

RIDDLE NO. 16

THE FOUR VARNAS—ARE THE BRAHMINS SURE OF THEIR ORIGIN?

It is the cardinal faith of every Hindu that the Hindu Social Order is a Divine Order. The prescriptions of this Divine Order are three. *First* Society is permanently divided into four classes namely (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas, (3) Vaishyas and (4) Shudras. *Second* the four classes in point of their mutual status are linked together in an order of graded inequality. The Brahmins are at the head and above all others. The Kshatriyas below the Brahmins but above the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The Vaishyas below the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas but above the Shudras and the Shudras below all. *Third* the occupations of the four classes are fixed. The occupation of the Brahmins is to acquire learning and to teach. The occupation of the Kshatriyas is to fight, that of the Vaishyas to trade and that of the Shudras to serve as menials to the other three classes above him. This is called by the Hindus the Varna Vevastha. It is the very soul of Hinduism. Without Varna Vevastha there is nothing else in Hinduism to distinguish it from other religions. That being so it is only proper that an enquiry should be made into the origin of this Varna system.

For an explanation of its origin we must have recourse to what the ancient Hindu literature has to say on the subject.

I

It would be better to collect together in the first place the views expressed in the Vedas.

This is a 33-page typed script having all necessary corrections and additions incorporated by the author. There are two concluding pages written by the author himself. All the pages of the chapter are loose sheets tagged together with a title page in the handwriting of the author.—Ed.

The subject is referred to in the Rig-Veda in the 90th Hymn of the 10th Book. It runs as follows:

“1 Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. On every side enveloping the earth, he overpassed (it) by a space of ten fingers. 2. Purusha himself is this whole (universe), whatever has been and whatever shall be. He is also the lord of immortality since (or, when) by food he expands. 3. Such is his ‘greatness, and Purusha is superior to this. All existences are a quarter of him; and three-fourths of him are that which is immortal in the sky. 4. With three quarters Purusha mounted upwards. A quarter of him was again produced here. He was then diffused everywhere over things which eat and things which do not eat. 5. From him was born Viraj, and from Viraj, Purusha. When born, he extended beyond the earth, both behind and before. 6. When the Gods performed a sacrifice with Purusha as the oblation, the spring was its butter, the summer its fuel, and the autumn its (accompanying) offering. 7. This victim Purusha, born in the beginning, they immolated on the sacrificial grass. With him the gods, the Sadhyas, and the rishis sacrificed. 8. From that universal sacrifice were provided curds and butter. It formed those aerial (creatures) and animals both wild and tame. 9. From the universal sacrifice sprang the *rich* and *saman* verses, the *metres* and the *yajush*. 10. From it sprang horses, and all animals with two rows of teeth; kine sprang from it; from it goats and sheep. 11. When (the gods) divided Purusha, into how many parts did they cut him up? What was his mouth? What arms (had he)? What (two objects) are said (to have been) his thighs and feet? 12. The Brahman was his mouth; the Rajanya was made his arms; the being (called) the Vaisya, he was his thighs; the Sudra sprang from his feet. 13. The moon sprang from his soul (manas), the sun from his eye, Indra and Agni from his mouth, and Vayu from his breath. 14. From his navel arose the air, from his head the sky, from his feet the earth, from his ear the (four) quarters; in this manner (the gods) formed the worlds. 15. When the gods, performing sacrifice, bound Purusha as a victim, there were seven sticks (struck up) for it (around the fire), and thrice seven pieces of fuel were made. 16. With sacrifice the gods performed the sacrifice. These were the earliest rites. These great powers have sought the sky, where are the former Sadhyas, gods.”

This hymn is known by its general name Purusha Sukta and is supposed to embody the official doctrine of Varna.

How far do the other Vedas support this theory?

The Sama-Veda has not incorporated the Purusha Sukta among its hymns. Nor does it give any other explanation of the Varna.

The Yajur-Veda has two branches—the *White Yajur-Veda* and the *Black Yajur-Veda*.

The Black Yajur-Veda is known to have three Sanhitas or collection of Mantras, the *Kathaka Sanhita*, the *Maitriyani Sanhita* and *Taitterriya Sanhita*.

The White Yajur-Veda has only one Sanhita which is known as *Vajasaneya Sanhita*.

The Maitriyani Sanhita and the Kathak Sanhita of the Black Yajur-Veda do not make any reference to the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda; nor do they attempt to give any other explanation of the origin of the Varna system.

It is only Taitterriya Sanhita of the Black Yajur-Veda and the Vajasaneya Sanhita of the White Yajur-Veda that have spoken something relating to the Varna system.

The Vajasaneya Sanhita contains one explanation of the origin of the Varna System. The Taitterriya Sanhita on the other hand contains two explanations. There are two things to be noted about these two explanations contained in the Taitterriya Sanhita. The first is that these two do not agree with each other in the least; they are quite different. The second is that one of them agrees completely with that contained in the Vajasaneya Sanhita of the White Yajur-Veda. The following is the text of the Taitterriya Sanhita which may be taken as an independent explanation :

“He (the Vratya) became filled with passions thence sprang the Rajanya”.

“ Let the king to whose house the Vratya who knows this, comes as a guest, cause him to be respected as superior to himself. So doing he does no injury to his royal rank, or to his realm. From him arose the Brahman (Brahman) and the Kshattria (Kshatriya). They said, ‘Into whom shall we enter, etc.’”

The explanation contained in the Vajasaneya Sanhita which tallies with the second¹ explanation given by the Taitterriya Sanhita reads as follows:

“He lauded with one. Living beings were formed. Prajapati was the ruler. He lauded with three: the Brahman was created: Brahmanaspati was the ruler. He lauded with five; existing things were created : Brahmanaspati was the ruler. He lauded with seven; the seven rishis were created; Dhatri was the ruler. He lauded

¹ Khanda IV. Prapathaka III Verses X following-

with nine; the Fathers were created: Aditi was the ruler. He lauded with eleven: the seasons were created: the Artavas were the rulers. He lauded with thirteen: the months were created: the year was the ruler. He lauded with fifteen: the Kshattra (the Kshattriya) was created: Indra was the ruler. He lauded with seventeen: animals were created: Brihaspati was the ruler. He lauded with nineteen; the Sudra and the Arya (Vaisya) were created: day and night were the rulers. He lauded with twenty-one : animals with undivided hoofs were created: Varuna was the ruler. He lauded with twenty-three: small animals were created: Pushan was the ruler. He lauded with twenty-five; wild animals were created: Vayu was the ruler (compare R.V.x. 90, 8). He lauded with twenty-seven: heaven and earth separated: Vasus, Rudras, and Adityas separated after them: they were the rulers. He lauded with twenty-nine: trees were created: Soma was the ruler. He lauded with thirty-one: living beings were created: The first and second halves of the month were the rulers. He lauded with thirty-one; existing things were tranquilized; Prajapati Parameshthin was the ruler.”

Here it should be noted that not only there is no unanimity between the Rig-Veda and the Yajur-Veda but there is no agreement between the two Samhitas of the Yajur-Veda on so important a subject as the origin of the Varnas.

Let us turn to the Atharva-Veda. The Atharva-Veda has also two explanations to give. It incorporates the Purusha Sukta though the order of the verses varies from the order in which they stand in the Rig-Veda. What is however important to note is that the Atharva-Veda is not content with the Purusha Sukta. It offers other explanations also. One such explanation reads as follows¹:

“The Brahman was born the first, with ten heads and ten faces. He first drank the *soma*; he made poison powerless”.

“The Gods were afraid of the Rajanya when he was in the womb. They bound him with bonds when he was in the womb. Consequently this Rajanya is born bound. If he were unborn unbound he would go on slaying his enemies. In regard to whatever Rajanya any one desires that he should born unbound, and should go on slaying his enemies, let him offer for him this Aindra-Birhaspatya oblation. A Rajanya has the character of Indra, and a Brahman is Brihaspati. It is through the Brahman that any one releases the Rajanya from his bond. The golden bond, a gift, manifestly releases from the bond that fetters him.”

¹ Muir's Sanskrit Texts Vol. I pp. 21-22.

The other explanation speaks of people being descended from Manu and is to be found referred to in the following passages¹:

“Prayers and hymns were formerly congregated in the Indra, in the ceremony which Atharvan, father Manu, and Dadhyanch celebrated”.
“Whatever prosperity or succour father Manu obtained by sacrifices, may we gain all that under thy guidance, O Rudra.”

“Those pure remedies of yours, O Maruts, those which are most auspicious, ye vigorous gods, those which are beneficent, those which our father Manu chose, those, and the blessing and succour of Rudra, I desire.”

“That ancient friend hath been equipped with the powers of the mighty (gods). Father Manu has prepared hymns to him, as portals of success to the gods.”

“Sacrifice is Manu, our protecting father.”

“Do ye (gods) deliver, protect and intercede for us; do not lead us far away from the paternal path of Manu.”

“He (Agni) who abides among the offspring of Manu as the invoker (of the gods), is even the lord of these riches.”

“Agni, together with the gods, and the children of Manush, celebrating a multiform sacrifice with hymns, etc.” “Ye gods, Vajas, and Ribhukshans, come to our sacrifice by the path travelled by the gods, that ye, pleasing deities, may institute a sacrifice among these people of Manush on auspicious days”.

“The people of Manush praise in the sacrifices Agni, the invoker.”

“Whenever Agni, lord of the people, kindled, abides gratified among the people of Manush, he repels all Rakshasas.”

Stopping for a moment to take stock so to say of the position it is quite clear that there is no unanimity among the Vedas on the origin of the four Varnas. None of the other Vedas agree with the Rig-Veda that the Brahmin was created from the mouth of the Prajapati, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet.

II

Let us now turn to the writings called the Brahmanas and see what they have to say on this question.

The explanation given by the Sathpatha Brahmana is as follows²:

“(Uttering) ‘bhuh’ Prajapati generated this earth. (Uttering) ‘bhuvah’ he generated the air, and (uttering) ‘svah’, he generated

¹ Muir’s Sanskrit Texts Vol. I pp. 162-165.

² Muir Sanskrit Texts Vol. I p. 17.

the sky. This Universe is co-extensive with these worlds. (The fire) is placed with the whole. Saying '*bhuh*', Prajapati generated the Brahman; (saying) '*bhuvah*' he generated the Kshattria; (and saying) '*svah*' he generated the Vis. The fire is placed with the whole, (saying) '*bhuh*', Prajapati generated himself; (saying) '*bhuvah*' he generated offspring; (saying) '*svah*', he generated animals. This world is so much as self, offspring, and animals. (The fire) is placed with the whole."

The Sathpatha Brahmana also gives another explanation. It reads as follows¹:

"Brahma (here, according to the commentator, existing in the form of Agni, and representing the Brahman caste) was formerly this (universe), one only. Being one, it did not develop. It energetically created an excellent form, the Kshattria, viz., those among the gods who are powers (kshattrani), Indra, Varuna, Soma Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mrityu, Isana. Hence nothing is superior to the Kshattria. Therefore the Brahman sits below the Kshattriya at the Rajasuya-sacrifice; he confers that glory on the Kshattria (the royal power). This, the Brahma, is the source of the Kshattria; hence, although the king attains supremacy, he at the end resorts to the Brahma as his source. Whoever destroys him (the Brahman) destroys his own source. He becomes most miserable, as one who has injured a superior. 24. He did not develop. He created the Vis, those classes of gods who are designated by troops, Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, Visvadevas, Maruts, 25. He did not develop. He created the Sudra class, Pushan. This earth is Pushan; for she nourishes all that exists. 26. He did not develop. He energetically created an excellent form, Justice (Dharma). This is the ruler (kshattria) of the ruler (kshattria), namely justice. Hence nothing is superior to justice. Therefore the weaker seeks (to overcome) the stronger by justice, as by a king. This justice is truth. In consequence they say of a man who speaks truth, 'he speaks justice;' or of a man who is uttering justice, 'he speaks truth.' For this is both of these. 27. This is the Brahma, Kshattria, Vis and Sudra. Through Agni it became Brahma among the gods, the Brahman among men, through the (divine) Kshatriya a (human) Kshattriya, through the (divine) Vaisya a (human) Vaisya, through the (divine) Sudra a (human) Sudra. Wherefore it is in Agni among the gods and in a Brahman among men, that they seek after an abode."

The Taittiriya Brahmana offers three explanations. First is in the following terms²:

¹ Muir Sanskrit Text Vol. I p. 20.

² Muir I p. 17.

“This entire (universe) has been created by Brahma. Men say that the Vaisya class was produced from Rick-verses. They say that the Yajur-Veda is the womb from which the Kshattriya was born. The Sama-Veda is the source from which the Brahmins sprang. This word the ancients declared to the ancients.”

The second says¹:

“The Brahman caste is sprung from the gods; the Sudra from the Asuras”.

The third is as follows²:

“Let him at his will milk out with a wooden dish. But let not a Sudra milk it out. For this Sudra has sprung from non-existence. They say that which a Sudra milks out is no oblation. Let not a Sudra milk out the Agnihotra. For they do not purify that. When that passes beyond the filter, then it is an oblation”.

Again looking at the testimony of the Brahmanas how far do they support the Purusha Sukta? Not one of them do.

III

The next thing would be to see what the Smritis have to offer some explanation of the origin of the Varna system. It is worthwhile taking note of them. This is what Manu has to say on the subject³.

“He (the self-existent) having felt desire, and willing to create various living beings from his own body, first created the waters, and threw into them a seed. 9. That seed became a golden egg, of lustre equal to the Sun; in it he himself was born as a Brahma, the parent of all the worlds. 10. The waters are called *narah*, for they are sprung from Nara; and as they were his first sphere of motion he is therefore called Narayana. 11. Produced from the imperceptible eternal, existent and non-existent, cause, the male (Purusha) is celebrated in the world as Brahma. 12. After dwelling for a year in the egg, the glorious being, himself, by his own contemplation, split it in twain.”

“That the worlds might be peopled, he caused the Brahman, the Kshattriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra to issue from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet. 32. Having divided his own body into two parts, the lord (Brahma became), with the half of male (purusha), and with the half, a female; and in her he created Viraj. 33. Know, O most excellent twice-born men, that I, whom that male, (Purusha) Viraj, himself am the creator of all this world.

¹ Muir's Sanskrit Texts Vol. I p. 21.

² *Ibid* p. 21.

³ *Ibid* pp. 36-37.

34. Desiring to produce living creatures, I performed very arduous devotion and first created ten Maharshis, Great rishis, lords of living beings, 35. viz., Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Prachetas, Vasishtha, Bhrigu, and Narada. 36. They, endowed with great energy, created other seven Manus, gods, and abodes of gods, and Maharshis of boundless might; 37. Yakshas. Rakshases, Pisachas, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Asuras, Nagas, Serpents, great birds, and the different classes of pitris; 38. Lightnings, thunderbolts, clouds, portentous atmospheric sounds, comets, and various luminaries; 39. Kinnars, apes, fishes, different sorts of birds, cattle, deer, men, beasts with two rows of teeth; 40. small and large reptiles mouths; lice, flies, fleas, all gadflies, and gnats, and motionless things of different sorts. 41. Thus by my appointment, and by the force of devotion, was all this World both motionless and moving, created by those great beings, according to the (previous) actions of each creature.”

There is also another view expressed by Manu in his Smriti as to the basic reasons for dividing men into four classes¹ :

“I shall now declare succinctly in order the states which the soul reaches by means of each of these qualities. 40. Souls endowed with the *Satlua* quality attain to godhead: those having the rajas quality become men; whilst those characterized by tamas always become beasts—such is the threefold destination..... 43. Elephants, horses, Sudras and contemptible Mlenchhas, lions, tigers, and boars form the middle dark condition..... 46. Kings, Kshattriyas, a King’s priests (purohitah), and men whose chief occupation is the war of words, compose the middle condition of passion.... 48. Devotees, ascetics, Brahmans, the deities borne on aerial cars, constellations, and Daityas, constitute the lowest condition of goodness. 49. Sacrificing priests, rishis, Gods, the Vedas, the celestial luminaries, years, the fathers, the Sadhyas, form the second condition of goodness. 50. Brahma, the creators, righteousness, the Great one (*mahat*) the Unapparent One (*avyakta*) compose the highest condition of goodness.”

Manu of course agrees with the Rig-Veda. But his view is of no use for comparison. It is not original. He is merely repeating the Rig-Veda.

IV

It will be interesting to compare with these views those contained in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

¹ Muir’s Sanskrit Texts Vol. I p. 41.

The Ramayana says that the four Varnas are the offspring of Manu, the daughter of Daksha and the wife of Kasyapa¹.

“Listen while I declare to you from the commencement all the Prajapatis (lord of creatures) who came into existence in the earliest time. Kardama was the first, then Vokrita, Sessa, Samsraya, the energetic Bahuputra, Sthanu, Marichi, Atri, the strong Kratu, Pulastya, Angiras, Prachetas, Pulaha, Daksha, then Vivasvat, Arishtanemi, and the glorious Kasyapa, who was the last. The Prajapati Daksha is famed to have had sixty daughters. Of these Kasyapa took in marriage eight elegant maidens, Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kalaka, Tamra, Krodhavasa, Manu and Anala. Kasyapa pleased, then said to these maids, ‘ye shall bring forth sons like me, preservers of the three worlds. Aditi, Diti, Danu and Kalaka assented; but the others did not agree. Thirty-three gods were born by Aditi, the Adityas, Vasus, Rudras, and the two Asvins. Manu (wife) of Kasyapa, produced men—Brahmans, Kshattriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. ‘Brahmans were born from the mouth, Kshattriyas from the breast, Vaisyas from the thighs, and Sudras from the feet,’ So says the Veda. Anala gave birth to all trees with pure fruits.”

Strange, very strange that Valmiki should have credited the creation of the four Varnas to Kasyapa instead of to Prajapati. His knowledge was evidently based only on hearsay. It is clear he did not know what the Vedas had said.

Now the Mahabharata gives four different explanations in four different places. The first runs as follows:

“Born all with splendour, like that of great rishis, the ten sons of Prachetas, reputed to have been virtuous and holy; and by them the glorious beings were formerly burnt up by fire springing from their mouths. From them was born Daksha Prachetas, and from Daksha, the parent, of the world (were produced), these creatures. Cohabiting with Virini, the Muni Daksha begot a thousand sons like himself, famous for their religious observances, to whom Narada taught the doctrine of final liberation, the unequalled knowledge of the Sankhya. Desirous of creating offspring, the Prajapati Daksha next formed fifty daughters of whom he gave ten to Dharma, thirteen to Kasyapa, and twenty-seven, devoted to the regulation of time, to Indu (Soma) on Dakshayani, the most excellent of his thirteen wives, Kasyapa, the son of Marichi, begot the Adityas, headed by Indra and distinguished by their energy, and also Vivasvat. To Vivasvat was born a son, the mighty Yama Vaivasvata. To Martanda (i.e. Vivasvat, the Sun) was born the wise

¹ Muir’s Sanskrit Texts Vol. I pp. 116-117.

and mighty Manu, and also the renowned Yama, his (Manu's) younger brother. Righteous was this wise Manu, on whom a race was founded. Hence this (family) of men became known as the race of Manu. Brahmans, Kshattriyas, and other men sprang from this Manu. From him O King, came the Brahman conjoined with the Kshatriya."

The theory propounded here is very much the same as that contained in the Ramayana with this difference, namely, the Mahabharata makes Manu, the progenitor of the four Varnas and secondly it does not say that the four Varnas were born from the different parts of Manu.

The second explanation¹ given by the Mahabharata follows what is given in the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda. It reads thus:

"The King should appoint to be his royal priest a man who will protect the good, and restrain the wicked. On this subject they relate this following ancient story of a conversation between Pururavas the son of Ila and Matarisvan (Vayu, the windgod). Pururavas said: "You must explain to me whence the Brahman, and whence the (other) three castes were produced, and whence the superiority (of the first) arises." Matarisvan answered: "The Brahman was created from Brahma's mouth, the Kshatriya from his arms, the Vaisya from his thighs, while for the purpose of serving these three castes was produced the fourth class, the Sudra, fashioned from his feet. The Brahman, as soon as born, becomes the lord of all beings upon the earth, for the purpose of protecting the treasure of righteousness. Then (the creator) constituted the Kshatriya the controller of the earth, a second Yama to bear the rod, for the satisfaction of the people. And it was Brahma's ordinance that the Vaisya should sustain these three classes with money and grain, and that the Sudra should serve them." The son of Ila then enquired: "Tell me, Vayu to whom the earth, with its wealth rightfully belongs, to the Brahman or the Kshatriya?" Vayu replied: "All this, whatever exists in the world is the Brahman's property by right of primogeniture; this is known to those who are skilled in the laws of duty. It is his own which the Brahman eats, puts on, and bestows. He is the chief of all the castes, the first-born and the most excellent. Just as a woman when she has lost her (first) husband, takes her brother in law for a second; so the Brahman is thy first resource in calamity; afterwards another may arise".

The third view is expounded in the Shantiparva of the Mahabharata²:

¹ Muir's Vol. I p.

² *Ibid* pp. 139-40.

Bhrigu replied: 'Brahma thus formerly created the Prajapatis, penetrated by his own energy, and in splendour equalling the sun and fire. The lord then formed truth, righteousness austere fervour, and the eternal Veda (or sacred science), virtuous practice, and purity for (the attainment of) heaven. He also formed the Gods, Danavas, Gandharvas, Daityas, Asuras, Maharagas, Yakshas, Rakshasas, Nagas, Pisachas, and men, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, as well as all other classes (varna) of beings. The colour (varna) of the Brahmans was white; that of the Kshatriyas red; that of the Vaishyas yellow, and that of the Sudras black.' Bharadvaja here rejoins: 'If the caste (varna) of the four classes is distinguished by their colour (varna), then a confusion of all the castes is observable. Desire, anger, fear, cupidity, grief, apprehension, hunger, fatigue, prevail over us all, by what then, is caste discriminated? Sweat, urine, excrement, phlegm, bile and blood (are common to all) the bodies of all decay; by what then is caste discriminated? There are innumerable kinds of things moving and stationary how is the class (varna) of these various objects to be determined?' Bhrigu replies: "There is no difference of castes":'

The fourth explanation is also contained in the same Shantiparva. It says:

"Bharadvaja again enquires: 'What is that in virtue of which a man is a Brahman, a Kshatriya, a Vaisya, or a Sudra; tell me, O most eloquent Brahman rishi'. Bhrigu replies: 'He who is pure, consecrated by the natal and other ceremonies, who has completely studied the Veda, lives in the practice of the six ceremonies, performs perfectly the rites of purification, who eats the remains of oblations, is attached to his religious teacher, is constant in religious observances, and devoted to truth. — is called a Brahman. He in whom are seen truth, liberality inoffensiveness, harmlessness, modesty, compassion, and austere fervour—is declared to be a Brahman. He who practises the duty arising out of the kingly office, who is addicted to the study of the Veda, and who delights in giving and receiving, is called a Kshatriya. He who readily occupies himself with cattle, who is devoted to agriculture and acquisition, who is pure, and is perfect in the study of the Veda,—is denominated a Vaisya. He who is habitually addicted to all kinds of food, performs all kinds of work, who is unclean, who has abandoned the Veda, and does not practise pure observances,—is traditionally called a Sudra. And this (which I have stated) is the mark of a Sudra, and it is not found in a Brahman: (such) a Sudra will remain a Sudra, while the Brahman (who so acts) will be no Brahman."

Except in one place the Mahabharata gives no support to the Rig-Vedic origin of the Varna System.

V

Let us inquire what the Puranas have to say on the origin of the Varna System.

To begin with the Vishnu Purana. There are three theories propounded in the Vishnu Purana on the origin of the Chaturvarna.

According to one the origin is to be ascribed to Manu. Says the Vishnu Purana¹:

“Before the mundane egg existed the divine Brahma Hiranyagarbha, the eternal originator of all worlds, who was the form of essence of Brahma, who consists of the divine Vishnu, who again is identical with Rik, Yajush, Saman and Atharva Vedas. From Brahma’s right thumb was born the Prajapati Daksha; Daksha had a daughter Aditi; from her was born Vivasvat; and from him sprang Manu. Manu had sons called Ikshvaku, Nriga, Dhrista, Saryati, Narishanta, Pramsu, Nabhagandishta, Karusha and Prishadhra. From Karusha the Karushas, Kshattriyas of great power, were descended. Nabhaga, the son of Nedishta, became a Vaisya.”

This explanation is incomplete. It only explains the origin of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. It does not explain the origin of Brahmanas and Sudras. There is also another and a different version in the Vishnu Purana. It says:

“Desirous of a son, Manu sacrificed to Mitra and Varuna; but in consequence of a wrong invocation through an irregularity of the hotri (priest) a daughter called Illa was born. Then through the favour of Mitra and Varuna she bore to Manu a son called Sudyumna. But being again changed into a female through the wrath of Isvara (Mahadeva) she wandered near the hermitage of Budha the son of Soma (the Moon); who becoming enamoured of her had by her a son called Pururavas. After his birth, the God who is formed of sacrifice of the Rik, Yajush, Saman, and Atharva Vedas, of all things, of mind, of nothing, he who is in the form of the sacrificial Male, was worshipped by the rishis of infinite splendour who desired that Sudyumna should recover his manhood. Through the fervour of this God Ila became again Sudhumna.”

“According to the Vishnu Purana, Atri was the son of Brahma, and the father of Soma (the Moon), whom Brahma installed as the

¹ Muir I pp. 220-221.

sovereign of plants, Brahmans and stars. After celebrating the Rajasuya sacrifice. Soma became intoxicated with pride, and carried up Tara (Star), the wife of Brihaspati, the preceptor of the gods, whom, although admonished and entreated by Brahma, the gods, and rishis, he refused to restore. Soma's part was taken by Usanas; and Rudra, who had studied under Angiras, aided Brihaspati. A fiery conflict ensued between the two sides, supported respectively by the gods and the Daityas, etc. Brahma interposed, and compelled Soma to restore Tara to her husband. She had, however, in the meantime become pregnant and bore a son Budha (the planet Mercury), of whom, when strongly urged, she acknowledged Soma to be the father. Pururavas, as has been already mentioned, was the son of this Budha by Illa, the daughter of Manu.

"Pururavas had six sons, of whom the eldest was Ayus. Ayus had five sons: Nahusha, Kshattravridha, Rambha, Raji, and Anenas."

"Kshattravridha had a son Sunahotra, who had three sons, Kasa, Lesa, and Gritsamada. From the last sprang Saunaka, *who originated the system of four castes*. Kasa had a son Kasiraja, of whom again Dirghatamas was the son as Dhanvantari was Dirghatamas."

The third version ascribes¹ the origin to Brahma. It says:

"Maitreya² says: 'You have described to me the Arvaksrotas, or human creation; declare to me, O Brahman, in detail the manner in which Brahma formed it. Tell me how and with what qualities, he created the castes, and what are traditionally reputed to be the functions of the Brahmans and others'. Parasara replies: 3. When, true to his design, Brahma became desirous to create the world, creatures in whom goodness (*sattva*) prevailed sprang from his mouth: 4. Others in whom passion (*rajas*) predominated came from his breast; other in whom both passion and darkness (*tamas*) were strong, proceeded from his thigh; 5. Others he created from his feet, whose chief characteristic was darkness. Of these was composed the system of four castes, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, who had respectively issued from his mouth, breast, thighs, and feet."

Herein the Vishnu Purana has given the Rig-Vedic theory supported by the Sankhya Philosophy.

In the Harivamsa are to be found two theories. One³ upholds the theory of the origin of the Varnas as being born from one of the

¹ Muir's Sanskrit Texts Vol. I pp. 61-62.

² The Vishnu Purana is cast in the form of a dialogue between Maitreya the student who asks questions and Rishi Parashara who answers his questions.

³ Muir's Sanskrit Texts Vol. I p. 227.

descendents of Manu as the stock of descent than the one mentioned by the Vishnu Purana:

“The son of Gritsamada was Sunaka, from whom sprang the Saunakas, Brahmanas, Kshattriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras.”

“Vitatha was the father of five sons, Suhotra, Suhotri, Gaya, Garga, and the great Kapila. Suhotra had two sons, the exalted Kasaka, and King Gritsamati. The sons of the latter were Brahmans, Kshattriyas and Vaisyas.”

The other version speaks of their being formed by Vishnu who sprang from Brahma and had become Prajapati Daksha and is as follows¹:

“Janmejaya² says: ‘I have heard, O Brahman the (description of the) Brahma Yuga, the first of the ages. I desire also to be accurately informed both summarily, and in detail, about the age of the Kshattriyas, with its numerous observances, illustrated as it was by sacrifice, and described, as it has been by men skilled in the art of narration.’ Vaisamapayana replied. ‘I shall describe to you that age revered for its sacrifices and distinguished for its various works of liberality, as well as for its people. Emancipation, practising unobstructed ceremonies, both in action and in abstinence from action constantly intent upon Brahma, united to Brahman as the highest object,—Brahmans glorious and sanctified in their conduct, leading a life of continence, disciplined by the knowledge of Brahman,—Brahmans complete in their observances, perfect in knowledge, and contemplative,—when at the end of a thousand yugas, their majesty was full, these Munis became involved in the dissolution of the world. Then Vishnu, sprung from Brahma, removed beyond the sphere of sense, absorbed in contemplation, became the Prajapati Daksha, and formed numerous creatures. The Brahmans, beautiful (or, dear to Soma), were formed from an imperishable (*akshara*), the Kshattriyas from a perishable (*kshara*), element, the Vaisyas from alteration, the Sudras from a modification of smoke. While Vishnu was thinking upon the castes (*varnan*) Brahmans were formed with white, red, yellow, and blue colour (*varnaih*). Hence in the world men have become divided into castes, being of four descriptions, Brahmans, Kshattriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, one in form, distinct in their duties, two-footed, very wonderful, full of energy(?), skilled in expedients in all their occupations. Rites are declared to be prescribed by the Vedas for the three (highest) castes. By that contemplation practised by the being

1 Muir’s Vol. I pp. 152-153.

2 The Harivamsa is a dialogue between Janmejaya and Vaishampayan.

sprung from Brahma—by that practised in his character as Vishnu—the Lord Prachetasa (Daksha), i.e. Vishnu the great contemplator (Yogin), passed through his wisdom and energy from that state of meditation into the sphere of works. Next the Sudras, produced from extinction, are destitute of rites. Hence they are not entitled to be admitted to the purificatory ceremonies, nor does sacred science belong to them. Just as the cloud of smoke which rises from the fire on the friction of the fuel, and is dissipated, is of no service in the sacrificial rite, so too the Sudras wandering over the earth, are altogether (useless for purposes of sacrifice) owing to their birth, their mode of life devoid of purity and their want of the observances prescribed in the Veda.”

The Bhagwat¹ Purana has also an explanation as to the origin of the Varnas, It says:

“At the end of many thousand years the living soul which resides in time, action, and natural quality gave life to that lifeless egg floating on the water. Purusha then having burst the egg, issued from it was a thousand thighs, feet, arms, eyes, faces and heads. With his members the sages fashion the worlds, the seven lower worlds with his loins etc., and the seven upper worlds with his groin, etc. The Brahman was the mouth of Purusha, the Kshattriya his arms, the Vaishya was born from the thighs, the Sudra from the feet of the divine being. The earth was formed from his feet, the air from his navel; the heaven by the heart, and the mahaloka by the breast of the mighty one.”

Lastly the Vayu Purana. What does it say? It takes up the theory of Manu as the originator of the Varna System.

“The son of Gritsamada was Sunaka, from whom sprang Saunaka. In his family were born Brahmanas, Kshattriyas, Vaisya, and Sudras, twice-born men with various functions.”

VI

What a chaos? Why could the Brahmins not give a uniform, and consistent explanation of the origin of the four Varnas?

On the issue of who created them, there is no uniformity. The Rig-Veda says the four Varnas were created by Prajapati. It does not mention which Prajapati. One would like to know which Prajapati it was who created the four Varnas. For there are so many Prajapatis. But even on the point of creation by Prajapati there is no agreement. One says they were created by Brahman. Another says they were created by Kassyapa. The third says they were created by Manu.

¹ Muir's Sanskrit Texts Vol. I p. 156.

On the issue how many Varnas, the creator—whoever he was— created, again there is no uniformity. The Rig-Veda says four Varnas were created. But other authorities say only two Varnas were created, some say Brahmans and Kshatriyas and some say Brahmana and Shudras.

On the issue the relations intended by the creator for binding together the four Varnas the Rig-Veda lays down the rule of graded inequality based on the importance of the part of the creation from which the particular Varna was born. But the white Yajur-Veda denies this theory of the Rig-Veda. So also the Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. Indeed the Hari Vansha goes to the length of saying that the Shudras are twice born.

This chaos seems to be the result of concoction of the theory of Chaturvarna which the Brahmins quietly singled into the Rig-Veda contrary to established traditions?

What was the purpose, what was the motive of the Brahmins who concocted this theory?

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