

## The Aryan Civilization

### Aryan Civilization

Over the centuries, the Aryans, who destroyed and looted the cities of the Indus Valley, became the builders of a new Indian civilization. It rose in the northeast along the Ganges River, rather than in the northwest by the Indus River. The Aryans were among many groups of Indo-European people who migrated across Europe and Asia seeking water and pasture for their horses and cattle.

The early Aryans built no cities and left no statues or stone seals. Most of what we know about them comes from the Vedas, a collection of prayers, hymns, and other religious teachings. Aryan priests memorized and recited the Vedas for a thousand years before they were written down. As a result, the period from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE is often called the Vedic Age.

In the Vedas, the Aryans appear as warriors who fought in chariots with bows and arrows. They loved eating, drinking, music, and chariot races and dice games. These nomadic herders valued cattle, which provided them with food and clothing. Later, when they became settled farmers, families continued to measure their wealth in cows and bulls.

Aryan society can be explained through the Vedas. They divided people by occupation. The three basic groups were the Brahmins or priests, the Kshatriyas or warriors; and the Vaisyas or herders, farmers, artisans, and merchants. At first warriors enjoyed the highest prestige, but priests eventually gained the most respect. Their power grew because Brahmins claimed that they alone could conduct the ceremonies needed to win the favor of the gods. The Vedas also show that the Aryans felt superior to a rival people called Dravidians. The Dravidians were conquered by the Aryans, and they were placed with other non-Aryan people and placed in a fourth group called the Sudras. This group included not only Dravidians, but servants, and other low level laborers. The division of people became a major part of Aryan civilization and gave rise to a caste system. These are social groups into which people are born and they cannot change. There is no social mobility, and people in the castes cannot marry out of the caste; they are absolutely unchangeable.

1. Who were the Aryans?
2. How is Aryan society broken up?
3. What is a caste system?

### Aryans and their Origin

If rainfall declined in the Indus region between 1800 and 1700 BCE, around 1500 it increased again, making the Indus Plain better able to support life. It has been estimated by various scholars that between 1500 and 1200 an illiterate, pastoral people migrated from the northwest. These migrants were to be called Aryans and to be classified as Indo-Europeans, their speech having been related to almost all modern European languages. Aryans were ruled by an authoritarian male figure and the women were most often dominated. They slowly developed a new religion called Hinduism.

Hinduism has its believers in a divine origin of faith—not unlike other religions across the world. They take pride in Hindu scripture being the oldest scripture among the great religions of today, claiming that Hindu scripture was composed sometime around 3000BCE.

1. Where did the Aryans come from?
2. Describe some facts about their origin.

### Aryan Religious Beliefs

The Vedas show that the Aryans were polytheistic. They worshipped gods and goddesses that embodied natural forces such as the sky, and the sun, storms and fire. Fierce Indra, the god of war, was the chief Aryan deity. Indra's weapon was the thunderbolt, which he used not only to destroy demons but to announce the arrival of rain, which was so vital to Indian life. Other major gods included Varuna, the god of order and creation, and Agni, the god of fire. Agni also served as the messenger who communicated human wishes to the gods. The Aryans also honored animals, such as monkey gods and snake gods. Brahmins or priests offered sacrifices of food and drink to the gods. Through the correct rituals and prayers, the Aryans believed, they could call on the gods for health, wealth, and victory in war. These basic principles eventually changed into a very powerful religion that would impact India for the next 3,000 years.

1. What kind of religion did the Aryans have?
2. What other religions are the Aryans gods similar to?
3. How did the Aryans prove their love for the gods?