PREFACE

A Study of the Feminine Space in the Vedic Literature has been undertaken keeping in view the gender inequalities experienced by the womanfolk in the global perspective. Vedic literature is the oldest literature in the world. Our Saṁhita texts, Brāhmaṇa texts and the voluminous Upaniṣat texts have provided a good space for women. A concern for awareness of gender inequalities in global perspective put the incentive to find out the space of women in the vedic literature. In the post Vedic texts we find ‘where women are worshipped there the Gods become pleased.’ “Yatra nāryastu Puṇyante tatra ramante devataḥ” Manusāṁhitā. Another text of Aitareya Brāhmaṇa VII-18 we get the reference ‘Kṛpanam ha duhitā jyotirhi putra parame Vyoman’.

This type of contradictory statements we come across in the Vedic texts. Therefore, the proposed research work ventures to dive deep into the matter to find out the actual space provided for women in the vedic texts.

The proposed research work is divided into five chapters. The first chapter prepares a study of the causes of the gender inequalities worldwide and its various phases. This inequality has been categorised
into certain categories. The second chapter prepares a study of the texts of the four Samhitās viz, the Rgveda, the Šamaveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda and the space provided for women therein. The third chapter deals with the Brāhmaṇa and upaniṣat literature. It has been subdivided into two sections. Section I deals with the former and section II with the later. The fourth chapter has been divided into three sections. Section I deals with the Attitude of the society towards woman. Section II deals with the Rights enjoyed by women. Section III deals with a comparative study of the Rights enjoyed by male and female. The fifth chapter resumes to its findings and provides for the conclusion of the proposed research work.

In the first chapter we have dealt with the origin of Feminism and its various perspective. Gender inequalities among the women exists in every corners of the Globe. Although mass awareness came in this respect only in Nineteenth Century. This awareness got intensified on the last century. Much energy has been spent but the desired goal is yet to reach.

Feminism concerns themselves with women’s inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. The awareness in the name of feminism has passed through a
couple of years. This development can be classified by its historical appearances at different stages as series of waves. In nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism as a distinctive term was referred to the feminist movements that concerned for gaining equal rights for women.

The Second chapter has made a survey of the texts of the Sārīhitas of the four Vedas, the Rgvedas, the Yajurveda, the Sāmaveda and the Atharvaveda, and traces out the space provided for women there in. This chapter, shows the status and privileges which Hindu religion provided to women in ancient vedic period. In this chapter the female seers of the hymns has been discussed and divided into some categories based on some principles which has some social reasons behind. Female goddesses have also occupied a room here. The different aspects of women’s life as available from different vedic texts and commentaries has been discussed.

The third chapter deals with the later vedic literature. This chapter has been divided into two sections. Section I is an account of the feminine space reflected in the Bṛāhmaṇa Literature and Section II furnishes an estimate of the space allowed for women in the Upaniṣats.
Section I deals with the Brāhmaṇa literature. The Brāhmaṇa Literature is a huge bulky one where we find an exhaustive description of various aspects of human life. Although the narratives are to some extant full of exaggerations but the actual tuning of society for human life is found there in. Each of the Sāṁhitā have their own brāhmaṇas. Among these brāhmaṇas, the two brāhmaṇa - Aitareya brāhmaṇa and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa are of the highest importance and are the real source of information. And the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is undoubteldy most voluminous and on the merits of its contents the most important of all the Brāhmaṇas.

The Sāṁhitās of the four vedas gave a wide space for women. In Brāhmaṇa literature, also the space for women is full of vivid account in different phases of their life. The ritualistic precepts and regulation made from time immemorial on various aspects of religious practices in the Brāhmaṇas gave profuse light on almost every perspective of a woman’s life in vedic civilization.

In fourth chapter, an attempt has been made to present an outline of the attitude of society towards women as revealed in the hymns of the four vedas and in the passages is the brāhmaṇic and upaniṣadic text and trace out the space provided for women there in the describe the
various features. This chapter has divided into three sections. Section I
deals with the attitudes of society towards women. Available evidences
showed that the maiden were fully grown up during their marriage. In
some verses of Rgveda we come across convening evidence in support
of the widow remarriage. Regarding education in the Rv. the fact that
the girls received education is evident from the composition of the hymns
by some female Ṛṣikā. The designation of women as female Ṛṣikā had
raise the womanhood in a higher position. In Ṛgveda we met the truth,
how the daughters in the Vedic age got well - education and possessed
full religious privileges. For all religious purposes, the father of vedic
society could thus regard a daughter to be as good as a son. Moreover,
the participation in religious rites elevated her religious value. In A.Br.,
we find some references which refer that, “Man could not become a
spiritual whole, unless he was accompanied by his wife.’

Furnishes with the rights enjoyed by women in vedic literature.
In this context it can be said that - the maiden of the vedic period had
naturally an effective voice in the selection of their grooms. This has
been well brought out in the custom of Svayamvara. The existence of
this custom is evidenced by surya’s hymn. Which made space in the Xth
manḍala of Ṛgveda.
Is an account of a comparative study of the rights enjoyed by both the male and female. It has been observed that the Rgvedic society was patriarchal. Due to this it is undineably true that, the preference of male child was there in society. But in cultured and rich families the parents have been found as welcoming the daughters and performed various rites to have a scholarly daughter. The limit of liberty given to women by the vedic civilization to take part in public assemblies reflects a good idea.

This paper ends with the conclusion that the Vedic Literature provided a very wide and vivid space for women. The Samhitas, the Brähmanas and th Upanisats present a full length portrait of women life Gender inequalities, in its literal sense. was not there but denial to the economic rights subjugation of the legal rights and status degradation was there.

This dissertation work has been prepared with the best possible sincerity and best effort has been made to remain loyal to the texts and commetaries to give a border line to the feminine space provided in the vedic literature