CHAPTER - 4
ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE DURING VEDIC AGE
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The Rigvedic society marked by pastoral character was largely dominated by the tribal values. In the absence of any full-fledged social hierarchy, we hardly find elements of social dominance during this period. The authors of the Vedic Index¹, on the other hand, hold that caste system was already on its way towards general acceptance. If the varna or caste system is understood in the sense of a social mechanism created in response to a mode of production in which the upper classes in form of priests and noble-warriors act as managers of production and collectors of surplus, it is very difficult to deduce such a picture from the Rigveda.² It is also to be noted here that sometimes role of the varna

2. R. S. Sharma, Material Culture and Social formation in Ancient India (hereafter MCSF), p. 49.
order has been overrated and regarded as a divisive factor. In the Rigveda we mainly get three social orders viz. brahmana, Kshatriya, rajanya and vaishya. It is only in the oft-quoted Purushasukta, perhaps added towards the end of the Rigvedic period, that we get the names of all four social orders i.e. brahmana, Kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. This very addition reflects the changing facets of social formation in the light of material growth of the period. Guided by the tribal values like potlatch the Rigvedic society was simple and based on kinship ties. Despite the mention of four social orders, the relation between them does not seem to be well defined. Social hierarchy and demarcation lines in each order was yet to make its appearance. Even the king seems to be first among equals. Thus, the Rigvedic society was largely egalitarian despite the fact that danastuti hymns from

4. RV. X. 90.
late mandalas indicate spoils going to tribal chiefs and priests. We find no class differentiation due to absence of surplus. However, there could be differentiation of rank as evinced from titles like vishpati, janasya gopa, gananam, ganapatī etc. 7 We also encounter distinction between warriors and the vīṣh which comprised of herders and fighters. The latter also provided resources for priests and the nobility. The brahmanas are mentioned fourteen times in the Rigveda 8 but not regarded as priest everywhere. However, some of the priests like Vishvamitra and Vashishtha were very important and also played political role in the vedic life. The Kṣatariyas mentioned nine times in the Rigveda 9 were warrior-chiefs called rajaṇ. However, in the absence of regular source of income, they were yet to acquire considerable power. We hear of rich people possessing chariots and cattle and also attending vidatha.

Nobility gradually acquired significance

probably towards the end of the Rigvedic period as indicated by the later portions of the Rigveda. It would, thus, be clear that the Rigvedic social groups had not yet demarcated hard lines and as such, there was no question of social dominance during this period. However, traces of slavery has been found during this period.\textsuperscript{10} On the basis of frequent mention of word 'dasa' and 'dasyu' in the Rigveda and use of contemptuous words against them it has been assumed that certain sections of native people were enslaved.\textsuperscript{11} However, slaves in the Rigvedic period did not face some harsh measures as they faced under the Hittites. In the absence of sufficient resources, social groups were based on kinship ties and element of interdependence and social cohesion certainly played a role in the social fabric.

The later Vedic phase saw the emergence of the PGW era. It also saw the beginning of the sedentary and agrarian life.

\textsuperscript{10} D. Chanana, Slavery in Ancient India, Delhi, 1960, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
as a result of which the surplus production was made feasible. In the light of such material changes social pattern also underwent a change as the need was now felt to consolidate the social order to fulfil the needs of state and the different social groups. Emergence of a full-fledged varna order and influx of various rigidities in it appear to be the outcome of this process.

In the later Vedic literature, the four social orders are very clearly and frequently mentioned. The *Sh. Br.*\(^{12}\) clearly mentions the brahmana, rajanya, vaishya and shudra. The varna order now turned into a complex and less flexible structure of the caste. Hence, it is said that the caste system in the age of the Brahmanas was a transition between the laxity of the Samhita period and the rigidity of post-vedic age.\(^ {13}\) Now, even the gods came into the ambit of the caste structure commenting on the *Ait. Br.*\(^ {14}\) Sayanacharya observes that among the

\(^{12}\) V. 5.4.9.
\(^{14}\) I.2.3.
gods Agni and Brihaspati are brahmanas; Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya Yama etc. are Kshatriyas; Vasus, Adityas, Visvadevah, Maruts etc. are vaishyas, Pushan is shudra. Such references also occur in other passages of the Shatpath Br.\(^\text{15}\) Time and again, the Brahmanas mention Indra as Kshatriya and Brihaspati as brahmana.

The caste distinction, as found in the Brahmanas, also enveloped the animal world and vegetable kingdom. Thus, the goat is brahmana, the horse is Kshatriya and the ass is both vaishya and shudra.\(^\text{16}\) Lions and tigers are called kings of beasts and eagle is termed as king of birds. In vegetable kingdoms Palash is brahmana\(^\text{17}\) and durba is Kshatriya.\(^\text{18}\) Even the vedic metres have caste distinction as Gayatri is regarded as brahmana whereas Tristuv as Kshatriya.

Before coming to our main topic of

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15. XIV.4.2.23, 24, 25.
social dominance it is better first to see the emergence of different social groups and their duties and interrelation among them as only then the issue of dominance of different groups would be more clear. First, we come to the duties of the four main varnas. The Ait. Br. mentions that the brahmanas could receive gifts, drink Soma more at will, be smart and opt for submission to the king.¹⁹ The vaishya has been described as one who pays tax to another, is lived on by another and can be oppressed or enslaved at will. The shudra is servant of another to be evicted at will and to be slain at will.²¹ If this passage is believed, it certainly presents the pitiable condition of shudras and also the deplorable condition of vaishya. The passage implies that shudra had no right of property or security of life against the king or the nobility in general. He was to serve the three upper varnas. However, he was not the sent as suggested by Keith.²² Similarly

19. Ait. Br. VII. 35.3.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
the vaishya enjoyed right to property or land on condition that he paid the taxes imposed by the ruling class in return of protections by the Kshatriya. The nobles or Kshatriyas were the owners of land and the vaishya could be dispossessed of his land at King's will. We have the story of raja Vishvakarman Bhauvan in Shatpath Br²³ wherein he is rebuked for settling people without the consent of the vish. The story says that the king performed a sacrifice and suppressed the wishes of the vish while making a gift of earth. Upon this the, earth became angry and said, "No mortal must give me away; thou; art foolish Vishvakarman Bhauvan."²⁴ The origin of the caste-System has not been discussed in the Brahmanas. The Purushasukta of Rigveda, already referred to, contains the sole of reference in Samhitas to caste. It seems that the four varnas were four divisions of the people classified according to their callings or professions and all the four classes

²³. XIII. 7.1.15.
taken together made up the organic whole of the social structure; every varna of the class was important and indispensable for the functioning of the social body. Thus, the brahmanas were the spiritual guides, the Kshatariyas were temporal rulers entrusted with administration and protection of people; the vaishyas looked after trade and agriculture, and the shudras served the upper three classes attending to their comforts and well being. However, it is not good to make generalisation here and it is better to say that not all the brahmanas were spiritual guides or all the Kshatriya entrusted with administration. Similar is the case with vaishyas and shudras. In fact, whatever appears in the Samhitás, is only a broad social division and except a certain section of all the four castes all others were perhaps engaged in other works. We find the brahmanas of kshatriya origin in the earlier section of many genealogies and which may even reflect common origin in some cases. We find

26. R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, p. 52.
the brahmanas of even non-Aryan origin. Agastya and Vashishtha are said to have been born from jars. Kavasa Ailusha, the Rigvedic seer was a dasiputra as was the well-known Dirghatamas. These may have been dasa families of some standing who could have been included into the brahamana varna. Even the Bhrigus are said to be priests to the daitya kings and Pulastya being the ancestor of the rakshasas.

Now, we turn to the social status of different varnas and also examine their interrelation before turning to the issue of social dominance.

Despite having the lowest status in the society, the shudras were not like the serfs in the feudal system as argued by some. Earlier, it was thought that shudras were indigenous tribal groups who became slaves and serfs of Aryans. But we can’t say with certainty

27. RV. VII. 33.
29. R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, p. 52.
whether *shudras* ever really became slaves. They were distinct from early *dasas*, who were drawn into servitude. 33 Most of the *Brahmana* texts donot mention the *shudra* while narrating the legend of origin of caste. The *Shatpath Br.* 34 mentions the creation of three higher castes—*brahmana*, *Kshatriya* and *vaishya* which is coeval with the creation of the cosmos. The *shudra* is left from this list. Again, the *Taittiriya Brahman* 35 states, in unambiguous terms, that while the *brahmana* sprang from the gods, the *shudras* sprang from the *asuras* or *danavas*. It is, thus, largely possible that they came from the Aryan community itself and were more as private workers—domestic servants, agricultural labourers and artisans. 36 However, in course of time, different aboriginal tribes also were included in this group. As argued earlier, the *shudra* served other communities and that he could be evicted from land, dispossessed of his belongings and might even be killed at the

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34. II.1.4.12.
35. I.2.6.7.
will of the master. The Brahman texts leave no room for doubt about the degraded or low social status of shudras. Sh. Brahman identifies the brahmanas, the rajanya and the vish or vaishya with Brahma, Kshatra and Maruts respectively while the shudra is identified with toil. Taittiriya Brahmanas debars shudras from milking cows for sacrificial purposes. It say that, "a Shudra should not milk the cow for sacrificial purposes. The shudra sprang from non-existence. If the shudra milks the cow the milk is unfit to be offered in the sacrifices. Shatpath Br. enjoins, in the unmistakable terms, that the milkman of the cow meant for sacrificial milk must be one of the upper three castes while the Taittiriya Brahman says that the milkman or the milkmaid must not belong to the shudra class. Sh. Br. goes further and enjoins that the sacrificer who attains divine communion after diksha, should not speak to all sorts of people. He may speak

37. XII. 6.2.10.
38. II. 3.9.
39. I. 7.1.10.
40. III. 2.3.9.
41. III. 1.1.10.
with a *brahma*, *rajanya* or *vaishya* because these three varnas are entitled to perform sacrifices, they are *yajniya*.

Regarding the eligibility for performing sacrifices, it is said in the *Brahman* that only three higher varnas-*brahma*, *rajanya* and *vaishya* are eligible to perform sacrifices.\(^{42}\) Further, prohibition is made against *shudra*’s entrance into the sacrificial ground or hall known as *prachinavansa*.\(^{43}\) In the *rajasuya* sacrifice, the king is sprinkled with holy water by all castes except the *shudra* community. Even certain activities are described as the *shudra* way. Thus, in the *Aitaryya Brahmana*, in the famous anecdote of *Sunahsepa*, a *brahamana* father selling his son as a sacrificial offering is stigmatised for his *shudra*-like behaviour. Further, the performer of the *Pravargya* sacrifice is forbidden to have contact with *shura*.\(^{44}\) They are forbidden even for sitting in the line of the *brahamanas*.\(^{45}\)

\(^{42}\) *Sh. Br.* III. 1.1.9. 10.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid.  
\(^{44}\) *Sh. Br.* XIV.1.1.31.  
\(^{45}\) *Ait. Br.* II. 8.1.
However, despite such statements, we have some brahmana passage which mention that shudras had access to sacrificial campus and they were even assigned role in the sacrifices.\textsuperscript{46} In the Sh. Br.\textsuperscript{47} we find that four different addresses have been prescribed for four different varnas in calling the Havishkrit in Soma sacrifice, ‘Ehi’ in the case of the brahmana, ‘Agahi’ and ‘Advava’ in the case of a vaishya and rajanya respectively and ‘adhava’ in the case of a Shudra. This passage goes to prove beyond doubt that the shudra had access to the sacrificial campus. At one place, a shudra woman is referred to as wife (tora) of some male belonging to Arya class, that is, three upper classes.\textsuperscript{48} and this probably indicates some sort of matrimonial relation between the shudras and the Aryans. Again, despite the lower social rank given to them, we find several references in the Vedic literature in which they are

\textsuperscript{46} Dreckmeier, op.cit., p. 19.  
\textsuperscript{47} I. 1.4-12.  
\textsuperscript{48} Sh. Br. XIII. 2.9.8.
mentioned as wealthy shudras.\textsuperscript{49} This leads us to assume that the assigned social rank was not a hinderance in economic upliftments of the shudra. Moreover, being economically well-off some of them must have enjoyed some influential role in the society.

Next to the brahmanas and Kshatriya, vaishyas occupied the third rank in the hierarchy of varnas. It is evident from the Brahmanical texts that this community comprised the majority of the subjects that is why the term vish meant both subjects and vaishyas. During the Rigvedic times, the term 'vish' denoted herdsmen and fighters.\textsuperscript{50} However, due to advancement in agriculture, the production of grain considerably increased during the later vedic period, which strengthened the position of vish. This term now came to indicate peasantry. During the Rigvedic times, Pushan had been urged to make grihpati i.e. wealthy peasants generous in gifts\textsuperscript{51}: but in the later vedic period

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Sh.Br. V.3.2.2; Panchavimsha Br. VI.1.11; Maitrayani Samhita IV.2.7.10.
\item \textsuperscript{50} R. S. Sharma, MCSF, p. 51.
\item \textsuperscript{51} RV. VI.132.
\end{itemize}
grihpati became more important and occurring more frequently in the context of gramani.\textsuperscript{52} In the later vedic literature and even in the late section of Rigveda the grihpati came to denote higher lineage.\textsuperscript{53} The social status of the vaishyas came to far more exalted and honourable position than that of shudras. They were entitled to upanayana or investiture with the sacred thread. The main calling of the vaishya class consisted of trade and agriculture and hence their importance could never be underestimated for the smooth running of social machinery. According to some scholars, there was a constant attempt on the part of the brahmannsa and Kshatriyas in the later vedic period to keep down the vaishyas so that the vaishya might not surpass the former two classes in the bid for social ascendancy.\textsuperscript{54} It is also argued that the perpetual need for collecting tributes and sacrificial fees from peasantry supplemented by the demand for services of

\textsuperscript{52} Sh. Br. V.3.16.
\textsuperscript{53} RV. X. 85; AV. XIV. 1 and 2, XIX. 31.12.
\textsuperscript{54} J. Basu, op. cit., p. 15.
Shudras kept two upper social groups together.⁵⁵ In this regard, it is necessary first to look at these arguments and then draw conclusions.

As mentioned earlier, the Ait. Br.⁵⁶ says that the vaishya had to pay taxes, was lived on by the two higher castes and could be conquered at will. He is made subservient to the Kshatriya⁵⁷ and by a particular rite the priest makes the Kshatriya subservient while kshatriya makes the vaishya subservient. The political subjection of the vaishya to the ruling class or the Kshatriya is, time and again, mentioned in the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas say that the vaishya and shudra were made subservient to the Kshatriyas.⁵⁸ Again, the two lower varnas—vaishya and shudra are described as incomplete varnas whereas brahmanas and rajanyas the higher two varnas—are described as complete ones. In another Brahmana we are told that one who is neither a Kshatriya nor a purohita is

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⁵⁵. R. Thapar, From Lineage To State, p. 81.
⁵⁶. Ait. Br. VII. 35.3.
incomplete. The fact that the Kshatriya found favour with the brahmanas and that the latter looked down upon the vaishyas is clear from the Brahmanas. The brahmanas could tolerate the temporal lordship of the Kshatriyas and respect them accordingly but they never allowed the vaishyas to equal or tower above the kshatriyas. Both the priestly class and the ruling class desired that the vaishya community should be obedient and subservient to them. In this regard, a passage is important which deals with the rajasuya sacrifice, there is a particular function in that sacrifice called ‘madhu-graha’ ceremony. The particular brahmana priest belonging to the Yajurveda order known as Adhvaryu presents a cup to a Kshatriya and another to a vaishya and in doing so the priest imbues the Kshatriya with truth, prosperity and light and smites the vaishya with untruth, misery and darkness.

The vaishyas are frequently asked to obey the Kshatriyas and it is told that a Vaishya becomes possessed of cattle when he is

60. Sh. Br. V. 1.5.28.
under the rule of a Kshatriya. Further, peasants are considered fit to be eaten by rajanya and brahmana. We have other passages in which certain measures were to be taken to control Vish. Hence, it is said that Vish should not be placed above nobility; nor should it be made equal to nobility in order to avoid confusion. It is further suggested that peasants (vish) should not be detached from warrior princes to avoid chaos and evil. Rituals became an instrument to establish authority over Kinsmen and peasants. The vaishya was regarded fit to be conquered and in this regard the brahmanas played an important role in making the peasantry subservient to nobility. Through the rituals, the brahma was supposed to imbue the ruler with powers and making him stronger than the people below.

61. Ibid., I.3.2.15.  
62. Panchavimsha Brahmana. VI. 1.10; Sh. Br. V. 2.1.17; VIII. 7.1.2, 2.2.  
63. Tait Samhita. VIII. 7.1.12.  
64. Tait. Samhita. X. 4.3.22.  
65. Sh. Br. XII. 7.3.15.  
66. Tait. Samhita. II. 2.11.2.  
67. Ait. Br. VII. 29.3.  
68. Sh. Br. XII. 7.3.12.  
69. Sh. Br. IX. 4.3.3.
Keeping in view the increased numerical strength of *vish*,\textsuperscript{70} its role certainly increased. It came to be equated with cows to be used by others.\textsuperscript{71} Nobility was seen as feeder people as food, which is good for prosperity.\textsuperscript{72} Such frequent references highlight the importance of the *vaishya* community in the later *vedic* phase. However, these references do not mean that the whole system was based on exploitation of the *vaishyas*. There does not seem to be any conscious effort behind it. People setting apart a special share for the *Kshatriya* or ruling power does not mean that any coercive measure was applied for realisation of tax. *Bhagadhuha* was probably a *vaishya* functionary who represented peasant taxpayers.\textsuperscript{73}

From the above discussions, it is quite clear that *Kshatriya* had upper hand in the Aryan social order. He was a temporal ruler, protector and fighter. The king was looked upon

\textsuperscript{70} P. V. Kane, op.cit., vol. II, p.41.
\textsuperscript{71} Tait. Samhita, VII. 1.10.5.
\textsuperscript{72} Sh. Br. VI. 1.2.25.
\textsuperscript{73} R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, p. 76.
as a symbol of vigour, strength and state.\textsuperscript{74} The term 'Kshatriya' as used in the Vedas meaning 'ruler' or 'rule' does not refer to a unit in the class structure.\textsuperscript{75} Even lower castes during the time of crisis, could assume throne as opined by the Mahabharata.\textsuperscript{76} Kshatriyas were to do everything to preserve stability and sacred tradition but control of internal affairs was never an exclusive prerogative of this group but involving castes, corporation and agencies. Some scholars opine that as Kshatriyas collected titles from peasants, they were owners of land.\textsuperscript{77} However, it is to be observed that despite collecting taxes from peasants they were not given any authority over land cultivated by peasants and land was not an important factor in relations between the two. While arable lands and homestead lands were in individual ownership, grasslands were held by the community.\textsuperscript{78} Even the king himself is said to have begged land

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Ait. Br. VIII.37.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} Dreckmeier, op.cit., p. 82.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} MBH. Shantiparva. 78. 35ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} J. Basu, op.cit., p. 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{78} U. N. Ghoshal, Agrarian System in Ancient India, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 2-3.
\end{itemize}
from the sun-god who is the divine Kshatriya. People used to be pay taxes to the king for maintenance of the state. The Kshatriya was also entitled to performing sacrifices; like the brahmana and the vaishya he also was a yajniya but had no right to partake of oblations of sacrifice. The brahmanas alone had the exclusive privilege to partake of sacrificial oblations. Hence, they are called ‘hutada’ whereas Kshatriyas and vaishyas are termed ‘ahutada; Shudras are entitled neither to perform sacrifice nor to partake of oblations there of. It is said that those subjects are hutada who are brahmanas; rajanyas, vaishyas and shudras are ahutada. On account of the inroads of dasyus and territorial expansion, Kshatriya had to engage in frequent warfare. Hence, it is said that a Kshatriya should always be prepared to fight his enemies, punish miscreants and help the needy and afflicted. Fighting was regarded as his strength and his function was both executive and legislative. The high esteem which the

79. Ait. Br. VII. 34.1.
Kshatriyas enjoyed and the grand conception of kingship are evident from many passages of the Brahmanas. The king was regarded as the great protector of the people, the maintainer of the law and order the mainstay of four castes and the terror of the enemies. In the Brahmanas, it is observed that the Kshatriya was born i.e. the overlord of all beings was born; the employer of the commoner was born; the slayer of the enemy was born; the protector of the brahmana was born."

During the Rigvedic times the word frequently used for Kshatriya was rajanya which implied status within lineage. But, during the later vedic phase this word was replaced by Kshatriya. Here, the term Kshatra implied temporal authority and power, sovereign, demanding prestations and ownership over clan land. The Kshatriyas, despite being less in number, became powerful because of military advantage and ritualistic support from the brahmana. Chief

81. R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, p. 32.
82. Ibid., p. 55.
reason for establishing this authority over peasants was to collect periodical tithes from the peasants. The king was called 'vishmatta' because grihpati provided wealth to rajanya in the form of tribute. In fact, the king is said to consume wealth in the same way as fire consuming grass. Kinsman of king seem to have acted as officials and, thus, may have formed segmentary or kin-based polity. We have mention of near kinsmen of kings bringing bali to the kind. Rajanyas or collaterals of the ruling tribal chief constituted his musclemen. However, in the absence of enough evidences, it is difficult to say that force was applied in collecting taxes.

The brahmanas were regarded as the spiritual guide and advisor to the king in temporal or social-political matters. All the three castes—brahmana Kshatriya and vaishya were eligible to perform sacrifice i.e. to say they were yajniya but, the brahmana alone had

83. AV. III. 4.2.
84. RV. I.65.4.
85. AV. XI. 1.6.
the exclusive privilege to partake of the holy learnings or sacred oblations of the sacrifice. He alone was 'hutada' whereas the others were 'ahudata'. Although there was reciprocity and division of duty between the Kshatriya and the brahmana, the latter was superior to the former in the social status. The earthly king is said to be the ruler of all three castes but he was not the king of the brahmanas. While consecrating the king during the rajasuya ceremony the brahmanas announced to the people that as a lord of the brahmanas is Soma, they (brhamans) are excluded from the power of king and also not to be exploited by the king.87 Another text88 also regards Soma as the king of brahmanas.

The killing of the brahmanas was regarded as one of the vilest of the crimes. The law specifically prohibited murder or manhandling of the brahmanas. The king also could not appear to be the brahmanas at will as it would bring impoverishment to his kingdom.89

88. Tait. Br. I. 7.4.2; I.7.6.7.
89. Sh. Br. XIII. 1.5.4.
Brahmana was even brought into the category of human deity or god on earth.\textsuperscript{90} Difference is established between the oblation and dakshina and it is said that while oblations are homage or gifts offered to divine deities like Agni, Surya, Mitra etc. dakshina is propitiation to the human god i.e. brahmana.\textsuperscript{91} Because of their exalted position in the social hierarchy, brahmanas were given four exclusive privileges for which people were made responsible. Thus, people were to show him respect and liberality, acknowledge his invincibility and granting him security against capital punishment.\textsuperscript{92} Another Brahmana text also lends support to this belief as it regards the brahmana as a divine caste.\textsuperscript{93}

Despite having certain social privileges, the brahmanas were not affluent class. On the other hand, years of discipline and vedic study impaired priests of their ability to earn a livelihood.\textsuperscript{94} In fact, we find that

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. IV. 3.4.4.  
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., XI.5.7.1.  
\textsuperscript{93} Tait. Br. I. 2.6.7.  
\textsuperscript{94} Dreckmeier, op.cit., p.29.
seventeen types of priests officiated at princely sacrifices but the *brahmanas* gradually climbed to the top. The priest by function of *brahmana* came in concrete form only during the rituals of the later Vedic phase. During this period, his special status was underlined by his privilege of being allowed to consume remains of sacrifice including flesh of sacrificial animal.\(^{95}\)

As the importance of sacrifices grew during the age of the Brahmanas, so was the office of *purohita*. The *purohita* was inevitably a *brahmana*. However, it is difficult to say that originally he was associated with war like activities and was a charioteer.\(^{96}\) Today the term *Purohita* means an ordinary priest, but, it has wider connotation and deeper significance in the Vedic age. Every king or noble had his domestic priest or chaplain who also functioned as the chief advisor of the king in matters both temporal and spiritual.

\(^{95}\) Vedic Index, Vol. II, p. 83.
\(^{96}\) Heesterman, *India And The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, p.151.
He used to precede the king both physical and metaphorically. Brihaspati, the priest and guide of Indra, is said to precede Indra. The same statement occurs in the Brahmanas also. The priest used to advise the king in important social, political and religious issues and show the way. In consultation with him, the monarch dictated the policy of the government. It is said that subjects of that king live in perfect harmony and are devoted to him who is guided by a wise priest. The Kshatriyas who were kings and represented the nobility could, not do without a brahmana or priest. Their spiritual guide was a priest in religious affairs; again their chief advisor or minister in temporal matters or socio-political issue was the priest or purohita. While we have mention of Vashishtha and Vishvamitra as great priests during the Rigvedic age, the Brahmana texts constantly stress the importance of purohita for the purposes of administration. He was indispensable to the king and had to seek his advice in all important

97. RV. IV. 50.8.
98. Ibid., VIII. 40.2.
matters relating to government in times of both peace and war. It is said that 'other kings befriend that king and his enemy gets vanquished, who has for his master, a learned purohita, who is the protector of the state (rashtra-gopa). Highlighting the role of the priest, it is said that gods could conquer heaven only because they had Brihaspati as their supreme guide and advisor. The eighth book (Panchika) of the Ait. Br. Chapter XXI, XXII and XXIII in particular, give a long list of kings who were initiated on consecration ceremony of Indra by their respective purohitas with the result that they were victorious. These chapters, in question, emphasise the supreme importance of brahmana purohitas in matters of administration and clearly state that the victory of permanent sovereigns were mainly due to the guidance of brahmana priests or ministers. However, each and every brahmana was not fit or allowed to be a purohita. He

should be learned and protector of the state.\textsuperscript{101} In the Brahmanas, we find the examples of same priest holding the office of priest of two and even three states. Thus, Devabhayga Shrautarsha was the purohita to both the Kurus and the Srinjayas.\textsuperscript{102} Similarly, the three famous states of ancient India-Kashi, Koshala and Videha-had one and the same priest.\textsuperscript{103} These instances prove the close connection and alliance of different states and the extra ordinary administrative ability of the brahman priests. In the consecration ceremony, though the Kshatriya i.e. the king is the yajamana, (sacrificer), he had to relinquish the sacrificer’s share to the purohita. Again, at the commencement of a sacrifice a Kshatriya had to the take a solemn vow not to injure or harm the priest throughout his lifetime.\textsuperscript{104} How wrath visits a king who cheats or plays false with a purohita is finely narrated in the brahmana\textsuperscript{105} according to which

\textsuperscript{101} Ait. Br. VIII. 40.4.  
\textsuperscript{102} Sh. Br. II. 4.4.5.  
\textsuperscript{103} Shankhayan Shrautrasutra, XVI. 29.5.  
\textsuperscript{104} Ait. Br. VIII. 39.1  
\textsuperscript{105} Ait. Br. VII. 23.
the Kshatriya king Atyarati Janantapi had to pay dearly for cheating his brahmin purohita, Vashishtha Satyahavya.

All these references may lead us to believe that brahmanas enjoyed the uppermost rank in the social hierarchy due to their position as being spiritual head and materially well-off as a result of growing importance of sacrifices. But, reality was not so. We find the mention of impoverished brahmana in the vedic literature. They maintained rigorous discipline. Moreover, they were generally expected to fulfil the requirements of all four ashramas. The Indian value system emphasises that non-material achievement, prestige and honour belong to the man who puts his ability in the service of goals higher than his own interests. Though the extensive privileges and immunities of the brahmanas are extensively given, we find several of the law givers emphasising that the brahmana had only to pursue vedic studies to be considered faithful to his obligation.

106. RV. l. 105. 7ff.
After discussing the relative position of each caste, we now turn to another important issue i.e. issue of social dominance. Certain western scholars, emphasised social differentiation and went looking out for higher authority in the Indian society. Seeking parallel from European history, they emphasized on internal conflict and social dominance. They argued that the brahmana-Kshatriya combine dominated the Indian political scene for a long period. It has been argued by scholars that increasing importance of sacrifices-both grihyasutra and consecration - emphasised the political and socio-religious role of the brahmana. Who saw them as a source of legitimation to chiefs. Thus, they are said to have established their hegemony over the other three castes. Sometimes, the brahmana and Kshatriyas are taken together and made responsible for establishing their authority over the vaishyas and shudras. Let us examine this conjectural issue in detail.

108. R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, pp. 51-52.
In the Rigvedic period the pastoral life of the tribe did not leave much scope for social dominance by any particular group. In the absence of any surplus production, different social groups acted in a coherent way. Hence, even the king had to enlist the support of each and every group for invading any other tribal group or consolidating his own position. Moreover, the element of social hierarchy had not yet taken a definite shape. Hence, the brahmanas and the Kshatriyas played major social role but there was hardly any social dominance during this period. The varna order which was occupational and ritualistic, was hardly in a position to arouse social tension during this phase.

It was during the later vedic phase that certain material growth made the tribal life sedentary. However, it was also the period when there was erosion of tribal values. Although we find four distinct social orders they still largely remained occupational groups. The Brahmana literature talks of privileges of
brahmanas and Kshatriyas for the first time but not at the cost of shudras and vaishyas as seen earlier. If the brahmana was not taxed shudra also was not taxed and the Kshatriyas, being ruling groups, got exemption probably as a mark of their class interest or being at the helm of affairs. The vish or the peasantry which consisted bulk of the population,\textsuperscript{110} certainly had to bear the brunt of taxation. However, we donot find instances of any physical torture to realise taxes from the vaishyas.

It is further argued that link between the brahmana and Kshatriya became stronger with Kshatriyas exchanging legitimation for dana.\textsuperscript{111} In this regard, it is to be noted that in the vedic and post-vedic political life there were several kings who were not Kshatriyas. We find brahmanas of Kshatriya origin in earlier section of many genealogies. We also find brahmanas of even non-Aryan origin as for example, Agastya and Vashistha were born

\textsuperscript{110} P. V. Kane, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{111} R. Thapar, From Lineage to State, p. 63.
from Jars.\textsuperscript{112} Brahmanas had a say in the socio-
political and cultural life of the people but it does not mean that they had become the sole
authority of giving legitimacy in exchange for a dakshina. Moreover, dakshina was not merely
a sacrificial fee or gift. It was regarded as a means for the welfare of all the people and the whole living creature.\textsuperscript{113}

While emphasising the element of social dominance, some scholars have gone to the extent of talking of a 'bipolar pattern' of Indian society in which the brahmanas, being the spiritual authority, and the Kshatriyas, being the temporal authority had, quite different interests which reflects conflict of tradition.\textsuperscript{114} In fact, there was harmony between complementary powers-temporal and spiritual.\textsuperscript{115} The relationship between the two is said to represent the yin and yang principles of China.

It has further been said that while

\textsuperscript{112} RV. VII.33.
\textsuperscript{113} Gopath Br. Ed. By R.L. Mitra, Delhi, 1972, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{114} Heesterman, The Inner Conflict of Tradition, pp. 141-142.
\textsuperscript{115} Dreckmeir, op. cit., p. 40.
there was mutual cooperation and understanding between the brahmanas and the Kshatriyas in order to establish authority over the vaishyas and shudras, they also fought among themselves mainly over sharing of surplus grain and cattle.\textsuperscript{116} In this regard it, is said that in the whole conflict brahmana established himself as superior to Kshatriya and his spiritual power dominated the temporal one. It is true that on some occasions the brahmana enjoyed ascendancy over the Kshatriya\textsuperscript{117} but we also have instances of Kshatriya ruling power's supremacy over the brahmana.\textsuperscript{118} We also have references of conflict between princes and priests found in the later vedic literature e.g. the conflict between Sudas and his priest Vashishtha\textsuperscript{119} and the fight between Sринjava Vaitahavyas and their priests Bhrigus\textsuperscript{120} resulting in the destruction of the former.

The Shyapernas were thrown out of priesthood

\textsuperscript{116} R. S. Sharma, MCSF, p.81.
\textsuperscript{117} Ait. Br. VIII. 1.4.9.6; Sh. Br. V. 4.4.15, XII.7.3.1; Panchaavimsha Br. XI. 1.2.
\textsuperscript{118} Panchavimsha Br. XIX. 1.4; Tait. Samhita.II.5.10.1; Sh. Br. I.3.2. and V.4.2.7.
\textsuperscript{119} Vedic Index, Vol. II, pp. 275-76.
\textsuperscript{120} Vedic Index, Vol. II, p. 110.
by their client Vaishvantara Saushadmana on account of their quarrel over sacrificial fee.\textsuperscript{121} We also hear of a dispute between Janamajaya and his priest Asitmrigas.\textsuperscript{122} It is said that such instances of conflicts point towards struggle for authority by the brahmans and Kshatriyas. In fact, such instances are very rare and the conflict arose over personal matters i.e. when a priest was removed by the king or due respect was not given to former. In fact, the later vedic texts particularly the Sh. Br. talks of unity and cooperation between the Kshatriyas and brahmans.\textsuperscript{123} A passage in the Brihadaranyaka Upnishad says that in beginning only the Brahma existed, but that he created in turn a superior form the Kshatra; "There is nothing higher than Kshatra...... (But) Brahmanhood is the source of Kshatriyahood. Therefore, even if the king attains supremacy, he rests finally upon his own source. So, whatever injures him (i.e. a Brahman) attacks

\textsuperscript{121} Vedic Index, Vol. II, p.309.
\textsuperscript{123} Such references are quoted in Vedic Index, vol. I, 204, Fn. 11.
his own source." Talking of brahmans, kshatriya relationship same text says that the priesthood is the conceiver, and the noble is the doer and the two are united. We may, thus, say that despite certain instances of conflict between the brahmanas and Kshatriyas there was stress on unity and co-operation for prosperity. However, it is not proper to say that this unity was sought for exploitation or dominance over the vaishyas and shudras. In fact, need for the vaishya was realised as it constituted of cultivators and traders who were also tax-payers. The shudra, belonging to the producing class, was essential to be employed as agricultural labourers or domestic servant. In the Brahmanas, we find that there was some short of contempt against them as they were deprived of certain vedic rites. However, they appear to have enjoyed considerable liberty and we donot find instances of physical torture or punitive actions against them in the vedic literature.

125. Ibid. IV. 1.4.1-4.
In the Brahmanas, mention is made of lower castes who have termed Nichya and Apachya.\textsuperscript{126} 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.\textsuperscript{127} 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 royal family, turned out to be outcastes and chiefs of dasyus.\textsuperscript{128} On the other hand, if a man of the lower caste or mixed caste happened to possess the wisdom of brahmana, he was held in high esteem even by the priestly class. In the vedic literature we possess several such

\textsuperscript{126} Ait. Br. VIII.38.3.
\textsuperscript{127} J. Basu, op. cit., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{128} Ait. Br. VII. 33.6.
instances. In the famous story of Kavasha\textsuperscript{129}, Son of Ilusha, we are told how he was expelled by sages because of being a dasiputra, but ultimately granted the vision of the Vedic hymn called Aponaptriya Sukta\textsuperscript{130} and the sages had to accept him as one of their colleagues. Mahidas, probably born of a shudra mother as his name suggests, was the author of the Ait. Br. The King Janaka, although being a Kshatriya king, was declared to be a brahmana\textsuperscript{131} an account of his spiritual attainment and knowledge.

An important corollary of the aspect of social dominance appears to be system of slavery. It has been argued that Aryans made a general enslavement of the native population and this institution of slavery was based on ethnic distinction.\textsuperscript{132} However, we have little trace of the general enslavement of the whole native population as the Aryans were not in such a numerical strength to enslave all natives. Moreover, ethnic factor did not play any great

\textsuperscript{129} Ait. Br. II. 8.1.  
\textsuperscript{130} RV. X.30.  
\textsuperscript{131} Sh. Br. XI. 6.2.10.  
\textsuperscript{132} D. Chanana, op.cit., p. 22.
role as Aryans fought among themselves to establish authority over vast area. During this process, they captured and enslaved people but the condition of slaves was not pitiable as was the practice among the Hittites, another group of Indo-Europeans. Moreover, in a verse, we are told that by means of acquiring wealth a dasa could become an Aryan.\textsuperscript{133} Thus, a dasa could uplift his social position through wealth.

We may, thus, observe that the division of vedic society into four orders did not lead to any social dominance. Although brahmanas and Kshatriyas enjoyed certain privileges, the vaishya and shudras were not the exploited people. There was an element of mobility and social upgradation. In recognition of enlightened persons attaining supreme knowledge and being authors of vedic hymn, we may trace the origin of the upgrading of the caste through knowledge as met with in the Upanishadic and post-vedic age. The Dharmsutras lend support to this view and attach greater

\textsuperscript{133} RV. VI, 22.10.
importance to spiritual attainment than to heredity. It is recorded that through acts of piety the low castes attained to the status of immediate higher castes.\textsuperscript{134} But sinful acts or vice degraded higher castes to their next immediate lower castes.\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Manu} also lends countenance to this view when he says that through illumination or learning a \textit{shudra} could attain the status of \textit{brahmana} while a \textit{brahmana} could become a \textit{shudra} through ignorance.\textsuperscript{136} He further makes it clear that distinction of \textit{Arya} and \textit{Anarya} is not determined by birth but by merits.\textsuperscript{137} This clearly shows that birth or heredity was not a major criteria of castes and there was very probability of social mobility and social upgradation. Such a situations was hardly congenial for social dominance and inner conflict in the Vedic society.

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\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Apastamba Dharmasutra}, II, 5.10-11.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Manusamhita}, X.65.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.}, X .66.