



## An estimate of women in Kādambarī and Harṣacarita

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### Abstract

In the ancient India, the position of women was considered to be very important and she was attributed to the epitome of power, wealth, love, care and sacrifice. She was no doubt a model par excellence of the power goddess, but at the same time was a source of the family life. The society got entangled with the women and evolved around her in all situations what so ever. Her sacrifice is still a point of discussion even in modern days. This paper will highlight all the above mentioned views.

**Keywords:** dowry system, bride – groom, married life, system of *satī*, *puṛḍā* system, society

### Introduction

Women in the beautiful creation of the God ever created. She is represented as the power of the *Śakti*. She is the doer of all our daily activities and with her sacrifice no family can sustain. The great service rendered by women in the various vocations of life as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, teachers, friends etc. has contributed substantially to march of civilization everywhere in human society and consequently in every social Organization. Women have been considered only in highly cultured societies. In the opinion of many, the best means of judging the standard of that society is based on its position of women. Let's watch Bāṇa's prose works in this context.

### 1. Marriage

Marriage is the basic criteria for family sustenance. It is considered as very sacred. The birth of a girl has ever been a source of much anxiety and pain to the Hindus and this anxiety increased when the girl reached the age of marriage. In the Harṣacarita, Prabhākara-vardhana gives expression to this fact very beautifully and brings out three pertinent facts regarding a Hindu girl's marriage. These are as follows:

i) The birth of a girl was the parent's concern and it put them to the greatest anxiety <sup>[1]</sup>, ii) That the bride – groom was generally an out-sider, many times wholly unconnected by blood with girl's parents and iii) that the people shed tears of chagrin when a daughter was born even though she was as much entitled to her parent's affection as a son <sup>[2]</sup>.

A growing daughter casts her father in the whirlpool of gloom, as a rising river casts its bank in a whirlpool.

*udvegamaḥāvartte pātayati payodharo nmanakāle/  
saridiva taṭamanuvarṣa vivardhanā sutā pitaram//* (H.C., 4.5)

The daughter is accepted as *Laxmī* in all houses as she goes to grow the husband's house.

### 2. Dowry System

Dowry system in the sense of something already promised was perhaps unknown. But large sums of money were given along with the girl at the time of her marriage. Our sources of information record that during the age of Harṣa, dowry was definitely given at the time of marriage ceremony and the parents were required to offer dowry in order to find out the grooms <sup>[3]</sup>. In our society, dowry was considered as the greatest wealth to be given to the daughter while going for marriage.

Bāṇa has thrown some light on Prabhākara-Vardhana. For instance, it is said that with his daughter Rājyaśrī-horses, elephants, ornaments and costly cosmetics were given. In Harṣa-carita, Bāṇa describes that:

*“nitupyamāṇāḥ youtukyogyāḥ mātāṅgāḥ turāṅgātaraṅgitāṅgam”*

Where the courtyard was surging with horses and elephants that were being examined as suitable bridal gifts as a kind of ..... *strīdhanāḥ*. Dowry is a voluntary gift from the family of a girl.

In the *Samāraiccakahā* the description of a bride shows that she was fully decorated with costly costumes and ornaments before marriage and carried all of them to her husband's house after marriage. Many a cases, the marriage is accepted as the pure state of meeting two minds in to one and sharing the burdens of future.

### 3. Forms of Marriage

Of the eight traditional forms of marriage first four i.e. *Brāhma*, *Daiva*, *Ārṣa* and *Prājāpatya* were regarded commendable for the people of all castes. *Gāndharva* and *Rākṣasa* were good for the *Kṣatriyas* alone. *Āsura* and *Paiśāca* were unanimously condemned. Harṣa's *Priyadarśikā* recognizes the legality of *Gāndharva* marriage. In *Kādambarī* when the heroine regards her inability to tell her parents about her love towards *Candrāpīḍa*, *Patralekhā* reminds her that there were many instances of girls who had themselves chosen their lords; otherwise the ordinance of *svayamvara* would have been meaningless. In *Harṣacarita* it was the parents' duty to select a good husband for the daughter. The mother, says *Rājyaśrī's* mother, are nothing more than nurses. In bestowing them the father is the final authority <sup>[4]</sup>.

Sometimes the girls may have remained unmarried for a long period. In the *Harṣacarita* we have reference even to a *jaratkumārī* i.e. an old maiden. In the entire literature of *Bāṇa* and *Harṣa*, we do not find a single example of the *Svayamvara* being performed. The kings mostly selected the bridegrooms through *svayambara* process.

### 4. Re-Marriage of Widows

Yuan Chung is not clear in his description pertaining to the re-marriage of widows. He says a woman never allows a second marriage <sup>[5]</sup>. It was not a custom to remarry again as it was strictly prohibited.

### 5. Married Life

The mutual relations between husband and wife were harmonious and cordial. This was mainly based on our religious out-look towards married life. *Manu* declares that mutual fidelity till death is the essence of the highest *Dharma* for husband and wife. The true aim of marriage in the Hindu society is the realization of the permanent and unbreakable partnership. This is but natural for all the women of all ages and all classes and of all the countries. It is based on human instincts. *Ratnāvalī* and *Priyadarśikā* offer best examples of this type. There is nothing abnormal in it. All the women characters in the contemporary literature represent noble ideals of married life. King *Prabhākara Vardhana* loved his wife sincerely and devotedly and sought her advice on almost all the major family issues. To *Yaśomatī* her husband was "the fond of life and joy on the earth" <sup>[6]</sup>, and when his end approached, she ended her own life in order to die un-widowed. This was supposed to be the highest and aims of one's life. It was considered as the epitome of one's sacrifice.

### 6. The System of Satī

The *Satī* system in India is a familiar phenomenon. The custom of *Satī* goes back to the age of *Ṛg-Veda*. Two contradictory views seem to have prevailed concerning *satī* in *Bāṇa's* time and curiously enough both of these are voiced by *Bāṇa*. The out-door view finds expression in the *Harṣacarita*. A little before the death of *Harṣa's* father *Prabhākara-Vardhana's* queen *Yaśomatī* decided to burn herself. *P.V.Kane* asserts that a loving (*anuraktā*) woman would enter fire before her husband dies. *Yośomatī* said the fire of sorrow for my husband is fed up by the fuel of imperishable love while ordinary fire is fed with fuel that may be exhausted. I wish to abide in this world not in flesh and blood but in the glory of widows. *Harṣa* first tried to dissuade her but finding her reasoning unanswerable allowed her to be a *satī*. *Rājyaśrī* had also expressed a similar feeling by saying. "A husband or a son is a woman's true support, but to those who are deprived of both, it is immodesty even to continue to live as mere fuel for the fire of misery."

Buddhists were against the *satī* system. *Rājyaśrī's* decision was changed only after the persuasion of the great Buddhist sage *Divākaramitra*.

In the *Priyadarśikā* we read of the wives of *Vindhyaketu* burning themselves after their husband's death in a battle. The fundamental system of marriage was to maintain continuity of growth of family tradition through dedication and sacrifice.

### 7. Purdā

Women were valuable properties of society for which they have to be protected. We cannot positively determine the existence of the *Purdā* system during *Harṣa's* period. The words *Avarodhikā* and *Avarodhavadhū* employed in our literature connote that women were not allowed any social freedom. *Bāṇa* informs that village wives hastened to the neighboring villages with baskets filled with various forest flowers. *Yuan Chaunag* studies that *Harṣa's* sister attended his court without any veil. The strictness of *Purdā* was generally relaxed on festive occasions. Everyone was allowed on the occasions of *Harṣa's* birth to enter the inner apartments of the place without any consideration of his being a servant or a master, old or young and so on. Besides these, *Yaśomatī* accompanied her husband on almost all important occasions. *Bāṇa* informs that *Yośomatī* gave certain important instructions to the ministers before she plunged into the fire to die unwidowed. These evidences proved that there was no strictness of *Purdā* in *Harṣa's* time. Though the protection of women was very much in demand, the society protected them through a strong support from family life.

### 8. Education

Women Education was not very much in focus in the then society. In spite of their confinement within the four walls of the house women were educated. *Rājyaśrī* who was distinguished for the knowledge of the *Sammatīya* school of Buddhists, attended the general council of *Harṣa* where scholars debated on questions of Philosophy. Similar education and training was also given to *Kādambarī*. We are informed that the supposed daughter of

Vindhya ketu was taught everything that a noble damsel should know. Rājyaśrī was also an expert in dance, music etc, as it is described in the 4<sup>th</sup> act of *Harṣacarita nṛtyagītādiṣu sakalāsu kalāsu*. The education was not so formal. It was handed down through family tradition and there by the children were also got education automatically.

### 9. Status of Women

The position of women was very significant. They were treated as wealth of the family. The attitude of the people of a particular community towards women has an important and great social significance in any society and any period. Indian women have an important and great social significance in any society significance in any period. Indian women of that period possessed a high standard of morality. They had an honorable status and possessed a commendable character.

Motherhood is the culmination of the noble needs, sincere love, sacrifice, sufferings, and devotion for which womankind has due claim for reverence and worship. Even the impact of science and technology could bring no change in this instinct. An ideal was Yaśomatī who is described by Bāṇa as:

*cakravākamayīpatipremṇi, madirāmayīva vilāseṣu, vṛṣṭimayīva bhṛtyeṣu, vetasamayīva gurūṣu, prāyaścitta  
suddhiriva strīvasya, praṇāma praṇasya viśrambhasya dharmasya sukhasya ca bhūmi.*

(*Harṣacarita*, ch,4,p.2)

She was full of *Amṛta* (nectar) to the thirsty. She was a *vetas* towards her elders. *Vetas* is a symbol of humility. It bends when a flood sweeps down upon it. She was as if the penance –purity of woman-hood. She was the centre of the life king; she was the very life of looking. A wife is the source of dharmācāraṇa as said by *Āpastamba*, -*dharmaprajāsampatti, prayojanam dārsaṅgrahasya*.

The status is more emphasized as “*ayajña vā yo 'patnīkaḥ*”, *taittirīya brāhmaṇaḥ*, III.3.3.1.

The *Mahābhārata* says that the wife is the source of *trivarga* (*Dharma, Artha, Kāma*).

*ardhā bhāryā, manuṣyasya bhāryā śreṣṭhatamā sakhā/  
bhāryā mūlam trivargasya bhāryā mūlam tariṣyataḥ//*

(*Mahābhārata, Ādiparva*, 74.40)

### Conclusion

Indian women got a good status in society. In ancient time, they were regarded as the centre of learning, source of energy and embodiment of wealth and beauty. Their position in society was very high. The society regarded and accepted women to be strong enough to be kind hearted and morally strong. Thus, it can be safely concluded that general attitude of the society towards the women was full of respect and they were given their due place in the domestic social and religious spheres of life.

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