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The Poetesses of the Ṛgveda: Life and Vision

Guest Speaker: **Dr. Mau Das Gupta** (University of Calcutta)

February 27 || 10:00-12:00 hrs

Room 1.06 Nauklerstr. 35 ||

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/91283643022?pwd=PTWbo5hHrIRIqAiliAkrzag2NFeUXM.1>

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The Ṛgveda, the earliest extant text of the Indo-European world, is remarkable not only for its antiquity but also for the presence of distinctly female voices within its sacred corpus. Unlike most ancient religious traditions, it explicitly acknowledges women as composers of hymns. Traditional sources such as the Bṛhaddevatā and the Ārṣānukramaṇī name twenty-seven women seers (ṛṣikās), while four more can be identified from internal evidence. Of these, at least fourteen may be regarded as historical figures whose voices reflect lived experience.

The hymns of these ṛṣikās offer valuable insights into early Vedic society. They reveal women as socially active, intellectually engaged, and ritually competent participants, unburdened by the severe restrictions imposed in later periods. Their poetry expresses concerns that are deeply human—companionship, marriage, fertility, emotional fulfilment, and personal dignity.

Equally striking is the frankness with which some poetesses articulate desire, affection, and sensual longing. Their verses do not separate spirituality from lived reality; rather, they integrate ritual vision with personal experience. Through their hymns, the women seers of the Ṛgveda emerge as poets of insight and sensitivity, whose life-affirming vision enriches our understanding of early Indian thought and culture.

Mau Das Gupta is an Indologist specializing in the Vedas. After studying Sanskrit at the University of Calcutta, she earned her doctorate at Jadavpur University; her dissertation was published under the title *Women Seers of the Ṛgveda* (DK Printworld, 2017). She has received several awards, including the Eashan Scholarship and the University Gold Medal. In addition to publishing numerous research papers, she also works as a translator, e.g., of Anamdaser Puthi (Sahitya Akademi, 2012), and as an editor, e.g., of Bankim Rachanāvali (6 volumes, Government of West Bengal). Prof. Das Gupta is currently a professor and head of the Sanskrit department at the University of Calcutta.



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