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Socio-Cultural Dynamics Of Andhra Under The Kalyana Chalukyas (C. 973–1189 CE)

Dr. Nalliboyina Saibabu

Department of History and Archaeology
Acharya Nagarjuna University
Nagarjuna Nagar – 522510, India

Abstract

The Kalyana Chalukyas, who governed extensive territories of the Deccan plateau from 973 to 1189 CE, profoundly shaped the socio-cultural landscape of Andhradesa (the Telugu-speaking region of present-day Andhra Pradesh and Telangana). This article examines the social stratification, gender dynamics, religious configurations, temple patronage patterns, and economic structures that characterised their rule in the Andhra region. Drawing primarily upon epigraphical evidence—including stone inscriptions, copper plate charters, and literary sources such as the *Manasollasa*, *Vikramankadevacharitam*, and *Gadayuddha*—the study illuminates a period marked by religious pluralism, complex social hierarchies, commercial prosperity, and intensive temple construction. The article further traces the gradual recession of Jainism, the ascendancy of Saiva sectarian traditions—particularly the Kalamukha and later Virasaiva movements—and the evolving public role of women in administration and religious patronage.

Keywords: Kalyana Chalukyas, Andhradesa, Medieval Deccan, Saivism, Jainism, Social Stratification, Merchant Guilds, Temple Patronage, Women's History

1. Introduction

The Chalukyas of Kalyana (also designated as the Later Western Chalukyas) ruled the Deccan from their capital at Kalyani (modern Basavakalyan, Karnataka) between 973 and 1189 CE. Their dominion extended across substantial portions of present-day Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. This investigation focuses specifically upon the Andhra region, where the Kalyana Chalukyas maintained direct administrative control over Telangana and parts of coastal Andhra, whilst simultaneously engaging in prolonged military contestation with the Chola dynasty for supremacy over the fertile Vengi region.

The socio-cultural history of this epoch is reconstructed primarily from epigraphical sources—inscriptions engraved upon rock surfaces, cave walls, structural pillars, temple edifices, and copper plates, composed predominantly in Kannada and Sanskrit, with a smaller corpus in Telugu. Contemporary literary works, including Ranna's *Gadayuddha*, Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharitam*, and the encyclopaedic *Manasollasa* (also known as the *Abhilashitarthachintamani*) attributed to King Somesvara III, furnish supplementary insights into the social and cultural life of the period.

2. Social Structure

2.1 The Caste Hierarchy

The traditional *chaturvarna* system, comprising Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra categories, continued to provide the ideological framework for social organisation in Andhradesa during this period, although its practical observance was not invariably rigid. The Chalukya rulers claimed Kshatriya status, though scholarly opinion remains divided regarding their origins, with some proposing an indigenous Kannada lineage that subsequently acquired Kshatriya standing.

Brahmins occupied a privileged position within the social order as repositories of learning, textual authority, and local judicial functions. They received substantial patronage from kings, nobles, and wealthy aristocrats, who granted them landed estates and residential quarters in *agrahara* settlements. Epigraphical records contain elaborate eulogies of Brahmins proficient in the Vedas, Puranas, philosophical systems, logic, and literary composition. Notably, Brahmins served not only as priests and educators but also as military commanders, a significant departure from orthodox Brahminical occupational prescriptions.

Vijnanesvara, the author of the *Mitaksara* commentary on the *Yagnavalkya Smriti* and a contemporary of the period, advocated a comparatively egalitarian juridical approach, denying special privileges to Brahmins who committed offences without premeditation. This position contrasts markedly with earlier legal commentators such as Medhatithi, suggesting a gradual evolution in social and legal attitudes during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

2.2 Professional Castes and Guild Organisations

The Vaisya category was far from homogeneous. Only the *settis* (merchants) and *balanjigas* (traders) were principally engaged in commerce. Numerous other professional groups are attested in the epigraphical record, including:

Profession	Caste Designation
Oil merchants	Telika
Potters	Kummara
Braziers	Kamsala
Carpenters	Vadrangi
Weavers	Sale
Agriculturalists	Meli / Okkalu

Each professional group formed its own guild (*samaya* or *nakaramu*), which regulated trade, collected commercial taxes, and in some instances maintained its own militia. The *Virabalanja Samaya* (Association of Brave Merchants) comprised *Ubhayanadesis* (itinerant merchants), *Mummuridandas* (merchant-militia), and members from thirty-six port cities, attesting to the extensive trade networks operating during the period.

The Jain poet Pampa challenged the notion that birth alone conferred social superiority, arguing instead that self-will (*challa*), character (*guna*), and self-respect (*abhimana*) constituted the true markers of nobility, a remarkably progressive perspective for the tenth century.

2.3 Position and Agency of Women

The Kalyana Chalukya period witnessed women occupying prominent positions in administration, religious patronage, and cultural life—a distinctive feature of Andhra society when compared to contemporary regions.

Women in Administrative Roles

Akkadevi emerges as an exceptional administrator. She governed multiple Chalukya territorial divisions, including Banavasi, Kisukadu, and Masavadi, for nearly half a century. She was the daughter of Dasavarman and Bhagaladevi and sister of emperors Vikramaditya V and Jayasimha II.

Several inscriptions record women making land grants and temple donations:

- **Bakkababbe** (elder sister of Queen Ayvabbadevi) granted *dasavandhamanya* to Cheriya Govaya-gavunda (1001 CE)
- **Attikabbe** (wife of Megavala Ketaya) installed the image of Bhairava at Vanapartha (1058 CE)

- **Queen Mannadevi** (bearing the epithet Abhinava Sarasvati), wife of Tribhuvanamalla, made grants to the Brahmesvara temple at Alampur (1101 CE)
- **Chandala Devi** (also known as Chandralekha), a Silahara princess and queen of Vikramaditya VI, governed the Karhata region and made multiple temple donations
- **Lakshmidēvi**, chief queen of Kumara Tailapa, made grants to the Ramesvara temple at Nekkonda (1121 CE)
- **Mallahini Mahadevi**, wife of Virakesava, gifted land and gold to a boatman at Kudali Sangamesvaram

Women and Temple Patronage

Women actively participated in religious patronage. **Mailama**, wife of Pergada Beta (minister of Kakatiya Prola-II), constructed the *Kadalalaya basadi* (Jaina temple) on the hilltop at Hanumakonda and endowed it with land (1117 CE). **Muppamambika**, wife of Duggabupa, built the temple of Muppesaradeva at Nidigonda (1104 CE).

Although the epigraphical evidence pertains predominantly to royal and aristocratic women, the available records suggest that women of lower social strata also participated in social and religious activities, indicating a relatively secure position for women within Chalukyan society.

3. Religious Conditions

The Kalyana Chalukyas patronised all major religious traditions, although inscriptions recording gifts to Saiva temples predominate, suggesting their personal inclination toward Saivism.

3.1 Saivism and Its Sectarian Developments

Saivism flourished under the Chalukyas, particularly the **Kalamukha** and **Kapalika** sects, which represented more radical forms of Saiva practice.

Kalamukha Saivism

The Kalamukhas enjoyed substantial royal patronage. Their *mathas* (monasteries) functioned as educational centres providing free instruction, lodging, and boarding. An inscription from Vemulavada records that *Mahamandalesvara* Rajaditya made land grants to a local deity and for the maintenance of students and teachers.

The early Kakatiya rulers—serving as Chalukya feudatories—patronised the Kalamukha school:

- **Beta-II** and **Prola-II** were disciples of Ramesvara Pandita, head of the Mallikarjuna Silamatha at Sripurvata (Srisailam)

- Ramesvara Pandita was an authority on the *Lakulesvara Agama*, confirming his Kalamukha affiliation
- Beta-II gifted a village called Sivapura (constructed southwest of Hanumakonda) to Ramesvara Pandita
- Ramesvara constructed several temples and Saiva establishments, including the Kalesvaram shrine on the Godavari River

Kapalika Sect

The Kapalikas practised more extreme rituals—dwelling in cremation grounds, smearing their bodies with ashes, eating from human skulls, and offering wine to Bhairava, the fierce manifestation of Siva. Bhairava worship was popular from the early Chalukya period, as evidenced by numerous Bhairava sculptures discovered in the Karimnagar district.

The Virasaiva Movement

By the late twelfth century, **Basavesvara** initiated the Virasaiva (Lingayat) movement, which:

- Rejected caste hierarchy and ritualistic formalism
- Emphasised equality, devotion to a supreme deity, and moral purity
- Insisted upon *kayaka* (physical labour for livelihood)
- Employed Kannada *vachanas* (simple poetic compositions) to disseminate its message

The movement contributed significantly to the decline of Jainism in the region, although the extent of active persecution remains debated among scholars.

3.2 Jainism: Patronage, Centres, and Decline

Jainism, which had flourished under the Rashtrakutas, continued to receive patronage from the Kalyana Chalukyas and their feudatories, though its influence gradually diminished.

Major Jaina Centres in Andhra

Centre	Location	Significance
Pottalakere (Patancheruvu)	Medak district	Capital of Jayasimha-II; housed five hundred Jaina <i>vasadis</i> ; source of numerous Jaina images now preserved in the Hyderabad Museum
Vemulavada	Karimnagar district	Subhadhama Jinalaya constructed by King Baddega-II for the scholar Somadeva
Hanumakonda	Warangal district	<i>Kadalalaya basadi</i> constructed by Mailama; served as a refuge for Jains during persecution

Kolanupaka	Nalgonda district	Important Jaina <i>tirtha</i> ; numerous Jaina images excavated
Hemavati	Anantapur district	Nolamba-Pallava capital; Jaina teacher Padmaprabha Maladhari composed the <i>Tatparya-vritti</i> here

Epigraphical Evidence for Jaina Patronage

Several inscriptions from the Kalyana Chalukya period provide valuable evidence of Jaina donations. The Chilkuru inscription of 1012 CE records a land grant to a Parsvanatha temple by Padamanabhayya during the reign of Vikramaditya V. The Maski inscription of 1027 CE documents the gift of fifty *mattars* of land to a Jaina *basadi* constructed by Basavoja during the time of Jayasimha II. The Sanigaram inscription of 1051 CE refers to the renovation of the Yuddhamalla Jinalaya by the son of Kakatiya Beta-I's minister. The Banajipet inscription of 1082 CE records a gift by Kakatiya Betarasa to the Virakamala Jinalaya built by Medarasa. The Bairanipalli inscription of 1108 CE registers the installation of a Jaina image with accompanying gifts by Biramaraddi.

Jaina ascetics played a crucial role in imparting education to their disciples, and the *basadis* functioned analogously to Hindu *mathas*, promoting both spiritual and temporal development. A notable example of Jaina scholarly achievement is Somadeva Suri, who composed his celebrated work *Yasastilaka Champu* at the Tribhuvanatilaka *basadi* in Gangadhara in 959 CE, underscoring the intellectual vibrancy of Jaina centres under Chalukya patronage.

Decline of Jainism

Despite its prolonged patronage under the Kalyana Chalukyas and their feudatories, Jainism in Andhradesa experienced a marked decline during the subsequent Kakatiya period. This shift was primarily driven by the rise of militant Virasaivism, the gradual transfer of royal patronage toward Saivism, and the conversion of existing Jaina *basadis* into Saiva shrines. However, Jainism was not entirely eradicated from the region; it persisted in peripheral centres such as Gooty, Penukonda, Chippagiri, and Adoni under later rulers. The survival of Jainism even during the height of Saiva ascendancy is confirmed by the Jaina literary work *Jinendrakalyana* (1319 CE), composed by Appayyacharya, which attests to the continued presence of Jaina religious and cultural activity during the time of the Kakatiya ruler Prataparudra.

3.3 Vaishnavism

Though less prominent than Saivism, Vaishnavism also received patronage. An inscription from Kazipet (1090 CE) mentions the merchant guild (*nakaramu*) of Hanumakonda gifting oil for a perpetual lamp in the Uma-Betesvara temple (a Saiva shrine). Separate Vaishnava temples also existed. At Nagunuru, the minister Vellaki Gangadhara installed the twenty-four forms of Vishnu (Chaturvimasti-Vishnu) in a

Vishnu temple (1171 CE). The same minister installed an image of Buddha, recognizing him as an incarnation of Vishnu—an interesting example of religious syncretism.

3.4 Buddhism

Buddhism had largely ceased to exist as an independent religion by the thirteenth century. Its famous *aramas* were converted into Hindu shrines. Buddha was by this time recognised as an incarnation of Vishnu, leading to the gradual absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism. The Gangadhara inscription (1171 CE) refers to the installation of Buddha at *Pattashala*, with verses indicating that Lord Vishnu manifested as Buddha to deceive the *asuras* (demons)—confirming this syncretic absorption.

4. Economic Conditions

4.1 Agriculture and Land Classification

Agriculture served as the primary source of income for both the state and the populace, forming the backbone of the regional economy. Land was systematically classified into distinct categories based on quality, location, and agricultural potential:

- Wet land (*gadde*) suitable for paddy cultivation
- Dry land (*velipolamu*) for rain-fed crops
- Garden land for horticulture
- Grassland
- Wasteland
- Forest areas

This classification enabled a differentiated taxation system in which rates varied according to land fertility. A fixed fraction of the total agricultural produce was levied as revenue, with common rates being one-sixth (1/6), one-eighth (1/8), or one-twelfth (1/12) of the annual yield, depending upon soil quality and irrigation availability.

The major crops cultivated during this period included rice (the staple food grain), pulses (for protein), cotton (for the textile industry), sugarcane (for sugar and jaggery production), and high-value cash crops such as areca nuts and betel leaves, which were extensively used in religious rituals, social ceremonies, and as articles of trade. This well-organised agricultural system, supported by irrigation infrastructure (tanks, wells, and channels)—much of which was donated by kings, nobles, and merchants as charitable endowments—not only sustained the local population but also generated substantial revenue that financed the empire's trade, temple construction, and administrative machinery.

4.2 Trade, Commerce, and Merchant Guilds

Trade flourished under the Chalukyas. Major commercial centres included Vemulavada, Bodhan, Gangadhara, Polavasa, Dharmapuri, Mantrakuta, Kalesvaram, and Kolanupaka, connected by road networks and river routes (particularly the Godavari).

The *Nakaramu* (merchant guild) played a vital role in urban administration and charitable activities. The Nagaresvara temple at Vemulavada was constructed by the *Nakaramu*. The guild collected a *Dharmanidhi* (charity fund) from commercial transactions.

The *Virabalanja Samaya* (Association of Brave Merchants) included itinerant merchants (*Ubhayanadesis*), merchant-militia (*Mummuridandas*), and the renowned Ayyavole-500 guild. An inscription from Polavasa (1108 CE) records their gift to the Pulastyesvara temple. A damaged inscription from Hanumakonda records a combined gift by the *Teliki-vevuru* and the *Settis* on the occasion of *Uttarayana-sankranti*.

5. Conclusion

The Kalyana Chalukya period (tenth to twelfth centuries CE) represents a significant epoch in the socio-cultural history of Andhradesa. Several distinctive features emerge from this study.

Socially, the period witnessed a complex caste hierarchy alongside notable social mobility. Brahmins occupied privileged positions as knowledge-providers but also served as military commanders—a departure from traditional norms. Professional castes organised themselves into powerful guilds that controlled trade, collected taxes, and even maintained militias. Women enjoyed relatively high status, with several queens and noblewomen serving as administrators, leading armies, and patronising temples—a distinctive feature of Andhra society compared to other contemporary regions.

Religiously, the period was characterised by pluralism and gradual transformation. Saivism dominated, particularly the Kalamukha sect, which established influential monasteries and educational centres. Jainism, which had flourished under the Rashtrakutas, continued to receive patronage but gradually declined due to the rise of Virasaivism—a militant, egalitarian movement initiated by Basavesvara that rejected ritualism and caste hierarchy. Vaishnavism existed alongside these traditions, while Buddhism had been largely absorbed into Hinduism.

Culturally, the temple served as the nucleus of socio-religious life. Extensive temple-building activity by kings, nobles, merchants, and women created architectural monuments that influenced later Kakatiya and Hoysala styles. Temple endowments—including land, villages, oil-mills, and water-lifting devices—supported religious institutions while simultaneously stimulating economic activity.

Economically, agriculture, trade, and a sophisticated taxation system sustained the empire. Merchant guilds played crucial roles in urban administration and charity. The minting of gold and silver coins at

Lokkigundi and Sudi, evidenced by numerous inscriptions and the famous Kodur treasure trove, reflects a monetised economy.

The Kalyana Chalukya rule in Andhradesa thus represents not merely a political interlude but a formative period that shaped the region's social institutions, religious landscape, and cultural traditions for centuries to follow.

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