

Sahyadrikhand censored

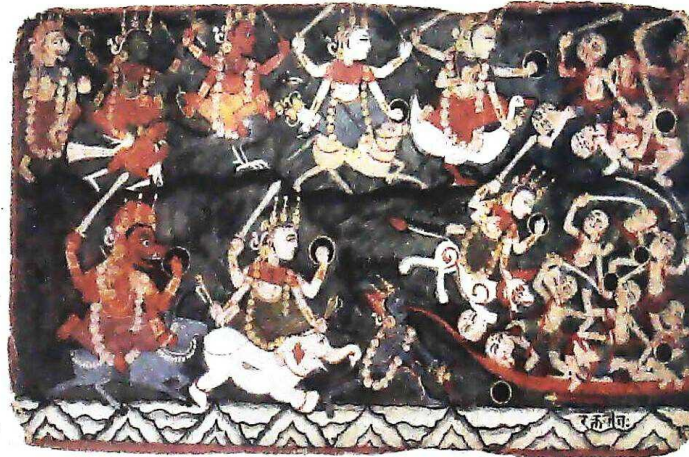
KONKANAPURANA



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Gaitonde, writing in 1992, adapted 'SHK' to the time; he left out of his text the embarrassing stories and accommodated his translation likewise; perhaps following the example of illustrious writers who translated the Samskrt texts into English in yesteryears. For instance, Roy rendered the immodest sentences in the English edition of 'Mahabharat' into Latin rather than English. [Roy, 1884: 'The Mahabharat', 314] As a result, the reader of 'SHKG' remained largely oblivious to the pungency of the strife that ravaged the bramhan communities of the western India at the time; and the immodest language of the exchange. Those censored stories cannot arouse passion anymore, for they will not even be accepted as realistic; they have simply become irrelevant. But those stories are invaluable to get an insight into the war that waged within the bramhan community of Komkan in the early centuries of this millennium. We are not interested in the conflict per se; not even as a historical record. What we are looking for are the clues that the stories offer into the making of the Komkni bramhan. And for that there cannot be a better context than 'Sahyadrikhand' and the associated texts like Sata[prasna]kalpa[latika] (manuscript by one Madhava, supposedly circa 1577 or 1690), Syenavi[jati]dharma[nirnaya] (supposedly a verdict of Shivaji's court, partially published in 1895 and 1913), 'Komkanakhyan' (a manuscript by an anonymous sarasvat, published in 1721) and 'Dasaprakarana' (Lakshman Narayan Keni, 1872); the clues that they provide need to be interpreted in the light of the historical evidence. Impropriety is not unusual in early Samskrt writings. Take the story of Agastyamuni for instance; his birth (along with that of his twin brother Vasisth) is ascribed to a miracle when Mitr and Varun deposited their semen in a pitcher (kumbh) on seeing the celestial nymph Urvasi. [Rgved, Mandal 7, Hymn 33]. A good part of the Sambhava Parva (in Adiparv) of Mahabharat, from the story of Vrihaspati to the story of Dwaipayana, is but a long narration of the unfettered mores of the time. Take for instance the admonition by Mamata, the wife of sage Utathya, to his younger brother, Brhaspati, the purohit of the celestials, as recounted by Bhishma: "O thou illustrious Brhaspati, the child that I have conceived, hath studied in his



mother's womb the Vedas with the six angas. (Semen tuum frustra perdi non potest). How shall then this womb of mine afford room for two children at the same time? Therefore it becometh thee not to seek for the consummation of thy desire at such a time." [Roy, 1884: 314] The most obvious censor's cut that is applied by Gaitonde in 'SHK' is in the chapter 2 of the 'Uttarardha' titled 'Karastrabrahamanotpati'; Gaitonde simply presents it in Samskrt, without a translation in Marathi. [SHKG, 126; SHKD, 305] Why did the story have to be kept out of the understanding of the common reader who does not understand Samskrt? As the chapter heading implies, it talks about the origin of the Karastra (karhade) bramhan. And this is what 'SHK' says about them. In response to Skand's question Mahadev tells that the karhade bramhan hail from a region called Karastr, 10 yojan (about 145 km according to Arthashastra) wide, located to the north of the Vedavati River and to the south of its confluence with the Koyna River. (Karastr corresponds roughly to the present Karhad region.) According to 'SHK' "this country is evil and populated by harsh, evil, and sinful people. They are extremely corrupt due to sinful actions and are born out of adultery. When the semen of a donkey was mixed with bones, these sinful ones were born.

The presiding deity of that region is Matrka Devi, who is extremely cruel and ugly. A bramhan is sacrificed annually in her worship. Born of fathers of the same gotr, the wretched ones commit the great sin of killing bramhan. One must stay away from them; even upon the slightest contact with them; one must bathe with one's clothes still on. Even in a different region, one must not smell their air in the circumference of three yojan. In all this one finds only two substantiated 'mahapatak' as per the sastra: that they are born of fathers of the same gotr, and that they kill a bramhan; the rest seem to be plain insults. In the 20th chapter, which recounts the creation of Komkan and the settling of the bramhan by Parsuram, 'SHK' alleges that the karhade bramhan are collaborators with the lowly bramhan from the Vindhya mountains who administer poison, and condemns them as non-Aryans, poison givers, and bramhan-killers. Who are these non-Aryan bramhan from the Vindhya mountains? Could that give us clue for the sarasvat-karhade hostility? Mahadev's response to Skand's question about the gotr of these bramhan could be important; the karhade bramhan, says Mahadev, are of atri, kausika, vatsa, harita, sandilya, and mandavyagotr. Comparing that with the gotr of the

sarasvat bramhan according to 'SHK': bhardvaj, kausik, vats, kaundinya, kasyap, vasisth, bhargava, visvamitr, gautam, and atri, both the sarasvat and the karhade bramhan belong to the same ethnic stock. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the sarasvat-karhade hostility as portrayed in 'SHK' does not lie in ethnic differences.

The history of the karhade bramhan is far from clear; however the extant records, though scarce, suggest that the rivalry between the two was largely on account of priestly posts and privileges. For instance, there was a legal dispute between the karhade and sarasvat over the post of sarajyotisi (the head-priest and the chief astrologer) at Sri Santadurga Temple in Kavalem which went on for nearly 200 years, from the 16th to the 18th century, until it was settled by the Portuguese government in favour of the sarasvat.

Similarly, in the late 18th century, the sarasvat mahajan of the temple of Sri Vijayadurga in Keri, Ponda, engaged in a legal battle with the karhade mahajan of the same temple; this ended with a lawsuit filed under the Portuguese regime in 1849. Such conflicts have been reported from the rest of coastal Komkan as well. [Patil, 2010: 'Conflict, Identity and Narratives - The Brahman Communities of Western India from the Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Centuries', 76]

These legal battles point to the raison d'être of the texts like 'SHK' at the time; these texts were repeatedly used to support the contentions of the litigating parties before the judicial authorities. As O'Hanlon puts it: "This impelled Brahman scholars to create authoritative texts of Sanskrit religious law, both to affirm its identity in the face of an advancing 'other', and for use when Hindu litigants approached courts under Islamic jurisdiction (SHK was used in courts under Portuguese jurisdiction as well). The digests were also used as a principal basis by Brahman judicial assemblies. In an age of social mobility, when questions of ritual entitlement might involve Brahmins from different regions, digests offered comprehensive information covering many contingencies. The assemblies' judgments frequently described the learned works they had at hand to guide them." [O'Hanlon, 2013: 'Performance in a World of Paper - Puranic Histories and Social Communication in Early Modern India, in Past and Present', No. 219, 95]