CHAPTER II

The Science of Stealing

I. The Steya-Sastra or The Manual of Theft

According to Bloomfield, Sanskrit literature recognises unmistakable tradition regarding a manual of Thievery, called Core-sastra, Caura-darsana, Steya-Sastra, Steya-Sutra, etc. The Sanmukhakalpa and other works refer to this sastra and particularly in the Mrchekatika, Sanmukhakalpa and Ahervavedaparisista we probably have a few paragraphs from works on this science. How could compose such works on steya? As the composition of such a work required first-hand knowledge of the science and art of Theft as well as profound learning, it might have been produced by a learned thief, eager to help his fellow-traders or the members of his family regarding the successful operation of their vocation. The love for classification and schematism might have induced some scholars to write books on Theft based on the experiences of master-thieves and their own personal observations. The princes and sons of well-to-do men in ancient India had to learn among other arts and sciences, Theft and Robbery with all seriousness probably from veteran thieves and robbers. Sometimes Kings engaged expert thieves to teach them thievery. The secret army of a king often included formidable fighters trained in the art of robbing. As theft and robbery had thus some practical utility to rulers and people of high position, some manuals on the subject might have been composed under their patronage.

Fortunately for us, a few names of the authors of the steya-sastra are mentioned in early Indian literature. According
to the Brhatkatha, Karnisuta also known as Karatka was one of the propounders of the steya-sāstra having Vipula and Acala, as his friends and Sasa as his adviser. He was a Ksatriya. Apahāravarma in the Daśakumāra-carita decided to tread the path of thievery as indicated by Karnisuta. Hearing Apahāravarma's exploit, his friend, Rājavahana says by way of a compliment that the former has even surpassed Karnisuta in strength of mind. In the lexicon entitled Haravali, Karnisuta is identified with Muladeva and said to be the father of the Science of Thieving. According to the Tamil Silappadikaram of the Sangama age, Muladeva wrote a treatise on Theft. Bloomfield identifies this Muladeva or Mulabhodhra, the arch-thief of Indian fiction, with Karnisuta, Gonikaputra, Goniputra, Gonikasuta and Kalānkura. Haribhadra Sūri calls him Mulasrī and describes him as a tricky rogue.

A resident of Pataliputra, Muladeva was probably a courtesan's son, a master of all the Kalaś (arts) and an author of treatises on the steya-sāstra, Kamesūtre, etc. This highly accomplished steya-sāstra pravartaka (First writer of a manual on Theft) frequented brothels, gambled away even his clothes, taught trickery to others, encouraged illicit love, used magic pills to effect changes in sex and appearance and was an adept in the use of cipher. A lover of adventure, a good-controversiologist, a brilliant narrator, an expert in massage and toilet, he was a special favourite of ladies. He was cultured, intelligent, kind, grateful and wise. He had a large number of followers and was held in high esteem by thieves. The thief Sajjalaka in the Carudatta bows to Kharapata who is described as the composer.
of a manual on Theft in the Mattavilāsaprāśanasūra. While being ready for committing burglary in the house of Carudatta, Sarvilaka bowed to Kumārakārttikeya, Kanakasaktī, Bhāskaranandīnand Yogacārya. (18) Skanda, though generally known as the patron-deity of thieves, was, according to some, (19) the human propounder of the steva-sāstra. Skanda was also known as Kanakasaktī. Sarvilaka in the Mrochakatike (20) says that the blessed Kanakasaktī has prescribed four Varieties of breach. This probably alludes to a book ascribed to the god or to a celebrated author of steva-sāstra of that name. Bhāskaranandīnand Yogacārya were probably authors of manuals on Theft or just famous teachers of that Science.

As no work on the steva-sāstra is now available, we have to reconstruct it as far as possible from the stories of theft and robbery and incidental references to thieves' practices in ancient Indian literature. At the time of making a breach in the wall, Sarvilaka says:

'But where shall I make the breach ? Where is the spot which falling drops decayed ? For each betraying sound is deadened there. No yawning breach should in the walls be made, So treatises on robbery declare. Where does the palace crumble ? Where the place That niter (nitre)-eaten bricks false soundness wear ? Where shall I escape the sight of woman's face ? Fulfilment of my wishes waits me there. (21)

He again says: 'The blessed Bearer of the Golden Lance (Kanakasaktī) has prescribed four varieties of breach, thus: if the bricks are baked, pull them out; if they are unbaked, cut them;
if they are made of earth, wet them; if they are made of wood, split them. About the shapes of breaches he says:

'Now what shall be the shape I give the breach?

A "lotus", "cistern", "crescent moon", or "sun"?

"Oblong", or "cross", or "bulging pot"? for each

The treatises permit.'

These paragraphs and Sarvilaka's description of a sleeping man, the utility of the sacred cord, magic powder and his own superb qualities and principles befitting a master-thief probably echo some verses of the manuals on thefeft. Thieves' implements mentioned in the Mrohakatika and Dasakumāracerita must have been recommended by the works on steya. In the Mahile-mukha Jātaka some thieves expound what seems to be a paragraph of such a manual: 'This is the way to tunnel into a house; this is the way to break in through the walls; before carrying off the plunder, the tunnel or breach in the walls ought to be made as clear and open as a road or a ford. In lifting the goods, you should not stick at murder; for thus there will be none able to resist. A burglar should get rid of all goodness and virtue and be quite pitiless, a man of cruelty and violence.' The following passage also smacks of the steya-śāstra: 'He must make no noise. He who goes burgling must not be afflicted with cough.' Charms and spells for attaining invisibility, breaking locks and doors, making others asleep, transfixing men, probably forming a chapter of the steya-śāstra are described in detail in the Artha-śāstra of Kautilya, Senmukhakalpa, works on Tantra, Buddhist and Jaina works and folktales. Such a śāstra must have also contained
lengthy discussions on the Caura-sanska (thieves' signal), (32) thieves' language, (33) their dress and disguise. In the Parsvanatha-caritra, (34) Prince Varasena gained the confidence of some thieves by making the thieves' signal and took away their booty. In Hemavijaya's Katharatnakara, (35) King Vikrarna gained the confidence of four thieves by giving the thieves' signal. In the Tamil version of the Vetalapancavimsati, (36) a thief about to be arrested by a King called the assistance of his accomplices in thieves' language. Muladeva was, as already pointed out, an adept in cipher. (37) According to a Kasmirian folk-tale, (38) a thief wrote a letter in a cipher code. The Skandasage or Dhurtakalpa chapter of the Atharvavedaparistate elaborately describes the ritual of Skanda-worship and its efficacy.

2. Teachers and Students of the Steya-sastray

In ancient India, the aim of education was to enable a man to prove himself equal to all situations by teaching him all the arts and sciences including Theft and Robbery and as pointed out before, princes as well as the sons of the cultured rich used to learn those subjects from expert teachers. The art or science of Theft besides satisfying man's adventurous spirit also taught him how to enter into the enemy's palace and also to get to his beloved. As already indicated, a king used to train his spies and envoys in theft and robbery by engaging master-thieves for that purpose. The sons of thieves were almost invariably trained by expert thieves or by their fathers. (41)

The guru-sisya relationship has always been very cordial in India, the relation between the teachers and pupils of the steya-
sastra being no exception to it. Sarvilaka in the Mr.ochakatika reverently remembers the name of his teacher before committing burglary and gratefully acknowledges the latter's gift of a magic ointment to him. He is also very proud of his teacher's affection for him. Thieves sitting around their teacher used to receive 'regular instruction in their art'.(43) Prince Candrapida learnt among others, tunnel-making (saremgopabheda), magic (indrajales), incantations (mantraprayoga), all kinds of signals (servasajnes), languages (servabhesaa), scripts (servalipi), arts of jumping over walls (lenghene), ascending walls or upper storeys of houses (or the art of mounting horses, etc.) (archana), crossing river (terena) and ejecting poison (Visapaharana).(44) Prince Rajavahana and his companions were taught all kinds of scripts and languages, incantations, medical science, all arts of deception and thievery, use of arms and weapons, etc. by the masters of those arts and sciences.(45) Ambitious thieves had to master all these subjects. Prince Vikramaditya learnt magic from magicians and thievery from thieves.(46) In the introduction to Nirmalaarvaka's Pancatantra,(47) we come across licentious princes practising stealing. In a story,(48) a king confesses that he used to steal while he was the crown-prince. It may be presumed that all of them were trained by veterans. Once a king decided to engage a master-thief as his tutor to teach him thievery so perfectly as to enable him to judge the cases of theft more efficiently.(49) He had a notorious thief brought before him for that purpose, but to his surprise, that thief persisted in saying that he was innocent of that art and bitterly complained of false accusation. The confused King dismissed him only to find that his signet-ring was missing. The
thief was at once brought before him and in spite of his denial of the charge of theft, was ordered to be impaled. The King, curious to hear his dying confession, went to the place of execution at dead of night and to his utter astonishment, heard him pleading his innocence and praying to God to punish the King for his gross injustice. Being now thoroughly convinced of the thief's innocence, the King set him free. Next day, the thief came to the King, gave back the ring and confessed that he had stolen it to prove his marvellous skill in thieving. When asked to explain his utterances at dead of night in the lonely execution-ground, he said that once a thief told a lie, he should stick to it even at the cost of the heaviest punishment and by his behaviour, he was only giving the first lesson in the art of stealing to his royal pupil. A thief's son, Sukumara, learnt from his father's teacher the whole art of stealing called taskaramärge. Rauhineya was trained in thievery by his own father. He learnt that art by which 'one's voice is exchanged for any (other creature's voice)'. He could mount any tree and cross the Ganges. He also learnt all sorts of magic art perfectly. The wife of Muladeva must have engaged a thief to teach her son thievery with perfection for the boy succeeded in robbing the cot under his sleeping father who was also an arch-thief. A queen of Kashmir neglected by her husband engaged a clever and experienced thief to teach her son all the tricks of theft so that he could create consternation in his father's kingdom by committing daring burglaries.
On seeing a hole in the wall of his friend's house, Maitreya says: 'This hole must have been made by one of two men, either by a stranger, or else for practice by a student of the science of robbery'. This clearly shows that apprentice thieves had to give from time to time practical demonstration of their skill. We have an interesting story which illustrates the method of testing the skill of the pupils by their teachers. Once two thieves (who may be described as the first and second) sent their sons to the school of a famous professor of roguery. After the completion of training, the professor, in order to test the skill of his pupils, declared that anyone who would be able to steal from the middle of the thatch roof of a dilapidated hut a big gourd which was constantly watched by the house-holder and his wife would be pronounced the dupe of the school. It was a very risky job, for the thatch was so worn out that even the movement of a mouse on it dropped bits of straw inside the hut thus awakening the inmates who slept right below the gourd. As none ventured to take up this challenge, the son of the first thief agreed to try. He took with him a string, a cat and a knife and went up to the gourd stealthily. When the inmates woke up and started talking, he averted their suspicion by squeezing the throat of the cat which kept on mewing. Fastening the string to the stem of the gourd, he cut it and hurled the cat on the ground with a thud. The cat gave a sharp cry and the inmates began to talk loudly. Taking advantage of this hubbub, the boy-thief brought down the gourd gently with the help of the string and came down safely. Although it satisfied his teacher, his father decided to subject him to a more rigorous test. He asked him to prove his proficiency by stealing the necklace from the queen's neck.
The boy agreed and before undertaking the dangerous job collected all the necessary information about the palace, its guards and also the habits of the queen and her maids. Clad in black clothes, he started one dark night for the palace with a sword, a hammer and some nails carefully concealed within his dress. He timed his movement through each of the four gates leading to the inner chamber precisely when new guards came to relieve the old ones, thus being able to escape unnoticed by the guards. While standing before the outer wall of the queen's bed chamber, he drove the nails into the wall against the sound of the Chinese gong which was then being stuck to mark the hour. Using the nails as steps, he reached the top of the wall, surveyed the room and seeing the queen asleep and a maid telling a story drowsily, entered the bed-room through an opening, killed the maid, recited the story for a few minutes and then dressed himself in her clothes. He then made a bundle of his own linens, gently took off the necklace from the queen's neck and came out of the palace without arousing the least suspicion in the minds of the palace-guards. This time he was praised by his father. The king being informed of the daring theft was determined to punish the thief. At his order, his men placed two bags of gold mohurs on the back of a camel and asked the driver to make a proclamation challenging the thief to steal those bags. The boy-thief in the guise of an ascetic sat on a tiger's skin before a fire and invited the camel-driver to smoke ganja (hemp) mixed with intoxicating drugs. The driver gladly swallowed the bait and soon fell asleep. The thief, at a suitable time drove the camel to a lonely place near his house, killed it and buried the
treasure and the carcass. The enraged king declared an attractive reward for catching the thief. Then the son of the second thief decided to show his skill by catching his class-mate red-handed. In the guise of a woman, he went from door to door crying piteously and begging some camel's flesh as it was prescribed by the doctors for the recovery of her dying son. This melted the heart of his class-mate's wife who gave him some camel's flesh. He at once informed the king of his discovery and soon the buried carcass of the camel was dug out along with the bags of gold mohurs. The king had then both the thieves buried alive.

Young thieves often showed more wisdom than their teachers or masters. Thus a boy-thief advised his master to enter a room through a hole legs first instead of headfirst as the latter contrivance might lead to the recognition of the entrant by the vigilant inmates. Another young apprentice charmed his master by his swindlery and clever lying. Bloomfield points out that Patanjali's Mahabhasya 'tells of thieves so clever that they steal ointment off eyes.' In folk-tales often a prince or a nobleman gets such an excellent training in theft that he can steal a crow's egg without the hatching; crow's knowledge and restore it in the same way. Muladeva's son, as pointed out before, stole his father's bedstead under him after letting him down on a heap of cotton without disturbing his sleep. Another young thief stole two tinkling bells from the feet of his father without his knowledge though he was an expert thief.
Bloomfield also points out that the teachers in India, including those of the steya-śāstra, have a way of presenting to devoted pupils at the end of their college-career some useful charm (vidyā) as a sort of viaticum for their success in life.

Pleased with Sarvilaka, his teacher gave him, as pointed out earlier, a magic ointment which when applied to a person's body rendered it invisible to the watchmen and immune to sword-cut. A teacher named Skandarudra presented his pupil Candarudra with a magic pill which, when applied to the eyes, made one invisible to all. Another teacher presented to his favourite pupil a lock-breaking charm. In Haribhadra's Śāmarāccakahā, Narayana received from his teacher two charms, the first enabling him to fly through the air and the other to open locks.


REFERENCE


7. _Kadambari_, ed. Hari das Siddhantavagis, p.63:

8. Desakumaracarita, pub. V. Ramaswamy Sastrula and Sons., p.94.

9. Ibid., p.127.


13. Dhurtyakryena, I.


17. *Namaḥ Kharapatayeti vākta yasyāyaṃ ca sastraṃ pranītam/* quoted by M. Bloomfield in *AJP*, *op. cit.*, p. 100. According to Bloomfield, this passage means 'Adoration to Kharapata' must be exclaimed by him who has composed a thieves' compendium. He thinks that Kharapata is scarcely an author but rather a divinity. The author of the *Sanmukhakalpa*, which may be regarded as a part of a manual on Theft (as it deals with the magic science that can be profitably used by thieves and robbers) pays homage to Sanmukhakumāra. We have, however, taken Kharapata as the author of a manual on Theft. Perdel,


18. Mrochakatika, pub. Mirnayasaśāra Press, p. 84:

*Namo Varadasya Kumārakārttikeyaya,*

*namah Kanakaśaktye Brahmanyadevaya Devavrataeya,*

*namo Bhāskara-ranandine, namo yogyācāryaye...*

'Some think that Kanakaśakti, Bhāskara-ranandin and Yogācārya are three writers on, and the teachers of, the art of thieving.' According to others Kārttikeya himself is meant by those names. See M. R. Kale, *Mrochakatika*, 1962, Bombay, p. 66.
19. R.G. Basak, 'Indian Society as Pictured in the Mrcchakatika'


21. Mrcchakatika (III. 12), trans. Ryder, p.47. The original verse is:

Kesah ko nu jalevasakasithila yasminn sando bhave-
dhittinam ca na darsanapartakal sandho bhave / 
Kserakasakshay ca lostakakram jirnai kva harmayam bhave 
tkesmintri jenadarasenem ca na bhevasyaderthasiddhisame //

22. Mrcchakatika, Act III, pub. Nirmañyaya Press, p. 84:

Jha khalu bhagavata kanakasaktin catuvidha-
sandhyapayo darsita// Tadyathai Pakvastakanaam
Kṛṣṇanaś, meṣṭakāṇāṁ cchedanaṁ, pindamāyāṁ secanāṁ,
Kṣatramayānāṁ pātanamiti //

23. Mrcchakatika, III. 13. See Ryder, op.cit., p.47. The original verse is:

Pedaevākosam bhāskaram Pālacakram Vapi Vistīnem
svastikam pūrṇakumbham.

24. Mrcchakatika, III. 18:

Nīhavāsasya na sākitaḥ suvīśedastulyantaravarta
Drstriyāddhahānāmitā na vikala nābhyaṃtā ye cañca / 
Gatraṃ srastāsarīrasendhisithilam sayyasramanadhikaṁ
Dīpam cāpi na mārṣeyadabhimukham svāllakṣyasuṣtam yadi //

25. Ibid., III. 16:

Etena mapayati bhittisu karmśeṣametena moceṣati
bhūsanasem/pravogen /
Uṛgāteko bhevati ventradhī karete Dāstaseva Kītabhujage-
ghī priveṣṭanem ca //
26. Ibid., III. 15: About Yogarocene or magic powder:

Anaya hi samalabdham na mam dreksyanti rakshah
Sestra ca peti tam gatre rujam notpadayisyati.

27. Mrochakatika, III. 20:

Marjārah Kramenamragh prasarene syeno grhalumcnc
Supta-suptamasyavirustulane eva sarpane pannagah
Maya rūpasiriravesaragane vagdesabhesante
Dipo rātrisu saṅkete su du dhuro vāji sthele naurjale //

Apice /

Bhujaga iva gatah girih thiratvā petagapateh parisarpane
va ca tulyah /
Sasa iva bhuvanābahokene' ham vrka iva ca ghrane bale
ca simah //

In Bhasa's Carudatta, we find the following verse (III.11):

Marjārah plavane vrko'pasarene syeno grhalokene
Nidra supta-suptamasyavirustulane samarpane pannagah
Maya varnasirirabhesakene vag desabhesante
Dipo rātrisu saṅkete ca timiram veyah sthele naurjale //

Mrochakatika, IV 3:

Perijenaksthāsaktah Kaścinnarah samupeksita

Kvacidepi grham nṛghaṁ nṛghatham nirikşya viyarjitam /
Narapetibale persheye sthitam ghaḍerūvavyavasita-
sateivyampravirnisa divasikrta // See to Carudatta, IV.6.

Mrochakatika, Ibid., IV. 6:

Viprasvaṁ na hareṁ kācancanametho yajñarthamabhyuddhatam /
Dhātryūtsengagataṁ hareṁ na jathā belam dhanārthi kvac-
thāryakaryavicarini mame maticasuryepi nityam sthite //
35. Ibid., pp. 99ff.
39. The arts are generally known to be sixty-four but sometimes seventy-two katas including theft are mentioned in literature. See Chintaharan Chakravarti's 'Two New Lists of Katas' in *IHQ*, Vol. VIII, pp. 542 ff. and Venkata Subbiah, 'The Literature of the Kales' in *JRAS*, (1914), pp. 616ff.
40. Bloomfield in *AJP*, Vol. XLIV, p. 104 writes: 'The practice was evidently quite congenial to the Hindu bea and macaroni . . . At the bottom of all this, doubtless represents little more than young scapegraces' sporadic inclination, to wildness and romanticism.' Kautilya's advice (I.18) to the prince who escapes from his father's prison to earn his livelihood by robbing merchants after drugging them probably shows a
practical application of the art of thieving. See Dasakumara-

The sons of a modern Indian criminal tribe, the Aheriyas
learn to steal at an early age without any formal training.
See W. Crooke's Tribes and Castes of the North-Western


M. Bloomfield, op.cit., p. 99.

Kadambari, op.cit., p. 263. Prince Candrapada also learnt
sakuniratana i.e. he could interpret the sound made by birds.
A robber-chief in the Pancatantre could understand the meaning
expressed by birds in their songs. See Ryder's trans., pp. 172.
Keutilya (XIII. I) also refers to the interpretation of
mrgapaksyabhera (utterances of animals and birds). Dasakum-

Dasakumara-carita, op.cit., p. 27.

According to a Nellore inscription, magic (ghutika) was also
taught as a science. Radha Kumud Mookerji, Local Government in
Ancient India, p. 282.


Loc. cit.

Loc. cit.
55. Ial Behari Dey, *Folk Tales of Bengal*, pp. 171ff.
63.
64. *Loc.cit.*

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