THE ANCIENT INDIAN SOCIETY HAS DEVELOPED TWO FOLD COORDINATED SYSTEM OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. ON THE ONE SIDE THE WHOLE HUMAN LIFE IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR STAGES NAMELY ĀŚRAMAS AND ON THE OTHER SIDE THE SOCIETY IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR STRATA NAMELY VARṆA. BOTH THE SYSTEMS ARE CONCERNED WITH THE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL AS WELL AS SOCIETY. TOGETHER THESE TWO SYSTEMS OF VARṆAS AND ĀŚRAMAS ARE KNOWN AS VARṆĀŚRAMA DHARMA, THE ANCIENT SOCIAL SYSTEM THAT WAS MEANT TO ASSURE SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL PROSPERITY FOR BOTH SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL.

AS THE VARṆAS DIVIDE THE SOCIAL BODY, THE ĀŚRAMAS DIVIDE THE LIFE OF AN INDIVIDUAL. ASSUMING THE LIFE OF A HUMAN BEING IS 100 YEARS, EACH STAGE IS AFFORDED 25 YEARS. THE FIRST QUARTER IS CALLED THE STUDENT PHASE (BRAHMACĀRYA). DURING THIS TIME OF LIFE THE INDIVIDUAL GOES TO THE HOME OF THE GURU (GURUKULA), THE ANCIENT Sanskrit WORD FOR SCHOOL AND LIVES A LIFE OF CELIBACY SERVING THE TEACHER AND LEARNING WHAT NEEDS TO BE LEARNED FOR LATER YEARS. AFTER GRADUATION THE STUDENT ADOPTS THE NEXT STAGE OF LIFE, THE HOUSEHOLDER (GRHASTHA) STAGE AND TAKES ON WORLDLY RESPONSIBILITIES, WHICH INCLUDE WIFE, FAMILY AND CAREER. BY AGE FIFTY IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE HOUSEHOLDER TURN HIS MIND BACK TO THE WAYS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AS IN YOUNGER DAYS AND SO MOVES INTO THE RETIREMENT (VĀNAPRASTHA) STAGE OF LIFE. IN THIS STAGE HE PASSES HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES OVER TO HIS CHILDREN, LEAVES HOME AND ENTERS THE FOREST (VANA) TO BE AWAY FROM THE WORLD. HUSBAND AND WIFE PERHAPS TRAVEL ON PILGRIMAGES. THE VĀNAPRASTHA STAGE IS THE GRADUAL WINDING DOWN OF MATERIAL AFFAIRS IN PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL STAGE, COMPLETE RENUNCIATION OR SAṆṆYĀSA. IN THIS FINAL STAGE OF SAṆṆYĀSA A MAN WILL SEND HIS WIFE BACK TO HIS FAMILY, SYMBOLICALLY PERFORM HIS OWN FUNERAL RITES AND SPENDS HIS REMAINING DAYS AS A WANDERING ASCETIC SEEKING FINAL RELEASE (MOKṢA) FROM THE WORLD.
The literal meaning of the term ‘varṇa’ is colour. Originally it has been used to refer the distinction between Ārya and Dāsa. Professor Ghurye says that in the Rgveda the word varṇa is never applied to any one of these classes. It is only the Āryan varṇa or the Ārya people that is contrasted with the Dāsa varṇa. The Śatapatha Brāhmana on the other hand described the four classes as the four varṇas. The colour connotation of the word was strong that later on when the classes came to be regular described as four varṇas. Four different colours were supposed to be distinguished.’

The caste system in India is deep rooted in the long-drawn socio-economic, cultural and political history. It has brought about a deep and complete division in the Hindu society. Various explanations are given for the origin of the caste system in India.² The origin is a sharp line between various layers of society. So in place of “origin of caste”² we should use plural form, viz., “origins of caste”. It is said that all human beings are divided into four categories according to their natural aptitudes and endowments. Some possess high spiritual and intellectual qualities, others fighting qualities, still others producing qualities, and accordingly they are placed in various categories. The caste system is therefore based on natural and inherent attributes found in the mankind. It is therefore called a contribution of the Hindu genius and credited with ensuring continuity and durability to Hindu society in spite of foreign onslaughts. But to think of natural qualities of human beings without taking account of the social and material environment in which they are born and nurtured would be going too far. Such a theory of the origin of the caste system obviously serves the interests of those who want to perpetuate this system. It sounds like the statement of Aristotle, according to whom certain people are born to command and others born to obey; the first become masters and the second become slaves.

According to a second theory the caste system is based on notions of purity and impurity. The Brāhmaṇas possess the purity of the first degree, the Kṣatriyas of the second degree, and so on. The ritual ranking of the varṇas and
jātis is based on their relative purity. The Brāhmaṇas, partly out of their honest desire to preserve the purity of Vedic ritual, partly being the victims of their own ideas of ceremonial purity, and partly also owing to their consciousness of superiority over the aborigines. But the exponents of this theory do not realise that notions of purity and impurity found in primitive and ancient societies outside India did not give rise to the caste system. In the case of India also even working in leather was not regarded impure in Vedic times. In the Vedic age artisans including leatherworkers were parts of the tribal community called viś, but in post-Vedic times the emergent classes of priests and warriors not only discarded manual and artisanal labour but hated those who practiced it. In fact the more they moved away from physical labour and primary production the more pure and noble they came to be regarded.

There is a third theory which explains the origin of caste as a legacy from the aboriginal tribal communities of India. According to it every tribe is divided into a number of clans and members of a clan marry within the tribe but outside the clan. When such a tribe is absorbed as a caste in the brahmanical system it continues to marry within the tribe or caste and refuses to have social intercourse with other castes. There is no doubt that once the caste system was set up tribes were converted into castes, but the earliest history of tribal amalgamations would show that tribes entered into marriage relations with one another as a result of war and trade. Marriage served as a form of exchange of women between groups, and this exchange was considered necessary to keep life going. Insistence on marriage within the caste began because of the need of maintaining the privileges of the upper orders, which automatically barred the lower orders from having social intercourse with the upper castes and condemned them to marriage within their circles.

A fourth theory accounts for the origin of the caste system in terms of the division of labour. It is said that the need for occupational division leading to more production and economic efficiency gave rise to castes. There is some validity in this theory. But what is ignored is the hereditary aspect of the caste
system. In Vedic times castes were occupational in nature, and change from one occupation to the other was possible. But over the centuries this change became impossible. What is further important, division of labour was effected in such a manner that Brāhmaṇas or priests and Kṣatriyas or warriors were withdrawn from direct production, which was placed in the hands of the Vaiśyas and Śūdras.

The origin and growth of the caste system can be better appreciated if we bear in mind that caste is a form of social differentiation. Since social differentiation arises out of social conflicts and unequal distribution of resources and produce, the origin and growth of the caste cannot be understood without a study of social processes which again are intimately connected with changes in material life. Of the many cultures flourished in India the literary records of the Indo-Āryan culture are not only the earliest but contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up caste.

Of the many cultures that flourished in India the literary records of the Indo-Āryan culture are not only the earliest but contain the first mention and a continuous history of the factors that make up caste. In the Rgvedic time there was no place for individual enterprise. Whether for hunting or for animal-keeping, for safety or for settlement the tribe had to work collectively. Hence distribution also was collective and equal. Since struggle for existence was hard and the food scarce, the goal was expansion of the tribe (praṇa) and of animals (pāṣu) for food.

The one-caste society of the Kṛta age is the mythicised version of the tribal herd bound by ties of kingship and tribal discipline. Men were governed by tribal rules of hunting and war. Tribal wars were fought to extermination. In course of time human labour was replaced by animal labour. Cattle-produce and animal labour yielded a surplus of wealth. It was possible to feed and use men and women captured in tribal feuds. The animal was yoked to the plough and the captive alien harnessed behind. Like animal man became booty of
plunder and an article of use. This is how slavery came, the two-caste society, social laws and fusion of tribal blood. When Āryan and non-Āryan tribes settled down and commingled, the tradition of uni-caste society gave way to the bi-caste society of Deva (gods) and Asura (demons) or the Ārya and Dāsa (master and slave). It was not the result of disintegration of the original viṣ but was produced by the impact of the hostile aboriginals who were admitted as slaves and wage-earners (bhṛtaka) within the Āryan society. The masters and the slaves became two castes or varṇas (color). The white-skinned and the dark-skinned as they are labeled in the Rgveda.

Now the duties of society were divided and the viṣ itself was split into three parts. The main body, i.e., the Vaiśya followed productive pursuits like agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. The surplus wealth went towards the maintenance of two new castes (varṇas), the Brāhmana and the Kṣatriya, marked not by the color of their skin but by their profession. The Brāhmana performed sacrifices for general welfare, studied the Vedas and formulated social laws (dharma) on the basis of custom and equity. The Kṣatriya was charged with the defence of the realm and the running of the administration. The three varṇas specialized in their avocations and each was accorded a place in the social hierarchy suitable to the dignity of its service. Below the three was the fourth caste of Śūdra or Dāsa serving the former and no longer an alien race but a subordinate partner within the Āryan system. The Puruṣāśūkta of the Rgveda gives a mythical story of the origin of the four castes from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the Lord Brahma. 

In the beginning the vocations of the varṇas were not strictly hereditary. A Kṣatriya could excel in philosophical pursuits and become a Brāhmana. A well-known story in Vedic literature is that of Viśvāmitra who was born a Kṣatriya but became a Brāhmana by acquiring brahmanical knowledge and virtues. The Satapatha Brāhmana gives a similar story about Janaka, king of Videha. A Brāhmana might acquire a kingdom by dint of his velour and become a Kṣatriya. He became known as Brahma Kṣatriya. In the Matsya
Purāṇa the Brāhmaṇas descended from the sage Bhrgu are described as founders of royal houses. The Vaiśya and the Śūdra could improve their status provided they possessed the necessary talents and virtues. Conversely, by choice or by accident, one might be demoted from a higher to a lower caste. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and the Purāṇas give instances of these two categories. Later on, caste and vocation were strictly fixed by heredity according to the laws of the Smṛtis. Social and economic divisions were identified and graded. The Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra were separated from and related to one another by a set of laws framed according to a scheme of division and synthesis.

Rise of individual enterprise necessarily led to the institution of private property. Anyone could recover some wasteland, turn the virgin soil by means of slaves and bullocks and become owner of agricultural land. In industrial arts the old collective enterprise still prevailed but the income was shared and not jointly owned. The trader made his fortune by exchanging the products of agriculture and industry. In the wake of caste and property came the state. The place of the viṣ was taken by the rāṣṭra (country); the Viśpati (patriarch) became Bhupati (lord of the land). The Kulapatis (paterfamilias) who were sharers in the tribal common-wealth were replaced by amātyas (officers and councilors), paid men of the king. The state protected private property and took a part of private income as revenue (bhāga). It had no hand in social regulation and was only the guardian of the rules of duty (dharmaṣya gopta).

The caste system was conceived with recognition of variations in human nature and as a plan to fit these variations in a graded structure according to the needs of society. This was a scheme of cooperation and synthesis to ensure progress. Given sufficient flexibility this was an excellent solution of the dichotomy of the individual and the community.

The law givers sought to give caste system an inflexible rigidity. The codes of Gautama, Baudhayāna and Āpastamba followed by later canon fixed
the varna irrevocably to birth and imposed restrictions on marriage and social relations. That these laws were meant to be obeyed is shown in descriptive literature. The narratives of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and the Jātaka stories of the Pali canon further show that at first varṇa not only remained in enjoyment of dignity and position but also to rise to wealth and power.

As in the closing period of the Vedic Age, the varna (the classes or the castes) and Āśrama (the four orders or stages of life) are the dominant features of society. They gradually become rigid and fixed, but the Hindu society was far from attaining its normal and standardized form in this age. The caste system developed rigidity so far as the Śūdras were concerned but there was no rigidity among the upper three classes. The duties of the different castes, as enumerated in the Dharma sūtras, have been very pithily put in his inimitable analytical manner by Kautilya in his Arthaśāstra. He enumerates the duties of the Brāhmaṇa as (1) Adhyayana (study), (2) Adhyāpana (teaching), (3) Yajña (worship), (4) Yājana (officiating at worship), (5) Dāna (making gifts) and (6) Pratigraha (accepting gifts). The svādharma or duties of the Kṣatriya comprised (1) Adhyayana, (2) Yajña (3) Dāna, (4) Śastra jīva (profession of arms as source of livelihood) and (5) Bhūtarakṣaṇa (protection of living beings). The duties of the Vaiśya are (1) Adhyayana, (2) Yajña, (3) Dāna, (4) Kṛṣi (agriculture), (5) Paśūpālya (cattle-rearing) and (6) Vānijya (trade). The functions assigned to the Śūdra are (1) Dvijatisūśrīṣā (menial service of the three twice-born castes), (2) Vārtā (production of wealth), (3) Kārakarma (arts) and (4) Kuśīlakārakarma (crafts). It will be seen from the above that Kautilya points out the common duties of the three higher castes as Study (Adhyayana), Worship (Yajña), and Making Gifts (Dāna).

The picture of the caste system as given in Hindu text, however, is very different from what we find in the Buddhist and Jain texts, and even in some parts of the epics. Thus the Mahābhārata lays down that one does not become a Brāhmaṇa by birth but by his conduct, a theory frequently met with in an elaborate form in the Buddhist texts. The Mahābhārata also declares
that the son of a Brāhmaṇa is a Brāhmaṇa, even though his mother is a Kṣatriya or Vaiśya. This view is also repeated in Buddhist texts. We are told that when Prasenajit came to learn that his queen was really a slave woman, he reported the matter to the Buddha who said:

"Wise men of old have said, what matters the mother’s birth? The birth of the father is the measure." He also cited a famous instance in support of this view. When the king of Kośala heard this, he was pleased and treated the queen and her son as suited their rank.

The Buddhist and Jain texts also always openly declare the Kṣatriyas to be less superior to the Brāhmaṇas, and name the Kṣatriyas first in enumerating the four castes. Thus, although the general framework of the caste system is admitted, the supremacy of the Brāhmaṇa is challenged in these texts. This view is also indirectly supported by the Mahābhārata. Although in theory priestly power is higher than the royal power, and the king is a creation of the priest, in practice the king often gets the upper hand. This is quite natural, as the whole political organisation was behind the king, whereas the priesthood had not been organised into a worldly power independent of the state. In any case the Epic, rarely, indicates that the king dictated and the priest obeyed.

The Buddhist texts and other evidence also leave no doubt that the so-called mixed castes really resulted from organisations, like guilds, of people following different arts and crafts. The general theory of intermarriage leading to the different mixed castes is puerile in the extreme, and hardly deserves serious consideration. It was a desperate attempt to explain existing social conditions on the basis of the orthodox theory of the four castes. But it has one great value. It shows how the different non-Āryan tribes like Khašas and Dravidas, and even foreigners like Šakas, Yavanas, Chīnas, etc., were gradually incorporated into Hindu society and formed an integral part of it. The gradual absorption of these foreign elements in the Hindu society is one of the most striking features of the period and testifies to the catholic spirit of the Hindus of

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that age. Even the hordes of nomadic tribes of Central Asia, not to speak of the civilized Greeks and Parthians, who came to India as conquerors, adopted Indian culture and civilization, and were so completely merged in the Hindu society that no trace was left of their individuality or separate existence as a community.

The Buddhist texts also show that caste was not rigidly tied to craft in those days. They tell of a Kṣatriya working successively as a potter, basket-maker, reed-worker, garland-maker, and cook, also of a Setthi (Vaiśya) 'working as a tailor and a potter.' Without loss of prestige in both cases. We find Kṣatriyas of the Sākya and Koliya clans cultivating their fields. The Dāsa-Brāhmaṇa-Jātaka states how Brāhmaṇas in those days pursued ten occupations against rules: as (1) physicians, carrying sacks filled with medicinal roots and herbs; (2) servants and wagon-drivers; (3) tax-collectors who would not leave a household without collecting alms; (4) diggers of the soil in ascetic garb with their long hairs and nails and covered with dust and dirt; (5) traders selling fruits, sweets and the like; (6) farmers; (7) priests interpreting omens; (8) policemen with arms to guard caravans and shops, like Gopas and Niśādas; (9) hunters in the garb of hermits killing hares, cats, fish, tortoises and the like; and (10) menials of kings who helped them in their baths in the garb of Yajnikas. Similarly, the Vasettha Sutta refers to Brāhmaṇas working as cultivators, craftsmen, messengers, sacrifices and landlords. The fragment on Śīlas mentions Brāhmaṇas following many diverse occupations as physicians, sorcerers, architects, story-tellers, cattle breeders, farmers and the like. The Jātakas refer to Brāhmaṇas pursuing the following callings: tillage, tending cattle, trade, hunting, carpentry, weaving, policing of caravans, archery, driving of carriages, and even snake-charming; and hold up a Brāhmaṇas peasant as a supremely pious man and even a Bodhisattva.

Both Jain and Buddhist works describe the normal Brāhmaṇa either as a citizen serving society or as a hermit who has renounced society. The second type is called a tapasa or a rṣi living in his āśrama in the forest. The first class
of Brāhmaṇas served as the king’s priests and sacrificers, as well as ministers, ambassadors and military officers. Besides the four established castes or Hindu society the Buddhist Pāli text-books speak of the peoples ranking socially below them as "hīna-jāti," "low tribes," marked out by their pursuits of ‘low crafts’, hīna-sippa, and instance the workers in rushes, fowlers and cart-makers, who were aboriginal peoples; as also mat-makers, barbers, potters, weavers and leather workers. Some texts apply the general term Milakkha to peoples lying outside the pale of Āryan society. These include the hīna-jātis, mentioned as five in the Vinaya-Sutta-Vibhaṅga, viz. Caṇḍāla, Vena, Nesada, Rathakāra and Pukkusa. Some of these counted as Śūdras belonging to Āryan society, while others lay outside its pale. The former are called by Pāṇini aniravāśita (abahiṣṭa) Śūdra and the latter, niravāśita. As examples of the latter, the Assalayana Sutta mentions the Yonas and Kambojas whose society knew of only two classes, employers and employed, or rather master (ayya) and slave (dāsa).

A graphic account of the caste system is given by Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He enumerates seven classes or castes into which the whole population of India is divided, viz. (1) Philosophers, (2) Husbandmen, (3) Herdsmen, (4) Artisans, (5) Military, (6) Overseers or Spies, and (7) Councilors and Assessors. He adds that "no one is allowed to marry out of his own caste, or to exchange one profession or trade for another or to follow more than one business."

This is undoubtedly a characteristic of the rigid caste system as enunciated in the brahmanical texts, but it is difficult to believe that the seven categories mentioned by Megasthenes really conformed to this. Neither of the last two classes of officials could really form such a close social corporation, and the fourth class, the artisans, must have included a number of such social units. There is no doubt that Megasthenes confused the castes with the professions or occupations with which he was more familiar than others. It is significant that he makes no mention of the fourfold divisions of caste, and his
obvious confusion between castes and occupations probably indicates that the broad division of society was based on this latter factor rather than on the theoretical classification in the brahmanical texts of the period. Whatever ‘we might think of the accuracy or otherwise of Megasthenes’s observations about the caste-divisions in general, we get interesting glimpses of the social conditions of his time from the particulars he records of them. Special interest attaches to his description of the ‘Philosophers’ whom he divides into two classes- Brachmanes and Sarmanes. There is no doubt that the first of these refers to the Brāhmanaṅgas. The second is generally taken as the Buddhist Śramaṇas, but most likely refers to ascetics as a class irrespective of the particular religious sect to which they belonged.

Around the third century CE the Vaiśya -Śūdra social formation was afflicted with a deep social crisis. The crisis is clearly reflected in the descriptions of the Kali age in those portions of the Purāṇas which belong to the third and fourth century CE. Emphasis on the importance of coercive mechanism (Dāna) in the Śānti Parva and the description of anarchy (arājaktā) in the epics possibly belongs to the same age and point to the same crisis. The Kali age is characterized by varna-saṅkara, i.e., peasants, artisans and laborers, either refused to stick to the producing functions assigned to them or else the Vaiśya peasants declined to pay taxes and the Śūdra s refused to make their labour available. This made the functioning of the state and society difficult.22

Early in the 5th century CE, Fa-hien testified to the prosperous condition of Northern India under the rule of the Imperial Guptas. He clearly depicted the picture of rigid caste system of that time. He says that the low caste Caṇḍāla on the outskirts of the city.23

Hsuen Tsang, who came to India in the 7th century CE and travelled more widely over the country than his predecessors wrote a detailed account of the life of the people. He mentioned that the division of society was based on
Caste. Concept of untouchables was in existence. Candalas or the Śūdras had to reside outside the city or village. The Brāhmaṇas were held in the highest esteem. The Chinese pilgrim noticed the king was generally Kṣatriyas. There were no inter-caste marriages.²⁴

So we can say that from this time society in India became more and more mechanical under the regulations of the Śāstras. The castes and sub castes were rigidly separated. Inter-caste contact was prohibited with strict rules of dining, marriage, touch and ceremonials.

A close study of the Rājatarangini shows that the population of Kashmir in early times comprised of several castes. There is, however, no well-defined caste system mentioned either by Kalhana or by his predecessors. Though the concept of the population as consisting of the four traditional castes was not unknown to him,²⁵ as he has used many terms like Brāhmaṇa, Rājaputra, Dombas, Kirātas, Candalas, Nona etc., but there was no such caste as Kṣatriyas, Vaiśya and Śūdra in early Kashmiri society. Many scholars like S. C. Ray believe that there was no intermediate caste in Kashmir, not even Śūdra²⁶. Actually the society of Kashmir was divided along the occupational or socio-economic lines. The one reason believed to be is the Buddhism which was introduced into Kashmir by Asoka and subsequently, flourished under the Kuśāṇas, had been accepted by the masses and was for a number of centuries the dominant faith in the Valley. Caste system, hence, had lost all rigidity and except for the Brāhmaṇas who maintained their traditions tenaciously and who were responsible later in re-establishing the Hindu faith among the people of Kashmir, and low-caste tribes who followed the calling of scavengers, night-watchmen and boatmen.

THE BRĀHAMAṆAS

Manu declares Brāhmaṇa to be gods on earth.²⁷ It says that Brāhmaṇa is superior to Kṣatriyas. In legal disputes between a Brāhmaṇa and non Brāhmaṇa, arbitrator or a witness must speak in favour of former. He is
prohibited from accepting food from Śūdra. The Satpatha Brāhmaṇa regards Brāhmaṇa as impure if he follows the profession of a physician. In later-vedic period as the importance of sacrifices and ritualism grew and with it the prestige of the priest also increased. The Satpatha Brāhmaṇa even sums up the rights and duties of the Brāhmaṇas, amongst which receiving gifts and observing purity of descent are mentioned. In this period Brāhmaṇa is characterised by tranquility, self-restraint, penance, purity, forgiveness, straightforwardness, knowledge, wisdom, realization of truth and faith.

Regarding the position of Brāhmaṇas in society, Dharma-Śāstras, follow Vedic literature in all respects, especially in assigning the highest status and dignity to the Brāhmaṇas. In the Dharma-sūtras the Brāhmaṇas are regarded as the highest caste in society. Society should give special privileges for Brāhmaṇas. For example they should be exempted from payment of many taxes. He could accept food offered by vaiśya but not that offered by artisans. He should perform sacrifices and practice of charity. In Manu-sanhitā, the highest supremacy in every respect is claimed for a Brāhmaṇa, though emphasis is also laid on the superior knowledge and qualifications on which that status rests. He must be well versed in his grasp of the Absolute or Brahma (Brahma-dharana) and his observance of vows (niyama-dharana) and must cultivate universal love. He filled the highest offices of State and society by his character-those of teacher, priest, judge, prime minister, assessor and member of the Dharma Pariṣad, the standing legal commission in the administration. He was punishable in law, but not by capital punishment.

While early Gupta period records indicate the existence of rural consultative councils that mediated between the rulers and the artisans and peasants, it seems that such consultative councils became less important or were phased out with the growth of the agrahāra. Thereafter, the Brāhmaṇas became the sole intermediaries between the village and the state, and over time, this may have enabled the Brāhmaṇas to exercise social and political
hegemony over other inhabitants of the village. It also appears that the greatest incidence of the practice of untouchability occurs in conjunction with the growth in the power and authority of the Brāhamaṇa in such villages.

Nevertheless, the seeds for a more privileged role for the Brāhamaṇas were also being sown through the process of land grants to Brāhamaṇas in post Gupta period. In some instances, thousands of Brāhamaṇas were granted rights to hitherto uncultivated land. In other cases, Brāhamaṇas were appointed as the local representatives of the state authorities in what are described as agrahāra villages where Brāhamaṇas presided over small peasants, who in Bihar were mostly landless sharecroppers or bonded labourers. These agrahāra villages were typically small villages and satellites of bigger villages that included members of several castes and bigger land-holders. In Bihar, such agrahāra villages proliferated and it is quite likely that in such agrahāra oppressive social relations and some of the most egregious patterns of caste-centered discrimination and exploitation may have developed.

But these developments took time to spread elsewhere in India, first spreading to Bengal and eastern UP, and very gradually elsewhere in India. However, this pattern was not necessarily replicated in identical form throughout India and some parts of India virtually escaped this trend. In agrahāra villages in other parts of India, Brāhamaṇas did take on the role of local administrators and tax collectors, but the status of the small peasantry was not always as miserable as in Bihar. The degree of exploitation and oppression appears to be related to the extent of alienation from land-ownership.

Like the other parts of the country, Brāhamaṇas were the privileged and honoured caste in the society of Kashmir. However, in the oldest literary source of Kashmir history, Nilmata Purāṇa word Brāhmaṇa does not occur. But the mentions of the other three varnas in the succeeding lines ensure it. In the various verses of Nilmata Purāṇa Brāhamaṇas are associated with the sacrifice. There are frequent mentions of the sacrifice or the worship of fire, which is
followed by the injunction of please Brāhmaṇas, indicates that the latter played a leading role in all the sacrifices.

Kalhana in his work has described them as the protectors of the valley\textsuperscript{47} and they could cause disaster if they were not given full respect\textsuperscript{48}. They were also supposed to be exempted from the capital punishments.\textsuperscript{49} Still, there are many incidents narrated by Kalhana which shows that the Brāhmaṇa community was not supreme. The origin of the Brahmanism in the valley of Kashmir is unknown, but there is clear evidence to show that many of the noted Brāhmaṇa inhabitants of Kashmir were the descendants of Brāhmaṇa inhabitants of other parts of India. Probably, there had been several large scale immigrations of the Brāhmaṇa from the plains of India into the valley of Kashmir from a remote period. The descendants of these immigrants seem to have composed the bulk of the Brāhmaṇa population of Kashmir.

The occupations adopted by the Brāhmaṇa were varied during the period of study; besides serving as priests, they were kathā-vacakas or narrators of Puranic stories, astrologers, vaidyas or physicians, teachers and even agriculturists. In the Nīlmatā Purāṇa they are shown largely associated with sacrifices, rituals and Vedic Study. On the day of the coronation of the king, the priest had to perform special sacrifices; reciting mantras meant for the attainment of the long life, fearlessness, prosperity etc. Reference is made to Kotihoma, Laksahoma and Salihotra.\textsuperscript{50} The Brāhmaṇas were entrusted with the duty of preserving the intellectual and spiritual culture of the society. Besides the general epithets of the Brāhmaṇas indicating their Vedic studies, the Nīlmatā uses two significant epithets for them viz. ‘acquainted with history’\textsuperscript{51} and ‘reciters’ (of Kathās, Purāṇas etc.).\textsuperscript{52} That the Purānic stories were narrated on religious functions is indicated by the description of ‘awakening of Viśṇu’.\textsuperscript{53} In the Gupta inscriptions also we find mention of Kathāvids, and Bāna in his Harsacarita refers to the reading of the Vāyu Purāṇa in his village. This practice may have been popular in Kashmir also, in circa 6th century CE i.e. sometime before the date of the Nīlmatā. Regarding
the epithet ‘Itihasavid’ it may be pointed out that the historical tradition has been very strong in Kashmir. Some of them joined the administrative services and were ministers and councilors of the state. Thus the Brāhamaṇa Mitraśārman was the saṃdhivigrāhaka of king Lalitdāitya. Jayāpiḍa’s minister was Devaśārman and his chief councilor was Dāmodaraṇgupta. Bhaṭṭa Phalguna was the minister of king Kṣemagupta and Queen Diddā and so on.

Politically, the Brāhamaṇas were a power to reckon with. The Brāhamaṇa assemblies of agraḥāras as well as the temple priests are found frequently in the Rājatarangini to influence the internal administration by means of their solemn fasts. Through the Purohita corporations who resorted to hunger strikes (prayopavesana) whenever any action taken by the king or his ministers went against their own interest or against those of the country, the Brāhamaṇa class acted as an effective check on the power of the king. Often, the Brāhamaṇa assemblies were called upon to choose a suitable person for the throne when there was an interregnum. It was such an assembly of Brāhamaṇas, who selected Yaśaskara as the king of Kashmir. The instances recorded by Kalhaṇa in his work prove that this bloodless but frequently effective form of passive resistance was resorted to not only as a protest against financial exactions, but also for getting rid of an all-powerful but unpopular ministers. During the reign of queen Diddā, we find a Brāhamaṇa holding a fast for removing Tuṅga from the office of chief ministership. Later, in the reign of Diddā’s successor, Sārṅgrāmarāja, they again resorted to a fast for the removal of Tuṅga from his high office. King Harṣa had to exempt the Brāhamaṇas from forced labour as they undertook a fast. Sussala was once brought to his senses by a similar fast when, neglecting his kingly duties, the Dāmaras got an opportunity to oppress the people.

Even as late as 1172 CE the Brāhamaṇa and other leading citizens chose, Vantideva as the king, when the throne fell vacant for want of a successor. They used this method for effective reconciliation between king Kalaśa and his father Ananta because their hostility was causing ruin to the
country. For drawing the attention of king Sussala towards the indifference of the ministers during a siege of the capital by pretender, Brāhmaṇas of Rājānāvātikā held a solemn fast. When royal army plundered the agrahāra of Aksosuva, the Brāhmaṇa of that place held a solemn fast against the king Bhikṣācara and they were followed by the Purohita-corporations of Gokula as well. On one memorable occasion, the Brāhmaṇa assemblies were summoned by the commander-in-chief Kamalavardhana just after his triumph over a chief-king, for the purpose of electing a successor to the throne. The assembly justified itself by setting aside the claims of the foolish commander-in-chief and elected the poor but wise Brāhmaṇa Yaśāskara, who became the founder of a new dynasty. Even Nīlmata Purāṇa throws light on the relation between the Brāhmaṇas and the king. It enjoins that a king should perform daily sacrifices and the other sacrifices for special purpose, in consultation with his Saṅvatsaras and the Purohitas. On the day of coronation the priest has to undergo a fast and make offerings in the fire with five sets of mantras viz. Pratiratha, Śabda, Varṣa, Ayusya and Abhaya. It is the family-priest who makes the king sit on the throne. The king is asked to honour the priest with gifts. He is to worship the gods and the Brāhmaṇas daily. In the description of the coronation bath of the king, the Brāhmaṇas, with their golden jars, are stated to come last of the other varṇas, but they lead others in the act of coronating the king.

It is interesting to find that Kalhana, notwithstanding his Brāhmaṇa descent shows no sympathy for the solemn fasts of the Brāhmaṇa assemblies and the temple priests. Repeatedly, he shows how all the Brāhmaṇas owed them to be won over by bribery. Mention is also made of their use of fasts for blackmailing, e.g., at the critical time when king Sussala was besieged by the rebels at the capital and was being deserted by his troops, the temple-purohitas performed a solemn fast and by besetting him with violence, made him pound up golden vessels and other valuables for distribution.
Thus the Brāhmaṇa Mitraśārman was the *sandhivigrahika* of king Lalitāditya. Jayāpīḍa’s minister was Devaśārman and his chief councilor was Dāmodaraṇga. Bhaṭṭa Phalguna was the minister of king Kṣemagupta and Queen Diddā. The military career also was open to the Brāhmaṇa Bhujāṅga; the son of a Brāhmaṇa Sāṃanta was employed by Sarṇgrāmarāja on a responsible post in his army. Kalhaṇa’s father, Caṇḍaka, held for a long time the post of the commander of forts under king Harṣa. Ajjaka, a Brāhmaṇa minister of Kalhaṇa, died in the battlefield while fighting against Sussala. Lavarāja and Yaśorāja, two Brāhmaṇaśas skilled in military exercises, were killed while fighting the assassins of Sussala. Kalyaṇarāja was a Brāhmaṇa soldier well versed in military exercises. Brāhmaṇaśas frequently took to arms during the unsettled times through which Kashmir passed often. A characteristic verse in the *Rājarātraginī* mentions that in the peaceful times of Yaśaskara, the Brāhmaṇa priests of temples sheathed their swords and again took to their peaceful avocations.

But though many Brāhmaṇaśas adopted political and military vocations, the majority of them appear to have earned their livelihood by performing religious rites, by serving as priests, and by teaching the sacred texts. Besides the sacrificial fees, donations were also frequently made to the Brāhmaṇas. The *Nīlmata Purāṇa* prescribes gifts to Brāhmaṇaśas on almost every religious ceremony and considers such gifts to acquire religious merit for the donor. Kalhaṇa often mentions that *agrahāras* was donated by the king to the Brāhmaṇaśas. In book one, king Lava bestowed the *agrahāra* of Lavara on the community of Brāhmaṇaśas. Stein identified the location of this agrāhāra with modern Lidar, one of the principal tributaries of the Vitastā. After him, his son Kuṣā granted the agrāhāra of Kuruhrā, which is identified with modern Kular. It is a fair sized village on the western side of the Lidar valley. Another king Godhara also donated the agrāhāra of Godhrā-Hastiśāla to Brāhmaṇa community. King Abhimanyu, who is considered to be the second Indra donated the agrahāra of Kaṇṭakotsa. Queen Vākpustā who was the wife of
king Tunjīna of Gonandiya dynasty also established the agrahāras of Katīmuṣa for Brāhmaṇa of Kashmir. The other class was the physicians, who lived in society and obtained their food, consisting of rice and barley-meal.

Another king Meghavāhana of Gonandiya dynasty, established the agrahāra named Meghavāna for Brāhmaṇa community of the valley. King Lalitāpiḍa granted the agrahāra of Phalapura and Locanotsa to Brāhmaṇas. Śūravarman who was the brother of Avantivarman, granted the agrahāra of Khāḍhūyā and Hastikarna to Brāhmaṇas. Queen Sūryāmātī from love for her younger brother Kalhaṇa granted agrahāra on his name. She also granted another agrahāra at Amareśvara on her husband Ananta’s name.

The priests of the temples had other sources of income. They enjoyed the revenue of the villages which belonged to the temples. It, therefore, follows that the Brāhmaṇa in Kashmir were mainly dependent on land and formed a class of small landlords. Sometime they sold flowers, incense, etc., to the people going to the temples for worship. Kṣemendra furnishes us with interesting information that at times sweets, etc., which were offered to the god of the temple were resold to the public by the priests.

The Brāhmaṇa’s life is broadly divided into two stages. In the first he lives in a simple style, in a grove in front of the city; he abstains from animal food and sexual pleasure, and spends his time listening to serious discourses or imparting his knowledge to others. After living in this manner for 37 years he retires to his home where he lives the rest of his days in ease and security. He marries as many wives as he pleases, eats flesh and uses fine dresses and costly ornaments. In this account we may easily detect an attempt to describe the first two stages of a Brāhmaṇa’s life, viz. those of studentship and householder.

The other class of philosophers, viz. the Śramanas, is divided into two classes. The more distinguished among them, the Hylobioi, lived an ascetic life in the woods, where they subsisted on leaves of trees and wild fruits, and wore garments made from the bark of trees. The other class was the physicians, who lived in society and obtained their food, consisting of rice and barley-meal,
from the householders for the mere asking, presumably for the valuable medical services rendered by them free of charge. We are told that they affected cures rather by regulating diet than by the use of medicines, among which the most esteemed were ointments and plasters. The Indians were also highly reputed for cure of snake-bites for which no adequate remedy was known to the Greeks.

The Brāhmaṇas and ascetics, whom Megasthenes brings together under one group, formed the highest class in society which, though inferior in ‘point of number to the other classes, was pre-eminent over all in point of dignity. They were engaged by the king and private persons to perform religious ceremonies, and some of them gave a forecast of the weather, health and other topics which might be of use to the public. It seems to be clear that Megasthenes has described here not so much any particular class or group, far less any caste, as a body of people who struck him as possessing the highest intellectual and spiritual powers and thus forming a class apart. Megasthenes high estimate of this class of people is fully borne out by the literary evidence referred to above, and the account of individual ascetics by the Greeks, to be referred to later. Thus it would be right to divide the life of Brāhamaṇa in to two stages.

MILITARY CASTES

The fighting castes of old Kashmir are represented by the Kṣatriya, Tāntrins, Ekāṅgas and Lavānyas. The Rājatarangini does not make specific references to Kṣatriyas as in the context of Kashmir’s ancient history but it is believed that from the ancient period Kṣatriyas have remained influential in Kashmir. Kṣatriyas in Kashmir would attach "āditya" word with their name. Pratapāditya, Lalitāditya, Vajrāditya, Balāditya, Ranāditya, Vedāditya and Vikramāditya are some of the instances. Rajputs or Rajputra were associated with the fighting and the ruling caste.
There are occasional references to the Kṣatriyas in the *Nilmata Purāṇa* indicating their martial character. They are described as skilled in the use of all sorts of weapons. The Nirājana ceremony, in which Durgā-the goddess of war-is worshipped and the weapons of war are also worshipped in the temple of Durgā, seems to have been a kind of military ceremony associated with the Kṣatriyas.

As regards their status in society, their mention after the Brāhmaṇas indicates their social status in accordance with the vartika on Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, which lays down the rule that the castes should be mentioned in the order of status, the highest one to come first and the lowest one last. At one place this order seems to have been upturned but the sense of gradation is not lost sight of there too. While bathing the king, the higher castes come later so as to assure the highest purity at the time of coronation. We have noted the position of the Brāhmaṇa Purohita and the Brāhmaṇa Saṁvatsara in the court of the king. The kings paid respect to the Brāhmaṇas as is shown by the treatment Candradeva and Mahāpadma received from Nilā and Visvagasva respectively. There is reference, no doubt, to Paraśurāma killing the Kṣatriyas twenty-one times put as Pargiter has pointed out; this account is purely a tale of brahmanical tradition with little historical background. Anyway, from the version of the story, as preserved in the *Nilmata*, making the significant assertion that some Kṣatriyas afraid of Rāma had sought refuge in Kashmir, we may infer the lack of Brāhmaṇa-Kṣatriya conflict in Kashmir of the age of the *Nilmata*.

Tāntrins, the second military class, mentioned by Kalhana appear to have formed in a caste of strong organization. The name Tāntrin survives in the tribal name of Tantri which is borne by a considerable section of the Muhammadan agriculturist population of Kashmir. Families claiming the Tantri *Kram* or surname may be found in most of the towns and villages throughout the Valley. At this period of chronicle Tāntrin foot-soldiers had formed a confederacy and were strong enough to punish or to favour the
rulers of the land.\textsuperscript{100} During the period of internal troubles between the succession of Pārtha and the defeat of Śarīkaravarman (906-936 CE), they organized themselves into a powerful condottiere and were at the height of their power.\textsuperscript{101} In 933-34 CE the Tāntrins overthrew Cakravarman and made Śūravarman, the son of Pāngu from Mrgāvatī, king.\textsuperscript{102} But his uncles and ministers had no affection for him. They were solely looking to their own advantage, caused the overthrow of the king by not paying what was due to the Tāntrins.\textsuperscript{103} Kalhana further tells that though the prince was of great character but he could not keep his ruling powers without the favour of Tāntrins and for that purpose he had to give them rich gifts.\textsuperscript{104} After one year the Tāntrins dethroned Pāngu and seeing the chance of profit, made the liberal Pārtha once more king.\textsuperscript{105} When king Cakravarman could not pay money to Tāntrins, in terror he fled in the month Pauṣa of the same year.\textsuperscript{106} Later on he sent Saṁbhuvardhana to negotiate with the Tāntrins.\textsuperscript{107} But he deceived his elder brother and got them to install himself on the throne. Kalhana says that the kings were in the service of the Tāntrins, and ousted each other, like village officials, by offering greater and greater bribes.\textsuperscript{108}

In another reference he tells that in this land, the rulers of which had conquered Kānyakubja and other countries, the king now maintained themselves by giving bills of exchange (\textit{hundikā}) to the Tāntrins.\textsuperscript{109} They raised different claimants to the throne of Kashmir, one after the other, demanding larger and larger bribes from each puppet king and oppressed the land by their heavy exactions. Queen Sugandhā, after Śarīkaravarman’s death, ruled for two years through the good will of Tāntrins.\textsuperscript{110} At one occasion she assembled the ministers, feudal lords, Tāntrin and Ekāṅgas in council, in order to invest some fit person with the regal power.\textsuperscript{111} Subsequently they formed an important and often troublesome element in the army, in which they seem to have served as foot soldiers.\textsuperscript{112} They are in the several references made in the \textit{Rājatarāṅginī} as clearly distinguished from the mounted forces and figure as royal guards. On the eighth day of the bright half of Caitya, the foot-soldiers
marched out for battle with Śaṅkarvardhana. King Parvagupta also took the favour of Tāntrins to secure throne. Later on this same king tried to control the increasing power of Tāntrins and grew his terror in their hearts. The Tāntrins also joined the conspiracy against Uccala. They also participated in action against king Raḍa-Śaṅkharāja and helped the consecrated Gārga as king. He worried king Sussala’s force by surprise attacks and in a fight killed Trailokyarāja and other prominent Tāntrins. When Sussala marched back to Kashmir with other councilors, Tāntrins in league with Janakasimha, came to meet him. Thus Tāntrins acted as true praetorians and king-makers. If any person found close union with them, only then he could succeed. In the Rājatarangini Tāntrins are compared with cruel snake-charmers.

The exact meaning of the term Ekānga cannot be established with certainty. It is frequently used in Books Five to seven of the Rājatarangini for the designation of an armed force. Troyer assumed them to have been the royal bodyguards and various references in the chronicle, show that he is not wrong. They are mentioned along with sāmantas (feudal lords), ministers, Tāntrins and Kāyasthas, (officials) as influencing the affairs of the court and the state.

After the death of her husband king Śaṅkaravarman, Queen Sugandhā assumed the royal power in her hand. Kalhana tells that she ruled for two years relying on the Ekāṅgas and through the good-will of the Tāntrins. On one occasion, Kalhana tells that she assembled the ministers, feudal chiefs, Tāntrins and Ekāṅgas in council, in order to invest some fit person with the regal power. In another story, Tāntrin made Pārtha king, who was the son of king Nirjitvarman, and queen Sugandhā was forced to leave the royal palace. At this point of time Ekāṅga troops went forth united, and brought back Sugandhā from Huskapura, where she had stayed. But when Tāntrins heard of her approach, they marched forth in fury. In this battle Ekāṅgas were defeated and Queen Sugandhā was captured.
At another place Kalhana mentions, when Pārtha was overthrown by his father, Pāngu, with the help of Tāntrins but soon Pāngu died and his another son Cakravarman, was placed on thrown. Thereupon the Tāntrin foot-soldiers, taking the side of Pārtha, who was anxious to seize his father’s thrown, fought a battle with the Ekāṅgas, who were protecting Cakravarman. Before his death, king Yaśaskara, who was suffering from an abdominal disease, in the presence of his ministers, Ekāṅgas and feudal lords, appointed varṇaṭa as a king. Varṇaṭa was the son of his paternal grand-uncle Rāmādeva. After the death of king Harirāja, his mother Śrilēkā wished the thrown for herself. When she was coming after taking the bath where the arrangements for the installation had been made, the assembled Ekāṅgas and the king’s milk-brother, Sāgara, made his child-son Ananta king.

Ekāṅgas fought with the Tāntrins, who supported another claimant to the crown, and saved Queen Diddā from a rebel force, whose onslaught they opposed in orderly array at the palace gate. They protected king Ananta with equal devotion against a pretender. When Tribhuvana, the powerful commander-in-chief of Ananta, collected the favour of Dāmaras and become to deprive the king of the throne, it was the honesty of Ekāṅgas that they did not leave the king’s side. In another incident, when king Ananta was in war field with Tribhuvana and his army, he saw at every step of war field Ekāṅga’s bodies were slashed with cuts. Ekāṅgas were under the office of Aksapāṭala. Who were probably character of be the chief office of account. The king, to show his gratitude, freed the Ekāṅgas from the harassing service at the Aksapāṭala, i.e. a sort of pension. It is in the vicinity of the Aksapāṭala that Harṣa endeavoured to collect a force of Ekāṅgas for a final struggle.

The later references show that Ekāṅgas were a force organized in a military fashion but employed chiefly for police duties. King Tuṅga had employed thirty brave Ekāṅgas in his service and who died in a battle field. Ekāṅgas are also referred as feudal lords as well. Kalhaṇa tells that Parvagupta wanted to dethrone Saṅgṛāmadeva, but could not do this from the fear of a
rising of the Ekāṅgas. So he arranged witchcraft for this purpose. But he could not achieve his aim. Fearing the hostile Ekāṅgas, and losing command over himself owing to his rising agitation and apprehensions, he became so miserable day and night that he suddenly collected his troops on a day when people did not even move outside on account of a heavy snow-fall, and surrounded the palace. Ultimately he assured the throne. When Parvagupta became king, Ekāṅgas were afraid of him. An Ekāṅga called Madanāditya, who was descended from the race of Suyya, burst his large drum through carelessness in the king’s assembly-hall. The angry king had his garments taken off and ill-treated him. Having his hair and beard shaved off, he became an ascetic. But from the text it is not clear whether Kalhana means the Madanāditya’s family following him in to his new status, or that the Ekāṅga, who had after his humiliating punishment turned in to a mendicant, married again subsequently. In another place Kalhana tells that an equerry, Trailokya by name tells Harṣa that his grandfather (Ananta) once won a victory with the Ekāṅgas and the mounted man. Therefore, he should go to the Aksapatala [office] in order to collect them because if they will join him, he can win over his enemy.

Ekāṅga’s modern counterpart would be customs and forest guards, and other revenue collecting agents. Till the beginning of the present century the ‘Patan Nizamat’ was a regiment, specially maintained in Kashmir for the support of the civil authorities for the collection of revenue etc.

The Lavanyas, who played a great part in the internal troubles which occurred in Kashmir during the closing years of the eleventh and the beginning of twelfth centuries, seem to have formed an important tribal section of the rural population who took to arms. Their name, too, survives in the modern Kram of Lon. The numerous passages in which the Lavanyas as a body of individuals is referred to, tell us nothing about their origin, but show that many of them must have held a position of influence as land-owners or tribal headmen. Up to Jonarāja’s time, the Lavanyas seem to have retained a certain
importance as their name is of frequent occurrence in his Chronicle, but by Śrivara, the later historian, they are mentioned only once. In the Rājatarāṅgiṇī, Kalhaṇa shows that the Lavanyas of this period were so powerful that who so ever powerful ruler came, they first tried to crush them. When Harṣa attacked the Lavanyas of Holada in Madavar, he killed the Lavanyas so ruthlessly that he left not even Brāhmaṇas alive if they were dressed liked Lavanyas e.i. who wore high hair dress and who had prominent appearance. He even killed travelers, taking them as Lavanyas. Those who brought heads of Lavanyas were paid heavily. Kalhaṇa tells that wherever king Harṣa took his abode, there the people formed wide-spreading triumphal garlands with the horrible heads of Lavanyas. With this ferocious action of Harṣa, Lavanyas became so frightened that they fled in all directions and the king was praised for the destruction of the Lavanyas. When Brāhmaṇas rebelled against the king, Kalhaṇa said that this was worse than the rebellion of Lavanyas.

Kalhaṇa tells that the Lavanyas caused so much trouble throughout the reign of king Sussala and subsequently killed him. Later on Sussala’s son Jayasiriṇha took the revenge and killed all Lavanyas. All ruling kings or those who wanted to be ruling power tried to do so with the favour of Lavanyas. Kalhaṇa in eighth book of the Rājatarāṅgiṇī tells that once king Bhikṣācara came to Vijayesvara in order to make the Brāhmaṇas of the agrahāras to give up their fast. Tilaka who was the commander-in-chief of king Bhikṣācara, advised him to kill all Lavanyas. But he did not accept this advice. Later Bhikṣācara along with Lavanyas got defeated by Sussala and thought of going abroad from fear of Sussala. Even the Śrīvaka, the brave Brother-in-law of Yāsorāja, never took hostile action against the Lavanyas. On the contrary they passed the time secretly in doing each other favour. Bhikṣācara took the favour of Lavanyas to gain the throne. When king Sussala returned to Srinagar in 1121 CE, he entered the palace in search of Bhikṣu, who was the son of Bhoja and Vibhavāmati. But he took the favour of Lavanyas, who helped him in saving his life. Bhoja also wanted to take the favour of
Lavanyas to strengthen his position. Lavanyas are also depicted as robbers. In Jayasimha time, villages were plundered by the Lavanyas.

TRADE COMMUNITIES

The Vaiśya is the third of four castes in Indian society. The word “Vaiśya” is derived from a word which means “to live,” and the caste was originally focused on farming, agriculture, and trading. Traditionally, they have composed the merchant class, and they have also provided for Indian society in general through alms giving and the construction of temples, hospitals, and other public facilities. Members of the Vaiśya have traditionally been in an awkward position in society, since they are among the lower ranking of the castes, yet they form a crucial part of society. This led historically to some bitterness on the part of the Vaiśya.

As the caste system developed, the Vaiśya deviated from their agricultural pursuits, focusing on trade as merchants, skilled labor and land ownership. Members of this caste have traditionally been wealthy, as a result of their occupations, and the caste has also traditionally valued education, especially religious education in the hopes of becoming twice born, an important accomplishment in Hindu life. The caste has also traditionally placed a value on artisanship and technical education.

Since the Vaiśyas have long been associated with wealth, the caste has also historically been expected to participate in charity and alms giving. Many Indian temples were constructed with Vaiśya funds, along with other structures which are meant to benefit society in general. The Brahmin caste may have encouraged this social and religious charity in the hopes of defusing the power which often comes with wealth.

Although Vaiśyas were wealthy and often well respected, they were in the lower part of the caste system. The resentment which this fostered led to Vaiśya based support of many revolutionary movements and religions. The
spread of religions such as Buddhism which reject the notion of caste was enhanced through Vaiśya conversion and funds.

There are not many direct references to Vaiśya s in the Rājatarangini. But Kalhana does mention the emergence of a rich and prosperous merchant class. The opening of overland trade and commerce with foreign countries appears to have received a boost. Commercial activity must have been particularly brisk during the rule of the Kārkotās. Extensive conquests by kings like Lalitāditya must have opened vast markets for Kashmiri goods in neighbouring territories. The account of Kalhana shows a respectable position of business communities in the Kashmir society. He gives a vivid description of the mansions of this class. It becomes clear that it was much more comfortable than the palace of the king of Kashmir, Durlabhaka Pratāpāditya II of the Kārkotā dynasty.¹⁵¹

The story narrated by Kalhana in his chronicle pertaining to king Durlabhaka Pratāpāditya II and a trader shows that the two classes were sharing very cordial social relations.¹⁵² The aforesaid king and the salt trader by the name Nona were so close that they used to frequently visit each other. The account given by Kalhana clearly proves the high socio-economic prestige of this class of the society. Kalhana in his work mentions a story that once the merchant stayed at the royal palace, but did not spend his night comfortably due to the smoke caused by the lamp.¹⁵³ Since this was news to the king; he decided to pay a return call to the trader. It was in the course of this visit, when he met the wife of the trader and ultimately, obtained her as his wife and it was this queen who gave birth to Lalitāditya, the most powerful ruler of the valley. Thus the general picture we get from the Rājatarangini of Kalhana regarding the condition of business community in Kashmiri society is the one enjoying very high status.

By the end of Kalhana’s work, the reputation of this class had declined. Kalhana compared merchant with dangerous scorpion,¹⁵⁴ who, for money could
even take the life of a person. In a story, a man had deposited a lakh of money in the house of a merchant, who was his friend and from time to time, he took some small sums of money from that merchant, according to his need. After twenty or thirty years later, that man asked the merchant to give him the balance amount, but the merchant denied returning any money.\textsuperscript{155}

**LOWER CASTES**

The origin of the lowest \textit{varṇa} of Hindu society might have been outside the pale of the Āryan society. Since then it has been held that the fourth \textit{varṇa} was mainly formed by the non-Āryan population, who were reduced to that position by the Āryan conquerors. It has been argued that the Dāsas and Dasyus were non-Āryan, must be speaking different language and having a different life style. They were organized in to tribe called Viś. In post Vedic period, Śūdras appear mainly as the serving class. They held independent property in cattle, which seems still to have been the chief form of wealth, may not have been under the necessity to serve upper classes. Manu even mentions Śūdra teachers and pupils, showing that the Śūdra was not denied the right to learning.\textsuperscript{156} But the \textit{Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa} refers Śūdra as serving class, who is created from the feet of Prajāpati.

As regards the Śūdra, "service was his portion in life". He was not eligible for sacraments (\textit{Sāṁskāras}), or for hearing sacred texts except their substance. But he was not denied the rites of marriage, cooking of daily food in the \textit{grhya} fires, and funeral ceremonies (\textit{Śrāddha}). As representing, however, the lowest level of culture, "a Śūdra majority in a country" (Śūdra-\textit{bhuyiṣṭham}), it was believed, "would spell its doom."\textsuperscript{157}

On the whole the lot of a Śūdra was an unenviable one. The formidable array of regulations in the \textit{Manu-Smṛti} against the Śūdra would make dismal reading. He had few privileges and many obligations. The discriminating laws against him and his social disabilities, uttered with brutal frankness, were an
inheritance of the past. But Manu treats him exactly like a slave and prescribes barbarous punishments as already noted above. To crown all, it is laid down that a Brāhmaṇa shall perform the same penance for killing a Śūdra as for killing a cat, a frog, a dog, or a crow.

To what extent these regulations represent the actual state of things it is difficult to say. But the Jātaka stories also describe how the Caṇḍālas were treated as despised outcastes doomed to live outside the city or village, and their very sight was regarded as impure. On one occasion two of them approached the city-gate to sell their wares, where two girls of aristocratic birth chanced to meet them on their way to a festival. They regarded it as a bad omen and returned after washing their eyes with perfumed water. The crowd, angry at the abandonment of a gathering where they would have been served with free food and drink, mercilessly belabored the two Caṇḍālas. Subsequently, concealing their birth, they went to Taxila for study. One of them made good progress but, eventually, their identity was discovered and they were again beaten and driven out. They went out into the woods, took to an ascetic life, and died shortly after.

We find in this story the beginning of those ideas of untouchability which have cast a slur on Indian civilization. But as yet the Śūdras was not included in this category. It is, moreover, refreshing to come across some instances in Buddhist literature where men of low caste were distinguished by culture.

Like the Dharma-Sūtras and the Smṛtis also sanction intermarriage between males of higher and females of lower castes (i.e. Anuloma) but not vice versa (Pratiloma). Though Manu clearly supports the marriage of a Brāhmaṇa male with a Śūdra female, this is expressly condemned in the rules that immediately follow. Such contradictions, which also occur in the Mahābhārata and Dharma-sūtras, prove that the practice was looked upon with disfavour and was gradually disappearing.
As regards interdining, Manu lays down that a Brāhmaṇa must not eat cooked food (given) by a Śūdra who performs no Śrāddhas. This, by implication, shows that food cooked by a Śūdra was not absolutely prohibited. But elsewhere, in Manu, such food is both permitted and forbidden. Similar contradictions are also found in the Dharma-sūtras. Manu gives a long list of persons whose food is forbidden, but the restriction is based on considerations of personal virtues, not of caste. On the whole the idea of untouchability or impurity, even of the Śūdras as a caste, was gradually growing, but had not yet become a rigid law or practice. No definite statement is made by Manu about changing one caste for another, but possibilities of such change are at least theoretically conceded. For example, it is laid down in Manu that “if the female issue of a Brāhmaṇa male and a Śūdra female bear children to one of the highest caste, the inferior (tribe) attains the highest caste within the seventh generation. Thus a Śūdra attains the rank of a Brāhmaṇa and (in a similar manner) a Brāhmaṇa sinks to the level of a Śūdra. The same thing happened with the offspring of a Kṣatriya or of a Vaiśya.” This rule merely expands and clarifies the principle enunciated in Gautama Dharmasūtra, and indirectly supports the view that intermarriage even between Brāhmaṇas and Śūdras was not altogether unknown, and not always as severely condemned as in some rules of Manu and later Dharmasūtras. Society of Rājatarangini was also not different from the rest of the country.

The society of Kashmir was also not unknown to this section of Indian cultures. The Nilmatā Purāṇa describes Śūdras to serve the twice-born varṇas. As regards their position in the society, those who served in the houses of the higher varṇas, received sympathetic treatment from their masters. The Nilmatā often includes the servants also in the list of the persons in whose company the householder feasts and enjoys. The Karmajīvis and the Śīlpīs belonged to the Śūdra varṇa. The former were probably low paid workers while the latter were artisans’ viz. weavers, carpenters, goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, leather-tanners and potters who commanded some
respect in the society and exchanged gifts with the higher varṇas during the Mahimana celebrations. They are enjoined to worship the goddess Bhadrakāli on the 8th of the dark half of Aśvina and also to worship their tools and implements in the temple of Durgā. Kalhaṇa in his chronicle has also mentioned lower castes of Kashmir society as well their status in the society.

DOMBAS

The Dombas have been frequently mentioned by Kalhaṇa as a caste of menials. Sometimes they are associated with Caṇḍālas. What exactly was their profession is not clearly mentioned by Kalhaṇa. In one passage of the Rājatarangini, they are described as scavengers, night-watchmen, messengers, singers and dancers and huntsmen. Kalhaṇa mentions Domba singers and from the stories recorded by him it seems that the Dombas were generally good musicians and earned their livelihood by entertaining people with their music and dancing. They, perhaps, supplied the demand from common people for the much needed entertainment and relaxation. During the reign of king Cakravarman two famous Domba singers named Harṇīṣ and Nāgalatā, came to his reception hall. Kalhaṇa says that Domba girls stepped forward, followed by king’s band, which was resplendent with necklaces, golden bracelets on arms and hands and other ornaments. These Domba girls won the heart of the king by their singing and acting, which are described in conventional Kāvyā fashion. The king was so impressed by these Domba girls that he paid no regards to their low caste and took them in to his seraglio. Harṇīṣ was raised by the love-blind king to the rank of chief queen, and enjoyed among the king’s wives the fanning with the chowries. During the reign of king Cakravarman Domba s were even raised to the level of ministers and secured important offices like the Akṣapaṭala and others. They were shown to be proud of their relationship with the king. They were respected by everybody as a royal order which has been obeyed. Albērūṇi, while speaking of the contemporary castes of northern India, mentions the Dombas who were flute-players and singers. The Domba s have been sometimes mentioned by Kalhaṇa also as śvapākas.
which literally means ‘dog-cooker’. He abuses ministers as they had eaten the foot-remnant of the Dombas. It is interesting to note that in the 11th century CE, Alberuni saw among the low castes of northern India, a particular community called Badhatau, who actually ate the flesh of dogs. The Dombas were invariably hated as a despised low caste and were treated with much contempt.

**CAṆḌĀLAS**

Another low caste of the valley was the Caṇḍālas. They seem to have been fierce and cruel fighters. Some of the Caṇḍālas served as royal bodyguards or as watchmen. Probably some were also freely engaged in the king’s army, though we are not absolutely certain on the point. Kalhana says that on several occasions, the Caṇḍālas were engaged as agents by selfish conspirators for assassinating their political rivals. In one story narrated in the *Rājatarangini* Kalhana says that When Uccala was marching by way of the village of Kambalesvara, armed Caṇḍālas suddenly came there, who were the robbers of that locality, and surrounded him. Caṇḍālas also participated in the conspiracy against king Uccala. At one place Kalhana has also described them as executioners. Kalhana abuses women who had meeting at night with a Caṇḍālas watchman. Candala youth must have some charm, which caused even a queen to fall in love with him, and to become subject to his power. Kalhana uses so harsh language for this kind of relationship that such ladies perhaps were descended from candala family. A fire which took place during the reign of king Abhimanyu purified the land, by burning the great buildings which the contact of the kings who had been touched by Dombas and Candālas had defiled. He says that According to Alberuni, the Caṇḍālas of north India practiced as a trade, killing of persons when they were sentenced to death by the judicial authority and this goes to support the statement made by Kalhana regarding the nature of livelihood pursued by the Caṇḍālas. Both Alberuni and Kalhana point out that the Caṇḍālas were universally hated.
NIṢĀDAS

Among other castes, the Niṣādas were perhaps the original inhabitants of the Valley and were relegated to menial work by the Āryan settlers. They occupied a very low position in the social life of the community. In Sanskrit, the term Niṣāda is generally applied to indicate persons who earn their livelihood by hunting and fishing. We find a mention of the Niṣādas in the Rājatarangini, where they are designated as boatmen.

KIRĀTAS

The Kirātas, another low caste, according to Kalhana, lived in the forest and destroyed wild animals by raising jungle-fires and constructing traps. Their livelihood seems to have been very much similar to that of the Niṣādas, as referred to in the ancient literature. But the relation between the Niṣādas of Kashmir and the Kirātas of that country is unknown. Racially, the Kirātas mentioned in Sanskrit literature belonged to the Tibeto-Burman groups. Perhaps, the Kirātas of Kashmir were neighboring hill tribes of the Tibetan region who were looked upon with much contempt in the society. Hsuen Tsang refers to a class of low-born people named Ki-lo-to who lived in Kashmir from a very early time and were opposed to the Bauddhas. Scholars have failed to identify the Ki-lo-to people. Phonetically the Chinese Ki-lo-to may be transcribed into Sanskrit as Kirātas. The Kirātas mentioned by Kalhana may be identical with the Ki-lo-to people referred to by the Chinese pilgrim. Another theory is that during recent excavations at Burzahom, a settlement of pit-dwellers was unearthed along with hunting equipment like stone daggers etc. These definitely belonged to a hunting class and Kirātas were perhaps their descendants.

Besides these four fold caste hierarchy Kalhana has mentioned many other Kashmiri or its neighboring castes.
The upper Kisanganga valley was in old days, inhabited by this race named Darads (skt. Darad, Darada) who are often referred by Kalhana as a neighbours of Kashmir on the north. Megathanes knew them in the upper Indus region. Kalhana, while relating events of his own time, he speaks of Malecchas further to the north. He refers to them first during the time of Mihirakula, who after killing the inhabitants of Āryadeśa, performed a terrible penance, and reestablished pious observances in this land which, overrun by impure Darads, who had fallen off from sacred law. In another reference Kalhana says that while the ministers were incapable and the king prone to show forbearance, Darads like people obtained predominance. Darads are also mentioned as ruler with power i.e. Darads rulers eager for the chase from Naga. King Ananta with the help of Ďāmaras defeated the king of Darads and latter on when king Ananta was invaded by Darads, his minster Rudrapāla cut off the head of Darad lord brought it in front of Ananta. During the reign of Harṣa Darads had occupied numerous villages in the territory of Kashmir. In one narration king Kalaśa was offered a fort by Janaka but he refused. Then the king of the Darads took the possession of it. Later on when Kashmirians fought with the Darad soldiers, now they were difficult to defeat on account of the shelter which that fort gave them. Thus Darads won in this battle and the number of those who were captured or slain by the victorious Darads, or carried away by the steam, could not be counted. When the force of Darads moved further, they were stopped by two sons of Uccala, like two mighty rocks on the coast stop the ocean. In other place Bhīmadeva after getting hold of Bhoja, a son of king Kalaśa, called Jayaddala, king of the Darads, for his assistance. Later Harṣa diplomatically retain the lord of Darads and turned him back without any fight. King Bhoja expressed his wish to get the favour of Darads to achieve his aim. Kalhana has also given the names of Darads rulers i.e. Yaśodhara.
BHAUTŢA

The name Bhauţţa is applied by Kalhaṇa and his successors as well, like its derivative the modern Kashmir. Bhauţţas, is referred generally to the population of Tibetan descent, but Stein says that the Bhauţţa as referred by Kalhaṇa inhabiting the regions immediately to the east and north-east of Kashmir which covers the modern mountain district of Dras, Ladakh, perhaps also Skardo. Kalhaṇa refers to them first during the reign of Lalitâditya. The Bhauţţas were defeated thrice by king MuktapiĎa. But the anxiety felt by Bhauţţas could not be seen on their faces, which are white generally but now had turned to red. Kalhaṇa has compared their expressions with monkey as the anger of monkeys cannot be seen on their faces, which is reddish-brown by nature. Kalhaṇa justified the cruel acts of Mihirakula and says that by doing so he re-established pious observances in the land of Kashmir, which was overrun by Bhauţţas, to whom he considered impure and those who had fallen off from the sacred law.

KHAŞAS

The name Khaşā has been used since early times in Skt. Literature for the designation of tribes settled in widely different parts of the Himalaya regions. Stein says that the south and west the adjacent hill-regions were occupied by Khaşas. The ethnography of the territories immediately adjoining Kashmir can be traced quite clearly from the notices of the Râjatarangini. Their settlement extended, as shown in numerous passages of the chronicle, in a wide semicircle from Kastavar in the south-east to the Vitastâ valley in the west. The hill-states of Râjâpurî and Lohara were held by Khaşā family; the dynasty of the latter territory succeeded to the rule of Kashmir in the eleventh century. Stein believes that the Khaşas are identical with the present Khakha tribe to which most of the petty chiefs in the Vitastâ valley below Kashmir, and in the neighbouring hills, belong. North of the Vitastâ valley and the Kisanganga one can find the Bombas as the neighbours
of the Khakhas to whom they are closely related. It is probably that the Karnav district was held by them already in old times. Kalhana seems to comprise them under the designation of Khaśa. He has also mentioned them during the period of Mihirakula, where Mihirakula’s cruelty is justified by saying that he acted so for the destruction of Khaśas, who had obtained predominance where the city of Nara had been burned through the wrath of the Naga.221

ḌĀMARAS

The term Ḍāmaras is one of common occurrence in the Chronicle of Kalhana, and it appears that the persons whom it designates play a prominent part in the later portions of the narrative.222 It is, hence, important to ascertain its significance with as much precision as our materials will permit. But the word Ḍāmara, in the sense in which it is used in the Rājatarāṅgiṇī and the later chronicles, has not yet been traced outside Kashmir. Neither Kalhana nor his successors have thought it necessary to define or explain the term. It cannot, therefore, surprise us that its true bearing has not been recognized by earlier interpreters.

Wilson had formed the opinion that the Ḍāmaras were a fierce intractable tribe inhabiting the mountains to the north of Kashmir. He had accordingly treated the subsequent notices of the Ḍāmaras referring to inroads made by that tribe into Kashmir. It may well be doubted whether that distinguished scholar would have expressed this opinion if the last two books had been accessible to him, or if his text for the first six had been less defective. His view, however, has been followed by all subsequent interpreters of the chronicle. The difficulties which it involved had evidently not escaped the authors of the St. Petersburg Dictionary who, with reference to a possible etymology, suggested that the word might have had originally a more general meaning, riotous, rebel.223 But the true purport of the term was recognized only in a brief supplementary note of that work which reproduces a suggestion of Professor H. Kern assigning to Ḍāmaras the meaning’ Bojar, i.e. feudal land-
Stein believes that this interpretation is the right one, is proved beyond all doubt by a careful examination of the numerous passages in which Kalhaṇa has occasion to speak of Ďāmaras. In this respect Kalhaṇa first mentions them during the period of Lalitādiya, where it is said that if they would keep more wealth, they will become strong enough to neglect the commands of the king. Kalhaṇa, amongst other curious maxims of administrative wisdom put into the mouth of Lalitādiya, makes that king warn his successors not to leave with the cultivators of the land more than what is necessary for their bare sustenance and the tillage of their fields. It is clear that the danger, against which the Macchiavellian advice of the king is directed, cannot have been a sudden transformation of his Kashmirian agriculturist subjects into fierce hill men. It is manifestly the growth among the well-to-do land-holding class, capable of forming a powerful rural aristocracy, against which he wishes his successors to guard.

It is unmistakably a representative of this class to whom we are introduced in the curious anecdote related of king Avantivarman’s visit to the shrine of Bhūteśvara. The temple-priests, questioned by their royal visitor about the evident destitute condition of the shrine, ascribe it to Dhanva, a powerful Ďāmara of the district (Lahara) who has appropriated the villages forming the temple’s endowments. Dhanva who owes his unrestrained local predominance to the patronage of the king’s powerful minister Šūra, neglects summons after summons. When he ultimately arrives to receive his due punishment, he appears on the scene with a host of armed attendants. Kalhaṇa clearly wants to describe to us here not a marauding hill-chief, but a member of that land-grabbing oligarchy which in his own time was threatening to destroy all remnant of royal power.

The process by which the Ďāmaras during a long period of weak reigns and internal troubles gradually became the most powerful element in the state
is fully illustrated by the story of the Dāmaras Sarṅgrāma. When king Cakravarman had been driven a second time (CE 935) from his capital by his mutinous praetorians, the Tāntrins, he took refuge with Sarṅgrāma, an influential Dāmaras, resident in Maḍavarājya. Moor the conclusion of a solemn compact the Dāmaras rose in support of the deposed king, and with the help of others of his class who joined him, succeeded in reinstating him. The Tāntrins were exterminated and the Dāmaras, who are referred to among the vassals obtained great influence. Subsequently, the ungrateful conduct of Cakravarman led to a conspiracy among the Dāmaras and to his murder. But there are characteristic indications of their growing influence even during the period of comparative consolidation which followed Yaśaskara’s accession and queen Diddā’s advent to power. Both under Unmattavanti and Diddā special mention is made of the success of royal commander-in-chiefs in coercive measures against Dāmaras.

It is, however, in the subsequent period, after the accession of the house of Lohara, there is the fullest development of the Dāmaras power. During the long succession of weak reigns from Sarṅgrāmarāja to Utkarṣa’s death (1003--1089 CE), the position of the Dāmaras as semi-independent feudal lords seems firmly to have established itself. Dāmaras set up pretenders, and siding either with father or son maintained Anantadeva and Kalaśa in their internecine struggle. The commanders of the royal troops are more than once represented as engaged in regular expeditions against these turbulent barons of various districts. In the midst of these troubles Kalhaṇa relates incidentally the personal story of a Dāmaras, which throws an interesting light on the origin and growth of this feudal class. Jayyaka, the clever son of a householder at the village of Selyapura (the present S’ilipor in Dūnts), had gradually raised himself to the position of a Dāmaras. By the revenue of his lands and by exporting victuals to distant regions, he accumulated exceptional wealth, which he kept safe by having great quantities of coins buried in the soil. He ultimately found his death in an attempt to seize, by armed force, territory in the
neighbouring district of Bangila. His buried treasures were confiscated by king Kalaśa, and were so great as to relieve the latter of all his money-troubles. This story proves clearly that the position of Dāmaras was not necessarily restricted to a particular tribal division or set of families it also indicates the means by which this status could be attained apart from direct inheritance.

Another incidental note referring to the time of Kalaśa, shows that sometimes strongholds Important for the safety of the whole land were in the power of Dāmaras. Lakkariacandra, a Dāmaras, had held the castle of Dugdaghāta which guarded the old route to the Darad country, corresponding to the present Dudakhut Pass. He had been executed by order of king Ananta. Subsequently his widow had offered the hill fort to king Kalaśa, apparently, as the succeeding narrative shows, with a view to better assuring the safety of the neighbouring tract from inroads of the Darads. king Kalaśa refused the offer. The stronghold then fell into the power of the Darad king, from whom Harṣa subsequently vainly endeavoured to recover it with the assistance of the neighbouring Dāmaras. The circumstances here alluded to justify the conclusion that strongholds as well as lands had practically become hereditary possessions in the families of these feudal lords, whenever the central authority in the land was unable or unwilling to assert the right of resumption.

An attempt in this latter direction may have been the real reason for the cruel persecution of Dāmaras of which we read in Harṣa’s reign. In narrating the war of extermination by which Harṣa endeavoured to rid the eastern portion of the valley of the powerful Dāmaras, Kalhaṇa indiscriminately also uses the term Lavanya to designate them. This becomes quite evident by a comparison of the verses quoted below. The same observation holds good for a series of passages in later portions of the Chronicle. The explanation is not far to seek. Lavanya is a tribal name still surviving to this day in the Krām name Lūni, borne by a considerable section of the agriculturist population of Kashmir. From the way in which Kalhaṇa employs the name in the passages
referred to, and from numerous others in which the Lavanyas are mentioned, it
must be inferred that the mass of the Dāmaras was recruited from that tribal
section. If this was the case the indifferent use of the ethnic and class
designations is easily accounted for. It finds its exact parallel in the way in
which, e.g. common usage in the western Punjab designates all shopmen as
‘Khattris,’ or all English-knowing clerks as ‘Bābus. Examples for the same
substitution of terms could no doubt be quoted in hundreds from all parts of
India. 236

Harṣa’s efforts to suppress the Dāmaras produced the reverse of the
object aimed at. The exasperated Dāmaras conspired with the refugee princes,
Uccala and Sussala, and by a successful rising put an end to Harṣa’s rule and
life. 237 The reigns which followed this revolution, represent an almost
uninterrupted series of struggles between the central authorities and the
Dāmaras, and between various factions of the latter themselves. The local
barons whom Kalhana now often mentions by the characteristic if not very
complimentary term of “robbers,” 238 seem to have usurped all power in the land
except in the immediate vicinity of the capital and the places occupied by the
royal troops. The most that the rulers are able to do, is to playoff one of their
sections against the other or to secure a footing by the support of one or the
other great Dāmara house. 239 Thus Gargacandra, the chief feudal lord in Lahara
(Lār) becomes a true” king-maker.” When Sussala ultimately fell out with him,
he could secure the Dāmara’s submission only by regular sieges of his
strongholds, and the creation of a powerful rival. 240 To similar prominence rose
subsequently Prthvihara and his sons, Dāmaras of S’amālā (Hamal), Tikka of
Devasarasa (Divasar), Mallalcoṣṭhaka of Lahara, Nāga of Khūyāśrama
(Khuyahom) and others. Throughout these troubles Kalhaṇa’s narrative brings
out strongly the local character of the Dāmaras power. The districts to which
they belong are regularly mentioned, 241 and show that their homes were
invariably in the fertile cultivated portions of the valley. These alone, in fact,
were able to support a large class of territorial barons of this type. Their seats,
which evidently formed strong places capable of defence are often referred to.  

Kalhaṇa with the mass of the officials and Brahmans must have cherished bitter feelings against this turbulent class of petty territorial lords, and does not hide his sentiments. He takes more than once occasion to refer to the Ḍāmaras’ boorish habits, and again to their ostentatious extravagance when in power. In a curious sketch of city-life he shows to us also the small fry of the class, "the Ḍāmaras from the environs of the city, who are more like cultivators, though they carry arms."  

In another passage where he praises the wife of the Ḍāmaras Koṣṭhaka, who became a Saṭī when her husband was mortally wounded, he does not omit to contrast this conduct with that of the ordinary Ḍāmara women who did not show much regard for their character as widows. Kalhaṇa plainly attributes the exceptional conduct of Koṣṭhaka’s wife to her noble descent from a family of Rajpūts. The mention of this marriage is instructive. Either the Lavanyas originally could not have held a very low position as a caste; or with their rise to wealth and power that gradual elevation in the social scale had already set in, which forms so interesting a feature in the modern history of many an Indian caste. The same conclusion is indicated in a fashion even more marked by the marriages of daughters of Ḍāmaras to members of the royal family.  

From the above sketch it will appear that the materials which Kalhaṇa’s chronicle supplies, are sufficient to give us a just idea of the political power and the social position held by the Ḍāmaras in his own times. But they leave us in the dark as to the conditions under which their landed property, the basis of their influence, was acquired and held. If we compare the conditions prevailing in other parts of India where a similar class of landed aristocracy is still extant, the view suggests itself that a kind of service-tenure, the grant of land in return for military or other services, may have been the original foundation of the
system. Yet even as regards this point the absence of all exact data prevents us from going beyond mere conjecture. Still less can we hope to ascertain the exact relations in which the Damaras may have stood towards their sovereign and towards the cultivators in matters of revenue, administration, etc.

The references to Damaras in the later Chronicles are comparatively few and do not furnish additional information. In most cases the term is found as a title applied to local grandees whether Hindu or Muhammadan, without there being any characteristic indication in the narrative as to their positions or functions. As the political conditions of the country do not seem to have undergone any material change previous to the advent of the Mughal power, the class represented by the Damaras probably continued to be an influential element also in the time of the Muhammadan Sultans. But it is difficult to say whether the term Dāmara as used in the narrative of these reigns was more than an archaism. In any case, its real significance must have been understood yet by the Pandits of the sixteenth century.

Kṣemendra’s *Samayamātrkā* and the *Lokaprakāśa* are the only works outside the chronicles in which Stein has been able to trace the word Damaras in the meaning above discussed. Kṣemendra describing the adventures of the courtesan Kankālī, one of heroines of his curious poem, makes her for a time grace the house of the Damaras Samarasīrha, who resides at Pratāpapura (the modern Tāpar). Brief as the Kṣemendra wants to represent to us the Damaras house as a place of comfort and plenty, and the master, himself, as another Bhīmasena, full of fighting spirit, quarrelsome, and a lover of good things. Living under Ananta and Kalasā, Kṣemendra had, no doubt, plenty of models to draw this figure from. The name he gives to his Damaras, Samarasimha, ‘Lion of the battle,’ is also significant. In the *Lokaprakāśa* the term occurs in a mere list containing various official designations without any comment.

Thus, we can say that the conception of the population as consisting of four traditional castes was not altogether unknown during the course of our
study. It is true that there was no such caste as Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra in the early Kashmir but we cannot deny this fact that Kalhana in his chronicle has used many terms related to the traditional caste system of India e.g. Brāhmaṇa, Rājaputra, Dombas, Caṇḍālas etc. It appears from what has been said above that the Kashmir society became something like a federation of castes and sub-castes, whose members did sometimes intermarry, more frequently in earlier than in later ages, but which nevertheless retained their separate identity. Society consisted of a large number of groups which had been brought into the same spiritual and cultural framework, but which had been only partially fused together. Caste was not altogether static, for new sub-castes frequently arose from migration, fusion or sub-division. Old sub-castes sometimes lost their identity and rose or fell in status. All the same, the institution acquired a permanent character and coloured all organization, law, custom and social philosophy. Every caste or rather sub-caste, more strictly the local segments of sub-castes, enjoyed a very large measure of autonomy in their social code, cultural tradition and even in judicial matters. This state of things, as we have seen, was reflected at every step in political organization and political thought. Here it may be stressed that caste resolved function into a purpose, into something like an ethical principle, almost a religious conception, and exalted the group to the detriment of individual values. This is one of the reasons why Hindu political theory speaks frequently of the duties, but rarely of the rights of the individual. In society, individuality derives its worth and significance from its contribution of service to the universal whole. Personality is thus taught to transcend itself by giving its devotion to something beyond itself. To everyone, theory prescribes a way of life which accords best with the duties he has to discharge. For instance it inculcates a life of poverty and austerity to priests, scholars and teachers, of whom the Brahmanic order was composed or ought to be composed. Caste furnished an additional incentive to that functional organization and self-government which are natural to all economic occupations, especially to industry and commerce. In such a community social control could not be concentrated at a single point. It was
pluralistic and was diffused among a variety of groups and associations. So, it is believed that the caste system in the society of ancient Kashmir was not so rigid as in other parts of country by that time. We even find men and women of the low-caste occupying positions of responsibility. Under Cakravarman the Đombas practically held all the important posts in the court and two Đomba women became the king’s favorite queens.
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