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ROLE OF WOMEN IN IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT IN MEDIEVAL ANDHRADESA (1000--1687CE)

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Abstract

Since the beginning of time, water has been one of man's precious needs. Water is considered to be liquid gold. Water is the essence of Nature. Without water, living things cannot survive and the world cannot exist. Most of the world's best civilizations have sprung and developed along the banks of the river and later on many rulers gave the water for irrigation and drinking utmost priority. Organized irrigation systems began in South India during the Megalithic times. But historical records prove that the kings and the philanthropists paid great attention to irrigation. One of the important aspects of the promotion of agriculture is the origin and practice of artificial tank irrigation. This research paper to be discussed in the Role of Women in Construction of Irrigation Works during Medieval Andhradesa (1000-1687 CE)

Keywords: Organised Irrigation, Raya's of Vijayanagara, Cultivating Land, Irrigation Development, Water Resources, Tank Constructions.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“the most prosperous of all, in the world he had seen”.

“Millions of precious gems

Millions of gold coins

Millions of miles of fertile country

Millions of amazing people”

Marco Polo

A Venetian Merchant, Explorer, Writer who travelled through Asia
along the Silk road between 1271 and 1295

In South India, the Chola Kings founded a mighty empire during AD 1000 AD 1200. The relationship between these Cholas, called the Imperial Cholas with the earlier Cholas mentioned in the Sangam literature is not clear. The Cholas came to power after overthrowing the authority of the Pallavas in South India. The founder of the Chola dynasty was Vijayalaya (9th century AD) but the real architects of the glory of the dynasty were Rajaraja I (AD 985AD 1014) and his son Rajendra I (AD 1014{ AD 1044). During the heyday of the Chola Empire, it extended from River Tungabhadra (a tributary of River.Krishna) in north to Kanya Kumari in south. The Chola Kings made a successful use of their navy and conquered not only Maldive and Lakshadweep Islands but also Sri Lanka. They also defeated the kings of Malaya and Java and Sumatra. One of the greatest contributions of Rajaraja I was the construction of the famous temple known as Rajarajeshwara or Brihadeshwara temple, dedicated to Shiva at Tanjore. He also initiated a project of land survey and assessment in 1000 CE which led to the reorganization of the empire into units known as valanadus. The rule of his son, Rajendra I was even more dazzling. He carried his arms up to Ganga in Bengal after defeating the Pala King, Mahipala. To commemorate this victory, he founded a new capital called Gangaikonda-cholapuram and acquired for himself the title Gangai-konda (conqueror of Ganga). He was a great patron of learning and was known as Pandita-chola. The last important Chola king was Kulottunga (AD 1070-1122 AD). Under him the Chola empire started disintegrating and shrunk to a much smaller area.

Medieval History – A Perspective

The state structure in this period has often been described as a decentralized political system. What is decentralized polity? It is a system in which there is of course a king as the main authority at the top, but he shares his rule with other small chiefs called feudatories or the samantas. The term Samanta basically refers to a king who has been defeated but his kingdom has been restored to him but with the condition that he will continue to accept the over lordship of the conquering king and also pay regular tribute to him in cash or kind. He may also be asked to help with military assistance in times of need. As these chiefs enjoyed freedom of administration over their regions, they were quite powerful. Surely you can guess that these chiefs could always be a threat to the



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overlord, and no wonder whenever there was a weak king at the top, they would assert their independence leading to the breakup of the empire.

Another aspect of decentralized polity was characterized by the practice of making land grants to Brahmanas and others. This practice was initiated by the Satavahanas kings in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, but after the Gupta period it had become a normal practice all over the country. Now land grants came not only to religious persons and institutions but to state officials as well. Why did it so happen? It is suggested that one of the reasons for the increase in land grants during this period, was the decline in trade and, therefore the shortage of coined money to pay to the officials and others for their services. The shortage of coined money in the post-Gupta period is indicated by the absence of the presence of coins in archaeological finds. The land granted to the receiver was tax free, i.e., the receiver did not pay any tax to the state and used the produce and income on it for his personal benefit. The receiver was also free from any interference by his king or his officials in managing the land donated to him. Thus, this receiver converted the lands granted to them into independent property of authority with no or little central control.

Social, Economic Medieval History

The early medieval period was also marked by many social and economic changes. Socially, an important phenomenon of this period was the proliferation or increase in the number of castes. How did it happen? One of the reasons for it was the inclusion of newer groups into Brahmanical society. It is suggested that as the number of land grants increased, new areas were brought under cultivation. It made local tribal people leave hunting as their main profession and take up agriculture. They were then transformed into peasants, and assimilated in society as sudras. The land grants in fact resulted in movement and migration of Brahmanas to different internal areas where they were able to introduce and enforce their brahmanical social values. Brahmadeya represented the grant of land either in a single plot or whole villages donated to Brahmanas by making them land-owners or land-controllers. The land grants also led to the increase in the number of Kayastha class, whose principal duty, besides carrying on the general administration of the state, consisted in the collection of revenue and taxes. The Kayasthas were basically scribes and they specialized in drafting and writing land grant documents. Naturally, with increase in the number of land grants their importance also increased. But the most important feature of this period was the rise of a new class of people called the Rajputs, such as Chahamanas, Paramaras, Pratiharas, Chandellas etc. Some historians believe that they were the descendants of various groups of foreign invaders such as Sakas, Kushanas, Hunas etc, who had been coming to India from northwest during different times of history. These people gradually settled down in the region of Rajasthan and, after intermingling with the Indian society, emerged as a warrior class.

The term 'Andhradesa' indicates the area inhabited by Telugu-speaking people living in the present Telangana, Andhra, and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh and some parts of neighboring states. Andhradesa is the name of a locality situated in Dakshinapatha (Deccan) or the southern part of ancient India, as recorded in the paliBuddist texts. The people of Andhradesa, i.e. the Andhras are also referred to in the Rock Edicts V and VIII of Asoka as a vassal tribe. Andhradesa is the place between the Godavari and Krishna rivers. During the period between 1000-1687 CE, these regions were ruled by Kakatiya, Musumuri, Rachakonda Velama, Reddi, Vijayanagara, and Qutbshahi rulers. Agriculture was the primary occupation of the majority of people in medieval Andhradesa. The prosperity of any country depends upon its economy supported by agriculture revenue.

Agriculture was the primary occupation of the majority of people in medieval Andhradesa. The prosperity of any country depends upon its economy supported by agriculture revenue. The means of irrigation of agriculture have been provided by rivers, monsoons, streams, lakes, canals, and cyclones. The absence of adequate rainfall and water sources was necessary for agrarian expansion was made possible by the creation of artificial irrigation which acquired great importance in the Andhradesa.

Irrigation Development

To study the irrigational works under the Kakatiyas, Rayas of Vijayanagara, and Qutbshahis several archaeological and literary sources are available. Wherever the rulers constructed temples, tanks, reservoirs, and canals, they laid inscriptions. Apart from plenty of inscriptions, literary sources are also available to understand irrigation facilities. Here an attempt is made to present a note on various types of epigraphical and literary sources, which belong to the period of study i.e, 1000-1687 A.D., and which throw light on the irrigational works in the medieval Andhradesa.

The contemporary inscriptions and literary works are providing useful information about various tanks built by Kakatiya, Velama, Qutub shahi rulers, their officials, rich people, Royal family women in different parts of Andhra Desa. Most of them are catering to the needs of present-day society. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight "The contribution of women in the construction of tanks in medieval Andhradesa". They took steps to repair the old wells, tanks, canals. They also constructed a large number of tanks, lakes. This helped the peasants of this region to live happily. In this paper, an attempt is made to highlight the role of women's participation in the construction of irrigation works in medieval Andhradesa.



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Objectives of the Research Study

The two important objectives of the present research article are:

1. So far, no scholar has attempted to highlight the role of women in the construction of irrigation works in the medieval Andhradesa.
2. It is also aimed to estimate the importance of these irrigation works in the progress of agriculture.

Kakatiya rulers followed the "Land Reclamation Policy". "Land Reclamation" in general means bringing fresh land under cultivation or making land cultivable. With particular reference to the Kakatiyas, the Land Reclamation policy had two aspects. Firstly, the construction of a large network of tanks for irrigation, reclamation of forests, and formation of new villages and secondly granting these villages as Devadana lands¹ to the temples and as Agrahara lands² to the Brahmanas. Kakatiyas realized that vast areas of fertile land were left uncultivated owing to a lack of adequate irrigational facilities. They also conceived the method of harnessing the big streams by constructing dams at suitable points along their course to form large reservoirs in which water sufficient to irrigate vast areas of land could be stored up. It was a technique by itself in those days to build good tanks³, Divine prosperity is always there in Hindu ethics attached to the construction of tanks which in several codes is mentioned as one of the sapta-Santana or seven deeds of everlasting virtues. The Karimnagar inscription of Gangadhara, minister of Rudradeva⁴, the Ganapesvaram inscription of Ganapatideva⁵, and several other inscriptions allude to Sapta Santana's namely, his son, a temple, a garden, a tank, an agrahara, a literary work, and a treasure.

Important Event in Medieval History

During the Kakatiya period, the rulers, officials, queens, and chiefs of Kakatiyas took a keen interest in the development of agriculture to provide water supply. In the Telangana region, they paid much attention to the storage of water. Huge tanks were built at different places like Bayyaram, Ghanpur, Kesamundram, Sundavaram, Laknavaram, Pakala, and Ramappa are in existence even today.

The land was the main basis of the Kakatiya economy and primary source of revenue. The Kakatiya rulers showed keen interest in providing irrigational facilities and expanding the area of cultivable land. "the Kakatiyas realized that the red and sandy soil of Telangana, lying on a bed of granite and crystalline rocks, was extremely fertile and eminently suitable for wet cultivation, its porous character demanded a plentiful supply of water to make it fruitful and yield sufficient grain to feed the people⁶. The large tanks were capable of irrigating thousands of acres of land whereas Cheruvus or Kere (tanks) were small tanks or village tanks which could irrigate a few hundred acres of land.

The prosperity of any country depends upon its economy supported by agricultural revenue. To improve agriculture the state resorted to artificial means of irrigation for the betterment of the economy. Several inscriptions refer to the construction of tanks by the Kakatiya rulers from the time of Prola I A.D. 1052-1076. A couple of Prola's inscriptions coming from Bayyaram⁷ and Motupalli⁸ states that he excavated a tank and called it KesariTatakam (a big tank) after his well-known title Arigajakesari⁹. The village named KesaSamudram (present Kesamudram Mandal headquarter) is existing even today. with a big tank by its side. This village is in Mahabubabad district¹⁰. This is the only reference we have about the excavation of tanks by Prola I.

It is quite interesting to notice that women of all classes had shown much interest in constructing water bodies to help the rapid growth of agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. It was mainly the concept of saptasantanas that inspired them to undertake the tank construction activities. It was this spirit that inculcated the brains of even the common women to involve themselves in one form or the other in the construction of a tank, a canal, or a well. If they were not in a position to contribute monetary donations, they donated their physical labor in executing the tank or canal construction.

Basavapuram explains how a female domestic servant Chandava, who used to work as a daily- wagger, contributed her physical labor freely and voluntarily when the government was venturing on the construction of a tank. It is mentioned that she did so, aiming at her religious merit¹¹.

The middle-class women believed that it was not only a meritorious act from the religious point of view, but also would bring about economic prosperity to the fellow-beings, quenches the thirst of cattle and birds, and consequently brings a marked social significance. As their economic resources were limited, they made donations for smaller irrigation works like digging canals and wells and for their maintenance. An inscription dated AD.1293 from Tripurantakam¹² informs us that a lady named Potasani had spent 156 golden gadyanas for constructing a tank called Tripurasamudram at Tripurantakam. Some canals named after women such as ProlakammaKaluva, Rudrama-Kaluva, KuppammaKaluva, Vengamma-Cheruvu (Kalvapalli, Warangal Dist.) and so many water bodies referred by the epigraphs reveal their involvement in the development of irrigation.



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The Kakatiyas attached much importance to the involvement of women in tank construction. Epigraphical evidence prove that almost all the female members of the Kakatiya family made donations for the construction of tanks and built townships around them with all amenities. We have many references to the construction of tanks and temples by the wives of chiefs belonging to the Kakatiya period. Mailama, the sister of Ganapatideva constructed Bayyaram tank (Khammam Dist) in 1194 A.D. and Matedu tank in 1117 A.D.(MahabubabadDist) on the name of her mother Bayyaladevi, after clearing the forest area and invited the farmers to cultivate the lands within the vast catchment area. The Bayyaram tank was constructed at a place where three streams pass between hillocks with lofty bunds of rocks and mud. According to the Bayyaram inscription, Mailama developed an ideal township known as Bayyavaram on the name of her mother Bayyaladevi.

Ganapatideva's other sister Kundamamba also excavated a tank called KundaSamudram after her name in A.D. 1219. Kundavaram¹³ and Nidigonda inscriptions inform us that Ganapatideva's other sister (and wife of Natavati Rudra) Kundamamba also was credited with the construction of tanks in Adilabad and Warangal Districts. Likewise, the village Muppavaram and Muppasamudram were constructed in the name of the wife of Mahadeva. Mailama constructed another tank known as Dharmasagaram (Warangal Dist.) on her title name "Dharmakirt" which she attained by her munificent acts. She constructed the Muppavaram tank, Tripurantakam tank, and many other smaller tanks and dug canals, where habitations were developed on her name as Mailavarams. Muppasamudram and Muppavaram (Warangal Dist.) were constructed on the name of the mother of Mahadeva by Mailama. Nearer to it, another tank namely Mahadeva-Samudram was constructed by Mailama in the name of her father.

Mahadevapuram township also was developed there by Mailama, which (both tank and township) are still in a flourishing condition. For the maintenance of the temple and the tank. Erukanamma of the Recherla family constructed a tank known as Erukasamudram founded a village Erakavaram and built a temple there to Erukeswaradeva, which was equipped with a Vidyamantapa. The same inscription informs us that she constructed another tank namely Laxmana-Samudram at Pillalamarri. Mailama, wife of MalyalaChaundaSenani built two tanks at Katkuru¹⁴ (Karimnagar Dist.) for the merit of her parents and husband in A.D. 1224 and 1240 respectively. The Peruru inscription (Nalgonda Dist.) dated A.D. 1262 informs us that one Yadava Perumandi Devi caused to dig Nallarijeruvu, Muccha-Samudram, Veligandia-cheruvu and Balevemula-cheruvu between A.D. 1199 and 1262. Another inscription records that queen Gundamadevi constructed Gundasamudram.

An inscription dated A.D. 1276 records that queen Kuppambika, wife of MalyalaGunda-Senani, constructed a tank and a temple in the name of her husband. The inscription also records a long list of meritorious activities of the donor including the construction of a tank in Bothpur (Mahboobnagar dt.) for the religious merit of Kakatiya Ganapatideva in A.D.1271. The Kuppa-Samudra and Bacha-samudram constructed the same place deserve our notice for the techniques adopted in excavating and making use of feeder canals which are controlled by the sluice to fill the tanks; the bund of the former being made use of a group of hills and piles of stones. A feeder canal is stated to have been dug from Bacha-samudram connecting Kuppasamudram so that it can always be full of water. These two tanks were known as brothers.

The Pammi inscription (Warangal Dist.) dated A.D. 1234 records the construction of Muppadiakunta, Maddekunta, Bhiramvarikunta and Madhavakunta by ViriyalaNagasanamma. Queen Rudrama, who ruled the Kakatiya kingdom as RudradevaMaharajunmgaru during A.D.1262-1289, too undertook many public welfare activities including the three 'Ts' i.e., Tank, Temple, and Township. She founded many villages on the name of her father and her name such as Ganapavaram, Ganapuram, Rudravaram, Ambapuram, etc According to Pratapa Charitra, Rudrama built 1000 Ambapurams and several Rudravarams throughout the Kakatiya kingdom, these were the villages founded around the tanks, lakes, and canals extended from reservoirs to the fields of cultivation.

Kakatiya's Social Development Activities: A Historical view

Thus, during the Kakatiya period, we can observe the political and diplomatic power vested in the hands of the king and that of the ritual with the queens and course ministers at, the instance of the king. They tried to increase the resource base of the state by contributing to the extension of arable lands through deforestation, providing irrigation, and founding many new villages.

The epigraphical evidence proves that the responsibility of sharing ritualistic duties (SaptaSantanas) especially constructing tanks, temples, and township by the female members of the ruling families helped in strengthening not only the economy of the state but also gaining popular support to their political power. As such, we can see innumerable evidence in the inscriptions and literature to this fact. The women of royal and noble families extensively toured in the kingdom and tried to regulate the local government system by summoning the village assemblies.



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Thus, we can observe a definite dynamic role played by the women of this period. The women belonging to the ruling class and noble families shared the responsibility of administration along with their husband and in the event of his demise, they took the reins into their hands. Kota GanapambaChagiMuppaladevi and Kota Pandambika of Tadikonda, ViriyalaNagasanamma, MalyalaKuppambika, etc., can be mentioned as the best examples in this regard, who worked as governors and samantas and strove for the development of agriculture, horticulture, and irrigation. Kota Ganapamba was much appreciated by Marco polo for her services to the growth of industry and trade which received a boom as a consequence of immigration and agricultural development.

Irrigation Works – Women Role in Medieval History

Lastly, it can be observed that the donations made by women who aimed at the welfare or religious merit of their family members like father, mother, husband, children, brothers or sisters and sometimes to redress the distress of destitute indicate their dedication to family and society, which reminds us of the motherly touch in public relations. The tanks they constructed were surrounded by newly founded townships in which these women donors provided all amenities including hospitals and educational centers. Rudrama established even a maternity hospital in Mandadam village (Guntur Dist.) and a herbal garden according to the inscription set up there, she made such arrangements at many other places specified therein²³. The participation of women including the poorer section by extending free service as laborers in tank construction and repair works is a noteworthy thing that indicates the root level of social involvement.

The history of Vijayanagar(1336-1650 A.D.) is a glorious chapter in the history of Medieval South India. It was the last important Hindu kingdom in South India. The Vijayanagara kingdom was founded in 1336 A.D. by Harihara- I and Bukka- I of Sangama dynasty with the advice of sage Vidyanarya¹⁵. They ruled from C 1336 to 1630 A.D. The four dynasties Sangam, Saluva, Tuluva, and Araviti) of Vijayanagar ruled over entire South India and a large part of Andhradesa. They had taken care to provide water facilities like tanks, wells, and canals for the development of agriculture. The construction of tanks, wells, and canals for the development of agriculture.

Effective measures were taken during the reigns of the earlier Kings of Vijayanagara to bring new land under cultivation. In Krishnadeva Raya's famous book "Amuktamalyada" he states that it is the extent of the State that decides the prosperity of the State and the prosperity is increased only when tanks and irrigation channels are constructed and favor is shown to the poorer cultivators in the matter of taxation¹⁶. The excavation of tanks was particularly considered as one of the "Saptasantanas" or the seven acts productive of religious merit¹⁷. Thus, during the Vijayanagara period, great attention was bestowed on the conservation of rainwater.

The Kaifiyats (village records) credit the kings of Vijayanagara for devoting their attention and resources to the welfare of the people. From the Kaifiyat of Kanala, we come to know that the Queen's mother Nagamma constructed a tank at a small village where she halted on her way back from Tirupati. She granted the village Kanala as an agrahara (tax-free village) to Brahmins renaming it KrishnarayaSamudram after her son¹⁸.

Several inscriptions refer that the rulers, nobles, and officials built several tanks or reservoirs, wells, and canals. Krishnadevaraya paid much attention to provide a water supply. During the reign of Krishnadevaraya, Paes visited the kingdom during the irrigation work was in progress in his capital.

Historical Era of Nizam

In A.D. 1518, RençuriChittamarusu, agent of PradhaniSaļuvaTimma constructed a tank in the village Pedakakani and also got another dug and donated to the local deity by his wife, Tirumalamba. Another instance of a lady making a grant of the tank could be known from an inscription at Vankayalapadu in the Guntur district. Chinnamamba, wife of the Chief Pratapayalla and sister of Ramaya Mantri Bacha, Chief Minister of king Achyutaraya constructed the tank known as Gopinatha Samudra. Varadarajamma, the wife of Krishnadevaraya dug Kambamcheruvu at Kambam. Chejerla inscription refers that Kondamarasayya constructed Tummasamudra and Kondasamudra in 1518 A.D. Kaluvayi inscription states that Rayamarasayya built a tank named "Kaluvayicheruvu" on behalf of his beloved parents in 1519 A.D.

The Qutb Shahi Kingdom was founded in 1518 C.E. as the capital of the Golconda in the Deccan region. This was one of the five states of the Bahmani kingdom. The founder of the kingdom was QuliQutb Shah, hailed from Persia. After the fall of the Bahmani kingdom, he declared independence in 1518 CE. After the downfall of the Vijayanagar empire, the region came under the control of Qutub Shahis of Golkonda. Agriculture was the primary occupation of the majority of people of this age. The Qutbshahi rulers like Kakatiya rulers realized the importance of constructing and maintaining small and big irrigational works for agricultural



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activities. The rulers of Golkonda provided water facilities in the Telangana region. They constructed tanks and dug canals for major rivers.

Maa-Sahaba Tank in Hyderabad

There was a tank in Hyderabad which was generally known as 'Masab Tank'. The tank bund is completely dry and converted into a public park now. Many people believe that this tank was built by Hayat Bakshi Begum, as she was called 'Maa Sahiba'. But it was not built by Hayat Bakshi Begum but by Khanum Agha the daughter of Mir Maqsood Ali Tabatabai. Khanum Agha was the wife of Mirza Mohammed Amin and mother of Mohammed Qutb Shah. We know this fact by the epigraphs that were carved out on the two towers of both sides of the bund. They were in 18 x 26 1/2 size in Naskh script¹⁹. A mud bund was constructed over it to stop the water. Banjara Hills and Jubilee hills areas were its catchment areas.

Maa-Saheba Tank Near Hayatnagar

This tank was built on the highway of Nagarjuna Sagar, at a distance of 8 miles from Hayatnagar and 15 km. from Hyderabad city. Gulam Hussain Khan in Gulzar-e-Asafia (Persian) writes that Hayat Maa Sahiba had built a tank near Hayatnagar.²⁰ The Telangana region is a rain shadow area and has a limited river system. Even those rivers which flow across this region are hardly beneficial for cultivation. There is no big river that flows across the Telangana region. Only the river Krishna flows touching peripheral zones of Telangana. The region ruled by Rachakonda and Devarakonda chiefs lay mostly in the present-day districts of Mahaboobnagar and Nalgonda. The contemporary epigraphic and literature furnishes information on source reveals that the establishment of new villages and tank construction²¹.

Many epigraphs issued by the Rachakonda and Devarakonda chiefs speak of the construction of tanks and wells²². The Velama rulers worked for the cause of improving agriculture in the region. Many tanks and lakes were constructed on the premises of their capital 'RachakondaMadanayaka's wife Naagambika' built a tank at Rajagiripotam (Rachakonda) which was known as 'Nagasamudram'.

The Velama rulers worked for the cause of improving agriculture in the region. Many tanks and lakes were constructed on the premises of their capital 'Rachakonda. Madanayaka's wife Naagambika' constructed a tank at Rajagiripotam (Rachakonda) which was known as 'Nagasamudram'. According to an inscription found at this place, Madhanayaka wrote a commentary on 'Raghaveeyam'. He dedicated it to Lord Sree Rama.

During the Reddi period, the rulers gave much preference for digging wells. But unfortunately, there is no epigraphical evidence of a good irrigation system. Well, irrigation was preferred in the areas where there was water scarcity due to the low rainfall, particularly in the Palnad area. Lankelabavi, Kanyakalabavi and peddigalabavi were dug by the Reddi Kings.

Near the village of Kolloru in the Sattenapalli taluk are found traces of two bunds of ruined tanks, 'originally intended to collect the water from the hills on the east'²³. Santanasagara was one such tank constructed during the reign of Peda Komati Vema by his wife Surambika. This fact is known to us from an inscription is the Virabhadrasvami temple in the village of Phirangipuram in Sattensapalli taluk, dated in Saka 1331. It is quite interesting to notice that women of all classes had shown much interest in constructing water bodies to help the rapid growth of agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry in Medieval Andhradesa. It was mainly the concept of saptasantanas that inspired them to undertake the tank construction activities. It was this spirit that inculcated the brains of even the common women to involve themselves in one form or the other in the construction of a tank, a canal, or a well. The Kakatiyas attached much importance to the involvement of women in tank construction. Epigraphical evidence proved that almost all the female members of the Kakatiya family made donations for the construction of tanks and built townships around them with all amenities.

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