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## **SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN EARLY KASHMIR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this research paper is to acquire an understanding of the status of women in ancient Kashmir. Women were treated with respect and dignity in ancient times. There were women rishis during this time, and they were highly respected. Women were treated with respect in royal households, and they played an important role in decision-making and administrative functions. They were educated in all areas and also played a significant role in politics. The birth of a girl child was not appreciated among the economically disadvantaged sections of society, and preference was given to male children. In Kashmir, there is no mention of women being sequestered or veiled, and she moves around freely, emulating the free-flowing sparkling waters of her country's springs. According to Kalhana's depiction of society in his chronicle, women had moved from the domestic to the political arena by this time. The queens had their own treasures and were heavily involved in the state's affairs. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, women's position in ancient Kashmir and the position of women in the Hindu dharma.

**Keywords:** Education, Family, Politics, Society, Women, Position, old Kashmiri texts, Nilmata Purana

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Women were revered in ancient India, and they made significant contributions to the welfare of the family and society. The women were given a high social status, which made them feel happy and fulfilled. They were given the opportunity to improve their intellectual and spiritual abilities. Many women rishis existed during this time. Polygamy was popular among the upper classes, but monogamy was more common. Sati and child marriage were not common practises. Women were revered and appreciated in Rig Vedic society, but they were discriminated against in the later Vedic period. Discrimination was mostly observed in terms of obtaining an education as well as other rights and facilities. With the prevalence of child marriage, sati, polygamy, and the purdah system, women's status has deteriorated even further. In the epics and puranas, women were primarily associated with property.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

The main objective of this research is to acquire an understanding of the status of women in ancient Kashmir.

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### **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study is a type of archival or primary research which involves diverse evidence from J&K state and Indian National archival records. It has been hunted through the 15 of documents relevant to the status of women in the different periods of history. This study lies at the heart of academic and other forms of original historical studies. Accordingly, the data are of library type and the method is analytical and exploratory. The contribution of the current study is identifying the status of women and its gradual evolution.

As Kashmir's oldest religious text, the Nilmata, allows her to participate in nearly all of the festivals and religious ceremonies. With her husband, children, servants, and husband's friends, she sits by the sacred fire on Kumauni-moonlit Mahotsava's night. Even so, it remains to be seen how much of an active participant she is in the musical and dramatic performances that took place that night. Not only does she attend home festivals, but she also participates in outdoor festivals, where she can be seen having a good time. There are no women at home on a day when the fields are ploughed and seeds are sown in a celebration that includes music, dancing and feasting for everyone. In ancient Kashmiri religion, the goddesses held prominent positions because of the high social status enjoyed by women at the time. The gods and their consorts are frequently mentioned. Sakra has fun with Saci, Visnu rests his feet on Laksmi's lap, Parvati leads Siva in worship, Rama's birthday is a time to honour Sita, and Kisna's wife is honoured on her lord's birthday. The goddesses' mothers are also mentioned. In addition to these, there are numerous female deities. Among the many female deities revered by the people of Kashmir are Asokika (the mother goddess), Syama (the goddess of wealth and prosperity), Durga (the mother goddess of destruction), Sri (the mother goddess of compassion), Karisini (the mother goddess of compassion), Bheda (the mother goddess of birth) and Kapinjal (the mother goddess of death and destruction). Uma, the goddess of Kashmir's rivers, is also a deity. The authenticity of the Nilmata's account is

demonstrated by the numerous Kashmiri writers who have backed it up. Bilhana demonstrates the literary prowess of Kashmiri women. There are numerous instances in the Rajatarangini that demonstrate the higher status accorded to women in religious and political circles.

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### 3. EDUCATION

Women were encouraged towards attainment of education, the reason being, they were the ones, who were merely responsible for the well-being of the family and community. They rendered a significant contribution in terms of areas such as, implementation of household responsibilities, health care, child development, taking care of the needs and requirements of the elderly family members, preservation of the environment and so forth. The women were vested with the responsibility of making provision of knowledge in terms of morals and ethics to the individuals. In the final canto of his "Life of Vikramankadeva," the Chalukya King Paramadi's Poet Laureate Bilhana (11th century A.D.) says that the women of Kashmir spoke Sanskrit and Prakrit fluently while describing his homeland. There is, however, evidence to suggest that lower-caste women were not afforded this privilege and had to make do with their native language. It is clear from the Kuttanimata Kavya that women of higher caste and wealth were educated in the sexual sciences of Vatsyana, Dattaka, Viuaputra, and Rajaputra, as well as the art of dancing as taught by Bharata and music as demonstrated by Dantila, in the works of Dantila. In addition, they were required to take classes in botany, painting, needlework, woodworking, clay modelling, and cooking, as well as receive hands-on training in instruments of music and vocal and dance performance skills. So it's no surprise that women in Kashmir are just as engaged in public service as men. There's no hint that women are kept in the shadows or ignored. The use of the veil was completely absent from the scene. In Harsa's court, for example, we see women sitting with other officials and ministers. On the battlefield, they are fighting alongside both foot and horse-mounted soldiers. Vijaymalla's brave wife, clinging to him on his horse as he fled after the failed coup against his brother, King Harsa, kept the pursuers at bay. To reach the Dard country, they and their horse swam across the inundated Vitasta near Shadipur together. In addition to Didda and Kota Rani, we have examples of bravery.

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### 4. MARRIAGE

Marriage is a big deal for women. Matrimony is followed by maternity, which makes women helpless and dependent on their husbands. Marriage affects a woman's fate more than a man's. A bad marriage is worse than a painful chain for a woman. So women should be mature enough to understand. The Nilmata Purana and the Rajatarangini reveal the role of women in Kashmiri society. Society respected married women. On Iramanjari-Pujana, a flower festival, housewives received flowers and garlands. Other occasions honoured the housewives. The homeowner celebrated the new snowfall with them.

Kalhana's Rajatarangini doesn't mention child marriage. Many references show women married after puberty. Ksemendra's Desopadesa story may indicate that girls married as adults. References indicate that marriages were either based on a marriageable match or arranged by parents. Some Rajatarangini verses show that political marriages were sometimes done with the bride and groom's consent. In one verse, Kalhana mentions King Aryaraja's Svayanvara, where Princess Amitaprabha gave him the bridegroom's garland.

King Jayapida's only daughter married Prince Kallata of Kamala. Although not fully accepted by society, the Rajatarangini of Kalhana references inter-caste marriages. In a passage about Sussala's fight for the throne, we learn that the wife of his ally, the powerful Damara lord Gargacandra, brought her two young daughters; one was married to Sussala and the other to his son Jayasinha. It brings inter-caste marriages. Damara Kosuhaka married a Rajput. Cakravarman married Domba girls and made them queens. Nilmata Purana and Rajatarangini make no mention of dowry. Dower was not unknown in Kashmiri society at the time. If dowry existed, it must have been voluntary to avoid the writers' attention.

Virtuous wives were expected. She must be loyal to her husband, manage the household, etc. In Kashmir, women could only marry once. Widows were expected to live simply after their husband's death. They couldn't wear ornaments or beautiful dresses. Widows and other women could remarry, though. Pratapaditya II married a wealthy merchant's wife. Since the Hindu joint family system is universal, the daughter-in-law is under her mother-in-law's supervision. Queen Suryamati, for example, made her son's wives clean the palace by hand.

Polygamy was respectable from the Gupta period on. The polygamous Hunas of Central Asia, who invaded Kashmir in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., left a mark on Kashmiri society. The influence of the Hunas on the local populace, which also influenced them, to the point of their total absorption in the Indian community, is clearly brought out by Kalhana, who says that "Brahmanas from Gandhara, resembling himself in their habits and truly the lowest of the twice-born, accepted agraharas from them." By then, polygamy was common in Kashmir. Kalhana's work shows that the king and nobility were polygamous. The kings' seraglios were full of queens, concubines, and aristocrats followed their example. Polyandry wasn't popular, but some aboriginal tribes in Kashmir's hill states may have practised it.

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### 5. PROPERTY RIGHTS

By the 12th century, a woman's right to an equal share of her husband's property was restored. Several things made it clear that women's property rights were getting better in general. Because of invasions from other countries, the central government fell apart, and a lot of small states formed. In different parts of India, local customs began to change the laws about inheritance. The moral fibre of society started to break down, and women spent more and more time at home. They needed their rights to be protected in a more formal way. Women in Kashmir probably had some property rights and their own legal status during this time. A part of the Rajatarangini seems to show that after her husband died, the widow probably got his land and buildings instead of his sons. Another helpful reference by Kalhana shows that women owned their own property. When he talks about the top Damara lords who stayed neutral during the rebellion led by Bhoja, another pretender to Jayasinha's throne, he also talks about a Damara woman who had her own fief. In another passage, it seems to be made clear that women owned land estates. In one of his works, Ksemendra also talks about a situation in

which a prostitute becomes the mistress of a rich man and, because she was living with him like he was her husband, she gets his property when he dies. The crown's decision gave her the right to own the property.

We can't deny that by this time, things were getting worse for women. In Kalhana's words, women are just things to look at and touch. It seems that having a daughter was rarely better than having a son. From what we know about history, the birth of a son was seen as a "saviour or protector in both worlds," and the mothers and their husbands thought it was lucky to be with him. Nilmata talks about a Naga god named Naga-Bahuputra. This god was worshipped so that people could have many sons. But it's important to note that female infanticide has never been a part of Kashmiri culture in the past. Kalhana gives a lot of proof that certain groups of women are very immoral and have weak morals. In Rajatarangini, by Kalhana, the sensual excesses of the palace and court women are described in great detail. The works of Ksemendra and Damodargupta can also be used to find proof of this. At this point in time, it looks like prostitution was very common. They were often used to decorate the King's private rooms and were often the real power behind the throne. The Rajatarangini makes a lot of references to courtesans when talking about festivals. This shows that prostitution was legal in the society of that time. The Rajatarangini doesn't say anything bad about courtesans. On the other hand, the important ones have to visit the king on the day of his coronation and take part in the ceremonies, which shows how high up in politics they are. There were also many other bad things in society, like the sati and jauahar customs and the dancing girls (Devadasis) who were tied to temples, among other things.

## 6. ROLE IN POLITICS

In politics, women played a prominent role. Megasthenes mentioned the Pandya women carrying out the administrative functions. Ancient India spans a vast period, 2500 B.C. to 250 B.C. Archaeology, ancient texts and artefacts are being used to reconstruct the lives of women. The earliest materials that were found by the archaeological excavations focus upon the worship of goddesses. The earliest recorded religious texts (1500 B.C.) call on the life-giving power of the goddesses to give life and to nurture and sustain it in an efficient manner. After the Aryan invasion, and the development of Hinduism and then Buddhism, India's extant written texts add to the knowledge of the individuals to a major extent. Women belonging to the aristocratic classes were provided with the opportunities to hone their educational skills and abilities and took pleasure in number of other aspects. But the common women, were the ones, who experienced deprivation, ignominy and impediments. Women's power was one of the most significant and surprising aspects of the early Kashmiri polity. Various references paint a picture of happy participation in various spheres of political activities, rather than one of servitude or deprivation. Several women have played pivotal roles in shaping Kashmir's political history. Even though she was only a regent, Yasovati became the first queen in Kashmir to be enthroned as a ruler. Sugandha and Didda, for example, made a strong case for their administrative abilities. Khadone, Amritprabha, Cakramardika, Kayanadevi, Ratnadevi, and Kamala Devi were among those who built Shrines, Marketplaces, and towns. The king elevated Candrapid's queen Kalyanadevi to Mahapratiharapala, a position similar to that of Chief Chamberlain. Queen Kalhanika was the chief queen of the second Lohara dynasty's king Jayasinha. She had a brief but significant role in Kashmir politics when she was dispatched on a dedicated diplomatic mission to bring Jayasinha and Bhoja, Salhana's son and a rival claimant to the throne, back together. Rani Yasomati rose to a position of power that allowed her to exert enviable influence to the point where even her enemies had to submit to her orders. She ascended to the throne in a state where life was chaotic and pell-mell. King Damodar's wife, Yasomati or Jasomati, was the daughter of King Gonanda, the first king mentioned in Kalhana's history of Kashmir. Kalhana has provided numerous references that show Kashmiri women were active in politics, either directly or indirectly.

As a result, Kashmiri women have occasionally played a significant role in politics. Some of them, like queen Sugandha, carved a permanent place for themselves in Kashmir's political history through their efforts and abilities in the male dominance sphere at the time. She was the chief queen of the Utpala dynasty's king Sankaravarman. Queen Sugandha, according to Kalhana, was the first queen to enter the political arena and exercise her power. Kalhana makes no mention of her political participation during her husband's lifetime. Scholars, on the other hand, believe she was a well-educated woman. She is thought to have extensive administrative experience because, after her husband was wounded in the Urawa region, she took over the administration under the supervision of her son Gopalavarman. Sugandha chose to live when the other queens of Sankaravarman performed Sati with their husbands. In the name of her minor son Gopalavarman, she assumed control of the administration. She fully exercised her authority over the state's affairs. Prabhakaradeva, her minister, aided her. Kalhana claims that gaining power marked the start of her moral decline. She was in love with a minister who was assassinated by black magic. She was dethroned after two years and Samkata, Sankaravarman's son, was installed on the throne, but he too died after a few days. Sugandha reclaimed the throne in A.D. 904 and attempted to appease her subjects through religious merits such as temple construction and image installation. She successfully completed her next two years of rule, but she was deposed by Tantrins in A. D. 906 and a minor son of Nitjitavarman was installed on the throne. She stayed at Hushkapura for the next two years before being imprisoned and eventually executed. Didda is a prominent name among the women of Kashmir who have played significant roles in politics. Throughout the second half of the 10th century, she effectively ruled the valley. Her influence on the throne spans 50 years, including her husband's reign, King Ksemagupta's regency, and later as sovereign ruler. From 958 to 1003, the widowed Queen Didda ruled Kashmir. She was the granddaughter of the legendary Hindusahi ruler Bhma and the daughter of Lohara's king, Sinharaja. Ksemagupta was her husband. Her marriage to Ksemagupta is regarded as a watershed moment in Kashmir's history, as it brought Kashmir under the control of a Lohara dynasty. Ksemagupta was a weak ruler who was completely dominated by his queen Didda. Didda's influence on Ksemagupta was so strong that he became known as Diddaksema, according to Kalhana. The copper coins of that ruler, which bear the legend di- kshema, attest to this. Didda became the regent of her minor son Abhimanyu after Ksemagupta died in A. D. 958. She spent the next half-century dealing with her ministers and frequent rebellions led by disgruntled councillors. Didda was stunning, but she appeared to be a bore. She was able to shift from a hesitant and politically naive persona to one that was ruthless, decisive, and ambitious. Her alternate policy of bribes and appeasement was effective in quelling rebellions. She bribed her enemies, and those she couldn't bribe, she ruthlessly punished. "Those treacherous ministers, who, during sixty years from the year. A. D. 901-02 onwards had robbed sixteen kings, from Gopala to Abhimanyu, of their dignity, lives, and richest they all together with their descendants and followers, were quickly exterminated by the angry queen Didda, with a mere terrifying frown, just as the great asuras (were exterminated) by Durga," says This is very much in line with her character being described as a queen who had no mercy and no scruples. In the year 972, her son Abhimanyu died and was succeeded by his son Nandigupta. His death softened her, and she began to perform religious acts. She established 64 religious institutions and repaired all of the old and dilapidated temples. The two temples of god Vishnu named Abhimanyusvamin and Diddasvamin, as well as a mauha for visitors from other parts of India, were among the most important of these. Her actions,

however, were only temporary. When her grandson became a hindrance to her political ambitions, he was dethroned in 973, and her grandson Tribhuvana was installed on the throne, but he too died in 975. Bhimagupta, her grandson, was now seated on the throne. But he soon learned of his grandmother's ambitions, and as a result of his concern, he was imprisoned and tortured to death in the year 980-81. Now she came forward and claimed all of the power in her name. Tunga, her lover, was promoted to Prime Minister by her.

When some Brahmanas objected, she bribed them and won them over, causing her rebels to split and their strength to dwindle. She has now taken complete control of Kashmir. Before her death in A. D. 1003, she appointed her brother Udayaraja as heir apparent and ensured the sovereignty of Kashmir to her Lohara Kinsmen. Despite her hedonistic and immoral nature, Didda possessed statesmanship and political acumen that not only enabled her to retain control of Kashmir for nearly half a century, but also elevated her to the ranks of the valley's most capable rulers. Suryamati was the next person who actively participated in state affairs. She was the younger daughter of Jalandhara's lord, King Inducandra. Inducandra has been linked to his namesake in the Katoca kings of Kangra genealogical list. She was the queen of Ananta, the third Lohara dynasty's ruler. Despite the fact that she never assumed royal power like Sugandha or Didda, she played a significant role in Kashmir's political history. She used to advise her husband on important matters, and her influence over Ananta was so strong that he almost always followed her advice. Ananta was completely influenced by Suryamati after the death of his brothers Diddapala and Anangapala. Ananta abdicated in favour of their unworthy son Kalasa due to her insistent advice. King Ananta has been compared to a "mirror reflecting queen Suryamati" by Kalhana. This queen established a Siva temple named Gaurisvara and a mauha named Subhatamauha after her own name. She founded two more mauhas near the shrines of Vijayesa and Amaresa. She also gave Brahmanas a number of Agraharas and lavish gifts of cows, gold, jewels, and horses in addition to these religious foundations. Suryamati and Ananta were devastated when their son Rajaraja died, and they decided to spend the rest of their lives at Sadasiva's shrine. According to Kalhana, Ananta spent irresponsibly and quickly depleted his treasury to the point where he had to pawn his royal throne and diadem to a Malava trader in Kashmir. Kalhana explains As a result, we can conclude that Kashmiri women held a prominent position in society during the period of our research. She appears to rise to the fore from time to time and play an important role not only in her family, but her actions have also changed the course of Kashmir's history. She had certain rights, such as the right to a good education and the right to choose her husband. However, social ills such as Sati and Jauhar customs, polygamy, prostitution, temple dancers, and the Devdasi system were all present in Kashmiri society.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In ancient Kashmir, women were given recognition and significance and also constraints were imposed upon them. The women belonging to upper castes and wealthy families rendered a significant contribution in improving the well-being of the family and community. They were provided with educational opportunities, they were engaged in teaching professions and also developed their skills and abilities in carrying out the administrative and political functions. Women experienced number of factors that imposed detrimental effects upon their well-being. These include, illiteracy, forced child marriage, polygamy and sati. They were not permitted to make any decisions on their own and were dependent upon the male members of the family. The status of women in early Kashmir experienced positive as well as negative effects. They were provided with opportunities as well as experienced discriminatory treatment. There was a connection between the status of women and their economic position. This in turn is dependent upon the rights and opportunities for rendering an effective contribution in economic activities. In addition, men and women were engaged in jobs, such as weaving, craftsmanship, pottery making and so forth. Hence, women were normally married off at an early age, they were deprived of acquiring education, they were meant to implement the household responsibilities and take care of the needs and requirements of the family members. Women usually remained within the house, as they primarily dedicated themselves towards the management of the household. Apart from these, they were engaged in the manufacturing and production processes to supplement family income.

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