

Vedic *arí* and the Pre-Islamic Nuristani Prestige Feast Giver

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1. Introduction

In this article I will present the essential role that the Nuristani society plays in our understanding of the remote Indo-Iranian past. The historical linguistic position of Nuristani forces us to rethink the socio-historical situation affecting the Indo-Iranians. Because there is strong evidence that allows the conclusion that Nuristani constitutes a third branch of Indo-Iranian (hereafter Iir)². If this is so, that Nuristani stems from the ‘Indo-Iranian’ period, and its documented pre-Islamic society and culture is remarkably unique with archaic features that strike one as outside of known Indo-Iranian reconstructions. Several scholars have begun to realize the importance of the Pre-Islamic Nuristani religion for enhancing our understanding of the Vedic and, more tangentially, the Avestan societies. Witzel has offered several contributions, with a longer

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² This hypothesis was first proposed decades ago by Georg Morgenstierne and he continued to maintain the position, despite some vacillation over the years, see Morgenstierne 1945:234, 1974:9. The linguist Richard Strand also maintains that Nuristani constitutes a third branch of Indo-Iranian and his arguments can be found at his website

<http://nuristan.info/Nuristani/nuristanis.html> and also

<http://nuristan.info/Nuristani/BasicEvolutionaryProcesses.html>.

While there are still dissenting opinions, the extra-linguistic data further justifies considering Nuristani as a third branch of Indo-Iranian.

paper on the Kalasha religion³ to which I will also draw attention in this paper because of its close association with Nuristani. Likewise, Parpola has also focused his attention on certain aspects of Nuristani society and beliefs as well.⁴ However, as I proceed, it will be clear that there is far more here than has been realized by scholars, and I wish to address this shortcoming. It is quite surprising just how important the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society is for our understanding of the seminal beliefs and practices of the Indo-Iranians. I use the term Indo-Iranian here in an inclusive sense, covering developments in the second millennium BC for the speakers of the known Indo-Iranian languages.

I will begin with an overview of the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society, as well as that of the contemporary Nuristani and Kalasha society.

The Pre-Islamic Nuristani society can be characterized as a ‘big man’ status society. A big man society is one in which status or prestige (more on this later) is achieved and not ascribed or inherited. An individual earns his prestige through a very specific set of requirements. Women were also included in this system and could also earn prestige. The ‘big man’ society is a cultural form which is well attested in the anthropological literature, primarily that dealing with Polynesia.⁵ The big man system, and its related great man system, are often discussed with a

³ Witzel 2004.

⁴ Parpola 1999, 2002, 2015.

⁵ Chudek and Boyd 2015; Lindstrom 1981; Godelier and Strathern 1991; Sahlins 1963, etc. Despite the difficulty of the term among anthropologists, the important points are the role of prestige, a recognizable status/prestige system, and the role of leadership through prestige and influence and the prestige must be earned. Parkes has also endorsed this social model as operative for the Kalasha society (Parkes 1983:367).

third form, that of the chieftainship. Based on specific features, I will characterize the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society as a ‘big man’ society. This is partly due to the nomenclature itself that is found in Nuristani. Richard Strand, arguably the most knowledgeable scholar on the Nuristani languages, has recorded an informant from the Prasun (Strand’s term: *Vāsi-Vari*) who uses this particular term when describing those who achieve the prestige-feasting rank.

Strand asks, “Is there an elder (*ǰešt*) among them (i.e. the agnates, the *totbřo*[lit. father-brothers]).” Zāman Xān replies, “Yes, there’s an elder. There’s a **big man**.” (*oal’ mānša*). In Prasun the term for ‘big man’ is *milyār*. In a rather remarkable way, Buddruss has recorded this term *miler* (Z) and *milyer* (D) which he glosses as ‘a kind of demon’!⁶ The Prasun are now Muslims and, given that in the ‘pagan’ period, a ‘big man’ was considered an incarnation of a divine power, their demonization makes sense. Zāman Xān goes on to say, “That elder would be the man who makes a name for himself. A **big name**. If he wanted to make a **big name**, he would gather together all the Pǰāsū~ and give them a feast. The man would have a name. They would say that the man had made a **big name** for himself.”⁷ Here we also see the term ‘**big name**’ (*oal nom*).

Within this system, there were two formal rank or status modalities in pre-Islamic times for achieving prestige. The ‘first’ rank was achieved through martial prowess; the second rank was achieved through ‘prestige feasting’. The first rank also included feasting, but not at the level that was required to achieve the second rank. The two ranks are sequential

⁶ Buddruss 2017: s.v.

⁷ Strand <http://nuristan.info/Nuristani/Vasi/VasiCulture/Zaman2.html>. Accessed January 3, 2018.

in that the ‘hero’ rank must be achieved before the ‘prestige feasting’ rank. Within each rank, there is the ability to add titles to that rank. It is exclusively through these two rank modalities that one achieves prestige, and which also differentiates one person within an egalitarian kinship system and the larger society from others. It is the **only** means of achieving political power and influence.⁸

These two ranks were also based on distinct age groups: young men and ‘elders’ (the middle aged ‘active’ and seniors ‘inactive’). The situation found among the Kalasha of Pakistan is essentially the same as for that of the Pre-Islamic period in Nuristan and helps us to further understand the Pre-Islamic Nuristani situation. The current situation among the Kalasha of Pakistan further explains the overall power structure within a clearly demarcated generational hierarchy. Parkes describes the three groups involved: *Başara-* ‘old men’ 50-80 years old, who are the peacemakers, advisers, mediators between active elders; *Gadäarak* ‘active elders’ 30-50 years old, who are competitive leaders, feast-givers, mediators between youths; *Juān* ‘youths’ 15-30 years old, who are antagonists, combative supporters of their elders (active in elopement and adultery). While the heroic rank has, more or less, dropped out of the Kalasha system, its presence is seen in symbols and song. The old men (*başara-*) have already achieved the requisite ranks to become ‘senior old men’ with influence. It is also interesting to note the relationship between the ‘old men’ advising the ‘active elders’ and the active elders advising the youth, but the ‘old men’ do not advise the ‘youth’. This tripartition described by Parkes was also a feature of the Pre-Islamic Nuristani system.

⁸ On the role of ranks and ‘political power’ see both Jones 1974 and Strand 1974b.

There is an intimate relationship between status/prestige and leadership. Most importantly, institutionalized leadership is held by a group of influential ‘status/prestige holding elders’ whose membership in the group varies from year to year, depending on individuals and circumstances. Formal political leadership was dependent on this status system, but political authority, that is, the right to make decisions affecting the society and certain penal decisions, was separate from the status acquisition system. Rank with its attendant prestige were required before one could have influence over others.⁹

Leadership was vested in those who were called *jeṣṭ* (Kati). Strand (1974b) makes the important, and critical, correction to Robertson’s misunderstanding of the ‘Jast’ (= *jeṣṭ*). Robertson confused the *jeṣṭ* with the second-tier rank achieved through prestige feasting. Strand simply translates the word *jeṣṭ* with ‘leader’, but there is far more to be understood by the use of this word. The term is cognate with OIA *jyeṣṭha* ‘eldest’ ‘senior’. However, its etymological roots connect the term with the verb *jyā*, whose earlier meaning is ‘to deplete’ and which subsequently comes to mean ‘to deprive’.¹⁰ One of the foremost characteristics of the prestige feast giver, the holder of the second tier rank, is that he will expend virtually all his livestock and possessions at a prestige feast. The *jeṣṭ* must be one who has ‘most depleted (his wealth)’ in his pursuit of power.

The distribution of one’s wealth without expecting anything other than prestige in return is still a driving force in the Kalasha society.

⁹ See Jones 1974 and Strand 1974b.

¹⁰ KEWA s.v. and EWA s.v.

Darling explains an interesting idiom involving the verbs ‘to sit’ and ‘to stand’ among the Kalasha of Pakistan.

“It is not enough to save and to have wealth: ‘uncooked wheat has no value’, and ‘an animal with its skin still on, is of no use’. The Kalash use an enigmatic phrase ‘*us-teik \ze ni-seik*’ which literally means “to stand up and to sit down”. It is an idiom about wealth that is used on several different levels. Not only does it refer to the stockpiles of wealth which rise and fall, as one works towards saving it and then giving it all away at feast, but it also refers to the constant round of guests coming day by day to one’s house, and sitting down (upon a “*han-yak*” ‘stool’) to have a meal, and then standing up to leave again. The term means public and private generosity and hospitality.”¹¹

In his dissertation on the Waigali Nuristani, Katz also discusses the process of status or prestige acquisition. He notes that within the community, i.e. the *deš*, individuals sought formal status/prestige and recognition through these two explicit modalities of martial prowess and institutionalized generosity.¹² In both modalities, the standards and requirements for recognition were explicit, as were the evaluative criteria and procedures for judging whether the outcome matched the expectations set for those standards and requirements.¹³ In both areas of activity, an individual’s accomplishments brought benefit to his entire community. Success as a warrior by staging murderous raids on enemies maximized

¹¹ Darling 1979:146

¹² Katz 1983: 114.

¹³ See also Jones 1974.

terror and helped to destabilize a large enemy territory. This forced their enemies into a preoccupation with their own security, which reduced their ability to stage successful attacks on Nuristani communities.

Social recognition for institutionalized generosity, which consisted in the lavish distribution of meat, grain, and cheeses, as well as live animals, at private and public feasts and community celebrations ensured that the available resources were shared as much as possible with the entire community. The entire community benefitted because those with productive capabilities beyond the requirements for their own subsistence needs and for maximum productivity distributed their surplus to the *deš*.¹⁴ This is also a characteristic of the prestige feasting practices among the Kalasha described in detail by Peter Parkes¹⁵ and Elizabeth Darling.¹⁶

I hold that the two “explicit modalities: martial prowess and institutionalized generosity”¹⁷ are exceedingly archaic and can be reconstructed as having been a feature of what I will call the Early Indo-Iranian society. These two modalities did not develop solely within the Nuristani community; rather, they are a continuation of cultural practices and beliefs from the Indo-Iranian (and subsequent) period itself. We also find the practice of prestige feasting in the Kalasha community. The Kalasha were most likely heavily influenced by the Nuristanis, but I think that, in regard to this practice, the Kalasha system does indeed represent a pre-Vedic system. However, although the Iranian and Vedic sides

¹⁴ Katz 1983:113.

¹⁵ Parkes, 1983, 1992.

¹⁶ Darling 1979.

¹⁷ Katz 1983:114.

progressively lost these distinct features in practice, we can find traces of them in verse and lore. These two status-achieving modalities and their accompanying institutionalized governance structure provide a powerful explanatory model for a number of longstanding problems in Vedic interpretation.

2. The Status/Prestige Modalities

In its treatment of ‘rank and status’, the literature on Nuristan can be somewhat confusing. There are clearly two rank statuses: the ‘heroic’ rank, *šura or lei moč*, and the prestige-feasting rank (in Kati *mi, mü, arā/aro*). Within each rank, there are a number of titles that one can achieve to further enhance one’s status and to enhance one’s future in the afterlife. The literature tends to confuse the issue by referring to these titles related to status enhancement within these principle rank as “ranks” as well. However, it is essential to make this distinction between the rank itself and one’s ability to acquire additional titles within it once one achieves that particular rank. One might ask whether this situation is analogous to the modern military assignment of status where we find the title officer [the broad status]: then, lieutenant, captain, major, general, etc.? Such an analogy breaks down within the area of responsibility in the Nuristani situation, since one does not gain new responsibilities as one adds titles to one’s rank, but continues to increase one’s ‘prestige’. The important point here is that there are only these **two modes** of status acquisition; within these two modes, one can add to one’s status/prestige within the rank that one has already achieved. Referring to some 15-20 titles as ‘ranks’ only obfuscates what is simply a two tiered system.

Among the Kom¹⁸ the first status modality is that of the *lei moč*¹⁹ ‘warrior’.²⁰ At their feasts, a *lei moč* was given an extra portion (*sor* or *baḍə*) of food. Within this status modality there were specific additional rank titles which could then be achieved. For example, the following two Kom terms will then refer to titles within the *lei moč* position: *puṅri moc* ‘man that had killed 7 men (pre-Islamic)’; *urāvič* “top notch” man (after the pre-Islamic warrior who had the most notches in his *d’ol pole*).²¹ Or, among the Kalašüm (Waigali speakers) we have the following heroic titles: *mač-māl-oda* N. Man who has killed up to six persons; *ḍanaköl-oda* N. Man who has killed up to 7 to 8 persons; *bâtür* N. Man that has killed 12 persons; *ḍal-oda* N. Man who has killed 18 persons.²² Morgenstierne,²³ Palwal,²⁴ Katz,²⁵ Fussman,²⁶ Schmidt,²⁷ and Klimburg²⁸ further enumerate other rank titles within the explicit status modality of either the heroic status or the prestige feast giver status.

¹⁸ The Kom Kati. This the Nuristani ‘tribe’ with whom Robertson lived. Richard Strand has also lived and has extensively covered their language and other aspects of Kom society. See especially his website.

¹⁹ Strand. <http://nuristan.info/IngFrameL.html> (accessed January 12, 2018). S.v. Kom vocabulary: Society: Community Defense.

²⁰ Strand 1974b.

²¹ Strand. <http://nuristan.info/IngFrameL.html> (accessed January 12, 2018).

²² Strand. <http://nuristan.info/IngFrameL.html> (accessed January 12, 2018). Waigali (=Nišci-alā): Society: Rank.

²³ Morgenstierne 1973.

²⁴ Palwal 1973, Palwal 1977.

²⁵ Katz 1983.

²⁶ Fussman 1983.

²⁷ Abdullah Khan et al 2006.

²⁸ Klimburg 1993.

3. Prestige Feasting Status

The second status modality is that of the Prestige-Feast giver. Among the Kom, it is called a *mü moc*, which Strand defines simply as the “man that held the *mü* rank for feast-giving (pre-Islamic).”²⁹ Strand refers to the term *mü* as being “a rank earned by giving a series of feasts to one’s community, the symbol of which was the crest feather of the male monal pheasant (pre-Islamic).”³⁰ In his earlier paper from the Hindu Kush conference, Strand elaborates on the *mü* rank.³¹

The acquisition of the rank of *mü* (*mi* in Kati) has also been described by Azar (=Abdullah Khan), a Pre-Islamic Nuristani whose manuscript *Morgenstierne* first partially translated from the Hindustani manuscript, and which has been subsequently completed by Schmidt and Cacopardo. Azar’s account is of tremendous interest because it is a firsthand account of the status system by a Nuristani in direct contact with the pre-Islamic customs, and, as such, it allows us to verify what we have learned after the conversion of Kafiristan. It also helps to verify Robertson’s account; indeed, it actually makes Robertson’s account all the more remarkable.

Azar writes:

If anybody wants to become a headman [that is. a ranked prestige feast-giver DN], the method for doing it is that the person first of all sacrifices sixty-four goats in the name of the deity called Gĩš at the end of September. While the goats are being slaughtered the

²⁹ Strand. <http://nuristan.info/IngFrameL.html>.

³⁰ Strand. <http://nuristan.info/IngFrameL.html>.

³¹ Strand 1974b.

people keep worshipping. When they finish the slaughter of the goats the worship of the deity is also concluded. Then the meat is distributed among all the men in the village. The method of doing so is this, that all the goat meat is first divided into fourteen equal parts and distributed among the fourteen *urus*. Each of these *urus* has his separate party. Every *uru* distributes the above mentioned meat among his own party.³² S-C 45-46

Interestingly, and I think significantly, the term among the Kom for these groups ('separate party') is *gũř*, which is cognate to OIA *gaṇa*.

Forty days after distributing this meat, he feasts the villagers. The method for doing it is as follows: a man is sent throughout the village to stop the men and women from cooking their own meals, and for four days, morning and evening, ie. Eight times, he serves the very finest food.

Forty days after this feast has passed, in mid-winter, he again feasts the whole village for four days in the above-mentioned way. A dance is held each day after the feast. In this dance, the community and this headman also dance. After the dance, at around two or three o'clock in the night, a feast is served to the dancers which is called supper in English. Four days later the man's ears are pierced and golden earrings are put into them. (The ears are pierced in three places, two above and one on the earlobe.) They tie a turban round his head. They let these earrings remain in his ears after his death and he is buried with them.

³² Abdullah Khan et al 2006:45-46

He is taken outside the village to an appointed place on the first day of the *Nīlō* festival.³³ **It is strictly forbidden for women** to visit him there, nor is he allowed to enter the village. (emphasis mine) But the men can visit him. He wears fine clothes and a round turban. ... After concluding these three dances he drives the lance or spear into the middle of the dancing platform and, holding the battle-axe in his hand, dances magnificently. On conclusion of all three dances and the festival he returns to his house. On reaching the village he invites the people of his lineage and the community leaders to a feast. On this occasion the title of *mī-moc* is given to this headman. At the end of one year he feasts the whole village. At the beginning of the second year the title of *sun-vāē aro* is conferred on him in perpetuity... But each time he gives a feast a *mī-moc*, that is to say *mī*, is added to his title.³⁴

Morgenstierne also recorded this feature³⁵ *diz mi ro* ‘twelve ‘mi’ chief’; here the word *ro* is from *aro*. Strand records a genealogical name Pujmü Căřmor ‘Five mü Căřmor.’ I would draw attention here to the Vedic personages called *Navagva* and *Daśagva*, and probably *atithigva*³⁶ as well, which I suggest are actually fossilized title terms attached to the prestige feasting rank. The terms will refer to ‘the one who has offered 9 cows’ and ‘the one who has offered 10 cows’ and ‘one who offers a cow to a guest’.

³³ For this festival, see Robertson 1896:472, 595. For the month name, see Lentz1978:83.

³⁴ Abdullah Khan et al 2006:47-49

³⁵ Morgenstierne 1967:1388.

³⁶ See Madonell-Keith 1995: s.v.

Palwal also describes the requirements for the prestige feasting rank:

As a first step, he killed 30 goats and distributed the meat uncooked. This meat was given to every male or everyone above 12 years old. Then, in the winter, he gave food to all the village for seven days. He fed the people of his village for five days in the month of *Giče*.³⁷

For those here who have read the descriptions of the *dīkṣita* and the *dīkṣā* in the *saṃhitās* and *brāhmaṇas*, the time periods and activities described above will seem at least vaguely familiar. The term *dīkṣita* should be translated as ‘ritually pure man’ or ‘one that has become/been made ritually pure’, rather than ‘consecrated’, as a more accurate rendering of the term. The entire matter of purity and pollution which is at the heart of the Pre-Islamic Nuristani and Kalasha belief system, affects virtually everything individuals do and believe, and it is central to their feasting activities.³⁸ Its fundamental presence in the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society again shows that this is an archaic belief in the Indo-Iranian sphere.

The question now is whether this feature of prestige feasting and an attendant ranking system involving the two modalities of ‘hero’ and the ‘prestige feast giver’ as found among the Nuristani and the Kalasha, represent an extremely archaic institution, that is, one which was found in the earliest stages of the Indo-Iranian community of the Trans-Urals and

³⁷ This is the month in which the Winter Solstice Feast takes place, the central feast of the year. For its description see Robertson 1896:580-583 and Abdullah Khan et al 2006. For its place in the Nuristani calendar see Leitner 1978:87ff.

³⁸ See Parkes 1983, Klimburg 1999.

Central Asia³⁹, or whether it represents a more recent innovation localized to the Nuristanis and then probably borrowed by the Kalasha when they were in close proximity with the Nuristanis.⁴⁰ The existing textual evidence provided by the Vedic (and some post-Vedic literature, notably the *Mahābhārata*) and Avestan literature point to the conclusion that prestige feasting is an extremely archaic institution that can be traced back to the earliest Indo-Iranian society. It is the Nuristani data that makes possible an understanding of not only the prehistory of the Vedic and Avestan societies, but also of the critical internal developments within their traditions.

³⁹ For this position, that the Early Indo-Iranians can be associated with the Sintashta-Petrovka culture, see especially Kuz'mina 2007. For a non-Russian archaeologist assenting to this assertion, see especially Anthony 2007. Most European (non-Russian) and American archaeologists tend to loathe to assign a linguistic or 'ethnic' association with archaeological sites. Kohl writes how "western readers may be struck by occasional ethnic, linguistic, and even racial attributions of specific archaeological cultures" (Kohl 2007a:XVI). However, the association of cultural features found in the Sintashta cultural complex and their likely correlaries described in early Vedic literature, plus the simple fact that the Indo-Iranian languages, well established in the 1st millennium BC simply had to come through Central Asia. There do not appear to be any other possibilities, unless one wants to argue for the Out of India theory, which is simply bizarre. In a subsequent article, I treat this connection in greater detail.

⁴⁰ Parkes 1983 records the extensive relationship between the Pakistani Kalasha and the Nuristanis, especially those in the Bashgal Valley. The relationship is rather one-sided with the Kalasha being the receivers over the Nuristanis are the 'givers'.

4. The *arāmuc*- 'prestige feast-sponsor'

To return to the prestige feast giver or sponsor as found among other Pre-Islamic Nuristani groups. I hesitate to give an etymology to the Kom word *mī* or *mü*.⁴¹ Also, there is some variation in the practices, time frame, material quantities, etc., between the various Nuristani groups with regard to the acquisition of this rank. However, the essential features of the lavish distribution of meat, grains, cheese and dairy products according to a set of standards for which one receives the rank is clear.

Among the Kati of Bashgal the holder of the prestige feasting rank is referred to as an *arā*, which Palwal renders as 'rich master'. The term *mi* refers to the rank itself, the term *arā/aro* refers to the individual holding the *mi* rank. This is indicated by the fact that the honorary privileges of this rank were also extended to the offspring of the *arāmuch*. Notably, his son was *arakur* 'son of an *arā*'. Palwal observes that an individual who seeks a particular rank would first announce his intention to seek that rank. Then, after performing the following actions, he would be declared an *arāmac*.

⁴¹ It is possible to derive *mi* and its cognate *mü* from **mitra* with the loss of the final vowel, subsequent loss of **r* as Morgenstierne has noted, loss of the final consonant **t* resulting in *mi*. Morgenstierne has recorded the word *amitr* in Kati meaning enemy, most likely from the meaning 'one with whom there is not a sworn oath relationship', but the negative prefix perhaps halted the similar development that we have with *mi*. If this is the case for *mi*, then we see a meaning in **mitra* as not only in the sphere of alliances and oaths, but also within the prestige feasting sphere.

5. OIA *ari* ‘prestige feast giver/sponsor’

I had been hesitant in making the connection between the Nuristani word *arā* with OIA *ari* and its related *arya* for a number of years, but I could not shake the conviction that in the Rgvedic passages dealing with the *ari*, we were dealing with an individual who would seem to be analogous to the Pre-Islamic Nuristani prestige feast giver or sponsor. However, I think the connection is solid, and that it requires us to re-examine the well-known argument of Thieme that IA *ari-* meant ‘stranger’, an interpretation that has gained the favor of most Indologists. Jamison and Brereton follow Thieme in their translation of the RV translate *ari* as ‘stranger’. But, it is in reconstructing a feast giving society similar to that found among the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis that we can reanalyze the seminal terms of the RV: *ari* and *aryá-*. The link between the Nuristani and the Rgvedic terms in terms of functions and linguistic form seems too great to be coincidental, thus allowing for a reconstruction of the term **ari-* in Early IIR meaning ‘prestige feast-giver’, with this meaning continuing into the period of the RgVeda (1300-1000 BC) itself.

The question is, what is the Nuristani word related to: **ari* or **aryá-*? The Nuristani form seems to be *ar* + suffix *ā*; this is reflected in Kom Kati which has the form *aro-* in which we see the usual *ā > o*. In terms of etymology, I think we are looking at the word **ari* in PN.

The term *ari-* has been the subject of intense scholarly debate for nearly 150 years; Bloomfield calls it the ‘l’enfant terrible’ of Vedic studies. This term also led to the longstanding debate between Thieme and Dumézil over its exact meaning. Indologists have tended to follow

Thieme's suggestion that the term means 'stranger',⁴² a person who could be either a friend or foe, thus accounting for the difficulties in its apparent contradictory meaning in various passages in the RV. In some passages, there is a positive connotation to the word, while in other passages, it has a negative connotation, leaving translators such as Geldner to render the term with 'rival' 'chief' 'miser' etc.

Thieme objects to these differing translations for this one term, stating: "It is my very point that a word cannot mean 'rival' and 'chief' (and besides 'miser' [Geldner]) and 'stranger' at the same time: these words represent non-interchangeable concepts that cannot be put over the same denominator."⁴³ Brereton, in summarizing Thieme's thesis also makes the same point: "In fact, he [sc. Thieme] argued it is only this translation (i.e. 'stranger' DN) which can account for the variety of contexts in which the word appears. Sometimes it designates a friend, other times, an enemy; sometimes a host, other times, a guest. Only an underlying concept "stranger" is applicable in all these contexts."⁴⁴

But this is simply not true. Within the context of a prestige feasting society such as found among the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis and the Kalasha, it is indeed the **exact situation** wherein a prestigious feast-giver is both 'friend' and 'foe', 'wealthy patron' and 'rival', a 'host', and a 'guest' and even a "miser" or 'stingy' to those excluded from his feast. The semantic problem is one of our own making, residing in the fact that in our attempt to translate these terms into our modern languages, we inadvertently end up with quite different concepts, thus arriving at the

⁴² Thieme 1938.

⁴³ Thieme 1957:75.

⁴⁴ Brereton 1981:151.

wrong conclusion that these are contradictory states, or “non-interchangeable concepts”, as Thieme claims. Yet, all of these conditions or states can indeed be subsumed by the single term **ari* or ‘prestige feast giver’. To use Thieme’s metaphor, we **can** put all these concepts in the numerator over the denominator *ari*. It is our need to translate with different terms the nuances of the single term, but here we are not dealing with mutually contradictory terms; rather, our translations do not properly recognize the nature of the ‘prestige feast giver’ within the context of his unique social institution, that of the prestige feast in its various forms.

In the following description from Palwal, the complexity of the prestige feast giver is made clear:

A prerequisite to becoming a ranked man [2nd tier rank DN] among the Kafirs is the holding of property. Wealth is judged in terms of how many cattle and goats a man owns, how much land he controls and the extent of his annual income from these holdings. The Kafirs are **highly competitive** and, in addition to claims of homicides committed, they demonstrate their **intratribal competition through comparison of individual property** ...Thus there are **aggressive overtones** to the distribution and ownership of property.⁴⁵

In this statement, we see wealth, rivalry, aggression, feasting, gifts, etc. as the critical and essential components of the prestige feast giver, all of which are subsumed in the character of the prestige feast-giver. The ethnological evidence provided by the Nuristani and Kalasha

⁴⁵ Palwal 1977:220.

data for the prestige feasting society clearly show that we could use all the various terms: ‘friend’, ‘leader’, ‘rival’, and ‘patron’, ‘guest’ and ‘host’ when dealing with the prestigious feast givers. Attempts to translate this word into modern languages present the problem as a straw man; how can this word mean these very different and contradictory concepts? If, however, the term refers to the prestigious feast giver as we encounter him within the context of the Nuristani and Kalasha feasting complex that is similar to that found in the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society, then these various ‘translations’ which Thieme claimed to be contradictory can be seen to be simply expressions or facets of his ‘office’ and of his relationships to others in his society--those in his family, in his lineage (*jana-*), in his community (*viś-*), in his territory (*janma-*).⁴⁶ Thus the term *arí* is neither an ethnic designation nor a kinship term; it is a designation of a particular important social function or category within the society, a function held by the overproducing feasting individual who has the capacity to distribute essential goods within a prescribed system—the sacrificial ritual. And because of his prestige feasting activities, he is accorded status, he has political power and influence, he is a leader, **and** he is in competition with others also competing for prestige. Thus, all the characteristics which we find listed for the *ari-* in the **RV** and which are seen to be somehow contradictory in our contemporary understanding, and thus only resolved by positing, oddly, the term ‘stranger’,⁴⁷ are simply descriptions of the various facets of a prestige feast giver. On an interesting side note, little has been written on the role of the *bhrātrvya*

⁴⁶ I take the meaning of the terms *jana-viś-janma* within a hierarchical context.

⁴⁷ Benveniste noted long ago that it is very strange for an ethnonym, i.e. *arya*, derived from *ari* to be derived from a term meaning ‘stranger’.

‘rival’, despite its clear importance in the texts as reflected in the large number of its occurrences. There is hardly a page in the Middle Vedic literature where the *bhrātr̥vya* is not encountered. I suggest that *bhrātr̥vya* is a replacement for the term *ari*, once the prestige feasting system had completely collapsed by the end of the period of actual Rgvedic hymn composition.

6. Competition and divine sanctioning

There is a distinct religious aspect to the activities and accomplishments of the prestige feast-giver. Palwal writes:

The ritual feasts of an individual should not be viewed out of their context. As noted earlier, the holder of a public office is in competition with rival members of his village, lineage, and lineage segments. The competitive nature of Kafir rivalry is such that once a man allows a competitor to surpass his **generosity or heroism**; the community will support and acknowledge his rival as the leading **consecrated** popular headman.⁴⁸ Palwal 1977:101-102 (boldface mine)

Competition was at the heart of the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society; the competition for status as expressed through rank motivates free-born men to perform their valorous deeds, give feasts and produce surplus products for dispensation to their people. But, there is also an important eschatological dimension to feasting, and this religious dimension is

⁴⁸ Palwal 1977:101-102.

always present in the feasting cycle. That is, feasting is not simply a ‘secular’ activity for worldly status and rank; intrinsic to the feasting complex is the religious dimension that confers and confirms the rank and status of an individual. This is very clearly seen in the erection of the funeral effigies for the men and women of rank as an assurance of their ‘immortality’. In this regard, Palwal writes:

The ritual feasts of an individual should not be viewed out of their context. As noted earlier, the holder of a public office is in competition with rival members of his village, lineage, and lineage segments. The competitive nature of Kafir rivalry is such that once a man allows a competitor to surpass his generosity or heroism, the community will support and acknowledge his rival as the leading consecrated popular headman. **This change of power is possible because the feasting and heroism are religious endeavors that bestow supernatural blessing and sanctification on the individual** and therefore endow him with higher status. The rival may thus become the headman of his lineage segment, lineage, or even the village, depending on the level and importance of the feasting and ranking. As a rule, the man with the highest private rank will have given the most elaborate feasts and will occupy the most important and prestigious public office. In order to keep holding this office or advance to a still higher one, he must maintain a popularity distance between himself and his rivals by acquiring further higher ranks through successive feast-giving.⁴⁹ (emphasis mine)

⁴⁹ Palwal 1977:102

Strand also arrived at the conclusion that there is a ‘sacred’ dimension involved in the feasting activities, going on to make an extremely important observation regarding the role that purity has with that of the ranking system.

In the pre-Islamic order, animal husbandry carried sacred and symbolic functions that it lacks today. **Numerous sacrifices of livestock were required to induce the state of purity necessary for communication with the gods, and huge quantities of meat and dairy products** were distributed in tribal feasts by aspirants to formal rank, who were required to have a minimum of 400 goats and 60 cows.⁵⁰ (emphasis mine)

The RV speaks of the *manyu* ‘wrath’ of the *ari*.⁵¹ I suggest that that this term is not to be seen as related to wrath, especially since the question that never seems to be asked (or answered) is: wrath over what? It refers rather to a sense of ‘obsession’, with the mind fixed on something. In this regard, Darling comments on the state of mind of the prestige feast giver among the Kalash, and this preoccupation is also mirrored in the Pre-Islamic Nuristani system. I quote in full Darling’s discussion of the Kalash “Duty of Feast-Giving”.

If a man begins to save his wealth for a feast, the Kalash say he is no longer able to ‘eat his wealth quietly’. Such a man becomes shiftless and restless, a worm is wriggling inside him,

⁵⁰ Strand 1974:123

⁵¹ RV 7.60.11; 8.48.8

compelling him to make a ‘na-moo-naa kromb’, a ‘strange, (deranged) work.’⁵²

During the feast, **his behavior is like a man possessed**, as he ‘**recklessly**’ dispenses with his and all his clan’s wealth. The latter observe him with some trepidation, however he is beyond their control because, to curb his actions at that point, would be to destroy their reputation and honor. The eulogies about the feast-giver go on to say that this is not ‘**madness**’ however, but the fulfillment of the man’s “*armaan*”, his ‘sorrow’ or ‘longing’ to comply with the wishes of god and his fundamental spirit of generosity. (emphasis mine)⁵³

This same behavior can be seen among the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis. Robertson writes:

A miserly Kafir ... will do his utmost, will try every shift and expedient, to render his feast a success. **He thinks nothing of ruining himself completely to become a Jast**, and ever afterwards refers to his impoverished condition with a proud humility, and generally getting, the sympathy and admiration of his audience at every such allusion.⁵⁴ (Emphasis mine)

This is this situation that lies behind the actions of both Yudhishtira and Nala in the *Mahābhārata* as they proceed to ‘obsessively’

⁵² Trail-Cooper 1999 s.v.: *namuna* ‘strange, novel’, *krom* ‘work’

⁵³ Darling 1979:146-147. Cf. Yudhishtira’s behaviour and Nala’s behavior. I have more to say on the implications of these societies on our understanding of the antecedents of the Mahabharata in a subsequent article.

⁵⁴ Robertson 1896:458-459.

give away their entire store of wealth. We are dealing not with a gambling situation, but at its original source, a prestige feast involving the total disbursement of not only one's own goods, but even those of one's lineage, as noted by Darling.

Let us return to the problem of the *ari*. Brereton states: "This important point, that the *ari* is always an outsider, should be obvious from Thieme's exposition..."⁵⁵ But this is also simply not true. In the list below, which summarizes the occurrences of the term, we do not find this sense of *ari*- as an 'outsider'. This is a conclusion that Thieme and other modern commentators read into the verses with the term *ari*. Thieme's theory that the term *ari*- means 'stranger', which he based on his objection to the assumed contradictory notions that seemed to surround it, led him to the unwarranted conclusion that, in the occurrences of the term *ari*- , he is an 'outsider', a 'stranger'. Rather, we must side with Palihawadana's conclusion that "the one thing that is quite certain about the word *ari* in the **RV** is that it consistently refers to a rich and powerful person."⁵⁶ Palihawadana justifies this conclusion with numerous examples. We can easily translate the term *ari* with 'prestige feast giver' to see that his role is not that of an 'outsider', but that of a member of the overall feasting complex which the poet is extolling and in which he wishes to participate, or as a member of an adversarial cultic group which the poets are condemning. It seems singularly unlikely that the hymn composers would be so familiar with the wealth and possessions of the 'stranger'. How could this be? And why would a 'stranger' be present at these, by their

⁵⁵ Brereton 1981:154.

⁵⁶ Palihawadana 1970:88.

very nature, exclusionary ritual feasts? Often the poet implores Indra to pass by an adversarial soma feast and to come to the one the poet endorses.

Let us briefly review some of these characteristics of the *ari*. When we substitute the word ‘stranger’, it is, as Benveniste commented decades ago, extremely odd for such a critical term (including also *arya*) to be associated with a meaning ‘stranger’. Palihawadana organizes the following categories and individuals that involve the person of the *ari* and his associations, along with his citations.⁵⁷

1. cattle 1.33.3; 1.121.15; 1.126.5; 10.27.8
2. wealth 1.81.6, 9; 5.2.12. Cf. also 8.24.22; 9.23.3; 2.12.4, 5; 10.86.1, 3
3. riches 4.48.1; 6.14.3; 6.20.1; 6.36.5; 6.47.9; 7.34.18
4. “nourishing possessions” 2.12.4 and 5; 2.23.15; 10.86.1/3
5. “firmly-held treasures” 8.21.16.
6. “man-sustaining food” 1.81.6
7. corn 10.27.8 (Perhaps also 10.42.7)
8. “fattening vivifying-treasures” 8.72.16
9. “vigour-giving booty” (to be won from the *ari*) 1.73.5

Of a somewhat different order are the following — which reflects the power or characteristics the *ari* had at his command:

10. splendour 4.4.6, 9.61.11. Cf. also 2.23.15; 4.16.19
11. fame 10.116.6
12. priests 8.65.9
13. insults/malicious speech 7.31.5
14. ‘wrath’ [= obsession ?] 7.60.11; 8.48.8
15. commands 8.60.12

⁵⁷ Palihawadana 1996:38.

16. men/people 5.33.2; 8.1.4; 10.27.19c. Cf. also 7.21.5 and 10.89.3

17. “overpowering manliness” 10.76.2 1

18. “manly forces” 1.169.6; 10.59.3

It strains credulity that, in these verses dealing clearly with interactions that characterize relationships between individuals and groups at the various feasts (*yajñas*)⁵⁸, the person of the ‘stranger’ or the ‘other’ could function in this manner. It is particularly unlikely that the hymn-composer would have had this detailed knowledge of a stranger’s possessions, his wealth, his state of mind—anger, envy, etc. It furthermore seems extremely unlikely that the ‘stranger’ would be a benefactor within within the socio-ritual context that is operative in these hymns. Finally, Beneviste’s observes that it is extremely odd that one would go from a term for ‘stranger’ or ‘other’ to the creation of an ethnonym, *arya*, from this term.⁵⁹ The problem stems from the failure to understand that actual underlying social structure found in a prestige feasting society, which then eliminates the supposed contradictions which can only be resolved in the manner that Thieme proposes. A far simpler explanation is the one proposed: a prestige feasting system in which we find all these multiple characteristics and facets in a single person operating within a particular social structure. This is not a criticism of Thieme—he was simply completely unaware of such a system; instead he derived his conclusion

⁵⁸ Note Thieme’s conclusion decades ago that the *yajña* is a ‘stilisiertes Gastmahl’. P. Thieme, (1957a): 90. I think he would have found the feasting system of the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis and that of the Kalash very interesting.

⁵⁹ Aguilar i Matas 1991:22 ff.

from the limited evidence and current understanding available to him at the time.

Even the term ‘miser’ makes sense if the prestige feast giver does not allow a particular person to participate in the feast. In this context, we can bring in the term *yātudhāna* or just *yātu* which is usually translated as ‘demon’. We can now argue that this term refers to an individual who seats the guests at the various prestige feasts with a meaning basically that of ‘seat arranger’. The verb *yat* has a meaning ‘to arrange in order’. Again, we need but look at the various feasts which were offered in the **Pre-Islamic Nuristani** times to see that not only are various groups invited, various groups and individuals are often **NOT** invited. In what appears to be a cultic struggle between the Indra/Soma group and the Non-Indra/Surā group, those who seat the guests become objects of derision and hostility because of their function within the sacrificial feasting structure.

7. Early IIr **ari*- ‘freeborn prestige feast giver’

For the various occurrences of the term *ari* in the RV, we can consider the term to mean ‘prestige feast giver’ and understand in this term all the nuances listed above, similar to those found in the Pre-Islamic Nuristani society and the Kalasha society. I suggest that during the **Early IIr** period (2100-1700), the word **ari* also meant ‘prestige feast giver’. The word **ari* thus referred to a person who held a ranked position that was available to the class of highly productive free-born men in the **Early IIr** society. This term designated the individual holding the prestige feast rank that constituted the second tier in the rank acquisition system, the first tier rank being that of the heroic rank (**śura-*). The **ari* rank was achieved

only after first achieving the heroic rank and thus we see an important and critical generational feature here: the heroic rank was achieved by the youth and the prestige feast rank achieved by the ‘elders’. By understanding this seminal term to mean ‘freeborn prestige feast-giver’, we can solve a number of problems associated with this word and those related to it.

Excursus on RV *arí-*

Thieme’s suggestion that the term *ari* meant ‘stranger’, despite a certain amount of reservation expressed in the scholarly literature, has received considerable acceptance. In their exceedingly important translation, long overdue for the English language, Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton have chosen to use this translation of the term in their own translation. However, a very strong counter-argument was put forth first in 1970 by M. Pahilawada in his remarkably underrated and undervalued paper. He followed this paper with further revisions and additions, culminating in his final revision of the paper in 1996. All the while, it still garnered very little interest or notice. In the interesting paper by Jarrod Whitaker in 2007, “Does pressing Soma make you an Āryan?”, Pahilawadana’s substantial contribution to this very question is not included in the references. It has finally received recognition, being re-edited and published in the *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* in 2017. While I will disagree with the final conclusion as to the meaning of *ari-* proposed by Pahilawadana, he systematically gathers the textual data that seriously undermine the possible meaning of *ari* as ‘stranger’ or ‘other’.

We can examine a number of verses in the *ṚV* which illustrate that the meaning ‘prestige feast giver’ for *arí-* is a more likely meaning for the term in the *ṚV*.

Excursus on *RV* 9.79.3

RV 9.79.3 provides us with an interesting verse that helps to illuminate the meaning of *ari*. Several recent translations of this verse render it thus:

RV 9.79.3ab

utá svásyā árātiyā arír hí śá
utānyásyā árātiyā vṛko hí śáḥ

“(Protect us) from the hostility of one of our own, for he (becomes) an alien [lit. another]; from the hostility of another, for he (becomes) a wolf.”⁶⁰

In the J-B translation, ‘alien’ is rendered with ‘stranger’.

Now, in the case of the hostility of one of our own, (we proclaim:) “he, indeed, is a stranger!” And, in the case of the hostility belonging to the other (side), (we proclaim:) “he, indeed, is a wolf!”⁶¹

“Whether he be our own ‘*ari*’--i.e. he is the ‘*ari*’ or whether he be the ‘*ari*’ of another--i.e. he is the wolf, may thirst overcome him

⁶⁰ Brereton 1981:153. *RV* 9.79.3ab ‘of the stinginess of one of our own ... and of the stinginess of another ...’ (Klein 1985:1:354)

⁶¹ JB 3:1313.

completely as if in the desert. Conquer, O purifying Soma, the evil-doer.”⁶².

I would translate:

RV 9.79.3ab

“Indeed (*hí*) he is a **prestige feast giver, but [he] does not give gifts to his own** and [concerning] the non-gift-giving [of another] **[[prestige feast giver, i.e. one who is outside of our community], indeed (*hí*) he is a wolf.”**

The term *arāti-* is a technical term referring to non-gift-giving. For those who do not receive from the bounty of the *arí-*, their natural concern, of course, is his alleged ‘stinginess’. The poet here is disparaging a feast-giver who refuses to distribute his feast goods to the poet or to his lineage, even though they are of the same community. On the ‘stinginess’ asserted here, however, I suspect that the poet was one who was not qualified to receive gifts from the prestige feast giver, but with the changing circumstances, he now feels entitled to such emoluments. Then, we also see the interesting opposition here of:

<i>svá</i> ‘own (community)’	<i>ánya</i> ‘another (community)’
<i>arí</i> ‘prestigious feast-giver’	<i>vṛka</i> ‘wolf’ (= <i>ari</i> of another community)

⁶² Banerjea 1963:5, fn. 4.

The term *vṛka* - ‘wolf’ must be a metaphor for a person and, most likely, it is a reference to an *arí* of another community. Why would this be? Within the context of the feast-giving society, the feasts are usually for one's own community, but the *arí*-s also exist in the other communities, where they are also the over-producers of goods that will be distributed at their own feasts. Thus, we can envision both community competition and rivalry for the scarce resources in a region. The *arí*-s are producing a surplus of food products, including meat, grain, etc. These abundant producers, the *arí*-s, the prestige feast-givers, are in competition for the resources not only with other members of their community (*svá*-), but also with those potential feast-givers in the larger area outside of one's own territory, designated instead by the term *ánya*-. Thus, the term *vṛka* - ‘wolf’ is a metaphor for the overproducing ones, the *ari*-s, from another community with whom there may not be a feasting relationship. In a situation of scarcity and competition for the pastures and agricultural land, those overproducing individuals, the *arí*-s of another community, are then likened to rapacious devouring wolves. The *ari*- of one's own community will share his ‘production’; the *ari*- of another community will not--he is the wolf that snatches the goods away.

RV 10.39.5

*purāṇá vāṃ vīryā prá bravā jáné 't'o hāsat^hur b^hiṣájā mayob^húvā/
tá vāṃ nú návyāv ávase karāmahe 'yám nāsatyā śrād arír yát^hā
dád^hat /9/*

“I shall declare your ancient heroic deeds in the presence of the (*jana*) ... so that this *ari* may gain faith, O *Nāsatyas!*”⁶³

⁶³ Pahlivadana 1970:94, fn. 18.

Here I suggest that the poet is referring to a prestige feast giver from another *viś* ‘settlement’ or *janma* ‘territory’, and thus outside of the poet’s lineage (*jana*). There appears to be a clear hierarchy of relationships designated by the terms *jana-* *viś-* and *janma-*, with the *jana-* constituting the smallest of the units. *Jana* is most likely a designation for a lineage, *viś-* refers to the settlement and *janma-* refers to ‘community (of settlements)’.⁶⁴ Thus, the occurrence of the term *jana-* explains why this prestige feast-giver, who is outside of the poet’s lineage, is now being brought into their particular ritual sphere. It is well known that the later Vedic rites are anything but uniform, with a fair amount of variance in liturgical practice among the various *śākhās*. This does not rule out their relationships with each other and their ability to participate at each other’s feasts. In this hymn, perhaps this prestige feast giver may, or may not, be unaware of the particular narrative which the poet indicates he will recount. In any case, the poet is also proving to this feast-giver that he is an authentic member of the liturgical feasting community--hence his need to declare that this is ‘ancient’, lest this particular *ari-* ‘prestige feast giver’ should doubt--that is, ‘not have faith’.

RV 1.70-1-2

vanéma pūrvīr aryó manīṣā
agnīḥ suśóko víśvāni aśyāḥ

⁶⁴ In RV 2.26.3ab there is the sequence: *jana* : *viś* : *janma* which Klein renders with folk : clan : race (Klein 1992:25). However, given that the archaic society will probably think in kinship relationship similar to the contemporary mountain societies, the terms probably mean something similar to: sublineage [*jana-*] : *viś*

ā daíviyāni vratā cikitvān
ā mānuṣasya jánasya jánma

Let us possess the many poetic inspirations of the stranger, Agni who burns well, let him obtain everything, he who has knowledge of the divine orders and the descent of the human race. (Mucciarelli 2014:14)

Again, why would they seek the ‘poetic inspirations’ of a stranger? Furthermore, it is interesting that the poet knows the language of the ‘stranger’. Leaving aside this point for the moment, we can see the conflict that is being articulated here. Just as in the Kalasha system, where the invited prestige feast givers will ‘spontaneously’ sing a praise hymn to the hosting prestige feast giver, here, too, the attending guest prestige feast givers offer their ‘poetic inspirations’. We now see the intrusion of the new ‘poet’, most likely one who is involved in the feasting, but is not one who has prestige. We are looking at the change in the larger social system with the incipient priesthood asserting itself.

The translation I suggest is:

Let us win (possess/appropriate) the many poetic songs of the (guest) prestige feast giver. Agni, of beautiful flames, obtains (*aś*) everything [for us]; [that Agni who], perceiving the pledges [we take] that are related to the devas, and the birth of the lineage from Manu.

8. Prestige Feast Givers outside of the RV sacrificial/ritual feasting community

RV 10.86.1

*ví hí sótor ásr̥kṣata néndraṃ devám amaṃsata /
yátr̥amadad vṛṣákapiṛ aryáh puṣṭéṣu mátsak^hā víśvasmād índra
úttarah //*

[Indra:] “Because they have left off pressing (soma), they have stopped honoring Indra as god, (in the places) where my comrade Vṛṣākapi was getting high on the goodies of the stranger.”--Above all Indra! (J-B 3:1527)

Pahilawadana renders this verse with:

They have lapsed from the pressing (of Soma), they have not revered Indra as a god - there, where Vṛṣākapi found pleasure in the nourishing riches of the ari.⁶⁵

We encounter again the oft-repeated indictment of those who do not ‘press’ the soma and who do not revere Indra. The *ari* is the prestige feast giver of the earlier tradition and, while speaking the same or similar language or dialect, has not adopted the soma cult and the worship of Indra.

... where my companion, *Vṛṣākapi*, was delighting in the nourishing foods of the (rival) prestige feast-giver, when (it is really) Indra who is the one of utmost confidence.

Excursus on the terms *dasyu/dāsa*

In his extremely underrated paper on the term *ari*, but which has finally been recognized and been published on the online journal in the

⁶⁵ Pahilawadana 1996:40.

highly respected *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*.⁶⁶ Pahilawadana concludes the following with regard to the two critical words in the RV, the *dasyu* and the *dāsa*.

The word *Dasyu* in the RV essentially carries **connotations of cult hostility, of being non-Vedic culturally and religiously** (as opposed to ***Dāsa* which carries connotations more ethnic and more ‘political’**). The word is often associated with other words denotative of differences of religious views and practices (e.g. *avrata*, *āsraddha*, *akratu*, *ayajyu*, *adevayu*, *akarma*, *amantu*, *anyavrata* etc.)⁶⁷ (emphasis mine)

He also concludes

If one were to judge from the Ṛgvedic evidence alone, one must say that *dasyu* is the term that is used to denote non-Aryans in general, perhaps any one distinguishable from the Aryans on account of religious differences; in distinction to that *dāsa* is a word that seems to denote a specific ethnic group that held authority in the area to which the Indo-Aryans migrated.⁶⁸

I think we can further identify the *dāsas* and the *dasyus* within this framework for which Pahilawadana convincingly argues and add certain refinements to his interpretation. I suggest the following situation.

The fundamental argument of Pahilawadana is that the RV clearly expresses the existence of three groups:

⁶⁶ Volume 24 (2017), issue 2.

⁶⁷ Pahilawadana 1996:110.

⁶⁸ Pahilawadana 2017:166.

1. Rgvedic Aryans, and the notion of Aryan is defined within the context of a very specific ritual sense and belief system: the one who worships Indra, who ‘presses’ soma, and who recognized Agni ‘Fire’ as a god.

2. The *Dasyus* are those who follow a liturgical, cultic practice, one which is **recognizable** to the Rgvedic Aryans, and those practices do not include the practices and beliefs of the Rgvedic Aryans following the cultic practices of number 1 above.

3. The *dāsas* are Indo-Iranian speakers who arrived in the subcontinent, having arrived via a southeasterly movement through Central Asia rather than the southwesterly route. They arrived prior to the most easterly branch of the Southwest Indo-Iranian speakers who are the *dasyus*. We can portray the situation thusly:

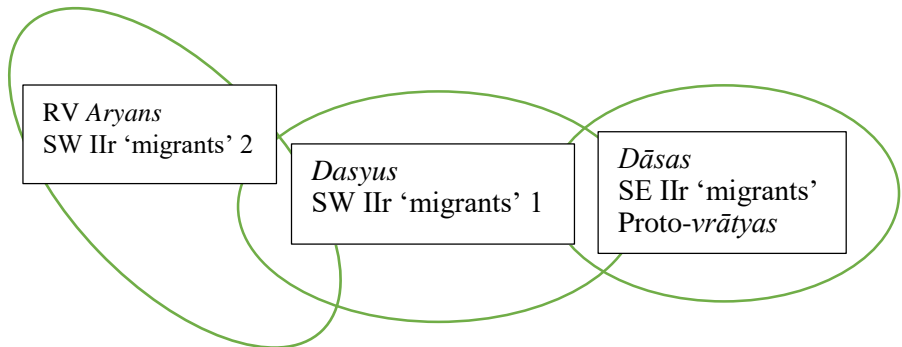


Figure 1. Relative position of the Indo-Iranian speakers within the subcontinent, approximately 1300-1200 BC.

It is because the *dasyus* are pre-Rgvedic speakers and were part of the earlier southwesterly movement into the subcontinent and with whom the Rgvedic Aryans shared, it would appear, a more or less common language. Hence the poet in 1.51.8ab can say

*vi jānīhi āriyān yé ca dásyavo
barhīsmate randhayā śāsad avratān*

Distinguish between the Aryas and those who Dasyus. Chastising those who do not make their pledge [to us], make them subject to the man who provides the ritual grass [i.e. following the Rgvedic Aryan cultic practice]. (Following J-B 1:165)

For the statement ‘distinguish’ (*vi+ jānā*) between’ only makes sense if there was some sort of problem in distinguishing between the two, otherwise, it would be obvious to the speaker and the hearer. This indicates what would seem to be a common language, a common dress, a common underlying form of ritual practice.

Another significant Rgvedic verse that has received a fair amount of commentary over the years is RV 10.28.1.

RV 10.28.1

*vísvo hy ànyó arír ājagāma māméd áha śváśuro nā jagāma /
jaksītyād dʰānā utá sómam papīyāt svāśitaḥ púnar ástam jagāyāt//*

Thieme holds that the *ari-* is opposed to the *śváśura* ‘father-in-law’.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Thieme 1938.

Banerjea offers the following translation of the first half of the verse in his study of the word *ari*:

“All the others (comprising) the ‘*ari*’ (**exogamous group**) have come, only my own father-in-law has not come.”⁷⁰

Jamison-Brereton translate:

[Sacrificer’s wife:] While every other stranger has come here, only my father-in-law has not come here.

He should eat the roasted grains and he should drink the soma. Well-fed he should then go home again.⁷¹

There are several questions here. The first question is: which father-in-law? The term *śvaśura* simply means ‘father-in-law’ and can refer to either the wife’s father or to the husband’s father. Thieme holds that the term *śvaśura* “is the father of the husband and the husband only.”⁷² Likewise, in Jamison’s and Brereton’s translation of this verse, the text is interpreted as though it is the wife speaking, and thus she is referring to her husband’s father. Yet, in the second half of the verse, the wife then states how the ‘father-in-law’ can return home after eating and drinking. This is an odd statement when there is the great likelihood that at the time of this hymn, and well known in subsequent Indian society, a patrilocal system was the social norm, and thus the daughter-in-law would be living with her husband’s father.⁷³

⁷⁰ Banerjea 1963:5.

⁷¹ J-B 3:1419.

⁷² Thieme 1957.

⁷³ Ghurye 1955.44ff; Karve 1965:36.

In the Nuristani languages the cognate of *śvaśura* is the word for the ‘spouse’s father’; thus it can refer to either the wife’s father or the husband’s father.⁷⁴ The same double meaning is also found in Kalasha *išpa’šur* ‘father-in-law’.⁷⁵ However, it is interesting to note that this cognate form in Prasun *čüjü* means both ‘father-in-law’ but also ‘wife’s father’⁷⁶ and Prasun is known for its often more archaic meanings.

There is then the possibility that it is not the wife who is speaking, but the husband. Why didn’t the father-in-law come? We can draw attention to the importance of the father-in-law to one seeking prestige through feasting. Strand notes the following situation with regard to affinal relationships.

“Affinal ties bind a man to his father-in-law (Kom *č’ür*) and, to a lesser degree, to his wife’s brother (*zām’i*). The strength of this tie depends primarily on the son-in-law’s willingness to perform various services for his father-in-law. It behooves the son-in-law to perform well, because his father-in-law is a primary source of economic support. Indeed, an amiable relationship between a man and **his father-in-law often provides the former with the most important source of support that he has, especially if he lacks close agnates.**”⁷⁷ (emphasis mine)

⁷⁴ See Strand <http://nuristan.info/kinship.html> (accessed January 12, 2018) for a treatment of the kinship structures in Nuristan. Kom *č’ür*; Kati *sač’ur*; Ashkun *šipas’u*; Wai *püšür*; Pra *čüjü* (Buddruss-Degener 2015:643).

⁷⁵ Trail-Cooper 1999, s.v.

⁷⁶ Buddruss-Degener 2015:643.

⁷⁷ Strand 1974b:56.

A situation such as this can be imagined for the verse here in question, in which the speaker seeks the economic and political support of his affinal relations, and in particular, that of his ‘father-in-law’, his wife’s father. It simply seems quite incongruous that the groom’s father is not coming to the wedding. But the relationships with the affines are more complex and more likely to be fraught with problems, and so the situation in which the wife’s father does not come, can be easily imagined..

However, while this verse is important for clearly eliminating a translation of ‘enemy’ for *arí-*, it does not necessarily have any particularly important kinship meaning attached to it, as Banerjea argues, that is, the *arí* being a member of an ‘exogamous group’. This simply indicates that the person to be married is from a prestigious family and has invited other prestigious members, that is, *arí*-s to come to the wedding. Thieme’s ‘stranger’ and followed by a similar understanding in the J-B translation, simply do not make sense for this particular event. Why are there strangers at a wedding? I think that it is the bride-groom speaking, and for some reason his father-in-law with whom it is critical to have a good relationship has not come because of some offense and the groom is clearly concerned. His ability to become an *arí* himself is now in jeopardy because he will rely on his father-in-laws resources to enable himself to become an *arí*.

I translate the first half of the verse:

“Every **other prestige feast-giver** has come, only my own father-in-law [who is also a ranked feast giver] has not come.”

9. Meaning of *adj. aryá* and *árya*

We can now take up the meaning of the derived terms *aryá*, *árya*, and *árya-* which are clearly related to *ari*.

The following meanings of *aryá- árya-* are according to Thieme (summarized by Brereton 1981:151

<i>aryá</i> adj.	‘protecting the stranger, hospitable’	1.123.1; 2.35.2; 5.16.3; 7.65.2; 7.86.7
<i>aryá</i> subs.	‘hospitable lord’	5.75.7; 8.1.34 (voc.)
<i>aryá</i> subs.	‘lord’	4.16.17 (voc.)
<i>árya</i> subs. < <i>aryá</i>	‘hospitable lord’ > ‘lord, master, householder’ Post RV	

Then Brereton posits the following conclusion: “*aryá* might be “belong to the other” or “protecting the other” or “characterized by the qualities of another (like us).” In the last case, the best translation is perhaps “civilized” or “civilizing,” by which I mean adhering to or upholding to the rites and customs of the Vedic peoples.”⁷⁸ Brereton translates *aryá* with ‘belonging to the *arí*’⁷⁹ as well as ‘civilizing’.

RV 7.86.7c *áçetayad acító devó aryó*

“The civilizing god enlightened those without understanding.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Brereton 1981:155.

⁷⁹ Brereton 1981:155.

⁸⁰ Brereton 1981:157.

“The civilizing god [=Varuṇa] made those without understanding to understand ... J-B 2:992

But this interpretation seems strained when we begin with the assumption that *ari* means ‘stranger’ and we then arrive at a conclusion that the derived word comes to mean ‘civilizing’.

If we return to our contention that the meaning of IA *ari-* is ‘prestige feast giver’, we can resolve the various problems associated with these terms. If the term *ari-* means ‘prestigious feast giver’, a concept which then involves **wealth** and **status/prestige** and **productivity**, the adjective and the derived noun must be related to these meanings. Thus the adj. *aryá* will encompass the following semantic range: ‘productive’ ‘prestigious’ ‘wealthy’ ‘generous’.

[b] RV 7.86.7cd

áchetayad acító devó aryó gṛtsamṇ rāyē kavítaro junāti //

“The **productive** (*aryá*) divine being (*devá*) enlightened those without understanding.”

The act of ‘enlightening’ someone is a ‘productive act’; it is a creative act, bringing forth something new. Brereton's ‘civilizing’ is a much different concept and one that I very much doubt is present in the poet’s thinking or in that of Vedic *Aryans*. That is, *Varuṇa*, who resides in the seat of ‘Life’ (*ṛta-*) and from whence the Life Principle emanates, is a ‘productive’ deity, he not only is responsible for life itself, but through his animating power, also produces and animates thought and here we see the Vedic poet dealing in an abstract realm similar to the innovative thinking of Zoroaster, for whom it is Ahura Mazdā (who is functionally equivalent to *Varuṇa*) who is the source of Good Thinking.

RV 8.19.36

*ádān me paurukutsyáḥ pañcāśátaṃ trasádasyur vad^húnām /
mámhiṣṭ^ho aryáh sátpatīḥ //*

Trasadasyu, the son of Purukutsa, most generous/productive (*aryá*), wealthy Lord of the Household, gave me 500 wives.

RV 1.123.1

*pr^htú rá^ho dá^hkṣiṇāyā ayojy aínaṃ devāso amṛtāso ast^huh/
kṣṇād úd ast^hād aryā vīhāyās cikitsantī mánuṣāya kṣáyāya//*

A broad chariot has been yoked for the priestly gift. The gods, the immortals have mounted it.

Up from the dark has arisen the lady of extensive power, being attentive to the human dwelling place. J-B 1:286

Rather, Dawn, qualified by *aryā*, is here ‘**The Productive/Generous/Fecund One**’. When she arrives, she brings with her the goods of life that are to be distributed as *dákṣiṇā* and as such, she is responsible for the safeguarding of the society through the continuation of fecundity in animals and agricultural products AND their distribution throughout the society.

10. Conclusion

Prestige feast giving was still very much a part of early Vedic society and was still somewhat similar in structure to that found among the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis, as well as the Kalasha, who are Indo-Aryan speakers. This is a very important conclusion for a correct understanding of Rgvedic social practices and social structure. During the period of the

RV, we are still dealing with a feasting society, albeit with a number of significant changes from the earlier, i.e. **Early Indo-Iranian** period. However, the institution of the ‘prestige feast’ continued into the Rgvedic period, finally collapsing along with the religious, social, and political system that supported it. The active composition of hymns ceased, along with the introduction of other significant changes in their social and economic sphere. I will have to deal with the reasons behind the collapse elsewhere. Nevertheless, we can see that, in the examination of a single prominent but problematical term, which allows us to derive an improved understanding of the social structure, we can come to a more accurate interpretation of ancient texts. Thus, when we have examined this seminal word in the Rgveda, within the context of a prestige feasting society similar to that of the Pre-Islamic Nuristanis and the Kalasha, the difficulties of the supposed contradictory meaning in the term can be resolved by an improved understanding of the social structure that forms the basis of the Rgvedic society. These conclusions can be further applied to other areas, allowing us to address in a far more cogent and convincing fashion the social structure that the hymns, by their very nature, do not make clear. The Pre-Islamic Nuristani and the Kalasha societies offer key insights into early Vedic society; bringing them into the Indological literature will prove to be most fruitful.

Abbreviations

EWA Mayrhofer 1986–2001

IA Indo-Aryan

Iir Indo-Iranian

KEWA Mayrhofer 1953–1980

J-B Jamison and Brereton 2017

OIA Old Indo-Aryan

PN Proto-Nuristani

RV Rgveda / Rig Veda

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Vedic *arí* and the Pre-Islamic Nuristani Prestige Feast Giver

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