

## INDIAN HISTORY : VEDAS, UPANISHADS, PURANAS

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### Introduction :

India's history and culture is ancient and dynamic, spanning back to the beginning of human civilization. Beginning with a mysterious culture along the Indus River and in farming communities in the southern lands of India. The history of india is one punctuated by constant integration with migrating peoples and with the diverse cultures that surround India. Placed in the center of Asia, history in india is a crossroads of cultures from China to Europe, and the most significant Asian connection with the cultures of Africa.

India's history is more than just a set of unique developments in a definable process; it is, in many ways, a microcosm of human history itself, a diversity of cultures all impinging on a great people and being reformed into new, syncretic forms. IndHistory.com brings you the india's history starting from ancient history of india to modern indian history. Shown below is the india timeline starting from 3000 BC of ancient indus valley civilization and harappa civilization to 1000 AD of Chola Dynasty of ancient history of india.

### Indian History in Short :

The History of India begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization in such sites as Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and Lothal, and the coming of the Aryans. These two phases are usually described as the pre-Vedic and Vedic periods. It is in the Vedic period that Hinduism first arose: this is the time to which the Vedas are dated.

In the fifth century, large parts of India were united under Ashoka. He also converted to Buddhism, and it is in his reign that Buddhism spread to other parts of Asia. It is in the reign of the Mauryas that Hinduism took the shape that fundamentally informs the religion down to the present day. Successor states were more fragmented.

Islam first came to India in the eighth century, and by the 11th century had firmly established itself in India as a political force; the North Indian dynasties of the Lodhis,

The European presence in India dates to the seventeenth century, and it is in the latter part of this century that the Mughal empire began to disintegrate, paving the way for regional states. In the contest for supremacy, the English emerged 'victors', their rule marked by the conquests at the battlefields of Plassey and Buxar.

The Rebellion of 1857-58, which sought to restore Indian supremacy, was crushed; and with the subsequent crowning of Victoria as Empress of India, the incorporation of India into the empire was complete. Successive campaigns had the effect of driving the British out of India in 1947.

### **Vedas - Upanishads - Puranas :**

#### **Vedas :**

The oldest literature of Indian thought is the Veda, a collection of religious and philosophical poems and hymns composed over several generations beginning as early as 3000 BC. The Veda was composed in Sanskrit, the intellectual language of both ancient and classical Indian civilizations. Four collections were made, so it is said that there are four Vedas. The four as a group came to be viewed as sacred in Hinduism. Some Vedic hymns and poems address philosophic themes, such as the henotheism that is key to much Hindu theology. Henotheism is the idea that one God takes many different forms, and that although individuals may worship several different gods and goddesses, they really revere but one Supreme Being.

#### **There are four Vedas :**

##### **The Rig-Veda :**

Its traditional date goes back to 3000 BC, something which the German scholar Max Mueller accepted. As a body of writing, the Rig-Veda (the wisdom of verses) is nothing short of remarkable. It contains 1028 hymns (10,589 verses which are divided into ten mandalas or book-sections) dedicated to thirty-three different gods. The most often addressed gods were nature gods like Indra (rain god; king of heavens), Agni (fire god), Rudra (storm god; the 'howler'), Soma (the draught of immortality, an alcoholic brew).

##### **The Sama-Veda :**

The Sama-Veda or the wisdom of chants is basically a collection of samans or chants, derived from the eighth and ninth books of the Rig-Veda. These were meant for the priests who officiated at the rituals of the soma ceremonies. There are painstaking instructions in Sama-

Veda about how particular hymns must be sung; to put great emphasis upon sounds of the words of the mantras and the effect they could have on the environment and the person who pronounced them.

#### **The Yajur-Veda :**

The Yajur-Veda or the wisdom of sacrifices lays down various sacred invocations (yajurs) which were chanted by a particular sect of priests called adhvaryu. They performed the sacrificial rites. The Veda also outlines various chants which should be sung to pray and pay respects to the various instruments which are involved in the sacrifice.

#### **The Atharva-Veda :**

The Atharva-Veda (the wisdom of the Atharvans) is called so because the families of the atharvan sect of the Brahmins have traditionally been credited with the composition of the Vedas. It is a compilation of hymns but lacks the awesome grandeur which makes the Rig - Veda such a breathtaking spiritual experience.

#### **Upanishads :**

The term Upanishad means sitting down near; this implies the students sitting down near their Guru to learn the big secret. In the splendid isolation of their forest abodes, the philosophers who composed the Upanishads contemplated upon the various mysteries of life and its creation whether common, or metaphysical. The answers were however not open to all, but only for select students. The reason for this was simple: not everyone can handle knowledge. The composition of the Upanishads marks a significant and stride forward in the direction of knowing the mystery of earth's creation and one comes tantalizingly close to the answers. Through episodes, commentaries, stories, traditions and dialogue, the Upanishads unfold the fascinating tale of creation, life, the essence of life and of that beyond to the seeker of truth. There is no exact date for the composition of the Upanishads. They continued to be composed over a long period, the core being over 7th -5th centuries BC. The Upanishads were originally called Vedanta, which literally means the conclusion to the Vedas.

In the Upanishads, views about Brahman (the Absolute, or God) and atman (one's true self) were proposed.

#### **There are 18 principal Upanishads viz :**

##### **Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad :**

The Brhad-aranyaka Upanishad is widely accepted to be the most important of all Upanishads. It has three khandas or parts. The madhu khanda contemplates on the relationship between the individual and the Universal self. The muni khanda or yajnavalkya is a debate

which goes on to give the philosophical backing to the earlier teaching. The khila khanda tackles various rituals of worship and meditation.

**Chandogya Upanishad :**

This Upanishad is a part of the Sama-Veda (see The Vedas). The name comes from the singer of the songs (samans) who is called Chandoga. The initial chapters of the Upanishad, discuss the ritual of sacrifice. The others debate the origin and profundity of the concept of Om, among other things.

**Aitareya Upanishad :**

This one forms part of the Rig-Veda. The purpose is to make the reader understand the deeper meaning of sacrifice and to take him away from the outer trappings of the actual act.

**Taittiriya Upanishad :**

A part of the Yajur-Veda, this Upanishad is divided into three sections or vallis. The siksa valli deals with the phonetics of the chants, while the others, brahmananda valli and bhrgu valli deal with self-realization.

**Isa Upanishad :**

Also called the Isavasya Upanishad, this book deals with the union of God, the world, being and becoming. The stress is on the Absolute in relation with the world (paramesvara). The gist of the teachings is that a person's worldly and otherworldly goals need not necessarily be opposed to each other.

**Kena Upanishad :**

The name of this Upanishad comes from the first word kena, or by whom. It has two sections of prose and two of poetry. The verses deal with the supreme spirit or the absolute principle (brahmaana) and the prose talks of ishvara (god). The moral of the story is that the knowledge of ishvara reveals the way to self-realization.

**Katha Upanishad :**

Also called the Kathakopanishad, this Upanishad uses a story (katha) involving a young Brahmin boy called Nachiketa to reveal the truths of this world and the other beyond the veil.

**Prashna Upanishad :**

Prashna literally means question, and this book is part of the Athrava-Veda. It addresses questions pertaining to the ultimate cause, the power of Om, relation of the supreme to the constituents of the world.

**Mundaka Upanishad :**

This book also belongs to the Atharva-Veda. The name is derived from 'mund' or to shave, meaning that anyone who understands the Upanishads is s(h)aved from ignorance. This book inscribes the importance of knowing the supreme brahmaana, only by which knowledge can one attain self-realization.

**Mandukya Upanishad :**

The Mandukya is an exquisite treatise which expounds on the principle of Om and its metaphysical significance in various states of being, waking, dream and the dreamless sleep. The subtlest and most profound of the Upanishads, it is said that this alone will lead one to the path of enlightenment.

**Svetasvatara Upanishad :**

The name of this Upanishad is after its teacher. It comments on the unity of the souls and the world in one all-encompassing reality. The concept of there being one god is also talked about here. It is dedicated to Rudra, the storm god.

**Kausitaki Brahmana Upanishad :**

The Upanishad has come down to us in bits here and pieces there. The core of the text is dedicated to illustrating the fact that the path to release is through knowledge.

**Maitri Upanishad :**

This is a comparatively later Upanishad as it has references to the Trinity of Hindu Gods (Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma) which is a later development, and plus references to the world being illusory in character reflects Buddhist influence.

**Subala Upanishad :**

Belonging to the Yajur-Veda, this Upanishad puts down a dialogue between the sage Subala and Brahma the creator of the Hindu Trinity of Gods. It discusses the universe and the absolute.

**Jabala Upanishad :**

Belonging to the Athrava-Veda this Upanishad addresses some questions pertaining to renunciation.

**Paingala Upanishad :**

The Paingala is again a dialog, this between Yajnavalkya, the sage mentioned the Brhad-aranyaka's muni khanda and Paingala, a student of his. It discusses meditation and its effects.

**Kaivalya Upanishad :**

This Upanishad delves into the state of kaivalya or being alone.

**Vajrasucika Upanishad :**

Belonging to the Sama-Veda the Vajrasucika reflects on the nature of the supreme being. The core of the teachings of the Upanishads is summed up in three words: tat tvam as you are that.

**Puranas :**

The Puranas contain the essence of the Vedas. They were written to impress the teachings of the Vedas onto the masses and to generate devotion to God in them. They have five characteristics: history, cosmology (with symbolical illustrations of philosophical principles), secondary creation, genealogy of kings, and Manvantaras (the period of Manu's rule consisting of 71 celestial yugas). The Puranas were meant, not for the scholars, but for ordinary people who could not understand high philosophy and could not study the Vedas. There is an emphasis on the worship of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), Shiva (the destroyer), Surya (the Sun God), Ganesha (the elephant headed god known to be the remover of obstructions ), and Shakti (the goddess). All the Puranas belong to the class of Suhrit-Sammitas, or the Friendly Treatises, while the Vedas are called Prabhu-Sammitas or Commanding Treatises with great authority. There are 18 Puranas : Brahma Purana, Padma Purana, Vishnu Purana, Vayu Purana or Siva Purana, Bhagavata Purana, Narada Purana, Markandeya Purana, Agni Purana, Bhavishya Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Linga Purana, Varaha Purana, Skanda Purana, Vamana Purana, Kurma Purana, Matsya Purana, Garuda Purana and Brahmanda Purana. Of these, six are Sattvic Puranas glorifying Vishnu; six are Rajasic, glorifying Brahma; six are Tamasic, glorifying Siva. Vyasa, the son of Rishi Parasara, is said to be the author of them all.

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