



## Review Of Research



### STATUS OF WOMEN DURING VIJAYANAGAR PERIOD

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#### ABSTRACT

A most significant feature of the social life of Vijayanagar period, is the rise of social consciousness among the different communities. The Vijayanagar rulers maintained the old tradition in respect of women. The empire under the Krishnadevaraya was at the zenith of political power, economic



prosperity and cultural bloom. The society during 16<sup>th</sup> century it was stratified. In order to have a better understanding about women in this period they may be classified on the basis of various classes and professions according to their status. They occupied prominent place in the society.

**KEY WORD:** Aristocratic, eunuch, inmates, pugnacious, termagant.

#### INTRODUCTION:

The society during the 16<sup>th</sup> century Vijayanagar was highly stratified. In order to have a better understanding about women during this period, they may be broadly classified on the basis of various classes and professions. According to status, they can be divided into women belonging to nobility, middle class women or family women and the lower class women.

The girls belonging to the noble class were taught to read and write not only the local languages but also Sanskrit. One of the necessary in music and dancing. To divert themselves from the daily routine, they went to the palace pleasure garden along with their maids. Even they enjoyed swimming and sported with water. There were separate pools for women of the nobility.

The women of aristocratic families spent the major portion of their lives within the four walls of the zenana. It was not possible for them to participate in the public functions where men were likely

gather<sup>1</sup>. They were unable to select their life partner out of their own. Moreover, the presence of polygamous habits which were present during the period made the elements of love highly improbable<sup>2</sup>.

Allasani Peddana, states in his *Manucharitra* how it was possible for one man to love several women and vice versa. In such an arrangement the feelings which were manifested towards women cannot be termed love but can be regarded as which a master condescendingly shows to his servants. The numerous women who surround such a man were nothing more than his maid servants who were influenced by the considerations of his attainments, wealth, position in society. Love can only be between single individuals and it is wrong to assume that a person could love several women at the same time<sup>3</sup>.

Under these circumstances, it was a rare fortune for a woman especially of the higher classes to secure a devoted husband. The pains caused by the cruel treatment of men towards women and subsequent reactions were described in the contemporary literary works<sup>4</sup>.

The wives of the king had each a house, women guards and required number of servants. All of them were women, except the eunuchs who were also engaged. No man was allowed to see them unless he was an old man of high rank, and specially permitted by the king. The wives of the king were usually carried in closed litters and were closely followed by the eunuchs<sup>5</sup>.

There is a difference between the principal queens, lawful wives and the other inmates of harem. For instance, Krishna Dev Raya had twelve lawful wives of whom there were three principal ones, the sons of each of these were heirs of the kingdom but not those of the others. When there were sons to all of them and if there was only one son to a wife, he was heir<sup>6</sup>.

One of the principal wives of the Krishna Deva Raya was the daughter of the king of Orissa i.e. Gajapathi king, and others, daughters of a king, his vassal who was a king of Seringapato; another wife was a courtesan whom when in his youth was his mistress before he became a king, and she made him promise that if he became a king he would take her as his wife and thus this courtesan became his wife<sup>7</sup>.

All the three wives of Krishnadevaraya and never any discord or ill feeling between them and all of them were great friends<sup>8</sup>. The queens had a very large sum of money, treasure and personal ornaments namely armlets, bracelets, seed pearls, pearls and diamonds and each of them had sixty maidens adorned as richly as could possibly be<sup>9</sup>. It was known that thirty six of the most beautiful of the king's wives covered themselves with gold and pearls and in the hands of each a vessel of gold with a lamp of oil burning in it. Sometimes they were hardly able to move<sup>10</sup>. Probably Nuniz who makes the comment must have been amused by the large amounts of gold these women possessed.

The royal wives of the emperor were permitted to enjoy the same privileges as enjoyed by the king in the audience hall. It shows that equal importance was given to queens along with the king by the people. Krishna Deva Raya was represented by Nandi Timmayya in a verse at the end of the first canto of his *Parijatapaharanam* as hearing along with his queens the works composed by the poets assembled at the court during the spring festival<sup>11</sup>.

During the reign of Krishnadevaraya, there were many evidences of queens accompanying the king during campaigns. One instance was that of Krishnadevaraya's campaign to Kalinga along with the queens. They visited Ahobala and made some gifts to the god Kondaveedu Chinnadeviamma and Tirumaladeviamma were with him. It was in the company of two queens that the emperor visited the

<sup>1</sup> Venkata Ramanayya N., *Studies in the Third Dynasties of Vijayanagar*, p.394

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.397

<sup>3</sup> Allasan Peddana, *Manu Charitra*, p.69-75

<sup>4</sup> Nandi Timmana, *Parijatapaharanam*, 1:96

<sup>5</sup> Robert Swell, *A Forgotten Empire, A contribution to the History of India*, p.247

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Nuniz, *Chronicle of Fernao Nuniz*, p.378

<sup>11</sup> Nandi Timmana, *Parijatapaharanam*, p.138-90

temple of Amareshwara near Darinakota and bestowed magnificent gifts known as Tualapurusha Saptasagara and presented some villages<sup>12</sup>. These references may be found only during Krishnadevaraya's time and not during the time of other Tuluva rulers. It can be inferred that queens enjoyed a better position during Krishnadevaraya's time than the other Tuluva rulers.

"Sati" was also performed by the women belonging to aristocratic families when their husbands died or were killed in battle. This gesture was considered to be a great honour and a source of merit.

Women belonging to the upper class did not enjoy certain rights which women of other classes were generally accustomed to as they were confined to the four walls of the zenana. Most of them did not come out in public to express their views freely and impartially. The queens moved freely within the precincts of the palace but outside it they were under seclusion. Most of the other women belonging to upper class were under the control of their male counterparts.

The upper class women wore garments of very thin cotton or silk or bright colours, five yards long; one part of which was girt around the waist and the other part was thrown over the shoulder and across their breasts in such a way that one arm and shoulder remained uncovered. They also wore leather shoes well embroidered in silk, their heads were uncovered and the hair was tightly gathered into a becoming knot on the top of the head<sup>13</sup>. The queens wore a separate upper garment is discernable from the bronze sculptures of Chinnadevi and Tirumaladevi at Tirumala. Both the queens covered their shoulders with a piece of cloth. Hence they used sewn or unsewn upper garment. The royal family members and other rich sections of society preferred ornaments of pearls and precious stones. This differentiated royal women from other sections of women.

Details of the financial status of the middle class women were not known but from the evidences available, it can be said that some type of private property was prevalent in medieval South India<sup>14</sup>. The parents of this class wanted their daughters to get married early to suitable persons. Among the Brahmin community, the girl's marriage was celebrated usually before she attained maturity. Among other communities, it was celebrated after maturity<sup>15</sup>. It was doubtful whether the girl was allowed to select her own husband. Marriages were usually celebrated with great pomp and show in the house of bride's parents. In the case of Brahmins, bride's parents demanded and obtained arana of the nuptial present<sup>16</sup>. In case of others, the bride's parents had to give several gifts to the bridegroom.

Generally the family women were under the control of their husbands. But all the women were not submissive to their husbands. There were rebellious, pugnacious and termagant women who made their married life a curse instead of a blessing. In order to remain faithful to their husbands under all circumstances they practiced sati. Most of the women preferred death than leading dishonorable lives as a widow. Sometimes, physical force was employed by the kindred of the widowed women who showed their excessive zeal for sati by casting into the funeral pyre so that the unhappy widows might be quickly reduced to ashes.

Brahmins were married and got very beautiful wives. Brahmin house wife was the mistress of the household and performed most of the domestic work.

The family women of this age can be compared with modern day housewives. But specifying of the term 'family women' by the contemporary literary writers and foreign travelers seem ridiculous. Apart from public women, every woman was called a family woman. This distinction was made to separate family women from public women who were large in number. Most of them were devoted to the households and did not participate in the public functions.

<sup>12</sup> *Archaeological Survey Reports, 1908-9*, p.178

<sup>13</sup> Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An Account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants*, p.205-6

<sup>14</sup> Dharma Kumar, *Private Property in Asia: The Case of Medieval South India*, p.341

<sup>15</sup> Kandukuri Rudrakavi, *Nirankusopakhyanam*, p.396

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

Some of the dress patterns of middle class women were known. In 'Sukaspatati' of Kadiripati, a Brahmin lady is described as arranging the pleats of her sari with fan-shaped ends. In 'Sringara Sakuntalam' by Pillalamarri Pinaveerabadrudu, a married woman was described as having a flowered bun. In Peddana's 'Manucharitra', a bride was described as wearing a Kundala. Kundalas were incised with cut and beaded design and star shaped design. In 'Kalapurnodayam' Pingali Surana, a bride is described as wearing three types of ear ornaments: (a) 'Kotapu Kammajodu', 'chevula poovulu', and 'bavirelu'. These three ornaments were identified with the three varieties of ear ornaments worn on the three parts of an ear mentioned in Bharata's 'Natyasastram', 'Kundalamu' was an ear-ornament worn on the ear lobe or the lower part of the ear. 'Nochakamu' was worn on helix or the middle part of the ear. 'Kilamu' was worn on the upper part of the ear. A Reddy woman was described as wearing 'rendugundala mungara' or a nose ornament with two small balls. This is identified with present day 'Besari' which has two or more pearls or precious stones or gold balls suspended from a nose stud. Nasa Mani i.e. the nose ornament made of diamonds was decorated by 'Godadevi', the heroine of Amuktamalyada<sup>17</sup>.

The lower class women and tribal women attended not only domestic work but also assisted their men in the fields. Referring to contemporary working class women, Linschoten writes, the women go with a cloth bound about their middle beneath their navels and hanging down to the middle of their thighs and the other end, they cast it over their shoulders whereby half of their breasts were covered<sup>18</sup>.

The tribal women represented in the 'Kiratarjuniya' panel in the Lepakshi paintings were seen in skirts down to their knees. They were made of leaves. The same panel at Lepakshi reveals that their hair was tied into a normal bun with a tiara of leaves on the forehead. The author of 'Amuktamalyada' compares the blue sky with its reddish tinge to the evening twilight with a 'Natabhushana' made of the wild seed guriginja worn by Chenchu tribal women. A Saivite mendicant woman decorated a copper ring with the insignia of 'nandi' or bull. In 'Amuktamalyada', a low caste Vaishnava devotee appeared to be wearing 'venamalakante' or necklace of Tulasi beads<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Krishna Deva Raya, *Amuktamalyada*, p.7-66

<sup>18</sup> Wheeler, *Early Travels in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century*, p.203

<sup>19</sup> Krishna Deva Raya, *Amuktamalyada*, p.77