



**WOMEN IN INSCRIPTIONS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL CHAMBA  
(A.D 600-A.D.1200)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study seeks to explore different aspects of women activities, particularly property rights, in early medieval Chamba. The source used for the construction of the arguments are the inscriptions. The category of inscriptions used are both donative and votive. We have about fifty inscriptions reported from Chamba. The object of analysis centres around the manner and the context in which they figure in the inscriptions and the ways they have been shown in the context of transfer of various resources.

**KEY WORDS :** Women, Inscriptions, Resources, Property & Rights.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The present study seeks to explore different aspects of women activities, particularly property rights, in early medieval Chamba. The source used for the construction of the arguments are the inscriptions. The category of inscriptions used are both donative and votive. We have about fifty inscriptions reported from Chamba which has been arranged in the tabular form below.

The details of the categories in which women figure in different capacities is given below:-

<b>Category of the inscriptions</b>	<b>Number of inscriptions</b>	<b>Evidence of Woman</b>	<b>Nature of Evidence</b>
Image inscriptions	13	5	Dedicatory
Copper-plate inscriptions	6	2	Donor
Fountain inscriptions	22	3	Donor
Rock inscriptions	6	0	—
Stone inscriptions	3	0	—
Prasasti	1	1	—
Sivalaya inscription	1	0	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>		

( I )

Out of the above inscriptions five women have been figure out as the donor.



The first one is Brahmour copper-plate inscription of Yugakara-Varman(plate xvi)<sup>1</sup>. The inscription speaks about land grant. The donor is the king, who is granting the land to God Narsihma, however, the statue of God Narsimha was got built by the queen Tribhuvna-rekha.

Next we have, Chamba copper-plate inscription of Soma-Varman and Asata(plate xxv).<sup>2</sup> The inscription tells us that the Queen Rardha possessed the land,out of which she granted four *bhu* of land. She is also the founder of one of the two temples(temple of Hari and temple of Shiva) to which the grant was made. The above data accounts for her possession of property where she also had the freedom to spend it.

The details of the land donated by the queen are given below :-

“Be it. known unto you, that within the domain under our sway in the Panthila district there are four *bhumi* of land belonging to Kuloti, enjoyed by the queen, the illustrious Rardha of divine descent, and at Mungala two *bhumi* belonging to the cook Surambhata, and at Vata there are two *bhumi* belonging to the *Chonneraka-gosthika*, and in the Tavasaka district at Bhadravarma there was one *bhu* held by Vijjaula of Bhadravah, and at Sarahula there waa one *bhu* held by Bhatta Vasanta, and at Dhalyaka two *bhumi* in Lartuka which belong to the watchman the son of Denna, and in the same village two *bhu* in Jaudhaka, belonging to the second watchman, the son of Ramanjaya, and in the Pārakamata district at Mangala in Dhjaulika two *bhumasaka* belonging to the son of Lutthuka and two *bhumasaka* belonging to the son of Humrtaka, both together making one *bhu*. In figures: of Kuloti 4 *bhu*, at Mungala 2 *bhu*, at Vata 2 *bhu*, at Bhadravarma 1 *bhu*, at Sarahula 1 *bhu*, at Dhalyaka 4 *bhu*, at Mañgala I *bhu*, thus 15 thus *bhu*, thus on the previously established terms of occupancy, as far as their limits, grass<sup>3</sup>, grazing<sup>4</sup> and pasture-ground<sup>5</sup>, with fallow land large and small, with ingress and egress, with fruit-trees and water, together with houses, kitchen.gardens<sup>6</sup>, orchards<sup>7</sup>, and resting-places<sup>8</sup>; also from the storehouse of Bhadravarma annually one *khari* of grain, in figure 1 *kha*, of grain. Out of these [lands] the two *bhumasaka* of the son of Lutthuka on the road to Mangala in Parakamata are bestowed as an *agrahara* on the Lord Vishnu, founded here by order of the illustrious Pasata the son of the Maharaja. The remaining 14 *bhu*



2 *ma*, and 1 *kha*, of grain are granted by me for as long as moon and sun shall endure, uncurtailable, inalienable, unopposed, as an *agrahara* by a formal libation of water. Here again it is written that, in exchange for the four *bhumasaka* of Mangala in Phrakamata, four, in figures 4, *bhumasaka*, belonging to the sons of Savayika, are given as an *agrahara* in apportionment (?) to the two gods.”

( II )

In Chamba, there seemed to have been the tradition to erect the fountain stones for the deceased relatives for the sake of the bliss in the next world. One of the evidence comes from Loh-Tikkri fountain inscription.<sup>9</sup> It tells us that the donor Musuna, together with his wife erect the fountain slab for the bliss in the next world. The second evidence is from Salhi-fountain inscription,<sup>10</sup> where Rani Delha, the wife of Rana Ludra-pala erect the fountain slab for the sake of Shiva’s heaven, in order to gain the other heaven of Vishnu for the sake of the joy of Paradise. The third is from Bhatkara fountain inscription<sup>11</sup> where we have reference to the fact that a fountain slab has been erected by Dhana. But the money for the erection was provided by his wife.

The above data is the indicative of their participation in certain spheres of life beyond the home. It imply directly towards holding their property rights. The donation of the items by the women indicate their control over local resources. The items which were donated, belongs to the royal family and by some other elite class clearly suggests the difference in the bearing of their designations. Unlike other areas, where the consent of the sovereign authority was needed to make the grant, no reference of that kind is referred to the donative inscriptions by the donor. One assumes that if a women commissioned a statue to be set-up then it may also imply that they had the money to spend, giving an unusual amount of economic and social authority, thereby, clearly indicative of the fact that the women enjoyed full property right.

Additionally, the fountain inscriptions also throws light on the participation and status of the women in society. In these inscriptions we get the reference of the women as the dedicatory and recipient both. Naghai fountain inscription<sup>12</sup> records the erection of a “*varun-deva*” i.e, the slab on which it is carved by Deva-prasada, the son of Rana Naga prasada, the son of Naguka for the sake of the bliss in the other world of Rani Mekhala. We may assume that the Rani who may have been the wife



of Deva-prasada, is represented on the stone by the female figure at the side of the Varuna. It is said to be still the custom in Chamba to erect the stone for women who have died in child-bed. This custom is based on a wide-spread superstition that the souls of women who die in child-bed become evil spirits. Possibly for this reason the Naghai stone was erected to assure peace to the deceased Rani in the next world. It imply that women was around the concept of care and maternity. Similarly, the royal authority also erect the fountain slabs for the sake of bliss of their deceased ancestors, male and female in the next world.<sup>13</sup>

We have another important inscription i.e, Mul-kilhar fountain inscription<sup>14</sup>. The fountain slab was constructed, evidently in memory of the deceased Suramati. The inscription tells us about the valour of the queen of *Rajanaka* Gayapalaka. She secured success to the factions of her father-in-law and her father. It is written that ‘certainly, having attained her wish and conquered the whole of men, she left earth and reached the abode of heaven, to transcend in beauty, loneliness and manners the women of the chief of the Gods’. By all means, it suggests that the queens had a very valuable place in the family and society. She was known and admired for her intellect. She got respect and admiration even after her death. In the inscription, the use of the particular words that ‘she conquered the world of men’ left no doubt that she got the highest respect because the inscription got built by the son of Suramati after her death and as a male, he had no objection while engraving those words on the slab.

### ( III )

As we have four image inscriptions of goddesses and one temple as the object of dedication. However, these are the inscriptions that honour prominent female deities as recipients of the dedication which reflects that women were considered as the agents of dedications and recipients of an honour both. This is how female divinity was important in the context of royalty.

The first two inscriptions i.e, Lakshna Image inscription<sup>15</sup> and Shakti Image inscription<sup>16</sup> got built by Meru-Varman (the ruler of Brahmour) belong to A.D 700, are the earliest inscriptions that we have of Varman dynasty.<sup>17</sup> The geological context of the inscriptions relates to Brahmour<sup>18</sup>, which was the centre of authority to the state before the shifting of the capital to Chamba. The statues of Lakshna devi and



Shakti on which the inscriptions were engraved gives the geneology of the king. The royalty namely: Aditya -Varman, Bala-Varman and Divakara-Varman chronologically belongs to the house of Musana. Besides these, there are other image inscriptions also which have also been found engraved on the images of the Goddesses namely: Bhagvati (Devi Ashtabhuji)<sup>19</sup> and Bhagvati (Parvati)<sup>20</sup>. Apart from this, there is a temple of Champavati, the daughter of Sahilavarman (A.D.920)<sup>21</sup>. There is a legend handed down by tradition in connection with the founding of the Champavati or Chamasni temple. His daughter, Champavati, was of a religious disposition, and used to visit the place of a sadhu for conversation. Suspicion was instilled into her father's mind, and he followed her on one occasion with a drawn sword in his hand, only however to find that the house was empty. As he entered, a voice came from the stillness upbraiding him for his suspicions, and telling him that his child had been taken from him as a punishment. He was further commanded to erect a temple to her on the spot where he stood, to atone for his sin, and avert calamity from his house. The temple was accordingly built, and named after his daughter, who is there worshipped as a goddess. It is regarded as the family temple of the Chamba Rajas, and a *mela* has been held in connection with it from time immemorial, from the 1st to the 21st *Baisakh*<sup>22</sup>. This is indicative of the fact that royalty was trying to link itself with the local deities and often tried to integrate them in the larger brahmanical pantheon. Because, the erection of the images of deities with the inscriptions were virtually unknown before A.D 700. Once the statues get build and the inscriptions get engraved on them, it remains as a visual and graphic symbol of the relationship between royal benefactor and the village or town.

( IV )

One of the important aspect of the inscriptions is the geneological description. In the details of the genealogy, the manner in which they are referred to also speaks about their importance socially and politically. Brahmour copper-plate inscription of Yugakara-Varman (plate XVI).<sup>23</sup> The king Yugakara-Varman made the donation to God Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, whose image had been erected by queen Tribhuvna-rekha, perhaps the consort of the donor. In the land charter the king has been described as sovereign power. For instance the geneological details are as follows:-



The inscription opens with “Hail! Reverence to Ganapati. O Thou that art the soul of the earth, the water, the fire, the aether and the air.....ancient and self-created! Hara, Bhava,Siva,Sarva,Tryambaka (three-eyed),Isana (Lord),Rudra, Trinayana (three-eyed),Varsabhanka (bull-marked),O Thou whose shape is endless, reverence to Thee.” The geneology begins, “From (his) residence at glorious Canpaka the very devout worshipper of the deities he who reverently remembers(lit.is meditating at the feet of),the twice- born(the brahmans) and the spiritual perceptors;(him) the supreme prince, the king of kings, the supreme lord,the illustrious and divine Sahila, and who was born from the womb of the supreme princess and queen the illustrious and divine Neena: he the tree of whose glory is inncreased by damming back the great wave of pride(arising from)the uprooting of the host of manifold foes;--he, the supreme prince, the king of kings, the supreme lord,the illustrious and divine Yugakara-Varman,the prosperous one .By this detail description of the geneology, he (the king) is trying to create a social memory of his legitimate lineage to royalty”.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in all the six copper-plate inscriptions(one is spurious),the queen has been given the illustrious position in the geneology with the grandiloquent expressions. The royal women made prominent in the geneology along with the royal men and for the first time made noticeable in the copper-plate inscriptions of early medieval Chamba. The title of the female queens are arranged in a tabular form to give an idea that how their position might have underwent changed over time.

<b>Copper-plate inscription</b>	<b>Title for the queen</b>
1) Brahmour <sup>25</sup>	<i>Maharani-sri-Neena</i> (the illustrious and divine Neena).
2) Sungal <sup>26</sup>	<i>Sri-Bhogmatidevya</i> (illustrious and divine Bhogati).
3) Spurious-Sai <sup>27</sup>	—
4) Kulait <sup>28</sup>	<i>Parambhatarika-Maharani-Sri-Rardha-Devi-Kuni-nirnirnidhi</i> (the supreme princess, the queen. the illustrious and divine Rardha even as the moon was born from the milk ocean).
5) Chamba <sup>29</sup>	<i>Parambhatarika-Maharani-Sri-Rardha-Devi-Kuninirnirnidhi</i> (the supreme princess,the queen.the illustrious and divine Rardha even as the moon was born from the milk ocean).
6) Thundu <sup>30</sup>	<i>Parambhatarika-Maharani-Sri-Rardha-Devyo darodhadhi-Vivirdhit aklangak</i> (the supreme princess, the queen, the illustrious Rardha of divine descent but was without spot).



From the above table, we can see that it became fashionable to depict queen in the genre of goddess. The use of the epithet 'sri' and 'devi' repeatedly with the name of the queens signifies that the royalty was trying to give due place in the society. The epithet 'sri' was earlier used for the ruling authority<sup>32</sup>, but after 920 A.D in the all copper-plate land charters we can see this epithet attached with all the queens. *Sri* is the earliest name for Laxmi. Laxmi is dear to Visnu according to puranic literature. Laxmi is the goddess of wealth or fortune<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, the study of the titles throws light on the different authority status engaged by them.

The eulogy portion clearly expresses the king's need to respect the female representations particularly by royalty. In the state, king's political requirements would lead the women of his family to have share in the public and political responsibilities. There were two purposes of the description of the genealogy of the charters. To begin with this was a mechanism through which the genealogy is being announced and made acceptable. The other thing is the declaration and the public announcement of the king's association with divine figure.

The evidence examined ever points to the fact that Varman dynasty tried to acquire the political status by making an attempt to associate themselves with the minor or the local deities and after that the extension of the territory and its consolidation required a constant device. And in the process they got many statues build and many inscriptions inscribed on them. This was the first stage of legitimisation and the second stage or the other way by which the royalty was also tried to associate with the dominant religious institute of the area is to start extending patronage to them by issuing land grants to them. Apart from the details of the property transfer in the land charters, the genealogy was also made to be the essential part of the charters. Both categories of inscriptions are indicative of royalty.<sup>32</sup>

### **Conclusion :**

The data discussed above points to the fact that in the initial inscriptions reference to women is missing whereas from the period of Yugakaravarman(A.D.920) they figure as the integral part of the genealogical description of royalty. What is, however important is that once their reference in the genealogical portion of the inscription start, it also grows elaborate and expansive over time which again is a



reflection of their growing importance in society especially in the realm of power. Our study also indicates that they were owner of various resources. In inscriptions they figure as the donor of land, temples, fountain slabs etc. This is indicative of the fact that they not only owned resources, they also enjoyed the liberty to spend their resources wherever and whenever they wanted. Lastly, the frequent reference to female deities and their constant patronization by royalty and acception by people in general may also be taken as reflection on the status of female in the given social structure.

## APPENDIX 1

**Table of the details of the items donated by the women:**

<b>Donor</b>	<b>Object of Donation</b>
Queen Tribhuvna-rekha	Statue of God Narsimha
Queen Rardha	Founded a temple and donation of land
Wife of illustrious Jaja (name of wife is absent)	Fountain slab
Rani Delha	Fountain slab
Wife of eminent Dhana (name of wife is absent)	Fountain slab

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2. *Ibid*,plate xxv,no.25,p.187.
3. *Tr na*,J.Ph.Vogel,*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193; Sircar, D.C.(1966). *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. Delhi-7: Motilal Banarsidas,,p.344.
4. *Goyuthi(gavyuti)*.Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193;a distance of about four miles.Sircar,D.C.*op.cit.*,p.113.
5. *Gocara*.Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193; Sircar,D.C.*op.cit.*,p.116.
6. *Shakvatika*.Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193.
7. *Variksharam*,Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193.
8. *Vishramopetam*.Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plate xviv,no.25,p.193
9. Vogel,J.Ph.*op.cit.*,plates xxiii & xxxvii,no.29,p.205.
10. *Ibid*,plates xxxi & xxxii,no.33,p.216.
11. *Ibid*,plates xxxviii,no.34,p.224.
12. *Ibid.*,plates xxi-xxii,no.22,p.178.
13. *Ibid*, plate xxiii,no.23,p.180.
14. *Ibid*,plates xxxiii,no.34,p.224.





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24. *Ibid*,p.163.
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26. *Ibid.*,plate xvii,no.15 p.164.
27. *Ibid.*,plate xvii,no.16,p.168.
28. *Ibid*,plate xxiv,no.24,p.182.
29. *Ibid*,plate xxv,no.25,p.187.
30. *Ibid*,plate xxvi,no.26,p.197.
31. *Ibid.*,plate x,no.5;plate x,no.6;plate x,no.7;plate x,no.8,pp.141-145.
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