



Authoritative ladies in Ancient India: A Numismatic Study

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Abstract:

History bears innumerable examples to justify this factor that women have played an important role. They have successfully conducted the state and administration and have given great contribution to conduct the society. But few times we come across the name of the queens on the coins of India, issued by sovereign rulers of different dynasties of different period. But the depiction of queens is found for few times. Some of the rulers who issued coins depicted the names of their wives as Satkarni 1st, Chandragupta 1st, Ajayraj Chauhan and some of the ladies issued coins on their names while working as regents of their younger sons which refer to their authoritative condition. In most of the cases the depiction of the names of queens on coins refers to their political participation and their identity in the family and society.

Keywords: Women, Regents, coins, identity, Nagnika, Kumardevi, Agathucelia, Didda, Prabhavatigupta, Somalldevi etc.

Introduction:

Women are one of the most significant parts of the society. In early India women were not given to participate in political activities. But in later times women made their identity by playing a considerable role in political activities. In most cases they were not given chance to rule independently. Such an example can be seen in Delhi Sultnate i.e Rajia Sultana. She was appointed as successor by his father Iltutmish. They always worked as the regent of their younger sons. Most of the ladies who bear their names on coins were dowager queens. Especially in early medieval India a number of examples can be seen of the successful conduction of administration by women. The earliest example of the depiction of the name of the queen is that of Nāgnikā, wife of sātāvāhana king Satkarni. The depiction of queens on coins refers to the identity made by these queens. Some of the dowager queens like Nāgnikā, Prabhāvati, Rudrambā, Diddā, Sugandhā made their identity by performing an significant role in polity. These ladies played an important role in the domestic life also. As Prabhavati Gupta played an important role in her familial life as she has been told the ornament of her husband's house and after the death of her husband she played an important role in Vakataka polity. Dattadevi has been depicted performing sacrificial duties on Ashwamedh type coins. Thus the depiction of queens on coins refers to their strength and their significant position in society.

Discussion:

Queen naganika, wife of king satakarni of satavahana dynasty, is perhaps the earliest person in history of India whose name is associated with the king on the coins. A silver coin from junnar,¹ in west of Nanaghat pass, in western India, has been found which bear the name of queen nagnika. This coin bears the legend on its obverse:

Rano 'Siri Sata (ka) ;रानो श्री सात (का)

Nagnikā obverse (नागनिका)



This instance refers to her crucial status in the society. This is evident by other contemporary records also. An inscription from Nanagaht ² records the performance of Vedic sacrifices as Ashvamedh, Vajpeya, Agnihotra and Agnadheya by Satvahana king Satkarni and his wife named Nāgnikā. And records the donation made by them on the performance of these sacrifices. The donations were in Karsapanas. Silver coins of Satakarni-I and Naganika from Junnar show that they were issued on the occasion of Asvamedha sacrifice. The Satavahana kings generally used the name of their mothers as their initials as Kotsiputra Satakarni, Gotamiputra Satakarni, Vasisthiputra Satakarni, Pulumavi. These are some of the names of Satavahana kings that we find both in inscriptions and coins. 'Kosi', Kosiki, 'Gotami', 'Vasisthi' these king mothers were certainly the crowned queens of the dynasty. But this doesn't show that they played any important role in political activities. Probably by these names Satvahana rulers wanted to show their affiliation with Vedic sages and felt pride in doing so.

Women used to take part in political activities as evident from the example of Agathokliea.³ She was the wife of Indo Greek ruler Menander. After the death of her husband she acted as a regent of her minor son Strato I. She is depicted on the coins also. Her coins show that she bore the title of 'Theotropou Bassilisses Agathokliea' (of God like queen Agathucleia).⁴ It shows that she was enjoying the position of high political authority. She has been depicted with her son named Strato I.



An another contemporary instance is of a Śaka princess whose name is found on a seal from Basrāh.⁵ She is mentioned as "Mahādevī Prabhudāmā" a sister of Mahakshtrapa Rudrasena. The depiction of her name on seal beckons to her significant position.

राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य स्वामी, रुद्रसिंहस्य दुहितु राज्ञो महाक्षत्रपस्य स्वामी रुद्रसेनस्य भगिन्या महादेव्या प्रभुदमाया :)⁶

The Gupta rulers issued various types of coins. Depiction of the king and the queen on the obverse of the coin is one of the remarkable feature of their coins. Such coins were issued by Chandra Gupta-I (319-350 A.D.), Samudra Gupta (350-375 A.D.), Chandra Gupta Vikramaditya (375-415) Kumara Gupta-I (415-450 A.D.) Besides great political significance the Chandra Gupta-Kumara Devi type of gold coins have great social and religious significance also. According to Altekar,⁷ on these coins Chandragupta-I is shown offering a marriage ring or Sinduradani to his beloved queen. This coin bears the name of kumaradevi. Along with this the name of her paternal family has also been mentioned. On the obverse “*chandraguptakumardevih*” and on reverse “*Licchhavaih*” is depicted.⁸ Depiction of her paternal name is also very important.



On the Asvamedha type of gold coins issued by Samudra Gupta, we find his queens with Chamara before a sacrificial post participating in the religious life of their royal husbands.⁹ She is samudragupta’s wife Dattadevi.¹⁰ She is mentioned in Eran inscription of Samudragupta. Her depiction on coins refers to her participation in religious activities and their identity in domestic life. But her name is not mentioned on coins.



On the king and queen on couch type coins of Chandragupta Vikramaditya, there is the depiction of his queen. There is not any mention of the name of his queen. Perhaps she is his chief queen Dhruvaswamini.¹¹ King and queen are sitting facing to each other and king is offering “sindurdani.” Some seals of Dhruvaswamini have been found from Vaishali. It refers to her crucial role in family.

(Vaiśāli seal)

महाराजाधिराज श्री चन्द्रगुप्त

पत्नी महाराज श्री गोविन्दगुप्त

माता महादेवी श्री –)

वस्वामिनी;¹²

Kumargupta's coins are same that of samudragupta's. In which queen is standing bearing a chawri in front of the horse. On Kumargupta's king and queen types, he is giving a bunch of flowers to his queens. She is his chief queen Anantdevi.¹³ Their depiction refers to their identity in domestic life. Prabhāvati Gupta, who was an influential lady of her times also issued some copper coins.¹⁴

During the rule of Bhaumakaras (8th-10th century A.D.) in Orrisan region six queens namely Tribhuvana Mahadevi, Prthvi Mahadevi, Gouri Mahadevi, Dandi Mahadevi, Dharma Mahadevi, occupied the throne. On some inscriptions there are some of the references of coins and the seals of queens.

Somala Devi, queen of Chahamanas dynasty of Sakambhari, issued coins in her names. She was ruling in 13th century A.D. On her coins either a bull or a horseman is seen on one side. The other side shows the queen moving on horse-back with the legend "Sri Somala Devi" in Nagari script.¹⁵

In the history of Kashmir many queens ruled successfully like Suryamati, Sugandha and Didda etc. Some of these Hindu queens had issued coins in her name. Sugandha was the wife of Kashmir ruler Shankarverman. After the death of Gopalverman, Sugandha conducted the administration. But soon after two years Parthverman was successful to overcome the power. Later she tried to gain the power but failed and was killed.

On the obverse of her coins there is a seated goddess and a legend on left side (Sri Sugan[dha]) and on reverse there is standing king and legend (Devyā) on left side.¹⁶



Another prominent lady of Kashmir was Didda. She belonged to Vappadava dynasty which continued from 1172 to 1338 A.D. she was the daughter of simharāj, the king of lohār dynasty. She was married to Kshemgupta. She wielded considerable influence over her husband with the result that Kshemgupta was nicknamed as Diddakshema.¹⁷



The coins issued by her were combination of mixed metal of gold and silver. They were called white metal coins or Electra coins. Her coins with the legend Di- Kshema

on the obverse belong to the region of her husband and testify Didda's impact in her husband. After the death of her husband, Didda gained the real authority during the reign of her younger sons. The coins with the name Śri Diddādevya¹⁸ testify that she was the formal ruler. Later in thirteenth century kaktiya ruler Rudramba devi issued coins on her name.



In medieval times also such examples can be seen as of Razia sultan. She was appointed as successor as her father. And in mugal times the example of jahangir's wife Nurjahan van be seen. She issued coins on her name. This beckons to her crucial status in Mugal polity. She had a great influence on Jahangir.

Conclusion:

Depiction of the name of queens on coins refers to their identity by playing an ideal role in domestic life or the political leadership. Their depiction on coins shows their contribution especially to political field. Most of the ladies who bear there name on coins were the regents of their younger sons and looked after the administration after the death of their husbands. It alludes to their capability to perform various duties and the administrative education that was imparted to them. It showed that along with performing the duty of an ideal wife they could give their contribution to every aspect of life.

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