Chapter Three

Implications of the Myths
Related to Asuras and Rākṣasas
The present chapter is devoted to discuss the ideas behind the mythical concepts related with Asura and Rākṣasa in Vedas. The meaning of the mythical accounts that depict the engagements of Dāsas, Dasyus, Paṇis etc. in Vedas can add some information in understanding the development of the concept of Asura and Rākṣasa to certain extent. Hence, a discussion with regard to this aspect also has been made therewith.

The references to the fortress of Dāsa leaders and the wealth of Paṇis etc. can be taken as evidence to the fact that they were highly civilized than the Vedic people who called themselves Aryans. The Dāsas, Paṇis etc. appear there as having different culture and beliefs. Some of the hymns in Rgveda mention these people as wealthy landlords. In some other hymns the deities Indra, Agni etc. are asked to destroy their abodes and to take away their wealth. These stories explicate a clear picture of domination of a new culture over the indigenous culture.

Dāsas and Dasyus in Vedas

Rgveda mentions some characters named Dāsas and Dasyus. These people are illustrated there as the enemies of Vedic people
since they opposed the sacrificial cult of Veda. Dāsas are closely related with Dasyus than Rakṣases and Asuras in Rgveda.

The stories related with the leaders of Dāsa and Dasyu present a comprehensible picture regarding the cultural past of ancient India. The very term Dāsa in the later period denotes slaves. But, Dāsa in Rgveda conveys an entirely different sense. Scholars like Alfred Hillebrandt¹ opine that Dāsa was a proper name in early days and later on attained the meaning of enemy or slave. He analyzes the component word Dāsa in Divodāsa who was a prominent Rgvedic king. It never meant an enemy or slave. He translates the meaning of Divodāsa as 'heavenly Dāsa'.²

R.S. Sharma is of opinion that the Rgvedic Dāsas and Dasyus were two different categories of people. He tries to relate the Rgvedic Dāsas with the Iranian Daha people, a Scythian tribe, belonged to the Indo-Aryan stock. In his opinion the Dasyus and Rakṣases were two pre-Aryan peoples. He analyses the association of Dāsa along with viś

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¹ More details can be gathered from Alfred Hillebrandt Vedic Mythology Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1990, p.339f.
² Hillebrandt considers the term Dāsa as a proper name which receives a honorific prefix in the genitive divas and gets the meaning of Heavenly Dāsa for Divodāsa. In his opinion the meaning of Dāsa in early Vedic period never attained the connotation of servant or slave. See Ibid.
which means tribe. The following pages of the present chapter will discuss about the ethnical identity of Dāsas and Dasyus and related categories in detail.

**Fortresses of Dāsas: *Ṛgveda***

Dāsas in *Ṛgveda* are described as the owners of fortresses and also wealthy landlords. Šambara, Pipru, Cumuri, Dhuni, Varcin etc. are prominent among Dāsas. The fortresses of Dāsas mentioned in *Ṛgveda* may be some strong holds that tempted the foreigners. *Ṛgveda* does frequent mention of the destruction of the fortresses of Dāsa leaders by the Vedic deities. Indra is the chief opponent of Dāsas in *Ṛgveda*. The hymns IV.32.10 and II.20.7 describe the destruction of the fortresses of Dāsas by Indra. One hymn reads:

![Hymn Text]

Here Indra is described as the destroyer of the cities of Dāsas. Dāśī, the feminine form of Dāsa is also seen in this hymn. The Dāśīs are said to be the carriers of black race in their wombs. The term

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5 R.S. Sharma, *Šûdras in Ancient India*, p.10ff and also p.25ff.
'krṣṇayonirdāsīrairayadvi' in the above hymn is interpreted by Śāyāna⁴ as 'low-caste Asura armies that disturb sacrifice'. Krṣṇayonīḥ is rendered as 'nikṛṣṭjāṭih' and Dāśī as 'upakṣapayītrī' or 'āsurisenāḥ'. Krṣṇayonīḥ is again interpreted as the pregnant wives of an Asura named Krṣna.⁵ The term 'Dāśī' is explained as the female member of Asura class, more specifically, the pregnant wife of an Asura named Krṣna. Wilson⁶ considers the term Krṣna in the sense of black. Scholars like Jyotish Nath⁷ explain the term as Dāsa people of dark complexion. But the interpretation 'Black skinned Dāsas' is doubtful.

The reference to Dāsas and Pānis as the speakers of different languages is available in Rgveda:

र्गो होन्दवस्ये विवाचो
हुन्ते चर्षणव: पुरुसालोऽ।
तो विविषिनुवं पर्शिजायस्वतंस्त्रेत:।
स्वतेत इस्मिनतां वाजामय।। Rgveda, VI.33.2.

Here the term 'vivāca' gives some inkling to the language of people spoken in the age of Rgveda. This term is intended to refer to Dāsa

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⁵ In Rgveda I.101.1 the term 'krṣṇatvacā' appears. There the meaning interpreted by Śāyāna is the pregnant wives of Krṣṇa. According to Śāyāna, Krṣṇa is the other name of Vṛtra. The interpretation of Śāyāna seems to be mythicised. Vṛtra and Krṣṇa are considered as two powerful Asuras in Rgvedic days. This reference is an important indication to the racial identity of the people of that time. The interpretation of Śāyāna on the term 'krṣṇatvacā' as the pregnant wives of Krṣṇatvacā can be taken as a reference to the race.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ See Jyotish Nath, op.cit, p.22.
and Panî and explains the differences of their speech. According to Śāyāna,\(^8\) 'vivāca' means 'vividhastutirūpā vāco yeṣāṁ' i.e. 'of various speeches that include many kind of praise'. The association of Dāsa with Panî indicates that they were considered in the same category of beings in that time. This might be due to their common stance against the Vedic pantheon.

In one place there is a mention of the wives of Dāsa:

\[\text{दासपत्नीहिंगोँ अलिहं-}\
\text{श्रियोऽपेषा पण्डिपेव गायः}\
\text{अपं बिलमिपिहित यदासोद}\
\text{वृंदः ज्ञातरः अप तह्वार।} \textit{Rgveda, I.32.11.}\]

In this hymn, Indra is praised as the destroyer of the wives of Dāsas. The term Dāsa here stands for Vṛtra who blocked the water. Śāyāna\(^5\) explains the term Dāsapatni in the above hymn like this: वधो विशोषप्रणमेनृत्र श्रियोऽपेषा पण्डिपेव गायः अपं बिलमिपिहित यदासोद अलिहं गोँ रक्षको यासोऽत।\(^9\)

Thus from this explanation Dāsapatni can plainly be understood as the wife of Dāsa.

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\(^1\) Refer to \textit{Rgveda Samhita}, Vo. II, \textit{op. cit.}, p.71.

\(^2\) See the \textit{Rgveda} translation of Max Müller, Vo. I, p.170. It is also explained that 'Ahi' means 'Vṛtra'. Thus the entities behind these terms can be considered as identical.

\(^3\) Dāsa here refers to Vṛtra. It is explained in the above hymn that Indra slew Vṛtra and reopened the outlet of water which had been closed. Hale thinks that this may be a way of saying in mythological terminology that Dāsas built dams which Indra smashed. Refer to W.E. Hale \textit{op.cit.}, p.167. It has already been mentioned the root-meaning of the 'vṛ' is 'to cover' in the context of the discussion of \textit{Varna}. See p.48 of the present study for more details. The term Vṛtra is derived from the root 'vṛ'. From the root meaning Vṛtra may be considered as a coverer i.e. one who covers things. In the context of \textit{Rgveda}, I.32.11 Vṛtra is explained as he covered (closed) the outlet of the flowing water.
Another hymn reads:

वि सूर्यो मये अगुचन्त्र दिवो
बिलहरसाय प्रतिमामाये।
हृदर्द्वादशप्रसूत्र समायत
हनव्रे व्याप्यत्तस्वरूपः ऋगविधम॥ ॥ Rgveda, X.138.3.

This hymn is addressed to Indra in the form of praise. The term Dāsa stands for the people who are the enemies of Rjīśvan. Indra is qualified by the word Arya here. He is praised here for he destroyed the strongholds of Asura Pipru who is associated with Rjīśvan. Pipru is referred to here as the possessor of māyā. But Śāyana does not give any explanation to this matter. It seems that the term māyin is used for Asura Pipru to indicate his power. Description of Vedic people as destroying the abodes of their enemies is a common theme in Vedic hymns. Here also the reference to the association of Asura with Dāsa as the enemies of Vedic people, gives the idea of commonness of these ethnic groups.

Dāsas along with Aryans

The references to the Dāsa leaders of Rgveda shed light on the social and cultural conditions of ancient India. The mention of Dāsas along with the hostile Aryans is collectively considered as the
enemies of Vedic people in certain hymns of Rgveda. These references
give a clear picture that both were separate groups of people. Dāsas
and Aryans in Rgveda are said to have concealed the wealth of
peoples;

दस्यां विश्वा आयो
चास: शेतोष्णया अरि:
निरस्तिः द्रामेव पवित्रिबि
तुष्येत् सो अन्ध्याम रथोऽ।। Rgveda, VIII.51.9.
This hymn also tells that the enemies of Indra include Āryas and
Dāsas. This leads to the assumption that Vedic people were in enmity
with the people of their own stock as well as other ethnic groups.

Another hymn reads;

आ संवहतमिन्द ज: स्वसित
सतुरुष्यस्य बुद्धिमुद्राम्
ज्ञश्च दासान्वायं गुर्गा
करो वद्र्ज्ञसुनुस्का नाहृष्णागि।। Rgveda, VI.22.10.
This hymn is addressed to Indra. Indra is praised here to overcome
his human enemies. Human enemies of Indra mentioned here include
both the Āryas and Dāsas.

The same idea is available in another hymn also, which reads:

अनाचर्यां निचांसितो
वद्र्ज्ञमिन्द्रिविवास्तः।।
चास्य व: मधयकत्वार्य
वा सन्तत्वंवतव वथम्।। Rgveda, X.102.3.
Here Indra is asked to destroy the weapon of Āryas and Dāsas. The consideration of Āryas and Dāsas in the same group may be a result of the contextually inevitable cultural contact between both people. The rivalry amongst the different sections of Vedic people may also be the reason for the depiction of hostile Āryas in these verses.

In *Rgveda* VII.83.1, Indra and Varuna are asked to slay the Dāsas and the hostile Āryas. They were also praised to do favour to the king Sudās with protection. A similar reference is seen in VI.22.10. There Indra is asked to destroy Dāsas and also the Aryan antagonists. The same hymn mentions of an ethnic group named Nāhuṣ. Jyotish Nath\(^\text{11}\) considers them as an agrarian people known after their king of the same name. It may be observed here on the basis of these references, that there were hostile groups among the Vedic followers themselves, and this is gleaned in the description of the hostile Aryans.

Dāsas, as is obvious from the citations made above are a group of people who were against the Vedic religion. There is reference to mythical Dāsas also. A hymn depicts it as follows;

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\(^{11}\) *Rgveda Samhitā*, edited by H.H. Wilson, Vol. II, p.23. Nāhuṣ people are said to be having great wealth and power in *Rgveda*, VI.46.7. There they were denoted by the word krṣṭi which clearly indicates the ethnicity of those people.
Indra is described as attacking a Dāsa here. The Dāsa in this verse seems to be loud shouting, six eyed and three headed. The name Trita seems to be of a Dāsa.

**Non-Vedic Dasyus**

Dasyus are another group of people who repeatedly appear in *Rgveda*. They, like the Dāsas were the antagonists of the sacrificial cult of Vedas. Dasyus were perhaps the most bitter enemies of Āryas than Dāsas. There is a large number of references regarding the nature of beliefs and culture of Dasyus in *Rgveda*. Dasyus are called as abrahaman, mayāvat, ayajña-s, anyavrata-s, akratu-s etc. by the Rgvedic poets. These abuses are significant as they point towards the difference in cultural practices and social customs. The cultural conflict between Dasyus and Vedic people is obtained in the following hymn;

अकर्मों दस्युत्कघो नो
अमन्नुर्वन्यबलो अमानुषः

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12 Refer to R.S. Sharma *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, op.cit, p.37.
Dasyus are mentioned here as non-human beings having no rites, indifferent to the Vedic people, and following different food-habits. Here the portrayal of Dasyus as non-human beings apparently is an exaggerated narrative. It is very much clear from other contacts that Dasyus were a different class of people who followed their own beliefs and practices that are different from that of the highly ritualistic Vedic people. The reason for depicting them as non-human beings must be the enmity of the Vedic people towards them. This is a state of mind of the dominant culture towards the people whom they view with a hostile look. In this hymn, Dasyu is identified with Dāsa. The usage of Dāsa for Dasyu indicates that Dasyu was a person of low grade in comparison to his settled conquerors.\(^{13}\) R.S. Sharma,\(^{14}\) based on this hymn, explains that Dasyus are treacherous people who do not practice the Aryan observances and are treated hardly human by the Vedic people.

Dasyus are referred to as neglecters of sacrifices in:

\[वर्योऽहि दश्यु बनिन् घननः\]  

\(^{13}\) See Jyotish Nath, op.cit, p.50.  
It is described in this hymn that Indra has defeated the wealthy Dasyu with the help of Maruts. The Dasyu here intended to be Vṛtra and the term symbolically denotes the uncivilized tribes of India.\(^{15}\) The name Sanakas mentioned here is explained by Sāyana\(^{16}\) as 'the followers of Vṛtra'. They are referred to as 'ayavans' (non-sacrificers) i.e. those who do not follow the sacrificial cult of Vedas. Another hymn specifically mentions Dasyus as ayavānah and adhamas indirectly.\(^{17}\)

Further Dasyus are mentioned as 'avratas' in:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{तत्त क्षिति स्वात्मी} & \\
\text{चोरवो मन्नो रथन्} & \\
\text{सहानादस्यन्यक्षमोः} & \\
\text{पत्र्व न शाविषा} & \quad \text{Rgveda, I.175.3.}
\end{align*}
\]

This hymn is addressed to Indra. He is asked to consume the irreligious Dasyus as a wooden vessel is burnt by fire. Thus, here

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\(^{15}\) In \textit{Rgveda} the word Vṛtra can be found in different senses. Vṛtra is described as an Asura in \textit{Rgveda} II.30.2, enemy in VII.19.4. In some other places Vṛtra is identified with the term Ahi i.e. cloud. In \textit{Nighatnī}, I.10 the term Vṛtra appears as the synonym of cloud (Megha). In the above mentioned hymn (\textit{Rgveda}, I.33.4) the interpretation of Sāyana for Sanakas as the followers of Vṛtra in the context of Dasyu reminds the commonness of these people who opposed the Vedic cult. Thus from these references Vṛtra can be taken as a symbolic name denoting a group of people who were against the Vedic faith. The references to the conflict of Indra with Vṛtra can be taken in support of this idea.

\(^{16}\) \textit{Rgveda Sanhitā}, Vol. I, p.84f.

\(^{17}\) \textit{प्रवरतेऽऽः स्वात्मित्वा सकालतः सकाळनात} \\
\textit{प्र पश्चिमी शेरीर वसालय निरक्तत्व अथवा शोभयः} \quad \text{Rgveda, I.33.5.}
Indra is asked to kill the Dasyus. The strong religious as well as ritualistic rivalry of Vedic people towards their enemies who do not follow them is very much evident from these references.

The word varṣa in *Rgveda* is variously interpreted by different scholars. In *Rgveda* the use of the term varṇa along with Dasyus is a significant context to be related with the above argument;

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

This hymn addressed to Indra describes him as the protector of Āryavarṇa, by killing the Dasyus. Sāyanā interprets Āryavarṇa as uttamavarṇa which means the best tribe or order. He further explains that the term Āryavarṇa collectively indicates the people who belong to the first three classes. Ragozin considers this reference to the difference in colour as the first trace of the beginnings of caste distinction. But this explanation to caste system cannot be taken as authentic as the custom was unfamiliar in the time of *Rgveda*.

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18 A discussion regarding the word varṇa in *Rgveda* has been made in the Second chapter of the present study. See p.11f.
Indra is asked to discriminate Dasyus and Aryans in *Rgveda*. One hymn reads:

वि जोमीहिनायणे च दसगे
वाहिनेतं र्त्थया शासुद्रवतान्।
शाको भव चन्द्रानात्य चोदिता
विस्वेत्ता ते सहमादेषु वाकन।। *Rgveda*, I.51.8.

In this hymn Indra is asked to discriminate between the sacrificing Aryas and the non-sacrificing Dasyus. Dasyus are mentioned here as the people who do not perform religious rites. The poet offers Indra ceremonies that give him satisfaction. The poet also wishes Indra to compel the Dasyus to submit to the performer of sacrifices. In the explanation of this hymn H.H. Wilson\(^2\) described the Dasyus as the uncivilized tribes of ancient India who do not follow religious ceremonies and are subdued by the followers of Vedas. These people are also described as inimical to the people who follow such religious practices.

In *Rgveda*, a hymn refers to the killing of Dasyus by the Vedic deities:

तं मायाभिप्रय मायिनेत्यमः
स्वाधिविषेयों अधि शुभावजयक्त।
तं पित्प्रूप्तिमण: प्रातः पुरः

Here Indra is praised for destroying the fortresses of Pipru and also protecting the Rjiśvān by killing the Dasyus.

R.S. Sharma\textsuperscript{22} is of opinion that although the references to the killing of individual Dāsas occur in \textit{Rgveda} there is no mention of Dāsahatya anywhere, whereas Dasyuhatya occurs therein. He views that the Aryans followed a policy of ruthless extermination towards Dasyus, which in the case of Dāsas was tempered with \textit{moderation}.

In one place \textit{Vṛtra} is said to be a Dasyu;

\begin{quote}
एवं दिनः सूचव ऋष्या
असूरी अनूपोऽविशिष्टा संवा।
एवं हि जातो असमाल्योऽः
पुरुष कृता हनिता नि दस्याः। \textit{Rgveda}, VI.29.6.
\end{quote}

Indra is asked to destroy the opposing enemies here. This hymn presents \textit{Vṛtra} as a Dasyu. He is also called an \textit{Asura} in \textit{Rgveda} itself. So Asura and Dasyu appear again as synonyms.

\textit{Śambara} in \textit{Rgveda} is described a Dasyu leader who is having hundred cities;

\begin{quote}
तवं सतात्यत्व शम्बरस्य पुरो जपयोक्तीनि दस्याः।
अशिष्टो यत्र शाच्या शाचीया दिवोधायय सुन्निते सुत्रोऽभ्रायान्त गृहणे कस्यनि। \textit{Rgveda}, VI.31.4.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22} R.S. Sharma, \textit{Śūdras in Ancient India}, op.cit., p.11.
Here Indra is said to have destroyed the hundred impregnable cities of Šambara. Indra is mentioned here as the giver of riches upon Divodāsa who had presented libations to him and Bharadvāja who praised him with hymns. Divodāsa is mentioned here as performing libations to Indra. According to Sāyana23 Dasyu Šambara is more styled an Asura. Thus in this context too Asura and Dasyu are used as synonyms.

Pipru also is said to be a Dasyu in:

लन्न माषाभिरण वानिनोऽक्षेत्रः
रवभुवितं अर्थ शुमावज्जितः।
लन्न पितानुभुमयां प्रारूपः पुरः।
prasūnānaṃ dasyuḥसयेवविष। Rgveda, I.51.5.

Pipru is mentioned also as an Asura as well as Dāsa in Rgveda itself. Indra is mentioned as the destroyer of the cities of Pipru who is a Dasyu, and also the defender of Rjiśvān. The indirect mention of Kuyava, a Dasyu leader, is seen in the following hymn:

प्रति बत्त्या श्रीवाको दशस्योः
रोको नाध्या बदन्ति जानती गात्।
अथ समानो महवञ्चक्कातिदित्मा
नो मवेश विषयो परा दा। Rgveda, I.104.5.

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23Ibid., Vol. II, p.69.
The first half of this hymn indirectly describes that it is Saramā who finds the hiding place of the Dasyus. Wilson translates this incident as a cow knows her residing place. The mention of Kuyava does not occur in this hymn. But Śāyana while commenting on this hymn explains Kuyava as one of the chief of the barbarians i.e. of Dasyus.

It may thus be said that the terms Dāsa and Dasyu sometimes appear as identical in Rgveda. The leaders who are described as Dāsas are also mentioned as Dasyus in Rgveda itself. Pipru and Śambara of Rgveda were prominent leaders who were identified as Dāsas and Dasyus. In some other places they are considered also as Asuras. These references clearly promulgate the identical nature of the people referred to by these terms in the time of Rgveda.

Settlements of Dasyus

As in the case of Dāsas, there are references to the settlements of Dasyus in Rgveda. Dasyus are described in Rgveda as the owners of cities. One hymn says;

\[ \text{तस्मै त्वस्य मनु दायिः} \]

24 Hale follows Geldner for the translation of this hymn. Refer to W.E. Hale, op.cit, p.154.
26 Ibid.
Here Indra is described as getting vigour by the oblations of his worshippers. He is also praised as a person who causes rain with the help of his thunderbolt in his hands. With the help of his weapon he had destroyed the cities of Dasyus made of metal. The term 'ayas' which stands for metal in this hymn indicates copper and not iron as is popular in later ages. There is no archaeological evidence for iron in Rgvedic age. So it may be inferred that the cities of Dasyus might have been built with some metal probably of copper and certainly not of iron. The settlement in a metallic fortress conspicuously suggests that the people living there had attained a higher stage of civilization rather than the Vedic.

Reference to the fortresses of Dasyus is available on another context as;

> स जातृभमां अश्वदान ओजः
> पुरो विभिन्नचर्हि दासीः
> बिश्वालीश्चिन्दनवेन हेतिमस्यायः
> सहो वर्षया चानन्मन्दः॥ Rgveda, I.103.3.

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27 M.K. Dhavalikar opines that the Rgvedic word 'ayas' means any metal which generally may be copper or bronze. See p.12 in the present study for more details.
Whether this hymn is intended to describe Dāsa or Dasyu is uncertain. This is addressed to Indra. In the translation of *Rgveda*, Wilson elucidates that the fortresses of Dasyus are destroyed by Indra with the strength of his thunderbolt. Thus Indra augmented the strength and glory of Ārya. Sāyana26 considers the term Dāsi mentioned here as related with Dasyus. He explains: ‘dāśirdasyusambandhini’. This explanation suggests that the Dāsas and Dasyus are identical beings.

The hymn IV.16.13 speaks of Pipru and another Asura named Mṛgaya, who was slain by Indra for the sake of Rjiśvān, a king of Vedic age. This hymn also informs about the fifty thousand Kṛṣṇas. Sāyana26 explains Kṛṣṇa as black skinned Rakṣasas. The hymns I.130.8; VIII.96.13 and VIII.96.13 also contain information about Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is thought to be a tribal leader who was having thousands of followers lived in the banks of river Amśuṭāti. But, it seems more logical to think that Kṛṣṇas were a people who were culturally different from the Vedic people. These evidences lead one to think that Asura, Rakṣas, Dāsa, and Dasyu were normally treated equally without any distinction.

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26 Refer to the *Rgveda Samhitā*, edited by Max Muller, Vol. I, p.455.
'Śiśnadevāḥ'

In Rgveda 'śiśnadevāḥ' is a significant term that has been interpreted by scholars in a variety of ways. Some people think that it is the people who worship a phallus deity. The reference to śiśnadeva is available in the following hymn:

न याताः द्रोत जुजुकुनो  
न बद्वना शाबंशु वेश्वाभिः।  
स स्वयं विषुश्च जन्तोमां  
शिशनेवा अनि गुरुवते न। Rgveda, VII.21.5

In this hymn Indra is asked to protect the progeny of the worshippers from evil spirits as well as Rākṣasas. But, the term Rākṣasa does not occur in this hymn. It seems that the term 'yātava' i.e. 'yātus' is taken by the commentator in the sense of Rākṣasas. Sāyana30 explains śiśnadevāḥ as abrahmacaryāḥ.31

Rgveda X.99.3 also refers to śiśnadeva;

स जातां यातापुरुषाः  
यत्वकर्षेत परिगुह्यातिीर्यन  
अन्नवं बच्चलावर्य वेदो  
छालिकास्वादो अभि कर्षस्य मृत्यु। Rgveda, X.99.3.

30 See Rgveda Samhitā, Vol. III, p.204f. Wilson explains the term following Yāska IV.19 that it may have the sense of those who hold the form of liṅga for a deity.
31 It is explained in the Rgveda edited by Max Muller that śiśnadevāḥ divyante kriṣṇante iti śiśnadevāḥ. Abrahmacaryāḥ ityarthah. See Rgveda Samhitā, Vol.III, p.50.
In this hymn Indra is depicted as the winner over the phallus worshippers in the battle. This reference can be taken as an important one as it gives vital information about the ancient Indian cultural history. The very term may mean a symbolic worshipper here i.e. a worshipper of idol[s]. Sāyāṇa clarifies śiśnadevas as incontinent or licentious. Thus in Sāyāṇa’s view it does not mean phallus worshippers. A.C. Das considers śiśnadevas as a separate tribe existed in the time of Rgveda. He considers śiśnadevas not as a tribe of phallus worshippers but connects the Śiva tribes with śiśnadevas as those people were popularly identified as the phallus worshippers in later period. Scholars like D.P. Saxena consider śiśnadevas as Dasyus, the people who were having a different religious trait.

**Atharvaveda on Dasyus**

The description of fortresses of Dasyus is available in *Atharvaveda* also. One of the hymns says thus;

अयोध्यानं अच्छतावर्गणं अच्छतं
तैरनिनो अपिंगसों दस्युनां विभिन्न: पूरस्तेन व्य द्विस्तो जहिः। *Atharvaveda,*

X.6.20

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33 See D.P. Saxena, *Regional Geography of Vedic India*, Grantham, Kanpur, 1976, p.31f.
It says that the strong holds of Dasyus are split by Agiras by a powerful amulet.\textsuperscript{34} It is apparent here that by the period of Atharvaveda also Dasyus were the owners of fortresses. The description of the use of a power substance to ward off the Dasyus can be taken as a reference that perceives Rakṣas as malignant beings who are to be driven away from the sacrificial places of the Vedic people. Thus this hymn turns out to be an important link that connects the concept of Dasyus with Rakṣases in Vedas.

The concept of māyā is popularly identified as a power of Asuras in Rgveda. An Atharvavedic hymn contains the term māyā along with Dasyu;

\begin{quote}
मायापितिस्मृत स्यं द्यामानिष्कत
अव दस्यूक्तमुखम्। \textit{Atharvaveda, XX.29.4}.
\end{quote}

Dasyus are described as the possessors of māyā in this hymn. This approach seems to have helped the formation of the later concept of Dasyus as hostile beings in history. It may also be noted that the

\textsuperscript{34} The use of amulets against enemies is also seen in Rgveda and Atharvaveda against the enemies in connection with the sorcerers and Rakṣases. The use of amulet is for the purpose of protection from enemies. In this way the amulets can be considered as certain power substances that have the ability to protect. This concept leads to the later meaning of the concept Asura, Rakṣas and related categories in the form of the use of power substances against them for protection. This sense of meaning is clearly developed from the negative root meaning of the terms.
connection of mâyā described in *Atharvaveda* can evidently be related with the mâyā of Asura in *Rgveda*.

Another hymn in *Atharvaveda* refers to Rakṣas, Yātu, Dasyu and Paṇi together;

\[ \ldots \]

*Atharvaveda*, XIX.46.2.

The divergent meanings of these terms can be seen in this verse. The terms 'rakṣa' and 'rakṣatu' are used in the sense of 'to defend', which is another meaning of the root. This is a supplication towards Indra to destroy Paṇi, Yātudhānas and Dasyu by the amulet called 'aṣṭṛta'. Dasyus are mentioned as barbarians in this verse. Hence, they can possibly be some sect of the indigenous people.

In *Atharvaveda* also, just as in *Rgveda*, Cumuri and Dhuni are mentioned as Dasyus;

\[ \ldots \]

*Atharvaveda*, XX.37.4.

This hymn is addressed to Indra who slew many Vṛtras. He is being extolled here to extinguish the Dasyus Cumuri and Dhuni for the sake
of Dabhiti. Dabhiti, appears to be an Aryan leader. The term Vṛtra used here in plural is significant. This plural usage obviously refers to the people of Vṛtra, and resultedly the people who are against the Vedic religion to which Indra and Dabhiti belong to.

Indra is depicted as the slayer of Dasyus in XX.34.10; XX.68.3 and XX.42.2 in Rgveda. In IV.32.3 Manyu is mentioned as the killer of Dasyus. Dasyus are mentioned as barbarians in I.7.1 and II.14.5. All these references are helpful to ascertain the distinct identity of Dasyus as an indigenous sect of people.

**Atharvavedic Dāsas**

In *Atharvaveda* too Dasas appear as a sect of people distinct from the Vedic people. In the discussion of varna in *Rgveda* it has been already pointed out that the very term was used there as a symbolic classifier to denote differences in religious practices, beliefs etc.35 In *Atharvaveda* also a description can be viewed regarding this issue. A hymn there spells out;

अयमां विचाकाशित्विवदनसामान्यम्
विज्ञाम पाकसुध्वनोऽभि धूर्मचाकरसः विधर्मादिन्द्र उत्तरः। *Atharvaveda*,
XX.126.19.

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35 See above p.49.
This verse clearly refers to the ritualistic practices of Aryans. Here Indra is characterised as confused before Dāsas and Aryans. He recognised Aryans, as they were having Soma juice and he joined with them as he believed that it is the practice of noble people. So, as is clear from this statement, by the time of Atharvaveda, the distinction of people could be possible only on the basis of beliefs and practices and not by the skin colour or any other visible physical feature.

At another context Indra is delineated as the conqueror of Dāsas;

देवेन्द्र विश्वचक्षु सृजनाति ।
यो दाससं च वर्णकारं गृहामः।
श्रेष्ठः दूर निर्गोविन्यासाध्यः ।
पुष्करन सं जनास हिन्दुः॥ Atharvaveda, XX.34.4.

Indra is described here as he chased away the Dasyus into the cave. R.S. Sharma views this act as Indra confining the base Dāsavarna to the cave.36 This also is a clear indication towards the separate identity of Dasyus, probably as a different ethnic group from the followers of the Vedic cult.

Interestingly, Pānis are referred to as wealthiest people in Atharvaveda. Their treasure includes cattle and horse. It is described as;

36 This hymn is seen in Rgveda also (I.12.4) conveying the same idea.
This hymn tells that wealth of Pani was found out by the Vedic sacrificers and they had stolen it. Some\textsuperscript{37} consider Pani as a person who possesses good behaviour of the world.

**Asura and Dānava in Atharvaveda**

One of the Atharvavedic hymns links Asuras with Dānavas,

\begin{align*}
\text{मयांनांतः \ बृहस्पतिंत्र} & \text{णिना व चतुर्चुर्गुण \ खंदिरमोक्षे} \\
\text{तं बिध्वज्ञन्तसं मणिमसुरां \ पुरोहितय दानवानं हिरणयाय} \\
\text{सो अस्मे त्रिस्थमिदं दूहेन भूषोमूय: \ भवन्ते न तव हिष्ठो जाहि।} \\
\end{align*}

_Atharvaveda, X.6.10._

Moon is described here as conquering the strong holds of Asuras and also the golden strong holds of Dānavas. The term Dānava became popular in later Vedic period and denoted the children of Danu, wife of Kaśyapa. Here the terms Asura and Dānava are used in its primary sense. They used to reside in fortified settlements made of some metal, whether the buildings of Asuras and Dānava were built with gold or other metal is not clear. However, it is apparent that Asuras and Dānava were highly civilized people of that time than the Vedic

\textsuperscript{37} See The Atharvaveda, Translated by M.A. Devichand, p.816.
people. This, it may be supposed, eventually caused rivalry between the two sects.

**Dāsas and Dasyus in Yajurveda**

*Yajurveda* comprises only a few references regarding Dāsas and Dasyus. In the descriptions available there they appear to be the aboriginal inhabitants of that age. The hymn XXXIII.8236 gives information about one of the princes of Dāsas named Ruṣāma Pavīru. He is mentioned as a pious person. *Rgveda* V.30.13-15 speaks of Ruṣāmas as a group of people. Reference to Dasyus is seen in XII.34. There Dasyus are the enemies of Vedic people. Pāthya is asked to destroy them. Pāthya in *Rgveda* VI.16.15 appears as a bull or a hero, probably a celebrated sacrificer.

**Sāmaveda on Dāsas and Dasyus**

As is seen in *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda*, Dāsas and Dasyus in *Sāmaveda* are described as the enemies of Vedic people. Dasyus are referred to as avratas in:

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36 This hymn is also found in *Sāmaveda* (II.7.3.19.1). Dāsas are said to be belonging to the group of Ruṣāma Pavīru in *Sāmaveda*. The reference to the racial identity of the people is available there. In Vedas there are not many references to the ethnic identity of the people Ruṣāma Pavīru. Albeit, from the available data it is clear that they belonged to certain ethnic groups in Vedic age. The reference to the name of their prince can be taken to be the leader of a well civilized Dāsa ethnic group.
This hymn is addressed to Soma Pavamāna. He is invoked here to destroy the rite-less Dasyus. In the translation of Sāmaveda by Griffith,35 instead of Dasyu, Dāsa is the rendering accepted by him in this hymn. Dasyus are mentioned as rite-less in Sāmaveda II.6.2.20.3 also;

त्यहि शुरु: सन्निता चोदयो मनुष्य रथम्।
सहायत्वायस्यमतलमोक्ष: जाति न शोकिषाः॥ Sāmaveda, II.6.2.20.3.

Indra is asked here to burn the Dasyus like a vessel with the flame. Dasyus are designated as rite-less people here also. This hymn is presented in the form of praise to Indra in order to heighten his glory.

Indra in another hymn is praised as the slayer of Dasyus;

कुवित्सस्य प्रहि बलं गोमती दस्युहिः गमति। शाशविभयं नो वरत॥ Sāmaveda, II.8.2.4.3.

The name Kuvitsa mentioned in this hymn according to Sāyana,36 is a certain person who does much harm. This hymn apparently says that Indra opens the stable (of the Dasyus) and takes

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36 According to Sāyana Kuvitsa is a certain person who does much harm to the Vedic followers. Griffith considers this verse is a praise to Indra to open the cow-stall for the followers of Veda and drive them the wealth of Dasyus or barbarians. Refer to The Sāmavedasamhitā, Translated by Ralph. T.H. Griffith, p.399.
away the cattle-wealth of Dasyus for the sake of the people who perform sacrifices. Another hymn II.6.3.17.2 addressed to Indra, also portrays Dāsas as the enemies of Vedic culture.

**Pāṇis in Vedas**

Another sect of people seen in Vedic hymns is Pāṇis. They are also referred to as the enemies of Vedic people. The engagements of Pāṇis in *Rgveda* tell that they were traders and rich people. They are described as having different way of life and culture. Scholars like Alfred Hillebrandt⁴¹ identify Pānis of *Rgveda* with the Parnians, a sub-tribe of Dahae. The Parnians lived in nearby the river Ochus which is identified as the modern river Tejne. All these points support the separate ethnic identity of Pānis.

In *Yajurveda* Pāṇis are described as the demons of darkness as well as enemies of Vedic people. One of the hymns explains thus;

अपेक्षो यथौ पर्णवायु सुर्यो देवन्योऽविष्कृतं।
स्वयम लोकः सुताक्तः। द्रुतिकर्तिकरं

द्वातिकसानंतरं। *Yajurveda*, XXXV.1.

Pāṇis are described here as rebellious as well as scorers of the gods. The Vedic people wanted to drive them away from their places. This clearly promulgates the difference in religion of Vedic people and

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⁴¹ See Alfred Hillebrandt, *op.cit*, p.4.
their enemies i.e. Panis. Panis in *Yajurveda* XVII.92 are seen as cattle-rafters. They are mentioned as demons of darkness in II.17, which seems to be a later conceptual formation.

**Dāsas and Dasyus in Later Vedic Periods**

There are least reference to the Dāsas and Dasyus in later Vedic period. It seems that by this time Dāsas and Dasyus had been imbibed into the folk of Asura and Rākṣasa and collectively identified as the enemies of Devas and eventually of mankind in later Vedic period. Hale\(^42\) opines that reference to Dāsa and Dasyu came rare when Asura began to be used often with a bad connotation.

In the time of Brāhmaṇas, Dāsa came to be identified as slaves. Reference regarding the concept of Dāsa as slaves can be found in *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* II.19 and VIII.22.\(^43\)

The stories related with Dāsas, Dasyus, Panis etc. in Vedas supply abundant information about the social and the cultural past of ancient India. The references to the fortresses of Dāsas and Dasyus

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\(^42\) W.E. Hale, *op.cit.*, p.181. In Vedas as has been seen Dāsa and Dasyu are described as the enemies of Vedic believers. In later Vedic literature *Asuras* and *Rākṣasas* became identical concepts and popularly portrayed as the enemies of Devas and men. It seems that Dāsa and Dasyu concepts are imbibed into the Asura and Rākṣasa concept in later Vedic literature.

clearly indicate the state of civilization of the ancient Indian indigenous people. The buildings referred to in Vedic hymns may be some strongholds of the people with whom they are mentioned. The migrants perhaps may not have had such abodes. The references to people such as Dāsas, Dasyus, Panis etc. beyond doubt prove that they were wealthy indigenous landlords. Their wealth was mainly cattle. There are a number of references in Vedas that the Vedic people are trying to take away the wealth of these peoples. Thus, it may reasonably be assumed that, in order to gain hegemony and resources the migrants were making attempts to assault the fortresses. This naturally resulted in a rivalry between the natives and migrants. The conflicts aroused in connection with this issue are reflected in the Vedic hymns as mythical accounts. In other words the mythical accounts available in Vedic literature are the mythicised form of the disputes emerged between the indigenous ethnic sects the migrants who followed sacrificial cult.

Ample evidences are found in Vedas on the inimical attitude of Vedic people towards other sects of people who did not yield to them. The rivalry was not only for gaining the wealth but there is a matter of religious schism also. Dāsas and Dasyus very often are mentioned
as avratas, ayajiṣas, akṛatas, mṛḍhravācs etc. in Vedas. These references beyond doubt indicate the difference in religion, rituals, language etc. of the people other than the followers of Veda. All these remarks are in the form of abuse against Dāsas, Dasyus, Panīs etc. The people who disputed strongly against the beliefs and practices of Vedas are viewed as the enemies of Vedic people and thus are portrayed in Vedic hymns. This analysis regarding the Asura and Rākṣasa concept made in these chapters expected to be of help to ascertain the real issues behind the concepts, beliefs, practices, religion and also politics in ancient Indian cultural history.