

## Explore the Fascinating Vedic Age of Indian History for WBCS Exam

Welcome to an enthralling journey through the rich tapestry of India's past. In preparation for the **WBCS exam**, delving into the fascinating **Vedic Age** is essential. This era, spanning from around **1500 BCE to 500 BCE**, represents a pivotal chapter in India's history, characterized by profound cultural, societal, and religious developments. As you embark on this exploration, you'll unravel the mysteries and intricacies of Vedic civilization, gaining valuable insights that can set you on the path to WBCS exam success.

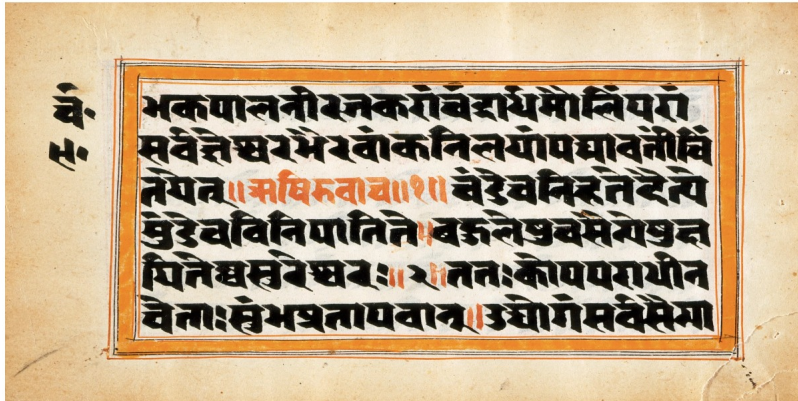
Discover the origins of India's spiritual traditions, the evolution of early Hinduism, the sacred texts, and the dynamic socio-economic structure that defined this epoch. Join us as we navigate this captivating period, offering you a comprehensive understanding of the Vedic Age's significance in the context of the WBCS exam, equipping you with the knowledge needed to excel in your journey toward success. This is the second blog of the series. We've discussed the **Indus Valley Civilization** in our previous Blog. Check out that blog by clicking the embedded link before moving on to this blog. It will help you to understand the chronology better. So, let's start understanding the **Vedic age**.

## The Vedic Age

Following the decline of the **Indus Valley Civilization** around **1400 BC**, a new era dawned in ancient India—the **Vedic Age**, spanning from **1500 BC to 500 BC**. Vedic Age period derived its name from the Vedas, a collection of sacred texts composed during this time, providing invaluable insights into the era's social, cultural, and religious practices.

The Vedic Age was characterized by the migration of **Indo-Aryans** into the Indian subcontinent, bringing with them their unique language, beliefs, and social structures. They settled primarily in the northwestern region, establishing a predominantly pastoral society centered around cattle rearing and agriculture.

The Vedas, the cornerstone of Vedic culture, comprised hymns, rituals, and philosophical treatises, reflecting a deep reverence for nature and a belief in a pantheon of deities. The Vedic people worshiped gods like **Indra, Agni, and Surya**, performing elaborate sacrifices to appease them and seek their blessings.



[Source: Wikipedia]

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Society during the Vedic Age was organized into a hierarchical structure, with the **Brahmins**, the priestly class, holding the highest status, followed by the **Kshatriyas (warriors)**, **Vaishyas (merchants)**, and **Shudras (laborers)**. The caste system, though not as rigid as in later periods, began to take shape during this Vedic Age.

The Vedic Age laid the foundation for Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions. The Vedas, Upanishads, and other texts from this period continue to influence Hindu beliefs and practices to this day. The Vedic Age marked a significant transition in India's history, shaping its cultural and religious landscape for millennia to come.

## Vedic Literature

The Vedas are the large bodies of religious text that is composed of Vedic Sanskrit and originated in the Vedic Age of ancient India. They form the oldest scriptures of Hinduism and the oldest layer of Sanskrit literature. The Vedas are said to have passed on through verbal transmission from one generation to the next. Therefore, they are also known as **Shruti**.

The term **Vedic literature** means the four **Vedas in their Samhita** and the allied literature based on or derived from the Vedas. We classify the Vedic literature into the following categories: The four Vedas i.e. the **Rig, Sama, Yajur** and **Atharva** and their Samhitas. The **Brahmanas** are attached to each Samhita.

The word '**Veda**' is derived from the Sanskrit word '**vid**', meaning **to know**, signifying knowledge par excellence. The Vedic text is '**Shruti**' i.e. directly revealed to authors by God.

**Smritis** are remembered and collected parts of literature of later periods. They are also called **Samhitas** in the sense that they represent an oral tradition of the time.



[Source: TemplePurohit]

Four Vedas and their Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads form a class of literature known as '**Shruti**'.

## The Rig Veda:





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Rig-Veda is known as the oldest religious text in the world. It is also known as the "First testament" of mankind. It was composed around 1700 BC. Last hymns were composed between 1500-1200 BC. It's a collection of hymns by a number of priest families. It is organized in 10 books which are called Mandalas.

## The Yajur Veda:

"Yajus" means "sacrificial formula" and Yajurveda is the book of sacrificial prayers. It contains the rituals of the Yajnas. It is estimated to have been composed between 1,400 and 1000 BC. It prescribes the rituals for performing different sacrifices. It was the manual of the Adhvaryus.

## The Sama Veda:

"Saman" means melody and it contains the Rhythmic compilation of Hymns of Rigveda. It ranks next in sanctity and liturgical importance to the Rigveda. It contains 1549 hymns which are meant to be sung at the soma sacrifice by a special class of Brahmans called "Udgatris". It has three shakhas or recensions:

1. **Kauthuma:** Panchvish Brahmana
2. **The Jaiminiya:** Jaiminiya Brahmana
3. **Ravayaniya:** Shadvish Brahmana

## The Atharva Veda:

Atharva-Veda is entirely different from the other three Vedas and is chronologically the last of the four. It is important and interesting as it describes the popular beliefs and superstitions of the humble folk. Atharvaveda contains the magic spells, incorporates much of early traditions of healing and magic that are paralleled in other Indo-European literatures. This Veda is also known as Brahma Veda.

## The Upvedas:

These are subsidiary Vedas dealing with secular subjects. Four important upavedas are as follow:

1. **Ayur Veda** Pertain to medicine.
2. **Dhanur Veda** Pertain to the art of warfare.
3. **Gandharva Veda** Pertain to music.
4. **Shilpa Veda** Pertain to art and literature.

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[Source: The Times of India]

Now, let's try understand what are **Upnishads**, one of the most important topic of Vedic Age.

## The Upnishads

“**Upa**” means **nearby** and “**sada**” means **sit**. So, Upanishads contain the knowledge imparted by the gurus to their disciples.

The term Upanishads indicates knowledge acquired by sitting close to the teacher. Under it, many metaphysical topics were discussed, such as the origin of the universe, the nature of God, the origin and death of mankind etc.

- They do not believe in orthodox rituals and sacrifices.
- On the contrary, they are the followers of **Karma (Action)**, **Atma (Soul)** and **God (Brahma)**.
- They are spiritual and philosophical in nature.
- Also known as Vedanta or the end of Vedas.
- They always preach the **Jnana marga (knowledge path)**.
- Upanishads are 108 in number.
- **Satyamev Jayate** is extracted from **Mundaka Upanishad**.

Have you heard about the Vedangas of the Vedic Age? Let's learn about them also.

## Vedangas (Limbs of Vedas)

Vedangas are six auxiliary disciplines associated with the study and understanding of the Vedas. They include Shiksha (Phonetics), Kalpa (Ritual Canon), Vyakaran (Grammar), Nirukta (explanation), Chhanda (Vedic meter) and Jyotish (Astrology).



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In the realm of Vedic scholarship, the Vedangas emerged as six auxiliary disciplines, serving as indispensable tools for comprehending and preserving the profound wisdom enshrined within the Vedas, the sacred texts of the Vedic age of ancient India. These disciplines, each with its unique purpose and methodology, provided a comprehensive framework for deciphering the linguistic, ritualistic, and philosophical nuances of Vedic knowledge.

1. **Shiksha**, the **science of phonetics**, focused on the precise articulation and pronunciation of Vedic mantras, ensuring the integrity of oral transmission.
2. **Kalpa**, the **ritual canon**, encompassed the intricate procedures and regulations governing Vedic ceremonies, ensuring the proper execution of sacrifices and rites.
3. **Vyakaran**, the **study of grammar**, delved into the structural intricacies of the Sanskrit language, providing a systematic approach to understanding the grammatical nuances of Vedic texts.
4. **Nirukta**, the **discipline of etymology**, delved into the deeper meanings of Vedic words, revealing their hidden symbolism and etymological roots.
5. **Chhanda**, the **science of Vedic meter**, explored the rhythmic patterns and metrical structures of Vedic hymns, ensuring the rhythmic integrity of recitations and preserving the poetic beauty of the verses.
6. **Jyotish**, the **study of astrology**, encompassed astronomical observations and calendrical calculations, providing insights into auspicious timings for rituals and understanding cosmic influences.



[Source: Indiafacts]

Together, these six Vedangas formed a cohesive framework for preserving and interpreting the vast corpus of Vedic knowledge. Their meticulous application ensured the accurate transmission of Vedic teachings across generations, safeguarding the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Vedic Age of ancient India.

## Epics

From the heart of ancient India's Vedic Age emerged two literary masterpieces, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, epics that have captivated and inspired generations. These grand narratives, woven with tales of valor, virtue, and divine intervention, epitomize the cultural and spiritual ethos of a bygone era.

## Ramayana:

From the heart of ancient India, **Maharishi Valmiki**, India's first poet, penned the Ramayana, an epic saga of **24,000 verses**, meticulously structured into **seven books (Kandas)** and **500 sargas**. This literary masterpiece narrates the journey of **Prince Rama**, an embodiment of righteousness, whose life epitomizes the triumph of good over evil.

The Ramayana's verses, composed in a rhythmic **32-syllable meter called Anustubh**, encompass **50,000 lines**, each echoing with tales of courage, devotion, and divine intervention. The epic unfolds across seven **Kandas**, each chronicling a pivotal chapter in Rama's life. These seven Kandas are: **Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda** and **Uttara Kanda**.



[Source: India Today]

The Ramayana's enduring legacy lies in its profound moral teachings, its celebration of righteousness, and its captivating narrative. It remains a cornerstone of Indian culture, inspiring generations with its timeless message of hope and resilience.

## Mahabharata:

From the depths of ancient India's literary heritage emerges the Mahabharata, an epic masterpiece attributed to the sage **Ved Vyasa**. This grand narrative, considered one of the two major Sanskrit epics of Hinduism alongside the Ramayana, stands as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and the complexities of human existence.

Initially composed of a modest **8800 verses**, the Mahabharata underwent expansions, eventually culminating in a staggering **1,00,000 verses**. This vast tapestry of words weaves a tale of two warring families, **the Pandavas and the Kauravas**, as they grapple with power, duty, and the intricacies of human relationships.



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[Source: The Economic Times]

The Mahabharata's influence extends beyond India's borders, with translations reaching far and wide. **Razmnama**, a Persian rendition of the epic, stands as a testament to its universal appeal and the enduring power of its narrative. The Mahabharata remains a cornerstone of Indian culture, its lessons echoing through the ages, reminding us of the complexities of human nature and the enduring quest for righteousness.

## Puranas

Puranas are a collection of ancient Hindu texts that narrate a vast array of legends, genealogies, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. They are considered a significant source of traditional knowledge and provide insights into the evolution of Hindu thought and practices.

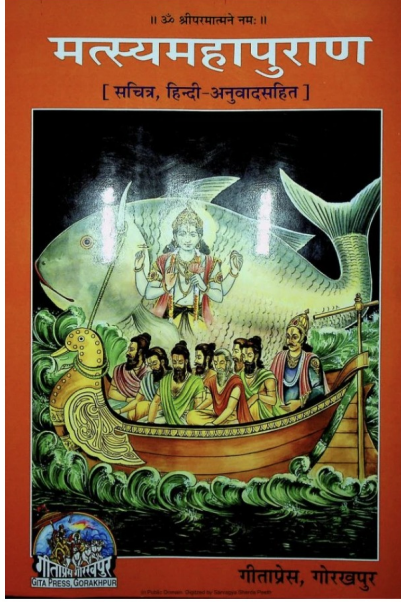
The term "**Purana**" means "**ancient**" or "**old**," reflecting their role as repositories of traditional knowledge. There are **18 major Puranas**, each focusing on different deities and themes. While some Puranas may have been compiled during the Gupta period, their origins extend much further back, with some dating as early as the 3rd century BCE of the Vedic Age.

The authorship of Puranas is traditionally attributed to Lomaharshana's son Ugrasravas; however, modern scholarship suggests that they were composed over a long period by multiple authors. Puranas are not a homogenous body of work but rather a diverse collection of narratives and traditions.

**Matsya Purana** is considered one of the **earliest Puranas**, but there is no definitive consensus on the exact chronological order of their composition. While Matsya Purana mentions various dynasties, its primary focus is on the legend of Matsya, the **fish incarnation of Lord Vishnu**.



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[Source: Geeta Press Gorakhpur]

Puranas are a valuable source of information about ancient Hindu beliefs and practices, offering insights into the cultural and religious landscape of India's past.

In closing, as you prepare for the WBCS exam, exploring the enthralling Vedic Age is an invaluable resource offered by Dhronas Institute. We've unraveled the complex and mesmerizing aspects of this era, providing you with essential insights into India's rich history. The knowledge you've gained on the origins of Indian spirituality, the profound significance of Vedic texts, and the societal dynamics of that time will undoubtedly strengthen your foundation for the exam.

We encourage you to continue your journey of discovery, leveraging the depth of understanding you've acquired through our program. Dhronas Institute is committed to empowering you with the historical knowledge and context needed to excel in your WBCS exam. Best of luck in your academic pursuits and future endeavors, and remember that you're equipped with the tools to succeed, thanks to your exploration of the fascinating Vedic Age. In our next unit, we will discuss about the **16 Mahajanpadas**. Till then, stay tuned!