



## Component-I (A) – Personal details:

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Paper : **Vedic, Epic and Puranic Culture of India**  
Module : **Women in Vedas**

  
ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

 **Pathshala**  
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**Component-I (B) – Description of module:**

Subject Name	Indian Culture
Paper Name	Vedic, Epic and Puranic culture of India
Module Name/Title	Women in Vedas
Module Id	IC / VEPC / 04
Pre requisites	Knowledge in Vedic Culture, Social conditions in Vedic Age
Objectives	To know about women and her position in the Vedic society / prominent women in Vedic Age
Keywords	Vedic Age / Culture / Women in Vedas

**E-text (Quadrant-I):****1. Introduction to Women in Vedas**

In the early Vedic age women enjoyed an honored place in the society. The wife was the mistress of the household and authority over the slaves. In all religious ceremonies she participated with her husband. Prada system was not prevalent in the society. Sati system was also not prevalent in the Vedic society.

The education of girls was not neglected. The Rig-Veda mentions the names of some learned ladies like Viswavara, Apala and Ghosa who composed mantras and attained the rank of Rishis. The girls were married after attaining puberty. The practice of 'Swayamvara' was also prevalent in the society. Monogamy was the general Practice.

Polygamy was, of course, practiced and it was confined only to Kings and chiefs. Remarriage of widows was permitted. The women were not independent persons in the eye of the law. They had to remain under the protecting care of their male relations.

**2. Women in Vedic Society**

"The home has, verily, its foundation in the wife"- The Rig Veda

During the Vedic age, more than 3,000 years ago, women were assigned a high place in society. They shared an equal standing with their men folk and enjoyed a kind of liberty that actually had societal sanctions. The ancient Hindu philosophical concept of 'shakti', the feminine principle of energy, was also a product of this age. This took the form of worship of the female idols or goddesses.

**3. Birth of the Goddess**

The feminine forms of the Absolute and the popular Hindu goddesses are believed to have taken shape in the Vedic era. These female forms came to represent different feminine qualities and energies of the Brahman. Goddess Kali portrays the destructive energy, Durga the protective, Lakshmi the nourishing, and Saraswati the creative.

Here it's notable that Hinduism recognizes both the masculine and feminine attributes of the Divine, and that without honoring the feminine aspects, one cannot claim to know

God in his entirety. So we also have many male-female divine-duos like Radha-Krishna, Sita-Rama, Uma-Mahesh and Lakshmi-Narayan, where the female form is usually addressed first.

#### **4. Position of Women**

Although there are numerous nationalist historians that claim that the Vedic period was a "Golden Age" for women, there are several refutations that don't hold women at a very high position in society. Unlike later eras, the Vedic age did allow women greater liberty, freedom and respect and they weren't looked down upon. Firstly, girls could be educated, by means of Brahmacharya or Upanayana, which suggests a sense of equality. Not only are there mentions of women sages that contributed to the composition of the Vedas, but also of goddesses and their worship and women taking part in sacrifices and rituals. Hymns of the Rig Veda speak of the honour and love a man must have for his wife, while comparing the purity of the relationship to that of god. In addition, widow remarriage was not uncommon and according to the system of Gandharva vivaha, a man and a woman may both choose their own spouses, revealing a rather reasonable amount of equality between the two sexes.

However, it is also important to take into consideration, the limitations of these aforementioned 'liberties' that women enjoyed as well as certain other factors that may undermine the position of women. Firstly, on the topic of women, the earlier Vedas overlooked the lower classes and tended to emphasize attention of the more elite women of society. The goddesses that were worshipped were far less important than the gods and the hymns dedicated to women are very few in number. The women sages mentioned are also very few and there is no mention of women priests or women receiving dana or dakshina. Strictly patriarchal, ancestry is traced with preference to the male's lineage – limiting women from inheritance and control. The social norms of households tended to have control over their sexuality and behavior. Moreover, matrimonial ties symbolize ties between two families and not the two individuals. A woman is bound by obligations and duties towards her husband's family while he isn't. Although a woman has several roles in society, she has few liberties. Being present at sacrifices, even the yajmana's wife may not offer oblations into the fire and is merely present for the purpose of formalities. Her main role is to bear sons for her husband and his family, and if she does not, she may even be cast off.

As developments with technology and implements came through the later periods, the man was favored since they occurred to benefit his position. The plough made a woman's role less significant in the farm and ownership of property allowed a man to possess land, surplus production and wealth, of which the woman gets a share, but has no right to possess. Men also brought female dasyus to treat them as slaves and concubines. Such developments further limited the position and power of women in society, leading to a drastic downfall of the status of women in the Aryan Society. It can hence be concluded, that although some claimed that the early Vedic age was a 'Golden Age' for women, they could have been trying to portray that ancient Indian civilizations were indeed more civil than western ones. However, most evidence mentioned above suggests that women were certainly considered inferior to men and were more or less slaves to society's protocol.

#### **4. Education of the Girl Child**

Vedic literature praises the birth of a scholarly daughter in these words: "A girl also should be brought up and educated with great effort and care." (Mahanirvana Tantra);

and "All forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee; and all women throughout the world are Thy forms." (Devi Mahatya)

Women, who so desired, could undergo the sacred thread ceremony or 'Upanayana' (a sacrament to pursue Vedic studies), which is only meant for males even to this day.

The mention of female scholars and sages of the Vedic age like Vac, Ambhrni, Romasa, Gargi, Khona in the Vedic lore corroborates this view. These highly intelligent and greatly learned women, who chose the path of Vedic studies, were called 'brahmavadinis', and women who opted out of education for married life were called 'sadyovadhus'. Co-education seems to have existed in this period and both the sexes got equal attention from the teacher. Moreover, ladies from the Kshatriya caste received martial arts courses and arms training.

## **5. Women & Marriage**

Eight types of marriage were prevalent in the Vedic age, of which four were more prominent. The first was 'brahma', where the daughter was given as gift to a good man learned in the Vedas; the second was 'Daiva', where the daughter was given as a gift to the presiding priest of a Vedic sacrifice. 'Arsa' was the third kind where the groom had to pay to get the lady, and 'prajapatya', the fourth kind, where the father gave his daughter to a man who promised monogamy and faithfulness.

In the Vedic age there was both the custom of 'Kanyavivaha' where the marriage of a pre-puberty girl was arranged by her parents and 'praudhavivaha' where the girls were married off after attaining puberty. Then there was also the custom of 'Swayamvara' where girls, usually of royal families, had the freedom to choose her husband from among the eligible bachelors invited to her house for the occasion.

## **6. Wifehood in the Vedic Era**

As in present, after marriage, the girl became a 'Grihini' (wife) and was considered 'ardhangini' or one half of her husband's being. Both of them constituted the 'griha' or home, and she was considered its 'samrajni' (queen or mistress) and had an equal share in the performance of religious rites. The following sloka highlights the roles of women in a family as a wife, as an advisor, as an assistant etc

**Karyeshu dasi, Karaneshu Mantri ! Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayaneshu Rambha !!**

**Rupeshu Lakshmi, Khsamaya Dharitri! Satkarma Naari, Kuladharmata patni!!**

## **7. Divorce, Remarriage & Widowhood**

Divorce and remarriage of women were allowed under very special conditions. If a woman lost her husband, she was not forced to undergo the merciless practices that cropped up in later years. She was not compelled to tonsure her head, nor was she forced to wear red sari and commit 'sahagamana' or dying on the funeral pyre of the dead husband. If they chose to, they could live a life of a 'sanyasin' or hermit, after the husband passed away.

## **8. Prostitution in the Later Vedic Age**

Prostitutes were very much a part of the Later Vedic society. They were allowed to make a living, but their lives were regulated by a code of conduct. They were known as "Devadasis" and they were married to God of the village Temple. They are expected to spend the rest of the life as his maid serving the men in the society.



## 9. Women Rishis

The Rig Veda mentions Romasa, Lopamudra, Apala, Kadru, Visvavara, Ghosha, Juhu, Vagambhrini, Paulomi, Yami, Indrani, Savitri, and Devajami. The Sama Veda adds Nodha, Akrishtabhasha, Sikatanivavari and Gaupayana.

When it comes to talking about significant female figures of the Vedic period

Ghosha, Lopamudra, Sulabha Maitreyi, and Gargi Kakshivati, Dakshina Prajapathya, Vishvavar, Atreyi,, Godha,, Apala, Yami Vivasvathi, Lopamudra, Romasha Svanya,, Aditi Dakshayeni,, Ratri Bharadwaja, Vasukra Pathni, Surya Savitri, Indrani, Sarma Devasuni, Urvashi, Shashwati, Angirasi, Sri Laksha

## 10. Women Rishis

Female Rishis (Rishikas) of about 30 of them are named in the Rig Veda.

Lopamudra was the wife of Agasthya , known for his command over Sanskrit and Tamil. The meaning of the word "Lopamudra " is one , who is totally absorbed in herself (i-e)., she is one of the Brahnavadhini Rshi-patnis.Two manthras of the Rg Vedam ( Canto I.179.1-2) are attributed to her There were women scholars like Visvavara,Ghosha, Sikata, Nivavari and Apala. Roamasa the wife of Svanya Visvavara belonging to the Athri family Aangirasi Sarasvathi of Angirasa family Apala of the Athri family Yami Vivasvathi , Sraddha , Vasukra pathni , Ghosha , Soorya , Indrani , Urvasi , Sarama , Joohu , Vagambhrini and Poulomi Sachi are well known women, who are revered and are associated with individual Rig Veda Manthras.

The seers of Rigveda's suktas 10-134, 10-39,10-40, 10-91, 10-95,10-107,10-109,10 - 154,10-159,10-189. etc. are women. Gargi was one of the learned persons summoned by king Janaka . The Upanishads refer to the conversation between Maitreyi and her husband Yajnavalkya.

Brahma Jnana can be attained in any stage:

Gargi got it in the BRAHMACHARYA stage.

Choodaala attained it while a GRIHASTHA.

Maitreyi attained it while in the VANAPRASTHA stage of life.

Sulabhayogini won it while a SANYASINI.

### 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 to 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 afterwards, 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 'brahmajajna', 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?" - flattened even the great Vedic men of letters.

### **Conclusion:**

There is a saying in Manu Smruti.

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।  
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥

Where the women are worshipped, there deities will dwell and there will be prosperity. Throughout the many years of Vedic culture, women have always been given the highest level of respect and freedom, but also protection and safety. The Women Rishis though very few contributed a lot for the cause of society and Vedas.



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