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“The story of Kashmir is rather like some lurid Victorian novel in which the heroine’s rare beauty brings her nothing but disappointment and unhappiness.”
(Keenan 2012: 19)

A Glimpse into the Happy Valley’s Unhappy Past:
Violence and Brahmin Warfare in Pre-Mughal Kashmir¹
(Walter Slaje)

Abstract: This paper focusses on the centuries-old stereotype of Kashmir as a “Happy Valley”. Reflections and observations made by Kashmiri authors hardly conform to the lyrical angle adopted by foreign visitors. A penetration into the rather gloomy aspects pre-modern writers have left us of the constant perils the inhabitants of the valley were exposed to in their well-documented history – ranging from natural disasters, famines and epidemics to the man-made evils of incessant violence and war –, coerces one into putting the dominant enthusiasm of the outsider somewhat into perspective. Particular attention will be paid to the involvement of Brahmins in warfare and their interaction with members of other social classes in armed conflicts.

There are of course many shades of meaning that may be assigned to happiness, depending on a wide range of circumstantial factors, and not least on the intention of the speaker. It is not my intention here to investigate the notion of the English word happiness by pursuing its etymology and semantics from a linguistic angle, or to compare imaginations with reality. Instead, in making the unassuming observation that it is obviously possible to attribute the concept of happiness to a whole country, my aim is to unveil the unknown reality behind the stereotype projected onto Kashmir. From the 19th century to the present, publications have even made use of this attribute for their titles. Suffice it to cite William Wakefield’s “The Happy Valley” of 1879, or the title of Ashok Aklujkar’s paper “Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya as a Key to Happy Kashmir” published some 130 years later in 2008. It is not difficult to trace the earliest occurrence of the idea. All testimonies point to judgments made by foreigners alone. I, for one, am not aware of any indigenous statement from the premodern era which calls the kingdom of Kashmir a happy one. It seems indeed that the self-conception its people entertained was of a very different nature, as will be pointed out later.

Let us therefore linger for a moment on the origin of happiness ascribed to Kashmir by outsiders. The ordinary, although somewhat tiring response one might expect nowadays would be that it must be attributed to a British colonial view of Kashmir. While this is not entirely wrong, for the British no doubt ensured a wide dissemination of such a notion by publicizing the same, they certainly did not create it. Had it been otherwise, why did Johann Gottfried Herder use the expression “happy valley” for Kashmir (“ein glückliches Thal wie Kaschmire”)² in his “Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind” at the end of the eighteenth century (1785)? At this time the valley was under Afghan rule and the English had not yet made their presence felt there in

¹ Enlarged and annotated version of a talk given at the Department of South Asian Studies at Harvard University, 26 March 2018. Structure and style of the presentation have been retained.

² „[...] ein glückliches Thal wie Kaschmire [...] ringsum von Bergen ummauert, sowohl wegen seiner gesunden erquickenden Wasser, als wegen seiner reichen Fruchtbarkeit und Freiheit von wilden Thieren berühmt, ja noch bis jetzt wegen seines schönen Menschenstammes als das Paradies des Paradieses gepriesen [...]“ (Herder 1785: 336).

any manner at all. Herder's praise finds a striking parallel in the "Voyages" by François Bernier,³ who visited "Cachemire" in the entourage of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) in 1664-1665. From Mīrzā Ḥaidar Duḡlāt, the first Mughal to conquer Kashmir in 1541,⁴ to the emperors who took ultimate possession of the valley,⁵ the charms and wonders of Kashmir are extolled beyond measure.⁶ Whether Mughal, Portuguese, French, or early British visitors⁷ – in this chronological sequence –, the admiration they expressed by using the concept of happiness almost always pertained to natural beauty. Of course the Kashmiris themselves were not blind to the scenic attractions of their homeland (*asmaddēśa*), as we learn from a number of detailed descriptions by outstanding poets and scholars.⁸ The snow-capped mountains, the beautiful rivers

³ First published in Amsterdam (Bernier 1699). Herder's wording, in particular his German spelling of the name "Kaschmire", resembles above all Bernier's "Voyages" originally composed in the French language ("Kachemire"): "From the sides of all these mountains gush forth innumerable springs and streams of water, which are conducted by means of embanked earthen channels even to the top of the numerous hillocks in the valley; [...] These waters, after separating into a thousand rivulets und producing a thousand cascades through this charming country, at length collect and form a beautiful river, [...]. The numberless streams which issue from the mountains maintain the valley and the hillocks in the most delightful verdure. The whole kingdom wears the appearance of a fertile and highly cultivated garden. [...] Meadows and vineyards, fields of rice, wheat, hemp, saffron, and many sorts of vegetables, among which are intermingled trenches filled with water, rivulets, canals, and several small lakes, vary the enchanting scene.", etc. (Bernier 1891: 396 f). It is unlikely that Herder was aware of the earliest report about Kashmir by the Portuguese Jesuit Father Jerome Xavier, who accompanied Akbar to the valley. It was published in 1605 in Antwerp: "the Kingdom of Caximir is one of the pleasantest and most beautiful countries to be found in the whole of India, we may even say in the East" (Keenan 2012: 89 f).

⁴ After having conquered Kashmir, Mīrzā Ḥaidar Duḡlāt, whose chronicle *Ta' rīḥ-i Rašīdī* dates from 1541 A.D., was slain in a popular uprising in 1551 (Conermann 2002: 182); for details of his assassination, cp. *Akbarnāma*, vol. 2, pp. 31 ff.

⁵ Akbar entered Śrīnagar on 5 June 1589 in triumph in the company of his court chronicler Abū'l Faḡl.

⁶ *Tārīḥ-i Rašīdī* pp. 424 ff; 439 ("a specimen of paradise"); cp. also the quote from a letter from Mīrzā Ḥaidar, in which he praised „the climate, the spring and autumn, and the flowers and fruits of Kashmir in the highest terms“ (*Akbarnāma*, vol. 2., p. 267). Moreover, "a special category of Persian topographical poetry flourished in the seventeenth century Mughal court under the emperors Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān that was exclusively devoted to the beauties of the landscape of the Kashmir valley. [...] the inscription of Kashmir as paradise [...]." (Sharma 2016: 184). "[Akbar] was constantly thinking of Kashmir and imagining its delightful climate. [...] it increased the emperor's desire to tour that land of perpetual spring." (186); "[...] in the spring of 1621 [...] Jahāngīr lapses into lyrical praise of the land: Kashmir is a perennial garden [...] an enjoyable place of retreat. Its lovely meadows and beautiful waterfalls are beyond description [...]" (187); "under the next ruler, Shāh Jahān, and his children, Dārā Shikoh and Jahānārā, [...] poetry on this province flourished as a full-fledged genre of its own. [...] Kashmir quickly became the favourite subject of Persian court poets because it came closest to the idealized Persian garden and paradise that appears as a metaphor in classical poetry" (188 f). Sharma even speaks of a veritable „Kashmir-mania among Persian court poets“ (190, n. 12) and that „the literary fad of the Kashmir poem lasted until the early years of the Emperor Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr's reign (r. 1658-1707)“ (197).

⁷ "[...] all along the bank were the English visitors who throng to Kashmir in the summer season [...]. For the wise real men in India avoid Simla and the Hill Stations and make straight for the Happy Valley." (Lawrence 1928: 129).

⁸ In his paper, Inden (2008) did not distinguish between alien notions of a 'paradise' in conformance with Christian and Muslim concepts of a hereafter in the shape of an eternal pleasure garden or heavenly abode, and indigenous Indian conceptions of the afterlife, when he anachronistically projects a uniform 'paradisaic' idea on Kashmir, which he thought had already been there in Sanskrit texts predating the foreigner views. The circa 8th century *Nīlamatapūrāṇa* (Inden 2008: 531) is no suitable witness, as it is "basically a *Māhātmya* of the Kashmir Valley" (Witzel 2016: 616), where, as typical of *Māhātmyas*, the notion of auspiciousness (*śubha*) dominates, which does not automatically render Kashmir or other places of pilgrimage a 'paradise'. Nor would *sukha* ("healthy" according to Inden, loc. cit.) do, as this is an editorial emendation starting from a unique variant reading, where other manuscripts read °*jala* or

and lakes, the charming climate, the vineyards and the pleasures of wine-drinking are frequently emphasized.⁹

In any case the stereotyped scenic depiction of Kashmir is pre-British,¹⁰ and took its shape from the pens of foreigners who came from the Indian plains. It started with the Mughals, who were the first extra-Kashmiri power to occupy the country permanently, annexing the territory to their Indian empire (1589-1752). From this time on Kashmir never regained its sovereignty. After the Mughals, the Afghans took possession (1752-1819), then the Sikhs (1819-1846),¹¹ and finally the Hindu-Dogras from the Jammu region (1846-1947). The latter allied themselves to the Indian Republic in 1947. It highlights the deep cultural alienation of Kashmir's foreign rulers that even Hindu-Dogras of the 3rd generation did not speak Kashmiri and were incapable of addressing their subjects in the local language. At times, a British official was requested to interpret when public speeches had to be delivered by a Dogra ruler.¹²

śubha. It is true that Kalhaṇa and a number of his fellow poets (cp. Slaje 2015: 26-30 with further literature) admired and extolled the natural beauty of their valley and its products (Inden 2008: 547), which, as Kalhaṇa poetically overstates, could not even be had in the highest heaven (*tridivadurlabha*, RT(H) 1.42d). This however only proves that they were no less susceptible to the aesthetics of nature as lyric poets elsewhere in the world. Shall we assume each of them was praising a 'happy paradise'? To cite Keenan's (2012: 87) humorous remark: "[...] the valley is said to have been the Garden of Eden, and no one can deny that apples thrive there."

⁹ Alcohol continued to be widely consumed in Kashmir until the final quarter of the 20th century (Slaje 2015: 28, n. 91; cp. also *Tārīḥ-i Rašīdī* p. 425); Forster 1798 (2): 19; Jacquemont 1834: 59; 64. Klimburg (2016: 281) interprets Kafir viticulture as „part of very old Indo-Iranian cultures in a wider region which saw the crossing of Indo-Aryan peoples from Middle/Central Asia to India, and which has a rich vegetation including wild vines“.

¹⁰ “The Indians and Persians call Cashmere the terrestrial paradise” (Jacquemont 1834: 31 [Letter dt. 22 April 1831]). The aspect of happiness however as defined by standards of the aesthetics of nature by outsiders stands in marked contrast to the negative character traits projected on the people of Kashmir in a comparably generalizing manner by more or less the same authors: “light and frivolous, and of a weak, pusillanimous disposition. [...] handsome in appearance, but [...] given to cunning” (Xuanzang, transl. by Beal 1884: 148); “deceitfulness and insidiousness endemic to Kashmiris” (*Akbarnāma*, vol. 2, p. 27); “[...] the scent of fanaticism comes from Kashmiris [...]” (loc.cit., p. 29); “The Kashmiris’ deceptive treachery [...] those evil hypocrites [...]” (loc.cit., p. 31). – “I never knew a national body of men more impregnated with the principles of vice, than the natives of Kashmere” (Forster 1798 (2): 25); “The cleverness and roguery of the Cashmerians are proverbial in the East. [...] As for the pundits, who are all of the Brahmin caste [...] they eat every thing but beef, and drink arrack. In India, none but the most infamous castes do so.” (Jacquemont 1834: 59 [Letter dt. 13 May 1831]); „[...] a very fine people [...] physically [...] splendid, in spite of the effeminate dress which foreign tyrants had imposed on them: while the women are famous for their beauty and their charm. As cultivators, as artisans, and as artists they are unrivalled in the East, and for brains the Kashmiri Pandit is hard to beat, as all India knows well. But the critic, and he drew his ideas from the ruling classes in Kashmir, said that the people were lying, treacherous and immoral” (Lawrence 1928: 143; cp. also Stein 1889: 29; 36); “to call a man a ‘Kashmiri’ is a term of abuse, for it stands for a coward and a rogue, and much else of an unpleasant nature” – Cecil Tyndale-Biscoe, quoted from Keenan 2012: 24.

¹¹ “In the reign of Aurungzebe [...] the sum collected in Kashmere amounted to three and a half lacks of rupees, but at this time [1783, W.S.] not less than twenty lacks are extracted by the Afghan governor, who [...] is allowed to execute with impunity every act of violence” (Forster 1798 (2): 23; “The Afghans, last century, having deprived the Moguls of that conquest, and the Seikhs having driven the Afghans from it, a general plunder followed each new conquest” (Jacquemont 1834: 76 [Letter dt. 16 May 1831]).

¹² Pratāp Singh, Mahārāja of Kashmir (1885-1925): “I do not speak Kashmiri” (Lawrence 1928: 199); cp. also pp. 114; 185; 214.

Until the Mughals forced it open the valley was secluded from the plains of India to a degree almost inconceivable today. Al-Biruni gives the following account of the situation in 1030 A.D.:¹³

The Kashmiris “are particularly anxious about the natural strength of their country, and therefore take always much care to keep a strong hold upon the entrances and roads leading into it. In consequence it is very difficult to have any commerce with them. In former times they used to allow one or two foreigners to enter their country, particularly Jews, but at present [i.e. in the 11th century, W.S.] they do not allow any Hindu whom they do not know personally to enter, much less other people.”

The fact that Kashmir was sealed off almost hermetically for considerably more than 1000 years by means of a system of frontier watch stations and fortified towers, is also corroborated by Chinese pilgrims. Small forts “closed all passes leading into the Valley which were used regularly”. Local sources corroborate the reports of foreign travellers. In the pre-Islamic period all frontier stations were under the supreme command of one high officer who bore the official title of Commander of the Gates,¹⁴ although command over the routes and watch stations was awarded under Muslim rule to a number of feudal chiefs (Maliks). Sometimes special permits were required to pass the gates of the country.

In addition to guarding the country against intruders the system could inversely also serve “as an important check on unauthorized emigration”.¹⁵ The system, under which no man could leave the valley without written permission (*mokṣākṣara*), was essentially maintained as a ‘permit’ system (*rāhdārī*) at least from the time of the first systematic Hindu persecution (over a period of almost thirty years from c. 1390 to 1417), and also through Afghan, Sikh and Dogra rule, until the Kashmiri famine of 1877-79 reached its climax.¹⁶ As Aurel Stein put it, “I have never been able to visit the sites of the old watch stations at the several passes without thinking of the scenes of human suffering they must have witnessed for centuries”.¹⁷

Kashmir’s restricted accessibility during its millennium of seclusion may well have preserved early cultural traits and favoured the development of what, in retrospect, may be considered to be characteristic for a Kashmiri sense of identity.

We should bear this background in mind, when we turn our attention to the image which the Kashmiris entertained of themselves, with the intention of determining the degree of happiness they themselves attributed to their country.

Let us start with Somadeva, the deservedly famous author of the “Ocean of the Rivers of Story”, a celebrated masterpiece of Sanskrit narrative art, dating from the second half of the eleventh century¹⁸. A merry spirit permeates this work, which, the author expressed his hope, would bring delight to the minds of noble souls. The intention behind its composition was, however, very different. As he emphasizes in his epilogue, it was written for the charitable learned queen Sūryavatī, the wife of Ananta, the King

¹³ For the following, cp. Slaje 2012: 10 ff.

¹⁴ “The routes into that country are such that if the ruler is apprised of a stranger’s arrival several days in advance, he can block the passes [...]” (*Akbarnāma*, vol. 3, p. 395).

¹⁵ Stein 1900, 2: 391.

¹⁶ JRT 656. “It is here necessary to observe, that [in the year 1783, W.S.] no person, except by stealth, can enter or depart from Kashmir without an order, marked with the seal of government” (Forster 1798 (2): 7).

¹⁷ Stein 1900, 2: 391 (n. 27).

¹⁸ Between 1063 and 1082 (Bühler 1886: 558).

of Kashmir, “to cheer her up *for just a moment*”.¹⁹ Except for this suggestion, the tragic background for his composition remains unspoken. Luckily for the modern scholar, another source reveals the historic context. For a number of reasons, which need not be detailed here, Sūryavatī’s husband King Ananta was compelled to resign in favour of their eldest son Kalaśa. He retired with the entire court from Śrīnagar to Vijayeśvara, taking with him all his treasure. A number of attacks launched against him by his firstborn resulted in the destruction of the new residence Vijayakṣetra by fire and the robbery of the greater part of the old king’s fortune. Torn between the two, the queen attempted to mediate between husband and son. Eventually the desperate king committed suicide by driving a dagger into his anus, first asking his wife and servants to conceal his embarrassing suicide by a public announcement that he had actually died of a haemorrhage. After her husband’s death, Queen Sūryavatī made her retinue take an oath to secure the safety of her grandchild Harṣa, mounted the pyre and immolated herself in the presence of her weeping grandson, who had just passed the age of twenty. He was to become one of the greatest tyrants India has ever seen. Narrated to comfort an unlucky queen with cheerful tales, Somadeva’s “Ocean of Story” thus has a bitter aftertaste, which, in the context of this paper, foreshadows its leading sentiment.

Until the present day Kashmiris entertain a persistent belief that they are all cursed.²⁰ This widespread belief was already observed by Walter Roper Lawrence,²¹ an unsurpassed expert on Kashmir’s society at the turn of the 20th century:

“The Kashmiri always gives me the idea that he has just recovered from a fright or that he is daily expecting some great disaster, and hardly a day passes without reference being made to the curse under which the people have fallen and to the sin (*Pāp*) which gave rise to the curse. [...] What the sin was which brought about the curse I have never discovered.”²²

The key to the understanding of that mysterious curse had however been documented earlier by Sāhib Rām, a slightly elder Paṇḍit contemporary of Lawrence in Kashmir. The two men never met: Sāhib Rām died in 1872, while Lawrence came to Kashmir in 1889²³ and stayed for 6 years.²⁴ The copious materials on the history of Kashmir Sāhib

¹⁹ KSS epilogue, 11d: [...] *kṣaṇam kim api cittavinodahetoḥ* („für einen Augenblick etwas zu ergetzen“, Bühler 1886: 553).

²⁰ Here is a journalist’s report from 2003 from the Sopore area, quoted from Inden (2008: 559): “[...] the Indian army erected a sign: “Kashmir is a heavenly paradise created on earth for earthly people.” Locals take a different view. “It is our curse that we were born here.””.

²¹ Kashmir remained a princely state and was never absorbed into British India, but there were Englishmen who assumed temporary positions in the administration as advisers or assistants. So also Lawrence, who was entrusted with the task of reorganizing “the whole system of taxation in the valley, which in turn meant fixing boundaries and sorting out the rights and duties of tenants and landlords. [...] at the same time he persuaded the maharaja [Pratāp Singh, W.S.] to abolish the cruel custom of *begar* or forced portage” (Keenan 2012: 80). On the *begār* system, see below, p. 13.

²² Lawrence 1895: 204; 280; cp. also Lawrence 1928: 136; 143.

²³ Lawrence 1895: 216.

²⁴ In the capacity of a Settlement Commissioner. “My work in Kashmir was based on facts and figures concerning the land and the people of the valley, and I gathered around me Moslem and Hindu landowners, who not only knew the fact, but had the most surprising genius for appraising the real value of other men’s land. They supported their valuation by most logical and convincing arguments, and during my twenty-one years in India I have never met the equal of these Kashmiri sages.” (Lawrence 1928: 145).

Rām had left were inaccessible to Lawrence at the time, who moreover was no Sanskritist. These documents are still unpublished.²⁵ Even so, they help us to comprehend the nature of this evil curse. In short, as Sāhib Rām's narrative recounts, the curse concerned the wrongful accusation made by Brahmins that a king had intentionally fed others with the flesh of a secretly murdered Brahmin. The king on his part had actually been deceived into this situation by a demon. The Brahmins' unjustified curse made god Brahmā, who declared the king free from the sin (*pāpa*) as insinuated, to curse the Brahmins²⁶. This story was certainly not made up by Sāhib Rām, as his direct quotations from likewise still unpublished *Māhātmyas* show²⁷. Seen from the perspective of Sāhib Rām's depiction, the whole country would have fallen prey to Brahmā's evil curse. Indeed, as sort of a maximum damage to the valley, it also caused the Islamization. There is of course no trace of the latter in the *Māhātmyas* composed earlier. The context established by Sāhib Rām provided him with an opportunity to glorify the then ruling king Ranbir Singh as a saviour who would re-establish the social order of the Hindus in accordance with the time-hallowed law of castes and life-stages (*varṇāśrama-dharma*).

While these ideas of a Hindu renaissance in Kashmir were hardly shared by the contemporaneous Muslim population at large, the conviction that the country and its inhabitants were generally doomed was rife. Lawrence reports that he had encountered this way of thinking in all strata of society in Kashmir. Misfortunes of any kind were attributed to the curse, from crop failure and loss of cattle to severe rulers, from natural calamities to epidemic plagues. But there was, in Lawrence's words, a marked distinction "between temporary evils caused by man and inevitable evils caused by the curse."²⁸

Which brings us to the inevitable share of Brahmā's curse in the shape of the many natural disasters and calamities which haunted the valley, above all floods and earthquakes and in their wake famine, cholera and a disastrous death toll.

For want of time, I do not intend to dwell on catastrophes, which are at any rate only peripheral to my subject, but it should be noted that premodern Sanskrit historiographers have left us numerous detailed and datable accounts of such incidents. Their conformity in many respects with modern eyewitness accounts of catastrophes and their mortal consequences strikes one as almost verbatim. This confirms that the often

²⁵ Bought by Aurel Stein from Sāhib Rām's sons and presented as a gift to the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

²⁶ Following the text edited by Krause 2016: 95-101.

²⁷ *Amareśvaratīrthamāhātmya* and *Kapaṭamunimāhātmya*. It remains to be seen if another curse mentioned in the *Nilamatapurāṇa* can be connected also to the one narrated by Sāhib Rām: "Allusion is made here [= RT(H) 4.710] to the story told in the *Nilamata*, 208 sqq., 326 sqq., according to which Kaśmīr was occupied in consequence of a curse of Kaśyapa for six months of each year by the Piśācas, who forced the human settlers to retire from the country from the full-moon day of Āśvayuja to that of Caitra." (Stein 1900, 1: note ad 4.710). "Kaśyapa then settled the land of Kaśmīr which had thus been produced. The gods took up their abodes in it as well as the Nāgas, while the various goddesses adorned the land in the shape of rivers. At first men dwelt in it for six months only in the year. This was owing to a curse of Kaśyapa who, angered by the Nāgas, had condemned them to dwell for the other six months together with the Piśācas. Accordingly men left Kaśmīr for the six months of winter and returned annually in Caitra when the Piśācas withdrew. Ultimately after four Yugas had passed, the Brahman Candradeva through the Nilanāga's favour acquired a number of rites which freed the country from the Piśācas and excessive cold. Henceforth Kaśmīr became inhabitable throughout the year." (Stein 1900, 2: 389).

²⁸ Lawrence 1895: 280; 293.

gruesome details committed to birch-bark should not be dismissed readily as mere exaggerations: The 19th century alone saw one catastrophic flood in 1893, four severe earthquakes, the most violent of which occurred in 1864 and 1885 respectively,²⁹ two terrible famines, one in 1831 and the other in 1877. The first famine reduced the population of Kashmir from 800,000 to 200,000, and only two-fifths of the total population survived the latter, which lasted until 1879. The observation of premodern historians, that famines were typically caused by the early occurrence of snow or rain, when the autumn harvest was still ripening, coincides with the reports of witnesses present in the valley in the 19th century.³⁰

If we add to these disasters the ten cholera epidemics which ravaged the secluded valley in the same century, we can conceive the impact on the minds of the people which the continuous threat proffered by the forces of nature must have exercised over the centuries. The year 1099, for example, was only one among many which “brought new calamities upon the land. While a plague was raging and robbers everywhere infesting the country, there occurred a disastrous flood which brought on a famine and universal distress.”³¹

The conviction that they stood under a curse may thus have suggested itself.

I believe that a systematic analysis of the natural disasters and their negative concomitants recorded in the consecutive *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*s could yield useful information not only in terms of historic disaster research, but also with reference to societies and their morals under life-threatening conditions. Such conditions were the proven companions of Kashmir’s physical history on a modern scale of veritable humanitarian crises, the only difference being that no aid from outside could ever be expected. Until the emigration prohibition system was abandoned in the midst of the last great famine already mentioned, troops stationed at the passes continued to prevent migration to the Punjab by following traditional procedures.³² It was said that fathers could pass the gates by bribing the guards, but their wives and children were left to die in the valley. Orphan girls were sold,³³ corpses no longer buried; wells were choked with cadaver, and dogs preyed on human carcasses. An eyewitness to the ravages caused

²⁹ Cp. Lawrence 1895: 205-213.

³⁰ Lawrence 1895: 213 f. Cp. also Tyndale-Biscoe (1951: 60): “[...] cholera epidemics [...] visited Kashmir every four or five years and caused a death rate of from 500 to 700 per day. The first one I experienced was in 1892. [...] They would not take Western medicine, but [...] a piece of Kashmiri paper, on which the Mohammedan Mullah wrote “Allah” or the Brahman priest inscribed “Shiva” or “Rama”. This paper was swallowed down with river water full of cholera germs.” For another terrible famine in 1597 during Mughal rule, cp. Keenan 2012: 45. On floods, famines and natural disasters in the 14th and 15th centuries, cp. JRT 358; 404-409; 528; 976; ŚRT 1.2.6-1.3.31.

³¹ Stein 1900, 1: 114.

³² George Forster, too, could leave the Afghan ruled country only after having offered the guards a large bribe (Keenan 2012: 112). Cp. Keenan (2012: 126) also on hundreds of desperate refugees trying to escape the country and to pass the posts on the border under Sikh rule. William Moorcroft intervened successfully. Similar observations were reported by Joseph Wolff in 1832 (141 f).

³³ This used to happen also in happier times: According to Victor Jacquemont, in 1831 “the lack of pretty women in Kashmir was undoubtedly because all little girls showing promise of good looks were sold at the age of eight and exported to the Punjab and India: They are sold by their parents for 20 to 300 francs, the average price being 50 to 60 francs” (Keenan 2012: 136 f, cp. Jacquemont 1834: 65); “the ugliness of the women is explained by continual exportation of every pretty Cashmerian face to the Punjab and India, to stock the harems of the Mussulmans, Seikhs, and Hindoos” (Jacquemont loc. cit., 74 f).

by the outbreak of cholera in 1892 called these the “awful signs of demoralization and helplessness”.³⁴

Although nothing could be done to prevent damage caused by earthquakes, and no remedies for epidemics and their repercussions were available in premodern times, the Kashmiris had developed a high degree of engineering skills in regulating rivers to prevent floods and building irrigation channels to address drought as early as the first millennium. The ample textual evidence for this kind of skilful activity is further confirmed by the durability of these constructions, many of which have maintained their functionality to the present day.

Let me close this brief digression on natural calamities in Kashmir with the remark that the earthquakes stimulated a Kashmiri philosopher to reflect on their cause. He concluded that, analogous to the human body, the globe must be a living organism moved by airflows wafting through the vessels of its giant spherical body. Its pneumatic movements were experienced as quaking by the humans, who lived on it like lice on the parting of the hair.³⁵

So much for the inevitable consequences of Brahmā’s curse. Let us turn now to theoretically avoidable, in Lawrence’s words “temporary evils caused by man”, that is, to man-made disaster such as violence and war in Happy Kashmir.

How peaceful was life really? Materials culled from *Dharmaśāstras*, Epics and *Purāṇas* present a picture in which violence and war were more or less the exclusive task of the Kṣatriyas: Brahmins would murmur prayers and Vaiśyas plough and harvest, while Kṣatriyas fulfilled their duties by plying their bloody trade among members of their own class only. In light of the evidence available this picture is certainly not applicable to Kashmir. Warfare there appears to have been a bizarre exception to the caste system as we think we understand it now. At a time when the ideology of four social classes (*cāturvarṇya*) was clearly operative in Kashmir, fighting units for combat missions were often composed of mixed members taken from the Brahmin-³⁶, Kṣatriya-, occasionally Vaiśya-,³⁷ and even untouchable classes (*cāṇḍāla*).

References to individual Brahmins engaged in warfare in different military ranks³⁸ occur particularly frequently and their individual names and activities can be found scattered over the centuries. The fact that such remarks were usually only made in passing shows that no special importance was attached to fighting Brahmins and that they were considered a normal part of warfare. Moreover, the natural manner in which warlike Brahmin engagement is referred to, together with a total lack of heroic hyper-

³⁴ Lawrence 1895: 215; 219. Also “the most learned and amiable of all Kashmirian scholars”, the noted Pandit Dāmodara, son of Sāhib Rām and author of the 5th *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, who continued the history “from the time of Akbar to the present time” (Stein 1892: XX, n. 1) succumbed to the last epidemic in 1892, when people died in thousands.

³⁵ Slaje 1993: 254 ff.

³⁶ Cp. also Ray 1970: 98; Witzel 1994: 277; 2004: 90; 2016: 632.

³⁷ RT(H) 7.207; 1312.

³⁸ *padātīmātro bhūpena dr̥ṣṭaśauryaḥ sa saṁyuge | mahodaro mahākāyaḥ prāpito mukhyamantritām* || RT(H) 5.425 || (“The king noticed [the Brahmin’s Rakka] courage in a battle while he was a mere foot-soldier, and raised this [man], who had a big body and great belly, to the position of prime minister.” Transl. following Stein 1900, 1). For Caṇpaka as a Gates Commander, cp. RT(H) 7.1178, on military expeditions 7.1180; for the Kāyastha Sahela, cp. RT(H) 7.1320; etc. Cp. also Witzel 1994: 277.

bole, gives the impression that the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*s depicted these engagements in a realistic manner with which any contemporary reader who shared the same cultural environment would have agreed. Valuable historical information can be extracted from these sources.

The following represents a selection from personal collectanea, admittedly picked at random. A systematic investigation into warfare in premodern Kashmir with a view to providing a comprehensive picture, would require the scrutiny of some 12,500 couplets written in the sophisticated Sanskrit style of ornate narrative literature line by line. This I cannot offer, not even approximately. Let me emphasize, however, that although my deliberations might give the impression of being unrepresentative, isolated cases due to their selective nature, almost all the instances quoted could be multiplied by additional evidence.

To begin with, the emphasis Kalhaṇa places on the fact that “the Brahmins [...] did *not* carry arms”³⁹ when Yaśaskaradeva, himself a Brahmin elected as king, ruled the country is telling. To Kalhaṇa, such circumstances were clearly an exception.⁴⁰ He extols the conditions which prevailed under Yaśaskara where villagers attended to agriculture and Brahmins recited the Vedas,⁴¹ thereby explicitly evoking law book ideals which he attributes to unnamed kings of a mythic past.⁴² If Kalhaṇa had possessed records in which Brahmins were generally speaking unarmed, and not only during Yaśaskara’s rule, and if he had witnessed this as a social reality in his day, his remark would have been off the point.

There is of course a difference between an armed Brahmin and a fighting Brahmin. The arms which were allegedly no longer carried by Brahmins under Yaśaskara were bladed weapons (*śastra*) as used in melees. Such *śastras* were not necessarily swords. We need not, therefore, imagine a bellicose street scene with sword brandishing Brahmins, although this did also occur, in the case of uprisings for example: “[...] the cultivators left their work on the fields and the Brahmins their Veda-recitations, and took to the sword, eager for rebellion.”⁴³ Judging from the numerous accounts, there must have been endless insurrections, frequently instigated as stratagems to weaken a ruler. A *śastra* as a knife or dagger, on the other hand, was eminently suitable for self-defence since it could be concealed. It is more likely that Kalhaṇa had such weapons in mind when mentioning the unarmed Brahmins under Yaśaskara. In fact, it was never safe in the streets, least of all at night. A member of the nobility was murdered on such an occasion: someone took advantage when he walked – just for once – “without his *śastra*”.⁴⁴

³⁹ *viprāḥ [...] nākurvañ śāstradhāraṇam* || RT(H) 6.9 cd ||

⁴⁰ Yaśaskara was reputed for his mild government and for the administrative wisdom he displayed during the nine years (939-948) of his rule (Stein 1900, 1: 103.).

⁴¹ *grāmyāḥ kṛṣiparādhīnā nāpaśyan rājamandiram | viprāḥ svādhyāyasaṁsaktā nākurvañ śāstradhāraṇam* || RT(H) 6.9 ||

⁴² *pūrvarājavyavasthāḥ* (RT(H) 6.6).

⁴³ *kṛṣiṁ kṛṣīvalair vedapāṭham utsrjya ca dvijaiḥ | utpiñjasajjair grāmeṣu sarvataḥ śāstram ādadhe* || RT(H) 8.2518 || (under Jayasimha). – “The whole population are armed with swords, in the use of which they are said to be very dexterous” (Jacquemont 1834: 64 [Letter from Kashmir, dt. 14 May 1831]).

⁴⁴ *nyastaśāstras sa rajanau gacchan mitaparicchadaḥ | randhiraṁ labdhvātha Śūreṇa Masodaṣ Ṭhakkuro hataḥ* || JRT 894 || (“When he went [back] at night unarmed [and] accompanied by [only] a small number of attendants, Śūra took advantage of his defencelessness and slew Mas’ūd, the Ṭhakkura.”).

Public safety depended, after all, on a king willing and capable of ensuring it. This was not always the case. Danger threatened from inside and outside the valley: “When even the king cowered concealed like an owl from sheer fear, what need one say of all the other people?”,⁴⁵ asks a chronicler when referring to foreign invasions in 1313,⁴⁶ which left the country devastated and depopulated. Citizens who had not been killed by the invaders, were tortured until they revealed their hidden belongings, then enslaved and deported. To give an idea of what it meant to be deported as a slave in a past which is perhaps too often glorified without due consideration: a strand of coarse horsehair was passed under and around a victim’s collar bone by means of a crooked needle. Then a loop was formed to which the traders attached a rope fastened to their saddle. The captives were thus constrained to keep near the horsemen with their hands tied behind their backs, and so marched in single file.⁴⁷ The earliest attestation of this type of slave caravan goes back to the Sassanians, who practised it on the Arabic Peninsula. It is also documented for the Kashmir Valley, and was witnessed for the last time by travellers in Afghanistan in the 19th century.⁴⁸ Not every king was a born hero. Indeed one king even attached a bell to his horse’s neck because he was afraid of trampling insects underfoot, but thought nothing of abandoning his people to their fate when he fled out of fear to Ladakh while his country was under foreign attack.⁴⁹ Maintenance of internal security was another yardstick of good rule. When, time and again, Kashmir had “no protection from the attacks of robbers, and when the weak were slain by the strong”, it was, says Kalhaṇa, “as if the country had been without a king”.⁵⁰ Since ambushes en route and brutal assaults by bands of outlaws on villages were common, a king was expected to guarantee his subjects their safety.⁵¹ There were indeed some rulers who successfully hunted bandits down and killed them, making the valley in its entirety “so free from robbery, that at night the doors were left open in the bazaars, and the roads were secure for travellers”, as in the case of the celebrated Yaśaskara.⁵² It was a Kashmiri Sultan who – as Jonarāja stated with immense irony –

⁴⁵ *rājāpi kvāpi sañchanno bhītyā ghūkavad āsta sah | itareṣāṃ tu lokānāṃ kā kathā tatravāsinām ||* Ps-JRT B 173.

⁴⁶ On the probable date of the most devastating incursion in 1313 A.D., cp. Slaje (forthc. (b), n. 160). *ruddhayor ḌalcaRiñcābhyāṃ prācyudīcyor bahur janaḥ | vasateḥ paścimām āśāṃ prāg Yamāsām athāgamat ||* JRT 155 || (“Since the east and north were sealed off by Du’l-Qadr and Rin-chen [respectively], many a man fled first to the west in order to take up [his] residence [there], and later, to the south.”).

⁴⁷ Dalrymple 2013: 446; cp. *jatruvedhena baddhānām ekayā carmavadhrayā | teṣāṃ durāpam apy āsīd anyo ’nyamukhadarśanam ||* Ps-JRT B 177 || (“[They] pierced [the slaves’] collarbones [and] tied them [so tightly] together with one single strap of leather that it became virtually impossible for them to look into each other’s faces.”).

⁴⁸ As characteristic of Uzbek slave traders, cp. Dalrymple loc. cit.

⁴⁹ Udyānadeva, cp. JRT 230; 234.

⁵⁰ *taskarārkrāntyāśaraṇaṇi balavannihatābalaṃ | arājakaṃ ivāśeṣaṃ rāṣṭraṃ kaṣṭhāṃ daśām agāt ||* 8.2757 || RT(H) 8.2757 || (rule of Jayasimha).

⁵¹ Still in the 18th century, „there was always the danger of highwaymen and brigands who frequently stripped a traveller of all he had, leaving him literally naked on the path“ (Keenan 2012: 107).

⁵² Stein 1900, 1 (*acaurābhūt tathā bhūmir yathā rātrau vaṇīkpathāḥ | atiṣṭhan vivṛtadvārā mārgās cāvighnitādhvagāḥ ||* RT(H) 6.7 ||); cp. also *sa hatvā caurasenānyaṃ sasainyaṃ durgame ’dhvani | pūrvāśām adhvānīnānāṃ vyadhān nirdhūtakaṇṭakām ||* RT(H) 7.1009 || (“He [Harṣa, W.S.] also, by killing a captain of robbers together with his men on a dangerous road, made the eastern region free from enemies for travellers.” Stein 1900, 1).

showed robbers pity and, instead of killing them, forced them into hard labour, chaining their feet with iron shackles.⁵³

After this brief excursus, let me now turn to fighting Brahmins. There is an interesting historical figure from the first half of the 12th century. His name was Alaṅkāra and he was a brother of Maṅkha, the well-known poet and lexicographer. Alaṅkāra served under two consecutive kings, Sussala and Jayasimha. Promoted from the rank of a minister of war and peace (*sandhivigrahaka*) to the representative of the king in his capacity as a high judge (*rājasthānīya*),⁵⁴ he held high offices at the royal court. But there was more to Alaṅkāra. In their respective works, his contemporaries Maṅkha and Kalhaṇa have pictured his personal abilities in detail. He emerges there not only as a reputed grammarian and a stout Vaiṣṇava (RT(H) 8.2425), but also as an impressive swordsman and accurate archer on the battlefield. In the course of several military campaigns he killed a considerable number of enemies. Kalhaṇa even mentions some of Alaṅkāra's victims by name.⁵⁵ For various reasons one cannot simply dismiss him as a legendary character modelled on mythical figures such as Paraśurāma. Most importantly however, Alaṅkāra is not the only recorded Kashmiri Brahmin who proved himself in combat, although not all of these occupied such a prominent position as he did.

We hear, for example, of a learned and courageous Brahmin, Trivya, killed in action in the winter of 1088 during a sortie;⁵⁶ of a seriously injured moaning Brahmin covered with dried-up blood from battle-scars and with foam coming out of his mouth. His head was shaved, which is a sure indication that he had prepared himself for going into battle.⁵⁷ We hear of Kalhaṇa's father Caṇpaka arguing with the crown prince Bhoja about a mare and thereupon heading a cavalry of fifty men on horseback.⁵⁸ He was not the only Brahmin commandant of the frontier defences⁵⁹, officers in charge of the passes leading into the valley who required soldierly qualities and assumed rough duties;⁶⁰ we also hear of a number of Brahmins sacrificing their lives for their lord in battle, such as Ajjaka, Rudra, Rayyāvaṭṭa, Vijaya, Lavarāja, Yaśorāja,⁶¹ and many more. Bhujāṅga, the son of a Brahmin liege (*sāmanta*) killed a number of guards when he was chasing the king through his chambers longing murderously for revenge.⁶² There is also an exceptionally detailed description of a single fight between one Brahmin named Mallaka and three assailants. When he saw his leaders struck down helplessly, he stepped up with drawn sword. Despite his astounding swordsmanship with “a hand rapid of counterstrokes” (*pratiprahṛtiṣu kṣiprāpatatpāṇi*)⁶³ and thus ready as it were

⁵³ *anighnan karuṇānighno narendro Ḍombataskarān | bandhayan niḡadair gāḍhaṃ mṛtkarmākārayat sadā ||* JRT 952 || (Sulṭān Zayn al-‘Ābidīn).

⁵⁴ Alaṅkāra was promoted to the higher rank of *rājasthānīya*, cp. RT(H) 8.2557; 2618; 2671; 2925; Slaje 2015: 14 f. On the obligations of this office, which was connected with the administration of justice, cp. Stein 1900, 1: 316 (n. on RT(H) 7.601).

⁵⁵ Cp. Stein 1900, 2: 188, n. on RT(H) 8.2423; cp. also RT(H) 8.2557; 2925 ff.

⁵⁶ *dvijas Trivyaḥbhidho vīraḥ paṇḍitaḥ śauryamaṇḍitaḥ | Rāmadevaś ca Keśi ca Karṇāṭo 'ribhāṭair hataḥ ||* 7.675 ||

⁵⁷ *raṇe pūrṇavaraṇāśyānaśoṇito lūnakuntalaḥ | phenodgāryāṇanaḥ krandaṇis tenaikaḥ praikṣyata dvijaḥ ||* 8.3018 ||; for battle preparations such as hair- and nail-cutting, cp. RT(H) 7.665 ff.

⁵⁸ RT(H) 7.1592 ff.

⁵⁹ Stein 1900, 1: 6.

⁶⁰ Stein 1900, 1: note on 5.214.

⁶¹ RT(H) 7.1481; 8.472 ff; 783; 1345; 2319; etc.

⁶² *Bhujāṅganāmā sāmantaadvijāpatyo grhāgataḥ | Saṃgrāmarājaṃ vidadhe gehād gehaṃ palāyitam || dvāraṃ kanakadaṇḍena bhañjann argalitaṃ tataḥ | viṃśatiṃ hataṃ yodhān sa rājasthānamāṇḍape ||* RT(H) 7.91-92 ||

⁶³ RT(H) 8.2322 (Stein 1900, 2).

for a movie appearance, he did not survive the encounter and eventually fell under the sword thrusts of his adversaries.⁶⁴ The interesting thing about the heroic death of this Brahmin is that Kalhaṇa, himself also a Brahmin, remarks that Mallaka had found a “death worthy of envy” (*sprhaṇīyāntakṣaṇa*).⁶⁵ Kalhaṇa’s account of a group of Brahmin brothers similarly extols a hero’s death as was normally expected from, and usually attributed only to, members of the warrior class. In their capacity as court counsellors the Brahmin brothers found their death in a brave fight, selling their skins dearly on the battle field.⁶⁶

The few instances just mentioned⁶⁷ leave me wondering about the nature of the class distinction between Brahmins and Kṣatriyas actually prevailing at the time. I do not doubt the existence of warlike Brahmins in Kashmir as a historic fact, since they have apparently survived well into the end of the 19th century. Judging, however, by fewer references recorded in later chronicles, a clear reduction seems to have taken place, starting approximately in the early modern period. Paṇḍits are, however, still attested in the 15th century court as attendants during military expeditions.⁶⁸ They were present on battle fields in their capacity as war reporters, in modern terminology, to whom we owe minute observations of the course of action in a pre-modern battle.⁶⁹ A brief communication published by Aurel Stein in 1900 may serve as additional evidence for Brahmins involved in war. The Pīr Pantsāl, the western mountain border range of the valley, would have been “a good recruiting ground for brave soldiers. Brahmins from the Salt Range used to take military service until quite recent times.”⁷⁰

A Brahmin could not always be told from a member of the warrior class by his mere appearance. In the first half of the 12th century Nona, a learned Brahmin, was waylaid by assassins. They attacked and killed him because they mistook him for a foreign Rajput on account of his physical build.⁷¹

In this connection it should be noted that Kashmiri Brahmins used to wear turbans, which incidentally often caused general surprise when they were travelling abroad.⁷² In Kashmir, on the other hand, in comparison with the headgear worn by the princely classes this did not make much difference. Nor would it have surprised anyone if individual Brahmins carried arms and used them in case of need.

⁶⁴ RT(H) 8.2319-2330.

⁶⁵ RT(H) 8. 2330 (Stein 1900, 2).

⁶⁶ *vijite Rājakaṣaṣe samakāryā dvijātayaḥ | mantriṇaḥ Śrīdharasutāḥ saptaḡatya vyadhur mṛdham || te kṛtvā sumahat karma samāptiṇ samare gatāḥ | nirbhīdya maṇḍalaṁ sapta saptasapter drutaṁ yayuḥ ||* RT(H) 7.22-23 ||; cp. moreover RT(H) 8.1071.

⁶⁷ Cp. in addition also Witzel 1994: 277.

⁶⁸ so *‘haṁ saṁmānya rājñāsmāi dattas tatsamaye ’nvaham | kurvan Bṛhatkathākhyaṇam abhūvaṁ dhṛtapustakaḥ ||* ŚRT 2.157 || (“Sulṭān [Ḥaydar Ṣāh] awarded me the privilege of sending me along with [Ḥasan Ḥān]. On the occasion of this [military campaign], I narrated [parts of (?)] the *Bṛhatkathā* to [Ḥasan Ḥān] every day from a manuscript in my possession.”).

⁶⁹ Cp. the battle of Mallaśilā in 1452 (ŚRT 1.1.86-174).

⁷⁰ Stein 1900, 2, note on RT(H) 8.1868. Of the Punjab, Forster reports that in the 18th century “Bramins are the usual soldiers of the country, many of whom eat flesh meat; and they never leave their home, even when not employed in military service, without weapons of offence” (Forster 1798 (1): XII).

⁷¹ *hato daiśikasaṁvādiddeho rājātmajabhrāmāt | vidvān dvijanmā Nonākhyas tikṣṇapakṣaiḥ puro gataḥ ||* RT(H) 8.1328 ||

⁷² Cp. PRV 12.59: *idam anyaparaṇi vaco jagau kavītā kaś ca papāṭha cātra kaḥ | katamaś ca vipaścid eṣa yo nibiḍoṣṇīṣadurīkṣyakuntalaḥ ||*. On the possible introduction of turbans as a headgear under King Harṣa, cp. Wilke 2018: 152. Cp. also Forster 1798 (2): 20.

Reversely, a Kṣatriya sometimes conformed to the conventional image normally associated with a Brahmin. The public assassination by king Harṣa and his accomplices of Malla, a noble from a side branch of the Lohara dynasty whose sons were about to succeed the ruling king, will suffice as an example. The elderly Malla had retired from court into a private, pious life in Śrīnagar. In the words of Kalhaṇa, he had found comfort from his early youth in sacred fire rituals.⁷³ His adversaries came on horseback while he was engaged in worship and challenged him to fight. Still donned with his ceremonial robe, with sacred cord and rosary, white ash on his forehead, his grey locks wet from the ritual bath he had just taken, he stepped out of his mansion. From this we may conclude that the attack must have been carried out in the early hours of the morning⁷⁴. The Brahminic character of Malla's appearance is transformed into something unique once its amalgamation with the martial additives I have not yet mentioned becomes evident. For Malla also wore the red warrior's headband and was armed with sword and shield as for final battle when he emerged. Among the few who fought by Malla's side were his head cook, two Brahmins and one soldier.⁷⁵ They were all killed in action. Meanwhile the assailants shot Malla down with arrows, whereupon Harṣa cut off his head and rode over his back.⁷⁶ Malla's appearance and the various castes his defenders belonged to would perhaps merit more consideration than is possible at the moment. But if we can avoid being misguided by anachronistic projections of the stereotypes of unchanging social units in Kashmir medieval society, the apparent overlapping categories of warlike Brahmins or Brahmin-like warriors could perhaps be explained as vestiges of a remote past, where the social divide had not yet become as unbridgeable as in classical Hinduism.⁷⁷ To give an example: Like any other villager, Brahmins were levied as load carriers required for military expeditions and could not easily escape from the oppressive system of forced portage (*begār*), which prevailed as "one of the most characteristic features of Kaśmīr administration"⁷⁸ until the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, as Michael Witzel has stated in one of his pioneering studies, "the history of the Kashmiri Brahmins may go back [...] all the way to the Vedic period",⁷⁹ when the division of labour and the formal contrast between

⁷³ *āseduṣe munidaśām ājanmaprīṇitāgnaye | tadā sa tasmai cukrodha pratyāsannavadho nṛpaḥ ||* RT(H) 7.1475 || "Against him then, who had lived the life of a Muni, and had observed from his earliest time the cult of a [sacred] fire, the doomed king turned his rage" (Stein 1900, 1).

⁷⁴ On the obligatory daily morning bath (*snāna*), which entitles the members of all twice-born classes to perform their rites with Vedic mantras, and where "the whole body together with the head also" is to be bathed in water, cp. HDhŚ p. 658. For special rules of additional baths applying to Brahmins and hermits, cp. HDhŚ p. 658 f.

⁷⁵ *bhoge puraskṛtāḥ kecit tadbhṛtyāḥ pūrvanirgatāḥ | amartyanārībhoge 'pi tasyāsann agrabhāgināḥ || dvau Rayyāvātṭa Vijayau dvijau paurogavas tathā | Koṣṭhakaḥ Sajjakākhyas ca yoddhā yuddhe hatā babhūḥ || kṣato 'py Udayarājākhyas kṣattāyuhśeṣasattayā | prāṇair niyogabhāg ājau nĀjjako 'pi vyayujyata ||* RT(H) 7.1480-1482 ||.

⁷⁶ *kṣanāc ca dadṛṣe śātaśaraśaṅkuśatācitāḥ | [...] || [...] | ciccheda [...] śiraḥ prṣṭhe hayaṁ cābhramayat smayāt ||* RT(H) 7.1485-1486. On watching the scene from their residence, the women of Malla's household immolated themselves collectively in a fire kindled there, resulting in a conflagration which consumed their mansion, cp. RT(H) 7.1487-1495.

⁷⁷ Cp. Jamison 2014: 56 ff.

⁷⁸ Cp. Stein 1900, 1: 209 f (n. on RT 5.172-174).

⁷⁹ Witzel 1994: 239. Cp. also "Most Brahmins of [the Sārasvata division] group [of Northern India] show rather conservative traits, at least as far as their Vaidika background is concerned." (loc. cit.); "Newcomers always were quickly absorbed" (Witzel 1994: 260). Regarding the behaviour of women in Kashmir in the year 1783, Forster observed that "the women [...] evince a freedom in their manner, which, without a tendency to immodesty, or connected with the habits of licentiousness, seems the result of the common

Brahmins and Kṣatriyas was still in its infancy.⁸⁰ Thus it was obligatory for every Āryan paterfamilias to perform sacrificial rites in his own domestic sphere, but there was no prohibition imposed on carrying weapons. This is not to say that social differentiation in pre-Islamic Kashmir was not by and large in conformance with the ordinary Hindu caste system. Of course it was, and as elsewhere on the subcontinent Kashmiri Brahmins were expected to earn their livelihood by fulfilling duties exclusively reserved for their class, namely teaching, sacrificing for others and accepting gifts.⁸¹ Moreover they occupied influential administrative positions, found employment at the court as scholars, poets and priests, or even worked as clerks. But a law against arms never existed. The rules formally valid at the time only prescribe the respective duties to be carried out: Brahmins should teach and Kṣatriyas should never be without arms.⁸² There was therefore nothing to prevent a Brahmin from taking up arms if required.⁸³ He could have been consumed by hunting fever,⁸⁴ have sought a career in the army, or even have used weapons for self-defence,⁸⁵ individually or collectively. One significant factor has not however been addressed yet, namely that Brahmins possessed the highest degree of purity. Their sanctity protected them from corporal punishment and the death penalty. This is why Brahmins were also frequently employed as emissaries between battle lines. If, on occasion, their inviolability was not respected by one party, and a Brahmin messenger returned atrociously manhandled, this violation aroused a fury with unimaginable consequences. A 15th century author recorded one case, where a Muslim general flouted the dignity of a Brahmin emissary. He immediately paid for it with his life, because the outraged Brahmin community of the town under siege undertook a collective charge slinging such a hail of stones that the general was buried under stones – as befitted his faith, as the chronicler sarcastically remarks.⁸⁶

confidence reposed in them by the men: I have seen a woman stop [...] and converse unreservedly with passengers; giving them an information of the road, or any other intelligence” (1798 (1): 309).

⁸⁰ Cp. Jamison 2014: 58.

⁸¹ Witzel 1994: 264. Cp. VdhŚ 2.11. “But though many Brāhmaṇas adopted political and military vocations, the majority of them appears to have earned their livelihood by performing religious rites, by serving as priests, and by teaching the sacred texts.” (Ray 1970: 98).

⁸² VdhŚ 2.4-6.

⁸³ According to the law effective during emergencies (*āpaddharma*), a Brahmin could seek “a livelihood pursuing occupations normally reserved for the next *varṇa* down, that of the Kṣatriya” [...], if] “the capacity for proper occupations to provide a livelihood has been exhausted [...]” (*Hindu Law*, p. 247). There can however be no question of an exhaustion of a Brahmin’s “proper occupations” in the cases under examination in this paper.

⁸⁴ This is the primary meaning of the double entendre in the following description by a Kashmiri author from the 8th century of a Brahmin revealingly called Purandara – an epithet of Indra (!): “he (/ as a hunter) passionately pursued the slot of deer” (*mārgānusṛtau lubdhaḥ*, Kuṭṭ 193a). Along the same lines of generating a double meaning he is also said to have taken up the sword in the literal sense (*khadgagrahaṇam*, Kuṭṭ 198b).

⁸⁵ “Many texts allow a Brahmin (like a Vaiśya) to take up weapons when his life is in danger, or in other similar emergencies [...]. But these situations should probably be seen as distinct from his adopting a Kṣatriya occupation for remunerative purposes. [...] that] a Brahmin should not adopt a Kṣatriya lifestyle because it is too harsh, [is] a reference most likely to the violence involved in the Kṣatriya’s normative occupations.” (*Hindu Law*, p. 249).

⁸⁶ Lola, a convert Ḍāmara General, was buried under the stones hurled by Brahmins (*viprakīrṇa*): *viprakīrṇais sa pāṣāṇair Lolo Ḍāmaranāyakaḥ | antarthitas samaṇi kīrtyā bhāvi ko nāma laṅghati ||* JRT 475 ||. For the present analysis and interpretation of *vipra-kīrṇa* instead of *vi-pra-kīrṇa*, see JRT, note 399 (p. 274).

Widespread use of slings in Kashmir as an effective lethal weapon is, incidentally, well attested in our sources, but tellingly absent in research literature about the valley. This also applies to the existence of trebuchets, cross-bows and early cannon.⁸⁷ Much has already been written and continues to be written on the philosophy and religion of Kashmir, but the realia of the history of warfare has been disregarded altogether although it formed part of everyday culture, and could not be avoided by even a single generation of Kashmiris. Take the sling just mentioned: While it was mainly used in battle by snipers and slinger detachments composed of lower classes, it seems to have been a common weapon also wielded by many a civilian. The residents of the Brahmin Rājānavāṭikā quarter⁸⁸ in Śrīnagar may serve as an example: they defended the suburb collectively against raiders from the Khaśa tribe, who attempted to plunder their quarter during a time of political turmoil and unrest. “All the citizens”, writes a contemporary author, “assailed them with a hail of stones from their slings”.⁸⁹

The Brahmins’ ability to put up a fight is however particularly interesting from the point of view of their assumed sanctity. If they were essentially exempt from corporal punishment on account of their purity, if the mutilation and the murder of a Brahmin, and the responsibility for his death were considered the greatest crimes, why is it that our historical documents show no traces of an inhibition against killing a Brahmin in an armed struggle?⁹⁰ Guilt and fear of karmic retribution for having harmed a Brahmin disappear as soon as he takes on the role of a warrior. At once he becomes an adversary like anybody else and as such could be killed like anybody else, even impaled, without fear of repercussion.⁹¹

In the context of purity, or rather of impurity, it is noticeable that members of untouchable classes such as Caṇḍālas or Śvapacas also participated in fights frequently. Source material for a cultural history of the Caṇḍālas is nowhere near to exhaustion, and the decisive study still remains to be written. Therefore what I can say is limited to stray observations, but clearly Caṇḍālas not only served in the army, but on occasion also fought and murdered side by side with Brahmins. By way of illustration, let me cite the assassination by a conspiracy of officials of King Uccala in the year 1111 A.D., who, as a side note, used to arrange duels to the death in his courtyard,⁹² taking delight in watching the bloodshed:

A Brahmin named Teja was the first to grasp the king by his hair and to strike him with a dagger. Then Caṇḍālas cut his knees, so that he fell to the ground. As he endeavoured to rise again with spilling entrails, all his assailants pounced on him with their weapons. While one Kṣatriya from abroad and one Brahmin tried to protect him

⁸⁷ Slaje (forthc. (a)); for mobile catapults in mountainous regions, cp. moreover *Akbarnāma*, vol. 1, p. 521.

⁸⁸ The present Rainawari city quarter, located between the Hari Parbat and the Dal Lake. For details, cp. Stein 1900, 2: n. on RT 8.756.

⁸⁹ *mārgarodhodyataiḥ sarvairiḥ kṣepaṇīyāśmavarṣibhiḥ* | [...] *sāhasaṃ kṛtam* || ŚRT 4.653 ||. “The sling, in the use of which they are expert, seems to be their favourite weapon, and enables them with little variation to oppose an adversary at a distance, and from places of security” (Forster 1798 (2): 29).

⁹⁰ Brahminicide is normally an “archetypal Dharmaśāstric sin [...], where] expiation is only possible if the deed was done unintentionally” (*Hindu Law*, p. 317). Lack of intention to kill could have hardly applied to opponents in an armed fight.

⁹¹ Pṛthvīhara captured the Brahman *Ojānanda* and others, and impaled them (RT (H) 8.1073). Retributive consequences on the metaphysical level of karmic causality were obviously not to be feared, at least they are not made a subject of discussion in such cases.

⁹² RT(H) 8.169-174 (Wilke 2018: 217 f).

with their bodies – which cost them both their lives –, another Brahmin cut the king’s throat.⁹³

This is not the only instance of Caṇḍālas involved in regicide.⁹⁴ Caṇḍālas were cunning fighters,⁹⁵ despite their reputation of being intellectually handicapped and savouring of robbery.⁹⁶ They found employment as soldiers,⁹⁷ guards, and village policemen.⁹⁸ Murder and battle beyond the level of mere inter-caste conspiracies extending to untouchable strata relationships by Caṇḍāla involvement is hard to digest. For Caṇḍālas were an utter impossibility even, or perhaps particularly, for Kṣatriyas.⁹⁹ Under normal circumstances, Caṇḍāla girls were not even acceptable in the royal harem because they were thought to pollute any prince who touched them. Dancing girls, on the other hand, who did not belong to the untouchable class, were always an option, and rulers would pick them right from the stage after watching their performance.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, conspirators used this obsession with pollution for their own ends and on occasion foisted Caṇḍālis on unsuspecting kings by feigning a different class affiliation. The idea was that contamination would eventually bring about their destruction.¹⁰¹ However, in violence and warfare the otherwise leading principles of pollution and purity seem to have been suspended.

I can offer no scholarly explanation for this phenomenon, especially considering that the impulse to violence as such was considered an inner impurity and that a “Brahmin who continues in a Kṣatriya’s occupation out of fondness for it [... is] rejected from caste [...]”.¹⁰²

I have already pointed to the Vedic period, where male members, the “brave men” (*nāra*), fought in combat teams from various social units such as extended families (*kūla*), clans (*viś*) and tribes (*jāna*) without recognizable hierarchic subdivisions based on ideas of graded purity.¹⁰³

This might remind one remotely of the Greek Polis, where all legal citizens had the right to bear arms, but also the obligation to serve in time at war. Thus Socrates

⁹³ RT(H) 8.304-328.

⁹⁴ “A Śvapāka of the name of Abhogadeva struck at the king with his dagger, and [so did] the resolute Gajjaka with his sword from behind.” (RT(H) 8.526, transl. Stein 1900, 2).

⁹⁵ “Like Caṇḍālas they killed him unarmed as he was, emaciated by hunger and parched up, crying and naked” (RT(H) 5.434); “[...] a Śvapāka, who had posted himself on a hill summit, discharged [at him] a swift-flying arrow, and this pierced the neck of the unwary [king Śaṅkaravarman, W.S.]” (RT(H) 5.218); “some Śvapākas (i.e. Ḍombas) did not themselves act as councillors, as they were fools” (5.390). All transl. Stein 1900, 1.

⁹⁶ “As [Uccala, W.S.] was marching by way of the village of *Kambaleśvara*, there came suddenly armed Caṇḍālas, robbers of that locality, and surrounded him. They wished to strike him down quickly, as he had only a very small force with him, yet his ... courage arrested their weapons, and they did not strike” (RT(H) 8.251 f, transl. Stein 1900, 2).

⁹⁷ Cp. RT(H) 8.94. “[...] the Ḍombas also earned their bread as hunters, fishermen, buffoons, quacks, etc., and their daughters as singers and dancers. Their occupations thus closely resembled those of the gipsies whose name, *Rom*, is undoubtedly derived from Skr. *ḍomba* [...]” (Stein 1900, 2: 430, n. 3).

⁹⁸ “Mummuni and other chiefs roamed with fierce Caṇḍālas outside his army, and formed his guard at night.” (RT(H) 4.516); “Having induced the Caṇḍālas on guard by bribes to refrain from resistance” (RT(H) 8.1825); for Caṇḍāla watchmen, cp. RT(H) 6.77; 7.309; 8.2172.

⁹⁹ Cp., e.g., King Cakravarman’s (936-937) impossible marriage of Ḍomba girls, RT(H) 5.361-388.

¹⁰⁰ Cp. RT(H) 7.858 ff.

¹⁰¹ Cp. *tābhyah kābhīr api kṣmābhīrt surataṃ samayocitaṃ | vāñchantībhiḥ kṛtaḥ svāṅgasparśād bhāgyodayojjhitaḥ* || RT(H) 7.1131 ||

¹⁰² *Hindu Law*, p. 223; 230; 252.

¹⁰³ Jamison 2014: 54 f.; cp. Zimmer 1879: 161 f; 294.

(470–399), the Greek philosopher who was possibly a contemporary of the Buddha, participated in the Peloponnesian war (431–404) as a hoplite foot soldier armed with sword, shield and spear.¹⁰⁴ His disciple Xenophon (430–354 BC), philosopher and historian, recorded the final seven years and the aftermath of the same war, in which he had served as a commanding soldier, in his celebrated “March of the Ten Thousand” (*Anabasis*).

The name of the highly reputed Brahmin scholar, minister, archer and swordsman Alaṅkāra, mentioned previously, comes to mind again in this context. Viewed from such a perspective – and leaving the question of happiness undecided –, why should a Brahmin in Kashmir not have proven himself equally in the fields of learning and battle under the premise that the ideology of Brahmanic sanctity ceased to operate during warfare?

¹⁰⁴ Cp. the lively depiction of Socrates as a soldier by Platon, put in the mouth of the Athenian General Alkibiades, in: „Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA. / London 1925: 220a-221c.

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