



Poetesses of Rigveda

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ABSTRACT

Not only does the Rigveda, one of the oldest books ever written, detail the religious and cultural activities of ancient India, but it also proves, by the hymns it contains, that there were remarkable female poets who contributed to the text. Despite being eclipsed by their male counterparts, these women contributed significant philosophical perspectives, spiritual insights, and personal stories to Vedic literature. The aims of this research are to examine the lines attributed to Rigvedic poetesses like Lopamudra, Ghosha, and Apala and to analyse their distinct voices in relation to Vedic culture. These women explored cosmic themes, divine relationships, and morality in their music. The scholastic and spiritual responsibilities of women in the Vedic period are illuminated by these hymns. In contrast to contemporary assumptions on the functions of women in ancient cultures, the Rigvedic poetesses show how gender, knowledge, and power dynamically intertwine.

Keywords: Rigveda, poetesses, Lopamudra, Ghosha, Apala, Vedic literature, women in Vedic society, ancient Indian poetry, spirituality, gender roles, Vedic hymns.

A strange phenomena on of Hindu civilizations is stated by Dr. A. S. Altekar, "The history of the known civilization shows that the further back we go into antiquity, the most unsatisfactory is found to be the general position of women. Hindu civilization is unique in this respect, for here we find a surprising exception to the general rule. The further back we go, the more satisfactory is found to be the position of women in more spheres than one. ¹" Likewise, status of women was excellent in Rigvedic India. Among the authors of the hymns of the Rigveda, we have some women.

Here is a list of Rśikās, or female-seers or Rgvedic Poetesses. List is prepared alphabetically² :-(1) Aditi (2) Aditi Dāksayanī (3) Agastyasvasā (4) Apalā Ātreī (5) Daksinā Prajāpatyā (6) Gaurivīthi Śaktyah (7) Ghoṣā Kaksivati (8) Godhā (9) Indramātarah Davajāmayah (10) Indrasnuṣa Vasukrapatnī (11) Indrani (12) Juhū Brahmajāyā (13) Lopāmudra (14) Nadyah (15) Rātri Bhāradvājī (16) Romasā Brahmavādinī (17) Sāchi Paulomi (18) Saramā Devaśuni (19) Sarparāgni (20) Śasvati Angirasi (21) Sikatā Nivavari (22)) Śraddhā Kamayani, (23) Surya Savitri (24) Urvasi (25) Vac Āmbhrnī (26) Visvavārā Ātreī (27) Yamī (28) Yamī Vaivasvati.

Some of them, from this list, may have been mythical personages; but internal evidence shows that others were in flesh and blood, who existed in Rgvedic India. Considering to the various opinions, we can say that among them there were following Rśikās: -

1. Apala Atreyi - VIII/91
2. Gaurivīthiśaktyah - V / 29
3. Ghosa in Kaksivati - X / 39. X / 40
4. Does X/134/6-7
5. Lopāmudra - 1 / 179/1-2
6. Ratri Bharadvaji - X / 127
7. Sikata Nivāvari - IX / 86 / 11-20, 31-40
8. Suryā Savitri - X / 85
9. Collect in Āmbhrnī - X / 125
10. Visvavārā Ātreī - V / 28

Some biographical remarks are available from various sources.⁴ Apālā was daughter of Atri. She had spiritual Knowledge. But as suffered from a skin disease leprosy, she was rejected by her husband knowing that Soma is the favourite drink of Indra through Soma. She had tried to please Indra. Indra fulfilled her desire, cured

her leprosy. With slight change, the same thing was happened with Ghosā - daughter of Kakśivān, grand daughter of Drgata, was disfigured by an evil disease and hence nobody turned up to select her. Remained in her father's house of 60 years. Wishing for beauty and good fortune she praised Aśvinas. They made her ageless, free from disease and beautiful. They gave her a husband and a son Suhastya. Gaurivīti was descendant of Śakti. Viśvavārā was from Atri family. Sūryā was daughter of Sun. Rātri, the preceding deity of night, once worshipped by Indrani. The necessity of marriage occurred to Agastya for his ancestors. At that time, Vidarbha king was doing penance to get child. Forming a beautiful girl from various parts of the animals, Agastya gave her to Vidarbha king. When she grew up to be a young lady, named Lopamudra, he approached king. The king was hesitant, but the daughter prepared to go with him. here are some examples, 5 which show the elegance of poetry of Rsikas: -

Apālā regarding Indra says,

'Will he not help and work for us? Will he not make us wealthier? Shall we not hostile to our lord, unite ourselves to Indra now?' VIII-80-4

Gaurivīti describes Indra's velour,

'When Maghavān with the thunderbolt demolished his nine-and-ninety castles altogether, The Maruts, where they met glorified Indra: Ye with the Trstup hymn obstructed heaven.' V-29-6.

Ghosā expresses fine thought for wedding life,

"They mourn the living, cry aloud, at sacrifice:

The men have set their thoughts upon a distance cast.

A lovely thing for fathers who have gathered here, - a joy to husbands, are the wives their arms shall clasp.' X-40-10

A simile is in this Godha's mantra. Thou barest in thine hand a lance like a long hook, great counsellor!

As with his foremost foot a goat, draw down the branch, O Maghavan.' X-134-6

Another simile is in Rātri's mantra.

'So favor us this night.

O thou whose pathways we have visited. As birds their nest upon the tree.' X-124-4

Sikatā in eulogy says to Soma.

O Soma, thou beholdest men from every side: O Pavamana, steer, thou wanderest through these.

Pour out upon us wealth in treasure and in gold: may we have strength to live among the things that be.' IX-86-38.

When Sūryā went to her lord's house -

'Hymns were the cross-bars of the pole, kurira-metre decked the car: The bridesmaid were the Asvin Pair: Agni was leader of the train.' X-85-8

Vāc declares her identity,

'I am the Queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship.

Thus Gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and abide in.' X-125-3

Importance of Agni is depicted by Viśvavārā,

Show thyself strong for mighty bliss, O Agni, most excellent be thine effulgent splendours.

Make easy to maintain our household lodes, and overcome the might of those who hate us. V-25-3.

Regarding the works of classical sanskrit poetesses Dr. S. K. De has observed, 'do not show any distinctive features to call for special comment. 6 Not with standing this opinion, when we evaluate the works of Rgvedic Poetesses, we can easily say that they deserve special mention, definitely.

The Symbolism and Themes in the Hymns of Rigvedic Poetesses

Hymns written by women, the Rigvedic poetesses are remarkable for many reasons, including the profound symbolism they contain and the breadth of the subjects they cover. The female seers' profound affinity for the material and spiritual realms is reflected in the poetry they wrote. Here we will discuss the key points of the hymns written by the poetesses of the Rigveda. These ideas include the conjuration of natural forces, the role of humans in the cosmos, and the possibility of supernatural intervention. We shall also discuss the symbolic meanings inherent in their language.

Divine Intervention and Personal Transformation

Poetesses like as Apala and Ghosha frequently depict divine intervention in human matters in their hymns, either to ease material misery or to tackle societal issues. Apala and Ghosha were unable to engage in social activities due to their ailments. Ghosha was hampered by a disability, whereas Apala suffered from leprosy. In an attempt to get their pleas heard, they sung hymns of healing and restoration to the gods, particularly Indra and the Ashvins. Their remarkable recoveries demonstrated the possibility of human development by commitment to spiritual pursuits, as well as the generosity of the divine.

For the general idea of reinvention and transformation in these songs, divine intervention acts as a metaphor. The healing and reunion of Apala and her husband symbolises the transition from rejection to acceptance, while Ghosha's recovery symbolises the triumph of faith over misfortune. These two events are part of the plot. These songs reveal a belief in the supernatural as a force that has the power to change people's material situations as well as their social status.

Cosmological and Spiritual Contemplation

Cosmology is another famous topic where the poetesses delve into the connection between the universe and one's own identity. Two historical figures, Vac and Ratri, investigated the nature of cosmic order and the function of heavenly forces in preserving it. Vac, for one, thinks she personifies divine speech—a power that permeates the universe and oversees its formation and understanding—and that she is responsible for all of it. The world's interdependence and the might of celestial knowledge are proclaimed in Vac's renowned poem found in the (Rigveda X/125). In her song, she proclaims her omnipresence and her capacity to take many forms.

In the Ratri song (Rigveda X/127), the change from day to night is reflected, symbolising the harmony of opposites like light and dark, work and relaxation. Night is revered as a guardian who ensures the safety of beings when they sleep, when they are most susceptible. In this representation of the divine's safeguarding qualities, the night is shown as a goddess.

Nature as a Symbol of the Divine

The rigvedic poetesses frequently use natural scenes to illustrate abstract spiritual ideas or to represent heavenly powers in their songs. The natural world has a huge role in these musical compositions. The poetesses often used elements of nature to represent the divine. Elements such as rivers, the sun, and the night fall under this category. For example, the Sun god is important in the hymn Surya Savitri (Rigveda X/85) and represents both the physical light that illuminates the world and the spiritual clarity that comes from knowing oneself. Marriage is a sacred institution that conforms to the laws of the cosmos, and the hymn's depiction of Surya's trip to her husband's house is a metaphor for the harmony of cosmic forces and the fulfilment of divine destiny.

There are hymns that provide a more positive picture of humanity's place in nature and its interdependence with it. The natural world is more than a mundane setting; it is a supernatural being who hears and answers human rituals and prayers. The close relationship between the Vedic people and nature is demonstrated by their veneration of rivers, mountains, and forests as significant deities.

Gender and Spiritual Authority

Hymns written by Rigvedic poetesses often feature strong statements about women's spiritual authority. These women speak their minds with conviction and clarity, despite the patriarchal character of their culture. For instance, the Vac song makes a strong case for the cosmic significance of feminine energy. Women in the Vedic era may have had more than just submissive roles; they may have had positions of immense spiritual importance, as shown by Vac's declaration of sovereignty over all things, including humans, who are symbolised by the divine principle of speech.

Lopamudra and Ghosha's hymns, which both address the power inside that arises from a true understanding of spirituality, convey a comparable message. As if they were on equal spiritual ground, Lopamudra sings to her husband, the wise Agastya, in her song (Rigveda I/179). She had a conversation that transcends traditional roles of teacher and student. The concept that women may engage in historically male-dominated intellectual and spiritual conversations is reflected in this song.

Conclusion: Symbolism of Empowerment and Inclusion

Historical women had significant roles in society, philosophy, and religion, as depicted in the hymns composed by the Rigvedic poetesses. These women were able to challenge societal conventions, assert their independence, and illuminate the intricate web of relationships among humanity, the cosmos, and the divinity via the hymns they composed. A culture that acknowledged the significant intellectual and spiritual contributions of women to Vedic society is shown by the use of metaphors from nature, the assertion of female spiritual authority, and the calling out of heavenly powers.

The lineage of these poetesses has the power to ignite debates on spirituality, gender, and the contributions of women to the formation of intellectual and theological canons. This research seeks to provide insight on the intricate dynamics of gender, power, and spirituality in one of the first religious writings in the world by studying the symbols and themes found in their songs.

The Role of Education and Knowledge in the Hymns of Rigvedic Poetesses

The Rigveda places a premium on education and knowledge, and several hymns express this value and the importance of wisdom. The Rigvedic poetesses, who are also known as Rsikās, had a major role in leaving this intellectual heritage. In addition to glorifying God, their music emphasised the significance of learning and education. Here we take a look at the Rigvedic poetesses' depictions of knowledge, wisdom, and intellectual pursuits in their hymns. This section will focus on how these topics illustrate the prevalent spiritual and social ideals of the Vedic era.

Knowledge as a Divine Power

A lot of the hymns written by the Rigvedic poetesses talk about how knowledge is a gift from God. The reason behind this is because knowledge is crucial for the preservation of both the material and spiritual realms. One of the most renowned poetesses, Vac Āmbhrnī, declares herself to be the personification of speech and wisdom in her famous line from the Rigveda X/125. "I am the Queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship," Vac proclaims, symbolising the vital role that knowledge plays in preserving the harmony of the universe. She contends that the ability to communicate via speech is symbolic of the information that is essential for comprehending the cosmos and that the possibility of creation is predicated on this knowledge.

Instead of viewing education and knowledge as just means to an end (i.e., monetary achievement), this issue suggests that they were respected as holy powers that united humans with the divine. Philosophical and religious enquiries were seen by the Rigvedic poetesses as integral to intellectual pursuits. For them, the ability to think rationally was fundamental to a life of faith.

Women's Access to Education in Vedic Society

As the poetry written by women in the Rigveda attests, women were granted access to education and could participate in intellectual pursuits throughout the Vedic period. It is clear that women were involved in religious ceremonies and intellectual discourse through the hymns performed by personalities such as Ghosha and Lopamudra. For example, according to the Rigveda (chapter I, verse 179), Lopamudra and her wise spouse Agastya supposedly had profound spiritual discussions while singing the song. Through her expression of intellectual and spiritual authority, she proved that women in Rigvedic culture could be knowledgeable and expressive participants in the educational and spiritual aspects of life.

Additionally, the hymns proved that women's knowledge extended beyond religious issues and that they were capable of profound intellectual contemplation and reflection. In addition to addressing her physical problems, Ghosha's songs show her profound insight of spiritual healing and the divine's involvement in her life. Even though males were frequently believed to have all the authority in this civilisation, the Rigvedic poetesses showed that women might be just as intelligent. Their intellectual conversations and songwriting helped them do this.

The Transmission of Knowledge: Oral Tradition and Teaching

A further essential component of Rigvedic education is the heritage of oral tradition, which served as a conduit for the transmission of information. A significant part of the poetesses' work was to recite the hymns aloud in order to keep them alive. Hymn composition and singing is a form of education in and of itself, as it requires not only fluency in the language but also an in-depth familiarity with Vedic religion and philosophy. For the sake of this discussion, the poetesses played the parts of teacher and pupil. They learnt from the sages and gods they revered, which allowed them to offer new hymns and unique perspectives to the canon as well. Rigveda V/28 states that Visvavara ltreyī is said to have written hymns that show how well she knew rituals and how Agni (fire) kept the cosmos in order. The poetesses' role in preserving Vedic knowledge and enhancing the education of subsequent generations was to be fulfilled via hymn composing.

Education and the Pursuit of Truth

A common thread running through the Rigveda is the poetesses' pursuit of enlightenment, and the hymns they wrote reflect this. A greater comprehension of the rules of the cosmos and divine favour are common requests of the poetesses in their poems. An example of this may be heard in a song by Lopamudra, which delves into the concept of desire and completeness while highlighting the singer's yearning for both spiritual enlightenment and worldly success.

In addition, Vac's and other poetesses' hymns stress the significance of introspection and research as means to enlightenment. Their songs illustrate how knowledge was not passively acquired but rather sought after via introspection, commitment, and interaction with the outer world. This never-ending quest for knowledge exemplifies the high regard in which Vedic society holds learning and intellectual development.

Conclusion:

The Rigvedic poetesses provide a rare glimpse into the spiritual and philosophical climate of Vedic civilisation. Also, they prove that women were integral parts of Vedic society's intellectual and religious spheres. Their ability to musically convey complex concepts and their profound spiritual awareness are both on full display in their hymns, which are filled with profound philosophical, cosmic, and personal insights. Lopamudra, Ghosha, and Apala are just a few of the women from the Vedic period that provide as examples of the wide variety of experiences that women had. Intellectual contemplation and personal problems were also elements of these interactions. These Rsikās challenged traditional gender roles in literature by demonstrating that women may be more than just witnesses of contemporary intellectual and spiritual life.

The study's findings highlight the need of acknowledging the impact of these underappreciated poetesses. In addition to serving as powerful reminders of the gender inclusion that existed in antiquity, these poems offer valuable insights into the roles that women played in influencing early Indian thinking. Not only does the

Rigveda show how diverse and complex Vedic literature can be, but it also gives credit to the female poetesses who added intellectual and spiritual depth to the text. The Rigveda is clearly not a book written by men, as this proves.

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