
Tradition and Reflection

Explorations in Indian Thought

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Homo Hierarchicus: The Conceptualization of the Varna System in Indian Thought

Introduction

1 There is an old and oft-repeated assertion that classical Indian philosophy does not concern itself with social matters. This view, which seems to agree with the Indian tradition's basic "division of labor" between the soteriological and trans-social orientation of philosophical thought on the one hand and the socially committed sciences of *artha* and *dharma* on the other, has been evaluated and interpreted from a variety of perspectives.¹ The tradition of the Advaita Vedānta, which has been portrayed as the very culmination of Hindu thought, appears to lend especially clear and unequivocal support to the truth of this assessment.

On the other hand, proponents of what has become known as the Neo-Vedānta have argued that this supposed shortcoming actually hides a rich potential of untapped positive possibilities and that the Advaita Vedānta in particular has direct relevance for the social and political problems of our time—that it alone is capable of providing a metaphysically based ethical orientation that would be acceptable to modern thought and appropriate to the current situation in the world. No matter how one may assess the meaning and actual political weight of this claim, the "practical," politicizing Vedānta has had a significant role to play in the philosophical self-representation of modern India. It merits a more serious scholarly attention than it has thus far been accorded, apart from a few promising exceptions. Directly related to this, the question as to the social relevance of classical Indian philosophy should also be posed anew—but without simply taking for granted the above-mentioned

“division of labor,” nor with a preconceived agenda of social and ideological critique. Instead, we should focus on those socially relevant statements that may indeed be found in the Indian philosophical texts, while admitting that these are scattered and isolated cases. There is no denying that India has never had a tradition of political and social philosophizing comparable to that reaching from Plato’s idea of the state to the Marxist program of a “secularization” of philosophy. Yet social themes have occasionally been taken up within the context of philosophical discourse, and philosophical terms and perspectives have been applied to social matters. The significance of these references cannot be assessed on a quantitative basis alone: even in their isolation, and as marginal phenomena within Indian philosophical literature, they are expressions of important attitudes and presuppositions of Indian philosophy, and symptoms of its social and historical role.

The conception of the four principal castes (*varna*) is the most obvious and significant point of reference for our investigation, and for this reason, the following pages will focus upon this conception. Drawing in particular upon the literature of the Hindu systems of the first millennium A D, we shall compile philosophical testimony on this subject and examine how the *varna* structure of society has been portrayed, analyzed, and rationalized within the context of cosmological, metaphysical, and epistemological discussions.

There has never been a full survey of the texts that pertain to this subject, whether by historians of Indian philosophy or the historians of the Dharmasāstra, and the following discussion can not and does not have any pretension to fill this gap. This notwithstanding, the passages which shall be presented and discussed below may be considered exemplary and should provide us with a textual basis sufficient for assessing the most important problems and developmental lines.³

2 The present chapter deals with theoretical concepts and constructs. It does not address the question to what extent these concepts correspond to social and historical realities, i.e., it does not deal with caste as an actual phenomenon. What this chapter discusses may, in fact, seem even more theoretical, abstract and removed from the realities of social life than what we find in the

Dharmasāstra literature The critique of brahminical schemes and constructions which E. Senart and many others have raised with regard to the Dharmasāstras may seem to be even more appropriate when it comes to the philosophical reconstructions of the varna structure.⁴

Indeed, we are dealing with theoretical speculations and constructions, yet these are constructions and conceptualizations developed by traditional Indian theorists. Unlike the interpretations and paradigms of modern Western theorists, they are not only ideas about, but also symptoms and components of the multi-layered Indian tradition. They may not provide us with much factual information about the social reality of traditional India, nonetheless, they are its products and reflections.

The chapter discusses traditional Indian conceptualizations and rationalizations of the varna system of society, i.e., of a supposedly natural and inherent hierarchy among human beings. The "homo hierarchicus" is just a segment of the pervasive hierarchy of living beings, which extends "from Brahmā to the tufts of grass" (*brahmā-distambaparyanta*). The Indian authors use a variety of terms to characterize this hierarchy of human, subhuman and superhuman forms of life, for instance *tāratamya* ("gradation"), *uccanīcabhāva* ("high and low status"), and *utkarsāpakarsa* ("superiority and inferiority").⁵ This hierarchy involves different levels of merit and demerit (*dharma*, *adharma*), pleasure and pain (*sukha*, *duhkha*), and of the "manifestness of knowledge, sovereignty, and so forth" (*jñānaishvaryaḥbhvyakti*), and it provides different stations of *samsāra*, i.e., of karmic reward and punishment.⁶ Some authors suggest that mankind alone, and no other species of living beings, is subdivided into further classes characterized by mutual "superiority and inferiority" (*utkarsāpakarsa*).⁷ In addition to such vertical hierarchies, we also find "horizontal" schemes of hierarchy, that is, concentric circles of increasing distance from a dharmic center. The brahmins would place themselves and the other "twice-born" (*dvija*) castes, as well as the orthodox followers of the Veda, in the central region, while the śūdra class with its innumerable subdivisions and bastardizations, as well as all more or less heterodox sects, would be seen as more or less removed or "external" (*bāhya*, *bāhyatara*) in relation to this center of legitimacy and orthodoxy.⁸

3 The title of this chapter does not imply that it is an attempt to defend L. Dumont's classical and controversial book against its Anglo-American critics. Nonetheless, it does support in its own way what Dumont calls "the main idea" of his book, that is, "the idea of hierarchy separated from power."⁹ Regardless of all problems that social and cultural anthropologists may find with this idea, the world-view that is presupposed or articulated in our philosophical sources is indeed inherently hierarchical.

There is no need for us to speculate on the origin of the caste system, on the original meaning and function of the terms *varna* and *jāti*, or on "the relationship between the caste system as it can be directly observed, and the classical theory of the varnas."¹⁰ However, a few general terminological observations will be useful. Many scholars have emphasized the fundamental differences between *jāti* and *varna*, and they have argued that "caste" should be avoided as a translation for *varna*. A. L. Basham says that the "indiscriminate use" of "caste" for both *varna* and *jāti* is "false terminology," and he adds "All ancient Indian sources make a sharp distinction between the two terms."¹¹ While Basham's call for terminological caution is certainly appropriate, his claim that the two terms were sharply distinguished in the classical texts is untenable as a general statement. As a matter of fact, for most of the philosophical sources to be discussed in this chapter the terminological distinction is virtually negligible.

Unlike *varna*, the term *jāti* does not play a noticeable and thematically relevant role in Vedic literature. It does appear in the Dharmaśāstra literature, beginning with the Dharmaśūtras and older verse texts. In these works, it is neither simply a synonym of *varna*, nor clearly and consistently distinguished from it. Manu and other authorities refer frequently to the "norms of the jātis" (*jāti-dharma*), usually in conjunction with the "norms of the regions and families" (*desadharma*, *kuladharma*), it does not seem likely that these are references to the four varnas.¹² Yājñavalkya mentions *varna* and *jāti* side by side, as separate or at least separable phenomena.¹³

Yet from an early time, there was at least a partial overlap, together with much interaction and "osmosis." Āpastamba's *Dharmaśūtra* uses *jāti* in the sense of *varna*.¹⁴ In later texts, this is a more or less familiar phenomenon. As stated earlier, the *Manusmṛiti* has

usages of *jāti* that imply a distinction from *varna*, and Manu X, 4 states that (unlike the *jāti*) the number of *varna* is strictly limited to four. Nonetheless, other verses of the same text use *jāti* to refer to the four *varna* and, even more conspicuously, *varna* to refer to the unlimited number of other "castes" or "races" (*jāti*). For instance, X, 31 uses the word *varna* with regard to the "inferior" (*hīna*) groups which result from bastardization, in other verses, the two terms seem to be interchangeable¹⁵

The commentators deal with this terminological situation in different ways. In a number of cases, they explain the term *jāti* by referring to the four *varna*, i.e., the brahmins etc.¹⁶, in other cases, they note that *varna* is used in the sense of certain subspecies or intermediate groups within the human species (*manusya-jāti*, *manusya-vāntarajāti*)¹⁷. There are, however, more specific and thematically relevant statements which explain the *jātis* as mixed castes, such as the *murdhāvasikta* (of brahmin fathers and ksatriya mothers) or *ambastha* (of brahmin fathers and vaisya mothers)¹⁸. This does not necessarily imply that *jāti* is used as a technical term, some authors state that, in addition to "mixed castes," it may also refer to "women" (*strī*) and other groups¹⁹. At any rate, the texts do not recognize any independent "jāti system," apart from the four *varnas*. The theory of "mixed castes" is an attempt to derive all other hereditary social formations from the *varna* system. Such derivation involves a basic ambiguity. Should the "mixed castes" be added to or subsumed under the four *varnas*? Do they constitute mere subspecies, or new, additional species, which are genetically derived from, but not included in the *varna* system? The answers may vary, and they are often more or less elusive²⁰. While it may be true that the theory of caste mixture "was used to refer real *jāti* to the *varnas*,"²¹ the instances of 'mixed castes' mentioned in the texts are not necessarily more factual than the four *varnas*.

4 The philosophical sources which will be discussed in this chapter do not pay much attention to the 'mixed castes,' or to the distinction between *jāti* and *varna*. They deal with the conceptual framework of the four normative and theoretical 'castes' which they may call both *jāti* and *varna*. In using the term *jāti* for this purpose, they obviously exploit the fact that it means not only

“birth” or “species,” but was also widely used in grammatical and philosophical literature as a term for “universals,” as opposed to particular, individual entities (*vyakti*, etc.)

In the context and for the purpose of this presentation, the term “caste” shall be utilized in the sense of the theoretical notion of *varna*. Although this deviates from current terminological usage, it is not only convenient, but may also remind us of the fact that, in spite of all differences, the *varna* system is, indeed, the prototype for important aspects of the “real” castes.

The textual references found in the following presentation could have been easily augmented. For this, the literature produced by the orthodox traditions of the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* and *Uttaramīmāṃsā* would be of great and obvious importance. In addition, the adaptations of the *Mīmāṃsā* arguments by the *Dharmasāstra* commentators, for instance *Medhātithi*, would have to be considered.²² The topic has continued to play its role in modern traditionalistic *pandit* literature. Among the relevant sources, the *Dharmaśāstra* by *Anantakṛṣṇa Sāstrin*, *Sītārāma Sāstrin* and *Srījīva Bhaṭṭācārya* deserves particular attention. However, Sanskrit *pandits* are also found among the advocates of a non-hereditary, ethical and characterological interpretation of the *varna* system.²³

In the later history of *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*, epistemological and ontological discussions concerning the status of the four *varnas* are a somewhat marginal, though certainly not negligible phenomenon. There are even some—hitherto unpublished—monographs in this area, for instance the *Brāhmanatvajātīvāda*, the *Brāhmanatvajātvicāra* and the *Brāhmanatvavāda*, manuscripts of these anonymous texts are found in the collection of the Sanskrit University Library (*Sarasvatī Bhavana*) in Benares.²⁴ The topic has also been discussed in the sectarian theistic traditions, primarily in the literature of the *Vaiṣṇava Vedānta* schools. Apart from the numerous *Brahmasūtra* commentaries produced by these schools,²⁵ we have to mention some direct and specific adaptations of *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* texts and procedures. *Venkatanātha* (also known as *Vedāntadesika*), one of the chief representatives of *Rāmānuja*’s *Srīvaiṣṇava* school, provides a remarkable example in his *Sesvaramīmāṃsā*, i.e., a theistic adaptation and interpretation of *Jaimini*’s *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, he discusses the ontological and epistemological status of the *varnas* in detail and reproduces *Kumārila*’s arguments from the *Tantravārttika*.²⁶



On the other hand, the opponents of brahminical orthodoxy, in particular the Jainas and Buddhists, have paid a great deal of attention to this issue. After the demise of Buddhism in India, the Jainas continued their vigorous attacks against the hereditary varna system and, more specifically, against the idea of real "caste universals." The great Jaina dialectician Prabhācandra (eleventh century) epitomizes this tradition of critique in two elaborate sections of his *Nyāyakumudacandra* and his *Prameyakamalamārtanda*.²⁷ Even within the Hindu tradition, the attempts of the brahmins to establish their hereditary rank as a quasi-biological species were questioned and ridiculed.²⁸ However, traditional Advaita Vedānta did not take part in this critique. Its non-dualistic metaphysics has generally not affected its orthodox and conservative position with regard to social norms; this includes its acceptance of the four varnas as legitimate and authoritative structures of the world of appearance. It has been left to the Neo-Vedānta to proclaim and exploit the social and political potential of nondualism.⁹

Antecedents of the Philosophical Varna Theories

5 The present context precludes any discussion of the factual origins of the caste system or the problems of its later historical development and its actual role within Indian society. Concerning its documentation and interpretation in the mythological, cosmological and ritual texts of the early period and its theoretical explication in the Dharmasāstra, we may refer to the available standard works, in particular the presentation by P. V. Kane,³⁰ as well as the older yet still useful compilations of J. Muir³¹ and A. Weber.³² Nevertheless, it seems fitting to include at least a few basic remarks about those aspects of the *varna* conception that became important for later philosophical debates, and in particular for the debates between Buddhists and Hindus.

As exemplified by the concept of the brahmin, the cosmic and the social, the ethical norm and the supposed "biological" fact, have been combined within the four varnas since they were listed in the cosmogonic hymn Rgveda X, 90. This is in keeping with a world view whose key concepts interweave aspects of a normative and factual, and an ethical and physical nature. The doctrine of karma and

rebirth, which was gradually consolidated, came to provide a natural framework for this approach.³³ And yet the literature from the Brāhmaṇa period also contains a number of terms which indicate that these various aspects and meanings were being distinguished from one another. For example, we find the brahmin who was characterized as such solely as a result of his ancestry or his fulfillment of purely formal functions (*jātibrahmaṇa*, *brahmabandhu*) being contrasted with the brahmin who was distinguished by his adequate knowledge and action and who had realized the full sense of his being a brahmin in this manner.³⁴ In other words, a distinction was made between the ethical and the hereditary aspects, which were conceptually juxtaposed and occasionally contrasted. What is more, the significance of hereditary legitimation occasionally appears to have been secondary,³⁵ although it would be going too far to see such scattered and often ambivalent passages as evidence of any far-reaching mobility or a predominantly ethical and characterological understanding of the caste system—as the Neo-Vedānta frequently does.

The critique by the Buddhists has to be seen against this background. Their “ethicizing” interpretation of the caste concepts was not a radical innovation. Instead, they drew upon aspects that had long been present in the spectrum of meaning of these concepts, but did so in a manner which credited the ethical aspect with the primary and more intrinsic meaning while playing this against the other aspects. It was here that the coexistence and occasional competition between the ethical/normative and the factual/hereditary aspects first came to be a problem, instead of being coordinated with one another, a sharp contrast began to be made between what was considered to be relevant and irrelevant. As a result, the caste distinctions themselves were ultimately called into question, and the traditional criteria subjected to fundamental criticism.³⁶

The concept of *svadharma*, which may be found in some of the later Upanisads and in particular in the Bhagavadgītā, offered a way out of this problematic situation.³⁷ This concept assigns great weight to the ethical motif while simultaneously maintaining and defending the hereditary legitimation of caste membership. The hereditary and the ethical aspects remain distinct and even stand in contrast to one another while being related in such a way that there was no direct competition and confrontation, a procedure that skirts

the danger of weakening the hereditary aspect. There is a different ethical appraisal of behavior for each of the four hereditary stages. In other words, each person should prove himself according to his hereditary position. Thus, while a "good" sūdra may be ethically "better" than a "bad" brahmin, this ethical hierarchy cannot change the fact that a brahmin will always remain a brahmin and a sūdra a sūdra.³⁸ The respecting of this hereditary affiliation and the avoidance of intermingling (*saṃkara*) is, in keeping with the concept of *svadharma*, in itself a standard and even a fundamental condition of ethical conduct: it is better to perform the duties appropriate to one's station poorly than to fulfill those of another well.³⁹

In Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, the problems of reference and differentiation which arise in connection with the "coexistence" of ethical and biological aspects in the concept of *varṇa* appear as topics of linguistic and epistemological reflection. In a section of the *Tatpuruṣāhnikā* (on Pāṇini II, 2,6 *nañ*) that discusses the function of the particle *a-* in such forms as *abrāhmaṇa*, the possibility is considered that the nominal meaning to which the particle of negation refers in such a case is to be understood in the sense of an aggregation of properties (*guṇasamudāya*), i.e., that the *a-* here signifies a deficiency or incompleteness. Such an interpretation would also explain the applicability of the remainder of the compound, i.e., *-brāhmaṇa*, for a share of those properties whose entirety makes up the full meaning of the word *brāhmaṇa* would be retained in its composition with the negative particle *a*. Here, several external criteria of identification (*gaura*, *śucyācāra*, *pingala*, *kapilakesa*, i.e., light-colored, of faultless conduct, brown-eyed, with reddish-brown hair) are added to such traditional "components of meaning" as asceticism (*tapas*), erudition (*śruta*), and legitimate birth (*yonī*).⁴⁰ According to this interpretation, any *vaiśya* who possesses certain ethical or physiological characteristics would be considered to be just as much a "partial brahmin" as a person whose "brahminness" was solely the result of his descent from brahmin parents. On the whole, however, this discussion remains noncommittal and can hardly be seen as an expression of social critique. At no time does the conceptual status of the brahmin etc. appear endangered, and the fact that there are certain problems and exceptions is not considered to be an occasion for questioning the fundamental validity of the caste system or the reliable identifiability of caste membership as a result of ancient tradi-

tion, people know how to distinguish a brahmin from a non-brahmin in daily life. Such physical features as hair and skin color, as well as peculiar forms of livelihood, are still considered valid criteria, while more penetrating questions concerning the authenticity or demonstrability of brahminness, etc., are not posed.⁴¹

A completely different level of reflection on this problem is developed in the Mīmāṃsā, and in particular by Kumārila. Here, as a later section of this chapter will show, the Buddhist challenge was met in full. The ethical and factual connotations were distinguished from one another in a much more resolute manner, and the priority of the hereditary legitimation was developed with a previously unknown conceptual rigor. Here, safeguarding the caste concept against the ambivalences that resulted from the combination of various semantic components and against the dangers of mobility and variability became an important motivating factor.

In general, the discussions of the varna system within traditional Hindu philosophy were largely apologetical and remained reactions to criticism and challenges from without. In accordance with the different stages of development and the fundamental systematic positions of the Indian philosophical schools, a variety of metaphysical, cosmological, and epistemological concepts and theories were placed in the service of this essentially apologetic task.

The Varna System and the Guna Theory

6 Of all the theories that may be found in classical Indian philosophy, the doctrine of the three *guna*, the three basic forces of the dynamic primordial matter (*pradhāna*) or nature (*prakṛti*) from which the visible world periodically develops, has been most widely applied to non-philosophical questions. This Sāṃkhya theory was developed from pre-philosophical and mythological sources and offered a potentially universal, and, indeed, frequently utilized principle for classifying and explaining empirical phenomena, often completely detached from the remaining doctrines of Sāṃkhya, it was applied in a variety of ways in cosmology, psychology, medicine, dietetics, poetics, etc. The *guna* theory was especially popular for classifying and characterizing living beings (especially humans) and their patterns of behavior. Similarly, it could also be used as a

means for discussing, justifying, and reinterpreting existing classifications and typologies. It is not surprising, then, that it also became linked in certain ways with the most significant of these classifications, that based upon the varna structure of society.

In the classical Sāmkhya texts from the first millennium A D (i.e., in particular in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāmkhyakārikā* and the corresponding commentaries) few explicit opinions are to be found, and—as these texts are concerned with fundamental cosmological, metaphysical, and soteriological questions—this was probably not to be expected. Yet one passage, *Sāmkhyakārikā* v. 53, is worthy of mention.

*astavikalpo daivas, tairragyonnyas ca pañcadhā bhavati,
mānasyas ca-ekavidhah, samāsato bhautikah sargah*

("The divine domain of evolution has eight types, the animal five the human one, this, in short, is the evolution of living beings.")

Directly after this verse (v. 54), this enumeration is supplemented by a hierarchical arrangement based upon the distribution of the three guṇas. Now it would certainly be incorrect to draw more far-reaching conclusions from the characterization of the human race as "uniform" (*ekavidha*). Yet, it should be noted that no matter what other assumptions may have been made about the subdivisions of the human race, these were not elevated to the rank of primary cosmological and biological relevance (as occurs in the often-cited Rgveda hymn X 90 and in the numerous texts which concur with this). The view of man in his unity and distinction, which tended to recede in later Indian thought, still appeared to possess a certain self-evident validity within the natural philosophy of the *Sāmkhyakārikā*.

In this context, it is interesting to consider some of the various ways in which commentators have reacted to this passage. In the richest and possibly oldest available commentary, the anonymous *Yuktidīpikā*, the word *ekavidha* is explicated through the comment that there are no subspecies (*jātyantarānupapattih*).¹ But the *Mātharavṛtti* and the *Sāmkhyasaptatvṛtti* (which has recently been published and which has obvious affinities with the *Mātharavṛtti*) limit themselves to the statement that the human race (which the verse characterizes as uniform) reaches from the brahmin to the cāṇḍāla on the

basis of the equality of characteristics (*linga*), i.e., primarily their visual appearance.⁴³ Vācaspati's remark that this characterization of the human race as uniform simply disregards the subdivisions into subspecies, brahmins, etc. is an obvious attempt to temper its tone.⁴⁴

In any case, one can hardly speak of any explicit social reference in the classical Sāṃkhya, nor do we find any explicit applications of the three *guṇa* to the theory of caste. The situation is different in pre- and post-classical Sāṃkhya, as well as in other texts—both older and more recent—that are either directly or indirectly related to the Sāṃkhya.

In this context, much, and much that is controversial, has been said about the most famous of those early texts that utilized Sāṃkhya concepts, the Bhagavadgītā. Let us present a few basic observations which are directly relevant to our topic.

Referring to passages such as IV, 13,⁴⁵ which state that the institution of the four varṇas follows the distribution of the guṇas and "works" (*karman*) and speaking of the role of the guṇa theory in the Bhagavadgītā in general, modern Hinduism has often advanced the thesis that the hereditary view of the caste system has here given way to an ethical or characterological view. S. Radhakrishnan, who tends to draw parallels between the Bhagavadgītā and the Buddhist *Dhammapada* with respect to other questions as well, has been an emphatic spokesman for this view. Here, the concept of *svadharma* appears to provide additional support for this ethicizing interpretation.⁴⁶

It is very symptomatic of the literary character and the historical role of the Bhagavadgītā that this work has also been subjected to completely opposite interpretations. That is, it has also been cited as an authoritative document which provides support for the traditional hereditary explication of the four varṇas. Such modern traditionalist pandits as Vāsudeva Śāstrin Abhyankara and Durgāprasāda Dviveda have cited the passages in the Bhagavadgītā that deal with *svadharma*, etc., as evidence for the hereditary view and *against* the ethicizing corruption of the caste concept, for they assume that hereditary caste membership and the social roles traditionally ascribed to the castes also correspond to the true and metaphysical being of the individuals concerned.⁴⁷ Of course, the Bhagavadgītā is distinguished by its avoidance of categorical and exclusive statements and its general tendency towards reconciliation, syn-

thesis, and ambivalence. For this reason, we should not expect it to explicitly play off the various meanings or aspects of the varna concept or claim exclusive validity for one meaning or one aspect. At the same time, it is clear that the fundamental hereditary meaning of caste membership remains unquestioned, and is in fact defended in a subtle, conciliatory, and very accommodating manner against the ethicizing meaning represented by Buddhism, in the opening chapters, the mixing of the castes (*varnasamkara*) is repeatedly referred to as a threatening phenomenon.⁴⁸ Classifications made on the basis of ethical or characterological criteria appear alongside of and within the biological and hereditary arrangement of the castes without replacing or even endangering it.⁴⁹ Here, it is obvious that we can no longer speak of any naive and unreflected coexistence among the meanings and aspects such as may be found in the older texts, and especially those dating from the pre-Buddhist period. The ethical and biological/hereditary aspects overlap and merge, albeit in a manner that clearly presupposes the confrontation between the meanings which the Buddhists brought about. The concept of *svadharma* (i.e., the duties that result for a person from his position in life) appears to allow a great deal of room for the ethical aspect while simultaneously securing and stabilizing the traditional, hereditary structure as the very context and foundation for ethical valuation, according to the doctrine of rebirth and retributive causality (*samsāra*, *karman*, etc.), the caste rank results from previous existences and does not necessarily reflect one's current moral achievements. The "distribution of the *gunas* and the works" (*gunakarmavibhāga*) referred to in the above-cited passage IV,13 is doubtlessly to be understood within the context of the doctrine of *samsāra*.⁵⁰

7. The manner in which the term *karman* was applied to the four castes is revealingly ambivalent while "works" in the sense of ethically relevant behavior (*ācāra*) are ascribed to the two higher varnas (*brāhmaṇa*, *ksatriya*), "works" in the sense of types of livelihood or employment are associated with the two lower varnas (*vaiśya*, *śūdra*).⁵¹ The reasons behind this practice are easy to understand since ancient times, the status of the brahmin, and to a lesser extent that of the *ksatriya*, has been associated with such characteristic virtues as wisdom, honesty, and self-discipline. These values were reserved for the higher castes, and could not also be assigned

to the lower castes as their appropriate norms (svadharma), for these lower castes, especially the śūdras, were associated with such ethically negative attributes as an impure way of life, licentiousness, and dullness—attributes hardly suitable to be assigned or recommended as norms or duties. Accordingly, the only alternative was to refer to the means of occupation—whose faithful fulfillment could open up the dimension of “ethical” values—to give meaning to the concept of svadharma for the lower castes. For this reason, while a śūdra could indeed be a “good” śūdra, his caste-bound achievements could not help him to attain the peculiar ethical potential that belongs (i.e., is “innate”) to the brahmin (*brahmakarma svabhāvajam*, XVIII, 42).

A clear paraphrase of this point of view may be found in the rhetorical question posed by a nineteenth century pandit, “Soobajee Bapoo,” who asked whether a mule, no matter how hardworking he is (i.e., who performs his functions as a mule as perfectly as he can) can ever become a horse.⁵²

It is remarkable that the central statements made in the Bhagavadgītā about the svadharma were also utilized in the law book of Manu.⁵³ Moreover, Manu also made use of the guna theory in order to lend a metaphysical and cosmological emphasis to his hierarchical classification of all living beings. This is a “mixed hierarchy” like those so typical in the “presystematic” texts. Manu introduces us to the following beings, arranged in an ascending order determined by the relative distribution of the three gunas—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.⁵⁴ Plants (*sthāvara*), worms (*krmi*), turtles, śūdras, barbarians (*mleccha*), lions, birds, hypocrites (*dāmbhikāḥ puruṣāḥ*), and *piśāca* demons are dominated chiefly by *tamas*, wrestlers (*malla*), actors (*nata*), ksatriyas, great debaters (*vādayuddhapradhāna*), and gandharvas are dominated chiefly by *rajas*, ascetics (*yati*), certain brahmins (*vipra*), stars (*nakṣatra*), *ṛṣi*, *deva*, *Brahmā*, *dharma*, the *mahān* (i.e., the cosmic *buddhi*, “knowledge”), and even *avyakta* (i.e., non-manifested “nature” itself) are dominated chiefly by *sattva*. Manu’s list clearly intermingles a number of aspects and criteria, his categories are partly ethical, characterological, mythological, biological/cosmological, or refer to occupation. Within the sphere of human existence, the four varnas are not considered as a comprehensive and exclusive principle of classification and subordination (the *vaiśya* are not mentioned at all). And Manu simply ignores the fact that much overlapping

and blending occurs in his list (this "overlapping of the genera," *jātsamkara* in the logical sense, was meticulously avoided by the later systematic philosophers)

There are a number of other examples in which the four varnas appear within comprehensive hierarchies and evolutionary series, for instance in the Mahābhārata or in the Brāhmanas (specifically in the "table of creation" used in the *agnicayana* ritual and first quoted by A. Weber)⁵⁵ The question whether the *varna* system was originally included in these hierarchies or added at a later time shall not be dealt with here. The passage from the *Sukānuṣṭhāna* chapter of the Mahābhārata, which, in a series of progressive dichotomies leads from basic biological categories to the concept of the true brahmin who knows brahman, is on a different conceptual level and reminiscent of the diheretic procedure found in Plato's *Sophist* and *Politicus*.⁵⁶ Enumerations that proceed from biological or essentially cosmological categories to ethical concepts, eventually culminating in the concept of the true brahmin as the genuine sage or the true knower of the Veda, have a tradition that may be traced from the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* to numerous more recent texts.⁵⁷

Returning now to our subject of how the *guna* theory has been utilized to explicate the *varna* system; it remains to be noted that the three *gunas* were not only applied within a context of general and comprehensive hierarchies, but also particularly and individually to the four varnas, sometimes in conjunction with the doctrine of caste colors.⁵⁸ Here, of course, difficulties, or inconvenience at the very least, arose from the fact that a threefold schema was being used to explicate and justify a group of four and that, quite generally, attempts were being made to link two schemas which originated from independent (and in fact divergent) sources.⁵⁹

One seemingly obvious solution to this conflict, yet one which was nevertheless surprising within the Indian context, was proffered by the *Anugītā* in the Mahābhārata, it applies the *gunas* to just three varnas, assigning *tamas* to the śūdra, *rajas* to the ksatriya, and *sattva*, the highest *guna*, to the brahmin, the vaiśya has no part in this process.⁶⁰ Now it would certainly be wrong to expect that a derivative text such as the *Anugītā* would critically and autonomously apply philosophical and cosmological concepts to social conventions, and thus attempt a critical reconstruction and reform of the *varna* system along the lines suggested by the metaphysics of the *gunas*,

and many other passages leave no doubt that the *Anugītā* never seriously calls the number of the four varnas into question ⁶¹

Other authors have used other means in their attempts to reconcile that discrepancy which the *Anugītā* clearly avoids through mere omission. Often, the *vaiśya* was endowed with a combination of *rajas* and *tamas* and the other varnas with "pure" *gunas* ⁶² Durgāprasāda Dviveda, whom we have already mentioned, proceeded in a somewhat different fashion, and further elevated the position of the *brahmin*. In his view, the *brahmin* is defined through *sattva* alone, the *ksatriya* through *rajas* and *sattva*, the *vaiśya* through *rajas* and *tamas*, and the *sūdra* through *tamas* alone or through *tamas* and *rajas* ⁶³

P. T. Raju's attempt to depict Plato's threefold psychological and social scheme of λογιστικόν, θυμός, and ἐπιθυμία as an analogy to such applications of the three *gunas* is not convincing ⁶⁴. Instead, it underscores a fundamental difference. For Plato develops a comprehensive rational construction that considers social and political questions in a manner that deliberately distances itself from existing conventions, among the *guna* theorists, on the other hand, we find a cosmological scheme being coordinated with a social order that was considered to be as natural as the cosmos itself. There is no contrast here between a "natural" and a "positive" or merely conventional order. The *guna* theory was not used to question or criticize the *varna* system. To be sure, the concepts *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* do serve to recall the ethical and characterological aspects of the *varna* system as opposed to its hereditary connotations, and in fact, modern authors have often used these concepts to explicate the four principal castes in the sense of psychological and physiological types ⁶⁵. Yet no criteria were developed for empirically determining and unambiguously distinguishing among these types and, therewith, for a practically feasible division of society independent of the hereditary order, and the readiness for alternatives often remained verbal. Even S. Radhakrishnan, one of the most persuasive spokesmen for an interpretation of the four varnas based upon character and vocation and not upon hereditary group membership, admitted: "Since we cannot determine in each individual case what the aptitudes of the individuals are, heredity and training are used to fix the calling" ⁶⁶. When viewed against this background, the position of such a traditional scholar as Durgāprasāda Dviveda

appears more consistent he considers the application of the three *gunas* to be merely another way of specifying what is by definition implied in the hereditary membership in a caste, and such hereditary membership alone is able to provide reliable testimony about the true, metaphysical, *gunic* disposition of a person, which is never really accessible to independent, empirically oriented criticism or verification⁶⁷

Castes as Real Universals

8 Another philosophical device that has been drawn upon in interpreting and discussing the caste system is the realistic concept of universals (*sāmānya*, *jāti*) While this did not achieve the popularity of the doctrine of the three *gunas*, its many metaphysical, linguistic, and epistemological ramifications assured it a greater importance in the philosophical discussions of the classical period The theory of real universals received its most distinctive treatment in the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, and in this version, it became a classical target for Buddhist criticism Yet it also played a very notable role in the Mīmāṃsā, in particular with respect to the present topic Before we take up the manner in which the concept of *sāmānya* was applied to the theory of castes, it seems appropriate to make a few remarks about its peculiar systematic role within the Vaiśeṣika and on its historical role during the classical period

Most probably in connection with linguistic considerations and initially in a more or less undifferentiated manner, the realistic concept of *sāmānya* or *jāti* was at first concerned with the problem of the one-in-many, of what particular entities may have in common, of the identical and enduring meaning of words That which is common and universal is one, indivisible, subject to no change or decay, yet inherent in many changing individuals However, the development of thought about this topic soon led to a distinction between what were considered to be real universals and other, merely accidental, "additional qualities" (*upādhi*) While this does not amount to an equivalence of the concepts of *sāmānya* and *jāti* with the Western concept of essence, they nevertheless served to demarcate what was substantial and constitutive from accidental attributes and merely temporal and extrinsic functions In this sense, the actual *sāmānya*

is that which makes a concrete individual thing what it is a horse (*asva*) is what it is insofar as "horseness" (*asvatva*) is inherent in it, while a cow is what it is insofar as "cowness" (*gotva*) is inherent in it. On the other hand, "cookness" (*pācakatva*) is merely an "additional quality," but not a real type and factor of identity. The *sāmānyas* thus signify structures of the universe, biological species, and other basic forms within the real, empirical world that remain unaffected by the periodic destructions of the world and always reappear at the beginning of a new epoch. For this reason, and in the face of the ancient cosmological associations of the varna doctrine, it would seem natural that the four castes were also viewed in the sense of such invariable prototypes.

Yet the old Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya texts did not portray the four varnas as universals. To be sure, the caste hierarchy, both in itself and as an integral component of dharma, was unambiguously and unequivocally accepted. In his mythical/philosophical description of the regeneration of the world after its disintegration into atoms at the beginning of a new epoch, Prasastapāda makes it clear that he attributes a cosmological status to the system of the four varnas. And in fact, he does this with much greater decisiveness than the classical Sāṃkhya. He even includes a clear allusion to the *Puruṣasūkta*, although in contrast to the Rgveda, he does not speak of an original cosmogonic act, but rather of a recurrent event. At the beginning of each new world period, souls (*ātman*) are assigned to these social archetypes, as well as to other forms of life, in accordance with their unredeemed karma from the preceding world period.⁶⁸

In Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika texts from the ninth and tenth centuries, we find that the interpretation and discussion of the varna theory within the context of the doctrine of universals had become a familiar and common theme. Here as well, the epistemological orientation which prevailed in the discussions of this period is in the foreground, that is, the discussions primarily revolve around questions as to how, within the context of the doctrine of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), each of the varnas may be safely recognized as such and distinguished from one another and how the view that the castes are determined by real universals may be epistemologically justified. Since the Vaiśeṣika and subsequently the Nyāya claimed that the universals (*sāmānya*) are demonstrable in

perception as the data of “mere intuition” (*ālocanamātra*, *nir-
vīkalpapakapratyaksa*), the question of perception also had to be posed
with respect to caste universals. And when countering objections
from the Buddhists and others, it was essential to consider the rela-
tion between direct perception and that indirect knowledge which
was acquired through “instruction” (*upadeśa*) and genealogical tradi-
tion.

9. In his *Nyāyamañjarī* (ninth century), Jayantabhatta notes
that a person initially requires “instruction” and genealogical knowl-
edge if he is to be able to ascertain the caste membership of a particu-
lar individual—at the very least, one has to have learned the
meanings of the corresponding words. Afterwards, however, one
merely has to use one’s perceptual abilities in order to identify a
person as a member of a particular caste. The fact that learning is
the prerequisite of this act does not, as he emphasizes, call into
question the results of perception as such. Must not a person simi-
larly first be instructed about the meaning of the word “cow”
before he is able to identify a cow as such? According to this line of
reasoning, linguistic instruction is merely the external preparation
for a perceptual act, a preparation that does not in any way detract
from the validity of the results of that act—just as that which a per-
son perceives after he has reached the top of a mountain does not
lose its status as content of perception (merely because it requires
such preparation).⁶⁹ While Jayanta does mention another position,
namely, that a brahmin can be identified merely on the basis of his
distinguished appearance even without prior genealogical instruc-
tion, he does not seem to concur with this view.⁷⁰

In a later section of his *Nyāyamañjarī*, Jayanta resumes the dis-
cussion of the perceptibility of “caste universals,” and once again, he
cites the simile of the view from the mountain, which he has obvi-
ously borrowed from Kumārila’s *Tantravārttika*.⁷¹

The fact that the perception of a brahmin, as opposed to the
seeing of a cow, does not presuppose a one-time learning alone but
also a genealogical inquiry that must be made for each case, was not
considered a difficulty to be taken seriously. On this point, the
Vaisesika commentator Śrīdhara (tenth century) was even more ex-
plicit. While admitting that the “brahminness” (*brāhmanatva*) of a
brahmin is not perceived as easily and directly as the “cowness”



(*gotva*) of a cow, he considers the difference merely one of degree. By being taught about the ancestry of a person, we learn to see him in the correct way, yet this does not detract from the authenticity of such seeing.⁷² Similarly, in order to be able to distinguish between the classes or “castes” of precious gems, one must have previously acquired a certain expertise in this field.⁷³ Śrīdhara’s epistemological confidence was not shaken by the critics who pointed out that the possible marital unreliability of brahmin women could endanger the legitimate descent of the offspring and the authenticity of the universal “brahminness.”⁷⁴

The notion of real “caste universals” is generally taken for granted by later Vaiśeṣika commentators, although it is not an extensively debated topic in their works. An anonymous commentary on the Vaiśeṣikasūtra which was written some time after Udayana, possibly around 1200, resolutely dismisses all arguments against the real existence and perceptibility of a universal *brāhmanatva*, and it concludes “This is not so, since (the universal brahminness) is, indeed, established through sense perception expressed in (the recurrent observation) ‘this is a brahmin, this (too) is a brahmin’ . Otherwise, such universals as cowness would also be eliminated” (*tan na, brāhmaṇo ’yam brāhmaṇo ’yam iti pratyaksād eva tatsiddheḥ anyathā gotvāder api vīlayāt*).⁷⁵

As could be expected, the Buddhist philosophers took up positions against these arguments of the adherents of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika. Examples of this may be found in Śāntaraksita’s *Tattvasamgraha*, Kāmalasīla’s accompanying commentary *Tattvasamgrahapañjikā*,⁷⁶ and the extensive linguistic and epistemological discussions in Prajñākaragupta’s *Pramānavārttikabhāṣya* (also known as the *Vārttikālankāra*).⁷⁷ Prajñākaragupta in particular discusses the relationship between “instruction” (*upadeśa*) and perception (*pratyakṣa*) that was also dealt with by Jayanta and Śrīdhara. In his view, however, no matter how this relationship is interpreted, there is no way to determine the reality and genuineness of caste universals, and especially of brahminness. In addition to these epistemological and “criteriological” questions, basic problems of definition associated with the doctrine of the four varnas are repeatedly touched upon.⁷⁸

10. In general, the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophers did not consider the defense and analysis of the varna system to be their

main task. The majority of the texts simply take it for granted, and they do not discuss it explicitly. Those that do typically limit themselves to a few brief remarks or allusions.⁷⁹ Quite obviously, this topic is not really intrinsic to the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika. The situation was different in the Mīmāṃsā, a system whose apologetic motivation is straightforward and which, as a whole, represents an attempt to develop a comprehensive explanation and defense of the Vedic dharma. It was especially Kumārila (seventh century), the leading philosophical systematizer of the Mīmāṃsā, who appropriated the concept of universals as an apologetic device for discussing the subject of caste. In contrast, the second major school of the Mīmāṃsā, which follows Kumārila's rival Prabhākara, developed some exemplary arguments for criticizing such applications of the concept of universals. Śrīdhara's discussion seems to be inspired by and based upon the positive as well as negative arguments produced by these two schools of Mīmāṃsā. The passage from the *Nyāyakandalī* discussed earlier does not go in any significant way beyond those ideas and arguments we find in the works of Kumārila on the one hand and in a representative text of the Prabhākara school, Śālikanāthamiśra's *Prakaranapañcikā*, on the other.⁸⁰

In a number of passages in Kumārila's main works, i.e. the *Sloka-vārttika* and the *Tantravārttika*, it is either explicitly stated or implicitly assumed that the four varnas are determined by real universals and thus "ontologically" different from one another, and that caste membership is metaphysically prior to all ethical, occupational and characterological criteria. In the reification and hypostatization of the universals (*jāti*, *sāmānya*), Kumārila does not go as far as the classical Vaiśeṣika, his universals occur *in rebus* and are related to their substrates in an identity-in-difference relationship. Nevertheless, they are real, eternal prototypes. Kumārila's predecessors, in particular Sabara and the so-called Vrttikāra, introduced the topic of universals under the title *ākṛti*, "form," "shape." According to Sabara's testimony in his commentary on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* I, 1, 5, the Vrttikāra taught that such "forms" are directly perceived (*pratyakṣa*), not inferred (*sādhya*). The Nyāya, on the other hand, distinguished between *ākṛti* and *jāti*. According to Gautama's *Nyāyasūtra* II, 2, 65(68), the "form" or "shape" manifests the universal and its characteristic marks (*ākṛtir jātiliṅgākhyā*). Both of these positions imply difficulties, as far as the identification of "caste universals" is con-

cerned Are there any distinctive visible forms (*ākṛti*, *ākāra*) or configurations (*samsthāna*) that could support the assumption that different universals, real generic properties, inhere in the brahmins and ksatriyas? Obviously, they do not differ from each other in the same conspicuous manner in which a horse differs from an elephant This is an observation which was sufficiently familiar to the opponents of the varna system ⁸¹

In his commentary on *Nyāyasūtra* and *Nyāyabhāṣya* II, 2, 65(68), Uddyotakaraṇa notes that not all universals are indicated by "forms" (*na punah sarvā jātur ākṛtyā lṅgyate*) Kumārila goes further than this He claims that the Mīmāṃsā concept of *ākṛti*, since it is used as a synonym of *jāti* or *sāmānya*, i e as general term for "universal," has no connotation of "form," "shape" or "configuration" at all ⁸² Both in the *Ākṛtivāda* of the *Slokavārttika* and in the *Ākṛtyadhikarana* of the *Tantravārttika*, he argues vigorously for the conceptual dissociation of "form"/"shape" and "universal" This has obvious and significant implications for his theory of caste universals

In the *Tantravārttika*, Kumārila remarks somewhat casually that the brahmins and the other castes have heads, hands, etc., that are quite similar in shape, and that they are usually the object of non-discriminating perception, nevertheless, the caste distinctions can be ascertained on the basis of memories concerning the lineage of the parents ⁸³ In the *Slokavārttika*, he states that different types of criteria may serve to identify real generic properties and the distinctive classes to which they belong, for instance color in the case of gold and copper, smell and taste in the case of sesame oil and melted butter, the shape in the case of a pot, and birth or descent (*yonī*) in the case of the brahmin and the other castes All this does not affect Kumārila's basic premise that ultimately the universals or generic properties themselves should be perceptible, reliance on these criteria is just the manner of accomplishing such perception ⁸⁴ Vācaspati adopts this argumentation for his *Nyāyavārttikatātparyatikā*, while commenting on *Nyāyasūtra* II, 2, 65(68) and on Uddyotakara's remark that not all universals are indicated by forms, Vācaspati, too, insists that universals such as brahminness are to be manifested by one's lineage (*brāhmaṇatvādhyātis tu yonivyangyā*) Of course, unlike the other criteria, the criterion "descent" involves genealogical information and recollection Kumārila does not deny this, but in his view, it is no fundamental difference It simply means that the iden-

tification of caste universals is less direct and requires more preparation than that of other universals

11 The passage most significant for our topic may be found at the beginning of the *Tantravārttika* (on Sūtra I, 2, 2) In his typically free and independent manner, Kumārila discusses an opposing opinion (*pūrvapakṣa*) which is presented in the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* and the corresponding commentary of Sabara This concerns the view that the *arthavāda* passages of the Vedas are irrelevant and devoid of authority One of the reasons for this given by the *pūrvapakṣin* is that the *arthavāda* passages and other passages evidently contradict the results of perception One of the examples given by Sabara is the following Vedic sentence "We do not know whether we are brahmins or non-brahmins"⁸⁵ The assumption behind the use of this example is that such a statement (ignoring its incompatibility with other passages) contradicts the knowledge of the difference between brahmins and non-brahmins that is generally familiar in daily life For Kumārila, this remark provides a starting point for a discourse on the "ontological" status and the recognizability of the four varnas Here, more than defending the meaning and the authority of the Brāhmaṇa passage cited by Sabara against those who would simply deny or doubt the caste theory, he defends it against those among its adherents who have a naive and unclarified understanding of the varna concept, and who depend too greatly upon external features of behavior or visual appearance for identifying the castes On this occasion, Kumārila demonstrates his thorough grasp of the definitional and epistemological problems associated with the subject as well as his recognition of the difficulties of genealogical derivation, for he actually stresses precisely these problems and difficulties, thereby lending further weight to his claim that it is quite possible to defend in an age of increased criticism and rational argumentation both the dharma and the varna system that is integrated therein In developing his arguments in this section, Kumārila abstains from any clear or direct attack upon an opposing viewpoint that is clearly marked as such Instead, he presents a kind of dialogue in which he gradually articulates and clarifies his own position⁸⁶ It is important to remember that here Kumārila is commenting upon a *pūrvapakṣa* passage—although he goes far beyond the starting point offered by Sabara, for he does not merely para-

phrase the pūrvapakṣa, but also appends his own critical opinion thereto. In order to fully understand this discussion, one other point must be considered as well: the philosophical Mīmāṃsā was concerned with securing the authoritativeness of the Vedic revelation and the sacred tradition (*śruti*, *sāstra*, *āgama*) within the framework provided by the doctrine of the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), in other words, the intention was to place the Veda alongside of the other means of knowledge (perception, inference etc.) as a source of knowledge in its own right capable of conveying contents which would otherwise be inaccessible.⁸⁷ The problem of the four varṇas should also be seen in this light: to what extent are they objects of the Vedic revelation, and to what extent are they accessible to and demonstrable through the worldly means of knowledge and normal human experience (*lokaprasiddha*)? Kumārila's position is carefully considered: while arguing that the varṇas are essentially accessible to the domain of worldly knowledge, he adds that the *śruti* nevertheless retains a helpful and important role for discovering their true nature.⁸⁸ According to his commentators as well as his opponents, Kumārila took it for granted that the four varṇas are determined by real universals. No special emphasis was laid upon this assumption.

Kumārila begins with the thesis that the castes may be demonstrated through normal human knowledge. What is the nature of this knowledge? Is it sensory perception? Is it really possible to argue that the class membership of a brahmin (i.e., his determination by means of the universal "brahminness") can be ascertained through sensory perception in the same manner as the class membership of a tree (i.e., its determination by means of the universal "treeness")? In the case of the brahmin, of course, we must first be told the facts of his ancestry. Yet in order to be able to identify a tree as such, must we not first be told about the meaning of the word "tree" as well?⁸⁹ Kumārila himself states explicitly that these two examples differ in more than just one respect. In the case of the tree, we have the impression of an entity that may be distinguished and identified on the basis of certain features of appearance that are independent of any knowledge of the appropriate word. Yet since such external features as conduct or occupation are unreliable because there is no way to be certain that a member of a particular caste will adhere to the duties he has been assigned, the same does

not hold true in the case of the brahmin⁹¹ According to the doctrine which Kumāṛila develops in the *Ślokavārttika*, however, external features such as these are not the only means for determining universals A knowledge of genealogical relationships may also serve this purpose This argument, in turn, leads into the problem of the possible unfaithfulness of brahmin women At first, Kumāṛila simply states that one should not argue against a rule by citing its exceptions Yet he does not fail to add that extramarital liaisons with men from the same standing are not problematic, and that the Smṛti has reliable rules available for cases of actual bastardization as well as rules for reassigning a lineage to a "pure" caste after a number of generations

Yet none of these arguments are really able to call the existence and recognizability of the castes into question, using a simile which (as we have noted earlier) will appear again in Jayanta's *Nyāyamañjarī*, Kumāṛila states that that which is perceived after one has reached the top of a mountain does not lose its perceptual character as a result⁹² His commentator Somesvara adds the general observation that non-perceivability does not result from the fact that something is difficult to apprehend The difference between a male and a female Kokila (a type of Indian cuckoo) only gradually enters into the realm of perception, and so is it with the differences between the castes as well it becomes possible to perceive these differences because we are initially aided by a genealogical knowledge based upon memory and uninterrupted tradition⁹³ Elsewhere, Kumāṛila compares the identification and distinction of castes with the distinction of correct and incorrect Sanskrit words In both cases, tradition, recollection, and learning are necessary before the appropriate determinations can be made through simple acts of perception Knowing how to distinguish castes is like mastering the Sanskrit language⁹⁴ The assumption is that, just as in the case of the expert gemmologist, the process requires a certain noncommunicable expertise or initiation

12 Several key remarks follow According to Kumāṛila, the alleged or real contradiction between the Vedic statement quoted by Sabara and the results of perception, which provides the starting point for the entire discussion, is pertinent to those who wish to derive brahminness, etc from behavior In his opinion, however,

there is no justification for deriving caste distinctions from behavior. Instead, we have to assume that the brahmins etc. are already established in their identity, for only on this basis can the behavioral norms to which they are subject be applied to them.⁹⁵ If their brahminness was a consequence of their behavior, then a vicious circle would result, it would be possible that the behavior of a person would render him a brahmin at one moment and a sūdra at the next, provided that he was not (reflecting the fact that some actions are ambivalent) both at the same time. In Kumārila's view, reducing the castes to the status of temporary and ambivalent functions and behaviors would be destructive as well as absurd. The Vedic provisions concerning a particular caste could not be applied, and stable social and religious rules would be impossible. Only when a person is a brahmin, a ksatriya, etc., can he be told what his duties are as such. Someone is a brahmin only to the extent that the universal *brāhmanatva* is inherent in him. Such an essential property cannot be added later, its acquisition must coincide with the event of entering into existence, i.e., with birth itself. Brahminness cannot be reduced to an aggregation of virtues, such as asceticism, nor can it be reduced to any disposition that arises as a result of such virtuous behavior, and it cannot be manifested thereby.⁹⁶ A brahmin's identity, like that of the member of any other caste, is rooted in his ancestry. For this reason, any knowledge of this identity must be founded upon genealogical relationships, although it may (ideally) also be attained through perception. In this way, Kumārila ruled out the possibility of an ethicizing reinterpretation or reduction of the four varnas as well as all caste mobility. Nothing on earth can affect one's caste membership, for this has a status of metaphysical stability.⁹⁷ It remains inaccessible to merely extrinsic criteria yet is not completely cut off from the domain of perception and argumentation. Kumārila's interpretation and defense of the four varnas conforms exemplarily with his program of defending the tradition of the Veda (i.e., primarily the Brāhmanas) in an age of critical reflection and discussion while simultaneously saving it from the grip of autonomous rationality. Here again, we find a philosophy of the Vedic dharma that has produced its own complex and subtle epistemology and whose apologetic and restorative aims are nevertheless easily recognizable.

Kumārila's discussion in the *Tantravārttika* suggests that he was

already in a position to look back upon a tradition of philosophical discussions which had considered this subject from a number of perspectives. An epistemological discussion about different ways to grasp the "universals" or 'forms' (*ākṛti*) can be found as early as Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, and this work in turn makes reference to still older sources. Patañjali also notes that *jāti* is that which is obtained by birth (*jananena yā prāpyate, sā jātiḥ*)⁹⁸ Later commentators have found in Patañjali's work explicit references to the problem of the relationship between direct perception and verbal instruction (*upadesa*)⁹⁹ By this time, the terminological coincidence between *jāti* as "caste" and as "genus" or 'universal' was obviously quite familiar, and the conceptual association of 'universals' and 'castes' should have been a natural step. There is, indeed, evidence that this connection had been made long before Kumārila's time. Our most important source is Bhartṛhari (ca. A.D. 500), who is in turn indebted to Patañjali and other older authorities. In general, Bhartṛhari's work has been of great importance for Kumārila.

Bhartṛhari discusses the status of the *brāhmaṇa* in several sections of his *Vākyapadīya*, for instance in the *Vṛttisamuddesa* of the third Kāṇḍa, which resumes and expands Patañjali's explication of the term *abrahmaṇa*¹⁰⁰ In the *Jāṭisamuddesa*, *brāhmaṇatva* appears repeatedly as a familiar example of a "universal" (*jāti*)¹⁰¹ To be sure, Bhartṛhari's understanding of universals is different from the static realism of the Vaiśeṣika, for him, they are potentialities or powers (*śakti*) of the dynamic "word-brahman" (*śabdabrahman*). Nevertheless, it was easy for Kumārila to combine this with his own adaptation of the Vaiśeṣika theory of universals. There are various other, more specific references in the *Vākyapadīya*. Just as Śrīdhara centuries later, Bhartṛhari mentions those experts who can identify precious stones or metals. They, too, exemplify the refinement of perception through training and practice. In the same verse, he states that superhuman beings (*asmadvīṣṭa*) can perceive universals directly by means of all sense organs.¹⁰² In his long and remarkable commentary on this verse, Helārāja refers specifically to the perception of "caste universals" and claims that 'something analogous to the dewlap,' i.e. to the criterion of the universal 'cowness' (*gotva*), must exist (and be accessible to superhuman perception) as far as "brahminness" (*brāhmaṇatva*) etc., are concerned, although it may be utterly imperceptible for us.¹⁰³ The idea of a superhuman aware-

ness of caste universals which does not depend on recollection and instruction (*smṛti*, *upadeśa*) has become a familiar assumption in theistic circles. We find it, for instance, in the *Sesvaramīmāṃsā* of Rāmānuja's follower Venkatanātha (i.e., Vedāntadesika, fourteenth century) ¹⁰⁴

This notwithstanding, Kumārila appears to have been the first to give this "application" its radical and explicit character and to combine it with a comprehensive philosophical defense of the Vedic dharma. And in his assertion that brahminness does not issue from an aggregation of ascetism or other properties, he also appears to allude to the passage in the *Mahābhāṣya* which, as we saw earlier, refers to a verse of unknown origin that deals with precisely this question of "aggregation" (*samudāya*)—admittedly in a manner which Kumārila was no longer able to accept ¹⁰⁵ In any case, it may be said that to a large degree, Kumārila's discussion became the starting point for the subsequent debate not only in Mīmāṃsā, but also in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika.

13. In general, Kumārila introduces numerous methodological and philosophical innovations in his endeavor to restore the allegedly original sense of the Vedic *dharma* and to defend it against innovations, he may, indeed, be considered as one of the most independent thinkers of the classical tradition. His relationship to Sabara is known to have been much freer than that of his great rival Prabhākara, whose own traditionalism frequently had radical and "innovative" consequences as well and whose own attempts to articulate the Vedic tradition in the medium of classical philosophy offers a revealing counterpart to Kumārila's technique. The ways in which he approached the question of caste provides us with a good example to illustrate this.

The school of the Prābhākaras, known to us primarily through its presentation by Śālikanāthamiśra, attempted to develop a defense of the *varṇāśramadharmā* which did not depend upon Kumārila's interpretation of the four principal castes as real universals. In their view, the existence of genealogical relationships and the traditional knowledge of these sufficed to make the Vedic rules applicable ¹⁰⁶ They saw no reason to seek recourse in questionable philosophical constructions. There are no human groups which are determined by and distinguishable through real universals, in fact,

there are no real universals at all below the *sāmānya* or *jāti* of "humanness" (*puruṣatva*), that corresponds to the one essential form (*ākāra*) shared by men and women, brahmins and *sūdras*. There is no determinable "form" nor anything like it that can serve as a sign of the generic differentiation between the brahmin and the *ksatriya*. In contrast to the *Bhāttamīmāṃsā* school founded by Kumārila, the *Prābhākara* school did not abandon the premise that "form" and visible similarity are essential features of genuine universals.¹⁰⁷ In *Sālikanātha's* opinion, no practice, preparation, or instruction could help one further since there is no real universal "brahminness," it cannot be manifested as a datum of perception. He dismisses Kumārila's argument that a person's experience in the domain of smell will eventually aid him to visually grasp the difference between melted butter and sesame oil, arguing that this amounts to a mere manipulation of the concept of perception, in reality, we are dealing with an implicit inference.¹⁰⁸

The alleged caste universals are nothing but "additional qualifications" (*upādhi*), i.e., extrinsic roles and functions which are admittedly sanctioned by tradition but do not fundamentally differ from such occupational epithets as "cook-ness" (*pācakatva*), the "additional qualification" most frequently mentioned in the discussion of the subject of universals. Brahminness, etc., means nothing other than descent from a particular lineage (*santatiṃśesaprabhavatva*), and lineages do not require any theoretical or metaphysical explanation, since they are generally familiar and established through traditional usage (*lokata eva prasiddhāḥ*). There is no need to hypostasize caste universals in order to justify the use of such words as "brahmin," etc., or the applicability of the specific Vedic rules for a caste. In this context, *Sālikanātha* takes up the problem of the marital faithfulness of brahmin women, a topic that enjoyed some popularity among Buddhist critics of the caste system. However, he does not consider this to pose any serious danger to the fundamental reliability of the traditionally accepted genealogical relationships, and dismisses the problem as an artificial scepticism with no serious impact upon the traditional knowledge and behavior of men.¹⁰⁹ Whereas Kumārila attempts to provide an independent metaphysical and epistemological basis, the *Prābhākaras* limit themselves to sanctioning what tradition already accepts. At first glance, this procedure may appear naive and unreflected, yet the fact that they

avoid a metaphysical construction like Kumārila's in itself amounts to a philosophical statement. Sālikanātha's arguments against Kumārila reveal an intellect sharpened on Buddhist criticism while his use of the term *upādhi* indicates a linguistic and epistemological position concerning this subject that was precise and radical in its own way.

Kumārila's school of the Mīmāṃsā represents the mainstream of traditional Vedic/brahminic orthodoxy. In contrast, Prabhākara and his followers remained outsiders, and they were even suspected by the orthodoxy of an intended or unintended alliance with Buddhism. Kumārila himself found a one-sided yet poignant way to express philosophically what was intrinsic and special in the Hindu dharma as compared to Buddhism and other "heterodoxies." This may be seen in the manner in which he presented the varna system and the rigorous fashion in which he anchored the identity of the castes in real universals, thereby removing it from any change, mobility, or reduction to criteria of ethical standards and the quality of behavior. His position and procedure with respect to the question of caste has clear echoes in several discussions in the modern traditionalist paṇḍit literature and in the arguments against reformers and reinterpreters contained therein. Vāsudeva Sāstrin Abhyankara has utilized them to counter the "idle chatter" (*pralāpa*) of those "moderns" (*ādhumika*) who wish to relate or even reduce the meaning of caste terms to behavior and who assert that a person can change his caste status and become a brahmin merely by virtue of his behavior.¹¹⁰ In this context, Abhyankara also speaks of the Bhagavadgītā, emphasizing that the "behavior essential to the brahmin" (*brahmacarma svabhāvajam*) referred to in verse XVIII,42 can in no way be utilized to justify an ethicizing explanation: such forms of behavior as moderateness, etc., are not meant to be factors that first create brahminness, but are solely duties that apply to it.¹¹¹ Brahminness, etc., can only be attained through birth. It is a genuine and real universal (Abhyankara speaks of *jāti* and *jātisāmānya*), on the same footing as the biological species. Even if their outer forms are similar, brahmins, ksatriyas, etc., are as different from one another as lions are from elephants. There can be no caste mobility.¹¹²

Abhyankara's argumentation is noteworthy for its trenchancy and terseness, but is not unique with regard to its implications. In

his *Cāturvarṇyāśikṣā*, Durgāprasāda Dviveda uses essentially the same arguments, namely, that the four varnas are constituted in a manner that is prior to all behavior, and in his eyes, this means that they must be determined by real universals ¹¹³ “Soobajee Bapoo,” the pandit who completed the 1839 edition of the *Vaṅgāsūcī* for L. Wilkinson (and who used the occasion to include some critical remarks of his own in his *Tanka*, or “Tunku”), argues along essentially the same lines that Kumārila developed in such an exemplary manner ¹¹⁴

Non-Dualism and the Varna System

14. While the philosophical theories we have been discussing thus far have played no great roles in the social and political discussions of modern India, the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta has often been associated with social and political topics, it has even been claimed that it affords a metaphysical basis for practical ethical demands and programs. This has occurred in particular within the widespread movement loosely referred to by the term Neo-Vedānta, and it has had significant effects upon both the public culture of India and the manner in which India has presented itself to the rest of the world. It would not be difficult to compile a list of literally hundreds of statements asserting that the Advaita Vedānta has social relevance for India as well as a more fundamental relevance for the future of all mankind. It has been associated with, and even utilized to “derive,” such concepts as tolerance, equality, peaceful coexistence, brotherhood, internationalism, the community of nations, democracy, and social and economic justice—as well as nationalism and anarchy ¹¹⁵. We encounter such phrases as “Vedantic socialism” (Ramaurtha), “political Vedantism” (Aurobindo), etc., we hear of “collective economic liberation on an idealistic (i.e., Vedantic) basis”, ¹¹⁶ we are even informed that the Vedānta is capable of providing us with “food, shelter and clothing” or of protecting us from the hydrogen bomb ¹¹⁷

These proponents of Advaita Vedānta assume that its monistic metaphysics can be reconciled without difficulty with the political ideas of the French revolution, the Enlightenment’s notions of autonomy, and the socialist ideal of justice, moreover, they suggest that the only prerequisite that must be fulfilled to ensure its practi-

Chapter 10: Notes

- 1 Two classical examples of such critique are provided by Hegel and Max Weber, cf *India and Europe*, ch 6 (on Hegel), M Weber, *Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen II Hinduismus und Buddhismus* Tübingen, 1921 (seventh reprint 1988), 142 ff (trans H H Gerth and D Martindale *The Religion of India* New York, 1968, 144 ff)
- 2 While Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* contains an elaborate methodology of politics and administration, it can hardly be classified as a system of political philosophy
- 3 For an earlier German version of this chapter, see *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* Philologisch-historische Klasse 1975, No 9 (published 1976)
- 4 Cf R Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, trans from the French by J D M Derrett Berkeley, 1973, 36 ff
- 5 See, for instance, Śāṅkara, BSBh I, 1, 4 (*Works* III, 13 f), Manu X, 42 (*utkarsam ca-apakarsam ca*) and commentaries, Anantakrsna Śāstrin et al, *Dharmaśāstra* Calcutta, n d (Preface 1937), 67 f
- 6 Cf BSBh I, 1, 4 (*Works* III, 13 f), I, 3, 30 (*Works* III, 129)
- 7 Cf Bhāruci on Manu X, 42 (ed J H Dave Bombay 1982, 307) *evam ca saty esa varnavibhāga utkarsāpakarsasambandho manusyavisaya eva dras tavyah, na gavādīsu*)
- 8 Cf Manu X, 30 f, Medhātithi on Manu II, 6 (ed J H Dave, 168)
- 9 Cf L Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus The Caste System and Its Implications* Complete revised English edition Chicago, 1980, XXXV Dumont finds this idea "generally rejected" by the majority of his reviewers
- 10 *Homo Hierarchicus*, 72
- 11 A L Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* New York, 1959 148

- 12 Manu VIII, 41 adds the norms and customs of the 'guilds' (*sreni*) to this list Gītā 1, 43 associates the destruction of *jātidharma* and *kuladharma* with the "mixture of varnas" (*varnasamkara*)
- 13 Cf Yājñavalkya II, 69^c *yathājāti yathāvarnam*, II, 206 *dandapranayanam kāryam varnajātyuttarādharaiḥ*
- 14 Cf Āpastamba II, 6, 1 *jātyācārasamsaye*, G Buhler, *Sacred Laws of the Āryas*, part 1 (Sacred Books of the East) translates 'If he has any doubts regarding the caste and conduct' Cf also L Dumont (see above, n 7), 73 'Far from being completely heterogeneous, the concepts of varna and *jāti* have interacted, and certain features of the osmosis between the two may be noticed'
- 15 See, for instance, Manu X, 5, 27
- 16 Cf Kullūka, Nandana, Nārada and others on Manu VIII, 41
- 17 Cf Medhātithi on Manu X, 4, Nandana on Manu X, 27, see also Kullūka's statement that caste mixture or bastardization can produce a new *jāti* comparable to a mule, but no new varna (on Manu X, 4 *sam-kīrṇajālīnām tv asvataravan mātāpitrjātyvyatiriktajātyantaratuān na varnatvam*)
- 18 See, for instance, Mitramisra, *Vīramitrodaya*, and Vijñāneśvara, *Mutāk-sarā*, on Yājñavalkya II, 69 (ChSS, 497, 502) and II, 206 (ChSS, 682, 684)
- 19 Cf Mitramisra, *Vīramitrodaya* on Yājñavalkya II, 69 (ChSS, 497)
- 20 Cf *India and Europe*, 180 and on mixed castes in general H Brinkhaus, *Die altindischen Mischkastensysteme* Wiesbaden, 1978
- 21 L Dumont (see above, n 7), 71 In this connection, Dumont also notes the 'the classical texts described in terms of varna what must surely have been a caste system in embryo'
- 22 Cf Medhātithi on Manu X, 5, see also P V Kane, "The Tantravārttika and the Dharmasāstra Literature" *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, N S 1 (1925), 95-102

- 23 Calcutta, n d (Preface 1937), the protection of the hereditary identity of Hinduism against reinterpretations and 'new sects' (*nūlanasam-pradāya*) is one of the main goals of the book, and the problem of castes (*jāti*) is its major topic, see 63–187 *Jātātattvaṇṇanā*. As an example of a basically ethical and characterological interpretation, we may mention Maheśvarānanda Giri, *Cāturvarṇyabhāratasamīkṣā*, 2 vols Bombay, 1963–1968. This work cites the *Vajrasūcī Upaniṣad* (vol 1, 22–25, see below, n 133) and shows the influence of Neo-Vedānta.
- 24 Cf *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts (Vivaranapañcikā)*, Sanskrit University Library (Sarasvatī Bhavana), vol 8 Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Mss Varanasi, 1962, Nos 34 017, 33 731, 31 393.
- 25 On Rāmānuja, see below, n 128. Problems concerning the perception and identification of castes especially "brahminness" (*brāhmaṇya*), are also discussed by Rāmānuja's predecessor Yāmuna, cf *Āgama-prāmāṇya*, ed and trans J A B van Buitenen Madras, 1971, 66, 103. Yāmuna (ca 1000) is obviously familiar with the Mīmāṃsā arguments on this topic.
- 26 Cf *Sesvaramīmāṃsā and Mīmāṃsāpādukā* by Vedāntadesika, ed U T Viraraghavacarya Madras, 1971, 144–151 (on MS I, 2, 2), see also below, n 104. Venkatanātha/Vedāntadesika discusses not only the theory of caste universals, but also the application of the *guṇa* theory to the *varṇa* system, cf *Sesvaramīmāṃsā*, 149 f. On Vallabha's version of the Mīmāṃsāsūtra, see G H Bhatt, "Vallabhācārya's Text of the Jaimini Sūtras II 1 1" *Journal of the Oriental Institute* (Baroda) 2 (1952), 68–70.
- 27 Cf *Prameyakamalamārtanda* (commentary on Mānikyanandin's *Parīk-sāmukha*), ed Mahendra Kumar Second ed, Bombay, 1941, especially 482–487 (*etena nityam nikhilabrāhmaṇavyaktivyāpakam brāhmaṇyam api pratyākhyātam na hi tat tathābhūtam pratyaksādi-pramāṇataḥ pratīyate*), *Nyāyakumudacandra* (commentary on Akalanika's *Laghīyastraya*), 2 vols, ed Mahendra Kumar Bombay, 1938–1941, especially vol 2, 767–779 (*brāhmaṇatva-jātivivācāra*).
- 28 See, for instance, Ksemendra, *Darpadalana*, ch 1 (examples of false genealogical pride).

- 29 Cf *India and Europe*, 234, 240 ff Traditional Advaita Vedānta does not try to apply non-dualism in ethics, instead, it sees ethical conduct either as a prerequisite or as a natural concomitant of non-dualistic spiritual realization According to *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, v 37, those who have attained this realization are inherently beneficial, just as the spring season" (*vasantavard*) This echoes Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas
- 30 Cf P V Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 5 vols Poona, 1930–1962, especially vol 2, 19–164
- 31 Cf Muir I, for a useful presentation of source materials
- 32 See A Weber, "Collectanea über die Kastenverhältnisse in den Brāhmaṇa und Sūtra" *Indische Studien* 10 (1868), 1–160
- 33 Cf *India and Europe*, 322 f, myths about the origination of the non-brahminical castes due to karmic deterioration are not unusual, see Mahābhārata XII, 181, 10–20
- 34 Cf A Weber, "Collectanea" (see above, n 32), 97 ff
- 35 Cf Weber, "Collectanea," 70 f, 97 ff, see also W Rau, *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien* Wiesbaden, 1957, 4, 62 ff, against Weber, Rau claims that the hereditary varna system did not take shape in the period of the Brāhmaṇas, but only in the period of the Sūtras However, Rau's references seem to deal with exceptions rather than with the general norm Ethical interpretations which presuppose an underlying hereditary system are more common in the epics, see, e.g., Mahābhārata III, 206, 12 (*vṛttina hi bhaved dvijaḥ*), and O Strauss, "Ethische Probleme aus dem Mahābhārata" (first published 1911) *Kl Schr*, ed F Wilhelm Wiesbaden, 1983, 11–153, especially 148 ff
- 36 The following Suttas of the Pāli canon contain critical references to the varna system *Aggañña*, *Ambattha*, *Sāmaññaphala* and *Sonadanda* in the *Dīghanikāya*, *Assalāyana* and *Madhura* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, *Vāsettha* in the *Suttanipāta* Several Buddhist texts in Sanskrit radicalize the critique, for instance the *Sārdūlakarmāvadāna* in the *Dvyaavadāna* (ed E B Cowell and R A Neil Cambridge, 1886, ed separately S K Mukhopadhyaya Santiniketan, 1954) and the *Vajrasūci* falsely attrib-

uted to Aśvaghoṣa, for editions of this text, see A Weber, "Über die Vajra-sūcī (Demantnadel) des Aṣvaghoṣa" *Abhandlungen Preuss Ak Wiss* Berlin, 1859, 205–264 (with German trans), S K Mukherjee, "The Vajrasūcī of Aśvaghoṣa" *Viśva-Bhārati Annals* 2 (1949), 125–184 (with English trans), *Vajrasūcī*, ed R P Dwivedi (with paraphrase and notes in Hindi) Varanasi, 1985

37 On *dharma* and *svadharma*, cf *India and Europe*, ch 17

38 Cf Bhagavadgītā I, 41 ff

39 Gītā III, 35 *sreyān svadharṃo viguṇaḥ paradharṃāt svanuṣṭhāt*, see also XVIII, 47 (and Manu X, 97) *varam svadharṃo viguṇo, na pārakhyah svanuṣṭhāt*

40 Cf *The Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya*, ed F Kielhorn, third ed by K V Abhyankar, vol 1 Poona, 1962, 411

*tapah śrutam ca yonis ca-ity etad brāhmanakāraṇam/
tapahśrutābhyām yo hīno jātibrāhmaṇa eva sa*

*tathā gaurah sucyācārah pingalah kapilakesa ity etān apy abhyantarān
brāhmanyē guṇān kurvaṇti*

41 The application of the word *brāhmaṇa* to persons who do not have the hereditary legitimation remains ultimately confined to cases of doubt and inadequate information, see *Mahābhāṣya*, vol 1, 411 f *jātihīne sam-dehād durupadesāc ca brāhmanasabdo vartate*

42 See *Yuktidīpikā*, ed R C Pandeya Delhi, 1967, 137

43 Cf *Sāmkhyakārikā with Mātharavṛtti*, ed V P Sarma Benares, 1922, on v 53 *tulyalingatvād brāhmanādīcandālāntah*, *Sāmkhyasaptatvṛtti* (V₁), ed E A Solomon Ahmedabad, 1973, 68 *tulyalingatvād brāhmanādīs candālāntah*

44 Cf *Sāmkhyatattvakaumudī* on v 53 *brāhmanatvādyavāntarajātibhedā-
vivaksayā*

45 Gītā IV, 13 *cāturvarṇyam mayā sṛṣṭam guṇakarmavibhāgasah*

- 46 Radhakrishnan has published annotated editions and translations of both works, see also *The Hindu View of Life* London, 1968 (first ed 1927), 86 "Caste is a question of character"
- 47 See below, n 110–113
- 48 Cf Gītā I, 41 ff, see also III, 24 f (avoidance of mixture, *saṃkara*, and maintenance of the social order, *lokasaṃgraha*)
- 49 See, for instance, Gītā VII, 16
- 50 Cf Śāṅkara on Gītā IV, 13
- 51 Cf Gītā XVIII, 41 ff, IV, 13, see also D P Vora, *Evolution of Morals in the Epics* Bombay, 1959, 129 There are, of course, also types of livelihood and occupation associated with the two highest castes, but they are not mentioned in the Gītā passage XVIII, 41 ff
- 52 Cf *Vajrasūcī*, ed A Weber (see above, n 36), 236
- 53 See Gītā III, 35, XVIII, 47, and Manu X, 97, for *svadharma*, see also Gītā II, 31, 33, Maitrī Upaniṣad IV, 3, Gītā XVIII, 45 f has *svakarman*
- 54 Manu XII, 42–52
- 55 See Mahābhārata XII, 200, especially 31 ff (on the four varṇa), cf also A Weber, "Collectanea" (see above, n 32), 7 We may also recall Rgveda X, 90
- 56 Mahābhārata XII, 229, 12–25
- 57 Cf A Weber, "Collectanea," 97, among later texts, see, e g, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, v 2
- 58 On "caste colors," cf Mahābhārata XII, 181, 5, A Weber, "Collectanea," 10 f Ps-Śāṅkara, *Sarvasiddhāntasaṃgraha* XI, 48
- 59 The coordination of the three guṇas with the "human goals" (*puruṣārtha*) creates analogous problems It is easy as long as the older

group of three goals (*trivarga*) without *moksa* is involved, Manu XII, 38 correlates *kāma* with *tamas*, *artha* with *rajas* and *dharma* with *sattva*. It becomes, however, more complex when *moksa* is added, cf Bhagavan Das, *The Science of Social Organization*, vol 1 Second ed., Adyar, 1932, 78

- 60 Cf *Anugītā* XXIV, 11, the text is found within the Mahābhārata XIV, 16–51
- 61 Cf *Anugītā* XX, 43, which refers to three twice-born castes and presupposes the *sūdras* as the fourth *varna*. The *vaiśyas* are also omitted in Manu XII, 42–52
- 62 Cf K. Damodaran, *Indian Thought* New York, 1967, 482 (referring to K. M. Munshi *Foundations of Indian Culture*, 68 “energy/inertia”), P. T. Raju, *The Philosophical Traditions of India* London, 1971, 209 ‘activity/lethargy’
- 63 Cf *Cāturvarṇyaśikṣā vedadr̥ṣṭyā sametā* Lucknow 1927, 2
- 64 *The Philosophical Traditions of India* London, 1971, 209
- 65 See, for instance, Vinoba Bhave, *Talks on the Gītā* New York, 1960, 191 ff
- 66 *The Hindu View of Life* London, 1968, 79
- 67 See above, n 63
- 68 Cf PB, 48 f., 272 f
- 69 Cf NM, 204 *na hi yad gīrīṣṛṅgam āruhya gr̥hyate, tad apratyaksam*
- 70 NM, 204 *upadesanirapeksam apī caksuh ksatriyādvilaksanam saumyākṛtīm brāhmaṇajātīm avagacchati ity eke*
- 71 Cf NM, 389 on Kumārila’s usage of the simile of the mountain see below n 92
- 72 See NK (in PB), 13 *tada brāhmaṇo yam iti pratyaksena eva pratyate*

- 73 Ibid The reference to precious stones appears natural for an Indian author of that period, since these, too, were divided into "castes" (*brāhmaṇa*, etc.), cf R Garbe, *Die indischen Mineralien* (*Naraharis Rājajñāntu* 13) Leipzig, 1882, 81 Kumārila refers to expert jewelers in his TV on MS I, 3, 25, on Bhāṭṭarhari, see below, n 102
- 74 Here, of course, one may refer to Manu's view that an illegitimate child would reflect the defects and the low status of the father in its behavior, cf Manu X, 60 ff
- 75 See *Vaiśeṣikadarsana of Kanāda with an Anonymous Commentary*, ed A Thakur Darbhanga, 1957, 14 f (on VS I, 2, 7)
- 76 Cf TS, v 1554 ff (with commentary)
- 77 Ed Rāhula Sāṅkṛtāyāna Patna, 1953 (Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series), see especially 10 ff, also 209 f, 530
- 78 Cf *Pramānavārttikabhāṣya*, especially 10 ff, also 209 f, 530
- 79 See, for instance, Bhāsarvajña, NBhūs, 311 (in connection with problems of inference), Laugākṣi Bhāskara, *Tarkakaumudī*, ed M N Divedin Bombay, 1886 (Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series), 21, Keśavamisra, *Tarkabhāṣā*, ed D R Bhandarkar Poona, 1937 (Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series), 33 (perception of a *brāhmaṇa*)
- 80 See below, n 83 ff, 106 ff
- 81 Cf the *Vajrasūci* (see above, n 36), the same type of argument has also been attributed to the materialists, see Kṛṣṇamīśra, *Prabodhacandrodaya*, ed and trans S K Nambiar Delhi, 1971, 38 (II, v 18) *tulyatve vapu sām mukhādyaṇyavayavair varnakramah kīdrso*
- 82 Cf SV, 438 (*Vanavāda*, v 16) *ākr̥tur jātir eva-atra samsthānam na prakalpyate*, 385 (*Ākṛtīvāda*, v 3) *jātim eva-ākr̥tim prāhur, vyaktir ākr̥tyate yayā*, and 388 (v 18) *sāmānyam akr̥tur jātih saktir vā*
- 83 Cf TV on MS I, 3, 25 *tulyasirahpānyādyākāresu api samkīrṇalokadrstigrāhyesu brahmanādīsu mātāpitṛsambandhasmaranād eva varnavivēkāva-dhāranam bhavati*

- 84 Cf ŚV, 439 f (*Vanavāda*, v 22–30) In v 29, Kumārila notes that conduct (*ācāra*) indicates the presence of *brāhmanatva* only if it is properly supervised by a king (*rājānupāhita*) In v 30, he emphasizes that the pervasive inherence of the universals in their substrates cannot be refuted since it is directly perceived (*pratyekasamavetatvam drstatvān na virotsyate*), and such perceptibility may well be “dependent on the knowledge of the parents (*mātāpitṛjñānāpekṣa*, see Pārthasārathi on this passage, with reference to TV)
- 85 Śabara on MS I, 2, 2 *na ca-etaḍ vidmo vāyam brāhmanā vā smo 'brāhmanā vā iti*, cf *Gopatha Brāhmana* I, 5, 21 *na vāyam vidmo yadi brāhmanā smo yady abrāhmanā smo Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* I, 4, 11 (ed L von Schroeder, vol 1, 60) *na vai tad vidma yadi brāhmanā vā smo brāhmana jā* The reference *Taittirīya Brāhmana* II 1, 2, given by the editors of TV, is incorrect
- 86 The commentator Somesvara feels occasionally compelled to state explicitly that Kumārila is, indeed, presenting his own view, cf NSudhā, 10 *āsankutā svābhūprāyam āvīskaroti*
- 87 Cf E Frauwallner *Materialien zur ältesten Erkenntnislehre der Karmamīmāṃsā* Vienna, 1968, see also above, ch 2
- 88 Somesvara tries to clarify Kumārila's somewhat ambiguous reliance on both perception and authoritative instruction, see NSudhā, 14 *pratyaksāvagatisambhavād anyatra sāstravyāpāro na angīkṛtaḥ, ita tu tadasambhavād chāstravisaṃvādam na-ayuktam nanv ākārasāmyena kvacid api brāhmanyadivivekasya pratyaksena-avagatya sambhavāt sarvatra āgamagamyatvam eva angīkāryam ity asankam nirākurvan upasamharati*
- 89 Somesvara, NSudhā, 10, states that it is necessary to assume something that is universally present in all individual brahmins and forms the content of the notion ‘brahmin’ (*tasmāt sarvesu brāhmanesu anuśyūtam pratyekasamavetatvam brāhmanapratyayaṃ vīśvabhūtam kimcid avasyam estavyam*), on p 11, he adds that universals such as brahminness which are to be known through such special pervasive notions, cannot be denied (*tasmāt samanākāreṣu api pīndesu vīlakṣanabrāhmanapratyayaṃ vedyabrāhmaṇyādijātir na apahnotum śakyate*)

- 90 For the following discussion, see TV, 4 ff (on MS I, 2, 2) The *sūdhānta* section (on MS I, 2, 7 ff) does not address this issue at all
- 91 As Kumāṛila notes in the *Slokavārttika*, conduct would be a valid criterion only under proper supervision, see above, n 84
- 92 See above, n 69 ff, cf also Somesvara, NSudhā, 12 *na ca durjñānatvamātreṇa-apratyaksatvam sankyam*
- 93 See TV, 6 *darsanasmaranapāramparyānuḡrhitapratyaksagamyāni brāhmaṇatvādīni*
- 94 Cf TV, 217 (on MS I, 3, 27)
*ādītas ca smṛteḥ siddhah pratyaksena-apī gamyate/
 sādhuvasādhuvibhāgo 'yam kusalaṃ varṇabhedavat*

See also above, n 73, on the case of the expert jewelers

- 95 Cf TV, 6 *suddhānām hi brāhmaṇādīnām ācārā vidhīyante*
- 96 Cf TV, 7 *na tapaādīnām samudāyo brāhmaṇyam, na tajanītaḥ samskārah, na tadabhivyāgyā jātiḥ*
- 97 According to Kumāṛila, there is no loss of brahminness etc in the strict and literal sense. Authoritative statements which seem to indicate that a brahmin sinks to the level of a sūdra due to certain types of misconduct can only mean that he is deprived of particular rights and responsibilities. Critics of the varṇa system sometimes use the loss of caste status as an argument against its hereditary nature, see, for instance, the *Vajrasūci*
- 98 Cf *Mahābhāṣya* on IV, 1, 63, V, 3, 55, and above, n 40
- 99 Nāgesa makes explicit reference to *upadesa*, cf *Patañjali's Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya Taitṭirīyāsāhnikā*, ed with trans by S D Joshi and J A F Roodbergen. Poona, 1973, 118 f
- 100 Cf VP III/14, 250 ff, and K A Subramania Iyer, *Bhartrhari*. Poona, 1969, 390 ff, 397 ff. On *abrāhmaṇatva*, see also Kumāṛila, ŚV, 402 ff (*Apohavāda*, v 13–30)

101 Cf VP III/1, 44

*brāhmanatvādayo bhāvāḥ sarvaṣrāṇṣu avasthātāḥ/
abhyaktāḥ svakāryānām sādhakā ity api smṛtīḥ*

Helārāja paraphrases *brāhmanatvaksatṛṛyatvādayaḥ sāmānyavṣesāḥ* Cf also VP III/1, 28 (*brāhmanatvādi*)

102 Cf VP III/1, 46

103 Cf *VP with the commentary of Helārāja* Kānda III, part 1, ed K A Subramania Iyer Poona, 1963, 51–55, especially 55 *brāhmanatvādisu asti kimcit sāsṇādisthānīyam upavyaṇjanam asmākam param atīndṛīyam*

104 Cf *Sesvaramīmāṃsā* (see above, n 24) 151 *ataḥ īsvaramaharsīprabhṛtīnām pratyakṣam brāhmanyādikam*

105 See above, n 40 90

106 For the following discussion, cf Śālikanāthamiśra, *Prakaranapañcikā* (with *Nyāyasiddhi* by Jayapurinārāyana), ed A Subrahmanya Sastrī Benares, 1961, 100–103

107 *Prakaranapañcikā* 101 *na hi ksatṛīyādibhyo vyāvartamānam sakalabrāhmaṇesu anuvartamānam ekam ākāram atīcivram anusandadhato 'pi budhyante* In his preceding rejection of a highest universal beingness or 'reality' (*sattā*, cf 97ff), Śālikanātha also refers to a lack of "similarity"

108 See *ibid* 101 *na hi tadānīm cāksusasya samvedanasya viśayātirekaḥ, kim tu anumānam eva tatra sarpiśaḥ*

109 *Ibid* 102 *katham punas tajjanyatvam eva saḥyam avagantum strīnām aparādhasambhavāt sambhavanti hi pumscaḥyo strīyaḥ parinetānam vyabhīcārantyaḥ* The *Vajrasūcī* (ed A Weber, 220, 232 see above n 36) epitomizes the manner in which the Buddhist critics exploit this issue

110 Cf *Dharmatattvanirṇaya* ed Mārulakara Poona 1929 (Anandāsrama Sanskrit Series) 18 ff

111 *Ibid* 18 *na hi tatra samadikam karma brāhmanatvajātīprayoḥakatvena uktam kim tu brahmanatvajātīprayoḥakatvena*

- 112 Ibid , 19 *tathā ca janmasiddhā jātīr, na kvāpi kathamapi nīvartate*
- 113 Cf *Cāturvarṇyasūksā vedadr̥ṣṭyā sametā* Lucknow, 1927, 198 f also 1 *asvādvaj jātīgūṇakṛyābhīr vibhinnabhāvātīsayam prapannāh*
- 114 Cf *Vajrasūcī*, ed A Weber (see above, n 36), 237, 239, 252
- 115 See S L Malhotra, *Social and Political Orientations of Neo-Vedantism* Delhi, 1970, VII f
- 116 See G C Dev, *Idealism and Progress* Calcutta, 1952, 440 ff , also his *The Philosophy of Vivekananda and the Future of Man* Dacca, 1963, 96 f ("Gospel of Emancipation of Common Man")
- 117 See S Joshi, *The Message of Shankara* Allahabad, 1968, 177, R N Vyas, *The Universalistic Thought of India* Bombay, 1970, V
- 118 R N Vyas, *Universalistic Thought*, 16
- 119 Ramatīrtha as cited by H Maheshwari, *The Philosophy of Śwāmī Rāma Tīrtha* Agra, 1969, 169
- 120 *Bunch of Thoughts* Bangalore, 1966, 5f , on the idea of a practical Vedānta," see also *India and Europe*, 239 ff (specifically on Vivekananda)
- 121 Ramakrishna often compared the world to a worthless 'hog plum' , cf *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans Nikhilananda Madras, 1969 (first ed 1944), 379, 903 In his *Karmayoga* (ch 5, conclusion), Vivekananda himself still cited Ramakrishna's metaphor of the 'dog's tail' to illustrate the incorrigibility of the world
- 122 *The Hindu View of Life* London, 1968, 18, see also *India and Europe*, 409
- 123 Cf *The Hindu View of Life*, 87, *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western* London, 1952–1953, vol 1 447

- 124 See, for instance, P Deussen, *Das System des Vedānta* Second ed., Leipzig, 1906, 63 ff (trans Ch Johnston *The System of the Vedānta* Chicago, 1912, 60 ff)
- 125 On Śankara's concept of *adhikāra*, see above, ch 3, § 12 ff Further statements on castes are found in BUBh I, 4, 6, 14, II, 4, 5 (castes and superimposition), TUBh II, 6, 1
- 126 Cf BSBh I, 3, 38, see also Gautama XII, 4
- 127 Cf BSBh I, 3, 37, in the Upanisad itself, the situation is somewhat ambiguous The story of Satyakāma is also cited and discussed by several Dharmasāstra commentators, see, for instance, Medhāūthi and Govindarāja on Manu X, 5
- 128 See Rāmānuja's *Sribhāṣya* on BS I, 3, 34–38
- 129 See *Naukarmyasiddhi* II, 88, cf also Śankara, BUBh II, 4, 5
- 130 Cf *Svātmanirūpana*, v 139 *varnāśramarahito 'ham varnamayo 'ham*, *Dasaslokī*, v 2 *na varnā na varnācārādharmāḥ* Both texts are found in *Minor Works of Sankarācārya*, ed Bhagavat Second ed., Poona, 1952
- 131 Cf *The Minor Upanisads*, ed F O Schrader, vol I *Samnyāsa-Upanisads* Madras, 1912 193 112
- 132 *Nirālamba Upanisad*, v 10 (in *The Sāmānya Vedānta-Upanisads*, ed Mahadeva Sastri Adyar, 1921)
- 133 See *The Principal Upanishads*, ed and trans S Radhakrishnan London, 1953 A Weber (see above, n 36) saw the *Vajrasūcī Upanisad* (which he ascribed to Śankara) as the model for the Buddhist *Vajrasūcī*, according to S K Mukherjee, the Buddhist text is the original It has been generally overlooked that a version of the *Vajrasūcī Upanisad* was already published and translated into Bengali by Rammohan Roy in 1821, see *Rāmamohana Granthāvalī*, ed B N Bandyopādhyāya and S K Dāsa Calcutta, n d (1959), section 4, 43–48 According to Rammohan, the text is by Mrtyumjaya, this can hardly

be Mrtyumjaya Vidyāṅkārā, Rammohan's teacher and, later on, opponent

- 134 Cf *Maitreya Upanisad*, in *The Minor Upanisads* (see above, n 131) 114 f
- 135 Cf *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* IV, 3, 22, see also Sankara, USG I, 15 ff (freedom of the *ātman* from caste distinctions), and the following statement by Madhusūdana Sarasvatī *varnāśramādivyavahārasya mithyāñānamūlatvena mithyātvam* (*Siddhāntabindu*, ed P C Divanji Baroda, 1933, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, 41)
- 136 Published in *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahāl Library*, ed P P S Sastrī, vol 13 Srīrangam, 1931, No 7736, see especially v 11 f
- 137 Cf *Alberuni's India*, trans E C Sachau London, 1910 (and many reprints) vol 1, 104
- 138 Cf Abhinavagupta *Īśvarapratyabhinyāñāumarsinī* IV, 2, 3, ed M Kaul Shastri Bombay, 1921 (Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies), vol 2, 276 *na-atra jatyādyapeksā kācit*
- 139 Cf P Olivelle, "A Definition of World Renunciation" *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens* 19 (1975), 75–83
- 140 Cf P Hacker, *Schuler Sankaras*, 105, but see also *Vivekacūdāmanī*, v 542
- 141 See *India and Europe*, 205 f, 212, 239 ff 251 ff
- 142 There were, of course important representatives of modern Indian thought who denied or questioned the ethical and social applicability of non-dualism in the nineteenth century, Debendranath Tagore (Thākur) and Dayānanda Sarasvatī were among the critics of Śankara's Advaita Vedānta
- 143 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans Nikhilananda Madras, 1969 (first ed 1944) 8 f

- 144 *The Gospel*, 204, for a somewhat different version, see 374 f
- 145 *The Gospel*, 9
- 146 Rgveda X, 90, 11-12
- 147 See S Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* London, 1968, 107
- 148 See *India and Europe*, ch 3, S Arokiasamy, *Dharma, Hindu and Christian, according to Roberto de Nobili* Rome, 1986, 289 ff , 292
- 149 See, for instance, *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* I, 4 10, on the interaction of animals, humans and gods, see also the concept of *lokasamgraha*, as used in *Bhagavadgītā* III, 20
- 150 See P Chakravarti *Origin and Development of the Samkhya System of Thought* New Delhi, second ed , 1975, 218 ff
- 151 See A Wezler, 'On the *varna* System as Conceived of by the Author of the Pātañjala-Yoga-Śāstra-Vivarana Dr B R Sharma Felicitation Volume, Tirupati, 1986, 172-188, specifically p 185 note 14 A Wezler deserves credit for having drawn our attention to the remarkable statements in the Vivarana
- 152 The Sanskrit text reads as follows *dhṛtīkāraṇam sarīram indriyānām, tāni ca tasya mahābhūtāni sarīrānām, tāni ca paraspāram sarvesām tai-ryagyonamānusadaivatāni ca parasparārthatvāt*
- 153 See YSBhV, 210 f (on YS and YBh II, 28)
- 154 See A Wezler, 'On the *varna* System,' 180 f
- 155 See above, ch 1, and *India and Europe*, 332
- 156 See above, ch 1, and L Renou, *Le destin*, 3