



A STUDY ON CONDITION OF WOMEN IN VIJAYNAGAR EMPIRE

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Abstract:

There's a famous quote by our First Prime Minister Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru in which he said the following *"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"*. Even our First Law Minister and Father of Indian Constitution Dr. Ambedkar also said that *"I will measure the progress of the Country by seeing the development of Women"*. These two quotes by eminent personalities tell us about the importance of developing the status of women folk.

No Country can progress if the condition of their women folk is not good. Because women are equal partners in societal development. It is important that necessary step should be taken to empower women in every fields. Likewise an empire of early medieval period will not considered developed and progressive if the condition of women during that time was in a very bad condition. Know in this article let us study about the condition of women in Vijayanagar Empire.

Key Words:

Low Caste Women, High Caste Women, Royal Harem, Devaradiyals, Courtesans, Sati etc.,

Introduction:

When North India was being ruled by newly formed Turkish power, at the same time South India was under the rule of the great Vijayanagar Empire. Vijayanagar Empire came to power in 1336 A.D founded by two brothers Harihara and Bukka and ruled till 1646 A.D¹. Their Capital was Vijayanagar. Total four dynasties ruled the Vijayanagar Empire *Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu*. Know in the article let us study about the condition of women in Vijayanagar Empire².

Low Caste Women:

Condition of Women in Vijayanagar Empire differed from caste to caste. In *Totti yans or Kambalattars* the polyandry and post puberty marriage was very prevalent. Bride groom was younger than bride. Morality was totally absent in this marriage bride used to have sexual relations with Father and other male relatives of husband³. Low Caste had the right of divorce and remarriage if their husband died, this privilege was generally denied to the high caste and royal women⁴.

Marriage:

Marriage was given a lot of importance because it was necessary to carry out the lineage. Brahmins usually married their girls early, Linechoton says he saw the marriage in which girls was 7 years of age and boy was in 9 years.

Usually the monogamy type of marriage was widely prevalent but King followed polygamy and he married numerous wives who lived in the royal harem⁵.

Dancers and Prostitutes:

Women also worked as dancers in the court. They were asked to dance in the court during the festive occasion. In the leisure time King also used to see and enjoy the dance⁶. Women were generally not allowed in the court but on the festive occasion they were permitted to enter. Many women prostitute also lived in the Vijayanagar Empire, prostitution was legalized and separate tax was collected from prostitutes⁷.

Royal Women:

Vijayanagar Rulers respected women as part of their old tradition. Many Royal Women accompanied king in the campaigns and many royal ladies have also contributed in the field of literature few example of which are Gangadevi wife of Kumara Kampana wrote the *Madura Vijayam*, Tirumalamba wrote *Varandambika Parinayam*, Mohanangi wrote *Marichi Parinayam*. Like King many Princesses also donated land to temple⁸.

Ritual of Sati:

Just like all other empires of Medieval India Sati was prevalent in the Vijayanagar Empire but it was Voluntary. Foreign Travellers like Barbosa, Nuniz, Ceaser speak about sati in their travel accounts. Widows usually performed sati within 2 or 3 months after the death of husband. Sati usually popular among the high caste women. Queens used to perform Sati to escape dishonour at the hands of invaders⁹. We can see numerous Sati Kals in the areas ruled by Vijayanagar Empire as an evidence for the performance of Sati. Those widows who did not want to commit Sati were required to Shave their heads and leave a life of isolation, women usually preferred Sati to escape this life of isolation.

Devaradiyals and Courtesans:

Some women were attached to the palace as courtesans, their job was to dance in from of the king and entertain him. Some other women were attached to the temples who were called ``Devaradiyals'' they danced and sang in temple and looked after the deity. King even donated land for their upkeep.

Royal Harem:

Royal Harem was the place where ladies of royal family used to live. In this harem some queens were designated as principal queens. All queens in the harem were given enormous wealth by the King for their upkeep and they were also they were also given house, maids, women guards, servants etc., In the harem everyone was women except the eunuchs, no man was allowed in the harem except the very old, high rank officer who was permitted by King. Paes says that king used to call his wives through eunuch.

Women serving in palace were given homes inside the harem and all necessities were made available inside the palace to prevent them from going outside. Barbosa and Paes speak about this in their travel accounts. Women in harem enjoyed great position, no male child was allowed after attaining 10 years. Barbosa says that there was rivalry among queen to get the King favour, but Paes says that there was no discord among queens.

Conclusion:

Condition of Women in Vijayanagar Empire varied from caste to caste. While women from low caste were allowed to remarry and were given the right of divorce and the right of employment this same was denied to the women of high caste. But we also see that many royal women were allowed to study, and they contributed their work in literature, this privilege was denied to the low caste women. At last, we can come to the conclusion that when compared to the later Vedic period women in Vijayanagar Empire go some form of rights but at the same time evil of sati was prevalent in the Vijayanagar Empire. We can see that the

evil of prostitution was also widely encouraged in the Vijayanagar Empire. We can only say that the condition of women in the Vijayanagar Empire were worst rather than disastrous like in the later Vedic period.

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