

ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY

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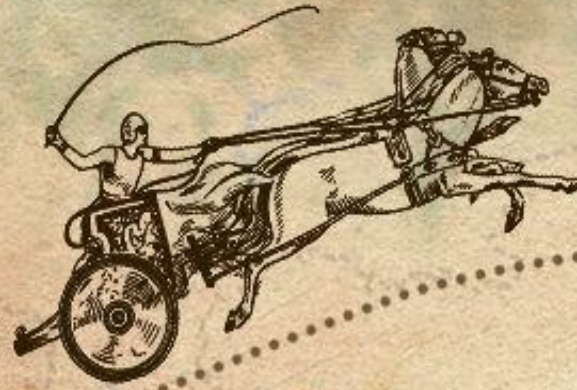
Vedic Period

Dr. Jitendra Kumar

Faculty of History
Ph.D (History) JNU
Former Asst. Prof. , DU



ARYAN DEBATE



British Indologist



Sir William Jones

Not only in language but also in its speakers

Similarities

b/w

Language

Greek, Latin and Sanskrit

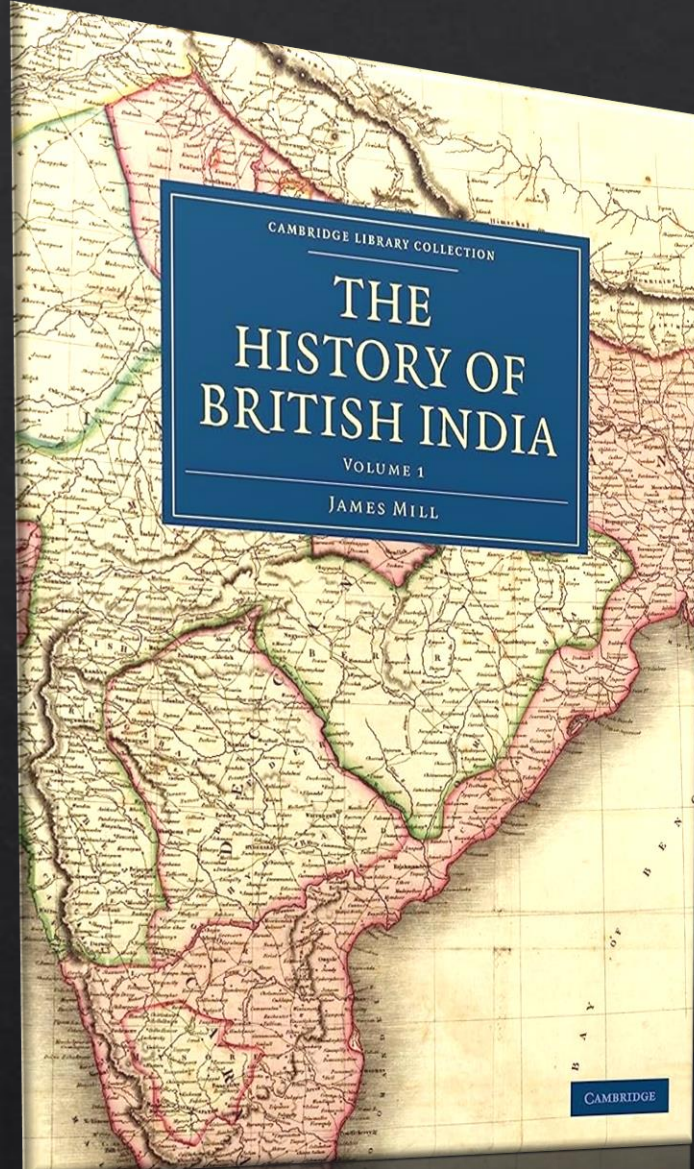
Proto-language

Origin



Develop

ENGLISH	OLD ENGLISH	LATIN	SANSKRIT
mother	modor	mater	matr
nose	nosu	nasus	nas
two	twa	duo	dva
mouse	mus	mus	mus
mead	medu	medus	madhu
murder	mortho	mорий	marati
name	nama	nomen	onoma



James
Mill

History of British India

1. Backwards
2. Stagnant
3. Inimical to progress
4. Lack of rationality, political consciousness, individualism

Max Mueller

Avesta (Iran)
Veda (India)

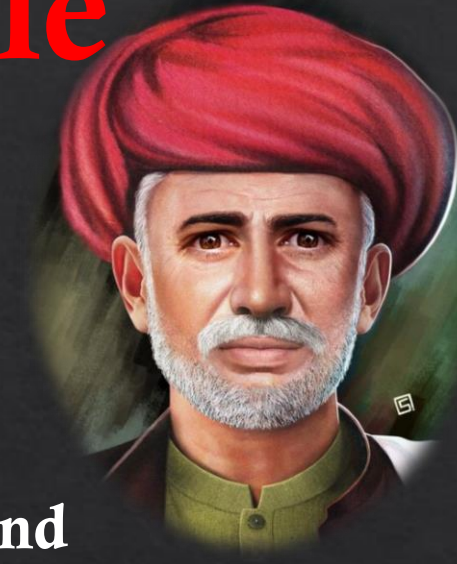


- ✓ Active & Combative
- ✓ Idea of Nation



- ✓ Passive & Mediative
- ✓ Religious & Philosophical

Jyotiba Phule



Das & Shudra

- Rightful inheritors of land
- Aryans – subjugated the local people

Aliens

Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Rig Veda



4500 BC



Based on his analysis of Vedic hymns, Avestic passages, Vedic chronology and Vedic calendars, Tilak argued that the **North Pole** was the original home of Aryans during the pre-glacial period, which they left due to climate changes around 8000 B.C., migrating to the Northern parts of Europe and Asia.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati



Satyarth Prakash

Tibet





Jonathan Mark Kenoyer

THE INDO-ARYAN CONTROVERSY

- ❑ Differences b/w Harrapan and Vedic People
- ❑ Cultural Changes during the late Harrapan Period (1900-1750 BC)
- ❑ Horse, burial practices, absence of writing



B.B. Lal

THE HOMELAND OF THE ARYANS

Critique of Aryan Invasion Theory

- ❑ No Evidence of attack on Harrapan Citadel, No skeleton- lower town of Mohenjo-Daro
- ❑ Gradual Evaluation of Everything
- ❑ Vedic People
 - ❑ Urban Planning
 - ❑ Pastoral (Animal + Agriculture)
- ❑ Horses: Lothal & Noursharu

Mortimer Wheeler

Fort

Indra (Purandhar)

Destroyer of Fort

Hariyupiya



Satya Swaroop Mishra

THE HOMELAND OF THE ARYANS

Linguistic Identities

Sampurnanand
A.C. Das

Sapta-Sindhu

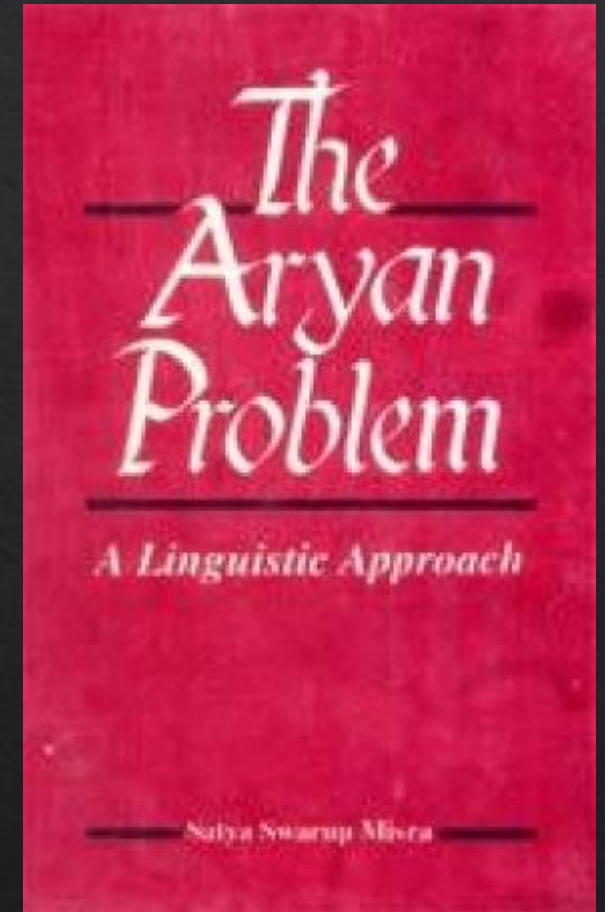
R.B. Pandey

Madhya Pradesh

- Finno-Ugric People
- Indo-Iranian
- Loans of Dialects
- No Evidence
- Went from India to the Caspian Sea regions

Rig Veda---- 5000 BC

No Indo-European so Old



Romila Thapar

❖ Language

❖ conquest and warfare or without

❖ Transport and communication technologies

❖ the horse and the chariot

❖ Use of iron artefacts, a metal superior to copper-bronze?

British Propaganda

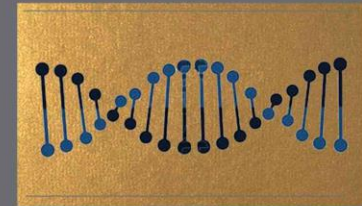
Myth

But Not All Hindus?

This book, therefore, does not claim to provide definitive answers but rather to lay out the field as it were, explain where we are at and indicate by implication the directions in which the analyses could proceed.



Which Of Us Are Aryans?



RETHINKING THE
CONCEPT OF OUR ORIGINS

ROMILA THAPAR, MICHAEL WITZEL, JAYA MENON,
KAI FRIESE, RAZIB KHAN

Early Vedic Period Polity

- Warring tribes---30 tribes
- Five tribes—the Yadu, Turvasha, Puru, Anu, and Druhyu (*Pancha-jana*)
- Purus and Bharatas (Allies—Enemy)
- Purus chief Trasadasyu
- Bharata king Divodasa---Dasa ruler Shambara
- The Bharata chief Sudas, grandson of Divodasa

The Battle of the Ten Kings
7th Mandala of the Rigveda
Beas and Sutlej--- Kurukshetra

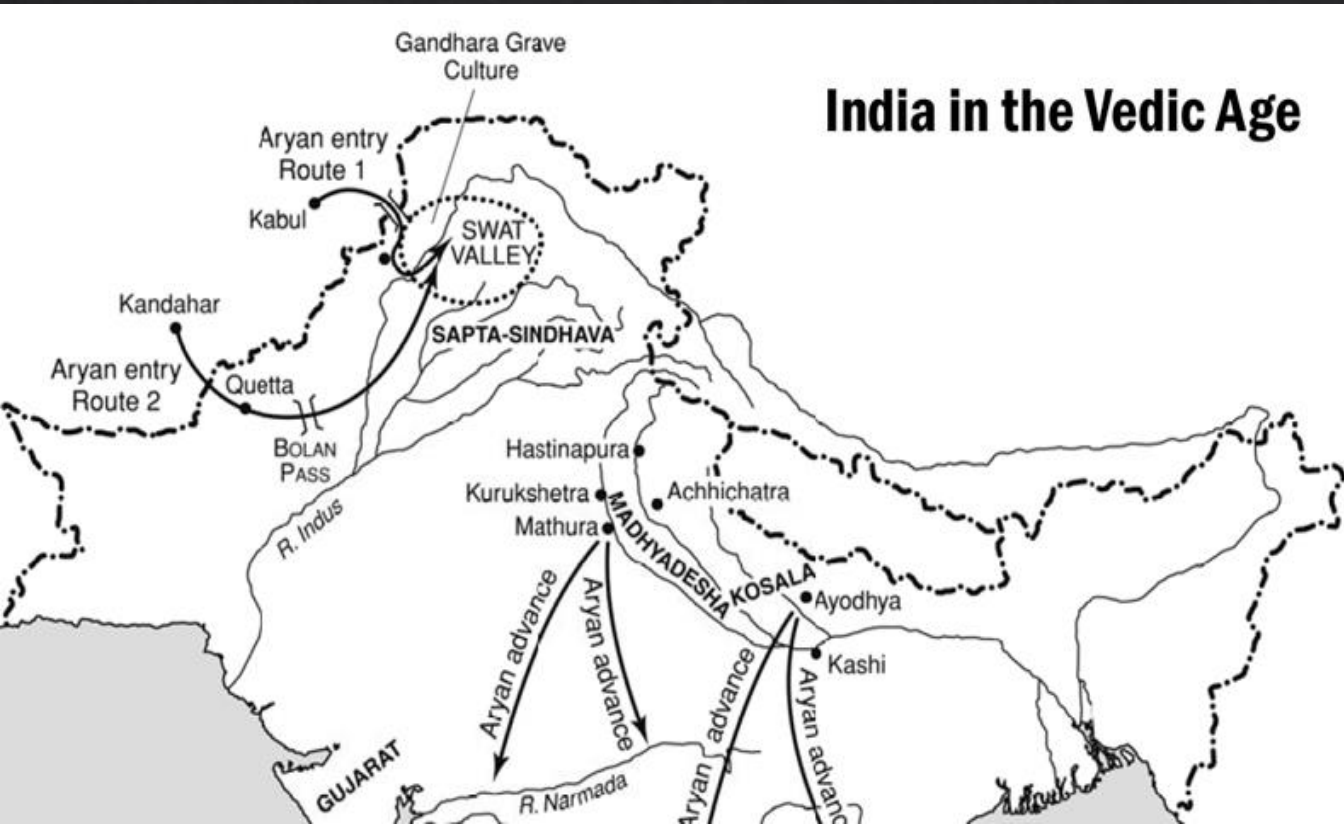
1. Ravi (then Parusni) near Manusa, west of Kurukshetra

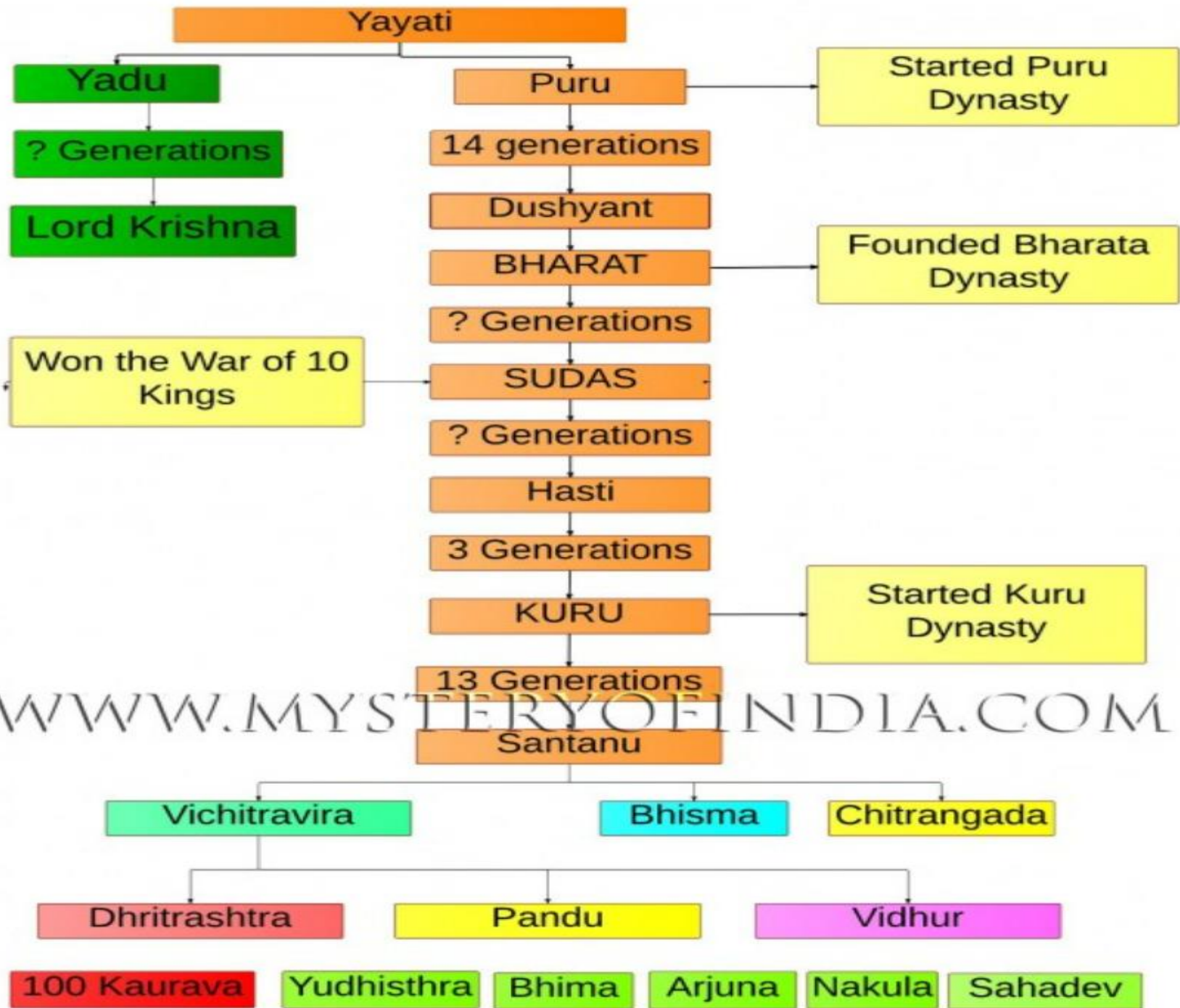
Yadu, Yaksu, Matsyas, Druhyus, Pakthas, Bhalanas, Alinas,
Vishanins, Sivas, Vaikarna, and Anu

Strategic breaching of a dyke on the river

2. Yamuna River, Bhida Ajas, Śighras, and the Yaksus

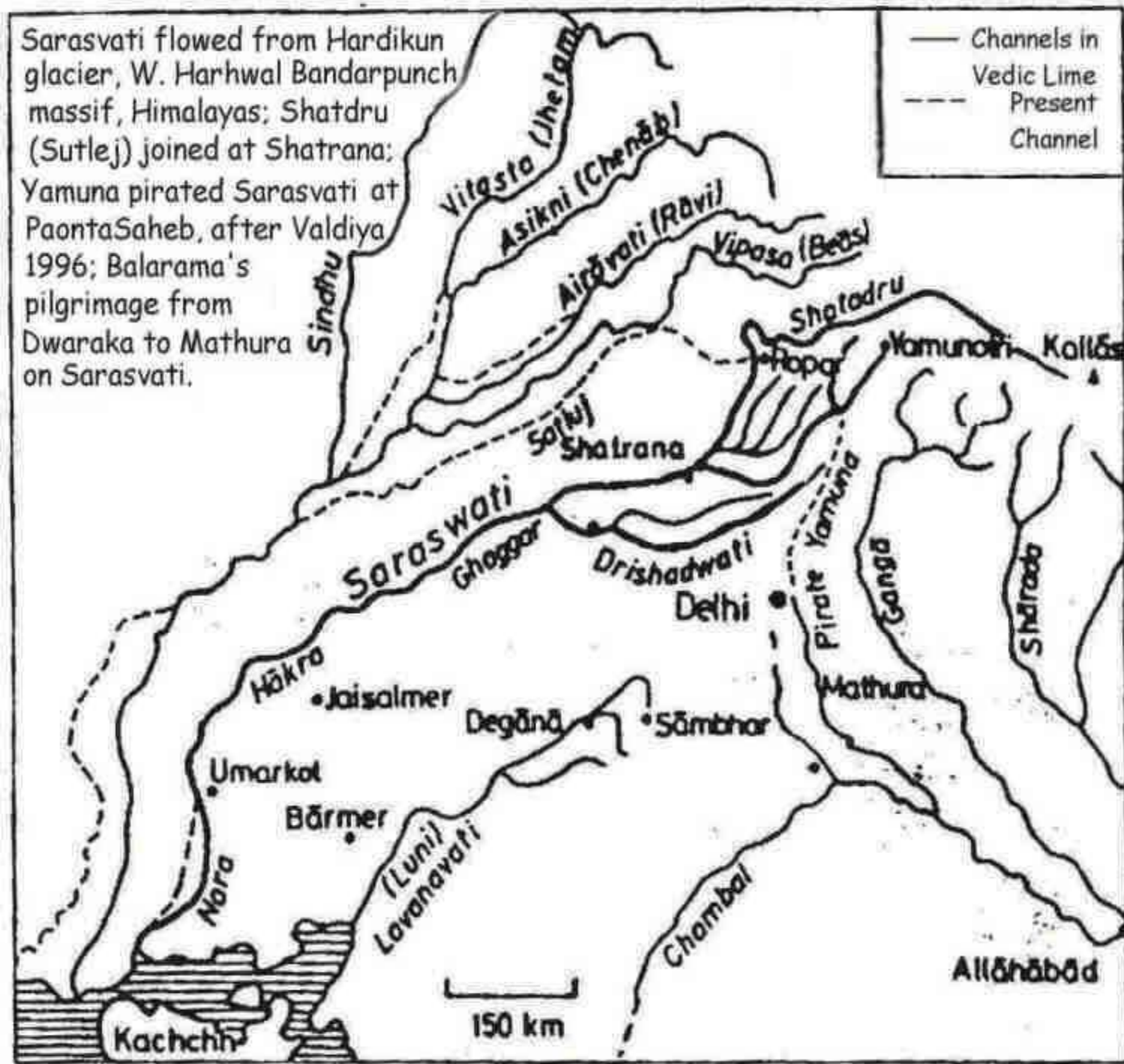
Puru territory (Western Punjab) around Sarasvati River
Sudas--- Ashvamedha





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Sapta-Sindhu Areas

1. Indus (Sindhu)
2. Jhelum (Vatista)
3. Beas (Vipasa)
4. Chenab (Askini)
5. Ravi (Purushni)
6. Sutlej (Sutudri)
7. Saraswati (Ghaggar Hakra)

Yamuna (twice)
 Ganga (only once)

Difference between the Early Vedic and Later Vedic Periods (Political)

Early Vedic Period

Later Vedic Period

Aura of warring tribes

Stronger kingdoms

About 30 tribes and clans, including Yadu, Turvasha, Puru, Anu, and Druhyu

Tribal settlements replaced by kingdoms

Purus and Bharatas dominant, initially allies but later fell apart

Wars fought for territories

Chiefs like Trasadasyu (Puru) and Divodasa (Bharata) mentioned

Hereditary kingship emerging

Fluid political alliances, e.g., Sudas fighting former allies, Purus

King's authority strengthened through rituals like Rajasuya, Vajapeya, Aswamedha

Royal priests like Vasishtha and Vishvamitra significant

King's influence enhanced, royal power increased

Assembly structures: sabha, samiti, vidatha

Traces of chief or king election, but hereditary kingship emerging

Socio-political units based on kinship: jana, vish, gana, grama, griha, kula

Transition towards janapadas from janas

Cultural interactions with non-Indo-European languages evident

Agrarian society replacing predominantly pastoral lifestyle

Early Vedic Religion

Religious Beliefs and Practices	Reflects the beliefs and practices of a religious aristocracy, indicating diversity in worship practices
Universe Division	Divides the universe into sky (dyu), earth (prithvi), and middle realm (antariksha)
Terminology	Uses the term "deva" (shining, luminous) frequently for gods, also refers to gods as asuras initially, later exclusively as demons
Number of Deities	Mentions 33 gods associated with sky, earth, and intermediate region, actual number of deities mentioned exceeds this count
Other Supernatural Beings	Mentions gandharvas (celestial beings), apsaras (celestial nymphs), rakshasas (demons), yatudhanas (sorcerers), pishachas (spirits of the dead)
Worship Methods	Deities worshipped through prayer and sacrificial rituals (yajnas)
Sacrificial Priests	Seven types of sacrificial priests mentioned with specific tasks laid down
Dakshina (Priestly Fee)	Priests given fee (dakshina) in return for duties performed
Temple Worship	Rig Veda does not mention temples or worship of images of deities
Polytheistic Beliefs	Reflects naturalistic polytheism, belief in gods personifying natural phenomena, e.g., Agni (Fire), Surya (Sun), Ushas (Dawn)
Anthropomorphic Depictions of Gods	Gods conceived as anthropomorphic, having physical form similar to humans


Vedic Period Goods

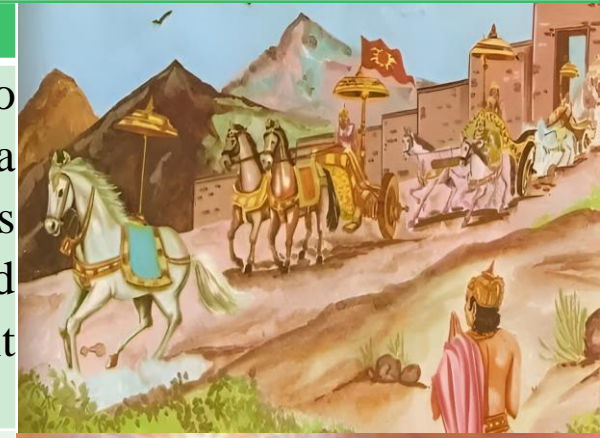
Indra	God of thunder and rain, warrior, leader of Aryas, bounteous, associated with soma, slayer of Vritra
Agni	God of fire, intermediary between gods and humans, sacrificial fire
Soma	Personification of soma plant, associated with wisdom, inspiration for poets, ruler over earth and humans
Varuna	Associated with kshatra (secular power), sovereignty, all-seeing, restrains and punishes evildoers
Mitra	Often invoked together with Varuna, member of Adityas, associated with friendship, and honesty
Surya	Sun god, drives away darkness, rides chariot across sky, sometimes visualized as horse or eagle
Vayu	Wind god
Ashvins	Twin gods associated with war and fertility
Vishnu	Benevolent god, infrequently mentioned, associated with Indra in some hymns
Rudra	Associated with destructive potential, inspires fear, not offered same sacrifices as other gods
Ushas	Goddess of dawn, generous, invoked for wealth, represents victory of light over darkness
Aditi	Mother of Adityas, invoked for freedom from sickness, harm, and evil
Raka	Benevolent, bountiful goddess
Sinivali	Bestows children
Prithvi	Earth goddess, often invoked together with Dyaus
Vach	Goddess of speech
Ida	Represents the milk and butter offered in sacrifice
Sarasvati	Represents the river of the same name

Difference between the Early Vedic and Later Vedic Periods (Religion)

Aspect	Early Vedic Period	Later Vedic Period
Focus	Reflects beliefs and practices of a religious aristocracy; diversity in religious practices	Centrality of the cult of sacrifice; emphasis on elaborate yajnas; growing importance of Brahmanas and their supremacy
Universe Division	Divides universe into sky, earth, and middle realm	Not specified
Deity Importance	Indra and Agni are central gods; other deities mentioned but less prominent	Indra and Agni lose importance; Prajapati, Vishnu, and Rudra become prominent; minor gods gain significance
Worship Methods	Worship through prayer and sacrificial rituals (yajnas)	Emphasis on elaborate yajnas involving large-scale animal sacrifices and destruction of cattle wealth; brought wealth to Brahmanas through dana and dakshina
Social Impact of Religious Practices	No mention of social impact	Reinforced authority of chiefs over people and territorial aspect of polity; contributed to priestly domination and societal divisions
Emergence of Idolatry	No mention of idolatry	Idolatry appears, with deities associated with different social orders; e.g., Pushan as god of the Shudras
Reaction against Priestly Domination	No mention of reaction against priestly domination	Strong reaction against priestly domination, cults, and sacrifices towards the end of the period, especially in regions like Panchala and Videha where Upanishads were compiled

Ritual Sacrifice in Vedic Period

Yagna	Purpose	Description
 Aswamedha	Ritual to establish sovereignty	The Aswamedha Yagna was performed by ancient Indian kings to demonstrate their supremacy and establish their dominion over a territory. It involved the ceremonial sacrifice of a horse, which was allowed to roam freely for a specific period. If the horse returned unchallenged, it symbolized the king's dominance over the regions it traveled through.
Vajapeya	Ritual for royal rejuvenation	The Vajapeya Yagna was a ritual conducted by kings to rejuvenate their rule and prowess. It was believed to bestow strength and vitality upon the king, enhancing his leadership capabilities and ensuring the prosperity of his kingdom. The ceremony involved various offerings, rituals and elaborate festivities.
Rajasuya	Ritual for universal sovereignty	The Rajasuya Yagna was the most prestigious and elaborate among the ancient Indian rituals. It was performed by kings to assert their supremacy over other rulers and establish themselves as the paramount sovereign. The ceremony involved a series of complex rituals, including the anointing of the king as the paramount ruler and the offering of tributes by subordinate kings, symbolizing their submission to his authority. The Rajasuya Yagna was considered a grand spectacle, showcasing the wealth and power of the ruling monarch.



Important Sages of Ancient India

Marichi
Atri
Angiras
Pulaha
Kratu
Pulastya
Vashistha

Sage	Contribution
Maharishi Vyasa	Compiled and arranged the Vedas, and authored the Mahabharata, an ancient epic.
Maharishi Valmiki	Authored the Ramayana, considered one of the earliest Sanskrit poets.
Maharishi Patanjali	Compiled the Yoga Sutras, providing a systematic approach to yoga philosophy.
Maharishi Kanada	Formulated the Vaisheshika school of philosophy, known for his atomic theory.
Maharishi Charaka	Contributed to Ayurveda by authoring the Charaka Samhita, a foundational text in Ayurvedic medicine.
Maharishi Panini	Composed the Ashtadhyayi, a comprehensive treatise on Sanskrit grammar, laying the foundation for classical Sanskrit language and linguistic studies.
Maharishi Gautama	Founded Buddhism, teaching the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.
Maharishi Vashistha	Considered one of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages), credited with composing hymns in the Rigveda and known for his wisdom.
Maharishi Vishwamitra	A revered sage known for his deep penance and contribution to various hymns in the Rigveda. He mentored Lord Rama and is regarded as the author of several hymns.
Maharishi Narada	A divine sage known for his travels and devotion to Lord Vishnu. He played pivotal roles in both the Ramayana and Mahabharata, offering guidance to various characters.
Maharishi Durvasa	Known for his unpredictable temper, Durvasa is featured in both epics for his interactions with various characters and his role in shaping their destinies.



The Three Great Sages



Bharadwaj

Dhanwantari

kashayapa

Ayurveda came to our land due to the efforts of the three Great Sages - Dhanwantari (in his Divodasa avatar), Bharadwaja, and Kashyapa. These mythological figures acquired knowledge of Ayurveda from Indra, the God of Thunder, through a variety of ways.

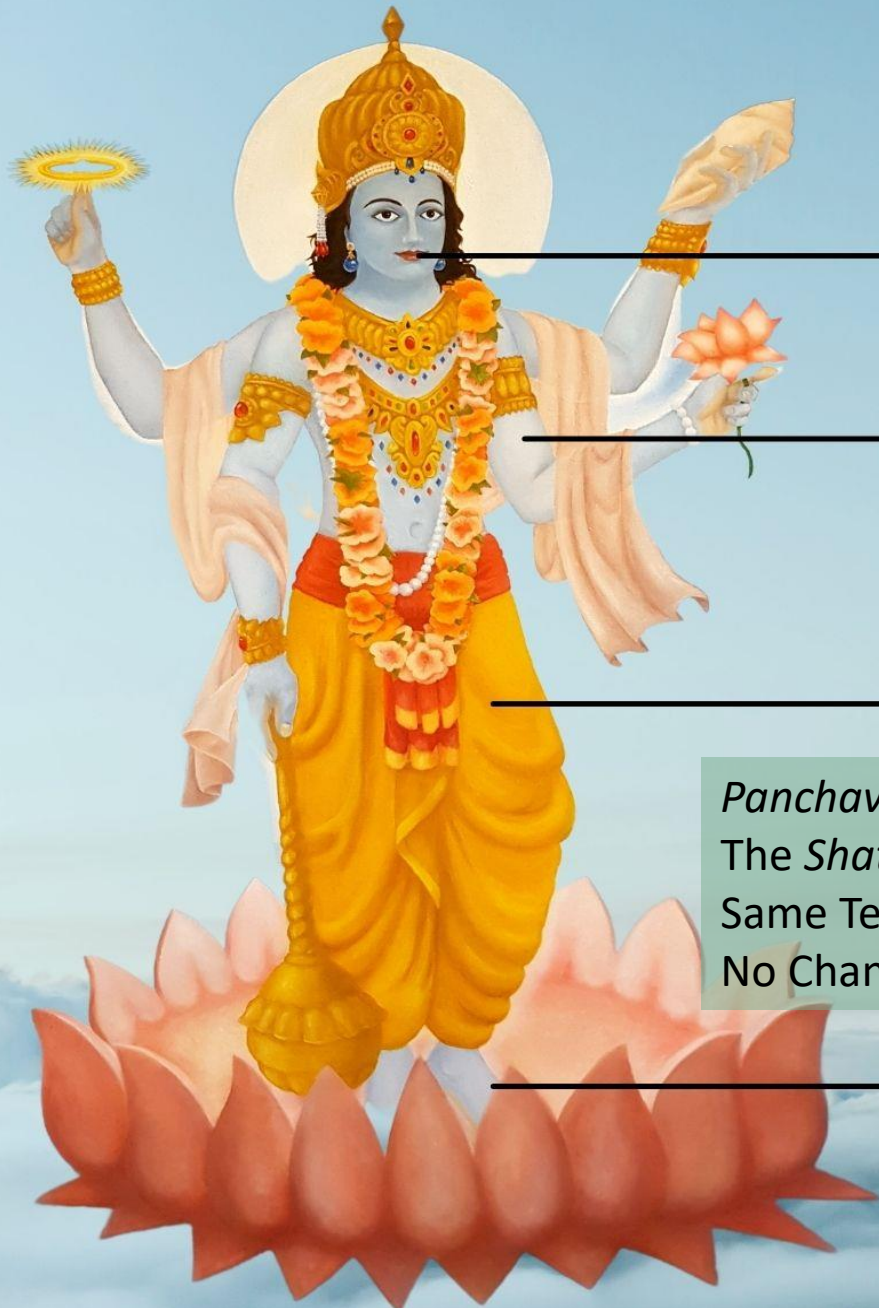
Later, each selected a set of students, whose works would further shape the philosophy of Ayurveda. They researched, codified, and created texts that are relevant to this day.

Difference between the Early Vedic and Later Vedic Periods (Society)

Early Vedic Period	Later Vedic Period
Tribal society with semi-nomadic life	Rise of social differentiation
Aryan tribes called Janas	Clear division into four varnas: Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras
Conflict with Panis over cattle	Increasing cult of sacrifices, Brahmanas gain power
Social stratification based on division of labor and gender	Rigid social hierarchy, discrimination against Shudras and Chandalas
Patriarchal society with some female empowerment	Women's importance diminishes, confined to household chores
No rigid caste system, occupation not based on birth	Caste exogamy extensively practiced, rigid social hierarchy
Mention of four varnas in Purushasukta	Education largely confined to dvija castes
Basic social unit: Kula (Family), patriarchal system	Joint family system emerges, patrimonial authority develops
Women educated, compose hymns, attend assemblies	Women lose importance, references to sati and child marriage
Marriage monogamous, some instances of polygyny/polyandry	Marriage between same gotra forbidden, Anuloma and Pratiloma Vivah mentioned
Gotra system appears later	Emergence of the institution of gotra



Varna System



Twice
Varna?

Upanayan
Ceremony

Brahman

Priests, Thinkers,
Philosophers, Teachers

Kshatriya

Warriors, Kings,
Administrators

Vaishya

Agriculturists, Traders,
Money Lenders

Panchavimsha Brahmana: Indra: Varnas
The Shatapatha Brahmana: Kshatriya-1
Same Text: Brahmana, Vaishya, Rajanya, and Shudra
No Changes: Dharmasutras onwards.

Shudra

Service Providers, Helping
other Varnas



I AM A **BRAHMIN** WHEN
I READ AND
TEACH MY KIDS..

I AM A **KSHATRIYA** WHEN
I SHIELD AND PROTECT
MY FAMILY



I AM A **VAISHYA** WHEN I AM
MANAGING MY HOUSE,
RUNNING IT TO PROVIDE
THE BEST FOR MY FAMILY..

I AM A **SHUDRA** WHEN I
CLEAN HOUSE AND DO
MENIAL JOBS AT
HOME..



IN ONE I AM ALL...

I AM A भारतीय

**STOP DIVIDING US ON CASTE BY
SPREADING MISINFORMATION ON
VARNA SYSTEM..**

Four stages of life In Hinduism

Brahmacharya



Age

1 year to 25 years
Approximately

Bachelor,
student phase
of life

Grihastha



Age

26 year to 50 years
Approximately

Married life
phase and duties
of maintaining a
Household

Vanaprastha



Age

51 year to 75 years
Approximately

Retirement
phase and
handing over
responsibilities to
next generation.

Sanyaas



Age

76 year onwards

Phase of giving
up material desires
and prejudices.
Wandering Ascetic
Stage

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Important Women of Early Vedic Period

Gargi Vachaknavi	Renowned philosopher and scholar mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; engaged in philosophical debates with prominent sages of her time; known for her profound wisdom and contributions to Vedic philosophy
Maitreyi	Learned wife of sage Yajnavalkya mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad; engaged in philosophical discussions with her husband on the nature of the self (atman) and ultimate reality (Brahman); known for her intellectual prowess
Apala	Mentioned in Rig Veda; composed hymns praising gods and goddesses; performed rituals and sacrifices; known for her poetic talent and devotion to religious practices
Lopamudra	Mentioned in Rig Veda; renowned for her beauty and wisdom; composed hymns dedicated to various deities; known for her spiritual devotion and contributions to Vedic literature
Vishvavara	Mentioned in Rig Veda; composed hymns dedicated to gods and goddesses; known for her poetic skills and devotion to religious rituals
Romasha	Mentioned in Rig Veda; composed hymns praising Agni, the god of fire; known for her devotion to religious practices and her poetic expressions
Ghosha	Mentioned in Rig Veda; composed hymns dedicated to various deities; known for her contributions to Vedic literature and her devotion to religious ceremonies
Shashwati	Mentioned in Rig Veda; composed hymns praising gods and goddesses; known for her poetic talent and her role in preserving and transmitting Vedic knowledge



Status of Women in Later Vedic Periods (Society)

- ❑ Later Vedic texts refer to marriage by capture, and to a woman choosing her spouse. Polygyny was more prevalent than polyandry.
- ❑ Kings could have any number of wives and concubines.
- ❑ The *Aitareya Brahmana* (3.5.3.47) states that even though a man may have several wives, one husband is enough for one woman.
- ❑ The *Maitrayani Samhita* refers to the 10 wives of Manu. A woman was married not only to a man but into a family.
- ❑ Later Vedic texts reflect the idea that the menstrual blood of women is dangerous and polluting.
- ❑ A menstruating wife is not supposed to participate in sacrifices. The sacrifice has to be postponed or it has to be performed without her.
- ❑ The *Taittiriya Samhita* reflects other taboos as well—it was inappropriate to talk to, sit near, or eat food cooked by a menstruating woman.
- ❑ According to this text, when Indra killed Vishvarupa, son of the god Tvashtri, he transferred one-third of the stain of killing a Brahmana to women.
- ❑ *Shatapatha Brahmana* (10.5.2.9) states: ‘A good woman is one who pleases her husband, delivers male children, and never talks back to her husband.’
- ❑ The *Aitareya Brahmana* (7.15) describes a daughter as a source of misery, and states that only a son can be the saviour of the family

Types of Marriage in Later Vedic Periods (Society)

- **Endogamy** refers to marriage within a unit –could be a kin group, caste, or a group living in the same locality.
- **Exogamy** refers to marriage outside the unit.
- **Polygyny** is the practice of a man having several wives.
- **Polyandry** is the practice of a woman having several husbands.

Grihasutra Dhramashashtra

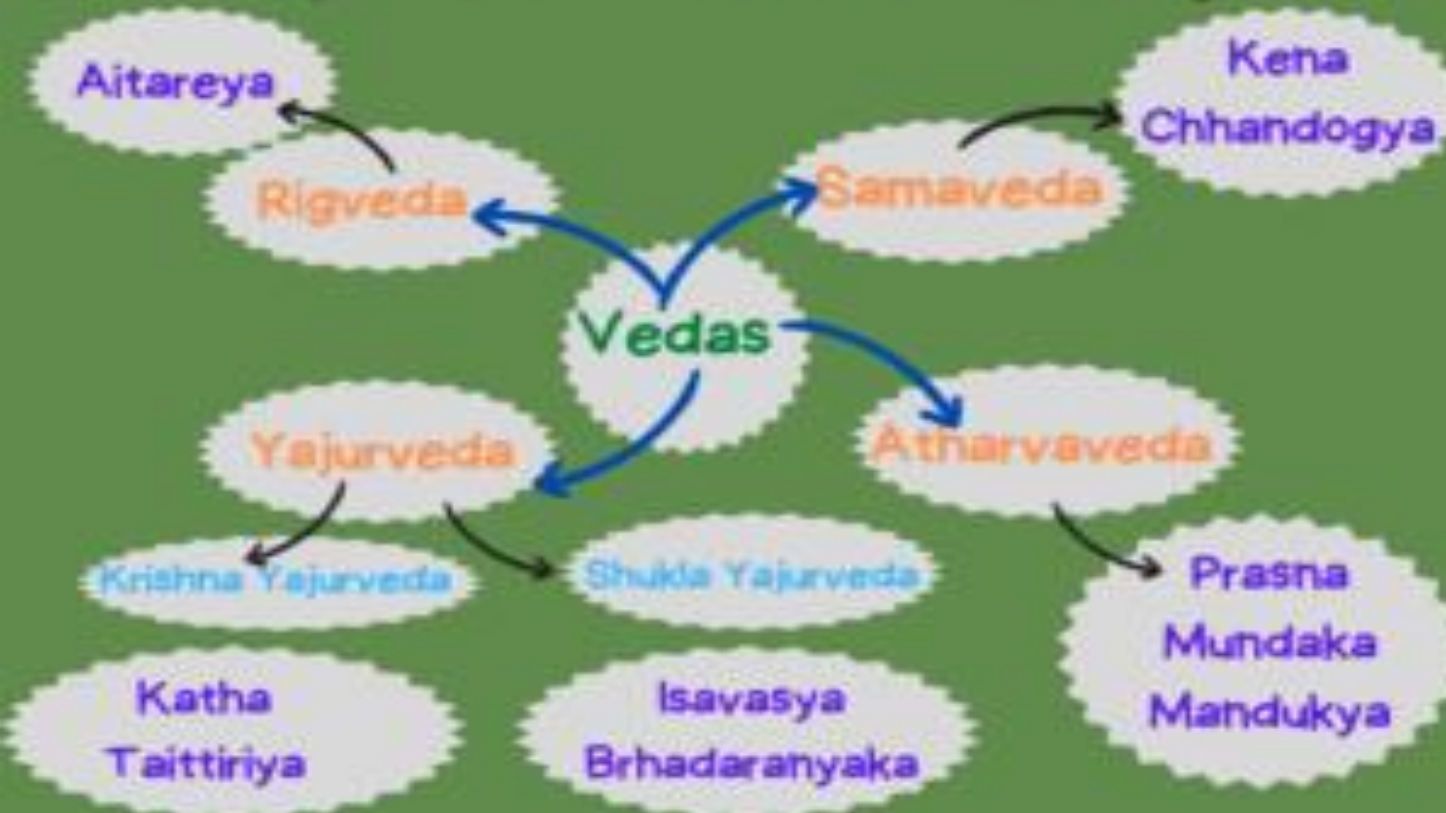
Later on, the gotra system came into existence. Each *gotra* was named after a Vedic seer, and all those who belonged to the same *gotra* were regarded as his descendants. Two rules about *gotra* were particularly important: women were expected to give up their father's *gotra* and adopt that of their husband on marriage and members of the same *gotra* could not marry.

Types of Marriage in the Later Vedic Period		
S. N	Marriage Type	Description
1	Brahma Vivah	Marriage of a girl with a boy of the same Varna with Vedic rites and rituals.
2	Daiva Vivah	When the father donated his daughter to a priest as a part of Dakshina.
3	Arsa Vivah	A token bride price of a Cow and a Bull was given.
4	Prajapati Vivah	Marriage without dowry.
5	Gandharva Vivah	It was a kind of love marriage
6	Asura Vivah	Marriage by Purchase.
7	Paisach Vivah	Seduction of a girl while sleeping or mentally unstable due to a drink
8	Rakshasa Vivah	Marriage by abduction.

Difference between the Early Vedic and Later Vedic Periods (Economy)

Aspect	Early Vedic Period	Later Vedic Period
Economic System	Pastoral society with cattle rearing as dominant activity; wealth measured by cattle ownership; barter system; no private property based on land ownership; gift exchange and redistribution	Emergence of agriculture as chief livelihood; clearing of forests for cultivation; mixed farming practiced; rice and wheat become staple diet; introduction of iron technology; taxes and tributes collected by Sangrihitri
Agricultural Practices	Shifting agriculture practiced; land cleared by burning forests; wooden plough used; barley mentioned as primary grain	Permanent cultivation with plough; rice and wheat grown as staple crops; rice offered in rituals; tila used in rituals; forests cleared for cultivation; ox-drawn wagons for transportation
Craftsmanship and Technology	Familiarity with copper technology; wooden plough used; crafts such as cart-making, carpentry, weaving mentioned	Introduction of iron technology (Krishna Ayas/Shyama Ayas); knowledge of tin, lead, silver, gold, bronze, and glass manufacturing; emergence of guilds (shresthins); pottery types include Painted Grey Ware, Black and Red Ware
Social Structure and Taxation	Communal land ownership with clan rights; no regular revenue system; voluntary tribute (bali); wealth measured by cattle	Communal land ownership with recognition of individual property; taxes and tributes collected by Sangrihitri; Vaishyas main tribute payers
Mode of Exchange	Barter system with cow as unit of value; niskha used as unit of value but not typical currency	Barter system continues; niskha used as unit of value but not typical currency; wagons drawn by oxen used as main mode of transport
Urbanization and Urbanism	No mention of urbanism	Traces of urbanism towards end of period; mention of towns (nagar) in texts

10 major Upanishads and their origin



- ❖ The oldest Upanishads are in prose, the later ones in metres. The *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya* are among the earliest.
- ❖ The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (3.1.1) states that *brahman* is that from which all beings are born, that by which they are sustained, and that into which they enter on death. *Brahman* is the eternal, imperishable reality in the universe.
- ❖ In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (3.8.11), the sage Yajnavalkya tells Gargi that the imperishable *brahman* sees but can't be seen, thinks but can't be thought of, perceives but can't be perceived.

Upanishads

- ❖ The *Mundaka Upanishad* (1.1.7) explains that just as a spider spins and gathers its web, just as plants grow upon this earth, and just as head and body hair grow from a living person, even so does everything in this world arise from the imperishable *brahman*. Later Upanishads speak of *brahman* as of a god.
- ❖ The goal of Upanishadic thought is the realization of *brahman*.
- ❖ Liberation (*moksha*, *mukti*) from the cycle of *samsara* could only be achieved through such knowledge.
- ❖ This knowledge (*jnana*) could not be obtained through mere intellectual exertion.
- ❖ The Upanishads are often seen as anti-sacrifice and anti-Brahmana.
- ❖ The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* states that the performance of sacrifice leads to the world of the fathers (*pitriyana*), but knowledge leads to the world of the gods.

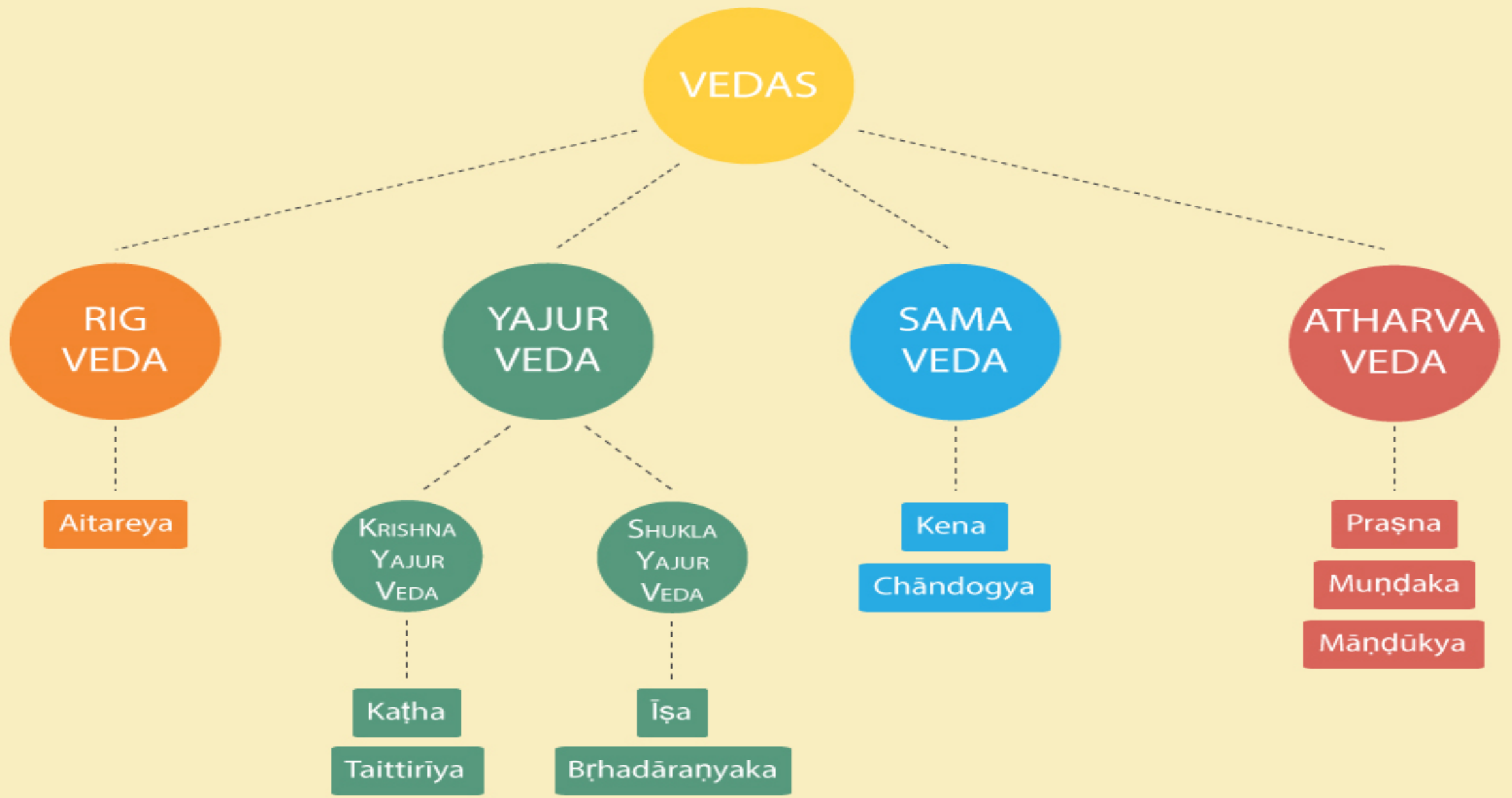
THE UPANISHADS

“SITTING DOWN NEAR”

108 IN *MUKTIKĀ*



- ❑ The Upanishads are late Vedic and post-Vedic Sanskrit texts that "document the transition from the archaic ritualism of the Veda into new religious ideas and institutions" and the emergence of the central religious concepts of Hinduism.
- ❑ Out of the traditional 109 Upanishads, ten of them are considered to be the principal ones: Isha, Kena and Katha, Prashan, Mundaka, Mandukya, Tattiriya, Aitareya, Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka.
- ❑ They emphasize on knowledge compared to rituals.



THE 4 VEDAS AND THE 10 MAIN UPANISHADS

Upanishad

24. Do you consider that the Upanishadic principles embody the high point of Vedic religious thought? Comment. (2021)

Vedic religion, known as Vedism, represents the earliest stratum of religious activity in India, introduced by Indo-European-speaking peoples around 1500 BCE. The Vedas, especially the Rigveda, form the bedrock of this ancient tradition. The Upanishads, which emerged later, around 700-400 BCE, mark a significant philosophical development from the ritualistic practices of early Vedic religion to more introspective and philosophical thought.

The Upanishads are a collection of texts that form the concluding part of the Vedic literature and are crucial for understanding the evolution of Indian religious and philosophical thought. They represent a transition from the ritualistic practices prevalent in the earlier Vedic texts to a more contemplative and philosophical approach.

Upanishadic Principles	Description
Aesthetic Spiritualism	Shifted focus from ritualistic practices to meditation and personal spiritual experiences.
Monotheism	Emphasized the existence of one supreme God behind the multiplicity of deities in the Vedic pantheon.
Moksha and Gyanmarga	Introduced the concept of Moksha (liberation) and Gyanmarga (path of knowledge) as means to realize unity with Brahman.
Theory of Samsara	Presented the idea of a cyclical existence driven by Karma, involving rebirth and the transmigration of souls.

Conclusion

The Upanishadic principles indeed represent a high point in Vedic religious thought, marking a profound shift from the ritualistic and materialistic concerns of the early Vedic period to a more philosophical and spiritual exploration of existence. While Vedic religion laid the foundation for ritualistic practices and the worship of multiple deities, the Upanishads introduced a more introspective and unifying vision of reality.

Upanishad

24. Do you consider that the Upanishadic principles embody the high point of Vedic religious thought? Comment. (2021)

Aspect	Vedic Religious Thought	Upanishadic Principles
Materialistic Spiritualism	Concerned with material prosperity, rituals, and offerings for worldly gains.	Focused on spiritual liberation and knowledge, moving beyond material concerns.
Polytheism	Belief in multiple gods associated with various natural forces and aspects of life.	Emphasized a single supreme reality (Brahman) underlying all phenomena.
Henotheism	Worship of one god at a time while acknowledging the existence of others.	Shifted towards monotheism, viewing all gods as manifestations of one supreme entity.
Animistic Cult	Worship of spiritual beings and animals, viewing them as sacred.	Moved towards philosophical inquiry into the nature of the soul and the universe.
Personification of Nature	Deities represented natural elements and forces, such as Indra (rain), Agni (fire), and Varuna (water).	Transitioned to seeing these deities as symbolic of deeper, universal principles.
Sacrificial Cult	Involved elaborate rituals and animal sacrifices to please deities and ensure prosperity.	Criticized excessive ritualism, promoting knowledge and inner realization as means to spiritual growth.

Historiography

Max Müller	Viewed Vedic religion as 'henotheism or kathenotheism' and emphasized the naturalistic polytheism prevalent in early Vedic practices.
Romila Thapar	Described Vedic religion as comprising 'embedded forms of history,' reflecting myths and genealogies crucial for understanding its context.
Kumkum Roy	Analyzed the transformation of Vedic religion from personal and familial rituals to a more organized system dominated by a priestly class.

The *atman*, according to Uddalaka Aruni

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* tells the following story: One day, Uddalaka Aruni told his son Shvetaketu to go forth and take up the celibate life of a student, as their family was Brahmana only in name and none had so far devoted themselves to study. So Shvetaketu went off to become a student when he was 12 years old. He learnt all the Vedas and came back swollen headed when he was 24, thinking that he knew everything. His father Uddalaka Aruni saw this. He went on to instruct Shvetaketu on a number of issues about which the son knew nothing, and soon made him realize just how little

he knew. In the following conversation between father and son in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (6.13.3), Uddalaka uses graphic analogy to explain the nature of the *atman* to Shvetaketu. The first speaker is Uddalaka, and the father and son speak alternately:

'Bring a banyan fruit.'

'Here it is, sir.'

'Cut it up.'

'I've cut it up, sir.'

'What do you see there?'

'These quite tiny seeds, sir.'

'Now, take one of them and cut it up.'

'I've cut one up, sir.'

'What do you see there?'

'Nothing, sir.'

Then he told him:

'This is the finest essence here, son, that you can't even see—look, on account of that finest essence, this huge banyan tree stands here. Believe, my son: the finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (*atman*). And that's how you are, Shvetaketu.'

SOURCE Olivelle, 1998: 255

What was the main difference between the Indus Valley civilisation and the Vedic civilisation?

- (a) Indus Valley civilisation was urban whereas the Vedic civilisation was rural.
- (b) Indus Valley civilisation believed in non-violence whereas Vedic civilisation in sacrifices.
- (c) The main emphasis in the Indus Valley civilisation was on trade, whereas in the Vedic age, it was on religion.
- (d) None of the above

'The world is God and God is my soul' is the philosophy contained in the:

- (a) Upa Vedas
- (b) Puranas
- (c) Brahmanas
- (d) Upanishads

The Gayatri Mantra contained in the Rig Veda is dedicated to which deity?

- (a) Agni
- (b) Savitri
- (c) Surya
- (d) Varuna

Which of the following statement(s) is/are not correct?

(a) The Rig Vedic people believed in primitive animism.

(b) The Rig Vedic women were highly respected and that most of the religious ceremonies were considered incomplete unless wives joined their husbands.

(c) The Later Vedic people used painted grey ware pottery.

(d) The Rig Vedic Aryans were by and large urban people.

The national motto of India, '*Satyameva Jayate*', inscribed below the Emblem of India is taken from

(a) *Katha Upanishad*

(b) *Chhandogya Upanishad*

(c) *Aitareya Upanishad*

(d) *Mandukya Upanishad*

The religion of Early Vedic Aryans was primarily of:

(a) *Bhakti*

(b) Image worship and *Yajnas*

(c) Worship of nature and *Yajnas*

(d) Worship of nature and *Bhakti*

Consider the following statements regarding the source of Vedic Civilisation:

1. The most important source of Vedic Civilisation is the Vedas.
2. The Vedas are neither any individual religious work nor a collection of a definite number of books compiled at a particular time.
3. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana are great epics.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- (a) Only I
- (b) I and II
- (c) II and III
- (d) All of these

Continuity From the Vedic Period

1. Social Hierarchy: Vedic society was stratified into four varnas (castes) - Brahmins (priests and scholars), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (labourers). This hierarchical system influenced every aspect of life, including occupation and social interactions.

2. Status of Women: Women had a high status during the early Vedic Period, i.e., Gargi, Maitreyi, Vishvavara, and Shashvati were given high status, but in later Vedic period, their role started declining.

3. Ritualism and Sacrifice: Vedic religion revolved around elaborate rituals and sacrificial ceremonies performed by Brahmins to appease various deities, seeking their blessings for prosperity, fertility, and protection.

4. Rigidity of Roles: Social roles were largely fixed and hereditary, with limited mobility between castes. This rigid structure provided stability but also led to social inequality and discrimination.

What are the main features of Vedic society and religion? Do you think some of the features are still prevailing in Indian society? (250 words) 15

5. Importance of Scriptures: The Vedas, ancient sacred texts, served as the foundation of Vedic religion and society, containing hymns, rituals, and philosophical teachings that guided individual and societal conduct.

6. Concept of Dharma: Dharma, the moral and ethical duty, was central to Vedic society, prescribing codes of conduct for individuals based on their caste, stage of life (ashramas), and social responsibilities.

7. Pantheon of Deities: Vedic religion encompassed a diverse pantheon of gods and goddesses, including Indra (god of thunder), Agni (god of fire), Varuna (god of water), and many others, each associated with specific attributes and functions.

Concluding Remarks

Many aspects of Vedic society continue to influence contemporary Indian society. The caste system, though officially abolished, still persists in subtle forms, impacting social interactions and opportunities. Concepts such as dharma and the importance of family and social obligations continue to shape moral and ethical values in Indian society. Despite modernisation and social reforms, the legacy of Vedic society and religion endures, contributing to the rich tapestry of Indian culture and tradition.

Analyse the differences and similarities between the Indus Valley and Vedic Cultures. (1992)

The Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) and Vedic culture represent two significant and distinct phases of early Indian civilization. Despite existing in different periods, there are both similarities and differences in their societal structures, religious practices, and economic activities.

Similarities

1. Religion:

- Nature Worship: Both cultures revered natural forces. The Indus Valley people worshipped natural elements and forces such as the Mother Goddess, trees like Peepal and Banyan, and animal figures. Similarly, the Vedic people worshipped deities like Agni (fire), Indra (rain and thunder), and other natural phenomena.
- Animism and Symbolism: Both cultures engaged in practices that venerated symbols and forces of nature. For instance, the Vedic culture personified elements like fire, sun, and wind as deities, similar to the way the Indus Valley Civilization may have revered elements of nature through their seals and symbols.

2. Social Life:

- Egalitarian Structures: Both the Indus Valley and early Vedic societies are believed to have had relatively egalitarian social structures, where women enjoyed a significant degree of respect and freedom. Women's roles and statuses were more prominent and respected in both cultures compared to later periods.
- Community and Settlements: Both cultures featured well-organized community structures. The IVC had advanced urban planning with cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, while the Vedic culture, particularly in its early stages, consisted of organized tribal settlements with a focus on communal living.

3. Economy:

- Pastoral and Agricultural Economy: Both cultures practised a mixed economy of agriculture and pastoralism. The Indus Valley Civilization engaged in surplus agriculture and animal husbandry, which was similar to the Vedic people who also relied on agriculture and livestock, particularly cattle, for their livelihood.
- Trade: Trade was crucial for both cultures. The IVC was known for its extensive trade networks with Mesopotamia and other regions, while the Vedic people engaged in regional trade, primarily focusing on barter and the exchange of agricultural and pastoral products.

Analyse the differences and similarities between the Indus Valley and Vedic Cultures. (1992)

Differences

1. Religion:

- Deity Worship and Rituals: The Indus Valley people worshipped deities like Pashupati Mahadev (Lord of Animals) and engaged in the worship of phallic symbols, indicating a form of proto-Shiva worship. In contrast, the Vedic religion was characterized by the worship of multiple deities such as Indra, Agni, and Varuna through rituals like Yajnas (sacrificial ceremonies), which were absent in the IVC.
- Absence of Priestly Class: The elaborate priesthood and ritualistic practices evident in the Vedic culture, particularly in the Later Vedic period, were not present in the Indus Valley Civilization, which seemed to have had a more decentralized religious structure without a dominating priestly class.

2. Social Life:

- Shift from Egalitarianism: While the Indus Valley society maintained a more egalitarian structure throughout its existence, the Vedic society, especially during the Later Vedic period, saw a significant shift towards a more patriarchal and hierarchical structure. The Later Vedic period witnessed the codification of social stratification and gender roles, with women's status diminishing over time.
- Tribal Leadership vs. Centralized Authority: The Indus Valley Civilization appears to have had a more organized and possibly centralized form of governance, as evidenced by uniformity in town planning and weights and measures. In contrast, early Vedic society was organized around tribal units led by chiefs (Rajans), with power being more decentralized and dispersed among tribal leaders.

3. Economy:

- Focus on Agriculture vs. Trade: The economy of the Indus Valley Civilization had a significant focus on both agriculture and extensive trade, including long-distance commerce with Mesopotamia and other regions. The Vedic economy, particularly in its early phase, was primarily agricultural and pastoral, with less emphasis on long-distance trade and more on subsistence farming and livestock rearing.
- Use of Metal and Crafts: The Indus Valley Civilization showed advanced use of metallurgy (bronze) and a high degree of craftsmanship, particularly in bead-making and pottery. The Vedic economy, especially in the early Vedic period, was more rudimentary in terms of metallurgy and crafts, focusing more on the production of basic goods and agricultural implements.

Throw light on the nature of religion and the classification of gods mentioned in the Rigveda.

The Rigveda, one of the oldest known texts, offers a window into the religious beliefs and practices of the early Vedic civilization. Vedic religion has been integral in shaping the broader framework of Hinduism. The Rigveda reflects a complex system of beliefs that encompassed materialistic and spiritual elements, polytheism, and a deep reverence for nature.

Nature of Religion in the Rigveda

Materialistic Spiritualism	- The Vedic people were concerned with material wealth, success in battles, and rituals.
Aesthetic Spiritualism	- Early Upanishads stressed rituals, while later ones emphasized meditation and personal spirituality.
Polytheism	- Multiple deities were worshipped, each with their own roles and importance.
Henotheism	- One god would be worshipped as supreme during a particular context, without denying other gods.
Animistic Cult	- Belief in spiritual beings and the sacredness of animals, e.g., cows were venerated.
Personification of Nature	- Natural entities like Aditi (infinite space), Usha (dawn), and Varuna (water) were deified.
Sacrificial Cult	- Rituals often involved animal sacrifices to appease gods and ensure prosperity.

Classification of Gods in the Rigveda

Indra	- God of thunder and rain, associated with strength and warfare, and defeat enemies.
Agni	- Fire god, mediator between gods and humans, present in domestic hearths and marriages.
Varuna	- God of water, upholder of cosmic order (rita), ensuring natural and moral balance.
Maruts	- Gods of storms, aiding Indra in battles, symbolizing tribal warriors.
Yama	- God of death, governing the afterlife and holding a significant place in Vedic beliefs.
Rudra	- God of animals, associated with wild nature and healing.
Dyaus	- Sky god, regarded as the oldest deity and father of the world.
Vishnu	- Traversed the earth in three steps, associated with cosmic maintenance.
Pushan	- God of roads, herdsmen, and cattle, crucial for a pastoral community.

Throw light on the nature of religion and the classification of gods mentioned in the Rigveda.

Historiography

Scholar	Perspective on Vedic Religion
Max Müller	Viewed Vedic religion as 'henotheism or kathenotheism' and 'naturalistic polytheism', emphasizing the worship of nature and multiple gods.
Romila Thapar	Categorized Vedic religion as 'embedded forms of history,' based on myth and genealogy, indicating its historical significance.
Kumkum Roy	Analyzed the transition of Vedic religion from a private affair to one dominated by a priestly class, highlighting its evolution over time.

Conclusion

The Rigveda provides a comprehensive understanding of the Vedic religion, showcasing its complexity and diversity. The nature of Vedic religion encompassed both materialistic and spiritual aspects, with a strong emphasis on natural forces and rituals. The classification of gods in the Rigveda reflects a polytheistic worldview, where each deity played a crucial role in the cosmos and human life. Historians like Max Müller, Romila Thapar, and Kumkum Roy offer varied perspectives on the Vedic religion, illustrating its historical and cultural depth. The insights from the Rigveda continue to influence the spiritual and cultural landscape of India, marking the foundations of Hinduism.