CHAPTER - II

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF LAMBARIS

The traditional account of the origin of the Lambanis (Banjaras) is contained in the mythological legends and stories which are quite popular. According to these stories, the Lambanis are the descendants of the Rajputs, and hence, they call themselves Kshatriyas. This is illustrated by the following story.

Lord Vishnu is the creator of the world. He first created two Maharshis namely Bhragu and Raghu. The Maharshis created both Raja Dhaj and Ambabai and from them was born a son known as Kower Dhaj. In turn Kower Dhaj had Rajpal and to Rajpal was born Reem. Reem had two sons, namely, Habal and Fabaat. The direct descendants of Habal were Hindus and of Fabaat were Muslims. Habal had a son named Wage. Wage had Jogat, Jogat had Sandal, Sandal had Kasam, Kasam had Karn, and to Karn were born two sons namely, Teeda and Chada. The descendants of Teeda are Lambanis (Banjaras). The descendants of Chada are the other Hindu communities.
The third and fourth sons, Mola and Mota, were the disciples of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna in his last moments, as the story tells, distributed all his Gopikas among his disciples. Radha and Rukmini were given in marriage to Mola and Mota respectively.

Radha and Mola became life partners and became dancers and acrobats. They used to go from one capital to another, exhibiting their skill before the Rajas and Maharajas. One day they happened to visit Raja Loha Pamphar Swamsha Kuli of Dharungadh. Radha and Mola performed their dance before the Raja. He was highly pleased with their amusing dances. Mola and Radha demanded one of his children as a reward. The Raja was happy to give away his son as reward. Taking this child with them they approached Raja Kasam of Rathod. Here too, by their exquisite dances, they could get one of the sons of Raja Kasam. In the same manner they went to Raja Chetur Bhuj, alias Phoolia of Mandavi, who too was pleased with their dances and gave away his son as reward.

Taking these three boys, Radha and Mola visited several places exhibiting their dances. These three boys were named Raja Pambar, Karan Rathod, and Payan Chowhan. They were known as Gwars and they married three Brahmin girls. The descendants of these three were Gwars or Lambanis (Banjaras). The myth in this
connection with the marriages of these three boys runs as follows.

There was one Brahmin whose name was Neelakantham. He had three daughters and a son. The names of three daughters were (1) Kakarache, (2) Madasone and (3) Nagarache, and the name of the son was Parshram. In those good old days it was the custom among the Brahmins that the marriage of Brahmin girl should take place before the attainment of puberty. As he could not celebrate the marriage ceremony of his daughters in time due to some unforeseen circumstances, the Brahmin was forced to leave his daughters in the jungle (forest). Radha happened to see those three girls and they were taken back and married with those three boys referred to above.¹

Pre-History of the Lambanis

The Lambanis (Banjaras) are mentioned as existing in India in certain old works. There is no doubt of their having come down to southern India within historical times. General Briggs writing in 1831 speaks of them as follows:

Lambanis came into south India along with the great armies of the Moghul emperors, when they invaded the south. The Charans (Banjaras, the descendants of Mola) with their herds of pack of bullocks helped the imperial army fighting in an exhausted country far from their base of supplies, by supplying a fearless and reliable transport service. When the Lambanis (Banjaras) came to the south, they were in five groups viz., Rathod, Pamhar and Chovhan named after the names of Rajaput clans said to have been adopted by Mola, Vadatya and Turi. Of these the Rathod family was and is even now the strongest and most wide-spread division. The following anecdotes are related about the value of their service to an army in the field.

The Charans (Lambanis) evidently came to the Deccan with Asafjan, sometimes called Asafkhan, the Vazir of Shahjahan, and in the year 1630, or there about Bangi and Jhangi Naiks had with them (1,80,000) one hundred and eighty thousand bullocks and Bhagavandas, the Vadatya Naik, only fifty two thousand. They accompanied Asafjan carrying his provisions during his raid into the Deccan. It was the object of Asafjan to keep these bullocks well up with his force, and so much were they prized by that Vazir that he was induced to give an order to Bangi and Jangi Naiks, as they put forward excuses regarding the difficulty of obtaining grass and water for the cattle. The order engraved on copper and in gold letters runs as follows:
"Ranjankapani
Chapparaghias
Dinka tin Khun Maaf
Aur Jahan Asaf Janka Ghode
Vohan Bhangi Jangika hail."

Meaning

"If you can find no water elsewhere you may even take it from the ranjans (pots) of my followers; grass you may take from the roof of their huts and if you commit three murders once in a day I will even pardon this provided that where I find my cavalry, there I can find always Bangi Jangi's bullocks shall be with them."

The leader of the Vadatyas, who is Bhagavandas, asked for a similar order which was refused. This naturally excited the jealousy of this leader and after the campaign was over, a feud broke out between the Rathodas known as Tamburis (Turis referred to above) singing songs regarding the quarrels of these rival clans, which substantially agrees with the following story. One day when Bangi Naik was returning from the Hyderabad Durbar with four followers he was attacked in daylight by Bhagavandas who with a number of followers killed all the five men. On
complaining to the Nizam, the followers of Bangi Naik were told to take their revenge, which they shortly did and were headed by Narayan Bangi, son of the deceased. They fell unexpectedly on Bhagavan as in such large numbers that he and one hundred of his followers were killed. The Vaatyaas awaited their return, and attacking the Rathods, killed a number of them and took away their standard.

The standard was an yearly present from His Highness the Nizam, who used to give Bangi's descendants eight thanas of Khadi of sixteen yards of a than. The only relics of this feud found in this state are an occasional narration of the deeds of the ancestors of each party and an expression of mild contempt for those of the rival clan.

Lambanis took service not only under the Delhi emperors, but also under the rulers of Satara and subsequently under the Poona Raj and the Subhaship of the Nizam, and several of them rose to consideration and power. Indeed, it is of interest to learn how these people are found spread over the country and how as opportunity offered and seemed tempting to the different powers greater or lesser as they rose, their own clanship even on opposite sides, remained unbroken. On the part which the
Lambanis played in the Mysore wars, as Purveyors of grain.\(^2\)

General Briggs\(^3\) wrote as follows about Lambanis.

"The peace of 1792, signed under the walls of Seringapatam, dispersed the allied armies and the Lambanis returned to their respective ranges north of the river Krishna. In the year of 1798, however, a similar confederation between His Highness the Nizam and the British Government took place. The sovereign of Mysore, and the services of Lambanis were again called forth. The British Resident advanced 1,50,000 rupees to the Chief at Hyderabad and there were mustered below the Ghats 25,000 bullock loads of grain, which had accompanied the Nizam's forces under the command of captain (now colonel) Sir John Malcolm. The army under the command of Lieutenant-General Harris now advanced into Mysore, but before it reached Seringapatam it experienced considerable distress for want of grain, when the General heard that Bhima Naik with a supply of 15,000 bullock loads was at the foot of the Ghats. But as he deemed it dangerous to permit his advance alone, Major General Floyd with the whole of the ...


British cavalry detached to give protection to this valuable convoy.

The army of the enemy the celebrated Kumrood-Deen Khan, hovered daily on the flanks but did not prevent his giving safe conduct to Bhima Naik up the Ghats. At this time, the army besieging Seringapatam was in the greatest distress and rice was at two rupees per seer, but the exertions of the British troops surmounted all obstacles, and the 4th May 1799 witnessed the downfall of the capital and the death of Tipu, whose granaries were so largely stored that the average rate of the price of rice was thirty seers for a rupee.

As the grains with Bhima Naik did not reach the city for some days after the fall of Seringapatam, if the British General had adhered to the letter of the compact with the Lambaniis they would never have joined us again, but the liberality which distinguished our government from all the others in the east compromised the matter, and secured the hearty cooperation and assistance of these useful people in a subsequent war with the Marathas. The whole of the grain was purchased at the average rate of five seers for a rupee. The Lambaniis returned the original sum advanced to them, and had sufficient remaining to pay them for their labour expense and risk. The Chief Naiks received
honorary dresses and swords, and their leader Bhima Bangi was presented with an elephant. But while liberality characterised our actions in this instance, a very short time afterwards, it was necessary to have recourse to some severe measures in another.

Seringapatam had not long fallen, when a partisan named Dhondy, collecting a considerable booty of the disbanded troops of the erstwhile Government, refused to acknowledge the authority of the conquerors, and a large force under the command of Hon'ble Colonel Wellesly was sent in pursuit of him, while another detachment under colonel Dalrymple, with the Nizam's subsidiary force was sent to co-operate. A small horde of Lambanis in the employ of this British Government were endeavouring to go over to the enemy, when they were intercepted by this latter officer, who by way of example to those accompanying him, hanged seven of the principal Naiks and explained to them that our vengeance was not less to be dreaded than our liberality was to be desired.

The following account of the Lambanis derived from the Charanas or Bhats may be found to be interesting.

It may be suggested that the Lambanis are derived from the Charan or Bhat caste of Rajputana. Mr. Cumberlege, whose
monograph on the Caste in Berar is one of the best authorities, states that four divisions existing there the Charanas are the most numerous and by far the most interesting class.

In the article by Bhat it has been explained how the Charans or Bards, owing to their readiness to kill themselves rather than give up the property entrusted to their care, became the best safe conduct for the passage of goods in Rajputana. The name Charan is held generally to mean wanderer and in their capacity of Bards, the Charans were accustomed to travel from court to court of the different chiefs in their sacred character, and afterwards by their custom of 'targa' or 'chandi', that is of killing themselves when attacked and threatened by their assailants with the dreaded fate of being haunted by their ghosts.

Mr. Bhimlal Kirparam remarks, "After Parashurama's dispersion of the Kshatriyas, the Charanas accompanied them in their southward flight. In those troubled times, the Charans took charge of the supplies of the Kshatriya forces and so fell

to their present position of cattle-breeder and grain-carriers. Col. Ted says, "the Charans and Bhats or Bards and genealogists are the chief carriers of these regions (Marwari) their sacred character overawes the lawless Rajput chief, and even the savage Koli and Bhill and the plundering Sahrai of the desert dread the anathema of these singular races, who conduct the caravans through the wildest and most desolate regions." In another passage Colonel Ted identifies the Charans of Lambanis as follows:

Murala is an excellent township inhabited by a community of Charans of the tribe Cucholia (Kacheli) who though poets by birth are Lambanis or carriers by profession. The alliance is a curious one, and would appear incongruous. It was the sanctity of their office which converted our Baraiais (Baras) into Lambanis, for their persons being sacred, the immunity extended likewise to their goods and saved them from all imposts, so that in course of time they became the free-traders of Rajputana.

Colonel Ted was highly gratified with the reception that he received from the community which collectively advanced to meet him at some distance from the town. The procession was headed by the

village elders and all the fair Charanis who, as they approached, gracefully waved their scarfs overhelm until he was made captive by the muses of Murlah. It was a novel and interesting scene. The manly persons of the Charans were following white robes with the high loose-folded turbans inclined on one side from which the Mala or the Chaplet was gracefully suspended. And the Naiks or leaders with their massive necklaces of gold with the image of the pritisvar (manes) gave the whole an air of opulence and dignity.

The females were uniformly attired in a skirt of dark brown dress having a bodice of light coloured stuff, with gold ornaments worked into their fine black hair; and all had the favourite Churis or rings of Halliaart (elephant's tooth) covering the arm from the wrist to the elbow, and even above it.

Colonel Tod further described them with Lambanis using the name alternatively. He mentions their large herds of pack-bullocks, for the management of the Charans, who were graziers as well as Bards would naturally be adopted. The name given to the camp, Tanña is that generally used by Banjara. The women wear ivory bangles as the Banjara women.
Ball notes a similar custom of the Lambani women far away in the Bastar state of the Central provinces. "I passed through another Lambani hamlet from where the women and girls all hurried out in pursuit, and a brazen faced, powerful looking lass seized the bridle of my horse as he was being led by the Sais in the rear. The Sais and Chaprasi were both Muhammadans and the forward conduct of these females perplexed them not a little and the former was fast losing his temper at being thus assaulted by a woman.

Irvine notices, "The Lambanis with the Moghal armies in similar terms. It is these people that the Indian armies in the field are fed, and they are never injured by either army. The grain is taken from them, but invariably paid for. They encamp for safety every evening in a regular square formed of the bags of grain of which they construct a breast-work. These Lambani and their families are in the centre and the oxen are fastened outside. Guards with matchlocks and spears are placed at the corners and their dogs to their duty as advanced posts. He has seen them with droves of 500 bullocks. They do not move above two miles an hour, as their cattle are allowed to graze as they proceed on the march." 

Colonel Mackenzie in his account of the Lambani caste remarks, "It is certain that the Charans, whoever they were, first rose to the demand which the great armies of northern India, contending in exhausted countries far from their basis of supply created, viz., the want for a fearless and reliable transport service. The start which the Charans then acquired they retain among Banjaras to this day, though in very much diminished splendour and position. As they themselves relate, they were originally five brethren, Rathor, Turi, Panwar, Chauhan, and Jafon. But fortune particularly smiled on Bhika Rathor, as his four sons, Mersi, Multasi, Theda, and Khamdar, great names among the Charans, rose immediately to eminence as commissariat's transporters in the north. And not only under the Delhi emperors, but also under the Satara, subsequently the Poona Raj and the Subahship of the Nizam, and several of their descendents rise to consideration and power. It thus seems a reasonable hypothesis that the nucleus of the Banjara caste was constituted by the Charans or Bards of Rajputana."9

Bhimbhai Kirparam also identifies the Charans and Banjaras, but he was not able to find the exact passage. The following notice by Colonel Tone is of interest in this connection:

The vast assumption that attends a Maratha army necessarily superinduces the idea of great supplies; yet notwithstanding this, the native powers never concern themselves about providing for their forces and have no idea of a grain and victualling department, which forms so great an object in a European campaign. The Baniyas or grain sellers in an Indian army have always their servants ahead of the troops on the line of March to purchase in the adjacent country whatever necessaries are to be disposed of. Articles of consumption are never wanting in a native camp, though they are generally twenty-five per cent dearer than in the town bazars. The Vanjaras or intinerant grain merchants furnish large quantities, which they bring on bullocks from an immense distance. These are a very peculiar race marked and discriminated people from any other seen in this country. Formerly, they were considered so sacred that they passed in safety in the midst of contending armies. Of late, however, this reverence for their character was much abated and they have been frequently plundered, particularly by Tipu.

The reference to the sacred character attaching to the Banjaras a century ago appears to be strong evidence in favour of their derivation from the Charans. For it could scarcely have been obtained by any body of commissariat agents coming into
India with the Mohammadans. The fact that the example of disregarding it was first set by a Mohammadan prince points to the same conclusion."^{10}

---

LOCATION OF STUDY AREA

TALUK HEADQUARTERS
VILLAGE LOCATION
OR
STUDY AREA

KARNATAKA IN INDIA

MUNDARGI TALUK IN DCHARWAD DISTRICT

DCHARWAD DIST. IN
KARNATAKA

Fig 1