

4. THE VEDIC AGE

(3500 B.C. - 4000 B.C.)

In the previous chapter we read about the Indus Valley or the Harappa civilization. Many years after that a new culture developed in the plains of the Indus and Saraswati rivers. It is known as the Vedic culture. The people who developed this culture called themselves Aryans. The word 'Arya' means 'best' or 'cultured.'



Rigveda

VEDIC LITERATURE

Vedic literature is an ancient literature of the world. It contains profound knowledge. Such a literature was not seen anywhere. The language of the Vedas is ancient Sanskrit. Vedas are four in number- Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. This is called 'Shruti' literature. 'Shruti' means 'that which is heard'. It was not written down. It was transferred verbally by hearing by word of mouth from the teacher. Students would listen to it and learn it by repeating it loudly. This way knowledge was carefully passed on from one generation to another.

RIGVEDA

Rigveda is the most ancient 'text' of the world. The mantras are called 'sukta'. 'Sukta' means spoken correctly. Gods and goddesses are praised in these suktas. Its study reveals detailed information about that period.

Vedic age can be divided into two category.

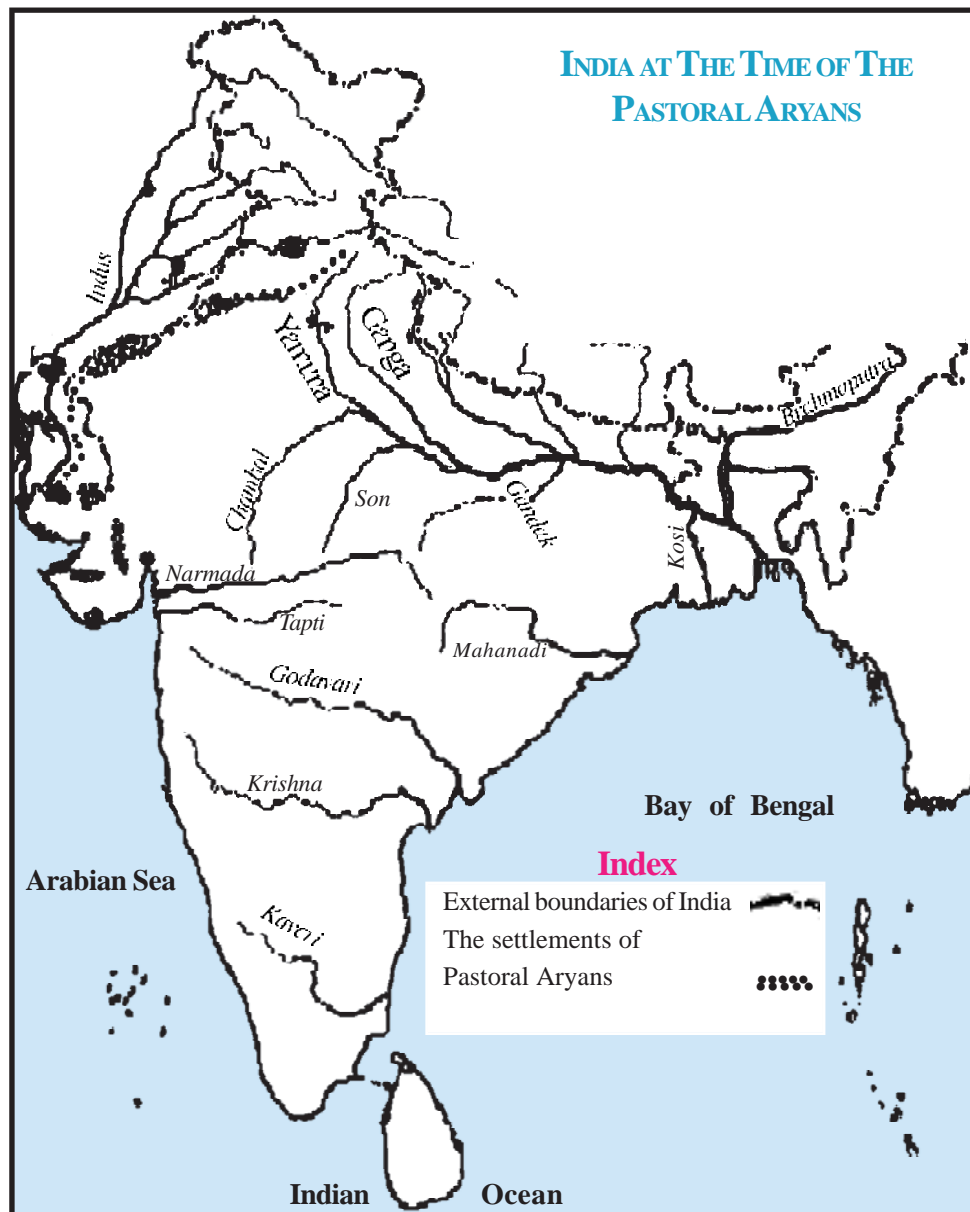
1. **Rig Vedic or Early Vedic period; and**
2. **Later Vedic period.**

RIGVEDIC OR EARLY VEDIC PERIOD

During the early Vedic period people lived in the region called Saptasindhu. Saptasindhu means seven rivers. The area was covered by the river Indus and its tributaries.

Locate these areas in the map 4.1 and name the rivers which flow through it.

The main occupation of the people was cattle rearing. They also grew wheat and barley, but farming was not their main occupation. They worshipped cows and got milk, butter, ghee etc. from them. Horses were also useful for them and were used



Map 4.1

in their chariots. Besides cows and horses they domesticated goats, sheep and dogs. They grazed their cattle in the common grazing fields. If there was scarcity of fodder they would go and settle at a new place.

Important craftsmen were those who build chariots. The Aryan women would spin and weave cloth.

LIFE STYLE

The Aryans led a simple life style. They lived in houses made of wood and mud. They would build huge cattle sheds for their cows. They used milk, butter, ghee, curd, buttermilk, wheat, barley and meat in their diet.

Father was the head of the family. Male members had important position in the society. Women were treated well and their presence was essential in religious



ceremonies. Women were educated. Several of them like Ghosa and Apala - had created 'suktas' of the vedas.

What are the similarities and dissimilarities in our food and that of the people of the Vedic age?

SOCIETY

During the Vedic period family was the basis of the society. A village or township was inhabited by people of several families. They were all related to each other. People of several villages were collectively called 'Jana'. At that time there were several janas like- Purujana, Kurujana, Yadujana etc.

Are the people in the villages today related to each other?

At that time besides the Vedic people there were several others who had different life styles and who did not speak Sanskrit. Vedic people called them dasa, dasya or pani. Sometimes there would be war between these people and the vedic people.

However, as time passed, the Vedic and non-Vedic people started interacting with each other and started learning from each other. In the early Vedic period all the people were treated equally. There were no social evils such as the caste system and untouchability.

RAJA

From the Rigveda we learn that in those days all the male members of a 'jana' would select their Raja. His duty was to lead at the time of war, perform yajnas and maintain law and order. The post of Raja was not hereditary. That is, a son could not become a Raja after his father. The Raja had to consult his subjects on important matters. He could not do just what he wanted. So we can say that their rule was based on republican traditions.

1. **Do you know where are important decisions regarding a village or a city are taken today?**
2. **What is the present form of government?**

WAR

Sometimes there would be war between two 'janas' because of cattle and pastures. They did not have a permanent army. Whenever there was a need, all men would go to fight. The Raja would be leading them. Cattle, wealth and pastures etc. of the defeated party would be distributed by the winning raja among the people of his jana. Raja would occasionally get gifts like milk, ghee, cows, wheat, jewels etc. from



the people of his jana. Out of this one part would be kept by the Raja and the remaining would be distributed among all the people.

Why would the people of a jana give gifts to the Raja ?

GODS, GODDESSES AND YAJNA

The people of the early Vedic era would perform yajna to please gods and goddesses. They would pray for children, happiness, cows, horses, freedom from diseases, and victory in war. Their main gods were Indra (rain), Agni (fire), Varun (sky), Surya (Sun) etc. They would offer milk, curd, ghee, barley etc. to the gods and recite Vedic suktas.

Besides praises of gods, Vedic suktas also had descriptions of nature, and thoughts related to the origin of the world.

The following are the greatest gifts of the Vedic culture:-

- 1. SANSKRIT- Sanskrit is an ancient language of India and is the mother of several languages.**
- 2. VEDIC LITERATURE - It is the ancient literature of India.**
- 3. REPUBLIC TRADITIONS- The tradition of governance where elected people rule for a definite period.**

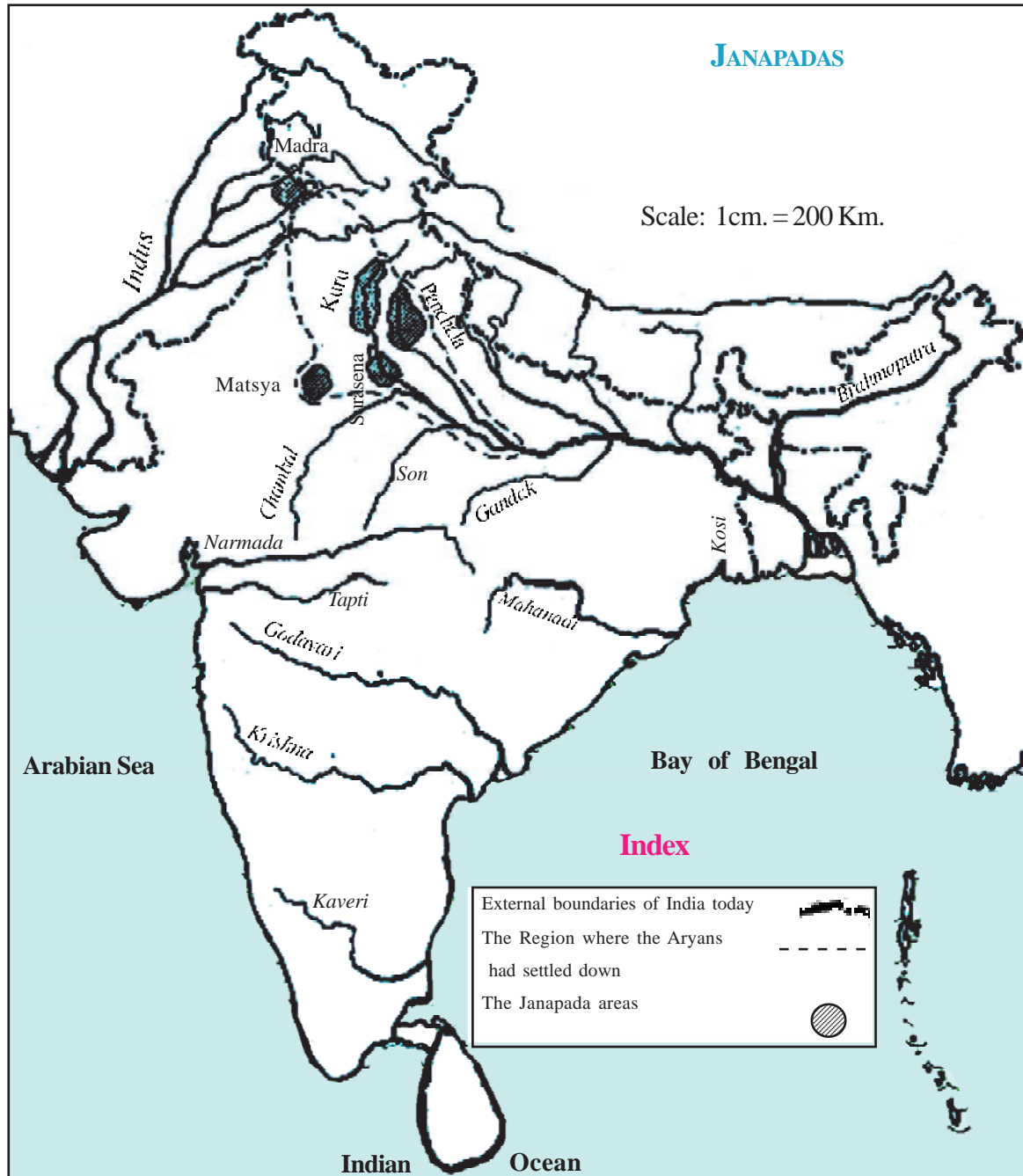
LATER VEDIC PERIOD.

The other three vedas- Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda were composed in this period. In this period Vedic culture spread from the Sindhu- Saraswati region to the northern Gangetic plains. Progress in agriculture resulted in development of new industries. With this new states came into existence and developed.

JANAPADA

The area in which people of one jana lived was called Janapada - like, Kuru janapada, Panchal janapada, Sursen janapada etc.

Look at map 4.2 and identify these janapadas. Besides which rivers were these janapadas located ?



Map 4.2

DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND MATERIAL PROSPERITY

In the Later Vedic Period agriculture prospered. Farmers were able to grow surplus amount of cereals like rice, wheat, oilseeds, pulses etc.

Materialistic prosperity was seen in the Later Vedic Period. There were craftsmen making new ornaments, leather items, wooden articles etc. Different metals especially iron began to be used. They called it Krishna ayask or black metal. We get this information from the Vedic literature. Things like clay pots, iron tools etc. of that time, have been found in the excavations.



Which industries developed in the Later Vedic Period ?

SOCIETY AND RELIGION

In the later Vedic Period there was joint family system. All the brothers and people of some generations lived together in a family. It was headed by the senior most male member. He was called 'grihapati'. Every one would obey him.

According to the Vedic literature a man's life was divided into four stages or ashramas. The first stage was brahmacharya- in this a man is a child and acquires education, second stage is grahastha in which a man marries and leads a family life. Third stage is Vanaprastha- in this stage a man stays away from the family and meditates. The fourth stage is sanyasa- it is complete retirement. Man spends his last days by visiting holy places.

Is your family a joint family ?

In the later vedic period most of the grihapatis were engaged in farming and cattle rearing. They were called Vaishyas. These grihapatis had people who would serve them. Occasionally grihapatis would send gifts to the Raja which would help in managing the expenditure of the state.

The Raja was the head of the whole jana. His relatives and colleagues were called Rajanya. Their main duty was to protect the janapada. But at the time of war all the males of the jana would also join them.

From the later Vedic literatures we learn that the Raja and his kinsmen would perform big yajnas like ashvamegh yajna, rajasuya yajna etc. These yajnas would continue for months, and a lot of money was also spent on them. They were performed by the Brahmins or Purohits.

Brahmins would get money, cows etc. in donations. They believed that these yajnas would make the Raja strong and bring prosperity to the land. In the Later Vedic Period the society was divided into four varnas. First were brahmins, who would perform yajnas and teach vedas, second were the kshatriyas who co-operated in ruling the society, third, were the vaishyas who were engaged in farming and cattle rearing; fourth were the Shudras- who were engaged in doing menial services for others. The varna system later turned into the caste system.

COMPOSITION OF THE EPICS

The two great epics of our country - the Ramayana and the Mahabharat were composed during this period. The Ramayana which was created by Maharshi Valmiki was based on the happenings of the Kosal janapada. Similarly the Mahabharata which was composed by Maharshi Vyas, was based on the Kuru, Panchal and Sursen janapads. Both these epics are the foundation of Indian culture. These epics have influenced the lives of people in all fields. The study of these epics tell us the history of that time.



EXERCISE

I. Fill in the blanks-

- 1) _____ is the language of the Vedas.
- 2) _____ is the ancient text of the world.
- 3) Aryans were familiar with _____ metal.
- 4) All the people in the Rigvedic Period were known as _____.
- 5) People of the jana gave _____ to the Raja.

II. Make pairs.

A	B
1. Sapta Sindhu	Kinsmen
2. Ramayana	Arya
3. Mahabharata	Valmiki
4. Relatives of the Raja	Vyas

III. Answers the following questions-

- 1) Name the Vedas.
- 2) Name the main Gods & Goddesses of the Aryans.
- 3) What was the ashram system in the Vedic period?
- 4) What was the Varna system in the society in the Vedic period?
- 5) Describe the life styles of the Aryans.
- 6) Write about the gifts of the Vedic culture.
- 7) What was the importance of cattle rearing in the Rigvedic Period?
- 8) Describe the development of farming and cattle rearing in the Later Vedic Period.
- 9) What was the condition of the women in the Rigvedic period?
- 10) Describe the characteristics of family in the Later Vedic Period.

Project work -

1. Find the compositions of Kalidas and write the names.
2. Which all category people live in your village/city? How do they celebrate their festivals ? Do there festivals in clude people from other classes ?
3. Find botanical medicines from elderly people of your village and write its benefits.

