



Faculty Name : **DR.M.MOHANKUMAR,** Academic Year : **2024-2025 (EVEN)**
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Course : **19HST105 & Essence of Indian Traditional Knowledge**

Course outcome: - Understanding the social and political state in India

Module 1- Society State and Polity in India

State in Ancient India: Evolutionary Theory, Force Theory, Mystical Theory Contract Theory, Stages of State Formation in Ancient India, Kingship, Council of Ministers Administration Political Ideals in Ancient India Conditions' of the Welfare of Societies, The Seven Limbs of the State, Society in Ancient India, Purusārtha, Varnāshrama System, Āshrama or the Stages of Life, Marriage, Understanding Gender as a social category, The representation of Women in Historical traditions, Challenges faced by Women. Four-class Classification, Slavery. **Contents**

1. States in ancient India
2. Evolutionary theory
3. Force theory
4. Mystical theory
5. Contract theory
6. Stages of state formation in ancient India

States in Ancient India

When a large number of human beings live together, there is need for some rules and regulations. So since early days, there is a realization in India that there has to be a 'Society' governed by some commonly agreed rules and regulations. However, such a 'society' is only loosely regulated it is governed by customs and practices, not by laws. Therefore, some more rigorous organization is needed, a system called 'State' in political thought, a political system with a legal sanction and foundation, a system ruled by law.

A 'State' or Rajya, has several dimensions - the duties/ rights of the ruled and the rulers. 'Society' or Samāja, has its own components, the different communities, and functional units called Varna or castes. In ancient India, a society has its structural units such as family, marriage, customs and practices such as inheritance, rituals of marriage and mourning, and finally a framework of individual and social life for example the ashrams vyavasthā laid down in the Hindu society as an ideal organization of an individual's life.



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State has been the key concept in political science since the period of grand thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. One of the most important topics in political science has been the origin and evolution of the state. In ancient India also thinkers like Bhishma, Narada, Brihaspati, Kautilya, Kamandaka have looked at the problem. On the basis of the writings of these thinkers we can detect four important theories regarding the origin of the state in ancient India, namely -

- a) Evolutionary Theory
- b) Force Theory
- c) Mystical Theory
- d) Contract Theory

Theory of Evolutionary Origin

Evolutionary Theory - This is the oldest theory of the origin of the state in India and has been mentioned in the Atharva Veda. The tenth hymn of the eighth chapter of the Atharva Veda gives a picture of the evolutionary origin of the state. According to this theory the state is the result of evolutionary progress and it didn't originate at a fixed time. Based on Atharva Veda several stages of the evolution of the state can be traced. The hymns of the Atharva Veda state that the earliest phase of human life was the stage of Vairagya or stateless state. It was a state of complete anarchy. But with the emergence of agriculture, stable life became possible. To fulfil the needs of agriculture, the family emerged and the head of the family became the first wielder of authority. Further, the need of co-operation in the different realms of society led to the emergence of sabhā and samiti. Sabha was the organization of elderly people and samiti was the general assembly of common people. With the emergence of sabhā and samiti organized political life began which finally culminated in the emergence of the state.

Force Theory - Though ancient Indian political thinkers did not propound force theory in a systematic way, force was considered to be an important factor in the evolution of the state in India. Earliest Aryan clans fought among themselves for pet animals (especially for the cow), pastureland, settlements and sources of drinking water. Only a strong and able warrior could lead the clan in such wars. So, he was given special status and the members of clan started obeying him. This tendency continued in the days of peace also and subsequently the leader became king. Citing examples from the Vedas (Rig Veda and Sama Veda) and the



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Brahmanas (Aitareya, Shatapatha) John Spellman also opines that the king in ancient India was primarily a military leader. But it should be clearly mentioned that none of the political commentators give a systematic and well knitted explanation of the role of force in the emergence of the state in ancient India.

Theory of Mystical Origin

Mystical Theory - This was the most popular theory of origin of the state in ancient India. Kingship was given divine sanction and the king was considered not to be the representative of God but himself a God who contained the powers of important Gods like Indra, Varuna and Agni.

It appears first in the epics and the law books of Manu. The king was exalted far above ordinary mortals, through the magical powers of the great royal sacrifices. The magical power which pervaded the king at his consecration (Rājāsūya) was restored and strengthened in the course of his reign by further rites, such as the ceremonial rejuvenation of the Vajapeya and the horse-sacrifice (Asvamedha) which not only ministered to his ambition and arrogance but also ensured the prosperity and fertility of the kingdom.

Contract Theory - Contract theory is the most extensively discussed theory of the origin of the state in ancient India. The reference to contract theory can be seen in the Buddhist texts like Dīgha Nikaya and Mahāvastu and brahmanical texts like Shanti Parva and Arthashastra of Kautilya.

It is said that there was a time when people were perfect and lived in a state of happiness and tranquility. This perfect state lasted for ages, but at last the pristine purity declined. Many differences have appeared like distinctions of colour. In a word, heavenly life degenerated into earthly life. Now shelter, food and drink were required. People gradually entered into a series of agreements among themselves and set up the institutions of the family and private property. But this gave rise to a new set of problems like theft and other forms of unsocial conduct. Therefore, people assembled and agreed to choose as chief a person who was the best favoured the most attractive and the most capable. In return they agreed to contribute to him a portion of their paddy. The individual, who was thus elected, came to hold in serial order three titles: a) Mahāsammata b) Khattiya and c) Raja According to the text the first title means one chosen by the whole people, the second title means 1:03 the lord of the fields the third title means one who charms the people by means of dharma,



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Stages of State Formation in Ancient India

Six main stages in the history of ancient Indian polity can be identified.

1. The earliest stage was that of tribal military democracy in which tribal assemblies, which had some place for women were mainly pre-occupied with war. The age of Rig Veda was primarily a period of assemblies.
2. The second stage saw the break-up of the tribal polity under the stress of constant conflicts between the rajanyakshatriya and the ordinary businessman called the Vis. The chiefs were helped by the priesthood called the brahmins. This stage saw the beginning of taxes and classes or varnas which came to be firmly established in the third stage.
3. The third stage was marked by the formation of the full-fledged state. There arose large territorial monarchies of Kosala and Magadha and tribal oligarchies in North-Western India and at the foot of the Himalayas. For the first time we hear of large standing armies and organized nachperry for the collection of land revenue.
4. The fourth or the Maurya phase saw bureaucratic centralization based on the expanding economic activities of the state. The state with the help of its bureaucracy controlled various aspects of the life of its subjects.
5. The fifth stage was marked by the process of decentralized administration in which towns, feudatories and military elements came to the forefront in both the Deccan and North India. This was partly neutralized by the emphasis on the divinity of the king.
6. The last stage, identical with the Gupta period, may be called the period of proto- feudal polity. Land grants now played an important part in the formation of the political structure and those made by the Gupta feudatories conferred fiscal and administrative privileges on priestly beneficiaries.



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Kingship

The king was the most important figure in the body politic. In the Saptanga theory of the state, developed by Kautilya the king has been described as the head or the most important organ of the state. The king performed multi-dimensional functions. The king's functions involved the protection not only of his kingdom against external aggression, but also of life, property and traditional custom against internal foes. He protected the family system by punishing adultery and ensuring the fair inheritance of family property. He protected widows and orphans by making them his wards. He protected the rich against the poor by suppressing robbery. He protected the poor against the rich by punishing extortion and oppression. Religion was protected by liberal grants to learned brahmins and temples.

The Arthashastra suggests a time-table for the king's day, which allows him only four and a half hours sleep and three hours for eating and recreation, the rest of the day being spent in the different kinds of affairs of the state. The king is told that he must be prompt in the administration of justice and always accessible to his people.

According to Altekar, the position, powers and privileges of the king have varied from age to age. In the prehistoric period, the king was only the senior-most member in the council of peers. There was a popular council (samiti) to actively supervise his administration. His position was insecure, and powers were limited.

After 500 BC, the office of king was elevated to new heights. During this period the king became the effective head of the executive administration and there was no popular assembly like samiti to check him. He controlled both the treasury and the military forces, though commander-in-chief and treasurer were under him. Ministers were selected by the king and held office at his pleasure. The king presided over the council of ministers and its decisions had to receive royal assent.

Council of Ministers

Ministers or council of advisors have been regarded by ancient Indian political thinkers as a very vital organ of the body politic. The Mahabharata observes at one place that the king is as vitally dependent upon ministers as animals are upon clouds, brahmins on the Vedas and women upon their husbands. Manusmriti points out that even a simple thing appears as difficult if one is to do it single handed; why then attempt to run the complex machinery of the administration without the assistance of ministers.

The size of this mantriparishad or council of ministers varied, and the authorities suggested



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figures ranging from seven to thirty-seven. It seems that the body was divided into two parts mantrina and mantriparishad. Mantriparishad was the large body resembling a modern council of ministers. It consisted of all the ministers. Mantrina was a smaller body or a core organization within the mantriparishad largely resembling the modern cabinet. It included the few most important ministers like the purohita (priest), senapati (supreme commander of army) and yuvaraja (the crown prince).

The council's purpose was primarily to advise the king, and not to govern, but it was no mere rubber-stamping body. Councillors should speak freely and openly and that the king should



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consider their advice. In fact, the council often exerted great powers. It might transact business in the king's absence, and it might take minor decisions without consulting him. The council of ministers was not merely a recording body, for very often it used to suggest amendments to king's orders or even recommended their total reversal.

Administration

With the advent of the Mauryas on the political stage of India, bureaucracy developed as a well-organized, hierarchical, cadre-based administrative system. If we rely on the Arthashastra of Kautilya the establishment of a large and complex bureaucracy was a remarkable feature of the Mauryan government.

The Arthashastra of Kautilya mentions 18 tirthas who are called mahamatras or high functionaries. Although the term mahamatra is used only on a few occasions in the Arthashastra, its real counterpart being amatya it is familiar enough in Ashokan inscriptions. In addition to the 18 trithas, Kautilya provides in some detail accounts of 27 superintendents (adhyaksas) concerned mostly with economic functions and some military duties though social functions are not ignored.

The Mauryas developed a well-organized bureaucracy. With the help of this centralized bureaucratic structure not only did the government regulate the economic life of the country, but it also took an important part in it. All mines including pearl beds, fisheries and salt pans, were owned by the state, and were either worked directly with the labour of criminals or let out to entrepreneurs, from whom the king claimed a percentage of output as royalty.

Political Ideas in Ancient India

Political ideas like liberty, justice, fraternity and nationalism are a product of the modern age. If viewed strictly from the lens of the contemporary period, we can't find any systematic expression of these ideals, in ancient India. But seen from a different perspective, ancient Indians did have these ideas in a rudimentary form.

Showing the importance of freedom, the Vedas state that independence is necessary for mankind and those who are not independent are worse than dead. In varnashrama institution too, an independent living has been kept in mind. A man lived independently during Grihasthaashrama and when he was likely to be dependent on the offspring coming of age, there is the provision of the older people resorting to Vanprastha and then to Sanyasa, again living freely in the solitude of hills and dales rather than living as dependent on their children. For disposal of justice the Mauryan state had a system of judiciary. Dharmasthiya was the



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civil court and kanyakashodhana was organized to deal with a large number of economic crimes.

The Ramayana extols this country as a karmabhumi, the land of pious acts. This shows the belongingness of people to land and their fellow beings. The early seeds of nationalism can be traced in this instance. Similarly, the ideas of ancient Indian thinkers were vasudhaivakutumbakam (treating the whole world like a family). This was the concept of universal brotherhood or fraternity.

From the days of Plato and Aristotle, European thought has turned its attention to such questions as the origin of the state, the ideal form of government, and the basis of law and the



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politics has long been looked on as a branch of philosophy. From the above discussion, it is clear that ancient India also thought about such questions, but she had no schools of political philosophy in the Western sense.

The Seven Limbs of the State or Saptanga Theory

Saptanga theory of state was given by Kautilya in Arthashastra. Kautilya has first time defined the State in Arthashastra. The word - Saptang indicates seven limbs, constituents or elements. Together, they constitute the State as an organism.

Seven Angas or elements were enumerated by Kautilya for describing the nature of the State in its totality. The seven limbs of a State are Swami (The King), Amatya (The Council of Ministers), Janapada (The People and the Territory), Durga (Fortification), Kosa (Treasure), Danda (Coercive authority) and Mitra (The Allies). According to Kautilya, an area cannot be a state unless there are not people and rulers to control that state. A state consists of different cities, people, military, treasury and tax-system. In the Vedas, the state was a source of peace, law and order, security and justice. In Kautilya eyes, the state and king are indispensable.

1. Swami (The King)

Kautilya assigned the highest place to the king in the body politic. Constitutionally, Swami or King was the chief executive head and commander-in-chief of the army. The king was the backbone of the state and the defender of the Dharma. According to Kautilya, the king is the primary element and main pillar of the state, and the master of the techniques of state craft. The king must be a scholar of high merit. In the state the kings are responsible for maintain peace and order to encourage, moral, religious and material progress and provide a sense of security to his subjects. King were vested executive, legislative, Judicial and financial powers. An ideal king is one who has the highest qualities of leadership, intellect, energy and personal attributes.

The qualities of leadership are birth in a noble family, good fortune, powers, association with elders, being righteous, truthful, resolute, enthusiastic and disciplined, not breaking his promise, showing gratitude, having lofty aims, being stronger than neighboring, kind and having ministers of high quality.

Kautilya preferred a king who is a native of the territory, who follows the teachings of the Arthashastra, who is free from disease and is strong. According to Kautilya the happiness of the king lies in the happiness and welfare of the people. The foremost duty of a king is protection of the people. Kautilya says if the king is energetic, his subjects will be equally



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energetic. As the king occupies the central position in the theory of Arthashastra, most of the activities of state are controlled by him.

2. Amatya (The Council of Ministers)

Amatya constitutes the second elements of the state. The term Amatya or Mantris is used for the minister of the high grade. Amatya means the council of ministers. In the Arthashastra, the Amatya constitute a regular cadre of the service from which all high officers such as chief priest, ministers, collectors, officers and the superintendents of various departments are to be recruited. Kautilya says kingship is possible only with assistance. Therefore, there was the



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need of Council of minister. The highest category of the Amatya is the Mantrins. The king deliberates over the policy of state with three or four ministers. The council of ministers is largely responsible for shaping the policy of the government. The king and ministers constituted the central government.

The Arthashastra reminds the king that he could succeed only if he assisted by competent councilors. The King cannot rule the kingdom alone. There should be ministers to be helping him. But ministers should be men of wisdom, integrity, bravely and loyalty.

The council of minister managed administration of the state. The size of the council of ministers should be neither too big nor too small. According to Kautilya the number of ministers should not be fixed, but the number depends on requirement. The ministerial appointment should purely depend on qualifications. According to Kautilya, the Mantris, Purohita, Senapati, and Yuvraj were the most important in administration. Mantris formed the topmost part of the administrative pyramid and were appointed by the king.

3. Janpad (The People and the Territory)

Janpad forms the third elements of the state. This unique element of Saptanga is the symbol of State, which stands for a - territorial society. Jana denotes people and Pada is a symbol of territory where these inhabitants permanently reside. Janpad defined in the Arthashastra implies both territory and population because without the territory and the population a state cannot exist. The territory should contain fertile lands, mines, timber, pasture grounds, forests and water ways etc. The people should include men with good character and loyalty, intelligent, wise masters and slaves. Kautilya envisaged ethnic differences among the people. In the beginning only people of common ethnic origin inhabited the land but with conquest and migration more than one ethnic people were included in the Janpad. Kautilya advised the king to induce people from other countries to migrate and settle in old villages or new sites. People from thickly populated areas of the kingdom settle down in such a village with a view to securing that each village should consist of not less than one hundred and not more than five hundred families and contain a sufficient K 15:29/35:06 CC number of cultivators.

Kautilya prescribes the following requisites of a prosperous Janapada in terms of territory:

- (i) Accommodate and support people.
- (ii) Defend the state against enemies.
- (iii) Find occupation of people.
- (iv) Have manageable neighbours.



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(v) Provide pastures.

(vi) Have arable land, mines, forest.

(vii) Provide good internal communication, i.e. rivers, roads, and outlet to sea.

4. Durga (Fortification)

For every state it is necessary to have safety and protection system. Therefore, Kautilya considered the forts as one of the main components of a state. He considers forts as powerful as people and land. Internal and external securities both are important for state. Without



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external security, no state can be stable. The king can protect the state from external attacks by forts and fortification. The security of the treasury and army depends on fortification. Fortification should be done for the purpose of security from the attacks. Kautilya advocates that there should be forts at all the four corners of the state so the security from all the sides can be ensured. Fort should be solid and there should be proper arrangement for ration and ammunition for the army.

Kautilya has classified forts in four types -

1. Audak fort where there should be trenches always filled with water.
2. Parvat Fort - which should be surrounded with high mountains and rocks.
3. Dhanvan fort - which should be surrounded with deserts and there should be no oasis nearby.
4. Van Fort - which are built in dense forest. It is very difficult to reach there. Such forts are important for the defense and protection of the state and its citizens. Audak and Parvat forts are most important when the state is going to attack on an enemy country. In case the need arises, the king could hide in such fort to protect from outside attack. Battle can be controlled from these forts effectively. The maintenance of army and the welcome ceremony of the foreign delegates are also done in these forts. They are also used to keep off the forest tribe and wild animals.

5. Kosha (The Treasury)

Kosha or Treasury constitutes the fifth element of the state. Kosha or Treasury is an extremely important resource. It is the backbone of any business. A strong and well managed treasury is the heart of any organization. Kosha or Treasury is necessary for the protection and maintenance of the state and army. The treasury should be filled with gems, gold, jewels etc and should have the capacity to sustain the calamities for long time. Income of the state was derived from taxes like export taxes, sales tax, village tax, etc. It is the duty of a king to keep the treasury full and prosperous. According to Kautilya, the treasury should be collected and maintained honestly and religiously. The treasure should be such full that it may be helpful in the time of difficulty for a long time.

6. Danda (The Army or the Force)

Kautilya has described the army as sixth aspect of the state. Without a strong defence system there cannot be the existence of state. For the defence of the state there should be a strong army. Therefore, it is very necessary that King constitute a strong army and use it for the



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internal and external threats.

Kautilya has used force word for army. Force means army and army is very compulsory for the defence of the state. Army is used to control anti-social elements in the society and disloyal people. Army is also useful in defending the state from outside attacks. Kautilya has described the six components of the army.

First is the clan army in which the son of soldiers becomes a soldier.

Second is the hired soldiers (hired troops).

Third is the army constituted by the corporations.

Fourth is the army formed with help of friendly countries.



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Fifth is the army formed with POW (Prisoner of War) i.e. soldiers of enemy country caught during war.

Sixth type of army can be formed with tribal people.

According to Kautilya, the state army should be given the best training and they should be provided with the best weapons. Soldiers should be fully satisfying especially when they are fighting in the field. For this purpose, the king should try his best effort to meet soldier's needs. A good soldier should be loyal, adventurous, courageous, brave, well versed in military science, etc.

According to Kautilya, it comprises of infantry, chariots, elephants and cavalry. The Kshatriyas constitute the main part of the army but allows the other castes to join the army if emergency arises. The best army should be strong, obediently and happy.

7. Mitra (The Allies)

Having realized that - political isolation means death, Kautilya proceeded to consider the Mitra or the ally as a vital factor. Mitra (ally) should be one with whom there is no possibility of rupture and one who is ready to come to help when occasion demands. The ideal ally is one who has the following qualities - A friend of the family for a long time, constant, amenable to control, powerful in his support, sharing a common interest, able to mobilize quickly and not a man who double crosses his friends.

Kautilya recognizes two kinds of allies - namely Sahaja and Kritrima. The Sahaja or natural ally is the one whose friendship is derived from the times of King's father and grandfather and who is situated close to the territory of the immediately neighbouring enemy. On the other hand, the Kritrima or the acquired ally is the one whose friendship is specially resorted to for the protection of wealth and life. Kautilya preferred an ally who is traditional, permanent, disciplined, and enthusiastic and from whom the possibility of opposition or rebellion is minimum.

Society in Ancient India

Society in ancient India had several distinguishing features. It was arranged in the form of four varnas. The life of individual was divided into four stages or ashramas. There were rules regarding marriage, family etc. The purpose of life was to attain four goals called purusarthas.



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Purusartha

The concept of purusarthas is the fundamental principle of Indian social ethics. The word purusartha means - attainments or life purposes. The literal meaning of Purusartha is object of human pursuit. They represent 4 fundamental goals or objectives of human life. The aim of every person is to attain the four noble ends or purusartha. These four purusarthas are: -

- 1) **Dharma** - Righteousness, Duty, Moral Values.
- 2) **Artha** - Wealth, Economic Values.
- 3) **Kama** - Desire.
- 4) **Moksha** - Liberation, Spiritual Values.



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Rig Veda put forward 3 fundamental objectives of human life in the form of Kama. Artha and Dharma. They were referred as trivarga or the 3 fundamental human pursuits. During the later Vedic age, Moksha added to them and as a result of that. 4 Purusārtha emerged.

1. Dharma

Dharma or the principle of righteousness is the supreme of the purusarthas. Dharma in Indian tradition is different from the Western concept of religion. The word religion has been derived from the latin word religare which means - to connect. In this sense religion is a set of principles which connects human beings with God. Therefore, religion essentially has some notion of God or some other supernatural entity. It is a particular way of worshipping. On the other hand Dharma derived from the Sanskrit root dhr, which connotes to sustain, support or uphold. Dharma has a wide range of meaning: it is the essential foundation of something and signifies truth. It is established, customary, proper and traditional or ceremonial. It is one's duty, responsibility, imperative and moral obligation. It is right, meritorious, and ethical and it is required or permitted through religious authority and thus legal.

Therefore, dharma in ancient India was a code of conduct for the members of the society. P.V. Kane also defines dharma in terms of privileges, duties and obligations of a person in a particular stage of life. Various forms of dharma in the sense of duty in ancient India like-

- 1. Samanya Dharma** - Some general rules which are universal in nature like truth, non-violence and non-stealing.
- 2. Raj Dharma** - Duties of the king.
- 3. Stree Dharma** - Duties of woman.
- 4. Dampatya Dharma** - Duties of husband and wife
- 5. Varna Dharma** - Duties of varnas
- 6. Ashrama Dharma** - Duties in the different stages of life.
- 7. Apad Dharma** - Duties during the crisis period.

Varnashrama System

In ancient India there was a common dharma for all members of society which must be followed by all equally. But at the same time there were different codes of conduct for different classes or varnas called varna-dharma.



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Varnas - First reference of varna is seen in the Rig Veda. Varna system was the basis of social stratification during the Vedic age. The tenth chapter of Rig Veda called Purusasukta mentions the organic theory of the origin of varnas according to which varnas originated from the different organs of the Prajapati or the creator. God created various varnas from his various organs. He created brahmins from his mouth, kshatriyas from his arms, vaishyas from his thighs and shudras from his legs. Significant feature of varna system was that the three varnas - brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas were described as dvija or twice born. Their first birth was natural birth. But they were considered to be born again at the time of the pious



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yajnopavita samskara when they were invested with the sacred thread and included into the Aryan society as its full-fledged member.

Brahmins - Brahmins were at the top of varna hierarchy. They were believed to possess great spiritual powers. Thus, they had a divine existence. In law, they claimed great privileges. Normally brahmins were exempt from execution, torture and corporal punishment. The main functions prescribed for brahmins were learning, teaching and priesthood.

Kshatriya - The second class was the ruling class described as kshatriya or rajanya. Kshatriyas represented heroism, courage and strength. They constituted the warrior class. The duty of kshatriyas was protection which had both internal and external aspects. External protection meant to protect the society from external invasion whereas internal protection meant governance in peace and protection from anarchy. Kshatriyas had the right to possess arms.

Vaishyas - Vaishyas represented the trading and commercial class. Though they were entitled to the services of the priesthood and to the ceremony of vainonavita, they were third in the social hierarchy. The main task of the vaishya was to keep and maintain cattle. But it seems that later on vaishyas became economically a very important class of society. The ideal vaishya possessed the expert knowledge of jewels, metals, cloth, threads, spices, perfumes etc. In this sense vaishyas were the ancient Indian businessmen.

Shudras - Shudras were at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They pursued the task of serving the other three varnas. They were not twice born. They were deprived of various rights. They were in fact second class citizens, on the fringes of Aryan society.

A.L. Basham maintains that shudras were of two types - not excluded or anirvasita and excluded or nirvasita. Anirvasita shudras were the part of Indian varna system where as nirvasita shudras were quite outside the pale of Hindu society and virtually indistinguishable from the strata of people known as untouchables.

Untouchables - A large number of people were deprived of all human rights. Having any contact with them might lead to the fall from grace by a normal Hindu. They were untouchables. Sometimes they are regarded as the excluded shudras whereas sometimes they are called the fifth class (pancham varna). Probably, they were the aboriginal tribes who were



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defeated by the Aryans. They were not allowed to live in the Aryan towns or villages. Their chief means of livelihood were the carrying and cremation of corpses and execution of criminals who were awarded the death penalty. They should be dressed in the garments of the corpses they cremated, should eat his food from broken vessels and should wear only those ornaments which were made of iron. Later, the four varnas were divided into various subcategories called caste.

Ashrama or the Stages of Life



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The ashrama system denotes the Hindu scheme of life according to which different stages in the life of an individual are well ordered. The average life span of an individual is considered to be 100 years and it is divided into four stages each stage having a time span of 25 years.

These four ashramas are:

1. Brahmacharyashrama or the Stage of Studentship - This is the first stage of life. It is meant for acquiring knowledge, developing discipline and moulding character. This stage starts with the ceremony called upanayanama or investiture with the sacred thread. Now the person became a brahmacharina, leading a celibate and austere life as a student at the home of his teacher.

2. Grihashthashrama or the Stage of Householder - This stage starts at marriage when the student has completed his studentship and is ready to take up the duties and responsibilities of household life. In this stage the individual gets married, earns money and begets children. The individual pursues wealth (artha) and pleasure (kāma) within the limits of the moral law (dharma).

3. Vanaprasthasharma or the Stage of Retirement from Active Life - After discharging all the duties and obligations as a householder, the individual enters into the Vanaprastha stage. It consists of the third quarter of person's life. In this phase, after retiring from active life, the individual dedicates himself to a life of spiritual contemplation. He leaves his home and goes to the forest to become a hermit.

4. Sanyasashrama or the Stage of Renunciation or Wandering Mystic - This is the last stage of life. Now the individual leaves his hermitage and becomes a homeless wanderer (sanyasin) with all his earthly ties broken. The sanyasin aspires and acts to attain liberation only.

Marriage

The institution of marriage as known today emerged during the Vedic Age (1500 BC to 600BC). Marriage or vivaha was a very important sanskara in ancient India. It was considered a sacrament (sacred ritual) during ancient times. Marriage is the beginning of the family and is a life-long commitment. It also provides an opportunity to grow in selflessness as you serve your wife and children. Marriage is more than a physical union; it is also a spiritual and emotional union. This union mirrors the one between God and his worship place. The purpose of marriages can be varied, but one could say that the purpose of marriage



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today is simply to make a commitment to the person you love. The marriage of Dushyanta and Shakuntala was an example of this marriage.

Marriage in ancient India had three main purposes –

- 1) Promotion of religion by the performance of household sacrifices.
- 2) Progeny of father and his ancestors and continuation of family line or kula.
- 3) Rati or sexual pleasure.

The eight forms of marriage are:



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1. Brahma Vivaha - This is considered to be the purest form of marriage. In this form of marriage, the father of the bride offers his daughter to a man of character and learning. The daughter who is decked with ornaments and richly dressed is given as a gift to a man of good character and high learning of the same class. This was the most favored form.

2. Daiva Vivaha - In the daiva form of marriage, the father offers her daughter as a dakshina (sacrificial fee) to a young priest who officiates the yajna which is arranged by him.

3. Arsa Vivaha - In arsa vivaha, father of the bride gives his daughter to the bridegroom after receiving a cow and a bull or two pairs of these animals from the bridegroom.

4. Prajapatya Vivaha - In this type of marriage, the father offers the girl to the bridegroom. But neither does he offer any dowry, nor does he demand bride-price.

5. Asura Vivaha - This is a form of marriage by purchase in which the bridegroom has to give money to the father or kinsman of the bride.

6. Gandharva Vivaha - This was a marriage by consent of the boy and the girl. Mutual love and consent of the bride and bridegroom was the only condition required to bring about the union.

7. Rakshasa Vivaha - This was marriage by capture in which the girl was forcibly abducted from her home crying and her kinsmen have been stained and their houses broken.

8. Paishacha Vivaha - Paishacha form of marriage is one in which the man seduces by force a girl who is sleeping or intoxicated or mentally disordered.



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Contents

- Understanding gender as a social category
- The representation of women in historical traditions.
- Challenges faced by women in India
- Slavery

Understanding Gender as a social category

Gender roles can be defined as the behaviors, values, and attitudes that a society considers appropriate for both males and females. Traditionally, men and women had completely opposing roles, men were the provider for the family and women were seen as the caretakers of both the home and the family. Gender issues include all aspects and concerns related to women's and men's lives and situations in society. Although the Constitution of India grants men and women equal rights, gender disparities remain. There has been gender discrimination mostly in favor of men in many realms. Women were under the guardianship of males: father, husband and son. When a woman married, it was regarded as her second birth. From an early age, Indian girls are told that their proper place is in the home, fulfilling domestic duties and attending to the needs of men, whereas males learn that they are superior to women and must exercise authority over them.

The Representation of Women in Historical Traditions

The status of women in India has been subject to many changes over the past few millennia. In ancient India, women in many places occupied an equal position to men. Many Hindu religious books like the Vedas, Ramayana, etc., have mentioned the names of several women who were great scholars, poets and philosophers of the time. According to ancient Hindu scriptures, a man without his wife cannot participate in any essential religious rites. Married men along with their wives are allowed to perform sacred rites on the occasion of various important festivals. Wives are called Ardhangini.

Women in the Vedic and the post Vedic Periods - The Indian cultural tradition begins with the Vedas. The degree of freedom given to ancient women to take part in public activities indicates the nature of the status enjoyed by women during Vedic period. Women never observed purdah. They enjoyed freedom and even they enjoyed freedom in selecting their male partner.



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Ancient India - Some scholars believe that in ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. Works of ancient Indian grammarians, such as Patanjali and Katyana, suggest that women were educated in the early Vedic period. Rig Vedic verses suggest that the women married at a mature age and were free to select their husband. Scriptures such as Rig Veda and Upanishad mention several women sages and seers, notably



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Gargi and Maitrey. Some kingdoms in the ancient India had traditions such as Nagarvadhu (Bride of the city). Women competed to win the popular title of the nagarvadhu.

In ancient times, the women were considered with respect and dignity. In royal households, women were given respect and they even rendered a significant contribution in the making of decisions and administrative functions. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard.

According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, later (approximately 500 B.C), the status of women began to decline with the different religious texts restricting women's freedom and rights.

In recent years the role and status of women has undergone some drastic changes due to globalization and commercialism. Recognizing the achievements of women in all facets of life - science, community, government, literature, art, sports, medicine - has a huge impact on the development of self-respect and new opportunities for girls and young women.

Challenges faced by Women in India

In the medieval period, the status of women went down extensive. Women were inferior to men. Many historians have called this age as the Dark Age. The woman's position became very miserable. Customs of purdah (a black cloth worn by women to cover their face), Sati (burning of widows), child marriage, restrictions on widow marriage, and the prevalence of joint family systems have been the factors responsible for the injustice done towards women. Women were deprived off their rights. The practice of child marriages is believed to have started from around sixth century. Earlier women in India were facing problems like child marriage, sati pratha, parda pratha, restriction to widow remarriage, widow exploitation, etc. However, almost all such old practices have almost vanished. But that doesn't mean an end to the challenges women face.

Slavery

In ancient Indian texts, the term Slave is most often used to refer 'Das'. This term have been derived from the word Das which means to finish or terminate something. It was associated with slaves because their work was to finish various jobs.

Slavery was prevalent during the Vedic age. Women slaves were used in household activities. During the Mauryan period, slaves were of 8 or 9 types as informed by Arthashastra. They



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are -

1. Slaves brought from another country
2. Slaves who were purchased
3. Prisoners of wars
4. Slaves who were inherited
5. Slaves received as presents
6. Those who sold themselves as slaves
7. Children of women slaves
8. Criminals whose punishment for their offence was to serve as a slave.



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Ashokan inscriptions also mention existence of practice of slavery during the Mauryan age. During the Gupta age, slaves were of types as informed as Narada Smriti. Most slaves were captured during wars. Some people used to become slave to earn merit (Punya) in order to get heaven after death. At times, people used to sell themselves due to economic hardship. A slave was liberated immediately if he/she saved the life of his/her master. While a member of any Varna could become slave, Brahmana slaves were rare. Buying and selling of Brahmana women were prohibited.