

## STATUS OF WOMEN WRITERS IN PRINCELY STATE OF TRAVANCORE – A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT :

The status of women in a society is an important criterion in determining the status of the society. It is generally believed that women in ancient India enjoyed equal status with men. But various invasions pushed Indian women's lives to the sides of mainstream. The Travancore Kingdome was one of the southernmost princely states in British India which was remarkable by political, socio-cultural reasons. Following the matrilineal system of succession, women's lives in Travancore were relatively independent and active. The purpose of this article is to understand the contribution of the women writers in the cultural arena of Travancore.

**Keywords :** Travancore, Women, Society, Family, Music, Literature

### INTRODUCTION :

The women of Travancore were educated and led an active cultural life. They were also great enjoyers of the genre of literature and music, but generally do not seem to show much interest in the composition of literary works. The princely state encouraged women's literary contribution by giving them proper recognitions. It can be understood that although the presence of women in the society was active, although they were highly educated and they excelled as rulers, in the public consciousness the cultural life of women was not generally regarded as something to be encouraged. However, some women writers have entered the cultural arena of Travancore and inculcate their imprint. Family Obligations can often be seen as an obstacle to the smooth running of their cultural life. Although they failed to pursue a very creative literary career, they never failed to mold well-known creative personalities by adapting to the traditional family framework.

### NATURE OF THE LITERARY COMPOSITIONS MADE BY WOMEN COMPOSERS

As Sanskrit had a very important place in educational system of that time all of these women writers were very good Sanskrit scholars. Women Writers in Travancore have

written mainly in the fields of music and stotra literature. They mainly focus on devotion, virtue, justice and spirituality and composed their works to inculcate these values. The other two important areas in which female artists contributed were music and painting. Vocal music and instrumental music were mastered by female artists alike. Aṭṭakatha, kīrttana,kaikoṭṭikkalippāṭṭu,oṭṭan tullal,drama etc., were their field of interest.

### WOMEN COMPOSERS OF TRAVANCORE KINGDOM

Swati Tirunal's sister Āyilyam Tirunāl Rugmiṇibāyi Tamburāṭṭy is one of the most important figures in the cultural legacy of Travancore. She was a great musician but had a very short span of life. Rugmiṇi Bāyi, mother of Ayilyam Tirunāl and Viśākham Tirunāl, kings of Travancore, died at the age of 28 in 1837. Only a few compositions by Rugmiṇi Bāyi, who has written over a hundred musical works, are now available. A talented musician both in vocal and instrumental music was very fond of dance too. Śri Padmanābha, the family deity of the Travancore royal family, is often praised in her works. The fact that their musical works were sung extensively is an example of their literary and musical prowess.

Kuṭṭikunju taṅkaci alias Lakṣmi Pillai was one of the important figures in the cultural history of Travancore as well as Kerala. She had her early education from Harippād Kocu Pillai Warriar, the teacher of King Swāti Tirunāl. After that Lakṣmi became the disciple of her own father Irayimman Tampi and began to expand areas of her interest. The father was committed to teaching his daughter all the techniques of literature and music and the daughter obeyed it literally. Therefore, the excessive influence of her father can be seen in Taṅkaci's works. It is also true that the theoretical knowledge of literature has limited the possibility of theatrical performances of her works.

Kuṭṭikunju taṅkaci mastered Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit and composed many āṭṭakkathas, kilippāṭṭu, Tiruvatirappāṭṭu, kirtans and kurattippāṭṭu. It is said that in the early days of Taṅkaci's cultural life, her father did not show much interest in it. But later recognized his daughter's talent and played an important role in molding her cultural life. The reason for his early dislike can be traced to the prevailing male dominance in the cultural sphere. From this, it can be seen that psychological perspectives, rather than social barriers, disrupt the social life of women.

She received the unwavering encouragement, and recognition from the kings of Travancore. The Travancore dynasty allotted her a house called Kizhakemaṭham which was later became the haven of budding poets of Travancore. Amidst of her busy personal and cultural life, Taṅkaci found time to encourage and nurture poets and artists and to guide them. Taṅkaci's āṭṭakkathas are all full of intricate stories and the poetic nature of this is more astonishing than the theatrical potential. These āṭṭakkatha were very popular during her days. Śrīmatīsvayamvara, Mitrasahamokṣa, and Pārvaṭīsvayamvara were her āṭṭakkatha while Tiruvanantapurasthalapurāna, Vaikkamsthalapurāna, Svargavātilekādaśipurāṇa, and Gāyatrīmāhātmya were her Kilippāṭṭu.

A number of kirtanas were also composed by her in praise of the deities of Pālkulaṅgara, Guruvāyur and Tiruvaṭṭār which were well accepted in the consorts. these compositions were exact blend of both music and sentiment. Kuṭṭikunju taṅkaci, the first composer of Travancore successfully led a personal life with 8 kids and cultural life with a lot of disciples till her last breath at 1904.

Rāni Lakṣmi Bāyi (1848-1901), who was the wife of Kerala Kalidasa Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampurān and heroine of Mayurasandesha, one of the great sandesakavya of Kerala was an eminent figure in the cultural history of Travancore as a sound individual and a cultural personality. literature, music and painting were her field of interest and was famous as a vina player. She composed a number of kaikoṭṭikkalippāṭṭu like Nalacarita and Gopikāvāstrāpaharāna and stotrakavyas like Pārvaṭistotra, Gopikāgita etc. Koṭṭarathil Sankunni, the famous Malayalam author of Aitihyamala composed a work on Lakṣmi Bāyi known as Lakṣmibāyisataka.

An eye-specialist and paediatrician by profession, Makayiramnal Ambadevi Tampurāṭṭi (1832-1887) was famous as the mother of Raja Ravi Varma, the great painter of India. An exponent in literature, music and painting she led a very active social life and composed an Oṭṭam tullal called Pārvaṭiparinayam.

Kilimānur Umādevi Tampurāṭṭi (1797-1836), who was famous as the mother of Vidvan Koyil Tampuran was an excellent scholar and composer of an Oṭṭam tullal called Visnumāyacarita. She received a token of appreciation from the hands of his highness Svāti tirunāl for her excellence in cultural activities.

Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampuran's niece Ambādevi Tampurāṭṭi of Anantapuram was an excellent scholar and literary personality composed 2 works belonging to drama and stotra genre. Candrika was the drama written by her, where Stotravali is her stotra work. Ambadevi enjoyed support from her family and hence found success in leading a cultural life.

Cembrol Ambādevi Tampurāṭṭi was a veteran scholar in both Malayalam and Sanskrit. She spends her time in translation. He translated Astamicampu of Melputtur in the same name. her elegance in translating Sanskrit to Malayalam and vice versa made her an important personality. Manavikrama Ettan Tampurān himself requested the translation of his Malayalam work, Dasakumāracarita in to Sanskrit which was critically acclaimed.

Although women were educated, their cultural life in general was limited to the enjoyment of literary and musical works. Rarely did some come into the composition. But they face various obstacles to move their public life forward. Many stood in the way. Rarely did some succeed. Very few, if any, have achieved a satisfying literary life.

## FINDINGS

1. The public life of women has not changed pleasantly in modern times either.
2. It is personal and familial restrictions and certain stigmas of society that drag a woman back into public life.
3. In the special context of Travancore, the cultural activities of women were encouraged by the administration not by the social consciousness.
4. The main areas of activity were music and song writing.
5. They emphasized devotion and spirituality.
6. Although very few, some women bravely went hand in hand with family and social life.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from the above mentions that the public life of women is limited by their harsh living conditions. A look back to the past is essential as the factors that control the public life of women still exist in this age of science and technology. It will certainly serve as a corrective force as well as a cornerstone in the journey ahead.

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