Chapter One

Introduction

Part One: Nature, Scope and Relevance of the Study
Part Two: Different Sects in Vedas
Part One

Every civilization has its own beliefs, practices, religion, language, mythical concepts etc. Among them, myths play an important role in the development of the social history of each civilization. Mythical concepts of ancient civilization comprise different aspects of human life and culture. The study of those myths can reveal the cultural history of that particular religious tradition also. Hence, Mythology of the ancient world is one of the most interesting areas of human inquiry. The term 'mythology' denotes both the study of myths and the total corpus of myths in a particular culture or religious tradition.\(^1\) Myth is a collective term that signifies a symbolic narrative. The definition of the term myth is given also as "they are specific accounts of god or superhuman being that is unspecified by which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience".\(^2\) Thus, mythology may be called as the science that studies myths, their origin and also the reflection of reality in them. It plays an important role in the study of social, cultural and also the political and scientific history of ancient civilizations. Myths generally are narratives framed in the

early stages of history, whose fantastic images, gods, legendary heroes, big events etc. were attempted to generalize and explain different phenomena of nature and society. Every myth is a worldview of a particular group of people in the ancient society. It has elements of religion, and it contains the concepts of the supernatural. But, at the same time it reflects man’s moral views and his aesthetic attitude towards reality.

India has a splendid heritage of innumerable mythical accounts. Myths of various natures can be seen in the history of India right from the dawn of civilization. New myths had been formed and the old ones have undergone metamorphosis in the succeeding ages. Vedic age also generated a large number of mythical accounts which have in later period become the bed-rock of Indian culture. Thus the study of ancient Indian mythology is of great help in the understanding of social and cultural heritage of this country.

**Anthropological Studies in India**

The study about the origin of human race, his physical, cultural and social development through the past ages is a very interesting area of inquiry. This type of study is possible mainly through Anthropology. The word Anthropology is derived from the
two Greek words 'Anthropos' (man) and 'logus' (study/science). Thus, Anthropology may generally be called as the science of mankind and his works and behaviours.\(^3\) Anthropology has been defined differently by various scholars. A famous definition is; "the study of human beings, in particular, the study of their physical character, evolutionary history, racial classification, historical and present day geographic distribution, group relationships and cultural history is called Anthropology".\(^4\) Another definition states that "it is the study of human kind every where throughout time which seeks to produce reliable knowledge about people and their behaviours, both about what makes them different and what they all share in common."\(^5\)

Anthropology is closely related with the disciplines of Linguistics, Archaeology, Sociology, Genetics, Social and Cultural history etc. Thus, Anthropological studies can influence any field related with human culture. It tries to study the human culture with the help of the above said branches of knowledge along with natural science, social order, cultural symbols etc.

\(^2\) *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol.1, p.446.
Anthropologists have difference of opinion about the division of Anthropology. The main branches of Anthropology are Physical and Cultural Anthropologies. Physical Anthropology studies the past as well as the present physical characteristics of humans while Cultural Anthropology deals with the study of human culture in every aspect.\(^6\)

M. Jha\(^7\) gives two major divisions of Anthropology such as Physical Anthropology and Social and Cultural Anthropology. Social and Cultural Anthropology has three sub divisions namely Archaeological, Linguistic and Applied Anthropologies.

William. A. Haviland\(^8\), a prominent Anthropologist, also admits a twofold division to Anthropology with some differences. According to him, Anthropology is divided into two viz. Physical Anthropology and the three branches of Cultural Anthropology named Archaeological Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology and Ethnological Anthropology. More subdivisions into the two main branches of Physical and Cultural Anthropologies are added by some scholars. In their view Physical Anthropology includes Human Genetics, Human Paleontology, Ethnology and

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\(^2\) Malahan Jha, *op.cit.*, p.3.
Anthropometry. The sub branches of Cultural Anthropology are Archaeology and Social Anthropology.9

Indian Anthropological studies were initiated and developed under the British rule in colonial India. British administrators studied the culture, social behaviour, origin of tribal race, caste system etc. of Indian people for their easy ruling of the country.10 In 1774 Sir William Johnes founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to study the nature and culture of Indian people. Eminent scholars have contributed many innovative research articles to the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal (started in 1784), Indian Antiquity (1872), Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society (1915) and Man in India (1921) etc.11

In the 20th century so many eminent Indian Anthropologists like S.C. Roy, D.N. Majumdar, G.S. Ghurye, S.C. Dube, N.K. Bose, L.P. Vidyarthi, Surjeeth Sinha etc. came forward with their valuable researches and contributions in the field of Anthropology. The

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9 Now there are a number of Anthropological branches which study various fields with which human life interacts. They are Developmental Anthropology, Ecological Anthropology, Visual Anthropology, Nutritional Anthropology, Cognitive Anthropology, Forensic Anthropology, Cyber Anthropology, New Anthropology, Symbolic Anthropology etc. Each branch of Anthropology studies some specific aspects of human behaviour.
10 K.N. Sahay observes that the Anthropological studies originated in India under the British Government was in the form of ‘Colonial Anthropology’, See K.N. Sahay Teaching of Anthropology in India, Indian Anthropologist, Vol.5, No.1 (June, 1976), p.2.
11 R.N. Sharma (Ed.) Indian Anthropology, Surjeeth Publications, Delhi, [n.d.], p.67. cf., also K.N. Sahay, op.cit., p.1. The above mentioned Journals concentrated in publishing research articles focused on the life and culture of the tribes of colonial India.
study based on human race and culture attracted many scholars and a number of research articles and monographs were published in this period regarding tribal culture, caste system etc. in India. The Anthropological studies helped the Government to implement various projects for the welfare of Indian tribes and castes to an extent.

**Scope of Anthropology in Vedic and Puranic Studies**

Vedas and Purāṇas contain a vast amount of mythical accounts which uphold elements of cultural history of ancient India. In the field of Vedic and Puranic mythical studies the Anthropological tools provided by Cultural Anthropology and Social Anthropology, Archaeology, Linguistics etc. would be highly helpful for the better comprehension of the nature and engagement of the people of that age. Each civilization has different culture, language, beliefs and practices etc. than other civilizations. Cultural Anthropology, particularly in Indian context, aims at the study of such aspects of human beings that undergone acculturation process.\(^2\) The ethnicity of ancient man can be

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\(^{12}\) V.S. Upadhyay and Gaya Pandey have pointed out that the whole system of life in a culture begins to change under the influence of any other culture and it is known as the process of acculturation. They also discussed about the difference of man from other animals based on the quality of culture. Refer to V.S. Upadhyay and Gaya Pandey, *History of Anthropological Thought*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2000, p.353 and p.355ff for a detailed discussion of various scholars on culture and civilization of men of ancient world. They observe that every culture is unstable. It
deciphered with the help of such studies. The study of prominent
mythical images especially of the subjugated characters of the
ancient civilizations can give abundant information regarding the
cultural change and diversity of the social history of ancient world
to a large extent. Archaeological and Linguistic evidences also can
contribute much in this approach. Hence, the conceptions of
Cultural and Social Anthropology are the tools used in this study
for the analysis of the subject. It must also be noted here that term
Anthropology used in this study is in its broader sense.

Relevance of the Present Study

The Rgvedic concepts of Asura and Rakṣas/Rākṣasa bear a
significant place in the mythology of ancient India. A close
observation of these myths reveals the fact that they are associated
with various important issues of ancient Indian history. An in-
depth inter-disciplinary inquiry into the issues associated with
Asura and Rākṣasa surely will make the understanding of the
controversies in the anthropic nature of these concepts as well as
the cultural diversities and religious schisms of ancient India.

Scholars like Jyotish Nath, W.E. Hale, V.G. Paranjpe, W.
Norman Brown etc. have made some attempts to examine the
mythical concept of Asura and Rākṣasa from an Anthropological point of view. These scholars generally accept the ethnicity of the Vedic concept of Asura and Rakṣas. These studies are concerned with only certain matters of the problem. The present study aims to analyze various issues related with the Asura- Rākṣasa concept in ancient Indian history. The development of the concept and the inter-connections of the relevant myths have also been discussed in this study. The socio-cultural impact of these concepts on Indian society also has been evaluated in the end of the study.

Part Two

The chronology of the literature is very much crucial in a investigation of the sort intended here. Hence, before entering into the analysis of Vedas with regard to the topic of discussion, it is necessary to take a stance about the time of their composition.

Position on the Date of Vedas

The date of Vedas, especially of Rgveda, it being the oldest literary evidence, is uncertain. Scholars have difference of opinion regarding the date of Vedas. Some scholars assign them to a recent time and some others to immemorial ancient date. The date of the

of the ancient world.
Vedas according to different scholars varies not by hundreds but by thousands of years. Many methods have been adopted by scholars for their calculation. Linguistic, Archaeological and Astronomical methods are prominent among them. The advent of the professed Aryan people who are believed to be the creators of Vedas and Vedic religion is put forward by some scholars as Aryan Invasion/Immigration Theory for dating the Vedas. It is believed that Vedic culture and civilization were of these migrant people and ancient Indian history was considered to be old as of Rigvedic days. But the information of Indus Valley Civilization and the 1920’s excavations from Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Kalibangan etc. prove the remnants of a well cultured ancient Indian riverine civilization of, in any case, thousand years before the Vedic days. Some scholars think that Vedic civilization is the continuation of the Indus Valley Civilization. But the main problem of the historians in calculating/writing the past events is the lack of evidences. There are abundant archaeological evidences but no written documents for the Indus Valley Civilization. Those documents which are excavated and considered as written documents from the Indus area are yet to be deciphered. On contrary, for the early Vedic culture, written documents are available but no sufficient archaeological data. So the knowledge
about both is incomplete. The views of some prominent scholars in this field which are relevant for this study are being discussed here.

Eminent Indologist and Historian Thomas. R. Trautman13 considers the time of Indus Valley Civilization many centuries before the time of Vedas. He has taken the views of Philologists and Scientists to support his views. The process of radiocarbon testing has confirmed the period of Indus Valley Civilization in between 2600-1900 BCE for the urban phase. According to Philologists the language of Veda is clearly related to the language of ancient Iranians. Their oldest text Zend Avesta is dated to about 700 BCE. Trautman thinks that the language of Vedas cannot be very much earlier than that of Zend Avesta. 1000 or perhaps 1200 BCE must be an outer limit. According to him the coming of Aryans into India must have been prior to the composition of Rgveda which could not be much earlier than about 1500 BCE. He considers the time of Mitanni treatises to support his findings. The five Vedic gods: Indra, Varuna, Mitra and Nāsatyas are seen in Mitanni’s Boghaz-Keui record datable to c.1380 BCE. Linguists thus think the language of Veda cannot be much earlier than this date. Thus the date of Vedas cannot be placed before 1500 BCE.
Modern scholars like Romila Thapar\textsuperscript{14} consider the date of the composition of Vedic corpus from mid second millennium to the mid first millennium BCE. She has given a three-fold division for the period of Indus Valley Civilization to fix the date of Vedas.

i. Pre Harappan/Early Harappan- Late 4\textsuperscript{th} millennium and continuing to 2600 BCE.

ii. Mature Harappan - From c.2600 to 1900 BCE.

iii. Late Harappan - to c.1750 BCE.

According to Thapar\textsuperscript{15} the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilization happened in the 1\textsuperscript{st} quarter of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennium BCE. Vedic Sanskrit became popular only in the last centuries of the same millennium. If Aryan invasion theory is accepted and Aryans were considered to have attacked and conquered the Indus cities, then there must be some strong proof for such a great war. In fact, there is no satisfactory evidence to corroborate the argument of such conquests over Indus cities. She in this regard analyses the Hittite evidences also. In her opinion if the language of the Hittites/Mitannis were considered to be more archaic than Rgvedic Sanskrit the composition of Rgveda would date to a period


\textsuperscript{14} For a detailed analysis regarding these issues see Romila Thapar, \textit{Early India-From the Origins to AD 1300}, Penguin, London, 2002, p.80.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p.106f.
subsequent to the 14th century BCE. Even if both were of the same date Rgvedic language would not be earlier than 2nd millennium BCE. She also places the date of later Vedas to the 1st millennium BCE.

M.K. Dhavalikar16 analyses the date of Rgveda with the help of Archaeology. The Archaeological evidences of the iron and domesticated horse are taken as important features by him. Rgvedic word 'ayas' in his words means any metal which generally may be copper or bronze but not iron. Jaiminiyopanisad 11.90 refers to 'kṛṣṇāyas' for the first time.

Iron is supposed to have been introduced to India from Iran after the Achaemenid invasion in the 6th century BCE and later to 100 BCE only after the PGW (Painted Grey Ware) culture. Horse, which is illustrated as an inevitable animal in Rgveda is also absent in Indus culture. The animal frequently seen in Harappan seals is something like rhinoceros. If the Indus and Rgvedic cultures are the same the picture of horse should be depicted in their seals. Thus he placed Rgveda in between 2000-1500 BCE.

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Famous Indologist A.L. Basham\textsuperscript{17} also thinks that Rgvedic and Indus culture are different. No common features are present in both civilizations. He places the latest hymns of \textit{Rgveda} 500 years before the date of Buddha. He assigns the composition period of \textit{Rgveda} in between 1500-1000 BCE. According to him the later hymns and whole collections may have taken place a century or two later.

David Frawley\textsuperscript{16} also holds a similar view. He considers the date of Vedas from 1500-1000 BCE and fixes the composition period of \textit{Rgveda} before 1000 BCE. In his opinion Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads can be placed at the time of Buddha i.e. 6\textsuperscript{th} century BCE. R.S. Sharma\textsuperscript{15} an eminent historian, accepts 15\textsuperscript{th} century BCE as the date of Rgvedic hymns. According to him the 14\textsuperscript{th} century Mitanni treatises which contain the names of some deities seen in \textit{Rgveda} clearly shows that it cannot be much earlier than 15\textsuperscript{th} century BCE. Due to its geography and close similarity with \textit{Zend Avesta}, \textit{Rgveda} cannot be dated in isolation.

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\textsuperscript{17} A.L. Basham \textit{The Wonder that was India}, Surjeeth Publications, Delhi, 2007, p.31.
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Some scholars have a more ancient date for the composition of Vedas. Modern Greek and Vedic scholar Nicholas Kazanas\textsuperscript{20} dates back Vedas to pre-Harappan times. He enlists a number of evidences in support of his view. According to him the bulk of \textit{Rgveda} is composed in the 4\textsuperscript{th} millennium BCE. He accepts both archeological and linguistic methods for his study. The evidence of popular Harappan features like urbanization, iconography, use of brick (iṣṭakā), silver (rajata), rice (vṛihi), cotton (kārpāsa) etc. were totally absent in \textit{Rgveda}. But all these features are found in post \textit{Rgveda} texts like other Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas and fully in Sūtra literature. For these reasons he assigns the date of the bulk of \textit{Rgveda} before 3000 BCE-c.3200 BCE. He in his another article dates \textit{Rgveda} to c.3100 BCE.\textsuperscript{21}

A.C. Das\textsuperscript{22} accepts a more ancient date for Vedas. He fixes the date of Rgvedic culture to about 25,000 BCE by examining the arguments of previous scholars in this field. He believes that the Rgvedic culture had begun in Saptasindhu area at about 30,000 year ago. The date of \textit{Athravaveda} according to him is from 15,000 to 20,000 years. He quotes B.G. Tilak’s dating of \textit{Rgveda} about

\textsuperscript{22} For a detailed study see A.C. Das, \textit{Rgvedic Culture}, Mohit Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp.20-44.
4,500 BCE who fixed this date by examining the astronomical statements seen in Vedic scriptures. Tilak argued the date and noticed that the vernal equinox was in the constellation of Mrga or Orion at about 4,500 BCE and considers it be the date of composition of *Rgveda*.

From the above discussions it would be clear that there is no satisfactory argument to connect the date of *Rgveda* to the date of Indus Valley Civilization. The Indus Valley Civilization is certainly indigenous and there is no Archaeological evidence for an invasion into the Indus area from outside. *Rgveda* is considered to be the creation of Sanskrit speaking people known as Aryans who are not the descendants of any indigenous sect of people. Vedic hymns are the praises of Aryans to their gods/deities. Thus the possibility for the creation of Vedas outside India is an undisputed fact. And, this may be the reason for the absence of the continuance of Indus Valley features in *Rgveda*. Based on all this evidence, it may not be wide of the mark to state that the acceptable date of the composition of *Rgveda* is mid second millennium BCE.

**Aryan Problem**

There is a belief among scholars that Vedas of India are the creation of the so called 'Aryans' who invaded to India from
Central Asia. Some scholars believe that they belonged to a particular ethnic/racial group. Some others think that Aryan is not a race but a culture. Although the issues related with the race of Aryans and the history of their invasion are still a matter of dispute, the argument of the immigration of a section of people to India is firmly established by the linguistic evidence. Lack of archeological evidence in this respect is still causes controversy.

The word 'ārya' in Sanskrit means 'noble' or 'pure'. David Frawley\textsuperscript{23} opines that this positive sense is the reason behind its usage in Vedic literature. Thus the people with high minds and good hearts, spiritual values etc. are considered to be belonging to Aryan clan. It is thought to be a culture based upon the rule of the seers and men of spiritual realization. Thus a person of any spiritual culture is Ārya and that of any non-spiritual culture is Anārya. Buddha used the term 'ārya' along with Dharma, i.e. Ārya-Dharma. It suggests certainly that there was no racial connotation for the term Ārya in the time of Buddha\textsuperscript{24}

John Garret\textsuperscript{25} admits Aryan as a race. It has two branches, an eastern and a western. Eastern branch comprehends the

\textsuperscript{23} David Frawley, \textit{op.cit}, p.24.
\textsuperscript{24} According to Frawley, Aryan is the noble or evolved state of things, as such a beautiful tree is Aryan, order of the Cosmos is Aryan. David Frawley, \textit{op.cit}, p.24.
inhabitants of Armenia, Persia, Afghanistan and Hindustan. Western branch consists of the inhabitants of Europe except Turks, Magyars and Finns.

*The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines Aryans as a people, who in pre-historic times settled in Iran and northern India. It is from the language Aryan the Indo-European languages of South Asia are said to have descended. In the 19th century the term was used as a synonym for Indo-European and also more restrictively to refer to Indo-European languages.²⁶

Benjamin Walker considers Aryan as a family of people known as Indo-Europeans. According to him the word 'arya' means 'noble'. Aryans came from the steppes of Russia and central Asia at about 2000 BCE. One group branched into Europe to become the ancestors of Greeks and another spread through Asia Minor to Iran.²⁷

Scholars like V. Nagarajan²⁶ think that Aryans were not invaders or aliens but were the original inhabitants of the Indo-Gangetic plains and were mainly peasants. They were a class not a race. There are no archeological or literary evidence to prove that

they were invaders. **Indus Valley Civilization** according to him was a part of Vedic civilization and it survived the Sarasvati basin civilization.

Famous linguist M.A. Mehandale\(^2\) analysing the word Aryan seen in the compound Indo-Aryan observes that Indo-Aryan is a specific group of languages spoken in a large part of ancient India as distinguished from Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, where other languages of the Indo-European family are spoken. Mehandale thinks that 'Ārya' does not mean the speaker of these languages belonging to a particular race called 'Ārya'. It is a well known fact that the speakers of these languages today represent an admixture of races. The speakers who belonged to this language family in ancient India called themselves 'Ārya'. This may be the reason for designating the language as 'Indo-Aryan'.

Some others like Bhupendranath Dutta\(^3\) hold the view that the Vedic Aryans did not belong to a particular biotype. In the homeland of Indo-Aryan there existed diverse biotypes from remote antiquity. According to him, Ārya in the Vedic age had been the cultural name of the Indo-European language speaking people.

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in India. They belonged to a cultural ethnic group, and not to a race for there is no substantive proof for such a homogenous racial group.

Famous Historian and Archaeologist R.N. Sharma\textsuperscript{31} gives a brief description about the invaded peoples of India. In his view, the oldest race came to India was Negrito race. These people were not much civilized and did not know about the usage of stone and bone-made instruments, cultivation of land, building houses etc. The people now found in Andaman Islands have the features of the Negrito type. Following Negrito people Proto-Australoid race arrived in India. The people found in present central and south-east part of Indian subcontinent are of Proto-Australoid group. They include the other Indian tribes like Santal, Munda, Birhar, Asur, Korba, Coorg etc. Among them the Asur tribe is claimed to have connection with the Vedic Asuras. These people were more civilized than the Negrito group. They were aware about the cultivation of land with the help of pick-axe and to grow rice, bananas, coconut, brinjal, betel leaf, lemon, jamboo fruit, cotton and so on. It is them who brought to the Indian mind the belief in rebirth, various stories about the origin of creation, worshiping

\textsuperscript{31} R.N. Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p.1f
various creatures like crocodile, monkey, snakes and belief in Gaṇeśa and Vāsuki.32

The third main race that came to India after Proto-Australoids according to R.N. Sharma was the Dravidians or Mediterraneans. They brought new gods to India such as Śiva, Umā, Kārtikeya and Hanūmat. The new way of worshipping gods with idols by offering sweets, flowers, tree leaves and ringing bell etc. were introduced to India by these people. After Dravidians, Aryans arrived. R.N. Sharma has pointed out that Aryans married Dravidian women because of the low population ratio of women among them. Even if Aryans were not interested in worshipping Śivaliṅga, their Dravidian wives brought it into the Aryan society. Due to the influence of Dravidians the number of Aryan gods increased, and the practices of worshipping of plants and trees like tulsi, pipal, banyan etc. have crept into the Aryan pantheon.33

Romila Thapar34 thinks that the Indus cities had declined by the time of mid 2nd millennium BCE which affected the economic and administrative systems and resulted in rural settlement. Probably around this period the Indo-Aryan speakers entered the north-west part of India from Indo-Iranian borderlands. They were

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32 ibid.
33 ibid.
34 ibid.
migrating in small numbers through the passes in the north-western mountains and settled in northern parts of India. The frequent small scale migrations may have followed earlier pastoral circuits. The migrations may mainly have happened in search of pastures and arable land for keeping their cattle wealth. The textual sources suggest that the initial settlement were in the north-west parts and the plains of Punjab. Later, some groups moved to the Indo-Gangetic areas. Myths seen in Zend Avesta, point toward to this frequent migration from Iran to Indus area. This clearly is an indication of the need of land felt in the society due to the increase in human and animal numbers. The language used in Vedas which has close affinity with the central Asian Indo-European, particularly Old Iranian, supports the migration of some foreigners to India. The life of foreigners, who were having a different language, culture, religious beliefs etc. from that of the aboriginals is obviously reflected in Rgvedic hymns also. Thus it should be believed that there happened some migrations to ancient India from various places at different times. Consequently, there may have happened some conflicts and collaborations in between the foreigners and the aboriginals. Thus, it may reasonably be stated that these conflicts and interactions in

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84 Romila Thapar, op.cit, p.106f.
ancient Indian society caused to the emergence of a dominant mixed culture which later came to be identified as Aryan culture. It has already been noted earlier that the word 'Aryan' literally meant 'noble'. Thus the new culture that gained domination in the society gradually was identified as a noble culture. The people who followed this culture called themselves Aryans and who do not pursue them came to be called as non-Aryans. Obviously, there were many different sects in India during that period who could not have been absorbed into the Aryan culture. Vedic Literature calls them by the names Dāsas, Dasyus, Asuras, Rākṣasas, Paṇis etc. Consequently, the language spoken by Aryans attained highest position in the society.

Aryan and non-Aryan Tribes

Vedic hymns profusely refer to Aryan and non-Aryan (Anārya) people. Scholars widely accept that the people who composed Vedas belonged to the Aryan clan. It has already been discussed in the previous section that Aryan is admitted here not as a race but as a culture. In Rgveda the term 'ārya' occurs in 36 contexts. Reference to the people who are identified as the enemies of Vedic people such as Dāsas, Dasyus, Asuras, Rākṣasas,

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Panis etc. are found hundreds of different contexts in Rgvedic hymns. The common nature of the concept of the references to the above noted people in Rgveda is the rivalry towards them by the Vedic people. It noticeably reflects the religious schisms in the ancient Indian social structure.

**Five People of Rgveda**

It is difficult to distinguish the Aryan and non-Aryan people in Rgveda. It often refers to five tribes as pañcamānuṣah (Rgveda, VIII.9.2), pañcakṛṣṭayaḥ (Rgveda, III.2.10; III.53.16) and pañcakarṣayaḥ (Rgveda, V.86.2; VII.15.2; IX.101.9). According to D.D. Kosambi the usage of kṛṣṭayaḥ and karṣayaḥ are derived from the root 'kṛṣ' the meaning of which in later times is 'ploughing the land'. Some scholars think that the five tribes known as pañcajanaḥ or pañcakṛṣṭayaḥ belonged to the Aryan class. The term 'kṛṣṭi' derived from 'kṛṣ' means to cultivate the land. H.H. Wilson in his translation of Rgveda, II.2.10 has given the meaning 'men' to 'kṛṣṭi'. The commentator Śāyaṇa explained the five tribes are the people who belonged to the four castes and Niśādas. But this interpretation seems to be of very later origin.

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39 In the commentary of Saṅkara on Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad he has explained that the term 'pañcajanas' includes the peoples such as the Gandharvas, fore-fathers, gods,
and thus pañcakṛṣṭayah only meant the five men or five people. Certainly it won’t be the four castes and Niśādas because there were no references to caste system in the early period of Ṛgveda. The compound ‘pañcajana’ (I.117.3) also indicates the sense of five tribal groups who have some common features. The tribes Anus, Druhyus, Yadus, Turvaśas, Tr̥tsus, Pūrus, and Bharatas which are frequently mentioned in Ṛgveda are considered to be representatives of the five tribes. A.C. Das\textsuperscript{40} considers Yadus and Turvaśas are in one tribal group of Tr̥tsus and Bharatas. But, scholars like D.P. Saxena\textsuperscript{41} and R.N. Dandekar\textsuperscript{42} point out that the five tribes are Anus, Druhyus, Pūrus, Turvaśas and Yadus.

**War among Ten Kings**

Ṛgveda incessantly refers to the persistent quarrel among the different tribal groups. Sometimes these quarrels were due to the personal or tribal jealousies or some other times as a powerful leader of one tribe cherished the ambition of extending his domain over the neighboring places. R.S. Sharma\textsuperscript{43} opines that war in a predominantly tribal society of Ṛgveda was a logical and natural

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\textsuperscript{40} A.C. Das, *op.cit.*, pp.45-49.

\textsuperscript{41} D.P. Saxena, *op.cit.*, p.42.


\textsuperscript{43} Refer to R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Macmillan, Delhi, 2000, p.38.
economic function. He also observes the process of man hunting was the logical extension of animal hunting. Dāśarājña war seen in Rgveda is considered to be the earliest recorded event in history. U.C. Sharma,\textsuperscript{44} who has done a detailed research about the Dāśarājña war, considers that the war took place at such a time when the Indo-Aryan settlers have already been established and have already their roots spread in the soil of ancient India. The narration of Dāśarājña war can be seen in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 7\textsuperscript{th} Mandalas of Rgveda which are attributed to the seer-ship of Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha respectively. The war is considered to be the most ancient of the recorded wars fought on earth in general and in India in particular. The fight has taken place between the forces of the Tṛṣṇa-Bharatas on one side and more than ten confederate tribes on the other side. The figure ten in the word is round and approximate and it actually meant many more than that. The leader of Bharatas was Sudās Paijavana who won the war. Romila Thapar\textsuperscript{45} opines that the conflict arose from several reasons such as stealing cattle, dispute over grazing grounds, controlling the river water etc. Families or clans of that time often owned herds but the pastures used were common for all. The rapid increase of livestock could only be achieved through a raid or conflict.

\textsuperscript{44} U.C. Sharma, \textit{op.cit}, p.17.
\textsuperscript{45} Romila Thapar, \textit{op.cit}, p.44.
The fertility of soil, abundance of water, regularity of seasons and bright sun-shine are some ecological factors which prompted the immigrants to settle down in India. The approximate regions where the earliest settlements had happened are Afghanistan, North-West parts of India, Western Punjab etc. Their tribal organization slowly came to be transformed into territorial states. Early five Aryan settlements in Saptak-Sindhu region are Pūrus, Anus, Druhyus, Turvaśas and Yadus. There were also a few non-Aryan settlements side by side with the Aryan settlements. The second wave of Aryan immigration according to Dandekar was of Bharatas. They were under the leadership of Sudās. He wished to defeat the earliest Aryan settlements as well as the indigenous non-Aryan principalities under his control.

Priests and the Tribes in Rgveda

Purohitas (priests) played an important and inevitable role in the socio-political organization of early Vedic period. Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha played a leading part for the victory of Sudās in Rgveda. In the initial stage Bharadvāja was the Purohita of Bharatas. However, while advancing into the Saptak-Sindhu area Viśvāmitra had taken the place of Bharadvāja. In that time Vasiṣṭha was the Purohita of Tṛśus and he was the most influential person

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in the Tratsu clan. Sudās wished Vasiṣṭha to be the priest of Bharatas. He believed that under the priesthood of Vasiṣṭha he can defeat other tribal groups and fulfill his aim. For that Viśvāmitra was replaced by Vasiṣṭha by the bold stroke of diplomacy created by Sudās. Furious Viśvāmitra went over to Pañcajanas and became their priest.

Bharatas and Trtsus led by Sudās and Vasiṣṭha on one side and more than ten kings presumably under the leadership of Bheda and Viśvāmitra as their Purohita on the other side fought each other. The War seems to have comprised two notable battles, one at the Paruṣni or Rāvi river-side and the other on the bank of the Yamunā. These evidences mark the boundaries of Sarasvati river region. The capital of Sudās might have been somewhere near to the Sarasvati. Thus modern Haryana and Punjab in India, the eastern part of the west Punjab in Pakistan were probably the war place. With the help of Vasiṣṭha’s brilliant priest-craft and under the benign behest of the Aryan war-god

47 There are many tribes and persons who took an active part directly and indirectly on both sides in the battle. Bharatas, Trtsus, Indra and Vasiṣṭha as their Purohita under the leadership of Sudās assembled on one side and became victorious in the Daśarājña War. The names of persons and tribes who fought against Sudās are Anus, Druhyu, Puru, Turvaśas, Yadus, Ajas, Ainas, Bhatañas, Bhargus, Kavaśa, Kavi Cāyamanas, Matisyas, Pākhas, Pratṛds, Purukutsa, Śigrus, Śimyus, Śivas, Vaiśakas, Vaiśanta, Vaiśānivas, Krivis, Yaksus and Pañcafas were presumably under the leadership of Bheda and Viśvāmitra’s priesthood. For a detailed study regarding the Daśarājña War see *Ibid.*, p.17 if and also see the Appendix of the same book.
Indra, Sudās became victorious in the war. Dandekar\textsuperscript{49} believes that it was after the name of those victorious Bharata people, the land of India came to be known as Bhāratavarṣa. This event is considered to be the many versions of the traditional rivalry between the families of the great seers Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra.

**Different Ethnic Groups in *Rgveda***

D.P. Saxena\textsuperscript{50} in his book *Regional Geography of Vedic India* has given a brief sketch of the regional distribution of Vedic tribes both Aryan and non-Aryan. He differentiates the Aryans and non-Aryans on the basis of some references seen in Rgvedic hymns. He thinks that the Aryans distinguished themselves from others based on the colour of skin and nasal index i.e. short nose of the non-Aryans. The cultural differences of both people are also pointed out by him. The non-Aryan Dasyus\textsuperscript{51} were regarded in *Rgveda* as 'akarman\textsuperscript{52} (riteless), 'adevyu\textsuperscript{53} (indifferent to the gods), 'abraham\textsuperscript{54} (without devotion), 'ayajvan\textsuperscript{55} (non-sacrificing), 'avrata\textsuperscript{56} (lawless), 'mṛdhra-vāc\textsuperscript{57} (unintelligible or hostile

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., See Appendix, p.56
\textsuperscript{50} D.P. Saxena *op.cit.*, pp.31-68.
\textsuperscript{51} A detailed study regarding the non-Vedic Dasyus is discussed in the third Chapter of the present study. See below p.74-77.
\textsuperscript{52} *Rgveda*, X.22.8.
\textsuperscript{53} *Rgveda*, VIII.70.11.
\textsuperscript{54} *Rgveda*, IV.16.9.
\textsuperscript{55} *Rgveda*, VIII.70.11.
\textsuperscript{56} *Rgveda*, 1.51.8; 1.175.3
\textsuperscript{57} *Rgveda*, V.29.10.
speaker) and 'śiśna-deva' (worshippers of a phallus deity). These cultural differences also caused the frequent conflict amongst the Aryan and Non-Aryan people.

Some scholars consider all the tribes in Vedas as belonging to one clan i.e. 'Aryan'. They are of opinion that difference in beliefs and practices different sections of them caused conflicts amongst them.

The Aryan tribes according to him are Anus, Druhyus, Yadus, Turvasas, Purus, Bharatas, Tirsus, Krivis, Pancalas [a fusion of Krivis], Kikatas, Cedis, Mutsyas, Ajas, Yakshus, Sigrus, Prthus, Visanins, Sivas, Alinas, Pakthas, Bhalanasas, Srijayas etc. The

58 *Rgveda* VII.21.5: X.99.3.
59 The geographical classification of Vedic tribes according to D.P. Saxena is:

**Aryan Tribes**

Tribes of Trans-Himalayan region- Uttara Kura, Uttara Madra.
1. Tribes of North Western Hills- Alinas, Bhalanas, Pakthas, Visanins, Gandharas.
2. Tribes of Himalayan region-Mujavan, Mujivants, Arjikas, Mahavrvas, Sivas, Bahikas.
3. Tribes of Sindhu basin- Yadus, Turvasas, Anus, Druhyus, Krivis.
4. Tribes of the Sarasvati basin- Bharatas, Tirsus, Phurus, Kurus.
5. Tribes of the Gangā basin- Panchalas, Usinaras, Varshas, Kasis, Kosalas, Videohas.

**Non-Aryan Tribes**

2. Tribes of the Trans-Vindhyan uplands- Satvants, Pulindas, Avantis.
3. Western Tribes- Sindhu-Sauvirs, Saurastras.

The names of the tribes here include both of the early Vedic and later Vedic periods. Most of the tribes referred to under the title of Vedic tribes belonged to Aryan tribes. In fact the details available about the non-Aryan tribes are very few. The area inhabited by a tribe was probably called after the name of that tribe and ruled by a tribal leader or a king. See D.P. Saxena. *op.cit.*, pp.31-68. The Yakṣas in the above mentioned list are closely related with the Rāksasas. In the time of Epics and Puranas Yakṣas and Rāksasas were said to be originated from a common ancestor.
people though belonged to the Aryan clan inherited a different culture and civilization, are also considered as the enemies by the prominent section of Aryans. They according to A.C. Das, include Śiśnadevas (phallic-worshippers), Vṛtras (serpent-worshippers) Kṛtvyas, Ārjikas, Kṛṣṇas etc.\(^1\)

The people who are mentioned under the group of Aryan and Non-Aryan apparently are the followers of two different cultures. This is the criteria of scholars in classifying them into separate groups. The division of Vedic people into Aryan and Non-Aryan is still a matter of dispute. Vedic hymns clearly attest to the existence of different cultured people. However, the difference is thought to be cultural and not racial. The details regarding the enemies of the Vedic people who inherited a different life and culture is few in Vedas. But, there are references within the Vedic texts which give valuable information regarding the cultural as well as religious differences among them.

**Hypothesis on the Concept of Asuras and Rākṣasas and the Related Categories**

Vedas and Purāṇas are invaluable sources which contain a vast amount of mythical accounts of ancient India. Almost all

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\(^1\) A.C. Das *op.cit.* pp.160-170.

\(^2\) Śiśnadevas, Vṛtras and Kṛṣṇas in the hymns of *Ṛgveda* are mentioned as the non-believers of Vedic cult and its practices. These issues are discussed in the Third
events and thoughts in Vedas and Purāṇas are narrated with a mythical undertone. The myths of Asura and Rakṣas (or Rākṣasa) dealt with in Vedic and Puranic literature\textsuperscript{52} bear unique position in the myths of early India.

Being the first literary composition, the oldest reference to Asura and Rākṣasa can be found in Rgveda itself. In Vedas both Asura and Rākṣasa were not considered as evil-beings. By the period of Puranic literature they have been described as representing evil forces. A perusal of the early Vedic literature would make it clear that both the categories of Asura and Rākṣasa are denoting particular sect of people or ethnic groups.

The very meaning of the term 'asura' and the concept regarding Asura has undergone a sea change while it is coming to Puranic and Classical literature from Vedic age. The meaning of the term 'asura' which was used as an adjective, in the sense of 'lord', for the Rgvedic deities such as Varuṇa, Agni, Indra etc. shifted into the sense of 'enemy' by the period of Purāṇas. At the same time, there are many references in Rgveda to support the view that Asuras are separate ethnic groups who were following different
culture and beliefs other than that of the Vedic religion. No reference to the identical relationship of Asuras and Rakṣases is found in Rgveda. But the engagements of Rakṣas in Rgveda have close affinity with the later concept of Asura as an anti-social group of being. There Rakṣases are presented as the disbelievers of Vedic sacrifices. Primary evidences lead one to believe that in Vedas Asura and Rākṣasa are referred to as particular sects. But in later literature they are depicted as evil beings that are in permanent antagonism with Devas (divine beings). These modulations, it can reasonably be assumed, happened due to the social and cultural changes occurred in ancient Indian life and culture. There may have some equations related with the political hegemony and the issue of economic control that brought new changes in the social strata. The present study tries to address these issues from an inter-disciplinary point of view.

The degradation in the concept of Asura can be read in Rgvedic references itself. Rgveda contains references to certain other categories that shed light in the analysis of Asura and Rākṣasa concepts. The categories of Dāsas, Dasyus, Paṇīs etc. can also be added into the group of Asuras and Rākṣasas as they also are described as some different ethnic groups in Vedas. There is
mention about the settlements of these people in Vedas. They are described in Vedas as wealthy landlords and the owners of fortresses. From the Vedic hymns it is evident that the Vedic people were constantly trying to take away the wealth of their enemies with the help of Indra, Agni and others. In Anthropological view Asuras, Rāķṣasas, Dāsas, Dasyus, Paṇīs etc. were indigenous people who were subdued by the mainstream Vedic culture. It may be noticed that in later Vedic literature Dāsa, Dasyu and Paṇīs are absorbed into the group of Asuras and Rāķṣasas. In later literature, the concepts regarding Asuras and Rāķṣasas became popular and they represented evil forces. The present study is based on this standpoint.

**Approach of the Study**

The study presupposes that, the mythical accounts related to Asura and Rāķṣasa studied with the help of the tools provided by Anthropology would be more helpful to sort out the real nature of the categories behind them and it surely will make the understanding of India's ancient past more vivid. Thus this study is designed as an investigation into the various issues related with the development of ancient Indian thought and culture through the ages.

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88 The origin and development of the term Asura will be discussed in detail in the
More mythifications and exaggerations are added into the concept of Asura and Rākṣasa while it is coming to the period of Purāṇa literature. An in-depth investigation into the matters connected with these concepts would give more information about the cultural as well as the political past of the ancient Indian social history.