

## Rig-Veda from a Folk Perspective

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**Abstract:** Rig-Veda (rgveda), the world's earliest literary record is in Sanskrit [1700-1600BCE]. It represents an oral tradition called *shruthi*. The Vedic tradition deems the Rig-Veda as *apaurusheya* - divine revelations. An interesting attempt is made here to note the contents of Rig-Veda from a folk perspective. The contents of Rig-Veda are hymns addressed to 33 elements of nature such as Agni, Indra, Vishnu, Sarasvati, Sinivali, Apamnapat, and others, which were later deemed to be gods/goddesses. There is a predominance of Agni hymns and Indra is equally vocally referred. The hymns which are called *rks* are 1028 in number and these *rks* are divided into *Mandalas* [graphic designs/constellations]. Each *Mandala* containing many *Suktas* [statements] and *Anuvakas* and *rks* called mantras. The 10 *Mandalas* are ascribed to 10 *Rishis*. The names of the *Rishis* are *Angiras, Kanva, Vasistha, Visvamitra, Atri, Kashyapa, Gritsamada, Agastya, Bhrigu* and *Bharata*. The *Mandalas* 2 to 7 are known as *Vamshya Mandalas* –family hymns. The Rig-Vedic narrative is oral and it refers to many practices and rituals which seem to have originated in a folk background. Recording of a narrative by a family or people of a tradition rooted in nature may thus be taken as the global and glocal definition of folk. Rig-Veda 1/8/164 states if one cannot understand this, what can any prayer do for him? Taking its Pre-Christian and Indo-European alliance and all the later folk elements, most of the Indian and much of the European, can be traced back to Rig-Vedic sources. The matrilineal tradition of Aditi, the riverine tradition of Punjab and Pan Indian rivers, the worship rituals of fire, water, Indras fight with Vrutas to release them are classic narratives of folk substratum. Some selected Rig-Vedic mantras are analysed below from this perspective.

- 1] *Asya-Vamiasukta* refers to an old sacrifice called *hota* attached to Rig-Veda who has two brothers and 7 children. This family sets up a *ratha*- chariot with one wheel driven by 7 horses. It has 3 axles-*nabhichakrams*. In the chariot are seated 7 sisters.
- 2] The *Aditisukta* referring to Aditi as sky, heaven, father, son, Visvedevas and Panchajanas [rv-1/8/89]
- 3] The *Gomayus* hymn refers to the eating of wealth by *Gomayus, Ajamayus, Prushnis*, and the *Rishis* and it pleads to give hundreds of cows, frogs as well as 100 years life. [rv 10/8/127].
- 4] The *Keshinirk* refers to one *Keshini*, who is also known by the name *Panchami*. Let her protect us in the name of *sama-nisha-devi*.
- 5] The *Sinivali* [the universal – mother-*Visvapatni*] *sukta* prays with a sacrifice [*juhotana*] to bestow protection to the seeker. She happens to be the sister of *devas*. She has robust arms. She is *Shungurya, Raka* as well as *Sarasvati, Indrani* and *Varunani*. [rv 5/2/32]

The cryptic examples given above encourage us to have a kaleidoscopic view of the Rig-Veda from a folk perspective.