CHAPTER-V

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

As in economy, there was no stagnation in the society of Andhra. As a result of the impact of the economic developments outlined in earlier chapters there were several social changes and the society of the medieval age in Telangana presents a complex picture. Generally, historians of India attempt to explain the society of a period against the background of the Caturvamsa order i.e. division of the "Hindu" society into four varnas, brâhmana, ksatriya, vaisya and sudra. But it must be said that the Caturvamsa system was only a traditional and theoretical concept, derived from the condition of the Vedic Aryans. In course of time, the Indian society has undergone several changes and departed from the Caturvamsadharma. There occurred a process of acculturation as Aryans expanded eastwards and southwards in the sub-continent. They came into contact with various non-Aryan races and attempted to aryenise them and integrate them into their own social order. Besides, the anuloma and pratiloma marriages between Aryan and non-Aryan groups resulted in the rise of mixed castes. The Dharmaśtras of Vaiśeṣa and Baudhāyana tried to fix the position of these mixed castes and tribes in the Aryan social order. Varnaśankara became a common feature in the society from very early times. Buddhism and Jainism, the two non-Vedic religions also contributed to the process of acculturation.
By the 11th and 12th centuries, Buddhism and Jainism declined and there was a resurgence of "Hinduism" in the form of Puranic theism which supported the caste system. The kings and the brāhmaṇa priests began to uphold the Caturvarṇa dharma. In the Andhra country the brāhmānical revival began in the Veṅgī kingdom during the reign of Rājarājanarendra (A.D. 1022-1063). Nannaya, the first great Telugu poet translated Mahābhārata with a view to uphold the Varnāśramadharma. Nannaya states that Rājarājanarendra upheld the Varnāśramadharma. Many literary works came in the wake of Mahābhārata and most of them, except those by the Śaiva poets like Pālkuriki Somanātha, propagated the Caturvarṇadharma. Even among and the Śaivites the followers of Mallikārjuna, known as the Ārādhyas reconciled with the brāhmānical social order.

Several inscriptions of Telangāna during the Cēlukya and Kākatīya periods refer to the theoretical concept of the order of four varṇas. The Māteṇu inscription (A.D. 1120) of mahāsāmanta Vemābola Bodḍama Mallēnāyaka, a general and feudal chief under Kākati Prola II refers to the creation of the four orders by Brahmā. The Kundavaram inscription of Kundamāmbiko refers to the emergence of Brahmā from the navel of Viṣṇu and the four orders from Brahmā. The kings of the period took titles like Caturvarṇadharma pratistāghārya and Caturvarṇadharma pratipālītulu. However the Varnāśrama-dharma was upheld only in principle by the rulers of the
period. The praśasti titles noted above are merely tradi-
tional and they should not be taken seriously.

Although the above titles were taken by the kings, the Cāturvarṇadharma could not be maintained. Though the concept of four varṇas remained, the castes based upon occupations increased in number since very early times. We find from the medieval inscriptions that the contemporary society was characterised by the astādaśa mahāpraja. As its name indicates, the astādaśa mahāpraja was a general assembly of 18 major communities. The basis of the classification of the society into 18 communities appears to have been occupational. Actually, the medieval records mention more than 18 castes. Like the Cāturvarṇa system, the concept of astādaśa mahāpraja also became purely traditional. It may be said that even in the time of the Sātavāhanas, eighteen śraṇis, each being an occupational group, were mentioned in contemporary inscriptions.

An occupational group may be called a Jāti. The Dharmaśāstras have defined Jāti as a group into which a person is born and as occupations were mostly hereditary, each occupational group came to be called a Jāti. These occupational groups had their own codes of conduct known as Samaya and samaya danda meaning the punishment for violating the code of the community. Each Jāti or kula had its own rules and regulations. If any member violated the Jāti regulations (kuladharma or Jātidharma or samya) he
was liable for punishment. Some inscriptions refer to "astādāsa samayāla samastapraja" meaning all the people belonging to 18 self-regulating communities. It is therefore, more realistic to keep in mind the concept of astādāsa-praja rather than cāturvānadhārma while attempting an analysis of the social conditions of the period under study.

The Astādāsaśa mahāpraja

The astādāsa mahāpraja which is mentioned in several records was a representative assembly of the major communities of a village or town or a sthala. It discharged several administrative functions and played an important role in the economic and social life of the people. The astādāsa mahāpraja generally consisted of:


Some other records mention them as

Actually we find many more communities mentioned in the inscriptions and literary works of the period. The Table XVI represents the communities, their profession and the guild they formed. Those professionals who have not organised into a guild are also mentioned.

The causes for the emergence of a large number of communities by the early medieval period are discussed by several authors. The major causes are discussed below:

**Ethnic factor**

Long before the medieval age, the process of drawing the hill and forest tribes like the śabaras, boyas, puḷindas, and others into the mainstream of society began. These tribes were warlike in nature and did heavy physical work. These features helped them to a large extent. As the constant warfare increased the military requirements of the rulers of the age, the more hardy of the tribes were recruited into military services, and others took to the cultivation of land. In the Māṭeḍu inscription (A.D. 1120) of Mahāsāmanta Vemabola Boḍḍama Malleṇyaka, a vassal under Prola II, mentions that he belonged to Puḷinda vamūśa which was created by Brahmā for the protection of brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaśya and śūdra order. The originator of his family, Būchena of Vemabolakula had the title kotamalla which means 'destroyer of forts'. Būchena should have
distinguished himself in wars and thus elevated his family's position at the Kākatiya court.

Another important tribe that became slowly integrated into the society was the boyas. The boyas were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. As they were war-like and known for their marksmanship, they were recruited into military service. Moreover, most of the cattle grants to temples were entrusted to the members of the boya community with an obligation to supply ghee for the temple lamp. They operated hydraulic machines like the rātman. Gradually, the boyas were integrated into the social mainstream and rose to high positions at the court and in the camp. On the basis of the Gaṇapēśwaram record, it seems that Jāyapa the Gajasāhiṇi of Gaṇapati descended from Nāraboya, the ruler of Divi.

The process of assimilation of various ethnic groups into the society multiplied the number of castes. As noted above the Dharmāśāstras facilitated the absorption of the aboriginals into Čaturvarṇa order through the concept of Varnāsankara. An inscription at Māllaceruvu mentions bettevāru in samastapraja. The word bette or bettu means fighting temperament, adventurism and cruelty and as such it signifies aboriginals and hunters. The above noted record makes it clear that aboriginals and hunters were absorbed into the society as bette caste (jāti).
While enumerating the castes in the city of Warangal it is interesting that Vallabhāmatya mentions turakas (Turks = Muslims) and their Masjid. There is reason to believe that at the turn of fourteenth century Muslim population in Telangāna was sizable and its presence significant. It is learnt that from about the last quarter of the 13th century, Muslims, especially Śūfī saints and their disciples, made their way into the south. A certain Muslim saint by name Baba Fakr-ud-din established his Kankah at Peṇugonda where he died in A.D. 1294. The Śūfī brothers Shaik Baba Sharai-ud-din and Shaik Baba Shiab-ud-din are said to have settled at a place near the present city of Hyderabad. Later, at the instance of the famous saint Khwāja Nizam-ud-din Auliya of Ghasipur, a band of sufis left for the south. Again in A.D. 1309 another band of sufis led by Burhan-ud-din Charib Shah came to the south. Many of these sufis settled down in Telangāna, built Masjīds and by their pious life attracted both Islamīc and Hindu devotees. The muslims known to the Hindus as Turks gradually became a part of the local social order, being looked upon almost as one of the śūdra subcastes.

**Economic Factors**

From early times, occupational groups gradually settled down in the "Hindu" society as castes or subcastes. Agriculture, being the mainstay of the economy during medieval
Andhra, led to the growth of a number of subsidiary supporting industries each of which gave rise to a subcaste. Even among the agriculturists, there were several subcastes such as the redlu, tammadlu, gollas, boyas, idara and others.

The textile industry which is next in importance to agriculture also led to the rise of subcastes based upon the specialised skills. Vastrabhedaka (dyer), devanga (spinner), tantuvaya (weaver), and vastraraksha (sewer) are mentioned in the records of the period. These four groups, evidently, were involved in the cloth making and cloth manufacturing.

Religious movements

The new religious movements of the 11th and 12th centuries within the fold of 'Hinduism' also led to the rise of new castes. The viraśaiva movement led by Basava in Karnatoka had its echoes in Telangana where the kalamukha system of saivism was popular. In Andhradeśa, Śripati Pāṇḍita and Mallikārjuna Pāṇḍita also preached a militant form of saivism which has developed into the Ārādhya system. All these saivite systems were opposed to caste or anti-caste in general. The Vīraśaiva movement had opposed the traditional brāhmanical order and Basava is described as an axe to the root of the tree of caste. The followers of Basava did not follow any rules regarding ceremonial pollution, though at a later date, the sect began to develop social
exclusiveness based on privilege of birth and cleanliness of profession. The followers of Basava were mainly the trading communities, potters, shoe makers, tanners, weavers and untouchables. On the other side, during the 11th and 12th centuries, Ramānuja led the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement in Tamilnādu. Ramānuja observed, "If we descend below the four castes and come to the Cāndālas who, however lacking in virtue, are true worshippers of ... Viṣṇu, their servants are my masters and their feet are mine to worship". The idea of caste negation, in the early phase of the movement, was entertained by the ācāryas and the Tengalai or Prabandhic school was dominated by mostly Śūdras who enhanced their status and tried to establish their superiority over the orthodox vaiṣṇavites who gave preference to the Sanskrit texts among other things. Śrīvaiṣṇava movement had made deep impact on Andhra and Telangāṇa regions which brought into its fold, the Śūdras enhancing their status regardless of pollution and caste privileges. These movements led to the rise of new sects among brāhmaṇas and castes among the Śūdras. The brāhmaṇa followers of Mallikārjuna and Ramānuja formed into the subsects of ārādhyaś and Śrīvaiṣṇavas respectively. Among the Śūdras the jangamas and balijas were śaivite sects where as dāsarlu and sātānis were vaiṣṇavites.

Political factors

The period under study witnessed the decline of the tradi-
tional ruling caste, generally claiming to belong to the ksatriya varna. The Ksatriyas were slowly replaced by tribal chiefs and peasant warriors. In the Rāstrakūta army, which invaded Vengi, there were several śabara chiefs whereas in the court of Velanādu many boya chiefs held very high positions including those of maṇḍaleśvara. The names of the early Kākatīyas such as Erṭa, Guṇḍa and Prola are very common among tribals. These names suggest that they too were tribals who were recruited into the army of the Rāstrakūtas. The early Kākatīyas called themselves as belonging to sāmanta visti vamsa, and visti is the sanskritic form of vetti which means a slave or servant. In later inscriptions they claimed to have belonged to the fourth caste. But in some instances, they are described as ksatriyas. But Vidyānātha describes that their fame excelled the fame of the solar and lunar families. It may be taken to imply that they did not belong to either. We have already noted the case of the puḷindas.

Another important development during this period is the rise of peasant warrior groups. The reḍdis, velamas and other kāpus who were mainly agriculturists entered the military services under various ruling families. This was necessitated by frequent wars of the age. Moreover, war gave an opportunity to plunder and become rich and powerful quickly, though at the risk of life. These factors helped the recruitment of young peasants into armies. The nāyakulu
and ekkatlu are two such groups mentioned in several inscriptions. Gradually, they rose to the position of military chiefs (dandanāyaka and senāpati) and that of governors (mandalikas) and sāmantas. The nāyankara system under Pratāpa Rudra helped further development and increase in number of these military chieftains. Immediately after the fall of the Kākatīyas, the Andhra country witnessed, the establishment of several independent kingdoms. Prolaya-nāyaka of the Musunūri family who is considered to belong to the kamma caste established an independent kingdom at Rekapalli. The reddy chief, Prolaya Vemāreddi became independent at Addanki and the velama chief Singamanīgu became independent at Rājukonda. These peasant-warrior nāyakas liberated the Telugu country from the muslim rule and resisted the Bahameni incursions. This period is generally known as the Reddi-Nāyaka age in the history of the Andhras.

A large number of government officials began to be appointed to discharge administrative functions in the Kākatīya period. Thus, a bureaucracy, loyal to the government developed both in towns and villages. These government officials at different levels (grāma and sthala) were referred to in inscriptions as karanālu. These were mainly drawn from the brāhmana caste who gradually developed into the separate sect of niyogie.
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T.I. = Telangana Inscriptions.
References


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