

CHAPTER 17

THE ROCK ON WHICH IT IS BUILT

Hindu Society is a house of Castes. Hindus are not a people. They are the aggregates of groups of people formed into castes. This is its peculiarity. This is what has struck the stream of foreigners who have visited India in the course of history. Notwithstanding this there are however people who endeavour to say that there is nothing peculiar about caste. For instance Prof. Baines remarks:

“There is little in the system which is not to be found, or which has not at some time or other existed, in other countries, even of the West, though it has there been long ago worn away by other influences. The crystalization of certain bodies into definite orders or classes, for instance, is a common, almost a universal, trait and among them the tendency to become hereditary and as exclusive or aspiring as circumstances allow may almost be called natural”.

The argument may be strengthened by reference to the social organization of Primitive peoples. In Primitive Society man is never found alone.

The commonest and therefore the most natural condition of men is to live in groups. This social grouping has taken many forms in the course of history. The family is one such social group which is universal and which has survived. The group larger than the immediate family was the clan. In its lowest terms, the clan (which also called kin, sept or sib) was supposed to be a group of individuals related to one another either through the mother or through the father. Far distant cousins might be considered in the relationship, and were regarded as members of the group. Again, the relationship may be purely fictitious, but from the social point of view this was as real a bond as that made by common blood. The next larger division than the clan is a social grouping of the clans. When the clans are organized into two groups each group is called a moiety. When it is organized in more than two groups each is called a phratry. This dual system was not by any means world-wide in distribution and the functions which the phratry or the moiety was intended to perform are not quite definitely known. But there is no doubt that each moiety and phratry was a social grouping

in which there was a feeling of brotherhood between the members of clans associated together. The tribal groups come next. There were wide differences in the nature, character and structure of tribes. Tribes may be made up of village communities with no divisions into clans or moieties. They may have clans and no moieties, or moieties and no clans; or they may have both moieties and clans. Tribal consciousness was sometimes strong or some time weak. Although in the formation of tribal groups there was neither a definite rule nor a single line of evolution, there were certain common features present namely a common dialect, common customs, a more or less definite territory and some form of Government to which the whole tribe was present. Larger than the tribe was the confederacy or union of Tribes. But this was very uncommon. A loose and informal alliance to meet some specific danger may bring about a union of tribes. It is very seldom that a definite compact is found among the primitive peoples. The famous Iroquois confederacy is one of the exceptions.

These are social groups based either upon the idea of kindred or on that of locality. There were groups among primitive peoples, where the cleavage is along other lines. These other lines of grouping took as its basis sex, age or some other criteria. As a form of social grouping there is nothing new or nothing peculiar in this institution of caste. A caste is like a clan and like the clan it is only a form of social grouping.

The analogy between caste and clan may be admitted although it must be strongly insisted that as to meaning and purpose, caste is antagonistic to clan. There is no clan system comparable to the caste system. There is no gradation of clans as there is no Class-Clan System to match the Class-Caste System. Indeed the clan organization of the Primitive people is a complete antithesis of the caste organization of the Hindus. I admit the analogy only to drive my point. To my mind the question whether the institution of caste is natural or unnatural, peculiar or common is no doubt an interesting and instructive. But it is not as important as the question I want to raise. That question is why has caste endured, remained in tact when similar social groupings which were existing in other countries have vanished with the growth of civilization.

The Romans had a Social organization very similar to the Hindus.

When all similar institutions have vanished why has caste alone endured? Why do people obey its rules, what is the sanction for Caste?

Obedience by men to rules of society is everywhere secured by means of four sanctions. They are (1) the natural, (2) popular, (3) legal and (4) religious. Which of these supports the caste system? But before going into that question it would be desirable to describe the manner each of these sanctions operates.

The natural sanction operates through habit. When a person is habituated to act in a certain way nothing is required to force him to act in that way. He becomes an automation and the regularity of the act is guaranteed as a matter of routine.

Popular sanction works through public opinion. It was the sense of approbation and disapprobation prevalent in Society in relation to certain ways and practices. A certain way becomes folkway and Acts in conformity with an established folkway, receives approbation and an Act contrary to it is regarded with disapprobation.

There is nothing special either in the natural sanction or popular sanction. They are to be found everywhere and behind everything that is social in its import. Their native force is precarious and wherever it possesses more than its ordinary efficacy it is only when they are derived from either of the other two sanctions. Legal sanction and Religious sanction are the only two sanctions which are capable of sustaining any given institution.

There is no doubt that caste had the sanction of Hindu Law. Every Hindu Law Book has recognized Caste as a legal institution—a breach of which was an offence and entailing punishment. The Law Book of Manu called Manav Dharma Shashtra is the oldest and the most authoritative Law Book of the Hindus. It would be enough to quote from it texts showing that Caste was recognized by Law.

Manu, the Hindu Law giver gives legal recognition to the institution of the four Varnas. To lay down the law of the four Varnas seems to be the principal object of Manu's code. This is clear from the opening verses of the Code. They state that:

I.1. The great sages approached Manu, who was seated with a collected mind, and, having duly worshipped him, spoke as follows:

I.2. "Deign, divine one, to declare to us precisely and in due order the sacred laws of each of the (four chief) castes (varna) and of the intermediate ones."

Not only he gives it his legal sanction, he makes it incumbent upon the King to uphold the institution:

VII.35. The king has been created (to be) the protector of the castes (varna) and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their several duties."

VIII.24. All castes (varna) would be corrupted (by intermixture), all barriers would be broken through, and all men would rage (against each other) in consequence of mistakes with respect to punishment."

Manu makes breach of Caste a sin and prescribes three different punishments to one who has become a Patit by loss of caste.

The first punishment is punishment after death. Manu says:

“XII.60. He who has associated with outcasts, he who has approached the wives of other men, and he who has stolen the property of a Brahmana becomes Brahmarakshasa.”.

In this life the punishment which a Patit has to undergo was twofold. One was excommunication. The nature and character of excommunication prescribed by Manu has been prescribed by him in the following terms:

“XI. 181. He who associates with an outcast, himself becomes an outcast after a year, not by sacrificing for him, teaching him, or forming a matrimonial alliance with him, but by using the same carriage or seat, or by eating with him.

“XI.182. He who associates with any one of those outcasts, must perform, in order to atone for (such) intercourse, the penance prescribed for that (sinner).

“XI.183. The Sapindas and Samanodakas of an outcast must offer (a libation of) water (to him, as if he were dead), outside (the village), on an inauspicious day, in the evening and in the presence of the relatives, officiating priests, and teachers.

“XI.184. A female slave shall upset with her foot a pot filled with water, as if it were for a dead person; (his Sapindas) as well as the Samanodakas shall be impure for a day and a night.

“XI.185. But thenceforward it shall be forbidden to converse with him, to sit with him, to give him a share of the inheritance, and to hold with him such intercourse as is usual among men.”. The other was disinheritance.

“IX.201. Eunuchs and outcasts, (persons) born blind or deaf, the insane, idiots and the dumb, as well as those deficient in any organ (of action or sensation), receive no share.”.

“XI.186. And (if he be the eldest) his right of primogeniture shall be withheld and the additional share, due to the eldest son, and in his stead a younger brother, excelling in virtue, shall obtain the share of the eldest.”.

The only way to avoid these two punishments of excommunication and disinheritance was to do penance in the prescribed form. Penance was the only remedy. Says Manu:

“XI.187. But when he has performed his penance, they shall bathe with him in a holy pool and throw down a new pot, filled with water.

“XI.188. But he shall throw that pot into water, enter his house and perform, as before, all the duties incumbent on a relative”.

There was a distinction between a male Path and a female Patit. Neither was exempt. The Rule applies to both, for Manu says:

“XI.189. Let him follow the same rule in the case of female outcast; but clothes, food, and drink shall be given to them, and they shall live close to the (family) house.”.

There can be no doubt that the legal sanction was powerful sanction.

The punishment prescribed by law for breach of Caste was two-fold. It involved excommunication and loss of right to inherit. How formidable these punishments were has been well described by Sir Thomas Strange in his treatise on Hindu Law. Referring to the subject he says:

“It remains to consider one case, that may be said to be, with reference to personal delinquency, *instar omnium*—occurring in every enumeration on the subject as a cause of exclusion, namely: degradation, or the case of the outcaste. Accompanied with certain ceremonies, its effect is, to exclude him from all social intercourse, to suspend in him every civil function, to disqualify him for all the offices, and all the charities of life;—he is to be deserted by his connexions, who are from the moment of the sentence attaching upon him, to desist from speaking to him, from sitting in his company, from delivering to him any inherited, or other property, and from every civil or usual attention, as inviting him on the first day of the year, or the like, so that a man under these circumstances, might as well be dead; which, indeed, the Hindu Law considers him to be, directing libations to be offered to Manes, as though he were naturally so. This system of privations, mortifying as it must be, was enforced under the ancient law, by denouncing a similar fate to any one, by whose means they were endeavoured to be eluded; but this severity was moderated at the beginning of the present age, in which it is said “the sinner alone bears his guilt”, the law deeming so seriously of non-intercourse, that if one who ought to associate at meals with another, refuses to do so, without sufficient cause, he is punishable. And, in the Bombay reports, there is an instance of an action of damages, for a malicious expulsion from caste. The analogy between degradation by the Hindu law, and excommunication, as it prevailed formerly among us, holds, not merely in the general nature and effect of the proceeding, but in the peculiar circumstance of the one and the other being two-fold. As, with us, there was the less, and the greater excommunication, so, of offences considered with reference to their occasioning exclusion from inheritance among the Hindus, they may also be regarded in a two-fold point of view. This we learn from a case that was before

the Sudder Dewanny Adawlut of Bengal, in 1814, in which the official Pundits, having been referred to, distinguished between “those which involve partial and temporary degradation, and those which are followed by loss of caste”,—observing that “in the former state, that of partial degradation, when the offence which occasions it is expiated, the impediment to succession is removed; but in the latter, where the degradation is complete, although the sinfulness of the offence may be removed by expiatory penance, yet the impediment to succession still remains, because a person finally excluded from his tribe must ever continue to be an outcaste.” In the case alluded to, the party in question having been guilty of a series of profligate and abandoned conduct, having been shamefully addicted to spirituous liquors, having been in the habit of associating and eating with persons of the lowest description, and most infamous character; having wantonly attacked and wounded several people at different times; having openly cohabited with a woman of the Mahomedan persuasion; and having set fire to the dwelling house of his adoptive mother, whom he had more than once attempted to destroy by other means”, the Pundits declared that “of all the offences proved to have been committed by Sheannauth, one only, namely, that of cohabiting with a Mahomedan woman, was of such a nature, as to subject him to the penalty of expulsion from his tribe irrevocably,” and of this opinion was the Court. The power to degrade is, in the first instance, with the Castes themselves, assembled for the purpose, from whose sentence, if not acquiesced in, there lay an appeal to the King’s Courts. In the case that has been cited, the question arose incidentally, upon a claim of inheritance, and that case shews that the power amounts to a species of Censorship, applicable to the morals of the people, in instances to which the law, strictly speaking, would not perhaps otherwise extend. The sentences can be inflicted only for offences committed by the delinquent in his existing state; and, where the offence is of an inferior nature, to justify it, it must have been repeated. What distinguishes degradation from other causes of exclusion is, that it extends its effects to the son, who is involved in his father’s forfeiture, if born subsequent to the act occasioning it. Born before, he is entitled to inherit, and takes, as though his father were dead. Whereas, in every other instance of exclusion, the son, if not actually in the same predicament with his father, succeeds, maintaining him; the same right extending as far as the great grandson. And, with regard to the father, or delinquent himself, where the exclusion from inheriting is not for natural

defects, the cause must have arisen, previous to the division, or descent of the property; if it do not occur till after, the succession is not divested by it. Hence, adultery in the wife during coverture, bars her right of inheritance; divesting it also, after it has vested; the Hindu widow resembling, in this respect, the condition of ours in most instances of copyhold dower, and holding it, like her, *Dum casta fuerit* only; according to an opinion of great respectability, that for loss of caste, unexpiated by penance, and unredeemed by atonement, it is forfeited. In general, the law of disqualification applies alike to both sexes.

“It appearing, then, that the incapacity to inherit, except in the instance of the outcaste, is personal merely; that one excluded may be said, in every case, to be entitled to be maintained; and that, in most, it is in his power, at any time, to restore himself to his rights;—whatever may be thought of the wisdom of some of these provisions, it cannot be said that they are universally destitute of justice, or, in any instance, totally devoid of humanity. Nor, in comparing this part of the law with our own, ought we to forget, that the latter has made none, for preventing the absolute disinheriting of children by will.

“It will appear, in a subsequent chapter, that, on entry into either of the two religious orders, the DEVOTEE (like the professed monk with us before the Reformation) becomes *Civiliter mortuus*; and the next heir succeeds, as though he were naturally deceased, AND, as the devotee himself, abdicating secular concerns, is incapacitated from inheriting, so is the religious PRETENDER, and the eventual Apostate. Under the former term may be included Hypocrites and Impostors, used synonymously for those who, usurping sacred marks, practise austerities with an interested design.

The remaining cause of exclusion to be noticed, is, an Incompetent marriage; that is, where the husband and wife are descended from the same Stock. Such a marriage being incongruous, the issue of it cannot inherit, excepting among Shudras. And the consequence is the same, where the marriage has not been according to the order of Class.

“The heir, or heirs, under no disability, having succeeded to the inheritance, it is next to be seen, to what Charge this is liable.”

Has Caste also a religious sanction? The Vedas recognize Caste.

The Rig Vedas recognized Caste and also explains its origin in the following passage:

- “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 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 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 that universal sacrifice sprang the *rich* and *saman verses*, the *metres*, and *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 his arms; the being (called) the Vaishya, he was his thighs, the Shudra 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 (stuck 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."

The Brahmanas also recognize Caste. In the Satapatha-Brahmanas Caste is mentioned in the following terms:

- “23. 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 develope. It energetically created an excellent form, the Kshattrra, viz., those among the gods, who are powers (Kshattrani), Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mrityu, Isana. Hence nothing is superior to the Kshattrra. Therefore the Brahman sits below the Kshattriya at the rajasuya-sacrifice; he confers that glory on the Kshattrra (the royal power). This, the Brahma, is the source of Kshattrra. Hence, although the king attains supremacy, he at the end resorts to the Brahman 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 develope. He created the Vis.—viz., those classes of gods who are designated by troops, Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, Visvedevas, Maruts.
25. He did not develope. He created the Shudra Class, Pushan. This earth is Pushan; for she nourishes all that exists.
26. He did not develope. He energetically created an excellent form, Justice (Dharma). This is the ruler (kshattrra) of the ruler (kshattrra), 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 man who is uttering justice, ‘he speaks truth’. For this is both of these.
27. This is the Brahma, Kshattrra, Vis and Sudra. Through Agni it became Brahma among the gods, the Brahman among men, through the (divine) Kshattriya a (human) Kshattriya, through the (divine), Vaishya 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.”

Taittiriya Brahmana, i. 2, 6, 7.—*daivyo vai varno brahmanh assuryyo sudrah*. “The Brahman caste is sprung from the gods; the Sudra from the Asuras.”

It must be admitted that the legal and the religious sanction were both powerful engines to keep caste going. But there is no doubt that the religious sanction was the primary sanction and caste has been maintained solely by the force of Religious Sanction. This is clear from two circumstances. That the legal sanction was very seldom invoked will have to be admitted. That means that the maintenance of caste

was secured by other means. Secondly this legal sanction was in use only till 1850. It was lifted or rather done away with by the Caste Disabilities Removal Act passed in that year by the British Government. Although the legal sanction is withdrawn, caste has gone on without abatement. That could not have happened if caste had not in the Religious Sanction another and more powerful sanction independent of the legal sanction.

That the Religious Sanction is the highest sanction which an institution or a belief can have to support and sustain it, is beyond question. Its power is boundless in its measure and tremendous in its curb. But it is very seldom understood how and whence this Religious Sanction gets this high-grade horse-power. To appreciate this it is necessary to note that the source of authority behind the Religious Sanction is two-fold.

In the first place what is Religious is also Social. To quote Prof. Durkheim.¹

“The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group, which makes profession of adhering to them and of practising the rites connected with them. They are not merely received individually by all the members of this group; they are something belonging to the group, and they make its unity. The individuals which compose it feel themselves united to each other by the simple fact that they have a common faith.”

In the second place what is Religious is Sacral. To quote Durkheim again:²

“All known religious beliefs whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic; they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane and sacred*..... In all the history of human thought there exist no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one another. The traditional opposition of good and bad is nothing besides this; for the good and the bad are only two opposed species of the same class, namely morals, just as sickness and health are two different aspects of the same order of facts, life, while the Sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between there is nothing in common..... Religious beliefs are the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the

¹ Elementary Forms of Religious Life. pp. 37-40.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things (while) rites are the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comfort himself in the presence of these Sacred objects.”

From this it will be clear that the Social, Religious and Sacral beliefs are closely knit. Religious is social though all that is social is not religious. Sacral is social though all that is social is not sacral. On the other hand the religious is both social and sacral.

One source of authority behind the religious sanction comes from the fact, that is, religion is social and the religious beliefs are social beliefs. Religious beliefs are enforced on the individual by the group in the same manner and for the same reasons which leads it to enforce its other non-religious and purely social beliefs. The object is to maintain the integrity of the group and as the integrity of the group is more closely bound up with its religious beliefs, the strictness and severity with which a group punishes the breach of a religious belief is usually greater than the degree of strictness and severity it employs for the chastisement of a person guilty of a breach of a non-religious belief. Social force has an imperative authority before which the individual is often powerless. In the matter of a religious belief the imperative authority of the social force is tempered as steel is by the feeling that it is a breach of a graver kind and gives religious sanction a far greater force than a purely social sanction has.

The Sacral source of the authority behind religious sanction comes primarily from the individual and only secondarily from the group. That is the noteworthy peculiarity of the social source of religious sanction. It prepares the individual to uphold the religious beliefs. It dispenses with the necessity of the group using its social group. That is why the sacral source of its authority makes religious sanction of such high order as to supersede all other sanctions indeed to dispense with them. That is why the Religious Sanction alone becomes sufficient to maintain the integrity of religious beliefs which even time and circumstances have proved powerless to affect. The way this happens is easy to follow. The Sacred inspires in the individual the sentiment of reverence and deference which he certainly has not for the profane. To use the language of Durkheim,

“The simple defence inspired by men with high social functions is not different in nature from religious respect (for the sacred). It is expressed by the same movements: a man keeps at a distance from high personage; he approaches him only with precautions; in conversing with him, he used other gestures and language than that used with ordinary mortals.”

The Sacred creates the sentiment of Reverence. It also creates the sentiment that it is inviolate. When a belief becomes consecrated as a Sacred thing, it is forbidden to touch it, to deny it or to contest it. There is a prohibition of criticism of the Sacred. The Sacred is 'untouchable and above discussion'. When an individual is saturated with these sentiments, when these sentiments become a part of his being, he himself becomes an upholder and protector of what he is taught to regard as something sacred.

This is exactly what the Hindus have done in the matter of Caste. They have given caste a place in the Vedas. Caste has thereby become sacred because the Vedas are Sacred. It would be wrong to say that the Vedas are sacred because they are religious. The position is that they are religious because they are sacred.

It might appear that the Hindus have no name for the Veda directly expressing the feeling of sacredness which the Hindu entertains towards the Vedas. Veda simply means knowledge. That may be so. But there can be no doubt that they regard the Vedas as sacred. Indeed the term they apply to Vedas expresses a far greater degree of reverence than the word sacred does. They call the Vedas *Shruti*—which means the word of God heard by (i.e. revealed to) man. In the primitive religion the Sacred is what man has made. In the Hindu religion the Sacred is what God has appointed it to be.

The Hindus regard the Vedas as the Sacred Book of their religion. They put the Vedas in a class by themselves. The Hindus hold¹ that there are cycles of creations called *Kalpas*. At the end of every cycle there is a deluge and a new cycle of creation begins. At the end of a *Kalpa*, the Vedas are destroyed in the deluge. At the beginning of every *Kalpa* they are revealed by God. Accordingly the *Vedas* were destroyed in the deluge at the end of the last *Kalpa* and that the beginning of the present *Kalpa* commencing with the *Krita Yuga*, they were revealed by God to the *Rishis*. The Vedas are regarded by the Hindus as *Nitya* (eternal) *Anadi* (beginningless) and *Apaurusheya* (not made by man). In short the Vedas are the words of God and constitute God's ordinances to man.

Even if the Vedas were not called *Shruti* they would have had the imperativeness of the 'Sacred'. Religions have been variously classified by Prof. Max Muller.² Natural as against Revealed is one way of classifying them. Individual as against National is another way. The third way of classifying them is to call them Atheistic, Deistic, Dualistic, Polytheistic, Monotheistic, Henotheistic and Animistic. True

¹ M. Krishnamachariar—Classical Sanskrit Literature. Introduction, pp. vii-viii and p. 836.

² Introduction to the Science of Religion.

and False is also another way of classifying Religions. Bookless Religions and Religions with books are two classes into which Religion could be grouped. This probably does not exhaust the ways of classifying Religions. For there remains one more distinction to be made, namely Religions which have founders and religions which have no founders.

These distinctions have social significance except two. They are the distinctions between Natural and Revealed and that between Bookless Religion and Book Religion. They differ in their function although that difference is not often noted.

The Book religion has a definite advantage over a Bookless religion. A Book religion is a Religion with a written constitution. A Bookless Religion is a Religion without a written constitution. A book religion creates the impression that it is true which a bookless religion cannot. By comparison with a book religion, a bookless religion wears the inferiority complex of being false. In the language of Max Muller Religions with books are alone “considered as real religions, and though they may contain false doctrines, they are looked upon as a kind of aristocracy to whom much may be forgiven, while the vulgar crowd of bookless or illiterate religions are altogether out of Court ”.¹ It is easy to understand the superiority accorded to a religion with a book over a bookless religion. When ‘black on white’ has become synonymous with true, it may seem very natural that a religion which is written, which is something black on white is not false. The Book serves as the voucher for truth. A religion without a book has no voucher.

The social significance of a religion with a book lies in the fact that it controls the mind of the people by giving them the impression that the religion contained in the book is true. It gives Religion authority over people and induces willing obedience in them.

But however a Religion may appear to be true by reason of the fact that it is a book religion, such appearance cannot save Religion from going under, if beliefs and rites empirically erroneous have crept into it. Man may go wrong in theory but his practical instincts will seldom allow him to go after a wrong theory for a long time. Unless therefore the religious beliefs of a social group are true, practically Religion must in the long run give way.

Herein comes the social significance of the distinction between Natural Religion and Revealed Religion. A Revealed Religion has superiority over Natural Religion. Natural Religion is used by several writers to certain historical forms of religion. Something which has grown along with the growth of people—as a result of the interaction

¹ Natural Religion, p. 549.

between the needs of the peoples and the environment in which they are placed. A natural religion is made by man. Its sanction is the sense of truth and the voice of conscience that is to be found in man. A Revealed Religion does not rest on the authority of man. It is not man-made, it is God-made. Its sanction is God who is absolute truth and absolute good. The function of Revealed Religion is to make religion sacred therefore inviolate and immune from criticism.

The Vedas have the characteristics of both. They have the advantage which a Religion with a book has over the Bookless Religion. They have the advantage which a Revealed Religion has over Natural Religion.

This discussion is intended to enforce the conclusion that Caste being preached by the Vedas, it automatically gets the authority of the written book and the sanctity of the divine word. As a scheme propounded by the Veda it is doubly protected. Every one must accept Caste because it is divine truth and no body must attack it as an error without being guilty of sacrilege because it is sacred.

This is the Hindu view of Caste and the average Hindu is not impressed by the modern explanation of it by Risley with his racial theory, by Senart with his occupational theory, by Nesfield with his functional theory. He knows and he believes that Caste must have been created by God, because it is mentioned in the Vedas which is *Shruti* or the word of God. It is therefore eternal and true.

That Caste is divine, that caste is sacred and that caste must therefore remain eternal has been the line of defence adopted by the Brahmins whenever they have been called out to defend 'Caste' against the criticism of its opponents. This view of Caste comes out in its luminous colours in the controversy that once raged on the subject of Caste between Brahmins on the one hand and Buddha and his followers, on the other i.e.:

"If the belief was once established, that not only the simple effusions of the Rishis, but the pointed doctrines of the Brahmanas also, emanated from a divine source, and could not therefore be attacked by human reasoning, it is clear that every opposition to the privileges which the Brahmans claimed for themselves, on the sacred authority of the Veda, became heresy; and where the doctrines of the Brahmans were the religion of the people, or rather of the king, such opposition was amenable to the hierarchical laws of the state. The Brahmans themselves cared much more to see the divine authority of the Sruti as such implicitly acknowledged, than to maintain the doctrines of the Rishis in their original simplicity and purity. In philosophical discussions, they allowed the greatest

¹ *Soure of the following quotations upto page 167 is not mentioned in the M.S.—Ed.*

possible freedom; and, although at first three philosophical systems only were admitted as orthodox (the two Mimansas and the Nyaya), their number was soon raised to six, so as to include the Vaiseshika, Sankhya, and Yoga-schools. The most conflicting views on points of vital importance were tolerated as long as their advocates succeeded, no matter by what means, in bringing their doctrines into harmony with passages of the Veda, strained and twisted in every possible sense. If it was only admitted that besides the perception of the senses and the induction of reason, revelation also, as contained in the Veda, furnished a true basis for human knowledge, all other points seemed to be of minor importance. Philosophical minds were allowed to exhaust all possible views on the relation between the real and transcendental world, the Creator and the created, the divine and the human nature. It was not from such lucubrations that danger was likely to accrue to the caste of the Brahmans. Nor was the heresy of Buddha Sakya Muni found so much in his philosophical doctrines, many of which may be traced in the orthodox atheism of Kapila. His real crime lay in his opposition to the exclusive privileges and abuses of the Brahmans. These abuses were sanctioned by the divine authority of the Veda, and particularly of the Brahmans. In attacking the abuses, Buddha attacked the divine authority on which they were founded, and the argument was short: he is a heretic; anathema etc.

“Buddha was Kshatriya. He was of principal origin, and belonged to the nobility of the land. He was not the first of his caste who opposed the ambition of the Brahmans. Several centuries before Buddha, Visvamitra, who, like Buddha, was a member of the royal caste, had to struggle against the exclusiveness of the priests. At that early time, however, the position of the Brahmans was not yet impregnable; and Visvamitra, although a Kshatriya, succeeded in gaining for himself and his family the rights for which he struggled, and which the Brahmans had previously withheld from all but their own caste. King Janaka of Videha again, whose story is given in the Brahmanas, refused to submit to the hierarchical pretensions of the Brahmans, and asserted his right of performing sacrifices without the intercession of priests. However great the difference may have been between the personal character of these two men and of Buddha, the first principle of their opposition was the same. All three were equally struggling against the over-weening pretensions of a selfish priesthood.

“But while Visvamitra contented himself with maintaining the rights of his tribe or family, and became reconciled as soon as he

was allowed to share in the profits of the priestly power, while King Janaka expressed himself satisfied with the homage paid to him by Yajnavalkya and other Brahmans, while, in short, successive reformers as they appeared were either defeated or gained over to the cause of the Brahmans,—the seeds of discontent were growing up in the minds of the people. There is a dark chapter in the history of India, the reported destruction of all the Kshatriyas by Parsurama. It marks the beginning of the hierarchical supremacy of the Brahmans. Though the Brahmans seem never to have aspired to the royal power, their caste, as far as we know the history and traditions of India, has always been in reality the ruling caste. Their ministry was courted as the only means of winning divine favour, their doctrines were admitted as infallible, their gods were worshipped as the only true gods, and their voice was powerful enough to stamp the simple strains of the Rishis, and the absurd lucubrations of the authors of the Brahmans, with a divine authority. After this last step, however, the triumph of Brahmanism was preparing its fall. In India, less than in any other country, would people submit to a monopoly of truth; and the same millions who were patiently bearing the yoke of a political despotism threw off the fetters of an intellectual tyranny. In order to overthrow one of the oldest religions of the world, it was sufficient that one man should challenge the authority of the Brahmans, the gods of the earth (Bhudeva), and preach among the scorned and degraded creatures of God the simple truth that salvation was possible without the mediation of priests, and without a belief in books to which these very priests had given the title of revelation. This man was BUDDHA, a SAKYA MUNI. Now if we inquire how Buddha's doctrines were met by the Brahmans, it is true that here and there in their philosophical works, they have endeavoured to overthrow some of his metaphysical axioms by an appeal to reason. An attempt of this kind we have, for instance, in Vachaspati Misra's commentary on the Vedanta Sutras. In commenting on the tenets of Buddha, that "ideas like those of being, and not being, &c, do not admit of discussion", Vachaspati observes that the very fact of speaking of these ideas, includes the possibility of their conception; nay, that to affirm they do not admit of reasoning, involves an actual reasoning on them, and proves that the mind can conceive the idea of being as different from that of not-being.

"Such, however, were not the usual weapons with which Brahmanism fought against Buddhism. The principal objection has always been, that Buddha's teaching could not be true, because it

did not derive its sanction from Sruti or revelation. The Brahmins, as a caste, would readily have allowed being and not being, and the whole of Buddha's philosophy, as they did the Sankhya philosophy, which on the most important points is in open opposition to the Vedanta. But while Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya school, conformed to the Brahmanic test by openly proclaiming the authority of revelation as paramount to reasoning and experience, Buddha would not submit to this, either for his philosophical (abhidharma), or for his much more important moral and religious doctrines (vinaya). No doubt it would have been easy for him to show how some of his doctrines harmonised with passages of the Veda, as in the Veda all possible shades of the human mind have found their natural reflection. If he had done so only for some of his precepts, such, for instance, as, "Thou shall not murder", "Thou shall not drink", "Thou shall eat standing", the Brahmins would readily have passed over other doctrines, even such as came into practice after Buddha's death, like "Who longs for heaven, shall worship the holy sepulchre", "He shall pull out his hair", &c. As he refused to do so, the line of argument taken by the Brahmins was simply confined to an appeal to revelation, in disproof of the possibility of the truth of Buddha's doctrines.

"There must be something very tempting in this line of argument, for we see that in later times the Buddhists also endeavoured to claim the same divine character for their sacred writings which the Brahmins had established for the Veda. A curious instance of this is given in the following discussion, from Kumarila's *Tantra-varttika*. Here the opponent (*purva-paksha*) observes, that the same arguments which prove that the Veda is not the work of human authors, apply with equal force to Sakya's teaching. His authority, he says, cannot be questioned, because his precepts are clear and intelligible; and as Sakya is not the inventor, but only the teacher of these precepts, and no name of an author is given for Sakya's doctrines, the frailties inherent in human authors affect them as little as the Veda. Everything, in fact, he concludes, which has been brought forward by the Mimamsakas to prove the authority of the Veda, proves in the same way the authority of Buddha's doctrine. Upon this, the orthodox Kumarila grows very wroth, and says: "These Sakyas, Vaiseshikas, and other heretics who have been frightened out of their wits by the faithful Mimamsakas, prattle away with our own words as if trying in lay hold of a shadow. They say that their sacred works are eternal; but they are of empty minds, and only out of hatred they wish to deny that the Veda is the most

ancient book. And these would-be logicians declare even, that some of their precepts (which they have stolen from us,) like that of universal benevolence, are not derived from the Veda, because most of Buddha's other sayings are altogether against the Veda. Wishing, therefore, to keep true on this point also, and seeing that no merely human precept could have any authority on moral and supernatural subjects, they try to veil their difficulty by aping our own argument for the eternal existence of the Veda. They know that the Mimansakas have proved that no sayings of men can have any authority on supernatural subjects; they know also that the authority of the Veda cannot be controverted, because they can bring forward nothing against the proofs adduced for its divine origin, by which all supposition of a human source have been removed. Therefore, their hearts being gnawed by their own words, which are like the smattering of children, and having themselves nothing to answer, because the deception of their illogical arguments has been destroyed, they begin to speak like a foolish suitor who came to ask for a bride, saying, 'My family is as good as your family'. In the same manner they now maintain the eternal existence of their books, aping the speeches of others. And if they are challenged and told that this is our argument, they brawl, and say that we, the Mimansakas have heard and stolen it from them. For a man who has lost all scheme, who can talk away without any sense, and tries to cheat his opponent, will never get tired, and will never be put down!" Towards the end of this harangue, Kumarila adds, what is more to the point, that the Buddhas, who ascribe to everything a merely temporary existence, have no business to talk of an eternal revelation."

From the foregoing discussion it will be seen that Caste is born in religion which has consecrated it and made it Sacred so that it can be rightly and truly said that Religion is the Rock on which the Hindus have built their social structure.

Does this not show that Caste is a very peculiar institution not to be compared with other forms of social grouping? I venture to say that any one who maintains that there is nothing strange in caste simply does not know what Caste is. I repeat that Caste is Sacred, which is its distinguishing feature. Caste is Sacred, which is what makes it abiding.

Prof. Max Muller makes some very instructive observations on the effects of Religion with Sacred books on the progress of Society. Says Max Muller:

"History, however, teaches us another lesson, namely that codes of law are apt to become a kind of fetish, requiring an implicit and

unquestioning submission, that their historical or natural origin is often completely forgotten, and that the old ideas of what is right and just are almost absorbed, nay, almost annihilated, in the one idea of what is written and legal.

“The study of Eastern religions teaches us the same lesson. Sacred books often become a kind of fetish, requiring an implicit and unquestioning faith; their historical or natural origin is often completely forgotten, and the old ideas of what is true and divine are almost absorbed in the one idea of what is written and orthodox.

“And there is a third lesson which history teaches us. The sense of responsibility of every citizen for the law under which he lives is in great danger of becoming deadened, when law becomes a profession and is administered with mechanical exactness rather than with a strong human perception of what is right and what is wrong. Nor can it be denied that the responsibility of every believer for the religion under which he lives is in the same danger of becoming deadened, when religion becomes a profession, and is administered with ceremonial exactness rather than with a strong human perception of what is true and what is false.

“My object, however, is not to show the dangers which arise from sacred books, but rather to protest against the prejudice which prevails so widely against religions which have no sacred books.

“There is great difference between book-religions and bookless religions, and the difference offers, from an historical point of view, a very true ground of division. But because the book-religions, have certain advantages, we must not imagine that the bookless religions are mere outcasts. They have their disadvantages, no doubt; but they have a few advantages also.

“A Blackfoot Indian, when arguing with a Christian missionary, described the difference between his own religion and that of the white man in the following words:

‘There were two religions given by the Great Spirit, one in a book for the guidance of the white men who, by following its teachings, will reach the white man’s heaven; the other is in the hands of the Indians, in the sky, rocks, rivers, and mountains. And the red men who listen to God in nature will hear his voice, and find at last the heaven beyond.’

“Now that religion which is in the head and in the heart, and in the sky, the rocks, the rivers and the mountains is what we call Natural Religion. It has its roots in nature, in human nature, and in that external nature which to us is at the same time the veil and the

revelation of the Divine. It is free, it grows with the growth of the human mind, and adapts itself to the requirements of every age. It does not say, 'Thou shalt', but rather, 'I will'. These natural or bookless religions are not entirely without settled doctrines and established customs. They generally have some kind of priesthood to exercise authority in matters of faith, morality, and ceremonial. But there is nothing hard and unchangeable in them, nothing to fetter permanently the growth of thought. Errors when discovered, can be surrendered, a new truth, if clearly seen and vigorously defended, can be accepted. If, however, there is once a book, something black on white, the temptation is great, is almost irresistible, to invest it with a more than human authority in order to appeal to it as infallible, and as beyond the reach of human reasoning. We can well understand what the ancient poets of the Veda meant by calling their hymns God-given, or by speaking of them as what they had seen or heard, not what they had elaborated themselves. But a new generation gave a new meaning to these expressions, and ended by representing every thought and word and letter of the Veda as 'God-given,' or revealed. This was the death-blow given to the Vedic religion, for whatever cannot grow and change must die. From this danger the bookless religion are exempt."

Similar observations are made by Sir William Muir. Speaking of Islam he has given powerful expression to the dangers arising from Sacred Codes of Religion. Sir William Muir says:

"From the stiff and rigid shroud in which it is thus swathed, the religion of Mahomed cannot emerge. It has no plastic power beyond that exercised in its earliest days. Hardened now and inelastic, it can neither adapt itself, nor yet shape its votaries, nor even suffer them to shape themselves, to the varying circumstances, the wants and developments of mankind" . (Quoted by E de Bunsen in an article in the Asiatic Quarterly Review, April, 1889, Mahomed's Place in the Church, p. 287.)

Every one who is interested in the progress of humanity cannot fail to echo these sentiments regarding the social consequences of Sacred Codes of Religion. But it seems to me that a further distinction is possible within the Class of Religion with Sacred Codes. It is a pity that Prof. Max Muller did not pursue the matter further. But it is worth pursuing because it discloses a difference which is very real which marks off the Hindus as a people with a Sacred Code of Religion from other people also possessing a Sacred Code of Religion. The difference will be clear if one begins to examine the different religions to find out what are the objects which religions have sought to consecrate.

Such an examination will show that there are instances where Society has consecrated inanimate things and inculcated on the minds of its members the religious belief that they are sacred. There are cases where stones, rivers, trees are made gods and goddesses. There are instances where Society has consecrated living things and inculcated on the minds of its members the religious belief that they are sacred. There are cases of animals which have become clan totems. There are instances where Society has consecrated human beings and inculcated the religious beliefs that they are sacred. But there are no instances where a particular Social Order has been consecrated by Religion and made Sacred. The primitive world had its clan order and its tribal order. But the clan or the tribal order was only a social order and was never consecrated by religion and made sacred and inviolate. The ancient world countries like Egypt, Persia, Rome, Greece etc., each had its social order in which some were free and some were slaves, some were citizens, some were aliens, some of one race, some of another. This class order again was only a social order and was never consecrated by religion and made sacred and inviolate. The modern world has its order, in some it is Democracy, in some Fascism, in some Nazism and in some Bolshevism. But here again the order is only Social order. It is not consecrated by religion and made sacred and inviolate.

Nowhere has Society consecrated its occupations, the ways of getting a living. Economic activity has always remained outside the sanctity of religion. Hunting society was not without religion. But hunting as an occupation was not consecrated by religion and made sacred. Pastoral Society was not without religion. But pasturage was not consecrated by religion and made sacred. Farming as an occupation did not become consecrated by religion and made sacred. Feudalism with its gradations, with its Lords, vassals and serfs was a purely social in character. There was nothing sacred about it.

The Hindus are the only people in the world whose Social order—the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred eternal and inviolate. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order—the relation of workman to workman—is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate.

It is not therefore enough to say that the Hindus are a people with a sacred code of Religion. So are the Zoroastrians, Israelites, Christians and Muslims. All these have sacred codes. They consecrate beliefs and rites and make them sacred. They do not prescribe, nor do they consecrate a particular form of social structure—the relationship between man and man in a concrete form—and make it sacred

inviolable. The Hindus are singular in this respect. This is what has given caste its abiding strength to defy the ravages of time and the onslaughts of time.

There is one other respect in which Hindus differ from other folk possessing codified religions similar to that of the Hindus. The Hindu Code of Religion is a revelation from God. That is why the Vedas are called Shruti (what is heard). So are the Codes of Religions accepted by the Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and Muslims. Ask to whom this God's word sent to the Zoroastrian, Jews, Christians, and Muslims was revealed, who heard this word of God ? The Zoroastrian will say that the word of God contained in their Religious Code was heard by Zoroaster. The Jews will say it was heard by Moses, Christians will say it was heard by Jesus and Muslims will say it was heard by Muhammad. Now ask the Hindu who heard the word of God contained in the Vedas, to whom was it revealed. The Hindu has no answer. He cannot name the person who heard this word of God. Now the Mantras contained in the Vedas have their authors mentioned in the Vedas themselves. But the Hindus will not say that these are the persons who heard the word of God which is contained in the Vedas. This difference goes a great way to protect the sacred character of the Vedas. For the Bible as a Sacred Book can be attacked by attacking the character of Moses or Jesus. Similarly the Koran as a Sacred Book can be attacked by attacking the character of Mahomed. But the Veda cannot be attacked by attacking the character of the messenger or the founder. For the simple reason that there is none.

As I have said Religion is the Rock on which the Hindus have built their house. It will now be seen that it is not an ordinary sort of hard Rock. It is granite.

