



# THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN VEDIC LITERATURE

**Ms. Rashima Sharma**

*Trinity Institute of Professional Studies, Dwarka*

## ABSTRACT

Some of the core ideas of human rights are found in the Vedic literature, which serves as the center of Sanskrit literature. The goal of this manuscript is to unravel the principles of human rights that are hidden inside the Vedic scriptures. It also looks at the topic of human rights from the viewpoints of Vedic writings and tries to see a link between ancient Vedic literature and human rights. Although the components of the notion postulate various cultural forms and are present in other civilizations, including Vedic civilization, the concept of human rights as expressed has a particular Western origin. Although the Vedic rights are undoubtedly not comparable to contemporary human rights, it would be unrealistic to expect much from scriptures that date back between 3500 and 4000 years. The link between Vedic literature and human rights is not totally harmonious and tension-free, despite the fact that it powerfully connects with the basic ideas of human rights. The inconsistencies between Vedic literature and human rights are the main focus of this text. The Manusmriti further explores Vedic society's larger background and social structure, which had strong intellectual and spiritual underpinnings. It explores how these ideas might have affected how people were treated and how their intrinsic worth was acknowledged, even though this was done within the limitations of a hierarchical structure. Concepts of justice, equality, and respect for all living things are identified through an analysis of the Vedic writings, including the Rigveda, Upanishads etc. Caste-based divisions and the unfair treatment of women and underprivileged groups, however, call into doubt the Vedic society's conception of human rights. The study also emphasizes how the idea of "dharma" (obligation) in Vedic literature may be seen as a potential limitation on personal freedoms as well as a moral code. A crucial aspect of the conversation is the conflict between social reality and idealistic ideals. The ethical foundation of respect, compassion, and accountability is relevant in today's human rights discourse, even though the Vedic vision may not coincide with ideas of universal human rights. This text seeks to offer a detailed perspective of how Vedic literature adds to the larger discussion on human dignity and rights by bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern principles.

**KEYWORDS:** Dharm, Education, Vedic, teachings, Explores, societal structure, Principles, Veda.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A significant period in Indian history, the Vedic era is distinguished by the creation of the Vedas, holy writings that not only included religious teachings but also offered insight into the social climate of the day. It takes a multifaceted investigation of many facets, such as societal structure, economic organization, religious beliefs, and women's status, to comprehend the social dynamics of the Vedic age. In order to shed light on the Vedic society's complicated character, this article will attempt to disentangle its many facets.

## II. MEANING OF VEDAS

The root vid, meaning "to know," is where the term "Veda" originates. The sacred knowledge found in the Vedic writings is referred to as Veda. The Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda are the four Vedas. Because they reflect the oral tradition of the era, these four Vedas are also known as "Samhitas."

## III. THE FOUR VEDAS

- **Rigveda** - Rigveda is the oldest Veda. It is divided into ten books (known as mandalas). It also includes Vishvamitra's famous Gayatri mantra and the Purusha Sukta prayer (the story of Primal Man). The Rigvedic Priest was known as Hotri.
- **Yajurveda** - It is essentially a manual for the Adhvaryu priest, who was responsible for almost all ritualistic tasks in a sacrifice. It is principally in prose form. It has been divided into two sections: the earlier "black" and the more recent "white".



- **Samaveda-** The Samaveda is the shortest of all the four Vedas. The Samaveda is a collection of Rigvedic verses organised in the form of poetry to facilitate singing. The Samaveda is specially intended for the Udagatar priest.
- **Atharvaveda-** The Atharvaveda is a compilation of magical spells and charms that are used to ward off evil spirits and diseases. The Atharva Veda is the latest and contains hymns (some from the Rig Veda).

#### IV. SOCIAL STRUCTURE DURING VEDIC PERIOD

The varna system, which separated society into four classes, served as the foundation for the Vedic era's social structure. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras were the several social groups. Features of social life of early Vedic Period are as follows:

- **Family-** The family belonged to a larger group known as a vis or clan. One or more than one clan made Jana or tribe. The Jana was the largest social unit.
- **Varna-Ashrama -** Despite the patriarchal nature of society, women played an important role in it. They had been educated and were entitled to the assemblies.
- **Women poets:** Apala, Viswavara, Ghosa, and Lopamudra. They were free to choose their partners and could marry whenever they wanted.
- **Tribal Conflicts-** No such system was prevalent during the early Vedic period.
- **Gotra System-** The growing need for more pasture lands and cattle contributed to an increase in inter and intra-tribal conflicts and warfare. Inter-tribal conflicts were frequent, an example being the battle of the Ten Kings mentioned in the Rigveda.
- **Marriage-** In early Vedic society, no such system was prevalent.
- **Social Groups-** Marriage was typically monogamous, but chiefs occasionally practised polygamy. Occupation was not based on birth. Varna, or colour, was used to distinguish between Vedic and non-Vedic people.

#### V. POLITICAL LIFE IN VEDIC PERIOD

The Early Vedic system lacked a clear political hierarchy, but as things changed over time, a socio-political hierarchy emerged, which was reflected in the 'Later Vedic phase' when the Varna system was largely egalitarian and governed by tribal values and norms. Features of Political life are as follow:

- **Social Unit-** The Aryans' chief social unit was known as Jana.
- **Chief/King-** Jana was headed by Rajan, whose main function was to protect the Jana and cattle from the enemies.
- **Post of Chief-** Not Hereditary and tribal assemblies were involved in the selection of the raja from amongst the clansmen.
- **Administration-** Rajan was helped in his task by the tribal assemblies called sabha, samiti, vidatha, gana and parishad, which are mentioned in the Rigveda.
- **Sabha-** council of select clan members
- **Samiti-** comprised the whole clan.
- **Taxes-** The people gave the chief what is known as Bali. It was simply a voluntary contribution made on special occasions by ordinary tribesmen.
- **Army-** The Sena, or army, was a temporary fighting force made up of able-bodied tribesmen who were mobilised during wartime.
- **Status of Brahmins-** The clans held large yajnas or sacrifices, which were performed by Purohita. They received a large portion of the rajas' gifts and assumed a superior position in comparison to the other members of the clan established. Primarily egalitarian, early Vedic society was regulated by tribal rules and beliefs.

#### VI. RELIGIOUS LIFE IN VEDIC PERIOD

Every aspect of Vedic life was infused with religion. Vedic religious rituals were based on the Vedas, which were written during this time period. Brahmin priests carried forth sacrifices, or yajnas, which were essential to Vedic ceremonies. It was thought that these rites preserved cosmic order and created a bridge between the divine and terrestrial worlds. In the Vedic pantheon, gods like Agni, the fire god, and Indra, the thunder and rain god, occupied important places. Vedic religious philosophy was based on the veneration of cosmic order and the worship of natural forces. Following are the features of religious life of early Vedic period:

- **Rigvedic Gods-** Indra, Agni, Varuna, Mitra, Dyaus, Pushana, Yama, Soma, etc are all male gods. Many goddesses, such as Ushas, Sarasvati, and Prithvi, hold secondary positions in the pantheon. The most frequently mentioned god in the Rigveda is Indra.



- **Yajnas-** In sacrifices, hymns and prayers were recited, and these yajnas were typically performed by priests. The sacrificial ritual also resulted in the expansion and development of knowledge of mathematics and animal anatomy.

## **VII. ECONOMIC LIFE IN VEDIC PERIOD**

The importance of cattle in Vedic society is amply demonstrated by the Rigvedic hymns. "Gau," which translates to "cow," is the source of numerous additional words. The main indicator of wealth was cattle, and a wealthy individual who possessed a large number of cattle was called a "gomat." During this time, names like gavishti, gavesana, gavyat, and others were used to describe conflicts and warfare. The 'gopati,' or one who guards cows, is the raja, or chief. In the Rigveda, the term "Godhuli" refers to a measure of time. Gavyuti is the term for distance. Following are the features of economic life of the early Vedic period:

- **Occupational Activity-** The dominant occupational activity in pastoral society was cattle rearing.
- **Agriculture-** There are no other grains mentioned along with 'Yava' or barley. Shifting agriculture was practised.
- **Domestication of animals-** Cattle, sheep, goats, and horses were raised for milk, meat, and hides.
- **Taxes-** The people gave the chief what was known as Bali, which was simply a voluntary contribution made by ordinary tribesmen on special occasions. There was no officer mentioned for tax collection.
- **Iron Technology-** They did not use iron technology and were familiar with copper.
- **Medium of Exchange-** Cows were the most popular means of exchange. Priests were compensated with cows, horses, and gold ornaments for performing sacrifices.

## **VIII. POSITION OF WOMEN IN VEDIC PERIOD**

- The birth of a male kid was usually desired in patrilineal Rig Vedic families. A sonless couple was as despised as if they were impoverished. Son adoption was encouraged. But when a girl was born, she wasn't abandoned, and she wasn't refused an education.
- During the Rig Vedic Society Age, female intellectuals such as Ghosha, Vishwavara, and Apala were well-known, and they wrote a small number of Vedic hymns.
- Together with their spouses, women may participate in assemblies and make sacrifices. The father's funeral rites could not be performed by a female kid. In addition to being able to partake in religious ceremonies alongside her husband, the wife was regarded as the head of the family and had authority over the husband, kids, elderly father-in-law, and domestic staff.
- The Purdah system did not exist.
- Women were allowed to freely participate in festivities.
- Although child marriage was unknown, girls were typically married after reaching puberty.
- According to the Rig Veda, 16 to 17 was the marriageable age. Both the bride and the husband were allowed to make their own decisions.
- Love marriage was not unheard of. The bride's price had to be paid by an unwanted son-in-law. Both bride-price and dowry were acknowledged. During their marriage, girls with physical flaws had to receive dowries.
- There are signs of polyandry, although polygamy was the norm. But during the Early Vedic Period, monogamy was the norm.
- Widows were allowed to remarry.
- It was common practice to wed the brother's widow.
- According to Rig Vedic law, women were not considered independent and had to continue to be protected by their male relatives.

## **IX. EDUCATION SYSTEM IN VEDIC PERIOD**

The Vedic system is the name of the educational framework that originated in ancient India. Stated differently, the Vedic Educational System was the name given to the ancient educational system because it was founded on the Vedas. In Indian culture, the Vedas hold a significant position. The four Vedas—the Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda—are the foundation of Indian culture. Some academics have separated the Vedic educational period into the Rig Veda, Brahmani, Upanishada, Sutra (Hymn), Smriti, and other periods. However, because of the Vedas' primacy, the goals and principles of education remained the same over all of these periods. For this reason, the Vedic period is used to study these times' educational systems. There are distinctive features and attributes of the Vedic education system that are not present in the ancient educational systems of any other nation.



During the Vedic era, there were certain distinctive features of the dominant educational system. Only BRAHMACHARIS and members of the upper castes have access to education. According to Indian custom, BRAHMACHARI is the second of four stages that make up a person's life cycle. Two varieties of BRAHMACHARIS were identified: UPAKURVANA BRAHMACHARI, who attends school for a little time before getting married and becoming a housewife and NAISHTHIKA BRAHMACHARI, who dedicates their life to learning and stays a student and celibate. This is the time allotted for education and skill development. This is the time allotted for education and skill development. The majority of the elite castes, who were either Brahmins or Kshatriyas, received their education throughout the Vedic era under a special system known as GURUKULAM. Living with their preceptors in forests far from towns, cities, or villages allowed students to receive their education.

The lives of the pupils known as SHISYAS were extremely demanding and hard. Individuals who were unable to meet these lofty expectations would only become marginalized. The existence of sages like Gautama and Jaimini, who founded various schools of Indian philosophy like Nyaya and Purva Mimamsa, is what distinguishes the Vedic period from other periods. Legendary acharyas like Sanandepani and Dronacharya taught epic heroes like Krishna and Arjuna martial skills. There was a lot of conjecture and intellectual activity at this time, which is rare today.

## **X. SALIENT FEATURES OF VEDIC EDUCATION**

1. **Spiritual and religious values are infused:** For the glory of God and the benefit of humanity, the main goal of ancient education was to inculcate in students a spirit of religiosity and piety. Religious ideals were pursued in the process of learning. Without religious teaching, schooling was nothing.
2. **Character Development and Personality Formation:** The Vedic era placed more emphasis on character development than at any other time in Indian history. Moral ideals were the practice of wisdom. The only way to achieve moral excellence is to practice moral principles.
3. **Knowledge:** Knowledge is education. Man's third eye is it. According to this proverb, knowledge creates the space for man's journey through life by opening his inner eye and filling him with spiritual and divine light.
4. **Education Goals:** In ancient India, education was primarily intended to help people fully realize who they were and free their souls from the bonds of both the present and the future, not to prepare them for life in this world or the next.

## **XI. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Vedic era in ancient India was a dynamic time characterized by the interaction of religious, social, and economic factors. The subcontinent's social fabric was permanently altered as the once flexible varna system gave way to the strict caste system. Dharma served as the foundation for economic activity, and religion infiltrated every facet of life through complex rites and intellectual investigations. As society developed, women's status changed from being more equitable at first, reflecting the complicated gender dynamics of ancient India. Although the caste system brought about some order, it also planted the seeds of social injustice that lasted for generations.

The Vedic era's intellectual heritage, as reflected in the Vedas and Upanishads, still influences Indian philosophy and ethics today. Deep philosophical investigations that cut across time were made possible by the investigation of dharma, karma, and moksha. Studying the Vedic era is a voyage into the foundations of Indian culture rather than just a historical retrospective. The cultural, theological, and philosophical environment of modern India is resonant with the echoes of Vedic philosophy, so understanding the present requires removing the layers of the past.

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