



Akkādevī: An Exemplification of Women Empowerment and Indian Secularism

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ABSTRACT

The Western Chālukya dynasty witnessed heroic rulers like Taila II, Someśvara I and Vikramāditya VI. Apart from these mighty kings and conquerors, the dynasty also boasted regal women who made their name as able administrators of a charitable disposition. One amongst them was Akkādevī. The epigraphical sources which shed welcoming light on the life and status of Akkādevī thereby prove that she was able to create a distinct position of her own in the Chālukyan administration and possessed immense respect for different religious sects.

Keywords: Western Chālukya Dynasty, Akkādevī, Women Empowerment, Indian Secularism

Akkādevī was the daughter of Daśavarman and granddaughter of the establisher of the sovereignty of the Western Chālukya dynasty, Taila II. Her earliest reference comes from the Sūdi inscription of the reign of Tribhuvanamalla-deva (Vikramāditya V) dated in Śaka year 932, wherein she is praised for being an incarnation of Lakshmī, a wishing-jewel of immeasurable bounty, a crest-jewel of discretion, uniform in speech (*ekavākya*) and charming by reason of her virtues (*gunāda-beḍaṅgi*).¹ More importantly, the record informs us that Kisukād seventy was under her governance.² It must be pointed out that this was quite in consonance with the tradition of the Chālukya family for we have other instances of queens forming an active part of the administrative set-up. Maiḷaladevī, one of the queens of Someśvara I, was holding the important post of the governor of Banavāsi twelve-thousand in 1054 A.D.³ During Śaka year 959, we are told by the Hoṭṭūr inscription of the reign of Jayasīmha Jagadekamalla, that Akkādevī was ruling the Banavāsi twelve-thousand along with a Mahā-Manḍaleśvara Mayūravarma-deva, who is mentioned after her.⁴ She seems to have been given an additional charge by her nephew Someśvara I of the Torugare sixty and the Māsavāḍi hundred-and-forty alongside Kisukād seventy sometime in or before Śaka year 973.⁵ Undoubtedly, she must have been an able administrator for at least three Chālukyan emperors trusted her with the task of governance.

Akkādevī was equally adept at warfare. The Arasībīḍi inscription (Śaka 969)⁶ and the Sūdi inscriptions (Śaka years 973⁷ and 976⁸) of the reign of Someśvara I glorify her by stating that her foot-lotuses were touched by the diadems of opponent kings. In the Belūr inscription of the time of Jayasīmha Jagadekamalla (Śaka year 944), she is hailed for destroying hostile kings and is called *Raṇabhairavi*.⁹ Sometime before 1047 A.D., at the head of an army, she laid siege to the fort of Gokāge in the Belgaum district.¹⁰ She is seen staying in Konkana even three years later restoring peace in the area.¹¹ Under her leadership, seven royal ministers in concert with the Commissioner of the County and other administrative officials granted to the eight Setṭhis and eighty households a renewal of their corporate constitution, which had partly been broken down in the stress of the war with the Cholas.¹² This war seems to have been the same in which her subordinate Mahāsāmanta Ajarasa claimed victory.¹³ In the same year a little later, according to V.V. Sastri, she is found sending Ajarasa on some enemy in the neighbourhood.¹⁴ J.K. Kamat observes that just like Ajarasa, who had defeated many kings, a large number of soldiers and chiefs were proud to acknowledge Akkādevī as their ruler.¹⁵ Her marriage to a Kādamba ruler¹⁶ must have also re-strengthened Kādamba loyalty to the Chālukyas.

Akkādevī's respect for different religious sects becomes evident from the inscriptions which mention her. Her charitable disposition was enjoyed by both Brāhmanas¹⁷ and ascetics. The Arasībīḍi inscription records a land grant made to the Goṇada-beḍaṅgi Jaina temple at Vikramapura, for the maintenance of the establishment and of the attached friars and nuns.¹⁸ This name of the temple is evidently derived from Akkādevī's title *gunāda-beḍaṅgiyar*, and shows that the temple was under her special patronage.¹⁹ She also seems to have extended a similar patronage to a Śaiva temple where the presiding God was named Akkeśvara.²⁰ She also assigned to the monastery of the God Keśaveśvara (Śiva) constructed by Permāḍi Kesi Gāvunḍa of Poṭṭiyūr, the fee due to her on the occasion of "laving the feet" of the ascetic lady Gaṅgikabbe.²¹ The Belūr inscription of the time of Jayasīmha Jagadekamalla proves that Akkādevī embodied the essence of religious harmony. The inscription states that Akkādevī practiced the religious observances prescribed by the rituals of Jina and Buddha, as well as those of Viṣṇu and Śiva.²² It records that she made a grant of the Perūr agrahāra,

and caused to be built there “a hall of the Traipurushas”, the Elders of which granted some land for the purpose of feeding and clothing students.²³ She was known as the “Joy of the student community” (*akhila vidyārthi janāvaḥinandinī*).²⁴

Thus, Akkādevī’s secular stance, able governance and fierce attitude elicits the mention of her name alongside the famous Western Chālukya emperors.

Notes and References:

1. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 75-77.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
3. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXII, p. 188.
4. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVI, pp. 75-81.
5. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 77-80.
6. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII, pp. 121-123.
7. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 77-80.
8. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 80-83.
9. *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 270-275.
10. D.C. Ganguly, “Some Aspects of the Position of Women in Ancient India”, in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1962, p. 599.
11. *Journal of Oriental Research (Madras)*, Vol. XVI, p. 144.
12. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 77-80.
13. C.R. Krishnamacharlu, R.S. Panchamukhi & N.L. Rao, *Bombay Karnatak Inscriptions*, Vol. I, Part 1, Government Press, Madras, 1940, p. 82.
14. *Journal of Oriental Research (Madras)*, Vol. XVI, p. 144.
15. J.K. Kamat, *Social Life in Medieval Karnāṭaka*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p. 107.
16. Sūḍi inscription of the reign of Trailōkyamalla Someśvara I (Śaka year 980) refers to Akkādevī as the mother of the Kādamba king Toyimadeva who was a Mahā-Maṇḍaleśvara under the Chālukyan emperor (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVI, pp. 81-88).
17. Sūḍi inscription of the reign of Tribhuvanamalla-deva Vikramāditya V (Śaka year 932) informs that the laic administration under Akkādevī leased out certain specified estates to the heads of the Brāhmaṇ community (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 75-77).
18. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII, pp. 121-123.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 121, fn. 2.
20. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, pp. 80-83.
21. *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVI, p. 88.
22. *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 270-275.
23. *Ibid.*
24. J.K. Kamat, *Social Life in Medieval Karnāṭaka*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1980, p. 107.