

Vedic Period or Vedic Age

Vedic Period (1500 BCE to 500 BCE)

- Early Vedic Period (1500 BCE to 1000 BCE)
- Later Vedic Period (1000 BCE to 600 BCE)
- Epic Period (600 BCE to 500 BCE)

Vedic Period

Early Vedic Age: The Vedic age began in India in about 1500 BC and extend upto 600 BCE with the coming of the Aryans, who scattered on the plains of northern India.

Max Muller believes it an anomaly to regard the race as Aryan because scientifically Aryan connotes nothing but language.

Vedas

- Aryans developed Vedic culture based on Vedas. The meaning of the word Veda is "knowledge", the best of all knowledge in the eyes of Hindus.
- It is a collection of hymns, prayers, charms, litanies and sacrificial formulae.
- There are four Vedas, namely, **Rig Veda**, **Sam Veda**, **Yajur Veda** and **Atharva Veda**.

Content

- [Origin of Aryans](#)
- [Aryans arrival in India](#)
- [Rig Vedic Polity](#)
- [Socio-Economic Life in Rig Vedic Period](#)
- [Rig Vedic Gods](#)
- [Later Vedic Polity and Economy](#)
- [Later Vedic Society](#)
- [Religion in Later Vedic Period](#)
- [Vedic Literature](#)
- [Vedic Doctrine of Hinduism](#)

Origin

- Some scholars, such as Max Muller and Dr. Thapar, believe that originally, the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the area east of Alps, in the region known as Eurasia, the region of the Caspian Sea and the southern Russian steppes, and gradually dividing into a number of tribes migrated in search of pasture, to Greece and Asia Minor, to Iran and to India. By that time, they came to be known as Aryans. This is proved by some Aryan names mentioned in the **Kassite** inscriptions of 1600 BC and the **Mitanni** inscriptions of the fourteenth century BC, found in Iraq which suggest that from Iran a branch of the Aryans moved towards the west.

Various theory

Original Home of Aryans

Region	-	Theorist
• Central Asia	-	Max Muller
• Tibet	-	Dayanand Saraswati
• Arctic Region	-	B.G. Tilak

Aryan Migration

- Aryans were Cattle Rearing people
- Believed to come from Central Asia



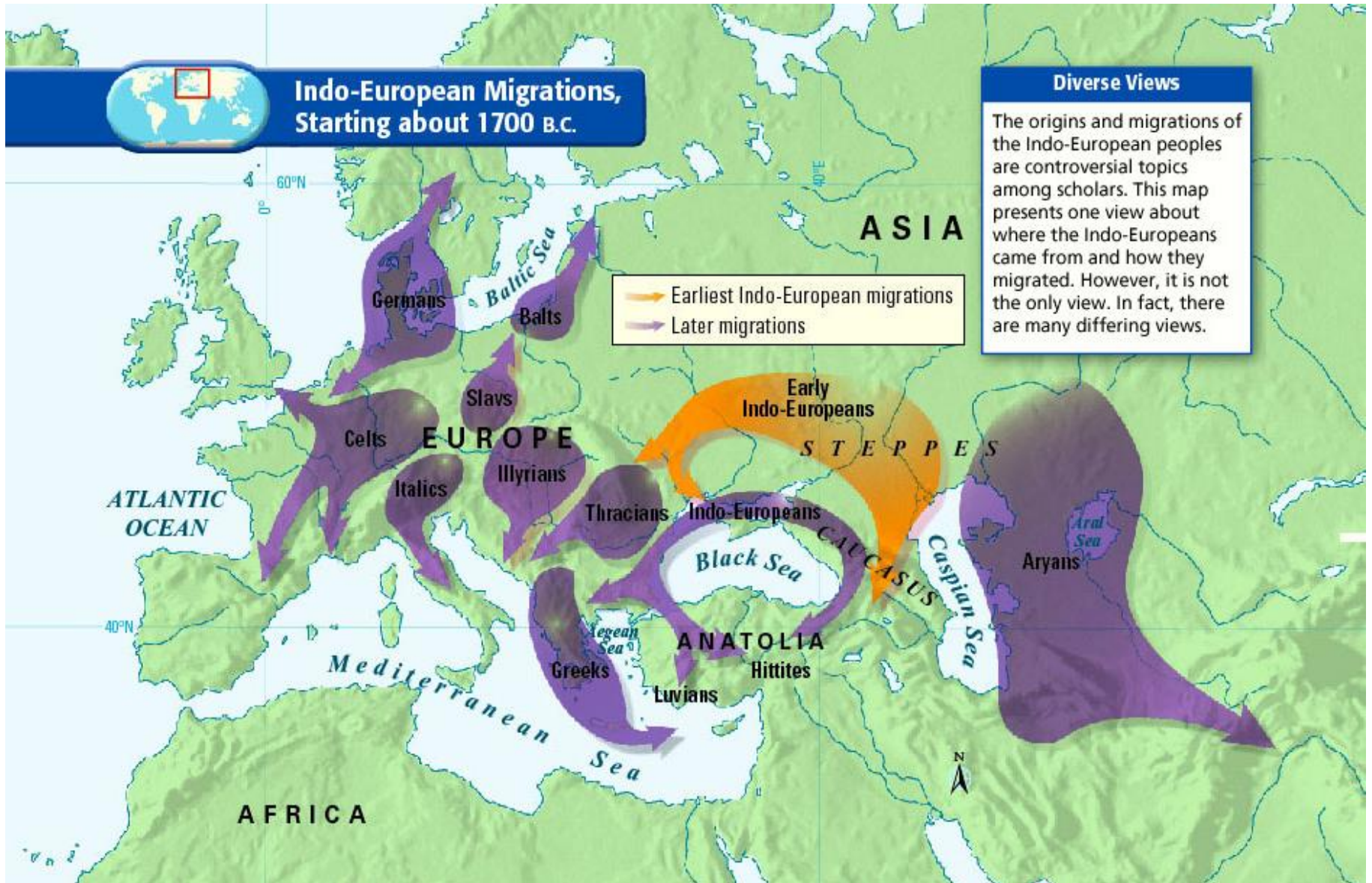


Indo-European Migrations, Starting about 1700 B.C.

Diverse Views

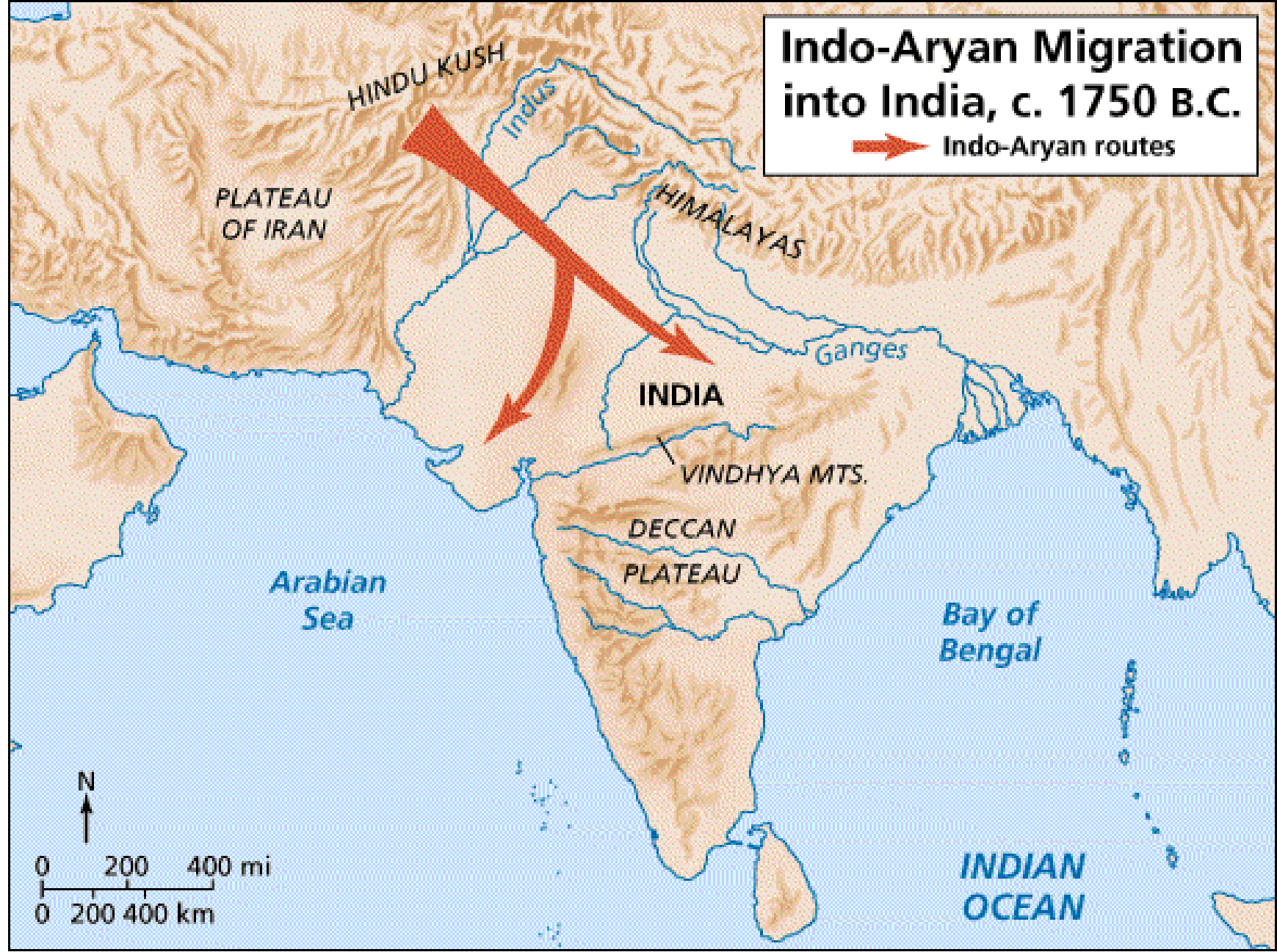
The origins and migrations of the Indo-European peoples are controversial topics among scholars. This map presents one view about where the Indo-Europeans came from and how they migrated. However, it is not the only view. In fact, there are many differing views.

- Earliest Indo-European migrations
- Later migrations



Indo-Aryan Migration into India, c. 1750 B.C.

➔ Indo-Aryan routes



Brief history

- The Aryans came to India in several waves.
- The earliest wave is represented by the Rig Vedic people who appeared in the subcontinent in about 1500 BC.
- They came into conflict with the indigenous inhabitants called the Dravidians mentioned as dasa or dasyus in Rig Veda.
- The Rig Veda mentions the defeat of Sambara by Divodasa, who belonged to the Bharata clan.
- Possibly the dasyus in the Rig Veda represent the original inhabitants of the country, and an Aryan chief who overpowered them was called Trasadvasyu.
- The Aryan chief was soft towards the dasas, but strongly hostile to the dasyus. The term dasyuhatya, slaughter of the dasyus, is repeatedly mentioned in the Rig Veda.
- Some of the chief tribes of the period were Yadu, Turvasu, Druhyu, Anu Puru, Kuru, Panchala, Bharata and Tritsu. Among the inter-tribal conflicts the most important was the 'Battle of the Ten Kings.'

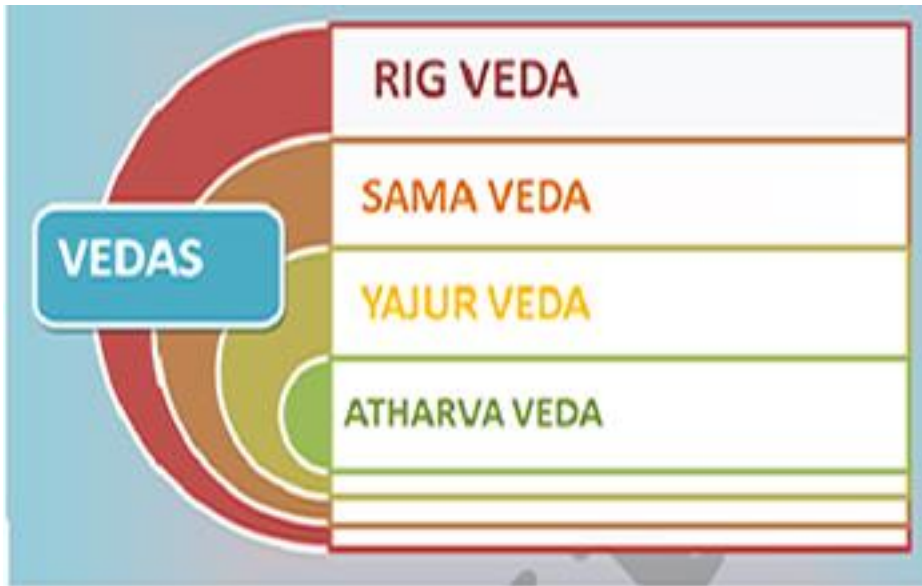
Sanskrit

Detached vowels	अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ए ऐ ओ औ ऋ ॠ	a aa i ee u oo ae aae o au ri Lri
Vowel marks	ा ि िी ु ू ै ौ ॠ ॡ	aa i ee u oo ri ae aae o au r ^ r accent
Numbers	० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Letters	क ख ग घ ङ च छ ज झ ञ	k kh g gh n ch chh j jh n
	ट ठ ड ढ ण त थ द ध न	t th d dh n t' th the thhe n
	प फ ब भ म य र ल ळ	p f b bh m y r l ll
	व श ष स ह श्र ष्ट वृ त्र ज्ञ ॐ	v sh shh s h shr ththh tt t'r gy om
	झ ण्य झ रु ह क्ष त्र ज ड ढ	jh n thhy hm ru hy ksh t'r z ad' ad'h
Half letters	क् ख् ग् घ् च् छ् ज् झ् ञ् त् थ् द् ध् न् ण् प् फ् भ् म्	k kh g gh ch chh j jh n t' th the n n p f bh m
	य् ल् व् श् स् ह् क्ष् ङ् ष्	y l v sh s h ksh gy b shh
	ऋ ॠ रू ॠ ॠ ॡ ॡ	Ri Roo ngk ngg thethe thethe thev

- Written language used by the Aryans

The Vedic Period

- Most of what we know about the early Aryan period comes from the Vedas
- Vedas
 - Sacred writings, Epic poems, hymns, magic spells
 - Passed on by oral tradition
 - Provide details about Aryan history and society



Rig veda

- Collection of hymns
- Oldest of all vedas
- Associated of 1017 hymns or **Suktas**
- Compiled in 10 'mandalas' & 8 'Akhtaks'.
- Also contains the famous **Gayatri Mantra**
- II, III, IV, V, VI & VII are oldest mandalas
- I, VIII, IX, X are latest mandalas.
- The Tenth "Mandalas" or chapter which has the "**Purushasukta**" hymn, was probably added later.
- Mandala IX is completely devoted to 'Soma'.
- Mandala II to VII were created by Grita Samada, Vishwamitra, Vamadeva, Atri, Bharadwaj, Vashistha,
- VIII Kanwa and Angira, IX Soma

Sama veda

- Rhythmic compilation of hymns for Rigveda
- "Book for Chants" contains 1,549 hymns, meant to be sung at the 'soma' sacrifice by a special class of Brahmanas called Udgatris.
- But the *Samaveda* has very little original value.
- Has only 75 fundamental hymns
 - Karnataka - Jaiminga
 - Gujarat - Kanthun
 - Maharashtra - Ranayaniya
- Sung by Udgatri

Yajur veda

- Book of sacrificial prayers
- Rituals of yajnas
- Is sung of priest "**Adhvaryu**"
- Its mantras tell us how the sacrifices were to be performed and what part the "**Adhvaryus**"- the Brahmanas who performed the manual work in the arrangement of sacrifice were to play at the time of sacrifice.
- Has been compiled in "fourth path"
- Has been divided into, Krishna(black) Yajurveda & Shukla(white) Yajurveda
- Prose text

Atharva veda

- Mantras for magic spells
- Populate ritualistic system & superstitions
- Associated with "Saunkiya" and "Paiplad" community
- Collection of 711/731/760 hymns
- Has been divided in 20 "Kandas"
- 18th, 19th & 20th 'Kandas' are later works
- Provides freedom from evils spirits.
- Oldest text on Indian Medicine.

The vast literature of the Aryans is divided into two parts - **Sruti** and **Smriti**

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1. **Sruti Literature**: The word Veda has been derived from the Sanskrit word **Ved**, which means 'spiritual knowledge'. The Vedas are four in number - **Rig Veda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda**. The Rig Veda contains a reference only to the first three Vedas, which suggests that the fourth **Veda** was composed at some later date.

- The Vedic literature is usually divided into three periods:-
- The Mantra period when the Samhitas were composed
- Brahman period when the Brahmanas, Upanishads and Aranyakas were composed
- the Sutra period.
- These three periods succeeded or overlap each other.

Brahmanas

- **Brahmanas** are massive prose text which contain speculation of the meaning of the hymns, give precepts for their application, relate stories of their origin in connection with sacrificial rites and explain the secret meaning of the later.
- Vedas and their Brahmanas 1. Rigveda Aitereya and Kaushitaki 2. Samaveda Tandya and Jaiminiya 3. Yajurveda Tattiriya and Satpatha 4. Atharvaveda Gopatha

Aranyakas

- The **Aranyakas** are the concluding parts of the Brahamanas. It does not lay much stress on rites, rituals and sacrifices, but merely contain the philosophy and mysticism. They deal with the problems of soul, origin and elements of universe and the creation of universe.
- Aranyaka Literarily, it means 'Jungle'
- Provides description of Moral Science and Philosophy
- Provides details of hermits and saints who lived in Jungles
- Give stress on meditation
- Protests the system of 'Yajnas'

Upanishadas

- It would be appropriate to describe Upanishadas as mystic writings. There are 108 Upanishads in all, the most prominent of them being *Ish*, *Prasana*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Chhandogaya*, *Kathoupanishad*, *Ishopanishad*, *Brehadaranyaka*, etc.
- Literary meaning is '**Satra**' (to sit near masters feet) in which Guru offers band of knowledge to their disciples
- Is a combination of Tatva-mimansa and philosophy
- They are also called "**Vedanta**"
- Primitive upanishada are "**Brahadaranyaka**" and "**Chandogya**"
- Later Upnishada like "Katha" and "Swetaswatar" have been written in poetic forms.
- Brahma is the summary of philosophy, which is the only a 'truth' in the world.
- Knowledge awards salvation says Upanishadas
- Oldest possibility Narsinghpurvatapani
- Latest possibility Allopanishada in Akbar's reign

Smriti Literature

- Smriti is traditional knowledge and designates almost the entire body of post-Vedic classical Sanskrit literature. Smriti literature generally includes the following overlapping subjects:-
- **The Vedangas:** They refer to certain branches of post-Vedic studies regarded as auxiliary to the Vedas. The Vedangas are conventionally divided into six heading namely:-
 - (i) **Kalpa** or the ritual canon, including the **dharma shastras** or legal codes,
 - (ii) **Jyotisha** or astronomy,
 - (iii) **Siksha** or phonetics,
 - (iv) **Chhanda** or metre
 - (v) **Nirukta** or etymology
 - (vi) **Vyakarana** (Grammar)
- The **Shad-Darsana:** Six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, namely Nyaya, 'Vaisesikha', Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta.
- **Itihasa:** Legendary or semi-legendary works, specifically the Ramayana and Mahabharata and often extended to the Puranas.

Puranas: Being a fairly late description of ancient legends, they are heavily coloured with the superstitions. The Puranas represent the most corrupt form of Hinduism. They are 18 in number

● The Eighteen Puranas

- 1 Brahma Purana
- 2 Vishnu Purana
- 3 Shiva Purana
- 4 Padma Purana
- 5 Shrimad Bhagwat Purana
- 6 Agni Purana
- 7 Narad Purana
- 8 Markandey Purana
- 9 Bhavishya Purana
- 10 Ling Purana
- 11 Varah Purana
- 12 Vaman Purana
- 13 Brahm Vaivertya Purana
- 14 Shanda Purana
- 15 Surya Purana
- 16 Matsya Purana
- 17 Garuda Purana
- 18 Brahmmand Purana

- **Upaveda:** Also known as the auxiliary Vedas, they deal with medicine, architecture, erotics, archery and various arts and crafts. These were partly derived from original Vedic texts and were traditionally associated with one or other of the Vedas.
- **Tantras:** Tantras are the writings of Shakta or Shaivite sects and also of certain antinomian Buddhist scholars
- **Agamas:** They are scriptures of sectarian Hindus like Vaishnavites, Shaivites and Shaktas.
- **Upangas:** They are a generic name for any collection of treatises although traditionally confined to the philosophical systems of 'Nyaya' and 'Mimansa' - the 'Dharma Sutras' the 'Puranas' and the 'Tantras'

- The administrative machinery of the Aryans in the Rig Vedic period worked with the tribal chief in the centre. He was called **rajan**. Although his post was hereditary, we have also some traces of election by the tribal assembly called the samiti. The king was called the protector of his tribe. He protected its cattle, fought its wars and offered prayers to gods on its behalf.
- Several tribal assemblies, such as *sabha*, *samiti*, *vidatha*, and *gana* mentioned in the *Rig Veda* exercised deliberative, military and religious functions. Even women attended the *sabha* and *vidatha* in Rig Vedic times. But from the political point of view important were the **sabha** and **samiti**
- In the day-to-day administration, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The most important functionary seems to have been the **purohita**. The two priests who played a major part in the time of **Rig Veda** were Vasishtha and Visvamitra. The next important functionary seems to be the senani. Princes received from the people voluntary offering called *bali*.
- There were cases of theft and burglary, and especially we hear of the theft of cows. Spies were employed to keep an eye on such unsocial activities. The officer who enjoyed authority over the pasture ground was called **vrajapati**. He led to the heads of the families called **Kulapas**. or the heads of the fighting hordes called **gramanis** to battle. The king did not maintain any regular or standing army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups called *vrata*, *gana*, *grama*, *sardha*.

Social and Economic life

- **Tribal Organizatoin**: Kinship was the basis of social structure. People gave their primary loyalty to the tribe, which was called *jana*. Another important term which stands for the tribe in the Rig Veda is *vis*. Probably the *vis* was divided into *grama* or smaller tribal units meant for fighting. When the gramas clashed with one another, it caused *samgrama* or war. The term for family (*kula*) is mentioned rarely in the Rig Veda. It seems that family in early Vedic Phase was indicated by term *griha*. Differentiation in family relationship leading to the setting up of seperate households had not proceeded far, and the family was a very large joint unit. It was obviously a patriarchal family headed by the father. Since it was a patriarchal society, the birth was desired again and again.

- **Marriage and Status of Women**: The institution of marriage was established, although symbols of primitive practices survived, We also notice the practice of levirate and widow remarriage in the Rig Veda. The status of women was equal to men and they received Upanayana and education, studied Vedas and some of them even rose to the rank of seers composing Vedic hymns. Monogamy was established, though polygamy and polyandry were also known.

- **Varna System**: Varna was the term used for colour, and it seems that the Aryans were fair and the indigenous inhabitants dark in complexion. The dasas and dasyus, who were conquered by the Aryans, were treated as slaves and sudras. Gradually, the tribal society was divided into three groups-warriors, priests and the people. The fourth division called the Shudras appeared towards the end of the Rig Veda period. In the age of Rig Veda, divisions based on occupations had started. But this division was not very sharp.

Occupation

- Their earliest life seems to have been mainly pastoral, agriculture being a secondary occupation. The Aryans did not lead a settled life. Although they used several animals, the horse played the most significant role in their life. The Rig Vedic people possessed better knowledge of agriculture. Ploughshare is mentioned in the earliest part of the Rig Veda though some consider it an interpolation. The term for war in the Rig Veda is **gavisthi** or 'search for cows'. The Rig Veda mentions such artisans as the carpenter, the chariot-maker, the weaver, the leather worker, the potter, etc. This indicates that they practiced all these crafts. The term, *ayas* used for copper or bronze shows that metal working was known.
- Metals Known to Rig Vedic People
- [Gold](#) - Hiranya
- Iron - Shyama
- Copper - Ayas

- **Diet**: The Indo-Aryans, while sharing the ancient Iranian [reverence](#) for the cow, felt no scruple about sacrificing both bulls and cows at weddings or on other important occasions. The persons who took part in the sacrifice ate the flesh of the victim, whether bull, cow, or horse. But meat was eaten only as an exception. Milk was an important article of food, and was supplemented by cakes of barley or wheat (*yava*), vegetables and fruit.

- **Strong Drinks**: The people freely indulged in two kinds of intoxicating liquor, called *soma* and *sura*. Sura probably was a kind of beer. Soma juice was considered to be particularly acceptable to the Gods, and was offered with elaborate ceremonial. The Sama Veda provides the chants appropriate for the ceremonies.

- **Amusements**: Amusements included dancing, music, chariot-racing, and dicing. Gambling with dice is mentioned so frequently in both the Rig Veda and the later documents that the prevalence of the practice is beyond doubt.

Rig Vedic Gods

- The early Vedic religion was naturalistic. Evidently, there were neither temples nor idols. The mode of prayer was recitation of mantras. Sacrifice was offered for *Praja* (children), *Pasu* (cattle) and *Dhana* (wealth) and not for spiritual upliftment or misery.

Early Vedic Religion

- Believed in one Supreme God
- Did not believe in idol worship
- Worshipped the forces of nature as the manifestation of one Supreme God
- Vedic Gods have been classified into 3 categories - Terrestrial, Atmospheric and Celestial
- Indra, Agni, Varuna, Surya, Rudra, Yama, Soma, Marut, Dyaus, Vayu and Prajanaya. Prithvi, Saraswati, Usha, aditi were female deities. They were not given the same position as male Gods.
- People did not worship for spiritual reasons but for the welfare of *Praja & Pashu*
- Recitation of prayers, chanting of Vedic hymns and sacrifices or yajnas were an important part of the worship.

Rig Vedic Gods

- **Indra** He was the most important divinity. He played the role of a warlord, leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons. 250 hymns are devoted to him in the Rig Veda. He was associated with thunder and storm and is addressed by various names: *Ratheshtha, Jitendra Somapa, Purandra, Varitrahan and Maghayam*
- **Agni** He was the second important divinity. He was intermediary between Gods and men. 200 hymns of the Rig Veda are devoted to him.
- **Varuna** He was the upholder of Rita or cosmic order or natural order. He personified water.
- **Soma** He was considered to be the God of plants. An intoxicant drink was also called soma.
- **Yama** He was the guardian of the world of dead.
- **Surya** Similar to that of the Greek God Helios

Cont...

- **Savitri** The famous Gayatri mantra is addressed to Savitri
- **Pusan** Lord of jungle path, main function was that of guarding of roads, herdsmen and cattle. **Vishnu** A relatively minor God at that time.
- **Vayu** Wind God
- **Dyaus** Father of Heaven
- **Aditi** Goddess of Eternity
- **Maruts** Storm Spirits
- **Gandharvas** Divine Musicians
- **Ashvins** Healers of diseases and experts in surgical art
- **Ribhus** Gnomes
- **Apsaras** Mistresses of Gods
- **Rudra** An archer of God, whose anger brought disease
- **Vishvadeva** Intermediate Deities
- **Aranyani** Goddess of Forest
- **Usha** Goddess of Dawn
- **Prithvi** Goddess of Earth

Political Organisation

- : In later Vedic times, the *vidatha* completely disappeared. The *sabha* and *samiti* continued to hold the ground, but their character changed. Women were no longer permitted to sit in the *sabha*, and it was now dominated by nobles and Brahmanas. The formation of wider kingdoms made the king more powerful. Tribal authority tended to become territorial. The term *rashtra*, which indicates territory, first appears in this period. The King performed the rajasuya sacrifice, which was supposed to confer supreme power to him. He performed the asvamedha, which meant unquestioned control over an area in which the royal house ran uninterrupted. He also performed the *vajapeya* or the chariot race, in which the royal chariot was made to win the race against his kinsmen. During this period collection of taxes and tributes, the king officer called *sangrihitri*.

Even in later Vedic times the king did not possess a standing army. Tribal units were mustered in times of war, and, according to one ritual for success in war, the king had to eat along with his people from the same plate.

Regions and Kings

- Eastern King Samrat
- Western King Suvrat
- Northern King Virat
- Southern King Bhoja
- King of middle country Raja

Imp Ratnins/Officials in Later Vedic Period

- Purohita Chief Priest, in also sometimes referred to as *Rashtragopa*
Senani Supreme Commander of army Vrajapati Officer-in-Charge of
pasture land Jivagribha Police Officer Spasas/Dutas Spies who also
sometimes worked as messengers Gramani Head of the village
Kulapati Head of the family Madhyamasi Mediator on disputes
Bhagadugha Revenue collector Sangrahitri Treasurer Mahishi Chief
Queen Suta Charioteer and court minstrel Govikartana Keeper of
games and forests Palagala Messenger Kshatri Chamberlain
Akshavapa Accountant Sthapati Chief Justice Takshan Carpenter

Kingdoms in the Later Vedic Age

- **Kingdom Location** Gandhar Rawalpindi and Peshawar districts of Western Punjab Kekaya On the bank of River Beas, east of Gandhar kingdom Uttar Madra Kashmir Eastern Madra Near Kangra Southern Madra Near Amritsar Kushinagar Northern region of modern Uttar Pradesh Panchal Bareilly, Badayun and Farrukhabad districts of modern Uttar Pradesh Kashi Modern Varanasi Koshal Faizabad region of today's Uttar Pradesh

Occupation

- The Aryans now lived a sedentary life, domesticated animal and cultivated on a greater scale than earlier sugar-cane. Cattle still constituted the principal form of movable property. Elephants were tamed. However, the idea of private possession of land gradually began to crystallize. Wheat was also cultivated during this period along with barley. Rice is mentioned in sources but was not an important crop at this time. Beans and Sesame and pulses such as Moong, Urad etc. were also known. New arts, artists and craftsmen also emerged i.e. smelters, ironsmiths, carpenters, weavers, leather workers, jewellers, dyers and potters. Trade was also boosted.

Pottery

- The later Vedic Aryans used four types of pottery- Black and Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware, Painted Grey Ware(PGW), and Red Ware. The black and red earthen pots were used around 600 BC by the people of Koshala. The Aryans knew copper or bronze and Iron. The introduced the PGW in northern India. It consisted of bowls and dishes, which were used either for rituals or for eating or both. These were mostly found to the upper Gangetic basin.

Currency

- A gold piece of specific weight called *Satamana* is mentioned in *Sathapatha-Brahmana*. *Nishka* was the popular currency. *Suvarna* and *Krishnala* were two other classes of coins of circulation. Barter system will continued in spite of the presence of metallic coins. Money-lending was a lucrative trade and the interest on loan was moderately charged. The usurer is mentioned as *Kusidin*.

Social Organisation

- The later Vedic society came to be divided into four varnas called the *Brahmanas*, *rajanyas* or *kshatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *shudras*, each varna was assigned with its duty. Brahmanas conducted rituals and sacrifices for their clients and for themselves, and also officiated at the festivals associated with agricultural operations. They prayed for the success of their patron in war, and in return the king pledged not to do any harm to them. Sometimes, the brahmanas came into conflict with the rajanyas, who represented the order of the warrior-nobles, for position of supremacy. Towards the end of the Vedic period, they began to engage in [trade](#). All the three higher varnas shared one common feature, they were known as *Dvijas* (twice born), i.e., they were entitled to *upanayana* or investiture with the sacred thread according to the Vedic mantras. The fourth varna was deprived of the sacred thread ceremony, and with it began the imposition of disabilities on the shudras. Outside the caste-system, there stood two important bodies of men, namely, Vratyas and Nishadas.

Cont...

- According to the *Aitareya Brahmana*, in relation to the prince, the brahmana is described as a seeker of livelihood and an acceptor of gifts but removable at will. A vaisya is called tribute-paying, meant for being beaten, and to be oppressed at will. The worst position is reserved for the *shudra*. He is called the servant of another. Certain section of artisans such as *rathakara* or chariot-maker enjoyed a higher status, and were entitled to the sacred thread ceremony. The term *Nagara* appears for the first time showing joint beginnings of town life. Women were generally given a lower position. Although some women theologians took part in philosophic discussions and some queens participated in coronation rituals, ordinarily women were thought to be inferior and subordinate to men.

Types of Marriages in the Later Vedic Age

- Brahma Marriage of a duly dowered girl to a man of the same varna with Vedic rites and rituals Daiva Father gives the daughter to the sacrificial priests as part of fee or dakshina. Arsa A token bride-price of a cow and a bull is given. Prajapati Marriage without dowry and bride-price. Gandharva Marriage by the consent of two parties, often clandestine. A special form of it was *swayamvara* or self choice. Asura Marriage by purchase. Paisacha It is seduction of a girl while asleep, mentally deranged or drunk, hence it can hardly be called a marriage. Rakshasa Marriage by Capture

Marriage

- Eight types of marriage were prevalent in the later Vedic age. Of these, four (Brahman, Daiva, Arsa and Prajapati) were generally approved and were permissible to Brahmans. These were religious marriages and were indissoluble.
- *Anuloma Marriage*: Marriage of a man below his varna was called Anuloma. It was sanctioned by the sacred texts.
- *Pratiloma Marriage*: Pratiloma marriage was the marriage of a girl or women to one lower than her own varna. It was not sanctioned by the sacred texts.

- **Gotra System**: The institution of *gotra* appeared in later Vedic times. Literally, it means the cow-pen or the place where cattle belonging to the whole clan are kept. The *gotra* has been regarded as a mechanism for widening the socio-political ties, as new relationships were forged between hitherto unrelated people. People began to practise *gotra* exogamy. No marriage could take place between persons belonging to the same *gotra* or having the same ancestor.

- **Ashrama System**: Ashramas or four stages of life were not well established in early Vedic times. In the post-Vedic texts, we hear of four ashramas: that of *brahmachari* or student, *grihastha* or householder, *vanaprastha* or partial retirement and *sanyasa* or complete retirement from the world. But only three are mentioned in the later Vedic texts. The last or the fourth stage had not been well-established in Later Vedic times. 4th Ashrama only mentioned in Jabala Upanishad.

- **Food and Drinks**: The staple diet was milk and *ghee*, vegetables, fruit and barely. Wheat was rarely eaten. On ceremonial occasions at a religious feast or the arrival of a guest, a more elaborate meal usually including the flesh of ox, goat, sheep and birds were taken after being washed with *sura*. Fish and other river animals were also relished upon. The guests were never served vegetarian foods, or at least one non-vegetarian food was compulsory.
- **Dress**: Clothes were simple. Two piece clothes were normally worn: *uttariya* or the upper garment and *antariya* or the lower garment. There was no difference between the clothes of male and female. Ornaments were used by both the sexes and bangles were worn by privileged few, Shoes were used. Use of oil, comb, mirror razors, hair ointment and a few cosmetics was known.

- **Amusements**: Music, both vocal and instrumental, was the major source of amusements. Playing of veena, drum flute, harp and cymbals were more common, also were dance. Chariot-racing and gambling were other sources of amusement.
- **Education**: It was for a privileged few. Only Brahamanas and Kshatriyas were allowed to get education. Even women education was discouraged and the study of Vedic literature were forbidden to women in spite of the fact that a few gifted women scholars were present at the time and female teachers were also there. The subject taught were *veda, itihasa, grammer, mathematics etihcs, dialectics, astronomy, military science, fine arts, music* and medical science.s

Religion in Later Vedic Period

- The two outstanding Rig Vedic gods, Indra and Agni, lost their former importance. On the other hand Prajapati, the creator, came to occupy the supreme position in later Vedic pantheon. Rudra, the god of animals, became important in later Vedic times and Vishnu came to be conceived as the preserver and protector of the people. In addition, some symbolic objects began to be worshipped, and we notice signs of idolatry. Pushan, who was supposed to look after cattle, came to be regarded as the god to the *sudras*. Important female deities during the Later Vedic Age were: Usha (goddess of Dawn), Aditi (Mother of Gods), Prithvi (Earth Goddess), Aryani (Forest Goddess) and Saraswati (River deity). The mode of worship changed considerably. Prayers continued to be recited, but they ceased to be the dominant mode of placating the gods. Sacrifices became far more important, and they assumed both public and domestic character. The guest were known as the *goghna* or one who was fed on cattle. The priests who officiated at sacrifices were regarded generously and given *dakshinas* or gifts.

- Chief Priests The Chief priests who were engaged in performing the sacrifices were:- **Hotri**: The invoker, he recited hymns from Rig Veda
- **Adhvaryu**: The executor, he recited hymns from Yajur Veda.
- **Udgatri**: The singer, he recited hymns from Sama Veda
- The Chief Priests received voluntary offering from the people called *Bali*

Important Vedic Rituals

- **Rajasuya:** The King's influence was strengthened by rituals. He performed this sacrifice, which was supposed to confer supreme power on him.
- **Asvamedha:** A King performed the *Asvamedha*, which meant unquestioned control over the area in which the royal horse ran uninterrupted. The ceremony lasted for three days at the end of which horse sacrifice was performed.
- **Vajapeya:** A king performed the *Vajpeya* or the chariot race, in which the royal chariot was made to win the race against his kinsmen. The ritual lasted for seventeen days and was believed not only to restore the strength of the middle-aged king but also to elevate him from the position to *raja* of that of *samrat*
- **Garbhadhana:** A ceremony which is performed to promote conception in women
- **Pumsayam:** This ritual is performed to procure a male child
- **Semontonayam:** It is a ritual performed to ensure the safety of the child in the womb.
- **Jatkarma:** It is a birth ceremony performed before the cutting of the umbilical cord.
- **Culakarma:** It is a ritual, also known as tonsure, performed for boys in their third year.
- **Upanayana:** It is an initiation ceremony to confer **dvija**(twice born) status of boys of the higher varnas in their eighth year.

Epic Period

- Some historians regard the Later Vedic Period as the Period of Epics.
- The *Mahabharata* and
- The *Ramayana*

Ramayana

- It is said to have been composed by the sage, Valmiki. The incident related in it precedes the *Mahabharata* by about a hundred and fifty years. The story of Ramayana is of indigenous origin and had existed in ballad form in Prakrit, in more than one version. It was rewritten in Sanskrit and augmented with many 'Shlokas'. The epic was given a Brahmanical character which was not visible in the original work. It is also known as *Adi Kavya*. Evidence places the oldest part of the Ramayana to before 350 BC. The reference in the epic to the mingled hords of Yavanas and Shakas suggests that it received accretions in the Graeco-Scythian period and may have acquired its final shape by about AD 250.

Mahabharata

- The Mahabharata is the bulkiest epic consisting of 100,000 verses and is divided into 18 paravas (books). This book is usually assigned to Rishi Ved Vyas, but scholars have expressed doubts if such a great work could have been accomplished by one single person. The story itself occupies only about one-fourth of the poem. It is a tale about conflict between Aryans-Kaurava and Pandava. The rest is episodal comprising cosmology, theogony, state craft, the science of war, ethics, legendary history, mythology, fairy tales and several digressional and philosophical interludes, of which the best known is the *Bhagavad Gita*