CHAPTER II

THE BRAHMANIC THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE SHUDRAS

HAS the Brahmanic literature any explanation to offer which can account for the origin of the Shudras? There is no doubt that the Brahmanic literature is full of legends regarding creation which touch upon the creation of the universe, of man and of the different Varnas. Whether or not they furnish any clue to discover the origin of the Shudras, there can be no doubt that all such theories should find a place in a book which is concerned with the problem of the Shudras if for no other reason than that of assembling all material relating to the Shudras in one place and making their story complete. It would be better to take each piece of the Brahmanic literature separately, and note what contribution it has to make to the subject.

I

To begin with the *Vedas*. As to the *Rig Veda,* the legend about creation to be found in its *Sukta* known as the *Purusha Sukta* has already been set out in the previous chapter. It now remains to take note of the legends contained in the other *Vedas*.

There are two recensions of the *Yajur Veda* : (1) the White *Yajur Veda* and (2) the Black *Yajur Veda*. To take the White *Yajur Veda* first. The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* of the White *Yajur Veda* sponsors two theories. One is a mere reproduction of the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda* with this difference that it has 22 verses, while the original as it occurs in the *Rig Veda* has only 16 verses. The six additional verses in the White *Yajur Veda* read as follows :

17. Brought forth from the waters and from the essence of the earth, he was produced by Vishvakarman in the beginning. Tvashta gives him form; that is the Universe of Purusha on all sides in the beginning.

18. I know this great Purusha, of the colour of the sun, beyond darkness. Only by knowing him does one go beyond death; there is no other path for going.

19. Prajapati moves in the interior of the womb; though unborn, he is born in many forms. Wise men see his source; wise men desire the place of the Marichis.

20. He who shines for the gods, he who is the priest of the gods, he who was born before the gods,—salutation to that shining offspring of Brahma.

21. The gods, generating the shining offspring of Brahma, said in the beginning: "That Brahmin who knows thus,— the gods will be under his control."

22. Sri and Laxmi are his wives; the day and night his sides; the stars his ornament; the Ashwins his bright face. Grant me my desires; grant me that; grant me everything.

The second explanation contained in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* is quite different from the *Purusha Sukta.* It reads as follows :

> V.S., xiv.28.[1]—"He lauded with one. Living beings were formed. He lauded with three: the *Brahman* was created; *Brahmanaspati* was the ruler. He lauded with five: existing things were created; *Bhutanampati* was the ruler. He lauded with seven: the seven rishis were created: *Dhatri* was the ruler. He lauded with nine: the *Fathers* were created: *Aditi* was the ruler. He lauded with eleven: the seasons were created: the *Artavas* were the rulers. He lauded with thirteen: the months were created: the year was the ruler. He lauded with fifteen: the *Kshatra* (the *Kshatriya*) was created: *Indra* was the ruler. He lauded with seventeen: animals were created: *Brihaspati* was the ruler. He lauded with nineteen: the *Shudra* and the *Arya* (*Vaishya*) were created: day and night were the rulers. He lauded with twenty-one: animals with undivided hoofs were created: *Varuna* was the ruler. He lauded with twenty-three: small animals were created: *Pushan* was the ruler. He lauded with twenty-five: wild animals were created: *Vayu* was the ruler (compare R.V., x.90.8). He lauded with twenty-seven: heaven and earth separated: *Vasus, Rudras* and *Adityas* separated after them: they were the rulers. He lauded with twenty-nine: living beings were created: the first and second halves of the month were the rulers. He lauded with thirty one: existing things were tranquillized: *Prajapati Parameshthin* was the ruler."

Now to turn to the Black *Yajur Veda.* The *Taittiriya Samhita* of the Black *Yajur Veda* gives altogether five explanations. The one at iv. 3, 10 is the same as has been put forth by the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* of the White *Yajur Veda* at (xiv.28) and which has been reproduced earlier. Of the rest those which narrate the origin of the Shudra are set out below:

> T.S., ii.4.13.1" "The gods were afraid of the *Rajanya* when he was in the womb. They bound him with bonds when he was in the womb. Consequently, this *Rajanya* is born bound. If he were born unbound he would go on slaying his enemies. In regard to whatever *Rajanya* any one desires that he should be born unbound, and should go on slaying his enemies, let him offer for him this *Aindra-Barhaspatya* oblation. A *Rajanya* has the character of *Indra,* and

1 Muir, Vol. I, p. 18.

2 Muir, Vol. I, p. 22.

a Brahman is *Brihaspati*. It is through the *Brahman* that anyone releases the *Rajanya* from his bond. The golden bond, a gift, manifestly releases from the bond that fetters him."

(2) T.S., vii. 1.1.4.[1]—*Prajapati* desired, 'may I propagate.' He formed the Trivrit (stoma) from his mouth. After it were produced the deity Agni, the metre Gayatri, the Saman (called) Rathantara, of men the Brahmin, of beasts the goats. Hence they are the chief *(mukhyah)* because they were created from the mouth *(mukhatah)*. From (his) breast, from his arms, he formed the Panchadasa *(stoma)*. After it were created the god, the Indra, the Trishtubh metre, the Saman (called) Brihat, of men the *Rajanya,* of beasts the sheep. Hence they are vigorous, because they were created from vigour. From (his) middle he formed the Saptadasa (stoma). After it were created the gods (called) the Vishvedevas, the Jagati metre, the Saman called the Vairupa of men the *Vaishya,* of beasts kine. Hence they are to be eaten, because they were created from the receptacle of food. Wherefore they are more numerous than others, for the most numerous deities were created after (the Saptadasa). From his foot he formed the Ekavimsa (Stoma). After it were created the Anushtubh metre, the Saman called Vairaja, of men the *Shudra,* of beasts the horse. Hence these two, born the horse and the *Shudra,* are transporters of (other) creatures. Hence (too) the *Shudra* is incapacitated for sacrifice, because no deities were created after (the *Ekavimsa)*. Hence (too) these two subsist by their feet, for they were created from the foot.

Coming to the *Atharva Veda,* there are altogether four explanations. One of these is the same as the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*. It occurs at xix.6. The others are as stated below :

(1) A.V.,[2] iv.6.1.—The *Brahman* was born the first with ten heads and ten faces. He first drank the soma; he made poison powerless.

(2) A.V.,[3] xv.8.1.—He (the *Vratya)* became filled with passion thence sprang the *Rajanya*.

(3) A.V., [4V]xv.9.1.—Let the king to whose house the *Vratya* who knows this, comes as a guest, cause him to be respected as superior to himself. So doing he does no injury to his royal rank, or to his realm. From him arose the *Brahman* (*Brahmin*) and the *Kshattra* (*Kshatriya*). They said 'Into whom shall we enter,' etc.

II

To proceed to the Brahmanas. The *Satapatha Brahmana* contains six explanations. There are two which concern themselves with the creation of the *Varnas*. Of the two, the one which speaks of the origin of the *Shudras* is given below :

S.B.[5] xiv.4.2.23.—"Brahma (here, according to the commentator, existing in the form of Agni and representing the Brahmana caste) was formerly this

1 Muir, Vol. I, p. 16.
2. Muir, Vol. I, p. 21
3. Muir, Vol. I, p. 22
4. Muir, Vol I, p. 22
5. Muir Vol I, p. 20

(universe), one only. Being one, it did not develope. It energetically created an excellent form, the Kshattra, viz., those among the gods who are powers (Kshattrani), Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mrityu, Isana. Hence nothing is superior to the *Kshatra.* Therefore, the Brahmana sits below the Kshatriya at the Rajasuya sacrifice; he confers that glory on the Kshattra (the royal power). This, the Brahma, is the source of the Kshattra. 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. He did not develope. He created the Vis, viz., those classes of gods who are designated by troops, Vasus, Rudras, Adityas, Visvedevas, Maruts. He did not develope. He created the Shudra class Pushan. This earth is Pushani; for she nourishes all that exists. He did not develope. He energetically created an excellent form, Justice (Dharma). This is the ruler (Kshattra) of, the ruler (Kshattra), 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 conseqence they say of a man who speaks truth, 'he speaks justice.' For this is both of these. This is the Brahma, Kshattra, Vis and Shudra. Through Agni it became Brahma among the gods, the Brahmana among men, through the (divine) Kshatriya a (human) Kshatriya, through the (divine) Vaishya a (human) Vaishya, through the (divine) Shudra a (human) Shudra. Wherefore it is in Agni among the gods and in a Brahman among men that they seek after an abode.

The *Taittiriya Brahman* is responsible for the following explanation :

(1) T.B.,[1] i.2.6.7.—"The Brahmana caste is sprung from the gods; the Shudras from the Asuras."

(2) T.B.,[2] iii. 2.3.9.—"This Shudra has sprung from non-existence."

III

Here is a complete collection of all the Brahmanic speculations on the origin of the four classes and of the Shudras. The ancient Brahmins were evidently conscious of the fact that the origin of the four classes was an unusual and uncommon social phenomenon and that the place of the Shudra in it was very unnatural and that this called for some explanation. Otherwise, it would be impossible to account for these innumerable attempts to explain the origin of the *Chaturvarnya* and of the Shudra.

But what is one to say of these explanations? The variety of them is simply bewildering. Some allege that *Purusha* was the origin of

1 Muir, Vol. I, p. 21

2 Muir, Vol. I, p. 21.

the four *Varnas,* and some attribute their origin to Brahma, some to Prajapati and some to Vratya. The same source gives differing explanations. The White *Yajur Veda* has two explanations, one in terms of *Purusha,* the other in terms of *Prajapati.* The Black *Yajur Veda* has three explanations to offer. Two are in terms of *Prajapati,* the third in terms of Brahman. The *Atharva Veda* has four explanations, one in terms of *Purusha,* second in terms of *Brahman,* third in terms of *Vratya* and fourth quite different from the first three. Even when the theory is the same, the details are not the same. Some explanations such as those in terms of Prajapati, or Brahma are theological. Others in terms of Manu or Kasyapa are in humanistic terms. It is imagination running riot. There is in them neither history nor sense. Prof. Max Muller commenting on the *Brahmanas* has said :

> "The Brahmanas represent no doubt a most interesting phase in the history of the Indian mind, but judged by themselves, as literary productions, they are most disappointing. No one would have supposed that at so early a period, and in so primitive a state of society, there could have risen up a literature which for pedantry and downright absurdity can hardly be matched anywhere. There is no lack of striking thoughts, of bold expressions, of sound reasoning, and curious traditions in these collections. But these are only like the fragments of a torso, like precious gems set in brass and lead. The general character of these works is marked by shallow and insipid grandiloquence, by priestly conceit, and antiquarian pedantry. It is most important to the historian that he should know how soon the fresh and healthy growth of a nation can be blighted by priestcraft and superstition. It is most important that we should know that nations are liable to these epidemics in their youth as well as in their dotage. These works deserve to be studied as the physician studies the twaddle of idiots, and the raving of madmen."[1]

On reading these Brahmanic speculations on the origin of the four *Varnas* and particularly of the Shudras one is very much reminded of these words of Prof. Max Muller. All these speculations are really the twaddles of idiots and ravings of madmen and as such they are of no use to the student of history who is in search of a natural explanation of a human problem.

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1 Max Muller, *Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (Panini office edition), p. 200.