

Genesis of Women Education in India: An Analysis

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Abstract: Education is considered as a lifelong process. However, the notion of education has been widely divided into various categories such as formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Among the different concepts of education, women education occupies a central position especially in a country like India wherein women segment scales a major place in total population of India. Importantly, the notion of women education is of great importance in the all round development and social upliftment to a great extent. Importantly, the notion of women education has a distinct historical background in India ranging from the Vedic period to till date. Hence, the present paper aims to unfold the historical background of women education in India.

Key: Women Education, Vedic Period, Colonialism, Constitutional Development.

Objective: The objective of the present paper is to unfold the historical background of women education in India in a brief .

Methodology: The methodology of the paper is qualitative in nature based on secondary sources. In this context, different books, articles and journals have been consulted while preparing the paper.

Discussion: “The present is embedded in the past” is a well truism. The history of women education in India has its roots in ancient period. Though at present women has to face different challenges but in ancient India specifically in Vedic period women has always constituted an educated, cultured and respected limb of the society inseparable from men. In the Rig Vedic age, women enjoyed freedom of the highest degree like male members of the society. They

participated in the performance of sacrifice with men so no 'Yajna' was considered to be completed without active participation of women. Ghosa, Lopamudra, Apala, Gargi, Maitrey were some of the educated women of this period. Some thinkers divided educated women of this period. Some thinkers divided educated women of this period into two categories, i.e. – Brahma-Vadini and Sadyabadhu. Brahma Vadinis were eligible to 'upanayana' (Education- initiation ceremony). Sacrifice to fine study of Vedas, and practice of mendicarrcy within the household. Whereas the Sadyabadhus had to perform 'upanayana' in the same form before her marriage. During this period, women were given practical and useful education which is mentioned in 'Rigveda' and 'Artharveda'. So women was at its peak at that time. In the Buddhist period, entry of women in Sanghas(Educational centres) were prohibited by Lord Buddha as according to the Buddhist principles women were regarded as infamous to men. But later, on the request of Ananda(a disciple of Buddha), Buddha allowed women to join Sangha. Even then women were kept under strict rules and regulations and their position were lower than that of male monks. The rules of admission of women in Sangha were hard, two years of probation was fixed for their permanent membership. They had to live separately. The educated women of Buddhist period were called as "Bhikshunis". It shows a picture that Buddhism had imposed many hard rules on education of women.

After Buddhist period, the Muslim rules patronised education system in India. Like Buddhism, the door of muslim education was not open for women too. 'Pandha-system' was the main obstacle of women education. So, women were deprived of attending 'Maktabs' and 'Madrasa'(Educational institutions). Though, education was difficult for the common girls, but daughter of royal families of those nobles were educated privately at home, Gulbadan, daughter of Emperor Babar was an educated women. She wrote 'Humanyunnama', likewise, Nurjahan wife of Jahangir, Mamtaz Mahal, wife of Shahjahan, Jahanara Begum had thorough studied literature and arts.

Initiation of Colonial rule in India brought drastic change in the greater socio-political scenario of the country including the education sector too. During British period, some Christian Missionaries took initiatives in this direction and established 'Zanana School'. In 1818, Ravarend May, established a women educational institution in 'Suchura'. English women also contributed to the field of women education by establishing 'Calcutta Female Juvenile Society'.

Government also paid attention to the field of women education, accordingly women educational intuitions were established in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. In the beginning of 19th century, schools were also established in Banaras for women on effort of Ani Besant. During this period, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Iswar Chandra Bidya Sagar, Mahatma Gandhi, Jyoti Rao Phuley took initiatives for development of women education by removal of superstitious believes from society. Similarly, pioneer female personalities like Pandita Ramabai, Savitribai Phuley and many other female personalities played a major role in disseminating as well as popularizing women education in colonial India. Due to such efforts of these eminent personalities, lady Hadinz college was established in 1916 in Delhi. Similarly, the role of the personalities like Indira Miri, Chandraprabha Saikiani and many others have contributed a lot towards the greater realm of the Women Education in Assam.

After independence, Indian Constitution took initiatives for development of women education. In Article 15 of the Indian Constitution it is written, “The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on ground only of religion, race, caste, creed, sex, place of birth or any of them.” Government is also encouraging education of women by declaring equal rights to women in this field. Besides the constitutional safeguards, Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-1949), National Council of Women (1959), Durgabai Deshmukh Committee (1959), Srimati Harsha Mehta Committee Report (1962), Bhaktabatsalam Committee Report, Kothari Commission (1964-1966), National Committee of Women Education, National Educational Policy (1986), Programme of Action (1992) also took initiatives and provided tremendous suggestions for the development of women education. In present, literacy rate of India is 74.04%, including 82.14% which is male literacy and 65.46% is female. Though the present female literacy rate is less than that of male but it is comparatively increasing day by day due to modernization, westernization, development of democratic attitude, expansion of education etc. In modern India, women have held high offices including that of President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, leader of opposition etc. It indicates the increasing development of women participation in different sphere of our life. Most importantly, the historic 73rd and 74th amendment of the constitution of India that ensures 33% reservation of women in PRIs and ULBs also played a vital role in gender sensitization and enabling women to exercise their due rights through the practice of participation and decentralization.

Conclusion: In the context of women education in India, it can be opined that women education in India isn't a newer concept from the very beginning of Vedic era to till date. In a nutshell, the notion of women education in India is a pragmatic concept and the prevue of the same has been enriching with different developments in the different epochs of time.

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