

Occupation (Work) and Castes (Varnas)



India is an ancient country. In the olden days India was not politically united. There were different states and different administrators, but the lifestyle was the same. Similar culture and lifestyle existed in these regions and the regions were tied together. Some factors of this culture and lifestyle exist even today. The Hindu culture has four goals (Purushartha) and four castes (varnas). Human life was divided into four ashramas – namely Brahmachary-ashram, Grihasthashram, Vanaprasthashram and Sanyasashrama. A person should follow four goals namely, 'Dharm, Arth, Kam and Moksha.' Similarly, according to the principle of division of labour the system, four castes (varnas) existed. Through it, social life was managed.

In the olden days, this system was simple. A person could choose the occupation of one's choice. Caste (varna) was decided according to one's karma or occupation. The occupations were divided into four types 'Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.' The one who followed the occupation of acquiring knowledge and giving it to the society was called Brahmin. It included learning and teaching of the Vedas, to establish the teaching institutes

(Gurukul), to make arrangements of the students there, to take care of them and to make them literate and enable them to live a good life. Similarly, the rituals, worshipping and praying Gods, Goddesses, Yadnya were entrusted to them.

The duties of Kshatriyas included, protection of the state, maintaining law and order, helping and rescuing the people caught in difficulties, to create facilities for the citizens etc.

Kings, administrators, commander-in-chief of the army, soldiers were in this category. The functions of the Kshatriyas included 'collecting taxes necessary to run the administration, to keep a watch on enemy's movements, to protect the life and wealth of the people, developing skills to become experts in war strategy and take part in wars.'

Traders were known as 'Vaishyas'. Trading of the things produced in the state, in and out of the state, importing goods from outside the state for the people, to sell them in the state, were the functions of the Vaishyas. The goods included food-grains, clothing, weapons etc. They had some moral restrictions like they should do trading sincerely, should not cheat the consumers, producers and administration and should not exploit anybody.

The functions of the Shudra included serving the society, to help the three varnas in their functions. They were the support system of the society.

A person has right to choose any occupation. A person may be born in any varna, was free to choose the varna as per choice. A person born in Shudra varna could

become a Kshatriya, if he acquires war skills, fit and healthy and mentally strong. He became a Kshatriya.

A person from a Brahmin class could migrate to be a Vaishya / Kshatriya. I recollect that once late Prin. Shivajirao Bhosale explained in a convincing way. He said that being a Kshatriya I should have been on the border to protect it but I am delivering lectures and educating the masses. However, Late Gen. Arunkumar Vadya being a Brahmin he should have been a priest or a teacher but he is protecting our borders. If he liked the profession, was ready to take risk. In the system everybody was free to take a profession as per choice and as the occupations were divided into four classes, work was available to all. As different skills were needed in different varanas, every varna had status and place in the society. This system was in accordance with the progress of the society. But in the course of time, this system became rigid. The concept of varna according to work was replaced by varna according to birth. One who was born in a particular varna, remained in the same varna. The division of labour led to discrimination. In the course of time, this imbalanced society started degrading.

Certain characteristics of the parents are inherited by the children. These are born traits. From birth, the child sees his parents working; observes them, helps them in their work. Hence, acquires perfection in their ancestral occupation, knows the risks and dangers in the work. By inheritance one gets knowledge by birth which one may require a larger time frame. Hence the tradition of the son doing the business of his father is justified. In the ancient times, there was permission of changing the occupations based on capabilities.

Actually, these four varnas are four legs of the society and it is wrong to differentiate. Later the flexibility disappeared and it was replaced by rigid system when the caste was decided by birth. Today there are some people who belong to a certain caste but they can't fit in occupations of their caste. A person is goldsmith by birth, yet constructs roads as an engineer.

People think that a doctor's son should become a doctor, a lawyer's son should become a lawyer and an engineer's son should become engineer and so on. This is mainly to reap the benefit of the established profession/business. Even if the doctor's son doesn't wish to become a doctor, he is to some extent persuaded. If he is not interested in his work, may not be an expert in his field. He does his profession without any interest. It is neither suitable for him nor for the society. Instead, if he takes the education of his choice, he might have excelled in it. In short, choosing the occupation as per choice leads to excellence. Varna should be according to occupation. Karma should become dharma.

It means that a person who likes learning and teaching should accept the varna of 'Brahmin' and take it as their religion. He should be knowledge hungry, should have self-discipline and should be available twenty-four hours for their students. The duty should be learning and teaching others. If a person likes to become Kshatriya, he may take military training and learn to handle different weapons. If he likes administration, he should take up the related education and develop the skill of management of state administration. He should work selflessly for the society without doing discrimination. A person accepting the dharma of Vaishya, should follow the principles of doing business honestly, not cheating others, selling and

buying the goods at proper rates. A Shudra should follow his dharma by giving the service to the society, sincerely. In short, your karma should become your varna and dharma.

How should this dharma be followed? Keep on doing your work, like 'yadnya', achieve excellence get knowledge and skill in the work; this is Tapasadhana (hard work). Due to Tapa work becomes the best and profitable to all. There should be accelerating effect i.e. one should share the knowledge gained with the others. Don't measure everything with money for self, give something related to your work to the society, may teach the poor free of cost, give free treatment to the poor etc. Such giving is more valuable to the society. Find out how the work will be the best used and be fruitful. A farmer may find out a variety of crops giving more production, do research on 'how the production and productivity can be increased with minimum use of water, how the storage capacity of the grains can be increased and the speedy transport of the grains.' In short using the means of yadnya, 'tapa' and daan, makes dharma. We have some karma (work or responsibility) like, children's responsibility, parent's responsibility, responsibilities towards family and society etc. A person's progress lies in carrying out these responsibilities. For this, value education is necessary.

We know of four goals of mankind. Dharma, Arth, Kam and Moksha. They mean getting the knowledge of religion, earn money to run the family, have children and finally attain salvation. Everyone followed this as the moral duties of a person. Earlier we had 'balutedari' system. It is 'barter system', based on agriculture. Farmers did farming, grew grains. In their everyday life they were helped by twelve 1) Wani, 2) 'gold-smith, 3) tailor, 4) black-

smith, 5) cobbler, 6) sweeper 7) priest, 8) potter, 9) Dhor 10) Koli, 11) Barbar 12) Waster etc.’ The farmers regard that the balutedars had a right on the food grains and they gave part of the produce to the balutedars. Similarly, the balutedars also thought that they owed their service to the farmers. This life style, based on mutual exchange continued for many years. Through it developed a homogeneous and self-dependent village.

What happened today? The homogeneity and self-dependency of a village is lost. A large number of goods are produced at one place. They are transported to other places. As a result, the expenses on the management of the availability of the goods are increasing and the goods are getting costly. At the same time, employment is available at the place only where the industries are located. The other places don’t have employment. People are leaving their villages in search of jobs. Hence villages are being deserted while the cities are swelling. In cities also, unemployment is on rise, due to automation but at the same time new job avenues have also been found. Due to migration of people in cities, urban problems are also increasing. Due to the problems of roads, water, electricity, gutters etc., urban life is disturbed. Previously, the villages were self-dependent. Gandhiji gave us the dream of such villages. Earlier, whether it was a city or a village, job opportunities existed and people lived a simple but happy life. We should think of this old system to make the villages independent again.

We know of many saints' devotees belonged to balutedari. Saint Tukaram was a Vaishya, Saint Chokhaj was a Chambhar and even today they are respected in all castes. While doing their duties, they use to worship God for salvation. Hence for all the people of the four varnas

and dharmas the doors were open for moksha (salvation). They were free to follow religion and yet employed. There was morality and orderliness in the society. There was decentralization. Today we see that in malls, you get all the things in one place, but don't you think, that it takes away the job opportunity of others? The business of mall owners grows, but those who are having business in the absence of malls are deprived of their opportunities. For this entire situation we need to blame demographic situation.

We see excess number of skilled people in one occupation and shortage of people in another. Today Shudras seem to be powerful than Brahmins. This is not a good picture. This picture lacks foresight. Today we see increase in corruption. Due to things like donation and reservations; self-education and hard works are rarely seen. Hence there is no healthy progress of the society. Unless we don't see the dreams of idealism and work accordingly, every class in the society will behave selfishly and then Lord Bramha won't assure you of the future.

Lastly what do we want? We want peace and satisfaction. We get peace due to sacrifice. There is no one in the world who can breathe all the air on the earth and can drink all the water. There is nobody who alone can enjoy everything in the world and can do all types of work alone. Since ancient times we see that we can't progress unless we are united and support each other. Division of means and occupations is necessary. If we consider the four varnas without any dissemination and maturity of occupation and the equal opportunities to reach salvation, this system is a must even today. Moreover, it is necessary, till man exists on the earth.

The objective of writing all this is not to advocate the Varnashram system in the present scenario, but to affirm that the Varnashram institution was also a right system in the then prevailing circumstances. However, as the population explosion was there and several inventions took place and man invented wheel, machines and so on, the varnashram came to an end to a great extent. Now one who is having capital, willingness to work, and passion to grow etc. can start industry / business and earn money. The element of competition came in and, in the process, those were deprived factors of production i.e. land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship remained economically backward. Today, the Government's efforts are to bring these deprived people above the poverty line and make them a partner in nation's progress and ensure improvement in their life-style.



Quote

“Every job from the heart is, ultimately, of equal value. The nurse injects the syringe; the writer slides the pen; the farmer ploughs the dirt; the comedian draws the laughter. Monetary income is the perfect deceiver of a man's true worth.”

— **Criss Jami, Killosophy**