

CHAPTER I

THE RIDDLE OF THE SHUDRAS

EVERYBODY knows that the Shudras formed the fourth Varna of the Indo-Aryan society. But very few have cared to inquire who were these Shudras and how they came to be the fourth Varna. That such an enquiry is of first-rate importance is beyond question. For, it is worth knowing how the Shudras came to occupy the fourth place, whether it was the result of evolution or it was brought about by revolution.

Any attempt to discover who the Shudras were and how they came to be the fourth Varna must begin with the origin of the *Chaturvarnya* in the Indo-Aryan society. A study of the *Chaturvarnya* must in its turn start with a study of the ninetieth Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda—a Hymn, which is known by the famous name of *Purusha Sukta*.

What does the Hymn say? It says¹ :

- “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 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 to 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 that universal sacrifice sprang the *rik* and *saman* verses, the metres and the *yaajus*.
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 Brahmana was his mouth, the Rajanya was made 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 the 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 sacrifices, 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 sacrifices the gods performed the sacrifice. These were the earliest rites. These great powers have sought the sky, where are the former *Sadhyas*, gods."

The *Purusha Sukta* is a theory of the origin of the Universe. In other words, it is a cosmogony. No nation which has reached an advanced degree of thought has failed to develop some sort of cosmogony. The Egyptians had a cosmogony somewhat analogous with that set out in the *Purusha Sukta*. According to it,¹ it was god *Khnumu*, 'the shaper,' who shaped living things on the potter's wheel, "created all that is, he formed all that exists, he is the father of fathers, the mother of mothers... he fashioned men, he made the gods, he was the father from the beginning... he is the creator of the heaven, the earth, the underworld, the water, the mountains... he formed a male and a female of all birds, fishes, wild beasts, cattle and of all worms." A very, similar cosmogony is found in Chapter I of the Genesis in the Old Testament.

Cosmogonies have never been more than matters of academic interest and have served no other purpose than to satisfy the curiosity of the student and to help to amuse children. This may be true of some parts of the *Purusha Sukta*. But it certainly cannot be true of the whole of it. That is because all verses of the *Purusha Sukta* are not of the same importance and do not have the same significance. Verses

1 Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. IV, p. 145.

11 and 12 fall in one category and the rest of the verses fall in another category. Verses other than 11 and 12 may be regarded as of academic interest. Nobody relies upon them. No Hindu even remembers them. But it is quite different with regard to verses 11 and 12. *Prima facie* these verses do no more than explain how the four classes, namely, (1) Brahmins or priests, (2) Kshatriyas or soldiers, (3) Vaishyas or traders, and (4) Shudras or menials, arose from the body of the Creator. But the fact is that these verses are not understood as being merely explanatory of a cosmic phenomenon. It would be a grave mistake to suppose that they were regarded by the Indo-Aryans as an innocent piece of a poet's idle imagination. They are treated as containing a mandatory injunction from the Creator to the effect that Society must be constituted on the basis of four classes mentioned in the *Sukta*. Such a construction of the verses in question may not be warranted by their language. But there is no doubt that according to tradition this is how the verses are construed, and it would indeed be difficult to say that this traditional construction is not in consonance with the intention of the author of the *Sukta*. Verses 11 and 12 of the *Purusha Sukta* are, therefore, not a mere cosmogony. They contain a divine injunction prescribing a particular form of the constitution of society.

The constitution of society prescribed by the *Purusha Sukta* is known as *Chaturvarnya*. As a divine injunction, it naturally became the ideal of the Indo-Aryan society. This ideal of *Chaturvarnya* was the mould in which the life of the Indo-Aryan community in its early or liquid state was cast. It is this mould, which gave the Indo-Aryan community its peculiar shape and structure.

This reverence, which the Indo-Aryan Society had for this ideal mould of *Chaturvarnya*, is not only beyond question, but it is also beyond description. Its influence on the Indo-Aryan society has been profound and indelible. The social order prescribed by the *Purusha Sukta* has never been questioned by anyone except Buddha. Even Buddha was not able to shake it, for the simple reason that both after the fall of Buddhism and even during the period of Buddhism there were enough law-givers, who made it their business not only to defend the ideal of the *Purusha Sukta* but to propagate it and to elaborate it.

To take a few illustrations of this propaganda in support of the *Purusha Sukta*, reference may be made to the *Apastamba Dharma Sutra* and the *Vasishttha Dharma Sutra*. The *Apastamba Dharma*

Sutra states:

“There are four castes—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

Among these, each preceding (caste) is superior by birth to the one following.¹

For all these excepting Shudras and those who have committed bad actions are ordained (1) the initiation (*Upanayan* or the wearing of the sacred thread), (2) the study of the Veda and (3) the kindling of the sacred fire (i.e., the right to perform sacrifice).²

This is repeated by *Vasishtha Dharma Sutra* which says :

“There are four castes (Varnas), Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Three castes, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas (are called) twice-born.

Their first birth is from their mother; the second from the investiture with the sacred girdle. In that (second birth) the Savitri is the mother, but the teacher is said to be, the father.

They call the teacher father, because he gives instruction in the Veda.³

The four castes are distinguished by their origin and by particular sacraments.

There is also the following passage of the Veda : “The Brahmana was his mouth, the Kshatriya formed his arms, the Vaishya his thighs; the Shudra was born from his feet.”

It has been declared in the following passage that a Shudra shall not receive the sacraments.”

Many other law-givers have in parrot-like manner repeated the theme of the *Purusha Sukta* and have reiterated its sanctity. It is unnecessary to repeat their version of it. All those, who had raised any opposition to the sanctity of the ideal set out in the *Purusha Sukta*, were finally laid low by Manu, the architect of the Hindu society. For Manu did two things. In the first place, he enunciated afresh the ideal of the *Purusha Sukta* as a part of divine injunction. He said :

“For the prosperity of the worlds, he (the creator) from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet created the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya and the Shudra.⁴

The Brahmin, Kshatriya (and) Vaishya (constitute) the three twice-born castes; but the fourth the shudra has only one birth.⁵”

In this he was no doubt merely following his predecessors. But he went a step further and enunciated another proposition in which he said :

“Veda is the only and ultimate sanction for Dharma.”⁶

Bearing in mind that the *Purusha Sukta* is a part of the Veda, it cannot be difficult to realize that Manu invested the social ideal of

1 Prasna 1. Patala 1, Khanda 1, Sutras 4-5.

2 Prasna 1, Patala 1, Khanda 1, Sutra 6.

3 Chapter II, Verses 1-4.

4 Manu, Chapter I, Verse 31.

5 *Ibid.*, Chapter X, Verse 4.

6 *Ibid.*, Chapter II, Verse 6.

Chaturvarnya contained in the *Purusha Sukta*, with a degree of divinity and infallibility which it did not have before.

II

A critical examination of the *Purusha Sukta* therefore becomes very essential.

It is claimed by the Hindus that the *Purusha Sukta* is unique. This is no doubt a tall claim for an idea which came to birth when the mind of man was primitive and was without the rich endowment of varied thought available in modern times. But there need not be much difficulty in admitting this claim provided it is understood in what respect the *Purusha Sukta* is unique.

The principal ground for regarding the *Purusha Sukta* as unique is that the ideal of social organization, namely, the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* which it upholds, is unique. Is this a sufficient ground for holding the *Purusha Sukta* as unique? The *Purusha Sukta* would really have been unique if it had preached a classless society as an ideal form of society. But what does the *Purusha Sukta* do? It preaches a class-composed society as its ideal. Can this be regarded as unique? Only a nationalist and a patriot can give an affirmative answer to this question. The existence of classes has been the *de facto* condition of every society, which is not altogether primitive. It is a normal state of society all over the world where society is in a comparatively advanced state. Looking at it from this point of view, what uniqueness can there be in the *Purusha Sukta*, when it does no more than recognize the sort of class composition that existed in the Indo-Aryan society?

Notwithstanding this, the *Purusha Sukta* must be admitted to be unique, though for quite different reasons. The unfortunate part of the matter is that many people do not know the true reasons why the *Purusha Sukta* should be regarded as unique. But once the true reasons are known, people will not only have no hesitation in accepting that the *Purusha Sukta* is a unique production of the human intellect but will perhaps be shocked to know what an extraordinary production of human ingenuity it is.

What are the features of the social ideal of the *Purusha Sukta*, which give it the hall mark of being unique? Though the existence

of classes is the *de facto* condition of every society, nevertheless no society has converted this *de facto* state of affairs into a *de jure* connotation of an ideal society. The scheme of the *Purusha Sukta* is the only instance in which the real is elevated to the dignity of an ideal. This is the first unique feature of the scheme set forth in the *Purusha Sukta*. Secondly, no community has given the *de facto* state of class composition a legal effect by accepting it as a *de jure* connotation of an ideal society. The case of the Greeks is a case in point. Class composition was put forth as an ideal social structure by no less an advocate than Plato. But the Greeks never thought of making it real by giving it the sanction of law. The *Purusha Sukta* is the only instance in which an attempt was made to give reality to the ideal by invoking the sanction of law. Thirdly, no society has accepted that the class composition is an ideal. At the most they have accepted it as being natural. The *Purusha Sukta* goes further. It not only regards class composition as natural and ideal, but also regards it as sacred and divine. Fourthly, the number of the classes has never been a matter of dogma in any society known to history. The Romans had two classes. The Egyptians thought three were enough. The Indo-Iranians also had no more than three classes:¹ (1) The *Athravans* (priests) (2) *Rathaeshtar* (warriors) and (3) the *Vastrya-fshuyat* (peasantry). The scheme of the *Purusha Sukta* makes the division of society into four classes a matter of dogma. According to it, there can be neither more nor less. Fifthly, every society leaves a class to find its place *vis-a-vis* other classes according to its importance in society as may be determined by the forces operating from time to time. No society has an official gradation laid down, fixed and permanent, with an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt. The scheme of the *Purusha Sukta* is unique, inasmuch as it fixes a permanent warrant of precedence among the different classes, which neither time nor circumstances can alter. The warrant of precedence is based on the principle of graded inequality among the four classes, whereby it recognizes the Brahmin to be above all, the Kshatriya below the Brahmin but above the Vaishya and the Shudra, the Vaishya below the Kshatriya but above the Shudra and the Shudra below all.

1 Geiger : *Civilization of the Eastern Iranians in Ancient Times*, Vol. II, P.64

III

These are the real reasons why the *Purusha Sukta* is unique. But the *Purusha Sukta* is not merely unique, it is also extraordinary. It is extraordinary because it is so full of riddles. Few seem to be aware of these riddles. But anyone who cares to inquire will learn how real in their nature and how strange in their complexion these riddles are. The cosmogony set out in the *Purusha Sukta* is not the only cosmogony one comes across in the Rig Veda. There is another cosmogony which is expounded in the 72nd Hymn of the Tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda. It reads as follows :¹

- “1. Let us proclaim with a clear voice of the generation of the gods (the divine company), who, when their praises are recited, look (favourably on the worshipper) in this latter age.
2. Brahmanaspati filled these (generations of the gods) with breath as a blacksmith (his bellows); in the first age of the gods the existent was born of the non-existent.
3. In the first age of the gods the existent was born of the non-existent; after that the quarters (of the horizon) were born, and after them the upward-growing (trees).
4. The earth was born from the upward growing (tree), the quarters were born from the earth; Daksha was born from Aditi and afterwards Aditi from Daksha.
5. Aditi, who was thy daughter, Daksha, was born; after her, the gods were born, adorable, freed from the bonds of death.
6. When, gods, you abode in this pool well-arranged, then a pungent dust went forth from you as if you were dancing.
7. When, gods, you filled the worlds (with your radiance) as clouds (fill the earth with rain) then you brought fourth the sun hidden in the ocean.
8. Eight sons (there were) of Aditi who were born from her body; she approached the gods with seven, she sent forth Martanda on high.
9. With seven sons Aditi went to a former generation, but she bore Martanda for the birth and death (of human beings).

The two cosmologies are fundamentally different in principle as well as in detail. The former explains creation *ex nihilo* ‘being was born of non-being’. The latter ascribes creation to a being which it calls *Purusha*. Why in one and the same book two such opposite cosmologies should have come to be propounded? Why did the author of the *Purusha Sukta* think it necessary to posit a *Purusha* and make all creation emanate from him?

Any one who reads the *Purusha Sukta* will find that it starts with the creation of donkeys, horses, goats, etc., but does not say anything

1 Wilson’s, *Rig Veda*, Vol. VI, p. 129

about the creation of man. At a point when it would have been natural to speak of the creation of man, it breaks off the chain and proceeds to explain the origin of the classes in the Aryan society. Indeed, the *Purusha Sukta* appears to make the explaining of the four classes of the Aryan society to be its primary concern. In doing this, the *Purusha Sukta* stands in complete contrast not only with other theologies but with the other parts of the Rig Veda also.

No theology has made it its purpose to explain the origin of classes in society. Chapter I of the Genesis in the Old Testament, which can be said to be analogous in intention and purpose to the *Purusha Sukta*, does nothing more than explain how man was created. It is not that social classes did not exist in the old Jewish society. Social classes existed in all societies. The Indo-Aryans were no exception. Nevertheless, no theology has ever thought it necessary to explain how classes arise. Why then did the *Purusha Sukta* make the explanation of the origin of the social classes its primary concern?

The *Purusha Sukta* is not the only place in the Rig Veda where a discussion of the origin of creation occurs. There are other places in the Rig Veda where the same subject is referred to. In this connection, one may refer to the following passage in the Rig Veda which reads as follows :¹

Rig Veda, i.96.2: "By the first *nivid*, by the wisdom of Ayu, he (Agni) created these children of men; by his gleaming light the earth and the waters, the gods sustained Agni the giver of the riches."

In this, there is no reference at all to the separate creation of classes, though there is no doubt that even at the time of the *Rig Veda*, the Indo-Aryan Society had become differentiated into classes; yet the above passage in the *Rig Veda* ignores the classes and refers to the creation of men only. Why did the *Purusha Sukta* think it necessary to go further and speak of the origin of the classes?

The *Purusha Sukta* contradicts the *Rig Veda* in another respect. The *Rig Veda* propounds a secular theory regarding the origin of the Indo-Aryans as will be seen from the following texts:

(1) *Rig Veda*, i.80.16: "Prayers and hymns were formerly congregated in that Indra, in the ceremony which Atharvan, father Manu, and Dadhyanch celebrated."²

(2) *Rig Veda*, i.114.2 : "Whatever prosperity or succour father Manu obtained by sacrifice, may we gain all that under thy guidance, O Rudra."³

1 Muir, Vol. I. p. 180

2 Muir, *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 162.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

(3) *Rig Veda*, ii.33.13 : “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.”¹

(4) *Rig Veda*, viii.52.1 : “The ancient friend hath been equipped with the powers of the mighty (gods). Father Manu has prepared hymns to him, as portals of access to the gods.”²

(5) *Rig Veda*, iii.3.6 : “Agni, together with the gods, and the children (*jantubhih*) of Manush, celebrating a multiform sacrifice with hymns.”³

(6) *Rig Veda*, iv. 37.1 : “Ye gods, Vajas, and Ribhukshana, come to our sacrifice by the path travelled by the gods, that ye, pleasing deities, may institute a sacrifice among these people of Manush (*Manusho vikshu*) on auspicious days.”⁴

(7) *Rig Veda*, vi.14.2 : “The people of Manush praise in the sacrifice Agni the invoker.”⁵

From these texts it is beyond question that the rishis who were the authors of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* regarded Manu as the progenitor of the Indo-Aryans. This theory about Manu being the progenitor of the Indo-Aryans had such deep foundation that it was carried forward by the *Brahmanas* as well as the *Puranas*. It is propounded in the *Aitareya Brahmana*,⁶ in the *Vishnu Purana*⁷ and the *Matsya Purana*.⁸ It is true that they have made Brahma the progenitor of *Manu*; but the *Rig Veda* theory of *Manu* being the progenitor has been accepted and maintained by them.⁹ Why does the *Purusha Sukta* make no mention of *Manu* ? This is strange because the author of the *Purusha Sukta* seems to be aware of the fact that Manu Svayambhuva is called *Viraj* and *Viraj* is called *Adi Purusha*,¹⁰ since he too speaks of *Virajo adhi Purushah* in verse five of the *Sukta*.

There is a third point in which the *Purush Sukta* has gone beyond the *Rig Veda*. The Vedic Aryans were sufficiently advanced in their

1 *Muir*, Vol. I. p. 163.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

6 Quoted by *Muir*, Vol. I, p. 108.

7 Quoted by *Muir*, Vol. I pp. 105-107.

8 Quoted by *Muir*, Vol. I. p. 110-112.

9 There is however a great deal of confusion when one comes to details. The *Vishnu Purana* says that Brahma divided his person into two parts: with the one half he became a male, with the other half a female. The female was called *Satarupa* who by incessantly practising austere fervour of a highly arduous description acquired for herself as a husband a Male called *Manu Svayambhuva*. There is no suggestion in the *Vishnu Purana* of incest by Brahma with his daughter. The *Aitareya Brahmana* and the *Matsya Purana* on the other hand speak of Brahma having begotten Manu by committing incest with his daughter *Satarupa*; the *Matsya Purana* adds that Manu by his austerity obtained a beautiful wife named *Ananta*. According to the *Ramayana* (see *Muir*, I, p. 117) *Manu* was not a male but a female and was a daughter of *Daksha Prajapati* and the wife of *Kasyapa*.

10 *Matsya Purana*- *Muir*, Vol., 1 p. 111 f.n.

civilization to give rise to division of labour. Different persons among the Vedic Aryans followed different occupations. That they were conscious of it is evidenced by the following verse:

Rig Veda, 1.113.6 : “That some may go in pursuit of power, some in pursuit of fame, some in pursuit of wealth, some in pursuit of work, Ushas has awakened people so that each may go in pursuit of his special and different way of earning his livelihood.”

This is as far as the *Rig Veda* had gone. The *Purusha Sukta* goes beyond. It follows up the notion of division of labour and converts the scheme of division of work into a scheme of division of workers into fixed and permanent occupational categories. Why does the *Purusha Sukta* commit itself to such a perversity?

There is another point in which the *Purusha Sukta* departs from the *Rig Veda*. It is not that the *Rig Veda* speaks only of man. It speaks also of the Indo-Aryan nation. This nation was made up of the five tribes, which had become assimilated into one common Indo-Aryan people. The following hymns refer to these five tribes as moulded into a nation:

(1) *Rig Veda*, vi.11.4 : “Agni, whom, abounding in oblations, the five tribes, bringing offerings, honour with prostrations, as if he were a man.”¹

(2) *Rig Veda*, vii.15.2 : “The wise and youthful master of the house (Agni) who has taken up his abode among the five tribes in every house.”²

There is some difference of opinion as to who these five tribes are. *Yaska* in his *Nirukta* says that it denotes *Gandharvas*, *Pitris*, *Devas*, *Asuras* and *Rakshasas*. *Aupamanyava* says that it denotes the four *Varnas* and the *Nishadas*. Both these explanations seem to be absurd. Firstly, because the five tribes are praised collectively as in the following hymns:

(1) *Rig Veda*, ii.2.10 : “May our glory shine aloft among the five tribes, like the heaven unsurpassable.”³

(2) *Rig Veda*, vi.46.7 : “Indra, whatever force or vigour exists in the tribe of Nashusa or whatever glory belongs to the five races bring (for us).”⁴

Such laudatory statements could not have been made if the five tribes included the *Shudras*. Besides, the word used is not *Varnas*. The word used is *Janah*. That it refers to the five tribes and not to the four *Varnas* and *Nishadas* is quite clear from the following verse of the *Rig Veda* :

1 Muir. Vol. I, p. 177.

2 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 178.

3 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 178.

4 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 180.

Rig Veda, i.108.8: "If, O Indra and Agni, ye are abiding among the *Yadus*, *Turvasas*, *Druhyus*, *Anus*, *Purus*, come hither, vigorous heroes from all quarters, and drink the Soma which has been poured out.¹

That these five tribes had been moulded into one Aryan people is clear from the *Atharva Veda* (iii.24.2) which says :

"these five regions, the five tribes springing from Manu."

A sense of unity and a consciousness of kind can alone explain why the *Rishis* of the *Rig Vedic* hymns came to refer to the five tribes in such manner. The questions are: why did the *Purusha Sukta* not recognize this unity of the five tribes and give a mythic explanation of their origin? Why instead did it recognize the communal divisions within the tribes? Why did the *Purusha Sukta* regard communalism more important than nationalism?

These are some of the riddles of the *Purusha Sukta* , which come to light when one compares it with the *Rig Veda*. There are others, which emerge when one proceeds to examine the *Purusha Sukta* from a sociological point of view.

Ideals as norms are good and are necessary. Neither a society nor an individual can do without a norm. But a norm must change with changes in time and circumstances. No norm can be permanently fixed. There must always be room for revaluation of the values of our norm. The possibility of revaluing values remains open only when the institution is not invested with sacredness. Sacredness prevents revaluation of its values. Once sacred, always sacred. The *Purusha Sukta* makes the *Chaturvarnya* a sacred institution, a divine ordination. Why did the *Purusha Sukta* make a particular form of social order so sacred as to be beyond criticism and beyond change? Why did it want to make it a permanent ideal beyond change and even beyond criticism? This is the first riddle of the *Purusha Sukta* which strikes a student of sociology.

In propounding the doctrine of *Chaturvarnya*, the *Purusha Sukta* plays a double game. It proceeds first to raise the real, namely, the existence of the four classes in the Indo-Aryan Society, to the status of an ideal. This is a deception because the ideal is in no way different from facts as they exist. After raising the real to the status of the ideal, it proceeds to make a show of giving effect to what it regards as an ideal. This again is a deception because the ideal already exists in fact. This attempt of the *Purusha Sukta* to idealize

¹ Muir. I. p. 179.

the real and to realize the ideal, is a kind of political jugglery, the like of which, I am sure, is not to be found in any other book of religion. What else is it if not a fraud and a deception? To idealize the real, which more often than not is full of inequities, is a very selfish thing to do. Only when a person finds a personal advantage in things as they are that he tries to idealize the real. To proceed to make such an ideal real is nothing short of criminal. It means perpetuating inequity on the ground that whatever is once settled is settled for all times. Such a view is opposed to all morality. No society with a social conscience has ever accepted it. On the contrary, whatever progress in improving the terms of associated life between individuals and classes has been made in the course of history, is due entirely to the recognition of the ethical doctrine that what is wrongly settled is never settled and must be resettled. The principle underlying the *Purusha Sukta* is, therefore, criminal in intent and anti-social in its results. For, it aims to perpetuate an illegal gain obtained by one class and an unjust wrong inflicted upon another. What can be the motive behind this jugglery of the *Purusha Sukta*? This is the second riddle.

The last and the greatest of all these riddles, which emerges out of a sociological scrutiny of the *Purusha Sukta*, is the one relating to the position of the *Shudra*. The *Purusha Sukta* concerns itself with the origin of the classes, and says they were created by God—a doctrine which no theology has thought it wise to propound. This in itself is a strange thing. But what is astonishing is the plan of equating different classes to different parts of the body of the Creator. The equation of the different classes to different parts of the body is not a matter of accident. It is deliberate. The idea behind this plan seems to be to discover a formula which will solve two problems, one of fixing the functions of the four classes and the other of fixing the gradation of the four classes after a preconceived plan. The formula of equating different classes to the different parts of the body of the Creator has this advantage. The part fixes the gradation of the class and the gradation in its turn fixes the function of the class. The *Brahmin* is equated to the mouth of the Creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the *Brahmin* becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is the noblest in the scale, he is given the noblest function, that of custodian of knowledge and learning. The *Kshatriya* is equated to the arms of the Creator. Among the limbs of a person, arms are next below the mouth. Consequently, the *Kshatriya* is given an order of precedence next below the *Brahmin* and is given

a function which is second only to knowledge, namely, fighting. The *Vaishya* is equated to the thighs of the Creator. In the gradation of limbs the thighs are next below the arms. Consequently, the *Vaishya* is given an order of precedence next below the *Kshatriya* and is assigned a function of industry and trade which in name and fame ranks or rather did rank in ancient times below that of a warrior. The *Shudra* is equated to the feet of the Creator. The feet form the lowest and the most ignoble part of the human frame. Accordingly, the *Shudra* is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely, to serve as a menial.

Why did the *Purusha Sukta* choose such a method of illustrating the creation of the four classes? Why did it equate the *Shudras* to the feet? Why did it not take some other illustration to show how the four classes were created. It is not that *Purusha* is the only stock simile used to explain creation. Compare the explanation of the origin of the Vedas contained in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. It says:¹

“Prajapati infused warmth into the worlds, and from them so heated he drew forth their essences, viz., Agni (fire) from the earth, Vayu (wind) from the air, and Surya (the sun) from the sky. He infused warmth into these three deities, and from them so heated he drew forth their essences,—from Agni the *ric* verses, from Vayu the *yajus* verses and from Surya the *soman* verses. He then infused heat into this triple science, and from it so heated he drew forth its essences—from *ric* verses the syllable *bhuh*, from *yajus* verses *bhuvah*, and from *Saman* verses *sva*.”

Here is an explanation of the origin of the Vedas from different deities. So far as the Indo-Aryans are concerned, there was no dearth of them. There were thirty crores of them. An explanation of the origin of the four *Varnas* from four gods would have maintained equality of dignity by birth of all the four classes. Why did the *Purusha Sukta* not adopt this line of explanation?

Again, would it not have been possible for the author of the *Purusha Sukta* to say that the different classes were born from the different mouths of the *Purusha*. Such a conception could not have been difficult because the *Purusha* of the *Purusha Sukta* has one thousand heads, enough to assign one species of creation to one of his heads. Such a method of explaining creation could not have been unknown to the author of the *Purusha Sukta*. For we find it used by the *Vishnu Purana* to explain the origin of the different *Vedas* as may be seen from the following extract:²

1 Muir, Vol. m. p.5

2 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

“From his eastern mouth Brahma formed the Gayatri, the *ric* verses, the trivrit, the sama-rathantara and of sacrifices, the agnistoma. From his southern mouth he created the *yajus* verses, the trishtubh metre, the panchadasa stoma, the brihatsaman, and the ukthya. From his western mouth he formed the *saman* verses, the jagati metre, the saptadasa stoma, the Vairupa, and the atiratra. From his northern mouth he formed the ekavimsa, the *atharvan*, the aptoryaman with the anushtubh and viraj metres.”

The *Harivamsa* has another way of explaining the origin of the Vedas. According to it:¹

“The god fashioned the *Rig Veda* with the Yajus from his eyes, the *Sama Veda* from the tip of his tongue, and the *Atharvan* from his head.”

Assuming that for some reason the author of the *Purusha Sukta* could not avoid using the body of the Creator and its different parts for explaining the origin and the relation of the four classes, the question still remains as to why he chose to equate the different parts of the *Purusha* to the different classes in the manner in which he does.

The importance of this question is considerably heightened when one realizes that the *Purusha Sukta* is not the only instance in which the different parts of the body of the Creator are used as illustrations to explain the origin of the different classes in society. The same explanation is given by the sage *Vaishampayana* to explain the origin of the various classes of priests employed in the performance of sacrifices. But what a difference is there between the two! The explanation of *Vaishampayana* which is reported in the *Harivamsa* reads as follows :²

“Thus the glorious Lord Hari Narayana, covering the entire waters, slept on the world which had become one sea, in the midst of the vast expanse of fluid (*rajas*), resembling a mighty ocean, himself free from passion (*virajaskah*), with mighty arms; Brahmans know him as the undecaying. Invested through austere fervour with the light of his own form and clothed with triple time (past, present and future) the lord then slept. *Purushottama* (Vishnu) is whatever is declared to be the highest. *Purusha* the sacrifice, and everything else which is known by the name of *Purusha*. Here how the *Brahmins* devoted to sacrifice, and called *ritvijas*, were formerly produced by him from his own body for offering sacrifices. The Lord created from his mouth the *Brahman*, who is the chief, and the *udgatri*, who chants the *Saman*, from his arms the *hotri* and the *adhvaryu*. He then... created the *prastotri*, the *maitravaran*, and the *pratishtatri*, from his belly the *pratiharti* and the *potri*, from his thighs the *achhavaka* and the *neshtri*, from his hands the *agnidhra* and the sacrificial *brahmnya*, from his arms the *gravan* and the sacrificial *unnetri*. Thus did the divine Lord of the

1 Muir, Vol. ID, p. 13.

2 Muir, Vol. I, pp. 154-155

world create the sixteen excellent *ritvijās*, the utterers of all sacrifices. Therefore this *Purusha* is formed of sacrifice and is called the Veda; and all the Vedas with the Vedangas, Upanishads and ceremonies are formed of his essence."

There were altogether seventeen different classes of priests required for the performance of a sacrifice. It could never be possible for anyone attempting to explain the origin of each by reference to a distinct part of the body of the Creator to avoid using the feet of the *Purusha* as the origin of a class, the limbs of the *Purusha* being so few and the number of priests being so many. Yet what does *Vaishampayana* do? He does not mind using the same part of the Creator's body to explain the origin of more than one class of priests. He most studiously avoids using the feet as the origin of anyone of them.

The situation becomes completely intriguing when one compares the levity with which the *Shudras* are treated in the *Purusha Sukta* with the respect with which the *Brahmins* are treated in the *Harivamsa* in the matter of their respective origins. Is it because of malice that the *Purusha Sukta* did not hesitate to say that the *Shudra* was born from the feet of the *Purusha* and that his duty was to serve? If so what is the cause of this malice?

IV

The riddles about the *Shudras* mentioned above are those which arise out of a sociological scrutiny of the *Purusha Sukta*. There are other riddles regarding the position of the *Shudra* which arise out of later developments of the ideal of *Chaturvarṇya*. To appreciate these results it is necessary first to take note of these later developments. The later developments of *Chaturvarṇya* are mainly two. First is the creation of the fifth class next below the *Shudras*. The second is the separation of the *Shudras* from the first three *Varnas*. These changes have become so integrated with the original scheme of the *Purusha Sukta* that they have given rise to peculiar terms and expressions so well-known that everybody understands what they stand for. These terms are : *Savarnas*, *Avarnas*, *Dvijās*, *non-Dvijās*, and *Traivarnikas*. They stand to indicate the sub-divisions of the original four classes and the degree of separation between them. It is necessary to take note of the relative position of these classes because they disclose a new riddle. If this riddle has not caught the eye of the people, it is because of two reasons. Firstly, because students have not cared to

note that these names are not mere names but that they stand for definite rights and privileges, and secondly, because they have not cared to find out whether the groupings made under these names are logical having regard to the rights and privileges they connote.

Let us therefore see what is the *de jure* connotation of these terms. *Savarna* is generally contrasted with *Avarna*. *Savarna* means one who belongs to one of the four *Varnas*. *Avarna* means one who does not belong to any one of the four *Varnas*. The *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are *Savarnas*. The Untouchables or *Ati-Shudras* are called *Avarnas*, those who have no *Varna*. Logically, the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are within the *Chaturvarnya*. Logically, the Untouchables or the *Ati-Shudras* are outside the *Chaturvarnya*. *Dvija* is generally contrasted with *non-Dvija*. *Dvija* literally means twice-born and *non-Dvija* means one who is born only once. The distinction is based on the right to have *Upanayana*. The *Upanayana* is treated as a second birth. Those who have the right to wear the sacred thread are called *Dvijas*. Those who have no right to wear it are called *non-Dvijas*. The *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* have the right to wear the sacred thread. Logically, they are *Dvijas*. The *Shudras* and the *Ati-Shudras* have no right to wear the sacred thread. Logically, they are both *non-Dvijas*. The *Traivarnika* is contrasted with the *Shudra*. But there is nothing special in this contrast. It conveys the same distinction which is conveyed by the distinction between the *Dvijas* and the *non-Dvijas* except the fact that the contrast is limited to the *Shudra* and does not extend to the *Ati-Shudra*. This is probably because this terminology came into being before the rise of the *Ati-Shudras* as a separate class.

Bearing in mind that both the *Shudra* and the *Ati-Shudra* are *non-Dvijas*, why then is the *Shudra* regarded as *Savarna* and the *Ati-Shudra* as *Avarna* ? Why is the former within and why is the latter outside the *Chaturvarnya* ? The *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are all within the four corners of the *Chaturvarnya*. They are all *Savarnas*. Why then is the *Shudra* denied the right of the *Traivarnikas* ?

Can there be a greater riddle than the riddle of the *Shudras* ? Surely, it calls for investigation and explanation as to who they were and how they came to be the fourth *Varna* in the Aryan Society.