



**Social
Institutions
among
the Hindus**

S. K. Ramachandra Rao



SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AMONG THE HINDUS

VIDYALANKARA

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TO

DR V. K. GOKAK

AS A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE

FOR HIS AFFECTIONATE INTEREST IN ME

CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	9
Social Institutions—Indian Civilization—Dharma—Institutional Arrangements—The Fourfold Purpose	
CHAPTER II: ENDURING GROUP ORGANIZATIONS	22
Caste System—The Problems thereof—Race and Culture Contacts—Varna and the Evolution of Castes—Characteristics of Caste-Society—Untouchability	
CHAPTER III: DOMESTIC DESIGN AND SACRAMENTAL SANCTIONS	41
Family in India—Saṃskāras—Their Social Implications—Āśramas	
CHAPTER IV: MARRIAGE, WOMAN AND HOME	52
CHAPTER V: REASON, REFORM AND REVOLUTION	68
Social Disintegration—English Education—Reformers—Prohibition of Sati—Widow Remarriages—Prohibition of Child Marriages—Social Legislation—Depressed Classes	
APPENDIX: ASPECTS OF INDIAN SOCIAL HISTORY	78
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

PREFACE

A knowledge of India would be incomplete without understanding her social institutions. These institutions have their own philosophy; and they have made a deep impact on the life in this country for over two thousand years. Weather-beaten and rusted, they are still positive forces in contemporary India.

But it is by no means easy to understand them aright. Prejudices, memories and scars are likely to vitiate a proper appraisal of the values and benefits of these social mechanisms. The phenomenon of diffusion and cultural redintegrations have brought about such an endless variety in these institutions, such a hopeless medley of customs and conventions that a tidy analysis seems almost impossible. Historical reconstructions and political evaluations have of course been attempted; but they do not tell the whole story. Social Anthropology and Social Psychology are disciplines that can afford a better insight into the meaning of these institutions.

I taught this subject to post-graduate students specialising in clinical and social psychology, for over ten years at the All-India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore. This course in Indian Social Institutions was supplemented by courses in Anthropology (social and cultural) and Social Psychology which subjects also I taught. I had therefore an opportunity to consider the problem of social institutions in a fresh light. This book has mainly grown out of my lecture notes for the above course.

It was the late Dr M. V. Govindaswami, who was the Director of this Institute from its inception till 1960, that had the wisdom to include this subject as worthwhile for clinical and social psychologists. I am indebted to him for the opportunity he gave me not only to teach the subject but to prepare the syllabus and draw up a programme of research in the subject.

I am indebted to my friend, Mr M. Sathyanarayana Rao of Rao and Raghavan, Publishers, Mysore, for having undertaken to publish this book and for having brought it out so neatly. My thanks are due to the Wesley Press, Mysore, the printers of this book.

Bangalore
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S. K. RAMACHANDRA RAO

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AMONG THE HINDUS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are by nature gregarious; they tend, untaught, to live in aggregates. A society is thereby built and maintained, for profit and for pleasure. By birth and by constitution men are truly animals; it is society that makes them human. Most of our actions are hard to explain except in a social context. Society, however, is a concept; it is a reification. What is real is the ensemble of social processes; they occur contemporaneously, and are events in the real world of space and time. But the social processes tend to get repeated, to be common for several individuals, to be uniform among several groups of individuals. Over space and time they occur in bundles; they assume the form of bubbles and float across the waters of the social continuum. Generations of individuals swim through these bubbles, and the bubbles get hardened. They become more real than the individuals that enliven them, they endure for longer durations than generations, and they begin to guide and control the movements of individuals in any generation. We call these real, enduring, restraining social bubbles 'social institutions'. Every society has them; and all individuals live by them. It is impossible for society to survive without these institutions; indeed society is defined only as a pattern of its institutions. The individuals get socialised, find meaning in life and derive comfort and pleasure only when rocked in the cradle of these institutions.

An institution is defined as a fixed mode of thought and behaviour held by a community of individuals. Besides enjoying common acceptance, an institution can be communicated through generations by processes of acculturation and socialisation. It is so strongly held and so zealously guarded against infringements that the deviant is at once singled out as a source

of disturbance. In fact, if culture is regarded as social heredity, as Ralph Linton does, it occurs only as a collection of institutions by which the individuals live together.

Institutions emerge as perfections of cultural processes. Every culture has typical modes of behaviour, and they mature and get stylised into institutions. Food-seeking, God-seeking, sex-satisfactions, child-bearing and child-rearing, production and consumption, art-expressions like singing and dancing, play and community transactions, are all involved in this stylisation. These are universal contents; culture equips them with distinctive forms. It is important to recognise that every social institution reflects the needs of individuals in the community. As long as the needs retain their demanding character, the survival of these institutions is assured.

The formal aspects of an institution change with the changing needs of the community. When institutions survive beyond their utility, they become sources of stress, distress and conflict. In contemporary society we have numerous instances of tension in groups due to such unnecessary survivals. There are instances of institutions failing large groups of individuals, but struggling to survive by force of habit or because of vested interests. Even when institutions do not change, they become subject to rearrangement processes. For institutions are related to each other, and are directed towards the individual's total environment. When the character of the environment changes, it is impossible for an erring institution to continue to enjoy unshakable fixity.

Institutional arrangements take the form of Home (sex, child-rearing, family relationships), Industry (work, production of utility goods, consumption, money, technology), Religion (worship, adjustment to the mysterious and the supernatural), State (governmental agencies, law, control), Education (adaptation, training in socialisation, role assumptions) and Science (search for truth, control of environment). There are also composite institutions involving one or more of the above, and resulting from recreational and creative processes.

Human societies reveal individual differences. The soil and the seasons, the fauna and the flora, the delicacies and the difficulties, the contacts and the conflicts, the experiences and the expectations, the achievements and the aspirations of aggregates

of individuals render their societies peculiar and different. The historical vicissitudes through which each group passes leave an indelible stamp on the structure and functions of that society. The social institutions reflect this impact of changing events. It is necessary, therefore, to study a society's institutions against its historical background. But a merely historical approach would only quench the archaeological thirst, divorcing the details from current reality. To engender a purposive sociological inquiry, what is known as the contemporaneous approach is recommended. Our main interest is in the present social structure, its merits and foibles, of which each of us is a living unit; but to afford the proper perspective, historical reconstructions are necessary.

Like most things in our country, the roots of our social institutions are concealed in dense obscurity. And again, like most things, they have survived for a couple of thousands of years to our own day, bearing, however, the scars of time, change, mutation and rejuvenation. Indian history is on fairly firm ground since the advent of Āryans into the present-day Punjab about 2000 B.C. But archaeology has suggested the existence of a civilization of a relatively high order among the natives even before this time. Indeed the material remnants of this civilization (known to the scholars as Indus Valley civilization) were unearthed at several sites around Mehēnjo-dāro and Harappā during our own times. The available remnants indubitably reveal a rich background to the Vedic culture; but the racial stock of the people, social structure, political conditions, economic activities and religious inclinations are matters for speculation. It is clear, however, that the invading Āryan hosts destroyed this presumably prosperous and material civilization and zealously spread their own neither so prosperous nor so material civilization on the mainland.

The early Āryans are remembered by posterity for the compilation of their poetical activities in the shape of the Ṛgveda. We can glean from this delightfully picturesque, rich and ancient collection a thousand details concerning the olden days in our country. There were the dark-skinned native tribes who were masters of the land. It was a motley array of divergent, and frequently belligerent, groups; the cultural

levels were numerous, ranging from the utterly primitive and ferocious head-hunters, plain hunters and hill-folk, to the highly refined, urban and skilful Dravidians and Kôls. Racially distinct and culturally different were the fair-skinned and Sanskrit-speaking Āryan tribes that trickled into the country about five thousand years ago. There were, of course, clashes and compromises and when the Āryans who eventually proved superior to the natives, settled down to a peaceful existence on the banks of the rivers of the modern Punjab and along the banks of the mighty Gaṅgā, they set about organising their community and consolidating their position in the strange land. The earliest recognisable germs of the Hindu social institutions that we are considering must be traced in this attempt and assigned to this age.

The awareness of ethnic difference between themselves and the natives spurred the Āryans to clearly delineate the psychological frontiers of the new society they were forming. The Ṛgveda furnishes a contemporary record of the long-drawn and disastrous fights that ensued between the natives and the newcomers. The newcomers styled themselves as the Āryans (which came to mean in later times 'noble men'), in contradistinction to the natives whom they called Dasyus or Dāsas or sometimes Asuras (whose chieftains Śaṁbara, Piprū and Varcin caused grave concern to the Āryans). Indra is frequently represented as destroying the Dasyus and protecting the *Āryavarna*: Indra and Agni with one effort are reported to have shaken ninety cities that had Dāsa chieftains (*Rg.* 3.12.6.). There was, apart from the trouble created by aggression, a glaring contrast in the cultures of Āryans and Dasyus. The ethnocentric Āryans hated the native Dasyu for not honouring the ordinances of their own gods (*avrata*), for not performing the sacrifices they recognised (*akratu*), and for speaking indistinctly rolling words too fast for the Āryan ear (*mṛdhravācah*). The Āryans could not help perceiving the dark colour of the skin and the snub nose (*anāsa*) that the natives conspicuously possessed. The Āryans fought the natives on this alien land and became in due course undisputed masters of the land and its peoples. The natives were ruthlessly destroyed and those who survived were enslaved. For Kauṭilya, the expression 'Ārya' signifies 'a free man' while 'Dāsa' meant one who had

lost his freedom. It is significant that the great grammarian Pāṇini employs the expressions 'āryakṛta' (masculine) and 'āryakṛtī' (feminine) in the sense of 'made free'.

Thus at the dawn of our historical civilization, we find a small Āryan ingroup and large native outgroups. It is likely that in the early stages the natives were scrupulously kept out of the pale of Āryan community. The Vedic Āryans were busy building up a neat, secure and isolated social structure for themselves. But increased communication with the native outgroups which was, after all, natural and necessary, resulted in the induction of numerous persons from the outgroups into the fold of the Āryan community. This process was both continuous and widespread. The Āryan society enlarged itself and was therefore in a position to impress its culture all over the country.

But the entrance of the non-Āryans into the orbit of the Āryan community posed serious problems for the Āryan community-builders. They had not only to think in terms of social classes, but they had to lay down clear rules of conduct permissible in the Āryan community for the benefit and guidance of the newcomers. It was thus that the celebrated manuals of conduct known as *Dharmaśāstras* came to be written, very much like our handbooks of air-raid precautions or instructions for bank transactions. Notwithstanding minor differences in detail, the bulk of the injunctions and prohibitions were common to all manuals. They all alike recognised the caste system, *āśrama* arrangement, and the *saṁskāra* rites; and spoke about marriage regulations, food taboos, duties of royalty, civil and criminal laws, punishments and expiations. It should be recognised that when they came to be written, there was no ring of finality about them; decisions on practical issues were by no means unanimous. The law-givers merely provided broad frameworks, tacitly conceding deviations within limits. No single author of a *Dharmaśāstra* ever claimed to be an undisputed law-giver; he was only writing a dissertation based on his observation, experience and common-sense. Even when he tended to be dogmatic he was aware that he was no more powerful than a chronicler. It is wrong, therefore, to assume that these *Dharmaśāstras* clamped a rigid regimen in

matters of daily conduct on the whole Hindu society at any time.

The discussion on the sources of *dharma* (or regulated conduct) which is contained in every manual of this sort helps us to understand the emergence and survival of the customs and codes as but normal and necessary social institutions. Gautama, one of the early authors, points to three sources: the Vedic literature embodying the Āryan ideals, tradition in memory (*smṛti*), and the actual practices of those who knew this tradition. The famous Manu enlarges the scope of the sources and mentions five of them: Vedic records, traditional lore, the practices of those who are intimately acquainted with this tradition, the conduct of the good and just folk (*ācārah sādḥūnām*), and one's own satisfactions (*ātmanas tuṣṭih*). It becomes clear that the rules governing Hindu society were by no means static and final, impersonal and mandatory, but on the contrary dynamic and flexible, realistic and personal. The real foundation of a *dharma* was in the actual living of a citizen within the bounds of his own society satisfying all his needs squarely. No petrified letter, however divinely revealed, can ever hold sway over an entire nation for any length of time.

It cannot, however, be ignored that Hindu society did at one time become letter-bound, rigid and cancerously afflicted; many social institutions like caste and custom were no longer dynamic; the levers of adjustment got rusted and became inoperative. But this was not due to miscalculations or mischievous intentions on the part of the *Dharmaśāstras*, but the tides of unforeseen social occurrences heaved so relentlessly that the machinery creaked under the pressure and the safety valves burst. For the breakdown of our social institutions in the recent past, historical contacts and conflicts have been largely responsible.

We may resume the discussion on the emergence of the *Dharmaśāstras*. It has been held that the earliest authors of these manuals—Gautama, Āpastamba and Baudhāyana—lived between 600 and 300 years before the birth of Christ. At this point of time, the concept of *dharma* had already gained deep roots; and no one denies that this is the central concept of all our social institutions. An inquiry into what was the operational

import of this concept is germane, therefore, to a discussion on social institutions in India.

The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhṛ*, which means 'to uphold', 'to support', 'to bear', 'to nourish'. The Vedic literature frequently uses the expression in the neuter, in the sense of religious ordinances, time-honoured ordinances (*sanatā dharmāṇi*) which support the universe and uphold human life (e.g. *Ṛgveda* i, 187, 1; x, 92, 2). The *Vājasaneyi-saṁhitā* (li, 3) hints that these ordinances are immutable in character (*dhruveṇa dharmāṇā*). The *Atharva-veda* includes *dharma* in a group of emergent factors like truth, austerity, nationhood, effort, valour, and prosperity (xi. 9. 17). The ordinances here occur as effects of our attention, as the products of religious performances, as precious processes that grow and develop. The *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* employs the word as a collective concept when it refers to the 'preserver of dharma' (*dharmasya goptā*).

The same line of thinking is followed by the *Chāndogya*, which speaks of the three-fold aspects of *dharma* (*trayo dharmaskandhā*): the first comprising religious rites, study and charity, the second consisting of unbroken austerities, and the third characterised by living with the teacher in his household (2. 23). Here *dharma* signifies the totality of obligations and privileges obtaining in different stages of life. The first refers to the householder, the second to the forest-dwelling hermit, and the third to the residential student. We find that the *dharma* had by now already lost its abstract and ideal connotation and had taken a more realistic, concrete and operational significance. It is in this sense that Manu speaks of *varṇa-dharma*.

The brilliant commentator on Manu, Medhātithi, deals at length with the implications of the concept of *dharma*. According to him, the traditional approach refers to a five-fold *dharma*: regulations with regard to caste—(*varṇadharmā*), stages of life (*āśrama*), caste-in-stage (*varṇāśrama*), occasions or situations (*naimittika*), and rôles (*guṇa*). In this classification are involved professional and vocational groupings, developmental arrangements, intergroup relationships and societal participations. *Dharma* is thus the most important simple concept that justifies the emergence of several social institutions in our country.

The fixity of these institutional arrangements in consideration of the individual's needs and temperamental differences, so that the societal patterns may survive the operations and be communicated through space and time, is the core of the concept of *dharma*. The fixity is both necessary and unavoidable, because otherwise common acceptance of the values and ways of living becomes impossible and the fixity is sought to be maintained artificially by threats of punishment in case of infringement. We can now understand how *dharma* came to be looked upon as immutable tradition, as imperative obligation and a supreme duty.

But the fixity is not, cannot, in fact, be absolute, for *dharma* is dependent in the ultimate analysis on individual human beings and on their activities in order to build up social institutions. The motives on the part of human beings are all focused on the satisfaction of primary and secondary needs, and this has not been overlooked by the authors of *Dharmaśāstras*. Even when *dharma* is taken, as Jaimini does in the sense of Vedic injunctions, the inner promptings towards satisfactions are held as the essential function of *dharma*. Hence the formulation of the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā*: 'codanālakṣaṇo'rtho dharmah' (1. 1. 2). It is in the same spirit that the *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* defines *dharma* as instrumental to the obtainment of happiness here and of emancipation hereafter (yato abhyudaya-niḥśreyasa-siddhiḥ). It is indeed right that they recognised the individual motivational dynamics behind the social institutional arrangements.

It cannot be denied that the roots of *dharma* are to be found in the numerous Vedic injunctions (*śruti*), and that they are nourished by tradition-in-memory (*smṛti*). But it must be recognised that they are made firm by repeated actions by the leaders of the community (*śiṣṭācāra*). The old texts make use of an expression in this context: 'āryasamaya'. The expression means agreement between, or convention among, the elite of the community, with regard to approved actions; these actions should not merely be permissible but must be praiseworthy. The *Mahābhārata* holds that this aspect of *dharma*, namely the heroic standard of action, is superior to action in conformity with tradition, which in turn is superior to action implied in Vedic injunctions. Indian thinkers placed great emphasis

on model personalities in the community. In *Bhagavadgītā*, we find that Krishna speaks of the 'best' (*śrēṣṭha*) in the community—'whatever the best do, others follow' (3, 21). Even in an earlier age, the age of the Upanishads, the same outlook was prevalent. In the *Taittirīya*, for instance, in the course of the famous 'instructions' (*śikṣā*), the teacher admonishes the pupil: 'In case of doubt about the propriety of your actions, look around and observe how the best in the community behave in the circumstances. Take their actions as examples.'

The actions thus upheld by the respected elders in the community by repeated indulgence are styled 'excellent custom' (*ācāra* or *sadācāra*): it is the same as usage with a binding character. This forms the pivot for our social institutions. But custom is of various stamps. There are customs current in different localities, determined by history, traditions and the temperament of the people. These are known as *deśācāras* or provincial customs. There are customs prevalent in a family, maintained by its members with a regard for family prestige: these are known as *kulācāras* or family customs. There are, again, customs applicable to the entire vocational group or caste, and these are termed *jātyācāras* or caste customs. The customs and usages obtaining in the family are held to be most binding. The *Smṛtimuktāphala* avers that they are superior even to the scriptural injunctions. This is understandable, as the family usages necessarily involve the essential aspects of both the provincial and caste usages. They serve, therefore, as most useful models for the growing individual in society.

Intimately bound with the idea of *dharma* are the other three concepts, wealth (*artha*), pleasures (*kāma*), and salvation (*mokṣa*). These four comprise the major human purposes (*puruṣārtha*) in Indian thought. The ideology of purposes is basic to all our social institutions, major and minor. The four purposes are designed not only to fulfil the social demands, but to satisfy the biological urges and the psychological appetites as well. They recognise that the human being is in his nature biopsychosocial and that his social behaviour is necessarily bound up with psychological and constitutional considerations. They, in fact, provide the rationale for caste organisation and *āśrama* arrangement.

The fourth purpose, viz., spiritual perfection or emancipation from the round of births and deaths, or simply salvation, is assuredly a late arrival in the scheme of purposes. The old texts recognise only the first three, and we do not come across *mokṣa* as a common human purpose until a late date in our history. Possibly the impact of early Buddhism helped the emergence of ascetic groups as socially approved units and the sole business of the members of these fraternities (*sanghas*) was to strive for salvation,—out and out an individual fulfilment, with little regard to social needs and values. We shall return to this discussion later, when we consider the institution of *sanyāsa*. Originally the purposes were only three: *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*. Gautama mentions only these three and characterises the purposes as threefold (*trivarga*). Manu takes up this lead and confines his attention to the *trivarga* (II, 224). The *Mahābhārata* too considers only these three (*tritayam*) as effects in life (*jīvite phalam*, *Anuśāsanaparvan*, 3, 18-19).

The importance of wealth in social life was fully realised by the author of *Arthaśāstra*, Kauṭilya. He was responsible for the famous dictum: 'Wealth is important inasmuch as both pleasures and polity depend on it.' He it was that emphasised that wealth is the most basic of human requirements and that social well-being depends ultimately on material prosperity. Devoid of the confidence that money gives, neither physical pleasure nor social earnestness is possible. But *artha* does not mean money in its limited sense of an approved instrument of exchange; it comprehends all objects and tools that are employed to obtain the other two ends of human life, *kāma* and *dharma*. *Artha*, in the sense in which Kauṭilya has employed the expression, includes wealth of the individual as well as the wealth of the nation, and Kauṭilya recognises that the wealth of a nation includes the individuals themselves. The aggregate of individuals together with all the agencies and inventions it brings about reflecting the needs of the individuals, are included in this concept. We may in this sense speak of *artha* as institutionalised wealth. Acquisition (*ārjanam*) and the improvement of the acquisition (*ārjitasya vivardhanam*) are both involved in this notion.

Contrary to the common notion that Indian thought condemns, or at least ignores, worldly pleasures, we find that all

the scriptures and *Dharmaśāstras* delicately but clearly point out that pleasures form an important ingredient in human life. Kauṭilya roundly pronounces that no one is justified in rejecting pleasures ('na nihsukhah syāt') (1, 7). He was supported by the ancient Āpastamba, who enjoined that one should get the best of both the worlds ('ubhau lokau abhijayati') (II, 8, 20f). However, it was Vātsyāyana who dogmatised on the primacy of pleasures. He attempted to arrange the three purposes in a hierarchy, valuing *dharma* lowest and *kāma* highest. Pleasures are constitutional inclinations, and they are for most of us the very cream of life. Fighting the natural proclivities would be of little avail for the majority of mankind, and the social institutions in this country have fully appreciated this fact.

But the pursuit of profit or of pleasure when unreasonable or unchecked, can be detrimental to the best interests of the individual as well as of the society. Social interests and collective considerations should necessarily temper the biological and egotistic urges of the individual. Indian thought holds out that *dharma*, the inner light of social conscience, should guide both *artha* and *kāma*. Even as upright living without profit or pleasure is undesirable, profit or pleasure without an upright attitude would be undesirable. The *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* points out that *dharma* without pleasures comes to be hated by the world; but one should, the text continues, take care to avoid the pleasures that are injurious to the interests of *dharma*. Kṛiṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* identifies himself with pleasures that are not repugnant to *dharma* (*dharmāviruddhah kāmo'smi'*) (7,11). The author of the *Mahābhārata* concludes the great epic with the poignant reflection that although it is from *dharma* that wealth and pleasures derive their justification, no one pursues *dharma* as zealously as he does the other two. The reflection highlights the human weaknesses and explains the rational basis on which our social institutions have been founded.

The idea of *dharma* as basic to the social organisation in India is broadbased and admits of universal application. In fact, the social *dharma* is described as general in its scope (*sāmānyadharma*) and as founded on sound common-sense. This consists of obligations and responsibilities, regardless of individual

differences; they are common to all castes, and even the outcaste *caṇḍālas* were not precluded from them. Truth, generosity, compassion, sympathy, cleanliness, restraint, forgiveness, non-enmity, friendliness, absence of selfishness, absence of jealousy and envy, straightforwardness and similar traits are mentioned in the old texts as composing the social *dharma*. Different lists are given, but values like truth, charity, non-violence, non-enmity and restraint are common to them all.

The selection of these traits follows a principle of universal validity: Treat others as you would like others to treat you. The sage Devala lays down, 'Attend to this, the essence of *dharma*: do not do to others what you would not do to yourself' (cited in *Kṛtyaratnākara*, p. 17). The *Mahābhārata* in the same vein counsels: 'Put yourself in the position of others (*ātmaupamyena*) and then act. Do not do to others what you would consider harmful to yourself. This in brief is *dharma*' (*Anuśāsanaparvan*, 113, 8, 9). The inner light of conscience is mindful of the welfare of all, and minimises ego-involvement in institutional behaviour. Here is the recognition that social institutions are primarily meant to achieve the greatest good of all the members of the society and that groupings on whatever basis should not upset the essential human balance.

It is true that Indian society appears to have specialised in groupings, to possess a genius for erecting barriers between groups and to effect isolations in several institutional units. In this country castes and subcastes, sects and subsects are almost legion and they bewilder an outsider by their infinite restrictions. Intergroup conflicts and rivalries have occasionally engendered in this subcontinent considerable fire and fury. Notwithstanding all this, and all that has suffered from prejudiced and exaggerated reports, the emergence of social institutions in India has been motivated by the rightest of considerations; the fundamental premises were absolutely human and universal, and entirely devoid of the spirit of exploitation of the unprivileged masses by the privileged minorities, whether priestly or royal. The concept of *dharma* and the explanations falsify the assumption that *dharma* as the basis of social organisation was the mischievous invention of a few in order to enslave the masses. In fact,

dharma is not specifically Indian in its scope. Ignore the Vedic tradition and all the rest that makes Indian culture, ignore the long history of this great people, ignore the stupendous social institutions that have appeared in this mysterious land, the idea of *dharma* can still stand unaffected. Indians gave birth to this idea, but it was not only the Indians that the idea encountered but all human beings. It was a gift of Indian genius and an idea for all humanity was ushered in. Nothing that has happened in our history can take away the importance of this Indian contribution to mankind.

CHAPTER II

ENDURING GROUP ORGANIZATIONS

There is hardly a social institution in the world that has come to such disrepute as the Indian caste system. Writers have taken sides and fought whether it is a wise or a wicked system. Arguments can be adduced to uphold that the system was both necessary and beneficent; arguments can also be adduced to support the contention that it has been the most disastrous arrangement. Passion and prejudice have combined to muddle the issue; and outsiders ignorant of the rationale of the caste system or its contemporary implications have fanned the fire of frustrations and raked up the forgotten rivalries. Social disabilities and political failures of groups are not infrequently ascribed to the whimsicalities of the caste structure. Militant words like oppression and exploitation are freely bandied about when caste is considered. Indeed it appears impossible to discuss the problem of caste in India dispassionately, in a non-partisan or purely academic spirit.

The reason for this is not far to seek. Caste rigidity is no doubt a longstanding trait of our society; the cleavage of the community into privileged and unprivileged groups has disturbed the normal coordinations within the population. The growing discontent among increasing sections of the people owing to unreasonable caste barriers is not unreal; the hierarchical arrangement of castes that was clamped on the community at some point in our history has no doubt evoked deep resentments. All this is true, but when did all this come to be?

There were attempts even during mediaeval times by social and religious reformers to settle the caste confusions and to undo the evil influences of the system; there were some attempts to eliminate the institution altogether. There is no doubt that Indians have been thinking vigorously about the issue for several centuries now. But there is no evidence to suppose that before the advent of the British on the Indian scene the problem was to any considerable degree venomous; it was the imperialist intention that poured poison into this problem. The English adventurers realised that the so-called

higher castes were dangerous to their Empire, during what they called the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (really, the first Indian War of Independence). The Bengal army was chiefly composed of Brāhmins and Rājputs, who showed that they could not be relied on to be mere passive instruments, always obedient to foreign rulers. There was in England a persistent demand to minimise the recruitment to the Indian army from these groups. The Commission of Lord Peel recommended that the Indian army should be composed of different nationalities and castes. After the great Mutiny, the British administrators were convinced that the only way to keep India in the Empire was to encourage fissions in the population: 'Divide and Rule' became their policy.

The British began to enlist, to safeguard their own interests in India, the sympathy and loyalty of the underprivileged and unprivileged groups by offering occupational and other incentives. The Finance Department of the Bombay Government, for instance, prohibited in an order dated September 17, 1923, the recruitment of Brāhmins to certain cadres of service. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms brought out caste distinctions in bold relief. The Indian army was increasingly purged of officers belonging to certain castes. This interested overture by the Empire-builders unleashed all over the country a sense of discontent with regard to caste status among several major social groups. The awareness on the part of the leaders of these groups that they had been discriminated against by the privileged castes resulted in several movements like the Satya Shodhaka Samāj (of Jyoti Rao Phule of Poona), the Madras Non-Brahmin Party, the Justice Party, the Draviḍa Kaḍhagam (of E. V. R. Naicker) and the Draviḍa-Munnētra-Kaḍhagam. These movements were no doubt motivated by genuine grievances, and they have helped considerably to right the wrongs done over centuries. While the agitation from these caste groups was amply justified, one should not forget that it was the anxious government that provided the stimulus, and actively encouraged the agitation. This legacy of British diplomacy had taken such deep root that independent India had no alternative except to accommodate the problem in her constitution.

This, however, is not to deny either the reality of castes or the severity of the problem in India. But it is a mistake to

suppose that caste groupings are peculiar to Indian society alone. It is true that strictly vocational units irrationally reinforced by hereditary considerations constitute the unique characteristic of castes in this country. But this kind of grouping and this ideology of discrimination have been found in many other civilizations. Consider, for instance, the social histories of Egypt, Rome, Japan, China and Persia: they reveal that in these countries caste system of one type or another did exist, although it did not survive for long. In Egypt and Japan the caste organisation was, as in India, occupational, hereditary and compulsory. Analogous institutions have been found in Madagascar, in Africa, in the Fiji Islands, in Burma and in Ceylon. The social status of the Eta outcastes in Japan was not any less severe than their Indian counterparts.

Distinctions in the matter of wealth, status, nobility, sophistication and profession continue to haunt all countries. If feelings of superiority and isolation are the major implications of casteism, if social disabilities and denial of communications mark the spirit of caste organisation, which nation even in the modern world is free from caste structure? The American sociologist Francis E. Merrill has written about the caste system as prevailing in contemporary America (*Society and Culture*, 1957, Prentice-Hall, pp. 285 f.). The world has not forgotten the cruel discriminations made against the Negroes in America, the Israelites in Egypt and the Poles in Nazi Germany. It may be that our country has preserved and perpetuated this social institution with common approbation and that incredible social injustice has stemmed from it. But if social distance is all that matters in caste ideology, no country is an exception to the psychological forces involved in it.

Group conflict in any society is not by any means unnatural; it is even necessary for progress. The very fact that for efficient functioning the society, like any organism, must be structured and composed of distinct and functionally independent units implies that each unit while contributing to the total form has a unique aspect which tends to isolate it from the rest. And one of the techniques for maintaining this isolation is to develop all round the unit impermeable barriers, which of course not infrequently occasion frictions. The frictions generate fresh activity and facilitate greater interaction among the units.

We see this principle in operation everywhere in the world. Both biological and human evolutions accommodate this necessary, although unpleasant, stress. This is how cells behave and that is how life goes on.

It must, however, be acknowledged that India has practised casteism of an extreme variety, and for the longest period in history. The ill-effects incidental to this system are so widespread and conspicuous that one is tempted to agree with Maine when he described the system as 'the most disastrous and blighting of all human institutions', or even with Sherring who cried out with passion that it was 'the most baneful, hard-hearted and cruel social system that could possibly be invented for damning the human race'. But it had also its brighter aspects. No social institution ever gets invented by a handful of rogues, the rest of the country innocently getting cheated into it. An institution that enveloped the whole nation and survived for centuries must necessarily have its own logic, its own justifications, its own appeal, and its own utility. There is undoubtedly some truth in the remark of Abbe Dubois that if the people of India never sank into barbarism, it was because of the caste system. If a caustic critic of Indian thought like the Abbe could regard the institution of castes as 'the happiest effort of Hindu legislation', there must surely be something in it. Sidney Low in his *Vision of India* has the following to say about the Indian castes '... fundamental stability of the society has been braced up for centuries against the shocks of politics and cataclysms of nature. The caste system provides every man with his place, his career, his occupation, his circle of friends. It makes him at the outset a member of a corporate body, it protects him through life from the canker of social jealousy and unfulfilled aspirations; it ensures him companionship and a sense of community with others. Caste organisation to the Hindu is his club, his trade union, his benefit society, his philanthropic society'. This picture is to be kept in view even when we consider the most sinister aspects of the caste system in our country.

The Sacred Council of Goa issued in 1567 a decree wherein the 'Gentoos' (Hindus) were described as dividing themselves into distinct *castas* (races or castes) of differential

dignity. The Portuguese word *casta* employed in this decree (used earlier, in 1563 for the first time by Gracia de Orta) meant breed, and indicated racial distinctions. Since the date of the decree, the word caste is being increasingly employed to describe the social stratifications in India. While very few would seriously dispute the ultimate racial components in the caste distinctions, the present-day caste structure cannot adequately be explained by racial groupings. Caste is, therefore, a wrong expression in the context of social organisation in this country. The social distance kept among castes is not always, nor even often, ascribable to racial prejudices. Castes in India do not differ as, for instance, the Negroes and the Whites do in America, or the dark natives and the Whites do in Rhodesia. As Hutton rightly remarks, the Indian caste is an institution of highly complex origin; it is not merely the ramifications of racial differentiations.

But the element of race did contribute considerably to caste structures. A look at the Indian peoples inhabiting the different states would convince one of the rôle of racial variety. The tall, long-headed, fair complexioned Punjabi or Kashmiri or Rajasthani is easily distinguished from the dark, round-headed, medium statured Bengali or Oriya; the light brown, short-statured Bihari is as easily distinguished from the dark complexioned, long-headed, broad-nosed South Indian. There are indisputably racial differences in this country. Risley has analysed the Indian people from the point of racial characteristics and he finds that the following classification obtains:

- (1) Turko-Irānian (Frontier provinces)
- (2) Indo-Āryan (Punjab, Kashmir, Rajasthan)
- (3) Scytho-Dravidian (Madhya Pradesh, Saurashtra, Coorg)
- (4) Āryo-Dravidian (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar)
- (5) Mongolo-Dravidian (Bengal, Orissa)
- (6) Mongoloid (Nepal, Assam, Himalayan regions)
- (7) Dravidian (South India, Madhya Pradesh, Chota Nagpur)

Besides the above, the primitive tribes of Cochin-Travancore like the Kadars and the Mala-Pantarans suggest a Negrito ancestry; there are tribes indicating Proto-Australoid (or Pre-Dravidian) affinities.

The history of India reveals that from very early times racial amalgamations in varying degrees have occurred. The Indo-Āryans who gave India its distinctive culture were themselves not native to this soil; they arrived in India about two thousand odd years before the Christian era. They had to combat and assimilate several aboriginal tribes collectively designated as the Dasyu or Dāsa. It is conjectured that these latter were of the Kolarian, Dravidian stock. Thus, at the very dawn of our history racial admixture has been socially expedient. About 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Persians, Greeks, and Śakas (Scythians) came to India. In the early centuries, before the present era, the nomadic Kushānas from Central Asia arrived here. By about the first century the Spanish Jews landed on the Malabar Coast, and since then an ancient Jewish pocket has been in existence in extreme South India. In the fifth century the wild Huns, in the eighth the Arabs, and in the sixteenth the Mughals invaded India. They came, conquered and settled down. By about this time the Portuguese had made Goa their home, the Mongoloid Shans had come into Assam, and the Mongolians had begun to inhabit the mountainous tracts in the North.

This continuous influx of outside peoples has rendered the social fabric of India not only complex but colourful. The caste system emerged as necessarily incidental to these widespread and unceasing racial contacts and cultural transactions on the Indian soil. There are, however, no pure races, nor unique culture groups. Admixtures and amalgamations have been the rule. But there have been, and there are, distinct tribes as isolated survivals, outside the caste structure, although the tendency has always been in favour of assimilation. In the hierarchical arrangement of castes, lower down the ladder, we have several castes which are predominantly tribal in origin. Above them are castes consisting of families and groups originally tribal but to a large extent assimilated into the culture complex. Even today we find the process of assimilation in operation: tribes like the Bhils, the Bāñjāras, the Gôṇḍs, the Baigas, the Kôrku, the Maṇipūris and the Toḍas are getting increasingly Hinduised. These assimilated tribes tend to acquire caste status with occupational differentials in village economy. Due to the insufficiency of enculturation

these newly formed castes are apt to lag behind in matters of education and economy.

The Government of India in its census report of 1931 countenanced the problem of these backward or depressed castes (or what was technically known as exterior castes) with predominantly Pre-Dravidian, Australoid and Mongolian racial elements. At that time, the following was the State-wise composition of these backward castes in the Indian population:

State	Percentage to Population
Travancore	... 35
Uttar Pradesh	... 23
Assam	... 21
Hyderabad	... 17
Bihar and Orissa	... 15
Mysore	... 15
Madras	... 15
Bengal	... 14
Bombay	... 8
Punjab	... 5
Jammu and Kashmir	... 5
N.W.F. Provinces	... Nil
Baluchistan	... Nil

When the Government undertook to provide special safeguards for these backward castes in order to facilitate their progress, anthropological considerations gave way to political pressures. The backward castes (or classes) began to include numerous castes of intermediate ranks and even the culturally interior castes; the major part of the population, in fact three-fourths of the people in India, began to be represented as backward!

Apart from the ethnic and cultural errors involved in this politically oriented classification, the differences defended by prejudice and passion discourage amalgamations and assimilations. Adult franchise and the urge for political power have combined to render each group rigorously ethnocentric, and to reduce the degree of tolerance between groups. Ethnocentric individuals tend to be indiscriminately antagonistic and suspicious towards reference groups. The obsession with status interferes with normal and healthy interpersonal relations. It is a fact

that special stress has been generated by the discrepancy between the democratic ideals of equality and the practice of discrimination by certain castes. But, as Erich Fromm points out, discrimination and inferior status do not always have adverse consequences, the discriminated groups do not necessarily show signs of emotional disturbance. On the contrary, history records healthy adjustments and mature intergroup relationships in such cases until the desire for power engenders social prejudice. The members of castes begin to express prejudice and hostility, not because of any real personal grievances or feelings of insecurity, but because antagonistic feelings are in the air around them.

An understanding of the development of the caste system does not by any means afford the key to the present chaos of casteism in India. But it furnishes interesting data to understand the caste system aright. Two Indian words of considerable antiquity, *Varṇa* and *Ĵāti*, cover the implications of caste. Neither word, however, can adequately comprehend all that we mean by the English word. *Varṇa* means class and there are traditionally four *varṇas*: Brāhmaṇa (priestly class), Kṣatriya (warrior class), Vaiśya (commonalty) and Śūdra (servile class). *Varṇa* also means colour and there prevails a custom of chromatically identifying the above classes with white, red, yellow and black colours respectively. This is a symbolic enunciation of the temperamental peculiarities of the classes referred to. Generally the *Varṇas* are only four, the four classic groups. Originally, however, only the first three *Varṇas* (*traivarnā*) were recognised, the fourth emerging at a later date as a miscellaneous collection of several tribal and occupational groups. The word Śūdra is not to be found in the early Vedic records. But since very early times the population of India has been dichotomously divided into those belonging to the *Varṇas* (*savarnā*) and those outside the *Varṇa* grouping (*varṇabāhira*), the latter representing the numerous uncultured tribes and exterior castes.

The ideology of *Varṇa* had perhaps a racial origin; but we cannot dogmatise on this. The word, as employed in the old texts, stands for specific culture, character, professional rôle, not necessarily determined by birth or heredity. The other expression *Ĵāti*, not so ancient as *Varṇa*, literally means birth

and refers primarily to groups the membership of which is solely determined by birth. The earliest employment of the word in this sense is to be found in the *Nirukta*; and the law-givers like Gautama, Manu and Nārada speak of *ġāti-dharmas*. It is *ġāti* that roughly corresponds to what we today mean by caste and *Varṇas* are in fact groups of castes. It cannot, of course, be denied that the two words are frequently used in our books as almost synonymous.

The fourfold division of the population became obsolete quite early in our social history, and even during the Vedic times there were numerous occupational castes like the Barber (*Vaptā*), Carpenter (*tvastā*), Physician (*bhīṣak*), Tanner (*carmāra*), Potter (*kulāla*), Iron-smith (*karmāra*), Actor (*śailūṣa*), Chariot-maker (*rathakāra*) and so on. The *Dharma-sūtras* as well as the Buddhist texts present the picture of a society accommodating hundreds of endogamous castes. Even an outsider like Megasthenes, who visited India before the Christian era, found that the population presented a seven-fold division: philosophers; husbandmen; neatherds and shepherds; artisans; military men; overseers; and councillors and assessors. This was, of course, a very broad classification and ignored the minor and inclusive groups, which he had no equipment to observe or understand.

It is estimated that today India has about three thousand castes; 2,378 of them were enumerated as early as 1901. In each of these, birth determines membership and endogamy is a rule, most of them have characteristic vocations which are in most cases fixed by immemorial tradition. And there are barriers of varying strength between one caste and another in matters of social communication and interactions among individuals. Members of a caste, for instance, are restrained by unwritten laws and longstanding convention from eating and drinking with members of another caste. The violations of caste restrictions would render the errant individual liable to be expelled from the caste, temporarily or permanently depending on the graveness of the error. Caste membership is usually fixed for life and transition from one caste to another is almost impossible. The most disturbing feature of the Indian caste system is the hierarchical gradations of castes with impositions of disabilities on the lower ones. There is

considerable truth in the assertion of Sherring that 'caste makes no compromises'. Caste is more or less a rigid social structure, the purpose of which appears to make a plural society like ours socially, economically and politically stable.

It is to be conceded that in the hierarchical gradation of castes the Brāhmin occupies the highest position and that by virtue of this superior position he enjoys the greatest possible freedom, ease, and respect within the milieu of the caste system. But it would be wrong to suppose, as Abbe Dubois did, that the entire caste structure was his ingenious device, imposed on the whole country to his own advantage. Any discerning social scientist will at once recognise that the development of the caste system in India is more organic than artificial. The social history of the country illustrates the enormous influence of the Kṣatriya groups, and the prevailing custom in most parts of India makes the ruling chief undisputed authority in matters of caste administration. Some kings, like the Mahārāja of Manipur, the Gaekwār of Baroda and the Rājā of Bastār were considered competent even to admit an individual to a caste higher than his own, or expel him from the caste to which he belonged by birth. Caste disputes and caste offences usually came up for decision before a king, and his ruling was final.

Further, barring a few higher castes, all the castes in India are governed by their own councils or *pañcāyats*, which are zealous advocates of individuality and rigidity. These caste *pañcāyats* are to a large extent responsible for the perpetuation of the caste system in India. Hutton is right in emphasising that castes act corporately and that in every caste the behaviour of its component members is controlled thereby. The caste council, at any rate in the rural areas, has powers to regulate the behaviour of caste members to dictate, to impose penalties, and to excommunicate.

In determining the differential status of the castes, the village economy which is so characteristic of the country also played an important rôle. Ownership of landed property and freedom from the obligation to do manual labour on the fields conferred a higher caste status relative to other sections of the population. Occupations incidental to farming were likewise arranged in hierarchical positions: artisans, for instance, were

ranked lower than farmers. There were, as Hutton has noted, numerous gradations of peasant and agricultural castes and the field labourers formed the lowest caste.

Economically unspecified and socially indefinite avocations had a tendency to agglutinate into miscellaneous units and even in the days of Kātyāyana and Patañjali (about 150 B.C.) we hear of many caste-groups (*samūha*, *varga*, *vrāta*, *gaṇa* or *śreṇi*) and professional guilds (*saṅghas*). As early as the Vedic period there were, as we have seen above, barbers, carpenters, physicians, iron-smiths, tanners, chariot-makers, potters, actors and other professional groups not amenable to regular caste classifications. In the centuries before the Christian era, we have the testimony of Megasthenes that the seven broad groupings in India were not identifiable as specific castes; they were rather caste-groups.

The Vedic literature affords an insight into the beginnings of the caste structure. The Vedas employ the expression *Varṇa* in the sense of group and make a sharp distinction between the Āryans (*Ārya-varṇa*) and the aboriginal *dasyus* or *dāsas* (*asura-varṇa*). There can be no doubt that there were severe conflicts and frequent skirmishes between the fair-complexioned newcomers and the dark natives. The *Rgveda* mentions again and again that the protectors of the *Ārya-varṇa* like Indra, Soma and Agni vanquished the *dasyus* (II. 12. 4; III. 34. 9; III. 12. 6; IX. 41. 1). The *dasyus* were segregated from the Āryan colonists not only by their complexion, but by what appeared to the newcomers as offensive cults, by their refusal to obey the ordinances of the Āryan gods (*avrata*), by their rejection of sacrifices (*akratu*), by their soft indistinct speech (*mṛdhravācah*) and by their snub nose (*anāsa*); the Āryans looked upon them as greedy traders (*paṇis*), faithless (*āsraddhān*) and irreligious (*ayajñān*). But the two groups were not always at war with each other. We read in the *Rgveda* (I. 179. 6) that the fierce sage Agastya protected both the groups. The loud invocations that reach Indra come from the five groups (*pancha-janya*), which include the four *Ārya-varṇas* and the *dasyus* or *niṣādas*. We also glean from the Vedic passages that the Āryans were fighting among themselves and that there were Āryan enemies ranked with the inimical *dasyus* (*Rgveda* vi-22-10; vi-60-6; vii-83-1; x-69-6; x-83-1; x-102-3).

It does credit to the Vedic composers to note that they, at the very dawn of civilization, could think in terms of human groups (*mānuṣīrviśah*, *Rgveda* iii-5-3; 6-3; 11. 5) beyond racial barriers and cultural differences.

There is no indication that the Indian society during the Vedic period was caste-ridden. Barring a solitary reference to the four castes in the interpolated *Puruṣa-sūkta* section of the *Rgveda*, we do not come across in the early Vedic literature even a mention of the class of Vaiśyas or of Śūdras, let alone the numerous outgroups that sprang up in due course. *Brahma* in the sense of hymn or prayer (and hence referring to the priestly class) and *Kṣatra* in the sense of valour (and hence indicating the warrior and royal groups) are of course clearly distinguished. But transition of individuals from one class to the other appears to have been frequent and normal. Birth at any rate did not determine class-belongingness, and a young man in the community was not always sure whether Indra would make him a warrior or a priest (*Rgveda* III. 44. 5).

The concept of *ṣāti* with its emphasis on the privileges of birth and heredity does not haunt the Vedic passages; the origin of this expression does not appear to be older than the *Nirukta*. The concept of *ṣāti* involves crystallisation of membership in the group, the definition of rules and penalties, the rise in status (*jātyutkarṣa*), the threat of fall in status (*jātya-pakarṣa*), and the possibility of the emergence of mixed castes (*jātisāṅkara*). The Vedic society was devoid of these details.

Towards the close of the Vedic period, however, the four-fold division of society into four castes was an accomplished fact. The *Śatapatha-Brahmaṇa*, for instance, clearly mentions these castes by name. The gradation too in an elementary way had crept in. The top status was reserved for the Kṣatriya or for the Brāhmin, and the two were contending fiercely for this privilege. The armed nobility, which made laws and maintained order, collected taxes and settled disputes (*vyavahāra*) naturally came up as the most dominant group. 'The Kṣatriya is supreme; there is nothing higher than Kṣatra (*valour*)' was the ancient verdict. There were in the Vedic period numerous tribal governments and ruling families: Yadus, Turvasas, Druhyus, Anus, Purus, Bhrgus, Tṛtsus and so on. But the warrior got his high status not merely because

of his valour but as a defender of religion (*dharmasya goptā*, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 38, 239, 3). And in this capacity he recognised the importance of the priestly class. The two together were styled the twin upholders of the order (*dhṛtavratau*) and there were scriptural injunctions for steady co-operation between the two classes. The frequency of such injunctions, however, suggests that the two groups were not always friendly towards each other. The stories of Kārtavīrya robbing the sage Jamadagni of his cows, and of Viśvāmitra carrying away the cow of the priest Vasiṣṭha, record but two instances of the Kṣatriya aggression on the Brāhmins; even the wives of Brāhmins (*brahmajyāyā*) were under threat of being kidnapped by the warrior heroes. In the solemn resolve of the *Taittirīya-samhitā* (i. 7. 10. 1) 'May we *purohitas* be awake in the kingdom', is seen an attempt to mobilise the priestly class and thus meet the Kṣatriya challenge. A Brāhmin may be without a king, it was declared, but there cannot be a king without a Brāhmin; a Brāhmin supported by a king is better than a Brāhmin not so supported, even as a *rājanya* supported by a Brāhmin is superior to one not so supported (*ibid.*, V. 1. 10. 3).

The Brāhmin during this period was a stickler for studies, and was preoccupied with intellectual, literary and religious pursuits. He was deemed deserving of honour (*arcā*) and worthy of gifts (*dāna*); the administration freed him from taxes and the harassments thereof (*ajyeyatā*); he had the right of way on the road and could not be molested (*avadhyatā*). All these privileges were conditional: he had to behave in a manner befitting his rôle in the community (*pratirūpacaryā*); and he had to teach and perfect the people (*lokapakti*). Manu comes down heavily on the Brāhmin who is lazy and who gives up his studies, who behaves outlandishly and who eats indiscriminately (5. 4). A Brāhmin was never to be interested in arms or administration, except under extreme and unavoidable circumstances.

The rules of conduct incorporated in the *Dharmaśāstras* were to the mutual satisfaction of these two rival groups, and the social distance between them was not considerable. But soon there sprang up a third group, composed principally of farmers and artisans and traders, socially and politically in

tune with the first two groups. This composite group formed the bulk of the population and the name Vaiśya suggests that it was the most populous group. The description that this group was like the thighs (*ūrū*) of the Societal Person refers to the economic stability of the country. 'Being eaten (i.e., subsisted upon) by others, the Vaiśya is not exhausted'; 'He has wealth and all the gods are his patrons' (*Taittirīya Samhitā*, ii, 5, 10, 2). Although this group appears to have lived apart from both Brāhmins and Kṣatriyas, the three were collectively styled as the twice-born class (*dvijāti*), and were alike heirs to Vedic culture. The belief in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* that the Vaiśya sprang from *Rgveda*, the Kṣatriya from *Yajurveda* and the Brāhmin from *Sāmaveda* recognises common rights and privileges for these classes. Even among the heavenly denizens the threefold grouping was projected. Among gods Agni and Bṛhaspati were Brāhmins; Indra, Varuṇa, Soma and Yama were Kṣatriyas; the Vasus, the Rudras, the Viśvedevas and the Maruts were Vaiśyas. Note the collective character of the Vaiśya gods; the Vaiśya class was not a homogeneous group but a class of castes.

The fourth class, viz. the Śūdra was since early times distinguished from the other three classes as more or less an outgroup. But it is difficult to explain who these Śūdras were or how the Śūdra class originated. It was certainly not an identifiable group in the Vedic period; the Vedic literature is not familiar with the nomenclature Śūdra. Even Vātsyāyana, who lived about 1,700 years ago and in whose days the *varṇa* grouping had taken root, does not mention the Śūdra group. It was during the mediaeval times that the Śūdras emerged as a distinct group, as the last stratum in the caste gradation, distinguished by unskilled labour and domestic service. This group, however, does not seem to have come into being in the same way as the other three groups did; its composition was miscellaneous, and before it reached the final stage of development it passed through a long period of progressive inclusions and exclusions of large parts of the population. It has been suggested that the Śūdras were all originally of non-Āryan extraction, and that they were conquered by the Āryan colonists and retained in the community as the working class. The low status conferred on this group entailing several disabilities has

been ascribed to the Āryan attitude of ethnocentricism and the spirit of exclusiveness.

Although the Śūdra group was assigned an inferior social status and excluded from the privileges of the twice-born, it was certainly not a group of slaves; they were never deprived of personal liberty. On the other hand, the authors of *Dharmaśāstras* have revealed unmistakable sympathy with them for their social position. It is true that Vedic study together with all the *saṃskāras* was denied to them; and they could not serve the community as teachers or as judges. But then they had several advantages to counterbalance the disabilities. They could, for instance, follow any vocation (except of course the religious and educational); their social maturity was not dependent on the sacramental rites as was the case with the twice-born; no food or drink was prohibited for them; and ordinarily they incurred no sin, unlike the Brāhmins who could hardly do anything without the threat of sin hanging over them.

It is a mistake to suppose that Śūdras were outside the *varṇa* structure of society. They were well within it. They could even participate in the Soma sacrifice, and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions the rôle of a Śūdra in such sacrifices. The mediaeval works leave no doubt about their being almost universally in the domestic service of the twice-born groups; they were employed even as cooks in the Brāhmin households. There is an interesting restriction that a *snātaka* (a Brāhmin boy returning home after completion of his studies in a *gurukula*) should not eat the food cooked by a Śūdra for three days after his home-coming (*samāvartana*). By implication, a Śūdra could serve him food after the fourth day. Even among the gods there were Śūdras: Pūṣan and the Aśvins, for example. If Vedic study was denied to the Śūdras, the entire collection of the *Purāṇas* was meant almost only to them. Manu declares that if a twice-born person, born of Brāhmin parents, declines Vedic study and engages himself in a secular occupation, he becomes in reality a Śūdra.

The so-called untouchables present a different picture altogether. We cannot know for certain when or how these outgroups originated; the early stages of the development of untouchability are shrouded in obscurity. The contemporary conditions of these groups are undoubtedly miserable and are

matters for shame so far as our society is concerned. The prevailing social distance is extreme and irrational, interferes with communications within the community, and tips the social balance disastrously. Mahatma Gandhi espoused the cause of these unfortunate classes and strove hard to better their lot. Thanks to his fervour and earnestness, conditions are changing and the government is doing its best to erase this ugly scar on the Indian people.

The word of antiquity identifying the untouchables is 'antyaja', which means 'end-born' or 'those born on the border-lands of Āryan culture'. Even to this day the Indian population contains numerous endogamous and racially distinct tribes which do not share the essential characteristics of culture with the rest of the population: Muṇḍas, Santāls, Juāṅgs, Korwas, Saoras, Khoṇḍs, Parjas, Bhils, Chenchus, Irūlas, Cheros and so on. In addition to these tribes, there are several 'lowly' castes which have been scheduled by legislation and deemed backward. It is interesting to note that the Indian word *antyaja* does not mean 'low-born'; the 'lowliness' is the result of scheduling. These castes have perpetuated social isolation for countless generations. Even during the Vedic times there were numerous tribal groups of *Da-yu* origin who defied Āryan culture and chose to remain distinct: not only did they refuse to amalgamate with the Āryan colonists, but they were often unfriendly, and resisted with vigour the spread of the Vedic culture. There were the Puṇḍrakas, Oḍras, Draviḍas, Śakas, Yavanas, Kambojas, Kirātas, Pahlavas, Śabaras, Puḷindas, Mūtibas and others, who were non-Āryan both by origin and by inclination.

Their antagonism to the Āryans was so uncompromising that residential segregation became not only expedient but imperative, in consideration of mutual interests. This residential segregation involved minimisation of contacts and maximisation of mutual suspicion and hatred. The tribes were not wilfully kept out of the pale of Āryan culture by the Āryans, but the tribes themselves chose to stay out; they could not without reservations assimilate the Āryan culture. The indomitable spirit of tribal exclusiveness prevailed.

There was another factor that contributed greatly to this confusion of outlying castes, and this was the degradation

members of higher castes into lower caste status (*jātyapakarṣa*). When the four *varṇas* came to be arranged in a descending scale of social status, the permissible form of marital relations was hypergamous (*anuloma*) and the offspring of dissimilar *varṇas* came to have in due course a distinct caste status, inferior to the paternal *varṇa*. While this was responsible for the wide array of caste groups within the *varṇa* structure, the prohibited hypogamous (*pratiloma*) relationships resulted in illegitimate, and therefore socially inferior, groups. These latter groups were frowned upon by the authors of *Dharmaśāstras* as adulterous in origin and were denied normal caste privileges. They too came to be segregated and assigned a low caste position in the community. Cāṇḍāla, Paulkasa, Vaina, Rathakāra and Niṣāda are examples of these mixed castes. The Cāṇḍāla, for instance, is the offspring of a Śūdra father and a Brāhmin mother. The whole collection of these mixed castes were designated as *Vrātya* (outlandish or exotic), and treated by the authors of *Dharmaśāstras* with contempt and horror.

But it is important to note that at no time in the history of the country was the enlightened opinion complacent about the atrocities committed in the name of caste distinctions. Even in the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhiṣṭira sounds a warning that it is impossible to identify the real caste of any one, for there has been such a hopeless admixture of all castes (*Vanaparvan*, 180, 31). What is prohibited by law tempts one by that very fact into a violation of the law; the rational approach would be to refrain from dogmatising on caste purity and from establishing privileges on that basis. The Buddha voiced a strong protest against caste claims determined by birth alone. Although Buddhism should not on any account be viewed as a revolt against the higher castes, the movement did diminish the importance attached to castes in determining the social status of individuals. Jainism likewise laid stress on rational considerations and minimised the importance of caste privileges.

During the days of the great Śaṅkara who was the maker of modern Hinduism, caste presented a picture of utter chaos. He deplored the disorganisation of *varṇa* values (*anvavasthitapṛāyān varṇadharmān*); and he did his best to reorganise the system in a more rational manner. Rāmānuja was full of sympathy for the folk of low caste status, and did upgrade

large numbers of them. Madhva may be presumed to have done a similar service, for his successor Vādirāja brought large groups of outlying Sonegārs into the *varṇa* fold. The Liṅgāyat movement, inaugurated by Basava, was a stout and unmistakable protest against caste claims, and helped the democratisation of caste considerations.

The great sages of all ages have taught that caste is an unimportant consideration in spiritual matters. And great reformers have zealously fought against the caste barriers: Kabīr, Nānak, Ramānand, Chaitanya, Purandara-Dāsa, Kanaka-Dāsa. In recent years Raja Rammohun Roy and his Brāhmo Samāj, Dayānanda Saraswatī and his Ārya Samāj, Mahadeva Govinda Rāṇaḍe and his Prārthanā Samāj, Gopāla Krishna Gokhale and his Servants of India Society, Swāmi Vivekānanda and his Rāmakrishna Mission have considerably loosened the hold of caste on the country's mind. The contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in this regard is memorable.

But it cannot be said that caste system has lost its fight entirely. The Christians and Muslims who were outside the caste structure when they came into contact with our culture, are found to have absorbed caste elements into their own organisations; Indian Christians and Indian Muslims are today not without caste considerations. Among Indian Muslims there are Momins or Jolahas (weavers), Lalkhanis (Nustim Rajputs) Gaddis (graziers), Mirasis (minstrels) and other groups which function as castes. It is interesting to note that a Muslim caste, Turkiya Banjāras, have gotras. The several reform movements, like the Brāhmo Samāj, have had to compromise with the caste structure. It should be admitted that most of these movements which started with a roar ended up with a grumble. Even Mahatma Gandhi did not succeed in shelving caste considerations altogether from our public life. This only means that the system has taken very deep roots in our culture, and it therefore dies hard. It is indeed fighting a war of survival. However, with increased technological impact on our daily life, the advancement and dissemination of scientific knowledge and a rapid westernisation of our habits and attitudes, caste is not likely to retain its strength for long. We can see around us the age-old castle crumbling down: the process is doubtless slow and unsystematic, but sure and irrevocable.

But when this system dies, it cannot be predicted with confidence that it will not be resurrected under a new guise. The fact that religion is losing its hold on the modern man is no guarantee that caste will disappear, for even the old caste structure was, in the words of Nesfield, 'a natural product of society in the creation of which religion played no part at all'. Occupation and temperament were more important than religion in the creation of castes. The democratic ideal of equality, which is said to destroy the demon of casteism in the present age, is by no means a modern notion; it existed even when castes were formed. Further, this ideal has been found to be incapable, even in the modern world, of preventing the practice of discrimination. It is important to recognise that at the back of social prejudice, which the operation of caste system involves, is the desire for power. And as long as this desire flourishes it is impossible to do away with social prejudice.

CHAPTER III

DOMESTIC DESIGN AND SACRAMENTAL SANCTIONS

The family in the Eastern countries is of paramount significance both to the individual and to the community. It is not more or less an expedient social arrangement for the biological ends of procreation and protection of the young. It has a deeper basis in culture and has a profounder religious justification. The Asian concept of family lays greater stress on the cultural and the religious aspects than on the economic and the protective. The awe in which the Asian stands before the unseen but imperative forces and the obsession with after-life that permeates his life here have contributed considerably towards determining the structures and functions of family in this continent. Especially family life in India, China, Japan, Burma and Ceylon follows a general ideological pattern; there is much in common.

But Indian family represents the most intricate and elaborately structured pattern of relationships. In matters of uncompromising familism, of fixity of structure and functions, of the subordination of the individual to the family mores and of the patriarchal nature of relations, India perhaps is an extreme illustration. Marriage in all the Asian countries is a network of highly symbolic rituals and is the sole justification for family organization, but nowhere is it so systematically worked out as in India. It is India, again, that has most methodically experimented with large and small patriarchal units as well as with polygamous arrangements. Polyandrous survivals, unlike elsewhere, are still to be found in India.

It is important to note at the very outset that family in this country is not the creature of the caste system. Family mores are binding, irrespective of caste affiliations. In fact, family life is the common soil on which the gigantic tree of caste system has been planted and reared up. Caste sanctions work only through family traditions, and family is beyond doubt the strongest unifying agent in this welter of caste

distinctions and distances. But for the enduring spell of family life the social fabric in this country would have been torn to shreds by now, and no social institution worth its while would have survived. In a very real sense, the entire community revolves round the family, and the family is the 'golden egg' in which common culture is contained.

The Indian family is borne on sacramental sanctions. Stabilising an institution by the touch of sacrament is an extremely ancient device in human history. Probably the hunting nomad practised it. Certainly the early Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Jews and the Christians have toyed with sacramental procedures. But sacrament was an obsession with the Indian, it was for him a living presence, enveloping even the smallest details of daily life. It is because of this, therefore, that we find in our epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, a persistent preoccupation with domestic values. These epics provide a glaring contrast to the epics of other countries which deal almost exclusively with battles and expeditions, chastisements and rapproachments, deeds of valour and daring. Turn to the greatest of Western epics, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: their accounts and contents reveal very little in common with the Indian epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. The latter turn round the structure and functions of family and the heroes there are invariably supporters of high domestic norms. Rama himself is held as an ideal householder, dedicated to strictest monogamous relations and zealously conjugal in his attitudes. The basis of this absorbing interest is undoubtedly religious. The belief that what is sacramental is inviolable runs through the entire gamut of Indian society.

The sanctity of domestic life is vouchsafed by the marriage ceremony, which is the most important of sacraments. A little digression into the significance of sacraments in Indian life would not here be out of place. The Sanskrit term for sacrament is 'saṁskāra', derived from the root *kr*, (to do) in conjunction with the prefix *saṁ* (well): it means 'to do well', 'to do properly'. The grammatical base *sakrghañ* has the import of education, perfection, cultivation, consecration, sanctification, decoration, polish and influence. The past passive participle, *saṁkṛta*, means 'well-trimmed', 'cultured', 'refined',

'perfected'. The great commentator Śabara on Jaimini (3. 1. 3) writes: 'The sacrament is that which renders the object fit for the intended purpose'. The implication is that an object or a person is charged or transformed by a ritual, or rather by a complex of rituals, so as to be able to accomplish a specific purpose. Before this can be secured, the sacrament should remove the inherent disabilities and defects (*doṣāpanayana*), and generate new traits and abilities (*guṇāntaropajanana*). In the old texts, the sacramental effect is described as distinct from the body as well as from the spirit, as an extraordinary effect and as the result of the performance of the prescribed duties.

Sacraments are no doubt saturated with simple superstitious concepts and a vast majority of them illustrate a primitive and naïve mentality. They invoke supernatural intervention and employ magic techniques. Examples are the rituals connected with the hair-parting (*śīmanta*) of the expecting woman, with the birth of the baby, and with the disposal of the dead. In all these, there is a zealous attempt to ward off evil, to eliminate the malevolent influences, to protect the object from the malignant spirits, and to propitiate and compel the benevolent powers. In the daily *sandhyāvandanam*, enjoined on every twice-born, the employment of water to wash away spiritual impurities and to wreck the disastrous designs of the evil forces answers mainly to this description. The incantations used in the initiation ceremonies as well as in the marriages belong essentially to the magic variety. The rituals as well as the formulae used on such occasions are survivals from a bygone age of unsophisticated mentality of white magic.

But it would be wrong to dismiss all sacrament as entirely superstitious. In every sacrament there is invariably an aspect that has unmistakable social or psychological significance. Consider, for instance, the wide range of domestic rites which indicate social privileges, and which provide periodic and measured opportunity for self-expression. The initiation of an individual into the Āryan community (*upanayana*), the re-entry of the student into the family fold after completion of his studies (*samāvartana*), the assumption of civic responsibilities on marriage (*vivāha*), the dissolution of membership with the current family on death (*antyeṣṭi*), and a host of other sacraments have a far-reaching value for social living. They are

not devoid of meaning so far as the individuals' participation in the community is concerned. In fact, an ancient authority Āṅgiras has brilliantly summed up in a verse the cultural value of the sacraments: 'Even as a painting gradually emerges from many dabbings of paints here and there, even so the refined personality is a product of many sacraments'. Sacrament, in other words, perfects the individual as a social unit: it helps the development of personality. It is a guide for social living and it is essentially a socialising technique.

It may not be out of place here to discuss in brief the implications of sacramental injunctions and prohibitions. Maṇḍana, the author of *Vidhiviveka*, interprets them as specific promptings (*pravartana*) involving inner volitional deliberations as well as actual operations. They are goads or propulsions to behaviour and have invariably in view a concrete end or purpose. Vedic commands (*nyoga*) are in the nature of promptings (*preraṇā*) of intentions subjectively felt (*ākūta*). Scriptures teach that the commands must be performed irrespective of the individual interests that are implicated; they must be performed for their own sake, and not with the anticipation of personal profit; that is to say, they are duties enjoined upon the individuals for collective good. Sacramental injunctions demand implicit conformity and do not brook inquiries or rational considerations, nor suffer individual idiosyncracies. This is the burden of the gospel of *Karmayoga*. Rāmānuja lays stress on the performance of obligatory and compulsory duties as religious commands (*ekasāstrārthatayā anuṣṭheyam*), while Śaṅkara regards such duties as means of perfecting or purifying the individual although they are not inherently compulsory. 'The wise man', says Śaṅkara, 'has no duties', for an action performed without personal motives is no duty at all. He does, however, recognise that social considerations justify sacramental orientations in one's life.

Indian sacraments are complex phenomena. Along with the primitive prayers, supplications and magic rituals, they involve the adoration of fire (which probably has been derived from the Indo-Aryan and Iranian impact), bathing, sipping and sprinkling of water, sacrifices with a symbolic import, as well as numerous cultural considerations. Many a sacrament is excellently hygienic, some of them stand the test of modern

medical and eugenic knowledge, and most of them reveal a robust common-sense. They involve actions and intentions, desires and deliberations.

The *Vaiṣṇānasa-smārta-sūtras* draw a distinction between sacraments that deal principally with the individual's body and those that involve sacrifices. Leaving aside the latter as irrelevant for our present purpose, the bodily sacraments are described as necessary to transform the animal nature of man to fit into the socio-cultural framework. The ancient law-giver Gautama enumerates as many as forty of these sacraments, while the later authorities like Manu are content with thirteen or sixteen of them. The sacramental treatment for the individual commences immediately after conception, long before the actual individual begins participation with the community. The first awareness of pregnancy is celebrated by the sacrament of impregnation, (*garbhāḍāna*), followed by another a little later (generally in the third month of pregnancy), the sacrament for securing male progeny (*pūṃsavana*). It is at this period that the vital sheath (*prāṇamayakoṣa*) is said to be formed for the foetus. The irrepressible craving for sons in the Asian countries, especially in India, is well known. The reasons for this desire are not far to seek: economically secure and socially independent, male children can be guardians for the parents in old age, whereas custom estranges the daughter on marriage from the parental home. These two sacraments along with the next, namely hair-parting (*śimantonṇayana*) performed in the seventh month of pregnancy are administered to the expecting mother: they are meant to counteract the malevolent influences, to protect the womb, and to secure safe delivery.

Immediately after delivery when the sacrament of nativity (*jātakarma*) is performed, both the mother and the child participate in it. The father prays for the child's longevity, welfare and wisdom. The essential significance of this ritual is to welcome the new arrival and to remove the impurities of the birth process. The baby is then named, usually on the eleventh day after birth, by another sacrament known as name-giving (*nāmakaraṇa*), which recognises the individuality of the newborn and the consequent claim to be looked after by the family members. The first feeding of the child with solids,

usually during the eleventh month, calls for another sacrament, *annaprāśana*. When the child grows up into boyhood, the first hair-cut after the completion of one year is celebrated as tonsure (*cūḍākaraṇa* or *caula*), a minor sacrament. Among the twice-born classes, the boy is in all seriousness initiated into the spiritual lore and he becomes heir to all the mysterious doctrines that have come down through thousands of years and that have been zealously preserved by the Brāhmins. This sacrament (*upanayana*) marks the second birth of the individual, birth into higher life. The first birth is merely physical, a coming out of the mother's womb as an independent animal, no longer connected through the umbilical cord with the mother's body. But the second birth, the birth at initiation, is emergence as an adolescent ready for training for citizenship. The earlier sacraments take the individual as still defiled by the process of birth; but at the sacrament of initiation he is inducted into a life of sanctity.

This sacrament is known as 'conducting-nearer' (*upanayana*) for it conducts the individual nearer the life-purposes (*puruṣārthas*). After this ceremony, the youth is endowed with social power and status and enters into the first stage of life, namely studenthood or *brāhmacaryā*. The teacher, with whom the boy now starts living and from whom he learns the lessons of life, gives him the second birth which is more excellent than the first, for it makes him an Ārya. The proper age for the investiture with the sacred thread (*mauñjibandhana*), which is the most important of the rituals connected with this sacrament is said to be the fifth year for the Brāhmin, sixth for the Kṣatriya and eighth for the Vaiśya. Today, however, this sacrament, which of course is invariably performed, is usually performed a few years and sometimes a day before marriage, and has no connection whatsoever with the educational programme. Barring marriage, this is the only sacrament which is celebrated among the present-day twice-born classes with great interest and solemnity. But, beyond doubt, it is a survival almost entirely devoid of the original significance.

In the olden days, when the young man thus initiated spent a period with the teacher and returned home, it was an occasion for celebration. This home-coming (*samāvartana*) signified that the youth was now a graduate (*snātaka*) and was ready to enter

family life as well as to participate as a citizen in the community activities. The training of the individual for social life being thus complete, he is now enjoined to marry and settle down. Married life (*gārhasthya*) has been held in high esteem in this country and a person is said to be incomplete until he marries. Marriage, therefore, is a major sacrament and the trend over ages has been to make it increasingly important. Today, it is perhaps the only sacrament that has survived intact in all its social and psychological aspects. Other sacraments, barring the funeral rites (*antyeṣṭi*) have receded into insignificance and have become more or less obsolete; even when they are performed, they evoke little excitement in the household and less interest in the neighbourhood.

As householder, an individual is expected to undertake several sacramental programmes like the seven *mahāyajñas*, seven *pākayajñas*, seven *haviryajñas*, and seven *somayajñas*. But at no time were these considered compulsory or obligatory; and they were certainly not widespread practices. Even Manu ignores their claim to be included in the normal scope of sacraments. Today, except the very learned puṇḍits no one knows what these sacraments are, much less does any one care; they have been totally stamped out. But, curiously enough, the sacraments relating to the disposal of the dead and the final rites (*antyeṣṭi*), transmuting the departed relative (*preta*) into a revered ancestor (*pīṭṛ*), have been retained by all classes of people with remarkable fervour. The popular opinion does not mind simplification of the marriage rituals, curtailment of many a meaningless detail and minimization of the religious and even social implications. But the same cannot be said with regard to funeral rites: the most sophisticated and westernized among the Hindus would go through without a murmur of protest the entire wearisome round of rituals on this occasion; and neither time nor money is any consideration.

The consideration of sacraments is linked up with the concept of life-periods (*āśramas*) prevalent in the Hindu society. The expression 'āśrama' is derived from the root *śram*, 'to exert', 'to labour', 'to work', and the prefix carries the significance of 'scope', 'field', 'area'. The word means 'place for exertion', 'field for activity', 'stage of life with specific

functions'. The traditional ideology classifies the normal life-span of a hundred years into four successive stages of unequal durations. The first stage of actual work commences not with the birth of an individual, but when he begins training himself for citizenship. So long as he lives with his teacher as a member of the latter's household exerting, learning the great lessons of life, imbibing the best of traditions, and acquiring skills he is considered a learner (*brahmacārin*) and this stage is designated as 'wisdom-faring' (*brahmacaryā*). This was a matter of several years, extending normally to ten or twelve years; and not infrequently a student chose to extend the period much longer, right into his middle age.

At the completion of this preparatory stage the young man who returned home married and set up his family. The second stage, the householder's (*gārhasthya*), would thus commence. The Indian idea of a household or family is saturated with socio-religious considerations. The householder alone was entitled to offer sacrifices, participate in community transactions and administer sacraments. An unmarried individual, unless he chose to be a monk, was looked down upon and had little social status. The threefold merits of the householder's stage were the performance of religious rites (*dharma-sampatti*), the continuance of the family line by begetting children (*prajā*), and the enjoyment of the pleasures of life (*rati*). The married individual sat in the village council, deliberated on important decisions and held major and minor offices in the community organization. He was a citizen in the full sense of the word; he was held in the vortex of responsibilities and privileges.

After discharging societal commitments the individual was free to retire to a woodland hermitage, usually on the outskirts of the township. Here he lived with his wife and spent his time in quiet contemplation; his sons would now be running his family as a social unit, as he had been doing before. This stage, known as retirement in a forest retreat (*vānaprastha*), was marked by austerities. But the hermit was not a mere seeker of personal salvation. He gathered round him students who lived with him; these residential schools (*gurukula*) were of immense significance in the country. The hermitages were thus principally educational institutions. The curriculum here

included both sacred and secular subjects: even such skills as archery and wrestling were taught in these hermitages. And frequently kings and leaders of the community approached these hermits for guidance and counselling.

When the hermit got tired of this stage he was at liberty to lay down all his responsibilities and commitments and become a wandering ascetic. This was the final stage, and was designated as 'total unburdening' or 'entire abandonment' (*saṁnyāsa*). One who renounced in this manner was not bound by the common laws and obligations; customs and conventions had no hold on him. He was bound to no specific residence, and begged his daily food; his business was to ponder over the mysteries of the universe, and his merit lay in the absolute control he had over his senses. He was therefore known as 'wanderer' (*parivrāt*), 'beggar' (*bhikṣu*), 'restrained one' (*yati*), 'silent mystic' (*muni*). Social considerations were altogether foreign to him; his attention centred on emancipation from the round of transmigration.

Although these four constitute the traditionally accepted āśrama-scheme, in very olden days only the first three were in vogue. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, for instance, we read that the three branches of *dharma* were (a) constituted by sacrifice, study and charity (*grhastha*), (b) constituted by austerities (*vānaprastha*), and (c) constituted by residence with the teacher (*ācāryakulavāsa* or *brahmacarya*). This tripartite division was in accordance with the triple-value (*trivarga*) ideology of Dharma, Artha and Kāma. The fourth stage, which consists largely of monastic institutions, appears to have been the result of the impact of Buddhism. The ancient law-givers are by no means kindly disposed towards the renunciants who had turned their backs on society; and the *smṛti* texts contain many a pungent stricture on the dealings between the lay folk and these outlandish and unsocial mendicants (*vrātyas*). But Pāṇini in the third century B.C. was familiar with this āśrama, and during the days of Vātsyāyana, 1,700 years ago, Hindu society was based on the fourfold āśrama scheme.

The ordering of the four āśramas has given rise to differences of opinion among law-givers. The commonly accepted point of view, however, is that the four stages should occur successively; that is to say, the order of āśramas would be

student, householder, hermit and mendicant. This view which emphasises co-ordination (*samuccaya*) insists that no stage can be skipped or dropped. Among the supporters of this view the most prominent is Manu. There is another point of view which affords option for the individual to choose the stage that suits his inclinations best. According to this view, known as 'Vikalpa-pakṣa', a student may straightaway become a mendicant, without ever having to live as a householder or as a hermit. Support for this view is to be found in *Īśābaloṇiṣad*. The third point of view celebrated as 'Bādhapakṣa' (annulment-view), and represented by Gautama and Bauddhāyana, protests that in reality there is but a single stage, that of the householder, and the other three so-called stages are merely annulments thereof. The studenthood, according to this point of view, is after all a preparation for the householder's life; and the hermit as well as the mendicant are in a sense parasites on the householder. Neither the student nor the hermit nor yet the mendicant participates in community activities and is therefore not an active member of society. The *Gṛhyasūtras* are unanimous in holding the householder's stage as the best, if not the only, stage.

In contemporary India, the sacrament of initiation does not indicate the commencement of residential studenthood for the young man. He continues to reside in his own family and the educational programme does not synchronise with the sacraments either of initiation or of marriage. However, one generally marries only after the completion of his studies. Brahmacharya as a distinct stage with its original implications has ceased to exist, although there are a few deliberate attempts, like the Kāngri Gurukula, in recent years to revive this institution. While the period of studies in one way or another has survived till our own day, the hermitages as social institutions have altogether disappeared. If we may rely on the authority of Vātsyāyana, they had gone out of vogue even 1,700 years ago. Today family life is the only āśrama that is prevalent and is of far-reaching significance; the other āśramas have either disappeared or have paled into insignificance.

Despite his absorbing interest that is other-worldly, the Indian is an incurable addict to the household. All his scriptures extol the merits of family life, and most of his activities

are comprehended by it. The caste restrictions and privileges are accommodated within that framework; indeed caste has little significance apart from family. That is why the Hindu social organization is described as 'Varṇāśramavyavasthā'. The Family as a social unit, as a vehicle of cultural transmission, as a field for sacramental activities and as a mechanism for fulfilling physical, psychological and social aspirations of the individual, has been recognised by the *Smṛti* texts.

Not infrequently constellations of several families function as endogamous units within larger caste groups; usually, especially among the artisans and labourers, occupational specifications are mostly matters of the family. Family prestige is a peculiarly powerful motive for an Indian; he does not shirk from risking his all for saving his family from infamy. The well-known story in *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the banishment of Sītā by Rāma illustrates this zealous, almost fanatical, regard for the reputation of the family. An Indian is more conscious of his family relations than of his caste affiliations. Family is not only his primary environment; it is his entire environment. He belongs to it by inviolable sacramental bonds.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE, WOMAN AND HOME

It is marriage that makes the family; and the Indian for whom family is the supreme sacramental cover naturally attaches great importance to marriage. 'We are a much marrying people, we marry early and we marry in large numbers', writes C. B. Mamoria of Udaipur.* The statement is true, although it sounds uncomplimentary. What he means is that in India marriage is early and universal. At one time in our history child marriage was a prevalent custom and the evils of pre-puberty intercourse, premature child-birth, immature maternity and early widowhood that stemmed from this custom have doubtless undermined the vitality of the nation. But now there is a tendency in favour of comparatively late marriages. To an extent social legislation defining the lower limit of marriageable age has helped this postponement; but by far the more important reasons for delaying marriage are stringent economic condition of the parents, engagement for longer durations in educational programmes and employment instabilities. Notwithstanding this trend, marriages in India are still early unlike in European countries.

The universality of marriage in India is truer in the case of women than in that of men. The same author remarks that 'in the country as a whole, roughly every other male is unmarried'†. This has sometimes been ascribed to severe sex disparity in India, where a marked excess of males obtains. According to the census estimate fifteen years ago there were 947 women for every 1,000 men; in the north-western areas the figure for women was 883, and in Rajasthan, as low as 600. The same census report mentioned that there was an excess of male children at birth, and suggested that female infanticide had not entirely disappeared.

Whatever the veracity of these estimates, it must be conceded that, for an average Indian marriage is obligatory, though

* *Social Problems and Social Disorganization in India*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1960, p. 9.

† *ibid.*, p. 180.

hazardous and expensive; it poses a tremendously big problem, for it is held unanimously so important and unavoidable. Life without marriage is almost unthinkable in this country and there is a sharp social stigma attached to the 'for-long-unmarried'. This is so to an extent anywhere in the world, but India has unparalleled convictions in the matter. There is a deep-rooted, long-standing, and widespread tradition here in favour of marriage as a basic sacrament. The unmarried individual is rarely invited to participate in sacramental, socio-religious functions; even the gods do not feel inclined to accept oblations and offerings from him; no gift becomes valid unless the wife pours water into the husband's hands signifying her assent. The scriptures protest that a man is but a half and that he becomes full only when he marries. The great epic *Mahābhārata* holds that the wife is really the source of the triple-purpose (*trivarga*), that she is the best friend and a sure help in this crossing-over. As early as the R̥gvedic period, we find the wife being equated with home, and the saying in Sanskrit to the effect that 'a home is where the wife is' has been popular all over the country for several thousands of years. There is a persisting esoteric belief that the husband gets reborn in the wife as son.

It is therefore that the Indian is not disposed to think lightly of marriage; he attaches a peculiar sanctity to marital relations and would not normally bring himself to break them. This is true of Moslems and Christians as well as Hindus. Although Moslems consider marriage a simple civil transaction in the nature of a contract rather than a sacrament, they regard the engagement as indissoluble except under most trying conditions. Divorce in that community is little more than a legal provision and it is not generally resorted to. In this regard they share with the Hindus sentiments of respect for family as a sacramental institution. The Christian regards matrimony as one of the seven sacraments and as involving sacred symbolism as in baptism and the eucharist. This is acceptable to the Protestants as well as to the Catholics.

India has experimented with numerous marital procedures. Some of them were quite novel and extraordinary. Manu describes eight forms of marriage as approved. The parents

seek and secure a boy for their daughter and invite him to accept her as his wife in the *Brāhma* or ceremonial form of marriage. This is the most ancient marital mode prevalent in the country and this is the one that has survived to this day. The union is sanctified by a well-defined series of rituals, including the gifting of the girl (*kanyādāna*), holding of the hand (*pānigrahaṇa*), acceptance by the groom who makes solemn promises with fire as witness (*saptapadi*), oblations and offerings (*homa*), and the propitiation of the assemblage of elders on the occasion (*sabhāpūjā*). The bride in this case is richly dressed and heavily ornamented, providing an additional incentive to the groom.

And the groom is chosen with great circumspection. Vātsyāyana mentions that the custom 1,700 years ago was that only a highly educated young man (*śrutavān*) was chosen. The choice (*varaṇa*) was a matter of great deliberation. Aśvalāyana counsels that one must choose an intelligent boy; Āpastamba insists on the choice of a boy that is well-connected, good-looking, learned and healthy; Baudhāyana lays stress on character in the boy. Bṛhatparāśara mentions ambition as one of the desirable traits in the groom; his list includes besides ambition, purity of caste, sound education, robust health, youth, sociability and economic sufficiency. Beyond doubt, his list is an excellent schedule even today. The *Mahābhārata* takes a common-sense view when it holds that the parties must be equals with regard to wealth and social standing. Lunacy, impotency, criminality, fell disease, moral depravity were disqualifications according to Kātyāyana.

The other types of marriages were at no time in great vogue, although they were practised repeatedly in different parts of the country. In the divine (*daiva*) variety, the father of the girl would be engaged in a sacrificial ceremony and the officiating priest, who was invariably a learned Brāhmin, would be offered the bejewelled and well-dressed girl in lieu of the customary fee. In the priestly (*ārṣa*) variety, however, it is the father of the girl that receives the fee, usually a couple of cows, from the marrying boy for agreeing to give her. In the above three marital modes rituals and solemn ceremonies form an important ingredient; the parents of the girl take an active rôle.

In what is known as the *prājāpatya* type of marriage, ceremonies and rituals are conspicuous by their absence. The girl is given away to the young man of her choice with a simple farewell prayer that the two may live happily ever after. It is the girl that here takes the initiative for choosing her spouse, and her parents passively participate in the function. The parents are altogether dispensed with in the *gāndharva* or clandestine type of marriage which is substantially in the nature of romantic elopement. When the boy and the girl have agreed to marry, they retire, unknown to the people around, to a secluded woody retreat, and there in the presence of the fire brought from a learned Brāhmin's house get married by simple affirmations of love and fidelity. As the marriage has taken place in the presence of the sacred fire, it is binding on the parents of both parties. It is obligatory for the bride's parents later to recognise and ratify the marriage by a formal function; failure to do this makes the father of the bride liable for legal proceedings. The *āśura* or mercenary marriages are those in which the bride's people receive monetary gratifications from the bridegroom's people; the bride-price is decided upon by mutual consultations. Among the backward communities this marital mode is still widely prevalent.

The diabolical (*rākṣasa*) marriages are altogether outlandish and aggressive, but recognised by the law of the land at one time. The girl was carried away by the boy, and her people were subjected to torture and death by the boy's party. The abduction of women as war-spoils by the victorious was not, during the heroic age, considered abnormal or reprehensible. The persistent hostility between clans and tribes occasioned frequent skirmishes and women were always the objects of lusty fighters. Neither romance nor sacraments played any rôle in such marriages; might and force were solely on the scene. Equally savage was the ghastly (*paiśāca*) marriage where the helpless girl was raped, in sleep or under intoxication, and the rogue was allowed by custom and law to have thereafter the girl as his wife.

It is strange, although understandable, that the exacting authors of the *Smṛti* texts allowed this wide latitude for marital arrangements. Perhaps they were only codifying the prevalent practices, and endeavouring to stylize the current customs.

India is a vast country with variegated peoples and its history is colourful with conquests and contacts; ethnological variations and cultural differences are in this country almost endless. The sensible codes of conduct, therefore, have to be tolerant and broadbased.

Besides these classical types of marriages, India also illustrates the universal types such as polygamy, monogamy, exogamy and endogamy. Monogamy is of course the rule, and is the only type that has been universally approved and widely practised in India as elsewhere in the world. Of the two forms of polygamy, namely polygyny and polyandry, the former (one husband with many wives) prevails in several communities and tribes, especially among the Nāgas, the Bhils, the Gōṇḍs, the Tōḍas and the Lushāis; and the latter (many husbands sharing one wife) obtains among tribal folk here and there, as among the Bōṭas, the Khāsas, and also among the Tōḍas. The polyandrous practices of the Jaunsār-Bawār in Dehra Dun, the Cis-Himalayan tribes and the matriarchal Nair society in Kerala are well known to anthropologists. Tibetan communities are also predominantly polyandrous. Some sections of Bhils and Tōḍas are endogamous (marrying within the group), while Korwas, Gōṇḍs, Baigās, Hōs, Khāsis and Nāgas are exogamous (marrying outside the group).

Caste is an endogamous unit, while lineage or *gotra* is an exogamous detail. Among the higher or rather more sophisticated castes, there is a prohibition against marrying the person of the same *gotra*, *pravara* and immediate ancestry (*piṇḍa*). The *gotra* (lit. 'cowshed') is a detail of identification for an individual in terms of descent from a sage-ancestor, while *pravara* is a sort of formula involving affiliation to a Vedic branch as well as enumeration of related sage-ancestors. These three, viz., *sagotra* (same *gotra*), *sappravara* (same *pravara*) and *sapiṇḍa* (same immediate ancestors), are considered incestuous relations. Normal marriage in caste society is described as exogamous within an endogamous unit.

The insistence that marriage must be within the caste and most often within the subcaste, has been widespread and persistent. In recent years, however, intercaste alliances are becoming increasingly common, especially among the upper middle classes. Urbanisation, diffusion of modern ideas,

educational and employment contacts are among the reasons that have facilitated this change, which, however, is not very common.

Although hypergamy (*anuloma*) and hypogamy (*pratiloma*) were so prevalent in India that the *Smṛti* texts had to deal with them elaborately, the commonly approved practice was endogamous so far as the caste was concerned. It is true that hypergamy (man of the higher caste marrying the girl of the lower caste) was permitted, while hypogamy (man of the lower caste marrying the woman of the higher caste) was severely condemned by all books of law; and the infinite ramification of the caste system has been due to the permitted hypergamy, while outcastes, mixed castes, and low castes are said to be the results of clandestine or rebellious hypogamous affairs. The heaviness with which the law-books come down on hypogamy suggests that it was by no means uncommon. But authorities like Āpastamba, Gautama, Vasiṣṭha and Manu disapproved of all exogamous (*asavarṇa*) relations; they were by no means sympathetic to hypergamous unions either. Manu and Yājñyavalkya debated whether the offsprings of the hypergamous proceedings, forming distinct castes like the Āmbaṣṭa, Niṣāda, Ugra and Mahiṣya, were eligible for sacramental privileges.

Manu, who was exceedingly well-informed about the practices current in India during his time, mentions with anxiety that a large number of mixed castes were coming up, as a result of hypogamous relations. Not only were there children born out of exogamous wedlock, but there were children who were the products of clandestine or adulterous unions. The former were in the eyes of the law normal, but they were obliged by custom to form their own castes, certainly inferior to the paternal castes, whereas the latter were illegitimate, although they too formed their own castes, subjected naturally to social indignities. It would appear that in the mediaeval ages there was a big confusion on the scene with a multiplicity of castes and subcastes, high and low. Yudhiṣṭhira in *Mahābhārata* despairs of ascertaining the caste of any one, for all castes are mixed up (*Vana-parvan* 180, 31). Śaṅkarācārya records that during his day castes and āśramas had got sorely disorganised. The word for this confusion was 'saṅkara', and

the authorities in the middle ages freely speculated as to the reasons therefor.

One of the theories that was widely circulated made women responsible for this mess in the social structure. Nārada in his book of law entreats the king of the land to exercise careful control over women, for they were responsible for 'saṅkara'; 'it is only when a Brāhmin woman goes astray and lives with a Śūdra man that an outcaste (*caṇḍāla*) arrives in the world'. It was during this period in India's history that women got discredited and lost their status in society. In Āryan India, the woman enjoyed equal privileges with man, although the social structure at that time was predominantly patriarchal. The woman was considered the bliss-bringer, gladdener, a precious gift from the high gods Bhaga, Āryaman, Savitr and Purandhri. She participated in all the important sacraments and she herself underwent sacramental treatment like men. Marriage was common and monogamy was usual; but unmarried women were not under disrepute. The longing for sons was (as it is even now) almost universal, without, however, the daughters being unwelcome.

Sons could fight, support the parents in old age and inherit the property. The daughter, on the other hand, goes out of the parental family and joins her husband's; even her *gotra* gets altered. Her affiliations and affections are turned to a new key. It is thus natural that parents desired sons. But the pronounced unhappiness at a daughter's birth which parents were said to experience was foreign to the Āryan society of the Vedic period. It is in the Brāhmaṇa period that we find that women came to be regarded as generally inferior to men in social and religious status, and one of the main reasons for this changed attitude was the dread or taboo associated with her frequent unclean periods resulting from menstruation and child birth. The economic hardships to which the father of a marrying girl was usually subjected made her undesirable in a large number of cases. But the woman still enjoyed a number of privileges and her claims were protected by law. During the Mauryan times, for instance, the woman was free to divorce her husband whose character was shady, or who was out of home for long periods, or who was cruel or impotent. If a husband

chose to chastise his wife violently or repeatedly, he was liable to be severely punished by the king. Widows, and wives of absconding or indifferent men could remarry. Kauṭilya mentions that an unmarried girl who had passed her seven menses was no longer under an obligation to be obedient to her father. According to the same authority, the marriageable age for a girl was twelve, that is to say she could not be married off against her consent. The popular attitude is reflected in the remark of the Brāhmin of Ekacakrapura in *Mahābhārata*: 'Some people say that man loves his son better, others hold that he loves his daughter better. But I love the two equally'.

During the time that Buddhism and Jainism flourished, women became increasingly dependent on men in administrative, social and religious matters; their claims were greatly minimised and occasionally ignored. Marriages were usually arranged by parents, although the *gāndharva* or romantic unions were not uncommon. The custom of buying brides with money (the *āśura* type) was coming into greater vogue. Women came to be regarded as tempters, as inherently enigmatic and dangerous, voluptuous and crafty. It may be that courtesans, royal attendants and harem-birds provoked this attitude; but it must be recognised that zealous monks who were the principal writers of the age emphasised this aspect of womankind to safeguard their own interests. This uncomplimentary attitude does not reflect popular opinion. The literary works of the period present a different and more realistic picture.

But it is true that, as ages rolled by, women gradually lost their freedom and the civic rights; and they came generally to be looked upon as mere instruments of pleasure and agencies for procreation. Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra* (about the 1st century A.D.) is a brilliant exposition of the view that what woman loved most was pleasure and all that man wanted of a woman was pleasure. It was during this time that polygyny was a prevalent practice, and Vātsyāyana jubilantly expatiates on the virtues of this practice. Whatever the views of this authority on the art of love, this practice deprived woman of her status in society, and family became more markedly patriarchal. The notorious statement ascribed to several lawgivers that a woman does not deserve freedom, for as a child her father looks after her, as a wife her husband

protects her, and as an old woman her son cares for her, was a product of this age. Marriage was no longer an equal partnership, but was tipped in favour of the man: the woman, it was held, merges into her man on marriage, as rivers lose themselves in the sea. Even the wise Manu is inclined to deprive a wife, a son and a slave of personal freedom and civic rights.

Pre-puberty marriages became imperative and the family of a girl who had come of age and yet remained unmarried came in for sharp condemnation, and oftentimes was ostracized. Although Manu did not go to the extent of dubbing post-puberty marriage as sinful, child marriage (and even infant marriage) became a rule. Any age between four years and ten years was considered the best for a girl to be married off; her choice in the matter was seldom considered. Her education and training were naturally all too brief and she was yoked to family responsibility all too early in life. Joint family was the order of the day and this minimised her hardships, for there were others under the roof to share her work, to teach her the domestic lessons and to play with her. In a sense, joint family structure encouraged child marriages; the earlier the girl was weaned from her parental home the better for the husband's people. In these circumstances, education of women suffered so seriously that it was soon considered unnecessary for them; priggish authorities were not wanting who sermonized that education was harmful luxury for women, better avoided.

This trend reached its climax in the subsequent ages dominated by the Purāṇic mentality in the early centuries of the Christian era. The lot of women got worse and they were placed under great disabilities. Widows were deprived of the customary right to remarry and were condemned to lead dependent lives of gloomy austerity and hard service. The condition of child-wives and virgin-widows within the framework of the joint family was deplorable. The custom of Sati (the wife burning herself on the funeral pyre of the dead husband), which in the previous ages, although occurring here and there, was by no means widespread in the country, now suddenly caught popular fancy. It was considered the rightest thing for a widow to do; and the unscrupulous priesthood was ready with scriptural citations (mostly fabricated) and convenient

interpretations. Alberuni records: 'If a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry another man. She has only to choose between two things—either to remain a widow as long as she lives, or to burn herself; and the latter eventuality is considered the preferable, because as a widow she is ill-treated as long as she lives. As regards the wives of kings, they are in the habit of burning them, whether they wish it or not, by which they desire to prevent any of them, by chance, committing something unworthy of their illustrious husbands'.

The invasion of India by Moslem adventurers in the eleventh century rendered the custom of Sati more expedient than ever among the military castes like the Rajputs. Wives of defeated chieftains and soldiers found Sati more honourable than the impending rape and capture, conversion and captivity. For this reason, Sati (Johar) was common among the womenfolk of Rajasthan, Kashmir, Punjab and Bengal—regions where Moslems had extensive contacts. The Hindu reaction to the impact of Islamic culture resulted in a further deterioration of the status of women. After the infiltration of Moslem institutions into Hindu society, numerous customs which belittled the dignity of women were introduced, as for instance the *Purdah* (Veil), the Zenana (harem), the slave-girls, obligatory polygyny, sophisticated prostitution, expedient child marriages and fashionable Sati. The Vijayanagar King in 1537 had twelve lawful wives, according to the visitor Paes; whenever he moved about 4,000 women were around him, according to Nicolo Conti; there were about 12,000 women in his harem, according to both. Hindus found it necessary and safe to marry off their daughters early and in haste to safeguard them against the rapacious attacks of Moslem adventurers. The physician Bernier saw in Mughal India the practice of Sati widespread among Hindus, especially of upper classes, although forcible Sati was outlawed.

There is little doubt that the institution of temple dancers was an old one; but it was transformed into systematic religious prostitution (*devadāsī*) about the twelfth century. The approbation and even encouragement which was accorded to prostitution in the elite society of Mughal India was responsible for this transformation. But it must be conceded that Moslems themselves kept prostitution strictly at the

secular level and did not admit feminine temptations into their places of prayer. However, the provision in the Moslem law that 'the husband was under no obligation to observe conjugal fidelity and a wife cannot leave him on that account' (Thomas*) determined the morals of the age and set the seal on the status of women. Khuda Bux sums up: 'The disgrace of having lowered the position of women belongs in the first place to the morose fanatical theologians of Islam'.†

Things changed for the better with the advent of Europeans in India about the seventeenth century. But the early European settlers emulated with avidity the unwholesome practices that were then current in the country. The officers reared harems of their own after the *nawābs* and *rājās*; they indulged in *nautch*-parties and encouraged brothels and concubinage; they contributed syphilis to the stock of diseases in India. They not only imbibed the immorality that was already in the air, but made it appear attractive to the newcomers and natives. The credit for crying halt to this outrageous infection should go to the courageous missionaries, who mobilised public opinion against the evil practices of their own countrymen and co-religionists. It is mainly due to their indefatigable energy and effort that Indian society got pruned of several ills. They spread the gospel of education, and the lot of women vastly improved.

In the wake of what is known as Indian Renaissance, family life in the country underwent far-reaching changes. The custom of Sati was completely abolished both by law and by public opinion; widow-remarriage was advocated by great leaders like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Child-marriage fell into disrepute and was eventually prohibited by a legislative measure (known as the Sarda Act after Har Bilas Sarda, its sponsor) in 1929. Thanks to the labour of the Christian missionaries and to the efforts of leaders like Keshub Chandar Sen, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Francina Sorabji, Ramabai Ranade, Pundita Ramabai and D. K. Karve, education of women became widespread and fruitful. Feminist

* Indian Women Through the Ages, p. 245.

† Studies Indian and Islamic (cit. *ibid.*, p. 250).

organisations like the Women's Indian Association (1917), the National Council of Women (1925) and the All-India Women's Conference were set up to work out the welfare of women. With education, employment opportunities were thrown open to women and soon women pursuing careers were not infrequent. The old stigmas and disabilities disappeared; women began to claim equality with men with regard to civic privileges, job placements and political partnership. Purdah was thrown aside and women vied with men for rights and responsibilities in social life.

With urbanisation, industrialisation, and dissemination of modern ideas women now are weaned out of the humdrum of household life and are increasingly participating in community activities. Women are no longer confined to the kitchen and their talents are not exhausted by child-bearing and rearing. Domesticity now is hardly attractive to a woman fed on modern ideas; her interest extends to out-door activities also. Economic considerations too are prompting married women to take up jobs to supplement the family resources. Education and employment have significantly raised the marriageable age for women; occasionally marriages are inordinately postponed. Seldom is an alliance settled without the consent of the girl; her choice in the matter is becoming increasingly important. Love marriages and inter-caste marriages are common. Unmarried women, who are by no means infrequent, are no longer objects of derision or victims of ill-treatment. She can be economically independent, and therefore respectable.

The family structure now is greatly altered. The joint family system having largely gone out of vogue, the family is becoming increasingly democratic in orientation, at any rate in larger towns and cities; the joint family, however, lingers in rural areas. Although the family in India is still patriarchal, it is no longer authoritarian. Bigamy has become a culpable offence, and with this the status of the woman has been raised. No one at present seriously disputes the equality of sexes and the woman's voice is invariably heard in all matters pertaining to the family. Industrialization and occupational mobility have encouraged small family units. The principle behind family planning has more or less generally been accepted and the householders are keen on raising their *per capita* living standards.

The traditional mores are breaking up and the family is no longer controlled by them.

But in India family has not lost its historical functions, as perhaps in the more advanced countries of the West. The biological, protective, educational, religious and recreational functions are still there; and family is the economic unit for production, by and large. Marriages are as a rule both sacramental and permanent, although divorces are not unknown and companionship marriages not infrequent. The freedom of urban life has no doubt facilitated to an extent the emancipation of youth from parental authority; but family life in this country is intensely affectionate. Radical writers here as elsewhere, are of course disturbed by what they denounce as the tyranny of morals, but their passionate crusades have not upset the home ideal. Home is still the most important preoccupation for an Indian, and is likely to continue so, for at least a few generations to come.

A passing reference was made to the joint family. The system is important enough to merit elaboration. The joint family is considered one of the distinctive features of Indian society; it has stoutly survived on this soil for at least some thousand years. It is only recently that it has been showing signs of disintegration. This unparalleled vitality has often been ascribed to the predominantly agrarian character of the country's economy. It is true that more than 80 per cent of India's population directly or indirectly depend on agriculture and are engaged in activities connected with it. And agriculture is productive of a comparatively static society where the family plays the central role. The methods of farming would necessitate fusion of kin-related families into a joint establishment, with a common roof and a common budget. The property, mostly landed, was held in common by the family members; there was collective contribution to the upkeep of the household. It functioned as a productive unit, where productivity was collective and responsibility joint.

Agricultural economy provided long stretches of leisure to the people, and in these periods a variety of socio-religious celebrations was accommodated. For the performance of these rituals and festivals, the joint family was best suited. As in the case of work in the field, so in the domestic set-up,

the greater the number of people the better it was. The nature of agricultural work as well as the frequency of festivals demanded intimate and continuous contact among the participants. In answer to this demand, the joint family structure was evolved. While the processes of farming necessitated the combination of nuclear families into a joint establishment, the relatively static character of the economy rendered the individuals dependent on the family. The property was collectively owned, and the members had collective responsibility. The family thus was supremely important for the members thereof; and the members were subordinated to the family.

The members of the joint family have common problems and they share, both by inclination and by necessity, the same pleasures and distresses. Participation in everyday domestic activities facilitates emotional adjustment, accommodation, understanding, and co-operation amongst the members. Interpersonal relationships are maximised. This entire assimilation, and often obliteration, of the individual in the framework of the family was necessary and convenient in the agricultural community.

It had, however, its sore points. Drones and parasites found the system comfortable, and idleness was methodically encouraged. Ambitious and adventurous young men found their efforts unrewarding, and the individuals were taught to sink their constitutional differences in the dull uniformity and conservative stereotype of collective living. Nevertheless the brothers and their wives were frequently involved in unseemly rivalries and jealousies, and there was often competition for the patriarchal position. Economic interdependence did not always guarantee emotional integration.

The joint family has given way under the stress of modern civilization. It is breaking up rapidly in towns and cities, and slowly but surely in villages. The trend appears irreversible and within a couple of generations it may entirely disappear. There are many reasons that have brought this about and they are not unrelated to each other. In fact, the causation is complex and does not admit easy diagnosis; it is not even uniform all over the country; sub-cultural variations inevitably enter into the causation. One of the most important causes

for the break-up of joint family, however, is progressive urbanisation and industrialisation of the country. It is true that India is still predominantly an agricultural country, with about 83 per cent of her people living in villages pursuing agricultural vocations or depending on them. There are in the country more than 558,000 villages. The proportion of urban population is relatively insignificant, about 17 per cent. But the villages are being increasingly urbanised and the seasonal unemployment incidental to agricultural labour prompts periodic movement of the village folk into towns and cities. This has upset the insular character of customary village life. Ideas of new standards of living, utilization of modern amenities, tendency towards sophistication and cultural reintegrations have altered the values connected with joint family. The changing patterns of employment in the industrial set-up constitute an important aspect of urbanisation. This has occasioned jolts to the joint family structure. Smaller, separate and distant units become necessary and expedient for industrial and urban occupations.

There were other causes operating in the break up of the joint family. In its prevalent type, the members shared the same house, but had separate kitchens; they had property in common and worked in the fields together, but for all practical purposes they were nuclear families within the fold of a joint family. The inevitable disparity in economic gains, unequal contribution to joint production, and differential responsibilities frequently resulted in quarrels within the family. The brides who trooped in were not bound by blood or by loyalty to each other, and were not always inclined to live amicably. Jealousies, taking sides in juvenile disputes, and the chronic mother-in-law complex added to the difficulties of the joint family. It was increasingly felt that living apart was both necessary and expedient. Ambitious young men found that joint family offered obstacles to their urge for adventure. Frequently, youngsters moved out from the parental hearth to try their luck in the wide world; and they were permanent losses to the joint family. When successful, they married and set up independent establishments.

Poverty is held out as another important factor that robbed the joint family of its survival value. In times of hardship,

draught, pestilence and misfortune, or when the family was in duress owing to the displeasure of the ruler or the community, the family could not survive with a large number of individuals in its fold; it would then be necessary to split up into smaller and manageable units. And once split, the chances of rejoining were remote.

However, when a joint family breaks up like this, the familial bonds between members are not normally affected. Although physically separate, the units do not lose the values that have arisen from joint living for ages. The nuclear families no doubt live apart, and are economically independent; but frequent occasions, both pleasant and unpleasant, witness the rejoining of these units. In the family tradition, the spirit of joint family has survived without much damage. The units are interdependent emotionally: there are family ties which become curiously stronger with economic independence and distance. These ties hold up the units from becoming disparate. It is wrong to assume that urbanisation and industrialisation have freed the families from traditions. In a large number of cases, convention is still the guiding spirit. Even when, therefore, the joint family is split up the familial and social values underlying it continue to flourish. As Redfield remarks: 'When new operative forces come into play, the old web of life with its pattern gets torn up. But these loose ends are re-woven into a new configuration.'

CHAPTER V

REASON, REFORM AND REVOLUTION

Krishna gives the assurance in the *Bhagavadgītā* that whenever *dharma* suffers a setback, He would make His appearance in the world of men to uphold it. *Dharma* is, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, a reification of social institutions and the values that sustain them. There are occasions when these institutions get corrupt and values get mixed up and clouded. Every society will necessarily be bothered periodically with critical moments in its developmental history; cross-cultural influences, technological innovations, political exigencies and religious movements are among the factors that bring about these anxious situations in the life of a community. Such situations call for leaders, reformation, reappraisal and reintegration. Krishna's promise symbolises important societal reactions that stem the tide of disintegration on such occasions. This divine promise has always been fulfilled, and everywhere in the world.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, Indian society was corrupt to the core. The Hindu community was steeped in superstition and several ugly social institutions had cropped up. The unwitting impact of the Mughal rule was mainly to demoralise the Hindus and foster baneful practices. The caste system had become rigidly hierarchical; its injunctions, restrictions and administration were thoroughly irrational. Large masses of people designated as depressed were subject to severe discrimination; the evil of untouchability had taken deep root. The upper classes were priggish, fanatical and aggressive. The lot of women was unspeakably miserable. They were deprived of the freedom and equality they had enjoyed in olden days, and were now little better than slaves. They were extremely ignorant, and therefore came to be cruelly exploited. Married early and yoked inescapably to domestic drudgery, they had no right to property, no rights of suffrage, no economic or social independence, not even the right in many parts

of India to move about on roads without veiling their figures. Child marriages and female infanticide were widespread. Widows in particular were victims of the most horrid social abuses, including the infamous Sati. There was an unmistakable deterioration in the Hindu social institutions and the unwholesome practices were shamelessly upheld on grounds of custom, convention and tradition. That these practices lacked scriptural sanction did not deter their protagonists from spreading them far and wide. Reason was conspicuous by its absence. Total disintegration of the society was almost imminent.

Warren Hastings, writing in 1784, suggested that most of the Englishmen regarded Indians almost as barbarians. This reveals how isolated the Indians were from the outside world. India of this period did not have a unitary character, despite common culture; the parts of the country were exclusive and ethnocentric. But when the doors of outside contact were opened, the Indians took to westernization readily. Bishop Heber who undertook an extensive travel over northern parts of India during 1824-1825 found 'obvious and increasing dispositions on the part of Indians to imitate the English in everything' (*Narrative of a Journey through . . . India*, vol. III, p. 228). Rev. Alexander Duff reports that the 'excitement for Western education continued unabated' (*Calcutta Review*, 1844). But soon this irrational excitement died down and a real revolution in the attitudes of the people was in the offing. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio of the Hindu College, Calcutta, about 1826, was mainly, although indirectly, responsible for the rational approach to social problems. He impressed upon the students 'the sacred duty of thinking for themselves'. He brought to the young men of India the teachings of Voltaire, John Locke, Francis Bacon, David Hume and Tom Paine.

Total disintegration of the society was feared. In this hour of trial a series of earnest and eminent Indians appeared on the scene and saved society from catastrophic turns, as if in fulfilment of the divine assurance. The whole of the nineteenth century was busy with the activities initiated by these inspired leaders by way of social reform, religious revival and political awakening. All these leaders were inclined to rational thinking and were alive with the finest of sentiments. Thanks

to their effort, reason, courage and sympathy were the watch-words of the new age that was ushered in.

It is not without reason that most of these reformers hailed from either Bengal or Bombay: it was in these two provinces that social ills had taken the most serious turn. It is also true that these two provinces benefited most from contact with enlightened Englishmen. And Bengal inaugurated the movement. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) has justly been described as the Father of modern India. This colourful personality heralded the age of reason, reform and renaissance; he strove, zealously and incessantly, to purge society of the evils that had grown into it. He was convinced that the main reasons for the corruption of our social institutions were ignorance and superstition. He was convinced that the spread of English education would greatly improve our morals and social conditions. It is mainly because of his interest that the first school to impart modern knowledge, the Hindu College, was founded in Calcutta. He attempted to mobilise public opinion against Sati, ill-treatment of widows, caste disabilities and idolatrous practices. Although his service to the cause of society was magnificent, his genius was in the field of religion. As the architect of Brāhma Samāj he gave India a religion which was more in the nature of revival than of reform. This institution, however, was in the vanguard of social reform in Bengal. Dwaraknath Tagore, Devendranath Tagore, Keshubchander Sen, Śaśipāda Banerjee, Sitanath Tattvabhusan, Sivanath Sastri and others who contributed considerably to the advancement of society in that part of the country were Brāhmas. Keshubchander Sen, in particular, altered the complexion of the Samāj from contemplation to social service, following a criticism from Bhāu Dāji of Bombay regarding the work of the Brāhma Samāj.

The great name in Bengal, in the matter of improvement in the condition of women, was that of Pundit Īswarchandar Vidyāsāgar (1820-1891). He fought relentlessly to correct the social perspective in regard to women in general and widows in particular. He opened schools for women and as many as a hundred schools were not only looked after but financed also by him. Within five months, in 1857-58, he founded as many as thirty-five girls' schools. He founded the first school for

women, Hindū Bālikā Vidyālaya (which later became the Bethune Female School) in 1849. Following his lead, Śaṣipāda Banerjee founded in 1865 a school for girls in his own home, braving hostile public opinion. About the same time Keshub-chander Sen busied himself with the same problem.

In Bombay Bhāu Dāji, Jagannāth Shankershet, Dādābhāi Naoroji, Karsondās Mūlji, Mahādeo Govind Rāṇaḍe, Behram Malabāri, Nārāyaṇ Chandāvarkar, Punditā Ramābai, D. K. Karve and others struggled hard to undo many social evils, principally concerning women. Education of women in this part of the country was pioneered by Jotiba Phule, who founded a school for girls in 1851, Framjee Cawasjee Banarjee (1840), Cursetjee Nusserwanjee Cama (1849), Jagannāth Shankershet and Dādābhāi Naoroji. The Prārthanā Samāj, which was founded in 1864 on the model of Brāhma Samāj, ably took up this cause. The members of the Samāj included such men of eminence as Mahādeo Govind Rāṇaḍe, Kāshīnāth Tryambak Telāṅg, Rāmakrishna Gopāl Bhāndārkar and Nārāyaṇ Chandāvarkar. The High School for Girls which was founded by D. K. Karve about the year 1896 grew into a Women's University in 1916. In Punjab, Swāmi Dayānanda Saraswatī and Lālā Lajpat Rāi took up the same cause and built up the Ārya Samāj as an instrument of social revival and reform.

Thanks to the unflinching devotion of these excellent men, most of the ills attending on social institutions were greatly mitigated; a few ugly institutions that had cropped up as a result of social corruption were eliminated. The country was inducted to the rule of reason and reform. If the present century presents a picture of the reconstruction of Indian society on the bases of industrialisation, rational religion, and science, the contribution of the great leaders mentioned above is not inconsiderable.

One of the many problems that incessantly engaged the attention of Raja Rammohun Roy was that of Sati, an unwholesome institution that had assumed horrid proportions in Bengal. It cannot definitely be ascertained how or when this practice of leading the widows to the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands originated. It was certainly not current in the ancient Āryan society, and we do not hear of it until late

mediaeval times. The practice had little, if any, justification from scriptural texts. Even when it was prevalent, it was mostly confined to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, although Rajasthan sporadically reported a high incidence of Sati, probably in the shape of Johar. The census figures of 1815-17 revealed that 864 cases of Sati were reported from Bengal while the rest of the vast country reported in all not more than 663 cases. The southern provinces were almost entirely free from this curse. And even in Bengal, the practice prevailed only among the upper classes, among whom the dead were by custom burnt, and not buried or thrown into rivers.

The English administrators were of course horrified by this inhuman practice, but they were reluctant to interfere with the religious and social customs and conventions of the natives. They noticed that Sati was after all a voluntary affair; no widow could be burnt against her will. But they did not recognise that a word in favour of it uttered by the unfortunate woman in a moment of anguish would be binding, and the poor widow could not retract from it later. Further, Sati was never 'too cruel': for instance, pregnant women or mothers with little children were prohibited from Sati. It is interesting to notice that during 1815, when the Government was indifferent to the practice, 378 Satis were reported; whereas in 1818, when the Government attempted to exercise some control, the figure shot up to 839!

But beyond doubt it was one of the most abominable practices and Raja Rammohun Roy took upon himself the task of rousing the public against it. He wrote, argued, lectured, persuaded and pleaded; and ultimately won. On December 4, 1829 the Act was passed making Sati 'a crime of culpable homicide punishable with fine, imprisonment or both'. William Bentinck played an important part in enacting this 'open, avowed and general prohibition' of what he described as 'the crime of multiplied murder'. There was of course a murmur of protest from the misguided reactionaries, but it died down when Raja Rammohun Roy went to England and got the Act confirmed.

In a way legal prohibition of Sati rendered the condition of widows more pitiable. They could not die, and society regarded them as inauspicious and unwanted. The structure

of the joint family forced the widows to live as little better than slaves in the household. The custom required that they should be cheerless all their life. Widows who could not reconcile their lot with inimical households, or were too heavily oppressed by ill-treatment, had no alternative except to let themselves loose into prostitution. The census of 1881 showed that in this country there were 2.1 million widows; in 1931 there were 846,959 widows belonging to the age group of 20-25 years. There were, in other words, so many unfortunate human beings who were condemned to life-long suffering, due to no fault of theirs whatsoever, but due solely to a wicked social institution.

The natural corollary of legal prohibition of Sati would have been to allow by law widows to marry again. But the English Government again hesitated; it regarded this as a purely social problem to be solved at the discretion of the natives. Pundit Īswarchandar Vidyāsāgar, who was the Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College and who was celebrated as a great scholar and writer, took up this cause and moved the Government in 1855 to institute an Act permitting remarriage of widows. Vidyāsāgar quoted extensively from the scriptures and established that this unfortunate lot of widows was an innovation of the late mediaeval times; he argued that *śāstras* do permit widow remarriage. When J. P. Grant proposed a Bill in the Legislative Council in 1855 legalising widow-remarriage, there were 40 petitions signed by 60,000 people against the provisions of the Bill, whereas support for the Bill came from not more than 5,000 persons in 25 petitions! However, on July 25, 1856 the Bill was passed into a law; it became compulsory that traditional rites were to be performed in reformed Hindu marriages.

But mere legislation in matters like this would be of little avail; no law can assure kind treatment to a widow in the household. Of greater importance are the education of the public and the mobilisation of public opinion. The great realist Vidyāsāgar, the uncompromising visionary Keshub-chander Sen, and the indefatigable reformer Śaṣipāda Banerjee undertook to accomplish the task of moulding public opinion in Bengal. In Bombay, the work of ameliorating the condition of widows was taken up by the brilliant Karsondās Mūlji who became famous for his legal battle with Jadunāthji Mahārāj of

the notorious Vaiṣṇava-Vallabh sect. Viṣṇu Śāstri Puṇḍit founded in 1850 a Widow Remarriage Association. Professor D. K. Karve of the Fergusson College, Poona, interested himself in the problem of widows and founded in 1896 Hindu Widows' Home in Poona to encourage and arrange remarriages for widows. As early as 1907, Mysore had a widows' home; three years later Bangalore had one; another two years later Madras had a Brahmin Widows' Hostel. Mrs Ramābāi Rāṇaḍe, wife of Mahādeo Govind Rāṇaḍe, brought into being the celebrated Sevā Sadan of Bombay in 1908, with active help from Behrāmji Malabāri. All these institutions helped considerably to change the public opinion in favour of widows.

Another problem that called for urgent solution was the practice of child marriages, which had somehow become widely prevalent in the country, especially among the upper classes. According to the findings of the Age of Consent Committee, one half of the population of girls in the country practised child marriage; girls were married before they reached the fifteenth year. Behrāmji Merwānji Malabāri, around 1884, started an extensive campaign to compel the Government to prohibit child marriages. His *Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood* was a powerful memorandum. In 1891 he succeeded in convincing the legislators that the age of consent should not be lower than 10. There were several measures to safeguard the age of consent. The most famous, however, was the Bill presented by Har Bilās Śārda in 1927, and adopted by the Legislative Council in 1929, penalising marriages where girls were under fourteen years of age and boys under eighteen, the *Prohibition of Child Marriage Act*. Despite this Act child marriages continued at least till 1951, when, according to the census report, more than nine million Indians had married before they were fourteen years of age.

Among pieces of social legislation that corrected the errant institutions in the wake of the renaissance movement, mention may be made of the following. The Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872, moved by Sir Henry Maine, sought to validate the marriages conducted under the auspices of the Brāhma Samāj according to special rites laid down. This Act was applicable only to the Brāhmas, who at that time were considered non-Hindus(!). Bhūpendranāth Basu attempted, unsuccessfully

however, in 1911, to get the Special Marriage Bill passed by the Legislative Assembly. This Bill was meant to cover strictly the Hindu population. The Social Reform Association of Bombay had been agitating since 1906 for recognition of civil marriages. It was only in 1954 that the Special Marriage Act recognised marriages as valid and brought the entire Indian population under the purview of this Act. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1956 made provision for divorce and fixed the lower age limit of 18 for boys and 15 for girls. Legislation also brought about equality of men and women in the matter of inheritance of property.

Social reform in this country kept close pace with political revolution. The Indian National Congress, it would be interesting to know, was originally meant 'to deal principally with social reform'. Mahādev Govind Rāṇaḍe who was one of the founder members of the Congress was essentially a social worker. But when A. O. Hume, at the instance of Lord Dufferin, pleaded for making the Congress exclusively a political organisation, Rāṇaḍe brought into being a sister organisation in 1887, the Indian Social Conference, which was the main agent in the country for social reform for nearly half a century. It is true that some of the Congress leaders like Bāl Gangādhār Tilak were averse to reform, and most of them were indifferent to it. But the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the nation highlighted the value of social reform in the intended political revolution. Annie Besant, who called him Mahatma, complained that he was a first-rate social reformer but no politician. She commented that he had turned the Congress into a social reform league, stopping all its work. While the criticism is to an extent true, it should be recognised that social reform and political revolution are intimately bound with each other.

Mahatma Gandhi devoted his attention primarily to the task of relieving the distresses and disabilities of the so-called depressed classes. The masses of low castes and outcastes within the orbit of India's population are doubtless a blot on the nation. As early as 1904, Gopāl Krishna Gokhale, the political guru of Mahatma Gandhi, had pledged himself in Dharwar to work for the upliftment of the depressed classes.

Two years later, the Depressed Class Mission Society of India was formed with Nārāyan Gaṇesh Chandāvarkar as its president; in its original set-up it was an organ of the Prārthanā Samāj. In 1909 the Depressed Class Mission Society of Madras came into being. These Societies undertook to spread education among the depressed classes. Even in 1897, one K. Ranga Rau of Mangalore had conducted schools for the children coming from these classes. Col. Olcott of the Theosophical Society also espoused the cause of education among these unfortunate classes. Education was supposed to undo the many ills that attended these groups of people, isolated from the rest of culture, discriminated against, and subjected to severe hardships. Along with educational activities, there were temperance societies, marriage reform leagues and other organisations that addressed themselves to the cause of improving the lot of the depressed classes. The most prominent of these bodies has been the Harijan Sevak Samāj, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi.

Sympathy with the depressed classes developed in due course into a movement against the caste system itself. When Minto-Morley Reforms provided separate representation for the Muslims, V. R. Shinde of the Prārthanā Samāj pleaded for special representation to the depressed classes. There were social workers who regarded these classes as separate social units and they hoped that adequate political representation would guarantee the improvement of their socio-economic conditions. But there were others, better informed and more influential, who held that the caste system in India should be broken before the disabilities of the depressed classes could be eliminated. Shankaran Nair, for instance, suggested that it was far easier to attack and break down the caste system than to raise the social status of the depressed classes. K. Natarajan, in the same vein, argued that outcastes would be there as long as castes were there, and that if the outcastes had to disappear castes must first disappear.

Gandhiji, as a social reformer, chose the middle path. He was by his own admission a *sanātani* Hindu, that is to say, a protagonist of the wisdom of the caste organisation. But he was convinced that the exclusion of large masses of human beings on whatever grounds from the privileges of this organisation was irrational, unwarranted and an unmitigated evil. He did

not, however, agree to their distinct social or political status. When he assumed Congress leadership in 1920 he pleaded for equal treatment of the depressed classes with the so-called caste Hindus. In the year 1923, he and Madan Mohan Mālavīya gave the call for the removal of untouchability, and soon it became a part of the constructive programme of the Congress Party. For Gandhiji, it was not a mere political expediency, but a matter of necessary social justice. He was thinking of the value of our social institutions; and social reform for him was somewhat in the nature of a servo-mechanism.

APPENDIX

ASPECTS OF INDIAN SOCIAL HISTORY

The early social history of India is obscure. The Vedic records provide a picture of antagonism and assimilation of the Aryan settlers and the Dasyu natives. The former are believed to be a Mediterranean stock that migrated from Iran. In the R̥gvedic period, the Aryan settlements were all over the western parts of India, from Sind to Aṅga, from Kashmīr to Māl̥vā and Rājaputāna. This part of the country was styled as Brah̥māvarta, lying between two rivers, now dried up, Sarasvatī and Dr̥ṣadvatī; Manu asserts that whatever conduct was prevalent in this region as long-standing convention is the 'standard' (sadācāra). The early *Dharmasūtras* had their origin in this valley.

While this region was setting up standards in right conduct, it is surmised that society was passing through turbulent times. Information concerning this remote past is meagre: but the early Āryan administrators were struggling to evolve social institutions to safeguard the best interests of the Āryan colonists, without upsetting the natives. Caste as an arrangement of the community to distribute duties and rights is doubtless an ancient institution. It was already well established during the days of the Buddha, about six centuries before the Christian era. The Buddhist records indicate that the Āryan society was by then stylised into hierarchically arranged, closed caste-groups (jātis). *Dīgha-Nikāya* suggests that outside the structured Āryan community were several 'low' castes (hīnajātis). The *Dharmaśāstra* texts of those days mention cāṇḍāla, vaina (vena), Niṣāda, Rathakāra, Paulkasa (pukkusa), and Mleccha as out-castes. The new social stratification involved the conception of nobility of certain occupations; and the widespread eagerness of individuals to transcend caste limitations is also evident. About 364 B.C., the rise of the Nanda dynasty marked a change in social values. The kings were no longer necessarily kṣatriyas. Nanda, the monarch was the son of a barber; and Mahāpadma-Nanda, another monarch, was of unknown origin

(ajñātakula). What is known as the Vedic polity was by then fast disappearing.

The invasion of Alexander into the north-western regions of the country about 330 B.C. posed a new problem to the leaders of the changing Āryan community. The Macedonian king left in India seven satraps with their own garrisons. The Greek soldiers and citizens who chose to stay in India freely mixed with the natives. Many of them became converts to Indian religion. It was about the second century B.C. that Heliodorus, son of Dion, and ambassador of King Antalkidas in the court of King Bhāgabhadra erected the Garuḍa-dhvaja to Vāsudeva, 'the god of gods' in Besnagar (Ancient Vidiśā); he styled himself in the pillar inscription a 'bhāgavata'. The urge to overthrow the Macedonian rule seized Chandragupta Maurya (Sandrocottos of the Greeks) about 323 B.C.; he was assisted in this project by the famous Chāṇakya. Chandragupta's was the first empire in India: it stretched from Iran to Śravanabelgoḷa (Mysore), Kathiawār to Kāmarūpa (Assam). He subjugated the satraps, and conquered the Nanda King. His army consisted of Śakas (Scythians), Yavanas, Kirātas, Kambojas, Pārasikas (Persians) and Bāhlikas. The Mauryan empire was Brāhmanical in its religious orientation; the Āryan ideology was reintroduced with necessary changes. Chāṇakya speaks of an Ārya as a free-born citizen of the Mauryan empire; and śūdras were included among Āryans. Despite the social stratification, all classes were equal in the eyes of law: there was equality so far as law suits were concerned (*vyavahārasamatā*), and there was equality in the matter of punishment (*daṇḍasamatā*). Slaves and serfs, menial labourers (*dāsas*) and domestic servants (*bhṛitakas*) obtained the status of free citizens; they were 'made Āryans' (*āryakṛta*). The Mauryan empire is said to have been a welfare state.

During the days of Chandragupta, about 300 years before the birth of Christ, Indian society was a mosaic of several racial strands in various stages of assimilation. India was in active contact with Persia, Egypt, Greece, Western Asia and China. People from all these countries gathered in the Maurya capital of Pāṭaliputra. The cosmopolitan character of the Indian society continued throughout the Mauryan times; the shift of religious orientation from Brahmanism to Buddhism during the time of Chandragupta's grandson, Aśoka (274 B.C.), did not affect

this character. But the continuous inflow of outsiders did cause disturbance in the Indian community. The Greeks, Bactrians, Scythians, and Persians were pressing forward in the north-western region; there were in that region no less than thirty foreign (mostly Indo-Bactrian Greek) monarchs. The natives resented this incursion of outside groups who chose not to get integrated but to remain distinct. There were a few rulers like the Indo-Bactrian king Menander of Sakala (Sialkot in Punjab) and the Parthian king Vindapharna (Gondapharnes) of Taxila, who were good, just and appreciative of Indian culture. The former is celebrated in the Buddhist *Miṇḍa-Panḥa*. The latter was the patron of St Thomas, the founder of the first Syrian Christian Church in India in the 1st century A.D. But these rulers in general were arrogant iconoclasts, ready to exploit the natives, and impose their ideas by force.

The widespread protest of the Indian community expressed itself in the form of the Śunga empire; the outsiders were either driven back or forced to become assimilated in the Indian community. Pushyamitra (187-151 B.C.), the founder of this dynasty, was a Brāhmin revivalist. The Śunga kings as well as their successors, Kaṇvas and Śātavāhanas, were zealous patrons of Brāhmanical ideology and upheld the institutions like *varṇa* and *āśrama*. The greatest of Indian law-books, *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, was evolved during their days. Thanks to the revivalist zeal of Śungas, the process of assimilation was speeded up. The Asiatic Greeks of Bactria discreetly got themselves integrated. The Scythian (Śaka) kings who ruled a large portion of India during the first century A.D. were thoroughly Indianised. They even had names like Rudradāman, Śivaghōṣa, Śivadatta, Rājula and Ghaṭaka; they intermarried and adopted Indian religion.

The Āryan society, which during the times of Śunga rulers, had become Brāhmanical, was now again a mosaic of several racial and religious groups: the misegeneration process went on. The community was cosmopolitan and tolerant. There were attempts on the part of leaders to reorganise the social institutions on a rational basis, and in keeping with the changing times. The old rigidity and exclusiveness of caste groups were no longer feasible; the rigour of the Dharmaśāstra provisions had to be toned down considerably. It was in answer to this

need for readjustment that the ideology of *Kaliyuga* was evolved. The four aeons (*yugas*) were said to witness a progressive decline of *Dharma*; the present one, the *Kaliyuga* (which commenced, according to *Sūrya-Siddhānta*, in 3102 B.C.) was described as a dark age of chaos and disintegration, in which *Dharma* rested on one of its four legs only. The *Dharmaśāstra* injunctions and restrictions had to be relaxed considerably to make sure that even the 'little *dharmā*' did not entirely disappear. What was regarded as a great sin in the first *yuga* would be considered but a minor lapse in the fourth; the *varṇāśrama* arrangement in this last *yuga* could not be exacting or precise. Social evils were so numerous and so varied, that re-establishment of the *varṇāśrama* scheme of life was impossible. The authorities in the matter of *Dharmaśāstras* recognised that it was expedient to ignore or condone a large number of social excesses and lapses, and that the Indian population was too greatly mixed up to be managed adequately by the time-honoured *Dharmaśāstras*. Convenience, expediency, accommodation to the changing times, concessions and tolerance characterised the spirit of the *Dharmaśāstra* texts in *Kaliyuga*.

While *Kaliyuga* was an ideology that was set floating in the early years of the Christian era, another concept now linked up with this, *Āpaddharma*, was more ancient. *Āpaddharma* is the set of rights and duties, affiliations and exclusions, injunctions and prohibitions in times of hardship and distress. The *Śānti-parvan* of *Mahābhārata* highlights this aspect of *Dharma*. In normal times the *varṇa* and *āśrama* arrangements were imperative, and the *Dharmaśāstra* canons in this regard would be binding. But when times are hard, and the individual or his family is in distress, there is no insistence on the fulfilment of canonical expectations. The individual, no matter what caste or *āśrama* he belonged to, was free to choose the vocation, rôle and attitudes that assured his survival; for survival is more urgent and important than rectitude of conduct. The *Āpaddharma* ideology prevails in *Kaliyuga*.

About 78 A.D. the Kuṣānas of the Eastern Turkish stock began to rule the country from Taxila. These Yeu-chi nomads of Central Asia acquired lordship over considerable parts of northern India and the empire of the greatest of them, Kanishka (78-101), covered the entire North India, Bactria and

Afghanistan. The remarkable thing about them was that they were completely Indianised; the Kuṣāna kings became Buddhists or Śaivites. The country was then in active contact with China, Rome, Iran, Alexandria and Egypt; even in the field of sculpture, the Eurasian craftsmen of Bactria made a deep impress upon Indians, and the rise of Greco-Roman Gāndhāra art is traceable to the Kuṣāna period. It is an indication that Indian community was not insulated from foreign contact.

It was but natural that Indians had to rethink about their social institutions. During the days of Kanishka, the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism necessitated a rearrangement of Hindu and Buddhist social organisations. The Kuṣānas, the Scythians and the Hūṇas had adopted indigenous customs, religions and attitudes. They had no idea of withdrawing from the Indian mainland and so made India their home. While the later Kuṣāna kings promoted the *Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇava* cults, the Hūṇas were Śaivite by persuasion. There was in the country a great spirit of tolerance and free interchange; and many ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism were incorporated into the revised Āryan religion, even as the Mahāyāna itself was the result of absorption of Vedic and Purāṇic ideology in Buddhism. The extremes were eschewed, and reintegrations were seen; people were catholic and liberal. The Gupta period (320-535 A.D.) that followed was magnificent because of these healthy reintegrations and revaluations. The Gupta empire that extended from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal was founded on racial admixtures, religious assimilations, and, above all, freedom of mind. There was a renaissance of the old social order in a new framework of values. When historians describe this period in Indian history as an age of neo-Brāhmanical revival, they emphasise the new values that came to be attached to old institutions; society was no longer Āryan, and the social order no longer Vedic. There was a shift in religious emphasis from pantheism to polytheism; superstition gained ascendancy over critical and rational thinking; the Vedic literature gave way to the Purāṇas; the elaborate sacrifices were abridged and adopted in rituals. The caste system was petrified and disparate social groups were evident all over the country.

In fact, the closing years of the period witnessed a large number of independent and inimical principalities: the Vard-

hanas of Thanēśvar, the Gurjaras of Pratihāra, the Gahadwalas of Kanauj, the Pālas of Bengal, the Cālukyas, Rāṣtrakūṭas and Pallavas in southern regions. The political anarchy was an outward expression of social confusion and religious chaos. It was out of this mass of uncertainty that the great Śaṅkara (about 788 A.D.) rose to redeem the country from total social and religious disintegration. He it was that salvaged the remains of Vedic culture and built up a new system of values retaining the old contents. Hinduism as we know it today, was doubtless the work of Śaṅkara. To complete the work of reorganisation that Śaṅkara spearheaded, several *Nibandhas* on social problems came to be written, and numerous intellectuals like Medhātithi (about 900 A.D.) undertook to reinterpret the old Dharmaśāstra texts in the light of social changes that had come about.

Before this work of reorganisation of social institutions could be completed, Mohammad of Ghazni (998-1030 A.D.) and Mohammad of Ghorī severely rocked the country, creating an atmosphere of suspense. While the former plundered and destroyed, the latter conquered and subjugated the local chieftains. The former had no intention of occupying India, but the latter had come to stay. When Sind and Punjab were conquered in 1192, India came under the control of the Turko-Afghans. Mohammad of Ghorī's officer Qutb-ud-din Aibak (about 1210) ruled over the whole of North India, from Punjab to Bengal. In less than a hundred years, Muslims were ruling over much larger stretches. Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq (1340) had control not only over the whole of North India but had sway over large sections in Deccan and Malabar. The political supremacy of Moslems fanned their zeal for conversion; a large proportion of Muslims in India today are converts from Hinduism. Mass conversions by force, by incitement, by lures of office and lucre disturbed society severely. To guard against further disintegration of social institutions, the caste-system became inelastic and defiant of change. The caste stratification was fixed on hereditary considerations, and inter-caste transactions were severely restricted; rigid barriers came to be erected in the matter of institutions and their adjustments. The numerous taboos that crowd a Hindu's mental make-up today are traceable to this period.

The Muslim aggression stimulated what is known as the Rājput renaissance. Rājputs were not the direct descendents of the old-time Kṣatriya chieftains. In fact, the Rājput class, was a composite one: Śakas, Scythians, Hūṇas, Gurjaras, Pratihāras as well as the local tribes like Goṇḍ, Jāt, Abhīra, Khāsiya, Bhojīa and Gūjār lent their strains to the emergence of this class. The Rājput aristocracy was intent on stemming the tides of Muslim expansion; it was transformed into several military groups, which were remarkably valiant. The Rājput princes were passionately Hindu in their attitudes; and they assumed the rôle of defenders of religion. If Hindu society continued the work of reorganisation started in the late seventh century, Rājput chieftains were largely responsible for the moral support and political security that this work needed. Due to several reasons, primarily due to the contact with Muslim social institutions and the stimulations provided by the warrior Rājput castes, women were degraded to inferior position in the reorganised society, and were excluded from a large number of social and religious pursuits. The evils of early marriage and widow-burning (*sati*) were creatures of this period.

The dream of the Muslim conquerors to make India a Muslim state was shattered by zealous and proud Rājput heroes, and the valiant Mahrāṭṭa hordes under the leadership of the great Śivāji, the matchlessly militant Sikhs and Jāts. It is true there were Muslims like Amir Khusru, Md. Jāyāsī (1494) Dārā Shukōh (d. 1659) and Akbar (1556-1605), who sought to fuse Hindus and Muslims into a new culture incorporating the best elements of both cultures. It was Dārā Shukōh, who was eminently sympathetic to the Sanskrit lore, that stimulated the development of Hindustāni as a fusion of Sanskrit and Persian. Akbar, the magnificent emperor, suggested the necessity of bringing into being a new religion, Din Ilāhi, which contained the essentials of Hinduism as well as Islam. Many saints like Rāmānanda, Kabīr (1410-1518), Dādu (1544-1600), and Nānak (1469-1538) contributed to this spirit of reconciliation.

Generally, however, Muslim rulers and chieftains were bigots and considered conversion of Hindus to Islam as a sacred duty. Aurangzeb, who represents an extreme case of this attitude, was in no mood for compromise. He imposed *jizyā* on Hindus and announced a 'holy war' (*jehād*) against

their religion. Had he not pursued this disastrous policy it is likely that Indian society would have incorporated a larger share of Islamic ideas in regard to its institutions. But his attitude of hatred was hotly resented by the Mahrāṭṭas in the South, Jāts in the central regions, Sikhs in the north-western regions, and Rājputs in the West.

Reaction was immediate and severe. There were several attempts to uphold the typically Hindu social institutions, and there was a call to resist all outside influences. Śivāji, who was crowned as *Chattrapati* in 1674, was influenced by the patriotic Saint Rāmadās (1608-1681), and sought to re-establish the Hindu Empire as visualised by the Dharmaśāstras and Smṛtis. This ideal of 'Hindu Pad-pādśāhi' was promoted by the powerful and conservative Peśvas. Guru Govind Singh, who organised the Khālsā in 1699, stirred the non-Muslims of Punjab to oppose Muslim domination and to resist Muslim influence. While he realised the evils of the caste system he retained the Brāhmaṇical *saṃskāras* in a changed form, as in the case of the rite of Pāhul. He sought to reorient Hindu society in order to resist the *ḡhād* menace. The social institutions of the North Indian Hindus bear the impact of this attempt.

The advent of Europeans in India was an earlier episode. The Portugese Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut in 1498, and the English had their factories at Agra, Ahmedabad, Surat and Broach by 1616. In due course, the English dominated the scene by defeating Sirāj-ud-daula at Plassey, the French at Chandernagore, and the Dutch at Chinsura. While the English merchants were not interested in meddling with Indian social institutions, the cross-cultural influences were indeed felt by increasingly larger sections of the Hindu population. The work of the English missionary, William Carey, who settled down at Serampore about 1799, contributed considerably to the changing patterns of Hindu society. Raja Rammohun Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Isvara Chandra Vidyasagar; the leaders of Ārya Samāj, Brāhma Samāj, Prārthanā Samāj, the Theosophical Society and Rāmakrishna Mission have brought about the changes in our social institutions which are continuing in our own day.

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