Chapter 2

Religious Life

Religion is not a reflection on life. It is the sympathetic understanding of life. It is a living experience (Sircar, M. N. Vaiṣṇavism 1)

Hinduism, in its multiple sectarian manifestations is definitely the principal religion seen in the Kathāsaritsāgara but we have reason to believe that Buddhism was also practised. Commenting on the state of religions in medieval India A. L. Basham remarks:

Both Buddhism and Hinduism had become affected by what is generally known as Tantricism or Tantrism, emphasizing the worship of goddesses, especially the Mother Goddess, the spouse of Śiva, known by many names. With this came sexual mysticism, and the sacramentalization of the sexual act, which was performed ritually by circles of initiates. Other socio-religious practices looked on as reprehensible by most modern Hindus, became more common in this period. Among these were the burning of widows on their husbands’ funeral pyres, wrongly called sati (suttee), child marriage, animal sacrifice, female infanticide, and the religious prostitution of the devadāsī. One feels there was a definite lowering in the value of human life in comparison with the days of the Guptas, when
according to Chinese accounts, even the death penalty was not inflicted. (“Medieval” 58-59)

Multiplicity is an important aspect of Hinduism. It is this aspect that prompts James. A. Kirk to comment in the introduction to his *Stories of the Hindus: An Introduction Through Texts and Interpretation* that religion in India is “a bewildering array of values, views, practices, traditions, associations, attitudes and loyalties” (xi). The Hindu pantheon consists of innumerable descendants, associates and consorts of various deities who provide adequate opportunity for the appropriate ranking and placement of any local deity in “relation to the great, encompassing gods of the central tradition” (Kirk 250). Commenting on the accommodative nature of the central tradition Kirk says that it combines in itself, “the natural capacity to provide room with dignity for any smaller units which need to be included” (250-51).

To go by what Kirk says in the preface to his work, understanding religion would demand “a combination of critical, philosophical subtlety and an outreaching empathy and open-mindedness which are hard to balance. It demands that we become familiar with things obscure and remote, and that we re-examine the familiar to find concealed inner meanings” (vii). The present chapter is primarily an attempt at understanding medieval Hinduism through a close reading of the *Kathāsaritsāgara.*
The Hinduism of medieval India which we come across in this work is considerably different from that of the Vedas. Doniger writes that the *Ṛgveda* has a kind of polytheism which is “a tolerant, hierarchical sort of devotional polytheism in which the worshipper acknowledges the existence, and goodness, of gods other than the god that he or she is addressing at the moment” (128). The polytheism of Vedic religion is actually a kind of serial monotheism that Müller named henotheism or kathenotheism, which is the worship of a number of gods, one at a time, regarding each as the supreme, or even the only god while one is talking to Him. Doniger remarks:

Vedic kathenotheism made possible a quasihierarchical pantheon; the attitude to each god was hierarchical, but the various competing practical monotheisms cancelled one another out, so that the total picture was one of equality. This creative tension between monism and polytheism extends through the history of Hinduism. (130)

Viṣṇu and Śiva as Rudra, the great gods of Hinduism, make only cameo appearances in the Veda. But in later Hinduism, the most important gods of the Veda, such as Agni, Soma, Indra, and Varuna who are all closely tied to the Vedic sacrifice, become far less important. They survive only as symbolic figures of natural forces such as the fire, the moon, the rain and the waters (Doniger 128-30).
The principal sectarian faiths in the *Kathāsāritsāgara* include the Śaiva faith, the Vaiṣṇava faith and the Śakta faith. We also come across a large number of gods and divine beings like Indra, Nārada, *siddhās*, *nāgas*, etc. But we take a close look only at the most popular faiths and beliefs in this chapter.

**The Śaiva Faith**

It is but natural that Lord Śiva would be the prominent deity in the monumental work written by Somadeva, a Śaiva bṛāhmaṇa of Kashmir. The invocation in the text shows his unbounded devotion to the God. “May the dark neck of Śiva, which the God of Love has, so to speak, surrounded with nooses in the form of the alluring looks of Pārvatī reclining on his bosom, assign to you prosperity” (*OS* 1: 1). Ujjayinī is considered to be the dwelling place of Śiva (*OS* 9: 2). Śiva also called Mahākāla, is addressed as “the very sovereign of Gods” (*OS* 9: 19). The gambler Ṭhinṭhākaṅkāla pleases Bhairava by praise and calls him three-eyed (*OS* 9: 19). He is also called “Triśirsha” (*OS* 8: 68). The power of Śiva is so great that it is stated that if one dares to pass over Kaiśasa, the abode of Śiva, he will lose his magic (*OS* 8: 73). Śiva as Hāṭaseśvara, is said to inhabit the lower regions (*OS* 6: 110). Śūryaprabha beholds “the great god Śiva, seated on a throne of crystal, three-eyed, trident in hand, in hue like unto pure crystal, with yellow matted locks, with a lovely half-moon for crest, adored by the holy daughter of the mountain, seated at his side” (*OS* 4: 120).
Śiva is the master storyteller who narrates the story to appease his wife Pārvatī and he is one of the many authorial voices in the Kathāsaritsāgara and at times an active participant in the story too, frequently coming to aid his devotees in the course of the story. He appears in “a terrible form, with drawn sword and lolling tongue, and making an appalling roar” to Mānasavega who had abducted Madanamancūkā (OS 8: 36). Śiva also appears when a splendid pillar in the court cleft asunder in the middle with a loud noise and Śiva issued from it in his terrible form. He filled the whole sky, in colour like antimony; he hid the sun; the gleams of his fiery eyes flickered like flashes of lightning; his shining teeth were like Cranes flying in a long row; and so he was terrible like a roaring cloud of the great day of doom. (OS 8: 41-42)

He carries Naravāhanadatta in his arms to safety from Mānasavega’s attack (OS 8: 41-42). Śiva, is “the giver of boons” (OS 9: 85). Naravāhanadatta “attains wives, magic sciences, sovereignty over the Vidyādharas” by his grace (OS 9: 85). Princess Malayavatī is prepared to enter the fire when she has not obtained her beloved, but obtains King Vikramāditya by Śiva’s favour (OS 9: 41). Ratnaprabhā talks of magic powers and magic herbs in Himavant which “dispels old age, death and fear, and are to be obtained only by Śiva’s grace” (OS 2: 137).
Penzer points out that the Kashmiri compilers of the *Brhatkathā* have altered the name of the central deity of the work “in accordance with local contemporary beliefs.” The name of the hero of the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, Naravāhanadatta means the gift of Naravāhana. Naravāhana is Kuvera’s title and not that of Śiva. The chief god of *Brhatkathā ślokasamgraha* is Kuvera and not Śiva. Hence he comments that “when Udayana was praying for a son, it must have been Kuvera whom he worshipped, otherwise our hero’s name would have been Śivadatta or some other name compounded from one of Śiva’s many titles” (*OS* 9: 119).

The prominence of Śiva in the Kashmiri version of Somadeva confirms that the poet is probably influenced by the form of Śaiva faith introduced in Kashmir by Vasugupta about two hundred and fifty years before the poet’s time and which was made popular by his pupil Kallaṭa Bhaṭṭa. About a century earlier than Somadeva’s time, this form of faith was further spread by Bhāskara, and then in Somadeva’s time made popular by Abhinavagupta and his pupils Kśemaraja and Yōgarāja. In the foreword to the first volume of *The Ocean of Story*, Temple expresses the opinion that the philosopher Somānanda and his pupil Utpalācārya who lived about two centuries before Somadeva also must have influenced him (xiii). Only the latter one third part of *The Nīlamata Purāṇa* praises Śiva highly while in the first parts he is inferior to Viṣṇu (Kumari 1: 158). So we can safely assume that Śaivism had achieved a stronghold in Kashmir later.
The tendency of the Śaivas to show other deities as inferior to Śiva is powerfully depicted in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. All the other Gods are shown as bowing before His superiority (*OS* 4: 19). For example, Indra and the immortals afflicted by the oppression of the *mlecchas* bow and praise Śiva who helps them (*OS* 9: 2). Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra and Bṛhaspati worship Śīvalīṅga and with their minds devoted to Śiva, “proceed to perform a severe course of asceticism in order to propitiate him” (*OS* 8: 152).

The story of Pārvaṭī’s former birth as depicted in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* recounts that Śiva was not invited for a sacrifice that Prajāpati Dakṣa had performed. The reason for his exclusion was that he was a wearer of skulls. A grief-stricken Pārvaṭī commits suicide and Śiva destroys the sacrifice in his wrath (*OS* 1: 4-5). Śiva’s antagonistic attitude towards Dakṣa has been explained as “the struggle of a non-Aryan deity for participation in Aryan sacrifices and his forcible entry into the Vedic pantheon” (*Kumari* 1: 159-60). Trikha concludes that “the cult of Rudra-Śiva, and of his consort, originally, perhaps, chiefly the property of tribes loosely or not at all connected with Brahmanical society has in course of time been fully Brahmanised” (16). “As the erotic god of the linga as well as the ascetic god of yogis, Shiva straddles the two paths of renunciation and release:” writes Doniger (386). Śiva, the lord of the mountains is also the god of fertility which makes the bull an appropriate emblem for him. Unlike most of the other gods in the pantheon who are handsome and well dressed, he is described as having three eyes,
bearing a trident in hand, wearing matted locks and a half-moon crest. He bears Gaṅgā on his head and his body is adorned with serpents. His partiality for serpents and his association with bhūtas who are his attendants are probably due to the tribal influence. Half of Śiva's body is occupied by Pārvaṇī and this symbolises the union of Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

In the Kathāsaritsāgara worshippers of Śiva believe that he can be pleased by fasting. Udayana and Vāsavadattā fast for three nights to please him. Muktāphalaketu fasts for twelve days (OS 8: 154). Among other characters, Devadatta, Naravāhanadatta, Sāgaravarman, Somadatta and Vararuci propitiate Śiva by undertaking austerities. King Bhūnandana propitiates Śiva by penance for twelve years to obtain his beloved Kumudini (OS 6: 114). Amitagati performs “a difficult penance on Mount Kailāsa” and propitiates Śiva (OS 8: 47). Naravāhanadatta goes to the domain of siddhās and by practising asceticism’s like “by sleeping on the ground, bathing in the early morning, and eating fruits” and “emaciated with self-mortification” achieves boons by Śiva’s favour (OS 8: 48; 51-52). Padmāvaṇī performs asceticism by “worshipping Śiva and Pārvaṇī three times a day” (OS 8: 176). A temple of Śiva is adorned with “stairs of jewels, walls of gold, pillars of precious stone” and the body of the edifice is “built of blocks of moon-gem” (OS 6: 110). We come across Śiva rising from a lake in the form of a liṅga (OS 9: 10). There is also a reference to a temple containing a liṅga (OS 7: 149).
The Śivaliṅga is a prominent symbol used in the worship of this deity. This can probably be traced to his manifestation as a god of reproduction.

The Śivaliṅga is a prominent symbol used in the worship of this deity. This can probably be traced to his manifestation as a god of reproduction. The Nīlamata Purāṇa speaks very highly of Śiva’s consort and the land of Kashmir is described as her material manifestation. She is stated to have taken the form of Kashmir’s most famous river, the Viṭāśa (Kumari 1: 163). M. N. Sircar writes that Kashmir Śaivism conceives Śiva and Śakti as “two inseparable realities” (153). Irfan Habib notes that “from a very early period Shaivism provided in Pārvatī/Durgā, the female principle of Creation, the fountainhead of Taṇtrism” (27). The Kathāsaritsāgara alludes to temples of Pārvatī.

Pārvatī, the daughter of the gandharva King Padmaśekhara performs “asceticism in the temple of Gaurī, to procure his victory” (OS 8: 163). Flowers are frequently offered to please her. We come across a princess playing a lyre to please Gaurī (OS 7: 52). Her devotees feel that she can be pleased by performing penances. A festival is also held in her honour (Trikha 25). In the city of Śobhavaī, there was a temple of Gaurī and also a lake called Gaurītṛtha. Every year, during a feast on the fourteenth day of the white fortnight of the month Āshāḍha, large crowds gather there from every part of the world to bathe (OS 6: 204). Princess Anangaraī was born after her parents had propitiated Gaurī (OS 4: 144). Gaurī “sprinkles nectar from her
pitcher” and Jimūtavahana rises up from the dead (OS 7: 61). Śringabhuja sees “an image of Śiva, with one of Pārvatī on his left and one of Gaṇeśa on his right” in a temple in the wood (OS 3: 228). There is a sanctuary of Gaurī in a garden (OS 7: 177). Another great temple of Pārvatī named Meghavana is mentioned (OS 8: 157). Her two sons, Skanda or Karttikeya and Gaṇeśa are also worshipped in the Kathāsaritsāgara.

Karttikeya

Karttikeya, also called Skanda, is the son of Śiva. He has six faces. (OS I: 214). Skanda is also called Svāmikumara (OS 4: 101). The Kathāsaritsāgara refers to the origin of this God from Śiva, from fire, thicket of reeds and from Kṛttikas (OS 2: 100-03). He is worshipped for attaining desired objects. His “groves are forbidden to females” (OS 2: 258). A city created by Karttikeya is also mentioned (OS 3: 284). Śarvavarman achieves the Kātantra grammar or the brief system by winning his favour through “feeding only on air observing a vow of silence” (OS I: 72). This is also called Kālāpaka grammar which is derived from kaḷāpa or the tail of the peacock on which the Lord rides (OS 1: 75). Penzer notes that this grammar is extensively used in the Eastern parts of Bengal. To obtain knowledge, Varṣa worships the God Karttikeya who “bestowed on him the knowledge of all the sciences” (OS 1: 15). We find many temples dedicated to him. A shrine of Karttikeya in Deccan is mentioned (OS 1: 18). Karttikeya is worshipped on the eighth day of the month (OS 8: 141). King Kanakavarṣa obtains a son through his favour (OS 4:
214). Śūryaprabha beholds him with the brightness of burning fire, accompanied by five sons like himself (OS 4: 119). *The Nīlamata Purāṇa* mentions him as the guardian deity of children (Kumari 1: 166).

**Gaṇeśa**

The *Kathāsaritsāgara* depicts Gaṇeśa not only as the son of Śiva but also as an independent god. It is stated that “even the Gods are not successful without honouring Gaṇeśa (OS 2: 103). Even Pārvatī has to adore him to remove obstacles and Indra is also ordered to do so to achieve his ends (OS 2: 102-03). He is “the Lord of Categories (Gaṇapati), the visible form of the principle of principles” (Kirk 247). Śūryaprabha witnesses Gaṇeśa “seated on a broad slab of jyoṭīrasa, with one tusk, and an elephant’s proboscis, in brightness like twelve suns, with pendent stomach, with three eyes, with flaming axe and club, surrounded by many Gaṇas with the faces of animals” (OS 4: 119). Gaṇeśa is the “god who stands guard at the doorway of the inner sanctum of the knowledge which goes beyond all that we have known, and removes the obstacles from before all serious and devoted inquirers” (Kirk 241). He is the “Lord of Gaṇas” and is “ranked as the chief of the followers of Śiva, hence all the others are termed as Gaṇas” (OS I: 202). He is the patron of the dancing-girls since he is regarded by them as the author of music (OS I: 240). The Gaṇapatya faith is a popular one. According to the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, the chief characteristic of Gaṇeśa is the power to avert all hindrances. As a remover of obstacles, Gaṇeśa is invoked at the beginning of every undertaking.
He is worshipped before setting out on any journey. Maidens like
Anangamanjañī and Kuvalaẏāvalī worship him for getting suitable husbands (OS
2: 99). Gaṇeṣa is also associated with dance. Sometimes he is held as a tree
spirit. There are references to temples of Gaṇeṣa. An idol of Gaṇeṣa is found in
a garden (OS 2: 99). He is worshipped with dance, songs and instrumental
performances. Mṛgaṅgaḍatta leaves food to worship him. Naravāhanadatta
also pleases him with austerities. The Nīlamata Puṇṇa mentions eighteen
places in Kashmir sacred to Gaṇeṣa (Kumari 1: 166).

Though Śiva and Pārvatī are depicted in both sculpture and painting
together with Skanda or Gaṇeṣa or both, it is very evident that each member
of this family is really a separate individual, with a separate prehistory and a
separate role in Hindu worship. They are not joined together as members of a
family usually are since Pārvatī does not bear the two children that are
depicted with her, and Śiva also does not father them in the normal way.

The family represents, rather, the forces of the universe that
humans must sometimes contend with, sometimes call on for
help, though they are often clustered together in a group that
presents the form, if not the function, of a family. The family is a
way of grouping them together in an image that is ‘with
qualities’ (sa-guṇa), in this case, the qualities of a human family,
while in their more commonly worshipped forms, they are not a
family at all. (Doniger 398)
The Vaiśṇava faith

In the Kathāsaritsāgara, the Vaiśṇavas call Viṣṇu superior to all the other gods as they have attained various stages of prosperity by his favour. We find many worshippers of Viṣṇu in these stories. On the twelfth day of the month a king worships Viṣṇu (OS 6:107). The Nīlamata Purāṇa also mentions such a custom (Kumari 1: 192). Princess Gandharvadattā vows to marry only a man who can sing Viṣṇu’s praises (OS 8: 28). Viṣṇu’s consort Lakṣmī is also worshipped in the Kathāsaritsāgara. Viṣṇu’s wife is also called Śrī (OS 9: 2). Princess Hamśāvālī is seen “bathing in tanks, and living on fruit, devoted to the worship of Vishṇu” (OS 6: 50). A club, a shell, and a gold discus are offered to Viṣṇu (OS 1: 144). We come across Rambha dancing before Viṣṇu (OS 9: 84). He wears the “kaustubha jewel” (OS 8: 60). A description of Śvetadvīpa where devotees of Viṣṇu dwell runs thus: “all the inhabitants carried the conch, discus, lotus and club, and had four arms, being assimilated to Vishṇu in appearance as they were devoted to him in heart. There they saw the god in a palace composed of splendid jewels, reposing on the serpent Śesha, having his feet adored by Lakshmī” (OS 8: 151). The god was also seen as:

reclining upon the snake Śesha; in front of him sat Garuḍa, at his side was the daughter of the sea, at his feet was the Earth; he was waited upon by the discus, the conch, the club and the Lotus, incarnate in bodily form, and the Gandharvas, with Nārada at their head, were piously chanting hymns in his
honour, and the gods, Siddhas and Vidyādharas were bowing before him. (OS 4: 185)

Lord Hari dwells in Śvetadvīpa (OS 4: 186). He dries up the sea with his weapon of fire and makes it restore the eggs of the birds it had taken (OS 5: 57). Viṣṇu and Śiva as self-existent deities are said to inhabit “a hundred shrines in Kaśmira” (OS 5: 123). We come across a shrine of Viṣṇu in Śvetadvīpa (OS 5: 203). Haṃśavālī goes to a temple of Viṣṇu (OS 6: 42). Kuvera worships Viṣṇu to obtain the heavenly lotus (OS 6: 72). Viṣṇu is worshipped on the twelfth day of the month (OS 6: 107). A holy bathing place Kramasaras arose from the footfall of Viṣṇu. His footfall is believed to have “created in Kaśmīra, another Ganges named Ikshuva” (OS 6: 107-08). He sends the asura king Kālanemi to heaven (OS 6: 215). His incarnation as Rāma is also mentioned (OS 7: 35).

**Unity of Viṣṇu and Śiva**

The essential unity of these two gods is also found in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* though the influence of the prevailing forms of Śaivism makes Śiva the most powerful of all the gods. It is held that Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā are really one. “Successes that are gained by worshipping them separately are short-lived and uncertain” (OS 6: 113). Viśavara sets apart a hundred dīnāras everyday for the worship of Viṣṇu and Śiva (OS 6: 179).
Proto-Tantric Śaiva Sects

Proto-Tantric Śaiva sects like pāśupatas and kāpālikas feature in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. In the first century, a sage named Lakuliṣa founded a sect of pāśupatas who were worshippers of Śiva as the Lord of Beasts. In the following centuries more and more people identified themselves as the pāśupatas. A pāśupata inscription of AD 381 counts back eleven generations of teachers to Lakuliṣa. The *Mahābhārata*, the *Kūrma Purāṇa* and the *Liṅga Purāṇa* contain references about them. They lived in cremation grounds and hence they were considered to be pariahs polluted by contacts with corpses. “Their rituals consisted of offerings of blood, meat, alcohol, and sexual fluids from ritual intercourse unconstrained by caste restrictions” (Doniger 410).

According to Doniger, the pāśupatas “gave a new meaning to passive aggression by going out of their way to scandalize respectable people” (410). They deliberately sought slander because their belief was that by receiving the ill-treatment of the people, they would transfer their bad *karma* to the people while taking their good *karma* from them. “An early text describes the Pashupatas as wandering, carrying a skull- topped staff and a begging bowl made of a skull, wearing a garland of human bone, covered in ashes (the ashes of corpses), with matted hair or shaved head, and acting in imitation of Rudra (the vedic antecedent of Shiva)” (Doniger 411).

The *Kathāsaritsāgara* depicts some pāśupata ascetics. A mighty pāśupata ascetic named Bhūtiśiva protects Nāgasvāmin from witches with a
trident in hand (OS 8: 55). Another ascetic cooks his own child with rice and eats it to accompany his *vidyādhari* wife to heaven (OS 8: 59). Paśupatas appear in the story of Niścayadatta and are believed to have practised magical charms to protect themselves from *yakṣinīs* (OS 3: 186-87). They even seem to have resorted to treacherous practices as in the story of King Tribhuvana (OS 4: 235).

“The Pashupatas were eventually transformed into a sect called the Skull Bearers (Kapalikas), who no longer followed the philosophy or stigmatizing behaviour of the Pashupatas except for the skull begging bowl and who developed their own texts” (Doniger 411). According to Monier Williams, a ḷaṭṭahalika is a worshipper of the left hand order, characterised by carrying skulls of men as ornaments and by eating and drinking from them. They are the same as aghoṇīs (OS 2: 90; 9: 12).

There are several instances where we come across the power of these ascetics. A ḷaṭṭahalika tries to outrage Madanamanjaṭṭi by spells duly muttered in a circle and by burnt offering. He worships a corpse and even has spells for mastering *yakṣās* (OS 9: 13). A ḷaṭṭahalika, who comes to beg, casts eyes on the wife of a young bṛhamaṇa Candrasvāmin. She catches fever from the moment he looks at her and in the evening she dies. The ḷaṭṭahalika comes near the pyre with his magic staff dancing on his shoulder and a booming drum in his hand. He quenches the flame of the pyre by throwing ashes on it and the dead wife rises up (OS 9: 69). A ḷaṭṭahalika loses his magic power when his
magic staff is lost. He had abducted many women using his magic but succumbs to defeat in the end. The author concludes: “Thus do heretics, who feign the vows of Śiva only for the pleasure of accomplishing nefarious ends, fall though their sin has already sunk them deep enough” (OS 9: 69). This is indeed a sharp criticism of the false ascetics. In the words of Habib, “the esoteric nature of many Tantric rites tended to conceal or overwhelm some of the higher ethical and moral elements which too the Tantric texts extol” (27).

**Brahmā**

Brahmā is held as the creator of this world. The *Kathāsaritsaṅgara* discusses the cause that led to the loss of interest in the worship of Brahmā. It tells us that Brahmā had ceased to be popular because he wanted Śiva to become his son (OS 1: 4). This argument can apparently be considered to be an invention of the Śaivas who wanted their favourite god to be superior to Brahmā. We also find that a lotus car made by Brahmā is gifted to Naraṅañhanadatta by Śiva (OS 8: 72). Brahmā once again accepts the superiority of Śiva when he says that “Śiva alone can remove the calamity he has caused and that God requires a long propitiation” (OS 8: 151).

**The Goddess**

The Goddess has been worshipped in India since prehistoric times, and we even have strong archaeological evidence from the Indus valley to prove this. According to O’Flaherty:
her assimilation into the Hindu pantheon, however, took place long after Śiva and Viṣṇu had been accepted, and in two distinct phases: first the Indo-Aryan male gods were given wives, and then, under the influence of Tantric and Śaṅktic movements which had been gaining momentum outside orthodox Hinduism for many centuries, these shadowy female figures emerged as supreme powers in their own right, and merged into the great Goddess. (238)

It is interesting to note that abstract feminine nouns are personified and married off to the great gods. For example Śrī which means prosperity is the consort of Viṣṇu while Śakti or power is the wife of Śiva. These personifications express the qualities of the god to whom they were attached. They are more powerful than the Vedic goddesses who were merely wives of the all powerful gods. This can be considered as a feature of the medieval religion where the Goddess becomes a force to reckon with though not all powerful. According to the Kathāsaritsāgara the Goddess emanates from Śiva, another goddess Kālarātri is said to have appeared from Viṣṇu when the sea was churned for the nectar, in order that she might tear in pieces the chief of the dānavaś, who wished to steal that heavenly drink. And later Śiva places her to guard the cave of Triśirsha (OS 8: 77). Thus we find that the Goddess is also said to have been created and given the present position by the all powerful gods. But this argument that the Goddess herself is said to have
originated from the two great gods makes her subordinate to them. This is a
typical way of ensuring the superiority of the two great gods. But there comes
a time in later history “when the Goddess came into her element “and “these
early myths were retold in a new light, with the Goddess using the gods to
serve her higher purpose” (O’Flaherty 238).

The Tantric goddess, Cāmunda, with whom human sacrifice is often
associated, appears at some places. Ēvadatta addresses her: “O thou of the
loud laugh, adorned with a garland of skulls, not to be gazed on, Chāmunda,
the terrible goddess, assist me quickly” (OS 4:149).

Śakti

The worship of Śakti or the female principle as the primary factor in
the creation and reproduction of the universe is called the Śkta faith. The
reverence shown to the different goddesses as the consorts of various gods is
different from the worship of Śkta. They hold her to be the highest power
and the source of all beings. Some scholars consider this cult to be an
offshoot of the Śaiva faith but others consider it as an independent one. The
Śkta faith is quite popular in the Kathāsaritsāgara. Many characters in these
stories believe that the Goddess can remove all calamities, grant boons and
even restore dead people to life. She can be appeased by performing
penances, and human sacrifices to please her are not infrequent. Several
passages in the Kathāsaritsāgara describe the blood thirsty orgies in honour
of the Goddess.
Viravara addresses her and says that she was addressed by Śiva himself with the following words:

Hail to thee, Chaṇḍī, Chāmunḍā, Mangaṇā, Tripuṇā, Jayā,
Ekānamṭā, Śīvā, Durgā, Nārāyaṇī, Sarasvāī, Bhadraṅkāiī,
Mahālakshmī, Siddhā, slayer of Ruru! Thou art Gayatṛī,
Mahāraṇjī, Revaṇī, and the dweller in the Vindhya hills; thou art
Uṃā and Kātyāyaṇī, and the dweller in Kailāsa, the mountain of Śiva. (OS 4: 179-80)

He adds that Skanda, Vāsiṣṭha, Brahmā, immortals, Ṛṣis and men praise her and he offers his own body as sacrifice to her.

The worship of the Goddess is not confined to men of noble birth. People who belong to the lower varṇas are also among her devotees. There is an instance in which we find bandits worshipping Goddess Durgā. They even make two caṇḍalas eat in their presence (OS 8: 141). Caṇḍikā guards a passage in Mount Kailāsa (OS 8: 73). Kālaṛatṛī is a goddess with “a skull in hand” and Naraṇāhanadatta tries to please her by cutting off his own head (OS 8: 77).

Caṇḍī is the family deity of Anangamanjarī (OS 7: 100). The merchant Arthadatta has an image of the goddess in his garden and upon his prayers she brings back the three dead people, Anangamanjarī, Kamaṭakara and Maṇīvarman back to life (OS 7: 104).

Other Gods and Goddesses

The brāhmaṇa Candrasvāmin worships and praises the Sun:
Hail to thee, O Lord! The brightness residing in the near and remote ether, that disperses the internal and external darkness.

Thou art Vishṇu, pervading the three worlds; thou art Śiva, the treasure-house of blessings; thou art the supreme lord of creatures, calling into activity the sleeping universe. Thou deposes thy brightness in fire and in the moon, . . . When thou risest the Rākshasas disperse, the Dasyus have no power, and the virtuous rejoice. (OS 4: 221-22)

Sarasvā, is the protecting deity of the land of Simhākṣa (OS 5: 180). She is the Goddess of learning, invoked and adored (OS 8: 1). A Goddess Śarīkā is worshipped by King Bhūnandana (OS 6: 109). Other Goddesses mentioned include the Goddess of fame, Goddess Jāhnavī or Gaṅgā, Goddess of destiny, Goddess of the earth, Goddess of omens, Goddess of beauty, Lakṣmī and Goddess of valour (OS 2: 90; 6: 149; 2: 218; 6: 194; 9: 76; 7: 129).

The cunning robber Simhavikrama worships Citragupta, who records the good and evil deeds of men to secure for him a place in heaven after death. He keeps continually feeding the brāhmaṇas to please him and is even ready to bestow his wife on a suitor to please his favourite deity (OS 6: 93). King Bhadrākṣa worships Lakṣmī everyday with one hundred and eight white lotuses upon a sword for obtaining a son (OS 6: 14). We come across the Wind God in a chariot (OS 8: 160). The God of Fire appears before King Vikramatunga who propitiates him (OS 3: 160). There are references to
Lokaśālas or guardians of the four points of the compass (OS 8: 163; 4: 45) and to Aśvins (OS 3: 254; 257). The story of Kāma being consumed by the fire of Śiva’s eye is also mentioned (OS 8: 7). Nārada, sent by Śiva to cheer up the King of Vatsa, descends from heaven surrounded by a circle of light, like a second Sun (OS 8: 27). We also find him performing at Indra’s court (OS 8: 187; 4: 18). Yama appears with a noose in hand (OS 4: 28). Vararuci witnesses a festival of Indra (OS 1: 30). Indra’s charioteer Mātali is mentioned (OS 4: 44). There is a reference to Indra fleeing from Śiva’s wrath (OS 4: 113). The Nīlamata Purāṇa also mentions Indra as a subordinate God (Kumari 1: 170). The same text mentions that traces of yakṣa worship are found in Kashmir (Kumari 1: 192) The Kathāsaritsāgara refers to the cult of the yakṣa, Maṇibhadra. Merchants visited his shrine to obtain various blessings. (OS 1: 162). There are references to tree worship (OS 2: 97).

Buddha

The Nīlamata Purāṇa considers Buddha as an incarnation of Viṣṇu (Kumari 1: 175). Ved Kumari concludes that Buddhism began to decline in Kashmir after the seventh century (1: 178). Buddhistic traits and stories are found in many places in the Kathāsaritsāgara which is predominantly śaiva in spirit. Benfey considers the story of Indra and King Śivī as Buddhist in origin. Buddha is said to have given his flesh to the hawk as Śivi in a former state of existence (OS 1: 84). “Svayambhū” or “the self–existent” is said to be the name of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Buddha (OS 7: 149). The work contains many stories
about *bodhisattvas* which show the influence of Buddhism. But in practice it was a degenerate form of Buddhism. There are Buddhist female ascetics like Yogakaraṇḍikā who lived in a sanctuary of Buddha and her pupil Siddhikaṇī, who are wicked to the core. They are false ascetics and try to procure the chaste Devasmītā for the wicked merchants (*OS* 1: 156-57). Habib is of the opinion that Buddhism maintained a strong presence in India when the Chinese monks Yuan Zhuang (Yuan Chwang, 602-664) and Yi jing (I-tsing, 635-713) visited India. He comments that by the eleventh century Alberuni could only write about Buddhism by hearsay. According to Habib this points to the fact that Brāhmaṇism had become increasingly popular and that Buddhism had declined by this time. He notes that the pilgrims from China ceased coming to India to visit their holy places after the first half of the eleventh century as they found their holy spots in India deserted (25).

The rivalry between the Hindus and the Buddhists are described in the story of the Buddhist merchant Viśāstadatta and his son Ratnadatta (*OS* 3: 2-5). He expresses his detestation of his father by calling him an impious man. “You abandon the religion of the three Vedas and cultivate irreligion. For you neglect the Brāhmans and are always honouring Śramaṇas.” According to him all kinds of low-caste men resort to Buddhist discipline, “to gratify their desire to have a convent to dwell in, released from bathing and other strict ordinances, loving to feed whenever it is convenient, rejecting the
Brahmanical lock and other prescribed methods of doing the hair, quite at ease with only a rag round their loins.” The merchant replies:

Religion is not confined to one form; a transcendent religion is a different thing from a religion that embraces the whole world. People say that Brahmanism too consists in avoiding passion and other sins, in truth, and compassion to creatures, not in quarrelling causelessly with one’s relations. Moreover, you ought not to blame generally that school which I follow, which extends security to all creatures, on account of the fault of an individual. Nobody questions the propriety of conferring benefits, and my beneficence consists simply in giving security to creatures. So, if I take exceeding pleasure in this system, the principal characteristic of which is abstinence from injuring any creature, and which brings liberation, wherein am I irreligious in doing so? (OS 3: 3)

King Kalingasena is a distinguished Buddhist and his city is densely crowded with Buddhist temples. We find him entering a monastery full of many images of Buddha. It is said that Buddha had attained that rank by “resolute asceticism” (OS 3: 18-19). It is noted that the Pradakṣīṇa rite, or circumambulation of shrines by pilgrims was also performed by ancient Buddhists. (OS 1: 192). King Viññatamati embraces the Buddhist faith upon being defeated in debate by the Buddhist mendicant Ratnacandramati. He then
builds “monasteries and almshouses for Buddhist mendicants, Brāhmans, and other sectaries, and all men generally” (OS 6: 76). Later he even reaches the rank of a bodhisattava.

“Hindus spoke in many voices about the Buddha, some positive, some negative, and some indifferent or ambivalent,” remarks Doniger (484). She traces the shift in the attitudes through three broad stages. First, Buddhism was assimilated into Hinduism in the Upaniṣads, the Rāmāyaṇa, and the Mahābhārata. In actual history, this was a period of harmony among Hindus and Buddhists. In the second stage, which falls around the turn of the millennium and after, the Buddhists became more powerful and were sometimes seen as a threat. The first set of puṇānic myths about the Buddha were composed at this time that is, during the Gupta period, when Hinduism was still fighting a pitched battle against Buddhism, Jainism, and other heresies. The scars of this battle may be seen in the puṇānic stories that contemptuously denounce the śastras of delusion like the Buddhist and Jaina scriptures and the people who use them. But in the third stage, when Buddhism, though still a force to be reckoned with in India, was waning, the texts have a more conciliatory attitude, and the Hindus once again acknowledged their admiration of Buddhism. In mythology, the texts belonging to these periods revise the myth of Viṣṇu as the Buddha to make it generous and tolerant. Doniger recounts that:
a Kashmiri king of the tenth century had a magnificent frame made for ‘an image of the Buddha Avatara,’ and the image that he used was a Buddha figure that had probably been under worship by Buddhists; this frame may have been made for the Buddhist figure in order to ‘Hinduize’ it, just as the doctrine of the Buddha was placed in the ‘frame’ of Puranic Mythology to Hinduize it and as Hindu temples were built on Buddhist stupas and, later, Muslim mosques on Hindu temples. (485)

_The Nīlamata Purāṇa_ mentions Buddha as Viṣṇu’s incarnation (Kumari 1: 10). It is quite evident that the work of Somadeva belongs to the third stage where Buddhism was viewed tolerantly and that Buddha was accepted as an _avatāra_.

**Snake worship**

The association of man with beneficial and dangerous animals, filled him with a sense of fear and adoration which in turn led to accepting them as part of religions. Serpents with their graceful slithering movement were greatly feared and this fear led to veneration. Traces of serpent worship can be found in every part of the world. James Fergusson remarks that Kashmir “has always been considered, in historical times, as one of the principal centres of Serpent worship in India, and hitherto it has been principally from her legends that what little was known of the Nagas has been gathered” (45). He adds that the North-West corner of India was “at one time the seat of
serpent worship” and that “with very few exceptions all the ancient temples
of Cashmere seem to have been devoted to serpent worship” (46-47). The
\textit{Nilamata Pur\=\={\textashy}a} mentions tribes like n\=agas and pi\=s\=acas inhabiting the
Kashmir valley. According to it the n\=agas were the sole inhabitants of the
valley at first but later pi\=s\=acas and descendents of Manu also became their co-
inhabitants (Kumari 1: 46). Fergusson also mentions the n\=agas as a race of
Turanian stock inhabiting northern India who were conquered by the war like
Aryans. He notes that the Aryans and Dravidians were not serpent
worshippers (60-61). The very name \textit{Nilamata} or “the teaching of N\=ila” owes
its origin to a n\=aga named N\=ila. It contains a list of names of six hundred and
three n\=agas (Kumari 1: 49). Worship of snakes is found quite often in the
\textit{Nilamata} but is generally associated with the worship of other deities. Kumari
feels that the reason for this subservience was the assimilation of n\=aga cult
into Hinduism (1: 180). There are some instances of snake worship in the
\textit{Kath\=\=asarits\=\=agara}. We come across a temple of the chief of snakes where
great crowds assembled, and a “festive procession in honour of V\=asuki, the
king of Snakes.” The idol was “full of long wreaths of flowers in form like
serpents.” There was also a “great lake sacred to V\=asuki, studded with red
lotuses, resembling the concentrated gleams of the brilliance of the jewels on
snakes crest, and encircled with blue lotuses” (OS 6: 155). Nar\=avanadatta
also worships snakes (OS 3: 142).

Keith in \textit{A History of Sanskrit Literature} remarks:
The religious world of Somadeva reminds us of the superstitious nature of the people of Kashmir, we can hardly doubt that the Kashmir recension added readily anything that seemed interesting in this regard, even if Somadeva himself is rather inclined to rationalising Märchen. Čiva and Parva in her dread form are great deities, though Viṣṇu inevitably appears in the episode of Naravahana’s visit to the Čvetadvipa. Human offerings are specially frequent, the Pulindas, the Bhillas, are regarded as ever on the lookout for victims for the Goddess to whom Jimutavahana is prepared to offer homage before his act of self-sacrifice. Witchcraft is taken as a matter of course and many details are given of the dreadful deeds of witches, and of the horrible scenes enacted nightly at the places where the dead are burnt or flung out as prey for beasts, birds and the ghouls who haunt these cemeteries; in his eeriness of description he is a match for the author of Māladhava. Buddhistic traits are not rare, though only sporadic; it must be remembered that as we know from Kalhana Buddhism in a degraded form had a stronghold in Kashmir. A number of tales are told to relate the action of Karman in determining a man’s life. . . . We have frequent mention of worship of Čiva’s phallic symbol, Linga and of the Mothers. Popular superstition is everywhere abundant.
The Gods and spirits mingle freely in ordinary life, the love of the marvellous is fully satisfied by tales of adventure at sea with shipwrecks and subterranean palaces or not less marvellous wanderings on land to strange places like Camphor-land where Princesses can easily be won. (284-85)

Kumari concludes that “the cults of Viṣṇu, Śiva, other brahmanic and folk deities, Buddha and the Nāgas flourishing side by side in Kaśmīra.” The spirit of synthesis of various religions is discernible and the brahmanic deities, nāgas and Buddha “all receive their share of worship” from the inhabitants of Kashmir. “The followers of different cults are stated to worship their respective deities, but the different deities are described themselves as honouring one another and thus creating an atmosphere in which various cults are unified”(1: 188).

Superstitious Beliefs

Belief in witches, witchcraft and magic was widely prevalent. Witches like Kuvalayāvalī and Kālarāthri have magic spells that enable a person to fly through the air. These powers are derived from eating of human flesh (OS 2: 103). The story of Guhacandra has a charm written over the door of a woman which helps in gaining her love. But magic becomes more powerful when aided by human artifice. The bṛāhmaṇa who aids him in his endeavour says: “A fire burns even without being fanned, but much more when a strong current of air is brought to bear on it; in the same way a charm will produce
the desired effect unaided, but much more readily when assisted by artifice” (OS 2: 44). This is an excellent piece of worldly wisdom. Charms are also used for securing long life, for obtaining a magical sword and for producing dreams (OS 6: 6; 76; 77; 80). In the story of Mr̥gankadatta a piece of antelope skin, with a charm attached, is believed to keep off bees (OS 6: 114). There are charms for appeasing the fire as in the story of Guhacandra (OS 2: 42), and to change the shape of human beings (OS 2: 20). Yaugandhaṛāyaṇa changes Vāsavadattā’s appearance with the help of such a charm. There are references to spells of various kinds. Yaugandhaṛāyaṇa knows “spells for breaking through walls, and for rending fetters, and receipts for becoming invisible, serviceable at need” (OS 1: 136). A charm is said to produce a dream. Sarvavarman uses one such charm (OS 1: 70). Certain charms are believed to enable a man to lay aside the body as in the story of Śūryaprabha (OS 4: 26). Magic can make a person invisible to others. The vidyādhari Bhadrā conceals Vidūṣaka in this way (OS 2: 67). A mendicant, performing magical rites on a corpse, brings it back to life and even uses the animated body as he likes (OS 2: 62).

A Banyan tree in the cemetery, when duly worshipped by offering rice boiled in milk can reveal miracles as in the story of Devadatta (OS 2: 233). People used to believe in enchanted trees, the fruits of which, when taken led to death (OS 3: 30). There is a means of propitiating the sea with jewels as the merchant Skandaḍāsa does when his ship stops suddenly (OS 2: 72). Offering of human flesh is believed to please vetālas. Devadatta offers flesh from dead
bodies to propitiate the *vetāla* and is even prepared to cut off his own flesh (*OS* 2: 235). There are charms for controlling *vetālas*. *Vamadatta* employs it (*OS* 6: 165). Man eating *yakṣinīs* doing mischief to human beings is a very popular belief. Śringotpādini (“producer of horns”) produces horns on the heads of her victims, and makes them fall into the fire by dancing and later devours the half-burnt body of the victim (*OS* 3: 187-88).

Another interesting belief depicted in the story of the *Prince and the Merchant’s Son* is that when a person sneezed, he would die if someone did not say “God bless you” (*OS* 3: 30). This custom is prevalent still in the modern world and Penzer has recorded this among people from various parts of the world. Among some people no benediction is given in answer to a sneeze. It is regarded either as a good or a bad omen depending on the special circumstances. Sneezing was believed to be due to the influence of demons. Different opinions prevail regarding the belief that it is caused by the *bhūta* either entering the nose or leaving it. People who sneeze utter the name of some God. Abbe Dubbois comments that “the Hindu never fails to exclaim Rama! Rama!” after sneezing (329). Penzer records that even in Islam Mohammed did not object to the custom of blessing the sneezer (*OS* 3: 308). He also gives a list of similar beliefs pertaining to sneezing salutations from various parts of the world like Greece, Rome, European countries and among the primitive tribes of Africa.
Itching or throbbing of various parts of the body was believed to be very significant in foretelling future events. The right eye of Naravāhanadatta throbs indicating good fortune (OS 4: 122). Penzer remarks:

Throbbing of the right eye in men portends union with the beloved. In all countries involuntary twitching or itchings are looked upon with great superstition—movements of the right ear, hand, leg, etc., signifying good luck and the left bad luck. This was the case among the Hindus, but it applied only to men. With women the omens were reversed. (OS 2: 144)

Thus in the story of Vasudatta the throbbing of his right eye is believed to indicate the coming union with the beloved (OS 2: 144), while Padmāvaṭī’s right eye throb boding evil fortune (OS 8: 173). In Act 5 of Abhijnānaśakuntalam Kalidāsa’s Śakuntalā asks

ŚAKUNTALĀ. (feeling a bad omen): O you gods! What means this throbbing of my right eye?

GAUTAMĪ. May all evil be averted; and may happiness always attend you. (234)

But when a man’s right eye throbs it bodes good fortune (OS 5: 200). Similar instances are also found in Shakespeare. Desdemona asks “Mine eyes do itch/ Doth that bode weeping?” (Oth. 4.3.56-57) and in Macbeth, the Second witch mutters “By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes” (4.1.61).
People placed great faith in omens and their meanings. Some of the evil omens listed in the story of Guṇaśarman are a crow sitting on one’s left hand, a dog running from left to right, a snake appearing on the right and throbbing of the left arm and shoulder (OS 4: 93). The terrifying howl of a jackal was regarded as very ominous (OS 3: 46). The howling of a jackal on one’s left side was also supposed to portend evil (OS 9: 76). Some of the wonderful instances that we come across include, inexhaustible grains of rice presented by God’s servants (OS 1: 75), a dead fish laughing out loud (OS 1: 46), a magic chariot roaming through the air (OS 1: 80), a herb which restores life to the dead (OS 6: 18), a heavenly chariot that travels through the sky (OS 6: 22) and an elixir prepared with the meat of a wild goat prepared by King Vīrabhuja’s physician to ensure the birth of a son (OS 3: 218). People had strong faith in astrology and the predictions of the astrologers. They said that the position of the heavenly bodies at the moment of Udayana’s departure portended the acquisition of a maiden together with imprisonment and it happened that way (OS 1: 134). Astrologers fix a day for marching on for war (OS 4: 49). They also set auspicious dates for a journey (OS 2: 12). Another peculiar custom mentioned is that during rainy season a cake of flour mixed with molasses is made in a disgusting shape and it is given to a brahmaṇa blockhead. If accepted it is said to remove discomfort caused by bathing in cold season and exhaustion caused by bathing in hot weather (OS 1: 131).
Dohada or the longings of a woman in pregnancy play an important role in these stories. It also plays the role of a narrative device to introduce unexpected twists and turn of events. Dohada means two-heartedness. This springs from the fact that a pregnant woman has two hearts in her body. Any wish that a woman may express is merely the will of the unborn child asserting itself and this causes the mother to ask for the things necessary for its auspicious birth. Penzer defines a dohada as the occasion “when a woman suddenly demands some jewel, fruit or animal, which at once starts an entirely fresh series of adventures, when the dutiful husband sets out on his journeys to procure the desired article” (OS 2: 31). But the dohadas that we come across in the Kathāsaritsāgara are bizarre desires which are fulfilled by the dutiful husbands as it is necessary to grant the expectant mothers’ wishes at any cost. Queen Mrgāvā, mother of Udayana, longs to bathe in a pool of blood. Her desire is fulfilled by her husband who fills the pool with water dyed by the juice of lac and other extracts (OS 1: 97). Sometimes it also provides an unexpected turn of events. Queen Mrgāvā fulfilling her dohada is mistaken by a Garuda bird to be a piece of flesh and is carried away. Queen Vāsavadattā “longs for stories of great magicians” (OS 2: 137) while another queen’s dohada is “to see a great battle” (OS 4: 50). Penzer notes that the dohada motif occurs in Grimm’s tale of Rapunzel (OS 9: 144). E. O. James is of the opinion that “ritual and its symbolism centred in the various aspects of fecundity” and they “became a recurrent phenomenon and dominating
influence.” This at first “found expression in an exaggeration of the organs of maternity, in the conditions of pregnancy and occasionally of child birth, the life-producing mother being the personification of fertility.” As a result, “a network of emotions and sentiments collected” around her which “gave a sacred significance to the female principle and all its attributes, particularly those connected with birth and food supply” (46).

To prove this we can quote as example the preparation of the lying in chamber of Queen Vāsavatā. To protect a birthing chamber, the mother and the new born from evil influences, the following measures are adopted. The queen repaired to the ornamented lying-in chamber, which was prepared by matrons having sons, and the windows of which were covered with arka and śamī plants. The room was hung with various weapons, rendered auspicious by being mixed with the gleam of jewel-lamps, shedding a blaze able to protect the child; and secured by conjurers who went through innumerable charms and spells and other incantations, so that it became a fortress of the matrons hard for calamity to storm. (OS 2: 161)

In India iron is supposed to scare away evil spirits, and hence weapons are hung in the birth chamber to protect the new born. Even today in many families in Kerala a piece of iron like a knife or a key is kept under the bed of a new born and its mother to ward off evil influences. Demons are said to fear
light and can indulge in their evil purposes only when it is dark. The same idea is applied to the time of child birth and the evil spirits are supposed to take advantage of darkness during this most crucial period. Thus it is an almost universal custom to have lights in the birth chamber to scare away such spirits.

Penzer writes:

The rule that, where a mother and new-born child are lying, fire and light must never be allowed to go out, is equally binding in the Highlands of Scotland, in Korea and in Basutoland; it was observed by the ancient Romans; and the sacred books of the Parsis enjoin it as a religious duty; for the evil powers hate and fear nothing as much as fire and light. (OS 2: 168)

Accordingly in the stories we find that lights were kept burning to protect the new born against evil influences (OS 3: 18).

Sisir Kumar Das rightly comments of the religious scene:

What is important about the medieval world is not its homogeneity but it's the multiple layers. This world is composed of materials coming from different religious sources, not always in harmony with one another. In addition to the major or great traditions, such as Saivism or Vaishnavism-which were also not monolithic-or the Nathas-various little traditions, obscure and esoteric, with their diverse rituals and performances, beliefs and customs, superstitions and habits,
with their mutations and evolutions, contributed to the growth of a vast fabric within which a diverse literature was accommodated. (21)

The Concept of Rebirth

The doctrine of rebirth or reincarnation, one of the cardinal features of Indian religions is found frequently in the Kathāsārītāgāra. But it differs from the view propounded by the Dharmaśāstra texts. It is held that “a creature receives the form of that which it was contemplating at the moment of death” (OS 6: 20). Peterson summarises the official view about the doctrine of karma and rebirth in this way:

All karma (action), good and bad, entails phala (fruit, result). This fruit ripens (pāka, vipāka, ‘ripening’) over a period of time. The complex of acts (karma) done during one lifetime thus necessitates one or more lifetimes in which the inevitable ‘fruit’ must be endured, and this implies samsāra (transmigration), an open-ended series of physical births and deaths (janma, jāti) for the self (ātman) who is the actor or doer of karma. Thus, the ‘self,’ by its definition as doer, is a transmigrating entity. In fact, although rebirth, therefore, has to be viewed within a much larger framework, there is no doubt that, for the compilers of the Dharmaśāstras it ranked as the first and most important result of action. (118)
Human beings may be reborn in a higher state like divine or semi-divine or lower state like animals or untouchables, and undergo varying degrees of pleasant or unpleasant experiences in accordance with the nature of their previous acts. The Dharmaśāstras provide a classification about the kinds of transformations brought about by particular actions. Manu, while laying down rules about the transmigration of the soul holds:

Men who delight in doing hurt (become) carnivorous (animals); those who eat forbidden food, worms; thieves, creatures consuming their own kind; those who have intercourse with women of the lowest caste, Pretas. Those who have associated with outcasts, he who has approached the wives of other men, and he who has stolen the property of a Brāhmaṇa become Brahmārākṣasas (sic). (497)

He also says that sinful mental action leads to rebirth in a low caste, evil with verbal action, to rebirth as a bird or a beast and for sinful acts committed with one’s body a man becomes an inanimate object (484-85). Accordingly the two brāhmaṇa boys who stole the property of another brāhmaṇa become brāhmaṇarākṣasas, for trying to kill an ascetic is cursed to become piśācas and for killing a cow become caṇḍalas and even turns to dove-tailed dogs, crows, vultures, peacocks, and swans (OS 8: 138-42).

All major religions of Indian origin are directed at the release from the circle of karma and rebirth. They agree in principle that rebirth is undesirable
and that one must strive to put an end to it. The *Kathāsaritśāgara* does not advocate this doctrine though it does not deny that action or *karma* is the cause of rebirths. For example in one story on account of exhaustion of merit a son of a god is born as a sow (*OS* 4: 176). In another story an inconsiderate judge, guilty of a brāhmaṇa’s death, “had to be borne for a long time in the bodies of animals” (*OS* 6: 84). The difference from the *Dharmaśāstra* position is that these stories place, “personal, idiosyncratic, and changeable agencies as the cause of rebirth” (Peterson 119). Moreover some of these stories do not represent rebirth as evil or miserable but as an opportunity for the protagonist to achieve his end. The focus here is on the restoration of the protagonist to his previous state or birth “along with the themes of memory, recognition, knowledge and recovery of identity” (Peterson 120). For example, in the tale of *King Sumanas and the Parrot* (*OS* 5: 27-38), a talking Parrot offers to recite the Śāstras in court and the King’s minister suspects that “this is some Rishi of ancient days become a Parrot on account of a curse, but owing to his piety he remembers his former birth, and so recollects what he formerly read.” The Parrot gives an account of his life which reveals that he was born to a Hen and a Cock Parrot “by the influence of my evil works in a former life.” He reaches Sage Pulastya’s hermitage where the sage finds that he had become a parrot “in consequence of a curse”. He talks of a *vidyādhaṇa* king who was in a former birth “a Rishi who knew all the Śāstras, but now on account of some remnant of former sin has become the parrot, and his wife also has been born
as a wild sow, and this Parrot, owing to the power of former austerities, remembers what it learned in a former life.” The Parrot concludes his own tale saying: “And now my evil works have spent their force, having been brought with me into the body of a bird.” The Parrot leaves the “body of a bird, and went to the home earned by his asceticism.” In the same story the Princess Makarandika is cursed by her parents in anger when she did not listen to them to be born in the nishāda race. But as the curse comes to an end everyone in the story is reinstated to their previous state of being and is reunited with their beloved. Here we find both the classical and the popular views of rebirth being echoed.

From the point of view of gaṇās and vidyādharaṃ human birth is a fall. Pārvatī curses the disrespectful gaṇās to “fall” into human births (OS 8: 137). Some are to undergo many miseries before the curse ends while for some others a mortal birth need not be completely evil. Pārvatī says that while three of her gaṇās shall “be happy in their lives as mortals,” while two “shall be miserable” (OS 8: 138). Muktāphalaketu is born a vidyāadhara prince by grace of Śiva. His birth and rebirth as a mortal are to serve a purpose, to perform a service to the gods (OS 8: 153). Some of the characters even desire rebirth. An asura maiden Trilokya-prabhā tries to commit suicide as she hopes to obtain Mukti-phaladhvaja as her husband in “a future birth” (OS 8: 190). What cannot be achieved in this birth is achievable in the next birth is a popular belief. The tales refuse to accept the attitude that rebirth is entirely evil. Though we come
across occasional lamentations about the evils of curses and rebirths, they are seen with a sense of approval. For a \textit{vidyādhara} cursed to fall from his semi-divine state, “rebirth generates positive adventures which are to be experienced and enjoyed with a sense of wonder, of the marvellous” (Peterson 136).

Many stories in the \textit{Kathāsaritsāgara} begin as a quest or as acts motivated by inexplicable desires. But as the tale unfolds, it becomes evident that behind each of these actions is the desire to return to a former life. Memory is the key to returning to their former lives. It triggers release from the curse. Some of these tales have group rebirths. These characters are reinstated to their past lives together after they remember about it. In such instances memory gives birth to knowledge which leads to “a process of recognition, rediscovery, return” (Peterson 141).

The three stages in the life of a \textit{brahman}a according to the \textit{Kathāsaritsāgara} is that of the student, householder and the hermit, that is \textit{Brahmachārin, Gṛhaṣṭha, Vānaparastha, Bhikṣu} (OS 2: 180). The stories give us a glimpse into these three stages. The sacred thread ceremony marks the beginning of formal education and marriage initiates a man into the state of the householder. As it is held to be the most important of all the \textit{saṃskāras}, it has been dealt with separately in another chapter. Retiring from one’s duties after entrusting your progeny with it forms the last stage.
**Upanayana and the Age for Education**

Passing “through the age of childhood” and being invested with the sacred thread seem to be the conditions to begin the pursuit of education (OS 1: 106). Various opinions exist regarding the proper age for *upanayana*. According to Manu if spiritual eminence for boy is desired, then *upanayana* may be performed in the fifth year for a bṛāhmaṇa, in the sixth year for a kṣatriya if there is a desire for military power, in the eighth year for a vaiśya if there is desire for endeavour to accumulate wealth. But ordinarily the age of *upanayana* of a bṛāhmaṇa, kṣatriya and vaiśya are eight, eleven and twelve respectively and does not pass until they are sixteen, twenty two and twenty four (36-37). Pandurang Vaman Kane quotes *Aśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* which holds that a bṛāhmaṇa boy should undergo *upanayana* in the eighth year, a kṣatriya in the eleventh year, a vaiśya in the twelfth year. Eight, eleven and twelve years are held as the principal time for the three varnas to undergo *upanayana* (2: 274-76). Accordingly we are told that eight years was the age set for the sacred thread ceremony which marked the beginning of formal education for boys (OS 8: 139; 7: 26-28). After they become eight years old, a hermit invests the Princes with the sacred thread (OS 8: 181). The hermit’s son is invested with the sacred thread and then is taught all sciences by his father, the hermit (OS 5: 33). Naravāhanadatta and sons of ministers of Udayana were instructed in sciences when they became eight years old (OS 3: 1).
Alberuni mentions that the education of a brāhmaṇa begins in the eighth year (2: 130).

**Retirement**

It is held that “good men desire a life of retirement after they have enjoyed their youth” (OS 4: 124). Accordingly we find several men leading an ascetic life after having abandoned their home. King Dvīpikarni goes to the forest after appointing son in his place (OS 1: 68). Udayana’s father ascends Himalaya with wife and ministers after appointing him on throne (OS 1: 121). Manu says that “when a householder sees his (skin) wrinkled, and (his hair) white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest”(sic) (198). He can either “commit his wife to his sons or be accompanied by her” (199). Hence a king abandons his kingdom and goes with his queen to “an ascetic grove of hermits” (OS 8: 209). After the coronation of Prince Mrgānakadatta his father goes to Varanasi (OS 7: 192). Another king retires to holy water and his conduct is in conformity with laws laid down for various periods of life (OS 7: 191). The aim of leading an ascetic life is the attainment of self-control but the fact that “anyone, even when a child, attains self control if favoured by the Lord, but no bad man attains self-control even when old” is also acknowledged (OS 4: 124). In another instance a queen is entrusted with the kingdom when the king goes to the forest with his son (OS 4: 125). Forests or holy rivers seem to be the places chosen for leading an ascetic life and to die thereafter. After witnessing his grandson’s marriage, a grandfather goes to
the river Gaṅgā with his wife to leave his mortal body (OS 2: 149). According to Manu, vanaprastha is permitted to members of the three higher varṇas (198). Hence we see a merchant going to the forest accompanied by his wife and friend (OS 2: 149).

Ritual Suicide

It was also customary for kings who led an ascetic life to end their own lives along with their dear ones. Udayana forces Gopālaka his brother-in-law to rule his kingdom and hurls himself off the cliff with wives and ministers (OS 8: 102). Gopālaka summons his younger brother, entrusts the kingdom and joins a hermitage (OS 8: 103). Alberuni records that “at the junction of the two rivers Yamuna and Ganges, Brāhmans and Kshatriyas are in the habit of committing suicide by throwing themselves into the Ganges” (2: 171). Kane has recorded several epigraphical references to ritual suicide like the Khairha plates of Yaśaḥkarnadeva dated AD 1073 which narrates that King Gaṅgeya obtained release along with his one hundred wives at the famous banyan tree of Prayāga. King Dhaṅgadeva of the Chaṇḍella dynasty is also said to have abandoned his body at Prayāga while contemplating on Rudra. The Calukya king Someśvara is said to have drowned himself in the Tuṅgabhadrā after performing yoga rites in AD 1068 (2: 925-26).

Pilgrimage

Kane states that “Tīrthyatāra was a popular way of redemption of sins in the case of all classes of men and women” and that “there was no question
of untouchability when bathing in holy waters” (4: 569). Innumerable ārthas and holy shrines have been mentioned from ancient times. Kane defines a ārtha as “a locality or spot or expanse of water which gives rise to the accumulation of righteousness (merit) owing to its own peculiar nature . . .” (4: 555). According to the Skandapurāṇa a ārtha is a spot of the earth resorted to by ancient good men for the collection of merit and that the main thing is to associate with holy men and pilgrimage is only a secondary object (Kane 4: 555). It was common for people to go on pilgrimages. Pilgrimages were undertaken to do penance, to acquire merit or even to escape from sorrow. They were undertaken by both men as well as women. Brāhmaṇa Vigatabhaya goes on pilgrimages through sorrow for his dead wife (OS 1: 107). A woman branded with infamy goes to a “holy bathing place to perform penance” (OS 7: 33). A queen along with wives of ministers, commander-in-chief, chaplain and physician goes on the thirteenth day of the white fortnight to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sarasvā (OS 5: 180). A king, we are informed “bathed, made offerings to fire, gave presents to brāhmans” before leaving on a pilgrimage after the death of his father (OS 7: 83).

Burial

Regarding the burial customs practised by the people, Alberuni comments: “The heirs of the dead person had to wash, embalm, wrap in a shroud and burn it with as much sandal and other wood as they can get. Part
of his burned bones are brought to the Ganges and thrown into it. The remainder of ashes is thrown into a brook of running water” (2: 169). In the stories of the Kathāsaritsāgara we find these customs being followed. We note instances of lamenting over the body, burning the body, scattering the bones in holy places (OS 5: 144; 7: 78), and throwing bones in the river Gaṅgā (OS 5: 146). A prince takes the bones of his dead father and duly flings them into the Gaṅgā river. He goes to Gaẏā and offers an obsequial cake to all ancestors. Later he performs a pilgrimage to all sacred waters (OS 7: 83). Throwing bones in river, giving gifts and performing śrāddha are also noticed (OS 7: 84).

Śrāddha denotes “three things, viz homa, the offering of piṇḍa (ball of cooked food) and gratification of bṛāhmaṇas invited to a dinner” writes Kane (4: 335). Āpastamba Grhya Sūtra prescribes that the obligatory śrāddha to be performed every month must contain food mixed with fat, the best course for supplying fat is to employ clarified butter and flesh; on failure of these two, sesamum oil and vegetables may be employed (Kane 4: 442). King Udayana gives “the offering of water to his father-in-law and mother-in-law” (OS 8: 101). We come across a husband performing śrāddha for his wife (OS 5: 85) and a king performs ceremonies for his dead wives (OS 6: 129). A śrāddha is seen being performed on the thirteenth day of lunar fortnight (OS 1: 56-57).
Various Ceremonies

Other ceremonies include those performed for good fortune according to the position of the planets (OS 8: 72), the ceremony performed by the mother before her sons set out on an expedition (OS 3: 265), the auspicious ceremony performed by the mother-in-law before the son-in-law sets out for war (OS 8: 48). It was customary to offer prayers before undertaking a journey. Thus we find a merchant before going to another country sets out after “offering usual preliminary prayers for success” (OS 2: 9).