

EARLY VEDIC AGE (1500-1000 BC)**The Aryans**

During the second millennium BC, Indo-European-speaking semi-nomads, called Aryans, migrated in different phases. These pastoralists spoke what can be identified as an early form of Sanskrit. The language had close similarities to other Indo-European languages like Avestan in Iran and ancient Greek and Latin. The word 'Aryan' meant pure and they consciously attempted to retain their tribal identity and roots. They tried to maintain a social distance from other inhabitants. The Aryans belonged to the region near the Caspian Sea in central Asia. Perhaps, they entered India through the Khyber Pass around 1500_{BC} in more multiple phases looking for new pastures. Zend Avesta, the holy book of Iran suggests that there is a possibility of entry of some Aryans to India through Iran. The word 'Aryan' has been derived from 'ar' which meant 'foreigners' or 'strangers' during the Vedic times. We find the first mention of the term Aryans in the **Bagharkai Peace Treaty** concluded in 1350_{BC} between the kingdoms of Mitanni and Hittites, to which the Aryan gods Varuna, Indra, Mitra and Nasatya were the witnesses.

REGION

The Aryans initially settled down in the region of Punjab and migrated towards the east and spread all over the Gangetic plain later on. The region occupied by the Aryans, extending from Afghanistan to Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh, was termed as Sapta Saindhav which means the Land of the Seven Rivers.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Aryans introduced a new language; a new set of anthropomorphic gods; a new social system based on the religion and philosophy of varnashrama dharma.

Concepts of Vedic Philosophy

- (a) Atma (Soul) also called jeevalma or living soul. It is a part of Paramatma or God. It is invisible and leaves the body after death.
- (b) Karma (Deeds) refers to the good and bad actions a human commits during his life span.
- (c) Pap and Punya (Demerits and Merits) Pap is the end result of bad deeds and Punya is the fruit of good ones. A human is sure to achieve happiness and satisfaction if he earns more punyas and is sorrowful if he commits more pap during his life span.
- (d) Punarjanma (Re-birth) The soul never dies. It is reborn after each life span comes to an end.

The Purushartas of Vedic Philosophy ★

- (a) Dharma (the Piety) actions of goodness.
- (b) Artha (Means of living) earning for food, clothes, shelter as per the dharma.
- (c) Kaama (Progeny) continuation of mankind through regeneration by family system.
- (d) Moksha (Deliverance) liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth and death

It is very difficult to offer the precise translation of the concept of varnashramadharma; however, it is based on three fundamental concepts:

Varna: It originally referred to the colour of skin, but later it was taken to mean social class.

Ashrama: It refers to the stages of life such as youth, family life, detachment from the material world and renunciation.

Dharma: It means duty, righteousness or sacred cosmic law.

The inherent idea of the varnashramadharma was that present happiness and future salvations depend on one's ethical or moral conduct. Both society and individuals must follow different but righteous courses appropriate for everyone.

POLITICAL

The fundamental unit of the Vedic State was family (kula). Vedic people lived in villages (grams). Each village was headed by a chief or a gramani. They elected panchayat to manage the affairs of the village. A cluster of villages was called the vis (district or clan) and a group of vis was termed as Jana (tribe). Each tribe was managed by a hereditary chieftain or the king (Rajan), who was responsible for the protection and welfare of the persons living in his tribe. The chieftain managed only his Jana (tribe) and did not have any specified territory. The Rajan had two assemblies—sabha, involving elders and samiti, the national assembly. He was not an autocrat. His restricted by the 'will of people' that they expressed in the sabha or samiti. Vidatha was a tribal assembly. The king was obliged to lead the tribe in battle and protect them. People rendered him obedience and voluntary gifts or bail in return. An Aryan raja or king was primarily a military leader who took a share of booty after successful cattle raids or battles. The king, however avoided conflicts with the powerful and authoritative, avoided conflicts with the priests, whose knowledge and austere religious life surpassed others the community.

Rigveda	No. of Sabhas	No. Of Samitis	No. of Vida-thas
Rigveda	08	09	122
Later Vedic Texts	17	13	22

SOCIAL The Aryans were semi-nomadic pastoralists, following a joint family system, living in groups and speaking Sanskrit. The head of the family was the father and he was called the grihapati. Women were respected individuals in the society. They dressed simply. They pursued outdoor activities such as dancing, wrestling, boxing, etc. They generally build their houses of wood. The fundamental unit of the Aryan society was family. A cluster of families made up a village, and many villages constituted a tribal unit. Child marriage was not very common. Parents' involvement in the selection of a spouse, and dowry and bride-price were very common. They wished for

the birth of a son as he could tend the cattle, bring laurels in battle, perform sacrifices, inherit property, and continue the family name. Monogamy was practised, although polygamy was not uncommon. Ritual suicide of widows was expected at a

More About the Aryan

The most accepted view is that the original home of the Aryans was in the great steppe land which stretches from Poland to central Asia. In the second millennium BC, they started moving from their original home and migrated westwards, southwards and eastwards. The branch that went to Europe was the ancestors of the Greeks, Romans, Celts and Teutons. Another branch went to Anatolia. The great empire of Hittites grew up from the mixture of these people with the original inhabitants. One branch of Aryans remained in their original home. They were the ancestors of the Slavonic people. Those who moved southwards came into conflict with the west Asian civilizations. The Kassites, who conquered Babylon, belonged to this stock. In the excavation at Boghaz-kot in Asia Minor, which dates approximately 1400_{BC}, inscriptions were found containing the names of deities like Indra, Varuna and Nasalya. These gods are all mentioned in Rig Veda. To the same period as the Boghazkoi, belong the clay tablets with cuneiform script discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt where references are found of princes of Mitanni in north-west Mesopotamia bearing Indo-Aryan names. In the course of the journey to the east or south, a group of Aryans had settled in Iran and developed a civilization of their own. Later, one branch crossed the Hindukush and entered India through Afghanistan. They occupied Punjab after defeating the original inhabitants and ultimately conquered the greater part of northern India.

Husband's death. This might have led to the practice known as sari later on.

ECONOMIC

The economy of the Aryans was largely rural based. They had the knowledge of agriculture and it was their

main occupation. The Rig Veda mentions artisans such as potters, weavers, carpenters, leather workers, chariot makers etc. They also knew metal work. Cattle's breeding was another source of livelihood. Cattle were the chief measure of wealth and a wealthy man who owned many heads of cattle was known as gomati. In the Rig Veda, gavyuti is used as a measure of distance and Godhuli as a measure of time.

The use of fire and stone tools is also mentioned in the Rig Veda. Permanent settlements and agriculture led to trade and other occupational differentiation. As lands along the Ganga (Ganges) were cleared, the river became a trade route, the numerous settlements on its banks acting as markets. Trade was initially restricted to local areas, and barter was an essential component of trade. Cattle were the unit of value in large-scale transactions, which further limited the geographical reach of the trader. Custom was law and kings and chief priests were the arbiters, perhaps advised by certain elders of the community.

RELIGIOUS

Being lovers of nature, Aryans worshipped the sun, water, fire, etc. Lighting the sacred fire that is, Yajna or havan was an essential part of their religion. They are said to have been the originators of the Hindu religion.

RELIGIOUS BOOKS

Though archaeology does not provide proof of the identity of the Aryans; there is no dispute over the issue of their evolution and spread across the Indo-Gangetic Plain. A body of sacred texts: the four Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Puranas is the source of modern knowledge of the Aryan culture. The sanctity accorded to these texts and their preservation over several centuries—through oral tradition—has made them part of the living Hindu tradition. These texts guide in piecing together Aryan beliefs and actions. The Aryans followed their tribal chieftain or raja. They remained engaged in wars with each other or with other ethnic groups. They gradually became settled agriculturalists having consolidated territories and distinguished occupations. They were skilful in using horse-drawn chariots. They also had the

knowledge of astronomy and mathematics. All this gave them a military and technological advantage that forced others to accept their customs and religious beliefs. By around 1000 BC, Aryan culture had spread over most of the northern parts of India, and in the process embraced much from other cultures that existed before them.

THE VEDAS

These are the most sacred books of curly Aryans. As per many historians, the Vedas were composed between 1500 BC to 400 BC. These give vivid descriptions of the life of the Aryans and are supposed to contain a divine mission. They were passed on orally from generation to generation; they were rendered in script during the Gupta period. There were four Vedas and the Brahmanas concerned with these Vedas are:

- ❖ Rig Veda (Brahmani Aitaraya and Kaushitika)—Book of Hymns
- ❖ Sama Veda (Brahmana Jaminya and Tandyamaha)—Book of Melodies and Chants
- ❖ Yajur Veda (Brahmana Satpatha)—Book of Sacrifices
- ❖ Atharva Veda (Brahmana Gopatha)—Book of Magical and Technical Formulae.

Among these, the Rig Veda is claimed to be the oldest book in the world. It contains 1,028 hymns (1,017 + 11 Valakhilyas divided into 10 Mandalas) and 8 Astikas written by a family of seers, such as Atri, Agnirases, Bhardwaj, Gritsamad, Kanva, Viswamitra, Vamdeva and Vasistha in the form of prayers to gods like Vayu, Agni, Indra, Varuna, etc. The Sama Veda deals with music. The Yajur Veda deals with sacrifices, rituals and formulae. The Atharva Veda deals with medicine. It also contains descriptions about goldsmithy, blacksmithy, organised agriculture, etc. These books reveal the beliefs, customs and culture of the Aryans. Vedic texts are sruti (heard)—directly revealed to the authors by the gods and not smriti (remembered). Rishis who were the authors of the Vedas are Madhuchandra Vaisvamitra, Gurutsamida, Atri, Bhardwaj, Kanva, Kashyapa, Rushikas, Vamadeva, Yami Vaivasvatai, Sasvathi and others.

The entire Vedic literature is called Sruti and apart from the four Vedas, it includes Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.

The Vedic doctrines were composed between 600 _{BC} und _{AD} 100. These are also called the six philosophies of Vedic Hinduism.

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