

Vedic period

The **Vedic period** or **Vedic age** (c. 1500 – c. 600 BCE) is the period in the history of the Indian subcontinent intervening between the end of the urban Indus Valley Civilization, and a second urbanisation which began in c. 600 BCE. It gets its name from the *Vedas*, which are liturgical texts containing details of life during this period that have been interpreted to be historical^[1] and constitute the primary sources for understanding the period.

The *Vedas* were composed and orally transmitted by speakers of an Old Indo-Aryan language who had migrated into the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent early in this period. The associated **Vedic culture** was tribal and pastoral until c. 1200 or 1100 BCE, and centred in the Punjab. It then spread eastward to the Ganges Plain, becoming more agricultural and settled. The Vedic period saw the emergence of a hierarchy of social classes and coalesce into Janapada (monarchical, state-level polities).^{[2][3]} Archaeological cultures identified with phases of Vedic material culture include the Ochre Coloured Pottery culture, the Gandhara Grave culture, the Black and red ware culture and the Painted Grey Ware culture.^[4]

The end of the Vedic period witnessed the rise of Mahajanapada (large, urbanised states) as well as shramana movements (including Jainism and Buddhism) which challenged the Vedic orthodoxy.^[5] Around the beginning of the Common Era, the Vedic tradition formed one of the main constituents of the so-called "Hindu synthesis".^[6]

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Early Vedic period



Geographical range	Indian subcontinent
Period	Iron Age
Dates	c. 1500 – c. 1100 BCE (uncertain)
Preceded by	Indus Valley Civilisation
Followed by	Late Vedic period, Kuru Kingdom, Panchala

Late Vedic period



Geographical range	Indian subcontinent
Period	Iron Age
Dates	c. 1100 – c. 500 BCE (uncertain)
Preceded by	Early Vedic culture
Followed by	Brihadrathas dynasty, Haryanka dynasty, Mahajanapadas

History

Origins

The commonly accepted period of earlier Vedic age is dated back to the second millennium BCE.^[7] After the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which ended c. 1900 BCE,^{[8][9]} groups of Indo-Aryan peoples migrated into north-western India and started to inhabit the northern Indus Valley.^[10] The Indo-Aryans were a branch of the Indo-Iranians, which—according to the most widespread hypothesis—have originated in the Andronovo culture^[11] in the Bactria-Margiana era, in present northern Afghanistan.^{[12][note 1]}



Archaeological cultures associated with Indo-Iranian migrations (after *EIEC*). The Andronovo, BMAC and Yaz cultures have often been associated with Indo-Iranian migrations. The GGC, Cemetery H, Copper Hoard and PGW cultures are candidates for cultures associated with Indo-Aryan movements.

Some writers and archaeologists have opposed the notion of a migration of Indo-Aryans into India.^[19] Edwin Bryant and Laurie Patton used the term "Indo-Aryan Controversy" for an oversight of the Indo-Aryan Migration theory, and some of its opponents.^[20] These ideas are outside the academic mainstream. Mallory and Adams note that two types of models "enjoy significant international currency" as to the Indo-European homeland, namely the Anatolian hypothesis, and a migration out of the Eurasian steppes.^[21] According to Upinder Singh, "The original homeland of the Indo-Europeans and Indo-Aryans is the subject of continuing debate among philologists, linguists, historians, archaeologists and others. The dominant view is that the Indo-Aryans came to the subcontinent as immigrants. Another view, advocated mainly by some Indian scholars, is that they were indigenous to the subcontinent."^[22]

The knowledge about the Aryans comes mostly from the *Rigveda-samhita*,^[23] i. e. the oldest layer of the *Vedas*, which was composed c. 1500–1200 BCE.^{[24][25][12]} They brought with them their distinctive religious traditions and practices.^[26] The Vedic beliefs and practices of the pre-classical era were closely related to the hypothesised Proto-Indo-European religion,^[27] and the Indo-Iranian religion.^[28] According to Anthony, the Old Indic religion probably emerged among Indo-European immigrants in the

contact zone between the Zeravshan River (present-day Uzbekistan) and (present-day) Iran.^[29] It was "a syncretic mixture of old Central Asian and new Indo-European elements",^[29] which borrowed "distinctive religious beliefs and practices"^[30] from the Bactria-Margiana Culture.^{[30][note 2]}

Early Vedic Period (c. 1500 – c. 1200 BCE)

The *Rigveda* contains accounts of conflicts between the Aryas and the Dasas and Dasyus. It describes Dasas and Dasyus as people who do not perform sacrifices (*akratu*) or obey the commandments of gods (*avrata*). Their speech is described as *mridhra* which could variously mean soft, uncouth, hostile, scornful or abusive. Other adjectives which describe their physical appearance are subject to many interpretations. However, some modern scholars such as Asko Parpola connect the Dasas and Dasyus to Iranian tribes Dahae and Dahyu and believe that Dasas and Dasyus were early Indo-Aryan immigrants who arrived into the subcontinent before the Vedic Aryans.^{[32][33]}

Accounts of military conflicts between the various tribes of Vedic Aryans are also described in the *Rigveda*. Most notable of such conflicts was the Battle of Ten Kings, which took place on the banks of the river Parushni (modern day Ravi).^[note 3] The battle was fought between the tribe Bharatas, led by their chief Sudas, against a confederation of ten tribes.^[36] The Bharatas lived around the upper regions of the river Saraswati, while the Purus, their western neighbours, lived along the lower regions of Saraswati. The other tribes dwelt north-west of the Bharatas in the region of Punjab.^[37] Division of the waters of Ravi could have been a reason for the

war.^[38] The confederation of tribes tried to inundate the Bharatas by opening the embankments of Ravi, yet Sudas emerged victorious in the Battle of Ten Kings.^[39] Purukutsa, the chief of the Purus, was killed in the battle and the Bharatas and the Purus merged into a new tribe, the Kuru, after the war^[37]

Later Vedic period (c. 1100 – c. 500 BCE)



Pottery of the Painted Grey Ware culture (c. 1000-600 BCE), associated with Vedic material culture

After the 12th century BCE, as the *Rigveda* had taken its final form, the Vedic society transitioned from semi-nomadic life to settled agriculture. Vedic culture extended into the western Ganges Plain.^[40] Possession of horses remained an important priority of Vedic leaders and a remnant of the nomadic lifestyle,^[41] resulting in trade routes beyond the Hindu Kush to

maintain this supply as horses needed for cavalry and sacrifice could not be bred in India.^[42] The Gangetic plains had remained out of bounds to the Vedic tribes

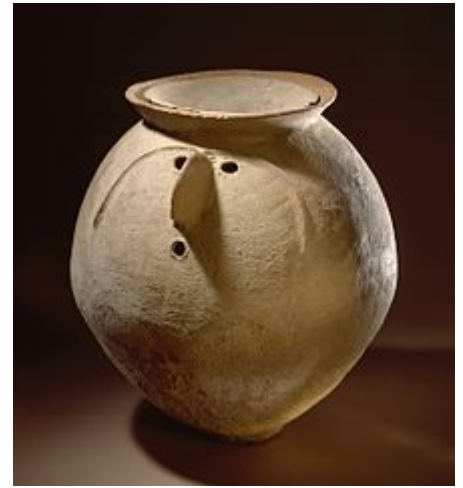
because of thick forest cover. After 1000 BCE, the use of iron axes and ploughs became widespread and the jungles could be cleared with ease. This enabled the Vedic Aryans to settle at the western Gangetic plains.^[43] Many of the old tribes coalesced to form larger political units.^[44]

The Vedic religion was further developed when the Indo-Aryans migrated into the Ganges Plain after c. 1100 BCE and became settled farmers,^{[45][46][47]} further syncretising with the native cultures of northern India.^[48] In this period the varna system emerged, state Kulke and Rothermund, which in this stage of Indian history were a "hierarchical order of estates which reflected a division of labor among various social classes". The Vedic period estates were four: Brahmin priests and warrior nobility stood on top, free peasants and traders were the third, and slaves, labourers and artisans, many belonging to the indigenous people, were the fourth..^{[49][50][51]} This was a period where agriculture, metal, and commodity production, as well as trade, greatly expanded,^[52] and the Vedic era texts including the early Upanishads and many Sutras important to later Hindu culture were completed!^[53]

The Kuru Kingdom, the earliest Vedic "state", was formed by a "super-tribe" which joined several tribes in a new unit. To govern this state, Vedic hymns were collected and transcribed, and new rituals were developed, which formed the now orthodox Shrauta rituals.^[54] Two key figures in this process of the development of the Kuru state were the king Parikshit and his successor Janamejaya, transforming this realm into the dominant political and cultural power of northern Iron Age India.^[45]

The most well-known of the new religious sacrifices that arose in this period were the Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice).^[55] This sacrifice involved setting a consecrated horse free to roam the kingdoms for a year. The horse was followed by a chosen band of warriors. The kingdoms and chiefdoms in which the horse wandered had to pay homage or prepare to battle the king to whom the horse belonged. This sacrifice put considerable pressure on inter-state relations in this era.^[55] This period saw also the beginning of the social stratification by the use of varna, the division of Vedic society in Kshatriya, Brahmins, Vaishya and Shudra.^[54]

The Kuru kingdom declined after its defeat by the non-Vedic Salva tribe, and the political centre of Vedic culture shifted east, into the Panchala kingdom on the Ganges.^[45] Later, the kingdom of Videha emerged as a political centre farther to the East, in what is today northern Bihar of India and south eastern Nepal, reaching its prominence under the king Janaka, whose court provided patronage for



Cremation urn of the Gandhara grave culture (c. 1200 BCE), associated with Vedic material culture



Modern replica of utensils and falcon shaped altar used for Agnicayana, an elaborate shrauta ritual originating from the Kuru Kingdom,^[45] around 1000 BCE.

Brahmin sages and philosophers such as Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka Aruni, and Gargi Vachaknavi.^[4]

Towards urbanisation

By the 6th century BCE, the political units consolidated into large kingdoms called Mahajanapadas. The process of urbanisation had begun in these kingdoms and commerce and travel, even over regions separated by large distances became easy.^[56] Anga, door step of modern-day West Bengal, a small kingdom to the east of Magadha, formed the eastern boundary of the Vedic culture.^[57] Yadavas expanded towards the south and settled in Mathura. To the south of their kingdom was Vatsa which was governed from its capital Kausambi. The Narmada River and parts of North Western Deccan formed the southern limits.^{[58][59]} The newly formed states struggled for supremacy and started displaying imperial ambitions.^[60]

The end of Vedic India is marked by linguistic, cultural and political changes. The grammar of Pāṇini marks a final apex in the codification of Sutra texts, and at the same time the beginning of Classical Sanskrit.^[61] The invasion of Darius I of the Indus valley in the early 6th century BCE marks the beginning of outside influence, continued in the kingdoms of the Indo-Greeks.^[62] Meanwhile, within India, the śramana movements (including Jainism and Buddhism) challenged the authority and orthodoxy of Vedic scriptures and ritual.^[5]

Culture

Society

Vedic society was relatively egalitarian in the sense that a distinct hierarchy of socio-economic classes or castes was absent.^{[63][64]} However, political hierarchy was determined by rank, where *rajan* stood at the top and *dasi* at the bottom.^[64] The words *Brahmana* and *Kshatriya* occur in various family books of the *Rigveda*, but they are not associated with the term varna. The words *Vaishya* and *Shudra* are absent. Verses of the *Rigveda*, such as 3.44-45, indicate the absence of strict social hierarchy and the existence of social mobility.^[32]

O, Indra, fond of *soma*, would you make me the protector of people, or would you make me a king, would you make me a sage who has drunk *soma*, would you impart to me endless wealth.

The Vedic household was patriarchal and patrilineal. The institution of marriage was important and different types of marriages—monogamy, polygyny and polyandry are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. Both women sages and female gods were known to Vedic Aryans. However, hymns attributable to female sages are few and female gods were not as important as male ones. Women could choose their husbands and could remarry if their husbands died or disappeared.^[64] While the wife enjoyed a respectable position, she was subordinate to her husband.^[65] People consumed milk, milk products, grains, fruits, and vegetables. Meat eating is mentioned, however, cows are labelled *aghnya* (not to be killed). Clothes of cotton, wool and animal skin were worn.^[64] *Soma* and *sura* were popular drinks in the Vedic society, of which *soma* was sanctified by religion. Flute (*vana*), lute (*vina*), harp, cymbals, and drums were the musical instruments played and a heptatonic scale was used.^[65] Dancing, dramas, chariot racing, and gambling were other popular pastimes.^[64]

The emergence of monarchical states in the later Vedic age, led to a distancing of the *rajan* from the people and the emergence of a varna hierarchy. The society was divided into four social groups—Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The later Vedic texts fixed social boundaries, roles, status and ritual purity for each of the groups. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* associates the Brahmana with purity of parentage, good conduct, glory, teaching or protecting people; Kshatriya with strength, fame, ruling, and warfare; Vaishya with material prosperity and production-related activities such as cattle rearing and agriculture; Shudras with the service of the higher *varnas*. The effects of Rajasuya sacrifice depended on the *varna* of the sacrificer. *Rajasuya* endowed Brahmana with lustre, Kshatriya with valour, Vaishya with procreative power and Shudra with stability. The hierarchy of the top three *varnas* is ambiguous in the later Vedic texts. *Panchavamsha Brahmana* and verse 13.8.3.11 of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* place Kshatriya over Brahmana and Vaishya, whereas, verse 1.1.4.12 places Brahmana and Vaishya over the Kshatriya and Shudra. The Purusha sukta

visualised the four *varnas* as hierarchical, but inter-related parts of an organic whole.^[66] Despite the increasing social stratification in the later Vedic times, hymns like *Rigveda* IX.112, suggest some amount of social mobility: "I am a reciter of hymns, my father a physician, and my mother grinds (corn) with stones. ~~W~~ desire to obtain wealth in various actions."^{[67][68]}

Household became an important unit in the later Vedic age. The variety of households of the Vedic era gave way to an idealised household which was headed by a *grihapati*. The relations between husband and wife, father and son were hierarchically organised and the women were relegated to subordinate and docile roles. Polygyny was more common than polyandry and texts like *Tattiriya Samhita* indicate taboos around menstruating women. Various professions women took to are mentioned in the later Vedic texts. Women tended to cattle, milked cows, carded wool; were weavers, dyers, and corn grinders. Women warriors such as *Vishphala*, who lost a leg in battle, are mentioned. Two female philosophers are mentioned in the Upanishads.^[69] Patrick Olivelle, in his translation of the Upanishads, writes that "the fact that these women are introduced without any attempt to justify or to explain how women could be engaged in theological matters suggests the relatively high social and religious position of at least women of some social strata during this period."^[70]

Political organisation

Early Vedic Aryans were organised into tribes rather than kingdoms. The chief of a tribe was called a *rajan*. The autonomy of the *rajan* was restricted by the tribal councils called *sabha* and *samiti*. The two bodies were, in part, responsible for the governance of the tribe. The *rajan* could not accede to the throne without their approval. The distinction between the two bodies is not clear. Arthur Llewellyn Basham, a noted historian and indologist, theorises that *sabha* was a meeting of great men in the tribe, whereas, *samiti* was a meeting of all free tribesmen. Some tribes had no hereditary chiefs and were directly governed by the tribal councils. *Rajan* had a rudimentary court which was attended by courtiers (*sabhasad*) and chiefs of septs (*gramani*). The main responsibility of the *rajan* was to protect the tribe. He was aided by several functionaries, including the *purohita* (chaplain), the *senani* (army chief), *dutas* (envoys) and *spash* (spies).^[71] *Purohita* performed ceremonies and spells for success in war and prosperity in peace.^[72]

In the later Vedic period, the tribes had consolidated into small kingdoms, which had a capital and a rudimentary administrative system.^[73] To aid in governing these new states, the kings and their Brahmin priests arranged Vedic hymns into collections and developed a new set of rituals (the now orthodox *shrouta* rituals) to strengthen the emerging social hierarchy.^[45] The *rajan* was seen as the custodian of social order and the protector of *rashtra* (polity). Hereditary kingship started emerging and competitions like chariot races, cattle raids, and games of dice, which previously decided who was worthy of becoming a king, became nominal. Rituals in this era exalted the status of the king over his people. He was occasionally referred to as *samrat* (supreme ruler). The *rajan's* increasing political power enabled him to gain greater control over the productive resources. The voluntary gift offering (*bali*) became compulsory tribute; however, there was no organised system of taxation. *Sabha* and *samiti* are still mentioned in later Vedic texts, though, with the increasing power of the king, their influence declined.^[74] By the end of the later Vedic age, different kinds of political systems such as monarchical states (*rajya*), oligarchical states (*gana* or *sangha*), and tribal principalities had emerged in India.^[74]

According to Michael Witzel's analysis of the Kuru Kingdom, it can be characterized as the earliest Vedic "state", during the Middle Vedic Period.^{[45][75]} However, Robert Bellah observes that it is difficult to "pin down" whether the Kurus were a true "state" or a complex chiefdom, as the Kuru kings notably never adopted royal titles higher than "rājan," which means "chief" rather than "king" in the Vedic context.^[76] The Middle Vedic Period is also characterized by a lack of cities; Bellah compares this to early state formation in ancient Hawai'i and "very early Egypt," which were "territorial states" rather than "city-states," and thus "it was the court, not the city, that provided the center, and the court was often peripatetic."^[77] Romila Thapar characterizes Vedic-era state

Vedic weaponry



Ancient Indian Antennae sword; Ancient Indian Ax Blade, 1500–500 BCE.



1000 BCE.

formation as being in a condition of "arrested development," because local chiefs were relatively autonomous, and because surplus wealth that could have been directed towards state-building was instead used for the increasingly grandiose rituals that also served to structure social relations.^[78] The period of the Upanishads, the final phase of the Vedic era, was approximately contemporaneous with a new wave of state formations, linked to the beginning of urbanization in the Ganges Valley: along with the growth of population and trade networks, these social and economic changes put pressure on older ways of life, setting the stage for the Upanishads and the subsequent sramana movements,^[79] and the end of the Vedic Period, which was followed by the Mahajanapada period.

According to George Erdosy, archaeological data for the period of period from 1000 to 600 BCE shows a two-tiered settlement pattern in the Ganges Valley, with some "modest central places," suggestive of the existence of simple chiefdoms, with the Kurukshetra District itself displaying a more complex (albeit not yet urbanized) three-tiered hierarchy.^[80] Subsequently (after 600 BCE) there are four tiers of site sizes, including large towns and fortified cities, consistent with an urbanized state-level society^[81]

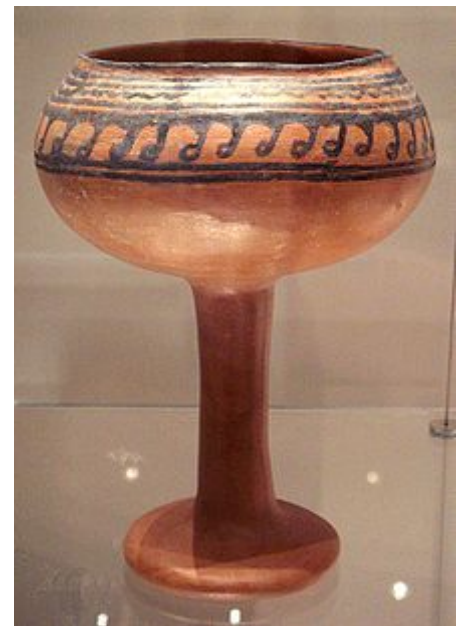
Economy

Economy in the Vedic period was sustained by a combination of pastoralism and agriculture.^[65] There are references, in the *Rigveda*, to the leveling of fields, seed processing, and storage of grains in large jars. War booty was also a major source of wealth.^[64] Economic exchanges were conducted by gift giving, particularly to kings (*bali*) and priests (*dana*), and barter using cattle as a unit of currency. While gold is mentioned in some hymns, there is no indication of the use of coins. Metallurgy is not mentioned in the *Rigveda*, but the word *ayas* and instruments made from it such as razors, bangles, axes are mentioned. One verse mentions purification of *ayas*. Some scholars believe that *ayas* refers to iron and the words *dham* and *karmara* refer to iron-welders.^[82] However, philological evidence indicates that *ayas* in the *Rigveda* refers only to copper and bronze, while iron or *śyāma ayas*, literally "black metal", first is mentioned in the post-Rigvedic *Atharvaveda*.^{[4][45]} and therefore the Early Vedic Period was a Bronze Age culture whereas the Late Vedic Period was an Iron Age culture.

The transition of Vedic society from semi-nomadic life to settled agriculture in the later Vedic age led to an increase in trade and competition for resources.^[83] Agriculture dominated the economic activity along the Ganges valley during this period.^[84] Agricultural operations grew in complexity and usage of iron implements (*krishna-ayas* or *shyama-ayas*, literally black metal or dark metal) increased. Crops of wheat, rice, and barley were cultivated. Surplus production helped to support the centralised kingdoms that were emerging at this time.^[45] New crafts and occupations such as carpentry, leather work, tanning, pottery, astrology, jewellery, dying, and winemaking arose.^[85] Apart from copper, bronze, and gold, later Vedic texts also mention tin, lead, and silver.^[86]

Panis in some hymns refers to merchants, in others to stingy people who hid their wealth and did not perform Vedic sacrifices. Some scholars suggest that Panis were semitic traders, but the evidence for this is slim.^[37] Professions of warriors, priests, cattle-rearers, farmers, hunters, barbers, vintners and crafts of chariot-making, cart-making, carpentry, metal working, tanning, making of bows, sewing, weaving, making mats of grass and reed are mentioned in the hymns of the *Rigveda*. Some of these might have needed full-time specialists.^[82] There are references to boats and oceans. Book X of the *Rigveda* refers to both eastern and western oceans. Individual property ownership did not exist and clans as a whole enjoyed rights over lands and herds. Enslavement (*dasa*, *dasi*) in the course of war or as a result of non-payment of debt is mentioned. However, slaves worked in households rather than production-related activities.^[64]

Religion



Ceramic goblet from Navdatoli, Malwa, 1300 BCE.

The Vedic forms of Hinduism are one of the precursors to modern Hinduism.^[87] Texts considered to date to the Vedic period are mainly the four Vedas, but the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and the older Upanishads as well as the oldest Shrautasutras are also considered to be Vedic. The Vedas record the liturgy connected with the rituals and sacrifices performed by the 16 or 17 Shrauta priests and the purohitas.

The rishis, the composers of the hymns of the Rigveda, were considered inspired poets and seers (in post-Vedic times understood as "hearers" of an eternally existing Veda, Śrauta means "what is heard").

The mode of worship was the performance of sacrifices (Yajna) which included the chanting of Rigvedic verses (see Vedic chant), singing of Samans and 'mumbling' of sacrificial mantras (Yajus). Yajna involved sacrifice and sublimation of the havana sāmagri (herbal preparations) in the fire accompanied by the chanting of the Vedic mantras. The sublime meaning of the word yajna is derived from the Sanskrit verb yaj, which has a three-fold meaning of worship of deities (devapujana), unity (saṁgatikaraṇa) and charity (dāna).^[88] An essential element was the sacrificial fire—the divine Agni—into which oblations were poured, as everything offered into the fire was believed to reach God. People prayed for abundance of rain, cattle, sons, long life and gaining 'heaven'.

Vedic people believed in the transmigration of the soul, and the peepul tree and cow were sanctified by the time of the Atharvaveda.^[89] Many of the concepts of Indian philosophy espoused later like Dharma, Karma etc. trace their root to the Vedas.^[90]

The main deities of the Vedic pantheon were Indra, Agni (the sacrificial fire), and Soma and some deities of social order such as Mitra-Varuna, Aryaman, Bhaga and Amsa, further nature deities such as Surya (the Sun), Vayu (the wind), and Prithivi (the earth). Goddesses included Ushas (the dawn), Prithvi, and Aditi (the mother of the Aditya gods or sometimes the cow). Rivers, especially Saraswati, were also considered goddesses. Deities were not viewed as all-powerful. The relationship between humans and the deity was one of transaction, with Agni (the sacrificial fire) taking the role of messenger between the two. Strong traces of a common Indo-Iranian religion remain visible, especially in the Soma cult and the fire worship, both of which are preserved in Zoroastrianism.

Ethics in the Vedas are based on the concepts of Satya and Rta. Satya is the principle of integration rooted in the Absolute.^[91] Whereas, Rta is the expression of Satya, which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it.^[92] Conformity with Rta would enable progress whereas its violation would lead to punishment.

Vedic religion evolved into the Hindu paths of Yoga and Vedanta, a religious path considering itself the 'essence' of the Vedas, interpreting the Vedic pantheon as a unitary view of the universe with 'God' (Brahman) seen as immanent and transcendent in the forms of Ishvara and Brahman. These post-Vedic systems of thought, along with later texts like the Upanishads, and epics, namely Gita of Mahabharat, have been fully preserved and form the basis of modern Hinduism. The ritualistic traditions of Vedic religion are preserved in the conservative Śrauta tradition.

Literature

The reconstruction of the history of Vedic India is based on text-internal details, but can be correlated to relevant archaeological details. Linguistically the Vedic texts could be classified in five chronological strata:^[4]

1. **Rigvedic text** The Rigveda is by far the most archaic of the Vedic texts preserved, and it retains many common Indo-Iranian elements, both in language and in content, that are not present in any other Vedic texts. Its time span likely corresponds to the Late Harappan culture, Gandhara Grave culture and Ochre Coloured Pottery culture
2. **Mantra language texts** This period includes both the mantra and prose language of the Atharvaveda (Paippalada and Shaunakiya), the Rigveda Khilani, the Samaveda Samhita (containing some 75 mantras not in the Rigveda), and the mantras of the Yajurveda. Many of these texts are largely derived from the Rigveda, but have undergone certain changes, both by linguistic change and by reinterpretation. Conspicuous changes include change of viśva "all" by sarva, and the spread of the kuru- verbal stem (for Rigvedic kṛno-). This is the time of the early Iron Age in north-western India, corresponding to the Black and Red Ware (BRW) and Painted Grey Ware (PGW) cultures, and the early Kuru Kingdom, dating from c. the 12th to 11th century BCE.



A steel engraving from the 1850s, which depicts the creative activities of Prajapati, a Vedic deity who presides over procreation and protection of life.

3. **Samhita prose texts** This period marks the beginning of the collection and codification of a Vedic canon. An important linguistic change is the complete loss of the injunctive. The Brahmana part ('commentary' on mantras and ritual) of the Black Yajurveda (MS, KS, TS) belongs to this period. Archaeologically the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture from c. 1000 or 900 BCE corresponds to the Kuru Kingdom and the subsequent eastward shift of the political centre from the Kurus to the Panchalas on the Ganges.
4. **Brahmana prose texts** The Brahmanas proper of the four Vedas belong to this period, as well as the Aranyakas, the oldest of the Upanishads (BAU, ChU, JUB) and the oldest Shrautasutras (BSS, VadhSS). In the east, Videha (N. Bihar and Nepal) is established as the third main political centre of the Vedic period.
5. **Sutra language texts** This is the last stratum of Vedic Sanskrit leading up to c. 500 BCE, comprising the bulk of the Śrauta and Grhya Sutas, and some Upanishads (e.g. KathU, MaitrU).



An early 19th-century manuscript of *Rigveda* (padapatha) in Devanagari. The Vedic accent is marked by underscores and vertical overscores in red.

See also

- History of India
- Historical Vedic religion
- Indus Valley Civilisation
- Vedanga
- Indigenous Aryans

Notes

1. The roots of this culture seem to go further back to the Sintashta culture, with funeral sacrifices which show close parallels to the sacrificial funeral rites of the Rigveda.^[13] Around 1800–1600 BCE, the Indo-Aryans are believed to have split off from the Iranians^[14] whereupon they were defeated and split into two groups by the Iranians,^[15] who dominated the Central Eurasian steppe zone^[16] and "chased them to the extremities of Central Eurasia".^[16] One of these Indo-Aryan groups would found the Mitanni kingdom in northern Syria (c. 1500–1300 BCE).^[12] The other group were the Vedic people, who were pursued by the Iranians "across Iran into India".^[17] For an overview of the current relevant research, see:
 - Michael Witzel (2001), "Autochthonous Aryans? The Evidence from Old Indian and Iranian Texts" (<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/EJVS-7-3.pdf>) in *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* (EJVS), vol. 7–3, pp. 1–93.
 - Shereen Ratnagar (2008), "The Aryan homeland debate in India", in PL. Kohl, M. Kozelsky and N. Ben-Yehuda (edd.), *Selective remembrances: archaeology in the construction, commemoration, and consecration of national pasts*, pp. 349–378.
 - Suraj Bhan (2002), "Aryanization of the Indus Civilization" in K. N. Panikkar, J. Byres and U. Patnaik (edd.), *The Making of History*, pp. 41–55.
 - [18]
2. At least 383 non-Indo-European words were borrowed from this culture, including the god Indra and the ritual drink Soma, which according to Anthony was "probably borrowed from the BMAC religion".^[31] "Many of the qualities of Indo-Iranian god of might/victory Verethraghna, were transferred to the adopted god Indra, who became the central deity of the developing Old Indic culture. Indra was the subject of 250 hymns, a quarter of the Rigveda. He was associated more than any other deity with Soma, a stimulant drug (perhaps derived from Ephedra) probably borrowed from the BMAC religion. His rise to prominence was a peculiar trait of the Old Indic speakers."
3. According to Erdosy this battle provided a prototype for the epic Mahabharata.^[34] Hiltebeitel calls this idea a "particularly baffling fancy."^[35]

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