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## Varṇa System and Dissemination of Knowledge in Principal Upaniṣads

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### Abstract of the Paper

The word *varṇa* denotes several meanings in Sanskrit, i.e. a colour, paint or dye, complexion, a class of men or race, a letter or character or sound or syllable, fame or renown, praise, dress or decoration or outward appearance, a cloak or mantle, the order or arrangement of a subject in a song etc. and many more. Usually four *varṇas* are prevalent in the society and in modern social science. Many a time the Vedic and Vedantic philosophy are described as Brahmanical or dominated by the Brahmin race. But neither the Vedas nor the Vedic Philosophical texts i. e. the *Upaniṣads* have restricted (*niṣedha*) any race or tribe from acquiring and disseminating knowledge. Ṛṣi Aitareya of *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, Trīṣaṅku of *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Pravahaṇa Jaivali, King Jānaśruti and Raikva, Satyakāma Jābāla and Aśvapati of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Gārgī as a lady in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* etc. are examples of non-dominance of Brahmins and having authority of knowledge.

When *Brāhmaṇa* text describes 'manuṣyadevaḥ' (*Śat.Br.* II/2/2/6), origin of each race from a particular deity (Brāhmaṇas are from Agni, Kṣatriyas from Indra, Vaiśyas from Viśvedevā and Śudras from Pūṣā) [*Śat.Br.*], then the misconception about the hierarchy of human beings based on birth can be pacified on the basis of the principal *Upaniṣads*. The paper aims for a detailed study of the instances of dissemination of knowledge other than the Brahmins by birth rather those who have purity and divine qualities from the references of *Upaniṣads* and to mollify the pseudo criticism.

Keywords: varṇa, Vedas, Upaniṣads

### Introduction

We find two words as *varṇa* and *jāti*. The term *varṇa* is derived from the root *vr*, means to cover, to envelop, count, classify, to consider, to describe or to choose. So, word *varṇa* (*vr* + *ghaṇ*) has several meanings including type, order, colour or class which is used to social classification of human race. In the Puruṣa sūkta of the *Rgveda*, it's said that the four categories of human beings come out of different imagined limbs of the Virāṭ Puruṣa<sup>1</sup>. Brāhmaṇas are vedic scholars, priests and teachers. Kṣatriyas are rulers, warriors and administrators. Vaiśyas are agriculturalists and administrators and Śudras are labourers and service providers. This quadruple division is a form of social classification and quite different than the regional *jātis* which are a latter classification. *varṇa* and *jāti*, both the words are synonyms as per the depiction of *Amarakoṣa*<sup>2</sup>. There are Brahma-varṇa, Kṣatra-varṇa, Vaiśya-varṇa and Śudra-varṇa in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kāṇḍa of *Amarakoṣa*. There are 158 types of human race as per their occupation as described in *Vājasaneyi Samhitā*<sup>3</sup>. The classification of human race into four divisions is on the basis of special qualities and action as per *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*<sup>4</sup>. Then, birth may not define or fix the category of a person. The action and character create the image of a person.

## The varṇa system and hierarchy

The *varṇa* system is extensively discussed in the *Dharmaśāstras*. *Dharmaśāstra* divides the society into four *varṇas* – Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śudra. Those who fall out of this system because of their grievous sins are ostracised as outcastes (untouchables) and considered outside the *varṇa* system. Barbarous and those who are unrighteous of unethical thoughts and actions are also considered outcastes.

The discussion of *varṇa* as well as untouchable outcastes in these texts does not resemble the modern era caste system in India. Patric Olivelle, a Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions and credited with modern translations of Vedic Literature, *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras*, states that ancient and medieval Indian texts do not support the ritual pollution, purity-impurity as the basis of *varṇa* system<sup>5</sup>. According to Olivelle, purity-impurity is discussed in the *Dharmaśāstra-texts*, but only in the context of the individual's

1 ब्राह्मणोऽस्य मुखमासीद्ब्राह्मणं राजन्यः कृतः । ऊरू तदस्य यद्वैश्यः पद्भ्यां शूद्रो अजायत ॥ (RV. X/90/12)

2 संततिर्गोत्रजननकुलान्यभिनजान्वयौ । वंशोऽन्ववायः संतानः वर्णाः स्युर्ब्राह्मणादयः ॥ (Amara. 2/1)

3 Vāj. Sam. 30/5-18.

4 चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागशः । तस्य कर्तारमपि मां विद्ध्यकर्तारमव्ययम् ॥ (Gītā 4/13)

5 <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> (The Dharmasastras), Cf: Olivelle, Caste and Purity (2008), pp. 240-241.

moral, ritual and biological pollution (eating certain kinds of food such as meat, urination and defecation)<sup>6</sup>. In this review of *Dharmaśāstra*, Olivelle writes “we see no instance when a term of pure or impure is used with reference to a group of individuals or a *varṇa* or caste”. This implies that individuals irrespective of their *varṇa* affiliation, all four *varṇas* could attain purity or impurity by the content of their character, ethical intent, actions, innocence, stipulations and ritualistic behaviours.

The first three *varṇas* are described as “twice born” as they have the *upanayana-saṁskāra* and qualified to study the Vedas according to the *Dharmaśāstras*. But such restriction of who can study the Vedas is not found in the Vedic Literature.

The *Mahābhārta* offers two models of *varṇa* system. The first model describes *varṇa* as colour-coded system through a sage named Bhṛgu - “Brahmin *varṇa* was white, Kṣatriyas were red, Vaiśyas were yellow and the Śudras were black”. This description is questioned by another sage named Bharadvāja who says that colours are seen among all the *varṇas*. Desire, anger, fear, greed, grief, anxiety, hunger and toil etc. prevail over all human beings that bile and blood flow in each human body. Then what distinguishes? According to Alf Hiltebeitel, a Professor of Religion, “there is no distinction of *varṇas*. This whole universe is Brahman. It was created formerly by Brahmā and came to be classified by acts”<sup>7</sup>.

The *Mahābhārta* thereafter recites behavioural model for *varṇa*, that those who were inclined to anger, pleasures and boldness attained the Kṣatriya *varṇa*, those who were inclined to cattle rearing and living off the plough attained the Vaiśyas, those who were fond of violence, covetousness and impurity attained Śudratva. Therefore, it's rightly said that each one is Śudra by birth, Dvija by the saṁskāras, Vipra by practising Veda and Brāhmaṇa by knowing the Brahman.

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः संस्कारात् द्विज उच्यते।

वेदाभ्यासाद् भवेद् विप्र ब्रह्म जानाति ब्राह्मणः<sup>8</sup>॥

The term Itarā associated with *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* and *Aitareya Upaniṣad* of *R̥gveda* or *R̥ṣi Aitareya*, Triśaṅku of *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Pravahaṇa Jaivala, King Jānaśruti and Raikva, Satyakāma Jābāla and Aśvapati of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Gārgī as a lady in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* etc. are examples of non-dominance of Brahmins and having authority of knowledge. This paper discusses these characters in details.

6 <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> (The Dharmasastras), Cf: Olivelle, Caste and Purity (1998), pp. 189-216.

7 <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> (The Epics), Cf: Hiltebeitel, Dharma (2011), pp. 529-531.

8 *Skanda Purāṇa*, Nāgar Khaṇḍa, Chapter 239, (Efficacy of Adoration, Penance etc.), Verse 31.

## Position of Women and Śudras in the scriptures

*Upaniṣads* are the highest knowledge or the ultimate knowledge i.e. परा विद्या. All others are textual knowledge or secondary knowledge i. e. अपरा विद्या<sup>9</sup>. Sāyaṇācārya, the 14<sup>th</sup> century commentator of the *R̥gveda* states in the *Preface to the R̥gveda* that there is no right of the Women and Śudras in Veda. Because they do not have the *upanayana saṁskāra*<sup>10</sup> and formal education or in other words, they are not qualified. But all women are not disqualified as it's described by Hārīta that women in Vedic age are of two types – Brahmvādīnīs and Sadyavadūs. There were *upanayana*, *Agnīndhana*, study of the Vedas and begging of alms by Brahmvādīnīs at home. Ordinary women may pass through the formality of the sacrament of marriage in order to go to heaven, but not the Brahmvādīnīs.

द्विविधाः स्त्रियः । ब्रह्मवादिन्यः सद्यो बध्वश्च । तत्र ब्रह्मवादिनीनामुपनयनमग्नीन्धनं स्वगृहे च भिक्षाचर्या इति । सद्यो बधूनां तूपस्थिते विवाहे कथञ्चिदुपनयनमात्रं कृत्वा विवाहः कार्यः ।

If women are not invested with sacred thread, they remain as Śudras. Hārīta has taken the consideration of the verse of *Manusmṛiti*. "The whole series of ceremonies must be performed for females also to sanctify the body, at proper time and proper order, but without the recitation of sacred texts or mantras"<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it's said by Hārīta that women are not like the Śudras<sup>12</sup>. There are four vargas or categories according to four *varṇas*. Further, the divisions and sub-divisions of their categories are described which indicate the inter-castes and occupations of people. There are 51 such races or castes or groups in Śudra-varga of *Amarakoṣa*<sup>13</sup>. They are –

1. Karaṇa (Śudra + Vaiśya)
2. Ambaṣṭha (Vaiśya + Dvija)
3. Ugra (Śudra + Kṣatriya)
4. Māgadha (Kṣatriya + Vaiśya)
5. Māhiṣya (Āryā + Kṣatriya)
6. Kṣattā (Āryā + Śudra)
7. Suta (Brāhmaṇī + Kṣatriya)
8. Vaidehaka (Brāhmaṇī + Vaiśya)
9. Rathakāra (Karaṇā + Māhiṣya)
10. Caṇḍāla (Brāhmaṇī + Vṛṣala)

9 द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा चैवापरा च । (Muṇḍaka Up. I/1/4)

10 श्रीशूद्रयोस्तु सत्यामपि ज्ञानापेक्षायामुपनयनाभावेन अध्ययनराहित्याद्देवेऽधिकारः प्रतिबद्धः । (R̥gveda Bhāṣya Bhūmikā, p. 116)

11 अमन्त्रिका तु कार्यं स्त्रीणामावृदशेषतः । संस्कारार्थे शरीरस्य यथाकालं यथाक्रमम् ॥ (Manusmṛiti II/66)

12 न शूद्रसमाः स्त्रियः । नहि शूद्रयोर्नौ ब्राह्मणधत्रियवैश्या जायन्ते । तस्माच्छन्दसा स्त्रियः संस्कार्याः । (हारीतः)

13 *Amarakoṣa* II/1.

11. Kāru = Śilpī/artist
12. Kulaka = Kulaśreṣṭhī
13. Mālākāra = Mālika
14. Kumbhakāra = Kulāla
15. Palagaṇḍa = Lepaka
16. Tantuvāya = Kubinda
17. Tunnāvāya = Saucika
18. Rangajīva = Citrakāra
19. Śastramārja = Asidhāvaka
20. Pādakṛt = Carmakāra
21. Vyākāra = Lohakāraka
22. Nāḍidhama = Svarnakāra = Kalāda = Rukmakāraka
23. Śaṅkhika = Kāmbavika
24. Śaulvika = Tāmrakuṭṭaka
25. Takṣā = Vardhaki = Tvaṣṭā = Rathakāra = Kāṣṭhataṭ  
(a) Grāmatakṣa (b) Kauṭatakṣa
26. Kṣurī = Muṇḍī = Divākīrti = Nāpita = Antāvasāyī
27. Nirṇejaka = Rajaka

28. Śauṇḍika = Maṇḍahāraka
29. Jābāla = Ajājīva
30. Devājīvi = Devala
31. Māyā = Śāambarī  
(a) Māyākāra = Pratihārika
32. Śailālina = Śailuṣa = Jāyājīva = Kṛśāśvina = Bharata = Naṭa
33. Cāraṇa = Kuśilava
34. Mārdaṅgika = Maurajika
35. Pāṇivāda = Pānigha
36. Veṇudhma = Vaiṇavika
37. Vīṇāvāda = Vaiṇika
38. Jīvāntaka = Śākunika  
(a) Vagurika (b) Jalika ] bird hunters
39. Vaitaṁsika = Kauṭika = Māṁsika ] meat sellers
40. Bhṛtaka = Bhṛtibhuk = Karmakara = Vaitanika ] those who depend upon salary
41. Vārtāvaha = Vaivadhika
42. Bhāravāha = Bhārika
43. Vivarṇa = Pāmara = Nīca = Prākṛta = Pṛthagjana = Nihīna = Apasada = Jālma = Kṣullaka = Itara
44. Bhṛtya = Dāseya = Dāsera = Dāsa = Gopyaka = Ceṭaka = Niyojya = Kirmkara = Praiṣya = Bhujiṣya = Paricāraka
45. Parācita = Pariskanda = Parajāta = Paraidhita] those who become pleased hardly
46. Manda = Tunda = Parimṛja = Ālasya = Śītaka = Alasonuṣṇa] lazy
47. Caṇḍāla = Plaba = Mātaṅga = Divākīrti = Janamaṅgama = Niṣāda = Śvapacā = Avantavāsī = Cāṇḍāla = Pukkasa
48. Kirāta = Śabara = Pulinda = Mlecchajāti
49. Vyādha = Mṛgabadhājīva = Mṛgayu = Labdhaka
50. Caura = Āgārika = Stena = Dasyu = Taskara = Moṣaka = Pratirodhī = Parāskandī = Pāṭaccara = Malimluk
51. Dhūrta = Akṣadevī (akṣam dīvyati iti) = Kitava = Akṣadhūrta

The four categories, their inter-caste, inter inter-caste and division of people by their occupation have created these 51 types of races. It's important to note that the category of people or *jāti* is done by their action or occupation. Therefore, it's clear that the caste or *jāti* is not always determined by birth. Similar description based on the occupation of the people is also found in *Vājasaneyi Samhitā* (30/5-18) where 158 types of races are there.

Those people are called Śudras who are impure without saṁskāras, good actions, purity of mind and intellect and less interest for the ultimate goal irrespective of their caste, creed, race, gender, age, language, occupation and country. Naturally those people are not qualified for study of the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads* and incapable for the dissemination of knowledge.

### The Instances of Scholars other than Brahmins by birth in the *Upaniṣads*

Acquiring and disseminating knowledge is free for all those who have inclination for it. Such characters, those who do not belong to the high caste, but are respected in the *Upaniṣads* as the scholars of the Highest Knowledge are Aitareya, the Ṛṣi of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad*, Triśaṅka of *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, Pravahaṇa Jaivali, King Jānaśruti and Raikva, Satyakāma Jābāla and Aśvapati of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Gārgī as a lady in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*.

## 1. Aitareya

- (a) itarā + ṭhak = aitareya  
which means the descendant of Itarā or Itara, sage to whom the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad* were revealed<sup>14</sup>.
- (b) Aitareya from aitarā. A descendant of Itara or Itarā, name of Mahidāsa, the author of a *Brāhmaṇa text*, *Āraṇyakatext* and *Upaniṣad text*.
- (c) The word Aitareya is also mentioned in Aufrecht's *Catalogues Catalogorum*. Aitareya is known as a great scholar with profound knowledge. Being a non-Brahmin, he was not able to learn the Vedas from a guru. In spite of this, he acquired considerable scholarship and became the author of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad*<sup>15</sup>. *Aitareya Upaniṣad* reads the mahāvākya 'prajñām brahma'<sup>16</sup>.

14 <https://www.wisdomlib.org> (Aitareya:7 definitions)[Cf: Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries: Cappeller Sanskrit-English Dictionary] 15 Vettam Mani. *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, p.19.

16 *Aitareya Up.* 1/2.7.

- (d) Aitareya is the son of Māṇḍuki by his first wife, Itarā. Being the son of Itarā, he came to be called Aitareya. As a boy, he was very pious. But he was very shy and silent boy. His father mistook his silence to be a sign of stupidity. Dissatisfied with him and being desirous of having learned sons, Māṇḍuki married another woman named Piṅga and had four sons by her who became very learned. Once Itarā called her son and told him that his father regarded him as an unworthy son and was often twitting her using insulting words for having given birth to so unworthy a son. She then told him of her resolve to sacrifice her life. Aitareya then made an enlightening discourse to her and dissuaded her from determination to commit suicide. Sometime later, Lord Viṣṇu appeared before them and blessed the mother and son. On the advice of Viṣṇu, Aitareya participated in the yajña conducted by Harimedhya at Koṭitīrtha and there he made a learned speech on the Vedas. Harimedhya was so pleased with him that he gave his daughter in marriage to him<sup>17</sup>.
- (e) According to *Sukhapradā vṛtti*, Brāhmaṇa Yajñavalkya has a second wife named Itarā and the son of them is known as Aitareya<sup>18</sup>.
- (f) According to Ācārya Sāyaṇa in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* which is cited from Ṣaḍguruśiṣyabhāṣya that there was a Ṛṣi and he had several wives. One of them was Itarā and her son was Mahidāsa. Once the sage neglected Mahidāsa and adored the sons of his other wives. By observing the unhappiness of Mahidāsa, the mother Itarā prayed her kuladevatā, the Bhūmi. Mother Earth comes in a divine form to the sacrificial place and made seated Aitareya in a thorn<sup>19</sup>. Further, the Mother Earth bestows more intellect upon Mahidāsa. With her blessings, Mahidāsa revealed the mantras of Aitareya Brāhmaṇa from 'ओम् अग्निर्वै देवानामवमो...' to 'अपि ह यद्यस्याश्ममूर्धा द्विषन् भवति क्षिप्रं हैवैनं स्तृणुते स्तृणुते' and the mantras of *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* from 'ओम् अथ महाव्रतम्' to '...योऽस्यैतदेवं नाम वेद ब्रह्म भवति ब्रह्म भवति, इति'.

17 अस्मिन्नेव मम स्थाने हारितस्यान्वयेऽभवत् । माण्डुकिरिति विप्राग्रयो वेदवेदाङ्गपारगः ॥

तस्यासीदितरानाम भार्या साध्वी गुणैर्युता । तस्यामुत्पद्यत सुतस्त्वैतरेय इति स्मृतः ॥ (*Skanda Purāṇa*, Chapters 1, 2 and 42/ 28-30)

18 आसीद् विप्रो यज्ञवल्क्यो द्विभार्यस्तस्य द्वितीयामितरेति चाहुः । (Commentary of Ṣaḍguruśiṣya, *Ai.Br.*)

19 Bhūmikā, *Ai. Br.*, ed. by Sudhakar Malaviya, p. 52.



## 1. Triśaṅku

Triśaṅku word suggests a person with dilemma. In *Taittīya Upaniṣad* of *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, Triśaṅku is a Ṛṣi of great knowledge in the tenth anuvāka of Śikṣāvallī. According to Paul Deussen, the tenth anuvāka is obscure, unrelated, likely to be corrupted or incomplete. It is rhythmic with *Mahābṛhatī Yavamadyā* meter which

has a mathematical structure – 8+8+12+8+8<sup>20</sup>.

Max Muller translates it as an affirmation of one's Self as a capable, empowered blissful being. The tenth anuvāka asserts, "I am he who shakes the tree. I am glorious like the top of mountain. I, whose pure light of knowledge has risen, am that which is truly immortal, as it resides in the sun. I (Self) am the treasure, wise, immortal, imperishable. This is the teaching of the Veda by Ṛṣi Triśaṅku<sup>21</sup>.

Ācārya Śaṅkara states that the tree is a metaphor for the empirical world, which is shaken by knowledge and realization of Ātma-Brahma (Self, eternal reality and Brahma, the invisible principle)<sup>22</sup>. The word Triśaṅku as a pronoun is known as a Vedic philosopher<sup>23</sup>.

In Rāmāyaṇa, Triśaṅku is a king who belonged to Ikṣvāku dynasty. Triśaṅku is commonly referred to a middle ground or limbo between one's goals or desires and one's current state or possessions.

As per Taittirīya Upaniṣad Triśaṅku is a Ṛṣi or philosopher, who is well versed with Brahmavidyā; but in a latter period, the same name describes a King.

## 2. Pravahaṇa Jaivali

There is a dialogue between Śilaka, the son of Śālāvān, Dālbhya, the son of Cikitāyana and Pravahaṇa Jaivali, the son of Jivala regarding Udgītha or Akṣara or Omkāra (*Chā. Up. I/8-9*). They are experts in the discipline of Udgītha. Pravahaṇa Jaivali was a Kṣatriya and other two were Brahmins.

Pravahaṇa asked the two Brahmins to start the discussion and addressed the other two as Brāhmaṇas due to the talkative nature of the Kṣatriya race<sup>24</sup>. First Śilaka put questions for Dalbhya. 'What is the goal of Sāma'? Dālbhya replied that it is 'svara'. Then the goal of svara is prāṇa, the goal of prāṇa is food, the goal of anna/food is -----

<sup>20</sup> Paul Deussen. *Sixty Upanisads of the Vedas*, Vol. I, pp. 128-129.

<sup>21</sup> Max Muller. *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XV, Ch. 3, Taittirīyopaniṣad, I/10/1.

<sup>22</sup> *Taittirīya Upaniṣa*, S. S. Shastri (translator), pp. 86.

<sup>23</sup> Vettam Mani. *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, p. 795.

<sup>24</sup> तथेत्यक्त्वा ते समुपविशुर्होपविष्टवन्तः किल । तत्र राज्ञः प्रागल्भ्योपपत्तेः स ह प्रवाहणो जैवलिरुवाचेतरौ भगवन्तौ पूजावन्तावग्रे पूर्ववदताम् । ब्राह्मणयोरिति लिङ्गाद्राजासौ युवयोर्ब्राह्मणयोर्वदतोर्वाचं श्रोष्यामि । (*The Commentary of Śaṅkara, Chā. Up. I/8/2*)

water, the goal of water is the other world or heaven and this is the upper limit of sāma. Then Śilaka replied that the knowledge of Dālbhya is incomplete about Udgītha. So, Dālbhya asked Śilaka to answer the next goal.

Śilaka said the opposite of what Dālbhya had said. Dālbhya had said that the goal of this world was the other world. But Śilaka said that this world is the goal of the other world. So, sāma did not praise the other world or svarga, but praise this world.

Then Pravahaṇa said that Śilaka was wrong and misinterpreting the knowledge. He said that the goal of this world is ākāśa or space. All sentient and non-sentient beings originate from ākāśa and ākāśa is the Supreme goal<sup>25</sup>. Here ākāśa means Brahman who is all pervading.

So, it was the Kṣatriya Pravahaṇa who got it right in the end by pointing to the Brahman as the origin of everything and as the goal to aspire for. It's not that knowledge is fixed to a caste, rather it depends upon it's cultivation and understanding and going deep into the theory to reach it's root.

### 3. King Jānaśruti and Raikva

The story of the King Jānaśruti and Raikva is described in the fourth chapter of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Jānaśruti was knowledgeable, pious, charitable, and he cooked food for all people. He believed that he was the greatest patron and that there was no one else like him. He used to measure his merit by amount of gifts and money he distributed. He had also mastered the languages of birds.

One night he was lying in the upper storey of his palace and enjoying the beauty of evening twilight. He observed two swans flying past with conversation. One of them said “Don’t you see the bright band of light that proceeds from King Jānaśruti. Beware. If you cross the flaming light of his fame, then you get yourself burnt. You must know that today there is no one famous like him for his abundance of charity”. Immediately the other swan reacted “Your goodness! You speak as if this Jānaśruti is greater than Raikva, the cart puller”<sup>25</sup>. King Jānaśruti was doing good things, but he was mad after the name and fame. This was the reason for which he was driven for action. With all his charities he was ever restless for praise which should not be in a higher consciousness. The first swan was asked back that who is this Raikva who is just a cart puller, but greater than King Jānaśruti.

25 अस्य लोकस्य का गतिरित्याकाश इति होवाच सर्वाणि ह वा इमानि भूतान्याकाशादेव समुत्पद्यन्त आकाशं प्रत्यस्तं यन्त्याकाशो ह्येवैभ्यो

ज्यायानाकाशः परायणम् ॥ (Chā. Up. I/9/1)

26 तमु ह परः प्रत्युवाच कम्वर एनमेतत्सन्तं सयुग्वानमिव रैक्कमात्थेति यो नु कथं सयुगवा रैक्क इति ॥ (Chā. Up. IV/1/3)

The King overheard the conversation of the two swans as they flew out the sight and night closed in on the city. Raikva’s name made him restless to search the person. King Jānaśruti sent a servant to search the great-soul. It was not easy to locate the small man of great-soul, Raikva. Finally the servant of Jānaśruti located him under a cart as an ordinary being and informed to the King.

Jānaśruti made elaborate preparation and went to Raikva with six hundred cows, a chain of gold and mule-driven cart. He offered them all to Raikva and said “Sir be pleased to accept all this and teach me spiritual knowledge”<sup>27</sup>. But felt disgusted with it and with irritation replied to Jānaśruti “Oh Śūdra! Please take back the chain, the carriage and the cows”<sup>28</sup>. Jānaśruti went back and came with more gifts even his daughter to offer her as Raikva’s wife. But Raikva did not moved by any material objects. Because knowledge of Self or *ātma-vidyā* is not for sale. Raikva considered Jānaśruti’s persistence and sincerity for knowledge. Then he teaches the *saṁvarga-vidyā* (air or breath as Brahman) to Jānaśruti. He taught “Air, verily, is the absorbent; for when a fire goes out, it goes out into the air. When the sun sets, it goes into the air, and when the moon sets, it goes into the air”<sup>29</sup>. Further he added that when water dries up, it just goes to the Wind. For the wind, truly, snatches all here to itself. Thus with reference to the divinities<sup>30</sup> (*adhidaivatam*). Then he preached *adhyātma-saṁvarga* and said “Breath (*prāṇa*), verily, is a snatcher-unto-itself. When one sleeps, speech just goes to breath; the eye to breath; the ear to breath; the mind to breath; for the breath truly snatches all here to itself. Verily, these are two snatchers-unto-themselves: the wind among the gods, breath among the vital breaths”<sup>31</sup>. The King Jānaśruti was extremely satisfied with these teachings about this *saṁvarga-vidyā*. Raikva rectified King Jānaśruti’s charity which became pride less and egoless. While departing after gaining the knowledge, the King offered milch

25 अस्य लोकस्य का गतिरित्याकाश इति होवाच सर्वाणि ह वा इमानि भूतान्याकाशादेव समुत्पद्यन्त आकाशं प्रत्यस्तं यन्त्याकाशो ह्येवैभ्यो

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26 तमु ह परः प्रत्युवाच कम्वर एनमेतत्सन्तं सयुग्वानमिव रैक्कमात्थेति यो नु कथं सयुगवा रैक्क इति ॥ (Chā. Up. IV/1/3)

27 रैक्कमानि षट्शतानि गवामयं निष्क्रोज्यमश्वतरि रथो नु म एतां भगवो देवतान् शाधि यां देवतामुपास्स इति ॥ (Chā. Up. IV/2/2)

28 तमु ह परः प्रत्युवाच हारेत्वा शूद्र तवैव सह गोभिरस्त्विति ।... (Chā. Up. IV/2/3)

29 Radhakrishnan, S. translated into English, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, Chā. Up. IV/3/1, p. 404.

30 Hume, Robert Ernest. translated into English, *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads*, (Chā. Up. IV/3/2),

p. 217.

31 do: तौ वा एतौ संवर्गौ वायुरेव देवेषु प्राणः प्राणेषु ॥ (Chā. Up. IV/3/4)

cattle, numerous gold coins, chariots and his own daughter in marriage to Raikva who accepted these this time. Thenceforth, the village came to be known as Raikvaparaṇa, name after the philosopher of cart (life cart indeed) who was not Brahmin as a cart driver. But the knowledge he had was lightened the swans in the sky as the episode describes in the beginning. So, *Brahmavidyā* is all luminous for those who are well-prepared for it.

#### 4. Satyakāma Jābāla

Satyakāma Jābāla is a boy with inquisitiveness for knowledge and later he became a Vedic sage. His context is found in the fourth chapter of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Once he addressed his mother Jabālā, “Mother, I desire to live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. Of what family am I?”<sup>32</sup> Then the Mother Jabālā replied to him “I do not know my child, of what family you are. In my youth, when I went as a maid servant, I got you. So I do not know of what family you are. However, I am Jabālā by name and you are Satyakāma by name. So, you may speak yourself as Satyakāma Jābāla (the son of Jabālā)”<sup>33</sup>

Then he went to the sage Haridrumata Gautama for knowledge. The teacher asks “my dear child, what family do you come from?” and Satyakāma replies that he is of uncertain parentage because his mother does not know the same as she was busy with household duties in her early youth. At that time she had got him as the son. With this reply, the sage declares that the boy’s honesty is the mark of a Brāhmaṇa, the true seeker of knowledge of the Brahman. Ṛṣi Gautama accepts him as a student in his school.<sup>34</sup>

The sage sends Satyakāma to tend four hundred cows and come back when they multiply into a thousand. The symbolic legend presents Satyakāma’s conversation with a bull, a fire, a swan (Haṁsa) and a diver bird (Madgu) which respectively symbolise Vāyu, Agni, Āditya and Prāṇa. Satyakāma then learns from these creatures that the form of Brahman is in all cardinal directions, worldly bodies, and sources of light and in the human being. Satyakāma returns to his teacher with a thousand cows and humbly learns the rest i. e. the nature of Brahman, the metaphysical and the ultimate reality.

Satyakāma graduates and becomes a celebrated sage. A Vedic school is named after him and an influential text is *Jābāla Upaniṣad*, a treatise on Sanyāsa or monastic life. Upakosala Kamalāyana was a student of Satyakāma Jābāla, whose story is also presented in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.<sup>35</sup> The description of Satyakāma is also found in *Puraic Encyclopaedia*.<sup>36</sup>

32 Radhakrishnan, S. translated into English, *The Principal Upaniṣads*, Chā. Up. IV/4/1, p. 406.

33 do, pp. 406-407.

34 तं होवाच नैतद्ब्राह्मणो विवक्तुमर्हति ...। (Chā. Up. IV/4/5)

35 उपकोसलो ह वै कमलायनः सत्यकामे जाबाले ब्रह्मचर्यमुवास तस्य ह द्वादशवर्षाण्यग्नीनपरिचचार स ह स्मान्यानन्तेवासिनः समावर्तयन्तं ह स्मैव न समावर्तयति ॥ (Chā. Up. IV/10/1)

36 Vettam Mani. *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, pp. 705-706.

So, Satyakāma is not from a well established family to acquire knowledge. As he told the truth, therefore he was considered as Brahmin by Guru Gautama. Never his birth put a question mark for him at that time; rather he became renowned with his Mother’s identity as Satyakāma Jābāla and framed the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* with that name. The modern patriarchy concept is failed here for Satyakāma Jābāla.

#### 5. Aśvapati

King Aśvapati has the knowledge of *Brahmavidyā*. Prācīnāsāla Aupamanyava, Satyayajña Pauluṣi, Indradyumna Bhāllaveya, Jana Śārkarākṣya and Buḍila Āśvatarāśvi are great householders and greatly learned in sacred lore. They came together to undertake an investigation regarding *Ātman* and *Brahman*. They went to King Aśvapati for this knowledge. King Aśvapati, the son of Kekaya gave them proper attention and said that there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no man without sacrificial fire, no ignorant, no adulterer, and much adulteress. I am going to perform a sacrifice. O venerable Sirs! I’ll give you as much as wealth as I give to each priest. Please stay in this sacrificial institution<sup>37</sup>.



Aśvapati is an expert in *Brahmavidyā* and also a wise administrator. Wisdom and work go together in him. When they said about their purpose of coming to him; then he told them for the next day. In the next day, they approached him with discipleship i.e. with fuel (*samidha*) with their hands. Aśvapati asked them all one after another. Their reply was partial about *Vaiśvānara* (Universal Self). The development of thought is effected gradually. Aśvapati elicits from these seekers their conceptions of the Universal Self. Their conceptions of sky, sun, air, space, water, earth are accepted as partially true. The *Vaiśvānara* Self is the whole, the all-comprehending Infinite of which natural objects and individual selves are parts. It is wrong to identify a particular deity; one's conceived presiding over a limited part of the world with the Universal Self.<sup>38</sup> Aśvapati instructed them the complete knowledge of the *Vaiśvanara Ātman* and told that this is the reality which connects the individual with universal through sacrifice and meditation. When Aśvapati addressed to each of the six seers separately to find out their *sādhana*, and then they explained each of them about the *Vaiśvānara Ātman* in terms of their own meditation. King Aśvapati told to Upamayava that he meditates upon Light and that is the head or upper part of the *Vaiśvānara* Self (*Chā. Up. V/12*). To Satyayajña he said that he meditates upon Sun and it is the eyes of the *Vaiśvānara* (*Chā. Up. V/13*). The third disciple Indradyumna was meditating upon air, so it is the *prāṇa* of the *Vaiśvānara* (*Chā. Up. V/14*). The fourth disciple Jana was meditating upon *ākāśa* (sky) and that is the *bahula* or trunk of the *Vaiśvānara* (*Chā. Up. V/15*). The fifth disciple Buḍila was meditating upon water and that is *rayi* and that is the bladder of the *Vaiśvānara* as explained by Aśvapati (*Chā. Up. V/16*). The sixth disciple Uddālaka was meditating upon earth and that is called the *pratiṣṭhā* and is the feet of the *Vaiśvānara* Self (*Chā. Up. V/17*).

37 ... स ह प्रातः संजिहान उवाच न मे स्तेनो जनपदे न कदर्यो न मद्यपो नानाहिताग्निर्नाविद्वान्न स्वैरी स्वैरिणी कुतो यक्ष्यमाणो वै भगवन्तोऽहमस्मि

यावदेकैकस्मा ऋत्विजं धनं दास्यामि तावद्भूगवद्भ्यो दास्यामि वसन्तु भगवन्त इति । (*Chā. Up. V/11/5*)

38 Radhakrishnan, S. *The Principal Upaniṣads*, pp. 436-437; *Chā. Up. V/11-18*.

Finally pointing to the limitations of the knowledge of these Ṛṣis, King Aśvapati explains that it is not by meditating on parts of the Universal Self one can know the whole. Truth (the *Vaiśvānara Ātman*) will be revealed when the whole will be meditated upon and realized<sup>39</sup>. Here the Universal Self is described as *Vaiśvānara*.

Usually the Ṛṣis advice such *ātmaavidyā*. But here the King Aśvapati, who is a Kṣatriya is imparting knowledge to the Ṛṣis. It's also not a fixed truth that all the Ṛṣis are Brāhmins. Brahmarṣis like Vaśiṣṭha and Rājarṣis like Viśvāmitra are there.

Aśvapati is known as the father of Sāvitrī and King of Madra in *Mahābhārata*. Another Aśvapati is the son born to Kaśyapa of his wife Dānu according to *Mbh*.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. Gārgī

Gārgī Vācakanviṣi a Ṛṣi in Vedic and Upanisadic texts. She was Brahmvādinī or knowledgeable about the *Brahman*. In the sixth and the eighth Brāhmaṇa of third chapter of *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, her name is prominent as she participates in the brahmajajña, a philosophical debate organized by King Janaka of Videha. She challenges Ṛṣi Yājñavalkya with perplexing questions on the issue of *Ātman*. The dialogue is like this – “O Yājñavalkya ! since all this is here woven, like warp and woof, in water, on what, is water woven, like warp and woof? Sage Yājñavalkya replied – O Gārgī ! On the worlds of the sky. On what then are the worlds of the sky woven? On the worlds of the *gandharvas*. On what then are the *gandharvas* woven? On the worlds of the Sun. On what then the worlds of the Sun are woven? On the worlds of the moon. On what then the worlds of the moon are woven? On the worlds of the stars. On what the worlds of the stars? On the worlds of the gods. On what the worlds of the gods are woven? On the worlds of the Indras? On what the worlds of Indras? On Prajāpati. Then how the Prajāpati is existed? On Brahmā. Then how the Brahmā's world is woven? Please don't ask too much Gārgī, replied Yājñavalkya”<sup>41</sup>. Thereupon Gārgī kept silence.

Gārgī, the daughter of sage Vacaknu in the lineage of sage Garga was named after her father. From a young age, she evinced keen interest in Vedic scriptures and became very proficient in the fields of philosophy. She is a respected female character of the Upanisadic period. This is the broadness of the Vedic society where an intellectually trained female can take part in the knowledgeable discourses of Kings court.

39 तान्होवाचैते वै खलु यूयं पृथगिवेममात्मानं वैश्वानरं विद्वांसोऽन्नमल्य यस्वेतमेवं प्रादेशमात्रमभिविमानमात्मानं वैश्वानरमुपास्ते स सर्वेषु लोकेषु सर्वेषु भूतेषु सर्वेष्व्वात्मस्वन्नमन्ति ॥ (Chā. Up. V/18/1)

40 Vettam Mani. *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, pp. 67-68.

41 अथ हैनं गार्गी वाचक्रवी पप्रच्छ याज्ञवल्क्येति होवाच यदिदं सर्वमप्स्वोतं च प्रोतं च कस्मिन्नु खल्वाप ...ततो ह गार्गी वातक्रव्युपरराम ॥ (Br. Up. III/6/1)

Gārgī as a Brahmvādinī has visualised mantras of *R̥gveda* (X/39 & V/28) where the questions are about the origin of all existence. The Yoga Yājñavalkya, a text of Yoga Philosophy is a dialogue between Gārgī and Yājñavalkya regarding the theories of Yoga.

## Conclusion

Though the number is less about females and other than the high class people, still there is no prohibition in the whole Vedic literature about acquiring and disseminating the knowledge for anyone. The restrictions are found in later interpretations and in a very later period which might have come to the mind of the commentators due to the political, social or other reasons.

So many other references are there in the Vedic and Puranic Literatures where the dissemination of knowledge is from a socially less important person. Sometimes we find references of birds or animals as the speaker of various knowledge.

So, according to *Chā. Up.*, those who have good conducts will take birth with a high position and family and those whose conducts are evil will take evil births in the next life. Therefore, let one seek to guard himself.<sup>42</sup>

42 ...रमणीयां योनिमापद्येरन्ब्राह्मणयोनिं वा क्षत्रिययोनिं वा ... सूकरयोनिं वा चाण्डालयोनिं वा ॥ ... जायस्व म्रियस्वेत्येतत्तृतीयं स्थानं तेनासौ लोको न सम्पूर्यते तस्माज्जुगुप्सेत तदेष श्लोकः ॥ (Chā. Up. V/10/7-8)

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