CHAPTER-IV

POSITION OF WOMEN

In the entire sub-continent, Kashmir has the distinction of possessing a well recorded history since ancient times. The old Kashmiri texts, *Rājatarangini* of Kalhana and *Nilmta Purana*, throw light on the status of women in early Kashmir society. The most revealing feature of the family-life of Kashmir, as seen in these texts is the position of women. Nowhere is she considered ‘the living torch illuminating the way to hell’ or ‘the devourer of the intellect of men’. There is no reference to seclusion or veiling of women in Kashmir and she moves quite freely in the society, emulating as it were the free-going sparkling waters of the springs of her country. The picture of society as depicted by Kalhana in his chronicle shows that by this time, woman had emerged from the domestic arena on the political stage. The queens had their own treasures and were actively associated with the affairs of the state. The *Nilmta*, the oldest text of Kashmir allows her to participate in almost all the festivals and religious ceremonies. In the moonlit night of Kumauni-Mahotsava, we find her sitting beside the sacred fire in the company of her husband, children, servants and husband’s friends. It is not clear, however, as to whether she is merely a silent spectator or takes active part in the musical and dramatic performances performed during this night. She is present in the common feast which takes place on the next day not only on the festivals celebrated at home but also in the outdoor festivals; she is seen freely enjoying herself. Thus, on the ceremonial day for ploughing the fields and sowing the seed characterized by music, dancing and feasting, the peasant’s wife is not behind the walls of her home. Women of the time enjoyed high position in society, which is the prominence of the goddesses in the religion depicted in the old text of Kashmir. The gods are mentioned often with their consorts. Śakra plays with Śaci; Viṣṇu’s feet rest in the lap of Lakṣmī; Parvatī accompanies Śiva; Sītā is worshipped during the celebrations of Rāma’s
birthday and Kṛṣṇa’s wife receives worship on the birthday of her lord. The mothers of the gods are also referred to. Besides these, we come across various other female deities. The goddesses Aśokīkā, Śyāmā, Durgā, Śrī, Karisini, Bhadrakālī, Bhedā, Kapiṣṭhā, Surēśvarī, Bhadeśvarī, Gautameśī, Kālaśīlā, Udyogaśrī, Gavākṣī, Caṇḍikā, Gaurī, Suvijāyā, Śakunī, Brahmacārinī, Cakreśvarī and Gr̄hadēvī form the shining galaxy of female deities worshipped by the people of Kashmir. The rivers of Kashmir are also personified as goddess Umā. The genuineness of the account given by the Nīlmata is proved by the corroboration it receives from the works of many Kashmiri writers. Bilhana gives a testimony to the literary efficiency of the women of Kashmir. The Rājatarangini is full of instances showing the higher status of women in the fields of religion and politics.4

EDUCATION

Kalhana, in his work gives the impression that women, of at least the upper classes, received education and from the picture which Kalhana has depicted in his chronicle, it becomes clear that women of this period were not only receiving education of a general nature but in diplomacy and statecraft too. Bilhana, the Poet Laureate at the court of the Cālukya King Paramādi (11th century A.D.), says in the last canto of his “Life of Vikramāṅkadeva”, while describing his homeland, that the women of Kashmir spoke Sanskrit and Prakrit fluently.5 There is, however, reason to believe that women of lower castes did not have this distinction and they had to be content with their vernacular speech.6 A closer study of Dāmodargupta’s Kuttannāmata Kāvya shows that women of higher castes and affluent classes received education which included the sexual sciences of Vātsyāyana, Dattaka, Viṣaputra and Rājaputra, the art of dancing as propounded by Bharata, art as in the treatise of Visakhila and music as for instance in the works of Dantila. They had, moreover, to learn botany, painting, needlework, woodwork, clay-modelling, cookery and receive practical training in instrumental music, singing and
dancing.¹⁷ No wonder, we find the women of Kashmir as active as men in the
discharge of Public duties. There is no indication of women being in seclusion
or relegated to the background. The use of the veil was non-existent. We find,
for instance, women seated along with other officials and ministers in the court
of Harṣa.⁸ We find them fighting alongside men on foot and on horseback.
Vijaymalla, while retreating after the unsuccessful coup against his brother,
King Harṣa, was ably assisted by his brave wife, who clinging to him on his
horse kept the pursuers at bay. Both of, they and their horse swam across the
flooded Vitastā near Shadipur, and thus, escaped to the country of the
Dārds.⁹ We have examples of heroism displayed by queen Diddā and later by
Koṭā Rānī.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is a very important event in the life of woman. Matrimony, in
the course of time, is followed by maternity, and its recurrence makes the
women periodically helpless and absolutely dependent on her husband for
some time. Marriage, therefore, determines the fate of a woman to a much
greater extent than it does the destiny of man. A good marriage is a welcome
protection for a woman, a bad one is worse than a painful chain.¹⁰ So women
should be mature enough to understand its importance. The most revealing
feature of the family life of Kashmir as seen in the Nīlmata Purāṇa and the
Rājatarāṅgini is the position of women in society. Married women were given
full respect in the society. For example, on Iramanjari-Pujana, a festival of
flower, the ladies of house were honoured with presents of flowers and
garlands.¹¹ The ladies of the house were honoured on various other occasions
too. The householder enjoyed upon to honour them on the new snow-fall day.¹²

We do not get a single reference to child marriage in Kalhaṇa’s
Rājatarāṅgini. There are plenty of references which show that women were
married after puberty.¹³ A story related by Kṣemendra in the Deśopadeśa may
indicate that girls were married at a mature age¹⁴. There are references which
indicate that marriages were purely either based on the choice of marriageable match or were arranged by their parents. Some verses from the *Rājatarangini* show that sometimes marriages were done for political ambitions as well, but with the consent of the bride and the groom. In one verse, Kalhaṇa has mentioned the practice of *Svayamvara* which was attended by King Āryarāja who received the bridegroom’s garland by the princess Amṛtaprabhā.

In another reference, King Jayāpiḍa married his only daughter to the prince of Kamala, Kallata. Although it was not accepted fully by the society but we get a plenty of references related to inter-caste marriages in the *Rājatarangini* of Kalhaṇa. We learn, for instance, from a passage describing Sussala’s fight for the throne that the wife of his ally, the powerful Dāmara lord, Gargacandra, brought her two youthful daughters; one of whom was married to Sussala and the another to his son Jayasirha. It brings another significant practice of inter-caste marriages. Dāmara Koṣṭhaka was too married to a Rajput Lady. We have the example of Cakravarman marrying Domba girls and elevating them to the position of chief queens. There is not even single reference of dowry in the *Nilmāta Purāṇa* or in the *Rājatarangini*. However, it is not to be presumed that the custom of giving dowry was absent in the Kashmirian society of that time. The institution of dowry, if it exists, must have been voluntary as not to attract the special attention of the writers of the period.

Married women were expected to be of good virtue. She should be loyal to her husband, should take good care of household affairs etc. The Women in Kashmir society, were usually allowed to marry only once in their life time. After the death of a husband widows were expected to live a pure life, devoid of all luxury. The ornaments or gorgeous dress were forbidden to them. But the remarriage of widows and other women does not seem to have been absolutely forbidden. We have the example of King Pratāpāditya II marrying the wife of a rich merchant.
Since the Hindu system of joint family was universal, we find the daughter-in-law under constant supervision and control of her mother-in-law. Queen Sūryamati, for example, treated the wives of her son, Kalaśa, harshly and required them to clean the palace with their own hands.25

Undoubtedly, the practice of polygamy was not only prominent but respectable from Gupta period onwards.26 The Hūṇas of Central Asia, who invaded Kashmir during the fifth and Sixth centuries A. D., were polygamous people and they left a notable imprint on the society of Kashmir. The influence of the Hūṇas on the local populace, which also influenced them, in turn, to the point of their total absorption in the Indian community, is clearly brought out by Kalhana as he says that “Brāhmaṇas from Gandhāra, resembling himself in their habits and verily themselves the lowest of the twice-born, accepted agrahāras from them”.27 Thus by this period Polyamity was quite prominent in the society of Kashmir. There are many references, given by Kalhana related to it in his work which shows the family life of the king and the nobility was polygamous.28 The seraglios of the kings were full of queens, concubines from all castes and their example was followed by the countries and aristocrats. Polyandry does not, however, seem to have been in vogue, though in certain hill states bordering on Kashmir, among some aboriginal tribes it might have been practised.29

PROPERTY RIGHTS

By 12th century, woman’s share in husband’s property was restored, to an extent equal to that of her sons. This general improvement in the property rights of women were recognized due to a number of factors.30 Due to foreign invasions, the central authority broke down and a large numbers of small states came into existence. Various local traditions began to influence the law of inheritance in different regions of India. The moral fibre of society became weak and women became confined to the household more than ever and they needed protection of their rights in a more formal way.31
time, the women in Kashmir probably had some proprietary rights and independent legal status. A passage from the Rājatarāṅgini tends to show that after the death of her husband probably, the widow became heir to his immovable properties and not his sons. Woman owned private property, is illustrated by another illuminating reference by Kalhaṇa. While enumerating the chief Dāmara lords, who remained neutral in the rebellion raised by Bhoja, another pretender to Jayasiṁha’s throne, he mentions a Dāmara lady also who held the fief in her own right. Another passage appears to point out that women were owners of landed estates.32 Kśemendra, in one of his works, also refers to an incident in which a prostitute becomes mistress of a rich man and on latter’s death, because she was living like his wife, inherits his property. The property became legally hers through the decision of the crown.33

We cannot deny that by this time the position of women had started deteriorating. In the words of Kalhaṇa, women are mere objects of senses.34 It seems that the birth of a daughter was seldom preferred to that of a son. The historical evidence indicates that the birth of a son who was considered as “savior or protector in the both worlds and in whose company, the mothers, along with their husbands were considered lucky. Nīlmata mentions about the worship of a Naga deity, Naga-Bahuputra, who was worshipped in order to be blessed with many sons.35 However, it is important to mention that, historically, female infanticide was unknown in Kashmir society. Kalhaṇa gives ample evidences to the gross immorality and laxity of character prevailing among certain classes of women. Kalhaṇa ’s Rājatarāṅgini delineates in niceties of details, the sensual excesses of the ladies of the palace and the court.36 Evidences related to it can also be had from the works of Kṣemendra and Dāmodargupta. It appears that, by this time, prostitution was very popular in society. They often adorned the King’s inner departments and were usually the power behind the throne.37 Numerous references to the courtesans in connection with the description of festivals, indicate that prostitution was freely allowed in the society of the days of the Rājatarāṅgini.
The Rajatarāṅgini does not decry the courtesans. The prominent ones of them, on the other hand, are enjoined upon to visit the king on his coronation day and take due part in the ceremonies—a fact proving evidently their high political status. Many other social evils like satī and jauhar customs, dancing girls (Devadāsīs) attached to temples etc were present in the society.

CUSTOM OF DEVADĀŚĪ

The word devadāśī or mahārī means “those great women who can control natural human impulses, their five senses and can submit themselves completely to god (Vācaspati). Mahārī means mohan nari that is, the woman belonging to god. Śrī Caitanyadeva had defined devadāśīs as ‘Sebaets’, who served god through dance and music. Pankaj Charan Das, the oldest Guru of Odissi classical dance, who comes from a Mahārī family. Explains Mahārī as Mahā Rup-ari (One who conquers the five main ripu-enemies).

Devadāśī was that Hindu religious practice in which girls were married in their childhood and dedicated to temples. These devadāśīs were supposed to live the life of celibacy. Devadāśīs are also known by various other terms, such as jogini. Furthermore, the Devadāśī practice of religious prostitution is known as basivī in Karnatak mataṅgī in Maharashtra. It is also known as Venkaṭaśaṅkī, nailing, murals and theradeyas. It was a “custom prevalent mostly in south India”.

The first reference to the dancing girls in temples, is found in Kālidāsa’s Meghadūta. An early example comes from the Risthal stone inscription, dated 514-15 A. D. It is said that the dancing girls were present at the time of worship in the Mahākāla temple of Ujjain. Before it, the jātakas, the Greek writers and Kautilya did not mention such customs. So scholars are of the opinion that probably the custom of dedicating girls to temples became quite common in the 6th century A. D. as most of the Purāṇas containing reference to it have been
written during this period. Several Purāṇas recommended that the arrangements should be made to enlist the service of singing girls for worship at temples.

By the end of the 10th century, this custom became so popular that the total number of devadāsis in many temples was linked to the wealth and prestige of the temple. During the medieval period, they were regarded as a part of the normal establishment of temples; they occupied a rank next only to priests and their number often reached high proportions. For example, there were 400 devadāsis attached to the temple at Tanjore and Travancore.

In south the Cola Empire encouraged the Devadāsi system. Men and women were dedicated to the temple service. They developed the system of music and dance employed during the temple festivals. Inscriptions reveal that the 400 dancers, their gurus and orchestras, were maintained by the Bṛhadēśvara temple. Thanjavur, with munificent grants, including the daily disbursement of oil, turmeric, betel leaves and nuts. As the Cola Empire expanded in wealth and size, they built more temples throughout their country. Soon other emperors started imitating the Cola Empire and developed the system.

Unlike other parts of India, the devadāsis of the Jagannath temple complex in the eastern state of Orissa had never practised prostitution, and had always been expected to remain celibate from the time they became devadāsis. Devadāsi is a name given to a group of women who only danced in the temple premises.

This custom was also promoted in Kashmir by the time of Kalhaṇa as well. However, unlike other parts of India, Kashmir society had the tradition of dedicating even married women to temple. The oldest book of Kashmir the Nilmata Purāṇa, also discusses this custom. The use of a simile comparing Kashmir with a temple due to the presence of tender ladies indicates the popularity of the institution of Devadāsis or temple dancing, during the period
of Nilmata Purana. The historical records reveal that Devadasi who belongs mostly to the underprivileged sections of the society.

Kalhana mentions in the Rājatarāṅgini that the system of dedicating girls to temples was prevalent during the reign of Durlabhaka Pratapaditya. In another reference in his chronicle he tells that king Jalauka gave hundred ladies of his seraglio who were well versed in dancing and singing to serve in the temple of Jyestharudra. While coming to the historical period, we also meet a number of other instances of girls serving in the temples. King Lalitaditya, in the course of his adventurous journey saw two dancing girls belonging to a temple. During the reign of Kalaśa two dancing girls Kayyā and Sahaja were attached to a temple and Kalaśa married one of these dancing girls named Kayyā. Utkarśa, his son, had seen Sahaja, who had been a dancing girl attached to a temple and Kalasa married one of these dancing girls named Kayya. Utkarśa, his son, had seen Sahaja, who had been a dancing girl attached to a temple, on the dancing-stage, and had taken her as a concubine into royal seraglio. When she had been a courtesan, she had been favoured also by Harśa, who also implored her not to become a Satī after Utkarśa’s suicide. Kalhaṇa himself was an eye-witness of superannuated dancing women in the temple of the valley. Even he was irked by this practice and he described it as an ocean of immorality.

It appears that it was incumbent by tradition on girls hailing from particular families to take up the profession of devadāsi. Kashmiri society had the tradition of dedicating even married women to temple. The historical records reveal that devadāsi, who belonged mostly to the underprivileged section of the society were taken as concubines by the kings. The Rājatarāṅgini makes it quite clear that girls who served in the temples could be taken away for personal enjoyment by the kings. King Durlabhaka Pratapaditya II fell in love with a married woman named Narendraprabha. He was very eager to have the lady, but afraid of slander could not take her to his seraglio.
Then the merchant Nona, the husband of Narendraprabha requested the king to adopt her as his queen but finding him reluctant, finally said, ‘If even after this declaration, you do not accept her, then you should take her from a temple as a dancing girl put there by me on account of her skill in dancing.’ Sahajā, a dancing girl attached to a temple, was taken by prince Utkarṣa as a concubine into the royal harem. It is, thus, evident that temple-girls, like common harlots, could be taken away by the king.

The bad immoral practices underlying the system of devadāsi must have received some opposition from the honest and pure minded section of the people. Alberuni refers to such an opposition in the north-west parts of India during his time but then says that this was of no avail since the kings and nobles supported the custom. In this particular system of society, the value sense of the people did not attack among social stigma. Thus their off-springs inherited the property and even a throne in the society.

JAUAHAR

Johar or Jauhar is derived from Jatu-grah, a house built of lac or other combustibles, in allusion to the attempted destruction of the pandumans. During the period of study Jauhar was prevalent in the Rajput societies. In the custom wives immolated themselves while their husbands were still alive. When people of Rajput clan become sure that they were going to die fighting at the hands of their enemy then all the women, whether married or not, arranged a large pyre and set themselves afire, while their husband used to fight the last decisive battle known as “Sāka”, with the enemy. Thus protecting the sanctity of the women and the whole clan, they used to sacrifice their lives.

It was the time when Mongols were invading India and for avoiding arrest and subsequent molestation by the enemy, Women of this period preferred this custom. This period of time was very uncertain and lots of wars and battles were taking place in whole of India. Even Kashmir was not
unknown to it. Kalhana has described the custom but only in his last two books. In his chronicle he says that Harṣa attacked Malla and killed Vyaddamangala, the son of Śrilekha’s nephew who was killed and women of his family and six female attendants of the ladies of his household committed Jauhar.⁵⁰ Other queen Nandā also sacrificed her life for honor which is described by Kalhana like this. Nandā, the mother of the future king, who was of noble birth, was in her own seraglio on the other side(of the river) and was eagerly looking from a high terrace towards the camps of her sons, distinguishable in the north and south by the smoke of their kitchen fires. This virtuous lady found herself in her house together with her nurse Candrī, who felt unable to see the water that was to be offered at the famous libations of her, whom she had brought up as a child with her own milk. She (Nandā) had not yet seated herself in the flaming fire, but was (already) surrounded by the flames that were playing around.⁵¹ Kalhana says that when Harṣa attacked the palace of Bhoja, the Śahi princesses committed jauhar⁵².

SATĪ CUSTOM

Satī which is the feminine of sat “true”, also called suttee is a religious practice among some Hindu communities during this period, in which, a recently widowed Hindu Women either voluntarily or by use of force and coercion immolates herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. The term derived from the original name of the goddess Satī, also known as Daksayānī, who self immolated herself because she was unable to bear her father Daksha’s humiliation of her (living) husband Śiva.

No reliable records exist of the practice before the time of the Gupta Empire, approximately 400 AD. Manusmṛti does not mention satī at all. Manu suggests that widow “may, if she chooses, emaciate her body by subsisting on flowers, root and fruits” and declares that “if she stayed virtuous and celibate, she would go to heaven”.
The earliest epigraphic reference to satī is found at Eran, Madhya Pradesh and is dated 510 A.D., though the largest collections date from several centuries later. These stones, called devti, or sati stones, become shrines to the dead women, who were treated as an object of reverences and worship. They were most common in western India. However, it is known to have occurred in the south from the 9th c through the period of the Vijayanagara Empire. By about the 10th Century satī was known across much of the subcontinent.

The early years of 6th - 7th century were marked by Political and social uncertainties and with invasions and strife and the threat of rape and abduction. Women began to be secluded to protect them and as an extension of this reasoning immolation can be looked on as a solution. The most explicit authority of widow burning in said to be found in the Taittirya Samitita quoted in Narayaniya Upanishad- “Agni (Fire), I will observe the vow of following my husband. Do thou enable me if accomplish it to gain the heavenly mansion. I enter into thee. Inspire me with courage and take me to my Lord.” Even Alberuni, who visited India during this period, gives references related to this custom:

“If a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry another man, she has only to choose between two things either to remain a widow as long as she lives or to burn herself, & the later eventually is considered the preferable because as a widow. She is ill treated as long as she lives”

Mādhavācārya who is probably the best known of the historical figures, who justified, (was originally a minister of the court of this empire) said that this practices continued to occur after the collapse of the empire, though apparently, at the fairly low frequency after the death of Talikota, so women committed sati in north-west Karnataka about 15 sati stones brought form Vijayanagara can be found.
Kashmir was also not unknown to this practice. *Nilmata Purana*, the oldest book of Kashmir does not say anything about this aspect of society. But in Somadeva’s stories of *Kathasaritasagara*, we find several instances of this custom. Kalhana has also given plenty of reference of sati practice in Kashmir during this period of time.

After the death of their husband Śaṅkaravarman, his wife Sureendravati and two other queens cremated themselves along with his funeral pyre. But his queen, Sugandhā did not become sati because before King Śaṅkaravarman entrusted to her the protection of his son Gopālavaranman, who was a child by that time. Sugandhā was supposed to be the guardian of this minor king. When Yaśaskara died, his wife Trailokyadevi followed her husband into the funeral pyre.

Śahi princess Bimba, after the death of the son of Tunga, who happened to be her husband, entered the fire as a *sati*. According to Stein, Bimba was daughter of the Śahi, i. e. Trilocanapala. According to Stein, it was the result of this association when Śahi King Trilocanapala was facing political turmoil, he was helped by the king of Kashmir.

Queen Sūryamatī who was the wife of King Ananta burnt herself along with her husband and became *sati*. Kalhana describes her as a lady of intelligence. According to *Rājatarāṅgini* Queen Sūryamatī used her intelligence and influence even during the reign of Ananta. He always used to take advice of her. When king indulged in great extravagance, which caused him under heavy debt with foreign traders. Queen Sūryamatī saved him by giving her personal savings. After these financial troubles according to Kalhana, Queen Sūryamatī assumed full charge of the royal affairs. Ananta’s weakness of Character made it possible for Queen Sūryamatī to obtain in the year 1063 his formal abduction in favour of their son Kalasa, but he did not prove to be worthy. When conflict arose between father and son, Sūryamatī innervated and compelled King Ananta to leave hostile attitude. As a result of
all these odds, King Ananta’s position became more and more untenable and he started altercating Sūryamatī and ultimately committed suicide in the age of 61. Queen Sūryamatī decided to become sati on the pyre of her husband.

Mammanika and six other queens accompanied king Kalaśa into death. So did Kumudalekhi on the death of her husband Malla. Queen Devalikha who was the wife of Sussala also entered the fire along with her sister Taralalikha. Kalhaṇa says that Devalikha belongs to Chamba. He praises her beauty by saying that her beauty was as great as the creator could make it. Another queen of Sussala Rājalakṣmī also becomes sati on the pyre of her husband. Kalhaṇa Identifies her as the daughter of Garga, who was called “the king maker”, or who was the true power in the land.

When the body of the deceased was available, the widow burnt herself along with dead husband. When it was not available, she ascended a separate pyre. Not only was the widow expected to become Satī along with the dead body of her husband, she burned herself even separately after some days of his death as did, for instance, Jayamati who burnt herself separately a few days after Uccala’s body was cremated. The system of sati was not confined to the royal family alone. Malla, the wife of Bhogasena, the chief-justice of Uccala, followed her husband to death. Kalhaṇa testifies that the wife of Dāmara Kośṭhaka entered fire at the news of her husband’s imprisonment and thus became a sati. It is strange here that in many verses Kalhaṇa has mentioned that the servants also became Satī along with the queens. It is, thus, concluded that by this time sati was not only for widow, but any near dear who felt departed and wanted to show her gratitude could become a Satī. Like, sometimes the courtesans accompanied their masters into fire. Jayamati, a harlot of king Kalaśa and Sahaja, a concubine of king Utakaraśa,68 entered the pyre of their masters. Damodaragupta relates about prostitutes performing the sati and immolating themselves. (Kutānzmatakavya) verses. The custom of sati was so deep-rooted in the valley, that even mothers and sisters and other near
relatives burnt themselves along with their beloved deceased. Gajja cremated herself with her son Ananda.\textsuperscript{69} Vallabha with her brother-in-law named Malla\textsuperscript{70} and the sister of Dilhabhattarak with her brother.\textsuperscript{71}

Although Sati is considered to be very cruel practice of Indian Society yet Kashmir was not unknown to this practice. As Kalhana has given plenty of references related to the practice of this custom in Kashmir during the period of our study, but one interesting feature of this practice in Kashmir is that Kalhana has not given reference of forcible or any compulsion of society related to this except one incident in the eighth book of his chronicle, in which Jayamati who was the wife of king Uchchala, bribes one of her ministers to save her from becoming sati.\textsuperscript{72} But the minister does not help her and unwillingly she enters fire and becomes sati. Except this Kalhana has given many incidents related to this practice, which show that this practice was purely voluntary. In one verse, Candrakida was in argument with a Brahmin widow. During their conversation, she tells that she did not become sati because she wanted to take the revenge of her husband’s murder.\textsuperscript{73} In another storytelling, Kalhana gives other reference of the voluntary practices- Yaśaskara who ruled Kashmir from\textsuperscript{939-948} A. D. had many ladies in his seraglio. But only single one sacrificed her life and became sati.\textsuperscript{74}

**ROLE IN POLITICS**

One of the most significant and surprising feature of the early Kashmir polity was the power that women enjoyed. The picture one gets from various references is not that of servitude or deprivation, but of happy participation in different spheres of political activities. Several women have played a significant role in shaping the political history of Kashmir. Yaśovati became the first queen in Kashmir to be enthroned as a ruler even though as a regent. Queens like Sugandhā and Didda gave very impressive account of their administrative acumen. Many others, like Khadone, Amritprabha, Cakramardika, Kayanadevi, Ratnādevi, Kamal evi, built Shrines and Market

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places and towns. Candrapid's queen Kalyānadev was exalted by the king as Mahapratiharapala, some thing like the chief Chamberlain.

Queen Kalhana was the chief queen of king Jayasirıha of second Lohara dynasty. She played a brief but very significant role in the politics of the Kashmir as she was sent on a dedicated diplomatic mission of bringing about a reapprochement between Jayasirıha and Bhoja, the son of Salhana, and a rival claimant to the throne. Queen Kalhanika was the chief queen of king Jayasirıha of second Lohara dynasty. She played a brief but very significant role in the politics of the Kashmir as she was sent on a dedicated diplomatic mission of bringing about a reapprochement between Jayasirıha and Bhoja, the son of Salhana, and a rival claimant to the throne.75

Rani Yaśomati, attained enviable position which enabled her to exercise envomour influence to the extent that even at times her foes had to bow to her decree. She attained the throne in the state when chaos and pell-mell was life of Kashmir. Yaśomati or Jaśomati was the wife of king Damodar, who was the son of king Gonanda the first king mentioned in the history of Kashmir by Kalhana. Kalhana has given many references which show that women of Kashmir were quite active directly or indirectly in the political field.76

Thus, women of Kashmir played a significant role in the political field from time to time. Some of them carved out a permanent place for themselves in the political history of Kashmir through their efforts and ability, in the male domination sphere at that time like queen Sugandhā.77 She was the chief queen of king Śaṁkaravarman of the Utpala dynasty. According to Kalhana, queen Sugandhā was the first queen who not only entered the political arena but also exercised her power. Kalhana does not say anything about her political participation during the life span of her husband. But scholars believe that she must have been an educated woman. She is believed to have close administrative knowledge because immediately after husband was wounded in Urawa region, she handled the administration with the guardianship of her son Gopalavarman. When other queens of Śaṁkaravarman performed Sati along with their husband, Sugandhā chose to survive. She took over the reins of administration in the name of her minor son Gopalavarman. She fully exercised her powers for managing the affairs of the state. She was helped by her

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minister Prabhakaradeva. Kalhana says that the capture of power was also the beginning of her moral downfall. She fell in love with minister, who was killed through black magic. After two years of rule she was dethroned and Samkata, who was the son of Śaṅkaravarman, was placed on the throne but he too died after a few days.

In A. D. 904, Sugandhā assumed the royal power again, and tried to please her subjects through acts of religious merits like the construction of temples and installation of images. She successfully completed her next two years of rule but she could not handle her enemies strongly and was deposed in A. D. 906 by Tantrins and a minor son of Nitjitavarman was placed on throne. She stayed at Hushkapura for next two years and at last was imprisoned and ultimately was put to death.

Amongst the women of Kashmir who played significant role in the politics, the name Didda stands out prominently. She virtually ruled over the valley throughout the second half of the 10th century. Her influence behind the throne spans 50 years, covering the reign of her husband, King Kṣemagupta, the time of her regency, and later as sovereign ruler. The widowed Queen Didda ruled Kashmir from A. D. 958 - 1003. She was the grand-daughter of the famous Hinduśahi ruler Bhīma and a daughter of Sīrṇharaja who was the king of Lohara. She was married to Kṣemagupta. Her marriage to Kṣemagupta is seen as a landmark in the history of Kashmir, as it ultimately brought Kashmir under the rule of a dynasty hailing from Lohara. Kṣemagupta was a weak ruler and was under full influence of his queen Didda. Kalhana informs us that Didda’s influence was so deep on Kṣemagupta that he comes to be known as Diddakṣema. This is attested by the copper coins of that ruler bearing the legend di-kṣema.

After the death Of Kṣemagupta in A. D. 958 Didda become the regent of her minor son Abhimanyu. Next half a century she was busy in handling
her ministers, and frequent rebellions sponsored by the dislodged councilors. Didda was very beautiful but was apparently lame. She was able to transform herself from a comparatively unsure and politically naive persona into a ruthless, decisive and ambitious one. Her alternate bribe-and placation policy helped in quelling rebellions. She bribed her enemies and those to whom she could not buy, she punished them ruthlessly. Kalhana explicitly tells that, "those treacherous ministers, who, during sixty years from the year (39)77 (i.e. A. D. 90-92) onwards had robbed sixteen kings, from Gopala to Abhimanyu, of their dignity, lives and riches - they all together with their descendents and followers, were quickly exterminated by the angry queen Didda, with a mere terrifying frown, just as the great asuras (were exterminated) by Durga". This is very much in consonance with the description of her character as a queen who knew no mercy and had no scruples.

Her son Abhimanyu died in A. D. 972 and his son Nandigupta was enthroned. His death softened her and she took to act of piety. She established as many as 64 religious establishments and got all the old and dilapidated temples repaired. Amongst the most important of these were the two temples of god Vishnu named Abhimanyusvamin and Diddasvamin and a matha for the residence of visitors from other parts of India. But her acts were for short period. When her grandson become hindrance in her political ambitions, he was dethroned in A. D. 973 and her grandson Tribhuvana was put on throne, but he too met the same fate in A. D. 975. She now placed her grandson Bhimagupta on the throne. But soon he also became aware of his grandmother’s ambitions and as a result of his expressed concern, he was imprisoned and tortured to death in A. D. 980-81. Now she came in for front and took all powers on her name. She raised her paramour Tunga to the position of Prime-Minister. When some Brähamaṇas objected it, she bribed them and won them, which also created split in her rebels and ultimately their strength declined. She now established undisputed control over Kashmir. She
appointed her brother *Udayaraja* as heir-apparent and ensured the sovereignty of Kashmir to her Kinsmen from Lohara before her death in A. D. 1003.

Inspite of her gross licentious and immoral character, Didda had the Qualities of statesmanship and political acumen which not only helped her in maintaining her hold over Kashmir for about half a century but also entitled her to the rank amongst the ablest sovereigns of the valley.

The next name who actively participated in the state affairs was *Sūryamatī*. She was the younger daughter of king Inducandra, the lord of Jalandhara. Stein has identified Inducandra with his namesake mentioned in the genealogical list of the Katoca kings of Kangra. She was the queen of Ananta, who was the ruler of third Lohana dynasty. Though she never assumed the royal power like Sugandhā or Didda, but still played very important role in the political history of Kashmir. She used to guide her husband in matters of importance and her influence over Ananta was so great that he acted almost entirely according to her advice. After the death of Ananta’s brothers Diddapala and Anaṅgapāla, Ananta was totally under the influence of Sūryamatī. It was due to her insistent advice that Ananta abdicated in favor of their unworthy son Kalaśa. Kalhana has compared King Ananta with a ‘mirror reflecting queen Sūryamatī’.

This queen founded a temple of Siva named Gaurisvara and a maṭha named after her own name as Subhatamatha. Two more maṭha near the shrine of Vijayeśa and Amareśa were founded by her. Beside these religious foundations, she granted a number of Agraharas to Brāhmanas and also made lavish gifts of cows, gold, jewels and horses to them.

When their son Rājarāja died, both Sūryamatī and Ananta were in deep sorrow and they decided to live their rest life at the shrine of Sadāśiva. According to Kalhana, Ananta spent recklessly and very soon, not only emptied his treasury but a situation arose when he had to pawn his royal throne and diadem to a trader of *Malava* settled in Kashmir. Kalhana tells
that at this time when her husband was facing difficulties in administrating the state, she stood with him and helped him to overcome them by paying the debt of her husband from her personal savings and at the same time took over the reins of administration in her own hands. In A. D. 1063 Sūryamatī persuaded her husband to abdicate in the favour of their son Kālaśa.

Sūryamatī was aware of her son’s disposition and kept a strict control over his actions for some time. But soon because of his immoral behavior, he came into clash with his father Ananta. Ananta wanted to punish him but Sūryamatī again prevailed upon her husband and persuaded him to leave the capital. So they repaired the temple of Vijayesa. But Kālaśa did not permit them to leave and attacked them in that holy shrine and burnt down the entire place. Now Kālaśa remonstrated with his wife for having blindly followed her advice. Ananta at last committed suicide out of sheer remorse. Sūryamatī was deeply repentant and she became sati on the funeral pyre of her husband Ananta.

Thus, we can say that during the period of our study, women of Kashmir enjoyed very prominent position in society. Time to time, she seems to come in forefront and play very distinguish part not only at family level but sometimes her acts transformed the whole history of Kashmir. She enjoyed certain rights like right to proper education and right to chose husband. But the society of Kashmir was also not free from social evils like Sati and Jauhar customs, polygamy, prostitution and temple dancers or Devdāsi system etc.
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