

POSITION OF COMMON WOMEN'S UNDER THE IMPERIAL CHOLAS

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Abstract

The age of Imperial cholas is an important epoch in the history of south India and in Tamil nadu. Women enjoyed a high status in the society. There were no restraints in their social life and activities. They showed keen interest in various social activities and patronised various kinds of art. The inscriptions of the period throw only scanty information about their status. [1] The royal woman played an important role in the socio-economic, political and cultural contribution of the country. [2] There are sample references about royal woman so this paper deals with common women's of the Imperial cholas.

Keywords: *cholas, royal woman, social life, Devaradiyars, Pottukkattal, K.A.Nilakanta Sastri*

Devaradiyar

The kings appointed Devaradiyars to the temples. In the same way even people of wealthy nature too granted women as Devaradiyars or servant maids or slaves to the temples. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri as mentioned by Marco Polo had mentioned that there was a tradition called Pottukkattal. It was a custom among the Tamils of the medieval period to handover their girls to the deities of the temple of their like. Those girls were used to celebrate a festival with joy. Different varieties of food stuffs were also cooked with their assistance. After offering them to the deities the food materials were distributed to the guests and others who were present in the temple. Such practices were continued till the dedicated girl got married [3].

The Chola monarch Raja Raja I. appointed more than 400 Devaradiyars to the temples [4]. As they were also associated with the Siva temple it is evident that women of that group too continued to have hereditary possessions [5]. They were even hailed with the titles. The women dedicated to the temples as dancers were entitled as Talaikkoli, [6] Sribalikottuvar, [7] Kaverippinakkal. [8] The Devaradiyars, who are mentioned in many inscriptions were associated with the temple and had social recognition. The Tanjore Pragadeeswara temple had 400 Patiyilar. They were called by different names due to their varied services. They rendered their services all throughout the day in a temple by living in temple. So they were known as Talichery Pendir. Their dedicated services fetched them the name Devaradiyar. Their deep involvement and engagement in the fine arts such as dance, they were called Nataga Kanigayar.

Above all as they were unmarried they had the name Patilyar [9]. They even offered food and other auspicious things to the deities of the temples to which they were attached. They ate the food, which were offered to the deities as Neivedyam. The inscription of Rajadhi Raja I (1018-1054 A.D) states that a Devaradiyar called Saduran

Seduri was the wife of Naga Perumkadan [10]. So it could be inferred that amount the women who were dedicated to the temples should have married and they should have made their daughters as their successors as Devaradiyars.

During the period of Rajadhi Raja II (1163-1182A.D.) four women sold themselves as Devaradiyars to the temple [11]. The 35th regional year (1213 A.D.) of Kulottunga III's inscription refers to the fact that Narpathennayira Manickam, a Devaradiyar of Thivurppam Puramudayar temple was attached with temple virtuals and festivals and given certain rights to be carried out during the days of Thiruvadhirai and during the month of Margali [12]. The Mahasabayor, Urkanakku and other village staff had attested the donations offered by the same lady [13].

The Patiyilar and Devaradiyar carried out the main dancing in the temple. The Istabalayar provided the music Akamarkam. The Devaradiyar carried the flower plate (Pushpatolagai) and the holy ash (Tirunir kappu). The Ishtabatalayar decorated the floor with Varikkolam by using rice flour. In addition to the above the women were employed to hold the mirror before the deity, fanning the deity with the fly Wisk [14], carrying the Sripadam etc [15]. The 14th regional year (1132A.D.) inscription of Uthamachola (1118-1135A.D.), informs that there were women dancers who were engaged to execute Santhikkuthu during chitra festival. She was directed to carry out the nine types of Kuthus and for she was granted lands [16]. Another inscription dated 1168A.D. too informs the same fact one Umalyalvar Sanhira Vidanga Nangai, for the dance to be arranged at the time of Chithirai festival was given a specified quantum of paddy. [17].

Slavery

Slavery prevailed in the days of the cholas. According to K.A.N.Sastri "That a considerable element in the population, especially among agricultural labourers, lived in a condition not far from slavery is clear from the literature of the age" [18]. The Thaduttatkondapuram reveals the existence of bonded slavery of a hereditary nature and the condition of slaves. Due to famine and hardships, people embraced slavery and thereby escaped death. With a view to honouring the prayers or solemn vows already made, they entered into the service of the temple on their own accord. The korakki inscription of Rajaraja III mentions more than hundred names of slaves given to the temple by an order of the king. They were purchased from several parties and by gifts from private individuals. Thus it is obvious that slavery in the chola period was practiced with legal sanction and royal patronage. There were instances where people entered into slavery by mortgaging themselves for the money they borrowed. Women were sold by a document called Alvilai pirammana isaiyu theetu.

Marriage

Nothing is known about the types and customs of marriage. Members of the royal family maintained matrimonial relationship with other families. The Cholas had

matrimonial alliances with the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Vaidumbas, Koumbalur, Chieftains, Malaiyamans, Malavarayars and other Velir chieftains. Such matrimonial alliances strengthened their position and enabled them to wield their influences in the neighbouring territories [19].

Polygamy prevailed among the members of the royal family. Parantaka I and Rajaraja I had many wives. But monogamy was the normal unit of social life. On the occasion of marriage property was given by the parents to the bride. It was known as Sridana. In many inscriptions the donations given by women from their Sridana properties are recorded. This shows that women were entitled to property and had the right to dispose them [20].

Marriage was usually arranged by the elders or parents. In general the bride groom's family approached the parent of the girl to have the girl married to their son. Girls seem to have been married only when they attained maturity. Given dowry was generally prevalent [21] from the evidence of literature we could guess that gold, jewels, instruments, furniture, household article and land were given by way of dowry. A married women enjoyed absolute rights over her Sridhana as is evident from way they freely endowed. Her property could be inherited only by her daughters [22]. The wife is referred to as Manayal, Manavatti, Illamudaiyal, Ahamudaiyal, Perumanaikilatti, etc. [23].

Sati

Sati or self-immolation by women on the funeral pyre of their husbands is occasionally mentioned in inscriptions. But, such instances were few and it was not a common practice during the Chola period. An inscription at Allur records the Sati committed by Gangama Deviyar, the wife of Virasola Ilango Velar. The Tiruvalangadu inscription of Rajendra I refer to the Sati committed by his grandmother Vanavan Mahadevi. [24]. There was no much reference about the common women's performance of Sati.

Dress and Ornaments

The people used both cotton and silk dresses. The sculptures of the temple provide information about varieties of dress worn by them. They used petticoats, blouses and Kachchai (breast bands). Tailoring was known to them and cosmetics were used by them.

They wore different types of ornaments. Sutti, Deiva Uthi, Porpu Nerri Sutti, Magara Kulai, Muthumalai, Piraivadam, Natchathiramanimalai, Niraitali, Manikatali and Talimanivadam were some of their ornaments [25]. Three types of ornament were worn ankle and feet. Padakam was worn close to the ankle Nupuram and Silambu were worn a little loose on the feet. Kinkini was also worn close to the ankle but it was more like a Padakam with stones inside the hollow frame to produce a jingling sound. Perhaps the Kinkini was worn by children and the Silambu and other anklets were worn by adults.

Education

Women had many roles to play in the Chola period. Women in general must have had some basic education. Special endowments were made for each lecture [26]. So might have also receives some form of higher education as we find in the epigraphy, Jain women ascetics were appointed as teachers [27].

Cosmetics

Women seem to have used a variety of cosmetics also in addition to adorning themselves with jewels. Cosmetics were used for the purpose of fragrance. The choice of herbs and flowers used for preparing the cosmetics, coloring substance and show that they were used not for fragrance and make up but also for the medicinal value [28].

Women's Membership in Sabha

In addition to the role of women in the temple services there were certain exceptional women who even served as judges of peace. The Manamai inscription mentions that a lady was included in the judicial committee of the village assembly. Like this one Lady called Perumkarunayatti alias Tevarkalamai was one of the Niyayathar or judicial officials of Uttaramathur [29].

The women were safeguarded from losing their prestige and for maintaining their self respect they were allowed even by attending the sabha for explaining their inability to pay a tax. In this regard the inscription belonging to the period of Raja Raja(985 to 1014A.D.) available at Kaverippakkam indicates that at the request of the Vellala of Venbaikkudi Nadu stands testimony to the tradition of avoiding women in attending the meeting of the Ursabha [30]. Such facts indicate the placement of women by the elders and administrators. It is also revealed that the women had no right to take part in the public deliberations.

Lady Officials

While the women of the ancient Tamil country were called Urimai Surram and Mudirpendir, their participation in the judicial administration [31] was also a laudable act. As this is revealed by the Manamai temple inscription, the Uttaramathur inscription too attests these facts [32]. The lady officials of the state too were playing their role in the establishment of the offices. One Somayan Amitravalli was a lady official employed by Lokamadevi, the queen of Raja Raja, the great [33].

Conclusion

This study leaves us with certain conclusion. The common women's in imperial Chola were in very respect, there was betterment in their position. Though there was a evil practice like Sati and Devaradiyars system. The women enjoyed considerable dignity and respect in society. The property rights through Dowry give a good status in an economic

position. In general, not only the royal women, but also the common women position is also in good manner.

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