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Oct. 15, 2002
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Female Rishis and Philosophers in the Veda?

Summary

It is a traditional but common misconception that a considerable number of Ṛgvedic hymns were composed by women. Though female authors and interlocutors are not entirely absent from the Vedas the role of 'literate' women in the Ṛgveda will have to be re-evaluated. The traditional names given for female Ṛgvedic authors include those derived from the wordings of the hymns but also personified Belief, Speech and a bitch.

$ 0. INTRODUCTION

It is a traditional and common misconception that a considerable number of Ṛgvedic hymns were composed by women. This amounts to some twenty female figures that have been regarded as Ṛgvedic Ṛṣis, ever since the "index" to the Ṛgveda, the late Vedic[1] Sarvānukramaṇī, was composed, supposedly by Kātyāyana.

The tradition regarding Ṛgveda authors has been very strong. It is a custom even today to mention the author, (meters and deities) before starting to recite a Ṛgvedic hymn.[2] However, we have to distinguish the traditional authors of the hymns from those actually preserved in the body of the text. The two sets frequently do not overlap. I cannot go into this matter in detail (see EJVS 7-2), suffice it to say that all statements in the Anukramaṇī must be regarded with a healthy dose of suspicion. Especially as far as RV 10 is concerned, clear invention of authors is easily visible. The method frequently used is to take up obvious names of some person or allusions to them found in the body of the hymn and make them the authors, -- even if it concerns such abstract concepts as *śraddhā* "trust, belief" (RV 10.125).

Though female authors and interlocutors are, prima facie at least, not entirely absent from the Vedas, the role of 'literate' women in the Ṛgveda will have to be re-evaluated. We have to distinguish, of course, between mere interlocutors in

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[1] See Witzel, WESTWARD HO! The Incredible Wanderlust of the Rgvedic Tribes Exposed by S. Talageri -- (Saavadhaanapattra no. 2) A Review of: Shrikant G. Talageri, The Rigveda. A historical analysis. EJVS 7-2, March 31, 2001 .

[2] Cf. Witzel, The Development of the Vedic Canon and its Schools: The Social and Political Milieu. (Materials on Vedic Śākhās 8). In: *Inside the Texts, Beyond the Texts. New Approaches to the Study of the Vedas*. Harvard Oriental Series. Opera Minora, vol. 2. Cambridge 1997, 257-345, and EJVS 7-2.

the hymns from actual authors, though women speaking such verses have habitually been made authors of these stanzas by the Anukramaṇī (see below for details).

In the sequel, we will take a closer look at the various types of alleged female Ṛsis, starting with obviously absurd cases, such as goddesses as authors.

$ 1. DEITIES AND MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES

Among the alleged female authors of Ṛgvedic hymns it is easiest to do away with the mythological figures, in other words, goddesses and female entities that are of mythological antiquity, such as the first humans and their immediate progeny.

A number of such "female Ṛṣis" clearly are goddesses. They include: Aditi, Indrāṇī, Urvaśī, Yamī, Yamī Vaivasvatī, Saramā Devaśunī, Sārparājñī, Sūryā Sāvitrī. They will be discussed here, though for obvious reasons not in great detail.

Indrāṇī 10.86.2-6, 9, 10, 15-18; 10.145
Yamī 10.154 = Yamī Vaivasvatī 10.10.1, 3, 5-7, 11, 13
Sūryā Sāvitrī 10.85

Indrāṇī is of course the (unnamed[3]) wife of the prominent god Indra and figures in the famous, quite obscene dialogue of RV 10.86 as interlocutor of Indra, the 'bull-monkey" Vṛṣākapi and his wife.

Sūrya (10.85) is the daughter of the sun god Sūrya and the bride of God Soma. The hymn has been the pattern and model of all Hindu marriages to follow (circumabulating the fire, etc.), and of the "ideology" underlying it, such as the three "previous divine husbands" of any human bride.[4] The less said about such divine "authors" the better.

Yamī (Yamī = Yamī Vaivasvatī, RV 10.10, 10.154) is the sister of Yama, son of Vivasvant, and the first mortal though still a god. (In the closely related Iranian

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[3] Śacī is a later name, derived from Indra's frequent epithet *śacīpati* "lord of strength", e.g. RV 8.37.3a *ekarāḷ asya bhuvanasya rājasi śacīpata indra viśvābhir ūtibhiḥ*

[4] See RV 10.85.40 with *Soma,* Gandharva, Agni (*somaḥ prathamo vivide gandharvo vivida uttaraḥ / tṛtīyo agniṣ ṭe patis turīyas te manuṣyajāḥ*). This model has been used in several ways, though this has not been recognized. For example, in the Newar initiation of girls (*ihi*), where Viṣṇu or the Bodhisattva is made the only real husband, and whence the later, actual ("temporary") human husband can be divorced by simply putting two betel nuts on the pillow; or the *devadāsīs* are married to the god as well, and their clients are "temporary husbands" only, or the more complicated Kerala case of Nambudiri *sambandham*. The standard model is of course that of an 'eternal' union of husband and wife who has been delivered to the 'hand-me-down' human husband.

mythology, even the ancestress of humans). His brother Manu is the first human. Such mythical beings from the beginning of humankind are not expected to be authors of Ṛgveda hymns.

The rest of the cases in this section are women of the distant mythological past that come from the very beginning of humankind. Here belongs the sister of Yama, the first mortal being, and Urvaśī (RV 10.95.2,4,5,7,11,13,15,16,18) is the wife of Manu's son Purūravas and disqualified for the same reason as Yamī.

The same applies to clearly mythological animals:
Saramā Devaśunī 10.108.2, 4,6,8,10,11, and Sārparājñī 10.189. While frogs do speak in the Ṛgveda, they do not compose hymns, and do so only in a simile.[5] However, a fairly silent being, the (daughter? of the) "Queen of Snakes" (Sārparājñī 10.189) is supposed to have composed this short hymn. The hymn is of enigmatic character, through it is not a riddle hymn, such has RV 10.164. A snake is not visible at all in this hymn; the attribution to a snake or snake deity is an idea of the Anukramaṇī, which however also gives the alternative that the author is the Goddess Sūryā.[6]

The bitch of Indra, Saramā, certainly is not a likely author either, though Sāmaveda signing is sometimes compared, in the Brāhmaṇa texts, with the howling of dogs. In the well known hymn RV 10.108 Saramā is supposed by the author of the Anukramaṇī as the speaker of those stanzas where she appears as speaker.

Disregarding all of this, Saramā has twice been represented in the International Sanskrit Conferences (1984, 1994) by two Indian Indologists (teacher & former student) as the "ambassador of Indra," speaking many languages with the "foreign cow thieves",[7] the Paṇi, who were identified, no wonder, with the Phoenicians (Latin *Poeni*). I have hardly ever heard more entertaining talks. They were certainly worthy of a TV sketch, but not of an Indian Govt. travel subsidy. I think we can agree that our dogs, or even this divine one, may tell us much, but they do not compose Ṛgvedic poetry.

$ 2. RITUAL ENTITIES

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[5] See G. V. Bajracharya, The Adaptation of Monsoonal Culture by Rgvedic Aryans: A Further Study of the Frog Hymn. EJVS 3-2 (1997).

[6] Other texts differ even more: the Bṛhaddevatā has Vāc; Sāyaṇa thinks of Sūrya; Uvaṭa and Mahīdhara of Agni. This divergence is important as it shows great flexibility, long after the composition of the Anukramaṇī.

[7] Actually it is Indra who wants the cows of the Paṇis who really own them, see Kuiper, *Ancient Indian Cosmogony* 1983.

Equally easily disposable are the "female Ṛṣis" that in fact are ritual entities and abstractions. They include: Juhū Brahmajayā 10.109, Dakṣiṇā Prājāpatyā 10.107,
Vāc Āmbhṛṇī 10.125, Śraddhā Kāmāyanī 10.151.

The three entities *Dakṣiṇā, Vāc*, and *Śraddhā* are of great importance for the performance of the ritual (and the ideology underlying it), but they certainly are mere conceptions and abstractions.

Dakṣiṇā, the "counter gift", given to the priests after the performance of a sacrifice.[8] Vāc is the sacred, well formulated speech of Ṛgvedic Ṛṣis. It enables the composition of magically effective hymns, telling the (mythological) truth and pleasing the gods (as well as learned listeners). Without its recitation ritual is impossible. Finally, Śraddhā 'trust, belief" is an ancient Indo-European concept (cf. Latin *crēdō*) that underlies all ritual. Without the belief in its efficacy,[9] ritual is virtually impossible and has none of the desired results. All three terms are underlying features of the all-important Ṛgvedic and later ritual -- well worth of detailed investigation-- but they certainly are not female humans and cannot compose hymns, even if Vāc does "speak" all of the time.

Finally, even a fervent feminist would think twice of including a ritual spoon (*juhū*) as an authoress, such as Juhū Brahmajayā (10.109). The hymn deals with the restitution of the wife of a Brahmin, just as King Soma once returned the wife of a Brahmin, apparently Bṛhaspati's wife (verse 5).[10] Gods, men, chieftains should return the wife of the Brahmin, otherwise even "highest heaven" would turn to disorder (verse 4). A woman's voice is not heard here at all.

The Anukramaṇī had no such compunction, and made the supposed author of RV 10.109, the ritual butter spoon (*juhū)* the wife of the (son[11] of) the then still non-existent, non-Ṛgvedic[12] god Brahman, Juhū Brahmajāyā. A ghee spoon, a word of feminine gender, is indeed mentioned in stanza 5. But that stanza just says that

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8 See J. C. Heesterman, Reflexions on the significance of the Dakṣiṇā, IIJ 3, 1959, 241-58.

9 H.-W. Köhler, 1973. *Śrad-dhā-* in der vedischen und altbuddhistischen Literatur. Ed. K. L. Janert. Wiesbaden. [Diss. 1948]; Witzel, Macrocosm, Mesocosm, and Microcosm. The persistant nature of 'Hindu' beliefs and symbolical forms. in S. Mittal (ed.), *IJHS Symposium on Robert Levy's MESOCOSM, International Journal of Hindu Studies,* 1.3 Dec. 1998, 501-53.

10 All of this may be a play on *bráhman/brahmán* "poem/poet" and on poetry, "the innocent cow, (*aghnyā*)" "as the "wife" of a *brahmán.* (Note the role of the poets' "girl friend", Uṣas). Brahmaṇas-pati "husband/lord of *bráhman*" is the primordial poet, see H.-P. Schmidt, *Bṛhaspati und Indra.* Wiesbaden. 1968

11 The Anukramaṇī has Ūrdhvanābhan, son of Brahman, or the wife of Brahman.

12 Brahman, whether neuter or masculine, is only a deity of the Upaniṣadic age; this is another indication of the late Vedic age of the composition of the Anukramaṇī.

the gods got back their spoon (just as Bṛhaspati his wife). At best, this deals with a "fictitious" woman, derived from the wording of the stanza in question. If might have been better to have made the wife of Bṛhaspati the author of the hymn. She can at least speak...

$ 3. REAL WOMEN?

That leaves a number potential *real* women authors of the Ṛgvedic period: Apāla Ātreyī 8.91, Godhā 10.134.6b, 7, Ghoṣā Kākṣīvatī 10.39.40, Romaśā 1.126.7, Lopāmudrā 1.179.1-2, Viśvavārā Ātreyī 5.28, Śacī Paulomī 10.159, Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī 8.1.34.

However, quite a number of these remaining women are mere interlocutors in hymns that are either dialogues or deal with other subjects.

$ 3.a. INTERLOCUTORS

Romaśā (1.126.7), the "hairy one", occurs in a standard *dānastuti* hymn, in which the poet Kakṣīvat (mentioned by name in the hymn, verse 3) thanks the otherwise unknown[13] "king" Svanaya Bhāvya for a great *dakṣinā* that he received at the end of a Soma Sattra ritual. This included a hundred pieces of gold, a hundred horses, a hundred cows, and in addition, all meant for his relatives, a herd of 1060 heads of cattle, 3 chariots and 8 cows ---- but also, for himself, ten chariots "with young women" (verse 3b *vadhūmanto daśa rathāso asthuḥ*).

This is the clue of the hymn, for in verses 6-7 we find a dialogue of such a female house slave and the poet; it is phrased in a rather erotic, lascivious tone:

> "She who is held fast, embraced firmly, squirts(?) like a female mongoose; she who clings on, the one to be enjoyed, gives me a hundred ejaculations."[14]

and the women answers:

> "Grab me here and there, don't think of me as one of (only) little (pubic hair). I am completely hairy like a little sheep of the Gandhāri (tribe)."[15]

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[13] Except for Svanaya Bhāvayavya, in ŚSS 16.1.5

[14] *1.126.6 āgadhitā parigadhitā yā kaśīkeva jaṅgahe /*
dadāti mahyaṃ yādurī yāśūnām bhojyā śatā //

[15] *1.126.7 upopa me parā mṛśa mā me dabhrāṇi manyathāḥ /*
sarvāham asmi romaśā gandhārīṇām ivāvikā // -- On the question of hair, see P. Olivelle @@

In sum, it is again the voice of the poet who puts verse 7 into the mouth of a women, -- remarkably well fit to his thinly veiled desires. For *dānastutis* often are more of wishful thinking ("100 horses"!) than the actual thanking a donor. The words in verse 7 may represent or resemble the words spoken by women of the period, but this is difficult to judge as we know little about sexual slang of the period.[16] Nevertheless it clearly is the poet who speaks throughout the whole hymn, assuming a female voice in verse 7 and the Anukramaṇī has reified her as an authoress, "the hairy one".

Lopāmudrā (1.179.1-2) appears in the famous dialogue of Agastya and Lopāmudrā -- and as a dialogue hymn it hardly fits the requirement of original women poetry. If so, one could also have added the even more famous dialogue of Purūravas and Urvaśī (10.95), which suffers from the same deficiencies. Here, it is even more clearly visible that Urvaśī speaks -- as a woman-- but that her speech is seen through the eyes of a man. This is the first divorce case in India. Urvaśī is good at retorting to Purūravas' complaints, claims and desires. In short, this is a real "*he said - she said*" story, where Urvaśī often twists the words of Purūravas in her favor.

The present hymn similarly purports to be the dialogue of husband and wife, apparently that of a distant, or rather an ascetic husband and his aging, eager wife who finally manages to seduce him. It is of course ridiculous to suppose that a Ṛgvedic poet/brahmin and his wife addressed each other with well formulated verses before, or during intercourse (vs. 4). In sum, the whole hymn again is one of an (unknown, very artful) male poet, who lets a woman speak in some of the stanzas.

The tone is sexual throughout, and offers several interesting similes and slang expressions.[17]

Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī (8.1.34) is the supposed author of one of the longer Indra hymns of the RV, a hymn actually attributed to the several Kaṇva poets (Medhyātithi, etc.). There is nothing unusual in this hymn; it has the regular praise of Indra. However, the last Pāda of the last stanza, vs. 34 , -- in a meter different from the rest of the long hymn-- is spoken by a women, introduced in the verse as the "woman Śaśvatī" (*nārī śāśvatī*).[18]

The context is rather unclear. Verse 33 speaks of the chieftain Āsaṅga, son of Playoga. Much later texts (śSS 16.11.17 and Bṛhaddevatā 6.41) connect this

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16 See however, Ivo Fišer, *Indian Erotics of the oldest period*, Praha 1966; Witzel, Saramā and the Paṇis. Origins of Prosimetric Exchange in Archaic India. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (eds.), *Prosimetrum*: *Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 1997, 397-409.

17 Such as "digging with spades" (vs. 6), etc.

18 8.001.34 *anv asya sthūraṃ dadṛśe purastād anastha ūrur avarambamāṇaḥ / śaśvatī nāry abhicakṣyāha subhadram arya bhojanam bibharṣi /* -- Of course *śaśvatī* can also be an adjective "the frequent, uninterrupted one".

chieftain with verse 34 and suggest that he regained his sexual functionality, thanks to the Ṛṣi Medhyātithi, the author of this hymn. Nothing of this tale is visible in the hymn. However, the intent of the appended stanza 34 is clear:

> "His stiff (member) has become visible again in front, that had hung down as a bone-less thigh. When the woman Śaśvatī saw this, she said: "O noble one (*arya*), you are carrying a joy-bringing enjoyer"

As in the other cases, a few words of sexual banter have been put into the mouth of a women, but she is not the composer of this stanza nor of the hymn question.

Godhā (10.134.6b, 7), literally 'cow sucker', "a female *waran* reptile " is the supposed author of two verses found in a regular hymn to Indra, ascribed by the Anukramaṇī to Māndhātṛ, the son of Yuvanāśva. Why stanzas 6b and 7 should be composed by a women is unclear. However 6b *(śaktim bibharṣi mantumaḥ*) has some assonance with 8.1.34d (*subharam arya bhojanam bibharṣi*) and *vayā* 'twig, branch of a lineage' in vs 6 as well as the refrain addressing a *janitrī* 'genetrix' may have been the reason that the Anukramaṇī, disregarding the context, saw a female speaker/author here.[19]

Note also that verse 6c is a refrain,[20] first found in stanza 1, which is a typical "copyright stamp" of Ṛgvedic authors. This well composed hymn by one poet would thus suddenly be interspersed by 6b : "Hold on to the twig/branch, like a ram with its forefoot, o bounteous one!" [21]

The following verse 7 does not help either, as no female voice is audible:

> "We do not fail in anything, o Gods, we do not try to hide anything, we want to follow your council. Here, we hold on to the sides, to the shoulders"[22]

At best, but quite unlikely so, verse 7 could be seen as sexual innuendo, pronounced in the plural, -- as women are sometimes apt to do in the Veda, when they want to hide behind the group of women belonging to a joint family.

$ 3.b OTHER WOMEN?

This leaves, finally, a few women that might stand the greatest chance of having been Ṛgvedic authors.

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[19] Another indication of the slipshod way the Anukramaṇī was composed.

[20] *devī janitry ajījanad bhadrā janitry ajījanat /*

[21] 10.134.06 *pūrveṇa maghavan padājo vayāṃ yathā yamaḥ*

[22] *10.134.07 nakir devā minīmasi nakir ā yopayāmasi mantraśrutyaṃ carāmasi / pakṣebhir apikakṣebhir atrābhi saṃ rabhāmahe //*

First, Viśvavārā Ātreyī (5.28), is the supposed author of a regular Agni hymn that invites all gods to the sacrifice. However, at best, stanza 1 can be seen to have a vague allusion to a female entity: a feminine *viśvāvārā* "she who is desired by all" is mentioned. However, this refers to the ritual spoon[23] (*juhū,* or a similar word), a grammatical feminine, and not to any real woman. This then is, again, a typical case of spinning off a name from the wording of a hymn. We have seen the divine *juhū* spoon, (see above *ad* 10.109).

Otherwise the hymn would just have been a regular Atri hymn (typical for the Atri authors of book 5). However, the idea of a female author *may* be relatively old, as JB 2.219 once mentions in passing that among the Atris "there are even female *mantra* authors" (*mantrakṛt),* unfortunately without specifying the stanza(s) intended.[24]

Then, we have a number of women looking for husbands,[25] as a young woman indeed should not remain unmarried.

A famous case is Apālā Ātreyī (8.91). This hymn is supposed to have been composed by a young women looking for a husband. However, the introductory verse clearly states that the rest of the hymn is a quotation introduced by the poet. It is thus unclear whether we have an original poem by a woman or, rather more likely, the words of a male poet put into the mouth of a young women. The hymn has been treated at length by H.-P. Schmidt (1987).

Another good candidate is Ghoṣā Kākṣīvatī (10.39.40). According to the Anukramaṇī, Ghoṣā was the daughter of the famous poet Kakṣīvant of RV book 1; she is supposed to have composed the three hymns 10.39-41. However, the hymn itself (RV 10.40.5) calls her *rājña {ūce} duhitā*, "the daughter of a chieftain" ("king"). She is mentioned twice as speaking in these hymns, and therefore the Anukramaṇī has made her the author, as it so often happened in this late Vedic text.

In 10.40. 5-12, the unmarried young woman Ghoṣā asks the Aśvins (who help in all sorts of calamities) for a husband. Again, the words of Ghoṣā are quoted, after a longer introduction, found in verses 1-5. In verse 5a we have : "Ghoṣā, the daughter of a chief circumabulating the Aśvin, and said: " I ask for you, o (two) men..." (*yuvāṃ ha ghoṣā pary aśvinā yatī rājña ūce duhitā pṛche vāṃ narā* /). The long speech (verses 5b-12) of Ghoṣā is of a rather erotic nature.[26]

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[23] *samiddho agnir divi śocir aśret pratyaṅṅ uṣasam urviyā vi bhāti / eti prācī viśvavārā namobhir devā… īḻānā haviṣā ghṛtācī //*

[24] Another case is mentioned in the late Vedic BĀU 6.4.17, with a prescription of how to obtain a female Ṛṣi in one's family.

[25] See H.-P. Schmidt, *Some women's rites and rights in the Veda*. Poona 1987.

[26] It is remarkable - and indicative of the mindset of the male RV authors that in their hymns women usually speak about sex, note the hymns involving Indrāṇī, Vṛṣākapāyī, Urvaśī and cf. detailed discussion in Witzel, Saramā and the Paṇis.

However, the real poet of this hymn reappear at the end, in verses 13-14, with a praise to the Aśvin.[27] It is clear hat the speech of Ghoṣā has been inserted into this hymn by another (male) author.)

$ 3c. AN EXCEPTIONAL WOMAN

Finally, we find an exceptional woman, Śacī Paulomī (10.159). The Anukramaṇī identifies Śacī as Indra's wife. However this is post-Ṛgvedic conceit, a "Homeric word," derived from Indra's fequent epithet *śacīpati* "lord of strength', and, Śacī is not mentioned at all in this hymn.[28]

This hymn comes much close to what we would like to see of a female author. However, it is found only in the appendix to the RV, in book 10. Indeed it is of Atharvan character and it composed in the much more popular Anuṣṭubh meter, a predecessor of the Śloka. Its character excludes it from the traditional, highly poetic, hieratic Ṛgvedic poetry. Rather, this hymn consists of straightforward sorcery. It is the self-praise, perhaps wishful in part, of the chief wife of a wealthy husband (a chieftain?) who has several wives (verse 4-6) and who also has a group of male followers (verse 6).

She has been so successful that she basks in her glory of having overcome all rivals -- just like her sons and daughters have overcome their own enemies (verse 3). She also " has overcome, as a victor, her husband (vs. 1))",[29] that "only to her mind the husband shall conform" (vs. 2)"[30] that she " can govern this man and his people (verse 6).[31]

All true words of an envious and powerful woman, not of at meek wife, as so often imagined in Indologcial/Indian writing. This rather is the voice of a Prabāvatīguptā of Gupta descent and queen of the late 4th c. Vākāṭaka kingdom of

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Origins of Prosimetric Exchange in Archaic India. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (eds.), *Prosimetrum*: *Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 1997, 397-409.

[27] Finally, the short hymn 10.41.1-3 is a normal Aśvin hymn of ritualistic nature. A woman's voice is not heard, just as it is not heard in 10.39.

[28] Actually verse 4 (referring to the female speaker's offerings to Indra) rather contradicts this. This is another instance of the ficticiousness of the Anukramaṇī accounts. -- Women in the Anukramaṇī thus are *not* a sign of *more* attention paid to women during the late Vedic period, but they are simple abstractions from the text of the Ṛgveda as many others referring to male authors. It is useful to extrapolate from this for the way the Anukramaṇī has been composed; this procedure is not much better as far as male authors are concerned: it includes such "authors" as Prajāpati, Tvaṣṭṛ, Indra, etc.

[29] *utāham asmi saṃjayā patyau me śloka uttamaḥ /*

[30] *mamed anu kratum patiḥ sehānāyā upācaret*

[31] *athāham asya vīrasya virājāni janasya ca*

the Northern Deccan, of a Diddā of 10th c. Kashmir, or of the Rāṇī of Jhānsi, that is speaking here.

Unfortunately for our purpose, this hymn is not one of "good" Ṛgvedic poetry, even if it tries starting Ṛgvedic fashion (*ud asau sūryo agād, ud ayam māmako bhagaḥ*) but mere sorcery stanzas.

$ 4. CONCLUSIONS

Where does all of this leave us? We can easily get rid of the hymns supposedly composed by goddesses, human ancestresses, mythical animals, and ritual abstractions or implements.

Among the real Ṛgvedic women speaking in the hymns, most are occasional interlocutors in dialogue hymns or in other poems composed by male poets. Only a few women remain as candidates for authorship. However, even among these, Viśvavārā Ātreyī (5.28) is spun off a grammatically female word occurring in the hymn, and among the two women looking for husbands, Apālā Ātreyī's (8.91) speech is a quotation made by the unknown, presumable male author, and Ghoṣā Kākṣīvatī 10.39.40, too, is presented just as speaking some stanzas -- composed by the author of this hymn.

In short, that leaves us with Śacī Paulomī 10.159. It is, however, rather ironical that the only time a women speaks up by herself and for herself, in all of the RV, this is a hymn of post-RV, Atharvavedic character. And even here we cannot be sure that it actually was composed by a woman, and not by a man speaking with the voice of a women. There is really no way to discern this, as we do not have reliable accounts of the authors of hymns, as long as they *do not mention themselves* -- and in the RV the search for such self-referred female authors is negative.

The real question is of course why women were excluded from traditional poetic formulation and from the ranks of traditional, bard-like Ṛgvedic poets.

The answer is not be difficult to find. Poets traditionally were male bards, not female "shamans" of various stripes. In other words, in the patriarchal society of the Vedic tribes, the Indo-Aryans, and the preceding Indo-Iranians and Indo-Europeans creating heroic and hieratic poetry was a male business.

Wherever we look, we cannot find female authors, such as the much later Sappho in Greece. In India, we have to wait similarly long, until the Buddhist canon and the Epics.

This does not mean, of course, that women did not compose poems (of whatever nature) during the (Ṛg)Vedic period, but it was not regarded important enough to be preserved, and we cannot say anything about it, except to speculate about its very existence, and to extrapolate its form from the male perception of female speech presented in the extracts given above.

The result for the RV thus is entirely negative, and the other Samhitās agree (which cannot be explained here, for lack of time). We simply do not have women's

poetry until the Therīgāthā of the Pāli canon and the supposed speeches of women in Mbh. -- of course again composed by male bards.[32]

It is however useful to take a brief look at the two other famous women in the Veda,[33] the Upaniṣadic Maitreyī and the formidable Gārgī Vācaknāvī of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2 and 3. Their role is usually overstated. As I have stressed elsewhere, it should be noted that women -- just like Kṣatriyas and kings, or even the son of a god, Bhṛgu, -- are inserted into such dialogues at critical points or when a special, new proposition has to be made as to draw attention to its unusual character.

Patriotic and nationalistic Indian writers of the time of the independence struggle badly wanted to see democracy and equality of men and women in the ancient texts, even or especially so in the Vedas. However, Vedic equality of women is as elusive[34] as democracy in the so-called "republics", rather oligarchies, of the Panjab and the Northeast (Bihar's Vajji confederation, etc.).

This, by now rather dated rewriting of history should finally be thrown of literary history. As could again be seen here, the Indians of today and their imagination of the past are different from those of 1000 BCE, and it is time to recognize this and describe the ancient period properly -- instead of constantly imagining a golden past that never existed.

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Appendix: A list of "female authors" in the RV

('family names' are given in brackets)

Aditi
Apāla Ātreyī
[Āṅgirasī =Śaśvatī
[Ātreyī =Apāla, Viśvavāra
Indrāṇī
Urvaśī
[Kakṣīvatī = Ghoṣā
[Kaśyapī = Śikhaṇ®inī

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32 See R. Soehnen, *Untersuchungen zur Komposition von Reden und Gesprächen im Rāmāyaṇa.* Reinbek: Wezler Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik : *Monographie 6*

33 Cf. C. Bader, *Women in ancient India*. K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. 1925) = Martin, M.E.R.; (transl.).

34 See Witzel, No Satī, Little Dowry: The lot of Women in the Vedic Period. IJTS 2-4 (Dec. 1996) http://www.asiatica.org/publications/jsaws/

Godhā
Ghoṣā Kākṣīvatī
Juhū Brahmajayā
Dakṣiṇā Prājāpatyā
[Dākṣāyaṇī = Aditi
[Devaśunī = Saramā
[Paulomī = Śacī
[Prājāpatyā = Dakṣiṇā
[Brahmajāyā = Juhu
[Bhāradvājī = Rātrī
Yamī
Yamī Vaivasvatī
Romaśā
Lopāmudrā
Vāc Āmbhṛṇī
Viśvavāra Ātreyī
[Vaivasvatī = Yamī
Śacī Paulomī
Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī
Śraddhā Kāmāyanī
Saramā Devaśunī
Sārparājñī
Sūryā Sāvitrī

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