

Empowering Women through Education: Insights from the Indian Knowledge System

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ABSTRACT: Education has long been recognized as a cornerstone of women's empowerment, fostering autonomy, dignity, and social transformation. However, in the Indian context, the discourse on women's education is often considered distinct yet often intertwined with the Western paradigms, overlooking the wealth of native perspectives embedded in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). This paper seeks to bridge that gap by examining how the IKS—comprising ancient scriptures, philosophical treatises, traditional pedagogies, and cultural narratives—can enrich the contemporary efforts to empower women through education. Through a critical exploration of Vedic and post-Vedic literature, the paper highlights the significant roles played by women scholars like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, and others who were not only educated but also contributed to intellectual and transcendent discourse. It also investigates the traditional learning environments, such as Gurukulas and temple schools, where inclusivity and holistic learning were emphasized in different regions of India and in different eras. By analyzing the empowering aspects of historical practices, this paper proposes a reinterpretation of IKS that is inclusive, gender-sensitive, and adaptable to the modern context. It argues that a culturally rooted, value-based education system inspired by IKS can foster not only cognitive development but also emotional resilience, ethical grounding as well as a strong sense of identity among women. In doing so, the paper positions IKS not as an artefact of the past but as a dynamic framework for reimagining women's education and empowerment in 21st-century India.

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KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Indigenous Education, Gender Equality, Vedic Literature, Women Scholars (e.g., Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra), Holistic Learning, Traditional Pedagogy, Cultural Narratives, Value-Based Education

INTRODUCTION:

India has a very rich culture of knowledge production since ages. The knowledge tradition of India has predominantly been kept in the verbal form and passed through the generations using a comprehensive language called Sanskrit. Multiple disciplines with diverse subject matters can be seen in the India tradition and these disciplines are collectively known as Indian Knowledge Systems.

Education has been a powerful tool for empowering women and raising awareness in several ways. Education provides women with the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are necessary to question the traditional norms, challenge the stereotypes, and stand up for their rights. Women's empowerment has different components like women's sense of self-worth; determine their choices; access to opportunities and resources; and their ability to influence the direction of social.

In ancient knowledge systems, Indian women always held a significant place as

contributors, practitioners, and preservers of knowledge across disciplines such as philosophy, science, medicine, literature, and the arts. Their wisdom was venerated, and many women earned recognition as scholars, sages, and artists.

Not only families but women are backbone of the communities as well. They provide care, support, and nurture to their families and are essential to the development of children. Women also play a significant role in community building and often take on leadership roles in community organizations.

Dimensions of Women Empowerment

Though Women Empowerment involves enabling women across a multitude of dimensions, on a broader level, Women Empowerment consists of the following three dimensions:

- **Sociology-Cultural Empowerment** – It refers to enhancing women's capacity and authority to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and

outcomes, within the context of their society and culture.

- **Economic Empowerment** – It refers to the process of providing women the means to achieve economic independence and strength, as well as ensuring their ability to participate fully and freely in the economy.
- **Political Empowerment** – It involves enhancing women's ability to participate in political processes, influence public policy and decision-making, and gain representation in political and governance structures at all levels.

Ancient Indian women made significant contributions to the Indian knowledge system, particularly in philosophy, literature, and education, with notable figures like Gargi, Maitreyi, and Lopamudra leaving a lasting impact.

Prominent Women Scholars and Their Contributions:

Gargi Vachaknavi:

A renowned Vedic scholar and philosopher, Gargi is known for her intellectual prowess and participation in philosophical debates, including discussions with the sage Yajnavalkya.

Maitreyi:

Another prominent figure in the Upanishadic tradition, Maitreyi was a scholar of the Vedas and actively engaged in philosophical discussions, contributing to the understanding of the self and reality.

Lopamudra:

A Vedic poet and philosopher, Lopamudra composed hymns that are still recited in Hindu ceremonies, showcasing her contributions to religious literature.

Other Notable Figures:

Brahmavadinis: These were women who dedicated their lives to the study of the Vedas and remained unmarried, becoming prominent scholars. **Sadyodvahas:** These women studied the Vedas until they married, demonstrating the value placed on education for women.

Female Physicians: Ancient India had female physicians who treated women's health issues, indicating the diverse fields women were trained in.

Female Warriors: Some women were trained in warfare, and there were female warriors in ancient Indian society.

Lilavati: Known as a notable mathematician, she exemplified the high level of learning attained by women in ancient society. Women in India have made significant strides in participation across areas such as education, sports, politics, and media,

though challenges remain. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving female prime minister. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_India)

Mary Roy (1933 – 1 September 2022) was an Indian educator and women's rights activist known for winning a Supreme Court lawsuit in 1986 against the inheritance law prevalent within the Syrian Malabar Nasrani community of Kerala. The judgement ensured equal rights for Syrian Christian women as with their male siblings in their ancestral property. [1][2] Until then, her Syrian Christian community followed the provisions of the Travancore Succession Act of 1916 and the Cochin Succession Act, 1921, while elsewhere in India the same community followed the Indian Succession Act of 1925. [3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Roy

Conclusion:

The accomplishment of Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, Draupadi, and Alapa turns out to be the most ideal role for women of this era. These women were competitive with men in many fields and also received and enjoyed their rights and equality, there were no restrictions on them, and they possessed great wealth and property. Along with that they even had a very strong say when it came to guiding their offsprings.

Women's contributions to medieval period:

Savitribai Phule:

She was born on January 3, 1931, in Naigaon village in Maharashtra. She is counted among the first feminists in India, a pioneering teacher, and an anti-caste discrimination activist. She was the first-ever female teacher in the country. She played a crucial role in women's empowerment with the support of her husband, Jyotirao Phule. In 1848, Savitribai and her husband established one of the first modern Indian girl's schools in Pune at Bhide Wada. She was also a prolific Marathi writer.

Anandi Gopal Joshi

She was born on March 31, 1865 in Kalyan, Bombay Presidency, British India. She is considered the first Indian female to study western medicine in the United States and was one of the earliest female physicians in the country. She inspired various women to pursue further education. Her original name was Yamuna. She was married at the age of nine to Goplarao Joshi. After returning from the U.S. to India, the princely state of Kolhapur appointed her as the physician-in-

charge of the female ward of the local Albert Edward Hospital.

Indira Gandhi

She was born as Indira Priyadarshini Nehru on November 19, 1917, in Allahabad, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, British India. She was an Indian politician and the first female Prime Minister of India who served for three consecutive terms (1966–77) and a fourth term from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984. In an online poll organized by the BBC in 1999, Indira Gandhi was named "Woman of the Millennium". She was also named by Time magazine among the world's 100 most powerful women who defined the last century in 2020.

Kalpana Chawla

She was born on March 17, 1962, in Karnal, East Punjab, India. She was an Indian-born American astronaut and engineer. She was the first woman of Indian origin to go to space. In 1997, she first flew on the Space Shuttle Columbia as a mission specialist and also the primary robotic arm operator. She died six years later, on February 1, 2003, when the space shuttle Columbia broke up on re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. All seven astronauts were killed on board. The legacy of Chawla has lived on. Her talent and her work inspired young people in India and across the world to consider careers in spaceflight.

Conclusion:

India has a rich history of great women who have made significant contributions to various fields and have left a lasting impact on the country and the world. The above mentioned are only a fraction of the many outstanding women in India. These women, along with many others, have made indelible contributions to India's history and continue to inspire generations of people with their courage, intelligence, and perseverance.

Modern Indian women are making significant contributions to the Indian knowledge system by excelling in various fields, including science, technology, education, entrepreneurship, and social activism, while simultaneously preserving and promoting traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.

Women's contributions to Modern Indian society:

Women's contributions to modern Indian society are immeasurable and profound. From politics to education, business to social services, arts and culture to sports, aerospace to journalism and media, science and technology to literature, entertainment to philanthropy, spiritual and religious leadership, entrepreneurship, social activism, and environmental conservation, women

are making an impact in every field. Their hard work and determination are a testament to their remarkable strength and resilience. The purpose of this research article is to explore the various ways in which women are contributing to the advancement of Indian society, to acknowledge their accomplishments, and to recognize the challenges that still exist for women in India.

Now in modern times, women showcase their empowerment and thus has changed the scenario a lot than that the previous one. They have initiated their self-help groups, work in factories, and had their own businesses. One of the best examples of women empowerment and business is Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad. This was the first papad business, which was handled and organized by an organization of women.

Until the middle of nineteenth century, girls and women were educated only for traditional household works. Now, the society is witnessing changes in the role-status of women. There is greater emphasis on education girls and women in the same way as we educate boys and men. The modern-day parents want to fulfill the aspiration of their children without gender parity. The educated women should insist on exercising their civil, social, political and economic rights. This will help improve the overall condition of women in the society. We can hope for better days while all women of our country will be enlightened and educated. Women education have been improved in all the urban and rural areas of the country however in the rural areas extra programme of development of women have been included. In the rural areas, awareness programme activities are run in order to improve the socioeconomic status of women. Both man and woman covers the half half population of the country. They are like two sides of the coin so need equal opportunity to participate in the country development. One cannot exist without other because women are everything as they give birth to the future generation. If they would be well educated they would give rise educated future generation and thus healthy social and economic condition in India

Conclusion :

In conclusion, women have definitely been making a significant contribution to modern Indian society in various fields, including politics, education, business, social services, arts and culture, sports, aerospace, journalism and media, science and technology, literature, entertainment, philanthropy, spiritual and religious leadership, entrepreneurship, social activism, and so on. They have not only been breaking barriers and challenging traditional gender

roles but also proving their worth in a male-dominated society. Women are emerging as leaders, entrepreneurs, and role models, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps.

Women's contribution to modern Indian society has been invaluable, and their efforts should be recognized and celebrated. They have proved that nothing is impossible and that women can achieve anything they set their minds to.

India is proud to have such talented, accomplished, and determined women, and it is hoped that they will continue to make their mark in the years to come.

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