

## Lesson4

### THE VEDIC AGE (1500BC–600BC)

#### Summary

What is Veda? The word Veda is derived from the root vid which means ‘to know’. The word Veda means the sacred knowledge contained in the texts known as Vedic text. Careful studies have shown that the Vedic texts reflect two stages of development in terms of literature as well as social and cultural evolution. The Rigveda which is the oldest Vedic text reflects one stage of social and cultural development whereas the other three Vedas reflect another stage. The first stage is known as the Rigvedic period, or Early Vedic period and the later stage is known as the Later Vedic period. You will read about the Vedic Age (1500BC-600BC) in this lesson.

#### The Vedic Texts

The *veda* means the sacred knowledge contained in the texts known as Vedic text

The four Vedas with their *Brahmanas* are also known as *shruti* or ‘hearing’, that which was directly heard by the sages

Two categories of texts are included in the corpus of the Vedic literature. These are *Mantra* and *Brahmana*

The *Aranyakas* and the *Upanishads* are mainly appendices to the *Brahmanas*

The *Mantra* category forms the core of the Vedic texts and has four separate collections

These are also known as the *Vedanta* (end of the *Veda*) and contain philosophical discussions

These are the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*

#### Migration of Aryans-

- The authors of the Vedic hymns were the Aryans.
- In the 19th century, Aryans were considered a race.
- Now it is thought of as a linguistic group of people who spoke Indo-European language from which later emerged Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek etc.
- Originally the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the Steppes stretching from southern Russia to Central Asia.
- From here, a group of them migrated to northwest India and came to be called Indo-Aryans or just Aryans.

## Geographical horizon of the Vedic Aryans



•The early Vedic Aryans lived in the area known as sapta-sindhu meaning area of seven rivers.



•This area largely covers the north-western part of South Asia up to river Yamuna. The seven rivers included Sindhu, Vitasta (Jhelum), Asikni (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Vipash (Beas), Shutudri (Sutlej) and the Sarasvati.

	<b>Early Vedic</b>	<b>Later Vedic</b>
<b>Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The early Vedic Aryans were <b>pastoralists</b>.</li> <li>• Cattle rearing was their main occupation.</li> <li>• Hunting, carpentry, tanning, weaving, chariot-making, metals meltery etc. were some other activities.</li> <li>• A few references show that they had knowledge of agriculture.</li> <li>• The products of these activities were exchanged through barter.</li> <li>• Cows were the most favored medium of exchange.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture became the mainstay of the Vedic people.</li> <li>• Many rituals were introduced to initiate the process of agriculture.</li> <li>• The god Indra acquires a new epithet 'Lord of the Plough'.</li> <li>• Beginning of the use of iron around 1000 BC.</li> <li>• Use of iron tools.</li> </ul>
<b>Society</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family was the basic unit of the Rigvedic society.</li> <li>• The <b>Jana</b> was the largest social unit.</li> <li>• Patriarchal in nature.</li> <li>• Monogamy was the usual norm of marriage.</li> <li>• Polygamy was also there.</li> <li>• Society was a simple and largely an <b>egalitarian</b> society.</li> <li>• There was no caste division.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The family remains the basic unit of the Vedic society.</li> <li>• Joint family with three or four generations living together.</li> <li>• Rise and growth of social differentiation in the form of varna system.</li> <li>• Important institution that began to take shape was ashrama or different stages of life.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ashram</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brahmacharya (student life)</li> <li>• Grihastha (householder)</li> <li>• Vanaprastha (hermitage)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupation was not based on birth.</li> <li>• Varna or colour was the basis of initial differentiation between the Vedic and non-Vedic people.</li> <li>• Rigveda mentions arya varna and dasa varna.</li> <li>• The women in society enjoyed respectable position.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanyasi.</li> </ul>
<b>Religion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Rigvedic gods were generally personifications of different aspects of natural forces such as rains, storm, sun etc.</li> <li>• The attributes of these gods also reflect the tribal and patriarchal nature of the society.</li> <li>• Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Dyaus, Pushana, Yama, Soma, etc. are all male gods.</li> <li>• Goddess such as Ushas, Sarasvati, Prithvi etc. which occupy secondary positions in the pantheon.</li> <li>• Vedic phase people did not construct temples, nor did they worship any statue.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An important feature was the increase in the frequency and number of the yajna which generally ended with the sacrifices of a large number of animals.</li> <li>• People began to oppose these sacrifices during the later Vedic period itself.</li> </ul>
<b>Polity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief social unit of the Aryans was known as jana.</li> <li>• The chief of this unit was the political leader called rajan.</li> <li>• The post of the chief was not hereditary.</li> <li>• Sabha and Samiti were the most important assemblies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The chiefship had become hereditary.</li> <li>• Chiefs became more powerful.</li> <li>• Popular assemblies gradually disappeared</li> <li>• A rudimentary army too emerged as an important element of the political structure during this period.</li> <li>• Rise of sixteen Mahajanpadas in the northern India</li> </ul>

**Evaluate yourself-**

- Q. Mention the prominent markers of the Aryan culture.
- Q. Differentiate between early Vedic and later Vedic society.
- Q. Explain the function of Sabha and Samiti.