



WEDIC WOMEN AND LIFE

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ABSTRACT

Women of the Vedic period (circa 1500-1200 BCE), were epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainments. The Vedas have volumes to say about these women, who both complemented and supplemented their male partners. When it comes to talking about significant female figures of the Vedic period, seven names - Arundathi, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Maitreyi, Romasa, Sati Anusuya, Vaak Ambrani - come to mind.

KEYWORDS: Arundathi, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Maitreyi, Romasa, Sati Anusuya, Vaak Ambrani.



INTRODUCTION:

Many of the Vedic rishis were women. Married and single women alike were acknowledged authorities on the Vedic wisdom. The prophetess Gargi composed several Vedic hymns questioning the origin of all existence. Other Vedic hymns are attributed to Vishwawara, Sikta and others. The Rig Veda identifies many women rishis; indeed, it contains dozens of verses accredited to the woman philosopher Ghosha and to the great Maitreyi, who rejected half her husband Yajnavalkya's wealth in favor of spiritual knowledge. It also contains long philosophical conversations between the sage Agasthya and his highly educated wife Lopamudra.

ARUNDATHI:

Arundhati was the wife of Sage Vasishta, one of the seven sages (Saptarshi). In spite of being the wife of one of the seven seers, Arundhati shared equal status with them. As mentioned in the Vedic and Puranic literature, Arundhati is the personification of several virtues such as devotion, chastity, and conjugal bliss. Many Sanskrit poems, written during the post-Puranic times, have depicted the character of Arundhati as 'chaste and revered'; someone who is 'unblemished, inspiring and worthy of imitation'. Many Hindu rituals center on Arundhati, and the most prominent amongst those is the one performed in the marriage during the Saptapadi ceremony.

According to one story, Lord Brahma created Sandhya and Manmatha as his 'Manasika' or mind born children. He got infatuated with Sandhya and Lord Rudra (Lord Shiva) chastised Brahma and the latter looked for an opportunity when Rudra might also be a victim of passion. However, Lord Vishnu advised Brahma against any such attempts as Rudra Deva was well known for his strong convictions.

In the meantime, being unable to bear the feeling of disgrace caused to her by Lord Brahma, Sandhya went on thousand-year hibernation under the auspices of Sage Vasishta. However, Sage Vasishta, at the instance of Lord Brahma, had appeared to Sandhya in his disguised form as a Brahman named Medatithi. Under the direction of Medatithi, Sandhya propitiated Lord Shiva for long years by reciting the holy mantra 'Om Namoh Shankaraya Namaha Om'. Despite praying for long period, when Sandhya's prayers went unheard, she decided to end her life by jumping into the sacrificial fire (Agni kunda) of the Yagna being conducted by her mentor Medatithi. Interestingly, when Sandhya was about to jump unto the fire pit, Rudra

Deva appeared before her and granted her multiple boons. Delighted Sandhya asked for more than one boon and they were as follows –

- None in her clan should harbor lust.
- She should be an epitome of chastity.
- Her husband should always be dedicated to her.

Rudra Deva granted all her wishes and asked her to merge in the sacrificial fire, having in mind the image of the person she desired as her soul mate in the next birth. The Prana Vayu or the Vital Air of Sandhya's burnt body was carried to the Solar System and Surya Deva converted it into three parts as Pratah Sandhya, Madhyahnika Sandhya and Sayah Sandhya or of the morning-noon-evening timings of a day. The Sages at the Yagna were wonder struck that Sandhya was re-born as a girl-child named Arundhati and was married to Vasishta when she came of age and became synonymous with chastity thereby earning exemplary fame.

As mentioned in *Bhagavata Purana*, one of the eight daughters of Kardama and Devahuti was Arundhati. She was also Sage Parashara's grandmother and Sage Vyasa's great-grandmother. She was then born to be the wife of Sage Vasishta. Many other Puranas have also stated Arundhati as Sage Kashyapa's daughter, with Narada and Parvata as her brothers; it was her brother Narada who offered her in marriage with Sage Vasishta.

As mentioned by Sage Valmiki in his great epic *Ramayana*, Arundhati bore one hundred sons who were unfortunately cursed to be killed by Sage Vishvamitra. Later on, she bore eight more sons. Two of his sons, named Shakti and Suyagya took their formal education with Lord Rama in the hermitage of Sage Vasishta. Arundhati was like a guardian angel of Sita. She is also portrayed as the mentor of the Raghu lineage.

In the epic *Mahabharata*, Arundhati is given a special scholarly position as she shares equal footing with the seven sages. As per the epic, Svaha, the wife of Agni, could assume the form of the wives of all the six seers of Saptarshi mandala, except the wife of Sage Vasishta, Arundhati.

Legends associated with Arundhati are mentioned in various Hindu Scriptures. Few of them are as follows –

Bhagavata Purana and *Shiva Purana* – The birth episode of Arundhati is mentioned.

Ramcharitmanas (Uttara Kanda) – Brahma's discourse, during which he gives crucial instructions to Arundhati, is mentioned here.

Valmiki's Ramayana (Balakanda) – The enmity between Vishvamitra and Vasishta, two of the greatest sages of all times, is mentioned here. As per this legend, the rivalry leads to the death of hundred sons of Vasishta and Arundhati in the hands of Vishvamitra.

Mahabharata and several other *Brahmana* – Several epics also mention Shakti as the son and Parashara as the grandson of Arundhati.

Ramayana, *Ramcharitmanas* and *Vinaya Patrika* – These epics elaborate on Lord Rama and Sita's meeting with Arundhati.

Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava* (the sixth canto) – It describes how Arundhati plays an important role in pleading Lord Shiva to marry Parvati.

Arundhati's role in *Ramayana* is that of a peacemaker. When Rama was forced to abandon his devoted wife Sita, there was a strong condemnation from King Janaka against Lord Rama and his subjects. During this time, Sage Vasishta and Arundhati were the only two eligible persons who could help resolve the issue.

However, the great Vasishta was declared unfit for the task, as it was at his behest to appease the people at any cost that Rama cast out Sita. In a triangular conflict between Rama, Sita's father Janaka, and Rama's subjects, Arundhati – with her tact, empathy, and strength of mind – helped in bringing about a logical agreement amongst the conflicting parties

Kamdhenu, the holy cow was in the possession of Arundhati and her husband Vasishtha. She was a miraculous 'cow of plenty' who provided her owner whatever he desired and is often portrayed as the mother of all other cattle and also the eleven Rudras. Kamdhenu is looked upon as the source of all wealth and opulence in Hinduism. She is also revered as a Devi, the Hindu Divine Mother, and is correlated to the fertile Mother Earth, i.e. Prithvi, who is often portrayed as a cow in Sanskrit.

Once there was an intense drought in the Himalayas. It did not rain for twelve years. Arundhati's seven sons who were great sages resided in the Himalayas. They suffered immensely because there were no roots of fruits to eat. Arundhati thought of bringing rains to the Himalayas and began intense penance for several years. Seeing this, Lord Shiva was impressed and appeared before her. Shiva granted rain which not only helped the seven sages but also every other living being.

Once, King Kalmashapada and Shakti (Arundhati's son) were caught into an argument over a trivial matter. The spat took an ugly turn and Shakti cursed Kalmashapada to turn into a wretched Rakshasa. Meanwhile, on learning about the ongoing fight between Kalmashapada and Shakti, Vishvamitra sent another Rakshasa called Kinkara in the body of Kalmashapada to kill Shakti and set off an old revenge with Sage Vasishtha. Eventually, all brothers of Shakti also got killed by Kinkara.

As mentioned in the epics, both Vasishtha and Arundhati became stars after their mortal life was over. As part of a Hindu marriage ritual, the groom shows the bride two stars symbolic to Vasishtha and Arundhati as they are regarded as an ideal couple blessed with marital bliss and devotion.

A fast is observed by all Hindu married women whose husbands are alive. It takes place during the lunar month of Chaitra. The fast and various rituals associated with it are performed for the longevity of the husband. There is a general belief that someone near to death should not straightly look at the Arundhati star. She/he should first gaze at other brighter stars before proceeding towards Arundhati.

Arundhatīdarśananyāya □ (IAST: अरुन्धतीदर्शनन्यायः), - a Sanskrit maxim is used to infer 'the unknown from that which is known'. The maxim is named after Arundhati. In the eponymous Hindi epic poem *Arundhati*, the life of Arundhati is vividly described. *Arundhati* was composed by Jagadguru Rambhadracharya in the year 1994.

GARGI:

In society man and woman are like two wings in a bird and unless both of them are spiritually inspired and move forward to lead a righteous life society will be unable to flourish or progress on the right path. Women in India are respected and revered. She is worshipped as Shakti or Energy without which even Shiva cannot create anything. She is the progenitor of the Universe. Women in the Vedic period complemented and supplemented their male counterparts. They were the epitomes of spiritual and intellectual attainments. One of the most famous woman seers of ancient times was Gargi who is honoured as one of the great natural philosophers. She composed several hymns that questioned the origin of all existence

King Janaka of the kingdom of Videha was a great King and philosopher and he had many scholars and intellectuals in his court. There were nine Navaratnas or nine gems. One of these nine was Gargi Vachaknavi who was the daughter of Rishi Vachaknu. Once, King Janaka organised a Brahmajajna or a philosophical Congress around the theme of the sacrificial fire. He wished to find out who was the greatest Brahma Jnani or knower of Brahman. All the Brahmins would be involved in debates and discussions and the winner was to be awarded one thousand cows with gold plated horns. A great sage named Yajnavalkya challenged and defeated all the Brahmins. He was an erudite scholar, a renowned sage and one of the law givers of Ancient India. He was a beacon of light who contributed to the Spiritual and Vedic renaissance. With his superior wisdom and knowledge he defeated all the scholars like Aswala, Artha Bhaga, Bhujyu, Uddalaka, Ushasta etc. Then finally it was the turn of Gargi. She began by asking him elementary questions about the world. She slowly began to ask more and more refined questions and Yajnavalkya answered them all correctly. His explanations were so lucid and full of wisdom that his descriptions on the nature of

Brahman were conveyed through a series of images and metaphors as Brahman was something that could only be experienced and not defined in rigid terms. Gargi was enlightened and defeated and declared in the august assembly that Yajnavalkya was the best and none could defeat him.

The dialogue between Sage Yajnavalkya and Gargi is recorded in Yogayajnavalkya Samhita a classical text on Yoga. Gargi was the only one who could question him twice with great courage. Being a woman and greatly learned she was placed on par with the male section during the Vedic times. Gargi's questions revealed a clear and intelligent mind. She discussed profound topics and concepts like Science and its unity with the material and non material world and the illusion of time, source of creation etc. She conceded and acknowledged defeat courageously and declared generously to all the Brahmins his greatness which points out to her magnanimity and courage to face the truth.

Gargi was a woman seer who was known for her exemplary intellectual knowledge and supreme spiritual attainment. She was called Brahmavadini because of her knowledge of Brahma Vidya. Being born in the Garga Gotra family line she was also called Gargi. Being a God realised soul it is said that she defeated Mandana Mishra earlier and her Kundalini was awakened due to which she really was a God realised soul. Her name is always taken with reverence in the annals of history and she is one of the classic examples of woman seers in ancient India.

GHOSH:

Women of the Vedic period were examples of spiritual attainment. They were revealers of Brahman and learners of the Vedas sometimes even composing some of the hymns. They were highly spiritually exalted and their knowledge and wisdom were on par or sometimes even greater than their male counterparts. They embraced simple living and high thinking. Some of them were wives or children of great Rishis.

Ghosha was the daughter of Rishi Kakshivan who was a descendent of Angiras and granddaughter of Dirgatamas. As she suffered from a skin ailment(leprosy) from childhood she was unable to get married. She dutifully served her father but continuously prayed to the Ashvini Kumars the divine physicians who were endowed with the power of rejuvenation. Pleased with her deep and sincere prayers the Ashvini Kumars taught her Madhu Vidya, the Science of secret learning which granted her youth and great knowledge and cured her of her ailment due to which she subsequently got a worthy husband. She composed two Rig Veda hymns 39, 49 of Mandal ten each containing 14 verses. The first eulogises the Asvini Devatas and the second is a personal wish expressing her intimate desires and feelings for married life. Her son Suhastya also composed a hymn in the Rig Veda.

Gosha is revered as one of the woman seers of Vedic India, a Rishika who was highly knowledgeable and proficient in the Vedas and even composed a few hymns. She was a Brahmavadini or speaker or revealer of Brahman and lived a highly spiritual life and has been recorded in the annals of ancient Vedic history as one of the famous woman seers along with Gargi, Lopamudra , Maitreyi etc.

LOPAMUDRA:

During the Vedic period women were assigned a very prominent and high place in society and shared a equal standing with the menfolk. The Hindu philosophical concept of Shakti or the feminine principle of energy was greatly revered and there were scholars and highly intelligent women who chose the path of Vedic studies like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, Ghosha etc.

Lopamudra was the wife of Sage Agasthya. Legend says that once the Devas and Asuras were at war with each other. Many Asuras were killed in battle and a few of them hid themselves in the ocean. Indra, the Lord of the Gods gave an order to Agni the God of fire to pursue them and destroy them. Thinking that destroying them would destroy all the sea creatures Agni returned to Indra and informed him that he had let them go rather than hurting the creatures in the sea. Indra was angry that Agni had failed to do his duty hence cursed him to be reborn on earth as Sage Agasthya. He was a great sage and a man of extraordinary spiritual power. Once it is said that when he was visiting heaven he saw his deceased ancestors with their

head downwards. This was a sign of them going to hell. Agasthya was disturbed and when asked the reason they said that there was no lineage to continue as he was not married and had no child hence it was Agasthya's fault. For this purpose he embarked on an unusual course of action. By his yogic powers he created a female who would possess all those characteristics and virtues that would be appropriate in the wife of a renunciate. Meanwhile the King of Vidharbha was noble and virtuous but being childless he was undertaking penances for the gift of a child. Agasthya through his divine powers came to know the plight of the King and arranged for the child to be born as his daughter. The child was named Lopamudra and she grew up in the lap of luxury with the best possible education.

When she grew up and reached marriageable age Agasthya approached the King and asked for her hand in marriage. The King was stunned as Agasthya was a renunciate but Lopamudra was insistent that he accept the proposal. Already understanding his daughter's strength of mind and character, the King agreed and Lopamudra left the riches of the palace to live in the forest at the hermitage of Agasthya. She was a dutiful wife and obeyed his every wish and served him faithfully. When Agasthya told her that he could never give her a royal life Lopamudra asked him to give her the wealth of his knowledge. Lopamudra is said to have written a two stanza hymn asking for Agasthya's love and attention as he was always immersed in his austerities. Agasthya asked Lopamudra if she wanted to bear many sons who had mediocre powers or one son who would be extraordinarily powerful. Lopamudra chose one son whom they named Dridhasyu and who later on became a great poet. In this way Agasthya is said to have fulfilled his duties to his pithrus and helped them to go to heaven. The Rig Veda includes long dialogues between Agasthya and Lopamudra which reflects on the great intelligence and character of Lopamudra. It is said that both of them together were renowned for spreading the eminence of the Lalitha Sahasranama which is the thousand names of the Divine Mother.

In the Vana Parva section of the Mahabharata there is a mention of Sage Agasthya and his wife Lopamudra performing penance at Haridwar. Her greatness and purity is recorded in the annals of Indian history and her name is always mentioned whenever there is reference to women who were epitomes of intelligence, goodness, servitude and devotion. It is said that Lopamudra has reincarnated as the sacred river Kaveri in present times.

MAITREYI:

Throughout the Vedic period in India women have been given the highest level of respect and freedom. They were given opportunity to reach their highest potential and there were women seers like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra etc who had reached an exalted state of spiritual realisation and were respected and venerated. They were called Brahnavadinis or the revealers and speakers of Brahman. Women stood for the foundation of moral development and were a decisive force in spirituality.

Maitreyi was the daughter of Mitra Rishi and the niece of Gargi and was born in Mithila. She was very well versed in the Shastras taught to her by her father and from a young age was unattached to material things and had reached an exalted state of spiritual purity. She wanted to be a spiritual disciple of Sage Yajnavalkya who was a Rishi and a householder as was common in those times and practice her sadhana. Sage Yajnavalkya was already married to a devout woman Katyayani who bore him three sons and whose main interest lay in her husband, children and home but seeing the spiritual fervour of Maitreyi his wife Katyayani agreed that she should be married to the sage to further her spiritual development. It is said that such was her spiritual personality that she enhanced Yajnavalkya's spiritual stature, knowledge and growth. Maitreyi composed ten of the thousand hymns in the Rig Veda.

Yajnavalkya at a particular stage of his life wished to give up his worldly life and become an ascetic. He called both his wives to give them his worldly possessions. There ensued a dialogue between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi which became famous and forms the second and fourth chapter of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Maitreyi reasoned that if her husband was willing to leave everything behind, it must be for something far greater. She asks him if having enough wealth could make her immortal. Yajnavalkya is very happy with her profound question. He advises her on the connection between existence, bliss and thought in the three

worlds to the eternal indestructible Self. He traces the roots of all bliss to the Self and explains that nothing exists apart from the Self. This is the Ultimate Statement of the Advaita philosophy, the Chudamani or the crest jewel. Hearing Yajnavalkya's explanation on the doctrine of the soul and the knowledge for attaining immortality, Maitreyi attains supreme bliss.

By hearing Yajnavalkya's discourse Maitreyi dived deep into spiritual understanding and gained the spiritual knowledge necessary to attain moksha and liberation from the infinite cycles of birth and death. She showed all women the way to achieve the heights of knowledge simply by carefully listening and practicing the Vedic path. It was the Self or Atma that made a person dear to another and which was the basis of all existence

ROMASA:

During the Vedic period the education of women within Hindu civilisation was important. Women were regarded as perfectly eligible for performing sacrifices as well as could study the Vedic literature. Women were examples for maintaining the basic principles of Santhana Dharma. After completing their education under a Guru they could perform religious rites. Romasha was one of the woman seers to whom hymns of the Rig Veda were revealed. She was a Brahmadini who underwent the upanayana or thread ceremony, Vedic study and Savitri Vachana (higher studies). She revealed the 126th hymn of the first book of the Rig Veda.

Romasha was said to be the daughter of Brihaspati and the wife of King Swanaya Bhawayabya. The literal meaning of her name is 'One with hair' indicating that either she had long, beautiful hair on her head or her body was full of hair. Her husband was also a rishi who is said to have performed a lot of charity as a King. Numerous mantras of Sama Veda are also attributed to Romasha.

Romasha was a Rishika or a woman Rishi or a seer in Vedic India where there were a number of pure, elevated and spiritually exalted women who were learned in the Vedas, even composing them and were seekers of Brahman. They are highly revered and are remembered and quoted even today and recorded for posterity in Ancient Indian history.

SATI ANUSUYA:

Sati Anasuya, the wife of Sage Atri, is one of the Seven Great Women i.e. Sapta Kanya of the Hindu religion. Though, she is not amongst one of the Pancha Kanya, as part of the Hindu ritual, she is supposed to be remembered first in the wee hours of the morning. Sati Anasuya is an epitome of chastity and austerity, qualities which every Hindu woman should strive to achieve for a fulfilled life. As mentioned in our ancient Indian scriptures, such were the powers of Sati Anasuya that she made trees bear juicy fruits and Ganga flow abundantly during the times when the land was struck with the deadliest droughts and famines.

Sati Anasuya was the wife of Sage Atri, one of the Saptarishi (Seven Sages) of the Saptarshi-mandala. The couple was deeply devoted to each other and their life story still set as a testimony during important Vedic rituals, including marriages.

Sati Anasuya was blessed with three sons, each with distinguished qualities. They were -

- o 'Dattatreya' the sage-avatar of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva;
- o the irascible Sage Durvasa and;
- o the moon-god Chandra.

Sati Anasuya was the sister of one of the Seven Sages, Sage Kapila; her parents were Sage Kardama and Devahuti.

In Ramayana, Sati Anasuya appears living in the forest of Chitrakuta with her husband in their small hermitage. When Lord Rama and Sita visited Chitrakuta during their exile period, they specially met Atri-Anasuya to seek their blessings. The couple invited Lord Rama and Sita with great pleasure. In course of her meeting with Sita, Sati Anasuya taught her that the highest duty of a wife is to serve her husband with

austerity and devotion. She also gifted Sita a sacred garland, pious sandal paste, and a sublime gem which the latter accepted with great respect.

There are two legends describing how the Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha (Shiva) became the sons of Sati Anasuya.

As per this legend, Sati Anasuya had the powers to perform miracles by sprinkling 'Paadha Theertham', the sacred water with which she washed Sage Atri's feet. However, when Sage Narada narrated this fact to the three Devis i.e. goddess Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati they were unable to believe it. They, therefore, decided to test the chastity of Sati Anasuya. Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati involved their husbands Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively in the plot.

The Trinity then arrived at the hermitage of Sage Atri in the form of three old mendicants seeking alms from Sati Anasuya. When Sati Anasuya approached the three mendicants with some food, the three denied it saying that because of the severe vow taken by the three of them, they cannot accept alms from those wearing clothes. The situation led Sati Anasuya in great confusion but, she had solution to every problem. By sprinkling the holy 'Paadha Theertham' she turned the three mendicants into babies and then fed the three baby-mendicants without wearing any clothes.

When Sage Atri returned to his hermitage, Sati Anasuya narrated to him what all had happened in his absence and presented the three babies to him. Sage Atri, through his divine vision, envisioned the Holy Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in the three babies. Sage Atri said to his wife that they have come to fulfill her wish to become their mother. The three babies then conjoined to become one. They occupied three separate heads, one trunk, two legs and six hands. When the three devis learnt the incident from Sage Narada, they went to Atri and Sati Anasuya to get their husbands back. Eventually, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva returned to their respective consorts. Simultaneously, they fulfilled the wish of Sati Anasuya and remained in the conjoined form as her child. The child grew up to be the one of the greatest sages of all times. He was named Dattatreya, and he served his parents till the end.

Well, there are numerous anecdotes and commentaries on Atri and Anasuya in the *Mahabharata*. Although the stories of the unflinching devotion of the rishis are manifold, devoted wives are numerous too, if not equal. Sati Anasuya was one such exemplary contemporary figure. Besides her, Sumanthi too had earned her place as an earnest devotee. She lived in Prathishtanagara. She was completely loyal to her husband Kaushika and remained devoted to him even when he fell into bad ways and contracted many ailments. Sumanthi would carry him on her back and wander from one place to another.

One day a number of thieves escaped from the king's soldiers. While they were searching for the thieves they mistook a sage named Mandavya to be the thief and presented him to the king. Angry king thoughtlessly ordered to stab him to death and the king's men carried out the royal order. However, Mandavya was not a normal human being and did not die as a result of his great power of *tapas*; he remained hanging on the stake.

In the meantime, Sumanthi was passing by the same place carrying her husband on her back. Unfortunately, she failed to notice the sage hanging on the stake and her husband's foot touched Mandavya body. That gave the sage severe pain and he got raged. He pronounced a curse on Kaushika saying "May you fall dead at sunrise".

The sage's curse was justifiable, but Sumanthi could not afford to lose her husband at any cost. Hence, Sumanthi – all powerfully – cried a loud, "Let the sun never rise" The words of this pious lady came true and the sun didn't rise the next day. The whole world came to a standstill and life on earth was in mayhem. The survival of living beings stood at risk.

The Devas, in heaven, always think of the welfare of the human beings. So do the great rishis of ancient India. They were aware of the fact that the curse of a devoted wife could be broken only by another devoted wife of similar stature. Hence, all the Devas along with Lord Brahma arrived at the ashram of Atri. Together they sought Anasuya's help in persuading Sumanthi to withdraw her curse and save the world from destruction. Sati Anasuya requested Sumanthi to take back her curse and thereby save the world. Sumanthi was in a deep dilemma because that way her husband would die. Finally, Anasuya thought of resolving the

situation. She assured Sumanthi that she would save her husband from death. Sumanthi relented after the assurance and Anasuya with her unequalled power of tapas (meditation) saved Sumanthi's husband and as a corollary the world was saved.

After this incident, all the gods and goddess in the heaven were extremely pleased with Anasuya and granted her a boon. In her boon, Anasuya asked the holy Trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as his sons. Her boon was consensually granted she gave birth to Dattatreya, the sage incarnation of the Trinity.

Sage Atri was amazed and proud of his wife's celestial power. Later, when Sri Rama visited Atri's ashram, Sage Atri proudly narrated Anasuya's virtues to the Lord. He never felt jealous of his wife when her stature grew in the eyes of Gods. Atri and Anasuya are almost synonymously worshipped today. At first every day - 'Sapatrum prapoojayet' pronounces our traditional literature when it refers to this couple. The mantra quotes Anasuya's unstinted devotion for Sage Atri and this gesture escalates Atri's status to acme. These two great souls were always engaged in maximizing the happiness of the humans at large. Their lives are inscribed in golden letters in the traditional landscape of this country. It is indeed amazing to understand the nature and the quantum of pain and hardships these outstanding humans had to endure for seeking universal welfare.

Sati Anasuya Ashrama, the holy abode of Sati Anasuya, is located in Chitrakuta near Mandakini River, amidst the thick forest. As mentioned in the epic *Ramayana*, one Chitrakuta and the region surrounding the River Mandakini was struck by severe draught for ten long years. Seeing the sufferings of the sages and animals, Sati Anasuya decided to use her divine powers and through her austerities she succeeded in bringing the River Mandakini down on earth. At present, Sati Anasuya Ashrama is one of the most peaceful places on earth where various streams converge to form the River Mandakini. This point is the starting point of the forest Dandaka, which was once ruled by King Ravana, the King of Lanka.

The character of Sati Anasuya is looked upon by all the Hindu women as she is the epitome of the austerity and devotion. Many regional Indian films have successfully depicted the story of Sati Anasuya. A film on her was made in the following chronological order –

1957 - Telugu film; Film name – 'Sati Anasuya'; Directed by Kadaru Nagabhusanam; Starring - Anjali Devi and Gummadi Venkateswara Rao;

1971 –Telugu film; Film name – 'Sati Anasuya'; Directed by B. A. Subba Rao; Starring - Jamuna Ramanarao as Anasuya, Tadepalli Lakshmi Kanta Rao as Atri Maharshi, and Sharada as Sumati; Music by P. Adinarayana Rao

VAAK AMBRANI:

In the Vedic period of Ancient India there were many woman seers who were proficient in the Vedas and even composed some of the hymns in the Rig Veda. They were generally the wives or children of great Rishis and were referred to as Rishikas or Brahnavadinis, the learners and revealers of the Brahman. In Ancient India women were always encouraged to advance spiritually and they were highly knowledgeable, wise, virtuous and pure. Some of the most famous woman seers were Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, Ghosha etc.

Vaak Ambhrni the daughter of Rishi Ambhruna was another famous woman seer of Vedic times. The Devi Sukta in the Rig Veda is attributed to her. She became a Seer inspired with the knowledge of the Self through whom the Goddess Vak proclaimed her own glory. The Devi Sukta is also known as Ambhrni Sukta and it consists of 8 verses and is dedicated to Vak(speech). This hymn is recited at the end of the recitation of Devi Mahatmyam and it sprang forth from the deep recesses of her heart when she was in communion with Brahman. It occurs in the 10th Mandala as Suktam number 1

Vaak Ambhrni was a famous woman Rishika or Brahnavadini of the Vedic period. She was highly spiritually proficient and was a Seer through whom Goddess Durga as Vaak Devi spoke. Her purity, wisdom and exalted spiritual state have been recorded for posterity in the annals of Vedic history.

CONCLUSION:

The women occupied a very important position, in the ancient Bharat Varsa, in fact far superior position to the men of the time. "Shakti" a feminine term means "power" and "strength". Literary evidence suggests that kings and towns were destroyed because the rulers troubled a single woman. For example, Valmiki Ramayana teaches us that Ravana and his entire kingdom were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharata teaches us that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. Elango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches us Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly did harm to Kannaki.

In Vedic times women and men were equal in many aspects. Women participated in the public sacrifices alongside men. One script mentions a female rishi Visvara. Some Vedic hymns, are attributed to women such as Apala, the daughter of Atri, Ghosa, the daughter of Kaksivant or Indrani, the wife of Indra. Apparently in early Vedic times women also received the sacred thread and could study the Vedas. The Haritasmruti mentions a class of women called Brahmavadinis who remained unmarried and spent their lives in study and ritual. Panini's distinction between acarya (a preceptor) and acaryani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife), and upadhyaya (a preceptor) and upadhyayani (a lady teacher or a preceptor's wife) indicates that women at that time could not only be students but also the teachers of sacred Vedas. There were several noteworthy women scholars of the past such as Kathi, Kalapi, and Bahvici. The Upanishads refer to several women philosophers, who disputed with their male colleagues such as Vacaknavi, who challenged Yajnavalkya. The Rig Veda also refers to women engaged in warfare. One queen Bispala is mentioned, and even as late a witness as Megasthenes (fifth century B.C. E.) mentions heavily armed women guards protecting Chandragupta's palace. Hindu religion has been occasionally criticized as encouraging inequality between men and women, towards the detriment of Hindu women. This presumption is inaccurate. In the Vedic period, we come across female scholars like Ghosha, Lopamudra, Romasha and Indrani. In the Upanishad period, names of women philosophers like Sulabha, Maitreyi, Gargi are encountered. In religious matters, Hindus have elevated women to the level of divinity. One of the things most misconstrued about India and Hinduism is that it's a male dominated society and religion and the truth is that it is not so. It is a religion that has attributed the words for the strength and power to feminine. "Shakti" means "power" and "strength". All male power comes from the feminine. The Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are all-powerless without their female counterparts.

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