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National Council of Educational Research and Training

Volume – 1

History

SIERRA INNOVATIONS

INDEX

1 CHAPTER

Ancient Indian History

The Significance and Evolution of Ancient Indian History

The study of ancient Indian history is fundamental to understanding the genesis of our civilization. It provides a window into the transition from early human settlements to the establishment of complex socio-political structures, reflecting a unique synthesis of diversity and unity.

1. **From Primitive Settlements to Civilized Society**
   The history of ancient India chronicles the long journey of human progress:
   - **Early Cultures:** History maps the "how, when, and where" of the earliest human cultures in the subcontinent.
   - **Economic Foundations:** The discovery and application of **natural resources** allowed humans to transition from nomadic life to settled, secure existence. This involved mastering agriculture, farming, animal husbandry, and craft specializations like **spinning, weaving, and metal-working**.
   - **Urbanization:** These advancements led to the clearing of forests, the foundation of villages and cities, and the eventual rise of large, organized **kingdoms**.
   - **Literacy and Language:** Civilization is closely linked to the art of writing. Ancient India developed scripts that serve as the foundational bedrock for the diverse languages and writing systems prevalent in the country today. These linguistic roots have evolved continuously through the ages.

2. **A Crucible of Diversity: The Ethnic and Religious Tapestry**
   India has historically functioned as a melting pot for various populations:
   - **Ethnic Synthesis:** Throughout history, India became a home to diverse groups, including the **Pre-Aryans, Indo-Aryans, Greeks, Scythians, Hunas, and Turks**. These groups mixed so thoroughly that they became indistinguishable in their original forms, contributing their unique cultural traits to the Indian mosaic.
   - **Religious Intermingling:** Ancient India was the birthplace of major religions like **Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism**. Rather than remaining isolated, these traditions interacted and influenced one another, fostering common lifestyles and social customs across the vast geography. This represents an inherent **"unity in diversity."**

3. **The Concept of Bharatavarsha and Political Integration**
   The ancient thinkers and rulers envisioned the Indian subcontinent as a single, cohesive entity:
   - **Geographical and Cultural Identity:** The name **Bharatavarsha** (Land of Bharata) was given to the entire country, named after an ancient tribe, the **Bharatas**. Its people were known as **Bharatasantati** (descendants of Bharata).
   - **The Vision of Unity:** Poets, philosophers, and writers conceptualized the land stretching from the **Himalayas to the sea** as the domain of a universal monarch.
   - **The *Chakravartin* Ideal:** Rulers who succeeded in establishing authority over vast territories—from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, and from the Brahmaputra in the east to the Indus in the west—were honored as **chakravartins** (universal monarchs).
   - **Historical Milestones of Unity:**
     - **3rd Century B.C.: Asoka** extended his authority over almost the entire country, excluding the extreme south.
     - **4th Century A.D.: Samudragupta** carried his military campaigns from the north to the borders of the Tamil land.
     - **7th Century A.D.:** The Chalukya king **Pulakesin II** defeated **Harshavardhana**, who was recognized as the lord of the whole of North India.

4. **Nomenclature and Foreign Perception**
   The geographical unity of India was not just an internal concept; it was recognized and named by external visitors:
   - **The Indus Connection:** Foreigners first established contact with the inhabitants living near the **Sindhu** (Indus) river. Consequently, they named the entire country after this river.
   - **Etymological Evolution:** The Sanskrit term **Sindhu** evolved into **'Hind'** in Persian and Arabic. Later, it became **'India'** in the Greek language. This reflects how the perception of India as a single geographical unit persisted in the minds of both cultural leaders and foreign conquerors.

5. **Linguistic and Cultural Unification Efforts**
   Ancient India witnessed a consistent drive to bridge linguistic gaps to maintain internal cohesion:
   - **The Lingua Franca:** In the **3rd century B.C.**, **Prakrit** functioned as the *lingua franca* (common language) of the country. This is evidenced by **Asoka's inscriptions**, which were written in Prakrit across major portions of India.
   - **The Rise of Sanskrit:** Over time, **Sanskrit** assumed the position of the state language, reaching even the most remote parts of the country. This became particularly prominent during the **Gupta period (4th century A.D.)**. Even in the post-Gupta period, when the country was politically fragmented into numerous small states, official documents continued to be recorded in Sanskrit.
   - **The Power of Epics:** The cultural unity was further solidified by the great epics, the **Ramayana and the Mahabharata**. These were studied with equal devotion in the intellectual circles of **Banaras and Taxila** as they were in the land of the **Tamils**. While these epics were eventually adapted into various local languages, the core substance and underlying Indian cultural values remained consistent throughout the country.

6. **The Unique Social Structure: The Varna/Caste System**
   A defining feature of Indian history is the development of a distinct social system that exhibited remarkable resilience:
   - **The Varna System:** Originating in North India, the **varna/caste system** eventually spread to encompass almost the entire country.
   - **Assimilation:** One of the most unique aspects of this system was its ability to absorb foreign populations. When various foreigners entered India in ancient times, they were systematically integrated into one caste or another.
   - **Persistence:** The influence of the caste system was so profound that it transcended religious boundaries. Even after the arrival of **Christianity and Islam**, the converts belonged to specific castes. Consequently, even when individuals left Hinduism to join these new religions, they often continued to maintain their traditional caste practices, illustrating the deep-rooted nature of this social structure.

The Construction of Ancient Indian History

Reconstructing the history of ancient India is a complex process that relies on the synthesis of material remains, coins, inscriptions, and literary accounts. Since ancient Indians did not document history in the modern sense, these diverse sources are essential to piece together the socio-economic, political, and cultural landscape of the past.

1. **Archaeological Sources: Material Remains**
   Archaeology is the scientific discipline of excavating ancient mounds in successive, systematic layers to understand the material life of past civilizations.
   - **Excavation Methodology:**
     - **Vertical vs. Horizontal Digging:** Most sites are dug vertically to establish a **chronological sequence** of material culture. Horizontal digging, which offers a complete picture of a site, is rare because it is highly expensive.

- **Preservation Factors:** Climate significantly impacts the survival of artifacts. The dry climate of western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and northwestern India preserves antiquities well. Conversely, the moist, humid climate of the middle Gangetic basin and deltaic regions often leads to the corrosion of iron implements and the degradation of mud structures.

- **Scientific Analysis:**
  - **Dating and Environment:** The **radio-carbon method** is used to fix dates. Plant residues and **pollen-analysis** help reconstruct historical climate and vegetation patterns (e.g., indicating agriculture in Rajasthan and Kashmir by 6000 B.C.).
  - **Material Analysis:** Scientific examination of metal artifacts identifies sources and technological stages, while the study of animal bones reveals domestication patterns and the roles animals played in ancient society.
- **Key Discoveries:** Excavations have revealed Northwestern cities dating back to 2500 B.C., as well as the layout of settlements, pottery, housing, cereals, and tools. Notably, **megaliths** (burial sites encircled by large stones) in South India provide vital evidence of life in the Deccan from the Iron Age onwards.

2. Numismatics: The Study of Coins

Numismatics provides a chronological and economic framework for history. Since ancient India lacked a banking system, coins were often stored as "precious hoards" in earthen or brass vessels.

- **Evolution and Materials:** Ancient coins were minted from **copper, silver, gold, or lead**. Paper currency was unknown until the 14th century.
- **Historical Significance:**
  - **Dynastic Reconstruction:** Coins often feature names of kings, gods, and dates. They are crucial for mapping the history of dynasties like the **Indo-Greeks** (2nd–1st century B.C.).
  - **Economic Indicators:** Coins issued by **guilds of merchants and goldsmiths** (with royal permission) indicate thriving crafts and commerce. A high frequency of coins (notably gold coins by the **Guptas**) signifies economic prosperity, while a scarcity in the post-Gupta period suggests a decline in trade.
- **Preservation:** Many Indian coins are housed in museums globally (Calcutta, Delhi, London, etc.) due to colonial-era transfers. However, many remain uncatalogued.

3. Epigraphy: The Study of Inscriptions

Epigraphy (the study of inscriptions) and **Palaeography** (the study of ancient writing) are the most reliable sources for ancient history.

- **Mediums and Locations:** Inscriptions were carved on seals, stone pillars, rocks, copper plates, temple walls, and bricks. While stone was the primary medium initially, **copper plates** became popular in the early centuries of the Christian era for recording land grants.
- **Scripts and Languages:**
  - **Harappan:** Earliest (c. 2500 B.C.), pictographic, and still **undeciphered**.
  - **Brahmi:** Prevailed across India (written left-to-right).
  - **Kharosthi:** Used in the northwest (written right-to-left).
  - **Evolution:** Asokan inscriptions (3rd century B.C.) were in Prakrit. Sanskrit became a standard epigraphic medium by the 2nd century A.D. and dominated by the 4th–5th centuries. Regional languages emerged in inscriptions by the 9th–10th centuries.
- **Decipherment: James Prinsep** (East India Company) first successfully deciphered Asokan inscriptions in 1837.
- **Types of Inscriptions:**
  - **Royal Orders:** Administrative/social directives (e.g., Asoka's edicts).
  - **Votive Records:** Marks of devotion by followers of Buddhism, Jainism, etc.
  - **Eulogies (*Prashastis*):** Praise of kings (e.g., Allahabad pillar inscription of **Samudragupta**).
  - **Donative Records:** Land grants to monks, priests, and officials, which are crucial for studying land systems.

4. Literary Sources

Ancient Indian literature is vast, though manuscripts are relatively rare in India due to the perishable nature of **birch bark** and **palm leaves**. Most ancient manuscripts are preserved in South India, Kashmir, and Nepal, while others were found in Central Asia.

- **Vedic Literature:**
  - **Rig Veda (c. 1500–1000 B.C.):** Primarily prayers.
  - **Later Vedic Texts:** Including the **Atharva Veda**, **Yajur Veda**, **Brahmanas**, and **Upanishads (c. 1000–500 B.C.)**: These contain rituals, magic, mythological stories, and philosophical speculations.
  - *Note:* These texts contain many interpolations.
- **Epics and Puranas (Compiled by c. A.D. 400):**
  - **Mahabharata:** Originally *Jaya Samhita* (8,800 verses), later *Bharata* (24,000), and finally *Mahabharata* (100,000). Reflects the period from the 10th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.
  - **Ramayana:** Grew from 12,000 to 24,000 verses; generally considered composed later than the Mahabharata.
- **Sutras (c. 600–300 B.C.):**
  - **Srautasutras:** Public royal sacrifices.
  - **Grihyasutras:** Domestic rituals (birth, naming, marriage, funerals).
  - **Sulvasutras:** Prescribed measurements for sacrificial altars; mark the beginnings of **geometry** and **mathematics**.
- **Religious Texts (Jaina/Buddhist):**
  - **Buddhist:** Earliest texts in **Pali** (compiled 2nd century B.C.). The **Jatakas** (folk tales of Buddha's previous births) offer invaluable insights into social and economic conditions from the 5th to the 2nd century B.C.
  - **Jaina:** Written in **Prakrit** (compiled 6th century A.D. in Valabhi, Gujarat); they contain significant historical data regarding the age of Mahavira.
- **Secular Literature:**
  - **Dharmasastras (Dharmasutras & Smritis):** Codified rules for social duties, property, and law.
  - **Arthasastra of Kautilya:** Finalized in the early Christian era; provides rich material on ancient polity and economy.
  - **Classical Works:** Writings of **Bhasa**, **Kalidasa** (*Abhijnanasakuntalam*), and **Banabhatta** reflect the social/cultural life of the Gupta and post-Gupta periods.
  - **Sangam Literature:** Tamil texts (1st–6th century A.D.) produced in assemblies (*sangams*); provide vital data on South Indian social, economic, and political life.

5. Foreign Accounts

Foreign travelers provided observations that supplement indigenous sources, often filling gaps where local records are silent (e.g., the lack of Indian sources on **Alexander's** invasion).

- **Greek and Roman Accounts:**
  - **Megasthenes:** Author of *Indika*; his mention of **Sandrokottas** (identified as **Chandragupta Maurya**) is the "sheet-anchor" of ancient Indian chronology.
  - **Geographical/Trade Data:** *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (c. A.D. 80–115), Ptolemy's *Geography* (c. A.D. 150), and Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (1st century A.D.) detail trade between India, the Roman Empire, and Italy.
- **Chinese Travelers:**
  - **Fa-hsien (5th century A.D.):** Records Gupta-era social, religious, and economic life.
  - **Hsuan Tsang (7th century A.D.):** Provides a detailed account of the age of **Harsha**.

6. **Historical Sense in Ancient India**

   While Ancient Indians did not write history in the modern sense, they possessed a clear historical awareness.

   - **Puranas:** Provided dynastic history up to the Gupta rule, using the concept of four ages (*krita, treta, dvapara, kali*) to illustrate the idea of change and degeneration over time.
   - **Dating:** The use of eras like **Vikrama Samvat (58 B.C.)**, **Saka Samvat (A.D. 78)**, and the **Gupta era (A.D. 319)** demonstrates a focus on recording events within a temporal context.
   - **Biographical Works (*Charitas*):**
     - **Harshacharita (Banabhatta):** Earliest notable biography.
     - **Ramacharita (Sandhyakara Nandi):** Details the conflict between the Kaivarta peasants and the Pala prince Ramapala.
     - **Vikramankadevacharita (Bilhana):** Records the life of Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI.
   - **Rajatarangini:** Written by **Kalhana** (12th century) on the kings of Kashmir; it is considered the most mature historical work, possessing multiple traits of history as understood in modern times.

The Geographical Setting of Ancient India

The history of India is intrinsically linked to its geography. The subcontinent, covering **4,202,500 square kilometres**, functions as a well-defined geographical unit. It encompasses the modern nations of **India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh**. Its diverse landscape—ranging from high mountain ranges to river-fed plains and plateaus—has dictated the patterns of human settlement, political evolution, and economic exchange throughout history.

1. **Natural Boundaries and Their Historical Impact**

   The subcontinent is largely situated in the **tropical zone**, protected by distinct natural barriers:

   - **The Himalayas:** Acting as a northern shield, the Himalayas protected the country from cold Arctic winds from Siberia, keeping northern India's climate relatively warm. This mild climate allowed for less heavy clothing and an outdoor-centric lifestyle. Historically, the range served as a formidable barrier against northern invasions.
   - **The North-Western Passes:** Despite the mountain walls, the **Sulaiman** and **Kirthar** ranges (southward extensions of the Himalayas) contained vital passes such as the **Khyber**, **Gomal**, and **Bolan**. These passes facilitated continuous two-way traffic between India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, serving as conduits for trade, cultural exchange, and, at times, invasions.
   - **Mountain Valleys:**
     - **Kashmir:** Nestled in the Himalayas, the Kashmir valley developed a unique lifestyle. It served as a **transmitting centre of Buddhism** to Central Asia and a repository for vast numbers of Sanskrit manuscripts.
     - **Nepal:** Accessible via passes from the Gangetic plains, it also became a major centre for the cultivation of Sanskrit and a similar repository of ancient texts.

2. **River Systems: The Arteries of History**

   The heart of historical India lies in its major river systems, which served as the primary routes for **commerce, communication, and military transport**:

   - **Economic Hubs:** Towns were predominantly established on riverbanks in pre-industrial times (e.g., **Hastinapur, Prayag, Varanasi, Pataliputra**). Rivers provided water for agriculture and canals, though they also caused destructive floods.
   - **Regional Political Units:** Geography defined political boundaries. For example:
     - **Kalinga:** Situated between the Mahanadi and Godavari rivers.
     - **Andhra Pradesh:** Between the Godavari and Krishna.
     - **Tamil Nadu:** Between the Krishna and Kaveri.

- **The East-West Flow:** The **Vindhya mountains** cut across the country, forming the boundary between North and South India. Despite being a barrier, the Vindhyas were not insurmountable; constant movement by traders, missionaries (especially **brahmanas**), and rulers facilitated a **composite culture** and the exchange of languages (Indo-Aryan in the north, Dravidian in the south).

3. Settlement Patterns and Resource Exploitation

Human settlement moved from west to east, dictated by the ability to clear forests and cultivate land:

- **West to East Progression:** The Indus and western Gangetic vegetation (rainfall 25–60 cm) was cleared using **stone and copper** tools. The middle and lower Gangetic basins (rainfall 60–250 cm) were thickly forested with hard soil and could only be cleared after the introduction of **iron implements**.
- **Crop Cycles:** The Indus and western Gangetic plains produced **wheat and barley**, while the middle and lower Gangetic plains became the cradle of **rice** cultivation.
- **Key Historical Phases:**
  - **Harappan Culture:** Flourished in the Indus Valley.
  - **Vedic Culture:** Originated in Punjab and moved to the western Gangetic basin.
  - **Post-Vedic Culture:** Thrived in the middle Gangetic basin due to iron technology.
  - **Gupta Period:** The lower Gangetic valley and North Bengal gained prominence.
  - **Early Medieval:** The Brahmaputra valley (Assam) gained importance.

4. Mineral Wealth and Economic Development

The exploitation of natural resources was a major catalyst for economic and political growth in ancient India.

- **Copper:** As the **first metal to be used**, copper holds a place of purity in Hindu religious rituals.
  - **Sources:** The richest deposits are in the **Chotanagpur plateau** (specifically **Singhbhum** district) and **Khetri mines** in Rajasthan.
  - **Usage:** Tapped by pre-Vedic and Vedic peoples, these mines supported settlements in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and the Ganga-Yamuna doab. Numerous copper celts found in the Khetri zone date to a period anterior to **circa 1000 B.C.**
- **Tin:** Scarce in ancient India, though once found in Rajasthan and Bihar (deposits now exhausted).
  - **Bronze Production:** Because tin was scarce, India lacked a "proper" Bronze Age (where tools were mostly bronze). Harappans imported limited tin from Afghanistan.
  - **Later Developments:** From the early Christian era, connections with **Burma** and the **Malaya Peninsula** (rich in tin) allowed for large-scale bronze production, especially for statues of gods in South India. Pala-era bronzes from Bihar used tin from Gaya, Hazaribagh, and Ranchi.
- **Iron:** Found in **South Bihar, eastern Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka**.
  - **Historical Significance:** Once smelting with bellows and steel-making were mastered, iron became essential for warfare and clearing dense jungles for regular cultivation.
  - **Empire Building:** The first empire in **Magadha** (6th–4th century B.C.) and the kingdom of **Avanti** (capital at **Ujjain**) rose to prominence largely due to the availability and use of iron. Powers south of the Vindhyas also utilized iron from Andhra and Karnataka.
- **Lead:** Andhra's lead resources explain the large number of lead coins issued by the **Satavahanas** (1st–2nd century A.D.) in Andhra and Maharashtra.
- **Silver and Gold:**
  - **Silver:** Rare in India, but early **punch-marked coins** were made of silver, sourced from mines in the **Kharagpur hills (Monghyr district)**, which were active until the time of Akbar.
  - **Gold:** Found in the **Kolar goldfields (Karnataka)**. Early traces date to the New Stone Age (c. 1800 B.C.), but large-scale exploitation began only by the 2nd century A.D. Most gold for early currency was obtained from **Central Asia** and the **Roman empire**. Gold coins were prevalent in the first five centuries A.D. but became rare when foreign supply lines ceased.
- **Precious Stones:** India produced a variety of stones, including **pearls**, primarily in central India, Orissa, and South India. These were highly sought after by the Romans as major trade items.

5. **Geographical and Cultural Synthesis**
   Every region—delimited by rivers, mountains, deltas, or plateaus—formed a distinct administrative and political unit.
   - **Regional Specialization:**
     - **Gujarat:** Known for its indented coastline and harbours, Gujarat became a hub for coastal and foreign trade due to its enterprising traders.
     - **Malwa:** Situated in western Madhya Pradesh, Malwa was a critical hinterland for Gujarat's ports, leading to constant historical conflict between Deccan and northern powers (e.g., Sakas vs. Satavahanas; Marathas vs. Rajputs).
   - **The Concept of Unity:** Despite regional differences, the country shared a **composite culture**. Communication was difficult due to the vast landscape, and natural frontiers made it hard for one region to rule others. However, the cultivation of **Sanskrit** across the country, alongside the shared Indo-Aryan linguistic stock in the north and west, provided a foundational cultural unity.
   - **Interconnectivity:** The constant movement of traders, cultural leaders, and rulers across the Vindhyas ensured a persistent "give-and-take" in language and culture, proving that India's geographical diversity was ultimately held together by a network of interconnected needs and shared values.

The Stone Age in India

The study of the Stone Age in India provides the foundation for understanding human evolution and the development of early societies. This period, categorized by the materials used for tools and technological advancements, is divided into the **Palaeolithic** (Old Stone Age), **Mesolithic** (Late Stone Age), and **Neolithic** (New Stone Age).

1. **The Palaeolithic Age (Old Stone Age)**
   The Palaeolithic Age in India corresponds roughly with the **Pleistocene period** (the Ice Age), a geological phase characterized by widespread glaciation in higher altitudes, while tropical regions experienced high rainfall. Human occupation in India is estimated to have begun around **500,000 B.C.** (Middle Pleistocene).

   Nature of Life
   - **Subsistence:** Early humans were food gatherers and hunters. They relied on roots, fruits, and hunting animals. They lacked knowledge of cultivation or house building.
   - **Tools:** The era is defined by the use of unpolished, undressed, rough stone tools. These served as essential implements for hunting and cutting.
   - **Settlements:** Sites are found across India (excluding the alluvial plains of the Indus and Ganga). Notable areas include the Soan/Sohan river valley (Pakistan), the Chotanagpur plateau, and the Belan valley (Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh).

   Phases of the Palaeolithic Age
   The period is categorized into three phases based on tool typology and climatic shifts:
   1. **Lower (Early) Palaeolithic:**
      - **Climate:** Covers the greater part of the Ice Age.
      - **Tools:** Characterized by **hand-axes, choppers, and cleavers**, similar to those found in Africa, Europe, and Western Asia.
      - **Sites:** Soan Valley (Punjab, Pakistan) and Belan Valley (U.P.). Cave dwellings and rock shelters were used as seasonal camps.
   2. **Middle Palaeolithic:**
      - **Tools:** The industry shifted to a **flake-based technology**. Key tools include **scrapers, borers, and blade-like tools**.
      - **Sites:** Soan Valley, Narmada River, and areas south of the Tungabhadra River.

3. **Upper Palaeolithic:**
    - **Climate:** The final phase of the Ice Age; the climate became warmer and less humid.
    - **Technological Shift:** Appearance of modern-type men (*Homo sapiens*) and new flint industries using **blades and burins**.
    - **Sites:** Bhimbetka (near Bhopal), Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Gujarat dunes.

2. The Mesolithic Age (Late Stone Age)

As the Ice Age ended around **8000 B.C.**, the climate became warm and dry. This led to significant changes in flora and fauna, enabling human expansion into new areas. The Mesolithic Age served as a transitional phase between the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, lasting from **8000 B.C. to 4000 B.C.**

- **Characteristic Tools:** The defining feature of this age is the **microlith**—tiny, specialized stone tools.
- **Geographical Spread:** Sites are abundant in Chotanagpur, Central India, and regions south of the Krishna River.
- **Sequence:** The transition from Palaeolithic to Mesolithic and then to Neolithic is best observed in the **Belan Valley** on the northern spurs of the Vindhyas.

3. The Neolithic Age (New Stone Age)

The Neolithic Age represents a shift toward a settled life, enabled by the development of agriculture and animal husbandry. In the Indian subcontinent, this phase generally spanned from **6000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.**

Key Technological Advancements

- **Polished Tools:** People used **polished stone axes**, which significantly increased efficiency in clearing land and woodcraft.
- **Pottery:** The need to store grains and milk necessitated the development of pottery. Early stages featured **hand-made pottery**, which later evolved to include the use of **footwheels**.
- **Domestication:** Evidence from the Belan Valley suggests the domestication of cattle, sheep, and goats as early as 25000 B.C. (Palaeolithic remnants), but widespread agricultural settlement became the hallmark of the Neolithic phase.

Regional Centers of Neolithic Culture

Neolithic settlements are categorized into three primary geographical areas based on tool types and habits:

1. **North (Kashmir):**
    - **Burzahom:** Located 20 km from Srinagar. Inhabitants lived in **pit dwellings** and maintained a hunting/fishing economy.
    - **Unique Features:** Use of **bone tools/weapons** and the practice of burying domestic dogs with their masters. They used coarse grey pottery.
2. **South (South of Godavari):**
    - Settled on granite hills or plateaus.
    - **Economy:** Pastoralist-based (cattle, sheep, goats). The presence of **rubbing stone querns** indicates the production of grains. Sites include Maski, Brahmagiri, Hallur, and Paiyampalli.
    - **Piklihal:** Notable for cattle-herding, use of ash mounds (resulting from burnt cow dung), and transition to mud-and-reed houses.
3. **East/Northeast:**
    - Neolithic tools are found in the **Garo Hills (Meghalaya)** and **Assam**.
    - **Chirand (Bihar):** Located at the confluence of the Ganga, Son, Gandak, and Ghaghra. It is famous for a significant collection of **bone implements** dating to approximately 1600 B.C.

4. Technological and Lifestyle Evolution: The Threshold of Civilization

By the Neolithic phase, the mastery of agriculture and animal husbandry marked a pivotal transition for human society. Communities began to settle in fixed locations, moving away from the nomadic existence of the earlier Stone Age.

Settled Life and Social Structure

- **Housing:** Neolithic settlers resided in circular or rectangular houses constructed from **mud and reed**. In the case of Burzahom (Kashmir), the people lived in **pit dwellings**.
- **Common Property:** It is believed that the primitive people living in circular houses likely held property in common.
- **Dietary Habits:** Agriculture became a primary source of sustenance. Cultivation of cereals such as **rice, wheat, and barley** was practiced. In the Allahabad district, there is evidence of **rice cultivation** as early as the sixth millennium B.C. Later Neolithic settlers produced **ragi and horsegram (kulathi)**.
- **Animal Husbandry:** The domestication of animals—including cattle, sheep, and goats—was widespread. At **Piklihal**, settlers were primarily cattle-herders who maintained seasonal camps with cowpens. They managed their environment by clearing camping grounds with fire, which resulted in the formation of **ash mounds**.

Limitations of the Stone Age

Despite the advancements made, Stone Age populations faced significant constraints:

- **Geographical Dependency:** Because they relied entirely on tools and weapons made of stone, they could not easily clear dense forests or cultivate hard soils. Consequently, they could only establish settlements in **hilly river valleys**. They were unable to settle in the vast alluvial plains of the Indus and the Ganga during the initial phases.
- **Subsistence Economy:** Even with their best efforts, the technological limitations meant that these communities could not produce a **surplus** beyond what was required for bare subsistence.

Conclusion: Transition to History

The period between **9000 B.C. and 3000 B.C.** witnessed remarkable technological progress in Western Asia, where the arts of cultivation, weaving, house building, and animal domestication were perfected. In the Indian subcontinent, the Neolithic Age began around the **sixth millennium B.C.** By producing their own food and settling into villages, the people of the Stone Age reached the threshold of civilization.

Chronological Summary Table

Phase	Estimated Time Period	Key Features
Lower Palaeolithic	Approx. 500,000 B.C.	Hand-axes, choppers, cleavers; Ice Age; seasonal camps.
Middle Palaeolithic	Varies by region	Flake-based industry; scrapers, borers, blade-like tools.
Upper Palaeolithic	Ends at 8000 B.C.	Blades, burins; modern *Homo sapiens*; warmer climate.
Mesolithic (Late)	8000 B.C. – 4000 B.C.	Transitional phase; **microliths**; warm and dry climate.
Neolithic (New)	6000 B.C. – 1000 B.C.	Polished stone axes; agriculture; pottery; settled village life.

Important Archaeological Sites for Reference

- **Burzahom (Kashmir):** Pit dwellings, bone tools, dog burials.
- **Chirand (Bihar):** Extensive bone implements, favorable location near river confluences.
- **Bhimbetka (M.P.):** Notable for Upper Palaeolithic caves and rock shelters.
- **Belan Valley (U.P.):** Crucial for the sequence of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic cultures.
- **Piklihal & Utnur (A.P.):** Significant for cattle-herding, ash mounds, and Neolithic evidence.
- **Maski, Brahmagiri, Hallur (Karnataka):** Excavated Neolithic sites showcasing settled life.

The Stone-Copper (Chalcolithic) Phase

Following the Neolithic period, human societies in India underwent a technological transition with the introduction of metals. The first metal to be used was **copper**, leading to a cultural phase known as the **Chalcolithic** (Stone-Copper) culture. This era, spanning roughly from **1800 B.C. to 800 B.C.**, represents a significant evolution in village-based economies and early metallurgical skills.

1. **Geographical Distribution and Settlements**
   Chalcolithic settlements were primarily located in semi-arid areas, riverine tracts, and regions near hills, excluding the heavily forested areas and deep alluvial plains.
   - **Key Regions:**
     - **Rajasthan:** Sites like **Ahar** and **Gilund** in the Banas valley. Ahar is notable for the local availability of copper, making copper implements more common than stone tools.
     - **Madhya Pradesh: Malwa**, **Kayatha**, and **Eran** (central/western M.P.).
     - **Maharashtra:** The most extensive excavations occurred here, including **Jorwe**, **Nevasa**, **Daimabad** (Ahmadnagar district), **Chandoli**, **Songaon**, **Inamgaon** (Pune district), and **Nasik**. The **Jorwe culture** (named after its type-site) is the most prominent, characterized by nucleated village settlements.
     - **Eastern India: Chirand** (Bihar), **Pandu Rajar Dhibi** (Burdwan, West Bengal), and **Mahishdal** (Midnapore, West Bengal).
     - **Other Areas:** Some Chalcolithic elements intruded into Neolithic sites in Andhra Pradesh, though copper objects are absent there.

2. **Economy: Agriculture and Subsistence**
   The Chalcolithic economy was essentially a **village economy**. People lived a settled life based on farming and animal husbandry, producing more cereals than their Neolithic predecessors.
   - **Crops:**
     - **Staple Crops:** Wheat and rice were produced. Navdatoli (Narmada bank) has yielded the most diverse collection of cereals in India.
     - **Others:** Barley, bajra, lentils (masur), black gram, green gram, grass pea, ber, linseed, and ragi.
     - **Regional Specialization:** Rice was the primary crop in eastern/southern India; barley and wheat dominated western India. Cotton was cultivated in the black cotton soil of the Deccan.
   - **Animal Husbandry:** They domesticated cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and buffaloes. Deer were hunted. Camel remains have been found, and there is debated evidence regarding the horse, donkey, or wild ass. **Beef** was consumed, but pork was not a significant part of the diet.
   - **Dietary Patterns:** In eastern India (Bihar/West Bengal), the combination of **rice and fish** was common, a tradition that persists to this day.

3. **Technology and Material Culture**
   While these communities possessed advanced knowledge of copper smelting, they remained technologically distinct from the contemporary Bronze Age civilizations (like those in Mesopotamia or the Harappan culture).
   - **Tool Industry:** The culture relied on a mix of **stone blades/microliths** and copper implements.
     - **Copper usage:** Found in forms like flat rectangular axes (Jorwe/Chandoli) and chisels (Chandoli).
     - **Limitation:** Copper is a pliant (soft) metal. They lacked the knowledge of mixing tin with copper to create the much stronger metal, **bronze**.
   - **Pottery:** The characteristic pottery was **black-and-red ware**, thrown on a wheel and often painted with **white linear designs**. People in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra also used channel-spouted pots, dishes-on-stand, and bowls-on-stand.
   - **Crafts:** Evidence of spinning and weaving is provided by **spindle whorls** found in Malwa and threads (cotton, flax, silk) discovered in Maharashtra.

4. **Housing, Burial Practices, and Religion**
   - **Settlements:** Houses were generally constructed of **wattle and daub** with thatched roofs; burnt bricks were seldom used. Inamgaon provides evidence of large mud houses, circular pit houses, and eventually (1300–1000 B.C.) multi-roomed houses, suggesting large families.
   - **Burial Practices:**
     - **Maharashtra:** The dead were buried in urns under the floor of the house in a **north-to-south** position, accompanied by pots and copper objects.
     - **South India:** Burials were generally in an **east-west** position.
     - **Eastern India:** Practiced post-extraction or fractional burial.
   - **Religion:** They venerated the **mother goddess** (evidenced by terracotta figurines). In Malwa and Rajasthan, **stylized bull terracottas** suggest the bull was a religious cult object.

5. **Social Stratification and Burial Evidence**

   The Chalcolithic phase witnessed the **beginnings of social inequalities**. Archaeological excavations at various sites provide clear evidence of status differentiation:
   - **Evidence from Graves:** In **Chandoli** and **Nevasa** (Maharashtra), some children were buried with **copper-bead necklaces**, while others had only pots.
   - **Affluence:** At **Inamgaon**, an adult was buried with pottery and copper. In a single house at **Kayatha**, 29 copper bangles and two unique axes were discovered, alongside earthen pots containing necklaces of **semi-precious stones** like **steatite and carnelian beads**. These grave goods indicate that specific individuals possessed significantly more wealth than others.

6. **Limitations and End of the Chalcolithic Culture**

   Despite their achievements, these cultures faced critical limitations that prevented them from developing into an urban civilization:
   - **Technological Constraint:** The supply of copper was limited, and as a metal, copper is naturally **pliant** (soft). Because they did not know the art of alloying copper with tin to forge **bronze**, they could not produce the durable tools required for the structural advancements seen in Egypt, Mesopotamia, or Crete.
   - **Lack of Writing and Urbanism:** Unlike the Bronze Age civilizations, Chalcolithic people did not know the art of writing and lived in a rural, rather than urban, environment.
   - **High Infant Mortality:** A striking weakness was the **high rate of infant mortality**, observed through the burial of a large number of children in western Maharashtra. Potential causes include a lack of nutritional knowledge, the absence of medical understanding, or the outbreak of epidemics. This pattern suggests the culture did not promote longevity.
   - **Transition:** These cultures were generally younger than the Indus Valley Civilization and did not benefit from the technological knowledge of the Harappans. They eventually faded, with stone tools being replaced by **iron tools** and the black-and-red pottery continuing in some regions until the second century B.C.

7. **The Copper Hoard Culture**

   Distinct from the rural Chalcolithic settlements are the **Copper Hoards**—more than forty collections of copper objects discovered across a wide area from the **Chotanagpur plateau** to the **upper Gangetic basin**.
   - **Concentration:** Nearly half of these hoards are concentrated in the **Ganga-Yamuna doab**.
   - **Artifacts:** The hoards comprise **celts, harpoons, antennae swords, and anthropomorphic figures**. These tools were utilized for fishing, hunting, fighting, and agricultural/artisanal work.
   - **Technological Skill:** The complexity of these objects indicates high technical skill, suggesting they were not the work of nomads but of **settled primitive agriculturists and artisans**.

- **Ochre-Coloured Pottery (OCP):** In the upper Gangetic basin, these copper objects were found in association with **ochre-coloured pots** and mud structures. This culture existed roughly between **2000 B.C. and 1800 B.C.**
- **Historical Note:** After the disappearance of these OCP settlements, the doab shows little habitation until about 1000 B.C. It is possible that the sanctity and religious purity currently associated with **copper vessels** in Hindu tradition may have its origins in this Copper Age.

Conclusion: A Comparative Perspective

While the **Harappans** were contemporaries of the Copper-Hoard people, there was likely some interaction between these groups. However, the Chalcolithic phase overall remained characterized by a rural background. While they were the **first to use painted pottery** and were pioneers in village-based cereal cultivation, the lack of iron and bronze technology ensured that India would have to wait for a later period to witness the rise of a widespread urban civilization across the subcontinent.

The Harappan Civilization

The Harappan civilization, also known as the **Indus Valley Civilization**, represents the earliest and most developed urban culture of the Indian subcontinent. Older than the preceding Chalcolithic cultures, it stands as a unique Bronze Age civilization that defined the third and second millennium B.C.

Geographical Extent and Chronology

- **Time Period:** The culture existed roughly between **2500 B.C. and 1750 B.C.**, with its **mature phase** spanning **2200 B.C. to 2000 B.C.**
- **Discovery:** First discovered in **1921** at the site of **Harappa** in the West Punjab province of Pakistan.
- **Geographical Reach:** It covered an expansive area of approximately **1,299,600 square kilometres**, encompassing parts of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh.
- **Boundaries:** It stretched from Jammu in the north to the Narmada estuary in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east. This zone was larger than ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia combined.

Urban Planning and Architecture

The Harappan culture is distinguished by its highly advanced system of **town planning**, which followed a uniform standard across different settlements.

- **The Grid System:** Almost all settlements were divided into blocks by roads cutting across one another at right angles.
- **Citadel vs. Lower Town:** Cities like Harappa and Mohenjo-daro possessed a **citadel (acropolis)**, likely occupied by the ruling class, and a **lower town** containing brick houses for the common people.
- **Drainage and Hygiene:** The drainage system was remarkably sophisticated. Houses featured courtyards and bathrooms, with wastewater flowing into street drains. These drains were covered with **bricks or stone slabs** and equipped with **manholes**, reflecting a unique concern for public health.
- **Building Materials:** The extensive use of **burnt bricks** distinguishes Harappan cities from contemporary Egypt (which used dried bricks) and Mesopotamia (which used fewer baked bricks).

Notable Structures

- **The Great Bath (Mohenjo-daro):** A large, brick-lined tank (11.88×7.01 meters, 2.43 meters deep) located in the citadel. It likely served ritual bathing purposes. It featured side rooms for changing and an efficient water inlet/outlet system.
- **Granaries:** Serving as centers for food storage and potentially wage payment in kind, these were prominent features.
  - **Mohenjo-daro:** Contained the largest single granary (45.71×15.23 meters).
  - **Harappa:** Contained a complex of **twelve units** (two rows of six) with circular brick platforms nearby for **threshing grain**.
- **Laborer Barracks:** Two-roomed barracks found at Harappa suggest housing for workers.

Economic Basis: Agriculture and Domestication

The fertility of the region was largely due to the **annual inundation of the Indus**, which deposited rich alluvial soil.

- **Crops:** The Harappans cultivated wheat, barley, sesamum, mustard, peas, and lentils. **Rice** was notably used at **Lothal** by 1800 B.C.
- **Irrigation:** While canal irrigation was absent, the people took advantage of natural flood plains. **Furrows** found at **Kalibangan** indicate the use of a plough (likely wooden).
- **Cotton:** The Indus people were the earliest to produce cotton. The Greeks later called it **sindon**, derived from "Sindh."
- **Animal Husbandry:** Animals were kept on a large scale, including oxen, buffaloes, goats, sheep, and pigs.
    - **Humped bulls** were highly favored.
    - **Domesticated pets:** Dogs and cats.
    - **Beasts of burden:** Asses and camels.
    - **Knowledge of other animals:** Elephants and rhinoceros were well known. Evidence of the **horse** remains controversial and was clearly not in regular use, though remains have been reported from **Surkotada** (c. 2000 B.C.).

Technology, Craft, and Trade

The Harappan culture is classified as a **Bronze Age** civilization. While stone tools remained in use, the mastery of metalworking was significant.

- **Metallurgy:** Bronze was produced by mixing **tin and copper**. Copper was sourced from the **Khetri mines** in Rajasthan (or Baluchistan), while tin was likely brought from Afghanistan (or potentially Hazaribagh, Bihar). Bronze smiths were a vital artisan class, producing axes, saws, knives, spears, and domestic utensils.
- **Other Crafts:**
    - **Textiles:** Spindle whorls indicate spinning. Evidence of **woven cotton** and wool has been found at Mohenjo-daro.
    - **Bead-making and Jewelry:** Expert goldsmiths worked with gold, silver, and precious stones (sourced from South India).
    - **Pottery:** The **potter's wheel** was in constant use. Their characteristic pottery was glossy, shining, and decorated with designs of trees, circles, and human images.
- **Trade and Exchange:** There was no metallic currency; trade functioned through **barter**.
    - **Transportation:** They utilized boats for coastal navigation (Arabian Sea) and bullock-carts/solid-wheeled carts for inland transport.
    - **International Links:** There was active commerce with **Iran, Afghanistan, and Mesopotamia**. Mesopotamian records (c. 2350 B.C.) refer to the Indus region as **"Meluha,"** with **"Dilmun" (Bahrain)** and **"Makan"** serving as intermediate trading stations.

Political and Social Organization

The political structure remains elusive due to the lack of deciphered records and the absence of clear royal or religious palaces.

- **Governance:** Unlike Egypt or Mesopotamia, no grand temples have been identified. The absence of religious monuments suggests that the civilization may have been governed by a **class of merchants** focused on commerce rather than conquest.
- **Social Hierarchy:** The distinct difference in quality between the sophisticated seals and images used by the upper classes and the "unsophisticated" terracotta figurines found elsewhere suggests a clear **class stratification**.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The Harappans practiced a form of worship that shares roots with later Hindu traditions, though the exact nature of their faith is unknown without their script.

- **Mother Goddess:** Numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found, including one with a plant growing from her embryo. This suggests the worship of the **Earth as a fertility goddess**.
- **Male Deity:** A seal depicts a three-headed, horned god in a **yogi posture**, surrounded by an elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, and buffalo, with two deer at his feet. This is widely considered a precursor to the image of **Pasupati Mahadeva (Siva)**.
- **Phallus Worship:** Numerous stone symbols of phallus and female sex organs have been found, indicating an early form of worship that later became central to Siva worship.
- **Nature Worship:** Tree worship (specifically the **pipal tree**) and animal worship (notably the **humped bull**) were prevalent.
- **Amulets:** Large numbers of amulets have been discovered, likely used to ward off ghosts and evil forces, similar to the charms recommended later in the *Atharva Veda*.

Script, Weights, and Measures

- **The Harappan Script:** Primarily **pictographic** (not alphabetical), with about 250–400 signs. It remains **undeciphered**. It is an indigenous product of the Indus region, showing no connection to contemporary Western Asian scripts.
- **Weights and Measures:** The Harappans used a standardized system of weights, typically based on the number **16 and its multiples** (16, 64, 160, 320, 640). This tradition of the number 16 persisted in Indian currency (16 annas = 1 rupee) until modern times. They also used measuring sticks, including one made of bronze.

The End of the Civilization

By 1750 B.C., the major cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had disappeared, though the culture faded gradually in outlying areas.

- **Causes of Decline:** No single reason is definitive. Theories include:
  - **Decreasing fertility:** Increasing soil salinity caused by the expansion of the neighboring desert.
  - **Geological changes:** Sudden subsidence or tectonic uplift causing catastrophic flooding.
  - **Invasion/Displacement:** The theory that the civilization was destroyed by **Aryan** invaders. Evidence of insecurity in the late phase of Mohenjo-daro (buried hoards, huddled skulls) and the appearance of new, "barbarian" pottery types and tools suggests the slow infiltration of new, possibly horse-riding peoples from Iran.
- **Legacy:** Despite the disappearance of the urban centers, elements of the Harappan culture—such as phallus worship, the pipal tree, the fertility goddess, and agricultural practices—persisted and integrated into the broader Indian cultural fabric.

The Advent of the Aryans and the Age of the Rig Veda

The Vedic period, beginning around 1500 B.C., marks a transition in the history of the Indian subcontinent. It is primarily documented through the **Rig Veda**, the earliest specimen of Indo-European language.

Origins and Identity

- **Original Home:** The Aryans were speakers of **Indo-European languages**. Linguistic evidence—specifically common names for animals (goats, dogs, horses) and plants (pine, maple)—suggests they originated in **Eurasia**, east of the Alps.
- **Lifestyle:** They were primarily a **pastoral people** with a mobile lifestyle, making agriculture a secondary occupation. This nomadism explains why they left few solid material remains.
- **The Role of the Horse:** The horse was central to their culture. Its speed provided a distinct military advantage, enabling them to make successful inroads into Western Asia from 2000 B.C. onwards.

- **The Indo-Iranian Link:** Before arriving in India, the Aryans lived for a long time in **Iran**. The **Rig Veda** and the **Avesta** (the oldest Iranian text) share numerous commonalities, including names for gods and social classes. Inscriptions from the **Kassites** (1600 B.C.) and **Mitanni** (14th century B.C.) in Iraq indicate that a branch of these people migrated westward.

The Arrival in India (c. 1500 B.C.)

- **Geographical Expansion:** The earliest Aryans settled in the "Land of the Seven Rivers," covering **eastern Afghanistan, Punjab, and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh**.
- **River Systems:** The **Sindhu (Indus)** is the river *par excellence* in the Rig Veda. Other mentioned rivers include the **Kubha** (in Afghanistan) and the **Sarasvati** (now the dry bed of the Ghaggar in Rajasthan).
- **Material Traces:** While archaeological evidence is scarce, finds of **socketed axes, bronze dirks, and swords** in north-western India are associated with their advent. Recent excavations at **Bhagwanpura** (Haryana) and three sites in Punjab have revealed **Painted Grey Ware (PGW)** in a pre-iron phase, coinciding with the Rig Vedic period (1600–1000 B.C.). The presence of a thirteen-roomed mud house at Bhagwanpura suggests either an extended family or a tribal chief's residence.

Conflict and Tribal Politics

- **Conflicts with Indigenous People:** The Aryans encountered indigenous inhabitants, referred to as **dasas and dasyus**.
  - **Dasyus:** Were strongly opposed by the Aryans; the term *dasyuhatya* (slaughter of dasyus) appears frequently. They were viewed as non-cattle keepers who potentially worshipped the phallus.
  - **Dasas:** Mentioned in ancient Iranian literature, they were likely a branch of early Aryans. Aryan chiefs like **Divodasa** and **Trasadasyu** are mentioned in conflicts involving these groups.
- **Tribal Warfare:** Aryans fought both indigenous groups and each other. The **Battle of Ten Kings** (fought on the **Parushni/Ravi** river) was a pivotal conflict where the **Bharata** clan, led by King **Sudas** and priest **Vasishtha**, defeated a confederacy of five Aryan and five non-Aryan tribes. This victory established Bharata supremacy, and eventually, the country was named **Bharatavarsha**.
- **Political Structure:**
  - **The Rajan:** The tribal chief, whose position was hereditary, acted as a military leader and protector of cattle.
  - **Assemblies:** Power was balanced by assemblies such as the **Sabha, Samiti, Vidatha, and Gana**. The **Sabha** and **Samiti** were the most influential, even attended by women in the early period.
  - **Administration:** There was no standing army or territorial tax system. Instead, the king received **bali** (voluntary offerings) and led a militia (*vrata, gana, grama, sardha*). The **Purohita** (priest) and **Senani** (army chief) were the key functionaries. The **Vrajapati** managed pastures, while the **Gramani** led tribal fighting units that later became village heads.

Material Life and Social Organization

Material Life and Economy

- **Pastoralism vs. Agriculture:** The Rig Vedic Aryans were primarily a **pastoral people**. The most significant form of wealth was the **cow**. The term for war, ***gavisthi*** (search for cows), highlights their economic priority. Land was not yet a form of private property, and gifts to priests were measured in cows and women slaves, never in land.
- **Agriculture and Crafts:** Although pastoral, they practiced agriculture, mentioning the **ploughshare** (possibly wooden), sowing, harvesting, and threshing. They were also skilled in various crafts, including carpentry, chariot-making, weaving, leather-working, and pottery. The term ***ayas*** indicates knowledge of copper or bronze working.
- **Trade:** There is no clear evidence of trade. While the term *samudra* is used, it refers only to a collection of water rather than the ocean. They did not live in cities, but likely resided in fortified mud settlements.

Tribal and Family Structure

- **Kinship and Tribe:** Kinship was the basis of the social structure. Primary loyalty was to the tribe (***jana***). The term *janapada* (territory) is absent, reflecting the nomadic, non-territorial nature of the society.
- **The Family (*Griha*):** The family was a large, joint, **patriarchal** unit. Because war was central to their existence, the birth of a **son** was specifically prayed for; no such desire for daughters is expressed.
- **Status of Women:** Women participated in social and religious life; they attended the *Sabha* and *Vidatha* and could offer sacrifices with their husbands. Some women even composed hymns. Practices like **levirate**, **widow remarriage**, and a few instances of **polyandry** existed, but child marriage was absent.

Social Divisions

- **Varna (Colour):** Social stratification began with the distinction between the fair-skinned Aryans and the dark-complexioned indigenous inhabitants. The conquered *dasas* and *dasyus* were relegated to the status of slaves or *sudras*.
- **Emerging Hierarchy:** Conquest and the distribution of war booty led to the rise of **princes** and **priests** at the expense of the common people. By the end of the Rig Vedic period, society was divided into three groups: warriors, priests, and the people. The **sudras** are mentioned for the first time in the tenth (latest) book of the Rig Veda.
- **Occupational Flexibility:** While divisions existed, they were not rigid. One hymn records a family where a son is a poet, his father is a physician, and his mother is a grinder, showing that family members could earn their livelihood through different means.

Religious Beliefs and Gods

- **Nature Personification:** The Aryans personified natural forces (rain, sun, rivers) as living beings with human or animal attributes. The religion focused on prayers and sacrifices for tangible worldly benefits like cattle, sons, food, and health, rather than spiritual uplift.
- **Key Deities:**
  - **Indra:** The most important god (250 hymns), known as ***Purandara*** (breaker of forts). He was a warlord and a rain god.
  - **Agni:** The second most important god (200 hymns). He served as an **intermediary** between humans and gods, carrying oblations through fire.
  - **Varuna:** Personified water and upheld the natural order of the world.
  - **Soma:** The god of plants, associated with an intoxicating drink.
  - **Maruts:** Represented storms.
- **Worship:** Worship involved collective and individual prayer and sacrifice. Unlike later periods, there were no complex rituals or magical formulas. Magical power was not yet attributed to the word itself. Male gods were significantly more prominent than female divinities (like Aditi and Ushas).

The Later Vedic Phase: Transition to State and Social Formation (c. 1000–600 B.C.)

The Later Vedic period represents a significant shift from a semi-nomadic, pastoral lifestyle to a settled, agricultural society. This era, centered in the upper Gangetic basin, saw the foundation of territorial kingdoms and the solidification of the varna system.

Literary Sources

Our knowledge of this period is derived from texts compiled after the Rig Veda:

- **Samhitas:** The **Sama Veda** (prayers set to tune), **Yajur Veda** (hymns and ritual instructions), and **Atharva Veda** (charms/spells against evils/diseases).
- **Brahmanas:** Texts explaining the social and religious aspects of rituals and formulae.
- **Significance:** These texts, combined with archaeological findings, provide a comprehensive picture of the social and political milieu of the early first millennium B.C.