

# 3

# The River Valley Civilisations : Egyptian Civilisation

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and locate the sites of Egyptian Civilisation on an outline map of Egypt.
- Question, discuss and appreciate the sources to know the civilisation.
- Compare the society then (in the past) and now.
- Appreciate the contribution of Egyptian Civilisation in today's world.

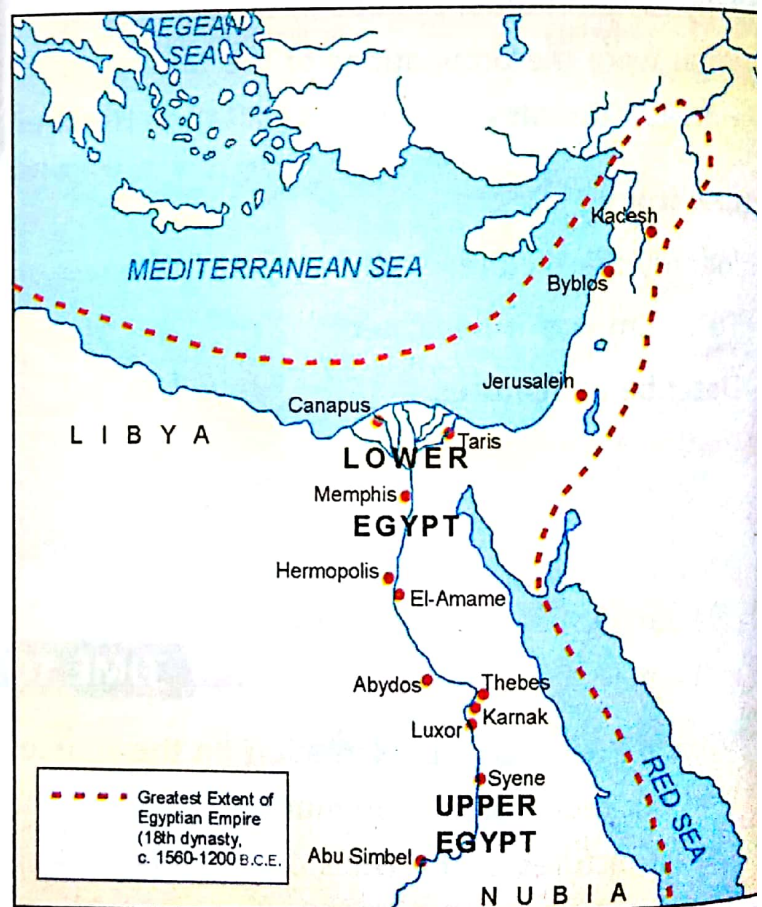
## TOPICS OF THE CHAPTER

- Extent of the Civilisation
- Sources
- Kingdoms
- Society
- Contribution of the Egyptian
- Decline

People along Africa's Nile River formed a rich and prosperous civilisation. The most remarkable quality of the Egyptian Civilisation was its longevity. It lasted for more than 2,000 years and left a lasting influence on the world.

## Location

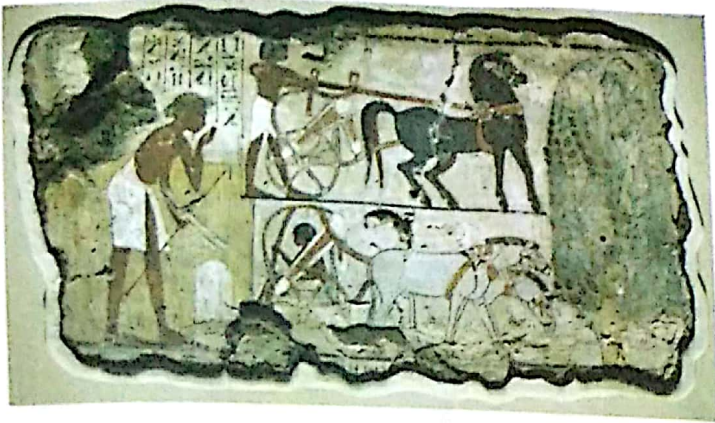
Egypt is located in the northeastern part of Africa. The Egyptian Civilisation is one of the oldest River Valley Civilisations. It flourished on the banks of the river Nile, which flows along the entire length of Egypt. Without the river Nile, Egypt would have been a desert. There is hardly any rainfall in Egypt. Egypt is therefore called the "Gift of Nile".



Egyptian Civilisation

Remarkable : Noticeable, extraordinary.

Influence : The capacity to have an effect development of something.



Painting — Nile Valley Civilisation

## Sources

Historians have based their knowledge of ancient Egyptian Civilisation on the inscriptions and official documents that they have discovered. These documents are preserved even today. Archaeological excavations have brought to light several objects, for example, utensils, art objects, buildings, etc.



Statue of Ushabti of Urmi with inscription

## Kingdoms

Egyptian history is divided into three periods :

- **The Old Kingdom — (3000 BCE – 2000 BCE):**  
This is known as the period of the pyramids.



Old kingdom statue — Saqqara



Pharaoh

**Territory :** Land owned by a particular kingdom.  
**Grandeur :** Impressive because of beauty, size, power.

**Distinct :** Clearly different.  
**Pharaoh :** Ruler of ancient Egypt.

- **The Middle Kingdom — (2000 BCE – 1750 BCE) :** During this time trade expanded. Its end came about with the invasion of Hyksos who conquered the Egyptians.
- **The New Kingdom — (1580 BCE – 1085 BCE) :** This period lasted for about 5 centuries after the Egyptian kings regained their lost territory. This period saw great heights and the grandeur of the Egyptian kings reached its peak.

## 3 Enrich Your Knowledge

(Greek historian Herodotus named Egypt "The Gift of the Nile." The river Nile flooded annually. When the water receded, it left behind a rich deposit of fertile, alluvial soil on its banks which was a boon for the Egyptian farmers. The Egyptians built an elaborate network of canals, dams, dykes and reservoirs for irrigation. The river Nile also served as a highway for promoting trade and commerce.)

## Society

There were three distinct classes in the Egyptian society. (The king had unlimited powers and was the political and religious head of his people. He was called the Pharaoh. He was considered to be God's representative on earth, and his statues were installed in the temples. The people worshipped him as a God. The other privileged classes were the higher clergy, the rich landowners and government officials.)

The rich people lived in luxury; they lived in palatial houses which were decorated beautifully. They led a comfortable life and got all their work done by their servants. Precious jewellery and costly clothes were worn by them.

### Pause and think

The temples in Egypt contain statues of the Pharaohs. Discuss why it was common practice in ancient Egypt to put statues of Pharaohs in temples.

The middle class included the rich merchants, traders, skilled artisans, jewellers, etc. Teachers, doctors, and writers were also included in this class. The majority of Egyptians belonged to the lowest class comprising peasants. At the lowest rung of the social ladder came the slaves, a majority of whom were prisoners of war.

Women were given respect. Though the family was patriarchal, it was made sure that their rights were protected. Rich women led a luxurious life but women of poor families worked hard.

The common people led a difficult life. They had to work for the rich for their survival and had to live in small houses.)

### Occupations

**Agriculture** was the chief occupation of the Egyptians. Other important occupations were manufacture of weapons, furniture, jewellery, perfume, glass ware and pottery. Trading was also given importance. Trade was both internal and foreign. Internal trade was carried on by road whereas foreign trade was carried on by sea.

Wheat and **linen** were sent to Europe and Asia, and timber and weapons were brought from there.

### Family Life

The society was patriarchal. The father was the

**Palatial** : A large and beautifully decorated building.

**Patriarchal** : Ruled or controlled by men.

**Luxurious** : Extremely comfortable.



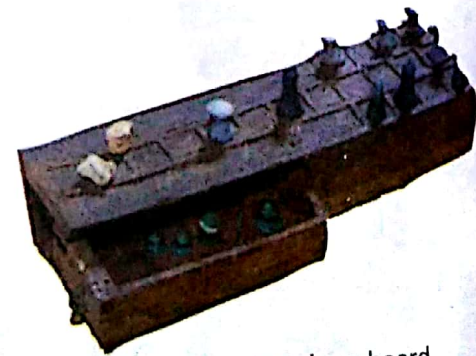
Egyptian farming

head of the family. Women were given freedom and respect, and enjoyed many rights. They were allowed to inherit property and even take the reins of power in their hands. For example, the legendary Queen Cleopatra, was known for her beauty and intelligence. Children were given freedom and had opportunities for enjoyment. The girls helped in the household chores.

The staple diet of the Egyptians was wheat and bread. Fruits, vegetables, dairy products and meat were also eaten.

### Amusements

Chess was the game Egyptian played for recreation. They also played musical instruments such as Harps, flutes, drums. They knew the art of singing and dancing. Hunting and fishing were popular pastimes.



An Egyptian chess board

**Linen** : Cloth made from flax.

**Recreation** : An activity done for pleasure or amusement.



The Great Pyramid, Egypt

## Religion

Religion was an important feature of Egyptian society. The Sun God Ra was the most important god. (The Pharaoh was considered the Son of Ra.) Some gods were represented by symbols such as the falcon, crocodile, etc. Some other gods were Isis, Osiris, Horus, Anubis and Amon.

The embalmed body (mummy) was placed in a coffin and put in a pyramid. Many objects which were used by the dead person were also placed in the pyramid with the belief that the dead person may need them. Osiris — the lord of the after-life — was an important god worshipped by the Egyptians. The pyramids were the tombs of Pharaohs.

The Egyptians believed in life after death. They believed that the body should be preserved so that the soul might live on within it. They developed the art of preserving the body to great perfection — a process called **mummification**.



An Egyptian Mummy

## Achievements of the Egyptians

### Pyramids

The most impressive monument of the Egyptians are the **pyramids**. They are large triangular structures. The two most famous and spectacular ones are situated at Giza (Gizeh) near Cairo. The largest of the pyramids, the Great Pyramid was built by Pharaoh Cheops (Khufu) in 2650 BCE. It is one of the seven wonders of the world and took 20 years to be built. The tomb of King Tutankhamen was found intact in the 1920s.

Pyramids were the tombs of Pharaohs. They contained mummies, clothes, jewellery and many precious items. When a pharaoh died, his embalmed body (mummy) was kept inside the pyramids. It was protected and preserved so well that it has survived for hundreds of years.

### The Sphinx

It is a fine example of Egyptian sculpture. It is a mythological animal with the body of a lion and the head of a man. It is carved out of a single stone. It was meant to guard the pyramids.

**Embalmed :** To treat a dead body with chemicals to prevent it from decaying.

**Pyramid :** An ancient massive structure found especially in Egypt with four triangular walls that slope in to a point at the top.

**Mummies :** Dead bodies that have been preserved.

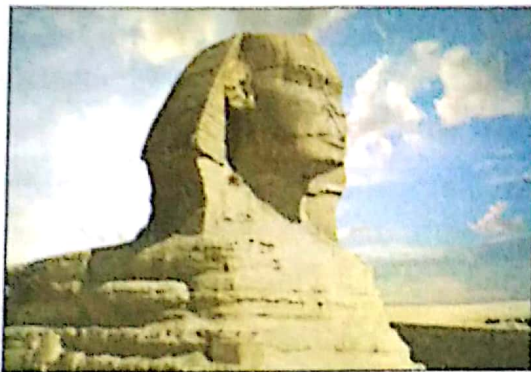
**Mythological :** Related to the myths especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition.



Painted around 1500 BCE, the wall of a tomb at Thebes is decorated with scenes illustrating daily life in ancient Egypt.

The most remarkable among them is the Great Sphinx at Giza which is 240 feet long and 66 feet high.

The temples at Karnak and Abu Simbel are very impressive and awe-inspiring.



Sphinx

## Egyptian Script

The Egyptians developed a kind of picture writing known as hieroglyphic, which means sacred or holy writing. The word 'Hiero' means 'holy' and 'glyphics' means writings. Therefore, Hieroglyphics means "Holy writings". Pictures and signs represented their ideas. It had about 500 signs. The Egyptians used pens made of reed. Ink was made of gum and soot.

**Hieroglyphic :** A system of writing mainly in pictorial characters.

They wrote on the bark strips of a plant **papyrus**. The word 'paper' has its origins word papyrus. )



Egyptian hieroglyphics

## Mathematics, Science and Medicine

The Egyptians made great progress in arithmetic. They knew about addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They were aware of decimals and fractions. They could measure volumes and distances.

They had made great progress in the field of medicine. One of their medical books gave a detailed description of blood-circulation system. The achievement of the Egyptians in the

**Arithmetic :** Involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of numbers, a part of mathematics.

of medicine can be proved by the fact that the mummies, kept thousands of years ago, are still well preserved.

### Astronomy

The Solar Calendar has been one of the greatest achievements of the Egyptians. They needed an accurate knowledge of seasons, rains and floods for their farming. They observed that the star *Sirius* appeared on the horizon when the floods reached Cairo and this happened after every 365 days. It inspired them to make the first known calendar of 365 days in a year of 12 months, each of 30 days; five more days were added to the calendar for celebration of religious festivals.

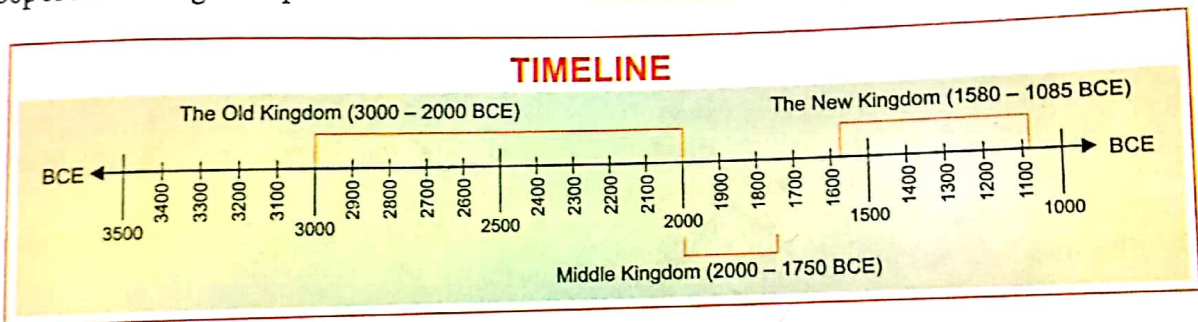
### Decline

Egypt prospered during the period of the new

kingdom. But by 1000 BCE, Egypt fell on bad days. It was conquered by new powers. The Pharaohs had to fight for their very existence against the invaders from the regions to the south of Egypt in Africa and the new powers across the Mediterranean Sea. The last ruler of Egypt was Cleopatra, and after her Egypt became a part of the Roman Empire.

### Enrich Your Knowledge

Tutankhamen was an Egyptian Pharaoh who ruled for a short duration. He started ruling at the age of 9, that is why he was nicknamed "Boy-King". He died at the age of 18. His tomb discovered in 1922, made "King Tut" one of Egypt's most famous Pharaohs.



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The Egyptian Civilisation is one of the oldest River Valley Civilisations which was located in northeastern part of Africa on the banks of River Nile.
- Contribution of the Egyptians:
  - ✦ Developed picture writing known as hieroglyphic, wrote on papyrus (a bark of a tree).
  - ✦ Pyramids, Sphinx and temples at Karnak and Abu Simbel are the examples of Egyptian architecture and sculpture.
  - ✦ They knew the four basic operations of arithmetic — addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.
  - ✦ Great progress in medicine — a book on blood circulation.
  - ✦ The Calendar was their greatest contribution. They observed that the star *Sirius* appeared on the horizon at Cairo when there were floods exactly after 365 days. This inspired them to divide 365 days into 12 months of 30 days each.

Horizon : The line far away where the land or sea seems to meet the sky.

Conquer : Overcome and take control of (a place or people) by military force.

# CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

## EGYPTIAN CIVILISATION

Location	Religion	Society	Achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● North Eastern part of Africa</li> <li>● On the banks of the river Nile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sun God Ra most important</li> <li>● God represented by symbols</li> <li>● Believed in life after death</li> <li>● Mummification—art of preserving the dead body.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Three distinct classes—Pharaoh (King), merchants and professionals; &amp; slaves and labourers</li> <li>● Patriarchal System</li> <li>● Women rights protected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Egyptian Script</li> <li>● Mathematics – progress in arithmetic and geometry</li> <li>● Medicine – preservation of the mummies</li> <li>● Solar calendar of 365 days</li> <li>● Architecture – Pyramids, Sphinx, Temples</li> </ul>

### Time to Learn

#### I. Tick (✓) the correct answer.

- The tombs of Pharaohs were called
  - Sphinx
  - Hanging Gardens
  - Pyramids
  - Mummies
- On bank of which River did Egyptian Civilisation flourish?
  - Amazon
  - Nile
  - Tigris
  - Euphrates
- The middle class included the
  - King
  - Merchants
  - Slaves
  - Labourers
- Who built the Great Pyramid?
  - Pharaoh Cheops (Khufu)
  - King Tutankhamen
  - Hyksos
  - King Nebuchadnezzar-II
- The most important God of ancient Egypt was
  - Ra
  - Isis
  - Anubis
  - Amon

#### II. Fill in the blanks.

- The Egyptian kings were called pharaohs.
- Mummification is the process of preserving dead bodies.
- The old kingdom is known as the period of the ph period of pyramids.
- The staple diet of the Egyptians was wheat, bread, fish, vegetables, meat.
- Agriculture was the chief occupation of the Egyptians.

#### III. Write True or False against the following statements.

- The Egyptians perfected the ...

# 4

# The River Valley Civilisations : Indus Valley Civilisation

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and locate the sites of Harappan Civilisation on an outline map of India.
- Question, discuss and appreciate the sources to know the civilisation.
- Compare the society then (in the past) and now
- Appreciate the contribution of Harappan Civilisation in today's world.

## TOPICS OF THE CHAPTER

- Discovery and Extent
- Main Sites
- Sources
- Town Planning
- The Great Bath
- Granaries
- Drainage System
- Society
- Occupation
- Amusement
- Dress and Ornaments
- Art and Cra
- Religion
- Script
- Decline

## Discovery and Extent

In 1921 an Indian archaeologist, Mr **Daya Ram Sahni**, discovered the ruins of the city of **Harappa** in the Montgomery district. In 1922 **Dr Rakhal Das Bannerjee** discovered the ruins of **Mohenjodaro** in the Larkana district of Sind. These two discoveries -

- nullified the old theory that the history of India started with the coming of the Aryans.
- brought to light the fact that a very advanced civilisation existed in India about 4500 years ago.

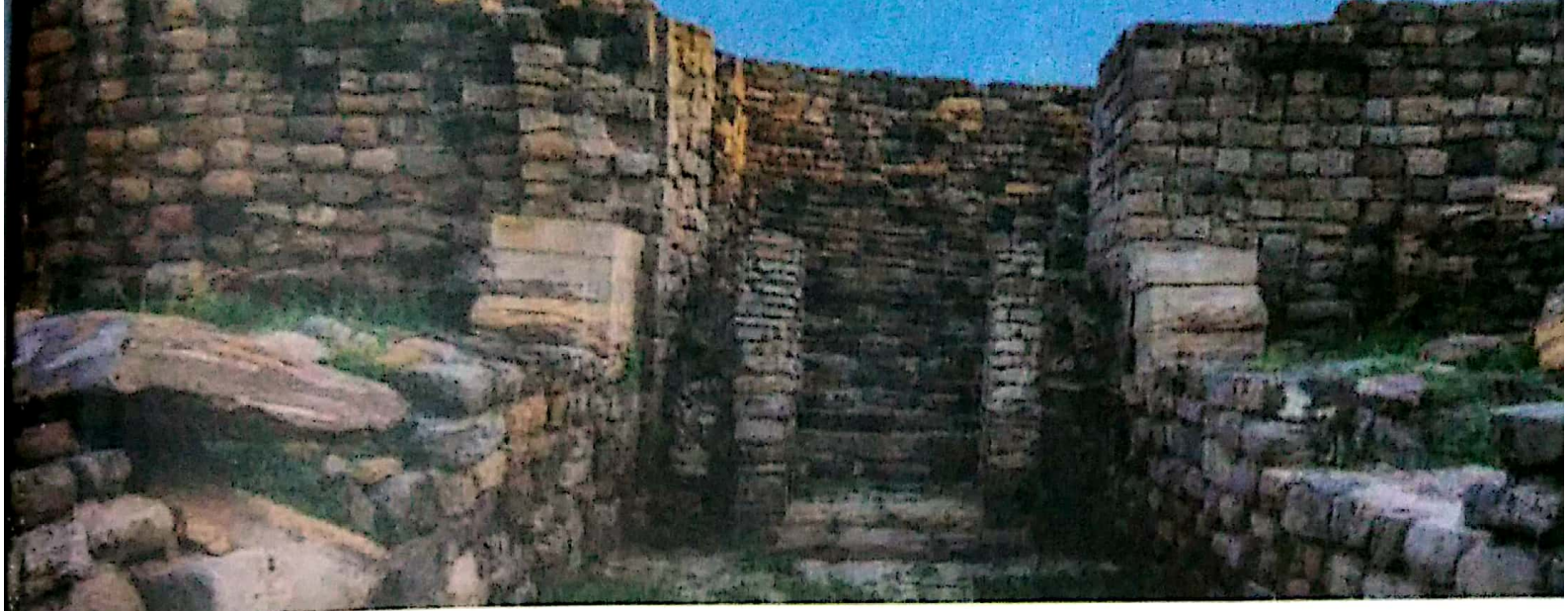
As both the sites belonged to the Indus Valley, this civilisation came



The Indus Valley Civilisation Sites

Archaeologist : People who specialise in archaeology.





Ruins of Dholavira

to be called the Indus Valley Civilisation. **Harappa** was the **first city** to be **discovered** in India, so this civilisation is also called 'Harappan Civilisation'.

### Enrich Your Knowledge

Harappa was one of the oldest cities discovered by archaeologists. Harappan cities developed about 4500 years ago. Although Harappa was the first site to be discovered it lay in ruins.

Mohenjodaro is located on the banks of the river Indus in the Larkana district of Sind. Harappa is on the banks of river Ravi in the Montgomery (now Sahiwal, Pakistan) district in Pakistan. Mohenjodaro means 'Mound of the Dead'.



Lothal Dockyard

### Origin

The Indus Valley Civilisation appears to have developed from the diverse agricultural communities

**Mound** : A pile of earth constructed over a particular site.

**Dockyard** : A place where ships are repaired or built.

in the region indicating its native origin. The site of Mehrgarh (Pakistan), discovered in 1974, by a team of archaeologists suggests that the earliest human settlement existed there. The site is now recognised as a predecessor of the Harappan Civilisation.)

### Main Sites

More than 256 sites have been discovered in large parts of North and Central India, Rajasthan, North Western India, Sind and Baluchistan. Some of the important sites (other than Harappa and Mohenjodaro) discovered are given in the chart below.

S. No.	Sites	Location	Feature
1.	Lothal	Gujarat	A dockyard was found where ships docked.
2.	Kalibangan	Rajasthan	Terracotta bangles found here
3.	Banawali	Haryana	Well constructed fort town
4.	Sutkagendor	Pakistan	Substantial stone walls and gateways
5.	Alamgirpur	Uttar Pradesh	Easternmost Harappan settlement
6.	Dholavira	Gujarat	Water Reservoir found to store water for agriculture

**Terracotta** : A hard reddish-brown baked clay used to make things.

## The Great Bath

The Indus Valley Civilisation flourished between 2500 BCE and 1500 BCE. In some places the civilisation lasted later than 1500 BCE.

Excavations at different sites show that the Indus Valley people led a highly advanced city life. Some of the spectacular features of this civilisation are—

- Systematically planned cities
- Well developed roads with lamp-posts
- Remarkable planning of houses
- Excellent drainage system.

## Sources

We learn about the Harappan Civilisation from various sources, such as the Great Bath, citadel, seals, their houses, pots, ornaments, etc. Our knowledge of the Harappan Civilisation is based entirely on archaeological remains. No adequate written records are available.

## Town Planning

The cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro were divided into two parts. The Upper Part was built on a raised ground. It has been described as the 'Citadel' or the 'Acropolis'. The Citadel had high walls which provided protection against floods.

Excavations : Digging of land by archaeologists to find ancient objects.

Sites : Places where ancient remains are found.

Here were built public buildings like the granaries and religious buildings. Probably the ruling class lived here.)

The Lower Part, which was much bigger, contained the houses and workplaces of the common people. Each house was built with a courtyard, several rooms, a toilet and a well. All the buildings were built of burnt bricks. Large blocks of houses were built along the sides of streets. These houses had flat roofs. Many of these were double-storied. They were of different sizes. Some of these were like palaces while others were small. The houses had open courtyards and rooms were constructed surrounding the courtyard.)

The roads of the Indus Valley civilisation

- wide and straight roads intersecting each other at right angles.
- The smaller streets joined the main streets at right angles.
- The streets had lamp-posts.
- The streets had the rounded corners so that carts could pass easily.
- Houses were built on both sides of the streets.

Citadel : A strong fort at a site high above the city.

Burnt bricks : Bricks burnt in a kiln to harden them.

Courtyard : An open space surrounded by walls.

## The Great Bath

Another famous structure discovered at Mohenjodaro is the Great Bath — a rectangular structure resembling a swimming pool. It is an example of beautiful brickwork. It measures  $11.88 \times 7.01$  metres and is 2.43 metres deep. The Great Bath was perhaps used for religious bathing. It had six entrances, a central bathing pool, galleries and dressing rooms. Steps led to the bottom of the pool. Burnt bricks were used for the floor and walls of the pool. There was an outlet to drain the used water. Water for the bath was taken from an adjacent well.

An Assembly Hall was also found at Mohenjodaro. It stood on twelve pillars made of burnt bricks. This could have been used for prayer or assembly.

## Granaries

Both Harappa and Mohenjodaro had impressive buildings in the Citadel. In Mohenjodaro the largest building discovered is the Great Granary. It was used for storing grains. But in the citadel of Harappa, we find as many as six granaries. Near the granaries brick platforms have been found. They might have been used for threshing grain. Many



The Great Granary

**Granary** : A place where grain is stored.

**Threshing** : To separate the grains from the stalks by beating.

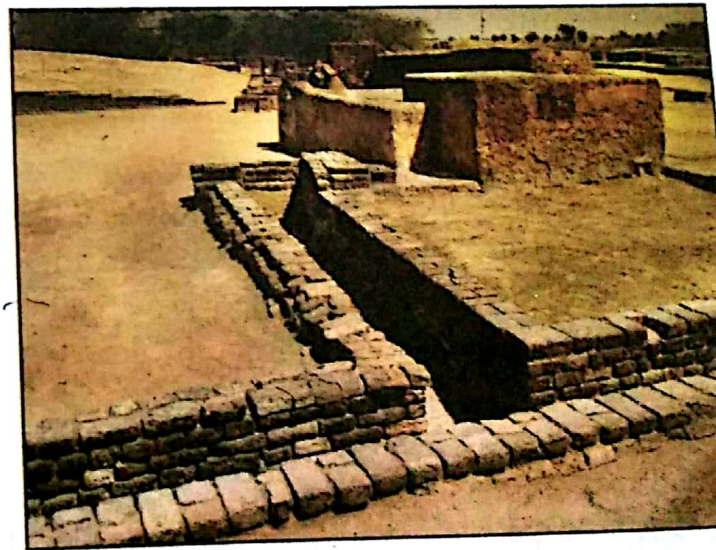
two-room shelters have also been found nearby, which could be the dwellings used by labourers. All these granaries had been built close to the river bank so that grains could be easily transported by boats.

## Enrich Your Knowledge

The Indus Valley people constructed Dwelling Houses. These houses were built on raised platform and varied in size. They were built of brick, lime & gypsum. They had fewer windows. Almost every house had wells, drains, bathrooms, kitchens and courtyards.

## Drainage System

The drainage system of the Harappan cities was incredible. The rooms had sloping floors and had drains which were connected to the street drains. The kitchen, too, had drains. The street drains were covered with stone slabs or bricks and had manholes at regular intervals. These drains were cleaned regularly. The main drains emptied outside the city. It shows that people of the Indus Valley were conscious of hygiene and sanitation.



Drainage System

**Dwelling** : A house where people live.

**Drainage system** : A network of drains to draw out water.

## Governance

The Indus cities were well administered. There is no evidence that a king or a single ruler ruled the cities. The cities were probably administered by a committee of people comprising rich merchants and priests. They looked after all aspects of life — trade, taxes, law and order, etc.

## Social Divisions

The society was probably divided into three classes. The ruling class consisted of rich merchants and the priests. They lived in the Citadel. The second class or group was of small merchants, artisans and craftsmen. They lived in the lower town. The labourers formed the third group and lived in outer limits of the city. Many farmers lived and worked in the villages around the cities.)

### Pause and think

Are there any similarities or differences between the Harappan society and present day society? Was there Gender equality?

## Occupations

### Agriculture

The main crops grown were wheat, rice, mustard, sesame and barley. People ate meat, fish and eggs. Fruits and milk were also popular. The Indus people were the earliest people to grow cotton. Oxen, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs, cats, dogs were domesticated.

### Trade

The Harappan people not only carried on internal trade, they also traded with foreign civilisations.



Seal depicting a boat

Trade was carried on with Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Afghanistan. Mesopotamian seals have been found in the Harappan cities, and Harappan seals in the cities of ancient Mesopotamia. Trade was carried on from the port of Lothal. A big dockyard has been discovered. Trade was carried on with Egypt and Iran. A variety of weights and measures were used. The barter system was used for trade. They carried on internal trade between places located in modern Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Kashmir.

### Other Occupations

Besides farming, the Harappan people had many different occupations — weaving, pottery, metal working, toy-making, stone seal making and trading. The art of pottery had reached great heights in this civilisation.



Pottery

Administer : To govern a country, region, etc.

Committee : A group of people chosen to do a particular work or to take decisions.

Weaving : To make cloth by crossing threads by hand or on a loom.

## Amusements and Recreation

Harappan people amused themselves in many ways. People enjoyed indoor games rather than outdoor games. Toys like small clay carts, figures of animals, rattles, whistles made of terracotta, and dolls have been found.



Toy cart

People enjoyed singing and dancing. They played a game similar to modern chess and dice.

## Dress and Ornaments

People usually wore cotton clothes. Woollen clothes were also worn. Men wore two pieces of cloth. One was a 'Shawl' worn on the upper part of the body. The lower garment was like the modern "Dhoti".



Beautiful jewellery has been found at Harappa

**Amulet :** A small piece of jewellery worn to protect against bad luck.

**Spear :** A throwing weapon with long shaft and sharp head.

Women wore short skirts tied at the waist. Both men and women wore ornaments. Women wore necklaces, bracelets, bangles and earrings. Men wore amulets. The rich people wore jewellery made of gold and silver; the poor wore jewellery made of bone, copper and shell.

## Art and Craft

A bronze figure of a dancing girl has been found at Mohenjodaro. One of the stone statues shows a bearded nobleman or priest wearing a shawl. The figures of animals, birds and men, painted on pottery, show the artistic skill of the people. Some of the pots are highly glazed and painted. They produced images, utensils, various tools and weapons such as axes, saws, knives and spears. Spinning, brick-laying, boat-making, seal-making and terracotta manufacture were important crafts.



The Dancing Girl

## Seals

The greatest artistic creations of the Harappan culture are the seals. About 2000 seals have been found. Many of them carry short inscriptions with pictures of one-horned bull, buffalo, tiger, elephant, goat, etc.

They were also used by merchants to mark their goods. The seals had animal figures and picture-like signs on them. They give us an idea of their religion. They are square or rectangular tablets made of clay. The script on these seals has not been deciphered as yet.

**Script :** A particular system of writing.

**Decipher :** To interpret the meaning of.



Seals from Indus Valley Civilisation

## Religion

The Harappan people worshipped trees and animals. Pipal tree was regarded as sacred. At various sites clay figures of Mother Goddess have been found. A three-faced figure surrounded by a tiger, a rhinoceros, a buffalo and an elephant is also found. According to some historians this is the earliest representation of Lord Shiva as "Pashupati".

Sacred : Relating to god or religion.

Inhabitants : People originally living in a place.

The most important animal to be worshipped was the humped bull.)

Inhabitants of the Indus valley worshipped gods in the form of trees, animals and human beings. But the gods were not placed in temples.

The Harappans believed in life after death. They buried their dead with ornaments and other things which belonged to the dead person.



Mother Goddess

## Enrich Your Knowledge

The Harappan culture belongs to the Bronze Age. Bronze had been discovered by the people of the Indus Valley Civilisation. The bronze was made of mixed copper (which came from Rajasthan and Balochistan) and tin (which came from Afghanistan and Iran) to form the bronze. Bronze statues have been found in various excavations.

Buried : Put a corpse inside a grave.



Pashupati Seal

### Script

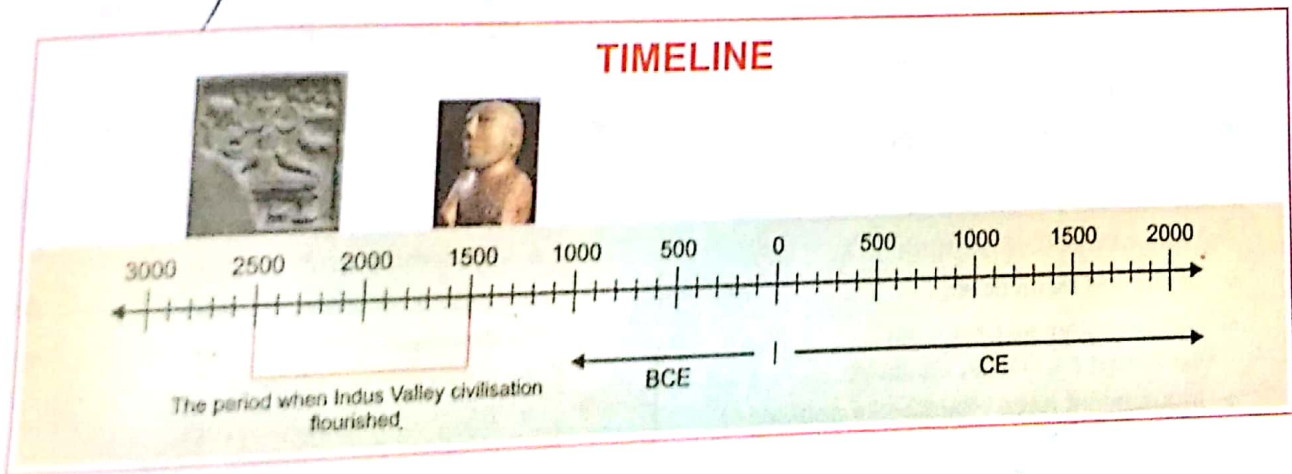
The Harappan people had developed the art of writing. Nearly 400 signs have been found, but historians have not been able to interpret the script. It is some kind of pictographic script reporting words, objects etc. It is the earliest form of writing discovered in India.

### Decline of the Civilisation

Historians do not know the real cause but there are many theories about the fall of the civilisation. Some writers believe that Harappan cities were destroyed by the invaders, who could have been the Aryans. Others believe that natural calamities like floods, earthquakes, epidemics might have destroyed the civilisation. It is also possible that river Indus might have changed its course and turned the region into a desert.

The Harappan Culture existed between 2500 BCE and 1500 BCE. Around 1750 BCE, cities of Harappa and Mohenjodro declined but other cities faded out gradually.

The Indus Valley Civilisation was the earliest known urban civilisation of India. Though these cities are in ruins, their history and culture instil a feeling of pride in our rich and glorious past. The Indus Valley Civilisation was one of the cradles of magnificent ancient civilisations.



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

- With the growth of trade, new cities came into being. It was in these cities that the Indus civilisation flourished.
- Indus Valley Civilisation : Flourished on the bank of river Indus. More than 250 sites have been discovered since 1921 in Sind, Gujarat, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. This civilisation was an urban civilisation.

### Special features :

- > An urban civilisation;
  - > Well-planned cities and proper drainage system;
  - > The Great Bath at Mohenjodaro;
  - > The granaries, public buildings in the citadel;
  - > Wheat and barley grown;
  - > Cotton and woollen clothes, ornaments worn by both men and women;
  - > Beautiful pottery and toys;
  - > Beautiful seals.
- Traded with Mesopotamia and Afghanistan.
  - Religion — people worshipped Mother Goddess and Pashupati. They also worshipped pipal trees and animals such as the humped bull.
  - This civilisation flourished roughly between 2500 BCE and 1500 BCE.
  - The civilisation could have come to an end due to invasion, earthquakes or floods.
  - Mohanjodaro is a UNESCO world Heritage site.

## CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

### Indus Valley Civilisation 2500 BCE–1500 BCE

#### Achievements :

- amazing town planners
- great builders
- efficient system of drainage
- good traders
- developed their own script
- seals used to stamp goods

#### Decline of the Civilisation :

- destroyed by invaders
- natural calamities such as, earthquakes, floods, epidemic
- Indus might have changed its course

#### Location and Important Sites :

- North and Central India, Rajasthan, NW India, Sind, Balochistan.
- Lothal, Kalibangan, Ropar, Banawali, Mohenjodaro, Harappa.

#### Economy :

- agriculture, craft, artisans
- potters, masons, jewellers
- both land and sea trade
- important port Lothal
- trade with Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, Greece, Egypt.

#### Religion and Beliefs :

- worshipped trees, animals, mother goddess, pashupati.
- believed in life after death.



# 6 The Vedic Civilisation

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the term 'Vedic' and list the various literature related to it.
- Summarise the lifestyle of the Vedic period by relating it to the epics.
- Discuss and identify the differences and similarities between the early and Later Vedic period.
- Trace the changing position of woman in early and Later Vedic Society.
- Analyse and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of India in terms of values, beliefs and traditions.

## TOPICS OF THE CHAPTER

- Origin of the Aryans
- Sources
- Early Vedic Period - Political Organisation, Social Life, Religion, Food and Dress, Amusements, Occupations, Transport and Trade
- Later Vedic Period - Political Organisation, Social Life, Religion, Economy, Literature, Science, Gurukul System of Education

The Vedic Period or the Vedic Age refers to the time period when the Aryans arrived in India. The Vedic Civilisation flourished from 1500 BCE - 600 BCE. The history of the Vedic period is based mainly on the Vedic texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Epics etc. It is the earliest Civilisation in Indian history of which we have written records.

Many great changes took place in India during the period of Vedic civilisation (1500 BCE - 600 BCE). The Aryans developed this civilisation. During this period agriculture was well developed and significant progress was made in social and cultural fields.

**Upanishads :** One of a class of Vedic treatises dealing with philosophical aspects of human life.

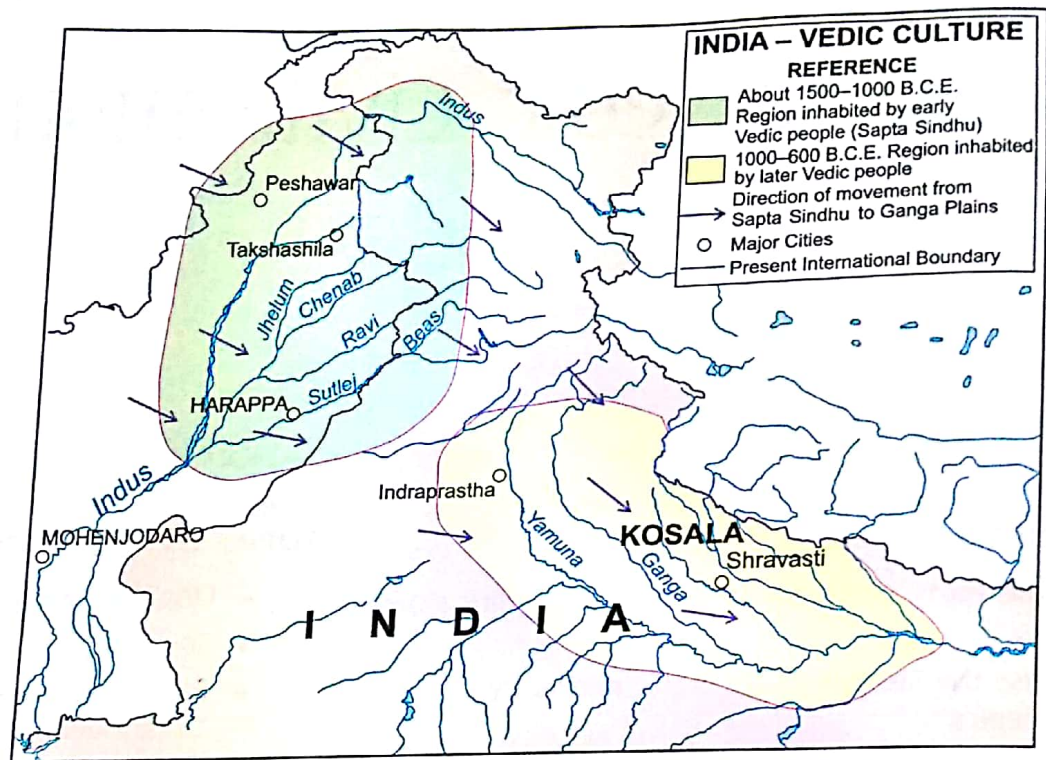
**Epic :** A long narrative poem recounting the deeds of heroic or legendary figures.

## Origin of the Aryans

There is uncertainty about the origin of the Aryans. There are different theories about it :

- They were original inhabitants of India.
- They migrated from the Arctic regions.
- They spread out from Central Europe.

But according to the most historians the Aryans came from Central Asia in about 1500 BCE. It is believed that Persians, Indians, Greeks and Romans must have lived together in very ancient times in Central Asia. This theory is based on common words and other similarities in Sanskrit and the European languages. For example :



Extent of the Aryan Civilisation

### Similarities in Language

Sanskrit	Persian	English
petri	pidar	father
matri	madar	mother
bhrata	biradar	brother



Vedic Literature

The Aryans who came to India in about 1500 BCE are called 'Indo-Aryans'. They first settled in the area known as 'Sapta Sindhu.'

'Sapta Sindhu' referred to the region around the seven rivers – Indus and her tributaries — Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, Satluj and Saraswati. This area was named 'Brahmavarta' by them meaning the land of gods.

The Aryans came to India in groups. From Punjab they moved and spread over the Gangetic Valley and

then southwards as far as the Vindhya Mountains. The land they settled down was called 'Aryavarta'. The original inhabitants were called Dasyus by the Aryans. The Dasyus were subjugated by the Aryans.

### Sources

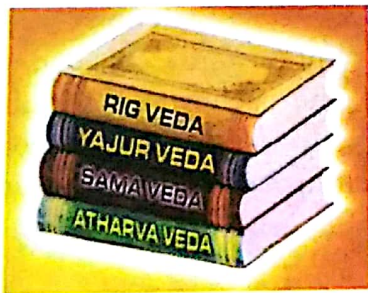
The main historical sources of this period are literary and archaeological.

Tributary : A river feeding a larger river.

Subjugate : To defeat a person or group and make them obey you.

## The Literary Sources

The Vedic literature, i.e. the Vedas, are the most important. The word 'Veda' means knowledge. The Vedas — *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda* — contain hymns composed in praise of gods. Before they were finally written down, these hymns were passed on orally from generation to generation. The Rig Veda which was composed in 1500 BCE is the chief source of information. The Vedas give us a lot of information about the religious beliefs and practices of the Aryans. Other literary sources are the Upanishads, *Brahmanas*, Puranas, Aranyakas and the Epics — the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The author of the *Ramayana* was Valmiki and the *Mahabharata* was written by Ved Vyas. The two epics provide information about the social, economic, political and cultural life of the people. This is the reason why the whole period from 1500 BCE to 600 BCE is known as the Vedic Age. The Vedic Age is further divided into the Early Vedic Age (1500 BCE – 1000 BCE) and Later Vedic Age (1000 BCE – 600 BCE).



The Vedas



Painted Greyware

## Archaeological Sources

Archaeological evidence about the Vedic Age includes some distinctive pottery which is called Painted Grey Ware (PGW). This painted grey ware was found in the excavations made at Hastinapura and at Atranjikhera.

## BRAHMAVARTA : EARLY VEDIC PERIOD

### Political organisation

The Aryans were divided into many tribes. Each tribe settled in a particular area and a number of villages sprang up. Each tribe had a king or ruler, selected for his bravery and wisdom. The king had to perform both military and religious duties. His chief duty was to protect the tribe and its territory. He was called 'Rajan'. The king was assisted in his work by a *Senani* (commander of the army) and a *Purohit* (chief priest). The village head (*Gramini*) also helped the king. The *Gramini* looked after the village administration and kept a fighting force ready to help the king in times of war.

The Aryans had two important assemblies— the *Sabha* and the *Samiti*. The *Samiti* was an assembly of all the people of the village. The *Sabha* was a smaller body consisting of senior citizens and important members. These assemblies checked the power of the king. The king treated them with great respect. The *Sabha* gave its advice to the king on important matters.



Rajan



Purohit



Senani



Sabha



Samiti

Hymns : A song in praise of God.

## Social Life

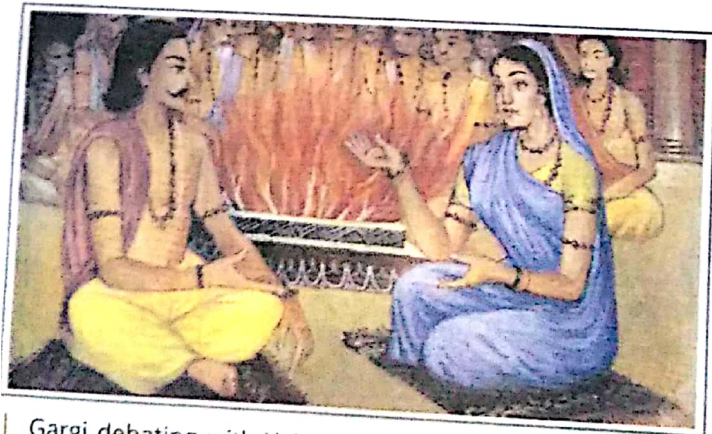
### Family

The Aryans lived in villages and each village was called 'grama'. The village consisted of a number of families. The society was patriarchal. Each family was known as a 'Kul'. The eldest male member of the family was considered the head and he made all the decisions which others had to accept. The head of the family was called **Grihapati**.

### Status of Women

Women were respected and treated at par with men and given education. The wife was the husband's partner in all religious and social ceremonies. A father's property was inherited by all his children. Sati and purdah system did not exist. Girls had the freedom to choose their husbands through the system of 'Swayamvara'.

Women were given a high status in the society. They were educated and actively attended assemblies and participated in debates. They also composed hymns. The system of widow remarriage was accepted. Gargi and Maitreyi were two highly educated women who lived during this time.



Gargi debating with Yajnavalkya

### The Four Varnas

The 'Varna' system was an important feature of the

**Inherited** : To receive from an ancestor as a right.

**Assembly** : A group of people who are elected to take decisions for a community.

**Hereditary** : Received by inheritance.

**Rigid** : Inflexible

## Enrich Your Knowledge

Some renowned women scholars of Vedic period were Vishwara, Ghosha, Lopamudra and Mudgalini who composed some of the Rigvedic hymns. Gargi, philosopher, debated with most renowned sage Yajnavalkya.

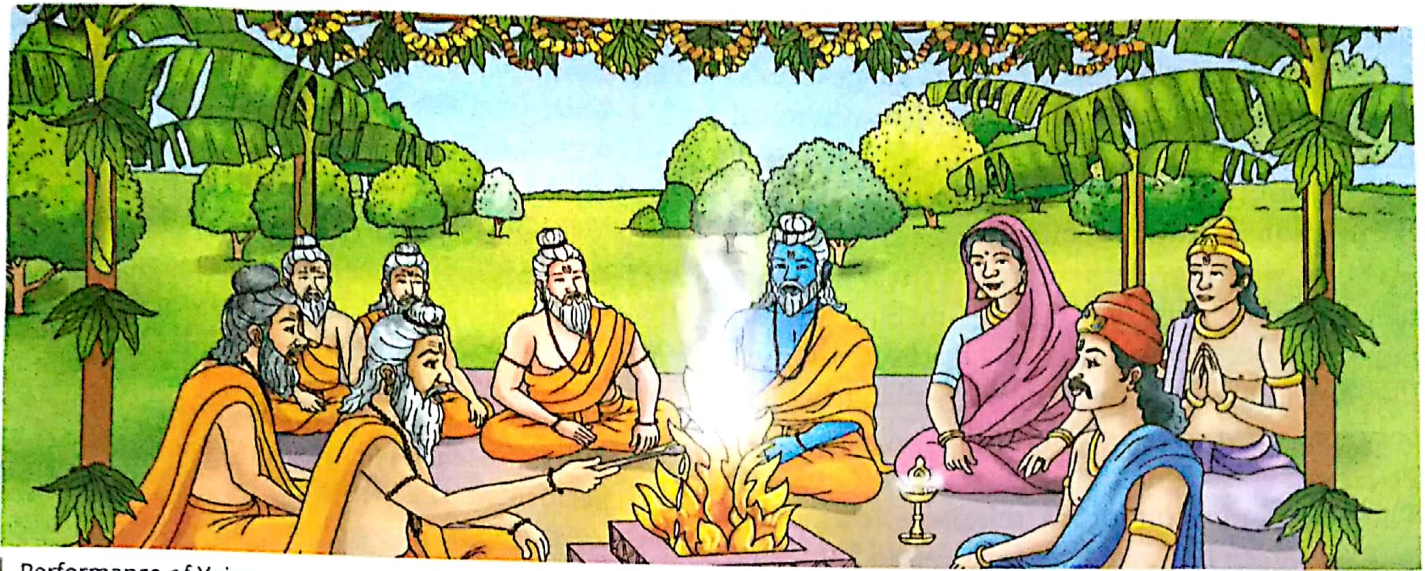
Vedic Society. There were four *Varnas* — *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*. This system was based on occupations of the people and not on birth.

- The teachers were called *Brahmanas*, who also conducted religious ceremonies.
- *Kshatriyas* were rulers, administrators and warriors,
- farmers, merchants were called *Vaishyas* and
- the group that served all the three classes was called *Shudra* which also comprised artisans and labourers.

During the Early Vedic period the *Varna* system was flexible and no restrictions were placed on occupations. But towards the end of the Later Vedic Period, the occupations became hereditary and the people from the same occupation formed a particular varna. Slowly the varna system became very rigid and discriminatory.

### Religion

The Aryans worshipped nature and its forces like the sun, earth, sky, wind, rain and fire. These became their gods and goddesses. Prayers were offered to *Agni*, the fire-god, *Varun*, the water-god, *Indra*, the god of rain and war. *Surya*, the Sun-God, was very important. *Indra* was the most important God. There were no temples or images for worship. *Yajnas* were performed and worship was carried out in the open with simple offerings and chanting of hymns.



Performance of Yajna

Some of the important Gods of the Vedic period were :

God	Worshipped as
• Varun	Water-God, God of seas
• Indra	God of Rain, Storm and War
• Surya	Sun-God
• Agni	God of Fire
• Vayu	God of Wind
• Usha	Goddess of Dawn
• Prithivi	Mother Goddess

### Pause and think

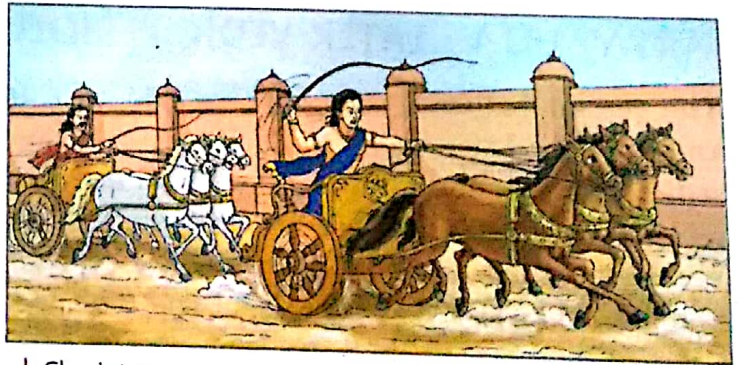
The Aryans worshipped nature and its various manifestations. Have you ever thought why it was so? Who were the female goddesses worshipped during the Vedic Age?

consumed on festivals, *Som* was taken only during special religious ceremonies.

The Aryans dressed in clothes made of cotton and wool. Men wore *dhotis* and turbans. Women wore *sarees*. Both men and women wore ornaments made of gold, silver, and other metals.

### Amusements

Chariot racing, hunting, gambling, singing, dancing, playing musical instruments were the favourite amusements of the Aryans. They loved to play the game of dice. The flute, the drum and lute were their favourite instruments.



Chariot race

### Economic Life

In the beginning, the Aryans were pastoral. Later, they settled down and started living in one place.

**Intoxicating :** Causing excitement and loss of control over senses.

**Ornaments :** A useful accessory worn to decorate oneself.

**Lute :** A musical instrument like a guitar.

**Pastoral :** Nomadic.

The Rig Veda mentions the importance of cows. The farmers of this period had a fair idea about various seasons of farming. The plough is also mentioned in the Rig Veda.

Agriculture and cattle rearing were the main occupations. Other occupations were pottery making, weaving, carpentry, jewellery-making, metal working, fishing. Chariot making was an important occupation. Iron was discovered during this age (1000 BCE) and metal working became very important.

Priests occupied a prestigious position in the society. They not only conducted religious ceremonies and sacrifices but acted as teachers and doctors. They knew about medicinal herbs and plants and attended to the sick. Cattle were considered the symbol of wealth and status in the Aryan society. The greater the number of cows a person had, the richer he was considered. A person owning many cows was called a *Gopati*.

### Transport and Trade

The use of horse was unknown in India before the coming of Aryans. The Aryans introduced the horse in India. Horses were used for drawing chariots. Ownership of a chariot was regarded as a status symbol in the Vedic society. Boats were used for water transport.

## ARYAVARTA : LATER VEDIC PERIOD

The period between 1000 BCE to 600 BCE is known as the Later Vedic Period. The Aryans now settled in the Gangetic valley. This period has been reconstructed on the basis of two sources; the Vedas, the epics and the archaeological remains from the regions such as Hastinapur and the upper Gangetic plains.

### Political Organisation

Small tribal organisation of Early Vedic Period now expanded and took the shape of large kingdoms.

**Chariot** : A cart pulled by horses used in ancient times in battles and races.

**Ashwamedha** : A religious exercise to display the power of a ruler and establish his unquestioned

Some of the kingdoms established in Later Vedic Period are—

- Kuru (modern Haryana, Delhi and western part of U.P.),
- Kosala (region of Awadh in U.P.),
- Magadh (region of Patna and Gaya)
- Kashi (Benaras)

The position of the king became stronger.

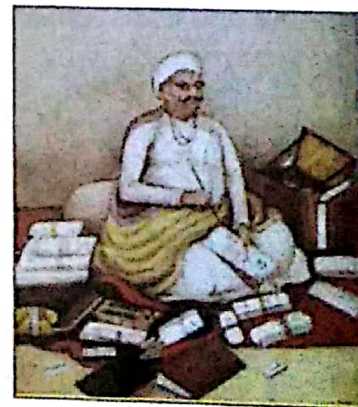
- He gained absolute power and his position became hereditary.
- The king began claiming himself to be the representative of God. Powerful kings performed the *Ashwamedha*, *Vajapeya* and *Rajasuya* sacrifices.
- The king assumed titles of *Samrat* and *Maharajadhiraj*. As kingdoms increased in size, powers of the king also increased and administration became complex. The king now required more officers to help him in administration.



Brahmana



Kshatriya



Vaishya



Shudra

The four varnas

power over the area through which his horse wandered without being stopped.

**Rajasuya** : A ritual performed to bestow supreme power on the king when he ascended the throne.

The *Senani* became very important as he helped the *Rajan* to expand his territory. Another officer who gained importance was the '*Sangrihitri*' or the tax collector. The two assemblies, *Sabha* and *Samiti*, lost their importance. The common people could not afford to attend the meetings of the *Sabha* and *Samiti*. Hence, these assemblies were attended only by the rich and the influential. These assemblies were now dominated by the aristocracy.

## Social life

### The Family

The fact that the birth of a son in the family was welcomed, shows that society was patriarchal. The position of women deteriorated during the period. Women were considered inferior to men now. They were denied education and not allowed to read Vedic literature. Polygamy was practised by the upper class and rich including the ruling princes. Taking care of their families and serving their husbands was all women were supposed to do, though religious ceremonies were still considered incomplete without them. Widow remarriage was looked down upon.

### The Four Varnas

Another significant change that came during this period was the rigidity in the varna system. Now

merit was discarded and birth into a family became important, which means the children of a *vaishya* or *shudra* were no longer allowed to teach, or fight in the battlefield and had to be in the same profession as their fathers, irrespective of their capabilities and interest. Varna became hereditary.

*Brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* became the privileged class which paid no taxes. The *Vaishyas* came next, they had to pay taxes. The *shudras* had no rights and were ill-treated as they were considered as untouchables. They did lowly and menial jobs.

## Religion

In the Later Vedic Period the mode of worship became complex and complicated. The Early Vedic gods such as *Indra*, *Agni*, *Varun*, etc., lost their importance and were replaced by *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. *Brahma* was worshipped as the creator; *Vishnu* as the preserver; and *Shiva*, as the destroyer. A *yajna* was the most common ritual. Sometimes, elaborate *yajnas* were organised, where a large number of priests chanted *mantras* for days. The priests were looked upon as messengers of God and enjoyed great power and prestige.

Towards the end of this period, certain people began to raise their voice against the complicated rites, rituals, animal sacrifices and the importance of *Brahmanas*.



Later Vedic Gods

**Deteriorated** : Became worse.

**Polygamy** : The practice of having more than one wife at the same time.

**Menial** : Work not requiring much skill and lacking prestige.

**Elaborate** : Bigger and complex.

## Economy

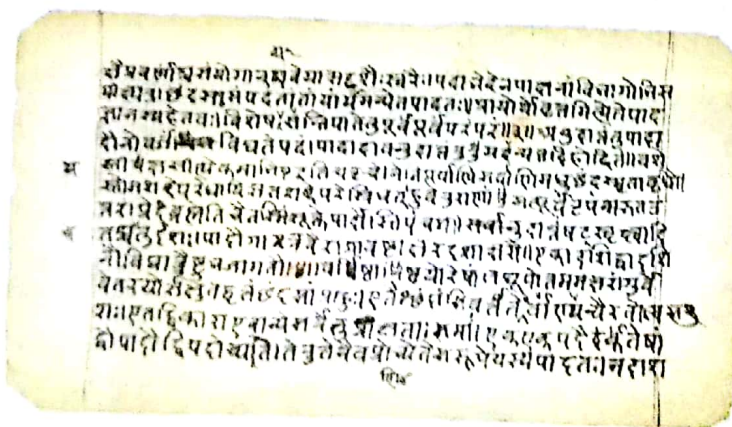
Use of iron became common during this period. A number of implements and weapons were made with iron. Though agriculture was still the most important occupation, other crafts such as weaving, leather work, pottery, carpentry and jewellery making developed. Rice began to be cultivated along with that of barley and wheat. Trade flourished in this period and there was growth of towns and cities towards the end of this period.

## Literature

Three Vedas – *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* were composed. The *Upanishads* were also composed towards the end of this period.

## Upanishads

The *Upanishads* dwell on philosophical aspects of human life. Questions such as : *What is God? Who is God? What is life? Where does one go after death?* are dealt in them. They lay stress on *Karma* (action) and *Moksha* (salvation). According to the *Upanishads*, a man's condition and position are determined by his actions in his previous life. The Aryans believed in '*dharma*' i.e., the right way of living. As time progressed, superstitions and misbeliefs crept into religion.



Page of Ken Upanishad

## Implements : Tools

**Philosophy :** The study of the fundamental nature and purpose of human life.

**Superstitions :** Mistaken beliefs.

**Incarnation :** A God or deity born as a human being.

This period also witnessed the writing of the two great epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

## The Ramayana

It was written by Sage Valmiki in Sanskrit. It tells the story of Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. It contains ideal characters like Rama, Lakshmana, Bharat, Hanuman and Sita. It describes a war between Rama and Ravana, ruler of Lanka. Rama kills Ravana and rescues Sita.

## The Mahabharata

It was written by Sage Ved Vyas in Sanskrit. It is a long epic which describes the great battle fought between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* at Kurukshetra.

The epics are the main source of information about the political and social conditions prevailing in the Epic Age. They are not only of great literary value, but they also reveal high ideals of life. The *Bhagavad Gita*, a part of *Mahabharata*, is one of the sacred books of the Hindus. It teaches that the soul is immortal. Though the body dies, the soul does not.

## Science

The Aryans also studied various branches of science. They made accurate calendars and could predict the time of eclipses. In mathematics they were fairly advanced as they knew *Anka ganita* (arithmetic), *Rekha ganita* (geometry) and *Beej ganit* (algebra), astronomy and astrology (*gyotish*).

## Gurukul System of Education

The *Guru-Shishya* tradition was followed in education. A student (*Brahmachari*) of 7 years was sent to Gurukul (family of a teacher) where he lived with his Guru. Vedic literature, mathematics, medicines, astronomy, astrology etc. were the subjects students would learn. Education was transmitted orally.

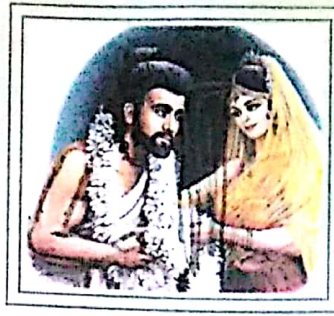
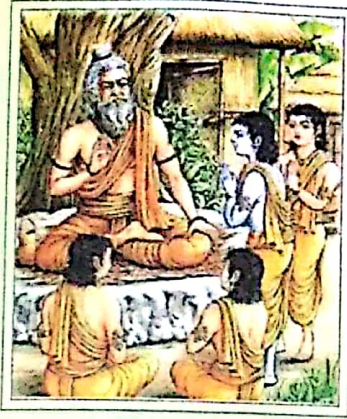
**Immortal :** Living or continuing forever.

**Eclipse :** The total or partial obscuring of one celestial body by another.

**Astrology :** The study of the positions and movements of the stars, planets and how they might influence people and events.



**Brahmacharya** - This was the first stage of life when a person received education and kept himself busy in attaining knowledge.

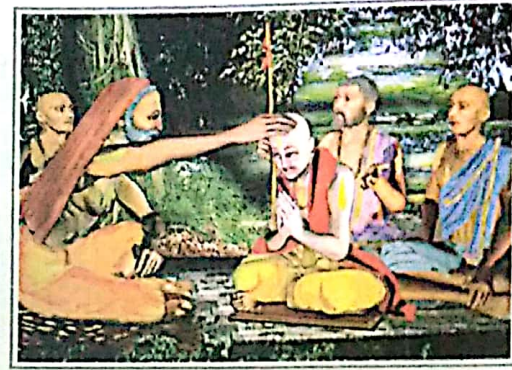


**Grihastha** - This was the second stage of his life when he got married and fulfilled his responsibilities towards his family.



**Vanprastha** - This was the third stage of his life when he gave up the materialistic world and went to the forest for meditation.

**Sanyasa** - The fourth and last stage in which he was supposed to give up all worldly ties and preach the moral values.



The Four Ashramas

They also learnt, sword fighting, archery, wrestling, etc. to be used in the battlefields.

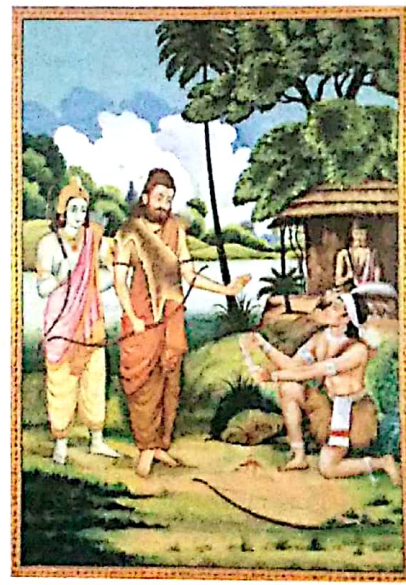
Students served their guru and paid *gurudakshina* or remuneration after the completion of their education, according to their ability.



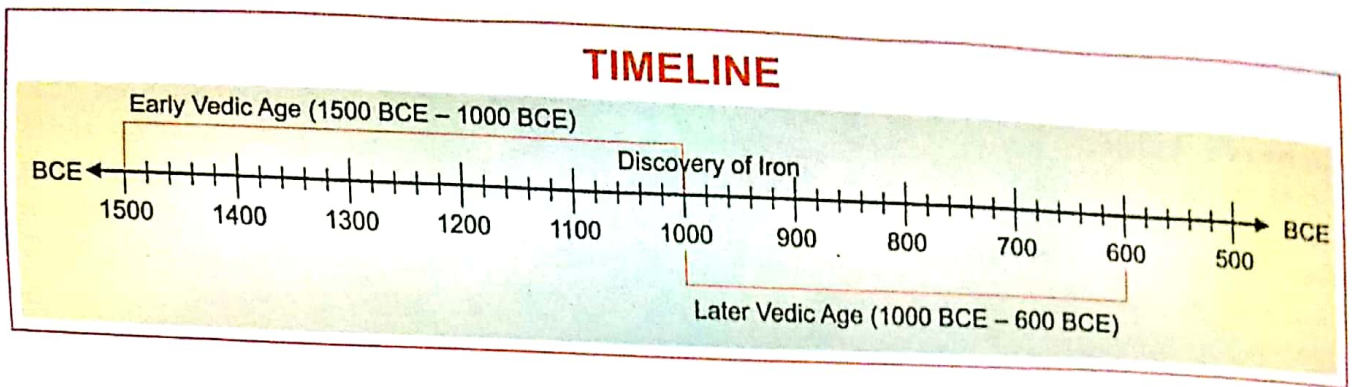
A Gurukul

### Tell A-Tale

Long ago, there lived a boy named Eklavya who belonged to the hunting community. He wanted to learn Archery from the the Great Guru Dronacharya. But Dronacharya only taught Princes. He refused to teach him. Eklavya prepared an image of Drona out of clay and began practising archery. One day, a dog disturbed him while he was practising. He shot five arrows so carefully into the dog's mouth that they silenced the dog without harming the animal. When Guru Dronacharya saw this, he was amazed at the skills of Eklavya. He saw the clay image made by Eklavya. He asked Eklavya to give his right thumb as 'Guru-Dakshina', which is given by the student to his Guru at the end of teaching. Without any hesitation Eklavya took out his knife and cut off his right thumb and placed it at the feet of Guru Dronacharya. Dronacharya blessed him. Eklavya is still praised as the most obedient and brave student.



Archery : The sport of shooting arrows.



### POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The Aryans developed the Vedic Culture from 1500 BCE to 600 BCE.
- Their original home was in Central Asia.
- They were nomads and came to India in 1500 BCE and occupied the Sapt Sindhu area. They gradually spread from the Himalayas to the Vindhya.
- The literary and archaeological finds are the historical sources.
- The literary sources of the Aryans consist of the four Vedas, the Upanishads and the two Epics.
- The **political administration** consisted of the king or Rajan as head of a tribe. He had great power. Ruled with the help of *Senani* and *Purohit* and two assemblies — the *Sabha* and the *Samiti*.
- **Social life** — Aryans lived in villages. The family was the smallest unit with the oldest member as the head. The village head was known as *Gramini*. Main occupations — agriculture, pottery, chariot making, weaving, carpentry and making iron implements. Food grown — rice, wheat, fruits and vegetables. Dress consisted of *dhoti* for men and *sarees* for women. Amusements were hunting, gambling, chariot racing, dancing and singing. Society was divided into four *varnas* — *brahmanas*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras*. These were not rigid in the Early Vedic Period but became rigid during the Later Vedic Period.
- **Religion** — Aryans worshipped nature — Indra, Agni and Varun. They performed *yajnas*. In the Later Vedic Age Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva became important gods. Religion was simple in the Early Vedic Age but became complicated in the Later Vedic age.
- The Aryans made great progress in science. Arithmetic, algebra and geometry were known to them. They knew about eclipses, astronomy and astrology.
- Women were greatly respected during the Early Vedic Period. They took active part in assemblies and debates and composed hymns during the early vedic period. Their importance declined during the Later Vedic Period.

# THE VEDIC CIVILISATION

## Early Vedic Age

- Aryans settled in the land they called as *Brahmavarta*.
- sources – Rig Veda, excavations
- political organisation
  - king powerful
  - assemblies kept a check on power of the king
- society
  - family patriarchal
  - women respected
  - *varna* system established though not rigid
  - agriculture chief occupation
  - worshipped forces of nature
  - religion simple, no images
  - *Rig Veda* written during this period.

## Later Vedic Age

- Aryans moved eastward, land they settled is called '*Aryavart*'
- sources – Vedas, excavations
- political organisation
  - king very powerful
  - power of assemblies declined
  - many officers assisted the king
- society
  - family patriarchal
  - status of women deteriorated
  - agriculture chief occupation
  - *varna* system became rigid. Varnas based on birth.
  - religion complicated
  - three *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Epics* written during this age.

## Time to Learn

I. Tick (✓) the correct answer.

1. The group that served all the three varnas was called
  - (a) Brahmana
  - (b) Kshatriya
  - (c) Vaishya
  - (d) Shudra
2. Which of the following Vedas was not composed during the Later Vedic period?
  - (a) Rig Veda
  - (b) Sama Veda
  - (c) Yajur Veda
  - (d) Atharva Veda
3. Who among the following was a Water-God?
  - (a) Agni
  - (b) Varun
  - (c) Surya
  - (d) Indra