



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE YAJURVEDA SAMHITA

Anjana S.

Research Scholar

Department of Sanskrit

University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Abstract: Even though, in a global perspective, the idea of the feminist literary criticism evolved from the 19th century onwards, we could trace back the representation of women from the Vedic literature itself. In the western concept of education, every text belongs to any one of the subjects like Science, Geography, Psychology, etc. But in the Indian Knowledge System, one could find out all kinds of subjects in a single work. Each one of the books will be interdisciplinary. A single work includes matters related with Science, Geography, Psychology, etc. One would come across all sorts of knowledge in a single work. Similarly, although there wasn't any feminist movement or a branch that dealt with feminist literary criticism, we could come across the thoughts related with woman in all the works of Indian literature.

Nowadays also, people around us believe in some misconceptions. One of them is that once upon a time, specifically during the Vedic period, the Indian women were not allowed any freedom.

This paper discusses how the various aspects of women are discussed in the *Yajurveda Samhita*. It clearly shows that the Vedic period gave very much importance to the women empowerment.

Keywords- *Yajurveda Samhita*; Women Empowerment; *Sarasvatī* Goddesses; *Idā* Goddesses; *Bhārati* Goddesses; *Savitā* Goddesses; *Sinīvālī* Goddesses

I. INTRODUCTION: YAJURVEDIC REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

The *Saṃskṛtaṃ* literature can be broadly classified into two: - the Vedic literature and Classical literature. The Vedic literature mainly consists of four Vedas namely *R̥gveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* as well as six *Vedāṅga*-s namely *Śikṣā* (Phonetics), *Kalpa* (description of religious rites), *Nirukta* (Etymology), *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar), *Chandas* (Metre) and *Jyotiṣa* (Astronomy). There are different opinions existing among the eastern and western scholars about the Vedic period.

Somewhere in the history of Bhārata, a feeling of discrimination entered into the mind of people on the basis of gender, caste and creed. It doesn't mean that since the Vedic period itself these discriminations were existing. But how could we know the mentality of the people in the Vedic period? It is possible by learning the Vedic literature. Although it is believed that the Vedic mantras belong to the almighty and were seen by the sages, without any doubt we could assume that those mantras depicted the lives of the people existed in that period.

From the vast source of Vedic literature, let us take a deep look into the *Yajurveda Samhita* to know the representation of women in the Vedic period. Out of the forty chapters in the *Yajurveda Samhita*, about seventeen chapters contain mantras that discusses about the women including goddesses mainly *Idā*, *Bhārati* and *Sarasvatī*.

II. COMPARING THE CONCEPT OF MOTHER

The concept of mother can be seen compared to various elements using the figure of speech named Simile.

- **The night and morning like two mothers:** Both the night and morning nurtures their child, that is, the Sun. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 12/2, 27/17)
- **Herbs and Medicinal plants like mothers:** When we are in trouble the only one who stand with us and take care of us will be our mother. That is why, the medicinal plants and herbs that heal and save our lives are compared to the concept of mother. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 12/78, 83)
- **Agni is compared to the mother:** The one who guide and raise the children in our house is definitely our mother. Similarly, the whole creatures in earth are sustained, guided and raised by the Agni. So, the Agni is compared to the mother. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 13/18)
- **Water is compared to the mother:** Just as the love of a mother to her children overflows in the form of the breast milk, the water, which is the gift of the nature, flows for making the lives of the people exist. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 36/15)

III. WOMEN IN THE FORM OF GODDESSES

In the 23rd and 29th chapters of the *Yajurveda Samhita*, we will come across four mantras whose goddesses are *Striyah*, that is, woman.

- **Described as the protectors of the nation:** The importance of women and their role in the Vedic period is extremely amazing. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 23/36)
- **Marriage is totally based on women's choice:** The concept of *Svayamvara* existed in *Bhārata* which gives the opportunity to the Virgin girl to choose the right person based on her wish. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 23/37)
- **Provides sufficient happiness and comfort:** When the husband goes through a difficult situation, the moral support he requires will be freely provided by his wife only. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 29/30)

IV. COMPARING THE CONCEPT OF YOUNG WOMAN

Personification of various objects as women or using simile not only shows the beauty of the mantras but also the qualities of young woman.

- **Compared to the Earth:** The firmness and sustainability of woman is compared to that of the earth. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 14/22)
- **Compared to the Ghee:** The movement of Ghee towards Agni is compared to a lovely bride moving towards her groom during her wedding ceremony. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 17/97)
- **Compared to the string of the bow:** Since the lovely whispering of young woman leads the warrior to victory, the movement of the stretched string on the bow drawn close to the ear of the warrior is compared to that of a young woman. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 29/40)

V. INSPIRING WOMAN TO EDUCATE

Several mantras of *Yajurveda Samhita* give motivation to girls for being educated.

- **Lead woman to the knowledgeable people:** The Yajurvedic mantra says that the woman must reach the knowledgeable people to gain knowledge. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/61)
- **Gain the knowledge from your partner:** The Yajurvedic mantra insists the lady to receive the pre-requisite knowledge and facts from her husband. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/62)
- **Share the knowledge with food:** The Yajurvedic mantra blesses the woman having knowledge as well as brilliance that let the food she had prepared for the *Yajña* and the knowledge she had gathered be utilized by all kinds of people. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/69)

VI. MISCONCEPTIONS AND FACTS

Several misconceptions exist in our society regarding the treatment of woman during the Vedic period in the history of our nation. Some of them are:

- **Girls were not allowed to educate:** Education is restricted to men only.
- **Women are meant for household works:** Woman is prisoned in the Kitchen and don't have any right to come out.

- **Woman has no right to educate others:** The woman is supposed to stand behind the shadow of man.

Let us check the facts behind these conceptions.

- **Girls were provided with ample opportunity for education:** The Yajurvedic mantra wishes that the scholars of different fields enlighten the intelligent girl to perfection. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/61)
- **Married woman is powerful:** She is the authority of the wealth of her husband. She is not an unpaid servant but the friend and supporter of her husband. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/62)
- **Woman as the supplier of knowledge:** The Yajurvedic mantra says that the knowledge gathered by a woman is a gift for everyone. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/69)

VII. RIGHTS OF A WOMAN IN THE YAJURVEDIC PERIOD

The woman in the Yajurvedic period enjoyed sufficient respect and freedom.

- **Right for a free life:** The Yajurvedic mantra instructs the bride- groom to have a free life with her wife. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/64)
- **Right for a fearless life:** The married woman is not supposed to lead a life with fear in her husband's house. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/64)
- **Devoid of any reservations:** The Yajurvedic mantra warns the bride- groom not to have any restriction with your wife on the basis of trust as well as faith.

VIII. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MOTHER

Yajurveda Samhita describes the rights and responsibilities of a mother.

- **Educate the children:** Yajurvedic mantra insists the mother that she should not deviate her children from education. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/68)
- **Be proud, bold and valiant:** The mother is the one who lead her children to success with her qualities such as boldness. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 11/68)
- **Right to not get hurt:** No one has the right to hurt the mother with his/her power or knowledge. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 12/15)

IX. ROLE OF THE GODDESS NAMED IDĀ

The goddess *Idā* is the voice of the spirit and meditation. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 29/8)

X. ROLE OF THE GODDESS NAMED SARASVATĪ

The goddess *Sarasvatī* is described as the enlightened woman or mother of the land. She is the supreme divine spirit. She is the goddess of Sacred knowledge as well as super- intelligence. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 20/84, 27/1)

XI. ROLE OF THE GODDESS NAMED BHĀRATĪ

The goddesses *Bhāratī* actualizes the speech of the Śāstric knowledge. (*Yajurveda Samhita* 27/19)

XII. CONCLUSION

Generally, the women of the *Bhārata*, faces several circumstances daily in her house, work site or surroundings. Even though, we have a lot of rules and regulations written in our Constitution, unfortunately, these are not implemented properly. This makes the lives of women difficult still in this 21st century. Due to this reason, people often believe that this was the situation of our country since the earlier period. The most ancient documents available in the world are the Vedas.

The analysis of the *Yajurveda Samhita* made clear that during the Vedic period, the woman was motivated to learn; the mother was given due respect; the married woman is like the *Agni* which gives everything to the earth; etc. Although there are several gods like *Indra*, *Agni*, two *Āśvinikumāra*-s, etc. praised in the Vedic mantras but there are goddesses named *Idā*, *Sarasvatī*, *Bhāratī*, *Savitā* and *Sinīvali* whom were given equal importance.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bālakṛṣṇan Venṇānūr, Yajurvedam, Aarshasri Publishing co
- [2] Ram Tulsi, Yajurveda, Paropakarini Sabha, Ajmer
https://www.thearyasamaj.org/uploads/book/2014/04/R1sSjG_eLb_sub_406_yajurveda.pdf
- [3] <https://vedpuran.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/yajurved.pdf>
- [4] <https://dn721800.ca.archive.org/0/items/wg847/WG847-2015-Yajurved.pdf>
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_literary_criticism
- [6] <https://kosha.sanskrit.today/word/sa>
- [7] Griffith, R. T. H. 2022. Yajurveda Samhitā, Parimal Publications, Delhi.
- [8] Kashyap, R. L. 2012. Yajur Veda Vājasaneyi Samhitā Part 1, Sri Aurobindo Kapāli Sāstry Institute of Vedic Culture, Bangalore.
- [9] Kashyap, R. L. 2012. Yajur Veda Vājasaneyi Samhitā Part 2, Sri Aurobindo Kapāli Sāstry Institute of Vedic Culture, Bangalore.
- [10] Balakrishnan, V. and Leeladevi, R. 1975. Yajurvedam, Vidyarthi Mithram Press, Kottayam.
- [11] Aiyer, Neelakantha. 2019. Yajur Vedam, Sooryagayathrimutt Publications, Vedagni.
- [12] Shastri, Pandit Jagdishlal. 1978. Vājasaneyi- Mādhyandina- Śukla- Yajurveda- Samhitā, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.
- [13] Desai, Gandabhai G. 1967. Thinking with the Yajurveda, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
- [14] Pandey, Uma Kant. 1979. Political Concepts and Institutions in the Sukla Yajurveda, Janaki Prakashan, Ashok Rajpath, Patna.
- [15] Sātavaḷekara, Vasant Śrīpāda. 1957. Yajurveda- Samhitā, Svādhyāya- Maṇḍala, Pāraḍī.