

Women Status in the Period of Badami Chalukyas

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Abstract

The Hindu caste system appeared and the government recognized prostitution. Some kings had concubines (Ganikas) upon whom they bestowed much respect, sati may have been absent as widows like Vinayavathi and Vijayanka are mentioned in records. Devadasis' appeared in temples. Sage Bharata's Natyashastra the precursor to Bharatanatyam, the dance of South India had been popular as seen in many sculptures and mentioned in inscriptions. Women enjoyed political power in administration. Queens Vijayanka, a noted Sanskrit poetess; Kumkumadevi, the younger sister of Vijayaditya; and Lokamahadevi, queen of Vikramaditya II. Women empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge. In fact the gender based discrimination is a deep-rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. Women empowerment in India is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the sociality, which are against women's growth and development.

Keywords

Badami Chalukyas, Women, Status, Education, Social

Introduction

The rise of the Chalukyas marks an important milestone in the history of South India and a golden age in the history of Karnataka. The political atmosphere in South India shifted from smaller kingdoms to large empires with the rise of Badami Chalukyas. For the first time in history, a South Indian kingdom took control and consolidated the entire region between the Kaveri and the Narmada rivers. The rise of

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that empire also saw the birth of efficient administration, rise in overseas trade and commerce and the development of new style of architecture called Vesara. Around the ninth century, it also saw the growth of Kannada as a language of literature in the Jaina Puranas, Veerashaiva Vachanas and Brahminical traditions. The eleventh century saw the birth of Telugu literature under the patronage of the Eastern Chalukyas.

In the sixth century, with the decline of the Gupta dynasty and their immediate successors in northern India, major changes began to happen in the area south of the Vindhyas— the Deccan and Tamilaham. The age of small kingdoms had given way to large empires in that region. Pulakesi I established the Chalukya dynasty in 550. Pulakesi I took Vatapi (Badami in Bagalkot district, Karnataka) under his control and made it his capital. Historians refer to Pulakesi I and his descendants as Chalukyas of Badami. They ruled over an empire that comprised the entire state of Karnataka and most of Andhra Pradesh in the Deccan. Pulakesi II (precoronation name “Ereya”) had been perhaps the greatest emperor of the Badami Chalukyas. Also known as Immadi Pulakesi, scholars consider him one of the great kings in Indian history. His queen, Kadamba Devi, had been a princess from the dynasty of Alupas. They maintained close family and marital relationship with the Alupas of South Canara and the Gangas of Talakad. Pulakesi II extended the Chalukya Empire up to the northern extents of the Pallava kingdom and halted the southward march of Harsha by defeating him on the banks of the river Narmada. He then defeated the Vishnukundins in the southeastern Deccan. Pallava Narasimhavarman reversed that victory by attacking and occupying the Chalukya capital Vatapi (Badami) temporarily.

The Badami Chalukya dynasty went into a brief decline following the death of Pulakesi II due to internal feuds. It recovered during the reign of Vikramaditya I, who succeeded in pushing the Pallavas out of Badami and restoring order to the empire. The empire reached a peak during the rule of the illustrious Vikramaditya II who defeated the Pallava Nandivarman II and captured Kanchipuram. The

Rashtrakuta Dantidurga overthrew the last Badami Chalukya king Kirtivarman I in 753. At their peak they ruled a vast empire stretching from the Kaveri to the Narmada.

Review of Literature

Political History of the **Chalukyas of Badami (1980)** written by **D. P. Dikshit**. Like his predecessors, Dikshit also used inscriptions and literature to write the political narrative of the Badami Chalukyas. Hence, one finds no significant change in the descriptive pattern, as he too starts with the usual account on the origin, caste, home, legendary and bardic accounts followed by chronological and genealogical details of the kings enumerated along with their military exploits. The other aspects that have been taken up for scrutiny are administration, revenue system, army organization were included as an addendum.

The Chajukyas of Kalyani (1977), written by Krishna Murari's. This book like the above works begins with a customary description about the home of the Chajukyas, their origin, caste, and the various legends associated with their origin. Besides, it enumerates the political history of the Kalyani Chalukyas in a chronological order with an emphasis on the military conquests and marriage alliances. In the second part of the book, the focus shifts to an understanding of the administration and the nature of state. With regard to the social and economic aspects that are added as separate chapters, there was a discussion on the life and position of women, social practices like sati and self-immolation, issues related to agriculture and crops, trade and industry, the role of corporations and so on. Religion, art and architecture were other aspects that were emphasized upon, before concluding the book with the factors leading to the decline of the Kalyani Chalukyan family.

Vaidehi Krishnamurty's work on Social and Economic Conditions in Eastern Deccan (from A. D. 1000 to A. D. 1250) (1970), defines the significance of the period chosen for study because it saw the end of the independent rule of the Eastern Chajukyas who now became feudatories of the Chojas. According to her, 'this Chojas ascendancy contributed a great deal to developments in the social and

religious life of the people. This, the author considers is 'responsible for the cultural development of the people at a standard higher than the rest of Andhra'.⁸¹ Where as this book does not use a dynastic nomenclature in the title, it nonetheless understands the various aspects on caste system, position of women, occupations of various social groups, education, dress, ornaments, games, sports, religion and temples within the dynastic framework, thus giving an erroneous impression that social conditions were somehow static. However, in all these writings scholars considered the political history of the period as an essential background to their study. Hence, the approach and methodology of some of them was traditional.

Women Status

Education:

Education in Hindu tradition is initiated in the life of a boy with the ceremony of upanayana. An indication of a person initiated into education is the wearing of the sacred thread called yajnopavita. In most sculptures of men, yajnopavita (sacred thread) figures as an attribute. It is interesting to note that in early sculptures of various deities it does not appear to be of mere thread but of pearls or beads (mukta-yajnopavita). Also, it is shown in malakara (garlandlike) fashion and not in savya (passing under right arm) as the case should be. Traditionally, in tarpana ritual, the gods are offered tarpana with yajnopavita in malakara. Probably, the gods were conceived to wear the sacred thread in 203 malakara fashion. However in later sculpture, it is normally depicted in savya fashion even for gods. Some of the female figures in Pattadakal are shown wearing yajnopavita-like thread. Women were allowed the upanayanasamskara during Vedic period. The practice does not appear to have continued after the Vedic period. Hence this object can be taken as more of an ornament than a sacred thread. But the sculptures of women in Badami and Aihole are not shown wearing yajnopavita. The upanayana-samskara during this period must have been limited to males of the first three varnas of the society.

Position of Women

Inscriptions of the Chalukyas portray the position of royal women. Chalukyan sources suggest that the later Chalukyas felt encouraged to follow this practice of giving responsibilities to women and the practice of appointing princesses to high government posts became very common. Akadevi, an elder sister of Jayasimha III, Lakshmidivi, the chief queen of Vikramaditya IV and Mailadevi, one of the queens of Somesvara I were holding important administrative charges.

Women and daughters had rights over property and land, and there are inscriptions recording the sale of land by women. Moneys and properties inheritable by women were called Stridhana. The Stridhana rights have been conceded in the Hindu society since very early times. The widow inherited their husband properties. It is clear from the south Indian context that a widow could inherit her husband's property after the death of their husband.

In the Mahapurana the position of women has been shown very high in the society. Women had the right to attend and the right to be in attendance in the court when it was occupied by the King. She used to encourage her husband for going to the battle field. She accompanied her husband in his amusements; visit to saints and in almost all the affairs of life. But in case of her husband not maintaining his high family traditions she was ready to get rid of her husband for its protection. Alberuni notes that at the time of self-denial of her husband she had choice to accompany her husband into the life of wilderness.

Sati or Sahagamana (self-immolation) was practiced among the royal family during the Chalukya periods but it was voluntary. Many a brave wife followed her heroic husband in death, but it was not a universal practice. Very few examples of sati are noticed in inscriptions and those that did occur were mostly in the royal families. Sulaiman, an Arab merchant of ninth century A.D. states that it was only sometimes that queens used to mount the funeral pyres of their consorts; it was entirely left to them to choose. But Alberuni observes that the wives of the dead kings were burnt with them whether they wished it or not. An

exception was made only for women of advanced years and for those who had children. The inference that the practice of Sati was not so common in the Deccan as it was in the north.

Social Practices

Dancing was a popular recreational activity and inscriptions speak of royal women being charmed by dancers, both male and female, in the king's palace. Devadasis were often present in temples. Other recreational activities included attending animal fights of the same or different species. Game preserves for hunting by royalty are recorded in the inscriptions of Govinda III. Astronomy was well developed and so was astrology. Even Jains showed interest in astrological predictions and metaphysical beliefs. Old persons suffering from incurable diseases preferred to end their lives by drowning in the sacred waters of pilgrim site or by burning themselves.

Conclusion

Women during the period of Chalukyas of Badami (presently situated in Bogalicot district of Karnataka State) were given due respect and some of the ladies of the royal family in particulars ruled over the territory efficiently. They were known for their sagacity, intelligence, benevolence, constructing temples, issuing grants and administration. Lokamahadevi is one of the queens who excelled in these qualities. The rule of the Chalukyas marks an important milestone in the history of South India and a golden age in the history of Karnataka. Lokamahadevi hailed from Haihayas family. She was married by Vikramaditya – II, a Chalukya king of Badami. It is recorded in the Kurtakoti undated stone slab inscription that she governed Kurulta Kumte. As such it can be presumed that she was well educated in all branches of Knowledge.

During the Badami Chalukya period Sanskrit literature was being studied and cultivated in its various branches. Under the Kalyani Chalukya Kannada literature had reached in the form of greater perfection. We can see the proficiency of the princes of the royal family in Purana, Sastra, etc. and of the numerous scholars patronized by the Chalukya kings. Inscriptions bear evidence of the strong influence of

the classics on the literary and epigraphical compositions of the time. The Aihole inscription of Pulakeshin II (634 A.D.) written by his court poet Ravikirti (Jain poet) in Sanskrit language and Kannada script is considered as a classical piece of poetry. A few verses of a poet named Vijayanaka who describes herself as the 'dark Sarasvati' have been preserved. It is possible that she may have been a queen of prince Chandraditya (a son of Pulakeshin II). Famous writers in Sanskrit from the Western Chalukya period are Vijnaneshvara who attained recognition by writing Mitakshara, a book on Hindu law, and King Someshvara III, a noted scholar, who compiled an encyclopedia of all arts and sciences called Manasollasa.

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5. Thapar, 326
6. V. Krishna Murthy, Op. Cit., 1970, p. ix.