

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.”

Lastly the Bhagwat Purana¹:

“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”.

The Vayu Purana takes up the theory of Manu but says:

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

What does this survey show ? If it shows anything it shows what a chaotic state has been created by the Brahmans in trying to explain the origin of the Varna system. There is no uniformity or consistency in the explanations they have offered. One and the same authority gives a variety of explanations. One and the same authority gives explanations some of which are mythical, some of which are mystical and rationalistic all intended to serve the same purpose namely to explain the origin of the Varna system.

The Vedas attempt to explain the Varnas as having arisen from Purusha, from Manu, from Prajapati, from Vratya and from Soma.

The Brahmanas show a marked divergence from the Vedas. They do not acknowledge Purusha, Manu, Vratya or Soma as the originators of the four varnas. They vacillate between Prajapati and Brahma

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

which is a new importation. The Taittiriya Brahmana sports with an altogether new theory. It speaks of Brahmins born of Gods and Sudras from Asuras.

The Manu Smriti offers two explanation mythological and rational. The mythological explanations ascribes the origin to Brahma and the rational ascribes it to the constitutional make up of the individual. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas seem to be in support of the theory of Manu as the progenitor of the four Varnas. In the handling of the theme of Manu they have made a complete mess of him. In the Ramayana this Manu is a female a daughter of Daksha and wife of Kasyappa. In the Mahabharata Manu is a male and not a female. He is the son of Vivasvat who is the son of Kasyappa. In the Mahabharata the wife of Kasyappa is not Manu but is Dakshayani who is also said to be the daughter of Daksha. The Puranas while expounding the theory of Manu as the originator of the four varnas have introduced into it many divergent elements. The Vishnu Purana instead of ascribing the origin to Manu proceeds to ascribe it to his sons. But in hurry explains the origin of the two Varnas only, namely, Brahmins and Sudras from two of Manu's eight sons and forgets to give an explanation of the two other varnas. In another place the same Vishnu Purana expounds another theory by which origin of the four Varnas through Manu in the female line of his daughter Ila. According to the second theory Ila married Pururavas who had six sons the eldest of whom was Ayus. From Ayus to Kshatravidha, from him Sunahotra, from him Gritsamada. The four varnas were originated from Gritsamada. The Vayu Purana does not admit this. It says that the four varnas were born from Saunaka the grandson of Gritsamada. The Harivamsa in one place agrees with the Vishnu Purana that the progenitor was Gritsamada with this difference that the Sudras did not spring but from whom gives no explanation. In another place it says that the four varnas sprang from Sunaka the son of Gritsamada thus differing from itself, from the Vishnu Purana and from the Vayu Purana.

These explanations are like effusions of the imbeciles. They show how hard the Brahmins were put to for the defence of the Varna system. The question is why were the Brahmins not able to give a consistent and uniform unimpeachable, convincing and rational explanation of the Varna system of which they have been such strong protagonists ?

Of these numerous explanations there are two on which the Varna system is defended by the Brahmins of today.

The first is the origin of the four Varnas from Purusha the theory that is propounded in the Purusha Sukta of the Rig-Veda. It is not a historical explanation. It would be something if it were mythological for mythology is history even if it is history in hyperbole. But it is not. The explanation is purely mystic. It is a fantastic dream of a troubled mind. That is why it was never regarded as the explanation and that is why there were so many other rival explanations. That it was treated with scant courtesy even by the Vedic writers is obvious from two circumstances. In the first place it occurs in the miscellaneous portion of the Rig-Veda. In the second place it does not occur in the Kathak and Maitreyani Sanhita of the White Yajur-Veda and the Taitteriya Sanhitas of the Black Yajur-Veda do not adopt it. The Sam-Veda incorporates only 5 Mantras of the Purusha Sukta from the Rig-Veda and what is important is that in adopting these five Mantras omit those which speak of the four Varnas springing from the four parts of the body of the Purusha. It is of course a very late composition and has been interpolated after all the four Vedas had taken their present shape. But apart from that it has all the marks showing its authors were not very sure of their explanation carrying conviction. It is probably an allegory, figurative narration which the Brahmins attempted to convert into a literal statement of hard fact. It does not solve the riddle. On the contrary it creates a riddle— which is, why were the Brahmins interested in supporting the theory of Chaturvarna.

The rational explanation has behind it the authority of the Bhagwat Geeta. Krishna, the God of the Hindus, explains that he created the system of Chaturvarna and propounds the theory that it is a system of difference of Guna: innate virtue. This theory of difference of Guna is derived from the Sankhya Philosophy of Kapila. Krishna offers this explanation of Chaturvarna in a commanding spirit as though it was incontrovertible. The Sankhya Philosophy no doubt asserts as a fundamental proposition that matter has got three Gunas-Raj, Tama and Satva. Matter is not inert. It is instable equilibrium when all the three Gunas are coequal in their power. Matter becomes dynamic when the equilibrium is disturbed when one Guna becomes masterful over others. Krishna was of course very clever in seeking to give scientific explanation of the Varna system by applying the Sankhya Theory of Guna dharma. But in doing so Krishna has really made a fool of himself. He did not realize that there are four Varnas and three Gunas and whatever ingenuity he might claim to have he could not account for the four Varnas with a theory which did not require more than three Gunas. Here again what appears to be a rational explanation is an absurd explanation. It does not solve the riddle. It

creates one. Why were the Brahmins fighting so hard to justify the Chaturvarna ?

II

The Ashram Dharma divides the life of an individual into four stages (1) Brahmcharya, (2) Grahasthashram, (3) Vanaprastha and (4) Sannyas. The state of Brahmacharya has both a *de jure* and *de facto* connotation. Its *de facto* connotation is that it means an unmarried state of life. Its *de jure* connotation means the stage of study under a teacher. Grahasthashram is the stage of a householder—a stage of married family life. The stage of Sannyas is a stage of renunciation of civic rights and responsibilities. It is a stage of civic death. The stage of Vanaprastha is in between Grahasthashram and Sannyas. It is a stage in which one belongs to society but is bound to live away from society. As the name implies it prescribes dwelling in forest.

The Hindus believe that this institution of Ashram Dharma is as old as that of the Varna Dharma. They call the two by a joint name of Varnashram Dharma as though they were one and integral, and the two together form the steelframe of the Hindu Society.

To begin with it would be better to have a full understanding of the Ashram Dharma before inquiring into its origin and its purpose and its peculiarities. The best source for an exposition of the Ashram system is the Manu Smriti from which the following relevant extracts are reproduced:

Ch. II-36. In the eighth year after conception, one should perform the initiation (upanayana) of a Brahmana, in the eleventh after conception (that) of a Kshatriya, but in the twelfth that of a Vaisya.

Ch. II-168. A twice-born man who, not having studied the Veda, applies himself to other (and wordly study), soon falls, even while living, to the condition of a Sudra and his descendants (after him).

Ch. III-1. The vow of the three Vedas under a teacher must be kept for thirty-six years or for half that time, or for a quarter, or until the (student) has perfectly learnt them.

Ch. III-2. Who has studied in due order the three Vedas, or two, or even one only, without breaking the (rule of) studentship, shall enter the order of householder.

Ch. VI-8. The student, the householder, the hermit, and the ascetic, these (constitute) four separate orders, which all spring from (the order of) householders.

Ch. VI-88. But all (or) even (any of) these orders, assumed successively in accordance with the Institutes (of the sacred law), lead the Brahmana who acts by the preceding (rules) to the highest state.

Ch. VI-89. And in accordance with the precepts of the Veda and of the Smriti, the housekeeper is declared to be superior to all of them; for he supports the other three.

Ch. VI-1. A twice-born Snataka, who has thus lived according to the law in the order of householders, may, taking a firm resolution and keeping his organs in subjection, dwell in the forest, duly (observing the rules given below).

Ch. VI-2. When a householder sees his (skin) wrinkled and (his hair) white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest.

Ch. VI-33. But having thus passed the third part of (a man's natural term of) life in the forest, he may live as an ascetic during the fourth part of his existence, after abandoning all attachment to worldly objects.

Ch. VI-34. He who after passing from order to order, after offering sacrifices and subduing his senses, becomes, tired with giving alms and offerings of food, an ascetic, gains bliss after death.

Ch. VI-35. When he has paid the three debts, let him apply his mind to (the attainment of) final liberation; he who seeks it without having paid (his debts) sinks downwards.

Ch. VI-36. Having studied the Vedas in accordance with the rule, having begot sons according to the sacred law, and having offered sacrifices according to his ability, he may direct his mind to (the attainment of) final liberation.

Ch. VI-37. A twice-born man who seeks final liberation, without having studied the Vedas, without having begotten sons and without having offered sacrifices, sinks downwards."

For these rules it is clear that according to Manu there are three features of the Ashram Dharma. First is that it is not open to Shudras and Women. The second is Brahmacharya which is compulsory, so is Grahasthashram. Vanaprastha and Sannyas are not compulsory. The third is that one must pass from one stage to another in the order in which they stand namely first Brahmacharya, then Grahasthashram, then Vanaprastha and lastly Sannyas. No one can omit one and enter the next stage.

Judging what Manu says in the light of history there are several questions which arise. Referring to the Vedas the theory of stages in life is quite unknown. The Vedas speak of Brahmachari. But there is nothing to show that Brahmacharya was regarded as an inescapable stage in life. There is reference to 'Yatis' in the Rig-Veda. That again was not regarded as a stage in life. Indeed unlike the Sannyasi the Yati in the Rig-Vedic times is a hated institution. In fact there are many hymns in the Rig-Veda where Indra is spoken of as having thrown the Yatis to the wolves. Why did the Brahmins formulate this theory of the four Ashramas? This is the first riddle about the Ashram Dharma.

The second riddle relates to the order of sequence among the four Ashramas. Now there is no doubt that there was a time when it was open to a Brahmachari to enter any of the three Ashrams. He may become a Grahasthashrami or he may at once become a Sannyasi without becoming a Grahasthashrami. Compare what the authors of the Dharma Sutras have to say on the point.

Vashishta Dharma Sutra says¹ :

"There are four orders, viz. (that of) the student, (that of) the householder, (that of) the hermit, and (that of) the ascetic."

"A man who has studied one, two, or three Vedas without violating the rules of studentship, may enter any of these (orders), whichever he pleases."

Gautama Dharma Sutra says²:

"Some (declare, that) he (who has studied the Veda) may make his choice (which) among the orders (he is going to enter)."

"(The four orders are, that of) the student (that of) the householder, (that of) the ascetic (Bhikshu), (and that of) the hermit in the woods (vaikhanasa).

Why did Manu remove the option and make the married state an obligatory state, why did he make the married state a condition precedent to the stage of hermit and the stage of hermit a condition precedent to the stage of a Sannyasi?

If the four stages of life have been devised to serve some important end it is difficult to understand why the two classes Shudras and women were excluded? The Shudras and women can only be householders according to the scheme of Manu. Why can they not be Brahmachari, Vanaprasthi or Sannyasi? What harm can there be either to them or to society if the Ashram Dharma was open to them ?

There are other riddles about the system of Ashram Dharma.

¹ S.B.E. Vol. XIV. p. 40. Chapter VII. verses 1, 2, 3.

² S.B.E. Vol. II, p. 192. Chapter III. verses 1, 2.

First relates to the distinctions which Manu makes among the Brahmacharis.¹

Ch. II-41. Let students according to the order (of their castes), wear (as upper dresses) the skins of black antelopes, spotted deer, and he-goats, and (lower garments) made of a hemp, flax or wool.¹

Ch. II-42. The girdle of a Brahmana shall consist of a triple cord of Munga grass, smooth and soft; (that) of a Kshatriya, of a bowstring, made of Murva fibres; (that) of a Vaisya, of hempen threads.

Ch. II-43. If Munga grass (and so forth) be not procurable, (the girdles) may be made of Kusa, Asmantaka, and Balbaga (fibres), with a single threefold knot, or with three or five (knots according to the custom of the family).

Ch. II-44. The sacrificial string of a Brahmana shall be made of cotton, (shall be) twisted to the right, (and consist) of three threads, that of a Kshatriya of hempen threads, (and) that of a Vaisya of woolen threads.

Ch. II-45. A Brahmana shall (carry), according to the sacred law, a staff of Bilva or Palasa a Kshatriya, or Vata or Khadira; (and) a Vaisya, of Pilu or Udumbara.

Ch. II-46. The staff of a Brahmana shall be made of such length as to reach the end of his hair; that of a Kshatriya, to reach his forehead; (and) that of a Vaisya, to reach (the tip of his) nose.

Ch. II-47. Let all the staves be straight, without a blemish, handsome to look at, not likely to terrify men, with their bark perfect, unhurt by fire.

Ch. II-48. Having taken a staff according to his choice, having worshipped the sun and walked round the fire, turning his right hand towards it, (the student) should beg alms according to the prescribed rule.

Ch. II-49. An initiated Brahmana should beg, beginning (his request with the word) lady (bhavati); a Kshatriya, placing (the word) Lady in the middle, but a Vaisya placing it at the end (of the formula).

The Brahmacharis all belong to the same class, namely they are twiceborn. Why should it be necessary to make a distinction in the material of their upper garment? Why should it be necessary to make a distinction in the material of their sacred thread? Why should it be necessary to make a distinction in their staffs? Why should it be necessary to make a distinction in the syntax of the formula for begging alms? Why should a Brahman Brahmachari say "Bhagvati Bhikshyam Dehi"? Why should a Kshatriya Brahmachari say "Bhikshyam Bhavati Dehi"? Why should a Vaishya Brahmachari say "Bhikshyam dehi bhavati"?

¹ S.B.E. Vol. XXV Manu pp. 37-39.

The Ashram Dharma is a peculiar institution of the Hindus and they are very proud of it. It is true that it has no parallel anywhere. But it is equally true that it is without any merit. Compulsory Brahmacharya appears very attractive since it has the look of compulsory education for children. It was certainly not universal. Shudras and women were excluded from it. Having regard to the fact that the Shudras and women form nearly 9/10ths of the Hindu Society it is obvious that the scheme was the result of cunningness rather than wisdom. It certainly was tainted by discrimination against the masses. It was scheme for the education of the governing classes. Compulsory marriage to say the least is a most stupid rule that can be imagined. To compel everyone to marry irrespective of money or health is to open the road to ruination both for the individual and the nation unless it is accompanied by a scheme whereby the state undertakes to guarantee subsistence to everybody. The most non-sensical stages are those of Vanaprastha and the Sannyasi. Let me quote the rules regarding these two.

The following is the code prescribed by Manu for the Vanaprastha¹:

Ch. VI-3. Abandoning all food raised by cultivation, and all his belongings, he may depart into the forest, either committing his wife to his sons, or accompanied by her.

Ch. VI-4. Taking with him the sacred fire and the implements required for domestic (sacrifices) he may go forth from the village into the forest and reside there, duly controlling his senses.

Ch. VI-5. Let him offer those five great sacrifices according to the rule, with various kinds of pure food fit for ascetics, or with herbs, roots and fruit.

Ch. VI-6. Let him wear a skin or a tattered garment; let him bathe in the evening or in the morning and let him always wear (his hair in) braids, the hair on his body, his beard, and his nails (being unclipped).

Ch. VI-7. Let him perform the Bali-offering with such food as he eats, and give alms according to his ability; let him honour those who come to his hermitage with alms consisting of water roots and fruit.

Ch. VI-8. Let him be always industrious in privately reciting the Veda; let him be patient of hardships, friendly (towards all), of collected mind, ever liberal and never a receiver of gifts, and compassionate towards all living creatures.

Ch. VI-9. Let him offer, according to the law, the Agnihotra with three sacred fires, never omitting the new-moon and full-moon sacrifices at the proper time.

¹ S.B.E. VOL XXV, pp. 199-203.

Ch. VI-10. Let him also offer the Nakshatreshti, the Agrayana, and the Katurmasya (sacrifices), as well as the Turayana and likewise the Dakshayana, in due order.

Ch. VI-11. With pure grains, fit for ascetics, which grow in spring and in autumn, and which he himself has collected, let him severally prepare the sacrificial cakes (purodasa) and the boiled messes (karu), as the law directs.

Ch. VI-12. Having offered those most pure sacrificial viands, consisting of the produce of the forest, he may use the remainder for himself, (mixed with) salt prepared by himself.

Ch. VI-13. Let him eat vegetables that grow on dry land or in water, flowers, roots and fruits, the productions of pure trees, and oils extracted from forest fruits.

Ch. VI-14. Let him avoid honey, flesh and mushrooms growing on the ground (for elsewhere, the vegetables called) Bhustrina, and Sigruka, and the Sleshmantaka fruit.

Ch. VI-15. Let him throw away in the month of Asvina the food of ascetics, which he formerly collected, likewise his worn-out clothes and his vegetables, roots, and fruits.

Ch. VI-16. Let him not eat anything (grown on) ploughed (land), though it may have been thrown away by somebody, nor roots and fruit grown in a village, though (he may be) tormented (by hunger).

Ch. VI-17. He may eat either what has been cooked with fire, or what has been ripened by time; he either may use a stone for grinding, or his teeth may be his mortar.

Ch. VI-18. He may either at once (after his daily meal) cleanse (his vessel for collecting food), or lay up a store sufficient for a month, or gather what suffices for six months or for a year.

Ch. VI-19. Having collected food according to his ability he may either eat at night (only) or in the day-time (only), or at every fourth meal-time, or at every eighth.

Ch. VI-20. Or he may live according to the rule of the lunar penance (Kandrayana, daily diminishing the quantity of his food) in the bright (half of the month) and (increasing it) in the dark (half); or he may eat on the last days of each fortnight, once (a day only), boiled barley-gruel.

Ch. VI-21. Or he may constantly subsist on flowers, roots, and fruit alone, which have been ripened by time and have fallen spontaneously, following the rule of the (Institutes) of Vikhanas.

Ch. VI-22. Let him either roll about on the ground, or stand during the day on tiptoe, (or) let him alternately stand and sit down; going at the Savanas (at sunrise, at midday, and at sunset) to water in the forest (in order to bathe).

Ch. VI-23. In summer let him expose himself to the heat of five fires, during the rainy season live under the open sky, and in winter be dressed in wet clothes, (thus) gradually increasing (the rigour of) his austerities.

Ch. VI-24. When he bathes at the three Savanas (sunrise, midday, and sunset), let him offer libations of water to the manes and the gods and practising harsher and harsher austerities, let him dry up his bodily frame.

Ch. VI-25. Having repositied the three sacred fires in himself, according to the prescribed rule, let him live without a fire, without a house, wholly silent, subsisting on roots and fruit.

Ch. VI-26. Making no effort (to procure) things that give pleasure, chaste, sleeping on the bare ground, not caring for any shelter, dwelling at the roots of trees.

Ch. VI-27. From Brahmanas (who live as) ascetics let him receive alms, (barely sufficient) to support life, or from other householders of the twiceborn (castes) who reside in the forest.

Ch. VI-28. Or (the hermit who dwells in the forest may bring food) from a village, receiving it either in a hollow dish (of leaves), in (his naked) hand, or in a broken earthen dish, and may eat eight mouthfuls.

Ch. VI-29. These and other observances must a Brahmana who dwells in the forest diligently practise, and in order to attain complete (union with) the (supreme) soul, (he must study) the various sacred texts contained in the Upanishadas.

The rules for a Sannyasi prescribed in the Manu Smriti are as follows¹:

Ch. VI-38. Having performed the Ishti, sacred to the Lord of creatures (pragapati) where (he gives) all his property as the sacrificial fee, having repositied the sacred fires in himself, a Brahmana may depart from his house (as an ascetic).

Ch. VI-39. Worlds, radiant in brilliancy, become (the portion) of him who recites (the texts regarding) Brahman and departs from his house (as an ascetic), after giving a promise of safety to all created beings.

Ch. VI-40. For that twice-born man, by whom not the smallest danger even is caused to created beings, there will be no danger from any (quarter) after he is freed from his body.

Ch. VI-41. Departing from his house fully provided with the means of purification (Pavitra), let him wander about absolutely silent, and caring nothing for enjoyments that may be offered (to him).

Ch. VI-42. Let him always wander alone, without any companion, in order to attain (final liberation), fully understanding that the solitary (man, who) neither forsakes nor is forsaken, gains his end.

¹ S.B.E. Vol. XXV. Ch. VI verses 38-45 pp. 205-206;

Ch. VI-43. He shall neither possess a fire, nor a dwelling, he may go to a village for his food, (he shall be) indifferent to everything, firm of purpose, meditating (and) concentrating his mind on Brahman.

Ch. VI-44. A potsherd (instead of an alms-bowl), the roots of trees (for a dwelling), coarse worn-out garments, life in solitude and indifference towards, everything, are the marks of one who has attained liberation.

Ch. VI-45. Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live, let him wait for (his appointed) time, as a servant (waits) for the payment of his wages.

Ch. VI-49. Delighting in what refers to the Soul, sitting (in the postures prescribed by the Yoga), independent (of external help) entirely abstaining from sensual enjoyments, with himself for his only companion, he shall live in this world, desiring the bliss (of final liberation).

Ch. VI-50. Neither by (explaining) prodigies and omens, nor by skill, in astrology and palmistry, nor by giving advice and by the exposition (of the Sastras), let him ever seek to obtain alms.

Ch. VI-51. Let him not (in order to beg) go near a house filled with hermits, Brahmanas, birds, dogs, or other mendicants.

Ch. VI-52. His hair, nails, and beards being clipped, carrying an alms bowl, a staff, and a water-pot let him continually wander about controlling himself and not hurting any creature.

Ch. VI-53. His vessels shall not be made of metal, they shall be free from fractures, it is ordained that they shall be cleansed with water, like (the cups, called) Kamasa, at a sacrifice.

Ch. VI-54. A gourd, a wooden bowl, an earthen (dish), or one made of split cane, Manu, the son of Svayambhu, has declared (to be) vessels (suitable) for an ascetic.

Ch. VI-55. Let him go to beg once (a day), let him not be eager to obtain a large quantity (of alms); for an ascetic who eagerly seeks, alms, attaches himself also to sensual enjoyments.

Ch. VI-56. When no smoke ascends from (the kitchen), when the pestle lies motionless, when the embers have been extinguished, when the people have finished their meal, when the remnants in the dishes have been removed, let the ascetic always go to beg.

Ch. VI-57. Let him not be sorry when he obtains nothing, nor rejoice when he obtains (something), let him (accept) so much only as will sustain life, let him not care about the (quality of his) utensils.

Ch. VI-58. Let him disdain all (food) obtained in consequence of humble salutations, (for) even an ascetic who has attained final

¹ S.B.E. Chapter VI pp. 207-209.

liberation, is bound (with the fetters of the Samsara) by accepting (food given) in consequence of humble salutations.

Ch. VI-59. By eating little, and by standing and sitting in solitude, let him restrain his senses, if they are attracted by sensual objects.

Ch. VI-60. By the restraint of his senses, by the destruction of love and hatred, and by the abstention from injuring the creatures, he becomes fit for immortality.

Ch. VI-80. ¹When by the disposition (of his heart) he becomes indifferent to all objects, he obtains eternal happiness both in this world and after death.

Ch. VI-81. He who has in this manner gradually given up all attachments and is freed from all the pairs (of opposites), reposes in Brahman alone.

Ch. VI-82. All that has been declared (above) depends on meditation; for he who is not proficient in the knowledge of that which refers to the Soul reaps not the full reward of the performance of rites.

Ch. VI-83. Let him constantly recite (those texts of) the Veda which refer to the sacrifice (those) referring to the deities, and (those) which treat of the Soul and are contained in the concluding portions of the Veda (Vedanta).

Ch. VI-84. That is the refuge of the ignorant, and even that (the refuge) of those who know (the meaning of the Veda); that is (the protection) of those who seek (bliss in) heaven and of those who seek endless (beatitude).

Ch. VI-85. A twice-born man who becomes an ascetic, after the successive performance of the above-mentioned acts, shakes off sin here below and reaches the highest Brahman.

Comparing the Vanaprastha with the Sannyasi the resemblance in this observances is so close that one is led to ask why these two stages are created as separate stages. There appear to be only a few differences. Firstly a Vanaprastha may take his wife with him and a Sannyasi cannot. Secondly a Vanaprastha is required only to leave his property behind, and a Sannyasi has to divest himself of it. Thirdly a Vanaprastha must make his dwelling in a forest and a Sannyasi cannot have a fixed dwelling but keep on wandering from place to place. As for the rest their mode of life is identical. Why did the Brahmins recognize an additional stage such as that of a Vanaprastha when the stage of Sannyas would have sufficed for both. But the question remains—namely what good these two stages serve. They cannot be cited as examples of self sacrifice. The Vanaprastha and Sannyasi cannot but be old men. Manu is very positive as to the

¹ S.B.E. Vol. XXV versus 80-85 pp. 213-14.

period when a Man can become Vanaprastha. The time ripe for it is after wrinkles which is of course quite an advanced age. The Sannyasi must be still more advanced in age. To exhibit such people who have enjoyed all the pleasures of life as instances of self-sacrifice because they choose to give up their pleasures at a stage of life when they are incapable of enjoying them must be nothing short of folly. Admittedly this abandonment of home and family is not for the purpose of rendering social service to suffering humanity. The purpose is to enable them to perform austerities and to wait peaceful death. It seems to be a height of folly to cut off old and aged men from him and family and die in jungles uncared and unwept for so insignificant and trivial a purpose.

The Ashram system is an ancient attempt of planned economy produced by the Brahmins. It is so stupid that it is a riddle to understand the causes and the motives which have led the Brahmins to devise it.

