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*Edited by*

**B. J. Sandesara**

**DIRECTOR, ORIENTAL INSTITUTE**



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# THE ANCIENT INDIAN PRACTICE OF DRINKING WINE WITH REFERENCE TO KATHĀSARITSĀGARA

By

APARNA CHATTOPADHYAY, PATIALA (Punjab)

The Kathāsaritsāgara (Kss.) of Somadeva, a work of the 11th century A.D., throws interesting light on the habit of drinking wine, which obtained among the ancient Indians since early times. The habit of drinking and also the recognition of its evil effects, and its condemnation are equally noticeable in the Ṛgveda. In the Ṛgveda it is forbidden as one of the seven sins<sup>1</sup>. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad a dutiful king proudly declares that there is no drunkard in his kingdom<sup>2</sup>. The Āpaṣṭamba Dharma Sūtra forbids it for all<sup>3</sup>. Buddha tried to stop it; abstaining from wine is one of the five duties<sup>4</sup> for a Buddhist. Kauṭilya, a practical politician as he was, has given rules and regulations regarding liquor and its consumption etc., but as an ideal has explicitly advised that wine should not be drunk<sup>5</sup>. It is really striking that Aśoka, while he is so anxious to stop animal killing, does not say anything about drinking and its evil effects, in his edicts, excepting pointing to the evil effects of 'samājas' which were stopped by his imperial decree. In Manu, all the 'dvijātis' are threatened with severe punishment for indulging in it<sup>6</sup>. In spite of all these prohibitions we find that the practice continued since the Vedic days.

In the Kss., wine formed an item of sumptuous meals. Drinks followed the excellent food served to guests in a feast given by Prahāda<sup>7</sup>. The same we find in other instances<sup>8</sup>.

Sometimes people drank first and then ate in feasts. This is what we find in the description of a banquet<sup>9</sup>. Al Bīrūnī noticed this second practice and says that 'the Hindus drink wine before having eaten anything'<sup>10</sup>.

Apart from its use as the item of a dinner, wine was drunk independently too and excepting Brāhmaṇas we find the three remaining classes and also

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1 Rv., X, 5, 6; Nirukta, VI, 27; Rv., XII, 86, 6.

2 Chānd. Up. V, 11, 5.

3 Āp. Dh. S. I, 5, 17, 21.

4 H. S. Thera, Hand-book of Buddhists, P. 4.

5 Arthaśāstra, Bk. VIII, Ch. III.

6 Manu., XI, 94-95.

7 Kss., XLV, 230.

8 Kss., XLIII, 64; LIV.

9 Kss., CX, 124-132.

10 Sachau, Vol. I, pp. 180-181.

women indulging in drinks. The fact that the Brāhmaṇas in the Kss. are generally not found drinking wine, is, however, in accordance with the Dharmasāstric regulations. It was strictly forbidden for Brāhmaṇas<sup>1</sup> in Manu and condemned in the Rāmāyaṇa<sup>2</sup> and the Mahābhārata<sup>3</sup>. In the Gṛhastharatnākara and Parāśara-Mādhaviya written in the 13th century, wine is forbidden to the Brāhmaṇas but permitted to the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas<sup>4</sup>. In Manu, Gautama, Kauṭilya, Yājñavalkya, it is condemned in the case of kings<sup>5</sup> too. The picture presented in the Kss. is perfectly in accordance with the regulation of the Gṛhastharatnākara and Parāśara-Mādhaviya. Hsüan Tsang also had noticed that Brāhmaṇas did not drink wine<sup>6</sup>. In the Kss., we find just a few instances of Brāhmaṇas drinking wine. Marubhūti, son of the Brāhmaṇa minister, Yaugandharāyaṇa, was drunk one morning and was reproached for being drunk in improper hours<sup>7</sup>. The close association of Marubhūti with the royal family especially with prince Naravāhanadatta, suggests that such Brāhmaṇas took to the habits of the Kṣatriyas. Among the Kṣatriyas, particularly royalties, the practice of drinking is very common. Kings like Udayana<sup>8</sup>, Dharmadhvaṇa<sup>9</sup> of Ujjayinī, Virabhūja of Vardhamāna<sup>10</sup>, Ratnādhipati<sup>11</sup> and prince Naravāhanadatta<sup>12</sup> all are found enjoying drinks regularly. The practice is found among Vaiśyas as well. Merchant Samudradatta<sup>13</sup>, a virtuous and honest man, is found indulging in drinks. Among the Śūdras the practice was not so common. A porter was, once, found living in luxury. A certain merchant interested to know the secret made him drunk one night and extracted the secret<sup>14</sup>. Similar is the case of a woodcutter whose kinsmen extracted the secret of his wealth, one day when he was drunk<sup>15</sup>. According to Al Bīrūnī, the Śūdras freely indulged in drinking, which was avoided by people of upper classes.<sup>16</sup>

On festive occasions drinks were enjoyed by all. Thus, on the night of Madirāvati's marriage all were drunk<sup>17</sup>. In the Naiṣadha-carita also we find that

- 1 Manu., XI, 94.
- 2 Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa.
- 3 Mbh., Ādiparva, 76, 67.
- 4 Delhi Sultanate, P. 600.
- 5 Manu., VII, 47-52; Gaut. Dh. S., XII, 38; Yaj., II, 47; Arthaśāstra, Bk. VIII, Ch. III.
- 6 S. Beal, Buddhist Records of the Western World, Vol. II, P. 143.
- 7 Kss., XL, 2.
- 8 Kss., XXI, 6-8; XI, 5.
- 9 Kss., LXXXV, 9-10.
- 10 Kss., XXXIX, 207.
- 11 Kss., XXXVI, 67-68.
- 12 Kss., LII, 2.
- 13 Kss., LXXVII, 57.
- 14 Kss., LVII, 7-8.
- 15 Kss., LVII, 26-34.
- 16 Sachau, Vol. II, PP. 151-152.
- 17 पानक्षीवेः पौरजनैरहम्—Kss., CIV, 162.

on the occasion of marriage feasts, drinking was common especially among Kṣatriyas.<sup>1</sup>

*Wine and Women:*

We find royal ladies sharing drinks along with their husbands. Thus, king Udayana used to drink along with his queens Padmāvati and Vāsavadattā.<sup>2</sup> King Bhīmabhaṭa neglected his state duties and began to enjoy himself in his harem being engrossed in drinking etc.<sup>3</sup> Prince Naravāhanadatta was enjoying drinks along with his newly-wedded wife, the princess of Śrāvastī<sup>4</sup>. King Dharmadhvaja took inspiring wine along with his wives.<sup>5</sup> The sad effect of wine-drinking on ladies, is found in the story of king Ratnādhipati who being disgusted with the faithlessness of his previous queens, married a girl named Rājadattā and kept her in a palace in a lonely island. One morning having enjoyed drinks with her he left her and went away on his regal duties. He came back, just to find the new queen in the arms of a stranger, a shipwrecked man, who had reached there by chance, and was brought in by the queen, heavily drunk, and so not in her right senses.<sup>6</sup>

The ladies drank independently too. Queen Alamkāraprabhā used to drink wine in her pregnancy<sup>7</sup>. King Vīrabhuja made one of his queens drink a great quantity of wine to extract a secret.<sup>8</sup>

Princesses and girls of higher rank also used to drink wine. A thief one night entered the palace of a king and got into the chamber of the princess. The princess became enamoured with the thief and spent the night in drinking and love-making with him<sup>9</sup>. We find another princess, who being angry with her father, decided to leave home. She went outside the city one day and having made her followers drunk with wine, went away.<sup>10</sup> Padmāvati, the daughter of Saṃgrāmavardhana, a courtier of the king of Kaliṅga, is found keeping wine about her. She entertained her old nurse with wine.<sup>11</sup> When her lover entered her apartments one night, she enjoyed drinks with him. Her cheeks were flushed with wine, as we are told in the Bṛhatkathāmañjarī.<sup>12</sup> In the Kss., a

1 Naiṣadha-carita, XVI, 99.

2 Kss., XXI, 6-8.

3 Kss., LXXIV, 304.

4 Kss., CVI, 51-53.

5 प्रियापीतावशेषानि विबन्नेमे मधूनि च Kss., LXXXV, 10.

6 Kss., XXXVI, 9-90.

7 Kss., XXXV, 109-110.

8 सा मद्यं तेनालिपायिता Kss., XXXIX, 207.

9 Kss., LXIV, 44-48.

10 पानमत्तेषु भृत्येषु—Kss., LXVI, 141-142.

11 Kss., LXXV, 115.

12 B.K.M., IX, Guṇḍa II, 125.

female ascetic is found in the habit of drinking wine. It is corroborated by the Bṛhatkathāmañjarī<sup>1</sup>.

Wine is forbidden to women in Manu<sup>2</sup>, Yājñavalkya<sup>3</sup> and Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra<sup>4</sup>. The Mitākṣarā on Yājñavalkya quotes a text that half of the body of him whose wife drinks 'surā' is guilty of grave sin<sup>5</sup>. But the practice did not strictly conform to the ideal. According to the Sūtras it was offered to women on the arrival of a bride<sup>6</sup> and to women who performed a dance on marriage<sup>7</sup>. In the Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra it is required to be offered to the wives of forefathers when 'piṇḍas' are offered to male forefathers<sup>8</sup>. The same is found in the Pāraskara-Gṛhya-Sūtra<sup>9</sup> and the Kāṭhaka Gṛhya Sūtra.<sup>10</sup> In the Rāmāyaṇa we find Sītā drinking Mairayaka wine<sup>11</sup>. She promised to offer a thousand pitchers of wine to the river goddess<sup>12</sup>. Kālidāsa also describes ladies such as Irāvati and Indumatī indulging in drinking.<sup>13</sup>

Wine was considered to be helpful in enhancing the charm of ladies. We have seen that Padmāvati had her cheeks flushed with wine.<sup>14</sup> In the Kathāsaritsāgara, the princess Bhagīrathayaśā while drinking wine, looked more beautiful than the moon, with the intoxicated play of her eyes and eyebrows.<sup>15</sup> In the Mandore inscription, the cheeks of intoxicated women are used in a simile<sup>16</sup>. In the post-Gupta period we find many references to the habit of drinking wine among women<sup>17</sup>. In the Karpūramañjarī, ladies are described as drinking 'vāruṇī' a variety of wine<sup>18</sup>. Hemacandra, in describing the delicate condition of Mayaṇalladevī, says that she had to give up drinking, due to the advanced state of pregnancy.<sup>19</sup>

1 Kss., XIII, 159 ; BKM., II, Gucca II, 236.

2 Manu, IX, 80.

3 Yāj., I, 73 ; III, 256.

4 Vas., Dh. S., 21, 11.

5 P. V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. II, Part II, P. 797.

6 Sām. Gr., I, 11, 5.

7 Āśv. gr., II 5, 5; Sām. gr., 7, 11, 5.

8 Āśv. gr., II, 5, 3-5.

9 Pār. gr., III, 3.

10 Kāṭhaka gr., 65, 7-8.

11 . . . मधुमैरेयकं शुचि . . . . . Rāmāyaṇa, Uttara Kāṇḍa, 42, 18.

12 Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa, 52, 89.

13 Omprakash, Food and Drinks in Ancient India, p. 185.

14 . . . मदारुणकपोलां . . . . . BKM, IX, Gucca II, 125.

15 Kss., CVI, 51-52.

16 Fleet, C.I.I., III, 18, p. 81.

17 मदिरोमत्तवनिता Jaina Padmapurāṇa Ch. II.

18 कान्तोच्छिष्टा वारुणी वारिमिश्रा Karpūramañjarī, p. 256.

19 A. K. Majumdar, Chaulukyās of Gujarat, p. 354.

The Kss. presents us with a society where motherly ladies presented wine to younger males on occasions and it was not against social etiquette to drink in the presence of motherly and elderly ladies. Thus on the occasion of the coronation of prince Naravāhanadatta, Kaliṅgasenā his future mother-in-law, presented him with excellent wines<sup>1</sup>. The prince of Puṣkalāvati had a wine party one evening and then heavily drunk he went to sleep while his old nurse sat by him<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Wine and courtesans*

It is interesting and rather surprising that the practice of drinking is not to be found among the courtesans of the Kss., though we get intimate details of the life of four courtesans in the work. Kṣemendra also does not refer to their habit of drinking wine in his works. In the Rājatarāṅgiṇī, however, Kamalā, the courtesan of Pauṇḍravardhana is found intoxicated with drink<sup>3</sup>.

#### *Banqueting Hall*

There was a banquet with drinks and revelry on the occasion of a victory.<sup>4</sup> Again there is an interesting account of a drinking party and banqueting hall<sup>5</sup> (Āpānabhūmi). It was a splendid hall full of jewelled goblets and jugs of intoxicating liquor. It was crowded with ladies, who drank wine and thus had their faces expanded and red with contracted eyebrows and red eyes. After the drinks, people proceeded to the hall of feasting attractive with various viands. It was strewn with coverlets, abounding in dishes and hung with curtains and screens and full of all kinds of delicious enjoyments.

It is interesting to note that Caraka has given rules and details of wine parties and requires the best type of drinking hall (‘Āpānabhūmi’) to be situated either in the heart of the town or outside the town, to be adorned with flowers, and perfumed with incenses, with cushioned couches and easy chairs having soft covers.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Types of wine in the Kathāsaritsāgara*

The types of wine, mentioned in the Kathāsaritsāgara are ‘surā’, ‘madya’, or ‘mada’, ‘āsava’, ‘madhu’ and ‘Śīdhu’. It seems that these terms denoting wine refer to different varieties and that they have not been used indiscriminately by the author.

King Udayana is found drinking ‘surā’<sup>7</sup>. ‘Surā’ is a very old type of wine used since the Vedic days. ‘Soma’ and ‘Surā’ are the two types of into-

1 Kss., XXXIV, 128.

2 Kss., XXVIII, 121-122.

3 R.T., IV, 435-436.

4 Kss., CIX 152.

5 Kss., CX, 124-130.

6 Caraka Saṁhitā, Ch. 24, Cikitsāsthānam, verses 12-14.

7 Kss., XI, 5.

xicating drinks in the Vedic age. But while 'Soma' was considered to be good and wholesome, 'surā' was an intoxicant, condemned for its bad effects on the drinker.<sup>1</sup> Still it was a very popular drink and Kṣatriyas were in the habit of drinking it. A cup of 'Surā' is placed in the hands of a king, in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.<sup>2</sup> Thus the picture of king Udayana drinking 'surā', is in conformity with the practice of ancient Indian kings. In Sūtra period it was served to women who performed a dance on marriage.<sup>3</sup> 'Surā' was prepared from fermented barley or wild paddy after distillation.<sup>4</sup> In Kauṭilya<sup>5</sup> there are five varieties of 'Surā', while in the Rāmāyaṇa there are two varieties.<sup>6</sup>

The term 'madya' was sometimes used as a general term for wine. In works on medical science, it is used in naming the chapter on wine.<sup>7</sup> But 'madya' it seems was also used to denote strong liquors.<sup>8</sup> In the Kathāsaritsāgara its use in the cases to make one totally drunk for some purpose, suggests it has been of a very strong type. A king with a view to extract some secret from one of his queens made her totally drunk by making her drink 'madya'.<sup>9</sup> The prince of Vārāṇasī with some motive, made his wife dead-drunk by giving her 'madya'.<sup>10</sup> In both the cases the two ladies are said to have been made heavily drunk and almost senseless. We find 'madya' again used for similar purpose in connection with the elopement of Vāsavadattā with Udayana.<sup>11</sup> Again, queen Rājadattā became totally senseless under the influence of 'madya' and unknowingly did something most disgraceful.<sup>12</sup>

The term 'madhu' in the sense of wine, is used in some places. In Kauṭilya we find two usages of the term madhu, one as honey and the other as wine. The honey of the bee was called 'madhu' and so was the juice extracted from grapes.<sup>13</sup> In the description of a banquet<sup>14</sup>, in the wine party of king Udayana along with his two queens,<sup>15</sup> and in the description of wine parties of kings and princes along with their wives,<sup>16</sup> we find 'madhu' being drunk.

1 RV., VIII, 2, 12.

2 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, XXXVII, 4.

3 Āśv. gr., II, 5, 5; Sāmkhya gr., I, 11, 5.

4 RV., VIII, 2, 12; I, 115.6; X, 131.4, 131.5.

5 Arthaśāstra, Bk. II, Ch. XXV.

6 Rāmāyaṇa, Ayodhyākāṇḍa, 52, 89, 55, 20, 81-21.

7 Suśruta Saṁhitā, Sūtrasthānam, Ch. XLV, Madyavarga. Caraka Saṁhitā, Sūtrasthānam, Ch. XXVII, Madyavarga.

8 Omprakash, Food and Drinks in Ancient India, p. 75.

9 Kss., XXXIX, 207.

10 Kss., LXXV, 160.

11 Kss., XIII, 15.

12 Kss., XXXVI, 86.

13 Arthaśāstra Bk. II, Ch. XV, English Trans., by R. Shamasastri, p. 101.

14 Kss., CX, 126.

15 Kss., XXI, 6-7.

16 Kss., CVI, 53; LXXXV, 10.

'Āsava' which is mentioned in the Kathāsaritsāgara in the description of a banquet<sup>1</sup> was, according to Kauṭilya, a preparation of strong drink in which the principal ingredients were Kāpittha ( *Feronia elephantum* ) juice of sugarcane and honey<sup>2</sup>. Śīdhu, another variety, found in the Kss.<sup>3</sup>, was prepared from molasses according to Suśruta.<sup>4</sup> In the Bṛhatkathāmañjarī, a maiden drinks sweet-scented, 'mādhvika' along with her lover.<sup>5</sup> The Gautama Dharmasūtra lays down that a liquor prepared from 'madhuka' flower ( *Bassia latifolia* ) could be taken by the Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas<sup>6</sup>. Both in Caraka and Suśruta we find a liquor called 'mādhavi' prepared from madhuka flowers.<sup>7</sup> In the Viṣṇudharma Sūtra 'mādhvika' a drink prepared from 'madhūka' flowers, is included in a list of ten kinds of intoxicating drinks forbidden for Brāhmaṇas<sup>8</sup>.

### *Wine cups :*

In the Kss. we notice jewelled<sup>8</sup> and golden cups<sup>9</sup> and crystal goblets<sup>10</sup> for drinks. This is in accordance with Dharmasāstric and medical rules. According to a description in the Rāmāyaṇa we find the practice of drinking from golden and crystal bowls and jewelled wine goblets.<sup>11</sup> In Greek accounts we find wine cups made of costly stones used in a royal banquet.<sup>12</sup> In Manu<sup>13</sup> and in Yājñavalkya<sup>14</sup> we find golden and silver vessels and vessels of pearl oysters. In Caraka<sup>15</sup> golden, silver and jewelled cups are noticed while in Suśruta<sup>16</sup> crystal and jewelled vessels are recommended for drinking. In the Vinaya Texts we find costly utensils like bowls of various kinds made of beryl, crystal, gold, silver etc., some of which were painted or set with jewels.<sup>17</sup> In the accounts of Hsüan

1 Kss., CX, 126.

2 कपित्थतुला फणितं पञ्चतैलिकं प्रथो मधुन इत्यासवयोगः । Arthasāstra, Bk. II, Ch. XXV, v. 19.

3 Kss., CX, 129.

4 दीपनः सृष्टविष्मूत्रो विशदोऽल्पमदो गुरुः ।

कषायमधुरः शीधुगौडः पाचनदीपनः ॥ Suśruta Saṁhitā, Sūtrasthānam, Ch. XLV, Madyavarga, v. 182.

5 आपाययतां माध्विकं पपौ च घनसौरभम् । BKM, IX, Gucca, II, 124.

6 P. V. Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, Vol. II, pt. II, p. 795.

7 Caraka Saṁhitā, Sūtrasthānam, 6, 39, 27, 185 ; Suśruta Saṁhitā Sūtrasthānam, 45, 190.

8 Kss., XXI, BKM, IX, Gucca II, 123-125; Kss., CX, 125.

9 Kss., XXI, 6, 8.

10 Kss., XXI, 10.

11 Rāmāyaṇa, Sundara-Kāṇḍa, Ch. IX, 24-26.

12 Classical Accounts of India, p. 403.

13 Manu, V, 112-113.

14 Yāj. I, 182-185.

15 Caraka, Cikitsā, Ch. 24, 14, 153.

16 Suśruta, Sūtrasthānam, Ch. 46, 449-459.

17 The Age of Imperial Unity, p. 577.

Tsang we notice the Indian practice of eating and drinking from the vessels of gold and silver.<sup>1</sup> We find reference to jewelled drinking vessels in the *Upamiti-bhavaprapaṅcākhā*.<sup>2</sup>

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1 S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, p. 135.

2 *The Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 386.