CHAPTER X

Social Conditions

Besides shedding light on the political, administrative, religious and economic conditions in the recent past in the Śrīnagarī Samsthāna, the kaḍataśa also tell us about the social conditions then prevalent. However, the information with regard to this subject is comparatively meagre. Though the Samsthāna was a stronghold of Brāhmāṇism, the Gurus followed a tolerant policy towards other castes and communities. Under the benevolent canopy of the Samsthāna were sheltered not only Brāhmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras but also Muslims. A few facts pertaining to the social conditions as revealed through the kaḍatas may be mentioned here.

The caste system

The Hindus of the Samsthāna inherited the caste system, as did the Hindus elsewhere in India, from ancient times. Of course, it had incorporated a number of changes suiting the times. In the absence of statistical records it is difficult to give the total number of population in the Samsthāna during those days castewise or sexwise.
a) **Brāhmins**

Whether Brāhmins were in the majority or not, they occupied an important and influential position in the society. Most of them, true to their traditions, were engaged in religious and educational activities. By and large they commanded respect from all the castes and communities. The Brahma that spread the doctrine of advaita, naturally attracted those Brāhmins who followed that faith. Brāhmins were in key positions. For instance, they were appointed as pārūpatayāgāras, archakas, bokkastas, etc. The kadatas refer to Veṅkaṭachala Śāstri¹ and Bṛṣṭhaya Śāstri,² the pārūpatayāgar and Subba Bhāṭṭa³ a treasurer. The galaxy of the āstāna vidvāns consisted of Brāhmins who promoted the study of religious knowledge.

The Brāhmins resided in a separate colony called agrahāra. They were granted lands for their maintenance. For instance, in A.D. 1389, Harihara II, granted lands (vrittis) in Kikkunda (in Santalige-nāgu) to the Brāhmins of the agrahāra in Śrīṅgēri.⁴

Much later, in Vijaya Samvatsara (A.D. 1653-54),⁵ Śivappa Nāyaka of Keladi, reasserted the rights of the Brāhmins of the Śrīṅgēri agrahāra, to be in possession of
vrittis granted by Hariharamahārāya.

The Gurus also granted svāstya (land exempt from tax) and houses to the Brāhmīns. In Śaka 1754 (A.D. 1832), Śrī Narasimha Bhāratī VIII, granted svāstya worth 9 gādyānas in the village Hosakoppa and also a house in a site on the western line of the royal street (rājabādi) in Śrīnāgēri to a person named Śāma Bhāṭṭa of Daḷavi agrahāra.

On some important occasions, Brāhmīns were supplied with provisions such as rice, milk and jaggery. For instance, on the occasion of a parjanya (A.D. 1758), performed at the shrine of Śrī Mallikārjuna, Brāhmīns were supplied with provisions for their svayampāka (cooking by self).

On festival occasions, Brāhmīns were given daksine (presents given to Brāhmīns). A letter (A.D. 1758) from Bidarūru to the Matha refers to the daksine to be given to Brāhmīns on the occasion of a parjanya that was to be conducted at the holy feet of Śrī Mallikārjuna.

Thus the majority of Brāhmīns possessed of small vrittis (landed property) and houses, were self-sufficient though not rich. Because of their austere life and scholarship, they commanded great respect in society.
b) Ksatriyas

The kadata also speak of the Ksatriyas. In Saka 1555 (A.D. 1633), the Budhivantas of Kumāra varga (a class among the Kṣatriyas) submitted a binnavattale to Śri Narasimha Bhārati of the Śrīṅgērī Matha. From this, it appears that as they had no Guru, they came to Śrīṅgērī and requested His Holiness to accept them as his disciples. The Guru was kind enough to accept them as such and asked them to render regular service to the Matha. Accordingly, these Kṣatriyas fulfilled the conditions.

Another binnavattale (A.D. 1633), submitted by the Kṣatriyas of Bārakūru, Mangalore, Banavāsi, Gersoppa, Chandāvara, Mīchē, Svāḍi, Bīlgī and Keladi, to Śri Saṅkara Bhārati, the disciple of Śri Narasimha Bhārati of Śrīṅgērī, tells us that there was a tussle between the Koṅkanigas and the Sēṟgērs (a class among the Kṣatriyas) with regard to the eligibility of the Sēṟgērs to wear the holy thread (janivāra). The matter was brought before Bhadrappa Nāyaka of Keladi, the ruler of these people. As the matter was a religious one, the Nāyaka asked the Sēṟgērs to approach the Śrīṅgērī Guru for the final settlement. Accordingly, they visited Śrīṅgērī and requested the Guru to permit them to wear the janivāra. They offered worship
to the deities of Sringeri and remitted kāṇike to the Matha and obviously secured the right to wear the sacred thread, though somehow its mention is not to be found in the document in question.

c) Vaiṣyas

A binnavattale,¹³ belonging to Śaka 1751 (A.D. 1829), makes a reference to the Setṭys of the Vaiṣya community from Ankola (N.K.). It is understood that Hari Setṭy, Paṭṭaṇa Setṭy, Veṅkatēśa Setṭy, Gōvinda Setṭy, Kūrma Setṭy, Honnappa Setṭy, Anda Setṭy, and others visited Śringeri and promised the Guru (Śrī Narasimha Bhāratī VIII), to offer agratāmbula and to remit charana-kāṇike, prāyaschitta-kāṇike etc., to the Matha's agent, in charge of āchāra-vīchāra in Ankola.

In Śaka 1710 (A.D. 1788),¹⁴ the Setṭys, who were merchants of Dānivāsa and Kūduvalī, promised to remit a part of their profit derived from their trade in areca, pepper and cardamom, to the Matha for the conduct of dīpārābhane (illumination).

A rahadari,¹⁵ dated, 1st December, 1813, issued by Kriṣṇarāja Woḍeyar III, to the amīldāre and killedāre, refers to Setṭys, who were merchants (Setṭy vartakaru),
requiring them to receive His Holiness (Sṛī Satchidānanda Bhārati III), with warmth, at their respective places. The Guru was to go on a pilgrimage to Gōdāvari.

d) Other communities

A few kadatas refer to the communities other than those mentioned above. For instance, on 26th January 1828, Krisṇarāja Woḍayar III, issued a nirūpa to the amīlḍārīs and killedārīs of his kingdom, asking them to accord a warm reception to His Holiness (Narasimha Bhārati VIII). It is understood from the nirūpa that the Guru who was to visit Mysore, was to be accompanied by 350 Brāhmīns, 200 Sudras, 4 palanquins, 4 elephants, 20 horses, 40 tattus or ponies, 100 bullocks, 60 Boyis or palanquin bearers.

It appears that there were communities, which were lower in social status who were doing menial jobs in the Samsthāna for which they were paid. For instance, a kadata pertaining to menial service, refers to a payment to Banja, the son of Clāṅabasava and Vīra, the son of Rudra.

There were parichārakas or servants whose main duty was to maintain cleanliness in the Matha. On festival occasions, they were also given rice, greengram, jaggery and milk for Svayampāka.
There were goldsmiths and oilmillers. For example, Timmappa, a goldsmith, took a rented house from Keśchaya, an oilmiller (gāṇiga). Barbers, washermen, shepherds and vālekaras are also referred to in the kadatas about whom the information is practically nil.

Tolerant policy

The Gurus of the Śrīnērī Matha were tolerant in their policy towards the people of different castes and communities. They wanted the people of the Samsthāna as a whole to be prosperous and happy. They granted lands not only to Brāhmins but to the other communities also. For instance, as noticed earlier, in Saka 1737 (A.D. 1815), Śrī Abhinava Satchidānanda Bhāratī II, granted the āuda of the Mandali village (in Ḍarakerī māgane) to a Muslim named Allibi the son of Vyakobi of Pāliya.

It is understood that some Muslims were doing contract business in sandalwood. For instance, in Saka 1756, Jaya samvatsara (A.D. 1834), Sābusāyib of Yeḍehalli, submitted a binnavattale to the Matha pertaining to the contract of sandalwood work.

The Gurus desired that the income of the Matha should be of use to the people of all Dharmas.
Nayaka's letter (A.D. 1653-54)\textsuperscript{24} addressed to Śrī Sat-
chīdānanda Bhāratī I, it is understood that the Guru wanted 
Śivappa Nāyaka to make the income of the Matha useful for 
the people of all Dharmas and pass laws to that effect. 
Accordingly, the Nāyaka promised to make the necessary 
arangements.

\textbf{Position of women in society}

Much is not known from the kādatas about the position 
of women in society. Women of the higher castes do not 
seem to have taken active part in social and cultural 
activities. Perhaps they were content with their domestic 
routine. But during festivals they were quite active. 
The Goddess Śāradā being the presiding deity in Śrīngārī, 
naturally women in large numbers visited the place and 
offered worship.

With regard to the women of other castes, we can 
gather a little more information. They were appointed 
to do various odd jobs.\textsuperscript{25}

Poor and helpless women of all castes who presented 
themselves before the chāvadi, were taken care of by the 
Matha. Such persons and, in certain cases, fallen women were 
either employed in the Matha to do menial service or sold
out to certain persons who also employed such women to
work in their gardens. The kadatas make it clear that
 orphan women were handed over to the pārupatyagāra at the
chāvadi. For instance, in Bahudānya Samvatsara (A.D. 1818),
Veṅkatāchala Sāstri, the pārupatyagāra of the Matha, sold
Paṇi, a widow of Maṇja, who had come to the chāvadi, for
3 varahas, to a person named Ahōbala Sōmayāji.

Similarly, Narasi Bhāṭṭa, the pārupatyagāra of the
Matha, sold a widow named Gōdi, for 12 varahas to
Chintāmaṇi Bhāṭṭa, the brother of the widow. Perhaps
Chintāmaṇi Bhāṭṭa wanted his helpless sister to be in his
own house rather than be wandering from door to door.

Some records in the kadatas refer to cases of
fallen women. In such instances, an inquest of the women
was held in the chāvadi; and her statement was recorded,
perhaps with the intention of punishing the person who
offended her.

An important social measure that the Mysore Government
took was, the passing of the orders in A.D. 1826, to emīls
and killedārs, asking them to hand over the fallen women
of the families of its disciples to the Matha and obtain
receipts. Such fallen women were handed over to the
Matha to be reclaimed and reformed so that they might lead decent lives thenceforth.

On 8th July 183", Timmappayya, the faujdar of Nagar, issued orders to the amils and killedāras, in accordance with the order passed by Commissioner Brigg, to keep a watch on such women who disregarded the rules of their respective castes. The cases of such women were decided by the Matha. But without prior permission of the Government, neither the Matha's authorities nor the Government officials were allowed to sell or purchase such women.30

A careful study of the documents pertaining to the cases of fallen women would lead us to infer that such women were looked down upon. It was considered a sin on the part of a woman to lose her chastity.

The Holeyas (untouchables) who served the rest of the society were also sold and purchased.31 They were employed perhaps to do the menial jobs in the Samsthāna.

9 The unsocial elements

Today we find a lot of unsocial elements in our midst. But even in the past there were thieves and
scoundrels, though their number was perhaps comparatively small.

The binnavattales submitted by Narasimha Bhaṭṭa and Śūri Bhaṭṭa respectively to the Matha tell us that a person named Aremahādeva Bhaṭṭa had gone out of his house on some mission to a far off place. On the same night, thieves entered his house and took away his belongings. From another binnavattale, it is learnt that the thieves were found out; but a person named Gōdāvari Veṅku Bhaṭṭa stood a surety for them.

There were cheats who thrived by deceiving the Matha and the people. A nirūpa (A.D. 1783) issued by Tipu Sultan to killedārs and pārṇaptavāgārs, tells us that there were deceitful people who lived by styling themselves as the representatives of the Śrīṅgūrī Matha and collecting kānikē from the people. The Sultan ordered his officials to find out such cheats and punish them. The officers were further ordered to assist the real representatives of the Matha in collecting their usual kānikēs.

The Matha and its disciples

A number of kadatas in the Matha illustrate the cordial relations that existed between the Matha and its disciples
since its inception. Among its disciples were kings and
chieftains rich and the poor of different castes and creeds.
We have seen in the earlier chapters that many rulers of
the various dynasties considered themselves as the disciples
of the Śrīṅgērī Gurus. For instance, Krīṣṇarāja Woṭeyar III,
calls himself the "Charanaśevaka" of the Śrīṅgērī Svēmi
and requests the Guru to bless him and send srimukha, phala
and mantrākṣate.

Besides kings, there were a number of important per­
sons who declared themselves as the disciples of the Gurus.
For instance, Lingā Śāstri, the purōhita of the Mysore
palace, in a letter 36 (A.D. 1818) addressed to Śrī Narasimha Bhāratī VIII, styles himself as the latter's "atyanta
priya bha (dearest disciple).

Achāra-vichāra

The Matha from the beginning took keen interest in
its disciples who lived within and outside the Samsthāna.
To curb irreligious and unsocial acts by the disciples
and to propagate Dharma, the Matha appointed Dharmadhi­
kārīs and Dharma-prāchārakas who toured the length and
breadth of the country and made enquiries into the conduct
of its disciples. In case such acts were committed by
any, the Dharmadhikarīs issued instructions for suitable prayashchittam to the offender. The Dharmadhikarīs issued proper instructions in cases of disputes among the disciples of the different Hindu communities. Several binnavattales in the kādātas pertaining to achara-vichāra, tell us of the Matha's control over its disciples.

The Matha was allowed to punish both male and female disciples who misbehaved. For instance, the Sirastedārs and Senubovas in the Nagar taluk were instructed by the Asaf's office, not to obstruct the Matha in punishing its male and female disciples who committed offences.³⁸

People were required to follow their own Jāti-Dharma (rules of the caste) failing which they were punished. For instance, Divān Purṇaiya issued a nirūpa³⁹ (A.D. 1807) to the killedārs and amildārs of Mysore, Tāyūru, Ḥādana- hallī, Elandūru etc. ordering them to prevent the people of the Māraka community (also called Hale-Karnātigas) from pretending to be Brāhmīns. The Mārakas who disobeyed the order were put under arrest.

In A.D. 1779-80, Nawab Hyder Ali Khan issued a nirūpa⁴⁰ to killedārs and pārupatvagāres ordering them to issue permits to the agents of the Sringerī Matha allowing
them to enjoy their time-honoured privileges like Śrī-Charana-kāṇike, agratāṃbūla etc. They were not to be prevented from making an enquiry into the matters of āchāra-vichāra of their disciples. Similarly, on 5th September 1832, a nirūpa was issued by the British Commissioner of Mysore to the amils, ordering them not to prevent the agents of the Matha from conducting inquiries over the āchāra-vichāra of the disciples belonging to different Varnāśramas and from collecting charana-kāṇike, mūlānāṣatra-kāṇike, agratāṃbūla, dīpārādhana-kāṇike, prāyaschittā-kāṇike etc. from them.

The above cited instances clearly indicate that the Matha had full control over the religious and social life of the disciples wherever they might have lived. A number of religious and social factors which governed the lives of the people, also helped to bring about social harmony in the Śrīṅgērī Samsthāna.

Excommunication (Bahiskāra)

The Guru excommunicated such disciples who disregarded their respective caste-customs. A few documents refer to the excommunication of a person named Narahari Sāstrī, who did not agree to carry out the duties prescribed
in the Dharma-Sastras. In spite of his excommunication by Sri Narasimha Bharati VIII, it appears that Narahari Sastri was invited by Anantayya, the amil of Chikka-balipur, to attend the upanayana of his son. Narahari Sastri did so and received phala (fruits) and tambula and blessed the vatu (boy) which was not expected of him. The incident was brought to the notice of Kriṣṇarāja Woḍeyar III, who ordered the amil to give up the cause of Narahari Sastri, till the reinstating order came from the Guru. 43

It is understood from a nirūpa (8th June 1828), issued by Kriṣṇarāja Woḍeyar III, to Channayya, the amildār of Koppa, that even barbers and washermen were informed of the excommunication of Narahari Sastri, and they were not to render their services to the excommunicated person.

Thus the Guru's power was so great that he could excommunicate a person. The excommunicated person had no place in society. If anybody maintained contacts with an excommunicated person, he was warned by the Government not to do so thereafter. The excommunicated person had only two alternatives before him; either he had to repent and beg His Holiness to forgive him or to run away from the country.
The adherence to the caste system, the tolerant policy of the Gurus, the position of the women, the presence of the unsocial elements, and the Matha's strict relationship with its disciples are a few of the insights that we get about the general social conditions that prevailed from 17th to 19th century in the Sringeri Samsthana.
Notes and References

1. *Kd.* 2, No.18; *Kd.* 28, No.6.
2. *Kd.* 8, No.6; *Kd.* 10, No.61; *Kd.* 21, Nos. 32 and 69.
5. *Kd.* 173, No.26; *Sg.R.*, 12.
10. According to the "Jagadguru Paramparā" as recorded in Śrīngēri Souvenir, p.157, in śaka 1555 (A.D.1633), Śrī Satchidananda Bhāratī I (A.D. 1622-63) was the pontiff whose immediate predecessor was of course, Śrī Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī I (A.D. 1599 – A.D. 1622) and successor Śrī Narasimha Bhāratī VI (A.D. 1663 – A.D. 1705).

Thus the binnavattale creates doubts with regard to the dates of the Śrīngēri Jagadgurus.

12. According to the Guru parampara list given in Śrīngēri Souvenir, p.157, in śaka 1555 (A.D. 1633), Śrī Satchidānanda Bhāratī I (A.D. 1622 – A.D. 1663), the disciple of Śrī Abhinava Narasimha Bhāratī I (A.D. 1599 – A.D. 1622), was the pontiff of the Śrīngēri Matha. Hence, in that year there was neither Narasimha
Bharatî nor Saṅkara Bhāratī. Moreover, the date mentioned in the binnavattale does not correspond with the reign of Bhadrappa Nāyaka (A.D. 1661 - A.D. 1663), in A.D. 1633, Vīrabhadra Nāyaka (A.D. 1629 - A.D. 1645) was the ruler of Kēladi.

Thus the binnavattale, neither with regard to date nor persons, agree with the established lineage of the Gurus and the Nāyakas. However, only on these two grounds the subject matter of the binnavattale cannot be ignored.

13. Kd. 10, No.35.
14. Kd. 82, No.7.
16. Kd. 21, No.16; Sg.R., 132.
17. A class of people who are by profession palanquin-bearers and fishermen.
21. Kd. 8, No.16; Kd. 10, No.29; Kd. 63, No.6.
22. Kd. 37, No.9.
23. Kd. 120, No.15.
24. Kd. 50, No.5.
26. Kd. 13, No.18; Kd. 28, No.72; Kd. 42, No.34; Kd. 44, No.108; Kd. 122, No.8.
27. Kd. 42, No.34.
30. *Kād. 73, No.4.*
31. *Kād. 122, No.8.*
32. *Kād. 120, Nos. 16 and 17.*
33. *Kād. 120, No.12.*
34. *Kād. 65, No.10; Kād. 66, No.129.*
35. *Kād. 91, No.6.*
36. *Kād. 12, No.150.*
37. *Kād. 10, No.36; Kād. 12, No.21; Kād. 21, No.56; Kād. 36 Nos. 9 and 126; Kād. 45, Nos. 11, 86 and 161; Kād. 50, No.10; Kād. 70, No.97; Kād. 81, No.22; Kād. 91, No.8; Kād. 116, No.3; Kād. 122, No.45; Kād. 126, Nos. 10 and 18; see "āchāra-vichāra" under Administration in the thesis.*
38. *Kād. 129, No.59.*
39. *Kād. 126, No.10.*
40. *Kād. 70, No.97.*
41. *Kād. 91, No.8.*
42. *Kād. 10, Nos. 28, 29 and 30.*
43. *Kād. 10, No.28.*
44. *Ibid. No.29.*