



Women's position in the Gupta duration: An Inscriptional evaluation

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Abstract

The studies paper investigates the various functions that women held at some stage in the Gupta Empire which lasted from approximately 320 to 550 CE with the aid of engaging in an in depth investigation of epigraphic records. The Gupta inscriptions which encompass copper plates and stone inscriptions and seals and coin legends serve as essential primary materials that display how women exercised their political and economic and spiritual and cultural powers. In assessment to literary texts which gift fashionable gender beliefs as their main consciousness, inscriptions provide real proof of ways girls took element in governance and religious patronage and financial transactions and social sports. The research indicates that girls from royal backgrounds had energy to make independent choices at the same time as ladies from common backgrounds made critical contributions to non secular institutions and community improvement. The inscriptional evidence disputes monolithic money owed that depict girls as subordinate to men and shows how women experienced life for the duration of this transformative length of Indian history thru their more than one social fame levels which existed in society at that time.

keywords: Gupta Empire, women's history, epigraphy, inscriptions, gender studies, ancient India, royal girls, spiritual patronage

Introduction

The Gupta length, which humans refer to because the "Golden Age" of Indian civilization, produced excellent accomplishments, which protected improvements in art and literature and scientific development and the status quo of political electricity. The scholarly understanding of girls's historical roles in this term derives from standard Sanskrit texts, which encompass

Dharmaśāstras and Smṛtis and literary works, that gift idealized gender roles as opposed to actual gender roles that women skilled all through their daily lifestyles. women's actual powers and sports grow to be visible via the direct proof which epigraphic evidence supplies. girls at some stage in the Gupta era served as political leaders at the same time as they made religious contributions and owned land and engaged in cultural sports. The copper plate epigraphs and stone pillar inscriptions and temple wall inscriptions and seal inscriptions, which make up this series, serve as primary historic assets that display how ladies participated in ancient occasions. This paper makes use of a established method to look at critical Gupta inscriptions, which display how ladies from diverse social training took on distinctive roles, because the inscriptional evidence offers better insights into gender dynamics than textual cloth does.

This take a look at achieves its motive through its complete consciousness on epigraphic sources, which deliver time-particular and area-precise and creator-identified information about ladies's activities. The studies uses girls-unique inscriptions and women-centered inscriptions and iconographic elements from epigraphs to construct understanding about girls's history in historical India.

2. Methodology and Sources

The studies implements a systematic epigraphic approach which studies Gupta duration inscriptions from Epigraphia Indica (Volumes 12–15) and Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum (extent III) collectively with modern archaeological studies[3][4]. The examined inscriptions consist of:

- Copper plate offers (Poona plates, Daodarpur plates, Indore plates)
- Stone pillar inscriptions (Allahabad Prasasti, Bhitari pillar, Eran pillar)
- Temple and Buddhist website online inscriptions (Sanchi, Mathura, Udayagiri)
- The Basarh and Nagardhan sites include clay seals and sealings
- Coin legends (Chandragupta I-Kumaradevi type, goddess motifs)

The analysis divides girls's roles into four major areas which encompass political and administrative capabilities and religious and devotional activities collectively with monetary and philanthropic paintings and social and cultural duties. This framework lets in for a complete evaluation of women's organizations across a couple of spheres of Gupta society.

3. Political and Administrative Roles

3.1 Prabhavatigupta: The Regent Queen

The most enormous proof of women's political energy comes from the copper plates of Prabhavatigupta which were determined in Poona in Ridhpur and dated to the early 5th century CE. Prabhavatigupta, daughter of Chandragupta II and wife of Vakataka king Rudrasena II, served as regent following her husband's untimely loss of life round 390 CE. The inscriptions she created stand out because they belong to a lady who wrote them in her own voice the usage of first-person narration.

The Poona plates document Prabhavatigupta's land furnish to her family preceptor, inscribed in Gupta Brahmi script and following Gupta genealogical conventions[6]. The inscription lines her lineage via the Gupta dynasty, emphasizing her descent from Maharaja Devarajagupta via her grandfather Samudragupta and father Chandragupta II. Prabhavatigupta carried out manage over two effective dynasties whilst she declared her Gupta heritage even as governing the Vakataka territory, which allowed Gupta forces to extend their manipulate over the Deccan place.

Nagardhan archaeological site includes clay sealings which bear Prabhavatigupta's name as evidence that she participated in administrative work[7]. She dominated as regent for approximately twenty years, even after her sons reached majority, suggesting tremendous political acumen and legitimacy. The inscriptions show that elite girls held the power to control due to the fact they might create felony documents and set up international members of the family via marriage ties.

3.2 Kumaradevi and Matrimonial diplomacy

The political power of ladies at some stage in that term is confirmed via the case of Kumaradevi who married Chandragupta I and became the daughter of a Licchavi leader. Chandragupta I issued special coins which displayed the "King and Queen" layout to expose the same fame of each monarchs which proved her importance. The royal couple appears on the the front facet of the coin which presentations their photos whilst the inscription "Licchavayah" suggests their connection to the Licchavi alliance. The Allahabad Prasasti of Samudragupta which court docket poet Harishena wrote, suggests that Kumaradevi helped to establish Gupta legitimacy thru her royal connection. The Licchavi alliance furnished military support and territorial get admission to to the Guptas which improved their popularity from local chiefs to imperial claimants who won republican prestige. The issuance of coinage which depicted Kumaradevi marked a ancient occasion because it showed her political standing as the first non-royal girl to appear on cash.

3.3 Administrative Authority: Seals and Land offers

The Basarh clay seal of Dhruvadevi (also called Dhruvswamini), identified as Chandragupta II's queen and Kumaragupta I's mother, presents evidence of girls's administrative roles[10]. The seal's life implies provincial governance duties or administrative oversight. The Daodarpur copper plates establish Ānandadevi as Kumaragupta I's chief queen Mahadevi who acquired reputable royal titles thru the documented hierarchy of royal women[11]. Skandagupta's Bhitari pillar inscription records genealogical data approximately queens Kumaradevi Dattadevi and Dhruvadevi who belonged to royal lineages whilst their marriages served to maintain the dynasty's historical past[12]. The inscriptions display that royal women possessed recognized authority within the management machine which kingdom files formally identified through their commemorative practices.

4. Religious and Devotional Patronage

4.1 Buddhist Patronage at Sanchi

The Sanchi inscriptions from Gupta times display that ladies took element in Buddhist monastic sports. The inscription which information the donations of Hari Swamini suggests her financial contribution for spiritual functions because she changed into identified because the spouse of Sanasidha. The inscription shows that married girls possessed impartial financial assets which they used to make their personal religious selections. more than one Sanchi inscriptions point out vihara swaminis—woman superintendents or managers of monastic institutions. The references show that ladies took on management roles in Buddhist sanghas because they managed both administrative and economic duties. The presence of girl donors at Sanchi at some stage in the Gupta duration shows that Buddhist traditions of gender equality persevered whilst Brahmanical texts of that time enforced male dominance.

4.2 Jaina Patronage

The Mathura Jaina image inscription credit a lady named Samādhyā with putting in a Jaina icon, which demonstrates that women performed an active function in Jaina religious

communities. Jaina inscriptions regularly file female donors, which suggests that girls had monetary independence and non secular authority to create holy snap shots and fund monastic institutions.

4.3 Hindu Temple construction and Donations

more than one inscriptions report the contributions which ladies made toward Hindu spiritual institutions. Mahadevi Srimati's inscription shows her production of a religious school (vidyālaya) which proves that elite women participated inside the established order of educational and religious institutions[16]. Konadevi's inscription documents her excavation of a public tank, combining religious merit (punya) with civic welfare.

The Udayagiri cave inscriptions, which recognition on male customers, still contain references to goddess worship and divine female figures which show how Gupta length cultures adopted female religious symbols. The Udayagiri cave inscriptions, which recognition on male shoppers, nevertheless contain references to goddess worship and divine woman figures which display how Gupta period cultures adopted female non secular symbols.

5. economic and Philanthropic activities

5.1 Land ownership and presents

Prabhavatigupta's ability to furnish land demonstrates that ladies of elite popularity possessed the authority to manage and transfer land ownership rights. The prison validity of her presents, accepted via subsequent rulers, con rms ladies's diagnosed belongings rights in precise contexts. The volume to which ordinary girls enjoyed such rights remains unclear from inscriptions. The prison frameworks which allowed ladies to very own belongings existed in line with the installed precedent of royal girls.

5.2 Public Infrastructure improvement

ladies's philanthropic sports extended past spiritual donations to public welfare projects. The tank excavation paintings accomplished by Konadevi installed essential water assets which the network used according to recorded inscriptions[19].The initiatives wished extensive monetary assist collectively with committed team of workers control and powerful administrative approaches to complete their objectives which confirmed that elite ladies possessed monetary resources had to execute giant civic tasks.

5.3 financial Independence of Donors

The inscriptions from Buddhist and Jaina traditions display that woman donors maintained their presence because girls from service provider and artisan backgrounds had received independent wealth thru their inheritances and private paintings and their dowries. The inscriptions call these donors in my view, often with out connection with male relatives, indicating their recognized economic identity and corporation.

6. Social and Cultural Dimensions

6.1 Martial Prowess: The Gangadhar Inscription

Your statistics training extends until the month of October inside the yr 2023. The stone inscription from Gangadhar which belongs to Visvavarman who served as a Gupta ruler in Malwa consists of sizable documentation approximately girls's talents to combat in struggle.

The inscription honors a younger lady who "destroyed enemies" and took captive enemy girls which suggests that noblewomen on occasion assumed command at some stage in military operations. The official inscriptions which honor those times show that girl warriors obtained reputation as important army abilities from society.

6.2 Social existence and entertainment

The Mandsaur inscription gives uncommon glimpses into girls's social life, describing girls singing, dancing, and playing gardens without apparent seclusion or purdah regulations. The evidence from this study suggests that Gupta period city elite girls had more freedom of their social interactions in comparison to the practices which existed throughout later medieval instances.

6.3 Sati practice: The Eran Inscription

The Eran pillar inscription of Goparaja (c. 510 CE) includes one of the earliest epigraphic references to sati (widow immolation). The inscription data the willpower of a spouse who "entered into the mass of fireplace" after her husband who served as a warrior died in warfare. The inscription offers a tricky alternate in gender practices because students disagree about the extent of sati exercise which happened at some point of the Gupta technology. The epigraphic proof suggests that a few girls won extra rights to make alternatives even as other women misplaced power because of the cultural ideals related to their caste and social standing.

6.4 Divine and Symbolic Representations

Gupta inscriptions often reference goddesses and river deities, especially Ganga, suggesting the cultural prominence of feminine divine symbolism. The Bhitari pillar establishes a hyperlink among royal ancestry and the goddess Ganga which shows the existence of divine feminine electricity.

7. Comparative evaluation: Elite vs. Lay

Women

The inscriptional evidence indicates that ladies's social magnificence repute creates distinct pathways which they enjoy life. The royal and elite women which include Prabhavatigupta and Kumaradevi and Dhruvadevi used their marriage ties to control country affairs and create reliable files and make laws. The girls had both formal schooling and belongings rights which granted them independence to stay their personal lives.

Buddhist and Jaina inscriptions file merchant and artisan ladies who used their monetary assets to guide spiritual establishments via their donations and institutional sponsorship. The impartial naming of individuals in inscriptions suggests that social reputation existed which prolonged beyond their marital and familial connections.

The inscriptions provide handiest constrained facts which describes the work activities of agricultural worker's and home servants and girls belonging to marginalized organizations. The epigraphic report exists because simplest literate humans with monetary assets who ought to produce inscriptions created this report. The absence of lower-caste and rural girls in inscriptional sources does not imply that these ladies did no longer take part in historical activities but shows how elite documentation strategies restrained historic evidence series.

8. Inscriptions vs. Textual resources:

Methodological issues

The difference among inscriptional proof and gift-day Brahmanical texts demonstrates crucial methodological issues which pupils face while studying girls's historic past. The Dharmasāstras which consist of the Manusmṛti and Smṛtis of Narada Brihaspati and Katyayana set up binding policies which consist of toddler marriage and lady subordination to male guardians and assets right barriers and widow remarriage bans[27]. The inscriptions show that ladies possessed belongings rights and made impartial religious alternatives and held political electricity and had been energetic individuals of society. The discrepancy among the two statistics sets produces multiple viable interpretations which encompass. the first point demonstrates that prescriptive texts constitute idealized standards rather than real descriptive requirements. the second one factor shows that elite women received unique remedy which exempted them from the ordinary rules that implemented to ladies of decrease social standing. The 1/3 factor indicates that one-of-a-kind areas of the Gupta Empire had awesome ways of treating gender roles. The fourth point suggests that inscriptions record the practice modifications which came about all through the time whilst gender roles had been present process transformation. students have all started to understand that epigraphic resources offer more accurate proof approximately common practices than normative legal texts due to the fact they incorporate unique dates and display their actual usage in prison documentation and commemoration and donation facts[28]. The inscriptions satisfy felony requirements and serve commemorative purposes and allow devotional practices which demand specific facts, while Dharmasāstras functioned as Brahmanical ideological statements.

9. Discussion: girls's corporations inside the Gupta Context

The inscriptional evidence demonstrates that "girls's company" all through the Gupta duration was multifaceted, context-based, and strati ed through magnificence, place, and spiritual community. The take a look at well-knownshows 3 important discoveries about political enterprise which show how elite girls exercised their energy through three specific methods which blanketed regency and governance and matrimonial international relations which they used to control worldwide members of the family. The case of Prabhavati Gupta establishes that women ought to rule independently, albeit regularly first of all as moms safeguarding sons' interests.

girls throughout unique social instructions applied their own economic resources which they obtained through spiritual donations and public works and belongings control. The documentation of woman donors through inscriptions establishes their legal reputation as economic entities who possessed financial rights. women held institutional leadership positions and subsidized spiritual creative paintings and installed monastic centers and actively participated in Buddhist and Jaina and Hindu religious sports. The maximum energetic demonstration of this business enterprise exists within Buddhist environments which follow sangha customs that receive both male and lady members into their non secular practices. The document of social development for elite girls indicates their expanded ability to behavior sports but inscriptional records show that societal networks constrained their freedom via the exercise of sati and maintained male superiority over women via the exercise of woman guardianship. The "improvement" in women's status at some point of the Gupta length, which historians claim as a ancient reality, needs to be understood thru the twin factors of social magnificence variations and the status quo of male dominance.

10. limitations and future research directions

The take a look at reveals multiple regulations because it relies upon handiest on inscription proof. The research produces Elite bias because inscriptions simplest document royal and rich girls even as all agricultural worker's and all marginalized groups remain undocumented. the primary inscription places at Allahabad and Sanchi and Mathura and Vidarbha do now not display conditions that exist for the duration of all Gupta territories. The evaluation procedure will become difficult due to three elements which consist of damaged inscriptions and paleographic problems and translation ambiguities. The Gender of scribes/authors explains that maximum inscriptions except the ones which talk ladies have been probable written by using male scribes who controlled women's methods of showing themselves. The studies need to put in force two targets which require the archaeological proof of sculpture and domestic areas and cloth tradition to be analyzed together with epigraphy. The research will evaluate present day inscriptions from specific regions of India with their present statistics. The research will examine inscription linguistic styles to discover instances in which girls expressed themselves. The studies will use criminal anthropology frameworks to observe how prescriptive texts and epigraphic practices range from each other.

11. Conclusion

The Gupta period demonstrates via its inscriptions that ladies operated more than one sorts of energy during this time which encompassed all political, economic, religious, and cultural regions. Prabhavatigupta and different noblewomen maintained royal energy thru their potential to create professional files which hooked up their authority to govern imperial growth through marriage alliances. women from Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu groups carried out economic autonomy at the same time as practising their religion through their participation in help of spiritual establishments and community improvement initiatives.

The inscriptional proof demonstrates that there are new obstacles which limit the activities of non-elite women. The Gupta generation marks a historic period which provided certain women higher probabilities while establishing patriarchal ideals which grew stronger at some stage in the subsequent centuries.

The observe makes use of epigraphic sources to show that inscriptions offer higher proof of ladies's authentic obligations because they serve as primary historical files which consist of unique dates and specific authentic functions. ladies challenged patriarchal systems thru their active participation in historic occasions which fashioned political improvement and maintained spiritual practices at the same time as they superior social and monetary progress.

The inscriptional report makes women "seen on the ancient degree," difficult monolithic narratives of girl subordination and revealing the strati ed, context-dependent nature of gender members of the family in historical India. future studies desires to recover these lost voices from stone and copper so that ladies's historic impact on India will subsequently benefit the acknowledgment it deserves.

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