

Contribution of Women in Sanskrit Literature After Independence

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Abstract

Women have played an important role in the intellectual, cultural, and literary development of Indian civilization since the Vedic period. Early Sanskrit traditions preserve evidence of women's participation as seers, scholars, and contributors to religious and literary discourse. Although women's educational and social opportunities declined during later historical periods, modern social reform movements and the post-independence transformation of Indian society created greater opportunities for women's participation in education and literature. This study explores the contribution of women to Sanskrit literature after Indian independence with particular attention to their role as authors and promoters of Sanskrit learning. Through descriptive and historical analysis, the paper examines the lives and literary works of prominent women Sanskrit writers including Pandita Kshamadevi Rao, Dr. Rama Choudhury, Leela Rao Dayal, Kamalaratnam, Dr. Vanamala Bhawalkar, Smt. Devaki Menon, and Smt. Bela Devi. Their contributions through poetry, drama, biography, literary criticism, and cultural writings demonstrate the expanding presence of women in modern Sanskrit literary traditions. The study argues that post-independence India witnessed a significant increase in women's engagement with Sanskrit literature, reflecting broader social changes in gender equality, education, and cultural participation. The continued contribution of women writers strengthens both Sanskrit literary heritage and the development of an inclusive intellectual society.

Keywords: *Sanskrit literature, Women writers, Post-independence India, Modern Sanskrit literature, Women's contribution, Sanskrit drama, Literary history.*

In the foundation of Indian society, women played a crucial role. Certainly, in the Rig Vedic Indian society, women were highly esteemed and had good living conditions. The possibility to achieve high intellectual and spiritual standards for women was extended. The Vedic era women were financially secure. Some of the women were working as teachers. Women also assisted their husbands in their agricultural endeavours as well. Women had complete privileges in the religious sphere and regularly joined their husbands in religious ceremonies. The husband and wife performed religious sacrifices and ceremonies together. Even in religious conversations, women took an active part. However, from the later period of the Vedic era, women have faced discrimination in education and other rights and facilities, while previously holding free and respected roles in Rig-Vedic society. The status of women slightly better during the Buddhist period though there was no tremendous change. Women have a huge significance in ancient Indian literature. There were many educated women in ancient India. In this discussion we are going to discover the role of women in Sanskrit literature as writer specially after independence period.

Generally, if we look in Sanskrit literature, we can see number of men writers was more than number of women writers. We can assume the probable reason for that, doing all housework women had less time to express their talent in the various field as well as literature, all though like men writer women writer also have a long history and it's still going on. In the beginning, in the Vedic era, there were some of women scholars, who was seer of mantra. In some of the Rig Vedic hymns, some of women writer's, seer of mantras names were mentioned. Those are Kakshabati, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Apala, Surya, Indrani, Shachi, Sarparagni, Biswabara. In this context Dr. Sushama Shukla, write in her book Vedic Banmaya mein Nari (वैदिक वाङ्मय में नारी) that-- लगभग 200 इ.पू. तक नारियों को वेदाध्ययन ओर यज्ञ करने का अधिकार प्राप्त था। ऋग्वेद के अनेक मन्त्रों की रचना कवियित्रियों ने की है। वैदिक युग में योगदान करने वाली लगभग 20 कवयित्रियों थीं, जिनमें विश्ववारा, घोषा, इन्द्रानी, अपाला, लोपामुद्रा, रोमशा, श्रद्धा, शची, कामायनी, यमी, सूर्या, सावित्री, विभावरी, अदिति, आदि प्रमुख थीं। Its means --“ in the Vedic periods approximately 200 B.C. women have right to read Veda and doing religious ceremony. Some of the Vedic hymn were written by them. In the Vedic era over 20 women writer existed, some of were Biswabara, Ghosha, Indrani, Apala, Lopamudra, romasha, shraddha, Shachi, Kamayani, yami, Surya, Sabitri, Bibhabari, Aditi etc.”

Similar things being said by Acharya Saunak in his book “Vrihad-Devta”. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. So, the contribution from women toward Sanskrit literature are starting less to lesser. Not only women but overall Sanskrit literature face down time in the medieval period (Period between 500 A.D to 1500 A.D). All though some books were written in this time mostly based on Grammer or kabysastra, but not much.

But in the modern era, the scenario is changed for women as well as Sanskrit literature too. Some of social reformer had change the status of women in the society. Like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and many more for women right and to give them the opportunity in every field like education, politics, technology, property and many more others. As a result, now adays involvement of women were increased almost every field so as in the field of Sanskrit literature specially after independence. We are going to discuss some of the women's writers of this time and their comprehensive work of poetry.

Kshamadevi Raw: -Adorned by title of Pandita, Sahityachandrika etc, Kshamadevi Raw occupies a special place in modern Sanskrit literature. As Dr. Puspa Dikshit says

“पण्डिता क्षमाराव की रचनाएँ भारतीयता के बहुत सन्देश को आपने में समेटे हुए हैं। उन्हें छोड़कर यदि हम भारत की महिला साहित्यकारों की चर्चा करते हैं तो हमारी चर्चा आधुनिक है, क्योंकि बीसवीं शताब्दी की महिला साहित्यकारों की यात्रा पण्डिता क्षमाराव से ही प्ररम्भ होती है” । Its means -- “in the literature of Kshamadevi Raw, she very much included Indian culture and its impotency. So, if we try to discuss women writers without Kshamadevi Raw then it will be incomplete because the path of women writer of twentieth century is starting from Pandita kshamadevi Raw.” She was born on 4 July 1890 in a Marathi family at Puna city. Her parent names were Shankarpanduranga and Usha Devi. After secondary education she was married and her formal education was stopped still she was not given up and continue to practice

Marathi, Sanskrit, English, France language and others also. Till 1930 she was composed many books in English language, and afterwards from 1931 to till death she only composed in Sanskrit language. 13 books of Sanskrit language were published in her name. Those are-

- i. Satyagrahagita(सत्यग्रहगीता), ii. Uttarsatyagrahagita(उत्तरसत्यग्रहगीता), iii. Swarajya-Bijayam (स्वराज्य-विजयम्), iv. Tukaramacharitam (तुकारामचरितम्),
- v. Ramadasacharitam (रामदासचरितम्), vi. Jnaneshwaracharitam (ज्ञानेश्वरचरितम्),
- vii. Miralahari (मीरालहरी), viii. Shankarajibanakhyanam (शंकरजीवनाख्यानम्),
- ix. Bichitraparishadayatra (विचित्रपरिषदयात्रा), x. Gramajyotih (ग्रामज्योतिः),
- xi. Kathapanchakam (कथापञ्चकम्), xii. Kathamuktabali (कथामुक्तावली),
- xiii. Akhyanchaturadashakam (आख्यानचतुर्दशकम्).

Dr. Rama Choudhury: - Dr. Rama Choudhury born at Kolkata in West Bengal on 8 February 1912, her father's name was shri Sudhanshu Mohan Bose and he was member of assembly of West Bengal. Her husband shri Yotindrabimal Choudhury, was a well-known Sanskrit writer and Principal of Sanskrit college Kolkata.

Dr. Rama Choudhury after getting degree of Master of Arts from Kolkata went to Oxford University, Landan and get Doctor of Phil degree on Nimbarka Philosophy and become first women to get Doctorate degree from this University. She was work as a Professor and Principal of Lady Brabourne College Kolkata. In 1969 she acted as a Vice-chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University Kolkata and again she becomes first women of India to do that. In 1943 Dr. Rama Choudhury and her husband Yotindrabimal Choudhury established Sanskrit Research institution and create a journal name as Prachyabani(प्राच्यवाणी) for better learning and development of Sanskrit. As she called Sharbashastra Parangama(सर्वशास्त्र पारंगमा) Dr. Rama Choudhury alongside of Sanskrit she also has deep knowledge of Bengali, English and she was written some of book in these languages also. In Sanskrit language she wrote more than twenty book and published on her own journal Prachyabani(प्राच्यवाणी). The books are: - i. Yatindrayatindram (यतीन्द्रयतीन्द्रम्), ii. Shankarashankaram (शङ्करशङ्करम्), iii. Kabikulakokilam (कविकुलकोकिलम्), iv. Kabikulakamalam (कविकुलकमलम्), v. Yugajibanam (युगजीवनम्), vi. Nibeditanibeditam (निवेदितनिवेदितम्), vii. Abhedanandam (अभेदानन्दम्), viii. Bharatacharjam (भारताचार्यम्), ix. Bharatatatam (भारततातम्), x. Bharatapthikam (भारतपथिकम्), xi. Chaitanyachaitanyam (चैतन्यचैतन्यम्), xii. Ramcharitamanasam (रामचरितमानसम्), xiii. Rasamayarasamani (रसमयरासमणिः), xiv. Prasannaprasadam (प्रसन्नप्रसादम्), xv. Ganadebatanatakam (गणदेवतानाटकम्), xvi. Agnibinanatakam (अग्निविणानाटकम्), xvii. Lelinabijayam (लेलिनविजयम्), xviii. Bharatabiram (भारतवीरम्), xix. Tanatanuh (तानतनुः), xx. Deshdipam (देशदिपम्), xxi. Pallikamalam (पल्लिकमलम्), xxii. Meghameduramedaniyam (मेघमेदुरमेदनीयम्), xxiii. Nagaranupuram (नगरनूपुरम्), xxiv. Sansaramritam (संसारामृतम्).

Leela Raw Dayal: -- Sanskrit Pandita Kshama devi Raw was mother of Leela Raw Dayal. She was born in Mumbai at 19 December, 1913. She completed her secondary education from Paris

and end her formal education life. After that she start informal learning and acquire knowledge in various field like Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, Garman, French, Italian and others. She was a multi-talented woman. She became first Indian Tanis Player to win a Tanis Match at Wimbledon Championships. Other than Tanis she has deep knowledge and expertise on Singing, Dancing, Painting etc. She also has interest in Tracking and Hiking. To spread knowledge of Sanskrit she uses drama and dance as medium. She has also broadcast her own written drama via Akashvani a radio channel in India and outside India. She loves her mother very much, she published some of book of her mother after her mother death, she even translates some of her mother book in English, and some book was recreated as drama. As memory of her mother, she established a Sanskrit library at Mumbai on 10 April 1973 as name Kshama-Sanskrit-library. Throughout the life she was devoted to Sanskrit and written more than twenty dramas, those are published by various journal---

i. Balayogi (बालयोगी), ii. Holikautsab (होलिकोत्सवम्), iii. Tukaramacharitam (तुकारामचरितम्), iv. Katubipakah (कटुविपाकः), V. Kapotalayah (कपोतालयाः). Vi. Ganeshachaturthi (गणेशचतुर्थी), Vii. Paramabhaktashibajirath (परमभक्तशिवाजीराट्), Viii. Mithyagrahanam (मिथ्याग्रहणम्), IX. Kshanikabibhramah (क्षणिकविभ्रमः), X. Asuyini (असुयीनी), Xi. Brittashamsicchatram (वृत्तशंसिच्छत्रम्), Xii. Swarnapurakrishibalah (स्वर्णपुरकृषीबलाः), Xiii. Birava (वीरभा), Xiv. Miracharitam (मीराचरितम्), Xv. Girijayah (गिरिजायाः), Xvi. Pratingya (प्रतिज्ञा), Xvii. Balabidhaba (बालविधवा), Xviii. Jayantu Kimauniah (जयन्तु किमाउनीयाः), Xix. Mayajalam (मायाजालम्), Xx. Tulachaladhirohanam (तुलाचलाधिरोहणम्), Xxi. Harisinghah (हरिसिंहः), Xxii. Anupah (अनुपः), Xxiii. Kripanika (कृपाणिका), Xxiv. Bithalacharitam (बिठालचरितम्), Xxv. Narakandashramah (नारकण्डाश्रमः).

Kamalaratnam:--- Kamalaratnam was born at 1914 in Allahabad now a days Prayagraj Uttar Pradesh and completed her M.A. from Lucknow University at 1931. Ater that she achieved and qualify a special examination T. D. on Educational Psychology from Landan University. Then From 1940 to 1947 she was assistant professor of Sanskrit at Kamalateja Mahavidyalaya, Gwalior, under Agra University. Peralaratnam, Foreign Secretary of Indian Government of that time married her. For that reason, she gets a opportunity to go various country and she implemented these outing for spreading knowledge of Sanskrit. She also gives lectures in Sanskrit, hindi on various university across Australia, Tokio, Mexico, Mosco and others place.

Dr. Vanamala Bhawalkar: -- Vanamala Bhawalkar was the first lady who introduce opera in Sanskrit drama. She was born at belgram in state of Karnataka. She starts her primary education at Mumbai because her father was a judge of Mumbai High Court. Later she was completed M.A. from Calcutta University on the topic of 'Ancient Indian history and culture' (प्रचीन-भरतीय इतिहास एवं संस्कृतिः) and place herself as gold medallist. From 1946, when Sagar University was established since then she was appointed as a lecturer and women's hostel super. After completing M.A. from Nagpur University, she was upgraded as permanent faculty at Sagar University. In 1961 she was achieved her degree Doctor of Philosophy on the topic of 'Women in Mahabharat' from Sagar University. She has a deep knowledge of many languages like Hindi, Sanskrit, Kannar, Marathi, English and German. She was written drama in Hindi and

Marathi and gets Shahitya-Parishada first prize for her Marathi drama. We can find five Sanskrit literatures written by her--1. Ramabanagamanam(रामवनगमनम्), 2. Sitaharanam(सीताहरणम्), 3. Parbatiparameshchariam(पार्वतीपरमेश्वरीयम्), 4. Padadanda(पाददण्डः), 5. Annadebata(अन्नदेवता).

Smt. Debaki Menan: -- Besides being the Principal of Queen-Mery's College of Madras Smt. Debaki Menan was also interested in literature writing. After retirement she was made her home at Ernakulam in Kerala state. She creates a new type of drama name Nabho drama on her won similar to ancient drama category name Bhana. She was written many Sanskrit literature as---
1. Sharada Devi Charitrasamgraha (शारदा देवी चरित्रसंग्रहः) 2. Kuchelabritam(कुचेलवृत्तम्), 3. Sairandhriprekshanakam (सैरन्ध्रीप्रेक्षणकम्), 4. Kalidarshanam(कालीदर्शनम्), 5. Samtanagopala(संतानगोपाल), 6. Prithanmustih(पृथङ्मुष्टिः).

Smt. Bela Devi: -- Bela Devi was born at Nadia district in West Bengal on 1919. She was written literature not only in Sanskrit language but Bengali language also. She was mainly written drama category literature, these are---1. Nachiketashcharitam (नचिकेतश्चरितम्), 2. Mahiyasi Gargi (महीयसी गार्गी), 3. Virangriham(विराङ्ग्रहम्), 4. Gopigitam(गोपीगीतम्).

The list of women writers not end there but we can say it's the beginning, so many women writers are there like Dr. Ratnamayi Devi Dikshit, Smt. Archana Puri, Dr. Jashabanti Hasamukhadev, Dr. Binapani Patani, Dr. Vedakumari Ghai, Dr. Nalini Shukla, Dr. Puspa Dikshit, Dr. Saraswati Bali, Dr. Uma Deshpande, Dr. Rajkumari Trikha, Dr. Prabesh Saksena, Dr. Kamala Pande and many more.

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that women have made meaningful and lasting contributions to Sanskrit literature from ancient times to the post-independence period. Although the number of women writers remained comparatively lower than male writers in earlier periods due to social restrictions, limited access to education, and domestic responsibilities, women never disappeared from the Sanskrit literary tradition. Historical evidence from the Vedic age itself demonstrates that women participated actively as scholars, composers, and preservers of knowledge.

After Indian independence, the social and educational condition of women gradually improved due to educational expansion, constitutional equality, and the efforts of social reformers and institutions. This transformation created opportunities for women to participate more actively in literary and academic fields, including Sanskrit studies. As a result, modern Sanskrit literature witnessed the emergence of several influential women authors who enriched Sanskrit through poetry, drama, biography, criticism, cultural writings, and educational initiatives.

The literary contributions of writers such as Pandita Kshamadevi Rao, Dr. Rama Choudhury, Leela Rao Dayal, Kamalaratnam, Dr. Vanamala Bhawalkar, Smt. Devaki Menon, and Smt. Bela Devi demonstrate that Sanskrit is not only a classical language of the past but also a living medium of creative expression in which women have played an essential role. Their works reflect intellectual depth, cultural consciousness, and dedication to preserving and expanding Sanskrit literary traditions.

This study also shows that women's participation in Sanskrit literature is closely connected with broader social development. Greater educational access, literary encouragement, and equal opportunities have enabled women to contribute significantly to the preservation and modernization of Sanskrit. However, further efforts are still needed to document, translate, publish, and critically study the works of many women Sanskrit authors whose contributions remain less known.

Therefore, the increasing participation of women in Sanskrit literature should be regarded not merely as a literary achievement but also as an indicator of social progress and cultural inclusiveness. The continued encouragement of women scholars and writers will strengthen Sanskrit studies and ensure that future generations inherit a richer, more diverse, and more representative literary tradition.

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