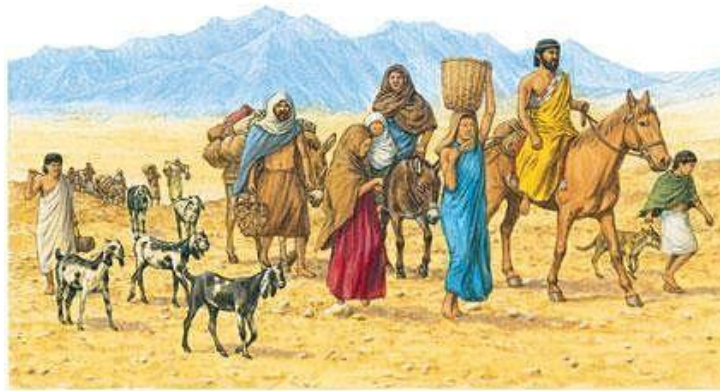


UPSC  
Old NCERT Summary (RS Sharma)  
Advent of Aryans & Rig Vedic Period

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### Original Home and Identity

- It is difficult to say that all the **earliest Aryans** belonged to one race, but their culture was more or less of the same type. They were distinguished by their common language.



### People in Rigveda Period: Aryans

- They spoke the **Indo-European** languages, which are current in changed forms all over Europe, Iran and the greater part of the Indian subcontinent. Originally the Aryans seem to have lived somewhere in the steppes stretching from southern Russia to Central Asia.
- Their earliest life seems to have been mainly pastoral, **agriculture** being a **secondary occupation**. Although the Aryans used several animals, the horse played the most significant role in their life. Its swiftness enabled them and some allied people to make successful inroads on West. Asia from about 2000 B.C. onwards.
- On their way to India to Aryans first appeared in Central Asia and Iran, where the Indo-Iranians lived for a long time. We know about the Aryans in India from the **Rig Veda**. The term Arya occurs 36 times in this text, and generally indicates a cultural community.
- The Rig Veda is the earliest text of the Indo European languages. It is a collection of prayers offered to **Agni, Indra, Mitra, Varun** and other gods by various families of poets or sages. It consists of ten mandalas or

books, of which Books II to VII forms its earliest portions. Books I and X seem to have been the latest additions.

- The **Rig Veda** has many things in common with the **Avesta**, which is the oldest text in the Iranian language. The two texts use the same names for several gods and even for social classes. But the earliest specimen of the Indo-European language is found in an inscription of about 2200 B.C. from Iraq. Later such specimens occur in Hittite inscriptions in Anatolia (Turkey) from the nineteenth to the seventeenth centuries B.C.
- Aryan names appear in **Kassite inscriptions** of about 1600 B.C. from Iraq and in **Mitanni inscriptions** of the fourteenth century B.C. from the Aryans appeared in India.



**Mitanni Inscription**

- The earliest Aryans lived in the geographical area covered by eastern Afghanistan, North-West Frontier Province, Punjab and fringes of western Uttar Pradesh. Some rivers of Afghanistan such as the river **Kubha**, and the river **Indus** and its **five branches**, are mentioned in the Rig Veda. The Sindhu, identical with the Indus, is the river par excellence of the Aryans, and it is repeatedly mentioned.
- Another river, the **Saraswati**, is called **Naditama** or the best of the rivers in the Rig Veda. The whole region in which the Aryans first settled in the Indian subcontinent is called the **Land of the Seven Rivers**.

### **Tribal Conflicts**

- We hear of many defeats inflicted by Indra on the enemies of the Aryans. In the Rig Veda Indra is called **Purandara** which means that he was the **breaker of forts**.
- The Aryans succeeded everywhere because they possessed **chariots** driven by **horses**, and introduced them for the first time into West Asia and India. The Aryan soldiers were probably equipped also with **coats of mail (vaiman)** and better arms.



Aryans with Chariot

- According to tradition, the Aryans were divided into **five tribes panchajana** but there might have been other tribes also. The **Bharatas** and the **Tritsu** were the ruling Aryan clans, and they were supported by priest Vasisththa.
- The country **Bharatavarsha** was eventually named after the **tribe Bharata**, which appears first in the Rig Veda. The Bharata ruling clan was opposed by a **host of ten chiefs**, five of whom were **heads of aryan tribes** and the remaining five of **non-aryan people**. The battle that was fought between the Bharatas on the one hand and the host of ten chiefs on the other is known as the **Battle of Ten Kings**.



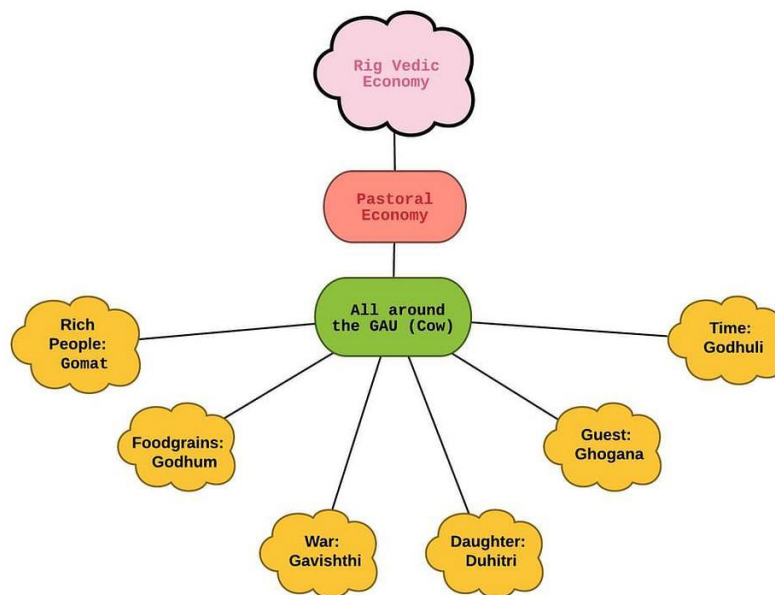
## Dasharajnya - The Battle of Ten Kings

- This battle was fought on the **river Parushni**, identical with the river Ravi and it gave victory to Sudas and established the supremacy of the Bharatas. Of the defeated tribes, the most important was that of the Purus. Subsequently, the Bharatas joined hands with the Purus and

formed a new ruling tribe called the **Kurus**. The Kurus combined with the Panchalas, and they together established their rule in the upper Gangetic basin where they played an important part in later Vedic times.

## Material Life

- The Rig Vedic people possessed better knowledge of agriculture. **Ploughshare** is mentioned in the earliest part of the Rig Veda though some consider it an interpolation. Possibly this **ploughshare** was made of wood. They were acquainted with sowing, harvesting and threshing, and knew about the different seasons.
- In spite of all this, **there are so many references to the cow and the bull** in the Rig Veda that the Rig Vedic Aryans can be called predominantly a **pastoral people**. Most of their wars were fought for the sake of cows. The terms for war in the Rig Veda is **gavishthi** or **search for cows**. The cow seems to have been the most important form of wealth. The Rig Veda, mentions such artisans as the carpenter, the chariot-maker, the weaver, the leather worker, the potter, etc.



## Terms used by rigvedic aryan

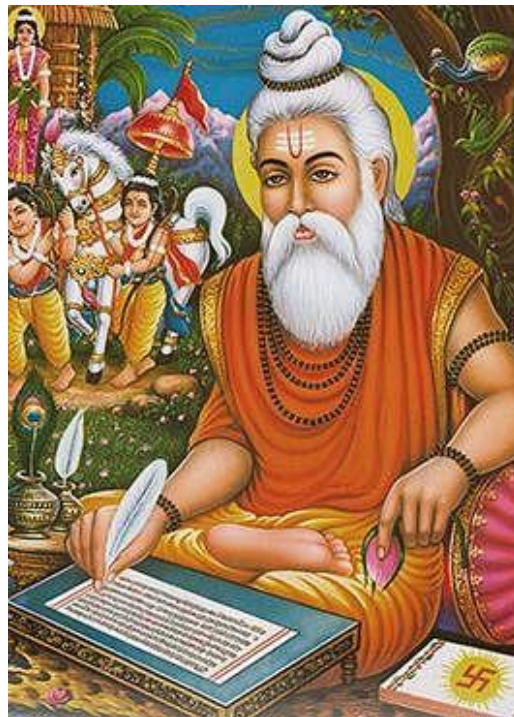
- This indicates that they practised all these crafts. The term **ayas** used for copper or bronze show that **metal-working** was known. But we have no clear evidence of the existence of regular trade. The Aryans or the Vedic



people were acquainted more with land routes because the word **samudra** mentioned in the Rig Veda mainly denotes a **collection of water**. We may, therefore, this of a **pre iron phase** of the PGW which coincided with the Rig Vedic phase.

### Tribal Polity

- The administrative machinery of the Aryans in the Rig period worked with the tribal chief in the centre, because of his successful leadership in war. He was called **Rajan**.
- It seems that in the Rig Vedic period the king's post had become hereditary. We have traces of election of the king by the tribal assembly called the **Samiti**. The **king** was called the **protector of his tribe**.
- Several tribal or the clan-based assemblies such as the **sabha**, **samiti**, **vidatha**, **gana** is mentioned in the Rig Veda. They exercised deliberative, military and religious functions. Even women attended the sabha and vidatha in Rig Vedic times. But the two most important assemblies were the Sabha and the Samiti. These two were so important that the chiefs or the kings showed eagerness to win their support.
- In the day-to-day administration, the king was assisted by a few functionaries. The most important functionary seems to have been the **purohita**.



## Sage Vasishtha

- The two priests who played a major part in the time of Rig Veda are **Vashishta** and **Vishwamitra**. Vishwamitra composed the gayatri mantra to widen the Aryan world. The next important functionary seems to be the **senani**, who used spears, axes, swords, etc. We do not come across any officer concerned with the collection of taxes.
- Probably the chiefs received from the people voluntary offerings called **Bali**. Presents and spoils of war were perhaps distributed in some Vedic assemblies. The Rig Veda does not mention any officer for administering justice. Spies were employed to keep an eye on such unsocial activities.
- The officer who enjoyed authority over a large land or pasture ground is called **Vrajapati**. He led heads of the families called **kulapas**, or the heads of the fighting hordes called **graminis** to battle.
- In the beginning, the gramani was just the head of a small tribal fighting unit. But when the unit settled, the gramani became the head of the village, and in course of time he became identical with the Vrajapati. The king did not maintain any regular or standing army, but in times of war he mustered a militia whose military functions were performed by different tribal groups called **vrata**, **gana**, **grama**, **sardha**. By and large it was a **tribal system of government** in which the military element was strong.

## Tribe and Family

- **Kinship** was the basis of social structure, and a man was identified by the clan to which he belonged. People gave their primary loyalty to the tribe, which was called **jana**. The term jana occurs at about 275 places in the Rig Veda, and the term janapada or territory is not used even once. The people were attached to the tribe, since the territory or the kingdom, was not yet established.
- Another important term which stands for the tribe in the Rig Veda is **vis**, it is mentioned 170 times in that text. Probably the vis was divided into **grama** or smaller tribal units meant for fighting. When the gramas clashed with one another it caused **samgrama**. The most numerous **varna of vaishya** arose out of the vis or the mass of the tribal people.
- The term for **family (kula)** is mentioned rarely in the Rig Veda. It comprised not only mother, father, sons, slaves, etc., but many more people also. It seems that family in early Vedic phase was indicated by the term **griha**, which frequently occurs in this text. In the earliest Indo-European languages one word is used for nephew, grandson, cousin, etc.

It seems that several generations of the family lived under the same roof. Because it was a **patriarchal society**, the birth of a son was desired again and again, and especially people prayed to the gods for brave sons to fight the wars.

- In the Rig Veda, **no desire is expressed for daughters**, though the desire for children and cattle is a recurrent theme in the hymns. Women could attend assemblies. They could offer sacrifices along with their husbands. We have an instance of five women who composed hymns although the later texts mention 20 such women.
- We also notice the practice of **levirate** and **widow remarriage** in the Rig Veda. There are no examples of child-marriage, and the marriageable age in the Rig Veda seems to have been 16 to 17.

### Social Divisions

- The Rig Veda mentions **Arya varna** and **Dasa varna**. The tribal chiefs and the priests acquired a larger share of the booty, and they naturally grew at the cost of their kinsmen, which created social inequalities in the tribe. Gradually the tribal society was divided into three groups - **warriors, priests** and the **people** - on the same pattern as in Iran. The fourth division called the **Shudras** appeared towards the end of the Rig Vedic period, because it is mentioned for the first time in the tenth Book of the Rig Veda, which is the latest addition.
- In the age of the Rig Veda **differentiation based on occupations** had started. But this division was not very sharp. We hear of a family in which a member says: "I am a poet, my father is a physician, and my mother is a grinder. Earning livelihood through different means we live together". We hear of gifts of cattle, chariots, horses, slaves, etc.
- Unequal distribution of the spoils of war created **social inequalities**, and this helped the rise of princes and priests at the cost of the common tribal people. But since the economy was mainly pastoral and not food-producing, the scope for collecting regular tributes from the people was very limited. We do not find gifts of land and even those of cereals are rare. We find domestic slaves but not the wage-earners.
- Tribal elements in society were stronger and social divisions based on the collection of taxes or accumulation of landed property were absent. The society was still **tribal** and largely **egalitarian**.

### Rig Vedic Gods

- The most important divinity in the Rig Veda is **Indra**, who is called **Purandara** or **breaker of forts**. Indra played the role of a **warlord**,

leading the Aryan soldiers to victory against the demons. Two hundred and fifty hymns are devoted to him. He is considered to be the rain god and thought to be responsible for causing **rainfall**.



**INDRA**



**AGNI**

- The second position is held by **Agni (fire god)** to whom 200 hymns are devoted. Fire played a significant part in the life of primitive people because of its use in burning forests, cooking, etc. The cult of fire occupied a central place not only in India but also in Iran, In Vedic times Agni acted as a king of intermediary between the gods on the one hand, and the people on the other.
- The third important position is occupied by **Varuna** who personified water. Varuna was supposed to uphold the natural order, and whatever happened in the world was thought to be the reflection of his desires.





## Varuna

- **Soma** was considered to be the god of plants and intoxicating drink is named after him. The **Maruts** personify the storm. This we have a large number of gods., who represent the different forces of nature in one form or another but are also assigned human activities. We also find some female divinities such as Aditi and Ushas who represented the appearance of the dawn. But they were not prominent in the time of the Rig Veda in the set-up of the period the **male gods were far more important than the female.**
- The dominant mode of worshipping the dos was through the recitation of prayers and offering of sacrifices. **Prayers played an important part in Rig Vedic times.** Both collective and individual prayers were made.
- **Originally every tribe or clan** was the votary of a special god. It seems that prayers were offered to gods in chorus by the members of a whole tribe. This also happened in the case of sacrifices. Agni and Indra were invited to partake of sacrifices made by the whole tribe (Jana). Offerings of vegetables, grain, etc. were made to gods.
- But in **Rig Vedic** times the process was not accompanied by any ritual or sacrificial formulae. They asked mainly for Praja (children), Pashu (cattle), food, wealth, health, etc.