CHAPTER - 7
ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE
AND ADJUSTMENT
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The authors of the Vedic Index and many other western scholars equated the varna order with the caste and emphasized on the issue of social dominance. Some scholars highlighted the divisive aspect of the caste system and even went to discover the perpetual conflict between the regnum and sacerdotal authority viz. the kshatriya and the brahmana. They sought to trace the rigours of the present caste system as a legacy of the remote past i.e. the Vedic Age and even beyond that. However, recently this issue has caught much attention in the hands of Indian scholars who have enquired into the various facets of this issue, in the successive phases of history. Hence, it will be better to have an observation on this issues from the Vedic age itself.

2. J.C. Heesterman, India and the Inner conflict of tradition, pp. 141.42
The Aryan social system cannot be equated with caste system. In fact, the word used for different social orders was varna which was based on complex occupational and ritual status rather than birth. Despite mention of four social orders in the Purushasukta\textsuperscript{3}, the brahmanas are shown at the top of the order. In fact, brahmana appears to be of less importance than the rajanya\textsuperscript{4}; the performance of the tribal sacrifice had not yet become the exclusive property of the brahmana; nor was the importance of the sacrifice well-established during this period. We find references of impoverished brahmana during this period.\textsuperscript{5}

Even the rajanya/kshatriya had not come to enjoy pre-eminent position during the Rigvedic period. In the absence of regular source of income and prevalence of pastoral character of the economy the kshatriyas were unable to wield considerable power. Even the king was to work according to the wishes of the vish. In the RV\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{enumerate}
\item RV X.90.
\item Drekmeier, op.cit. p.21.
\item RV I.105.7ff
\item RV IV.42.8
\end{enumerate}
the king Trasadasyu is referred to as a demigod, like Indra. The relationship of the king and his fellow warriors is more direct than it is in later times.

The vish, as mentioned earlier, collectively used the land. Although we have references to individual ownership of land as seen in the case of Apala's father's land, it cannot be generalized. Thus, the clan ownership of land by the vish i.e. peasantry considerably enhanced its power and made it less vulnerable to royal control. As the vish made voluntary gifts i.e. bali to the king, the latter too was not in a position to interfere with the affairs of the vish. Thus, there was little scope of dominance either by the brahmana or the rajanya during the Rigvedic period. It was earlier suggested that the shudras were indigenous tribal groups, who became slaves and serfs of the Aryans. But, we can no longer say with certainty whether the shudras ever really became slaves.

7. RV VIII.91.5.
8. RV VI.22.10
The fact that shudras were sometimes assigned a role in the sacrifice, seems to suggest that they were not outside the pale of the Aryan community.

There is considerable disagreement among historians regarding the dasas and the dasyus. While some historians take them as belonging to aboriginal tribes of the pre-Aryan India others take them as a branch of the early Aryans who came to India quite earlier. As the name suggests, they were the people conquered by the Aryans. But, they were not serfs and their condition was not very deplorable as we have several instances where slaves could become an Aryan by means of acquiring wealth. This is very important as it denotes the aspects of social mobility and social upgradation among the Aryans. There is no mention of physical torture or other types of anomalies meted out to slaves during this period.

As the society came to acquire sedentary character during the later Vedic
phase, we find significant changes in the social beliefs. As the importance of sacrifice grew, brahmanical influence considerably increased and the brahmanas came to acquire the first position in the social hierarchy. Even the king's position seems to have improved. According to the later Brahmanas ⁹ the sacrifice-rajasya, which could be performed only by a powerful king and the ashvamedha sacrifice-enabled the performer to become a god; acquire the vitality of Indra; but the potency seemingly derives from the sacrifice or from Indra, not from the king. It is not hereditary divinity that we find in the hymns, but rather an analogy with the gods that improvement in the position of the kshatriya is further seen. In fact, the position of the warriors and priests was based on personal talent and achievement as well as on ascribed status ¹⁰. But, the rise of the brahmana class clearly derived primarily from the increasing emphasis on religion in the Aryan conception of social order.

⁹. Sh.Br. XIII. 4.4.3; V.4.3.4.
Although we tend to assume a large degree of cohesion in the ruling class, there is often dissention within the ranks of the elite groups. Power is not always integrative nor does it always serve collective goals, and power is not always power over others in the struggle for scarce values.

During the period of the Brahmanas, importance of rituals increased with the notion—"This did the gods; thus men do". The rituals aim at reconstructing the original unity of things, the world is created a new after each sacrifice. Magic gained increasing prominence in the sacred rite. The ritual provides a means of acting out and, thus, reducing strains and frustrations produced by the uncertainties and rationally inexplicable occurrence of life. On the social level, it consolidates the values of the community, reminding individuals of shared purposes and representing in simple, dramatic form the essentials of social and religions relationship. To a great extent, rituals succeeded in consolidating different
social groups and also making a cohesive organization of the society. However, it will be incorrect to say that the brahmanas failed to utilize the latent cohesive function of ritual.\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the ritual had a religio-psychological motive behind it and it was not introduced to establish hold over other social groups or with a view to earn more in the form of dakshina.

Citing the Vedic hymn\textsuperscript{12}, it has been suggested by anthropologists that there is a dichotomy in the concept of Brahma-kshatra. Hence, the sacerdotum and regnum are kept apart by the example of sky and earth. It is argued that there existed dichotomy between the sacerdotum i.e. brahma and regnum i.e. kshatriya. The RV tells of world’s beginnings, of Varuna who pressed the sky upward and spread the earth out broadly\textsuperscript{13}. The Chhandogya Upanishad\textsuperscript{14} has it that what was originally

\begin{itemize}
  \item[11.] Ibid. p.10.
  \item[12.] RV. I.157.2.
  \item[13.] RV. VII.86.
  \item[14.] Chhandogya Up. III. 19.
\end{itemize}
non-being developed into the cosmic egg, which eventually split asunder; the silver shall become the earth, the golden shall the sky, we might speculate that the first division characterizes the earliest history of the Aryans, when power was more or less equally distributed in the tribe. Later, as the subject population was absorbed into the community and old warrior gana represented only one of the several modes of social organization, the second type of division became more important.\textsuperscript{15} This dualism, however, does not reflect stagnation but the dynamic nature of society. In the Maitri Up\textsuperscript{16}. we are told that half the year is sacred to Agni, half to Varuna. It is possible that the Mitra-Varuna (later the Agni-Indra pairing) which appears to be the precursor of the concepts of brahmana and kshatriya, was reflected in a division of Aryan clans similar to that which characterizes extant tribal communities. There exists harmony between the temporal and spiritual powers, which are complementary to

\textsuperscript{15} Drekmeier. op. cit. p.38.
\textsuperscript{16} VI.14.
each other. This harmony between the two powers ensures the harmony of the world. The combination Mitra-Varuna represents the same harmony. Here, Varuna represents moral order and his success required the co-operation of Mitra. It follows that the brahmana was not subject to the temporal authority, but the brahmana co-operation with the political class would aid the realization of the aims of both.  

We are told in a passage in the very early Br. Up., which forms the conclusion to the Sh.Br. 18, that in the beginning only the Brahma existed, but that he created, in turn, a superior form, the kshatra: "There is nothing higher than kshatra ........ (But) brahmanhood (Brahma) is the sources of kshatrahood. Therefore, even if the king attains supremacy, he finally rests upon brahmanhood as his own sources." In the Sh.Br., we find that Mitravaruna is called the "counsel and the power". Mitra the sacerdotum (Brahma) is the counsel, and

17. Mbh. III.27. 5ff; XII. 73.74.
Varuna, the regnum (kshatra), the power. The priesthood is the conceiver, and the noble is the doer and, thus both are united.\textsuperscript{19} The priest who officiates at the sacrifice, is identified with Agni mediating between heaven and earth. The interdependence of priest and king, who is patron of the sacrifice implies a corresponding interdependence of kshatriya and priestly gods. Fertility depends on the uniting of the two—Mitra inseminates Varuna.\textsuperscript{20}

In the brahmanical literature, at most of the places, superiority of the brahmana is established and thus the spiritual power dominates over the temporal authority.\textsuperscript{21} However, it is also true that Brahma and kshatras are sometimes declared to be equal in authority, and there are even rare hints that the kshatriya ruling power has ascendancy over the brahmanas.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, it is very difficult to believe that either the brahmana or the kshatriya was dominant

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. V.3.3.12
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. I.6.3.14; II. 4.4.10.19; X.4.1.5
\textsuperscript{21} Ait.Brz. VIII. 1.4.9.6; Sh. Br. V. 4.4.15; XII. 7.3.1; Panchavimsha Br. XI.1.2; Tait.Samhita.II. 6.2.5
\textsuperscript{22} Panchavimsha Br. XIX.14; Tait. Samhita II.5.10.1; Sh.Br.1.3.2; V.4.2.7
class. It appears that the relationship between the two is of complex nature and element of interdependence and harmony was present. In fact, the *brahmanas* formed no corporate body as such and, thus, lacked the strength of the hierarchically organized institution. Hence, there was very less chance of forming a dominant group. The *Purohita* appears to have enjoyed considerable power as he shared the governing function with the king. According to the *Ait. Br.*\(^{23}\), the *Purohita* is "half the self" of the king. The sacrifice of the king is not accepted by the gods if the king has no *Purohita*.

There is no indication that membership in the *brahmana* class was originally confined to offspring of the *brahmanas*. At first, knowledge and conduct rather than birth, may have been the determining factors. A number of passages in the texts record the conversion of the *kshatriyas* and even *vaishyas* to *brahman* rank. At this time, priests took wives from

\(^{23}\) *Ait. Br. VIII. 24*
other social classes although marriage with the non-Aryans was not approved. By the later vedic period, the brahmanas and the kshatriyas seem to have been endogamous but there are also several instances of marrying outside one's own social order. Although infrequently, the brahmanas took the kshatriya females as wives.

The brahmanas was expected to fulfil the requirements of all four ashramas. His authority was exalted because of his association with the non-material achievement and being engaged in teaching and tapas, which was expected of every human being. Gautama declares that it is the duty of all Varnas to serve their superiors. The brahmana accordingly inherited the services of the lower orders of society and as a consequence of his scholarly abilities and his control of the sacrifice, he had preference in the award of many high offices. His lands were exempted from tax. The rate of the interest charges on loans to a brahmana was a nominal sum. Certain services were to be provided for him without charges. Even after
doing the severest of the crime, the punishment of the brahmana took the mildest form. 24 No matter what the crime, he was seldom subject to corporal punishment. If for religious purposes, he stole from the shudra or from vaishya and kshatriya who had been negligent in their ritual duties, this was not to be regarded as a crime, in the opinion of some commentators.

These advantages of the priesthood may be an indication of the significance of the community attached to the brahmana function. There is less doubt that they attest to the importance of brahmana authors and compilers assigned to their own social role and prerogatives. The advent of the non-brahmanical religions during the age of the Buddha, however, constituted a challenge to the traditional position and social privilege of the priest.

The term kshatriya, although meaning rule or ruler, does not refer to a unit in the class structure. But, whereas brahmana

retained its abstract form, kshatriya became a more specific concept. The kshatriyas were those who filled the governing and military roles in Aryan society. Even kings having no kshatriya lineage sought legitimation by forging kshatriya descent. However, there are instances in which no attempt was made do invent kshatriya status. Members of the lower castes who assumed the throne might, by ritual purification, gain status as kshatriya. The very fact of governing was often enough to qualify the ruler as kshatriya. In the Mahabharata even a vaishya and shudra is legitimized for kingship in the period of crisis.\(^\text{25}\) This is suggestive of the lack of a common kshatriya origin, which accounts, in part, for the fact that kshatriya consciousness never developed the communal feeling. In the absence of such consciousness element of dominance has very limited role to play.

The story of Parashurama points towards considerable tension between the brahmanas and kshatriyas in the struggle for

\(^{25}\) Mbh. Shantiparva.78.35ff.
social supremacy but it is difficult to know how to evaluate such legends. The purpose of this Brahman legend is to show that wronging the priests would not go unavenged as it was the duty of the ruler to ensure certain minimum standards of well-being and to present the brahmana with gifts of land and money. The episode of Parashurama also shows that such measures became inevitable in the case of violation of dharmic orders. The brahmanical authority was to be regarded as superior, although more properly the two authorities must be understood as complementary. The Br. Up. identifies brahmana as the source of kshatra. The king’s attack on the brahmana is, thus, an attack on his own source. The brahmana is placed below the kshatriya at the sacrifice, the latter representing the excellent form. Thus, he is the master of all except the kshatriya.

26. Apastamba Dharamsutra, II.10.26.1
27. Mbh. Shantiparva. 48.70
29. Gautama Dharmasutra. XI
The characteristic obligation of the kshatriyas are punishment and the conduct of hostilities. The world is such that order can be maintained only by the threat of violence against those who would use violence. Where the moral ambiguity of action would threaten the authority of others, the kshatriya is required to do whatever is necessary to preserve stability and sacred tradition. However, it should be noted that control of internal affairs was never the exclusive privilege of the warrior nobility. The enforcement of norms and resolution of conflicting interests involved corporation and agencies. Here, of course, the brahmanas were of crucial importance.

The vaishyas, who were not of so much importance during the early Vedic period, sought into prominence during the later Vedic phase. Farming and herding were considered the representative work of people.\textsuperscript{30} The vaishya was regarded as a freeman, but he, in fact, possessed little security for his personal

\textsuperscript{30} Mbh.1.64.2ff.
rights. He was burdened with payments such as the bali, contribution to the king and with encroachment on his property. That the vaishya responsible for the satisfaction of the economic needs of the community, was recognized as the foundation of the state and its prosperity, is indicated by the occasional reference to the king as “lord of the vaishyas.”

The shudras being at the lowest rung of the society, suffered from several unethical impositions. However, it is difficult to equate shudra’s position as serf without security of tenure as argued by some. In the time of the Brahmanas, when the position of the priestly class was important, the shudra was not permitted to practice austerities or to recite or even to listen to Vedic hymns—let alone to perform sacrifices. The Panchavimsha and Sh.Br. describe the shudra as the servant of the other classes and Manu holds that he was created expressly for the service of the brahmana. The

32. Manu Samhita., VIII. 413.
shudra had no protection from the whims of the twice-born castes and no absolute claim to his property for all practical purposes he was beyond the pale of justice. Nor had he even a claim to human dignity, he must content himself with the discarded food and clothing of others. The law books declare that he could never be released from the condition of servitude to others for this was his natural state.\textsuperscript{33}

However, it may be added that Indian economy was never dependent on slavery as was classical Greece. Slavery probably did not have the same connotation that it had in Greece and the treatment of Slaves was, no doubt, more humane than it was in most societies where slavery existed. The Yajnavalkya Smriti holds that a man may be reduced to slavery only with his consents.\textsuperscript{34} Narada, though be does not go as far as Yajnavalkya, discusses ceremonies for emancipating slaves.\textsuperscript{35} The law books are not of one voice on the general subject of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Manu Samhita. VIII. 414.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Yajnavalkya Samiti. II. 182.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Naradasmriti. V. 42f.
\end{itemize}
slavery, but they do suggest that slavery got strengthened. It is probably inaccurate to characterise the *shudras* or even any significant portion of them as slaves. It was generally in state's interest to prevent expansion of slavery. Even the *shudra* order fragmented into subcastes and the variety of *shudra* functions and occupations tended to weaken class cohesion. In the *Smriti* literature we note the beginning of distinction between— "clean and unclean", *shudras*. The former might be allowed to requisition of the *brahmanas* although, of course, *Vedic* formule could not be employed and, hence, the religious significance of the ritual was greatly curtailed. And here is the occasional grudging admission that the *shudra* had potential capacity for virtuous living.

The *Dharmasutras* deny that unions of lower castes men with women of higher position can be marriages in the true sense. These *hypogamous* unions were unacceptable. The children resulting from them were without benefit of the sacred law, exception being the
Sutas. when brahma women joined with shudra male, the progeny must be considered chandala. The hypergamous marriage (husband being of higher status) was considered less despisable. Baudhayana considers the child of a kshatriya women by a brahma to be a brahma and that of a vaishya woman by a kshatriya to belong to the caste of his father. This is likely to have been the common practice in the earlier period of caste development. Marriages of males with female of the caste immediately below were, by no means, unusual; nor was there generally a loss of status for the child. But as the social gulf, between the higher and the lower classes widened, sexual relations with a vaishya woman were discouraged by the codifiers. The social status of father was no longer granted to children of unions between males of the vaishyas and shudras. Shudra women, according to Vashistha, were meant for the pleasure of the other castes, and we know that women of the lower order were taken as mistress by men of higher rank.

The problem of economic relations

36. Yajnavalkya Samhita I.93.
among the groups of social order was solved by the principle of ritual cleanliness in caste occupation. Thus, Baudhayan says that the hand of an artisan is always pure. 37 Where intercourse among the various social classes was necessary, a rationale could be found. But class privilege was the rule. Rates of interest for example varied with the caste of the debtor, typically 2% for the brahmana and 5% for the shudra for the same period of time. The brahmana host was to feed his brahamana guests before the kshatriya guests; vaishya and shudra guests must eat with servants. But the brahmanas were advised to use kindness. 38 However, it is better to say that many of these features developed quite later and in the age of the Brahmanas, society had not yet become stereotyped and the harsh features of the caste system had not yet made their presence felt.

The later vedic period possessed aspect of social mobility. Despite the well-established

37. Baudhayana Dharmasutra. I. 5. 9. 1.
38. Manu Samhita III. 110ff.
position of the brahmanas, it was still possible during this period for a family to experience an upward and downward change in social order in the space of several generations.  

Apart from the shudras, we find mention of several other lower castes who have been termed Nichya and Apachya in the Brhamanas. Sayana remarks, while commenting on the text of Ait. Br., that such castes ranked very low in the hierarchy of castes and were inferior to others in their manners and ways of life. The Ait. Br. also gives the names of such castes as Andhras, Pundras, Sabaras and Mutibas. These lower castes, mixed castes and outcastes were often looked down upon by higher castes. But men of lower castes were honoured and regarded as seers for their knowledge and spiritual uplift. On the other hand, even the children of upper castes could become outcastes. We have instances when grandsons of the sage Vishvamitra, although belonging to the royal

39. G. S. Ghurye, Caste And Class In India, 1927, Bombay, p. 41.
40. Ait. Br. VIII. 38.3.
family, were cursed to become lower caste. In the vedic literature, we possess several such instances. In the famous story of Kavasha, son of Ilusha, we are told how he was expelled by sages because of his being a dasiputra, but was ultimately granted the vision of the Vedic hymn and sages had to accept him as one of their colleagues. In a similar way, Mahidas probably born of shudra mother, as his name suggests, was the author of the Ait. Br. 43 The king Janaka, although being a kshatriya, was declared to be a brahmana on account of his spiritual attainment and knowledge.

It was in an endeavour to establish harmony and order that the concept of the rit seems to have been evolved. Although interpreted differently by different scholars, it stood for moral order. It was a way of systematization and regulation of the world affairs. Hence, under principle of rit everything was put in order devised for control, and different duties

42. Ait. Br. VII. 33.6.
and separate, departmental functions for supervising operations. Varuna was the protector of this law. This rit was replaced by 'dharma' during the period of the Brahmanas.\textsuperscript{44} The concept of dharma includes theory of the place of power in the cosmic order and this in turn introduces the all important role of the sacrifice- the bond between man and the gods. The word dharma seems to have acquired two interpretations related but distinguishable. It came to imply virtue, the moral duty and it came to the performance of caste function, the social duty.\textsuperscript{45} Although defined variously, dharma stands for the eternal and necessary moral law, the code of righteousness, the term is used to denote both truth and righteous conduct. In short, it means a manner of life the whole duty of man in relation to the general, moral, material and intellectual purpose of life.

The next step of the development of the dharma theme was that the state became

\textsuperscript{44} Drekmeier.op.cit., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{45} P.V. Kane. op. cit. Vol.I, p.1f
associated with it. It became the major obligation of the state to preserve dharma. Thus, the dharma now became the rajdharna, which was the guarantor of whole social structure. The principle of danda also came to be associated with it. The Mahabharata and the Manuismriti declare that society is regulated by the ability of the king to punish. To them, it is danda that rules the subjects, it is danda that keeps awake and guards the people when they sleep.

Although the Vedas do not directly indicate that caste existed in more than embryonic form by the end of the Vedic period institution has acquired certain rigidity. Although the Aryans thought of themselves as culturally different from the indigenous population it does not follow that they thought of themselves as culturally superior. We are unjustified in reading modern racial consciousness in this distinction. The Aryans accepted many non-Aryan features and, thus, tribal elements were incorporated into the dominant Aryan
culture. The *brahmanas* took the lead in articulating and nourishing this culture and infusing into it a principle of organization that could provide the basis of a society larger than the tribal community based an kinship ties. The adaptive and assimilating approach of the *Aryans* was able to enrich the *Aryan* culture.

The age of the *Buddha* was marked by tightening of the *caste* law, which is supported by *Smriti* laws as well as the literary accounts of the *Pali* language. The *Kshatriyas* had to come to dominate the political scene and in the western and north-western India, the hold of the traditional *brahmanism* was still visible. But, it was in the eastern lands that a serious challenge to *brahmanism* was brought forward by *Kshatriyas*. The *Kshatriyas* exalted as to the purity of their descent through seven generations, both on the fathers and the mother's side and are described as 'fine in presence, stately to behold.' The *brahmanas*

46. Kosambi, op. cit., p. 25.
47. T.W. Rhys- Davids, Dialogues of The Buddha, I.148; Vinaya Pitaka.11.4.160
too claimed descent from the sacrificial priests and though majority of them followed other than prescribed pursuits, they were equally with nobles considered distinguished by high birth. However, it is to be noted that such four gradation—brahmana, Kshatriya, vaishya and shudra—within the borders of each of the four varnas and the borders themselves were both variable and undefined. But this enumeration was not complete as we find mention of hin-jatiyo (low-tribes) and hin-sippani (low-trades). Among the first, we are told of workers in rushes, bird-catchers and cart-makers—aboriginal tribesmen, who were hereditary craftsman in three ways. Among the latter—mat-makers, barbers, potters, weavers and leather workers, it is implied that there was no hard and fast line, determined by birth. People could and did change their vocation by adopting on or other of these “low trades.” Thus, in a Jataka story, a love-lorn Kshatriya works successively as a potter, basket-maker, reed-worker, garland-maker and cook. In another Jataka

48. T. W. Rhys-Davids, Buddhist India, London, 1903, p.28
49. V. 290.
story, a setthi works as tailor and as a potter and still retains the respect of his high-born relations. Finally, we hear in both the Jaina and Buddhist books of aboriginal tribes, chandalas and pakkusas who were more despised even than these low tribes and trades.

Besides the above, who were all freemen, there were also slaves, the individuals who had been captured in predatory raids and reduced to slavery or had been deprived of their freedom as judicial punishment or has submitted to slavery of their own accord. Children born to such slaves were also slaves and the emancipation of slaves is referred to. But we do not hear of such hersh treatments as meted out of their counterparts in Rome. For the most part, the slaves were household servants and not badly treated and their number seem to have been significant.

In appears that in the initial

50. VI. 372.
51. Anguttara Nikaya.I.162, Jacobi, Jain sutras 2.301.
52. Jat. 4.220.
54. Vinaya Text, I.191.
55. T.W. Rhys-Davids, op. cit., p. 28.
phase, all the social orders had been originally one. But, with the firming up of the economy and society hierarchical orders appeared. The nobles and priests were merely those members of the vaishyas who had raised themselves into a higher social rank. 56 We also find instances of social mobility. The poor men could become nobles and both could become brahmanas. We find numerous instances in the books, some of them unconsciously preserved even in the later priestly books which are otherwise under the spell of the caste theory. Some Kshatriyas appear to have descended from the non-Aryan tribes who might have been assimilated into the Aryan community. This assimilation and adaptation might have also led to acquiring political importance and with it an entry into a higher social grade.

The pali literature enumerates numerous instances where there was much freer possibility of change among the social ranks

than is usually supposed. In a Jataka story\textsuperscript{57}, a Kshatriya king's son, apprentices himself successively in pursuance of a love affair to a potter, basket maker, a florist and a cook, without a word being added as to loss of caste when his action becomes known. In another Jataka story\textsuperscript{58}, a price resigns his share in the kingdom in favour of his sister and turns trader. In further instances of the Jatakas we find noble working as an archer\textsuperscript{59}, a brahmana taking to trade\textsuperscript{60}, weaving and hunting.\textsuperscript{61} Brahmanas also appear as agriculturists as mentioned earlier and as hiring themselves out as cowherds and even goatherds. All such instances prove that differentiation between different social group had not become hardened at least whether, information gathered from the Buddhist literature. At least, we may say that role of Buddhism in reducing this differentiation might have been significant. In this regard, Manu

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} II.5.290.
\item \textsuperscript{58} IV.84.
\item \textsuperscript{59} II.87.
\item \textsuperscript{60} V.22; 471.
\item \textsuperscript{61} II.200; VI.170
\end{itemize}
also needs to be quoted when he says that distinction of Arya or Anarya is not determined by birth but by merits.\textsuperscript{62}

Despite the brahmanical emphasis on the marriage outside gotra, we find instances of irregular unions. In some cases, as mentioned in Jataka, the offspring of such unions took the rank of nobles or as brahmanas.\textsuperscript{63} If not consuming with the people of the lower castes is taken an important criterion of caste,\textsuperscript{64} even that was not practised with severity. We have clear instances of a brahma eating with a Kshatriya and repenting of doing so.\textsuperscript{65} The whole episode of the marriage of the Shakya maiden to Prasenjit, king of Kosala, turns on the belief that a Kshatriya will not eat, even with his own daughter, if she has been low-born. And we hear of sending people to coventry for breach of such customs. Thus, on another occasion,\textsuperscript{66} we are told that brahmanas were

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Manu Samhita. X. 65.
\item IV. 38, 146, 305; VI. 348, 427.
\item Fick. op.cit.
\item Jat.II.82.
\item Jat IV.388.
\end{enumerate}
deprived by other *brahmanas* for drinking water mixed with the water a *chandala* had used. And in an older document, one of the Dialogues, we are told how this was done. Three *brahmanas* for some offence or other, outlaw a *brahmana* shaving him and cutting him dead by pouring ashes over him, thus banishing him from the land and from the township. 67 And the passage goes on to state that if *Kshatriyas* had done this to a *Kshatriya* the *brahmana* would still admit him to the sacred feasts and allow him to eat with them at their sacred feasts.

As a further proof of flexibility of caste-rules, we find in the *Jataka*, 68 a *brahmana* taking as his only wife, the discarded consort of a *Kshatriya*. But the people laugh at him not because he is acting in any way unworthy of his social standing but because he is old and ugly. There are also numerous instances, even the priestly manuals of customs, of unions between man and women of all degrees of social

67. T.W. Rhys-Davids, Dialogues of The Buddha, I.120
68. V.280
importance. These are not only between men of ranks and girls of a lower and woman of a higher position. Such instances evince that social differentiation and division was often bridged over by a number of almost imperceptible stages. We find numerous instances where boundaries were overstepped. However, there were still real obstacles to unequal unions. Though the lines of demarcation were not yet drawn hard and fast, we still have to suppose a society having certain demarcating features.

While in the low-books and the epics the brahmanas have been given high-sounding epithets, they also have epithet, 'low-born' in comparison with the king and nobles. The claim of the law-books to brahmanical superiority had not been yet accepted in eastern India. Hence, they claim for the north-western, as distinct from the eastern, provinces a most strict adherence to ancient custom. The ideal land is to them that of the Kurus and Panchalas, not that of the Kashis and Kosalas. But, they

69. Hina-Jacho, see for instance Jat. V.257.
do not put forward their arrogant claims against the Kshatriyas which is a distinctive feature of the society. However, the very influence of the brahmanas in sacrificial matters was strongly denounced especially by persons of noble birth who also happened to be Buddhists.\textsuperscript{70} Even the Jain literature placed nobility above the brahmanas. Yet, the Buddhists and Jains were only critical of ostensity and ritualism of the Vedic religion. They did not denounce brahmanhood but gave due emphasis on the virtuousness of the brahmanas as seen in the story of Uddalaka Jataka. It is better to say that there was no rivalry between brahmana and Kshatriya to establish dominance. There was continuous process of mutual adjustment between the two in order to strengthen social harmony.

It is difficult to reconcile with the view that brahmana and Kshatriya exploited the productive labour of the vaishyas and shudras. The brahmanas were not an aristocracy in the European sense, which combine blood

\textsuperscript{70} Fick-op.cit., p.32.
lineages with economic and political power but a group which identified itself with the ideology that provided rationality and coherence to society. The majority of the population might have been ignorant of or unfamiliar with the brahmanical ideology in its articulated form, but the reverence it enjoyed over centuries shows its extraordinary dominance as ideology.  

It consist of a coherent and consistent intellectual statement about a cosmic order that links all its elements in a continuous and understandable pattern. It does not imply that ideology remained unchanged as suggested by some.  

It modified and adjusted its ideology to the changing tunes of time. The brahmanas were not a homogenous community as it consisted of regional variations and complex internal differentiations regarding beliefs and customs. Diverse local traditions were brought in the fold of brahmanism which paved the way for a larger social identity. However, it is important

to note that when it came to assertions of brahmana superiority, they did succeed in projecting a collective identity.\textsuperscript{73} The brahmana who possesses the knowledge of the Brahman and has the right to decide the rules of conduct (dharma) maintains the cosmic order in which entity occupies a necessary and logical place. It is this remarkable continuity of the core of brahmanism with the flexibility to adjust to radically different political and social situations without wielding ground, that gave the brahmanas an awareness of sharing a common heritage of language and values with others of their varna throughout the subcontinent, despite fluctuating patronage under different political authorities.

Through brahmanisation, the peripheral and remote areas were brought into the fold of Aryan cultures. Here, the basic objective of the brahmana was to enter into a dialogue with the indigenous population through the propagation of the vedic culture. Introduction

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
of Vedic culture to these areas also intended to invoke a particular response in their intended recipients. These socio-religious prescriptions consisted of a series of legitimations of local beliefs and practices already in vogue and the reiteration of the fundamental principles of brahmanism. These legitimations had to be worked out in such a way that they did not impair the recognition of the original model and yet privileged the brahmanas with the authority to decide the degree of admissibility of the local usages. Although being a heterogenous group, both socially and in sectarian persuasion, they had a closely guarded and complex hierarchy of status and ranking. Moreover, as the vedic hymns suggest they had personal loyalties to different gods and goddesses. They did not pursue the same profession, nor were they expected to have the same intellectual ability or moral distinction. However, the Vedic hymns instead of glossing over these differences, make every effort to present the brahmanas as
a single community. The brahmana to be revered and propitiated with gifts is never an individual but the representative of an entire social group, whatever be the internal differences.

Like the brahmanas, the Kshatriyas too consisted of heterogenous groups. Not all of them were in the nobility, nor were they all expected to have warrior-like qualities. Despite having certain hegemony over the vaishyas or shudras and aborigines, they were expected to rule according to the provisions of the rajadharma. This concept of rajadharma elaborated upon in the Mahabharata and mentioned earlier, was to serve as a check on the dominant position of the Kshatriya. The need to secure legitimacy from the brahmanas might also have worked as a check, although to some extent, on his dominant status.

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