
Queen Yasovati: A Descriptive Study on her Leadership in the Kingdom of Kashmir

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Abstract: *The contribution that Queen Yasovati made to the establishment of women's rule in Kashmir is the subject of this study. In Kashmir, women have traditionally enjoyed a standing that is more equal to that of men than in other parts of the world; as a result, four of them have risen to prominence as notable rulers. In Kalhana's Rajatarngini, three well-known female rulers are discussed: "Yasovati of the Gonda dynasty, Sugandha (904-906 AD) of the Utpala dynasty, and Didda (980-1003 AD) of the Lohara dynasty." Yasovati belonged to the Gonda dynasty, while Sugandha and Didda both ruled over the Utpala. Kota Rani was the fourth queen to rule Kashmir, and she was also the last queen to do so. But the first queen monarch of Kashmir, Yasovati, who formalised the rule of women in Kashmir and built the framework for it, has been forgotten by historians throughout history. This queen deserves to be remembered since she played an important and active role in the history of Kashmir; however, her accomplishments as a woman in a position of power were not given any consideration at the time.*

Keywords: *Didda, Kota Rani, Sugandha, Yasovati.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout ancient India, women were esteemed, and their contributions to the welfare of the family and the community were vital. The elevated social standing of the ladies helped them feel good about themselves and gave them a sense of purpose. In order to develop their intellectual and spiritual capacities, they were provided with the chance. During this period, there were several female rishis. In the higher classes, polygamy was widespread, although monogamy was more prevalent. There were no widespread practises of sati and child marriage at the time. In Rig Vedic culture, women were cherished and valued, but in the later Vedic era, they were discriminated against. When it came to getting an education and other rights and privileges, we saw the greatest discrimination. Women's standing has worsened even more as a result of the prevalence of practises like as child marriage, sati, polygamy, and the purdah system. Epic and Purana stories depicted women as largely linked to property.



Since its beginning, Kashmir has been home to many great poets and other luminaries who have left behind a rich cultural legacy. Its monarchs restored its natural splendour by erecting world-famous landmarks and beautiful gardens, which are now frequented by throngs of tourists. It's also worth pointing out that Kashmir has generated literature that will be preserved for a long time and pass on its wisdom to succeeding generations. It's also full of myths and legends dating all the way back to time immemorial. There are only a few regions in north India that have produced historians of great grade in ancient times: Kashmir. During the reign of King Jaysimha of the second Lohara dynasty, poet historian Kalhana authored *Rajatarangini*, a historical novel (1149-50). When he wrote *Rajatarnagini*, he defied the long-held belief that Indian history was written by Muslims. Additionally, women had a fair level of freedom in the region and some became powerful rulers.

We do know, however, that women monarchs have rarely risen to power in the traditional route. There were various reasons for this, including social taboos, patriarchy, and the widespread conviction that men alone are capable of leading others. It is also important to note that men exploited religious scriptures and other crucial instruments, such as the ideology of patriarchy and monarchy, to keep women subordinate. Manu went so far as to claim that women are not subject to the law of primogeniture when it comes to the succession of monarchs. It wasn't easy for women to be accepted as rulers in a society when they were viewed as secondary citizens.

In addition to educational and non-educational institutions, a number of essays, articles, and novels have been published on various elements of Ancient Kashmir. This isn't the only reason why there are an infinite number of articles, essays, and books produced by a wide variety of authors from any university. Some research is also done at the university level, such as those leading to a Ph.D. or M.Phil. This is despite the fact that many aspects of ancient and early mediaeval Kashmiri women's rule remain obscure and unexplored by historians and authors; it is expected that more research into Kashmir's social and cultural history will be conducted in the near future.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the importance of the inception of women rule in ancient Kashmir and specifically, this study aims to explore the life and leadership qualities of Queen Yasovati.

2. DISCUSSION

“The woman in society was counted among the items of property, one who could satisfy the needs of man and give birth to legitimate heirs. In the law books of Manu woman is depicted as a dependent creature, at times depending on his father, brother, and husband. According to the same text, a good wife served her husband like a meek slave even if he behaves badly. The image one gets from the literal sources of ancient India is that woman was deprived of all the types of freedoms. Society was harsh toward the birth of a female child. The rigidity of society reflects where a daughter was considered a source of suffering and a son saviour of the family. At these odds, women have considered secondary citizens was not easy for them to be accepted as rulers. True some have been born inside the walls or inherited the sceptre by

divine right but still more arrived via the alley door or over the basement transom as queen mothers, regents, widows, and even concubines. A handful of the queens, dare to capture the throne. Many have been allowed to share authority with their husband.”

As a result of these conditions, it came as a surprise to learn that women are capable of making sound decisions and exerting authority over others. Despite the ridicules of society and vast tradition, women's involvement in statecraft, notably in Kashmir, was not hindered by this process. To allow women to reign or serve as counsellors to the king was a ground-shaking development in traditional civilizations, the concept of gender, and the concept of womanhood in general. From the beginning, women were involved in the activities of the state. Female rule in ancient Kashmir was also an acceptable cultural component, as revealed by the Source of ancient Kashmir. Regardless of whether they were royalty or not, the women in charge of the affairs of the kingdom had legal authority. They laid the groundwork for a more active role for women in a male-dominated society after their rule in the patriarchal system. “Yasovati of the Gonda dynasty, Sugandha (904-906 AD) of the Utpala dynasty, and Didda (980-1003 AD) of the Lohara dynasty were all queens of Kashmir.” Kota Rani, the last queen of Kashmir, was the fourth and final ruler. After her, the Kashmir crown passed to Muslims, as she was the last Hindu ruler in the valley.

A Brief Outlook

The Rajatarangini is the earliest known account of Indian history, particularly in Kashmir. Kalhana mentions that prior to the Gonanda dynasty, Kashmir was ruled by a number of kings, but their reigns were not documented. Once Gonanda I had taken the throne of Kashmir, the Gonanda dynasty was established. “Kalhana refers that he borrowed the first four names of kings and queens of the Gonanda dynasty from the *Nilmatapurana*. Some years before the Mahabharata war on the plains of Kurukshetra, Kashmir was ruled by the king Gonanada-I.” Before the Mahabharata war, King Gonanda I of Kashmir was persuaded to aid King Jarsamdha of Magadha in a war against the Yadavas by his distant relative King Gonanda. In response to an appeal for assistance, the king of Kashmir marched his vast army to the riverbanks of the Kalindi (Yamuna) to surround Krishna. During the struggle for Kashmir, the monarch of Kashmir was injured. Finally, the monarch of Kashmir was slain by his own relatives' foes during a battle in Kashmir. Gonanda I, the monarch of Kashmir who perished in war, was lauded by Kalhana. According to him, Damodara I succeeded his father as king.

Damodara I, the new monarch, was fueled with vengeance for the death of his father. He was eagerly awaiting the opportunity to avenge the death of his father. Against the occasion of Svayamarathe king's attack on Krishna and the other Yadu scions at Gandahara on the Indus river, When they were close, Kalhana commanded an expedition that "obscured the sky with the dust that the horses of his army created" against them. The king fought valiantly but was ultimately defeated. I Kashmir was ruled by women for the first time after King Damodara passed away, which was a significant historical event for me.

Queen as Ruler

Women had a big part in politics. Pandya women were referred to as administrators by Megasthenes. Indian civilization dates back as far as 2500 BC and reaches as far back as 250



BC. Ancient writings and artefacts are being utilised to retell the stories of women's lives via archaeology. Archaeological digs have uncovered the oldest evidence of goddess worship. The goddesses' life-giving power is invoked in the oldest religious scriptures, which date back to 1500 BC, to give life and to nourish and maintain it in an effective way. India's existing written writings contribute significantly to human knowledge after the Aryan conquest and the subsequent development of Hinduism and Buddhism. Women of the aristocratic class had access to a wide range of educational and recreational options, as well as the ability to pursue their interests in a variety of different ways. They were those who had to deal with poverty, ignominy, and other hardships. An important and unexpected feature of the first Kashmiri political system were women's involvement in politics. Rather than one of slavery or suffering, several sources convey a picture of contented engagement in different political activities. Kashmir's political history has been shaped by a number of women. Although she was simply a regent, Yasovati became Kashmir's first queen to be crowned a monarch. When it came to their administrative skills, Sugandha and Didda stood out. Shrines and cities were constructed by the likes of Khadone, Amritprabha Cakramardika Kayanadevi Ratnadevi and Kamala Devi. Mahapratiharapala, a rank akin to Chief Chamberlain, was given to Candrapid's queen Kalyanadev by the monarch. The second Lohara dynasty's monarch Jayasinha's primary queen was Kalhanika. Once, she was sent on a diplomatic mission to reunite Jayasinha and Bhoja, Salhana's son and a challenger for the throne, in order to bring them back together. As a result of her rise in authority, Rani Yasomati was able to exert a powerful influence that even her opponents had to follow. At the time of her coronation, the country was in a condition of disarray and confusion. In the history of Kashmir written by Kalhana, the first ruler to be recorded is Yasomati or Jasomati, the wife of King Damodar. According to Kalhana's extensive research, Kashmiri women have a long history of political involvement, both directly and via other means.

Yasovati, the pregnant wife of king Damodara I, was put on the throne of Kashmir after the death of Damodara I, who left no successor behind. Ancient Kashmir's first female king, Yasovati, is the first person to be officially documented. The king's wife had been established on the throne by Krishna, a descendant of Yadu, who was in charge of the kingdom at the time. It's worth noting that in Kashmiri mythology, the land is seen as a manifestation of the goddess Parvati. As a further basis for Yasovati's reign, this is reaffirmed in the definition of its rulership. Kashmir's first female ruler. A woman was being crowned queen at the time, and the advisers were unhappy about it, according to Kalhana. Some of the state's disloyal ministers were enraged by greed and tried to seize the throne for themselves. Reciting the verse from Nilmatapurana helped the Krishna become a powerful monarch who was accepted by her subjects (Shali, 1993). In the Nilmata Purana, Kalhana says that Krishna appeased the counsellors by reciting this passage from Nilmata Purana.

“Kashmir land is Parvati; know that its king is a portion of Siva. Though he is wicked, a wise man who desires his prosperity will not despise him” Regardless of their age, women were considered as juveniles under Hindu religious law. However, this did not stop the ascent of female political dominance. During Kashmir's Hindu era, numerous strong female rulers rose to power. History claims that a lady ruled Kashmir before the epic Mahabharata was fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavs. She was the wife of King Damodara and was murdered on the battlefield by Damodara's troops. Later, following the birth of her son, his



expectant wife succeeded him as Queen Regent. Her menstruation has been classified as a success. She describes the "popular ruler" as being revered by her people, who treated her as if she were a deity. Even though Yasovati herself is a shadowy figure, the rule of women is supported by Lord Krishna's exhortation that all occupants of the throne are portions of Shiva and, therefore, need to be respected, thereby providing a strong divine sanction to male and female rulership in Kashmir. The legitimacy of Kashmir's female rulers is affirmed by this full, supernatural validation of their authority. The fact that women's rule was given a religious undertone was noteworthy. It was during Krishna's recital of a couplet from the Nilamata canto that the idea that women had the ability to make decisions and govern over their subordinates was given tangible form. In other locations, religious scriptures and other literal sources were used to restrict women's freedom, but in Kashmir, texts were cited to offer full rein to a woman in rulership. This proved beneficial to the women of Kashmir. Because of their selfishness and the Brahmanical belief that women are solely meant to be a source of pleasure, the advisers who initially opposed the women's authority in Kashmir have since honestly started obeying the queen as monarch. Yasovati's reign is unfortunately not documented in full. Neither the queen's reign nor the exact date or year of her ascension have been documented by any historian. Due to the lack of attention her reign was given by historians. Even Stein, in recounting the lineage of the Kashmiri monarchs in the book's opening pages, makes no mention of Rajatarangini. It was Bazaz Prem Nath and Ranagchari Devika, who came after Kalhana to bring attention to a queen whose role in establishing women's reign in Kashmir had been largely overlooked by academics. Most historians believe that the reign of women in Kashmir began with the reign of queen Sugandha and that queen Yasovati served as regent (Stein, 1979). It's possible that the lack of information on her persona is linked to the fact that she gave birth to Gonanda II, the future heir. In spite of the fact that her rule as a queen was largely ignored, she set the groundwork for the eventual independence of women in Kashmir. In Kashmir, she was the first to legitimise women's rule. Yasovati proved to be an effective and popular ruler who thoroughly understood and successfully executed the obligations entrusted to her care, according to Bazaz, whether she was the sovereign queen ruling in her own right or a regent running the realm on behalf of her son. The queen ruler was a challenge to the male-dominated succession and defended women's rule. Even if the king dies without a male successor or leaves an infant in his will, the queen can take command of governance. An attack on those lawgivers and literal authorities who argued that the hereditary rights to rule could only be passed down to male successors. Because of her rule, we can claim that the males who once held positions of authority in Kashmir's region and who wrote the laws that facilitated women's easy subjection now have no place in this land. In the Rajarangini, the Kalahandi only allocated five verses to the queen, which reflects the queen's level of indifference. It's unclear from Kalhana's account how long the queen ruled or how long she acted as regent for her son Gonanda II. However, it's impossible to ignore the impact she had on the history of Kashmir, particularly in terms of ensuring the equality of women. Throughout Kashmir's history, the queen became a model for both royal and non-royal females. After her, women monarchs like queen Sugandha, Didda, and Kota Rani established the idea that women may reign over their followers. The queen became a role model for future rulers of Kashmir who would follow in her footsteps. Although her time in power was brief, she paved the way for future female monarchs.



Queen as Regent

The Nilamata Puran, an ancient book on Kashmir's geography, culture, and history, is one of Kalhana's favourite sources. The Nilamata Puran opens with a conversation between Rishi Vaishampayan and King Janamejaya, who inquires about the Mahabharat war's lack of Kashmiri kings. Kashmir's pregnant queen Yashovati (friend of Jarasandha) was proclaimed Queen after the deaths of Kashmir's King Gonada (friend of Jarasandha) and his brother Damodar by Balarama and Krishna respectively. He was too young to fight in the Mahabharat battle, therefore Yashovati's son King Gonada the second was not allowed to participate. It doesn't matter whether it's ancient or not; the Nilamata Puran is vital for its descriptions of Kashmir and its natural splendour, as well as for its allusions to battle etiquette, unusual occurrences like the crowning of a pregnant queen, and other geographical information. When her husband, King Damodara I, was killed in war, the queen monarch was pregnant. After taking the throne, the queen gave birth to a son named Gonanda II. It was determined by the Brahmans that Yasovati's young son should be crowned as king of Kashmir. Following the conference, Queen Yasovati abdicated the throne and assumed regency over her young son Gonanda II. As the regent of her small son, Yasovati remained the de facto ruler of the realm. Gonanada I, the young king's grandfather, bestowed upon him the title of king. Even after she was removed from direct leadership, the regent mother continued to wield power. Although she no longer had direct control, the queen was able to increase the impact of her presence by putting words in her infant son's lips. Infant king ascends to her mother's throne, which is notable to point out. Because he was a newborn during the Mahabharata war, neither the Kurus nor the Pandavas "took him to assist them in war. According to Kalhana, a succession of 35 kings succeeded the child king. After the thirty-five kings, Lava became king of Kashmir, built an enormous number of stone structures, and established a temple in his honour, known as Lolora in his native Kashmir. For the most part, we find male domination to be the norm when we look back at the history books. Thus, women's credibility in socio-cultural development has been continually deteriorated. This horrendous predicament has persisted for some time. However, it is the youthful, strong, and determined ladies of the world who deserve credit for becoming the most powerful leaders of nations while being held in the patriarchal world. To the contrary, these women were passionate enough to bear the weight of the world while still maintaining a motherly character. They rode high above the rest of the world with the country. As luck would have it, such a fearless and kind lady had already given Kashmir the recognition it deserved. Yasovati handled her stewardship of the land with great tenderness. Only she could have persuaded the people and restore their last shred of faith in their ability to struggle, strike, and never give up. When she was crowned queen, people began to voice their displeasure. The pain of the patriarchies begins to pierce the crown of the unchallenged king. Historically, male domination has been an issue in nearly every community. Yasovati is praised for her excellent use of her power, which made people feel more safe than they had in the past. Unfortunately, patriarchy still exists today, and this is not news to many historians. Even the famous historian overlooked Queen Yasovati. She deserved more recognition, but since she was a woman, she was left in the shadows and in an abyss. To emerge and take control of Kashmir, Yasovati had laid a foundation. Only a few books have been produced regarding her reign's socio-political progress. As a result of losing her husband in the war, she was forced to deal with traditional gender norms that viewed women as subordinate. She, on



the other hand, rose above the fray and set her sights on ensuring that the country ran smoothly. Because of her, another woman was able to establish her authority.

3. CONCLUSION

The Queens of Kashmir had a major role in the governance, according to this summary. As a result of their efforts, several administrative tasks had been completed on time and on budget. The kings and their successors had been guided by them in their management and affairs while they maintained their authority and prestige. As a result, women in Kashmiri society have come to embrace their place in politics. As a result, the reign of Yashovati, the first Kashmiri queen ruler, marked the beginning of a new era.

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