

CHAPTER X

THE DEGRADATION OF THE SHUDRAS

WHAT is the technique which the Brahmins employed to bring about the degradation of the Shudras from the rank of the second to the rank of the fourth Varna?

The discussion has so far centred round two questions as to whether or not the Shudras were originally a part of the second or Kshatriya Varna and whether or not the Brahmins had not received sufficient provocation to degrade the Shudras. It is now necessary to deal with the question, which is logically, next in order of sequence. What is the technique of degradation employed by the Brahmins?

My answer to the question is that the technique employed by the Brahmins for this purpose was to refuse to perform the Upanayana of the Shudras. I have no doubt that it is by this technique that the Brahmins accomplished their end and thereby wreaked their vengeance upon the Shudras.

It is perhaps necessary to explain what Upanayana means and what importance it had in the Indo-Aryan Society. The best way to give an idea of Upanayana is to give a description of the ceremony.

As a rite *Upanayana* was originally a very simple ceremony, The boy came to the teacher with a *samidh* (a grass blade) in his hand and told the teacher that he desired to become a Brahmachari (i.e a student) and begged the teacher to allow him to stay with him for purposes of study. At a later date it became a very elaborate ceremony. How elaborate it had become may be realised from the following description of *Upanayana* in the Ashvalayana Grihya Sutra :¹

Let him initiate the boy who is decked, whose hair (on the head) is shaved (and arranged), who wears a new garment or an antelope skin if a Brahmana, rum skin if a Kshatriya, a goat's skin if a Vaishya; if they put on garments they

¹ Kane, *History of Dharmashastra*, Vol. II (i), pp. 281-283.

should put on dyed ones, reddish-yellow, red and yellow (for a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya respectively); they should have girdles and staffs (as described above). While the boy takes hold of (the hand of) his teacher, the latter offers (a homa of clarified butter oblations) in the fire (as described above), and seats himself to the north of the fire with his face turned to the east, while the other one (the boy) stations himself in front (of the teacher) with his face turned to the west. The teacher then fills the folded hands of both himself and of the boy with water and with the verse 'we choose that of Savitri' (Rg.V. 82.1) the teacher drops down the water in his own folded hands on to the water in the folded hands of the boy; having thus poured the water, he should seize with his own hand the boy's hand together with the thumb (of the boy) with the formula' by the urge (or order) of the god Savitri, with the arms of the two Ashvins, with the hands of Pushan, I seize thy hand, oh so, and so,' with the words 'Savitri has seized thy hand, oh so and so' a second time (the teacher seizes the boy's hand) with the words 'Agni is thy teacher oh so and so' a third time. The teacher should cause (the boy, to look at the sun, while the teacher repeats 'God Savitri, this is thy brahmachari protect him, may he not die' and (the teacher should further) say Whose brahmachari art thou? thou art the brahmachari of Prana. Who does initiate thee and whom (docs he initiate)? I give thee to Ka (to Prajapati).' With the half verse (Rg. III.8.4) 'the young man well attired and dressed, come hither' he (the teacher) should cause him to turn round to the right and with his two hands placed over (the boy's) shoulders he should touch the place of the boy's heart repeating the latter half (of Rg. III. 8.4). Having wiped the ground round the fire, the brahmachari should put (on the fire) a fuel stick silently, since it is known (from sruti) 'what belongs to Prajapati is silently done,' and the brahmachari belongs to Prajapati. Some do this (offering of a fuel stick) with a mantra to Agni: 'I Have brought a fuel stick, to the great Jatavedas; by the fuel stick mayest thou increase, Oh agni and may we (increase) through *brahman*' (prayer or spiritual lore), svaha.' Having put the fuel stick (on the fire) and having touched the fire, he (the student) thrice wipes off his face with the words 'I anoint myself with lustre,' it is known (from sruti) for he does anoint himself with lustre. 'May Agni bestow on me, insight, offspring and lustre: on me may Indra bestow insight, offspring and vigour (Indriya) ;on me may the sun bestow insight, offspring and radiance; what thy lustre is, Oh Agni, may I thereby become lustrous; what the strength is, Agni, may I thereby become strong; what thy consuming power is, Agni, may I thereby acquire consuming power.' Having waited upon (worshipped) Agni with these formulae, (the student) should bend his knees, embrace (the teachers feet) and say to him 'recite, Sir, recite, Sir, the Savitri.' Seizing the student's hands with the upper garment (of the student) and his own hands, the teacher recites the Savitri first pada by pada, then hemistich by hemistich (and lastly) the whole verse. He (the teacher) should make him (the student) recite (the Savitri) as much as he is able. On the place of the student's heart the teacher lays his hand with the fingers upturned with the formula 'I place thy heart unto duty to me, may thy mind follow my mind; may you attend on my words single-minded; may Brihaspati appoint thee unto me.' Having tied the girdle round him (the boy) and having given him the staff, the teacher should instruct him in the observances of a brahmachari with the words 'a brahmachari art thou, sip water, do service, do not

sleep by day, depending (completely) on the teacher learn the Veda.' He (the student) should beg (food) in the evening and the morning; he should put a fuel stick (on fire) in the evening and morning. That (which he has received by begging) he should announce to the teacher; he should not sit down (but should be standing) the rest of the day.

The Upanayana ends with the teaching by the Acharya to the boy of the Vedic Mantra known as the Gayatri Mantra. Why the Gayatri Mantra is regarded as so essential as to require the ceremony of Upanayana before it is taught it is difficult to say.

From this description of the Upanayana ceremony two things are clear. First is that the purpose of Upanayana was to initiate a person in the study of the Vedas which commenced with the teaching of Gayatri Mantra by the Acharya to the Brahmachari. The second thing that is clear is that certain articles were regarded as very essential for the Upanayana ceremony. They are (1) two garments one for the lower part of the body technically called *Vasa* and the other for the upper part of the body called *Uttariya*, (2) Danda or wooden staff, (3) Mekhala or a girdle of grass tied across the waist.

Any one who compares this description of Upanayana as it was performed in ancient times with the details of the ceremony as performed in later days is bound to be surprised at the absence of any mention of thread called *Yajnopavita* to be worn by the Brahmachari as a part of his Upanayana. The centre of the modern ceremony of Upanayana is the wearing of this thread and the whole purpose of the Upanayana has come to be the wearing of this *Yajnopavita*¹ So important a part this *Yajnopavita* has come to play that most elaborate rules have come to be framed about its manufacture and its use.

The *Yajnopavita* should have three threads, each thread to be of nine strands well twisted. One *tantu* (strand) stands for one devata (deity).

The *Yajnopavita* should reach as far as the navel,² should not reach beyond the navel, nor should it be above the chest.

1. Yajnavalkya (T, 16 and 133) calls It Bramhu Sutra,

2. Kane, D.S. H (i), p. 292.

The nine devatas of the nine *tantus* (strands) according to the Devala Smriti are, Omkara, Agni, Naga, Sema, Pitris, Prajapati, Vayu, Surya, Vishvadeva. Some change seems to have come about in this view. For Medhatithi (see Kane) says that in *ishtis*, animal sacrifices and soma sacrifices, the *Yajnopavita* was to have only one thread of three *tantus*, but it was three-fold in three classes of *ahina*, *ekahu* and *sattra* sacrifices as they required three fires, and in the seven *somasamstha* seven-fold, and five-fold when viewed with reference to the three savanas and two samdhyas.

A brahmachari was to wear only one *yajnopavita*, and samnyasins, when they kept *yajnopavita* at all, also wore only one. A snataka (i.e., one who has returned from the teacher's house after brahmacharya) and householder were to wear two, while one who desired long life may wear more than two. A snataka should always wear two *yajnopavitas*, A householder may wear any number up to ten.

A person could wear more than one *Yajnopavita*,

A man must always wear *Yajnopavita*. If he took his meals without wearing the *Yajnopavita*, or answers the call of nature without having the *Yajnopavita* placed on the right ear, he had to undergo prayascitta, viz., to bathe, to mutter prayers and fast.

Wearing of another's *Yajnopavita* along with several other things (such as shoes, ornament, garland and kamandalu) is forbidden.¹

Three ways of wearing the *Yajnopavita* are recognized: (1) *nivita*, (2) *pracinavita* and (3) *upavita*. When the cord is carried over the neck, both shoulders and the chest and is held with both the thumbs (of the two hands) lower than the region of the heart and above the navel, it is called *nivita*. Suspending the cord over the left shoulder in such a way that it hangs down on his right side, it becomes *upavita*. Suspending it on his right shoulder in such a way that it hangs down on his left side, it becomes *pracinavita*.

How did this *Yajnopavita* come in? Mr. Tilak offers an explanation² which is worth quoting. Mr. Tilak says :

“Orion or Mrigashiras is called Prajapati in the Vedic works, otherwise called Yajna. A belt or girdle of cloth round the waist of Orion or Yajna will therefore be naturally named after him as *Yajnopavita*, the *upavita* or the cloth of *yajna*.

The term, however, now denotes the sacred thread of the Brahmins, and it may naturally be asked whether it owes its character, if not the origin, to the belt of Orion. I think it does on the following grounds:

The word *yajnopavita* is derived by all native scholars from *Yajna* + *Upavita*; but there is a difference of opinion as to whether we should understand the compound to mean an *upavita* for *yajna* i.e for sacrificial purposes, or, whether it is the ‘*upavita* of *Yajnas*.’ The former is not incorrect, but authority is in favour of the latter. Thus the Prayoga-writers quote a *smṛiti* to the effect that ‘the High Soul is termed *Yajna* by the hotris, this is his *upavita*; therefore it is *yajna-upavita*.’ A mantra, which is recited on the occasion of wearing the sacred thread means, ‘I bind you with the *upavita* of *yajna*’, while the first half of the general formula with which a Brahmin always puts on his sacred thread is as follows:

यज्ञोपवीतं परमंपवित्रं प्रजापतेर्यत्सहजं पुरस्तात्

The Mantra is not to be found in any of the existing Samhitas, but is given in the Brahmapanishad and by Baudhayana. This verse is strikingly similar to the verse quoted above from the Haoma Ycsht. It says, ‘*yajnopavita* is high and sacred; it was born with Prajapati, of old.’ The word *purastat* corresponds with *paurvanim* in the Avesta verse and thus decides the question raised by Dr. Haug,

1. Kane. History of Dharmashastra Vol. II, (1), p. 293.

2. *Orion*, pp, 144-146.

while *sahaja*, born with the limbs of Prajapati, conveys the same meaning as *mainyutastem*. The coincidence between these verses cannot be accidental, and it appears to me that the sacred thread must be derived from the belt of Orion. Upavita, from *ve* to weave, literally means a piece of cloth and not a thread. It appears, therefore, that a cloth worn round the waist was the primitive form of *yajnopavita*, and that the idea of sacredness was introduced by the theory that it was to be a symbolic representation of Prajapati's waistcloth or belt."

This explanation by Mr. Tilak is no doubt very interesting. But it does not help to explain some of the difficulties. It does not explain the relation of the *Yajnopavita* to the two garments the *Uttariya*, and the *vasa*, which are necessary for a person to wear while undergoing *Upanayana*. Was the *Yajnopavita* in addition to the two garments? If so, how is it that there is no mention of it in the early description of the ceremony of the *Upanayana*? It does not explain another difficulty. If that thread is a substitute for the cloth, how is it that the wearing of the cloth is retained in the *Upanayana*?

There seems to be another explanation. I offer it for what it is worth. According to it, the wearing of the thread had to do with the adoption of the *gotra*. Its object was to tie oneself to a particular *gotra*. It had nothing to do with the *Upanayana* as such, the object of which was to initiate a person in the study of the Vedas. It is not sufficiently realized that under the Ancient Aryan Law, a son did not naturally inherit the *gotra* of his father. The father had to perform a special ceremony to give his *gotra* to his son. It is only when this ceremony was performed that the son became the same *gotra* as the father. In this connection, reference may be made to two rules observed by the Indo-Aryan Society. One is the rule of impurities. The other is the rule of adoption. With regard to the rule of impurity, brought about by death, the days of impurity vary with the kinship with the dead. If the kinship is very close, the days of impurity are greater than those in the case where the kinship is less close. The impurities attached to the death of a boy who has not been invested with the thread are very meagre,¹ not extending for more than a few days. With regard to the rule of adoption,² it lays down that a boy who was invested with the thread was not eligible for adoption. What is the idea behind these rules? The idea seems to be quite clear. The impurities are nominal because there being no thread, the boy had not formally entered into the *gotra* of his father. Adoption means

1. See *Manu Smriti*, Chapter V, Verses 66-70,

2. *Kalikapurana* quoted by Vyavahara Mayukha, edited by Kane, p. 114. This plea has been taken in various cases in Courts by litigants to which Mr. Kane makes references.

entering into the *gotra* of the adoptive father. Once the thread ceremony had taken place the boy had already and irrevocably entered another *gotra*.

There was no room for adoption left. Both these rules show that the thread ceremony was connected with *gotra* and not with *Upanayana*.

The view that the thread has connection with *gotra* seems to receive support from Jain literature. Shloka 87 of the fourth Parvan of the Padmapurana by Acharya Ravishena reads as follows :¹

“Bhagwan ! you have told us the origin of Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. I am anxious to know the origin of those who wear the thread in their neck.”

The words ‘those who wear the thread in the neck’ are very important. There is no doubt that it is a description of the Brahmins. From this it is clear that there was a time when the Brahmins alone wore the thread and no other class did. Read with the fact that the *gotra* relationship was confined only to the Brahmins, it is clear that the thread ceremony was connected with bringing the boy into—actually tying him up to the *gotra*— of his father, and had nothing to do with *Upanayana* which was connected with the initiation in the teaching of the Vedas.

If this is true, then the thread ceremony and the *Upanayana* ceremony had different purposes to serve. At some later date the two merged into one. The reason for this merger appears to be very natural. The *Upanayana* without the thread ceremony involved the danger of the Acharya taking the boy in his *gotra*. It was to avoid the danger that the father of the boy performed the thread ceremony before handing him over to the Acharya. This is the probable reason why the two ceremonies came to be performed simultaneously.

Be that as it may, *Upanayana* means the teaching of the Veda by the Vedic Brahmin.

III

While I am convinced that my thesis is sound, it would be over confident to think that there will not be found persons who will not raise objections to it. I anticipate the following :

- (1) Is absence of *Upanayana* the test of Shudradom;
- (2) Did the Shudra ever have the right to *Upanayana*?

¹ Quoted by Nathuram Premi in his *Jain Sahitya our Itihas* (Hindi), p. 55a,

- (3) How can the loss of *Upanayana* result in the general degradation of Shudras?
- (4) What power did the Brahmins have to deny *Upanayana* to the Shudras?

Having stated the possible objections to my thesis, I like to give my reply to them.

IV

To begin with the first. The best way to deal with this objection is to refer to the judicial decisions in order to find out what the Courts in India have regarded as the surest criterion for determining who is a Shudra.

The first case to which reference may be made is to be found in 7, M.I.A.18.¹ It was decided by the Privy Council in 1837. The question at issue was whether at the relevant time there were in India any Kshatriyas. The contention of one side was that there were. The contention on the other side was that there were none. The latter contention was based upon the theory propagated by the Brahmins that the Brahmin Parashurama had killed all the Kshatriyas and that if any were left they were all exterminated by the Shudra king Mahapadma Nanda, so that thereafter there were no Kshatriyas left and that there were only Brahmins and Shudras. The Privy Council did not accept this theory which they regarded as false and concocted by the Brahmins and held that the Kshatriyas still existed in India. The Privy Council did not however lay down any test by which a Kshatriya could be distinguished from a Shudra. In their view, the question must be determined in each case on its own facts.

The second case on the subject is to be found in I.L.R.10 Cal. 688.² The question raised in the case was whether the Kayasthas of Bihar were Kshatriyas or Shudras. The High Court decided that they were Shudras. The partisans of the Kayasthas took the position that the Kayasthas of Bihar were different from the Kayasthas of Bengal, the Upper Provinces and Benares and that while those in the Upper Provinces and Benares were Shudras, the Kayasthas of Bihar were Kshatriyas. The court refused to make this distinction and held that the Kayasthas of Bihar were also Shudras.

1. Chuohirya Run Murdan Syn *Versus* Sahub Purhulad Syn.

2. Raj Coomar Lall *versus* Bissessur Dyal.

The validity of this judgement was not accepted by the Allahabad High Court. In I.L.R.12 All. 328,¹ Justice Mahamood at page 334 observed as follows :

"I entertain considerable doubts as to the soundness of the view which seems to have been adopted by both the Courts below, that the literary caste of *Kayasthas* in this part of the country, to which the parties belong, falls under the category of *Shudras*, as understood in the division of mankind in the Institute of Manu or elsewhere in authoritative texts of the Hindu Law. The question is one of considerable difficulty not only ethnologically, but also from a legal point of view, so far as the administration of the Hindu Law to this important section of the population is concerned. I do not take the question to be settled by any adjudication of the Lords of the Privy Council either in *Sri Narayan Miner vs. Sree Mutty Kishen Soondoory Dasse*,² or in *Mahashova Shosinath Ghose vs. Srimati Krishna Soondari Dasi*³ in both of which the cases referred to adoption by Kayasthas of Lower Bengal, who may be distinguishable from the twelve castes of Kayasthas in Upper India, such as the North-western Provinces and Oudh. Nor do I think that the unreported decision of the learned Chief Justice and my brother Tyrell in *Chaudhari Hazari Lai versus Bishnu Dial* (First Appeal No. 113 of 1886, decided on the 15th June 1887), which was also an adoption case, settles the question. But I need not pursue the subject any further...."

The third case is reported in (1916) 20 Cal. W.N.901⁴. Here the question raised was whether Kayasthas of Bengal were Kshatriyas or Shudras. The High Court of Calcutta held that they were Shudras. The case was taken to the Privy Council by way of appeal against the decision of the Calcutta High Court. The decision of the Privy Council is reported in (1926) 47 I.A. 140. The question whether the Bengali Kayasthas are Shudras or Kshatriyas was not decided upon by the Privy Council but was left open. In between 1916 and 1926 the Calcutta High Court gave two decisions which held that inter-marriages between Kayasthas of Bengal and *Tantis*⁵ and *Domes*⁶ two of the low castes, were legal on the ground that both of them were sub-castes of Shudras.

These decisions which caused further deterioration in the position of the Kayasthas were followed by another which is reported in I.L.R. 6 Patna 506.⁷ In a most elaborate judgement extending over 47 pages Mr. Justice Jwala Prasad went into every Purana and every

1. Tulsi Ram *versus* Behari Lai.

2. L. R. I. A. Sup., Vol. 149.

3. L. R. 7,1.A., 250.

4. Asita Mohan Ghosh *versus* Nirod Mohan Ghosh Maulik.

5. (1921) 48 Cal. 626. Bishwanath Ghosh *versus* Srimati Balai Desai.

6. (1924) 51 Cal. 788. Bholanalh Mitter *versus* King Emperor.

7. (1926) Ishwari Prasad *versus* Rai Hari Prasad Lai.

Smriti in which there was a reference to the Kayasthas. He differed from the Calcutta High Court and held that the Kayasthas of Bihar were Kshatriyas.

Next come cases in which the question at issue was whether the Maharattas are Kshatriyas or Shudras. The first case in which this issue was raised is reported in 48 Mad. I.¹ This was an interpleader suit filed by the Receiver of the estate of Raja of Tanjore in which all the descendants as well as the distant agnates and cognates of the Raja were made defendants in the suit. The kingdom of Tanjore was founded by Venkoji, otherwise called Ekoji, who was a Mahratta and the brother of Shivaji the founder of the Mahratta Empire. The judgement in the case covers 229 pages and the question whether the Mahrattas were Kshatriyas was dealt with in a most exhaustive manner. The decision of the Madras High Court was that the Mahrattas were Shudras and not Kshatriyas as was contended by the defendants.

The next case which also relates to the Mahrattas is reported in I.L.R. (1928) 52 Bom.497.² The Court decided that :

“There are three classes among the Mahrattas in the Bombay Presidency: (1) the five families; (2) the ninety-six families; (3) the rest Of these, the first two classes are legally Kshatriyas.”

The last case to which reference may be made is reported in I.L.R. (1927) 52 Mad. I.³ The issue was whether the Yadavas of Madura were Kshatriyas. The Yadavas claimed themselves to be Kshatriyas. But the Madras High Court negatived the claim and held that they were Shudras.

Such is the course of judicial pronouncements on the issue as to how to determine who is a Kshatriya and who is a Shudra. It is a most confusing medley of opinion which settles little and unsettles much. The Kayasthas of Bihar, of the Upper Provinces (now U.P) and Benares are Kshatriyas, while the Kayasthas of Bengal are Shudras!! According to the Madras High Court all Mahrattas are Shudras. But according to the Bombay High Court, Mahrattas belonging to five families and 96 families are Kshatriyas and the rest are Shudras!! The Yadava community to which Krishna belonged is popularly believed to be Kshatriyas. But according to the Madras High Court, the Yadavas are Shudras!!

1. (1924) Maharaja of Kolhapur *versus* Sundaram Ayyar.

2. Subbarao Hambirao Palil *vera?* Radha Hambirao Patil.

3. Mokka Kone *versus* Ammakutti.

More important for our purpose are the criteria which the courts have adopted in coming to their decisions than the particular decisions in the cases referred to. Among the criteria which the courts have laid down, the following may be noted :

- (1) In I.L.R. 10 Cal. 688, the criteria adopted were (i) use of Das as surname, (ii) wearing the sacred thread, (iii) ability to perform the *homa*, (iv) the period of impurity; (v) competence or incompetence of illegitimate sons to succeed.
- (2) In I.L.R. 6 Patna 606, the criterion seems to be general repute. If a community is Kshatriya by general repute it is to be treated as a Kshatriya community.
- (3) In 48 Madras 1, a variety of criteria were adopted. One was the consciousness of the community. The second was undergoing the ceremony of *Upanayana* as distinguished from wearing the sacred thread. The third criterion was that all non-Brahmins are Shudras unless they prove that they are Kshatriyas or Vaishyas.
- (4) In I.L.R. Bom. 497, the tests adopted were (i) the consciousness of the caste (ii) its custom, and (iii) the acceptance of that consciousness by other castes.

No one who knows anything about the subject can say that the criteria adopted by the various courts are the right ones. A criterion such as the period of impurity is irrelevant and of no value for determining the question. A criterion such as the capacity for performing *homa* is relevant but not valid. It mistakes effect for a cause. The criterion of consciousness is hardly a fair criterion. A community may have lost its consciousness by long disuse of necessary religious observances due to causes over which it has no control. The criterion of *Upanayana* stands on a different footing. The courts have not put it properly. But there is no doubt that rightly understood and properly put the criterion of *Upanayana* is sound. The Courts have not made any distinction between the *de facto* position of the community and its position *de jure* in regard to *Upanayana*, and have proceeded on the assumption that what is true *de facto* must also be true *de jure*. It is this fault in the application of the criterion of *Upanayana* which has produced anomalies and absurdities, such as one community having one status in one area and quite a different status in a different area—or allowing any pretender community to wear the thread and by continuing its

pretence for a period to acquire a vested right or contrariwise punishing a community by declaring that it had no *de jure* right to wear the thread merely because it has not been wearing it *de facto*. The real criterion is not the wearing of the sacred thread but the right to wear the sacred thread. Understood in its proper sense, it may be said without fear of contradiction that the right to *Upanayana* is the real and the only test of judging the status of a person whether he is a Shudra or a Kshatriya.

V

The second objection is quite untenable. To assume, as the objection does, that from the very beginning the Aryan Society treated its different classes differently in the matter of *Upanayana* is to my mind a very unnatural supposition. Primitive society does not begin with differentiation. It begins with uniformity and ends in diversity. The natural thing would be to suppose that in the matter of the *Upanayana* the ancient Aryan society treated all its classes on the same footing. It may however be argued, on the other side, that such an original tendency in favour of uniformity need not be accepted as being universal, that it may well be that in the ancient Aryan society the Shudras and the women were excluded from *Upanayana*. Fortunately for me, it is not necessary for me to rely on logic alone though I contend that logic is on my side. For there is ample evidence both circumstantial as well as direct to show that both Shudras as well as women had at one time the right to wear the sacred thread.

That the ancient Aryan society regarded *Upanayana* as essential for all will be evident if the following facts are borne in mind.

Upanayana was allowed for the deaf, the dumb, the idiot and even the impotent. A special procedure was prescribed for the *Upanayana* of the deaf and dumb and idiots. The principal points in which their *Upanayana* differs from that of others are that the offering of *Samidh*, treading on a stone, putting on a garment, the tying of *mekhala*, the giving of deer skin and staff are done silently, that the boy does not mention his name, it is the *acharya* himself who makes offering of cooked food or of clarified butter, all the *mantras* are muttered softly by the *acharya* himself. The same procedure is followed as to other persons who are impotent, blind, lunatic, suffering from such diseases as epilepsy, white leprosy or black leprosy, etc.

The six *anuloma* castes were also eligible for *Upanayana*; this is clear from the rules¹ for the *Upanayana* of Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and of mixed castes like Rathakara, Ambashtha, etc.

Upanayana was permitted to *Patitasavitrikas*. The proper age for the *Upanayana* of a Brahman boy was 8th year from birth, of a Kshatriya 11th year and of a Vaishya 12th year. But a certain latitude was allowed so that the time for *Upanayana* was not deemed to have passed upon the 16th, the 22nd and the 24th year in the case of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas respectively. After these years are passed without *Upanayana* taking place, a person was held to have become incompetent thereafter for learning the Savitri (the sacred Gayatri verse). Such persons were then called *Patitasavitrika* or *savitripatita*. According to the strict interpretation of rules, no *Upanayana* is to be thereafter performed for them, they are not to be taught the Veda, nor is anyone to officiate at their sacrifices and there is to be no social intercourse with them (i.e., no marriage takes place with them). But even in their case, there was readiness to relax the rules² subject to certain penances.

Upanayana was permitted in the case of Brahmagnas. A Brahmagna is a person whose father or grandfather had failed to perform *Upanayana*. The original rule³ was that if a person's father and grandfather also had not the *Upanayana* performed for them then they (i.e., the three generations) are called slayers of *brahma* (holy prayers or lore); people should have no intercourse with them, should not take their food nor should enter into marriage alliance with them. But even in their case the rule was relaxed and they were allowed *Upanayana* if they desired, provided they performed the prescribed penance.

1. Baud. Gr. Sutra (II.8). Kane, *History of Dharmashastra*, II (1), p. 299.

2. Ap. Dh. S., I. 1. 1 28-31, prescribes that after the 16th or 24th year, the person should undergo the rules of studenthood two months just as those who meant to study the three vedas and whose *Upanayana* has been performed, observe (viz., begging for food, etc.) then his *Upanayana* should be performed, then for one year he should bathe (thrice if possible) every day and then he should be taught the Veda. This is a somewhat easy penance. But others prescribe heavier penalties. Vas. Dh. S. XI. 76-79 and the Vaik. Smarta, 11.3 prescribes that one who is *patitasavitrika* should either perform the Uddalaka vrata or should take a bath along with the performer of an Ashvamedha sacrifice or should perform the Vratyastoma sacrifice. See Kane, *ibid.*, p. 377.

3. Ap. Dh. S., I. 1.1. 32-2. 4. The penance prescribed was that of observing the rules of studenthood one year for each generation (that had not the *Upanayana* performed) then there is *Upanayana* and then they have to bathe (thrice or once) every day for a year with certain mantras, viz., the seven Pavamani verses beginning with 'yad ami yacca durake' (Rg. IX. 67. 21-27), with the Yajus Pavitra (Tai. S., I. 2.1. 1=Rg. X. 17. 10) with the *samapavitra* and with the mantras called Angirasa (Rg. IV. 40.5) or one may pour water only with the *Vyahritis*. After all this is done, one must be taught the Veda. See Kane, *ibid.*, p. 378.

A further relaxation was made in the case of a person whose generation beginning with the great grandfather had not the Upanayana performed on them.¹ Even they were allowed to have their Upanayana performed if they desired, provided they performed penance which included studenthood for twelve years and bath with the Pavamani, and other verses. On his Upanayana, instruction in the duties of the householder was imparted to him, and though he himself could not be taught the Veda, his son may have the samskara performed as in the case of one who is himself a *patitasavitrika* so that his son will be 'one like other Arya'.

Upanayana was permitted to the Vratyas. It is difficult to state exactly who the Vratyas were, whether they were Aryans who had for more than three generations failed to perform the Upanayana or whether they were non-Aryans who were never within the Aryan fold and whom the Brahmins wanted to convert to the Aryan faith. It is possible that it included both. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Upanayana was open to the Vratyas provided they performed Vratyastomas. Vratyas were those who lead the Vratya life, were base and were reduced to a baser state since they did not observe studenthood (brahmacharya) nor did they till the soil nor engage in trade. There were four Vratyastomas, the first of which is meant for all Vratyas, the second is meant for those who are *Abhishasta* who are wicked or guilty of heavy sins and are censured and lead a Vratya life, the third for those who are the youngest and lead a Vratya life and the fourth for those who are very old and yet lead a Vratya life. In each of the four Vratyastomas, Sodasastoma² is always performed. It is by the Sodasastoma that they can attain this (superior status). The Sodasastoma was supposed to have the power to remove the guilt of these. By performing the Vratyastoma sacrifice, they should cease to be Vratyas and become eligible for social intercourse with the Orthodox Aryas, to have the sacrament (*samskara* of Upanayana) performed of them and then be eligible to study the Veda.

In the Vratyata-shuddisamgraha³ provision is made for the purification of Vratyas even after twelve generations subject to appropriate penances.

1. Ap. Dh S., 1.1. 2.5-10.

2. Kane (*ibid*, p. 385) refers to the Tandya Brahmana 17.1.1 which tells the story that when the gods went to the heavenly world some dependents of theirs who lived the *vraty*a life were left behind on the earth. Then through the favour of the gods the dependents got at the hands of Maruts the *Sodasastoma* (containing 16 stotras) and the metre (*viz.*, *anustubh*) and then the dependents secured heaven.

3. Kane, *ibid*, p. 387

Upanayana was so highly thought of that Baudhayana (ii.10) allowed Upanayana for the Asvattha tree.

Given these facts, it is difficult to believe that the women and Shudras were excluded from the Upanayana by the Aryan society from the very beginning. In this connection, attention may be drawn to custom prevalent among the Indo-Iranians who were very closely related to the Indo-Aryans in their culture and religion. Among the Indo-Iranians, not only both men and women but men and women of all classes are invested with the sacred thread. It is for the opponents to prove why the system was different among the Indo-Aryans.

It is, however, not quite necessary to depend upon circumstantial evidence. There is enough direct evidence to show that there was a time when both women and Shudras had the right to Upanayana and did have it performed.

As to the Upanayana of women the statements¹ contained in the Hindu religious books are quite explicit. Anyone who examines them will find that Upanayana was open to women. Women not only learned the Vedas but they used to run schools for teaching the Vedas, are even known to have written commentaries on the Women Purva Mimamsa.

As to the Shudras, the evidence is equally positive. If Sudas was a king, if Sudas was a Shudra, if his coronation ceremony was performed by Vasishtha and he performed the Rajasuya Yaga, then there can be no doubt that the Shudras did at one time wear the sacred thread. In addition to circumstantial evidence and the evidence of the authors mentioned before, the Sanskara Ganapati cited by Max Muller² contains an express provision declaring the Shudra to be eligible for Upanayana.

The only difference between the women and the Shudras is that in the case of women there is some plausible explanation given as to why the Upanayana of women was stopped, while there is no such explanation for stopping the Upanayana of the Shudras. It is argued that the Upanayana of women continued as long as the age of Upanayana and the age of marriage continued to be different. It is said that in ancient times the age of Upanayana was 8 and the age for marriage was considerably later. But at a later stage, the age of marriage was brought down to 8, with the result that the Upanayana

1. See *Purushartha* Number for September 1940 where all authorities are collected in one place.

2. *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature* (1860), p. 207.

as an independent ceremony ceased to exist and became merged in marriage. Whether this explanation is right or wrong is another matter. The point is that in the case of the Shudra, the Upanayana was at one time open to him, that it was closed to him at a later stage and that there is no explanation for this change.

Those who, in spite of the evidence to which I have referred, think that they must insist upon their objection should remember the weakness of their side. Assuming that the Shudras had never had the benefit of Upanayana, the question they have to face is why were the Shudras not allowed the benefit of the Upanayana. The orthodox theory merely states the fact that there is no Upanayana for a Shudra. But it does not say why the Shudra is not to have his Upanayana performed. The explanation that there was no Upanayana of the Shudra because he was a non-Aryan is a modern invention which has been shown to be completely baseless. Either there was once an Upanayana and it was stopped or the Upanayana was from the very beginning withheld. Either may be true. But before one or the other is accepted to be true, it must be accompanied by reasons. There being no reason why the benefit of the Upanayana was withheld from the Shudra, the presumption must be in favour of my thesis which states that they had the right to Upanayana, that they were deprived of it and gives reasons why they were deprived of its validity.

VI

The third objection is no objection at all. Only a person who does not know fully all the incidents of Upanayana can persist in upholding its validity.

The Aryan society regarded certain ceremonies as Samskaras. The Gautama Dharma Sutra (VIII. 14-24) gives the number of Samskaras as forty. They are :

Garbhadhana Pumsavana, Simantonnayana, Jatakarma, namakarana, annaprasana, caula, Upanayana, the four vratas of the Veda, Snana (or Samavartana), vivaha, five daily mahayajnas (for deva, pitri, manushya, bhuta, and Brahma); seven pakayajnas (viz., astaka, parvanasthalipaka, sraddha sravani, agrahayani, caitri, asvayuji); seven haviryajnas (in which there is burnt offering but no Soma, viz., Agnyadheya, Agnihotra, Darsapurnamasa, Agrayana, Caturmasyas, Nirudhapasubandha and Sautramani); seven soma sacrifices (Agnistoma, Atyagnistoma, Ukthya, Sodasin, Vajapeya, Atiratra, Aptoryama).