

Heritage

Brahminical Culture was influenced by Dharmashastra-A study in the light of Bengal Inscriptions

Arpita Dey, Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, Bethune College

Sumita Batabyal, Professor, Burdwan University

Bengal inscriptions are included in the eastern Indian Epigraph. From the Bengal inscriptions we get a social picture of the then society which was based on varṇasystem, as mentioned in dharmaśāstras. It is impossible to mention the exact date of establishment of this varṇa based society. Due to long and close connection of Gaṇḍaḥaṅga with Ārjābarta, the Aryan culture, civilization, society spread throughout the ancient Bengal. The structure of Aryan society was based on varṇa system as described in dharmaśāstra. This varṇa based society established in Bengal on a strong base after the arrival and permanent settlement of the brāhmaṇas. We can collect the relevant information regarding the settlement of brāhmaṇas from the Bengal inscription. The Aryan culture followed the dharmaśāstras. Gaṇḍaḥaṅga got in touch with Aryan culture which included it in brahminical culture. The rules of dharmaśāstras are also equally applicable here.

In this article I tried to realise to what extent the dharmaśāstras before the Christian era influenced the varṇa chief brāhmaṇas of the varṇa based society as described in the inscriptions of the Bengal up to the 13th century. It is learnt from the reign of the Kumār Gupta I that the land was granted generously to the Vedic and sacrificial brāhmaṇas. The importance of the granting land to the vedic brāhmaṇas was well discussed in almost all the dharmaśāstras. By granting of land one can reach the heaven as per Yājñavalkyaśmhitā.

ভূদীপাশ্রমবজ্রাস্তিলসর্পিঃ প্রতিশ্রয়ান্ ।

নৈবেদিকং স্বর্গধূমং দত্ত্বা স্বর্গমহীয়তে ॥

In it is said that the land donor after enjoying a heavenly life for a century will spend a grain from a heap of sand as high as SaptarṣiMandal (Great Bear). The attainment of this virtue knows no bound. Āditya, Baruṇa, viṣṇu, Brahmā, Chandra, Agni, lord Mahādev congratulate the land donor.

আদিত্যো বরুণো বিষ্ণুর্ব্রহ্মা সোমোহুতাশনঃ ।

শূলপাণিস্তু ভগবানভিনন্দন্তি ভূমিদম্ ।

বালুকালুকানাং কৃত্যং রাশির্থাবৎ সপ্তর্ষিমন্ডলম্ ।

গতে বর্ষশতৈঃ চ বপলমেকং বিশীর্ষ্যতি ॥²

The evidences of granting land are found in Bengal inscriptions eg. Mallaśārul copper plate was discovered in the third year of the reign of king Gopochandra. In that plate it is known that king Bijoysen granted land as permanent endowment to Vatsyasvāmin brāhmaṇa belonging to kaṇḍinyagotra and Brhacśākhādhyāyī for performance of daily five sacrifices to gain spiritual merit for himself and his parents. Similarly Faridpur copper plate was discovered in the third year of the reign of king Dharmāditya. In that plate it is known that sādhanik Bātabhoga granted the land as permanent endowment to Chandrasvāmin belonging to Bhāradbājagotra. It is also mentioned that land was granted to build the temple and also to meet the expenditure of the daily worship of god. eg. Four villages were granted for the worship of Naranārāyana as found in the Khālimpur copper plate of Dharma Pal. Two –copper plates referring the reign of Śaśanka were found in Medinipur. As per first plate, Śubhakirtī, the ruler of Daṇḍabhukti granted a purchased land to brāhmaṇa Dāmyasvāmin belonging to Bhāradbājagotra and Mādhyandinśākhā. The second plate indicates that Sāmanta Mahārāj Somodutta granted a village to Adhurja Bhaṭṭeswar, belonging to the Kāśyapagotra. From copper plate of Kalaikuri Sultānpur it is also known that a land was granted as Akṣayanībī to three brāhmaṇas. The word Akṣayanībī is well explained in Manusmhitā in the light of Dharmaśāstra. It is mentioned in the Manusmhitā that the learned disciples would get Akṣayanībī from the king after returning

Heritage

from the house of preceptor . The land in question cannot be stolen by the thieves or enemies .This tax free lands were given to brāhmaṇa only for occupancy right.

আবৃত্তানাং গুরুকুলদ্বিপ্রাণাংপূজকো ভবেৎ ।
নৃপানামক্ষয়ো হোষ নিখির্বক্ষোহভিধীয়তে ।।
ন তৎস্তু নান চামিত্রা হরন্তিন চ নশ্যতি ।
তস্মাদ্রাজা নিধাতব্যো ব্রাহ্মণেষবক্ষ্যে নিধিঃ ।।3

It was instructed in Manusmṛhitā not to collect tax from Śrotriya brāhmaṇas .

ত্রিয়মাণোহপ্যাদদীত ন রাজা শ্রোত্রিয়াংকরম্ ।
ন চক্ষুধাহস্যসংসীদেচ্ছোত্রিয়েমিষ্যবসন ।।4

Instructions have been given in the dharmaśāstra in respect of the above vedic sacrifices as described in the inscriptions. For example, It is instructed in Manusmṛhitā that the house master (গৃহস্থ) would perform the daily five sacrifices after his marriage . On the other hand the vedic sacrifices in different times and stages are also instructed. This are Agnihotra ,Darśapurnamāsa ,Āgrāyaṇa or Nabānnajāg , Cāturmāsyesṭi etc.

বৈবাহিকেহগ্নৌকুবীতগৃহ্যৎকর্ম যথাবিধি ।
পঞ্চযজ্ঞবিধানঞ্চ পন্ডিঞ্চান্মহিকীং গৃহী ॥5
অগ্নিহোত্রঞ্চ ভূহ্যাদাদ্যন্তে দুনিশোঃ সদা ।
দর্শন চার্দ্রমাসন্তে পৌর্ণমাসে নৈব হি ।।6

There are two objects of granting land to the brāhmaṇas . Firstly to gain spiritual merit as per smṛitiśāstra. This religious merit was gained by not only the donor but also the king who also got one sixth of it .Because the king protected the granted land. In Viṣṇusmṛhitā it is told that-

রাজা চ প্রজাত্যঃ সুকৃতদুষ্কৃতযষ্ঠাংশভাক্ ।7

Secondly to spread the vedic education and culture by performing vedic sacrifices in accordance with dharmaśāstras. The Vedas, the source of all dharma was preserved by establishing Brahmanism . The second object like the first one was also supported by dharmaśāstra . For example it is mentioned in the Viṣṇusmṛhitā that one gains many times as compared to what he donates to the veda studying brāhmaṇas.

সহস্রগুণংপ্রাপীতে অনন্তং বেদপারগো ।8

The brāhmaṇas are instructed in Hārītsmṛhitā to study the Vedas and the dharmaśāstras .

বেদধ্বংসব্যাসেমিত্যংশ্রুতৈশেষমাহিতঃ ।
ধর্মশাস্ত্রং তথা পাঠ্যং ব্রাহ্মণৈঃ শুদ্ধমানসৈঃ ।।
বেদবৎপঠিব্যঞ্চ শ্রোতব্যঞ্চ দিবানিশি ।
স্মৃতিহীনায় বিপ্রায় শ্রুতিহীনে তথৈব চ ।।9

In this respect evidence may be cited in the Bengal inscriptions which are as follows. It is known from the Bhubanesvaraprasasti of Bhaṭṭabhadra the village Siddhal , the motherland granted to the brāhmaṇas was sonorous with the study of the vedas . For long time the inhabitants of the Gaudabanga were reluctant to aryan culture and were against the Vedas. But gradually by granting land to brāhmaṇas and their settling it came within the sphere of brahminism . Perhaps from then the social system based on varṇa and caste was established. In this connection it is seen from the very beginning of the Hārītsmṛhitā that the king Ambarīṣa asked Mārkaṇḍeya about the varṇāśrama dharma.

বর্ণশর্মধর্মস্থান্তে ভক্তাঃ কেশবংপ্রতি ।

ইতিপূর্বং তুষা পোক্তং ভূর্বং স্বদ্বিজোত্তমাঃ ।।10

Heritage

Apart from this, varṇāśrama was well discussed in all dharmaśāstras . In this regard the Nālandā copper plates of DebaPāl may be considered as an evidence. From this plate it is learnt that Dharma Pal, an expert warrior and son of Gopāl would remain conscious to keep his subjects established in their respective varṇa based dharma. If anyone deviated from his own dharma, the king made him return to his own dharma by the royal instruction.

Varṇa means colour . But in practice varṇa means caste. It is said in Padmapuraṇa that the colours of brāhmaṇa ,kṣatriya , Baiśya and Śūdra are white ,red ,yellow and black respectively .

ব্রাহ্মণানাং সিতো বর্ণঃ ক্షত্রিয়াণাং চ লোহিতঃ । বৈশ্যানাং পীতকশ্চৈব শূদ্রাণামসিত স্তথা ॥11

Brāhmaṇas and other castes were divided depending upon the colour of the fine and course human body. The prevailing caste system is based on this varṇa .The brāhmaṇa is the best among the four varṇas . The role of the brāhmaṇas in the field of the vedic education and culture is undeniable. Because it is mentioned in the Manusmṛitā that the brāhmaṇas after studying Śāstras , Vedas and vedāṅga , circulate them to their disciples as per rule .

বিদুষা ব্রাহ্মণেনৈদমধ্যৈতব্যং প্রযত্নতঃ ।

শিষ্যোভ্যশ্চ প্রবক্তব্যং সম্যগ্ভ্যন্যেন কেনচিৎ ॥2

The deities and the forefathers are served through the service to the brāhmaṇas . All the good works are performed at the advice of the brāhmaṇas . The kings used to make gift and gave honorarium to the brāhmaṇas for the good and development of his subjects and the country. For example it is mentioned in Atrismṛitā that those countries are well rained where the Vedas knowing brāhmaṇa , expert in all Śāstras are honoured properly.

ব্রাহ্মণান্ বেদবিদুষঃ সৰ্ব্বশাস্ত্রবিশারদান্ ।

তত্র বর্ষতি পর্জন্ত্যো যত্রৈতান্ পূজয়েন্মৃগঃ ॥3

That is why the relation between the kings and the brāhmaṇas was so deep. As flatterer and family historian, the brāhmaṇas were so expert that they became the main claimants of the legal grants of the king. By establishing deep relation with the courtiers they had the only role in the royal appointment and administration. For this reason the rulers of Bengal used to grant land generously for the settlement of the brāhmaṇas.

The procedure which was followed in granting land was also as per dharmaśāstra as found in the inscriptions .In Viṣṇusmṛitā the following procedures are instructed .The names of the grant receivers up to their third forefathers and the donor , the area of the land within a boundary shown by any permanent support should be written in the copper plate duly stamped by the coin or seal of the king .These were done to realize the actual situation by the next king .Nobody will be able to dispossess that land .In almost all the copper plates meant for grant the land cheater or confiscator were cursed and the land grantor were praised as per dharmaśāstra .

ব্রাহ্মণেভ্যশ্চ ভূবৎ প্রতিপাদয়েৎ ॥ তেষাং যেষাঞ্চ প্রতিপাদয়েৎ স্ববংশ্যান্ অন্তরপ্রমাণং দানচ্ছেদোপবর্ণনঞ্চ পটে তাম্রপট্টে

লিখিতং স্বমুদ্রাঙ্কিতঞ্চ গামিনীপবিজ্ঞাপনার্থং দদ্যাৎ ॥ পরদত্তাঞ্চ ভূবৎ নাপহরেৎ ॥ ব্রাহ্মণেভ্যঃ সৰ্বদায়ান্ প্রযচ্ছেৎ ॥4

In that age the profession was hereditary .The sons inherited the profession of their fathers .There was no hard and fast rule in taking profession. The caste of a person was determined by his ancestral profession even after taking another profession. Our discussion is about be profession of the brāhmaṇas .

অধ্যাপনমধ্যয়নং যজনং যাজনং তথা ।

দানং প্রতিগ্রহঞ্চৈব ব্রাহ্মণানামকল্পয়ৎ ॥15

Heritage

But as per evidences found in the Bengal inscriptions it was learnt that the brāhmaṇas took the profession of minister, commander, trader, farmer though it was approved by the dharmaśāstra . In support of this, the evidences found in the BhuvaneswarPraśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēb may be mentioned here. It is known that Ādideva was a minister of king in his time of relaxation, prime minister, supreme official, foreign minister though he was a brāhmaṇa. Bhaṭṭabhavadēb was also a minister of king Harivarmā of varmandynasty. He was a scholar and expert in all śāstras . Śaśānka was the king of Gauḍa though he was a brāhmaṇa . From his two copper plates of Medinipur it indicates that the managing committee of Tābīrkaraṇa was framed by the brāhmaṇas. brāhmaṇas had a role in administration also . From the DeopārāPraśasti of BijaySen it is known that SāmantaSen , the king of sen dynasty was a brahmakṣatriya that means a brāhmaṇa took the profession of a soldier leaving the profession of teaching and learning.

সব্রহ্মক্ষত্রিয়াগামজানি কুলশিরোদাম সামন্তসেনঃ ॥ 6

In his last life he took bāṇaprasṭha (the third stage of life) and stayed in a holy āśram on the bank of the Ganges as per dharmaśāstra . On the other hand he used to explain and teach the Vedas. The pillar inscription of BāḍalGaḍur denotes that Deva pāl and NārāyaṇPāl belonging to pal dynasty had brāhmaṇa ministers Darbhapaṇi and his grandson KedārMitra respectively. It is found in the kailan copper plate of Dhāranābata that Śīlvadra ,principal of NālandāBihār was a descent of a royal brāhmaṇa family . In kalaikuriSultānpur copper plate, the word ‘Kutumbī’ is meant for brāhmaṇa house holder, who was a agriculture trader. That is the brāhmaṇa took the profession of agriculture. To teach Vedas to Śūdras and also to act as a priest in any sacrifice arranged by them were enlisted among the blamed profession of the brāhmaṇas . Those blamed brāhmaṇas were degraded and known as varṇabrāhmaṇa. Medical service, painting and astrology were forbidden profession for the Brahmins. Such evidences are found in dharmasastra. In Atrismhitā it is said that if the brāhmaṇa took the profession of kṣatriya and agriculture with animal husbandry were called kṣatriya and baiśya respectively.

অষ্টাহতশ্চধনানঃসংগ্রামেসর্বসম্মুখো
আরম্ভেনির্জিতা যেন স বিপ্রঃক্ষত্রিউচ্যতে।।
কৃষিকর্মরতো যশচগবাঞ্চ প্রতিপালকঃ ।
বাণিজ্যব্যবসায়শ্চ স বিপ্রো বৈশ্যউচ্যতে।। 7

It is also said in Yājñavalkyaśmhitā , in danger period brāhmaṇa could take the profession of kṣatriya and baiśya.

ক্ষত্র্যেণকর্মণা জীবৈদিশাংবাপ্যপদিদ্বিজঃ ।
নিস্তীৰ্য্য তামথাআনংপাবয়িত্বা ন্যসেংপথি।। 8

Brāhmaṇa could take the profession of kṣatriya and baiśya in the scarcity of his own livelihood as per Manusmhitā.

অজীবৎস্তু যথোক্তেনব্রাহ্মণঃ শ্বেনকর্মণা ।
জীবৎক্ষত্রিয়ধর্মণেস হাস্য প্রত্যনন্তরঃ ।।
উভাভ্যামপ্যজীবৎস্তু কথং স্যাদিতিচেদ্ভবেৎ
কৃষিগোরক্ষমাস্ত্রায়জীবৈদৈশ্যস্যজীবিকাম্।। 9

On the other hand, in the royal work the king would take the advice from the pious and scholar brāhmaṇa in connection with war matter.

সর্বেষাম্তু বিশিষ্টেনব্রাহ্মণেনবিপশ্চিতা ।
মন্ত্রয়ৎপরমংমন্ত্রংরাজা ষাড়গুণ্যসংযুতম্।। 20

Heritage

In judicial matter the king would appoint educatedbrāhmaṇa.

যদা স্বয়ং ন কুৰ্যাতু নৃপতিঃ কার্যদর্শনম্ ।
তদা নিযুক্ত্যাদিহাংসংব্রাহ্মণং কার্যদর্শনে । 21

The said profession of brāhmaṇa was approved by dharmaśāstra and hence mentioned in the Bengal inscriptions. The forbidden profession in the light of dharmaśāstra were also blamed in the inscriptions .Such as in Atrismhitābrāhmaṇas were advised not to teach the Vedas to the Śūdras .

অকুলীনেহাসদব্ভেজডেশুদ্রেশ্চিজৈঃ ।
এতেষেবন দাতব্যমিদংশাস্ত্রং দ্বিজোত্তমৈঃ । 22

Brāhmaṇa astrologers were not invited in the funeral ceremony, sacrifices and great endowment. Painter and medical trader brāhmaṇas were not respected even if they were scholar.

জ্যোতির্বিদেহাথর্কর্বাণঃকীরপৌরাণপাঠকাঃ ।
শ্রাদ্ধেযজ্ঞেহাদানেবরনীয়াঃকদাচ ন ॥
আবিকশ্চিৎকরশ্চ বৈদ্যো নক্ষত্রপাঠকঃ ।
চতুর্বিপ্রা ন পূজ্যন্তে বৃহস্পতিসমা যদি । 23

As per Manu the brāhmaṇa who performed the Agihotra sacrifice for the Śūdras in lieu of money were blamed by the Vedicbrāhmaṇas.

যে শূদ্রাদধিগম্যার্থমগ্নিহোত্রমুপাসতো
ঋতিজন্তে হি শূদ্রাণাংব্রহ্মবাদিন্ গর্হিতাঃ । 24

Generally brāhmaṇas used to get huge amount of wealth by acting as a priest in any sacrifice arranged by other. From the Rampāl copper plate of Sri Chandra it is learnt that ŚāntibārikPītabasaguptaśarman, a brāhmaṇa belonging to ŚāndilyaGotra performed the kotihomsacrifice. On the other hand Barrackpore copper plate of BijaySen indicates that Udayakardevaśarman acted as priest in kanakatulāpuruṣadāna sacrifice arranged by the queen. It is also learnt from Deopārāpraśasti of BijoySen that the brāhmaṇas were given gold, silver and jewels as honorarium. As an evidence of dharmaśāstra it is said in Manusmhitā that the king would select the brāhmaṇa for the priesthood of the sacrifice. These priest performed Gṛhyakarma (such as Śāntisvastayaṇ etc.) and Baitānik karma (Dakṣiṇāgni ,Āhabanīyāgni, Gārhapatyāgni- three sacred fire) of the king . According to Manu in sacrifices brāhmaṇas were given honorarium, gold, money and consumer goods by the king.

পুরোহিতঞ্চকুবীতবৃণুয়াদেবচতুর্জম্ ।
তেহস্যগৃহ্যানি কৰ্মাণি কুৰ্যুর্বেতানিকানি চ ॥
যজ্ঞেতরাজা ক্রতুভিবিধৈরোগুদক্ষিনৈঃ ।
ধর্মার্থঞ্চৈব বিপ্রেভ্যোদদ্যাভোগান্ধনানি চ ॥ 25

From the Bengal inscriptions within the period of fifth to seventh century brāhmaṇas began to settle in Bengal for vedic ritual patronized by the ruler. In dharmaśāstrabrāhmaṇas were favoured in every sphere of life to make them economically solvent. These were done for smooth performance of vedic sacrifices and vedic education .Following this the rulers of Bengal used to favour the vedicbrāhmaṇaby granting land and other works as prescribed in dharmaśāstra .It is ascertained from the wide discussion stated above that the dharmaśāstras before the Christian era were equally applicable in the brāhmaṇa society as described in the Bengal inscriptions till the thirteenth century and so on . The than brāhmaṇa society was benefited by performing vedic ritual and thus the vedic culture was preserved. By this, the evidences of the applied side of the social,religious, judicial and administrative rules written by twentyDharmaśāstrakars are found from the Bengali inscriptions.

Heritage

Reference

1. 1/210	Yājñavalkyaśaṃhitā	p-157
2. 330,331 no	Atrisaṃhitā	p-21
3. 7/82,83	Manusaṃhitā	p-476,477
4. 7/133	Manusaṃhitā	p-497
5. 3/67	Manusaṃhitā	p-181
6. 4/25	Manusaṃhitā	p-273
7. 3/14	Vinusaṃhitā	p-31
8. 93/4	Viṣṇusaṃhitā	p-118
9. 1/22,2	Hārītsaṃhitā	p-128
10. 1/1	Hārītsaṃhitā	p-127
11. 27 th chpt	Padmapurāna	(swargakhanda)
12. 1/103	Manusaṃhitā	p-47
13. 24no	Atrisaṃhitā	p-2
14. 3/57-60	Visnusaṃhitā	p-33
15. 1/88	Manusaṃhitā	p-42
16. 5 no	DeopārāPraśasti Of Bijaysen	p-237
17.368,359 no	Atrisaṃhitā	p-23
18. 3/35	Yājñavalkyaśaṃhitā (Apaddharmaprakarana)	p-201
19.10/8182	Manusaṃhitā	p-445-446
20. 7/58	Manusaṃhitā	p-446
21.8/9	Manusaṃhitā	p-547
22.8 no	Atrisaṃhitā	p-1
23.376,378	Atrisaṃhitā	p-28
24. 11/42	Manusaṃhitā	p-876
25. 7/78,79	Manusaṃhitā	p-474-475

Bibliography

1. *Manusaṃhitā. Ed. Manabendu Bandopadhyay. Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar. Kolkata ; 1410 (Bengali year)*
2. Battabyal sumita. GuptottarAvilekhe ItihāsBīkhana. Sadesh Kolkata; 2013
3. Chattapadhyay Bhaskar GaūdabāṅgerItihās Samskriti kol-09 2005
4. Sarkar, Debarchana. *Nityakāler tui Purātan* Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak, Kol-06 .2013
5. Sarkar Dinesh Chandra Śīlālekhetāmraśāsānadi Prasanga, Kalasahityalok Kol -06 2009
6. Tarkaratnapanchanan Ūbinśatisaṃhitā, Kolkata.1316(Bengali year)