– the Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. The oldest Veda is the Rigveda, composed about 3500 years ago. The Rigveda includes more than a thousand hymns, called sukta or “well-said”. These hymns are in praise of various gods and goddesses. Three gods are especially important: Agni, the god of fire; Indra, a warrior god; and Soma, a plant from which a special drink was prepared.

The Rigveda is in old or Vedic Sanskrit, which is different from the Sanskrit you learn in school these days.

Sanskrit is part of a family of languages known as Indo-European. Some Indian languages such as Assamese, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri and Sindhi; Asian languages such as Persian and many European languages such as English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish belong to this family

Other languages used in the subcontinent belong to different families. For instance, those used in the north-east belong to the Tibeto-Burman family; Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam belong to the Dravidian family; and the languages spoken in Jharkhand and parts of central India belong to the Austro-Asiatic family.

the hymns in the Rigveda are in the form of dialogues. This is part of one such hymn, a dialogue between a sage named Vishvamitra, and two rivers, (Beas and Sutlej) that were worshipped as goddesses

This manuscript of the Rigveda, on birch bark, was found in Kashmir. About 150 years ago, it was used to prepare one of the earliest printed texts of the Rigveda, as well as an English translation. It is now preserved in a library in Pune, Maharashtra.

Other rivers, especially the Indus and its other tributaries, and the Sarasvati, are also named in the hymns. The Ganga and Yamuna are named only once.