

THE VEDIC PERIOD

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, Bhardvaj, Kanva, Kashypa, 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 and AD 100. These are also called the six philosophies of Vedic Hinduism.

SIX SYSTEMS OF THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The Six systems of the Indian Philosophy are Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa. Each of these systems differs in one way or the other in terms of its concepts, phenomena, laws and dogmas. Each system has its own founder as well. Each system of Indian philosophy is called a Darshana. Thus, the Sanskrit word 'Shad-Darshna' refers to the six systems of philosophy'.

Nyaya

Gautama is known as the founder of the Nyaya system of philosophy. Nyaya belongs to the category of Astika

Darshanas. Astika Darshanas realise the significance of verbal testimony or the authority of the Vedas, Gautama, who is also called Akshapada is thought to have lived during the mid-fifth century BC. He was the first philosopher to stress the importance of the valid means of knowledge and hence, the Nyaya system of philosophy is said to have laid the firm foundation to the development of the Science of Hindu logic. Gautama's Nyaya System of Philosophy is called by names such as Nyaya Sastra and Tarka Sastra.

Vaisheshika

The Vaisheshika System of Indian Philosophy was founded by Kanada or uluka. That is why it is

called Aulukya Darshana. Vaisheshika System followed the Nyaya System very closely and hence, experts in the study of philosophy often combine the two schools as Nyaya-Vaisheshika.

The Vaisheshika System recognises seven 'Padarthas' or categories which are: substance, quality, action generality, particularity, relation of inherence and non-existence.

Samkhya

Sage Kapila founded the Samkhya System of Philosophy. The Samkhya system laid the firm foundation for the Advaita Vedanta later on. The dogmas put forth by Kapila were further expounded by his disciples Asuri and Panchashikha. The Samkhya system accepts only three Pramanas or the valid means of acquiring knowledge. They accept Pratyaksha or perception, Anumana or inference and Shabda or verbal testimony. The Samkhya Sutras compiled by Kapila were commented on later by Ishvara Krishna of the fifth century AD.

Yoga

The Yoga System of Philosophy was founded by Patanjali. He authored the Yoga sutras or the aphorisms of Yoga. Yoga aims at the final state of spiritual absorption through eight component parts together called Ashtanga Yoga. According to Patanjali, the eight limbs of yoga are Yama, Niyama

Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. All the eight are jointly called Raja Yoga. The Yoga System of Philosophy accepts three fundamental realities namely Ishwara, Purusha and Prakriti or the Primordial matter. Patanjali names some obstacles to the path of Yoga. They are called 'Antarayas' and they include Vyadhi (illness), Styana (apathy), Samsaya (doubt), Pramada (inadvertence), Alasya (laziness), Avirati (incontinence), Bhrantidarshana (wrong understanding), Alabdha Bhumikatva (nonattainment of mental plane) and Anavasthitatva (instability).

Purva Mimamsa

The Mimamsa Darshana believes firmly in the performance of rituals and supports the view that the

body is perishable but the soul survives even after the death of the body and it reserves the right to enjoy the fruits of the rituals in heaven. The school firmly believes in the preservation of the effect or the fruits of the rituals by a remarkable power. This philosophical system of Purva Mimamsa was founded by Jaimini. He accepts two types of knowledge namely Pratyaksha (immediate knowledge) and Paroksha (mediate knowledge). Mimamsa does not speak about the existence of God. Performance of daily duties or the Nitya Karmas is the ultimate goal of man.

Uttara Mimamsa

The Philosophical System of Uttara Mimamsa does not have a specific founder because it is a

conglomeration of three different schools of thought namely Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita. The Philosophical system of Uttara Mimamsa is otherwise called Vedanta. All the three schools of Vedanta had different teachers. Adi Sankara was the head of the Advaita system, Ramanuja was the architect of the Visishtadvaita system and Madhva was the head of the Dvaita system of Vedanta Philosophy. It is important to note that all the three teachers accepted Vedas as a valid means of knowledge.

The Upanishads At the end of the Vedic period, we noticed that there was a strong reaction against the

TABLES 1.1 The Six Schools of Philosophy of Hinduism

Doctrines	Priest/Teacher	Important information
1. Nyayasytra (Logical Doctrine)	Gautama Maharishi	Hindu doctrines based on logic
2. Vaisheshika (Monic Doctrine)	Kanad and Ramanuja	This is the basis of Vishishtadvaita
3. Yogasutra (Yoga Doctrine)	Maharshi Pathanjali	A harmonic doctrine that deals with harmony between the mind and the body through Yoga
4. Sankyasutra (Numerical Doctrine)	Kapilamaharshi and Madhvacharya	Dwaita Siddhanta which deals with numerals
5. Uttara Mimamsa	Badarayana	Major Upanishads the work taken up by the rishis of that time
6. Purva Mimamsa	Jaimini Maharshi	About worship via Yajna (rituals) and also became the basis of Karmamarga

Domination of priests, cults and rituals, particularly in the regions of the Panchalas and the Videha. In this background, in about 800 to 500 BC the Upanishads were compiled. The Upanishads were philosophical texts that criticised the rituals and stressed on the value of right belief and knowledge. They also criticised the ceremonies and sacrifices. The Upanishads are the major source of Indian philosophy. There are nearly 108 Upanishads. Of these, 10 have been greatly appreciated at a global level because they deal with the philosophy and theology of the Aryans. These ten Upanishads are Ishopanishad, Kenopanishad, Kathopanishad, Parashanopanishad, Mandukopanishad, Koushikopanishad, Thaittiriyanopanishad, Aitareyanopanishad, Chandogyanopanishad and Brihadaranyakopanishad. These are in form of

commentaries attached to the Aranyakas and associated mainly with philosophy and religion.

The Brahmanas They presents the socio-political life of the Aryans. They also explain their religion, particularly the sacrifices. They also involve ritualistic formulae for the respective Vedas and the priests.

The Aranyakas These are the forest books on mysticism and philosophy and are the last parts of the Brahmanas. They are associated with the metaphysics and symbolism of sacrifice. They do not emphasise on sacrifice but on meditation. They oppose sacrifices and a number of the early rituals. They stress on tire moral virtues. They form a bridge between the way of works (karma) and the way of knowledge (gyan).

The Smriti the Smritis are the additional. Treatise or the supplementaries of the Vedas. Smritis refer to the literature that has been carried on from one generation to the other. It is a derivative word and considered less authoritative than 'Shrutis', which is considered authorless and literally means that 'which is heard'. Manusmriti is the most important of all the smritis. It deals with the laws of inheritance, duties of kings and their subjects. Manusmriti or 'Laws of Manu', served as a foundational work on Hindu law for the ancient Indian society.

The Puranas There are 18 Puranas totally. The Bhagawat Parana and Vishnu Purana are the most important.

A Note on Vedas and Puranas

It is well known that ancient India did not produce any historical work, but even the Vedas and Puranas contain some data on political history, while they have great value for reconstructing the social, religious and cultural history of India. They have preserved not only the names of the kings and tribes, but also of important events as well, for example, the Dasarajna, the battle, of 10 kings.

The Pariplavaakhyanas (cyclic tales), which were recited by the lute players during the Asvamedha sacrifice, included the Vamsanu-charila or the dynastic history. The Pariplavaakhyanas also contained all the elements of parica laksanas of the puranas, and it is possible that the puranas (in the Vedas this term usually occurs with Itihaasa or history) continued the tradition of the Vedic Age, and gave the dynastic lists a permanent form by reducing them to writing. The dynastic list is not free from mistakes, but they make useful framework, the practice of compiling dynastic lists persisted for a long time particularly in Nepal and Western India.

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 crimckto be regarded as a source of misery. Women could not attend sabha, they were excluded from inheritance und 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. Ther 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. Niksa 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 the 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 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), Kshalriya (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 tour major Vanias, 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 Sukla, 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 the 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 author's 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 descendants 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 Jaya Samhita. 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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