

Women's Under the Imperial Cholas

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Abstract— The position of women in the Chola dynasty is a fascinating field of interesting study. This paper deals with some great women of the Chola dynasty, and their importance of Chola royal family, common women status, position of devaradiyars and their religious endeavours, education, marriage system and dowry practices, polygamy, remarriage and women's slavery also focused in this paper. The variety of dress and decoration, ornament are gleaned from the Chola inscriptions. They also reveal the socio-economic setup that was prevalent during the Chola period. This study mainly concentrate the position of the women's in the imperial Chola dynasty.

Keywords— *Cholas, Royal Women, Devaradiyar*

1. Introduction

Our Indian culture always provides important roles to women. During the early vedic period, women were educated, civilized, enjoyed equal rights to men and they had high status in the society. During the sangam age, the women of Tamil Nadu were treated well and they enjoyed high status in the society. Tolkappiyam clearly tells the status of women during sangam period. The status of women under the Pallavas, Imperial Cholas and Pandyas was high but, the education imparted to women was different when it is compared to men [1].

The age of the Imperial cholas is an important epoch in the history of south India and Tamil Nadu in particular. The Cholas raised the power again at the close of the 9th century A.D. Powerful Empire who dominated a large part of the peninsula right till the early part of the 13th century.

Women in the time of the Imperial Cholas seem to have held a position much different from the sangam age. Women in the Chola period have made enduring the positive contributions. In general ranging from the royal women to the women of the lower strata, they had contributed to the socio-economic, political and cultural contribution of the country [2].

Women in general were referred to as 'Arivaiyar', 'Magalir', 'Pen', 'Taiyalar', 'Pendugal', 'Nangaiyar', 'Pedaiyar', 'Pinakkal' and 'Pendir'[3]. Women had many roles to play in the Chola period. Women in general must have had some basic education. Special endowments were made for such lectures [4]. So might have also receives some form of higher education as we find in the epigraphy, Jain women ascetics were appointed as teachers [5].

2. Royal women

Royal women played a prominent role in society. The Queens were generally known as 'Madeviyar', 'Deviyar', 'Madevadigal', 'Kokkilanadigal'[6] the chief queen was known as 'Agramahadevi', 'Tribhuvanamadevi' and 'Logamadevi' in the early period and later more distinctly as 'Bhuvanumuludadaviyar', 'Ulagumulududaiyal', or 'Avanimulududaiyal'. The chief queen claimed equal status in the king. Queen's occupied a position of great dignity, honour and power. They had their own official, male and female, and their own retinue and resources. Royal ladies exhibited great philanthropic attitude in establishing mutts, rest houses, hospitals and schools. Royal women had been models for the society, the Cholas had contracted matrimonial alliances not only with the other south Indian dynasties, but also some of the prominent feudatories [7] this was no doubt mainly due to political reasons. But it brought about a cultural synthesis.

Among such princess from other royal lines, 'Ponmaligaiththunjiya devar deviyar chearanmgalar Paranthakan Deviammanar' was a Chera princess and was the queen of Paranyakan II[8] Veeman Kundavai, queen of Arinjaya must hailed from royal family of the Eastern Chalukyas. Aditya I married a Pallava princess, as is evident from an inscription, which states that his queen was the daughter of a 'Kaduppattigal'[9] a typical Pallava title. His senior queen was 'Ilango Picci'[10] a Rashtrakuta princess.

Royal women occupied a place of honour and dignity. Tough polygamy appears to be a political necessity for the royal family, princess from different royal houses appears to have lived in perfect amity. Place of special importance was normally assigned to the chief queen. The chief queen had the honour of sharing the throne with the king. This honoured place was filled by another when the first died. When 'Bhuvanumulududaiyal', chief queen of Kulottunga I died, her place was occupied by 'Tiyagavalli'. Similarly 'Thiagapadagal' succeeded Mukkokilanadigal as chief queen of Vikrama Chola in 1127 A.D. [11].

Royal queen had made lot of endowments. Queen Sembiyan madevi, queen of Gandaradita and mother of Uttama Chola and Kundavai, the sister of Rajaraja I could be said to have occupied honoured position and influence in the state. They had considerably influenced policy matters of the state. They built temples, mutts, hospitals, and other charitable institutions and endowed them. For example queen Sembiyan madevi built a number of

temples [12] Kundavai also endowed for a hospital at Tanjore [Athurasalai][13], from one of the inscription of Rajaraja I, the place of honour assigned to the royal women becomes apparent. He ordered that endowment made by him. His elder sister and other ladies of the royal family should be recorded on a stone in the Vimana of the great temple built by him at Tanjore. Queen Sembiyan madevi was held in high esteem by Rajaraja I. In her honour he constructed a great hall at Tirumukkadal known as the Sembiyan madevi Perumandapam [14].

Queen Sembiyan madevi constructed and reconstructed so many temples, some of the temple are still to be seen at 'Virudachalam', 'Tirukkodikka', 'Tenkurangaduturai', 'sembiyan madevi', 'Tiruvauraneri', 'Tiruthuratti', 'Anangur', 'Tirumanjeri', and 'Tiruvkkarai' [15].

In memory of her husband she built a temple at Trunallam or Konerirajapuram and named it after her husband as Kandaradittam [16] and set up an image of her husband in the act of worshipping siva, as he was a great devotee of siva.

Royal women seem to have been skilled in the art of dance. Such practice was common among royal women. The 'Kalachurya someswaras' queen 'sovala devi' is said to have danced in public. Queen 'Santala devi' of Hoysala line was much praised for her skill in dancing and music. Queen's was customary for the queens to accompany the ruler on occasions. They participated in event with him. Queen Logamadevi of Rjaraja performed 'Tulabara' at Tiruvisalur [17]. The fact that queens appeared in public along with the king becomes evident from the chola paintings. In the first tier of the vimana of the great temple at Tanjore, Rajaraja is seen with his queen in the act of worshipping the lord. At a lower level are seen their attendants. Some of the royal ladies who committed sati, a few of the queens of the chieftains also committed sati. Sundarachola queen Viramadevi, mother of Rajaraja I died as sati. Gangamadevi, queen of Veerachola Ilangovalar, the Kodumbalur chieftain also committed sati as is evident from the Alur inscription.

3. Devaradiyars

The institution of Devaradiyar needs special consideration. Generally classifying them as courtesans or dancing girls. When exactly the custom of dedicating women to temple in India began is still disputed. Dedication of women temple, in India must have been originally meant for rendering service to the presiding deity, as mode of worship was peculiar to India. Among the sixteen forms of worship prescribed by the scripture, dancing and singing are included and were considered as part of the duties of the devaradiyar. The great role the temple had come to play under the imperial Cholas is a well known factor. The temples offered scope for service and devotion. It should not be forgotten that the state provided for the maintenance of the temple and many

donors endowed on a grand scale. Rajaraja I brought 400 such women and settled them in Tanjore for serving in the great temple of Rajarajeswaram, built by him. During the reign of Kulottunga I, a chieftain by name, 'Achchapidaram Ganavathi Nambi' alias 'Alagiya Pandiya Pallavarayan', dedicated a few female members of his family to the temple of Tirunallam branding them with the trident as a symbol of dedication [18]. It is evident from this that even individuals belonging to the higher status of society dedicated their women to the temple. They have donated more number of donations to the various temples in Chola dynasty. Thus Devaradiyar hailed from their higher position in The Chola society

4. Occupations of Women

"Adigariccis" this is the title, queen bearing this title to any female for their own right [19]. Queen of Rajaraja I logamadevi had an 'Adigaricci' to supervise her endowments to the temple she built. The women seem to have held certain offices, apart from owning property. The 'Anukkis'[20] are referred to and they were women bodyguards of the king inside the palace. The 'Padimagalir' were those women body guards of the king who attended on him while he was camping in time of war. There were a number of petty occupations in which were engaged. Perhaps those with a nominal income women worked in the fields as agricultural laborers and did all kinds of work connected with agriculture. The cowherds who prepare butter and ghee who were known as 'Ayar madar' or 'Aichiya'r sold the milk products and what they earned was perhaps kept by them as their own.

Jewellery owned by women might have been great economic assets for women. Most of the women folk used jewels in the form of chains, ear studs, bangles and rings, besides some worn on the feet and some as head ornament. It is further evident from inscription that some women have gifted jewels instead of money like landed property jewels must have been another form of wealth owned by women.

Elaborate descriptions are given in literature about the various objects sold during fairs or public occasions. Specially for women indicate the demand for the same and indirectly indicate their purchasing power. Whether costly or cheap, it indicates the economic status of women of this period.

5. Marriage

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 had attained maturity. The Sivaka Sintamani states that one could marry only 'Thoi thangai magalir' inscriptional records also shown evidences of marriage among cousins. Preference was especially for marrying one's own maternal uncle's

daughter or son or paternal aunt's daughter or son. Such matrimonial alliances were to be seen between the royal houses of the cholas.

Giving 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 the way they freely endowed. Her property could be inherited only by her daughters [22]. The wife is referred to as 'Manayal', 'Manavatti', 'Illamudaiyal', 'Ahamudaiyal', 'Perumanaikkilatti' etc. Indicating her importance in the family. Though chastity on the part of the wife was emphasized, these were instance of infidelity on the part of wives. Such described as 'Kondor pilaitthavar', those who wronged the husband. Such women were punished by disgracing them in the public by pouring water over her after smearing her with powdered brick. Sometimes such women were tied with sand filled pots and allowed to drown in rivers. But such an extraordinary punishment was not meted out of the husband if he proved faithless to his wife. This was perhaps due to the polygamy was permitted and also perhaps the society was patriarchal. A widow was forced to lead an austere life. This kind of life was expected even in the age of Rajaraja Chola period. There is no evidence about the remarriage; it is very clearly that widow remarriage was not prevalent even in the age of the Imperial Cholas. The widows were known as 'Kalikala Magalir' as the removed their jewels on the death of their husband. Since sati was not popular in the common women's slavery also used to partice in Chola dynasty. One individual sold three of his female daughter to slaves the Vayalur temple [23]. A particular inscription records the royal order conforming the royal order conforming the sale of women to a temple. Famines had been responsible for such sale of slaves. In 2010 A.D. a Vellala sold himself and his two daughters to the mutt attached to Tiruppampuram [24]. A royal order inscribed provided for the recapture of slaves who had ran away [25].

6. Dress and Decorations

A variety of clothes were used by women to beautify them. A wide variety of jewellery was also worn by women were Tyil, Kalingam, Kosigam, Adai and Tusu. Patt is also referred to Udai, indicated dress; 'Kodi' is used to refer to a newly woven cloth. The tern 'Madi' is yet another tern that has been used for cloth or saree. The term 'pudavai' which is specifically used to refer to the saree in modern times was used to refer to any piece of lengthy cloth. Clothes were used very fine texture. Clothing made of cotton the people seem to have used silk and a cloth made from a kind of fiber, white, red, green, blue and black colored clothes were commonly used. Women seem to have used normally two 'garments' and the 'Vadagam' was the upper garment.

Tanjore inscription enable us to understand that the jeweller's had reached its high water mart under the Cholas. The variety of Jewels which are no longer in use and which were perhaps specially worn in that age. To mention a few there were the Sonakachchidukku, Kolagai, Kaligai, Velimani and Idaya vasnai. From the Tanjore inscription we may infer that 'Chidukku' was perhaps a knot like devise used as a fastener or as a link in a chain of stones or pearls. The Kaligai was a gold jewel worn on the chest. Velimani was perhaps an ornaments student with precious stones and worn on the head. Kolagai was an intricate ornaments made of ivory and worn on the head to enrich the hairdo wad known as 'Talaikkolam'. In the centre, where the hair was parted women wore the suttu, a dangling pendent, above the thilakam or the mark in the forehead. Two types of earning were mainly worn on the ears, one sticking close to the ear lobe and the other hanging or dangling heavily from it. Heavy study seem to have been used purposely to enlarge the hole. Palm leaf rolls and ivory ear studs were also used.

Three types of ornaments were worn the ankle and feet. Padagam 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 pasdakam with stones inside the hollow frome to produce a jungling sound. Perhaps the 'Kinkini' was worn by children and the 'Silambu' and other anklets were worn by adults.

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 substances and show that they were used not for fragrance and make up but also for the medicinal value.

7. Conclusion

A study of women under the imperial Cholas leaves us with certain conclusion. Find that in every respect there was betterment in their position. Compared to the earlier period, there was no independent rule by any queen's. Some people held responsible offices and had official titles. The position of a widow was no longer pitiable though instances of sati were there. It was not a general rule and the tendency was to dissuade the wife from committing sati. The institution of Devaradiyars had become well recognized. They enjoyed considerable dignity and respect in society. Women held property and enjoyed considerable independence in respect of their property and wealth. In general women under the imperial chola dynasty are treated in good manner.

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