THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SCENE
Chapter Nine
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The life of the people constitutes the main subject matter of a cultural history. The state comes into the picture as the most potent factor in moulding that life. Fortunately the inscriptions and the early Marathi literature have recorded valuable information on the social and economic life of the period.

Caturvarnya and Castes System:

The society was organised by the caste system, which is the 'most striking feature of the ancient Indian sociology'. The concept of 'caturvarnya' is the key to understand Hindu society and the caste system is closely connected to it. The basic belief of the Hindus in the caturvarnya remained undaunted during our period, in spite of the theoretical objections raised against it by the Viraasaiva and the Mahanubhava movements.

Though Sovindaprabhu and Cakradhara did not themselves believe in caturvarnya, their followers in this respect conformed with the society. Even a fundamental thinker like Jnanesvara who realises all the evils in the society, and wants to remove them, vindicates caturvarnya in clear terms. This shows what a tremendous and deep-routed impact the concept had upon the contemporary thinking.

But caturvarnya did not imply in any way a rigid four-fold classification of the society which probably never existed. It only implies a recognition that men are not born equal and that there is a hierarchy of social order based on birth. For a particular period recognition of caturvarnya implies the belief in the existing social order as a divinely ordained one.
So revolt against caturvarnya was a revolt against religion and society, and was bound to meet with intolerance. Thus the concept was a theory which provided the moral foundation for the caste system, whereas the functioning of the society depended upon the Smritis. We shall here consider the castes known from our sources.

**Brahmanas:**

The brahmanas no doubt occupied the foremost position among all castes. The brahmanas of our period as known by three attributes 1) Gotra 2) Vedic branch and 3) Country i.e. region. Out of these, the first two already existed but the third one had its beginning by the 11th century. The exogamous institution of gotra served was one of the links between the family and the society. Yadava inscriptions refer to various gotras of the brahmanas like, Harita, Sandilya, Bharadvaja, Gautama, Kasyapa and so on. The names of the brahmanas are usually mentioned along with their gotras. Dr. Mrs. Mulay has enlisted 24 gotras from Yadava records, which had already occurred during earlier periods and about 13 gotras as new ones. She has observed that Bhardvaja gotra occurs in the largest number of Yadava records.

Brahmanas were also distinguished by their Vedic branches. But the Vedic branches had not yet developed into sub-castes during our period. Hemadri clearly approves of marriages between different sakhas. Whatever Vedic recension a family learnt as a hereditary obligation, was recognised as its Vedic branch. In Yadava records the Rig-vedic brahmanas occur in the largest number then Yajur-vedic and a few Sama-vedic are found, Atharva-vedic being totally absent. Along with gotras and Vedic branches, family names also begin to appear during our period. Brahmana surnames like, Ghaisasa, Pattavardhana,
vardhana, Upadhye, Pathak, Upasani, Dixit, Agnihotri and Joshi have been discovered in Yadava records. But the surnames have not acquired the importance they have to-day.

The third distinguishing feature of the brahmanas which they were developing during our period is the regional sub-castes. Thus we get the Karhada sub-caste in the Lila Caritra (Ⅵ, Lila 1) and in Silahara records. But the Kokanastha and Desatha—two prominent sub-castes of to-day were a creation of the post-Yadava period. Palaśe and Sahavāsi are two other sub-castes known during our period. Brahmanas like the Kshatriyas used to migrate to other places where they got patronage. Thus we come across brahmanas from Gujarat, Kashmir, Uttara Pradesh, M.P. and so on settled under the Yadavas. The brahmanas did adopt professions other than religious performances and learning like war, statesmanship etc. but profession did not play any part in the formation of sub-castes among them.

The Brahmanas of our period represented the intelligentia of the society. They had not disintegrated themselves into rigid sub-castes such as the 40 of them existing among modern Marathi Brahmins. They commanded respect not only from rulers and masses but even from the Mahanubhavas. Cakradhara who does not believe in Caturvārnya had not made the Brahmanas an object of his attack. This would be better appreciated if we recall how Ekānath the follower of Jnanesvara's tradition, had to severely criticise the Brahmins by the end of 16th century A.D.

Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas:

A number of Kshatriya families rose to importance during our period. Their family names have been adopted by the Maratha families of the later periods, e.g. Yadava (Jadhava), Silahara (Shelar),
Maurya (More), Cauhana (Chavan) and so on. These Kshatriyas were the forerunners of the Marathas of later periods. But the Maratha caste which plays an important role later has not been referred to during our period. Kshatriyas are also not found as a caste in the Mahanubhava literature. Dr. Altekar states that 'Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were brought down to the level of Surdas during our period'. This might be the condition of the ordinary members of the castes, otherwise we know a number of Kshatriya and Vaisya families of repute. The Settis who played important role under Simghana and Krishna were Vaisyas. Vaisyas occur in the Mahanubhava works (Utt. Lila 225, 269). The gurvas referred to are Vaisyas.

Sundras:

The sudras are also very often referred to in the Mahanubhava literature. A number of their castes occur e.g. Kunabis (Utt. 210), Kolis (fisherman), Gavalis (cowherds), Telis (oilmen) and Kumbharas (potters). The last four occur very often. These castes must be normally well-to-do.

Yet some sudras were living in abject poverty and ignorance. Their condition was not much different from that of the untouchables. Cakradhara gives a graphic description of the pitiable life of a sudra (Utt. 404) and sums up his ignorance by saying, 'He is not aware that there exists any happiness other than he has seen.'

Cakradhara also gives us another glimpse into the life of a wood-cutter. (Utt. 405). '....The poor fellow has only one all purpose blanket. It is too worn out to permit its use. So he goes to sleep by keeping it folded safe under his arms. The same is
kept on the head for carrying wood, and the same again for holding grains. But there also, it is too short to serve the purpose.... He has never learnt any sense of cleanliness. He takes his grub among the kids having runny noses.... Then at the day's end he just falls on the broken cot where passion takes his possession, and he awaits her. She at that time urges him to send her to her parents where the kids would get something to eat. But the fellow turns a deaf ear to her. He is too attached to part with anything around. Even ignorance is too dear to be given up.' This is a page from the life of a sudra. These glimpses not only tastify to the humanitarian outlook of Cakradhara but also give us a peep into contemporary life.

**Out-castes:**

Untouchability in the Hindu society existed at that time and it took its present form and character during our period. The Mahars, Cambhars, Dhors and Mangas often occur in the Mahanubhava works as untouchables (Ek.12, Utt.460, GC, 73). They mostly lived in separate colonies outside the town (GC.47). They often did not have proper water facilities (GC.48). Deities monopolised by the upper castes were beyond their reach. They satisfied themselves of having had the 'darsana' of God in the temple by the sight of the Sikhara (Utt.56).

**Trades and Professions:**

**Government Servants:** A good number of persons must have been employed in the conduct of the government either as paid or hereditary servants of various levels. The highest social status was that of the Mahamandalesvaras, Mahapradhanas and Generals. All such officials are discussed in chapter VII.
Agriculture was the basic occupation and a way of life of the majority of people. It is testified to, by the innumerable references to agriculture in the Mahanubhava literature and Jnanesvari. The farmer is usually referred to as Kunabi or Kulawadi. The Vaisyas are referred to as tillers and land lords. They made good profit out of it. (Jn.XVIII.877). Land was the only means of subsistence for the farmer and so he filled it every year (I Jn.X.54). He was often required to face famines (Sm.St.27,107, and p.87). Many activities of the farmer are reflected in the sources.

Trades: There were a number of other trades. Some cloth merchants had their shops (Ek.,58,Jn.VI,292, XI,641-42), while some others travelled for selling their cloth from Uttar Pradesh to Gujarat (Utt.505-506) and from Warangal to Cambay (Sm.St.p.81). The migratory traders are elsewhere also referred to (GC.160, Utt,292). The dealers in horses were known as 'Hedaus' (GC.161). The goldsmiths (GC.249,305-6), Coppersmiths (GC.278), blacksmiths (GC.304) barbers (Utt.350), potters (GC.124-25), butchers (GC.49), cow-herds (Ek.40), washerman (GC.151, Pur.10) tailors (Utt.121), oilmen (Ek.18), fortune-tellers (Jn.XIII.826), cooks (Sm.St.110, Jn.XIII.420) and many others functioned in the society. Various traders had their own guilds to manage their affairs (App.Insc.nos. 113,85). A number of sadhus also existed for whom sanyas and begging were a means of livelihood (Jn.XVI.376, XVIII.1056-58).

Entertainers: A number of other persons earned their livelihood on entertainment. There were dancers, singers, actors,
gondhalis, garudis, bhāṭas, painters and so on who belonged to this category. The Kirtankāras narrated entertaining themes with religious morals and the Purāṇikas related Puranas (Sm.St.120-121).

**Festivals:** The common man enjoyed the years of his life through the festivals. The naming of a child on its 12th day after birth was a festival (Ek.15, GC.91). It was very well celebrated. The thread ceremonies (GC.277), marriages were great social festivals. Then Divali, Holi, Nagapanchami, Padva, etc. are referred to in the Jnanesvari. People enjoyed Holi by relaxing the usual social restraint and vulgarity was often set free on that day (Utt.20, 21, GC.280). Pola was a festival associated with the cattle (GC.309).

**Education:**

Education in those days was a private enterprise patronised by the state. Temples, Agraharas, Brahmapuris and Mathas could be called the educational institutions of the times. Education mainly formed a part of religious instruction. Kirtana and Purana served as institutions of adult instruction so to say. The Agraharas were rent-free villages given to the Brahmanas. Brahmapuris were also settlements of the Brahmanas. As the Brahmanas propagated knowledge these settlements served as educational institutions. A number of agraharas referred to in our inscriptions are enlisted at the end of this chapter. The acaryas of the temples used to be well-versed in subjects like Vedas, Dharmasastras, logic, literature, grammar, Jyotish etc. and commanded great respect.

Apart from the above institutions, special colleges also existed such as one at Patna founded by Simghana's astrologer Cangdeva for the study of the Siddhantasiromani and other works of
his ancestors (App.Insc.no.48). Vaghali was another similar centre (App.Insc.no.5). Devagiri, Paithana, Nasik, Salotgi, etc. must have great centres of education and learning.

**Insecurity:**

One important fact reflected in the literature and inscriptions is that a general state of insecurity existed in those days. The innumerable hero-stones are a standing testimony not only to the sacrifice made by common folk like carpenter Bomeja, potter Nagayya or herdsman Dosa in defending the village or recovering the cows, but also to the lack of proper protection from the state. Gangsters, dacoits seemed to flourish very well on robbery as a profession (Ek.66) and travelling was not safe due to them (Ek.71, Utt.370, Sm.St.1). Protection was a private enterprise and people were left to themselves in protecting their villages and might was often right in this respect.

**The Town and the Village:**

A number of towns had come to the fore-front. As religious places, political citadels, trade-route junctions, seats of learning, or commercial centres, a number of towns like, Devagiri, Paithan, Srinagar, Patna, Riddhipur, Kolhapur, Puligere, Ingalesvara, Venugrama and so on had become centres of human activity and progress. But many of them were not free from the evils of gambling and prostitution.

But the villages were the real abodes of the masses who lived their uneventful lives in their own world. Some interesting glimpses of village life are recorded in our sources. The public well or the river formed an important centre of the village whence...
women fetched water not without quarrels and where as many others assembled, the barber found his customers.

Cow-dung was an essential domestic requirement and the maidens in search of it would vie with each other for getting its possession (Sm.St.46). The presence of milk-maid added a touch of romance to the rural scene and the sculptures choice often fell on her, as one of his motifs. Village disputes did arise and sometimes resulted in the deserting of the village by some persons. The Woman:

The woman often figures in our sources. Though a few emenent women like Mahadaisa, Kanhopatra, Janabai and others are known, the woman was confined to the domestic domain and wedded to the kitchen and kids. In the ideal aspects the woman was one born of a respectable family (Kula-Stree), a devoted wife (Pativratā) and a divine mother. As a widow she must lead an ascetic life. The widows in general seem to be large in number (Sm.St.1,183). This might be due to the custom of child marriages, which was prevalent at that time (Utt.117). Widow-remarriage was not unknown (GC.155) but it must have existed only in the lower communities.

As the path of sanyasa attracted many followers, and a peculiar problem of their wives confronted the society (GC.213, Utt. 29,30). While the husband sought salvation of his soul the wife was often thrown into miserable plight. The custom of sati was not unknown but the cases are exceptional. It was admired as an ideal in theory but not followed in practice.

The characteristic 9-yard Marathi sari must be in vogue during this period, though it is only indirectly referred to (Utt.121, GC.185). The peculiar Indian custom of imposing ritualistic segregation upon women during their menstrual period
existed at that time. Cakradhara has once condemned it (Utt.347) but people in general must have been extremely sentimental about it.

Certain ignoble types of woman are also referred to. Bātaki was a keep and the practice of having keeps existed among rich people (Utt.169). Debauchery also prevailed among some women as in men. Such women are referred to as swairinis. Some of them could tactfully keep their husbands in the dark about their activities (Jn.XIII.809). But some formidable husbands dealt very cruelly with such women (Jn.XIII,506). Another type of woman that figures very often is the prostitute.

**Prostitution:**

Prostitution was quite widespread during those days. Big cities like Alajapura, Riddhipur, Srinagara, Devagiri and Mehekār are referred to in the Mahanubhava literature as having regular prostitute-bazaars known as samanya-stri-hata. The same must have been the case with other cities. Apart from its wide extent, prostitution was accompanied by a number of other social evils. Jnanesvara gives a vivid description of this condition.

The prostitution areas were centres of gamblers, drunkards, strangers, (mlenccha), black-marketeers, and socially irresponsible persons, who openly believed in hedonism. They were afraid neither of God nor of society. They argued that the body did not get leucoderma, due to illicit sexual contacts, nor did mis-appropriated money turn into poison. The whore would supply to such a person, beauty, dancing, music, flattery, and in her arms he would lie intoxicated in the sweet fragrancy of flowers and scents, and would forget the whole world. Here he would become
liberal and squander his money, earned through unfair means, in order to enrich the harlot. She would completely give herself to the customer but her surrender would be exploitation in disguise. The heaven of enjoyment would exist only so long as his purse was full — and no sooner did he become penniless than she would allow him not even to knock at her door.

The prostitutes also had a religious mind and some of them did feel like changing their way of life. They showed respect for great saints like Cakradhara and Govindaprabhu. The custom of dedicating women to Hindu temples also must have existed in parts of Karnatak.

Thus the contemporary social picture is one of an early mediaeval Hindu society organised on caste system and regulated by tradition with a religious sanction behind it. Economically the period must have been in general a prosperous one.
References

1. Jn.XVIII, See title page.

2. Muley, Dr.Mrs., Historical Geography and Cultural Ethnography of the Deccan, p.379.

3. Ibid., p.382.


5. Ibid., p.113.

6. Ibid., p.108.

7. Ibid., p.108.


13. Jn.XVII
14. In XVI

15. In XIII

16. In IX

17. Raikar, Y.A., JOI, Vol.XIII, no.2. All these points are dealt with.
LIST OF AGRAHRAS

1. Agarkhed (App.Insc.no.266)

Agarkhed is known as an agrahara in Indi taluka of Bijapur district.

2. Anuje (App.Insc.nos.355,361)

Anuje is known as an immemorial agrahara in Devangare taluka of Chitaldurga district. A grant was made in 1266 A.D. to God Mulasthana Kali of Hemmana-Betur which was in the great agrahara Anuje.

3. Bennehalli (App.Insc.no.487)

Bennehalli in Chitaldurga district was an agrahara village. It received grant for water-shed in the market-place.

4. Bhuvanavalli (App.Insc.no.391)

Bhuvanavalli in Devanagari taluka of Chitaldurga list was probably an agrahara. An arrangement was made that the property of those who died without heirs would go to the 'brahmanas of Bhuvanavalli'.

5. Bilva-grama (App.Insc.no.403)

Modern Bel Pandhari in the Nevasa taluka of Ahmednagar dist. was granted as an agrahara by Ramacandra.

6. Harihara (App.Insc.no.407)

Harihara in Devanagare taluka of Chitaldurga district was a wealthy agrahara.

7. Haveri (App.Insc.no.317)

Haveri in Dharwar district is referred to as an agrahara.

8. Kokatnur (App.Insc.no.126)

Modern Kokatnur in Athani taluka of Belgaum district was called Korggata or Korggatanur agrahara in Kanambade-300;

9. Kratuka (App.Insc.no.55)

Kratuka village in Gadga, Dharwar district was an agrahara in Belvola-300. It is referred to in 1213 A.D. The Trikutesvara temple there was a Lingayat one and Bhillama V had given a grant to it in 1191 A.D. (App.Insc.no.14).
10. Kukkanur (App.Insc.no.136)

Kukkanur in Yelburga taluka, Raichur district, was an agrahara with its Virasatva tempe of Virupakshaswami.

11. Kuppatur (App.Insc.nos.82,118,135,442)

Kuppatur in Sorab taluka of Shimoga district is described as an immemorial agrahara in the pleasant Nagarakhanda. It looked beautiful with its splendid temples, lofty mansions, streets of shops and even houses of dancing girls! The wealth of the agrahara had lured robbers and upstarts. Twice we know, (in 1218 and 1237) it was raided.

12. Madhubavi (App.Insc.no.146)

Madhubavi in Athani taluka, Belgaum district was an agrahara with a Siva temple.

13. Pippalagrama (App.Insc.no.403)

Modern Bel Pimpalgaon to Nevasa taluka, Ahmednagar district, was granted as an agrahara by Ramacandra.

14. Purushottamapuri (App.Insc.no.483)

This magnificent agrahara at Purshottampuri in Dhir district was created by Ramacandra's minister Purushottama and named after him. It consisted of four villages Pokhari, Adagu, Vaghara, and Karanaparagau situated in the Kanheri desa. Elaborate arrangements were made to meet the cost of various purposes.

15. Tilavalli (App.Insc.no.343)

Tilivalli in Hangal taluka of Dharwar district was an agrahara. It received patronage from Mahadeva's minister Devanna.

16. Vadathana-grama (App.Insc.no.)

This village Vadagaon on the banks of Godavari, Aurangabad district, was an agrahara granted by Ramacandra to 57 Brahmanas. It was regarded as an ornament of Seunadesa.

17.

Simghana's general Kholesvara is known to have founded a number of Agraharas like Khollapura in Amravati district, Varanasi (unidentified) and another one in Amra desa i.e. Mominabad taluka. (SMHD-I,p.58).