

CHAPTER 6

The Ancient Regime: The State of the Aryan Society

This essay consists of 11 typed foolscap pages tagged into a file. From the last sentence it appears that the Chapter is incomplete.—Editors

I

Buddhism was a revolution. It was as great a Revolution as the French Revolution. Though it began as a Religious revolution, it became more than Religious revolution. It became a Social and Political Revolution. To be able to realize how profound was the character of this Revolution, it is necessary to know the state of the society before the revolution began its course. To use the language of the French Revolution, it is necessary to have a picture of the ancient regime in India.

To understand the great reform which he brought about by his teaching, it is necessary to have some idea of the degraded condition of the Aryan civilization at the time when Buddha started on the mission of his life.

The Aryan Community of his time was steeped in the worst kind of debauchery; social, religious and spiritual.

To mention only a few of the social evils, attention may be drawn to gambling. Gambling had become as widespread among the Aryans as drinking.

Every king had a hall of gambling attached to his palace. Every king had an expert gambler in his employment as a companion to play with. King *Virat* had in his employment *Kank* as an expert gambler. Gambling was not merely a pastime with kings. They played with heavy stakes. They staked kingdoms, dependents, relatives, slaves, servants.¹ King *Nala* staked everything in gambling with *Paskkar* and lost everything. The only thing he did not stake was himself and his

¹ Mahabharat—Vanaparva.

wife Damayanti. Nala had to go and live in the forest as a beggar. There were kings who went beyond Nala. The Mahabharat¹ tells how Dharma the eldest of the Pandavas gambled and staked everything, his brothers and also his and their wife Draupadi. Gambling was a matter of honour with the Aryans and any invitation to gamble was regarded as an injury to one's honour and dignity. Dharma gambled with such disastrous consequences although he was warned beforehand. His excuse was that he was invited to gamble and that as a man of honour, he could not decline such an invitation.

This vice of gambling was not confined to kings. It had infected even the common folk. Rig-Veda contains lamentations of a poor Aryan ruined by gambling. The habit of gambling had become so common in Kautilya's time that there were gambling houses licensed by the king from which the king derived considerable revenue.

Drinking was another evil which was rampant among the Aryans. Liquors were of two sorts *Soma* and *Sura*. *Soma* was a sacrificial wine. The drinking of the Soma was in the beginning permitted only to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Subsequently it was permitted only to Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The Vaishyas were excluded from it and the Shudras were never permitted to taste it. Its manufacture was a secret known only to the Brahmins. *Sura* was open to all and was drunk by all. The Brahmins also drank Sura. Shukracharya the priest to the *Asuras* drank so heavily that in his drunken state he gave the life giving *Mantra* known to him only and with which he used to revive the *Asuras* killed by the Devas—to *Katch* the son of Brahmaspati who was the priest of the Devas. The Mahabharat mentions an occasion when both Krishna and Arjuna were dead drunk. That shows that the best among the Aryan Society were not only not free from the drink habit but that they drank heavily. The most shameful part of it was that even the Aryan women were addicted to drink. For instance *Sudeshna*² the wife of King Virat tells her maid *Sairandhri* to go to *Kichaka's* palace and bring Sura as she was dying to have a drink. It is not to be supposed that only queens indulged in drinking. The habit of drinking was common among women of all classes and even Brahmin women were not free from it. That liquor and dancing was indulged in by the Aryan women is clear from the *Kausitaki Grihya Sutra* I. 11-12, which says; "Four or eight women who are not widowed, after having been regaled with wine and food are to dance for four times on the night previous to the wedding ceremony."

¹ Mahabharat—Sabhaparva.

² Vanaparva. Adh. XV. 10:

That the drinking of intoxicating liquor was indulged in by Brahmin women, not to speak of women of the lower *Varnas*, as late as the seventh and eighth centuries- A.D. in the Central region of Aryavarta, is clear from Kumarila Bhatta's *Tantra- Vartika* I (iii). 4, which states, "Among the people of modern days we find the Brahmin women of the countries of Ahicchatra and Mathura to be addicted to drinking". Kumarila condemned the practice in the case of Brahmins only, but not of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas men and women, if the liquor was distilled from fruits or flowers (Madhavi), and Molasses (Gaudi) and not from grains (Sura).

The sexual immorality of the Aryan Society must shock their present day descendants. The Aryans of pre-Buddhist days had no such rule of prohibited degrees as we have today to govern their sexual or matrimonial relationship.

According to the Aryan Mythology, Brahma is the creator. Brahma had three sons and a daughter. His one son Daksha married his sister. The daughters born of this marriage between brother and sister were married some to Kashyapa the son of Marichi the son of Brahma and some to Dharma the third son of Brahma.¹

In the Rig-Veda there is an episode related of Yama and Yami brother and sister. According to this episode Yami the sister invites her brother Yama to cohabit with her and becomes angry when he refuses to do so.²

A father could marry his daughter. *Vashishta* married his own daughter *Shatrupa* when she came of age.³ *Manu* married his daughter *Ila*.⁴ *Janhu* married his daughter *Janhavi*.⁵ *Surya* married his daughter *Usha*.⁶

There was polyandri not of the ordinary type. The polyandri prevalent among the Aryans was a polyandri when kinsmen cohabited with one woman. Dhahaprachetani and his son Soma cohabited with Marisha the daughter of Soma.⁷

Instances of grandfather marrying his grand-daughter are not wanting. Daksha gave his daughter in marriage to his father Brahma⁸ and from that marriage was born the famous Narada. Dauhitra gave his 27 daughters to his father Soma for cohabitation and procreation.⁹

The Aryans did not mind co-habiting with women in the open and within sight of people. The Rishis used to perform certain religious

¹ Mahabharat Adiparva. Adh. 66.

² Rig. Veda.

³ Hari Vansha Adh. II.

⁴ *Ibid.* Adh. X.

⁵ *Ibid* Adh. XXVII.

⁶ Yask Nirutta Adh. V. Khanda VI.

⁷ Harivansha Adh. II.

⁸ *Ibid.* Adh. III.

⁹ *Ibid.*

rites which were called *Vamdevya vrata*. These rites used to be performed on the *Yadnya bhumi*. If any woman came there and expressed a desire for sexual intercourse and asked the sage to satisfy her, the sage used to cohabit with her then and there in the open on the *Yadnya bhumi*. Instances of this may be mentioned. The case of the sage Parashara had sexual intercourse with Satyavati and also of Dirghatapa. That such a custom was common is shown by the existence of the word Ayoni. The word Ayoni is understood to mean of immaculate conception. That is not however the original meaning of the word. The original meaning of the word Yoni is house. Ayoni means conceived out of the house i.e. in the open. That there was nothing deemed to be wrong in this is clear from the fact that both Sita and Draupadi were Ayonija. That this was very common is clear from the fact that religious injunctions had to be issued against such a practice.¹

There was prevalent among the Aryans the practice of renting out their women to others for a time. As an illustration may be mentioned the story of *Madhavi*.² The king *Yayati* gave his daughter *Madhavi* as an offering to his Guru *Galav*. *Galav* rented out the girl *Madhavi* to three kings, each a period. Thereafter he gave her in marriage to *Vishwamitra*. She remained with him until a son was born to her. Thereafter *Galav* took away the girl and gave her back to her father *Yayati*.

Besides the practice of letting out women to others temporarily at a rent there was prevalent among the Aryans another practice namely allowing procreation by the best amongst them. Raising a family was treated by them as though it was a breeding or stock raising. Among the Aryas there was a class of persons called *Devas* who were Aryans but of a superior status and prowess. The Aryans allowed their women to have sexual intercourse with any one of the class of *Devas* in the interest of good breeding. This practice prevailed so extensively that the *Devas* came to regard prelibation in respect of the Aryan Women as their prescriptive right. No Aryan woman could be married unless this right of prelibation had been redeemed and the woman released from the control of the *Devas* by offering what was technically called *Avadan*. The *Laja Hoame* which is performed in every Hindu marriage and the details of which are given in the *Ashwalayan Grahya Sutra* is a relic of this act of the redemption of the Aryan woman from the right of prelibation of the *Devas*. The *Avadan* in the *Laja Hoama* is nothing but the price for the existinguishment of the right of the *Devas* over

¹ Mahabharat, Adi Parva—Adh. 193.

² *Ibid.* Udyoga Parva—Adh. 106-123.

the bride. The *Saptapadi* performed in all Hindu marriages and which is regarded as the most essential ceremony without which there is no lawful marriage has an integral connection with this right of prelibation of the Devas. Saptapadi means walking by the bridegroom seven steps with the bride. Why is this essential ? The answer is that the Devas, ii they were dissatisfied with the compensation, could claim the woman before the seventh step was taken. After the seventh step was taken, the right of the Devas was extinguished and the bridegroom could take away the bride and live as husband and wife without being obstructed or molested by the Devas.

There was no rule of chastity for maidens. A girl could have sexual intercourse with and also progeny from anybody without contracting marriage. This is evident from the root meaning of the word *Kanya* which means a girl. *Kanya* comes from the root *Kam* which means a girl free to offer herself to any man. That they did offer themselves to any man and had children without contracting regular marriage is illustrated by the case of *Kunti* and *Malsyagandha*. *Kunti* had children from different men before she was married to *Pandu* and *Matsyagandha* had sexual intercourse with the sage *Parashara* before she married to *Shantanu* the father of *Bhishma*.

Beastiality was also prevalent among the Aryans. The story of the sage Dam having sexual intercourse with a female deer, is well known. Another instance is that of Surya cohabiting with a mare. But the most hideous instance is that of the woman having sexual intercourse with the horse in the Ashvamedha *Yadna*.

(INCOMPLETE)

••