

WOMEN EDUCATION IN VEDIC ERA IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Many women scholars of the Vedic period overcame many social constraints. In Vedic period, they were as equal as man in education and had surpassed men in their scholarly fields also. Apala, Atreyi and Ghosha are some of the renowned scholars of this period. In richer families in this period, special teachers were mainly employed to teach various arts like toilet ointments, dancing, music, garland-making, painting, patching, sewing, magic, composing poems and preparation of toys along with other arts. In some learned persons houses also, young girls could learn the lessons just by listening which were being taught to the young students. Therefore, we can say that there was a greater authority and honor in the position of the women in the Vedic society. They along with their husbands participated in social sacrifices, domestic ceremonies and feasts. Thus, social morality was of comparatively high standard and social relations were maintained with mutual spirit and cordiality. Access to education was easy for the women in ancient times. Through the massive Women education in Ancient India, several women seers and thinkers originated in ancient times such as Gargi and Maitreyi. Women enjoyed the tremendous right to education and teaching. The women intellectuals in ancient India gathered eminence by participating in educational debates and discussions in the assemblies of intellectuals.

Keywords: Women, Vedic Period, Education, Enjoyed, Tremendous and Debates.

INTRODUCTION:

During the Vedic Period (c. 1500-500 BCE), women enjoyed high social status and had significant educational rights, including studying Vedas, philosophy, and even becoming scholars (Rishikas) like Gargi and Lopamudra, participating in assemblies, and performing religious rites. Both boys and girls attended Gurukuls, learning subjects like Vedic literature, logic, and music, with education seen as vital for suitable marriages and spiritual growth, though this ideal declined in the later Vedic era with early marriages and patriarchal shifts.

The term "Vedic Era" refers to the period during which the Vedas — Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda — were composed. Education was central to this era, influencing individual development, social structure, and the religious and philosophical traditions of ancient India. Education was primarily oral, deeply rooted in the Guru-Shishya Parampara (teacher-disciple tradition), and aimed at developing a well-rounded

personality. The Gurukul System was the foundational model of education during the Vedic period in ancient India. It was a residential, student-centered education system that emphasized holistic development, moral values, and close interaction between the guru (teacher) and the shishya (student). The Vedic era, spanning roughly from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, represents one of the most formative periods in the intellectual and spiritual history of ancient India. Rooted in the hymns, rituals, and philosophical reflections preserved in the Vedas, this epoch not only shaped the religious and cultural framework of the subcontinent but also laid the foundations of a unique and holistic system of education. Education in the Vedic age was not merely the transmission of information; it was an integrated process aimed at the all-round development of the individual—physical, mental, moral, and spiritual—preparing one to fulfill their duties towards self, society, and the cosmos. The system was deeply intertwined with the Gurukula tradition, where students (śiṣyas) lived with their

teachers (gurus) in a close-knit, residential setting that fostered discipline, humility, and the personal transmission of knowledge. The curriculum extended beyond the mastery of Vedic recitation and ritual performance, encompassing subjects such as grammar, phonetics, astronomy, logic, and ethics, while emphasizing the cultivation of character and self-control. Philosophically, Vedic education was guided by the ideals of *śraddhā* (faith), *tapas* (discipline), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy and dedication to learning). Knowledge was revered as sacred, a means to attain both worldly prosperity (*artha* and *dharma*) and ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*). The teacher–student relationship was rooted in mutual respect and a sense of spiritual kinship, reflecting a worldview where learning was inseparable from moral responsibility. This study seeks to examine the historical development, institutional framework, pedagogical methods, and philosophical underpinnings of education in the Vedic period. By analyzing primary sources such as the Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, and Dharmashastras, along with secondary scholarly interpretations, it aims to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of how education functioned in this era and how its principles continue to influence Indian thought and pedagogy.

Key Aspects of Women's Education:

- **Equal Opportunities:** Girls received education similar to boys, focusing on Vedic texts, philosophy, and practical skills.
- **Brahmavadinis:** Some women pursued lifelong learning, becoming revered scholars (Brahmavadinis) and teachers, like Ghosha, Visvavara, and Apala.
- **Curriculum:** Included Vedic studies, Upanishad teachings, logic, and music (Rig Veda chants).
- **Institutions:** Education occurred in Gurukuls, under gurus, with no child marriage preventing early studies.

The Vedic period has witnessed many women scholars and they were well-versed in sacred texts and Vedas. These women not only composed hymns but they also learnt music and dancing. The women who belonged to the lower strata or caste learnt spinning, weaving and needle

work. The educators of Vedic period had wisely divided women into 2(two) groups namely- Brahmavadinis and Sadyodvahas. Brahmavadinis were the life-long students of philosophy and theology. Sadyodvahas used to prosecute their studies until they got married at the age of 15-16 years. Many educated women became teachers or Upadhyayinis. There were many women poets and philosophers in Vedic period. The Vedic age has witnessed many capable and sagacious women like Apala, Ghosha and Visvavara, who used to compose mantras and were said to be rose to the rank of rishis or sages. Lopamudra, one of the female preachers of Vedic period, is believed to have preached as many as 179 hymns of the first book of the Rig Veda along with sage Agastya. Therefore, it can be said that women were given equal opportunities in education along with the male ones to prove their capability and intelligence whether in the field of education or in any social customs and rituals. In pre-Vedic times also, women used to take part in religious activities and sacrifices along with their husbands. When formal education was given to the girls and women, they were required to utter 'Mantras' or verses so that it could help them to recite verses with very clarity and with correctness. Many women scholars of the Vedic period overcame many social constraints. In Vedic period, they were as equal as man in education and had surpassed men in their scholarly fields also. Apala, Atreyi and Ghosha are some of the renowned scholars of this period. In richer families in this period, special teachers were mainly employed to teach various arts like toilet ointments, dancing, music, garland-making, painting, patching, sewing, magic, composing poems and preparation of toys along with other arts. In some learned persons houses also, young girls could learn the lessons just by listening which were being taught to the young students. Therefore, we can say that there was a greater authority and honor in the position of the women in the Vedic society. They along with their husbands participated in social sacrifices, domestic ceremonies and feasts. Thus, social morality was of comparatively high standard and social relations were maintained with mutual spirit and cordiality.

Access to education was easy for the women in ancient times. Through the massive Women

education in Ancient India, several women seers and thinkers originated in ancient times such as Gargi and Maitreyi. Women enjoyed the tremendous right to education and teaching. The women intellectuals in ancient India gathered eminence by participating in educational debates and discussions in the assemblies of intellectuals. Gargi was a prominent participant in the ancient society beside men such as Uddalaka Arni. In Vedic period, educational system was developed and the main subject taught was the Veda. The Veda or the six *Vedangas* were taught including the performance of sacrifice, correct pronunciation, knowledge of prosody, etymology, grammar, and Jyotisha or the science of calendar (Astrology). Women education in ancient India produced women with significant authority. Ancient Indian texts describe the influence of the women in the society. Valmiki's Ramayana also depict the influence of Seetha that resulted in the defeat of Ravana. Mahabharata by Veda Vyasa narrates the persuasion of Draupadi on the husbands to overthrow the Kauravas.

According to the Vedic teachings and ancient Aryan scriptures, women have been placed at a higher status than man. She has been given preference to man in every field, so much so that when giving a boy a joint name of a God and Goddess, the name of the Goddess was always placed before the God. "*Yatra Poojyante Nariastu Ramante Tatra Devah*" indicates the prominence given to women in the ancient period. In the Vedic period women had all rights similar to men in studying the Vedas. Its important to remember that Vedas, *Shastra's*, *Sanhitas*, Upanishads in ancient time was taught in *Gurukuls* is similar to schooling education in modern times. So denying this right to women in ancient times would have meant denying women the right to education. But, this was not the case, instead Women enjoyed equal liberty and freedom in their pursuit of knowledge in ancient India similar to men. The medium of language during the Vedic system was Sanskrit, while those in the Buddhist system were Pali. During those times the education was of Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, and Dharmasutras. Unmarried women were required to attend school since only educated women were capable of performing Vedic ceremonies correctly. Women were permitted to

participate in the Upanayana (Educational entrance rite) process. After the age of 16, women were allowed to marry and had the right to choose their life partners.

Formal schooling was given to young ladies and women, they were expected to present the mantras or the stanzas with clearness and proficiency. In ancient India, women were given equal opportunities as men in educational institutions but this privilege end very soon as they grow and women were only exposed to domestic work and family responsibilities. Women who tried to overcome these barriers were cursed and got abandoned by society. Thus, women became unaware of issues taking part in society and lacked knowledge of larger society. Co-education was also prevalent in ancient India in mild form. Sometimes boys and girls were educated together while receiving higher education. From the '*Malatimadhava*' of Bhavabhuti, written in the 8th century A.D., we learn that the nun Kamandaki was educated along with Bhurivasu and Devarata at a famous centre of education. In the '*Uttara-Ramacharit*' also (of the same author) we find Atreyi receiving her education along with Kusa and Lava.

It is difficult to determine the exact extent of education imparted to women during the early Vedic period in India. Upanayana ritual was obligatory for girls, and this must have ensured the imparting of a certain amount of Vedic and literary education to the girls of all classes. But female education received a great set-back during later Vedic period primarily owing to the deterioration of the religious status of women.

Upanayana began to be gradually prohibited to girls and by about 500 B.C. it had already become a formality. The discontinuance of Upanayana was disastrous to the religious status of women and they were declared unfit to recite Vedic Mantras and perform Vedic sacrifices. Thus Vedic education was prohibited to women. With the advent of foreigners, the Brahmanical society became rigid and conservative. The pandits adopted measures of defence. For this the women lost their freedom. They were confined within the home. In the changed situation the right to study came to be denied to women. With the code of Manu (200 A.D.) (Manusmriti or Manusanghita) her dependent

position was firmly established. According to Manu, “by a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently’. Manu further opines that “in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons”, a woman must never be independent.

“Day and night must women be kept in dependence by the males of their families. Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence”. Thus, at the time of Manu, women were in low esteem and were not allowed to study the Vedas. Early marriage had become by now the custom.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Rout, (2016) This progressive outlook towards women's empowerment found its roots in the Vedic period, a time when women were revered as embodiments of the divine feminine energy, encouraged to pursue spiritual and intellectual growth.

Rout, (2016) The ancient Indian educational system, which flourished under the patronage of enlightened rulers and scholars, established prestigious institutions of higher learning, such as the renowned Nalanda University. These hallowed halls of knowledge welcomed women as students and scholars, shattering the prevailing patriarchal norms of the era.

Kapur, (2019) The Vedas, the foundational texts that shaped the philosophical and spiritual fabric of Hindu civilization, upheld the principle of gender equality, emphasizing the necessity of imparting knowledge to both men and women alike.

Pradeep, (2019) The ancient Indian educational system nurtured the talents of women writers, poets, and dramatists, whose literary works continue to be celebrated and studied to this day.

METHODOLOGY:

The paper is based on secondary data. The Researcher has collected data from different sources. These are websites, journal articles, e-books reports, commission, articles published in local papers, national and international etc.

The mischief caused by the discontinuance of Upanayana was further enhanced by the lowering

of the marriageable age. In the Vedic period, girls were married at about the age of 16 or 17; but in the later Vedic period (from 500 B.C to 500 A.D.) girls were married at the age of 8 or 9. Early marriage of girls gave a death-blow to female education. Though in society, as a whole, female education received a great set-back during this period, it continued to receive attention in rich, aristocratic and royal families. Girls in these families were given a fairly good literary education but surely not Vedic literature. The only education a girl of an ordinary family received was one which fitted her to fulfil her duties in the household of her husband. Her duties mainly confined to rearing up her children, keeping everything clean, preparing food for the members of the family and looking after the household utensils. Thus, the education of girls was entirely domestic. They used to receive education at homes.

Women in India were deprived of educational privileges for centuries, but there were always some exceptions to this general condition. Indian literature of all ages refers to educated women who took prominent part even in public affairs and showed finest skill in fine arts as well as in military art. Chandragupta Maurya had women bodyguards. But, the daughters of princes and well-to-do families often received some education from their fathers or elders or family priests. Many female ascetics and mendicants used to learn some Sanskrit and were conversant with popular religious poems. Madhava Samhita on Parashara Smriti says “Yopanayanam krutwa pashcad vivaham karoti sa brahmavadini | tathaiva ya prathamata upanayanam krutwa sadya eva vivaham vidhaya tato vedamadhite sa sadyovadhuh This means - She who studies Vedas after upanayana and then gets married is brahmavadini, she who gets married immediately after upanayana and then studies Vedas is sadyovadhu. This goes on to show that women were eligible to both the sacred threading ceremony as well as the Vedic studies in ancient times. This also means that women are also eligible to Gayatri Upadesha and to learn the Gayatri Mantra, because any person who has gone through the Yajnopavitam ceremony is eligible for Gayatri Upadesha. So, denying the women rights to study vedic knowledge, to Yajnopavitam Sanskara and Gayatri Upadesha is un-Vedic. In the Vedas there is not a single

reference which denies the women these rights. Even women Scholars got the name of – Rishika.

All the Vedic hymns were actually revealed to different Vedic scholars, which is why we find each Vedic hymn attributed to a particular Rishi. Now what is interesting to note is that, there are many Vedic hymns attributed to Rishikas (female Vedic scholars). In Rig Veda alone there are around 30 women Vedic scholars (Rishikas) to whom different hymns have been attributed to. It would be lack of experience to say that women cannot study the Vedas, while there are hymns in the Vedas which were revealed to women sages! Katyaayana in his Rig-Veda Sarvanukramani lists the 27 Rishikas as follows, saying these are the Brahnavadinya or female Vedic scholars.

***“Godha Ghosha Vishwavara Apalopanishannishat
Brahmajaya JuhUrnama Agastyasya Swasa Aditih
Indrani Indramata Sarama cha Romashorvashi
Iopamudra cha Nadyashca yami Nari cha
Shashwati
Shrirlaksha Sarparaj ji Vak Shraddha Medha cha
Dakshina
Ratri Surya cha Savitri Brahnavadinya Iritah”.***

Even Panini in his Ashtadhyayi refers to *Kathi* as female students of the *Katha Shaakha* of the Vedic school. He also refers to *Bahvrichi* as female students who are well versed in many hymns of the Rig-Veda. Panini also mentions about the female students admitted to the study of Meemamsa and about *chhatri* (girl students) and *Upadhyayi* (women teachers). This clearly shows that even during the time of Panini, Vedic education was imparted to both men and women. In his book “Siddhartha Kaumudi” Bhattoji Deekshita, the 17th century Sanskrit grammarian from Maharashtra wrote on the Ashtadhyayi of Panini. In this book the author refers to the term *Upadhyayi* explicitly as ladies who are themselves teachers and not merely as wives of male teachers. This shows that, even in not so distant past, there were female teachers in Sanskrit education.

Isn't this an irony that on one hand we have the western civilization where women who were denied equal rights to that of men in the ancient times today enjoy equal rights with men in all sections of the society. And on the other hand our ancestors during the early Vedic civilization started

off with equal rights to men and women, and today we have advocates who want to deny the very same Vedic education and Sanskara to women.

Even during Sankaracharya period, 9th Century AD. It was the period when Muslim invaders had not come to India, he came to Mithila for a Shastrarth with Mandan Misra, in which Mandan Misra got defeated by Sankaracharya, that time Mandan Misra's wife came in front and said Mandan je only half defeated because you have not defeated me. A new Shastrarth took place between Sankaracharya and Bharti, wife of Mandan Misra. In first round Bharti was on the upper hand in the Shastrarth on Kama, Sankaracharya took time he got knowledge about Kamasashtra and only after that he defeated Bharti. That Shastrarth took more than 1 year. It shows that there was education in women till that time. Lilawati is a renowned Mathematician of her time. There is a book by her Lilawati. Gargi was a great scholar and is famous for his Shastrarth.

Conclusion:

The Vedic era, spanning roughly from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE, represents one of the most formative periods in the intellectual and cultural history of India. Education during this time was deeply rooted in the transmission of sacred knowledge, moral discipline, and practical skills necessary for individual and societal well-being. The Gurukula system, with its emphasis on close teacher-student relationships, oral tradition, and holistic development, fostered not only academic learning but also ethical values and spiritual growth. Philosophically, Vedic education sought harmony between the individual and the cosmos, prioritizing selfrealization (*ātma-jñāna*) as the highest aim of learning. While the system was shaped by the socio-religious context of its time, its core principles—such as the integration of knowledge and character, experiential learning, and reverence for the teacher—remain relevant to contemporary educational thought. This study reaffirms that Vedic education was not merely an academic pursuit but a lifelong process aimed at cultivating wisdom, virtue, and a sense of universal responsibility. Women education in ancient India was prevailed without any inequality, but later due to various reasons women education declined and they remained mainly with

house works. Now, Women's education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside.

Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover, educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

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