



Role of vocational education in strengthening women

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Abstract- Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development of any country. The empowerment of rural women is seen only as the means of poverty eradication. Any step of empowering these poor women can make provision to link the nature of empowerment with the skill training required for efficiently running it. India is seriously handicapped with a very weak and narrow knowledge and skills base, with 12.3% gross enrolment ratio, as compared to 21% in China, 54.6% in developed countries and the world average of 23.2%. This paper represents the concept and Meaning of Vocational Education and Training by linking it to lifelong learning. The importance of VET for underprivileged, marginalized groups and women has been pinpointed, as it is a powerful weapon against poverty and hunger, and for women's empowerment. VET can make a big difference for many of the rural poor and women by improving household productivity, employability and income-earning opportunities and also for enhancing food security and promoting environmentally sustainable development and livelihoods.

Keywords: Skills, Economy, Literacy, Vocational Education, Women empowerment, Employability.

I. INTRODUCTION

Scope of Future Research:

Vocational education and training trains a person in the desired field. It reduces wastage of resources and money. The scope of vocational education is ever increasing. Educational institutions are now focusing on adding vocational education courses in their curriculum. Such type of education is an asset for the economy. Apart from providing stable jobs, it also increases the knowledge base and confidence of a person.

Research Outcomes

1. Skill Development and Women Workers in India: a brief overview

The policy brief looks into the bottlenecks associated with women's livelihoods and the importance of skill development interventions to tackle the same. Policy provisions for skill development of women have also been encapsulated. Female workforce participation rate (WPR) in India stands at 31.8%, which is almost half of the male WPR at 73.2%. While north-eastern and hilly states have performed well on female WPR, with Mizoram having the highest WPR at 61.3%, the situation is worrisome in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, with WPR as low as 9% in the latter. According to a McKinsey Global Institute study, India could boost its GDP by \$2.9 trillion by 2025, if female workforce participation rate is improved by 10 percentage points. This would be equivalent to bringing 68 million more women into the non-farm labour force.

According National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), there are over 30 lakh unemployed women in India in 2012. As on December, 2013, a total of 1.65 crore women had registered on employment exchanges. However, only 58.8 thousand women had been placed through these exchanges in the same year.

Improving participation of women in the workforce would require improvements in access and quality of education, skill development and employment opportunities available to women. The government of India is running several programs to enhance job opportunities in India- such as: - a) the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP), b) National Livelihoods Mission, c) Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDUGKY), d) Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) along with several entrepreneurship development programs. With a pressing need to harness the demographic dividend that India enjoys, special focus has been skill development initiatives.

The National Skill Development Mission, headed by the Prime Minister, was launched in 2008, and a Co-ordinate an action Plan for Skill Development was formulated with a three-tier structure that includes, (a) the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, as the apex body for advice on policy and interventions, (b) the Skill Development Co-ordination Board to device detailed strategies, guidelines and instructions based on the advice of the council, and (c) the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), a non-profit company registered under the Companies Act of 1956. The role of the corporation is to identify the full range of skill development needs, develop processes with special emphasis on excellent standards and certifications, training of trainers, and proper delivery of training. Historically, vocational training has been primarily coordinated by Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET) under Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE), Government of India; while technical training falls under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. "The main objective of vocational education and training (VET) is to furnish the technical and management skills and help develop appropriate attitudes for specific occupations and jobs." However, this traditional objective is being widened now to include approaches and interventions that promote capacity building and empowerment, and not just training p. The present focus is to develop and achieve sustainable improvements in the livelihoods of the poor.

2. Key Issues and Challenges in Brief

As noted earlier, the aim of skill development, particularly in case of women, is not merely to prepare them for jobs, but also to improve the performance of women workers by enhancing the quality of work in which they are engaged. The NSDC has identified a few of the major challenges, which need to be addressed for building a conducive ecosystem, of skill development for the women workforce. These are as follows,

- (i) the large number of women who need to be trained since currently only 2% of the female workforce is formally trained,
- (ii) inadequacies in the quality and relevance of TVET (technical and vocational employment training in India),
- (iii) inadequate Infrastructure, acute shortage of trained women workers, poor quality of training,
- (iv) lack of mechanisms to judge and certify quality,
- (v) inequity in access to TVET for women,
- (vi) low level of education of potential women trainees that limits training of women in the formal sector,
- (vii) lack of recognition of prior learning of potential women trainees,
- (viii) relatively high opportunity cost of learning involved for training women.

3. Problems of Vocational Education system in India

The present TVET system in India is facing some serious problems including outdated courses and curricula, low funding and multiple levels of policy planning and governing. Some of the major problems of the Indian TVET system are listed below

A). Multiplicity of regulations, certifications and curriculum- Curriculum is main pillar of VET training system. If VET provisions are implemented by different departments, ministries, agencies and organizations, whether Government or private, with a multiplicity of certification, standards and curricula it will result in overlapping of courses and institutions as well as creating confusion for students and employers [a].

B). The demand supply mismatch of job market - The current VET programs are largely supply-driven and still lack of relevant training for available jobs. There is a need to improve links between schools and the industry to minimize this mismatch. A divergence between the skills that the population possesses and skills required by industry is a major cause of low employability among Indian youth. India has predominantly been an agricultural economy and much of its population is still dependent on traditional activities, over 90% of the labour force of India still works in the informal sector, with low productivity and skills. With low skills and experience limited to the unorganized sector, these workers remain unemployable in industry. The current public VET system offers only a few training courses and covers

around 100 skills. Out of these, several skills like stenography have becoming outdated due to the emergence of new technologies. This increases the gap between industry need and manpower supply [b].

C). Poor perception and public mindset- Many Indian parents want their children to pursue a clerical job or be an office assistant, not realizing that a technician can earn more than these jobs. In countries like India VET has always been considered by the public and parents as the career choice for the less academically-qualified with the impression that VET is for school drop-outs, rather than as an important strategy to train skilled workers. Too much attention and resources are given to 'academic' rather than vocational education [c].

D). Lack of coordination among Government Agencies and regulatory bodies –Different ministries manage their employability initiatives independently in India and there is a wide range of VET providers such as social businesses, non-profits and corporate. Coordination between all these players is required to create an enabling environment that enhances the capacity, quality and utilization of VET.

E). Inadequate academia-industry linkage- This results in low rates of employment due to the reason that what job providers are seeking for, are not communicated with the training sector. Besides it also affects the placement.

F). Lack of updated curriculum- An updated curriculum which is relevant to present day need of the industry is a major requirement. The curriculum should be relevant to the need of the industry.

G). Shortage of qualified teachers- Availability of good quality trained and qualified teachers and trainers is an important problem. Poor recruitment process of Governments is responsible for this.

H). Lack of proper infrastructure – building, modern equipment and raw materials is a hurdle in learning during training. This can be attributed to improper release of funds.

I). Lack of autonomy- Lack of administrative and financial autonomy and accountability is another pitfall in the way. If these institute are given good deal of autonomy, they will be better able to change and adjust them in changing scenario of the present-day market needs [d]. It is clear from the above points that there are a lot of challenges in the field of VET education in India and to achieve the targets there is a strong need of substantial expansion of quality technical and vocational education and training system.

4. Solutions for the problems of VET sector

There are several suggestions and implications to overcome the challenges and problems of vocational education sector in India and for the overall improvement of the VET sector and skill development programme in India. Below are some of the main suggestions, given under the following heads [e]:

A) Rejuvenating Vocational Education at Schools level: This can be possible by Improving Provision of VET in Schooling system and by strengthening and establishing new Vocational Schools. In schools, focusing on areas like curriculum building and enrolling quality teachers to improve the existing vocational education courses is need of the time. The following steps can be useful in this direction.

a. Introducing relevant curriculum- A strong curriculum to engages students and develop their interest in vocational education is a pre-requisite to successful learning. Improving the existing curriculum to incorporate experiential learning into vocational education courses, will attract more students to vocational education in secondary school. Introducing a range of vocational skills and a well oriented curriculum better oriented towards skills development in mainstream schools would be a successful step. Introducing trades like carpentry and clay modelling etc. as a part of the curriculum can provide students a better understanding of VET opportunities [5].

b. Engaging quality teachers- Qualified teachers with a strong background in a particular skill or trade are needed for practical skills involved in TVET. Using local experts in various trades to impart skills training in schools will be good. These local resources persons can be given basic training in curriculum and pedagogy in their respective trades, and students can learn skills directly from these experts who conduct school-based sessions once a week.

B) Improve public perception of VET: the polytechnics and vocational institutions should rebrand their vocational courses as equivalent of conventional courses. The use of media for sensitization as well as enlightening of the society is necessary in order to dispel the myth crated around VET.

C) Collaboration of the private sector, international development partners and other stakeholders:

The policymakers in the VET system should emphasize the collaboration with the private sector, international development partners and other stakeholders to support government's efforts to ensure effective implementation of VET. This collaboration should take care of advocacy to change public perception of VET, access to funds, training of VET instructors and provision of infrastructural learning resources. Reinforcing links with the labour market and involving the private sector for skill development initiatives in the country will be great moves: Germany has one of the strongest VET systems in the world because it is led by the private sector. In Germany, only 16 percent of total financing for training and skill development is borne by the government, and rest by the private sector. While in India the ratio of government- private sector contribution in the skill development sector is about the reverse. If India has to benefit from its demographic dividend, involving the private sector to take a responsible position in the skill development sector is necessary [d].

D) Ensuring proper funding: The Ministry of Education should persuade the Federal Government to earmark adequate funding for VET in the face of the daunting challenges highlighted above. Other funding sources like World Bank Step-B intervention fund, and Commonwealth assistance should be explored.

E) Establishment of good Relationship with industry: For proper results of mainstreaming VET with the needs of the industry, it is required raining to form strong relationships between the training institutes and industry. This would be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, institutes would get access to facilities of practical exposure to students during industrial tours, Industrial attachment and internship. Secondly, as it would encourage the private sector to direct their corporate social responsibility initiatives towards fortification of TVET in the polytechnics, like the steps taken by Microsoft Inc., NBC, CISCO, NIKE in the middle-East, India and other developing countries [f].

F) Bringing skill development programmes under one roof: The entire national skill development system should be put under the single ministry or governing body, rather than running them under the leadership of several other Ministries. This will lead to better focus and coordination between different initiatives.

G) Revisiting the Apprenticeship Act: the government formed the Apprenticeship Act in 1961 to connect job seekers and industrial units. It made obligatory for employers in specified industries to provide basic skills and job training according to prescribed standards. There is a need for improvements in the 1961 Act according to the present times, circumstances and challenges faced by youth, which are different from those existed in India at the time of formulation of the act. The employment scenario has changes and different types of skills are required to meet the present industrial demand.

H) Upgrading and expanding of the craftsmen training scheme: The main craftsmen training scheme in India are Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and private Industrial Training centers (ITCs). ITIs have been criticized for offering out dated and not relevant trades for the present-day employment requirements. There has been a steady need of expansion of ITIs in the country, however further expansion is needed mainly in the 'backward' regions of the country. Besides the expansion, it is equally crucial to build basic infrastructure especially in remote areas, making ITIs more accessible, particularly for women.

I) Govt. And regulatory agencies should ensure that there is uniformity in the curricula of VET adopted by government owned and private-technical and vocational institutes. This move is necessary to empower learners with relevant skills as per the needs of the labour market. Provision of multiple entry, multiple exit and flexibility in delivery will be a useful step.

J) Bridging the gap between VET and higher education: One of the biggest problems for VET in South Asian countries including India is the poor quality and low status of sector among potential students. Curricula should be relevant to today's job market, with direct linkages to employment skills and market, are needed today. For this the development of VET sector skills councils—having collaboration of industry and government may be useful linking skills training with job prospects. Specialized technical skills and a high degree of co-ordination of the government, the public sector and other stakeholders will be required to go forward.

Vocational education might be classified as teaching procedural knowledge. This may be contrasted with declarative knowledge, as used in education in a usually broader scientific field, which might concentrate on theory and abstract conceptual knowledge, characteristic of tertiary education. Traditionally, direct

preparation for work was the main goal of vocational education. It was perceived as providing specific training that was reproductive and based on teachers' instruction, with the intention to develop understanding of a particular industry, comprising the specific skills or tricks of the trade. Students' motivation was seen to be engendered by the economic benefits to them, in the future. School practice demonstrates that these interpretations are applicable to a greater or lesser extent depending on the country. The introduction of vocational courses in secondary schools usually involves very practical courses that can lead to the lowest level of certification. Certificate 1 in areas such as construction, furnishing, engineering and drawing give students practical skills and knowledge against very detailed descriptions of the required outcomes. Competency-based training was chosen by most governments in Western societies as a model for vocational education (VE). For example, training packages introduced in Australia specified competency outcomes, assessment guidelines and national qualifications, in accordance with workplace skill requirements. Changes associated with innovations in science and technology and the requirement to prepare knowledge workers, together with the demands imposed by the changing nature of the working world, posed challenges to vocational education. Changing patterns of economic competition and work organisation have led to a greater call for soft skills such as teamwork, work ethic, and a preparedness to be flexible and to embrace change (Curtis & McKenzie, 2002). Vocational education and training designed to advance individuals' general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupations. The term does not normally include training for the professions. At a higher level, the technical education and vocational training system in India produces a labour force through a three-tier system:

- a) Graduate and post-graduate level specialists (e.g. IITs and engineering colleges) trained as engineers and technologists
- b) Diploma-level graduates who are trained in polytechnics as technicians and supervisors.
- c) Certificate-level craft people trained in ITIs as well as through formal apprenticeships as semi-skilled and skilled workers.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The level of participation in formal education continues to remain lower for women than for men and this article examines a number of reasons for the persistence of this gender gap. The author also investigates the low impact of formal education on the status of women in society and suggests that formal education institutions and non-formal programs of adult education and training can help to eliminate this inequality.

1. Promoting equal access of girls/women to technical and vocational education

UNESCO's policy to promote the equal access of girls and women to technical and vocational education is based on the Organization's normative instruments: The Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (1974) and the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1989). As these instruments indicate, the continued persistence of inequality in this field calls for specific action in respect of girls and women taking into account their particular needs and the obstacles to be overcome.

2. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

Realizing the gravity of this issue, it was highlighted in the Address to the Joint Session of the Parliament by the President in June, 2014 and thereafter, in the Budget Speech of the Government. Since coordinated and convergent efforts are needed to ensure survival, protection and empowerment of the girl child, Government has announced Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative. This will be implemented through a national multimedia campaign and focused multi sectoral actions in 100 selected districts, low in CSR, covering all States and Union Territories. Further, it has been decided by the Government that Ministry of Women and Child Development shall be the Nodal Ministry for implementing this joint Scheme which will be implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development Empowering the girl child through education and creating an enabling environment that provides equal access to education, health, employment/skill development etc. is another critical component.

3. Long Term Skill Development Training via Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)

Through a wide network of 15,042 ITIs, spanning the country, over 22.82 lakh candidates have been enrolled (in the trades of one year and two-year duration) and special focus is laid on enrolment of women. There is nearly 97% increase in admissions in 2018 as compared to 2014 to reach 173,105 women trainees from 87,799. 18 National Skill Training Institutes (for Women) are imparting skill training exclusively for women. Further, exclusive batches to provide basic/ theoretical training to women have been started under National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) in all Centrally Funded Institutes (CFIs). The NSTIs (W) organize NCVT approved skill training programmes under Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) and Craft Instructors' Training Scheme (CITS) in several areas such as Office Management, Electronics, Fashion Design & Technology, Computer Aided Embroidery & Designing etc. We are also seeing active participation from women in new age job roles aligned to Industry 4.0 like those in Artificial Intelligence, 3D printing, Data Analytics etc. and also across in skills like welding, automobile mechanics etc.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A Case Study on Vocational Training

Can a woman who is unlettered and from a poor family dare take on the dangerous forest mafia in a fiercely male dominated society? Kalavati Devi Rawat, a resident of Bacher, a remote village in Uttarakhand border district of Chamoli dared and succeeded. Now in her mid-forties, Kalavati Devi was barely seventeen when she took on the timber criminals, out to destroy the forests of Bacher. She tamed the out-of-control alcoholics in the mountain village, once a prototype of Uttarakhand brutally male-dominated hill society. Devi's success lies, perhaps in her inherent honesty. "I am absolutely unlettered, I can't read or write and my parents were too poor to send me to school," she admits rather disarmingly. The same unlettered but fiercely passionate Devi went on to win the Women's World Summit Foundation's prestigious 'Prize for women's creativity in rural life.' The secret behind the success story of this peasant woman, as one soon discovers, is her open-mindedness and inherent keenness to learn. She considers 'Chipko' leader Chandi Prasad Bhatt her inspiration. The Chipko movement, the world's pioneering green campaign, began in Uttarakhand sometime in 1970. It presented a unique sight with the hill women hugging trees to save forests from the forest mafia's onslaught. Kalavati Devi's crusade against timber criminals was inspired by the same campaign. But she discovered only later that a 'Chipko'-like non-violent struggle could also help humble the forest mafia. She had the realization during her informal training as a budding social activist when she went about trying to solve the day-to-day problems of the village. The first problem she confronted when she arrived in Bacher after getting married was the lack of electricity. Power was yet to reach the remote village and caused discontent among residents. "We started looking for a solution and, one day, my village sarpanch and I trekked 25km to Gopeshwar where we met Bhattji (Chipko leader) at his residence and discussed our problem with him", recalls Devi. He took them to the officer concerned and reasoned with him. In a few days, the entire village was bathed in light; it had been connected to an electrical grid. "I had learnt my lessons: Never give up and keep pursuing things doggedly," says Kalavati Devi animatedly. Experiences such as these were, in fact, gradually preparing her for future challenges, she says. One such challenge presented itself soon. The year was 1985. One morning, a group of women from Bacher set out on the five-km trek up to the panchayat forest of Taantri to bring fodder. "As we entered the jungle we were shocked to see a strange sight," recalls Devi. "The foresters present there had marked rows and rows of dead trees for felling. They were around 1000 in number", she adds. "That's the last thing we wanted", recalls Radha Devi Rawat, a village forest panchayat member. "For, in the absence of deadwood, we would be forced to cut green trees for fuel and our forests — the only source of sustenance for us— would be finished," she adds. The foresters were, therefore, repeatedly urged to not fell trees, but to no effect. There was a heated exchange of words between both sides. "The foresters tried all tricks to browbeat us", recalls Kalavati Devi. "They tried to offer us a bribe and even threatened to kill us but we refused to be cowed down." As the impasse continued, the village women decided to launch an agitation in favor of their demand. "One morning, we women set out on a 25-km hilly trek to the district headquarters' town (Gopeshwar) chanting slogans 'Chipko Andolan Jindabad' (Hail the Chipko Movement), Ped Lagao, Desh Bachao (Plant Trees, Save the Nation)", recalls Radha Devi. A 12-hour dharna later, the administration acquiesced. Trees won't be felled in the Taantari forest, the district magistrate announced. A war had been won. But a bigger problem persisted: the nexus between the forest mafia and the 'alcoholics' of Bacher. It continued to torment the women. "Kalavati Devi had a novel solution to that problem too", recalls Chandi Prasad Bhatt. "She knew the only way to break this nexus was by controlling the village forest Panchayat," he adds. The then sub-divisional magistrate did put up some resistance to Kalavati Devi's demand that women be allowed

to contest the Panchayat election. "The official concerned fell in line when I forcefully argued that women had been legally empowered to contest the Panchayat elections", she recalls. Kalavati Devi was, in fact, referring to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments enacted in the early nineties. The Panchayat polls were soon announced. The long-tormented women of Bacher contested and literally swept the village forest Panchayat election. Since then, their hold over the local body has been intact. Now, armed with power, the women act tough with the alcoholics. "Earlier, the women confined themselves to breaking their crude distilleries. After their entry into the Panchayats, they became tougher... and started hitting them with stinging nettle grass", says Kalavati Devi who has been the president of the Mahila Mangal Dal, (an all-women group) of her village for the past three decades. "Almost all our men folk have now given up liquor," she adds with her trademark smile, "There is also no trace of the timber mafia."

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Concept of Women Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was defined as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women. In its definition of women empowerment, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes factors such as (1) Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed; and (2) Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

2. Women Empowerment in India

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women so that women can improve their livelihood. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. Declaring 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti), the Government of India (GoI) passed the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women which has the goal to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the GoI with the aim to strengthen generally processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. One of the key strategies of NMEW is - investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, microcredit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women. This finely conveys that mere imparting literacy would not be sufficient; the women need vocational training or skills also to be able to stand on their feet and be the earning members of the family. Women have been taking increasing interest in recent years in income generating activities, self-employment and entrepreneurship that also lead to property rights, political representation, social equality, personal right, family development, market development, community development and at last the nation development.

V. CONCLUSION

Women are not less than men in any perspective. They compete men in every field of work whether it may be pilot, loco pilots, engineers, doctors, labour, etc. Irrespective of gender discrimination equal opportunities and training is to be provided to women to make them and our country's economy more efficient. Women are keen to learn and earn for a living, we only need to create a conducive environment to support their living and earning. It is very important that women be encouraged to learn either academic or vocational education and enable themselves to sustain on their own without support which will enable them to be confident, independent and fearless.

For enhancing employability of the women even men also, action is needed on three fronts of VET named capacity building, quality improvement and enhancing utilization. If necessary, steps are taken like introducing VET-related career guidance in mainstream education, it will put a high impact on enhancing skills and employability. Different stakeholders—the government, corporate sector, social businesses and non-profit organizations and NGOs— need to operate in a collaborative ecosystem to overcome the challenges of capacity, quality and utilization across VET. Enhancing employability by improving VET is a complex issue involving demographic trends, economic and labour market reform, education systems, industry participation and upward mobility for backward social groups.

As it is well said by **Bringham Young**, “You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”

‘You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women’ - **Jawaharlal Nehru**

VI. CORRELATION WITH ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

"The skill of a teacher imparted to a worthy student attains greater excellence as the water of a cloud is turned into a pearl in a sea-shell", exclaims teacher Ganadasa, a creation of Kalidasa in *Malavikagnimitram* [1]. This remark was the result of observing for quite some time that whatever graceful movement was taught to Malavika, was so well received by her that it seemed she taught him back by improving on it! In ancient India as in any other country of all times, it was the dream of a teacher to get good students and see the fulfilment of his attainment in them. How far they could fulfill this eternal dream with the help of the society, is a worthwhile study. This article deals with only a few examples on certain facets of female education of the period.

In the Vedic period, girls were married at about the age of 16 or 17; but in the later Vedic period (from 500 B.C to 500 A.D.) girls were married at the age of 8 or 9. Early marriage of girls gave a death-blow to female education. Though in society, as a whole, female education received a great set-back during this period, it continued to receive attention in rich, aristocratic and royal families. Girls in these families were given a fairly good literary education but surely not Vedic literature.

In Vedic times, there was no discrimination of sex in the field of studies. A particular mantra was prescribed to beget a learned daughter in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* [2]. In the same Upanishad, we find Gargi and Maitreyi distinguishing themselves in *Brahmavidya*, the highest knowledge. In the *grihyasutras* are found several mantras to be recited by women and the commentary on *Gobhilarigrihyasutras*, states that the female-folk should be taught, for without such studies they cannot perform *agnihotra* sacrifice [3]. Both Panini and Patanjali refer to women admitted to Vedic study. Thus, a woman-student of the Katha school was called a Kathi, and the Rigvedic Bahvricha school, Bahvrichi. Female students were also admitted to the study of *mimamsa* and the one who studied *mimamsa-sutra* of the sage Kasakritsna is called Kasakritsna. There were *chhatri* (lady students) and *Upadhyayi* (Lady teachers) [4].

This trend of liberal female education declined in the period that followed. The right of women for initiation to Vedic studies by way of *upanayana* seems to have receded slowly, though we find mention of learned women in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. By the time of the *smritis*, their education came to be limited to domestic and vocational studies only, by which they could become good housewives. Santoshkumar Das feels that it is probably the early foreign invasions of India which may account for the exclusion of women from Vedic studies. "In almost every nation of the world, in the primitive stages of its development, the early ideas about the inferiority of the female sex prevailed - When the people of Hindustan who had already attained to a high degree of civilization came in contact with their first foreign rulers, far less civilized than they, they might have adopted those rules concerning the position of women, which belonged peculiarly to an imperfect civilization [5]". Our country is known for assimilating outer influences and giving coloring of its own. It is not unlikely that this alien custom become slowly part of the Indian society.

Women of Buddhist and Jaina faiths had comparatively more freedom to pursue the path of knowledge because womanhood was no bar to salvation as per their respective precepts. From Ashokan times we find women becoming preceptors and nuns and even going outside India for teaching Buddhism. Among the women authors of the *Therigatha* (stories of nuns) 32 were unmarried women and 18 were married ones. When so large a number of women were leading a life of celibacy, in pursuit of religion and philosophy, it is but natural that the average level of intelligence and education among them must have been fairly high

according to Dr. Altekar [6]. Hiuen Tsang has observed that Rajyasri, the sister of Harshavardhana was of great intelligence and distinguished for her knowledge of Sammatiya school of Buddhism. She sat along with the king and seemed to appreciate the learned discourse of Hiuen Tsang on the Mahayana doctrine [7].

We hear of a large number of women in Jaina texts who distinguished themselves as teachers and preachers [8]. We also come across women who dressed in men's attire, putting on armour, equipped with weapons, arms, shields etc. [9]. It is interesting to know that in the 14th century, in Gujarat, the university of Tapogaccha conferred various degrees on women like, Ganini, Pravartini, Mahattara etc. These titles or degrees mean a leader of a Gana, a worker, and a great lady respectively. The names of the women on whom the above degrees were conferred are also mentioned in the work [10].

In Karnataka, we have illustrious examples of queens and princesses who distinguished themselves not only in various fine arts but also in the field of administration. There were great patrons of learning like Attimabbe [11] and Sovaladevi [12]. In the days when sword reigned supreme, these women philanthropists tried to spread education by giving numerous grants. Attimabbe patronised poet Ranna and popularised Ponna, by getting one thousand copies of his Santi-purana copied and distributed free. Her great gift which later generations should remember with gratitude, is this gift of books, which led to diffusion of learning and raised our cultural level. The heroes, fighters, administrators and builders who strode that world of her time are not remembered; but she is remembered and will be remembered as long as Kannada language lives, because of the writings of her protégés Ponna and Ranna.

Women connoisseurs of art and literature were quite common. There used to be learned (vidagdha), skillful in the use of words (vakya-chature), witty and humorous (parihasavinodi), who could appreciate the import of, and sentiment of literature (sahityarasabhavajna), and expert raconteurs (kathana-kovida) women in the palace according to Manasollasa [13].

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