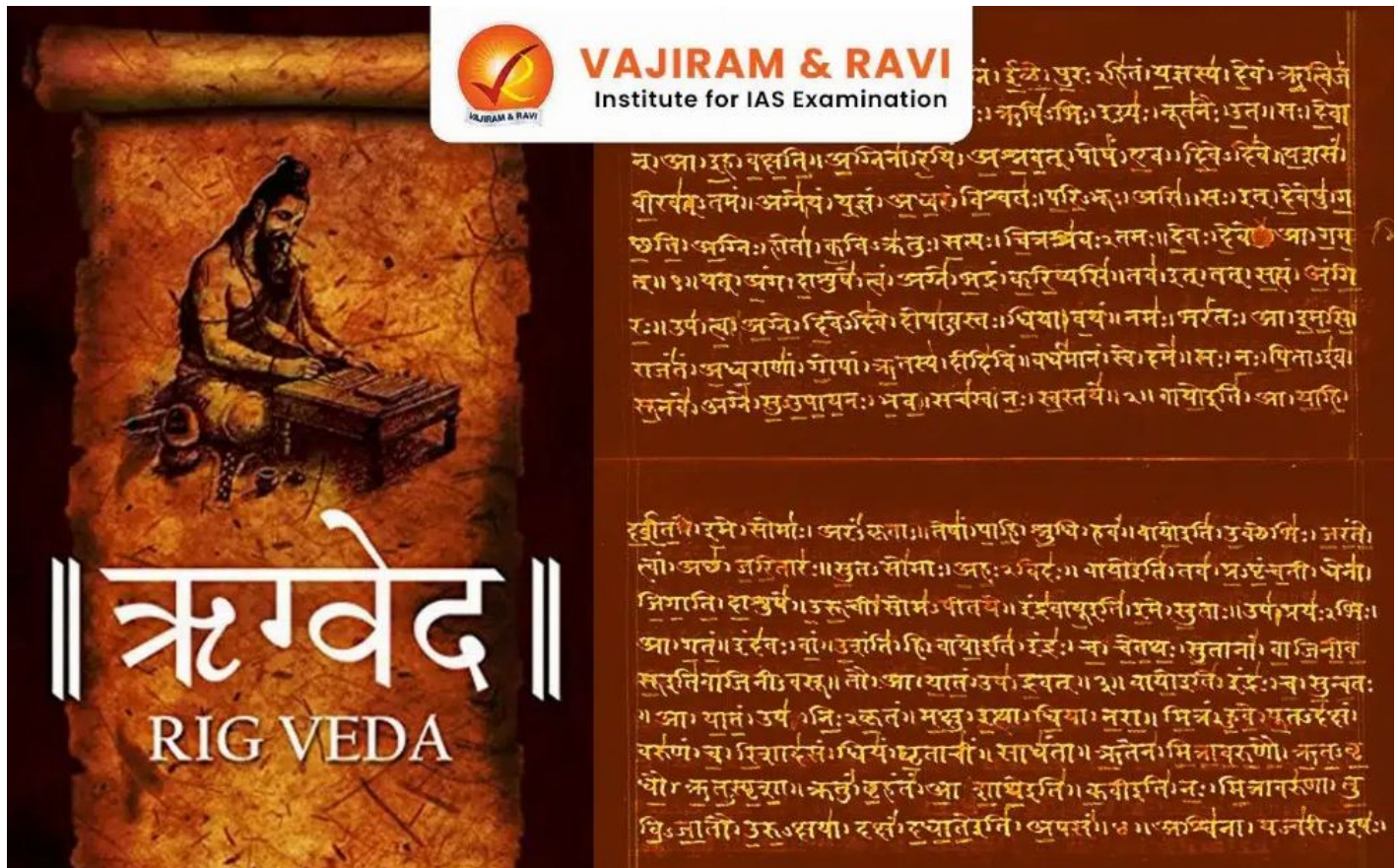


Rig Veda, History, Structure, Significance, Structure

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The Rigveda is the oldest and most sacred Hindu scripture, composed in Vedic Sanskrit around **1500-1000 BCE**. It contains **1,028 hymns** and **10,600 verses** organised into **10 books (mandalas)**. The Rigveda explores themes such as ritual and sacrifice, cosmology and creation, and the role of deities like Indra, Agni, and Soma.

The Rigveda provides insights into early Vedic society, which was **pastoral and agrarian**, with a **semi-nomadic tribal structure** and a **patriarchal family system**. The text also touches upon the polity, with a **tribal chief** at the centre and the emergence of monarchy in later Vedic periods. Recognising its universal value, **UNESCO** has listed the Rigveda as part of the **World Human Heritage**.

Rig Veda History and Compilation

The Rig Veda is an ancient collection of **Vedic Sanskrit hymns**. It is one of Hinduism's four sacred texts and ranks among the world's oldest scriptures.

- **Composition period:** The hymns that comprise the Rigveda are estimated to have been composed over a vast period from **~1500 BCE to 1000 BCE**.
 - However, the compilation into the canonical text likely occurred between **1200 BCE and 900 BCE**.

- **Oral tradition:** Hymns were preserved through generations by Brahmin families using advanced oral tradition techniques, which included **mnemonic devices, lyrical composition patterns, pitching accents, and melodic recitation.**
- **Rishi families:** Prominent families of ṛishis (sages) are credited with composing the hymns.
 - These ṛishi clans include **Kashyapa, Atri, Bharadwaja, Vishwamitra, Gautama, Jamadagni and Vasishta.**
- **Surviving shakhas:** Out of the original five shakhas (recensions), only two have survived: **the Sakalya and Baskala.**
- **Associated texts:** These recensions are accompanied by **Brahmanas** and **Upanishads**, which the same ten Rishi families authored over centuries.

Rig Veda			
Sakhas/Schools	Commentaries		
Baskala	Aitareya Brahman	Aitareya Aranyakas	Aitareya Upanishads
Sakalya	Kaushitaki Brahman	Kaushitaki Aranyakas	Kaushitaki Upanishads

Vedic Texts

- The Vedic text is a complex amalgamation of four types of texts woven into its fabric:
 - **Samhitas:** The core layer containing the poetic hymns.
 - **Brahmanas:** Prose commentaries on the hymns.
 - **Aranyakas:** Ritual interpretations for hermits.
 - **Upanishads:** Philosophical texts on spiritual knowledge.

Rig Veda Structure and Components

The Rigveda is divided into **10 mandalas**. Each mandala is further divided into suktas (hymns) and verses. In total, the Rigveda contains around **1,028 suktas** and over **10,600 verses**. The mandalas are not arranged chronologically, but rather by length and content.

- Notable highlights of the mandalas:
 - Mandala 1 (191 hymns) is primarily dedicated to deities like **Agni, Indra, and Varuna**. This includes the philosophical Riddle Hymn, which influenced later Upanishads such as the **Mundaka**.
 - Mandala 2 (43 hymns): It focuses on **Agni** and **Indra**, attributed to **Rishi Gṛtsamada Śaunahotra**.
 - Mandala 3 (62 hymns): It hymns to **Agni, Indra**, and the **Vishvedevas**, with the significant inclusion of the **Gayatri Mantra**.
 - Mandala 4 (58 hymns): It comprises hymns to **Agni, Indra**, and **Rbhus**, among others, attributed to **Vāmadeva Gautama**.
 - Mandala 5 (87 hymns): It addresses **Agni, Indra, Visvedevas, Maruts**, and twin-deity **Mitra-Varuna** , mainly attributed to the **Atri clan**.

- Mandala 6 (75 hymns): It is dedicated to **Agni, Indra**, and a broad range of deities, associated with the **Bārhaspatya family of Angirasas**.
- Mandala 7 (104 hymns): It contains hymns to **Agni, Indra, Visvadevas**, and other deities, attributed to **Vasiṣṭha Maitravaruṇi**.
- Mandala 8 (103 hymns): It includes various hymns to different gods, with the **Vālakhilya hymns** considered apocryphal.
- Mandala 9 (114 hymns): It is exclusively devoted to **Soma Pavamana**, related to the sacred potion in Vedic rituals.
- Mandala 10 (191 hymns): It contains later language hymns to **Agni, Indra**, and others; includes significant hymns like the **Nadistuti sukta** (praise of rivers) and the **Nasadiya sukta** (speculations on creation).

Maṇḍala	Deities	Key Ṛṣis
Mandala 1	Agni, Indra	Madhuchchhandas, Medhatith, Gotama and others
Mandala 2	Agni, Indra	Ṛṣitasamada and His Family
Mandala 3	Agni, Indra	Vishvamitra and His Family
Mandala 4	Agni, Indra	Vamadeva and His Family
Mandala 5	Soma	Atri and His Family
Mandala 6	Agni, Soma	Bharadvaja and His Family
Mandala 7	Agni, Indra	Vashiṣṭha and His Family
Mandala 8	Various	Kanva, Angriva and their family
Mandala 9	Soma	Kaśyapa, Soma Devata and others
Mandala 10	Agni, Indra	Vimada, Indra, Shachi and others

Rig Veda Significance

The Rigveda is considered one of the most sacred texts of Hinduism, and its significance extends beyond its historical and cultural importance.

- **Philosophical and spiritual significance:** The Rigveda is primarily concerned with the worship of Hindu deities such as **Surya, Indra, Rudra, Vayu, Agni, Vishnu**, and others.
 - The Rigveda mentions several female deities, with **Ushas**, the dawn goddess, being the most celebrated, along with **Aditi, Prithvi, Rathri, Sarasvathi**, and **Vageshvari (Vac)**, but none are central to the text.
 - The hymns and stories within the Rigveda reflect the Hindu philosophy and belief system.
 - They were used for **ritualistic purposes** in ceremonies like marriages and to ward off illness and negativity.

- The text **addresses issues of morality and righteous societal behaviour**, tackling topics like gambling and good governance.
- **Geographical and cultural significance:** The Rigveda contains significant references to the geographical features of the Indian subcontinent, including mentions of rivers, seasons, and other natural phenomena.
 - The instructions and teachings of the Rigveda influenced life in the subcontinent for centuries, outlining the duties of the different social classes and emphasising the importance of religion, worship, sacrifices, and religious rituals.
- **Cultural legacy:** The Rigveda and its scriptures remain deeply rooted in Hindu culture, with many verses and prayers still recited on auspicious occasions. It is one of the world's oldest religious texts still in use today, with an impact on Hinduism and Indian culture.
- **UNESCO:** The Rigveda manuscripts have been included in **UNESCO's Memory of the World Register**, a compendium of documentary heritage of exceptional value, recognising their global significance and the need to preserve this invaluable cultural treasure.

Rig Veda UPSC PYQs

Question 1. With reference to the difference between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are correct? **(UPSC Prelims 2017)**

1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare whereas the people of Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them.
2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver and copper whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron.
3. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/rig-veda/>

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