

An Analytical and Historical Perspective on Women's Education in India

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Introduction

The process of social, economic, and political change in traditional and underdeveloped societies is known as modernisation. In the context of India, modernisation refers to the process through which a traditional society develops into a contemporary one. The Colonial era marked the beginning of India's modernization process, which meant that a traditional society came into contact with the west as it was undergoing its own modernization. This interaction mostly led to the transition of agricultural cultures into industrial economies. This shift spread beyond just the commercial and industrial sectors and influenced social change as well. The development of economic modernization was assisted concurrently by social modernization. Education, a determinant and an indication of social change, was one of many social dimensions of the social transition or modernization. The modernization of the state had been greatly aided by education. Education, according to Alca Myrdal, "embraces a multiprocess, by which, on the one hand, culture and values are transferred and, on the other hand, it also serves to bring about a rationalisation of attitudes, beliefs, and habits, etc."

Education was viewed as one of the "primary agencies of socialisation" by another academic, M. S. Gore. The current study, however, offers a summary of women's education in ancient and mediaeval India.

Summary of Women's Education

The topic of women's educational standing and their social circumstances are related. The condition of women's education before and after the British arrival will assist to reveal the condition, growth, and changes occurred in women's education over the time, as the current subject is quite broad and complete. According to Minna G. Cowan, three major conceptions of womanhood—Vedic, Muslim, and Christian or Western—have dominated Indian society at various points in time.

The following paragraphs discuss the state of women's education during certain times:

Education of Women in the Ancient Period

In India, the position of women in education went through various phases of rise and decrease. Women's education has a long history that dates back to ancient society. In the Vedic era, women actively participated in all aspect of human life and worked in all disciplines just like men. There being no sati, widows might remarry to the husband's younger brother, and females married when they were of legal age, preventing child marriages. The wife was his true partner in happiness and misery, the head of the home, and a true collaborator in all of his temporal and spiritual endeavours.

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A lady had a strong sense of duty and carried the load for the entire family. They were permitted to go to the meetings and social events as well. They collaborated with men in the production of bows, arrows, fabric, and other items of public utility. They were active participants in the work of agriculture.

As women's social position evolved, so did their educational level. Women were permitted to participate in the educational system. They received an education and rose to a prominent position in society. Daughters had to live a life of learning and discipline, just like the boy, and were also involved in the Vedic studies. In the past, boys and girls started their education with the Upanayana ceremony, which was done when they were around eight years old and welcomed them into the preceptor's home.

Women who wanted an education attended Gurukula and got married only after finishing their studies. The course work covered all areas of culture and knowledge, as well as the study of religious texts. Many women went on to become intellectuals, debaters, poets, instructors, etc. of the Vedas. Some of them, known as Brahmanavadinis, even chose to live unmarried lives in order to pursue knowledge nonstop. Women of culture made sacrifices and wrote hymns just as men. Some even received a portion of the father's property. Women scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi wrote the hymns in ancient India, especially during the Vedic period. With the spread of Buddhism in India, everyone had access to education, which prompted the founding of certain internationally renowned educational institutions including Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Takshashila. The Buddhist monasteries gave rise to these educational institutions. In the fourfold society of the Buddhist order, women were given a specific place as bhikkhunis (nuns) and upasikas (lay female devotees), the female counterparts of bhikkhus (priests) and upasaks (lay male devotees). The inclusion of women in the Buddhist order paved the way for female education; Sanghmitra, Subha, Anupama, and Sumedha, for instance, received their education from the order.

Many women entered the order of nuns during the Buddhist era and committed themselves to studying Buddhism and its philosophy for the rest of their lives. Buddhist nuns composed the therigatha. Women joining the Buddhist and Jain orders without the elders' consent, according to Altekhar, caused a Hindu backlash in society. In an effort to reverse this trend and revive Hindu custom, early childhood marriage has received increased attention. Women's education was not given enough attention as these norms for women were being established. As a result, women had better (higher) positions in society. Women used to be free to move about in society without being excluded.

There is a tonne of proof that shows upper-class ladies frequently knew how to read and write. They were forbidden from reading any of the sacred texts, but they did read and remember the two major popular epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—which are the embodiments of many Indian customs and ideals. It appears that girls did, in fact, have the chance to pursue an education in the community. These factors led R. S. Tripathi to claim that their standing at the time was actually "one of honour." Unfortunately, from the Later Vedic period, the status of women began to deteriorate and suffered a serious setback. Her condition significantly deteriorated. Women were only allowed to have a small amount of the relative freedom they had during the Vedic era. At this time, women were totally reliant on men and were subject to their fathers', wives', and mothers' authority. According to

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Altekar, "therefore, for approximately 2000 years from 20 B.C. to A.D. 1800, the position of women slowly declined, despite the fact that she was coddled by parents, cherished by her husband, and venerated by her offspring. Her situation was rendered more difficult by the resurgence of sati, the ban on second marriages, the spread of purdah, and the enormous frequency of polygamy. The sati custom, child marriages, and the ban on widow remarriages were all very common. It was noted that the position of women gradually declined throughout this time. According to Neera Desai, "women were kept in a state of utter servitude, denied any rights, suppressed and oppressed because socially they were kept as a completely lower species, inferior to the man, having no significance, no personality."

Due to the social changes that occurred in later years, women's education virtually vanished. Economically, socially, and politically, women's status was declining. This deterioration had an impact on women's education as well because she fell behind men not just socially and culturally, but also academically. Within society, the prejudiced views opposing women's education grew stronger. The exclusion of girls from the caste initiation rites, which acted as a prerequisite to the education of boys, effectively eliminated the prospect of education. They were initially denied access to study the holy books. Later, the Upanayana ceremony was restricted to boys alone, and eventually, women were prohibited access to all forms of education. There were, nevertheless, sporadic instances of women who were gifted readers. Even if there is evidence that educated women existed in ancient times, it is impossible to say that systematic education for girls was offered at that time due to the lack of records. There most likely wasn't a regular education system for girls of all classes throughout this time.

Women's Education in the Middle Ages

Women's status during the mediaeval era underwent some modifications. The Purdah system and its corrosive impact arrived with the Moslem conquests. The opinions on the necessity and use of purdah for women developed by Mohammed, according to contemporary Muslim historians, for the protection of women in untamed and chaotic times, it has fostered mistrust of their morals and abilities, Minna Cowan writes in her book. Although many Indian women today view the Purdah as a mark of prestige and their worth in their husbands' eyes, a critical observer must consider it, in its ultimate social significance, as a signal of distrust. However, this restriction prevented the upper classes from having access to structured schooling outside of the house, at the very least. The Purdah system prevented girls over a certain age from enrolling in schools, however very young girls did so when it was feasible. Theoretically, every man and woman in Muslim society was required to have some form of education. The Muslim girls attended different schools.

During their tenure, the Muslim monarchs promoted education, including education for women. They established book clubs and libraries. Babur established the public work department known as Shuhrat-i-Am to begin promoting education for the populace. Muslim rulers in India were interested in creating educational facilities for girls as well as for boys. For the girls' school in Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar maintained separate chambers. The education of the aristocratic Muslim women of Zenana was unaffected by the Purdah system. The daughters from the royal families received private instruction in their own houses. Among them were Sultana Razziya, Gulbadan Begam, Babar's

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daughter and author of Humayun-Namah, Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan's wife, Jahanara Begum, Shah Jahan's eldest daughter, and Zibunnisa Begam, Aurangzeb's eldest daughter. Nur Jahan, Jahangir's famed wife, was also present. Sultana Razziya, the princess who succeeded to the throne of Delhi, was educated. The princesses received a liberal arts education from the Mughal emperors. Despite social stigmas against girls' education, the daughters of Rajput Chiefs were also capable of reading and writing.

Another educational system was imported into India with the start of the Muslim era. Islamic influences on conventional educational practises grew over time.

There were two different kinds of institutions: the Maktab and the Madarasa. To teach boys and girls how to read and write the Holy Koran, these were typically attached to mosques. Despite the fact that the education given to women during this time was mostly focused on teaching them how to read religious texts, at times a little extra information was also provided to "allow them to manage their estate accounts, in the absence of their husbands." As a result, the sacred literature received more attention.

In the past, Buddhist, Jains, and Hindu-run educational institutions were all centred on religion and provided religious instruction. Even in the Middle Ages, instruction was given to develop a thorough understanding of the Holy Koran. Since education in India in its traditional form was strongly tied to religion, the "religious environment" may thus be noticed in the educational institutions where the students were taught religious lessons.

Conclusion

Women had a greater standing in ancient India, according to research on the historical development of women's education and their place in Indian culture. However, following the Vedic era, women's standing began to deteriorate. Under Islamic authority, it hit its lowest point ever. As H. C. Upadhyay correctly noted, it began to improve gradually with the introduction of the British educational system. But it is undeniable that India, a country that has long been known as a centre of learning, has grown with renowned educational institutions, fostered a love of learning even before the British, and supported women's education.

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