

Later Vedic Age

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Introduction

The Later Vedic Age (1000 BCE – 600 BCE) followed the Early Vedic or Rigvedic period. Its main sources include the Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads. It represents a transition from pastoral life to agriculture and from tribal society to monarchy.

1. Political Life

- Emergence of larger kingdoms such as Kuru, Panchala, Kosala, and Videha.
- Kings became more powerful, and monarchy became hereditary.
- Importance of assemblies like Sabha and Samiti declined.
- Tax system (Bali) emerged.
- Wars fought for territory, cattle, and wealth.

2. Social Life

- Varna system became rigid:
 - Brahmanas (priests) held highest status.
 - Kshatriyas (warriors) held power but under Brahmanas.
 - Vaishyas (farmers, traders) were commoners.
 - Shudras (servants) were lowest and deprived of rights.

- Patriarchal family system, women's position declined.
- Women lost political rights and participation in assemblies.
- Polygamy became common.
- Joint family system strengthened.

2. Economic Life

- Transition from pastoralism to agriculture.
- Iron (Krishna Ayas) tools enabled agricultural expansion.
- Main crops: rice, wheat, barley.
- Crafts developed: weaving, pottery, metalwork.
- Trade grew – barter system and use of Nishka (gold ornaments).
- Domestication of animals such as cows, horses, and elephants.

3. Religious Life

- Rituals and sacrifices (Yajnas) dominated religion.
- New deities emerged: Prajapati (creator), Vishnu (preserver), Rudra (destroyer).
- Indra and Agni lost importance.
- Brahmanas emphasized rituals.
- Upanishads stressed philosophy, meditation, Atman-Brahman unity.
- Belief in Karma, rebirth, and Moksha.

4. Cultural Life

- Sanskrit language and literature developed.
- Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata were composed (in early forms).
- Growth of music, dance, and art linked with religion.

Conclusion

The Later Vedic Age marked a transition from tribal to territorial polity, rise of monarchy and priestly dominance, decline of women's position, social stratification and caste rigidity, and philosophical advancement through the Upanishads.