



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS TO UPLIFT THE WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

Women's education was considered equally important in the Vedic age and upanayne ceremony was performed at the time of her initiation into learning According to A.S. Altekar (P-350), "The period of 500 years between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D. was a very dark and dismal one for Northern India." The position of a widow was affected adversely. Widow re-marriage fell in disrepute and heinous practice of sati was instituted.

Key words: MISSING

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INTRODUCTION

Women's education was considered equally important in the Vedic age and upanayne ceremony was performed at the time of her initiation into learning. In 'Manu Smriti' no worthwhile role has been visualized for women in the political arena. Rather it was advocated that women needed protection of men. Graha Sutra describes the actual initiation ceremony where the girl is addressed as Yagnopavitini.

This was later supported even by some of the law givers. The well-known dictum of Manu reveals the position of women. The dictum holds that a woman should do nothing independently even in her own house. In childhood they must be subject to their fathers, in youth to their husbands and in death to their sons. In short, women must never be independent. Manu realized the great importance of women as a component part of man, the two together making a complete whole, but he also regarded women as more emotional and less rational than men and advocated for their protection throughout their life.

Significantly learning itself was defined as Saraswati, a feminine symbol, we have names of women who contributed about 200 hymns in the composition of Vedas. Some of the intellectual women of the age were Gargi, Maiterai, Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra and Sukanyal. There are about 20 women among the seer or authors of Rigveda. Women were at times referred to as Acharya and Acharyani and updyaya and

updyayani. Evidence shows Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikata, Nivavari and Ghosha were the authors of the Rigveda. Women students were divided into two classes Brahnavadinis and Sadyadvaras the former were lifelong students of theology and philosophy the latter used to study till the marriage at the age of 15 or 16. Buddhist literature is opposed to the Brahmanic rituals where in woman was denied the primary role and a childless and a widow was provided no place. The lower position of women in spiritual world and cultural was elevated. In Buddhist law, the inequality between man and woman was wiped out. Polygamy was allowed and divorce was permissible. Buddhism and Jainism tried to uphold women's status to some extent by providing an alternative position of dignity to those who wished to dissociate themselves from the normal role of woman and join the Sangh. Buddhist Sanga admitted women, not only those who were pure and virtuous in character but also sinners as well who were not acceptable under any circumstances into any other religious order. Participating in politics. He never thought women to befit to rule a nation. The admission of women to the Buddhist order gave a great impetus to the cause of female education. Several women in Buddhist order led a life of celibacy to acquire knowledge in religion and philosophy. Even Jain Tradition mentions the name of the Jayanti, A daughter of king Saharanika of Kousambi who remained unmarried and received ordination at the hand of Mahavira. The girls in the ruling families used to get some military and administrative training also. Kautilya's Arthashastra furnishes details of salaries of the queen suggesting thereby that they were also

entrusted with state administration female bodyguards of the kings and women spies have been also mentioned. There are instances of prostitute women being used as spies. Chanapkali was one such lady. Moreover some of the women in the ancient period were found administrator. Reference of queen Nayanika of the Satavahana dynasty (2nd century B.C.) and Prabhavati Gupta of the Vakataka family (4th century A.D.) are two examples who ruled their kingdoms. In spite of that the position of common women has been changing with the time. In the vedic home wife was regarded Ardhagini (the batter half). There were no social evil prevalent in the society. A widow in Vedic times was allowed to remarry if she wished so. There are many references in the ancient times, which proved the instances of widow remarriage. The custom of sati was not followed by vedic Aryans, neither the widow was disallowed to wear jewels. The age of Rigveda is considered roughly from 2500 to 1500 BC. In the end of this age the position of women showed signs of gradual decline between the periods 1500 BC to 500 B.C. Although the dignity of the women remained the same. The position deteriorates considerably during the period of the sutras, the epic and the early samritis (500 BC to 500 D) The age of marriage was lowered. They lost independent status. During this period, women were not allowed to study the Vedas. The ceremony of upanayna was discouraged.

According to A.S. Altekar (P-350, "The period of 500 years between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D. was a very dark and dismal one for Northern India." The position of a widow was affected adversely. Widow re-marriage fell in disrepute and heinous practice of sati was instituted. Although sati was confined to the warrior class in the beginning but gradually it spread wider in the society. However, in the later Vedic period, women's position began to deteriorate. The birth of a daughter which was not a source of anxiety during the Vedic period, in post Vedic phase, came to be treated as misfortune. Thus it was said that the birth of a son is bliss incarnate while that of a daughter is the root of family misery. A son began to be considered more important than a daughter since he had to perform funeral rites of his parents. Women did not take part in political activities as actively in later Vedic period as they did in the Rig-Vedic period. They ceased to be a part of the Sabha. Education of women, which was an accepted norm during the Vedic period, slowly began to be neglected and later on a time came when girls were totally denied any access to education.

Ram Mohan Roy was the first fruit of the new plant which grew as a result of the dissemination of Western culture in the Indian soil. His approach in religious matters was largely intellectual. The Society (Brahmo Samaj) which he organized was based upon his severely rational attitude. Again, his discovery and exaltation of the principle of monotheism was the outcome of an individual mind which had the courage to defy the contemporary beliefs of the Hindu community. Thus his Brahmanism could only attract minds of an intellectual cast, His deistic theology, rational ethics, liberal attitude in social, economic and political matters, thorough-going repudiation of medievalism in thought and practice, and differentiation between secular and religious concerns was strong meat not easy to digest. In its practical aspects, Brahmo worship consisted in congregational study, contemplation and meditation without the colorful appurtenances usual in the ritual and ceremonial of churches for holding the attention of the worshippers. In the dry and rarefied atmosphere of its hall of prayer, it was not easy for the puritanical faith to flourish.

The death of Ram Mohan Roy was followed by a decade of inaction and regression. Then, in 1843, Debendranath Tagore, (son of Dwarkanath Tagore, the saintly collaborator of Ram Mohan Roy) was initiated into the Samaj. He undertook the reorganization of the Samaj. He opened a school known as the Tattvabodhini Pathshala to train Brahmo missionaries, established the Tattvabodhini Sabha for philosophical and religious discussions, and started the Tattvabodhini Patrika, under the editorship of A. K. Dutt, to propagate Brahmoism. Her drew up the rules of membership and regulated the appointment of the ministers. A Brahmo Covenant, consisting of vows for the members enjoining love and worship of one God and performance of deeds loved by Him, was drawn up and a liturgy of theistic prayer and adoration was introduced; a treatise on religion based on Hindu texts (Brahmo Dharma) and a prayer book were compiled. The Samaj, thus rejuvenated, made much progress. Its missionaries visited different parts of India and established its branches from the Punjab to East Bengal. Thus from 1843 to 1857, there was much progress in the religious movement started by Ram Mohan Roy. Then, in 1857, Keshab Chandra Sen joined the Samaj and threw himself with all the fervor of his ardent nature into its work. By this time. Brahmoism had travelled far from its original stand. The tellectualism and individualism of Ram Mohan Roy had not been abandoned, but other sectors of the mind and ranges of human experience which he had neglected, were brought to the fore and his religion was humanized. The ideas of prayer and communion with God, of consecration of life, of loving devotion to God and service of man according to His will, and of search for His light, inspiration and blessing, became parts of the faith and imparted to it the emotional content which it had lacked. However, the spirit of enquiry, reform and change once roused, could not remain satisfied with the Covenant and the doctrines of Debendranath. He had started with the dogma of the infallibility of the Vedas, but soon discovered its unsoundness and fell back on the rationalism of Ram Mohan Roy. Nature and intuition remained the two sources of religious knowledge. Debendranath rejected not only the belief in the divinity of the Vedas, but also in the Hindu doctrines of Karma and transmigration. The basis of Brahmanism henceforth would rest on "the human heart illumined by spiritual knowledge born of self-realization." But so keen was his sense of national dignity that throughout his life Debendranath persistently refused to receive any favors from the British Government or even to enter into any manner of association with the representatives of the alien authority in his country. In the words of Raj Narayan Bose: "Debendra Babu is usually unwilling to be acquainted with the Europeans because he cannot agree with them on the Indian affairs. It is easy to get recognition in England and India by endorsing their views, but Debendra Babu is not anxious to get the recognition from the British. The Principal of the Krishnanagar College, Mr. Lobb, once wrote: "The proud old man does not condescend to accept the praise of Europeans."

On the other hand, Keshab Chandra Sen's ebullient mind eagerly sought to explore new ideas and to undertake fresh experiments, so that he soon found himself unable to remain within the fold of Hinduism. In 1860, he founded the Sangat Sabha (the Friendly Association), where enquiries were held into the validity of the Hindu rites like the 'Durga Puja,' and the Hindu institutions like the caste. It was decided to discontinue their observance. In 1861, the Calcutta College was established to impart English education, and the Indian Mirror was started

to give publicity to the activities of the mission. In 1864, Keshab Chandra undertook a tour of India—the first important attempt in modern India to bring about ideological unity in India. As a result of his mission, the Veda Samaj was established in Madras and the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra. Meanwhile, Keshab's radicalism was pushing the Samaj so fast that soon a clash occurred between him and Debendranath on questions relating to Hindu customs and Hindu religious attitudes. It led, in 1865, to Keshab's withdrawal from the parent body and the establishment of a new association. The objects of this association were to admit all the Brahmas of India, men and women, in one body, and to establish the principles of Brahmo religion on a universal basis, gleaned from the teachings of all religions. Significantly, it chose for itself the name of 'Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj,' that is, the Brahmo Samaj of India. Debendranath's society came to be known as the 'Adi Brahmo Samaj,' or the 'Original Brahmo Samaj.' The first schism in the Samaj was followed by a second a few years later. From the commencement, the new Samaj was under the complete spell of Keshab Chandra, whose enthusiasm and genius attracted the youth of Bengal. But his was a restless spirit. In 1870, he visited England and returned with redoubled enthusiasm for social reform and social welfare work. In 1872, he persuaded the Government to place on the statute book the Brahmo Marriage Act, which legalized the form of marriage according to Brahmo rites. This constituted a distinct break with Hinduism. In the meantime, Keshab had been developing new ideas. On the one hand he was greatly attracted by Christianity; on the other, he was gripped by the devotional practices of the Vaishnavites. The concept of Avatara-God incarnating Himself as man, in both these religions, led him to add revelation as a source of religion, besides nature and intuition. He began also to give more and more time to prayer, adoration of God and Kirtana. The feeling that he was an especially inspired messenger of God gradually took possession of his mind. Keshab, who had ruled the Samaj as an authoritarian patriarch, now began to speak of his deeds as God-inspired. This aroused opposition among a section of his followers. In 1878, the marriage of his daughter to the young Maharaja of Cooch-Bihar when both the bride and the bridegroom were under-age, in accordance with Hindu rites and in violation of the Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872, infuriated his opponents, and they seceded from the Samaj in a body. The secessionists formed a new organization under the name of 'Sadharana Brahmo Samaj,' whose membership was open to only those who completely refrained from idolatrous practices, repudiated the caste system, supported the emancipation of women, followed Brahmo rites in all domestic ceremonies, and adhered to the new creed formulated by the society. The young Brahmos who founded the Sadharana Brahmo Samaj took a prominent part in political movements. Under Sibnath Sastri's leadership, they "proclaimed their faith in independence, forswore service under the alien Government, but promised to work in a peaceful way in view of the circumstances of the country." They also worked for the universal liberation of all peoples "under the banner of democratic republicanism." Surendra Nath Banerjee, who later rose to the position of the uncrowned king of Bengal, was the most prominent among them. For Keshab Chandra, this schism was an occasion of sore trial, but he came out of it with a fresh resolve to revitalize the Samaj with deeper spiritual intent and greater reforming zeal. He promulgated his new mission which he called the Nava Vidhana or the 'New Dispensation'. Its most marked features were: (1) emphasis on the mystic aspect of religion; and (2) an attempt to combine Christian and Hindu

ideals and practices. He organized a band of twelve disciples who were declared as God-appointed 'apostles,' and an order of men and women who were placed under strict vows. On the one hand, he avowed that "Christ was a model man, a model Theist in so far as he attained to that high degree of communion in which the soul lost in Divinity," and looked upon him as a prophet; on the other, he came under the influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, from whom he learnt to regard God as Mother, the sweet and tender benefactor of man and of the whole creation. Keshab Chandra desired his 'New Dispensation' to be "the harmony of all scriptures and prophets and dispensations." It also endeavored to convert outward facts and characters into facts of consciousness, so that man might realize the objective divinity of God in his own heart, not merely as a person, but also as a character. His last years were devoted to the development of the doctrines, ritual, and organization of his new church. In the field of religion, his was the most outstanding attempt to bring about deliberately a fusion of the ideals of the Christian West with those of Hindu India.

After his death in 1884, no leader of his grand stature arose in any of the three Samajas. But Keshab's eclectic religion failed to evoke any considerable response among his educated countrymen and the Brahmo Samaj ceased to expand. In 1911, there were 183 Brahmo Samajas in India with a total membership of 5504. Though small in numbers the Brahmo Samajists were spread all over the country. For the first time, a modern religious movement propagated by the representatives of the middle class intelligentsia had sought to unite followers all over India together. The Samaj may not have achieved striking success numerically, but its influence on the social reform movements was considerable. In rousing the sentiment of patriotism the Samaj played a prominent role. Bipin Chandra Pal assessed the contribution of the Brahmo Samaj in the evolution of nationalism in these words: "The Brahmo Samaj, under Keshab Chandra Sen, had proclaimed a new gospel of personal freedom and social equality, which reacted very powerfully upon the infant national consciousness and the new political life and aspirations of young Bengal.... The old paralyzing sense of superiority of their political masters over them was visibly replaced by a new self-confidence in our educated countrymen." Among the prominent leaders of the social reform movement was Raj Narayan Bose (1826-99), a broad-minded scholar who was well acquainted with Persian language and literature. He wrote *The Science of Religion* which has a unique interest for the Brahmos. "It is, in short, their theology," wrote the Brahmo Public Opinion. He was a bitter critic of Keshab Chandra Sen and his disciples who wanted to set him up as an incarnation of God. He laid stress on the essential identity of Brahmanism and Hinduism; only he held that in Brahmanism the Hindu faith had reached its highest development.

He founded the Society for the Promotion of National Feeling whose objects were the physical improvement of youth through Indian gymnastics, the development of Hindu music, medicine, Sanskrit language, and ancient learning through schools, and the replacement of the foreign usages, manners and language by Indian forms. In order to popularize his movement of Indianization he started the Hindu Mela, in 1867 AD, and the National Society. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891 AD), was more an educationist than a religious reformer. He was a profound Sanskrit scholar who became a professor in the Sanskrit College, Calcutta in 1850 AD and a

year later, Principal. He served also as a Special Inspector of Schools. He resigned from Government service in 1858, but continued to advise informally the Government on educational matters. He accelerated the process of secularization initiated by Ram Mohan Roy by introducing the study of English in the Sanskrit College in order to promote the modern outlook. He wrote to the Council of Education: "For certain reasons... we are obliged to continue the teaching of the Vedanta and Sankhya in the Sanskrit College. That the Vedanta and Sankhya are false systems of philosophy is no more a matter of dispute. These systems, false as they are, command unbounded reverence from the Hindus. While teaching these in the Sanskrit course, we should oppose them by sound philosophy in the English course to counteract their influence." For the modernization of society in Bengal he advocated a number of social reforms. The evils which he attacked were polygamy, child marriage, and prohibition of widow remarriage. It was due to his efforts, supported by those of other influential men, that the Legislature passed the Act of 1856 legalizing the marriage of Hindu widows. In his advocacy of reform he did not reject authority, but rather relied upon the one which was most suitable for modern conditions. For this purpose he selected the Parashar Samhita. Unfortunately, the other social reforms in which he was interested, viz., that of polygamy and child marriage, did not succeed, in spite of his powerful support through pamphlets like *Bahu-vivaha* and *Balya-vivaha* Dosh.

The second powerful movement among the Hindus to uplift the status of women was the Arya Samaj. It was founded by Mul Shankar better known as Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He laid the foundation of Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875. Although the Arya Samaj was established in Bombay but it took its final shape in Lahore in 1877. The Arya Samaj believed in God and in doctrine of karma. The Arya Samaj launched a crusade against the social evils and became a most important and most proselytizing of all the reform movements in the Punjab. The Arya Samaj severally criticized the evil institutions like child marriage, purdah and laid a great stress on women education. After the death of Swami Dayananda Saraswati (in 1883), the Arya Samaj activists opened many educational institutions to spread education among the women. The Kanya Maha-Vidyalaya was one of the earliest institution opened at Jalandhar by Lala Devraj in 1886 with the help of Mai Bhagwati of Haryana.

The institution became a pioneer of female education in whole of Northern India and attracted girls from outside Punjab also. The Arya Samaj exercised powerful impact in educating and creating awareness among the women, justifying the Arya samajists claim that crust of social prejudice was first broken by the Arya samaj. The Arya Samaj not only criticized social evils but also promoted widow remarriage as said earlier in the previous chapter. The pioneers of the Arya Samaj in Punjab were Lala Hans Raj, Munshi Ram, Dev Raj and Lala Lajpat Rai, who successfully spread the mission among the people of province.

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