

## Class VI

## History

### Hand-out

### Module 1/1

#### What Books and Burials Tell Us

##### One of the oldest books in the world

The oldest book known all over the world is supposed to be that of the Vedas. They were composed about 3,000-3500 years back and are the earliest literary source available. The word 'Veda' means knowledge.

There are four Vedas: Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda.

##### The Rigveda

It is the oldest Veda and was composed about 3500 years ago. The Rigveda includes more than a thousand hymns called **sukta** or "well said". These hymns are in praise of various gods and goddesses. Three gods are especially important. They are:

1. **The Agni**, the god of fire
2. **Indra**, a warrior god
3. **Soma**, a plant from which a special drink was prepared

Most of the hymns were composed, taught and learnt by men. A few were composed by women. The Rigveda is in old or Vedic Sanskrit. The Rigveda was recited and heard, rather than read. It was written down several centuries after it was first composed and was printed less than 200 years ago.

##### Sanskrit and other languages

- Sanskrit is part of a family of languages known as Indo-European.
- Some Indian languages such as Assamese, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri and Sindhi are Indo-European in origin.
- Asian languages such as Persian and many European languages such as English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish belong to this family.
- They are called a family because they originally had words in common.
- Take the words 'matr' (Sanskrit), 'ma' (Hindi) and 'mother' (English).

- Those used in the north-east belong to the Tibeto-Burman family. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam belong to the Dravidian family;
- And the languages spoken in Jharkhand and parts of central India belong to the Austro-Asiatic family.

### **How historians study the Rigveda**

- Historians, like archaeologists, find out about the past, but, in addition to material remains, they examine written sources as well.
- Some hymns in the Rigveda are in the form of dialogues.
- One such hymn is a dialogue between a sage named Vishvamitra, and two rivers, (Beas and Sutlej) that were worshipped as goddesses.

### **Cattle, horses and chariots**

There are many prayers in the Rigveda for cattle, children (especially sons), and horses.

1. Horses were used in battles.
2. Battles were fought for land, water, and also to capture people and cattle. There was no regular army, but there were assemblies, where people met and discussed all matters. Most men took part in wars and also chose leaders.
3. Wealth that was obtained was kept by the leaders, some part of the wealth was given to the priests and the rest was distributed among the people.
4. Some wealth was used for the performance of *yajnas* or sacrifices meant for gods and goddesses.
5. Offerings could include ghee, grain, and in some cases, animals.
6. There was no regular army, but there were assemblies where people met and discussed matters of war and peace. They also chose leaders who were often brave and skilful warriors.

### **Words to describe people in Rigveda**

Let us see some words used to describe people found in the Rigveda.

There are two groups who are described in terms of their work :

**The priests:** They were also called *brahmins*. They used to perform various rituals.

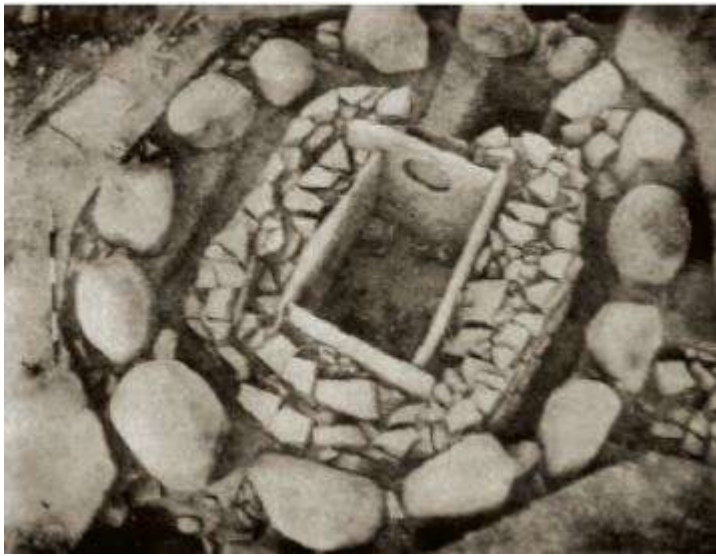
**The *rajas*:** They did not have capital cities, palaces or armies, nor did they collect taxes. Sons did not automatically succeed fathers as *rajas*.

Two words were used to describe the people or the community as a whole:

1. One was *jana*.
2. The other was *vish*. (The word Vaishya comes from vish)

The people who composed the hymns described themselves as **Aryas** and called their opponents *Dasas* or *Dasyus*. The term **dasa** means ‘slave’. Slaves were women and men who were often captured in war. They were treated as the property of their owners. The victors could make them do whatever work they wanted to extract from them.

### **Silent sentinels – the story of the megaliths**



- These stone boulders are known as megaliths (literally ‘big stones’). These were carefully arranged by people, and were used to mark burial sites. The practice of erecting megaliths began about 3000 years ago, and was prevalent throughout the Deccan, south India, in the north-east and Kashmir.
- While some megaliths can be seen on the surface, other megalithic burials are often underground.
- Sometimes, archaeologists find a circle of stone boulders or a single large stone standing on the ground. These are the only indications that there are burials beneath.
- All these burials have some common features. Generally, the dead were buried with distinctive pots, which are called Black and Red Ware.
- Also found are tools and weapons of iron and sometimes, skeletons of horses, horse equipment and ornaments of stone and gold.
- **Iron** equipment has also been discovered in megalithic burials.

## **Finding out about social differences**

- Archaeologists think that objects found with a skeleton probably belonged to the dead person.
- Sometimes, more objects are found in one grave than in another.
- There was some difference in status amongst the people who were buried. Rich people were buried with more gold beads, stone beads, copper bangles, etc., whereas poor people were buried with only a few pots.

## **Were some burial spots meant for certain families?**

- Sometimes, megaliths contain more than one skeleton.
- These indicate that people, perhaps belonging to the same family, were buried in the same place, though not at the same time.
- Stone circles or boulders placed on the surface probably served as signposts to find the burial site, so that people could return to the same place whenever they wanted to.

## **A special burial at Inamgaon**

- It is a site on the river Ghod, a tributary of the Bhima. There was a human settlement here between 3600 and 2700 years ago.
- Here, adults were generally buried in the ground, laid out straight, with the head facing the north.
- Sometimes burials were within the houses. Vessels that probably contained food and water were placed with the dead.
- One man was found buried in a large, four-legged clay jar in the courtyard of a five-roomed house (one of the largest houses at the site), in the centre of the settlement. This house also had a granary. The body was placed in a cross-legged position.

## **Occupations at Inamgaon**

- Archaeologists have found seeds of wheat, barley, rice, pulses, millets, peas and sesame. So, these have been cultivated in agriculture.
- Bones of a number of animals, many bearing cut marks that show they may have been used as food, have also been found. These include cattle, buffalo, goat, sheep, dog, horse, ass, pig, *sambhar*, spotted deer, blackbuck, antelope, hare and mongoose, besides birds, crocodile, turtle, crab and fish.
- There is evidence that fruits such as ber, *amla*, *jamun*, dates and a variety of berries were collected.

### Points To Remember:

1. There are four Vedas— The Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva veda. All these Vedas are written in Sanskrit. Rig Veda is the oldest Veda.
2. People are described in the Rigveda in terms of the work they do, the languages they speak, the places they belong to. There are two groups: the priests known as *brahmins*, who performed various rituals and the *rajas*, the rulers. Apart from these, there are many terms such as *jana* and *vish* used to describe people.
3. Horses were yoked to chariots and used in battles for capturing cattle. *Yajnas* such as the Ashvamedha *yajnas* were performed with horses.
4. Agriculture was the prime occupation. Cattle were important to till the land. Cows provided food items in the form of dairy products, horses were prayed for, since they were an important mode of transport and were used in battles to pull chariots.
5. Early Aryans worshipped different forces of nature such as sun, earth, sky, wind, rain, fire and so on. All these became their gods and goddesses. These gods were given a human form. Lord Indra was one of the supreme deities in the *Rigveda* and was a symbol of courage and strength.