Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis, "Studies in Social Life in Karnāṭaka" spans the period from tenth to fourteenth century of the Christian era. I was fascinated more about how people lived, thought and acted in those times, than about their political achievements. This is essentially a study in the history of society. It is a big subject and hence I had to limit myself only to a few aspects.

These studies are mainly restricted to the present Kannada-speaking tract comprising the nineteen districts of Mysore State. But the territory governed by the Chālukyas (973 – 1200 A.D.), the Kalachuris (1156 – 1183 A.D.), the Yādavas (1175 – 1312 A.D.) and the Hoysalas (1022 – 1346 A.D.) was much vaster than the present-day Karnāṭaka.

These studies are divided into two parts:

In the first part, Chapter I deals with food and food habits of those times. It explains the cookery then in vogue; astonishing varieties
of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food are enumerated by Mānasollāsa. Lōkōpakāra of Chāvundarāya deals with vegetarian recipes for the humans and some non-vegetarian recipes for members of the vegetable kingdom like trees, and flower-plants. The importance of spices, fresh fruit, and green and raw vegetables was well-recognised and the people knew how to extract different fruit juices, and prepare ersatz food.

(ii) The second chapter deals with the dress and ornaments of those times. Fashions of Karnāṭaka were so elegant that they were introduced by King Harsha into Kāśmīr, by the end of the eleventh century A.D. Foreign travellers confirm the people's love of ornaments. And the literary sources describe a great variety of these ornaments and articles of luxury. Scented soap, powder and unguents (cold cream) which seem modern were common in those times.

(iii) The third chapter comprises sports, pastimes and amusements. There is a general belief that ancient Indians lacked a system of physical culture, and that they did not have any organised sports. But it is proved in this chapter that
physical culture was developed to a fine art in mediaeval Karnāṭaka. The state patronised many
games and people witnessed sports and games in
specially constructed arenas. Golf and polo existed
in their indigenous forms. Physical strength was
highly developed and honoured in society.

(iv) Women occupied a distinguished place
in society. We come across women administrators in
different cadres, working women, heads of religious
establishments, philanthropists and nuns. Courtesans
belonged to a different category and society
recognised them.

The second part is concerned with education.
Therein I have tried to show the concept of education
and the types of education that prevailed. The role
of various agencies like the hermitages, temple
schools, mathas, chatikās, acrāhāras and brahmapurīs
is then discussed. The subjects of study described
in the inscriptions, the roles of the teacher and
the taught and the amenities provided for the spread
of education are dealt with.

There have been no independent studies of
social life in early or mediaeval Kamarātaka so far. Political histories like those relating to Kadambas, Ḍashātrakūtas, Gangas, Hoysalas and Yādavas do include chapters on social life. But these are more or less appendages to the main theme of political history. They are not complete studies by themselves. The present attempt is intended to fill the gap for the pre-Vijayanagara period in certain fields mentioned earlier.

**Sources**

Inscriptions form an important source in this study. They are not of much help for certain aspects like food and food habits, dress and ornaments etc. But the literary sources of the period and sculptures come to our rescue, because no artist, poet or sculptor could escape the social milieu of his age. His works do resound a contemporary note. Sculptures help us to identify the ornaments and dress described in the contemporary classics. The inscriptions help us to know the religious beliefs and social ideals of those times.

**Literary sources are of immense help to**
understand the contemporary life. *Agni Purana*¹, compiled in the ninth century is of an encyclopaedic nature, and throws a good deal of light on the social practices of those times. We find that the formulae given in *Mānasollāsa* and *Lōkōpakāra* regarding manufacture of unguents, hair-oils and incenses are confirmed in *Agni Purana*. All these might have been borrowed or adapted from some yet unknown books of earlier times, on cosmetics; but this only shows the continuity of traditions of such arts.

*Yasastilaka Champu* was written by Sōmadeva Sūrī (959 A.D.). He belonged to north Karnāṭaka. His book is a valuable source of the cultural history of his land and period.

*Lōkōpakāra* of Chāvundarāya² (1025 A.D.) is a very useful hand-book of everyday life. It gives exhaustive information about the science of cookery, perfumery and cosmetics, treatment of plants, medicine etc. It is essentially a common man's guide. While *Mānasollāsa* describes the costly unguents and delicacies, for the elite, Lōkōpakāra has given many synthetic preparations which cost nominal expenditure.
Akhyānakamanikāsā of Nemichandra was composed between 1073 - 1083 A.D. and seems to be a work of western India. This work has been of great utility to corroborate certain facts given in Hānasollasa and other works.

Vikramanakadevacharita of Bilhana composed in about 1090 A.D. helps us to get glimpses of contemporary society. The Mitākshara of Vijnaneswara composed in the same court is equally useful for the same purpose. Kalhana's Rājataevangini also gives us some facts relating to contemporary Karnātaka, and the cultural relations between Kāsmir and Karnātaka. It is evident that both the Kāsmiri pandits Bilhana and Kalhana had a special liking for certain customs of Karnātaka which we find in their works.

One of the main sources for my study is however Hānasollasa or Abhilashtārthaschintāmani. This is ascribed to the Chālukyan King Sōmesvara III, 1126 - 1138 A.D. This wonderful manual for princes provides details about the luxurious life of the upper strata. In fact, this book came to me as a source of inspiration to take up the study of social life. Divided into one hundred chapters, the work
covers all the important subjects, a king was expected to know, and thus excels as a source of contemporary court life.

Karnada classics like Vaddārādhane (900 A.D. to 1070 A.D.) works of poets, Pampa (10th century A.D.), Brahmasāva (c 1100 A.D.), Nayasēna (1112 A.D.), Nēmichandra (c 1100 A.D.), Jamma (c 1200 A.D.), Pārāva (1205 A.D.) and Harihara (c 1185 to 1280 A.D.) also throw a good deal of light on the contemporary society. I may specially mention Pārāvanātha Purāṇa of poet Pārāva which is full of social data of the period. In fact, each of the works of the poets mentioned above provides ample scope for an independent study. The vachanas or pithy sayings of the Vīraśaiva saints which throw light on contemporary life have also been utilized. Padmarāja Purāṇa of Padmarasa and Basava Purāṇa of Bhīma, both composed in the early part of the 14th century have also been used.

Accounts of foreign travellers, Alberuni (1030 A.D.), Marco Polo (1292 A.D.), and Ibn Battuta (1336 - 1342 A.D.) are priceless for the study of social history; all these, along with other foreign accounts, have been extensively made use of.
Notes

1. P.V. Kane: *History of Dharmasastra* (HDS) I Poona 1930: P 172
5. Ibid
6. Ibid P 139
7. Ibid P 377
8. Ibid P 379
9. Ibid P 371