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Status Of Women In The Rig Vedic Period

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in orienting life and family were elucidated in Rig Vedic age. They enjoyed independence and self-reliance. Besides their domestic role, they had every access to education with tremendous potential to realize the highest truths. Many of them were seers who had an intellectual and spiritual depth. Women played an important role in maintaining the economic status of the family with the occupation of spinning, weaving, and needlework. Widow's remarriage was permitted in Rig Vedic society as evidenced in the funeral hymn in the Rig Veda. Caste system in the society did not seem to be strict. During this time inter-caste marriages took place in society. Women learned several disciplines that included vocal and instrumental music and dance. Women were also allowed to learn martial pursuits. Respect and value of the women in the Vedic society not merely as household mistress but also as individuals with great potential to contribute to human society were revealed. Women were encouraged to study the scriptures and were given *Upanayana Samskara* (initiation into learning). They were considered to be the custodians of purity and perseverance. In the interest of the society and interest of the family, women enjoyed independence and self-reliance. The situation of the women during that period as derived from a study of the Rig Veda is described below. Women were respected and valued in the Vedic society not merely as mothers for bringing in a new generation, but also as individuals with great potential to perceive the truth and contribute richly to human society. There is much that modern society can learn from that period. In the Rig Vedic society, there were no discriminatory practices in the society against women. In fact, many of them achieved great fame like Vishwara, Ghosha, Upala and Mudgalini. Many of these female scholars composed hymns of Rigveda

KEY WORDS: UPANAYANA SAMSKARA - SAMHITAS OF YAJUR VEDA- SAMITI-SAWAMBAR- SATI PRATHA- PURDAH SYSTEM- B.C.E- GURUKULAS- RIG VEDA SLOKAS- KSHATRIYA-BRAHMINS- SUDRA- VAISHYA- EPICS – NIYOGA- BRAHMAVADINIS- GOSHA- GODHA- VISHWAVARA,-APALA- SADYODVAHAS- AMAJUR- VADHRIMATI – VISHPALA

INTRODUCTION

Let us learn about the women in Vedic and post Vedic periods, what their roles were, the Role and Status of Women in The Rig Vedic and Later-Vedic periods, and the educational opportunities for women in early Vedic and post Vedic periods. The Vedic Period was a crucial period in the development of Indian civilization and culture. It arose from a simple system of a complex society, much like all other civilizations. There are four main Vedas available to provide light on society, which are mainly religious scriptures that also remark on many areas of society such as political, economic, and more.

They wrote Samhitas of Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda, and Sama Veda during the later Vedic Period when society became more complicated due to the shift to a completely rural civilization. The texts that were created were also intricate, with special rites and procedures. Men and women are considered the chariot wheels as they depend on each other for various things. Over time, some scholars and sociologists have strained the study to find out the change in status around the world and generally in India and also evaluate the difficulties confronted by women during the historical time. The Vedic period, as described in the Rig Veda, depicts a highly evolved society in which women played a stellar role in the orienting life and the family. They were accorded equal status and privileges along with men and were second to none. Some of the women seers described while that period were remarkable personalities of great depth and understanding.

Women were encouraged to study the scriptures and were given *Upanayana Samskara* (initiation into learning). They were considered to be the custodians of purity and perseverance. In the interest of the society and interest of the family, women enjoyed independence and self-reliance. The situation of the women during that period as derived from a study of the Rig Veda is described below.

WOMEN IN THE VEDIC AND THE POST-VEDIC PERIODS

In general, the Vedic Period was a very advanced period. Women and men were on an equal footing. This was due to a complicated system in place at the time. As a result, husband and wife's political rights were shared in a pair. Even larger bodies like the senate (Sabha) and the government followed this policy (Samiti).

Many upper-class women would hold Swayamwars to select the husband of their choosing. Despite the fact that both parties consented, marriage remained a major event.

Women in the post-Vedic period had equal rights. The woman in the Vedic period most likely degraded as a result of the entrance of a non-Aryan marriage. The non-Aryan wives were unfamiliar with Vedic rituals. In different religious acts, they were unable to associate with their Aryan husbands. The Aryan spouses, too, eventually lost many of the benefits they had previously enjoyed.

The daughters were eventually denied formal education. Girls' marriageable ages were reduced to 8 or 10 years. As a result, the number of pre-puberty marriages soared, and child-wives with little education became the norm. Women in the post-Vedic Period were asked for dowry, and being a widow was not always a bad thing, but widow remarriage was not always encouraged.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE RIG VEDIC AND LATER-

VEDIC PERIOD

ROLE AND STATUS IN EARLY RIG VEDIC PERIOD:

- Women were highly regarded and had positions of power in society. Gods, according to Aryans, exist where women are valued.
- Women were allowed to take part in both home and religious rites.
- Unmarried women were required to attend school since only educated women were capable of performing Vedic ceremonies correctly. Women were permitted to participate in the Upanayana (educational entrance rite) process.
- After the age of 16, women were allowed to marry and have the right to choose their life partners. They are also permitted to perform or organize their sawambar.
- Child marriage was unheard of, and Sati pratha was rare. Even though it was a patriarchal culture, there were provisions in the early Vedic civilization for adult marriage, marriage at will, and widow remarriage.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN LATER RIG VEDIC PERIOD:

- The position of women in the later Rig Vedic period changed for unclear reasons.
- Scholars argue that social engagement with newer cultures pushed individuals to place limitations on women based on specific criteria. During this time, it became a harsh patriarchal culture in which women's rights were seized.
- Religion was the primary reason for these limits on women, and as a result, many of their rights, such as the ability to marry at will and the right to education, were revoked.
- Her marriage age was lowered, and she was regarded as a regenerative instrument.
- Her social mobility dwindled as limits were placed on her; she was not permitted to leave the four walls of her home and was forced to stay at home and work as a housewife. Widow remarriage was forbidden, and widows were compelled to live as widows. The purdah system became prevalent.
- The number of children married was at an all-time high.

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Women's education opportunities were equal to men's in the later Vedic Period. It was seen as critical. This only began to fade after 200 B.C.E., and it lasted for centuries beyond that, long after the Vedic Period, which is estimated to have ended around 600 B.C.E.

Throughout the later Vedic Period, both girls and boys were sent to educational institutes called Gurukulas, where they all observed the Brahmacharya Ashrama of student life before marriage, learning a variety of subjects. In order to be eligible for Upanayanam, women were encouraged to be proficient in philosophy, logic, and Vedic knowledge, as well as to sing Rig Veda slokas. Women were more likely than men to study the Atharva Veda.

There was also a system of homeschooling for women, which was far more common among the lower classes who couldn't afford to travel or live away from home for long periods of time. As a result, daughters, like their brothers, often supported their dads with agricultural work, learning to milk cows, cut yarn, knit, and

sew, as well as being proficient in artistic arts like dancing, painting, and drawing. Texts like the Taittiriya Sanhita and the Satapatha Brahmana emphasized women's practical education.

Male and Females are the two common constituents of the human civilization, depending on each other, respectively, and each of them carries nearly half of the overall population. Men and women are considered the chariot wheels as they depend on each other for various things. Over time, some scholars and sociologists have strained the study to find out the change in status around the world and generally in India and also evaluate the difficulties confronted by women during the historical time.

Any finding or Study on society of historical times is unfinished without reviewing the role, status, and also the position of women during the historic period. Women of Indian society established the arch keystone and proved their superiority at that time. There is no hesitation to claim that the women of Rig Vedic society have adored higher status, and the situation was always pleasant for the women and also had the right to attain high intellectual and spiritual standards. But the beginning of the later Vedic period has started discriminating against the esteemed position and free positions of women.

Later on, later Vedic society has induced education and other privileges and facilities for women. Indian civilization is created on the essence that women's source is men; they grow or descend collected, godlike or dwarfed, free or bonded. There is no uncertainty that we are in a society that is in the middle of a prodigious rebellion in the antiquity of women. The indication is universally seen, such as the rising number of women can be seen in the parliament, the streets, and also in court. While on the other hand, women from the western part need to stand and fight for basic rights such as the right to vote, and they need to fight for more than a century, but India has served equal rights to both men and women from the beginning.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE LATER VEDIC PERIOD

The lifespan of the women from the Later Vedic Society was very difficult in comparison to the Rig Vedic society. Numerous great Kingdoms rose during the later Vedic period and retained aggressive nature with each of them. Caste System is one of the gradual factors growing its motion. The status of women started degrading as the later Vedic period began, and bad practices such as the dowry system in gaining their position in society.

The Later Vedic Civilization observed enormous variations in the caste system. Such as the traditional four-castes system classes commonly known as Kshatriya, Brahmins, Sudra, and Vaishya and still in place in the modern period. However, numerous sub-castes sprang up in addition to the historical four castes. In regards to the caste system during the later Vedic period, women are unable to find higher positions for themselves as compared to the Rig Vedic period. During the later Vedic period women were not allowed to visit and perform religious activities and also not allowed to join politics. Furthermore, the wedding guidelines became discerning for the bride. The women in the Later Vedic period did not have rights of basic equality and are unable to enjoy their domestic lives. Women in the Later Vedic Period are served with very few rights and low-grade status. A woman was treated as a substance for the satisfaction of passion and not as the spouse of men. In the Later Vedic period, women were deprived of their properties and were not considered necessary for political, economic developments.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE EPICS

The status of women epics period is known as the golden period for women, as women in the epics period are rewarded with an honorable status in the society due to the influence of Mahabharata Ramayana in the society, and in Ramayana and Mahabharata majority of women are educated.

The Mahabharata and its influence on society resulted in the reserved rights for women and equality, as women gave advice to men and also shared a higher position with men, sharing the effective role of women in social, political, and religious issues. Ramayana demonstrates the Hindu ideal of women of India.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE SMRITIS

In terms of the status of women in the Smritis period, While talking about a woman and their connections to men. Women continue to be honored and appreciated by their fathers, husbands, brothers, and also brothers-in-law, who wish for their well-being.

Manu witnesses that the family where women agonize is guaranteed to be abandoned, while on the other hand family where women are happy is bound to flourish. Further instructs that each person is to uphold concord with the household of the female members. He also guides each householder to delight his daughter as the uppermost object of sensitivity and honors the mother as the highest respected person in the world.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE BUDDHIST PERIOD

During the Buddhist period, numerous immoral social practices, such as the exercise of pre-puberty weddings, rejection of educational rights, and also marriage selection, etc., were forced on women throughout the Puranas and Brahmins periods.

In the Buddhist historical age, the place of women was enhanced to some level; in the spiritual field, women derived from inhabiting a noticeably superior place. Women have got generous occasions in public life. However, the economic position of women remained unaffected.

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN DURING THE RIG VEDIC PERIOD

The situation of women during the Vedic period can be inferred from a study of the Rig Veda. Apart from their domestic role in begetting and bringing up progeny and thereby contributing to the continuation of society, they were considered as custodians of morality and values. Even more important is their depiction as individuals with tremendous potential to realize the highest truths.

THE FAMILY STATUS AND SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN

The position of the woman and her equal status to man in every dimension of life is elucidated in the hymn 10.85. "The hymn (10.85) shows fascinating spotlight on the position of woman. She was the mistress in household, lifelong companion of the husband and real partner in all his activities and religious sacrifices. The union of husband and wife in both body and mind is repeatedly emphasized, and her entry into husband's home is regarded as an auspicious event bringing blessing to the entire household, including the domestic birds and animals." "Perfect harmony and happiness are prayed for in conjugal life, which will be long enough to bless

the couple with sons and grandsons (VIII.31.5-6; X.34.11; 85.18, 19, 42). Rig Veda hymn X.85.46 described the newly married wife as the most respected person as the mistress of her new household.

The idea of equality is expressed in Book 5, hymn 6, verse 8, "... the wife and the husband being the equal halves of one substance were regarded equal in every respect, and both took equal part in all duties, religious and social."

There is no reference to child marriage and girls were normally married after reaching maturity. In Rig Veda age "... the practice of child marriage did not exist." Women had their right to accept or reject their life partner. "The frequent mention of unmarried girls like Ghosha, who grew up in the house of their parents (I.117.7; X.39.3, 40.5), the references to the ornaments worn by maidens at festival occasions in order to win lovers (I.123.11; VII.2.5), to the youth's courtship of the maiden he loves (I.115.2), to the lover's gifts (I.117.18), to their mutual love (I.167.3; I X.32.5, etc.) all this evidence speaks in favour of the custom of girls marrying long after they had reached puberty".

As a sign of woman's social dignity widow remarriage was permitted in Rig Vedic society, as evidenced in the funeral hymn in the Rig Veda hymn (10.18.8 R): "The widow who lay on the pyre by the side of her dead husband was asked to come to the world of the living."

In X.40.2 and X.18.7, 8 there is more reference to levirate (Niyoga). It was positively enjoined upon her by the social and religious custom in order to obtain progeny. The impotency of the husband is the usual ground, though other circumstances, such as imprisonment of the husband, etc.

Women attended fairs and festivals and were free to move about with their husbands or loved ones. They were allowed to attend Sabhas or assemblies of the learned ones, in the company of their husbands or loved ones. "Like women at a gathering fair, the streams of oil look on with a gentle smile and recline to Agni."

In fact, there is enough evidence that points out to the remarkable freedom women enjoyed, even to the extent of affairs being tolerated, similar to men. Even wives suspected of having paramours are not denied social and religious rites, far less driven away from the family.

Compartmentalization of society does not seem to have been rigid. During this time, inter-caste marriages took place in society. People were given absolute freedom to select their caste. "In one case, the father was a priest, the mother grinder of corn, and the son a physician, all three lived happily together."

Women played a role in maintaining the economic status of the family. The women took up spinning, weaving and needlework. Clothes were much more expensive in ancient India than at present. Among other important occupations, the first place must be given to weaving both in cotton and wool, which supplied clothes to people. "It is noteworthy as in later days, both men and women were engaged in this work as well as in the subsidiary process of dyeing and embroidery."

WOMEN AND LEARNING

Women had every access education and even more importantly, several of them became seers of a very high order displaying an intellectual and spiritual depth that is second to none.

They are called in Sanskrit *Brahmavadinis*, the speaker and revealers of Brahman - the infinite source of spirituality.

The Rig Veda contains hymns composed by as many as 27 *Brahmavadinis* or women seers viz., Gosha, Godha, Vishwavara, Apala, etc. (Brihad devata, 11.84). The acquisition of supreme philosophical realization on the part of women, at the very dawn of human civilization, was unparalleled in the history of the world.

If they wanted to pursue knowledge without getting married, they were allowed to do so, without any constraints. The educators wisely divided women into two groups namely *Brahmavadinis* and *Sadyodvahas*. “The former were life-long students of theology and philosophy, the latter used to pursue their studies until their marriage at the age of 15 or 16.”

Marriage was by no means compulsory for them and the special Vedic term *Amajur*, meaning an unmarried woman (1.117; 2.17; 10.39.3; 8.21.15) shows that several women preferred a life of single blessedness. Women were fully entitled to *Upanaya* and *Brahmacharya*, initiation and Vedic studentship equally with men. The Vedic *Brahmavadinis*, who dedicated the whole of their lives to the pursuit of truth, were, in fact, not only by far the earliest, but at the same time among the best of all women ascetics of the world.

Women mastered several disciplines of fine arts that included vocal and instrumental music and dance. Women sang during ceremonial occasions and demonstrated their aptitude for dancing (1.9.2, 1.9.4).

Women were also allowed to explore martial pursuits. There are several references to women warriors, namely, Vadhrimati and Vishpala, in the hymn of the female seer Ghosha (10.39, 40). Both of them took part in actual fighting in the battlefield. We find another fighting woman in Shashiyasi (5.61.6, 5.61.9). Women warriors fought and died along with men, in one instance, Indra kills Danu, mother of Vritra, fighting by her son's side (Rig Veda 1.32.9). Sarama, one of the most powerful woman warriors of her day was sent by her husband in search of robbers. She discovered their hiding place and killed them.

Despite, the importance and respect accorded to women in the Vedic age, there are also evidences of the birth of sons being celebrated to a greater extent than daughters. The Rig Veda does not say anything directly on this point, but prayers for ten sons in the marriage hymn, without reference to any daughter, seems to indicate that latter was less welcome than the former.

FAMOUS FEMALE FIGURES OF VEDIC INDIA WOMEN OF THE VEDIC PERIOD

Circa 1500-1200 BCE), were epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainments. The Vedas have volumes to say about these women, who both complemented and supplemented their male partners. When it comes to talking about significant female figures of the Vedic period, four names - Ghosha, Lopamudra, Sulabha Maitreyi, and Gargi - come to mind.

GHOSHA

Vedic wisdom is encapsulated in myriad hymns and 27 women-seers emerge from them. But most of them are mere abstractions except for a few, such as Ghosha, who has a definite human form. Granddaughter of Dirghatamas and daughter of Kakshivat, both composers of hymns in praise of Ashwins, Ghosha has two entire hymns of the tenth book, each containing 14 verses, assigned to her name. The first eulogizes the Ashwins, the heavenly twins who are also physicians; the second is a personal wish expressing her intimate feelings and desires for married life. Ghosha suffered from an incurable disfiguring disease, probably leprosy, and remained a spinster at her father's house. Her implorations with the Ashwins and the devotion of her forefathers towards them made them cure her disease and allow her to experience wedded bliss.

LOPAMUDRA

The *Rig Veda* ('Royal Knowledge') has long conversations between the sage Agasthya and his wife Lopamudra that testifies to the great intelligence and goodness of the latter. As the legend goes, Lopamudra was created by sage Agasthya and was given as a daughter of the King of Vidarbha. The royal couple gave her the best possible education and brought her up amidst luxury. When she attained a marriageable age, Agasthya, the sage who was under vows of celibacy and poverty, wanted to own her. Lopa agreed to marry him and left her palace for Agasthya's hermitage. After serving her husband faithfully for a long period, Lopa grew tired of his austere practices. She wrote a hymn of two stanzas making an impassioned plea for his attention and love. Soon afterward, the sage realized his duties towards his wife and performed both his domestic and ascetic life with equal zeal, reaching a wholeness of spiritual and physical powers. A son was born to them. He was named Dridhasyu, who later became a great poet.

MAITREYI

The *Rig Veda* contains about one thousand hymns, of which about 10 are accredited to Maitreyi, the woman seer, and philosopher. She contributed towards the enhancement of her sage-husband Yajnavalkya's personality and the flowering of his spiritual thoughts. Yajnavalkya had two wives Maitreyi and Katyayani. While Maitreyi was well versed in the Hindu scriptures and was a 'brahmavadini', Katyayani was an ordinary woman. One day the sage decided to make a settlement of his worldly possessions between his two wives and renounce the world by taking up ascetic vows. He asked his wives their wishes. The learned Maitreyi asked her husband if all the wealth in the world would make her immortal. The sage replied that wealth could only make one rich, nothing else. She then asked for the wealth of immortality. Yajnavalkya was happy to hear this and imparted Maitreyi the doctrine of the soul and his knowledge of attaining immortality.

GARGI

Gargi, the Vedic prophetess and daughter of sage Vachaknu, composed several hymns that questioned the origin of all existence. When King Janak of Videha organized a 'brahmayajna', a philosophic congress centered around the fire sacrament, Gargi was one of the eminent participants. She challenged the sage Yajnavalkya with a volley of perturbing questions on the soul or 'atman' that confounded the learned man who had till then silenced many an eminent scholar. Her question - "*The layer that is above the sky and below the earth, which is described as being situated between the earth and the sky and which is indicated as the symbol of the past, present, and future, where is that situated?*" - bamboozled even the great Vedic men of letters.

CONCLUSION

It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that women have never had such a high social status as they had during the Rigvedic Period (1500–1000 BC). Women had the same status as men. Women were the mistresses of the house and held a high position in the family. The prestige and dignity of women declined in the later Vedic Period. The birth of a son was desired, whereas the birth of a daughter was viewed as a sign of sadness. Participation in political gatherings ceased. Child marriage, the sati system, and dowry started increasing. The status of Women during the Later Vedic period, epics, Smritis, and Buddhist did not have rights of basic equality and were unable to enjoy their domestic benefits. A woman was taken for granted and was treated as a substance for the satisfaction of passion and not as the spouse of men. The later Vedic period was considered as the most unlawful and unhealthy environment for women to survive, and they are not allowed to be a part of development, such as deprived of their properties, not able to vote, not allowed to attain political and social activities, etc. Women were respected and valued in the Vedic society not merely as mothers for bringing in a new generation, but also as individuals with great potential to perceive the truth and contribute richly to human society. There is much than modern society can learn from that period. In the Rig Vedic society, there were no discriminatory practices in the society against women. In fact, many of them achieved great fame like Vishwara, Ghosha, Upala and Mudgalini. Many of these female scholars composed hymns of Rigveda.

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