

## Women's Education in Ancient Indian Religious Texts

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In the latest environment in the ancient Indian religious texts, half of the world's population has reached the highest peak of success, whose foundation is modern education. Women's education is a pillar of light in whose light women are waving their flag of power and success from earth to space. This has been possible due to equal rights given to women in the modern era, but cannot be considered completely true as history gets repeated. In this context, ancient religious texts were studied in which many things were revealed in the context of female education.

Women's education has been important in ancient India. Education enriches and enhances a man's life and strengthens his intellect and wisdom. For this reason, the education of women has been emphasized since the Vedic era. Women's education was at its highest in the Vedic era. Women were equal to men in knowledge and education. But this condition of female education could not be maintained further. Until 200 BC -200 AD, the path of women's education had been blocked. It was a thing, of the past for the girl to go to the educational institutes and gurukul to get knowledge. In the Vedic era, the girl practiced celibacy, studying various subjects. Women were proficient in philosophy and logic. They used to sing the *shlokas* of the Rigveda. *Ghosha*, *Lopamudra*, *Vishvavara*, *Appala*, *Urvashi* were *pandit* women. (1) It is also known from the householder that along with the *upanayana* of the woman, there was also the inclusion ceremony (2), that is the *sutra*. Like the men the women used to lead regular celibacy in getting education. *Samvartana* rites were performed after the end of *Brahmacharya* life. *Gargi*, *Barwa*, *Sulabha*, *Maitrei* etc are the names of sages (3). Even in the later Vedic age, women were educated in celibacy (4). She was also proficient in additional fine arts of Vedic knowledge. There were two types of women in that era. One sage bride and the other *Brahmavadini* *Sadu* bride followed *Brahmacharya* before marriage and *Brahmavadini* used to learn throughout life (5).

Women doing teaching work were called *Acharya*. Even in Buddhist era, evidence of female education is found. Among the poetry of *Theri Gatha*, 32 lifelong *Brahmcharini* and eighteen were married (6). *Khema* was a highly educated woman of that era. Known monk *Subhadra* from the *sanyukta nikaya* was famous in lecturing. The property of *Raj Griha*, *Bhadra Kundal*, daughter of *Sali Seth*, attracted

everyone with his knowledge. According to one *Jataka*, four daughters of a Jain father, while traveling the country, challenged people to debate philosophy. Jain literature also finds excerpts from female women of which *Jayanthi* was the institutional head (7).

It is known from the above details that the tradition of higher education of women started from the pre-Vedic era, continued till the Buddhist era, but it was banned in the *Smriti yuga* (8). *Manu* and *Yagnyavalakyam* prohibited female education (9). Now the chanting of Vedic mantras in their *Upanayana* rites was discontinued. Like *Shudra*, women were also kept separate from education and culture. Perhaps for this reason Sanskrit literature also mentions women and *Shudras*. According to the *Shatapatha Brahmin*, do not look at the female dog and black bird while teaching, because they are untrue. This view is also found in *Parashar Griha Sutra*. On several occasions, teachers' interactions with women and *Shudras* were also said to be inappropriate. According to *Buddhayan*, *Brahmachari*, who fast for success, should not communicate with women and *Shudras* (10). *Manusmriti* (11) and *Koram Purana* (12) have also given similar quotes. According to the *Aam Tamb Sutra*, the woman *Shudra* had the right to receive the *Atharvaveda* sermons as the *Atharvaveda* did not come under the category of Vedas at that time. Later on, the woman *Shudra* was allowed to acquire the knowledge of the Puranas but till the 12th century AD but it was forbidden to read the Vedas near them (13). This example shows that in the *Smriti Yuga*, the condition of women was extremely pathetic. Although female education is mentioned in the epics.

According to the *Mahabharata*, *Kunti*, the mother of the *Pandavas*, was accomplished in the *Atharvaveda* (14). According to *Ramayana*, some women were absorbed in life-long studies and did not marry (15). *Vedavati*, the daughter of the *Rishi Kush Dhvaj*, was one such Brahmin (16). A woman named *Kashkritisani* pioneered the much-discussed book on difficult and esoteric topics like *Mimamsa* (17). Even in the Buddhist era, women started to get into deep and serious subjects like philosophy. *Yajnavalkya's* wife *Maitri* was a noted philosopher (18). *Gargi* stunned a sage like *Yajnavalkya* with her amazing reasoning at a scholarly seminar at *Janaka's* assembly (19). *Maitri* gained fame by learning Vedanta from sages like *Balmiki* and *August*. There

were mantras with women like Kaushalya and Tara. Sita used to pray Vedic regularly (20).

This fact shows that in the then society, women did not only get education but also went out of the threshold of home and went to the seminar. Such women were called *Upadhyaya* (21). *Panini* mentions a women's teaching school (22). Possibly, the teaching work in these schools was done by the students. Therefore, it can be said that the women of the former Middle Ages were fully devoted to their education initiation.

*Manu* and *Yajnavalkya* imposed restrictions on female education. It was probably because of their inability to pronounce mantras correctly that memory based learning made this arrangement. Whatever may be the reason, but it is true that in the *Smriti Yuga*, the path of female education was blocked. Women and *Shudras* were considered extremely impure classes of society. In the *Gita*, *Krishna* says, "He *Parth ve bhee jo paap yoni hai arthath stree Vaishya aur shudra mere sharan mein aakar param gati ko prapt karte hain*" (23). There is no doubt that they are assured of achieving the ultimate speed, but by telling them their sins, they also feel the hatred of the society then (24). Similar views have been expressed in the *Dharmasutras and Puranas*. The women mentioned in the epics were *Rajkula* elite and upper-class, where there was a proliferation of female education. Possibly women of ordinary class used to stay away from education.

In the *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*, there is mention of co-education, that is, boys and girls were educated together. In the ashram of *Valmiki*, he was educated with *Atreyi, Luv, Kush* and this tradition was in Vedic period (25). Examples of women's education are also found in *Mahabharata*. *Amba* and *Shekhawat* are said to have studied together (26). According to *Malti Madhava*, *Kamandaki* studied in Gurukul with *Bhuri Vasu* and *Devarath* (27). It is known from the *Puranas* that there were two forms of feminine education. One was spiritual, second is practical, spiritual knowledge was *vrihaspati, Bhagini Bhuvana, Aparna, Ekapana, Patala(28), Dharani(29), Sannati(30), Satarupa(31)*, etc. and received a man of choice by their penance.

*Rajasekhar* mentions *Vidushi* and *Kavitri* (32). Many such women are also described in the saga *Saptashati*. Who composed many saga (33). Thus, it can be said that in the 200BC-200AD, memory based learning blocked the path of education, but such mention is not found in the epics.

There was also a system of home education for women and it was said to be the best for them. This practice was going on since pre-Vedic era. According to the *Rigveda*, a girl named *Apala* supported her father in agricultural work (34). The girls also knew cow milking, yarn cutting, knitting and sewing. The girl was also proficient in fine arts (35) The girl

also danced skillfully and practiced the composition of the *Rigveda* (36). In the later Vedic period, emphasis was also placed on practical education of women (37). *Kanya* dance art was also taught in painting. It is also described in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The women of *Tripuri* used to keep people cheerful with their gestures(38). The expected use of sketching colors and the expression of the shape were the mainstay of the painting and women used to learn it. *Sakhi Chitralkha*, daughter of *Banasura's* minister *Kushmand*, marked the images of many *Deo Gandharva* human beings on the screen (39) which also had an attractive picture of *Anirudh* (40)

It is clear from the references mentioned that the path of women education was blocked in the 200BC-200AD. If one used to take education in *Rajkul*, but the path of women education was blocked in the general public. Education was prevalent among upper-class women but she also used to go with her father, brother or husband in debate. This means that even women of higher class were not fully independent.

This tradition continues in modern Indian society as well because *Ramayana Mahabharata and Manusmriti* are the pillars of our culture who does not believe in the independent existence of women. Even today Indian women are showing their success in every sphere of life, but their independent existence is still questioned because modern society is still not in favour of giving them freedom completely.

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