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Educational status of women in the Vedic period: An introduction

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Abstract

Religious environment was a potent mode to influence ancient Indian education. Indian education can be basically called as the product of the Aryan mind and aesthetic and vocational aspects were mainly inspired by the emotional and material nature of the Dravidians. The educational scenario of girls and women saw a change from Vedic (2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.) to Post-Vedic (1000 B.C. to 200 B.C.) periods. The status of women was high in Indian society in the Vedic period. This paper has been written to know about the educational position of women in Vedic Period along with their social status. Secondary sources have been mainly used to write this paper to show the importance of education for women in the Vedic period and how did it help them to sustain their social status

Keywords: Vedic women, education, Vedic period

1. Introduction

In earlier times, Hindus considered education as a process of life. It was of belief of the ancient Hindus that education should prepare an individual to attain the main objectives of life like liberation, for living, for character formation (self-confidence, self-reliant and self-respect) and preservation of culture. Therefore, education was given to the women as it is directly related to the improvement of the society, economic prosperity, national solidarity, their social status and for good family relation.

Indian womanhood and their education have gone through socio-economic and psycho-spiritual changes. From 4th century B.C. to 3rd century B.C., girls and women were given education which helped them to acquire self-respect, self-confidence, worth and freedom. In Vedic period, according to A.S. Altekar, education was regarded as very essential to secure a suitable marriage". In Rig Vedic society "...the practice of child marriage did not exist". That is why, girls were able to study and education was given an utmost importance.

The essence of Aryan civilization has been mainly preserved in 4(four) Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvan). Even though the early Vedic family was of patriarchal type, but Vedic women had some control over the entire household. The patriarchal system never deprived the privileges and rights of the women. Vedic sacrifices were performed jointly by the husband and wife. Therefore, in Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with the man.

2. Methodology and Objectives of the Study

To write this paper, mainly secondary data have been used from textbooks, reference books, websites etc. The study is mainly based on analytical study only. The main objectives of writing this paper are:

- a) To know about the educational status of the girls and women in the Vedic period
- b) To make a study about the Vedic women' educational conditions and their social status

3. Discussion

The status and condition of women and girls were much better in Vedic period than any other subsequent period. If any women wanted to pursue education and knowledge and that too without getting married, they were allowed to do so without any bindings and constraints. Most of the girls from well to do families also had the privilege to acquire education. The Upanayana (initiation ceremony) were organized for both the girls and boys. During the Aryan period which is also called poetical period, it can be rightly said that the education of

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women were not being neglected. They never showed prejudice against women education and were concerned about the righteousness of the social order of the women. Through the Vedas, it is clearly comes to the notice that the whole Aryan race collectively were very conscious in terms of promulgating codes and laws and uplifting the conditions of women. It greatly contributed to the collective creative forces of the general mass. Aryans were mainly not aware or conscious about the gender power politics and conflicts at their time because at that time society was not complex and it was in developing stage.

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- Brahnavadinis and Sadyodvahas. Brahnavadinis 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 Agasthya. 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, Atreyiand 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.

4. Conclusion

From the discussion on educational status of the girls and women in Vedic period, we can come to the conclusion that the women were luckier and had the chance and privilege to choose their education and decisions of life in comparison to the other subsequent periods. So, we can compare a similarity between a Vedic women and modern day women

in terms of education. Vedic women were given equal status in education and in the society along with the male ones. Thus, we can say that Vedic Age or period is one of the rich and developed periods mainly for the upliftment of the educational status of the girls and women.

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