
**TOPIC: SHUDRAS THROUGH THE STUDY OF SMRITI LITERATURE
ESPECIALLY INMANUSMRITIAND YAJNAVALKYASMRTI.**

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Abstract: *The present paper deals the depiction of Shudras class in the Smriti literature particularly in Manusmriti and Yajnavalkyasmriti. This paper also focused on the Aryan invasion and how they subjugated the Dasas and Dasus, the original inhabitants of the India which created racial and social differences. The special attention has been made on how the rights of shudras were curtailed and how they were shown low-born, polluted, alienated and server of the upper three varnas in the Smriti literature. They could not marry in the upper three varnas. They were considered the provider of the service to the upper three varnas such as Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. They were treated unequal in the Brahmanical Society. They had no right to study Vedas. They were given menial jobs in the Brahmanical social order.*

Key Words: subjugated, curtailed, polluted, alienated, menial and depiction.

It is said that inequality has been traced before the coming of the Aryans invasion to India. It was during the Harappan period where inequality was prevailed in the society which is supported by many archaeological evidences.

¹ The Aryans invaded India around 1500 BC. They had distinct physical and cultural features. They conquered the natives of India were known as *Dasas* and *Dasyus* who were racially different from the Aryans. They were black in colour. Aryans enslaved them.² The present theory is that Aryans were linguistic group not racial group which is most acceptable view.³

¹ VivekanandJha, Caste, Untouchability and Social justice: Early North Indian Perspective, *Social Scientist*, Vol.25, No.11 and 12, Nov-Dec.1997, p.19.

² Arvind Sharma, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the Aryan invasion and the Emergence of the Caste system in India, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.73, No.03, Sep. 2005, pp.843 and 846.

³ *Ibid*, p.847.

We have many references regarding the non-hereditary of profession. A poet whose father was a physician and his mother was a corn-grinder.⁴ The 10th *Mandla of Rigveda* (*Purushasukta*) deals the Varna system where the Brahmans represent as the mouth, the Kshatriya as the arms, the Vaishyas as the thighs and Shudras as the feet of the divine purusha.⁵ It means the inequality has been traced from the Rigveda. It was later Vedic period; the Varnas started separating from each other. The Brahmans became specialized in teachings, rituals and priests. The Kshatriyas became the protector of the people, Vaishyas became traders, artisans, cattle-rearers and Shudras became slaves, domestic servants and agricultural labourers.⁶ It was at the end of later Vedic period, Varnas became hereditary and caste system became rigid.⁷ It is said that before the Mauryan period, the social, economic, political and religious positions of Shudras were deprived.⁸ But it was during the Mauryan period, they were employed as agriculturalist labourers and slaves by the state. Asoka, the Great tried to remove the caste distinction but the lower varna could not benefited out of his policies.⁹

After Mauryan period, the position of Shudras became critical because of the writings of the Smriti literature. They were given low social status in the society and they were considered the server of the upper three varnas. But during the Post-Mauryan period, the development of agricultural, trade and commerce, rise of arts and crafts created good positions of them.¹⁰ The Smriti literature depicted their image in the society as low-born, polluted and unequal. There are some narratives which were narrated in the Smriti literature especially in *Manusmriti* and *Yajnavalkyasmriti* which depicted their image, role and positions in the society.

The first three varnas were considered twice-born (*divijya*) and last one not. The ceremonies of the first three varnas were recited by the sacred formulas.¹¹ There was Upayana ceremony which was performed by all the three upper varnas but it was not to

⁴. VivekanandJha, Caste, Untouchability and Social justice: Early North Indian Perspective, *Social Scientist*, Vol.25, No.11 and 12, Nov-Dec.1997, p.20.

⁵. *Ibid.*

⁶. *Ibid.*

⁷. *Ibid*, p.21.

⁸. R.S.Sharma, *Shudras in Ancient India*, MotilalBanarsidass, Delhi, 1958, pp.280 and 281.

⁹. *Ibid.*

¹⁰. *Ibid.*

¹¹. *YajnavalkyaSmriti*, tr. RaiBhadurSrisaVidyarna, Allahabad, 1918, p.18.

perform this ceremony by the Shudras.¹² It is written in *Padma Purana* that Shudras should keep no *sikha* (lock of hair). They could not wear sacred threads. Even they were not given right to speak the Sanskrit language.¹³ It is said that a Brahman can have wives of three classes such as Brahmani, Kshatriyani and Vaishyani not Shudrani, but Shudra can have only one wife in his own caste.¹⁴ Paisacha marriage was a marriage which was done through fraud practices on girls. This marriage was valid for Vaishyas and Shudras.¹⁵ A son born to a Vaishya father and Shudra mother was called *Karana*. He was considered illegitimate and bastard.¹⁶ The Sati was not applied for Brahman widows and it was applied for the lower castes.¹⁷ The Shudras were also discriminated in dresses also. Manu says that sacrificial string of Brahman should be made of cotton, Kshatriyas made of hemp threads and Vaishyas made of woolen threads.¹⁸ It is said that a Brahman who take a Shudra wife to his bed, after death he would sink into the hell. If he begets a child by her, he would lose the rank of a Brahman. The manes and the gods would not eat the offerings of the man who performed the rites in honor of gods with a Shudra's wife.¹⁹ If Shudra comes to the house of a Brahman as guest, he may allow eating with servants.²⁰ Even the country which is ruled by a Shudra king, a Brahman should not live. The Shudras were not given the right to recite the Vedas.²¹ They were not allowed to walk with the upper castes and when the people of upper castes were alone.²² The learned and law-knower Brahmans should not eat the cooked food of Shudras. Even the dead Brahmans not to be carried by a Shudras.²³ The Shudras had given severe punishment as if a Shudra insults twice-born, he has to cut his tongue for his low origin.²⁴ If a low-caste man who tries to place himself on the same seat with a man of high caste shall be branded on his lips and be banished, if he holds hair of a superior, let the king cut off his hands.²⁵ If a low-caste who makes love to a

¹². *Ibid*, p.55.

¹³. *Ibid*, p.44.

¹⁴. *Ibid*, pp.118-122.

¹⁵. *Ibid*, p.127.

¹⁶. *Ibid*, p.123.

¹⁷. *Ibid*, p.168.

¹⁸. *The Laws of Manu*, tr. G.Buhler, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1886, p.05.

¹⁹. *Ibid*, p.12.

²⁰. *Ibid*, p.15.

²¹. *Ibid*, pp.24 and 25.

²². *Ibid*.

²³. *Ibid*, pp.23-28.

²⁴. *Ibid*, p.52.

²⁵. *The Laws of Manu*, tr. G. Buhler, p.52.

maiden of the higher caste, he shall be liable for corporal punishment.²⁶ If a Brahman who slains Vaishyas shall pay 100 cows and one bull, if he slains a Shudra, he has to give 10 white cows and one bull to the Brahman and perform penance.²⁷ It is written in the Smriti literature that the main duty of the Shudras were to serve the upper three varnas.²⁸

Conclusion: At last, we can say that the inequality in the society was prior to the comings of Aryans to India which is proved by the archaeological evidences. The Aryans who were considered linguistic group migrated to India and they defeated the local inhabitants of India who were called *Dasas* and *Dasus* and finally conquered them. The Aryans were superior race as they were good in look and *Dasas* and *Dasus* were black in color and Aryans considered them inferior race. In the Aryan text *Rigveda*, there is the evidence of Varna system but it was during the later Vedic period, the varna system became rigid and hereditary. It was during the Post-Mauryan period, the Smriti literature particularly *Manusmriti* and *YajnavalkyaSmriti* depicted the image of the Shudras as low-born, alienated and treated unequal in the Brahmanical social order. They were considered the server of the upper three varnas as it was their duty. They were discriminated in society, religion, law, politics, economy and education which is proved by the narratives of law-givers such as by Manu and Yajnavalkya.

²⁶. *Ibid*, p.55.

²⁷. *Ibid*, p.75.

²⁸. *Ibid*, p.66.