CHAPTER II

VEDIC PERIOD
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At the outset, it must be noted that there was no separate political life or political rights either to a man or a women in the Vedic period; because social, political and religious life was rolled into one. We have to deduce conclusions regarding the position of women in society during that period from the Vedas. Vedas deal with many topics. The study of Vedas is essential to the human progress. This has been rightly tressed by Dhundirajshastri Vinod.

Famous women in Vedas:

The material for the study of the life and position of women in the Rig-Vedic period are very scanty and therefore one has to depend upon indirect evidence like literary allusions. There are a number of women referred to in Rig-Ved. They are as follows -

(1) Aditi (अदिती)  (2) Apala (अपाला)
(3) Indrani (इंद्राणी)  (4) Urvashi (उर्वशी)

1. एते गो. विनोद - पुस्तावना - ऋग्वेददर्शन "मानवशाला भविष्यविद्वाकास, मानवी जीवनाची पृष्ठ, मुक्तिमांगणात हृदय असलेल्या अतीत्तिय शक्तीपूर्ण परिणति इत्यादि ध्येयाच्या पूर्वितातील लागणारी स्फुर्ति, गात्र व शक्तित ऋग्वेदाच्या अंतर्गत अत्यन्त मूलबळ्य होईल".
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These well-known women have been referred in Brihaddevata². These women are also referred as ब्रह्मवादिनी अर्थात ब्रह्मी. This shows that there existed equality between men and women as far as intellectual activities are concerned. In addition to the twenty-four women cited above, the list includes the names of Upanishat (उपनिषद्), Brahmajaya Juhu (ब्रह्मजया जुहू), Indramata (इंद्रमता), Naddya (नद्या), Shri Laksha (श्रीलक्षा), Vak (वाक), Shraddha (श्रद्धा), Medha (मेधा), Dakshina (दक्षिणा), Ratri (रात्रि)³.

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2. रा.गा. कोलंके - ऋषिदं - दर्शन - पृ. २२१.
3. Rig Ved Darshan - Page 222.
Composition of hymns by women:

Some of the Vedic Hymns are composed by these famous female Rishis; these may be classified as follows:

(a) Hymns that are definitely composed by female Rishis;

(b) Hymns that are partly referred to female Rishies;

(c) Hymns that are attributed to female Rishies, but are of dubious authorship.

Vishvavara (विष्ववार) and Apala belong to the first group. Vishvavara composed hymns in praise of Agni (अग्नि) Apala composed hymns in praise of Indra (इन्द्र). Vishvavara is even described as a sacrificer. Lopamudra (लोपमुद्रा) and Shashiyashi (शशियाशी) belong to second group. Their names appear in the course of dialogues and the parts of the hymns are attributed to them. Yet, there is no internal evidence, in support of their authorship.

Ghosha Kashiyati (गोशा काशीयती), Surya - Savitri (सूर्या-सावित्री) Indrani (इन्द्राणि);

Shraddha - Kamayani (श्रद्धा कामायनी) Shachi Paulomi (शची पाउलोमी) Sarparajni (सपृरजनी);

Urvashi (उर्वशी) belong to third group. Hymns
composed by these women are attributed to mythological beings and personification of abstract qualities, whether the authors of these hymns were men or women is not known. No internal evidence is available.

**The birth of a girl:**

The position of a woman in a society can be judged by the way in which the birth of a girl is received. Was she considered inauspicious? The hymns in the Rig Veda say nothing to that effect, but we find prayers for the birth of a son⁴, though we do not come across any reference deprecating the birth of a daughter. So it can be presumed that the position of a girl was not very low, though it cannot be said that she was regarded as equal to a boy⁵.

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4. इच्छेद-दर्शन - रा. गो. कोलंको पृ. 325, 403, 508 व 511 (श) "दशास्या पुज्ञाना केहि" - या दृष्टिक, दे इन्द्रा। टूं दसा पुज्ञावी माता कर (१०. १५-१५) (ब) "नित्यस्य रायः पति: स्ताम्।" आम्दीं और सुप्रायो धनी असाके। (६-१५-५) (क) "मदेद जसदिमा: सुवीरा।" उत्तमौतम पुज्ञावी दिखाती तुल्यवन्न होती। आम्दी शेतर वषो सुखार्नीत कालाकृमणा कर। (६-१५-१५) (क) मा बृहे अर्जुनें निक्षानं तुम्मुः। निपुञ्जाच्या धर্মी राहण्यावा आदियादर प्रत्येक न येवोः। (६-१५-१५).

Putrika:

There are two passages in the Rig-Veda which refer to the case where a daughter is the only child of the family. In later literature we find such a daughter designated as Putrika (पुत्रिका). Yaska quotes one of these to explain the legal position of the only daughter. According to his interpretation, it means that a brotherless maiden (even after she was given away in marriage) can perform the funeral rites of her father. Not only does this give her the right to inherit the property, but it shows that she is legally recognised as equal to a son. This view must have been current at the time of Yaska, since the author included it in his book. The commentator Durgacharya further elucidates it that, even after her marriage, she can retain this right. It is only because of this that an only daughter was not eligible for marriage. The later law givers strictly prohibited such a union. The fourteenth century attitude is reflected in Sayana's interpretation of this passage. He says that a maiden who has no brother seeks for clothes and ornaments from relatives belonging to her
father's family. If she has a brother, he looks to her needs. It is only in his absence that she seeks the help of her uncles etc. He goes further and proposes another interpretation. If her own brother is living, he performs the funeral rites of their father, but in his absence, she goes to the place of her paternal relatives to perform the funeral rites herself.

**Freedom of women:**

"The position of a girl in society and the measure of freedom she enjoyed are evident from the description of samana contained in the various hymns of the Rig-Veda.... "It sacrificial ceremony ..... was a festival of the Rig-Vedic people, specially meant for recreation and not for any religious purpose ..... Women, young and grown up are described as decorating themselves to participate in it. Young women, especially un-married girls, are described as utilising the opportunity for meeting and conversing with strangers"6.

A faint picture of maidens life is reflected in the characterisation of Usha, the goddess of dawn. In the description and eulogies of this goddess, certain other phases of a maiden's life and of society

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6. Ibid - Page No. 6
are revealed. It reflects a society, where there was freedom to both sexes prior to marriage. Marriage was a union of two persons of full development. No reference regarding age or its limitations, can be traced in Rig-Veda. Woman as a wife is described by the words Jaya (जया महणे घर). After marriage woman was given a very honourable position in the house-hold. She could offer oblations to the fire in performing sacrifices. The aim of the marriage was "घर - गृहार्थकम् हि विवाह" :- it was not merely a union of bodies but a union of souls, for procreation, for sharing equal responsibility and for doing duties. For this purpose both should give up their individual whims and should become one personality with one soul (समापो -हद्यानि नौ). Such a married woman was regarded with due respect in every sphere of life, and she was not subject to any merciless laws of an unsympathetic society. There was no discrimination between the male and female in the anger of the gods.

7. श्रेयसद-दर्शन, रा.गो. कोलंडे - Page No. 80 Usha is described as "दृष्टिदिव-, मुक्ति, मुक्तवासा:, अभासा; अभासा, "जायेय पत्य उच्चती सुवासा उच्चा हस्तविद्य न रिश्यि अपि:। पन्हेतुलुकु तलन रत्नी सुंदर

8. वर्तालकारानी विवृकित होुन धास्यमुख मुखाने जबी आपल्या पतीपुढे पेलुभू जभी राहते, तद्वस्त ही तास्यमाफित उण्डेवीं सुंदर सम धारण कलन जगापुढे उपरिष्क वोते.

8. Ibid -"जायेदसा" - Page - 313
Sati:

There is very little evidence of the prevalence of the custom of Sati or widow - burning in the Rig-Veda, though we may detect a semblance or reminiscence of this ancient custom in Mandal X where the widow is asked to descend from the funeral pyre of her dead husband on which she was first made to lie. The only safe conclusion would be that the practice was not widely prevalent. There are references which point to the practice of requiring a childless widow to cohabit with her brother-in-law until the birth of a son. This system and other references are clear evidence that the remarriages of widow was permitted in certain circumstances.

"Women had to be under the protection of some guardian or other; for example in the case of their fathers until marriages, of their husbands after marriage and of their brothers if not married, still they enjoyed much freedom." In short, the position of women in Rig-Vedic society as far different from what we find in later literature.

9. The Vedic Age - Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan - Page 391