



## Moral Values as revealed in the *R̥gveda* : its relevance in modern perspective

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### Abstract

The *R̥gveda* is the store-house of all knowledge. It is a textbook of morals. The hymns of the *R̥gveda* may broadly be divided into three classes-religious, philosophical and secular. Among the secular hymns, there are some instances of didactic poetry in which moral ideas are presented in the form of verses. The IX. 112, X.34, X.71 and X.117 are the four hymns of the *R̥gveda* where the moral values are mainly revealed. These hymns represent the storehouse of our ancient value systems, talk about the following key values as very important : (a) *Satyam* - Truth; (b) *Tapa* - Austerity; (c) *Dama* - Sense control; (d) *Sama* - Tranquillity of mind; (e) *Dharma* - Righteousness; (f) *Dānam* - Charity; (g) *Dayā* - Mercy; and (h) *Nyāsa*- Renunciation. There are verses to encourage and motivate us to a moral life. There is a lot to learn from our ancient Indian wisdom, which would be of immense help in the modern times where there is a steep fall in the value system. Therefore, an attempt will be made here to highlight the moral values as revealed in the above mentioned hymns of the *R̥gveda*.

**Keywords:** *R̥gveda*, moral values, *R̥gveda* IX.112, X.34, X.71, X.117

### 1. Introduction

The *R̥gveda* is the oldest literary monument of the Indo-European language. It is the source book of all knowledge. The hymns of the *R̥gveda*, on the basis of the common features, may broadly be divided into three classes – religious, philosophical and secular. The religious hymns are those which are addressed to divinities, containing a eulogy of them and requests for the granting of riches, progeny, cattle and so on.<sup>1</sup> In the *R̥gveda-Samhitā* there are a number of hymns which are cosmogonic in nature and full of philosophical ideas and thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Philosophical hymns which may also be called cosmogonic, are those which refer frequently to such questions as who I am, whence I come, what is the prime cause of the universe and so on. By the word secular, those hymns are meant which are not particularly addressed to divinities, but

are concerned with social customs, moral questions, riddles etc. Among the secular hymns there are some instances of didactic poetry in which moral values are presented in the form of verses. These are *R̥gveda* IX.112, X. 34, X.117 and X.71. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the moral values found mainly in the above mentioned hymns.

### 2. Analysis

#### 2.1. *R̥gveda* X.34

The *R̥gveda* X.34 is the most beautiful among the secular poems of the *R̥gveda-Samhitā*. This hymn is the monologue of a repentant sinner who has destroyed his happy life by his irresistible love for gambling. In *R̥gveda* X.34, the harmfulness of gambling is elaborately described through the experiences of a gambler in the following way-

The dice (*akṣa*) which were made of the nut of the great *Vibhīdaka* tree delight the gambler as they continue to roll upon the dice-board. The exciting dice seem to him like a draught of the soma-plant grown on mount *Mujavati*. It is mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* thus- “*prāvepā mā brhato mādayanti pravāteya iriṇe varvrtānāḥ/ somasyeva maujavatasya bhakṣo vibhī dako jāghrīvirmahyamachān*”//<sup>3</sup>

The gambler’s wife was kind to him and to his friends; she never quarreled with him nor despised him. But the gambler for the sake of the partial dice has driven away his devoted wife from home. So the Vedic seer says -

“*na mā mimetha na jihīla eṣā sivā sakhibhya uta mahyamā sīt/ akṣasyā hamekaparasya hetoranuvratāmapa jāyāmarodham*”//<sup>4</sup>

The gambler’s mother-in law hates him, his wife discards him. In his distress he finds no comforter. So it is mentioned thus – “*dveṣti śvaśrurapa jāyā ruṇaddhi na nāthito vindatimarḍitāram*”//<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, all the family members refuse to know the gambler.<sup>6</sup> When the gambler resolves not to be tormented by them because he is abandoned by his friends who withdraw from him, yet as soon as the brown dice are thrown, make a rattling sound he hastens to their meeting like a woman to her lover. In the *Ṛgveda* it is mentioned thus-

“*yadādīdhye na daviṣāṅybhīḥ parāyadbhyo ava hīyesakhibhyaḥ/ nyuptāsca babhravo vā-camakratanemideṣām niṣḅṛtam jāriṇiva*”//<sup>7</sup>

Desiring money, the indebted gambler approaches with trepidation the houses of other people at night.<sup>8</sup> At last the gambler wants to give up gambling and live for his family.<sup>9</sup>

Thus the above mentioned hymn describes that the gambler is always neglected by his family members. The family has to live unhappily for the deviant tendency of the gambler. The Vedic seers give a solution to come out from the addiction of gambling. They opined to made people agriculture-oriented to keep them aloof from the terrible effect of gambling as agriculture was the main source of earning livelihood during the Vedic period. It is said in the *Ṛgveda*-

“*akṣairmā divyaḥ kṛṣimītkṛṣasva vittī ramasava bahu manyamānaḥ/ tatra gāvaḥ kitava tatra jāyā tanme vi caṣṭe savitāymaryaḥ*”//<sup>10</sup>

It was the moral obligation to every man who earned livelihood by adapting honest means thereby prosperity occurs not only in the family but in the society as a whole. This moral thought helps not only an individual but also the family and the society to grow prosperity.

## 2.2. *Ṛgveda* X.117

The *Ṛgveda* X. 117 underlines the necessity of social obligation, focusing attention on hunger. The idea sought to be stressed is that gifts ultimately make the donor affluent. A person who does not share his food with those that need it enjoys it in vain. One who enjoys for himself commits a sin. This hymn has, thus, a message of philanthropy and humanity.

In the very first verse of this hymn it is mentioned that the hunger should not be taken as a punishment for the poor and the hungry and the poor should not be left to die. It is said thus-

“*na vā o devāḥ kṣudhamidvadham dadurutā- śitamupa gacchanti mṛtyavaḥ/ uto rayiḥ pṛṇato nopa dasyatyutāpṛṇan marḍitāram na vindate*”//<sup>11</sup>

Bounteous, indeed, is he who gives unto the feeble beggar who comes to him,<sup>12</sup> because, as the poet adjures: “Let the rich satisfy the poor implorer, and bend his eye upon a longer path way. Riches come now to one, now to another and like the wheels of cars are ever rolling”.<sup>13</sup> Fruitless is the labor to win food of a man who is not inclined to give. To speak the truth, that food shall be his ruin. Neither does he enrich a patron nor a friend. He who eats alone bears misfortunes alone.<sup>14</sup>

Thus this hymn carries a great message of humanity. We should always share our wealth or food with others, especially with the needy.

## 2.3. *Ṛgveda* X.71

The entire hymn *Ṛgveda* X .71 is in praise of wise speech. The subject-matter of this hymn is ‘the glorification of knowledge.’ The wise ones mentally fashion and purify the speech like men cleaning corn-flour in a cribble. In their speech the auspicious goddess of wealth is hidden. So it is said-

“*saktumiva titaunā punanto yatra dhīrā mamasā vā camakrata/ atrā sakhāyaḥ sakhyaṇi jānate bhadrāiṣām lakṣmīrnihitādhi vāci*”//<sup>15</sup>

To the poet wise speech reveals her beauty as does a loving well-dressed bride to her spouse.<sup>16</sup>

In the society of the scholars, the wise person is honoured by all. None can impel him in discussions. The speech without meaning is compared with a cow yielding no milk.<sup>17</sup>

Thus through this hymn, the seer has eulogized that knowledge which leads to the attainment of the highest goal in human life.

#### 2.4. *Ṛgveda* IX.112

This hymn consisting only of four stanzas describes in a moralizing strain of mild humour how men follow after grain in various ways. In this hymn we have the reference to the people following the different professions, e.g. it is said- "I am a poet, my father is a physician and my mother grinds corn."<sup>18</sup> We find mention of the black-smith who makes not only furniture but also the chariots for use both for war and peace.<sup>19</sup> Having various occupations, and

seeking riches, the people of *Ṛgvedic* age remained in peace and harmony in the family<sup>20</sup>. All works appeared to be equal for them. So though we have various occupations in our family we should do our duties peacefully and always try to maintain harmony and peace in the family. This thought can lead us to the peaceful world.

#### 3. Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it can be concluded that the above mentioned hymns of the *Ṛgveda* have high moral values which are very important in our day to day life. They give emphasis on humanitarian approach, helping attitude, friendly nature, full interest in profession, sympathy, respect for knowledge etc. Such virtues, if practiced by individuals, can bring about social harmony.

#### Endnotes

1. *Yāska* has stated that the Mantras of the *Ṛgveda* are employed by their seers for material gain. Cf. *yatkā ma ṛṣṛyasyām devatāmārthapatyamicchan stutiṃ prayunkte tad daivataḥ sa manthro bhavati-Nirukta.* 7.1
2. *Ṛgveda.* X.90, X.121, X.125, X.129. etc.
3. *Ibid.* X.34.1
4. *Ibid.* X.34.2
5. *Ibid.* X.34.3
6. Cf. *pitā mātā bhrātara enamāhurna jānīmo nayatā baddhametam/Ṛgveda.* X.34.4
7. *Ṛgveda.* X.34.5
8. Cf. *ṛṇāvā bibhyad dhanamichamāno anyesāmastamupanaktameti//Ṛgveda.* X.34.10
9. Cf. *ataḥ param dhanāni akṣārthamaham na sampādayāmi/Sāyaṇa* on *Ṛgveda.* X.34.12
10. *Ṛgveda.* X.34.13
11. *Ibid.* X.117.1
12. *Ibid.* X.117.3
13. Cf. *pṛṇīyādinnādhamānāya tavyān drāghīyāmsamanu pasyēt panthām/ o hi vartante rathyeva cahrā nyamenyamupa tiṣṭhanta rāyah// Ṛgveda.* X.117.5
14. *Ṛgveda.* X.117.6
15. *Ibid.* X.71.2
16. *Ibid.* X.71.4
17. *Ibid.* X.71.5
18. *Ibid.* IX.112.3
19. *Ibid.* IX.112.2
20. *Ibid.* IX.112.3

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