

Chapter 4: Central Asia and India's Beginnings: 4-3 India's Vedic Epoch

Book Title: World Civilizations

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4-3 India's Vedic Epoch

These Aryans and their Indo-European-speaking relatives were among the earliest nomadic, horse-breeding people of ancient Asia, and their aggressive ways were the terror of other civilizations besides that of the Indus Valley. Many scholars believe that they overwhelmed agrarian Indian civilizations and set themselves up as a sort of master group, using the Indians as labor to do the farming and trading that the Aryan warriors despised as inferior.

Our knowledge of the Aryans comes largely from their [Vedas \(\(VAY-dahs\) The four oral epics of the Aryans brought into ancient India.\)](#) (VAY-dahs), ancient oral epics that later were recorded in an ancient Indo-European language called *Sanskrit*. From these Vedas, we know that the Aryans, like many other pastoralist nomads, worshiped gods of the sky and storm to whom they sacrificed horses, and they made impressive use of bronze weaponry and horse-drawn chariots in battle. (Apparently, the Indus Valley people knew the horse only as a beast of burden and were at a disadvantage against the Aryan chariots.) The [Rigveda \(\(rig-VAY-dah\) The most ancient of the four Vedas, or Hindi religious epics, brought into India by the Aryans.\)](#) (rig-VAY-dah), the oldest and most important Veda, paints a picture of a war-loving, violent folk led by their *Raja* (RAH-jah), or chieftain, and their magic-working priests.

The Aryans moved on from the agriculturally played-out Indus Valley, preferring instead better-watered regions to the east and south. In time the Aryans extended their rule across all of northern India, but centered it on the Ganges River and its tributaries (see [Map 4.1](#)). They gradually abandoned their nomadic ways and settled down as agriculturists and town dwellers, just as they had elsewhere. Two factors probably contributed to this: the new iron technology the Aryans introduced, which gave them better tools, and the introduction of rice cultivation from the east, supplemented by pepper and spices, which provided more and better foods for their diet. They never conquered the southern half of India, and as a result, the southern culture and religion still differ in some respects from those of the north.

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