

Indian Social System

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Introduction

The study of Indian society necessitates that we try to understand the basic elements which provide the blueprint for thought and action. How are relationships organized through the history and in the contemporary times? What the rules and norms for individual and social conduct and from where they derive legitimacy are some of the issues which need to be understood. Indian society is extremely diverse in terms of societies, cultures and social behaviour. Sociologists, however, point to caste system as an organizing principle of Indian society. It is seen to be providing the basic frame around which relationships across groups are organized. Legitimacy for the caste divisions is derived from Hinduism the great religion of the Indian continent. Sociologists, however, also point out that earlier social science understandings were derived from great Hindu texts that these act as the guiding principles for social behaviour. The contextual realities vary a great deal.

In the first section we discuss the blueprint for social organization of Indian society i.e. varna system, belief system and its relevance in understanding the system.

VARNA SYSTEM

In the Indian social system, Varna is only a reference category and not a functioning unit of social structure, and only refers broadly to the ascribed status of different jatis. It is also a classificatory device. In it, several jatis with similar ascribed ritual status are clustered together and are hierarchically graded. The three upper levels-the Brahman, the Kshatriya, and the Vaishya- are considered twice-born, as in addition to biological birth they are born a second time after initiation rites. The Sudra, the fourth level, includes a multiplicity of artisans and occupationally-specialized jatis who pursue clean, i.e. non-polluting occupations. Though the Varna hierarchy ends here, but there is a fifth level which accommodates those following supposedly unclean occupations that are believed to be polluting. They are *Antyaja*, i.e., outside the Varna system. They constitute what are known as the Dalit.

Origin of the Varna

There are several passages in the oldest Vedic literature dealing with the origin of the varnas. The four orders of society are believed to have originated from the self-sacrifice of *Purusha*-the creator, the primeval being. *Purusha* is said to have destroyed himself so that an appropriate social order could emerge. The oldest is the hymn in the *purusha-sakta* of the Rig-Veda which says that the Brahmana Varna represented the mouth of the purusha,-which word may be translated as the “the Universal Man”, referring perhaps to mankind as a whole, - the Rajanya (i.e. Kshatriya) his arms, the Vaisya his thighs and the Sudra his feet.

But it has been shown that there are other passages, apart from the Purusha-Sukta, in which the division of society in to Varnas, though not in the rigid form of later times, is mentioned. Thus, in Rig-Veda (VIII, 35, 16-18), the three varnas, the Brahma, Kshatam, and Visah are mentioned; while in Rig-Veda (I,113, 16), the four varnas are referred to thus: “One to high sway (i.e. Brahmana), one to exalted glory (i.e. the Kshatriya), one to pursue his gain (i.e. the Valsya) and one to his labour (i.e. the Sudra),- all to regard their different vocations, all moving creatures hath the Dawn awakened. Haug’s opinion on the origin of the institution of caste seems to be correct. “It has been of late asserted” he observes, “that the original parts of the Vedas do not know the system of caste. But this conclusion was prematurely arrived at without sufficiently weighing the evidence. It is true that caste system is not to be found in such a developed state; the duties assigned to the several castes are not so clearly defined as in the law books and Puranas. But nevertheless the system is already known in the earlier parts of the Vedas, or rather presupposes. The barriers only were not as insurmountable as in later times.

S.C.Dube (1990) gives the Triguna theory of the origin of the Varna system i.e. the philosophic speculation of ancient India identified three *gunas*-inherent qualities-in human beings, animate and inanimate objects, and in human actions: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* consisted of noble thoughts and deeds, goodness and virtue, truth and wisdom. *Rajas*, on the other hand, were characterized by high-living and luxury, passion and some indulgence, pride, and valour. At the bottom was *tamas*, with the attributes of coarseness and dullness, overindulgence without taste, the capacity to carry out heavy work without much imagination. Those with *sattvic* qualities were

classified as Brahman, those with *rajasic* as Kshatriya and Vaishya, and those with *tamsic* qualities as Sudra. Another third theory takes account of ethnic admixture, culture contact, and functional specialization. Any of these three components cannot singly explain the origin of the Varna. In the initial stage of the evolution of Hindu society-the Vedic stage-race and complexion were important factors, but in its fully evolved form it was only a make-believe phenomenon, not a biological reality. Aryanization was the result of culture contact, but it was not a one-way process involving donor-recipient relations. The Vratya pre-Aryan traditions asserted themselves and in the process modified the Aryan scheme of social organization, rituals, beliefs, world-view, and its ethos. Groups were incorporated *en masse* into the emerging social order, adopting some new features, retaining some old characteristics, and imparting their imprint on the wider society.

Reverting to the *Purusha-Sakta*, an allegorical meaning is by the whole *sakta* with reference to the *Purusha* and the creation of varnas from his limbs. The *Purusha* is described as being himself “this whole universe, whatever has been and whatever shall be” Further, we are also told that the moon sprang from his mind (*manas*), the Sun from his eyes, Indra and Agni were created out of his mouth, and air or wind from his breath. Again, from his navel arose the atmosphere (*antariksham*), from his head the sky, from his feet the earth (*bhumi*), and from his ear the four quarters (*disah*); in this manner, the worlds were created.

There is a great deal of theorizing in the Epic and the Dharma-Sastra literature on the problem of the origin and development of varnas; There were no distinct castes or classes of men in the *Krita* Yuga, according to the Mahabharata At another place, the sage Bhrgu says that only a few Brahmanas were first created by the great Brahman. But later on, the four divisions of mankind Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra developed. The complexion (*varnah*) of the Brahmanas was white (*sita*) that of Kshatriyas red (*lohitah*), that of the Viasyas yellow (*pitakah*), and that of the Sudras black (*asitah*) - thus does the rishi Bhrgu explain his theory of the origin of the varnas to Bharadwaja.

At first the whole world consisted of Brahmanas. Created equally by Brahman, men have, on account of their acts, been divided into various varnas. The theory goes on to explain how the four varnas and other castes (*jatayah*) arose out of the one original class of Dvijas (twice-born). Those who found excessive pleasure in enjoyment became possessed of the attributes of harshness and anger; endowed with courage, and unmindful of their own dharma, (*tyakta-sva-dharmah*), those Dvijas possessing the quality of redness (*raktangah*), became Kshatriyas. Those again, who, unmindful of the duties laid down for them, became endued with both the qualities of Redness and Darkness (*pitah*) and followed the occupations of cattle breeding and agriculture, became Vaisyas. Those Dvijas, again, who were given to untruth and injuring other creatures, possessed of cupidity (*lubdhah*), who indiscriminately followed all sorts of occupations for their maintenance (*sarva-karmo'pa-jivinah*), who had no purity of behaviour (*saucha-paribhrashtah*), and who thus, nursed within them the quality of Darkness (*krishnah*) Became sudras. Thus “divided by there occupations, the Dvijas, (who were, in the first instance, all Brahmanas) due to falling away from the duties of their own order, became members of the other three varnas. None of them, therefore, is prohibited from carrying out all the activities of dharmas and yajnas. Further, those who, through their ignorance, fell away from their prescribed duties and led a loose

life (svachchandacharacheshtitah), ended in reducing themselves to the various lower castes (jatayah), viz. the Pisachas (feinds), the Raksasas (goblins), the Pretas (the evil-spirited), and the various mlechchha (barbarian or outcast)jatis (castes).

The theory that the four varnas proceeded from the limbs of the creator is also held by Manu-Smriti. And, in order to protect this whole universe (*sarvasya*), differential duties and occupations have been assigned to the different varnas (*prithak-karmani*) by him. Manu then goes on to eulogise the Brahmana varna as the supreme creation of God. He further positively asserts that the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and sudra are the only varnas in existence; there is no fifth varna; and with this, Yajnavalkya, Baudhayana and Vasishtha also agree.

Manu's theory of the origin of mixed castes is, in certain respects, different from that of the Mahabharata. Sons begotten by twice-born men (*dvijas*, i.e. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas) of wives from the immediate lower class belong no doubt to the varna of their fathers respectively but they are censured on account of the faulty inherent in their mothers (*matri-dosha*). Such is the traditional (*sanatana*) law (*vidhih*) applicable to children of a wife from a varna only one degree lower than her husband's. The real mixture of varnas (*varnas-samkarah*) therefore arises with offsprings born of a woman two or three degrees lower. Thus the son born of a Brahmana father and a Vaisya mother would be called an Ambashtha; that born of a Brahmana father and a sudra mother would be called Nishada, and so on. The mixture of varnas takes place in other ways also. Of a Kshatriya father and Brahmana mother spring issues belonging to the Suta caste; children born of a Vaisya father and Kshatriya mother or a Brahmana mother belong to Magadha and Videha castes respectively; and so on And, inter- marriages between these new castes give rise to newer and newer castes, so that the process goes on multiplying. Here in this sloka (X,II), Manu has used the word Jati as distinct from varna. This sloka opens the topic concerning offsprings begotten on a woman of higher varna by a man of lower varna. Thus, the Suta, the Magadha and the Vaideha are so named according to their "jati" (*jatitah*). And, in the next sloka, Manu also uses the term Varna-samkarah, mixture of varnas, in this connection. Though Manu refers to four Varnas only, he mentions about fifty seven jatis, as a result of Varna-samkarah.

Duties of the Varna

The division into four Varnas is here correlated to the duties of each Varna. Their origin is a symbolic representation of the rank and functions of the four Varnas. In the cultural body-image the head, the arms, the thighs, and the feet are ranked in descending order, so are the traditional functions.

The *Purusha-Sukta* has been interpreted as having an allegorical significance behind it from another point of view. Thus, the mouth of the *Purusha* from which the Brahmanas are created is the seat of speech; the Brahmanas therefore are created to be teachers and instructors of mankind. According to Manu, a Brahman should always and assiduously study the Veda alone and teach the Vedas. It is also the privilege of a Brahman to officiate as a priest and as a means of livelihood permitted to receive gifts from a worthy person of the three higher varnas. This is known as *pratigraha*.

The arms are symbol of valour and strength; the Kshatriya's mission in this world is to carry weapons and protect people. Thus, defence and war, administration and government were the functions assigned to the Kshatriya. It is difficult to interpret that portion of the hymn which deals with the creation of the Vaisyas from the thighs of the Purusha. But the thigh may have been intended to represent the lower portion of the body, the portion which consumes food, and therefore the Vaisya may be said to be created to provide food to the people. Trade, commerce and agriculture were the work of the Vaishya. The creation of the Sudra from the foot symbolizes the fact that the Sudra is to be the "footman", the servant of other varnas. The Sudra ranked the lowest by serving others through crafts and labour.

The whole social organization is here conceived symbolically as one human being—the "Body Social", we may say – with its limbs representing the social classes based on the principle of division of labour. The Mahabharata states the same thing thus: Our obeisance to That (*Purusha*) who consists of Brahmanas in the mouth, Kshatriyas in the arms, Vaishya in the entire regions, stomach and thighs, and Sudras in the feet.

Ascending order of Responsibilities and Status

In the above mentioned fourfold classification of duties according to Dharmashastras, there was an ascending order of responsibilities. While Brahmin was given the highest position he was also entrusted with maximum responsibilities. The entire task of preserving Dharma was mainly the responsibility of the Brahmin. The next social status in Varna hierarchy was given to the Kshatriya as he had the responsibility of defending the nation in times of war and administering law and order in the society. He provided social justice with the help of the Brahmin scholar. The Vaishyas and Sudras had lesser responsibilities and therefore were assigned lower status. The Sudra gradually came to be so much looked down upon that he could not touch a Brahmin. The Sudra could not be initiated into the Vedic study and the only ashram out of the four that he was entitled to, was that of the householder.

The abovementioned descriptions are largely derived from what is called as the 'book view' of society that is from the great tradition or the scriptures. The ground situation or the 'field view' often does not correspond with these ideal notions and is quite flexible. The book view is also said represent the brahmanical view of society not largely adhered by the so-called 'lower castes.' In real life the operational categories are in fact not the varna but the jati or subcastes who do have their own interpretations of caste hierarchy.

CASTE(or jati)

Definitions of Caste

Caste may be defined as a hereditary endogamous group which decides the individual's status in the social stratification and his profession. Caste is also defined as an aggregate of persons whose share of obligations and privileges is fixed by birth, sanctioned and supported by magic and or religion. Ketkar(1909) defines caste as a social group having two characteristics-memberships confirmed to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born and the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. According to Cooley when a class is

somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it caste. When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot in life without any hope of changing it, then class takes the form of caste.

Origin of Caste in India

According to G.S. Ghurye(1961),caste in India is a Brahminic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganges country. Abbe Dubbois(1906) first propounded the political theory of the origin of Caste in India. However, the complex social structure based upon castes appears impossible that the aim of caste system would have been to maintain the dominance of the Brahmin priests over Hindu society according to Majumdar (1951). The traditional theory attributes the origin of the caste system to the creator Brahma who created the four varnas. According to Hutton, the caste system originated in the religious customs and rituals of the non-Aryan group particularly the theory of Manu. The traditions of endogamy, untouchability etc. has their roots in Manu. According to Majumdar (1951), caste system was developed to save Aryan Race and culture from intermixing with other races.

Characteristics of Caste

There are various characteristics which determine the caste of a person. These are given below:

1. Determination by birth: The membership of a caste is determined by birth. A person remains the member of a caste unto which they are born and this does not undergo change even if change takes place in his status, occupation, education, wealth, etc.
2. Rules and regulations concerning food: Each individual caste has its own laws which govern the food habits of its members. Generally, there are no restrictions against fruit, milk, butter, dry fruit, etc. but kachcha food (bread, etc.) can be accepted only from a member of one's own or of a higher caste.
3. Definite occupation: In the Hindu scriptures there are mention of the occupations of all varnas. According to Manu, the functions of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras are definite. The function of the Brahmins is to study the Vedas, teach, guide and perform religious rituals, to give and receive alms. Sudras have to do menial work for all the other varnas. Having developed from the varna system, the occupations in caste system are definite.
4. Endogamous group: The majority of persons marry only within their own caste. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Sudras and Vaishyas all marry within their respective castes. Westermarck has considered this to be a chief characteristic of the caste system. Hindu community does not sanctify inter-caste marriage even now.
5. Rules concerning status and touchability: The various castes in the Hindu social organization are divided into a hierarchy of ascent and descent one above the other. In this hierarchy the Brahmins have the highest and the untouchables the lowest place. This sense of superiority is much exaggerated

and manifests in the south. The very touch and sometimes even the shadow of a member of the lower caste is enough to defile an individual of a high caste. In Kerala, a Namboodari Brahmin is defiled by the touch of a Nayar, but in the case of a member of a Tiyyar caste a distance of 36 feet must be kept to avoid being defiled and in the case of a member of the Pulayana caste the distance must be ninety six feet. The stringent observation of the system of untouchability has resulted in some low castes of the Hindu society being called 'untouchables' who were, consequently, forbidden to make use of places of worship, cremation grounds, educational institutions, public roads and hotels etc., and were disallowed from living in the cities.

Mobility of the Varnas

There seems to be a constant upward and downward social mobility between the different Varnas. Yajnavalkya speaks of two kinds of such mobility. When a lower Varna changed into a higher varna, it was known as *jatyutkarsa* or uplift of the caste. On the other hand, if a person belonging to a higher varna gradually descended into a lower Varna, it was known as *jatyapakarsa* or the degeneration of the caste. Provisions for both these processes of social mobility in stratification were laid by different Dharmasastras with minor distinctions about the conditions. It was particularly based upon two conditions, firstly, upon the following of the vocation of some other Varna for five to six generations and secondly, marrying into different Varnas for as much period. It may be easily guessed that in practice such mobility happened only in exception, since the process had to be covered for several generations, but it is clear that the Dharmasastras did prescribe change of Varnas by means of interaction between the Varnas both upwards and downwards. This can be through marriage and education.

While varna dharma had to be followed in normal circumstances, in abnormal circumstances the Dharmasastras prescribe what is known as *Apad Dharma* or that which is worthy of following in exceptional circumstances. Manu enumerate ten means of maintaining oneself in *apad*(distress) viz, learning, arts and crafts, work for wages, service i.e., carrying out another's orders, rearing cattle, sale of commodities, agriculture, contentment, alms, money-lending. Out of these some cannot be followed by Brahmin or a Kshatriya when there is no distress. The Dharmasastras maintained that Brahmins doing certain things are to be treated as Sudras. Without studying the Veda but works hard to master something else is quickly reduced to the status of a Sudra together with his family. Thus, *Apad Dharma* does not mean the license to do whatever one likes to do in the times of trouble. There are numerous cases of so many notable persons who refused to change their allotted duties even in the face of extremely adverse circumstance. Again, even when such a change was permitted, it was always looked down and never appreciated.

Caste Structure and Kinship

Caste structure is intimately related to the kinship system amongst the Hindus in India. The sole reason for this relationship lies in the endogamous nature of caste system. Caste is basically a closed system of stratification, since members are recruited on the criteria of ascribed status. In other words, an individual becomes a member of a caste in which he or she is born. Thus it is an ascribed status. Even if

there is social mobility in the caste system through the process of Sankritisation, urbanizations, etc it is only a positional change rather than a structural change.

A person remains the member of his/her caste irrespective of his/her individual status. Any movement in the structure occurs in the social mobility of the caste group in the local hierarchy of the society, which is only a shifting of its position from one level to another.

Kinship is a method or a system by which individuals as members of society relate themselves with other individuals of that society. There are two types of kinship bonds. One is consanguinal and the other is affinal. Consanguinal ties are ties of blood such as, between mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, etc. Affinal ties are ties through marriage, such as, between husband-wife, husband-wife's brother, etc.

Kinship in India is largely an analysis of the internal structure of the sub-caste. Sub-caste is the largest segment of a caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste like endogamy, social control, etc. For example, the Brahmin caste has several sub-castes like endogamy, social control, etc. For example, the Brahmin caste has several sub-castes like the Gaur Brahmins, the Kanyakubjis, the Saraswat Brahmins, etc. It is these segments of the main caste of Brahmins which form the effective functioning group within which social interaction, marriage etc. takes place. However, these segments are also subdivided and have a regional connotation too, like the Sarjupari Brahmins of North India are those who originally lived beyond the river Saryu or Ghaghara.

The effective caste group is the caste population of a single village while the effective sub caste group within which marriage and kinship takes place is composed of the people belonging to the region around the village having several scores of settlements. Due to the practice of endogamy and restriction in social intercourse a person marries within the sub-caste group, or at the most caste group in India; which extends generally, beyond the village to a larger region.

Kinship system found in various parts of India differs from each other in many respects. However, generally speaking, we can distinguish between the kinship system in the Northern region, the Central region and the southern region.

North India is in itself a very large region, having innumerable types of kinship systems. This region includes the region between the Himalayas in the North and the Vindhyas in the South. In this region a person marries outside the village since all the members of one's caste in a village are considered to be brothers and sisters, or uncles and aunts. Marriage with a person inside the village is forbidden. In fact, an exogamous circle with a radius of four miles can be drawn round a man's village (Srinivas 1955: 12)

Hypergamy is practiced in this region according to which a man takes a wife from a clan, which is lower in status to his own clan. That is, a girl goes in marriage from a lower status group to a higher status group within a sub-caste. The effect of the hypergamy and village exogamy is that it spatially widens the range of ties. Several villages become linked to each other through affinal and matrilineal links. In his study of the Ramkheri village in Madhya Pradesh, Adrian Mayer (1960) not only described

the Rajput caste and other sub-castes of the village but also the regions around it as well.

The clans, lineages, and kutumbs are all part of the internal structure of the caste at the same time being part of the kinship organisation. These groups are all the time increasing and branching off with time.

The organisation of family in the northern region is mainly patriarchal patrilineal and patrilocal. The lineage is traced through the male, i.e., patrilineal system is followed in this region. It is patriarchal because authority lies with the male head of the family and it is patrilocal because after marriage the bride is brought to reside in the father's house of the bride-groom.

Generally, in most of the castes in the north such as the Jats, an agricultural caste of South Punjab, Delhi and Haryana the "four-clan" rule of marriage is followed. According to this rule,

- i) A man cannot marry in the clan to which his father (and he himself) belongs;
- ii) To which his mother belongs;
- iii) To which his father's mother belongs; and
- iv) To which his mother's mother belongs (Karve 1953)

In the northern region, therefore, marriage with cousins, removed even by two or three degrees is viewed as an incestuous union. In most parts of the region, as mentioned earlier, village exogamy is practiced by most of the castes, especially the Brahmin, kshatriya and Vaishya castes. This rule is known in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab, as the rule of Sassan.

In Central India which includes Rajputana the Vindhya, Gujrat, Maharashtra and Orrissa we find the general practice of caste endogamy. Hypergamy is most characteristic of the Rajputs of this region and village exogamy is also found in this region. However, in this region especially in Gujarat and Maharashtra amongst some caste communities we find cross-cousin marriages being practised. Here there is a tendency for a man to marry his mother's brother's daughter. But marriage with the father's sister's daughter is taboo. The preference for a single type of cross-cousin marriage seems to move away from the taboo of marrying cousins of any class in the northern region. Thus, in many ways this preference suggests a closer contact with the practices of the southern region.

The southern region comprises states like Karnatak, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala where the Dravidian languages are spoken. This region is distinct from the northern and central regions of India in the sense that here we find basically preferential rules of marriage. Here a man knows whom he has to marry while in most areas in the north a man knows whom he cannot marry.

Most of the parts of the Southern region except some, like the Malabar, follow the patrilineal family system. Here also we find exogamous social groups called *gotras*. The difference between the exogamous clans in the north is that a caste in a village is held to be of one patrilin and therefore, no marriage is allowed within a village.

Sometimes even a group of villages are supposed to be settled by one patrilineage and marriage between them is prohibited.

In the South, there is no identification of a *gotra* with one village or territory. More than one inter-marrying clans may live in one village territory and practice inter-marriage for generations. Thus the social groups; which are formed due to this kind of marriage pattern in the South shows a centripetal tendency (of moving towards a centre) as against the centrifugal (of moving away from the centre) tendency of social groups found in north Indian villages. In the South, a caste is divided into a number of *gotras*. The first marriage creates obligations about giving and receiving daughters. Hence, within exogamous clans, small endogamous circles are found to meet inter-family obligations and a number of reciprocal alliances are found in South Indian villages.

Apart from castes, which are patrilineal in the southern region, we also find some castes, such as the Nayars of Malabar district who follow matrilineal system of kinship. Their household is made up of a woman, her sisters and brothers, her daughters and sons and her daughter's daughters and sons. Amongst them, property passes from the mother to the daughter. But the authority even in this system lies with the brother, who manages the property and takes care of his sister's children; Husbands only visit their-wives in this system. The Nayar matrilineal house is called a *Tharavad*. Nayar is a broad category of castes of which not all of them follow the same kinship system (Dube 1974: 26)

The relationship between the caste structure and the kinship system is so inter-twined that we cannot understand one without understanding the details of the other. In this section we have explained the regional variations found in the relationship between the caste structure and related kinship pattern.

Sub-Caste

A sub-caste is considered a smaller unit within a caste. In the village setting usually we find that there is only one sub-caste living there. A larger number of sub-castes indicate the late arrivals to a village. Thus for all practical purposes a sub-caste represents the caste in the village. In the wider setting of a region, however, we find many sub-castes. One example from Maharashtra is of Kumbhar (potters). The sub-caste is the smallest endogamous groups and it has some mechanisms like *panchayats* to regulate the behaviour of members in the traditional setting. In a village, the difference between caste and sub-caste does not come to the surface but in a region, the difference is visible.

In the following section we shall discuss the ideal life course prescribed for Hindus in the scriptures.

The Four Stages of Life

It is the *dharma* of a Hindu to pass through four different *ashram* (stages) in their life. The first Ashram is called *brahmacharya ashram* (the educational stage) from which the fourth Varna, Sudra and women of the first three varna are barred. It ends at marriage. The second stage of life is called the *grihashthashram*. During this a man

rears a family, earns a living and performs his daily personal and social duties. After this a man gradually enters the third stage of life called the *vanaprashthashram*. During this stage the householder relinquishes his duties in the household, and devotes his time to religious pursuits. His links with his family are weakened. During this ashram a man retires into the forest with or without his wife leaving behind the householder's cares and duties. The final phase of Hindu's life begins with the stage known as the *sanyasashram*. In this stage one attempt to totally withdraw oneself from the world and its cares by going to the forest and spending the rest of life in pursuit of *moksha*. Like the Varna system, the *varnashram* is a model that is not compulsory but recommended.

Purushartha

The Hindu scriptures declare four goals in human life and they are called the *purushartha*. The term *purushartha* not only denotes what the objectives of life should be but it also means what the objectives of life are as the result of the psychological tendencies of the individual. The *purushartha* consists of dharma, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* in the same order.

First, every human being needs to obey the law of nature by strictly following dharma. Dharma is the stability of the society, the maintenance of social order, and the general welfare of mankind. And whatever conduces to the fulfilment of this purpose is called 'dharma'.

Artha is the acquisition of wealth, is regarded as the primary purpose of life, as without it, human existence is impossible. One has to live before one can live well. *Artha* is the foundation upon which the whole structure of life has been built and all the other purushrtha-s can be achieved only by the fulfilment of this primary purpose in life. The acquisition of wealth is through dharmic actions and wealth needs to be used in the preservation of dharma.

Kama means desires, desires of varying degrees. It is from dharma that artha and kama result. Man recognises here that *artha* and *kama* satisfy the psychological tendencies of man and they form essentially the two fundamental aspirations of every individual. It is implied what one desires need to be within the threshold of one's wealth and within dharmic values!

Now the word *moksha* means the ultimate freedom from birth and death or the deliverance of the soul from bondage. From the *advaitic* point of view, *moksha* results from the extinction of false knowledge (ignorance). The self-knowledge is the aim and end of man's misery and bondage.

In support of the realization of SELF, the Upanishads outline several additional explanations. The universe has the natural tendency to guide the realization by the human soul. The natural forces of the universe maintain the balance between the material objects, living plants, conscious animals, and intelligent human beings. The transition from human consciousness into divine (transcendental) consciousness is a long and laborious process. Ordinarily, within the span of a single lifetime, it is not feasible to transit from human to divine. Life is a continuous journey, carried over and continued through the succeeding lives till the attainment of SELF realization.

According to Hindu *sastra-karas* (i.e., those who have written the *sastrasm* the scientific treatises) have taken man into influence his life and its conduct: He is considered in relation to : (i) *deha*, (place, region) which may be said to be the regional approach to the study of society; (ii) *kala* (time) which, we may say, constitutes the historical approach to the study of society, (iii) *srama* (effort) which takes in to account man with reference to his nurture and development in the contemporary environment; and (iv) *guna* (natural traits), which refers to the natural inherent psycho-biological equipment of man. In sharp contrast with such attitude, the Hindu, in his *sastric* discussions of social life and practices, first raises the fundamental question of the significance of man's existence on earth, gives consideration to basic questions of the relation between man and the possible ultimate purpose and fulfilment of his existence, and, upon such bases, seeks to define and formulate his relations with every other thing, person, event and circumstance in the world. Thus, for the Hindu, the individual's relations with the ultimate principle of the Universal or Primal Cause defines his relations with other men, with his family, with the group or society in which he lives or with which he comes in contact, with his village and his country;-and, indeed, with the entire animate and inanimate creation. The whole of the life of an individual is, for the Hindu, a kind of schooling and self-discipline. Now, during the course of this schooling and self discipline, he has to pass through four stages,-four grades of training, as it were-called the *Ashrams*. And, in regard to the *Ashrams*, too, every item and stage and phase has to be defined in terms of the already defined relations between man and God. Here, therefore, practically we start with supernatural basis; upon this we erect the superstructure of man's earthly career. The earthly existence has thus to be defined primarily in terms of dharma; and dharma has to be interpreted in the concrete in terms of karma. The *ashram* scheme, therefore, defines our dharma in and through a life of worldliness, of *samsara*, before it, and beyond its pale; and, in practice it seeks to delineate the implications of dharma in terms of karma. This scheme of transition from one stage to another is prescribed for men of upper castes only, women are supposed to help and support their husbands in proper fulfillment of these goals.

In order to understand the psycho-moral basis of the *ashrams* proper, it is advisable that we should look in to the theory of the *purushartha* which concern themselves with the understanding, justification, management and conduct of affairs of the individual's *purushartha* are four, viz, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*. We speak of this life in relation to the group, in and through the *asramas*. The *purushartha* as the 'psycho-moral' bases of the *asrama* theory, because, on the one hand, the individual receives a psychological training through the *asramas* in terms of lessons in the use and management of the *purushartha*; while, on the other hand, in actual practice, he has to deal with the society in accordance with these lessons. It is in the light of the understanding of the meaning and place of the *purushartha* in the *asrama* scheme that we shall be able to comprehend the right method, way and outlook for the management of each of the *asramas*.

It is usual to translate these terms dharma, artha, kama and moksa in English by such words as morality, wealth, desires or passion, and salvation respectively. But the Sanskrit terms are potent with deeper meanings than these English words singly convey. Thus, the word dharma is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhri* meaning 'to hold together, to preserve.' The social implications and meaning of dharma as a

principle for maintaining the stability of society is brought out by God Sri Krishna in three verses in the Mahabharata: In advising Arjuna as to what is dharma he explains that “dharma is created for the well-being of all creation”, and further that “all that is free from doing harm to any created being is certainly dharma; for, indeed, dharma is created to keep all creation free from any harm” Sri Krishna proceeds, next, to give a still more comprehensive view of dharma: “Dharma is so called because it protects (dharanat) all; dharma preserves all that is created. Dharma, then, is surely that principle which is capable of preserving the universe”. *Artha*, on the other hand, is to be understood as referring to all the means necessary for acquiring worldly prosperity, such as wealth or power. And *kama* refers to all the desires in man for enjoyment and satisfaction of the life of the senses, including the sex drive to which the word *kama* more prominently refers. The term refers to the native impulses, instincts and desires of man, his natural mental tendencies, and finds its equivalent, we may say, in the use of the English terms “desires”, “needs”, “basic or primary motives”, “urges”, or “drives” and the collective use of the term *kama* would refer to the totality of the innate desires and drives of man. The term is also often used in a broader sense to include socially acquired motivation too. Dharma, *artha* and *kama*, therefore, refer respectively to the moral, material and mental resources, accessories and energies available to man.

Of these three, *artha* and *kama* refer to two of man's earthly belongings, while dharma stands on a higher level. At its lowest level of manifestation, *kama* is understood in the sense of pure sex drive, and is said to be one of the six “enemies” of human being.

But it is equally true that a human being cannot conduct his life without *artha* which constitutes the material means of living, and *kama* which helps the propagation of the species. Therefore, it is needed that the correct quality and quantity, the place, and the time of *artha* and *kama*, have to be determined and laid down by the wise sages. This is done in terms of dharma, which defines, for man, the proper quantum, place and season, for the right functioning of *artha* and *kama*. By attending to his dharma, therefore, a person is able to live a proper life even though it may be lived in terms of *artha* and *kama*.

In the opinion of Manu, the good of humanity lies in a harmonious management or co-ordination of the three (*trivarga*), viz, *dharma*, *artha* and *kama*. Says he: “some declare that the good of man consists in dharma, and *artha*; others opine that it is to be found in *kama* and *artha*; some say that dharma alone will give it; while the rest assert that *artha* alone is the chief good of man here below (on earth). But the correct position is that the good of man consists in the harmonious co-ordination of the three”.

Now, as we shall see in our discussion of the *grihasthasrama*, *artha* and *kama* have to be practised by the individual with reference to one or more other individuals. So also, the practice of dharma cannot be possibly conceived as existing apart from the relation between the individual and the group, -except when the dharma directed is entirely in the interest of the *moksha* of the individual, as in the case of the *samnyasin* (the recluse), in whose case *artha* and *kama* become transformed and get merged in to *moksha*. Thus, on the whole, the *purusharthas* are concerned both with the individual as well as the group. They enunciate and justify the kinds of relation between the individual and the group; they define the just relations between activities of the

individual and those of the group; they also state explicitly and by implication, the improper relations between the individual and the group with a view to enabling the individual to avoid them. Thus, the *purushartha* control both the individual and the group, and also their-relations.

Here, it is to be remembered that when we refer to *artha* and *kama* as *purusharthas*, we refer to them in their proper proportions, that is to say, only in the best sense of these words. *Artha* refers to the problem and activities connected with the finding, making, gathering, conserving and organizing of the material necessities of life and all that accompanies the same. Similarly, *kama* refers to the sex and the reproductive aspect, its understanding, its right functions, its functioning, its organization and management both with reference to the individual and the group. As we have pointed out above, *Kama* in the wider sense refers to all the innate desires and urges of man. Dharma seems to be the arbiter, the conscience keeper, the director, the interpreter, of the properties that govern the right functioning and management of the relations between the inner man and the outer man and between the individual and the group. Dharma is, therefore, the holder of the balance in terms of which *artha* and *kama* have to be dealt with weighed, practiced and apportioned. *Moksha*, on the other hand, seems to be concerned mainly with the individual. It refers, perhaps, to the appeal of the inner man to the individual, unaffected by the group. It is perhaps too personal an outlook that defines the struggle and hope and justification within the individual for *moksha*. But, from the Hindu's point of view, we must also remember, that the inner personality of the individual, at its best, is identified by him not only with the group, nor only with the society, nor with the nation, nor the race, nor even with the entire human race, but with the whole creation, animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, which includes all these and is still much more than all these. In the light of these considerations, the goal of *moksha* does not possess the narrow individual outlook, for the Hindu nor is it to be pursued exclusively and directly by an individual unless and until he has duly satisfied all his social debts (*rinah*) or obligations.

In the Indian social system family is the core and central unit of society. An individual is seen as part of the family, community and caste group unlike the west where individualism is pronounced. In this section we shall look into the ideal notion of family system as enunciated through the book view of society. Though Indian system displays wide variety of family and household systems, joint family has got maximum attention of scholars due to its persistence through the centuries.

JOINT FAMILY

Definitions of a joint Family

Joint family is a group of kins of several generations, ruled by a head, in which there is joint residence, hearth and property and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations. The chief characteristics of joint family are common residence, common kitchen, joint property, common worship, rule of the *pater familia* and consciousness of mutual obligation among family members. Joint family has been viewed as one of the enduring units of the Indian society which has been undergoing change over time.

According to I. Karve (1965), “A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.” Not only parents and children, brothers and step-brothers live on the common property, but it may, sometimes, include ascendants, descendants and collaterals up to many generations. According to I.P. Desai (1964), “We call that household a joint family which has greater generation depth (i.e., three or more) than the nuclear family and the members of which are related to one another by property, income and mutual rights and obligations.”

A joint family may consist of members related lineally or collaterally or both. A family is essentially defined as “joint” only if it includes two or more related married couples who may be related lineally (as in a father-son relationship or occasionally in a father-daughter relationship), or collaterally (as in a brother-sister relationship). Both these types refer to the compositional aspect of the patrilineal joint family. In matrilineal systems, found in south west and north east India, the family is usually composed of a woman, her mother and her married and unmarried daughters. The mother’s brother is also an important member of the family; he is the manager of the matrilineal joint family affairs. The husbands of the female members live with them. In Kerala, a husband used to be frequent visitor to the wife’s household and he lived in his mother’s household.

Characteristics of a joint family

The characteristics of a joint family are as follows:

Commensality: The joint family is characterized by a common hearth; members cook and eat food from the same kitchen.

Common Residence: Members of a joint family have not only the same hearth but share the same dwelling place.

Joint Ownership of Property: Members of a joint family have joint ownership of property and this may be regarded as the most crucial factor in legal terms for the characteristic of a joint family.

Cooperation and Sentiment: In a joint family, the ownership, production and consumption of wealth take place on a joint basis. It is a cooperative institution, similar to a joint stock company in which there is a joint property, and the head of the joint family is like a trustee who manages the property of the family with a view to deriving material and spiritual benefit for the members of the family. I.P. Desai (1964) and K.M. Kapadia (1958) point out that jointness should be looked in functional terms. A functionally joint family lays stress on fulfillment of obligations towards kin. They identify themselves as members of a particular ‘family’, cooperate in rituals and ceremonies, render financial and other kinds of help; and they cherish a common family sentiment and abide by the norms of joint living.

Ritual Bonds: The ritual bonds of a joint family are considered to be important component of jointness. A joint family, thus, is bound together by periodic propitiation of the dead ancestors. The members perform a ‘*shraddha*’ ceremony in

which the senior male member of the joint family propitiates his dead father's or mother's spirit, offering it the '*pinda*' (ball of cooked rice) on behalf of all the members.

Common deity Worship: Another ritual bond among joint family members can be common deity worship. In many parts of South India, each joint family has a tradition of worshipping a particular clan or village deity. Vows are made to this deity in times of joy and trouble. The first tonsure, donning of the sacred thread, marriages etc. are celebrated in or near the deity's temple.

Types of joint family

Pauline Kolenda (1987: 11-2) has classified the joint family on the basis of the relatives who are its members as follows:

Collateral Joint Family: This comprises two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond. In this type, usually a brother and his wife and another brother and his wife live together with unmarried children.

Supplemented collateral Joint Family: This is a collateral Joint family along with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives. The supplemented relatives are generally the widowed mother of the married brothers or the widower father, or an unmarried sibling.

Lineal Joint Family: This is joint family of two couples between whom there is a lineal link, like between a parent and his married son or some times between a parent and his married daughter live together.

Supplemented lineal Joint Family: In this unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father's widower brother of the son's wife's unmarried brother or sister.

Lineal Collateral Joint family: Here there or more couples are linked lineally and collaterally. For instance we can have a family consisting of parents and their two or more married sons together with the unmarried children of the couples.

Supplemented lineal-collateral joint family: In this type a lineal collateral joint family plus unmarried, widowed, separated relatives who belong to one of the nuclear families (lineally and collaterally linked), for example, the father's widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

We may find that Joint family varied and differs across caste, community and region. Factors like life expectancy, average age at marriage, average number of children born per couple, age of father at the birth of various children as well as the influence of education, spatial mobility and diversification of occupation also brings about variation in the joint family. Sociologists clearly show that joint family has largely been the feature of upper castes in Indian contexts or wherever land or business resources were commonly pooled. Such family units help to avoid division of common property resources.

Advantages of the joint family

The advantages of the joint family are as follows:

Economic advantage: The joint family system has several economic advantages. It prevents property from being divided. Land is being protected from extreme subdivision and fragmentation. The joint family also assists in economic production where the male members do such work as furrowing, sowing and irrigation while the women assist at the harvest, children graze the cattle, collect fuel and manure. The cooperation of all members helps to save money which would otherwise be paid to a labourer.

Protection of members: the joint family can provide assistance to not only the children but to the old, insane, the widows and helpless. The joint family is capable of providing assistance at times of pregnancy, sickness etc. If a person dies, his wife and children are looked after by the other members of the joint family, and their honour, wealth, and prosperity are protected collectively.

Development of personality: In a joint family the members are able to develop the ideal qualities of a person. The elders care for the children and see to it that they do not engage in undesirable and antisocial behaviours.

Co-operation and Economy: the joint family fosters co-operation and economy to an extent achieved by few, if any, other institution. A sense of cultural unity and an associational feeling exists among the members. There can also be much economy in expenditure.

Socialism in wealth: according to Sir Henry Maine, the joint family is like a corporation the trustee of which is the head of the family. Everyone in the family works according to his capacity but obtains according to his need and in this way achieves the socialistic order from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.

Changes in the joint family

In recent past the joint family has undergone various changes. This can be attributed to the following factors:

Economic Factors: Monetisation (the introduction of cash transactions), diversification of occupational opportunities for employment in varied spheres, technological advancements (in communication and transport) are some of the major economic factors, which have affected the joint family system in India.

With the opening of employment in government services and the monetization people left their traditional occupation and moved to cities or towns where jobs are available. Thus they break away from their ancestral place taking their wives and children with them. Since independence opportunities for and diversification of occupations have increased. With a constitutional commitment to promote equality between the sexes, women are being emerged into varied kinds of occupation and role relationships are changed which affects the joint family.

Educational Factors: With the coming of the British opportunity for higher education emerged in which all castes and community had access to the facilities provided by them. Some educated people began to question the Hindu customs and practices relating to child marriage, denial of rights of education to women, property rights, and ill treatment of widows. Marriage for both women and men were desired at a much later age by the educated and this affects the nature of the joint family.

Legal Factors: Legislations regarding employment, education, marriage, and property have affected the family system in many ways. Labour laws, Child Marriage Restraint Act and the Hindu Succession Act affected the joint family in a great way.

Urbanisation: The process of urbanization has also affected the pattern of family life in India. There is a shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. Population pressure on land, education and the prospects for better jobs, medical care and better means of living has led to the migration from rural to urban areas which has affected the joint family.

Changing gender equations: Over last one century gender equations have witnessed major shifts. Traditional joint families had little space for women's autonomy. Women had to bear the brunt of maintaining household work as well as social relations. With expanding horizons of women's education and employment women especially from upper caste families have entered the public sphere with little time for household work and investment in interpersonal relations. Smaller family size also contributes to this phenomenon.

Though the joint family system has seen various changes K.M. Kapadia (1972) has observed that those who migrated to the cities still retain their bonds with their joint family in the village and town. They families may set up residence separately but still retain their kinship orientation and joint family ethic. This is evident in the performance of certain role obligations which include physical and financial assistance to kin members. Milton Singer (1968) and Kolenda (1987) find that industrialization has served to strengthen the joint family because an economic base has been provided to support it or because more hands are needed in a renewed family enterprise or because kin can help one another in striving for upward mobility. Thus, the joint family may seem to be breaking up but it still retains a bond between its members among certain kin groups.

Changes in the Caste System

Studies by historians like Romila Thapar (1979), A.R. Desai (1984), and M.N. Srinivas(1964) have shown that Indian society was never static. The main traditional avenues of social mobility were sanskritization, migration and religious conversion. Lower castes or tribes could move upward in the caste hierarchy through acquisition of wealth and political power. They could consequently claim higher caste status along with sanskritising their way of life, by emulating the life style and customs of higher caste.

Occupational association of caste has marginally changed in rural areas. Brahmins may still work as priest but they have also taken to agriculture. Landowning dominant

castes belonging to both upper and middle rung of caste hierarchy generally work as supervisory farmers. Other non-landowning lower castes, including small and marginal peasants, work as wage labourers in agriculture. Artisan castes like carpenters and iron-smith continue with their traditional occupations. However, migration to urban areas has enabled individuals from all castes including untouchables to enter into non-traditional occupations in industry, trade and commerce and services.

Inter-caste marriage is almost non-existent in rural areas. Restrictions on food, drink and smoking continue but to a lesser degree because of the presence of tea stalls in villages patronized by nearly all the castes. The hold of untouchability has lessened and distinction in dress has become more a matter of income than caste affiliation. People migrate to cities and bring back money which has changed the traditional social structure. Caste has acquired an additional role in the operation of interests groups and association in politics since the introduction of representative parliament politics.

Thus, we find that caste has undergone adaptive changes. Its traditional features, i.e., connubial (matrimonial), commensal (eating together) and ritual, still prevail in rural areas. The core characteristics of the castes, which have affected the social relations, are still operative. However, the status quo of the intermediate and low castes has changed due to their acquiring political and economic power. The hegemony of the high castes has given way to differentiation of these statuses in some regions of India so that high castes do not necessarily occupy a higher class position or power.

Factors for Casteism

Casteism is partial or one-sided loyalty in favour of a particular caste. It is a blind group loyalty towards one's own caste or sub-caste which does not care for the interest of the other castes and seeks to realize the social, economic, political and other interests of its own group. The factors of casteism are as follows:

1. **Sense of Caste Prestige:** the most prominent cause of casteism is the desire of people belonging to a particular caste to enhance the prestige of their own caste. In order to achieve this objective every caste provides its members with all the possible privileges in order to raise their social status.
2. **Endogamy or Marriage Restrictions:** Under the caste system the restrictions that apply to marriage turn every caste into a monogamous group in which each individual looks upon himself as related in some way to all the others and for this reason the solidarity within caste group increases which in its turn encourages caste.
3. **Urbanization:** With the advent of urbanization it became possible for all caste to collect in large numbers in towns and cities.
4. **Modernization:** Modernization has lead to better communication and better means of transport which help in the spread of propaganda. This improvement has led to the establishment of intimate relationships between members of a caste who were previously separated because of distance. The feeling of casteism is also easily spread through the medium of newspapers, journals and the internet.

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