

CHAPTER XII

THE THEORY IN THE CRUCIBLE

I

THE object of this essay was to trace the origin of the Shudras and discover the causes of their degradation. After an examination of historical material and of theories suggested by various writers—orthodox as well as modern—I have put forth a new thesis. In the preceding chapters, it has been presented in parts for the facility of laying the foundation of each part separately. It is time these parts were assembled together for a full and complete understanding of what the thesis is. It may be summarized as follows :

- (1) The Shudras were one of the Aryan communities of the Solar race.
- (2) The Shudras ranked as the Kshatriya Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society.
- (3) There was a time when the Aryan Society recognized only three Varnas, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The Shudras were not a separate Varna but a part of the Kshatriya Varna.
- (4) There was a continuous feud between the Shudra kings and the Brahmins, in which the Brahmins were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities.
- (5) As a result of the hatred towards the Shudras due to their tyrannies and oppressions, the Brahmins refused to invest the Shudras with the sacred thread.
- (6) Owing to the loss of the sacred thread the Shudras became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the Vaishyas and came to form the fourth Varna.

It now remains to assess the validity of this thesis. It is usual for the author to leave this to others to do it. I propose to make a departure and myself enter upon the task of putting my thesis to

test. I do so because it gives me an opportunity of vindicating my thesis.

II

I can well imagine my critics to allege that my thesis rests upon a single statement from the Mahabharata in which Paijavana is described as a Shudra; that identification of Paijavana with Sudas is not proved beyond the shadow of doubt; that the description of Paijavana as a Shudra does not occur in any other place except in a single place in the Mahabharata. How can a theory built on such weak foundations be acceptable? They are bound to invoke the usual agreement that a chain is not stronger than its weakest link. I am sure that my thesis cannot be discredited and demolished in such an easy manner.

In the first place, I do not admit that a thesis cannot be built up on a single piece of evidence. It is a well-known principle of the law of evidence that witness must be weighed and not numbered. The number of witnesses is a less important consideration than the weight to be attached to the individual testimony of each or to the sum of the testimonies of all taken together. There is no reason to doubt the truth of the statement that Paijavana was a Shudra. The author of the Mahabharata has no reason to give a false description. Writing after such a long time, no motive, no partiality could be attributed to him. The only conclusion one can draw is that the author was recording a true tradition.

The fact that Paijavana is not described as a Shudra in the Rig Veda does not militate against the truth of the statement which occurs in the Mahabharata. Many explanations can be given for the absence of the word Shudra from the description of Paijavana in the Rig Veda. The first explanation is that it is wrong to expect such a description in the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda is a book of religion. A description such as Shudra could not be expected in a book of religion. It would be irrelevant. But such a description may well be expected to occur in a book of history such as the Mahabharata wherein as a matter of fact it does.

The other explanation for the infrequent mention of the word Shudra in connection with Sudas which I can think of is that it was unnecessary. Descriptions in terms of kula, gotra, tribe, etc., are really speaking marks of identification. Marks of identification are

necessary in the case of lesser people. They are unnecessary in the case of famous men. There is no doubt that Sudas was the most famous man of his time. It was unnecessary to describe him as Shudra for the purpose of identifying him to the people. This is not altogether a mere matter of speculation. One can cite historical instances. Take the case of Bimbisara and Pasenadi, two kings who lived in the time of Buddha. All other kings who were their contemporaries are described in the literature of the time by their *gotra* name. But these two are just spoken of by their personal names. Prof. Oldenberg¹ who noticed this fact explains this on the ground that they were well-known and did not stand in need for being described by their gotra names.

III

But it is really wrong to suppose that my theory is based on the solitary passage in the Mahabharata or on the identification of Paijavana with Sudas. Nothing of the kind. The thesis is not supported by a single chain and therefore the argument that a chain is not stronger than its weakest link does not apply to it. The case is supported by several parallel chains. The weakness of a link in one of them cannot be said to weaken the support. The weakness of one link in one chain throws the whole weight on other chains. Consequently, before concluding that the theory has broken down, it is necessary to prove that the other chains are not able to sustain the weight.

The description of Paijavana as Shudra and the identification of Paijavana with Sudas of the Rig Veda is not the only chain which supports the thesis. There are other chains. One of these is the admission in the Satapatha and Taittiriya Brahmanas that there were only three Varnas and the Shudras did not form a separate Varna. The second consists of evidence that Shudras were kings and ministers of State. The third consists of evidence that the Shudras were at one time entitled to Upanayana. All these are strong chains quite capable of taking all extra weight arising out of a possible breakdown of the first chain.

As far as evidence is concerned, absolute certainty amounting to demonstration is seldom to be had and I do not claim absolute

¹ *Lift of Buddha*, p. 414.

certainty for my thesis. But I do claim that the evidence in support of the theory is both direct as well as circumstantial, and where it is conflicting it is supported by strong probabilities in favour of it.

IV

I have shown what strength there is in the thesis I have presented. I will now proceed to show that the thesis is a valid one. There is one test which I think is generally accepted as the right one by which to appraise the validity of a thesis. It is that a thesis which demands acceptance must not only suggest a solution, but must also show that the solution it proposes answers the riddles which surround the problem which it claims to have solved. It is this test that I propose to apply to my thesis.

Let me begin by listing in one place the riddles of the Shudra. The following include the most important of them :

- (1) The Shudras are alleged to be non-Aryans, hostile to the Aryans, whom the Aryans are said to have conquered and made slaves. How is it then that the rishis of the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda should wish glory to the Shudras and express a desire to be in favour of the Shudras?
- (2) The Shudras are said not to have the right to study the Vedas. How is it then that Sudas, a Shudra, was the composer of the hymns of the Rig Veda?
- (3) The Shudras are said to have no right to perform sacrifices. How is it that Sudas performed the Ashva-Medha sacrifice? Why does the Satapatha Brahmana treat the Shudra as a sacrificer and give the formula of addressing him?
- (4) The Shudras are said not to have the right to Upanayana. If this was so from the very beginning, why should there be a controversy about it? Why should Badari and the Samskara Ganapati say that he has a right to Upanayana?
- (3) The Shudra is not permitted to accumulate property. How is it that the Maitrayani and Kathaka Samhitas speak of the Shudras being rich and wealthy?
- (6) The Shudra is said to be unfit to become an officer of the State. How is it then that the Mahabharata speaks of Shudras being ministers to kings?

- (7) It is said that the duty of the Shudra is to serve, in the capacity of a menial, the three Varnas. How is it then that there were kings among the Shudras as testified by the case of Sudas and other cases mentioned by Sayana?
- (8) If the Shudra had no right to study the Vedas, if he had no right to Upanayana, if he had no right to sacrifice, why was he not given the right to have his Upanayana, to read the Vedas and to perform sacrifice?
- (9) The performance of Upanayana of the Shudra, his learning to read the Vedas, his performing the sacrifices, whether they were of any value to the Shudra or not, were certainly occasions of benefit to the Brahmins in as much as it is the Brahmins who had the monopoly of officiating at ceremonies and of teaching the Vedas. It is the Brahmins who stood to earn large fees by allowing the Shudra the right to Upanayana, the performance of sacrifices and the reading of the Vedas. Why were the Brahmins so determined to deny these concessions to the Shudras, when granting them would have done no harm and would have increased their own earnings?
- (10) Even if the Shudra had no right to Upanayana, sacrifices and Vedas, it was open to the Brahmins to concede him these rights. Why were these questions not left to the free will of the individual Brahmins? Why were penalties imposed upon a Brahmin if he did any of these prohibited acts?

How can these riddles be explained? Neither the orthodox Hindu nor the modern scholar has attempted to explain them. Indeed they do not seem to be aware of the fact that such riddles exist. The orthodox Hindu does not bother about them. He is content with the divine explanation contained in the *Purusha Sukta* that the Shudra was born from the feet of the Purusha. The modern scholar is content with the assumption that the Shudra in his origin is a non-Aryan aboriginal, for whom the Aryan quite naturally prescribed a different code of laws. It is a pity that none of these classes of people have cared to acquaint themselves with the riddles which surround the problem of the Shudra, much less have they thought of suggesting a theory of the origin of the position of the Shudra capable of solving them.

With regard to my thesis it will be seen that it can explain everyone of these riddles. Postulates (1) to (4) explain how the Shudras could be kings and ministers and why the rishis should

praise them and desire to be in their good books. Postulates (5) and (6) explain why there was a controversy over the Upanayana of the Shudra, also why the law not only denied the right to the Shudra but imposed penalties upon a Brahmin, helping to make it effective. Indeed there is no riddle which the thesis does not solve. The thesis, if I may say so, is a close and a perfect fit. Few theses can therefore have a better title deed than this.

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Appendices

APPENDIX I

References to the word “Arya” (अर्य) in the Rig Veda.

I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX		X	
H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
33	3	23	13	43	2	1	7	2	12	14	3	8	1	1	4	23	3	20	4
70	1	23	15			2	12	33	2	15	3	21	5	19	36	61	11	27	8
71	3	35	2			2	18	33	6	16	27	21	9	21	16	79	1	27	19
73	5					4	6	33	9	20	1	31	5	24	221			34	13
81	6					16	19	34	9	24	5	34	18	34	10			42	1
81	9					20	3	54	12	25	7	48	3	39	2			59	3
116	6					24	8			36	5	56	12	48	8			76	2
118	9					29	1			45	33	60	11	49	12			86	1
121	15					38	2			47	9	64	3	52	7			86	3
122	14					48	1			48	16	68	2	54	9			89	3
169	6					50	11			51	2	83	5	55	12			133	3
184	1									59	8	86	7					148	3
185	9											92	4					191	1
												100	5						

APPENDIX II
References to the word “Arya” (आर्य)
(I) In the Rig Veda

I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX		X	
H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
51	8	11	18	34	9	26	2	34	6	18	3	5	6	24	27	63	6	38	3
59	2	11	19			30	18			20	10	18	7	103	1	63	14	43	4
117	21									25	2	83	1					49	3
130	8									33	3							65	11
156	5									60	6							69	6
																		83	1
																		86	19
																		102	3
																		103	3
																		138	3
																		191	1

(II) In the Yajur Veda												(III) Atharva Veda							
IV		V		VI		XVIII		XIX		XX		IV		XX		XXII			
H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
20	4	11	3	63	4	1	21	32	8	18	5	32	1	11	9	63	4		
20	8							62	1	85	4			17	4				
														18	5				
														36	10				
														85	4				
														89	1				
														95	4				

APPENDIX III

Different meanings of the word “Arya” (अर्य) found in the Rig Veda.

Meaning	I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX		X	
	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
Enemy	70	1					16	19	33	2	14	3	21	9	48	8	79	1	42	1
	73	5									15	3	34	18	49	12			59	3
	118	9									20	1	48	3					76	2
	121	15									36	5	56	22					89	3
	169	6											68	2						
													92	4						
Respectable Noble	33	3	23	15	43	2	1	7	33	6	24	5	8	1	19	36			20	4
	81	6	35	2			2	12	33	9	25	7	21	5	21	16			27	8
	81	9	43	2			4	6	34	9	47	9	31	5	24	22			27	19
	121	14					20	3					86	7	34	10			34	13
	184	1					24	8					100	5	55	12			86	1
							29	1											86	3
Citizen							38	2											116	6
							48	1											148	3
																			191	1
							2	18												
							20	3												

APPENDIX V
References to “Dasyu” in the Rig Veda

I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX		X	
H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
33	4	11	18	29	9	16	9	4	6	14	3	5	6	6	14	41	2	22	8
33	7	11	19	34	6	16	10	7	10	16	15	6	2	14	14	47	2	47	4
33	9	12	10	34	9	16	12	14	14	18	3	19	4	39	8	88	4	48	2
36	18	13	9	49	2	28	3	29	10	23	2			50	8	92	5	49	3
51	5	15	9			28	4	30	9	24	8			51	2			55	8
51	6	20	9			38	4	31	5	29	6			56	2			73	5
51	8							31	7	31	4			70	11			83	3
53	4							70	3	45	24			98	6			83	6
59	6																	95	7
78	4																	99	7
100	18																	105	11
101	5																		
103	3																		
103	4																		
108	12																	170	2
117	3																		
117	21																		

APPENDIX VI
References to the word “Varna” in the Rig Veda

I		II		III		IV		V		VI		VII		VIII		IX		X	
H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M
73	7	1	12	34	5	5	13									65	8	3	3
92	10	3	5													71	2	124	7
96	5	4	5													71	8		
104	2	5	5													97	15		
113	2	12	4													104	4		
179	6	34	13													105	40		