



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Women Empowerment In Ancient Vedic Society

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(The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century not only at National level but also at the International level. Women's Empowerment has been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginning of the history. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women. Women represent half of the World's population and gender inequality exists in every nation of the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potential. The greatest need of the hour is to change of social attitude towards women. When women move forward the family moves and the nation moves. It is essential as their thought and their value system lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the main stream of development. It's important that society must take initiative to create an atmosphere in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in social, political most important educational and economic life of the country with a sense of equality. This paper is all about through a light on women empowerment in our ancient India.)

Women Empowerment in India refers that women must need to be aware of their rights like the right of vote, property rights, freedom of movement, their legal rights and many more, which means, empowering women is making realize their self-worth their abilities to determine their own choice and shaping the society where women can enjoy their respect and rights just like other humans. Women Empowerment is an essential factor that works for the betterment and development of society, community and country. When it is to specifying women's population in the world we get the result of around 50% but when the focus on the people of India, it happens to be a disproportionate sex ratio which means the female population is comparatively lower than the male.

Comparatively the western part of the world is very liberal about women's empowerment but women's empowerment in India is the least concern of society because of gender biasness. It is believed that the problem with literacy, population and health issues won't solve until there is any solution for the gender biasness so that women can take a free part in building a society and a community where every one's rights and demands will be paid attention to. In true sense, women's empowerment means exercising their power

and their own actions which mean having control over your own materials assets, intellectual resources and your own ideologies.

The Vedas are the main scriptures that guide the entire human race in which the religious path of the human race has been demonstrated and the main topics of this religious path are – Action, Worship and Knowledge. This has been indicated in the sentences of Bhagvad Gita like त्रैगुण्यविषयाः वेदाः etc. Nothing in Veda has been said with reference to men and women or to differentiate between men and women. Here, whatever has been said in them has been said equally for all mankind. However, Vedas are a mine of knowledge, by searching in them; one finds enough elements that through light on women. Women have been discussed the most in Rig Veda, but there is very little discussion of women in other Vedas. Many verses which shed lights on women's culture and civilization since ancient times are found in Rigveda. The wise women of that time used to recite the hymns and were revered as sages. As said in Atharv veda :

यथा सिन्धुर्नदीनां साम्राज्यं सुषुवे वृषा

एवं त्वं सम्राज्ञेधि प्रत्युरस्तं परेत्य च ॥ (अथर्ववेदः 14.1.46)

In ancient Indian culture, women were treated as equal to men, and there was no discrimination on the bases of gender instead of that women were honored by society and society at that time considered women as **Janani** which means mother even in Hindu Scripts women are considered as **Devi**. As it is said in Upanishad : मातृदेवो भवः (तैत्तरीयोपनिषद्) । It is also said that यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः (मनुस्मृतिः) . They used to enjoy their full basic rights where they were free to receive education at that time, the wives of the Rishis could willing to take part in spiritual activities with their husbands , they were also known as the **Ardhangini** (better half) to live equal life just like men used to live. Women in Indian history have gone through two things in their life one is subjection and other is deliverance. With the passage of time, their positions might have changed but in the Vedic era, they were a complete symbol of protector and caretaker of mortality and ideals. As it is said in Atharvveda :

एषा ते कुलपा राजन् तामु ते परिदद्मसि (अथर्ववेदः:1.14.3)

The accomplishment of **Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, draupadi and Alapa** turns out to be the most ideal role for women of this era. These women were competitive with men in many fields and also received and enjoyed their rights and equality, there were no restrictions on them, and they possessed great wealth and property. Along with that they even had a very strong say when it comes to guiding their offspring.

In the ancient text of Vedas, the concept of human is bedrock for society, in Taittiriya Samhita, women and men were considered as the two wheels of a cart. These lessons given by the Vedas to society were good examples of equality between men and women. As written in Rigveda : सामाहमस्मि ऋक्त्वम् .

In Rig Vedic Society, the women would have been honored to carry out sacrifices jointly with their better half. Women also had the liberty to read sacred literature and also had the right to take part as debaters in public assemblies. Women in ancient India enjoyed a high status in society and were given equal importance to men in terms of education and empowerment. Women were encouraged to pursue higher education and many of them became scholars as Poets and philosophers. Women also played an important role in politics and economics and had a say in social and cultural matters. The contribution of women scholars like Gargi, Lopamudra, Maitreyi and others are still remembered and celebrated in India today. It is important to learn from the ancient Indian Civilization's emphasis on education and women's empowerment and continue to work towards gender. The Vedas have some hymns accredited to women scholars who were known as **Brahmavadini's**.

There was considerable promotion of women's education in the Vedic era. Women used to wear Yajnopavita, study Vedas and perform Homa etc in the morning and evening which was mentioned in Shatapatha Brahmana. According to Harit Samhita, there were two types of women in the Vedic period – Brahmavadini (ब्रह्मवादिनी) and Sadyovaha (सद्योवाह). Among these, Brahmavadinis had the rights of Yagya (यज्ञम्), Bedadhyayan (वेदाध्ययनम्) and Bhaisiyacharya (भैस्यचर्या). Sulava, Maitreyi, Gargi etc. are famous for their scholarship. These women receive education for a long period of time. Some of these women even achieved spiritual progress by remaining celibate throughout their life. These women attained the state of a sage through study of Vedas, composition of poetry, sacrifice and penance and some also experienced mantras. In some of the ancient text or mantras of the Rigveda seventy Brahmavadini women's have been mentioned. Shaunak has mentioned the name of mantra seer women in his book Brihad –Devata. The sages of many hymns of Rigveda are women. As example : Brahmavadini Yosha is the Rishika of 36<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Sukta of the tenth chapter of Rigveda. Romasha is a sage of 1-27-7 mantras. Viswavara of 5-28 mantras, Indrani of 10-145 mantras, Shachi of 10-156 mantras and Apala of 6-56 mantras. Surya had narrated Shukta 10-85. Apart from these, Usha, Vak, Aditi etc. had also narrated the hymns.

Sadyovaha were those women who ran the household life. But for them also it was necessary study celibately. Which mentioned in Arthav veda as: ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम् (अथर्ववेदः 1.15.18). Their studies ended after marriage. Women were given very liberal education like poetry, music, dance, acting fine arts etc. She also learned to use weapons and accompanied her husband in the battle. Thus, it is clear that during the Vedic period, there was good arrangement of education for all round development of the girls.

Women in ancient India enjoyed a high status in society. They had the right to own property and inherit from their fathers. Women were also allowed to participate in religious ceremonies and perform rituals. In fact, there were many female priests who officiated at religious ceremonies. They also played an important role in politics in ancient India. There were princess and queens who ruled kingdoms. For examples : the

queen of Magadha, Nandini ruled the kingdom after her husband's death. The princess of Ayodhya, Shanta was a renowned scholar and philosophers.

In addition to political power, women also involved in trade and commerce and were known for their business acumen. As – the city of Pataliputra, which was the capital of the Mauryan empire was known for its women traders. Women also had a say in social and cultural matters in ancient India, women were involved in decision –making processes and had a say in the affairs of the family and the community. Women were also involved in the arts and literature and were known for their creativity and artistic talent.

Women Empowerment in Vedas offers a fairly liberal stance on the role of a woman. The access to power for women during Vedic time period is evaluated by the perception of women, education freedom, marriage rituals and economic freedom as depicted by the Rig Veda, the first Vedic scripture. Throughout the Rigveda words such as independent, loving, happy, tolerance, preserver of truth, scholar, learned and glorious are used to describe women. From a spirituality lens, measuring a woman's portrayal to its proximity to that of an enlightened person, it is evident that the Vedic scripture places respect for women higher than for men.

The demands for women empowerment makes clear that every human being must need to be treated in a way where their dignity and rights are not getting violated. For a long millennium of time women are suffering from this harassment where their very existence is just nothing more than materials, but as the world has evolved and women cannot fight for their own rights, there are few sections of women to whom the light has not yet ventured.

To live in a civilized world, it is our duty as a human to help people to enlighten and take them out of any dogmatic state of mentality where it harms society in moving forward. We must educate our women and children so that they can carry on the legacy to the upcoming generations and take part in building a nation. There are three major elements that are required for nation development and empowerment. As:

- a. Clarity of goals and expectation.
- b. Support by providing the resources needed for success and removing any obstacles that may hinder progress.
- c. Autonomy.

In these process women play a vital role because they are known to be the symbols of spirituality, strength, love, sacrifice and courage. Women education guarantees better advancement of human progress as well as to instruct after that era as well. The status of women in today's world is changing significantly in recent years but there is still a long way to go. No doubt, women have the potential to achieve an equal footing with men. But it is the social practice and male attitudes that are making an effective and invisible barriers preventing women from rising above in a certain point. Swami Vivekananda had said "**That nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future.**" In pursuant of making India a great nation let us work towards giving women their much deserved status, so that they must be respected and never underestimated on the ground that they are women.

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