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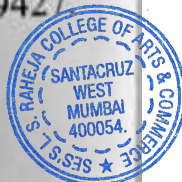
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Higher Education and Women in Ancient India

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Abstract

The general position of women in ancient India was unique. They enjoyed high status and independence in the society. An unmarried young learned daughter ought to be married to a learned bridegroom. Both secular and sacred education was handed over systematically by formalizing the system of education. It systematically began away back in the times when the hymns of the Vedas were being composed. Technological development and complexity of the society, contributed a lot for the growth and development of higher education system in ancient period. For a long time family was the only educational institution, and even boys used to receive education only from their fathers or elders. The same naturally was the case with girls. But in course of time with development of technology and complexity, education was restricted to women.

Keywords: Women and Education, Education system of Ancient India, Ancient Indian Education.

Introduction

The education in India has a rich and interesting history. In the ancient days, the education was imported orally by the sages & the scholars & the information was passed on from one generation to the other. Throughout the long centuries of Indian history educational development was taking place. The study of educational philosophy, its principles, its methods and its history of ancient India is immensely important for better understanding of the present education system. It systematically began away back in the times when the hymns of the Vedas being composed. Women held very important position in Indian History. As the time passed the position of women underwent changes in all sphere of life. Number of attempts has been made to interpret the history of women by different scholars. 19th century socio-religious reformers and



nationalist historians of the early 20th century often presented the Vedic age as a golden age for women. This will also help us to understand not only the student and teacher relationship of ancient India, but also gives us a fair image of educationists and policy making of ancient India.

Education System

In ancient India, during the Vedic period from about 1500 BC, Education was based on the Veda (hymns, Formulas, & incantations, recited or chanted by priests of a Pre-Hindu tradition) & later Hindu texts & Scripture. Education, at first freely available in Vedic society, in the course of time soon became an institution, limited to upper three caste only. Education in its general sense is a form of learning which the knowledge, skills, values, belief and habits of group of people are transformed from one generation to the next. The establishment of peasant economy and the emergence of the state mark a qualitative change in the history of a society since it arises out of and initiates a series of interrelated changes at many levels. In settled agriculture complicated ritual practices have been crystallized. Institution of Varna shrama system with the respect of Varna was created. Varna shrama are to be regarded as resting places during one's journey on the way to final liberation each of the Ashrama is a stage of life in which the individual has to train himself for a certain period and exert himself within the circuit of the same in order to qualify himself for the next.

It occurs through any experience that has formative effects on the way one thinks, feels or acts. It became a well developed institution of ancient Indian Society, which they called "Varnashrama vyavastha". There are four 'ashramas' 1) Brahmachary ashrama 2) Grihasthashrama 3) Vanaprasthashrama 4) Sanyashrama. With the development of complete society, identity consciousness has increased. Social watch dogs were established to control the behavior of the women. With the increasing of the varna system and to maintain the purity of blood, men started controlling her sexuality and reproduction. The experience of women belonging to different groups in society varied. Women have to be understood in relation to men and their relationships are embedded in wider social, economic and political context.

In the older writings a great part of the discussion about women of the Vedic age focused on upper caste women, ignoring the lower strata of the society. Though Rig-Veda mentions goddesses none of them are as important as the major gods, where in proto-historic culture mother goddess (fertility god) cult was in vogue. The proportion of humans attributed to



Trade had become serious complex system. It included production, gathering and marketing, supply and sale. It also included cash crops. With this new class emerged which only involved in trade. Settled agriculture characterized by urbanizes economy. Everybody was part of that complex society. They produced their product in money value i.e. coins, symbol of settled life. Female reproductive power in such complex developing society is regarded as valuable because the very survival of the community is dependent upon it but men realized his role in reproduction, he started controlling it. It is an evident in the process of social production as reflected in earliest texts; woman was at the receiving end. Her status depended upon on her male counterparts' position in the society. She was seen as the medium of reproduction.

Conclusion

This gradual transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture made an impact perhaps indirectly on other aspects of Vedic life, including system of education. Specialization of labor demanded also the specialization of knowledge. Under these circumstances, universities started coming up along with the second urbanization. The period of transition from pastoralism to settle agriculture was the most creative one in history of Hindu literature, philosophy and science. The experience of women belonging to different groups in society varied women have to be understood in relation to men and their relationships are embedded in wider social, economic and political context. Biological difference between men and women created set of social differences among which education was one of them.

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