

# Role of Women in Society, Education and Preserving Culture in India: A Vision

**Ms. Neelima Bangwal**, Pursuing PhD in English Literature Research Scholar (2016- Present)

DIT University (DITU), Makkawala Village, Mussourie Diversion Road, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. India.

**Dr. Vijay Negi**, Associate Professor and Head of Humanities and Liberal Arts, DIT University (DITU), Makkawala Village, Mussourie Diversion Road, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. India.

## ABSTRACT

If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered". – Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru This paper is miniature which will try to showcase state of women in patriarchal society and her role in educating not only herself but the entire society too. It will cover various real women characters from Vedic period to modern contemporary period. On one hand women is eulogized as incarnation of Durga or Goddess itself but on the other, she is considered as weakest member of the society, she is mistreated by her own people she is called as 'Abla', but with education as a weapon in her hands, she is no more Abla and weak. She has more power than ever, she not only have degrees in her hands but have her rights and powers. And education is the only thing by which women emerges despite all obstacle to hold her identity not only in personal but in professional life too. With education women is considered as equal and walking side by side to a man, she is no more an accessory to man rather a companion, a life partner.

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## Introduction

No one can deny the importance of women in one's life; there are no other opinions which consider women as Durga. She is extolled to the heights of Durga. Durga in the Hindu pantheon is a goddess riding a lion or tiger, with many arms each carrying a weapon. May be the weapon in the hands of Durga epitome of powers in the hands of women to perform various duties, the weapons can be considered as weapon of teaching her kids, raising them, loving them, taking care of the family, homemaking and many more. The importance of women cannot be denied, she is considered Laxmi of the family. From the Vedic period she is given a high platform, when a girl is born in a family, it is said that 'Laxmi' is born, if new bride enters her in-laws house she is denoted with 'Laxmi' too. Why she is compared to or symbolizes as Durga and Laxmi? Laxmi is the goddess of prosperity and happiness and women as a daughter and daughter-in-law considered as Laxmi who not

only brings happiness with her loving and caring nature but brings prosperity too. She is denoted with many other names like Annapurna, Saraswati, Laxmi, Chandramukhi, Vaibhavi and Chamunda and Kali in her fierce form.

She played an important role in society so as in education. Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, beliefs, values and habits. Educational methods include storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators; however learners may also educate themselves (Dewey). In its broadest perspective it is the lifelong learning, which aims at equipping the individual effectively with acceptable skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences that will enable him/her to cope favorably with the problems of the society. It is one of the main keys to economic development and improvements in human welfare. Education is also linked to human development at its

maximum. In Early Vedic period women were given much higher status and were regarded important in education and they had free access to education. But now unfortunately, the potential contribution of women in education is undervalued and underutilized (Adamu, 2012). Women education not only brings prosperity in her family but also help in the economic growth of her country. Former UN secretary General Kofi Annan says "To educate a girl is to reduce poverty".

From Epic age to medieval period the position of women in education deteriorated. Her freedom of education and participations in Vedic functions reduced. But now in Contemporary period the condition of women is improving. From the Vedic age till today, her status and position has been changing with the passing of time. Vedic society was the free society. The society didn't impose any rules and specific 'Pratha' for women. Purda system was not recorded at that time women were allowed to study, they studied Veda and fine arts there were no bounds in choosing their soul mates they were free to choose partner of their life. Swayamvar was practice at that time to choose the husband of one's choice. Swayamvar was one of practice followed in ancient India to choose husband among a list of suitors. Swayam in Sanskrit means self and vara means groom in this context which further means the Var chosen by girl herself. On the day of 'Swayamvara' girl chooses from an assembly of suitors, or the suitors by completing a task. When the girl identifies the husband of her choice, she garlands him and a marriage ceremony is held immediately. Sita, Kunti, Draupadi and Damyanti were the women whose marriage was arranged after Swamvara was performed and they chose their prominent husbands. This is an indicator of their dignified status in the Vedic society. But divorce was not legitimate at that time. The practice of dowry was unknown but the girls were given gifts under the name 'Dan'. Women were given equal freedom as man and considered as Ardhanginis to their husbands. In a

traditional Hindu marriage, there lie various concepts that outline its significance. One such concept is a wife is considered as Ardhangini in the Hindu marriage. The eternal being is composed of two halves i.e. the man and the woman. The ancient Hindu tradition says that a man's life can never be complete without a wife i.e. his Ardhangini or his better half. She was considered as other half of the men that mean she was given equal importance as a man holds. She is a Sahayogini which means she cooperates with her husband in all his jobs. She is Sahakarmini which means she shares an equal part in all the actions performed by her husband. When she was given the title of 'Ardha- Anga' in Vedic period, then her highest stature cannot be denied at that time. The term 'Dampati' was frequently used in the Vedic texts. The term meant "two joint owners of the household." "A woman is half her husband and completes him." "Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brother-in-law who desire their own welfare. Where women are honoured, there is the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards". "The husband receives his wife from the gods; he must always support her while she is faithful". (Girdhari Maheshwari) Women not only in domestic life were considered to be supreme but her importance in education can never be denied. Even the deity of learning 'Saraswati' got the position of goddess of education which shows women in the Vedic era excelled in the sphere of education too they are not only associated with domestic life only. Gargi and Maitreyi were the prominent women among the twenty women who composed Rig Vedic hymns. They were considered the leading philosophers of the time. There were co-ed schooling like it is now in modern world; girls were allowed to study with boys in Gurukuls. Urvashi Ghosa, Kakhivati Surya Savitri, Yami Shachi, Indrani, Shradha Kamayani, Poulomi, etc. were major names among females Rishi's. Status of women in epic age was high they were accorded with honorable position in the society.

Most of the female characters of Ramayana and Mahabharata were well educated. There were many instances where women gave counsel and advice to men on social and religious issues. Kaikayi, Mandodari, Draupadi and Gandhari were among them who helped and advised their husbands on matters related to battle and their relations with others. Most of the female characters of Ramayana and Mahabharata were well educated but Puranas reveals that the position of women declined in the corresponding age. According to Manu Smriti there were certain provinces which go against her interest, among them were the worship of husband as Devta regardless of the characters and virtues a Devta should possess and deprivation from Upanayana ceremony and education. This brought her to subservient position in the family. Manu had a very poor opinion about women. She was not deserved to be Independent, she should be guarded by her father (in her childhood), brothers (in her youth before her marriage and after death of her father), and husband (in her youth after her marriage) and later by sons (after the death of her husband). Women were considered as 'Pramada' & 'Swabhav ev narinam' a temptress (Satya). All the practices against women rights started in Smriti age, which includes pre-puberty marriage, prohibition of inter-caste marriages etc. The condition of Hindu Women degenerated after Mughal Period. First Muslim invasion was recorded in Eight Century when Shankaracharya was the one who took the charge to spread Vedas and giving it supremacy among all religions. Second Muslim invasion was recorded in Eleventh Century after Ghajni's subjugation which brought economic depression and general decline of social life, particularly among women. The rules and practices were followed which brought decline of equatorial rights of women, 'Purdah', 'Johar' or 'Sati', 'Child Marriages' 'girl killing', 'polygamy' etc. were recorded during that time. Women born in a family was considered as curse due to the inhumanity which was spread against women in Mughal Period. From Fifteenth century The

Bhakti Movement started which brought changes in the status of women saints like Chaitanya, Nanak, Kabir, Meera, Ramdas and Tulsi stood for the right of women to religious worship. Hence, this movement, at least, provided religious freedom to women. The condition slightly upgraded after the entrance of Britishers in India, women were then allowed to be educated, Sati practice and Johar was abolished after Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts and Bengal Sati Regulation which banned the Sati practice in all jurisdictions of British India in 1829 by the then Governor-General Lord William Bentinck. Women were allowed to read religious books, Saints were the bringer of women's freedom, and The Bhakti Movement gave a new sphere to women freedom but it only helped her in religious branch her condition remained same in the society. After colonialization the status of women somewhat rose as with the establishment of British Raj, the westernization hit the Indian land, western ideas and institutions entered India affecting its denizens in good and the bad way too. The good ones was women's rights which were given importance during that period, cultural practices suppressing women were banned. The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of the National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who was in favour of removing all the disabilities of women. Freedom movement was in rise at that time and women actively participated in freedom riots equally as men. Women mass participated under Gandhiji's leadership which gave them a sense of equality with men. With The National Movement and various women's movements paved the way for their liberation from the social evils and religious taboos. People became conscious of the social disabilities and attempts were made to dispel all kinds of inequalities prevailing at that time. During British period women were allowed to educate themselves which is regarded as the major tool in upgrading the status of women. A girl's school was started for the first time in Bombay in 1824. The Hunter commission too emphasized on the need for female education in

1881. After 1882 girls were allowed to go for higher education. The Calcutta, Bombay and Madras Universities did not permit admission to girls up to 1875. Maharshi Karve established SNDT Women's University in Maharashtra in 1916. He actively participated in bringing the status of women at par. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Annie Besant and Mahatma Gandhi were also the major names who uplifted the status of the women.

### Conclusion

“Marriage can wait, Education cannot” -Khaled Hosseini

From the above research it is concluded that the weapon of education can bring the status of women at par, for understanding laws and rights one needs to be educated that is the basic need a woman wants for her from the society. It is concluded that man and woman have been established as the two wheels of a chariot. It may be concluded that during the Vedic period the status of women was not unequal to that of men. Women got the same education as men and participated in the philosophical debates. They were not bound by the conventional thoughts and rituals and were independent. Swayamvar was vogue at that time to find the prospective bridegroom for the multifaceted daughters of the Kings which showed that the women were educated enough and were well versed with the scriptures and Vedas and they ought to choose their partners as much as they have knowledge. Girls were allowed to freely choose their husbands. The customs of infant marriage and enforced widowhood were not prevalent in Vedic India. Women in ancient India had free access to education. They were expected to participate in Vedic sacrifices and utter mantras. Even some of the hymns of the Rigveda were composed by poetesses. Women were the uplifters of their own stature; they only needed a support from the closed ones and the society. During the Independence women actively participated in the freedom movement which gave her a sense of freedom from the orthodox ideas imposed on

them too. They not only fought for the country's freedom but for their freedom too from the conventional thoughts imposed on women which suppressed them to the lowest level. An awareness of the need to remove social disabilities of women was created during the freedom movement, the doors of education were opened for them, and women's organization emerged to represent the needs and cause of middle class urban women. Even our scriptures accentuate women's importance for the family. According to Manu:

*The houses, on which female relations,  
not being duly honored, pronounce a  
curse, perish completely, as if destroyed  
by magic.*

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