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## Life and Education of Women in the Rg-Vedic Period: A Study

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### Introduction:

Vedas deserves an outstanding place in the history of world literature. The word Veda has been derived from the root *Vid*. There are many verbs of the form, *vid-jñāne*, *vid-sattam*, *vid-lābhe*, *vid-vichāre*, *vid-chetanā* which means to know, to be, to obtain, to consider and to feel. Indisputably, the Vedic literature is the oldest literature of the Hindus and the most foremost of all the works of the Vedic literature is the *Rg-Veda*. This consists of the text handed down to us in a collection of 1028 hymns (*suktas*) which are divided into ten books (*Maṇḍalas*).

Women play an active role for the development of a family, community, society and a nation. Women constitute half-part of the total population of a country and development can't be achieved by neglecting this vast segment. The popular UNESCO slogan-“Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a women and you educate a family”. As we are standing on the threshold of the new millennium, there is a realization that the modern world is becoming increasingly complex and choric. At the same, the newly emerging concepts like women education, women empowerment has been emerged out to bring the women to the equal status of man.

### Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this study is to-(i) Find out the life and education of women as revealed in the *Rg-Veda* and (ii) to discuss the relevance of these concepts if any, in the present-day-society.

**Methodology:** Both the primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The secondary data have been collected from various books, articles etc. The primary data are mainly collected from the *Rg-veda-Samhitā*. In addition to the observation method, the descriptive and analytical method is also employed in due course of the study.

### **Major Discussions:**

It is fact that Indian women have a glorious history since the *Rg-vedic* period. From the *Rg-vedic* period, women have been treated with profound veneration. Entire women have been worshiped as a most designated power. The Indian sages pray or worship to the different types of natural objects as our mother, reveal a great sense of respect towards the women. The *Rg-vedic* sage addresses *Uṣā*, the Sun as our mother who dispel the darkness of the world.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the first *maṇḍala* of the *Rg-samhitā*, the sage addresses *Vāyu* (the air) as *Mātariśwa*<sup>2</sup>. Goddess *Śvaraśwati* is depicted as the power of all our knowledge<sup>3</sup>. Such types of instances are found here and there in the whole pages of the Vedic literature. Thus, the deification of these natural elements in the female forms signifies the importance of the female parts in this universe and should always be respected by all means.

From the various internal and external evidences, it has been found that in the Vedic period the sages taught the students in the forest, popularly known as *Āśramas*. At that period, the Indian women enjoyed the equal educational opportunities with man<sup>4</sup>.

In the *Rg-vedic* age, the Aryans believed ten types of *Samskāras* to complete a life. These are –*Jātakarma*, *Niṣkarmman*, *Annaprāsanna*, *Cudākaraṇa*, *Upanayana*, *Vedārambha*, *Upakarma*, *Utsarjana*, *Godāna*, *Samābartana*, *Vivāha*, *Garvadhāraṇa*, *Puṅgsavaṇa* and *Simontonayaṇa*. Among these- *Upanayaṇa*, *Vedārambha*, *Upakarma*, *Utsarjaṇa* and *Samābartana* etc. are related to the parts of the educational life of a person. In the *Smṛiti*, *Yama* the sage says that ...

*purākalpe kumārīṅāṁ mouñji vandhanamiṣyate /*

Thus, it proves that the girls have to read the Vedas and they had to take part in the *Samkāras* like *Upanayana* as like a boy.

In the *Rg-vedic* period, both man and women have the equal right to performing sacrifice. Even a man could not perform sacrifice if he is unmarried. On the other hand, a female *Rishi* could conduct a sacrifice (*yajña*) as the chief *hotā* through her credit. As for instance, we can mention the name *Rishi Vāk*. She was unmarried. But through her spiritual contemplation she placed herself as a *brahmavādinī*, where she found no distinction between the supreme *brahma* and herself. So, she utters-

*aham Rudrebhīrvasurbhīscarāmyahamādityeka viśvadevaiḥ /*

*aham MitraVarunobha Vibhārmyahamindragñi ahamaśvinova //*<sup>5</sup>

This again proves that the *Rg-vedic* women were very worthy, independent and they could express their expressions without any hesitation. In a word, any kind of nondependent could touch the women of the *Rgveda*.

The wives of the sages were known as *patni*. In this case, Pānini, the great Sanskrit grammarian, in his sūtra '*paturnoḥ yajñasamyoge*' gives the meaning of the word as – who helps *pati* (husband) in their sacrificial works. Similarly, in terms of some grammatical rules, Pānini gives the meaning of these words *Kathi*, *Vrihavrīci* as- one class of girl students who studied the *Katha* and *Vrihavaca* branch of the *Rg-vedas* respectively<sup>6</sup>.

In the *Rg-veda*, we have many female *Rishi*, who composed the *Rks* or *Mantras*. Here we can mention the name of Lopamudrā (1.179), Viśwavarā (5.29), Apāla (8.91), Ghosa (10.4 & 39), Sāvritri Surya (10.85), Vāk (10.125), Indrāni (10.145), Yami (10.154) etc.

All these denote the equal status of women with man in the *Rg-vedic* period.

In the *Rg-veda*, we have many women who went to the battle field to fight against the enemies. As for example, the wife of the king Namuci went to the battle-field as a warrior with her husband. Similarly, in the context of the *Rk* of *Aświnikumāra*, we have the depiction of the queen Viśwapāla, her Excellency in the battle-field<sup>7</sup>. Another hymn of the *Rg-veda* states that

“*striyo hi dāsā ayudhāni cakre kiṃ makarannavāla asya senā*”. Moreover, the hymn 5.61; 5.80; 9.78, 5; 8.33, 19; 8.91, etc. clearly shows the braveness and Excellency of the *Rg-vedic* women in the defense sector of their states.

The *Rg-vedic* women were well-versed and well educated in home science. Also, they took an important role in the cultural sides of a society. Therefore, another *brahmana* of the *Rg-veda*; the *Kauśitaki-brāhmana* clearly states that-“*nṛtyaṃ gītaṃ strinām karma*.” Again the same *brahmana* of the *Rg-veda* states that the women of the *Rg-vedic* period were expert in handloom and handicraft<sup>8</sup>. The women of this period were expert weaver and weaved their own cloths. The *Rg-Vedic* hymns 7.33, 9; 10.71,1 etc. bears the testimony of the same.

In the *Rgveda*, we have some *Rks* which always encourages the women to establish her as a most powerful, vigorous and unhesitant-minded women in her family or in her society. i.e.

*samrajñi svasure bhava samrajñi svasvaṃ bhava /*

*nānāmdari samrajñi bhava samrajñi adhi deveṣu //*<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it seems that the *Rg-vedic* women were found as most powerful most designated power. They had an equal status with man and enjoyed all equal opportunities with man. Both boys and girls used to undergo a ceremony of *upanayana* in the *Rg-vedic* period and had all educational opportunities with man. Moreover, the *Rg-vedic* women, through their strong personality could able to show their abilities in any sphere of life. At the same time, they could establish themselves as a *brahmavādinī* who composed *Ṛk* or performed sacrifices; as a brave warrior; as a good house wife; as a good weaver, and so on.

*Aitareya-brāhmana*, the *Rg-vedic brāhmana* states that *Sadyabadhu* (one class of women) got marry after their *Upanayana-saṃskāra*. “*sadyobadunāmtuupasthitebibahekathañcitupnayanamkritvābibāhaḥ kāryah*”<sup>5</sup>. In the same tone the great sage Govila says-*jañjopabitināmabhyu-dānamjapetsomodadatgandhavyā iti*.<sup>11</sup>

From the above discussion, we found that the physical, mental, spiritual, and ethical as well as the other educations of the *Rg-vedic* women was very rich. At the same time, we find the same women as a Rishi, who composed the *Rks* or mantras; as a teacher, as a student of the Vedas, as a married or unmarried *brahmavādinī*, as a weaver and so on. Here, we can mention

the name of Viśwavarā, Apāla, Romasa, Lopamudrā, Amrni Vāk, Jarita, Paulami, Vrisapala etc. They had an equal position with their man and enjoyed a kind of liberty. The women had equal educational opportunities with man. Both boys and girls used to undergo a ceremony of *upanayana* in Vedic days to study the Vedas. The education system of Vedic period has unique characteristics of qualities which is probably rare in the ancient educational system of any other country of the world. In the words of Dr. P.N. Prabhu, “Education in ancient India was free from any external control like that of the state and government or any party politics. It was the kings’ duties to see that learned pundits, pursued their studies and performed their duty of imparting knowledge without interference from any source what so ever”.

### **Relevance of the Concepts of Life and Education of Women of the *Rg-Vedic* Period in the Present-day-Society:**

Society cannot run with a single wheel. Women constitute the most powerful resource as well as dynamic source of a progressive society. Therefore, progress and development of a country and development on the literacy of its women, which gives them divine light of walk along the path of success and prosperity admits all disappointments and darkness of life. Though the Indian women have contributed to growth of society and advancement of Indian civilization, but in the present society they are suffering a lot. Violence affects the lives of millions of women manifests itself as rape, molestation, stripping, kidnapping and abduction, domestic violence, dowry-death etc. The *Rg-vedic* women were considered in practice of moral values. The teacher and taught were ideals of morality, for both practiced it all through their lives. During the *Rg-vedic* period women were regarded as a great source of power, place satisfaction and knowledge for men. Thus, the deification of women has a great significance by which it indicates that as son, man should not cause harm to his mother, his goddesses. So, it may be a great teaching for the present-day society of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The feminine principle of energy was also a product of this *Rg-vedic* age. This took the form of worship of the female idols or goddesses. The feminine forms of absolute and the popular Hindu goddesses are believed to have taken shape in this era.

In the whole Vedic tradition, it is common to see the pairing of Vedic male Gods with female counterpart which represents sets of powers and qualities that each would have. The



Rg-veda is not exceptional from this tradition. In the tenth *Mandala* of the Rg-veda we have several dialogue hymns which are great moral lessons for mankind for forever. And some of them ultimately indicate that we have the combination of male and female divinities to complete our life. In the recent years empowerment of women is recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The far-furthered ancient Indian seers realized it very well. The *Rg-Vedic* ancestors believed that 'Respect for Women' will protect the every sides of an woman and it is possible through in every individual education or at all level of education.

Finally, it may be said that in the present century, the century where women empowerment, women education becomes as the central issue in determining the status of women, the concepts of the *Rg-veda* with regards to the life and position of women may help and show us the way to build a peaceful society in the true sense.

### **Notes & References:**

1. *Rg-Samhitā*, 1.92.1
2. Ibid. 1.148.1-5
3. Ibid. 7.96.1-6
4. Ibid. 5.28.1
5. Ibid. 10.125.1
6. *Vedar Parichay*, p-231
7. *Rg-Samhitā*, 1.116.15
8. *Vedar Parichay*, p-240
9. *Rg-Samhitā*, 10.85.46
10. *Vedar Parichay*, p-231
11. Ibid, p-231

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