



ECONOMICAL & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF ANCIENT INDIAN WOMEN DURING VEDIC PERIOD

MS. PUJA GUPTA ¹

¹ ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN HLCS (HUMANITIES, LANGUAGE, AND CULTURAL STUDIES) DEPARTMENT, IK GUJRAL PUNJAB TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY KAPURTHALA, JALANDHAR, PUNJAB.

ABSTRACT:

The Vedic Period marks as a social, religious and cultural foundational era of the ancient Indian history. It was roughly spanning from 1500 BCE to 500 BCE. The women of the Vedic period occupied significant positions in economic, religious and political activities. Which is in contrary to the later periods of the Indian history where women played a comparatively passive role. Studying the diverse contributions of the women in Vedic Period highlights crucial insights into the issue of gender dynamics and the responsibilities and contributions of the women of that period. This research paper analyses the important roles and the participation of women in the economic and political spheres during the Vedic Period. The paper also discusses the gradual decline of the status of women in the subsequent period of history through the stratification of the society and the emergence of patriarchy in the Indian society.

KEYWORDS:

VEDIC PERIOD, WOMEN, ECONOMICAL ROLE, POLITICAL ROLE, VEDIC SOCIETY, ANCIENT INDIA, SABHA, SAMITI, INTELLECTUAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The Vedic Period of the ancient India was a remarkable period that demonstrated important roles of women across the economic, political, intellectual and religious spheres. The women of the Vedic period enjoyed considerable freedoms and responsibilities in contrary to the passive roles of the later periods. They were skilled artisans engaged in the different economy and trade related activities like, weaving, dyeing, embroidery, etc. Politically, they were also held important leadership roles like queens and clan leaders with actively participating then assemblies like Sabha and Samiti and influenced the governance and decision making. Yet, despite this remarkable progressiveness their role and status were gradually reduced with the stratification of the society and evolving of the patriarchal norms. However the analysis of the contributions of the women in the Vedic Period reshapes the perceptions of the gender roles in the early phase of the Indian history and highlighted their contributions in shaping the Indian society.

2. ECONOMICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE VEDIC PERIOD:

Women in Vedic period enjoyed economic freedom, with the ability to manage personal property like jewelery and

clothing, however their right to inherit property was restricted. They had a significant economic participation especially through agriculture, weaving and animal husbandry as well as earning from diverse activities like teaching and selling dairy products. In fact, their role was defined though their ability to contribute to the community's economic life, which was central during the pastoral and early agricultural phases of the Vedic period. Further, they were considered as essential partners alongside men in ensuring sustenance and economic stability of their communities.

2.1 PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE & ALLIED ACTIVITIES:

The Rigveda (hymn 8.91.5-6) provides the direct evidence of women's involvement in agricultural activities, with the story of Apala, who assisted her father in agricultural work. This evidence of Rigveda not only mentioned her presence on the farm but also depicts her as actively engaged in tending the fields. Which is showing that the education and transmission of agricultural skills included women and girl at par with the men.

In the Aryan society of the Rigvedic period cattle rearing was vital to the economy. In this activity, both the

daughters and sons participated in milking cows, processing dairy and maintaining herds. In fact, the term "duhitr" for daughters meaning 'one who milks cows'. This is itself a vital proof of women's important role in the sustenance activities.

Further, beyond the direct farming, women took part in processing agricultural products and fuel preparation from the cow dung. Which is reflecting their indispensable presence in the entire agricultural cycle.

Moreover, they were also engaged in marketing these agricultural products. Which indicates their involvement in the economic exchange and trade networks of the Vedic period.

Thus, it is evident that, the Vedic period was characterized by a gender complimentary agricultural economy in which women's contributions were highly recognized and valued as fundamental to the societal prosperity of the Vedic Period.

2.2 TEXTILE AND CRAFT PRODUCTION:

In addition to agriculture the Vedic women's skills in crafting garments and decorating materials were the prominent economic activities that supported both the local use and trade. They were involved in various artisanal crafts and specially weaving, dyeing and embroidery were common occupation among the vedic women. Which contributed immensely to the textile economy.

The Vedic women embellished fabrics with a detailed stich patterns featuring geometric shapes, floral motifs which were not only decorative but also reflected their cultural narratives and religious symbolism. This skill of Vedic women added the aesthetic and commercial value which aided economic exchange both within communities and beyond. In fact, these mastery in crafts provided the Vedic women an autonomous economic space where their creativity and labor were integral to both the household livelihoods and regional trade networks.

2.3 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL ROLES:

The Vedic women's educational and religious activities were highly linked to economic implications. Which is reflecting their important position in sustaining both the material and spiritual economy of that period. Their engagement in religious rituals involved managing and conducting ceremonies with economic dimensions like offerings, donations and sacrificial rites. These ritual performances and gifts contributed to the redistribution of wealth within their community to a great extent. Further, their role in education sustained social structures empowered in empowering their society with knowledge required for religious, legal and social governance.

Moreover, the intellectual contributions of the important figures like Gargi and Maitreyi played an important role in imparting education and preserving the oral tradition of the Vedas. The educational dissemination of women of this period reinforced the hierarchical and cultural norms that

governed the economic practices of that time. The women of the Vedic period held an indirect but significant control over the resources and cultural capitals through their religious authority and educational influence. Which shaped the economic landscapes of the Vedic society.

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN VEDIC PERIOD:

The hymns of the Vedas and the historical interpretations strongly indicate the women's presence and their strong voices in the vedic assemblies like Sabha and Samiti. Which is strongly suggesting an early form of political participation and public discourse of women in India. In fact, these assemblies like Sabha and Samiti addressed issues ranging from social customs and legal matters to resource allocation and wars.

3.1 WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP:

The women of the Vedic period exercised political leadership, administrative duties and led military expeditions. In fact, the Vedic literatures describe the women who held authoritative role like queens, chieftains, clan leaders, etc. The leadership of important women leaders of that time such as Lopamudra and Gargi challenged the prevalent patriarchal norms and demonstrated the capacity of women to lead and strategize at the community and regional level.

3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL AND INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCE:

The women philosophers and scholars in the Vedic era were known as Rishikas. They contributed immensely in the development of the intellectual and philosophical landscape of the ancient India. Their engagement in the intellectual discourse not only enriched the spiritual and metaphysical understanding but also carried significant political implications. Women sages like Gargi, Maitreyi, Vachaknavi were greatly admired for their knowledge, wisdom and the questioning spirit. Importantly, their intellect was recognized alongside their male counterparts. Which highlights an early tradition of gender inclusive scholarship.

3.3 ROLE IN SHAPING POLICY AND LAWMAKING IDEAS:

The women philosophers and sages of the Vedic period were highly contributed to the creation of the legal frameworks and societal norms through their profound engagement with Vedic philosophy and ethical enquiry. The women philosophers like Gargi and Maitreyi were highly involved in exploring the fundamental questions of Satya/Truth, Righteousness/Dharma and Rita/Cosmic Order, which were the central concepts to the Vedic socio-political organizations.

Further, the women's participation in shaping the legal and customary norms of the Vedic society articulate the values and duties essential to social harmony, justice and public welfare with guiding the rulers and the legislators in their policy decisions. Again, the intellectual engagement of the Vedic women impacted the areas of justice, economic regulations, caste relations and ritual obligations. Which were highly influenced the policy

formulation and implementation of that period. Which was helped in maintaining a governance based on the cosmic and social order rather than arbitrary rule.

3.4 GRADUAL DECLINE OF POLITICAL ROLES:

The progress of Vedic period in to Later- Vedic and post Vedic period indicates a gradual decline in the women's political role and public participation. The transformation in these later periods was influenced by social, cultural and religious developments that highly favoured the patriarchal structures with diminishing the authority of women in political and governance affairs. In fact, the laws codified in the Dharmashast as, maintained the women's dependency on fathers, husbands and eventually sons for their social identity and economic security. Particularly, this dependency significantly curtailed the autonomy and capacity of women to engage in political decision making.

CONCLUSION:

The Vedic Period in ancient Indian history demonstrates a remarkable spectrum of women's economic and political participation. During this period of the Indian history the women excelled as skilled artisans in crafts like weaving, dyeing and embroidery, which was an integral part of the textile economy and local trade networks. the religious and educational contributions of women helped in preserving and transmitting the Vedic knowledge with maintaining economic significance through ritual offerings and sacrifices. In the political sphere, women held important roles of queens and chieftains and actively participated in

assemblies like Sabha and Samiti. Which was greatly influenced the governance and lawmaking. Further, their moral and intellectual capability helped them in exerting indirect political influence in providing ethical social norms to both the policy formulations and implementations. However, with the social stratification and the rise of patriarchy gradually restricted their political roles over time. After all, Vedic period of the ancient Indian history signifies the glory of the great contributions of women in the economic and political sphere of the ancient Indian society.

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