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**PORTRAYAL OF LOWER CASTES IN THE
RAJATARANGINI OF KALHANA**

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Portrayal of Lower Castes in the Rajatarangini of Kalhana

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Abstract – The origin of the lowest Varna of Hindu society might have been outside the pale of the Aryan society. Since then, it has been held that the fourth Varna was mainly formed by the non-Aryan population, who were reduced to that position by the Aryan conquerors. It has been argued that the Dasas and Dasyus were non-Aryan, must be speaking different language and having a different life style. They were organized in to tribe called Vish. In post Vedic period, Sudras 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 Sudra teachers and pupils, showing that the Sudra was not denied the right to learning. But the Jaiminiya Brahmana refers Sudra as serving class, who is created from the feet of Prajapati. In this article I will highlight their postion in society.

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INTRODUCTION

As regards the Sudra, "service was his portion in life". He was not eligible for sacraments, or for hearing sacred texts except their substance. But he was not denied the rites of marriage, cooking of daily food in the *gAhya* fires, and funeral ceremonies (*Sraddha*). As representing, however, the lowest level of culture, "a Sudra majority in a country" (*Sudra-bhuyiCtham*), it was believed, "would spell its doom." On the whole the lot of a Sudra was an unenviable one. The formidable array of regulations in the *Manu-Smriti* against the Sudra 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 Brahmana shall perform the same penance for killing a Sudra 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 Jataka stories also describe how the *Candala* 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 *Candala*. 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 Sudras 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-Sudra and the Smritis 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 Brahmana male with a Sudra female, this is expressly condemned in the rules that immediately follow. Such contradictions, which also occur in the *Mahābhārata* and Dharma-Sudra, prove that the practice was looked upon with disfavour and was gradually disappearing.

As regards interdining, Manu lays down that a Brahmana must not eat cooked food (given) by a Sudra who performs no *Sraddhas*. This, by implication, shows that food cooked by a Sudra was not absolutely prohibited. But elsewhere, in Manu, such food is both permitted and forbidden. Similar contradictions are also found in the Dharma-Sudra. 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 Sudras 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 Brahmana male and a Sudra female bear children to one of the highest caste, the inferior (tribe) attains the highest caste within the seventh generation. Thus a Sudra attains the rank of a Brahmana and (in a similar manner) a Brahmana sinks to the level of a, Sudra. The same thing happened with the offspring of a Ksatriya or of a Vaisya." This rule merely expands and clarifies the principle enunciated in *Gautama Dharmasutra*, and indirectly supports the view that intermarriage even between Brahmanas and Sudra s was not altogether unknown, and not always as severely condemned as in some rules of Manu and later DharmaSudra. Society of *Rajatarangini* 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 *Nilmata Purana* describes Sudras to serve the twice-born *Varnas*. As regards their position in the society, those who served in the houses of the higher *Varnas*, received sympathetic treatment from their masters. The *Nilmata* often includes the servants also in the list of the persons in whose company the householder feasts and enjoys. The *Karmajivis* and the *Silpis* belonged to the Sudra *Varna*. 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 *varnaduring* the Mahimana celebrations. They are enjoined to worship the goddess Bhadrakali on the 8th of the dark half of Asvina and also to worship their tools and implements in the temple of Durgā. *Kalhana* in his chronicle has also mentioned lower castes of Kashmir society as well their status in the society.

DOMBAS

The Dombos have been frequently mentioned by *Kalhana* as a caste of menials. Sometimes they are associated with *Candala*. What exactly was their profession is not clearly mentioned by *Kalhana*. In one passage of the *Rajatarangini*, they are described as scavengers, night-watchmen, messengers, singers and dancers and huntsmen. *Kalhana* mentions Dombo singers and from the stories recorded by him it seems that the Dombos 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 Dombo singers, came to his reception hall. *Kalhana* 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 Dombo girls won the heart of the king by their singing and acting, which are described in conventional *Kavya* fashion.

The king was so impressed by these Dombo girls that he paid no regards to their low caste and took them in to his seraglio. Harsa 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 Dombo s were even raised to the level of ministers and secured important offices like the AkKapaNala 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. Alberuni, while speaking of the contemporary castes of northern India, mentions the Dombos who were flute-players and singers. The Dombos have been sometimes mentioned by *Kalhana* also as *svapakas*, which literally means 'dog-cooker'. He abuses ministers as they had eaten the foot-remnant of the Dombos. 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 Dombos were invariably hated as a despised low caste and were treated with much contempt.

CANDALAS

Another low caste of the valley was the *Candala*. They seem to have been fierce and cruel fighters. Some of the *Candala* 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 *Candala* were engaged as agents by selfish conspirators for assassinating their political rivals. In one story narrated in the *Rajatarangini* *Kalhana* says that When Uccala was marching by way of the village of Kambalesvara, armed *Candala* suddenly came there, who were the robbers of that locality, and surrounded him. *Candala* 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 *Candala* 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 ca Lala 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 Dombos and *Candala* had defiled. He says that According to Alberuni, the *Candala* 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 *Candala* . Both Alberuni and *Kalhana* point out that the *Candala* were universally hated.

NISADAS

Among other castes, the Nisadas were perhaps the original inhabitants of the Valley and were relegated to menial work by the Aryan settlers. They occupied a

very low position in the social life of the community. In Sanskrit, the term Nisada is generally applied to indicate persons who earn their livelihood by hunting and fishing. We find a mention of the Nisadas in the *Rajatarangini*, where they are designated as boatmen.

KIRATAS

The Kirtas, 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 Niradas, as referred to in the ancient literature. But the relation between the Niradas of Kashmir and the Kirtas of that country is unknown. Racially, the Kirtas mentioned in Sanskrit literature belonged to the Tibeto-Burman groups. Perhaps, the Kirtas 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 Kirtas. The Kirtas 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 pitdwellers was unearthed along with hunting equipment like stone daggers etc. These definitely belonged to a hunting class and Kirtas were perhaps their descendants. Besides these four fold caste hierarchy *Kalhana* has mentioned many other Kashmiri or its neighboring castes.

DARAD

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, Megasthenes 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 Aryadeśa, 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 Damaras defeated the king of Darads and later on when king Ananta was invaded by Darads, his minister Rudrapāla cut off the head of Darad lord brought it in front of Ananta. During the reign of Harsha Darads had occupied numerous villages in the territory of Kashmir. In one narration king Kalasa 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 Bhimadeva after getting hold of Bhoja, a son of king Kalasa, called Jayapadala, king of the Darads, for his assistance. Later Harsha 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. Yasodhara.

BHAUTTA

The name Bhautta is applied by *Kalhana* and his successors as well, like its derivative the modern Kashmir. Bhauttas, is referred generally to the population of Tibetan descent, but Stein says that the Bhautta as referred by *Kalhana* inhabiting the regions immediately to the east and north-east of Kashmir which covers the modern mountain district of Dras, Ladakh, perhaps also Skardo. *Kalhana* refers to them first during the reign of Lalitaditya. The Bhauttas were defeated thrice by king Muktapida. But the anxiety felt by Bhauttas could not be seen on their faces, which are white generally but now had turned to red. *Kalhana* has compared their expressions with monkey as the anger of monkeys cannot be seen on their faces, which is reddish-brown by nature. *Kalhana* 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 Bhauttas, to whom he considered impure and those who had fallen off from the sacred law.

KHASHAS

The name Khashas 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 Khashas. The ethnography of the territories immediately adjoining Kashmir can be traced quite clearly from the notices of the *Rajatarangini*. Their settlement extended, as shown in numerous passages of the chronicle, in a wide semicircle from Kastavar in the south-east to the Vitasta valley in the west. The hill-states of Rajapuri and Lohara were held by Khashas family; the dynasty of the latter territory succeeded to the rule of Kashmir in the eleventh century. Stein believes that the Khashas are identical with the present Khakha tribe to which most of the petty chiefs in the Vitastā valley below Kashmir, and in the neighbouring hills, belong. North of the Vitasta 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 Khashas. 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 Khashas, who had obtained predominance where the city of Nara had been burned through the wrath of the Naga.

DAMARAS

The term Damaras 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. It is, hence, important to ascertain its significance with as much precision as our materials will permit. But the word Damara, in the sense in which it is used in the *Rajatarangini* 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 Damaras were a fierce intractable tribe inhabiting the mountains to the north of Kashmir. He had accordingly treated the subsequent notices of the Damaras as 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. 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 Damaras the meaning 'Bojar, i.e. feudal landowner or baron.

Stein believes that this interpretation is the right one, is proved beyond all doubt by a careful examination of the numerous passages in which *Kalhana* has occasion to speak of Damaras. In this respect *Kalhana* first mentions them during the period of Lalitadiya, where it is said that if they would keep more wealth, they will become strong enough to neglect the commands of the king. *Kalhana*, amongst other curious maxims of administrative wisdom put into the mouth of Lalitadiya, 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 Bhutesvara. The temple-priests, questioned by their royal visitor about the evident destitute condition of the shrine, ascribe it to Dhanva, a powerful Damara 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 Sura, neglects summons after summons. When he ultimately arrives to receive his due punishment, he appears on the scene with a host of armed attendants. *Kalhana* 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.

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. We cannot deny this fact that *Kalhana* in his chronicle has used many terms related to the traditional caste system of India e.g. Brahmana, Rajaputra, combas, *Candala* etc. 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. 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 Dombos practically held all the important posts in the court and two comba women became the king's favorite queens.

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