

Social Reflection In the Nitisara

Abstract

Kamandaka¹ too refers to this categorization and appears to support the basis being of deed rather than birth. The social structure of the time was essentially characterized at once by the strong as well as weak points of the puranic culture that prevailed in Indian life in the Gupta-period and in the centuries following it. The varna system is not reflected as such in Kamandaka's work. The contemporary sources like Dandin referred that the Aryan community had hardly changed during Kamandaka's period. The social custom and practices are not described in the *Nitisara* although it is described the contemporary sources as *Dasakumaracharita*², *Maltimadhava* and others.

Keywords: Purus sukta, mandala, mahapurusha, anvikshikee, trayee, varta, feudal, cultivation, sanskara, dana, twice-born, varnasamkara, ayogava, vaideha, arthapala, gopkanya sankarvarna and magadhas.

Introduction

The social order continued to be based on the categorization in accordance with the varnas system since the vedic period. The Aryan society was composed of the four traditional varnas; Brahmana (the spiritual class), Kshatriya (governing or the warrior class), vaishya (trading and the cultivating class), and the shudra (The servile class). Kautilya³, Manu⁴, Kalidasa⁵, Bhasa⁶, even Kamandaka are in agreement with the reference in the 90th hymn of the Xth purush sukta mandala of the Rigveda. Manu quoted the reference of Rigveda that the four varnas were born from the different parts of the body of Brahma (Mahapurusha), for the furtherance of the world. Brahma created brahmana from the mouth, kshatriya from arms, vaishya from the thighs and shudra from the feet. During the Vedic period the varna system was based on ability and nature of work. It gradually came to be associated with birth alone during the post vedic period and by the gupta period the social categorization had emerged in its rigid form. However thinkers like Shukra⁶ continued to accept the scheme of varna on the basis of quality and deeds and not on birth.

Aim of the Study

With the emergence of craft structures the rural base underwent a change. The society also changed due to the changing social, political and economic conditions and developed into a synthesis of rural and urban basis. In such circumstances the social scene underwent a transformation without changing the basis social structure developed in reality. The origin of feudalism in the pre-gupta , was to further lead to a social formation which would fruits society's harms and the sastans had prove risen to deal with these changes as evidences in the writings of Manu, Yajnavalkya, Brahaspati and Narada. Kamandaka too although indirectly sets up a picture of the society as it should be.

Finding

The society in ancient india since the later vedic period had been based on the varna-ashrama system. The society came to be divided in to four categories of varna brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra. All the members of the varnas were expected to trust through the ashrama system. Here we do not need to go into the origins of the system. The ashrama system based on the life cycle of a human being was divided in to the brahmacharya, grahastha, vanaprastha and the sanyasa, varna came to be associated with the castes system and ashrama as the mode of living in different periods of existence for all the castes. Different duties were assigned for every varna and ashrama cycle the people were expected to perform their duties honestly. No doubt a particular section of the society was deprived but the tremendous impact made by the brahmanical revival on the social and cultural life of the country in the beginning of the Gupta-age was still being felt although its momentum had perceptibly slowed down. The disparities in the master-servant relationship. He also writes on



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their rights and duties. The caste structure gleaned from the *Nitisara* can be stated as follows.

Brahmana

The brahmana was the superior caste in the society. The origin of the term brahman has a certain religious significance Kautilya⁸ writes that the religious life of the community was under his control. They take full part in the festivals. They were known as twice born and enjoyed special rights in the society. Manu⁹ also accepted the categorization of the 'purush sukta'. Brahmana the highest among the varna performs the duty of per morning vedic rites as also study the Vedas and kulluka (men who teaches of God and religion). Yajnavalkya¹⁰ and Narada¹¹ also extended a concept of 'svayambhuva' for brahmana which meant those who had self control and performed greatest of all auspicious rites. Kamandaka¹² also refers to brahmanas as a spiritual class. About their duties he writes that he must have knowledge about 'anvikshikee' (the science of spiritual knowledge). He performs the holy acts of teaching and conducting sacrifices on behalf of others, and of accepting alms from the pious. These have been enumerated by the sages to be the means of livelihood for those belonging to the superior section. He also states that to attain religious merit, ladies were anxious to donate one thousands cows to the Brahmins. According to Dandin¹³ the brahmana's were granted not only land but revenues as well under the agrahara donation. A significant departure is evidenced during this period for they are permitted to adopt agricultural activities¹⁴. This is however not referred to by Kamandaka. The practice of untouchability had not emerged and the caste rules were not so strict.

Kshatriya

The second group of the so called dvija was the kshatriya. Kautilya¹⁵ refers to them as being part of a well trained army. He however writes that not all fighters belonged to kshatriya varna since a large force was required; recruitment from the shudra masses was quite common. As stated earlier the kshatriya were said to have been created from the arms of the great being and they were expected to protect the life and property of their subject from all kinds of evils and to punish the wicked. Manu¹⁶, Yajnavalkya¹⁷, Shukra¹⁸ and Bhasa¹⁹ refers to kshatriya as a twice-born and he was found in very high position and as the ruling class. Manu states that his duties included protection of the people, granting gifts, performance of sacrifices, study of the Vedas and abstention from luxury (vishayesh vakra saktischa). Kamandaka²⁰ also refers to kshatriya as a ruling class. He describes him as a monarch, as a vijigishu and as a sovereign. Kamandaka describes their fields of study. They should study anvikshikee²¹ trayee²² and varta²³. He should live by his weapons and by protection of his subjects. He who can protect men, he who is valorous, restrained and powerful and he who was expected to punish the wicked was called kshatriya. Kamandaka and the other scholars agree that the kshatriyas should receive proper training in the use of arms and in administering kingdom properly. He portrays the classification of kshatriyas

on the basis of their dynasty but the dynasty (suryavanshi, pandya/ chandravanshi) was not reflected in that society but emerged shortly there after. During his time there were Gurjara-pratihara, Pala and Rastrakuta who did not trace the lineages from the sun.

Although according to the Dandin²⁴ they were known as the warring (kshatra) class in general and the kings in particular commanded popular respect for the political or military power they wielded and also for their heroism. They were often bracketed with the brahmana and the two constituted the privileged upper class for all practical purpose. Kshatriya also adopted the deeds of a vaishya. They were not only a ruler; they were a military power, a business man and a land owner (feudal) as well²⁵.

Vaishya

The vaishya were also classified as part of the twice born- dvijas as they were required to perform all the rites (sanskara) from the conception to the funeral with the utterances of the incantations (mantras). The means of subsistence of a vaishya were cattle rearing, cultivation and trade. The occupation of those who lived by these means was called varta. Kautilya²⁶, Manu²⁷, Yajnavalkya²⁸, Shukra²⁹, Bhasa³⁰ and Kamandaka are all agreed with the above statements regarding a vaishya. Kalidasa portrays him as the businessmen of ancient times. Kamandaka³¹ does not describe details regarding the vaishyas. However other contemporary sources do describe and reflect the changes for the vaishya as evidenced during this period. Dandin³² and others portray them as kayastha and as bankers. The distribution of charity (dana) continued to be one of the duties of the vaishyas as laid down in the dharmasastras. Most likely the vaishyas utilized their wealth, earned through trade for the welfare of the society. According to the Chinese traveler Fa Hein³³ the prominent people among the vaishya community had established charity houses and hospitals in cities and the inmates were provided with all kinds of help. The contemporary sources also describe the vaishya serving in the capacity of a soldier. They had become well learned person and did the work of a clerk. Kamandaka's silence on the vaishya is intriguing. It can either be held that they had become insignificant or else that their status had declined as stated by Puri³⁴.

Shudra

The fourth category of the varna structure was the shudra. They were known as servants of the twice-born. Kautilya³⁵, Manu³⁶, Yajnavalkya³⁷, Shukra³⁸ and Kamandaka³⁹ all portray him as one belonging to the service class. One after another the authors state that his means of livelihood were fine arts and the occupation of a ministerial. By the Mauryan period the condition of education nor the right of salvation. During the Gupta period their condition had changed further. They adopted many other professions besides serving the other. They took to agriculture and trade as well. By early medieval period or A.D.8th century. Their condition under went further transformation.

Kamandaka does not portray the actual status of the shudra varna either directly or indirectly. According to other contemporary sources the shudra had acquired the right of education. However Parasara, states that eating a shudra's food, associating with a shudra, sitting on the same seat with a shudra and talking lessons from a shudra were acts which dragged down even a blazing person⁴⁰. This possibly hints at the emergence of untouchability of the later times since the touch or even the sight of a shudra came to taken as an act of pollution. However that a shudra was still not an untouchable yet can be gathered since the feet of brahmanas and other guests were to be washed by the shudras⁴¹.

Mixed Caste

Kautilya makes no reference to the existence of mixed castes during the mauryan period. However by the time of Gupta, we find references to the mixed-caste. Manu⁴² gives a long list of varnasamkara (mixed-caste) which was based on inter-varna marriage. He states that the children born out of the marriage of brahman husband and a vaishya wife were known as ambasthas. In the same manner the progeny of a marriage of Brahman husband and a shudra wife were known as nishada; of a kshatriya husband and a shudra wife were ugra; of a kshatriya husband and brahmana wife were known as suta, while those of a vaishya husband and kshatriya wife were magadhas. The children of a vaishya husband and brahmana wife were known as vaidehas, of a shudra husband and a vaishya wife were known as ayogavas, of a shudra husband and a kshatriya wife were known as kshattas while a child born from of a shudra husband and a brahman wife was called as a chandala. Ayogava, chandala, Magadha, vaideha, suta were all known as the lowest or belonging to the vile caste.

Kamandaka⁴³ also makes a reference to the mixed caste. According to him if the four varnas neglected their duties that would result in the spread of mixed castes and this brings about the ruin of this world. The idea of new varna called a sankaravarna was introduced only to accept them into the social fold. However Kamandaka does not give the examples and duties of this group. Dandin⁴⁴ too refers to the mixed caste and states that Arthapala married the gopkanya and saktikumara married a harlot and their progeny formed part of the mixed caste. It therefore appears that although accepted as constituting a part of the society, the mixed castes were not looked upon favourably by Kamandaka or by the prevailing society.

Conclusion

Literary work anywhere are generally a mirror of a contemporary society and therefore should be used to interpret the social, political, economic and cultural scenario of a given times and place. This becomes all the more important in the event where there is paucity of historical literature as in the case of early India. Historical works apart there are ample other literary works dealing with philosophy, religion, governance polity and other secular subjects which have come down to us. Historians trying to trace the histories of ancient India have used these works to

substantiate and corroborate the available archaeological data to reconstruct the imagery of a given period. One such work is *Nitisara* written by Kamandaka a work associated mainly with polity. The Indian social order had since early times been based on the four fold division or the so called caste categorization of society. He defines the social order in to the brahman, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra and details their duties. However the transformation in this order gets reflected in the *Nitisara* since the duties of brahmana get adopted by kshatriya and brahmana took on the duties of a kshatriya. The position of vaishya emerges as having been degraded with respect to earlier times. The condition of a shudra however appears to have improved as already concluded in the paper on the basis of the evidence available. The shudra's were permitted to take on the duties of a vaishya. Further change in this social structure is brought out by Kamandaka. Kautilya was silent on the question of the mixed castes while Kamandaka deals with them (varnasamkara). Thus reflecting the changed social system of that time. Largely however Kamandaka sticks to the idealistic order of society and appears to support it.

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