

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This present work comprising six chapters has been introduced with the chapter, entitled ‘The *Atharvaveda* and its Importance in the Vedic Literature.’ At the very beginning of this chapter, the derivation and the etymology of the term *veda* have been discussed. From the opinions of different scholars of Vedic literature, it is found that the term *veda* denotes the knowledge or the treatises, containing the knowledge, revealed to the seers through their deep intuition. Some other terminologies, used in the sense of Vedas have also been mentioned.

Among the four Vedas, viz. *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* representing the knowledge of the seers, the *Atharvaveda* is reckoned at the fourth position. The *Atharvaveda* is also known by the names *Atharvāṅgirasaḥ*, *Bṛhgvaṅgirasaḥ*, *Brahmaveda* and *Kṣatraveda*, etc. These names suggest certain features of the *Veda*. *Atharvāṅgirasaḥ* is the oldest of all these names. Though nine recensions of the *Veda* have been referred to in certain scriptures, but, only two, viz. the *Śaunakiya* and the *Paippalāda* recensions are extant. The data, regarding the arrangement and number of books, hymns, mantras, etc., of both the recensions have been furnished. But, the *Śaunakiya* recension has only been utilized in the present study. A note on the classification of the hymns, on the basis of their nature of contents, has been attached to this chapter. Bloomfield’s way of classifying the hymns seems to be more proper and hence, the same has been adopted for the study. The contents of the

each class of hymns have been introduced briefly. Almost all the hymns, except a few are aimed at practical end, promising to fulfil the material needs of the masses.

Because of the peculiarity of its contents, the *Veda* possesses a unique position in the Vedic literature. The remarks of different scholars, regarding its status in Vedic literature have also been discussed. Regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the *Atharvaveda* in the corpus of the Vedic literature, different views of ancient as well as of modern scholars are met with. The various points of view, on which the importance of the *Atharvaveda* lies, have been dealt with towards the end of the chapter.

In the second chapter, the *strīkarmāṇi* hymns of the *Atharvaveda* have been discussed. Bloomfield, in his list, has enlisted thirty-three hymns under this category. But, during the research work, three more hymns have been found as pertaining to women. Thus, the list counts thirty-six hymns in total, which are related to women. These hymns throw considerable light on the various perspectives of women throughout her lifespan.

In the hymns, designated as the *patedanasūkta*, the eagerness of the family persons to find out a suitable husband for the maidens gets expressed. Gods have been prayed for the obtainment of the same and for the prosperity of the women with progeny and cattle, etc. One hymn is also dedicated to a wifeless person, who, by means of propitiating Indra, wants his basic need of begetting offspring to be fulfilled through a wife. The happiness of a conjugal life depended upon the abundance of wealth and progeny. Reference to the offerings of certain oblations, containing *dadhi*, *madhu*, *ghrta*, etc., for the affluence of the married life with cows and other riches has also been made. Long lives for the couple have also been prayed for. Mutual love of the

couple finds special attention in some hymns. The wife wanted to bind her husband within herself with the help of certain consecrated garments.

A good number of hymns are connected to the birth related aspect of women. A woman was asked to fasten *parihasta*, an amulet, effective in bringing about conception, upon her wrist, so that she may give birth to a male child. The birth of a male child was always preferred and hence, a woman has been asked to deliver a male child in all the issues. Laying emphasis on this aspect, a woman is called *dhenukā*, i.e. like a cow she may beget a son. The use of certain herb to enable a woman to beget a male child has also been referred to. The female birth was undesired and was wanted to be taken place anywhere else.

Various references to the female anatomy, specially concerned to the reproductive system have been recorded in certain hymns. The hundred entrails and the thousand canals of a hated woman, were wanted to be blocked for her sterilization. Besides, the entire process of preparation for fruitful conception is attributed to different gods and goddesses. A woman was prescribed to drink some sort of liquor, which causes the impregnation successful. The *gavīnī nāḍīs*, the two fallopian tubes have also been mentioned.

Women earned much attention during her period of pregnancy. Demonic forces were believed to be responsible for miscarriage and hence, Agni is prayed to take control over them. The amulets of white and yellow mustard were used to destroy the various malevolent aspects, wanting to harm the foetus. Protecting the foetus up to ten months, at the time of its delivery, different divinities have been prayed for. The process of delivery, discussed in the relevant context displays an advanced picture of the Atharvavedic medical practices.

A huge portion of the *strīkarmāṇi* hymns is devoted to the love charms. To sweeten the relation of a husband and a wife, to stimulate the feelings of love in between the two, to ward off their mutual hatred, certain means have been discussed in due context. The carnal desire of a man to win the love of a woman has beautifully been exposed in certain hymns. The comparisons of the man with a horse, his call for love with the chirpings of the birds is remarkable. The lustrous person wants himself to be embraced by the desired woman as the creepers enfold a plant. Wanting the woman to be submissive to the man, the use of certain plants, ointment and amulet has also been noted. Women, on their part also followed certain ways to restore the love of their disinclined husbands with the herb Sauvarcala and tried to establish their mastership over their husbands with the help of the herb Śaṅkhapuṣṭī. Women, disinclined to the men were also intended to be inflicted by means of imposing pain and love over them. The imposition was performed according to the laws of Varuṇa. To have an assignation with the desired woman, people even used certain charms to put her to sleep along with her family members. Prayers have also been made to capture a truant woman. To appease the anger and the emulation of an envious person, caused by the violation of love-relation, certain medicine and consecrated water were used. Imprecation of calamity and disaster on an undesired wife also finds place in the hymns. Besides, an attempt to monopolise the love of a common husband by the co-wives with the help of the herb Pāṭhā has been recorded in one of the hymns. Due to the extreme antagonism to a man, one intends to make him an impotent one and desires eunuchism of the same.

Certain miscellaneous topics have also been dealt with in the *strīkarmāṇi* hymns. In one of such hymns, the bodily marks of men and women, considered to be the signs of misfortune have been asked to be removed. For the protection of the child,

born on the star Jyeṣṭhā or Mūla, one hymn of this class has been dedicated. The last hymn of the list is intended to expiate the child whose first pair of teeth appears on the upper line.

In the third chapter, a comprehensive account of the various aspects of the familial and the social life of the Atharvavedic women has been furnished. It is observed that the women were treated in a varied manner in the different stages of their lives. Four different roles of the women in the family have been discussed in detail in the relevant chapter.

A woman, as a daughter was the undesired child, who never enjoys high position like that of a son in the family. During her adulthood, she became the centre of beauty. After marriage, she had to take over the responsibilities of the new home, becoming the mistress of all the family members. She was looked upon as the symbol of peace and prosperity of her husband's family. Being a *patnī*, she was the religious partner of her husband. But, her state of being a wife succeeded with the production of children. The primary meanings of the terms, such as *jani* and *jāyā*, which stand for a wife and the epithets, assigned to her, such as *urvarā*, *prajāvatī*, *vīrasū*, *putriṇī*, etc., hint at her procreative character, unless which, a wife had no value. By means of begetting children, a woman became a mother, in which form she enjoyed the most exalted position of her life. Motherhood has been prayed much in the *Atharvaveda* with great zeal. Not only on the human level, but, in the universal ground also, the source of creation, the place of shelter has been extolled as the mother. Mother Earth has been urged to provide shelter to the deceased person as lovingly and carefully as a caring mother. Apart from her child-giving aspect, she was treated as a nourisher of her child. A mother's attitude to her son subjects to the comparison of ideal love and protection.

In a family, a mother was greater than all others and thus, she was offered a sublime position in the family. The word *jāmi*, used to denote a sister suggests her nature of producing children and *svasṛ*, another denotative expression of a sister implies her freedom of movement. The relation of a sister with her brother has been discussed in the proper context. The absence of a brother was the cause of misfortune to a woman, as because, such a woman had to remain unmarried in order to perform the funeral activities of her father.

The social issues, connected to the women include the various customs of marriage, practices of polygamy and polyandry, women education, occupation and dress habits of women, widow's position, etc.

Marriage was the institution, celebrated in order to unite a man and a woman, and to tie the both into a conjugal relation and to give social recognition to the same. Regarding the age of marriage, though there is no direct reference in the *Atharvaveda*, but, from the studies of certain references, as have been furnished in the relevant point, it is clear that both the male and the female indulged into marriage during their adulthood. The fixation of marriage has been ascribed to divine entities. The parents also played the role of mediator in this regard. But, maidens were also allowed to choose husband for themselves. During the wedding ceremony, her hands were grasped by the husband and after marriage, she had to adopt a new home and to adjust herself therein. A newly wed woman was offered a warm welcome in the new home and was treated as the symbol of fortune and prosperity. In the marriage ceremony, she was offered certain gifts, containing garments, ornaments, etc., from her father's family. This custom of offering gifts seems to be followed indispensably and perhaps for this reason, a poor girl is spoken of as causing trouble to her mother and father.

Though the then society was chiefly a monogamous one, yet, the prevalence of polygamic and polyandric practices has also been traced out. Usually women of that period were confined within household affairs and hence, the field of work, they occupied was also limited therein. They engaged themselves in domestic activities like cooking, weaving, sewing garments, etc. Some women also served others being a *dāsī*, i.e. a servant. Such women were not treated amiably in the society. Women's dress and ornaments have a few references. The single reference of woman-education has also been mentioned in the point provided. Widow-immolation was also in vogue, though it was exercised voluntarily, but, not forcefully. From the reference of a second husband of a woman, the remarriage of women may be traced in that society. An indirect reference to the property right of a woman has also been mentioned.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the study of the female deities of the *Atharvaveda*. The study of the character and functions of these deities is envisaged to be helpful for the understanding of womanhood. The list enumerates more than thirty female deities and the nature and activities of these deities, the meanings of their names in most cases, the attributes and epithets, assigned to them have been furnished in all possible details. On basis of their character; as delineated in the respective points, the deities broadly may be divided into three main groups, viz. benevolent, malevolent and abstract. Deities like Aditi, Pṛthivī, Āpaḥ, Vasupatnī, Sinīvālī, Asunīti, Iḍā, Oṣadheyah, etc., are of benevolent nature. Āsurī, Grāhi, Nirṛti, Krtyā, etc., are the malevolent deities, and Medhā, Śraddhā, Ākuti, etc., belong to the abstract deities. Almost all these deities, whether benevolent, or malevolent, or abstract have been prayed for the well-being of mankind. Some of these deities have been prayed for all sorts of benefits.

Different aspects, related to womanhood have been observed in the delineation of these deities. Some of these deities, viz. Aditi, Āpah, Pṛthivī, Rātri, Idā, Vasupatnī, have been presented as the Mother goddesses. Aditi has been portrayed as the universal mother of all, the source and resort of the entire creation. Pṛthivī has also been deified as the Mother goddess. Sometimes, Pṛthivī and Dyau and sometimes, Pṛthivī and Parjanya have been invoked as the parents of all. While personifying the deities as the mother, the generating forces of nature must have been noticed by the seers as may be observed in their eulogies. Aditi herself fastened the *parihasta* amulet to obtain a son, as an ordinary mother. In the character of Rātri also, the creative aspect of a mother gets revealed. The other goddesses like Āpah, Idā, Vasupatnī, etc., have been personified as the Mother deities mostly from the view point of a nourisher. The natural expectations of a child for care, love and forgiveness from a mother also may be inferred from the panegyrics to these deities. In fact, the concept of a mother, in the eyes of the seers, seems to be grandeur.

The subordinate position of a woman in a human couple may also be discerned from the character of certain female deities, like Aśvinī, Agnyāyī, Varuṇānī, Rodasī, Indrāṇī, etc., who have been identified after the names of their male counterparts. The wives of the deities are entreated as a separate class of deities, designated by the name, Devapatnī. This discloses the fact that independent status was not given to the wives of human beings also. Some of the female deities are found to be endowed with physical beauty. Nirṛti, even after her being a malevolent deity, has been treated as a divinity with luminosity. An alluring appearance with golden complexion and golden hair has been ascribed to her. In case of Sinīvālī too, a beautiful picture is observed. Her fingers, arms, and other organs are endowed with beauty. Her hairstyle is also spoken of as

being an attractive one. This means that the picture of a woman as the epitome of beauty was always in the minds of the seers. Sūryā and Indrāṇī have been presented as the ideal brides. The presentation of womanhood, as the symbol of good fortune may be inferred from the epithet *subhagā*, used commonly to most of the deities. Some other epithets, such as *śivā*, *bhadrā*, *sumāṅgalī*, *mayobhuvā*, *payasvatī*, *jananī*, *yuvatī*, *anavadyā*, *āyuṣmatī*, *prajāvatī*, etc., have been assigned commonly to the female deities and to the women on human ground also.

Thus, different directions related to womanhood have been presented through the deification of the female deities.

The various rites and rituals, pertaining to women have been undertaken in the fifth chapter. The *strīkarmāṇi* hymns of the *Atharvaveda*, discussed in the second chapter, the marriage hymns and some other hymns have been applied in the rituals discussed in this chapter. The rituals have been delineated here following the prescriptions of the *Kauśikasūtra*, the *Grhya* manual of the *Atharvaveda*.

At the very beginning, the indispensability of marriage in the lives of the Vedic Aryans has been discussed. Then, the rites related to marriage have been explained extensively. The various observances of the marriage ceremony, such as, the performance of Ājyahoma, the bathing of the bride, the equalization of the bride with the bridegroom by means of dressing her with the *vādhūyavastra*, fastening of a *yoktra* to her waist, grasping of her hands by the bridegroom, etc., were accomplished with the recitation of certain mantras, which are, in fact, prayers to different deities, chiefly aimed at the good fortune and long association of the couple in their conjugal life. After the accomplishment of the marriage rites, the bride was carried to her husband's home and during her journey to the same by the bridal car, she was cared much. At the new

home also, the bride had to undergo certain rites, performed symbolically to emphasize the birth of a male child.

After three days of the wedding ceremony, another rite, called Caturthikākarman was performed, which was aimed at the nuptial cohabitation of the couple. This rite was followed by the expiation of the bride.

Amongst the rites related to pregnancy and birth, Garbhādhāna is one, which is aimed at fruitful conception. Puṁsavana was the another rite, performed to ensure the birth of a male child. The rite, performed to secure the foetus against abortion is known as Garbadṛinhaṇa. Sīmantonnayana was also performed with the same purpose. Paying concentration upon the safe delivery of the foetus, the rite Prasūtikaraṇa was practised. At the delivery of a dead child, some other observances have been prescribed. The birth of twin children, again, required certain expiations. Such birth was considered as *apartu*, i.e. unseasonable. For the fertilization of a barren woman, certain practices were exercised. This type of rite is designated as Vandhyāprajananakarana.

A large number of charms, dealing with love and jealousy of men and women have also been described in this chapter. These charms are intended to appease the anger of a husband or a wife, to ward off jealousy, to win the love of a woman, to subjugate a wicked woman, to secure good fortune to a woman, to remove the unlucky signs from her body, to cause misfortune to a rival man or woman, to deprive one from obtaining a male child, to make a man impotent, to bring back a truant woman, to obtain a husband or a wife, etc. It is observed that the aims of the rites, related to birth, love and jealousy are based upon the efficacy of the mantras, which are applied in the performance of the rites. The use of various plants, herbs, amulets and some other

biological substances in these rites remarkably deserves further research on scientific ground.

But, it is noteworthy that the Atharvavedic women find no place in the rites observed for a male child, viz. Jātakarman, Nāmakarāṇa, Annaprāśana, Upanayana, etc. Even though a woman participated in her husband's funeral rites, but, no reference to a woman's funeral rite is recorded in the *Atharvaveda*.

After having a review of the various perspectives, dealt with in the foregoing chapters, it may be deduced that a blend of feelings was offered to the women, belonging to the society of the Atharvavedic period, which was a male-dominated one. Basically, they were inferior to the men in familial as well as social scale. But, for the aspect of fecundity, they were always given a pride of place. The utilitarian value of domestic work made the women far more valuable. They earned much importance for their fascinating and captivating nature also. But, on their part, they enjoyed less importance in comparison to the male. But, it is observed that wherever there was a male interest, women were praised much. In fine, it can safely be concluded that women were the means of attaining happiness for others and their individual interest was always in secondary importance.