

## **Education for women in ancient India**

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### **Abstract**

Empowerment of women is seen as requiring education, and achieving gender equality depends on it. The construction of a world that is tranquil, affluent, and sustainable depends on this. As a result, nations all over the world strive to achieve it. This essay aims to investigate how education and female emancipation are related. It also aims to investigate why women, a group of the population that may have been responsible for their subjugation, have been denied access to education. It makes an effort to go deeply into the history of Ancient India in order to understand the causes behind the denial of education to women. The Rig Vedic Age) was a time of relative equality between the sexes, according to textual sources, as we learn from extremely ladies with education, women who are intellectuals and warriors. They appeared to have the freedom to use their rights and decide for themselves. However, gradually over generations, these rights were taken away from women and limits were put on them according to Manu's code of law and the Dharamshastras. The effect of child marriage was a significant setback for women's education. This gradually reduced all other social statuses, privileges, and authority, causing them to become subordinate. This persisted into the contemporary era, with some improvements in women's education and empowerment, but there is still a long way to go before there is gender equality.

**Keywords:** *Patriarchy, Autonomy, Subordination, Education, Empowerment, and Women.*

### **Introduction:**

Women's empowerment has taken on significant importance in contemporary state policy. In India, women make up about half of the population. Their empowerment is crucial for a peaceful, affluent, and forward-thinking society as well as for achieving gender equality. As a result, the government and civic society are working hard to promote women's empowerment throughout the country. Any civilization's advancement depends heavily on education, and no culture can advance if a sizeable portion of its population—women—remains ignorant. It might be argued that education is a step in the right direction for women's

empowerment, which can lead to beneficial societal developments. Without the assistance of roughly half of its population, no country can advance. Therefore, for any progressive society, women's education and empowerment are crucial. Here is exemplified by the following quote from our first prime minister and head of state: "If you educate a woman, you educate a family. If you educate a man, you teach an individual. Mother India is empowered when women are. Nehru, Jawaharlal

Regardless of inequalities in race, caste, or class, a number of national and international institutions have been making efforts towards the goal of gender parity in education. Women may overcome the obstacles created by society, traditions, and rituals from the dawn of time with the help of education. A woman may acquire information, secure a living, and achieve the respect she merits in society by getting an education. It improves women's status in the home sphere and contributes to closing the gender gap. Having some degree of empowerment allows women to exercise their rights and make decisions.

## **Education:**

Education is crucial for the advancement of women in society. This has several benefits; in addition to personality development, it has a big impact on sociocultural and economic progress (Majumdar, 1916). In order to promote full female literacy in contemporary, independent India, the Indian State has undertaken several measures and introduced programmes like "beti bachao beti padhao." Indian women with education are not less than males in any manner. They have demonstrated their ability to perform their jobs effectively in a variety of settings. Therefore, it's critical that they have equitable access to quality education.

If we look back at India, we can see that only some high caste, royal, aristocratic, or women from wealthy households had access to resources and knowledge. Due to society, norms, and practises, as well as indifference and women's subordinate status, the majority of women were denied access to education (Sharma, 2015: 107) in the society. The biggest barriers to females' education in contemporary times have been societal attitudes, child marriage, and dowry, even in India. In the modern marriage market, both a college degree and a stable job (in the government, a university, or another profession) are desired bridal characteristics. This is done not to increase the bride's independence or sense of self-worth,

but to guarantee the family a higher status through a second source of income (Majumdar, 1916). All of this is intimately related to the subject of female subjugation. Therefore, in order to comprehend the denial of education to women in general, we need to identify the historical causes of this subjugation.

The topic of women's subjugation has a long history, particularly in the setting of India. We need to go back to the earliest time of India's history, the Ancient Age, to discover the answers to these issues about the denial of rights to women. We must evaluate if women in this era had access to education and authority. If so, when did their historical era of servitude start?

### **Women in Ancient Indian**

**Vedic Age:** According to renowned historian Max Muller, although being patriarchal, the Rig Vedic Age was regarded as the golden age for women due to their equality in position and rights, particularly the right to study. Despite the fact that historians have disagreed on this issue, most people agree that women's education was essential to Vedic civilization. No matter their gender, all children received an education. Women were permitted to pursue education while choosing to maintain their virginity (Rout, 2016). The majority of females from wealthy homes have the opportunity to pursue an education. Female students of the three higher varnas might learn the Vedas from a teacher who was frequently a woman. To achieve moksha, or freedom, was the ultimate goal of education. After undergoing upanayana sanskara, also known as the initiation ritual (sacred thread ceremony), the learner was deemed a brahmachari. Without the upanayana sanskara, one was not permitted to chant the Vedic mantras on any occasion. Textual records show that women (wives, mothers, widows, and girls) recited mantras at a number of both public and private settings. Female students at Katha school were referred to as Kathis, and those at Bahvricha school as Bahvrichis. Females were allowed to study mimamsa, and once they had finished learning the mimamsa-sutra from Rishi Kasakritsna, they were given the name Kasakritsna. During this time, female teachers and pupils were generally referred to as Upadhyayi and chhatri, respectively. The term "panini" alludes to residences, also known as "chhatrisalas," where female students, also known as "chhatris," were housed and directly supervised by upadhyayis. 2015 (Sharma). Along with a boy, prayers were also said for a lovely and intellectual girl. The Haritasmrti

refers to two groups of educated women: Brahnavadinis, who were spinsters devoted to Vedic study. The Sadyodvahas, or those who studied the Vedas till marriage by the age of 15 or 16, made up the second group. We have evidence of solitary women undertaking religious ceremonies as well. According to King (1987), women often engaged in religious rites alongside their spouse. During the Vedic era, women are mentioned as scholars, philosophers, painters, and poets. Sulabha, Maitreyi, and Gargi are mentioned in the Upanishad (800–500 BCE) during the periods of Kathi, Kalapi, Bahvici, Visvavärä, Ghos, Apälä, Lopamudra, Romasha, and Indrani. Many hymns have been assigned to a select handful of them, and some of them wrote hymns (Mookherjee, 1994). 27 out of over 1000 hymns of Rig Veda is said to have been composed by women sages, including Visvara (King, 1987).

Women got training in dance, singing, and painting as well as writing plays and poetry in Sanskrit. According to sources, women from aristocratic or royal families got military training and actively took part in the conflict. Other commercial tasks carried out by women in this era included dyeing, thread, basket, mat, rope, and clothing and perfume production. These professions made it possible for women to have respectable socioeconomic lives. Despite early exceptions, only male members of the Brahmanical caste were able to attend higher education (King, 1987).

"With her knowledge, the learned lady cleanses our life. Yajur Veda (Sharma, 2015): "She promotes virtue and effective management of society through her knowledge and deeds."

According to historical records, there were intelligent women like Grgi and Maitreyi who could speak to a gathering of philosophers on complex subjects and who had acquired Brahnavidya, the greatest level of philosophical understanding (Mookherjee, 1994). When Yajnavalkya retired to the jungle, he had a famous dialogue with his highly educated wife Maitreyi, which suggests that at the time, women were "considered as intellectual companions of their husbands" (Majumdar, 1916). The Upanishads include instances in which female philosophers engaged male colleagues in verbal duels, such as when Gargi Vacaknavi battled Sage Yajnavalkya (Rout, 2016). Women who had access to education were better equipped to conduct honourable and respected lives. In society, educated women were treated with respect and appreciation. They were capable of defending themselves from any kind of abuse (Kapur, 2018). The situation, however, changed over time as social norms and

legislation consigned women to the home, denied them access to education, and placed them in a powerless position at the mercy of patriarchy.

**Later Vedic Age:** Beginning around 500 BC, women began to lose the privileges and rights they had throughout the Vedic era. They were no longer able to participate in Upanayan sanskara, making them ineligible for schooling. This further disqualified them from reciting Vedic mantras or offering sacrifices. Later, the Dharmashastra and Manusmriti legal codes severely restricted women's rights by lowering the marriage age to 8 or 9 years, depriving them of the chance to pursue an education.

Manusmriti (200 A.D.): "Nothing must be done independently by a girl, a young woman, or even an elderly one." "A female must be subject to her father in childhood, her husband in youth, and her sons when her lord is dead," he continues (Sharma, 2015).

Some women from affluent and royal households did continue to obtain a literary education, but they were not permitted to study the Vedas. Since their lives were restricted to the home, ordinary women were often taught how to be excellent husbands and mothers (Sharma, 2015).

**Age of Buddha and Mahavir:** Initially, the Buddhist order had barred women from entering. On the other hand, he agreed to his aunt Mahapajapati Gautmi and his student Ananda's request to allow women to enter the Sangha for the sake of education. The job of educating the bhikshunis was given to a bhikshuk or monk. Before being granted 'Diksha' (religious custom), Bhikshunis had to remain in the Sangha and serve a two-year apprenticeship. Buddhist education was once exclusively available to "bhikshus" and "bhikshunis," but much later it was made available to the general public in an effort to spread Buddhism. Notably, 13 prominent Buddhist nuns were dispatched to spread Buddhism in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and other nations. Famous followers of Lord Buddha were Rani Kshema, Sujata, Shuva, Anupama, Sumedha, etc. Despite being far less numerous than Buddhist monks, female nuns created numerous hymns, dramas, and poetry in Sanskrit and received training in music, fine arts, and painting. According to sources, a number of Buddhist nuns achieved great levels of intellectual understanding and succeeded as teachers and academics in their fields (Sharma, 2015).

**Mauryan Age:** Even Emperor Asoka's daughter, Sanghamitra, was initiated into the Buddhist community and dispatched to spread Buddhism during the Mauryan period. According to Jain traditions, Kosambi princess Jayanti stayed single so she could pursue her studies in philosophy and religion (Radhamma, 20220). According to Lalita Vistara, women were educated in reading and writing at the time of the Buddha and were capable of achieving success in a variety of fields (Majumdar, 1916). They created plays, poetry, new forms of art including music and painting, trained in combat, and even took part in religious rituals. Additionally, they favoured learning about dharmashastras, economic ethics, combat, and other subjects. One category of women, courtesans were skilled in specific arts like music, poetry and sexual pleasure. This clearly indicates that not all women were deprived and relegated to the domestic space. There were a section of women who acquired certain specific skills and education, still, the scope of womens' education was very limited.

## Conclusion:

Therefore, we may go back in time to the Ancient era of Indian history to find the roots of women's disempowerment and denial of their access to education. But this restriction of women's rights and options persisted in India right up until the present. Social ills like the Sati system, purdah, and female feticide gradually made the situation of women worse. To enhance India's reputation among Western nations, our social reformers worked throughout the colonial era to eradicate societal ills like sati and promote female education, among other things. These actions were a reaction to the imperialist perception of Indian society as a primitive nation with oppressive traditions like Sati. As a result, many of these rituals were abolished during colonial authority as a result of the initiatives launched by social reformers in the early 19th century, but the right to gender equality was only established with the ratification of the Indian Constitution. Despite the fact that women are legally granted equality, decades of tyranny, inequity, and exploitation have placed them far behind the other sex.

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