

WOMEN EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

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Abstract: In Vedic times women and men were equal as far as education and religion were concerned. Women participated in the public sacrifices along with men. The position of women in ancient India was free and frank bold, women were well educated and respected members of society. In the period of Vedic literature women occupied the prominent position. They are educated and they are liberty to adequate any work. This is valid according to Veda. Thus in the post Vedic period also women are considered to be pivotal for cultural and good qualities like sacrifice etc. Women ought to have undergone Upanayana ceremony before mastering Vedas. After mastering the Vedas they were allowed to participate in debates along with men. **“Purā Yugeshu Nārinām Mounjibandhanamishyate. Vedasyādhyayanam Samyak Gāyathrīvachanam Tathā.”** (In ancient days, it was practice to conduct Upanayana even for ladies and then enable them to study the Vedas and recite the Sāvitrī). (Gobhila Gruhya Sūtra 3-70).

Introduction: “The wife should do Agnihotra (yagna), Sandhyāvandana and all other daily religious rituals. If, for some reason, her husband is not present, the woman alone has full rights to do yagna.” (Rig-Veda Samhita 1-79-872).

That women and men are equal in the eyes of dharma is made explicit in a beautiful sloka from the Rig-Veda: “O women! These mantras are given to you equally (as to men). May your thoughts, too, be harmonious. May your assemblies be open to all without discrimination. Your mind and consciousness should be harmonious. I (the rishi) give you these mantras equally as to men and give you all and equal powers to absorb (the full powers) of these mantras. (Rig-Veda Samhita 10-191-3).

They used to marry after their education of them like Vedavati, a daughter of sage kusadhvaja, did not marry at all. In Rig-Veda women and their virtues are notified. The following mantras say about the rich tradition of women. “Anuvrataha Pithuh Putro Mātā Bhavatu Sammānāh, Jāyāpatye Madhumatī Vācham Vadatu Sāntivān.” (Rig-Veda 10-81-8).

In Yajurveda women are shown as expert of Medicine and Vyakarana similarly, environmenta subject is a favourite one for them. “Oshadayāh Pratigruhnīta Pushpavati Supippalāh, Ayam Vo Garbhartvayah Pratnamsadhashtamesadhavat.” (Yajurveda 9-32). Women in Vedic age enjoyed the status of teacher also. The women are considered as Teachers, “Mātruman Pitruman Āchāryavān Purushovedhah.” Which means that a person who has mother, father and guru will gain knowledge. Here, we can notice that women occupies first place among teacher. In these days it is said that women should have equal rights with men, but scriptures have granted them special privileges.

Classification of Women in Ancient India based on Vedic Education: Women were classified as Brahmavādinī and Sadyovadhu in ancient Vedic times. Brahmavādinī was a woman who studied the

Vedas after the Yajnopavītam sanskara (sacred thread ceremony) and got married later or stayed a bachelor in further pursuit of the Vedic knowledge. Sadyovadhu was a woman who got married immediately after her sacred thread ceremony. This has been mentioned in the texts like Madhava Samhite on Parāsara Smṛiti, in Hārīta Dharma Sutra, etc. Some claim that Brahmavādinī is just a wife of a daughter of a male rishi. But that is not what the texts define them as, nor does the very word Brahmavādinī imply anything of that sort. Instead the word actually implies knowledge of the Vedas.

Mādhava Samhite on Parashara Smṛiti says:

“Yopanayanam Krutwā Pashcad Vivāham karoti Sā Brahmavādinī. Tathaiva Ya Prathamatā Upanayanam krutwā sadya eva vivahām vidhāya tato vedamadhite sā sadyoyadhuh.”

Which means- She who studies Vedas after Upanayana and then gets married is Brahmavādinī, she who gets married immediately after Upanayana and then studies Vedas is Sadyoyadhu.

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 Gāyatri Upadesha and to learn the Gāyatri Mantra. Because any person who has undergone the Yajnopavītam ceremony is eligible for Gāyatri Upadesha. So, denying the women rights to study vedic knowledge, to Yajnopavītam Samskara and Gāyatri Upadesha is un-vedic. In the vedas there is not a single reference which denies the women these rights.

Shri Madhvācharya in his Mahābhāratha Tātparya Nirṇaya, describes the scholarly nature of Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas as Great women should study the Vedas like Krishna (Draupadi)

Rishika – Women Vedic Scholar: 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 rishika (female Vedic scholars). In Rig Veda alone there are around 30 women Vedic scholars (rishikas) to whom different hymns have been attributed to. At the end of the article you will find a non-exhaustive list of the female Vedic scholars to whom the hymns of the Rig-Veda have been attributed to.

Now obviously, it would be naive 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 brahmavadinis or female Vedic scholars.

Godha ghosha vishvāvara apalopanishannishat
Brahmajaya juhurnama agastyasya swasa adithih

Indrāni Indramāta ca saramā romashorvashi
Lopamudra ca nadyascha yamī nārī ca shashwatī
Shrīrlaksha sarparaj ji vak shradja medha ca dakshina
Rātri surya ca sāvitri brahmavādinya iritāh.

Panini on Female Vedic Scholars: Panini in his Ashtādhyāyī refers to Kathi as female students of the Katha Shākha of the Vedic school. He also refers to Bahvrichi as female students who are well versed in many hymns of the Rigveda. Panini also mentions about the female students admitted to the study of Meemamsa and about chhatri (girl students) and Upādhyāyī (women teachers).

This clearly shows that even during the times of Pānini, Vedic education was imparted to both men and women.

Women Vedic Scholar	Rig Veda hymn attributed to
aditi	4.18
aditirdākshāyaṇī	10.72
apālā ātreyaī	8.91
indrāṇī	10.86
ūrvashī	10.85
godhā	10.134
goshā kākshīvatī	10.39, 10.40
juhūrbramhajāyā	10.109
tvaṣṭa garbhakartā	10.184
dakshīṇā prajāpatya	10.107
yamī	10.154
yamī vaivasvatī	10.10
rātrīrbhāradvājī	10.127
lopāmudrā	1.171
vasukrapatnī	10.28
vagāmbhṛṇī	10.125
vishvavārā ātreya	5.28
sashvatyaṅgīrasī	8.1
shradhdā kāmāyāni	10.151
shachī paulomi	10.159
sarparājñī	10.189
sikatā nivāvari	9.86
sūrya savitrī	10.85
romashā	1.126
saramā devashunī	10.108
shikhandinyava psarasau kāshyapan	9.104
jaritā sharṅgah	10.142
sudītīrangirasah	8.71
indra mataro	10.153

Vedic Education of Women mentioned in recent Times: Siddhanta Kaumudi by Bhattoji Deekshita, the 17th century Sanskrit grammarian from Maharashtra is a commentary 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 it an irony that on the 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 samskaras to women!

A non-exhaustive list of Women Vedic Scholars to whom hymns of the Rig Veda were revealed to: So women were more independence and free in every aspect and educate and educated. Several hymns of the Rig-Veda were composed by female Rishis (Sages). Thus the culture growth depends upon women education only.

References:

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