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Society and Economy under the Chalukyas of Kalyana

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Abstract:

The Western Chalukyas ruled most of the [western Deccan](#), [South India](#), between the 10th and 12th centuries. This dynasty is sometimes called the Kalyana Chalukya after its regal capital at Kalyana, today's [Basavakalyan](#) in Bidar district of [Karnataka](#) and alternatively the Later Chalukya from its theoretical relationship to the sixth century [Chalukya dynasty](#) of [Badami](#). The dynasty is called Western Chalukyas to differentiate from the contemporaneous [Eastern Chalukyas](#) of [Vengi](#), a separate dynasty. Prior to the rise of these Chalukyas, the [Rashtrakutas](#) of [Manyakheta](#) controlled most of Deccan and central India for over two centuries. In 973, seeing confusion in the Rashtrakuta empire after a successful invasion of their capital by the [Paramara](#) of [Malwa](#), [Tailapa II](#) a feudatory of the Rashtrakuta ruling from [Bijapur](#) region defeated his overlords and made Manyakheta his capital.

The dynasty quickly rose to power and grew into an empire under [Somesvara I](#) who moved the capital to Kalyana.¹

For over a century, the two empires of southern India, the Western Chalukyas and the [Chola dynasty](#) of [Tanjore](#) fought many fierce wars to control the fertile region of [Vengi](#). During these conflicts, the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, distant cousins of the Western Chalukyas but related to the Cholas by marriage took sides with the Cholas further complicating the situation. During the rule of [Vikramaditya VI](#), in the late eleventh to early twelfth century, the Western Chalukyas convincingly contended with the Cholas and reached a peak ruling territories that spread over most of the Deccan.² Vast areas between the [Narmada River](#) in the north and [Kaveri River](#) in the south came under Chalukya control. During this period the other major ruling families of the Deccan, the [Hoysalas](#), the [Seuna Yadavas of Devagiri](#), the [Kakatiya dynasty](#) and the Southern [Kalachuri](#), were subordinates of the Western Chalukyas and gained their independence only when the power of the Chalukya waned during the later half of the twelfth century.³

The Western Chalukyas developed an architectural style known today as a transitional style, an architectural link between the style of the early Chalukya dynasty and that of the later Hoysala empire. Most of its monuments are in the districts bordering the Tungabhadra River in central Karnataka. Well known examples are the [Kasivisvesvara Temple](#) at [Lakkundi](#), the Mallikarjuna Temple at Kuruvatii, the Kallesvara Temple at Bagali and the [Mahadeva Temple](#) at Itagi. This was an important period in the development of fine arts in Southern India, especially in literature as the Western Chalukya kings encouraged writers in the native language of [Kannada](#), and [Sanskrit](#).⁴

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SOCIETY

POSITION OF WOMEN

The rise of [Veerashaivism](#) was revolutionary and challenged the prevailing [Hindu caste system](#) which retained royal support. The social role of women largely depended on their economic status and level of education in this relatively liberal period. Freedom was more available to women in the royal and affluent urban families. Records describe the participation of women in the fine arts, such as Chalukya queen Chandala Devi's and [Kalachuri](#) queen Sovala Devi's skill in dance and music. The compositions of thirty [Vachana](#) women poets included the work of the 12th century [Virashaiva](#) mystic Akka Mahadevi whose devotion to the [bhakti](#) movement is well known.⁵ Contemporary records indicate some royal women were involved in administrative and martial affairs such as princess Akkadevi, (sister of King Jayasimha II) who fought and defeated rebellious feudals.⁶ Inscriptions emphasise public acceptance of widowhood indicating that [Sati](#) (a custom in which a dead man's widow used to [immolate](#) herself on her husband's funeral [pyre](#)) though present was on a voluntary basis.⁷ Ritual deaths to achieve salvation were seen among the [Jains](#) who preferred to fast to death ([Sallekhana](#)), while people of some other communities chose to jump on spikes (Shoolabrahma) or walking into fire on an eclipse.

Caste System

In a Hindu caste system that was conspicuously present, [Brahmins](#) enjoyed a privileged position as providers of knowledge and local justice. These Brahmins were normally involved in careers that revolved around religion and learning with the exception of a few who achieved success in martial affairs. They were patronised by kings, nobles and wealthy aristocrats who persuaded learned Brahmins to settle in specific towns and villages by making them grants of land and houses. The relocation of Brahmin scholars was calculated to be in the interest of the kingdom as they were viewed as persons detached from wealth and power and their knowledge was a useful tool to educate and teach ethical conduct and discipline in local communities. Brahmins were also actively involved in solving local problems by functioning as neutral arbiters (Panchayat).⁸

FOOD AND DRINKING HABITS

Regarding eating habits, Brahmins, Jains, Buddhists and Shaivas were strictly vegetarian while the partaking of different kinds of meat was popular among other communities. Marketplace vendors sold meat from domesticated animals such as goats, sheep, pigs and fowl as well as exotic meat including partridge, hare, wild fowl and boar.⁹ People found indoor amusement by attending wrestling matches (Kusti) or watching animals fight such as cock fights and ram fights or by gambling. Horse racing was a popular outdoor past time.¹⁰ In addition to these leisurely activities, festivals and fairs were frequent and entertainment by traveling troupes of acrobats, dancers, dramatists and musicians was often provided.¹¹

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Schools and hospitals are mentioned in records and these were built in the vicinity of temples. Marketplaces served as open air town halls where people gathered to discuss and ponder local issues. Choirs, whose main function was to sing devotional hymns, were maintained at temple expense. Young men were trained to sing in choirs in schools attached to monasteries such as Hindu [Matha](#), Jain Palli and Buddhist [Vihara](#).¹² These institutions provided advanced education in religion and ethics and were well equipped with libraries (Saraswati Bhandara). Learning was imparted in the local language and in Sanskrit. Schools of higher learning were called Brahmapuri (or Ghatika or Agrahara). Teaching Sanskrit was a near monopoly of Brahmins who received royal endowments for their cause. Inscriptions record that the number of subjects taught varied from four to eighteen.¹³ The four most popular subjects with royal students were Economics (Vartta), Political Science (Dandaniti), Veda (trayi) and Philosophy (Anvikshiki), subjects that are mentioned as early as [Kautilyas Arthasastra](#).

ECONOMY

AGRICULTURE AND LABOUR

Agriculture was the empire's main source of income through taxes on land and produce. The majority of the people lived in villages and worked farming the staple crops of [rice](#), [pulses](#), and [cotton](#) in the dry areas and sugarcane in areas having sufficient rainfall, with [areca](#) and [betel](#) being the chief cash crops. The living



conditions of the labourers who farmed the land must have been bearable as there are no records of revolts by the landless against wealthy landlords. If peasants were disgruntled the common practice was to migrate in large numbers out of the jurisdiction of the ruler who was mistreating them, thereby depriving him of revenue from their labor.¹⁴

TAXATION SYSTEM

Taxes were levied on mining and forest products, and additional income was raised through tolls for the use of transportation facilities. The state also collected fees from customs, professional licenses, and judicial fines.¹⁵ Records show horses and salt were taxed as well as commodities (gold, textiles, perfumes) and agricultural produce (black pepper, paddy, spices, betel leaves, palm leaves, coconuts and sugar). Land tax assessment was based on frequent surveys evaluating the quality of land and the type of produce. Chalukya records specifically mention black soil and red soil lands in addition to wetland, dry land and wasteland in determining taxation rates.¹⁶

Key figures mentioned in inscriptions from rural areas were the Gavundas (officials) or [Goudas](#). The Gavundas belonged to two levels of economic strata, the Praja Gavunda (people's Gavunda) and the [Prabhu](#) Gavunda (lord of Gavundas). They served the dual purpose of representing the people before the rulers as well as functioning as state appointees for tax collection and the raising of militias. They are mentioned in inscriptions related to land transactions, irrigation maintenance, village tax collection and village council duties.¹⁷

GUILDS OR ORGANISATION OF CORPORATE ENTERPRISES

The organisation of corporate enterprises became common in the 11th century.¹⁸ Almost all arts and crafts were organised into guilds and work was done on a corporate basis; records do not mention individual artists, sculptors and craftsman. Only in the regions ruled by the Hoysala did individual sculptors etched their names below their creations.¹⁹ Merchants organised themselves into powerful [guilds](#) that transcended political divisions, allowing their operations to be largely unaffected by wars and revolutions. Their only threat was the possibility of theft from [brigands](#) when their ships and caravans traveled to distant lands. Powerful South Indian merchant guilds included the [Manigramam](#), the [Nagarattar](#) and the [Anjuvannam](#). Local guilds were called nagaram, while the [Nanadesis](#) were traders from neighbouring kingdoms who perhaps mixed business with pleasure. The wealthiest and most influential and celebrated of all South Indian merchant guilds was the self styled [Ainnurruvar](#), also known as the 500 Svamis of Ayyavolepura ([Brahmins](#) and [Mahajanas](#) of present day [Aihole](#)),²⁰ who conducted extensive land and sea trade and thereby contributed significantly to the total foreign trade of the empire. It fiercely protected its trade obligations (Vira Bananjudharma or law of the noble merchants) and its members often recorded their achievements in [inscriptions](#) (Prasasti). Five hundred such excavated Prasasti inscriptions, with their own flag and emblem, the bull, record their pride in their business.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Rich traders contributed significantly to the king's treasury through paying import and export taxes. The edicts of the Aihole Svamis mention trade ties with foreign kingdoms such as [Chera](#), [Pandya](#), Maleya ([Malayasia](#)), [Magadh](#), [Kaushal](#), [Saurashtra](#), [Kurumba](#), Kambhoja ([Cambodia](#)), Lata ([Gujarat](#)), Parasa ([Persia](#)) and [Nepal](#). Travelling both land and sea routes, these merchants traded mostly in precious stones, spices and perfumes, and other specialty items such as camphor. Business flourished in precious stones such as diamonds, [lapis lazuli](#), [onyx](#), [topaz](#), [carbuncles](#) and [emeralds](#). Commonly traded spices were cardamom, saffron, and cloves, while perfumes included the by-products of sandalwood, [bdellium](#), musk, [civet](#) and rose. These items were sold either in bulk or hawked on streets by local merchants in towns.²¹ The Western Chalukyas controlled most of South India's west coast and by the 10th century they had established extensive trade ties with the [Tang Empire](#) of [China](#), the empires of [Southeast Asia](#) and the [Abbasid Caliphate](#) in [Bhagdad](#), and by the 12th century Chinese fleets were frequenting Indian ports. Exports to [Song Dynasty](#) China included textiles, spices, medicinal plants, jewels, ivory, rhino horn, ebony and camphor. The same products also reached ports in the west such as [Dhofar](#) and [Aden](#). The final destinations for those trading with the west were Persia, Arabia and Egypt.²² The thriving trade center of [Siraf](#), a port on the eastern coast of the Persian Gulf, served an international clientele of merchants including those from the Chalukya empire who were feasted by wealthy local merchants during business visits. An indicator of the Indian merchants' importance in Siraf comes from records describing dining plates reserved for them.²³ In addition to this, Siraf received [aloe](#) wood, perfumes, sandalwood and condiments. The most expensive



imports to South India were Arabian horse shipments, this trade being monopolised by Arabs and local Brahmin merchants. Thirteenth century traveler [Marco Polo](#) recorded that the breeding of horses never succeeded in India due to differing climatic, soil and grassland conditions.²⁴

CONCLUSIONS.

The Western Chalukyas who ruled most of the [western Deccan](#), [South India](#), between the 10th and 12th centuries are sometimes called the Kalyana Chalukya and the Later Chalukya also. During the Chalukyas of Kalyana, the social role of women largely depended on their economic status and level of education. The Hindu caste system was conspicuously present and the [Brahmins](#) enjoyed a privileged position in the Society. Brahmins, Jains, Buddhists and Shaivas were strictly vegetarian while the partaking of different kinds of meat was popular among other communities. Schools and hospitals were built in the vicinity of temples, Hindu [Matha](#), Jain Palli and Buddhist [Vihara](#), schools of higher learning were called Brahmapuri (or Ghatika or Agrahara).

Agriculture was the main source of income through, staple crops of [rice](#), [pulses](#), and [cotton](#) in the dry areas and sugarcane in areas having sufficient rainfall, with [areca](#) and [betel](#) being the chief cash crops were cultivated. Taxes were levied on mining and forest products, tolls for the use of transportation facilities, fees from customs, professional licenses, and judicial fines, horses and salt were taxed as well as commodities and import and export taxes. Gavundas (officials) or [Goudas](#) were key officials for collection of taxes. The organisation of corporate enterprises were common and almost all arts and crafts were organised into guilds. Merchants traded mostly in precious stones, spices and perfumes, and other specialty items. The Western Chalukyas controlled most of South India's west coast, they had established extensive trade ties with the [Tang Empire](#) of [China](#), the empires of [Southeast Asia](#) and the [Abbasid Caliphate](#) in [Baghdad](#).

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