The Demise of the Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus valley proved capable of nurturing a civilization that endured for over a thousand years. But when Harappa collapsed, the plains of the Indus were bypassed in favor of the far more lush and extensive lands in the basin of the Ganges River network to the east. Though the Indus would later serve, for much shorter time spans, as the seat of empires, the core areas of successive Indian civilization were far to the east and south.

Harappa was destroyed and it disappeared from history for thousands of years. Though the peoples who built the Indus complex left their mark on subsequent Indian culture, they did not pass on the fundamental patterns of civilized life that had evolved. Their mother goddess and the dancing god of fertility endured, and some of their symbols, such as the swastika and lingam (usually stone, phallic images), were prominent in later artistic and religious traditions. Harappan tanks or public bathing ponds remain a central feature of Indian cities, particularly in the south. Their techniques of growing rice and cotton were preserved by cultivating peoples fleeing nomadic invaders, and were later taken up by the newly arrived Indo-Aryan tribes.

Virtually everything else was lost much of what the Harappan peoples had accomplished had to be redone by later civilized peoples. The cities of the Indus civilization were destroyed and comparable urban centers did not reappear in South Asia for hundreds or, by some scholars' reckoning, thousands of years. Their remarkably advanced standards for the measurement of distance and weight ceased to be used. Their system of writing was forgotten, and when rediscovered, it was celebrated as an intriguing but very dead language from the past. Harappan skills in community planning, sewage control, and engineering were meaningless to the nomadic peoples who took control of their homelands. The Harappan penchant for standardization, discipline, and state control was profoundly challenged by the brawling, independent-minded warriors who supplanted them as masters of the Indian subcontinent.

In the India the nomadic threat was remote, perhaps nonexistent for centuries. The Harappan peoples were deficient in military technology and organization. When combined with natural calamities, the waves of warlike nomads migrating into the Indus region proved too much for the Harappan peoples to resist or absorb. The gap between the nomads' herding culture and the urban, agriculture-based Harappan civilization was too great to be bridged. Conflict between them may well have proven fatal to a civilization long in decline.

The cities of the Harappan Culture had declined between 1700 BC to 1500BC. Consequently, their economic and administrative system had slowly declined. A number of rural settlements appeared afterwards. These rural settlements show continuity of certain Harappan elements. Around the same time we find archaeological evidence of the arrival of new people known as Aryans or Indo-Aryans on the outskirts of the Harappan region. Initially they would have come in small numbers through the passes in the northwestern mountains. Their initial settlements were in the valleys of the north-west and plains of the Punjab. Later, they moved into Indo-Gangetic plains. As they were mainly a cattle-keeping people, they were mainly in search of pastures. By 6th Century BC may be divided into the Early Vedic Period or Rig Vedic Period (1500BC – 1000BC) and the Later Vedic Period (1000BC 0 600BC).

It was between about 1500 and 1000 B.C., as the great cities of the Indus region crumbled into ruins, nomadic Aryan invaders from central Asia moved into the fertile Indus plains and pushed into the Ganges River valleys to the east. It took these unruly, warlike peoples many centuries to build a civilization that rivaled that of the Harappans. The Aryans concentrated on assaulting Harappan settlements and different Aryan tribal groups. As peoples who depended primarily on great herds of cattle to provide their subsistence, they had little use for the great irrigation works and advanced agricultural technology of the Indus valley peoples. Though they conserved some Harappan beliefs and symbols, the Aryan invaders did little to restore or replace the great cities and engineering systems of the peoples they had supplanted.

     Eventually, however, many of the Aryan groups began to settle down, and increasingly they relied on farming to support their communities. By about 700 B.C., their priests had begun to orally record the sacred hymns and ritual incantations that had long been central to Aryan culture. In the following centuries, strong warrior leaders built tribunal units into larger kingdoms. The emergence of priestly and warrior elites signaled the beginning of a new pattern of civilization in South Asia. By the 6th century B.C., the renewal of civilized life in India was marked by the emergence of great world religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and a renewal of trade, urban life, and splendid artistic and architectural achievements.

The Advent of the Aryans

The majority of scholars agree that Indo-Aryans came from the steppes north and east of the Caspian Sea and migrated across the Iranian plateau to the northern and northwestern Indian subcontinent. There are no firm evidence for this theory as well as for the theory that all Indo-European speaking people had a common homeland from where they migrated into parts of Asia and Europe. Indo-European theory primarily bases on linguistic similarity of Sanskrit and some European languages although there are also archeological evidence and historical sources. In the treaty between the Hittites and Mitanni kings are mentioned gods Mitira, Indara, Uruvna and Nasatyas which correspond to the gods mentioned in Rigveda - Mitra, Indra, Varuna and Ashvins (Nasatyra), while the Kassites who settled in Mesopotamia in the 18th century BC introduced horse and the chariot (Indo-Aryans also used chariots), and had Indo-European names. For that reason the theory of a common Indo-European homeland has many supporters among the scholars. However, recently became popular also the hypothesis which claims that Indo-Aryans did not migrate from Central Asia but were indigenous ethnic and linguistic element of the Indian subcontinent.

Different scholars have identified different regions as the original home of the Aryans. They include the Arctic region, the Greek, the Germany, the Central Asia and the southern Russia. Bala Gangadhara Tilak argues that the Aryans came from the Arctic region on astronomical calculations. However, the theory of southern Russia appears to be more probable and widely accepted by historians. From there, the Aryans moved to different parts of Asia and Europe. According to the Archaeology Guide, information about the so-called "Aryan Invasion" of the Indian subcontinent. The story goes like this: The Aryans were a tribe of Indo-European-speaking, horse-riding nomads living in the Russian arid Steppes. Sometime around 2000 BC, the Aryans invaded the ancient urban civilizations of the Indus Valley, and destroyed that culture. The [Indus Valley civilizations](http://archaeology.about.com/od/indusrivercivilizations/index.htm) were far more civilized than any horse-back nomad, having had a written language, farming capabilities, and led a truly urban existence. Some 1,500 years after the supposed invasion, the descendants of the Aryans, so they say, wrote the classic Indian literature called the [Vedic manuscripts](http://archaeology.about.com/od/vterms/g/vedic.htm).

O**riginal Home of Aryans**

Central Asia Max Muller

Tibet Dayanand Saraswati

Bactria J.C. Rod

Arctic Region B.G. Tilak

Russian Steppes Prof. Belfy

Central India Rajbali Pandey



Sapta Sindhu A.C. Das

German Plain Prof.Penka

Pamirs Mayor

Kashmir L.D.Kala

Turkistan Hurz Fe

The spread of the Aryan pastoralists into the hills and plains of northern and eastern India between 1500 and 500 B.C. Harappa extended over the largest territory of any of the first civilizations, and it existed without interruption for over a millennium. Its longevity invites comparison with Egypt. But Egypt proved more able than either Harappa or individual Mesopotamian civilizations to absorb massive invasions of nomadic peoples.

     Faced with major climatic shifts, the Harappans proved unable to also withstand the steady and prolonged pressure of the Aryan incursions. Thus, the dominance of these invaders in the Harappan core regions and much of the rest of northern India by 1000 B.C. meant the end of India's first civilization.

  It is still impossible to do more than guess at the social organization or the political and administrative control implied by this vast area of cultural uniformity. The evidence of widespread trade in many commodities, the apparent uniformity of weights and measures, the common script, and the uniformity--almost common currency--of the seals all indicate some measure of political and economic control and point to the great cities Mohenjo-daro and Harappa as their centers. The presence of the great granaries on the citadel mounds in these cities and of the "citadels" themselves suggests--partly on the analogies of the cities of Mesopotamia--the existence of priest-kings, or at least of a priestly oligarchy, that controlled the economy and civil government. The intellectual mechanism of this government and the striking degree of control implicit in it are still matters of speculation. Nor can scholars yet speak with any certainty regarding relations between the cities and surrounding villages.

GEOGRAPHICAL HORIZON OF THE VEDIC ARYANS

The Aryans were semi-nomadic pastoralists. Their main economic was cattle they used them for plowing and for food. They also had sheep and goats. They bred horses for riding and for chariots in both warfare and sports. They had honey and fish and wheat and barley. They used wool and flax to make clothes. Their tools were made of stone, wood or bone. They were unquestionably a tough people, and they were fierce and war-like. Their religion reflects it dominated as it is by a storm-god or sky-god that enjoins warfare and conquest. Hence their culture was oriented around warfare, and they were very good at it. They were superior on horseback and rushed into battle in chariots. Hence, we noted from here that they had "strong physiques, a hearty appetite in both solids and liquids, ready brutality, a skill and courage in war, which soon gave them a mastery of Northern India. The Aryans wanted land for their cattle and pasture for their horses. The process of conquest was gradual. Successive tribes crossed the mountains into the Indus River Valley and the Punjab. They had a lot of motility because of their dominance of horses. The Aryans settled in the Sapta Region. sapta-sindhu meaning area of seven rivers. This area largely covers the northwestern part of South Asia up to river Yamuna. The seven rivers included Sindhu, Vitasta (Jhelum), Asikni (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Vipash (Beas), Shutudri (Sutlej) and the Sarasvati. In this area the Rigvedic people lived, fought battles, grazed their herds of cattle and other domesticated animals. Gradually moving eastward, they came to occupy eastern U.P. (Kosala) and north Bihar (Videha) during the Later Vedic period. Here they came into contact with the people who spoke languages different from their own and were living in this area for long.

What did the Aryans do with their time? They seem to have had a well-developed musical culture, and song and dance dominated their society. They were not greatly invested in the visual arts, but their interest in lyric poetry was unmatched. They did not, however, have much interest in writing even though they could have inherited a civilization and a writing system when they originally settled India. The earliest records of writing of Indian culture were the Vedas. They were composed in Sanskrit between 1500-800 B.C. They are full of hymns, spells, ritual observations and charms of the Aryans. The Indus religion was a religion based on fertility. It held the earth as the center and giver of life. The Aryan religion concentrated on the sky, atmosphere, sun, stars, storms and fire. It was more of a priestly religion, focusing on regular sacrifices. These religious foundations gave way to Hinduism.

The Aryans Culture also known as **Vedic civilization** was a new start in Indian culture. Harappa was more or less a dead end; the Aryans adopted almost nothing of Harappan culture. The inhabitants of northern India were subdued and patterns of conduct and thought of the Aryans were imposed on them. The Aryans did adopt some things from the Dravidians, the peoples living in southern India. They adopted the village community instead of nomadic pastorialism. They also adapted the systems of land tenure and taxation.They built no cities, no states, no granaries, and used no writing. Instead they were a warlike people that organized themselves in individual tribal, kinship units, the **jana**. The *jana* was ruled over by a war-chief. These tribes spread quickly over northern India and the Deccan. In a process the *jana*, slowly developed from an organization based on kinship to one based on geography. The *jana* became a **janapada**, or nation and the *jana-rajya*, or tribal kingdom, became the **jana-rajyapada**, or national kingdom.

When we carefully studies about the Vedic texts they have shown the reflection of two stages in the development in terms of literature as well as social and cultural evolution. The Rigveda which is the oldest Vedic text reflects one stage of social and cultural development whereas the other three Vedas reflect another stage. The first stage is known as the Rigvedic period or Early Vedic period and the later stage is known as the Later Vedic period. The age of the Early Vedic period corresponds with the date of the composition of the Rig vedic hymns. This date has been fixed between 1500 BC and 1000 BC. The later Vedic period is placed between 1000 BC and 600 BC.

**Rig Vedic Age or Early Vedic Period (1500 - 1000 B.C.)**

During the Rig Vedic period, the Aryans were mostly confined to the Indus region. The Rig Veda refers to Saptasindhu or the landof seven rivers. The political, social and cultural life of the Rig Vedic people can be traced from the hymns of the Rig Veda.

**Political Organization**

These Aryan also were a tribal people ruled over by a war-chief, or **raja** (king). Somewhere in the early centuries of the second millennium BC, they began to migrate southwards in waves of steady conquest across the face of Persia and the lands of India. They swept over Persia with lightening speed, and spread across the northern river plains of India. Their natures as a warlike, conquering people are still preserved in Vedic religion, the foundation of Hinduism.

The basic unit of political organization was *kula* or family. Several families joined together on the basis of their kinship to form a village or grama. The leader of grama was known as gramani. A group of villages constituted a larger unit called *visu*. It was headed by vishayapati. The highest political unit was called jana or tribe. There were several tribal kingdoms during the Rig Vedic period such as Bharatas, Matsyas, Yadus and Purus. The head of the kingdom was called as *rajan* or king. The Rig Vedic polity was normally monarchical and the succession was hereditary. The king was assisted by *purohita* or priest and *senani* or commander of the army in his administration. There were two popular bodies called the *Sabha and Samiti.* The former seems to have been a council of elders and the latter, a general assembly of the entire people.

We have mentioned above that the chief social unit of the Aryans was known as jana. The chief of this unit was the political leader called rajan. The main function of the chief was to protect the jana and cattle from the enemies. He was helped in his task by the tribal assemblies called sabha, samiti, vidatha, gana and parishad.

Out of these sabha and samiti were the most important assemblies. All aspects of life were discussed in these assemblies. These may include wars, distribution of the spoils of wars, judicial and religious activities etc. Thus these assemblies in a way limited the powers of the chiefs. Interestingly, women were also allowed to participate in the deliberations of the sabha and samiti.

The purohita assisted and advised the chief on various matters. Other than the purohita, there were a limited number of other officials who assisted the chief in the day-to-day tribal affairs. Senani, kulapa, gramani, etc. are some of the functionaries which find mention in the Rigveda. The sena or army was not a permanent fighting group and consisted of able bodied tribesmen who were mobilized at the time of the wars. Takshan, the carpenter and rathakara, the chariot maker were responsible for making chariots. There is no official mentioned as a collector of taxes. The people offered to the chief what is called bali. It was just a voluntary contribution made by the ordinary tribesmen on special occasions. All this shows that the early Vedic polity was an uncomplicated system based on the support and active participation of all the tribesmen.

This situation, however, changed during the later Vedic phase.

**Social Life**

The Rig Vedic society was patriarchal. The basic unit of society was family or *graham.* The head of the family was known as *grahapathi*. Monogamy was generally practiced while polygamy was prevalent among the royal and noble families. The wife took care of the household and participated in all the major ceremonies. Women were given equal opportunities as men for their spiritual and intellectual development. There were women poets like Apala, Viswavara, Ghosa and Lopamudra during the Rig Vedic period. The women in society enjoyed respectable position. She was married at a proper age and could choose a husband of her own choice. She could take part in the proceedings of the tribal assemblies called sabha and samiti.

Both men and women wore upper and lower garments made of cotton and wool. A variety of ornaments were used by both men and women. Wheat and barley, milk and its products like curd and ghee, vegetables and fruits were the chief articles of food. The eating of cow’s meat was prohibited since it was a sacred animal. Chariot racing, horse racing, dicing, music and dance were the favourite pastimes. The social divisions were not rigid during the Rig Vedic period as it was in the later Vedic period.

The Rig vedic society was a simple and largely an egalitarian society. There was no caste division. Occupation was not based on birth. Members of a family could adopt different occupations. However certain differences did exist during the period. Varna or colour was the basis of initial differentiation between the Vedic and non-Vedic people. The Vedic people were fair whereas the non-Vedic indigenous people were dark in complexion and spoke a different language. Thus the Rig Veda mentions arya varna and dasa varna. Here dasa has been used in the sense of a group different from the Rig Vedic people. Later, dasa came to mean a slave. Besides, certain practices during this period, such as concentration of larger share of the war booty in the hands of the chiefs and priests resulted in the creation of some inequalities within a tribe during the later part of this Vedic phase.

The warriors, priests and the ordinary people were the three sections of the Rig Vedic tribe. The sudra category came into existence only towards the end of the Rig Vedic period. This means that the division of society in the early Vedic period was not sharp.

This is indicated by the following verse in the Rig Veda: “I am a poet, my father is a physician and my mother grinds grain upon the stone. Striving for wealth, with varied plans, we follow our desires like cattle.”

**Economic Condition**

The Rig Vedic Aryans were pastoral people and their main occupation was cattle rearing. Their wealth was estimated in terms of their cattle. They reared cattle, sheep, goats, and horses for purposes of milk, meat and hides. We arrive at this conclusion after analyzing the literary evidence in the Rigveda. A large number of words are derived from the word “go” meaning cow. A wealthy person was known as “gomat” and the daughter called “duhitri” which means one who milks the cow. The word “gaveshana” literally means search for cows, but it also means battle since many battles were fought over cattle. The cows were thought of as providers of everything. Prayers are offered for increase in the number of cattle. All the above and many more references show that the cattles breeding was the most important economic activity of the Rig Vedic Aryans.

When they permanently settled in North India they began to practice agriculture. With the knowledge and use of iron they were able to clean forests and bring more lands under cultivation. Carpentry was another important profession and the availability of wood from the forests cleared made the profession profitable. Carpenters produced chariots and ploughs. Workers in metal made a variety of articles with copper, bronze and iron. Spinning was another important occupation and cotton and woolen fabrics were made. Goldsmiths were active in making ornaments. The potters made various kinds of vessels for domestic use. The products of these activities were exchanged through barter. However, cows were the most favoured medium of exchange. The priests received cows, horses and gold ornaments as fees for performing sacrifices.

Trade was another important economic activity and rivers served as important means of transport. Trade was conducted on barter system. In the later times, gold coins called nishka were used as media of exchange in large transactions.

**Religion**

The Rig Vedic Aryans worshiped the natural forces like earth, fire, wind, rain and thunder. They personified these natural forces into many gods and worshipped them. There were no temples and no idol worship during the early Vedic period. Prayers were offered to the gods in the expectation of rewards. Ghee, milk and grain were given as offerings. Elaborate rituals were followed during the worship.

The prayers to propitiate gods for physical protection and for material gains were the main concerns of the Rig Vedic people. The Rig Vedic gods were generally personifications of different aspects of natural forces such as rains, storm, sun etc. The attributes of these gods also reflect the tribal and patriarchal nature of the society as we do not find many goddesses mentioned in the text. Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Pushana, Yama, Soma, etc. are all male gods. In comparison, we have only a few goddesses such as Ushas, Sarasvati, Prithvi, etc which occupy secondary positions in the pantheon.

The functions of different gods reflect their needs in the society. Thus, since the Rig Vedic people were engaged in wars with each other they worshipped Indra as a god. He is the most frequently mentioned god in the Rig Veda. Indra was the tutelary deity of the invading Aryans, He protects the Aryan colour and subjects the black skin; he have land to the Aryans and made the aborigines subject to them. He appears to have been originally a god of thunder, a phenomenon which lends itself to anthropomorphic treatment. Maruts the god of storm aided Indra in the wars in the way tribesmen aided their leader in the tribal wars.

Agni or Fire illustrates the fluid and intangible character of Vedic divinities. He is one of the greatest in the Pantheon, and in some ways his godhead is strongly marked. He blesses, protects, preserves, and inspires: he is a divine priest and messenger between gods and men: he “knowns all generations”. Yet he is not a god of fire but regarded as divine. The hymns tell us that he was a tawny beard and hair; a flaming head or three heads; three tongues or seven; four eyes or a thousand. One poem says that he faces in all directions; another that he is footless and headless. He is called the son of Heaven and Earth.

Soma the sacred plant whose juice was offered in the most solemn sacrifices, we again find the combination of natural phenomena and divinity. Soma worship is connected with a very ancient but persistent form of animism, for the Vedic poets celebrate as immoral the stones under which the plant is pressed and beg them to bestow health and children.

Varuna another important deity, he is the omnipotent and omniscient uphold of moral and physical law. He established earth and sky; he set the sun in heaven and ordained the movements of the moon and stars; the wind is his breath and by his law the heavens and earth are kept apart. He perceives all that exists in heaven and earth or beyond, nor could a man escape him though he fled beyond the sky. The prayer to him for release from sin and his is gracious to the penitent hence the hymns addressed to Varuna contain petitions for forgiveness.

Pushan was the god of the roads, herdsmen and cattle. In the life of the pastoral nomads, this god must have been very important. Other gods were similarly associated with other aspects of nature and life.

All these gods were invoked and propitiated at yajnas or sacrifices. These sacrifices were organized by the chiefs of the tribes and performed by priests. Gods thus invoked in the sacrifices supposedly rewarded the sacrificers with success in wars, progeny, increase in cattle and long life. It also brought large number of gifts in the form of dana and dakshina to the priests.

It is important here to note that during the entire Vedic phase people did not construct temples nor did they worship any statue. These features of Indian religion developed much later.

Summary

We know more about the Aryans than we know about their Indus civilization predecessors. Our knowledge comes largely from the four Vedas ("Knowledge"), great collections of hymns to the gods and ritual texts composed and handed down orally between 1500 and 500 B.C. by the Aryan priests, the Brahmins. Hence this thousand-year period is commonly called the Vedic Age.

     The earliest and most important of the Vedas, the Rig-Veda ("Royal Veda"), the earliest surviving Indo-European work of literature, gives an insight into the institutions and ideas of the Early Vedic Age, which ended about 1000 B.C. Each tribe was headed by a war leader called rajah, a word closely related to the Latin word for king, rex. Like the early kings of Sumer, Greece, and Rome, the rajah was not considered divine; nor was he an absolute monarch. Two tribal assemblies, one a small council of the great men of the tribe and the other a larger gathering of the heads of families, approved his accession to office and advised him on important matters.

     The earliest hymns in the Rig-Veda mention only two social classes, the Kshatriyas (nobility) and the Vaishyas (commoners). But by the end of the Early Vedic Age two additional classes were recognized: the Brahmins, or priests, who because of their specialized religious knowledge had begun to assume the highest social rank; and the Shudras, the non-Aryan conquered population of workers and serfs at the bottom of the social scale. From these four classes the famous caste system of India was to develop during the Later Vedic Age.

     The early Aryans had an unsophisticated pre-moral religion. It involved making sacrifices to the deified forces of nature in return for such material gains as victory in war, long life, and many offspring. The gods were conceived in the image of humans - virile and warlike, fond of charioteering, dancing, and gambling (dice, like chess, is an Indian invention). They were addicted to an intoxicating drink called soma, which was believed to make them immortal. The most popular god of the Rig-Veda was Indra, storm-god and patron of warriors, who is described leading the Aryans in destroying the forts of the Dasas. Virile and boisterous, Indra personified the heroic virtues of the Aryan warrior aristocracy as he drove his chariot across the sky, wielded his thunderbolts, ate bulls by the score, and quaffed entire lakes of intoxicating soma. Another major Aryan god was Varuna, the sky-god. Viewed as the king of the gods, he lived in a great palace in the heavens where one of his associates was Mitra, known as Mithras to the Persians and widely worshiped in the Roman Empire. Varuna was the guardian of rita, which is the right order of things. Rita is both the cosmic law of nature (the regularity of the seasons,for example), and the customary tribal law of the Aryans.

**Later Vedic Period (1000 – 500 B.C.)**

The Aryans further moved towards east in the Later Vedic Period. The Satapatha Brahmana refers to the expansion of Aryans to the eastern Gangetic plains. Several tribal groups and kingdoms are mentioned in the later Vedic literature. One important development during this period is the growth of large kingdoms. Kuru and Panchala kingdoms flourished in the beginning. Parikshat and Janamejaya were the famous rulers of Kuru kingdom. Pravahana Jaivali was a popular king of the Panchalas. He was a patron of learning. After the fall of Kurus and Panchalas, other kingdoms like Kosala, Kasi and Videha came into prominence. The famous ruler of Kasi was Ajatasatru. Janaka was the king of Videha with its capital at Mithila. His court was adorned by scholar Yajnavalkya. Magadha, Anga and Vanga seem to be the easternmost tribal kingdoms. The later Vedic texts also refer to the three divisions of India – Aryavarta (northern India), Madhyadesa (central India) and Dakshinapatha (southern India).

**Political Organization**

The changes in the material and social life during the later Vedic period led to changes in the political sphere as well. The nature of chiefship changed in this period. The territorial idea gained ground. The people started to lose their control over the chief and the popular assemblies gradually disappeared.

The chiefship had become hereditary. The idea of the divine nature of kingship gets a mention in the literature of this period. The brahmanas helped the chiefs in this process.

The elaborate coronation rituals such as vajapeya and rajasuya established the chief authority. As the chiefs became more powerful, the authority of the popular assemblies started waning. The officers were appointed to help the chief in administration and they acquired the functions of the popular assemblies as main advisors.

A rudimentary army too emerged as an important element of the political structure during this period. All these lived on the taxes called bali, the shulka, and the bhaga offered by the people. The chiefs of this period belonged to the kshatriya varna and they in league with the brahmanas tried to establish complete control over the people in the name of dharma.

However, all these elements do not show that a janapada or territorial state with all its attributes such as a standing army and bureaucracy had emerged in the later Vedic period but the process has started and soon after the vedic period in the sixth century BC we notice the rise of sixteen mahajanpadas in the northern India.

The Aryans, who were mainly cattle herders, became agriculturists later, and assisted by the knowledge of iron technology they were able to establish larger settlements in the Ganga- Yamuna doab region. This is shown by the PGW (Painted Grey Ware) archaeology and the contents of the Later Vedic literature. This change precipitated a series of changes in the other spheres of life. From an egalitarian, tribal socio-political set up during the Early Vedic period it was transformed into a varna divided territorially based set up by the end of the Vedic period. The position of the tribal chiefs became hereditary and the emerging officials usurped the role of the popular assemblies. The growing number of yajnas shows the importance of the king as well as of the brahmanas. Similarly, the gods who were important earlier lost their significance and gave way to new deities. All these changes ultimately resulted in the rise of janapadas and mahajanapadas i.e. bigger territorial states in the sixth century BC.

**Economic Condition**

Iron was used extensively in this period and this enabled the people to clear forests and to bring more land under cultivation. Agriculture became the chief occupation. Improved types of implements were used for cultivation. Besides barley, rice and wheat were grown. Knowledge of manure was another improvement. Industrial activity became more varied and there was greater specialization. Metal work, leather work, carpentry and pottery made great progress. In addition to internal trade, foreign trade became extensive. The Later Vedic people were familiar with the sea and they traded with countries like Babylon. A class of hereditary merchants *(vaniya)* came into existence. Vaisyas also carried on trade and commerce. They organized themselves into guilds known as *ganas*. Besides *nishka* of the Rig Vedic period, gold and silver coins like *satamana* and *krishnala* were used as media of exchange.

During later Vedic phase, agriculture became the mainstay of the Vedic people. Many rituals were introduced to initiate the process of agriculture. It also speaks of ploughing with yokes of six and eight oxen. The buffalo had been domesticated for the agricultural purposes. This animal was extremely useful in ploughing the swampy land. The god Indra acquires a new epithet ‘Lord of the Plough’ in this period. The number and varieties of plant food increased. Apart from barley, people now cultivated wheat, rice, pulses, lentils, millet, sugarcane etc. The items of dana and dakshina included cooked rice. Thus with the beginning of food production agricultural produce began to be offered in the rituals. Tila, from which the first widely used vegetable food-oil was derived increasingly, came to be used in rituals.

The main factor in the expansion of the Aryan culture during the later Vedic period was the beginning of the use of iron around 1000 BC. The Rig Vedic people knew of a metal called ayas which was either copper or bronze. In the later Vedic literature ayas was qualified with shyama or krishna meaning black to denote iron. Archaeology has shown that iron began to be used around 1000 BC which is also the period of later Vedic literature. The northern and eastern parts of India to which the Aryans later migrated receive more rainfall than the north-western part of India. As a result this region is covered with thick rain forests which could not be cleared by copper or stone tools used by Rig Vedic people. The use of iron tools now helped people clear the dense rain forests particularly the huge stumps left after burning, in a more effective manner. Large tracts of forestland could be converted into cultivable pieces in relatively lesser time. The iron plough could turn the soil from deeper portions making it more fertile. This process seems to have begun during the later part of the Rig Vedic period but the effect of iron tools and implements become evident only towards the end of the Later Vedic period.

There has been a continuous increase in the population during the later Vedic period due to the expansion of the economy based on agriculture. The increasing number and size of Painted Grey Ware (PGW) settlements in the doab area shows this. With the passage of time the Vedic people also acquired better knowledge of seasons, manuring and irrigation.

All these developments resulted in the substantial enlargement of certain settlements such as Hastinapur and Kaushambi towards the end of the Later Vedic period. These settlements slowly began to acquire characteristics of towns. Such rudimentary towns inhabited mainly by the chiefs, princes, priests and artisans were supported by the peasants who could spare for them some part of their produce voluntarily or involuntarily.

**Social Life**

The family remains the basic unit of the Vedic society. However, its composition underwent a change. The later Vedic family became large enough to be called a joint-family with three or four generations living together. The institution of gotra developed in this period. This means that people having common gotra descended from a common ancestor and no marriage between the members of the same gotra could take place. Monogamous marriages were preferred even though polygamy was frequent. In the family, the power of the father increased during the Later Vedic period. There was no improvement in the status of women. Some restrictions on women appeared during this period. They were considered as inferior and subordinate to men. Women also lost their political rights of attending assemblies. Child marriages had become common. According the Aitreya Brahmana a daughter has been described as a source of misery. Women had to stay with her husband at his place after marriage. The participation of women in public meetings was restricted. However, the women in the royal household enjoyed certain privileges.

However, the most important change was the rise and growth of social differentiation in the form of varna system. The four varnas in which society came to be divided were the brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras. The growing number of sacrifices and rituals during the period made the brahmanas very powerful. They conducted various rituals including those related to different stages of agricultural operations. This made them all the more important. The kshatriyas, next in the social hierarchy, were the rulers. They along with brahmanas controlled all aspects of life. The vaishyas, the most numerous varna were engaged in agriculture as well as in trade and artisanal activities. The brahmanas and the kshatriyas were dependent on the tributes (gifts and taxes) paid to them by the vaishyas.

The shudras, the fourth varna were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They were ordained to be in the service of the three upper varnas. They were not entitled to the ritual of upanayana samskara (investiture with sacred thread necessary to acquire education).

The other three varnas were entitled to such a ceremony and hence they were known as dvijas. This can be construed as the beginning of the imposition of disabilities on the shudras as well as the beginning of the concept of ritual pollution.

Another important institution that began to take shape was ashrama or different stages of life. Brahmacharya (student life), grihastha (householder), and vanaprastha (hermitage) stages are mentioned in the texts. Later, sanyasa, the fourth stage also came to be added. Together with varna, it came to be known as varna-ashrama dharma.

**Religion**

We have already noted that in the later Vedic period agriculture had become an important activity of the people. Changes in the material life naturally resulted in a change in their attitude towards gods and goddesses too. Continuous interactions with the local non-Aryan population also contributed to these changes. Gods of the Early Vedic period like Indra and Agni lost their importance. Prajapathi (the creator), Vishnu (the protector) and Rudra (the destroyer) became prominent during the Later Vedic period.

Another important feature was the increase in the frequency and number of the yajna which generally ended with the sacrifices of a large number of animals. This was probably the result of the growing importance of a class of brahmanas and their efforts to maintain their supremacy in the changing society. These yajnas brought to them a large amount of wealth in form of dana and dakshina. Some of the important yajnas were –ashvamedha (horse sacrirfice) , vajapeya (chariot race), rajasuya (consecration ceremony) etc. In these yajnas which continued for many days a large part of gifts went to the brahmanas.

The purpose of these yajnas was twofold. Firstly, it established the authority of the chiefs over the people, and secondly, it reinforced the territorial aspect of the polity since people from all over the kingdom were invited to these sacrifices.

Therefore, towards the end of this period there was a strong reaction against priestly domination and against sacrifices and rituals. A large number of cattle and other animals which were sacrificed at the end of each yajna must have hampered the growth of economy. The rise of Buddhism and Jainism was the direct result of these elaborate sacrifices. Hence, a path of good conduct and self-sacrifice was recommended for happiness and welfare in the last sections of the Vedas, called the Upanishads. The Upanishads contain two basic principles of Indian philosophy viz., karma and the transmigration of soul, i.e., rebirth based on past deeds. According to these texts real happiness lies in getting moksha i.e. freedom from this cycle of birth and re-birth.