

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN DASAKUMARACHARITAM OF DANDIN

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The paper is an effort to throw light on the position of women in the famous historical sanskrit text Dasakumaracharitam written by Dandin. The paper discusses about the status of women in family and society of that period. The paper also illustrate the importance of women in various fields such as their education, what kind of education was their for women, were they educated or not, how they were portrayed by the law givers of that time etc. It also describes about the different role of women in society. The paper also presents the outline of their marriage, their works, their social rights and other important aspects.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Status of Women, Dasakumaracharitam, Dandin*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The text Dasakumaracharitam was written by Dandin. However, there is a lot of controversy among the scholars about Dandin and his date and place. Dandin was stated to be the grandson of Bharvi's friend, but according to some he was the grandson of Bharvi. His mother's name was Gauri. According to the text Avantisundari, he is commonly placed in the seventh century A.D.<sup>1</sup> The text is divided into eight Uchavas (Chapters), including various stories. The verbal meaning of Dashakumaracharitam is the story of ten princes. The text Dasakumaracharitam gives us a lot of information about women of that time through the several stories. The content of the text is full of various stories of kings, queens and the common people. The art of storytelling through text is similar to Brihatkatha of Gunadya, Brihatkathamajari of Kshemendra, Kathasaritasagara of Somadeva and Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharma. The story includes many other stories in the series. The text refers to a birth of a girl child as not an unwelcome event.<sup>2</sup> The childhood of a common girl was spent in playing, singing and education. The text mentions the child marriage but also that it was not mandatory. After marriage, a woman had to live with her husband, in his house. The society was mainly patrilineal.

In general husband and wife were the important part of the family. The text indicates that man was the head of the family, but it does not mention that man is supreme. The importance of the wife is mentioned in the text. The text mentions that women had the right to choose their husband. The story of Kandukavati in chapter six refers to the right to choose a husband for her. Kandukavati was also mentioned as an expert in playing ball and a festival named 'Kandukotsava' was celebrated in her name.<sup>3</sup> this shows the importance of women in society, that she could freely play games and chooses a husband for herself. The story of Kalindi also refers to the right of women to choose a husband for themselves during those times.<sup>4</sup> The story of Avantisundari also indicates that women could openly move and roam in parks and gardens and had right to choose a husband for themselves. The story mentions Avantisundari and her friend Balachandrika going to the garden near the city where other common ladies of the city were also present. Her lover Rajavahana with his friend Pushpodbhava was

looking for her. They wrote letters to each other. This incident shows that women knew reading and writing. Reading and writing of love letters and sending and receiving personal messages by women are commonly referred to in the text.<sup>5</sup>

The text mentions that women were experts in dancing, singing, playing musical instruments and sports, particularly playing balls.<sup>6</sup> The third chapter of the text refers to expert women who excelled in singing and had melodious voices. The female ascetics and dhatri (nurses) are also mentioned along with Buddhist nuns and female servants. The first chapter mentions the story of Praharvarma and his twin sons who grew up under the guardianship of their dhatri.<sup>7</sup> The sixth chapter of the text mentions the story of Ratnavati<sup>8</sup>, whose husband did not like her. She met an old female ascetic to whom Ratnavati expresses her agony by saying that to be hated by one's husband is simply a living death in case of women and more particularly of women of high birth. It does not mean that she was powerless and unable to live in the society but she expresses her heartfelt thoughts about her husband. The sixth chapter of the text includes questions and answers of a man with a Bramharakshasa<sup>9</sup>, wherein the Bramharakshasa asked him a few questions. Two of them were related to women. First question he asked was 'what is cruel in the world'? He answered 'the heart of a woman'. Another question asked by the Bramharakshasa was 'what contributes to the happiness and welfare of a householder'? His answer was 'virtues of a housewife'. The answer of the first question did not mean that every woman had cruel heart; in relation to the second answer to the question it indicates that, for a house holder other women are not considered good for him and his family and his wife was most important. In fact, without a virtuous wife, a family cannot survive. This shows the importance of women in a family. The text also mentions about the prostitutes and courtesans who were active in society.<sup>10</sup>

The text refers to the custom of sati but it does not give a particular word for this custom. Women chose death after the passing of their husband not only by entering into the pyre, but they also embraced death by hanging themselves.<sup>11</sup> The text also refers to the death of men in the absence of their wives or after the death of their wives. The third chapter of the text tells the story of Ratnodbhava who tries to commit suicide in the absence of his wife.<sup>12</sup>

The chapter eighth of the text refers to the criticism of law makers of that time. It mentions that Sukra, Angiras, Vishalaksh, Bahudantiputr, Parashara etc. were all fickle minded.<sup>13</sup> It seems from the statement that the law makers of that time had degraded their position and their laws were not necessarily followed by the society and people openly challenged them. It is apparent from this statement that their views about women were generally not accepted by the common people. This chapter also tells the story of a king named Avantideva<sup>14</sup> of Kuntal who tortured women and as a result the people planned to kill him because of his deeds. Comprehensively the text represents that women were respected as an important part of the family.

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