CHAPTER XII

SOCIETY

I. Aryanisation of Bengal

The origin of the Bengalis has been discussed above in Chapter II (pp. 17 ff). It has been shown that Bengal was inhabited at first by motley groups of peoples belonging to different racial stocks of diverse types of culture, and a long period elapsed before they came into contact with the Aryans. The little that we know of this pre-Aryan culture in Bengal has also been noted in this connection.

The gradual infiltration of the Aryans and the settlement of many of them in Bengal made a revolutionary change in the culture of Bengal. It is a law of history that when a highly civilised people conquers a primitive people the latter gradually imbibe the culture of the former to such an extent that in the course of time only a few traces of their primitive culture are left. This happened also in Bengal and gradually the entire population was Aryanised with the exception of a handful of primitive peoples living in isolation in hills and forests.

As noted above, it was not till a comparatively late period represented by the Epics and the Manu-smṛiti, that the people of Bengal first began to imbibe the social and religious ideas of the Aryans. The gradual stages in the progress of the Aryanisation of Bengal are unknown to us. It is certain, however, that one of the earliest steps was an attempt to bring the indigenous people within the framework of Aryan society. This is indicated by the fact that indigenous tribes like the Vangas, the Suhmas, the Šabaras, the Pulindaš, the Kirātas, and the Punḍras are classed as Kshatriyas in early literature. That some classes of the people of Bengal were raised to the rank of Brāhmaṇas, we have no reason to doubt, and the story of Dirghatamas seems to indicate, what even otherwise appears probable, that there was inter-marriage between the immigrant Brāhmaṇas and the native people. The majority of these people were ultimately classed as Śūdras. It is interesting to note that according to Manu-smṛiti (x. 44) the Paunḍrakas and Kirātas, who were originally Kshatriyas, were degraded to the rank of Śūdras because they did not come into contact with the Brāhmaṇas and
forsook the Brähmanical rites and customs. This was probably the case with other tribes also. The Kaivartas, for example, are referred to as mixed caste in Manu, but are described as abrahamanya in the Vishnu Purana. These show that the caste-divisions in the early Aryanised society of Bengal were yet in a state of flux, and further that the adoption of Aryan manners and customs by the indigenous tribes of Bengal was a long and tedious process. It must have required many years, perhaps centuries, before the Aryan immigrants from the Midland and the people of Bengal could be fused together in a rigid framework of Aryan society.

We can hardly doubt that a gradually increasing number of high class Aryans poured into Bengal in the early centuries of the Christian era, either in the wake of military campaigns or for more peaceful pursuits. These included, as already noted above, followers of the different religious sects, Brähmanical, Buddhist and Jaina.

The establishment of the political power of the Guptas in Bengal must have not only quickened the pace of these immigrations, but also given an ascendancy to the orthodox followers of Brähmanical religion. In any case, the inscriptions of the Gupta period, which for the first time give us a definite glimpse of the religion and society in Bengal, refer to orthodox Brähmanas performing smāraṇ and brauta rites and Purānic worship all over Bengal (infra Ch. XIII). The growing importance of Bengal as an Aryan settlement is indicated by the fact that even a nobleman from Ayodhya makes pilgrimage to Bengal and endows a temple in the Himalayan region in the northern outskirts of the province (No. A. 10).

The inscriptions of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. have preserved the personal names of a few officials and a large number of leading men in different parts of Bengal. A perusal of these names shows the complete domination of Aryan influence in all classes of society, both urban and rural. It is interesting to note the prevalence, even at this early period, of certain name-endings which are used as surnames in Bengal even today; viz., chaṭṭa, varman, pāla, mitra, datta, nandin, dāsa, bhadra, deva, sena, ghosha and kunju. It is to be noted, however, that personal names in those days consisted generally of a single word, such as Durlabha, Garuđa, Kalasakha etc. It is difficult to say whether the name-endings in some cases such as Bandhumitra, Dhritipāla, Chirātadatta etc. were surnames or parts of names.
An analysis of the place-names mentioned in the early inscriptions of Bengal also shows the strong Aryanisation of the land. Names like Puṇḍravaradhana, Koṭivarsha, Pañchanagara, Chanḍagrama, Karmanta-vāsaka, Svachchhanda-pāṭaka, Śilakunja, Navyāvakāśikā, Palāsavṛindaka are purely Aryan. But, as in later days, old non-Aryan names persisted, as is evidenced by Ṇoṅgā (grāma), Nāgiratī, Kuṭkuṭa, and Kaṇha-motikā. An attempt at Aryanisation of non-Aryan names is also manifest in Prishtima-pottaka, Goshāṭapuṇja, Trivṛtā, Khāḍā(ṭā)pāra, Trighattika, Rolla-vāyikā, and Vakhaṭa-sumālikā. Sanskrit technical terms are also used to denote measurements of land.

So far, therefore, as available evidence goes, we may regard the essential features of Aryan society to have been present in Bengal as early as the fifth century A.D. The literary and epigraphic evidences of the subsequent period enable us to postulate a continuous progress of the Aryan features in Bengal society without let or hindrance; and we may presume that the social development took place more or less on the same lines as in the rest of Northern India. It is worthy of note that even during the long rule of the Buddhist Pāla dynasty the orthodox system of caste was upheld as an ideal by the kings (infra, Ch. XIII).

II. The castes and sub-castes

The most characteristic feature of the society was the existence of innumerable castes and sub-castes. It is a well-known fact that the division of the people into four varṇas, viz. Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras, was merely a theory, except perhaps in the most ancient period with which we are not concerned. By the time Bengal adopted the Aryan culture, numerous castes and sub-castes had been evolved, mainly by the development of different arts, crafts and professions, but partly also for other reasons, and tribal, racial and religious factors were at work in gradually adding to their number. There can be hardly any doubt that the numerous castes mentioned in the Śrīritis did actually exist in society, and the differences in the various Śrīritis in their enumerations reflect the actual conditions which varied in different localities and in different periods. The authors of the Dharmasūtras and Śrīritis regarded the Vedas as eternal and infallible, and therefore strove hard to bring the actual state of society of their days within the framework
of the four varṇas. Hence they started with the theory that the numerous castes (and even tribes and races), actually existing in the country, arose from the unions of males with females belonging to varṇas differing from their own. This theory, originally applied to the males and females of the four primitive varṇas, had to be extended to those of the subsidiary or mixed castes, arising out of their union; for, otherwise it was not possible to account for the numerous castes and sub-castes which continually went on increasing. Even then the Smṛitikāras could not follow this process logically ad infinitum. According to the Vishnu Dharmaśāstra (16. 7), which belongs to the early centuries of the Christian era, ‘the further mixed castes arising from the unions of mixed castes are numberless.’ This shows that the society had been divided into quite a large number of castes and sub-castes even before the beginning of the Christian era, and ‘the writers on Dharmaśāstras practically gave up in despair the task of deriving them, even though mediately, from the primary varṇas.’

It is needless to point out that while the different castes, mentioned in the Smṛitis, undoubtedly represent actual state of things, not the least historical value can be attached to the puerile fiction of their derivation from specified union of males and females belonging to different varṇas. Yet it must be admitted that throughout the mediaeval period, and down to modern times, much importance has been attached to these theories for ascertaining the position and importance of each caste, even though the different Smṛiti texts often give conflicting accounts of the derivation and status of one and the same caste. There can be hardly any doubt that the people generally believed in this theory of mixed caste, and it exercised a great influence in determining the status of the different castes and sub-castes in the society.

As already noted above, the names and number of the castes and sub-castes varied according to time and localities. The lists of such castes in the different Smṛitis were largely influenced by the local conditions at the time in which they were composed. In order, therefore, to understand the condition in Bengal in this respect we must have access to a text which belongs to Bengal or represents conditions of that region. Although it is difficult to be quite sure or dogmatic in this matter, the Bhārad-dharma Purāṇa and the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa may be regarded as such texts.

The Bhārad-dharma Purāṇa is not very widely known, and
is evidently of late origin. It is perhaps not much later than the 12th century A.D., but there are indications that it reflects the peculiar conditions in Bengal. It authorises, for example, the Brāhmaṇas to eat fish and meat, and divides the non-Brāhmaṇa population into thirty-six castes (the conventional number of castes in Bengal even today), all described as Śūdras. These are characteristic features of society in Bengal as distinguished from the rest of North India. The special emphasis on the sacredness of the river Gaṅgā and the reference to the rivers Padmā and Yamunā (in Bengal) also support the close association of the text with this province. This question has been discussed in Appendix IV.

The text describes how king Veṇa, bent upon violating the rules of varṇāśrama (caste and order), deliberately created a number of mixed castes by forcing the union of males and females belonging to different castes which included not only the original four castes, but also the mixed castes resulting from their union. It differs from the general body of the Smṛitis in deriving the mixed castes, not from the marriage of males and females of different castes, but from their promiscuous union at the bidding of, or under the compulsion exercised by, the king. Whether this contains any veiled allusion to any actual historical fact, and refers to forced abolition of strict caste rules about marriage by an unorthodox or heretical king with zeal for reforms, we cannot say. It must be noted, however, that although Veṇa is represented as an opponent to orthodox Brāhmaṇical cults in epics, Smṛitis and Purāṇas, no other text ascribes to him the origin of mixed castes as we find in the Bṛihad-dharma Purāṇa. The castes that arose out of these promiscuous unions are classified as uttama, madhyama and adhama saṅkaras, all having the status of Śūdra.

The names of these castes and their vocations as settled by the Brāhmaṇas during the reign of Veṇa's successor may be enumerated as follows:

1. **Uttama (High) Saṅkaras**

1. The Karaṇas, who were good scribes and efficient in office-work, were to continue the same vocations and became sat-Śūdras.

2. The Ambashṭhas were asked to study Āyurveda and practise as physician; and hence they were called Vaidyas. They
were to follow the vocation of Vaiśyas in respect of manufacturing medicines and that of Śudras in respect of religious ceremonies.

3. The Ugras were to follow the vocations of Kshatriyas and practise military arts.

4. The Māgadha, being unwilling to practise arms as it involves hīṃsā (slaughter), which is unrighteous, was made the court-bard and carrier of messages.

5. Tantuvāya—weaver.
10. Taulika—dealer in guvāka (betelnut).
13. Śaṅkhika (Śaṅkhakāra)—conch-shell worker.
15. Vārajīvi—betel-vine growers.
17. Mālākāra—florist.

The vocations of the following are not definitely stated but may, in most cases, be gathered from their names.

18. Sūta (bard or carpenter?)
19. Rājaputra (Rajputs?)

2. Madhyama (Intermediate) Saṅkaras

21. Takshan (carpenter).
22. Rajaka (washer-man).
23. Svāraṇakāra (goldsmith).
25. Ābhīra (cowherd or milkman?).
26. Tailakāraka (oilman).
27. Dhīvara (fisherman).
28. Śaunḍika (vintner).
29. Naṭa (dancer, acrobat or juggler).
30. Śāvāka, Śāraka or Śāvāra (Sarāk?).
31. Āekhara.
32. Jālika (fisherman).
3. Adhama (Low) Saṅkaras or Antyajas, outside the pale of caste (varṇāśrama-vahishṭita)

33. Malegrahi\(^{21}\) (?) (a branch of Mal caste ?)
34. Kuḍava (Korwa-boatman ?)
35. Chāṇḍāla (Chāṇḍāl)
36. Varuḍa (Baori ?)
37. Taksha (carpenter ?)
38. Charmakāra (leather-worker)
39. Ghaṇṭajīvī or Ghaṭṭajīvī\(^{32}\) (modern Pāṭñī caste)
40. Dolāvāhi (palanquin-bearer)
41. Malla\(^{33}\) (modern Mālo ?)

The above division into three classes is said to be based on a definite principle viz. (1) those whose father and mother both belong to the four primitive castes are regarded as class I; (2) those whose mothers alone belong to one of these primitive castes but fathers belong to class I form class II; (3) those whose father and mother both belong to any mixed caste are relegated to class III.\(^{24}\) The total number of these mixed castes is said to be thirty-six, though actually forty-one are enumerated. Five of the above must, therefore, be regarded as later additions. It is interesting to note that even today the the conventional number of castes in Bengal is thirty-six.

The Śrotriya Brāhmaṇas are permitted to function as priests only of the twenty mixed castes belonging to class I (uttama). The priests of the other castes are said to be degraded (patita) Brāhmaṇas, who attain the status of the castes they serve. Reference is also made to Brāhmaṇas called Devala, brought from Śākadvīpa by Suparṇa (Garuḍa) and hence called Śākadvīpi Brāhmaṇas. The issues of a Devala father and Vaiśya mother were Gaṇaka (astrologer, also called Graha-vipra) and Vādak.\(^{25}\) From the body of Veṣa sprang a son called Mlechchha whose sons were Pulinda, Pukkaśa, Khaśa, Yavana, Suhma, Kamboja, Śavara, Khara and others.

Most of the castes enumerated above as belonging to Class I and II are well-known in Bengal,\(^{34}\) and we may reasonably presume that many, if not all, of these must have developed as distinct castes before the close of the Hindu period. The gradual disappearance of a distinct Kshatriya caste, the progressive assimilation
of the Vaiśya with the Śūdra, and the division of the last into 'sat' and 'asat' (higher and lower) may also be regarded as applicable to Bengal during the Hindu period.²⁷

As regards the status of the different castes, the Kāraṇas and the Ambashṭhas are given the position of pre-eminence. The Ambashṭhas are equated with the Vaiyās, and the Kāraṇas, as will be shown later, were identical with or fore-runners of the Kāyasthas. The predominance of Kāyasthas and Vaiyās, among the castes other than the Brāhmaṇas, forms a distinctive and characteristic feature of the social life in Bengal even today. Such castes as Śaṅkhakāra, Dūsa (cultivator), Tantuva, Modaka, Kārmaka, and Suvarṇa-vāṇik are well-known in Bengal, but are not generally met with in other parts of India. These considerations support the view that the Brihad-dharma Purāṇa reflects the condition of Bengal.

The list of Śaṅkara or mixed castes given in the Brahma-vaiwarta Purāṇa²⁸ closely resembles that of the Brihad-dharma Purāṇa, though there are certain differences in detail. It first mentions Gopa, Nāpita, Bhilla, Modaka, Kāvara, Tāmbūli, Svarṇakāra and the different classes of Vāṇiks as sat-śūdras.²⁹ It next mentions Kāraṇa and Ambashṭha, and enumerates nine castes as born of a Śūdra woman by Viśvakarman born as a Brahmīn architect. Of these nine, six, viz. Mālakāra, Kārmaka, Śaṅkhakāra, Kubindaka (i.e., Tantuva), Kuṃbhakāra and Karṇakāra are regarded as good artisans, but the other three, viz. Sūtradhāra, Chitrakāra and Svarṇakāra were degraded by the curse of the Brāhmaṇas, the first two for neglect of duty, and the third for theft of gold.³⁰ A class of Vāṇiks, associated with Svarṇakāra (i.e., probably Suvarṇa-vāṇik), was similarly degraded. It then gives a long list of degraded (patita) mixed castes, which includes Aṭṭālikā-kāra (mason), Koṭaka (builder of houses), Tīvara, Tailakāra, Leṭa, Malla, Charmaka, Śunā, Paṇḍraka (Pod ?), Māṃsachchheda (butcher), Rājaputra, Kaivarta (Dhivara in Kaliyuga), Rajaka, Kauyāl, Gaṅgāputra, Yuṅgi (Jugil) and Āgarī (Ugra-kshatriya ?).³¹

The Brahma-vaiwarta Purāṇa mentions a majority of the castes of classes 1 and 11 mentioned in the Brihad-dharma Purāṇa (exceptions are Nos. 4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 18, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32) including five out of the six castes, characteristic of Bengal, referred to above. All the castes in the common list which the Brahma-vaiwarta Purāṇa regards as high or clean mixed castes are included in class 1 of the latter. Corresponding to the castes of class 11 and Mlechchha castes of the
Brihad-dharma, the Brahma-vaivarta mentions Vyādha, Bhaţja, Kola, Koñcha, Haďdi (Haţi), Đom, Jolā, Bāgatīta (Bādzi?), Vyālagrāhi (Vediya?) and Chaṇḍālas, all of which are met with in Bengal.

A somewhat detailed account is given of the origin of the Vaidya caste. Aśvinikumāra, the son of Sun-god, forcibly ravished the wife of Brāhmaṇa while she was on a pilgrimage, and a son was immediately born. She returned with the child to her husband and reported everything to him. The angry Brāhmaṇa drove her out with her son. By her yotic powers she transformed herself into the Godāvari river, while the son was brought up by Aśvinikumāra who taught him the medical science and other arts. This son became the progenitor of the Vaidyas.32

In conclusion, reference is made to the Brāhmaṇas who were degraded as Gaṇakas for their negligence to the Vedic Dharma as evidenced by their constant study of astrology and astronomy and acceptance of fees for their calculations. These Gaṇakas (most probably a section among them) came to be known as Agradānī for having accepted, first of all, gifts from Śūdras, as well as funeral gifts. Mention is also made of Bhaţta, born of Sūta father and Vaiśya mother, who recited the praises of others, and is probably represented by the Bhāṭas of the present day.

The number, designation and the relative status of the different castes in any society must have varied at times. Reference has already been made above (v. supra p. 252) to the story recorded in the Vallāla-charita how Vallālasena raised the status of some castes and degraded others. Whatever we might think of this story, it undoubtedly proves that such things were regarded as possible. On the other hand, reference to the Pāla kings as having maintained the system of caste (v. supra p. 111) indirectly implies the right and duty of the royal authority to maintain the status quo in the sphere of social life. Besides, the innate conservatism of the people renders major social changes a matter of extreme difficulty.

In view of the probability of change in status and designation of the various castes in the course of time, the very close agreement in this respect between the present society in Bengal and that described in the two Purāṇas, mentioned above, must be regarded as very remarkable.

The various castes in Bengal in the nineteenth century A.D. may be broadly classified in four well-defined strata which may be enumerated as follows 33:
I. Brāhmaṇas, Vaidyas and Kāyasthas.

II. Sat-Śūdras or Clean Śūdras whose touch does not pollute drinking water of the upper classes, and in whose religious functions the Brāhmaṇas can act as priest without degrading themselves. These are: Gandha-vanīk, Tantu-vāya, Modaka (Mayarā), Kumbhakāra, Kaṁsa-kāra, Telī, Gopa, Bārui, Mālākāra, Nāpita, Karmakāra, Saṅkha-vanīk, Chāshi-Kaivarta, Sadgopa, Tāmbūli. The Svarṇakāra, Sūtra-dhāra, Goālā (including Ābhīra), Koch and Āgarī (Ugra-Kṣatriyas) are also regarded as clean, though not universally.

iii. (a) Śūdras, who are not regarded as clean:
(b) the Brāhmaṇas serving as priests of certain unclean castes; and
(c) other degraded Brāhmaṇas.

The following are illustrative examples:
(i) Suvarṇa-vanīk, Śauṇḍika, Kalu (oilman), Mālo, Jāliā Kaivarta, Tiyara, Jugī.
(ii) The priests of Suvarṇa-vanīks, Goālās, Kalus, Rajakas, Bāḍdis and Kaivartas.
(iii) Agradānīs, Gaṇakas.

IV. Low castes and aboriginal tribes included in the Hindu society, such as Chāmār, Ḍom, Baiti, Bāḍdi, Baori, Pod, Hāḍī, Vediyā.

A comparison of the above with the accounts of castes given in the Brīhad-dharma and Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇas would show a striking agreement not only in the general scheme but also in the details. The agreement in respect of the absence of pure Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, and the composition of group I has already been noted above. Almost all the castes in group II are mentioned in the Purāṇas as uttama-SAṅkaras. Some of the differences are more apparent than real. For example, the Telis derive their name from Tula and we have Taulika in the Purāṇa list. The Bārui and the Tāmbūlis may both be included in the latter. The castes included in group III are all found in the list of madhyama-SAṅkaras of the Brīhad-dharma and patīta SAṅkaras and Brāhmaṇas of the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa.

The castes in group IV except Baiti are also found in the list of adhama-SAṅkaras, or degraded mixed castes referred to in the two Purāṇas.
A detailed comparison leads to the conclusion that the system of caste as we find in Bengal today does not, in essential features, differ from that depicted in the *Brīhad-dharma* and the *Brahmavaivarta* Purāṇas. Unfortunately, the date of none of these works can be fixed with certainty. They are not, however, possibly much later than the 13th century A.D., and as such may be regarded as preserving a picture of the state of society as it existed in Bengal towards the close of the Hindu period. We may, therefore, legitimately conclude that the framework of caste-system in its final evolution in Bengal during the Hindu period already reached the stage in which we find it today.

Although arts, crafts and professions were generally hereditary and the different castes normally followed the vocations assigned to them, it is now generally recognised that there was never any absolute rigidity or exclusiveness in actual practice. That the same laxity prevailed in ancient Bengal is positively proved by epigraphic and literary references. Even the Brāhmaṇas, for example, became soldiers, rulers, administrators and counsellors, and followed other vocations. Literary and epigraphic evidences prove that a Kaivarta served as high royal official (v. *supra* p. 144). The Karanaṇas practised medicine and military arts, the Vaiydas became ministers, and the Dāsas served as officials and court-poets.

The mutual relations between the different castes in ancient days cannot be precisely defined, but they had not developed into the strictly rigid system such as prevailed in the nineteenth century A.D. Although marriage among members of the same caste was the ordinary rule, inter-marriage between a male of a higher and the female of a lower caste was regarded as valid down to the last days of the Hindu period. That it was followed in actual practice in Bengal, as elsewhere in India, is proved by isolated references such as occur in the Tippera copper-plate of Lokanātha (A. 36). It mentions that the ancestors of Lokanātha, both on the father's and mother's side, were Brāhmaṇas. His mother's father Keśava is, however, called a Pāraśava, which shows that Keśava's Brāhmaṇa father married a Śūdra lady. The facts, that Keśava was placed in charge of the army, that he was in touch with the king, and that he was held in high esteem by the good, prove that the marriage of a Brāhmaṇa male and Śūdra female was not always even condemned, and the issue of the marriage did not occupy a low status. Lokanātha himself is referred to as a Karaṇa.
though it is not quite certain whether he was degraded to this caste on account of his mother, or whether Karana is used here as an official designation and not a caste-name. That such marriage between a Brähmana and a Śūdra continued down to the end of the Hindu period is proved by the writings of Bhavadeva and Jimutavāhana (pp. 365-8), the two leading expositors of the sacred law and usage in Bengal.

Jimutavāhana says in his Dāyabhāga\textsuperscript{28} that marriage is allowed between a male of a higher varṇa with a woman of the lower varṇa, including the Śūdra, and quotes Manu (III. 12-13) as his authority. He adds, however, that both Manu and Vishnu have strongly censured the union of a twice-born with a Śūdra woman (and quotes Manu III. 15-17), and therefore Śaṅkha (Smṛti) omits the Śūdra in describing a wife eligible for a twice-born man. This contradiction has been a puzzling one both in ancient and modern times, but the solution offered by the great Bengal jurist is certainly not complimentary, either to his scholarship and intelligence, or to the moral ideas of his countrymen. “Hence these evils,” says he, “do not ensue on the procreation of offspring upon a Śūdra woman not married to (the Brähmaṇa) himself; but a venial offence is committed, and a slight penance is requisite.” In other words, though marriage with a Śūdra woman involves degradation and loss of caste, illicit union with her is reckoned as a trivial offence. The commentator Śrīkṛishṇa still further improves upon this legalised moral depravity by explaining the words “not married to himself” as “married to another man.” In other words, adultery with a married Śūdra woman is much less heinous than marriage with her.

All these definitely prove the existence of inter-caste marriages, though they show a growing desire to put a stop to the marriage of a Brähmaṇa with a Śūdra girl. But there is no doubt that such marriage was regarded as valid, and did actually take place. This follows not only from the reference to the “accomplished Śūdra wife of a Brähmaṇa” in Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa’s Prāyaśchitta-prakarana,\textsuperscript{29} and the rules of inheritance laid down by Jimutavāhana regarding the Śūdra wife of a Brähmaṇa and her son, but also from the injunctions by the latter\textsuperscript{40} regarding the competence of a wife to assist in the performance of sacrifices and other sacred rites. Jimutavāhana, after citing Manu (IX. 86-87) to the effect that only a wife of the same varṇa is so competent, observes that “on failure of a wife of the same varṇa is so competent, observes that ‘on failure of a
be employed in such duties.' So, on the failure of a Brāhmaṇī, the Kshatriyā wife of a Brāhmaṇa may perform these duties, "but not a Vaiśyā nor a Śūdrā though married to him." This involved the fiction that a woman may be espoused but may not rank as wife, as this rank only belongs to one who is competent to assist in the performance of religious rites. This fiction is hardly supported by the authority quoted by Jīmūtavāhana, but he applies it in expounding the law of inheritance laid down by Nārada (xiii. 25-26, 51-52). Although no distinction is made by Nārada among the wives of different castes, Jīmūtavāhana takes these passages to refer only to 'women actually espoused but not having the rank of wives.'

The above passages confirm the view noted above, that down to the close of the Hindu period inter-caste marriage was in vogue in Bengal, but the marriage of the upper castes with Śūdra girls was gradually coming into disfavour. They further indicate a growing distinction in the status of wives of different castes. In particular, the Śūdra wife of a Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya and Vaiśya was being subjected to special disabilities, insults and indignities, not contemplated in the Dharma-śastras, though the validity of her marriage and her right to maintenance after the husband's death were not yet questioned.

Restrictions about inter-dining, like those about inter-marriage, were also evolved through stages of slow growth. The older Smṛritis do not impose any restriction about drinking water and taking food except upon the Brāhmaṇas, and these restrictions, applied only against the Śūdras and the very low castes, were not very rigid in character. A fair idea of the position in this respect towards the close of the Hindu period, may be obtained from the writings of Bhāvadeva Bhaṭṭa.

As regards drinking water, Bhāvadeva prescribes penances for all the four castes only for drinking water touched by, or kept in the vessel of, a Chāṇḍāla or antyaja. Lighter penance is prescribed for drinking water of a Śūdra. The antyaja is defined as a group of seven low castes viz. Rajaka, Charmakāra, Naṭa, Varuṇa. Kaivarta, Meda and Bhilla.

As regards food, Bhāvadeva quotes older authorities prescribing penances for a Brāhmaṇa eating food touched by a Chāṇḍāla or cooked (anna) by antyajas, Chāṇḍālas, Pukkaśas, Kāpālikas and a number of specified low castes such as Naṭa, Nartaka, Takshaṇa, Charmakāra, Suvarṇakāra, Śauṇḍika, Rajaka, Kaivarta, and
Brāhmanas following forbidden vocations. He also quotes a passage from Āpastamba prescribing a *krichchhra* penance for a Brāhmaṇa who takes food cooked by a Śūdra. In commenting on this he says:

"It is to be inferred that the penance would be reduced by a quarter and half for a Brāhmaṇa eating the food respectively of a Vaiśya and a Kshatriya, and a Kshatriya eating the food respectively of a Śūdra and a Vaiśya, and half the penance is prescribed for Vaiśya eating the food of a Śūdra."

As no authority is cited for this it is to be inferred that there existed none, and Bhavadeva merely legalised a practice that was slowly growing in Bengal. Bhavadeva further quotes Āpastamba and Hārīta to show that certain kinds of food of a Śūdra, including those cooked with oil or parched (grain), and pāyasa, may be eaten with immunity. Further, he quotes Parāśara to the effect that if in times of distress (*āpat-kāla*) a Brāhmaṇa takes food in a Śūdra's house, he becomes pure by feeling sorry for it (*manastāpena*).

It would be quite clear from the above analysis of the views of the foremost Śrāvaka leader in Bengal in the eleventh or twelfth century that restrictions about food and drink between the different castes were far from being as rigid as we see it now. The restrictions about drink affected the Brāhmaṇas alone, and only in respect of Śūdras and a few low castes definitely specified. The restrictions of food were also at first confined to the Brāhmaṇas and only in respect of food cooked by the Śūdras and certain low castes. Later, these were gradually extended to other castes. But even then the Brāhmaṇas, far less members of any other caste, were not degraded and did not lose caste by taking food from another caste, and only penances were prescribed for even the worst transgression, such as taking food of a Chāṅḍāla.

A review of the available data, cited above, leaves no doubt that both as regards inter-dining and inter-marriage, the restrictions originally concerned only the relations between a Brāhmaṇa and low castes. It is probable that these gradually came to be regarded as marks of aristocracy or orthodoxy, and were extended not only among other castes, but also among the various branches of the same caste. In the final stage, marriage was absolutely confined within the narrow fold of one of the numerous sub-castes, branches, or clans into which a caste was sub-divided, and inter-dining was similarly restricted and forbidden with a caste or sub-caste regarded as occupying an inferior status. But it is certain that this stage was far from being reached by the end of the twelfth century A.D.
An important factor in the evolution of this final stage is the growing fiction that almost all non-Brāhmaṇas were Śudras. The origin of this fiction is perhaps to be traced to the extended significance given to the term Śudra in the Purāṇas, where it denotes not only the members of the fourth caste, but also those members of the three higher castes who accepted any of the heretical religions or were influenced by Tāntric rites. The predominance of Buddhism and Tāntric Śāktism in Bengal, as compared with other parts of India, since the eighth century A.D., perhaps explains why even some notable castes in Bengal were regarded in the Brihad-dharma Purāṇa and other later texts as Śudras, and the story of Veṇa and Prithu might be a mere echo of a large-scale reconversion of the Buddhists and Tāntric elements of the population into the orthodox Brāhmaṇical fold.

It would, perhaps, be wrong to conclude that there were no Kshatriyas or Vaiśyas in Bengal. The fact, however, remains that we have no reliable reference to any Kshatriya or Vaiśya family. The Senas, who called themselves Kshatriyas, were immigrants from Kānāṭa, and the Pālas are not designated as Kshatriyas till three hundred years had elapsed after their accession to power. But negative evidence of this kind cannot be regarded as conclusive, particularly as constant reference to Kshatriyas and Vaiśyas is found in the writings of Jīmūtavāhana, Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa and other writers on sacred laws and usages in Bengal.

III. The Brāhmaṇas

While the Kshatriyas and the Vaiśyas were all but unknown in Bengal, the Brāhmaṇas played a dominant part in its history. These Brāhmaṇas, belonging to various gotras, pravaras and branches of Vedic school and performing Śrauta rites, had settled in large number all over Bengal by the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. Their number was constantly increased by fresh immigrations from Upper India for which there is abundant epigraphic evidence. A large number of inscriptions from the eighth to the twelfth century A.D. refer to the settlement in Bengal of Brāhmaṇas hailing from Lāṭa (Gujarat), Madhyadeśa, and such individual localities as Kroḍaṇchi or Kroḍāṇja (Kolaścha), Tarkāri (in Śrāvasti), Muktavastu, Hastipada, Matsyāvāsa, Kuṇṭīra and Chandavāra.46

In the course of time the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal were divided into
various sub-castes or branches such as Rāḍhīya, Varendra, Vaidika,47 and Śākadvīpī. Towards the close of the Hindu period the Brāhmaṇas were also classified according to their gāmī, a title derived from the name of the village endowed to the family by the king or a private donor. These gāmis are referred to in books and inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the titles derived from them are still in use.48 Detailed account of the origin of these classes forms the subject-matter of an extensive literature known as Kulajis. The nature and historical value of these comparatively modern works will be discussed in App. I. to this chapter, and it will suffice here to give a very brief outline of the story recorded by them.

(a) Rāḍhīya and Varendra Brāhmaṇas

Ādiśūra, king of Gauḍa, invited five Brāhmaṇas from Kanauj to perform Vedic sacrifices, as the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal were ignorant of Vedas. These Brāhmaṇas were ultimately settled in Bengal and were granted villages for maintenance. They derived their surnames (gāmī) from these villages, and were the forefathers of the entire Brāhmaṇa community of modern Bengal with the exception of a few minor groups like the Vaidikas, who came at a later period. The Saptaśantis, consisting of the remnants of the original Brāhmaṇas, seven hundred in number, were degraded to a lower rank and have disappeared without leaving any trace.

In the time of king Vallālasena the Brāhmaṇas came to be known as Varendra and Rāḍhīya according to the localities in which they settled, and were classified in several grades of honour and distinction (kulīna) according to personal qualifications. These grades were revised from time to time, and more than hundred such revisions took place before the fifteenth century A.D., when they became hereditary and were organised on the lines which have continued till today.

Even apart from the numerous discrepancies in details in the different versions, we can hardly regard the main story as historical in character.49 As already noted above, a few particulars, depicting social features which were present in the late age when the Kulajis were composed, such as the classification of the Brāhmaṇas into Rāḍhīya and Varendra and their organisation into gāmis, were true of the Hindu period and may, therefore, be regarded as having some
historical basis. But this can hardly be said of the central theme on which the whole story is based. In the light of the epigraphic evidence that we possess, it is difficult to believe that there was a dearth of Veda-knowing Brāhmaṇas in Bengal in the time of Ādiśūra, even if we accept the earliest date proposed for him viz., 654 Saka (= 732 A.D.). Nor is it possible to accept the view that the Brāhmaṇas who settled in Bengal before the time of Ādiśūra were only seven hundred in number and almost entirely vanished from Bengal, whereas the descendants of five Brāhmaṇas multiplied to millions in course of a thousand or twelve hundred years. Our doubt is increased by the complete absence of any reference to the story of the five Kanauj Brāhmaṇas or to Kulin as in the large number of inscriptions later than the eighth century A.D., some of which record the history of important Brāhmaṇa families for several generations.

Further, in judging of the historical character of the Kulaji story, we should not attach too much importance to the fact that several Brāhmaṇa families did actually migrate from Madhyadeśa to Bengal, for Brāhmaṇa families from Madhyadeśa are also found to have settled in Mālava, Dakshiṇa Kośala, Oḷra-viṣhaya and in many other countries.60 There was a large settlement of Brāhmaṇas from Magadha in the Pāṇḍya kingdom in the Far South.51 Indeed, the migration of Brāhmaṇas from one province to another was a common affair in those days. Nor can we regard such migrations into Bengal as indicating in any way either the dearth of Brāhmaṇas in that province or their inferiority in status and knowledge. For a good number of Brāhmaṇa families from Bengal, well versed in the Vedas, settled in Orissa, Mālava, and the Deccan, and received grants of lands from the ruling chiefs.52

(b) Vaidika Brāhmaṇas

According to the tradition preserved in the Kulajis, Śyāmalavarman of Gauḍa, probably the Varman king Śāmalavarman (supra p. 209), had five Brāhmaṇas brought from Kāṇyakubja (or Benares) in Śaka 1001 and settled them in Bengal, as the Bengal Brāhmaṇas did not maintain sacrificial fire and were not well-versed in the Vedas. According to another version, the Vaidika Brāhmaṇas settled on the banks of the Sarasvatī river, left their homes for safer regions when they came to know, by their astrological calculation, of the impending invasion of the Yavanas. Some of them came to
Bengal and settled in Koṭālipāḍā (Faridpur) under the patronage of king Harivarman.

These Vaidika Brāhmaṇas, who came from Upper India came to be known as Pāśchātya (Western). Another section of Vaidika Brāhmaṇas, known as Dākshīṇātya, is said to have come from Drāviḍa country (South India) and Utkala (Orissa).

Halāyudha (supra p. 371.) observes in his Brāhmaṇa-sarvasva that the Rāḍhiya and Vārendra Brāhmaṇas have no knowledge of the Vedic texts which are studied only by the Utkalas and the Pāśchātyas. These possibly refer to the two branches of the Vaidika Brāhmaṇas, who must have thus settled in Bengal before the close of the twelfth century A.D. The words might, however, mean in a general way the Brāhmaṇas of Utkala and Pāśchātya without any reference to the Vaidik Brāhmaṇas of Bengal. Save this doubtful reference we have no sure testimony to the existence of the Vaidika Brāhmaṇas in Bengal before the end of the Hindu period. The reference to the two kings Sāmalavarman and Harivarman in the Kulajīs together with an approximately correct date for their reigns invests their account with an historical character, and we may provisionally accept as true, that a few Brāhmaṇas, with a special knowledge of Vedic texts, migrated to Bengal during the rule of the Varmans. The details of the story, conflicting in themselves, are hardly worthy of credence.

(c) Other classes of Brāhmaṇas

Of the classes of Brāhmaṇas other than those mentioned above, the Sārasvatas are mentioned by Vallālasena in his Dāna-sāgara and the Śākadvīpi in an inscription dated A.D. 1137 as well as in the Bṛihad-dharma Purāṇa. According to the Kulajīs the former came from the banks of the Sarasvatī river at the invitation of the Andhra king Śūḍraka, and the ancestors of the latter, also called Graha-vipra, were brought by Śaśāṅka, king of Gauḍa, in order to perform some ceremonies for curing himself of a disease. Several other classes such as Vyāsa, Parāśara, Kauṇḍinya and Saptaśatī Brāhmaṇas are referred to in Kulajī texts, but there is no reliable evidence of the existence of any of these classes, under these names, before the close of the Hindu period.

The main functions of the Brāhmaṇas, as laid down in the Smṛitis, were to perform religious rites, to serve as priests at those
of others, and to study and teach the sacred texts. There can be no question that many of them devoted themselves to these orthodox duties, and we have reference to many famous scholars and priests. They generally led simple and unostentatious lives, and the ideal of plain living and high thinking was actually realised by many of them. Some were fortunate enough to gain wealth by officiating as priests in the sacrifices or religious rites performed by kings and members of the royal family and the rich aristocracy. But apart from sacrificial fees, donations, large or small, were made to Brāhmaṇas by kings and private persons, as such gifts were considered to confer spiritual merits (pūṇya) on the donors. Many such examples are found in contemporary records. The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena informs us how the king made rich gifts of silver, gold, pearls, emeralds and jewels to the Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas, and the wives of these poor fellows had to be taught to recognise and distinguish the precious articles by their similarity with objects well-known to them. In spite of obvious exaggeration of such statements we may well believe that many learned Brāhmaṇas gained wealth and affluence, and others secured their means of livelihood, by the generous gifts of the king and the public, so that they could pursue their high vocations in life without being troubled with cares for the maintenance of their families.

On the other hand, as already noted above, the Brāhmaṇas followed many other vocations, both high and low. We hear of two Brāhmaṇa royal dynasties in Samataṭa in the 7th century A.D. Two important Brāhmaṇa families, renowned for their scholarship and knowledge of sacred Vedic rites and sacrifices, served the Pāla and Varman kings as counsellors and generals (v. supra pp. 111, 210), maintaining at the same time their high position in the Brāhmaṇical society. Apart from these actual examples, the Smṛitis and Nibandhas refer to various other vocations followed by Brāhmaṇas, some of which, like agriculture, were approved, and others, covering almost all walks of common life, were disapproved. These condemned vocations, of which a long list is given by Bhavadeva, include teaching the Śudras, and officiating at their sacrificial rites. Nothing perhaps more strikingly illustrates the moral and intellectual perversion of the age brought about by the caste system. While no blame attached to the Brāhmaṇas who served as ministers and generals—and Bhavadeva himself belonged to this category—one following the sacred vocation of teaching and officiating at religious
rites, which are enjoined upon him by the Smṛitis from time immemorial, was degraded to the lowest rank of society, simply because the object of his care was a person of the lowest caste and who, for that very reason, required all the more the ministrations of the Brāhmaṇas, who were repositories of the sacred learning and practices.

The result of this policy was the creation of new classes of Brāhmaṇas, for the idea gradually grew that the Brāhmaṇas serving these castes attained their rank. Even today we have a number of such castes, called Varna-Brāhmaṇas, who serve as priests to Suvarṇa-vaniks, Gōlās, Kalus, Rajakas, Bāgdis and Kaivartas. These priests form practically independent castes. "The good Brāhmaṇas will not take even a drink of water from their hands, and inter-marriage between them is quite out of the question." This final stage was not reached before the end of the Hindu period, for Bhavadeva prescribes only penance for 'removing the sins of eating the food of these Brāhmaṇas,' but the system was in the making. It is interesting to note that 'the practice of medicine' and painting and other arts were some of the condemned vocations, and the Devala Brāhmaṇas were degraded for cultivating the study of 'astrology.' It is evident that in the opinion of the orthodox Brāhmaṇas, the pursuit of these arts and sciences was more reprehensible on the part of a Brāhmaṇa than to accept the high post of minister or lead armies in battles. This attitude is mainly responsible for the fact that a decline in secular studies in various arts and sciences set in towards the close of the Hindu period, and has continued ever since.

IV. Non-Brāhmaṇa Castes

1. Karaṇa—Kāyastha

Next to the Brāhmaṇas the Karaṇas appear to have been the most important caste in ancient Bengal. This not only follows from the passage in the Brīhad-dharma Purāṇa quoted above, but also from the high offices and position actually occupied by members of this caste. Reference has already been made to the powerful chief Loka-nātha who is described as a Karaṇa (v. supra p. 423), and a Karaṇa-Kāyastha is referred to in the Gunaighar cp. (A. 14) as the Minister in charge of Peace and War. The author of a medical
treatise, called Šabda-pradīpa, describes himself as belonging to a Karaṇa family (Karaṇ-ānvaya). He was a court-physician himself, and his father and grandfather served in the same capacity two kings—Rāmapāla and Govindachandra—of Bengal. (v. supra p. 213 f.n. 3. and pp. 376-7). Sandhyākara Nandi, the famous poet and author of Rāmcharita (v. supra pp. 143, 356), describes his father as ‘the foremost amongst the Karaṇas’ (karaṇānāṁ = agrāṇī) and Minister of Peace and War.

Karaṇa occurs as the name of a caste in the old Sūtras and Sūtris, and perhaps also in the Mahābhārata. But according to Kshiravāmin’s commentary on Amarakosha, Karaṇa also denotes a group of officers like Kāyastha. The lexicographer Vaijayanti (11th century A.D.) seems to take Kāyastha and Karaṇa as synonymous and explains it as scribe. This agrees with the view of Brihad-dharma Purāṇa noted above, and the identity of Karaṇa and Kāyastha is also proved by epigraphic evidence. It is worthy of note, that the Karaṇa caste, whose members performed the same vocations as the Kāyasthas, gradually disappears in Bengal, after the close of the Hindu period, whereas the Kāyastha caste does not come into prominence before the same period. It would not, therefore, be unreasonable to conclude that the Karaṇa merged itself into the Kāyastha, and these two castes were ultimately amalgamated in Bengal as in other parts of India.

The Kāyastha is mentioned as a royal official in Vishnu and Yājñavalkya Sūtris. According to the former he wrote the public documents, and the commentary to the latter explains his office as that of an accountant and scribe. The term is used in the same sense in the inscriptions from the eighth to the eleventh century A.D., and even later. The Rājarāmagīti refers to the Brāhmaṇa Śivaratha as a roguish Kāyastha in the twelfth century A.D. The term Karaṇa is also used in the same way.

It is evident, however, from a record of Amoghavarsha that there was a Kāyastha caste in Western India (valabha-Kāyastha-vainā) as early as the 9th century A.D. The existence of Kāyastha as a caste in Northern India is also indicated by reference to Gauḍa-kāyastha-vainā, Kāyastha-vainā, Mathur-ānvaya-kāyastha, and Kāyastha-kaṭāriy-ānvāvāya, migrated from Mathurā, in inscriptions dated respectively A.D. 999, v.s. 124x (1183 to 1193 A.D.), A.D. 1328, and A.D. 1288. Several inscriptions indicate that a Kāyastha race, descended from Vāstu and hence called Vāstavya
Kāyastha, lived near Kālañjara in or before the eleventh century A.D. One of these inscriptions specifically states that the Vāstavya Kāyasthas followed the profession of a Karaṇa, and it refers to the caste both as Karaṇa and Kāyastha. Two later Śrūtis, Uśanas and Vedavyāsa, refer to Kāyastha as a caste. The Uśanas says that the word Kāyastha is “compounded of the first letters of kāka (crow), Yama, and sthapati to convey the three attributes of greed, cruelty and the spoliation (or pāring) characteristic of the three. The Vedavyāsa Śrūti includes the Kāyastha among Śūdras along with barbers, potters and others.”

Mythical accounts of the origin of the Kāyasthas are supplied by some early records. Soṭṭīhala, who flourished in the middle of the 11th century, states that he was born in the race of the Kāyastha named Vālabha (Vālabho nāma kāyasthānī váhīga). He traces his descent from Kaladitya, the brother of king Siladitya. Kaladitya was an incarnation of the gana called Kāyastha, and was an ornament of the Kshatriyas (Kāyastha-nāmno Māheśvara-ganaśy=āvatāraḥ kshatriya-vibhūshanāṁ Kaladitya...). The king Siladitya, referred to, was in all probability a king of the Maitraka dynasty of Valabhi, which was Kshatriya by caste. According to this statement the Kāyasthas were descendants of the Kshatriyas. The Rewa inscription of a minister of the Kalachuri king Karna, dated 1049 A.D., however, gives a different account of the origin of the Kāyastha caste to which he himself belonged. We are told that a great sage named Kāchara, born of Śiva, gave a boon to his Śūdra (turīya-janmā) servant that he would have a son of well-known and righteous deeds whose caste would thereafter be known by the name of Kāyastha, since he had innumerable merits in his kāya (body). We are next told that in the Kāyastha race, sprung from this son, were born wise and meritorious diplomats, the last one being the minister of Karna. According to this account the Kāyasthas would seem to be of Śūdra origin. It may be noted that the derivation of the word Kāyastha in this record agrees with that in the Naishadha-charita (xiv. 66), but is diametrically opposed to that given in Uśanas Sanhitā Śrūti quoted above. The Ajaygarh inscription of Nāna, a minister of the Chandella king Bhojavarman, traces the origin of the Kāyasthas to the sage Kāsyapa.

The reference to prathama-kāyastha (or jyeshṭha-kāyastha) in the records of the fifth, sixth and eighth centuries A.D. in Bengal (v. supra pp. 291, 302) shows that it had not yet come to
denote a caste. The Tibetan work Pag Sam Jon Zang mentions Daṅgalāsā as a Kāyastha (writer or ministerial officer) of Dharma-pāla. If true, this would also push the rise of the Kāyastha caste in Bengal to a date later than the eighth century A.D. The mention of Gauḍa-Kāyastha-vaṁśa, as noted above, shows that the Kāyasthas were recognised as a caste in Bengal by the tenth century A.D. It is, however, very surprising that the Kāyastha is not mentioned either in the Brīhād-dharma or in the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa.

According to the Kulajīs the Kāyasthas of Bengal, at least their upper classes, are descended from the five attendants of the five Brāhmaṇas who came to Bengal at the invitation of king Ādiśūra. The historical value of this story has been discussed in Appendix I. According to Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar and others the Kāyasthas were descended from Nāgara Brāhmaṇas who had a large settlement in Bengal long before the eighth century A.D. These are supposed to have originally migrated from Nagarkot in the Punjab to various parts of Gujarāt and Kathiawar Peninsula, Ānandapur (also called Nagar) in Lāṭa being one of their chief settlements. That some Brāhmaṇas came to Bengal from Lāṭa, as from other parts of India, has already been mentioned above (v. supra p. 427). But the evidence in support of a large-scale immigration of Nāgara Brāhmaṇas is hardly convincing. The Nāgara Brāhmaṇas in Vaṇga, mentioned in the Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana, may refer to the Brāhmaṇas of the city (nagara). The fact that the surnames of Nāgara Brāhmaṇas such as datta, ghosha, varman, nāga and mitra also occur in the names of the Kāyasthas of Bengal does not signify much, as these surnames or name-endings were commonly used all over India about that period. The existence in Pañchakhaṇḍa (Sylhet) of a liṅga called Hāṭakeśvara, which is said to have been the tutelary deity of the Nagara Brāhmaṇas, hardly justifies the assumption of a large settlement, for even individual settlers might introduce their own peculiar cult. Besides, there is nothing to show that the worship of Hāṭakeśvara was exclusively confined to the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas.

2. Vaidya—Ambaśṭha

The Vaidya, like the Kāyastha, does not appear to have formed an important caste in ancient Bengal. Like Kāyastha, the term Vaidya originally denoted an important profession viz. that of the
physician. It is difficult to say when this professional group was developed into a caste. The earliest reference to Vaidya as a distinct social group occurs in the Talamanchi Plates of Vikramaditya Chāluṇya, dated A.D. 660. and next in three South Indian inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. The members of this group occupied very high positions in State and society, and according to Dr. H. Kṛishṇa Sāstri’s interpretation, one of them at any rate was regarded as a Brāhmaṇa. But there is no definite reference to Vaidya as a caste in Bengal before the 12th century A.D. The Bhāṭerā copper-plate Grant of king Īśānadeva (C. 23) refers to his minister (patṭanika) Vanamāli Kara as Vaidya-vaiṁśa-pradīpa (brilliant light in the race of Vaidyas). This, as well as the fact that a Karaṇa family served as hereditary royal physicians in Vaṅga during the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., goes against the assumption that the Vaidya, as a professional group of physicians, was definitely recognised as a distinct social unit in Vaṅga long before the close of the Hindu period.

The Vaidya as a caste-name does not occur in the old and genuine Smṛitis. The Uśanas Smṛiti refers to a caste called Bhishak (physician) born of illicit union between Brāhmaṇa male and Kṣatriya female, and designates it as Vaidyaka. A mythical account of the origin of the Vaidya caste is given in Brahma-vaivartha Purāṇa, as noted above (p. 421), and also in a passage, which is said to be a quotation from Skanda Purāṇa, but does not actually occur in the printed text. The former distinguishes Vaidya from Ambaṣṭha, but the latter identifies the two, as is the case also in Brihad-dharma Purāṇa. Ambaṣṭha as the name of a mixed caste, born of a Brāhmaṇa father and Vaśya mother, is well known, and occurs in early Dharmasūtras and Smṛitis. Manu prescribes the art of healing as his vocation (X.8.47). The Brihad-dharma Purāṇa gives the following account in Chapter 14:

“Pṛithu asked the Brāhmaṇas to determine the ‘varga’ (caste) and ‘vritti’ (profession) of the mixed castes. The Brāhmaṇas then took up the case of the Ambaṣṭhas, who were known as such because of the fact that they created mixed castes (viz. Svaṁkāra and Svaṁvanaṇik) on women belonging to the same caste as that of their mother (ambā), and who were consequently looked upon as great sinners and despised. The Brāhmaṇas gave these Ambaṣṭhas ‘almost a rebirth’ by performing their samskāra (ceremony of purification), named them as ‘Vaidya’, and gave the ‘Āyurveda’ to them through Nāsatya and Dasra. Thus the
Ambashṭhas were made sinless (pāpa-śūnya) and good-looking (chāru-rūpa-dhara). The Brāhmaṇas asked these Ambashṭhas (i.e., Vaidyas) to adopt the course of the Śūdras in their ordinary life, to perform the Vedic rites, to study the Āyurveda only and not any other work such as the Purāṇa etc., and to follow the profession of Vaiśyas in the manufacture and distribution of medicines. 

The identity of Vaidya and Ambashṭha has been generally assumed throughout the post-Hindu period. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the Vaidya was an offshoot of the Ambashṭha caste. But there is no definite evidence of the prior existence of the Ambashṭha caste in Bengal and, in view of what has been said above, it is not likely to have evolved from the professional group of physicians. On the other hand, some Kāyasthas in Bihar and U. P. call themselves Ambashṭhas, and the Sūta-saṁhitā identifies the Ambashṭhas with the Māhishyas.

The Kulajis refer to Ādiśūra both as Ambashṭha and Vaidya, and also regard the Sena kings as Vaidyas. But the texts in which these views are expressed can hardly claim much historical value, and the utmost that can be said is that they preserve the belief and the tradition current in the sixteenth and following centuries.

3. The Kaivarta—Māhishya

The revolt in Northern Bengal during the reign of Mahīpāla II (v. supra pp. 142 ff.) and rule of Divya and his two successors indicate the importance of the Kaivarta caste to which they belonged.

The Kaivarta is referred to in Manu (x.34) as an alternative name, current in Āryāvarta, of Mārgava or Dāsa, who is born of a Nishāda father and an Āyogava mother, and subsists by working as a boatman. The Jātakas refer to the fishermen as Kevattas (=Kaivartas). According to the Brahma-vaitara Purāṇa, Kaivarta is born of Kshatriya father and Vaiśya mother, but it seems to imply that the Kaivarta was degraded in Kali-yuga by his association with the Tīvara and was known as, or adopted the vocation of, a dhīvara or fisherman. Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa also refers to the Kaivarta as one of the seven antyaja or low castes, as noted above (p. 425). According to ancient Smṛtis the offspring of a Kshatriya father and a Vaiśya mother is known as Māhishya, whose origin is thus identical with that of Kaivarta as given in the Brahma-vaitara. These ancient accounts serve to explain the present state of things.
in Bengal.\textsuperscript{98} The Māhishyas of Eastern Bengal, also known as Hālikā Dāsa and Parāśara Dāsa, are now regarded to be the same as Chāshi Kaivartas of Midnapore and other districts of Western Bengal. Both of these form important sections of the Hindu community. There are many Zamindars and substantial land-holders among them, and in Midnapore they may be regarded among the local aristocracy. This position is fully in keeping with the part played by them during the Pāla rule. On the other hand, the Dhīvaras or fishermen in East Bengal are known as Kaivarta. According to Amara-kosha, the Kaivartas include both Dāsa and Dhīvara. This, added to the evidence of the Brahma-valvarta Purāṇa, Manu and Jātakas, referred to above, indicates that the Kaivartas were from ancient times divided into two sections, the cultivator and fishermen.\textsuperscript{97} The tradition recorded in the Vallāla-charita (v. supra p. 252) that Vallālasena improved the status of the Kaivartas, and made them a clean caste so that they might serve as menials to upper castes, evidently refers to this lower section. On the whole, it would not be unreasonable to infer that the Kaivartas, who are referred to in the Vishṇu Purāṇa (iv. 24. 8) as abrahamāṇya, were an old aboriginal tribe who, like many others, were merged into the Aryan society and affiliated to the mixed caste known as Māhishya.

4. Low castes

Regarding the many other castes mentioned above that existed during the pre-Muslim period our knowledge is very meagre. But attention should be drawn to some of them who were regarded as almost beyond the pale of society. A number of these castes or tribes are mentioned in Bṛhād-dharma and Brahma-valvarta Purāṇas and have been noted above. A few of them are referred to as antyajas by Bhavadeva, and reference has already been made above to their status and designation in connection with the impurity attached to their food and drink (v. supra p. 425). The early Charyā-padas\textsuperscript{98} of Bengal refer to Đoma, Chaṇḍāla and Śavara. The first two are still well-known in Bengal and occupy the lowest stratum in society. The Śavaras are frequently referred to in literature associated with Bengal, and probably figure in Pāharpur sculptures. Their primitive and even indecent practices influenced the higher classes, as will be seen later. The Đomas lived outside
the town and were regarded as untouchable. They built baskets and looms (*tānt*). The Ṯoma women were of loose character and moved about singing and dancing. The Ṣavaras lived in hills. Their womenfolk wore ear-rings and decorated themselves with peacock-tail, and garlands of guñja seeds. The Chaṇḍālas are said to have occasionally abducted married women from their homes. It appears from the Naihati cp. of Vallālasena that the Pulindas lived in forests in or near the border of Bengal, and their women, too, like the Ṣavarīs, were fond of garlands of guñja seeds. The terracotta plaques at Pāhārpur illustrate the habits and physical appearance of aboriginal tribes of this class. A string of leaves round the waist forms the only clothing of both males and females. The latter neatly dress the hair, and wear ornaments of jungle leaves and flowers, and necklaces of beads and guñja seeds. The men sometimes wear boots, and have a cuirass for the breast, bows, and quivers containing arrows. Even the women used bows and daggers, and in one case, a woman carries a deer or other wild animal which was presumably hunted by her and formed their staple food.

Finally, reference must be made to the Śūdras in the *Bṛihad-dharma* Purāṇa, for, according to it, all the Mixed Castes mentioned above, (pp. 417 ff.) i.e., practically all the non-Brahmins of Bengal, had the status of Śūdras which was most humiliating in many respects. This would be evident from Book III, Chapters 4 and 20. The following extracts are taken from a summary made by Dr. Hazra:

A Śūdra is to serve the twice-born but should not read the Purāṇas or teach the members of the higher castes... It is only in times of distress that a Brāhmaṇ is allowed to instruct *mantras* to Śūdras and to read out the Purāṇas to them... A Brāhmaṇa should not give to a Śūdra such food as has been dedicated to a deity. A Śūdra should drink the water with which the feet of a Brāhmaṇa have been washed.... A Śūdra should not call a Brāhmaṇa ‘grandfather’, ‘uncle’ etc., and *vice versa*. A Śūdra commits *mahāpātaka* by reading of Purāṇas, non-salutation of Brāhmaṇas, sexual intercourse with Brāhmaṇa women.... spread of sins among people through conversation, touch of the body, breaths, inter-dining, riding the same vehicle, and sitting on the same seat.
V. Socio-Religious Rites, Ceremonies and Festivals

A distinctive feature of the orthodox Hindu society is the series of semi-religious rites (saṁskāras) concerning almost every stage of a man’s life, from conception in the mother’s womb to death, or even beyond it. We know in a general way that these brāuta and smārta rites were performed since the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. (v. supra p. 414), when Brāhmaṇas, learned in the Vedas, began to settle in Bengal in large numbers. But we have no definite knowledge of how these saṁskāras were performed in Bengal till towards the close of the Hindu period. It is only as late as the 11th and 12th centuries A.D., when Vedic studies made great headway in Bengal (v. supra p. 369), that we have the works of Bhaṭṭa Bhava-deva, Jimūtavāhana, Aniruddha Bhaṭṭa, Vallālasena and others (supra pp. 364 ff.) which throw light on the Brāhmaṇical society of those days. From these sources we learn that the life of the orthodox Hindus, specially the Brāhmaṇas, in Bengal was characterised by the various purificatory rites and ceremonies prevalent in other parts of India, viz., Garbhādhana (the ceremony of impregnation), Puṁsavana (the ceremony to ensure the birth of male progeny), Śīmanta-onnayana (the ceremony of parting of the hair), Śoshyantī-homa (performance of a homa which was meant for easy delivery on the part of the wife), Jūta-karman (the ceremony performed at the birth of a child), Nishkramaṇa (the ceremony of taking out a child for the first time into open air), Nāma-karaṇa (the ceremony of naming the child), Paushtīka-karman (the ceremony for the nutrition of the child), Annaprāśana (the ceremony of giving a new-born child solid food to eat for the first time), Naimittika-putra-mūrdhābhīghrāṇa (the ceremony of occasional smearing of the son’s head by the father), Chūḍākaraṇa (the ceremony of tonsure), Upanayana (the ceremony of investing the boy with the sacred thread), Sāvitra-charu-homa (the ceremony of offering oblations with charu to Savitṛi), Samāvartana (the ceremony on the student’s return from his teacher’s house), Vivāha (marriage), and Śālā-karman (the ceremony on the occasion of entrance into a newly built house). In almost all these ceremonies the domestic fire was first to be consecrated with the performance of a rite called kuṣaṇḍikā, and homas such as the Mahāvyāhriti, Śālyāyana etc. were to be performed with the citation of relevant Vedic mantras. The usual procedure of the main homa connected with
the principal function was as follows. At first sacrificial fuel, soaked with clarified butter, was silently thrown into the fire; then the *Mahāvyāhriti-homa* was performed with the citation of relevant Vedic mantras; next the main homa was conducted with the use of necessary Vedic verses; then the *Mahāvyāhriti-homa*, followed by the silent offer of fuel, soaked with clarified butter, into the fire, was repeated. The *Śātyāyana-homa* and some other operations ending with the chanting of the *Vāmadevya-sāman* were performed at the end of the whole function to allay the sins that might have arisen out of mistakes committed consciously or unconsciously. Finally proper fees were paid to the Brahmin priest.

A short description of these ceremonies, especially as they were observed by the Sāmavedins, is given below in order to show their distinctive features.105

The ceremony of impregnation (*Garbhādhāna*) used to be performed after dusk on the sixth or eighth day from first menstruation. In this ceremony the husband was to wear clean clothes, smear his body with scents, and take his seat by the side of his wife (already seated on blades of *kuśa* grass) with his face turned towards the east. He was then to touch a certain part of his wife's body with his right hand, and mutter relevant Vedic verses invoking the gods for impregnation. After giving to the wife a mixture of the five products of the cow (*i.e.*, *pañcha-gavya*), the husband was to accept, in the hem of his cloth, various fruits offered by his wife after tying them in a piece of yellow cloth, and to return them to his wife. Such acceptance and return were repeated thrice.

The ceremony of *Puṁsavana*, which was to be celebrated on an auspicious day at the beginning of the third month of pregnancy, might be performed in two ways. According to the first method, the husband was to take his bath in the morning, kindle a fire named *Chandra*, perform *kuśandikā* ending with the muttering of the *Virūpāksha* hymn, seat his wife on blades of *kuśa* on his right to the western side of the fire with her face turned towards the east, and after silently offering fuel, soaked with clarified butter, into the fire, perform the *Mahāvyāhriti-homa*. He was then to take his stand at the back of his wife, touch her navel with his right hand after touching her right shoulder, and mutter *mantras* to ensure the birth of a male child. According to the second method, a defectless sheath of a fresh *vata* bud (*vata-kūṅgā*), furnished with
two fruits, was collected, with the citation of mantras, from a north-easter branch of a vāṭa tree, after besmearing the sheath seven times with the powders of barley (yava) and pulse (māsha). This sheath was then pounded with a piece of stone by a Brahmachārīn or an unmarried girl or a pregnant woman or a Brahmin who was well versed in, and regularly studied, the Vedas. While being thus pounded the sheath was to be soaked with dew-water according to the local custom. The husband then tied this herb in a piece of cloth and pressed its juice into the right nostril of his wife, seated by the side of the sacred fire, with his face turned towards the west. While thus pouring the juice, the husband was to pronounce a Vedic verse for a male progeny.

In the ceremony of Simantonnayana, which was performed in the fourth, sixth or eighth month from pregnancy, the husband was to take his bath in the morning, perform Vṛiddhi-brāddha, kindle a fire called Maṅgala, consecrate it with kuśaṅḍikā, and seat his wife on blades of kuśa to his right on the western side of the fire with her face turned towards the east. He was then to take his stand behind his wife with his face turned toward the east, and tie round his wife’s neck a pair of ripe figs having a common stem, after stringing these fruits with a piece of thread of silk and adding to them nimba, white mustard, bhallātaka etc. for the sake of protection. According to the local custom a pair of Vāsudeva’s feet were made with gold or some other metal and tied to the wife’s neck with the same purpose along with natural grains of barley. Next the husband was to part his wife’s hair, first with darbha-piṅjalīs for a number of times, and then with a reed (śara), a spindle filled with yarn, a white quill of a porcupine, etc. He was then to show her the kriṣara (a kind of food) prepared with sesamum, rice and māsha, and finish the main function with the performance of the homas etc. Next, some Brahmin women, who had sons and whose husbands were living, were to take the wife to the altar, bathe her with the water contained in the pitcher, and perform all other rites which were conducive to her welfare (maṅgala-kṛitya). The wife then ate up the kriṣara with a quantity of ghee poured on it.

In Śoshyanti-homa the wife was to play no part at all, although this rite was meant for her easy delivery and was performed at a time when she was in the mature stage of pregnancy. In this ceremony the husband was to take his bath, consecrate the fire with kuśaṅḍikā, silently offer fuel, soaked with ghee, into the fire, and perform the
Śoshyantt-homa by offering oblations with the mention of the intended name of his future son.

The Jāta-karman ceremony did not require any fire. As soon as a son was born, the father said: "Don’t sever the artery, don’t allow the child to suck the mother’s breast." Thus prohibiting (the nurse), he took his bath, performed Vṛiddhi-śrāddha, and rubbed the child’s tongue, first with the powder of vr̥hi and yava taken with the thumb and the ring-finger of his right hand, and then twice with ghee and gold. It should be mentioned here that this powder of vr̥hi and yava was to be prepared on a piece of stone by a brahma-chārin, or a virgin girl, or a pregnant woman, or a Brahmin who was well versed in, and regularly studied, the Vedas. Next, giving his permission with the words, "Sever the artery, allow the child to suck the mother’s milk," the father again took his bath.

It should be mentioned here that in those days no temporary hut was constructed for child-birth; one of the permanent living rooms was used for the purpose, and this room was deemed pure as soon as the period of impurity due to child-birth was over.

In the ceremony of Nishkramaṇa, which was celebrated on the third day of the third bright half of a lunar month from the date of the child’s birth, the child was bathed in the morning. After dusk the father stood with his face towards the moon. The mother wrapped the child in clean and sanctified clothes, went with it to the left side of the father, stood with her face towards the north and handed over the child to the father with its head turned towards the north. Then the mother went to the father’s right side and stood with her face turned towards the west. The father then showed the child the moon, offered arghya to the moon, and handed over the child to its mother with its head turned towards the north. He next performed the purificatory rites and entered the house. In this way the child was to be shown the moon on three other third days of the bright halves of lunar months, and libation of water was to be offered to the moon on these occasions.

The ceremony of Nāma-karaṇa was, according to the local custom, celebrated after the expiry of twelve or hundred-and-one nights, or on the birth-day, though the Grīhya-sūtras ordain that this ceremony was to be performed after the expiry of ten nights, hundred nights, six months, or a year. In this ceremony the father took his bath in the morning, performed the Vṛiddhi-śrāddha, and consecrated the fire named Pārthīva with kuśaṇḍikā. The mother
then handed over the child (covered with clean clothes) to the father, and took her seat on the left side of her husband. The father next performed homa for the pleasure of the presiding deities of the child’s birth-day and star, whispered the child’s name first into the mother’s ear and then into that of the child, and handing over the child to the mother, performed Mahāvyāhṛiti-homa etc.

The ceremony of Paushṭika-karman, which was meant for ensuring the vitality of the child, was performed on every janma-tithi or pūrṇimā of every month in the first year. In this ceremony a fire called Balada was required, and the father was to perform the different homas almost in the same way as in Nāma-karaṇa.

In Anna-prāśana, which was celebrated on an auspicious day of the sixth month, the father was to take his bath in the morning, perform Vṛiddhi-śrāddha, consecrate the fire named Ąuchī with kuśaṇḍikā, silently offer fuel, soaked with ghee, into it, perform the Mahāvyāhṛiti-homa, offer oblations to Hunger, Thirst etc., and give food into the mouth of the child with citations of mantras.

It is to be noted that the present custom of placing a pen, an ink-pot, a gold or silver coin, a piece of earth, and the like for examining the leanings of the child was not in vogue, at least among the Brahmins, in those days, and that the ceremonies of Nāma-karaṇa and Anna-prāśana were celebrated at different times.

The ceremony of Naimittika-mūrdhā-bhīghrāṇa (i.e., the occasional smelling of the son’s head by the father) seems to have been peculiar with the Bengal Brahmins. It was performed especially when the father returned home after a long sojourn. In this ceremony the father touched the heads of his sons in order of age with both his hands, muttered three mantras for their long life, smelt their heads with the citation of a mantra, and chanted the Vāmadevya-sāman.

The ceremony of tonsure (Chūḍā-karaṇa) might be celebrated in the first or third year according to the custom of the family. It required the performance of Vṛiddhi-śrāddha, consecration of a fire called Satya, and performance of homas etc. During Chūḍā-karaṇa, a cup of bell-metal containing hot water and a razor made of copper (or a mirror in its stead) were placed to the south of the fire, and a barber took his stand there with an iron razor in his hand; on the north, bull’s dung, sesame, rice, beans (māsha), kidney-beans (mudga), kṛśara etc., were placed; and on the east, three pots filled with vrīhi, yava, tila, māsha etc. were kept. The shaving
was done with the iron razor; the copper one (or the mirror) was meant only for touching the head with. First the father shaved certain parts of the child's head after seasoning the hair with hot water and touching it with the copper razor (or its substitute, the mirror), and then the barber, who was adorned with flowers etc., was to give the finishing touch. The hair, thus severally collected, was first to be placed, according to the local custom, on bull's dung contained in an earthen pot held by a young friend of the child, and then the whole was to be thrown into the forest. Some hung it to the branch of a bamboo tree.

Upanayana (or investiture with the sacred thread) is one of the most important sacraments for a twice-born. For a Brahmin boy, the proper age for Upanayana was the eighth year from conception or birth. In case the boy failed to undergo Upanayana at that age, the time could be extended up to his sixteenth year; but after that he was deemed Sāvitrī-patita, and, therefore, unworthy of Upanayana. The procedure of this ceremony was briefly as follows. The father of the boy was to take his bath in the morning and perform Vṛiddhi-śrāddha. Then he himself, or an Āchārya selected by him, or a religious student (brahmachārin, in case no Āchārya was available), was to kindle a fire called Samudbhava and consecrate it with the performance of kuśandikā. He then conducted the boy, who was to take his meal in the morning, to the northern side of the fire, had his head shaved along with the sikhā (i.e., the tuft of hair that was left on the crown of his head), bathed him, made him put on a silken garment or a piece of white and untorn cloth made of cotton, adorned him with ornaments such as ear-rings, and seated him on his right side. The Āchārya then offered fuel, soaked with ghee, into the fire, performed Mahāvyāhṛiti-homa, offered oblations several times into the fire, and performed the function of Aṅjali-pūraṇa. The boy then asked the Āchārya for Upanayana, whereupon the latter asked the former his name, and when he knew it from the boy, held the boy's right hand by the thumb in his own right hand and went round the fire. The Āchārya next touched, with his right hand, first the boy's right shoulder and then his navel, breast etc. and muttered Vedic mantras. Then, after touching the boy's left shoulder with his left hand, he instructed the boy to collect sacrificial fuel, to work, to avoid sleep by day, to be a brahmachārin, and so on. After the boy had consented to abide by his instructions, the Āchārya made the boy
wears a three-fold girdle of muñja grass, a sacred thread (upavīta) and the skin of a black-antelope, taught the Sāvitrī, first by fourth parts, then by halves, and then with the Mahāvyāhritis (viz., bhūh, bhuvah, and svah), and gave him a staff made of vīla or palāśa wood. The length of the staff was to be determined by the height of the boy's body. After taking this staff the boy collected alms first from his mother and sister, and then from others including his father, and offered these to the Āchārya, who then performed the Samid-dhoma, Mahāvyāhriti-homa, Śātyāyana-homa etc. Priestly fee was then offered to the Āchārya or, if the father himself was the Āchārya, to the Brahmin who conducted the function. The boy had to pass the whole day at that place. At dusk he finished his evening prayers, offered oblations to the fire and saluted it. He then silently ate the food collected by begging, after mixing it with clarified butter only. While eating he used only the three fingers, viz., the middle finger, the ring-finger and the thumb, and held the dish with his left hand. He then sipped water. In this way the boy had to worship fire daily in the morning and evening till the ceremony of Samāvartana; but the method of taking food was to be followed by him till his death.

On the fourth day from Upanayana, Sāvitrī-charu-homa was to be performed in the fire called Samudbhava, by the father, or his substitute or a religious student or an Āchārya appointed by the father. For the preparation of the charu, a mortar, a pestle, a vessel (chamsa)—all made of varuṇa wood—, a winnowing-basket made of bamboo, and vṛīhi etc. were required. After the function was over, a cow was to be given to the Āchārya, or, if the father himself performed the duties of the Āchārya, to the Brahmin who conducted the ceremony.

Being thus invested with the sacred thread the students began their studies in right earnest under the supervision of their fathers or some other teachers selected by their guardians. The subjects studied by them were generally the following:—Vedas, Dharmasāstra, Purāṇa, the Epics, Arthaśāstra, Ganita, Mīmāṃsā, Jyotiḥśāstra, Kāvya, Tarka, Vyākaraṇa, Alaiṁkāra and Chhandas, but from Halāyudha's statement in his Brāhmaṇa-sarvāśva that he wrote this work because he found that the Brahmins of Raṁā and Varendra did not study the Vedas, and therefore did not know the Vedic rites properly, it seems that though the Brahmans always claimed to have been versed in the Vedas, in reality they did not usually
study these ancient works with much interest and earnestness. As a matter of fact, there were many among the Brahmins who did not care to study the Vedas at all. However, besides the above-mentioned subjects, the Brahmins sometimes also read Ayurveda, Astra-veda, Āmgaa (i.e., Tantra), etc. Higher education was, however, by no means confined to the Brāhmaṇas, and the examples of Vallālasena (v. supra p. 370) and Kāntideva’s father prove that kings and nobles also were noted for learning and scholarship.

The ceremony of Samāvartana was performed when the student finished his studies and returned home with the permission of his teacher. In this ceremony the father of the student took his bath and performed Vṛiddhi-srāddha. Then he himself, or an Āchārya selected by him, or a brahmachārīn (if an Āchārya be not available) kindled a fire named Tejas, consecrated it with the performance of kusāṃḍikū, and performed Samid-dhoma and Mahāvyāhirīti-homa. He then seated the boy on his right side and offered oblations to the fire. When the sacrifices connected with the ceremony of Samāvartana were over, the student (brahmachārīn) fed the Brahmins, took his meal, had his head and beards shaved with only a tuft of hair (śikhō) left on his head, put on defectless clothes and ornaments, wore a garland on his head and a pair of leathern shoes, had a bamboo stick (his former staff being thrown into the fire), mounted a cart drawn by two bulls (go-yuga) and came to the Āchārya, first going to the east or north, and then turning to south. The Āchārya honoured him with the offer of arghya and received dakshinā (fees).

Next comes the most important sacrament in a Hindu’s life, viz., that of marriage.

Regarding the proper age of marriage Jīmūtavāhana in his Dāyabhāga quotes, with approval, the injunction of Vishnu and Paithinasi that dire consequences would follow if a girl is married after puberty, and the statement of Manu that “the nubile age is twelve years for a girl to be married to a man aged thirty, and eight years for one to be espoused by a man aged twenty-four; and the age prescribed for entry into another order is fifty years.” Jīmūtavāhana quotes a line from Vishnū Purāṇa (iii. 10. 16) to show that the marriageable ages for the bride and bridegroom should be in the ratio of 1 to 3. In his Sāṃbandha-viveka Bhavadeva quotes, from earlier authorities, a few verses which say that if a girl attained puberty in her father’s house her father became guilty of killing an embryo (bhrūṇa-hatyā), and the girl
was deemed to be a vrishali; that if any one married such a girl out of greed or infatuation, he became aśrūḍhya (unworthy of śrūḍha) and apāṅktiya (unfit for sitting in the same line), and was regarded as a vrishali-pati (husband of a vrishali); and that if a girl attained puberty during the time of her marriage, a special homa was to be performed before the commencement of the actual rites of marriage.\textsuperscript{114} It appears from these prescriptions that people were generally in favour of early marriage of girls, and did not like that men should marry after the age of fifty. It is, however, not known how far these prescriptions were actually followed in practice by the different grades of people.

The Saṁbandha-viveka further informs us that in matters of marriage great importance was attached to the sapinda, sagotra and samana-pravara relationship between the bride and the bridegroom. No marriage was permitted in the first four forms (viz., Brāhma, Daiva, Arsha and Prājāpatya), if the bride was within the fifth generation on the mother’s side of the bridegroom, or within the seventh generation on his father’s side, or if the bride and bridegroom were of the same gotra (through their fathers or mothers) or of the same pravara. In the last four forms (viz., Āsura, Gāndharva, Rākshasa and Paisācha), however, a bridegroom might marry a bride who was not within the third generation on his mother’s side, or the fifth generation on his father’s side; but those who contracted such marriages were deemed as degraded to the position of Śūdras. Nor was marriage permissible with one’s own maternal uncle’s daughter or with the daughter of one’s step-brother’s maternal uncle: because such a girl was as good as a sister to the bridegroom. Among uterine brothers or sisters, marriage was permitted in order of seniority in age. But if the elder brother became a sannyāsin, or was afflicted with a dangerous disease (such as insanity, phthisis etc.), or lived in a distant country, or had a savage temperament, or was guilty of any of the mahāpātakas, the younger brother was allowed to supersede him in marriage without incurring any social stigma. If anybody married a girl whose elder uterine sister, though free from any serious defect, remained unmarried, he was to forsake that girl, perform the Prājāpatya penance, and maintain her with food and raiments.\textsuperscript{115}

Though monogamy was the ideal, and probably also the rule, at least among the members of the Brāhmaṇical fold, people were allowed to have more wives than one;\textsuperscript{115} but when a person wanted
to have a second wife, he was to gratify the first one with sufficient wealth in order to have her assent.\textsuperscript{117} Whatever might be the number of the wives of a person, the first savarṇā (of the same caste) wife enjoyed the highest position in social and religious functions (supra p. 424).

Of the different forms of marriage the Brāhma seems to have been the most popular with the Brāhmaṇas, the last four forms being rare but not quite unknown to them.\textsuperscript{118} The procedure of this Brāhma form, as followed by the Sāmavedins, has been given by Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva in his Karmānushṭhāna-paddhati.\textsuperscript{119} According to Bhavadeva the marriage rites began with Jñāti-karman (or preliminaries done by the bride’s blood relations on her father’s side) in which the bride’s body was besmeared with a mixture of powders of masūra, yava and māsha by her father’s sapinda or suhrīt, and she was bathed with the water poured on her head and profusely on her lap, with the citation of relevant Vedic mantras. Then the guardian (sampradātā) of the bride was to receive the bridegroom, honour him with pāḍya, arghya, āchamanīya, scented flowers, clothes, sacred thread, finger-ring etc., and intimate his intention of giving his ward in marriage to him. The bridegroom having given his consent, mukha-chandrikā followed. A cow was tied on the northern side of the marriage-pandal, and viṣṭaras (i.e. seats made with kūkas in a particular manner) and other requisite articles were placed in their proper places. The sampradātā stood with his face towards the west, and the bridegroom sat on a seat with his face towards the east. The sampradātā then offered to the bridegroom two viṣṭaras, a vessel containing water (i.e., pāḍya), arghya (consisting of akṣhata and twigs of durvā grass—all placed on a dish made of conch-shell or some other material), āchamanīya (i.e., water for sipping), and madhu-parka (i.e., a mixture of ghee, curd and honey). The bridegroom duly received all these things, and after sipping water, he besmeared his right palm with auspicious herbs and placed on it the right hand of the bride. Then either a woman, who was fortunate and whose husband and sons were living, or a Brāhmaṇa tied these two hands with kuśa along with a fruit after performing certain auspicious rites (according to custom). Next followed the ‘giving of the girl to the bridegroom’ (kanyā- sampradāna) after adorning her properly; the offer of dowries,\textsuperscript{120} —a pair of cows, food, water, beds, a maid-servant and five kinds of grains; the tying of the ends of the bride’s and bridegroom’s clothes
by a Brahmin woman whose husband and sons were living, with
the performance of various auspicious customary rites; the guardian's
untying the knot made with kuśa; and his removal of the piece of
cloth so that the bride and the bridegroom might see each other's
face. The barber, who stood near the marriage-pandal, exclaimed
'a cow, a cow,' and the bridegroom cited a mantra. The barber
then let loose the cow. Next the bridegroom performed kuṣaṇḍikā
in front of the main house. A friend of the bridegroom covered his
body with clothes, took a pitcher full of water collected from a
water-reservoir which never dried up, went to the south of the fire
by the east, and stood there silently with his face towards the north.
Another friend of the bridegroom took a doll in his hand, went
in the same way to the south of the fire, and stood there on the
east of the former friend. On the western side of the fire, some
mixture of fried grain (lāja) and samī-leaves were to be placed
on a winnowing-basket; and near it a flat piece of stone, furnished
with a smaller piece (saputra śilā), and a mat, made of vīraṇa-leaves
and surrounded by a piece of cloth (paṭa-vesṭita), were placed.
The bridegroom then entered the house, made the bride put on two
pieces of defectless cloth (the uttarīya or upper garment being a
substitute for the yajñopavīta), painted her forehead with a mark
of vermilion, and brought her to the side of the fire. The bride first
touched a side of the mat with her right foot and then sat on its
eastern part to the south of her husband. She touched the right
shoulder of her husband with her right hand; the bridegroom
offered oblations six times into the fire, and then performed the
Mahāvyāhṛiti-homa. Next came the bride's śilakṛaṃṇa (i.e., the
placing of her foot on a flat piece of stone furnished with a
smaller piece), Lāja-homa (performance of homa with fried grains
for a specified number of times), Agni-pradakṣiṇa (going round
the fire with the bridegroom), and Saptapadi-gamana (taking
seven steps in seven small circles along with the bride-
groom). After these functions were over, the bridegroom's friend,
who held the pitcher full of water, came forward and bathed the
bridegroom and the bride. The bridegroom then muttered six
mantras after taking the bride's hands into his, came to the fire with
the bride, performed the homas and gave sees to the priest. The
bridegroom next kindled a fire called Yojaka, performed kuṣaṇḍikā,
and remained there until the stars were visible (in case the marriage
took place in day time). When the stars became visible, he stretched
a dry red-furred hide of a bull, seated the bride on the side furnished with fur, performed the Mahāvyāhriti-homa, and offered oblations of ghee six times into the fire. He then showed the Dhruva and Arundhatī stars to the bride, and the bride saluted the bridegroom. Then in accordance with the local custom, women, who had their husbands living, placed the bride and the bridegroom on the altar, bathed them with water sanctified with mango-twigs, and performed other auspicious rites. The bridegroom then entered the house, took rice mixed with ghee (havishyānna) but without salt, and gave the remnants of his food to the bride. For three consecutive nights the newly married couple were to live on food taken without salt, abstain from all kinds of sexual enjoyment, and sleep on the ground on a bed furnished with kūṣa. The bride was then seated in a cart made of kiṁśuka, bālmali or some other wood, and led to the bridegroom’s house. On the way, all the cross-ways (chatushpatha) were invoked (for allaying the impediments of the journey). When the bridegroom’s house was reached, the bride was taken down and led into the house. Brahmin women, whose sons and husbands were living, performed various auspicious popular rites and then seated the bride on a red bull’s hide. They placed a beautiful Brahmin boy on her lap and gave a white-lotus-bulb or some fruits in his hand. The bridegroom then kindled a fire named Dṛitī, performed kusāṇḍikā and the homas, and made the bride bow down to her father-in-law and others.

On the fourth day from the date of marriage, the Chaturthi-homa was performed. The wife took her seat on the southern side of the sacred fire, where a vessel of water furnished with kūṣa was also placed. The husband offered oblations twenty times into the fire with the mention of the mantras of Agni, Vāyu, Chandra and Sūrya—severally and collectively, and each time the ladle, with the remaining ghee sticking to it, was dipped into the water. The wife was then taken to the northern side of the fire and bathed with this water.

From the descriptions of the Vedic rites and sacraments given above, it is evident that the contributions of local customs, family traditions, and superstitions, especially of women, to the procedures of these rites and sacraments were not at all negligible. But in this there was nothing peculiar to Bengāl. For, in connexion with marriage, the Áśvalāyana-Gṛihya-sūtra (1, 7, 1-2) says: “Various indeed are the observances of the (different) countries and villages;
and one should follow those in marriages...."; and the Āpastamba-Gṛihya-sūtra (2, 15) declares: "People should understand from women (and others) what procedure is (to be observed according to custom)." Various festivities and amusements were held in connection with the marriage ceremony, and the procession of the bridegroom to the bride's house was accompanied by music.\(^{125}\)

Besides the Vedic rites and sacraments mentioned above there were other ceremonies which were regularly performed, and many of them served as occasions of mirth and festivities to the people of Bengal. As typical examples, the worship of Durgā in her different forms, and of Gaṅgā, Sarasvati, Indra, Sūrya, Manasā\(^{126}\) and Kāma or Madana (Cupid), the spring festival Holi (the present Holi), the Sukha-rātri-vrata, the Dyūta-pratipad, the Pāśaṇa-chaturdāśi etc. may be mentioned. Regarding the merry-makings of the people on the occasion of worship of Durgā and her other forms, Sandhyākara Nandi says in his Rāmcharita that Varendrī became "full of festivities on account of the excellent worship of the goddess Umā."\(^{126}\) In the autumnal worship of Durgā, a peculiar kind of merry-making, called śāvarotsava, was observed by the people on the Daśamī tīthi.\(^{126}\) During this merry-making, those taking part in it had to cover their bodies with leaves etc. and besmear themselves with mud and other things to resemble the Śavaras. They had to jump and dance at random, sing, and beat drums incoherently. A couple of verses occurring both in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Kāla-viveka show that the programme of this Śāvarotsava included not only topics on, and songs about, sexual intercourse, but also the requisite movements of the body, and that the violation of this practice incurred the rage and curse of Bhagavati.\(^{127}\) The Brihad-dharma Purāṇa (II, VI, 81-83) introduces certain restrictions in this merry-making, saying:

"People should not utter before others words which are expressive of the male and female organs etc.; they should utter these during the great worship (of the goddess Durgā) in the month of Āśvina. But (even on that occasion) they should never pronounce (such words) before their mothers or daughters or those female disciples who have not been initiated to Śakti-worship."

But it supports by arguments, which cannot be reproduced without using indecent language, that "one, who is worthy of worshipping her, should utter (such expressions) with a view to creating her pleasure."
The use of objectionable expressions was not peculiar to Durga-
pūjā only. In the Kāma-mahotsava also, the people used such
objectionable expressions (jugupsit-okti) to the accompaniment of
music, because they believed that by such practices Kāma was
pleased to confer wealth and progeny on the worshippers.\textsuperscript{118} It
should be mentioned here that this Kāma-mahotsava, or the great
festival of the Cupid, was celebrated in the month of Chaitra. The
worship of Indra, called Ṣakrothāna,\textsuperscript{129} consisted in erecting a
flagstaff dedicated to the god, and the ceremony was attended by
kings, citizens, ministers and Brāhmaṇs in festive dress. The most
important spring festival of the people of the east was the Holākā\textsuperscript{130}
which must have been greatly enjoyed by all people without distinc-
tion of caste or sex. In the Sukha-rātri-vrata (the vow of a happy
night) which was performed in the month of Kārtika, the poor were
fed in the evening, and people, whether mutually related or not, were
to greet one another with sweet words in the morning following the
Sukha-rātri (happy night).\textsuperscript{131} In the Pāshāṇa-chaturdāśi, which was
observed in the month of Agrahāyana, big cakes were eaten at
night.\textsuperscript{132} More interesting was the festival called Dyāta-pratipad
which was observed on the sukla-pratipad in the month of Kārtika.\textsuperscript{133}
In this festival the morning was spent in playing dice or gambling, because people believed that success in the game indi-
cated a happy year. They then put on ornaments, smeared their
bodies with scents, attended to vocal as well as instrumental music,
and dined in the company of intimate friends. At night they decorated
their beds and bed-rooms, and enjoyed the company of women they
loved. On this occasion, they also gave new clothes to their friends
and relatives as well as to Brahmins. In the Kojāgara also, which
was observed on the full-moon day of Āśvina, the night was
passed in playing dice, and friends and relatives were gratified
with food consisting chiefly of pressed rice (called chipīaka) and
preparations of cocoanuts.\textsuperscript{134} In the Bhrātrī-dvitiyā which was
celebrated in the month of Kārtika, sisters fed their brothers who,
in their turn, gave ornaments, clothes, etc. to their sisters.\textsuperscript{135} There
are many other rites, ceremonies and festivals, referred to in
Kāla-viveka, with which we are familiar today, such as Dipānvitā,
(illumination of houses) and Ākāśa-pradīpa (burning a lamp high
in the sky) in the month of Kārtika, Janmāśṭamī, Akshaya-trītyā,
Abhāshṭamī, Agastya-arghya, holy bathing in the Ganges (known
as Dabahārā) and in the Brahmaputra (known as Ashītiṃ-snāna),
bathing on the Māghī Saptamī day, etc. There are also long lists of food and action forbidden on particular tithis; and the proper days for fasting and appropriate time for study, pilgrimage, journey, etc. are laid down with punctilious care. Detailed regulations were also laid down for the disposal of dead bodies and a short account of the funeral rites is given in Appendix III. In short, life was subjected to a series of injunctions and prohibitions, controlling even the minutest details of daily life to an extent which it is difficult for us to realise. How far all these were actually observed in practice it is, of course, difficult to say. But a perusal of the Smṛiti literature in Bengal presents a picture of life tightly bound within a narrow framework of Śāstric rules. On the other hand, the rites and festivals mentioned above must have made family and social life highly enjoyable, and afforded opportunities to people to come into close and intimate touch with one another.

VI. Life of the People

Sufficient data are not available for reconstructing a comprehensive picture of the life lived by people in ancient Bengal. All that we can do is to throw some light on its important phases with the help of foreign accounts, sculpture, literature and inscriptions. The literary works of Bengal, which supply most of the particulars, belong to the twelfth century A.D. with the single exception of the Charyā-padas,¹⁸⁷ which were probably one or two centuries earlier. On account of the paucity of data no attempt has been made to trace the evolution of social life, according to distinct chronological periods. The sources of information range between the fourth and twelfth century A.D. and the picture drawn in the following pages may be regarded as broadly true of this period.

1. General nature

The Chinese traveller HiuEN Tsang has recorded a few general observations on the nature of the people in different parts of Bengal visited by him. The people of Samataṭa, according to him, were "hardy by nature," and those of Tāmralipti, both "hardy and brave." The manners of the people of Karṇasuvraṇa were "honest and amiable," but those of Tāmralipti, "quick and hasty." An excessive
love of learning and earnest application to it characterised the people of Punḍravardhana, Samatā and Karṇasuvāra.\textsuperscript{138} I-tsing's testimony to the high moral standard of the Buddhists of a vihāra in Tāmrālīpti will be referred to later.\textsuperscript{138a}

Fondness for learning, to which Hiuen Tsang bears testimony, and which characterises the people of Bengal even today, induced them to visit distant parts of India, even as far as Kashmir, for study. But they were not always noted for good behaviour. In his satirical poem Daśopadeśa, Kshemendra observes that the students of Gauḍa who came to Kashmir with frail bodies which seemed to break even at the touch of people, soon acquired overbearing manners under the bracing climate of this country, so much so that they refused to pay the shop-keepers and drew out knife at the slightest provocation. This aspect of the Bengali character is also emphasised by the remark of Viṣṇuśvara that the people of Gauḍa were quarrelsome.\textsuperscript{139} The Brāhmaṇical writers of Bengal always insisted on a high moral standard of the people. They decried all kinds of vices and sensualities, and the killing of Brāhmaṇas, drinking of wine, theft and adultery were regarded as heinous crimes for which the heaviest penalties and expiations were prescribed.\textsuperscript{140} At the same time they encouraged the culture of all kinds of virtue such as truth, charity, purity, kindness and continence.

2. Position of women

We know from Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra that the women of Gauḍa had the reputation of being soft and timid, sweet-speaking and graceful.\textsuperscript{141} It appears from Dhoyi's description (in Pavana-
dūta)\textsuperscript{142} of the women of Vijayapura, the capital city of Lakshmana-
sena, that the Purdhā system was not much in vogue. But certain remarks of Vātsyāyana indicate that the women of the royal harem of Vaṅga were not accustomed to move out freely, and spoke with outsiders from behind a curtain.\textsuperscript{143} Women were educated, and probably many of them were literate.\textsuperscript{144} In ancient Bengal, as in the rest of India, a woman had hardly any independent legal or social status, except as a member of the family of her father and husband. The Brhihad-dharma Purāṇa (11. 8 1-2), representing the state of things at the very end of the Hindu period, repeats the old dictum that the duty of a wife is to serve her husband and not to forsake her under any circumstances—she must not fast or perform
any Vrata without his permission. It is interesting to note, however, that the great Bengal jurist Jimūtavāhāna asserts the right of a widow to inherit her husband’s entire property in the absence of any male issue. Jimūtavāhāna notes the conflicting views on this subject, and refutes in an elaborate argument the opinion of those who held that the brother and other relations of the deceased should have preference over his widow, or that the latter would be entitled only to maintenance. He adds, however, that the widow shall have no right to the sale, mortgage, or gift of the property, and her enjoyment should be consistent with the life of a chaste widow, solely devoted to the memory of her husband. She should live in her husband’s family with his parents, abstain from luxury (such as wearing fine clothes), and spend just enough to keep herself alive in order that she might do all acts and rites beneficial to her dead husband. Besides, she had to be fully subservient to her husband’s family, even in respect of the disposal of her property. In the absence of any male relation of husband, down to a sapinda, she must live under the guardianship of her father’s family.

Women enjoyed few legal rights and privileges even in respect of their person and property, and had to rely mostly upon the natural instinct of love, affection and sense of duty possessed by their husbands, sons and other relatives. The prevalence of polygamy must have made their lives at home somewhat irksome. In spite of strong insistence of physical chastity of women, contemporary evidence indicates that there was a certain amount of laxity in this respect. Mention may, however, be made in this connection of one redeeming feature in society which offers a striking contrast to modern ideas. It is laid down in the Brahma-valvarta Purana that a woman, forcibly ravished against her will, is not degraded or excommunicated thereby, but becomes pure on performing a penance (prayaashchitta).

Married women sometimes helped their husbands by earning money by means of spinning, weaving or some other mechanical art. Sometimes employers offered bribes to the wives of labourers in order to induce them to send their husbands or some other members of their families to work. After the death of their husbands the wives had to live in complete chastity and to avoid all kinds of luxury and exciting food such as meat, fish, etc. The position of the widows in society was not at all enviable. They were often looked upon as inauspicious, and were very seldom allowed to take part in the different rites and ceremonies. They seem to have been
encouraged by the people to immolate themselves in the funeral pyres of their husbands. The *Brihad-dharma Purāṇa* (II. 8. 8-10) says:

“A devoted wife should follow her husband in death. By doing so she saves him from great sins. Oh twice-born! there is no greater exploit for women, because (by this) she enjoys in heaven the company of her husband for a manvantara. Even when a widow dies by entering into fire with a favourite thing of her husband, who died long ago, and with her mind absorbed in him, she attains the same state (as mentioned above).”

So, it appears that the custom of the burning of *Sāti* came into vogue in Bengal from fairly early times.

3. Food and Drink

Rice, fish, meat, fruits, vegetables and milk (in various forms) constituted the chief articles of diet. Fish and meat were not usually eaten by Brāhmaṇas outside Bengal, but the practice was so common in Bengal that Bhavadeva Bhaṭṭa had to defend it by a lengthy argument. He quotes the opinion of previous authorities like Chhāgaleya, Yājñavalkya, Manu and Vyāsa, and observes:

“All this (prohibition) is meant for the prohibited (days) like Chaturdaśi *etc... so it is understood that there is no crime (dosha) in eating fish and meat.”

As regards fish the *Brihad-dharma Purāṇa* (II. 5, 44-46) recommends that a Brāhmaṇa should eat *rohita, sakula, śaphara* and other fishes which are white and have scales. It was due to this consumption of fish by all classes of people in Bengal, that Śrīnāthāchārya also allowed the people to eat fish and meat except on some *pārvaṇ* days enumerated in two verses of the *Vishṇu Purāṇa* which he quoted. Jīmūtavāhana’s inclusion of the fat (taila) of illisa (Hilsa) fish among the different kinds of vegetable and animal fat tends to show that this fish was largely consumed in Bengal, and the people used its fat for various purposes. But the people, especially the Brāhmaṇas, were not allowed to take any kind of fish they liked. They had to avoid those fishes which had ugly forms, or had heads like snakes, or lived in holes. Though people were asked to avoid rotten fish, some of them took dried fish. Sarvānanda says in his *Ṭikā-sarvasva* that the people of Vaṅgāla were fond of taking dried fish. Among the different species of fish relished by the Bengalis we find mention of madgur, rohit, śakula (śaul),
śrīṅgi (śiṅgi), safara (punṭhi), mauli (maurala), moini, nalamīna (shrimp), crabs (kāṅkrā) and timi. The last is mentioned by Sarvānanda. All these were caught both by hook (baḷish) and net.

As regards meat the flesh of goat, lamb, deer, pigeon, and hare seem to have been very popular.\textsuperscript{158}

Among the animals whose flesh was not recommended to the people by the Smriti works, were snails, crabs, fowls (both domestic and wild), cranes, ducks, dātyūha birds, camels, boars, cows, etc. Among the five-nailed animals, the godhā, the porcupine and tortoise might be eaten.\textsuperscript{157} But in no case was the taking of raw or dried meat permissible.\textsuperscript{158} Among vegetables, mushrooms, onions, garlicks etc. were always to be avoided.\textsuperscript{159} Betels were taken with guvāka, khadira lime and karpāra (camphor).\textsuperscript{160}

Various preparations of milk (of cows, she-goats and she-buffaloes), such as are regarded as delicious even today (ghṛita, mākhan, chhāṇā and kshīra, as well as pāyas and maṇḍa or sweet-meat) were very popular items of diet, but Bhavadeva prohibits various kinds of milk, chiefly on hygienic grounds.\textsuperscript{161}

We find a long list of fruits such as mango, jackfruit, coconaut, vilva, badari, orange, piyāla, pomegranate, melon, cucumber, lemon, palmyra, kapittha (kayet-bel), drākshā, āmalaka, lakucha, plantain, śrīṅgāṭaka (pāṇiphal) lavali, lakucha, kaśeru, jambu, kharjura and udumbara. The juice of palmyra and sugarcane was regarded as very delicious and they were cultivated in plenty.

There is also a long list of vegetables such as paṭola, vārtāku, kushmāṇḍa, alābu, mūlaka (radish), kārkotaka (kānkrol), māsaka (barbaṭi), tintiri, etc.

Among pot-herbs are mentioned, mustard, vetrāgra, kachu sunisannaka (śuśiṇi), kalambikā (kalmi), haridrā, nimba, hilamochikā (helaṅcha), etc. Among spices, we find pepper (marich and pippali), lavaṅga, jiraka, elā (cardamum), saffron, ginger, camphor, nutmeg, hingu, and ajamodā (rāndhuni). Rice and pulses (mudga, masura, chaṇaka, kalaya, aḍhaka or arahar and māśa-kalāi), and to a certain extent, yava, but not wheat, formed the staple food along with the two well-known preparations of rice, chipiṭaka (chiḍā) and khai.\textsuperscript{162}

As regards intoxicating drink those in common use were spirituous liquor made by distillation of rice, molasses, flour and honey. But there were many other kinds of wine. The early Charyā-padas refer to drinking at liquor shops where Śaunḍika’s wife
sold the liquor after fermenting it by means of the fine powder of the root of a tree. Reference to Madhuka (Mahuā) and Palmyra tree probably also indicate preparation of intoxicating drink from their juice.

Bhavadeva vehemently disapproves the taking of intoxicating drinks by the people, be they twice-born or not. But to what extent it stopped this evil practice it is difficult to say. The Bṛihad-dharma Purāṇa (ii. 6, 98) says: "In times forbidden by the scriptures, a Brāhmaṇa should not worship Śiva with gold, blood, wine, human sacrifice, fish and meat," thus indicating that wine was used by the Tāntric Devī-worshippers.

As mentioned above (see p. 358) Śrīharsha, the author of the Naishadhacharita, was most probably a Bengali, and this Kīvya refers to a number of customs peculiar to Bengal. The menu of the marriage-feast of Damayanti may, therefore, give us some idea of a rich banquet of Bengal. It consisted of a large number of vegetable and fish curries, cooked meats of mutton and deer, many kinds of sweet cakes and fragrant drinks, and the dinner was followed by chewing of betel leaves. An ordinary householder was quite satisfied with "boiled husked rice, boiled or fried tender leaves of sarshapa (sarshapa-śākam), somewhat liquid curd (pichchhilāni cha dadhīni), and some cheap sweets (alpa-vyayena mishām)". The Prākritapaitagala, a text composed about 1400 A.D., refers to a happy middle class householder whose wife serves, on a piece of cleanly washed leaf of a plantain tree, his daily food consisting of "warm boiled rice with its boiled juice or gruel (oggara bhattā), some quantity of clarified butter prepared from cow's milk (gāika-ghīttā), some milk, properly boiled, duly cooked small fish (moili or moini machchhā) and a quantity of pot-herbs called nālitā (pāṭ-śāka)."

The above description of food shows how little the diet of Bengalis has changed since ancient times. Similarly we may trace the continuity of some of their habits about food. More than two thousand years ago Megasthenes noted, presumably from his experience of the people of Bihar where he lived, that "they have no fixed hours when meals are to be taken by all in common, but each one eats when he feels inclined." Since this habit continues even today it may be presumed that the Bengalis have persisted in the habit of their ancestors who must have come from Bihar in large number for centuries after the time of Megasthenes.

The Chinese monk I-tsing who stayed in Tāmralipti towards
the end of the seventh century A.D. once proposed to invite some priests, but was told that "it was the old custom to prepare abundant food, and people would smile if the food supplied be only just sufficient to satisfy the stomach." The tradition in Bengal, before the scarcity of food in very recent times, has been that so much should be given to each guest that he must leave a sufficient quantity on his plate.

As regards the order of taking different items of food, the following direction is given in the Brihad-dharma Purâna: "At first rice mixed with ghee, then vegetables, next soup etc., and at last rice mixed with milk should be taken. Salt must not be mixed with milk, nor molasses with sour things." This is strictly observed by the Bengalis even today, with the probable exception of the last. But far different was the case in other parts of India. Thus according to a verse in the Vishnu Purâna quoted by Halâyudha in his Brâhmaṇa Sarvasva one should begin with sweet, then partake of objects with saline and sour taste, and end with things of pungent and bitter taste." This is more or less followed by the people of Gujarat even today.

4. Dress and Ornaments

Literary evidence indicates that men and women in ancient Bengal generally wore a single piece of cloth as under-garment, and occasionally also an upper garment (uttariya and oṣṇā). They also used various ornaments such as ring, ear-ring or ear-pendants (kuṇḍala), necklace (hāra) armlet (keśamraka) and bracelet (valaya), that made of conch-shell (śaṅkha-valaya) being a speciality for women. Reference has been made above (pp. 341-3) to costly garments and jewellery.

A more precise idea of the dresses and ornaments and the mode of wearing them may be formed by a study of the sculptures, chiefly those of Pāhārpur.

Men wore dhoti which was generally shorter and narrower than that worn by the Bengalis of the present day (see illustrations). Ordinarily it hardly reached below the knee, and in many cases it was even shorter than that. The cases where the dhoti reached up to the ankle may be regarded as exceptional. The usual mode of wearing the dhoti was different from the present fashionable mode. The central part of the dhoti having covered the lower part of the body below the navel, both the ends of the cloth were drawn in
and tucked up behind. It was held tight round the waist by a
girdle, consisting of three or more bands, fastened together by means
of a knob in the centre, just below the navel. Sometimes only the
left end of the dhoti was tucked up behind, and the right end was
allowed to hang in graceful folds in front. This mode of wearing
dhoti exposes the contour of the legs as the cloth fits them closely,
and the folds are often marked by incisions both vertical and
horizontal.

The women also wore šādīs in the same way, though they were
much longer and generally reached the ankle. This mode appears,
however, to have come into fashion during the Pāla period, for in
earlier sculptures at Pāhārpur, the šādīs went round the lower part
of the body, one end falling vertically behind the left leg in graceful
folds. This resembles the way in which modern Bengali ladies put
on šādī to cover the lower part of the body. In ancient Bengal the
šādī, like the dhoti, never covered the upper part of the body which
generally remained exposed, though sometimes it was partially covered
by a long narrow scarf (uttarīya or oḍṇā). In addition, in the
cases of women, the breast was occasionally covered by a chauli or
stanaṇṭa, and in a few cases by a bodice which covered the body
above the navel and a portion of upper arm. The šādīs of the
women and even the dhoti of the men were embroidered with various
designs, composed of lines or floral and ornamental devices of various
patterns.

The above may be regarded as the normal dress. There must
have been special dresses for special occasion, and Jīmūtavāhana
refers to the dress for assemblies. Although we have no definite
idea of such a dress, some exceptional modes of dress are represented
in the sculptures. Sometimes men dressed in something like short or
lengati which covered only a small portion of the thigh, and women
in a close-fitting tunic or pyjama reaching up to the ankle. This
was undoubtedly the case with the dancing girls who wore in addition
a long oḍṇā, which was loosely thrown over the shoulder behind
the head and passed under the arms so that its ends fluttered during
a dance. The scanty lengi worn by an ascetic as well as by a
drummer (?) is curious: so are the short dresses put on by warriors.

The dress and ornaments of the boy Kṛiṣṇa in Pāhārpur
reliefs probably represent those generally used by the children.
The chief points of interest are the three tufts of hair on the crown,
called kāka-pakṣa in literature, the torque with medallions round
the neck which is in use even today, and the upper scarf tied round the middle of the body between the chest and the abdomen. The lower garment consisted either of a short dhoti or shorts.

The ornaments worn by men and women, like their dresses, were very similar. The many amorous couples in Pāhārpur reliefs have each large ear-pendants, two lines of necklaces, armlets, bracelets, elaborate girdles and anklet. These may be regarded as the ornaments generally used. Sometimes a woman put on too many bracelets like the up-country ladies.180

Neither men nor women used any covering for the head, but the sculptures of Pāhārpur show that they elaborately dressed their hair.

"Men wore their hair long with thick tresses falling on the shoulder, tied a knot on the top and had curls or ringlets on the forehead kept in place by a neat fillet. Women had their hair gathered in a bunch at the back or arranged it fan-wise behind the head."181

The ascetics had their braided hair arranged in two piles one above the other.182

The literary evidence indicates that men used leather shoes and wooden foot-wears, and carried umbrellas and bamboo-sticks.183 No figure in Pāhārpur sculptures, except warriors, is, however, represented with any footwear, and it was probably not in common use. It appears, however, that the warriors were also often without shoes.184 The umbrella is represented in sculptures.

Married women painted their forehead with a mark of vermilion, a custom that prevails even today. They also reddened their lower lips with vermilion, used saffron as a cosmetic, and painted their feet with lac.185

As regards furniture we know little of the different articles in use. The bedstead, mirror, and lock with key are referred to in early Charyā-padas.186 Various kinds of household furniture, made of gold with fine artistic designs, are mentioned in Rāmācharita (III. 33-34). Terracotta toys, bedsteads, flower-stands, caskets, and domestic utensils such as bowls, vases and pitchers, of which there are large number of varieties, and earthenware of all kinds and of various types are represented in sculptures.187

5. Games and Pastimes

Among the indoor games dice and chess seem to have been very popular. The first was current in India since the earliest Vedic
period and formed a part of certain religious ceremonies in Bengal (v. supra p. 453). We do not know for certain when the second came into use, but as details of the chess, such as sixty-four squares on a piece of cloth, and the pieces known as rājā, mantrī, gaja and vaḍīa are referred to in early Charyā-padas, the game must have been well-known before the tenth century A.D.\textsuperscript{188}

The Charyā-padas refer to music, both vocal and instrumental, dancing and theatrical performances. They also mention vīnā (lyre) with thirty-two strings which was constructed and played upon as in modern times.\textsuperscript{189} Each region had probably some specialities in these matters, and the Rāmcharita (iii. 29) refers to various kinds of tabor (muraja) "which were specially practised in Varendra." Music and dancing were cultivated as high classes of arts by both men and women, and specially by the public women and devadāsīs in temples who strictly followed the directions given in Bharata's Nāṭyasūtra and other texts on the subject.\textsuperscript{190} There are frequent references in literature\textsuperscript{191} and inscriptions\textsuperscript{192} to music and dancing and several representations at Pāhārpur,\textsuperscript{193} of men and girls in the dancing posture, and musicians playing upon cymbals, gong, lyre and even earthen pots, and holding drum and lute.

Among outdoor pastimes of women may be mentioned gardening and water-sports.\textsuperscript{194} Men favoured wrestling and acrobatics.\textsuperscript{195}

6. Conveyances

The conveyances in ancient Bengal consisted of bullock cart,\textsuperscript{196} horse, carriage,\textsuperscript{197} elephants and boats. The bullock cart was used even for bridal procession (v. supra p. 451) and its shape did not materially vary from the modern type. Horses, carriages and elephants were obviously meant for the rich and the aristocrat. Commenting on the injunctions of Manu and Vishnu that clothes, vehicles, etc. were not liable to partition, Jīmūtavāhana explains vehicles as "carriages or horses and the like,"\textsuperscript{198} indicating that these two were the usual vehicles of the well-to-do classes in Bengal.\textsuperscript{199}

Elephants, both as a fighting element and an aristocratic conveyance, were known in Bengal from a very early period.\textsuperscript{200} The Bengali Charyā-padas refer to the capture of camels\textsuperscript{201} by means of snares. A camel is represented in the Pāhārpur sculptures, and a rare image of a goddess riding a camel has been discovered in N. Bengal.\textsuperscript{202}
In a country covered with a network of rivers, boats must have been the principal means of conveyance. The early Bengali Charyā-padas frequently refer to boats, including sea-going vessels, and mention their component parts viz., helms and oars, instrument for baling out water, ropes both for towing and fixing it to a wooden post on the land, sails, mast and wheels. For short journeys rafts were used. Ferry-boats were in use, and had to be paid for by means of cowries.

7. Luxury and Immorality

Bengal was primarily a rural country and a beautiful description of its countryside is given in the Rāmācharita. But even in ancient times there were a number of towns and important commercial centres which were abodes of wealth and luxury (supra, p. 340). The description of Rāmāvati and Vijayapura, the capital cities of the Pālas and Senas, by two contemporary poets, in spite of obvious poetic exaggerations, gives us a vivid picture of the wealthy cities of ancient Bengal. Such towns contained wide roads and symmetrical rows of palatial buildings, towering high and surmounted by golden pitchers on the top. The temples, monasteries, public parks and large tanks, bordered by rockery and tall palmtree roofs, added to the beauty and amenities of town-life.

These towns, as in all ages and countries, were the homes of all shades of peoples; the plain, simple, virtuous and religious, as well as the vicious and the luxurious. Luxuries were chiefly manifested in fine clothes, jewellery, palatial buildings, costly furniture, and sumptuous feasts. Abundant supply of food, far beyond the needs and even capacity of invited guests, was characteristic of these feasts in ancient, as in modern Bengal.

Wealth, luxury and extravagance are hardly compatible with a strict code of morality. Evidences, both literary and epigraphic, testify to the immorality and sensual excesses in ancient Bengal. An idea of the moral laxity of the fashionable young men and women of Gauḍa may be formed from the vivid description of their amorous activities in Kāmasūtra (vi. 49) and Pavana-dūta (v. 42). The language of Dhoyi seems to imply that these were not merely tolerated, but regarded as part of normal social life. The same conclusion follows from the very slight penalty imposed upon a Brāhmaṇa for illicit union with a Śūdra girl to which reference
has been made above (supra, p. 424). Courtesans were familiar, and presumably not unwelcome, features of city-life, for appreciative references are made to them not only in the Pavana-dūta and Rāma-charita, but also in official records of the Sena kings. Vātsyāyana’s references to the most disgraceful amorous intrigues of the members of the royal harem in Gauḍa and Vaṅga with Brāhmaṇas, officers, slaves, and servants, seem to indicate that people outside Bengal held a very low opinion of the moral standard of her aristocratic class. Similarly, Bṛihaspati, describing the manners and customs of the people of different parts of India, remarks that the twice-born people of the east are fish-eaters and their women are notoriously immoral.

The low standard of sexual morality was the cause of, or at least mainly responsible for, the growth of certain evil customs. The first was the general practice of keeping female slaves, referred to by Jīmūtavāhana, and these, as the commentator Maheśvara informs us, mean ‘women kept for enjoyment’.

The second was the system of dedicating girl (popularly known as deva-dāsī) for service in temples. Whatever might have been the primary nature and object of this very ancient institution in India, there is no doubt of its degradation in Bengal towards the close of the Hindu period. Contemporary records refer in rapturous terms to the personal beauty and charm of the hundred women whom Vijayasena and Bhavadeva Bhāṭṭa assigned to the temples erected by them. Dhoṣī also refers to such women in a temple erected by the Sena king (Lakṣmandaṇasena ?) in Suhma. That this practice was in vogue even in earlier periods is indicated by the reference in Rājatarangini (iv. 421 ff.) to the courtesan Kamalā, who was a dancing girl in a temple in Pūṇḍravardhana in the eighth century A.D. These girls were well versed in dance and music, and sometimes in other arts, and though dedicated to the service of gods, or associated with ceremonies in temples, were often no better than common courtesans. The long and detailed account of the very rich and accomplished courtesan Kamalā throws an interesting light on the lives of the higher classes of these women and the moral standard of society in those days.

It may be suggested that this low standard of sexual morality was an inevitable consequence of the Tantric doctrines and the religious tenets and practices of the last phase of both Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist religions in the eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D., to
which reference has been made above (supra, pp. 379-80). Whether these were the effects or causes of laxity in sexual morality in society it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty, but perhaps each reacted on the other. Certain it is that the literature of the Sena period and the religious texts and practices of the later phases of both Hinduism and Buddhism occasionally betray a degradation in ideas of decency and sexual morality which could not but seriously affect the healthy development of moral and social life. It is obviously a dangerous ground to tread upon, in view of the religious susceptibilities of our people, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that religious influences were responsible to a large extent for the two great evils which were sapping the strength and vitality of society: the disintegrating and pernicious system of rigid caste-divisions with its elaborate code of purity and untouchability; and the low standard of morality that governed the relations between men and women.

VII. A Nation in the Making

The people of ancient Bengal gradually became conscious and even proud of their distinct entity among the peoples of India. But apart from geographical contiguity, this consciousness was based upon linguistic rather than social or racial affinity. The feeling of nationality, based on a common language, is, however of recent growth, and could not have developed much in pre-Muslim period when the modern vernaculars had not yet taken shape, and were in the unformed and almost fluid state. The Vernacular literature, as we have seen above, was then in its infancy, and "without a literature there cannot be the pride in a language which is needed to make it one of the bases of nationalism in the modern sense of the term." The facts known so far do not encourage the belief that there was enough social solidarity or cultural homogeneity to foster feeling of national unity in ancient Bengal. Socially and culturally, India, in ancient and mediaeval period, was divided horizontally rather than vertically, and a Brāhmaṇa of Bengal felt and consciously maintained greater affinity with a Brāhmaṇa of Upper India than with a member of lower caste in his own province. Besides, social solidarity was rendered difficult, if not impossible, by the evolution of the elaborate structure of caste, which made a permanent cleavage between the Brāhmaṇas
and the remaining elements of people, almost all of which were degraded to the level of Śūdras. Even the latter were divided into numerous isolated and rigid groups by the creation of innumerable castes and sub-castes to which detailed reference has been made above.

There remained, therefore, only two elements which might constitute a nation in Bengal, viz., racial and geographical unity. As regards the first, we have already seen above that the main bulk of the people formed a homogeneous ethnic group. To what extent a full realisation of this was prevented by the social divisions we cannot say, but herein undoubtedly lay an important basis for a truly national feeling.

The geographical unity of Bengal, too, was not evidently fully realised in ancient times. No common name for the whole province was evolved, although the number of old regional names was gradually being reduced. Even up to the very end of the Hindu rule, Gauḍa and Vaṅga denoted not only two distinct geographical divisions but, to a certain extent, also two political entities.

The absence of a common designation for the country or the people as a whole seems to show that in spite of the political unity for a long period under the Pālas, and for shorter periods under other dynasties, a united Bengali nation, as we understand it, had not yet probably come into existence, and there was a broad demarcation between Eastern and Western Bengal, traces of which persist even to-day.

But both the Gauḍas and the Vaṅgas had attained a definite status, and references in inscriptions and literature of other parts of India leave no doubt that they were recognised as two distinguished and important political units. Proud of their past history and achievements, and flourishing in a compact territory with well defined areas, they had each developed a national life which has left its impress even upon posterity. But signs were not wanting that these two component parts would, at no distant date, be welded together into a united nation.

The geographical contiguity, the community of language, and political unity were the forces at work which were destined to bring Gauḍa and Vaṅga closer together, and ultimately evolve a national life among the people who lived in the region later known as Bengal.

In the domain of art and literature they had already developed a common trait which characterised them as distinct from the rest of
India, and this may be regarded as the beginning of that cultural unity which helped the growth of national feeling. There were many other common elements in the culture and civilisation of Gauḍa and Vaṅga in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries which differentiated them from the rest of India, and imparted a distinct individuality to the Bengalis. Reference may be made, for example, to the evolution of Proto-Bengali dialect and alphabet, the special preference for the goddesses representing female energy culminating in the worship of Durgā as national festival, the growth of Tāntrism, the absence of any head-dress, the use of fish and meat as articles of food, and lastly, the peculiar laws of inheritance codified by Jīmūtavāhana which differed in essential respects from those in force in other parts of India. These characteristics were sure to stamp the Bengalis as a separate entity among the Indian peoples.

To sum up, so far as available evidence goes, we cannot say that there was a united Bengali nation by the end of the 12th century A.D., but everything indicates that such a nation was in the making.