CASTE AND CLASS IN PRE-MUSLIM BENGAL

(Studies in Social History of Bengal)

Thesis

Submitted by

Narottam Kundu

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In the University of London, 1963.

ProQuest Number: 11015672

ProQuest 11015672

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the preparation of this thesis

I am indebted to several libraries of London, particularly the India Office Library for offering me permission to go through some rare Sanskrit manuscripts preserved here. Also the libraries of Calcutta have given me opportunity to see and examine some kula-granthas. But for assistance, guidance and directions of Dr. A.L. Basham, Professor of Indian History in the University of London, this thesis might not have seen the light of the day.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at showing the development of
social consciousness and social organisation of the
Bengalis from the days of the Guptas to those of the
Senas.   It is divided into eight chapters :-

Chap. I.   gives a short account of ancient geography of
            Bengal as well as traditional divisions of the
            Bengali classes and castes.

Chap. II.   outlines the Ādisūra legend and the proof on
            the original sources how it is false.

Chap. III. narrates the factors for the growth of caste-
            system, examining thereby how far they are
            responsible for building up of this institution
            in Bengal.

Chap. IV.   describes Brāhmin and non-Brāhmin classes,
            their origin, centres of location and divisions
            among them.

Chap. V.   treats of caste in Bengal from the Guptas to
            the Senas.

Chap. VI.   gives an analysis of different kinds of
            marriage and of that among the royal families,
            as well as their subjects belonging to the
            different castes and classes.

Chap. VII.   traces the origin of Kulinism.

Chap. VIII. summarises all the above chapters.

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. AA...Aitareya Aranyaka.

2. AIA...Ain-i-Akbari.

3. Arth...Arthasastra.

4. ARASI...Annual Report of Archaeological Survey
                        of India.

5. ABORI...Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research
                        Institute.

6. ASR...Asiatic Society Research.

7. BRWW...Beal, Records of the Western World.

8. C...Canto.

9. Char...Charyyapada.

10. CII...Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.

11. Cp...Copper Plate.

12. DH...Deccan History.

13. DR...Dacca Review.

14. EAIL...Evolution of Ancient Indian Law.

15. EC...Epigraphia Carnatica.

16. EI...   "   Indica.

17. GI...Gupta Inscriptions.

18. GL...Gouralekhamala.

19. GR...Gourarajamala.

20. Gr...Grant.

21. HC...Harsha Charita.

22. HCI...Hutton, Caste in India.

23. IA...Indian Antiquary.

24. IB...Inscriptions of Bengal.

25. IC...Indian Culture.

26. IHQ...Indian Historical Quarterly.

27. Ins...Inscription.

28. J...Jataka.

29. JASB...Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal.

30. JBBRAS... "   " Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic
                                        Society.

31. JBORS... "   " Bihar & Orissa Research Society.

32. JIH... "   " Indian History.

33. KLNII...Kielhorn, List of North Indian Inscriptions.

34. L...Line.

35. LRBK...Legge, Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms.

36. M...Manu.

37. MFSONEI...Maitra, Fick's Social Organisation in
                          North East India.

38...MI...Megasthenes, Indica.

39. MM...Manasi O Marmavani. (a Bengali journal).

40. MR...Modern Review.

41. Ns...New Series.

42. PIHC...Proceedings of India History Congress.

43. Pl...Plate.

44. PSJZ...Pag-Sam-Jon-Zong.

45. RC...Rama Charita.

46. RHB...R.C.Majumar(ed), History of Bengal. vol.I.

47. Rg...Rig Veda.

48. SBE...Sacred Book of the East.

49. SEHI...Smith, Early History of India.

50. SI...Select Inscriptions.

51. V...Verse.

52. Vl...Volume.

53. VI...Vanglar Itihas.

54. VJI...Vanger Jatiya Itihasa.

55. VSPP...Vangiya Sahitya Parishat Patrika.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this thesis Bengal is taken to
mean those regions formerly known as Aṅga, Vaṅga, Gauḍa,
Rāḍha, Puṇḍra, Suhma and Samataṭa collectively or
separately. Though the modern word Bengal is derived from
Vaṅga, yet the latter was sometimes bigger or smaller in
area than the Bengal of pre-partition days, according to
its expansion and contraction under the authority of
different rulers. Hence the name Vaṅga varies in
connotation and students are apt to apply the nomenclature
Bengal to a region of widely differing area. It should be
remembered that when we write a history of Bengal in this
way, we refer to a period before the name Bengal came
into existence.

Although we find the mention of Vaṅga with other names
such as Puṇḍra, Suhma etc. in the Rāmāyaṇa[1] the Mahābhārata,
later Vedic literature,[3] the Vishnupurāna,[4] the Vayupurāna,[5]
the work of Vāgabhata[6] etc, yet we should not pin faith
on these accounts as evidence of the early existence of
a Kingdom of Bengal bearing in mind that the stories of the

1. Ayodhyā Kānda. Chap. X.
2. Ādiparva. 104/50.
3. Keith (ed): AA. 2/1/1. pp.101,200.
4. 4/8/1.
5. 99/11/85.
6. 24/4/18.

Epics and the Purānas are legend, not history. We are
here concerned with the historical period of Bengal.

The earliest definite reference to Bengal is found
in classical accounts of Alexander's invasion. These tell
of Alexander's hearing about a people called Gangaridae
who apparently lived in Bengal. The classical word has
been interpreted as equivalent to Gangārādha, Gangārighī,
or Gangārāshtra.[7] Thus we may have here the earliest
mention of the region known as Rādha. Diodorus gives us
an account of what Alexander heard about the Gangaridae:
"He (Alexander) had obtained from Phegeus (a local Indian
Chief), a description of the country beyond the Indus.
First came a desert, which it would take twelve days to
traverse; beyond this was the river called the Ganges,
which had a width of thirty-two stadia and a greater depth
than any other Indian river; beyond this again were
situated the dominions of the nation of the Braisii and the
Gandaridae, whose King Xandramas had an army of 20,000
horse, 200,000 infantry, 2,000 chariots and 4,000
elephants trained and equiped for war. Porus assured him
of the correctness of the information, but added that
the King of the Gandaridae was a man of quite worthless
character, and held in no respect as he was thought to
be the son of a barber. This man the King's father, was
of a comely person, and of him the Queen had become deeply

7.   D.C. Sircar: 'City of Gangā'. PIHC. 1947. pp.91-98.

enamoured. The old King, having been treacherously murdered by his wife, the succession had devolved on him who now reigned[8].'

Alexander was very afraid of the strength of the King of the Gangaridae, and dropped the idea of his triumphant march towards it.[9]

Plutarch repeats this same story: "... For, as it was with the utmost difficulty they (Alexander's soldiers) had beaten him (Porus), when the army he led amounted only to 20,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry, they now most resolutely opposed Alexander when he insisted that they should cross the Ganges. This river, they heard, had a breadth of two-and thirty stadia and a depth of one hundred fathoms, while its farther banks were covered all over with armed men, horses and elephants. Nor is this number at all magnified, for Androcottus (Chandragupta Maurya), who reigned not long after made Seleucus, a present of five hundred elephants at one time, and, with an army of one hundred thousand men, traversed India, and conquered the whole."[10]

Pliny states that this place was the last part of the Ganges; its people known as Modgalingi were residing on the sea-bound Gangetic way.[11]

8. Diodorus XVII. p.93.
9. ibid. XVIII. p.6.
10. Plutarch: Anexander. p.62
11. Pliny: Historia Naturalis. Bk VI. Chap.21. pp.8-23.

Even today there is a group of people (who are on the verge of extinction) living in southern Bengal, comprising the districts of Khulna, Jessore, Chittagong and Dacca, who are known as Molangi. From the sea they raise saline water for the manufacture of salt with pots known as Molangi; perhaps the term is connected with the Modgalingi of Pliny's description.

From the above accounts we can suggest that the Gangaridae were a people of Southern Bengal. Moreover, the river Ganges passed through these regions. The Yumnā, the Padmā, the Meghnā and the Madhumati in those days were collectively known as the Ganges.[12]

If the name Gangāridae is believed to be drawn from the Ganges, we can safely place its location in these places through which the Ganges passes. Furthermore, the terms 'Braisii' in the account of Diodorus[13] and 'Prasii' in that of Plutarch[14] seem to denote the Sanskrit prāchya. This term certainly refers to the eastern countries of Āryāvarta.[15]

12. S. Mitra: Jassore-Khulnar Itihas I. p.171.

13. XVII. p.93.

14. op cit. p.62.

15 Lassen: Indische Alterthums Kunde. I. p.93f. cited by
    Mitra: op cit. p.171.

Thus the evidence of the Greek and Latin authors
shows that the ancient people of Bengal were not unknown
to the foreigners, although the modern name Bengal and
its people the Bengalis were unrecognised by them. But,
it is doubtful whether the word Gangaridae included the
name Rāḍha. In any case the accounts do not give us a
complete picture of ancient Bengal.

Perhaps the early reference to Vaṅga is to be found
in the Mauryan Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthāngaṛh, a
village of Bogra district of north Bengal.[16] This record
mentions Puṇḍranagara, the chief city of Puṇḍra or North
Bengal. It was possibly the headquarters of a province,
the Mahāmātrās of which received directions from some ruler
of the Mauryan period, if not of the Maurya family, to
give relief to the famine-affected people called
Saṁvaṁgīyas . The term may refer to the people of Bengal
or Vaṅga, the prefix Saṁ implying the whole region.

Mahāsthān is situated on a river called Karotoya[17]
and it has been identified by Cunningham with ancient
Puṇḍranagara of the inscription.[18] The villages of this
region very often have to face devastations due to the
inundation of this river. East Bengal was and is full
of turbulent rivers with numerous rivulets and canals.
From time to time the inhabitants suffered from famine,

16. EI. XXI. pp.83-85.
17. Watters: On Yuan Chwang II. p.81.
18. ARASI. XV. p.110.

like that by which Śāmvāṅgīyas were affected. Here we
have the first historical evidence of ancient Bengal.
In this inscription the word Vaṅga may imply a large
area of North and East Bengal, or it may be confined to
North Bengal only.

While we can show the antiquity of the words Rādha
and Vaṅga, we find it hard to explain how the term
Vāṅgala (from which the modern name Bengal is derived)
came into being.

The early sources refer only to Vaṅga without the *l*.
Epigraphic records mentioning this name in its more
modern form begin in the eleventh century. Karṇadeva of
the Kalachuris of Madhya Pradesh was the father-in-law of
Vigrahapāla III (1055-70) of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal.
His great grandfather Lakshmaṇarājadeva, who lived during
the second half of the tenth century, is described as
skilled in crushing Bengal.[19]. Mahipāla I, another Pāla
ruler, was defeated in a battle in 1021 A.D. by Rājen-
dra Chola. The victor commemorates his triumph over the
ruler of Vaṅgāla-desa.'[20] In the 12th century, according
to the Calcutta Sahitya Parishat copper plate of
Visvarūpasena of the Sena dynasty, some royal land,
consisting of eleven plots, donated to a Brahmin had its
boundary in the south touching the region Vaṅgāla.[21]

19. Goharwa cp. EI. XI. pp.142; IHQ. XVI. pp.226-27.
20. Tirumalai Rock ins. EI. IX. p.232.
21. IB. III. p.146. 1.43.

Thus, from the eleventh century onwards we meet the name Vaṅgāl, although its exact location was not definitely indicated by these epigraphic records.

The Charyāpadas[22] distinctly refer to certain people as Vāṅgāli or Vaṅgāli, the inhabitants of Vāṅgāla. The Sahajia, a cult propagated by some sādhakas and reflected in these poems had three branches Avadhuti, Chaṇḍāli, and the latter was also known as Dombi, Vāṅgāli or Vaṅgāli.[23] Those who belonged to the Dombi group and constantly sang songs for the glorification of God were termed Vāṅgāli. One Charyāpada verse records:

'Aji Bhūsu Bangāli bhaili

Nia gharini chaṇḍāli leti.'[24]

i.e. Today Bhūsu became a Bengali after his marriage with a Chaṇḍāli.

By the time of the composition of these poems the word had become so widely known that it was used in a specialised sense.

After the occupation of Bengal by the Muslims, (1206) the form with the l became usual. In a verse of the famous

22. There is still a controversy over the date of their composition. It may belong to the Pāla period since these padas mostly have a Buddhist character and under the Pāla Buddhism flourished in Bengal; or they may be later works composed on the very eve of the Muslim invasion. This latter view seems most probable from both their linguistic form and their content.
    (P. Banerji: Rachanāvali p.100f.)

23. ibid. p.101.

24. Sastri (ed): Charyāpadas pp.12,23.

Persian poet, Hafiz (1350) we read:-

    'Sakar Sikam Savanda namtutiyanei hind

    Jin Khandai parsi kihav vangal mirbad.'[25]

    'All the parrots of Hind (India) take (Persian) sugar. With this Persian sugar (candy) the people of Bengal became habituated.'

From the sixteenth century onwards when the European travellers and adventurers came to Bengal, they first came in contact with eastern and Southern Bengal and referred to this country as Vangala.[26]

Vasco de Gama, the Portugese adventurer who came to India in September 1500, spoke of Vangala as Benguala:-

    'Benguala has a Moorish King... The country exports quantities of wheat and very valuable cotton goods. Cloths which sell on the spot for twenty-two shillings and sixpence fetch ninety shillings in Calicut. It abounds in silver.'[27]

In 1620 Hughes and Parker, two English merchants, mentioned the region as Bengala, which is close to the modern term Bengal. Their description runs thus:

    "The Portugese extended their commerce to Patna in

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25. (tr) Vangavani. B.S. 1326. p.106.

26. JASB. 1920; Numismatic Supplement. No.XXXIV.

27. Quoted in Campos' Hist. of Portugese in Bengal. p.25.

Bihar in which connection Hughes and Parker who had gone there from Surat to found a factory write in 1610 - 'The Portingalls of late years have had a trade here in Puttana, coming up with their friggitts from the bottom of Bengala where theye [they] have two portes [sic], the one called Gollye, the other pieppullye.'[28]

Further on:

'They are' they wrote on July 12th 1620 'Some Portingalls in Bengala ~~with~~ into whose trafigue (traffic) I have made enquiry.'[29]

Thus the name Bengal went through some changes and several modifications from the early historical period to that of advent of the Europeans in Bengal. Throughout this time its boundary was not fixed and it is very difficult to establish its limits at any precise period with accuracy. From age to age, and from one individual reign to the other, it varied either little or much. Sometimes through a change of the course of the Ganges a separate geographical entity came into being, and was given a separate name. Sometimes political and diplomatic reasons were accountable for different names to the particular parts of Bengal.

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28. ibid. p.116.
29. Foster: The English Factories in India. pp.213-14.

Dr H.C. Rayachaudhuri is of opinion that Vaṅgā
and Vaṅgāla were separate countries from the eighth
to the tenth centuries. Vaṅgā was the present West
Bengal and Vaṅgāla East Bengal.[30] The same historian
maintains elsewhere that Vaṅgā in a loose sense referred
to Vikrampur in Dacca and the neighbouring regions up to
the Brahmaputra river, but in a wider sense Vaṅgā included
a large area from the east of the Brahmaputra to the
Midnapur district of West Bengal.[31]

Thus his two statements are different in identifying
the location of Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla. Actually there is
much difficulty in establishing their geographical
position. During the second half of the tenth century
a King of the Kalachuri dynasty, Lakshmaṇarāja claimed
victory over Vaṅgāla. The Ablur inscription of Bijjala,[32]
which gives us an account of this invasion apparently
refers to Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla as separate regions.[33]

The King of Bengal (Vaṅgāla) acknowledging this
defeat may have been Pūrṇachandra, the Second ruler of the
Chandra dynasty, who was then ruling over parts of South

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30. MM. B.S. 1335-36. p.566ff.
31. Studies in Indian Antiquities. pp.187-88.
32. EC. V. p.179; IHQ. XII. p.77.
33. Such a structure is also reflected in the Hāmhira-
    Mahākāvya of Nayachandra Suri, composed perhaps
    before 1496 A.D. (IA. 1879. p.58).

and East Bengal. Vaṅgāla can be safely located in these areas. During the rule of Pūrṇachandra over the South-east parts of Bengal, Mahipāla I had established Pāla Suzerainty over Magadha and other remaining parts of Bengal. The area which he directly controlled may be identified with the Vaṅga, referred to in the Ablur inscription. Thus Vaṅga may have been West Bengal.

In the Bāngaḍh copper plate inscribed in this ninth year of Mahipāla's reign,[34] and also in the Āmgachhi grant of Vigrahapāla III[35] Mahipāla was said to have obtained his paternal Kingdom, which had been snatched away by people who had no claim to it. This is proof of the loss of some territories by his predecessors.

Before the time of Mahipāla there may have been independent kingdoms in some parts of Bengal, and so it is no surprise that the Chandras held sway over east Bengal, the Vaṅgāla referred to in Goharwā copper plate.[36] Again, in 1155 the Kalachuris invaded Bengal and their powerful ruler Karṇa defeated the King of Vaṅga.[37]

This Vaṅga (not Vaṅgāla) is now referred to east

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34. EI. XIV. p.326. V.12.
35. ibid. XV. p.296. V.11.
36. ibid. XI. p.142.
37. Bherāghāt ins of Alhanādevī. ibid.II. p.15. V.12.

Bengal. The Rewāh stone inscription of Karṇa[38] emphasises his victory over the King of Vaṅga and indicates its location in the present Chittagong area. The defeated King was a ruler of the same Chandra dynasty. This inscription goes on to say that the ship of the King of the eastern country, being driven by the storm of unparalled arrogance, was submerged in the ocean of Karna's forces.

This Vaṅga King cannot have been any ruler of the later Pāla dynasty, for the Kingdom of the later Pālas, as shown by their own inscriptions and those of their contemporaries, was by now confined to parts of Bihar and north-west Bengal. This defeated Vaṅgarāja must have been Srī-Chandra or his son Govindachandra, both of whom are mentioned in inscriptions[39] and who were among the last rulers of the Chandra dynasty. We know that the Varmans supplanted the Chandras in east Bengal in the eleventh century A.D. It may be that Karṇa, after defeating the Chandra ruler, either annexed Vaṅga or placed his own nominee in its charge. This nominee may have been one of the Varman rulers, named Vajravarman, and Karṇa cemented this political friendship by giving his daughter Viraśrī in marriage with him.[40]

38. ibid. XXIV. p.113. v.23.
39. Kedārpur cp of Srī Chandra. IB.III. p.10ff; Edilpur cp of Srī-Chandra. ibid. pp.166-67.
40. Belavā cp of Bhojavarman. ibid. p.14. 1.13.

We believe that when the Gaharwā copper plate and
the Rewāh stone inscription describe respectively the
territory occupied by the Kalacharis as Vaṅgāla and Vaṅga,
the terms represent the identical region. Both names, as
the tenor of the inscriptions shows, can be referred to
East Bengal. The nomenclature of different portions of
Bengal therefore varies in the different inscriptions.
So the suggestion of Raychaudhuri, identifying East Bengal
at one place with Vaṅga and elsewhere with Vaṅgāla, is
quite feasible.

In any case Vaṅga is the older appellation and Vaṅgāla
is the later one. Sometimes Vaṅgāla was applicable to the
whole of Bengal except West Bengal. The Chandras established
their rule first of all in southern Bengal, which was actuall
termed Vaṅgāla, as has been explained above. It may be
that in their expansion as far as Pāhārpur in the Rajashahi
district the Chandras extended the name of their home to
northern Bengal also. We know that the empire of the Chandra
embraced Rajshahi and Rangpur in the north, as well as
Tipperah and Chittagong in the south. This area is
collectively known as Vaṅgāla.[41] But West Bengal was
excluded from it.

The other regions of ancient Bengal with which the
epigraphic records deal are Puṇḍra or Puṇḍravardhana
(North Bengal), Vārendra or Vārendrī (part of Puṇḍra)

41. EI.XXI. p.98; Hunter: Statistical Account of Bengal. VII
p.312.

and Gauḍa (West Bengal, sometimes including North Bengal).
According to Cunningham the word Pauṇḍra is derived from
Puṇḍra, the name of the pale yellow sugarcane which grows
in abundance in North Bengal. Similarly he thinks that
Gauḍa is probably connected with Gur, a later Indian word
for Molasses or raw sugar. Sugar cane grows in plenty
throughout North Bengal.[42]

In the three 6th century inscriptions of Dharmāditya[43]
we find the name of a province known as Vāraka[44] or Vāruka[45]
in North Bengal, which is roughly equivalent to the later
Vārendra.[46] Vārendra probably denotes a tract of high
ground. Since its literary meaning is 'lord of Vāra',
which may mean marshy land which is possibly alluvial.

Gauḍa was probably a small area in the 8th and 9th
centuries, since the Rāshtrakūṭa rulers of south India
described it as Gauḍa-Vishaya.[47] During this period the
Pālas, Chandras and Varmans were ruling over the different
portions of Bengal, and each probably had a different name
for the region of their own small kingdom.

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42. JASB. V. pp.204-234.
43. SI. I. Nos. 43-45, pp.350-59.
44. ibid. 1.3 of No.43; 1. 5 ~~up~~ of No.44.
45. ibid. 14 of No.45.
46. Also the seals attached to all plates bear this name.
47. Kanheri hill inscription of Amoghavarsha I. IA. XIII.
     p.347.
     (We know; bhukti = province, vishaya = district).

During the days of Śaśāṅka Gauḍa covered a large area. Bāṇa describes him as 'Gaudeśvara.'[48] In Yuan Chwang's description he is referred to as She-Sang-Kia (Śaśāṅka), King of Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na (Karṇasuvarṇa).[49] Karṇasuvarṇa was extensive. According to the Chinese pilgrim it was about 4,450 *li* (1,400, or 1,500 miles) in circuit, and Śaś aṅka built up a big empire,[50] based on this region.

Gauḍa under Śaśāṅka was the general term for his empire, comprising western and northern Bengal as well as the regions bordering on Magadha and Banaras up to Kuśinagara in the Nepal tarai; for the Chinese description marked, Mo-kie-to (Magadha) and Kie-shi-na-kie-lo (Kuśinagara) as the boundary of Gauḍa.[51] A seal inscribed on the rock at the hill fort of Rohtasgarh in the Shahabad district of U.P. bears an inscription 'Śrī Mahāsāmanta Śaśāṅkadevasya'[52] and this shows clearly that the boundary of Gauḍa was wider then Bengal proper.

During the 8th century A.D. the terms Vaṅga and Gauḍa were confused. When the Pālas were ruling, Gauḍa generally

48. H.C. p.1808.
49. BRWW. I. p.210.
50. ibid II. pp.91,118,121,201.
51. ibid.
52. GI. pp.283-84.

referred to north and west Bengal and Vaṅga to south and east Bengal. There is definite evidence that Gauḍa and Vaṅga were not merged in an inscriptional record of the Rāshtra Kūtas' struggle with Dharmapāla. Thus Govinda III, the Rāshtra Kūṭa ruler (775-815) took defensive measures to protect Mālava, as an 'excellent door bar of the country of the lord of Gurjaras who had become evilly influenced by conquering the lords of Gauḍa and of Vaṅga.' ('Gauḍendra-Vaṅga-pati-nirjjaya')[53]

It seems that the two geographical entities Gauḍa and Vaṅga existed side by side, both had rulers of their own, and both were independent. In fact by this time the Pālas were ruling over Gauḍa, and the Chandras over Vaṅga.[54] It is therefore clear that Vaṅga denotes east Bengal and Gauḍa the west.

From the mid-eighth century the Pālas ruled over Gauḍa and its extent during the reigns of Dharmapāla and Devapāla reached beyond the natural boundary of modern Bengal.

Gopāladeva (circa. 750-770), the founder of the Pāla dynasty assumed the title Mahārājā dhirāja, as he established his imperial control over the chieftains of

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53. Beniram pl. IA. XII. p.160.
54. For a detailed description of the Chandras, IHQ.XVI.
    p.225ff; its criticism in Bhāratavarsha, B.S. 1348.
    p.768ff.

G II.

Nālāndā and the ruler of Magadha in addition to Gauḍa.[55]
His son, Dharmapāla (circa.770-810) pushed his power to
North Bengal and west to Kānyakubja beyond Magadha.[56]

When Devapāla (circa. 810-850) inherited the empire
he was known as the ruler of Gauḍa and he retained this
title even when he added further conquests, as revealed in
the Bādal pillar inscription.[57] According to Tārānātha
the rest of Vārendra (puṇḍravardhana) and Orissa was
annexed to Gauḍa by Devapāla.[58]

During the eleventh century Mahipāla I was known as
Gauḍādhipa, in spite of the fact that the Rāshṭrakūṭas,
the Cholas, the rulers of Orissa and those of Kāmarūpa
continued to give much trouble to the later Pālas, and
even snatched away rich and fertile tracts from them.

On the basis of this evidence we can conclude that at
this time Gauḍa was a general name applicable to the whole
of Bengal. In the mid-tenth century an ascetic who
migrated to Dhārwār (in Bombay) described himself as being
born in the Village Tāḍa,[60] and as the illuminator of the
Vārendri country; at the same time he took pride in
being 'the crest-jewel of the Gauḍa-country.'[61]

55. Image ins of Nālāndā Bodhigayā. KLNII. p.35. Nos.631,6
                                                    632.
56. Khālimpur pl. EI.IV. p.249.
57. ibid. II. p.163.
58. ASR. XV. p.111.
59. Sārnāth image ins. IA. XIV. p.140. ARASI. 1905-6.
     pp.221-22.
60. to be identified with the modern village Tārā, lying at
     a distance of about 12 miles south-east of Dinājpur in
     north Bengal.   EI. XXI. P. 264. V. 13.

We have further proof in support of this. It is said
that Vijayasena defeated the Kings of Gauḍa, Kāmarūpa and
Kaliṅga.[62] This King of Gauḍa may be one of the later Pālas
whose rule was then confined to north Bengal and south-east
Bengal. Now Gauḍa under Vijayasena, as it stood covered the
major portion of Bengal.

Then again, when Lakshmaṇasena his grandson seized
the Kingdom of Gauḍa,[63] he assumed the title Gaudeśvara
or the lord of Gauḍa.[64] As has been said above, Vijayasena
caused 'Gauḍendra' to make a hasty retreat, but it may be
that he was not completely successful in bringing about the
defeat of the Gauḍa ruler. The present inscription states
that when a Kumāra (during the reign of his father Balḷāla)
Lakshmanasena deprived the Gauḍa King of his fortune.

So we can say that the boundary of Gauḍa was then
extensive, covering west, east, north and south of Bengal.
Hence, it was possible for Lakshmaṇasena at the timeof the
Muslim invasion over west Bengal to fly to east Bengal.

Again, the general term Gauḍa was in use when Viśarū-
pāsena, the grandson of Lakshmaṇasena ruling over a
fragmentary part of east Bengal, assumed the title
Gaudeśvara.[65] The inscriptions of Bengal, though they tell
a little, are silent over what happened to the last rulers

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62. Deopārā ins. ᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡᵡ
    IB III. p.48.v.20.

63. Mādhāinagar cp. ibid. p.111.v.11.

64. ibid. U. 26-32. [* title of these royal lines.

65. Mādanapāḍā cp. ibid. p.136. 1.38. The title Gaudesvara
    or Gaudendra held by the different Kings of the Pālas

of the Sena dynasty. A south Indian inscription supplies
us with the information that in a battle of 1250 A.D. the Yād
ava ruler, Kauara claimed to be the victor over the ruler of
Gauḍa.[66]   Here again Gauḍa is a general term including
Vaṅga (east Bengal) also.

The above survey helps us to say something about the
political condition of Bengal. It goes without saying that
Bengal in those days was not united; each principality had
a separate name, and was totally different from the
neighbouring states, though the more powerful rulers of
the Pālas or the Senas might impose ~~suzer~~ suzerainty over
the whole region. The ruler of a particular area, when he
got the better of another State and annexed its territories,
extended the name of his home State to the conquered regions.
The Pālas and the Senas did this. Thus we find the
extension of the names Vaṅga and Gauḍa to regions even
beyond the Bengali-speaking area. For administrative
purposes a big kingdom was percelled out into smaller regions

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66. Māmdapur ins of the reign of Kauara. EI. XIX. p.22. 1.14

II

CASTE

To discuss the development of caste in Bengal of which the component parts have been discussed above, required, first of all its definition.

According to Sir Henry Risley the word 'caste' came from the Portugése adventurers who followed Vasco De Gama to the west coast of India. It is derived from the Latin castus and denotes purity of breed.[67]

Emile Senart defines it in the same way. The term 'caste' originated from the Portugése word 'casta'. In the sixteenth century the Portugése carried on trade with the Hindus of the Malabar coast. Here they noticed traditional divisions among the Hindus, - the upper divisions not coming closely and intimately in contact with the lower ones, and the former following systems and practices which were forbidden to the latter. Thus a gulf of difference between the two was noticeable, even to the foreigners. This custom of division was handed down from generation to generation, and this made the system rigid and insurmountable. These many divisions created so many races which had characteristics of their own. Indian society seemed like a many-storied mansion, and reminded the Portugése of the difference among the European races.[68]

67. The People of India. p.66
68. J. Tagore (tr) Senart's Les Caster dans L'Inde. p.14.

Caste is a foreign term and the Indian synonymous word for it is <u>jāti</u>, which is derived from Sanskrit, meaning births. In the Pāli texts caste is denoted by <u>Kula</u>, which is often used in the sense of caste.[69]

Sometimes, modern sociologists, as pointed out by J.H. Hutton, the best known and most respected contemporary authority on this subject, have used the term 'caste' to cover the four classes known as <u>Varna</u> as well as <u>jāti</u>. But Hutton believes that this is a mistake and mentions that these two terms, <u>Varna</u> and <u>jāti</u> do not convey the same meaning.[70]

<u>Varna</u> means class and the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sūdra in the Vedic times were classes rather than castes.[71] '...Post-Vedic scholars looking for authority for the caste system in the earliest Vedas, have interpreted the nature of the Varna in terms of the caste system as they know it. At any rate the varna of the present day is not a caste, though it may be regarded as a group of castes and there is tendency among social reformers to advocate the substitution of four varnas for three thousand or more endogamous groups of the caste system, a movement, which if successful, would tend to fix a hard and fast line of social cleavage between classes and which probably under-estimates the power and misunderstands the significance of

69. 'Cattāri kulam, Khattiya kulam, brāhmanakulam, veśśakula śūddakulam' - Vinaya Pitaka. II. pp.239.
70. H.C.I. (3rd ed.) p. 64.
71. ibid. p.66.

the caste-system, its origin and the important function
it still performs in the integration of Indian society.'[72]

If the view of Hutton be true, we can say that the
existence of the caste-system is not in fact indicated
in the Purusha-sūkta of the Ṛg Veda (X.90). This sūkta
enumerates four classes, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaiśya
and Śūdra, who are supposed to have arisen respectively
from the mouth, breast, thighs and feet of Brahma. Their
functions were also different. The Brahmin was to worship
and carry on priestly activities; the Kshatriya was to
fight; the Vaiśya to run business and the Śūdra to
serve all these three upper classes.[73]

It is thus evident that Varna already existed when
this hymn of the ṚgVeda was composed. Although this
tradition resulting from the Purusha-Sūkta on the origin
of the Indian caste system from the original four varnas
is still popularly believed today, in the light of modern
research it seems to be baseless. In fact, Indian in
ancient times had no such a divided society. The picture
with which we are presented is of a predominantly casteless
society (except in case of South India), but divided into
four broad classes.

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72. ibid. pp.67.
73. II. 20.

In the opinion of Weber the Purusha-sūkta is one of the latest hymns of the RgVeda, and there is no good evidence that the four varṇas existed when the main body of the hymns was composed.[74]   In the later Vedic period and that reflected by the Pāli texts we find that social divisions akin to the caste system were not rigid, and many sections of the society paid little regard to them. In fact, though the four divisions, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaiśya and the Śūdra, are mentioned in the literature of this period, yet no definite line of demarcation is laid down for distinguishing one caste from the other and there was no regid formulation of caste-functions.

In the Buddhist literature we find mention of the four classes, Khattiyas, Brahmins, Vessas and Suddas.[75] But their respective functions were not strictly defined. The Assalāyana Sutta[76] tries to prove the worthlessness of the caste system. Although there were then four classes, the division was not rigid.

The Majjhima Nikāya[77] mentions Brahmins and non-Brahmins, but emphasises that they are fundamentally all the same. A Jātaka story tells that, when being asked

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74. Indian Literature. p.38.
75. Morris and Hardy (ed): Anguttara Nikaya.III. p.362ff.
76. Quoted in MFSONEI. p.18.
77. Quoted in JASB. 1894. p.394ff.

what caste he belonged to, a minister replied that he
was neither a Khattiya nor a Brahmin. 'I come of a
family of ministers' (amaccakula).[78]

Thus it appears that at that time caste had not
obtained all its later characteristics. Some of its
features,[79] such as the tendency for social status to
be inherited, may have been present. But that did not
set up an artificial wall between one class and the other.
Individuals within one caste did not shut themselves off
from the other social divisions. In short, caste-
consciousness was almost absent, and there was a stronger
sense of community in some circles. If there was any
caste organisation, it had no rigidity, and the position
of the four castes was not finally fixed. The Kshatriyas
at times had precedence over the Brahmins notably in
Buddhist literature.[80]

The Brahmins, who held themselves above the other
castes because of their Vedic knowledge, high birth and
dignified occupation, often found their position shaky.

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78. T. II. 87. 125.

79. Generally birth-right is the yardstick for determining
    caste affiliation. The four original caste, Brahmins,
    Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, are therefore class-
    ified according to their respective birth. The children
    born to the Kshatriya families are always Kshatriya, and
    so on. When the multiplication of castes took place
    birth was also the criterion for specialising the sub-
    castes.

80. Morris and Hardy: op cit. p.362ff.

They were not always held in respect and veneration by the other castes. Their priestly functions were greatly curtailed, and the animal sacrifice, the bloody work of the Brahmin was not approved by the Buddhists, who prohibited it. The practice of worshipping the gods and goddesses favoured by the Brahmin was not encouraged by the early Buddhists, and Vedic incantations were given no importance by the followers of Buddha. These and manifold other circumstances curbed the strength of the Brahmin. When the Brahmanical group, the spearhead of Indian caste system, was thus side-tracked, the question of rigid caste organisation did not arise and such a caste system as existed was in a very fluid state.

But this forms only one side of the picture. On the other side, we find that during this period the caste system was crystallising to some extent, although in a rudimentary form. In the Kannakathāla Sutta[81] Buddha mentions the four castes; of these two were prominent, namely 'the Khattiya and the Brahmana, sofar as relates to the salute, the seat to be offered, the extension of the folded hands and the service to be rendered.' This picture must not lead us to believe that Gautama Buddha supported caste, but only described the actual order of the society of the times and who was predominant in it.

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81 No. 90 of the Majjhimo Nikaya in JASB. 1894. p.394ff.

Brahmanisim was by no means totally extinguished even in those regions and periods in which Buddhism was strongest. The social order was not fundamentally altered by the spread of Buddhist doctrines.[82] Even among the Buddhist monks who were drawn both from high and low castes the conception of caste-distinction was not absent.

In the Vinaya Pitaka[83] we read of the six monks who played the role of consistent mischief-makers in the early Saṅgha, and who requisitioned all places for themselves and their teachers, and offered no shelter to the others. Being informed of this Gautama Buddha invited the leading monks and asked them, who deserved to get the best quarters. Different answers came from two directions:- 'He who was a Khattiya' and 'He who was a Brāhmaṇa.'

In the Maurya age the social picture was apparently more or less like the above. The Brahmins had lost their predominant hold except that certain privileges were given, nominally and formally to them. Yet the vitality of Brahmanism was not totally destroyed.

The account left by Magasthenes corroborated this. The division of Indian Society into caste came into the purview of his knowledge either from hearsay or from the

82. Hopkins: The religions of India. p.586n.
83. Oldenberg: Buddha. p.342ff.

local Brahmins who happened to meet him. According to him there were seven divisions of the Indian society, - philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates and councillors.[84]

But, it is clear that philosophers, farmers etc. formed classes rather than castes.[85] Evidently, Megasthenes' information is garbled in some way, for his seven classes have no relation to any Indian system. There is no need to take Megastenes as literally true. He appears to have heard vaguely about the four Varṇas and to have divided Indian society arbitrarily according to the classes which he chiefly noticed. Perhaps Megasthenes was mistaken in his statement that the caste system was absolutely rigid and that no inter-dining and inter-marriage were allowed. He may have obtained this information from some orthodox Brahmins who told him rather about the ideal of the Śāstras than about things as they xxxx really were. In the Mauryan court it is unlikely that he would obtain much opportunity to investigate so deeply Indian social life at first hand.

During the reign of Aśoka caste cannot have made any headway. His propagation of Buddhism further tended to neutralise the superiority of the Brahmins in Indian society. His emphasis on ahiṃsā and prohibition of animal sacrifice ran counter to other Brahmanical principles.

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84. Indica. XI. cited by Thapar: Aśoka. p.57.
85. Thapar: ibid. pp.57-58.

Haraprasad Sastri[86] has tried to prove that Aśoke directly opposed the Brahmin, - he exposed the divinities of the Brahmin as false gods, and discouraged Brahmanical festivals and mangala - recitations, while his religious agents, the Dhamma-mahāmattas carried on unrestricted activities against the Brahmanical religion.

U.N. Ghoshal[87] supports Saṣtri and is of opinion that the social and religious order of the Brahmins was very much disturbed by Aśoka's anti-Brahmanical attitude. While the Brahmanical group was losing importance, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras came to the forefront. Because of the the development of extensive trade during the Buddhist period and the gradual contact with the outside world arising from Aśoka's propagation of Buddhism the Vaiśyas took the opportunity of throwing off the age-old social yoke of the Brahmin. With the gradual rise of the Vaiśyas their importance had been taken into account by the imperial authorities, as the State was dependent not only on the political structure, but also on the economic organisation. On the whole Mauryan social history does not show any clear-cut manifestations of rigidity in the fourt castes. More-over, whatever may have actually happened, it is clear that it was not the deliberate intention of Aśoka to undermine the Brahmin's position. The evidence indicates

86. JASB. 1910. pp.259-62.
87. Studies in Indian History and Culture. p.258.

that he asked his subjects to show them respect and regard.[88]

Even in this early period, however, there are stray evidences of particularistic and individualistic feeling akin to caste organisation. It is said that the last Nanda ruler of Magadha crushed all the Kshatriya princes of his time and thereby raised the position of the Sūdras.[89] The Brahmin pushed into the background by Aśoka, tried to make headway. When the Suṅgas, who were Brahmins, took control of the Maurya empire, the strength of Brahmanical influence much increased. Brahmins then gave a final shape to the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata as well as to Sanskrit grammer and the early Smṛitis.[90]

Thus, in general, in early Indian social organisation the barrier between classes was far from rigid. In the early part of our period Bengal shows us a similar picture. Castes of different types are mentioned in the land-grants of almost all the Kings of Bengal. But strict ideas of pollution by contact are hardly found, if at all.

The people of ancient Bengal, according to the available epigraphic records mainly led an agricultural and pastoral life. The Mauryan Brāhmī inscription of Mahāsthān gives us this impression of the Bengal of the

88. D.C. Sircar: Ins. of Asoka. p.41. Rock Edict No.IV. Girnar Text; p.47. RE.No.IX. Mansehra Text.

89. Pargiter: The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age. p.25.

90. Sastri: Absorption of the Vratyas. p.3.

third century B.C.[91]. The inscription states that among the people of Pundranagara there was distress due to flood, leading to famine; hence came the order of the Maurya ruler to the Mahāmatras of Pundranagara that relief measures were to be carried out in the form of the distribution of paddy from the State granary and the advance of loans to the people known as Saṁvaṁgīyas.

In this brief inscription there is no evidence of social discrimination; if any inference can be drawn from it, it indicates that the class system was not rigid.

In the Pāla and the Sena land-grants we find caste-names such as Brahmin, Māhisya, Kāyastha, Karana, Chāndāla etc. At the time of donation to the Brahmins they were summoned together with various local officials.[92]

The long list of persons called to witness the donations in these grants includes not only central and local officials and village servants, but caste groups from the Brahmin at the head of the social hierachy to the humble Medas and Chāndāalas at its bottom, together with groups from other lands, such as Odras and Karnāṭas and tribal people like the Khasas. This suggests that in the village society of the times caste was already in existence, but that there was still a strong sense of community and social solidarity and even the lowest members of society were not

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91. EI. XXI. pp.83-90.

92. Khālimpur plate of Dharmapāla. ibid. IV. p.243f; Nālandā copper plate of Dharmapāla. ibid.XXIII. p.290f; Bhāgalpur plate of Nārāyanapāla. IS.XV. p.304f; Bāngarh plate of Mahipāla. EI.XIV. p.324f; Amgāchhi plate of Vigrahapāla III. ibid.XV.p.293f; Barrackpore plate of Vijayasena. ibid. XV. p.

without their dignity and significance in the social order.

This picture of a compact social order was not discoloured even by religious schism. The Chandras, who were ruling over Bengal from the tenth to the twelfth century, were Buddhist in faith. In all their land-grants they are found to bestow lands on the Brahmins, as indicated in the Rāmpāl[93] and the Dhulla[94] copper plates of Śrī-Chandra.

It is to be noted that, like those of the Pālas and other Buddhist Kings, the grants of the Chandras are made to the Brahmanical class. It seems that the fundamental solidarity of Bengal society at the time extended to the realm of religion, and that even those who were primarily Buddhists respected and supported those who were the traditional religious/leaders of society.

The Varman rulers who came after the Chandras patronized the Brahmins in a similar way. They, like the former rulers, invited to the ceremony of donation all the officers of the State and people from other regions, as well as representatives of certain caste-groups, as is evidenced by the Belavā copper plate of Bhojavarman.[95]

In fine, we can say that down to the end of our period, in the major land-grants of the royal authorities, similar lists of caste-groups occur. Thus from the Guptas to the Senas we find the same strong sense of social solidarity in Bengal, fostered by Kings of every dynasty, whether orthodox or otherwise.

93. IB. III. p. 1ff.
94. ibid. pp.165-66.
95. ibid. p.14f.

CHAPTER II

THE ADISURA LEGEND

It is a very fanciful idea still prevalent among the
Bengalis that the origin of the caste system in Bengal is
connected with a King named Adiśūra. He is supposed to
have brought into Bengal Brahmins and Kāyasthas from Kanauj,
and thereby helped by the introduction of these two major
groups in creating division in the early social structure
of Bengal.

In fact, Adiśūra was only a legendary King; Brahmins
and Kāyasthas were already there in Bengal before the date
to which their coming from Kanauj is attributed. We shall
show later that this legend is a mere fabrication of the
Brahmins, who, during the Muslim rule over Bengal, tried to
uphold their position among the non-Brahmins.

Let us first of all make a brief survey of the sources
of this account and the legend itself.

Nagendra Vasu in his National History of Bengal[1] has
elaborately discussed some of the Kulapañjikās on the basis
of which this legend stands. The dates of their composition
are supposed to be ancient by the supporters of this legend.
According to their description the oldest authorities on
Adiśūra are Dhruvānanda Miśra's Gauḍa Vaṃśāvali, Bhatta-
nārāyaṇa's (it is said that he was one of the five Brahmins
brought by Adiśūra from Kanauj) Veṇīsaṃhāra and other

1. VII. Pt.I. Brāhmaṇa Kāṇḍa.

subsidiary sources like Vaṃśi Vidyāratna Ghaṭaka's
Kulapañjikā, Nulopanchānan's Goṣṭhikathā, Vāchaspati Miśra's
Kularāma Hari Miśra's Rādhīya Kulakārikā, Sarvānānda Miśra's
Kulatāttvārṇava. Besides these, we have other Kārikās
like Kāyastha-Kulakārikā, Kāyastha Kuladīpikā, Vārendrakula-
pañjikā, Rādhīya Kulamañjari etc. which are full of
descriptions of both Brahmins and Kāyasthas and their origin.
All these accounts are also reproduced in medieval and
modern sources like Bhavānī Prasād's Durgāmaṅgal, Kshitiś
Vaṃśāvali, Umes Gupta's Ballālamohamudgar, and Lalmohan
Vidyānidhī's Sambandha nirṇayakār. Modern authorities who
have tried to uphold this legend are Mahima Mozumdar in
Gauḍe Brahmin and Pyarimohan Das in Hindu jatir Vivaraṇa etc.

Attempts have been made in some regional histories
of Bengal to show that some prominent Brahmins living in
some regions are to be identified as the descendants of
the Brahmins and Kāyasthas invited by Ādiśūra. We find
such theories in Kumud Mallik's Nadiā Kāhinī, Jogen Gupta's
Vikrampurer Itihās, and Dines Datt's Kalas Kāṭhir Itihās
(Barisāl) etc.

In most cases the accounts, dates, names of five
Brahmins and five Kāyasthas, and their Gotras as revealed
from the Kulapañjikās vary greatly although in rare cases
unanimity prevails. The only common features in the
description are that the Brahmins and Kāyasthas of Bengal
came from Kanauj and their number in each case was five.

The narration of their accounts is very interesting.
When Ādiśūra sent for the Kanauj Brahmins, Kamalāyudha
Yaśovarmadeva, the King of Kanauj rejected the proposal.
The former being thus insulted declared war upon the latter,
but was defeated. Then a second expedition was launched
by Ādiśūra, in which he emerged victorious through sheer
diplomacy. He placed the native Brahmins of Bengal in
the front of his attacking army. These Brahmins were made
to ride on bulls. The King of Kanauj was going to give
battle. But, he was a Hindu of the orthodox type. He
was afraid of killing the Brahmins and the bulls, as the
Hindus worship the bovine animals and do not kill them.
So, at last he agreed to send five Brahmins, followed by
five Kāyashas.

These emigrants were dressed in military manner and
armed with swords, bows and arrows. As Brahmins should not
behave like military men, this created a bad impression on
Ādiśūra xxxthe who did not come forward to receive them.
Then, they put the garland which they had brought for
blessing Ādiśūra on the wooden pole in the front of the
sitting room. In the twinkling of an eye this pole put
forth blossoms. This news was reported to the King who
then came forward in person and apologised for his unfriendly
attitude. He appreciated their extraordinary power.
Heartily and sincerely he welcomed them as well as the
Kāyasthas, their attendants.

These Brahmins are said to have been invited for the performance of a _yajña_, and after its conclusion they with their Kāyastha followers returned to Kanauj; but they were excommunicated on the ground that they had gone to the forbidden land like Bengal.

The native Brahmins of Kanauj asked them to perform expiation for their sins, saying that if they would do, they would be readmitted into the Kanauj society. This they refused to do. So they were ordered by the Kanauj King to leave his country. Accordingly, they came back to Ādiśūra and told him what had happened.

For their settlement and livelihood Ādiśūra offered them five villages. With regard to the Kāyasthas he did the same thing. It is said that the descendants of these Brahmins and Kāyasthas took up residence in different parts of Bengal and gave rise to the modern Bengal Brahmins and Kāyasthas.

In considering this legend we have to furnish answers to several questions, such as: How did the people take the Ādiśūra legend in a chedulous way? How did this tradition arise? What was its earliest form? If the story is not true, why did it arise? There is a xxxxxxxxx reason for every legend. - what were reasons behind this one? Why does the legend emphasize the origin of the Brahmins from Kanauj and not from elsewhere?

Vincent Smith doubted the existence of King Ādiśūra in the second edition[2] of his Early History of India; but in its third edition[3] he changed his opinion and wished us to believe that Ādiśūra was not a mythical King, but ruled Gauḍa and the neighbourhood approximately in 700 A.D. or a little earlier.

Haraprasād Śāstri believed that Ādiśūra was neither a mythical nor a half-mythical King, but really invited the five Brahmins from Kanauj, not in the eleventh century, but in the eighth century.[4] Śāstri maintains on the basis of a statement of Hari Miśra that the Pālas became the rulers of Bengal just after the advent of the Kanauj Brahmins. As the Pālas gained the ascendancy between 760 amd 770 A.D., the coming of the Brahmins and the reign of Ādiśūra should thus be fixed earlier than this period. In the eleventh century the descendants of the five Brahmins were already divided into Rādhīyas and Vārendras, and had received the gift of 156 villages. Modern Rādhīya and Vārendra Brahmins derive their names from the names of the villages which were their places of settlement. During Ballālasena's reign there were 800 Brahmin families resulting from these groups.

Śāstrī does not offer us any reliable evidence in support of his theories. Moreover, we have never found any record to show how the five Kanauj Brahmins ultimately became 800 in number.

2. SEHI. p.366.

3. ibid. p.397.

4. JASB. N.S. VIII. 1912. pp.347-48.

For the story of Ādiśūra there are seven different
authorities, six of whom state the religious purpose for
which the Brahmins were invited.[5]   The Kulajis and the
native chroniclers vary in their statements regarding
the events leading to their arrival.   Among the reasons
cited are the sitting of a vulture on the roof of Ādiśūra's
palace, a sign of ill omen;[6] the performance of the Vedic
rite of putreshthi yajña in order to obtain a son, as the
King was childless;[7] the performance of agnihotra yajña, as
being a kshatriya he was eager to perform a vow or
sacrifice befitting his kula;[8] and the performance of the
Vājapeya sacrifice, as his subjects had been suffering from
constant and excessive rain.[9]   The Kanauj Brahmins were then
regarded as purer than the Bengal Brahmins who had forgotten
the Vedic rites owing to the spread of Buddhism in Bengal.
Hence, he sent for the Kanauj Brahmins to teach the Bengal
Brahmins the Hindu Śastras.[10]   Ādiśūra's wife Chandramutchī,
being religiously minded, was eager to perform Vedic rites
sanctified by pure Brahmins.[11]

5.   RHB. I. p.626.
6.   Kshitis' Vamśśvali Charitaṁ.
7.   DR. B.S. 1319. Falgun 'Ādiśūra'.
8.   V. Ghalāk. Rādhiya Kulakārikā.
9.   B. Prasād. Durgā maṅgal. p.27
10. L. Vidyānidhi: Sambandha Nirnayakār. pp.14-15.
11. M.M. B.S. 1321. Māgh. 'Ādiśūra'.

The above accounts have no confirmation in earlier
historical sources of our period. Moreover there is no
uniformity in the statements. These may be set aside
outright as mere legendary stories, unsupported by any
inscriptions of the period.

The dates cited by different authorities in support
of Adiśūra's existence are also conflicting. Some
Kulaśāstras maintained that Adiśūra brought the Kanauj
Brahmins and Kāyasthas in Vedavānanka (Veda = 4, Vān = 5,
anka = 9) i.e. 954[12] Saka era, and other in Vedavānanga
i.e. 654. S.E. (as anga = 6). So there is a gulf of 300
years between these two dates.

R.D. Banerji preferred the first[13] and B.B. Roy the
second.[14] According to Rajendralal Mitra this date is
886 saka or 964 A.D., according to Mahim Chandra Mozumdar[15]
it is 954 Sāka or 1032 A.D., according to Lālmohan
Vidyānidhi[16] 864 Saka or 942, according to Kshitīś
Vaṁśāvali it is 999 Sāka or 1077 A.D.[17]

Just like the reasons for the summoning of the
Brahmins, the dates of their coming are also varied and
confused. When there is no strong historical evidence to

12. According to the Indian mathematical rule ankasya
    vāmāgati.
13. M.M. B.S. 1320. Asāḍ. 'Adiśūra O Kulaśāstra'.
14. D.R. op cit.
15. Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa. p.123.
16. Saṁbandha Nirṇayakār. p.21.
17. All these dates quoted in Mānasi. B.S. 1320.

substantiate any of these dates, how can we regard
Ādiśūra as a historical figure?

Attemps have also been made to prove that Ādiśūra
was a historical King on the basis of archaeological
evidence. But they are fruitless, as there is no
historical fact in their support. Towards the middle
of 1927 the Calcutta Kālidāsa Samiti carried on an
investigation in Rāḍha in order to discover the capital
of Ādiśūra. Its reports were published in the Bengali
journals, Vaṅgavāsī,[18] Hitavādi,[19] and Śakti.[20]

These reports are not based on archaeological evidence
at all; but merely on local tradition. Nothing had been
discovered by excavation. Only some existing building
were pointed out by the local people as Ādiśūra's
palace, castle, temple, treasure-house, guest-house, cow-
shed, markets etc.

Some neighbouring villages such as Ādinagar, Ādigrām
and Ādisthān were alleged to have derived their name
from Ādiśūra, as the term Ādi has been prefixed to them.
The reports were published only in minor journals, and not
in leading ones, and after their publication no response
came from established historians in support of this
investigation. On the whole, we can say that local
tradition does not carry any value or weight as historical

18. B.S. 1334. Aghrān. 'Ādiśūrer Rājdhānī Āvishkār'.
19. B.S. 1334. Ādiśūrer Rājdhānī'.
20. B.S. 1334. Bhādra. 'Ādiśūra O Tāhār Durga'.

evidence. Of course there is not enough to disprove
the tradition, any more than counter-statements by
believers in Ādiśūra would prove it.

Modern historians like Akshoy Maitra do not regard
Ādiśūra as the originator of the Bengal caste system.
According to their opinion either his story is a myth
or legend, or there is doubt about the truth of his
invitation of the five Brahmins and five Kāyasthas from
Kanauj.[21] Maitra pointed out that there was no clear
and explicit evidence of the existence of a Bengal
King Ādiśūra either in copper plates and inscriptions
or in contemporary books.[22]

The author of Gauḍa Rājamāla has expressed the same
opinion: 'So long as there is no discovery of copper
plate or rock inscription in order to prove the
authenticity of the historical evidence on Ādiśūra,
it will be a farce to attempt to set him up as a
historical personage, in view of so many conflicting
proofs coming forth.'[23]

Let us asses the authenticity of the Ādiśūra story.
We have seen above that, except for H.P., Śāstrī, the
opinions of all the authorities agree in placing the
coming of the Kanauj Brahmins in the eleventh or the

21. M.M. B.S. 1321. Māgh.
22. Introduction to Gauḍa Rājamāla. p.4.
23. Chandra: GR. p.59

twelfth century. Śāstri has fixed the date of the Pāla
age or immediately before their rule in Bengal. However,
we can show on the basis of epigraphic records that there
was no doubt dearth of qualified or Vedic Brahmins in
Bengal before either of these two dates.

The view that there were no orthodox Brahmins in
Bengal before this legendary importation of those from
Kanauj is on the face of it most improbable. Brahmins
existed in nearby Magadha from the time of Buddha onwards.[24]
The Mahāsthān inscription gives certain evidence that in
Mauryan times North Bengal was within the sphere of
Aryan culture.[25] It is indeed unlikely that there were
no Brahmins in Bengal at the time.

The Dāmodarpur copper inscriptions[26] found in the
Dinajpur district of Rajashahi division of Bengal
which cover roughly a century of the Gupta period, from
443-44 A.D. to 533-34 A.D., show the existence of the
Brahmanical group in Bengal before the date selected by
Śāstri for Ādiśūra.

These sources give us sufficient glimpses of early
Bengal to show how the Brahmanical sacrifices like
agnihotra fires (plate no. 1) and the Panchamahāyajñas
(plate no. 2) took place and how learned Brahmins were
held in veneration, not only by the village elders and

24. MFSONEI. PP. 144-45.
25. EI. XXI. pp.83ff.

26. SI. I. Nos.18-19, 34, 36, 39.

administrative officials, but also by the lay Brahmins.
Lands both cultivated and uncultivated were given to the
Brahmin for their life-long maintenance, and temple-
management was put in their charge.

The fact that considerable areas of land were given
to them is evidence enough that they held an honoured
position, and they were evidently learned and performed
their priestly functions adequately.

In this connection we can cite further evidence.
Three copper plate grants from east Bengal, discovered
in the Faridpur district, - the first two referring to
Dharmāditya, and the last one to Gopachandra, both of
whom followed the Guptas[27] in Bengal are indicative of
the presence of Brahmins. Moreover, one of these plates
(grant no. 1) records a gift of three acres of cultivated
land in the village,Dhruvilati to an orthodox Brahmin named
Chandrasvāmin of the Bhāradvāja gotra. This is the very
gotra of one of the Brahmins whom Ādiśūra is said to
have imported.

It might be objected that, whatever the situation
in the Gupta period, by the 8th century the Bengal
Brahmins had either degenerated or become so corrupt
that it was necessary to import new ones. But this view
cannot stand on a fair scrutiny. In the times of Harsha

27. ibid. Nos. 53-45. pp.350-59.

Hiuen Tsang visited Bengal. His accounts show that
certain Bengal Brahmins had become rulers. Rājabhaṭa,
the ruler of Samataṭa, whose reign covered the period
of the first half of the 7th century A.D. was a Brahmin.[28]

An epigraphic record also shows that apart from
Samataṭa there was a Brahmin ruler in East Bengal. The
Mahākula (Bādāmi) pillar inscription[29] of Raṇavikrānta,
the western Chalukya King (probably 601-602 A.D.) says
that the Brahmanical Kings of Samataṭa, Vaṅga etc. had
been defeated by Kirtivarman I.

As the theory of Śāstrī is not chedible, we will
examine the other theory, that the advent of the Kanauj
Brahmins occurred in the eleventh or twelfth century.
Here again, we can prove the presence of the orthodox
priestly class in Bengal before the prescribed period.

To start with we can mention one copper plate the,
Tipperāh plate of Lokanātha[30] of which the date has
been tentatively fixed as 650 A.D. This record introduces
us to a donor Pradoshaśarman, an orthodox Brahmin with
many sided virtuous qualifications. He applied to
his chief, Lokanātha for a plot of land in the forest
region where he desired to erect a temple in the name
of Ananta-Nārāyaṇa. This donated land would also serve

28.   Sen: Historical Aspects of Bengal Inscriptions. p.281.
29.   ibid. J.A. XIX. p.16.
30.   EI. XV. pp.301-15. There is a controversy over whether
       Lokanātha ruled over east Bengal after the death of
       Harsha, or a vassal chief of Ādityasena, one of the
       later Gupta dynasty in Magadha or a feudatory of the
       Pālas of Bengal. (ibid. XI. p. 176ff).

the purpose for the maintenance of the daily worship
of this image with bali, charu, satra etc. and for the
abode of Brahmins versed in the four Vedas (chaturvidya),[31]
whose number exceeded a hundred. All of his fathers and
forefathers were of orthodox Brahmin who were agnyahita
Brahmin i.e. a Brahmin who constantly maintains and
consecrates the sacred fire in his residence. The relatives
on his mother's side were also orthodox.

Furthermore, we have strong reason to believe in
the definite presence of the Brahmins in Bengal even in
the age of the Palas. The Pala rulers who were primarily
Biddhists, even went so far as to support the Hindus'
holy scriptures and the caste system.[32] Their religious
endowments went both to the Buddhists and the Brahmins.[33]
Most of the grants of land made by the Palas to the Brahmins
were carried out with the performance of orthodox Hindu
ceremonies, as is evidenced from the Belwa plates, no. 1 of
Mahipala I,[34] no.2 of Vigrahapala III[35] and the Bangaon
plate of Vigrahapala III.[36] Before each of these donations
the Pala Kings bathed in the holy river Ganges on the
occasion of the Vishuvat sankranti.[37] The Bhagalpur
plate[38] of the Paramasaugata (supreme devotee of the Buddha),

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31. ibid. 1.24.
32. Monghyr cp. EI. XVIII. p.304.v.5; Amgacchi cp.ibib.XV.
    p.293. v.13.
33. Khalimpur cp. ibid. IV.p.243; Nalanda cp. ibid XVII.
    p.318; Bhagalpur cp. 9A. XV. p.304.
34. ibid. XXIX. pp.1-9.
35. ibid. pp.10-14. [36. ibid. pp. 48-56.
37. 1.48 of Belwa cpI; 1.46 of Pl.2; 1.39 of Bangaon pl.
Vishuvat Sankranti takes place on the occasion of the sun's
equinoctial passage into Mesha on the 1st day of solar month
Vaisakha or Kartika (D.C. Sircar in EI. XXIX. p.2.)

King Nārāyaṇapāla, is indicative of his leaning towards
the Śaiva sect. His land grant was made for a Śiva
temple at Kalaśapota, where he built a _Sahasra-āyatana_
(a temple with a thousand pillars), made arrangements for the
performance of _pūjā_, _bali_, _charu_, satra and _navakaraṇaṁ_
(repair or extensions of the temple) and provided seats,
medicines for the sick, and dwelling sites for the
Pāśupata teachers. The Manahali plate of Madanapāla[39]
refers to the royal donation to a Brahmin as _dakshiṇā_ (fee)
for his recitation of the Mahābhārata before the queen
Chitramatikādevī.

As far as the Pāla period is concerned we have ample
evidence that though the rulers were primarily Buddhists
they also supported Brahmins, of whom some held high
positions in the State,[40] and the Brahmanic rituals were
regularly performed in Bengal.[41] The same statement is
true of the minor kingdoms of the time, such as those of
the Khaḍga dynasty,[42] the Chandras[43] and the Varmans.[44]

During the period of the Senas we must notice that
both orthodox and lay Brahmins were to be found living
in the different parts of Bengal. Brahmanical hermits
chanting Vedic hymns had been seen by the forefathers of
Vijayasena on the Gangetic borders of Bengal, as indicated

39. Gl. p.148ff.
40. Bāḍal pil. ins. ibid. p.70.
41. Aṁgachhi gr. E.I. XV. pp.293-301.
42. Sarvāṇi im. ins. ibid. XVII. p.357ff.
43. Rāmpāl cp. IB.III. pp.5-8; Dhulla cp.IB. In.pp.165-66.
44. Belavā cp. ibid. pp.14-24.
45. xxxxxxxxxxxx-xxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx-26

by the Dwpārā inscription.[45]   The Govindapur plate [46]
of Lakshmaṇasena mentions a Brahmin donee versed in Vedic
lore.

The foregoing accounts, covering an extensive period
from the Guptas to the Senas, prove the presence of
Brahmins throughout Bengal during the whole of the period.
It is mentioned in one kulagrantha[47] that the five Kanauj
Brahmins each of different gotra - Bhāradvāja, Sāṇḍya,
Sāvarṇa, Kauśika, Vatsya - were allowed to settle in
different parts of Bengal by Ādiśūra, and it was they who
for the first time introduced the gotra system among the
Bengal Brahmins. How can such false and baseless arguments
stand when there is such clear evidence that from the
Gupta period down to the Senas, there were gotras among
the Bengal Brahmins?

Epigraphic records mention these same Bhāradvāja,[48]
Sāṇḍilya,[49] Sāvarṇa,[50] Kauśika,[51] Vatsya[52] Brahmins, in
each case versed in Vedic learning and culture. It was
evidently from this forefathers, and not from Brahmins
invited by Ādiśūra, that they obtained these gotra-names.

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45.   ibid. pp.47-56.
46.   ibid. pp.93-96.
47.   Rādhīya Kulakārikā.
48.   Gr. of Dharmāditya. SI.I. Nos.43-44; Silimpur ins of
       Jayapāla. EI. XIII. p.283ff.
49.   Āmgachhi gr of V. Pāla III.E.I.XV. pp.293-301;
       Rāmpāla cp. of Sri Chandra. ꝗꝗ.III. pp.5-8.
50.   Belavā cp of Bhojavarman IB.III. pp.14-24.
51.   Dhulla cp of Sri Chandra. ibid. pp.165-66.
52.   Govinda cp of L. Sena. ibid. pp.47-56.

These overwhelming proofs clearly show the existence
of Brahmanical strongholds in Bengal and thereby lead us
to reject the myth of Ādiśūra. In fact, there were
continuous Brahmanical activities in Bengal from the Gupta
age onwards and almost certainly much earlier, and there is
no valid evidence of decline or corruption at any time.

That the Ādiśūra legend is totally false can be
proved further by reference to another fact. According to
the tradition the Kāyastha caste was non-existent in
Bengal until in the 10th century Ādiśūra brought them
along with the Brahmins from Kanauj.[53] But Kāyasthas are
mentioned with the Brahmins in most of the copper plates we
have noticed.

Though we have rejected the Ādiśūra tradition as
historical fact we cannot neglect it entirely. We must
seek an explanation of how and why it arose, and why it
took the form it did.

In furnishing answers to these questions we have to
go through some at least of the more important Kulapañjikās
and to judge what their opinions are.

It appears that the work of Dhruvānanda Miśra[54] is
the earliest Kulaśāstra; it is said to have been written

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53. D. Miśra: Gauḍa Vaṁśāvali.

54. ibid.

during the period of the Senas. But this claim has been
challenged by Rama Prasad Chandra [55] who believes that
of
most/the Kulapañjikās were written after the Muslim
occupation.

Much earlier than the above ~~Kulapankija~~ Kulapañjikā we have a
record of a King Ādiśūra in neighbouring Mithila. This
is found in Vāchaspati Miśra's Nyāyakanikā,[56] a commentary
on Mandana Miśra's Vidhviveka, which according to the text
itself was composed in 841 A.D., and which refers to a
local King Ādiśūra then ruling. We may tentatively
suggest that at some later date certain Bengali purohitas
who served as matchmakers among the better classes
imported the name of Ādiśūra from the traditions of the
neighbouring region and by associating themselves and some
of the higher classes with him gave prestige to their own
sections of society. It is well known that in pre-Muslim
times and the Mithila Brahmins were very famous for their
learning and sanctity, and it is not surprising that
legends should pass from them to their followers in Bengal.

Attempts have also been made by the Kulāchāryas to
identify some Kulin Brahmins as described in their Kula-
śāstras with some Brahmins of the historical period.
The Śaktipur[57] (Murshidabad) plate of Lakshmanasena
mentions a Brahmin donee named Kuvera, the son of Ananta,
grandson of Prithvidhara and great grandson of Aniruddha,
with their gotra Śāndilya.[58]

55: G.R. p.27.
56: Benares ed. p.290; VSPP. LVII. p.68.
57: EI. XXI. pp.211-19.
58: ibid. ll. 41-42.

These names are more or less identical with those
found in the writings of the _ghatakas_,[59] where there is the
mention of three orthodox Brahmin brothers named Devala,
Vāmana and Kuvera, sons of Dharmāṁśu, grandsons of Pitho
and great grandsons of Aniruddha.

Thus the names in the grant, Kuvera and Aniruddha,
are the same, and Pitho is evidently a contracted form of
Prithvīdhara. Ananta is possibly a cogomen of Dhasma-
viṣṇu (Dharmāṁsu may be read as such), since the god
Viṣṇu has the cognomen _Anantaśayin_. The gotra is the same
in both cases. Aniruddha of the Śāṇḍilya gotra is said by
the Ghatakas, to have been one of the Brahmins brought to
Bengal by Ādiśūra.

But the Aniruddha of the Śaktipur grant must have
lived long after the traditional date of Ādiśūra, towards
the end of the Pāla period. It would appear that the
creators of the Ādiśūra tradition incorporated the names
of the known ancestors of certain Brahmin families,
without regard to their dates, in order to add prestige
to their patrons' stock.

Furthermore, there are other hints of historical factors
which may have contributed to the development of the
traditional account. Most of the _Kulaśāstras_ describe
Ādiśūra as coming of a Śūra dynasty, mentioning all his
successors with names ending in Śūra. The Barrackpore plate[60]

59. VJI. Brāhmaṇa Kāṇḍa. pp.140,155,162.
60. IB. III. pp.57-67. 11.119-20.

of Vijayasene states that Vilasadevī his queen came of
a Sūra family of Rāḍha, and gave birth to Ballāla.

The expression Śūrakulambodhikaumudī used in regard to
Vilasadevī might seem to corroborate the Ādiśūra story,
connecting him with the Senas of Bengal. But at the same
time it helps us to refute it.   R.D. Banerji quotes an
extract from a Kulaśāstra:[61]

Rājñaḥ saptama-santānasya dauhitrobhūd Vallālākhaḥ.
i.e. Ballāla was the daughter's son of the seventh
descendant of Ādiśūra. At the same time Banerji shows in
another place that Ballāla was described as the daughter's
son of Ādiśūra. These contradictory statements,[62] he says
definitely prove 'that the majority of the genealogical
works of Bengal are not reliable sources of historical
information'.

There is no doubt that a Sūra-family ruled in Rāḍha
about 1025 A.D., for this is proved by the Tirumalai
inscription,[63] mentioning the name of the King as Raṇa-
śūra. The family had matrimonial relations with the Senas
to whom it, evidently became subordinate. It seems likely
that the Sūra family survived at least throughout the
reign of Ballālasena, and probably long afterwards. As a
small line of local chieftains it may well have continued
after the Muslim conquest. We may suggest that the story
of Ādiśūra arose among Brahmins patronised by this family.

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61. EI. XV. p.279.
62. Vāṅgālar Itihāsa (2nd ed) p.161.
63. EI. IX. p.232; Mem. A.S.B. V. no.3. pp.72-73.

They had heard of the Ādiśūra of Mithila tradition, and
falsely associated him with the Sūras of Bengal as the
first ancestor of the family. And they strengthened
their own ties with it and added to their own and their
patrons' prestige by developing the story about the
fictitious ancestors of both.

Another garbled historical recollection may have found
its way into the story of Ādiśūra in the name of Kamalāyudha
Yaśovarmodeva, the King of Kanauj with whom Ādiśūra fought.
It is common knowledge that there was a powerful King of
Kanauj named Yaśovarman who ruled in circa 730 and who
fought and defeated a King of Bengal. His name was
remembered in later centuries through the Prakrit poem
Gaudavaho of Vākpati. It may be suggested that this feature
of the legend was developed by Brahmins who had read the
Gaudavaho, which, incidentally, states that Yaśovarman
killed the King of Bengal, whose name is not given. The
Ādiśūra story admitted the defeat of the hero in the
first instance, but did not allow his killing. The
fantastic story of Ādiśūra's victory by the trick of
putting Brahmins and cattle in the van of his army, might
well have been devised by a much later Bengal Pandit who
knew the Gaudavaho. Yaśovarman must have defeated the King
of Bengal, because the text said so, But there was no
record of the lasting control of Bengal by Kanauj. Therefore
Yasovarman's victory was not permanent, and must have been

followed by a defeat. Hence the Bengal royal family
cannot have been extirpated as the text of Gaudavaho
states. But Yaśovarman was a great conqueror and the
defeated King of Bengal would not have had the strength
to turn the tables except by underhand methods. By some
such semi-conscious reasoning as this the study of Ādiśūra's
victory over Yaśovarman may have been developed. Kings
with names ending in Āyudha are known to have ruled in
Kanauj later in the 8th century and one of them
Chakrāyudha, is mentioned as being the vassal of Dharmapāla
of Bengal.[64] It is possible that this, transmitted in
some garbled form, accounted for Yaśovarman's title
Kamalāyudha, which is not elsewhere attributed to him.

A further feature of the story may be accounted for
by the widespread practice in India of the migration of
families and caste groups. From ancient times to modern
days the migration of people from one State to another is
a common feature of Indian life. This was not the
exception in the case of ancient Bengal at various periods.

In the Bāmon land grant of Vigrahapāla III it is[65]
stated that both the donor and the donee came from
Kolāncha or Krodāncha, which is perhaps to be identified
with Kānyakubja or Kanauj.[66] In this land record the

64. EI. II. p.350f.
65. ibid. XXIX. pp.48-57.
66. RHB. pp.479-80.

donor Ghaṇṭisa described himself as the servant of the
lord of Gauḍa.[67] Thus an immigrant Brahmin from Kolāñcha
or Kanauj took part in the political life of Bengal under
the Buddhist Pālas, and on the other hand he maintained his
social heritage by donating land in favour of another
Kanauj Brahmin, Ghāṇṭukaśarman. In another plate of
Vigrahapāla III[68] the Brahmin donee Khoduladevaśarman was
also an immigrant from Krodāñchi.

There are numerous records of Brahmins coming to
Bengal from other places in what is now Uttar Pradesh.
The Rāmgañj plate of Iśvaraghosha[69] (a vassal of the Pālas)
states that the Brahmin donee Bhaṭṭa-Nibbokeśarman was an
immigrant from Chaṇḍavāsa in U.P. From the Belavā plate
of Bhojavarman we learn an immigrant Brahmin, living in
north Rāḍha, coming originally from Madhyadeśa.[70] The
Barrackpore plate of Vijayasena[71] also mentions a Brahmin
donee migrating from Madhyadeśa.[72]

Thus there was a frequent flow of Brahmins from Upper
India to Bengal. Whether they came as individuals or in
groups cannot be said with certainty.   Whether they exercised
a considerable influence on the social life of Bengal or
revitalised or reformed the social outlook of the Bengalis
cannot be ascertained. In those days migration was frequent

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67. above. 1.50.
68. Āmgachhi gr, EI. XV. pp.293-301. 1.39.
69. IB.III. pp.149-57. 1.28.
70. ibid. pp.14-24. 1.43.
71. ibid. pp. 57-67. 1.33.
72. This Madhyadeśa was not a particular area, nor a small
    region; it covered a wide region including U.P., C.P.,
    and Bihar. (E.I. XXI. p.90).

and there is no concrete proof that it brought about radical and wholesale changes of custom.

Migration took place rather for political and economic reasons than for social ones. The Dāmodarpur plate inscription [73] (plate no.5) describes the Brahmin donor of the land-grant as Ayodhyaka Amṛitadeva; thus he was an immigrant from Oudh.

Oudh had been under the imperial Guptas and this man was the subject of the Gupta ruler. At the time the Guptas were on the decline and losing their outlying provinces. By now their empire was probably confined to Magadha and Bengal. In their retreat from the west some of their subjects may well have followed them. It was probably due to the declining influence of the Guptas beyond Magadha that this Brahmin Amṛitadeva migrated from Upper India to Bengal. Thus it was probably a political, and not a social reason that led him to settle in North Bengal.

Another instance of migration for a policial reason is given by the Nālandā inscription [74] of Vipulaśrīmitra dated about the eleventh century. This states that a Buddhist ascetic Karuṇaśrimitra of Somapura [75] had to leave his home when his house was set on fire by an army of

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73. SI. I. No.39. 1.6.

74. EI. XXI. pp.97-99. v.2.

75. Somapura is identified by K.N. Dikshit with Pāhārpur in north Bengal where he discovered among others some terracota sealings with an inscription Śrī Somapure Śrī-Dharmapāladeva mahāvihāre (ARASI.1927-28. pp.105-6).

Vaṅgāla,' presumably by the followers of Divya the Kaivarta
chief who, it is said, rose in arms against the later Pālas
and devastated the several parts of Puṇḍravardhana.

We have another instance of political migration after
the defeat of Lakshmaṇasena at the hands of the Muslims in
1200 A.D.[76]   The conquerors established their court at
Debkot in Dinajpur (North Bengal) and the orthodox
Brahmins fled with the fugitive king to east Bengal from
Vārendra. The Keor Vishnu image inscription of the
Sena period described the installation of a Vishnu image
by an immigrant named Vaṅgaka,[77] great grandson of
Śauriśarman, grandson of Pitāmaha and offspring of the
couple Sayoga and Anuyāmī. Here the name Vaṅgaka is
significant.   While all four members of his family bore
Sanskrit names, his name Vaṅgaka must have been given after
the State to which the family migrated, presumably that
migration had created a deep impression on the family, and
hence when the son was born he was named with this
peculiar nomenclature.

Evidence of the migration of Brahmins over comparatively
shorter distances, from one village to another, is very
widespread and needs no emphasis.

Such movements were evidently common enough and
generally had little effect on social history.   The
immigrants were apparently soon absorbed among the local

76. Keor vishnu im. ins. EI. XVII. pp.355-56.
77. ibid. 1.2.

people of the region to which they migrated and became part of its life and environment. Many passages from the epigraphic records of our period show conclusively that such immigration was always going on from the 4th to 12th century A.D., having little impact on social life.

It would thus be quite natural that the leading Brahmin families would like to believe that they came from Kanauj, which from the 7th century onwards was culturally and intellectually, and often politically also, the most important city of Northern India.

Now the question arises, if the Ādiśūra account is false, why and how did it arise and become so popular? This story is accepted even today by almost every family of Bengal.

The social structure of Bengal was so closely knit in ancient times that, though obviously stratified, it formed a single social order led by the Brahmanical group. There were Brahmanical preceptors over the lay Brahmins as well as over non-Brahmins. What the preceptor (guru) said was binding. In other words, disciples could in no case ignore or refuse to follow the advice of their preceptors with impunity.

In religious affairs and in any ceremony, whether marriage, birth or śrādha, they were guided by the laws derived by their Brahmin preceptors either from

the Śrutis, Smṛitis etc., or from other Sanskrit works
of authority. Customs prescribed by the Brahmins obtained
in every caste, village, society or family. What the
priest laid down was followed in letter and spirit by
every member of the family. All these Brahmanical laws,
dispensations, and family customs or usages seemed to
the ordinary men the repetition or continuation of the
Vedic laws and they were afraid of violating them.

Whether the story of Ādiśūra was true or false, was
not the concern of the Bengalis of the days when this
legend developed and spread; as it was taught by the
Brahmins they could not but accept it. It was perhaps
their tacit consent to the Ādiśūra legend that made it
current.

We have no record from earlier times to show that
any doubt or criticism was ever cast on this legend. When
every family of Bengal pinned its faith in the
suggestions and arguments of the Brahmin, why should they
not accept this legend in full faith?   Perhaps in this
way the Bengalis accepted this legend and it was due to
their acceptance that it remains popular today.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGINS OF CASTE

There are probably many factors involved in the rise and development of the caste system. No one of these factors is wholly responsible for it, or is more than a contributing cause.

In the first place it is beleëved that the Smṛitis are responsible for the development of caste. They had been composed in the pre-Mauryan period.[1] After the fall of the Mauryas they were re-written by Brahmins with the encouragement of Brahmins.[2] The revival of caste institutions was the aim of Brahmins, so that they might again have the leadership of the Hindu society. Hence they induced the Hindus, it is alleged, to believe in the Smṛitis rather than the Vedas.[3] The Vishnu Samhita, Gautoma Samhita, Paraśara Samhita, Uśanas Samhita, Atri Samhita, Vyāsa Samhita, Śankha Samhita etc were named by these clever Brahmins after the rishis whose names are found in the Ramāyaṇa, Rāmāyaṇa, although these sages never propounded the customs and usages embeded in the Smṛitis. These texts are replete with stringent rules regarding marriage, dining and the right to Vedic study,

1. D. Datta: Vaidik Varṇa pp. 34-35.

2. H. Sastri: Absorption of the Vrátyas. p.3.

3. Datta: op cit.p.36

prescribed for the different castes.

The detailed elucidation of the Smṛitis would require many pages. Here we consider only their ideas of how the multiplication of castes took place. According to the Vishṇu Samhitā pratiloma marriage, i.e., marriage between a man of lower caste and a woman of higher caste, must be condemned;[4] but it allows anuloma marriage, i.e., marriage between a man of higher and a woman of lower caste. Thus a man belonging to the Brahmiṇ class can marry a woman coming from any of the three non-Brahmiṇ castes. But the śloka anulomaṣu mātṛi varṇa[5] led to the creation of new castes. Of a marriage between a Brahmin male and a Kshatriya female the joint issue, according to this śloka, took the caste of the mother, i.e., Kshatriya.

Such a son, though born of a Brahmin father, would not be accepted by the Brahmins and moreover would be detested by the Kshatriya as the son of a renegade. His chief associates would be people of birth similar to himself and these would form a new caste.

The Tipperāh plate of Lokanātha[6] (7th century A.D.) offers us such an example of anuloma marriage and the resulting issue becoming a member of another caste. Verse 2 describes the great-grandfather of Lokanātha as a Bhāradvāja Brahmin.

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4. XV1.3.

5. XV1.2.

6. EI.XV.pp. 301-15.

Similarly verse 6 describes the great-grandfather and grandfather of his mother as dvija-varaḥ and dvija-sattamaḥ respectively. But his mother's father Keśava is stated in the same verse to have been a Pāraśava by caste. According to Manu, Pāraśava means a Śūdra.[7] Thus Lokanātha's father's and mother's side were mainly of pure Brahmin descent, but he could not be classed as a Brahmin, as his maternal grandfather Keśava was a Pāraśava, since Keśava's Brahmin father married a Śūdra lady. Though Lokanātha's father was apparently a pure Brahmin, when he married the Pāraśava Keśava's daughter, Gotradevī, the resulting issue must have been other than Brahmin. Hence according to the prevailing caste-idea of the time, Lokanātha described himself as a Karaṇa, a man of a mixed caste.[8]

We have another example of a son born of a father of higher and a mother of lower caste from the Banguon plate of Vigrahapāla III.[9] The dūtaka or executor of the land-grant referred to in this plate is said to have been the mantrin Prahasitarāja, who is described as a man son of the king Vigrahapāla III. It is thought - provoking that in all the epigraphic records of the Pālas the other sons of reigning kings mentioned are referred to by names ending in - pāla. Here the king's son was known as rāja. Why was the title rāja used in preference to pāla? Was Prahasitarāja born of a lady

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7. IX. 178.

8. V.9.

9. EI. XXXX. pp.48-56. b.48.

of lower caste? The tenor of the record suggests this.
Vigrahapāla perhaps did not wish to undermine the position
of his son, although he knew very well that society might
not allow him to declare his son to be his legal successor.
It may be for this reason that he gave him the post of
mantrin (minister) and the title rāja, and put him in charge
of carrying out this land-grant, to make the son forget
of his degraded position in the society. Dr D.C. Sircar has
raised doubts as to whether this son was the legitimate
child of Vigrahapāla III. He might have been born of a
concubine of the King.[10]

Thus we see that the issue of an anuloma marriage
either formed a separate caste or did not hold a high
social position. Of course the last example is not wholly
conclusive. The fact that the name of Vigrahapāla's son
ends in rāja suggests that he was looked on as a Kshatriya.
Moreover, he did not occupy an inferior post, a mantrin's
social position must have been quite high. But in any case
these examples indicate one probable factor in the growth
of castes through the application of the Brahmanical law.

The Brahmanical responsibility for the growth of caste
is also pointed out by G.S. Ghurye.[11] He believes that

10. ibid. p.51.fn.1.

11. Caste & Race in India. pp.144-147.

with the decline of Buddhism Brahmanism gained ground and tightened its hold on the society. It was the Brahmins who stopped inter-dining and inter-marriage between high and low castes. It was they who made the sacrificial rituals stricter than before, and made a clear-cut distinction between things pure and impure. It was they who made society rigid by upholding social and customary etiquette, and the maintenance of such standards became the only valid passport for membership of the society.

On the other hand Hutton rejects the view that the caste system was the ingenious device of the twice-born class. In his view this institution was deeply rooted in the social life of India and no administrative measure or religious sanction could change or modify it. 'It is organic rather than artificial.'[12]

We are inclined to agree with Hutton and find no reason to attribute the growth of the caste system to the Brahmin only. Of course the priestly class had supreme authority over the society and to some extent could mould it according to their will. But though they may have contributed something to the growth of caste, they should not be held totally responsible for the permanent division of Hindu society in this way.

Not only had the Brahmin to adhere firmly to the rituals and thereby set examples of the orthodox way of social life, but also the Kshatnya kings usually supported

12. Caste in India (3rd ed.) p.170.

them. The Sonpat copper seal inscription of Harshavardhana[13] (found at Delhi) states that most of the members of the Pushyabhūti dynasty were engaged in regulating all the castes and stages of religious life. The Asirgadh copper seal inscription of Sarvavarman (found in Burhanpur in M.P.)[14] similarly states that the Maukhari King Mahārāja Harivarman observed and regulated the rules of the different castes. The Pālas of Bengal too proved themselves to be the defenders of caste.[15] We have already seen that, although they were devout Buddhists, they followed the Brahmanical way of life. The Kings took a ritual bath in the river Ganges before making a land-grant, and the grants were made on auspicious days as marked by the Hindu calender; They favoured the Brahmins with the bestowal of villages, and obeyed their gods; they were eager to listen to the stories of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata.

In view of this evidence we can agree with Hutton so far as to admit that Brahmanical responsibility was not the only factor in the rise of the caste system. The orthodox way of Hindu life was adhered to by the Kshatriya Kings and even by the Buddhists.

In fact, Brahmanic ritual and the Hindu social system cannot be regarded as something imposed arbitrarily on a

13. GI. p.232. 1.5.
14. ibid. p.220. 11.1-2.
15. Monghyr cp of Devapāla, EI. XVIII. p.304. v.5.

servile populace who resented it and felt no need for it.
For reasons which it is impossible to specify with
certainty in this day and age, the division of castes and
the hierarchic structure of society met the needs of most
sections of the population of India, giving them a sense
of security and order. India may have been psychologically
prepared for the caste system, as Hutton has suggested, by
the age old customs of non-Aryan tribal peoples, and
survivals of such customs may well have led the early Hindus
to divide themselves into castes.[16] They were certainly
encouraged to do so by the Brahmins; but it is naive and
unrealistic to attribute the remarkable social system of
India, into the framework of which nearly every Indian of
earlier generations felt himself to fit naturally, solely
to the machinations of an arrogant and designing priesthood
anxious to perpetuate its influence.

It has been held by some scholars like Gilbert[17] that
geographical divisions such as sea-coasts, agricultural
lands, uncultivated land, pastoral ground, mountainous and
arid regions helped much in the growth of diverse castes.
In other words, this ecological reason led to the
differentiation of the people into various groups and
formed the basis of the caste system. The people
accustomed to the climate of riverine or riparian borders
took to a life of fishing, and they ultimately formed the

16. HCI. cp.XII.
17. People of India. pp.29,56.

fisher and boating caste. Similarly, the people living in and around the agricultural lands became the cultivator casts and those dwelling in the uplands formed the mountain tribes. Also, the distribution of different mineral resources and other products on the earth helped much in forming social divisions among the people. Thus people living in different zones showed the peculiar characteristics adaptable to these areas, leading to caste-like organisation.

The theory is to some extent borne out in Bengal, where we find that the Kaivartas or fisher caste who headed a revolt against the later Pālas lived in the land of Vārendra, which is covered by a network of rivers.

Thus geography may be one of the factors in the growth of caste institutions. But this cannot hold good in all cases. If some trading and professional castes arose through geographical and ecological factors this cannot be the case with the Brahmins, who had no local background, and the same must be true of many other lower castes, traditionally engaged in crafts practised all over the land.

A.M.T. Jackson,[18] basing his view on the work of Colebrooke, is of opinion that some sort of internal government helped the gradual growth of castes. Direction or imposition from the higher authorities also tended to the formation of the collective caste-customs of individual castes and sub-castes. Jackson points out that many regions or places are called after the name of a caste or sub-caste

18. JASB. III. 1907; 'Note on the history of the caste system

and cites numerous examples from the old Bombay Presidency.

The Jātakas supply us with places named after their prodominant caste. - the carpenter village,[19] the potter village,[20] etc. From the Belwa plate of Mahipāla I we learn of a Kaivarta-grāma[21] (the Kaivarta caste living in this place), and a Brāhmaṇa-grāma (an abode of Brahmins in Koṭivarsha a division of Puṇḍravardhana) is mentioned in the theĀmgāchhi grant of Vigrahapāla III. These may be examples of castes naming their permanent abode according to their caste-names, as if to form exclusive and separate caste divisions from the others. This seems to be a step towards the crystalisation of caste institutions.

Jackson's view may be partly right, but it does not account for all the phenomena, for it is quite clear from the many land-grants from the time of the Guptas to that of the Senas that many caste groups would regularly live together in a single settlement. Thus we cannot wholly accept Jackson's theory that all the castes and sub-castes developed on the basis of occupational groups, settling together in a single village and forming their own local government.

Some authorities, including Stanley Rice[23] and E.A.H. Blunt,[24] are of the opinion that the most important

19. J.II. p.18.
20. ibid. III.p.281.
21. EI. XXIX. pp.1-9. l.29.
22. ibid. XV. p.297. l.24.
23. Hindu Customs. p.48ff.
24. Caste system of Northern India. p.229ff.

factor in the growth of the caste system was the formation
of guilds or corporations which gradually developed over
the Hindu period down to the time of Muslim domination.
When crafts and trade came into being alongside the
agricultural profession, they led to the division of
labour. In this way Hindu society was formed. Gradually
the agricultural and trading classes formed exclusive
groups to uphold their respective interests. Thus there
was a steady process of development from classes to
corporations and from corporations to castes, and in this
way different castes named after their particular crafts
came into existence. We know that in ancient India the
mercantile and trading community formed corporations or
guilds on a co-operative basis.[25]

Generally those who carried on trading in particular
commodities formed an exclusive guild. The son took up
the profession of the father and joined the association.
In this way guild membership became hereditary. This
process undoubtedly helped the development of some of
the castes of India.

In the opinion of Slater[26] and N.K. Dutta[27]
exclusiveness of occupation was prevalent among the
Indians even before the advent of the Aryans. Hereditary
occupations and the tendency for marriage to be arranged
between persons of the same occupation and group led to

25. MFSONEI. p.260f; Bose: Social & Rural Economy of North
     India. p.283.
26. Dravidian Elements in Indian Culture. p.23ff.
27. Das Altindische Volkstum. referred to by Hutton, HCI.

the development of caste. It is suggested that marriage
outside the prescribed group was banned even in pre-Aryan
society. The Aryans after entering India left the social
organisation of pre-Aryan days more or less intact.
Different occupational classes later formed further castes.
The common craft followed by the parents and predecessors
was taken by their descendants.   In this way, generation
after generation, a particular occupation and its trade
secrets were confined to a particular collective group.

But this theory cannot account for all the phenomena
of caste. We have many examples of members of one caste
taking the occupation of another and the Smritis made full
allowance for this change. Moreover similar tendencies
towards hereditary craft exclusiveness existed in many
ancient and medieval societies, but did not result in a
caste system.

Dahlmann[28] suggested that caste is due to the combined
action of religious, political, social and economic
causes. According to this German scholar Indian society
was originally organised in three natural groups, - the
priesthood, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Each of them
had its respective functions and had to stick to them. The
task of the priesthood was religious, that of the nobility
political, and that of the bourgeoisie socio-economic.
Within such classes particularly castes tended to become

28. Das Altindische Volkstum. referred to by Hutton. HCI.
     p.171.

cut off from other castes.

But we have already seen that absolute craft and professional exclusiveness has never prevailed in India, and cannot be looked on therefore as an absolutely essential feature of the caste system. Thus, we can say that the factors put forward by Dahlmann may have contributed to the growth of castes, but were not the main reason for them.

Hocart suggested that the origin of caste was ritualistic.[29] He pointed out that the system of the four Varnas which led to the division of society was meant primarily for ritualistic purposes. The four Varnas are each represented by a colour, - white, red, yellow and black respectively.

But the ritual observances of the Hindus have much in common for all castes, and though ritual practices may have had some influence in bringing about the institution of the four Varnas they cannot account for the many castes of later times. So Hocart's theory of caste on the basis of ritual cannot be accepted wholeheartedly.

Racial differences have been cited by many authorities,[30] as the springhead of Indian social divisions. O'Malley has tried to show that when the Aryans came to India they set up their uniform social

29. Les Castes quoted by Hutton. p.176.

30. (a) O'Mally: India Social Heritage pp.9-10; (b) H. Rao: Indian Caste System. p.66; (c) Ghurya: Caste & Race in India. ch. VII.

organisation as well as their political machinery. A
cleavage between them and the Dravidians ensued over
questions of race-superiority, social status and
family tradition. Nevertheless, some Aryans married
Dravidian women. Yet a clear-cut racial distinction
still remained and iter-marriage aggravated it. The
Aryans were very anxious to preserve their racial purity,
dominant position and standard of living. Naturally
they relegated to a lower status the children of mixed
marriages.

Sir Herbert Risley[31] speaks of this hypergamy
arising out of racial differences. He suggests that
inter-marriage between the 'fair-complexioned invaders
and dark-coloured aborigines produced progeny which,
being shut off from the Aryan fold, formed new social
divisions. What Aryans did in respect of non-Aryans
was followed by Brahmins in respect of non-Brahmins.
The Brahmins wanted to maintain their race-purity, and
adopted similar practices of social demarcation. This
policy of the Brahmins was also followed by the inter-
mediate castes against the very lowest groups, and in
this way the many-storied caste-edifice was built up,
wherein each social division remained aloof from the
others.

The hypothesis of Risley is more or less consistent
with the traditional account of the origin of low castes

31. The People of India. pp.178ff.

as given by Manu, but it hardly accounts for all the
phenomena. It seems hardly likely that racial
distinctions accounted for all caste elements found
in the historical period and we have no definite evidence
to substantiate the view that race-consciousness
encouraged any caste to look down on the caste below
it or that in any other way racial disparity led to
the multiplicity of existing castes.

Senart[32] has tried to show family-worship, family-
meals eaten in common and belief in ancestral family
spirits as the basis of caste. These produced a
particularistic feeling which led to the exclusiveness
of one group of people in their relations with others.
Such an attitude was developed by the Indian priestly
class, because they had their particular family
traditions and family dignity and developed scruples
against mixing with others of inferior descent or
professing other faiths. Such an exclusive spirit was
the breeding ground of many restrictions which in turn
created walls of separation.

Senart rejected racial, occupational and functional
theories, but put emphasis on the family worship which
hardened the social structure of India. His explanation
is not wholly satisfactory. We have already seen that
the Brahmanical class must not be blamed as the sole
creator of caste institutions.

32. Les Castes dans l'Inde (tr) E. Denison: Pt.II. Chaps.
III & IV.

Another factor may be pointed out as contributing to the growth of castes, although it cannot be held as the main one. Groups of travelling craftsmen and entertainers may have helped considerably in the development of various lower castes. Thus the Jātakas mention conch-blowers,[33] musicians,[34] elephant-tamers,[35] archers,[36] snake-charmers,[37] dancers[38] etc. Each seems to have formed a body, akin to a caste, the sons following their father's occupation.

Hutton[39] points out some characteristics prevalent among the hill tribes of Assam akin to the caste system. In the Naga tribal area each village forms a self-contained social and political unit through its exclusiveness and by the occupation of the respective villagers.

Some villages are engaged in making pots only, some in weaving cloth. Thus one particular occupation marks off a group of villagers from the others. They also barter their finished goods with their neighbouring villagers. Sometimes immigrants from one village come to the next. Then we find an exclusive spirit developing among the hosts. If the hosts carry on some particular business, they will not allow the strangers to pursue their own occupation if it is different from the former's

33. J.I. p.284.
34. ibid. 384; II. 250.
35. ibid. II. 221.
36. ibid. 87. V. 128.
37. ibid. 267.
38. ibid. IV. 324.
39. HCI. Ch. XII.

ancestral craft. It is the belief of the hosts that
the atmosphere of their village will be spoiled if
the strangers are allowed to carry on their own craft.
They will not even allow the strangers to take certain
foods which are exclusive to themselves. Thus a sort
of cordon is set up, and fosters an exclusive spirit.
This practice seems to display some features of caste.

We have examined the main theories held by the
sociologists on the reasons for the growth of castes.
We are inclined to feel that none of them satisfactoril
explains the caste system, and the factors they cite
are only symptoms or contributory causes. All of these
factors contributed to the caste system to xx some extent
but not to the full. Caste is a complex system,
involving several conflicting principles. As such, we can-
not hold any factor as the main or cardinal reason for
the growth of caste. The social groupings of the Indian
peoples cannot be explained by conjectures or plausible
theories, and many problems connected with the caste
system are still insoluble and unexplained.

From the Dāmodarpur collection[1] we have evidence
of the presence of such Brahmins and of orthodox Brah-
manical sacrifices such as <u>agnihotra</u> rites (plate no.1) and
the <u>panchamahāyajñas</u> practised in the Dinajpur district,
the find-spot of these plates. The Pāhārpur copper grant[2]
dated 159 Gupta era '479 A.D.) introduces us to an
orthodox religious family. The Dhanāidaha copper
inscription[3] (found in the Natore sub-division of Rajshahi)
gives évidence of Brahmanical strongholds in this area
where were found different types of Brahmins, both
priestly and lay. The Khālimpur plate of Dharapāla[4]
(found in the Malda district of North Bengal) describes a
priestly Brahmin worshipping the gods Śiva and Vishṇu.
In the Belwā plate (A) of Mahipāla I[5] (discovered in the
Dinajpur district) we find another Brahmin, Jīvadhara-
devaśarman versed in the Vedic lore. The Bāngarh grant[6]
of the same king (found in the same district) shows us that
temples were erected for the Brahmanical gods and lands
were granted in favour of an orthodox Brahmin. The Belwā
plate (B) of Vigrahapāla III[7] speaks of a well-known
scholarly Brahmin who was reputed for his command over
Mīmāmsā, grammar and logic. In the Amgāchhi grant of
this King[8] (found in Dinajpur) we also meet these learned
Brahmiṇs.

1. SI. I. nos. 18-19,34,36,39.
2. EI.XX. p.61.
3. ibid. XVII. p.345ff.
4. ibid. IV. p.343f.
5. ibid XXIX. pp.1-9.
6. ibid. XV. p.324f.
7. ibid. XXIX. pp.9-13.
8. ibid. XV. p.293ff.

The Brahmanical centre in West Bengal was more or less like the former in the north. The Vāppaghoshavāta grant of Jayanāga[9] (found in Mālliā in Murshidabad) of the 6th century A.D. indicates six different small centres of the Brahmin's abode in the district. The Naiharti plate of Ballālasena[10] states that the village bestowed on the Brahmin donee was in Uttara-Rādha of the Vardhamānabhukti.. The Govindapur plate of Lakshmaṇasena[11] locates the village donated to a Brahmin in the same region, Vardhamāna. The Bhavadeva Praśāstiḥ[12] shows that in Rādha the family of this scholar orthodox Brahmin lived for generation after generation. It was for their fame and name that their village, Siddhāla was known as the 'Ornament of Rādha'.

From the foregoing evidence it is reasonable to say that the northern and western regions of Bengal were influenced by Brahmanical ideals rather earlier than the eastern and southern zones of Bengal. The Mahāsthān Brahmi inscription suggests that the organisation of these areas preceded the diffusion of Aryan culture in the other parts of Bengal. This was probably due to the location of these areas adjoining the country of Magadha, the centre of culture and learning from pre-Mauryan times onwards.

This flow of Brahmanical influence was first concentrated in these zones and then spread to the other

9. ibid. XVIII. p.60ff.
10. JB. III. p.68ff.
11. ibid. pp.92-98.
12. EI. VI. pp.203-7.

parts, as is indicated by the Faridpur collection,[13]
pointing to the existence of Brahmanical strongholds in
southern Bengal and by the Tipperāh copper plate of
Lokanātha[14] which gives evidence of the location of
orthodox and Chaturvedin Brahmins in Tipperah.

The other inscriptions, such as the Deulbādi Sarvāṇi
image inscription[15] dated in the 8th century, the
Bāghaura Nārāyaṇa image inscription[16] dated 976 A.D.
(issued in the third year of Mahipāla I), the Bhārella
Nartteśvara image inscription[17] dated in the 10th century,
and the Keor Vishṇu image inscription[18] dated in the 13th
century, give evidence of the flourishing Brahmanical
gods. Some of the epigraphic records of the Chandras,
Varmans and Senas show the existence of Brahmanical
centres in East Bengal, as they were issued from Vikrampur,
once a centre of learning and the capital of these dynasties

Thus we have ample evidence of the existence of
the Brahmins in early Bengal. But, owing to the lack
of authentic records as to their origin it is difficult
or virtually impossible for us to say whether these
Brahmins were native or immigrants from the other
regions of upper India. Although we have rejected the

Ādiśūra story, there is evidence of the immigration of
the members of the priestly class even before the accepted
date of Ādiśūra. Of course, our statements are based on

13. SI. I. Nos. 43-45. pp.350-59.
14. EI. XV. pp.301-15.
15. ibid. XVII. pp.357-59.
16. ibid. ββ. 353-55.
17. ibid. p.349f.
18. ibid. pp.355-56.

slender evidences, and we are not sure whether the immigrants came to Bengal either as individuals or in groups, or whether they brought with them their wives or married the native women of Bengal.

We have already pointed out that Brahmins from upper India came to Bengal from time to time. In the Gupta period, as shown from a Dāmodarpur grant (plate no. 5), a Brahmin named Amṛitadeva came from Oudh. In the Bāngaon land grant of Vigrahapāla III[20] both the donor and the donee came from Kolāncha, which is sometimes identified with Kanauj. The Āmgachhi grant[21] of this King introduces us to a Brahmin donee, an immigrant from Krodāncha. In the Rāmganj plate of Iśvaraghosha[22] we have the Brahmin donee coming from Chanḍavāra in U.P. Both the Belavā plate of Bhojavarman[23] and the Barrackpore grant of Vijayasena[24] describe the Brahmin granters as coming from Madhyadeśa.

These isolated pictures of migration show that it has a history running back to the days of antiquity. There was probably a regular flow of Brahmins from the other regions of India to Bengal. Thus Brahmanical influence, like Aryan civilisation may have come in gradually and the Brahmin gradually colonised the different parts of Bengal.

20. EI. XXIX. pp.48-57.
21. ibid. XV. pp.293-301. 1.39.
22. IB. III. pp.149-57. 1.28.
23. ibid. pp.14-24. 1.43.
24. ibid. pp.57-67. 1.33.

GOTRA.

The etymology of the term gotra is very obscure and need not concern us here. Its primary meaning in our period was, and still is, an exogamous group of Brahmins claiming descent from a common ancestor, who was one of the legendary rishis. Kshatriyas and Vaiśyas generally looked upon themselves as belonging to the same gotra as their hereditary family priests.[25]

As well as by his gotra a Brahmin was also known by his pravaras. These were the names of other legendary rishis mentioned regularly in family ritual, and believed to be collateral ancestors of the family. The main importance of pravara was in the matter of matrimony. since common pravaras, even among persons of different gotra, formed a bar to marriage.[26]

A further Brahmanical classification was the Śākhā, the branch or recension of the Vedas which a given priestly family traditionally studied.[27] The Śākhā had few social implications, but it is often recorded in inscriptions referring to donations to Brahmins, and represented a Brahmanical school, continuing its own special traditions.

Furthermore, these Śākhās were sub-divided into numerous charanas according to divergence in practice and codes of Vedic laws. Thus the Śākhās were larger

25.   EAIL. p.165f.
26.   ibid. pp.167-68.
27.   Max Müller: History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature. pp.50-52.

religious groups, whereas the <u>charaṇas</u> were small units.
The <u>Charaṇa</u> was a later classification. The growth of
<u>Charaṇa</u> meant the break-up of the old system, when the laws
of the <u>Charaṇas</u> were put in writing.[28]

Gotra, Pravara and Śākhā traditions[29] were prevalent
among the Bengal Brahmins when our earliest evidence
appears in Gupta times.

From the list of Gotra-pravaras in the Appendix it
appears that one gotra, only that of Bhāradvāja, was
pre-dominant in all centuries and at all periods from
the Guptas to the Senas. This gotra of Brahmins was
found throughout Bengal. The next position was held by
the Vātsya Brahmins, but these Brahmins were hardly
found in the northern parts of Bengal. They were confined
to some districts of West and East Bengal.

The Kānya-Laukitya, Kauṇḍinya, Savarṇa and Vārdha-
Kauśika Gotras were not found at all in North Bengal.
Their centres can be located in a few districts of
Southern Bengal. The first two gotras mentioned
above, together with Kāśyapa and Agastya, appear in the
6th and the 7th centuries; but in later centuries they
are hardly heard of. In modern Bengal, of course, these
Gotras are to be found.

The Maudgalya and Gārgya gotras seem to be of later
development, as far as Bengal is concerned, as our early

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28. Sen Gupta: <u>Sources of Law   Society in Ancient India</u>.
    p.45.
29. A list is given in Appendix II.

records do not mention them. Brahmins belonging to the
Hastīdāsa gotra were rarely found, and they were
confined to the Dinajpur district of North Bengal. It
appears also that from the 8th century onwards the number
of gotras of the priestly class gradually increased.
Before the 8th century only five gotras are attested,
but after this period we find the number increasing to
fifteen.

Furthermore, the list gives further evidence that
the story of Ādiśūra inviting Brahmins of five gotras
from Kanauj is a mere myth. These Gotras, Bhāradvāja,
Śāṇḍilya, Sāvarṇa, Kauśika and Vātsya were already
present in different parts of Bengal from ancient times.

Pravaras mentioned in this list correspond with the
standard formulae given in the list of Brough,[30] except
that the pravaras connectioned with the Bhāradvāja gotra,
such as Vāndana, Mātavascasa and Śainya are not to be
found in our list.

The distribution of śākhās and charaṇas in different
centuries gives us some knowledge about the position of
different branches of Vedic study. The Ṛig Veda is the
oldest text, and the Brahmins of Bengal in the 6th
century A.D. were engaged in its study. But with the
passage of time it seems that eagerness to learn the
other Vedas and their branches, such as the Sāma Veda,
Yajur Veda and the Upaṇishads, grew among them. Of course

30. Early Brahmanical System of Gotra and Pravaras. p.30ff.

there were cases where the priestly class was found to put equal emphasis on the Ṛig, Sāma and Yajur Vedas.

From the 8th century onwards the different branches of each of the Vedas were paid heed to. It is specially noteworthy that, as the Atharva Veda is the latest text and was for long not accepted by many orthodox scholars, the Bengal Brahmins, as the record shows, did not pay attention to it till the 12th century. From the 8th to the first two decades of the 12th century the Ṛig Veda is not so frequently mentioned. But in the later part of the 12th century it came into the picture again. Perhaps the reason for this is that by this time the Brahmanical class was interested in the latest Vedas, so the Atharva, and they wanted/to speak to build a bridge between the Ṛig and the Atharva Vedas by showing their simultaneous knowledge of both.

The regional distribution of Ṣakhās and Charaṇas supplies us with other interesting information. As the Bhāradvāja Brahmins were found in almost all the regions of Bengal and in all centuries, so they also pursued all the branches of Vedic study. Perhaps their settlement in the various regions of Bengal led to the development of these places under their direct or indirect patronage.

The copper plates from the 12th century onwards indicate that Brahmins of different gotras appear to have studied the Vedas, particularly the Ṛig Veda and Sāma Veda,

especially in the regions of Naihati and the adjacent
place of Barrackpore. This study and Vedic knowledge
continued, and perhaps it was due to this impetus that
Naihati became a flourishing centre of learning, so
that a particular group of Brahmins arose in one town
of this region, Bhātpāḍā.   These learned Brahmins were
known as the Bhātpāḍā Brahmins from the 16th century
onwards.

We have similar evidence Navadvīpa, about 70 miles
north of Naihati. Here the study of the Sāma Veda, the
Yajur Veda and the Upanishads has continued from the
12th century. There may have been influence from
Naihati upon Navadvīpa later or vice versa. It was due
to this reason that Navadvīpa later on became the chief
centre of Sanskrit learning. Across the Ganges opposite
Navadvīpa two copper plates (in the district of
Murshidabad) dated from the 6th and 12th centuries have
been found. (Appendix). Here the Brahmins studied
different branches of the Vedas.   This wave of learning
from across the Ganges may have touched Navadvīpa and
invigorated the cultural and religious outlook of this
place.

In Rāḍha as shown from the Mullasarul plate[31], the
study of the Vedas can be traced from the 6th century A.D.
Although no further copper plate of the next four
centuries has survived from this area we can presume that

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31. EI. XXIII. p.155ff.

it continued unchecked until Bhavadeva of the eleventh
century gives us an account of his family tradition of
Vedic learning going back seven generations, all of whom
had masterly command over the Vedas, philosophy, grammar etc.

Similarly the Appendix shows that in Dacca, where in
the 15th century Vikrampur became a flourishing seat of
learning all Vedic learning was carried on except the
study of the Rig and the Atharva Veda. In North Bengal,
as has been already pointed out, the study of all the
branches of the Vedas and their sub-branches was pursued
with vigour much earlier than in other parts of Bengal.

Brahmanical Beliefs and Customs

From birth to death the Brahmanical life is moulded
by regulations and to go beyond them or violate them
requires Saṁskāra or purification. The Smritichaudrikā[32]
(written in the 14th century) describes how the birth of
a baby-boy is welcomed with the blowing of the conch in a
jubilant spirit. On the eighth day of his birth there is
held a ceremony attended by boys under nine years old, who
are given good dishes. It is believed that to satisfy
these youngsters means to adore God, as He is supposed
to reside in every boy's heart, which is always pure. So
by this ceremony divine blessing is showered on the new-
born baby.

The Kṛityaratnākara[33] (written in the 14th century)
instructs that a new-born baby should be given a name

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32. (Bengali tr) B.Mukherji. p.171.
33. ("   ) K. Bose. Chap. III. p.121.

after the one month of its birth. But the Smritichandri-
kānibandha[34] states that not one name, but three names
should be given, one after the name of a god, the second
after the family-name which will be expressive all the time,
and the third the secret name which will be known to none
except the family-priest and the parents. This nāma-
karaṇa ceremony should take place not after a month, but
after six months, simultaneously with the Annaprāsana
ceremony, the rite of feeding the child with solid food
for the first time.

The next important event in the life of a Brahmin is
Upanayana, the sacred thread ceremony. All the nibandhakāra
such as Raghunandana, Vāchaspati Miśra, Aparādity Deva
and Devanna Bhaṭṭa agree in their general accounts of this
ceremony, in spite of variatins in some places.

Strictly speaking, before the performance of
Upanayana, which occurs at the age of eleven or twelve
years, the young boy is treated as, or thought to be, a
Śūdra. With initiation he steps in Brahmanhood.

The time for this ceremony is either morning or
midday. After a sacred bath the boy sits before his
preceptor (Guru), facing eastward. The Guru whispers in
the boy's ear the Gāyatri mautra which the latter is
taught to utter three times a day. He offers the boy a
string made of kuśa-grass to be fastened around the waist,
a sacrificial thread, made of cotton (which must be spun

34. above.

by a Brahmin) of which length is folded in three, and
a stick of palāśa (a kind of native plant) which is the
symbol of begging alms or the wandering life of the
Sannyāsī. For three nights he must sleep on ground,
eat only fruit, and drink the water of the Ganges.

Marriage is described by the nibandhakāra/Raghunandana[35]
as a second initiation. He declares that marriage must
be settled before puberty; otherwise the parents or
guardians have to undergo Saṃskāra. Śūlapāṇi, one of
the judges of Lakshmaṇasena's court, in his nibandha[36]
tries to prove by numerous citations from Yājñavalkya and
other Smṛitis that unless a suitable bride or bridegroom
has been found as the case may be, and unless the union
is found to be suitable on the basis of horoscopes, no
marriage should be contracted.

<h2>OTHER PRACTICES</h2>

Orthodox Brahmins led their lives according to
routine. Their meals should be cooked by a Brahmin. The
contrary practice will lead to defilement, for which
purification is needed.[37] On all auspicious days and
festivals strict orthodoxy is to be maintained. On the
Ekādaśī tithi (eleventh day of the lunar month) fasting is
to be practised.[38] On most days of festival fasting, gifts
to the poor, bathing in the Ganges, and constant utterances
of the names of the Gods and Goddesses are prescribed.[39]

35. Udvāhatattva MSS No.191 b (1419) [Ind.Office] (tr) K.
    Bhaltacharyya. p.97. fn.1.
36. Dīpakalikā MSS. No.1278a (1287) quoted in Manasi.B.S.
    1322 p.233.
37. Vṛiddha-Śātātapa Smṛiti MSS.69e (1360); quoted in Manasi.ibi

An orthodox Brahmin should rise early in the morning between 4 A.M. and 6 A.M. His first act is to utter the name of gods or goddesses. He then bows to the floor with the divine name on his lips and good thought in his mind. Then, with open eyes, he looks at the picture of his chosen divinity either in reality or in imagination.[40]

After this he has to rinse and gargle his mouth and wash his face, and then perform Saucha (evacuation), after which he should change his dress. There are different rules about these practices which vary according to the age of the Brahmin concerned.[41] Penances are prescribed for not practising any of them properly.[42]

In bathing and worshiping gods similar prescribed rituals are also maintained.[43]

In a funeral procession no other caste should follow the corpse of a Brahmin. The Brahmins themselves were not allowed to touch the dead body except the relatives of the deceased.[44] Before setting fire to the funeral pyre, the priest in charge of the burning ghat utters the names, gotras and pravaras of the dead and of his or her forefathers with the hope that soul may rest in peace.[45]

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40. Sātāta a Smṛti. op cit.
41. Smṛtichandrikā MSS. āchārakāṇḍa. folio 148. op cit.
42. ibid. Prāyaśchittadhyāya, folio 122. (Ṛg. Veda III. 62.10 quoted)
43. ibid.
44. ibid.
45. ibid.

In discussing the Bāngaon plate of Vigrahapāla III[50]
Dr D.C. Sircar points out that Narasimha was perhaps the
preceptor of the Brahmin donee Ghaṇṭukśarman. Similarly in
the Belwā plate [51] of the same King he cites another
example, that the donee, Jayānanda devaśarman was the
disciple of Śrī-Ananta. Thus we have evidence that
during the Pāla period the practice of preceptoship was
prevalent, as it no doubt was even before this. It is
through the Gotra system that the name of the preceptors
or family priest has been kept alive.

Some of the Brahmins practised astrology, and were
well versed in astrological calculations and palmistry.
They claimed to be able to foresee the shape of things to
come, and to foretell events in advance. To check any
future mishaps or for the appeasement of angry gods the
service of these Brahmins was called upon.

In the Rāmpāla plate of Śrī-Chandra [52] and the
Belavā plate of Bhojavarman[53], as well as the Mādhāinaḡar
plate[54] and the Tarpanadighi plate[55] of Lakshmaṇasena we
meet such Brahmins.

The Temple Brahmins were engaged in worshipping the
images installed in the temples. Because of this purity
only they were entitled to touch the images, bathe them

50. EI. XXIX. pp.48-56.
51. ibid. pp.9-13.
52. IB. III. p.8.
53. ibid. pp.14-24.
54. ibid. pp.106-115.
55. ibid. pp.99-105.

and dress them. For all these performances they received
fees, which in modern times may be either in cash or in
kind. In ancient Bengal we have no clear evidence of cash
given to these priests, for their services; but they were
regularly given means and materials for their maintenance
and livelihood, as is shown by many copper-plate grants.

In the Dāmodarpur collection[56](last two plates) we
find (plate no.4) that a businessman named Ribhupāla
wanted to purchase a large measure of land of which 4
kulyavāpas were to be devoted to the temple of Kokāmukha-
svāmīn and 7 Kulyavāpas to that of Śvetavarāha-svāmīn.
The first may have been a *linga* of Śiva and the second an
image of the Boar incarnation of Vishnu. He was further
in need of some vāstu or building ground, presumably for
the residences of the temple Brahmins. Thus these two
temples received sources enough to maintain the officiating
priests.

Plate no. 5 states that the donor Amṛitadeva was
eager to purchase one Kulyavāpa of uncultivated (Khila)
and rent-free land for provision to be made for the
repair and maintenance of the shrine of Bhagavān Śvetavarāha-
Svāmīn. It was presumably to be placed in charge of a
Brahmin whose name is not mentioned. Numerous other
land grants of our period refer to similar donations.

We also find the priest functioning in a non-religious
sphere. The Brahmins in ancient times, just in present day

56. SI. I. Nos. 46,39.

Bengal, did not confine themselves exclusively to priestly work. Of course they were acquainted with the Vedic principles, but they had no wide command over them like the Vaidik Brahmin and they appear to have been more interested in wordly affairs than in spiritual, though they evidently had full faith in the value of Vedic study, and in the orthodox religion and its dispensations. Hence various copper plates record land or other gifts made by lay Brahmins to orthodox Brahmins. Although they worked for money, held official posts, and enjoyed dignified positions both in social and political life, they showed a reverential attitude to the priestly Brahmins.

Brahmins belonging to this class were found occupying high administrative ranks in government or working in a private capacity. In the Dāmodarpur collection,[57] particularly the third plate, lay Brahmins figure among the members of the village board of Chaṇḍagrāma, to which the application for the purchase of land was made by the donor, Nābhaka. It was only after the collective decision of this board that permission was given for the transfer of the land. Here the Brahmins formed one section of the collective authority of the village concerned.

The Dhanāidaha plate of the time of Kumārā Gupta[58] offers us further evidence of these lay Brahmins. Here the donor was a rich Brahmin who could afford to buy and donate a considerable area of land. The Brahmins of the

57. Above.
58. EI. XVII. pp.347-48.

village formed a sort of council before which all
petitions and problems affecting the village came. Hence
the donor before donating the land approached some of
the leading Brahmins of the village who are named as
Siva/sarman, Nāgaśarman, Devaśārman etc.

In the Faridpur collection[59] (grant A) we meet a
lay Brahmin named Bṛhaccaṭṭa who was one of the members
of the district board of Puṇḍravardhana. The tenor of
the grant seems to suggest that his function was to
co-operate with the other members of the board in making
collective decisions regarding the affairs affecting
this district. Thus when the donor Sādhanika Vātabhoga
expressed his desire to purchase land situated within
this district, he could not do so without placing his
application before this board. Obviously, Bṛhaccaṭṭa
in collaboration with the other members, gave consent
to the prayer of the donor. In the second grant we find
a Brahmin named Gopāla-Svāmin occupying a high position
in the local administrative machinery. He functioned as a
customs officer in the district of Navakāsika in Puṇḍravardha-
province and had been appointed by the provincial governor
(Uparika) Nāgadan. When the Brahmin donor Vāsudeva-
Svāmin wished to purchase a plot of land in this district
he approached this Brahmin custom officer together with the
other district officers. This Brahmin too like that of

59. Above.

the first grant exercised collective authority and gave consent to the sale of the required land.

Its third grant is Similar to the second one, the only difference being that the Brahmin donor Vātsapāla-svāmīn purchased the land from another group of Brahmins belonging to the Bhāradvāja gotra. The Bhāradvāja Brahmins in those days were generally engaged in priestly activites and the study and interpretation of the Vedas. But here this is not the case, for we meet Bhāradvāja Brahmins who have been abandoned their traditional way of life and become lay. Evidently they found more interest and gain in having landed property than in sacrificial and other religious activities.

Other Brahmins of this group were engaged in agriculture, as we find in the Barrackpore plate of Vijayasena,[60] where a distinction is made between Kshetra-karān Brāhmaṇān and Brāhmaṇottarān, agriculturist Brahmins and priestly Brahmins.

Other lay Brahmins were magicians[61] who lived by displaying some strange phenomena by means of tricks, and it is said that they could turn water-vessels into gold.[62]

As well as dividing the Brahmins according to their activities, we may group them ethnically according to the place of their traditional origin. Among such groups we find Sārasvata, Kanauj, Gauḍa, Maithilī, Utkalī, Dākshiṇātya,

60. JB. III. pp.57-67. 1.30.
61. Edilpur cf. ibid. p.120f. v.16.
62. ibid.

Vaidika, Vārendra, Rāḍhī, Bhaṭṭapallī and Nadiā. These
classes are well known at the present time. It is
difficult to say how and when these divisions came into
being, as there is lack of authentic evidence, since
they are only referred to in the Kulagranthas and not
in older inscriptions and literature. Probably the
concentrated colonisation of certain Brahmins in
particular places gave rise to such divisions in some
cases. In others traditions concerning their origin in
other parts of India gave them their names.

It is said[63] that the Sārasvata Brahmins were the
first Brahmins to settle in Bengal, coming from the
sacred Sarasvati river in the Panjab. Later they become
known as Saptaśatī or Sātsatī, because when Ādiśūra
invited the Kanauj Brahmins to Bengal there were only
seven hundred indigenous Brahmins who were regarded as
degenerate. From this number (Saptā śatam) they became
known as Sātsatī.

Similarly, Brahmins claiming to have originated
from Kanauj were known as Kanauj or Pāśchātya Brahmins,[64]
while those coming from the Deccan, Mithila and Utkal
(Orissa) were known as Dākshinātya Vaidika, Maithilī and
Utkalī Brahmins respectively. Gauḍa, Vārendra, Rāḍhī,
Bhaṭṭapallī and Nadiā are apparently of later divisions
of Brahmins who took their names from the place from whence
their ancestors are said to have originated.[65]

63. R. Goswami: Vaṅgīya Brāhmaṇa Vivṛiti. pp.1-19.
64. ibid.
65. ibid.

II.

Non-Brahmin Classes

Kāyastha

This caste is the second largest group among the non-Brahmins. In our Dharmaśāstras both Kāyastha and Karaṇa are used in the sense of scribe or clerk[66] and the class of Kāyasthas included writers, record-keepers and accountants. Some Kāyasthas of North Bengal described themselves also as Karaṇas, and Karaṇa and Kāyastha thus seem to convey the same meaning.[67]

To trace the origin of the Kāyasthas requires a study of Dharmaśāstras. It has already been mentioned that the Smṛitis, which were modified and altered by the Brahmins, speak of this caste. It is said that the class of Kāyasthas included men who were cruel, greedy and given to robbery.[68] Because of these bad characteristics they were described as Śūdra.[69] But it is difficult for us to accept the Śūdra origin of the Kāyasthas in the light of the facts.

We have already seen that the people of this group held a high social position in our period. They became governors of provinces, controlled district administrations and played an important part in the village-boards. This

67. Kāyastha Patrikā. B.S. 1317. p.112.
68. Kane: op cit.
69. ibid.
66. Kane: Hist. of Dharmaśāstra. I pp. 76-77.

hardly suggests that the Kāyasthas in our period
occupied an inferior position in the society. Nor do we
find any concrete evidence in our Bengal sources to
warrant the description of them as greedy, cruel, etc.

We have seen also how Lokanātha, being a Karaṇa,
ruled over Tipperāh in the 6th century A.D., and how he
was loved by the people.

The above survey does not give us any account of the
Śūdra-theory being attached to the Kāyasthas.

The epigraphic records of Bengal have described this
caste by such names as Karaṇa, Karaṇika, lekhaka,
and Kāyastha. Although their full connotation and
denotation sometimes vary, their meaning is more or less
the same.

In the Faridpur collection[70] the same man Nayasena
in two plates (B and C) is referred to as jyeṣṭhakāyastha.
His function of record-keeping or writing is implied
here and he was evidently one of the leading men of the
province of Puṇḍravardhana. The donors in both these
plates approached him in connection with the purchase of
land. Apparently the jyeṣṭhakāyastha had to examine the
records to ensure whether the land was transferrable,
what its revenue was, and whether its sale would affect
anybody in the neighbouring regions.

In the Khālimpur plate of Dharmapāla[71] we are

70. above.
71. EI. IV. p.253. ll.43-46.

introduced to the same designation jyestha kāyastha
and side by side with it to another one, Karana. Here
the scene was the occasion of a royal land-grant where
all the local dignitaties and heads of castes were
summoned. As both these officers, the jyestha-karana
and karana were invited at the same time, it may be that
their respective functions were slightly different.
Karana here possibly denotes a scribe or clerk and
jyestha-kāyastha, the senior member of the caste of
Kāyasthas.

In the same sense we can explain the term prathama-
kāyastha in the Dāmodarpur collection,[72] meaning the
chief writer, here the chief secretary of the village
board of the Kotivarsha district of Pundravardhana
province. His position was similar to that of the jyestha-
kāyastha in the Faridpur collection.

Again, we find the mention of a mahā-kāyastha, no
doubt similar in rank to the jyestha-kāyastha, together
with a Lekhaka, or clerk, in the Rāmganj plate of
Isvaraghoṣa,[73] a vassal chief of the Pālas. The activities
of these two officers may have been essentially the same,
but the former must have been the chief of the latter.
Hence they were mentioned by different terms.

In this record too, we find another designation of
chief Kāyastha, mahākaraṇādhyaksha, or great superintendent

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72. Above.
73. GB III. p.151ff. ll. 13-18.
74. ibid. p.121f. ll. 64-65

of the secretariat. We have the other wing of Kāyastha being expressive in terms of <u>Karana</u> or <u>Karanika</u> as indicated in the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena.[74] Here the <u>Karana</u> passed the land-grant charter, acting as the clerk of the Chief Minister of the Senas. This function is also referred to in the Madanapāḍā plate of Viśvarūpāsena.[75]

Thus in ancient Bengal people of the Kāyastha caste were differently designated according to their rank and functions. As far as our sources go their activities were confined to the record-keeping and secretarial tasks, but of course some members of this caste may already have taken up other avocations.

Kielhorn has shown that <u>Karana</u> primarily denotes 'a deed, a legal document' and <u>Karanika</u> 'the writer of legal documents',[76] but towards the latter part of our period we find that <u>Karana</u> was frequently used for <u>Karanika</u>.[76a] In the Sena age the two terms, <u>Karana</u> and <u>Kāyastha</u> seem to denote the same people with little variation in their occupation. Later on, the <u>Karanas</u> are heard of no more, and they were probably merged in the Kāyasthas.[77]

<u>Vaidyas</u>.

A mythological story describes the origin of this caste. Once a Vaiśya girl offered a drink to a thirsty sage, Gālava by name. The Sage was pleased and he bestowed on her the

74. ibid. p.121f. ll.64-65.
75. ibid. pp.132-39. ll.59-60.
76. Banerji EI.IV. p.105.
76a. Banerji: Vānglār Itihās. VI. (2nd.ed) p.305.
77. J. Bhattacharyya: Hindu Castes & Sects. pp.188-89

boon that she would have a son, who when he grew up would purify her family. She replied that she was still unmarried, and asked how she could have a son. Then the Sage took her to his hermitage. The other Sages, hearing of the prophecy of Gālava declared that the words of Gālava must be maintained. They in turn prophesied that Dhanvantari, the divine physician would be born of her. Then they put a child made of Kuśa grass on the lap of the girl, and began to recite Vedic mantras. After a little while life was infused into the figure, and a child was born.

The child was called by different names: <u>Dhanvantari</u> according to the prophecy of the Sages, <u>Vaidya</u> as he was born after the recitation of the Veda, <u>Ambashtha</u> as he was born on the lap of his mother (<u>amba</u>), and <u>Amritācharyya</u> or <u>Bhishaka</u>, as he was taught medical sciences by the sages.[78] Although this is a mere myth, the modern Vaidyas refer to themselves by these different names.

In the light of modern research this mythical story cannot stand. The Vaidyas as a regular caste came into prominence after the Buddhist age, and not before.

The Vaidya was later thought of as born of the union of a Brahmin father with a Vaiśya mother.[79] Epigraphic records indicate their existence from the eighth century A.D.

78. U.C. Gupta: Jāti-tattva-Vāridhi. I. p.36.
79. MFSONEI. p.6.

when we first find the name Vaidya in some south Indian
inscriptions specially belonging to a Pāṇḍya King. The
Velvikudi grant of Neduñjaḍaiyan,[80] Madras Museum plates
of Jatilavarman[81] and Annāmālai inscriptions of

Mār
of
Vai
Māranjadaiyan[82] contain such terms as Vaidya, Vaidyakas,
Their profession was not that of the physician, but
they were versed in music, singing, oration and the
Śāstras. A Bengal inscription similarly mentions such
a caste. The Bhāterā copper plate grant of King Iśānadeva
dated eleventh century refers to one of his ministers,
the pattanika Vanamāli Kara as Vaidya-vaṁśa-pradīpa, the
light of the Vaidya stock.[83]

Māhiṣya or Kaivartas.

This is said to be a mixed caste, born of a nishāda
father and an āyogava mother.[84]   In the Buddhist age the
Kaivartas formed a class by themselves. It was their
occupation that led to the nomenclature of this caste, as
they were engaged in the act of fishing.[85]

This caste was a low one. It may be that its members
tried at one time to uplift themselves from this humble
condition by violent means. During the reign of Mahipāla II,
under the leadership of their chief Divya they came to the
forefront,[86] when they headed a revolt and defeated the Pāla
ruler.[87]

80. EI. XVII. pp.291-309.   84. M.10/34.
81. JA.1893. p.57ff.   85. Nesfield: Caste System.p.9.
82. EI. VIII. pp.317-21.   86. Sastri (Ed): Rāma charita of
83. Proc.JASA.1880, p.141ff.   S. Nandi. v.38.
                              87.

Other Castes.

Other important castes of Bengal were Tālis,
Suvarṇavaniks, Weavers, Carpenters, Potters, Goldsmiths,
Blacksmiths, Braziers, Betel-caste (Tāmvulī and Bārū=
jībī belong to this caste, both are betel-growers and
sellers), gardeners, wood-cutters, washermen, barbers,
besides some fifty types of antyajas.

A thorough study of each of these castes in more
recent times would reveal that the leading members of
each caste have tried to defend and maintain its traditions,
connecting it with the legendary and epic periods. Many
of the casts publish journals in Bengali, which record the
caste traditions, but such traditions have little if any
historical value, and throw no light on conditions in
our period.

The Suvarṇavanik caste is first referred to in Ānanda
Bhaṭṭa's Ballāla-Charita. It is said that because of a
personal grudge Ballālasena degraded this caste.[88] Although
the Ballāla-charita is fanciful and its historical value has
been doubted by many scholars, yet so far as this caste
is concerned, the King is said to be an arbiter of the
caste status.

It is said that the carpenter caste was formed out of
the carpenter-guild,[89] although there is no definite
evidence for this assertion. According to the Jātakas they

88. Chap. XXII.
89. Bhārati. B.S. 1319. p.321.

lived together in one particular place known as carpenters'
village.[90] This was no doubt a factor in changing the guild
into a caste.

The potters like the carpenters formed the potter
village according to the Tālakas.[91] Both crafts were
employed by the Kings of Bengal for drawing and making
of images.[92] The potters sometimes enjoyed royal
patronage, and hence were called rājakumbhakāra.[93]

Potters, sculptors and the engravors of copper plates
formed an artist and artisan class in the historical period
and were often collectively known as silpins. In the
Dāmodarpur collection[94] we meet Dhṛitimitra, the chief
artisan (Prathama Kulika) of the district. It may be
presumed that under the patronage of the Guptas the artisans
flourished and had a reputable place in society. That is
why this man Dhṛitimitra no doubt occupied a foremost
position in a local company of artisans. Also he was one
of the representatives of this class in the district board
of Puṇḍravardhana. In other inscriptions of the same
district we have further reference to such persons - the
chief artisans Varadatta[95] and Matidatta.[96]. Evidently the
voice of the leaders of this class carried weight in the
district administration.

90. J.U.P.18
91. J. III. p.281
92. Dikshit: Pāhārpur Excavation. ARASI. 1928-29. p.90.
93. J.V. p.290.
94. SI. I. Nos. 18-19, 36, 39, Pl. 1 & 2. 1.5.
95. ibid. Pl.4. 1.4.
96. ibid. Pl.5. 1.5.

In the Pāla age these artists developed a great
creative genius. Two prominent artists Dhīmān and his
son Bītapāla. [97]   According to the Tibetan source these
two persons developed the Eastern School of Art.[98]   These
two men were born and brought up in Vārendra. Their style
and that of their followers were also known as the Vārendra
School.[99]

It seems that there were many artists in the land of
Vārendra. The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena[100]
contains a reference to an important artist of the day,
Rānaka Śūlapāṇi, son of Bṛihaspati, grandson od Mahādāsa
and great-grandson of Dharma; he is given the epithet
'crest-jewel of the Guild of Artisans of Vārendra'.

The importance of this artist class in the period
from the Guptas to the Senas testifies to the growth of
groups of people specialised in the cultivation of design.
The rulers of the time favoured such people, even to such
applied artists as gardeners, who formed a class by
themselves and when they received royal favours they
were known as rājamālakāra.[101]

We have other Bengali castes like Gandha-Vaṇik,

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97. Smith: Hist of Fine Art. p.305.
98. Tārānātha: History of Buddhism in India.(tr)JA.IV.p.102.
99. Maitra: Introduction to Gaudarājamāla. p.VI.
100. JB.III. pp.47-56. v.36.
101. J. V. p.292.

Manivaṇik, Kāṁsavaṇik (brazier) etc. They together with
the Tili caste formed the business class. In our period
we do not find these particularistic caste-names. The
only designations of such people attested in our sources
were śreshthin, sārthvāha and vyāpāra.

In the Faridpur collection[102] the repeated mentions
of some particular terms, Vyāpāra-Kāraṇḍaya in plate B[103]
and in plate C, Vyāpārandya,[104] Vyāpāraya Vīniyukta[105]
and pradhāna-vyāp[106][-ara] seem to suggest that the Guptas
favoured this business class. They were either the
officials of the State looking after the interests of
trade or they were the representatives of the business
class with seats in the local board.

Vyāpāra is a Sanskrit word, meaning occupation or
business. In Bengali it is modified into Vepārī and
denotes a merchant class. The various mentions of vyāpāra
with its variations and derivatives suggest that trading
class flourished, and that the leading members of each
caste or guild were very influential in the local admin-
istration with seats on the district board.

In the Dāmadarpur collection[107] the president of
the guild of merchants was known as Nagara-śreshthin.[108]

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102. Above.
103. ibid. 1.5.
104. ibid. 1.3.
105. ibid. 1.5.
106. ibid. 1.9.
107. Above.
108. ibid. Pl.1. 1.4.

In all the plates this merchant class appears to be in a
flourishing position.

The point to be noted here is that the Vaiśya or
trading class was divided into many commercial corporations.
It can be said that it was due to the development of
trading facilities since the Mauya age, that this class be-
came prominent.

CHAPTER V.

CASTE FROM THE GUPTAS TO THE SENAS

The caste organisation of the Bengalis from the period of the Guptas to that of the Senas was in a very fluid state. The Bengalis had not then developed such social consciousness as was needed for the stratification of a rigid social order. But their professions, activities and daily movements seem to have moulded their society in a caste-wise direction. It will be found from what follows that it was not the conscious intention of different groups to encourage a rigid exclusiveness, but the situation was such as to produce a particularistic feeling akin to caste system.

Under Gupta rule there was a momentous development of Brahmanical ideas and an increase in the influence of Brahmin. By the end of the period the Brahmins appear to have been the arbiters of social life nearly everywhere, probably because of the gradual decline of Buddhism and the patronage they enjoyed under the Guptas.

In Mauryan Bengal we cannot definitely define the position of the Brahmin, as there is no strong evidence for arguments about it. Their position was probably like that of the Brahmins of other regions in northern India. Brahmanical supremacy over Hindu society was temporarily checked by the strong current of Buddhism; but they were still a vital force in society. That is why, Brahmanism

revived under Pushyamitra Śuṅga.

For a prolonged period, approximately from the third century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. Buddhism appealed to the Bengalis more than Brahmanism. As Professor D. R. Bhandarkar says: ' Bengal was first Sramanised and then Brahmanised'.[1] In fact, we have no valid evidence about the caste structure of Bengal, if any, before the Gupta period. So, it is not far to seek why caste did not make its influence felt in Bengal at this time.

Evidently Bengal was not burdened by the rigid caste system of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Moreover, the Buddhist idea of Saingha coloured the society of Bengal. There was no caste in the Saingha at least in theory. Buddhía accepted monks from all varṇas. The Brahmins are in many places referred to in the Jātakas. They are depicted as holding their position through their virtue and not through their social status. 'It was the Brahmin's wisdom, knowledge of various cults and the spirit of renunciation which in reality maintained his supremacy in society rather than his arrogant desire for domination over other castes'.[2]

The absence of secturian hatred can be gathered from a Pāhārpur copper grunt,[3] dated Gupta era 159 (479 A.D.).

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1. ARASI. Xll.p.lll f.

2. Cal Review. 1931 Oct '"Jātaka-gleanings bearing on ancient Indian culture & civilisation".

3. EI.XX.pp. 59-64.

This shows that although there was predominant Brahmanical influence in Bengal under the Guptas the force of Buddhism and Jainism was not lost. It states that on orthodox Brahmin Nāthaśarman and his wife Rāmī approached the didtrict Officer, the city-Council, the district Board and the Record-Keepers for permission to purchase land in North Bengal for the purpose of maintaining the worship of the Arhats (Jain Tiåthaħkaras). Such was the fluid state of religion in Bengal. It was not irreligious for the Buddhist to favour Brahmanism, and it was not felt to be a violation of Brahmanical principals to lend some support to other faiths such as Jainism as revealed in this record.

On the other side there was in some places the idea of Brahmanical predominance. The five Dāmodarpur plates of the Gupta age[4] show that some of the Brahmins regularly performed agnihotra rites and daily Vedic sacrifices, that th they encouraged the erection of temples for installation of Brahmanical gods and that every officer from the rank of Governor (uparika) to that of village-elders was expected to pay respect to this priestly class.

The Faridpur collection[5] also furnishes similar information. Thanks to royal patronage the Brahmins were

4. Above

5. Above

respectful to the government. Whenever they embarked on a new religious project they first of all sought royal sanction. Presumably one of their main motives for doing so was to get financial support for it. A good mutual relationship apparently existed between the government and Brahmins, and the latter enjoyed many advantages in return for their allegiance.

Kālidāsa states that King Prithu removed all obstacles in the way of the Brahmin, and protected the priests and ascetics from the robbers and thus set an example to his contemporaries.[6] The Brahmins paid no toll at river-crossing.[7] It was laid down that the discovery of any mines or hidden treasure should be immediately notified to the King, who would normally take their possession, but if Brahmins were the discoverers, the treasure would go to them.[8] After the death of a man his property, if a legitimate heir was not discovered for three years, would be transferred to the royal Tresury. But in similar cases the King could bestow the whole wealth of a dead Brahmin on other Brahmins.[9] All castes except the Brahmin could sell meat, boiled rice, precious stones, garments and silks.[10] The King was the master of a

6. Rāghu vaṁśa. XVll.p.65.
7. Nārada. XVlll.p.38.
8. ibid.Vll.pp.6-7.
9. Brihaspati.Xlll.pp.13-18.
10. LRBK.p.43.

lands except those of the Brahmin.[11] The King very often made gifts of milch cows or bulls to Brahmins.[12] The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta mentions the King's reverence for the Brahmin.[13] The Sanchi stone inscription of Chandra Gupta II declares that the murder of a Brahmin was a great offence.[14] The Eran pillar inscription of Budha Gupta[15] proclaims that the Gupta Kings wanted the prosperity of the Brahmins together with that of their other subjects. The King gave orders to his Officers to buy some land to be given to a Brahmin.[16]

These references indicate the importance of the Brahmins and the revival of Brahmanism under the auspices of the Guptas. But it appears that such Brahmins came into prominence not merely throught their caste, but through their virtuous way of life and their learning, and some of the characteristics of modern caste were absent in the Brahmin groups of this period.

The Gupta records, especially those of Bengal show that people of many classes supported the Brahmins by providing for their settlement and life-long maintenance.

On the other hand the Brahmins did not always adhere to their priestly calling, and they frequently changed their profession. In the Dāmodaspur collection, [17] particularly

11. Gautama Dharmaśāstra.Xl.l.
12. Brihatsamhita.Xll.pp.15-16.
13. CII.p.8.
14. ibid.p.32.
15. ibid.p.90.
16. EI.XXlll.p.52ff.
17. Above

in the third and fifth grants people of this caste are
mentioned as occupying a high position on the district
board, and they evidently acquired riches by other means
than the priestly profession.

The Dhanāidaha plate of the time of Kumāra Gupta
I.[18]   shows that the Brahmin donee referred to was a rich
man, who bought with his accumulated wealth land with which
to endow another Brahmin belonging to the priestly class.
Thus the record indicates that everal persons with names such
as Śivaśarman, Nāgaśman and Devaśarman who were obviously
Brahmins were members of the district board.

From the Faridpur collection[19] it appears that
Brihaccatta was a Brahmin member of district administration
(1st grant), and another Brahmin, Gopālasvāmīn was in
charge of custom-duties (2nd grant). In the third grant
Bhāradvāja Brahmins are referred to as the owners of both
cultivated and uncultivated lands.

In the Ghugrahāti copper plate inscription of
Samācharadeva[20] the Brahmins donor, Supratīkasvāmīn is
evidently a rich man having money enough to offer donation
to another Brahmin.

The above picture is an indication to us that the
Brahmin should be thought of as a class rather than a caste;
they returned the nomenclature, Brahmin, but did not firmly

18. EL.XVlll.pp.345-48.
19. above
20. EI.XVlll.pp.74-86.

retain their vocation. The Tipperah plate of Lokanātha[21] states that the Brahmins were given plots of land in a region close to a dense forest where ferocious animals walked at large. Thus it may be presumed that the Brahmins lived in that dangerous district in order to make their livings, and we may believe that as far as their day to day activities were concerned they acted like the Kshatriya. Brahmins were even sometimes found to descend to the position of leather merchant or shoe-maker.[22] Nārada prescribes that a Brahmin should take up the profession of a Vaiśya in time of emergency,[23] and the rules of apaddharma gave scope to the Brahmin to follow many professions.

On the other hand some castes regularly adhered to their functions. The copper plates mentioned above show that the Kāyasthas, merchants, (śresthin), and traders (sārthavāha) etc carried on their respective professions over several generations.

Secretarial and clerical tasks were entrusted to the Kāyasthas. We were not sure whether by the Gupta age the Kāyasthas had become a caste, but their attachment to a particular family profession hints at their development as a caste, although perhaps in a nebulous form.

In the Damodarpur collection[24] we are told that the officer in charge of records of Vārendra was known as Prathama-Kāyastha. We have the names of Sambapāla (plates 1 & 2), Viprapāla (plate 4), and Skandapāla (plate 5) as successive holders of this post. The fact that all these

21. ibid.XV.pp.301-15
22. Nārada Smṛiti.I.pp.60-63.
23. Nārada Smṛiti.pp. 56.61.

24. above

names end in pālas. which is the typical surname of modern Kāyasthas, suggests that this profession was confined to a hereditary group.

In the Faridpur collection[25] Nayasena, who was in charge of the district administration, is styled Tyeshtha-Kāyastha (plates B & C). The terms Prathama and Tyeshtha prefixed to Kāyastha are indicative that they occupied a high position in the local society.

The mercantile class during the Gupta period had also some status.   In the Dāmodarpur plates (Nos.1,2,4,& 5)[26] such a business magnate or President of the guilds is known as Nagara-Śreshthin probably represented is the various guilds or corporations in the town or the rich urban population.   The board also contained another member of the trading class, known as the Sārthavāha, the chief merchant representing various trading communities. As there were thus two representatives from the business class, it may be presumed that their functions were separate, and that this class had a strong voice on the local board.

In the Faridpur collection[27] we meet other men from business circles, probably occupying a lower position than the former group. They were Vyāpāraya-Kāraṇḍaya (plate B) and Vyāpāraṇḍya, Vyāpāraya viniyukta and Pradhāna vyāp (Plate C). The network of rivers throughout Bengal and the

25. above
26. above
27. above

proximity of the Bay of Bengal perhaps encouraged trade in diverse commodities.

In any case the evidence indicates the development of a merchant class more or less under the patronage of Guptas. But there is no evidence of any clear-cut development of a merchant caste. Nor do we find that the guilds were taking on the character of castes at this time. It is therefore fair to say that Bengal of this period had a definite class-structure, but that there is no evidence of the development of caste or castes in the stricter sense, at this time.

Relating to intermediate and lower castes and classes we have few records in the Gupta period. From the Dāmodarpur plates (Nos. 1 & 2) it appears that the government recognised the importance of the artisan class which was represented on the local board of the district administration. There may have been representatives of this class on other boards also. IN any case it is evident that the Prathama-Kūlika or chief of the artisans, was a significant figure in local society.

The Śāstra-literature of our period helps to elucidate the class-structure, rather than the caste-stratification, of the society. Only the four Varṇas, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras are mentioned with occasional references to a few occupational groups like cobblers, gold-smiths, silversmiths, etc. The four classes are referred to in many contexts, such as the formation of guilds: - which class[28]

28. Brihaspati. Xlll.13.

would have a place in a joint guild, what would the final
position of a partner's death if he be a Brahmin, Kshatriya,
Vaiśya etc.,[29] what could be the prodedure to be followed
in acquisition of property according to the four traditional
class-wise system;[30] what would be the fate of any
issueless person in case of his death and ownership of his
property[31] and what would be the royal share over a dead man's
property and its variation according to the grades of the
Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaiśya and Sūdra.[32]

These texts refer to numerous types of craftsmen, such
as goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, stone-
carvers, wood-cutters and leather-workers who must have their
respective equal share in their craftship.[33]

A fully developed caste system is nowhere evident from
the Gupta records, as we have seen. Only picture we have
is the rise of Brahmanism. The Guptas did not bother much
for the social development on a sound basis, as there is no
strong evidence.

The Pālas and the other Social groups

The Pālas
„though Buddhists maintained the precepts of
the Hindu Sāstras and, as we have seen, claimed to be
supporters of the system of the four varnas. During their
rule the Brahmins enjoyed their patronage, as they did
during that of the Guptas. The post of Chief Minister

29. ibid.14-17.
30. Nārada I.51-54.
31. ibid.XlII.51.
32. Gautama. XI.I.
33. Brihaspati. XIII.33-37.

designated as Sachiva or Mantri, was generally confined to the Brahmanical group. Ultimately it became practically hereditary. The family of the Brahmin Garga occupied it from the days of Dharmapāla to those of Nārāyaṇapāla.[34]

According to Chaturbhija, the Brahmin author of Haricharita, his ancestors had received from Dharmapāla special favour and grants of lands for the performance of Vedic Sacrifices, for the construction of temples and for the study of the Hindu scriptures.[35]

The Khālimpur copper plate of Dharmapāla[36] records the gift of a piece of land for setting up the image of Bhagavān Nanna-Nārāyaṇa in the temple at Śubhasthaṭi and for entertaining Brahmin worshippers. The Monghyr plate of Devapāla[37] records that a whole village, Mesika by name, was donated to a Brahmin named Vihekarata Miśra. The Badal pillar inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla[38] goes on to say that the Pāla emperor Surapāla (VigrahapālaI) took his seat, just as the disciple does before his preceptor, beneath the seat of Kedara Miśra of a Vārendra Brahmin family, and lowered his royal head in order to receive his blessing and to be sprinkled with sanctified water. In the Bhāgalpur copper plate[39] of this King we find that Nārāyaṇapāla donated the village of Uukuṭika in Tirobhukti

34. Kamauti cp of Vaidyadeva. EI. II. p.350; Bāngarh cp of Mahipala I. JASB. LXI. p.77.
35. Sastri: Catalogue of MSS found in the Durbar Library. Nepal. I. p.134.
36. EI. IV. p.243.
37. JA. XXI. pp.253-57.
38. EI. II. pp.160-67.
39. JA. XV. p.304.

(modern Tirhut) to Gurava Miśra, a member of the
same family, for the management of a Śiva temple and
the study of the Śaiva doctrine. The Belwa plate of
Mahāpāla states that the King offered three localities
in Puṇḍravardhana to a Brahmin named Ŧīvadhāradevaśarman.
This plate (no.B) of Vigrahapāla III[41] records the gift
of a village in Puṇḍravardhana in favour of a Brahmin
Jayānandadevśarman. In the Amgachi grant of this
King[42] we notice another Pāla grant in favour of a
Brahmin, Khoḍuladevaśarman.

These are enough to show that the personal religious
views of the Pālas did not exercise much influence,
except in rare cases, over their State policy. The
rise of Brahmanism from the time of the Guptas onwards
went on unchecked, and the Brahmins' religious doctrines
were in most cases accepted by the Pāla rulers.
Moreover, their supremacy, as in the days of the Guptas
was due to their religious mode of living, and not
to their top-ranking position in the caste-hierachy.
In general, the supremacy of the Brahmins must have been
due, as it is today in orthodox circles, partly to
the weight of tradition, and partly to the fact that
only the Brahmins could perform essential xmẽxxgixitxxi
magico-religious rituals which were essential for the
social and spiritual welfare of the ordinary Hindus.
They were supreme in this sense and not because of their
piety exactly.

41. ibid. pp.9-13.
42. ibid. XV. p.293.

During this period the Brahmin did not exercise overlordship over the other castes. Perhaps the reason was that the Buddhist ideas of the Pālas did not encourage the development of strong caste feelings. Of course, there was mild influence of the guru, purohita and sannyāsī over their subordinates; but it was not so expressive as it is today.

In such inscriptions as the Khālimpur plate,[43] the Belwa plate (no.B)[44] and the Āmgachhi plate of Vigrahapāla[45] we find reference to different classes such as Brahmin and Kshatriya, modern caste names such as Kāyastha, Māhisya and reference to low castes such as Medas and Chāṇḍālas. The Kshatriyas generally were put in charge of high posts like mahā-pratihāra *Sāndhivigrahiko* (minister in charge of peace and war) mahā-pratihāra (keeper of the frontiers) and mahāsenāpati (Commander-in chief of the army).

The engravers of the plates of the Pālas' land grants are often mentioned by name[46] which indicates that they enjoyed a respectable place in society. Other artisans included carpenters,[47] stone-masons,[48] potters,[49] and wood-cutters[50] etc.

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43. ibid. IV. p.243.
44. ibid. XXIX. pp.9-13.
45. ibid. XV. p.293ff.
46. Bāngarh plate. XIV. pp.324-330.1.62; Āmgachhi pl.
    ibid. XV. p.293ff.
47. Badal ins. ibid. II. p.160f.
48. JASB. IV. pp.101-102.
49. Āmgachhi pl. above.
50. Mahāhāli cp. JASB. LXIX. p.68.

The mention of the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Kāyastha,
and some minor castes may be taken as the indication
of a well-developed caste system under the Pālās.
But a thorough scrutiny of the sources reveals that
caste hierarchy was in a very nebulous form. There
is no clear proof or authentic ecidence that men of
any specific caste received special favour or
appiintments from the Pālas. Had the Pālas harboured
the rigid caste prejudices of later days, they might
not have appointed a Sūdra like Divya in high
administrative rank. This Kaivarta chief was a high
official under the Pālas.[51]

Significance of the Kaivarta revolt

The revolt of Divya has been interpreted wrongly.
It is generally said that it was due to the social
injustice done to the Kaivartas that they rose in arms.
But our only authority, Sandhyā Karanandī's Rāmacharita,
says nothing of this sort. It is through a mis-
statement of H.P. Sastri on Rāmacharita that later
students have gathered this false idea. Sastri accuses
Mahīpāla II of misconduct towards his subjects in
general and the Kaivartas in particular. His
statement runs thus:

'Mahipala by his impolitic acts incurred the
displeasure of his subjects.... The Kaivartas were

51. Sastri (RJ): Sandhyākara Nandī's Rāmacharita. V.38.

smarting under oppression of the King. Bhīma, the son
of Rudoka, taking advantage of the popular discontent
led his Kaivarta subjects to rebellion.'[52]

The <u>Rāmacharita</u> makes no mention of the discontent
of the subjects, nor do we find that this revolution had
a popular character. Sastri is also mistaken when he
says that Bhīma was the leader of the revolution. Divya
became the King of Vārendra after the overthrow of Mahīpāla
After him his brother Rudoka became King, and he was
succeeded by his son Bhīma. So Bhima was the third in
succession and cannot be described as the leader of
the revolution at all. Moreover, Sastri has no basis for
the statement that the Kaivartas, led by Bhīma rose in
arms against the oppression of the King.   But the
<u>Rāmacharita's</u> statement and its commentator's elucidation
do not tally with Sastri's remarks. The former refers
to an <u>anītikarambha</u>,[53] an impolitic act of Mahīpāla II
and the commentator explains this as <u>milit-ananta-sāmanta-</u>
<u>chakram</u>, implying that the revolt was due to the intrigue
of a large number of his vassals, and the King obsessed
with the traditional valour of the Pālas made a dash
attack on the rebels, disregarding the advice of his
ministers. This was the <u>anītikarambha</u> of the King.

Why Vārendra was lost to Mahīpāla is also explained
in the <u>Rāmacharita</u>. This was due to the King's <u>durnnaya</u>
or wrong policy and his (<u>yuddha-)vyasana</u> or passion for
war.[54]   This evidence does not indicate that Mahīpāla II

52. Ibid. Introduction. p.13.
53. RC. C.I. V.37.
54. ibid. V.22.

ill-treated his Kaivarta subjects or gave them any justifiable occasion for their rising.

Under the Pālas' rule there lived all kinds of peoples, belonging to different classes and castes. The Kaivartas only constituted a small fraction of the subjects of the Pālas. If the King ill-treated his subjects, why did this particular section revolt and not the whole population?

Thus it appears that this revolt had no social significance, and should in no way be characterised as a Kaivarta revolt. There is no proof to show that the Kaivartas formed a discontented class among the subjects of the Pālas. Secondly, it was not a popular and widespread movement. There is no real indication that the people or a particular caste like the Kaivartas actively participated in it. It was a movement led by a confederation of vassals, as revealed in the statement milit-ananta-sāmanta-chakra. Thirdly, Divya was not a popular leader. There is no evidence in the Rāmacharita that he was elected King by the people. Because of his high position in the State and his thorough knowledge with the inner politics of the Pālas' empire, he took advantage of this revolt headed by factitious vassals. He forcibly occupied the throne of Vārendra and it was not offered to him by the people. He is described

as an enemy who took away 'Rāmapāla's beautiful
fatherland'.[55]   Two adjectives are attached to his
name: dasyeǝ, ('bandit') and upādhivrati,[56] ('one
whose ᴠows are mere pretexts') which may imply that
he snatched away the throne from the victorious vassals
by false pretences. Finally, revolt is not an
uncommon feature of history. Such revolts have
occurred in the history of every state. The Rāmacharita
has described Divya's revolt as a dire calamity qhich
wrapped the State in darkness.[57]   It was anika-dharma-
viplava[58] (complete destruction of the laws of war and
the military code'). It was bhavasya āpadam ('a[59]
calamity to the world').

The Senas and the other social groups

From the time of the Guptas we have noticed the
gradual rise of Brahmanic influence. With the rule
of the Chandras, Varmans and Senas orthodox Brahmanism
obtained full state support from the Kings and there
was a further increase in rise of Brahmanical
influence over the religious and social aspects of
imperial administration. In the Sena records we find
that the designation purohita changed into mahā-purshita
first occasionally and then regularly; priests under
the various names - Śāntiāgārika, Śāntiāgārādhikrita,

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55. ibid. V.31
56. ibid. V.38.
57. ibid. V.22.
58. ibid. V.24.

59. ibid. V,27. That such revolts
     or occasional outbursts happene
     in some states of North India h
     been vivedly described in the
     Dacca University Studies. I.No.2

Śāntivarika and rāja-pandita - were appointed for performance of various religious rites.[60]

We find also some evidence of the conditi n of other classes. The Deopārā inscription[61] mentions the śilpī-class, the chief of which was Rāṇaka. There was a good understanding between them and the royal authorities.

With the passage of time we find that the social atmosphere of Bengal was gradually being surcharged with the orthodox system. The Ballāla Charita[62] tells how the King Ballālasena dealt very badly with the Suvarṇavaṇik caste and excommunicated its members from respectable society.[63] We find that in the society of the times there was a division between higher and lower castes, and the latter did not occupy an important position either socially or politically.

Bhavadeva also shows the rigid society of Bengal during the Senas' regime. He gives us a list[64] of low castes with whom the Brahmins of the age did not maintain close relationships, never inter-dining, mixing with them freely or inter-marrying, and whose profession was disliked by the Brahmanical society.

60. RHB. I. p.281.
61. JB III. p.42ff.
62. (ed) Sastri: Ch. XXIII.
63. Ch. VII. of this thesis.
64. Prāyaśchitta Prakaraṇa. p.60ff; Śava-sūtakāśauca Prakaraṇa. p.32ff.

These were mainly members of the artisan class including the nata, nartaka, takshaka, chitropajīvī, rangopajīvī, svarnakāra, karmakāra, and other castes like the gopa (milkman), and narasundara (barber) including the Chāṇḍālas and medas.

Not all of these were to be kept completely from contact with the upper classes of society. The artisan classes were employed by the so-called caste Hindus. But Bhavadeva points out that prāyaśchitta (purification) must be carried on by them after the lower classes left the room or palace. Of course inter-dining and inter-marriage were forbidden between higher and lower castes. Men of the upper castes could follow the funeral procession of one of inferior social status, but should not touch the dead, and if they did so, they should bathe in the Ganges for purification. If there be no close relatives of a dead person of a lower caste, men of a higher caste could carry the funeral bier or help in carrying it. But this was a rare case of emergency. In such circumstances the bearer was to be purified after three days. The Chāṇḍālas and medas were totally outcast. No question of inter-dining, social contact or inter-marriage with them could therefore arise at all.

Thus the social order was gradually becoming hardened during the rule of the Senas. Clear-cut

divisions were arising between one caste and another
and society was moving towards the rigid orthodoxy
of later centuries.

The castes of the Royal families of Bengal

If it be accepted that caste ideas were gradually
being formed during our period, it is likely that the
ruling dynasties exhibited some favour towards certain
castes or caste-like divisions. From this and other
evidence we can suggest the caste to which they
belonged, although our arguments may not always be
definite and conclusive.

(a) Caste of the Pālas

The Pālas were Buddhists. Buddhism did not
theoretically support caste. But religion is one
thing and the social order another.   A Vaiśya might
be Buddhist, Śaiva or Vaishṇava. Change of religious
views did not necessarily always change the caste of
the person concerned. Even in the copper grants it
is stated that the Pālas defended the caste system
as it was in those days.[65] It may be that they
inherited or unconsciously adopted ideas of their
predecessors, who were Hindus and who were accustomed
to the Hindus' caste institutions.

Our sources of information indicate that the
Pālas' caste showed a gradual evolution. Tāranātha

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65. Monghyr cp. EI. XVIII. p.304. v.5.

says that Gopāla was born at Puṇḍravardhana of a beautiful Kshatriya woman who was in liason with a tree-god.[66]   According to the orthodox caste theory, from the marriage of Kshatriya with a member of another caste or anybody of unknown origin other than a Brahmin the resulting issue is to be considered as Śūdra.

Further evidence to strengthen this conclusion is that the Khālimpur plate of Dharmapāla[67] tells us that the Pāla family sprang from Dayitavishṇu who was known as Sarva-vidyāvadāta (sanctified by all sorts of knowledge). It appears thar Dayitavishṇu belonged to an educated plebian family, which was neither Brahmin nor Kshatriya, and which might well have been Śūdra.

Further, it may be argued in support of this theory that the Pālas went so far as to appoint a Śūdra like Divya in an important administrative post. Most administrative officers were generally confined to the Brahmins. We have seen already that the post of Chief Minister was practically the monopoly of the Brahmins. Why were the Pālas so well disposed to this Śūdra? Divya belonged to a low caste, the Kaivartas. He was described as a Dasyu[68] only, presumably because

66.   Schiefner (tr): Geschichte des Buddhismus in India. p.195.
67.   EI. iv. p.247.
68.   Sastri (ed): Rāmacharita. v.38.

he revolted. Perhaps the tradition of the Pālas'
Śūdra origin had led them to offer a responsible
post to this man.

This identification is not certain, but only
speculative, and in the absence of definite evidence
we cannot rely on this argument.

In the Khālimpus plate[69] we have three names of
Dharmapāla's ancestors - Gopāla, his father;
Vapyāta, his grandfather and Dayitavishṇu, his great-
grandfather. Vishṇu the name-ending of Dayitavishṇu,
was a Brahmin title found among the ancient Bengalis.
In the Dhanāidaha plate of Kumārā Gupta I we meet
a Bengali Brahmin donor whose name ends in - vishṇu.[70]

The probable reason for Brahmins having names
ending in Vishṇu is that Vishṇu is the name of a Hindu
god. Naturally a Brahmin may take such a name,
since he regards himself as the incarnation of god.

This evidence rather suggests the Brahmin origin
of the Pālas. Another argument also points to such
an origin.

Soḍḍhala, the Gujarāti poet of the eleventh
century A.D. states that Dharmapāla belonged to the
family of Māndhāta (Māndhātṛ Vaṃśa).[71] Some
Brahmin princes of Broach belonged to this vaṃśa.[72]

69. above.
70. EI.XVII. pp.345-48. In this plate too, we find
    another person with a name ending in - vishnu who
    was a village-chief.
71 EI. XII. p.197.
72. ibid.

In verse 11 of the Khālimpur plate Dharmapāla described himself as Māndhāta. So the Brahmanical origin of the Pālas is also suggested by these arguments.

Against the theories of the Śūdra and the Brahmanical origin of the Pālas there is ample testimony to identify them with the Kshatriyas.

Firstly, we have seen that according to Tārānātha Gopāla was born of a Kshatriya lady who was supposed to have been in union with a tree-god. In Hindu tradition the Kshatriyas because of their valour were loved by the gods themselves. It is well known that the gods have no caste. So, if we are to determine the caste of Gopāla, the founder of the Pāla dynasty, it should be judged according to the caste of his mother. Secondly, the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva,[73] a feudatory of Kumārapāla, speaks of Vigrahapāla III as <u>Vamiśe mihirasya jātavān</u>, implying born in the solar race and in the commentary of the Rāmacharita.[74] Dharmapāla was said to have come from the sea, <u>samudra-kula-dīpa</u>. In the light of these two traditions the Kshatriya origin of the Pālas can be suggested.

73. EI. II.p.350.
74. Memoirs of JASB.III. No.1. pp.20-21.

P.Sen[75] has tried to show that samadrakula denotes
also sūrya-kula, the solar race, as Samudra was born
out of Sūrya. He backs this with a quotation from
the Rāmāyaṇa,[76] that the Samudra was the kinsman
of Rāmachandra, who also belonged to the solar race
of Kshatriyas. Furthermore, he says that Sāgara
(= Samudra) is one of the 108 names of Sūrya, the
sun.[77] Therefore, samudra-kula means sūrya-kula and
vice versa. Hence the Pālas were the Kshatriyas.

Finally, the commentary of a Nepal manuscript
of the Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramita, written by
Haribhadra in the reign of Dharmapāla, speaks of
the latter as Rājabhaṭ-ādi=Vaṃśa-patita,[78] being
descended from a family of which Rājabhaṭa was the
first. There are some difficulties in saying that
Rājabhaṭa was the founder of the family, as the
Khālimpur plate[79] states otherwise, that Dayitavishṇu
was its originator. Attempts have been made to identify
Rājabhaṭa with Rājarāja_bhaṭa, son of Devakhaḍga of
the Khaḍga dynasty of Bengal.[80] This identification
may not be correct. It implies that the Khaḍga rulers

75. Prāchīn Vāṅgālir Varṇaveda. p.19.
76. Laṅkā kāṇda. Ch. XIX. VV.30-31.
77. Mahābhārata. Ch. III. p.152.
78. VI. I. p.1402.
79. above.
80. JASB. 1923. XIX. pp.378-9.

were warlike and the Pālas were their worthy followers,
and were Kshatriyas.

All the above arguments concerning the origins
of the Pālas are largely based on surmise and none
of them is strong enough to be conclusive. In the
same way as efforts have been made to show that the
Pālas were Brahmins or Kshatriyas, on the basis of
Āin-i-Ākbarī [81] we can pronounce that the Pālas
belongs to a Kāyeth family, that is, that they were
Kāyasthas. But this cannot stand without any sound
proof.

(b) Caste of the Senas

The Senas came to Bengal from Karnāṭa in South
India. The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena [82]
connects the Sena family with Vīrasena and others, who
were inhabitants of Dhārwār. [83] We have the same
account in the Mādhāinagaḥ grant of Lakshmaṇasena. [84]

'In the family of Vīrasena, which had become
illustrious through the legends recorded in the
Purāṇas was born Sāmantasena, the head-garland of the
clan of the Karnāṭa-Kshatriyas.'

If the connection between the Senas of Bengal
and other Senas of Karnāṭa be proved in this way on
the basis of original records we can say with precision
that the former Senas had changed their religious views.

81.   (ed) Blochmann & Jarrett: II. p.145.
82.   JB. III. pp.46,50.
83.   Dharwar is located in Lat 15° 30½ Long 74°59 of
      Bombay (EI.XVII. p.117).

Originally they belonged to the Jain, then to the Saiva, and at last to the Vaishnava sect.

In the Mulsund inscription[85] of South India we have such Sena-names as Kanakasena, who was described as Jainacharyya. Similar references to Jaina leaders such as Ajitasena and Brahmasena are derived respectively from the Sravan Belgola[86] and Invar inscriptions[87]. All these places are near Dharwar. So we can draw the conclusion that most of the local Sena families were Jain. It has already been proved that Virasena, the predecessor of the Senas, came from this region. Therefore it is probable that the first of the Senas of Bengal were Jain in faith. Later on, they became Saiva. The epithet parama-mahesvara among the official titles of both Vijayasena and Ballasena points to their Saiva faith and the other titles parama-vaishnava or parama-narasimha adopted by Lakshmanasena are indications of his Vaishnavism.[88]

Similarly, with the changes of their religious devotion the Senas of Bengal underwent modification in their caste. These changes make it difficult to determine the actual caste of the Senas.

The most popular view as to the Senas' caste was that they were Brahma-Kshatriyas. This term

85. EI. XIII. p.193.
86. ibid. V. p.171.
87. JA. XIX. p.272.
88. Govindapur cp. JB. III. p.92; Bhowal cp. EI.XXVI. p.1f.

implies that they were both Brahmin and Kshatriya. In the Deopāra inscription[89] Sāmantasena is described as such. Yet, it seems strange to us how one person could belong simultaneously to two castes. A ruler should be either Brahmin or Kshatriya.

The term may be interpreted as implying that they at first were Brahmin and then changed to a martial caste.[90]

That they were originally Brahmins is also suggested by title Brahma-vādī, adopted by Sāmantasena. It is applicable to one who interprets the Vedas. In this respect the Mādhāinagar plate is helpful.[91] It states that frequently the Sena princes 'made preparations for sacrifices (kratu) befitting a conquest of the three worlds and thereby checked the priests serving in the Sessional soma sacrifices of the gods.'

Here both the functions of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya are evident. The word Brahmavādī probably indicates that Sāmantasena was as much Brahmin as Kshatriya.[92]

Thus the Senas began as Brahmins by caste and then due to taking up military activities were known as Kshatriyas.

In the Mādhāinagar grant Sāmantasena is

89.   above.
90.   JB. III. pp.44 fn.3. Appendix p.192.
91.   ibid. pp.109-110,113. v.3.
92.   ibid. p.51. fn.1.

described as belonging to the 'Karnāṭa-Kshatriyas'.[93]

Reference to one of his military exploits is found

in the Deopārā inscription,[94] which states that in

the battle-field be brought about the killing of the

wicked destroyer of the Lakshmī (wealth) of Karnāṭā.

This ruling capacity and conquering zeal bespeak the

Kshatriya caste.   Sāmantasena's forefathers were

said to be so many lords who established paramount

supremacy over parts of the earth.[95]   Particularly,

the Karnāṭa Sena prince Vikramāditya (probably of

the Chālukyas) led frequent Kshatriya-like campaigns

against the princes and chieftains of Bengal and

Assam about 1063 A.D.[96]   The cвossing of the

Narmadā and the Vindhyas by Vikramaditya was a

memorable feat.[97]   It is enough for putting the

Senas within the fold of the Kshatriyas.

Attempts have been made to show that the Senas

were either Kāyasthas or Vaidyas.[98]   But these are

mere speculative theories based, not on the original

records, but on the Kulajīs, later Sanskrit books

which have no historical value in their accounts.

93. ibid. pp.110,113, v.4.
94. above. v.8.
95. Barráackpore cp of Vijayasena. ibid. pp.61-62,
    64. V.3.
96. Devanagore Taḷiq ins. EC. nos. 2 & 3; Sudi ins.
    EI. XV. pp.86, 97-99. 104; Kelawadi ins. EI.IV.
    p.262.
97. Bombay Gazetteer. I. pt.II. p.452.
98. Sādhāraṇī. B.S. 1280. p.56. VI.II. Introduction.

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE SYSTEM

Our knowledge about the Hindu marriage system and rituals connected with it can be derived from the Āśavalāyana Gṛhyasūtra.[1]   From ancient to modern times the system underwent a gradual evolution, giving rise to the eight forms of marriage: (1) Brāhma, (a) Daiva, (3) Ārṣa, (4) Prājāpatya, (5) Rākṣasa (6) Asura (7) Gāndharva (8) Paiśācha.

1.   Brāhma:

It is said that the god Brāhma introduced this practice. The father of the girl was asked to offer the hand of his daughter to a meritorious and noble-charactered young man, versed in the Vedas.

2.   Daiva:

In this marriage the daughter was offered by her father to a priest who acted as the performer of a sacrifice on the father's behalf.

3.   Ārṣa:

Here the bridegroom offered two bullocks to the lady's father for religious purposes.

4.   Prājāpatya:

In this marriage the bridegroom himself asked the girl's father for the hand of his daughter. The father judged the efficiency and fitness of his would-be son-in-law,

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1. 1.6.

and if he was satisfied he settled the marriage.

5.   Rākṣasa:

In this type of marriage the girl was forcibly carried away against her will from the custody of her father or guardian.

6.   Āsura:

This was purely marriage by purchase. The father or the guardian of the girl was given a certain amount of money as a reward for his consent.

7.   Gāndharva:

In this form of marriage bridegroom and bride settled the marriage between themselves, on their own initiative without waiting for the parents' permission. There are many examples of such marriages in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. The Svayaṁvara marriage was another form of the Gāndharva. In this ceremony there was an assembly of suitors for a single beautiful girl. The latter with a garland in her hand proceeded towards the menfolk and placed it around the neck of the suitor of her own choice. Sometimes an adventurous task was performed by a suitor in the presence of many Kshatriya spectators, and the girl offered the garland to the victor and selected him as her husband.

8.   Paiśācha:

This is a form of marriage in which women were ravished while they were asleep, intoxicated or senseless.

Such practice must have prevailed among the people who had not developed a social consciousness, when there was the chaotic order in the State.

Among the Smṛitikāras of our historical period Gautama and Vishṇu are worthy of mention. N.C. Sen Gupta points out that Gautama recognised the first four forms of marriage, but of the others did not mention Rākṣasa, Paiśācha only referring to Gāndharva and Āsura. This shows that Gāndharva and Āsura were at the time fighting for their recognition in the society.[2]

Vishṇu[3] on the other hand gave all the eight forms of marriage in the following order, presumably according to his choice:-

(1) Brāhma, (2) Daiva, (3) Ārṣa, (4) Prājāpatya, (5) Gāndharva, (6) Āsura, (7) Rākṣasa, (8) Paiśācha. Of these the first six he describes Dharma or legitimate and the last two Adharma or illegitimate.

The Ārṣa form of marriage has been interpreted by many scholars as marriage by purchase.[4] But actually this is Āsura marriage. Whatever controversy and alternative interpretations of these two forms there may be, we have an example of marriage by purchase in our period.

The Erāṇ stone pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta[5] states that he married Dattadevī, his virtuous wife and

2. EAIL. p.85.
3. ibid. p.86.
4. ibid. p.83.
5. GI. p.21.

the price (datta-śulka) paid for her was his manliness,
bravery and chivalry. In other words, but for his
adventurous career he might not have won her as a wife.
In the Udayagiri cave inscription[6] of Chandra Gupta II
we read: '... bought with money of (whose) prowess (the
earth), in which (all other) princes were humiliated by
the slavery (imposed on them by him)'.

On whether the Rākṣasa and the Paiśācha forms of
marriage were actually practised in Bengal we have no
evidence except scattered references in legal texts and
nibandhas. It is laid down in Bṛihaspati[7] that a man who
has intercourse with a woman in secret against her will,
when she is asleep, disordered in her intellect, or does
not notice his approach, has to pay the highest fine.
One nibandha[8] of 17th century prescribed the excommunication
of those who practise these marriages.

Gotra and Marriage

Gotra has to be taken into account at time of
marriage negotiations. In ancient times the Hindus
imposed restrictions within which marriage was considered
invalid and illegal. The most important of these was
that marriage must not be contracted between persons
belonging to the same Gotra.

There may be sensible reasons for prohibiting

6. ibid. p.35.
7. XXIV. 2.
8. Smārta: Vyavasthārṇa. MSS. 638b(1491) Ch.VII (tr)
   B. Ghoshal. p.290.

sagotra (endogamous) marriage. Firstly, the attraction
of the unfamiliar persons may lend romance to a marriage.[9]
Secondly, matrimonial relationships established between
far-distant families would lead to less likelihood of
conflict between persons of the same tribe.[10] Thirdly,
the doctors have often pointed out the evil affects of
in-breeding. In their opinion marriage between two
strangers is likely to produce better progeny.[11]
Although modern genetic science does not wholly agree
about the evils of in-breeding, and some peoples such
as the ancient Egyptians practised it regularly, without
obviously harm to the race, there is no doubt that in
most societies of the past it has been much disapproved
of. Fourthly, there were intercine conflicts between
tribe and tribe, sect and sect, class and class.
Friendship with groups or tribes living far from the
neighbourhood was felt to be a useful and effective defence
in the blood-feud. Exogamous marriage widely practised
by many primitive peoples may have had the conscious
or unconscious motive of attacking and repelling opponent
groups.[12]   Finally, ethical and moral considerations
must have played a part. From marriage within the same

9. Vinogradoff: Historical Jurisprudence. I. p.186.
10. Panchapushpa. B.S. 1338. p.103f.
11. Vinagradoff. op cit. p.181.
12. EAIL. p.52.

family it is but a short step to wedlock between the
brother and sister, and that relationship has been
looked on as immoral, repulsive and objectionable by
nearly all societies down to the present day. That is
why, Baudhāyana says: 'He who inadvertently married a
girl sprung from the same original stock as himself
must support her as a mother.'[13]

As there are restrictions on marriage within the sa
gotra marriage, so also prohibitions are imposed on
inter-caste wedlock. So it seems strange that śāstric
injunctions allowed marriage between persons of the same
caste, but did not permit sagotra marriage.

By the time of the Jātakas marriage between high and
low castes was already forbidden. The Sigāla Jātaka[14]
tells how a barber's son (nahāpitasutta) living in Vaisāli
fell in love with a Kshatriya princess of the Licchavis.
He was so absorbed in this love affair that he felt it
necessary to tell his father the whole story in order to
seek his permission. On day, he told his father that he
would die unless he could get her for life. The father's
reply was: 'My son, don't fix your desires upon impossible
things; you are the son of a barber, and of low caste (hīna-
jacca), the Licchavi princess is of high birth (jātisam-
panna) as the daughter of a Khattiya, and no possible
party for you. I will seek another girl for you who will
suit you in caste and family.'

13. Colebrook's Digest.Bk.V.
14. J. II. p.5.

Although this is only a tale, it evidently alludes
to the social order of a period well before the Christian
era, and even at this early time when marriage between
high and low castes was virtually impossible. Megasthenes
stated that marriages between the separate castes were
not allowed.[15]   Rules were even framed by orthodox
Brahmins prohibiting inter-marriages with other Brahmins
who served as priests to low castes such as Suvarnavanika,
goālas (milkmen), rojakas (washermen, kaivartas (fishermen)
etc.[16]

Our nibandhakāras[17] state that if such a marriage
takes place, no orthodox Brahmin should participate in
the marriage procession, marriage-feast or talk with
either part on a social occasion.

Thus purity of individual caste was maintained and
persons of one caste were prevented by social custom and
usage from marrying those of another. If there was
deliberate violation of these long-standing Brahmanical
dispensations, excommunication was the punishment of the
law-breakers.

This was one aspect of the picture, but another was
of free association and friendship between persons of
higher and lower ranks. Inter-marriage occurred
frequently among all castes in our period. Such marriage

15. Megasthenes: Indica quoted by M.C. Crindle. Chap.XII.
    Diodorus II. 40. quoted by R. Thapar, Aśoka. p.58.
16. Bhottacharyya: Hindu Castes & Sects. p.125.
17. Smārtha-Vyavasthārnava MSS (tr) B.Ghoshal. p.291.
    Raghunandana's Ndvāhatattva MSS. quoted in Pravasī.

was considered legitimate in many circumstances, and was
not an unusual phenomenon even up to the last days of
Hindu period.[18]

The writings of Bhavadeva and Jīmūtavāhana are
replete with examples of marriage between members of
different castes. The only matter in question was the
status of the parties and their issue, and these
authorities devoted much time and thought to such problems
as the succession and law of inheritance in the case of
the union of a Brahmin father and a Śūdra mother.

Jīmūtavāhana recognises the legality of a marriage
between a male of higher caste and a female of a lower
one,[19] while even marriage between an orthodox Brahmin
and a Śūdra is not included in the list of forbidden
marriages in the Prāyaśchitta Prakarana of Bhavadeva.[20]

If we begin our survey from Manu we find that the he
recognised this practice of inter-marriage, but apparently
disapproved of it, as the offspring of such unions were
not generally given a respectable social status.[21]

Jīmūtavāhana gives seniority to the highest caste
in all activites, both secular and religious. He says
that if a man has wives of different castes the Brahmin

18. Kane: History of Dharmaśāstra. II. pp.52ff. 447ff.
19. Colebrook (tr): pp.159-61. Dāyabhāga Chap.IX. pp.1-11.
20. (ed) Girish Ch. Vidyaratna. p.90.
21. M. X. 12-30.

wife must be given preference to the Kshatriya, the
Kshatriya should be given the second position and she
should even take the first one in the event of the early
death of his Brahmin wife. Similarly, if the man
marries a Brahmin lady after his marriage with a
Kshatriya, the Brahmin wife would take the uppermost
position. If the first wife if a Brahmin and dies
earlier than his other Kshatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra wives,
and if the man later marries another Brahmin girl, this
youngest wife should be counted as senior to his other
wives. In this connection Jīmūtavāhana's pithy sentence
runs: 'The rank of wife belongs in the first place to
the woman of the highest jāti.'[22]

Similarly preference should be given in inheritance
to the sons of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra wives
in that order. In religious functions or performances
only the wife of the first rank should participate.[23]
If the husband does otherwise, and rejects the claim of
a Brahmin wife in favour of a favourite non-Brahmin lady,
such an act should be counted as unsocial and immoral.

Jīmūtavāhana quotes Manu[24] who says: 'To all such
married men, the wives of the same class only (not wives
of a different class by any means) must perform the duty of
attendance, and the daily business relating to acts of

22. Dāyabhāga. XI. I. 47.
23. ibid.
24. IX. 86-87.

religion. For he who foolishly causes those duties to
be performed by any other than his wife of the same class,
when she is near at hand, has been immemorially
considered as a mere Chāṇḍāla begotten on a Brāhmaṇī'.

Vishṇu's opinion is similar, but he adds: 'If there
be no wife belonging to the same class, he may execute
the business relating to acts of religion with one of
the class immediately following in case of distress. But
a regenerate man must not do so with a woman of the
Śūdra class.'[25]

Jīmūtavāhana recognised the right of inheritance
of sons born of the Śūdra wife of a Brahmin husband, but
he excluded her from religious functions.[26]

There are a few examples of inter-caste marriage
from the historical period. The Tipperāh copper plate
of Lokanātha[27] (7th century A.D.) is one such. In verse
9 Lokanātha is described as a Karaṇa, a mixed caste
according to Manu. Verse 2 describes the great-grandfather
of his father as sprung from the family of the Sage
Bhāradvāja. The great-grandfather and grandfather of
his mother are in Verse 6 referred to as dvijavarah and
dvijasattamah respectively. But his mother's father,
Keśava, is described in the same verse as a Pāraśava by
caste. The term Pāraśava means Śūdra.[28] Thus the first

25. XXVI. 3.
26. XI. 1. 47.
27. EI. XV. pp.301-15.
28. M. IX. 178; Gautama IV. 16 & 21.

few ancestors, both paternal and maternal, of Lokanātha were Brahmins. But his maternal grandfather was not a pure Brahmin, as Kesava's Brahmin father married a Śūdra woman. Thus Keśava is described as Pāraśava, and hence Lokanātha was a Karaṇa. In view of the evidence we conclude that anuloma marriage was at least occasionally practised in the 7th century.

Marriage between a woman of a higher caste and a man of a lower caste is known as pratiloma marriage. Tārānātha mentions the name of a Bengali Abhayākara Gupta, a vastly learned man of the 11th century A.D., living in Tibet. He was well acquainted with the Hindu Śāstras. It is said that his father was a Kshatriya and his mother was a Brahmin.[29]

Not only do we find intercaste, but also inter-regional marriage in the historical period. Matrimonial alliance between States was rather of political significance than of social importance. It aimed at the formation of some sort of confederacy among the Hindu Kings.

In the Pāla dynasty we come across numerous instances of political marriage. Vīgrahapāla, the son of Devapāla[30] married a princess of the Haihaya family, ruling in Gorakhapur in modern U.P. This family was one of the branches of the Kalachuris. When the Rāshṭrakūṭas formed several matrimonial alliances with the Kalachuris, why

29. JASB. 1882. Li. pp.16-18.
30. Bhagalpur cp. JA.XV. p.304. V.9.

should the Pālas lag behind in gaining the friendship
of these powerful rulers?[31]

Sometimes the cessation of hostilities was followed
by marriage between the families of the victor and
vanquished. The Rāshtrakūta King KrishnaII was a
contemporary of Nārāyanapāla of Bengal. The former made
great headway in his campaign against the Pāla King, and
the war continued even after the death of the two rivals.
Rājyapāla, the son of Nārāyanapāla, grew tired of this
long-drawn out strife and terminated it by marrying
Bhāgyadevī, the daughter of the Rāshtrakūta King Tunga,
the son of Krishna.[32]

Even when the later Pālas' power was on the wane,
such diplomacy was still working. From the days of
Mahīpāla I to those of Rāmapāla their empire was
given much trouble by the Kaivarta revolt. To find a
way out Vigrahapāla III married a Rāshtrakūta princess,
and its consequence was fruitful. Mathana, properly
known as Mahana, the Rāshtrakūta chief who was the
maternal uncle of Rāmapāla, helped this Pāla ruler by
sending his two sons and a nephew to stand by the decadent
Pāla empire. The growing power of the Gahadavālas
in Madhyadeśa was also a menace to the Pālas. It was

31. Raychandhuri: Dynastic Hist. of Northern India. II.
     pp.760-61.
32. Bāngarh cp. EI. XIV. p.324, JASB. LXI. p.77.

through the agency of Mahana that Rāmapāla's
granddaughter was given in marriage to Govindachandra
of the Gahaḍavālas. Such a marriage alliance was meant
to cement a diplomatic tie between the Gahaḍavālas and
the Pālas.[33]

The history of Bengal is replete with records of
other royal marriages of Bengali families with those
of distant Hindu Kingdoms. In these there was no
question of bars or restrictions based on Śastric
injunctions. It may be presumed that the Śāstric laws
were applied chiefly to commoners and could not be
enforced upon ruling authorities.

The Varmans who ruled over East Bengal in the
second half of the eleventh century followed the Pālas'
tradition of cementing friendship between two distant
States by marriage. We are told, according to the Lokhā-
maṇḍal praśasti[34] that the Queen of Jalandhara in the
Panjab came from Bengal, and belonged to the same
family from which the Varmans originated, the Yādava
royal line of Simhapura in Rāḍha. Jātavarman, the
second ruler of the Varman dynasty set a similar
example by marrying Vīraśrī, the daughter of Karṇa,
the Kalachuri King.[35] The same source states that

33. RHB.I. pp.159,165-66.
34. EI. I. pp.10-15.
35. Below cp. ibid. XII. p.37.

Sāmalavarman, another ruler, had many queens coming from distant kingdoms.

Sometimes such a matrimonial relationship led the outsider to identify himself with the people of the State to which the queen belonged. It is well-known that the Senas of Bengal came from Karnāṭa. The Deopārā praśasti says that Vīrasena,[36] the great-grandfather of Vijayasena, married Somata, the daughter of a Gauḍa Brahmin. It may be that this was the beginning of the settlement of the Karnāṭa people in Bengal. Thenceforward the Sena rulers are described as the rulers of Bengal with the epithets Vaṅgadhīpa, Gauḍeśvara etc. Similarly Vijayasena followed the footsteps of his predecessors in marrying Vilasadevī of the Śūra family of Dakshiṇa Rāḍha, as revealed in the Barrackpore grant.[37]

The facts cited above show that inter-caste and inter-State marriages were not wholly impossible in ancient Bengal. But this evidence hardly applies to the ordinary people. From the behaviour of Kings we cannot generalise for the subjects.

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36. JB. III. p.42ff; Śāstri (Ed): Ananda Bhaṭṭa's
     Ballāla Charita. Ch. XII. p.55.
37. ibid. p.57ff. V.7.

Inter-religious marriage

No restriction was put in the way of such
marriages. Members of different religious sects
such/as the Buddhists, Hindus, and the Śaivas inter-
married freely and the leaders of society did not
frame any regulations or enforce any injunctions
prohibiting such marriages. Dhanadatta, a Buddhist
who lived during the reign of Dharmapāla, married a
Śaiva princess.[38]

Other evidence of such marriages is not lacking.
Taking advantage of the later Pālas weakness there
was a mushroom growth of small kingdoms in Bengal.
Among the rulers we find a Buddhist King Mahārāja
Kāntideva, whose date has been tentatively fixed
between 850 and 950 A.D. It is said, as revealed from
an incomplete draft of a copper plate found in an old
temple at Chittagong,[39] that he married Bindurati, the
daughter of a great Hindu King, and this helped him
in establishing and stabilising a small principality
in Harikela in Bengal.

Saraha or Sarahapada (770-810 A.D.), one of the
84 Buddhist Siddhas, according to the description of
Sampa Mkhan-Po[40], did much to bring about the con-
version of many Brahmins, and later on, became the
High Priest of Nalandā. It is said that when he

38. RHB. I. p.426.
39. MR. 1922. p.612; Hemachandra's Abhidhana Chintamani.
   V.257.
40. (ed) S. Das. pp.XXVII, 84-85.

visited Maharashtra he married a Hindu archer's
daughter.

Bigamy and Polygamy

We have seen that no ban was imposed on inter-
marriage between two religious groups and such
marriages were not challenged by society. Similarly
there was no restriction on bigamous or polygamous
marriage. Śavari (or Śabara)-Pada, one of the Buddhist
Siddhāchāryas living during Dharmapāla's reign had
two wives, Lokī and Gunī.[41] Sāmala Varman of the
Varman dynasty had more than one wife.[42] Bhavadeva,
a renowned Brahmin pandit living in Sena times
states that his father had two wives.[43]

Child Marriage

There is every reason to believe that child
marriage was unusual or non-existent in the Vedic
period, and indeed much later. The earliest reference
indicating this practice is found in some of the
Gṛhyasūtras,[44] where the term nagnikā is found. It
is said that at the time of choosing a bride a
nagnikā should be taken into consideration. This term
has been variously interpreted. Literally it would
mean a girl of tender age.[45] According to Altekar[46]

41. Schiefner: Tārānātha's Geschichte des Buddhismus
    in Indien. pp.CXXI, 90.
42. ŚB. III. p.23.
43. ibid. p.37.
44. (tr) Oldenberg: S.B.E. XXX. Pt. III.46.
45. EAIL. p.99.
46. Position of women in Hindu Civilisation. p.52.

nagnikā denotes a little girl playing in the dust, without being clothed adequately.

But we can take the term in two senses. Nagnikā may mean a little girl who does not feel ashamed of going naked. But the commentator on Hiraṇyakeśin's Gṛhyasūtra, where this word is used, comments that a nagnikā practically means a marriageable girl who can embrace her husband in privacy immediately after marriage. In any case from this term we must admit the possibility of the existence of pre-pubertal marriages in the period before the Christian era.

Manu[47] makes reference to child-marriage, since it is mentioned that a man of thirty years should marry a girl of eight years of age. The legal texts of our period fully recognise such marriage. The practice may have arisen through fear of untimely death without producing children. Our jurists also entertain this fear and encourage every couple to produce children, particularly a son. Vishṇu[48] and Jīmūtavāhana[49] and their commentators give a false etymology of Putra; as the son delivers (trāyate) his father from hell (put) he is known as putra.

Jīmūtavāhana quotes Hārīta who observes, 'A

47. IX. 94. 2.
48. XV, 43.
49. XI.1.6.

father is exonerated in his life time from debt to
his own ancestors, upon seeing the countenance of a
living son; he becomes entitled to heaven by the birth
of his son and devolves on him his own debt.'[50]

Other reasons for child-marriage are suggested by
N.C. Sen Gupta.[51]   Firstly, it has been laid down in
the Śāstras that if a girl should menstruate in her
father's house, the father must suffer the consequences
of heinous sin. Secondly, the father may lose his
guardianship over his daughter, if she remains unmarried
after puberty. Finally, parents should promptly give
their daughters in marriage lest they should go
astray or be seduced by the others.

Widow remarriage

In ancient India during the period of the Sūtras
in certain circumstances widow remarriage was permitted,
as we find reference to it in the Dharmaśāstras. This
sort of wedlock is known as Niyoga. i.e. marriage by
appointment or agreement. Niyoga is not widow remarriage
in general, but only a very specialized form of it.

Gautama[52] lays down that the inheritance of a
sonless man normally goes to his agnates. But there
are two alternatives: the widow may inherit the
property of her husband or she may seek to raise issue

50. IX. 138.
51. EAIL. pp.100-101.
52. XXVIII. 21. 22.
53

in his name. In fulfilment of the latter alternative
she may raise offspring to her brother-in-law,[53] or
she may have offspring by a Sapinda, a sagotra, a
samānapravara,[54]

The Vasishtha Dharmasūtra[55] prescribes Niyoga,
but with a somewhat rigid restriction which runs as
follows:- Rikthalobhānnāstiniyogah, 'There can be no
niyoga out of greed for the inheritance'. The same
restriction is also found in Gautama,[56] who also
prescribes that the widow can raise issue for a sonless
man, but that no more than two children should be
begotten thus.

Vishṇu[57] sanctions the remarriage of a widow as
akshatā, a virgin. This niyoga marriage is in his text
described as punarbhū after the widow being purified
(saṁskritā).

Punarbhū is normally the widow herself, not a
kind of marriage. The punarbhū is a widow who has, so
to speak, returned to the world. Hence the punarbhū
has nothing to do with niyoga. Perhaps the meaning
in the connection with niyoga is that such a girl,
after purification, is known as a punarbhū.

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53.   ibid. 4.
54.   ibid. 5.
55.   XVII. 56-57.
56.   XXVIII.8.
57.   IX. 10.

Nārada[58] recognises niyoga and states that a
sonless widow may marry her brother-in-law, the latter
may only have intercourse with the widow in order to
produce a child and not from carnal desire. If he
does so, the child born is illegitimate and incapable
of inheritance. In another place Nārada is more
liberal when he says that widows who are mothers can
wed,[59] although this does not surely imply that all
widows without exception may remarry.

Inheritance of widows.

On this there is considerable controversy.
Manu[60] never recognises the right of widow to
inherit. At one place[61] he gives the order of
inheritance as- (1) mother (2) father's mother, while
in another verse[62] he gives it as - (1) father, (2)
brother.

Jīmūtavāhana,[63] on the other hand, recognises the
widow's right and says: 'The widow of a childless man,
keeping unsullied her husband's bed and persevering
in religious observances, shall present his funeral
oblation and obtain (his) entire share.' But the
commentators Śankha Lihita and Paithīnasi take the
opposite view: 'The wealth of a man who departs for

58. XII. 84-88.
59. XXVIII. 8. XII. 96-100
60. IX. 217.
61. ibid.
62. ibid. 185.
63. XI. 1.7.

heaven leaving no male issue goes to his brothers.
If there be none, his father and mother take it or
his eldest wife, or a kinsman (<u>sagotra</u>), a pupil or
a fellow student.'[64]

Jīmūtavāhana[65] insists on the widow's right,
quoting Brihaspati's opinion that the whole wealth
of the sonless man, whether movable and immovable,
including gold and other effects shall belong to
his widow, although there be brothers of the whole
blood, paternal uncles, daughter's sons and other
heirs. Any of those who contests with her for the
inheritance, or who seizes the property, shall be
punished as robbers.

Thus the jurists of Bengal by their rules and
prescriptions recognised the widow's right of
succession. As the widow has none to look after
her or support her, the late jurists sanctioned
her right to her husband's property. Jīmūtavāhana[66]
makes it clear that the widow's claim is not merely
to wealth sufficient for subsistence, but the whole
estate which belonged to her husband before his death.

If the widow's right of inheritance be recognised,

64. Colebrook: P.153. para.15.
65. XI.I.3.
66. XI.1.6.

the question then arises who among the wives will
inherit the property, if the husband has a number
of them. On this point there is much controversy.
Colebrooke citing the views of texts such as
Kalpataru, Ratnākara and Vīramitrodaya, confirms
Jimūtavāhana's 'Patnī vā jyeshthā', the patnī (real
wife) or the first wife. The legal or first wife
must have the property, setting aside the claims
of other wives.[67]

Jimūtavāhana[68] interprets patnī as a real and
legal wife, and gives her all responsibilities
and the right of inheritance. He distinquishes the
Patnī from the other wives who are known by the terms
strī, nārī (women), and bhāryā (spouse).

Jimūtavāhana gives a special meaning to the term
patnī. Any woman married to a man by orthodox rites
is a patnī. This refers to the jyeshthā among the
patnīs, presumably here the senior first married wife.

Another problem that naturally arose in conceding
the widow's right of succession was the distribution
of the deceased man's wealth, if he had wives of
different castes. Jimūtavāhana,[70] quoting the views
of Vishṇu and Yājñavalkya, adds that in the absence
of a wife of the same varṇa the right of inheritance

67. XI. 1.49.
68. ibid.

69. XI. 1.47.
70. ibid.

should go to a wife of the next following varna.
In the absence of these two the brothers and the rest
of the husband's family should inherit the estate,
giving only maintenance to surviving wives of lower
class.

Society thus recognised the rights of Brahmin
and Kshatriya wives, but made only a little provision
for Vaiśya and Śūdra wives. It is to be noted that
in all discussions on this topic it is assumed that
the deceased is either a Brahmin or a Kshatriya.
Hence it follows that the provisions of the jurists
give no recognition of the Vaiśya or Śūdra wife's
right to inheritance on the death of her husband,
even when he is of the same class as herself.

Widow-burning

We find reference to the burning of widows in
India in the Greek accounts, which show that it was
practised among the tribal people of the Panjab.[71]
In Taxila particularly it was regarded as a sacred
custom. The classical sources give examples of widows'
accepting death in this manner both willingly and other-
wise, and state that those widows who were unwilling
to die on their husband's pyres were socially degraded.[72]

Our jurists also give directions for the Sati.
Vishṇu[73] and Bṛhaspati[74] prescribe that widows may

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71. Diodorus. XVII. 9; XIX. 33.
72. Strabo. XV.62.
73. XXV.14.
74. XXIV. 11.

either live the rest of their days in austerity or embrace self-immolation. The rite was therefore in theory voluntary.

The work of Bhatta Bhavadeva, who was the chief minister of Lakshmanasena,[75] shows the existence of widow-burning in Bengal during the Pāla and Sena periods. He makes a distinction between sahamarana, the burning of the widow with her husband's corpse, and anumarana, when the widow ends her own life after her husband's cremation. Bhavadeva prescribes the first for Brahmins and both types for non-Brahmins. In his Sava-Sūtakāśaucaprakaraṇa[76] he prescribes sahamarana and not anumarana for Brahmins.

In another work of Bhavadeva[77] he suggests that at the cremation of a dead Brahmin husband the corpse should be accompanied in the flames by his Brahmin wife only. In the case of the three other castes cremation should be done with their wives also.

Other nibandhakāras agreed with him. Govindānanda in his Suddhi-kaumudi[78] prescribes only sahamarana and not anumarana or anugamana.

Another authority Raghunandana in his Suddhitattva[79]

75.   Bhavadeva Prasasti. JB. III. p.32ff.
76.   (ed) R.C. Hazra. p.38.
77.   Tautātila-matātilaka. p.100.
78.   p.84.
79.   p.236.

prescribes similarly that sahamarana only is to be performed by a Brahmin wife, but both sahamarana and anumarana may be carried out by others.

Thus we see that widow-burning was not confined to the Brahmin, but was also practised by the other castes. It can be presumed that this practice was often followed by widows in order to fulfil the social custom of the day.

CHAPTER VII

KULINISM

The original sources of our period hardly dwell on this subject. Hence, it is strictly speaking outside our jurisdiction. But, we cannot ignore the working of the system of Kulinism, since itis very probable that similar practices, less thoroughly formalised were not unknown in our period.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Kulinisn was the strongest force among the Bengali Brahmins. There were three main divisions - (a) Kulinas (b) Śrotriyas, (c) Bangajas. A Kulina Brahmin was always eager to marry the daughter of a Śrotriya Brahmin. His main aim was to secure social status, as well as money in the shape of the dowry, because the Śrotriyas were generally opulent. Similarly, the Śrotriya found his social position upgraded by the marriage of his daughter to a Kulin.

A Kulina would lose his Kulinism if he married the daughter of a Bangaja. The aim of the Śrotriyas was to rise in the social scale. So marriage between the Śrotriyas and the Bangajas hardly took place.

A Kulina could marry the daughter of a Kulina. But, there was serious obstacle to his freedom of choice. Among the Kulinas there were thirty six _melas_.

A Kulina of one _mela_ must marry the daughter of the same _mela_, otherwise he lost his Kulinism. These _melas_ were in fact sub-castes and marriages between two different _melas_ were forbidden. It was therefore the general inclination of the Kulinas to seek the hands of the daughters of the Śrotriya Brahmins rather than those of the Kulinas in order to avoid complications, and for fear of losing Kulinism. Sometimes marriage between the different _melas_ depended on the decision of the Ghatakas. In this decision party interests played their important role. The question of dowry was also connected with the selection and the more its amount the better from the point of view of maintaining Kulinism.

Kulinas could maintain their Kulinism by marrying their sons to girls from other Kulina families or from those of Śrotriya Brahmins. But they found greatest difficulty in finding suitable bridegrooms for their daughters. They could marry their sons to the daughters of Śrotriya families. A daughter's marriage might be settled with a Kulina Brahmin only. A man's Kulinism therefore depended not only on the marriage of his sons, but also on that of his daughters. The Ghatakas put special emphasis on this. It was an oft-quoted statement of the Ghatakas that Kulinism was Kanyāgata, that is, it was to be judged from the

marriage of the _Kanyā_ or daughter. The _mela_-system
also stood in the way of the marriage of Kulina girls.

It would follow that, owing to the keen desire
to maintain Kulinism and to difficulty in finding a
pure Kulin husband for a girl, several Kulin parents
were compelled to marry their daughters to the same
man. So Kulinism encouraged polygamy.

A similar marriage system was prevalent among
the Kulina Kāyasthas and Vaidyas. These castes
borrowed such rules and practices as were current
among the Kulina Brahmins.

Thus Kulinism had certain evil effects. Being
unable to find a suitable bridegroom, guardians had
often to keep their daughters and sisters unmarried
even up to the advanced age of thirty or thirty-five
years. It brought about polygamy on a large scale.
If an aged husband died, his many wives became widows
at the same time; among them there were girls of
different ages. When _Sati_ was practised all were
expected to follow the husband to the funeral pyre.
To obtain a Kulina Brahmin bridegroom required a
very large dowry. Only wealthy parents of daughters
could meet the high demands of a Kulina. Parents
or guardians, unable to find eligible Kulin husbands
would often settle the marriage of their daughters
with bridegrooms selected from near relations. There

is a common Bengali saying, <u>Kuliner emni dhara bone</u>
<u>svasuri bhagina sala</u>, 'a sister sometimes becomes a
mother-in-law, and a sister's son a brother-in-law.'

The Brahmin Ghatakas thus made the social life
of Bengal even more complicated than before. They
became in effect the fathers of the society and in the
name of its purification brought a multitude of evils
upon it. The more benign aspects of Hinduism vanished
from the land with the introduction of this practice.
Sastric marriage was replaced by Kulina marriage, which,
with all the practices connected with it was derided
by the outside world. Polygamy became a regular
profession among the educated Kulinas of Bengal.

This pattern of wedlock can be called hypergamous
marriage, as the Kulina bridegrooms in most cases married
brides from other Kulin sub-castes with lower standing
than their own; but Kulina girls could not be given
marriage to men of higher sub-castes. Thus hypergamous
marriage was allowed between members of Kulina groups
which definitely differed in social status.

The working of this system was baneful to social
life. As the number of suitable Kulina bridegrooms
was limited, many Kulina girls remained unmarried.
In order to balance this inequality polygamy was
practised or female infanticide had been resorted to.
Both these practices were connected with hypergamy.

Moreover when women of a given Kulina sub-caste were married to men of higher Kulina families, the men of this sub-caste tended to remain unmarried, finding no girls of their own rank. Owing to this artificial dearth of women the men of this group often practised polyandry. In such circumstances infanticide of the male-babies might have been expected, but, we have no evidence of it. Very often men of higher rank married women of lower rank, or were forced to form unofficial alliances with the aboriginal women like _Ādivāsis_.

This system of Kulinism is generally connected with the name of Ballālasena. It is said that Ballāla introduced it in order to purify the society of Bengal. Bengal at that time was supposed to be socially currupt in the extreme. The Brahmins forgot their Vedic rites and abandoned their Brahmanical duties. They encouraged inter-marriage between the Brahmins of high birth and those of lower rank. The other castes followed suit.[1] In the _Ballāla Charita_, a work by Ānanda Bhaṭṭa (1510),[2] it is said that owing to the prevalence of Tāntric Buddhism many obscure rites were practised and Ballālasena became a devotee of them.

He is alleged to have come into contact with an actress of low family, whom he intended even to

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1. Navyabhārata. B.S. 1297. p.325ff. Sources of this tradition are discussed in this Bengali journal.
2. Proc. of JASB. 1902. January. No.1.

marry. But a hermit from Badarikāsrama exercised some religious influence, on him and converted him to Śaivism. With his new religious zeal Ballāla tried to persecute the people of his old faith, who had tempted him to perform an unsocial act. To show his radical change of character to his subjects he proposed to perform a great sacrifice. But who would inaugurate it? All the Brahmins were found to have degenerated. He could not tolerate such a state of affairs, so he determined to bring about the thorough reorganisation of the social system through the introduction of the system known as Kaulinya by which those who possessed and showed some of the best qualities of brain and mind would be raised to form a sort of nobility, and be known as Kulina.[3]

Most of our knowledge of this theoretical basis and early history of Kulinism is obtained from texts known as Kula-gran-thas or Kulajī-Śāstras, which were composed in order to classify the Bengalis as Kulina and non-Kulina.

But, it appears that these Kulajis have little sound historical basis. They were not composed during the reign of Ballālasena, and so their statements cannot be regarded as the contemporary evidence. All were written five or six centuries after Ballāla's death. Even today they exist only in manuscript form.

3. Navyabhārara. B.S. 1308. p.125ff.

It is believed by those historians, such as R.P.
Chanda and R.C. Majumdar, who have studied them that
with the passage of time many alterations and modif-
ications have been made in these <u>Kulaśāstras</u>, several
irregularities regarding the actual time of the
introduction of Kulinism and many conflicting issues
have crept into them.[4]   Many Sanskrit Pandits such
as Nagen Vasu have written books on the social history
of Bengal on the basis of these so-called original
documents and some modern authors attempting to throw
light on Kulinism have shown no hesitation in following
these Pandits.

One would have expected that the rise of Kulinism
would have been reflected in contemporary literature
and the inscriptions of the Senas; but the fact is
otherwise. In these sources there is no hint of it at
all, not to speak of its explicit mention. As it is
said that <u>Kaulinya</u> was at first applied only to the
Brahmin jurists who flourished during the time of the
Senas would have written of it. But curiously enough
famous Pandits like Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa, Halā-yūdha
and Aniruddha, as well as several less well-known
Brahmins of this period, wrote of many other things but
not of Kulinism.

R.D. Banerji expressed doubt on the genuineness
of Kulinism, when he has obtained: served 'In the copper plate

4. Chanda: <u>Indo-Aryan Races</u>. Ch.V; Majumdar in
       <u>Bhāratavarsha</u>. B.S. 1346. Kartik. pp.623-34.

of Ballala Sena there is mention of the Brahmin
donees, but no mention of Kaulinya introduced by
Vallala Sena. Had Vallala Sena paved the way for
revolutionising the society of Bengal, there must
have been in its reference in the copper plates of the
period. Perhaps, after Vallala Sena's reign this
noble community came into being; but if that be,
why is there no mention of it in the four copper plates
of Lakshmana Sena and those of Kesavasena and
Visvarūpāseva?   No authentic proof has hitherto
been discovered as to whether Vallala Sena is really
the author of Kaulinya. Probably Kulinism was
introduced by Brahmins long after the Muslim conquest
of Bengal.....[5]

Whatever may be the merits and demerits of
Kaulinya let us examine what the Kulaśāstras and their
supporters say, and then pronounce our own judgement
on whether it was really introduced by Ballālasena
or not.

Although according to the tradition Ballāla did
not find any pure Brahmin for the perforance of yajña,
he did not show any disregard for the degenerate
Brahmins of his realm. According to Sarvānanda Miśra's
Kulatattvārnava he invited them, and after

5.   'Lakshmanaseher Samāj' Pravāsī B.S.1319. Sravana.

consultation expressed his desire to introduce the
Order of Merit among them. He then declared that
nine merits would be the yardstick for determining
Kaulinya:- Āchāra vinaya vidyā protishṭhā tīrtha-
daśśanam; Nishṭhā vṛittistapodānam navadhā kulakshanam.

'Nine virtues - good conduct, humility,
learning, noble works, pilgrimage, faith, profession,
religious austerity and charity are the signs of a
Kulina.'

In other words with the introduction of Kulinism
attempts were made to create artificial barriers
between the Kulina and the non-Kulina, so-called pure
and impure persons, even of the same varna.

Curiously enough the possession of these
fundamental virtues is mentioned uniformly in all
Kula-śāstras. If these be needed by the Brahmin, so
also they must be possessed by the Kāyasthas, the
second group of Bengali castes. It is surprising
that the relevent ślokas in the Kāyastha Kparikā
seem to be echoes of similar ones in the Kulaśāstras
of the Brahmins.

The Kāyasthas were divided into two sections,
Kulina-Kāyastha and Maulika-Kayastha on the basis
of their possession of these virtues. Good conduct,
humility, learning, noble works, pilgrimage, faith,
a (good) profession, religious austerity and charity,

are the nine qualifications of the Kulina-Kāyasthas.
Being learned, pure in heart and body, of a seene temper
charitable, doing good to others, serving the King,
and being kind to all are the seven qualifications
of the Moulika Kāyasthas.

In this way, if we are to believe the tradition,
during Ballāla's reign the society of Begal was
divided on the basis of its character. Apart from
the groupings of caste further divisions within the
individual castes were inaugurated and kept alive
through this Kulinism.

It was also believed that purity of blood
could be maintained only by marriag between persons
of the same group to the exclusion of others. Those
who lost their Kula would naturally lose their former
rank. They would not in future be allowed to vitiate
the blood of other higher ranks by marriage into
the Kulina class. Once they were deprived of the
dignity of Kaulinya they became outcastes, so to
say, in the eyes of the Kulina.

In the Kulatathvāanava there is an analysis of
each of these nine virtues:-

1.   Achāra:-

Kulānukramatojushtah sviya varnāśramochitah,
Dharmah śrutismritiproktah sa evāchāra Iritah.

'That is the good conduct where Dharma is

being served according to Kautilnya in accordance with the Varṇāśrama system and Śruti and Smṛiti rules.'

The point seems to be that Kulinism is the essence of the Vārṇāśramadharma; Śruti and Smṛiti depend on it. As the Vedic laws are inviolable and mandatory, so also was this new system, Kautilnya; as the Varnāśrama moulded the life of ancient India, so also Kautilnya would lead to the stratification and purifiction of Bengali society.

2. Vinaya:-

Gurau jyeshthe Kulāchāryye namratā priyabhāshaṇaṃ
Sarvatra Madhuraṃ chārudhruvaṃ sa vinayo mataḥ.

'To show humility to the preceptor, the aged and the Kulachāryas, and to speak in all places sweet acceptable and true words are known as Vinaya.'

The verse is significant. Whatever the Kulaji-pandits say on Kulinism must be obeyed. As Kulinism was their introductinn, naturally they propagated the view that the Kula-scholars must be held in regard. Veneration for Kulāchāryas is the test of humility. In other words they impose injunctions of Kautilnya and people are expected to accept them without protest.

3. Vidyā:-

Punyāghagunadashādi sadasat suvicharaṇaṃ;
Dharmaśāstreshu pāṇḍityaṃ sā vidyā samudāhritā:

'The power of making distinction between vice and virtue, merits and demerits, honesty and dishonesty, as well as scholarship in the Dharmaśāstras are known as learning

The conception is here that Kulinas must distinguish between the high and low qualities of a person, for these form the criterion to judge who are Kulinas and who non-Kulinas. The acquisition of learning will lead to such knowledge. Naturally, Kulinism is meant for the higher castes; its people have resources enough to gather knowledge and learning through teachers.

4. **Pratishtha**:-

Dūradeśe gatā kīrtistapoyogādisambhavā,
Kulajña-pramukhairgītā sā pratishthā nigadyate.

'Fame spreading to a distant country, arising from asceticism, meditation etc. and praised by the chief Kula-pandits is called celebrity.'

Here also the aim of the Kulācāryas is to intensify the idea of the merits of Kulinism.

5. **Tīrthadarśanam**:-

Sradhayā pushkare tīrthe gangākshetre gayādoke,
Sambandhaśchakshuyo yaścha vijñeyam tīrthadarśanam.

'Seeing with faith holy places like Pshkara, Gangā, (Srī.) Kshetra (Purī) and Gayā means pilgrimage.'

In ancient times only religiously minded persons went on pilgrimage. Such religious attitudes and practices are supposed to be maintained in Kulinism. That is why the Kulachāryas included this merit in Kanlinya and created grades accordingly.

6. <u>Nishtha</u>:-

<u>Dharmajnane sadodyoga-dharmatadgatamanasam.</u>

<u>Dharme yo dridha-Visvaso nishtha sapyabhidhiyate.</u>

'Constant engagement in religious knowledge with deep concentration, a mind fixed on <u>Dharma</u> and firm faith in religion are known as <u>Nishtha</u>'.

A religious mentality is thus one of the main yardsticks of Kaulinya.

7. <u>Vritti</u>:-

<u>Tulyaya tulyavamsyiya kanyadana-pradanatah;</u>
<u>Ubhayostulya-dharmatvam sa vrittih parikalpita.</u>

'The marriage (offering daughters to and taking them from equal lineage) between the two persons of equal virtue on the same <u>Vamsa</u> (family) leads to their equal religious grade which is called <u>Vritti</u>.'

This precept is of the essence of Kaulinya. Marriage between two Kulinas is essential and only this, it is believed, produces a pure breed.

8. <u>Tapas</u>:-

<u>Indriyader upayamair ajasram tattvachintanam;</u>
<u>Pujanam kuladevasya tapas tat parikirtitam.</u>

'Subduing all sensual forms, always thinking on philosophical truths and worshipping the family-god is <u>Tapas</u>.'

This declares indirectly that the family tradition must be kept and there must not be any deviation from it.

Marriage must always be between Kulinas and the system must be handed down from generation to generation.

9.   Dāna:-

Paropkrityai yas tyagah parānugrahakāmyayā,

Satpātrebhyas cha dātavyaṁ tad dānam iha kathyate

'Giving (things) up for the good of others and from a desire to please others, as well as a gift to the distinguished recipient are known as Dāna.'

In this verse we find nothing specially relating to marriage, but it may be implied in the exphasis on gifts to a Satpātra. The offer of the hand of the daughter to a well-qualified man is the main idea behind Kulinism.

Thus the Kulachāryas or Ghatakas in the name of Ballālasena set up a system under the banner of which restrictions on marriage were tightened even further. In short, marriage between two noble families is the theme of Kulinism. Thus in the Kulatattvārnava we read:-

Kuladharmaḥ kulinasya kanyāyām cha samāsthitah,

Ādānaṁ cha pradānaṁ cha saparjye cha praśastakah.

'The Kula-dharma (noble rank) devolves on the daughters of those of equal succession of descent.'

Then again:-

Nātidūre samīpe cha rnagraste cha durjane,

Vyādhiyukte cha murkhe cha shatsu kanyā na diyate.

'Daughters should not be given in marriage in six cases - to those who live in a distant place, or too

near, or who are involved in debt, or to wicked, or to diseased, or to ignorant persons.'

In the <u>Kulatattvārnava</u> it is also stated that a matrimonial relationship between a Kulina bridegroom and a bride having equal succession of descent should be considered the best bond. The <u>Kula</u> or nobility of a Kulina may also be maintained, if he, in the absence of a real living daughter give a daughter in the form of a doll made of Kusa-grass to a Kulina or binds himself with a promise to marry his daughter if born hereafter to him. The four attributes of <u>Kula</u> or nobility are in the actual giving and taking (of a daughter), the gift of a boy-daughter made of Kusa-grass, when there is no living daughter, and the promise made before the <u>Ghataka</u> to marry one's daughter when she is born.

After examining the merits of the Bengali Brahmins Ballāla is said to have divided them in two groups, <u>Mukhya Kulina</u> (principal) and <u>Gauna Kulina</u> (secondary).

Apart from this account derived from the <u>Kulotattvārnava</u> the Rādhīya Kulajis tell us something of the <u>Gāmi</u>. It is said that the five Brahmins brought by Ādiśūra became in course of time fiftynine during the reign of his grandson, Kshitiśūra. To each of these descendants this King offered a village for his abode. From this village the term <u>gāmi</u> came into being. Each Brahmin who was offered settlement took their surname from the name of his village. [6]

6. RHB.I. p.629. Some sources of Kulinism are referred to in this book.

During the reign of another King, Dharāśīra, the Rādhiya Brahmins were divided into fifty nine gāmis and were sub-divided into three ranks, Mukhya Kulina, Gauna Kulina and Srotriya.[7] According to the Vārendra Kulajis the Brahmins were divided into four grades. Those who possessed nine, eight or seven virtues were known respectively as Kulina, Siddha-Srotriya and Sodhya-Srotriya. The rest of the Brahmins were known as Kashta-Srotriya.[8]

Ballāla, it is said, made similar classifications among his Kāyastha subjects. Divisions among them were four - Kulina, Siddha, Maulika and Sādhya Maulika.[9]

It is also said that he intereferred with the social order of other castes. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa's Ballāla Charita indicates that it was the Suvarna Vanik caste who was mostly affected with Ballāla's Kulinism. The people belonging to this caste was very rich. One Vallabhānanda Ādhya, its leading member, lent money twice to Ballāla. On a certain occasion the merchant refused to pay (make a further loan) when the arrears of the last one were still out-standing. Ballālasena was then in great jeopardy, being attacked simultaneously by the Pālas of Magadha and the ruler of Manipur. He was immediately in need of money. But, when Vallabha remained adamant in his refusal to lend any more, Ballāla through his special agents began to plunder the property of this merchant community.

7. ibid.
8. ibid. p.630.
9. Kāyastha Samāj. B.S. 1328. p.367f; B.S. 1330. pp.442-44.

Even then the obstinate merchant did not give in
to the King. Ballāla then tried diplomacy, and summoned
the Vaniks to a royal feast. On reaching the palace they
found their seats arranged beside those of the Śūdras.
Thus insulted by the King they left the place with a
strong protest.[10]

Ballāla became very angry with this merchant class.
He divested its people of their secred thread and gave
peremptory orders that any Brahmins officiating as priests
among these Vanika were to be excommunicated. By way of
retaliation he raised the status of the Kaivartas, the
socially degraded class, as well as that of Mālākāras
(gardener), Kumbhakāras (potters) and barbers.[11]

However Ballāla's Kulinism was not fixed. No one could
enjoy Kulina status purely on a hereditary basis. He
allowed a sort of selection, judgement to be pronounced
by the Kulāchāryas as to who were Kulina and who non-
Kulina on the basis of their merits every thrirty-sixth year,
particularly among the Brahmins. Thus many Kulinas were
degraded to Maulikas and Maulikas raised to the status
of Kulinas. Domotion and Promotion depended respectively
on the loss of any one or more of the nine virtues and on
the acquirement or recovery of a lost virtue or virtues.
It is said that Ballāla introduced this system so that
his subjects might try to follow virtuous ways.[12]

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10. Ballāla Charita. p.160.
11. ibid.
12. Kāyastha Samāj. op cit.

Lakshmanasena continued this system of appointment to Kulina status. But it was found that most of the old Kulinas had lost their Kaulinya and had been replaced by the Maulikas. At this sudden change there arose symptoms of revolt on the part of these defeated groups. In order to check this state of things the King stopped the system of promotion and demotion, and declared that those who were already Kulina would remain so from generation to generation. No new Kaulinya would be offered to anybody.[13] Another important step taken by him was Samikarana - he raised seven Kulina groups, taking them from the different divisions of the Brahmin, to equal rank with the 14 groups of Kulina Brahmins and allowed marriage between them.[14]

The history of Kulinism is also connected with the names of Edumisra, Dattakhasa and Devivara Ghataka. It is said that during the reign of Kesavasena, the son of Lakshmanasena, there was further chaos in both the social and political life of the Bengalis owing to the Muslim invasion. He invited the noted Ghataka Edumisra to reorganise society on the basis of the existing Kulinism. Edumisra examined the virtues of the Bengali Brahmins and made 24 divisions of Kulina Brahmins on the basis of Samikarana.[15]

After a century Dattakhasa, another Ghataka divided the Kulinas into only 8 groups. He did not increase the number, as it was found that many impure persons had secretly entered the so-called Kulina groups, and also, because of the Muslim penetration, many Kulinas had fled their original

13. Vängälar Kaulinyer Katha' Näräyana. B.S.1322. Magh.
14. ibid.

homes and scattered in different places, thereby rendering
the Ghatakas ignorant of their Kaulinya.[16]

Gradually, the Muslims overshadowed every aspect of
the Bengalis' life. There were a large number of conversions
and destructions of Hindu temples, palaces and buildings.
In the course of this large scale devastation many Kulajis
had been lost. One day in 1478 Husain Shah, the Muslim
ruler of Bengal, himself invited the Kulāchārya Devīvara
Ghataka. On seeing the pitiable social condition of the
Bengali Hindus the Sultan asked him to reintroduce Kulinism.
Under royal patronage this Ghataka devoted himself to the
task. But, when he found that most of the Kulasāstras had
been burnt by the Muslims he himself introduced new Kaulinya
of his own choice. His system was known as Melbandhana -
he included within his Kaulinya persons who had Kulina
status, but also included those with both merits and demerits.
In other words he mixed the most virtuous with those who were
less so and ordered the marriage to between them to take
place. Hence this was known as Milan or union. From
Milan Melbandhana came into being. He thus created the 36
Mels or separate Kulin groups.[17]

These are the traditional accounts of the different
stages of Kulinism. But a study of the Kulasāstras in the
light of original sources such as contemporary literature
and epigraphic records would reveal that these are nothing

16. ibid.
17. ibid.

but stories.   It is doubtful whether this practice
was actually introduced at the time of the Ballalasem.
It was probably introduced during the Mughal period.
and not during Ballala's.   In the sixteenth century
a noted Brahmin Pandit Raghunandana did much for the
reform of society.   It was he who, by re-writing the
Smritis, offered the Bengalis new directions for the
reorganisation of their then troubled society.   Thence-
forward the class consciousness of the Bengalis increased
greatly.[18]   It may be suggested that the society of
Bengal was then taking a new turn.

Let us try to define Kulinism and see its connot-
ations.   If such features can be traced in the 12th
century Bengal, we may find confirmation that Ballala
was the actual author of Kaulinya.

The literal connotation of <u>Kulina</u> is 'having a
(good) family'.   Nowadays it implies a member of a high
caste family of good ancestry and by tradition high
religious intellectual and moral qualifications.

This Kulin system brings about a good relationship
with the noble families through marriage.   Marriage
contracts for the selection of good and pure brides
and bridegrooms, which was the basis of Kaulinya, were
customary in Indian family life long before the advent
of Ballal.

In the Jatakas many stories show how the social life
of India was moulded through the marriage-tie among
persons of equal standing.   Nobody of high social rank
would normally propose marriage with a family of lower
class.   Parents looked on such marriages as causing

18.   Nihar Roy: Vangalir Itihas (Adiparva) p.263

the degeneration and degradation of their family.
The same caste, the same rank and the same family
tradition became the rule in marriage-negotiations.
We have many facts in support of this statement.

'Take a girl out of a family who belongs to the
same family as we' (ekam samajatakakula kumarikam
janha).[19]   A Brahmin agriculturist gives his son in
marriage with a daughter of similar caste.[20]
(Brahmano puttassa vayappattasse samanakulata kumari-
kamanesi). If the parents are unable to go to select
a husband for their daughter, they send for agents
and ask them to carry on negotiations with other parents
of the same rank.[21] Similarly, an aristocratic Brahmin
wishes to marry his son (kulaputta) to the daughter of
an aristocrat belonging to an equal family. (assamat-
apitaro samanajatiyam kulato derikam anayimsu).[22]
Similarly the selection of a bride or bridegroom
from a suitable family is thebasis of Kulinism. If
either husband and wife be found to be of impure stock,
he or she must be abandoned for ever. We can find
We can find sentiments similar to those of Kaulinya
even in an early text such as the Dharmasutra of Baud-
hayana who says 'If the husband is of another caste,
outcaste, impotent, addicted to sin, of the same gotra,
a slave or affected with a chronic disease, the girl

19. J. III. p.422
20. ibid. p.162; IV. p.22.
21. ibid. III. p.93.
22. ibid. I. p 199.

even if she had been married, should be given to another, decked with clothes and ornaments'.[23]

For the improvement of the _Kula_ the _Dharmasas-tras_ give injunctions to offer girls to men with the right qualifications. If the Brahmin carries on all his activities with men of noble pedigree, on their account he attains greatness, and if the reverse be done he becomes degraded.[24]

This evidence is enough to prove that the ideas associated in Bengal with Kulinism were already influential in the Indian life, both in theory and and practice long before the time of Ballalasena. It is therefore fallacious to say that Ballala was the real author of Kaulinya.

Besides, there is a certain vagueness of our sources on this topic. The Kulajis on which this story stands contain many conflicting statements. They differ on the actual number of gamis created with Kaulinya, some mentioning a hundred and others fifty.[25]   The Kulajis are silent on the question why important Brahmins such as Aniruddha Bhatta, Bhavadeva, and Kedara Misra were not dubbed as Kulina by Ballala when he did not show the least hesitation offering kaulinya to other less known Brahmin.[26]   They are evidently based n'n later traditions which have hardly any histocical value.[27]   The desire to be

23. Colebrook: Digest. Bk. V.
24. M. 4/224/22.
25. RHB. I. p.629.
26. ibid. p.632.
27. Pal: Early Hist. of Bengal. II. p.32

connected with highly esteemed persons is more or
less inherent in human nature,[28] and in one form or
another it manifests itself in all societies at all
times. For such sentiments to appear in Bengali
society would scarcely require the positive intervention
of a particular ruler. Finally, the main story of all
the Kulajis has now support in either the inscriptions
or the literature of the period.[29]

The Ballāla Charita which is the main source of the
tradition of the foundation of Kaulinya has been
proved to be spurious and unauthentic by H.P. Sastri.[30]
It exists in six versions, each attributed to a
different author (strictly speaking only 5 authors),
the subject matter of the six being the same, with
slight variations at places. The six are: (1) Ananda
Bhaṭṭa, (2) Gopala Bhaṭṭa, (3) Gopati Bhaṭṭa, (4) Natha
Babul (5) Gopala Bhatta' s appendix to Ananda Bhaṭṭa's
version (6) Suren Datta.

H.P. Sastri, who himself translated Ananda Bhaṭṭa's
text, expresses doubt on the soundness of Ballāla Charita
as a source of history. He states in his Introduction:
'I was not without doubts as to its authority and
genuineness. A Sanskrit work of that name was published
some years ago by the Nāthas, the well known booksellers
of Chinabasar in Calcutta. I pronouced it to be spurious
and unreliable, and I have had since no reasons to
change my opinion. The Charita which I was requested
to translate, might, I thought turn out to be equally

28. ibid.
29 Chanda: Indo-Aryan Races. Ch. V.
30. Introduction to Ballala Charita.

spurious and unreliable.[31]

The tradition on Kulinism arose and the people accepted
it so credulously in much the same way as did the Adisura
legend which we have already discussed; these two topics
are based on the same sources, such as the Kulasastras
written by the Kulapandits.

From these arguments it is clear that neither
Adisura nor Ballala and his successors introduced
Kaulinya. It is of much later origin. It is the formal
elaboration by the Brahmins who are always ready to come
forward for the regulation of the social and also some-
times the political structure of India, of deep-seated
tendencies already long in existence in the upper classes
of Bengal society.

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31. Introduction to Ballala Charita.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Until the Pala period the caste system was in a very
rudimentary form. It did not then form the basis of
the social structure, as it does in modern times.
Nobody was rigidly confined to following his caste-
functions. Artifical divisions between man and man, or
among men of higher and lower birth were far less
rigid than they later became. Simplicity, brotherhood,
and fellow-feeling were the characteristics of the
period.

From the Maurya and the Gupta period we find social
parity, at least to a certain extent. We meet the
traditional divisions, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and
Sudras. But they were classes rather than castes,
and one class did not seriously over-shadow the other.
We have no direct evidence that the Brahmins and the
higher classes generally assumed the attitude of
arrogance towards the lower, which later became typical
of Indian social relationships. But after the fall of the
Mauryas the influence and pretensions of the Brahmins
increased.

From the Guptas to the Senas scattered references
give us hints of the existence of certain castes. But

the four classes and not castes are always in the
forefront. During this period particular castes
often carried on functions which were not prescribed
for them. We have seen that the Brahmins abandoned
their priestly activities, became the owners of land,
occupied administrative posts, held ministerships
and even took up the sword and sceptre as Kings. We
find the same in the case of the Kayasthas.

Even the Buddhist Palas defended Varnasrama which
implies the class-system, but not necessarily the
institution of caste. In this period the emphasis
is strongly placed on class, and not on caste. Social
life was moulded in this way, and it had its re-
flection in the imperial policy. Royal families paid
little regard to the caste system, as distinct
from the system of the four classes. They were above
this parochial feeling. That is why, in every land-
grant people of all social ranks were summoned to
grace the occasion in order to ensure that no injustice
should be done to anybody. Kings entered into
matrimonial relationships with other royal or semi-
royal families, without paying any heed to caste.

There is evidence, however, that castes existed
if only in a rudimentary form. People of a particular
occupation grouped themselves together, living in the

same place in order to maintain their homogeneity, and they even sometimes gave their caste name to a particular village, such as Brahmangrama, Kaivarta- grama etc. The functions of record keepers, engravers of land-grant plates, artists, etc. were trans- mitted from father to son.

Each of these rudimentary castes had some status in society. Hence in royal land-grants the kings invited them separately by name. If there has been no caste at all, royal authorities would not have mentioned them. But even the lowest castes like the Chandalas and Medas were recognised in such documents.

That the Brahmanical groups occupied a high position is proved by the royal patronage they enjoyed The kings and commoners alike donated lands to Brahmins, but not to other castes. In every land- grant it is explicitly states that the donor was giving land to Brahmins to augment his merit. The idea that adoring the Brahmins was the same as worship- ping the gods gained the ground in the society of the times.

The Mahasthan Brahmi inscription indicates that Bengal was already organised by the time of Asoka, and even possibly before that. So it is foolish to believe that the Brahmins were mainly brought by the mythical King Adisura, or that any sound and pure

marriage system was introduced by Ādisura or Ballālasena.

Certain factors such as the guild-system were already working unconsciously to give shape to later caste institutions. It was not a sudden growth but on the contrary it was a very slow process that gradually led to the stratification of the social divisions of Bengal.

If we go beyond our period we shall find that society gradually hardened by Brahmanical injunctions. We have already seen in the accounts of Jimūtavāhana and Bhavadeva how society gave different social status to Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sūdra wives in case of marriage, inheritance or property etc. But this again is rather connected with the class-structure than with the present caste system.

From the 13th century onwards society become rigid. The Dānasāgara[1] emphasises the importance of donations made by the Sūdras to the Brahmins on all auspicious days and ceremonies, to wipe off pre-birth Sūdra defects. The Brahmanasarvasva[2] of Halāyudha, the chief justice of Halayudhaxxx Lakshmanasena, extols the Brahmins to the skies, and states that their injunctions and dispensations must be followed by the other castes.

The Smriti-Kaumudi,[3] written in 1550, differentiates the religious duties of the Sūdra castes in order to lead

B No.719 (1704)
No.2321(1640) cited in the Bengali journal Manasi B.S.1319. p.119.
ibid; 3. MSS. No.2515 (1649) cited in Panchapuspa. B.S. 1340. P.60

a virtuous life. The Jativiveka[4], written in 1600,

discusses the gradual development of castes and sub-

castes, their different functions and endogamous

marriage. The Samkalpa Kaumudi,[5] written in the 18th

century treats of the Samkalpas (religious oaths)

of different castes in order to discharge their

religious functions. The Acharachandrika,[6] written in

1788 prescribes the different functions and duties

of Sudra castes, states that they were degenerate and

suggests means whereby they may obtain rebirth in

higher degrees classes.

This rigid caste divisions in Bengal appear to be

the products of a later period than ours. Also we

believe that the society of Hindu Bengal was much

sounder, healthier and more natural in the days of

the Palas and Senas than it later became.

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4.   MSS. No. 1469 (1638) cited in Sahitya. B.S.1347.
     pp.12,17,19.
5.   MSS. No. 838 (1703) cited in Manasi. op cit.
61   MSS. No. 554 (1648) ibid.

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(I) Khalimpur CP.EI. IV. P.243.

(2) Nalanda .. EI.XXIII. P.290.

II. Devapala

(I) Kurkihar Image Ins. JBORS. XXVI. P.251.

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(I) Gaya Temple Ins. Palas of Bengal.P.60.

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(2) Bārrāckpore Gr. IB. III.P.57ff;EI.XV.P.278ff.

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APPENDIX. I.

Alphabetical tabulated list of all castes of Bengal
with their occupation.
(covering our and post-Sena Periods).

Caste	Occupation
1. Abhir	rearing of cows.
2. Aguri	cultivation.
3. Ambashtha	medical service.
4. Andhra	hunting with arrows.
5. Bagdi	fishing, field-work.
6. Barui or Barujibi	growing of betel.
7. Bauri	field-labour.
8. Bhar	fish-selling.
9. Bhuinmali	cultivation, palanquin-bearing
10. Brahmin	priesthood.
11. Chamar or Charmakar	skinning, tanning.
12. Chandal	fishing, cultivation.
13. Chasa	cultivation.
14. Chitrakar	painting.
15. Chunari or Churnkar	lime-making.
16. Dhangar	scavengers
17. Dhibar	fishing
18. Dhobi	washermen.
20. Dom or Dombi	working in the burning ghat, scavengers.

APPENDIX I (CONTD)

Caste	Occupation
21. Gangaputra	dead body-carriers.
22. Gharami	hut-makers.
23. Goala	milkmen.
24. Gopa	" , cattle-breeders.
25. Hadi	pig-breeders.
26. Haliya Kaibartta	cultivation.
27. Jalik Kaibartta	fishing.
28. Jola	weaving.
29. Jugi	"
30. Kaibartta	Fishing, cultivation.
31. Kapali	rope & sack-making.
32. Kalu	oil-pressing.
33. Karmakar	blacksmiths.
34. Kansakar	braziers.
35. Kayastha or Karana	writing.
36. Kumbhakar	potters.
37. Kewat	fishing, cultivation.
38. Let	fishing.
39. Mahishya	cultivation.
40. Manikar	goldsmiths.
41. Malla	fishing.
42. Malakar	garland-makers or gardeners.
43. Meda	hunting wild animals.
44. Namasudra	cultivators, boatmen.
45. Nata	dancers.

APPENDIX I (CONTD)

Caste	Occupation
46. Napit	barbers.
47. Nishad	hunters.
48. Pattikar	image-makers.
49. Pode	fishermen.
50. Rajaka	washermen.
51. Rajbansi	fishermen.
52. Sadgope	cultivators.
53. Saraka	fisherman.
54. Sakhari	conch-sellers.
55. Sudi	wine-makers.
56. Sutradhar	carpenters.
57. Svarnakar	goldsmiths.
58. Tantuvaya	weavers.
59. Tambuli	betel-sellers.
60. Teli	oil-pressmen.
61. Tili	merchants in oil & sesamum.
62. Ugra Kahatriya	fishermen & cultivators.
63. Vaidya	physicians.

APPENDIX II.

Alphabetical tabulated list of all gotras, sakhas,

charanas in Bengal inscriptions.

Gotra   Date   Location Pravaras   Sakha Charana
                                          &

                         Source
....

1. Agastya. C.650. Tipperah   +   +   +
             A.D. EI. XV.PP.301-15.

2. + 5th century Natore   Samaveda. +
             in Rajsahi.
             EI. XVII. PP.345-48.

3. Bharadvaja. 6th Faridpur.   Vajasaneya. +
             century. SI. Nos.43,45.

4. Do.   C.650. Tipperah.   +   +   +
             A.D. EI. XVI. PP.301-15.

5. Do.   C.1042. Dinajpur. Angirasa; Pippalada. +
             EI. XXIX (2) Barhaspatya.
             P.9ff   (3) Bharadvaja.

6. Do.   12th Naihati.   Do. Kauthuma sakha Samaveda.
             cent. IBIII.68f. of Samaveda.

7. Do. Do. Dinajpur.   Do.   Do.   Do.
             IB.III.P.102ff.

8. Bhargava. 11th. Dinajpur. (I) Apnuvan: Jamadagnya +
             cent. IB.III (2) Aurvva;
               P.149f. (3) Bhargava;
                 (4) Chyavana;
                 (5) Jamadagnya.

Gotra	Date	Location	Pravaras	Sakha	Charana
		Source			

....

9. Gargya. 12th 24Pargs. (I) Angirasa; Asvalayana +
cent. IB. III. (2)Bharadvaja; sakha of
P.169f. (3) Brahaspati; Rgveda.
(4) Gargya;
(5) Usanas.

10. Hastidasa.10th Dinajpur.(I) Ambarina: + +
cent. EI.XXIX. P.If.(2)Angirasa;
(3)Yauvnasva.

11. Kanva- 6th Faridpur. + Vajasaneya +
Lauhitya. cent.SI. No.44. sakha.

12. Do. Do. Do. SI. No.45. + Do. +

13. Kasyapa. Do. Mursidabad. Chhandoga. +
EI.XVIII.P.60f.

14. Kaundinya. Do. Burdwan. + Bahvrcha sakha +
EI.XXIII of Rgveda.
P.155ff.

15. Kausika. 12th Nadia. (I)Bandhala; Kanva-
cent. IB.III.(2) Kausika; sakha of +
P.87f.(3)Kusika; Yajurveda.
(4) Visvamitra.

16. Do Do. Pabna. + Paippalada sakha +
IB.III.P.106f. of Atharvaveda.

Gotra	Date	Location	Pravaras	Sakha	Charana
		&			
		Source			

....

17. Maudgalya. Do. Dacca. (I)Apnuvan; Kauthuma
    EI. XXVI. (2)Aurvva; sakha of
    P.I. ff. (3) Bhargava; Samaveda.
    (4) Chyavana;
    (5) Jamadagnya.

18. Parasara. 10th Dinajpur. (I) Parasara; Vajasaneya
    cent. EI. XIV. (2)Sakti; branch of
    P.324 ff. (3) Vasishtha. Yajurveda.

19. Sandilya. 11th Dinajpur.(I)Asita; Kauthumi sakha
    cent. EI. XV.P.293f(2)Daivala; of Samaved
    (3) Sandilya.

20. Do. 12th cent. Dacca. Pravaras of
    IB. III.P.6f3 rishis(not mentioned).

21. Sandilya.12th Murshidabad. (I) Devala. Kauthumi
    cent. EI. XXI.P.2II f. sakha of Samaveda.

22. Savarna. Do. Dacca. (I)Apnuvana; Kanva Vajasaneya
    IB. III. P.14f.(2) Aurvva; Sakha charana.
    (3)Bhrigu; of Yajurveda.
    (4) Chyavana;
    (5) Jamadagnya.

23. Do. 11th Bhuvanesvara.
    cent. EI. VI. P.203 ff.

Gotra	Date	Location & Source	Pravaras	Sakha	Charna

....

24. Vardha- 12th Dacca. Pravara of   Kanvasakha.   +
    Kausika.   cent.IB.III. 3 rishis.
                P.165 f. (not mentioned).

25. Vatsya 11th 24 Pargs. (I)Apnuvana; Asvalayana   +
           cent.IB III. (2) Aurvva;   Sakha of
                P.63f. (3) Bhrigu;   Rgveda.
                (4) Chyavana;
                (5) Yamadagnya.

26. Do. 12th 24th Pargs. Do. Kauthama sakha Samaveda
        IB. III.96ff. except Bhrigu of
                which is replaced by Samaveda.
                Vatsya.

27. Vatsya 13th Faridpur (I) Apnuvana;   +   +
           cent. IB. III. (2)Aurvva;
                P.132 ff. (3) Bhargava;
                        (4) Chyavana;
                        (5) Jamadagnya.

28. Do. Do. Dacca. Do.   Kanva sakha of   +
             IB. III.P.140ff.   Yajurveda.

29. Do. Do.   Faridpur. Do.   +   +
             IB. III.
             P.121f.

Gotra	Date	Location & Source	Pravaras	Sakha	Charna