



Women And Wisdom: The Empowering Impact Of Education In Ancient And Modern India

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Abstract: Women's education is important to achieve their empowerment and gender equality. Women's empowerment has consistently been a crucial aspect of both human and economic development in a country. Women play a significant role in the development process of social, economic, and political empowerment tends to foster growth. They are not only a vital component of society but also influence the course of change in it. In this paper we can learnt about women empowerment from Vedic period to modern era. To understand the origins of the denial of education to women, we must go deep into our past and examine the history of Ancient India. Historical sources indicate that the early period of history, the Rig Vedic period was one of the relative for equality and empowerment between the sexes. We hear of highly educated women, learned women scholars, and even warrior women. Scriptures such as the Rig Veda and Upanishads mention several women sages and seers, such as Gargi, Maitreyi, Viswavara, Ghosa and Apala. Now in modern era the government setup several scheme for empowered women. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to understand and develop knowledge regarding women empowerment since Vedic period to modern era. This paper "Women and Wisdom: The Empowering Impact of Education in Ancient India" will help us to gain knowledge about women empowerment in the context of India.

Keywords: Women, Education, Empowerment, Vedic Period, Equality.

Introduction

"Real empowerment of women would be possible only through education, encouragement of economic self-dependence and procisional of opportunities enabling the unfolding of one's full potential".

-Former President Pranab Mukherjee.

Women are the gift to the society. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. Development of any nation depends on women status and women empowerment of that nation. An empowered woman is a nation's strength. Women play an active role for the development of a family, community, society and a nation. Now the women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. We can see a slow and stable rise up of women in all fields of

importance. Today women are not just constricted to cooking and taking care of their households, they have to step out their comfort zones to create their own images in the outside world as well, Meena B. S. & Meena M. (2023). But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions.

If we look back in ancient Rig Vedic(1500 BC-1000 BC) India we saw that women had respectable position. Every women had equal rights with men to get any type of education. Where the girl's education passes through the stages of Upanayana and Brahmacharya leading to the marital state, Tharakan, S. M., & Tharakan, M. (1975). We find evidence in many mantras of Rig Veda. Women used to participate freely in Yagya rituals in religious festivals. Women were considered as half of the man and sahadharmini (equal partner). Vedic women had economic freedom. Some women were engaged in teaching work(as acharyas). Home was the place of production. Spinning and weaving of clothes were done at home (Rani, K. S. 2021). Women also had the liberty to read sacred literature, and also had the right to take part as debaters in public assemblies (Pal, B. 2019). Women's also had freedom to take part in war, athletics, archery, public activities, education, decision making, and also had freedom to choose their male partners has represented the nature of women's status in the social background of the Rig Vedic period (Altekar, A. S. 1956).

But after Rig Vedic Period(1500 BC-1000 BC), women eventually lost their position. From enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic(1000 BC-600 BC) period in education and other rights and other facilities (Paranthaman, G. et.al. 2019). Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position (Kumar, H.et.al. 2024).

In Buddhist period(500 BC-100 BC) Women education was improved silently. The Buddha's own attitude to women is worth narrating. Although the wider culture of sacrifices recognized that regardless of barriers of caste, class, or gender everyone had the potential for salvation, the Buddha was unwilling to admit women into the Buddhist sangha. Permission was ultimately granted, though with apparent hesitation, due to the persistence of Buddha's foster mother, Mahapajapati Gotami, who travelled many miles through heat and dust in pursuit of the Buddha. Ananda played a crucial role in the decision to permit the entry of women into the sangha, whose attitude to women was in striking contrast to that of the Buddha.

In medieval period (500 A. D to 1500 A.D), Women lose their position and even they are denied the right to get education. During this time polygamy, early child marriage, 'Purdah' system came in existence, Marriage and domestic life become compulsory for women.

Women had faced many obstacles particularly educational field. Women's rights to education their independence and rights on their own wishes changed over time. We saw, sometimes women had superior position and sometimes faced discrimination and becomes the victim of early child marriage, purdah etc. During those periods women enjoyed power, respect and position they had right in education. Proof of our statement is above mentioned different period in ancient India. "Women empowerment will be more relevant if and only if women are educated. If women are uneducated, the future generations will be

uneducated”(Mandal, B. (2018). Because of this, Napoleon, a Greek warrior once stated as “Give me a few educated mothers, I shall give you a heroic race”.

In the recent years, to eradicate gender discrimination and bad practices against women several constitutional provisions and legal rights have been implemented by the govt. of India. To protect women from all forms of crimes against them, a set of safety legislation for Indian women working in the field has been established. The government offers numerous programs and initiatives aimed at empowering women. In India, the empowerment of women is crucial to the nation's overall progress. So, In the 21st century, women's empowerment is a crucial instrument for the nation to completely develop (Latha, B. R. 2022).

Historical context of women's education in ancient to modern India

In the Vedic periods women had high status in society. The Rigveda and Upanishads mention several female sages and seers, such as Gargi and Maitreyi, indicating that women were respected and equal to men. Historical studies and scriptures show that Indian women are empowered during this time (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.). In Vedic society, women were scholars, philosophers, artists, and poets, and held esteemed positions in society. The Upanishad between 800 and 500 BCE, includes scholars such as Sulabha, Maitreyi, Gargi, and others. Women participated in both domestic and religious rituals. Women could participate in the Upanayana ceremony, to entrance into education; Women played an important role in the political history of early Vedic India. Women from ruling families or Kshatriya families received military as well as administrative training (Jane, S. 2023). During Rig Veda period women were enjoy equal position along with men. In ancient period women were divided into two classes one is Brahnavadinis another is Sadyodvdhas. Brahnavadinis were scholars and aimed to pursue academic career during their lifetime, mainly studied theology and philosophy. Sadyodvdhas were common women who studied until age 14-16 before they got married. They learnt Vedic hymns for daily and periodical prayers used for rituals and sacraments in which they need to take part after their marriage (Jane, S. 2023). During Vedic age, men are depended on women in the field of agriculture manufacturing of arrows or bows and other war material. Samhita include women engaging in basket making, embroidery, dying, weaving, teaching, singing, and dancing etc. to become their self-reliant. Women become independent because of their training in the childhood.

During the Later Vedic Age, the status of women decreased with limitations placed on their rights and participation. Societal norms and attitudes significantly impacted their lives during this period. By approximately 500 BC, women were no longer able to receive education and undergo the Upanayan sanskara, thus said them ineligible to chant Vedic mantras or perform sacrifices. Furthermore, in the Dharmashastra and Manusmriti imposed restrictions on women, including reducing the age of marriage to as early as eight or nine years old, thereby denying them further opportunities for education. Women were also not allowed to attend public gatherings such as Sabhas and Samitis, and also were no longer allowed to participate in ceremonies like the Upanayana. These limitations on women were often justified by religious beliefs, social norms and child marriages became more common during this period. Despite these barriers,

some women from royal families continued to receive education, whereas they were not permitted to study the Vedas. Overall, women were primarily trained to be good wives and mothers, with their lives largely confined to the domestic sphere. During ancient time woman had to rule kingdom in absence of head of the male family member such as fathers, husband son etc. This helped women imparted life skills for defending their hearts and homes in the times of dangers. As an example, in Chalukya, Rajput, and Maratha administration to have women rules, governors and administration such as Vijayabhatarika, Jijamata, Tarabai, Rani Laxmi Bai, Durgavati, Chinmma, Ahilya bai, Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir. Later Vedic period, several professions become popular such as teaching and writing. Women teachers are called Acharyanyi. Women also entered into many fields such as medicine, businesses, art, music and dance. Some women served as servants. Some women also were engaged as guard door keepers, hair dressers etc,

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In the Muslim period the position of women was not so high like Vedic period. In this time, child marriage and Purdah system were common. During this period women are not allowed to get education. Women were restricted to take participate in social and political gathering. In spite of challenges, some women were contributed in the field of education. Razia Sultan was a first female Muslim ruler. In Mughal period women from royal families were educated and take part in cultural role in the court.

The status of women in British period was multifaceted. The concept of educating women was first emerged in the British period. The Christian missionaries agreed women to get educated after Bhakti movement. The Christian missionaries took their first motive for set up the Calcutta Female Juvenile Society in 1819 (Mondal, B. 2018). In the early British period, the British government shows itself as a civilizing force, passing legislation to abolish practices like sati and allow widow remarriage (Faruquee, 2017). Raja Ram Mohan Roy abolished sati custom with the help of British government. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the prominent of window marriage and window marriage bill passed by then governor general Lord Canning in this period. Vidyasagar also established 35 girl's school in Bengal. During this period different commission laid down stresses on women education such as Wood's despatch 1854, Hunter commission 1882 etc. "Some women's organizations such as Bharat Mohila Parishad (1904), Bharat Stree Mahamandal (1910), Women's Indian Association (1917), National Council of Women India (1925) and All India Women's Conference(1927) took up issues like women's education, abolition of social evils, Hindu law reform, equality of rights and opportunities and women's suffrage" (Mondol, B. 2018).

In modern education women education is traced back after India Independence. University Education Commission (1948-49), Modular Commission (1952-53), Kothari Commission (1964-66), National Policy in Education (1968), National Policy for Education (1986) have been recommended on importance of women education.

Now in 21st century the government of India set up many schemes for empowering women. Some of these schemes are given below.

- 1. Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao Scheme:** The Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao Scheme was established by PM of India in Haryana on 22 January 2005. This scheme was taken by government to ensure the education and protection of girls.
- 2. One Stop Centre Scheme:** One Stop Centres each shall be established during the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-2020. One Stop Centres (OSCs) are intended to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace.
- 3. Working Women Hostel (Sakhi Niwas):** This scheme was initiated for the safe and comfortable scheme for working women in India.
- 4. Women Helpline Scheme (WHS):** 181 is a toll-free 24*7 emergency responses help line number for women affected by violence. This Scheme was also initiated under the umbrella scheme of Mission Shakti Program.
- 5. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** The scheme was initiated in May, 2016 by the ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MOPNG). . This scheme was established in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh by the Hon'ble PM of India on 1 May, 2016.
- 6. Mahila Shakti Kendra:** This is popular women empowerment scheme in India. This scheme was initiated in November, 2017 as a central sponsored scheme for empowered rural women through community service.
- 7. National Creche Scheme:** National Creche Scheme was a Centrally sponsored scheme. The earliest name of this scheme was Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme. It started from 1.1.2017 for working mother's children to provide day care facilities.
- 8. Mission Shakti Scheme (MSS):** Mission Shakti Scheme was established during 15 financial commission period 2021-22 to 2025-26. This scheme came into effect from 1 April, 2022. It is an integrated women development program and an umbrella scheme for the safety, security and empowerment of women.
- 9. Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana:** Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme initiated on April 8, 2015 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving loans up to 10 lakh. It provides affordable credit for women entrepreneurs and self-help groups.

Conclusion

“Empowerment of women has become the solution to many societal problems”.

- Rameshwari Pandya (2008).

We saw that the position of women was respected in Rig Vedic period but in Later Vedic period gradually women lost their position in all fields in the society and lose their right to get education. In Buddhist period at first women were also not allowed to monasteries for getting education. After that Gautam Buddha allowed women in monasteries because of his student Anand. Degradation of Women's position was observed during the Muslim period as a result of Islamic culture. And in British period the status of women developed, as some commissions and policies laid down stresses on women education to empower women. So, we see that Women had faced many obstacles particularly educational field. During those periods women enjoyed power, respect and position they had right in education.

At present time for women empowerment there are many scheme and legal provisions as made by the Govt. of India. Such initiatives and provisions contribute to their empowerment, security and autonomy and also empowering women to become physically, mentally, and financially resilient, empowered and self-reliant women play a crucial role in building a powerful nation (Dr Gautam, B. 2023). So, In the 21st century, women's empowerment is a crucial instrument for the nation to completely develop (Latha, B. R. 2022). And the empowerment is possible if women are educated and also required their active participation and efforts to empower themselves.

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