



# The Vedic Gods



# Indus Valley Civilisation -Mature Phase- (c. 2600-1900 BCE)



# THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (IVC)



# **Terracotta Female Figurine with Headdress of Flowers**

**Harappan, c. 2500 BCE,  
Lahore Museum**



Terracotta  
Figurine of a  
Toy Ox or  
Water  
Buffalo-  
drawn Cart  
with Driver

Harappa,  
c. 2600–1900 BCE.

Earliest of these are unfired figurines found at the Neolithic site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan;

There was an exponential expansion starting with the transition from the early Harappa period (c. 3200–2600 BCE) to the mature period (2600–1900 BCE);

The existence of mother goddess cult must be viewed with great caution.



# Terracotta Female Figurine

**Mature Harappan Period  
Mohenjo-daro**



## Bronze Dancing Girl

**Mahenjo-daro c 2300–1750 BCE,**

**National Museum, New Delhi**



# Second Bronze Dancing Girl

**Mahenjo-daro c 2300–1750 BCE,**

**National Museum, Pakistan**



## **The Vedic Texts:**

The collectivity of Vedic texts were orally composed between 1500–500B BCE;

The *R̥gveda* is the oldest;

Records from Mitanni documents of northern Iraq/ Syria circa 1400 BCE mention the vedic gods;

*R̥gveda* does not know iron, but only, copper and bronze and is not aware of large cities, which limits dates to after 1900 but before 1200 BCE;

Most scholars date the *R̥gveda* between 1500–1200 BCE.

Called themselves *ārya*, ‘noble,’ but the term carried with it a cultural connotation;

Spoke vedic Sanskrit and carried with them vedic culture and vedic ritual;

Patrilineal society, organized in clans and tribes; leaders/ chiefs called ‘*rājans*’;

In constant battle with one another and with non-āryan groups called *dasyu*;

Partially nomadic cattle-herders (horses, cows, sheep, and goats) and practiced limited agricultural;

Employed chariots, ‘*rathas*,’ in both play and war.

**The pantheon** found in the *R̥gveda* is complicated, and often a conflicting.

**Some of the gods represent nature:** Vāyu, wind god, Agni, fire god, the goddess Āpaḥ, ‘Waters,’ Dyauḥ Pitā/Pṛthivī [Mātā], Father Heaven and [Mother] Earth, the goddess Uṣas, ‘Dawn.

**Others reflect moral and ethical ideas:** such as Varuṇa, Mitra, Aryman, etc., These gods keep the cosmic and human worlds functioning.

*r̥ta*, ‘moral / ethical truth,’ which is, somewhat similar to the later construction of *dharma*.

**Indra**, perhaps the most famous of the vedic gods, is the warrior god.

Indra and Agni, were worshipped in the elaborate public *śrauta* rituals, or sacrifices, yajñas;

*soma* sacrifice; Soma is also worshiped as a god in his own right;

*domestic rituals*, such as rites of passage (*saṃskāras*), such as birth, coming of age, marriage



Invitation of the gods to the ritual grounds where they are offered a seat near the sacred fires [agni], fed, praised with hymns

Vāc (Speech, i.e., divinely revealed speech)

*aśvamedha*, 'horse sacrifice', *rājasūya*, sacrifice performed at the coronation of a king (by himself)

Patrons—*rājans*, 'kings'

Priests—*brāhmans*

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# **Viśvakarman**

**13<sup>th</sup> century CE**  
**Lopburi, Thailand**





# Aditi and Lord Brahmā

19<sup>th</sup> century  
Illustration Saraswati  
Mahal Library  
Collection, Tanjore

Aditi, ‘boundlessness, immensity, abundance’

Mother of gods, last of which is Martāṇḍa/Mārtāṇḍa, ‘dead egg,’ another name for the sun (Sūrya)

Sister, is Diti ‘bounded one’ mother of a demonic race (*daityas*)

Aditi appears often in the post vedic literature, but is not normally visualized.

# Heaven and Earth

## Dyaus and Pṛthivī (dyāvā-pṛthivī)

### Dyaus Cognate with the Greek Zeus and Latin Jupiter

They are often referred to as ‘mother’ and ‘father’ (*pitr̥/mātr̥*)

#### Common Traits:

They never grow old.

They are great, and wide-extended [spread wide]

Each is a broad and vast abode.

They grant food and wealth [cows] and bestow fame and power.

Sometimes they are ascribed moral qualities, wise, and promote righteousness [ṛta].

They guard beings [as parents].

*RV 1.185 refrain*

*dyāvā rákṣatam pṛthivī no ábhvāt*

*Let Heaven and Earth Protect us from the void  
[non-existence].*



# **Vāc (Sarasvatī)**

**Gupta Dynasty; 6th century;  
Sandstone;  
The Museum of Fine Arts,  
Houston**



**Vāc (Sarasvatī)**

**Mysore-style**



# Agni, God of Fire

{Optionally Identified as a *yakṣa*, ‘Agnipāṇi  
(‘Fire Holder’)

100 BCE

Mathura Museum



Rear View

Agni, God of Fire



## *Ṛgveda 1.1.1*

*agnīm īḷe puróhitam  
yajñásya devám ṛtvíjam  
hótāram ratnadhātāmam*

‘I praise Agni, the domestic priest [*purohitam*], the lord of the sacrifice, the sacrificial priest [*ṛtvij*], the invoker [*hotāram*], the bestower of wealth.’

Butter-backed [the ghee is poured into the  
sacrificial fire to make it flame up]

Flame-haired

He has a tawny beard

Sharp jaws

Golden teeth

The gods eat the oblation with his tongues  
(flames)

He is compared to many animals:

He resembles a bull, when first born, a calf;

He is kindled like a horse that brings the gods;

He is yoked to bring the sacrifice to them;

He is also called a divine bird;

Wood and ghee are his food, melted butter his drink;

He must be nourished three times a day.



## Bronze Seated Ascetic

—Deified King, Agni  
(The God of Fire)

Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh

ca. 3rd century, Gupta

Metropolitan Museum of Art



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Deified King,  
Agni (The God of Fire)

(Back)



## **Agni**

Seated with prayer beads  
and flask

Stone Relief  
7th. century  
Nalanda, Bihar

## **A few common additional names of Agni:**

Pāvaka ‘The Purifier’

Havyavāhana, ‘The One who Carries the Sacrificial Offering’

Saptajihva, ‘The Seven-tongued One’

Anala, ‘fire, as digestive power’

Hutāśana ‘The Eater of Oblations’



**Agni**  
on Ram  
Carrying Axes

Modern



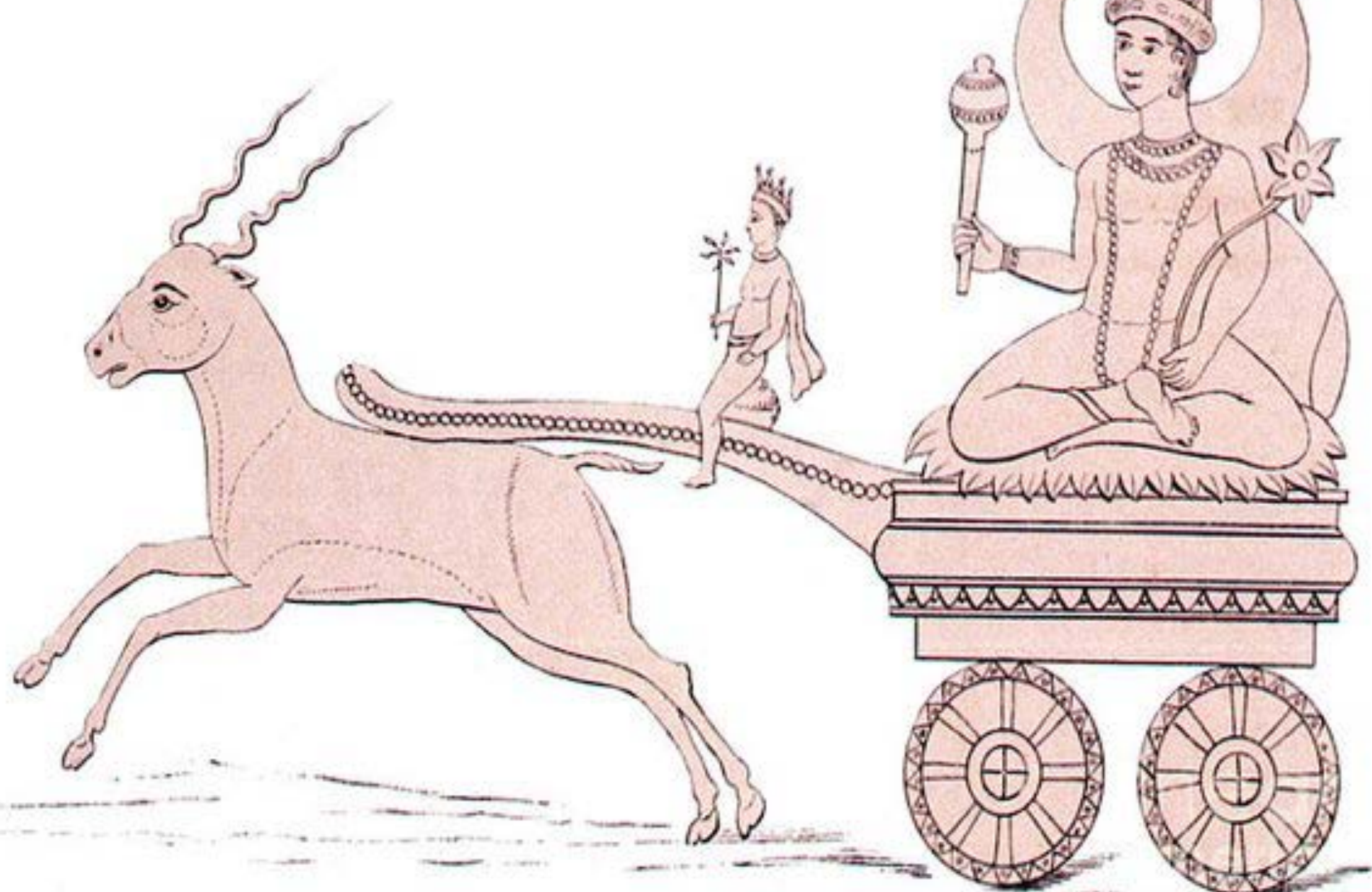
# SOMA

= Avestan *haoma*

**Ritual drink of the vedic sacrifice, as well as the personification of that ritual drink.**

Later identified with the Moon





*ápāma sómam amṛtā abhūma  
áganma jyótir ávidāma devān  
kīm nūnām asmān kṛṇavad árātiḥ  
kīm u dhūrtír amṛta mártiyasya // RV 8.48.3*

We have drunk the soma; we have become immortal;  
we have gone to the light; we have found the gods.  
What can hostility do to us now, and what the malice of  
a mortal, o immortal one?

# SOMA

DIVINE MUSHROOM  
OF IMMORTLITY

*R. Gordon Wasson*





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**INDRA**

The King of Gods

He is the god of battle who helps the āryan forces to victory.

He consumes large amounts of *soma*.

His physical features are often mentioned.

He is tawny [*hari*] in color; his hair and beard are both tawny.

He has powerful arms, which wield the *vajra* ‘thunderbolt’.

The *vajram* ‘thunderbolt’ :

It was fashioned by Tvaṣṭṛ, the craftsman of the gods.

It is made of iron (*āyasā*)

It is golden, tawny, sharp, many pointed, etc.

Indra is called *vajrin*, ‘possessor of the vajra’.





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## The Sabhā of the Gods

ca. 150-100 BCE; Sunga Period

Bharhut stupa

Calcutta Museum

Three-storied “Palace of Victory;” on first story, Indra sitting in middle with four female figures, two on each side, attending him

Bhagavato chudamaho sudhamma devasabha Vejayamtapasade."(tr. "The festival in honor of the Divine Being's dressed hair-lock. The council-hall of the gods in the Palace of Victory"



Indra sitting in middle with four female figures, two on each side, attending him.



Vṛtra  
Trying to Eat  
Indra

From a *Bhāgavata*  
*Purāṇa* Mss.



Indra with  
consort sitting  
on his elephant,  
Airāvata, and  
carrying his  
Vajra

Hoysala Dynasty  
1268 CE

Keshava Temple  
Somnathapur, Karnataka



**Uṣas**

The Goddess  
of Dawn

She is a young woman;

She comes with light driving away the  
darkness;

She is young, born repeatedly, though  
ancient;

She wastes away the lives of mortals;

She drives away evil dreams and evil spirits;

She brings the gods to drink the *soma*;

She has a shining or golden chariot drawn by ruddy steeds or cows [representing the morning rays;

She is closely associated with Sūrya, the sun god;

She is his wife, or sometimes he is called her mother.

*RV 1.92.4*

Like a dancing girl, she bedecks herself with jewelry.

She bares her breast as a cow does her udder,

Casting forth her brilliance on the entire world,

Dawn has burst open the darkness as cows might their

pen.





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# Sūrya, The Sun God

# Sūrya

He is often referred to as the 'eye' of Agni or other gods.

He is far-seeing; all-seeing; the spy of the whole world;

He beholds all beings and their good and bad deeds.



## Standing Sūrya

ca. 6th century

Merged with other solar divinities, giving rise to his being called Savitr, Mitra, Pūṣan;

Mārtāṇḍa, ‘dead egg,’ Āditya;

Bhāskara, ‘maker of light,’ Divākara, ‘maker of day,’ Prabhākara, ‘maker of light.’

## **Mitra and Varuṇa**

Dual relationship which goes back to the Indo-Iranian period where they are called Ahura and Mithra.

They are young;

They are called asuras [problematic word in the vedas];

Their eye is the sun;

They wear glistening garments;

They mount their chariots in the highest heaven;

Their abode is golden and located in heaven, thousand doored and thousand columned.

They have spies that are wise and cannot be deceived;  
They are rulers and guardians of the entire world;  
They support heaven, earth, and air;  
Their ordinances are fixed and cannot be obstructed even  
by the immortal gods;  
They are barriers against falsehood, which they dispel,  
hate, and punish;  
They afflict with diseases those who neglect their worship;  
They punish those who violate ṛta.



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# VARUṆA

ca 400-425 CE,  
Buff sandstone

Udayagiri  
Madhya Pradesh



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The Paśupati  
or  
'Proto Śiva' Seal

Mahenjo-daro  
2350–2000 BCE

# Rudra

His hands, arms, and limbs are mentioned;

He has beautiful lips and wears braided hair;

His color is brown, his form is dazzling, he shines like the  
radian sun, like god;

He has golden ornaments and wears a glorious necklace  
(*niṣka*).



He is often associated with the Māruts, the storm gods;

He is often regarded as malevolent, the hymns addressed to him chiefly express fear of him;

He has healing powers.



# Viṣṇu Trivikrama

Dhaka Museum,  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

Prajāpati, ‘lord of creatures, comes to be later associated with Brahmā, who is a post-vedic deity, which Bob will deal with.

The name Prajāpati is referred to only four times in the *R̥gveda* and this is in the later tradition.

The word *prajāpati* used at R̥V 4.83.4, but scholars do not link the term with the god.