



---

# Power, Opportunity And Status Of Women In The Golden Vedic Era

Vanshika (PhD Scholar) and Prof. A.S. Rao

Mody University, Lakshmanagarh, Rajasthan, India.

E-mail: Author- [vanshi0312@gmail.com](mailto:vanshi0312@gmail.com)

asrao.slas@modyuniversity.ac.in

---

## Abstract

In terms of status and position, women were treated similarly to their male counterparts during the Rig Vedic era. On multiple times, only married males who were present with their spouses were allowed to perform religious rites. In the scriptures, women are not only characterized as having an equal place but also as being more than the better half—a status that has eroded over time. Women were respected and treasured in Vedic civilization not only as the cares for future generations but also as individuals with extraordinary vision who made significant contributions to human society. Early Vedic times saw women having access to proper education. Women had the freedom to select their husbands, and "Swayamvar" gave them that option. Women were treated with respect and affection in ancient India, despite the patriarchal structure that predominated at the time. The Rig Veda has an idea of women fighting on the battlefield. Hinduism has come under fire for creating male-female inequality because of the low position of women. This presumption is incorrect. In the Vedic Period (1500–1000 BC), women were revered as the mother goddess (Shakti), a representation of life with a prodigious capacity for tolerance and sacrifice, and as such, they were accorded a respected position in society. The Epics and Puranas had a connection between women and property. Even Buddhism wasn't much of a benefit to women. In order to strengthen women in society, we should heed Vedic advice.

**Keywords:** Rig Vedic, Vedic Civilization, Hinduism, Epics, Puranas,

## Introduction

Through its history of dominance and restraint, women's labor has illustrated the ideal of civilization, resulting in the establishment of human civilization and the affirmation of its power. Since the beginning of time, women's contributions have made a substantial contribution to improving human civilization by their superiority and desire to pursue quick development in all fields on this planet. Ancient Indian literature illustrates women's

visibility in this way, where women's standing has changed across time and space, despite the fact that women's accomplishments have been hidden throughout history. A woman's status refers to her position within a web of societal roles, privileges, rights, and obligations. It makes references to her social and familial obligations.

Women's status and respect are frequently compared to men's in order to determine how high they are regarded. Hindu women's standing has been changing in India. It has undergone major changes over the course of history. In India, women have traditionally experienced two stages in their lives: submission and deliverance. She has experienced oppression and repression, as well as being venerated as the household's divinity. Her rank and position have evolved over time, beginning in the Vedic era and continuing today. They were viewed as the guardians of morality and values. More importantly, they are depicted as having great potential for understanding the highest truths.

A creature of institutions is the woman. It is necessary to address the vast and extensive topic of women's position and status. They performed an admirable role in family and social life and made a beautiful contribution to society's overall growth because of their creativity, intellect, and spirit of sacrifice.

Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, Ghosa, Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi are among the venerable accomplishments of the Vedic era. They continue to serve as inspiration for modern women. In the past, such women's moral character and intelligence were exalted, and outdated traditions were respected. They were entirely equal to men in terms of having access to and the ability to understand the absolute. They were Mantra-perceivers who performed extreme penance and did things that were only possible for men. There were no limits imposed by the society. They were the lone parents of their progeny, owned vast money and land. They were revered as representations of deities, sustainers, and creative forces that contributed to the development and prosperity of human society.

The position of women in India during the Vedic era must be examined in light of a number of different aspects. The Vedas, Arthashastra, Dharmashastra, Ramayana, Mahabharat, Gita, and other ancient literary works can teach us more about the past. Manu, the founder of Indian political thought, describes the condition of women in Vedic times as one of dependence and subjection. The ancient political work Arthashastra attests to the fact that women in society were subject to a number of limitations.

In the Vedic era or ancient India, laws were mostly derived from customs and religious considerations. India has a lengthy and well-researched legal past, as well as a collection of laws called Smritis that go all the way back to the Vedic era. Even during the Indus Valley Civilization, India had a set of laws and a legal system that formed the basis of its society and system of government. Dharma, which is outlined in Manu's Dharamshastra, served as the basis for Hindu law. It was composed of the caste system, or Varna, system. The

Hindu Varna system categorised society into four groups. The group was composed of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Life cycle rites, everyday customs, assigned duties, and acceptable conduct were all part of the Dharmashastra.

The Vedas are ancient scriptures that formed the foundation of ancient society and contain the earliest thoughts known to mankind. The Taittiriya Samhita depicts a man and a woman as two wheels of a cart, suggesting that they both resemble two bulls drawn by a chariot. The Samhita claims that women serve as stepping stones for their families. In accordance with Vedic doctrine, Brahma (the Creator) caused a man to appear on his right side and a woman to appear on his left. The lesson delivered by the Vedas through this symbolic account is that there is equality between men and women in this world, and that humanity should be mindful of it in all their dealings.

In a passage from the Brihadhartha Purana, Maharshi Jabali queries Maharshi Vyasa, "What elements are supreme in all three worlds?" Maharshi Vyasa asserts that there is no better place to perform a pilgrimage than the Ganges, no bigger world-sustaining deity than Lord Vishnu, no one more revered than Lord Shiva, and no finer teacher than one's own mother. In addition to the aforementioned, the Manava Dharma-Sutra claims that motherhood is 10,000 times more significant than that of a teacher (upadhyaya, one who imparts formal knowledge), a lakh times more significant than that of a preceptor (acharya), and 1,000 times more significant than that of a father.

Throughout the later Vedic era, their standing declined. Fairness and peace, the wonderful RigVedic values, began to falter. They were forbidden from studying the Vedas, chanting Vedic mantras, and engaging in Vedic ceremonies. Contrarily, women were coerced into domesticity, marriage, and undivided devotion to their husbands. The birth of a girl did not please their parents. Several Dharmashastra and Purana authors made fun of Sudras and women. They were widely thought to be the most unethical. Members of the first three Varnas are required to perform Vedic bathing and prayer mumbling rituals, while women and Sudras are not allowed to do so, according to the Brahma Purana.

### **Community Status**

The oldest of the Vedas, the Rig-Veda, is replete with hymns to the natural world. The RigVeda portrays women's status with a great deal of reverence. In the Rig-Veda, Usha (the goddess of Dawn) and Aditi, the mother of numerous Gods including Mitra, Varun, Rudra, and Aryaman, are pictured. By banishing the night and reawakening the living, the goddess Usha ushers in the new day. Usha and Rati are daughters of Heaven, and it is because of Rati, the Night, who is Usha's sister, that all creatures relax after a hard day's work. In the Rig-Vedic era, the family was a prominent institution.

The daughter of the family was given the name Duhitri. Despite the fact that it could seem as though society favours male children, references in the RigVeda imply that female children are equally appreciated. A parent in Vedic times did not want to distinguish between his son and daughter. He treated everyone of them equally. Women received great education to enable them to have full social and personal lives.

For instance, Gosha, Apala, Lopamudra, Saci, and Vishvavara wrote hymns and became well-known thinkers. In the Vedic era, marriage was seen as a religious duty. In this way, daughters were given the option to select their spouses. Daughters, who aren't married, however, might stay at their father's home. There are no records of child marriage in the RigVedic era because the girls were adults when they got married. After becoming married, brides were believed to bring luck to the home of their future husband. They were granted a position of authority. According to legend, older women used to go to a lot of festivals and public events to meet future spouses, and their mothers would often permit them to do so. The care of their young and domestication of animals were two of the most important duties of Vedic women. According to a Rig Vedic hymn, women should do sacrifices, weave clothing, water plants, and satisfy the needs of their family members. The concept of "Dan," or gift, was popular during the Vedic era. On the other side, dowry was not a known practice. The word "Dampati" was used frequently in Vedic texts. "Two joint proprietors of the household" is the meaning of this term.

In the Vedic hymns, Gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Agni, and others are worshipped, while Goddesses like Saraswati, Laxmi, and Mahashakti are also accorded equal honour and significance. According to Vedic literature, Kshatriya girls were also allowed to arrange marriages in accordance with their own inclinations. This was made possible by the "Swayavara" or self-choice tradition. This represents their standing in Vedic society. The Vedic people were totally ignorant of the idea of divorce or dissolution of marriage. In Vedic times, widow remarriage was popular, and the brother of the deceased husband took care of the grieving sister-in-law.

Since the time of the Vedic civilization, Hindus have practised dual worship of Siva and Sakthi, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Rama and Sita, and other deities. Lord Shiva and his bride, Shakti, are seen as one body, with her on the left and him on the right. The origin of this creation is God's half-man, half-woman avatar, Ardhanariswara. Each of the three principal Hindu deities—Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Protector, and Siva, the Destroyer—is accompanied by a Shakti, who serves as both his feminine opposite and his manifestation power. This more encouraging aspect of women's high status in ancient India only partially explains the situation.

The portrayal of women on the other side doesn't seem to be as positive, though. According to numerous inscriptions and literary references, polygamy was prevalent among

monarchs, nobles, wealthy, and upper rank men. Keeping female slaves was another social status indicator, in addition to polygamy.

### **Financial Status**

The Vedic women had their own means of support. Some of the women were educators. The spinning and weaving of clothing was done at home. Manufacturing took place at home. Women supported their husbands' agricultural endeavours as well. For the women, personal items like jewellery and dress were permitted. Women are permitted to own up to 2000 silver panas according to the Arthashastra. The funds in excess of this cap were held in trust by the husband for the wife. A spouse would only use a woman's possessions in the most desperate situations. When a woman passes away, her daughters inherit her possessions (not to the husband or the sons). The widow received her husband's property if he passed away without a son. Women seem to be treated like commodities in some situations. Like any other object, she can be hired out or given away. This was the mentality of a private property-based, patriarchal society. The provision for Stridhana is quite limited, covering just the wife's rights to jewels, decorations, and gifts given to her at the time of her marriage. Women had no proprietary interests under Brahmanical law.

A widow did not have the right to inherit her deceased husband's property during the Vedic era. On the other hand, the Rig Veda acknowledged a spinster's ownership of her father's property. Unmarried daughters received a portion of their father's wealth. The daughter had full legal rights to her father's property in the absence of a boy. After Mother passed away, her inheritance was equally divided among her sons and unmarried daughters. Contrarily, married women were not entitled to their father's property. As a wife, a woman had no direct rights to her husband's property. A mother who had lost a child was eligible for some benefits. Additionally, Manu denies women their economic rights. A wife, son, and a slave are all considered to be without property; the money they make goes to the person to whom they are a part.

Since the beginning of time, women have had a specific economic function to play. This position has changed over time based on changes in social status, age, location, and religious beliefs. Additionally, there was a clear connection between women's social position and their engagement in production. Wherever we find work on women, it usually seems to follow the model set by the Dharmasutras, which is that of women in relation to home work. Most ancient texts are mute on the association of women with productive and creative activity.

### **Status in Religion**

Throughout the Vedic period, women were encouraged to take on certain tasks that suited their skills. She was able to perform the ceremonies because she was granted religious

freedom. She was given responsibility for a crucial aspect of the sacrifice. Gargi and Maitreyi stand out in Brahavidya, the supreme knowledge. A Rtvik is replaced by Visvavara in a sacrifice. The wife had complete privileges in the religious sphere and frequently participated with her husband in religious rites. Together, the husband and wife participated in religious rituals and sacrifices. Even religious discussions saw active participation from women."Women must always be honoured and respected by the father, brother, husband, and brother-in-law who wished their own wellbeing," says Manu of women and their relationships to men. He also asserts that "where women are honoured, the very Gods are pleased, but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite even could yield rewards."

Manu holds the opinion that a family with unhappy women will inevitably fail, but a family with happy women prospers. Additionally, he gives everyone instructions on how to keep the women of the house in line. Additionally, he advises every householder to revere his mother as the world's most adored individual and to love his daughter as the most precious object of affection.

### **Statutory Status**

Women's education was very important in ancient India. A person's life is enhanced and made more enjoyable by education by increasing their knowledge and wisdom. Women's education has therefore been given priority since the Vedic era. Women had the highest levels of education during the Vedic period. Women were equally knowledgeable and educated to men. Throughout the Vedic era, the girl learned a variety of subjects while maintaining her celibacy. Women excelled in the fields of philosophy and logic. They used to chant the shlokas from the Rigveda. Ghosha, Lopamudra, Vishvavara, Appala, and Urvashi were examples of female pandits.

There was the woman's Upanayana and the sutra, or rite of inclusion. Traditionally, women and men had to be celibate in order to pursue higher education. Samvartana rituals were held when Brahmacharya's life had come to an end. Names of sages include Maitrei, Sulabha, Barwa, Gargi, and others. Even in the later Vedic era, women were trained to be celibate. She was knowledgeable about other branches of Vedic knowledge as well. There were two categories of women in that time period. One is a Brahmavadini, while the other is a sage bride. Before getting married, Sadu ladies adhered to Brahmacharya, and Brahmavadini never stopped learning. Many females from wealthy households received good education up until about the year 300 B.C.

Women who functioned as instructors were known as acharyas. Even throughout the Buddhist era, there are examples of women being educated. In Theri Gatha's poetry, there were thirty-two Brahmacharinis in total, including eighteen married individuals. In her day, Khema was a woman of education. The Sanyukta nikaya's well-known monk Subhadra was famed for his lectures. From the pre-Vedic period until the Buddhist era, when it was

forbidden during the Smriti Yuga, women were able to pursue higher education. The education of women was outlawed by Manu and Yagnayavalakyam. The recitation of Vedic mantras in their Upanayana rites has now been discontinued. This system of memory-based learning evolved most likely as a result of their inability to pronounce mantras properly. Shudra was one of many women who were excluded from culture and education.

In the past, women were supposed to benefit most from the homeschooling system, which was formerly in place. This practise is pre-Vedic in origin. She was permitted to participate in debates alongside her father, brother, or spouse despite debate attendance being widespread among upper-class women. This demonstrates that even women from higher social classes lacked complete independence. Because the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Manusmriti are the foundational texts of our civilisation, which rejects the idea of a distinct identity for women, this practise is still prevalent in contemporary Indian society.

### **Political Condition**

Women were significant players in politics throughout the Vedic era. She is regarded as the most significant member of society by the Atharvaveda. The public gatherings known as the Sabha, Vidatha, were where women could openly attend and speak. A newlywed girl was honoured to be a member of the Vidatha when she was sent to her husband's home, according to an Atharva Vedic scripture. At the period, women were used as messenger forms. Women went through the same military training as men back then. On their way to the front lines of combat, Vispala and Mudgalani are observed. That was made possible by the early military training they had acquired.

To support their men in political concerns, the Vedic women went to the front lines of battle. As an example, the Asvins added an iron leg to Vispala, who had lost one of his legs during the battle. Asvamedha, Purusamedha, Sarvamedha, Rajasuya, and Vajapeya are a few sacrifices that have ties to social and political life. The sacrifice of Asvamedha involves the god Savita in a crucial way. The evidence reveals that during the Vedic era, women's political obligations were not only established but also continued in full force. There are extremely few examples of women participating in politics in antiquity. Megasthenes gave an account of the Pandya women in charge of the government. The Satavahan queen "Nayanika" governed the kingdom of Minor Son. Chandragupta II's daughter Prayabati served as the Vakataka prince's representative in government. After the Gupta era, Andhra Pradesh, Kashmir, and Orrisa were all ruled by queens. Princess Vijaybhattacharika presided over the region as the Chalukya King "Vikramaditya I" reigned. Women also held regional and local authority in the Kannada region.

### **Domestic Activities**

The bearing and rearing of children was one of the main duties of women. The mother was typically the mistress of the house. Women's condition was not as deplorable in ancient India as it was depicted in the Smritis. She had the dual identities of slave and deity. The wives were to get all reasonable luxuries in accordance with the husband's riches, along with good care for them. Wives were not to be harmed or mistreated because God would not accept a man's contribution if he mistreats or abuses his wife. Women were viewed as the perfect housewife in ancient India. They have extraordinary mental tranquilly, which enables them to face even the most challenging situations with ease. Indian women dedicate their whole lives to raising their families. In the names of goddesses like Saraswati, Durga, Parvati, Kali, etc., they were propagated.

The freedom and equality of women increasingly decreased over time. Their predicament worsens when they produce girls. Men gave them terrible treatment. In addition to being restricted to their home, they were also denied access to education. Additionally, they were expected to dine last or even consume their husbands' leftovers. Women were not allowed to handle either domestic or outside issues. Ladies from upper caste families were fashionable in donning veils. Both their parents and their husband before and after their marriage had an impact on them.

## **Conclusion**

Women had a lot more freedom during the Vedic era than they did later in India. Hindus have given women the rank of divinity in terms of their beliefs. The feminine is where all male power comes from. The male members of the Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) are useless without their female counterparts. During festivals and celebrations, women were openly seen, and they took part in sacred offering with men. Like Gargi, she was capable of studying and participating in intellectual discourse. If she became a widow, she might remarry without any restrictions.

The eminent position of women during the Vedic, Epic, Jain, and Buddhist eras severely deteriorated beginning with Manusmriti and continuing through the Dharmashastras. The decline of women's status was brought on by Manu's compilation of social regulations, Brahmanical austerities on Indian society, strict social caste restrictions, and the marriage relationship between Aryans and non-Aryans.

Vedic culture has a lot to teach contemporary culture. Women's emancipation is a hot topic in the modern period, thus it makes sense to give preference to the virtues of Aryan women in the Vedic era. Adopting the traits and virtues of women in the Vedic age can be extremely beneficial for repressed and powerless women in modern society. The position of women in society serves as a barometer for social structure.

## **References**



1. Bader, C. (2013). Women in Ancient India. Trubner's Oriental Series, Routledge, ISBN: 1136381333, 9781136381331.
2. Chakravarti,U.(1988).Beyond the Altekarian Paradigm: Towards a New Understanding of Gender Relations in Early Indian history. Social Scientist, 16(8), 44-52.
3. Jayapalan. (2001). Indian Society and Social Institutions. Atlantic Publishers, ISBN: 978- 81-7156-925-0, p. 145.
4. Sharma, R.S. (2011). Economic History of Early India, Viva Books, ISBN: 9788130910123
5. Singh, Anita. Economic Condition of Women in Ancient India (c. 1500 B.C to 1200 A.D.), Pilgrims Publishing, ISBN: 9788177698442
6. Altekar, A. S. (2014). The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization. Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, ISBN-10: 8120803256.
7. Kaman, R. (2014). Status of Women in India in the Rigvedic Age and Medieval Age. The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies, 2(9), 31-32.
8. Malviya, S. (2008). A Study of women in ancient India & an introduction to crimes against women”, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, Varansi, ISBN 8172702264.
9. Devi, N.J., & Subrahmanyam,K.(2014).Women in the Rig Vedic age. International Journal of Yoga-Philosophy, Psychology and Parapsychology, 2(1)1-3.
10. Tripathi, L.K. (1988). Position and Status of women in ancient India. Volume-I, Banaras Hindu University, Varansi.
11. Nandal, V., & Rajnish (2014). Status of Women through Ages in India. International Research Journal of Social Sciences, 3(1), 21-26.
12. Salawade, S. N. (2012). Status of women in ancient India: The Vedic period. Indian Streams Research Journal, 2(8) 1-3.
13. Jaiswal,S.(2001).Female Images in the Arthasastra of Kautilya. Social Scientist,29(3/4),51-59.
14. Chattopadhyaya, D. P. (2009). Women in Ancient and Medieval India. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, ISBN: 8187586354.
15. Mishra, R. C. (2006). Towards Gender Equality. Authors Press, ISBN: 8172733062.
16. Atharva Veda XIV-I, p. 43-44
17. Manu Smriti (III-56).
18. Rig Veda I, p. 122; p. 131; III p. 53, X p. 86.
19. Manu, chapter IX, verse 77
20. Rig Veda, Book V, Hymn 61, Verse 8.
21. Ramayana
22. Mahabharata
23. Gita
24. Manusmriti
25. Brahmin Purana

