

## GROWTH OF THE INDIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION: THE SPECTACLE OF REASSERTION BY SUBJUGATED CULTURES

It seems that whenever there is a struggle between cultures, the culture of the victorious people becomes the culture of the people as a whole in the beginning, but later on the culture of the subjugated people asserts itself and many of its essential elements have to be integrated in the elite culture. We can see this process at work in the making of the Indian civilization. In the beginning the culture of the newly triumphant Aryan hordes naturally became the dominant culture of the Indian sub-continent. But later on the culture of the subjugated non-Aryans asserted itself, and during the second Brahmanical revival it found full-blooded expression in the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyana and the Puranas. As we shall see in this paper, even though the Aryans were conscious of the non-Aryan influence and resisted it, their attempts could not prevent copious inflow of non-Aryan culture.

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The Aryans hated the phallus worshippers and considered the dark complexioned non-Aryans to be Amānusa or non-human. But later on the Vedic god Rudra was unified with the phallus god and was given the Aryan name Mahādeva or the great god. This is only one example. Many gods and Mother goddesses were included in later mythology which constitutes the basic substratum of Hinduism. In this paper we propose to examine the process which led to the emergence of Hindu mythology, the bulk of which came from non-Aryan subjugated cultures. The priestly elites could not save the purity either of the Aryan race or original Aryan religion but they succeeded in securing for themselves the supreme position in the social structure. Another interesting feature of this process is that those very people whose culture and religion the priestly elites took over, were denied a respectable place in the social order that was sustained by the doctrines borrowed from them and even the right to enter the temples where gods who originally belonged to their own cultures were worshipped.

Many of the basic metaphysical doctrines like the theory of Karma (transmigration of soul) and that of the illusory nature of this world seem to be of non-Aryan origin. They are not found in the Rgveda which is believed to be the original word of God himself by all orthodox Hindus. Similarly, most of the gods of the elite religious tradition of Hinduism seem to have non-Aryan origins. We shall try to outline how the vast and many-faceted edifice that is Hinduism took shape as a result of the interplay of numerous contending and cohesive forces in its long and turbulent history.

#### THE R̥GVEDIC RELIGION AND GODS

We find the earliest glimpses of the ancient religion of the Aryans in the prayers of the R̥gveda. The R̥gvedic Aryans were very much devoted to their gods. They were robust, active and fond of good life. Their gods also were conceived to be like them. They worshipped gods for gaining riches. They believed in heaven. The Aryans considered themselves superior and were proud of their race, religion and language. They called non-Aryans non-humans,

or Amānusa.<sup>1</sup> They maintained a distance from the non-Aryans. The poet Vaisiṣṭha says: “The worshippers of Phallus should not come near Rta”.<sup>2</sup> Rta was conceived to be the universal law.

It is remarkable that the doctrine of transmigration of soul, “Punarjanma” which is one of the cardinal principles of later Hinduism finds no mention in the Ṛgveda.<sup>3</sup> The Aryans of the Ṛgveda performed fire sacrifices and prepared *Soma* to appease the gods. In return gods were believed to fight with them and bestow various favours. All the gods were anthropomorphic. It is explicitly asserted that all of them are virile and none among them is a child.

Through their sacrifices the Ṛgvedic Aryans offered to the gods the food that they themselves ate. It consisted of different preparations made from barley. It included ground roasted barley or *Karambha*, roasted barley and barley cake,<sup>4</sup> apart from *ghi* or clarified butter. They also offered horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams in the fire sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> Agni or the fire-god carries the food offered to all the gods.

The heaven of the Aryans was believed to be placed at “lofty heights above”.<sup>6</sup> In heaven “the ancient fathers live together with gods, those ancestors who have satiated the gods”.<sup>7</sup> The heaven is described as “deathless and “undecaying world”, “where everlasting luster shines. Where food and full delight are found. Where there is happiness, joys and felicities combine, and longings are fulfilled”.<sup>8</sup> We find an indirect description of hell also in the Ṛgveda. To this hell “sinners”, “unfaithful” and people of “evil conduct”<sup>9</sup> go. Aryan gods are personified forces of nature. Prominent among them are the following:

**Indra.** The god Indra is the hero and leader of the Ṛgvedic Aryans. He has a golden beard and golden hair.<sup>10</sup> He wears a crown of

<sup>1</sup> Ṛgveda, X.XXII.8.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ṛgveda, VII. XXI.5.

<sup>3</sup> Ṛgveda, VIII.XXX.1.

<sup>4</sup> Ṛgveda, III. LII.7.

<sup>5</sup> Ṛgveda, X.XCI.14.

<sup>6</sup> Ṛgveda, X.XIV.1.

<sup>7</sup> Ṛgveda, I.125.5.

<sup>8</sup> Ṛgveda, IX.CXIII.7-11.

<sup>9</sup> Ṛgveda, IV.V.5.

<sup>10</sup> Ṛgveda, X.XCXI.8.

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gold and wields a thunderbolt as his weapon.<sup>11</sup> The horses of Indra “have tails like peacocks’ plumes”.<sup>12</sup> Indra is called “immortal”.<sup>13</sup> He fights with the enemies of Aryans in battles and plunders the wealth of non-Aryans for Aryans.<sup>14</sup> He drinks *Soma* with Aryans.<sup>15</sup> Aryans prepare the meat of bulls for Indra and invite him to eat.<sup>16</sup> Indra is also called the destroyer of cities—“Purandara”. This is significant. Early Aryans were pastoral people. Their hordes attacked and devastated the urban settlements of the Paṇis (who perhaps were civilized Mediterraneans) and plundered them. It is natural therefore that their leader Indra is given the title of “Destroyer of Cities”. Indra bestows victory, booty, power and glory. More than one fourth of the hymns of R̥gveda are devoted to Indra.

**Agni** or Fire. Agni is second only to Indra in pre-eminence. He is called immortal, bearer of offering to gods, and envoy of men.<sup>17</sup> R̥gvedic Aryans also used fire against their enemies.<sup>18</sup> He has “flashing teeth and golden beard”.<sup>19</sup> His hair is “flame”.<sup>20</sup> He has got two red horses.<sup>21</sup> He is called lord of house, the Gṛhapati. He gives rains from heaven. He is a great priest. He grants offspring and prosperity.

**Varuṇa.** Varuṇa is the ancient god of Aryans. The old Slav god Perūna appears to be connected with Varuṇa. Many scholars\* think that Ahuramazdā of the Iranians was originally Varuṇa. Varuṇa is the upholder of the cosmic order, R̥ta, which regulates all activities of the Universe. It regulates day and night, the flow of rivers, and all human behaviour.<sup>22</sup> He is connected with

\* Following the example of James Darmesteter, famous translator of the language of Avesta.

<sup>11</sup> R̥gveda, III.XXXII.3.

<sup>12</sup> R̥gveda, III.XLV.1.

<sup>13</sup> R̥gveda, IV.XVI.14.

<sup>14</sup> R̥gveda, IV.XVII.9.

<sup>15</sup> R̥gveda, III.XXXII.11.

<sup>16</sup> R̥gveda, X.XXVIII.3.

<sup>17</sup> R̥gveda, VI.XV.8.

<sup>18</sup> R̥gveda, VI.XVI.32.

<sup>19</sup> R̥gveda, V.VII.7.

<sup>20</sup> R̥gveda, III.XIV.1.

<sup>21</sup> R̥gveda, VII.XVI.2.

<sup>22</sup> R̥gveda, I,XXIV.10; CV.12.

water.<sup>23</sup> Varuṇa binds down sinners with his noose or *pāśa*. In the Ṛgveda we come across prayers addressed to Varuṇa to loosen his fetters.<sup>24</sup>

**Soma.** *Soma* is a very important god. It is a plant. The juice of its shoots was the favourite beverage of Aryans. All the Aryans and their gods, especially Indra and Agni, are fond of *Soma*. Poets give credit to *Soma* for the exploits of Indra and Agni. *Soma* gives great exhilarating power.<sup>25</sup>

**Heaven and Earth.** Heaven and earth are called *Pitarau* or parents. They are ancient gods of early Indo-European times. Through the rains of Heaven the earth produces different kinds of vegetation and creatures.<sup>26</sup> Dyaus seems to be akin to the Greek god Zeus. He is also akin to the Roman god Jupiter (Dyaus-Pitara or Father Heaven).

**Viṣṇu.** Viṣṇu is a minor god in the Ṛgveda. He is conceived as the Sun. He is personified as a moving luminary who traverses the three worlds. Though the priests employ these hymns for the god Viṣṇu of the later Hinduism obviously the character of Viṣṇu of Ṛgveda is different from this later god. Viṣṇu is described as a god who has taken three strides which represent the three divisions of the universe enlightened by the Sun.<sup>27</sup> Of course the Purāṇas, which contain later classical mythology, have adapted this myth from the Ṛgveda in their own way.

**Rudra.** Rudra is invoked much less than Viṣṇu in the Ṛgveda. He is conceived as fierce and destructive. Poets offer prayers to him so that he may not kill men, cows or horses.<sup>28</sup> He is described as “strong, great, tawny and fair-complexioned”.<sup>29</sup> He is the one who has a “thousand medicines”.<sup>30</sup> He is quite different from the later phallus-god Śiva with whom he was unified later. While the Ṛgvedic Rudra is feared by men for the damage that he may cause, Śiva is essentially benevolent and is believed to be satisfied easily, “Āśutosa”.

<sup>23</sup> Ṛgveda, VII.XXIV.10.11.

<sup>24</sup> Ṛgveda, V.LXXXV.8.

<sup>25</sup> Ṛgveda, VI.XVII.1-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ṛgveda, VI.XXX.1-5.

<sup>27</sup> Ṛgveda, I.CLIV.1-4.

<sup>28</sup> Ṛgveda, I.CXIV.7-8.

<sup>29</sup> Ṛgveda, II.XXXIII.8.

<sup>30</sup> Ṛgveda, VII.XLVI.3.

Through the synthesizing process of Indian tradition which integrated cultural elements from diverse sources, the Ṛgvedic Rudra was related to the classical and popular god Śiva. But the two are essentially different. Śiva of the popular and classical tradition is typically represented and worshipped as phallus, but the Ṛgvedic Aryans had great disdain for the worshippers of phallus. Yet there is a tendency among Hindu scholars to mix up the two. This is true even of such a great scholar as P.V. Kane. However, the references from Ṛgveda which he has cited are all only to Rudra, and none of them is to Śiva as such.<sup>31</sup> The Ṛgveda belongs to the era when the primary concern of the Aryans was that of overpowering and subjugating the non-Aryans. But the later Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇa Granthas were composed when the Aryans had established their supremacy and settled down. The higher stratum of this society consisted of the Aryans and they were divided into three higher Varnas. The four classes of Varṇa are Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. The non-Aryans formed the serving class—the Śūdras. The later Samhitās and Brāhmaṇa Granthas contain detailed rules of procedure of grand sacrifices. This is especially true of the Yajurveda and Sāmaveda Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇa Granthas. For performing such elaborate sacrifices the priests divided themselves into four large groups, each headed by a head priest. These expensive sacrifices presuppose the presence of powerful kings and wealthy householders.

The four head-priests perform specialized functions in such sacrifices. The first of these is called Hotā. He invokes the gods by uttering hymns of the Ṛgveda. The second is Udgātā who sings the melodies of the Sāmaveda. The third is Avadhāru who performs various sacrificial acts while muttering the Yajus. The fourth is called Brahmā. He keeps a watch over all sacrificial activities. The Brahmā priest should be well versed in all the three Vedas, so that even a minor error of speech or procedure is corrected. The householder or sacrificer had to give liberal fees to the priests.

<sup>31</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharma Sastra*, Bhandarkar Research Institute, Poona, 1962, vol. V., Part II, p. 1622.

## THE ERAS OF THE BRĀHMAṆA GRANTHAS AND UPANIṢADS

By the times of the later Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇa Granthas, simple rituals had been transformed into complex and expensive sacrifices. The contents of the Brāhmaṇa Granthas are of two kinds—precepts and rationalizations. We come across many myths which prescribe and rationalize certain sacrificial rituals. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa prescribes five great observances or sacrifices of Pañca Mahāyajñas which the Sūtras and the Smrtis followed. These are mentioned in the following order: the sacrifice to beings or the Bhutayajña, or the sacrifice to men which is offering men a cupful of water daily; Pitṛayajña or offering Svadhā or a cupful of water to fathers; Devayajña or making offerings of the log daily with the word “*Svāhā*” in the fire for the gods; and Brahmanayajña or the daily study of the Vedas.<sup>32</sup> The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa introduced the five great sacrifices for the first time in a rudimentary fashion. These were for the three higher Varṇas or classes. The later works systematized and elaborated them further.

## THE UPANIṢADS AS BRAHMANIC CONSERVATISM

Elaborate sacrifices were not suited to all sections of the society. The Kṣatriya kings who had to pay for them found them too costly. There was a kind of revolt, and it found expression in the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads were in a simple language, and they introduced the concept of “Brahmā”. Brahmā is the ultimate reality, devoid of adjuncts. When one realizes Him, He becomes one with the Ultimate Reality. In the Upaniṣads we find even Śūdras and women participating in philosophical discussions. The Upaniṣads challenged the ritualistic way of life. There are instances in the Upaniṣads where Brāhmaṇa teachers went to learn the knowledge of the self from Kṣatriya kings. A king approached even a cartman for gaining the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

We find a story in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad in which a proces-

<sup>32</sup> Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XI. 5-6.1-3.

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sion of white dogs is portrayed as priests who recite, “Om\*, let us eat; Om, let us drink; Om, may the divine Varuṇa Prajapati, Savitri bring us food; Lord of food bring hither food, bring it, Om”. Through such stories the Upaniṣads expose the parasitism of priests with scathing sarcasm.<sup>33</sup>

The Upaniṣads are far more liberal than the earlier Vedic literature. We do not find racial prejudice in the Upaniṣads. In the Ṛgveda persons of dark complexion are declared non-humans or Amānuṣa. Due to strong patriarchal values the birth of a daughter was considered a misfortune. But in the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad we find rituals for securing the birth of a dark complexioned son along with those for a blond son. There is a ritual even for securing the birth of a daughter.<sup>34</sup> In marked contrast to the common traditionalistic viewpoint, the Upaniṣads do not look backwards to a golden past. It is expected from the younger generation to be better than the older. In the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad the father blesses his new-born son to make more progress than his father and grandfather.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of rebirth is found for the first time in the Upaniṣads. It seems to have a non-Aryan origin. In the Ṛgveda and the Avesta the dead go to live with their forefathers in heaven. The introduction of the idea of transmigration of soul is thus a radical departure. It is another matter that it was made the foundation-stone of the system of Varṇa hierarchy and was effectively employed for legitimatizing the inequality based on birth. In systems of metaphysics like Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Vedānta it crystallized into the theory of Karma which provided a strong basis for rationalizing the ascription of social status by birth over the millennia.<sup>36</sup>

\* The word *Om* is uttered in the beginning of every *mantra* (hymn) which accompany Vedic offerings and sacrifices. This passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad is a satire on these sacrifices. It suggests that such rituals are in fact meant to secure food and drinks for the Brahman priests. This is why every assertion in this passage begins with a sarcastic “Om”.

<sup>33</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad, I. 12, I-E.

<sup>34</sup> Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, VI. 4.14-17.

<sup>35</sup> Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, VI. 4.28.

<sup>36</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of this thesis, see Shrirama Indradeva, “The doctrine of Karma. Towards a Sociological Perspective” in *Diogenes* 140, 1987.



The Upaniṣads mark the revolt of people against the priestly elites. In the course of this revolt many non-Aryan ideas entered into the elite tradition. The idea of transmigration of soul and rebirth was among them. Paradoxically, later on this idea proved to be a most effective instrument in the hands of the priestly elites for rationalizing, justifying and ensuring almost universal acceptance for the system of Varṇa hierarchy, which originally was a system based on racial discrimination enforced through physical might.

This doctrine propounds that everyone takes high or low birth according to his own deeds in previous lives. Therefore a Brāhmaṇa earns his higher status due to his good deeds of previous lives and a Śūdra gets the low position due to his own bad deeds in previous lives. A firm and pervading belief in this doctrine seems to have induced a general apathy towards all human suffering. The common attitude tends to be that every sufferer is bound to be a sinner, and therefore one should not interfere in the divine dispensation of justice lest he may himself be inflicted by the sins of the sufferer. Even the exploited sections accepted and internalized this doctrine.

The doctrine of the Upaniṣads asserted that sacrifices lead only to superficial gains such as earning heaven by performing various sacrifices, but one cannot arrive at the ultimate reality through sacrifices. Only after attaining real knowledge one becomes free from all the worldly sufferings.<sup>37</sup>

The Bramanical priestly elites lost their grip over the society during the Upaniṣadic era. The Varṇa hierarchy and the patriarchal order were both weakened.

#### THE FIRST BRAHMANICAL REVIVAL: SUBSTITUTION OF RITUAL FOR RACE. THE KALPA SŪTRAS

In order to revitalize and preserve the tradition that gave these institutions the supreme position in society, the priestly elites consolidated the ancient Vedic lore in the form of aphorisms—the

<sup>37</sup> Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, I.2. 7-13.

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Kalpa Sūtras. Kalpa Sūtras consist of Gṛhya Sūtras, Śrauta Sūtras and Dharma Sūtras.

Since the racial purity of the elites had already been greatly compromised, racial features could no more provide the basis for their supremacy. It seems that scruples of ritual purity were put forward as a substitute for the earlier criterion of racial purity. And for the first time a number of Sanskāras or sacraments were introduced in the Gṛhya Sūtras. These sacraments are to be performed by all male members of the three higher Varnas. The sacraments begin before the conception and last even after death. In this dispensation, priestly elites were the chief gainers and the Śūdras as well as women became the primary losers.

Since the priestly elites wanted to preserve, revive and derive authority from the ancient past, we find the mention of Ṛgvedic gods in the Gṛhya Sūtras. We find in them the mention of the ancient god Yama who was originally the leader of the Aryan migration but had become the god of death even in the Ṛgveda; though in some hymns of the Ṛgveda, too, he is referred to as the leader of migration and the first mortal.<sup>38</sup>

Besides the sacraments connected with *rites de passage*, a number of other rituals too are prescribed in the Gṛhya Sūtras. The presence of a priest in the rituals is optional. In some rituals animal sacrifice is also prescribed. They include those of marriage; offerings to the manes; and the reception of guests. Many household rituals have a high degree of magical content.

The Śrauta Sūtras contain elaborate procedures for performing various sacrifices. They follow the later Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇas. These sacrifices are performed by a team of priests for the householders.

#### THE DHARMA SŪTRAS: RETURN TO ARYAN CULTS

Dharma Sūtras are primarily the law-books of Aryans. These also contain the earlier norms of the Aryans pertaining to conduct, custom, and religion. In the Dharma Sūtras we find the ancient

<sup>38</sup> See Shrirama Indradeva, "Cultural Interaction between Ancient Civilizations: A Study of Indo-Iranian Relations" in *Diogenes* 111, 1980.

Aryan insistence on keeping the non-Aryans (Śūdras) away from their scriptures. The Gautama Dharma Sūtras provide that if a Śūdra intentionally listens to the recitation of the Vedas, his ears shall be filled with molten lead or lac. If he recites Vedic texts, his tongue shall be cut off; if he remembers them his body shall be split into two parts.<sup>39</sup>

The Gautama Dharmasūtra speaks of four Āśramas. These are *Brahmacārī* or student, *Gṛhastha* or householder, *Bhikṣu* or ascetic and *Vaikhānasa* or hermit in the wood.<sup>40</sup> But Āpastamba provides Āśramas in a different order.<sup>41</sup> These are *Gṛhasthya* or the order of house-holders; *Ācāryakula* or the order of students; the *Mauna* or the order of ascetics and *Vāṇaprasthya* or the order of hermits in the woods. Baudhāyana enumerates four Āśramas<sup>42</sup> and then makes the startling remark that these Āśramas were introduced by an Asura, Kapila, the son of Prahlāda and that a wise man should not take heed of them.<sup>43</sup>

In the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtras we find a strange practice. It is that of the carrying of water in a pot which is to be used for toilet as well as for washing and in ritual.<sup>44</sup> This was an ancient Aryan practice. But in Smṛtis and Puraṇas this custom is declared *Kalivariya* or “forbidden because of the Kali age”. Many ancient Aryan practices which became unpopular among the people were forbidden and declared *Kalivarjya*.

The Manava Grhya Sūtras say that the four Vināyakas are evil spirits. These are: Śālakaṅtaka, Kūsmāṇḍarajaputra, Usmita and Devayajana. People when seized by them have had dreams of inauspicious sights such as shaven persons, persons with matted hair or wearing yellowish garments, camels, hogs, asses and Cāndālas. Seized by them princes, though capable, do not get their kingdoms, maidens, though endowed with all accomplishments, cannot secure husbands, married women have no children, even virtuous wives lose their children in infancy, husbandmen lose their crops, and so on. For removing the evil influences of Vin-

<sup>39</sup> Gautama Dharmasūtra, XII. 4-6.

<sup>40</sup> Gautama Dharmasūtra, III.2.

<sup>41</sup> Āpastamba Dharmasūtra, II.9.21.1.

<sup>42</sup> Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra, II.6.11.12.

<sup>43</sup> Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra II.6.11.28.

<sup>44</sup> Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra, I.4.7.1-8.

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āyakas' seizure, Manva Gṛhyasūtra prescribes propitiatory rites. Unlike Aryans gods, they were offered oil, fish and liquor.<sup>45</sup> Probably the Vināyakas are gods of non-Aryan origin and therefore they were considered destructive by the Aryans and were to be propitiated differently.

We find a gradual change in the prescribed mode of worship. In the Deva Yajna as prescribed by the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa only a fuel stick was to be offered to the fire for being transmitted as offering to the gods. But in the Aśvalāyana and Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhyasūtra includes even the name of non-Aryans goddess Bhadrakālī, among the Aryan gods to whom offerings are to be made.

The Apastamba Dharmasūtra provides that a householder should collect the left-over food and wash it with water and at a clean place to the north, offer it to Rudra.<sup>46</sup> It is asserted that in this way the house will become prosperous. This manner of offering food to gods also appears to be of a non-Aryan origin.

### THE IMPACT OF BUDDHISM

The social norms established by the Sūtras were again threatened by Buddhism. The teachings of Buddha were in Pālī, the dialect of the people. These were meant for all the sections of the population. Therefore Buddhism gained influence among the people. Buddha propounded equality of all castes. Once a young Brāhmaṇa Assalāyana challenged him. He said:

“Brāhmaṇas maintain that only they are the highest class and the others are lower. They are white, the others black; only they are pure and not the others. Only they are true sons of Brahmā, born from his mouth, born of Brahmā, creation of Brahmā, heirs of Brahmā. Now what does worthy Gautama say to that?”

“Do the Brāhmaṇas really maintain this, Assalāyan, when they are born of women just like anyone else, of Brāhmaṇa women who have their periods and who conceive, give birth and nurse their children, just like any other women?”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Manava Gṛhyasūtra, II. 14. 1-21.

<sup>46</sup> Āpastambā Dharmasūtra, II. 2.4.23.

<sup>47</sup> Majjhima Nikāya, 2.147.ff.

Ultimately the Buddha convinced him that the people of all castes are equal.

The Buddha also challenged the efficacy of sacrifices. He said that performing a sacrifice is as futile as throwing a stone into deep water and then imploring it to spring up onto the shore, but of course the stone remains at the bottom.<sup>48</sup>

The Buddha says that descent is not important but conduct is important.<sup>49</sup> Through the right conduct even the persons of lower castes could accomplish a higher position and ultimately obtain salvation for which he used the terms Nirvāṇa or “blowing out of the lamp”. He compares life with a lamp.

The Buddhist doctrine, though it was deeply influenced by the Upaniṣadic philosophy, rejects the concepts of Brahmā and soul. But it did emphasize the importance of life without passion. He compares life with a lamp. Just as a new lamp may be lighted by another lamp, similarly rebirth is possible without soul. Good and bad actions determine the fate and fortune in the next birth. Though Buddha rejected the Varna hierarchy he was not able to reject the theory of Karma, which has played such an important part in rationalizing and justifying the Varna inequality. He says: “Be thine own lamp. Do not seek external support. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Every individual, if he performs good actions in many births, will ultimately achieve the final stage of Nibbāna or Nirvāṇa or the blowing out of the lamp”.<sup>50</sup>

#### ORIGINS AND NATURE OF THE SECOND BRĀHMANICAL REVIVAL. MANU SMṚTI

Buddhism became widely accepted in India and abroad. It deprived the priestly elites of their privileged status. This led to reassertion of their status by the Brāhmanical elites around the 2nd century A.D. Due to weakening of the Varna system and also the widespread racial admixture that had inevitably taken place, the norms of racial purity even of the priestly elites had been compromised. The foreign hordes, which continued to enter India from time to time had a complexion which was fairer than even the established priestly elites. Norms of the people of non-Aryan origin also began to assert themselves. Many ancient Aryan cus-

<sup>48</sup> Samyutta Nikāya, XLII.6.

<sup>49</sup> Vinaya Mahāvagga, 4.9.

<sup>50</sup> Buddhist Suttas, II.33.

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toms lost their hold on people and became repugnant. By that time it must have become quite clear to the priestly elites that the ancient religion of the Aryans could not be revived in its original form. To combat these challenges the priestly elites composed various Smṛti texts. These texts bear the names of ancient Vedic seers. The Manu Smṛti is the first among these. Manu followed the dicta of Dharma Sūtras. Yājñavalkya, Bṛhaspati, Nārada, and Kātyāyana followed the Manu Smṛti.

Manu tried hard to revive the ancient religion of the Aryans. But it could not be revived in its pure form. The priestly elites were declared the repositories of the Vedic religion. Manu says that “the Brāhmaṇa from the very birth is an eternal incarnation of the sacred law”.<sup>51</sup> To establish the priestly elites, Manu revived the ancient Rgvedic myth of the origin of the four Varṇas and called them “lords of this whole creation”.<sup>52</sup> Manu prescribes six duties for the Brāhmaṇa. One of the duties of the Brāhmaṇa is sacrificing for others.<sup>53</sup> The non-Aryan religious practices which were prevalent among Brāhmaṇas were disapproved by Manu. Manu prescribes that those Brāhmaṇas who worship idols in temples as priests and those who offer sacrifices to the Ganas or the four Vināyakas must be avoided at sacrifices offered to the gods and manes.<sup>54</sup> But it appears that non-Aryan gods had already become popular among the Aryans. For example, following Sankhāyana Grhya Sūtra, Manu had to provide that a householder should offer a Bali or leave an offering to Bhadrakālī near the foot of the bedstead.<sup>55</sup> Vaikhanasa-Smarta Sūtra and Uśanas provide that a Pāraśava or the son of Brāhmaṇa with a Śūdra woman may worship the goddess Bhadrakālī or may learn the Śaiva Āgama.<sup>56</sup> It appears that despite the provision by Manu that a Brāhmaṇa householder should make an offering to Bhadrakālī, many elites did not favour this even at a later time. An exception was made in the case of a Pāraśava son of Brāhmaṇa, that is a person born of the union between a Brāhmaṇa man and a Śūdra woman. He could perform that offering without fear of pollution (for he was not as pure as a pure Brāhmaṇa).

<sup>51</sup> Manu Smṛti, I.98.

<sup>52</sup> Manu Smṛti, I.92.

<sup>53</sup> Manu Smṛti, X.75-76.

<sup>54</sup> Manu Smṛti, III. 152, 164.

<sup>55</sup> Manu Smṛti, III.89.

<sup>56</sup> Vaikhanasa Smarta Sūtra, X.13; Uśanas Smṛti, 36.

## PROHIBITED CULTS

Though the *Māhābhārata* enumerates Buddha among incarnations of Viṣṇu it does not make complimentary remarks about him. It says that “during the Kali age I (god Viṣṇu) am taking birth as Buddha, the son of Śudhodana; dressed in yellow garments I would confuse people. The Śūdra would wear yellow garments. Priests would neither study nor sacrifice. Śruti and Smṛti would be forgotten”.<sup>57</sup> The *Rāmāyana* also condemns the Buddha. It calls him an atheist and a thief.<sup>58</sup>

The *Vṛddha Hārīta Smṛti* clearly states that an Aryan householder should not enter the Shrines of Śaiva, Buddha, Skanda and Śākta cults.<sup>59</sup> Medhātithi on *Manu Smṛti* was so conscious of the non-Aryan and non-Vedic origins of these sects that he declares that the Pañcarātras or Vaisnavas, Niragranthas of Jaina and Pāśupatas or Śaivas are outside the pale of Vedic orthodoxy.<sup>60</sup> The *Kurma Purāṇa* asserts that “various Śāstras opposed to the Vedas and Smṛtis which are popular among people such as Kāpāla, Bhairava, Yamala, Vāma and Arhata are for deluding the world and are based on ignorance”.<sup>61</sup> The *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* quoted in the *Mitākṣarā* commentary on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, and the *Smṛti Candrikā* quotes the *Śaṭtrimṣanmata* to provide that if a man touches a Buddha, Pāśupata, Jaina, Lokāyatika, atheist, a Dvijāti or twice-born living by condemned actions, or a Śūdra, he should bathe with his clothes on.<sup>62</sup> The four Vināyakas who are considered demons in the *Mānava Gṛhya Sūtras* appear in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* as one single god.<sup>63</sup> There is evidence that at one time even the outcaste people such as the Cāṇḍālas and the Pukkasas used to worship in the temples of Visnu along with Brāhmanas. And even the Cāṇḍālas could establish the temples of Bhairava. It is provided in

<sup>57</sup> *Mahābhārata*, 12. 48.2.

<sup>58</sup> *Rāmāyana*, *Ayodhya Kānda*. 109.34.

<sup>59</sup> *Vṛddha Harita Smṛti*, XI.143.

<sup>60</sup> Medhātithi on *Manu Smṛti*, II.6.

<sup>61</sup> *Kurma Purāṇa* I. 12. 161-162 quoted in *Mitākṣarā* on *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* III.

<sup>30</sup> *Śaṭ-trimsan-Mata* quoted by *Smṛti-Candrika*, I.p.118.

<sup>62</sup> *Brahmananda Purāṇa*.

<sup>63</sup> *Mānava Gṛhyasūtra*, II. 14.1-2, *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* I.281-283.

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the Nityācārapaddhati that if a Brāhmaṇa touches outcastes such as Cāndālas and Pukkāsas who came to worship god Viṣṇu in the temple, the Brāhmaṇa need not take a bath.<sup>64</sup> The Nirṇayasindhu quotes a passage of Devi Purāṇa which provides that Antyajās or outcastes could establish a temple of Bhairava or Śiva.<sup>65</sup> But later on even the Sūdras, not to speak of the outcastes, were forbidden from visiting temples.

#### TOLERATED PARALLEL CULTS

As time passed even the basic Aryan ritual, Agnihotra or fire-sacrifice, was declared Kalivarjya or forbidden in the Kali age by Vyāsa.<sup>66</sup> Thus the non-Vedic religious practices were almost completely adopted by the priestly elites and Hinduism which is substantially different from the religion of the Vedas came into being. Despite the disapproval of some Brahmanical elites, the Pāncarātra or Vaiṣṇava cult and Pāsupata or the Śaiva cults were accepted in the elite Brahmanical tradition. Vināyaka or Gaṇeśa became the chief god who was the first to be invoked before all other ceremonies commenced. This is considered imperative for ceremonies to be completed without hindrance. It seems that one of the reasons for such adaptation was the temptation of monetary gain for the Brāhmaṇa priests.

#### THE COMPLEX FABRIC OF HINDUISM

Since the Aryan religious practices had no longer remained popular among the masses, the Brāhmanical priests felt compelled to give up the Vedic sacrifices and ultimately adopted the popular non-Aryan idol worship. And so many popular folk beliefs, customs, myths and historical incidents have been interwoven in the complex fabric of Hinduism that it is hard to isolate or identify them. Undoubtedly, the two great epics, the Mahābhārata and

<sup>64</sup> Nityācārapaddhati, p. 130.

<sup>65</sup> Nirṇayasindhu, III.Devapratistha.

<sup>66</sup> Vyasa quoted in Smṛtimiktaphala, p. 176.



the Rāmāyaṇa, and numerous Purāṇas profoundly influenced and unified the people of the whole of the Indian subcontinent by integrating elements from diverse sources. Priests made concerted efforts for many centuries to make a consistent mythology and popularize it. Thus a broad and strong basis was provided to Hinduism. During the period between the second century B.C. and the third century A.D. Hinduism seems to have acquired the shape that was to last for much more than a millennium and a half.

In the Purāṇas the cultures of the subjugated people can be seen to have overpowered the culture of the victorious Aryans. The most evident example is the legend of the struggle of the Vedic hero-god Indra and cowherd-god Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa challenged the power and position of Indra. To teach him a lesson, Indra brought rains continuously for seven nights while Kṛṣṇa held up a mountain on one finger and gave shelter to the people. Ultimately Kṛṣṇa won the battle and prevented people from offering sacrifice to Indra.

#### MYTHICAL ARRANGEMENT AND SYNCRETISM

The Vedic god Rudra was unified with the non-Aryan phallus god and was given the name of Paśūpati, and called Śiva or one who bestows welfare. The mother-goddesses were unified and made his spouses. But in spite of this mythical arrangement, various mother-goddesses are still worshipped independently. The mother-goddess is called Śakti or power. The worshippers of Śakti are called Śakta. Śakti is said to be the power of Śiva. It is said that without her Śiva becomes Śava or a dead body. Kumara, who figures as a demon in the Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtras and, according to these Gṛhya Sūtras, caused epilepsy among Aryan infants,<sup>67</sup> was Brahmanized and called Subrahmanyam or Skanda, the god of youthful powers and bravery. He was recognized as the first born son of Śiva. Similarly the four Vināyakas who were described as demons in the Mānava Gṛhya Sūtras,<sup>68</sup> were unified into one god and given the Aryan name of Ganeśa, who

<sup>67</sup> Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra, I.16.24-25.

<sup>68</sup> Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra, II. 14.1-21.

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became the second son of Śiva. Similarly Rāma and Kṛṣṇa were unified with the Ṛgvedic sun-god Viṣṇu, through the notion that they were incarnations of the god Viṣṇu. His spouse is the Vedic goddess Śrī who was later on called Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. The integration of the Vedic gods with the goddesses of non-Aryan origin helped the unification of the people of different races and cultures of the Indian subcontinent. Thus the worship of phallus and idols of non-Aryan gods and goddesses which were intensely repugnant to the Aryans became an important part of the elite tradition of later Hinduism. In fact Hinduism as it has been actually practiced over the centuries gives scarce importance to Vedic Yajñas and gods of the Ṛgveda. Brāhma Purāṇa and Matsya Purāṇa make an interesting observation that in Krta, or the earliest age, there was a single Varṇa but at the end of the Kali age almost all people will be Śūdras.<sup>69</sup>

### THREE PRINCIPAL CULTS

The main sects of Hinduism which developed later on are Vaiṣṇavas or the worshippers of Viṣṇu, Śaivas or worshippers of Śiva, and Śāktas or worshippers of Śakti. These are devotional sects. The Viṣṇu, Śiva and Śakti are the deities of these sects. These deities are supposed to be omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. When the devotee surrenders himself unreservedly to his deity, he goes to the heaven of that deity. This surrender might be through the worship of the idol of his deity or by singing devotional songs or chanting the name of his chosen deity. The worship of an idol of the deity consists in bathing the idol, offering him food, water, flowers, leaves, incense, music and dancing. By the whole-hearted worship of the deity the sins of the devotee are condoned by the deity and the devotee goes to the heaven of that particular deity.

Behind the unification of various gods and goddesses of different origins, and the making of a consistent mythology, one attraction for the priestly elites must have been economic. And this process still continues. Whichever new deity emerges and becomes

<sup>69</sup> Brāhma Purāṇa 229. 52; Matsya Purāṇa, 144.78.

popular, the Brahmanical priests take over its priesthood from the low caste person who is its initial priest.

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