Celibacy and the *Āśrama* System: A Study of the Early *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras*

(c. 4th century BCE to 2nd century CE)

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Contents

Abbreviations

ĀpDh	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
AŚ	Arthaśāstra
BDh	Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra
GDh	Gautama Dharmasūtra
KS	Kāmasūtra
MS	Manusmṛti
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
VaDh	Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra

Introduction

The word *brahmacarya* includes the English meanings of the words 'celibacy' and 'chastity'. The word simply means control or complete renunciation of sexual or sensual desires. However, etymologically, it means more than this. The word *brahmacarya* is a combination of two terms 'Brahman' and '*carya*'. 'Brahman' in brief means the ultimate reality, the supreme being, the ultimate or the final truth in the sense of the highest good or ideal, and '*carya*' is connected with '*ācāra*', code of conduct or way of living. The combined term '*brahmacarya*' thus means code of conduct, actions, or movement in quest of true Brahman or the Ultimate truth, or the practice for the absorption in Brahman. In this sense, renunciation of sex or sexual desires would be considered as only a part of *brahmacarya* as a whole because sexual or sensual desires are considered as hindrances to the achievement of the final goal, i.e., *mokṣa*.[1] Here, it is important to add that in Vedic texts the word *brahmacārin* was used for those men of the first three *varṇas* who devoted themselves in studying the Vedas. Also, *brahmacarya* as a period of celibate studentship was later became a part of the *āśrama* system.

According to the Brahmanical dharma, human life for men of the first three *varṇas* is believed to comprise of four stages (*āśrama*). The first *āśrama*: *brahmacarya* or the stage of the celibate student, the second *āśrama*: *gṛhastha* or the stage of the householder, the third *āśrama*: *vānaprastha* or the stage of the hermit, the fourth *āśrama*: *saṁnyāsa* or the stage of the wandering ascetic. In three of these stages, celibacy is paramount (*brahmacarya*, *vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsa*). According to Brahmanism, these *āśramas* are linked to the ultimate goal of human life i.e. *mokṣa* (freedom from the perpetual cycle of birth, death and rebirth). The way to end this relentless cycle of rebirths is to obliterate earthly longings and desires, including *kāma* or sexual desire, and cultivate higher knowledge. The *āśrama* system is supposed to help one to achieve that goal.

Philosophies, traditions, legends and value systems attempt to shape the human psyche, and in turn are probably shaped by it. It is in this context that I propose to explore the meaning of celibacy/*brahmacarya*, as both derived from and representing the social position of someone who is celibate and an ideal with various dimensions. We humans always look

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[1] Jain, K., *The Concept of Pañcaśīla in Indian Thought*, P.V. Research Institute, Varanasi, 1983, pp.125-126.

for the ideal; ideal society, ideal lifestyle, ideal political system, etc. This concept of the 'ideal' is a subjective issue. It changes with time and space. What remains unchanged is our attraction to the idea of the 'ideal'. The *āśrama* system is one such ideal about living one's life advocated in ancient India. And that brings the concept of hegemony associated with it. Hegemony implies domination. Referring to Raymond Williams, Joseph S. Alter writes, "hegemony is not a formal structure of consciousness and control; rather, it refers to 'relations of subordination and domination' embedded in the commonsense world of everyday life. Domination of this sort can be reflected with considerable power in seemingly innocuous areas: a work of art, seating arrangements, smoking etiquette, dietary patterns, body aesthetics."[2] Here, the Brahmanical hegemony is propagated through an ideal life in terms of the *āśrama* system and was supposed to be followed by men of the first three *varṇas* while excluding women and śūdras.

The followers of this ideal of the *āśrama* system might be few in number. It might be followed by the elite few. But they represented a life which the community considered as exemplary. An analogy to this in Radhakrishnan's words: "when the wick is ablaze at its tip, the whole lamp is said to be burning."[3]

What makes the *āśrama* system unique is its emphasis on the controlled and detached way of living. Historians have also pointed out that three out of the four *āśramas* emphasized celibacy. The prominence of celibacy in the *āśrama* system is worth noting. Yet the *āśrama* system has not been studied from the point of view of celibacy. Therefore, focusing on this connection may enable us to understand the entire system better.

The *Dharmasūtras* and a *Dharmaśāstra*

To study this, my sources would be the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* (*ĀpDh*), the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* (*GDh*), the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* (*BDh*), the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* (*VaDh*), and the *Manusmṛti* (*MS*).

The *Dharmasūtras* are recognized as part of the *vedāṅgas*. They belong to the same literary tradition that produced the works comprising the scriptural corpus of the Vedas,

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[2] Alter, Joseph S., *The Wrester's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p.21.
[3] Radhakrishnan, S., *Hindu view of life*. George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1926, p.91.

written by an elite minority of brahmins.[4] The *Dharmasūtras* are in prose or mixed prose and verse dealing with the subject of *dharma*. They laid down social norms as defined by brahmins. Towards the end of the Vedic period, there were developed six Vedic supplements/*vedāṅgas* (lit., "limbs of the Veda): *śikṣā* (phonetics), *chandas* (metrics), *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology), *jyotiṣa* (astronomy), and *kalpa* (ritual expositions). The *Dharmasūtras* form part of the "ritual expositions" collectively known as *Kalpasūtras*. *Kalpasūtras* are classified into three classes; first, *Śrautasūtras* that deal with solemn Vedic sacrifices, mentioned or discussed in the Vedas and *Brāhmaṇas*; second, *Gṛhyasūtras* that deal with domestic ceremonies such as Upanayana, marriage and with daily and periodical rites and employ mantras for them mostly from one Śākhā of the Veda.; third, *Dharmasūtras* that treat of some of the topics dealt with in the *Gṛhyasūtras* but add provisions on matters concerning economic life, politics, government, civil and criminal law.[5] A complete *Kalpa* should cover all three divisions. However, we have only two *Kalpasūtras*, those of Āpastamba and Baudhāyana, which covered all three divisions.

The *Dharmasūtras* also carry the names of their authors. The four major authors of the *Dharmasūtras* are: Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasisṭha, and Āpastamba. But it remains unclear whether they were the historical authors of these texts or whether the texts were ascribed to them. P. V. Kane argued that Āpastamba and Baudhāyana's *Kalpasūtras* were composed either by one and the same person or at least by father and son or grandfather and grandson and so on.[6] One of the complications regarding the issue of authorship, outlined by Patrick Olivelle, is that apart from the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, these texts contain numerous additions made at later times.[7] However, according to Olivelle, "it appears very likely that the *Dharmasūtras* were composed by individual authors, in much the same way as Pāṇini's grammar, even though each author appears to have incorporated substantial material from other common sources. These were not individual authors writing in isolation; they were part of a tradition of experts whose views and compositions influenced each other."[8]

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[4] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p.1.

[5] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 1 (Part 1), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, Reprint 2019, p. 10.

[6] Ibid., p.16.

[7] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p.4.

[8] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

It is generally accepted among historians that the *Dharmasūtras* were composed between *c.* sixth-second centuries BCE. According to P. V. Kane, the *Dharmasūtras* of Gautama, Baudhāyana and Āpastamba certainly belong to the period between 600 to 300 BCE.[9] And the *Dharmasūtras* of Gautama is declared to be the oldest one.[10] However, Olivelle (also, B. K. Ghose and J. J. Meyer) argued that Āpastamba is older than Gautama.[11] Kane has given some upper and lower date limits to these texts: Gautama 600-400 BCE, Āpastamba 450-350 BCE, Baudhāyana 500-200 BCE, and Vasiṣṭha 300-100 BCE.[12] However, according to Olivelle, the upper limit of Āpastamba could be around the beginning of the third century BCE and the upper limit of Gautama could be in the middle of the third century BCE. Therefore, according to Olivelle, the composition of the three earlier texts (i.e. Āpastamba, Gautama and Baudhāyana) could be from the beginning of the third to the middle of the second century BCE, and somewhat later for Vasiṣṭha (i.e. closer to the beginning of the Common Era, or even in the first century CE).[13] While discussing the issue of authorship and dates of these texts, an important point must be kept in mind, outlined by Olivelle, that "even though our authors often express personal opinions, they operated within an expert tradition." When certain features, elements or themes were introduced into this tradition, those themes or features found a place in all subsequent texts. For example, the discussion of the "land of Āryas" (*āryāvarta*), the "legal assembly" (*pariṣad*), and mixed classes. "Numerous passages from different *Dharmasūtras* are nearly identical and point to either borrowing from each other, or more likely, from a common source."[14]

The geographical area where these texts were composed is not very clear. According to Patrick Olivelle, all the *Dharmasūtras* were probably composed in northern India.[15] However, Kane suggests that Āpastamba came from south India, probably from Āndhra.[16]

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[9] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 1 (Part 1), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, Reprint 2019, p.13.

[10] Ibid., p.29.

[11] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p.8.

[12] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p.9.

[13] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, pp.9-10.

[14] Ibid., pp.6-11.

[15] Ibid., p.5.

[16] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p. 5.

The *Manusmṛti*, a *Dharmaśāstra* ascribed to Manu, was composed after the *Dharmasūtras*. The text is supposed to have been written between the second century BCE and the second/fourth centuries CE.[17] However, Patrick Olivelle suggests that the composition of the text took place around the 2nd-3rd centuries CE.[18] The *MS* was composed entirely in *ślokas*. This was different in comparison to the previous literature of the *dharma* tradition which was composed mostly in prose (the *Dharmasūtras*). There is no orderly arrangement of topics in the *Dharmasūtras* while in the *MS* the subjects are dealt with under three principal headings: *ācāra* (proper conduct), *vyavahāra* (law) and *prāyaścitta* (penance).[19] Comparing the narrative structure of the *Dharmasūtras* and the MS, Olivelle writes, "the *Dharmasūtras* are not only written in prose but are also presented as nothing more than scholarly works. There is no literary introduction; the author gets right down to business. He presents his material in a straightforward manner, and on points of controversy and debate he presents opposing viewpoints. All this is eliminated by Manu. Here the real author is presented not as a scholar but as the primeval lawgiver, the creator Svayaṃbhu, and his intermediaries, his son Manu and the latter's disciple Bhṛgu. The law is promulgated authoritatively: there cannot be any debate, dissension, or scholarly give and take."[20] This authoritative nature of the *MS* places it in a higher position among the texts of *dharma* tradition. The higher position of the *MS* is evident from the fact that nine commentaries on the *MS* have survived, the most on any single *Dharmaśāstra*. P. V. Kane wrote, "if we are to judge of the authority of a *smṛti* by the commentaries thereon, then the *Manusmṛti* stands preeminent. Next to it is the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*."[21]

The *MS* is widely known as an ancient legal text. It discusses a range of issues that can be a part of a human's life. The *MS* is divided into 12 *adhyāyas* (lessons or chapters). Chapter 1 contains the story of creation. Chapter 2 contains the sources of dharma, rites of passage, and the duties of a student. The largest portion of the central section on the four *varṇas* is devoted to the four-fold *dharma* (*dharma, artha, kāma, moksa*) of a Brahmin encompassing much of chapter 2 and all of the chapters 3-6.[22] The duties of a king are spread

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[17] Roy, K., *The Power of Gender & The Gender of Power: Explorations in Early Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, p.272.

[18] Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p.25.

[19] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 1 (Part 1), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, Reprint 2019, p. 21.

[20] Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p.26.

[21] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 1 (Part 1), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, Reprint 2019, p.306.

[22] Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p.12.

over chapters 7, 8, and 9; the single topic of judicial procedure and the grounds for litigation is spread over chapters 8 and 9; and chapter 9 contains the final discussion of the king's *dharma* and the *dharma* of Vaiśyas and Śūdras.[23] Chapter 10 deals with mixed *varṇas* and occupations of the four *varṇas*. Chapter 11discusses the topic related to penance. Finally, chapter 12 contains the discussions of the fruits of action and the actions leading to the supreme good.

The issue that I would like to discuss here is about reading the text, especially with reference to the *MS*. Is there an 'authentic', 'balanced' and 'objective' way to read the text like the *MS*? What is the importance of context while reading the content of the text? But, first, let me discuss Kumkum Roy's 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman'[24] and Chandrakala Padia's 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*',[25] in order to show that the reading of the same text (even the same verses) can lead to different conclusions or understandings of the text.

Kumkum Roy in her paper, while "examining certain themes commonly perceived as central to the identity of the Hindu woman,"[26] has explored *MS* too (with the *Ṛg Veda*). Chandrakala Padia in her paper, while critiquing Roy's readings of the *MS*, attempts "to show that whereas there surely are some parts of this text which appear odd and even unacceptable to the modern mind, there are, on the other hand, quite a few such emphases too as are of unquestionable value to us even today, and which therefore make it imperative for us to take *a balanced and objective view of the text in question*, as a whole."[27] [emphasis mine]

Referring to the no.33 and the following verses of Ch. IX, Roy writes that "the womb is equated with the field, in which men sow seed, offspring being determined by the nature of

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[23] Ibid., p.7.

[24] Roy, K., 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman.' In Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), *Women And The Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1995.

[25] Padia, C., 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002.

[26] Roy, K., 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman.' In Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), *Women And The Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1995, p.13.

[27] Padia, C., 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002, p.236.

the latter, with the former conceived as a passive, supportive receptacle."[28] Padia focuses only on the verses nos. 33 and 34 of Ch. IX and writes that "according to Manu, the seed or the male person is more important in some contexts; and the field (or woman) in quite a few others. This is indeed (a part of) what the 34th verse says. The additional idea there is that where the seed and the field alike contribute to the act of begetting or production, the maternity involved is commendable."[29] However, Padia ignores the very next verse which says, "between the seed and the womb, the seed is considered dominant; for the offspring of all creatures is marked by the characteristics of the seed."[30]

Now, comparing the means of acquiring wealth legitimately open to men and women, Roy concludes, "the former were granted access to inheritance, profit, purchase, the fruits of victory, interest on loans, gifts whereas the latter were restricted to receiving gifts from their kinsfolks during marriage…;"[31] referring to the verses 115 of Ch. X and 194 of Ch. IX. To make her point clearer, she also refers to the verse 199 of Ch. IX which says women "were not allowed to accumulate without the permission of their husband."[32] While disagreeing with Roy's reading of the text, Padia discusses only the verses 115 of Ch. X and 194 of Ch. IX and writes that "a careful look at the first one of these shows that it only lists the seven sources of legitimate income. The second one, similarly, only speaks of the legitimate sources and agents of gifts and riches for a wife. In neither of these verses any preference has been shown to men, as against women, in respect of the sources or means of enrichment or benefit."[33] She again chooses to ignore verse 199 of Ch. IX which Roy referred to while making her arguments.

This selective reading of the verses to arrive at a particular conclusion is problematic to our reading and understanding of the text. Even Padia acknowledges this problem when she writes, "[it] makes me sad, and not merely surprised, is the fact that some eminent scholars have based their criticisms on such a casual interpretation of some verses (of

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[28]Roy, K., 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman.' In Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), *Women And The Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1995, p.17.
[29] Padia, C., 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002, p.238.
[30] MS 9.35.
[31]Roy, K., 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman.' In Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), *Women And The Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1995, p.19.
[32] Ibid., p.19.
[33] Padia, C., 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002, p.240.

Manusmṛti) as is not at all warranted by the actual text."[34] This selective and casual interpretation of the verses happens often because of ignoring the context in which those verses were written. For instance, if one read only the much-quoted verse of the *MS* which says, " where women are revered, there the gods rejoice,"[35] ignoring the context in which this statement is said; one may not look for the answer to the question that how one should revere a woman? Manu had given the answer in the following verses. The text says, "if men want to become prosperous, therefore, they should always honour the women on joyful occasions and festive days with gifts of adornments, clothes, and food."[36] Kumkum Roy has rightly pointed out that " what is overlooked in this entire enterprise of elevating womanhood is the context within which the statement is located, and the forms of worship enjoined, the former [women's worship] explicitly domestic, a domesticity overlaid with patriarchal values."[37] Overlooking the context, sometimes may lead to wild conclusions. For instance, if one quotes just these lines from the *MS*, "equanimity towards all" (samata caiva sarvasmin);[38] the reader/listener may be forced to think that why has Manu been blamed for enforcing the hierarchical *varṇa* system in the society? But the complete verse is "A bowl, the foot of a tree, a ragged piece of cloth, a solitary life, and equanimity towards all—these are the marks of a renouncer."[39]

The context becomes very important while reading a text like *MS*. Arvind Sharma appositely observed while answering how to read Manu that "different people could make different suggestions; different people could also make the same suggestion or the same person could make different suggestions."[40] And it is the third category that one should keep in mind while reading the *MS*. However, what Sharma's writing failed to identify is the underlying unity of those different suggestions given by the same person. This can be illustrated by what seems contradictory at the first glance regarding the suggested different *dharma* (duty) for different *varṇas* (to maintain the social hierarchy), and when the same person (Manu) teaches the lesson that a man should see "equally himself in all beings and all

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[34] Ibid., p.240.
[35] MS 3.56.
[36] Ibid., 3.59.
[37] Roy, K., 'Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice: The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman.' In Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (eds.), *Women And The Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1995, p.21.
[38] MS 6.44.
[39] Ibid., 6.44.
[40] Sharma, A., 'How to Read Manusmṛti.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002, p.224.

beings in himself;"[41] but these two are not contradictory suggestions but complement each other.

One of the best ways to maintain hierarchy without inflicting violence is to draw an underlining unity/sameness among those who are part of that hierarchical system. Here, the underlying unity/sameness has been represented in the term of 'soul/Brahman'. The same soul in one life can be born as śūdra while in other as brahmin, depending on the karma of one's life. And the reward/punishment of one's karma will be given on the basis of how dutifully one had performed one's duty (*dharma*); "To each according to his deeds."[42] This concept serves a dual purpose. For a brahmin, he must follow his *dharma* to maintain his social position in this birth and for the next birth too; or to attain *mokṣa*. If he won't then he will be born in the lower *varṇa* in his next birth. For a śūdra, he must follow his prescribed *dharma* (serving the people of higher *varṇas*) without showing any sign of discontent because he is born as śūdra because of his previous birth's deeds. And also, with a hope that with this birth's deeds he may be born in the higher *varṇa* in his next birth.

The underlying unity in the *MS* can be understood in the debate around the authorship of the text.[43] Olivelle argues in the favour of a 'single author' of the text. He suggests that the *MS*, "if not by an individual, then it must have been composed by a 'strong chairman of a committee with the help of research assistants who carried out his plan."[44] And 'they' had a clear purpose while writing the *MS*.[45]

The *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstra*s are normative texts. These texts don't tell us what happened in history but what should have happened in history. "They tell people what to do; they don't tell us what people actually did."[46] These normative texts tell us how people, especially brahmin males, were ideally expected to live in a hierarchically arranged society.

Any piece of writing is incomplete until it is read by someone. This brings the issue of the audience of these texts. The main audiences of these texts were brahmin males. Olivelle has outlined that "the principle appears to be that when no class is explicitly mentioned or

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[41] MS 12.91.

[42] Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2016, p.95.

[43] See Olivelle's introduction to the *Manusmṛti* in Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005.

[44] Ibid., p.7.

[45] Ibid., pp.62-66.

[46] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha: Annotated Text and Translation* Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, P. 17.

when the subject is referred to simply by a pronoun, then a rule refers to the brahmin."[47] However, in general, the *dvija* males, "twice-born" (brahmin, kṣatriya, and vaiśya) constitutes the larger group of audience for these texts. The language of these texts was Sanskrit and they were the people who were allowed to read at that time.

On some Secondary Sources

In a foreword written for the latest edition of A. L. Basham's *Wonder that was India*, Thomas R. Trautmann writes, "like any other book of history we can understand it best by seeing it as the result of the intersection of three things: the author's intellectual formation, the historical period in which it was written, and the prior texts upon which it builds or from which it seeks to distinguish itself."[48] It is on the basis of these three categories that I will be discussing some of the major texts consulted for this dissertation.

Just for technical reasons these two books—P. V. Kane's *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)* and Patrick Olivelle's *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Tradition*—are mentioned as secondary sources.

P. V. Kane is considered as one of the best Sanskrit scholars and Indologists of modern India. His five-volume books on *History of Dharmaśāstra*, written over a period of thirty years (1930-1962) and running over six thousand pages, is one of the most cited works in the field of ancient Indian history. His study of ancient Sanskrit texts is considered as objective in nature. The range of Sanskrit texts he used while writing his books makes his work rich. Any research scholar wishing to work in ancient Indian history based on the Sanskrit textual tradition cannot miss Kane's writing. His work helps us to locate primary sources.

On the *āśrama* system, Patrick Olivelle's work, published in 1993, is an authoritative one because of the range of primary sources he has used while studying this system. It is almost impossible for an M.Phil. student to follow in his footsteps (all footnotes) while doing research on the *āśrama* system. His work is a landmark in the study of the *āśrama* system. He has rightly written in the prologue of his book that "the Brahmanical *dharma* is often referred to simply as *varṇāśramadharma*...the system of the four *varṇas* especially within the context

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[47] Ibid., p.11.
[48] Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, Picador, New Delhi, 2004, p.ix.

of the related system of castes (*jāti*), has been the subject of repeated study by scholars both Western and Indian…(However) the parallel system of the four *āśramas*, on the other hand, has received much less scholarly attention, apart from platitudes repeated in general studies of Indian culture and religion."[49]

So, what I have tried to do is, apart from studying the celibate nature of the *āśrama* system, to study this system with relation to the *varṇa* system.

In the list of secondary sources, A.S. Altekar's works need special contextualization although much has been written on his works by other historians. I have primarily consulted his book, *Education in Ancient India* (first published in 1934) and an article, 'The Ashrama System' written for the *Professor Ghurye Felicitation Volume* (1954).

A.S. Altekar's writings fall under the category of nationalist historiography or nationalist approach of history writing. One of the characteristics of nationalist writing during the colonial period was the uncritical glorification of the past; or in this context, having uncritical pride about our glorious education system. In the conclusion of *Education in Ancient India* (from the Vedic period up to 1200 CE), Altekar writes that "in the heyday of its glory, ancient Indian education was widely spread, women and a large section of the masses being admitted to its privileges. It was able to develop character and personality, to inculcate civic virtues, and turn citizens well qualified to follow their professions and discharge their duties in life. It was not only able to preserve the heritage of the past but also to enrich it from generation to generation. It produced a galaxy of able scholars and thinkers from age to age, who made important contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the spheres of philosophy, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine and chemistry. It enabled India to achieve high material prosperity by the excellent arrangements it made for training young men in arts, crafts and professions. The general principles which underlay the system, e.g. plain living and high thinking, the intellectual freedom, individual attention to students, the monitorial system, *gurukula* (hostel) system, location of the educational institutions away from the din and dust of city life, are sound and capable of giving good results even in modern times, if applied with due regard to changed circumstances."[50]

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[49] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.3.

[50] Altekar, A. S., *Education in Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, Nand Kishore & Bros., Varanasi, 1965, pp.286-287.

What makes Altekar's writing special among nationalist historians is that he never ignored the questions related to caste and gender. He had justifications for almost every unjust practice that existed in the past. For instance, if one asks why śūdras were not allowed to study? His answer was that "the exclusion of the śūdras from the Vedic studies undoubtedly appears as unjustifiable to us at present, but there were peculiar circumstances that necessitated this step in early times. The art of writing was not utilised for the purpose of preserving the Vedic texts for a long time. The āryan theologians believed that if there was the slightest mistake in the accent or the pronunciation of the Vedic *Mantras*, a disaster would inevitable issue. As the Vedic Sanskrit was not the mother tongue of the śūdras, it was feared that Vedic hymns would be transformed out of recognition, if they were transmitted orally in śūdra families from generation to generation. In the eyes of theologians, this would be a great disaster. Later on when female education began to lag behind and women as a class ceased to be educated in Sanskrit, it is interesting to note that the brahmin theologians did not flinch from placing their own mothers, wives and daughters in the category of the śūdras and declaring unhesitatingly that they also were unfit for Vedic studies."[51] Was it truly the case or is it just an act of imaginative explanation/justification?

Feminist historians have widely criticised Altekar's position on women issues. I have nothing much to add except this that exceptions do not make rule. Because when an exception tries to be a rule the first resistance comes from the makers of the rule. The end of the celebrated Gārgī-Yājñavalkya debate is an example of that.

The importance of A.S. Altekar's writings is due to the fact that his studies were based on the exhaustive use of primary sources. We may not agree with his interpretations of historical facts. But, the reason for revisiting his works in particular and nationalist historians' works in general again and again is because even today there exists a large section of people who believe in this kind of interpretation of past events.

One last book I would like to discuss here is B. R. Ambedkar's *Riddles in Hinduism*. The book did not get published in his lifetime. It appears in Volume IV of the ongoing multivolume series called "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches", produced by the Maharashtra government's education department in 1987.

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[51] Ibid., p.46.

Gandhi once said or wrote that Dr. Ambedkar is a challenge to Hinduism.[52] There are thousands of books on Hinduism. But what makes Ambedkar's writing unique is that, as S. Anand has rightly observed, "his scholarship goes a step beyond cataloguing inequality to also asking the difficult, but ethical question of justice. Primarily, they mount a moral critique on Hindu 'spirituality' or rather the absence of it."[53] In his book, Ambedkar listed twenty-four riddles related to Hinduism. Like, a true historian he relied on various sources before raising those questions. The questions Ambedkar asked throughout his book regarding Hinduism challenge the scholars who have studied or are studying Hinduism. It also adds a different perspective on reading Brahmanical texts. We cannot ignore Ambedkar's works simply as a 'political work' because at one level, "we need to explicitly acknowledge that all academic (and other) interventions have political implications both intended and unintended."[54] His works need to be studied because what Kumkum Roy appositely suggests is that "there is an urgent need to create space for constructive, critical dialogues amongst alternative formulations."[55]

Chapters in Brief

The dissertation has been divided into three chapters apart from the introduction and conclusion. The chapters are titled as follows:

Chapter One: The *Āśrama* System: A Critical Study

Chapter Two: Desire, Celibacy and the *Āśrama* System

Chapter Three: Exclusion, Hegemony and the *Āśrama* System

The first chapter studies the *āśrama* system while highlighting the celibate nature of this system. The chapter also explores the idea of 'debt' which is an important aspect of Brahmanical theology. The 'doctrine of debt' is considered as one of the reasons to make the householder stage compulsory. This chapter also goes through the historiography of the householder vs. renouncer debate and how it led to the formation of the classical *āśrama*

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[52] Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated and Critical Edition*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2014, p.322.
[53] Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, p.15.
[54] Roy, K., 'The Unspoken Debate: Revisiting Mid-20th Century Conceptualizations of the *Shudras*', In Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Kesavan Veluthat (eds.), *History and Theory: The Study of State, Institutions and the Making of History*, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, Hyderabad, 2019, p.80.
[55] Ibid., p.66.

system, and to argue that the formation of the *āśrama* system could also be seen as a system to guard the hierarchical *varṇa* order.

The second chapter is written in the search of the meaning of celibacy while keeping the *āśrama* system as a framework of one's life. It starts with the studentship period where celibacy is a must and desires are supposed to be suppressed. It then moves to the householder's stage where desires are supposed to get fulfilled but again in a restricted manner. The third and fourth stages are again celibate in nature. The chapter also discusses the optional nature of the third stage, i.e., *vānaprastha*. And finally, the meaning of celibacy we get suggests that a celibate life is the meeting ground for the householder's and renouncer's life because they both are living their life in conformity with dharma.

The third chapter studies the hegemonic characteristics of the *āśrama* system through the exclusions of śūdras and women from it. In a way, this chapter complements the argument of the first chapter. Here, one's way of living life becomes a tool to propagate the Brahmanical hegemony. The system not only protected the *varṇa* order but also made sure that people who were following the *āśrama* system will be revered in society. The chapter also explores the prescribed identity of an adult woman—mother-wife-widow. It also discusses the fruits of living a self-controlled life mentioned in the *MS*.

I have written this dissertation in search of my voice in the world of words. It is a humble attempt to make arguments in the midst of citations.

CHAPTER ONE

The *Āśrama* System: A Critical Study

A 'celibate' view on the *āśrama* system

There are three central features of ancient Indian asceticism: celibacy (*brahmacarya*), homeless wandering, and mendicancy.[1] For a person seeking liberation, overcoming desire and attachment is a major goal, and ascetic celibacy is the path to achieve it. The value of celibacy and the control of sexual passion are strongly advocated in the Indian tradition. *Brahmacarya* is also a part of the fourfold *āśrama* system (*brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha,* and *saṁnyāsa*). When we talk about *brahmacarya*, asceticism in particular and the *āśrama* system, in general, come into the discussion. Asceticism is a part of the *āśrama* system and asceticism has an independent existence as well and in both *brahmacarya*/celibacy is common. In this section, I am going to look at *brahmacarya* within the *āśrama* framework in the classical formulation of the *āśrama* system (prescribed for the twice-born man) which is found in the *Manusmṛti* (*MS*), ascribed to Manu.[56]

In the first *āśrama*, studentship period, Manu suggests that a student should control his organs. He writes that "a learned man should strive hard to control them, like a charioteer his horses."[57] "By attachment to the organs, a man undoubtedly becomes corrupted; but by bringing them under control, he achieves success."[58] He also argues that the desire cannot be ever fulfilled, it only grows. "Desire is never quenched by enjoying desires; like a fire fed with ghee, it only waxes stronger. Between a man who obtains all these and a man who gives them all up—giving up all desires is far better than obtaining them all."[59] Manu in the following verses also discusses those preconditions through which a man can be recognized as someone who has control over his organs. He writes that "when a man feels neither elation nor revulsion at the hearing, touching, seeing, eating or smelling anything, he should be

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[56] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.137.
[57] MS 2.88.
[58] Ibid., 2.93.
[59] Ibid., 2.94- 95.

recognized as a man who has mastered his organs."[60] If someone does that then one can achieve all his goals. In the words of Manu,"by bringing the full range of his organs under control and by restraining his mind, a man will achieve all his goals without having to shrivel up his body through yoga."[61] In the section when Manu discusses who are competent to receive Vedic instructions, he suggests that a brahmin should be honest, restrained and chaste to receive Vedic knowledge. Here Vedic knowledge is regarded as treasures that need to be shared with someone who deserves that or shows that kind of quality. Manu writes that Vedic knowledge came up to the brahmin and said, "I am your treasure, Guard me! Do not hand me over to a malcontent. I shall thus become supremely strong. A man you know to be honest, restrained, and chaste---only to a such brahmin should you disclose me, as to a vigilant guardian of your treasure."[62] After studying the Vedas without violating his chastity, he can enter into the second *āśrama* i.e., *gṛhastha* or the stage of the householder. Manu states that "after he has learnt in the proper order the three Vedas or two of them, or at least one, without violating his chastity, he should undertake the householder's order of life."[63]

In the second *āśrama*, the household period, the issue of celibacy is discussed in the light of the relationship between a man and a woman. "After spending the first quarter of his life at his teacher's, a twice-born man should marry a wife and spend the second quarter of his life at home."[64]

According to Manu, the sexual life in the household stage cannot go unrestricted. There are some defined time periods when sexual union should happen. Manu writes that "the natural season of women, according to tradition, consists of sixteen nights, together with the other four days proscribed by good people. Of these nights, the first four, as well as the eleventh and the thirteenth, are disapproved; the remaining ten nights are recommended."[65] At another place, he writes that "the new-moon day, the eighth day of a fortnight, the full-moon day, and the fourteenth day of a fortnight---on these days, a twice-born who is a bath-graduate should always remain chaste, even if his wife is in her season."[66] Manu warns that "though aroused, he must never have sex with his wife after the onset of her menstrual period, or even lie on the same bed with her; for when a man has sex with a woman

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[60] Ibid., 2.98.
[61] Ibid., 2.100.
[62] Ibid., 2.114-115.
[63] Ibid., 3.2.
[64] Ibid., 4.1.
[65] Ibid., 3.46-47.
[66] Ibid., 4.128.

besmirched with menstrual blood, his wisdom, energy, strength, sight, and life-force waste-away. When he avoids a woman besmirched with menstrual blood, his wisdom, energy, strength, sight, and life-force will wax stronger."[67] In Manu's view, "regardless of the order of life in which a man lives, if he avoids women during the forbidden nights and during the other eight nights, he becomes a true celibate."[68] The above discussions show that in the householder life celibacy is not sexual deprivation but a kind of controlled sexual union.

The last two *āśramas* signify the ascetic life. It shows one's journey from being a forest hermit to a wandering ascetic. Manu writes that "after living this way in the householder's order according to rule, a twice-born bath-graduate should duly live in the forest, controlling his self and mastering his organs. When a householder sees his skin wrinkled, his hair turned grey, and his children's children, he should take to the wilderness. Giving up village food and all his belongings, he should go to the forest, entrusting his wife to his sons or accompanied by her."[69] He should make no effort to obtain pleasurable things and should remain celibate.[70] This austerity and celibacy gain more prominence in the wandering ascetic stage. He should subdue his senses and should remain seated without longings or sensual attachments.[71]

In the *MS* ascetic life is seen as a part of the *āśrama* system. A twice-born should live through the studentship period and householder life, only then he should plan to renounce the world. In the section of the qualifications for the wandering ascetic, Manu emphasises this. He writes that "only after he has studied the Vedas according to rule, fathered sons in keeping with the law, and offered sacrifices according to his ability, should a man set his mind on renunciation; if a twice-born seeks renunciation without studying the Vedas, without fathering sons, and without offering sacrifices, he will proceed downward."[72] He also reiterates the Vedic doctrine of debts. A twice-born must pay that first and only then prepare to renounce the world. He writes that "only after he has paid his three debts, should a man set his mind on renunciation; if he devotes himself to renunciation without paying them, he will proceed downward."[73]

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[67] Ibid., 4.40-42.
[68] Ibid., 3.50.
[69] Ibid., 6.1-3.
[70] Ibid., 6.26.
[71] Ibid., 6.30, 49.
[72] Ibid., 6.36-37.
[73] Ibid., 6.35.

In the *Manusmṛti,* the discussion of celibacy can be found in all four *āśramas* which shows that it is not exclusive to the ascetic life. However, the notion of celibacy in the *gṛhastha āśrama* is different from the rest of the three *āśramas* (*brahmacarya vānaprashtha* and *saṁnyāsa*). *Brahmacarya*/celibacy is rooted in self-consciousness and in self-control. It is not just about renouncing worldly life but also living one's life in a controlled way. As I have mentioned earlier, *brahmacarya* literally means leading the way to the Brahman or the Absolute or the way of greatness. And this can be followed only if one is self-conscious or has self- control in his life. In other words, a *brahmacāri* is someone who is in the journey of self-discovery or in pursuit of knowing the meaning of his life.

Even if we narrow the meaning of *brahmacarya* as different from married life and free from sexual activity, all *āśramas* except that of the *gṛhastha* can be regarded as celibate. Three out of the four *āśramas* exclusively give prominence to celibacy. Yet Manu did not forget to mention that "student, householder, forest hermit, and ascetic: these four distinct orders have their origin in the householder. All of these, when they are undertaken in their proper sequence as spelled out in the sacred texts, lead a brahmin who acts in the prescribed manner to the highest state."[74] The making of the householder life mandatory in one's spiritual journey represents the ideal religious life within the Vedic ideology that found an echo in later Brahmanical texts also. Also, it is in this stage when a twice-born man offers sacrifices to the gods and begets offspring in order to get rid of the religious debt. But is it possible for someone to get rid of his debt?

The idea of 'debt'

The earliest description of the *āśrama* system is found in the *Dharmasūtras* of Gautama, Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, and Vasiṣṭha. In these texts, the *āśrama* system was presented not as the four temporary stages of a man's (of the first three *varṇas*) life (student, householder, hermit and renouncer) but as the four alternative and permanent modes of life open to an individual, any one of which he may freely choose. It was different from the classical formulation of the *āśrama* system, ascribed to Manu, where these four stages in man's life were fixed in the order.

The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* (*ĀpDh*) says:

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[74] Ibid., 6.87-88.

"There are four orders of life: the householder's life, living at the teacher's house, the life of a sage, and that of a forest hermit. If a man remains steadfast in any of these, he attains bliss. A common prerequisite for all is to live at the teacher's house following one's initiation, and all are required not to abandon Vedic learning. After he has learnt the rites, he may undertake the order that he prefers."[75]

The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* (*GDh*) says:

"He has a choice, some assert, among the orders of life: student, householder, mendicant, or anchorite."[76]

The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* (*BDh*) says:

"a division enunciated in this verse: Four paths leading to the gods traverse between heaven and earth. Among these, all you gods, place us on that which brings unfailing prosperity. That division consists of the student, the householder, the forest hermit, and the wandering ascetic."[77]

The *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* (*VaDh*) says:

"There are four orders of life: student, householder, forest hermit, and wandering ascetic. After studying one, two, or all the Vedas, a man who has not violated his vow of chastity may live in whichever of these he prefers."[78]

It is clear from the views expressed by the *Dharmasūtras* that (1) *brahmacarya āśrama* was considered as the first and unavoidable stage in life. Only after completing the first stage (period of study), one had the option to choose any mode of life from the remaining three *āśramas*. (2) the married life or *gṛhastha* stage was an optional stage. After *brahmacarya*, one could directly enter the stage of *vānaprashtha* or *saṁnyāsa*.

The above discussion leaves us with two questions. First, why did the brahmins make *brahmacarya* a compulsory stage in the life of an individual? Second, why did Manu remove the option and make the married state an obligatory state, why did he make the married state a condition precedent to the stage of the hermit and the stage of hermit a condition precedent

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[75] ĀpDh 2.21.1-5.
[76] GDh 3.1-2.
[77] BDh 2.11.11-12.
[78] VaDh 7.1-3.

to the stage of a *saṁnyāsa*?[79] The first question will be dealt in the next chapter. Here I will address the second question.

The making of the married state an obligatory state is related to the idea of 'debt.' Manu says:

"Only after he has paid his three debts, should a man set his mind on renunciation; if he devotes himself to renunciation without paying them, he will proceed downward. Only after he has studied the Vedas according to rule, fathered sons in keeping with the Law, and offered sacrifices according to his ability, should a man set his mind on renunciation; if a twice-born seeks renunciation without studying the Vedas, without fathering sons, and without offering sacrifices, he will proceed downward."[80]

The Sanskrit word for the 'debt' is *ṛṇa*. Explaining the meaning of the word, P. V. Kane wrote that "the word *ṛṇa* had been both applied to spiritual and secular (monetary) debts… the son was not only desired for repaying the spiritual debt owed to one's ancestors, but he was also expected to free his father (if the father could not himself repay the monetary debt) from the liability he incurred to his creditor."[81] In this section, we will be discussing (in Kane's words) the spiritual debt, which some scholars have studied under the heading of "primordial debts."[82]

From the time of the *Ṛgveda*, it was believed that men were under obligations to gods and *pitṛs* (ancestors), which could be fulfilled by worship (*yajña*) and by the birth of a son,[83] which later developed into the doctrine of three spiritual debts. The systematic formulation of the doctrine of debt appeared in the two texts of the *Yajurveda---Taittirīya Saṃhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.[84]

The ideal religious life within Vedic ideology is that of married life. Patrick Olivelle underlines that the two theologically central religious activities referred to in Vedic literature are offering sacrifices and procreating children. Only a married householder was qualified to

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[79] These questions were asked by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, pp.133-135.

[80] MS 6.35-37.

[81] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. III), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p.416.

[82] Graeber, D., *Debt: The first 5000 years*, Penguin, UK, 2012, p.43.

[83] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. III), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, pp.415-16.

[84] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.49.

perform either of them. These central religious activities are related to the theology of debts and the theology of the great sacrifices, which became important devices for legitimizing several central religious and social obligations of the Vedic world. Both appear to represent an attempt to legitimize theologically the major religious duties of a twice-born man.[85]

The formulation in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (*TS*) (6.3.10.5) is as follows:

"A brahmin, at his very birth, is born with a triple debt—of studentship to the seers, of sacrifice to the gods, of offspring to the fathers. He is, indeed, free from debt, who has a son, is a sacrificer, and who has lived as a student. This (debt) he satisfies (*avadayate*) by these cuttings (*avadāna*). That is how the cuttings get their name."[86]

The formulation in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*ŚB*) (1.7.2.1-6) is as follows:

"Now, whoever exists is born indeed as a debt at his very birth to the gods, to the seers, to the fathers, and to men. Because he has to sacrifice, he is born as a debt to the gods; and he pays it to them when he sacrifices to them and when he makes offerings to them.

Because he has to study the Veda, furthermore, he is born as a debt to the seers; and he pays it to them, for they call a person who has studied the Vedas "the guardian of the seers' treasure."

Because he has to desire offspring, furthermore, he is born as a debt to the fathers; and he pays it to them when he has children that provide the continuity of their lineage.

Because he has to provide shelter, furthermore, he is born as a debt to men; and he pays it to them when he offers them shelter and food.

Whoever does all these things, has done what he has to do; he obtains everything, and he conquers everything. So, because he is born as a debt to the gods, he sacrifices (*avadayate*) them when he sacrifices and when he makes offerings in the fire. Therefore, whatever they offer in the fire is called *avadāna* [the portion cut for sacrificial offering]."[87]

Although both statements are about the same doctrine, the *TS* mentioned only three debts while the *ŚB* spoke about four debts. We see this difference in the number of debts in

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[85] Ibid., p.53.

[86] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.47.

[87] Ibid., p.48.

the *Mahābhārata* also. "The *Ādiparvan* (120.17-20) holds that men owe four debts; the three Vedic ones and the fourth to humanity in general (which is paid back by goodness to all) and *Anuśāsana* (37.17) raises them to five (adding brahmins and guests to the well-known three).[88] However, "the exegetical tradition and later legal literature take into account only the three debts of the *TS* and generally ignore the *ŚB* formulation."[89]

One of the arguments related to this doctrine of debt is that it served as an important theological device for legitimizing the classical formulation of the *āśrama* system where before renouncing the world a twice-born has to fulfil the obligations of studentship and marriage.[90]

Patrick Olivelle, in his book *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, argues that the *āśrama* system is primarily a theological construct. Therefore, the history of this theology is primarily the history of Brahmanical hermeneutics (*mīmāṃsā*).[91] This hermeneutical tradition is also discussed by P.V. Kane in "Chapter VIII: *Āśrama*."[92] When we acknowledge the existence of such a tradition; we also acknowledge the fact that all these authors of the *Dharmasūtras* or *Dharmaśāstras* were well aware of earlier writings (history) and to some extent aware of one another's writings.[93] This awareness of history enables someone to add on or argue something new based on the same premise. Like, the sin or guilt associated with not paying one's spiritual debt transferred and evolved in the secular (monetary) debts. Kane had argued that "it appears to me that this theory of spiritual debts being already in the air, the same sanctity came gradually to be transferred to one's promises to repay monetary debts and carry out other secular engagements."[94] Even, when ancient authors were using some doctrine to argue something; their motive to use that doctrine was primarily concerned with justifying their arguments. When Manu says that only after paying one's three debts, should a man set his mind on renunciation;[95] later authors

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[88] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. III), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p.416.

[89] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.51.

[90] Ibid., p.139.

[91] Ibid., p.34.

[92] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. II, Part-I), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p. 424.

[93] Olivelle, P., *The Codes of Apastamba, Gautama, Baudhayana and Vasistha: Annotated Text and Translation*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, pp.4-5.

[94] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. III), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p.416.

[95] MS 6. 35.

interpret this to mean that "it is unnecessary to pass through the third *āśrama* because the payment of debts is completed in the first two."[96] Even, Manu himself forgot this doctrine of debt while writing that "untold thousands of brahmins who remained celibate from their youth have gone to heaven without producing offspring to continue their family line; just like these celibates, a good woman, though she is sonless, will go to heaven when she steadfastly adheres to the celibate life after her husband's death."[97] The answer to this inconsistency in Manu's writing, we may find in the authorship debate related to the *MS*. Even in that case, if those authors were part of "the Brahmanical hermeneutical tradition," then they behaved much like modern historians who sometimes transform the past to suit their wishes for the future. In the words of Voltaire, "history proves that anything can be proved by history."[98]

Let us now turn to the first systematic formulation of the doctrine of debt; i.e., the doctrine of debt appeared in the two texts of the *Yajurveda---Taittirīya Saṃhitā* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. How can a twice-born man free himself from debt?

The *TS* answers that when one has performed his three duties by being a student, a sacrificer and a father of a son; one becomes freed from debt. The *ŚB* does not give such a straight answer. Instead of declaring someone free from debt once he has performed one's duties, it says that after performing one's duties one obtains everything and conquers everything. Olivelle see this as "the *ŚB* envisaged the four duties as lifelong obligations; one is freed from debt only at death."[99] But, these are not commercial/secular debts that are meant to be cancelled out. That is because commercial transactions imply both equality and separation.[100]

In terms of the commercial transaction, debt means a "peculiar agreement between two equals that they shall no longer be equals, until such time (after paying the debt) as they become equals once again,"[101] but this was not the case with spiritual debts. One cannot bargain with the gods (because they already have everything) and not even separate oneself from the gods. Therefore, David Graeber argues about these formulations of 'primordial debts' that "these examples are all about overcoming separation: you are free from your debt

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[96] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.139.

[97] MS 5.159-60.

[98] Durant, W., *Story of philosophy*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1961, p. 285.

[99] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.51.

[100] Graeber, D., *Debt: The first 5000 years*, Penguin, UK, 2012, p.68.

[101] Ibid., p.303.

to your ancestors when you become an ancestor; you are free from your debt to the sages when you become a sage, you are free your debt to humanity when you act with humanity…… one could in fact interpret this list as a subtle way of saying that the only way of "freeing oneself" from the debt was not literally repaying debts, but rather showing that these debts do not exist because one is not in fact separate to begin with, hence that the very notion of cancelling the debt, and achieving a separate, autonomous existence, was ridiculous from the start."[102] Then what can we understand from these formulations of the doctrine of debt?

These formulations of the doctrine of debt can be seen as the part of giving meaning to our relationship with the seers, gods, and father, and with the whole of humanity. Then, if paying off the debt can't be regarded as the reason for the formulation of the classical *āśrama* system then what was the reason for making that system?

The *āśrama* system: a system to guard the *varṇa* order

The story of the formulation of the *āśrama* system can broadly be outlined from the earliest description of the system in the *Dharmasūtras* of Gautama, Baudhāyana, Āpastamba, and Vasiṣṭha, where after completing the first stage i.e., *brahmacarya,* one could choose or directly enter to any stage of life, i.e., *gṛhastha*, *vānaprashtha* or *saṁnyāsa*, and could remain in that stage till his death to the first classical formulation of the āśrama system which is found in the *Manusmṛti* (*MS*), ascribed to Manu, where one should go through every stage in the proper sequence, i.e., *brahmacarya*, *gṛhastha, vānaprashtha* and *saṁnyāsa* in one's life to attain *mokṣa*. All this happened around c. sixth centuries BCE to second/fourth centuries CE. Before moving to the theme of this section, it may be useful to provide brief survey of earlier historians' view on this development of the *āśrama* system. The discussions around the development of the *āśrama* system include the debate on householders and renouncers.

A.S. Altekar in his writing, 'The Asrama System', has discussed the development of the *āśrama* system. He doubts whether the system was developed during the period when the Vedas were composed. However, there is no doubt that in some families'—childhood and adolescence were spent in learning the Vedas. This period was designated as *brahmacarya* as

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[102]Ibid., p.68.

early as the time of the *Atharvaveda*.[103]But this does not mean that *brahmacarya* was recognized as a stage of life. The study of the Vedas was primarily done because of the necessity of performing Vedic sacrifices.[104] The period of studentship was followed by marriage.

In Vedic literature, there are references to a number of individuals who used to devote themselves to the attainment of spiritual goals. They were designated as *ṛṣis* or *munis*. Altekar sees this class of *munis* as devoted to severe austerities like the *vānaprasthas* and *saṁnyāsins* of the later time.[105]

Vedic sacrifices were prominent in this period. But 'tapas' was also regarded as essential to achieve great results in some circles. Fasting and yogic practices were part of their discipline.[106]

Renunciation and austerities were becoming more and more popular by c.500 BCE. During the period of 800-500 BCE, many schools of thoughts came into existence. There were sixty-four schools of philosophy contending for survival. Buddhism and Jainism were also among them. Old faiths were in the melting pot and new ones were claiming to be heard.[107]Even in the Brahmanical circles, Vedic sacrifices were regarded as unreliable boats. Family life was considered as a distraction. A number of persons began to renounce the world without entering into matrimony.[108]

It was probably when *saṁnyāsa* as the means of salvation became popular, that the idea of the *āśramas* came into existence. According to Altekar, the *āśrama* system represents the synthesis of the school of activity (*pravṛtti*) and of renunciation (*nivṛtti*). This was done by the *āśrama samuccaya* theory.[109] The theory of the four *āśramas* is systematically propounded for the first time in the *Manusmṛti*. Altekar in his writing emphasizes that the development of the *āśrama* system was a synthesis of the different school of thoughts that

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[103] Altekar, A. S. 'The Ashrama System', *Professor Ghurye Felicitation Volume*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, p.183.
[104] Ibid., p.185.
[105] Ibid., p.183.
[106] Ibid., p.184.
[107] Ibid., p.185.
[108] Ibid., p.186.
[109] Ibid., p.190.

were present within Brahmanism. Altekar's arguments related to the *āśrama* system are similar to P.V. Kane[110] and Patrick Olivelle's arguments.

In the same year of the publication of Altekar's writing, i.e. in 1954, A.L. Basham brought out his classic book *The Wonder That Was India*. In this book, A.L. Basham sees the *āśrama* system as an artificial attempt to find room for the conflicting claims of study, family life, and asceticism in a single life time. According to Basham the system of the *āśrama* was evolved partly as a counterblast to the unorthodox sects such as Buddhism and Jainism, which encouraged young men to take up asceticism, and bypass family life altogether.[111] This argument of A.L. Basham has been taken forward by Romila Thapar.

Renunciation can be seen as the abandonment of ritual activities. As Romila Thapar writes, "the householder as the performer, preserver, and guardian of the sacrificial ritual became the counterpoint to the renouncer who denied both the ritual and the social role of the one who preserved it."[112] . The concept of renunciation or *saṁnyāsa* is a part of the Vedic world view also, but the householder gets prominence there, whereas in the non-orthodox movements, namely Buddhism and Jainism, the concept of renunciation gets prominence. Thus according to Romila Thapar, the *āśrama* system was invented to blunt the opposition between renunciation and married life by blending the two into a single lifetime. She writes that "thus whereas the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, for example, encouraged the dichotomous categories in the role of the *gahapati* and the *bhikkhu*, the Brahmanical tradition sought to weaken it by weaving it into a single life-cycle."[113] Here, Louis Dumont's comment on Indian society and religion is worth noting. He writes that "Indian society and religion, on the one hand, have produced a rich growth of movements considered heretical to a certain extent, and on the other hand they have tended to absorb formerly heretical inventions." He calls that the aggregation by orthodox tendencies of elements introduced by

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[110] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. II, Part-I), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p. 424.

[111] Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1954, p.158.

[112] Thapar, R., 'Householders and Renouncers in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions.' In T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life: King, Householder, renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p.279.

[113] Ibid., p.296.

the heterodox.[114]   This is somehow similar to the arguments that Romila Thapar is making regarding the formation of the *āśrama* system.

However, scholars like J. C. Heesterman and Patrick Olivelle don't agree with the above arguments. They trace the development of the *āśrama* system within Brahmanism. J. C. Heesterman argues that whatever additional outside stimuli there may have been, the renunciatory tendency can be seen to arise orthogenetically from within the Vedic sacrificial tradition itself. It is a result of the inner logic of that tradition. It also joins together both the ascetic wanderer and the worldly householder.[115]   Olivelle also presents a similar kind of view and sees the creation of the *āśrama* system as part of the Brahmanical hermeneutical process. He argues that it came into existence, not because of external threats but it developed within Brahmanism.[116] So, what is this Brahmanical hermeneutical process? Olivelle summarises the Brahmanical hermeneutics.

Central to Brahmanical hermeneutics is the resolution of conflicts that arise when Vedic injunctions contradict each other. There are three ways of resolving these conflicts. First, one may choose (*vikalpa*) one or the other of the alternatives if the contradictory injunctions have the same power or authority. With regard to the *āśramas*, this view is represented by the supporters of the original formulation where the *āśramas* were considered as four alternative paths open to an adult male. Second, if it can be demonstrated that one injunction is more authoritative than the other—if one, for example, is found in the Veda, while the other is found in smṛtis—then the injunction of the lesser authority is annulled (*bādha*). The third view is called *samuccaya* or "aggregation" according to which all the items enjoined by conflicting injunctions are considered equally obligatory, the conflict being resolved by referring them to different times, individuals, or activities. The classical formulation of the *āśrama* system—as obligatory modes of life suitable for different periods of a man's life—favours this hermeneutical principle. There are injunctions prescribing all four *āśramas*, and a way must be found for all of them to be followed. This formulation provides a scheme within which it is possible for an individual to follow the modes of life of

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[114] Dumont, L*., Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980, p.269.

[115] Heesteramn,J.C., 'Householder and Wanderer.' In T. N. Madan (ed*.), Way of Life: King, Householder, renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p.270.

[116] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, pp. 96-98.

all four *āśramas*. Since they cannot be performed together, they are to be performed at different times in the individual's life, similar to the sacramentary (*saṃskāra*) system.[117]

Thus, Olivelle argues that the transition from the original to the classical formulation of the *āśrama* system entailed a shift from the hermeneutical principle of "choice" or *vikalpa* to that of "aggregation" or *samuccaya*.

While discussing the authorship questions regarding the *āśrama* system—the questions about who were the inventors of this system and what was the purpose of that invention—Olivelle again follows the Brahmanical hermeneutical tradition. He rejects the common assumptions regarding the authorship and intent of the *āśrama* system that it was created by conservative Brahmins with the intention of resisting the new religious movements and safeguarding the Brahmanical religion by incorporating the renunciatory life style. According to Olivelle the creation of the *āśrama* system is a part of the Brahmanical hermeneutical process. The authors of the system were Brahmins who were supporters of or sympathetic towards the ideals of celibacy and renunciation. Their purpose in creating the system was to legitimize the modes of life different from that of the householder by providing a place for them within the sphere of dharma. This is evident from the very nature of the original *āśrama* system where *āśramas* are considered as four alternative paths.[118]

However, Olivelle's arguments related to the origin of the *āśrama* system are problematic. While discussing the socio-economic context of that time (fifth century B.C.E., the period of urbanisation and non-Brahmanical religious movements), Olivelle concludes that the *āśrama* system is an urban invention or at least reflects the openness of an urban mentality. He argues that there appear to have been tensions and rivalries between the traditional brahmins of the villages (ritualistic), who were the heirs and guardians of the traditional world, and the newly urbanized brahmins (anti-ritualistic and pro-celibacy), who were most influenced both by the dramatic socio-economic changes of urbanization and by the rising prestige and influence of non- Brahmanical religious movements. This conflict was resolved through the theory of option (*vikalpa*) that comes from the Mīmāṃsa (Brahmanical hermeneutic) tradition.[119] Here Olivelle, on the one hand, accepts the non-Brahmanical religious movements' influence on urban brahmins but on the other hand, rejects the possibility of the threat posed by non-Brahmanical groups that might work as the catalysts for

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[117]Ibid., p.134.
[118] Ibid., pp.96-98.
[119] Ibid., p.98.

the creation of the *āśrama* system. The history of religion cannot be studied by only paying attention to the theological and exegetical tradition of that religion. What we consider as a religious institution sometimes develops in defence also.

To conclude this discussion, we may say that the development of the *āśrama* system was the result of the act of balancing two different world views. It seems that both views were present in the Brahmanical tradition, but we can't deny the influences of the non-orthodox religious movements. However, in this whole discussion one important link was missing, that of *varṇa*. When someone was renouncing the world, he was also renouncing his *varṇa* identity too. And this whole development of the *āśrama* system could also be seen as an attempt to guard that *varṇa* system from the non-orthodox movements of that period.

During the period of history that we are discussing, according to the Brahmanical sources, society was divided into the four *varṇas* (and women). For whom was this *āśrama* system prescribed and with what benefit? For men of the first three *varṇas* to attain the highest goal in their lives, i.e., *mokṣa*. Why not women and śūdras? Because śūdras were supposed to attain *mokṣa* by serving their masters (belonging to the first three *varṇas*) and women were getting *mokṣa* by serving their husbands. Also, in the case of śūdras, getting *mokṣa* was not their prime concern because until one's belly is not full, one can only think of food, not of *mokṣa*. Who were the target audience groups of the non-orthodox movements? Men belonging to the first three *varṇas*, especially from merchant (vaiśyas) and ruling (kṣatriyas) groups.

Any system needs the support of power and money for its existence. And, in the Brahmanical dharma, what was regarded as crucial was the *varṇa* system. In the ancient Indian context, power comes from the support of kṣatriya (ruling) group and money comes from vaiśya (merchant) group. So, in this case, the supporting groups of the Brahmanical dharma were drifting away from it and so the *varṇa* system was under threat too. Therefore, the Brahmanical hermeneutical tradition was not only resolving the issues between, as Olivelle suggests, the traditional brahmins of the villages (ritualistic), who were the heirs and guardians of the traditional world, and the newly urbanized brahmins (anti-ritualistic and pro-celibacy),[120] but also saving their support groups to guard the hierarchical system of the *varṇa* order. One may conjecture that it was in this context that the consolidation of the idea

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[120] Ibid., p.98.

of *varṇa* and the idea of *āśrama*, i.e., *varṇāśramadharma* took place, and the credit for this consolidation goes to Manu.[121]

This critical study of the *āśrama* system shows that in order to protect the *varṇa* system, the ideal life designed for an individual gave prominence to celibacy. Apart from three exclusive celibate *āśramas*, the *gṛhastha āśrama* also includes some aspects of celibacy in terms of controlled sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, if we keep aside this role of householders and renouncer's debate in the development of the *āśrama* system and see the role of householder stage as a stage where one of the basic human instincts, i.e., sexual desire, gets space to express itself, then the role of the householder stage and the entire *āśrama* system seems different. Highlighting the importance of the *gṛhastha*, S. Radhakrishnan wrote that "India has known for centuries what Freud is popularising in Europe, that repressed desires are corrupting in their effects than those exercised openly and freely. Monastic tendencies were discouraged until one had a normal expression of natural impulses."[122] Something similar to this, Altekar wrote that "it was also seen how - among a large number of persons who had renounced the world in their youth, only few could live up to the high ideals of the order and rest had fallen prey to the sensual temptation which they could not overcome….. this stage recognises that desire and passions that are implanted in the human heart will make it difficult for an ordinary individual to rise above them and dedicate his life entirely to the spiritual pursuits."[123]

There is also a kind of opposition between *brahmacarya*/celibacy and sexual love. The Indian philosopher Ramchandra Gandhi argues that the supporter of either side suffers from a kind of self-righteous attitude. Gandhi sees this problem in the light of the 'democratization of ideals' in our age. It works like 'if *brahmacarya* cannot be right for all, it can't be right for any.'[124] He also highlights the underlying hypocrisy in *brahmacarya* and sexual love. He argues that hypocrisy and cruelty abound in the moralist camp of *brahmacarya*, as they do in sexual love.[125] Unhappy attempts at sexual love are no less numerous than unhappy attempts at *brahmacarya*. Celibacy is too often founded upon the

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[121] Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, p. 133.

[122] Radhakrishnan, S., *Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin LTD, London, 1926, p.83.

[123] Altekar, A.S., 'The Ashrama System', *Professor Ghurye Felicitation Volume*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, pp.189-192.

[124] Gandhi, R., 'Brahmacarya', In T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life: King, Householder, renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982, p. 209.

[125] Ibid., p.209.

sand of sexism and collapses with the violent awakening of sexual desire. However sexual unhappiness does not diminish with more sexual enjoyment but only with love and the witness of *brahmacarya*. He argues that the chief topic of *brahmacarya* is the possibility of a non-sexiest identity and a consequent renunciation of sexual desires, or to put it in another way, the renunciation of sexual desire via the acquisition of a non-sexist identity.[126] He suggests that this non-sexist identity is related to the non-sexist notions of our reality. To understand this connection, we need to show a very great interest in Self-consciousness and Atman and Spirit and Egolessness and Being.[127] And here the idea of ascetic life comes into the discussion. However we cannot deny the sexist attitude of asceticism in reality, but in the philosophical discussion, it transcends the idea of gender, self, ego etc.

This very brief exchange of views shows that the issues of desire and sexuality are closely linked with the idea of celibacy that will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[126] Ibid., p.210.
[127] Ibid., p.210.

Chapter Two

Desire, Celibacy and the *Āśrama* system

Studentship and Celibacy

The life of a student (of the first three *varṇas*), *brahmacarya āśrama*, begins with the Vedic initiation (*upanayana*). This *upanayana* also marks the superiority of the first three *varṇas*. One of the reasons for the impurity of śūdras, according to the Brahmanical tradition, is the denial of this rite for them. This rite means a second birth, which is why the men of the first three *varṇas* are called *dvija* (twice-born) Manu says;

"For a brahmin, the Vedic initiation should be carried out in the eighth year from conception; for a kṣatriya, in the eleventh year from conception; and for a vaiśya, in the twelfth year from conception. For a Brahmin desiring eminence in Vedic knowledge, it should be carried out in the fifth year; for a kṣatriya aspiring for power, in the sixth year; and for vaiśya aspiring for a spirit of enterprise, in the seventh year."[128]

After initiation, a boy leaves his house for study. The learning takes place in the teacher's house. A. S. Altekar, in his book *Education in Ancient India,* wrote that "the term brahmacāri, which is used to denote a student, primarily refers to a person leading a celibate life in order to realise his educational ideals and ambitions. Our authorities insist that the student should observe celibacy both in thought and deeds."[129]

Highlighting the important features of ancient Indian education, P. V. Kane wrote, "the salient features of the educational system outlined in the *Dharmaśāstra* works are the high and honourable position assigned to the teacher, the close personal contact of the pupil with the teacher and individual attention, the pupil's stay with the teacher as a member of his family, oral instruction and the absence of books, stern discipline and control of emotions and the will, cheapness (as no fees were stipulated for)."[130]

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[128] MS 2.36-37.

[129] Altekar, A. S., *Education in Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, Nand Kishore & Bros., Varanasi, 1965, p. 25.

[130] Kane, P. V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. II, Part-I), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p.369.

What is the imagery that comes into our mind when we think about a student's life in ancient India? Brahmacārins, who were living in the gurukul in the midst of the forest serving their gurus and reciting the Vedas. Student life had no place for any kind of luxury or amusement. Apart from learning they had to do all other work in the gurukul. There were certain rules and observances prescribed for students. P. V. Kane noted that there are two kinds of observances—some are prescribed for a very short time and some are supposed to be observed during all the years of studentship.[131] Rules prescribed for a very short time are related to the days or a year after *upanayana*. The observances that last throughout the period of studentship were centred around "*agniparicaryā* (worshipping fire), *bhikṣā* (begging for food), *saṁdhyopāsana*, study of the Veda and its methods and duration, avoidance of certain foods and drinks and other matters like singing, etc., *guruśuśrūṣā* (including honouring him and his family and other elders) and the special *vratas* of the brahmacāri."[132] This is not the place to discuss every observance in detail, so I will confine myself only to the rules related to celibacy or chastity. Before doing so, some more about the characteristics and features of the ancient Indian education system. This discussion is largely based on the readings of two books with the same title *Education in Ancient India*. One was written by A. S. Altekar, the sixth edition was published in 1965. Another is written by Hartmut Scharfe, published in 2002.

A.S. Altekar had divided his study of education in ancient India into four periods—(i) pre-historical times to c.1000 BCE (the Vedic period) (ii) c. 1000 BCE to c. 200 BCE (the Upanishad-Sūtra period) (iii) c. 200 BCE to 500 CE (the Dharmaśāstra period) (iv) c. 500CE to 1200 CE (Purnanic Period). According to Altekar, "it is in the works of the Dharmaśāstra period that we begin to get systematic discussion of the aims and methods of education."[133] What were the aims and ideals of education in Ancient India? Altekar writes that "infusion of spirit of a piety and religiousness, formation of character, development of personality, inculcation of civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture may be described as the chief aims and ideals of ancient Indian education."[134] And how were these aims and ideals achieved? The student had to observe the religious observances (*vratas*) which included daily morning and evening prayers, fasting and worshipping on different religious occasions etc., during the studentship period. He must

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[131] Ibid., p.304.
[132] Ibid., p.305.
[133] Altekar, A. S., *Education in Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, Nand Kishore & Bros., Varanasi, 1965, p.268.
[134] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

observe good manners while interacting with his seniors, equals and inferiors. He must live a self-disciplined and self-restrained student life. The purpose of his study also meant the preservation and transmission of Vedic knowledge.[135]

Hartmut Scharfe has similar observations like Altekar while discussing the goals of education in ancient India. Since education in ancient India was concerned with religious, ritual and philosophical matters too, one of the prime goals of education was expressed in terms of getting *mokṣa*.[136]Besides this, Scharfe writes that "Indian education pursues the formation of the ideal character, the preservation of the ancestral heritage including customs and social conventions, and of many secular skills. Only occasionally we read that education gives pleasure."[137] Yet, education was not only about religion and character building. Scharfe mentions that " list of arts, sciences and skills has grown steadily over the centuries with the rise of grammar, metrics, philosophy, medicine, veterinary medicine, tree care, statecraft, law, literature, aesthetics, architecture, sculpture and painting, music, and countless others, some with direct practical applications, others more theoretical."[138] The list had gone up to sixty-four in the *Kāmasūtra* (*KS*).[139] However, Indian education was largely centred on the subjects like grammar, religious literature and logic whereas subjects like physics, chemistry, geography, etc. were more or less ignored.[140]

One of the important features of ancient Indian education was its orality; especially while teaching the Vedas. The Vedic knowledge was taught orally not because the writing technique was not available but because it was supposed to be taught and learned orally. Sāyaṇa wrote that "the text of the Veda is to be learned by the method of learning it from the lips of the teacher and not from a manuscript."[141] Also, the Vedic *mantras* are supposed to be recited in the correct accent and pronunciation. Any mistake could cause disaster.[142] One crucial aspect of this orality was the development of a special teacher-student relationship. In this case, the teacher was the sole authority from whom the Vedic knowledge could be

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[135] Ibid., pp. 9-17.

[136] Scharfe, H., *Education in Ancient India*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, p. 47.

[137] Ibid., p.48.

[138] Ibid., p.58.

[139] KS 1.3.15.

[140] Scharfe, H., *Education in Ancient India*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, p.60.

[141] As cited in Scharfe, H., *Education in Ancient India*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, p.8.

[142] Altekar, A. S., *Education in Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, Nand Kishore & Bros., Varanasi, 1965, p. 46.

acquired. Scharfe notes that "the teacher was the sole font of wisdom, acquiring knowledge from other sources was discouraged."[143]

Apart from observing the vow of chastity, these two duties of a student were very much a part of the student's identity in ancient times; first, a student must beg for his food and second, offer fuel-sticks every day. Manu says, "if he fails to beg for food or put firewood into the sacred fire for seven nights without being sick, he should perform the penitential observance prescribed for a student who has broken his vow of chastity."[144]

"The term 'austerity," the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* says, "is used with reference to the rules of conduct."[145] According to the *ĀpDh*, "he shall not eat ritual food, spices, salt, honey, or meat. He shall not sleep during the day, wear perfume, engage in sexual intercourse, or show himself off. He shall not wash his body. When anything dirty stains it, however, he may wash it out of his teacher's sight. If he bathes, he should not be boisterous in water but plunge in like a stick."[146] It adds, "he shall not watch dancing, nor visit casinos or fairs. He shall not be given to gossiping but keep things confidential. He shall not engage in recreational activities in places frequented by his teacher. He shall speak with women only as much as is required. He shall be gentle, calm, controlled, modest, firmly resolute, energetic, not given to anger, and free from envy."[147] This list also includes, "he should not look at a naked woman or cut anything from plants or trees to smell it. He should refrain from using shoes, umbrellas, and vehicles. 'Let him not smile, or, if he smiles, let him do so covering his mouth'—so states a *Brāhmaṇa*. He should not kiss a woman with his mouth, covet her in his heart, or touch her without a good reason. A *Brāhmaṇa* states: 'he shall keep his body dirty, his teeth stained, and his speech true'."[148]

Similar rules are stated by the *GDh* (adding abstaining from gambling and 'if he is a Brahmin, he should always abstain from liquor'),[149] the *BDh*,[150] and the *VaDh*.[151]

According to the *MS*, "bringing all his organs under control, a Vedic student living with his teacher should observe these restrictions in order to increase his ascetic toil…. he

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[143] Scharfe, H., *Education in Ancient India*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, p. 34.
[144] MS 2.187.
[145] ĀpDh 1.5.1.
[146] Ibid., 1.2.22-30.
[147] Ibid., 1.3.11-24.
[148] Ibid., 1.7.3-11.
[149] GDh 2.13-20.
[150] BDh 1.3.23-24.
[151] VaDh 7.7,15.

should avoid honey, meat, perfumes, garlands, savory foods, women, all foods that have turned sour, causing injury to living beings, rubbing oil on the body, putting collyrium on the eyes, using footwear or umbrella, lust, hatred, greed, dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, gambling, gossiping, slander, lies, looking at and touching women, and hurting others."[152]

Also, "he should always sleep alone and never ejaculate his semen; for when he voluntarily ejaculates his semen, he breaks his vow. When a brahmin student ejaculates his semen involuntarily in sleep, he should bathe, worship the sun, and softly recite three times the verse: 'May the virile strength return again to me….'"[153]

A self-restrainted life and vow of chastity are emphasised during the student life in these texts. These texts also prescribed penances for students who break their vows. The most deplorable act of a brahmacāri is to have sex with a woman.[154]

A student who has broken his vow of chastity should sacrifice a/an donkey/ass.[155] Adding in the process, the *ĀpDh* pronounces that "a śūdra should eat that offering."[156] While the *GDh* prescribes that "wearing its skin with the hairy side out and carrying a red bowl, he should beg food from seven houses while proclaiming his deed."[157] The *BDh* directs that "the portion to be eaten by the sacrificer should be cut from the animal's penis, while the other portions are offered in water."[158]

An alternative penance for a student who has sex with a woman is suggested by the *ĀpDh*. It says, "alternatively, he should put firewood into the sacred fire on the night of the new moon; perform the preliminary rites of Dārvīhoma; and make two offerings of ghee, saying: 'O Lust, I have spilled semen! I have spilled semen, O Lust! To Lust, Svāhā!' and 'O Lust, I have been squeezed out! I have been squeezed out, O Lust! To Lust, Svāhā!'……"[159] An alternative penance is suggested by the *VaDh*[160] also, adding to that, "the same penance

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[152] MS 2.175, 177-179.
[153] Ibid., 2.180-181.
[154] Kane, P. V. , *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. II, Part-I), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p.374.
[155] ĀpDh 1.26.8, GDh 23.17, BDh 2.1.31, VaDh 23.1, MS 11.119.
[156] ĀpDh 1.26.9.
[157] GDh 23.18.
[158] BDh 2.1.33.
[159] Ibid., 2.1.34.
[160] VaDh 23.2-3.

applies when he masturbates deliberately, sleeps during the daytime, or practices some other observance, until the time he returns home after completing his studies."[161]

Some other penances related to sexual activities done by a student are pronounced in the *VaDh*. It says, "if he has sex with an animal, he should give a gift of a white bull with a black penis. If he has sex with a menstruating woman, he should give a gift of a black bull with a white penis. The culpability for having sex with a cow is spelt out in the rule about killing a śūdra woman."[162]

However, the important aspect of this vow of chastity is that it is not only confined to students but some rules of it have to be followed by the teacher too. The *ĀpDh* says:

"These are the restrictions that a teacher should observe from the commencement of the annual course of Vedic study until its completion. He should abstain from shaving the hair on his body, eating meat, partaking of an ancestral offering, and sexual intercourse. He may optionally have sex with his wife during her season. In accordance with the Vedic precepts, he should be intent on imparting Vedic knowledge to his pupils, and on observing the restrictions. If he acts in this manner, he will bring bliss to his ancestors, to his descendants, and to himself."[163]

What do these rules suggest about the ideal student life? The obvious answer would be that the life of a student should be celibate and free from desire; he should be living a restrained life. In the words of Altekar, "self-restraint that was emphasised was distinctly different from self-repression. Simplicity in life and habits was all that was insisted upon. The student was to have a full meal, only it was to be a simple one. The student was to have sufficient clothing, only it was not to be foppish. The student was to have his recreation only, they were not to be frivolous. He was to lead a life of perfect chastity, but that was only to enable him to be an efficient and healthy householder when he married."[164] One may differ with these views. Although the study of Jaya Tyagi's work is based on the *Gṛhyasūtras*, her insights on the emphasis on the brahmacārin's celibate life are worth noting. She argues that "control over sexuality indicates a misogynist attitude that is reflected in the need to exercise control over brahmacārins and their relationship with women. It also implies that women are to be systematically kept away from learning, as well as those who are aspiring towards

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[161] Ibid., 23.4.
[162] Ibid., 23.5-6.
[163] ĀpDh 2.5.16-18.
[164] Altekar, A. S., *Education in Ancient India*, Sixth Edition, Nand Kishore & Bros., Varanasi, 1965, p.14.

learning. The very fact that the term *brahmacarya* commonly denotes greatness for one who abstains from sexual behaviour by laying down norms that young males had to adhere to and by enforcing their moral systems in society."[165] This controlled sexual behaviour retained its importance even in the householder stage.

However, keeping with the ideals of the *āśrama* system ancient Indian thinkers were concerned with every aspect of life and were trying to develop methods or rules which could help humans to live a balanced or ideal life. Even the text like the *Kāmasūtra* (written around 3rd century CE) says, "childhood is the time to acquire knowledge and another kind of power, the prime of the youth is for pleasure, and old age is for religion and release. But because the life span is uncertain, a man pursues these aims as the opportunity arises. But, he should remain celibate until he has acquired knowledge."[166] The importance of this ideal life of a student in ancient India can be summed up in the words of Manu—"a well-disciplined brahmin, although he knows just the Sāvitrī verse, is far better than an undisciplined one who eats all types of food and deals in all types of merchandise, though he may know all three Vedas."[167]

It is important to note here that at this stage one could take a vow of perpetual celibacy, and continued religious studies throughout one's whole life. In other words, one can become a life-long student. Manu says, "if he wishes to live with his teacher's family all his life, however, he should diligently serve the teacher until he is freed from his body. When a Brahmin obediently serves his teacher until his body comes to an end, he goes immediately to the eternal abode of Brahman."[168]

Householder stage: Fulfilment of Desire

The second stage is that of the householder or *gṛhastha*. According to the *MS*, "after he has taken the concluding bath with his teacher's permission and performed the rite of returning home according to rule, the twice-born should marry a wife belonging to the same class and possessing the right bodily characteristics."[169] A student after completing his study takes the concluding bath, then that person is known as a *snātaka* or bath-graduate. While discussing

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[165] Tyagi, J., *Engendering the Early Household: Brahmanical Precepts in the Early Gṛhyasūtras, Middle of the First Millennium B.C.E.*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2008, p.195.
[166] KS 1.2.2-6.
[167] MS 2.118.
[168] Ibid., 2.243-44.
[169] Ibid., 3.4.

the householder stage one should keep in mind that the life of an ordinary householder prescribed in the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras* are somehow different from the life of a bath-graduate. If we are studying the *āśrama* system as an ideal life suggested by these texts then the life of a student must be followed by the life of a bath-graduate. In the *Āpastamba*, *Gautama*, *Baudhāyana* and *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtras*, there is a special section dedicated to the rules and observances related to the bath-graduate. The *Manusmṛti* has one chapter (chapter three) dedicated to marriage and the householder's life and one special chapter (chapter four) allocated for the life of the bath-graduate.

One of the reasons for the praise of this ancient ideal life lived according to the *āśrama* system is its practical approach towards life. Renouncing the world in one's prime youth is neither in his spiritual interest nor in the material interest of society. Even if we keep society aside for a while and think about the physical need of the young life then also renouncing the world in one's youth seems "impractical". A. L. Basham writes that "marriage had three main purposes: the promotion of religion by the performance of household sacrifices; progeny, whereby the father and his ancestors were assured of a happy after-life and the line was continued; and *rati*, or sexual pleasure."[170] Let's see the ideal life of a bath-graduate and how he fulfils these purposes, especially the third one.

The *ĀpDh* and the *BDh* have nothing to say about the sexual life of the bath-graduate except at one place, the *ĀpDh* says that "at night he should always adorn himself for his wife."[171] According to the *GDh*, "after engaging in sexual intercourse, he should not be tardy in purifying himself. And he should not do the recitation of the Veda sitting on the same bed…he should not have intercourse with his wife when she is indisposed or having her period, or embrace her when she is in that state. Neither should he embrace an unmarried girl."[172] Self-control has got a special emphasis in the *GDh*. The *GDh* writes, "he should not look at someone else's wife when she is naked, or draw a seat to himself with his foot. He should not let his penis, stomach, hands, feet, speech, or sight get out of control."[173] The interesting thing with the *VaDh* is that while prescribing rules sometimes the text also gives reasons for them. In the *VaDh*, it is said that "he (a bath-graduate) should engage in sexual intercourse with his wife during her season, avoiding the days of the moon change. Let him

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[170] Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1954, p.165.
[171] ĀpDh 1.32.6.
[172] GDh 9.25-31.
[173] Ibid., 9.48-50.

not have intercourse in a place other than the vagina. Now, they also quote: if a man performs the sex act in the mouth of the woman he has married, during that month his ancestors will feed on his semen. Sexual intercourse performed without transgressing (the vagina) is in conformity with the law."[174]

The sexual life of a bath-graduate in the *MS* has been discussed in the first chapter. It is clear from these texts that the sexual life with his wife is primarily meant for procreation and not for sexual pleasure. And that procreation is an act of lust that gets purified at the time of the Vedic initiation (*upanayana*).[175] Even the emphasis on the sexual intercourse confined to the vagina has gone to the next level when the *BDh* says that "a man who ejaculates his semen in any place other than the vagina becomes equal to a thief, equal to a murderer of a brahmin."[176] And it is clear from these texts that the worst crime one can commit is murdering a brahmin. Also, what the *GDh* suggests of purifying oneself after sexual intercourse is that sexual activity is something that is not pure. One must purify oneself after that. What appears is that the life of a bath-graduate with his wife is supposed to be very formal. A glimpse of that one can see when the *GDh* and the *VaDh* suggest that he should avoid eating with his wife.[177] The reason may be found in the idea of protecting male superiority. Or what the *VaDh* gives as a reason behind not having food with one's wife— "his children will lack the manly vigour."[178] Protecting or showing the manly vigour either by keeping a distance from one's wife or getting close with one's wife with only the purpose of bearing offspring, defined the personal space of husband and wife.

The laws of a bath-graduate prescribed in the *MS* seem like an extension of his student life by adding some duties related to the householder's life. It also suggests the broadening of the meaning of celibacy in terms of living a self-controlled, content, detached and austere life. His livelihood should be just to sustain himself. "He should gather wealth just sufficient for his subsistence."[179] A bath-graduate may be allowed to do agriculture and trade. However, under no circumstances he is allowed to sustain himself by means of the "dog's life". Here, service to others is called the "dog's life".[180] According to the *MS*, the less material wealth serves more in terms of winning the heavenly world. Manu writes, "let him

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[174] VaDh 12.21-23.
[175] MS 2.147-48.
[176] BDh 3.7.2.
[177] GDh 9.32, VaDh 12.31.
[178] VaDh 12.31.
[179] MS 4.3.
[180] Ibid., 4.6.

be a man who stores grain sufficient to fill a granary, a man who stores grain sufficient to fill a jar, a man who has sufficient grain to last three days, or a man who keeps nothing for the next day. Among all these four types of twice-born householders, each should be recognized as superior to the ones preceding it and better at winning the heavenly world, according to the law."[181]

In one case it may seem an ideal or the very popular picture of a *daridra* brahmin (poor brahmin) living an upright and honest life. But the contempt it shows for labour when it says that he must gather wealth without "fatiguing his body" and also comparing doing service to a "dog's life" shows the underlying Brahmanical hegemony propagated through this ideal "subsistence-based life." Here comes a very important point while studying the *āśrama* system with the prominence of a celibate life is that this ideal life prescribed in these texts serves an important purpose of maintaining the Brahmanical hegemony. One question which arises while studying the ideal bath-graduates life is why a bath-graduate was supposed to live a contented, self-controlled and poor life. One possible answer lies in the fact that education was a very limited affair confined to the men of the first three *varṇas*. Even in that the learning and teaching of the Vedas were very much limited to the brahmin class. The rest of society was supposed to perform rituals without having authority or knowledge of that and in the presence of a brahmin priest. Education serves as an antidote to hegemony. But in the Brahmanical system education serves as a tool to maintain hegemony without imparting knowledge to the larger society. One of the ways to show yourself as a learned person is to teach or share your knowledge with others. The Brahmanical system limits that practice. In the absence of that, the other option that remains open is to show how you live your life. In other words, living or behaving like a learned man to show or assert one's superiority as a knowledgeable person. D. D. Kosambi rightly observed that 'their poverty, the long rigid training needed to be a good brahmin, even their vain pretensions to superiority over the other castes (which they were not accorded in practice) were all put to good use. In order to be respected by the lower classes, the ideology of the ruling class must be practised seriously by the classes themselves with a certain amount of obvious hardship."[182] This idea of hegemony associated with this ideal living of life will be explored in the next chapter too. Here, let's see more of the ideal life of a bath-graduate.

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[181] Ibid., 4.7-8.

[182] Kosambi, D. D., *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2016, p.78.

His daily routine comprises the study of the treatises because as Manu says, "for, the more a man studies treatises, the more he comes to understand and the more brightly shines his understanding."[183] His daily ritual duties include "the sacrifices to seers, gods, beings, humans, and ancestors."[184] He must be careful about his appearance. According to Manu, "he shall keep his nails clipped, his hair and beard trimmed, and himself restrained; wear white clothes; remain pure; and apply himself every day to his Vedic recitation and to activities conducive to his own welfare."[185] Some list of things that a bath-graduate must never do includes, "look at a woman when she is naked…he must never dance; sing; play a musical instrument; clap; whistle; make noises when sexually excited…He must never give a śūdra advice, leftovers, or anything offered to the gods; teach him the law; or prescribe an observance to him…he must never recite the Veda near a cemetery, in the outskirts of a village, in a cow pen, wearing the same clothes he had on during sexual intercourse, or after accepting something at an ancestral offering."[186] This is only a glimpse of a long list of not to do things by a bath-graduate. The ideals of a bath-graduate can be best summarised in the words of the *GDh* where it is stated that "he shall speak the truth; behave like an ārya; teach only cultured men; be cultured by adhering to ritual purifications; take delight in the Vedic texts; never hurt any creature; be gentle and steadfast; and be devoted to self-control and gift-giving. A bath-graduate who lives in this manner will liberate his parents and his relatives of past and future generations from sins, and will never fall from the world of Brahman."[187]

The next two *āśramas* (*vānaprastha* and *saṁnyāsa*) exemplify the human's sole pursuit for the oneness with god. The third stage, *vānaprastha*, arises when the responsibilities of the home are given up. *Vānaprastha* is the period of retreat for the loosing of social bonds. Explaining the meaning of *vānaprastha* Sanjib K. Ghosh Chaudhury writes that "the word *vana* comes from the root "*van*" which means forest that grows on increasing, also has a meaning "*vistāra*" from "*vana*" which literally means flood or deluge. In either sense, whether we take flood or forest, the underlying idea is that it stands for the state of expansion or spreading out. *Vānaprastha* thus represents the life of expansion—expansion from home to beyond."[188] *Saṁnyāsa* as a fourth stage is when one becomes a homeless

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[183] Ibid., 4.20.
[184] MS 4.21.
[185] Ibid., 4.35.
[186] Ibid., 4.53,64,80, 116.
[187] GDh 9.68-74.
[188] Chaudhury, S. K. G., 'Chaturasrama—A Composite Feature Of Life in Pre-Buddhist India', I*n Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 27), Indian History Congress, 1965, p.132.

wanderer. S. Radhakrishnan writes that "the aim of the *saṁnyāsin* is not to free himself from the cares of outward life, but to attain a state of spiritual freedom when he is not tempted by riches or honour; and is not elated by success or depressed by failure."[189] G.S. Ghurye's reading of Indian asceticism links celibacy, one of the important traits of a *saṁnyāsin*, to the ideal and purpose of the *āśrama* system. He writes that "in general, it has been expected that the aspirants of the ascetic life should take vow before they have tasted sex in the ordinary course and settled down as married men and women. It is only in Indian civilization that asceticism is laid down as the last stage in an individual's life… asceticism or *saṁnyāsa* is entered not only after sex is satisfied but also after its urge has subsided"[190] He further adds that "the recognition of *saṁnyāsa* as a regular stage or *āśrama* was itself an indication that asceticism was felt to be a necessary element in an individual's spiritual endeavour."[191]

However, some Sanskrit texts consider the third stage as optional. One such instance comes from the *Yājñavalkyasmṛti*, where Yājñavalkya explicitly permits a person to renounce "either from the forest (third *āśrama*) or from home (second *āśrama*)."[192] Regarding the question of the optional nature of the third *āśrama*, Ghurye cites the *Jābāla Upaniṣad* which declares that "one may renounce the world whenever one feels the urge, being imbued with detachment."[193] Patrick Olivelle sees this skipping of the third āśrama within the context of the Brahmanical theology of debts. He argues that "the primary concern of Brahmanical theology, therefore, was not that one should faithfully follow the sequence of *āśramas* but that the obligations of the ritual religion be fulfilled before a person commits himself to a celibate life. A householder who has paid his three debts is thus permitted to become a renouncer immediately. Whether or not a person becomes a hermit prior to renunciation is not an issue about which these theologians show great concern."[194]

What do the texts which I am looking at say about the optional nature of the third stage? As we have discussed in the first chapter in the *Dharmasūtras* texts the *āśrama* system is presented as four alternative and permanent modes of life. In the *MS*, these four stages of the *āśrama* system are fixed in order. The *MS* never explicitly writes that one may skip the

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[189] Radhakrishnan, S., *Hindu View of life*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1926, p.90.
[190] Ghurye, G.S., 'Ascetic Origins', *Sociological Bulletin*, 1(2), 1952, p.172.
[191] Ibid., p.176.
[192] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 174.
[193] As cited in Ghurye, G.S., 'Ascetic Origins', *Sociological Bulletin*, 1(2), 1952, p.173.
[194] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.177.

third *āśrama*. However, the rules of conduct for the life of the *vānaprastha* and the *saṁnyāsa* are so similar that makes 'the third *āśrama*'s eventually becoming obsolete."[195] I would like to repeat the question raised by B. R. Ambedkar—why did Manu feel the necessity of dividing the life of the individual after *gṛhasthāśrama* into two stages? Why was the one stage of *saṁnyāsa* not enough? Where did Manu get this idea of *vānaprastha āśrama*? What is his source?[196] One of the arguments in the defence of the third *āśrama* is that it is the stage of preparations for the complete renunciation. Ambedkar found a different reason for that and that is worth noting. He argued that "a brahmacāri may at once become saṁnyāsi without entering the stage of *gṛhasthāśrama* (as we have seen from the reading of the *Dharmasūtras*). But there was also another line of life which a brahmacāri, who did not wish to marry immediately, could adopt, namely to become *āraṇas* or *āraṇamānas*. They were brahmacārins who wished to continue the life of study without marrying. These *āraṇas* lived in hermitages in forests outside the villages or centres of population. The forests where these *āraṇa* ascetics lived were called *āraṇyas* and the philosophical works of these *āraṇas* were called *Āraṇyakas*. It is obvious that Manu's *vānaprastha* is the original *āraṇa* with two differences: (1) he has compelled *āraṇa* to enter the marital state and (2) the *āraṇa* stage, instead of being the second stage, is prescribed as the third stage. The whole scheme of Manu rests on the principle that marriage is compulsory." He concludes, "a brahmacāri, if he wishes to become a saṁnyāsi, must become a *vānaprastha* and if he wishes to become a *vānaprastha,* must become a *gṛhasthāśrami,* i.e., he must marry."[197] It is a marriage life where rituals, social duties and desires get fulfilled but in a controlled manner.

What are the rewards of living this kind of controlled life? The answer is "heaven, long life, and fame…wisdom, eminence in Vedic knowledge…and happiness."[198] But also keeping oneself on top of his life's priorities. At one place Manu writes, "a man should save his wealth for a time of adversity, save his wife even at the cost of his wealth, and always save himself even at the cost of his wife and wealth."[199] It may seem a piece of practical advice but it also underlines the fact that wife and wealth are replaceable items. While laying down various rules of conduct which seem very strict and propagating a self-controlled life and at the same time also mentioning happiness as a reward is a curious case for study. What

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[195] Ibid., p.132.
[196] Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, pp.135-137.
[197] Ibid., pp. 137-38.
[198] MS 4.12,13,94,246.
[199] Ibid., 7.213.

does happiness mean in a text like *MS* and how it could be achieved? Manu says, "he should carefully avoid all activities that are under someone else's control, and diligently pursue those that are under his own control. Whatever is under someone else's control—that is suffering; whatever is under one's own control—that is happiness. He should know that is, in a nutshell, is the definition of suffering and happiness."[200] The text also suggests that "one who seeks happiness should become supremely content and self-controlled, for happiness is rooted in contentment and its opposite is the root of unhappiness."[201] Does this suggest that the idea of living a self-controlled life also means living an independent life? It is a life that is free from emotional bondage because what one is performing is just a part of his duty; a dutiful life that brings emotional liberty because here one's happiness is in one's own control; a self-controlled life for self-controlled happiness. What about desires? Is it the opposite of detachment? Is there any meeting ground between desire and detachment? Is a self-controlled celibate life the meeting ground? Because celibacy also has a wider meaning of "conduct of controlled sexuality".[202]

Desire, Detachment and the Meaning of Celibacy

On desire, Manu says:

"To be motivated by desire is not commended, but it is impossible here to be free from desire; for it is desire that prompts Vedic study and the performance of Vedic rites. Intention is the root of desire; intention is the wellspring of sacrifices; and intention triggers every religious observance and every rule of restraint—so the tradition declares. Nowhere in this world do we see any activity done by a man free from desire; for whatever at all that a man may do, it is the work of someone who desired it. By engaging in them properly, a man attains the world of the immortals and, in this world, obtains all his desires just as he intended."[203]

Desire, eros, love, pleasure, sex, passion, whatever that translated word we choose for the word *kāma*, the fact is that these all represent those intangible experiences of one's life about which no one has a fixed definition or explanation. Whenever someone tries to explain

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[200] Ibid., 4.159-60.
[201] Ibid., 4.12.
[202] Scharfe, H., *Education in Ancient India*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, p.97.
[203] MS 2.2-5.

these feelings or experiences, one's sentences become either poetic or philosophical. Also, *kāma* represents pleasure and desire, not merely sexual, but more broadly sensual which include music, good food, perfume, and so on. In the realm of desire and senses of ancient India, one may often find oneself lost to the picture of exotic and erotic India represented in the texts like the *Kāmasūtra*, in the works of poets such as Kālidāsa, Jayadeva and in the art and architecture of temples like Khajurāho. What about the desire within the framework of the *dharma*; rules related to expressing desire according to the *dharma* or without violating *dharma*? Because *dharma* brings pleasure and *adharma* brings pain.[204]

Even the text like the *Kāmasūtra* (*KS*) before talking about all the detailed descriptions of various positions of doing sex (however the text is not limited to that only and has a lot more to offer) does not forget to mention the three aims of human life, i.e., *dharma* (religion), *artha* (power) and *kāma* (pleasure) and suggests "undertake any project that might achieve / the three aims of life, or two, or even just one / but not one that achieves one / at the cost of the other two."[205] The text while acknowledging the importance of pleasure in life also warns of its shortcoming. It says, "pleasures are a means of sustaining the body, just like food, and they are rewards for religion and power. But people must be aware of the flaws in pleasures, flaws that are like diseases."[206] The text ends with these verses—"he (Vatsyayana) made this work in chastity and in the highest meditation, / for the sake of worldly life; / he did not compose it / for the sake of passion. A man who knows the real meaning of this text / guards the state of his own religion, power, and pleasure / as it operates in the world, and he becomes / a man who has truly conquered his senses. The man who is well-taught and expert in this text / pays attention to religion and power; / he does not indulge himself too much in passion, / and so he succeeds when he plays the part of a lover."[207]

The verse I would like to make special attention to is when it suggests "guarding one's *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* as it operates in the world and he becomes a man who has truly conquered his sense." It is broadening the meaning of celibacy because conquering one's senses is the prime aim of a celibate. Also, one of the purposes of these texts on *dharma* (the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*) is to suggest how an ideal society should operate. And in that ideal society, human desires can't go unrestricted. Why can desire not go unrestricted in society? Where is the line when love becomes lust and needs to be controlled

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[204] Ibid., 1.26.
[205] KS 1.2.41.
[206] Ibid., 1.2.37-38.
[207] Ibid., 7.2.57-59.

like anger? Is it necessary to control the desire for the formation and functioning of a society or civilization? Does living a chained and controlled life create discontent in our life? Or, is it necessary for collective happiness and even sometimes for individual happiness? One possible answer; or better to say perspective related to these questions, I found in the writing of Sigmund Freud. *Kama* (desire) may be a basic instinct or natural force but it functions within society and society has some rules.

The title of the book, *Civilization and its discontents* (published in 1930) itself suggests that there is a kind of dissatisfaction with civilization. We are not happy with it. The root cause of this discontent lies in the difference between our desire/ purpose of our life and the nature of civilization (the way it has been developed) and its demands. Freud wrote that "there may be particular features in the development of the individual that are not matched in the process of civilization; the former need coincide with the latter only in so far as its aim is to incorporate the individual into the community."[208] The book tries to address our hostility to civilization.

What does the word 'civilization mean? According to Freud, "the word 'civilization designates the sum total of those achievements and institutions that distinguish our life from that of our animal ancestors and serve the dual purpose of protecting human beings against nature and regulating their mutual relations."[209] Civilization undermines the individual happiness also. Freud proclaimed that the creation of a great civilization would be most successful if there were no need for concern with individual happiness.[210] Freud recognized two basic forces in the mind; Eros (love/life drive) and the death drive (aggression/drive for destruction). Civilization tries to control both. Both are obstacles to civilization. Also, there is an internal conflict between Love and aggression.

According to Freud, there are two kinds of love; sensual (genital need) love and aim-inhibited love or affection. He wrote that "the word 'love' denotes not only the relation between a man and a woman, whose genital needs have led them to found a family, but also the positive feelings that exist within the family between parents and children, and between siblings, though we are bound to describe the latter relation as aim-inhibited love or affection. This aim-inhibited love was in fact once a fully sensual love and it is still is in the individual's unconscious. Both fully sensual and aim-inhibited love extend outside the family

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[208] Freud, S., *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Penguin Books, London, 2004, p.100.
[209] Ibid., p.34.
[210] Ibid., p.99.

and create new bonds with people who were previously strangers."[211] In fact, aim-inhibited love played an important role in the development of civilization. It promotes community feelings. Also, it avoids some of the restrictions of genital love, such as its exclusivity. However, civilization is not very kind to sensual love. According to Freud, "the opposition between civilization and sexuality (sexual love) can be understood from the fact that sexual love is a relationship between two people, in which a third party can only be superfluous or troublesome, whereas civilization rests on relations between quite large numbers of people."[212] Thus, civilization behaves towards sexuality like a tribe or section of the population that has subjected another and started exploiting it.[213] The relation of love to civilization ceases to be unequivocal. On the one hand, love comes into conflict with the interests of civilization; on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions.[214]

Another obstacle to civilization is aggression. One of the ideal demands of a civilized society is: 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'; not that 'love thy neighbour as thy neighbour loves thee'.[215] Freud declared that "human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love, at most able to defend themselves if attacked; on the contrary, they can count a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments. Hence, their neighbour is not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to take out their aggression on him, to exploit his labour without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to take possession of his goods, to humiliate him and cause him pain, to torture and kill him. Homo homini lupus [Man is a wolf to man]."[216] Even if we bind quite large numbers of people together in love, still others are left out as targets for aggression. This fundamental hostility of human beings to one another, civilized society is constantly threatened with disintegration. This programme of civilization is opposed by man's natural aggressive drive, the hostility of each against all and all against each.[217] Freud claimed that "civilization overcomes the dangerous aggressivity of the individual, by weakening him,

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[211] Ibid., p.50.
[212] Ibid., p.56.
[213] Ibid., p.52.
[214] Ibid., p.50.
[215] Ibid., pp.57-59.
[216] Ibid., pp.60-61.
[217] Ibid., p.74.

disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him (super-ego), like a garrison in a conquered town."[218] The story of the origin of the 'sense of guilt' is part of it.

In conclusion, Freud writes, "if civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man's sexuality, but also on his aggressivity, we are in a better position to understand why it is so hard for him to feel happy in it."[219]

Sigmund Freud's understanding of society and human desire may not be wholly applicable while reading ancient normative texts. However, one can't deny the fact that people in power or the higher positions in society have always tried to control and regulate society for various purposes. One of the purposes is to maintain and protect their higher position in society. One of the ways of doing that is to write or teach or preach laws (*dharma*) in society. An ideal individual life leads to an ideal society. We can never predict or control a single human's behaviour or actions. Human behaviour might be erratic in isolation. But through these teachings of ideals or rules or laws (*dharma*), they may succeed in manipulating collective human behaviour for the smooth functioning of the society while retaining their higher positions. However, that purpose can't be achieved while being wholly selfish. One justification of their works is that if they won't do that society will fall into chaos. An illusion must be propagated that this system has something better for everyone. And that creates contradictions in the society and even within the texts' teachings. Upinder Singh in her book, *Ancient India: Culture of Contradictions*, urges the reader to think of ancient India in terms of five powerful contradictions—social inequality and universal salvation; desire and detachment; goddess worship and misogyny; violence and non-violence; and religious debate and conflict. In her words, "these powerful contradictions are not part of a dead, fossilized past. They exist even today in refracted memories of that past and in the lived realities of the present."[220]

One way of understanding this contradiction of desire and detachment is by looking at the life of *ṛiṣis* told in ancient texts; *ṛiṣis*, the epitome of detached life; *ṛiṣis* who used to practice *tapas*. Upinder Singh writes, "in fact, the relationship between *ṛiṣis* and sex was complex. On the one hand, they could burst into a terrible rage if their austerities were disturbed by seductive nymphs (this is what happened when Menakā disrupted Viśvāmitra's austerities). On the other hand, the sages provided a powerful seminal resource (literally) for

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[218] Ibid., p.77.
[219] Ibid., p.65.
[220] Singh, U., *Ancient India: Culture of Contradictions*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2021, p.xv.

procreation (ex. in the *Mahābhārata*)."[221] This contradiction can be understood from the fact that "*tapas* can refer both to the heat of desire and the heat of asceticism. Asceticism, especially of the yogic type, is often connected with celibacy and the retention of semen."[222] At one level, *tapas* is the generative power that created the universe. At another level, *tapas* is the heat experienced as sexual passion. These contradictions actually help us to understand the meaning of celibacy by placing it in a larger context of *tapas*—ascetic toil, the heat of desire, and austerities.

One meaning/translation of *tapas* is ascetic toil.[223] It had played a great role in the creation of *saṃsāra*. The creation story mentioned in the *MS* says that the self-existent lord divided his body into two. One half became a man and the other half became a woman. From that woman "the lord brought forth Virāj."[224]The story continues—"by heating himself with ascetic toil, that man, Virāj, brought forth a being by himself—know, you best of the twice-born, that I am that being, the creator of this whole world. Desiring to bring forth creatures, I heated myself with the most arduous ascetic toil and brought forth in the beginning the ten great seers…they, in turn, brought forth seven other Manus of immense energy…lightning, thunderbolts, clouds…monkeys, fish, bird, wild animals, humans…and immobile creatures of various kind."[225] The story concludes, "in this manner through ascetic toil, those noble ones brought forth at my command this whole world,- the mobile and the immobile, each creature in accordance with its activity."[226]

Another meaning of *tapas* is the heat of desire or sexual passion. *Tapas* has a close affinity with sex. This relationship is best summarised (as per my knowledge) by Roberto Calasso in his book *Ka*. He writes, "in eros a body acts upon another body, and is acted upon by another body, in the same way that in *tapas* the mind acts upon the mind and is acted upon by the mind. Sexual union, this whole made up of elements that are each both active and passive, is the activity that most closely resembles the activity of the mind. What they have in common is *tejas*, the flourishing energy, of desire and knowledge. Two fires, which may from time to time become one. We lived suspended between the two. They alternated within us. Neither could go on forever. As Sāyaṇa observed, sex and asceticism were the 'two ways'

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[221] Ibid., p.72.
[222] Ibid., p.72.
[223] See appendix I.
[224] MS 1.32.
[225] Ibid., 1.33-40.
[226] Ibid., 1.41.

that the *ṛṣi* Agastya 'cultivated'.[227] In the creation story in the *Ṛg Veda*, the sons of the self-existent god are called *mānasputras* (born-of-the-mind sons).

One another meaning/translation of *tapas* is austerity. What is austerity? The *GDh* answers that "observing chastity; speaking the truth; bathing at dawn, noon and dusk; remaining in wet clothes after the bath; sleeping on the floor; and fasting—these are the austerities."[228] According to the *BDh*, "practicing non-injury; speaking the truth; refraining from theft; bathing at dawn, noon, and dusk; obedience to elders; chastity; sleeping on the floor; wearing a single garment; and fasting—these are austerities."[229] And this *tapas* is not restricted to ascetics alone but could be practised by any individual.

Controlling desire or observing chastity means controlling all kinds of senses and organs. According to the *MS*, there are eleven kinds of organs. In which ear, skin, eyes, tongue and nostrils are called "the organs of perception".[230] Anus, sexual organ, hands, feet and speech are called "the organs of actions".[231] Mind is the eleventh organ that belongs to both categories.[232] It is through mastering the mind one can control all his organs because the mind is the organ of both perception and action. "A learned man should strive hard to control them, like a charioteer his horses."[233] Because, "of all these organs, however, if a single one slips away, through that his wisdom slips away like water through the foot of a skin. By bringing the full range of his organs under control and by restraining his mind, a man will achieve all his goals without having to shrivel up his body through yoga."[234]

We may find different rules related to different *āśramas* but some rules or observances are common for all four stages or orders. The *MS* writes, "twice-born men belonging to all these four orders (*āśramas*) must always observe the ten-point law diligently."[235] These are—resolve, forbearance, self-control, refraining from theft, performing purifications, mastering the organs, understanding, learning, truthfulness, and suppressing anger.[236] If self-control and mastering the organs are common in all four *āśramas* then in a certain amount the idea of celibacy is present throughout human existence. It is not confined

[227] Calasso, R., *Ka*, Penguin Classics, New Delhi, 2019, pp.159-160.
[228] GDh 19.15.
[229] BDh 3.10.13.
[230] MS 2.90-91
[231] Ibid., 2.90-91
[232] Ibid., 2.92.
[233] Ibid., 2.88.
[234] Ibid., 2.99-100.
[235] Ibid., 6.91.
[236] Ibid., 6.92.

to a brahmacāri or a saṃnyāsi alone. There may be a certain amount of dichotomy between householder and renouncer, but at some level they have something common to share—a self-controlled celibate life. Allow me to repeat that line from the *MS* where it says, "regardless of the order of life (*āśramas*) in which a man lives, if he avoids women during the forbidden nights during the other eight nights, he becomes a true celibate."[237]

In a way, a celibate life becomes an entry point of the *dharma* in all parts of human life.[238] A celibate life is a spiritual life. For spiritual growth in life, at one level, following celibacy is a must. It is a controlled and disciplined life. A celibate man is a reflective person and is different from the executive man. He believes that happiness doesn't come by conquering the world but by conquering himself. His life is a protest against overindulgence in worldly pleasures. Indeed, celibacy is a middle path of overindulgence and over-negation. It is not a synonym of renunciation which represents a kind of negation of the world but acceptance of the world according to the *dharma*. In fact, celibate life is the meeting ground for the householder's and renouncer's life, because they both are living their life in conformity with *dharma*. The true nature of *dharma* lies in the fact that it saves humans from getting lost in worldly affairs and reminds them of the ultimate goal of human life, i.e., *mokṣa*.

These messages of the ideals of a celibate life may sound universal. However, the exclusion of *śūdras* and women from all these affairs of the *āśrama* system underlines the hegemonic character of this whole enterprise which will be explored in detail in the next chapter. Yet, one question remained unaddressed in this chapter. Is *kāma* (desire/pleasure) really controllable? Kāmadeva is sometimes also called *smara*. *Smara* literally means memory. He evokes desire through memory. And it is because of those "sweet" memories one return to seek pleasure again and again. It may be possible that pleasure leaves no memory and that is why we pursue it again and again. One may claim that he is free from desire but no one can say that he is free from memory. *Kāma* is a riddle that can't be solved. It is a matter of experience and our invented alphabets can't express it. No act is free from desire (*kāma*) and one can find pleasure (*kāma*) in any kind of activity or on denying every activity.

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[237] Ibid., 3.50.
[238] See appendix II.

Chapter Three

Exclusion, Hegemony and the *Āśrama* System

Exclusions: Śūdras and Women

The *āśrama* system was meant for men of the first three *varṇas*. The śūdras has no place in this whole affair. He has no right of initiation and studying or listening to the Vedas. His path for *mokṣa* is not asceticism too. In the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*, the discussion of śūdras comes in relation to the upper *varṇas*; either, how they should treat śūdras or as a warning that if they will not follow the prescribed *dharma* then they will fall into the category of śūdras. There are very few independent discussions related to śūdras in these texts.

The *ĀpDh* says, "śūdras are to serve the other classes; the higher the class they serve, the greater their prosperity."[239] The general rule for śūdras, according to the *MS*, "leading to bliss is simply to render obedient service to distinguished brahmin householders who are learned in the Veda. When he keeps himself pure, obediently serves the highest class, is soft-spoken and humble, and always takes refuge in brahmins, he obtains a higher birth."[240]

He should earn living by serving people of the upper *varṇas*. However, "the service of a brahmin alone is declared to be the pre-eminent activity of a śūdra, for whatever other work he may do brings him no reward."[241] Even, his *tapas* (ascetic toil) is service of the upper *varṇas*.[242] At the time of adversity, he may earn his living by working as an artisan but should pursue those artisanal activities "which best serves the twice-born."[243] But, "even a capable śūdra must not accumulate wealth; for when a śūdra becomes wealthy, he harasses brahmins."[244]

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[239] ĀpDh 1.1.7-8.
[240] MS 9.334.
[241] Ibid., 10.123.
[242] Ibid., 11.236.
[243] Ibid., 10.100.
[244] Ibid., 10129.

However, in the case of women of the first three *varṇas*, they at least take part in their husband's householder's stage. Yet, "uninitiated and barred from studying the Veda, women are only marginally superior to śūdras."[245]

Women were excluded from the *āśrama* system because of two reasons. First, they were excluded from both initiation and Vedic study, at least from the period of the classical formulation of the *āśrama* system. The *MS* testifies to this. In the name of initiation this is what prescribed for women—"for females, on the other hand, this entire series should be performed at the proper time and in the proper sequence, but without reciting any Vedic formula, for the purpose of consecrating their bodies."[246] Also, "for females, tradition tells us, the marriage ceremony equals the rite of Vedic consecration; serving the husband equals living with the teacher; and care of the house equals the tending of the sacred fires."[247] In all, a woman's social and religious life was supposed to be centred on her husband.

Second, Patrick Olivelle has rightly observed that "with the exception of widowhood and pre-pubertal childhood, Brahmanical theology does not recognize any celibate state for women."[248] So, they don't fit in the latter two celibate *āśramas* (*vānaprastha,* and *saṁnyāsa*) independently. Even a man is not obliged to take his wife with him either in the hermit or wanderer ascetic stage. He may leave his wife behind under his sons. Although, we may find references to female ascetics, that was not the ideal behaviour recommended by the *Dhrmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*.

I am not going into the details of 'the position of women in ancient India'. Historians have worked on this aspect in a very detailed manner and it will not be possible for me to bring all those discussions here. However, I would like to discuss some of the laws concerning husband and wife in particular and women in general, prescribed in the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*.

In general, women's lack of independence got invoked twice in the *MS* (5.147-9, 9.3). In the first instance, her lack of independence is justified in terms of protecting the family honour. Manu says, "even in their homes, a female—whether she is a child, a young woman

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[245] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.184.
[246] MS 2.66.
[247] Ibid., 2.67.
[248] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 186.

or an old lady—should never carry out any task independently. As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She must never want to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; for by separating herself from them, a woman brings disgrace on both families."[249] In the second instance, her lack of independence is justified in order to control her overflowing sexuality. Manu says, "day and night men should keep their women from acting independently; for, attached as they are to sensual pleasures, men should keep them under their control. Her father guards her (sexuality) in her childhood, her husband guards her (sexuality) in her youth, and her sons guard her (sexuality) in her old age; a woman is not qualified to act independently."[250] Also, "a father is reprehensible, if he does not give her away at the proper time; a husband, if he does not have sex with her at the right time; and a son, if he fails to guard his mother ('s sexuality) when her husband is dead."[251] Similar statements related to the lack of independence as far as women are concerned are found in the *VaDh*.[252]

The text is very clear in its intent. However, one may read these lines in another way too. According to Chandrakala Padia, "*not fit to be independent*; these words I take to mean: not physically fit to be independent, or to be left alone—unprotected. Those who regard a woman as integral to their life and emotional well-being—namely, the father, husband, or her sons—they have to look after her. Her ability and character are not doubted here in any way. Alternatively, it would make little sense to say that because of some inherent defect in abilities, a woman needs the physical protection of those who are immediately close to her. A non-physical disability does not need physical protection. On the other hand, because of relative physical weakness, most of our women need physical protection even today."[253]

In these texts, women's social position is defined in terms of mother, wife and widow. In all these three, her social position as a mother is the highest one, under her son. However, there are three things that cause women to fall from their caste: "killing a husband, murdering a brahmin, and getting an abortion."[254]

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[249] MS 5.147-149.
[250] Ibid., 9.2-3.
[251] Ibid., 9.4.
[252] VaDh 5.1-3.
[253] Padia, C., 'Feminism, Tradition and Modernity: An Essay in relation to *Manusmṛti*.' In Chandrakala Padia (ed.), *Feminism, Tradition and Modernity*, IIAS, Shimla, 2002, pp.242-243.
[254] VaDh 23.7.

The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* says:

"A mother does countless things to bring about male progeny. So, even if she has fallen from her caste, he must always serve her, but not let her participate in any of his religious activities."[255]

The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* says:

"The teacher is the foremost of his elders; according to some, the mother."[256]

The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* says:

"Even if she has become an outcaste, however, a man should support his own mother, but without speaking with her."[257]

The *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* says:

"Now, they also quote: 'a teacher is ten times more eminent than a tutor; a father is a hundred times more eminent than a teacher; and a mother is a thousand times more eminent than a father."[258]

Her social position as a wife gives a sign of control and being faithful to one relationship by defining her role, or confining her role around her husband. Women's role in household life is centred on fulfilling her duties towards her husband. Whether her husband is alive or dead she is supposed to be always faithful and dedicated to him. She also plays an important role in enabling a man to fulfil his duties in the *gṛhastha āśrama.* Let's see some laws concerning husband and wife.

According to the *MS*, "fidelity to each other should be observed until death—this should be recognized as the highest law between husband and wife in a nutshell."[259] It may create an illusion of equality because, in reality, a husband's prime task is to guard his wife. And that can't be done always by force. Manu acknowledges this fact. Therefore, the text mentions several strategies to guard one's wife without using force. Manu suggests, "he should employ her in the collection and the disbursement of his wealth, in cleaning, in

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[255] ĀpDh 1.28.9-10.
[256] GDh 2.50-51.
[257] BDh 2.3.42.
[258] VaDh 13.48.
[259] MS 9.101.

meritorious activity, in cooking food, and in looking after household goods."[260] Because, "when they are kept confined within the house by trusted men, they are not truly guarded; only when they guard themselves by themselves are they truly well guarded."[261]

The definition of a good woman in Manu's view is—"a woman who controls her mind, speech, and body and is never unfaithful to her husband attains the worlds of her husband, and virtuous people call her a 'good woman'."[262]

Her social position as a widow depends on her chaste life with the exception of the levirate union. However, there is an internal debate in these texts regarding the process and validity of such a relationship. After her husband is dead, she must never mention even the name of another man. In the case of a widow, celibacy becomes not a matter of choice but compulsion. In other words, celibacy is imposed on a widow. She should remain patient, controlled and celibate until her death.[263] Here one question arises that what if the husband dies at a young age and she remains sonless. Dealing with this case, Manu suggests that even in that case the woman should be celibate and compares her journey to heaven after death with the celibate Brahmins. He writes that "untold thousands of Brahmins who have remained celibate from their youth have gone to heaven without producing offspring to continue their family line; just like these celibates, a good woman, though she is sonless, will go to heaven when she steadfastly adheres to the celibate life after her husband's death."[264]

Uma Chakravarti in her article, 'Gender, Caste and Labour: Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood,' has conceptualized the idea and the practice of widowhood created by Brahmanical patriarchy. She has focussed mainly on the upper-caste widows. This article explores the relationship between gender, caste and labour in the context of widowhood.

She has argued that once the woman becomes a widow, this is equivalent to her social death. After the death of her husband the woman gets marginalized in her both natal and marital family alike. The Brahmanical texts and rituals play an important role in doing this. The Brahmanical patriarchal society retains a widow in society "but places her on its margins and then institutionalized her marginality."[265] She was deprived of her sexuality. She was

[260] Ibid., 9.11.
[261] Ibid., 9.12.
[262] Ibid., 9.29.
[263] Ibid., 5.158.
[264] Ibid., 5. 159-160.
[265] Chakravarti, U., *Everyday Lives, Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of 'Ancient' India*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, p.157.

expelled from the normal participation in the community as she could not prevent the death of her husband. Her very sight was regarded as inauspicious and thus shared a sense of becoming an outcaste.

Symbolic ideas related to widowhood were exhibited in rituals. One of the most humiliating and traumatic rituals is the tonsure of her head. Usually, the widow (upper- caste or brahmin) of south and western India had to tonsure her head. This tonsure was not for a single time, but it had to be followed till her death. The underlying motto of this ritual is to make the widow sexless as there is an overwhelming preoccupation with the profound danger represented by the sexuality of the widow. The sexual control of a widow (the upper-caste) leads to her social death. The upper caste was woman primarily engaged in reproduction which defines her status in the household. Being a widow she is marginalized and obliged to control her sexuality which causes her sexual and social death.

In order to explain the attitude of Brahmanical patriarchy towards the upper-caste widow one has to look at the position of the wife in the household. The wife plays a central role in Brahmanical patriarchal social production. She is the most important among the different categories of women found in the prescriptive texts. She is the one who helps her husband in procreation to get progeny. She helps her husband in performing *yajñas* to get ritual merits. The goal of the life of the women was according to Brahmanical texts to get married and procreate sons. In fact, "marriage is the only ritual prescribed for the woman."[266] These texts dealing with the marriage rituals solely focussed on the rituals that helped in procreation. *Haldi* ceremony, red *kumkum* or *sindoor*, the red dress of bride all have hidden meaning related to procreation and sexual energy.

It is also evident that the sexual energy of women was considered wild and uncontrollable. Marriage was the rite through which this wild energy of woman was channelized in an organized system of production. There are many references about how a wife should behave in the presence and absence of her husband. The ideal wife that is the *pativratā* and her roles are elaborately discussed in the Brahmanical texts. Chakravarti writes that "the ideal type of women in these texts is one who is imbued with the qualities of a *satī*. She is a women whose chastity makes her a living *satī* and gives her the power to ensure that

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[266] Ibid., p.159.

she dies before her husband. Alternatively, if her husband dies before her, she has the power and will to accompany him in death as a *satī* and thereby reject widowhood."[267]

This shows why the widow was seen as inauspicious for family and society in a patriarchal structure. Thus widows were themselves regarded as the cause of their widowhood and had to do redemption for this. Through bodily mortification and steadfast devotion to her departed lord, she must stringently monitor her sexuality and master the promiscuity that inheres in all women.

After the death of the husband the sexuality of the wife is of no use and caused a great panic for the patriarch who had to manage the sexuality of widow. The best way to manage or control the sexuality of a widow was to completely de-sex her. However, there was the practice of *niyoga* or levirate unions. This practise survived through the first millennium CE. This practice was for or till the birth of a son. Widows were forced to lead a celibate life or the life of an ascetic. However, her celibacy and ascetic life were followed within the home. She could not leave home like the men ascetic. There was a constant fear among upper-caste men about the mating of high caste women with low caste men. This could have caused the loss of caste and ritual purity of women. Also, this could have had weakened their hierarchical order of society based on caste and gender.

Chakravarti shows that "widowhood in non-Brahmanical society is not marked by the kind of dramatic break in the life of a woman as in high- caste society"[268] Among the lower castes widowhood can be seen along with the production and reproduction. Lower caste women could be married or remarried as long as she was able to produce and reproduce. In other words, she has a certain authority and choice in case of her sexuality. She contributes to the family with her labour and reproductive capacity. The elaborate rituals of upper-caste women like those of tonsuring head and leading an ascetic life are not followed by them. Widow re-marriage is a common practice among them. This is one of the reasons why they are considered as impure within Brahmanical ideology. However, lower castes were expected to conform to this practice as this maintained the caste hierarchy and also created a labour force to work for high-caste people. However, "this is not the recognition of the sexual needs

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[267] Ibid., p.162.
[268] Ibid., p.172.

of widows, but an arrangement to utilize the productive and reproductive labour of widows."[269]

The condition of the lower- caste widow is not always good or better than that of the upper-caste widow. In some of the lower caste communities in the name re-marriage or re-habitation of widows, they are forced to cohabit with unequal partners. They may be sold by their in-laws. It shows that the widows of all castes were oppressed in terms of the patriarchal structure. Different kinds of patriarchies have different kinds of rules and regulations to exploit widows.

The Brahmanical Hegemony and the Āśrama system

Suvira Jaiswal in her book, *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaiṣṇava Theology*, argues that the creation of Brahmanical hegemony happened "through the institutions of caste, gender and religious ideology."[270] She writes, "the concept of hegemony implies domination—which may be achieved not only through force, although the role of violence cannot be underplayed. However, in the long-term suppression of the oppressed, the impact of economic and socio-cultural factors too has been taken into consideration, particularly if these take the form of a religious ideology. It is necessary to investigate the role of its agents and the material environment in which they operate…in the making of Brahmanic hegemony, religion and mythology have played an important role in reducing the potency of counter-hegemonic forces and in providing an important means of communication with the subaltern, creating social ties between the dominant and the depressed."[271] Adding to the list, the *āśrama* system has also played an important role in the making of Brahmanical hegemony.

In the field of social sciences, the concept of 'hegemony' was made popular by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Before him, the concept of hegemony was used to define "political rule or domination, especially in relations between states."[272] But after Gramsci's writings, hegemony means the domination of that system that operates with 'consent'; or domination that gets established without inflicting open violence. It uses subtle ways, like education, social etiquette, media, advertisement, welfare schemes, etc., to 'manufacture

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[269] Ibid., p.174.

[270] Jaiswal, S., *The Making of Brahmanic Hegemony: Studies in Caste, Gender and Vaiṣṇava Theology*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2016, p.2.

[271] Ibid., p.2-5.

[272] Williams, R., *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977, p. 108.

consent' in society to establish or maintain its domination. Hegemony is derived in English from the Greek word *hēgemonia*, which means leader, guide or ruler. Here, I am not going to discuss the history of this concept or the debates around it. I will stick to the basic tenets of this concept and how it helps us to understand the hegemonic character of the *āśrama* system.

Hegemony as a concept at once includes and goes beyond the concepts like culture and ideology. Here, culture means "a whole social process in which men define and shape their whole lives."[273] And ideology means "in any of its Marxist sense, in which a system of meaning and values is the expression or projection of a particular class interest."[274]

Hegemony goes beyond culture "in its insistence on relating the 'whole social process' to specific distributions of power and influence."[275] Explaining this Raymond Williams writes, "To say that 'men' define and shape their whole lives is true only in abstraction. In any actual society there are specific inequalities in means and therefore in capacity to realize this process. In a class society these are primarily inequalities between classes. Gramsci therefore introduced the necessary recognition of dominance and subordination in what has still, however, to be recognized as a whole process."[276] And it is this recognition of the "wholeness of the process" that the concept of hegemony goes beyond ideology.[277] Also, hegemony is not ideology. An ideology can be forcefully implemented but not hegemony. Being ideological is just an aspect of hegemony which if need may be take the form of economic and political too.

However, according to Williams, hegemony is not something that is once achieved as a finished product. It is a process that demands constant efforts to maintain it. It often gets challenged by counter-hegemonic forces and the dominant group has to always renew their policies or rules after those interactions.[278] He writes that "the dominant culture, so to say, at once produces and limits its own forms of counter culture."[279] It defines the parameters of protest. What hegemony does is that it makes the hegemonic system seems natural. And for those who don't consider it natural and register their dissent, the system can punish them and for that punishment, there is people's consent too.

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[273] Ibid., 108.
[274] Ibid., 108.
[275] Ibid., 108.
[276] Ibid., 108.
[277] Ibid., 109.
[278] Ibid., 114.
[279] Ibid., 114.

An ideal, in any form, cerates hegemony in society. The *āśrama* system is one such ideal propagated in Brahmanical texts that is hegemonic in its nature. The hegemonic character of the *āśrama* system can be understood if we see it in the totality of the Brahmanical *dharma*, ie., *varṇāśramadharma*. The position or role of śūdras and women in the *varṇa* system and the *āśrama* system is well discussed. But, to maintain the domination and the cultural superiority of the first three *varṇas* and at the same time expecting respect for that demands effort (D. D. Kosambi had also point out those efforts). In the *āśrama* system, one's way of living life becomes a tool to propagate the Brahmanical hegemony. One cannot simply get respect (throughout his life) just because he is born in the higher *varṇa*, he will have to live an exemplary life or a life according to *dharma*. And the *āśrama* system was meant to serve that purpose. It not only protected the *varṇa* order (as I have argued in the first chapter) but also made sure that people who were following the *āśrama* system would be revered in society. Even in the modern age, the praise we listen to or read about the *āśrama* system, although knowing the exclusionary provisions of this system, testify this. Brahmanism is not simply an ideology but hegemonic because its survival never depended only on power or force. Brahmanism does not force itself in society; it creates consent for itself, by showing that in his interest lies everyone's interest.

At the centre of this hegemonic ideal life is a self-controlled celibate life. But why should one live that kind of restrained life? The answer we may find in the fruits of actions (*karma*) or in the action that lead to the supreme good. It is also linked with sins and rebirth. This following discussion is primarily based on the last chapter of the *MS*.

Action produces good and bad results. There are three sources of action—the mind, speech and the body. "Action produces the human conditions—the highest, the middling, and the lowest."[280] There are three kinds of faulty mental actions—"coveting the property of others, reflecting on undesirable things in one's mind and adhering to false doctrines."[281] There are four kinds of faulty verbal actions—"harshness, falsehood, slander of every sort, and idle chatter."[282] There are three kinds of faulty bodily actions—taking what has not been given, unsanctioned killing, and sex with another's wife."[283] The result of faulty mental actions is—"he becomes a man of the lowest caste."[284] The result of faulty verbal actions is—

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[280] MS 12.3.
[281] Ibid., 12.5.
[282] Ibid., 12.6.
[283] Ibid., 12.7.
[284] Ibid., 12.9.

"he becomes a bird or an animal."[285] The result of faulty bodily actions is—"a man becomes a immobile creature."[286]

Therefore, one needs to check all these. Manu suggests, "the rod of speech, the rod of mind, and the rod of action—a man in whose intellect these are kept under control is said to be triple rodded. When a man has laid down these rods with respect to all creatures and brought lust and anger under control, he thereby secures success."[287]

And then comes into the discussion about the three attributes of the body—*satva* (Goodness), *rajas* (Vigor) and *tamas* (Darkness). These three attributes bring the highest, the middling and the lowest fruits. According to the *MS*, "Goodness is knowledge; Darkness is ignorance; and Vigor is passion and hatred."[288]

The attributes of Goodness are—"Vedic recitation, ascetic toil, knowledge, purification, the control of the organs, righteous activity, and contemplation of the self."[289] The attributes of Vigor are—"delight in undertaking activities, resolve, taking up improper tasks, and constant indulgence in sensual pleasures."[290] The attributes of Darkness are— "greed, sloth, lack of resolve, cruelty, infidelity, deviation from proper conduct, habitual begging, and carelessness."[291] And the fruits of these actions are—"those who possess Goodness become gods; those who possess Vigor become humans; and those who possess Darkness always become animals."[292] There are three categories of animals and śūdras are part of the middle category of animals. According to the text, "elephants, horses, śūdras, despised foreigners, lions, tigers, and boars—these constitutes the middle course related to darkness."[293]

While talking about all these philosophical things about life, the text does not forget to remind its reader about the respective *dharma* according to one's *varṇa*. It says, "when people belonging to the social classes deviate from their respective occupations outside a time of adversity, they go through evil cyclical existences and end up as servants of the Dasyu people. When a brahmin deviates, he will become an Ulkāmukha ghost eating vomit; a

[285] Ibid., 12.9.
[286] Ibid., 12.9.
[287] Ibid., 12.10-11.
[288] Ibid., 12.26.
[289] Ibid., 12.31.
[290] Ibid., 12.32.
[291] Ibid., 12.33.
[292] Ibid., 12.40.
[293] Ibid., 12.43.

kṣatriya will become a Kaṭapūtana ghost eating filth and corpses; a vaiśya will become a Maitrākṣajyotika ghost feeding on pus; and śūdra who deviates from the law proper to him will become a Cailāśaka ghost."[294]

At one place the text declares that "pleasure is said to be the mark of Darkness."[295]Therefore, pleasure should be the least sought-after thing in a human's life. According to the *MS*, "vile and ignorant men attain evil transmigratory paths by their attachment to the senses and by their failure to follow the law."[296] The text warns that "the more that people addicted to sensual pleasures indulge in sensual pleasures, the more their proclivity to them grows. By repeatedly engaging in these sinful actions, these men of little understanding undergo torments here in various births."[297]

These teachings were supposed to be followed by learned people because that makes him best among them. As Manu puts it, "those who rely on books are better than the ignorant; those who carry them in their memory are better than those who simply rely on books; those who understand are better than those who simply carry them in their memory; and those who resolutely follow them are better than those who only understand."[298]

The text also discusses rules of actions exclusively for a brahmin that secure the supreme good. According to the *MS*, "Vedic recitation, ascetic toil, knowledge, controlling the senses, refraining from causing injury, and service of the teacher—these are the highest means of securing the supreme good… for a brahmin, ascetic toil and knowledge are the highest means of securing the supreme good; by ascetic toil he destroys impurity and by knowledge he attains immortality."[299]

The *MS* ends with this—"when a twice-born recites this treatise of Manu proclaimed by Bhṛgu, he will always follow the proper conduct and obtain whatever state he desires."[300] The second last statement of the text is that "when a man thus sees by the self all beings as the self, he becomes equal towards all and reaches Brahman, the highest state."[301] There are

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[294] Ibid., 12.70-72.
[295] Ibid., 12.38.
[296] Ibid., 12.52.
[297] Ibid., 12.73-74.
[298] Ibid., 12.103.
[299] Ibid., 12.83, 104.
[300] Ibid., 12.126.
[301] Ibid., 12.125.

similar statements in the text too.[302] This statement may remind us of the Upaniṣadic doctrine of Brahman; the ultimate equality of all beings. One of the issues while reading the Brahmanical texts on dharma is that some of the teachings of these texts seem universal but at the same time the text itself reminds us of the discrimination based on caste and gender. And it is a contradiction within Brahmanism. I would like to end this chapter with two views dealing with this contradiction. What Kane saw as an important characteristic of Hinduism, Ambedkar saw as a riddle in Hinduism.[303]

There is an Upaniṣadic doctrine that the individual self is non-different from the one essence. Explaining that Kane wrote, "the highest truth (*pāramārthikasatya*) is that Brahman is one, that everything in this world (men, animals, inorganic matter) is Brahman ('*sarvam khalvidam brahma*' Chān Up. III.14.1, '*aham brahmāsmīti tasmāt tatsarvam-abhavat*'Br. Up. I.4.10)).[304] In the words of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (III.2.8), "just as rivers flowing (towards the ocean) become merged in the ocean after giving up their names and forms, so the man who realizes (knows), being free from name and forms, attains the divine Person that is higher than the highest."[305] Kane considered "this Vedānta doctrine is one of the most characteristic features of Hinduism and is India's greatest contribution to the spiritual development of man…. one in the many and many in one"[306]

Ambedkar discussed the same theme in the riddle no. 22, under the title, 'Brahma is not Dharma: what good is Brahma (Brahman)?' He called that Upaniṣadic doctrine, the doctrine of Brahmaism. According to him, the essence of Brahmaism is summed in these three Mahāvākyas or the great sayings: "(i) '*Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma*'—All this is Brahma, (ii) *Aham Brahmāsmi*'—Ātman (self) is the same as Brahma. Therefore I am the Brahma, (iii) 'tattvamasi'—Ātman (self) is the same as Brahma. Therefore thou art also Brahma."[307] Ambedkar saw this doctrine of Brahmaism as something which has great value as a foundation of democracy. He wrote that "if all persons are parts of Brahma then all are equal and all must enjoy the same liberty, which is what democracy means. Looked at from this point of view, Brahma may be unknowable. But there cannot be the slightest doubt that

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[302] Ibid., 12.85, 91.

[303] There may be a debate around using the term Hinduism while dealing with the sources of that period.

[304] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. V, Part-II), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, pp.1498-99.

[305] Ibid., p.1625.

[306] Ibid., p.1625.

[307] Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, p.173.

no doctrine could furnish a stronger foundation for democracy than the doctrine of Brahma."[308] Ambedkar then asked some important questions. "The question is what happened to this doctrine of Brahmaism? Why then did Brahmaism fail to produce a new society? This is a great riddle."[309]

The answer we get from Kane's work is that that there is a difference between mere knowledge of Brahman and realization of Brahman. This highest metaphysical realization of Brahman can be achieved by very few.[310] It is open to all but at the same time entry is restricted to the few; the inability of someone to know Brahman. Ambedkar also discussed this point.[311]But what he adds to this discussion is noteworthy. He wrote, "it is not that the brahmins did not recognize the doctrine of Brahmaism. They did. But they did not ask how they could support inequality between the Brahman and the śūdra, between man and woman, between casteman and outcaste. The result is that we have on the one hand the most democratic principle of Brahmaism and on the other hand a society infested with castes, subcastes, outcastes, primitive tribes and criminal tribes. Can there be a greater dilemma than this?"[312]

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[308] Ibid., p.177.

[309] Ibid., p.178.

[310] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. V, Part-II), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, pp.1508-14.

[311] Ambedkar, B. R., *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses: the Annotated Critical Selection*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2018, pp.175-76.

[312] Ibid., pp.178-79.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to address two interconnected questions. First, do we get historical evidences of the followers of the *āśrama* system? Second, since these texts are normative in nature, were their teachings actually followed in ancient India? In other words, I would discuss the link between normative texts (such as the *Dharmasūtras* and the *Dharmaśāstras*) and the social life of India.

The *āśrama* system is a part of Brahmanical theology. This social system was expressed in Brahmanical texts. So, we should acknowledge the limitation of its outreach. As Olivelle argues that the 'Brahmanical ideology' does not represent "an accurate historical description of ancient Indian society."[313] However, we cannot deny the fact that the 'Brahmanical ideology' represents the view of the learned upper class of ancient Indian society which was supposed to be ideal.

The very essence of the Brahmanical *dharma* was often defined as *varṇāśramadharma* which was interpreted by brahmins and supposed to be preserved and enforced by the king. A. L. Basham writes that "the implication of this phrase is that Dharma is not the same for all."[314] The *dharma* of the men of the upper *varṇa* is not the same as that of the lower *varṇa*. For instance, the first *āśrama* is the period of studenthood. Now the same text which talks about the *āśrama* system restricts the Vedic initiation and study to males belonging to the first three *varṇas*.

The relationship between *varṇas* and *āśramas* is explicitly discussed in the *Vaikhānasa Dharmasūtra*. The text declares that "(All) four *āśramas* are meant for a brahmin, the first three for a kṣatriya, and just two for a vaiśya."[315] Explaining this, Olivelle writes, " two important points are made here: the rule, on the one hand, restricts renunciation to brahmins, and, on the other, excludes vaiśyas from both the ascetical institutions

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[313] Olivelle, P., 'Ashoka's Writings: New Insights into Ancient Indian Cultural History', in Kumkum Roy and Naina Dayal (eds.), *Questioning Paradigms, Constructing Histories: A Festschrift for Romila Thapar*, Alpeh Book Company, New Delhi, p.16.

[314] Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1954, p.137.

[315] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.191.

comprehended by the final two *āśramas*."[316] Here also, there is no mentioning of the śūdra *varṇa*. We find another reference to the relationship between *varṇas* and *āśramas* in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. It states that "undertaking the four *āśramas* is enjoined by only on brahmins."[317] In the next chapter the text distributes the *āśramas* among the *varṇas*— "brahmin: Householder, Hermit, Student, Renouncer; kṣatriya: Householder, Hermit, Student; vaiśya: Househlder, Hermit; śūdra: Householder."[318] It also suggests the degraded status of vaiśyas in the later periods.

Women were also excluded from the *āśrama* system. Serving the husband is prescribed as the highest *dharma* for a woman. Women were supposed to participate with their husbands in religious activities in the householder stage. There are references where women accompanied their husbands in the hermit stage. But the formulation of the *āśrama* system was meant only for men (twice-born men). There are literary references to both female renouncers and female hermits. Sulabhā and Ambā in the *Mahābhārata*; Śabarī in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; Gārgī in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* are some of the examples where a woman renounced the world and lived a celibate life, but "such independent and celibate modes of life for women never came to be integrated into the *āśrama* system."[319]

We have no satisfactory data to tell what percentage of persons followed the ideal ofd the four *āśramas*. What we find is the references to the literary and historical evidences where a person is mentioned as following the *āśrama* system. "Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhisthira are represented in the *Mahābhārata* as having retired from active life and became *vānaprasthas* and *saṁnyāsins*; the same was the case with the father-in-law of Sāvitrī. Kālidāsa refers to the king Raghu taking *saṁnyāsa* after handling over the reign of the government to his son. In terms of historical cases, for the Rashṭrakūta dynasty, we find the case of Amoghavarsha I (814-879 A.D.) retiring into renunciation towards the end of his life. In the Chandella dynasty kings Ḍhanga (954-1002 A.D.) and Jayavarman (c. 1117 A.D.) are known to have done the same."[320]

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[316] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 191.

[317] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 192.

[318] Ibid., p.192.

[319] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 190.

[320] Altekar, A. S., 'The Ashrama System'. *Professor Ghurye Felicitation Volume*, Popular Book Depot, Bombay, 1954, p. 193.

The link between the normative texts and social life of India is well discussed by several historians. According to P. V. Kane, "*Smṛtis* mirrored the beliefs and practices of people and also influences writers and ordinary people."[321] He gives examples for this: "the *Raghuvaṁśa* states that the subjects of Dilipa did not swerve in the least from the beaten path laid down from the days of Manu. In *Raghuvaṁśa*, Kālidāsa says that Manu laid down that the *dharma* of a king was to safeguard *varṇas* and āśramas. The drama *Mṛcchakaṭika* shows that a brahmin guilty of murder was not to be sentenced to death and the judge refers to the dictum of Manu to that effect."[322] Kane also refers to some inscriptional evidences that refer to *Smṛtis*, "particularly to the *Smṛti* of Manu."[323]

Patrick Olivelle in the introduction to his English translation of the *Manusmṛti* has discussed this issue under the question: "what is the connection between *śāstra* and practice"? And he concludes that the *MS* "was clearly not a 'how to' book; it was neither a *Handbook of manners* nor a *Law Code*, although it contains aspects of both. Its connection with lived reality was not immediate but mediate."[324]He identifies two aspects of this mediation. "First, a central *śāstra* such as this would have been used in the instruction of budding scholars, principally young brahmins; it must have been part of the standard curriculum for aspiring *dharmapāṭhakas* in Brahmanical colleges such as *ghaṭikāsthānas* in southern India."[325] One may see that this training in the *Dharmaśāstra* helped brahmins to get selected as judges, lawyers and arbiters, at least during the colonial period. "Second, it was a point of reference for the ongoing scholarly conversations, debates, and literary production in the field of *Dharmaśāstra*. Some of these debates and interpretations may indeed sound panditic pedantry. But they also had a serious and often practical purpose. After all, many of the medieval Nibaṇdhas and commentaries were commissioned by kings and others were carried out under royal patronage."[326]

One related aspect of this link is whether rules come before practice or practice before rules? There is no clear-cut answer to this or maybe both would have happened. However, what these sources of laws (*dharma*) did/does is that they give legitimacy to an act that may

[321] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmasastra (Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India)*, Vol. 1 (Part 1), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, Reprint 2019, p.302.
[322] Ibid., p.302.
[323] Ibid., p.301.
[324] Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 66.
[325] Ibid., 66.
[326] Ibid., 66.

get performed in the name of *dharma*. And it is in this context that they remain relevant in society. They set or talk of an ideal for society and ideals have hegemonic characteristics.

In the first chapter, I have tried to argue that the classical *āśrama* system developed as a system to guard the *varṇa* order. And it further gets explored in the third chapter while understanding the hegemonic character of the *āśrama* system. One of the aspects of that argument lies in the frequent reference to Hinduism as *varṇāśramadharma*. Patrick Olivelle in his book, *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, quotes G.S. Ghurye in the very first paragraph of his book stating that "*Varṇāśramadharma*, duties of castes and *āśramas*, is almost another name for Hinduism."[327] And it became the king's royal duty to protect it. After going through the passages of different ancient Sanskrit texts, P. V. Kane in the chapter titled 'Duties and Responsibilities of the Ruler,' writes that "the principal duties of the king were conceived to be to protect the subjects, to see that the rules of *varṇas* and *āśramas* were carried out by them, to punish the wicked and to do justice."[328]

According to Olivelle, "when *āśrama* is coupled with *varṇa* to represent the totality of *dharma*, the essence of royal duty came to be encapsulated in 'the protection of *varṇas* and *āśramas*,' an expression that became a cliché when poets and panegyrists sang the virtues of a king."[329] The earliest recorded description of the king's duty is mentioned in the *GDh*.[330] The *Gdh* says, "he (king) should watch over the social classes (*varṇas*) and the orders of life (*āśramas*) in conformity with their rules, and those who stray he should guide back to their respective duties."[331] According to Manu, the formulator of the classical *āśrama* system, "the king was created as the protector of people belonging to all social classes and orders of life who, according to their rank, are devoted to the law specific to them."[332] The famous text on the statecraft, the *Arthaśāstra* (*AŚ*) (fourth/third centuries BCE to second century CE) ascribed to Kauṭilya lays emphasis on the king's duty to keep the *varṇas* and *āśramas* to their duties. According to Kauṭilya, the laws specific to the four orders (*āśramas*) of life are:

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[327] As cited in Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 3.
[328] Kane, P.V., *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Vol. III), Third Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, 2007, p. 57.
[329] Olivelle, P., *The Āśrama system: The history and hermeneutics of a religious institution*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p.202.
[330] Ibid., p.202.
[331] GDh 11.9-10.
[332] MS 7.35.

"The specific Law of a householder consists of obtaining his livelihood in accordance with the Law specific to him, establishing matrimonial relations with persons of equal class but of different lineages, having sexual relations with his wife during her season, venerating gods, ancestors, and guests, generosity toward servants, and eating what is left over.

That of a Vedic student consists of Vedic recitation, tending the fire, ablution, the practice of subsisting on almsfood, and living until death with his teacher−or, in his absence, with his teacher's son or with a fellow student.

That of a forest hermit consists of celibacy, sleeping on the ground, wearing matted hair and antelope skin, offering the daily fire sacrifice, bathing, venerating gods, ancestors, and guests, and eating forest produce.

That of a wandering ascetic consists of mastery of the senses, abstaining from ritual activities, living without possessions, abandoning attachments, practicing mendicancy, residing in the wilderness but not in a single place, and purifying himself externally and internally.

Non-injury, truthfulness, purification, lack of malice, compassion, and forbearance−these are common to all.

The Law specific to someone leads him to heaven and to eternal bliss. When it is violated, people are destroyed through the intermixture.

Therefore, the king should not permit people to violate the Law specific to each of them, for when they adhere to the Law specific to each they rejoice here and in the hereafter."[333]

Here, by making sure that one must follow one's *āśrama dharma*, the king is also protecting the *varṇa* order because, without fulfilling the duties of the *gṛhastha āśrama*, one cannot renounce the world. In other words, one cannot renounce his *varṇa* identity.

What Ambedkar points out is also worth reflecting on while studying the *āśrama* system. He writes, "a cursory reflection on this system of stages, which may well be called a system of planned economy of the life of the individual, raises many questions. The first is, what forced Manu to have such a system of planned economy?" Apart from the theological explanation of the *āśrama* system, one can't ignore the economic structure associated with it. And the *āśrama* system can also be seen as the supporter or part of that Brahmanical

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[333] AŚ 1.3.9-16.

economic system where brahmins are getting the economic benefit without doing any kind of manual jobs. When Manu says, "student, householder, forest hermit, ascetic: these four distinct orders have their origin in the householder… the householder is said to be the best, for he supports the other three,"[334] he is guarding that economic system too.

The second chapter studies the four *āśramas* while exploring the meaning of celibacy. It suggests that celibacy is not a synonymous with renunciation. It is just one of the various features of renunciation. A man may live in the world while being celibate. Also, celibacy is not just about controlling sexual urges or the retention of semen. The code of conduct prescribed for a celibate includes control of several others desires too. For instance, a celibate is not allowed to eat honey or play musical instruments (*Manusmṛti*, 2.177-179). All these produce a complex picture of celibacy leading me to argue that in a way, a celibate life becomes an entry point of the *dharma* in all parts of human life.

In the third chapter, I have tried to explore the hegemonic character of the *āśrama* system while explaining the basic tenets of hegemony. The chapter also studies the woman's role in society as a mother, wife and widow. It also examines the importance of celibacy/chastity in a widow's life and the social implications associated with it. The chapter ends with two views (of B. R. Ambedkar and P.V. Kane) on the concept of Brahman and how it represents the internal contradictions or dilemmas that exist in the Brahmanical tradition.

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[334] MS 6.87-89.

Appendix I

The Ascetic Toil (*tapas*)

According to the *MS*:

"All happiness here, whether divine or human, has ascetic toil as its root, as its middle, and as its end—so have wise men who saw the Veda declared. Knowledge is the ascetic toil for a brahmin; protection, for a kṣatriya; trade, for a vaiśya; and service, for a śūdra. Solely by ascetic toil do well-disciplined seers, subsisting on fruits, roots, and air, observe the three worlds together with their mobile and immobile creatures. Solely by ascetic toil do medicines, antidotes, spells, and the various divine conditions become effective; for ascetic toil is the means by which they become effective. What is difficult to cross, what is difficult to obtain, what is difficult to enter, what is difficult to do—all that is accomplished by ascetic toil, for it is difficult to prevail over ascetic toil. Persons guilty of a grievous sin causing loss of caste, as also others who have committed misdeeds, are freed from their sins simply by ascetic toil vigorously carried out. Insects, snakes, moths, animals, birds and immobile creatures attain heaven by the power of ascetic toil. Whatever sin people commit through their mind, word, or body—with ascetic toil as their wealth, they quickly burn off all that simply by ascetic toil. The denizens of heaven accept the offerings of a brahmin purified solely by ascetic toil, and they fulfil his desires. Prajāpati, the Lord, created this Treatise solely by ascetic toil; the seers, likewise, obtained the Vedas by ascetic toil. Thus did the gods proclaim this grandeur of ascetic toil, as they observed the sacred origin of this whole world from ascetic toil."[335]

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[335] MS 11.235-245.

Appendix II

Sins, Penances and Celibacy

In the second chapter, I have argued that in a way, a celibate life becomes an entry point of the *dharma* in all parts of human life. This also can be seen in the rules related to different penances (*prāyaścitta*). These penances are prescribed for a twice-born only. This section is based on the *MS*.

Manu says, "when a man fails to carry out prescribed acts, performs disapproved acts, and is attached to the sensory objects, he is subject to a penance…a sin committed unintentionally is cleansed by Vedic recitation, whereas a sin committed deliberately through folly is cleansed with various types of penance…one should always do penances to purify oneself; for individuals whose sins have not been expiated are born with detestable characteristics."[336]

There are several categories of sins. However, the grievous sins causing the loss of caste are—killing a brahmin, drinking liquor, stealing, and having sex with an elder's wife.[337] Olivelle argues that "drinking liquor becomes a grievous sin only when done by brahmins."[338] There are several options to do penances after killing a brahmin. One of the options is that "to rid himself of the brahmin's murder, he may walk one hundred leagues reciting one of the Vedas, eating little, and keeping his organs under control. In conclusion Manu says, "thus always remaining steadfast in his vow, collected in mind, and chaste, he rids himself of the brahmin's murder at the end of the twelfth year."[339] Nevertheless, "this purification is enjoined for killing a brahmin unintentionally; for killing a brahmin deliberately, there is no prescribed expiation."[340]

One of the penances for sex with an elder's wife includes, "he may perform the lunar penance for three months, keeping his organs under control and subsisting on sacrificial food or barley gruel, so as to remove the sin of sexual intercourse with an elder's wife."[341] In the

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[336] MS 11.44, 46, 54.

[337] Ibid., 11.55.

[338] Olivelle, P., & Olivelle, S. (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 340.

[339] MS 11.82.

[340] Ibid., 11.90.

[341] Ibid., 11.107.

lunar penance (*cāndrāyaṇa*), "he should decrease his food by one rice-ball a day during the dark fortnight and increase it likewise during the bright fortnight, bathing three times a day."[342]

One of the penances for killing a cow prescribes that "he should eat a small amount of food without artificial salt at every fourth mealtime, bathing with cow's urine, and keeping his organs under control."[343]

In general, "a sinner is freed from his sin by declaring it publically, by being contrite, by performing ascetic toil, and by reciting the Veda; during a time of adversity, also by giving gifts."[344] There are other means of expiation too. For instance, "a man guilty of a grievous sin causing loss of caste should follow cows with a collected mind; he comes purified by subsisting on alms food and reciting the Pāvamānī verses for one year…or, if a man, self-controlled, fasts for three days while bathing three times a day and reciting the Aghamarṣaṇa hymn three times, he is freed from all the sins causing loss of caste."[345]

This very brief survey indicates that a self-controlled, celibate period is a common rule in all the penances. One should be celibate while performing penances.

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[342] Ibid., 11.217.
[343] Ibid., 11.110.
[344] Ibid., 11.228.
[345] Ibid., 11.258, 260.

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