

## **EARLY VEDIC PERIOD**

### **VEDIC PERIOD**

After the decline of the Indus Valley civilization, Vedic civilization emerged in India. This civilization existed from roughly 1500 BC to around 600 BC. This period is known as the Vedic Period because in this period, Vedas were written. We know about the history of this period through the Vedic texts.

The period between 1500 BC and 600 BC is divided into Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic Period (1500–1000 BC) and the Later Vedic Period (1000–600 BC). The Rig Vedic Period is called so because we get to know about this period through Rigveda. We get to know about Later Vedic Period through later Vedic texts.

The people who played predominant role in this civilization called themselves "Aryas" or "Aryans." They were the ones who were responsible for bringing up this civilization. "Arya" literally means the man of "noble character," and the "free-born." The Aryans were not native. They came from outside India.

### **Where Did the Aryans Come From?**

Aryans are believed to have migrated from Europe to India and the other parts of Asia. Originally, the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the area east of the Alps. It is difficult to locate the exact part of Europe where the Aryans originally lived, before they migrated elsewhere. They came into India from the North-Western direction.

Some of the inscriptions which prove that the Aryans were there in Central Asia such as Boghaz Koi inscription in Turkey and Amarna Letters (also referred as clay tablets) in Egypt.

Due to their ancestry, the Aryans were able to speak the Indo-European languages. Modern languages like Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek, and Gothic have developed from these languages. The similarity of words in Sanskrit and European languages proves to the fact that Aryans were of European origin. For example "Pider" and "Mader" in Parsi, "Pater" and "Mater" of Latin, "Father" and "Mother" of English resemble with "Pitru" and "Matru" of Sanskrit.

### **Where Did Aryans Settle in India?**

Aryans migrated to India a little earlier than 1500 BC. They settled down in parts of eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, and border of Uttar Pradesh. The earliest settlements of Aryans were restricted to the valleys of Sindh (Indus) and its tributaries, Saraswati and Drishadvati. It is believed that Vedas were composed at the confluence of Saraswati and Drishadavati rivers. Saraswati (Naditarna) is mentioned as the holiest river in Rigveda. It is named after Harakwati (Helmand River) in Afghanistan.

Gradually, settlements reached between the areas of Himalayas and the Vindhya. Rivers like Krumu (Kurram), Gomati (Gomal), Kumbha (Kabul), and Suvastu (Swat) have been mentioned in the Rigveda. Aryans extended their settlements in the East and South directions. As Aryans were mainly cattle-rearing people, they came in search of green pastures. By 6th century BC, they occupied the whole of North India, which was referred to as "Aryavata."

### Various Terms Used in Reference of India

- **Saptasindu:** The Rigveda refers to "Saptasindu," i.e., land of seven rivers, which was the name of Punjab. Part of Punjab was earlier inhabited by Aryans. The seven rivers are Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, and Saraswati.
- **Hindustan:** The term "Hindustan" known as "Land of People" living in the East of river Sindhu (Indus). The term "Hindus" was coined by Greeks.
- **India:** The ancient Greeks referred to the Indians as "Indoi," which translates as "the people of the Indus."
- **Jambudvipa:** Jambudvipa refers to large island or continent.  
The word Jambudvipa literally refers to "the land of Jambu trees" where Jambu is the name of the species (also called Indian Blackberry). Surya Siddhanta, an astronomical text, refers to Northern Hemisphere of the Earth as Jambudvipa, whereas the Southern Hemisphere is referred to as Patala.
- **Bharatvarsha:** Bharatvarsha is used after the name of powerful "Bharat" tribe.

### Vedic Names of Popular Rivers

Rig Vedic Name	Modern Name
Sindhu	Indus
Vitase	Jhelum
Askini	Chenab
Parushni	Ravi
Vipas	Beas
Sutudri	Sutlej
Gumal	Gomati
Krumu	Kurram
Drishadvati	Ghaggar
Naditarna	Saraswati

### EARLY VEDIC PERIOD (1500-1000 BC)

The Rigveda consists of hymns in honor of God, but society, economy, and polity of that time can also be deduced by this religious text. The various aspects of early Vedic living can be characterized as follows:

Aryans were mainly pastoral. Agriculture was their secondary occupation. As a result, cattle rearing played an important part. There are prayers in the Vedas for cattle ("Gosu" in Sanskrit). Cows were considered sacred. Aryans indulged in other occupations as well. Weaving was the other important occupation. The subsidiary industries included dyeing and embroidery. Discovery of iron and manufacture of iron implements made clearing of forests easy. Availability of wood leads to emergence of carpenters. The carpenters build houses, chariots, and wagons, and supplied household utensils and furniture.

There were blacksmiths who supplied various necessities of life, from fine needles and razors

to the sickles, ploughshares, spears, and swords. The goldsmiths made ornaments like bangles, necklaces, bands, etc. The leather workers made bow-strings and casks for holding liquor. The physicians cured diseases. The priests performed sacrifices, composed hymns, and taught them to the disciples.

### **Trade and Economy**

Initially, barter system was popular. Cow was sometimes used as a unit of exchange. Gradually, pieces of gold called "nishka" were used as means of exchange. Trade and commerce was regulated and managed by a group of people called "Pani."

Traders made long journeys to faraway lands to fetch more profits. There might be some commercial connections with Mesopotamia and other Western Asian countries. Though they used to travel to far off places for trade purposes, but there is no mention of trade through sea.

### **Transport and Communication**

The chief means of transport were rathas (chariots) and wagons drawn by horses and oxen. Horse riding was also popular. There was presence of robbers at highway called Taskara.

### **Agriculture**

Pair of oxen was used to plough fields. It has even been mentioned in Rigveda that 24 oxen were attached at the same time to plough a piece of land. The land under cultivation was known as *Urvara* or *Kshetra*. Irrigation was also used to supply water to the fields. They were well acquainted with the use of manure. Two crops were mainly cultivated—(i) barley and (ii) wheat. Cotton and oil seeds were also grown. Rice was not extensively cultivated. Wheat and barley, milk and its products like curd and ghee, vegetables and fruits were primary food articles.

### **Domestication of Animals**

Cows were considered sacred. There are prayers in the Vedas for Gosu (cattle). Cattle was also considered as a symbol of wealth. The Aryans used to domesticate many other animals such as horses, draught ox, dog, goat, sheep, buffalo, and donkey.

### **Religion**

Aryans were very religious people. They primarily worshipped elements of nature, such as the Sun, the Moon, the Wind, and the Air, etc. Various Vedic hymns were written in praise of Nature Gods. It has been mentioned in the Rigveda that around 33 Gods were worshipped by the Aryans. The classification of Gods could be done in three categories:

1. Terrestrial Gods, such as Prithvi (Earth), Brihasapati, Agni (Fire), and Soma (God of wine or pleasure). In ancient Hindu literature, "Brihasapati" is a Vedic era sage who counsels the Gods, while in some medieval texts the word refers to the largest planet Jupiter.
2. Intermediate or Madhyamsthana Gods, such as Indra (God of victory), Vayu (Wind), and Rudra (Lightning).
3. Celestial Gods, such as Varuna (God of water), Marut (God of storm), Usha (Dawn), Surya, Savitri (Daughter of Sun God), and Vishnu.

Among these Gods, Indra was considered the most important God. Indra was the God of strength and victory in war. He has also been regarded as "Pirrandar" or "Purandar," literally

meaning "destroyer of forts." He was also the God of rain and thunder. Around 250 hymns of Rigveda, the largest as compared to others, were addressed to Indra.

Agni was the second most important God after Indra. Agni acted as the mediator for all the deities. It was believed that Agni conveyed the people's prayers to the Gods. No sacrifice could be performed without offerings to the God Agni. Prithvi was regarded as the Goddess of grains. Varuna was regarded as the God of truth and moral order.

Surya was regarded as the destroyer of darkness. Vishnu was worshipped as the God of three worlds.

Apart from these deities, Savitri and Saraswati were also worshipped.

### **Mode of Worship**

Aryans adopted simple mode of worship. They gave great importance to prayers and chanting hymns. Sacrifices were also used to appease the Gods and Goddesses. Food offerings were common. Animals like horses, buffaloes, bulls, and even cows were sometimes sacrificed.

The process of sacrifice was simple. Every Aryan family took part in the offering of prayers and performing of fire-sacrifice. There were no priests for performing these rituals. There were no shrines or temples. The idea of worshipping an idol did not exist. The concept of reincarnation was there but was not fully developed. They believed in theory of Karma and soul.

### **Political Organization**

The political organization of the Aryans consisted of many units, but the basic unit was known as Kula and the head of the Kula was known as Kulapa. Kula is a Sanskrit word that can be translated as "community," "clan," or "tribe". Various Kula joined together to form Grama (Village). Village headman was known as "Gramani." During war, he used to lead the soldiers from his village. He attended the meetings of the "Sabha" and "Samiti." Several villages formed a "Vis." It was placed under a "Visapati." He was also a military leader.

Group of "vishes" formed a "Jana" (tribe). "Gopa" was the head of one "Jana." Rigveda mentions about various powerful tribes, such as Bharatas, Matsyas, Yadus, and Purus. Several Janas collectively formed a "Janapada" or "kingdom." The "Rajan" (king) was the head of the Janapada.

### **Sabha and Samiti**

The Rigveda mentions two popular bodies—(i) Sabha and (ii) Samiti. Sabha was a body of elders. The head of the Sabha was called "Sabhapati." The Sabha advised the king on administration. It also performed functions of courts.

The Samiti was a general assembly of the entire people. The head of Samiti was called "Pati." The Samiti dealt mainly with the political business of the state. The appointment of king required approval of Samiti.

Though the king enjoyed substantial power, yet he consulted these two bodies and acted according to their decision. The role of Sabha and Samiti declined in the Later Vedic Period.

### **Rajan and his Functionaries**

The leader or the head of the kingdom was known as Rajan (king). Normally, there used to be a single king for each kingdom. The king was appointed based on heredity. However, he could not inherit the throne without permission of Samiti. Kingdoms without hereditary kings were governed by the tribal councils.

The main responsibility of Rajan was to protect his kingdom. He was aided by several functionaries including the Purohita (Chaplain), the Senani (Army Chief), Dutas (Envoys), and Spash (Spies). Purohita performed ceremonies and spells for success in war and prosperity in peace. Spies were employed to keep an eye on antisocial activities, such as theft and burglary.

There was no regular revenue collection system and the kingdom was maintained by the voluntary tribute (Bali) by subjects and the booty won in battle.

### **Army**

The military system of the Aryans was strong and their military was much advanced. They succeeded everywhere because they possessed chariots driven by horses. The weapons used by the soldiers were bow and arrows, swords, axes, and spears.

### **Battle of Ten Kings or Dasraja Yudha**

On advent of Aryans, territory was under control of a number of tribes. Among all of them, Bharatas were the most important tribe. India was named "Bharatvarsha" after this tribe.

The battle took place between Sudas (a Bharata king of Tritsu family) and a confederacy of 10 other well-known tribes, which included Puru, Yadu, Turvasa, Anu, Druhyu, Alina, Paktha, Bhalanas, Shiva, and Vishanin. The first five tribes are said to be Aryan tribes, while the remaining five are said to be non-Aryan tribes. The battle took place on the banks of river Parushni (Ravi). In this battle, Bharatas emerged victorious.

Later on, Purus allied with Bharatas and together they formed a tribe called Kurus. Kurus inhabited the region of present-day "Kurukshetra" in Haryana.

### **Society**

#### **Dress and ornaments**

Both men and women wore upper and lower garments made of cotton and wool. A variety of ornaments were used by both men and women.

They were very fond of food, dresses, and soma (Vedic ritual drink), and sura (intoxicating liquor). Soma was drunk at sacrifices and its use was sanctified by religion. Sura was disapproved by the priestly class.

Chariot racing, horse racing, dicing, music, and dance were the favorite pastimes. People also indulged in gambling.

### **Family**

Family (Graham) was the basic unit of society and the head of the family was known as Grahapathi. The institution of marriage was important. They were usually committed and indissoluble. Monogamy (being married to one person at a time) was the practice. Other forms were rare but did exist. Other forms included levirate (where a man may be obliged to marry his brother's widow), polygamy (in which a man has more than one wife), and polyandry (in which a woman has more than one husband).

### **Position of Women**

The Rig Vedic society was patriarchal. However, women enjoyed honorable place in the society. They were given opportunities for their spiritual and intellectual development. The education of girls was not neglected. The Rigveda mentions the names of some learned ladies who composed mantras and attained the rank of Rishis like Apala, Viswavara, Ghosa, and Lopamudra.

Women could choose their husbands and could remarry if their husbands died or disappeared. Parda system was not prevalent in the society. The girls were married after attaining puberty. Sati system was also absent.

Women could enter the popular assemblies, Sabha and Samiti. The wife took care of household and participated in all religious ceremonies.

### **Divisions in Society**

Aryan society was democratic. The words Brahmana and Kshatriya occur in various family books of the Rigveda, but they were not associated with a particular skin color. The words Vaishya and Shudra were absent. The social divisions were not rigid during the Rig Vedic Period. The society was divided into three groups—warriors, priests, and common people. Later, the fourth division called Dasas or Shudra was also added. The fourth division appeared toward the end of the Rig Vedic Period. It is mentioned for the first time in the 10th Mandal (book) of the Rigveda. As the time passed, Aryans laid more emphasis on purity of blood.

### **VEDIC LITERATURE**

Vedic literature is composed in Sanskrit. The Vedic literature is broadly divided into two categories— (i) Shruti and (ii) Smriti.

#### **Rita, Dharma, and Karma**

Rita literally refers to "truth" or "order." In other words, Rita is the physical order of the Universe. Because of Rita, the Sun and the Moon pursue their daily journeys across the sky and the seasons proceed in regular movement. Vedic religion features the belief that Rita was guarded by God Varuna. The proper performance of sacrifices to the Gods was necessary to guarantee its continuance.

The concept of Rita led to the doctrines of Dharma (duty to sacrifice) and Karma (accumulated effects of good and bad actions). Violation (Anrita) of the established order by improper behavior, even if unintentional, constituted sin, and required careful penance.

## **Shruti**

Shruti means which has been heard. Veda is Shruti scripture. It is believed that saints (rishi or seers) in the state of meditation (Tapasya) heard Vedas directly from Brahma/Parameshwara. In other words, jnana attained by saints in state of samadhi is called Shruti.

Thus, Vedas are not created by man and are believed to be the words of God. There are four Vedas—(i) Rigveda, (ii) Samaveda, (iii) Yajurveda, and (iv) Athrvaveda. Rigveda was written between 1500 BC and 1000 BC. Other Vedas were written between 1000 BC and 600 BC.

The literal meaning of Veda is “superior knowledge.” The word “Veda” is derived from root word “Vid,” which means to know.

Vedas are classified into two categories:

1. Mantra/Samhita part
2. Brahmanas part

Samhita is the main part of Veda (which is believed to be heard by Rishis) and Brahmanas are the interpretation and commentaries on Samhita part of Vedas. Brahmanas help in understanding the meaning of Samhita part. They also explain methodology of performing rites (i.e., rituals). Each Brahmana is associated with one of the four Vedas. Brahmanas are considered as the part of Vedas.

Brahmanas lead to Aranyakas and Aranyakas further lead to Upanishads. In other words, Aranyakas are extracted from Brahmanas and Upanishads are extracted from Aranyakas. Thus, four Vedas— (i) Rigveda, (ii) Samaveda, (iii) Yajurveda, (iv) and Athrvaveda with Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyakas, and Upanishads are Shruti texts.

## **Smriti**

Smriti means which is remembered or which is based upon memory. In other words, this text is produced out of human intellect. These are texts written/composed by rishi and handed down by tradition. In contrast to Shruti which is of divine origin, Smriti is produced out of intellect and usually attributed to an author. Smriti texts are written on the basis of Shruti. These texts are given less importance than Shruti.

Major Smriti scriptures are Vedangas, Upavedas, Upang, Dharma-Sutra/Shashtra (including popular Smriti scriptures by sage Manu, Yajnavalkya, Narad, Parasara, etc. and other Sutras), 18 Purans, Itihasa, i.e., Ramayana, Mahabharata (Bhagavad Gita), etc. Commentaries on various Shruti texts by Acharyas including Brahma Sutra, etc. and various scriptures on Darshan Shashtra (Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa, Nyaya, etc.)

## **Vedas**

### **Rigveda**

The Rigveda has 1028 hymns (Shloks). The hymns in the Vedas are written in the praise of Gods, such as Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Soma, and others. The Rigvedas consist of 10 books (or Mandals). The book numbered from 2 to 7 were written earliest. Thereafter, book numbered 8 and 9 were written. Book numbered 1 and 10 were the last to be written. The Vedas have a lot

of things common with Avesta (religious text of Zoroastrianism). The 3rd Mandal consists of the Gayatri mantra which was composed by Vishwamitra to offer prayers to the solar deity "Savitri." Thus, Gayatri mantra is also called Savitri mantra. The 10th Mandal mentions about caste system for the first time.

### **Samveda**

It is a composition of hymns, mostly collected from the Rigveda. The main theme is melodies and chants. It involves modulation of voice while reciting the verses. It includes the 1875 hymns. Samveda is full of tunes known as Ragas. This Veda laid the foundation of music. It is the basis of Indian Sangeet Shastra. The Brahman who recited Samveda was known as Udgatri.

### **Yajurveda**

The theme of the Yajurveda is rituals/ceremonies. The Brahman who recited the Yajurveda was known as Ardhyawahu. It is written in the verse and prose form. The Yajurveda is divided into two parts—(i) Shukla Yajurveda and (ii) Krishna Yajurveda. The rituals performed by Aryans were known as Shukla Yajurveda, it is also known as White Yajurveda (*Vajasaneyi Samhita*), whereas the rituals followed by non-Aryans were known as Krishna Yajurveda. It is also known as Black Yajurveda (*Taittiriya Samhita*).

### **Atharvaveda**

It mainly dealt with the theme of witchcrafts, black magic, diseases, and their cures, building construction, etc. It was not considered as a Veda for a very long time because it was not considered fit to be the scripture for the masses.

Out of the four Vedas, it is the most beneficial Veda because it consists of important subjects, such as Ayurveda, Ganita Shastra (Maths), and Rekhanigita (Geometry).

### **Brahmanas**

These are the prose commentaries of all the four Vedas. These dealt with explaining the symbolic meaning of the rituals and ceremonies. They are 18 in number.

### **Aranyakas**

Aranyakas were composed in forests and dealt with the forest life. It also described the lifestyle of Sanyasis in forests.

### **Upanishads**

Upanishads are mainly philosophical texts criticizing the rituals and laid stress on right belief and right knowledge. Upanishads are in the form dialogues between guru and shishya. They contain parables (short stories to teach a lesson). They were probably written by Kshatriyas. There are 108 Upanishads. Upanishads are also known as Vedanta, meaning end of Vedas. The important Upanishads are:

- **Katha Upanishad:** It dealt with the concept of death. It contains dialogue between Nachiketa (a young boy) and Yama (Lord of Death).
- **Jabala Upanishad:** The Varnashrama/Dharm system was introduced for the first time under this Upanishad.
- **Iso Upanishad:** It talks about the creation of everything.
- **Mundaka Upanishad:** It consists of Satyameva Jayate.



- **Chandogya Upanishad:** It mentioned Lord Krishna for the first time.
- **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad:** It talks about the transmigration of soul.

### Vedangas

These are regarded as the "limbs of the Vedas." They were developed by rishis to make the spiritual and ritual concepts easily understandable. There are six Vedangas:

1. **Shiksha:** It is related to the science of phonetics and pronunciations, and recitation of Vedic mantra.
2. **Chandas:** It is related to the rules of composition of mantras.
3. **Vyakarna:** It is related to grammar, which helps in making the language clear.
4. **Nirukta:** It is related to finding the origin of the words and their meanings. Nirukta was written by Yaska. He was an early Sanskrit grammarian who lived in the 6th or 5th century BC. Not much is known about him.
5. **Jyotish:** It is related to Astronomy, Astrology, Mathematics, and Geometry.
6. **Kalpa:** It is related to the science of rites and rituals.

The Kalpa Vedanga is further divided into 4 Sutras. The sutras were written to compile all the aspects related to a particular subject into single work. The four sutras are:

1. **Shrotasutra:** It explains the method of performing yajna. Yajnas such as Rajsuya, Vajpeya, etc are prescribed under this head.
2. **Grihyasutra:** It describes the process of marriage, construction of a house and agriculture related activities, animal husbandry, treating diseases, and sanskaras.
3. **Dharma Sutra:** It describes Varna-ashram system, tradition, practices and social conduct.
4. **Shulva Sutra:** It explains how to make yajna-vedi. Its measurement and principles are discussed.

### Upavedas

In addition to Vedas, there were Upavedas. They can be called as subsidiary Vedas. They dealt with the subjects like man, matter, and society. There are four Upavedas:

1. **Ayurveda:** It is related to science of medicine.
2. **Dhanurveda:** It is related to science of archery and warfare.
3. **Sthapatyaveda or Vastushastra:** It is related to science of architecture.
4. **Gandharvaveda:** It is related to science of music and dance.

## Practice Questions

1. The similarities are found between Avesta and Rigveda. Avesta is an ancient text that belongs to

- (a) Islam
- (b) Christianity
- (c) Zoroastrianism
- (d) None of the above

2. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- 1. The predominant occupation in the early Vedic society was agriculture.
- 2. Iron was not popular in the early Vedic society.

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

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

3. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- 1. During early Vedic Period, stone tools were popular in usage.
- 2. Shifting agriculture was practiced during Early Vedic Period.

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

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

4. Which of the following statements is/are correct about Early Vedic Period?

- 1. There is strong evidence of democracy in the political organization.
- 2. Women were part of the democratic bodies.

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

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

5. Which of the following statements is/are correct about Early Vedic Period?

- 1. The caste-based divisions were absent in the society.
- 2. The most popular form of marriage was monogamy.

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

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

6. Which of the following statements is/are correct about Early Vedic Period?

- 1. Women could remarry on death of their husbands or if their husbands disappear.

2. Women were not allowed to be part of any religious ceremony.

Select the correct answer using codes given below:

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

### Perfecting Past Prelims

1. 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

2. The religion of early Vedic Aryans was primarily of (2012)

- (a) Bhakti
- (b) Image worship and Yajna
- (c) Worship of Nature and Yajna
- (d) Worship of Nature and Bhakti

3. Consider the following statements: (2024)

- 1. There are no parables in Upanishads.
- 2. Upanishads were composed earlier than the Puranas

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

## Answer Keys

### Practice Questions

1. (c)	2. (b)	3. (c)	4. (c)	5. (c)
6. (a)				

### Perfecting Past Prelims

1. (c)	2. (c)	3. (b)		
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## Solutions

### Practice Questions

2. (b) Statement 1 is incorrect: The early Vedic society was mainly pastoral. Agriculture was their secondary occupation.

6. (a) Statement 2 is incorrect: Women took part in religious ceremonies including Yajna.

### Perfecting past Prelims

3. (b) Statement 1 is incorrect. The Upanishads are known to use parables and stories to explain complex philosophical concepts. A famous example is the parable of the two birds in the Mundaka Upanishad, which illustrates the relationship between the individual self (Atman) and the universal self (Brahman).

Statement 2 is correct. The Upanishads are generally dated to be composed between 800 BCE and 400 BCE, while the Puranas are considered much later works, ranging from 300 BCE to 1300 CE.

## LATER VEDIC PERIOD

### LATER VEDIC PERIOD

The history of the Early Vedic Period is known through Rigveda, whereas the history of Later Vedic Period is known through later Vedic texts. Later Vedic Period existed from 1000 BC to 600 BC. The later Vedic texts include Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads.

### Settlements in Later Vedic Period

These texts provide information that during the Later Vedic Period, the Aryans shifted from the North- Western region to Ganga and Yamuna basins. Aryans spread their reach to the whole of North India and Central India up to the river Narmada.

Kurus, a powerful kingdom, occupied upper portion of the Ganga–Yamuna doab along with Delhi and set up their capital at Hastinapur. The excavation of Hastinapur has revealed faint beginning of town-like structure at around 900 BC. Kurus united with Panchalas of Aligarh, who occupied middle portion of the Ganga–Yamuna doab. This era marks the famous Mahabharata war at land of Kurus, i.e., Kurukshetra.

### Construction

In later Vedic times, people hardly knew the use of burnt bricks. This was concluded because only mud structures have been discovered at Hastinapur. After Hastinapur was destroyed due to heavy floods, Kurus moved to Kaushambi near Allahabad.

### Technology

There is mention of iron and the weapons made from it. Iron has been mentioned as "Syama Ayas" which literally means black metal. Later Vedic people succeeded in expansion because of the use of iron weapons and horse-drawn chariots. Discovery of iron also led to agriculture becoming the primary occupation of people. Consequently, people began to live settled life and the importance of land increased.

### Political Organization

The power of the king increased. The institution of king became hereditary and eldest son (primogeniture) held the institution. To increase powers of the king, yajna were performed. Yajna were form of devotion which involved sacrifice. It was conducted with the help of sacred fire along with Vedic mantras. Agni was considered the God of fire and a messenger of God.

There were three prime Vedic Yagna– Rajasuya Yagna, Ashvamedh Yagna and Vajapeya Yagna.

- **Rajasuya Yagna:** Rajasuya Yagna was performed on the occasion of coronation of king. The word Rajasuya literally mean 'King-engendering'. The priest was given 2,40,000 cows for performing Rajasuya Yagna.
- **Ashvamedha Yagna:** The literal meaning of Ashwamedha is 'sacrifice of horse'. In this ritual, a horse was left to wander for a period of 1 year. If the horse returned without any harm, the territory covered by horse was considered to belong to the king. The horse, after return, was then sacrificed.

- **Vajapeya Yagna:** The term Vajapeya is made up of two words—(i) “Vaja” means strengthening liquid and (ii) “Peya” means a drink. As part of this yajna, king was required to drink Soma. This ritual was performed to maintain harmony in the state. The performer of this Yagna was titled as ‘Vajpayee’.

### Later Vedic Period Administration

The popular assemblies, Sabha and Samiti, continued to exist but lost their importance and the power of king increased at their cost. Women were no longer permitted to sit in Sabha and it was now dominated by nobles and brahmans.

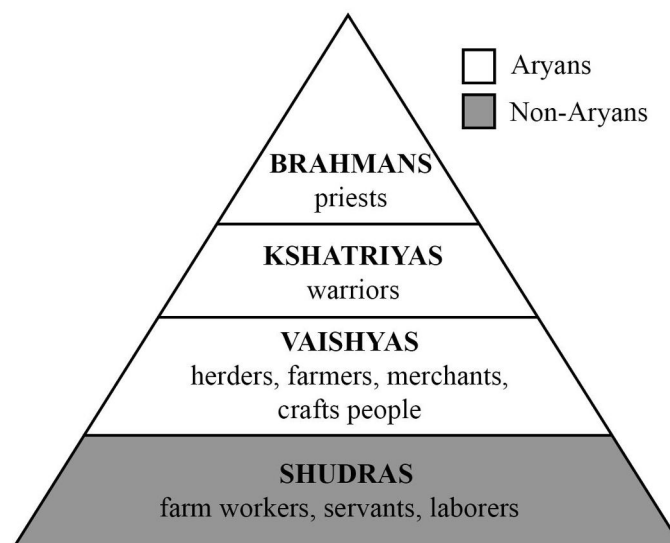
The collection of taxes became common. Officials were appointed for the same. Bhagadugha was responsible for collection of taxes and sangrihitri was treasurer.

The standing army appeared for the first time.

### Societal Division in Later Vedic Period: Birth of Varna System

In the Later Vedic Period, the society became complex. Earlier, the society was divided into three groups—(i) Kshatriyas (Warriors), (ii) Brahmins (Priests), and (iii) Vaishyas (Common people/traders). The Trivarnas were already well established. The fourth division, the Shudras (Untouchables), was added in the Later Vedic Period.

The first two groups enjoyed high status in the society. The growing practice of sacrifice greatly added to the power of brahmans. The Vaishyas were considered superior to the Shudras but their condition was gradually deteriorating due to heavy tax burden on them. The condition of the Shudras was miserable. They had to serve the other three categories. They were even treated as untouchables.







The first three divisions were allowed to wear a sacred thread called “Janeu.” Shudras were deprived of the sacred thread ceremony and recitation of Gayatri Mantra. To give legitimacy to this division, it was emphasized that the Brahmins have emerged from the head of the creator, Kshatriyas from arms, Vaishyas from thighs, and Shudras from feet.

Due to the fact that the Shudras were considered untouchables, the upper caste people adopted ways to keep them away from villages. Shudras were further divided as follows:

- **Antyaja:** Last born who lived outside the village,
- **Kiratas:** Uncivilized forest people,
- **Nishad:** The person who dealt with dead bodies and was prohibited to enter the village.

### Birth of Ashrama System

			
Brahmacharya Ashram	Grihastha Ashram	Vanprastha Ashram	Sanyasa Ashram
0-25 yrs.	26-50 yrs.	51-75 yrs.	>75 yrs.

The oppressed or the dissatisfied section of the society started looking for ways to escape from the system. They started following the path of Sanayasa. Following this, a new system of leading a life was proposed. The Varna—Ashrama/Dharma system was introduced. It divided life into four phases:

1. **Brahamchari:** For student life,
2. **Grihastha:** For family life,
3. **Vanaprastha:** Hermit (a stage of gradual detachment),
4. **Sanayasa:** Ascetic who has renounced the world fully.

### Birth of Gotra System

Society was organized on the basis of Gotra. Gotra meant people belonging to a group having a common ancestor. Members of same Gotra were considered as relatives. For matrimonial alliances, Gotra exogamy was considered appropriate. People belonging to the same Gotra were not allowed to marry each other. It was considered as a way to widen the sociopolitical ties, as new relationships were forged between unrelated people.

The marriages took place after considering the caste and the Gotra. There were two main types of marriages that were against caste rules:

- **Anuloma:** The male belongs to the upper caste and the female belongs to the lower caste. The child will be considered as half polluted.
- **Pratiloma:** The male belongs to the lower caste and the female belongs to the upper caste. The child will be considered as fully polluted.

### Status of Women in Later Vedic Period

Women lost their high position in the society. They were deprived of their rights. Many religious practices, which were earlier performed by the women, were now performed by the

priests. Women were not allowed to attend the political assemblies.

People started practicing polygamy. Child marriages appeared for the first time. Women started offering themselves to the brahmins.

### **Economy**

The economic condition of the Later Vedic Period people underwent significant changes. Due to the discovery of iron, rearing of cattle was replaced by agriculture. The use of manure was also known to the people.

Later Vedic texts talk about sea voyages. It is inferred that during this period trade relations with other civilizations existed. A certain class of traders controlled the trade. Merchant guilds or corporations were formed to facilitate trade and commerce.



*Coin of Later Vedic age*

Coins were used in trading. They were known as "Nishka," "Satamana," and "Krishnala." "Nishka" was a gold bar. "Satamana" and "Krishnala" were gold and silver coins, respectively. Each weighed one rati, i.e., 0.1215 gram.

Due to the caste system, various new occupations emerged. People attained specialization because professions were caste based and same occupation was performed by successive generations. There are references about money lenders, chariot makers, dyers, weavers, barbers, goldsmiths, ironsmiths, washermen, bow makers, carpenters, musicians, etc.

### **Gods of Later Vedic Period**

The Rig Vedic Gods lost their importance. Old Gods were replaced by New Gods. People started worshipping Rudra (Destroyer), Prajapati (the Creator), and Vishnu (Preserver). This age witnessed the beginning of worship of Durga and Ganesh.

Religion was overshadowed with rites and rituals. Culture of sacrifice was established. The sacrifices involved large-scale destruction of cattle wealth. Sacrifices were to be accompanied by carefully performed rituals. The rituals were performed by Brahmins in a specialized manner, leading to the supremacy of Brahmins. Sacrifices became an important part of the rituals. It was a common belief that Yajna satisfied the Gods. This led to rise in number of sacrifices.

### **End of Vedic Period**

Toward the end of the Vedic period, the tribal society became more complex. The use of iron became more prominent. Agriculture became more productive. Trade expanded, both within India and with the outside world. The script was invented and the oral traditions started getting converted into the written forms. The end of the Vedic period marked the beginning of the territorial kingdoms (Janapada).



## Practice Questions

1. The Upanishads are collectively known as
  - (a) Vedangas
  - (b) Vedanta
  - (c) Shruti
  - (d) Smriti
2. Which one of the following pairs of famous sayings and their sources is correctly matched?
  - (a) Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: Arthashastra
  - (b) Yogakshemam Vahamyaham: Rigveda
  - (c) Satyameva Jayate: Vedanta
  - (d) None of the above
3. Which one of the following usages was a post-Vedic development?
  - (a) Dharma—Artha—Kama—Moksha
  - (b) Brahmana—Kshatriya—Vaishya—Shudra
  - (c) Brahmacharya—Grihastashrama—Vanaprastha—Sanyasa
  - (d) Indra—Surya—Rudra—Marut
4. The famous dialogue between Nachiketa and Yama is mentioned in the
  - (a) Chandogya Upanishad
  - (b) Mundaka Upanishad
  - (c) Katha Upanishad
  - (d) Kena Upanishad
5. Which one of the following four Vedas contain an account of magical charms and spells?
  - (a) Rigveda
  - (b) Yajurveda
  - (c) Atharvaveda
  - (d) Samaveda

## Perfecting Past Prelims

1. The national motto of India, "Satyameva Jayate" inscribed below the Emblem of India is taken from (2014)
  - (a) Katha Upanishad
  - (b) Chandogya Upanishad
  - (c) Aitareya Upanishad
  - (d) Mundaka Upanishad

## Answer Keys

### Practice Questions

1. (b)	2. (c)	3. (c)	4. (c)	5. (c)
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### Perfecting Past Prelims

1. (d)				
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## Solutions

### Practice Questions

2. (c) Option (a) is incorrect: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is found in Maha Upanishad which means "the world is one family."

Option (b) is incorrect: Yogakshemam Vahamyaham is found in the Bhagavad Gita.

Option (c) is correct: Satyamev Jayate is found in Mundaka Upanishad/ Vedanta.

5. (c) Atharvaveda contains magical charms, spells, and folk traditions.