

"Dispute over Kayasthas: Gagabhatta & his opponents"

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ABSTRACT:

This paper deals with the history of the dispute regarding the status of the Candraseniya Kayastha Prabhu (CKP) community of Maharashtra. The origin of this dispute lies in the wider dispute concerning whether there are any true Ksatriyas in the Kali age. The CKPs of Maharashtra claimed to be Ksatriyas and thus entitled for the rite of Upanayana, while the dominant regional opinion was that they were Sudras and not entitled for Upanayana. The dispute broke out a few years before Shivaji's coronation, and to the discomfort of the local Brahmans, Gagabhatta of Banaras settled it in favor of the Kayastha's in his work, Kayasthadharmadipa. In decades after Shivaji's death, the dispute broke out again, and within Maharashtra, gradually the dharmasastric opinion shifted against the views of Gagabhatta, and toward the end of the rule of the last Peshwa, this dispute was settled by Nilakantha Sastri Thatte in Pune against the Kayasthas. I have traced the lineage of Nilakantha Thatte, through his teacher Vaidyanatha Payagunde, to his teacher, the great Nagesabhatta of Banaras. Nagesabhatta produced his Vratyatanirnaya at a sastrasabha in Jaipur, where he argued that there were no true Ksatriyas surviving in the Kali age. So the Kayasthas could not claim to be genuine Ksatriyas either. It was this opinion of Nagesabhatta, counter to the opinion of Gagabhatta, that steadily gained popularity among the Pune Brahmans during the rule of the Peshwas, finally reflected in the activities of Nilakantha Thatte.

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