaveda Samhita:

- Liturgical **chanting** and **melodies** to be recited by **Udgatra** (chanter) priests
- **First book on music**. Some Rigvedic hymns are put in musical form.
- It has **hardly** any **original** material in it, as all but 99 of its 1,603 stanzas are taken from the Rig-veda.
- It yields **no social/historical information** whatever and is of interest only to the specialist in Vedic rites and music.

Yajurveda Samhita:

- **Sacrificial formulas** and **prescriptions**
- The first Veda that contains **both prose and poetry**.
- It has precedence over Sama-veda in scriptural hierarchy, but historically it is the later work.
- It portrays a **society** that has evolved an **incipient varna system** and has made several advances in **technology and crafts**. It is a work of considerable **value to historians**, because of the incidental light it throws on Vedic society.

Atharvaveda Samhita:

- Book of **charms, prayers and spells**.
- About 1200/6,000 stanzas are taken from the Rig-veda
- It's a class in itself. Because of its different purpose/content – occult practices, charms, spells and plebeian (everyday) concerns by shamans/sorcerers.
 - Not a feature of original Aryan society but many local practices which were incorporated/assimilated.
- From the historian's point of view, this is the **most valuable** of the Vedas
 - Reconstructing the **lifestyle** of the Vedic people.
 - **Medicine** mentioned (cure by mantras, and not scientific like Charaka) Dhanvantari is mythical figure.
 - Reference to Iron – **Shyamayas, Krishnayas**

Additional Facts about Vedic Samhitas:

| | Rigveda | Samaveda | Yajurveda | Atharvaveda |
|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Parts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Mandalas, 1028 Suktas, 10552 mantra II-VIII Mandalas oldest | Purva Archika , Uttara Archika | 40 Adhyayas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 kands, 760 hymns (160 from Rig) |
| Shakhas | Shakalya, Fragments of Bashkala, Fragments of Ashvalayana | Ranayana, Kuthuma, Jaimini | Six shakhas divided into 2 schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Krishna (black) Shukla (white) – Vajseniya Samhita | Paippalada, Shaunakiya |
| Priest | Hotri | Udgatri | Adhvaryu | Brahmin (Brahmaveda) |

Today each Veda has got 4 parts:

| | Rig | Sam | Yajur | Atharva | |
|------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Samhita | | | | | Religious Change: Mantra → rituals → charms and spells |
| Brahmana | Aitareya, Kaushitaki | Sadvimsa, Mantra, Daivata | Shatapatha, Taittiriya | Gopatha | Instruction manual – with detailed descriptions of rituals and sacrifices. To be performed only by Brahmin class. (karma-kanda) |
| Aranyaka | Aitareya, Kaushitaki | Jaiminiya | Taittiriya, Kath, Brihadaranyaka | Nil | Forest books. Discuss meaning of rituals from various perspectives; including some philosophical speculations. (mix of karma-kand and jnana-kand) |
| Upanishad | Aitareya | Chandogya, Ken | Taittiriya, Katha, Isha, Brihadaranyaka | Mandukya, Mundaka, Prashna | Deals with philosophical speculation called Vedantic philosophy. It is the root of all Indian philosophy. |

Sutra Literature – Vedanga (part of Smriti)

Vedangas contain subjects essential for Brahmins to perform ritual ceremonies properly.

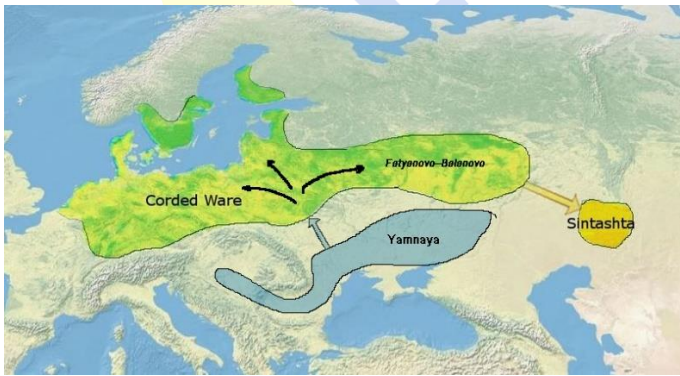

- These **handbooks**, called **Sutras**, were composed **between 500 and 200 BC**.
 - In time the literature on Vedic rituals (**Brahmanas**) became so **voluminous and scattered** that **new guides** had to be prepared to present sacrificial procedures and traditional practices in a **succinct and systematic manner**.
- The Sutras are **matter-of-fact works with no literary affectations, no commentaries or speculations**, but are so **precise** in their descriptions that it is possible to reconstruct from them various sacrifices without having seen them performed.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Kalpas | <p>Instructions for rituals associated with major life events such as birth, wedding and death in family, as well as discussing the personal conduct and proper duties of an individual in different stages of his life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrauta Sutra: attached to the four Vedas and dealing with the high rituals performed by priests • Grihya Sutras: rites performed by the householder. • Shulba Sutra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Mathematical methodology to construct altar geometries for the Vedic rituals. • Dharma Sutra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The oldest dharmasutra is Apastamba, and then Gautama, Baudhayana, and Vashistha. |
| Shiksha | Pronunciation/phonetics |
| Chanda | Prosody, Poetic Metre |
| Vyakarana | <p>Grammar</p> <p>One of the greatest monuments of human intelligence</p> |
| Nirukta | <p>Etymology, roots of the words, esp archaic words.</p> <p>Yaksha's Nirukta is called as Nighantu which was a collection of rare or difficult words gathered by earlier sages for easier understanding of Vedic texts</p> |
| Jyotisha | <p>Right time for rituals with the help of position of nakshatras and asterisms and astronomy. It's all about movement of planets for time keeping.</p> |

Part II – Who were Aryans?

- **Idea of homeland:** Origin
 - People *diffused/migrated* outwards in various directions. (not invasion)
 - Language Evolution: Proto-Indo-European → Proto-Indo-Iranian → Indo-Iranian → Indo-Aryan.
- 5200 BCE: "Proto-Indo-European Homeland" in Pontic steppes (north of black sea and Caspian). It developed after domestication of cattle (foragist → pastoralist cultures).
- 4000 BCE: From this area, people spread west, south and east.
 - Climate change and drought
 - The languages may have been carried by small groups of males.



| Westward and southward Branches | Eastward Branch |
|---|--|
| The tribes that swarmed westward into Europe were lost for several centuries in that land without history. It possibly led to the development of Proto-Celtic, Proto-Italic, proto-Germanic etc languages. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sintashta culture (2050–1900 BCE) is where proto-Indo-Iranian language developed first. • This culture grew into Andronovo culture (2000–1450 BCE). • It also interacted with Bactria-Margiana Culture (BMAC – Oxus civilization) which was Bronze Age urban civilization (2250–1700 BCE). |
|  |  |

- Of these diverse tribes from Andronovo culture, one group settled in the **Iranian plateau**, and called themselves **Aryans**. They developed the **Indo-Iranian language**.
 - Common religious inheritance of Iran and India – Rta, Soma, Mitra etc.
- From here, the **Aryans soon split into three branches**.

| Towards West | South – Iran | Southeast |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| One branch went to Eastern Anatolia: Mittani Empire (1550-1250 BCE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boghazkoi Inscription (Turkey): peace treaty between two warring tribes. It mentions 4 Vedic gods Indra, Varuna, Mitra and Nasatyas. • Kikkuli Text (Kukkuli was a master horse trainer of Mittani people) | Remaining people migrated to Iran → Zend Avesta of Zoroastrianism (Iranian) | Rigvedic Aryans (Indo-Aryan) |

Some Cognate Terms:

| Vedic Sanskrit | Avestan | Vedic Sanskrit | Avestan |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Aap (water) | Aap | Arya | Ariya/Ariia |
| Asura | Ahura | Yama | Yima |
| Atharvan (priest) | Atar | Manu (man) | Manu |
| Deva | Daeva | Rita | Arta/Arsha |
| Vritrahan (Indra) | Verethreaghna | Yajna | Yasna |
| Mitra | Mithra | Hotri | Zoatar |
| Nasatiya (Ashwin) | Naonhaithya | Atharvan | Athravan |
| Saraswati | Haraxvati | Tapati (solar goddess) | Tapaiti |
| Madhu (honey) | Madu | Sukta (good word) | Hukhta |

Migration Into India

- Punjab as the homeland for **Rigvedic Aryans** ie **Early Vedic Era**.
- Moved eastward into Afghanistan and still pressing on squeezed through the narrow passes of the Hindu Kush and **entered the Indus valley around 1500 BCE**.
 - Called themselves the **Pancha-jana**
 - Once came to India, their **opponents were**
 - **Dasas/Dasyus** (earlier Aryan tribes?)
 - **Panis** (trading communities).
 - Perhaps Aryans were able to overawe them militarily due to their horses, chariots, warfare technique.
- **Dash-Rajna Yuddha (Battle of 10 kings)**
 - Mandala VII of Rigveda: Not a struggle between Aryans and non-Aryans
 - The Aryan **Bharat tribe, led by King Sudas** and assisted by sage **Vashishta**, fought against the confederacy of 10 tribes (**Aryan + non-Aryan**), assisted by sage **Vishwamitra**, on the **banks of the Parushini/Ravi**.
 - The **Bharatas** emerged victorious. The defeated tribes were relegated to a lower social status and enslaved.
 - First recorded incident in Indian history. Possible date – 1400 BCE

| Vedic people speak of local people with contempt | |
|--|-----------------|
| Mridhavacha | Alien speech |
| Avrata | Without rites |
| Ayajna | Non-sacrificers |
| Anindra | Without Indra |
| Anas | Without nose |

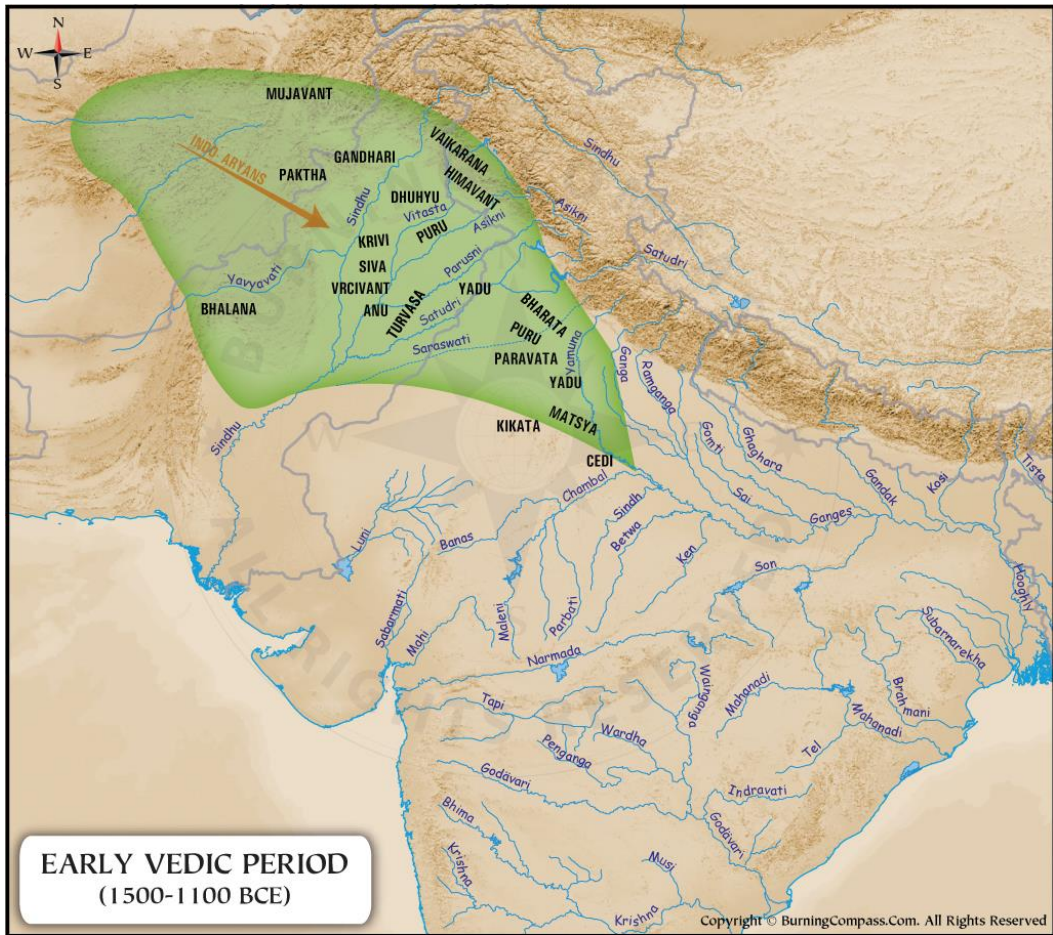
Geography: Sapta Sindhu Region → Northern Punjab region

- Textual evidence
 - Land from Saraswati to Kabul river. It was the land of 7 rivers, sapta-sindhu
 - Drishadwati and Saraswati later dried up and so it became Punjab.
 - Rigveda in all mentions 25 rivers
 - Nadistuti Sukta calls **Sindhu** as Ambi-tama. It was the central lifeline of Rigvedic Aryans. It is mentioned the greatest number of times. Most Aryan settlements were along Indus.
 - Another major river was **Saraswati**, which is mentioned 72 times. It has huge religious significance.
 - **Yamuna** is mentioned in 3 paras. **Ganga** is mentioned only once.
 - They knew **Himalayas** but not Vindhya.
- Archaeological identifiers: Cemetery H, Gandhara Grave
- Transformation of Rigvedic Aryans
 - Over time, the two people intermingled, each influencing the other.
 - Gradual transformation of economy: primarily pastoral → primarily agrarian → settled life → security of life + food → Population → further into subcontinent.

| Rigvedic Name | Ancient Greek | Today |
|---------------|---------------|---------|
| Shutudri | Hesidros | Sutlej |
| Purushni | Hydroatis | Ravi |
| Asikni | Acensines | Chenab |
| Vitasta | Hydapses | Jhelum |
| Vipasha | Hyphasis | Beas |
| Kubha | Kophes | Kabul |
| Saraswati | | Ghaggar |
| Sindhu | Hindos | Sindhu |

Further into India → **Later Vedic era**

- 1000 BCE → gradually covered entire Indo-Gangetic plain.
 - Migration: Sapta-Sindhu → **Aryavarta** (Gangetic doab, till Prayag/Allahabad region)
 - Rivers: **Ganga** now replaced Saraswati as the most sacred river.
 - In Yajurveda, there is no mention of Indus and its tributaries.
 - Atharvaveda: Mujavant, Gandhar, Balhika are distant while Anga, Vanga, Magadh are not completely cultured.
 - Archaeology – PGW, OCP
 - Sites – Hastinapur (Meerut), Ahichhatra (Bareilly), Atranjikhhera (Etah), Noh (Bharatpur, Rajasthan)
- Literary evidence of migration in Shatapatha Brahmin
 - “Agni went burning along the earth to the east, and priest **Gotama Rahugana**, and king **Madhava Videgha** followed after him, as he was burning along.” For a while Aryan advance was halted by Sadanira (Gandak) which was hard to cross, and the land beyond it was marshy.
 - Aryan occupation of Ganga valley was a slow and arduous process.
 - Impenetrable virgin forests covering the entire region.
 - Iron became fairly common + Burning down the forest was easier
- Transformation: Jana → Janapada
 - Settled and formed prosperous communities, naming tracts by tribes
 - And in this new home, in 1000-500 BCE, Aryan culture synthesized with the Indian culture, mutate and begot Indian culture.



- II-VIII Mandalas of Rigveda – Early Vedic – 1500-1000 BCE
- All other – Later Vedic – 1000-600 BCE

Vedic Economy

Agro-pastoralism: Primarily involved in domestication of animal. Semi-nomadic, semi-pastoral life.

There was as yet **no private ownership in land**.

In rural India, **wealth** continued to be **measured in cattle**. The cow was the most valued domestic animal of Rig-vedic Aryans.

176 'go's – gopati (rich man), gavishti (war)/gosu/gaveshana, duhitri (one who milks cow – daughter), gavyuti (unit of distance), gop, gotra, godhuli, goghna (honoured guest or cattle meat, or one who is offered ghee), aghanya – cow (not to be killed)

Agriculture was not completely absent.

- Indian and Iranian Aryans had a common term—*krish*—for ploughing.
- In India, **they adopted many local farming techniques**, as indicated by the words of Dravidian or Munda origin in Vedic literature for farming implements.
- Rigved has Kshetrapati sukta.
- Yava is used for barley.
- No rice known. No word for cotton. Both these were known to Indus people and Aryans learnt about them only in Later era.

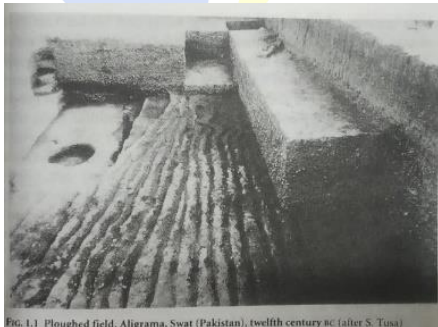


FIG. 1.1 Ploughed field, Aligrama, Swat (Pakistan), twelfth century BC (after S. Tusa)

Domestication continued but **agriculture now developed** much more. So, **surplus production** became possible.

Grains mentioned:

- **Godhuma** (wheat), **vrihi** (rice), and **Yava**: three main cereals.
- Three other crops not mentioned but found archaeologically before 1500 BCE – **bajra, jowar, ragi**
- Atharvaveda mentions **sugarcane**.
- **Cotton** still missing. Its first mention is in Ashvalayan sutra.

It took an enormous effort to establish **agrarian settlements in the Gangetic Plain**

Land was cleared – plough of 6-12 oxen.

Many **agrarian rituals** came up

- Shatapatha Brahmana invites puja of plough, ox, land etc.
- There are mantras for seasons mentioned in Atharvaveda.

Not much industry. It was a tribal society.

Some crafts existed: **carpenters, takshaka (for chariots), woodcutter (vriksha-chhedaka), leather-maker (charmamna), and pottery.**

The **OCP** which was very fragile, badly painted. Thus, technology was **not developed.**

Iron played a very important role in the growth of agriculture.

Evolving meaning of Ayas:

It initially meant only copper. But by now, Krishna Ayas (iron) and tamra ayas (copper).

It is not known when Aryans acquired the art of smelting and carbonising iron, without which the metal was not of much use, but certainly by the later Vedic period the use of iron implements had become common among them. **Metalworking** was rather the **frontier technology** in Vedic society, and the smith enjoyed high social status. Other metals found are **gold, silver, tin, bronze, lead.**

Now **PGW** pottery – very well fired, strong and better painted. Technology improved.

Thus, overall, diversity and specialisation – **Vajasesniya Samhita list**

It was a **subsistence** economy and had not made the transition to commercial production and trade.

Though primarily **barter trade** among Aryans from very early times, there is also the mention of **Hiranya/Nishka/Shatamana** But wealth was still primarily measured in cattle.

Gradually, as Aryan society moved towards urbanisation in the Gangetic Valley during the later Vedic period, **trade began to gain prominence, and there are several references to merchants and usurers** in the later Vedic literature.

| No | Craft/Profession | Meaning | 10 | Ranjayatri | Dyer |
|----|------------------|----------------------|----|----------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Kaulala | Potter | 11 | Charmamna | Leather-maker |
| 2 | Karmar | Blacksmith | 12 | Hiranyakar | Goldsmith |
| 3 | Mani-kar | Jeweller | 13 | Dhivara | Fisherman |
| 4 | Ishu-kar | Arrow maker | 14 | Hastipa | Elephant keeper |
| 5 | Dhanu-kar | Bow maker | 15 | Ashvapa | Horse keeper |
| 6 | Jya-kar | Maker of bow strings | 16 | Gopalaka | Cattle keeper |
| 7 | Rajju-sarja | Rope maker | 17 | Suta | Charioteer or bard |
| 8 | Sura-kar | Distiller | 18 | Sailusha | Musician, singer |
| 9 | Vasahpalpuli | Washerman | 19 | Mrigayumantaka | Hunter |

Vedic Polity

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Concept of territorial state had not emerged. Basic political unit was the tribe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribe was jana headed by Rajan/Janpati • Clans, vish, headed by vishpati • Family clusters gramas headed by Gramani • Family was kul (the smallest unit) headed by Kulpati. <p>Entire tribe was bound by kinship ties</p> | <p>Gradually the concept of territorial state emerged as land became valuable resource. Thus, Jana → janapada (by 900-800 BCE) → 16 mahajanapadas (by 600 BCE)</p> <p>Land identity became more important than tribal identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grama meaning extended from family group → village without any kinship associations. • Tribal names → names of regions • Tribal assemblies → Monarchy <p>(These changes were gradual)</p> |
| <p>It was a tribal policy, relatively democratic in nature. There was also no hereditary monarchy.</p> <p>Rajan was the elected head, and not a hereditary king. He was not autocrat, his powers were very limited. (Rajan = Janasya Gopa) He functioned under the control of the Sabha, Samiti and Vidatha, tribal assemblies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vidatha: both genders participated. It was the oldest of all Vedic assemblies. • Sabha: open to all the adult men. It elected Rajan. • Samiti: small, select body of elders/notables. It probably met more often. It had both judicial and administrative responsibilities, and also provided political advise to Rajan. | <p>Position of Rajan: Hereditary Monarchy now became norm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabha/Samiti/Vidath lose their significance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Pretence of people's consent continued for some time. ◦ Rajan claimed himself to be the earthly representative of Prajapati "May Samithi and the Sabha, two daughters of Prajapati, concurrently aid me," <i>Shatapatha Brahmana</i>. • Monarchical Ideal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Svarata, Samrat, Ekrat, Virat – high sounding titles. ◦ Performed elaborate sacrifices to legitimize his position with support of the priestly class. <p>Three royal sacrifices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rajasuya (coronation/ consecration ceremony): Display royal pomp and power. • Vajapeya (drink of potency) ceremony later in reign, to replenish his vigour and glory. • Most important royal rite, Ashvamedha, to legitimize kingship and to gain more territory and declare territorial sovereignty. |
| <p>Rajan was more of a military commander than a ruler. His primary duty was to lead people in person to bring victory in the inter-tribal wars and thus bring prosperity to the tribe. This fight was for go-dhan (ie cattle raids. The Vedic term for war was <i>gavisti</i>, meaning 'desire for cows')</p> | <p>Because land had become important with agriculture, now, fights were for land, not cattle. So, Gopati → Bhupati.</p> <p>Ruled by danda: Importance of armed forces increased due to need to protect territory in face of frequent territorial wars.</p> |

Tax, Army, Administration

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>There were some officers like Purohita and Senani</p> <p>There was no regular taxation, yet one word Bali is found. It was a gift given by people to the Rajan, and it was not mandatory.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratnahavimshi ceremony in Rajasuya. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ King's court quite rudimentary. Miscellaneous group of advisors called <i>Ratnins</i> made up of the king's relatives, courtiers and officials, whose services were considered so crucial to the king that special rites were performed during the royal consecration to secure their loyalty. • Taxation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bali: Voluntary → Mandatory. Special officer Sanghitri or Bali sadhak was appointed to collect it. Kings collected it in order to provide protection. ○ Bhaga (land revenue) now emerged and soon became the largest source of state income. ○ Bhoga: Voluntary offering fruits and flowers to king on occasions ○ Shulka: toll tax on craft/trade/commerce ○ Vedic people reproachfully called the king <i>bhagadugha</i>, 'he who milks the share'. The king, says the Rig-veda, "eats the rich" like fire eats the wood. (vishamatta). |
|--|--|

Ratnahvimshi ceremony in Rajasuya Yajna

| No | Ratnin | Meaning |
|----|--------------------|--|
| 1 | Purohita | Brahmin priest. He was a key royal functionary. |
| 2 | Rajanya | Noble king, leader |
| 3 | Mahishi | Chief queen |
| 4 | Parvrikti | Discarded queen |
| 5 | Senani | Commander of the army |
| 6 | Suta | Charioteer or bard. He was an important official, for he was also the royal bard and confidant. |
| 7 | Gramani | Village headman |
| 8 | Kshattri | Royal chamberlain (officer who manages royal household) |
| 9 | Sangrahitri | Master of treasury, collector of tribute? |
| 10 | Bhagaduga | Distributor of food, collector of king's share in produce? |
| 11 | Akshavapa | Maintenance of accounts (also colleague of the king in gambling) |
| 12 | Gavikartana | Chief huntsman |
| 13 | Takshan | Carpenter |
| 14 | Rathakara | Chariot-maker |
| 15 | Palagala | Courier |
| 16 | Sthapati | Local chief or judge |

Vedic Society

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Tribal society with Primary unit kula. Father was the head.</p> <p>Fundamentally egalitarian. Concept of private property was not yet fully developed, and wealth was either collectively owned or there was large element of redistribution. Thus, sharp social differences were absent, there was less inequality.</p> <p>No social distinction. No rigid restrictions of inter-dining and intermarriage. All professions open to everyone. ('I am a singer; my father is a bhishak, my mother is a upla-prakshini')</p> <p>There was rigid Aryan-non-Aryan divide initially. <u>Varna actually meant complexion.</u> (Arya/dasa/dasyu varna)</p> <p>There was no untouchability, but some classes of people could be enslaved.</p> <p>Change started happening in the very end of the Early Vedic Era. 10th Mandala – Purushasukta (creation hymn) Purusha is Prajapati, the creator primordial man. First time social division into 4 varnas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brahmins – mouth • Kshatriya – arms • Vaishya – thigh • Shudra – feet <p>But the word Varna is not mentioned here. Purusha represents an organic whole, 4 interdependent parts of society. The sukta describes spiritual unity of the universe. And it is the story of creation.</p> | <p>Primary unit – still family and patriliney.</p> <p>However, social life now changed dramatically due to changes in economic-political-religious spheres and <u>emergence of settled agrarian society</u>.</p> <p>Now, there is increasing inequality due to private property and land ownership and, tendency to accumulate and hoard. So, by the end of the Later Vedic era, society no longer resembled its class-less tribal early Vedic form.</p> <p>There was also the emergence of four institutions which organized social differences: Varna-Ashram-Jati-Gotra.</p> <p>The varna made social discrimination more extreme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth started to become the prime determinant of social status (increasing rigidity, with less social/professional mobility) • Ritual Hierarchy: Br, Ks, Vs, Sh • Privileges: less punishment for higher varna, dvija ceremony denied to shudra • Purity of blood: anuloma, pratiloma marriage • <i>Satapatha Brahmana</i> specifies different degrees of politeness to be used in addressing the four classes, and also varying sizes of funeral mounds for them. • However, untouchability is still absent. <p>Ashrama system: <u>Chandogya</u> talks about 3 ashrama in pre-Buddhist era. Ashrama system is fully developed by <u>Jabala</u> Upanishad (may be during/after Buddha) which discusses the subject in detail (still, not sequential).</p> <p>Jati system: More diversification → professions became hereditary → groups lived in separate villages/zones → split into innumerable jatis.</p> <p>Jatis maintained their exclusivity through endogamous marriages and by imposing various food/occupation taboos.</p> |
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| | |
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| | <p>Gotra system: Some rishis in the past are taken as common ancestors. Thus, to avoid incest people followed gotra exogamy. It began loosely among Brahmins during Early Vedic eras but by later Vedic era, gotra system was followed by other varnas too.</p> <p>Despite all this, there was still a fair amount of flexibility in class and caste relationships throughout the Vedic period, had not yet become rigidly established. Society still in flux.</p> |
|--|---|

Gender Relations:

| | |
|---|---|
| Tribal society – women’s position was better compared to later times. | Decline in position of women but it was still relatively good. |
| <p>Public Role (education, political, warrior, religious)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Married at mature age. Thus, opportunity to get educated. Many females contributed to Vedic hymns. (Brahmavadini eg. Lopamudra, Vishwavara, Sikta, Ghosha, Maitrey, Apala etc) Political participation in assemblies. Warrior women No religious ceremony without wife’s presence. | <p>Public Role diminished. Increased restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively early marriage. Thus, deprived of education. Confined to home. Domesticity is the norm. Vajseniya Samhita still gives various occupations followed women. Political participation restricted as democratic assemblies lost their importance. Role of women declined in religion as rituals grew complicated. |
| <p>Household and Marriage –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth of son is preferred. However, girl child not neglected. No pre-puberty marriages. Polygyny was fairly common, while polyandry not unknown. Incest was frowned upon Samana fairs Jarath/vridhahakumari – marriage not compulsory but considered important. No Parda system Symbolic Sati Niyoga practice | <p>Household and Marriage –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth of the girl became undesirable. Somewhat favoured pre-puberty marriage Marriage became very essential for women. Varna endogamy and gotra exogamy restricted their choice of marriage. Polygyny increased while polyandry was discouraged. Focus was primarily on the domestic chores and produce children. Widow remarriage was allowed but discouraged. |

Rituals:

Objectives:

- Early Aryans were **nature worshippers**. Rig Vedic Aryans prayed to overcome **fear** of nature due to ignorance.
- **Desire** was another motivating factor. They prayed for Praja, Pashu, Vijay, Aayu etc. (*"wealth, rain, cattle, superiority within clan or tribe, good health, living for the proverbial 100 years, and then finding one's way to heaven"*) Thus, the Early Vedic religion was **materialistic** in nature.

Simple Yajna Rituals:

- As a form of worship, Rig Vedic Aryans performed **Yajnas** (sacrifice) along with the chanting of **hymns** (mantras).
- These yajnas were **simple, inexpensive and personal**, with most being performed within the household by the householder.
- The common items of **oblation**: milk, butter, grain, and cakes, as well as Soma and meat.
- Some yajnas performed with the assistance of different classes of priests. The Rig Veda mentions 16 priestly classes, such as –
 - Hotra made sacrifice.
 - Udgatra - sent out invitations.
 - Brahmin – supervisor (Later, Brahmin became the most prominent, and others vanished.)

Note: There was **no idol worship, no temples and no Bhakti element**.

Rigid Ritualism:

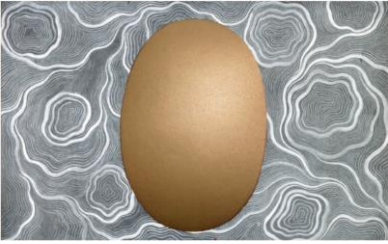
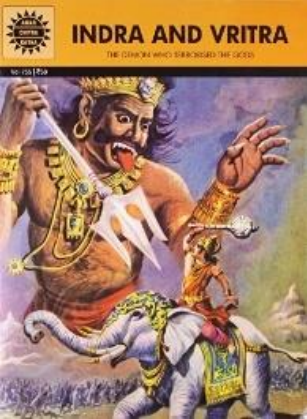
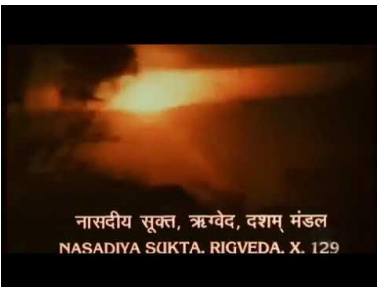

- Nature worship continued, but the **significance of sacrifice greatly increased**.
- The simple, personal and inexpensive faith of Early Vedic Religion gave way to **complex, specialized, rigid, costly, long, sacrifices** and **priestly domination**.
- There was an overemphasis on **yajnas** and **correct pronunciation of mantras**, which could now be performed only with the help of expert priests who charged dakshina and sought daan.

Samskaras:

As many as 16 **Samskaras** (major Vedic rituals) had to be performed by an individual from the cradle to the grave:

- Garbhdharan
- Namkaran
- Annaprashana
- Chudakaran/Mundan
- Upanayana/ Yagyopaveet for Dwijas (twice born)
- Vivaah
- Antyeshti

Creation Myths:

| | | |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visvakarma, the All-maker, fashioned the world like a carpenter. • Or perhaps the world was created by the gods in a sexual act • A primeval pair, Daksha-Aditi, formed the worlds, including the gods, by agitating waters: |
|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Or perhaps the cosmos is just an expression of time. • Or it could be that the world arose from tapas, the white heat of ascetic intensity. • Or perhaps fire was all that there was in the beginning, and all that there will be in the end. |

Gods (Vedic Pantheon):

Nature of Gods

- Nascent culture → rather elementary gods like **primitive animism**
- **Personifications** of the mysterious forces of nature, thus **naturalism**
- Most of the major gods were **male**
- **Anthropomorphic** gods
- Aniconism

The names of **33 deities** have been mentioned in the Rig Veda

Although it appears to be polytheist outwardly, the element of **monotheism** was also present in its essence.

The most important gods were-

- **Aerial Indra**: God of rain, lightening, storms, thunder, and worshipped as 'Purandhar' and Vritrahana. (250 hymns dedicated)
 - Vajra as the weapon, loves to drink soma
 - Comrades: Vayu, Marut, Rudra

- The importance of Agni, Varuna and Indra declined.
- **Prajapati/Brahma** (creator) became the most important god.
- **Vishnu** was now worshipped as the sustainer.
- However, the concept of **Trimurti** had not yet emerged.

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agni: God of fire, also the intermediary between God and man (200 hymns dedicated) • Celestial Varuna: God of Rta (moral cosmic order), also worshipped as god of cosmos and heavenly bodies (175 hymns) • Soma: God of drink, which was derived from a plant (Mandala IX is entirely dedicated to Soma, over 100 hymns) • Vishnu: minor god, not the sustainer of the universe. (5 times) • Rudra: only thrice • Goddesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aditi: Mother Goddess (mother of all Gods) ○ Usha: Goddess of Dawn. ○ Prithvi: Goddess of the Earth ○ Saraswati: river goddess personified, not speech | <p>Lakshmi: Rig Veda mentions Lakshmi once, in the context of a 'sign of good fortune', and by the time of the Atharva Veda she had developed a fairly evolved personality.</p> |
|---|--|

Philosophy and Metaphysics:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>The high philosophy of metaphysics was absent.</p> <p>Rta: moral law and cosmic order governing the universe and man. <u>(Appears 390 times in Rigveda.)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of rita, the sun and moon pursue their daily journeys across the sky, and the seasons proceed in regular movement. • Rita was guarded by Varuna, and that the proper performance of sacrifices to the gods was necessary to guarantee its continuance. • Violation (anrita) of the established order by incorrect or improper behaviour, even if unintentional, constituted sin and required careful expiation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The simple, materialistic Early Vedic faith was replaced by the high-minded philosophy of Upanishads. • Spiritualism became extremely important, and religion became increasingly concerned with salvation and the afterlife. <p>A number of philosophical and social constructs were codified, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dharma: duties and obligations of each individual. It acted as moral compass for everyone. • Karma: accumulated effects of good and bad actions (Notion of Dharma and karma shifted emphasis away from the gods as executors of Rta and made individual ethically responsible for upholding Rta through his actions.) • Brahman: Ultimate reality, neither male/female • Atman: soul, indestructible, separate from body) • Transmigration of Soul • Moksha: Realization of unity of atman and brahman. |
|--|--|

Upanishads

The goal of the Upanishads, as of all philosophy, is to unravel the enigma of life and examine the relationship between man and the universe. It is the inquiry into truth behind creation and existence. This is the birth of fundamental ideas of Indic religions. It is also known as **Vedanta**.

- *upa-ni-shad* (to sit down near one)
- In all, there are about 108 Upanishads (Muktika canon)
 - Vary considerably in length and style, as well as in the theories they expound.
 - *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the longest while *Isa Upanishad* has just 18 verses;
 - Earlier Upanishads (*Brihadaranyaka*, *Chandogya*) are in prose, while the later ones (*Katha*, *Svetasvatara*) are in verse.

Six important pre-Buddhist Upanishads

Chandogya

- One of the earliest expositions of concept of dharma as ethical duties
- Fore-runner of ashrama system: discusses first 3 ashramas and also two types of marriages – Anuloma, Pratiloma
- First known text to declare Ahimsa as ethical precept
- Mentions musical instruments
- Om, let us eat, Om, let us drink, Oh lord, please bring food here...!

Brihadaranyaka

- One of the earliest formulations of Karma Theory
- Ethics – three virtues of Dan, Daya, Dam (imp for Buddhism)
- Verses on human psychology, behavioral theory.
- Scepticism – Yajnavalkya as Neti Neti
- Maitreyi-Yajnavalkya dialogue. Important evidence of women education.

Mandukya

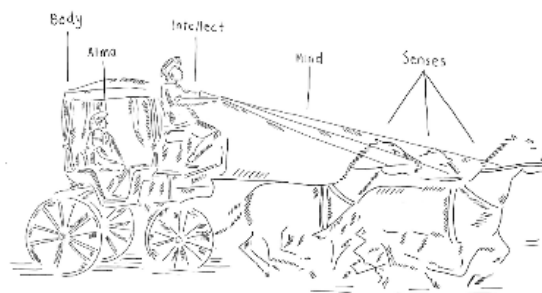
- **Shortest** of all
- Muktika says – alone is sufficient to gain moksha
- **Aum** as Brahman
- Theory of 4 stages of **consciousness**
- Inspired Gaudapada to write **Karika** – classic text on Vedanta
- **Historically important** to determine chronology and philosophical relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism

Mundaka

- Directly asserts sacrifices are useless, only knowledge is useful.

Kath

- Legendary **Yama-Nahciketa Samvad** about what happens after death? – nature of man, knowledge, atman and moksha
- **Ethics** – theory of Shreyas vs Preyas
- Rathakalpana: The parable of chariot.
- Path to self-knowledge is Yoga.



Isha

- One of the shortest (ek, divka, trika)
- "If all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left in the memory of the Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever." – **Mahatma Gandhi**

Additional: Shvetashvetara Upanishad

- It is a foundational text of the philosophy of Shaivism.
- Imp: use of the term Bhakti.
 - Notable for its discussion of the concept of personal god – Ishvara and suggesting it to be a path to one's own Highest Self.

Some important Upanishadic Quotes:

| Four Mahavakyas | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Tat Tvam Asi | Chandogya Upanishad |
| Aham Brahmasmi | Brihadaranyak Upanishad |
| Prajnanam Brahma | Aitareya Upanishad |
| Ayam Atma Brahman | Mandukya Upanishad |
| Other Important Quotes | |
| Satyameva Jayate (National Emblem) | Mundaka Upanishad |
| Aanto Ma Sadgamaya, Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya | Brihadaranyak Upanishad |
| Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramaya | Brihadaranyak Upanishad |
| Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma | Chandogya Upanishad |
| Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye | Chandogya Upanishad |
| Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam | Maha Upanishad |
| Ekoham Bahusyam (The one manifests as many) | Taittiriya Upanishad |
| Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti | Taittiriya Upanishad |
| Atithi Devo Bhava | Taittiriya Upanishad |
| Sham No Varunah | Taittiriya Upanishad |
| Esha Dharma Sanatanah | Taittiriya Upanishad |
| Charati Charato Bhagah | Aitareya Brahman |
| Vayam Amritasya Putraha | Shvetashvetar Upanishad |

Some important Upanishadic Dialogues:

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Yama Nachiketa Samvad | Katha Upanishad |
| Yagyavalkya Gargi Samvad Yagyavalkya Maitreyi Samvad | Brihadaranyaka Upanishad |
| Aruni Shvetaketu Samvad | Chandogya Upanishad |
| Pururava Urvashi Samvad | 10 th Mandal, Rigveda |

Q. Who among the following was a Brahnavadini who composed some hymns of the Vedas? [1995]

- a) Lopamudra
- b) Gargi
- c) Leelavati
- d) Savitri

Q. The river most mentioned in early Vedic literature is [1996]

- a) Sindhu
- b) Sutudri
- c) Saraswati
- d) Ganga

Q. The famous dialogue between Nachiketa and Yama is mentioned in the [1997]

- a) Chhandogyopanishad
- b) Mundakopanishad
- c) Kathopanishad
- d) Kenopanishad

Q. The term 'Aryan' denotes [1999]

- a) an ethnic group
- b) a nomadic people
- c) a speech groups
- d) a superior race

Q. Which one of the following four Vedas contains an account of magical charms and spells? [2004]

- a) Rig-veda
- b) Yajur-veda
- c) Atharva-veda
- d) Sama-veda

Q. The 'dharma' and 'rita' depict a central idea of ancient Vedic civilization of India. In this context, consider the following statements: [2011]

1. Dharma was a conception of obligations and of the discharge of one's duties to oneself and to others.
2. Rita was the fundamental moral law governing the functioning of the universe and all it contained.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q. The religion of early Vedic Aryans was primarily of [2012]

- a) Bhakti
- b) Image worship and Yajnas
- c) Worship of nature and Yajnas
- d) Worship of nature and Bhakti

Q. With reference to the difference between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are correct? [2017]

- 1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare whereas the people of Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them.
- 2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver and copper whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron.
- 3. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

1. Which of the following Veda is considered a non-Aryan work?

- a) Rigveda
- b) Samaveda
- c) Yajurveda
- d) Atharvaveda

2. Match the following pairs:

List I: Upanishad

- A. Chandogya Upanishad
- B. Kathopanishad
- C. Mundakopanishad
- D. Jabala

List II: Important Contents

- 1. Satyameva jayate
- 2. The four Ashrams
- 3. Types of Marriages
- 4. Story of Immortality

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

- a) A-1; B-4; C-3; D-2
- b) A-3; B-4; C-1; D-2
- c) A-2; B-4; C-1; D-3
- d) A-2; B-4; C-3; D-1

3. With reference to the comparison between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are INCORRECT?

- 1. Both the Rig Vedic and the Harappan Cultures were rural in nature.
- 2. Religion was a very important aspect of life of Rig Vedic Aryans but people of Indus Valley did not practise religion and were secular.
- 3. Rig Vedic Aryans had domesticated the horse whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been done so.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

4. In context of religion in Rigvedic society, consider the following statements:

Assertion (A): The Religion of the Rig Vedic Aryans was materialistic in nature.

Reason (R): There were no temples or idols in the Rig Vedic period.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) Both assertion and reason are true and reason is correctly justifies assertion
- b) Both assertion and reason are true but reason does not correctly justify assertion
- c) Assertion is true, but reason is false
- d) Assertion is false, but reason is true

5. Consider the following statements about the religious practices of Later Vedic culture and identify the correct one/s:

- 1. Indra and Agni which were smaller deities in the Rig Vedic society became extremely important.
- 2. People did not believe in idolatry.
- 3. People worshipped Gods in the forms of trees and animals.
- 4. Some of the important yajnas of this time were – ashvamedha, vajapeya, rajasuya, etc.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (b) 2 and 4 only
- (c) 3 and 4 only
- (d) 2, 3 and 4 only

6. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Painted grey ware became the most important form of pottery in the Later Vedic period.
- 2. Similar to Rigvedic period, taxes in the later Vedic period were also mandatory.

Which of the statement/s given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

7. Which one among the following is not true with regard to Rig Veda Samhita? (NDA 2011)

- a) There are about 300 non-Indo-European words in Rig Veda
- b) There is a reference to dasa-rajna (battle of ten kings) in Rig Veda
- c) It is mentioned in the Rig Veda that the Bharata chief Sudas fought against a confederacy of ten tribes.
- d) Porus sided with Bharata in the battle of ten kings.

8. Which one of the following rivers was earlier known as Vitasta? (NDA 2019, I)

- a) Tista
- b) Jhelum
- c) Tungabhadra
- d) Bharatpuzha

9. Consider the following statements-

- 1. Mitanni inscription
- 2. Kassite inscription
- 3. Zend Avesta
- 4. Rigveda

Which of the above-mentioned sources confirmed that Aryan moved west to east?

- (a) 2 and 3
- (b) 1, 2 and 3
- (c) 1, 3 and 4
- (d) All of the above

10. Consider the following statements regarding Aryans:

- 1. Chariot driven by horses
- 2. Use of armour
- 3. Different type of forts
- 4. Use of bows and arrows, sword and spear

Which of the distinctive features were associated with Aryans?

- (a) 2, 3 and 4
- (b) 1, 2 and 3
- (c) 1, 3 and 4
- (d) All of the above

11. According to the Atharva Veda, who were considered twin daughters of Prajapati?

- (a) Sabha and Samiti
- (b) Usha and Prithvi
- (c) Sindhu and Saraswati
- (d) Gargi and Maitreyi

12. Consider the following statements-

- 1. Vidatha was the oldest institution of Aryans.
- 2. Ishan was the president of Sabha.
- 3. Bali was a regular tax in Rigvedic period.

Which of the statements above mentioned is/are correct?

- (a) Only 2
- (b) 1 and 3
- (c) Only 1
- (d) 1 and 2

13. Consider the following statements in the context of early Vedic period-

- 1. Panchjana comprised of 5 tribes such as Puru, Druhu, Anu, Turvashu and Yadu.
- 2. Agriculture was the dominant economic activity.
- 3. Rigveda was written in later Vedic period.

Which of the statements above mentioned is/are correct?

- (a) Only 2
- (b) 1 and 3
- (c) Only 1
- (d) 1 and 2

14. In the context of Vedic period, consider the following statements-

1. Cow was supposed to be sacred animals.
2. 'Elephant', 'Tiger' and 'Lion' are mentioned in the Rigveda.
3. Cows were called 'Aghnya'.
4. 'Yava' was grain crop.

Which of the statements above mentioned is/are correct?

- (a) 2 and 3 (b) 1, 3 and 4
(c) 1 and 4 (d) 1 and 2

15. Match the following-

| Term | Meaning |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Bhishaka | - Goldsmith |
| 2. Hiranyaka | - Physician |
| 3. Nishka | - Medium of exchange |

Which of the above mentioned is/are matched correctly?

- (a) 1 and 3 (b) Only 3
(c) 1 and 2 (d) Only 2

16. In the context of Vedic religion, consider the following statements-

1. Worship of nature and anthropomorphism were basic feature Vedic religion.
2. Attaining salvation was ultimate goal of worship during Rigvedic period.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

17. Consider the following statements:

1. References of famine occurring are mentioned in 'Chhandogya Upanishad'.
2. There is no description of land grants during later Vedic Age.
3. 'Shyam Ayas' or 'Krishna Ayas' refers to use of iron during later Vedic Age.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 2 and 3 (c) 1 and 2
(b) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

18. In the context of Vedic religion, consider the following statements-

1. Prajapati became the supreme God during later Vedic age.
2. Pushan was worshipped as the God of Shudra.
3. Ashwin was considered the protector of agriculture.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 2 and 3 (c) 1 and 2
(b) 1 and 3 (d) 1, 2 and 3

19. Consider the following statements about Vedic literature: (Assam PCS 2023)

- (i) Vedic literature is broadly divided into two parts: Shruti and Smriti.
- (ii) The language used in four Vedas is classical Sanskrit.
- (iii) The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two major important components of Vedic literature.

Select the correct statement(s) using the codes given below.

- (a) Only (i)
- (b) Both (i) and (ii)
- (c) Both (ii) and (iii)
- (d) (i), (ii) and (iii)

20. Which of the following Rig Vedic God is associated with medicine and healing?

- (a) Varun
- (b) Agni
- (c) Asvins
- (d) Surya

