

**SAMSKĀRAS IN THE EARLY HISTORICAL  
CONTEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GRHYASŪTRAS  
AND THE DHARMASŪTRAS**

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24 July, 2001

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled "**SAMSKĀRAS IN THE EARLY HISTORICAL CONTEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE GRHYASŪTRAS AND THE DHARMASŪTRAS**" by **SHWETANSHU BHUSHAN** is in partial fulfilment for the requirement of the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university. To the best of my knowledge this is her own work.

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*Dedicated to . . .*

*My Parents*

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Errors, if any, are mine.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ApDS	:	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
ApGS	:	Āpastamba Gr̥hyasūtra
AsvGS	:	Āsvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra
BDS	:	Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra
GDS	:	Gautama Dharmasūtra
PGS	:	Pāraskara Gr̥hyasūtra
SGS	:	Sāṅkhāyana Gr̥hyasūtra
VDS	:	Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The word *samskāra* is derived from the Sanskrit root 'samskrghāñ'. Though the term *samskāra* hardly ever occurs in Vedic literature, the root 'Kr' with 'Sām' and the passive participle 'samskrta' occur often enough.<sup>1</sup> *Samskāra* means purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of an individual so that he (and occasionally she) may become a full fledged member of the community.<sup>2</sup> Literally meaning 'making a person perfect or fit for a certain purpose'<sup>3</sup> the *samskāras* are meant to consecrate an individual and enable him to overcome the risks of a new stages in his life. They are basically 'to generate fresh qualities or a peculiar excellence and to fortify him at the moments of transition to a new period of life, such as impregnation, birth, naming, initiation and investiture with the sacred thread, the return home of the youth ('Veda student') after the completion of his education, marriage, death'.<sup>4</sup> So covering all important phases of human existence from conception until death and beyond they make the individual gradually approach the state of the 'twice-born' reach it and continue in it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. II, part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64, p.190.

<sup>2</sup> R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1969, p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Kane, op.cit, p.190.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sūtras, History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II, Part I, Otto Harrassowitz, Weisbaden, 1977, p.469.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p.557.

The *samskāra* are described in some hymns of the Vedas, a few Brāhmanas, the Gṛhyasūtras, Dharmasūtras, the Smṛtis and later treatises. The main focus of the study of *samskāras* in this work will be on the prescription regarding the rituals in the Gṛhyasūtras and the Dharmasūtras.

The Gṛhyasūtras as their title suggests, deal with the household rites and the most characteristic *gṛhya* rites are the so called *samskāras*, an Indian variant of the '*rites de passage*'. The *samskāras* in their strict sense fall within the jurisdiction of the Gṛhyasūtras. While a range of texts mention *samskāras*, the details of the stages find only in Gṛhyasūtras.

The Gṛhyasūtras prescribe sophisticated rituals in details and lay down mantras and formulas to be recited at different stages of a particular *samskāras*. The Dharmasūtras on the other hand very rarely describe the ritual, their scope is wider, their principal purpose is to dilate upon the rules of conduct, law and custom. The Dharmasūtras dealing with correct behaviour (including the duties, rules of conduct, lawful occupations of the classes of society and the stages of life, ritual purity and dietary laws, punishments and penances as well as various allied subjects) have some of their themes in common with the Gṛhyasūtras but due to the different angle from which they view ritual life, lay emphasis upon other aspects. The Gṛhyasūtras are the oldest manuals of the *samskāras* and in the corpus of the Kalpasūtras (which comprises Śrautasūtra, Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras) the Dharmasūtras as a rule follow the Gṛhyasūtras.



The Gr̥hyasūtras used in the present work are: Āsvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra (AsvGS), Āpastamba Gr̥hyasūtra (ApGS), Pāraskara Gr̥hyasūtra (PGS), Sāṅkhāyana Gr̥hyasūtra (SGS); the Dharmasūtras are: Āpastamba Dharmasūtra (ApDS), Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra (BDS), Gautama Dharmasūtra (GDS), Vāsishtha Dharmasūtra (VDS). In these Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras, AsvGS, SGS, VDS, are related to R̥gvedic tradition; GDS related to Samavedic tradition and BDS, ApDS, ApGS and PGS to Yajurvedic tradition.

As to the question of the authorship of the different sūtras belonging to the same tradition, one in almost all cases finds it difficult to put it beyond doubt.<sup>6</sup> Būhler has shown for the Gr̥hyasūtra and Dharmasūtra of Āpastamba, that both the texts were composed by the same author in pursuance of a definite plan according to which the Gr̥hyasūtra was made as short as possible and a portion of the subject matter generally treated of in the Gr̥hyasūtras was reserved for the Dharmasūtra.<sup>7</sup> The same scholar has established the common identity of the authors of GDS and BDS.<sup>8</sup>

Some names of sūtrakāras occur in the lists of Vedic teachers recorded in gr̥hya and dharma works in the context of the *tarpaṇa* ceremony<sup>9</sup> which consists of offering water to gods, sage and the deceased ancestors; Gautama<sup>10</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> P.V. Kane, op.cit, vol. II, part II, p.689.

<sup>7</sup> Kane, op.cit, vol. II, part I, pp.33-34.

<sup>8</sup> ibid, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Kane, vol. II, part II, p.689.

<sup>10</sup> AsvGS 3.4.4, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published 1886], (Reprint), Motilal.Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

Suyajña Śāṅkhāyana<sup>11</sup>, Āśvalayana<sup>12</sup>, Kānva-Baudhāyana<sup>13</sup>, Āpastamba<sup>14</sup> etc. The order of the names in the lists of the teachers mentioned in the *tarpaṇa* section are hardly reliable in the matter of relative chronology, to say nothing of fixed periods. It is impossible to assign any precise dates to the composition of individual works.<sup>15</sup> Some authors wisely confine themselves to statements such as “the general period of the sūtras extends from the sixth and seventh century B.C to about second century B.C.”<sup>16</sup> P.V. Kane in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Vol. I) dated the AsvGS and ApGS to be between 800-400 B.C and the ApDS, GDS, BDS and VDS and the PGS to be between 600-300 B.C. The present work is based on the chronological framework. It is often said that the Gr̥hyasūtras were composed a little later than the Srautasūtras and a little earlier than the Dharmasūtras and therefore Gr̥hya and Dharma work periods have no doubt largely overlapped.<sup>17</sup>

Stylistic criteria are also useful in establishing the relative chronological position of the texts. Another criterion used especially in the context of the Dharmasūtras, is the proportion of prose to verse. Generally the Dharmasūtras which contain a greater proportion of prose are considered to be earlier than those which contain verse, as the later Dharmasūtras are composed almost

<sup>11</sup> ibid.

<sup>12</sup> ibid; SGS 4.10.3, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964. BDS 2.5.9.14. *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>13</sup> BDS II.5.9.14.

<sup>14</sup> ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Gonda, op.cit, p.475.

<sup>16</sup> Ramgopal, *India of the Vedic Kalpasūtras*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1959, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Gonda, op.cit, pp.478-479.

entirely in verse, Kane thus argues for the priority of the GDS on the ground that it is written entirely in prose, while the fact that the last three chapters of the BDS are written entirely in verse may be an indication of its lateness. Similarly chapters XXV-XXVIII of the VDS are probably late as they do not contain a single sūtra.<sup>18</sup> Likewise it has been proved that the AsvGS must be earlier than SGS and then came the PGS. Ram Gopal compared the texts and points out that PGS contains more prescriptions than the SGS. It is understandable that emphasis on caste-distinctions becomes more pronounced in later works.<sup>19</sup> Similarly a comparison of the SGS and PGS would demonstrate that the short sūtras of SGS have been welded by PGS into larger ones. For instance, the sūtras 8, 21-23, 26, 31, 33, 37 and 38 of the SGS<sup>20</sup> have been incorporated by PGS<sup>21</sup> in a single sūtra by means of a long compound of six words. Therefore the balance of probability is that SGS is slightly earlier than PGS.

It has been asserted that though the text of GDS has not come down to us in its pristine purity, GDS is the oldest writer on Smārta Dharma.<sup>22</sup> VDS refers to the views of GDS and borrows the XXII chapter of his Dharmasūtra from the chapter XIX of GDS. Therefore he may be placed later than GDS. The position of BDS vis-à-vis the GDS is more definitely established BDS<sup>23</sup> cites

<sup>18</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of the Monarchy in North India (C. 8<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.) as reflected in the Brahmanical Tradition*, Thesis submitted to CHS/SSS, JNU, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Ram Gopal, op.cit, pp.71-73.

<sup>20</sup> SGS 4.7, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> PGS II.11.6, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>22</sup> R. Gopal, op.cit, p.82.

<sup>23</sup> BDS, I.1.2.7, op.cit.

GDS as an authority on Dharma. Secondly BDS<sup>24</sup> reproduces the XIX chapter of the GDS. Further, GDS and BDS contain many provisions in common. So though the BDS is later than GDS, the two texts were possibly not far removed in time.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the consensus of opinion lays down that it is not possible in the present state of research into Vedic literature to assign precise dates to individual sūtrakāras.

Ramgopal has tried to classified the sūtra literature into three groups broadly, viz: AsvGS, BDS, GDS form the earliest stratum of sūtra literature, SGS, PGS, ApGS and ApDS constitute the second stratum and VDS form the third and last stratum.<sup>26</sup> We will examine whether this stratification helps us in analysing the *samskāras*.

Regarding the geographical location of the texts the problem of determining the region is complicated by the fact that some of the texts contain virtually no reference to specific places or geographic features, the Grhyasūtras and some of the Dharmasūtras being outstanding examples of this.<sup>27</sup>

In some cases, sūtrakāras such as Āpastamba have been assigned to the South. This is often based on the evidence of the prevalence of later traditions of Vedic learning. It is likely that given the data and the close connection of some of these texts to the brahmanical ritual tradition, they may have originated in North India, even though they were later preserved and

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<sup>24</sup> BDS, III.10, op.cit.

<sup>25</sup> K. Roy, op.cit, p.350.

<sup>26</sup> R. Gopal, op.cit, p.84.

<sup>27</sup> K. Roy, op.cit, p.491.

transmitted in other regions as well. We will develop our analysis within the broad chronological and geographical framework of the early historic period in north India.

## Section II

A number of existing studies help us in our analysis. These include works on the significance of rituals and sacrifices, in general works discussing the *samskāras* as well as those dealing with specific *samskāras*.

In their classic work *Sacrifice : Its Nature and Function*, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss claim that sacrificium (sacrifice) is the basic rite in ancient religion. The authors suggest that sacrifice, by its very nature, implies dependence as there is no sacrifice without intermediaries. This intermediary is the ritual victim (who is the full representative of and the substitute for both the giver and the recipient of the sacrifice) and through this victim the communication between the sacred and profane realms is affected. In the context of *samskāras*, I will explore both this and other means of mediating between the sacred and profane and their significance.

Frits Staal is amongst those who discusses the significance of ritual in general. He suggests that we have intuitions about what rituals are but we can not precisely define them.<sup>28</sup> Differentiating between 'ritual' and 'sacrifice', he defines the latter as a ritual in which an animal is ritually killed. Therefore all ritual is not sacrifice. An attempt will be made in this work to examine whether

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<sup>28</sup> Frits Staal, *Ritual and Mantras: Rules without Meaning*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1996, p.62.

this distinction between ritual and sacrifice is useful in our discussion on *samskāras*.

One of the most distinguished scholar in our area of research is Arnold Van Gennep whose excellent work *The Rites of Passage*<sup>29</sup> is the English translation of his original French work '*les rites de passage*'. He has classified these rites into three categories: rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation. Rites of separation are prominent in funeral and transition rites play an important part in pregnancy, betrothal and initiation etc.<sup>30</sup> Distinguishing the three phases and their subcategories, Gennep emphasised that all these ceremonies have their individual purposes. The author's views on transition is clear from his statement that man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings : birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death; for everyone of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well-defined.

Other scholars have focussed more explicitly on rituals in which we are interested. Brian K. Smith in his monograph *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*, has shown the specifics of Vedism and Hinduism.<sup>31</sup> From the Veda, the author has squeezed the principles of Hinduism and reveals the class differentiation within the performance of the ritual of the *Upanayana*.

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<sup>29</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid* Introduction.

<sup>31</sup> Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989.

The trend of shifting from religious studies to a focus on the social implications can be better viewed from N.N. Bhattacharyya's work '*Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*'.<sup>32</sup> He discussed various rituals belonging to different periods, categories and region and concludes that all Indian rituals are based on certain well-defined principles which are again interrelated. For analysing the ingredients of the various rituals, he studies the tribal institutions. He also stresses the fact that primitive notion of fertility, beliefs and practises are found abundantly in the puberty rites which he dealt as his subject of matter while discussing ancient Indian initiation and menstrual rites.

One of the earlier works, '*Social and Religious Life in the Gr̥hyasūtras*'<sup>33</sup> by V.M. Apte attempts to present a connected account of the evolution of social practices in ancient India from 2500 B.C – 200 B.C which he considers covers the period of R̥gveda to that of Gr̥hyasūtras. His chronology is not generally accepted, but the work is useful for the detailed classification of the evidence.

P.V. Kane's '*History of Dharmasāstra*'<sup>34</sup> is an encyclopaedia for the study on the various subjects in the Dharmasāstra texts. He has explained extensively the purpose, number and classification of *samskāras*, the procedure the persons involved etc. Kane stresses the fact that the purpose of *samskāras* are manifold.

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<sup>32</sup> N.N. Bhattacharyya, '*Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*', Manohar Book Series, Delhi, 1996.

<sup>33</sup> V.M. Apte, '*Social and Religious Life in the Gr̥hyasūtras*', Ramlal Pitambar Das, Ahmedabad, 1939.

<sup>34</sup> P.V. Kane, '*History of Dharmasāstra*', Vols. I-V, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64.

Some like *upanayana* are thought to serve spiritual and cultural purposes, bringing the unredeemed person into the company of the elect, opening the door to Vedic study and conferring special privileges and duties. They have also psychological value, impressing on the mind of the person that he has assumed a new role and must strive to observe its rules. Other *samskāras* like *nāmakaraṇa*, *annaprāśana* and *niṣkramaṇa* were more or less of a popular nature. They afforded opportunities for the expression of love and affection and for festivities. Yet other *samskāras* like *garbhādhāna*, *pumsavana*, *sīmantonayana* had mystical and symbolical elements. *Vivāha* (marriage) was a sacrament which brought about a union of two personalities for the purpose of the continuance of the social order and for the uplift of the two by self-restraint, self sacrifice and mutual cooperation.<sup>35</sup> About the number of *samskāras* GDS uses the word *samskāras* in the most extended sense. He speaks of forty *samskāras*<sup>36</sup> though most Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras do not enumerate so many. Kane argues that in most of the digests the principal *samskāras* are said to be sixteen viz. *garbhādhāna*, *pumsavana*, *sīmantonayana*, *vishnubali*, *jātakarma*, *nāmakaraṇa*, *niṣkramaṇa*, *annaprāśana*, *caula*, *upanayana*, *vedavrata* (four), *sāmavartana* and *vivāha* but there is some difference of opinion as to these sixteen also.<sup>37</sup> Kane remarks that in modern times most of the *samskāras* (except *garbhādhāna*, *upanayana* and

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p.192-193.

<sup>36</sup> GDS, VIII.14-24, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Bühler, 1<sup>st</sup> published by the Clarendon Press, 1879, (reprint) Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>37</sup> Kane, *op.cit*, p.194.



*vivāha*) have fallen into oblivion and are hardly ever performed even by brāhmanas in the manner and at the times prescribed by the smrtis.

In spite of the comprehensive classification, certain possibilities remain unexplored. For instance *samskāras* like *garbhādhāna*, *pumsavana* and *sīmantonnyana*, Kane opines that they had mystical and symbolic elements.<sup>38</sup> I feel that notions of procreation and fertility are also there in these rituals as well as *vivāha*. So an attempt will be made to explore these elements as well.

Last but not the least work on *samskāras* is R.B. Pandey's *Hindu Samskāras*<sup>39</sup> which traces the origin and development of *samskāras*. Pandey discusses the origin of each *samskāra* and then its subsequent development in its social context. He suggests that the *samskāras* had practical utility and therefore, according to him a study of the *samskāras* forms an important part of an investigation into the origin and development of civilization.<sup>40</sup>

### Section III

The transition from an absence of states to state systems in the mid first millennium B.C has generally been treated as a significant change. Ṛgvedic society has been described as a tribal society and that of the later Vedic period as one of the state-based Kingdoms, the transition having occurred during the period from the late second to the early first millennium B.C.<sup>41</sup> by the close of the Vedic period – that is during the period of the sūtras the treatises on the

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<sup>38</sup> ibid, pp.192-193.

<sup>39</sup> R.B. Pandey, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> ibid, p.8.

<sup>41</sup> Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid First Millenium B.C in the Ganga Valley*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1984, p. 4.

domestic rituals (Gṛhyasūtras) and the codes of socio-ethico-legal norms depict the socio-cultural fabric of the contemporary society and give more articulate expression to the ritual prescriptions and prohibitions, obligations and privileges of the four *varnas*, attempting to create distinct hierarchically arranged social classes by the time of Dharmasūtras, many castes or socio-ritual status groups by birth or heredity appear to have come into existence. Romila Thapar has discussed broadly regarding the various theories relating state formation and emergence of states during the early historical period. Whatever be the various causes viz. the population growth and social circumscription, conquest theory and emergence/rise of the increasing power of the *kṣatriyas* etc., one thing is evident that increasing social and cultural heterogeneity to social stratification.

In the process of stratification and the building up of a hierarchy, marriage alliances are of some importance. Endogamous alliances strengthens a small group with potential and actual power. Exogamous marriages are more suitable for the assimilation of new groups. These theories point to the analysis of states formation being a complex process in which a range of factors may be crucial and may apply differentially to varying situations. As such there can be no single factor which causes the change, although certainly some would be more central than others.<sup>42</sup> When different form of stratification begin to emerge an attempt is made through the *varna* framework to draw them together into a holistic theory of social functioning.

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p.8.

The growth of social differentiation to also emphasized by R.S. Sharma. He asserts that social differentiation arises out of social conflicts and unequal distribution of resources and produce and therefore caste system cannot be understood without a study of social process which are intimately connected with changes in material life.<sup>43</sup>

The early historical period in the north India witnessed material changes of far reaching consequences. All the innovations of this period are interrelated to each other. In the of technology, iron had come into use by this time. Iron is expected to have introduced revolutionary changes in the economic of people – in agriculture, transport and trade and in the promotion of civic life. Particularly, iron implements have been thought to be indispensable for the cutting down of the primeval forests of the Ganga plains and for the expansion of agriculture and iron ploughshare for the tilling of the heavy soil of the plains. For the first time we come across a definite system of coinage which in turn, promoted organized commerce. Trade had been established with distant lands and it was a further impetus to the growth of towns. That again presupposed, as well as produced, arterial roads. The introduction of a monetary system considerably facilitated trade. Punchmarked coins are prolific in silver. Baked brick, virtually unknown after fall of the Harappan cities reappears and led to the construction of monumental buildings, including fortifications. There is now a system of writing, again for the first time after the

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<sup>43</sup> R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1983, pp.25-28.

Harappans. The distinctive ceramics of the period was NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware), which appeared in c.500 B.C., [the earlier part of its flourish coinciding with the later part of that of the PGW (Painted Grey Ware)]. From its homeland in the central Ganga plains, where it is found in profusion, it was exported to cities like Taxila and Ujjain as a result of commerce.<sup>44</sup>

It was in the midst of this milieu that cities – a major innovation of the early historical period sprang up in the Ganga valley. The factors responsible for process of the transformation of the incipient headquarters of the janapadas into cities have been discussed above. As craft production was important in these cities the expansion of town also brought about an increase in the number of artisans who were organized in guilds (shreni).

R.S. Sharma opines that with the beginning of the wide use of iron tools for crafts and cultivation, conditions were created for the transformation of the tribal, pastoral, almost egalitarian Vedic society into full-fledged agricultural and class-divided social order in the sixth B.C. The varna mechanism was devised for appropriating the social surplus produced by the peasants, artisans, hired labourers and agricultural slaves. According to it members of the three higher *varna* or social orders were distinguished ritually from those of the fourth *varna*.<sup>45</sup>

The changing features of social and economic life, such as the growth of towns, expansion of the artisan class, and the rapid development of trade and

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<sup>44</sup>       ibid.  
<sup>45</sup>       ibid, p.30.

commerce were closely linked with changes in another sphere; that of religion and philosophical speculation. The conflict between the orthodoxy and the aspirations of newly rising groups in the urban centres must have intensified the process, which resulted in a remarkable richness and vigour in thought which was rarely surpassed in the centuries to come.<sup>46</sup>

There was a wide range of unorthodox sects, regarded with scorn and accused of immoral practices by the orthodox. The brāhmaṇas were particularly harsh, since the sects objected to the ritual and ceremonial sacrifices on which the priests insisted, and which was their livelihood.

Of all the sixty-two heterodox sects the two which came to stay were the puritanical sects of Jainism and Buddhism, both of which were to become independent religions. Mahavira who gave shape to Jainism in the sixth century B.C and his teaching led to the rapid spread and organization of the Jaina sect. His other contemporary was Gautama Buddha who emerged as more famous. Later Buddhism was to be one of the dominant religions in Asia.

After discussing the various secondary sources on rituals and *samskāras*, a major lacunae one can find is that most of these focus on the male. Though some of them mention the women's role in *samskāras* but it is not systematically explored. The present study of the *samskāras* is located within this context of economic developments, the emergence of new political institutions, increasing social complexity and new religious beliefs. An attempt will be made to explore how the *samskāras* were used to regulate social relations. One

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<sup>46</sup> Romila Thapar, *History of India*, Vol.I, Penguin Books, England, 1966, p.63.

major area of investigation will be the extent to which *samskāras* are used to construct gender identities and shape gender relations. While going through the *sūtras* one can realise that the doors of performing rituals were not open for women though in almost most of the *samskāras* her presence was inevitable. It is only in the *samskāras* of marriage that she plays a pivotal role during the ceremonies.

Further, for each of the *samskāras*, an attempt will be made to examine the extent to which there were are used to maintain kinship ties especially patrilineal ties.

Another category which is excluded and in fact always neglected was that of the *śūdras*. For them performance of rituals with mantras was prohibited. They are explicitly referred to as *ekajāti*. Thus our objectives in re-examining the texts will be to focus more explicitly on such inclusions and exclusions to assess their implications.

The analysis will be in the terms of contents of rituals, deities, rituals acts and performances etc., also in terms of the people involved in the rituals and roles assigned to them.

The arrangement and number of *samskāras* is not standardized in the *Gr̥hyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras* (for example *Dharmasūtras* starts from initiation and studentship, they do not mention pre-natal and childhood *samskāras*). Thus list of *samskāras* varies from source to source. Here in this work an attempt will be made to take into account such variations.

While doing this, an attempt has been made to adopt a chronological sequence in terms of the life cycle of a man belonging to the first three *varnas*. After briefly introducing the *samskāras* in **chapter I**, the whole schematic presentation has been divided as follows:

**Chapter II** deals with the *Samskāras* preceding *Upanayana*, which discusses the pre-natal and childhood *samskāras*.

**Chapter III** focusses on *Upanayana samskāra* performed for the studentship among the first three *varnas*.

**Chapter IV** sheds light on the ritual and social aspects of *Vivāha samskāra* which is regarded as the most important phase for woman.

**Chapter V** discusses the *samskāra* associated with death, i.e. *Śrāddha*.

The conclusion based on the whole study has been presented in the **chapter VI**.

## CHAPTER II

### *SAMSKĀRAS PRECEDING UPANAYANA*

The *samskāras* preceding *upanayana* can be subdivided into two categories : (i) the prenatal *samskāras*, which constitute mainly the *garbhādhāna* (conception of a child), *pumsavana* (quickening of male child) and *śmāntonnayana* (parting of the hair of women) and (ii) the *samskāras* of childhood i.e. *jātakarma* (birth ceremonies), the *niṣkramaṇa* (first outing of a child), the *annaprāśana* (first feeding), the *cūḍā-karaṇa* or *caula* (tonsure or shaving of head) etc.

Section I will deal with the pre-natal *samskāras* and Section II with the *samskāras* of childhood.

In this chapter we will be relying entirely on the Gr̥hyasūtras which are primarily ritual texts mainly concerned with the description and prescription of domestic ritual. Dharmasūtras do not deal with the details of ritual performance but focus on the duties, rules and regulations for individuals. Therefore the largest portion of the Dharmasūtras is devoted to the āśrama-dharma.

#### Section I

The *samskāras* cover the full span of life and extend beyond death through the cult of dead. They were arranged in such a way as to shape a person's life from birth and even prior to birth. The *garbhādhāna samskāra* was to be performed at the proper time when the couple were physically fit and



in a healthy condition, where they knew each other's heart and had intense desire for possessing a child.<sup>1</sup>

The *garbhādhāna* ceremony has not been mentioned as a separate *samskāra* in all the Gṛhyasūtras, perhaps originally it was considered part of the marriage ritual.

SGS<sup>2</sup> mentions *garbhārakshana* which means the ceremony for the protection of the embryo. According to SGS this ceremony was to be performed in the fourth month of pregnancy and after the performance of *pumsavana* in the third month (the ceremony to secure the birth of a male child). Thus it seems that Sāṅkhāyana's *garbhārakshana* is distinct from *garbhādhāna*. Further in the SGS<sup>3</sup>, PGS<sup>4</sup> and ApGS<sup>5</sup> the rite called *caturthikarma* or *caturthihoma* takes the place of the *garbhādhāna*. N. N. Bhattacharyya has suggested that *caturthikarma* is a variation of a tribal rite of ceremonial defloration which was performed just after the first menstruation of women. He is of the view that in the brahmanical texts this has been made a part of marriage rituals to be performed on the fourth day after marriage and equated with the rite of *garbhādhāna*. Its early relation with the first menstruation is attested by its other name *ṛtusangamana*.<sup>6</sup> Since the increasing

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*; Motilal Banarsidass, N. Delhi, 1969, p.33.

<sup>2</sup> SGS I.21.1-3. *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> SGS I.18-19.

<sup>4</sup> PGS I.11. *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> ApGS 8.10-11. *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1892], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>6</sup> N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*; Manohar Book Series, New Delhi, 1996, pp.178-179.

influence of patriarchy demanded the absolute chastity of women, the law books entrust the function of ritual defloration to the husband.<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharyya has given the examples of tribals where they observe a rite of seclusion when their girls menstruate for the first time. He opines therefore that the law makers of the Brahmanical texts also had to compromise with various local customs.

The point to be noted is that SGS and PGS both describe the performance of *caturthikarma* and both are placed in the second stratum of Ramgopal's three strata as discussed in the introduction.

Further AsvGS<sup>8</sup> mentions *anavalobhana* besides *garbhāla-mbhana*, unlike other Gr̥hyasūtras. Perhaps variations among the name of the *samskāras* signify that the sūtrakāras are trying to accommodate the various local practices and customs. According to the AsvGS *garbhālabhāna* meant the ceremonies for securing the conception of a child and *anavalobhana* was meant for preventing disturbances which could endanger the embryo. Kane opines that *garbhārakaśana* of SGS and *anavalabhana* of AsvGS are the same.<sup>9</sup> We are in the dark regarding the character of these ceremonies because AsvGS does not describe *anavalobhana* and *garbhālabhāna*. But one thing is clear that providing for as many as three ceremonies reveals the importance attributed to regulating conception and pregnancy.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.177.

<sup>8</sup> AsvGS 1.13.1., *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. II, part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64, p.220.

The Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras are unanimous on the point that the *garbhādhāna* should be performed when the wife was physically prepared to conceive. The proper time for conception was from the fourth to the sixteenth night after the monthly course of the wife.<sup>10</sup> Nights are prescribed for the conception and day time was prohibited.<sup>11</sup> On the fourth night after the monthly course of the wife the husband was required to touch her and murmur verses like,

“Open thy womb; take in the man’s sperm, may a male child be born, the most excellent of his kin”.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the procedure for producing a male child begins from the first conception. The mantras uttered in this *samskāra* are essentially prayers offered to help the bride conceive a good son. The deities mentioned are Agni, Vāyu, Sūrya, Prajāpati, Savitr̥. There is the process of personification by which natural phenomena had has identified as gods. Agni or Fire is the chief deity as the sacrifice is offered to him. Apte opines that prayers were used to avert misfortune from conjugal life and to ensure prosperity and the birth of hero sons.<sup>13</sup> Kane notice that all *samskāras* other than *garbhādhāna* can be performed by any agnate in the absence of the husband.<sup>14</sup>

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Y:3(Q).44A  
PI

<sup>10</sup> R.B. Pandey, op.cit, p.51, PGS I.II.1.

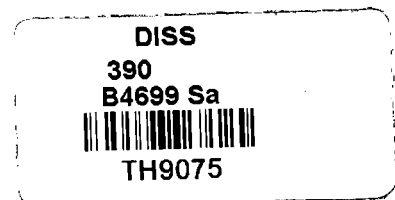
<sup>11</sup> ApDS II.1.1.16-17. *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas* part I, ed., by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879] (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>12</sup> SĠS I.19.6, op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> V.M. Apte, *Social and Religious life in the Gr̥hyasūtras*, Ramnik Pitambar Das, Ahmadabad, 1939.

<sup>14</sup> Kane, op.cit, vol. II, part I, p.206.

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After the *garbhādhāna* comes, the *pumsavana*<sup>15</sup>, the ceremony to secure the birth of a male child. The *AsvGS*<sup>16</sup> described the rite as follows:

“he should in the third month of her pregnancy, under the constellation *Tishya*, (i.e. *Pusya*) give (thrice) to eat to the wife, after she has fasted, in the curds of a cow which has a calf of the same colour (with the cow), two beans and one grain of barley for each handful of curds. On his asking (the women) what dost thou drink? What dost thou drink? She should thrice reply ‘*pumsavana*’. (Generation of a male child!)”

In this way he should make her take three handfuls (of curds with two beans and barley). Also during this ritual, a few drops of the juice of the banyan stem are put into the right nostril of the pregnant women to inhale it, with a prayer for the birth of a son.

It is clear that the *pumsavana* rite has several symbolic elements. Agni, and Prajāpati are invoked in the rite. Perhaps inserting *nyāgrodha* or banyan stem juice has some medical qualities and properties of relieving trouble during pregnancy. Beans is also a symbol of progeny and fertility. Mention of cow and curd or any milk products evoke the idea of fecundity. The idea itself is related to the sacred cow and its five products (milk, ghee, butter, urine and dung). According to the Vedic way of thinking, these five products represent both the cosmic power of life and the clouds of the monsoon whose heavy rains provide fertility to the earth. This is why clouds are often compared to cows in sanskrit poetry.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> SGS I.20. 1-5; PGS I.14.1-5.

<sup>16</sup> *AsvGS* I.13.2-7, op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> Helene Stork, ‘Mothering Rituals in Tamil Nadu: Some Magico – Religious Beliefs’, ed., J. Leslie, *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1991, p.91.

Helene Stork has given the following symbolic equation :

Sterility (barrenness) = aridity (barren ground) = dryness.

Fecundity (fruitfulness) = fertility = dampness.<sup>18</sup>

With this equation Stork suggests that barrenness is considered to be the worst evil, one that has to be counteracted by all possible means. Further the desire for the male child was so strong that the main aim of *pumsavana* was to ask god for a great family of sons i.e. the generation of males.

PGS says it should be performed when the moon is conjunction with a male *nakṣatra*.<sup>19</sup> Further PGS say that the rite should be performed in the second or third month of pregnancy. Also AsvGS,<sup>20</sup> SGS<sup>21</sup> prescribe the third month. PGS makes an interesting point that this rite should be performed before the foetus begun to move or throb in the womb. Provided it is practiced during the first two or three months of pregnancy (that is, before the manifestation of the sex of the foetus), this rite is believed to be capable of reversing the sex of the child.<sup>22</sup> The thing to be pointed out here is that the authors of the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras may be drawing on the tradition that the sex of the foetus was not completely fixed before the third month after conception. There is no mention of deities or any other kinsfolk in the rite of *pumsavana*. The absence of these groups suggest that the husband alone plays the central role in the pre-natal *samskāras* (as evident also in *sṭmatonnayana*)

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<sup>18</sup>       ibid.  
<sup>19</sup>       PGS I.14.3.1.  
<sup>20</sup>       AsvGS I.13.2.  
<sup>21</sup>       SGS I.20.1.  
<sup>22</sup>       Stork, op.cit, p.92.

The third *samskāra* for the embryo was the *sīmantonnayana*. This word literally means ‘parting of the hair (of a woman) upwards’. The AsvGS<sup>23</sup> describes it as follows:

“In the fourth month of pregnancy the *sīmantonnayana* (should be performed). In the fortnight of the waxing moon, when the moon may be in conjunction with a *nakṣatra* that is (regarded as) male (or the name of which is of the masculine gender) then he establishes fire (i.e. performs the details of homa upto offering of *ājyabhāgas*) and having spread to the west of the fire a bull’s hide with its neck to the east and the hair outside, he makes oblations (of *ājya*, clarified butter) while his wife sits on it (hide) and takes hold (of his hand), with the two verses ‘may *Dhātr* give to his worshipper’ with the two verses,

‘I invoke *Rākā*’, and with (the texts), ‘*Negameśa*’, and ‘*Prajāpati*’, no other than thou’.

He then three times parts her hair upwards beginning from the front and proceeding backwards with a bunch of an even number of unripe fruits with a porcupine quill that has three white spots and with three bunches of *kuśa* grass, with the words,

‘*bhur, bhuvah, svar, om!*’

or he does so four times. Thus variations in the timing of the parting of the hair of the woman suggests that there were no strict regulations. Then he gives orders to two lute-players,

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<sup>23</sup> AsvGS, I.14. 1-9. op.cit.

‘sing (praise of) king soma’. (They sing,) ‘may soma’, our king, bless the human race. Settled is the wheel of N.N. (here they name) river near which they dwell. And let them do whatever aged brāhmana woman whose husbands and children are alive, tell them to do. A bull is the fee (for the sacrifice)’.

So they were invoking the divine king (soma) in the context of the domestic ritual. There was a reference to dwelling near the river<sup>24</sup> in the ritual. Van Gennep argues that it indicates that they intended to separate the woman from her surroundings and permit her reintegration into her usual surroundings only by stages.<sup>25</sup> This would suggest an element of control over the reproductive power of women.

There is a great divergence among the Gṛhyasūtras about the traditions and customs. This *samskāra* was to be performed in the fourth month according to AsvGS<sup>26</sup>, in the sixth or eighth according to PGS and in the seventh according to SGS.<sup>27</sup> These variations provide the scope for different practices to get accommodated.

It is remarkable that AsvGS alone requires that the woman should be seated on a bull’s hide, which shows that this was not regarded as an impure as at present in the brahmanical tradition. The bull may have been regarded as the symbol of virility. An alternative has been suggested in the PGS which recommends a soft chair or seat.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> PGS 1.15.7, Asv G.S 1.14.7.

<sup>25</sup> Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960, p.43.

<sup>26</sup> Asv G.S. 1.14.1.

<sup>27</sup> SGS I.22.1.

<sup>28</sup> PGS I.15.4.

Almost all the Gr̥hyasūtras agree that in parting the hair the husband is to use a bunch of unripe fruit (PGS and SGS, specify that it was to be a *udumbara* fruit), a porcupine quill with three bunches of *Kuśa* grass.<sup>29</sup> PGS also adds the use of *virātara* stick and a full spindle.<sup>30</sup> AsvGS prescribe that the parting must be done thrice<sup>31</sup> SGS says that the unripe fruits are to be tied to a string of three twisted threads and the string is to be suspended from her neck as a garland.<sup>32</sup> PGS also seems to suggest the same.<sup>33</sup> ApGS<sup>34</sup> says that the husband should (by way of ornament) tie a string of barley grains with young growing shoots on the woman's head.

There is divergence as to whose praise is to be sung during the *s̥mantonmayana* rite. SGS<sup>35</sup> and PGS<sup>36</sup> say that the ballad sung must be in praise of the (ruling) king or any one also who is valiant. AsvGS prescribes a *gāthā* in honour of king Soma (the plant), perhaps because Soma was considered to be the symbol of fertility. Also, Soma was considered to be the king of the brāhmanas and therefore it is a part of the process of brahmanising the ritual.

AsvGS<sup>37</sup> and SGS<sup>38</sup> expressly state that a bull is the fee for the officiating priest in this *samskāra*. The bull which symbolizes god Prajāpati

<sup>29</sup> AsvGS I.14.4.; SGS I.22.8; ApGS 6.14.3,

<sup>30</sup> PGS I.16.4.

<sup>31</sup> AsvGS I.14.4.

<sup>32</sup> SGS I.22.10.

<sup>33</sup> PGS I.16.6.

<sup>34</sup> ApGS VI.14.7.

<sup>35</sup> SGS. I.22. 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> PGS I.16.7.

<sup>37</sup> AsvGS I.14.9.

<sup>38</sup> SGS I.22.18.



and also Indra is often invoked in the ritual for the increase of the sacrificer's fertility.<sup>39</sup> ApGS and PGS<sup>40</sup> say that brāhmaṇas are to be fed in this rite. Though the participation of priests is marginal and not very frequent in these rites, their presence provides legitimacy to the ritual.

The contents of the mantras are nominally related to one single ritual act and their links with the ceremony are implicit or deducible from the terminology used. Regarding the specific materials used like the quill of porcupine, *udumbara* leaves etc. during the performance of the above mentioned *samskāras*, one can observe that not only pregnant women were required to take utmost care to facilitate this but also there was a belief that a woman in her pregnancy was subject to attacks by evil spirits and some rite should be performed to ward them off.

Kane says that the porcupine quill with three white spots resembles the three auspicious things associated with the gods viz. the three meters, the three worlds etc.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps it can also be suggested that the sharp quill of the porcupine was used so that the child should be endowed with sharp and penetrating intellect. Also the porcupine quill may have symbolized a bridge between the domestic and the wild.

The deity invoked during the ritual is *Rākā* who is the presiding deity of the full-moon. It seems that *Rākā* was invoked by the sacrificer so that the

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.58.

<sup>40</sup> PGS I.16.9.

<sup>41</sup> Kane, op.cit, vol. II, part II, p.222.

unborn child should be beautiful like the full-moon. The full-moon is also symbolic of completion.

Amongst the pre-natal *samskāras*, the *sīmantonayana* is described at length in the Grhyasūtras. The ritual included prayers, as well as propitiations of the gods. The ambit of action of the sacrifice is especially noteworthy, for it was expected to produce a double effect, one on the object for which it is offered (here the unborn child) and upon which it is desired to act, the other on the moral person (here, the husband who initiates the act) who desired and instigates that effect.<sup>42</sup>

Another interesting fact is that the sūtrakāras are divided in their opinion whether this *sīmantonayana samskāra* should be performed in every pregnancy or only in the first conception. The difference of opinion suggests that there may have been differences in the kinship pattern. It seems that there were differences in values. For instance if this *samskāra* was to be performed only in the first conception, it would imply that the eldest son was regarded as especially privileged. If performed in all conceptions, it would suggest a greater degree of equality amongst siblings. ApGS<sup>43</sup> and PGS<sup>44</sup> expressly say that this *samskāra* is to be performed only once, at the first conception.

Thus the pregnancy ceremonies include a great many rites, whose main purpose is to facilitate delivery of a son and to protect mother and child against evil forces, which may be impersonal or personified. Obviously the pre-natal

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<sup>42</sup> Herbert and Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its nature and Function*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> ApGS VI.14.1.

<sup>44</sup> PGS. I.15.1.

*samskāras* could not be performed without the wife, yet she was assigned a subsidiary and inferior role during the whole ceremony. It is the husband who offers the sacrifice and oblations and he plays the pivotal role in the ritual. Moreover the wife was to observe a fast during the whole ceremony though she was not allowed to perform the sacrifice.

The ceremonies of pregnancy and childbirth, together generally constitute a whole. Often the first rites performed separate the pregnant women from society, from her family group. They are followed by rites, pertaining to pregnancy itself, which is a transitional period. Finally come the rites of childbirth intended to reintegrate the woman into the group to which she previously belonged, or to establish her new position in society as a mother especially if she has given birth to a son.<sup>45</sup>

Among the post-natal *samskāras*, the foremost is *jātakarma* which is the ceremony performed at the time when the child is born. P.V. Kane opines that this must have been a rite of hoary antiquity.<sup>46</sup> Regarding our sources, there is a great divergence in the *Gṛhyasūtras* on the different details that go to make up the birth ceremonies or the *jātakarma*. Some viz. PGS<sup>47</sup> give almost all the details while other *Gṛhyasūtras* omit some of them. The order of the components differs according to the Veda to which each text is attached. AsvGS<sup>48</sup> and SGS<sup>49</sup> both belong to *Ṛgveda* and it has been noticed that both of

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<sup>45</sup> Van Gennep, op.cit, p.41.

<sup>46</sup> Kane, op.cit, p.228.

<sup>47</sup> PGS, I.16.1-25.

<sup>48</sup> AsvGS I.16.4.

<sup>49</sup> SGS I.24.5.

these Gr̥hyasūtras prescribe giving a secret name to the child on the day of birth and do not prescribe a separate *nāmakarana* ceremony.

The chief rites of the *jātakarma* are *medhājanana* or production of intelligence, *āyusya* where the father murmurs some mantras near the navel or the right ear of the child, *amsābhimarṣaṇa* i.e. touching the child on the shoulder or shoulders, *pañca-brāhmaṇa-sthāpana* which prescribes the breathing over the child by five brāhmaṇas or the father himself etc.

In *medhājanana* the father gave the child honey and ghee or ghee alone using his fourth finger and an instrument of gold.<sup>50</sup> The formula employed is:

*“Bhūh I put into thee;”*

*Bhuvah I put into thee;*

*Svāha I put into thee*

*Bhūr Bhuva Svāha everything I put into thee.”*<sup>51</sup>

The use of ‘*bhuv, bhuvah, svaha*’ marks the identification of birth rituals with the sacrifice as these are the standardized formulae for offering to *devas*. The food the child was fed, was also thought to be conducive to mental growth. Ghee was to strengthen memory, talent and life, honey and gold are also regarded as being favourable to mental progress and prosperity.<sup>52</sup>

During *āyusya*, the father murmurs

“Agni is long lived; through the tree he is long lived. By that long life I make thee long lived. Soma is long lived; through the herbs etc. The brāhmaṇ

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<sup>50</sup> PGS I.16.4.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> R.B. Pandey, *op.cit*, p.74.

is long lived; through ambrosia etc.. The ṛsis are long lived; through observances etc. Sacrifice is long lived; through sacrificial fire etc. The ocean is long lived; through the rivers etc.”<sup>53</sup> There is a reference to deities (Agni, Soma), natural forces (tree, ambrosia), social categories (ṛsis) and natural forces (ocean) in the above mantra. It can be noticed that all types of forces are brought in to the single ritual through a small mantra.

Further the importance of brāhmaṇas has been shown by the *pañca-brāhmaṇasthāpana*<sup>54</sup> rite where the father invites five brāhmaṇas, place them towards five regions (north, south, east, west and fifth one looking upwards). While breathing was thought to be productive of life connecting brāhmaṇas to the ritual lent added weight to it. When the ceremonies were over, presents were offered to the brāhmaṇas and gifts and alms were distributed.

Further it is the brahmanical sūtrakāras who have maintained the birth of a male-child auspicious and regard the girl-child as inferior. This argument would become clearer from the *nāmakaraṇa* ceremony. It is a simple ceremony of giving a name to the child. Almost all Gṛhyasūtras contain the rule that the name should begin with a sonant and contain a semi vowel in the middle.<sup>55</sup> Apart from this the most important rule in all the Gṛhyasūtras is that the name for males should contain two or four syllables, or an even number. In contrast to this, the Gṛhyasūtras suggest that girls name should contain uneven number

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<sup>53</sup> PGS I.16.6.

<sup>54</sup> PGS I.16. 11-16.

<sup>55</sup> AsvG.S.-I.15.4; PGS I.17.2; SGS I.24.4; Ap GS 1.15.9.

of syllables.<sup>56</sup> PGS<sup>57</sup> further says that the names of girls should end in ‘ā’ with a *taddhita* (suffix) to a girl while boys name should have *krit* suffix and not a *taddhita*.<sup>58</sup> This open demarcation between the boy and girl child reveals the narrow mindedness of the sūtrakāras. AsvGS<sup>59</sup> attaches different kinds of merits also to different number of syllables, “one who is desirous of fame, his name should consists of two syllables, one who desired holy luster, his name should contain four syllables,” for boys even number of syllables were prescribed because the brahmanical authors wanted their sons to be meritorious and valiant. Such qualities were not desired in girls or women.

The idea of the *varna* order and social status was deep-rooted and was reinforced through variations in the names as is clear from the fact that PGS states that the different *varnas* should have different titles: ‘The name of a brāhmana should end in sarman (for instance Visnuśarman), that of a kṣatriya in varman (for instance Lakshmivarman), that of a vaiśya in Gupta (for instance Candragupta).’<sup>60</sup>

There was no place for sūdra category in this scheme of things but it is believed that perhaps *dāsa* was added to the name of the sūdra<sup>61</sup> because they were regarded as the lowest who were born to serve the three so called higher *varnas*.

<sup>56</sup> AsvGS I.15.7; Ap G.S. 6.15.11; PGS I.17.3.

<sup>57</sup> PGS. I.17.3.

<sup>58</sup> *Krit* has an active role while *taddhita* has passive role.

<sup>59</sup> AsvGS I.15.5.

<sup>60</sup> PGS I.17.4.

<sup>61</sup> R.B. Pandey, op.cit, p.8.

Numerous other rules about names have also been given in the Gr̥hyasūtras like ApGS<sup>62</sup> prescribes that the name should have the *upsarga* ‘Su’ in it, as it indicates stability. Also the same Gr̥hyasūtra mentions that the name should end in a *visarga* preceded by a long vowel (e.g. *Āpastamba*, *Pāraskara* etc.).

Some Gr̥hyasūtras add a detail immediately after *nāmakaraṇa*. For e.g. AsvGS<sup>63</sup> says ‘when a father returns from a journey he holds in his hands his sons head’, mutters the verse:

‘From limb by limb thou art produced; out of the heart thou art born. Thou indeed art the self called son; so live a hundred autumns!’ and thrice smells (kisses) his son on the head’.

ApGS<sup>64</sup> also prescribes that on returning from a journey the father should address his son (*abhimantraṇa*) and should murmur in his right ear the mantras’. The significant point is that in the case of the girl there is no murmur of the mantras in the ear, but only address (with a prose formula).<sup>65</sup> PGS<sup>66</sup> and AsvGS<sup>67</sup> also clearly mentions that father kisses the head of the daughter silently. This no doubt indicates that greater value was attached to a son than to a daughter. The importance of the ritual lies in reestablishing the contact and continuity between father and son, thus emphasizing patriliney.

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<sup>62</sup> ApGS, VI.15.10.  
<sup>63</sup> AsvGS 1.15. 9-10.  
<sup>64</sup> ApGS VI.15.12-13.  
<sup>65</sup> Kane, op.cit, p.254.  
<sup>66</sup> PGS I.18.7.  
<sup>67</sup> AsvGS, I.15.10

The *niṣkramaṇa* i.e. taking the child out of the house in the open is considered to be a minor rite and PGS<sup>68</sup> gives the longest description. The procedure of this *samskāra* consisted in taking the child out by the father and making it look at the sun with the verse, “that eye”. The time for performing this *samskāras* was in the fourth month after birth. It has been stated that the later smrtis and nibandhas elaborate the rituals and customs relating to it.

The radiant sun in this *samskāra* is symbolic of the energy and vigour and therefore perhaps the father wants that the infant child should start his first exposure to the world with seeing the sun so that he be endowed with strength and life like the sun.

After the first outing of the child is performed the *annaprāśana* *samskāra*, which has been briefly described in the Gr̥hyasūtras. The procedure is brief in all, except SGS<sup>69</sup> and PGS<sup>70</sup>, and therefore they derive the authority for *annaprāśana* *samskāra*. All of them prescribe the sixth month from birth as the time for this *samskāra*. SGS says that the father should prepare food of goat’s flesh, or flesh of partridge, or of fish or boiled rice, if he is desirous of nourishment, holy luster, swiftness or splendour respectively and mix one of them with curds, honey and ghee and should give it to the child to eat with the reciting of the *mahāvyaḥrtis* (*bhūh, bhuvah, svāh*). AsvGS<sup>71</sup> has almost the same rules as to food, omitting fish. Here we notice that cooking food would normally have been women’s work, but in the ritual was now to be taken over

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<sup>68</sup> PGS I.17.5-6.

<sup>69</sup> SGS I.27.1-11.

<sup>70</sup> PGS I.19.1-13.

<sup>71</sup> AsvGS I.16. 1-5.



by men. The consumption of food, and activities like breathing are symbolic of continued life. In the *samskāras* we find them treated as activities associated with the patrilineage. ApGS<sup>72</sup> prescribes the feeding of brāhmanas, making them give benedictions to the child and then making the child eat only once a mess of curds, honey, ghee and boiled rice mixed together, with the recitation of mantra joined to the three *vyāhrtis* singly and collectively and according to some teacher the flesh of partridge may also be added. As in the case of other *samskāras* Gṛhyasūtras<sup>73</sup> prescribes that the rite should be performed for a girl without the mantra.

The deities invoked during the ritual were of varied nature as PGS describes when food was prepared, one oblation was offered to speech with the words, ‘the gods have generated the goddess, speech, manifold animals speak her forth: May she, the sweet sounding the highly praised one, come to us *Svāha!*’ The next oblation was offered to vigour, ‘may vigour come to us today’. Having made the above sacrifices, the father offered further four oblations with the following phrases:

“Through up-breathing may I enjoy food, Svāha!

Through down-breathing may I enjoy food, Svāha!

Through my eye may I enjoy visible things, Svāha!

Through my ear I enjoy fame, Svāha!”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> ApGS VI.16.1-2.

<sup>73</sup> AsvGS I.16.6.

<sup>74</sup> PGS I.19. 2-4., op.cit.

It seems that 'food' is used in wider sense and the prayer was offered, so that all the senses should be gratified so that the boy may live a happy and contented life.<sup>75</sup> The ceremony terminated with the feeding of the brāhmaṇas.<sup>76</sup> Thus we see that without the brāhmaṇas the performance of any ritual was regarded incomplete, their presence were inevitable to legitimize the transaction.

The ceremony of *cūḍākarma* is known by various names as *cūḍākarana* or *caula* or the first tonsure i.e. first time cutting of the hair on the child's head. This *samskāra* is mentioned in every Gr̥hyasūtras.<sup>77</sup>

'Cūḍa' means the 'lock or tuft of hair' kept on the head when the remaining part is shaved (i.e. the *śikhā*); so *cūḍākarma* or *cūḍākarana* means that rite in which a lock of hair is kept (for the, first time after birth). We get 'cauḍa' from 'cūḍā' meaning 'a rite the purpose of which is keeping a lock of hair' and 'da' and 'la' often, interchange places. So we get 'cauḍa' or 'caula' also as the name of the ceremony.<sup>78</sup>

According to PGS<sup>79</sup>, it may be performed in the first or third year, AsvGS<sup>80</sup> says it may be performed in the third year or in the year in which it is the custom of the family to perform it. PGS also refers to family usage.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> R.B. Pandey, opcit, p.93.

<sup>76</sup> PGS I.19-13.

<sup>77</sup> Asv G.S. 1.17 1-18; ApGS 6.16.3-11; PGS II, 1-25; SGS I. 28.1-24.

<sup>78</sup> Kane, opcit, p.260.

<sup>79</sup> PGS, II.1.

<sup>80</sup> AsvGS, I.17.

<sup>81</sup> PGS II.1.4.

ApGS<sup>82</sup> says it should be performed when the moon is in conjunction with *punarvasu nakṣatra*.

So there is divergence of opinion among the sūtrakāras regarding the proper time for the performance of the *cūḍākarma* ceremony. But one thing is clear that the principal act in this ceremony is the cutting of the hair of the child. The other subsidiary matters are the performance of homa, feeding of brāhmaṇas, receiving of their benedictions and giving of *dakṣinā*, the disposal of cut hair in such a way that no one can find them.<sup>83</sup> Among all the Grhyasūtras, the most exhaustive treatment of this ceremony has been done by AsvGS.<sup>84</sup> The materials required are:

To the north of the fire are placed four vessels each of which is separately filled with rice, barley, beans and sesamum seeds; the mother with the boy on her lap is to be seated to the west of the fire and two vessels one filled with the dung of a bull and other with sami leaves are to be placed; to the right of the mother the father sits holding twenty one bunches of *kuśā* grass or the brāhmaṇa should hold them; to the west of the boy, the father pours warm water (with the words), ‘with warm water, O Vāyu, come hither!’. After *homa* is performed, the principal matter (of cutting the hair) is to be begun. With the words:

“Axe do not harm him, he presses a copper razor (on the *kuśā* blades). The hair is cut with the mantra ‘with that razor with which *savitṛ*, the wise, cut (the hair) of king Soma and of

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<sup>82</sup> ApGS, VI.16.3.

<sup>83</sup> Kane, opcit, p.261.

<sup>84</sup> AsvGS I.17.2. SGS says that these are to be given to the barber at the end of the rite op.cit.

Varuna, cut now his (the boy's hair), oh brāhmaṇas, so that he may be endowed with long life and (reach) old age.”

Each time the hair is cut, he gives the cut hair with their ends turned towards the east together with Sami leaves to the mother, who puts them down on the bull dung. Thus it is the father who plays the principal role and wife or mother is only dependent on the husband.

Cutting is done a second time with what *dhātā* shaved (the head) of *Brhaspati*, *Agni* and *Indra* for the sake of long life, with that I share the (head) for the sake of long life, fame and happiness.

The cutting is done a third time with the mantra with ‘he may after night, see the sun again and again with that I shave thy head for the sake of long life, fame and happiness’.

The cutting is done for the fourth time with all the mantras together. Then the hair is cut three times on the left side similarly. The edge of the razor is then wiped off with the mantra ‘when thou shavest as a shaver the hair (of the boy) with the razor that wounds and is well-shaped purify his head, but do not deprive him of life.

Then he gives orders to the barber ‘without causing him any wound arrange his hair well’. Also has been said let ‘him have the hair of the boy arranged according to the custom of the family’.

The rite for the girl has been mentioned to be performed without the mantras. In any ceremony, rites and rituals only makes it decorative and

complete and it is so unfortunate that there were prohibitions for performing the rituals for the girl child during the *samskāra* ceremonies.

The continuous exclusion of girl children from the performance of rituals in *samskāra* would serve to reinforce the gender hierarchy which was of basic importance to the development of patrilineal kinship structure.

The Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras are entirely silent as to what was done for the child's education between the third year when usually *caula* was performed and the eighth year (from conception) when the *upanayana* usually took place (in the case of brāhmaṇas).

Both shaving the head (*cūḍākarana*) and ear piercing (*karnavedha*) are brahmanical rites (*samskāras*) prescribed in the literature pertaining to domestic rituals (Gr̥hyasūtras). As is the case with all such rites, their object is to sanctify and refine the body and mind of the individual from conception onwards, according to the ancient Indian tradition, life starts from the moment of the conception and not simply from the moment of the birth.<sup>85</sup> Prenatal and childhood rites (*samskāras*) are intended to protect the son and the birth of the girl was considered an unwelcome event. Also everywhere the son was valued more than the daughter. Thus one can say that all the rituals were performed to protect the child especially the son and the sūtrakāras were not attentive about the wife or mother. Only in one instance, the wife has been asked to wear gold ornaments,<sup>86</sup> if she likes, otherwise at no other place is the opinion of wife or

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<sup>85</sup> Stork, op.cit. p.97.

<sup>86</sup> SGS I.22.17.

women taken into consideration. She was only treated as a ritual instrument to procreate a son for the man.

From the above discussion it seems that the rituals child seemed to remove the child from the mother and was connected with the father. Thus the whole set of rituals implies that the natural bond between the mother and the child is negated and curtailed and the bond between the father and the child is reinforced.

## CHAPTER III

### UPANAYANA

The term *upanayana* literally means 'leading or taking near'. It appears that it originally meant taking near the *ācārya* (for instruction); it may have also meant 'introducing the novice to the stage of studenthood'.<sup>1</sup> Some of the Gr̥hyasūtras bring out this sense clearly for example the PGS<sup>2</sup> says "I have come hither for the sake of studentship and I will be a student (*brahmacārin*)."

Regarding the sources, the *upanayana samskāra* became fully established in the time of the Gr̥hyasūtras. They lay down all the regulations and every possible detail of the ceremony while the Dharmasūtras do not discuss the ritual. They focus on the social side of the *samskāra*. They give full information and discussion about the age of the child to be initiated, the lawful recipients, the duties of a student and his conduct. Many changes were introduced in these rules and regulations over time. Kane<sup>3</sup> further stresses the fact that originally *upanayana* was a simple matter and there were no elaborate ceremonies like those described in the Gr̥hyasūtras. Earlier, the would be student came to the teacher with a *samidh*<sup>4</sup> in his hand and told the teacher that he desired to become a *brahmacārin* but subsequently it came to mean that rite by which the boy is taken to the *ācārya* and so *upanayana* principally is

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<sup>1</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. II, part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64, p.266.

<sup>2</sup> PGS II.2.6, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Kane, op.cit, p.273.

<sup>4</sup> Samidh is a fuel for fire, therefore samidh symbolises the continuity of ritual from the teacher to the student through the use of fire as in the case of sacrificial cult.

*gāyatri-upadeśa* (i.e. the imparting of the sacred *gāyatri-mantra*). As ApDS<sup>5</sup> says that *upanayana* is a *samskāra* (purificatory rite) laid down by revelation for him who seeks learning and it is a *samskāra* brought about by imparting the *gāyatri-mantra* to him who seeks learning. So the centrality of the mantra may be assigned only in this text.

As the Gr̥hyasūtras describe the full-fledged ritual of *upanayana* ceremony, it is necessary here to give a short account of the ritual<sup>6</sup>

The ceremony is performed in the eighth, eleventh and twelfth years of the male child calculated generally from the date of conception, for the first three *varnas* i.e. brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas respectively. On the day of the initiation,<sup>7</sup> the youth is given something to eat, his head is shaved, his hair was arranged, he is bathed and decked with ornaments.

Then the boy comes near the *ācārya* and announces his intention to become a *brahmacārin*. Having accepted his request the *ācārya* offers him clothes with the verse:

‘In the way in which Bṛhaspati put the garment of immortality on Indra, thus I put this garment on thee, for the sake of long life, of old age, of strength, of splendour’.<sup>8</sup>

New clothes given to the student in the above mantra is symbolic of new identity and protection that is being established. Also since Indra

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<sup>5</sup> ApDS I.1.8-10, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas* ed, by F. Max Mullar, part I, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879] (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> PGS II-2.1 – II 5.43.

<sup>7</sup> SGS II.1.1.1-5, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>8</sup> PGS II. 2.9.



represents kṣatriyas and is considered as the king of gods while *Brhaspati* represents brāhmaṇas, perhaps it meant that kṣatriyas are born from the brāhmaṇas.

Next the *ācārya* ties the girdle around the waist of the youth. The girdle encircles the boy protecting his purity and warding off evil.<sup>9</sup> The girdle is also symbolic of the bond between teacher and student.

Then a staff (or stick) is given by the teacher to the student. The staff is symbolic of the fact that the boy is now regarded as a guardian of the Vedas, and is meant to endow him with long life, lustre and holiness.<sup>10</sup> The staff is referred to as *daṇḍa*, which the ruler also has, thus it seems that the new *brahmacārin* is being trained for the role of the protector of the social order. Also the stick (*daṇḍa*) that is used by the *brahmacārin* and which he is advised to maintain is intended perhaps for protection against all elements worldly and spiritual.<sup>11</sup>

Before initiating the boy into the *gāyatri-mantra*, the guru (i.e. the spiritual father) pours water in the joined palms of the boy. This perhaps is to symbolize purifying him before receiving the mantra. The boy is asked to see the sun.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he is asked to learn from the sun unswerving duty and discipline. Moreover sun is the symbol of power, light, vision and enlightenment.

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<sup>9</sup> PGS II.2.8.

<sup>10</sup> PGS II. 2.12.

<sup>11</sup> H.C. Sastri, *Studies in some aspects of Hindu Samskāras in Ancient India in the light of Samskaratattva of Raghunandana*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1967, p.24.

<sup>12</sup> PGS II. 2. 14-15.

After this the teacher touches the heart of the pupil reaching over his right shoulder.<sup>13</sup> This touching symbolizes the bond, heart between the teacher and pupil. Now the proper taking charge of the student begins.<sup>14</sup> The teacher seizes the student's right hand and asks his name.<sup>15</sup> After the pupil's reply he enquires, 'whose pupil (*brahmacārin*) art thou? where upon the student replies "yours".' The ācārya correcting his answer says, 'Indra's pupil art thou; Agni is thy teacher...!' Here to note that Indra and Agni represents kṣatriyas and brāhmaṇas respectively. Thus the relationship between student and teacher is represented as an implicit analogy with *varna* relations.

Thus the teacher took the boy in his charge for education and protection. But thinking himself not omnipresent, he commended the student to the protection of gods and all creatures,

"To *Prajāpati* I give thee in charge  
To god *Saviṭr* I give thee in charge  
To heaven and Earth I give thee in charge  
To all beings I give thee in charge  
The sake of freedom from harm."<sup>16</sup>

Thus one can notice that different type of deities are mentioned viz. Agni is the god of priesthood, therefore god of brāhmaṇas; Indra, king of gods symbolizes the physical power and therefore god of kṣatriyas, Prajapati is the creator god and also god of cattle. Thus the *varnas* are represented by their

<sup>13</sup> PGS II. 2.18.

<sup>14</sup> PGS II.19-22.

<sup>15</sup> Seizing the hand here is identical with the rite of *pāṇigrahana* in *vivāha samskāra*, where the bridegroom holds the bride's hand to transform her from a girl to women, giving her a new identity, similarly in *upanayana* ceremony it symbolizes the establishment of her new identity with the continuity of old.

<sup>16</sup> PGS II.2.21, op.cit.

presiding deities and such presiding and beneficent gods were worshipped by sacrifices for their blessings.

Next, the most sacred *gāyatri-mantra* is taught to the student.<sup>17</sup> *Gāyatri-mantra* is the verse to *savitṛ* (devoted to sun god) read in *gāyatri* metre. (The two other metres are *ṛṣhtubh* and *jagati*, we will discuss the significance of the variations in metres below) If he could not follow it just on that day, it could be recited to the boy after one year, six months, twenty-four days, twelve days or three days.<sup>18</sup> Thus there was leniency in remembering the mantra and the *sūtrakāras* tried to accommodate in it.

The rite of first enkindling and feeding of the sacred fire is performed after the teaching of the *gāyatri-mantra*. Here the student puts fuel on the fire with the prayer to Agni. This action of sustaining the fire connects his role with the sacrificial cult.

Then follows the student's doing the rounds for alms. This is the ceremonial beginning of what is going to be the chief means of his maintenance through out his student career. Dependence on alms is symbolic of the fact that he is no longer involved in actual production processes and is in a sense removed from routine social activities. Thus *upanayana* marks the dawn of a new era in the life of the initiate. He is no more a child and is introduced to a life of a stern discipline.

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<sup>17</sup> PGS II.3.3.

<sup>18</sup> PGS II. 3.6.

The question of proper age for the performance of the *upanayana* ceremony indicates variations among the different *varnas*. *Upanayana* is recommended to be performed at different ages for *brāhmaṇas*, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* as mentioned earlier. The outer limit for the performance of this ceremony in the case of a *brāhmaṇa* is sixteen, of the *kṣatriya* twenty-two and of the *vaiśyas* twenty-four. If this time has passed, they become *patitasāvitrīka* i.e. they have lost their right to learn the *sāvitrī*.<sup>19</sup> In some text *upanayana* is allowed to be performed even earlier or at different ages, e.g. GDS<sup>20</sup> prescribes that *upanayana* for a *brāhmaṇ* in the eighth year from conception but it may be in the fifth or ninth according to the result desired. An interesting fact is that PGS<sup>21</sup> allows *upanayana* rite in the eighth year from conception and adds that in the case of all *varnas* family usage may be followed, so we find that there occur variations in the prescription of the texts. Besides it seems that what is prescribed is not the entire ritual, other variations are possible and these are accommodated within the text.

Further the most important rite within the *upanayana* is the imparting of the *sāvitrī* verse. This verse is to be recited in different metres by the members of the different *varnas* *brāhmaṇas* are to learn in *gāyatrī* metre, *kṣatriyas* in the *ṛṣṭubh* and *vaiśyas* in the *jagati*. The *gāyatrī* is directly connected to *brāhmaṇas*, or to Agni, the priest of gods. The *ṛṣṭubh* is systematically

<sup>19</sup> AsvGS I.19.12.5-8, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964. SGS II. 1.6-8; GDS I.12-14, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First published, 1879] (reprint) Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>20</sup> GDS I.6.

<sup>21</sup> PGS II.2.4.

associated with the Kṣatriyas, physical power and with Indra, king of Gods. The *jagati* is in like manner, consistently connected to vaiśyas or to cattle, prosperity in general.<sup>22</sup> Herman Oldenberg<sup>23</sup> sums up this complicated set of resemblances as ‘the number of years given for the *upanayana* of the three castes (i.e. the brāhmaṇa 8-16, kṣatriya 11-22 and vaiśyas 12-24) is evidently derived from the number of syllables of the three meters which are so very frequently stated to correspond to the castes, to the three gods or categories of gods (Agni, Indra, Visvedevas) etc. viz. the *gāyatri*, *ṛṣhtubh* and *jagati*’. Smith argues that it was indeed the production of a ‘real’ life for the initiates that the ritualists aimed for. And to do so in the Vedic world was to move the candidate from in-born, biological imperfection to a ritually constructed or a ritually connected identity.<sup>24</sup> N.N. Bhattacharyya<sup>25</sup> explains this inconsistency in relation to the age of initiation in terms of puberty rites. He says that the highest age limit is fixed which is sixteen years for brāhmaṇa, twelve for kṣatriya and twenty four for vaiśya; supporting his argument by citing Kautilya’s statement that a girl attains maturity at the age of twelve while a boy at sixteen. Further he argues that supreme importance has been attached to celibacy and the initiated one has to follow a number of sexual taboos and in the case of a boy attaining the age of puberty such restrictions are needed.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989. p.99-100.

<sup>23</sup> SGS II.I.1, op.cit.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.100.

<sup>25</sup> N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*, Manohar Book Series, Delhi, 1996, p.144.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

Continuing his explanation, he states that the prefix 'Upa' of *upanayana* denotes something 'secret' and has some bearing on matters 'sexual' and therefore the original ritual of the *upanayana* seems to have some esoteric elements.<sup>27</sup>

Thus *upanayana* or initiation into *brahmacarya* (or studenthood) is the first of the *rites de passage* by which a person enters the first stage or *āśrama* of life and obtains *dvijatva* or second birth. This *dvija* status or rebirth is regarded as the best as it is spiritual as opposed to the earlier physical birth.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from ApDS, GDS<sup>29</sup> also mentions that initiation considered being the second birth. The *dvija* can study (the Vedas), sacrifice and make gifts i.e. he alone can participate in ritual and status conferring activities.<sup>30</sup> The rebirth by *upanayana* ceremony is regarded as better and in contrast to the first biological birth from the mother and thus it devalues the position of women or mother and extols the ritual labor of men.

The brāhmanical priests feel that they are ultimately qualified to produce proper offspring; both the cosmos and individual humans can be "truly born" only from a womb controlled by priests, (that is the womb of the sacrifice).<sup>31</sup> Here Walter Kaelber's argument is noteworthy when he says that there is a shift in emphasis from womb symbolism to passage symbolism. That is

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<sup>27</sup> ibid, p.143.

<sup>28</sup> ApDS I 1.1.6

<sup>29</sup> GDS, I.7.

<sup>30</sup> GDS 10.1. As a logical corollary of this, the VDS (11.75) states that one could not sacrifice for a man who had not been initiated, nor could one enter into matrimonial relations with him unless he made amends by performing prescribed penances. GDS belongs to Samaveda while VDS to Rg Veda.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.94.

passage symbolism becomes progressively more conspicuous in the subsequent literature while womb imagery conspicuously decreases (even disappears) as a symbol indicating spiritual rebirth.<sup>32</sup> Kaelber aptly argues that the disappearing importance of womb and gestation symbolism is clearly evident in the *upanayana* ceremony. Thus the initiation of the student remains integral to the brāhmanical tradition and now the term *dvija* stands without any supporting of the natal imagery, it has become, in fact, only a sociological category without any reinforcing physical symbolism.<sup>33</sup>

Like the different ages of initiation, different seasons are recommended for the performance of the *upanayana* ceremony by different *varṇas*: brāhmaṇas in spring, kṣatriyas in summer and vaiśyas in autumn.<sup>34</sup> These different seasons are supposed to be symbolic of the temperament and occupation of different *varṇas*. The moderation of spring symbolizes the moderate life expected of a brāhmaṇa, the heat of summer represented the fervour associated with a kṣatriya, autumn is when the commercial life of early India reopened after the rainy season and suggests the wealth and prosperity of a vaiśya.

Likewise, the individual items of the uniform of the student, bestowed during the course of the initiation rites, also serves to differentiate among the types of students of different castes and they highlight the particular qualities

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<sup>32</sup> Walter O. Kaelber 'The Dramatic' Element in Brahmanic Initiation : Symbols of Death, Danger and Difficult Passage' *History of Religions*, August 1978, Vol. 18, No. 1, Chicago, 1978, p.65.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p.67.

<sup>34</sup> AGS IV.10.4; ApDS 1.1.1.19; BDS 1.2.3.10, This age provision is mentioned in both the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras,

peculiar to each. Each boy is given an upper garment, a lower garment, a belt, a staff and the sacred thread (*yajñopavita*) that becomes central to rituals of *upanayana* later. R.B. Pandey is incorrect when he writes that none of Gr̥hyasūtras contain the prescription of wearing the sacred thread<sup>35</sup> because SGS<sup>36</sup> talks of adjusting of sacrificial cord (*yajñopavita*). The Dharmasūtras<sup>37</sup> on the other hand which belongs to later period than Gr̥hyasūtras contain references to *yajñopavita*.

Regarding the differences in uniform, they are drawn from the natural substances and the qualities of the different socio-ontological classes. The upper garment for example is to be a skin from the black antelope, the initiate is a brahmin, from the spotted deer of a kṣatriya and from a goat or a cow, vaiśya.<sup>38</sup> PGS adds that if any one cannot secure a skin suited to one's *varna*, he may wear an upper garment, of cow hide as the cow is the chief among animals.<sup>39</sup> ApDS (I.1.3.7-8) gives the option to all *varnas* to use a sheep skin (as upper garment) or a woolen plaid (*kambala*). Smith has explained these variations in dress code pointing out that in the brāhmaṇa texts the black antelope is consistently connected with brahmins, the brāhmaṇa power, sacrifice etc. Although the connection between the *Kṣatriya* and spotted deer is less straight forward, presumably the latter resounds with physical and royal

<sup>35</sup> R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1969, p.224.

<sup>36</sup> SGS. II.2.3.

<sup>37</sup> VDS, XII.14, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part II, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [ First Published 1882], (reprint) Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965; ApDS I.2.6. 18-19.

<sup>38</sup> AsvGS I.19.8; PGS II 5.17-19; VDS XI.61-63.

<sup>39</sup> PGS II.5.20.



power.<sup>40</sup> Smith has arrived this conclusion also because in a variant opinion tiger (substituted for the spotted deer) is indeed an animal with courage, physical power and strength and indeed an animal (king of the animal kingdom) with resemblances to the *kṣatriya varna*.

Similarly as for the relationship between the *vaiśya* and the productive valuable cow or the prolific goat; Smith's explanation is that goat is said to be the very form of 'increase' or *puṣṭi* in the Taittiriya-Brāhmaṇa, cow hide and the skin of the goat are the symbols of "food."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps it can simply be said that *vaiśyas* chief occupation was pastoralism and therefore goat and cow remain of considerable importance for them.

Such systematic identifications between the components of nature and those of society are also present in the case of the girdle tied around the boy at initiation. In general, this item of the uniform is meant to protect the boy who wears it<sup>42</sup> and to give him strength and it may have also been a symbolic umbilical cord of the newly reborn student.<sup>43</sup> Most texts agree that the *brāhmaṇas* cord should be made of *muñja* grass, that of the *kṣatriyas* from the bowstring or the *mūrvā* hemp from which strings were made and the *vaiśyas* from wool or hemp.<sup>44</sup> It seems *muñja* grass symbolizes the brahmins connection to the sacrifice, for in the ritual it is used in various capacities (for brooms, cords, seats, purifiers etc.) *muñja* is quite flammable was used in the

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.97.

<sup>41</sup> ibid.

<sup>42</sup> PGS II.2.8.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.97.

<sup>44</sup> AsvGS, I.19.12; SGS II.1.15-17; PGS II.5.21-23; VDS XI.5.8-10; GDS I.15.

sacrifice to make the fire blaze up, thus restoring “vigor” or “life sap” (*ūrj*) to the sacrifices. The resemblance between the kṣatriya and the bowstring is obvious as the bow represents the manly strength and martial attributes, warriorship of the kṣatriya. As for the vaiśya hemp appears to suggest proliferation and reproduction and wool clearly bonds the pastoralist to his domesticated animals.<sup>45</sup> According to ApDS<sup>46</sup> the vaiśyas belt should be made of rope used for yoking oxen to the plough, emphasizing the agricultural function of this *varna*.

Similarly the staff (or stick) serves to create and reinforce class differentiations and hierarchy amongst the boys undergoing the initiation *samskāras*. It is to be of varying lengths<sup>47</sup> and different woods<sup>48</sup> according to *varna*: *palaśa* or *bilva* for brāhmana, *nyāgrodha* for the kṣatriya and *badara* or *udumbara* for the vaiśya. Smith has shown that these prescriptions are not haphazard. In the Brāhamaṇas, *palaśa* is frequently identified with the Brahman power or with *soma* and is said to instill luminosity (*tejas*) and the luster of brāhman power. The *nyāgrodha* or banyan tree with its bending branches which take root in the ground imparts physical vitality and *ojas* and the association of *udumbara* with life sap and food is well established in the Vedic texts.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Smith, op.cit, p.98.

<sup>46</sup> ApDS 1.1.2.37.

<sup>47</sup> AsvGS 1.19.13; GDS 1.26; VDS. 11.55-57; BDS 1.2.3.15 for the inverse see, however, SGS 1.1.21-23.

<sup>48</sup> SGS 2.1.18-20; ApDS 1.1.1.38; ApGS 4.11.16; VDS 11.52-54; AsvGS 1.19.13; GDS 1.22-23; PGS 2.5.15-27.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, op.cit, pp.98-99.

Thus from the whole argument one thing is visible that the references of different stuffs for different *varnas* in the *upanayana* ceremony reveals the reinforcement of *varna* identities through the ritual processes. Further we notice the variations among the performance of rituals, which more or less serves the same purpose of creating *varna* identities. The thing to point out is that variations largely occur in the *Gṛhyasūtras* which are primarily is the ritual texts.

It has been stated that all those who performed the rite acquired *dvija* status, but not all *dvijas* are equal. This split in the *dvija* category ultimately leads to a situation where the term becomes virtually synonymous with *brāhmana*.<sup>50</sup> So in order to understand the ontological importance of the *samskāras* in Vedic ritualism, it is necessary to look at the depictions of those who have not yet undergone or are not eligible for the performance of the *samskāras*. So as important as the ordering of the hierarchy within the ritual, is the ordering through the exclusion of various groups from the ritual. *Gṛhyasūtras* specifically refer to *śudras* as *ekājati*.<sup>51</sup> The members of *śūdra* class have not been reborn into *brāhmanical* society through the initiation and therefore are known as the 'once-born'. This clearly reveals the link between the *varna* hierarchy and the ritual status. The uninitiate, regardless of the class

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<sup>50</sup> Kumkum Roy, "Legitimation and the Brahmanical Tradition : The Upanayana and the Brahmacharya in the Dharmasūtras", *Indian History Congress 46<sup>th</sup> Session*, Amritsar 1985, p.138.

<sup>51</sup> GDS, 10.1 and 10.50.

of his birth, is likened in many Dharmasūtras to others who are also excluded from Vedic rituals so we have statements such as:

‘They do not put any restrictions on the acts of (a child) before the initiation, for he is one the level with a śūdra before his (second) birth through the Veda’.<sup>52</sup>

‘No religious rite can be performed by (a boy) before the initiation, because he is on the level with a śūdra before his birth through the Veda’.<sup>53</sup>

So the śūdra were considered to live in a state of inherited and perpetual irresponsibility; they cannot perform an act serious enough and they were thought to be permanently stuck in the child like condition of natural deficiency that members of the other classes pass through the means of ritual renovation. This may appear to be more significant in a situation of social stratification.

The other group explicitly excluded is women. While the Gr̥hyasūtras are ambiguous as to whether the *upanayana* can be performed for women or not, the evidence from the Dharmasūtras clearly points to their exclusion.<sup>54</sup> ApDS<sup>55</sup> declares that the boy who has been initiated, although he can eat the leavings of his father and elder brother but he was not been allowed to eat his mother’s or sister’s leavings.<sup>56</sup> The references are to male kinsfolk, related patrilineally while kinswomen are totally ignored. ADS<sup>57</sup> refers to the situation of *pitā*, *pitāmaha* and *prapitāmaha* and there is no discussion on the role of

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<sup>52</sup> BDS 1.2.3.6.

<sup>53</sup> VDS II.6.

<sup>54</sup> BDS 1.2.3.6.

<sup>55</sup> ApDS II.4.9.7.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, I.4.4.11-12.

<sup>57</sup> ADS, II.4.97.

women. She has been only treated as a secondary and subsidiary part during the performance of the *samskāras*. She is regarded as intellectually inferior to man.

R.S. Sharma in his work<sup>58</sup> has stated that woman and śūdras were considered to be the most condemned sections of society. This has been co-referred in the Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras as well. According to PGS after the *sāmavartana* ceremony, which is to be performed after upanayana, one should avoid seeing women, śūdras, dogs etc. and also one should not talk to such beings.<sup>59</sup> A similar regulation is found in BDS<sup>60</sup>, which states that in performing rites for success the student should not talk to a woman and a śūdra. It has been aptly stated by Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring<sup>61</sup> that women's ritual rules are domestic rather than public, their images are reduced to sexual function and they are excluded from leadership roles in most public rituals.

Thus through the ritual of *upanayana* certain political and social roles have been suggested to student and certain others like economic role has been excluded. It implies that rituals were performed to claim a certain social and political status as well as exemption from direct participation in economic activities. Further regarding the role of women it is only in the second part of the *upanayana* ceremony that mother and women figures and that too in a

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<sup>58</sup> R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1983, pp.47-48.

<sup>59</sup> PGS II. 8.3.

<sup>60</sup> BDS IV.5.4.

<sup>61</sup> Judith Hoch-Smith and Anita Spring ed. *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*, New York, 1978, Introduction.

marginal role.<sup>62</sup> They request and beg alms from the ladies because they will not be refused these alms which were given by the student to his teacher.

So the *upanayana* ceremony does not have a role for women but the next *rites de passage* we will be discussing which is *vivāha samskāra* could not be performed without women. We will discuss the nature and implications of the participation of women in *vivāha* in the next chapter.

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<sup>62</sup> PGS, II.5.7; AsvGS, I.22.7; ApDS, I.I.3. 28-30.

## CHAPTER IV

### VIVĀHA

The term 'marriage' has a reference to a "union of the male and female which does not cease with the act of procreation but persists after the birth of offspring until the young are capable of supplying their own needs".<sup>1</sup> Though marriage is an important social institution but to an individual, *vivāha* or marriage is not merely an arrangement for a man and a woman to live together, a kind of social contract, it is a sacrament. It is the most important of all the *samskāras*.<sup>2</sup> The several words such as *udvāha*, *vivāha*, *pāriṇaya*, *upayāna* and *pāṇigrahana*, that are employed to denote the idea of marriage, indicate one or more of the elements of the *samskāra* of marriage. However, marriage is the most common term for *vivāha*. *Udvāha* means 'taking the girl out of her paternal home', *vivāha* indicates 'taking the girl away in a special way or for a special purpose that is for making her one's wife', *pāriṇaya* means 'going round i.e. making a *pradakṣinā* of the fire', *Upanayana* indicates 'bringing near and making one's own', while *pāṇigrahana* is nothing but 'taking the hand of the girl'.<sup>3</sup>

Marriage was regarded as a sacrifice and one who did not enter into married life was called "one without sacrifice".<sup>4</sup> When religious consciousness developed, marriage was not only a social necessity but became a religious

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1969, p.156.

<sup>2</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. II, part I, Bhandankar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64, p.427.

<sup>3</sup> Kane, vol. II, I, p.427.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System*, Oxford University Press, U.S.A. 1993, p.41.

duty incumbent upon every individual. This chapter which extensively deals with the marriage *samskāra* is divided into two sections: section I deals with the ritual aspects of marriage relying on the Gr̥hyasūtras while section II will be on the social implications of these rituals based mainly on various Dharmasūtras. In addition to these, there is an effort to focus on the symbolism of marriage and deal with the deities, mantra, and the role of priests etc.

The Gr̥hyasūtras mainly deal with the ritual of marriage. They prescribe a sophisticated ritual with all the details while the Dharmasūtras primarily deal with the social aspect of marriage, rules of conduct, laws etc. The Dharmasūtras attach great importance to the form of marriage. It was believed that if the form of marriage was solemn and dignified the progeny born out of it would be good and noble. BDS<sup>5</sup> quotes a saying that “the quality of the offspring depends on the quality of the marriage rite”. The same view is expressed by ApDS<sup>6</sup> in almost the same words.

### Section I

Regarding the ritual, the account from the Gr̥hyasūtras can be summarized in three parts:

- (a) The preparation and rites preceding the actual marriage ceremony.
- (b) The marriage ceremony proper.
- (c) Uttara-*Vivāha-karmani* or the post marriage rites.

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<sup>5</sup> BDS, I, 11.21.1, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Bühler, [First Published, 1879], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965..

<sup>6</sup> ApDS II.5.12.4, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part II, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Bühler, [First Published, 1882], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.



For the preparation for marriage, Gṛhyasūtras describe some rites and customs preceding the actual marriage rites. They discuss the proper time for marriage, selecting the suitable bride and groom etc. Rules for the selection of the bride are a more elaborate than those for selecting a bridegroom. AsvGS<sup>7</sup> says :

‘one should marry a girl who is endowed with intelligence, beauty, a good character and auspicious characteristics and who is healthy.’

SGS<sup>8</sup> also requires, that the girl should be possessed of auspicious characteristics (or indications). Here, Sāṅkhāyana says that he (i.e. the bride groom) should choose such a girl who give birth to six men. This clearly reveals that the girl was considered to be the means for gestation of male child. In this context, we can say that marriage is the transfer of the bride’s procreative potential to a family.

ApGS<sup>9</sup> says that the girl to be married must not bear the names of the *nakṣatra*, or of a river, or of a tree. Moreover those girls are also objectionable in whose names the last letter but one is ‘r’ or ‘l’. Further ApGS lists other “defects” of girls viz. one should not choose a girl who is asleep or weeps or has left the house.

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<sup>7</sup> Asv G.S. I.5.3, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, trs. vol. XXIX, by H. Oldenberg, [First Published 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>8</sup> SGS, I.5.6-10, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> ApGS, I.3.1-113, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXX, ed. by F Max Muller, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published 1892], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

Some of the Gr̥hyasūtras propose a peculiar mystical method of selecting a bride. The AsvGS<sup>10</sup> after stating that one should select a girl endowed with good characteristics (*lakṣanas*) states that *lakṣanas* are very difficult to discern and therefore prescribes that eight lumps of different kinds of earth should be taken respectively from a field that yields two crops a year, from a cow-stable, from a *vedi* (sacrificial altar, after sacrifice is performed), from a pool of water that does not dry up, from a gambling place, from a place where four roads meet, a burial ground, then he should recite over the lumps the formula

‘*ṛta* (right) has been born first in the beginning; truth is founded (or fixed) in *ṛta*; may this girl attain here that for which she is born; may what is true be visible;’ then he says to the girl ‘take one of these’.<sup>11</sup>

According as she chooses the lump, it may respectively be deemed that she will have offspring rich in food (if she chooses the lump of the earth taken from the field of two crops a year), or rich in cattle, or rich in spiritual luster or rich in everything, or addicted to gambling, or wandering in different directions or poor, or that she will bring death to her husband (if she takes the lump of the earth from the burial ground).

Thus the description of several criteria among the Gr̥hyasūtras and especially Dharmasūtras for the selection of the bride for marriage reveals that the sūtrakāras tried to lay down some criteria for the selection of a girl. Perhaps

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<sup>10</sup> AsvGS, I.5.3-6, op.cit.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

it was believed that the girl should be lucky and possess acceptable characteristics.

Coming to the time for marriage almost all the Gr̥hyasūtras made remarks about the auspicious time for marriage. Most of them are unanimous about one thing that marriage should be during northern course of the sun and on an auspicious day. Only the SGS does not discuss this topic. The PGS<sup>12</sup> says that it should be performed under one of the three *nakṣatras* of which *uttara* is the first. It further says that it should be performed under the *mrigaśiras* or *rohini*. The AGS<sup>13</sup> gives more details, “All seasons are fit for marriage with the exceptions of two *śiśira* months and the last of the summer month, the wooers (bridegrooms father) are send during the *invakā-nakṣatra*. It also mentions that in the *māgha-nakṣatra* two cows are given to the bride’s father<sup>14</sup> and the bride is brought in *phālguni*. This indicates the prevalence of the *Ārṣa* from of marriage. As different *sūtras* prescribe different times for marriage, it seems thus that there was no uniform system. There were probably various traditions and customs practiced by different social groups in different regions, which were incorporated in the Gr̥hyasūtras.

Regarding the essential rites at wedding, the preparation for the nuptial sacrifice has been explained by AsvGS<sup>15</sup> broadly. The place where the sacrifice is to be performed is besmeared with cow dung; lines are drawn on it; the fire is established there and articles, implements and material necessary for the rites,

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<sup>12</sup> PGS 1.4.5.7.

<sup>13</sup> AsvGS, I.2.2.

<sup>14</sup> AsvGS 1.3.

<sup>15</sup> AsvGS I.3.1.

are arranged systematically. According to AsvGS<sup>16</sup> a mill stone is placed to the west of the fire and a water pot to the North East. After the ceremony of presenting gifts to the bride and that of sprinkling her with water under a yoke have been completed, the bridegroom leads her to the fire holding her by right hand.<sup>17</sup> It is known that fire plays a pivotal role in any sacrifice. Since marriage ceremony is being treated here as a sacrifice, fire and water act as purifiers providing sanctity to the ritual.

The Gr̥hyasūtras generally lay down that the bridegroom and the bride should sit on a mat or on a bundle of grass or on something of the kind, to the west of the fire with their faces to the east. The main purpose to face towards east is for auspiciousness as it is the direction of sunrise. They hold the view that when the bridegroom and the bride takes their seats to the west of the fire, the latter sits to the right side of the former.<sup>18</sup> When the bridegroom and the bride have taken their seats near the fire, the bride touches the groom. SGS states that while she touches the groom, he offers three oblations of melted butter (*ājya*) with the *mahāvyaḥritis* together.<sup>19</sup> *Aghara* oblations, the oblations of two *ājya* portions, oblations with *mahāvyaḥritis*, the general expiatory oblations, the *prājāpatya* oblations, the *sviṣṭakṛt* oblations the further adds that at the wedding the groom may make oblations with *rāṣṭrabhṛit*, *jaya* and *abhyātāna* formulas (i.e. the formulas for procuring royal power, victory etc.).

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<sup>16</sup> AsvGS I.73, op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> AsvGS II.4.9, op.cit.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> SGS I.12.11.12, op.cit.

SGS<sup>20</sup> states that after the groom has offered oblations into the fire, the father or brother of the bride, facing the west and standing, offers oblations on her head with the point of a sword or with *sruva* (a sacrificial ladle), while she sits facing the east, he here recites the mantra of the R̥gVeda which begins with the words; “Be queen over your father-in-law”. The father and brother hold a sword which indicates power and strength. Another point to be noted here is that the *sūtrakāras* have not taken the R̥gVedic mantra in sequence. They have chosen mantras from the R̥gVedic hymn according to their ritual arrangement and preferences.

In most of the Gr̥hyasūtras, the sacrifice (homa) is followed by the *pāṇigrahaṇa*.<sup>21</sup> According to SGS and AsvGS, at the *pāṇigrahaṇa* the groom stands facing west while the bride sits facing east. Reciting the R̥gVedic mantra,

‘I grasp your hand for great prosperity etc.’

The groom grasps her right hand together with the thumb with his right hand, the palms of their hands being turned upward.<sup>22</sup>

Though this ritual has its own importance it is the bridegroom only who holds the bride’s hand and chants the mantra. It has been said in this connection that the crux of the ritual evidently centered on uniting two persons who were construed differently and empowered, but not in identical ways.

<sup>20</sup> PGS I.5.3, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> Ramgopal, op.cit, p.230.

<sup>22</sup> SGS 1.31.1, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964; AsvGS 1.7.3.; PGS 1.6.3, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

Hence the bonds envisaged were not amongst equals, but had to be worked out in terms of control, dominance and subordination. This is in a sense epitomized in the grasping of the hand *pāṇigrahaṇa* which constituted the central ritual episode.<sup>23</sup> Some of the Gr̥hyasūtras express the view that of the bridegroom desires the birth of daughters only, he should take hold of the bride's fingers only, and if he desires both sons and daughters, he should grasp her hand on the hairy side together with her thumbs and fingers.<sup>24</sup> From this is clear that seizing the hand was viewed as symbolic of an appropriation of the procreative powers of the woman. Also different ways of holding the bride's hand shows the variations among the people who perform this ritual accordingly, depending on the kind of offspring desired.

The Gr̥hyasūtras differ a great deal in the order in which the three rites – *aśmārohaṇa*, *pāriṇayana* and *lājahoma* are performed. In the PGS the *lājohoma* is described before the *parinayana*. However in most other like SGS etc. *aśmārohaṇa* is followed by *lājahoma* and *parinayana*. For *aśmarohana* (treading on a millstone) it has been said that after a stone has been placed by the priest to the north of the fire, the bridegroom makes the bride rise with the words:

‘come, joyful one; and then he makes her tread with the top of her right foot on the stone with the mantra: ‘Come tread on stone. Be firm like a stone trample on those who have evil intentions. Suppress the wicked.’<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> K. Roy, Marriage as Communication: An Exploration of Norms and Narratives in Early India, *Studies in History*, 10,2, 1994, New Delhi, p.187.

<sup>24</sup> AsvGS, 1.7.3-5; ApGS II.4.11-15.

<sup>25</sup> SGS I.13.11-12; PGS 1.7.1; AGS II.5.3, op.cit.

The interesting point is that the bride in this context has been treated as a courageous human beyond her ability to procreate though again the bridegroom has taken the initiative of saying the mantra. Yet he is asking the bride to become firm like a stone and powerful, to be destroyer of enemies. According to PGS<sup>26</sup> after the performance of the *aśmārohaṇa* ceremony the bridegroom sings a *gātha* which contains the two verses:

‘O sarasvati! Promote (this understanding of ours), O gracious one! O bountiful one! You whom I praise the source of all creation. It is you in whom the whole creation arose and in whom this whole world dwells; today I shall sing that song which is the highest glory of woman’.

Coming to *lājahoma* it is the sacrifice of fried grains. Having poured some *ājya* into her joined hands, her brother or any other man acting in her brother’s place, pours out fried grains mixed with *sami* leaves from his joined hands into the joined hands of the bride.<sup>27</sup> Further PGS adds that after *ājya* has been spread over these fried grains, she offers them into the fire without opening her joined hands, while the bridegroom recites the mantra;

‘This woman, offering fried grains into the fire, prays, may my husband live long, may my relations increase, *Svaha!*’

SGS and PGS lays down that the bride performs the *lājahoma* standing.<sup>28</sup> Again there is the evidence of subordination of women, as a bridegroom is only uttering the mantra. As grain is the symbol of fertility, the offering symbolizes her transfer, as a fertile person from one household to

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<sup>26</sup> PGS 1.7.2, op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> AsvGS 1.7. 8-13 ; PGS 1.6.1-2.

<sup>28</sup> SGS 1.13.11-17, 1.14.1-4; PGS 1.6.1-2.

another. So it was the girl who has now been transformed into a woman with her ability to procreate the offspring. All the Gr̥hyasūtras indicated that the three rites i.e. *aśmārohana*, *lājahoma* and *pariṇayana* thrice. Further SGS<sup>29</sup> states that these rites may be optionally performed a fourth time also but it ought to be silently. Likewise AsvGS and PGS also remarks in the same way.<sup>30</sup> PGS further adds that the fourth time the, bride pours the whole *lājas*, by the neb of a winnowing basket, into the fire with the words, 'To Bhaga Svaha!'<sup>31</sup>

Then the great *sapta-padi* or 'the rite of seven steps' takes place. This ceremony is important from the legal point of view, as marriage is regarded legally complete after it is performed. In the AsvGS the *saptapadi* comes after the *pānigrahana* and before the *aśmārohana*, *lājahoma* and *pariṇayana*, yet in the majority of Gr̥hyasūtras the *saptapadi* follows the *pariṇayana*. This rite where in the bride is caused by the bridegroom to take seven steps to the north of the fire brings an end to the main marriage rites according to the majority of the sūtras. The formulas employed by all the sūtras are similar with slight variations. The husband makes the wife, step forward in northern direction step with the words

one step for sap,  
two for juice,  
three for prospering of wealth,  
four for comforts,  
five for cattle,  
six for seasons.

<sup>29</sup> SGS, 1.14.4., op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> AsvGS XVII.14-15, op.cit.; PGS I.7.4-5, op.cit.

<sup>31</sup> PGS, 1.7.5.



Friend! be with seven steps united to me. So be thou devoted to me.<sup>32</sup>

According to AsvGS and SGS, the bridegroom makes the bride step forward seven steps in the north eastern direction. Besides according to the AsvGS fifth step is for offspring.<sup>33</sup> Thus, there are small variations among the Gr̥hyasūtras but it cannot be denied that everywhere *saptapadi* is regarded as the most important of all rites at the wedding.

All the Gr̥hyasūtras require that water should be sprinkled on the heads of the bride and the groom at the end of the *saptapadi*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the transfer of the bride was symbolized by the journey comprising the seven steps, the *saptapadi*, which marked the transition as particularly auspicious and as a means of acquiring prosperity implicit in the bride. Very often this preceded an actual journey to ward off various hazards.

For the post *saptapadi* rites, the PGS<sup>35</sup> lays down that after the bridegroom has sprinkled the bride's head with water, he makes her look at the sun and that when he touches her heart with the mantras,

‘into my will I take thy heart; thy mind shall follow my mind;  
in my word thou shall rejoice with all thy heart; may  
*Prajāpati* join thee to me.’

The heart is regarded as the centre of feelings. By touching it the husband symbolically tries to rouse them in the world of love.<sup>36</sup> After the bride was blessed by the invited guests, a strong man snatched the bride up from the

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<sup>32</sup> PGS I.7.5, op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> Asv G.S 1.7.19.

<sup>34</sup> U.M. Apte, op.cit, p.103.

<sup>35</sup> P.G.S. 1.8.3-8, op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> This touching of the heart by the husband is similar to the touching of the student by the ācārya in the *upanayana* ceremony to strengthen the bond of relationship.

ground and set her down in an eastern or north direction in an out of the way place outside the house, on a red bull's hide, with a mantra. According to R.B. Pandey bull's hide is symbolical of fertility and prosperity.<sup>37</sup> Also bull's hide is symbolic of virility and masculinity.

The priest who conducts the nuptials was paid the sacrificial fee. The sūtras from SGS<sup>38</sup> says that 'A cow is the optional gift to be given by a brāhmana, a village by a rājanya and a horse by a vaiśya'. These sūtras are identical with PGS<sup>39</sup> though SGS belongs to the Ṛgveda and PGS to the Yajurveda. An interesting point is that both these sūtras fall in the same category (i.e. in the second stratum) as defined by Ramgopal, mentioned in the introductory chapter.

After the payment of the fees, a number of ceremonies still remain to be performed. One of the many to be mentioned here is showing of the pole star and other stars to the bride AsvGS<sup>40</sup> described this as:

'having seen the pole star, the star *arundhati* and the *ursa* major, she should break her silence by pronouncing the formula, 'may my husband live and may I have offspring'.

Thus AsvGS describes the mantra recited by the bride herself, other wise PGS lays down that the bridegroom shows her the pole star with the mantra :

'firm are thou; I see you firm you (O bride) be firm in my home, thriving; Brihaspati has given you to me; possessing

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<sup>37</sup> R.B. Pandey, *Hindu Samskāras*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1969, p.221.

<sup>38</sup> SGS I.14.13-15, op.cit.

<sup>39</sup> PGS I.8.15-18.

<sup>40</sup> AsvGS I.7.22, op.cit.

offspring you live with me' and that even if she cannot see the pole-star, she should reply; 'I see it'.<sup>41</sup>

Thus it seems that such ceremonies were only symbolic in nature. It can be mentioned here that some Grhyasūtras lay down that this rite to be performed just after the wedding at the bride's house while others viz., SGS<sup>42</sup> prescribes its performance at the bridegroom's house. Behind this rite, the firm and life long companionship between the bride and the bridegroom is the main objective in view.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, K.Roy implies that this ritual is performed in the hope that the values ascribed to three stars, constancy and devotion, would be manifest in the new bride.<sup>44</sup> Also this rite is important because it reveals that polar star and its firmness have deeply influenced the mind of the *sūtrakāras*. This is a new rite, an addition of this period. The Vedic age did not have this rite in its ceremonies.<sup>45</sup>

The mantras were recited during the bride's departure from her house to bridegroom's house. SGS and AsvGS deal with it at length and describe, the whole procedure of the couple's departure. The Grhyasūtras also prescribe the mantras to be recited on various occasions in the course of the journey. Certain mantras, for instance, should be recited by the bridegroom when the bride boards a boat; when they pass by crossings, villages, rivers, big trees, cemeteries, or deserts, when they see a ferocious beast or a snake etc.<sup>46</sup> After

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<sup>41</sup> PGS I. 8.19-20, op.cit.

<sup>42</sup> SGS I.17.3-4, op.cit.

<sup>43</sup> Pandey, op.cit, p.228.

<sup>44</sup> Kunkum Roy, op.cit, p.189.

<sup>45</sup> U.M. Apte, op.cit, p.113.

<sup>46</sup> AsvGS 1.8.6-7; SGS 1.15.14-21; Ap GS II.5.2.5 and II.6.15, op.cit.

the couple reaches and enters the house, the bridegroom performs a *grhapraveśaniya-homa* i.e. a burnt oblation is offered to celebrate and announce entry in the house. AsvGS says that the bridegroom shows his house to the bride with a mantra. Thus the bride has come to her new house and the husband and the wife are expected to generate a world of their own.

The other point can be marked here was that marriage was considered as a removal of evil influences. Since marriage is the most critical event in the life of a man/woman and from there they usher a new era of life; therefore it seems that he/she wants to be blessed to remove all the dangers to his/her life. There are number of deities mentioned in the Grhyasūtras some of them are Agni, Prajāpati, Puśan, Mitra, Bṛhaspati, Surya. Also Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Indrani, Tvastar, Savitar, Kundra, Tvastri, Vishnu etc. The chief among them are Agni which is symbolic of priesthood, Soma of kings, Prajapati of offspring and Puśan of cattle. It seems that Prajapati is the presiding deity of *vivāha* samskāra.

The fact that marriage is not a passport for sexual indulgence but a human institution aiming at moderation in the conjugal life, has been emphasized at the end of the nuptials, when the *trirātravrata* or the ‘observance of continence for three nights’<sup>47</sup> is undertaken. It has been said that through a period of three nights they shall eat no saline food, they shall sleep on the ground, refrain from sexual intercourse for at least three nights. The symbolism of this observance seems to be to give a lesson in moderation to the

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<sup>47</sup> PGS I.15.21; SGS I.17.5; AGS II.8-10, op.cit.

married couple. Therefore all the rituals and utterances of mantras has a large social impact in one way or another.

So with the study of the nuptial symbolism, different aspects of the then societal life can be studied. It is true that the rites associated with marriage ceremony provide an occasion for giving expression to relationships at several levels between bride and groom, within and amongst *varnas*, and amongst kins folk and these all along with the discussion of deities and role of brāhmana priests has been discussed in the following section.

## Section II

For this part which deals with social implications of the marriage rituals, Dharmasūtras are of vital importance because they deal primarily with the social aspects of marriage. The sūtras in our context mention forms of marriage namely *Brāhma*, *Daiva*, *Prājāpatya*, *Ārṣa*, *Gāndharva*, *Āsura*, *Rākṣasa* and *Paiśācha*. The ADS and the VDS omit *Prājāptya* and *Paiśācha* forms of marriage. These eight forms of marriage one defined in the sūtras as follows:

1. ***Brāhma***: If the father, pouring a libation of water, gives away in marriage his daughter adorned with ornaments to a suitable man of virtuous conduct and great learning and who has been invited and honorably received by the father himself, it is called the *Brāhma* form of marriage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> AsvGS I.6.1; VDS I.30; BDS 1.11.20.2; ApDS II.5.11.17; GDS IV.6. The other Grhyasūtras do not mention about the eight forms of marriages.

2. **Daiva:** The gift of a daughter decked with ornaments to an officiating priest (*Ritvij*) who is performing a *śrauta* sacrifice for the giver, during the course of its performance, is called the *Daiva* form of marriage.<sup>49</sup>
3. **Prājāpatya:** If the father gives away his daughter in marriage after having addressed the bridegroom and the bride with the words; “May both of you perform together your duties” and after having shown due honour to the bridegroom, it is called the *Prājāpatya* form of marriage.<sup>50</sup>
4. **Ārṣa:** If the father gives away his daughter according to the sacred law, after having received from the bridegroom a cow and a bull, it is called the *Ārṣa* form of marriage.<sup>51</sup>
5. **Gāndharva:** If a maiden and her lover unite themselves through love, it is called the *Gāndharva* form of marriage.<sup>52</sup>
6. **Āsura:** If a suitor obtains a maiden, after having gladdened her kinsmen with money, it is called the *Āsura* form of marriage.<sup>53</sup> The VDS<sup>54</sup> calls it *Manuśa* form of marriage.
7. **Rākṣasa:** If a maiden is forcibly abducted from her home by the bridegroom or his companions, after slaying or wounding her relatives, it is called *Rākṣasa* form of marriage<sup>55</sup> According to VDS<sup>56</sup>, it is called *Kshatra* form of marriage. It is strongly condemned by the sutras.

<sup>49</sup> AsvGS I.6.2; GDS IV.9; BDS I.11.205; ApDS II.5.11.19; VDS 1.31, op.cit.

<sup>50</sup> AsvGS I.63., GDS IV.7. BDS I.11.20.3, op.cit.

<sup>51</sup> AsvGS I.64.; GDS IV; BDS I.1.1.20.4; ApDS II.5.11.18; VDS I.32, op.cit.

<sup>52</sup> AsvGS I.6.5; GDS IV; 10; BDS I.11.20.6; ADS I,33, op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> AsvGS I.6.6; GDS IV.II; BDS I.11.20.7.; ADS II.5.12.1, op.cit.

<sup>54</sup> VDS I, 35.

<sup>55</sup> AsvGS I.6.8.; GDS IV.12; BDS I.11.208, op.cit.

<sup>56</sup> VDS, I.34.

8. ***Paiśācha***: If a man carries off or seduces a maiden who is unconscious through sleep or intoxication; it is called the *Paiśācha* form of marriage.<sup>57</sup>

Of the eight forms of marriage described above, only the first four are generally countenanced by the sutras.<sup>58</sup>

GDS regarding this states that some teachers approve the first six forms of marriage. Further according to the BDS<sup>59</sup> 'out of these forms of marriage the first four are recommended for a brahmana; among these four forms also each preceding form is better than the following one'. Of the remaining four forms each succeeding one is more sinful and among them too, the sixth and the seventh are in accordance with the disposition of the Kṣatriyas because strength is the predominant trait of their character. The fifth and the eighth are for the vaiśyas and the śūdras respectively, because they do not exercise proper control over their wives due to their preoccupation with agricultural service. Thus, one can observe here the *varna*-prejudice to a ludicrous extent. Like a number of *samskāras*, which are prescribed for members of the regenerate classes (i.e. brahman, kṣatriyas, and vaiśya) and denied to śūdras, even the subject of marriage was restricted for this particular *varna*. In this respect, the texts suggest that the three privileged classes should enjoy the utmost liberty and the śūdra category should be debarred from holding any position in the society.

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<sup>57</sup> Asv G.S I.6.7; GDS IV. 13; BDS I.11.209, op.cit.

<sup>58</sup> GDS IV.14; ADS II.5.12.3, op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> BDS I.11.20.10-15, op.cit.

R.S. Sharma<sup>60</sup> argued that it appears that there were compelling economic reasons behind the *varna* classification and further the women of the lower castes participated in the agricultural production which slackens the bonds of dependence upon their husbands. This may be corroborated by the fact when *Gāndharva* and *Paiśācha* forms of marriages were prescribed for the last two *varnas*.

In regard to the selection of a bride, the Dharmasūtras lay down a number of qualifications concerning her age, family, special characteristics etc. It has been maintained that 'A son whose father as well as mother belonged to the same caste was considered to be the best type of son known as *aurāsa*.'<sup>61</sup> This state of things indicate that an inter-caste marriage was considered to be inferior to a marriage between members of the same caste. Karve stresses the fact that to understand any phase of the culture of any group of people in India caste system is vital because endogamy and distribution over a definite area make caste members related to one another either by ties of blood or by ties of marriage.

However, each caste is further divided into a number of exogamous groups or *gotra*<sup>62</sup>, and marriage between the members belonging to the same *gotra* was prohibited. The difference between the *gotra* and the *pravara* has been implied by P.V. Kane as *gotra* is the latest ancestors of a person by whose name his family has been known for generations, while *pravara* is constituted

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<sup>60</sup> R.S. Sharma, op.cit, pp.53-54.

<sup>61</sup> BDS II.2.3.14.

<sup>62</sup> The term 'gotra' denotes a group of persons who are distinguished by the same family name i.e. (surname) and who are considered to have descended from the same ancestor.



by the sage or in some cases the remotest ancestor alone.<sup>63</sup> BDS says that though there are innumerable *gotras*, the number of their *pravaras* is forty-nine only. With the above discussion, it seems that sūtra writers have interpreted the nuptial practice through the brahmanical perspectives only because the *gotra* and *pravara* exogamy were strictly meant for *brahmins* and not the other three *varnas*.

ApDS lays down that a man should not marry a girl belonging to his own *gotra*.<sup>64</sup> BDS<sup>65</sup> further declares that, if a woman belonging to the same *gotra* is taken as a wife without the previous knowledge of her *gotra*, she should be maintained like a mother; and that the man should undergo the *Kṛcchra*<sup>66</sup> penance, if she has given birth to a child GDS and VDS<sup>67</sup> state that a man should marry a girl who does not have the same *pravara*.

Another type of relationship mentioned in the Dharmasūtras is of *sapinda*. It is not of much importance for us because Dharmasūtras do not mention *sapinda* in discussions of marriage. It is specifically referred to only in respect of impurity, funeral offerings and inheritance. The literal meaning of *sapinda* is 'one who has the same *pinda* i.e. body (or particles of the body) *sapinda* relationship (between two persons) is derived from from (their) being connected by having particles of the same body.<sup>68</sup> BDS<sup>69</sup> states that *sapinda*

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<sup>63</sup> P.V.Kane, vol. II, part I, opcit, p.497.

<sup>64</sup> ApDS II.5.11.15.

<sup>65</sup> BDS II.1.1.38.

<sup>66</sup> In ApDS 1.9.27.7 and VDS XXI. 23.20, *Kṛcchra* penance – for three days he must not eat in the evening and then for three days not in the morning, and then three next days he must live on food which has been given unasked and then three days he must not eat anything.

<sup>67</sup> GDS IV.2; VDS VII.1.

<sup>68</sup> P.V.Kane, vol. II, part I, opcit, p.452.

relationship extends upto the seventh ancestor, that is it ceases with seventh ancestor. Like VDS<sup>70</sup>, ApDS<sup>71</sup> mentions *sapinda* only in terms of death and impurity etc. and not marriage.

Coming to the kinsfolk referred in the marriage ceremony BDS<sup>72</sup> refers to the custom of cousin-marriage among the people of the south and declares it to be condemnable. Jack Goody in his monograph<sup>73</sup> also implies that the difference between the south and north India lies on a pattern of close marriages (particularly between cross cousins) as distinct from the prohibition in the north on marriage to kin.

Among the kins folk who were mentioned as participating in the rite are only the bride's father and brother. They accompany her in performing the sacrifices like *lājahoma* etc. In some cases the bride's father has been given special importance on other occasions as well. PGS<sup>74</sup> lays down that the bride's father is among the six persons to whom *arghya* reception should be given.

The point to be raised here is that none of the sūtras mentions the mother or sisters role in the marriage This shows the subordinate position assigned to women in the sūtras. Perhaps there was a difference between the prescription in the sūtras and the actual practice. The variations in the texts suggest that the sūtrakāras tried to regulate the local customs and rites. Even the uttering of the mantras by the male (father, brother and bridegroom, or even priest) during the

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<sup>69</sup> BDS 1.5.11.2

<sup>70</sup> VDS IV.17-18, op.cit.

<sup>71</sup> Ap II.6.15.2, op.cit.

<sup>72</sup> BDS 1.1.2.2-3.

<sup>73</sup> J.Goody, *The Oriental, The Ancient and The Primitive*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1990, p.230.

<sup>74</sup> PGS-I.3.9.1, op.cit.

marriage rituals reveals that women were depicted as not only ritually inferior but also disabled for performing sacrifices which may have reinforced notions of women's social inferiority. Menski<sup>75</sup> here aptly remarks that in the later centuries, Hindus seized upon this apparent connection to justify further social measures assigning a lowly position to women. This is true as *Grhya* works lay down a number of qualifications for the selection of a bride, her age, external and internal characteristics and qualifications and other qualities. Therefore one would see that utmost care was spent on the examination and selection of a bride while it was not strictly followed in the case of the bridegroom.

The other category who dominate the rituals of marriage are priests or brāhmanas. We have already discussed their fees in section I. It has been aptly argued that though the *Grhyasūtras* differs considerably in detail from each other but they have one crucial characteristic common that they all take into account the ritual activities of a priest who now dominates the entire ceremony, at least as far as the central ritual of marriage is concerned.<sup>76</sup> Thus one can assert that the role of priest was introduced in the *sūtras* only to give brahmanical legitimacy and social support to the various forms of marriage rituals.

Further the other categories who played some social role on the occasion of marriage are guests and relatives. The bridegroom invited the assembled guests and relatives to bless the bride reciting the verses over her, "Auspicious

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<sup>75</sup> Menski, op.cit, p.60.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, p.62.

ornaments does this woman wear, come to her and behold her. Having brought luck to her, go away back to your houses. This mantra shows that there was an attempt to gain social acceptance because when people will come and bless the bride and groom, it gives some sort of recognition to that ritual and the relation established through it.

Therefore the bridegroom not only wants himself and his bride to be blessed but also their offspring, cattle etc.<sup>77</sup> the rituals give us an idea about prevalent social ideas and values. ApDS<sup>78</sup> lays down that during the reception of the bride the groom places in her lap the son of a woman who has only sons). This suggests that the birth of sons was preferable. More generally brāhmanas claimed to be at the apex of the pyramidal structure of *varna* system etc.

Also marriage is more important for women because the occasion is like a transformation process for a girl from her childhood into a woman. Women in this process are exchanged by men to cement the bond between families, thereby creating concrete social relationships. In this institution though she plays the central role, she does not have any rights as male always take the initiative to recite the ritual mantras during the ceremony.

After discussing *vivāha* we lead to the next major *samskāra* which is performed not by the individual himself but by his sons. This is the *śrāddha* ceremony. These two rituals have an interesting parallel. In both cases, the

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<sup>77</sup> SGS I.9.4-10; AsvGS I.8.8-9; PGS I.5.9.9-10.

<sup>78</sup> ApDS, II.6.11.

central figure (that is the bride and the departed soul respectively) is a passive participant. Yet, it is through establishing and/or breaking ties with her/him, that the continuity in the social order is assured we turn to the *śrāddha* in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### ŚRĀDDHA

The last *samskāra* performed not in the life of a man but after his death is the *antyeṣṭi* or the funeral *samskāra* which marks the concluding chapter of his worldly career. While living, an individual consecrates his worldly life by performing various rites and ceremonies at the different stages of his progress. At his departure from this world, his survivors consecrate his death for his future well being in the next world.

This chapter will concentrate upon the cult and not the disposal of the dead. It is believed that the departed souls from this world can be elevated to higher planes of existence or pushed further on the scale of evolution if their direct descendents on earth, especially the male progeny perform some annual rites and make sacrificial offerings to them with such rites, not just one but the entire family of ancestors would be benefited and spiritually uplifted. Also such rites emphasize the importance attached to the continuity of patrilineage.

In the Vedic age, the belief was that the spirit of the dead man became a *pitṛ* immediately after the disposal of his corpse. As soon as he became a *pitṛ*, he became a sharer in the sacrifices like the *pinḍapitṛyajña*.<sup>1</sup> In the Gr̥hyaśūtras the idea was introduced that a man immediately after his death became a *preta* and did not become a *pitṛ* until some rites were performed for his release from

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<sup>1</sup> It is basically a Śrautasūtra sacrifice to worship fathers.

the *preta* stage. It usually takes a year for a *preta* to become a *pitṛ*.<sup>2</sup> For releasing the dead from the painful condition of a *preta* the rituals of the monthly *ekoddistas* and *sap̄ṇḍikaraṇa* are introduced.<sup>3</sup> Thus, though *śrāddha* is an obsequial funeral sacrifice, it also implies offerings to the progenitors of an individual and of mankind and always forms parts of a religious ceremony.

But before going to the rituals performed in the *śrāddha* ceremony there is a need to say a little about the primary texts. The *antyeṣṭi samskāra* is described only in a few Gr̄hyasūtras. In our sources AsvGS only deals elaborately with the rituals of the subject. On the other hand in the Dharmasūtras this topic has been discussed under the following heads: kinds of *śrāddha*, places prescribed and prohibited for the performance of *śrāddha* and various rules and regulations for performance of the *śrāddha*.

*Śrāddha* or funeral oblations denotes three things, viz. homa, the offerings of *pinḍa* (ball of cooked food) and gratification of brāhmaṇas invited to a sharing of meals. These things have their own symbolic meaning like *pinḍa* implies the relation between the body of the dead and the one who is offering the oblations for him, therefore *pinḍa* is symbolic of bond between both of them. Similarly 'food' in sanskrit tradition is identical with body and therefore sharing of meals also symbolizes continuity of tradition from one generation to another.

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<sup>2</sup> D.R. Sastri – *Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Workshop in India*, Bookland Pvt. Ltd., Cal. 1963, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

D.R. Sastri traced the development of the rituals of a *śrāddha* ceremony and found three distinct stages of development of the rite which is the further elaboration of the above said argument. He says that in its first stage the ritual consisted in only *agnaukaraṇa* or the casting of the sacrificial materials into the fire. In this stage it was not very different from other sacrifices. Probably, the *pitṛyajña* sacrifice referred to in the RV was introduced in this stage. In the second stage of the rites; the offering of *piṇḍa* or lump was, probably introduced. The rite of *piṇḍapitṛyajña* referred to and described in the Yajurveda, the Brāhmaṇas and the Śrauta works represents this stage. In the third or last stage of development the feeding of brāhmaṇas as the essential element was introduced. In this stage we meet with the *śrāddha* rite in which all the elements of the ritual of ancestor worship in India, gradually incorporated in the ceremony, are present. The brāhmaṇas play a very important part in this rite.<sup>4</sup> They have come in this rite and make brahmanisation a regular and legitimate process. Therefore in *śrāddha*, defined in Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras one entertains the firm conviction (that is *śraddha*) that what is given up to the brāhmaṇas for the benefit of the departed man or the fathers will reach him or them in some way.<sup>5</sup> Further Kane argues that it is not only the conviction but there is a firm belief that a person is under an obligation to offer it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ibid, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> S.C. Magne, *Śrāddha Sāgara of Kullukabhata*, D.K. Printworld Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1994, Introduction, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. IV, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-1964, p.351.



The term '*śrāddha*' is unknown to the Vedic works down to the śrauta sūtras. It is in the Gr̥hya works that this name has been introduced. Though we meet with the word for the first time in a passage of the Kathopaniṣad, but, there its genuineness is not beyond dispute. Some scholars explain this as an interpolation.<sup>7</sup> So far the first time the word '*śrāddha*' apparently appears in the AsvGS.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a statement of the ĀpDS<sup>9</sup> makes it clear that the *śrāddhas* are not of very ancient origin. It states that formerly men and gods lived together in this world. Then the gods, in recognition of the sacrifices they performed, went to heaven, but men were left behind. Those men who perform sacrifices in the same manner as the gods did, dwell after death with the gods and Brahmā in heaven. Now, seeing men lagging behind, Manu revealed this ceremony which is designated by the word '*śrāddha*' and thus this rite has been revealed for the salvation of mankind. In this rite the manes (*pitārah*) are the deities but the brāhmanas (that are fed) are in the place of the *āhavanīya* fire (in which the sacrifices to gods oblations are offered). On account of this last sūtra Haradatta (commentator of ĀpDS) and others hold that feeding the brāhmanas is the principal act at *śrāddha*.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is apparent that the authors of the Gr̥hyasūtras concern themselves chiefly with the brāhmanas with a marked emphasis on brahmanical supremacy. Further Kane has argued that probably only a few rites were known as related to the *pitrs* and that therefore no need

<sup>7</sup> D.R. Sastri, opcit, pp.126-128.

<sup>8</sup> AsvGS, IV, 7.1. *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> ĀpDS, II.7.16.1, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879] (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>10</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. IV, part I, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1930-64, p.349.

arose for a generic term in very ancient times to comprehend several rites for the *pitrs*. But when the number of rites in honour of *pitrs* increased, the generic term ‘*śrāddha*’ was hit upon. Therefore it seems that it is during the later period that the *sūtrakāras* realized that *brāhmaṇas* should be recognized as religious authorities in the society.

The rituals and sacrifices performed during this *samskāra* are numerous. Though the rites were not performed under the name of *śrāddha* in early Vedic literature but there were three rites for the departed ancestors. They were called *piṇḍapitṛyajña* (which is performed on the *amāvasyā* of each month by an *āhitāgni*)<sup>11</sup>, secondly the *mahāpitṛyajña* (performed in the *cāturmāsya* called *sākamadha*) and the third called *aṣṭakā* rites.<sup>12</sup> The *aṣṭakā* are of special importance. The *Gr̥hyasūtra* and *Dharmasūtra* authorities present great variations on almost all points such as the number of days and the months in which they were to be performed, the deities to be worshipped, the offerings to be made and the procedure to be followed. GDS<sup>13</sup> mentions ‘*aṣṭakā*’ rite as the first among the seven kinds of *pākayajñas* and as one of the forty *samskāra*. ApGS<sup>14</sup> says the same, but adds that on it (the eighth *tithi*) the moon is in *jyeṣṭhā* constellation. This means that if the eighth *tithi* is spread over two days, then that day on which the moon is in *jyeṣṭhā* would be called *Ekāṣṭakā*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Āhitāgni* is that man who has set up the sacrificial fires.

<sup>12</sup> Kane, vol. IV, part I, op.cit, p.350.

<sup>13</sup> GDS VIII. 19, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879] (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>14</sup> ApGS VIII.12.10, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1892], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>15</sup> Kane, op.cit, p.354.

According to AsvGS<sup>16</sup> the *aṣṭakā* days (and rites) were four, viz the eighth *tithis* of the dark halves of the four months of the seasons of *hemanta* and *śiśira* (i.e. of *mārgaśirśa*, *pauśa*, *māgha* and *phālguna*)<sup>17</sup> while PGS<sup>18</sup> states that there are only three *astakā* rites viz on the eighth after the full moon day of *mārgaśirśa* (called *agrahāyani*) i.e. in the dark halves of *mārgaśirśa*, secondly *pauśa* and third *māgha*.

Gr̥hyasūtras such as those of *Āśvalāyana* describe a very elaborate procedure of *aṣṭakās* compared to this ApGS is short. After defining *ekāṣṭakā*, ApGS proceeds:

‘He (the performer of the *aṣṭakā* rite should perform subsidiary (or preparatory) rites in the evening of the previous day (i.e. on the seventh day of the dark half). He cooks (or bakes) a cake from rice taken up (from a heap) in four cups, according to some teachers the cake is prepared on eight potsherds (like a *purodāśa*).’<sup>19</sup>

There is a symbol of fertility in this rite as grains have connotations of fertility because cutting of plants and harvesting implies death and again rebirth of plants. Through the grains perhaps they are showing that, man dies in this world and reborn in the other world. The cutting of the plants symbolizes the death. Further the growth of the plants symbolizes the continuity of the generations. After the ceremonies upto the ‘*ājyabhāgas*’ have been performed in the same way as at the *amāvasya* and full moon sacrifices, he makes with his joined hands oblations of the cakes. The cakes that have already baked is

<sup>16</sup> AsvGS II.4.1

<sup>17</sup> Kane, opcit, p.354.

<sup>18</sup> PGS III.3, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>19</sup> ApGS, VIII.21.11-8.22.12, op.cit.

divided by him into eight parts and offered to the brāhmanas. On the following day he prepares the cow for immolation by touching her with a *darbhā* with the words :

‘I make thee that are agreeable to the fathers ready (for sacrifice)’.

Having silently (i.e. without uttering the word *svāha*) offered five oblations of clarified butter, having cooked the omentum of that (cow) and having spread under (the cooked omentum) and sprinkled over it clarified butter he offers it with a *palāśa* leaf from the middle (or the end of the stalk). He sacrifices boiled rice together with the flash (of the cow).

Then (he offers) the oblations of clarified butter (ghee) with the eight verses. The rites from *svistakṛt* down to the placing of the *piṇḍas* are the same as described in ApGS.<sup>20</sup> Some teachers prescribes that the placing of the *piṇḍas* are offered the day after the *aṣṭakā* (i.e. on the ninth of the dark half). Here follows another method (of celebrating the *aṣṭakā* rite). He sacrifices curds with his joined hands in the same way as he offers the cake. Having left over from the meat (of the cow) as much as may be required, he performs on the day following the *aṣṭakā* day) the *anvaṣṭakā* rite.

SGS<sup>21</sup> and ApGS<sup>22</sup> state that *anvaṣṭakā* rite follows the procedure of *piṇḍapitryajña*, the ninth days of the dark halves of the months in *aṣṭakās* are

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<sup>20</sup> ApGS, VIII.21.1-9

<sup>21</sup> SGS III. 13.7, *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. by F Max Muller, vol. XXIX, trs. by H. Oldenberg, [First Published, 1886], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>22</sup> ApGS II.5.3 Both SGS and ApGS belong to the second strata of Ram Gopal’s classification of the sūtras.

celebrated are called *anvaṣṭakā*. AsvGS<sup>23</sup> describes this rite as:

‘Having prepared a portion of the same meat<sup>24</sup> having established the fire on a surface sloping towards the south, having fenced it in and made a door on the north side of the enclosed shed, having strewn round the fire three times sacrificial grass with its roots without touching it, turning the left side (of one’s body) towards the fire, he should place down the things to be offered, boiled rice, boiled rice mixed with sesamum, rice cooked in milk, meal-pap with curds and meal pap with honey’.

The ceremony should follow the ritual of the *piṇḍapitryajña*. Having sacrificed (part of the foods specified except meal-pap) with honey let him offer portions of those substances to the *pitṛs* and to their wives with the addition of liquor and the scum of boiled rice.<sup>25</sup> Here we find in AsvGS an interesting variation from the other Gṛhyasūtras both in terms of participants and offerings. Some place the portion to be offered into pits, which may be two or six. In those situated to the east he should present the offerings to the *pitṛs*; in those to the west, to the wives. The wives are being offered in the west direction which is the direction of sunset and therefore considered in auspicious. On the other hand *pitṛs* were being offered in the direction of sunrise i.e. east. Thus men and women are clearly differentiated. Thereby the ceremony celebrated in the rainy season on the *māgha* day in the dark fortnight

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<sup>23</sup> AsvGS, II.5.2-15.

<sup>24</sup> AsvGS II.4.13. The meat is that of the animal killed on the *ṣṣṭakā* day.

<sup>25</sup> AsvGS II.5.5.

after the full moon of *prauṣṭhapada* (i.e. *bhādrapada*) has been declared. And thus he should offer (a festival like the *anvaṣṭakā*) to the *pitṛs* every month, observing uneven<sup>26</sup> numbers. He should give food at least to nine (*brāhmaṇas*) or to any un-even number of *brāhmaṇas* (food should be given) to an even number on auspicious occasions or on meritorious deeds. This notion of uneven number can also be understood on the terms that it is an additional number to any pair or even number. Though even number means harmonious relationship or pairing yet uneven signifies addition of one in that pairing. This uneven additional symbolizes continuity. Therefore uneven numbers implies that life is continuing after the rupture of death. Further the rite is performed from left to right. Again one can observe that the direction is opposite and anticlockwise this perhaps implies the bring back the dead man that is reversal from the world of dead to the world of living. That is by performing in this manner the survivors are recognizing connections. Barley grains are to be used instead of sesamum.

The *śrāddha* was offered to three immediate ancestors, father, grandfather and great grandfather. Regarding this the BDS<sup>27</sup> states that there is a group of seven persons closely knit together that is called *avibhaktadāya sapinḍas*<sup>28</sup> viz great grand-father, grand father, father he man himself (who offers *pandas* to the preceding three), two full brothers, his son from a wife of the same caste, the grandson and great grandson, that *sakulyas* are those that

<sup>26</sup> That is, selecting on uneven number of *bramana*'s on uneven *tithis*.

<sup>27</sup> BDS I.5.9-10, *The Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, Part I, ed by F. Max Muller, trs. by Georg Buhler, [First Published, 1879], (Reprint), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Kane, vol. IV, part I, opcit, p.365.

are called 'Vibhacādāyādas', that the wealth of the deceased, descends to those who are born of the body of the deceased.

From the above discussion one could understand that there were distinction between the two groups of deceased that is firstly those who have departed early and considered as fathers (*pitrs*), to whom periodical offerings (as above discussed) are paid and who, though most of them are rather distant and half forgotten, are honoured not unlike the gods. The second group comprises those who have departed lately and have not yet been received into the community of the fathers (the "departed", *preta*). SGS<sup>29</sup> clearly says – "Three for the fathers, one for the (newly) dead person".

There were rites also for the newly dead person (i.e. *pretas*). The so-called *ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha*<sup>30</sup> destined for one individual recently dead & not for the 3 ancestors. Its object was to raise the departed to the rank of *Pitr* from *preta* and thus had to be achieved by continued *śrāddha* offerings during a whole year. Āpastamba says that the *śrāddha* for a deceased relative should be performed every day during the year, & that, after that, a monthly *śrāddha*, only, should be performed; no more personal *śrāddha* is necessary, because the departed shares, henceforth, in the regular *pārvana śrāddha*<sup>31</sup>. SGS<sup>32</sup> says the same thing that the personal *śrāddha*, lasts for a year & then the fourth, that is the great-grandfather is dropped, while the lately departed occupies the father's

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<sup>29</sup> SGS 4.3.5.

<sup>30</sup> SGS 4.2.1-8.

<sup>31</sup> D.R. Shastri- opcit, p.63.

<sup>32</sup> SGS, 4.2.7-8.

place among the three principal *pitrs*. This is called the *Sapinḍikarāna*<sup>33</sup> i.e. the elevating of the departed to the rank of an ancestor. The literal meaning of *sapinḍikarāṇam* means “making a person a *sapinḍa*”, i.e. one who is entitled to the same *pinḍas* (as the other deceased ancestors).<sup>34</sup> The point can be made here that the performance of *śrāddha* has been suggested everyday which implies that there was an element of reinforcing the memories. Further taking into account the practicality, the *sūtrakāras* suggested monthly and then yearly *śrāddha* for they understood that it can be reinforced periodically. Also, only upto three generations of ancestors were to be offered as there is strict genealogy to remember and practically it is not possible to keep on extending the line.

PGS indicates the rule that there can be no fourth *pinḍa* & further it states that everyday who shall give food to him (i.e. to the deceased person); and if he was a *brāhmaṇa*, a vessel with water.<sup>35</sup> This distinction of the *brāhmaṇas* reveals the importance attached to the *varna* system. Moreover it has been stressed everywhere that the ritual and sacrifices complete only when the *dakṣinā* has been given to the *brāhmaṇas*. Thus we can observe that the consideration of only *pitā*, *pitāmaha* and the *prapitāmaha* denotes that kinswomen were totally ignored. It is only at one place that SGS<sup>36</sup> provides that the *sapinḍikarāna* is performed for the mother, a brother or wife who has died before her husband.

<sup>33</sup> SGS 4.3.1-8.

<sup>34</sup> Gonda, *Vedic Rituals*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1980, pp.442-443.

<sup>35</sup> PGS III.10.53-54.

<sup>36</sup> SGS 5.9.6.



After the discussion on the rites of the performance of the *śrāddha* ceremony the next topic of debate is about the time or occasion when *śrāddha* is to be performed. *śrāddhas* are divided into three classes by Kane<sup>37</sup>:- *nitya*, *naimittika* and *kāmya*. An observance is called *nitya* when it is laid down that it must be performed on a certain or fixed occasion (such as everyday, on an *amāvasya* (new moon day or an *aṣṭakā* day). What is laid down for being done on an occasion which is uncertain is called *naimittika* (such as the birth of a son) what is ordained to be done in case one desires a certain reward or fruit is called *kāmya* (e.g. the performance of a *śrāddha* on *kṛttikā* or Rohini by one who desires heaven or progeny). Further ApDS<sup>38</sup> provides certain times for the performance of *śrāddha* viz that it must be performed in the latter half of every month, that the afternoon is preferable for it, that the last days of the latter half of each month are preferable to the first days of the latter half. In his next verse ĀpDS dictates that if it is to be performed on the first day of the half month, the issue (of the sacrifices) will chiefly consist of the females. Thus women were regarded as inauspicious and inferior because they prefer last days of the latter half of the month for males. GDS<sup>39</sup> and VDS<sup>40</sup> say that *śrāddha* may be performed on any day of the dark half of a month after the fourth day and GDS<sup>41</sup> adds that if particularly appropriate materials or particularly holy *brāhmaṇas* are available or the performer is near a very sacred place a *śrāddha*

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<sup>37</sup> Kane, vol. IV, part I, op.cit, p.369.  
<sup>38</sup> ApDS II.7.16. 4-7.  
<sup>39</sup> GDS 15.3.  
<sup>40</sup> VDS 11.6.  
<sup>41</sup> GDS, 15.5.

may be performed on any day. Thus brāhmaṇas were considered inevitable for the rituals and they were taken as the basic elements of any form of sacrifice and rituals. ĀpDS<sup>42</sup> has described what rewards a man gets if he performs *śrāddhas* on each of the days from the first to the fifteenth of the dark half. Further it forbid the performance of *śrāddha* at night or at twilight or when the sun has just risen except in the case of an eclipse of the moon.<sup>43</sup> It also adds that when once a *śrāddha* is begun in the afternoon and owing to some cause there is delay and the sun sets than the performer should perform the remaining rites the next day and he should observe a fast till the placing of the *piṇḍas* on the *darbhās*. ApDS<sup>44</sup> states about the persons who defile the co. if invited to a funeral sacrifice and they comprises also the son of (a brāhmaṇa who by marrying first a śūdra wife had himself become) a śūdra, born from a brāhmaṇa woman, GDS<sup>45</sup> has provided various rules regarding funeral oblations. He provides that let him not feed a person who sacrifices for women<sup>46</sup>, the son of a twice-married women etc.<sup>47</sup> Also it states that food seen by dogs, *cāndālas* and outcaste becomes so unclean and unfit that one should offer *śrāddha* in a covered or in an enclosed place; or he should strew round about the place sesamum or a worthy brāhmaṇa who purifies a row of diners by his presence.<sup>48</sup>

Going further in our discussion, now we examine the qualifications of the brāhmaṇas that were invited to dinner on a *śrāddha* day. It is to be

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<sup>42</sup> ApDS II.7. 16.8.22.  
<sup>43</sup> ApDS II.7.17.23-25.  
<sup>44</sup> ApDS II.7.17.21.  
<sup>45</sup> GDS XV. 1-30.  
<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, 16.  
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 18.  
<sup>48</sup> GDS XV.25-28.

remembered that only brāhmaṇas were entitled to be invited for *śrāddha* dinner whoever may be the performer of the *śrāddha*. Hence they are highly eulogized by the texts. AsvGS,<sup>49</sup> SGS,<sup>50</sup> ApGS,<sup>51</sup> ApDS,<sup>52</sup> GDS<sup>53</sup> provide that the brāhmaṇas to be invited should be possessed of Vedic learning, should be of excellent character (free from anger and passion and possessed of control of mind and senses) and of meritorious conduct, pure, not deficient in a limb or not having an excessive limb (example having six fingers). The ApDS<sup>54</sup> states that he who has studied the *trisuparna*, one who is a *triṇaciketa*, one who has studied the mantras required for the four scarifies, one who keeps the five fires, he who knows the *sāman* called *jyeṣṭha*, he who carries out the duty of daily Vedic study, the son of one who has studied the Veda and is able to teach the whole Veda with its *angas*, a *śrotriya* – these persons sanctify the company if they eat at a funeral repast. GDS<sup>55</sup> contains all the same words though a bit short about those who sanctify the company of dinners (that is who are *panktipāvana*).<sup>56</sup> BDS<sup>57</sup> say that a performer of *śrāddha* should invite one who is not a relative connected by marriage (such as a maternal uncle) nor one who is of the same *gotra*, nor one who is connected with the performer by Veda study (i.e. is his teacher or pupil) nor a friend nor one who expects monetary

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49 AsvGS IV.7.2.  
50 SGS IV.1.2.  
51 ApGS VIII.21.2.  
52 ApDS II.7.17.4.  
53 GDS XV. 9.  
54 ApDS II.7.17.22.  
55 GDS XV.28.  
56 Kane, vol. IV, part I, op.cit, p.385.  
57 BDS II.8.14.6.

help from the performer. Contrary to this ApDS<sup>58</sup> expressly says that if strangers do not possess the requisite qualifications then even one's full brother possessed of all the qualifications (as to Vedic learning, good conduct etc.) and pupils may be fed at a ceremony of *śrāddha*. BDS<sup>59</sup> even allows a *sapinda* to be fed who knows the texts. GDS<sup>60</sup> appears to be of the view that even pupils and *sagostras* may be invited when they are possessed of excellent qualities and strangers with good qualifications are not available. Thus we see that though texts are allowing the strangers but the knowledge of Vedas was compulsory for all the performers, thus it hardly makes a difference because it was only twice burns who were allowed to study the Vedas. So there was no place for *sūdras* and they were not even considered also for the performance of ritual.

According to GDS (15.10) young persons with the requisite qualifications are to be preferred to older ones, while according to some, young man were to be invited at a *śrāddha* for one's deceased father and old man for a *śrāddha* for one's grandfather. On the other hand ApDS<sup>61</sup> says among *brāhmaṇas* possessing the same qualifications, the older ones are to be preferred and among those that are old are to be preferred the poor that are anxious to earn money. The VDS<sup>62</sup> provides that the performer should invite ascetics, households, well conducted men, who are not very old. There is a debate on the age of the *brāhmaṇas* to be invited at the *śrāddha* ceremony

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<sup>58</sup> ApDS II.7.17.5-6.  
<sup>59</sup> BDS II.8.14.4.  
<sup>60</sup> GDS XV.20.  
<sup>61</sup> ApDS II.7.17.10.  
<sup>62</sup> VDS 11.17.

among the Dharmasūtras but majority of them preferred younger ones because there was multiple reasons behind that young brāhmaṇas will continue much better than old ones, also they are symbol of longevity and life full of zeal and happiness contrast to them, older ones are symbols of frail and slack health and relaxation.

Further inviting the large numbers of brāhmaṇas is regarded as meritorious in the AsvGS.<sup>63</sup> SGS<sup>64</sup> prescribes that one should invite an uneven number of brāhmaṇas, at least three, to sit down as (representing the fathers). GDS<sup>65</sup> requires he shall feed an uneven number of brāhmaṇas at least nine or as many as he is able (to feed) and that they should be learned in the Veda and endowed with polished speech, good appearance, mature age and good character. If five were invited two would be for gods and three for *pitṛs*; if seven, then four for gods and three for *pitṛs* and so on. So three brāhmaṇas were made representatives of *pitṛs* and were fed. Gennep calls this sharing of meals rites of incorporation. He mentions that the main purpose is to reunite all the surviving members of the group with each other, and sometimes also with the deceased in the same way that a chain which has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links must be rejoined.<sup>66</sup>

Among the materials used in the ritual are *Kuśa*, food, roots etc.

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<sup>63</sup> AsvGS IV.7.2-3.

<sup>64</sup> SGS IV. 1.2.

<sup>65</sup> GDS XV.2.7-9.

<sup>66</sup> Van Gennep, *opcit*, pp.164-65.

AsvGS<sup>67</sup> states that *darbhās* are the essence of waters and herbs. BDS<sup>68</sup> provides that when the invited brāhmanas come they should be given water with sesame. Further it states that sesamum grains are holy in *śrāddha* for making gifts of them or as part of food or being mixed in water.<sup>69</sup>

We propose to bring this chapter to close by observing and saying in short that all the *samskāras* from *garbhādhāna* to funeral *samskāras*, they have been portrayed in terms of the ‘brahmanical elements’ where brahmanical supremacy is emphasized all through.

Though funeral *samskāras* has been excluded by various sūtrakāras but it is of interest that in our sources, we get to know about the large number of rites and prayers during this *samskāras*. It is clear that the whole ceremony was dominated by brāhmanas. Thus it seems that all the rituals are the offshoots of the same brāhmanical norms. There is no reference of women’s participation in this *samskāra*.

The performance of *śrāddha* can also be viewed from the point of view that it is performed for claiming property rights. It is brāhmanas sections of who can legitimize these claims and therefore brāhmanas play the most dominant role in this *samskāra*. Moreover the importance of the ancestor-worship and the eligibility of ‘only sons’ for offering oblations to the manes illustrates the male’s authenticity of control.

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<sup>67</sup> AsvGS, III.2.2.

<sup>68</sup> BDS, II.8.8.

<sup>69</sup> BDS, II.11.64.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Conclusions are not ends but beginnings. This study having examined the major Gr̥hyasūtras and Dharmasūtras for the purpose of locating the prescriptions regarding various *samskāras* has provided useful and interesting insights regarding their range and contents.

It seems that the main aim of the performance of the *samskāras* is to create a set of actions and rituals to assimilate different social categories, beliefs and practices within a single brahmanical pattern.

The early historical period in which sūtras were being compiled was the period of emergence of cities, marked by social stratification and complexity. In this situation the sūtrakāras tried to ensure brahmanical supremacy by accommodating a range of beliefs and practices.

Not all *samskāras* had an identical goal. Those associated with child birth and child rearing (chapter II) were concerned with fertility and procreation. At the same time, one can see the emphasis on patriliney and the male child. It is likely that rituals dealing with childbirth had developed in a situation where infant mortality may have been high. However, in the Gr̥hyasūtras, these were converted into occasions for introducing the brāhamana into the household.

The pregnancy and childbirth *samskāras* which have been dealt with in chapter II covers a number of *samskāras*. While considering the chronological classification of the sūtras, we can see that these rituals are dealt with in both

the early and the later Gṛhyasūtras. What is also noteworthy is that the prescriptions regarding these rituals is more or less identical in the later texts that is the PGS and SGS. This would indicate an attempt to standardize these rituals.

We find the use of fire being prescribed in most of these *samskāras*. This would suggest an attempt to treat these as a sacrifice. Oblations were made to the deities for their blessing for the birth of a son.

The *samskāras* preceding *upanayana* contain all three elements regarded as typical rites of passage i.e. separation, transition and incorporation. The first rites performed on the pregnant woman separate her from society and from her family group. They are followed by rites pertaining to pregnancy itself, which is a transitional period. Finally come the rites of childbirth which intended to reintegrate the woman into the group to which she previously belonged, or to establish her new position in society as a mother, especially if she has given birth to a son.

These *samskāras* not only deal with the mother but also with the newly born child. The three rites of passage applies to him/her also. Rites which involve cutting something viz. *cūdakaraṇa* are rites of separation; naming the child (*nāmakaraṇa*) are rites of incorporation. Therefore, rites of pregnancy and childbirth must be viewed as having considerable individual and social importance. However in all these *samskāras* the birth of a girl was generally an unwelcome event. Almost everywhere in all the *samskāras* the son was valued more than the daughter.



The function of the *upanayana* may have been somewhat different. On the one hand, it probably marked male puberty. On the other hand, it marked a formal initiation into Vedic studentship. This may have become all the more necessary in the context of alternate traditions of learning, developed within Buddhist and Jaina monasteries. This is why the *sūtrakāras* gave added emphasis added to this ritual. As we have seen, this is one of the *samskāras* that was dealt within both the *Gr̥hyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras*. In terms of Ramgopal's chronology, it is interesting to note that the ritual is described in a concise fashion in the FGS, that he assigns to the second stratum. It seems that as the *upanayana* was also dealt with in the *Dharmasūtras*, later *Gr̥hyasūtras* did not go into all the details, unlike the earlier ones like the *AsvGS*.

Like other *samskāras*, *upanayana samskāra* has also been equated with a sacrifice because after the student recites a *gāyatri-mantra* he has to perform a sacrifice with the prayer to Agni.

It can be termed as a classic rite of passage because in it partly are elements of separation where the boy is taken away from his family; incorporation, where he is being incorporated into studenthood and of course, transition from childhood to adulthood. So there is overlapping of all three elements identified by Van Gennep.

The exclusion of *śūdras* and women from the *upanayana samskāra* implies the idea of rigid social stratification which was upheld by the *sūtrakāras*. Through the *upnayana* the brahmanical student was made to conform to the mainstream of the twice-born classes.

In the context of *vivāha*, we can see an attempt in the Dharmasūtras to recognise divergent practices. At same time, the Gṛhyasūtras try to develop a broadly identical ritual tradition.

The eight forms of *vivāha* is mentioned only in AsvGS and all the Dharmasūtras. It is interesting to note that although the PGS is later than the AsvGS, their descriptions of marriage is similar. The marriage ceremony has been dealt in almost all the texts.

The nuptial sacrifice performed at the marriage ceremony is one of the most essential rites at the wedding. The place where the nuptial fire is to be placed, is considered very sacred and besmeared with cowdung. Once again, the importance assigned to the use of fire would suggest analogies with the sacrifice.

Marriage is the phase of separation of a girl from her father's family, incorporation into the bridegroom's family and also transformation from a girl into a woman. Once again we see how a single ritual contained multiple elements typical of a rite of passage.

The brahmanical model of marriage ritual reveals that women were exchanged while being transformed from girls to women by men to cement the bond between the two families. Though marriage is an important event in any man/woman's life but it was viewed as more important for women. However, she played a marginal and subordinate role during the whole ceremony.

For the *śrāddha* ceremony to be performed by the dead man's sons, AsvGS has described the ritual extensively. Apart from AsvGS, a number of

rites performed during this *samskāras* has been mentioned by different Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras. There are parallels between the Gṛhyasūtras assigned by RamGopal to the second phase, i.e. ApGS and SGS. However PGS does not discuss the *śrāddha* rituals, it only refers to water libations for deceased persons.

This *samskāras* describes numerous oblations offered to the three fathers: *pitā*, *pitāmaha* and *prapitāmaha*. In this ceremony offering of *pinḍas* plays the central role, as it is believed that such rites would benefit and spiritually uplift the departed souls in the other world.

As in the case of the *upanayana* and *vivāha*, the Dharmasūtras focus at length on the social relations, established through the *śrāddha*. Once again, we notice a concern with patriliney and with asserting the supremacy of the brāhmanas. The last rites marks the man's separation from this world, his journey to the other world and incorporation with his patrilineal ancestors.

Sons came to be viewed as essential to performing the *śrāddha* sacrifices to the family ancestors and daughters came to be considered of no use for these *samskāras*. The occasion was also used to legitimise the claims of sons to the property of their fathers.

If we are to identify certain crucial social messages that were transmitted through the *samskāras*, these would be as follows:

A consistent attempt was made to suggest that the presence of brāhmanas was indispensable for *rites de passage* for men of the first three *varnas*. Secondly, patriliney and patriarchy were routinely enforced. There are

several derogatory observations against women. Through out the chain of the *samskāras* that is from the prenatal *samskāras* to the *śrāddha*, the seeds of the idea that daughters were useless while sons were useful were consistently sown in the *Gṛhyasūtras* and *Dharmasūtras*.

We thus come to observe the marginalization of women in the *samskāras*. Though the wife's presence was required in the pre-natal, natal and marriage *samskāras*, her activities were circumscribed. One can read a number of *sūtras* of ritual at a stretch without finding a single mention of the wife while the priests and the husband (i.e. men) were expected to move around the ritual ground reciting and offering. For long periods of the ritual the wife was expected to do nothing at all but sit in her assigned spot, silent and immobile. Furthermore, even when she was expected to act this activity was not related to the most important ritual or symbolic moments.

Another related finding from our discussion is regarding the status of *śūdras*. As is evident from our sources the *sūtrakāras* tried to reinforce the *varna* system. The *śūdras* suffered and were not regarded as fit for the performance of the *samskāras*. The supremacy of the *brāhmaṇas*, their honoured position and claims to privileges, were asserted.

If we return to the historical context I had outlined at the outset, it would seem that the prescription and performance of the *samskāras* would have reinforced social stratification, especially in terms of gender and *varna* hierarchies. The complex historical transition taking place may explain why rituals were being codified through the texts, and why *brāhmaṇas* were trying

to consolidate their power through the process. Codification of rites of passage would have also meant an attempt to regulate the day to day lives of men and women.

At the same time, we notice large and small variations amongst the texts in terms of rituals to be included/excluded, sequence, participants etc. These would suggest that codification did not necessarily mean uniformity. Customs may have varied according to localities, as well as within different social groups. The sūtrakāras tried to accommodate such differences even as they asserted brahmanical supremacy.

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Regarding the ĀpDS and VDS, ĀpDS<sup>5</sup> deals with the four āśramas at the end of his discussion. He probably intended to deal with this problem separately and outside the general framework of his text.<sup>6</sup> Further VDS realized the potential of the āśrama theory for organizing his Dharmaśāstric material. His predecessors hardly deal with the duties of the first āśrama, because they are the same as those of the studentship following initiation. They completely ignore the householder in the discussion of āśramas, because his duties are dealt with under the sacrament of marriage. VDS on the other hand, gives a more prominent role to the āśramas, dealing with them before the *samskāras*.<sup>7</sup> He devotes one chapter to each āśramas and deals with the duties of both the student<sup>8</sup> and householder<sup>9</sup> within the framework of the āśramas. VDS, therefore represents an important advance in the process of incorporating the āśramas theory and renunciation into the Dharmaśāstric framework. The treatment of *vānaprastha* in the VDS fits in with Ram Gopal's dating of the text, which he assigns to the third and latest stratum.

Regarding the rituals of becoming an ascetic, the description in the BDS<sup>10</sup> is probably the most elaborate. However an effort has been made to present it briefly:- "After having cut the hair on the head, the beard, the hair on the body, the nails, he makes ready three sticks, a rope, a cloth for straining water, a water

<sup>5</sup> ApDS II.9.1-21.

<sup>6</sup> P. Olivelle, Renouncer and Renunciation in the Dharmaśāstras, *Studies in Dharmaśāstras*, ed. R. W. Larivere Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1984, p.93.

<sup>7</sup> VDS. Ch.VII.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> VDS deals āśramas in chapter 7-10 and *samskāras* on chapter 11-15.

<sup>10</sup> BDS II.10.17. 1-45.

vessel (jar) and an alms bowl. Having taken these he should go to the end of his village; he should partake of clarified butter, milk and curds (mixed together) and should fast or should drink water. Then he should recite the *vyāhṛtis* separately preceded by ‘om’ and followed by saying ‘Om, bhuh, ‘I enter the *savitri*’, *tat savitur varenyam; Om bhuvah, I enter the savitri, bhargo devasya dhimahi, Om I enter the savitri, dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt* (he shall recite the *sāvitri*) foot by foot, half verse by half verse, (and finish by repeating) the whole or the parts (of the verse).”<sup>11</sup> Further the next verse explains “It is declared in the Veda that entering order after order, (man) becomes (one with) brāhman.<sup>12</sup> Before sunset, he heaps fuel on the *gārhapatya* fire brings the *anvāhāryapacena* (*dakṣiṇāgni*) to the spot, takes the flaming *āhavanīya* fire out of the *gārhapatya*, melts clarified butter on the *gārhapatya* cleanses it (with *Kuśa* grass), take portions of the butter in the spoon called *sruc* and offers in the *āhavanīya* fire on which fuel sticks have been heaped a full oblation (i.e. whole spoonful) four times saying ‘om svāhā’. This offering is called *Brahmanvādhāna* (putting full-sticks on fire for securing knowledge of brāhman)”.

Then in the evening after *agnihotra* has been offered, he strews-grass to the north of the *gārhapatya* fire, places on the grass sacrificial vessels in pairs with the upper parts turned downwards, spreads *darbhā* grass to the south of the *āhavanīya* fire on the seat meant for the brāhmaṇa priest, covers it with black antelope skin and remains awake the whole of that night. It is to be remembered

<sup>11</sup> BDS II.10.17.14. op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> BDS II.10.17.15. op.cit.

that black antelope skin was used as the upper garment for the brāhmaṇa student during the initiation ceremony and symbolized brahmanical authority.

Then he rises at the time (muhūrta) sacred to Brahmā and offer *agnihotra* in the *agnihotra*. Then after covering the part of the altar called *pr̥ṣṭhyā* and bringing water he prepares an offering for Agni, *vaiśvānara* cooked on twelve potsherds. That well known *iṣṭi* will be the last he will perform. Afterwards, he throws in the *āhavanīya* fire those sacrificial vessels which are not made of stone or earth. While throwing the two *aranis* he utters the words, ‘may you two be of one mind with us’ then he (mentally) repositis the three sacred fires in himself. Then he inhales the smell of the smoke of each of the three fires thrice. Then standing with the sacrificial enclosure he says thrice in a low voice and thrice aloud the words:

‘*Om bhuh, bhuvah, svaḥ* I have entered the order of ascetics, ‘I have entered the order of ascetics’ ‘I have entered the order of ascetics’.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly he pours out as much water as will fill his joined hands saying:

‘I promise not to injure any living being’.<sup>14</sup>

He must hence forward restrain his speech. He holds his staff saying ‘thou art my friend, protect me;’<sup>15</sup> He takes the rope, reciting, ‘the brilliant light’<sup>16</sup>. He takes the cloth for straining water with the words ‘with which means of purification the gods,’<sup>17</sup> takes the water pot and says ‘Through that light, by

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<sup>13</sup> BDS II.10.17.27, op.cit.  
<sup>14</sup> BDS II.10.17.29, op.cit.  
<sup>15</sup> BDS II.10.17.32, op.cit.  
<sup>16</sup> BDS II.10.17.33, op.cit.  
<sup>17</sup> BDS II.10.17.34, op.cit.



which the gods rose on high,<sup>18</sup> takes the alms-bowl reciting the *vyāhritis*. And taking all these things leaves. Further discussing the rules of the four orders BDS says:

‘A *vaikhānasa* (shall live in the forest, subsisting on roots and fruits, practising austerities and bathing at morning, noon and evening; he shall kindle a fire according to the *Srāmanaka* rule; he shall eat wild-growing vegetables and grain only; he shall worship gods, manes, *bhūtas*, men, and *r̥ṣis*; he shall receive hospitably (men of) all *varnas* except those with whom intercourse is forbidden; he may even use the flesh of animals killed by carnivorous beasts; he shall not step on ploughed (land); and he shall not enter a village; he shall wear his hair in braids, and dress in garments made of bark or skins; he shall not eat anything that has been hoarded for more than a year.<sup>19</sup>

In this sūtra it is clearly evident that *śūdras* were prohibited from being received by an ascetic as intercourse with them was condemned in the sūtras.

As entry into a renunciation was viewed increasingly in terms of a sacrament, *śūdras* were debarred from renunciation. According to the sūtra writers, a person who has completed his Vedic studies can select an *āśrama*, including renunciation. Now, initiation and Vedic study were only permitted to all twice-born *varnas* viz. *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* and *vāīśya*. *Śūdras* were entitled neither to be initiated nor to be taught the Veda. The *śūdras* were devoid of *vānaprastha* also. While discussing the hermits life, VDS says:

‘Let him discontinue the performance of all religious ceremonies, but let him never discontinue the recitation of the Veda. By neglecting the Veda he

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<sup>18</sup> BDS II.10.17.35, opcit.

<sup>19</sup> BDS II.6.11.15 – The same sūtras has been mentioned in GDS III. 28-35. BDS and GDS lies in the first Strata of Ramgopal’s classification.

become a śūdra; therefore he shall not neglect it.<sup>20</sup> Therefore it is evident that in their view renunciation was not meant for śūdras.

The case of women's right to renounce, is similar to that of the śūdras. The Dharmasūtras and Gr̥hyasūtras consider women never to be independent:- 'In childhood they are under the control of their fathers, in adulthood under that of their husbands and as widows under that of their sons.'<sup>21</sup>

Renunciation, on the contrary, implies total freedom and independence. However it is, be recognized that mainstream of the sūtra tradition considered the śūdras and women as not eligible for performing *vānaprastha*. The VDS is recognized as the latest of the Dharmasūtra, contains an elaborate description of the ritual, as does the BDS, which is recognized no being earlier. It is possible that the discussion in the BDS is a later interpolation. Significantly, the Gr̥hyasūtras do not deal with *vānaprastha* at all.

As in the case of other *samskāras* we find the use of fire being recommended and the role of the sacrificer being brought to a formal ritual end. In that sense this is the reverse of the *upanayana* and marks the withdrawal of the man from the social life. Therefore elements of separation are emphasized throughout the ritual.

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<sup>20</sup> VDS 10.4, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> VDS 5.1; BDS 2.3. 44-46, op.cit.

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