

Status of women in Hinduism

- Rigveda is a vast book of more than ten thousand verses in Sanskrit.
- The **Rig Veda** is a collection of 1,028. hymns to the gods.
- Three other collections the Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda were added later.

women in Vedas

- attitude towards women streams from religious scriptures which refer to women as disregard.
- the 'Vedas' referred to women in more disapproving form.
- '**Sati pratha**' (custom of burning the widow with the body of her husband)
- '**Dasi Pratha**' (keeping the slave girls)
- '**Niyog Pratha**' (ancient Aryan custom of childless widow or women having sexual intercourse with a man other than husband to beget child),
- were among cruel customs responsible for the plight of the women.

- No one wanted a daughter. As a result; female infant came to be considered unwanted. Everyone was interested in having a son.
- The birth of the son was celebrated, but the birth of the daughter plunged family into gloom. This attitude still persists, even though certain other customs have undergone changes.

- "Almighty God, you have created this womb. Women may be born somewhere else but sons should be born from this womb" - Atharva Ved 6/11/3
- "O Husband protect the son to be born. Do not make him a women" - Atharva Ved 2/3/23
- 'Rig Veda' censures women by saying: "Lord Indra himself has said that women has very little intelligence. She cannot be taught" - Rig Ved 8/33/17

- **At another place in Rig Veda it is written:
"There cannot be any friendship with a women. Her heart is more cruel than hyena" - Rig Ved 10/95/15.**
- **'Yajur Ved (Taitriya Sanhita)'- "Women code says that the women are without energy. They should not get a share in property. Even to the wicked they speak in weak manner" - Yajur Ved 6/5/8/2**

Custom of Polygamy

- In 'Rig Ved' (10/59) it is written that Lord Indra had many queens that were either defeated or killed by his principal wife.
- In 'Aitreya Puran', preachings of 'Rig Veda', (33/1), there is a reference to the effect that Harish Chandra had one hundred Wives.
- Not only one man had many wives (married and slave girls), but there were cases of many men having a joint wife. It is confirmed from the following mantra in 'Atharva Veda': "O men, sow a seed in this fertile women" - Atharva Veda 14/1

'Vedas' also sanction 'Sati Pratha'

- Widow was burnt at the funeral Pyre of her husband. The widow was burnt at the funeral pyre of her husband so that she may remain his slave, birth after birth and may never be released from the bonds of slavery.

The Atharva Veda says:

"O dead man following the religion and wishing to go to the husbands world, his women comes to you."

- If the women was not remarried, then her head was shaved. This is evident from Atharva Veda (14/2/60).

Girl child

- Many mantras in Rig Veda express desire to be get heroic sons. There are no similar prayers wishing for a girl child. This perhaps reflected the anxiety of a society that needed a larger number of male warriors to ensure its survival. Sons were preferred to daughters.
- In the Rig-Veda, twin daughters were compared to heaven and earth. The daughters were not unpopular. They were allowed Vedic studies and were entitled to offer sacrifice to gods. The son was not absolutely necessary for this purpose.

Education

- The girls were entitled to Upanayana (to receive sacred thread) and to the privilege of studying Vedas; just as the boys.
- Women performed religious rites after completing their education under a Guru.
- women chanted mantras along with their husbands while performing rituals.
- These highly intelligent and greatly learned women, who chose the path of Vedic studies and, lived the ideal life of spirituality were called Brahmavadinis; and the women who opted out of education for married life were called 'Sadyovadhus'.

Dowry & Marriage

The practice of dowry is not endorsed by orthodox Hinduism and "may be a perversion of Sanskritic marriage prescriptions."

- In the Manu Smriti, on the other hand, 8 types of marriages are specified.
- There is very little evidence of child (or infant) marriage in the Rig Veda
- The Rig-Veda (v, 7, 9) refers to young maidens completing their education as brahmacharins and then gaining husbands.

- Marriage was an established institution in the Vedic Age. It was regarded as a social and religious duty; and not a contract. The husband-wife stood on equal footing and prayed for long lasting love and friendship. At the wedding, the bride addressed the assembly in which the sages too were present. [Rig Veda (10.85.26-27)]

Status of Mother

- "A son must always serve his mother even if she has been an outcast."
- "The professor is equivalent of ten teachers, the father is equal to hundred professors, the mother exceeds a thousand fathers in honour."
- "All other sins are expiable but he who is cursed the mother never liberated."

Divorce, Widowhood and remarriage

- Hinduism in general disapproves of divorce.
- Widows are expected to devote their lives to pursuit of religion.
- These restrictions are traditionally strongest in the highest castes, in which the head is frequently shaved as well.
- The highest castes also have severe restrictions on remarriage.
- Such restrictions are now strictly observed only by a small minority of widows, though some degree of ritual inauspiciousness lingers

Property rights

- Daughters and sons equally inherited their mother's property; but some scriptures insist that a mother's property belongs solely to the daughters [Manu IX 131], in order of preference: unmarried daughters, married but poor daughters, married and rich daughters.
- When a father died, unmarried daughters had to be given a share in their father's property, equal to one-fourth from every brother's share [since it is assumed that the married daughter had been given her share at marriage] [Manu IX. 118].
- If the family has no sons, the (appointed) daughter is the sole inheritor of the property [Manu IX 127].