CHAPTER VI

THE HARÇA AGE
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Life sans recreation is as insipid as food without spices. During all the ages we find various means of amusements. Many sports and pastimes were common sources of recreation also during the age of Harṣavardhana.

SPORTS

HUNTING

Hunting, probably, an aristocratic amusement was favourite with kings and elites of the society during the age of Harṣa. Bāṇa has described Harṣa as a fawn-eyed hunter, with his bow drawn to the ear. He emitted rain of shining shafts which "in a comparatively few days left the forests empty of wild creatures." Prince Candrapīḍa, the hero of Bāṇabhatt's classical novel Kādambarī, is also stated to be fond of hunting (mṛgāyā). Huien Tsiang makes mention of a certain king busy hunting a boar.

It appears that kings hunted in the woods, with a great retinue of runners, horses and elephants. The huntsmen are recorded on such occasions, to have led in a golden leash largehounds as asses. The beasts hunted appear to have been wild boars, lions, carabhas, yaks and various...
kinds of deer. Use of poisoned baits in killing beasts is made evident from the Rājya-Vardhana's words: "At sovereignty my eye grows disordered like the partridge at poison." It seems hunters lured deer with the music before entrapping them. During such hunting expeditions princes wore a particular kind of hunting dress. Kālidāsa refers to such a costume (mṛgayaśvesām). Bāṇa has also made mention of such a dress in his novel Kādambari. Candrapīḍa, the hero, is stated to have taken off his corselet and removed the rest of his riding apparel.

At the hunting expedition almost all palatial luxuries and comforts were provided in the camp, where the kings and nobles retired in the evening. Candrapīḍa is stated to have been accompanied by a large number of attendants who looked after everything. All the necessary arrangements were made for bathing, exercise, worship and all other matters of daily routine. Betel bearer (tāmbūlakaraṅkavāhī) was also there in the camp. Sometimes, kings used their elephants or horses in hunting. Harṣa's elephant Dārṣāpāta is stated to be his friend in battle and sport (kṛīḍā). Herein kṛīḍā stands for hunting. The status that Dārṣāpāta received from Harṣa, was also given to Indrayudha by Candrapīḍa.

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Hunting was also quite popular among the jungle tribes. It was their main source of food and livelihood. It was more like an occupation rather than an amusement for them. They ate the flesh of animals and made ornaments and decorative pieces out of teeth, bones, skin, horns and bristles of the animals they hunted.

Despite the fact that kings and princes took delight in hunting, it seems that hunting was not considered as a good means of recreation. During the pre-Kauṭilyan days hunting was regarded as one of the fourfold vices, but kauṭilya recommends hunting as one of the royal sports. He says that "in hunting exercise, the disappearance of phlegm, bile, fat, and sweat, the acquisition of skill in aiming at stationary and moving bodies, the ascertainment of the appearance of beasts when provoked and occasional march are its good characteristics."

In the age of Harṣa the wise brāhmanas regarded hunting as an evil. In Kādambarī we find Śukanāsa advising prince Candrapīḍa not to take delight in hunting when his anointment was to be celebrated. But keeping in view Harṣa's active participation in hunting and his selection of a particular elephant for it and delightful indulgence of Candrapīḍa in hunting, it can be said with considerable amount of certainty that kings and
member of the higher classes took full delight in hunting.

It seems chariot-driving (råthacarya), elephant riding (gajapṛṣṭha), swimming-rowing-jumping (torāṇa-lapghana-pluti) and gymnastics were also common sports in the period. In the immortal prose, Kādambarī the poet Bāṇabhatta had given a list of subjects, in which the hero, ċandrapīḍa gained mastery in various sports like gymnastics, elephant-riding, chariot-driving, swimming, rowing and jumping.

DICING

The game of dice being a popular sport in the age of Harṣa is made evident in the classical work of Bāna, viz., Kādambarī and Hṛṣačarita. In the Kādambarī the people of Ujjain are said to have been familiar with playing of dice. ċandrapīḍa, the hero of Bāna's Kādambarī is said to have gained mastery at the art of gambling. It seems that the sons of rich and wealthy people were trained at dice so that they might not be cheated in the gambling. In the Hṛṣačarita, Bāna makes mention of his two friends Akhaṇḍala and Bhīmaka who were masters of the game of dice. He also informs us about the city Sthanviśvara which was hailed as a gambling house by the bards. It seems the game of
draughts was known to the people of the age of Harṣa. A reference to this is made in Bāna's work, Kādambarī. The hero Candrapīḍa is stated to have "sent for his amusement by the proters at Kādambarī's bidding, players on lute and pipes, singers, skilful dice and draught players, practiced painters and reciters of graceful verses." Perhaps the game of chess was introduced for the first time in the seventh Centrury A.D., Chess as a game is first mentioned by Bāna in the Harṣacarita. He clearly states that during Harṣa'a reign "only chess boards teach the position of the four members (caturāṇīga)." He refers to a grateful dice and observes how "dicemen and chessmen lone left empty squares."

The reference to playing of dice is also discovered on the main stūpa site no. 3 of the ancient Buddhist Saṅgarāma of Nālandā. It suggests that "the Buddhist brethren in residence here were not altogether above the amusements of less austere humanity." Similar pieces of dice had been recovered from monasteries nos. 1 and IA, as well as on many other Buddhist sites.

There are references which reveal the fact that dice was also played in the mixed company of men and women.
There is also an indication that couple played with two dice. Bana also describes Candrapida playing dice with the maidens sent by Kadambari. There is no doubt that dice was very popular with the masses during all the ages but it's playing was never applauded by the wise and learned people. In Kadambari Sukranasa considered gambling as a vice and cautioned Candrapida about rogues who mislead kings by representing gambling as a mere recreation. Kautilya, who laid down rules to regularise gambling says that, "of the addiction to gambling and women, gambling is more serious evil. It violates duty and incapacity to deal with politics." Kamandaka too condemns gambling bitterly. He holds the view that "it causes loss of money, neglect of righteous ceremonies, separation from the company of the good, endless hostility, disregard of necessary duties and loss of prestige." Despite severe condemnation of the playing of dice its popularity never diminished. People enjoyed the playing of dice without any apprehension of being criticised during the age of Harsha.

**PASTIMES**

**MAGIC**

Magic seems to have been very popular pastime among the people of the age. Huen Tsiang describes the people of
Sthanvisvara to be very much interested in the use of magical arts and honoured those of distinguished ability in other ways. The art of magic was so much advanced that Harṣa, named fourth act of his novel Ratnāvalī as Aindrājālika. Candrapīḍa the hero of novel Kādambarī is stated to have gained mastery over the magical arts. The magicians were highly skilled at this art. In Ratnāvalī a magician claimed to be capable of producing the moon (mrigānika) on the earth or hills, (mahīdhāraḥ) in the sky (ākāśa) or fire (jvalanāḥ) in water, or dusk (Pradasāḥ) at noon (Madhyāne). King and his royal retinue were also enthralled by the shows of rare magical feats. The magician from Ujjayini claimed to show whatever the king wished to see by power of his preceptor's incantation (mantra). Magician exhibited Brahmā in the sky on his lotus (saroje), Saṅkara with a digit of the moon (rajanīkara) on his crest. Viṣṇu or the the slayer of the demons (daityāntakāḥ) indicated by the four hands, distinguished by bow, sword, lotus and discus (cakra). He displayed nymphs (divyanēryāḥ) dancing with anklets jingling on their restless feet. He also made the illusion of the lord of the gods (Indra) seated on Airāvata.
This all makes us infer that art of magic was highly advanced. The people of the age seemed to have been really enthralled by such shows of rare magical feats. It seems shows of jugglery were also popular.

**DRINKING**

Use of intoxicating drinks have been quite popular since the Vedic period. During Harṣa's reign too wine-drinking was in vogue. The drinking bout was a feast for the people. Bāṇa apprises of the public drinking saloons (āpanamandapam) where people took wine freely. At the birth celebration of Harṣa wine is said to have been flown in stream "where in overwhelming joy, the wise forgot themselves as they were intoxicated." The king Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa sent several pitchers of sweet wine on that occasion. At Vasantotasa and other occasions of merriments people drank to their satisfaction and enjoyed the company of their sweethearts. It seems women also partook such drinks. Describing the women of Sthanviāvara, Bāṇa says that "their faces were brilliant with white teeth, yet their breath was perfumed with fragrance of wine." It seems government gave impetus to wine-drinking. On the occasion of marriage of Rājyasrī leather-workers (Carmakārāḥ) were feasted with wine and they were
stated to have been wild with intoxication. This shows that drinking was given social recognition.

**COCK-FIGHTS**

Cock-fighting must have been a popular pastime. That cocks were most familiar domestic birds in the days of Bāṇa, is evident from the Bāṇa's statement, after the death of Prabhākaravardhana, Bāṇa comments: "anon the cocks began to clamour wildly, as if in grief". Trained cocks of opposite parties used to fight with each other. The winner were awarded prizes. Cock-fights attracted a large gathering and seemed to have amused people immensely.

Vātsyāyana included cock-fighting in sixty four fine arts which he enumerates as accomplishments of every cultured man and woman. He clearly states that in the daily programme of a citizen "the morning is spent in amusements, the afternoon with friends, cock-fighting or teaching parrots to talk, and in the evening there is singing". Bāṇa too alludes to the rules of cock-fighting and this allusion again reveals that cock-fighting was well-known in Northern India in the seventh Century.
That painting flourished and got patronage in the age of Harṣa is suggested by the reference to Citraśālā or picture-houses, citrācāryas or painters, and painting in general. Baṇa refers to a city full of picture galleries (citraśālās) filled with pictures of Devas, Dānavas, Siddhas, Gandharvas and qepu snakes which were well adorned with paintings of foliage decorations and many coloured birds.

Citrācāryas in royal employ were instructed to paint pictures to suit royal tastes. On the occasion of marriage of Rājyasrī a group of skilled painters painted auspicious scenes on the walls of the palace.

Method of execution was almost the same as in the days of Gupta's. Like its preceding age, in the age of Harṣa too the outline was drawn either with a pencil called Vārtika or with a delicate brush known as the tulikā, a process technically styled as the citra-unmīlana.

Even the human skin was used as a back-ground for painting. It seems women ornamented their faces and breasts with lovely drawing of wavy creepers and quaint dragons.
DANCE AND MUSIC

Bāṇa has very beautifully portrayed the picture of the show of perfect synthesis of dance and music both vocal and instrumental at the birth celebrations of Harṣa. He describes, "Tambourines were slowly thumped, reeds sweetly piped, cymbals tinkled, string-drums were belaboured, the low-gourd lute sang, gently boomed the Kāhalaś with their brazen, soundings boxes, while all the time a subdued clapping proceeded. Even the clank of jingling anklets kept time pace by pace, as if intelligent with the clapping. Whispering softly like cuckoos, in low passionate tones, they (dancing girls) sang the words of vulgar mimes, ambrosia to their lover's ears. with tossing forehead marks and ear rings they swayed like creepers of love's sandal tree. Like waves of passions flood they gleamed all reasonant with the cries of anklets adding music to their steps. As to what was proper to be said or not, they were as void of discrimination as the childish play of happiness".

From the above observation of Bāṇa, it can be inferred that dancing especially by the low-class dancing girls, was performed to the accompaniment of instrumental and vocal music and they sang lewd songs. That clapping proceeded in the course of a dance as though to keep
time with the rhythm and the sounds of the drums, musical instruments. But dancing was not confined to lower standard alone. It was learnt and practised by elite class as well. It has been observed that music and dancing were the subjects taught to young princesses and princes right from a very early age. It is, therefore, not unusual that they became known to the people in the age of Harṣa. Rājyaśrī was taught music, dancing and other arts. Candrapīḍa is also stated to have attained skill at musical instruments like lute, drum, cymbal, and pipe, also in dancing and of music.

Regarding the use of musical instruments foreign travellers and contemporary chroniclers throw some light. Yuan chwang refers to "sounding drums and blowing horns, playing on flutes and harps. Bāṇa too mentions many such musical contrivances like the horn of conch (śāṅka), drum (dundubhī), tabor (turyā), timbrel (veṇu), lute (vīpā), tamberin (jballarikā), reed (vādyā), cymbal (tāla), string-drum, lowgourd, lute (ātodyavādyā) and the horn with its brazen sound tones (kāhala). Playing of musical instruments was so popular that on his way to snānahuvana (bath-chamber), king Harṣa was accompanied by the lute players, flute-player, drum-player or to be more precise by an orchestra party.
Yuan chwang remarks: "when the king goes to his bath there is the music of drums and stringed instruments and song. Worship is performed here and there are bathing and washing." Bāna styled this art of instrumental music as Gandharvasāstra.

TAMING OF BIRDS AND ANIMALS

Parrot, mainā, peacock, goose, cock were favourite birds that were domesticated by the people. These birds were in fact like members of the family. The following passage from Kādambarī clearly shows how close these birds were to the people." The parrot race was garrulous with prayer of oblation that they learnt by hearing it incessantly. The Subrahmaṇya was recited by many a mainā, the balls of rice offered to the dieties were devoured by the cocks of the forest, and the offering of wild rice was eaten by the young kalāhamas of the tanks closely." The parrots and the mainā were taught to speak like men. The parrots that were kept by Kuber Bhatta, predecessor of Bāna Bhatta had learnt Sāmaveda and Yajurveda to that extent of perfection that they could pinpoint the mistakes committed by the students. Peacocks, parrots, and mainā were in fact close companion of the ladies. Princess Kādambarī had mainā, Kālindī, and parrot, Parihāsa as close friends. Peacock also
was a favourite pet.

It seems dogs were also kept as pets. They are stated to be bosom friends.

CELEBRATION OF BIRDS, PLANTS AND CREEPERS

Elders and children enjoyed the marriage celebrations of birds and plants. In Kādambarī, Mainā, Kālindī was married to Parihāsa, the parrot; Yuan Chuang * has made mention of mock marriage of a man to a pāṭali tree.*

Once upon a time a very learned brahmin had a large number of disciples. A party of these on a certain occasion wandered into the wood, and a young man of their number appeared unhappy and disconsolate. To cheer and amuse the gloomy youth his companions agreed to set up a mock marriage for him. A man and a woman were chosen to stand as parents for the bridegroom and another couple represented the parents of the imaginary bride. They were all near a pāṭali tree at the time, and as the name of the tree had a feminine termination they decided to make it the bride. All the ceremonies of a marriage were gone through and the man acting as the father of the bride broke of a branch of the pāṭali tree and gave it to the bridegroom to be his bride.*
FAIRS AND MERRIMENTS

During the age of Harṣa people enjoyed seasonal festivities which throw light on their cultural background.

MADANOTSAVA

Of all the festivals Madanotsava was the most joyful and popular. The arrival of spring was celebrated on the fullmoon day of Phālguna and it may be identified with the Hindu Holī festival. Madanotsava is vividly described in Ratnāvalī. This joyful festival was the gayest merriment, melodious music was heard on this occasion and heaps of scented coloured powder were scattered about over the people. The whole yard used to get flooded with ceaseless flow of water poured by fountains.

On this occasion Madanlīlā was enacted by young ladies named Madanikā and Chaturikā. King highly commended this enactment. Men and women danced and sang together. The queen worshipped Kāmadeva or Madana (the god of love) at the Makaranda garden (udyāna) in this festival. The popularity of this festival is known from the fact that the first act of the Ratnāvalī is named as "Madanamahotsava nāma pratham-aṅkaḥ". 

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The second popular festival was Kaumudimahotsava. It is perhaps synonymous with the grand autumnal celebration of the full-moon day of Asvina (September or October). It is observed as Sarata-Pūrnimā festival. Reference to Kaumudimahotsava is made in third act of Priyadarśikā, where Manorama the maid of the queen Vāsavadattā apprises that she and others of the queen’s retinue were to perform the play composed by Sānkṛityāyana about the king and queen’s adventure. The fourth act of the play also mentions regarding the previous performance of the mimic play on the day of Kaumudimahotsava.

The Udayana-festival appears to have been instituted to celebrate the capture of Udayana as it was associated with the winning of Vāsavadattā. This festival seems to be of great importance, since it came to be associated with a particular event of king Udayana’s life. It is natural for any such social festival to fade in popularity with lapse of time. All the more the continuity of the fervour in the festival also rests in the popularity of the person, to whom it is related.
The festival is celebrated in the honour of Indra. The festival consisted of hoisting a great flag and worshipping it along with Indra, the god of gods. Kālidāsa has also made mention of this festival which was celebrated during the first half of the month of Bhādrapada in honour of the god of rain (Indra) when a post with a flag attached to it was erected. On this occasion plays were generally enacted. In the first chapter of Nātyaśāstra a reference is made to Indradhvaja and it appears that the first drama was enacted on that occasion.

From the above account of the various sports and pastimes popular during the age of Harṣa, it is clear that like in its preceding age dicing, hunting, cock-fight and the like were the most popular forms of recreation. There was nothing unique about this age. Almost all the sports and pastimes were similar to its preceding age. Only the use of magical powers were more popular and more advanced.
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