



# Women and Education in Karnataka

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**Abstract:** *The Ancient India may be described as the golden age in the history of the women in more spheres than one And, the field of education is most noteworthy in this respect. Women, like men were admitted to full religious rites, and consequently to complete educational facilities. In short, they were not disqualified for pranayama and Vedic studies There were doubtless many women who seem to have attained fair eminence in the realm of scholarship and literature.*

**Key words:** *Romasha, Lopamudra, Vishvavara, Yajnavalkya, GobhilaGrhya Sutra, Nagacandra or Abhinava pampa*

## Introduction

The Ancient India may be described as the golden age in the history of the women in more spheres than one And, the field of education is most noteworthy in this respect. Women, like men were admitted to full religious rites, and consequently to complete educational facilities. In short, they were not disqualified for pranayama and Vedic studies There were doubtless many women who seem to have attained fair eminence in the realm of scholarship and literature. Some of them, like Ghosa Lop mudra and others enjoy the unique distinction of being included among the authors of the Rigvedic Samhita. Women sages were called rsikas and brahmavadins. Dr. R. K. Mookerji has pointed out that the Rgveda knows of as many as 19 risikas, like Romasha, Lopamudra, Vishvavara and so on, and the samaveda adds four more to the list

The available evidence shows that, even during the later Vedic (Bhahmana and Upanisadic) period, education was not denied to women and they are found to share in the intellectual interests of the day. Some passages in the Brhadaranyakopantshad (iii,4 I; iv, 5,I) show that Maitrey, one of the two wives of Yajnavalkya, takes no unimportant part in the disputations on philosophical topics. Indeed, the intellectual disputation between Yajnavalkya and Gargi and subtle cross-examination of Yajnavalkya by Garg show that she was a dialectician and philosopher of a high order The Vedic tradition as regards education of women was continued during the period of Sutra literature also GobhilaGrhya Sutra, for instance, states that the wife should be educated to be able to take part in sacrifices. A passage in the Harita Dharma Sutra shows that women students were divided into two classes, viz. (1) brahmavadins, and (2) sadyodvahas (sadyo-vadhus). The former were like the naisthikabrahmacarins among

men life-long students of theology and philosophy: the latter used to prosecute their studies till their marriage at the age of early.

It is worth noting here that admission of women to Buddhist order gave a great impetus to the cause of female education, especially among the ladies in commercial and aristocratic families. It may be recalled, however, that it was only with considerable reluctance and misgivings that the Buddha consented to admit women as his disciples on their renouncing the world and householder's state. Furthermore, the rules laid down for regulating the life the women disciples clearly betray at every step the mental and moral inferiority attributed to the fair sex, and they keep the nuns in condition of complete subordination of the monks. But still, the order of Nuns opened up avenues of culture and social service to the women of Buddhist India, for which some of them became very distinguished. Buddhism produced numerous women within its own fold, who played a prominent part as leaders of thought in that religious reformation.

Reference is found in both the Buddhist and Jaina texts to women of the brahmavadini class, who remained unmarried to carry on their studies. Among the authoresses of the Therigatha, 32 were unmarried women and 18 married ones. Futhers, Panini 26 refers to women-students of Vedic sakhas. Both Katyayana and Patanjali refer to women-teachers, who were called upadhyaya or the Amarakosa. The necessity of coining a special word shows that women teachers were in large number. The extent of education among women from the Vedic to the Sutra period (Down to c. 300 B.C.) is difficult to determine. However, girls in the cultured and well-to-do families seem to have been given a fair amount of education during that period.

It has been pointed out that after c. 300 B.C., the cause of women's education suffered a good deal on account of various reasons, namely, child (or early) marriage, discontinuance of upanayana to girls and such other factors. In brief, the lowering of the marriageable age (to 9 or 10 by about the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) rendered any education worth the name next to impossible. And, the cancellation of upanayana to girls---first reduced to mere formality and then dropped altogether---put an end to their Vedic education. Indeed, this was the signal for the gradual "spiritual disfranchisement" of women. Consequently, they became, like the sudras, unfit for reacting Vedic prayers.

It may well be doubted whether, in ordinary families, women received any education worth the name. We, however, learn from Rajasekhara (9<sup>th</sup> century A. D.) that higher education of women was confined to royal official and well-to-do families, and also to the class of dancing-girls (ganikah). Turning to the period under study, the Smṛti commentaries and digests of the period repeat the old rules relating to the religious and social inferiority of women. Vijnanesvara for instance, observes that, in the case of women, marriage stands in the place of upanayana: and that the women, like the Sudras, are illiterate and have no capacity for japa .ets.

Further, as regards Harita's classification of women into two classes, viz brahmavadinis and sadyovadhuh (as noted above), the Smṛti- candrika points out that it belongs to a different time -cycle (kalpa) . After this it appears,

according to Dr.U.N. Ghoshal, that the reference to female teachers (upadhya, acarya found in the contemporary lexicons, “is no more than a historical anachronism” Moreover it compulsory for the guardians of a girl to give her away in marriage before the attainment of puberty. Contemporary epigraphs and literary works do not help us much to know the extent of literacy among the women of Karnataka during the period under study. We, however, get references here and there to some women, who seem to have been learned

A Hombal (Dhār ward District) record of 1049 A.D. for instance, refers to one Manikyambike as vidvajjiananute (i.e. praised by scholars). It is likely that she was admired for her learning but the record does not specifically refer to that effect. In the Sukamara-carite of santinatha (1068 A.D.) one Nagasri is descry bed as a great scholar in many branches of learning. The same story had been already narrated by the author of the Vaddaradhane (9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) nagasri who was illiterate, became all of a sudden great sholar by the blessings pf a jaina teacher, Surymitra-Bhatara. She seems to be a mythological rather than a historical character. Perhaps Kanti is another such character. According to a tradition she was a jaina poetess at the court of Hoysala Ballala I and had literary contests with Nagacandra or Abhinava pampa. The historicity of this tradition is not beyond question Again, in some stories narrated by nayasenarefaerence is made to some women as scholars.

It may be recalled here that, during the latter half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the rise of the Virasasivamovement , inspired and organized by great Basava and his followers, was distined to make its mark in religion, social life and literature, As a result of that movement women were given an equal status with men in society. Its impact was felt more especially in the field of learning and literature. Among the numerous writers who brought into existence the extensive vacana literature--- written in simple prose easily understood by the common folk and well calculated to popularize the new creed---there were all contemporaries of Basava (c.1160 A D.) we know the names of 16 women writers of the period namely Mahadevi Bijjaladevi, Nilamma, (wife of Basava), Lingamma, kalavve and others.

Akka-Mahadevi was by far greatest of them all. She was a writer of forceful and passionate prose. Her sayings, which have become practically aphorism, have been compared in quality to those of Confuius. Legend has it that she wass the daughter of Vimala and Sumati of udutadiim Mysore, and king Kausika, aJaina, wanted to marry her: and that she refused, as he would not believe in her faith .She decided to renounce this world and became an ardent follower of Basavesvara. Her vacanas have the touch of great poetry and are incredibly picturesque. Contemporary epigraphs make it clear that, generally, higher education of women was confined to the royal courts, and also to the families of high officials and the rich, and special attention was paid to the cultivation of fine arts like music and dancing, apparently with a viov to develop the aesthetic sense of grills.

It may be remembered in this context that the cultivation of flne arts like music dancing and painting was encouraged in case of girls since very early times. In fact musical recitation of the Same hymns was originally the

special function of ladies Again among the arts which ladies in cultured families were expected to cultivate, Vatsayayana assigns the most prominent place to music and dancing.

Some inscriptions are throws light on the women's Proceeding first to the imperial court at Kalyana, mention may be made of the accomplishments of the queens of Vikramaditya VI. Ketaladevi seems to have been noted for her learning and musical attainments. She is referred to as well- versed in all arts (sakalaladhar I), and as indeed, a new Sarasvat (abhinava-Sarasvat). The expression aneka-desa-bha.....sanglta – vidyadharI" may indicate that she was an expert in singing songs composed in many languages of the country.

Candaladevi [or Candralekakha], the chief queen of the emperor, has been described as a very SarasvatI, the Goddess of Learning [abhinava-SarasvatI (sarada): also as a very Vidyadhar in the art of dancing [nrtya-vidyadhar] These expressions, according to Dr. P.B. Desai, were not merely formal, and she appears to have been highly educated and accomplished in music and dancing A record of 1098 A.D. from Gulbarga District shows that Rakkasayya, the donor of the grant assigns the merit of his gift in favour of this distinguished lady [Candaladeviyaradhamavagi], apparently to place on record his sense of respect for her. She made in 1096 A.D. some endowments for the cause of Rgveda-khandika and sastra-khandika----a fact highlighting her keen interest in the promotion of education and learning.

Rebbaladevi (Rebbanabbe), the wife of General Ravideva is praised at length in a record of 1090 A.D. alike for her learning beauty, and mastery of the fine arts she delighted to play on the vina and is referred to as PratibhaSarasvati ,i. e. a very Sarasvati in intellect (or genius)Turning to the subordinate courts of the HosalasKalacuris and others, santala, the queen-consort of HoyasalaVisnuvardhana, is a great name in this respect. She is described in many records as perfectly trained in the arts of music (both vocal and instrumental) and dancing a master, indeed, of Bharatagama. Their accomplishments in such fine arts in public, without incurring thereby any social opprobrium " an instance of feminine independence most unusual in those times" An instance or two may be cited to that effect.

Savaladevi, the queen f Kalacurya Raya-Murari-Sovideva(A.D.1167-7was not only skilled in these fine arts, but also used to display her accomplishments in public. She is said to have performed to an audience of connoisseurs gathered from her own country and from abroad, and to have greatly pleased both her audience and her royal husband. Music was evidently an inherited gift in her family, since we are told that her brother, Bhairava, was an expert in conducting orchestra and playing on the Brahmavina while her sister, Vacaladevi, was equally proficient in the arts of music (gita) and dance (nrtya).Again, Bacaladevi, the wife of MahamandalesvaraGangapermadi, displayed her talents in dancing, and won the title of patra-jagadale from her husband. She was equally good in music: If any person were to challenge her in the art, that person's pride would have been surely humiliated-----says the record.

Such instances of accomplished women can be multiplied easily. All side and done, such hyperbolic statements in the inscriptions on the qualities and accomplishments of queens and other aristocratic ladies cannot be accepted at their face value. However, the evidence is enough to show that “there was in existence a well-understood course of education and training in the fine arts for the gentler sex, and that this was regularly followed by some in each generation.

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