

## Role and Position of Women : An Exploration Through Rig-Veda

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### ABSTRACT

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The Position which women occupied in Hindu Society at the dawn of civilization during the Rig-Vedic age, is much better than what we ordinarily expect it to have been. The age of the Rig-Veda was from c. 2500 to c. 1500 B. C. The source materials for a study of the life and position of women in the Rig- Vedic age are very scanty, hence any observation is, in most cases, bound to be based more on indirect evidence like literary allusions, than on direct and systematic data. The procedure, therefore, that can be followed with best advantage is to survey the subject from the various points of view, from which conclusions may profitably be drawn.

Keywords: Rig-Veda, systematic data

The position of a woman in society can be judged by the way in which the birth of a girl is received. Was she considered in-auspicious? The hymns of the Rig-Veda, say nothing to that effect, but we find prayers for the birth of a son, though we do not come across any reference deprecating the birth of a daughter as in A.V. VI,11. So it can be presumed that the position of girl was not very low, though it cannot be said that she was regarded as equal to a boy (Chatterji et al. 1937: 222-223).

We find in the Rig-Veda a number of names to denote a girl in her different stages of life and in her different positions in the family. Of these various names, the words Kanya and Duhita have survived to the present day, they are found in the vernacular literature or the Post-Vedic age. Here Kanya not only means a girl of growing age, but also a lovely girl. The

word Duhita have been more in use in the R.V. and it is used frequently to refer to a daughter.

There are two passages in the Rig-Veda (R.V.I, 125, 7; R.V.III, 31,1) Which refer to the case where a daughter is the only child of the family. In later literature we find such a daughter designated as Putrika (Vedic Index I. 528, 537; II, 496). Yaska quotes and explain the legal position of the only daughter. According to his interpretation (Nirukta II, 5), it means that a brother-less maiden (even after she has been given away in marriage), can perform the funeral rites of her father. Not only does this give her the right to inherit the property, but it shows that she is legally recognized as equal to a son. This view must have been current at the time of Yaska, since the author included it in his book. The commentator Durga Charya further elucidates it that, even after her

marriage, she can retain this right. The later law-givers strictly prohibited such a union. The fourteenth century attitude is reflected in Sayana's interpretation of the passage. He says that a maiden who has no brother seeks for clothes and ornaments from relatives belonging to her father's family. If she has a brother, he looks to her needs. It is only in his absence that she seeks the help of her uncles, etc'. He goes further and proposes another interpretation. If her own brother is living, he performs the funeral rites of their father, but in his absence, she goes to the place of her paternal relatives to perform the funeral rites herself.

The position of a girl in society and the measure of freedom she enjoyed are evident from the description of Samana (Macdonell, A.A. and Keith, A.B. 1912: Vol. I, 481; Vol. 11, 429) contained in the various hymns of the Rig-Veda. What was this Samana? The word is often to be met with in the Rig-Veda, but different scholars have rendered it variously. Sayanacharya explains the word according to the context, and in some cases gives a meaning to fit it with the sacrificial ceremony; hence his meaning of the word is not definite (Shastri 1969; 5). Among western scholars, Pischel thinks it to be a popular festival or social gathering in which men and women took part (R.V. I. 124, 8; IV, 58, 85; VI, 75, 4, A.V. II, 36, I, A.V. 92, 2). Poets thronged there to acquire fame, bowmen to exhibit their skill in archery, horses to run races, women, young or grown up, to seek their partner in life; and courtesans to profit by the occasion. The festivities lasted until the next morning or as long as the conflagration of the ceremonial fires lasted, Roth, however takes it to be either 'a battle' or 'a festival'. Griffith has rendered the word as 'a gathering'. Setting aside all these interpretations, the first-hand impression, the word suggests a festival rather than anything else. Samana was a festival of the Rig-Vedic people, specially meant for recreation and not for any religious purpose. People in every station of life worked forward eagerly to this function, which gave

them an opportunity of meeting old friends, and knowing people of all sorts and conditions. Women, young and grown up, are described as decorating themselves to participate in it. Young women, especially unmarried girls, are described as utilising this opportunity for meeting and conversing with strangers. (Shastri 1952: 6).

In the latter, the word Samana has been explained by Sayana as a meeting. But Pischel's interpretation cannot be drawn directly from it. With what purpose does the Hota or priest go to the assembly? This is not a meeting held for a purely religious purpose; so his services as a priest are not required there. We may therefore infer that his going there is to display poetical skill and win fame.

From the references to the various kinds of activities at a Samana, the meeting seems generally to have been held in a large open space. In a corner set apart for feats of archery bowmen displayed their skill and won prizes. Pischel sees such a meaning in Rig-Veda VI, 175, 3. Another corner of this great gathering was reserved for horse-races while the courtesans took their place in a different part of the extensive area. In other places 'Samana' gives us the picture of a battle-array. Sayana too ascribes the same sense to it. Some verses (R.V. VII 2, 5; VI, 75, 4 and IV, 58, 8) give the picture of maidenhood which seems to be a festival where young girls could freely meet and talk to strangers. But it is wrong to assume that these verses reflect the life of courtesans as some scholars seem to think (Shastri 1952: 7).

At the centre of this area was reserved a place where a fire was burnt, around which all people met. This indicates the time of the festival. It was held in the winter season, so that a fire was necessary as in all cold climates to warm the people. Pischel thinks that the meeting was generally held at night, as he thinks that the fire is described as being alight until morning, when the gathering dispersed. But verse I,

48, 6, where the goddess Usha is described as the creator of Samana, seems to imply that the festival began early in the morning, just at day-break.

This seems to have been prevalent in the earliest days of the Rig-Vedic period, and must have continued for some time after their settlement in India, for a passage in the tenth Mandala of the Rig-Veda describes it as an ancient one, and although the festival continued to be celebrated, its scope was restricted, and women were not later allowed to join it freely.

The hymn R.V.X, 86, 10 described the deeds of Indra and Indrani. Indra of the Rig-Veda is a phenomenon of nature personified and as such he had no wife. In the oldest Mandalas the name 'Indrani' does not appear. She is the creation of a much later age than the Rig-Vedic one, when the hierarchy of gods was formed, in which Indira became the King of Heaven, and had a partner in life, Indrani, the Queen of Heaven. So this hymn certainly belongs to a later period.

A faint picture of a maiden's life is reflected in the characterisation of Usha, the goddess of dawn, who has been described in many places as a maiden. In the earliest Mandalas, usha is described as a pure and simple phenomenon of nature, sweeping away the darkness of the night. In course of time, however, human feelings were introduced into the picture of Usha, and Dawn came to be personified as a maiden. Hence in many places the touches given to the picture of Usha are directly drawn from the life of a young maiden of vedic society. She is described as marching in the Heavens, not with the hesitation of a shy girl, but radiant in the pride of her beauty (R, V, VI, 65, I), She is often described as inspiring admiration in the minds of all who looked at her. Surya is mentioned as her lover, and he is described as pursuing her, a scene which reminds us of the story of Apollo and Daphne of Greek mythology (Ragozin, Z. A. 1961: 225-26).

In the description and eulogies of this goddess, certain other phases of a maiden's life and of society are revealed, some of the verses refer to the love of young people. The word for a lover here is Jara, which has not acquired the sinister sense with which it came to be invested in later times. It reflects a society, where there was freedom to both sexes prior to marriage (R,V,X, 85, 7; 4, 12, 17, 18). Marriage was a union of two persons of full development. No definite reference regarding age or its limitations, such as are found in later works, can be traced in the Rig-Veda. Neither can it be said that child marriage existed then, as a reference to it is to be found only in the Sutra period. The existence of the word Amajur which meant a girl who grew old at her father's house, and the references to the attendance of maidens and young women at the Samana festival, as well as the unmarried female Rishis as Apala-Atreyi suggest that matrimony was not compulsory for a woman and that no limitation had been placed on the age of marriage. Ghosha can be cited as an example of this condition, and in the two hymns attributed to her, she is depicted as being unmarried and living in her father's house. Thus there is sufficient evidence in support of the view that there were at least a few cases in which girls remained unmarried in their father's houses to an advanced age (Shastri 1952 : 9-10).

Marriage is a very significant event in the life of a woman. Marriage determine the fate of a woman greater extent than it does the destiny of a man. A good marriage is a welcome protection for the women and a bad one is worse than a painful chain. Marriage and the problems connected with it form an important topic in the history of woman(Edward Westermarck,1891:537-39).

The institution of marriage was well established in the Rigveda and it was also regarded as a social and religious duty and necessity. A Vedic passage says that a person, who is unmarried, is unholy. From the religious point of view he remains incomplete and is

not fully eligible to participate in sacraments. This continues to be the view of the society even now, the modern practice of keeping a betel nut by one's side in the absence of the wife or the older one of having her image to indicate her symbolical presence at the time of a sacrament both are due to the same belief. Marriage opened a new period of holy life which was to be led at the altar of truth and duty(R.V.,X,85, 24). In the Rig-Vedic society, marriage was regarded as normally necessary and desirable for both men and women. But sometimes society did not insist that it should be performed at all cost, even if there were insuperable impediments in arranging a suitable match. The Rig-Vedic literature often refers to the spinster, amajuh one who grows old in one's parent's house, is the significant expression used to denote an old maid. The usual cause that compelled maidens to remain unmarried was some serious physical defect or disease. Such, for instance, was the case of Ghosha, who could not marry till she was cured of her skin disease by the favour of gods Aisvins.

It can be said that girls were married at a fairly advanced age in the Rig-Vedic period. The Precise age is not stated. The very term for marriage, Udvaha, 'carrying away (of the bride)' presupposes a post-puberty marriage, for it shows that immediately after her marriage, the bride went to her husband's house to live as his wife. A perusal of the marriage hymn (X, 85) shows that the bride was fully mature and quite grown up at the time of the marriage, she is expressly described as blooming with youth and pining for a husband(X,85,22.and X 85,9).

A hope is expressed that the bride would forthwith take over the reins of the household from her parents- in law(X85,46).

This would have been possible only in the case of grown up brides, at least 16 to 18 years in age.

Some other arguments advanced to prove the existence of child marriages in the Rig-Vedic age. It is true that in two passages of the Rigveda (1, 51, 13 and 1, 116,1) The word arbha has been used to denote the bride and the bridegroom. This expression, however, denotes tenderness rather than childhood, for Vimda who has been described as an arbha bride-groom is seen to be defeating his rival in battle and winning his bride. This is possible only in the case of a full-grown youth. In the RigVedic period when post-puberty marriages were the order of the day, religious and spiritual ideals were held in high veneration by the community; they used to permeate the atmosphere of society and raise up its moral tone (Altekar 1959: 65). Of the various kinds of marriages that came to be developed and classified by the law-givers, the rudiments of three kinds can be traced to the Rig-Vedic age. One is the 'Kshastra' or 'Rakshasa' type of marriage, the other 'Svayamvara', the third 'Prajapatya'. The evidence is so slight and so infrequent, that it cannot be said with certainty whether they were largely prevalent in society or not. In the 'Kshatra' and 'Svayamvara' kinds of marriages, we do not find any ritual accompanying it. Nor do they seem to be the usual methods of marriage. In the wedding hymn, we get definite proof of its development into a social institution, where it was concluded in accordance with the rules laid down by society. We find here the growth of a ritual.

In the Rakshasa marriage or Kshatra marriage, the women were regarded as prizes of war. In this marriage the victor carried away the bride and married her. In Rigveda (I, 116) Vimada is described as having won his bride in battle. The next form of marriage was the Asura Vivaha, under which the husband used to get a bride by paying a reasonable price for her. In the Rig-Veda, the custom of the bride purchase was known, but not held in esteem; the son-in-law in such cases was described as a Vijamata or a disreputable son-in-law.

(R.V.,I, 109,2) In the Brahma marriage, the bride, properly bedecked and ornamented, is offered to a bridegroom who is specially invited for the purpose, while in prajapatya, the bride is offered according to due rites, but with an injunction to the couple that they should be always inseparable companions in the discharge of their religious duties. These definitions do not really state the differences between the two forms. Brahma and Prajapatya are synonymous words and it is quite possible that the Brahma marriage was originally identical with the Prajapatya one.

It is not certain upto what extent marriage among relations was allowed. The references are meagre on this important point. The two stray instances that throw light on the subject are the dialogues of Yama and Yami in X, 10, and the myth of prajapati in X, 61, 5-7. In the former the marriage between a brother and a sister is censured (Macdonell, A.A. and Keith, A.B. 1912 P.130). The latter is represented as a pure allegory, and these two cases can be taken as only echoes of savage customs that were dying out.

Hymn X, 85, represents the wedding ritual, and it is here that we first come across anything like a ceremony. From a close study of the rituals, we find that marriage took place in the house of the bride. Before the ceremony, a prayer to God Vishvavasu, who is supposed to protect virgins is uttered, and he is begged to leave the bride and transfer his guardianship to her husband (R.V.X. 85, 21, 22).

The decorated bride was then presented at the place of ceremony with her friends and attendants. Then follows the ceremony. The bridegroom, taking hold of her right hand, utters the following verse, which was in the nature of an oath. It is from this that the husband came to be called a 'hastagrabha', one who seizes the hand (R.V.X. 18, 8).

'I take thy hand for good fortune, that thou mayst attain old age with me, thy husband; the gods Bhaga,

Aryaman, Savitar, Purandhi have given thee to me, that I may be the master of a household' (R.V.X, 85, 36).

There is nothing to indicate in the Rig-Veda that the ceremony was performed before the fire, nor can we suppose that the bride has been led round the fire by the husband. That part of the ceremony, found in the Grihya rituals or the Atharva-Veda, is not mentioned here.

The ceremony ended with a common prayer to the gods for the prosperity and fruition of their married life.

'May the universal gods unite both our hearts. May the waters unite them; may Matarishvan; Dhatri and the bountiful unite both our hearts' (R.V.X, 85, 47).

The bride is then transferred formally from the family of her father to that of her husband. The gifts presented at the time of marriage are sent first (Ragozin, Z.A. 1961: 367-71).

A most hearty welcome awaited the bride at her new home. The assembled guests, friends and relatives shower blessings and benedictions on the couple. The bride is specially welcomed to reign supreme over the whole household and all the members of the family, the relatives and dependents of the bridegroom.

The brides received affectionate and respectful treatment in their new homes. The Rigvedic marriage hymn lays down that the bride should immediately take the reins of the household from her elderly relations, (R.V.X. 85, 46). Her views were usually to prevail in the household management. Perhaps these statements are the nature of the admiration and glorification of the new bride. Probably they refer to the wife of the eldest son in the family, who has become its de facto head owing to the old age of his parents, his unmarried brothers and sisters being still under his guardianship (Altekar 1959: 90-91). We can

say that the elders of the Rig-Vedic age treated the brides with very great consideration, regard and affection.

More vital for the wife's happiness is the treatment which she receives from her husband. In the Rig-Vedic times the husband and the wife were regarded as the joint owners of the household. The Rig-Vedic word for the couple, *dampati* etymologically means the joint owners of the house. Discord, disorder and dead-locks arise in domestic management on some occasions if the husband and the wife are each allowed an absolutely equal power, and happen to possess conflicting and opposing views. To resolve these deadlocks, ultimate supreme authority has been given to one of the two parties, and in patriarchal societies it is naturally the husband who is invested with it. In the Rig Vedic house-hold the husband is the senior partner and the wife is under his general guidance. The Rig-Vedic marriage ritual does not tell the duty of obedience upon the wife. Both parties take the same vows. Though supreme authority was clearly vested in the husband, the wife's position was one of honorable subordination. In the Rig-Vedic society we find that the wife was treated with utmost courtesy and regard. It was well recognised that the wife was the ornament of the house (R.V.I, 66,3); nay, the wife herself was the home (R.V.III, 53,4).

The home management was under her direct charge and ordinarily, her views were to prevail there. It was she who used to rouse the servants and assign them their proper duties (R.V, 1, 124, 4), and thus arrange for the normal running of the household.

The normal relations between the husband and the wife were determined by the principle that there should be an absolute identity in their aesthetic, material and moral interests. This principle was recognised in the Rig-Vedic age. It was also said in the marriage vow taken by the couple that they would invariably cooperate with each other in the

realisation of their aims and ambitions in the spheres of life, wealth and spirituality. The husband and the wife were considered the complements of each other. Women as a wife is denoted by the words. *Jaya*, *Jani* and *Patni*, each indicating special aspects of wife hood. *Jaya* has the special sense of a sharer of the husband's affections; *Jani*, the mother of children; and *Patni*, the partner in the performance of sacrifices. These three words are to be found in the Rig-Veda, and exist side by side; it can be said with certainty that these names indicate the existence of wives in a family whose duties were specified.

So, on marriage, a woman was not only given a very honourable position in the household, but could offer oblations to the fire in performing sacrifices. She was looked upon as a guardian of all the young and old, where her husband was the eldest son of his father. The charge of the whole household was transferred to her hands, and she was charged to look not only to the physical needs of the members of the family but also to the happiness and wealth of the house. It is hard to determine the then ideal of home-life, but the wife seems to an object of reverence and compassion. The husband and wife are regarded as a unit of society and it is evident from the use of the word '*Dampati*' to denote a pair in the Rig-Veda.

In hymn VIII, 31, where a couple are described as washing and pressing the Soma juice, and plucking the sacred grass for sacrifices we get a glimpse of the home life of the Rig-Vedic times. Here the couple lived in harmony, helping each other in their daily routine work. The hymn embodying the nuptial ceremony, as well as the references to the wifehood of a woman, indicate a home where the wife shares the burdens of her husband, not only in domestic life, but in religious ceremonies. The tenth Mandala, however, contains hymns embodying the incantations used by the co-wives which show a discordant home, but it is not certain whether these hymns really belonged to the Rig-Vedic times. If, on the other

hand, they did belong to it, they present an element to which no references is to be found in any other Mandala of the Rig-Veda. From this it may be presumed that polygamy was not in vogue in the early Vedic days, at least in that social strata, the culture of which is depicted in Rig-Veda.

It is true that monogamy normally prevailed in the Rig-Vedic society. The word *dampati* 'two joint owners of the household' excludes a third person from the conjugal life. The ritual too does not provide for the association of more than one wife in the normal sacrifice. The Rig-Vedic gods also are monogamous. In practice, however, polygamy often prevailed in the rich and ruling sections of society. The Rig Veda in one place compares a person attacked on all sides by his enemies to a husband troubled by his jealous wives (R.V., 105, 8). Polyandry custom was practically unknown to Rig-Vedic society. In the Rig-Vedic marriage hymn Surya is married to Asvins: the latter, however, are not two persons but a twin deity. The marriage of lady Rodasi (sky) with maruts (Stormgods), is figurative, (R.V.I. 167, 6). It is intended to show the close connections between the sky and the storm. It is also true that there are some passages in Rig-Vedic literature where the wife is mentioned in connection with husbands in plural. The plurals in these cases are, (however, either generic or used *majestatis cause* (R.V., X. 85, 38).

As to the legal position of the wife, nothing has been clearly said anywhere. In the wedding hymn, we find that the gifts received by the bride at the time of her marriage were taken to her husband's house and the husband as the legal guardian appropriated these gifts. Thus the women could get property only by way of gifts from their relations. There is no reference of their acquiring any estate either by inheritance or by partition. Among the female heirs the brother-less daughter was the first to succeed in establishing her right of inheritance. Circumstances were more favourable for the recognition of her right than that

of the wife or the widow. In the patriarchal atmosphere the wife could advance no claim in competition with her husband. The widow often used to marry or get a son by *Niyoga*; so the problem of her inheritance did not arise in society in any acute form. The daughter in the Rig-Vedic age was well educated and possessed full religious privileges. Probably she could not herself offer funeral oblations to the manes, but she could get this done by her son. For all religious purposes the vedic father could thus regard a daughter to be as good as a son. He had a strong prejudice against adopting a son. (R.V., VII, 4, 8). He therefore preferred property passing to his own daughter in preference to a stranger, who by a religious fiction, was to be regarded as an adoptive son (Altekar 1959: 235-36).

Thus a brotherless daughter was the first to get her right of inheritance recognised. Rigveda refers to a brotherless daughter getting her share of patrimony (R.V., I, 124, 7).

Patriarchal traditions were reigning supreme in the Rig-Vedic times and they were not favourable for the recognition of a daughter's right of inheritance in competition with a brother. In the Rig-Vedic period, however, girls were fairly well educated and very often they would remain unmarried either by choice or by the force of circumstances. In such cases it was recognised that they ought to be allowed to have a share in their father's property. A Rig-Vedic stanza refers to an old maiden claiming her share in her patrimony (R.V., II, 17, 7). Usually, however, daughters married, and then they did not get any share in their patrimony. A Rig-Vedic poet expressly informs the brother that he should not give any share to his sister; she is after all to migrate to a different family. (R.V., III, 31, 2)

The custom of the sacrifice of the widow at the funeral of her husband was not prevailing in the Rigvedic times. It is not referred to in the funeral hymns of the Rigveda, where it would certainly have

been mentioned if it had been in existence. It is true that in the great controversy that regard at the time of the legal prohibition of the Sati custom by lord William Bentinck, it was argued that the custom had a vedic sanction. It was maintained that the funeral hymn in the Rigveda refers to widows ascending the funeral pyre. The case, however, could be rendered plausible only by fraudulently changing the last word of the stanza from 'agre' into 'agneh'. The verse in question refers to women with their husbands living coming forward to anoint the corpse before it was consigned to flames, and contains no reference whatsoever to any widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre (R.V, X, 18, 7).

It is true references to the life of a widow are very few. We get only glimpses of some aspects of the life of widow. It was not characterized by so many restrictions and austerities as in later days. X, 18, 8 and X, 40, 2 convey that a widow was taken charge of by the brother of the deceased, who could marry her with the permission of the elders. This custom was in vogue for a long time, at least in Rig-Vedic India. Besides this it seems more probable that the widow was taken away by his brother and near kinsmen. She was brought home to live with and to take care of her sons, grandsons and kinsmen. Reference like those in Rigveda X, 40, 2 seem to contemplate Niyoga rather than a regular marriage with the brother-in-law. (R.V., X, 40, 2). References to regular remarriages of widows in Vedic literature are few, probably because Niyoga was then more popular than remarriage. At this period, however, a widow could get as many as three sons by Niyoga so the Niyoga relationship practically amounted to a remarriage (Das, A.C.1980: 259).

In the Rig-Vedic times women could move quite freely in society and manage the family. The Purda was unknown at that time. Rig-Veda contains no reference to the purda system. The Vedic marriage hymn requires the bride to be shown to all the

assembled guests at the end of the marriage ritual (R.V.,X.85,33).

The hope was further expressed that the bride should be able to speak with composure in public assemblies down to her old age. The presence of ladies in social and public gatherings was a normal feature in the Rig-Vedic times. it was quite welcome to society(R.V.,X, 85, 26). Whenever anything charming or graceful is to be described, Rig-Vedic poets usually think of the beautiful attired lady, going out for a function, as the standard object of comparison (R.V., IV, 58, 7, X, 168, 2: etc.)

In the Rigvedic age women enjoyed all the religious rights and privileges, which men possessed. Women used to receive vedic education. Some of them were the authors of vedic hymns. They therefore could recite vedic mantras as a matter of course. Some women, especially unmarried ones, are seen offering vedic sacrifices all by themselves. In one place we find a maiden taking a shoot of the soma-shrub while returning from her bath, and straightway offering it in sacrifice to Indira, when she reached home (R.V., VIII, 91, 1). In another place we find a lady, named Visvavara, getting up early in the morning and starting the sacrifice all by herself (R.V.,V, 28, 1). Normally, religious Prayers and sacrifices were offered jointly by the husband and the wife. Therefore, the offering of sacrifice and prayer was the only popular and well-established method of worshipping divine powers.

In the intellectual field, the only evidence of culture among women is to be inferred from the fact that some of the hymns are attributed to female Rishis. These may be classified as follows (Shastri 1952: 12-15): -

1. Hymns that are entirely attributed to female Rishis.

2. Hymns that are partly attributed to female Rishis.
3. Hymn that are attributed to female Rishis, but are of dubious authorship.

The first group included the poems of Vishvavara and Apala, composes respectively of V, 28 and VII, 91. Both of them are said to belong to the Atri family.

Vishvavara's hymns is in Praise of Agni and Apala's is in praise of Indra. From both the hymns it is evident that the Rishis were women and they were the author of these hymns because their names comes in the hymn.

The second group in which parts of the hymns are traditionally attributed to female Rishis consists of Lopamudra and Shashiyasi, the wife of Taranta. They seem to be the composers respectively of I, 179, 1 and 2; V, 162, 5-8. The names appear in the course of dialogues and parts of the hymns are attributed to them, but no internal evidence is available in support of their authorship.

The third group consists of the hymns attributed to Ghosha, Kashivati, Surya-Savitri, Indrani, Shraddha-Kamayani, Shachi Paulomi, Sarparajni, Urvashi. With the exception of Ghosha all these hymns are attributed to mythological beings and personification of abstract qualities, who obviously cannot be the authors. Whether the real authors were men or women is not known. No interval evidence is available. The doubt about Ghosh's poems consists not only in the matter of authorship, but also as to whether they really belonged to the Rig-Vedic times. The Atharvaveda too mentions her name.

The position of women was fairly satisfactory in the Rig-Vedic age. Ordinarily girls were no doubt less welcome than boys, but we must add that there were also some parents in society who would perform special religious rituals for the good luck of getting

learned and capable daughter. These girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of Brahmacharva. In the above a few female Rishis used to remain for ever unmarried, as they were anxious to devote themselves entirely to the cause of learning and religion. The phenomenon is repeating itself in modern times. Today also we have some ladies in society who prefer to remain unmarried, because they want to devote themselves to the cause of education and social service.

The position of woman in society can be known from some of the hymns of the second Mandala of the Rig-Veda ascribed to Paruchchapa, the son of devadasi. Children were generally named after the title and name of the father. But this exception to the rule indicates the existence of devadasi system: - women dedicated to the service of gods.

The instances in which women out-stepped the code of moral law, as we understand it today, are frequent in the Rig-Veda. The way in which they are introduced in the hymns show that they were not looked askance at by society.

The Goddess of Dawn, for instance, is often described as a women dressed in variengated colours, like a dancing maid, appearing on the stage to exhibit her beauty. References to the existence of illegitimate love and the abandonment of off-spring are also to be found in the Rig-Veda. There were women who were professional dancers is evident from the description of the dawn.

The womanhood in the vedic period had its heights and depths, its brighter and darker spots. Women was regarded with due respect in every sphere of life, and she was not subject to any of the merciless laws of an unsympathetic society. Even when she overstepped moral laws, she was judged with sympathy. There was no discrimination between the male and the female in the anger of the gods. It is true that monogamy was the established order of society. It is only in the very

late collections that we come across references to polygamy. The winning of a maiden by feats of chivalry, the existence of mutual affection and self-choice before marriage were present.

In brief, it can be said, the picture of womanhood given in the hymns of the Rig-Veda is far different from what we find in later literature. The existence of festivals like samana where men and women joined, the unconventional life of a young girl, female Rishis dedicating themselves to the cause of learning and

religion, the pursuit of the sun-god after the goddess Usha, very much like the scene of Apollo and Daphne, the custom of dedicating women to the service of gods, the winning of a maiden by feats of chivalry and various other customs were common to the Aryan family. The position of women on the whole was fairly satisfactory in the Rig-Vedic age. The community was showing proper concern and respect for women, allowing them considerable freedom in the different activities of the social and religious life.

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