

have been undoubtedly otherwise.

### ***SOCIAL LIFE IN THE RAJPUT PERIOD***

The caste system continued to be the backbone of that Hindu society. Out of four original castes the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas the Vysyas and the Sudras-many new subcastes sprang up. Among these, Brahmans were given predominance and respect in society. They claimed the monopoly of all kinds of knowledge-spiritual and secular. They acted as counsellors and ministers to king. But generally they confined themselves to study, teaching, performing sacrifices, religious rites and other functions. They were renounced as priests and consequently they enjoyed some privileges and facilities denied to other castes, for example, capital punishment was not awarded to them.

The *Kshatriyas* provided protection to the rulers and the ruled. They *Vysyas* now had given up agriculture and took up business and money lending. The *Sudras*, apart from following the profession of agriculture and artisans, to render services to other caste people. Though the rigidity of the caste system was in the later Rajput period, inter-caste

marriages took place in the early Rajput period. The well-known Sanskrit author Bana refers to Parsava as the son of the Brahman born of a Sudra woman. The Pratihara inscription (861-A.D) speaks of Harischandra, a Brahmin by caste who married Bhadra, a Kshatriya girl. The caste of the children of inter-caste marriages was determined according to that of the father. But in the later part of the Rajput period, such customs had disappeared and the rigidity of the caste system was strictly enforced. The old social order began to disintegrate. In their struggle against Buddhism and especially against its principles of social equality and universal brotherhood, Brahmans tightened their bonds of caste and defended themselves by the increased rigidity of caste associations. Consequently, as noted above, in the place of the four original castes into which Hindu society was divided, a large number of new castes and sub-castes sprang up. These sub-castes came to be associated with birth, occupation, place of residence, customs, religious practices, differences about food and other similar factors. Probably the process of disintegration began with the Brahmin caste. Apart from the Rig vedic and the Yajur vedic Brahmans of old order, their sub-castes multiplied and they came to be known by their territorial limits. So also sub-divisions among the kshatriyas and Vysyas soon followed. In due course several other occupational castes, such as weavers, potters, carpenters, etc., began to prosper.

A new caste called the Kayasthas also came into existence. Its main function was clerical (religious) work. Probably it was a mixture of several castes. All these had their evil repercussions on the social and political life of the country. For the social and political vision of each sub-caste was circumscribed by its own interest. They endangered narrow outlook. Prevented the growth of feelings of fellowship, proved greatest stumbling block in the emergence of a healthy nationalism and hindered all kinds of progress in the society.

Women seemed to have enjoyed a honourable position in the family and the society at large. The *purdah* system was not in prevalence as gleaned from the literature of this period. They were given opportunity to acquire education, accumulate the talents in arts and sciences and were allowed to enter into discussions with scholars. Avanti Sundari, Indulekha, Marula, Morika, Vijika, Shila, Subbhadra, Padmashri, Madalsa and Lakshmi are some of the eminent women scholars of this period. A few other women proved to be capable in administration and warfare. Akkadevi, the sister of Vikramaditya, the Solanki king was not only a warrior woman, but also was at home in administration. She is said to be the governor of four provinces and led an expedition against a fort in Belgaon district (Gujarat State) and besieged it. Music and dancing, drawing and painting were the popular recreations of the women. Child-marriages were gradually vanishing as days rolled by. Re-marriage of women was not allowed and it led to thousands of women remain widows. Polygamy was an accepted social custom of this period. The practice of *Sati* gained momentum. Male children were preferred to their female counterparts and so female infanticide was in vogue among the people.

The Rajput women enjoyed great freedom in selecting their husbands. That is known as the practice of *swayamvara* (selection of a bridegroom). However the condition of average women was deteriorating. Her dependency on her husband or male relatives

was increasing. The upper class people who were financially sound lived in palatial buildings and enjoyed all kinds of luxuries. Sometimes they maintained slaves. Hospitality was the crowning quality of the people. They celebrated several fairs and festivals all the year round. Music, dancing, drama, chess, dice, boating and hunting were the favourite pastimes. Both men and women adorned them-selves with ornaments. They were fond of various kinds of dresses. In making the dresses, the variety, design and beauty of the cloth dominated.

In the matter of diet, purity was maintained to the core. Due to the impact of Buddhism, they were reluctant to eat meat. But the upper caste people were liberally and freely indulged in intoxicants like liquor, opium and the like. They were accustomed to chewing (betal leaves) but were not in the habit of smoking.

How ever, one can say that the Rajput society in total has lost assimilative power. The old vitality of the society had completely disappeared. "The people were kept in ignorance, fed with unwhole-some superstition and engages with gorgeous and never ending festivals". The growing number of sub-castes and the rigidity of the caste system and the dominance of Brahmins who posed themselves to be the custodians of all spiritual and temporal knowledge, narrowed considerably the social and political vision of the people.

### ***ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:***

During the Rajput period agriculture continued to be the primary profession of the people. Irrigation facilities were provided. Reservoirs, tanks, wells and canals were maintained by the state. At times of drought, scarcity or famine, the state offered considerable aid to the farmers. Such as exemption of land tax, monetary compensation for purchase of seeds and agricultural operations. The land tax was fixed at one sixth of the produce. Trade and commerce flourished well. Largely populated cities were connected with the network of roads. India, at this period, specialized in industries like metallurgy, cotton and textile, steel and iron. The rich and prosperous economic condition of India, no wonder, attracted Mohammedan invaders like Mohammed of Ghazni and later on Mohammed of Ghor to intrude into India.