

# The women of mauryan age history essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Chandragupta Maurya is the king and first emperor of India during the Mauryan Period. He ruled the Mugadha Empire from 320 B. C to 297 B. C. He is considered as a contemporary of Alexander and won many battles and empires. Kautilya also known as Chanakya who was the prime minister and chief political adviser to Chandragupta was considered as the mastermind behind the Chandragupta's victories. Chandragupta consolidated his dynasty under the guidance of Kautilya.

Kautilya is known more for Arthashastra, a book written by him which is part political philosophy and part manual of statecraft in 4th century B. C. He wrote this book to keep as a guide for those who govern the administration and to increase the monarch's wealth. Arthashastra can be translated from Sanskrit as the Art of Well-being or the Science of Polity. Arthashastra has profound influence in traditional India in making political decisions. This book not only tells the political philosophy, but also treated as manual instruction to the administration and ways to overcome the challenges it will face. This book also explains the human relations in the Mauryan Period.

We are going to discuss about life of women in the Mauryan period. The role of women in Mauryan society is of some significance. It was taken for granted that their position was subordinate to that of the men. This is explained by Kautilya in his Arthashastra. Kautilya mainly focuses injustice happening to women in the society and therefore introduces some laws in his Arthashastra .

Firstly let us discuss chapter II concerning marriage, second marriage and property of women in Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book III, " Concerning Law".

Kautilya explains the different types of marriages in that period. One among them is Asura, where large amount of money is received by a man to marry the women. He states that whenever the husband is absent or dead and made no provision for her maintenance, the women can make use of the jewelry property to feed their children or to give it to her daughter-in-law. If the husband is live, he too can use this property in the situation of dangerous deceases or to use in the charitable acts. If the husband is dead, the women should be given her jewelry and money back that she owns and should also receive the balance amount that is given to the guy's family for the marriage. If she desires for a second marriage, occasion shall be given to her by her husband or father-in-law or both. She will be eligible to give the property back by the father-in-law only if she marries the one he chooses.

(The Arthashastra, Book III, Chapter 2)

If the woman has sons, she shall be not at liberty in using the property that she needs to give to her sons. Sons should receive the property from her. If she claims that she needs the possession of her own property for the maintenance of her sons, then she shall endow the property in the name of her sons. A woman with more than one son should conserve the property among her sons according to the condition she received from her husband. A woman shall endow even the property that she has full powers of enjoyment in the name of her sons. If the woman does not have any children for eight years, her husband can marry another girl. If a woman bears only a dead children, her husband has to wait for ten years before he can marry another. If a woman gives birth only to girls, her husband should wait at least twelve years before he can marry another girl for the desire of sons. A fine of 24

panas should be paid to the government if he violates any of the above rules. A man can marry any number of women for the desire of sons if he fulfills the above conditions. (The Arthashastra, Book III, Chapter 2)

The secondary source, Indian Civilization and Culture by Suhas Chatterjee, explains how the life of woman in Gupta Period is changed compared to woman's life in Mauryan Period. Woman's position is considerably changed between the two time periods that doesn't have much time gaps. In Mauryan Period, woman from higher or upper classes are allowed to study and take part in political activities. But the lower class women have to follow all the rules that are stated previously. The woman from the higher castes especially Kshatriyas or Brahmins are allowed to get educated in music, philosophy, drawing and history in the Gupta Age. Many stories from Gupta Age tell us that women later were educated in merchant class also. They not only get educated but also took part in instructing children. One example was Princess Basavadatta, who was not only portrayed as romantic, but also as well educated and cultured girl. (Indian Civilization and Culture, pg 273)

Though the women were allowed to receive higher education, they were debarred from participating in political activities of nation. There were many instances where even the princess was well educated; she has to leave the throne to her husband. Women in this period were also not encouraged in mixing with opposite sex. Rules are placed on women that they should remain virgin until their marriage and married women must stay with their husbands for their whole life. Though women got more rights on her property, they are not allowed to have any rights on her husband's or father's property. Rather they are allowed to distribute her property to

<https://assignbuster.com/the-women-of-mauryan-age-history-essay/>

daughters along with sons. Sons have moral responsibility to maintain their mother and legal responsibility and liability of their unmarried sisters providing more safety to woman. (Indian Civilization and Culture, pg 274)

During this time, widow remarriages are allowed. Usually the husband's brother will marry the widow in the warrior class. These widow marriages were most prevalent among the slaves and Sudras. If the woman chooses not to marry, she has to spend the rest of their lives in strict adherence to the rules. Among the upper classes, women are allowed to choose the groom and in the lower classes parents will choose the groom for their daughters. Inter-caste marriages are not allowed during this time. (Indian Civilization and Culture, pg 274)

Secondly let us discuss chapter III the Duty of a Wife in

Kautilya's Arthashastra: Book III, " Concerning Law". Contrary to the today's world, men will attain majority when they become sixteen years old and women will attain majority when they turn twelve years old. A woman who hates her husband and loves another man should come back to her husband and give all the money and jewelry she possess to her husband and should allow another him to lie down with another woman. Divorce system is introduced. But a woman cannot take divorce from his man without his will and a man cannot take divorce from her wife against her will. (The Arthashastra, Book III, Chapter 3)

Woman should not engaged in amorous sports and drinking. If they found engaged in any of these activities, they have to pay a fine of three panas to the government. This fine will be increased if woman were found in such

activities in day time. In that case they have to a fine of six panas. Apart from this woman are not allowed to go out and see amorous sports involved by other man apart from their husband. If they do so, a fine of twelve panas should be paid. A woman shall be fined twelve panas if she goes out of the house when her husband is asleep or intoxicated. The same fine applies if she shuts the house door against her husband. Finally, if a woman makes signs with another man with a view to sexual enjoyment or involved in any conversation with sexual intention, she will be fined twenty-four panas. In place of fines, whips will be substituted if they hold or involve a conversation with another man in suspicious places. (The Arthashastra, Book III, Chapter 3)

The secondary source, History of India by N. Jayapalan, explains how the life of woman has changed with the time. Women in the time of Mugadha, also considered as part of Mauryan Empire, were participated in the wars along with men. While child marriages still exist, the concept of Swayamvara was introduced, which means woman can choose the man which she wants to marry. (History of India, page 57). Men and Women have to do religious ceremonies together. Women enjoyed equal rights with men in all aspects and there are no restrictions on woman education. They were allowed to participate in philosophical debates along with men. Though the parents consent is still required for the marriage, they were allowed the freedom to choose among the grooms. Child marriages slowly started vanishing. Woman are allowed to participate in sports and allowed to watch the sports played by other men. But liquor consumption by women is still treated as wrong and will charge fines on them. Women don't need to give dowry to groom and

dowry will be given for women only with physical defects (History of India, page 25).

Thus the woman's life has changed in India during the Mauryan Period. They have risen from the bottom as explained in Arthshastra to the equal level with man as explained from the two secondary sources.