



A Note on *R̥gveda* X.34 in the modern perspective

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Abstract

Religious authorities generally disapprove of Gambling. Gambling is the betting of money or something of material value on an event with an unsure result with the main target of winning additional money or material goods. Normally, the result of the bet is clearly to be seen within a short period. It has often been seen as having social consequences. For these social and religious reasons, most legal jurisdictions limit Gambling. But it increases in our present society day by day. The Vedic seers also feel the harmfulness of the Gambling and stated it in the thirty fourth hymn of the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gveda*. This hymn (X.34) brings out the picture of a person who because of his addiction of dice play is completely ruined but can't resist the temptation even when he is lent in a measurable condition. It is also elaborated (*itihāsapurāṇābhyām vedaṃ samupabīṇhayet*) in the great epic *Mahābhārata* (*Dyutaparva*, 65th chapter, sub parva of *Sabhāparva*) through the dice game between Duryodhana's uncle *Sakuni* (Kauravas) and *Yudhiṣṭhira* (Pandavas). *Yudhiṣṭhira* loses all his wealth in the bet, then his kingdom. He then even gambles his brothers, himself, and finally his wife *Draupadī* into servitude. At last the Pandavas are required to go into exile for 12 years, and in the 13th year must remain hidden. If discovered by the Kauravas, they will be forced into exile for another 12 years. An attempt has been made here to highlight the mal practices like gambling in the present day society.

Keywords : Gambling, *R̥gveda*, *R̥gveda*. X.34

1. Introduction

The hymns of the *R̥gveda* are considered the oldest and most important of the Indian literature. These hymns concern mostly the worship of gods and goddesses which are personifications of the powers of nature. With these worships, secular matters are also concerned. The earliest thoughts of India are directly revealed in these secular hymns. The numbers of secular hymns are small, but many of them are of particular interest. Some of them are didactic in nature. There are four didactic hymns¹ in the *R̥gveda*. The X.34² is one of the most noteworthy of them. It is a lament of a gambler, who unable to resist the attraction of the dice, regrets the ruin he has brought on

himself and his family. The present hymn shows that what was then thought of Gambling.

Religious authorities generally disapprove of Gambling. In the *Manusmṛiti*, it is stated as crime³. Gambling is the betting of money or something of material value on an event with an unsure result with the main target of winning additional money or material goods. Normally, the result of the bet is clearly to be seen within a short period. It has often been seen as having social consequences. For these social and religious reasons, most legal jurisdictions limit Gambling. In India also, Gambling is heavily restricted. The Public Gambling Act⁴ of India prohibits running or being in charge of a public gaming house. The penalty

for breaking this law is a fine of ₹ 200 or imprisonment of up to 3 months. Additionally, this Act prohibits visiting gambling houses. A fine of ₹ 100 or imprisonment of up to one month is the penalty. In spite of legal limitations, Gambling increases in our present society day by day. An attempt has been made here to highlight the mal practices like gambling in our society.

2. Analysis

The Vedic seers feel the harmfulness of the Gambling for society and stated this thought in the *R̥gveda* X.34 through the experiences of a gambler. The experiences of the gambler are stated in the following :

2.1. The tumbling airborne products 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 growing on mount *Mujavati*. It is said in the *R̥gveda*.....

*prāvepā mā bṛhato mādayanti pravāteja iriṇe
varvṛtānāḥ /
somasyeva maujavatasya bhakṣo vibhīdako
jāghṛvirmahyamachān //⁵*

This statement is also mentioned in the *Nirukta*⁶ ‘*somasyeva maujavatasya bhakṣo maujavato mujavati jāto mujavān parvato muñjavān muñjo vimucyate*’ *iti* /

2.2. The gambler’s wife never quarreled with him nor despised him; she was kind to him and to his friends. But he for the sake of the partial dice has rejected his devoted wife. In the *R̥gveda* it is said....

*na mā mimetha na jihīla eṣā śivā sakhibhya uta
mahyamāsīt /
akṣasyāhamekaparasya hetoranuvratāmapa
jāyāmarodham //⁷*

2.3. The gambler’s mother-in-law hates him, his wife discards him. In his need he finds no comforter. It is mentioned in the *R̥gveda*.....
*dveṣṭi śvaśrūrāpa jāyā ruṇaddhi na nāhito
vindatemaṛḍitāram //⁸*. The family members also

refuse to know the gambler⁹. 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 *R̥gveda* it is mentioned.....

*yadādīdhye na daviṣānyebhiḥ parāyadbhyo ava
hīyesakhibhyaḥ /
nyuptāśca babhravo vācamakratanemīdeṣām
niṣkṛtam jāriṇīva //¹⁰*

2.4. The akṣas bow not before the wrath of the fiercest¹¹. The king himself makes obeisance to them. These celestial coals when thrown on the dice-board scorch the heart of the gambler though cold themselves. It is said in the *R̥gveda*.....

*divyā aṅghārā iriṇe nyuptāḥ śūāḥ santo
hṛdayaṃnirdahanti //¹²*

2.5 In debt and seeking after money the gambler approaches with trepidation the houses of other people at night¹³. It vexes the gambler to see his own wife and then to observe the wives and happy homes of others. In the *R̥gveda*, it is said....
*‘striyaṃ dṛṣṭvāya kitavaṃ tatāpānyeṣām
jāyāmsukṛtam ca yonim’¹⁴*. At last the gambler makes a decision not to spend money any more for gambling¹⁵.

From the above experiences of the gambler we can say that he is hated by his wife, mother in law, parents, brothers and sisters. Moreover he is always neglected by every member of the family concerned. He never hesitates to take the act of stealing for gambling. He fails to lead a normal life. The family has to live unhappily for the deviant tendency of the gambler. Indirectly there will be social chaos in the changing society. Therefore, the gambling is regarded as very harmful not only for a gambler but also for the family and the society.

This Vedic thought is also elaborated in the *Mahābhārata*¹⁶ through the dice game between Duryodhana’s uncle Śakuni (Kauravas) and Yudhiṣṭhira (Pāṇdavas). *Yudhiṣṭhira* loses all his wealth in the bet, then his kingdom¹⁷. He then

even gambles his brothers¹⁸, himself¹⁹, and finally his wife Draupadī into servitude²⁰. At last the Pāṇdavas are required to go into exile for 12 years, and in the 13th year must remain hidden. If discovered by the Kauravas, they will be forced into exile for another 12 years. It was happen with the Pāṇdavas only for the addiction of gambling.

3. Conclusion

Man uses to gamble for various purposes. Some of them use to gamble for entertainment and some for earning livelihood. But the addiction of gambling has paralyzed one to all. 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 dīvyah kṛṣimikṛṣasva vitte ramaṣva
bahu manyamānaḥ /
tatra gāvaḥ kitava tatra jāyā tanme vi caṣṭe
savitāyamaṛyaḥ //*²¹

It was the moral obligation of every man who earned livelihood by adopting honest means thereby prosperity occurs not only in the family but in the society as a whole.

The harmfulness of the gambling have discussed in detail in the above as mentioned by the Vedic seers. Therefore, we should not select such a way to gain wealth for livelihood and for entertainment. This moral thought helps not only an individual but also the family and the society to grow prosperity.

Endnotes

1. The four didactic hymns of the *Ṛgveda* are IX.112, X.34, X.71 and X.117.
2. There are 14 verses in this hymn. All the verses are in *Triṣṭup* metre except the 7th verse. The 7th verse is in *Jagatī* metre.
3. Cf. *dyutaṃ samahryaṃ caiva yaḥ kuryātkārayet vā /
tānsarvānghāyedrājā srūdraṃ śca dvijaliṅgīnaḥ // Manusmṛiti IX. 224*
4. The Public Gambling Act of 1867
5. *Ṛgveda* X.34.1
6. Cf. *Nirukta* 9.8
7. *Ṛgveda* X.34.2
8. *Ibid* X.34.3
9. Cf. *pitā matā bhrātara enamāhurna jānīmo nayatā baddhametam / Ibid* X.34.4
10. Cf. *yadādīdhye na daviṣānyebhiḥ parāyadbhyo.ava hīyesakhibhyaḥ /
nyuptāśca babhravo vācamakratanemīdeṣāṃ niṣkṛtaṃ jāriṇīva // Ibid* X.34.5
11. Cf. *ughrasya cin manyave nā namante rājā cidebhyonama it kṛṇoti // Ibid* X.34.8
12. *Ibid* X.34.9
13. Cf. *ṛṇāvā bibhyad dhanamichamāno.anyeṣāmastamupanaktameti // Ibid* X.34.10
14. *Ibid* X.34.11
15. Cf. *ataḥ paraṃ dhanāni akṣārthamahaṃ na sampādayāmi /
Sāyaṇābhāṣya of Ibid* X.34.12
16. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva, 65th Chapter*

17. Cf. *ayutaṃ prayutaṃ caiva śaṅkuṃ padmaṃ tathārvudam /
kharvaṃ śaṅkhaṃ nikharvaṅca mahāpadmaṅca kotayaḥ //
madhyaṃ caiva parārdhaṅca saparaṃ cātra paṇyatām /
etanmama dhanaṃ rājaṃstena dīvyāmyahaṃ tvayā // Ibid. 65. 3-4*
18. Cf. *śyāmo yuvā lohitaḥśaḥ siṃhaskandho mahābhujah /
nakulo glaha evaiko vidhyetanmama taddhanam // Ibid. 65. 12*
*ayaṃ dharmān sahadevo anuśāsti loke hyasmin panditākhyāṃ gataśca /
anarhatā rājaputreṇa tena dīvyāmyahaṃ cāpriyavat priyeṇa // Ibid. 65. 15*
*yo naḥ saṃkhye nauriva pāraneta jeta ripuṇām rājaputrastarasvī /
anarhatā lokavīreṇa tena dīvyāmyahaṃ śakune phālgunena // Ibid. 65. 21*
*balena tulyo yasya pumān na vidyate gadābhṛtāmagrya ihārimardanaḥ /
anarhatā rājaputreṇa tena dīvyāmyahaṃ bhīmasenena rājan // Ibid. 65. 25*
19. Cf. *ahaṃ viśiṣṭaḥ sarveṣāṃ bhrātṛmām dayitastathā /
kuryyāmahaṃ jitaḥ karma svayamātmanyupaplute // Ibid. 65. 3-4*
20. Cf. *naiva hrasvā na mahatī na kṛṣṇā natirohiṇī /
nīlakuṅcitateśī ca tayā dīvyāmyahaṃ tvayā // Ibid. 65. 3-4*
21. *Ṛgveda X.34.13*

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