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'WOMEN' AS DEPICTED IN THE INSCRIPTIONS OF CHHATTISGARH



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A B S T R A C T

Chhattisgarh is a region surrounded by hills, forts and rivers. The culture and civilization of Chhattisgarh have developed its own distinct characteristics. There are several dynasties which have contributed in the development of culture of Chhattisgarh. The inscriptions of the dynasties are best evidences regarding its ancient culture. Various references of Sarabhapuriya, Panduvamsins, Somavamsins and other minor dynasties show that the ideal virtues of a woman was possession of beauty, religious mind] devotion to husband and having sons. Some women also had religious freedom. Marriages within the caste were a general rule although there were examples of inter caste marriages also.

Anulom type of marriages involving marriage with the girl of lower caste is also known. Polygamy was a common among the kings as well as the high officials. Most of the inscriptions indicate the formation of joint family as a common practice. The custom of Sati was prevalent, although it was not obligatory. There are instances of ladies committing Sati as well as those who survived after the death of their husbands. The institution of Devdasis was prevalent in the Orissa region. Various grants were made on their names. Dancing girls were also appointed in the temples. The evidences drawn from various inscriptions of different dynasties have also been discussed in the this paper. So the present paper is mostly based on the inscripational evidences gleaned from the different inscriptions of the dynasties belong to chhattisgarh region.

The region of Chhattisgarh, geographically encompassed with hills and forests all sides, is a compact unit and is drained by many rivers. This peculiar

natural set up seems to have helped in developing its culture and civilisation with its own distinct characteristics. In ancient times it seems to have been divided into two parts. While some of its northern areas along with adjacent portion of modern Orissa state formed the part of Kisala or Mahakosala and some portion of Bastar district was included in Dandakaranya or Mahakantara. There are sufficient evidence regarding its ancient culture when we come to the regime of Sarabhapuriya dynasty which was followed, successively and some times simultaneously, by the Panaduvamsins of Mekala, Panduvamsins of Kosala, Somavamsins of Kosala, Kalachuris of Ratanpur and some other minor dynasties.

POSITION OF WOMEN

According to the description of Bahmani pls. of the second year of the Panduvamsin king Udirnavaira, Bharatabala's queen who was from Amaraja family of Kosala country possessed pure and crystal like character. She was famous for self restraint and self disci-

pline as well as for the performance of religious duties. Besides, she had obtained the highest status by virtue of having grandsons and great grandsons.¹ According to the Koni stone inscription of K.Y. 900 of the kalachuri king Prithvideva, the lady Lakhma, wife of Mimbadeva, was the most virtuous woman. It is stated that in respect of love she was like Rati and in respect of righteous deeds she was Arundhati. She was religious minded and tried for the prosperity of the home.² Gunda Mahadevi, the Patta Mahadevi of the Nagavamsi king Dharavarsah, as described in Narayanapal stone inscription was the half body of her husband like Parvati of Siva, beautiful like Ganges and exceedingly devoted to her husband. She was lovely like Arundhati, kind like Sarasvati goddess liberal like earth goddess and gave birth to many children and offered protection to many who came to her.³ She seems to have enjoyed the freedom in certain religious matters such as constructing temples and carrying many other charitable works of her own accord e.g. the queen Vasata, as described in the Sirpur Lakhman temple stone inscription of the time of Sivagupta, Balarjuna, constructed the temple of Hari.⁴ Svetalladevi, wife of Vallabharaja, the feudatory chief of the Kalachuri king Prithvideva II, as mentioned in Ratanpur stone inscription of K.Y. 910 made many charitable works at different places of her own accord.⁵ As informed in Kuruspal inscription of Dharanamahadevi, the queen donated a land⁶ situated near the place Kalemva, free from all encumbrances and taxes, to the god Srikamesvara.

MARRIAGES

The best example of this type of marriage is from Nala epigraph. According to the Riddhapur pls. of Bhavadattavarman, the king had married the girl named Achali Bhattarika who, as mentioned by Shukla, H. was of the Vaisya⁷ caste. The Sirpur Lakshmana Temple stone inscription of the time of Sivagupta Balarjunainforms that Sivagupta's mother Vasata was the daughter of the king Suryavarman of Magadha.⁸ The Brahmanas, generally, married within the castes but marriages of the anuloma type which involves the marriage with the girl of lower caste were also known, Rajasekhara, a Brahmana of Yavavara family married Avantisundari of the Chuhan⁹ lineage and there must

be many more examples of this type marriages.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy, as the available evidence indicates, was in vogue during the period of the inscriptions. The king as well as officers were to have more than one wife. The Sheorinarayana inscription dated K.Y. 919 of the king Jajalladeva informs us about the three wives¹⁰ of the prince Ullhanadeva. The Kharod tone inscription of K.Y. 933 tells us about the virtuous conduct of Ralha and Padma. Two wives¹¹ of the Kalachuri king Ratanadeva III. The composer to Ratanpur stone inscription of the K.Y. 1207. of the Kalachuri king Prithvideva II had two wives¹² Prabhaand Jamho.

FAMILY LIFE

The joint family system was the practice of the day. Almost all the grants recorded in the charters of the kings of different dynasties were given for the increase of religious merits of the parents and of the king himself. Though the grants were always given by the king, queen and other members of the royal family independently sometimes, as the stray¹³ Sarabhapuriay pls. indicate, the children, elderly members of the family of the donor were also associated with him in making the grant. Besides parents, maternal uncle was also respected. The undated Mallar pls. of the king Sivagupta Balarjuna record the grant given to the monastery at Taradamsak-bhoga at the request of the maternal uncle Bhaskaravarman.¹⁴

The Riddhapur¹⁵ charter of the Nala king Bhavadattavarman registers the grant given to the Brahmana named Dayarya and his eight sons. Mention of Kayastha Ratansimba's grand father, father, uncle as well as wife, son, daughter-in-law, two grandsons and one grand daughter in Ratanpur stone inscription dated V.Y. 1207 of the kalachuri king Prithvideva II also speaks of the existence of the joint family system.¹⁶ The other example of the joint family is of Sarvadhikari Purushottama of the Kalachuri king Ratnadeva II. The Koni stone inscription of K.Y. 900 of the king Prithvideva II supplies us the names of father and grand father of Purushottama and his four sons who were well versed in tatemanship and were living with him.¹⁷ The grant registered in Amoda pls. of K.Y. 905 of the king Prithvideva II was given to three brothers¹⁸ namely Silana, Pithana and Lakhana who

were grand sons of Mihirasvamin and sons of Devasarman and belonged to the Chandratreya gotra.

SATI

The custom of sati, as the available evidence indicates, was prevalent in the region. According to Hiralal, baloda¹⁹ sati pillar inscription, ascribed to the second cent. A.D. is the earliest sati record found in the region. Sheorinarayan inscription of K.Y. 919 of the king Jajalladea II I yet another charter providing us the instance of the custom of sati. According to the charter, after the death of the prince Ulhanadeva, his three queens committed sati.²⁰ The Temra sati stone inscription of S. 1246 records the immolation of Manikyadevi²¹ after the death of her husband at the Temrithana of Sairahjarajya in Chakrakotarashtra during the regime of the king Harischandradeva. The commission of sati, however, was not obligatory on women because we know instances of the ladies who survived their husbands and lead restrained life and guided their sons in the administration of the kingdom. The queen Vasata²² mother of Sivagupta Balarjuna, the king of Paduvamsin, dynasty of Chhatisgarh, as mentioned in Sirpur Lakshamana temple stone inscription, built a temple of lord Hari after the death of her husband, Gunda Mahadevi,²³ as described in Narayanpal inscription of Gunda Mahadevi, the queen consort of the Nagavamsi king Dharavarsha, witnessed the regime of son Somesvaradeva as well of the grand son Kanharadeva and granted a land to the god Narayana.

DEVADASI

Some of the grants available to us speak of the institution of the Devadasis prevalent in the Orissa region. The Brahmesvara temple²⁴ inscription of the time of Mahabhavagupta IV Uddyotakesarin registers the construction of the temple of Brahmesvara along with the miniature shrines by the queen mother Kalavati at the spot called Siddhatirtha at Ekamra and grant of a few beautiful maids bedecked with gem-set ornaments as darika²⁵ to the temple. The Ratnagiri pls. of Mahasivagupta V Karna of year six give us interesting information about the existence of the institution of Devadasis in Orissa during the regime of the Somavamsin kings. According to the grant, the donee instead some Brahmana was a lady named Rani Karpurasri,²⁶ the grand daughter of Udayamati Mahari

and daughter of Mahunadevi. She hailed from Mahavihara of Salonapurain Utkala desa and belonged to the Kasyapa gotra.

Now coming to the donee, her mother and grand mother, the grant tells us nothing beyond their names, relation and the place to which they originally belonged. Surprisingly, their names have not been associated with the names of their husbands, father or grandfather respectively. The grant specifically gives the names of daughter, mother and grand mother and hence Sircar takes karpurasri as born of harlot. According to scholars, harlots are mentioned in the similar way in other records too. As regards the meaning of Mahari. Sircar states that it was the title of Mahunadevi. Mahari is the same as Oriya Mahari or prakrit Mehari meaning songstress or dancing girls or devadasi or harlot.²⁷ Thus, Mahunadevi was a harlot or devadasi, Devadasis are always associated with Brahmanical temple. But, these ladies, as described in the grant, had come from great monastery Salonapura, It has been identified with the place Salonapura situated on the north of Vaitarani in Balasore district. It is somewhat interesting to, note that Rani Karpurasri, Udayamati and Mahunadevi belonged to Kasyapa gotra and it must be in accordance with the Bengali saying, as stated by Sircar, that one who has no gotra can claim Kasyapa gotra.²⁸ Thus, the one important thing which the reference suggests is that the dancing girl was made the landlord. The practice of appointing dancing girls in temples was known in ancient past. There is a reference to this practice in Medhatithi²⁹ as well as in inscription. The existence of the dancing girls³⁰ in the temple in Bastar region is known from Gadia Telugu inscription of the Nagavamsi king Somesvaradeva. The inscription refers to the continuation of the practice of employing dancing girls in the temple. The reference to Bhavina³¹ in Velus stone inscription of S. 1324 of Sangama harihara suggests that they were employed in temple for the entertainment of god. The inscription of the Chola king Rajaraja I record the transfer of four hundred temple women³² from other establishments in Chola kingdom the king's own temple at Tanjore. The evidence of attachment of the dancing girls³³ to the temples is also supplied by the sculptures depicted on the walls of different temples. Abu Zaid also speaks of

the courtesans attached to Indian temples.³⁴ Their association with Buddhist Mahavihara, however, is very much curious. Perhaps, they were employed there for testing the capacity of the person intending to join the ascetic cader to keep themselves away from worldly life or temptations. It is said that these girls were specifically sent to lure such persons.³⁵ Thus, it seems that Rani Karpurasri, her mother and grand mother were employed in Mahavihara with this purpose. It is to be noted here that the courtesans as a class were not held in odium in the ancient past. The great kings and religious teacher did not look down upon them. We are all aware of the fact that Gautama Buddha himself visited Amarapali, the famous courtesan of Rajagriha, took meal at her place and gladdened her by this religious discourse.³⁶ This event itself speaks of the prestige attached to this class of women. Amrapli, as described in Vinaya text of Mulasarvastivada, was the daughter of Lichchhavigana, she agreed to lead the life of public woman. The king Bimbisara also visited her and the Pali Vinaya text tells us that on the request of a merchant, the king Bimbisara installed her as courtesan in Rajagriha.³⁷ Dancing was the favourite pas-

time of the kings. In the court of Rashtrakuta kings, as Kadab pls. tell us, there were skillful dancers.³⁸ The solitary record of the time of the Yadava king Singhana registers the grants to Brahmanas and dancing girls.³⁹ The Kharepatan pls. of S. 930 of Silahara king Rattaraja refer to 'darika⁴⁰ Kutumba' inside the fort.

CONCLUSION

According to the inscriptions Woman was looked upon with respect and was expected to work for the prosperity of her home, possess good character and have grandsons. The grandsons were to give her additional status. References show that possession of beauty, to be religious minded, devotion to husband and to have sons and grand sons were considered as ideal virtues of a woman. She seems to have enjoyed the freedom in certain religious matters such as constructing temples and carrying many other charitable works of her own accord. Although the marriages within the caste was the commonly accepted rule of the society, inter-caste marriages were also known. The joint family system was the practice of the society. Polygamy was in vogue during this period. Dancing was the favourite pastime of the kings.

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