

## GENERAL AWARENESS

### ★ **History and Culture of India**

(Indus Valley Civilisation, Vedic Culture, Emergence of New Kingdoms, Medieval India, Advent of Europeans and Indian National Movement)

### ★ **Indian Polity**

(The Constitution of India and its Salient Features, Executive, Legislature, Constitutional & Non-Constitutional Bodies and National Symbols)

### ★ **Indian Geography**

(India-Location, Relief and Drainage, Climate and Natural Vegetation, Resources and Industries)

### ★ **Indian Economy**

(National Income, Rural Economy, Banking, Fiscal and Monetary Policies)

### ★ **General Science**

(Physics – Measurement, Force & Motion, Light, Heat & Temperature and Electricity)

(Chemistry – Matter Around Us, Atomic Structure and Chemistry in Everyday Life)

(Biology – Plant and Animal Kingdom, Micro-organisms, Organ Systems and Nutrition & Health)

## VEDIC CULTURE IN NORTH INDIA AND MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN SOUTH INDIA

### Vedic Age

The first phase of urbanisation in India came to an end with the decline of Indus Civilisation. A new era, called Vedic Age began with the arrival of Aryans.

**Vedic Age** – It is a period in the History of India between 1500 BC (BCE) – 600 BC (BCE). It gets its name from four 'Vedas'

**Slash and burn agriculture** : It is a farming method that involves clearing the land by cutting and burning all the trees and plants on it. Cultivation is done there for a short time and then abandoned. People then move to a new piece of land for cultivation.

### Aryans

The Aryans were Indo-Aryan language speaking, semi nomadic pastoralists. They came from Central Asia in several waves of migration through Khyber Pass of Hindu Kush Mountains.

Though cattle rearing was their main occupation, they also practised slash and burn agriculture.

**Slash and burn agriculture** : It is a farming method that involves clearing the land by cutting and burning all the trees and plants on it. Cultivation is done there for a short time and then abandoned. People then move to a new piece of land for cultivation.

#### Time, Spread and Sources

Geographical range	North India
Period	Iron Age
Time	1500 BC(BCE) – 600 BC (BCE)
Sources	Vedic Literature
Nature of Civilisation	Rural

### Aryans and their Home in India

- ◆ Aryans of the Rig Vedic Period were semi-nomadic. They were basically pastoral people with cattle as their main source of wealth.
- ◆ In the Rig Vedic times, the Aryan homeland was Punjab, which was at that time called Sapta Sindhu, the land of seven rivers.

- ◆ Around 1000 BC (BCE), Aryans in India moved eastward and settled in Indo-Gangetic Plain.
- ◆ Use of iron axes and ploughs became widespread.

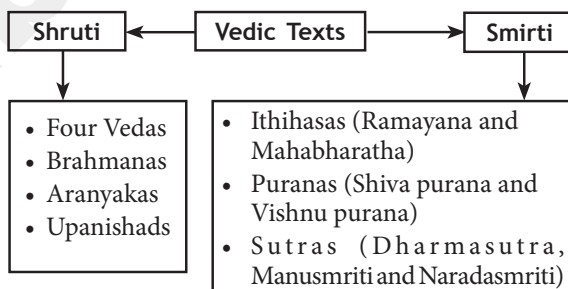
**Four Vedas** : 1. Rig, 2. Yajur, 3. Sama, 4. Atharva

### Sources

#### Vedic literature

Vedic literature can be classified into two broad categories.

- ◆ **Shrutis** - The Shrutis comprise the four Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. They are considered sacred, eternal and an unquestionable truth. 'Shruti' means listening (or unwritten) ones that were transmitted orally through generations.
- ◆ **Smritis** - A body of texts containing teachings on religion such as Ithihasas, Puranas, Tantras and Agamas. Smritis are not eternal. They are constantly revised. 'Smriti' means definite and written literature.

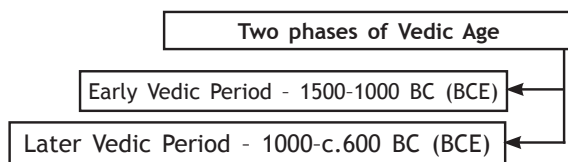


**National Motto** : “Satyameva Jayate” “(Truth alone triumphs)” is taken from Mundaka Upanishad.

### Archaeological Sources

Material remains such as iron implements and pottery from the archaeological sites in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan along the Indus and the Ganges.

### Classification of Vedic Age



## Vedic Culture

### Polity and Society

- ◆ The Rig Vedic polity was kinship - based. Kula (clan) was the basic unit of the polity. It was under a head called Kulapati. Several families joined together to form a Grama (village). Grama was headed by Gramani.
- ◆ A group of villages was called Vis (clan) and was headed by Vishayapati. Rajan was the head of the Jana (tribe) and he was addressed as Janasyagopa (guardian of the people). There were several tribal kingdoms (Rashtras) during Rig Vedic period (Bharatas, Matsyas, Puras).

### King

- ◆ The main responsibility of the Rajan was to protect his tribe. His powers were limited by tribal assemblies namely Vidhata, Sabha, Samiti and Gana. Of these Vidhata, (the tribal assembly) was the oldest.
- ◆ The king appointed a purohit (chief priest) to assist him. In economic, political and military matters, the king was assisted by the Senani (army chief). Gramani was the leader of the village.
- ◆ When the Aryans moved east ward- into Ganges-Yamuna-Doab regions, the early settlements were replaced by territorial kingdoms. Hereditary kingship began to emerge.
- ◆ In the monarchical form of government, the power of the king increased and he performed various rituals and sacrifices to make his position strong. Many Janas or Tribes were amalgamated to form Janapadas or Rashtras in later Vedic period. The importance of Samithi and Sabha diminished and the Vidhata completely disappeared. New states emerged. Bali was a voluntary contribution of the people to the King. In the later Vedic period bali was treated as tax and collected regularly. The Kuru and Panchala kingdoms flourished and large cities like Ayodhya, Indraprastha and Mathura also emerged during this period.

**Bali** - a tax consisting of 1/6 of the agricultural produce or cattle for a person.

### Social Organization

- ◆ The Vedic family was patriarchal. The fair complexioned Aryans distinguished themselves from dark complexioned non-

Aryans whom they called Dasyus and Dasas. Within the early Vedic Society there were three divisions (Treyi) ; the general public were called Vis, the warrior class was called Kshatriyas and the Priestly class was named Brahmanas. At a later stage, when the Aryans had to accommodate non-Aryan skilled workers in their social arrangement, a rigid four-fold Varna system was developed, i.e., the priestly Brahmanas, the warrior Kshatriyas, the land owning Vysyas and the skilled workers Sudras. Thus a graded social order emerged. Although the Vedic Age is evidenced by good number of texts, it does not have adequate amount of material evidences.

### Status of women

- ◆ In Rig Vedic society, women relatively enjoyed some freedom. The wife was respected as the mistress of the household. She could perform rituals along with her husband in their house. Child marriage and sati were unknown. There was no bar on the remarriage of widows. Nevertheless, the women were denied right to inherit property from their parents. They played no role in public affairs.
- ◆ In the later Vedic period the role of women in society, as well as their status, even within the family, declined. Women could no longer perform rituals in the family. The rules of marriage became much more complex and rigid. Polygamy became common. Widow remarriage was not encouraged. Education was denied to women. Intercaste marriages were spurned.

### Economic Life

- ◆ Economy in the Vedic period was sustained by a combination of pastoralism and agriculture. Though occupation of Rig Vedic Aryans was cattle rearing, there were carpenters, chariot makers, potters, smiths, weavers, and leather workers. **Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP)** was attributed to this period. Horses, cows, goats, sheep, oxen and dogs were domesticated.
- ◆ When Aryans permanently settled in Sindh and the Punjab regions they began to practise agriculture. The staple crop was yava (barley). There is no mention of wheat or cotton in the Rig-Veda, though both were cultivated by the Indus people. Two crops a year were raised. In the later Vedic period the Aryans tamed

elephants, apart from cow, goat, sheep and horse. In addition to craftsmen of early Vedic period there were also jewellers, dyers and smelters. Pottery of this period was **Painted Grey Ware Culture**.

- ◆ Use of iron plough and axe helped to put more areas of land under cultivation. Crops of wheat, rice and barley were cultivated. With the growth of agriculture, the idea of private possession of land came into existence.
- ◆ New crafts and arts developed leading to surplus production of commodities for sale.
- ◆ Trade became extensive. Barter system was prevalent (exchange of goods). They used Nishka, Satmana (gold coins) and Krishnala (silver coins) for business transactions.

**Metals Known to Rig Vedic People:** Gold (Hiranya), Iron (Shyama), Copper/ Bronze (Ayas)

### Religion

- ◆ Rig Vedic Aryans worshipped mostly the earthly and celestial gods like Prithvi (Earth), Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), Varuna (rain), Indra (Thunder). There were also lesser female deities like Aditi (goddess of eternity) and Usha (appearance of dawn). Their religion was Yajna centered. The mode of prayer was recitation of Vedic hymns. People prayed for the welfare of Praja (children) Pasu (cattle) and Dhana (wealth). Cow was considered a sacred animal.
- ◆ There were no temples. Idol worship had not yet come into existence.
- ◆ Later on priesthood became a profession and a hereditary one. New gods were perhaps adopted from non-Aryans. Indra and Agni lost their importance. Prajapathi (the creator) Vishnu (the protector) and Rudra (the destroyer) became prominent. Sacrifices and rituals became more elaborate.

### Education

#### Gurukula System of Education

- ◆ The gurukula system is an ancient learning method.
- ◆ The word Gurukula is a combination of the Sanskrit Word Guru (teacher or master) and Kula (family or home).
- ◆ The shishyas resided with their guru and served them and simultaneously learnt and gained knowledge.

- ◆ The students received education through oral tradition meaning rote learning, and were required to memorise everything.
- ◆ The subjects of the study included the four Vedas, Ithihasas, Puranas, grammar, logic, ethics, astrology, maths and military science. The students were also trained to lead a disciplined life.
- ◆ Only Dvijas could be Shishyas. No women could have formal education.

#### Age - based Ashramas

Towards the end of the later Vedic period, the concept of four stages in life (the four ashramas) developed.

- ◆ Brahmacharya (Student Life)
- ◆ Grihastha (Married Life)
- ◆ Vanaprastha (Going to the forest to meditate)
- ◆ Sanyasa (Leading a life of an ascetic so as to attain Swarga)

The term '**Asva**' (**Horse**) is mentioned 215 times and **Vrishabha** (**bull**) is mentioned 170 times. But neither tiger, nor rhinoceros is found in Rig Vedic text. The last mentioned two animals are tropical animals which are not mentioned in Rig Veda. Rig Veda shows no urban way of life. Hence the identity cannot be correlated to Harappan culture, which does not know horse.

#### Contemporary culture in south India

- ◆ The early Vedic culture in northern India coincided with Chalcolithic cultures that prevailed in other parts of the sub-continent. Since, people used copper (chalco) and stone (lithic), it was called Chalcolithic period.
- ◆ Though Chalcolithic culture of India was contemporary to the mature phase of Harappan culture, they continued to exist even after the decline of the latter.
- ◆ The later Vedic culture in north India and the Iron Age in south India belongs to the same period.
- ◆ Towards the end of Iron Age, people stepped into what is known as Megalithic Culture (600 BC (BCE) and AD (CE) 100).
- ◆ Megalithic Period in ancient Tamilakam synchronised with the pre Sangam period. The Black and Red Ware Pottery became the characteristic of the Megalithic period.

## GREAT THINKERS AND NEW FAITHS

### Intellectual Awakening

The Sixth Century BC (BCE) is regarded as an important period in the history of ancient India. As a land mark period in the intellectual and spiritual development in India, historian Will Durant has rightly called it the "shower of stars".

#### Sources

##### Literary sources

- ◆ Angas – Jain texts
- ◆ Tripitakas and Jatakas - Buddhist texts

##### Causes for the Rise of Intellectual Awakening and the Birth of Buddhism and Jainism

There were several reasons for the rise of new intellectual awakening. Some of the exploitative practices that paved way for new faiths include :

- ◆ The complex rituals and sacrifices advocated in the later Vedic period
- ◆ Expensive sacrificial ceremonies
- ◆ Superstitious beliefs and practices that confused the common man.
- ◆ Upanishads taught as alternative to sacrificial rites were too philosophical, which a layperson could not understand.
- ◆ Slavery, caste system, gender discrimination also contributed to the new awakening.

**Origin of Jainism :** Jainism is one of the world's oldest living religions. Jainism grounds itself in 24 Tirthankaras. A 'Tirthankara', is the one who revealed religious truth at different times. The first Tirthankara was Rishabha and the last one was Mahavira. Jainism gained prominence under the aegis of Mahavira, during the sixth century BC (BCE).

#### Mahavira (The Great Hero)

Vardhamana, meaning 'prosperous', was a kshatriya prince. However, at the age of 30, he renounced his princely status to adopt an ascetic life. He undertook intense meditation.

Mahavira	
Original name	Vardhamana
Place of Birth	Kundhagrama near Vaishali, Bihar
Parents	Siddharth, Trishala
Place of Death	Pavapuri, Bihar

After twelve and a half years of rigorous penance, Vardhamana attained omniscience or supreme knowledge, known as Kevala. Thereafter, he became Jina meaning 'one who conquered worldly pleasure and attachment'. His followers are called Jains. Mahavira reviewed the ancient Sramanic traditions and came up with new doctrines. Therefore he is believed to be the real founder of Jainism.

**Omniscience** – It is the ability to know everything or be infinitely wise.

#### Unique Teachings of Jainism

Jainism denies God as the creator of Universe.

Basic philosophy of Jainism is Ahimsa or 'non – Violence'.

Ultimate aim of Jainism is attaining moksha or ending the cycle of birth – death – rebirth.

Jains reject the belief in Last judgement, where God, a supreme being, decides who goes to heaven or hell.

Jainism advocates that the goodness or quality of one's life is determined by one's karma.

**Karma** - The belief that a person's actions in this life determine the quality of his or her later part of the current life and the next incarnation.

#### Tri-rathnas or Three Jewels

Mahavira exhorted the three – fold path for the attainment of moksha and for the liberation from Karma. They are : 1. Right Faith, 2. Right Knowledge, 3. Right Action

**Moksha** - Liberation from the cycle of birth and death

#### Jain Code of Conduct

Mahavira asked his followers to live a virtuous life. In order to live a life filled with sound morals, he preached five major principles to follow. They are:

- ◆ Ahimsa - not to injure any living beings
- ◆ Satya - to speak truth
- ◆ Asteya - not to steal
- ◆ Aparigraha - not to own property
- ◆ Brahmacharya - Celibacy

**Gautama Swami**, a chief disciple of Mahavira, compiled the teachings of Mahavira, called Agama sidhantha.

### Digambaras and Svetambaras

Jainism split into two sects

#### Digambaras

Digambaras are orthodox and conservative followers.

Monks of the digambara sect, do not wear any clothing and live naked. They are forbidden to have any kind of possessions. Digambaras believe that women cannot achieve nirvana or liberation directly.

#### Svetambaras

The Svetambaras are considered progressive. Monks of Svetambaras sect, wear white robes. They are permitted to have Rajoharana (broom with wollen threads), begging bowl and book. Svetambaras believe that women are equally capable of achieving liberation as men.

#### Reasons for the Spread of Jainism

The following are the main reasons for the wide acceptance of Jainism in India :

- ◆ Use of people's language.
- ◆ Intelligible teachings.
- ◆ Support from rulers and traders.
- ◆ Perseverance of Jain monks.

### Buddhism

#### Gautama Buddha

Gautama Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. His real name was Siddhartha. Like Mahavira, he was also a Kshatriya prince belonging to the ruling Sakya clan. When Siddhartha was only seven days old his mother died. So he was raised by his step mother Gautami.

Buddha	
Original name	Siddhartha
Place of Birth	Lumbini Garden, Nepal
Parents	Suddhodana, Maya devi
Place of Death	Kushi Nagar, UP

#### Four Great Sights

At the age of 29, Siddhartha saw four sorrowful sights. They were :

- ◆ An uncared old man in rags with his bent back.
- ◆ An sick man suffering from an incurable disease.
- ◆ A man's corpse being carried to the burial ground by weeping relatives.
- ◆ An ascetic

### Enlightenment

Buddha, the Awakened or Enlightened One, realised that the human life was full of misery and unhappiness. So at the age of 29 he left his palace and became a hermit. He sacrificed six years of his life towards penance. Nonetheless deciding that self-mortification was not a path to salvation, Buddha sat under a Pipal tree and undertook a deep meditation near Gaya. On the 49<sup>th</sup> day he finally attained enlightenment. From that moment onwards, he was called Buddha or the Enlightened One. He was also known as Sakya Muni or Sage of Sakya clan.

Buddha delivered his first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath, near Benaras. This was called "Dharma Chakra Pravartana" or the Turning of the Wheel of Law.

#### Buddha's Four Noble Truths

- ◆ Life is full of sorrow and misery.
- ◆ Desire is the cause of misery.
- ◆ Sorrows and sufferings can be removed by giving up one's desire.
- ◆ The desire can be overcome by following the right path (Noble eightfold path)

#### Eightfold Path

- ◆ Right view, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Knowledge, Right Meditation
- ◆ The teachings of Lord Buddha were simple and taught in a language which people used for communication. Since the teachings addressed the everyday concern of the people, they could relate to them. He was opposed to rituals and sacrifices.

#### Teachings of Buddha

- ◆ Buddha's teachings are referred to as dhamma.
- ◆ Buddhism accepted the Theory of Karma – meaning that the quality of man's life depends on his deed.
- ◆ Buddha neither accepted nor denied the existence of God, but believed in the laws of universe.
- ◆ Buddha asserted that attaining nirvana is the ultimate aim of life.
- ◆ Buddha advocated ahimsa or non-violence.
- ◆ Buddha had rejected the caste system.

**The Wheel of life** – represents the Buddhist view of the world.