

CONCLUSION

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The role of women in Orissa from the earliest times to 1568 A.D. in the political, social, sculptural and religious history was quite illustrious. Their role in the realm of politics was spectacular, too. Mention may be made of the queen Padmavati, mother of Karakaṇḍu, Madra Devī, the wife of Chullakaliṅga and mother of Kaliṅga-II, Susima, a princess of Kaliṅga, the grand-mother of the king Vijaya of Baṅga, who came to prominence in the political field. They all belonged to the post Mauryan period. Presumably in the pre-Mauryan period women might have played important roles in Kaliṅga. But no specific woman character is found in either literary or archaeological sources. The next significant role in shaping the history of ancient Orissa was played by Karuvakī, an extremely charming girl of Kaliṅga. She was known to have worked as the immediate cause of the Kaliṅga war. And because of her influence Asoka was converted to Buddhism. Position of women during the time of Asoka in Kaliṅga was high. He appointed Itijhaka Mahamatra, a woman officer, to look after the welfare of women. It is also presumed that Asoka might have organised Saṅgha for the nuns at Kaliṅga, but there is no record to that effect.

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Was there a female officer?

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Equally important was the role of women after Asoka. Khāravēla's chief queen was Vajiraghara and his second queen Simhpatha. Rani Vajiraghara was found to have added glory to the Chedi family by constructing an upper storey of the Manchapuri cave for the Jaina ascetics and dedicated a suit of caves to the Sramanas of Kalinga. The chief queen at times used to help the king in the administration and as such she commanded great respect and influence in the realm. Women of this period were highly accomplished in dancing and the playing of various instruments and were well acquainted with nursing and military exercises, such as driving elephants and hunting. All this testifies to their exalted place in the society. Another princess of Kalinga, Hemamāllā, the daughter of Guhasiva, and her husband Dantakumara took the tooth relic of Gautama Bud^dha to Ceylon.

Women were found to have exercised considerable influence ^{in the} next important dynasty, namely, the Bhauma-Kara dynasty. This dynasty was fortunate to have five widowed queens and one unmarried princess as ruling monarchs. They were

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Tribhuvanamahādevī-I, Prthvimahādevī alias
Tribhuvanamahādevī-II, (widow queen of Śivakara-III),
Gaurimahādevī, Dandimahādevī (unmarried daughter of
Śubhakaradeva-V and Gourimahādevī), Vakulamahādevī,
and Dharmamahādevī. All of them ruled with full regal
status. The accession of six female rulers belonging
to a single dynasty is indeed an unprecedented event
in the history of India. They succeeded to the throne
in the absence of male heirs and were treated as equal
in status to the sons of the dynasty. The rulers of
the dynasty were also not in favour of adopting sons.
However, they played a dominating part in the
political affairs of the state. As the sovereign
rulers of Orissa they enhanced the position of the
women in the society.

Kolāvatīdevī, the Chief queen of Ya^Yatī-II
of the Somavāmsī dynasty, was famous and is remembered
by the people of Orissa for her Brahmesvara temple
inscription of 17 verses describing the history of
the Somavāmsī rulers in Orissa. For the first time
she appointed dancing girls (devadāsīs) in the
Brahmesvara temple. Vijaya Mahādevī the queen of

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Ranabhanja too constructed Vijayeshvara Siva temple in the village Vahiravada on the bank of the river Mahanadi. Chandrikadevi, the daughter of Aniyankabhima-III, built the Anantavasudeva temple at Bhubaneswar. While the former two queens were devout Saivites, the latter one was a Vaisnavite. Their contribution to the field of the religion of the time was remarkable. An unprecedented event of the period was the illicit relation of king Kamarava Deb with a lady named Parvati and their daughter Kausalya, for whom he had to leave the royal palace and had to live in the Kausalya Ganga Island fort. Women of this period even went to the extent of ascertaining the inherent worth of Buddhist and Brahmin Sadhakas. Mention may be made of Surama, the queen of Raja Raja Madan Mahadev. Similarly the episode of Manika Gauduni (the cowherd woman) reveals the generous heart of a woman for the cause of her people and emperor when they were in danger.

There was yet another woman who played a no less eventful role in the political history of Orissa. She was Jaganmohini, the daughter of

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Prataprudradeva, an extremely beautiful and accomplished princess. To keep up the prestige of the Gajapati dynasty she had to marry Krishnadeva Raya, ruler of Vijayanagar empire.

The sculptures of Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves present a vivid picture of the society during the time of the great king Khāravēla. The dress and ornaments used by both men and women along with their various coiffure, bedecked with ornaments are revealed from the sculptures. The reliefs too give a picture of women dancers as well as the orchestra formed by the women. Women used to accompany their husbands to religious functions and festivals.

Single female figures or couples in love were the most prominent sculptural ornamentation on the exterior walls of the temples. To pay homage to the weaker sex, the crowning decoration of sixteen types of female beauty i.e., Alasakanyas or indolent maidens in their playful liveliness, were carved on the temples. Erotic images for the first time in various voluptuous poses were carved on the walls of

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the temple during the Bhauma-Kara rule and it reached the climax during the Ganga rule when the Sun temple at Konārak was built.

The Mithuna figures are carved on the temple walls where both the male and the female are equally projected in various poses. It seems that those were projected not to save the structure from evil spirits nor to protect it against lightening, cyclone and other natural calamities but to conceal the yantra from the eyes of the worldly persons and to give delight to the people.

Women too played an important role in the socio-religious life of Orissa. Upasika Achalasthira of the Nagarjuni Konda inscription was a Buddhist nun who instructed Sudhana, a favourite disciple of Manjusri, about the whereabouts of the monk Sarvagāmin. Lakshmīkarā, the preceptor of Sahajāna, revolted against worshipping Tathāgata, having the Buddha knowledge and all sorts of traditional and moral injunctions existing in the society. Her preaching was based on the highly sublime aspect of sex, i.e., the union of female and male ecstasy was

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the main principle of Tāntricism. Out of the seven Tāntric maidens living in Kumari Patna, Gyanadei Maluni was one who could through her ^eocult practices and Tantric activities convert a man into a sheep and again convert him into a man at night.

Devadasis were attached to the temples. They were called auspicious women and danced and sang in the temple every day. They used to dance as devadāsīs before puberty and during that phase of their life they could only take part in the morning rituals of the god. After puberty they could participate in the evening rituals too. They were married to the deity and as such they could not marry any mortal man; yet they could have liaisons with any of the temple servants or any other person of that locality, but not with outsiders. They too had children. Though the devadāsīs in theory belonged to the temple, yet in some cases the king had control over them. They too used to attend ceremonies in the ^oroyal palace as well as in the houses of the priests. They attended these ceremonies in a group of at least five persons. They played an important role in the festivals. They also remained ahya even 9

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if the king died. They never attended any funeral ceremonies. The tradition of Devadāsī in course of time became a defamed tradition. So the social reformers made efforts at abolishing this system.

Furthermore there were temple maids called Gudisani for fanning the gods. The Deis were another group of women who were attached to the royal palace and took part in most palace festivals as well as the royal ceremonies in the palace. They did not marry any mortal man, yet their marriage was performed with the image of Lord Jagannath. They too remained ahyas throughout their life. They used to attend all the life-cycle ceremonies, viz., pregnancy of the queen, child-birth, various functions connected with the birth of the child and wedding.

The institution of marriage was obligatory. Religious and social pressure made it virtually unavoidable. Procreation of at least one son was recommended for the spiritual responsibility towards the ancestors and the right to inherit their property. The family was partriarchial. Polygamy was prevalent in the upper class of the society. Keeping of

concubines persisted among well-to-do classes. Women were not encouraged to take up a life of asceticism.

From the above facts it is observed that women of Orissa since the earliest times till 1568 A.D. have shown remarkable achievements in the social, political and religious field in the society.