

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE LOHARA DYNASTY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the condition of upper class and lower-class women in the Lohara Dynasty. In contrast to the condition of the women in other North Indian dynasties, women of the Lohara Dynasty participated with women in the state Rajatarangini by Kalhana portrays active participation of women in the state administration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women in the Lohara dynasty belonging to the upper class received education in statecraft and diplomacy whereas less is known about the lower-class women. Rajatarangini by Kalhana mentions about Queen Srilekha licentious mother of King Hariraja the first ruler of Lohara dynasty, who endeavored to seek the crown for herself after her son's death. This portrays the thirst for power in the upper-class women. Later, her son King Ananta married Queen Suryamati the daughter of King Indracandra. Queen Suryamati was a pious lady who founded the shrines of Sadasiva and the temple of Gaureswara. In the time to come Queen Suryamati proved an able administrator overpowering King Ananta rescuing the state from the financial crisis caused by the indebtedness of King Ananta. She roused a servant named Haladhara to the position of the prime minister. He proved to be an able administrator. Queen Suryamati can be seen as a lady who made an ardent decision in state administration. While the queen looked after state administration, King Ananta used the congenial conditions to establish his authority in the neighboring hilly tracts.

The charismatic personality of Suryamati made her influential resulting in the abdication of King Ananta in 1603 in favor of his son Kalasa. Queen Suryamati was blinded in her love for her son neglected Kalasa's inefficiency as a ruler. Therefore, King Ananta took upon to took up regal functions shifting his capital to Vijayesvara. After violent altercations with his family King Ananta died. The king's death was followed by practice of sati by Queen Suryamati. Practice of sati prevalent showed that after the death of once husband women led a miserable life with austerity. Women of King Harsa's household were compelled to commit sati under the turbulent circumstances between King Harsa and his counterpart Uccala. Queen Vasantlekha the chief queen of King Harsa a Sahi princess did the practice of sati.

2. SECOND LOHARA DYNASTY

During King Sussala's reign, the royal ladies led a turbulent life, the rivalry between King Sussala and his counterparts led to the death of his queen Meghamanjeri. In some cases, women entered the state politics, Rajatarangini mentions about the chief queen of Queen Kalhanika who undertook the task of mediating King Jayasimha and his rival Bhoja. The queen walked down to receive Bhoja on his surrender. Although, the rulers ascended the throne but the power of decision making lay with the queen consort. Matrimonial alliances were seen as a major step in forming political alliances, were women of the royal household to secure political alliances. Rajatarangini mentions King Jayasimha's daughter Menila being married to Bhupala, chief of Rajapuri.

Kota rani was the last ruler of the Lohara dynasty. She was the daughter of Ramachandra, the commander of King Sahadeva's army. She married Prince Rinchan the murderer of her father in her quest for power. She gained the control of state administration gaining ascendancy over the king. After Rinchan's death the threat to the throne of Kashmir lingered in the form of rebellions. Rani remarried and proclaimed Udyanadeva as the new ruler to curb the rebellions. Therefore, Kota Rani secured her power over the throne of Kashmir, made King Udyanadeva as the de facto head. Still the rebellions against the Rani continued to grow especially after the arrival of an invader named Achala. King Udyanadeva fled Kashmir, but the Rani with her undaunting courage decided to devise a plan to curb the rebellion. Subsequently, Achala was defeated by Rani. In the time of political crisis when the king fled to safeguard his interests, Kota Rani with her exemplary courage curbed the insurgency. Kota Rani ascended the throne in 1338 as a reigning monarch, soon her authority was challenged by Shah Mir who was once a loyal courtier.

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After offering five months of resistance finally the queen subdued, killing herself at the sight of her defeat. Kota Rani's frivolous nature matched with her intelligence and charm countered the insurgencies. However, her quest for power doomed to her end.

3. PRACTICE OF SATI

The practice of sati was a noble act that a woman could do to reunite with her husband eternally. During the second, Lohara Dynasty the practice became confined to royal families, whereby it was performed after King Jayasimha's death by his queens Jayamati and Bijjila. Remarking this event Kalhana writes, "these women of inscrutable minds, who though given unfaithfulness and killing their husbands, step with ease into the fire." There are incidents of royal women bribing the royal officials to dissuade them from voluntary resolutions to accompany their departed husbands. The practice of sati saw roots in the households of the officials reaching to the lower classes. Rajatarangini portrays the practice of sati as a noble act unifying the husband and wife eternally.

4. EDUCATION

Education was an opportunity only provided to upper class women. Damodargupta's Kuiuanimata Kavya shows that women studied sexual sciences of Vatsyayana, Dattaka, Viuapatra and Rajaputra. They meticulously learned needlework, painting, botany, and practical training in instrumental music. However, the women of lower class were oblivious to the education took upon the occupation of dancing girls or prostitution.

5. CLASS OF PROSTITUTES

The class of prostitutes finds mention in Rajatarangini and Samayamatrka by Ksmendra. These works claim the prostitutes lured men to extract money following imbecile means. Queen Jayamati took upon a woman named Karnasravati who became the concubine of King Uccala. But she later became the chief queen of governor Ananda. Here, Karnasravati can be seen as a lady with a charismatic personality who whimsically won over the King Uccala and governor Ananda living an affluent lifestyle in the royal household. Dancing girls (martaki) were attached to the temples living lives within the inner spheres of the temples. Rajatarangini mentions a dancing girl named Sahaja who was taken up by King Utkarsa in his royal seraligo. Sahaja went on to commit sati after the death of King Utkarsa. Kalhana praises her for her noble conduct. Therefore, the class of prostitutes were prevalent to merely satisfy the desires of kings and royal officials. The lower class women living in poverty choose the occupation to enter the royal seraligo.

6. CONCLUSION

The women in Lohara Dynasty enjoyed a good amount of freedom in every sphere of life. Rajatarangini by Kalhana mentions that women enjoyed freedom in every sphere of life. The royal women played the role of regent for their minors, councilors of their husbands and most importantly as rulers. They also emerged as the donors of wealth, temple makers and even built towns. The women enjoyed proprietary rights and independent legal status. In contrast to the position of women in other North Indian dynasties, the women in Lohara Dynasty enjoyed considerable independence in domestic and public sphere. Thus, the women in Lohara Dynasty carved out a space for themselves in the Indian History.

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