

## PRABHAVATI GUPTA - THE REGENT QUEEN OF VAKATAKA DYNASTY

*Dr. Preeti Prabhat,  
Asst. Professor- History  
Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Government P.G. College,  
Lucknow.*

### ABSTRACT

*Women in the Gupta age were not disqualified from the exercise of public rights. It is proved by the fact that Prabhavati gupta ruled the Vakataka kingdom as the regent on behalf of her minor son in the fourth century A.D. Prabhavati gupta was a lady of strong personality. She became the dowager queen and acted as a capable regent of her minor son's. Her regency enabled the main Vakataka house to continue their independent existence. Prabhavati gupta also gave full support to her father, Chandragupta II, in accomplishing his task of victory over the Sakas of Western India. Prabhavati gupta is a unique example of women in ancient Indian history as she not only kept her husband's empire intact but also helped her own father in fulfilling his ambition of becoming the undisputed king of northern and western India.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dowager Queen, Sakas, Gupta's, Vakatakas, Regency.*

### Introduction

The Imperial Guptas united the whole of north India under a strong enlightened government. It has been said that the Gupta period is in the annals of Classical India almost like the Periclean age in the history of Greece. The Gupta epigraphs inform that Samudragupta's son and successor was Chandragupta II ruled from c. 375- 415 A.D. He had a queen named Kubernaga, of Naga lineage, and from this marriage was born Prabhavati gupta. In the Poona copper plate inscription, Prabhavati mentions her mother Kubernaga as Nagakulasambhuta, i.e, born in the Naga family. Chandragupta Vikramaditya had established matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas of Deccan. The Vakataka Empire extended from the southern edges of Malwa and Gujarat in the north to the Tungabhadra River in the south and from the Arabian Sea in the western to the edges of

Chhattisgarh in the east. They were the most important successors of the Satavahanas in the Deccan and contemporaneous with the Gupta's in northern India.

The Poona copper plate epigraphs inform that the daughter of Chandragupta Vikramaditya, Prabhavati gupta was married to crown prince Rudrasena II, the son of Prithvishena I. The Vakatakas were one of the greatest powers of Deccan. Its ruler Prithvishena I, a contemporary of Chandragupta Vikramaditya, agreed to the marriage of his son, the Vakataka crown prince Rudrasena II with Prabhavati gupta, the daughter of Chandragupta II. This wedding was probably celebrated at Pataliputra in c. 380 A.D, with great pomp and show.

It is being said that this marriage with the Vakatakas was established by Chandragupta II as a diplomatic prelude to his imperial expansionism in western India. This matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas proved very advantageous for the Guptas. After the death of Pravarasena I, the son in law of Chandragupta, the Vakataka crown prince Rudrasena II ascended the throne. Prabhavati was the chief queen of King Rudrasena II and had tremendous influence over him. It was probably she who led him to give up his ancestral religion, Shaivism, and become a Vaishnava. Rudrasena had hardly ruled for five years as he died a premature sudden death in c. 390 A.D., leaving behind his widow Prabhavatigupta and two sons Divakarasena and Damodarasena. Due to the death of Rudrasena, the Vakataka throne fell vacant as Rudrasena had left behind him his widow Prabhavati gupta and two minor son's Divakarsena and Damodarasena aged 5 and 2 respectively. Probably at this critical moment Chandragupta II paid a visit of condolence to his daughter and advised her to assume the reins of administration on behalf of her minor sons. So, Prabhavatigupta on the advice of her powerful father Chandragupta II began to rule as the regent of her minor sons Divakarasena and Damodarasena. Her regency was quite prolonged and it lasted until her son took the reins of administration in his hands. Probably Chandragupta II gave his daughter all possible help including military and administrative. He even sent several officers from Pataliputra for helping Prabhavatigupta in carrying on the Vakataka administration efficiently and took an active interest in the training and education of his grandsons. It is said that Chandra Gupta had sent Kalidas to Vakataka kingdom to teach his grandsons. It is also said that Pravarsena II i.e. Damodar Sena had written a book named 'Setubandhu' which was corrected or edited by Kalidas himself.

Prabhavatigupta had her own individuality and was quite proud of her Gupta lineage. In her regency the Gupta influence on Vakataka kingdom had greatly increased. The influence of the Guptas became more prominent and stronger in the empire of the Vakatakas during this period which is evident from

the copper plates of Prabhavati Gupta as she mentions details of Gupta dynasty, along with the of Vakataka dynasty. The Poona copper plates of Prabhavatigupta begin with Gupta genealogy instead of Vakataka genealogy. Prabhavatigupta, even after her marriage with Rudrasena continued to use the gotra of her father instead of her husband's gotra. Prabhavati Gupta had proclaimed herself to as a lady belonging to the 'gotra' of 'Dharana', which was the gotra of Chandragupta II, particularly in her Riddhapur and also Poona copper plate inscriptions. Two charters were issued by Prabhavatigupta. She issued Poona copper plate inscription during the final and 13th year of her regime, as the mother of the prince Divakarasena and the Riddhapur plates, issued from the Ramagirivamipadamula in the 19<sup>th</sup> regnal year of her son Pravarasena II. In the seal attach to Poona plates Prabhavati describes herself as the "mother of the yuvaraja, the ornament of the Vakatakas, who has attained royal fortune by inheritance". The Poona copper plates issued by her are written in Gupta script, instead of Vakataka script. Probably it was drafted by Gupta officer send by Chandragupta to help Prabhavatigupta. The Riddhapur copper plates of the 19th year of the reign of Prabhavati Gupta's son Pravarasena II, informs that Prabhavati Gupta was the mother of Pravarasena II as well as Damodarasena. The Miregaon Charter of the 20<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Pravarasena has preserved its seal, which reads as "This is the enemy-chastising command of the illustrious Prabhavatigupta, who is the mother of two powerful Vakataka kings". Prabhavati issued a proclamation on her visit to a temple of the god Ramagiriswamin, who is identified as the deity of Ramtek near Nagpur. In it she is described as a devotee of Lord Vishnu and is credited with the lineage and the family designation of her father. Prabhavati was undoubtedly proud of her Gupta lineage and used the cognomen of her father's family even after her marriage.

Hence after the death of Rudrasena, the Gupta influence on Vakataka kingdom further increased. Though it was a personal loss for Prabhavatigupta and Chandragupta but it was a political gain for the

Guptas. As now Prabhavati Gupta became the dowager queen and ruled as the regent of her minor sons. It is being said that during the regency of Prabhavati Gupta, Chandragupta II took full advantage of the Vakataka kingdom. According to scholars, the Vakataka kingdom was quite prosperous and had a powerful army. With the help of Prabhavati Gupta Chandragupta started his campaign against the Sakas of western India and destroyed their power completely. According to R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, "it was probably during the regency of Prabhavati Gupta that the Gupta conquest of Gujarat and Kathiawad were accomplished and the dowager queen afforded all possible assistance to her illustrious father". R. K. Mookerji is of the view that "Chandragupta's campaign against the Sakas was materially aided by his alliance with the Vakatakas, whose geographical position could affect movement to its North against the Saka-Satrapies of Gujarat and Saurashtra". So the regency of Prabhavati Gupta as the dowager queen proved to be of immense help to Chandragupta II in accomplishing his task of invasion of Saka dominions. Prabhavati Gupta must have rendered all possible assistance to make her father's venture a great success. This Vakataka help enabled Chandragupta to end the three hundred year old Saka rule from India by bringing out their ultimate

destruction. According to Rajbali Pandey the matrimonial alliance with the Vakatakas was of immense help to the Guptas, in maintaining their empire in the South and Oceanic regions. The regency of Prabhavati Gupta made the position of Guptas more secure in the south, which made them free to look after their political gains in other parts of the country. As a result of the defeat of the Sakas the provinces of Gujarat and Kathiawar were also included in the Gupta Empire.

Prabhavati Gupta acted as the regent of her sons for about twenty years from c. 390 to 410 A.D. But she has to face one more tragedy during her regency i.e., the death of Divakarasena, her elder son, probably some-time after the thirteenth year of her regency. So her younger son Damodarasena was installed on throne. Prabhavati Gupta's successful regency was mainly due to her illustrious father. As in Basim branch of Vakatakas, Vindhyashakti II was ruling. He was probably the eldest agnatic member of the Vakataka family and after Rudrasena's death it was his turn to be appointed as the regent of the minor Vakataka princes. But Prabhavati Gupta with the support of her powerful father took the charge. Vindhyasakti did not offer any opposition and continued to maintain cordial relations with Prabhavati Gupta during her regency.



Copper Coins issued by Prabhavati Gupta

Hence, it appears that the help given by Chandragupta II to her daughter Prabhavati Gupta after the death of Rudrasena II, proved quite beneficial for the Vakatakas. Due to the solid backing of the imperial Guptas, no one dared to offer any opposition to the regency of Prabhavati Gupta, and she successfully carried on the works of administration until the maturity of her sons. If she did not have the support of her mighty father, then it was quite likely that the main Vakataka house would have come under the protection and guardianship of the Basim branch, as its ruler Vindhyaśakti was the eldest male member of the Vakataka family. This could have resulted in the merger of both the branches under the ruler ship of Vindhyaśakti II. So, this marriage alliance with the imperial Guptas helped the main Vakataka house to continue their independent existence in the successful regency of Prabhavati Gupta.

At the time of Rudrasena's death probably Prabhavati Gupta was 25 years old, and she did not have the experience of handling administrative work. But with Chandragupta's help she successfully carried out her royal duties and emerged as a lady of strong will, determination and courageous personality. She successfully acted as the regent of her minor sons which is also proved by the fact that no one ever objected to her widow status in 4<sup>th</sup> century as she continued to use the gotra of her father in her name instead of her husband's and in the epigraphs she had mentioned the genealogy of her father's side and not the Vakatakas. The epigraphs issued by her are written in Gupta Brahmi script and she was also a Vaishnavite like the Guptas. However, the regency of Prabhavati Gupta was quite peaceful free from any internal or external revolt except the tragedy of her elder son, Divakarasena. In the thirteenth year of her regency Prabhavati witnessed a great tragedy, the death of Divakarasena, and she had to continue her regency for another five to six years before her younger son

came of age. Prabhavati Gupta certainly deserved rest after having ably kept the empire intact and capably rearing her minor sons. In c. 410 A.D her regency terminated when Damodarasena took the reins of administration in his hands. Her younger son issued an order concerned with her welfare in his nineteenth ruling year, which claims that she lived for more than 100 years, but her death cannot have taken place much before 455 when her brother Kumara Gupta died. Following the family tradition, Prabhavati married her grandson Narendrasena to the Kadamba princess Ajitabhatarika, thus ending the enmity between the Kadambas and the Vakatakas.

Thus, it indicates that Prabhavati Gupta while acting as the regent of her sons was quite independent and no one from her Vakataka family dared to raise voice against her activities. This strong position was possible only due to the support of her illustrious father Chandragupta II. Perhaps she also gave full support to her father in accomplishing his task of victory over the Sakas of Western India. Hence it appears that the independent existence of the main Vakataka house after the death of Rudrasena II was only possible due to the help given by Chandragupta II in enabling her daughter to rule successfully as the regent of her minor sons, otherwise the main Vakataka house would have come under the guardianship of Basim branch of Vakatakas or even could have fallen prey to the imperialistic ambitions of neighboring kingdoms. So Prabhavati Gupta enabled the Vakatakas to maintain their independent existence. Prabhavati, is one of the most important queens of ancient India, ruling the Deccan for about 13 years. She was an expert diplomat. Her career as a mediator started young when the Gupta empire came under threat from the Vakatakas in the fourth century. Her royal father's support ensured that others of the Vakataka family refrained from challenging her and she successfully carried out all her personal and administrative responsibilities.

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