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Ancient India Varna and Jati "Advantages and Faults"

A B S T R A C T

The Hindu social organization is remarkable for its Varnasrama Dharm or duty based on other and stages of life. This broad division was originally associated with the color conscious Aryans to distinguish them from the non-Aryans. The Purusha-sukta hymn(), refers to the emergence of the four —fold social order from the four limbs, of the creator. The hymn is in the last book of the Rig-Veda, suggesting its late origin "This tradition of creation is accepted and even propounded by Manu(), who refers to the assignment of different duties and occupation to different social groups".

A caste is 'a collection of families or groups of families, bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with a mythical ancestor, human or divine; professing to follow the same calling; and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community". According to Dr.V.A. Smith, a caste may be defined as "a group of families internally united by peculiar rules for the observance of ceremonial purity, especially in the mater of diet and marriage".

Manu mentions the term "Jati" meaning caste. Originally these two terms had no doubt different connotations, but in later times they were considered as synonymous. The term varna meaning color was used to distinguish the Aryans from the non-Aryans. Later on, it stood for all the four groups. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, representing the four fold division of Hindu society. The other term jati connotes, according to the legal texts, not only the four castes or groups but also numerous new castes, created to accommodate the off-springs of inter-caste marriages. These castes became more or less water-tight compartments, with qualities, work and rights and obligations peculiar to each. For various castes, separate set of rules of conduct were framed. In course of time the various groups of people were accommodated in different stages of material and spiritual development into a composite pluralistic society. The (Jatis) or castes enjoyed considerable freedom in formulating the details such as marriage, food, communion etc. of their social life.

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The Beginning:

The caste system of the Hindus developed in the later Vedic age and the Epic periods. Its is complicated and split up Hindu society into numerous compartments. It became strongest impediment in the way of the solidarity of the Hindus but created social inequality among them. Buddha and Mahavira, and Nanak they refused this system⁽¹⁾.

Varna or Color was the original basis of the caste system, It is difficult to say that at what time and in what manner the caste system originated. So The Brahmanas attribute a divine origin to caste system⁽²⁾, They base their views on the tenth Mandal⁽³⁾ of the Rigveda called the Purusha Sukta. It asserts that the Brahmana was born out of the mouth of Brahma God, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaisya from his stomach, and the Sudra from his feet⁽⁴⁾. By virtue of his supposed origin from the head of Brahma (the creator), the Brahmana is considered of the highest of the castes. The Kshatriya as originated from the arms of Brahma, practiced the profession of arms. The Vaisya, emanated from Brahma's thighs, his duty was to increase the prosperity of the country and support the country economically. As the Sudra emanated from the feet of Brahma he was supposed to render services to the people of above three castes⁽⁵⁾. As the Vedas are revealed books and contain nothing but the truth , so the division of society as given therein is attributed to divine ordinance.

The original idea of caste was that of color (Varna). The fair-skinned Aryans looked down upon the dark skin. And the Indian terms used to describe the caste system are (Varna and Jati), complexion and birth. The former refers to racial difference and the latter means "birth" and "descent". It was to mark off the racial difference between the Aryans and non-Aryans, and they are used as such in Rig-Veda. When the Aryans came to India as invaders with radical differences in complexion, religion, customs and manners between them and the non-Aryan inhabitants, there came about the first broad grouping in the Aryan society. Politically, the Aryans were the conquerors and the non-Aryans the conquered and racially the former were of a fair complexion whereas the latter were dark⁽⁶⁾.

According to Nesfield, the decisive factor in the growth of the caste system was professional specialization. Occupations were classed in order of rank-hunting or fishing, stock-breeding, agriculture, manual or servile labor, trade, priesthood. It seems that there was something in early social structure which permitted the division of society into classes. Later on, when the Aryans came and settled in the Indo-Gangetic plains⁽⁷⁾, both color and occupations contributed to the development of a system which was called caste system. In other countries, the old distinctions disappeared with the passage of time, but in India certain peculiar circumstances forced the society to continue with this unnatural distinctions⁽⁸⁾.

The monarchs in the later Vedic period loved to perform religious rites on an elaborate scale. At this time religion became more ritualistic. This period sufficient work for a class of specialists and therefore, such a group arose in the descendants of the old priest community of the Rig-Vedic times. They devoted their life for mastering elaborate rituals of sacrificial worship thus acquiring special knowledge to perform them in all their minutest details⁽⁹⁾. This led to the rise and subsequent supremacy of the Brahmana caste.

In the Rig-Vedic period during the tribal wars, all able men accompanied their chief to the battle and returned to plough in times of peace. But the constant wars compelled the

Aryan rulers to keep always a body of trained and skilled soldiers. Thus, these warriors in due course formed themselves into a separate independent class and were styled as Kshatriyas⁽¹⁰⁾. Therest of the Aryans engaged in old jobs, i.e. trade, industry and crafts were called the Vaisyas. They got a lower position than the Kshatriyas. The fourth class of men were called the Sudras. They were the menial and servile workers. Their duty was to serve the other three classes. The rank of the sudras who occupied the lowest position was swollen by the aborigines⁽¹¹⁾. Thus the caste system based on a division of labor. This is the historical origin of the caste system.

The Evolution:

The racial factor, the philosophy of karma⁽¹²⁾ (deeds) the basic idea in political domination and the occupational bias —all have contributed in the formation of the caste system. Starting originally with four castes. These four castes in course of time were divided and subdivided into many compartments of sub-caste. Only the birth determines the caste or sub-caste of a man with the number of castes the rigidity of the system also developed⁽¹³⁾.

It is already suggested that the Hindu social fabric with its four Varnas — the original divisions — relaxed itself to accommodate not only foreigners. But even aboriginals, and also provided social security to the off-springs of inter-caste and inter-racial marriages. This resulted in the emergence of numerous sub-castes with defined functions and obligations prescribed by the legal texts. According to these, the Brahmans occupied the top place in the social hierarchy and this was upheld by legalizes like Manu and The Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts, however, give precedence for the Kshatriyas⁽¹⁴⁾.

The Brahmans could take up the occupation of teaching and perform sacrifices for others. The Brahmans enjoyed certain privileges in the society. They received lesser punishments for their offences. They enjoyed concessions in property rights. The Brahman's position and privileges were not disturbed even if he failed to attain proficiency in the study of the sacred texts and was a Brahman by birth alone. It was possible for Brahmans to take to the profession of the Kshatriyas who were just below them in the hierarchy and there are several instances of Brahman generals. Further, the ruler was expected to support a Brahman engaged in performing sacrifices and one belonging to this caste could as well accept gifts from any person⁽¹⁵⁾.

The Kshatriyas represented in Purusha-sukta as the Rajanya class in the Vedic times (i.e., kinsmen of the ruler, had emerged as a distinct social group then), shared with the Brahmans the task of Vedic study, performance of sacrifices and the making of gifts, but their main occupation was administration and fighting; however, any Kshatriya in distress could take to the profession of a Vaisya. There are references in records to the Kshatriyas in general had their rules of conduct and morality. These concerned the treatment accorded to guests, showing kindness to all and protecting the refugee seeking shelter⁽¹⁶⁾.

In the middle ages, the power and prestige of Kshatriyas started declining. The political power passed almost completely into the hands of the Sudras. Many dynasties of Medieval India were of low origin. The Kakatiyas⁽¹⁷⁾, the Reddis⁽¹⁸⁾, etc⁽¹⁹⁾.

Acquisition of wealth is commendable in a Vaisya and encouraged to make money by all legitimate means. Most of the trade and commerce was under the control of the Vaisya. The deceitful merchants were given severe punishments. We find some of the Vaisya

community distinguished themselves as soldiers, writers, linguistics and lords. The Set this or Merchants formed an organized group with their head known as Sreshthin*. This guild has economic and social importance.⁽²²⁾

The Sudras, They too had a number of sub-castes. Probably based on their vocation. They not allowed to study the Vedas, but could perform the smaller sacrifices without the use of Vedic formulae. These sub-castes formed from proper and improper unions between the four original Varnas or with one another⁽²³⁾

The Sudra community was divided into a number of clans. Occupations and territorial division were the main factors deciding the sub-division among them. of which Kamma and Telaga are examples of caste group formed on a territorial basis. The Velama Balija, and Reddy were examples of occupational or trade groups⁽²⁴⁾.

The Sudras abandoned the plow in the later eras of the Rajveda in exchange for the sword in order to serve the state, According to the Smriti law, the Chandalas* had to do the simplest chores, such as carrying corpses and cleaning the streets, They had to live outside the village, and were not allowed to roam at night except by distinctive signs fixed by the village chief⁽²⁵⁾. Strict rules were established to prevent contamination of other classes by contact with them. The evidence shows the Chinese traveler Huen Tsang adopted these rules during the Gupta era* in the first half of the seventh century, as the Chandalas and similar casts lived in dwellings located outside villages and cities and were seen as outcasts⁽²⁶⁾.

The Chandalas lived in the Andhra Desa (Deccan) region of southern India, They were divided in two groups, (a) the Mala and (b) the Madiga. The Mala constituted the bulk of agriculture laborers, while shoe making was the legitimate trade of the Madigas⁽²⁷⁾.

We can get vivid glimpses of the clothing, morals, religious and social customs of these tribes, such as offering human flesh to their gods, subsistence on hunting, and kidnapping women for marriage. These changes in the social order were the result of several factors, particularly the emergence of new sub-castes based on new professions , vocational mobility and due to the impact of foreign religious forces⁽²⁸⁾.

Other Castles Positions:

The Brahmins as a class were considered to the highest in society. Their duty, according to the Manu and Dharama —Sastra* was to read and teach the Vedic literature and to perform various sacrifices for themselves and for others. They were to live on the charity of the people or on the many obtained by the performance of various rites⁽²⁹⁾. This was the intellectual aristocracy from which were expected to maintain a very high standard of morality and were to be an ideal for the rest of society. Sometimes the Brahmins held government jobs⁽³⁰⁾.

The Kshatriyas were primarily concerned with the administration of the country, especially defense. As political power was the most important power, the Kshatriyas often asserted their authority over the Brahmanas. There were eminent scholars among Kshatriyas. And more of them were profoundest scholars of the Vedas⁽³¹⁾.

The Vaishyas were concerned with the economic life of the country. Their main duty was production of wealth. They were next to the Kshatriyas in the society. Sometimes they became kings and warriors⁽³²⁾. While The Sudras were the strangest creation of the Indo-

Aryans. They were denied the study of the Vedic literature and the wearing of sacred thread*. The Chandalas position was still worse. They were to perform the meanest work⁽³³⁾.

Advantages Of The System:

The system was based on the economic principal division of labor, which promoted economic strength and efficiency in professions. When the births began to determine the castes, the system preserved skilled labor by transmitting vocational skill from generation to generation. Thus, it made the progress possible and maintained the continuity of professions and crafts. Hieun Tsang, Alberuni, Ibn Batuta and even the early Britishers were impressed by the artistic skill of the Indians in every art and craft.

So it can be said that this system was introduced to meet the needs of the time when different races — the Aryans and the non-Aryans had to live together in friendship and peace. It helped in preserving the two distinct races and cultures — the Aryans and the Dravidians. It is the caste system responsible for the preservation of Hindu religion and culture.

The caste system engendered a spirit of orthodox, exclusiveness and class pride which served as a strong resistance against foreign encroachments. It has enabled the Hindu society to withstand the shocks of the foreign invasions. This system was also responsible for preserving the purity of blood among the various groups of Hindus even to day. Each caste framed rigid rules for marriage. Inter-caste marriages were forbidden⁽³⁴⁾.

So, India was able to preserve racial purity to a large extent. It contributed considerably to the stability of the Hindu national morals, religion, art and craftsmanship, in spite of the fact that the Hindu community has been passing through centuries of political turn moils.

The concept of organic unity and inter-dependence ran through the whole caste-system. Even when it was sought to deduce divine sanction for the ascendancy of the superior orders on the hypothesis that the four castes had emanated from four different limbs of the Creator of Universe, the underlying idea was not of detachment but of union. Each unit formed part of the whole. Everyone had, therefore, to perform his duty towards himself and society at large, each was under an obligation, as long as he was able, to contribute his share of labor, according to his capacity and calling, for the benefit of society. Such an attitude of mind brought all the castes, their beliefs, customs and activities, under one common system. Every one found a place appointed for him; everyone had his legacy of the common tradition, common creed, and common ethical code in addition to the special legacy of hereditary skill for the fulfillment of the part to which he was called⁽³⁵⁾.

The system conduced to the solidarity of castes as distinct units of the social organization; it prompted effective association not only to the different members of each group but also of group and groups. Thus was the ancient tradition preserved, social tranquility safeguard, civil and economic welfare secured, individual happiness and contentment promoted. Thus the caste system has been useful in promoting civic virtues, self-sacrifice, love and service. Therefore, it is proved a useful social institution⁽³⁶⁾.

The Faults Of The System:

Though this institution has been of great value to Hinduism, many evils have resulted from this system, It split up the Hindu society into hundreds of castes and sub- castes and It

developed a spirit of exclusiveness and class pride, It created wide gulfs between the various sections of the community⁽³⁷⁾. In course of time it proved a disintegrating rather than a unity factor, so A cobbler was not permitted to devote himself any educational profession even he had intellectual caliber. Thus this system suppressed genius and repressed individual liberty⁽³⁸⁾. But the caste system, has done more harm than good. Sir Hefiry Maine* describes the Indian caste system “as the most disastrous and blighting of human institutions” and It is anti-national. Caste-prejudices and caste feuds have always dominated our history⁽³⁹⁾.

A caste system based on the principle of birth is undesirable. The social divisions, according to Gita*, should be passed on “Karma” i.e. character and deeds. The present Indian castes is based on birth and so it makes no provision for “low-born talents” to rise and “high-born incompetents” to occupy a low position. In this way, it is also open to grave and genuine criticism⁽⁴⁰⁾.

According to V.A. Smith, the system “it shuts off Indians from free association with foreigners”, thus making it difficult for Indians to understand them. The upper castes, particularly the Brahmans, would not mix with foreigners (even with the ruling classes) and consequently created innumerable difficulties and often hindered hearty co-operation between the Indians and foreigners during the various periods of Indian History⁽⁴¹⁾. The caste system has been responsible for narrow outlook and caste exclusiveness. Till recently, the Indians lived according to caste customs and never bothered about the general affairs of the country, so Castes hindered the growth of nationalism. On account of the above reasons, an average Indian is conservative and stay-at-home. But the chief curse of the caste system is “untouchability”. The upper castes did not regard the low-caste Sudras as even human beings, They were treated with contempt, Their shadow defiled the upper classes, They could not touch utensils, clothes and water that was of the upper castes, They could not even draw water from the wells of the upper castes to quench their thirst and They could not worship in the temples of the upper castes⁽⁴²⁾. They were treated as beasts not as a man. The social reforms in the 19th century raised their voice against this evil. The Indian Government banned untouchability in all its forms in the constitution of India⁽⁴³⁾.

Caste in India became anti-democratic. As this system does not encouraged freedom, it affected the spirit of democracy. By splitting the people, this system could not help the growth of national sprit and for this reason for centuries India was at the mercy of foreign conquerors.

Conclusion:

Caste system is a unique trait of the Hindu society. There is difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the origin of the caste system. In Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda it is said that Brahmana was born out of the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaishya from his stomach, and Varna or color was the original basis of the caste system. While others opined that different occupations formed the basis of the caste system. The main castes in the society were the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sudras. Contemporary sources refer to sub-castes among the main groups Chaturvarnas. The caste system in early stages was flexible but afterwards they became rigid. The foreign invasions further increased the rigidity of the caste system. The Brahmans were considered as the highest in society. The Kshatriyas were concerned with the administration of the country, the Vaishyas were

connected with economic life of the country, The Sudras rendered services is based on the principle of division of labor which developed efficiency of production. It promoted social service activities. It helped for preserving the purity of blood.

The caste system has done more harm than good. It is based on the principal of birth is undesirable. It restricted Indians from free association with foreigners. It was responsible for narrow outlook. The main curse of this system is untouchability. The upper castes ill-treated the lower castes. It has broken the solidarity of Hindu society. At present the caste system loosing its importance.

(١) ريتشارد اوزبرن وبورن فان لون، الفلسفة الشرقية، تر: إمام عبد الفتاح إمام، القاهرة، ٢٠٠٣، ص ص ٣٥، ٩٢.

(2) Hussein Alanzi, The political and social organization in India during Early Vedic Civilization (1500 –

1000 B.C).٧٥٤، ص ٧٥٤ / نيسان، جامعة واسط / نيسان، ص ٧٥٤.

) 3(Mandal, is a spiritual and ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, representing the universe. has become a generic term for any diagram, chart or geometric pattern that represents the microcosm of the universe.

Hussein Alanzi, The political and social organization in India..., P 761.

(4) Malti Malik, History of India, Delhi, 2016, P 99.

(5) R.V.Aralakshmi, Socio-Economic History of Medieval India, Hyderabad, 2009, P 176.

(6) Hussein Alanzi, The political and social organization in India..., P.759.

(7) Gail Omvedt, Dalit and the Democratic revolution, London, 1994, P 23.

(8) R.V.Aralakshmi, Socio-Economic History of Medieval...,P 185.

(9) Marianne Keppens and Jakob De Roover, the Brahmin, the Aryan and the powers of the priestly class: Puzzles in the study of Indian religion, Religions,11,181,2020,P 3.

(10) ول ديورانت، قصة الحضارة: الهند وجيرانها الشرق الأقصى الصين، القاهرة، ١٩٦٨، ص ٢٣-٢٤.

(11) عبد العزيز الزكي، نشأة الفكر الهندي وتطوره في العصور القديمة، عالم الفكر، المجلد الأول، العدد الثالث، ص ٢٣٢.

) Karma, means action, work, it also refers to the spiritual principle of cause and effect where intent and 12(actions of an individual (cause) influence the future of that individual (effect). Good intent and good deeds contribute to good karma and future happiness, while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad karma and future suffering.

(13) V.K.Agnihotri, Indian History, Delhi, 2009, P A528.

(14) Gail Omvedt, Dalit and the Democratic revolution..., P 22.

(١٥) كامل سغفان، معتقدات أسبوية، ١٩٩٩، ص ١٨٣.

Marianne Keppens and Jakob De Roover, the Brahmin, the Aryan...,P 3.

- (16) Jeannine Auboyer, Daily life in ancient India: from 200 B.C to 700 A.D, London, 2002, P 26-27.
- 1323 C.E) was rule South Indian dynasty whose capital was Orugallu, —) The Kakatiya dynasty (1163 17(now known as Warangal. It was eventually conquered by the Delhi Sultanate. The demise of Kakatiya dynasty resulted in confusion and anarchy under alien rulers for sometime, before the Musunuri Nayaks brought stability to the region.
- (18) The Reddy dynasty (1325-1448 C.E) was rule in southern India in coastal regions of the Andhra Pradesh state by Prolaya Vema Reddy who was belonged to a confederation which had initiated a movement against the Delhi Sultanate armies had invaded this area in 1323 CE. And He is successfully evicted the invaders from Warangal region.
- (19) R.V.Aralakshmi, Socio-Economic History of Medieval...,P 177.
- (*) Sreshthin, reference to there were rich traders and were organized into guilds for money lending.
- (22) G.Venkatrajam, Indian History and culture (from the earliest time to 1200 AD), Hyderabad, 2009, P 137.
- (23) R.S.Sharma, Sudras in Ancient India(the lower order down to circa AD 600), Delhi, 1990, P 113.
- (24) G.Venkatrajam, Indian History and culture...,P 138.
- (*) Chandalas, They are a Hindu lower caste, deals with disposal of corpses, traditionally considered as untouchable.
- (25) R.V.Aralakshmi, Socio-Economic History of Medieval...,P 177.
- (*) للمزيد حول عصر كويتنا مراجعة بحثنا الموسوم ، إمبراطورية كويتنا Gupta التاريخ السياسي والإداري ٢٣٠ – ٥٠٠ ميلادي، مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية، جامعة بابل، العدد ٣٩، حزيران ٢٠١٨.
- (26) Xinru Liu, Ancient India and Ancient China (trade and religious exchanges (AD1-600), Oxford, 1994, P 68.: Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, Class and Religion in Ancient India, London, 2013, P P 96,209.
- (27) B.V.Rao, History of Asia from early time to AD 2000, Delhi,2001,P 296.
- (28) V.K.Agnihotri, Indian History...,P A532.
- (*) Dharama —Sastra, is a collection of ancient Sanskrit texts which give the codes of conduct and moral principles (dharma) for Hindus. There are estimated to be these Dharmasatra texts emerged during the Vedic era. And these texts offers commentaries on responsibilities, duties and ethics for an individual's behavior toward his self, his family and his community. So these texts are enlightening historical documents which give considerable information about ancient India society.
- (٢٩) أحسان حقي، منوسمري كتاب الهندوس المقدس، الباب الأول، فقرة ٨٨، القاهرة، ص ٣٦-٣٧.
- (٣٠) منذر الحايك، تورا براهما شريعة الهندوس، دمشق، ٢٠٢٠، ص ٢٤.
- (31) Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, Class and Religion in Ancient India..., PP 67,156.
- (32) Makkhan Lal, Ancient India, Delhi, 2002, P 225.
- (*) Sacred thread (Upanayana), It is a Hindu ritual dedicated to children, to signify their rebirth into the world of the Vedas and their readiness to learn the tradition. In the middle of the ceremony, given to boys special tradition clothes, they are also given the "sacred thread" in the form of a cord tied over the

left shoulder and under the right arm. These materials signify the boys readiness for learning, studying the Vedas, and performing rituals.

(٣٣) ريتشارد اوزيرن وبورن فان لون، الفلسفة الشرقية ...، ص ٣٦.

(34) M.K.Gandhi, An Autobiography or the story of my experiments with Truth, Ahmedabad, 1927, P 37.

(35) G.Venkatrajam, Indian History and culture...,P 140.

(36) M.K.Gandhi, An Autobiography or the story of my experiments...,P37-38

(37) Ibid, P 39.

(38) V.K.Agnihotri, Indian History...,P A 533.

(*) Sir Henry James Maine, (1822 – 1888) was an English comparative jurist and legal historian. Influenced by his experience in India, compared eastern and western ideas, finding common threads in the development of society.

For more look, New world Encyclopedia (Henry Maine).

(39) S,Natrajan, Political and Cultural History of India, Vol:1, Hyderabad, 1981, P 48.

(*) Bhagavad gita, is an episode recorded in the Mahaparata a Sanskrit epic poem of ancient India. It is an religious text in Hinduism that takes the form of a dialogue between prince Arjune and Krishna, an avatar of Hindu deity Vishnu. It was likely composed in the 1st or 2nd century.

For more look, Encyclopedia Britannica (Bhagadgita, Hindu Scripture).

(40) Gail Omvedt, Dalit and the Democratic revolution..., P 26-27.

(41) V.D.Mahajan, Ancient India, Delhi, 2008, P 129.

(42) G.Venkatrajam, Indian History and culture...,P 141.

(43) Gail Omvedt, Dalit and the Democratic revolution..., P 89.

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