



JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC LETTERS
www.jslsci.com

CULTURAL NORMS ON WOMEN'S STATUS IN VEDIC SOCIETY: AN EVALUATION

Debjani Majumdar

Research Scholar, History, Eklavya University, Damoh

Dr. Siraj Khan

Supervisor, Eklavya University, Damoh

ABSTRACT

Cultural norms were imposed on women since historical times. There were variations seen during the early and later Vedic ages. In early Vedic ages, restrictions and norms were imposed less on women. This could be seen from their participation and allowance in educational, religious activities. Exemplar here are the female sages like Maitreyi, Gargi, among others. But in the later stages, patriarchy emerged, which declined women's social status. They were confined to the household chores and were not allowed to participate in the social activities. Widow Remarriage was banned, and ironically child marriage was increased.

Keywords: Culture, norms, status, women, Vedic society, evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper tends to evaluate cultural norms, which were prevalent during Vedic Age. These norms were directed towards women, restricting their individual freedom and liberty. Delving deeper into the historical context, status of women in Vedic society was neither uniform nor static. Rather, the status evolved significantly with time (Dwivedi & Malik, 2022). There were variations, as compared to the early (Rig Vedic) and later Vedic periods. An evaluation is needed in terms of understanding the cultural norms which were imposed on women. This evaluation is done from perspectives of textual evidence and social practices, which finds great significance in Vedic literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Women in Early Vedic Society

In the early Vedic period (c. 1500–1000 BCE), women enjoyed relatively high social status. Textual evidences like *Rig Veda* reflect women who were educated and intellectual in their practices of life. Female sages (*rishikas*) find their presence greatly. To name a few, these rishikas were Gargi, Maitreyi, and Lopamudra who became popular among people. Mishra, (2014) argued that these female sages or rishikas gained popularity by composed hymns and participating in philosophical debates. Women were also allowed to undergo *upanayana* (initiation), study and gain knowledge through Vedas, and perform certain religious rituals, acting at par with men.

Marriage during Vedic period was based on mutual consent. Practices such as *swayamvara* (choice of husband) was highly prevalent, providing high degree of autonomy. Women were allowed to remarry, although not in all cases. This right was particularly provided to widows. Evidences are very few for cases of rigid seclusion or child marriage. Economically, Majhi, (2023) stated that women contributed by participating in pastoral and domestic production. This production contributed to the household and community yields.

2.2 Changes reflected in the Later Vedic Period

By the later Vedic period (c. 1000–600 BCE), women's status slowly and gradually declined. Reason behind this was emergence of stratified and patriarchal domination. Property, lineage, and inheritance gained significance for deciding status. As a result of this, stricter control was applied

on women's sexuality and social roles. Evidence lies in *Brahmanas*, *Dharmasutras*, and later *Smritis* where women's dependence on male guardians have been reflected. These males were mainly father, husband, brother, son. Opportunities for education were narrowed down. Upanayana was now the right of males. Ritual participation was no more allowed to women. Practices like child marriage were practiced. Anand, (2024) was of the view that widow remarriage was discouraged, confining women to household chores. Although women continued to be symbolically tagged as mothers, wives, and goddesses, their real social and legal autonomy was reduced.

2.3 Ideology contradicted

As far as Vedic culture is concerned, ideological reverence and social reality can be contradicted. While women were worshipped as embodiments of strength and fertility, their symbolic status did not achieve equality and power in everyday life. According to Paranthaman et al., (2019), patriarchal norms were deeply embedded, in prescriptive texts.

2.4 Evaluation

Overall evaluation stated that Vedic society was a complex one. In later stages, the evolving picture of women's status is a proof of it. The early Vedic period was comparatively more egalitarian, as women were exposed to more educational, religious, and social opportunities, which created an agency of their own. However, the later Vedic period shifted towards patriarchy restricting freedom and liberty for women. Therefore, Dwivedi and Malik, (2022) stated that it would be inaccurate to describe women's status in Vedic society, as oppressive or empowering. Correct description is a historical change, evolving from economic, social, and religious transformations.

3. METHODOLOGY

Inductive approach is effective for inducing new ideas, facts, theories and notions on women's position in Vedic societies. This induction is from interviewing historians dealing with such subjects. This interview is effective for gaining their response, perspective and beliefs on the transitions which came in the social status of women during the period. Analysis of the responses with tables, charts and graphs creates an alarming situation of the shifts in social status of women, especially during the later Vedic Ages.

4. CONCLUSION

An evaluation of cultural norms in Vedic society revealed decline in women's status during the later Vedic stages. Early Vedic traditions reflect allowance for participation and autonomy in education, intellectual and religious events. However later developments unleash restrictions in women's rights and roles. Understanding this progression is crucial for inducing proper interpretation of gender, prevalent in ancient Vedic Indian history.

REFERENCES

Anand, A. (2024). Exploring The Status of Women in Indian Society: A Descriptive Analysis. *Educational Administration Theory and Practices*. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4887245]

Dwivedi, M., & Malik, S. (2022). Status of Women in Vedic Period. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(3).

[https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=27177564&AN=156727292&h=Ft%2FtZY7sgsISwzs8RTZi%2Fj1DQT7s3w%2BdM5Qyo0a3zZ%2FFSR3dKDUmoQa5q%2BgCqs5TLcJSDxmRYIvRfvv6slAYTw%3D%3D&crl=c]

Majhi, L. (2023). Status of Woman Reflected in Vedic Literature. *Partners Universal International Innovation Journal*, 1(1), 46-52. [https://www.puiij.com/index.php/research/article/view/14]

Mishra, S. (2014). Women in Social Life: An Exploration Through Vedic Culture. *Available at SSRN 2541168*. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2541168]

Paranthaman, G., Santhi, S., Radha, R., & Poornima Thilagam, G. (2019). Indian women status: a historical perspective. *Muallim Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 258-266. [http://www.mjsshonline.com/index.php/journal/article/view/48]

Author's Declaration:

I/We, as an author/authors of the above paper/article, hereby declare that the content of this paper is prepared by me/us for publication in this journal is completely my/our own genuine paper and if any person having copyright issue or patent or anything related to the content, I/we shall always

be legally responsible for any issue. If any data or information given by me/us is not correct, I/we shall always be legally responsible. With my/our whole responsibility legally and formally have intimated the publisher that the paper has been checked by guide or expert or supervisor to make it sure that paper is technically right and there is no unaccepted plagiarism. If any issue arises related to plagiarism or any issues, I/we will be solely/entirely responsible for any legal disputes or legal issues. I/we declared that if publisher finds any complication or error or anything hidden or implemented otherwise, my/our paper may be removed from the website. I/we also aware that the publication fees is not refunded further in any circumstances. Even if anything is found illegal publisher may also take legal action against me/us. I/we also declared that this journal/publisher will not be held responsible any legal issues in future regarding this paper publication in this journal.

Debjani Majumdar

Dr. Siraj Khan