

The Vedic age itself is divided into the Early Vedic Period (1500 – 1000 BCE) and Later Vedic Period (1000 – 600 BCE)\*. The reason being that society underwent drastic changes from the time the first Vedas were written to the appearance of later Vedic scriptures.

### Differences Between Early Vedic Age and Later Vedic Age

Early Vedic Period	Later Vedic Period
The caste system was flexible and based on profession rather than birth	The caste system became more rigid in this period with birth being the main criteria
There was no concept of Shudra or untouchables	Shudras became a mainstay in the Later Vedic period. Their sole function was to serve those of the upper-castes
Women were allowed a greater degree of freedom in this period. They were allowed to participate in the political process of the time to a certain extent	Women were restricted from their participation in society by being relegated to subordinate and docile roles
Kingship was fluid as the kings were elected for a fixed period by the local assembly known as <i>Samiti</i>	As society became more urbanized in this period, the need for stable leadership was realized. Thus the absolute rule of the Kings became more and more prominent
Early Vedic society was pastoralist and semi-nomadic in nature	Society became more settled in nature. It became centred around agriculture in general
In the Early Vedic Period, the barter system was more prevalent with little to no monetary value transaction being part of the exchange	Although the barter system was still in practice, it was largely replaced by the exchange of gold and silver coins known as <i>Krishnala</i>
Rigveda. This text is cited as the earliest text from this period	Yajurveda. Samaveda Atharvaveda

# PRE-VEDIC AND VEDIC RELIGION

It would appear from the archaeological findings made in the prehistoric and protohistoric sites that these people revered both the male and female aspects of divinity as well as the sacredness of the force that was responsible for the creative process. It would appear that they venerated natural phenomena such as the sun and the moon as deities in their religion. This belief is also partly supported by the early writings of the Aryans, which was written in their language. The nature of the religious beliefs and practices of the Aryans can also be gleaned from the Rig Veda. The Aryans believed in a wide variety of gods, including Indra, Varuna, Agni, Surya, and Rudra. The most important part of religious practice consisted of making sacrifices and offering food and drink to a fire as part of a ritual to honor the gods. The Sama Veda and the Yajur

---

Veda both went into detail about the various aspects of the acts of sacrifice, and the Brahmanas went into even more detail about the rituals that were performed. A substantial amount of animistic beliefs could be found in the Atharva Veda. There was some uncertainty among the seers regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of the Vedic ritualism. The ideas of monotheism presented a challenge to polytheism, and the many gods that existed at the time were explained as simply different names for the same eternal entity.

The sections of the Vedic literature known as the Aranyaka and the Upanishad both have a forward-looking perspective. The Upanishads are the early stage in the origin and development of the religious and metaphysical concepts that were later used by the religious leaders and reformers of ancient

and medieval India. They are also known as the Vedas. While some of them proceeded along the paths of conventionality, others went in a direction that was non-conventional.

## UNORTHODOX RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

This is the group that contains the religious movements that emerged around the middle of the first millennium BC and were associated with figures such as Mahavira and the Buddha. During this time period, there were also a great number of other creeds. Some of them preached creeds that included aspects that were not in line with the Vedic tradition. These creeds were incompatible with the Vedic tradition. They did not take into account the infallibility or the supernatural origin of the Vedas. Many of these new teachers were of the

Kshatriya caste, in contrast to the Brahmin sages who served as the Vedic seers. Both Buddhism and Jainism can be considered to have originated as atheistic creeds. The religion of Buddhism, on the other hand, endorsed the doctrine of the Law of Karma and upheld the belief in rebirths of the embodied skandhas as well as the inevitability of suffering in the very existence of beings. Both of these concepts are part of the belief that suffering is an inevitable part of the existence of beings. A good number of these perspectives can also be found in the principal Upanishads.

## RELIGIONS DENOTED AS THEISTIC

Nearly simultaneously with the development of religions that did not believe in a god, theistic creeds came into existence. The important deities in these religions did not come primarily from Vedic sources; rather, they were those that originated from non-traditional settings. The pre-vedic and post-vedic folk elements that influenced them the most were the ones that were most noticeable in their origin. Bhakti, which can be defined as a worshiper's undivided allegiance to a personal god connected in some way to morality, was the primary impetus behind the development of these creeds. As a consequence of this, numerous religious subgroups came into existence, such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Saktism, all of which were eventually considered to be elements of orthodox Brahminism. Over the course of history, these subgroups came to have a significant influence on the most widely practiced schools of Buddhism and Jainism.

## CULTS OF THE FOLKS

The adoration of Yakshas, Nagas, and various other folk deities was the most significant aspect of the religious practices that were practiced in primitive times. Bhakti played a very significant part in this aspect of religious practice. Early literature and archaeology both provide a significant amount of evidence suggesting that this particular mode of worship was practiced frequently by the people.

---

## MOVEMENT OF THE VAISHNAVAS IN THE SOUTH

The history of the Vaishnava movement from the end of the Gupta period until the first decade of the thirteenth century AD focuses primarily on South India. This span of time spans from the end of the Gupta period to the beginning of the thirteenth century AD. Vaishnava poet-saints who were known as alvars (a Tamil word that refers to people who have become immersed in Vishnu-bhakti) preached devotion to Vishnu with a single-minded focus, also known as ekatmika bhakti, and the collections of their songs were known as prabandhas.

## SHAIVISM

Shaivism, in contrast to Vaishnavism, can trace its roots back to ancient times. Panini talks about a group of people who worshiped Shiva and called them

Shiva-bhagavatas. These people could be identified by the iron lances and clubs they carried as well as the skin garments they wore.

Movement of Shaivism in the Southern India: Many of the 6th century holy men who came to be known as Nayanars in Tamil contributed significantly to the early success of the Shaiva movement in the southern regions of India (Siva-bhakts). Their beautiful and moving songs in Tamil were known as Tevaram Stotras. These songs are also referred to as Dravida Veda, and they were performed ceremonially in the local Shiva temples. The Nayanars consisted of individuals from a variety of castes. On the doctrinal side, this was supplemented by a large number of Shaiva intellectuals whose names were associated with various forms of Shaiva movements such as Agamanta, Shudha, and Vira-shaivism.