



## Economic Structure of the Rig Vedic Period

The **Rig Vedic Aryans** were primarily **pastoralists**, with **agriculture** serving as a secondary activity. Cattle, especially cows, were the most significant source of wealth, and **war booty** was another important economic factor.

### Pastoralism



- ◆ **Cattle as Wealth:** In the Vedas cows were considered sacred and referred to as "Aghanya," meaning they should not be killed. **Only sterile cows were used in sacrifices, while fertile cows were protected.** They were central to the economy and social structure, with several terms derived from the word "Gau" (cow):

Term	Meaning	
<b>Gopa</b>	A leader or chief.	
<b>Gomat</b>	A wealthy or influential individual (literally "one who owns cows").	
<b>Godhana</b>	Refers to "wealth of cows," emphasizing cattle as a primary form of wealth.	
<b>Gavisthi</b>	"Search for cows," also signifying wars fought for cattle possession.	
<b>Goshu</b>	Refers to the wealth or abundance of cattle.	
<b>Duhitri</b>	Daughter, literally meaning "one who milks the cow."	
<b>Gotra</b>	Cow pen; a group of people with a common ancestor, named after a sage.	
<b>Godhuli</b>	Measurement of time based on the dust raised by cattle at dusk.	
<b>Gavyuti</b>	Measurement of distance.	
<b>Goghna</b>	"Cow killer," referring to a guest (atithi).	

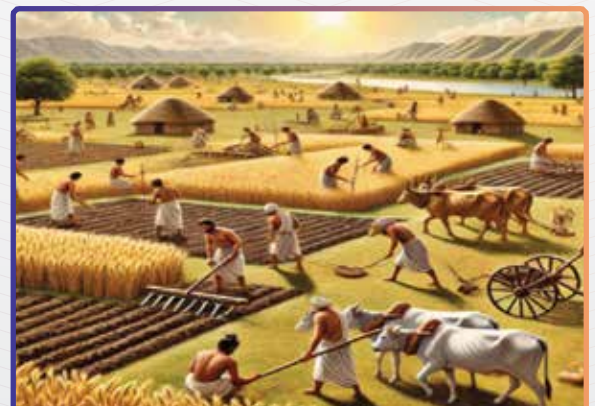
**Cattle herding** was primarily performed by the **non-priestly** and **non-warrior** classes, indicating a clear division of labor within the society.

- ◆ **Nomadic Lifestyle:** The Aryans led a **nomadic life**, frequently moving in search of grazing lands for their cattle. As a result, there was little time for large-scale agriculture, and **wars over cattle** were common.

## Agriculture

### ◆ Basic Crops:

- **Barley (Yava) and Wheat (Godhuma)** were common, with barley being more prevalent.
- **Rice (Vrihi)** was cultivated in the northwest, but less widely.
- Other crops likely included **pulses, legumes**, and possibly **melons**.



◆ **Irrigation and Tools:**

- Simple tools like wooden plows and sickles. The **plough (langala)** was powered by **oxen**, with references to **24 oxen** being used to plough a single field.
- Dependent on **natural rainfall**; no large-scale irrigation.

◆ **Geography:**

- Practiced in the fertile **Sapta Sindhu** region (land of seven rivers).

## Ownership of Land in the Rigvedic Period

◆ **In general, there was no private ownership of land** during the Rigvedic period, and scholars have **varying views on this matter-**

◦ **Community Ownership:**

- Scholars like **Dr. H.C. Raychaudhury** argue that **pasturing lands** (used for grazing cattle) were **community-owned**, while **homestead and farming lands** were privately owned, reflecting a division between shared grazing areas and individually controlled cultivation lands.

◦ **D.D. Kaushambi's View:**

- **Suggested that land was primarily owned by the community in the early Vedic period**, with individual ownership emerging as agricultural practices increased..

◦ **Emerging Private Ownership:**

- By the end of the **Rig Vedic period**, land ownership shifted from **communal** to **family ownership** due to the rise of agriculture and decline of the tribal system.

## Domestication of Animals

◆ **Cows and Bullocks:** Revered for their milk, which was essential for food, and **ghee**, which was used in religious sacrifices.

◆ **Horses:** Vital for transportation and warfare.

◆ **Goats and Sheep:** Important for **wool** production.

◆ **Elephants:** Rarely domesticated, mentioned only in later hymns

## Occupations

◆ **Weaving and Carpentry:**

- **Weaving** was a key occupation, with wool and cotton being the primary materials used. **Carpenters** made **chariots, wagons, and household utensils**.

#### ◆ **Metalwork:**

- The Rig Veda mentions **ayas for copper and bronze**, indicating the use of metal for tools and weapons.
- **Iron: The use of iron was likely unknown in the early Vedic period**, with iron smelting becoming widespread only in later periods.
- **Goldsmiths** crafted **ornaments** such as **earrings, necklaces, and bangles**.
- **Bronze:** The **bronze smiths** were skilled in creating tools and weapons.



- ◆ **Leatherwork:** Leather workers produced bowstrings and casks for storing liquids, while **physicians** used herbal remedies to treat diseases.

## Trade and Commerce


- ◆ **Barter System:** The primary means of trade was the **barter system**, with goods exchanged, primarily using **cattle** as currency. Over time, **gold** (in the form of **nishka** pieces) emerged as a unit of exchange.
- ◆ **Overseas Trade:** Some references in the Rig Veda to **ships** suggest that maritime trade could have existed, but these are often seen as poetic descriptions.
- ◆ **Trade Regulation:** Trade and commerce were managed by a group of individuals known as the **Pani**, who facilitated the exchange of goods.

## Transportation and Communication

- ◆ **Land Transport:** The primary means of transport were **chariots (rathas) and wagons**, drawn by **oxen and horses**. **Horseback riding** was also common.
- ◆ **Water Transport:** Boats were used for river transport.





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