A Glimpse of Socio-Cultural Patterns in 7th Century Northern India as Reflected in the Lives of the People: An outlook of two Texts.

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The field of social history developed independently from economic and political history. However, there is no watertight compartment between them. It is also true that there is no fixed agenda to write social history. There could be multiple perceptions to study social history. One area of study is the issue of identity in the social sphere. It helps to distinguish the identity of an individual, a family, a community and a professional group. Identity is connected to the culture of a particular community and it helps to get a person or group legitimized in a particular society and its social system. In this context the important question is what is social in social history? Seeking answer to this question may take us to an in depth and complex analysis, where views of different scholars are different and their ideologies also differ to a great extent.

In the context of early Indian history, R.C.Majumdar was the first prominent figure of 1940's who edited a two volume series entitled *History and Culture of the Indian People from BCE 600 to CE 750*. He made first an effort to define social history. According to him, "The 'social' here largely denotes Varṇa status; followed by evidence

on family, marriage, position of women, dress and ornaments, and occasionally, by reference to general condition of life."[1] Niharranjan Ray's *A history of Bengali people* is a departure from the stereo-typed understanding of the word social. He widened the

[1] Cited.in B.D.Chattopadhyaya,introduction, in ideam (ed), *A Social History of Early India*, Centre For Studies In Civilizations, Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2009. pp.xxxiv.

parameter of social; for him "it is the '*kauma*' or the 'tribal' (?) unit which remains at the core of the complex regional structure, over laid with the structure of an implementation of an ideal social order".[2] R.S.Sharma's work entitled *Sūdras in Ancient India* and Devraj Channana's *Slavery in Ancient India* add a bit more to mould the structure and understanding of social history. B.D.Chattopadhyaya has also proposed his view in this regard. According to him social history is "a history without politics" this makes a clear distinction between political and social history. [3]

All the above discussed understanding about social history and history writing conveys that social history had different conceptual meanings, which basically depended on the context. Here the understanding of social history is solely based on the literary sources which help to give a one sided view of a social system in a particular context. What will happen if we did not have any literary account of a community? In this context B.D.Chattopadhyaya makes two points to depict the drawbacks of textual sources or to use them as a source to write a social history.

- If one were to write about the forest-dwelling tribals of the past on the basis of

texts alone, the tribal would remain largely invisible, as they indeed they are. Seen through 'superior' eyes of the literate contemporaries, the social existence of the tribals has been negligible in historical narratives.

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[2] B.D.Chattopadhyaya, op.cit., p.xxxv.

[3] Ibid.

- The limitation of choosing text alone as the source for social history becomes self-evident when one realizes that in most historical narratives India has no social history which is pre-literate.[4]

There is no doubt that the literary sources have their own limitations. But one should not to be forgetting that if and only textual sources make their availability then they become very crucial to reconstruct the social history of a society. *Harṣacarita* and *Kādambarī* both are textual sources. The earlier one as *charitra*-literature which is not fall in the category of normative text while the later is a fiction, full of exaggeration. Therefore these texts are important as they represent the philosophy as well as the ideology of the early medieval society. They should help to understand the social milieu and cultural context. .

Social Norms

The early medieval period witnessed proliferation of castes and *jātis*, where the idea of four fold division is not strictly applicable. This leads us to look for the processes of changes that were occurring in *jāti* and caste formations. During the early medieval

period the idea of four fold *Varṇa* order[5] largely remained an ideal whereas the ground reality changed as is being depicted in the dominant historiography. In the beginning of *Harṣacarita* and *Kādambarī* as well, Bāna not only gives a detailed description of his

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[4] B.D.Chattopadhyaya, op.cit, 2009, pp.xxxii.

[5] The first reference of *Varṇa* order can be found in *Rig-veda*'s tenth maṇdala of named Purūsukta. There society has been divided into four *varna* viz., Brāhmaṇa, Ksatriya, Vaiśyas and Sūdra.

origin, his genealogy from Vātsyana race,[6] he also linked up his cosmological origin with 'Brahma' to legitimize his identity.[7] Bāna puts Brahmans at the top of the ladder where it was their duty to perform the sacrificial rites and follow the teaching of *Vedas*. When he came back from the visit to the capital Bāna made several enquiries from his kins:

> Have you been happy all this time? Does the sacrifice proceed without hindrance? Do the fires devour oblations with ritual duly and without flaw performed? Do the boys pursue their studies at the proper time? Is there the same unbroken daily application to the *Vedas*?[8]

They replied:

> "All the ceremonies proper to Brāhmaṇs are fully carried out as far as our powers and means permit and in due season."[9]

Hence, this gave a very clear indication that during the early medieval period, houses of Brāhmaṇs were not only his own residence but were acting as place of educational institutions where *dvija* attain their formal education.

The engagement of Brāhmaṇs was not confined to studying, teaching and

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performing the priestly rites and rituals; other than these was a time when they began to have some administrative positions. For example, Kumārapalita the minister in King

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[6] Bāna gives a full-fledged description to trace his origin and genealogy. He belongs to the race of Vatsa, Vatsa was the twin brother of Sārasvata (son of saraswatī). Thus Vatsa was the person to begin the Vātsayana race. For detailed studies see, *Harsacarita*, first chapter, pp.7-46.

[7] Ibid.

[8] *Harṣacarita*, pp.90-91.

[9] Ibid.

Śudraka's court was a Brāhmaṇ by caste.[10] He was chief among the circle of all the royal counselors.[11] Another reference to a Brāhmaṇ minister can be made. Śukaānsa the minister in the court of King Tārāpīda's was also a Brāhmaṇ by caste. [12]

This shows that by the early medieval period Brāhmaṇs began to take part in administration and marked their presence in every sphere of society: teaching and studying of *Vedas*, performing the religious rites and rituals and political activities as well. This was a break for them and marked a shift from the tradition religion and religious activity, which was assigned to them in the four fold *Varṇa* order.

At one place in the *Harṣacarita*, Bāna mentioned that King Harsa granted hundred villages to Brāhmaṇs which was known as *brahmadeya* land. A *Brahmadeya* was a settlement of Brāhmaṇs. They cultivated the land by themselves which implied they had chosen farming as a profession. Hierarchy was another interesting point which emerged with the coming of *brahmadeya* land. It is said the "expansion of agrarian settlements through the creation of *brahmadeyas* often involved the superimposition of

the superior rights of the brhmanas over the communal holding and the clan families of the locality."[13] Further they helped the spread of Brahmanical ideology and the brahmanical form of social representation.[14] It was not possible for every brāhmaṇa to act

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[10] *Kādambarī*., p15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p.79.

[13] Rajan Gurukkul, Characterizing Ancient Society: The Case of South India, *Proceeding of the Indian History Congress*, 59th session, Patiala,1998, p.49.

[14] Ibid.,pp.50-51.

as a *rājpurohit* or priest. However, the land grant system provided brāhmaṇs a feasible environment to select alternative professions.

The emergence of Kāyastha community was a major change in early medieval times. It can also be said that the emergence of Kāyasthas was the result of the development of land grant system. R.S Sharma says, "In early medieval times, the constant transfer of land or land revenue made by princes to priests, temples and officials led to the rise and growth of the scribe or the Kāyastha community."[15] The earliest evidence of the use and popularity of the term "Kāyastha" has been depicted in the *Yājavalakya smriti*. In the court of King Tārāpīda "thousands of royal orders were being written down by the judicial clerks who knew the names of all the villages and cities, who looked upon the whole world as one house and who as they wrote down all sorts of transactions taking place in the world………"[16]. Therefore, the Kāyastha emerged as the rival of the older social

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aristocracy in more than one sphere. Their voice may have led to the loss of the economic privileges of the Brāhmaṇs. [17]

During this period people were engaged in different occupations, and simultaneously they were consolidating their own identity around that particular occupation. Identities were being decided perhaps by people's profession rather than by their caste group or *Varṇa.* Bāna gives a long list of his friends and companions; who

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[15] For detail study see, R.S.Sharma , op. cit., 2001,p.194.

[16] *Kādambarī*,p.121.

[17] Chitgopikar, op. cit., 1998, p.55.

were of his own age group and among them 'two brothers were of low birth[18] Chandṛasena and Matṛisena, vernacular poet Icana, prākṛit poet Vāyuvikara, an ascetic widow Cakravakika, a gold smith Camikāra, a Scribw Givindaka, a dancing girl Hariṇika, a potter and so on.[19] Potter, gold smith and leather worker were considered untouchable. Bāna's list suggests that though he was a Brāhmaṇ, still he was being accompanied by numerous so called "low caste professional groups". It reflects that he did not follow and had no faith in the existing social order, or that social interactions were far more open.

The *antyaja* or untouchable emerged as the fifth rung of the traditional four *Varṇa* hierarchy. The *antyaja* idea helped the growth of a servile labour and was reinforced by the sanctification of forced labour by legal writers. [20] Medieval legal texts describe the

untouchables as eater of cows, and list them as antyaja, baratar, baruda, bheda, bhilla, candela, carmkāra, dosa, nata and rājaka[21]. There are some sources belongs to the early medieval period which suggest that sūdras not only appeared as slaves, artisans and agricultural laboures; they also took the place of vaiśyas as cultivators. For instance Xuanzang has shown in his account that, sūdras were agriculturists.[22] The *Skanda purāṇa,* an early medieval text, describe sudras as giver of grains (*annada*) and house

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[18] Paracavau = sons of a Brāhmaṇ and a sūdra woman.

[19] *Harṣcarita*, pp.44-47.

[20] R.N.Nandi, *Religious Instituation and Cult in the Deccan*, Delhi, 1973, p.xvi.

[21] Vasudeva Uppadhayay, *Socio-Religious Condition of North India (AD 700-1200),* Varanasi, 1964, p.92.cited.in R.S.Sharma,op.cit,2008, p.260

[22] T.Watters, p.168.

holder (*gṛahastha*).[23] This reflects the functioning of the society; where the social norm of *Varṇa* order was not necessarily the reality.

The early medieval period was a period of proliferation and fragmentation of castes. The process of proliferation of castes appears to be the most striking feature of this period. Among the several reasons of proliferation one was inter-caste marriage; which seems to be not so rigid in the period. Bāna refers to two wives of his father; one was Brāhmaṇ and another Sūdra. He himself was the son of Brāhmaṇ Mother whereas his two brothers Candṛasena and Matṛasena were *parasavas*[24]. Further, Mahāśvetā daughter of Gandharva (*apsarā*) also selected an ascetic named pundarika, as her future life partner.[25]

The *Vishnudharmottara purāṇa*, a work of about the eighth century, states that thousands of mixed castes were produced as a result of the connection of vaiśya women with men of lower caste.[26] Several reasons are given with regard of inter-caste marriage, which were acceptable on the ground of early medieval circumstances.

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[23] R.S.Sharma, op.cit., 2008, p.256.

[24]*Harṣacarita*, p.44. .

[25] For detail study see *Kādambadrī,*pp.130 ,156.

[26] R.S.Sharma,op.cit, 2008, p.259.

The earliest versions of the Kali age in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas[27] have been perceived as symptoms of social and political crisis. The purāṇas and smriti purpose that perfect *dharma* which consists of four feet is found only in the Krita age. The Krita age was of perfect bliss and happiness, and then it degenerated into the second age called the Treta, when *dharma* lost its one foot. Nonetheless, this age witnessed the ideal reign of Rāma depicted by Vālmikī. The Treta was followed by Dvapaya age which witnessed the great Bhārata war. Though *dharma* lost one more foot in this age Yudhisthira was looked upon as its embodiment. The last phase witnesses the progressive degeneration of dharma is marked by the advent of the kali age, when *dharma* retains only one foot.[28]

The Kali age has been perceived by scholars in different ways, from representing a situation of actual historical crisis to an imagined segment of time or a fall from the ideal envisaged order.[29] The expression also occurs in Bāna's work as it may be useful to examine the context of it occurrence.

For Bāna, Kali meant an age where the tendency of continuous decline of morals and dharma could be seen. In support of his idea he gives several references from *Mahābhārata* and justifies his perception of the Kali age as a fall from normative

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[27] *Bhagvatapurāna* described a story of the begning of kali age. Pariksit once saw a sūdra in a king's attire (who was actually the age kali incarate), beating a bull and a cow which stood for dharma and prthivi respectively. Cited in, V.Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A historico-Anthropological perspective*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi,2001.p.95.

[28] R.S.Sharma,op.cit,2001,p.46. For detail study this can also be looked, Santi parva in Mahābhārata text, as constituted in its Critical Edition, ed. various hands, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1927-1966.

[29] Ibid.

standards. Most of the time he compares Krita age with Kali age. For instance he says, "In Śrikāntha region the laws of caste usage were forever unconfused and the order of the Krita age prevailed"[30] More interestingly he also suggests the alternative applied by the subjects of Ujjainī to remove the sin of Kali age. In that city the sins of the people were wiped off by the noise of the sacred studies which were always carried on the there. And the heaven was gladdened by the smoke of rite, steadying always the taint of the Kali age.[31] They used to love (to read) the *Mahābhārata*, the Purāṇas, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and they were all well acquainted with the contents of the *Brihatkathā*.[32]

The earliest known record in which the spirit of the ruling class appear to have been crushed by the experience of Kali age is mentioned in the Harhaa stone inscription (vikarama year 611= 533.4) of the Maukharī ruler Isaānavarman. There he played a

significant role to establish *dharma* and remove the stain of Kali age crisis.

"The *Vishnupurāna* speaks of a ruler of the kali age named Visvaphatika who created a new order of castes and gave high places in the state to Kaivartas and Pulindas. Elsewhere we are also told in the same text that in kaliyuga the kingly status would belong to one who would be strong and he would have the right to marry girls from all the *varṇas*."[33] These give a very clear indication of the changes. These changes included the, process of local state formation, emergence of new ruling classes, bhakti movement, expansion of the agrarian system and continuo attacks by foreigners. To legitimized the

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[30] *Harṣacarita*, p.101.

[31] *Kādambarī*, p.68,

[32] Ibid., p.70.

[33] Vishnu…..... ,tr., H.H.Wilson, vol.5, London, 1864-70; reprint Calcutta, 1972.cited in V.Nath, op.cit, 2001, p.97.

changes and the rule of the king it became necessity to use the Kali age crisis as a idiom and it was represented as a marker of change of age.[34] To justify this it was compared with the Krita age.

The intention of this study is neither to define the kali age, nor is to criticize it. Our aim is to understand the social notion of kali age. Bāna and his other contemporaries discus a lot about the Kali age. For them it was a stain which could be washed off by performing the rituals, rites, following the ideal Brahmanism and established *dharma.* There was an inherent problem in it. We know rituals scarifies rites, study of the Vedas and establishment of *dharma* and order were and only could be performed by the dvija.

That means Bāna and other writers had perceived the Kali age crises within the Brahmanical paradigm, and as an antithesis of *dharma.* What about the rest? It leaves no space for the common mass, including the sudras and tribals to participate in it. Those categories were denied to perform these religious rituals and rites.

Interestingly Bāna lived in the same house with his two half brothers; born from a sūdra mother. He did not account it as a part of the Kali age crisis. His long list of friends included a courtesan, drummer and potter. These all falls in the category of untouchables. He mingled with them and that was more important and was perhaps very common practice in daily life.

After analysis the sources it can be concluded that the Kali age was more an ideological construction of the period and less a crisis. There were certain social norms in

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[34] B.P.Sahu, op.cit., 1997.

the society and it was expected of all classes to follow them. But the interesting and crucial facet is that contradictions and tensions were inherent within the social norm.

Women in society

Historically woman has been presented as a youthful young woman, as a wife, as a mother, as a widow and finally as a member of the society, struggling hard to give meaning to her life. "A true woman was one who accepted and internalized the view of herself dictated by male dominated society and the social and cultural norms it set."[35]

The role of woman, her place in society and her character has been determined by the patriarchal society. The texts of ancient times whether it was the Vedas, *Upanishads, Smṛities,* and *Kāvya* literature[36], all of them were written by the male folk. The idea and history of a woman have come through these writings and has reached the present state. We do not have textual sources which claim that a woman was the writer of it or she had played some role in the writing process. However the objective of this study is primarily to look into the narrative content of the textual sources written in Northern India during

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[35]Jagdish Lal Dawar, Feminism and feminity : Women in Premchand's fiction , *Studies in History*, 3 Sage publication ,New Delhi,1987.

[36] *Kavya* is a literature as a form of art, as distinct from scripture (*āgama)*, history, (*itihāsa*) and technical treatise (*śāstra*) cited in ; A.K. Warder, *Indian kāvya Literature*, vol. I. Delhi. 1989. Traditionally, it includes not only poetry (*mahākāvya or saragabandha*) but drama (*nātya*), novel (*kathā)* and biography (*ākhyāyikā).*

the seventh century and explore the logic and ideology of gender[37] representations in them.

Early medieval Indian society was very complex. *Varna, jāti* and professions were intermixed. The women were degraded and fell in the category of sūdra.[38] The age of marriage was reduced. Practice of *satī* became a part of social custom. The door of *bhakti* was open to women. Women were deprived from formal education and debarred from reciting the *Vedas*. It was a time when women were considered as an object. On the other hand, ironically women began to be worshiped in the images of deities like Pārvatī and

Shakti within the Brahmanical patriarchy. Yājnavlakya, Atri, Deval, Parāśara, Harita, and Kātyāna smṛities were written or composed in the early medieval period. They discussed about the rights and duties of women. They also mentioned the verses in praise of women, but the parameter was fixed for it. All of the discussed smṛities give a glimpse of women during the period. They give an idea according to which one can see how she lived her life.

Harṣacarita and *Kādambarī* written by Bāna were important in that respect. The purpose of the writer was to write a *caritra*-literature and a *kathā.* He did not aim to show

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[37] Sex is the biological given for men and women. Gender is the cultural definition of behavior. It defines as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles; therefore it is a cultural product which changes over time.

[38] Here the idea behind this argument made is that women were excluded from performing Vedic rites and sacrifices. She was refused the study of the *Vedas.* In fact the condition of widows was worse; as she was deprived from participating in social functions.

how a society functioned ideally at that point of time. He has given the picture of the society as well as the history of women during the seventh century.

Smṛities and other literary sources of the period have discussed the rights and duties for woman. Rights and duties are helpful to understand the mentality and perspective of males towards women. Bāna discussed at length about the mentality of the male folk in *Harṣacarita.* He mentioned, 'One day the King, standing on the roof of seraglio, heard a man in the outer court sing on arya couplet which had suggested itself to

him:

"At the time of the bosom[39] swelling, growing with the passing of each rainy

season,

A daughter bring low her father, like a river its bank, in a whirlpool of

agitation"'[40]

Hearing this, the king dismissed the servants, and said to the queen at his side:

"Our darling Rājyaśrī, my queen, is now grown a young woman. The thought of her, like noble qualities[41], never for a movement leaves my heart. As soon as ever girls near maturity, their fathers become fuel to the flame of pain. The swelling of her bosoms[42] darken my heart, as clouds

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[39]Or –punningly- 'cloud.'

[40] Harṣacarita , p.156.

[41] *Gunavatta* might be translated 'the possession of attributes': the Kashmir text has an easier reading gunavritta, 'as if become an attribute;' with doubtless puns in *guna* and *vritta. Sint*, would be better rendered by 'anixety'.

[42] Or- punningly- 'cloud.'

the day. It is a law of right, by whom so ever framed not with my consent, that children born of our body, dandled at our breast, never to be abandoned, are taken from us by the unexpected arrival of someone unknown to us truly, these indeed are the brand marks of this transient life. Herein has sorrow's fire more than in aught else a power to burn, that whereas both are our domestic life, take refuge in offspring good men

grieve at a daughter's birth. Hence is it that to their daughter's noble men offers water even at birth[43] in their tears. For this fear sages, neglecting marriage, dispensing with desolate forests."[44]

The above statement suggests that the people had set up in their mind that the girl is no longer a part of her father's family. As she would attain her marriageable age she had to go with her future husband to his place. Thus she was considered a burden for her father and to the family also.

Kādambarī, the other text of the same period gives a completely opposite view about the girl. Mahāśvetā a daughter of 'Gandharva race' tells Candrāpīda, 'her father having been (long) child less, welcomed her birth with a great festival exceeding in gaity that held on the birth of a son. And when the tenth day arrived, he having performed the useful rites bestowed her name of Mahāśvetā (extremely white) which was quite significant.'[45]

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[43] Water is offered to the dead at a funeral (*jalānjali*).

[44] *Harṣacarita* , pp. 156-157.

[45] *Kādambarī,* p. 187.

King Parbhākarvardhana decided that his daughter would get married as soon as possible. On the other hand the birth of Mahāśvetā was welcome and celebrated the same way as that of a son's birth. Both Mahāśvetā and Kādambarī framed the pattern of their lives by their own. Mhāśvetā, a young princess of about eighteen years choose her love by her own although she decided to become an ascetic. While her friend Kādambarī also

decided to remain unmarried throughout her life in sympathy for her.

There was a contradiction in Bāna's discourses of the social system. At one point he reflects a society where a girl child's birth was considered a trouble. On the other hand he shows that the girl was welcomed and given an environment under which she could take her decisions herself. To what extent these two views could be placed in the same context is a matter of speculation. It needs to be clarified by comparing the discussed sources with the other sources of the same period.

The word *satī* in its original Sanskrit (*satī* a feminine noun derived from sat; meaning "goddess" or "virtue") denotes not the practice but the practioner; the "good woman" who, by choosing to join her husband in death, refuses to became an inauspicious widow[46]. The practice of widow burning is the product of a strong patriarchal society. The origin of widow burning is not simple to discover, but the antiquity of its practice can be traced with the help of the historical sources.

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[46] Jones Lindsay, Encyclopedia of Religion, op cit, 2005, vol-12, p.8129.

The first established historical evidence of a widow burning was found in Eran in the Sagar district of present day Madhya Pradesh. A ruler had it inscribed that on his army commandeer died at this place in the battle and his widow had followed him into the death on his funeral pyre.

Harṣacarita refers to two cases of *satī* witnessed by the King Harṣavardhana. One was his mother and other one his sister.

His mother became *satī* when her husband was alive. Before going to *satī* she meets her son, and paid last rite:

> Having embraced her son kissed his head, the queen (Yaśovatī) went forth on foot from the women's quarter, and, through the heavens, filled with the citizen's lamentations, seemed to block her path, proceed to the Sarasvatī's bank. Then having worshipped the fire with the blooming red lotus posies of a women's timorous glances, she plunged into it as the moon's form enters the adorable Sun.[47]

Harṣa had tried to persuade her be. In answering to Harṣa's remonstration; she talks of her position as a chief queen and connected it with her pride- 'I am the lady of a great house, born of a stainless ancestry, one whose virtue is her dower. Have you forgotten that, I am the lioness mate of a great spirit, who like a lion bad big delight in a hundred battles? Daughters, spouse, mother of heroes, how other wise could such a woman as I,

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[47] *Harsacarita*., p.197.

whose once was valour, act?........I would die while still unwidowed. I can not endore, like the widowed *raii*, to make unavailing lamentations for a burnt husband.'[48]

Rājyaśrī who was the sister of Harsa not only gives her reason before performing the act of *satī* but also she tries to justify her decision. She said ' A husband or a son is a woman's true support ; but to those who are deprived of both, it is immodestly even to continue to live, as mere fuel for the fire of misery'[49]

The terminology of the discourse of Harṣa with mother and sister indicates the practice of *saīi* was a necessary demand of the society but not necessarily inevitable. If it was so, then the contrasting version of Bāna would not appear in *Kādambarī* a text of the same period.

After the death of Pundarika, Mahāśvetā decided to give up her life but at the same moment a heavenly figure appeared before her and told her with the concern of a father, 'child Mahāśvetā, you should not give up your life; you will again be united with him , he flew up with him into the sky'.[50]

In Kādambarī prince Candrāpīda reassured Mahāśvetā on the rightness of her continuing to live after her lover Pundarika's death.[51] He says:

Following one in death is exceedingly useless. It is a way followed by the illiterate, it is a pastime of infatuation, it is a path of ignorance, it is a piece of rashness, it

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[48] Ibid., pp.195-196.

[49] Ibid. p-321.

[50] *Kādambarī*. p.224.

[51] *Canrāpīda*'s view is that 'nothing makes a woman more despised' than to kill herself 'by poison , fire, or famine'.

is taking a narrow view of the matter it is a great piece of carelessness, and it is a blunder due to folly, that life is resigned when one's father, brother, friend or husband is dead. If life does not leave one of itself, it should not be resigned. If this matter be thought over, this giving up of one's life is for one's own interest; for it serves as a remedy for the unbearable agonies of sorrow suffered by one's self. It bring no good whatever to the

dead man. In the first place it is not a remedy to bring him back to life; nor is it a means of adding for the stock of his religious merit, nor the cause of securing a world of bliss for him, nor a remedy against the falling in hell, nor the way to see him, nor the cause of mutual union. [52]

Candrāpīda gives her several examples, mainly from the *Mahābhārata,* of women who did not give up their lives after the death of their husbands. He mentions Rati Pritha, Uttarā, Dushālyā who did not follow their husband on the funeral pyre[53].

It was clearly understood that the practice of widow burning was not only common in society but the women themselves wanted to perform it. Whether it could be yaśovatī, Rājyaśrī or Mahāśvetā every one wanted to give up their lives when they got to know about the death of their respective husbands or lovers. In fact they had reasons as well. It was the matter of pride for queen Yaśovatī. And Rājyaśrī did not have any male kin (husband or son) to support her. Social isolation was another reason to prefer *saīi.*

During the time of Rājyaśrī's marriage only 'married women who put up "un widowed dames with lines of vermilion powder glittering on their forehead"[54] were

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[52] *Kādambarī*, p.227.

[53] Ibid, pp.227-228.

allowed to do the marriage rituals. Matrons[55] prepared the dress for the bride. Textual evidence clearly indicates the Social pressure, threat of Social outcaste and criticism that

compelled the widow to burn herself at the funeral pyre of her husband. Yaśovatī, Rājyaśrī and Mahāśvetā all belonged to the upper class of the society. Here the question emerges why these upper class women followed the practice of *satī ?*

Uma chakaravarti has said, 'Widowhood in India among the upper castes is a "social death" i.e her alienation from reproduction and sexuality, and her exclusion from the functioning social unit of the family.'[56] Since the upper-caste women in Brahmanical patriarchy were primarily a vehicle for reproduction, hence by the death of her husband, her sexuality also died. In fact its best and alive example might be seen in Harsacarita at the time of Raāyaśrī's marriage, where it has been shown that only matron could do auspicious ceremony. Hence it is clear that there was dual ideology towards the female. Women have been categorized on the basis of *Varṇa*. The women of upper caste had to follow sati after the death of her husband while the Sūdra women were free from it.

The custom of *Pardāh* is considered a social evil in modern world. However it was not an evil when it was adopted in Indian society. Generally *Pardāh* has been linked with the arrival of Turks. The roots of *Pardāh* and its antiquity can be trace in the texts of seventh century. Bana referred in Harsacharita, at the time of marriage ceremony the 'Bridegroom, passed on to the door of the bride house, Bride (Rājyśrī), whose face

[54] *Harṣacarita* , p.158.

[55] Married women.

[56] Chakrabarti, op cit,2006,pp.157-158.

hidden, like the morning twilight. By its "roseate veil", dulled the gleaming lamps by its radiance'.[57] Whereas the other reference of *Pardāh* in another text Kādambarī states, 'Vilāsvatī the queen of Tarāpīda, covered her face with silken veil when Śukānasa (prime minister) came to talk to her'[58].

Both these incidents show that the veil was a part of courtly culture. In fact, it was a symbol of division between the royal and the common women. The importance of the *Pardāh* lies in the fact that it was a symbol of pride and respect for upper class women and they had to follow it. Male dominance and women's invisibility was structured in very complex ways, and women themselves were not a homogeneous category.

According to the above analysis, it can be said that the new emerging socio-cultural patterns have established themselves as an important component of the society to maintain social order and to mitigate the sin of the Kali crisis. Most of the Smritis and Puranas not only mentioned but also emphasized the significance of Cultural values. During the early medieval period, many regional and tribal practices become part of Brahmanical culture. During the early medieval period, there was no unilinear pattern to follow Socio-Cultural norms or perform rituals. The period was one of change. Rituals also had a phase of change but the interesting facet is that the rites and rituals still had significance and they were performed at large to get legitimacy. Moreover, certain social

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norms like Sati and the custom of Pardah were still far from being a common practice that was relatively assigned or to be followed(performed) by the Royal class and the upper varna only.

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