

LATER VEDIC PERIOD (1000-600 BC)

From the original settlements of Aryans in the Punjab region, they gradually began to penetrate eastwards, clearing dense forests, and establishing tribal settlements along the Ganga and Yamuna (the whole of eastern Uttar Pradesh) plains between 1500 and 800 BC. By approximately 500 BC, most of northern India was inhabited and had been brought under cultivation, facilitated by the increasing knowledge of the use of iron implements, including ox-drawn ploughs, and spurred by the growing population that provided voluntary and forced labour. As riverine and inland trade nourished, many towns along the Ganga became centres of trade, culture and luxurious living. Increasing population and surplus production provided the bases for the emergence of independent states with fluid territorial boundaries over which disputes frequently arose.

Region

The history of the later Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts that were compiled during the post-Rig Vedic era. These texts reveal that Aryans expanded from Punjab to the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. On excavating these regions, archaeologists have found the remains of few cities of this period out of which Hastinapur, Ahichatra and Kausambi form prominent examples.

Guild (Shreni) in Ancient India ★

Guild (Shreni) in ancient India was an association of traders, merchants and artisans. Normally, a separate Shreni existed for a particular group of persons engaged in the same activity. However, persons, engaged in life destroying activities like hunting and fishing did not form any shreni. One of the widely referred shreni was of ivory carvers of Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh. This Shreni is accredited with sponsoring and financially, supporting the construction of the southern gateway of the stupa at Sanchi which is presently a World Heritage Site. Some scholars have opined that as the

each economic activity and craft was having its specific traditions and trade secrets, Shrenis were formed to protect the same and the fathers used to pass on the same to their sons, and so it continued from one generation to the next generation.

Characteristics**POLITICAL**

This period was more developed than the early Vedic period: the tiny, early tribal settlements were replaced by strong kingdoms. The rudimentary administrative system headed by tribal chieftains was transformed by a number of regional republics or hereditary monarchies that devised ways to appropriate revenue and to conscript labour for expanding the areas of settlement and agriculture farther east and south, beyond the Narmada River. These emergent states collected revenue through officials and built new cities and highways. Powers of the king, who was called Samrat, increased phenomenally; the importance of assemblies declined. A regular army was maintained for the protection of the kingdom. The formation of wider kingdoms made the king more powerful. The Rajanyas, who based their power on their role as a protector of their tribes in the Vedic period now came to be known as Kshatriyas. There are also references to the priest (Purohita), commander-in-chief (Senapati), charioteer (Suta), treasurer (Sangrahita) and tax collector (Bhagdugha). The other important members of the royal court were the crowned queen (Mahisi), the chamberlain (Ksatlar) and the game companion (Aksuvapa). By 600 BC, 16 such territorial powers—Including the Magadha, Kosala, Kuru and Candhara—stretched across the North Indian plains from modern day Afghanistan to Bangladesh. The right of a king to his throne, no matter how it was gained, was usually legitimised through elaborate sacrificial rituals and genealogies concocted by the priests who ascribed divine or superhuman origins to the kings. The famous Altarcya Brahmana classification of ruler ship was Samrat in East, Svarat in West. Viral in North, Bhoja in South and Raja in central India.

SOCIAL

Growth of big cities like Ayodhya, Indraprastha and Mathura were seen. Women enjoyed freedom and respect but, in comparison to the early Vedic period, their overall status deteriorated. A daughter came to be regarded as a source of misery. Women could not attend sabha, they were excluded from inheritance and along with Sudras could not own property. The necessity of a trained class of people who could perform accurately the elaborate and complicated ceremony of the yajnas led to the growth of a distinct body of learned men who came to be known as Brahmanas, and gradually with an increase in numbers, formed a distinct class in society, highly respected on account of their association with religious duties. There was an advance in the knowledge of metals, in addition to gold and 'ayas' (copper or iron), there is mention of tin, lead, silver, etc.

ECONOMIC

In addition to agriculture and cattle rearing, trade and industry also gradually began. References to corporations (ganas) and older men (sresthins) indicate the organization of merchants into guilds. Niska, Satamana and Krisanala were used as convenient units of value. Niska was probably a lump of gold of a definite weight while Krisanala weighed one ratti.

RELIGIOUS

This was also called as the Brahminical age, which came very close to modern Hinduism. There was a remarkable development in the domain of religious and philosophy. The simple ceremony of worship gave place to elaborate sacrifices, a complicated procedure. Some old deities like Varuna and Prithivi passed into insignificance, while new ones like Rudra and Vishnu rose to eminence. In the later period, Samhita and Brahmana sacrifices dominated the scene.

The doctrines of Karma, Maya, transmigration, identity of individual soul with the universal soul, which were the foundations of the different systems elaborated by later writers and which find their first expression in the Upanishads.

Varna System

The original three-tiered society—Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warrior) and Vaishya (commoner)—eventually expanded to four to absorb the subjugated people—Shudra (servant)—or (even five, when outcasts were included). Thus, the Hindu society was divided into four major Varnas, initially based on occupation (during the Rig Vedic period), which later became hereditary (during Later Vedic period), namely : (i), Brahmins (priestly class), (ii) Kshatriyas (military class), (iii) Vaishyas (business or trading class) and (iv) Shudras (labour class).

The Four-Fold Varna Division ★

The fourfold Varna division is mentioned in Purusha Sukta, and is a part of the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda. It says that Brahmanas emanated from the mouth of the primeval man the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet.

The Epic Age

It was the epic age in which the Aryan tribes established themselves all over North India. The land between the Himalayas and Narmada River was divided into 16 independent states. Information about the socio-religious life of the people is derived from the two great epics of this period—the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The victory of good over evil is epitomised in the epic Ramayana (The Travels of Rama or Ram in the preferred modern form) while another epic, Mahabharata (Great Battle of the Descendants of Bharata), spells out the concept of dharma and duty. The Mahabharata records the feud between the Aryan cousins the Pandavas and the Kauravas, which culminated in an epic battle in which both gods and mortals from many lands allegedly, fought to death. The Ramayana recounts the kidnapping of Sita, Rama's wife, by Ravana, the demonic king of Lanka (Sri Lanka), her rescue by her husband (aided by Hanuman and the Vanar Sena) and Rama's coronation leading to a period of prosperity and justice.



The Ramayana

Originally, the Ramayana included 12,000 verses. With the passage of time, the number of verses was raised to 24,000. Just like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana also grew by accumulation as the time passed through many years. Its development started nearly by 300 BC and continued for the around next 500 years.



The Mahabharata

It is believed that the composition of the Mahabharata began as early as 500 BC. Its development went on for the next 900 years. Finally, it reached its present form nearly by 400 AD, under the rule of the Gupta rulers. Originally, it was of Kshatriyan origin; however, over the years it became specifically a Brahman work. During its growth, it included the Bhagavad Gita and many other works entirely in itself. Finally, it attained a length of 107,000 octameter couplets. Its entire length is over seven times the length of the Iliad and the Odyssey combined together. It grew in an accumulative manner and is clear from the fact that its authors name has been given as Vyasa, meaning 'arranger' in Sanskrit. Initially, the epic Mahabharata was a description of a feud between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, two prominent Aryan tribes. Both the tribes claimed to be the descendents of the mighty Bharata. Therefore, they were known as the Maha Bharata or Great Bharata tribes. It gave the epic its name. It is from Bharata that the modern name of India has been derived. Perhaps the Mahabharata was the earliest Indian endeavour to write history. Its significance as a historical source is still to be critically examined despite the fact that scholars agree that the basis of

the epic story is based on facts. The epic is useful for rebuilding the social and cultural history of the era. Originally, the epic had had 8,800 verses and it was named as JayaSamhita. These verses increased to 24 000 and were renamed as Bharata. Its final compilation raised the number of verses to 100,000 and it came to be known as the Mahabharata or the Satasahasri Samhita.

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