BOOK ONE

Chapter II

[Page 10] REASON IN RELATION TO OTHER DISRUPTIONS
Significance of dharma and its relation to rājadharma

In the previous chapter was emphasised the supremacy of the principle of dharma over the Indian thought and life both in the theory and practice. Rājadharma, being linked with the general conception of dharma, cannot be considered in isolation. The present chapter will analyse the relation between rājadharma and varnāśrama-dharma in greater detail.

The conclusion of the previous chapter may be summarised as under:

1) The nature of dharma is such that it pervades all existence. It is the very essence in the order of things.

2) Dharma as the moral law governs not only the individual's morality (svadharma) but has its implications in social organisation in the definite laying down of duties for different groups within a social order (varnāśrama-dharma). The social order thus envisaged would be the only basis on which individual and social life could be organised and harmony effected between the rights and duties of the individuals within
a society according to ancient Indian thinkers. 

iii) Even within the life of the individual the rights and duties do not remain the same. The variations in age have a corresponding effect on the rights and duties of the individual which, therefore, cannot be static but would depend on his place in life (śramadharma).

iv) But to equate dharma merely with varṇadharma would be to narrow down the connotation of dharma. Dharma has its implications also in some of the special stations in life like that of the king (raja-dharma).

v) The various dharms form harmonious parts of the all-pervading law, dharma. The raja-dharma and other dharms are only extensions or applications of the same supreme principle.

It is from the above premises that we have to investigate the nature of raja-dharma and its relation to other dharms. The varṇadharma and the śramadharma being the basis of organisation of life and society in ancient India, the relation of raja-dharma to varṇadharma would have to be analysed in detail in the following pages.

The nature of raja-dharma and its place in social order

The meaning of raja-dharma has been confusingly interpreted by some scholars. Jayaswal, for example,
equates ṛajadharma with politics.1 The term ṛajadharma, however, does not mean the art of government in which the king is expected to be proficient. K.V.R. Aiyangar criticising the above view remarks, "Ṛajadharma is commonly equated with political science. Its content is assumed to be the art of government. It is forgotten that literally and historically it means not the art of government, but the indications of the duties of a particular functionary, i.e., the crowned king".2 Vijñānesvāra, the writer of Mitākṣara commentary on the Yājñavalkya Śruti, while introducing the subject of the mental equipment of a king, defines ṛajadharma as "the specific duties of that particular house-holder who is endowed with the qualities of being appointed as king".3 Etymologically translated ṛajadharma refers to the dharma of the king, including within it his rights, duties and place in the social order. The term also suggests that the king wields dharma by virtue of which he is entitled to that high office. The Mitākṣara commentary on Yājñavalkya śruti quoted above rightly includes the duties of the king as a part of his duties as a kṣatriya. Aiyangar further elucidates ṛajadharma in the following words:

"The duties of administration devolve on one who is put at the head of a state. In Indian conception he who has to discharge the duties must obviously belong to the second āśrama, as the other three are outside worldly life. While the ideal is that the head of the state
should be a ksatriya, the position might go to men of other varnas; but even so the duties of the office (gunadharma) will still devolve on him. That there may be no misunderstanding, Yājñavalkya (1,311) uses the neutral designation narādhima (king) instead of rāja, which, like ksatriya, is frequently used in smṛtis in the sense of a 'king'.

Even in the Vedas the earthly king, being a representative of the deities, is the guardian of rta; he models his policies as protector and ruler on those of Mitra and Varuna. The kṣatra, which signifies the ruling power in the social order as also the ruler is to function in accordance with rta or the natural and moral law. (The kṣatriya, therefore, is the protector and defender of the moral law, enforcing it even by fighting, if necessary).

The nature of rājadharma, therefore, is clear. It is not just 'politics'; nor is it merely what is equated with the rights and duties of the king. The king is an important link in the frame-work of dharma, as the upholder and protector of the natural and moral law (rta and dharma in the Vedas and dharma in the smṛtis). Hence the treatment of the concept in a naive manner by the students of ancient Indian polity is far too inadequate to bring out its full significance. When we consider the place of the king in the moral and social order, the profundity of the relation of the king to society will be more easily understood. P.V. Kane states thus the importance of rājadharma in the moral
and social order:

"The fulfilment of their duties and responsibilities by rulers was of paramount importance to the stability and orderly development of society and to the happiness of individuals in the state and, therefore, one often finds that rājadharma is said to be the root of or the quintessence of all dharms".6

In the following pages it is proposed to consider the relation between rājadharma and varnāśramadharma. First, the nature of the social order based on the varna scheme and its relation to rājadharma will be taken up, and this will be followed by an exposition of the āśrama scheme also in its relation to rājadharma.

(i) The nature of Varna

'Varṇa' means 'colour' as well as 'choice'. The varna scheme as expounded in the smṛtis can hardly be called a racial grouping based on the colour of the skin. It would be more correct to say that the varna scheme is based on assigning various roles to individuals in a community in order that there is harmony in society. This fourfold scheme in social organisation has been subjected to a great deal of criticism by the interpreters, who follow the ancient texts more in letter than in spirit. Possibly, the application of the ancient principles in actual social context is itself due to a literal interpretation of the
texts, although it must be conceded that interpretation is an academic question, whereas in actual practice, one tends to go more by the literal meaning than by its spirit. It must, however, be stressed that the fourfold scheme as it evolved in the Hindu society was not originally intended to be a static division of professions, as it is commonly thought to be. Even considering historical facts, the *varṇa* scheme in practice, does not appear to have been very rigid. For instance, there have been kings and warriors from all the four *varṇas*. Chandragupta Maurya (322 B.C. to 298 B.C.) was an emperor in spite of his being a *śūdra* (and despite Kautilya being his Prime Minister). The *Suāgas* (136 B.C. to 75 B.C.) were Brāhmaṇas. In the later years, we find an influx of races from outside the country who were quickly absorbed into the Aryan fold. The *Sakas* (scythians), the *Pahlvas* (Parthians), the *Yavanas* (Bactrian Greeks) and the *Kuśānas* are cases in point. These and many more instances (which we need not mention here) demonstrate that the *varṇa* structure was not rigid. One would be led to regard it as a kind of class structure, which was based neither on racial considerations nor even on those of birth, but on the individual's role in society.

The passages, very often quoted out of context, which are subject to a great deal of criticism are *Rgveda* X 90.12.:—

"The Brāhmaṇa was his mouth, of both his arms
was the Rājanya made. His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the Śūdra was produced.  
(Ralph T.H. Griffith's translation).

"But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, he caused the Brāhmaṇa, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya, and the Śūdra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, and his feet".  
(G. Buhler's translation).

These passages refer to the origin of the four varnas from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and the feet of Brahma or Puruṣa. This tradition is also repeated in the Mahābhārata. This only illustrates that society is to be regarded metaphorically as a body. The roles to be assigned to each social group are represented by the roles of the corresponding parts. There is no reason prima facie to suggest that the social structure thus interpreted is rigid - rigid in the sense that the hierarchy suggested is congenitally inevitable. There is also no evidence to show that the distinction made, springs from any type of racial differences. The distinction is rather based upon the cultural or the spiritual level attained by each individual and the assignment of the role to be played by him in society with reference to such attainments. If the latter view is correct then the whole varna scheme is a functional distribution of society.
and not creation of a rigid class of serfs, noblemen, and priests who would enjoy privileges on account of their birth. Manu, for instance, equates every child with the Sudra. The Sudra and the child belong to the same category so long as the former is not initiated in the Vedas. In another passage Manu says that the twice-born (Brahmanas, Ksatriyas and Vaisyas) who do not study the Veda soon sink to the level of the Sudras within the same life.

Very often karma is cited in support of the varna differences. Actions in the previous birth, it is maintained, will determine the varna in which a man is reborn. Thus merit accumulated in the past birth would enable a man to be reborn in a higher varna. Karma seems to pursue the individual successively in generations of birth and rebirth, the universe itself with all its differentiations being interpreted as originating in the working of the law of karma. A passage in M.B. Santiparva (XII.188) may be cited in support of this view:

Na visesuasti varpañam sarvam brahmanidam jagat
Brahmapañ murvaspṛṣṭam hi karmaṁhirvarpañatām satam

Some interpreters might think that karma theory is brought in only to find a moral justification for perpetuating inequities in the social structure. Our view is that the doctrine of karma is not so much a justification of differentiations as it is an incentive to
the performance of right actions. Indeed, redemption could come about in one's lifetime if there is obedience to the moral law. The Indian thinkers have put forward dharma as the only way to transcend one's limitations. Moreover, Karma-marga is not the only way to salvation; Jñāna and Bhakti are also mentioned as important alternative paths. Indian mythology is full of legends about how a man born in the lowliest rungs of the social ladder could attain not only social but spiritual transformation.

Social differentiations arising out of different cultural and spiritual levels cannot of course be transformed suddenly in a short time. Progress in this direction has necessarily to be slow and depends on many factors, the two most important of which are the individual's temperaments and his efforts. The division into classes was made on the basis of the gunas (qualities or temperaments) and karma (action) of each group or class. Thus, sattva-guna is interpreted to be innate to the Brāhmaṇa class. The rajo-guna that of the Kṣatriya and the Vaisya, and tamo-guna of the Śūdra. These gunas or qualities bear much resemblance to Plato's conception of the virtue dominating each class, viz., wisdom, courage and temperance, with the difference that while Plato's conception of virtues is clear, the exact meaning of these three gunas seems to be obscure. These three gunas, however, correspond to the three ends of life (purusārthas) - dharma, artha, Kāma respectively. The
Gunas are described as primordial in nature, creation itself being effected by them. Thus, what the individual is likely to be is moulded by his psychical make-up and by karma (actions), the allotment of duties being dependent upon the potentialities of gunas and karma. The king has had to possess all these three gunas in a perfectly balanced manner.

Radhakrishnan in his note on Bhagavad Gita - XIV.5 remarks that "it is difficult to have adequate English equivalents for the three words sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is perfect purity and luminosity while rajas is impurity which leads to activity and tamas is darkness and inertia. As the main application of the gunas in the Gita is ethical, we use goodness for sattva, passion for rajas and dullness for tamas." But this explanation is even more vague and does not enable us to grasp the nature of the gunas. The Gita itself interprets these gunas as binding themselves down in the body. Sattva-guna attaches itself to happiness and knowledge, rajo-guna to action or karma and tamo-guna to negligence, indolence and sleep. In this hierarchic order goodness or sattva-guna should dominate over the other two. The Gita puts forward the ideal that the soul should rise above these three qualities in order to attain eternal life (vimuktam mrtam ashute).

Despite the vagueness in the conception of the three
The texts make it sufficiently clear that the ideal person is one who manifests a perfect equilibrium between the various virtues. The right performance of actions hence would depend on how harmonious the person himself is. Harmony in the human person envisaged by Indian thinkers is not so similar to the 'golden mean' of Aristotle as it is to Plato's idea of righteous individual. From this we pass on to a discussion of svadharma, sāmānyadharma, and visesadharma.

Sāmānyadharma, Visesadharma and Svadharma

Sāmānyadharma includes within its fold the duties common to all whatever the station, while the visesadharma comprises duties peculiar to each station and is approximately equivalent to svadharma - duties peculiar to oneself, by virtue of the station in which one is placed. It is from the idea of visesadharma that the varna scheme has arisen. It is realised by all the smṛti writers that there have to be specific duties for each class depending upon its overwhelming inherent qualities and dispositions and station in life. Sāmānyadharma or duties common to all classes are aptly summarised by Manu in the following verse:

"Contentment, forgiveness, self control, abstention from unrighteous appropriation of anything, purification, restraint of organs (of sense), wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness and abstention from anger, - these form the tenfold dharma" (Manu VI.92.).
In another verse Manu again summarises the duties of four varṇas as "abstention from injury (ahimsa), veracity, abstention from covetousness, purity and control of senses" (Manu X.63).

These simple moral rules are binding on the whole human race, whatever the creed or caste or occupation of any of its sections. This is why the duties enumerated are called 'sāmānya' - common to all. Radhakrishnan says, "The system of caste insists that the law of social life should not be cold and cruel competition, but harmony and co-operation. Society is not a field of rivalry among individuals. The castes are not allowed to compete with one another. A man born in a particular group is trained to its manner, and will find it extremely hard to adjust himself to a new way. Each man is said to have his own specific nature (svabhāva) fitting him for his own specific function - (svadharma), and changes of dharma or function are not encouraged. A sudden change of function when the nature is against its proper fulfilment may simply destroy the individuality of the being. We may wish to change or modify our particular mode of being, but we have not the power to effect it. Nature cannot be hurried by our desires. The four castes represent men of thought, men of action, men of feeling, and others in whom none of these is highly developed. Of course, these are the dominant and not the exclusive characters, and there are all sorts of
permutations and combinations of them which constitute adulterations (sankara) and mixture (misralati). 22

Thus a sūdra is not qualified to read, chant or understand the Vedas. The brāhmaṇa is not qualified to perform the duties of a warrior. The brāhmaṇa, according to the ancient Indian conception, is meant to be the priest-philosopher of the community, the kṣatriya the warrior and the governor, the vaiśya as the trader and businessman, and the sūdra as the worker and the peasant. The leadership of the community vests in those who are qualified to take it up. Thus the criticism sometimes directed against the smṛtis, as providing for only the dictatorship of the priest and as perpetuating the dominance of the aristocratic classes, is not valid if we examine the smṛtis themselves closely. No egalitarian ideal is fully workable unless it takes into account the differences and the potentialities of each individual. 23 It is true, however, that if these class distinctions mentioned in the smṛtis are based on birth, the social structure as visualised by them would be rigid and compartmental in character, as the people born in the lower rungs of the social ladder would never be able to attain any higher status, whatever be their potentialities. But as stated earlier, the scheme of varṇas originally appears to have signified broadly the choice of professions according to one's capabilities, and not a rigid classification of society. Much of the compartmentalisation
in the interpretation of varnadharma was, even historically and traditionally, a later growth. We cite below the opinion of some modern interpreters of the varna scheme which more or less confirms our view.

Charles Drekmeier, in his book Kingship and Community in Early India remarks: "Although stratification is universal and essential to organized social activity, societies may vary greatly in degree of social mobility, in cohesiveness among members of a particular group, in value assigned to different gradations, and so forth. To those reared in the liberal tradition, caste would seem to strike at the very basis of individuality. Caste did, in fact, produce a kind of pluralism and diversity - characteristics that we have learned to associate with the social structure of a liberal state. But in India such pluralism could not encourage individuality because of the complete identification of the person with his social role.

"The very word caste brings to mind the traditional social structure of India, but it is at least arguable whether caste accurately describes the sociological configuration of ancient India. Class restrictions had not completely hardened even in Gupta times". 24

S. Radhakrishnan, in one of his Upton Lectures delivered at Oxford, said: "The institution of caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration
of races and the co-operation of cultures. Paradoxical as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust. Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system. At another place he opines: "While the system of caste is not a democracy in the pursuit of wealth or happiness, it is a democracy so far as the spiritual values are concerned, for it recognises that every soul has in it something transcendent and incapable of gradations, and it places all beings on a common level regardless of distinctions of rank and status, and insists that every individual must be afforded the opportunity to manifest the unique in him. Economically we are a co-operative concern or brotherhood where we give according to our capacity and take according to our needs. Politically we enjoy equal rights in the sight of law, and these two enable us to attain true spiritual freedom. A just organisation of society will be based on spiritual liberty, political equality and economic fraternity."

Explaining the meaning and significance of varna (which he equates with caste), Swami Vivekananda remarked, "Caste is a very good thing. Caste is the plan we want to follow. What caste really is, not one in a million understands. There is no country in the world without caste. In India, from caste we reach to a point where
there is no caste. Caste is based throughout on that principle. The plan in India is to make everybody brāhmaṇa, the brāhmaṇa being the ideal of humanity. If you read the history of India, you will find that attempts have always been made to raise the lower classes. Many are the classes that have been raised. Many more will follow till the whole will become brāhmaṇa". 27

The Indian social mind, therefore, sets before humanity an order of social hierarchy, where wisdom and learning will be given the highest social status, even higher than the political power. Despite this privilege given to the brahmana class, the other classes were never denied a rightful place in the social order. Sri Aurobindo dilating on the varṇa scheme remarks, "The test of Indian genius for socio-political construction lay in the successful application of its principle of a communal self determined freedom and order to suit this growing development and new order of circumstances ---. The Indian mind evolved to meet this necessity, the socio-religious system of four orders. Outwardly this might seem to be only a more rigid form of the familiar social system developed naturally in most human peoples at one time or another: a priesthood, a military and political aristocracy, a class of artisans, and free agriculturists and traders and a proletariat serfs or labourers. The resemblance is only with externals, and the spirit of the system of cāturvarṇa was different in India". 28
Sociologists have a tendency to translate *varna* as caste and to study it empirically more as it exists today than as the ancient Indian texts originally visualised it. The equivalent for caste in Sanskrit is perhaps *jati* and not *varna*. Hence any mention of caste in these pages has been avoided as far as possible. Our outlook on the ancient Indian *varna* scheme should not be influenced by modern conditions. The Marxists criticize social stratification, but it is more to the institution of caste that their criticism is directed than to the *varna* scheme. In ancient India *varna* did in fact contribute to the preservation of social cohesion and solidarity.

**Varṇadharma, Keśātradharma and Rājadharma**

It is not necessary to go into more details of the duties of each class as the aim of the present work is restricted to establishing a relation between *varṇadharma* and *rājadharma*. In the succeeding pages it is proposed to examine (a) what *keśātradharma* is, (b) whether *rājadharma* comprises the duties of a ksatriya alone, and (c) what special significance, if any, can be attached to *rājadharma* in the *varṇa* scheme of the social order.

In the *Sukrāṇīti* is given a full account of what may be regarded as *keśātradharma*. The *nītisāstra* according to Sukra is of paramount importance to the king, while the study of grammar and logic, of *Mīmāṃsa* and *Vedānta* ought to be cared for and mastered by such persons only as have need
for these teachings. The duty of the kṣatriyas in general and of the king in particular is to maintain the stability of human affairs with skill and intelligence. The Mahābhārata echoes this when it proclaims: Danda eva hi raiendra ksātradharma na mundanam. (Kṣatriya's) duty is to maintain order by danda (judicial authority) and not to become an ascetic by shaving off the hair. The same idea is repeated in the M.B. Udvyogaparva. The Bhagavad Gītā also confirms this view when it says: "There exists no greater good for a kṣatriya than a battle enjoined by dharma (duty)." The kṣatriya, therefore, is not expected to perform the three duties of the brāhmaṇa which Manu mentions as yajnam (officiating as a priest in rituals performed by others), adhyāpanam (teaching) and pratigraham (acceptance of gifts). His duties primarily are military and administrative; he is to take up arms to maintain law and order in society and to rule the country according to the principles of nitiśāstra. The Śukraniti34 and Manusmṛti35 also support this prescription for the king. Thus the duties of a king are essentially that of a kṣatriya to which class he should normally belong. His responsibility is quite high as much as the whole structure of law and order in society is dependent on how effectively he uses authority to the benefit of all. The moral order (dharma) coupled with might to enforce it (danda) will enable prosperity to flourish.36

Whatever action a kṣatriya performs in the social

* Mahābhārata
situation in which he is placed must be for the sake of protection of the people and not for individual gain. Vasiṣṭha propounds the same duties for the kṣatriya while enumerating the duties essential to each varṇa:

"(The lawful occupations) of a kṣatriya are three: studying, sacrificing for himself, and bestowing gifts. And his peculiar duty is to protect the people with his weapons; let him gain his livelihood thereby."

Kautilya echoes the above passage when he summarises the duties of the kṣatriya as follows:

"That of a kṣatriya is study, performance of sacrifice, giving gifts, military occupation, and protection of life."

Thus rājadharma includes all the duties of a kṣatriya; and besides this it comprises duties arising out of the king's special station in life viz., protection of the subjects, administration of justice and maintenance of social order. In short, rājadharma covers all the executive, judicial and military duties; and all these were to be performed in strict conformity with the law as prescribed in the dharmaśāstras.

The special significance of rājadharma in the social order is evident by the fact that the welfare of all classes in the maintenance of their various rights and in the performance of their respective duties is dependent on how the ruler performs his duties himself. The reference to
matsyanvāya in Kautilya is to the fact that without a king as dharmaprabhavartaka, the society would lapse into chaos and the social order would disintegrate. The Ṣaṁhitā states that all dharmas are merged in rājadharma and that rājadharma is at the head of all dharmas. At another place, it is said, "The welfare, good rains, sickness, calamities and death among people owe their origin to the king. The king is the root cause of the Śatyuva, the Treta, the Dvapara and the Kaliyuga."" 

Elaborating the role of rājadharma, Kane writes, "It may be said with truth (as done by the Ṣaṁhitā) that rājadharma was the highest goal of all the world, that it comprehended within itself all rules of dharma (conduct), vyavahāra (administration of justice) and pravascitta (penance and punishment). It is on account of this all pervading influence of government or royal power that the Mahābhārata frequently emphasises that the king is the maker of his age, that it is he who can usher a golden age or an age of strife and misery for the country." 

The Mahābhārata and the Śukraniti both emphasise the importance of king as the maker of his age: Rāj Kālasva kārapam. "The king is the cause of setting on foot the customs, usages and movements and hence is the cause or maker of time; if the age or time were the cause there could be no virtue in the actors."
The king was visualised as occupying a pivotal place in ancient Indian society as he was looked upon as the creator of epochs; he was not only the cause of all social movements but also determined the direction in which the movement was to take place. The character of the king is truly reflected in his subjects and the king in turn is the reflector of his time. The ideal put forward in the common saying vathā rājā tathā prajā (as the king so the people) is an index to the all pervasive influence that a king could exert on his subjects and on society at large. It was not enough, therefore, that the king cultivated in himself all the qualities of nobility and high character; he was also expected to become a positive force in society in providing leadership and standards of good conduct. Obviously, it was a very high ideal of monarchy as visualised by the ancient Indian thinkers. This was the reason why the king was supposed to be divine in character, not in the sense that his rights and status emanated from God or gods but in the sense that his character and equipment were to be such that he was to provide effective leadership in society in the same way as God is the prime-mover of the whole universe. The virtues of a king are not merely born out of expediency, to enable him to keep himself firmly in power but were also rational in the sense of being dictated by dharma or moral law, and directed more towards the welfare of his people than of himself.
How far these ideals have been actually realised in practice is a matter of controversy, which centres around two points, viz., (i) the ideal was even in the past utopian and (ii) it is out-dated in the present. In our view these ideals were not utopian in the sense that they were incapable of realisation. On the other hand there is enough material in the ancient texts to show that the ideals were put into practice by the rulers. King Asvapati, for example, is mentioned to have achieved the rule of dharma in his kingdom where there was "no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no non-sacrificer, nobody uneducated and no lustful man, with the result that there was no lustful woman." The arthasastras and dharma-śāstras visualised a state which was always possible and practical at least in its essentials. It is another matter to regard these ideals as out of date. In the times in which there were no political organisations or constitutions as have been developed in modern times, monarchy as almost the only political institution had to fulfil, in our country, certain requirements before it became an effective force in history. Kingship, therefore, may be regarded as a historical necessity, and it had to be the only and ultimate source of authority and social organisation. Thus, considered within the limitations of the age in which the smṛti writers visualised politics, the ideal of dharma-guided monarchy was fully practicable.
Ancient Indian history cannot be regarded only as a biography of kings, as it was, at the same time, a record of the age in which the king was the chief architect reflecting in his personality, his own character as well as that of his subjects.

(ii) The āśrama scheme of life

We have so far explained the varna scheme of social organisation according to the smṛtis. We have next to consider the importance of āśramadharma in human activity. The varnadharmā is characterised by a kind of externality in which the individual's activity has a frame of reference outside his own life in relation to other individuals in the social sphere. In contrast to this the āśramadharma prescribes conduct consistent with the internal development of the individual and is, therefore, an activity of inwardness. But both the varna and the āśrama scheme have to be regarded as an integrated whole in which the individual moulds himself internally in accordance with his potentialities and also externally with reference to the broader social structure. Thus both the schemes taken together constitute the varnāśrama-yyavasthā.

What guides the āśrama scheme is a question answered by the four rurusārthas or the objectives which
the smṛti writers placed before themselves - dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. Mokṣa (liberation) provides the summun bonum of human activity in so far as it is the supreme end of life itself. There are different philosophical theories propounded by various schools of thought as to the exact nature of mokṣa. In general we might say that mokṣa refers more to the life hereafter than to the life here and now. Therefore, of the other three purusārthas which directly relate to man's actions, dharma is regarded as the highest by all the smṛti writers. artha and kāma come later in the order of importance. artha refers to the means for acquiring worldly prosperity and material wealth, and kāma to the desires of man leading to pursuits involving their biological and psychological fulfilment. Dharma is not only moral enlightenment or theoretical moral consciousness but is also a comprehensive doctrine of duties intended in practice to promote the individual's highest self-development. Some schools of Indian thought (for instance, the Buddhists) equate dharma with nirvāṇa. But here dharma becomes the transcendental moral law, the highest ideal which can be realised only when it frees itself from the contradictions which beset empirical performance of actions.

The word āśrama is derived from śram which means to exert or to labour. The etymological meaning of āśrama is a stage or period of life in which one exerts oneself.
P.T. Raju says: "Asramas are the stages into which the Aryans divided man's life for its gradual inwardization". The Asrama scheme divides the human life into four spans, living through which man gains more and more spiritual stature and 'by turning his gaze inward' he progressively releases himself in order to attain the zenith of spiritual fulfilment - moksa. According to the Asrama theory as incorporated in the Dharmasutras and Smritis, the first of the four Asramas is brahmacarya or life of the celebate student which (after the vivaha - samskara or marriage) is followed by the second, i.e. grhastasrama or the life of the householder. Vanaprastha and samnyasa mark the third and the fourth Asramas, the former meaning the life of the forest-dweller and the latter that of the samnyasin or the renouncer, who is expected to lead a life of total inwardness, when all contact with the mundane world and with society is lost. Manusmriti, which is the most well-known of the Dharmasastras, regards the span of human life to be of one hundred years although all may not live to that age (satiyur vai murusah). This span is divided into four parts. The first part of man's life according to Manu's detailed exposition of the Asramas, is brahmacarya in which he is a student and learns both theoretical knowledge and practical wisdom from his teacher (IV.1). After having finished his studies, he marries and enters the second part of his life and becomes a householder. Here he discharges his debts to his ancestors by begetting
sons and to the gods, by performing vaiñas or ritual sacrifices (V.169.). At the age when 'his hairs turn grey and wrinkles cover his body' he retires to the forests and becomes a vānapraśtha (VI.1-2.), and after spending this period of his life in the forest he spends the rest of his life as a sampvāsin (VI.33.). Similarly, Kautilya after enunciating the duties of the four varnas, gives a detailed list of the duties of each ārama. Considering the householder first, he states: "The duty of a householder is earning livelihood by his own profession, marriage among his equals of different ancestral rishis, intercourse with his wedded wife after her monthly ablution, gifts to gods, ancestors, guests and servants and the eating of the remainder". 49

Kautilya describes the duties of the remaining three āramas as follows:

"That of a student (brahmacārin) is learning the Vedas, fire worship, ablution, living by begging and devotion to his teacher even at the cost of his own life ---".

"That of a vānapraśtha is observance of chastity, sleeping on the bare ground, keeping twisted locks, wearing deer skin, fire worship, ablution, worship of gods, ancestors and guests, and living upon foodstuffs procurable in forests".

"That of an ascetic retired from the world (parivrājaka) is complete control of the organs of sense,
abstaining from all kinds of work, disowning money, keeping away from society, begging in many places, dwelling in forests and purity both internal and external". 50

Further, Kauṭilya adds: "Harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, freedom from spite, abstinence from cruelty, and forgiveness are duties common to all (varṇas and āśramas)". 51

Kauṭilya concludes that the observance of one’s own duty "leads one to svarga (heaven) and infinite bliss (ānanta). When it is violated, the world will come to an end owing to the confusion of castes and duties". 52

Although there have been slight variations in the sequence of the āśramas it may be accepted that from the times of the most ancient dharmaśūtras, the number of āśramas has been four. Manu forbids the start of sanvyāsa immediately after brahmacarīva. Most of the dharmaśāstras glorify the status of a householder and consider it to be a period of necessary preparation for entering into the third and fourth āśramas.

The whole āśrama scheme is in consonance with the goals of human conduct, viz., dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa, which the ancient Indian thinkers viewed to be primordial to human life. Each one of the āśrama acts as a moulding force to shape individual personality and making it capable of realising these goals. The highest
The goal set before man is moksa, i.e., liberation from the never ending cycle of births and deaths and the attainment of moksa. Brahmacharya is the stage in which the individual undergoes the training of the will and emotions and becomes equipped with knowledge and wisdom. This stage disciplines, educates and enriches the mind. The householder tastes the pleasures of the world, enjoys life, discharges the ancestral debts and satisfies his bodily senses. A stage comes when he becomes convinced of the futility of human appetites and worldly pleasures and begins to seek purifications of the spirit by retiring to seclusion in order to ponder over the great enigma, and purpose of human life. This stage is characterised by 'plain living and high thinking'. The last stage marks the emancipation of the soul after attaining spiritual perfection.

The asrama scheme, therefore, belongs to the realms of mind, body, spirit, and the soul. Each of the asramas marks the fulfilment of the appetites and drives belonging to each of the above spheres. While the varna scheme deals with man as a member of the society and prescribes his rights, functions and responsibilities as its member, the asrama scheme relates to the subjective life of man. It awakens the individual to the spiritual goal of his existence and prescribes the order of life which can make possible the attainment of that goal. Kane remarks:

"The theory of asramas was truly a sublime conception, and
if owing to exigencies of the times, the conflicts of interests and distractions of life, the scheme could not even in ancient times be carried out fully by every individual and seems to have failed in modern times, the fault does not lie with the originators of this conception."^54

Kane also quotes Deussen and Geden who have paid laudable tributes to the grand conception of āśramadharma in Indian philosophy. Geden remarks: "The entire history of mankind does not produce much that approaches in grandeur to this thought".55

A detailed narration of the activities and the role of the individual in each of the fourfold āśramas would be irrelevant for our purpose. We may, however, remark that the chief merit of the āśrama scheme lay in the fact that it was regarded as common to all the four varṇas. No matter what the station or status of the individual is, the āśramas must be pursued in their true spirit. Instances are not lacking in Indian history where we find the sudras and even the untouchables (who do not come under the four varṇas) becoming saints and attaining the highest stage of social respect.

Another fact to be noted in the varṇaśramadharma, as detailed earlier, is that there are certain rules of morality which are common to all the varṇas and āśramas. From very ancient times these rules have been exalted above everything else. Truth is the foremost principle
of all life and action. **Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad** remarks: "Truth and dharma are in practical life identical terms".56 Another prayer in the same **Upaniṣad** contains the following famous words:

"From falsehood lead me unto truth, from darkness lead me unto light, from death lead me unto immortality".57

The **Mṛḍakopaniṣad** says, "Only truth is victorious and not falsehood; the path of the gods is spread out by (the pursuit of) truth".58 The need for cultivating the cardinal virtues of self-restraint (dama), compassion (dāya) and charity (dāna) as also other virtues has been greatly stressed. The **Mahābhārata** declares that "non-injury to all beings in thought, word and deed, goodwill and charity are the eternal dharmas of the good".59

**Vasistha-dharmaśūtra** in a similar vein clearly states that "avoiding back-biting, jealousy, pride, egoism, unbelief, crookedness, self-praise, abuse of others, deceit, covetousness, delusion, anger, and envy is the dharma of all āśramas". "Practise dharma and not adharma, speak the truth and not untruth; look far ahead and not near; look at what is the highest, not at what is not the highest".60 **Apastamba-dharmaśūtra** calls upon all āśramas to eradicate falsity that tends to destruction and to cultivate the opposite virtues.

Above we have given only a few extracts from the
ancient texts which emphasise the need for the cultivation of virtues among persons of all varnas and ásramas. Naturally it follows that the ancient Indian thinkers attached great importance to moral values which were to be exhibited not merely in the performance of sacrifices or religious ceremonies but were to become a positive force behind every thought and action. Varnas and ásramas are convenient ways of ensuring that each one performs his actions in accordance with the moral law (dharma); moreover, special duties which arise from one's station have to be classified separately. A general scheme of morality would not be adequate to cover these special duties. The king's station, for instance, is perhaps the most important in the social structure. The responsibility that lay upon him had to be great, because he had not only to present himself in the ideal character but also to uphold dharma in society and mould the character of his subjects. It is, therefore, very essential that the king should possess the highest virtues and the noblest qualities whereby he could become an ideal ruler. It is with reference to the qualitative equipment of the king that the ásramas of the king have to be more rigid and arduous than those of others. Moreover, the functions that a king had to perform were so important and extensive in their nature and responsibility that a thorough training and mental discipline was indispensable to produce in him the qualities of an ideal ruler.
Kautilya emphatically declares: "A king shall never allow people to swerve from their duties; for whoever upholds his own duties, ever adhering to the customs of the Āryas, and following the rules of caste and divisions of religious life, will surely be happy both here and hereafter." The dharma of the king is certainly of a special character (asādharma) which is called supādharma. First, there is an obligation on the king to maintain local usage, customs of caste and family, administer justice, keep all his people contented and happy and defend them against external danger. Secondly, he was, above all, expected to uphold dharma, in the broader context of realising the eternal moral law in himself and in the social order. The king, therefore, has to become a custodian of people's welfare and a defender of dharma both in the proximate and ultimate sense: The rāja, therefore, is rightly regarded as the dharma-pravartaka.

We shall reserve a more detailed exposition of the ideal of kingship according to the various representative texts to the next few chapters. The above account is only an attempt to give a preliminary, synthesised view of rājadharma in ancient Indian thought in general.
Chapter II


5. Rg-Veda - VII.64.2.


7. Rg-Veda - X.80.12 : 
   Sṛkṛtanāsya mukham layaṁ
   bahu rājanavah kṛitah,
   aśa va rāja vāiṣvah
   maddhyan śādha eśvara.

8. Manusmriti - I.31 : 
   Lokāṁ tu vyvṛchyaṁ
   mithabhiruddhīkātaḥ,
   bṛhitṛṣṭaṁ kṣatriyaṁ
   vaisyaṁ śudrayat kīrtīkātaḥ.


10. "The Bṛāhmaṇa is called the mouth of Puruṣa, as having the special privilege, as a priest, of addressing the Gods in prayer. The arms of Puruṣa became the Rājanya, the prince and soldier, who wields the sword and spear. His thighs, the strongest parts of his body, became the agriculturist and tradesman, the chief support of society; and his feet the emblems of vigour and activity, became the Śūdra or labouring man on whose toil and industry, all ultimately rests". (Rg-Veda, Griffith's Translation, Vol.II, X.80.12., Footnote at p-518).
11. Radhakrishnan - Religion and Society, p. 131: "The system was designed to unite, first the heterogeneous population of India, and then of the whole world, in one common economic, social, cultural and spiritual bond. By assigning definite functions and duties, and according rights and privileges, the different classes were expected to work in cooperation and to achieve racial harmony. It is a mold into which all human beings can be poured, according to their vocational aptitude and temperament. The basis of the varna dharma is that every human being must try to fulfill the law of his development. We must discipline our life in conformity with the pattern of our being; instead of wasting our energies in following those which we lack."

12. Manusmrti II.172: "Śūdraṣā kaśma śāyad vāvat vade na īyata"

13. Ibid., II.163.


Also compare: "Śūdavona hi itasvā sadggunā upatiśthah vratatvan labhate brhmam kṣatriyatvan tathārtvar ca ēriyo vartaṇeśvāya bhūpavan abhījayate." (Vaisnavadeva - Aranyakāraa).

15. e.g., Viśāmitra and Vālmīki.

16. "The fourfold order was created by me according to the divisions of quality and work". - Bhagavad Gītā, IV-13 and also XVIII. 41-44; (Edited and Translated by Radhakrishnan).

17. Manusmrti - 1.15-16.


19. Ibid., XIV.5-10.

20. Ibid., XIV.26-27.

22. Radhakrishnan - The Hindu View of Life, p-111.

23. Cf. Aldous Huxley - The Perennial Philosophy, pp - 312-313:
"But what is duty or dharma for the Kshatriya is adharma and forbidden to the Brahman; nor is it any part of the normal vocation or caste duty of the mercantile and labouring classes. Any confusion of castes, any assumption by one man of another man's vocation and duties of state, is always, say the Hindus, a moral evil and a menace to social stability. Thus, it is the business of the Brahmins to fit themselves to be seers, so that they may be able to explain to their fellow-men the nature of the universe, of man's last end and of the way to liberation. When soldiers or administrators, or usurers, or manufacturers or workers usurp the functions of the Brahmins and formulate a philosophy of life in accordance with their variously distorted notions of the universe, then society is thrown into confusion. Similarly, confusion reigns when the Brahman, the man of non-coercive spiritual authority, assumes the coercive power of the Kshatriya, or when the Kshatriya's job of ruling is usurped by bankers and stock-jobbers, or finally when the warrior caste's dharma of fighting is imposed, by conscription, on Brahman, Vaisya and Sudra alike. The history of Europe during the later Middle ages and Renaissance is largely a history of the social confusions that arise when large numbers of those who should be seers abandon spiritual authority in favour of money and political power. And contemporary history is the hideous record of what happens when political bosses, business men or class-conscious proletarians assume the Brahman's function of formulating a philosophy of life; when usurers dictate policy and debate the issues of war and peace; and when the warrior's caste duty is imposed on all and sundry regardless of psycho-physical make-up and vocation."


26. Ibid., p-117.
27. Selections from Swami Vivekananda, pp - 346-347.

28. Sri Aurobindo - The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity, p-39. Compare also Kroeber in Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences under article 'Caste' where he says: "The Hindu does not feel caste a burden as the individualistic occidental might. To him it seems both natural and desirable, its deliberate breach unnatural, perverse, and unforgivable. Whatever his caste, the Hindu is proud of it as Westerners are proud of their nationality. It gives him a sense of solidarity, and he does not seek to escape it." (Quoted by Charles Drekmeyer in his book Kingship and Community in Early India, p-38.).


31. *Mahābhārata* - *Udyoga-parva* - 32.65: 'There are only two types who can break the solar constellation (and attain salvation) - one is the yogic ascetic and the other is a soldier who dies fighting'.

32. *Bhagavad-Gītā* - II.31: "Dharmādhi vuddhaḥ chrevaṁ na kṣatriyasva ma vidvate".

33. *Manusmṛti* - X.75-76.


41. Caitanya arthaśāstra - Book I, Chapter IV, p-8.

42. Kālābhāṣa - Sāntinārva - 63.23.: 'evam dharmān rājadharmasya sarvān, sarvasthān sarvānāthō hi kevala.'
and 63.27.: 'sarve dharmān rājadharmān prabhūtaṁ.'

43. Ibid., 141.9-10.


45. Kālābhāṣa - Udvyog-sūrva - 132.16; Sāntinārva - 39.79., 91.6. and 91.9.; Manuśāstra - IV.1.50.

46. Manuśāstra - I.43-44.

47. Chāndogya Upaniṣad - V.11.5.

48. Raju P.V. - India's Culture and Her Problems, p-12.


50. Ibid., p-7.

51. Ibid., p-7.

52. Ibid., p-7.

53. Manusmrti - IV.1.; VI.1.


55. Ibid., p-124. (as quoted by P.V. Kane).
56. *Brahāṇavāya Unanisad* - 1.4.14.: "Ya vai sa dharmaḥ, satvam vai sat").

57. Ibid., 1.3.23.: "acato ya sad yaaya, Tamata ya Iyakha yaaya, ucyor nāyanta yaaya.

58. *Mandaka Upanisad* - 3.1.6.: "Satyam eva tva vastra nāyanta satyena santid vīceto deva-vānaha".


60. *Vasisthā Dharmasūtra* - X.30 and XXX.1.


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