Women’s Education in Ancient Indian Religious Texts

[1] Dr. Sujatha Kumari
[1] LEC S.J.M. College, Bhagalpur, Bihar, Indi

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 Upayana 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 Brahmacharini 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 Yagnavalkyam prohibited female education (9). Now the chanting of Vedic mantras in their Upayana 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). Manasmsriti (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 Dhwaj, was one such Brahmin (16). A woman named Kashkriti 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 Vaishyach 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), Sannatii(30), Sutarupa(31), etc. and received a man of choice by their penance.

Rajasekhar mentions Vidushi and Kavitrī (32). Many such women were 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 Chitrakekha, daughter of Banasura's minister Kushman, 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 Rajkal, 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.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Rigveda, 8.31, including Sayan Bhasya, Editor, Max Muller, Pune 1933_57
2. Social History of Ancient India, page 536, Bihar Hindi Granth Academy, Patna, 2001 Dr. Jayashankar Mishra
3. Gautam Griha Sutra 2.1. 19.20 cited, above mentioned
4. Ashava lion Griha Sutra 3.4, quoted,
10. Boudhayan Maharsutra 4.45 Above
14. Mahabharata 4.1.14.3.155, Nilkanth Tika with Kolkata 1946
15. Ramayana, 7.17 Madras 1933
17. Mahabharata, above mentioned
18. Brihadaranyaka. Upanishad, 2.4.4.5 Economic and Social History of Early India, Page 40 Hindi Medium Directorate of Implementation, University of Delhi, 1993
21. Patanjali, 3.822 Mahabhashya, Editor, F. Keelehan, Mumbai
22. Ibid
25. Uttararamachari T, Issue 2, Mitra Ibid, 537
29. Vishnu Purana 3.10.19
30. Brahmin Purana 2.13.20
31. Matsya Purana 20-27 Quoted Egypt Above
32. Kavyamamsa, Egypt Ibid Page 412
33. Manusmriti 2.67
34. Rigveda 8.91.56
35. Above 1.2.3.6
36. Above 1.92.4
38. Matsya Purana, Mitra, Ibid, Page 411