



VEDIC AND LATER VEDIC PERIODS (c.1500 BCE - 600 BCE)

I. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

▪ Literary Sources:

▪ Vedas:

- **Rigveda** (oldest, c.1500-1000 BCE) – main source of Early Vedic period
- **Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda** – compiled during Later Vedic period
- **Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads** – religious and philosophical commentaries
- **Vedangas, Sutras** – auxiliary texts on grammar, rituals, astronomy

▪ Archaeological Sources:

- Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture – associated with Later Vedic period
- Iron tools and weapons (Krishna & Ganga basins)



II. EARLY VEDIC PERIOD (c.1500 - 1000 BCE)

1. GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT

- Aryans settled in **Sapta Sindhu** region (Punjab, NW India)
- Rivers: Indus, Saraswati, and its tributaries

2. POLITY

- **Tribal polity** - *Rajan* (king) elected or hereditary
- No standing army or bureaucracy
- Tribal assemblies:
 - **Sabha** - council of elders
 - **Samiti** - general assembly, could elect/dismiss kings
- Officials: *Purohita* (priest), *Senani* (military), *Gramani* (village head)

3. SOCIETY

- **Patriarchal** and **patrilineal**



- **Varna system** was fluid: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra (emerging concept)
- **Women had higher status:** could attend Sabha/Samiti, educated (e.g., Lopamudra, Ghosha)
- Marriage: monogamy preferred, swayamvara & widow remarriage existed

4. ECONOMY

- **Pastoral economy** – cattle main wealth
- Limited agriculture (barley and wheat)
- No coins; **cow** used as a unit of exchange
- Trade limited, no large cities
- Use of **horse-drawn chariots**

5. RELIGION

- **Nature worship** – Agni (fire), Indra (war), Varuna (cosmic order), Soma (plant deity)
- No temples or idol worship
- Rituals and yajnas emphasized



- Belief in life after death, no elaborate concepts of karma or moksha yet

6. LITERATURE

- **Rigveda**: 1028 hymns, oldest Indo-European text
 - Written in Vedic Sanskrit
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III. LATER VEDIC PERIOD (c.1000 - 600 BCE)

1. GEOGRAPHICAL EXPANSION

- Movement towards **Eastern India**: Doab, Kosala, Videha, Kashi
- Settlements along **Ganga-Yamuna doab**

2. POLITY

- **Monarchical polity** became stronger
- Kingship became hereditary
- Decline of Sabha and Samiti



- Emergence of **large kingdoms** (e.g., Kuru, Panchala)
- Officials: emergence of complex administration – Purohita, Senani, Bhagadugha (tax collector), Sangrahita (treasurer)

3. SOCIETY

- **Varnashrama dharma** (4 varnas, 4 ashramas) system rigidly enforced
- Brahmanical dominance increased
- **Women's status declined:**
 - Excluded from education and rituals
 - Child marriage began
- **Gotra system** emerged
- **Caste-based restrictions** on food, marriage, profession

4. ECONOMY

- **Agriculture became dominant** – rice (vrihi), wheat, barley
- Iron tools (krishna-ayas) used for clearing forests and farming
- **Private land ownership**
- **Taxes** (bali) collected



- **Trade increased**, use of barter; coins (nishka, shatamana) mentioned
- Domestication of animals, crafts and guilds developed

5. RELIGION

- Yajnas (elaborate rituals) dominated by **Brahmins**
- Priestly class gained power
- New philosophical ideas emerged:
 - **Upanishads**: focus on inner knowledge, Brahman, Atman, karma, moksha
- Seeds of **Bhakti** and **Sramanic traditions** (Buddhism, Jainism) sown

6. LITERATURE

- **Samhitas** (other three Vedas)
- **Brahmanas** – ritualistic texts
- **Aranyakas** – forest books, transition to philosophy
- **Upanishads** – philosophical texts, base of Vedanta
- **Sutras** – law, rituals, grammar (e.g., Dharmasutras)



IV. COMPARATIVE CHART: EARLY VS LATER VEDIC

Feature	Early Vedic (Rig Vedic)	Later Vedic
Area	Punjab, NW India (Sapta Sindhu)	Ganga-Yamuna Doab, East India
Polity	Tribal, assemblies active	Monarchical, hereditary kingship
Economy	Pastoral	Agricultural, use of iron tools
Society	Flexible Varna system	Rigid caste hierarchy
Women	High status, educated	Decline in status
Religion	Nature worship, simple yajnas	Ritualistic, priest-dominated
Literature	Rigveda	Other Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF VEDIC AGE

- Foundation of **Indian society and culture**
- Evolution of **language, religion, philosophy**
- **Transition from tribal to territorial kingdoms**
- **Basis for future religious developments** – Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism