

Karhad Brahmins: Historical background

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The name Karhada is derived from the word Karhataka. The word has regional rather than communal connotation. The South-Western part of modern Maharashtra was once well known by that name. A copper plaque commissioned by Chalukya king Vikramaditya in the year 703 A D contains the words कर्हाड विनिर्गत भारद्वाज अग्निवेश्यायाम् Well known Kannada poet Janna (12th century) refers to *Karahata* in his *champu* classic *Yashodhara Charite* 2. Another work कर्हाटक माहात्म्यम् written in 1860 says that *Karahataka* country lay at the confluence of Krishna-Veni and Koyna rivers³. Several other inscriptions and documents since the 10th century also refer to *Karhataka* or *Karahataka*. All these references point at one thing: that a country by the name कर्हाटक was a famous land. Nagavarma, a Kannada grammarian, in his celebrated work 'Bhasha Bhushana' mentions the words 'Karahadadol puttidadam Karahadicham'. From this reference, one can conclude that what was hitherto a locational nomenclature had already acquired a communal (pertaining to the community) connotation.

Vasudev Athale is of the opinion that all *Karhades* follow अश्वलायन सूत्र. Moving out of *Karahataka*, when they settled down in the Konkan, they continued to be referred to as *Karhatakas* which name stuck to them. Interestingly, most of the Brahmins found in the original *Karahataka* country today are Deshasthas!

The word Karahataka eventually got corrupted into
Karahata > Karhata > Karhada > Karada

Also
Karagataka > Karhata.

Today, a town between Kolhapur and Satara is known as Karad. It lies about 70 kilo meters from the borders of Karnataka. There is no doubt that this was the *Karhataka* of the olden days. A group of the Karhatakas eventually migrated to the Konkan and onwards to certain places in Kasaragod and South Kanara districts. Late खंडेरि अनंत शास्त्रि in his अगत्याडि माहात्म्यम् records thus:

ते धारवाडेपि च पुन्यपत्तने भूवल्निकायामपि केरलादिषु
विलित्यिरे प्रीतहृदो हि भूसुराः स्वजीवितायां निहिताधिभाराः ॥

Today, outside Maharashtra, Karhade Brahmins are found in large concentration in Dharwar, Goa, South Kanara and Kasaragod district areas. There is no uniformity in the language (dialect) spoken by them, in their traditions or life

styles. That forces one to conclude that they had either come in different groups or from different regions.

Of all these groups, the one that had chosen to settle down in Kasaragod area, had its language coming under the greatest influence of Dravidian languages. Almost 50% of the words are borrowed from either Kannada or Tulu (a local dialect). Those settled in Dharwar and South Kanara have got their languages almost intact. From this, one is again tempted to conclude that the group found in Kasaragod is the oldest to move out of the Konkan.

There is also a community of Marathi speaking Naiks found in this area. Most probably, they kept company to the Karhad Brahmins as they moved from place to place. Their language too had come under the influence of Dravidian languages, especially Tulu. Till recently, they were found living close to Karhad Brahmin settlements. Traditionally, they seek out Karhad Brahmins for priesthood when they want to perform any of their rites.

There is no incontrovertible evidence found yet to pin point when the Karhad Brahmins came to settle down in Kasaragod area. Prof P K Gode of Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, Pune opines that they have a history dating back to 930 A D. According to him, Mitakshara (मिताक्षर) who was the court poet of Vikramaditya VI of Chalukya dynasty (1076 – 1126) has referred to a community of Brahmins who practiced 'Shakala Shakha (शाकल शाखा) and Ashwalayana Sutra' (अश्वलायन सूत्र). Shilaharas were the vassals of Chalukyas. The latter are believed to have brought some 'Ashwalayana Sutra and Shakala Shakhiya' Brahmins with them as priests. Since they came from Karhataka, the people of Konkan called them as Karhade when they went there to settle down, according to historians.

A community of Ramakshatriyas (रामक्षत्रिय) is also found in Kasaragod area. This group too is believed to have come in from Vijayadurga area of Ratnagiri in the 16th century and settled down here. Vijayadurga was used as a military base by Vijayanagara (विजयनगर) as well as Keladi (केळदी) rulers. A group of Ramakshatriyas shifted their loyalty to Shringeri Mutt from Kaule (कौळे) Mutt during the reign of Veerabhadra Nayak of Keladi (केळदी) (1630 – 1646), according to a document (*sanad*) available at Shringeri. A dispute between the Konkani's and Ramakshatriyas is believed to have prompted the latter to go for the change, historians believe. Veerabhadra Nayak was succeeded by Shivappa Nayak. Marching with a battalion of Ramakshatriya warriors, Shivappa Nayak annexed some forts in Kasaragod area and established his overlordship there. When Shivappa Nayak returned to his capital, he set up the Ramakshatriyas, locally known as Kote's, to hold the reigns for him. The Ramakshatriyas are known for their athletic build and valour. *Mushtika Chanuras*, locally known as *Mattigas*, are a faction of Ramakshatriyas, and are equally famous for their valour.

Madras Gazetteer of 1894 says, "Karadi Brahmins are their (Ramakshatriyas') priests and owe allegiance to the head of the Shringeri Mutt." Till recently, the Kote's used to seek out Karades to perform their religious rites. Both Karhades and Ramakshatriyas have their roots in Ratnagiri and became followers of Shringeri Mutt after they settled down in Kasaragod. Both are *Shaakta's* or worshippers of *Shakti*.

It may not be out of place to add a few surmises here in respect the Durga Parameshwari temple at *Malla*, near Kasaragod. The word **Malla** (मल्ल) means big or large in Tulu. In Kannada and Malayalam, it means a wrestler. Not far from the temple of Malla, at *Polali*, the *Keladi* rulers had a fort. In the past, the tradition has it that several *Mushtika Chanura* families used to live there. They were also associated with the management of the *Malla* temple. From this, one is tempted to conclude that *Malla temple* must have got its name because of its association with the *Mallas* or wrestlers.

From the evidence so far culled out, one can say that the *Karhades* and *Ramakshatriyas* came to settle in Kasaragod area during the reign of *Keladi* rulers in the 17th century.

References:

1. कहाड ब्राह्मणांचा इतिहास
2. Janna, who wrote Yashodhara Charite in 1209, was a Jain. The Shilaharas (शिलाहार) who were ruling Karahataka at that time, were friendly towards Jains, opines R G Bhandarkar in *Early History of the Deccan*, pp 124.
3. मध्यादेशे महाक्षेत्रं नाम्ना श्री करहाटकम्
यत्र श्री कृष्णोपनिषत्सुः कर्मुदमत्याश्च संगमः ॥
5. About 600 years ago, *Rani Kamaladevi* and her minister *Madhava Mantri* were instrumental in bringing a group of *Karhades* into Goa. They were later appointed as priests who eventually came to be called *Padhye Brahmins* in Goa. – K. Srinivasa Bhat in *Karhada*.

The word is generally written as Karhada. I have however used the simplified form 'Karada' in my M.Phil. thesis.

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