

Education of Women in Early Vedic Period

Smriti

Masters of Arts, English, Department of English, Patna Women's College, Patna, Bihar

Received: 29 Aug 2023; Received in revised form: 01 Oct 2023; Accepted: 06 Oct 2023; Available online: 14 Oct 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— “Education in ancient India was free from any external control like that of the state or the government or any party politics. It was one of the king’s duties to see that the learned pundits pursued their studies and their duty of imparting knowledge without interference from any source whatever. So, education did not suffer from any communal interest or prejudices in India.” Said by P.N.Prabhu. In earlier times, Hindus considered education as a process of life. The education system for girls and women were favorable and available for them. In Rig Vedic Society, “child marriage did not exist” so the young girls were also able to study and education was given the utmost importance.

But with time, the education system has lost its essence and quality in and after the 21st century. With some physical training, sports has also been fully removed and knowledge is forced through books and indoor teaching. This has limited the analytically thinking capacity of the youth that would help one to be more active and alert. This research work will be introducing the major missing aspects of the previous works presented in this field with some suggestions to retrieve it.

- Educational status of non-Brahmin women are nowhere mentioned.
- Both men and women were well trained in the military art, medicine, the science of weapons and were also trained for war-like situations.

Education was only for Brahmins.

Keywords— Early Vedic Period, Education, Women.



I. INTRODUCTION

With the topic “Education of Women in Early Vedic Period” it is clear that this research work is all about the educational conditions of women in earlier times. People associated with the study of history and historical knowledge tend to have more knowledge about the particular topic but as a student of literature, I have put my utmost efforts to take this research work up to the mark.

While preparing and going through the materials, I was bombarded with a lot of questions as ‘Is it true that women were privileged to have education in such an early time period?’; ‘education was only allowed to Brahmins?’. Why it was such a custom of educating both men and women equally?’ and many more. So, it became more interesting to find evidences of women’s educational status in Vedic time. In the Post Vedic period itself, the same

society which once allowed women to study took away their right to education and told them to manage the house. Women lost all their rights including educational rights. They were devoid of performing all the sacrifices and yajnas. This research work will be bringing out the untold aspects regarding the education of women, Brahmin women and non-Brahmin women. Some suggestions will also be there at the end of the discussion to support this work.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In A.S.ALTEKAR’S book entitled as ‘Education in Ancient India’ he has mentioned that education was the basic right and was given the utmost importance. Both girls and boys were given proper education.’ Yet in the same book it is nowhere mentioned about the education of

non Brahmin women. Even the educational rights were given to the 'men' of all the three main castes i.e. Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas but not to the 'women' of the same castes. In this research paper, the question has been raised about the educational status of non-Brahmin women, and how the codes of Manu closed the doors for women.

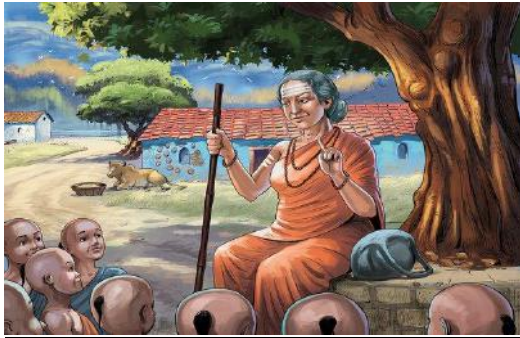


Fig.1 : Old woman preaching students

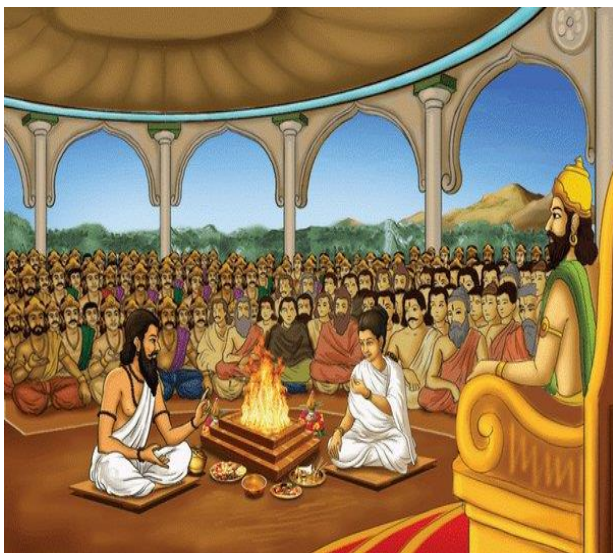


Fig.2 : Women participating in Yajnas.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this research paper is to provide an insight to the subjection and subordination of women. This work will describe the essential points and several important aspects which are nowhere mentioned in already done works or journals. They are as follows:-

- Reasons associated with the degradation of women's educational rights.
- What other heterodox religions contributed in the degradation of women's status and education.
- How the Manu codes closed the doors for women in the Later Vedic Period.

DATA

Both primary data and secondary data have been used. Primary data as in the first hand data has been used from parents, teachers and friends.

Secondary data as in the data or information collected from books, journals, etc has also been used.

HYPOTHESIS

Primary Hypothesis – The educational status of women saw a great transformation from the 20th century.

Secondary Hypothesis – The pedagogy of women have been polished since 20th century.

LIMITATIONS

The topic- Education of Women in Early Vedic Period is a grand as well as an important topic to work upon and discuss. However, while searching for topic related information, not much articles or research works are present. Some articles were present but they were based on the status of women. One article was found but it did not have much information despite having the same topic. The lesser number of related research topic materials gives the researcher a challenge and opportunity to give their best yet at the same time, it is the biggest limitation in writing a research work. Also, the time limit given for this research work was very little and some personal engagements too were the distractions.

III. DISCUSSION

Vedas in ancient India held a crucial relevance in the lives of the people. They were sacred texts which presented the right path for people to lead their lives. The first education system of India was the Vedic education system, where the children of upper caste Brahmin and Kshatriya were taught the Vedas during their teenage at Gurukuls. The four Vedas which were studied during the Vedic period are namely – Rig Veda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda. The Vedic education system focused on the comprehension of Vedic texts, and it points more towards religious neutrality. It furthermore practiced independence among students. According to Vedic world view the world is pervaded by divinity and the aim of every living being is to achieve liberation and finally salvation. Thus, according to Vedas, the aim of education is liberation.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Education improves and enriches a person's life by empowering their intelligence and wisdom. During the Vedic era, women's education was very significant and at its peak. The education is the source of knowledge which shows the real way in the various fields of life.

It enhances a person's ability to think, to understand and to take valuable decisions of life. In the theory of the Smriti period, women were treated as equal to as Sudras which means they were disqualified for Upanayan Sanskara, Vedic education and Vedic rituals as well. It is said in the Vedas itself that the husband and the wife are the two halves of one entity. But, it was limited to just a courtly compliment and nothing else. In this period women had no religious participation for them but also they were imposed to men if they refused to get married. But, if we look in the same time period but a little early then it is mentioned in the historical texts that women and men shared equal status and took a joint part in supervising over or participating in the various functions going on in the sacrificial pandal. Women were also entitled to participate in sacrifices and yajnas.

But, that kind of participation required a fairly intelligent acquaintance with Vedic literature and rituals. This was not possible without a proper mastery of Vedas which required Upanayana, followed by at least a short period of Vedic studies.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN

There were some serious lady students who continued their studies, didn't get married and became Brahmavadinis. There were also some ladies who continued their studies after marriage as well and reserved their places in the book of history by Sadyodvahas. Many fathers of this time were anxious to give their daughters as high an education as their sons used to receive. Their education was not confined to Vedic learning only; some used to study deeper problems of philosophy.



Fig.3 : Origin of the concept of female teachers can be recieved from this period.

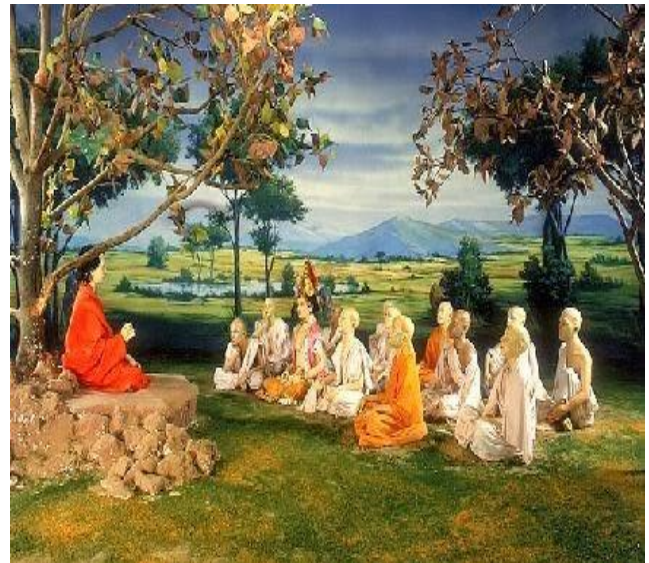


Fig.4 : Brahmavadinis and Sadyovahas

Maitreyi, Gargi, Atreyi, Lopamudra, Apala, Kadru, Visvavara, Ghosha, Juhu, Vagambhrini, Paulomi, Yami, Indrani, Savitri and Devajami are the names of women scholars or to be more precise, they were actually women rishis of the early vedic period. When there were so many lady scholars in society, some of whom remained unmarried, it is natural that some may have taken the teaching profession.

TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

Patanjali informs us that Upadhyayani and Upadhyaya in Sanskrit language, the two terms denotes the wife of the teacher while the latter denotes a female teacher. These special terms were coined to denote a lady teacher. Some of them like Sulabha, Vadava, Prathiteyi, Maitreyi, Gargi and Vachaknavi seem to have made some real contributions to the advancements of knowledge, as they are included in the galaxy of distinguished scholars.

DEGRADATION OF EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN: THE BEGINNING

In the period where women enjoyed such great honor of receiving education, later, in the same time period, this opportunity given to women started to decline slowly and silently. The ordinary lady scholars were taught by only the family members like father, uncle or the brother. They will not go out for the daily round of alms like the male Brahmacharis. Under these conditions only the high caste girls could have education. Where the near male relatives had not the time or the ability to teach personally to their girl ward, the higher education of the latter must have been an impossibility. They've got only the elementary education. The women chose their husbands and the fathers conducted Swayamvars for their daughters in the

Vedic period. The females or the women were kept in the centre and the final decisions were taken by the females only.

Towards the end of this period (c. 250 B.C.) even the formal Upanayana, necessitating some amount of primary and Vedic education, was becoming unpopular. Aitiasayana was the leader of the movement advocating the cancellation of the religious and educational privileges of women. The real cause for the degradation of women seems to have been the practice of non Aryan wives by the three higher castes. Inter caste marriage between the three castes were not unknown in the vedic period. Some recorded examples of such marriages are Arjuna and Udupi, Bhima and Hidimba. Now the Sudra or non-Aryan wife with her ignorance or very imperfect knowledge of Sanskrit language and Hindu religion could not enjoy the same religious privileges as the Aryan wife.

The marriageable age of girls also was being lowered at this time rendering any education worth the name next to impossible. Atisayana and other thinkers like him began to think of the complete removal of all the women rights is to disqualify all the wives for sacrifices and to declare that only men could perform them.



Fig.5 : Education of women gradually declined.

This new change surely affected the educational prospects of lady students. Manu Smriti at that time was against permitting women to recite and therefore to study Vedic stanzas. A Brahman was advised to boycott a feast in connection with a sacrifice performed by a woman.

DEGRADATION OF EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN : THE END

By the 3rd century A.D. even the formality of Upanayana un-accompanied by any Vedic Mantras, had gone out of vogue in society. The cancellation of Upanayana was enhanced when the marriageable age for girls were

lowered. The writers of the age advocated in favour of girls to be married as early as the age of 12 and if she couldn't get married at the particular age then she would end up staying unmarried for the rest of her life. This condemnation had the natural effect. A Brahman was never allowed to marry a girl above the age of 12. Many marriages must have taken place much earlier, for the Smritis written at the end of this period, began to glorify the virtue of a girl at the age of 7, 8, or 9 with the ideal age of girl's marriage. With this the complete disposal of girls and female's education already came to prominence.

Upanayana of girls continued as a kind of formality for a few centuries. Upanayana without Vedic Mantras is a contradiction in terms; Manu takes up this illogical position probably because it regarded Upanayana as just a Sarira Sanskara rather than a Vaidik Sanskara that possess some spiritual and cultural value. By about the third century A.D. even the formality of Upanayana, unaccompanied by vedic mantras had gone out of the society. Later, Upanayana having disappeared, even the elementary education began to become rarer and rarer among the girls of the poorer classes. This led to the little girls having no knowledge of the Vedas and its verses. They were even unable to recite the simplest of mantras that they were expected to recite at the time of marriage. The ritual writers of this period laid down that if the bride is unable to recite the mantras on account of illiteracy then either the husband or the priest may do so, on her behalf. (Instead of providing them education they even snatched away this opportunity as well from the bride or the women to study.) When the vast majority of women were unable to properly recite the Vedic hymns, they were naturally regarded as ineligible for Vedic studies. Thus, the degradation in providing education to women finally dissolved and spread with the coming of post Vedic period.



Fig.6 : Women were well trained in the fields of arts, sciences, humanities and war sciences as well.



Fig.7 : The stone engraved sculptures depict the women of the aristocratic families who were well trained in both Vedas and military sciences.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE WOMEN OF THE ARISTOCRATIC FAMILIES

Though Upanayana was prohibited to girls, some higher class families made provisions for the secular and literary education of the fair sex down to about the 10th century A.D. It appears in the Lalita-Vistara, that girls in cultured families could read and write, compose poems and understand Sastras in the early centuries of the Christian era. Several lady poets in Southern India, composed poetry in Prakrit. From the Gatha-sapta-sati of Hala, there are seven poetesses namely, Reva, Roha, Madhavi, Anulakshmi, Pahai, Vaddhavahi and Sasiprabha. Devi was a well known poet of Gujarat who continued to enchant her readers even after her departure from earth to heaven.



Fig.8 : Caste system and prohibition of Women's participation began later in this period itself.

Some ladies were attracted towards medical studies as well. The majority specialized in Gynaecology. Some lady doctors had also written authoritative works on the medical science. Among the Hindu works on medicine were translated into Arabic in the 8th century A.D. was a book on midwifery. It was written by a lady doctor named Rusa in the Arabic garb. Very probably most of these women belonged to cultured families of officers, ministers and princes.

Girls in cultured families used to get some training in fine arts as well. Vocal and instrumental music, dancing, painting, garland making, personal and house decorations were the chief among them. Special tutors were appointed in rich families for the training for girls in these branches. Therefore, not only in Vedic education but in cultural education as well the girls of this period were trained.

WOMEN AND MILITARY TRAINING

Since the ladies of the aristocratic families were expected to be at the helm of the realm in case of emergency, they must have been given a fairly good military and administrative training. They must have been fairly acquainted with the use of arms and weapons. Some of them could also ride and swim. In ordinary families, some military training seems to be imparted to the lady folk. Village women often defended their hearths and homes in times of danger. The second wife of king Dashrath named Kaikeyi was well trained in war tactics and weapon sciences by which she once saved the life of king Dashrath in a war. The daughter-in-law of king Dashrath, the daughter of Rajrishi Janak, Sita is also said to be well acquainted with war tactics as she used to practice archery with her other three sisters. Sita's mother Sunaina was a princess of a branched dynasty of the same kingdom Videha. Sunaina being a princess was definitely trained in all the important fields and so she trained Sita as well. Therefore, many women trained in military sciences were nothing new but an important skill to be well trained in.

NON BRAHMANS AND VEDIC STUDIES

The traditional division of professions among various castes suggests that the students who used to receive useful and industrial education must have belonged to non-Brahmana class. The caste system was not rigid in the early vedic period. People followed professions according to their capabilities and tastes. We find several Brahmans learning and following the professions of the trader, soldier, doctor, serpent charmer, and the cultivator. In one Jataka story we come across that a Brahmana priest of holy Benares sends his son to Takshasila for gaining proficiency in archery. This Jataka story is supported by Smritis. The Smritis lay down that Brahmanas took

professions as traders, physicians, navigators, trainers of horses and elephants, and dealers in dogs and camels were devoid of 'Sradha'. The army recruited from all the classes. Down about 500 A.D. inter-caste marriages were not a taboo by the society as well as Smritis. A useful and important profession like the medical one was followed by the members of all the castes in the 2nd century A.D.

Brahmanical tradition itself recognized that some of the composers of the Vedic hymns like Vainya and Visvamitra were Kshatriyas, and in the Upanishads some Kshatriya kings are seen to be taking a leading part in philosophical developments. Vaishyas were perfectly entitled to study the Vedas and yet in practice they were regarded ineligible as the Sudras. Vedic studies must have been disappeared from the Vaishya community before the beginning of Christian era.

IV. CONCLUSION

Brahmand, the word is made of two words i.e. Brahma and Anda. Brahma means universe and Anda means the globe. The person who has the knowledge of both the universe and the globe is known as Brahman.

The national song of Rig Veda –

O Brahma (universe)!

May the new generations be born in this kingdom

The wise men illustrate for spiritual knowledge,

May the sons be born to the heroic, skilful archers and mighty warriors,

The cows give plentiful milk, the oxen are good at carrying,

The swift horse and the highly accomplished women,

May rain, fall as we desire,

May our fruit bearing plants ripen,

May the medicine heal us fast,

May all our wishes get fulfilled by Mantras,

May our enemies get destroyed and

And our good luck prosper.

As mentioned in the introduction part that women in Rig Vedic period enjoyed the full authority and power but later on in the same time period, all those who gave them the authority and power snatched it away from them. There was a time when both the girls and boys from a very young age received education. Co-education was there and practiced freely. There were even those women who went for further in depth education in the field of philosophy. The fathers of that time encouraged and supported their daughters and wanted to educate them as much as they

educated their sons. The education system allowed women to continue their studies even after their marriage. The women were allowed to participate in sacrifices and yajnas either solely or with their husbands.

While writing the research paper, it is nowhere to be found the educational status of non Brahmin women. The women of the working class like farmers, cobblers, carpenters, sculptors, fishermen, and tribal women and etc. In ancient times castes were divided on the basis of the type of job the person or his family was pulling up for ages. Only the men of these families worked and the women of these men supported their husbands by staying and looking after the house. So, it can be said the idea of a working women was too much for that time period so they only stayed at home naturally devoid of any kind of education or participation in any kind of ritual. Secondly, as mentioned above, women were literally trained in military art, medicine, the science of weapons and for war like situations as well. In the last lines of the discussion part, it is mentioned that some ladies who were interested in medicine continued to go in depth and gained knowledge. They even published books and research papers related to the medical field.

Later on they were slowly devoid from the basic educational rights as the ritual writers considered them unqualified for Vedic education. They made a rule of not giving the girls or women the Vedic education so the lack of that education lead to the known factual problem that the girls were unable to recite the simple Mantras at the time of their marriage. Then instead of providing them education they threw away the idea of educating them rather they made a certain theory that educating girls is not a good idea. Slowly, as we move ahead, we see that the marriageable age of the girls were reduced and various ideas were given in favour of child marriage to completely separate them from even the idea of getting educated.

V. SUGGESTIONS

- The education of women is extremely important as there's a saying that if a women is educated, then the whole family will get educated. It should never be a burden on the family to educate their mothers, daughters, wives, daughter-in-laws, etc.
- The education system must find new ways to inculcate the idea of women's education in society.
- With education, the training of martial arts, karate, sports, horse riding, fencing, archery, etc should also become an option for female students to learn a different and unique kind of skill.
- Language should never become a barrier. As our current government is focusing on every aspect including education system. It is making educational

channels and mediums available in all Indian languages so that knowledge can reach to each and everyone out there.

- Last but not the least, we all must take a pledge with a strong determination that we will always support and try to encourage the education of women. It is very shocking to know that still there are several communities or families who believe that educating a woman is a waste. We all should come forward and must try our best to change this idea.

REFERENCES

- [1] <https://www.lokogandhar.com/history-of-women-education-in-india/>
- [2] <https://www.examboard.in/2019/08/brahmavadini-and-sadyovadhu.html>
- [3] <https://unacademy.com/content/railway-exam/study-material/history/characteristics-of-the-earlyvedicperiod/#:~:text=The%20Early%20Vedic%20period%20is,symbols%20of%20abundance%20or%20wealth.>
- [4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic_period
- [5] <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/womens-education/womens-education-in-ancient-india/63492>
- [6] www.allresearchjournal.com
- [7] <https://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2017/vol3issue8/PartF/3-6-228-625.pdf>
- [8] www.unwomen.org
- [9] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/featurestory/2022/10/leaving-no-girl-behindineducationblog.teachmint.com>
- [10] <https://blog.teachmint.com/vedic-education-all-you-need-to-know/www.worldhistory.org>
https://www.worldhistory.org/The_Vedas/www.cwds.ac.in
- [11] <https://www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/EducatingWomen.pdf>
ijream.org
- [12] <http://ijream.org/papers/IJREAMV04I0945128.pdf>
- [13] https://vaniquotes.org/wiki/Essence_of_all_Vedic_literature
- [14] <https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/abigail-adams.html>