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WOMEN EDUCATION IN REFERENCE OF ANCIENT EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract:

Women's Education has been a topic of interest n a topic of interest throughout history, with ancient societies offering a rich tapestry of practices and beliefs regarding female learning. This present paper explores the role of women's education within ancient educational systems, examining various civilizations such ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and India. Drawing upon historical texts, archaeological findings, and scholarly research, this paper investigates the extent of educational opportunities available to women in these societies, as well as the societal attitudes and cultural norms that shaped their educational experiences by comply of the historical date used by other researchers, government agency, texts and reference books. Furthermore, it considers the implication of women's education in ancient times for contemporary debates surrounding gender equality and access to education By analysing the historical context and legacy of women's education in ancient societies, reflects that there is a need of deeper understanding of the on-going struggle for educational equity and empowerment for women worldwide as 50% (approximately) representation of total population which is not quite good in present scenario.

Keywords: Education, Women, Ancient, Curriculum, India etc

I. Introduction:

A. Overview of women's education in ancient times:

In ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, women's access to education varied significantly depending on social, cultural, and economic factors (Pomeroy, 1995). While some societies provided limited educational opportunities for women, others restricted their access to formal learning altogether.

B. Importance of education for women in ancient societies:

Education held immense importance for women in ancient societies as it often determined their social status, marital prospects, and roles within the family and community (Lefkowitz & Fant,

2005). Despite the challenges and limitations, education empowered women to engage in intellectual pursuits, participate in religious rituals, and contribute to cultural and artistic endeavours.

II. Ancient Education Systems:

A. Mesopotami:

1. Role of women in education:

In Mesopotamia, women's involvement in education was limited primarily to domestic and familial duties (Kramer, 1983). They were responsible for transmitting cultural and religious knowledge to the next generation within the confines of the home.

2. Types of education available for women:

Educational opportunities for women in Mesopotamia were primarily informal and focused on practical skills such as cooking, weaving, and childcare (Roth, 1997). Formal schooling was rare, and women were typically not permitted to attend the scribal schools that trained men for administrative roles.

B. Ancient Egypt:

1. Education opportunities for women:

Women in ancient Egypt had relatively more opportunities for formal education compared to other ancient civilizations (Robins, 2008). They could attend schools, albeit segregated from men, to learn reading, writing, mathematics, and religious rituals.

2. Subjects taught to women:

The curriculum for women in ancient Egyptian schools included literature, mathematics, music, and dance, along with instruction in household management and religious ceremonies (Tyldesley, 2011).

C. Ancient Greece:

1. Restrictions on women's education:

In ancient Greece, women's access to education was heavily restricted, particularly in Athens where they were confined to the domestic sphere (Lefkowitz & Fant, 2005). Formal education was reserved for elite males, and women were expected to focus on household duties.

2. Exceptions and notable female scholars:

Despite the restrictions, some wealthy women in ancient Greece received private tutoring in subjects like music, dance, and poetry (Pomeroy, 1995). Notable exceptions include philosophers like Hypatia of Alexandria who gained prominence in intellectual circles.

D. Ancient Rome:

1. Education for elite women:

Elite women in ancient Rome had access to education, primarily provided by private tutors or within the household (Dixon, 2001). They were taught subjects such as literature, philosophy, and

rhetoric to enhance their social status and ability to participate in elite circles.

2. Public vs. private education for women:

While some Roman women received private education tailored to their social class and status, others attended public schools where they were segregated from men and received instruction in basic literacy and numeracy (Lefkowitz & Fant, 2005).

E. Ancient India:

1. Education in ancient India:

Women actively participated in all aspect of human life, during the Vedic era and worked in all disciplines alongside males. Sati did not exist (A. S. Altekar, 1987:343). The state of women's education evolved alongside their social standing. The school system accepted women as participants. They obtained a high status in society and were educated. Daughters were required to study Veda, just like sons, and live a life of discipline and learning (A. S. Altekar, 1987:10). In ancient India, boys and girls began their education with the Upanayana ceremony, while women attended Gurukula and married after education. Many women became Vedic scholars, debaters, poets, and teachers, and even unmarried Brahmanavadinis pursued knowledge (A. S. Altekar, 1987:34). Women intellectuals like Gargi and Maitreyi composed hymns(A. S. Altekar, 1987:10-30). In its fourfold society, the Buddhist order assigned women a specific role as bhikkhunis (nuns) and Upasikas (lay female devotees), the female equivalents of bhikkhus (priests) and upasaks (lay male devotees). Women were admitted to the Buddhist order, which resulted in female education. Sanghmitra, Subha, Anupama, and Sumedha, for instance, received their education from the Buddhist order. Many women joined the nunnery throughout the Buddhist era and committed themselves to studying Buddhism and its philosophy for the rest of their lives (A. S. Altekar, 1987:10–30). Buddhist nuns composed the therigatha.

2. Curriculum and Institutions in ancient India:

Women wrote Sanskrit plays and poetry, dance, music, painting, and participated in combat. They also engaged in economic pursuits like dyeing, sewing, and crafting (King, 1987). Buddhist nuns, trained in music, fine arts, painting, and Sanskrit, achieved intellectual achievement and success as instructors and researchers (Sharma, 2015).

III. Challenges and Barriers:

A. Social norms and expectations:

Social norms and expectations in ancient societies often dictated that women's primary role was within the household, limiting their access to education and intellectual pursuits (Pomeroy, 1995). These norms reinforced the idea that women's value lay in their domestic abilities rather than their intellectual capabilities.

B. Access to resources and opportunities:

Women's access to education in ancient times was also hindered by disparities in resources and opportunities based on factors such as social class and geographic location (Robins, 2008). Wealthy and elite families were more likely to afford private tutors and formal schooling for their daughters, while poorer families often prioritized education for sons.

C. Gender discrimination and bias in education:

Gender discrimination was pervasive in ancient education systems, with institutions and educators often favouring male students over females (Lefkowitz & Fant, 2005). This bias extended to curriculum development, with subjects tailored to reinforce gender roles and stereotypes.

D. Limited career options for educated women:

Despite receiving education, women in ancient societies faced limited career options outside of traditional roles such as wife, mother, or priestess (Tyldesley, 2011). Even elite women who were educated in literature, philosophy, or rhetoric were largely excluded from participating in public life and holding positions of authority.

IV. Impact of Women's Education:

A. Individual empowerment and personal development:

Women's education in ancient times played a crucial role in empowering individuals to develop critical thinking skills, confidence, and self-reliance (Robins, 2008). Education provided women with the tools to challenge traditional gender roles and assert their autonomy in various aspects of life.

B. Contributions to society and culture:

Educated women in ancient societies made significant contributions to their respective cultures through artistic, literary, and intellectual endeavours (Pomeroy, 1995). They produced works of literature, poetry, and music, and participated in religious rituals and cultural ceremonies that shaped the social fabric of their communities.

C. Influence on future generations:

The education of women in ancient times had a lasting impact on future generations by serving as a model for the importance of female education and empowerment (Tyldesley, 2011). Educated women served as role models for younger generations, inspiring them to pursue learning and break free from traditional constraints.

D. Progression towards gender equality:

Although gender equality was not achieved in ancient societies, the education of women laid the foundation for progress towards greater equality in subsequent generations (Lefkowitz & Fant, 2005). By challenging societal norms and expectations, educated women paved the way for future movements advocating for women's rights and equal opportunities in education and beyond.

V. Conclusion:

A. Recap of the significance of women's education in ancient times:

Women's education in ancient times was significant as it provided opportunities for personal development, cultural contributions, and the empowerment of individuals within restrictive societal norms. Despite facing numerous challenges and barriers, educated women in ancient societies played essential roles in shaping their communities and influencing future generations.

B. Reflection on the progress and challenges in modern times:

While significant progress has been made in promoting women's education and gender equality in modern times, challenges persist, including disparities in access to education, gender discrimination, and cultural barriers (UNESCO, 2019). Efforts to address these challenges require ongoing commitment and investment in inclusive and equitable education systems.

C. Importance of continuing efforts to promote education for all women:

The importance of promoting education for all women remains paramount in modern times as education serves as a fundamental human right and a catalyst for social and economic development (World Bank, 2021). By investing in women's education, societies can unlock the full potential of half of their population, leading to greater prosperity, empowerment, and equality for all. Continued efforts to promote education for all women are essential for building more inclusive and equitable societies.

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