CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION
The formation and development of society is a landmark in the history of mankind. In this process, the division of society into different units is a universal practice, for it is indispensable for organised social activity. Unlike other societies, the Indian society presents an exceptionally complex phenomenon in its division based on caste. The fundamental characteristic of this caste division is ordered on rank. According to this plan the ancient Indian society is divided into four primary ranks called - Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. These four divisions are known as varnas and they are awarded rank in the same order.

As in any country, even in India the formation, the initial development and the stratification of society involve speculation. Two main sources for these speculations are - writings of the ancient thinkers and writings of the modern scholars. The latter, with their modern methods used many advanced techniques to explain the circumstances that might have contributed to the formation and development of this unique phenomenon of division based on caste. Immeasurable contributions are made in this field of research. At present there are as many theories on this aspect, as the exponents themselves. Some of the exponents hold the theory that the division of society in terms of caste does not promote individual development. They have arrived at such a conclusion.

1. Iravati Karve: The Hindu Society - An Interpretation, p. 40.
2. D.N. Majumdar: Races and Cultures of India, p. 279.
on account of their presupposition that belonging to a caste is determined on the basis of certain factors over which the individual has no control.

The word caste, a derivative of the Portuguese word 'caste'; signifying breed, race or kind, is used by modern authors to explain not only the modern social division, but also the stratification of the traditional society. The term 'caste' has been used variously in explaining the traditional Indian society wherein the fourfold division of society is prevalent. This usage of the word 'caste' has been criticised and disapproved by some modern authors¹. Ancient Indian literature made use of the term 'varna' to describe the four classes of society the brāhmana, kshatriya, vaiśya and svādha. Those who descended from inter-marriages between the four classes and also those who descended from an admixture of the sub-divisions are broadly categorised as belonging to 'jāti'.

Prof. Dümmler observes, 'that the term caste was applied indiscriminately to both 'varna' or 'class' and 'jāti' or caste proper. This is a false terminology. Castes rise and fall in the social scale and old castes die out and new ones are formed but the four great classes are stable². Another eminent scholar on this subject also comes to the same conclusion and states that 'varna' is very far from being the same thing as caste³. Etymologically 'varna' means colour,

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1. J.H.Dutton: Caste in India, p.64
2. J.H.Dümmler: Judentum that was India, p.146
3. J.H.Dutton: op.cit., p.46
alphabet and description. Taking a clue from the etiological meaning some tried to show that stratification of society was made on the basis of colour of the people. Some preferred the meaning 'description' because according to them 'varna' explains the basic assumption or tradition with which one starts the description of society.

The last explanation is appropriate because the term 'varna' enables one to explain the social division. Then there were only four divisions, varna was used to explain the society. When further stratification took place, the term 'jati' was used to explain this additional division of society. But it is very difficult to draw a line between these two terms, because at times they were used synonymously. As pointed out by Namadevaasarma which classified and enumerated a large number of 'jatis' there is no clearcut distinction between them. Such synonymous usage is not inconsistent because primarily the term 'varna' was used to describe the society where status-hierarchy was an accepted fact. In awarding status-hierarchy jatis were not treated in exclusion from the varnas. All the numerous jatis were brought into this fourfold hierarchical division. As a matter of fact any aspect of 'jati' has to be decided only with reference to the other divisions of society, either of the nature of 'varna' or 'jati'.

2. C. S. Charyap: Caste, Class and Occupation. 68, VII.
3. K. N. Pansare: op. cit., p. 3.
4. cf. Anne K., op. cit., p. 37. Also see Bose, op. cit., p. 51.
for one. In, the status of 'jāti' jāti is decided upon in comparison with not only other jātis like Brahmā, Vaiśeṣa, Āstāna, and so forth but also with reference to the basic castes (varna) Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaiśea and Śudra.

Whether it is 'varna' or 'jāti' each of them maintains its own individual characteristic and is distinct from the other. The word 'caste' obscures such distinctions. Hence the word caste is used throughout this thesis to describe social stratification, either 'varna' or 'jāti'.

The question why people organised themselves into a society and divided it further is fundamental to the enquiry into the nature of any society. Ancient Indian texts provide us with scanty information to answer this question. These texts do not give much prominence to this question, even though it was posed on some occasions. In the Mahābhārata1 it is enquired, 'whence has the Brahmana sprung and whence the three other orders'? The reply is that 'the Brahmana has sprung from the mouth of Brahman. The Kshatriya has sprung from his two arms, and the Vaiśea from his two thighs. The Śudra has sprung into life, being created from the feet of Brahman'. This is similar to the brhamasūkti version of Rig Veda where the origin of the four varnas is mentioned for the first time. It is stated in the Rig Veda2 that the four varnas emerged from the parts of the body of Primal Manwa who sacrificed himself, stated thus: 'His mouth became the Brahmana, his

1. Mahābhārata, 72.
2. Rig Veda, 52.
the one were born into rṣīs, the one the brahman, from his two feet the veśya were born. Incidentally this will show that the stratification of society was already present by the time of the Vedas. In the Brahmanical literature there is another view regarding the classification of society. According to this view which has its classic expression in the Gita, the fourfold division of society into varnas is based on the predominance of one of the three innate guṇas—sattva, rājas, tamas in an individual. Conflating the Gita and purushasūkta versions, a later text, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa evolves its own view. According to this, people in whom the 'sattva' predominates are created from the north of Brahmā, those in whom the 'rājas' holds its sway are created from his two feet and those in whom rājas and tamas are strong proceed from his thighs, and those in whom tamas alone prevails come from his foot. These are the four varnas—brahmana, kṣatriya, veśya and vaśya respectively.

The Buddhists have made the most singular and original contribution by their remarkable theory on the origin of society and social stratification. According to this view at the beginning there was no distinction between beings, people were living happily adhering to the principles of dharma. All of them were feeding upon self-ripening rice collecting it each morning and evening. They were actually cooperative and even one being would invite the other for rice gathering stating 'Come, good being, let us go rice-gathering.'

2. I, iv, 3-6.
3. B.B. XII, p.64 ff.
Since they feared succumbing to evil and immoral practices, they observed the rule of dharma. To avert the danger of falling from dharma, they chose a brahmin, who was afterwards known as kshatriya. It is further stated that the brahmans, vaishyas, sudras and the recluses subsequently got stratified. Thus came the division of society into the four varnas and the recluses according to an important Buddhist version.

As could be noticed, the brahminical view expressed in the Brahmanical version and others are categorical in stating that the division of society into four castes is of divine making. In the very beginning, of the process of creation itself, the society was divided into four castes. Hence, from this point of view, the condition of society before division of society is inconceivable. According to this view, even in the early speeches when dharma was observed, fully the caste division was present.

Buddhism looks at the origin of the caste-system from quite a different angle. According to the Buddhist version, stratification is essentially of human making. Society was divided at the instance of human will. Hence, they conceive of the condition of society before the formation of division as one, full of happiness when dharma reigned to the full. In the absence of greed and other evils, people were of a sociable temperament. They were conscientiously conscious of the needs of their fellow beings, as one would invite the other to procure his life-sustaining rice. Society was stratified only when people failed to adhere to principles of dharma to
to the full. That follows from this is that as long as charity
is not restored completely the division of society continues
to stay.

Of the numerous theories on the origin of caste, for-
mulated by modern authors, on the basis of scriptural, archaeo-
logical, anthropological and other evidences, the following
conclusions are of particular significance. Evans-Pritchard contends
that function is the sole basis of caste⁴. According to
Smart caste originated in family⁵. Drainey holds that the
social factor is the fundamental basis of the caste-system⁶.
Ezias, Ghurye⁷, and Key⁸ think that law of purity and
pollution led to the emergence of the caste system. Cey
Lobor is of the opinion that the Brahmin supremacy in combination
with the Karma doctrine furnished a fixed scheme for the religi-
ous and social integration leading to the caste hierarchy⁹.

According to Smart birth is not always a sufficient
cause for determining, caste. These and several other hypothe-
ses focus their attention on one or a few factors in which the
caste-system is rooted.

1. J.C. Lockhead: Brief View of the Caste System of the North-
Western Province and Cutch.
2. H. Smart: Caste in India. tr. A. R. Bied. 1000.
3. H. R. Drainey: The People of India.
4. S. V. Ezias: History of Caste in India.
6. S. C. Ghurye: Proceedings and Transactions of the 7th All India
Oriental Conference.
8. A. D. Smart: Caste.
Incident of the fact that this complex and all pervasive social organisation presupposes the existence of many of the aforesaid features, it is fallacious to assume that one or a few of these features is or are the sole cause of this unique system. Prof. Batten\(^1\) remarks 'the Indian caste system is the natural result of the interaction of a number of geographical, social, political, religious and economic factors, not elsewhere found in conjunction'. Assuming that the caste system originated in the play of several factors that are mentioned above, still it cannot be construed that these factors are responsible for the rigidity of the caste system. Rigidity of the caste system means that mobility from one caste into another is impossible at least during an individual’s life time. That is, an individual has absolutely no control over his membership of a caste. His caste has been decided by certain factors, which he cannot alter even if he endeavours to do so.

There are many opinions regarding the period in which social division developed into a rigid caste system. Mees\(^2\) considers that the rigidity of caste developed gradually and that it was not so in the times of the Brahmanas as in the later period. P. H. Davide\(^3\) speaks of a considerable social mobility tending to a fairly fluid system of caste till the Mauryan period. Some\(^4\) are of the opinion that the fluidity of the caste system did not crystallise into rigidity till the

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3. Buddhist India, p.56.
end of the Dharmasūstra period. Such a varied opinion is
but the natural concomitant of the contradictory ideas ex-pressed in the literature of this period. Dharmasūstras and
such of these texts which represent the essence of Brahmi-
nical opinion, irrespective of their gradual tendency towards
prescribing codes of conduct leading to rigidity of the caste
system fail to maintain it in unequivocal terms. They could
not formulate any theory that would give rise to a rigid and
inflexible division of society. An examination of the basic
principles of Brahmiical texts testify that none of the
aspects of the caste system was taken very seriously by them
and that there were impasses at all levels to suggest that they
did not contemplate a uniform formula theoretically for the
working of a rigid caste system.

To draw a candid conclusion regarding either the
rigidity or flexibility of the caste system an examination
of its vital factors is necessary. The desire to explain the
basis for the rigidity of caste has led to a perennial confu-
sion and hardly can we find a single explanation that would
be satisfactory. Of the several factors that are considered
to be responsible for the development of the rigid caste
system the following three are by nature contributory to
such an end. They are birth, marriage, and belief in the
doctrine of karma.

If membership of a caste is only through birth then
individuals have absolutely no power to change it. One will
become a member of one's current caste. One has no chance to move from one caste to another.

The above will lead to the presupposition that marriage between individuals belonging to the same caste alone should be upheld. A practice contrary to this would lead to the displacement of caste.

If the karma doctrine holds that the individual's birth in a particular caste is predestined and he should remain in the same caste then the individual is left with no chance to move from one caste to another.

The individual, when the above three factors are considered, has absolutely no control over the first and the third at least during his life. In the case of the second factor although an individual is given an opportunity to avoid displacement it does not approve of mobility from one caste to another. It is necessary to recognize these factors to ascertain their contribution to the rigidity of the caste system.

Birth is considered as the primary source that aids in identifying the varna of an individual. Heredity is held to be one of the principles that should be respected by all; it is stated that it is observed even in the case of horses. There is no doubt about the important role played by birth in deciding the varna of an individual. For, there are several incidents where the parentage of a person is enquired into for deciding his varna. In the Mahabharata when Karna wants

to challenge Arjuna. In an hurried context Kripa says 'this is Arjuna, son of Kuru who accepts the challenge, unknown challenger warrior, tell us your name and family'. When Dhritarashtra enters the scene Karna embraces him and calls him 'father'. This incident answers Kripa's question and Karna after being publicly proclaimed as a 'duta', is denied an opportunity to compete with Arjuna. This incident shows that Arjuna's birth and parentage have outwitted his valor. The Mahabharata which gives paramount importance to birth in the case of Karna, considers some castes, who are by birth of inferior origin, as Brahmans. According to it Vyasa is born of a fisher woman, Hariddhar of a shudra woman, Uparajahala of a gandhar woman, Yasodara of a prostitute (gamika) and Subhadraka of a hook woman. These castes of inferior origin through acquisition of knowledge could become Brahmans. The same text justifies their birth with the statement that the nature of rights, rivers, plain people, great souls and of the bad character of women cannot be discovered.

When Agnivesa Dharavaj addresses Madhva as 'Vrisala' (outcaste), Madhva replies 'not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a Brahma, by deeds one becomes an outcaste, by deeds one becomes a Brahma'.

In the Mahabharata, elsewhere Yudhisthira expresses that birth
is not the criterion of the caste. The diverse opinions and creeds mentioned above show that birth, though an important factor, was not an essential factor for determining the caste of an individual.

Marriage is another determining factor for the development of the rigid caste system. According to this view certain rules were drawn by ancient Indian texts to regulate the choice of life's partners and it invariably led to a rigid caste system.

Ancient Indian texts formulated rules regarding savarna (aristocracy) marriages and asavarna marriages. Marriage between partners of the same varna is known as a savarna marriage. Marriage between partners of different varnas is called as 'asavarna' marriage. An asavarna marriage resulted in two types of marriages - anusmara and pratihara. The anusmara marriage is one where a man of a higher caste marries a woman from a lower caste, in the pratihara marriage, this order is reversed.

One such regulation is that all marriages should be endogamic. This means that the partners of marriage should belong to the same caste. In addition to this some texts hold that good children are born to those parents who are of great families. 1.2.1.54; 155; XII, 104-123; cf. Yaj. 131, I, 35. 2.6.1.54; 155.
side are well known is called a ten generation fold. The same text further states that a man should marry from such a family. Manu suggests that one should shun marital connexion with low ones and points to different families that are to be avoided. In another verse, he goes a step further and states that "twice born men, who, in their folly, and gives of the law, i.e., sudra caste, soon degrade their families and children to the state of sudras. Manu inflicts heavy penalties on a man of a higher caste marrying a woman of a lower caste and ordains thus: 'A Brahman who takes a sudra wife to his bed will after death sink into hell, if he begets a child by her, he will lose the rank of a Brahman.' Vanini too trends the same path by stating that a sudra woman is unfit for a brahmin to marry. The Mahabharata also states that a brahmin who marries a sudra woman degrades his position and that arddhah performed by the offspring of such a marriage has no efficacy. That these preceptors and law givers, despite such serious statements banning inter-caste marriages, off and on prescribed various laws for asavarna marriages contradicts their former statements and approves of marriages between different castes. Manu holds that a twice born man should take his first wife from his own caste.  

1. Yaj. I, 64.  
can: take the other wives from the other castes in the succes-
sive order. Other\(^4\) law givers too approve of such a procedure.
According to this procedure, a Brahman can marry four wives,
one from each caste. A Kshatriya can marry three wives—one
from his own caste and one each from Vaiśya and Sūdra. Like-
wise Vaiśya can marry from his own caste and one from the
Sūdra caste. A Sūdra cannot marry more than one wife from
his own caste.\(^3\) These texts not only accept such amolous
marriages, but also prescribe different kinds of rituals to be
practised in such marriages. The girl holding an article to
symbolise her caste, is a common ritual. Discussing brides
of different castes, Vaiśya ordains, among those, if a man
marries one of his own caste, their hands shall be joined. In
marriages with women of different classes, a Kshatriya bride
must hold an arrow in her hand, a Vaiśya bride a whip, a Sūdra
bride the skirt of her stole.\(^3\) Here too prescribes similar
rituals in the case of such inter-caste marriages.\(^4\)

It is evident from the above observations, that by
prescribing such rules the ancient thinkers recognised the
legality of the amolous marriages. Only in the case of the
reverse order of marriages or pratiloma type, they proceed
their thumb a little hard. Now does not approve of such
marriages. Children born of them are given such lower status
than their parents and are kept outside the pale of society.

\(^1\) C. I. X, 2-3; Yaj. I, 67; Vas. I, 34-35; VI. XV, I-4.
\(^2\) ID. XIV, 40-49; Am. I, 8, 10, 11; I, 47-48; Vas. I, 34;
Cant. IV, 2-3; 12-17.
\(^3\) Vas. Sam. XXIV, 5-8.
\(^4\) Har. XIII, 34; XIII, 49.
Feature observers, children born in the inverted order of wives of the higher castes become outca, logadhra, nregena, labhitra, vaidealina or candakna. Although all the marriages of pratiloma type are recognised, in general, they are not approved of. This disapproval of certain combinations of types of marriages is a practical reason.

Due to their restrictive tendency the Prajapati could not but discriminate the importance of the principle of endogamy (avarna) marriage. Contracection recognises this fact, when he ignores the need for consideration of endogamy (avarna) in finding a bridegroom. Yajnavalkya says, the vasa should give their daughter after investigating the seven qualities - family, mentality, health, age, education, wealth and support. According to him family in only one among the several factors that are to be looked into before considering an alliance. Yajnavalkya and Vedic too treat the family as one of the several factors in the selection of a bridegroom.

However, references to pratiloma type of marriages in ancient literature are considerably few in number. Devapati and Yaddaka and the parents of Lakshmi, come under this category. In the artha and other works there is no mention of examples for mixed marriages. Lakshmi, Arjuna, Bhima and several others make such contracts in the Vishnu Purana. In Dvaitavatna the break in wedding ceremony is a courtisan. Here, the brāhmaṇa pest.

1. Cat.IV, 16,17.
2. III, 34.
3. IV, 3.
5. Sis.III, 120.
for a stepmother by a coumar mother. These examples and the law giver's attitude towards these intercaste marriages suggest that by marriage the partners of marriage do not lose their status, not referring to anomalous marriages, Prof. Deshan observes, various mixed classes, many of them the fore-runners of later castes, were said to be the products of marriages of this type, and their members have not looked on in any way anomalous, but enjoyed a position intermediate to that of the two parents. We cannot agree with the statement of Prof. Deshan that members of such marriages were assigned intermediate status. By members it should mean at least partners of marriage and their progeny. As already observed partners of such marriages are not generally degraded. Only in exceptional cases law codes make occasional statements degrading them to a lower status. However, it is not in the spirit of these texts to degrade such partners. As far as progeny is concerned we have already pointed out that birth is always not the criterion to judge one's caste. Even people of such mixed origin claim the status of Brahman and other castes. In the basis of these facts, it is conspicuous that intercaste marriage too was not rigidly considered in the placement of an individual's caste.

The belief in the karma doctrine is another factor contributing to the rigidity of caste. At one stage, the social habits of castes are inextricably tied up with religious sanctions whose influence is reinforced by the doctrine of

2. Supra p.79.
karma. It is observed that caste had become hereditary the
theory of reincarnation came to the foregroud (in a way,
taking the place of the theory of karma) to explain the
possibility of rising to higher castes, in subsequent lives1.
Birth need not be taken here as a universally applicable for-
\[\text{mula but as a limited factor in the development and preser-
\[\text{vation of the caste order. According to the doctrine of karma,
\[a man's condition in this life is the result of his conduct
\[in the previous birth. A regularly misunderstood version of
\[this states that an individual's high or low caste being the
\[reward or punishment of his past behaviour, it is possible to
\[raise his status in the next life along, if he engineered his
\[behaviour well in the present life. Reinhard Renck2 discus-
\[sing the karma theory in its social context states that an
\[individual's fate in the present life could be exactly propor-
\[tional to the positive or negative balance that he had earned
\[for himself in his previous life. Thus, according to him,
\[this relationship with a religious dogma provides the caste
\[system with a rationale which renders the superficially in-
\[equitable distribution of function acceptable as being a part
\[of the divine order of the universe3. As a corollary of this,
an individual who is born in a brahman or sudra family should
\[accept his status as a consequence of his previous karma (fruit)
\[and as an outcome of the divine act. Thus incidentally it is
\[held to provide an incentive to perform good actions, for,

1. Hoss, op.cit., p.73.
3. Ibid., p.9
accumulation of merit through such actions in this life is essential for a better birth or salvation. Thus it would follow that the individual is bound to his caste function with a view to bettering his lot. Some scholars agree that the karma concept has contributed much to the caste system, but they do not agree with the interpretation of caste in terms of ethical principles and ideals, and hold that such interpretation probably had little to do with its primary origin. As the primary origin of caste and karma are not related, this can be supposed from the fact that references to the varna system are noticed from the Vedic period whereas references to the karma doctrine were made only from the Upanisadic times onwards.

As stated earlier according to the Brahminical texts division of society of ancient India was a divinely ordained phenomenon. Its component units, order of precedence, as well as their respective functions are ordained by divine will. By contrast, as pointed out the Buddhist thinkers emphasised the essentially human basis of the social organisation. A fusion of these two—the divine will and the human basis—is to be seen in the caste system supported by the karma doctrine. Although ethical principles and ideals contributed little to the origin of the caste system, at least in the later explanations, they assumed importance. A few modern scholars have interpreted the karma doctrine so as to emphasise that one

2. Supra, p.74.
should follow the dictates of caste independently of one's qualities. These interpretations yield bad results as they entail social mobility and change. These writers have arrived at such conclusions solely to their presupposition that the moral principle is essentially determinate and that it entails the individual's freedom to choose. But, as explained earlier, caste is not deter cradle. The part played by this concept in the caste system is that it constrains why a particular caste is born in a particular status group. There is no denial of improving oneself in this life. For example, in India the bullock cart driver refuses to carry out his master's order to kill animals in the courtyard. He defends himself by saying: "acting out of love was no a slave at birth, I do not wish to fall again into the same misfortune, and therefore I shall refuse to commit a crime." The situation is extraordinary for the bullock cart driver refuses to serve the orders of his master who belongs to a higher caste. This is not in tune with the norms of conduct of one who is a lower caste, because the texts ordain that a lower caste should not in obedience to his master and serve him all his life. The above anecdote demonstrates that one belonging to a higher caste cannot compel another of a lower caste to commit a wrong deed. Though the moral principle prevented the masses of people from investigating the causes of their miseries in the actions of lower agencies, it has not altogether left them unscathed from
exploitation. In a situation like the above people could escape from committing a wrong deed by pointing to the implications of the karma doctrine.

Sanctions accorded to intercaste marriages and changes of professions show that the karma principle was not interpreted in such a way as to exact social nobility.

Character or guna\textsuperscript{1} is considered as the source of varna, by many Indian texts. As noted earlier, Yudhisthira in the Mahabharata gives prominence to character, not to birth, in fixing an individual's caste. He observes, 'A person is a brahman in whom one finds the virtues of truthfulness, good conduct, benevolence, complete self-control and mercy... He who is distinguished by these qualities is a brahman and he who does not possess them is a sudra\textsuperscript{2}. Buddhist and Jaina sources too emphasize that character or the nature of a person is more important in deciding on his caste. A Jaina ascetic is stated to have instructed a brahmin named Vijayacharya in the following passage of Uttaradiyamitra\textsuperscript{3}. He who does not injure living beings in any of the three ways (thought, word, and action) him we call a brahman. Also he who does not speak untruth from anger, or for fun, from greed or from fear, him we call a brahmam\textsuperscript{4}. These and several other similar references bear testimony to the fact that they tried to translate

\textit{\textsuperscript{1} Loc. cit., p. 73; 'equates guna with character (p. 73); translates it as 'qualities' (p. 137).}

\textit{\textsuperscript{2} LSH. II, 176.}

\textit{\textsuperscript{3} WXY 108.}

\textit{\textsuperscript{4} XIII, 2, 13.}
philosophical concept into social life. It was well recognized that the good actions of an individual were essential for redemption. Bhaduranganan Upanisad says, "by good action one becomes good, and by bad action bad." Yoga-sutra of Patanjali considers Yoga as an important step of Yoga. It explains non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, non-receiving and also many more such qualities as Yoga.

These factors represent the principles of a character. Thus it is suggested that action of an individual is directly related to character. All the major philosophical schools of India uniformly stress the importance of adherence to such principles for the achievement of higher goals. Buddhism and Jainism as stated earlier, though basically antagonistic to the caste system or any division of such a kind, on several occasions, acquiesce in the existing pattern and finally insist that one should be called a brahman only when one is in possession of such high principles, reflected in his character. In a typical discourse Brahman enters into a discussion with a brahman named Asankaama and proves that character alone is the main basis for judging an individual's competence to claim respect. And also he states that one is a brahman not by birth and one is brahman only by his deeds. This is a uniform pattern and we notice that even Heraclitus, the Apostle of

2. II. 36;
4. Sivapala 113.4.
brahman. He says, 'as in a clerest upper grade of wood, an autology node of leather, such is an unlearned brahman. These three have nothing but names. Thus we notice that the character of an individual is an essential factor in the consideration of action.

The principle of character is applied in several instances in determining the status of persons of doubtful birth. In Vayu Suxunara, Sakhat, a brahman, is the son of Ditya- 
thama by a suta maid servant of king Bali and in the end he is mentioned as a suta by birth. Vatsa, in Pandavavana brahman proves his brahmanhood, when questioned, by walking through fire unscathed. There are also incidents where persons born in a particular varna could change their varna by virtue of their special nature. Vivashana, a kshatriya by birth and Vaiśāki a suta turned brahman by their learning and austerity. As a matter of fact the change over is no easy task, for one has to demonstrate his character as equal to what is prescribed by the scriptures. However, change cannot be ruled out as impossible. Patton observes that a change into the brahman varna was possible in the early stages of Hinduism, whereas such a change was widely prevalent in the other subordinate varnas. Hence people of low birth could elevate their status.'
by their exemplary character, strangely enough, this principle does not seem to have been applied in the case of a brahmana of a low character. There is no reference to the degradation of such brahmans. The Buddhist scriptures speak even of butcher brahmans. The Jātaka gives a list of ten professions followed by brahmans. According to it there are physicians, messengers, tax-collectors, tax-cutters, tradesmen, cultivators, shepherds, butchers, military guards and burners among the brahmans. Though in brahminical texts there are references to several brahmans who performed such odd functions, it is not approved that they become degraded to such a low level as described by the Buddhists. In Landini's 'Bhāvakāra caritra' we come across a very interesting and suggestive episode. King Dājavahana makes the following enquiry of a brahman when he meets on the Vindhyā mountain, 'the sacred thread across your shoulder marks you a brahman, the scar on your lower leg a savage, explain the paradox'. The brahman relates his story thus, '6 prince, in the forest dwell many nominal brahmans who abandon scriptural and other learning, spurn the duties of their order, put away truth, purity and all the virtues, who seek after sin following the lead of savages and eating their food. Of one of these I am the reprobate son, and my name is Kuntaka. With a barbarous band I would enter settlements, seize wealthy villagers with their wives and

1. Rhys Davids: Buddhist India, pp.29-36.
children, imprison them in the forest, plunder all their property and destroy them. So I live a stranger to pity.

The above episode shows that though identification of caste is made on the strength of symbolism, character is given prominence, for, the king is surprised at the character of the brahman, which does not go hand in hand with the codes of conduct of a brahman, proscribed by the scriptures. The brahman himself looks upon his position with shame and dismay and could claim himself as a brahman only inter, when he sends his character. Though there are instances of such nominal brahmans, undoubtedly they were looked down upon with contempt. Generally the scripture does not give a free hand to a brahman to behave as he likes. Of course there are few exceptional statements like that of Parāśara, who notes that 'a brahman without the Gayatri-mantra is more degraded than a sudra... the person of a wicked brahman is more worshipful than that of a sudra, who has controlled his senses. The will milk a cow with one hand in preference to a vicious cow... occasionally we come across such statements in the texts. But they cannot be taken for granted. Those who failed to adhere to their caste duties could never claim the same treatment. In the Mahābhārata Drona was laughed at by his own pupil Dhīma, for transgressing his ordained duty, in spite of the fact that it was approved on the principle of aparākāram. Rare statements like that of Parāśara afford a typical example of how the inadequacy of symbolism could be

1. The Ten Princes translated by Ryder, p. 31.
2. VII, 31-32.
Allotted for personal purposes.1

Now the question as to why the scriptures, having severely condemned the behaviour of such nominal brahmans, maintain conspicuous silence regarding their degradation. The rule of upad-ashrama which approves of the change of profession provides no with the answer. This principle approves of a man who transgresses the rules of conduct in times of emergency, but it always maintains that one from the lower order should not undertake the duties of the higher order. It approves of a person of a higher order undertaking the duties of a lower caste. The principle of upad-ashrama when applied, tells us that brahmans can perform the duties of kshatriyas and vaishyas, kshatriyas, those of vaishyas and sudras, and vaishyas those of sudras2. It cannot be done the other way round because an upward trend needs a specialised training. It is quite likely that caste and other calcinnies are responsible for the use of this principle. In periods of crises, as during and seventama the heroes of the Mahabharata did, the need of a brahmana participating in a war is more important than his teaching. One of the strongest criticisms levelled against the principle of upad-ashrama is that the varna structure or class division deprives a man of the opportunity of improving his condition. Because it allows one to adopt the professions of others below and does not allow people at the lower level to adopt the professions of people above them. There is a specific reason

2. ibid X, cf.61 ff and 102 ff.
for such arrangement. The important factor that is responsible for such an attitude is the inadequate communication system.

Hence, not developing methods for storing and preserving knowledge, they had to resort to memorizing. The best way of transmitting knowledge was through constant practice and repetition which can possible chiefly through a teacher transmitting knowledge to his student. Only after being taught in the house one could go to a teacher or expert for higher training. In times of distress it was easier for a man of a higher caste to learn the duties of a lower caste than vice-versa. If the schools have remained at a distance it is because of their lack of initial training more than anything else.

While the principle of apad-dharma approves of a Brahmana's change to a lower varna, it does not say anything about his character in the new situation. Thus, it is only in an extraordinary situation that an individual is allowed to perform duties to which he is not well suited, and also for which he is not well trained. But in normal conditions an individual has to perform duties to which he is well suited. The dharma of an individual lies in the performance of duties to which he is suited well and also for which he is trained. These duties constitute the avadhama of an individual. Ancient Indian texts claim that individuals should strictly adhere to principles of avadhama. The Gita says, 'better is one's own dharma (avadhama) though imperfect than the dharma of another well-performed.' But the true nature of avadhama is

2. Gita, XVIII, 47; cf. XIII, 35.
hold that character or suitability is not the basis in deciding on the svadharma of an individual. According to the above explanation svadharma is nothing but dharma, uncharged with karma. That is to say that a man is born in a particular status group owing to his past karma (previous action) and that his dharma (duty) is tacitly to accept the providential decree and to perform the duties of the status group into which he has fallen. As a corollary, a man is bound to acquire the characteristics of the caste in which he is born. We have observed earlier that neither karma is deterministic nor dharma static. The above observation is not qualified if concepts of karma and dharma are rightly viewed as non-deterministic and dynamic in nature.

Ancient Indian texts lay emphasis on character in the performance of one's duties (svadharma). Elsewhere in the Gita, this is more candidly expressed. The Lord says 'Chaturveṣṣaṇa mayā saṣṭaṇa ānugata haram vibhūga sūla' (IV-13) - I have created the four varnas according to the distribution of qualities and work. But this statement is subjected to various interpretations. One scholar points out that the phrase 'Mayā saṣṭaṇa' is post-tense and as such it could be maintained by a feat of dialectic, that in the epic and historic times, the four castes were only hereditary. This is a typical example of a partial reading of the sloka, for, the above cited

passages of the Gita point out consciously one aspect of brahminical thinking that the four castes were created by the Lord. This is consistent with the views expressed in the Vedas and other brahminical literature. However, this need not lead to the conclusion that birth is the criterion for caste. Because in the above passage, obviously, the emphasis is laid on 'distribution of qualities and work'. In fact the Gita is more categorical on this point when it says, 'Svabhava nityam karna' (work is ordained by nature¹), and is clear in viewing the dharma of an individual as an inner law of his being rather than something imposed from outside. The dharma of an individual corresponds to this innermost being and is regarded as svadharma. Thus svadharma serves to regulate an individual's conduct, his righteousness and his very sense of right and wrong², with reference to the individual's inner law of beings. Based on this assumption, the nature of different varnas is discussed as follows:

the Gita, 'purity, self-restraint, austerity, patience, forgiveness, and also uprightness, knowledge, realisation, belief in a hereafter - these are the duties of the brahmanas, born of their own nature' (ch.18-42). 'Heroism, vigour, firmness, resourcefulness, not fleeing from battle, nobility and lordliness are the duties of the kshatriyas born of their own nature' (ch.18-43). 'Agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade

1. Svabhava is nothing but Prakriti, the constituent of the three gunas (XVIII, 41).
are the detius of the vaishyas, born of their own nature, and action consisting of service in the duty of the saddus born of their own nature (ch. 10-14).

Loma lays down that the duties of the brahmanas are to study and teach, to perform sacrifice and to give and receive gifts, those of the kshatriyas are to protect people, to perform sacrifice and to study, those of the vaishyas are to breed cattle, to till the soil, to pursue trade and to lend money, and that of the saddus is to render service. The vaya Purana a later work puts it thus: Those of them who were suited for command and prone to deeds of violence, he appointed to be kshatriyas, from their protecting others. Those disinterested men who attended upon them, spoke the truth and declared the Veda alright were Brahmans. Those of them who formerly were feeble, engaged in the work of husbandman, tillers of the earth, and industrious, were vaishyas, cultivators and providers of subsistence. Those who were eaters and ran about on service, and had little vigour or strength, were called saddus.

The above passages will show that according to even later Purana texts there should be a close relationship between the nature of an individual and the type of action he performs. Only on the agreement of these two aspects, an individual can be designated as a brahman, kshatriya, vaishya or saddu. The standpoint of the ancient Indian texts that an individual should be called a brahman or saddu on the basis of character significantly emphasizes this point. Character

2. Vaya Purana IX, 36-42.
and behaviour pertaining to a caste are synonymous here, for,
the character of an individual is judged on the basis of the
behaviour of that individual. An individual behaves in a
particular way because his inner being moves him to behave so.
For instance, an individual born to brahman parents can
behave in a manner that is quite opposite to the behaviour
that is expected of a brahman. According to ancient Indian
texts such an individual should not be called a brahman
because he cannot perform the duties that are prescribed for
a brahman. Thus the svadharma of an individual is not the
observance of the duty of the parents, that is, not necessarily
the duty of the caste in which he is born. Rather, it is the
dharma to which he is suited well. This is more clearly ex-
plained in the Gita where Lord Krishna advises Arjuna. In a
critical situation, unable to decide whether to choose to
fight or renounce, battle Arjuna beseeches Krishna stating
'I am confused about dharma, I beseech you, tell me the better
thing to do.' It has to be noted here that the question is
posed by a man who is not ignorant of dharma completely. It
is clear that Arjuna is not doubtful about the applicability
of renunciation to his situation. But he is only confused as
to whether he could practice it at that particular juncture.
Lord Krishna advises Arjuna as a master advises his pupil.
The Lord says, 'considering your own dharma you should not
lose. For a kshatriya nothing is better than a just war.'

but if you renounce your own desire and refuse to fight this righteous war, then certainly you will incur sin."

Traditionally it is approved that the advice of the learned people should be sought in deciding what is dharma. In the present context Arjuna seeks Lord Krishna’s advice in the same spirit. As Arjuna is inclining, by nature, to perform Kshatriya dharma, Lord Krishna advises him to fight the war. If Arjuna is to be morally convinced by decision of the caste in which he is born, he may not have any other option than to fight. In such a case, the question, ‘I am confused about dharma, I beseech you, tell me the better thing to do’ would appear ridiculous, more so, especially in the context of lines already drawn for the forthcoming fierce battle.

Thus according to this scheme, the caste of an individual and the action that he should perform are primarily dependent on his character or quality. The question that will arise at this stage is: Is it possible to ascertain the quality or character of every individual and assign him a particular caste and also duty? Like Arjuna if every one comes with the request, ‘I beseech you, let me know my dharma’ can it be answered? Certainly it is not possible. As pointed out by a scholar, one does not conduct a survey of abilities of the population and use that as a basis for assigning social roles. In view of difficulties involved in this, the caste of an individual and the action that is expected of him are initially governed by the situation of parents to whom he is born, But

1. Ibid II, 33.
if an individual seeks to claim the status of the parents, or claim a status above them, as a first step he should demonstrate necessary qualities and qualify for such a claim. Sattkama Jabaia who was of a doubtful origin could gain recognition as a brahman only because he was truthful. In the absence of necessary qualities one is not accorded treatment that one is entitled to through birth. As stated in the Mahabharata one does not require the status of a brahman if he is devoid of the qualities of a brahman. It is pointed out in the same text such an individual is not eligible to receive any favour from the rest of society because he will not be recognised as a brahman and accorded treatment that a true brahman deserves.

Thus the ancient Indian texts atleast in principle contemplate a social order where the privileged position of an individual depends on his character and quality. Taking birth into consideration, even if an individual is called brahman or such it matters little because his privileged position does not depend on this.

1. "One does not acquire the status of a brahman if he is devoid of compassion and both not given up desiring" - MBH, XIII, 351.