

WOMEN IN SATVAHANA POLITY AND ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The Satvahana dynasty was the first Deccanese dynasty to build an empire in Dakshinapath i.e. southern region. In the Deccan and central India, the Satvahana succeeded the Mauryas although after a gap of about 100 years in the first century BCE. Satvahana period was remarkable in a sense as it witnessed the revival of the eminent role of women in politics and administration. The position of women was better in this dynasty, compared to other kingdoms as Kings bore their mother's name instead of their father. The main objective of this paper is to develop an understanding of the significant role of women in Satvahana polity and administration which had lost the importance in Later Vedic period, Sutrakall and henceforth. The research methodology being used in this paper is explanatory in nature and for the purpose of data collection, it implied mostly secondary sources such as journals, books, websites etc. The detailed analysis clearly mentions this point that although Satvahanas did not mention their fathers in inscriptions that primarily bore matronymics, succession was always reckoned with patriarchal lineage

Keywords

Satvahanas, Women, Polity and Administration.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Received: 17.03.2024
Approved: 26.03.2024

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AND ADMINISTRATION*

Article No.19
*RJPSS Oct.-Mar. 2024,
Vol. XLIX No. 1,
pp. 135-140*

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[https://doi.org/10.31995/
rjps.2024.v49i01.019](https://doi.org/10.31995/rjps.2024.v49i01.019)

Introduction

The Satvahana dynasty played an important part in the history and culture of the Deccan. With the weakening of the Mauryas and the Sungas respectively, it appears that several parts of Deccan became independent. This process of disintegration was checked with the rise of the Satvahana dynasty which ruled over the Deccan for about 300 years. It clearly shows that the Satvahana Empire is the biggest South Indian empire and the longest-lived of Indian empires.

Satvahana emerged as a critical dynasty in the post-Mauryan age. At the height of their power, the Satvahanas held distant areas of Western and Central India. The early Satvahana Kings appeared in Maharashtra and later in Andhra. Satvahanas were also known as Andhras.

The coins, sculptures and literature found in the region like Nashik and Nanaghat are the sources of our knowledge not only in respect of the contemporary administration but also about the political, social, economic and religious-cultural conditions.

The Satvahanas retained some of the administrative features of the Mauryas. The king was represented as the upholder of Dharma. In other words, the Satvahana polity followed the rule specified in the Shastras and it adhered to the Sovereign Monarchy in the state was hereditary, but they had a decentralized administration as local administration was left largely to feudatories subject to the general control of the Royal Officials.

During the Satvahana period, society was divided into 4 (four) classes. The division was based on economic activity and status. Women were an integral and important part of the society. They were honored, were given education and they also took part in religious ceremonies and sacrifices. Some of the rulers even added their mother's name to their own name such as 'Gautamiputra', 'Vashishthiputra' etc. This practice itself reveals that the status of women was much higher. Sometimes, women assumed guardianship of their minor sons and acted as their regents. They also took part in the Ashwamedhas, such as Naganika (the Satvahana Queen), who took part in the Yagna along with her husband Satkarni (I).

Women occupied a soaring position in the Satvahana period. The evidence provided by the Western India caves and Amravati inscriptions says that a great number of ladies made very costly donations. Women during the Satvahana period were founders of the Chetiyaghars at Nashik and Kuda. Men and women stood in the construction of the Chatiya Cave, the most excellent mansion in Jambudvipa at Karle.

We can safely infer from the above that during the Satvahana dynasty women played very important roles both in social activities as well as in administration. The study of several historical facts and events related to the Satvahana dynasty by many historians and scholars has concluded that the political power was originally vested in women folks and they could as well assert their legal rights on certain occasions.

Objective

The main objective of the paper is to understand the participation of women in Satvahana polity and administration which had lost the importance in Later Vedic period, Sutrakall and henceforth.

Research Methodology

The research methodology being used in this paper is explanatory in nature and for the purpose of data collection, it implied mostly secondary sources, such as journals, books, websites, etc.

Analysis

To analyze the role of women in the Satvahana administration and polity, the author has presented a description in the name of different headings. The detailed analysis is as follows:

A. Religious Ceremonies and Sacrifices

The situation and the status of women during the Rigvedic period was better as they could take part in social, religious and similar community activities. However, (post-Rigved) due to the changes in religious beliefs and changing patterns of the caste system, women saw a decline in their status till the rise of Satvahanas. The long and impressive list of Vedic Sacrifices performed by Satvahana Queen, Naganika, is an indication of the matriarchal influence over the Vedic and Brahmanical patriarchal tradition which did not permit sacrifices to women.

B. Queen's Own Identity

Satvahana queens retained their identity. It is a norm in many contemporary Indian marriages that the newlywed wife leaves her family and becomes part of her husband's. Her identity is subordinated to the one that she marries into and her children take on the last name of their father. The Satvahanas, though did something very different; the sons of Kings took on not their father's name but their mother's eg. 'Gautamiputra Satkarni', 'Vashishtiputra Pulumavi' etc.

C. Economic Strength

The 2 Satvahana queens, Naganika and Gautami Balasri, gave their antecedents in full, their land grants were not endorsed by the king. In these cases,

the queen held villages not as maintenance grants, but probably as position of matrilineal inheritance. Many women gave land grants to monks which shows that they have considerable agency. Men and women stood equal in the construction of the chaityas and caves. Women during the Satvahana period were founders of many Chaityaghars at Nashik. These examples without a doubt reveal that women were allowed to possess property of their own.

D. Position in Government:

The wives of the officials and vassals of the Satvahana dynasty, bore the administrative designations held by their husbands which shows that they claimed similar prestige and influence; the titles Mahasenapatni and Maharathini bear witness to this. We also have a peculiar example of a woman doorkeeper who drafted a land charter. All these facts are sufficient to demonstrate the role of women in the Satvahana system of governance.

E. Legal Rights:

Here, we took into account the case of Gautamiputra Satkarni who evidently looked after the kingdom inherited by his mother. Occasionally the Queen asserted her legal rights as she did in the 24th year of her son's reign, when she directly conveyed her orders to the Governor of Govardhana, Ahara, regarding the grant of a filed. Only the rightful occupant of the throne could function in this manner, for in Ashoka or in other Satvahana inscriptions orders were sent to the Governor only by the king.

We have some other examples to prove the significant role of women in the Satvahana dynasty:

Queen Naganika wife of Satkarni (I) of Satvahana dynasty is perhaps the earliest person in the history of India whose name has been associated with the king on the coins. The inscriptions in Nanghat in Western India showed the powers enjoyed by royal women.

Conclusion

After going through the detailed analysis of the importance of women in Satvahana polity, we can say that this era saw a significant role of women in the socio-economic and administrative activities of Satvahanas. Compared to any previous era, the Satvahana dynasty gave women the much-needed equal status which made this dynasty a unique one and this was the differentiating factor from all previous kingdoms. However, despite the power and authority enjoyed by women, this dynasty kept its reservations when it came to giving the actual power to women. One such example in this regard is that though Satvahana Kings adopted their

mother's name to their own, the pattern of succession was always through patriarchal lineage. In spite, of this fact, women in the Satvahana era always enjoyed the equal status when compared to men, which could not be continued in the succeeding periods such as the Guptas and Post-Guptas periods because of changes in social and religious beliefs which saw the downfall of women's status in the society.

Having said the above and after carefully studying the role of women in Satvahana polity, it becomes clear that although absolute power was never vested with the women, women enjoyed a remarkable role in the society and administration.

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