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## Social Order and Ethical Responsibility in the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*

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### Abstract

The *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*, one of the principal texts of the Śukla Yajurveda, contains significant insights into the ethical and social ideals of Vedic society. While primarily associated with sacrificial rituals, the text also presents a comprehensive framework of social ethics based on duty, harmony, cooperation, and moral responsibility. This study examines the concept of social ethics in the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* with particular reference to *varṇa*, family, marriage, women, and education. The text portrays *varṇa* as a system of social responsibility in which each group contributes to the maintenance of social order and collective welfare. It emphasizes the family as the primary institution for ethical learning and regards marriage as a sacred partnership founded on mutual trust and shared duties. The study further highlights the honoured position of women in family and religious life, recognizing their role in nurturing moral and social values. In addition, the ideals of education and *Brahmacarya* are examined as means of cultivating discipline, self-control, and responsible citizenship. Through an analysis of the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the paper demonstrates that social ethics in the Vedic tradition were deeply rooted in moral conduct, social cooperation, and the pursuit of collective well-being.

**Keywords:** *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*, Social Ethics, *Varṇa*, Family, Marriage, Women, *Brahmacarya*, Moral Discipline.

### Introduction

The *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā*, the principal *Saṃhitā* of the Śukla Yajurveda, is an important source for understanding the ethical and social ideals of Vedic life. Though primarily known as a ritual text, it also contains valuable references to the moral structure of society, the duties of different social groups, the place of family and marriage, and the discipline of education. Its mantras do not merely accompany sacrifice; they also reflect a vision of human life ordered by duty, harmony, and responsible conduct.

The social ethics of the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* may be understood through its concern for the proper functioning of society. It presents the social order as one sustained by the mutual roles of *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Śūdra*, each contributing to collective life in a distinct way. At the same time, it gives importance to the household as the centre of social stability, where marriage, family responsibilities, and the role of women shape moral life. The text also reflects the value of discipline, learning, and self-control through the ideal of education and *Brahmacarya*. Thus, the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* offers a meaningful picture of social ethics rooted in duty, order, cooperation, and the moral regulation of life.

### 1. *Varṇa* and Social Responsibility

The Śukla Yajurvedic tradition, as reflected in the *Saṃhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa* literature, presents the concept of *varṇa* not merely as a social classification but as a structured framework of social responsibility (dharma) that sustains the moral and functional order

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of society. The text clearly associates each *varṇa* with specific duties that contribute to collective welfare and cosmic balance. In the Śukla Yajurveda *Samhitā*, the four *varṇas* are created with distinct responsibilities: a *Brāhmaṇa* for the propagation of Vedic knowledge, a *Kṣatriya* for the protection of the kingdom, a *Vaiśya* for agriculture and cattle rearing, and a *Śūdra* for service and labour. <sup>1</sup> This distribution of duties indicates that social structure was grounded in functional ethics rather than mere hierarchy.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* further reinforces this principle by defining *varṇas* in relation to cosmic and ritual order, stating that the *Brāhmaṇa*, *Rājanya*, *Vaiśya*, and *Śūdra* collectively sustain society. <sup>2</sup> Each group is assigned a moral role, and the stability of society depends upon their harmonious cooperation. The *Brāhmaṇa* is entrusted with spiritual authority and knowledge, the *Kṣatriya* with governance and protection, the *Vaiśya* with economic support, and the *Śūdra* with service-oriented functions.

Importantly, the text emphasizes interdependence rather than isolation. The Śukla Yajurveda invokes blessings and goodwill for all *varṇas* alike, indicating an ethical vision of social unity. <sup>3</sup> Thus, *varṇa* in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* is fundamentally a system of shared moral responsibility, where each role contributes to the maintenance of *ṛta* (cosmic order) and the welfare of society as a whole.

## 2. Family as the Basis of Social Life

In the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*, the family is regarded as the foundation of social life and moral development. It is within the family that individuals first learn ethical values such as truthfulness, respect, cooperation, responsibility, and affection. These values shape human character and prepare individuals to participate in society in a morally responsible manner. Thus, the family functions as the primary institution for ethical education and socialization.

The *Samhitā* emphasizes the importance of harmony and cooperation between husband and wife. Both are encouraged to perform household and religious duties together, reflecting the ideal of shared responsibility. Such cooperation promotes peace, stability, and ethical living within the family and serves as a model for social harmony. <sup>4</sup> The text suggests that family life prospers when relationships are based on mutual trust, understanding, and support.

The ethical duties emphasized within the family include mutual respect among family members, affection, responsibility, and commitment to collective welfare. The nurturing role of the mother is particularly valued and is symbolically compared with the sustaining nature of the earth. <sup>5</sup> Through these relationships, the family becomes a place where moral virtues are practiced in daily life.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* further highlights the significance of family by stating that a person attains completeness through marriage and family life. <sup>6</sup> Therefore,

the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* presents the family not merely as a domestic institution but as the basis of social ethics, where moral character is developed and social harmony is maintained.

## 3. Marriage as a Sacred Social Institution

In the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*, marriage is regarded as a sacred social institution that plays a vital role in maintaining social order and ethical life. It is not viewed merely as a personal relationship between a man and a woman but as a moral and religious partnership founded upon duty, cooperation, and mutual commitment. Through marriage, individuals assume responsibilities toward their family and society, thereby contributing to social stability and collective welfare.

The *Samhitā* emphasizes that husband and wife should jointly perform household and religious duties, reflecting the ideal of cooperation and shared responsibility. <sup>7</sup> Such partnership is considered essential for maintaining harmony within the family and promoting ethical conduct in society. The text also highlights the importance of truthfulness and faithfulness in married life, suggesting that a strong marital bond must be based on sincerity, trust, and moral commitment. <sup>8</sup>

The significance of marriage is further reinforced in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, which states that an unmarried person is not qualified to perform sacrificial duties, thereby emphasizing the social and religious importance of marriage. <sup>9</sup> The complementary nature of the marital relationship is beautifully expressed through the symbolism that the husband is mind (*manas*) and the wife is speech (*vāc*), indicating that both are essential partners in the fulfilment of household and social responsibilities. <sup>10</sup> Thus, the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* presents marriage as a sacred institution that fosters ethical values, family harmony, and social cohesion. Through mutual trust, cooperation, and commitment, marriage becomes an important pillar of social ethics.

## 4. Women in Vedic Social Ethics

The *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* presents women as important participants in family, religious, and social life. Women are not portrayed merely as dependents within the household but as essential contributors to social harmony and ethical living. Through their roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers, they help preserve moral values and strengthen the social fabric of the community.

The *Samhitā* emphasizes the cooperative relationship between husband and wife, indicating that domestic and religious duties should be performed jointly. <sup>11</sup> Such cooperation reflects the ethical ideals of mutual respect, partnership, and shared responsibility. Women are also highly valued for their nurturing role as mothers. The text compares the protective and life-sustaining nature of the mother to that of the earth, thereby highlighting motherhood as a sacred social responsibility. <sup>12</sup>

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* further recognizes the dignity and importance of women by describing them as embodiments of prosperity (śrī) and explicitly prohibiting violence against them.<sup>13</sup> It also portrays the relationship between husband and wife as complementary and inseparable, symbolically identifying the husband with mind (manas) and the wife with speech (vāc).<sup>14</sup> This imagery suggests that both are necessary for the fulfilment of social and religious life.

Thus, the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* accord women an honored place within society. Through their participation in family life, nurturing responsibilities, and religious activities, women contribute significantly to the development and preservation of social ethics.

### 5. Education, *Brahmacarya*, and Moral Discipline

The *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* regards education as an essential means for the development of moral character, spiritual wisdom, and social responsibility. The aim of education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but the cultivation of discipline, self-control, truthfulness, and ethical conduct. Through education, individuals are prepared to fulfil their duties towards society and contribute to the maintenance of social order.

A significant aspect of Vedic education is *Brahmacarya*, the disciplined life of a student devoted to learning and self-development. The student was expected to live under the guidance of the teacher, observe self-restraint, and dedicate himself to the study of sacred knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The teacher played a crucial role in shaping the physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth of the student, thereby transmitting not only knowledge but also ethical values.<sup>16</sup>

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes student life as a prolonged sacrifice (dīrghasatra), emphasizing dedication, discipline, and commitment to learning.<sup>17</sup> It also prescribes daily duties such as tending the teacher's sacred fire and serving the preceptor, which cultivated humility, obedience, and responsibility.<sup>18</sup> The close relationship between teacher and student was founded on mutual respect and the sincere pursuit of knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* present education and *Brahmacarya* as important instruments of moral discipline. By fostering self-control, respect for learning, and ethical conduct, they contribute significantly to the development of social ethics and responsible citizenship.

### Conclusion

The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* presents a comprehensive vision of social ethics rooted in duty, cooperation, and moral responsibility. Its teachings indicate that social harmony is sustained through the proper fulfilment of individual and collective obligations. Concepts regarding *varṇa*, family, marriage, the role of women, and education are integrated

into a broad ethical framework aimed at maintaining social order and collective well-being. The text emphasizes that every member of society plays a meaningful role in upholding harmony and fulfilling the principles of *ṛta* (cosmic order). Family and marriage are regarded as the foundation of an ethical life, while women are recognized as essential contributors to moral and social stability. Furthermore, the ideals of education and *Brahmacarya* highlight the importance of discipline, self-control, and character building. Thus, the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* offers enduring ethical values that continue to provide guidance for responsible social living and human welfare.

### Reference

1. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* XXX.5.
2. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* V.5.4.9.
3. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* XVIII.48.
4. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* II.27.
5. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* II.10.
6. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* II.6.2.14.
7. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* VIII.32; XI.50.
8. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* VIII.5.
9. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* V.1.6.10.
10. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XII.8.2.6.
11. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* II.27; VIII.32.
12. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* II.10.
13. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* II.4.3.2: “strī vā eṣā yat śrīḥ”.
14. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XII.8.2.6.
15. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* III.7.6.3.
16. *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* II.33.
17. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* II.3.3.2: “dīrghasatram vā eṣa upaiti yo *Brahmacaryam* upaiti.”
18. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XI.5.4.5; XI.3.3.1.
19. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XI.5.4.14.

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