

HIS†ORY

What Books and Burials Tell Us

The Four Vedas

The period in which the Vedas were composed in the Indian subcontinent is known as the **Vedic Age**. The Vedas were composed by the Aryans. There are four Vedas- the Rigveda, the Samaveda, the Yajurveda and the Arthaveda.

Rigveda

Following are some facts about the Rigveda:

- Rigveda is the oldest written Veda which was composed about 3,500 years ago in old Sanskrit.
- It includes more than a thousand hymns called *sukta*. These hymns have been written in praise of various gods and goddesses such as Agni (the fire god) and Indra (the warrior god).
- These hymns were written by the sages. Knowledge in the Vedas was imparted by the priests to the students with great care. The Rigveda was mostly heard and recited rather than read.
- Most of these hymns were composed by men and only a few were composed by women.
- Historians learnt about the Vedic Age not only through archaeological sources but also through the interpretation of the Vedas.
- Many of the hymns in Rigveda are in the form of dialogues which has helped historians to reconstruct the Vedic history.
- There are a number of prayers in the Rigveda for cattle, children (especially sons) and horses.



A manuscript containing a sukta of the Rigveda

Sanskrit and Other Languages

Sanskrit is one of the Indo-European languages. Many Indian languages such as Gujarati, Assamese, Hindi and Kashmiri and foreign languages such as English, French, German and Greek belong to the family of Indo-European languages. These are called a family as originally they had many words in common.

Battles and Wars

- Horses and chariots are considered important in the Vedas as they were used in fighting wars and battles.
- Battles were fought for land, water and to capture people.
- Land was important as crops were grown on it.
- A major portion of the wealth which was obtained in battles was kept with the king. Some of the wealth was given to the priests and the rest was distributed amongst the people.
- Wealth was also used for the performing of the yajnas, in which sacrifices were made.
- There was no regular army and usually the men folk participated in the wars.



Chariots are said to have been brought to India by the Aryans

People in the Vedic Age

- People were divided into various categories. The top position was occupied by the rajas and the priests (also known as Brahmins).
- The rajas in the early Vedic Period neither lived in palaces nor collected taxes. Their position was not hereditary.
- People who composed the Vedas were known as the Aryans and the slaves came to be known as the dasas or the dasyus. These were people who were captured in the wars.
- The dasas were not allowed to read and write and participate in the sacrifices.
- The word 'jana' referred to the community of people. Purujana, Bharata jana and the Yadujana were some communities of people at this time.

Megaliths

The big boulders of stones which were arranged by the people of the Vedic Age to mark their burial sites are known as **megaliths**.

Some important facts about megaliths are:

- The practice of erecting megaliths began about 3,000 years ago and this practice was prevalent in Deccan and North-East and Kashmir.
- Some megalithic sites were discovered at Adichanallur (present day Tamil Nadu) and Brahmagiri (present day Karnataka).
- While some megaliths were found on the surface of the earth, many were found underground.
- Generally, the dead were buried with pots which are now known as Black and Red Ware. Sometimes they were also buried with tools, horses and ornaments of stone and gold.
- At one burial site in Brahmagiri, one skeleton was found buried with 33 gold beads, 2 stone beads and 4 copper bangles. This shows that while some people were rich, some were poor.
- At many places, megaliths containing more than one person have been found. This shows that perhaps the members of the family were buried in the same place.
- In Inamgaon, at one burial site, adults were buried in the ground with their heads towards the north.
- One male skeleton was found to be buried in a large, four-legged clay jar in the centre of a big five-room house. This was one of the largest houses and also had a granary.
- Skeletons tell us about the buried person. About 2,000 years ago, a famous physician of India named 'Charaka' wrote a book on medicine known as Charaka Samhita. In his book, he concluded that the human body has 360 bones. He arrived at this figure by counting the teeth, joints and cartilage.



A megalith marking a burial site



Map showing Inamgaon, Brahmagiri and Adichanallur

Occupations of the People of Inamgaon

Archaeologists in Inamgaon have found the seeds of crops such as wheat, rice, barley, millets and peas. This shows that people were engaged in agricultural activities. Remains of many animals such as cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, asses, and blackbucks have been found. This exhibits that while many animals were herded, some were also used as food. There is also evidence that people collected and ate fruits such as amla, ber, jamun, dates and varieties of berries.

Thus, we find that various manuscripts, pottery, artifacts and burial practices give us a glimpse of how people lived in many hundred years ago.