

I. Introduction

Perhaps nothing has generated more acrimony, or been less well understood, than the dual teaching of varna-jati, underlying the phenomenon of so-called "caste". Few aspects of Hindu metaphysics have been so little understood, yet so widely discussed as if they were, than this teaching. Largely because, in studying the social phenomenon roundly called "caste", scholars have simply assumed they also were studying this teaching.

This seems especially true of Western social scientists; but, not only. And many Hindus, in failing to think quite far enough, and succumbing, perhaps, to the fear of the embarrassing prospect of having to embrace a system accused of fathering atrocities - the social evils supposedly associated with "caste" - have taken what to them seems the only way out. Rather than abandon Hinduism because of their limited views on this teaching, and its links with what they then see Hinduism as - as many Buddhist converts, and not a few Christian ones, have done (indeed, the Christian missions have sometimes traded quite shamelessly on their inadequacies of understanding in these areas) -, they have chosen rather, the simpler path of abandoning the teaching. They have chosen to claim it no part of Hindu orthodoxy, but rather a very much later, too deeply-foreign accretion. Rather than abandon Hinduism because of a loathing for "caste", they choose to abandon "caste", because of their love for Hinduism.

But this move is wholly untenable, if orthodoxy is what you wish to preserve (and you may not); as unmistakable references to this teaching are, though few, nonetheless to be found in the earliest literatures, and no grounds whatever exist for holding them later accretions. Perhaps the most significant of these references is, oddly, one of the most ignored - Bṛhadāraṇyaka 1:4:11-15. This passage expresses what I would argue unmistakably to be the orthodox Hindu understanding of varṇa, in a most succinct and brilliant fashion. This is the teaching that varṇas are "splendoured forms" (śreyo-rūpas) of Brahma, brought forth as archetypal principles before all visible manifestation. As such, they, unlike jātis, are not things that creatures have, or are.

But this fascinating, largely ignored Bṛhadāraṇyaka passage demands lengthy treatment in its own right. I have done this in a chapter of a book still languishing for a press. I will not do this here, and merely plead with the reader to study this passage for himself, to better understand what little else I will say about varṇa. I must reluctantly isolate attention in this piece to jāti, the term I consider truly adverting to "caste", as something people have, or are.

II. Gandhi, and the Central Distinction

"Varnāśrama is in my opinion inherent in human nature; and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science".

These are the words of a man who spent most of his adult years forcefully combating what he viewed as the evil of "caste" - Mahatma Gandhi. How could he, of all people, speak so laudably, then of varṇa? The reason, I suggest, is because he saw a distinction many before and since him have missed - between varṇa as an aspect of Hindu metaphysic, and that aspect of Indian society called caste, often supposed to

reflect this metaphysic. But there are three things here, which we must distinguish at the start: for I will be talking only of the first two, and only by the way of the third.

Firstly, the metaphysical teaching of archetypal principles, pre-figuring any ideal community; secondly, the manner in which these principles should be reflected, ideally, in society; and, thirdly, the manner in which this teaching, attenuated and mingled with many other alien and polluting things, actually seems reflected, socially, in that cluster of institutions Sociologists, for instance, call "caste". I will use the word "varna" to name principles expressed by the teaching in its first expression; "jāti", to speak of the birth-caste phenomenon said to be implied by this teaching, and which should be lived in terms of, should we wish to establish right-order in our society; and no word whatever to talk, exclusively, of how things actually are, socially, that is, of what we actually do live in terms of. For our concern here is with the metaphysic, as a system of enlightening teachings, and not the least with any system - like society, in fact - in which these teachings are usually corruptly contained.

Put briefly, varna I will henceforth view as authentic ontological bases, functioning as principles underlying caste, and jāti as "caste-proper", or that factual manner in which these principles find their instances in people and their birth-places. The human perversion of the teaching, fraught as it surely is with iniquities - there are evils here -, is something I must leave to the Social Anthropologist, or Social Worker; reminding them both, though, that what they call "caste", and usually (I would argue) mistake for the real thing, often is merely a shallow perversion, foisted on man by man, to his eternal shame and

degradation. We might call this, "pseudo-caste". No less than Gandhi am I appalled at the excesses of maltreatment perpetrated by people in secular power to reinforce that power, expressly in the name of "caste". But no less than Gandhi again am I in the least bit tempted to mistake this grotesque distortion for the truth of the teaching itself. Let me now move to this teaching, to these truths, and to these contrasts.

III. A Textual Note

The most important sources in śruti-literature for the dual teaching of varṇa:jāti are, Rg Veda X:90:11-12 Brhadāranyaka Upanisad I:4:11-15; Bhagavadgītā I:42-45, and XVIII:40-48 (you'll note that the Gītā begins and ends with talk about this teaching, which could be seen to token how vital its author felt it to be); and the later Vajrasūcikā Upanisad, a small work important for its effort to demonstrate that it isn't the social categories people place one in that determine, or in any way reflect one's true-caste, but other more deep things about one's doings, and being, as a mokṣa-questing individual. He who is called "a Brahmin" is not a Brahmin for that; even if he is one at all.

Let me now further unfold this distinction between varṇa and jāti by spending a short while looking at the Vajrasūcikā and Gītā references, where both these terms appear, and in ways that may seem either to run them together, or fail to carry quite the distinction I am arguing for.

In the most explicit terms Vajrasūcikā remarks: "Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra - these are the four varṇas".¹ I, on the other hand, would argue these names for jātis as instantiations of varṇas, but not for varṇas, as the principles then instantiated, themselves. Yet there need be no reason to hold Vajrasūcikā saying other than this, except in

shorthand. Why we should hold this use to be a shorthand of this kind may not prove wholly clear without a full analysis of Bṛhadāraṇyaka, but we may at least note this. That there seems every reason to believe this later Upaniṣad's prime aim to be the marking-off of true-caste from some other thing called "caste" in society-at-large of the time; and that it has found it convenient to do so by using "varṇa" precisely to advert to true-caste by unequivocally bringing it back to its source, as true-principles.

Vajrasūcika's method is this. In questing the origins of each caste, or in principle of each, it asks what it means to be one of them, namely, "Brahmana". In brief, it asks what it is which makes any Brahmana truly so, as distinct from a series of things people clearly might, and presumably then did, think makes one such. It asks: "What (about a person) truly bears the Brahmana-name? The living-being? The physical-body? Birth (jāti)? Knowledge? Karmic-nature? Doer-of-dharma?" (ko va brahmano nāma? kim jīvaḥ? kim dehaḥ? kim jātiḥ? kim karma? kim dharmika iti.śloka 2)

All of these the author considers inadequate objects for the "Brahmana-name", that is, that about a person which makes him Brahmana (if he is), for his various reasons. We need concern ourselves only with the reference here to "jāti", as what it might be about a person which makes any true Brahmana what he is in being so. The answer he gives - an odd one, out of context - makes perfectly plain that he is not here speaking of that about persons which is their inherence of varṇa-principles, but of some other thing. For he replies that "birth", the minimal meaning we can give to "jāti" here, is not of the essence, for many Brahmanas are not born of human yonis. He lists one as born of

a deer, another of Kuśa-grass, another from a jackal, another from an ant-hill, another from a fisher-girl, another from the back of a hare, another from a nymph, and even one of an earthenware pot.

What we make of the facts here is not relevant. What matters is what he is saying - that one's human birth is not of the essence. But to say this, it's clear he must be addressing a certain teaching that finds this of the essence in a certain way, for there can be no doubt whatever that one's birth exactly reflects one's karmic-desserts. And whilst fully accomplished Brahmana-hood would only be reflected in this way were it true that vestigial sañcita-karma demanded it - a vexed question among polemicists -, for otherwise a person, being wholly enlightened, would have no occasion for rebirth (or none, necessarily; enlightenment incarnate from birth could happen for a Cosmic reason, though in no way related to demands enforced by this "being's" karmic-nature), those who were Brahmana in much, but not yet fully accomplished, certainly would be remanifest, and possibly reborn, in a manner quite strictly reflecting such status. In this measure, Radhakrishnan cannot be correct to hold this Upanisad "valuable in that it undermines caste distinctions based on birth".

What could then be the teaching which finds one's human-birth of the essence in signifying Brahmana-hood in some unacceptable way? We might I suggest with some confidence speculate it precisely to be the contemporary reflection of what I have styled "pseudo-caste". There are several reasons for believing this work much more recent than Radhakrishnan appears to believe in ascribing it to the Sāma Veda, not least its use of the term "saccidananda" ("being-consciousness-bliss") as an appellation for Brahman, a term really only current post-Śaṅkara.

It is therefore likely that the dogma (I switch advisedly from "teaching") of pseudo-caste, as that cluster of hardened conventions imposed on all social members in terms of man-made extrinsic conditions, and not intrinsically jāti, had reached such a level of development that the latter, or true-caste ones, were much forgotten. Under these conditions, much as today, "being born Brāhmana" would be an hereditary affair, which is not at all the same as finding it reflected in one's birth. For the former is a matter of classes of families (kulas) grouped together at some point in history for extrinsic, no doubt essentially selfish, power-hungry or self-endorsing reasons, and maintained for the same reasons, such that they need in no way reflect those intrinsic properties of one's karmic-nature which actually do determine one's caste. Being "born" into families called "Brāhmana" - or, for that, by any other caste-name - is in no way any guarantee whatever of being authentically Brāhmana.

And if, as seems, the whole confessed aim of this writing is to enforce a return to the true source of caste, and hence of authentic Brāhmana, it is to be expected, as indeed we find, that varṇa as a word for true-principles of caste should be used when the latter is spoken of.

Of the Gītā, the situation is, if anything, even clearer. The term "varṇa" occurs only in three passages - I:42-45, where it appears in conjunction with jāti; IV:13, where a simple mention is made of the four varṇas with no further detail; and IX:5, where a reference seems meant merely to "colour", and not to "caste" at all. And though the teaching occurs clearly on one other important occasion - XVIII:40-48 - where there is no doubt that what I mean by "jāti" is being spoken of, neither of the terms varṇa or jāti are actually used, so no case whatever can be built on it.

Now, when we look at I:42-45, we find one interesting fact - that the word varṇa is used twice, and the term jāti, once. What is more, and not to labour the point (I leave that to a footnote²), the teaching is plain: that where, through the advent of adharmā, you inherit varṇa-saṅkara (varṇa-"messing-up") there do you, in consequence, also inherit a breakdown in jāti-dharma, or the laws governing jāti. A teaching which, far from equating varṇa and jāti, explicitly distinguishes them as follows - where the principles of caste are misunderstood, or perhaps ignored, people as the instantiation of these principles (as bearers of jāti, or true-caste) get miscategorized, so thrust into places they are ill-suited to, or don't deserve. In consequence, community is imperilled, for dharma gets ignored.

IV. Elaboration

Varṇa, I would argue then, talks of items ontically prior to people, though explaining why they are how they are - why, that is, they incline to the offices they do, so far as their karmic-nature gets honestly expressed. This is the simplest way of understanding varṇas - as ontologically prior principles underpinning needful divisions within any ideal society, by inclining the right people to their appropriate offices.

Jāti, on the other hand, simply describes people as they are. It speaks about what people do have, and, in light of being "varṇa, incarnate", how this should be exercised for the good of all. This "thing" I am saying people have is their actually being suited to a particular office, due to their karmic-nature, signalled by that aspect of this nature which is the general direction in which it truly inclines, when left untrammelled by extrinsic pressures. This is that actual

spirit, incarnate in one's being, towards a particular job of work, or kind of job.

As an aside, we might note that one wholly important reason for occasional retreat to the quietness of, say, a mountain resort, is the simple supplying of an atmosphere, deliberately freed as much as possible of these trammelling pressures. Retreats of this kind are precisely important as occasions for literally finding oneself afresh. They liberate us from distractions, at least in very much, and show us the state of our karma.

This, the state of our karma as expressing true-caste, we might call "our station", meaning that station one actually has - one's actual karmic-"status", if you like - and not something one merely is entitled to get; like, say a job one hasn't got but should by rights have. One's true-caste as opposed to any pseudo one is not necessarily known by one, or such that society will allow one to enact it. As I've remarked, today's Age is very much marred by the thwarting of true-caste through the wholly powerful extrinsic imposition of pseudo ones. Till one scarcely can see one's "true" self at all, be this one's ātmic-self, or even merely one's karmic-self. I find here a deep cause for much that is presently a malady in Modern community.

Now, though there may appear to be several proper stations, or social (and ultimately sanctifying) tasks one is well fitted to despatch, were there a range and not merely just one, all would fall within a specific caste-area, determined by one's measure of enlightened ability. Yet more important than whether there might not be a number of offices one might fill, is the fact that there are far, far more one likely never could, or certainly never should. For this, at least in

some part, vitally reflects the limits of one's abilities, and hence of one's true karmic-nature. I daresay there are other ways offices are debarred one, not relating to one's ability to despatch them. Certainly, in our day, socio-economic forces have closed the doors of much to many; and among these doors are at least often those to an expression of true-caste. Yet much is anyway innately inaccessible, due to inability in the first place; due, that is, to the makings of one's karmic-nature. Much of course that is inaccessible in this way is these days openly attempted by many. Society widely sanctions much of this, which merely is to say, it fosters pseudo-caste. Confusions in this area are deep. And tragic.

For Hinduism, though, the important quest is an understanding of the laws governing that which is inaccessible in fact due to karmic-nature. For these laws determine one's station. Yet to this must be added the further fact that every station carries with it a deliberately inbuilt urge for betterment, an impetus ultimately to move away from the restricting, merely mundane aspects of just this station, into another more nearly expressive of Brahman, that is, marked by ātma-vidyā. Nor should this urge be viewed as other than integral to any present station, but rather as an aspect defining the internal dynamic of true-caste. It is not something thrust upon it from without. "Divine laws", wrote Radhakrishnan, "cannot be evaded. They are not so much imposed from without as wrought into our natures. Sin is not so much a defiance of God as a denial of soul, not so much a violation of law as a betrayal of self".³ And when later teachings, Śāṅkara especially, argued that all are subject to mumukṣatva or "burning desire for the freedom that is mokṣa" unless hopelessly obscured or befuddled by contrary influences

(as might seem true of many today), they were striving to formalize this urge at the level of psychology. They were arguing it a necessary part of man's natural make-up; and hence, such that all true jāti must accommodate it. For "natural" here means, "inclining to expression of true-nature": and "true nature" in the Hindu context means, "ātman-nature" (if "nature" here is an acceptable term), or "ātma-vidyā through mokṣa".

This latter teaching was, then, in part meant to show what anyway should have been clear - that any task always carries the rider of being done only to the end of mokṣa, so that, as we approach it more nearly, some tasks it once was wholly proper for us to do in our then present phase of self-understanding, no longer are proper for us to do, or no longer proper in quite that way. If we do them it is not because we now see them as essential for our well-being, but for some other reason.

Jātis as true-caste, then, are people imbued with varṇa; they are people inclined to those offices their karmic-nature means they are fitted for; they are people indwelt by the spirit of one, or some mingling, of four general areas of task; they are, in a most general way, varṇa made visibly manifest. But, do varṇas come first, then people as jātis afterwards? But this proves an unreal question. As principles they come first, yes. There is an ontic priorness. But though they should, accordingly, be thought of as the ontological bases of my presently en fleshed karmic-nature, they need not be the creating origins of it. Nor need they be thought to be prior in time. They need not have been made first. The relation between them may, for instance, be much as that between presently unseeable atoms, and the easily seeable common objects physicists tell us are but the manifestings of these atoms and their configurations. How the one "gives rise" to the other is as

much a mystery to modern physics, as how the varṇas "operate" to invest us with manifest jāti is to any non-enlightened person.

Briefly, to say the former are ontologically prior to the latter is merely to say that, were we to analyse any "principled" activity, from its less to its more ultimate components - that is, starting with those components which depend for their "being" entirely on other components, and ending with any which may appear to depend on no other whatever -, at the start of our list would be enactments of our principles (the living of our jāti), and at the end, these principles as real items themselves (here, varṇas). Quite the same would prove true were the physicist to analyse any mere object, from its publicly seeable 'thing' state to its presently non-seeable atomic one.

Still the only fact of cogency here is that all people are so imbued and indwelt by varṇa; so that the task of understanding people is very much the task of understanding this indwelling, and instructing people in their offices, accordingly. Varṇas are groups of ontically-prior principles, jātis, groups of people characterized in certain ways by these principles, visibly manifest. It really is as simple as that, and need be obscured no further.

Even so, it is obscured further by some scholars who, rare in acknowledging a difference here, have nonetheless put it all in the wrong place - all on the side of jāti. They use the two terms to name two things both true of jāti, and of jāti alone - that there are in some sense merely four; and that, in another, there are countless thousands. There are four as we have mentioned and are about to discuss further - the four general groupings of people in our world, characterized as Brahmaṇa, Ksatriya, Vaiśya, and Sūdra. And these can, in fact, be subdivided in

countless ways, according as those falling under them are enlightened. For each enlightenment-level is in many ways different, so demanding of different treatment. These needfully different patterns of treatment, and of behaviour, could, should one wish, be labelled, "different castes". And some have done so. For clarity, let us call these general groupings of people "generic-castes", and use the term "jāti" primarily of these, and their more detailed dividings, "species-castes", or "specific" ones; remembering only that the four generic ones - that is, the four jātis - are related in another way not always thought to hold true of genres in our world. For they are ranked in a hierarchy, according as they are nearer to or farther from enlightenment, or the mokṣa of ātma-vidyā. This hieratic character of generic-castes will get clearer in a moment. For now, though, to note that, merely to speak of these two things, as the above scholars have, is merely to speak of jāti, and leave out varṇa altogether; for varṇa quite clearly is neither.

My hunch is that these scholars have erred in this way because of an inability either to see, or, if not to see, then to admit any possible distinction between invisibly manifest, so non-observable prior items, and visibly manifest subsequent ones. For invisibly manifest prior items as authentically real aspects of our Cosmos, which, however, cannot be discerned, even inductively, by some physical science, are not much heard of these days. Given, then, this rarity, and so the above inability or bland refusal, because these scholars have nonetheless noted some difference operating here - between varṇa and jāti - they have, we might speculate, been led to cast about for some distinction in the area to pin these two terms to. One obvious division is that between the four jātis (generic-castes), and their many variants in real-life, in

terms of enlightenment-levels (species-castes). Perhaps on the principle that everything must be "in real-life", and that there can be nothing "invisibly prior" to the observably manifest, they have judged the former to be "varṇa", and the latter endless subdividings, "jāti".

Typical are these words: "The dharma-sūtras invariably use the word jāti when they want to indicate the real castes". An interesting observation indeed, one well concordant with our case. But from this, our author, Robert Lingat, concludes in quite the next breath - "There are only four varṇas, although the number of castes is unlimited".⁵ And even should these last words be taken accurately to render Mānavadharamaśāstra X:4, as Lingat would appear to take them, clearly in that context they are ambiguous, and don't carry the clear-cut distinction Lingat claims for them.

Briefly, endorsing this way of seeing the varṇa:jāti distinction would be to assume that Hinduism works on the above principle - viz., that everything accountable must be "in real-life". And like every other great wisdom-tradition, it clearly does not, but rather admits these non-observable invisibles at least as happily as it does visibles, or at least empirically discernibles. Little sense could be made of Bṛhadāraṇyaka I:4:11-15, and especially of its claim that varṇas are devas, unless we concede at least this much. Nor, for that, of the many other instances where aspects of the metaphysic's ontology - for instance, gūṇas - are equated with devas. Accordingly, there can be no doubt whatever that these interpretations quite miss the point, even though they do, as many do not, at least see there's a difference.

Whether there is this distinction - between invisibly manifest, non-observable prior items, and visibly manifest subsequent ones -,

I leave the reader to discern for himself through appropriate yoga.

I would, though, ask him to note this - that, in one sense, all principles are invisibly manifest, and prior, in quite this way. They are not seeable things; they are "there" to be lived-by or acted upon, rejected (or whatever); and they come before their enactings, livings-by (etc.). Still, there could prove other ways of conceiving "principles" than as real ontic items.

In summary, then, we are born with certain capacities, and without certain others, and this means we are suited to some tasks and not others. If we take to the wrong tasks we will make a mess of them, and of ourselves. If we take to the right ones, or those to which we are suited by karmic-nature, we are likely to flourish and to prosper. At least, if we apply ourselves with industry to them; and nothing hinders. A problem these days is that very much hinders, for pseudo-caste predominates. This can only promote confusion and hinder productivity by encouraging a wastage of resources. Still, in much, this is our world today. Which is why some Hindus believe it Kali-Yuga, or "dark days", foreshadowing the coming apocalypse. They see the signs. But of course, the signs can be read in other ways; whether correctly or not.

V: Brief Recapitulation

It is worth noting that not making a mess of things is partly why the Bhagavadgītā warns against doing someone else's dharma, even should one do this well, and not in that sense make a mess of things.⁶ For at least one is not doing what one should, so not flourishing oneself; but also, it's very likely, in some way hindering some other person who should be doing this dharma. This is a very deep and complex matter, even though it may seem simple. "Foreign Aid" as feeding others through

hand-outs might be doing others' dharma, it being argued they should feed themselves, and failing to do ours, which, it could be argued, could for some of us be showing others how to feed themselves, how to be self-sufficient. For no man is sufficient at all until he is self-sufficient. "Foreign-Aid" of this kind could well be messing things up on a very grand scale indeed.

Now, as we have noted, being born with certain capacities, and not with certain others, means two things in the Hindu context. First, that one is born with certain karmic-traces which preform one's capacities by inclining one in certain ways, so giving one certain interests, so influencing one to develop in certain fashions. All of which will mean one's capacities are of a certain sort, and not of another sort. Second, that one is enlightened or possessed of ātma-vidyā in a certain specific degree. For the nature of one's capacities is always a measure of the nature of one's enlightenment. One's karmic-bonds always mirror the extent to which one has mastered oneself and the world.

We have, then, births reflecting countless levels along the enlightenment way (bodhi-mārga), and an index of these levels will be an index of how well suited these individuals are for any specific office; that is to say, put finally, the jāti one exhibits through birth strictly depends on how enlightened one is before it.

Accordingly, we might note the following elements in the varṇa-jāti complex:

- (i) prior principles, or "splendoured forms", either as invisible "mysteries", expressing themselves, visibly, as people imbued with true-lights to their proper offices in dharmaic-society, or as those Spiritual Archetypes, proffered as deva-models, to appropriate

members of which we might appeal in light of our knowledge of proper office (the ground of authentic yaṅnā, or "worship"): all of these taken together comprise, when thought of from one side, an ineffable paradigm projected from the sva-rūpa of Brahman, of which the visible expression is ideal community, or, thought of from the other, the ontological bases of true-caste whose lived-expression brings this ideal into being;

(ii) real people, divided in terms of how these principles, or Spiritual Archetypes, actually apply, generally into four groupings, and, specifically, into many thousands of "rights-to-specific-office" bearers, in each case due (in the first place) to innate capacity, and (in the second) to ones subsequently acquired;

(iii) karma, as determining these capacities, both on birth (prārabdha and sañcita-karma), and through growth in life (āḡāmi-karma);

(iv) the fact of varying levels of achieved-enlightenment in our world by these people, as a result of their varying karma-determinants;

(v) real people, divided in terms of the offices, or jobs of work, they actually choose or are compelled to do in our world, and which may or may not coincide with those they should by right be doing for the furtherance of ideal community.

(i) is varṇa; (ii), jāti, both generic and specific, as "true-caste"; (iii), the fact of innate and acquired karma; (iv), the cosmologically important reflection of (iii); and (v), "pseudo-caste", so far as our jobs of work do not conform with out karmic-nature, as, I have argued, in today's world, mostly they don't. I have also argued this

to be tragic, so far as reinforcement of Kali-Yuga could be said to be such. Tragic certainly in that, ex hypothesi, most cannot hope to be approaching enlightened understanding of true-nature.

I want now to talk about how these prior principles (varṇas) apply to give rise to true-caste (jāti), reflecting enlightenment levels. For one should always recall that the whole thing, in the end, has entirely to do with the latter, that the entire Hindu endeavour, these offices and these stations, are all to the end of enlightenment. So that, quite as one's present degree of enlightenment will strictly dictate one's presently appropriate office and station, these very offices and stations will themselves be appropriate and so dictated to one - indeed, precisely within one's capacities and grasp - only because they exactly, and no other, are able to further one's enlightenment.

VI: The Jātis as inhering Varnāśrama-dharma

In line with what I've noted, we might simply vision the jātis, both generic and specific, as groupings of people in our world directly reflecting levels of enlightened self-understanding. Let us look at each generic-jāti - henceforth just called "jāti"- in these terms, and supplement our looking by the Gītā's views as well.

(i) The first group will be those, quite simply, of the highest enlightenment-level, so those who most wholesomely instantiate the Brahma-principle, or that manner of being whose essence is "the Truth of truth" (satyasya satyam).⁷ These quite simply will be those who have the clearest insight into true-nature, and who, for the well-being of our society, should be allowed the highest degree of initiative in spiritual matters; that is to say, who should in some paramount way be our teachers, preachers, and

performers of proper-rite, so far as these things amount to insightful avenues to self-understanding.

The name of such people, so far as they be found in our world, would be Brāhmaṇas (or, Brahmins), for they inhere in a most high manner the Brahma-principle. In the words of the Gītā:

"Equanimity, control, asceticism, pureness,

tolerance and uprightness,

learning, higher-wisdom, and piety

- are the task-attributes (karma) born of Brahma's
true-nature (sva-bhāva)."⁸

(ii) Next will be those individuals among us who, though highly enlightened, still are not sufficiently so to teach or perform proper-rite, without in some vital way misleading. But who are nonetheless endowed with sufficient high understanding to be able, admirably, to protect society; they have, in other words, at least a sufficient grasp on the nature of ultimate realness beneath appearances, and hence on the nature of the wherewithal for the perfectability of things, amply to know how to enhance, promote, and protect it, and especially how to safeguard its social or communal conditions, how, that is, to guard dharmaic-community.

Again, the Gītā offers us a list of attributes we might use to pick this second kind of being, insofar as we can know they flow from the nature of the being exhibiting them. This, I might add, is the importance of these verses from chapter XVIII - that they do in the simplest of ways offer us practical guidance about how we are to pick who really are of such-and-such a jāti; and hence, how we are to guarantee rightful distribution of office and

and station. Whoso conform to these attributes in each case, they should be esteemed deserving of the office in each case. And though of course picking these things out as natural is increasingly difficult these days, where patterns of conformity tend to dictate rather than natural-law, it nonetheless remains a little true that some people do appear discernibly naturally disposed in one way (or ways), and others, in others. To the Hindu mind, we ignore these discernibly natural disposings to our peril. Of the second kind of office, the Gītā, then, notes:

"Valour, majesty, resoluteness, competence,
as well as not taking flight in battle,
generosity and lowliness

- are the task-attributes (karma) born of Kṣātra's
true-nature (sva-bhāva)."⁹

These accordingly are our policing-guardians, in all senses, not merely in the sense of policing-or guarding-forces. They will be whoever, next to the Brahmanas, are best fitted to lead and guard us in all ways relevant to safeguarding our dhammic-structures. They will as well be our politicians as our policing-leaders. And note, of course, that not for a moment is it here being said that all members of these forces are of this demeanour; and no doubt most would be of the fourth jāti, than of this, the second. For we are speaking here merely of those equipped to be leaders among men, and not at all, or by the way only, of those equipped best to be led. We are speaking of those who, because of what in fact they naturally are, deserve, and, for society's sake, must be given

the second highest degree of spiritual initiative, as outlined above. That they should teach and preach is by no means denied: that they should do this essentially, or predominantly, or by way of effecting their natural office, assuredly is. For were we to heed them and not the true Brāhmaṇa (if we can find him), we would in the nature of the case be led into ruin.

Again, people who, in fact of nature, are of this order would be called, should there be any (an empirical matter) - Kṣatriyas, as inherers of the Kṣatra-principle.

(iii) The next group into which we might expect people to fall are those, not so enlightened they can be expected to teach without in some gross way misleading, nor even such that we might happily vouchsafe the task of social-protectors and leaders among men to them. For these are people whose hold upon the metaphysic beneath all dharma-promoting, mokṣa-enhancing, enlightenment-safeguarding society, is insufficient even always to be clear what should be protected, and how, and (quite as importantly) what should not be nurtured, even condoned, and how it should not be (equally as vital).

But, nonetheless persons whose wisdom warrants at least the task of producing and distributing social goods, in the detailed as well as general sense of nourishing communality in general. Whose natural bent and flare is for community works of one kind or another, where this might range from producing, and marketing, farm-goods, to organizing evenings for the aged. Naturally, these things we may all do a little; but only those whose office this naturally is are those truly of this jāti.

And any people who might be of this kind would be called Vaiśyas, or "bearers of the Viś-principle".

(iv) Finally, those who would in all ways, for the sake of the community, and for their own sake, best be given little to no initiative in spiritual matters (on our defining), are those who are accordingly best fitted to heed the advice given sagely by the wiser, and to follow. These would be those whose level of "true-nature" - understanding is, in fact of nature, so minimal that virtually anything other than sheer service on their part would be disastrous for their own development and that of others. For these are people who, because of their heavy burden of self-imposed negative karma, have, as it were, everything to learn. And, if everything to learn, then nothing to teach; or, next to nothing. Hence, they must be persons who could only mislead, disorganize, disrupt or destroy, were they to take as their essential office the tasks demanding of higher wisdom.

Should there be persons of this kind - and remember, these are generic types; and perhaps very few would be minimal-people in the most extreme way -, they would be named Śūdras, as dispensers, sheerly, of nourishing service.

As I have noted, the very great lack of this today is perhaps one of the reasons modern society should be ailing so. For that anyone should, by nature, be in the etymologically literal sense "servile", would naturally these days be outrageous even to suggest. Though should we alter the adjective to the participle "serving", we might get some response; though scarcely sufficient to vindicate the thought that there could be a very large number whose social

office this should as a full-time matter be. Our service-industries are not this, but basically self-serving ones.

Briefly, that nourishing service should be suggested of the essence of any person's vocation, not to say of a vast horde of people's, so that self-interested self-seeking has no part whatever, would, in the main, be to say something most would think silly. "Naive", perhaps, would be the term some may use. Yet perhaps for most these Kali days something like this should be of the essence of what we are - if only of the "Īśvara-pranidhāna" type. If only, that is, of the form of service which amounts to abandoning utterly oneself to one's most inwardly guiding light.

Finally, the Gītā, sketchily, though with much concision, says of the Vaiśya and Śūdra jātis:

"Agriculture, cattle-rearing, and general-commerce,
are the task-attributes (karma) born of the Vaiśya's
true-nature (sva-bhāva);
task-attributes whose very essence (ātma) is service
are, for the Śūdra, self-nature born".¹⁰

VII: Two Points

There are two points we should bear in mind in all this. Firstly, that whilst the four jātis entail reference to real offices in our world, they obviously do not refer merely to four tasks, but to a whole galaxy of related tasks, all sharing a certain cluster of characteristics, or at least relations, in common. Briefly, there are not merely four birth-castes in India, but four, subdividable into thousands upon thousands, in quite the way that enlightenment levels might be so sub-divided. For self-knowing is not something that grows

in four great jumps, but obviously a continuum with gradations. And one can be, or be born, at any point on this continuum. Moreover, there is obviously more than one way of teaching and preaching; more than one way of leading; more than one way of enhancing communality; and more than one form of basic service. And each of these offices have, as it were, as many sub-offices as there are, on the one hand, possible gradations in this specific slab of the continuum, and, on the other, possible ways of doing these general office-defining tasks.

All that is fairly obvious, or should be. Perhaps less so is the fact that, on these terms - offices graded in terms of essential wisdom -, socio-economic and political factors function in no way whatever to determine the nature of right society. These factors, as well, indeed, as the general factor of "history", are, it is not too strong to aver, totally irrelevant to the business of structuring ideal community. For this is to be fashioned entirely in terms of these gradations on this continuum - briefly, entirely in terms of levels of achieved wisdom in matters of the spirit, or in knowledge of essential true-nature, and especially of the nature of self (atman). Accordingly, there is no sense whatever in which "caste" can be equated with "class", still less this latter with "varṇa".

In traditional society, or society organized ideally, in these terms - were there ever such; and there needn't be for it nonetheless to function as a questable ideal -, there is just no parallel whatever between socio-economic or political strata, and those of caste. The tops in caste are Brahmanas, who are neither tops politically nor economically. In theory, indeed, they are devoid altogether either of political or economic power, tops in the former of course being the

truly political among true Ksatriyas, and tops in the latter being the major merchants among true Vaiśyas. Likewise, tops in exploitable manpower, as a source enshrining social power of a very present, wholly self-maniputable kind (instance the socially-crippling power of the governed-employees to "strike"), are the Śūdras at large.

These facts are important to bear in mind, for they show the disparity between the Hindu mind fashioning Hindu social theory in its classical form, and almost the entire Modern mind fashioning its supposed "realistic" understanding of social formations. Naturally, ideals are not at all points concordant with realities, and what actually happens in the world may diverge greatly from what the world would wish should happen. But there can be no denying that Modern social theory - and by "Modern" I just mean, "where we are now"; though it started long before now, or even yesterday - does more than merely embrace what it takes to be the realities of how things will happen in the world anyway, and also models its practice overtly on socio-economic and political understandings, thought to be at the heart of what best determines the social dynamic.

Hindu social theory could never consider these things to be at the heart of what is best. And in part, naturally, because it roundly differs from what the Modern theorist would consider "natural"; for, as I've striven to show, Hindu social theory is based on what it views as natural-law, and any view of "nature" which saw it governed, and not merely unfortunately presently swamped, by socio-economic cum political forces, it would simply consider a most sorry perversion.

It is not my part to take these sketchy comparative observations further here, except to note that, should our concern be to promote the

growth of self-understanding, and of such wisdom as accrues from this, the Hindu suggestion, as others of its ilk (cf., Plato), bears a very much more serious look than ever it gets today. For should this be our aim - as at least it surely should - the very radical disparity between these two approaches must be emblematic, somewhere and in certain ways, of some very serious malady indeed. And Modern ways need not be assumed by us full wholesome, simply in virtue of our living them. Most of us would anyway agree there to be a very deep canker in the heart indeed. And one sign of this, I think, quite wide agreement precisely is the present-day turning by at least many earnest people to systems of non-Western wisdom for something that well seems missing in our present Western ones.

VIII: Eight Objections

I want now to deal with a group of objections - eight in all - typically mooted by people about "caste", and varṇa-theory. I wish to use them largely to illustrate the coherence and cogency of the social theory in question - namely, the Karma:dharma:varṇa complex, expressed in jāti.

I don't suggest the really very swift responses I will proffer in each case to these objections adequately deal with them, though in most cases I feel they do. My intention is rather more to example the kind of response available to the Hindu social theorist (of the Classical kind I've outlined), than to greatly argue these responses at all points adequate. I say this, not to hedge bets, but to have it clear that I would wish to say much more than I will say in expounding these responses, to feel sure that I have done them full justice. I am not frightened of losing; merely cautious of anyone imagining I think I have won too cheaply.

To each of these criticisms in turn, then.

- (i) But how could this, a social system based on karma: dharma:varṇa, ever make people better?

Briefly, it is suggested that only this type of hieratic system ever could, because only this could ever amount to promoting educational and welfare opportunities, and associated facilities, which seek to develop each individual, individually, that is, in terms of the person he is. Such other systems as take their central principle for social organization from, say, an ideology, or some other thing extrinsic to the human dynamic, and hence to personhood per se, are, in that very measure, concerned only with developing people - all people, regardless - in terms of this outside standard. Which means, they are prone to promote some manner of "unequal equality", an "equality" based on ignoring true difference; or at least, on recognizing only those differences imposed by this outside standard, and so by factors extraneous to what persons are, inside. In which case, most truly personal differences, those between people as betterment-seekers, are bound, either to be ignored altogether, or given very short shrift indeed. Which is not only foolhardy, since bound to thwart all possibility of instantiating ideal community, but plainly unjust, leading most away from authentic development.

Than this, much to be preferred is a system based on the effort deliberately to give each individual person his due, in terms of that internal, personal dynamic giving rise to his needs and capacities. The Hindu effort is entirely to do just this.

- (ii) But this fosters injustice by perpetuating a class-structure, based on birth and family, that is, upon a certain form of spiritual aristocracy.

This very common form of criticism quite misses the point in several ways. In the first place, caste (jāti) should not in any normal sense be equated with "class". We have been through that. But, secondly, it is wrong-headed and false in a basic way, anyway. For the karma:dharma:varṇa grouping, as expressing Hindu social teaching, in no way "perpetuates" anything.

Sofar as "birth" and "family" are concerned, the claim is a factual one - that one is born into that structure which strictly reflects that level of enlightenment achieved on last death. Put in other terms: that one's consciousness is remanifest in that environment, down to every last detail (ergo, including family), needed to express or work-out its inclinations. This claim either is false or true; certainly, it "perpetuates" nothing.

Nor does it foster injustice, being, in so many ways already worked through, the one way possible to promote full fairness (dharma). Moreover - and this is a third thing - jīvan-mukti is open to all, no matter how humble one's beginning. That is to say, one's birth-level is one, wholly inflexible thing, due in an absolute sense to accumulated karma (as vāsanās). One can in no way yield further control over that. However little one may in the event like one's birth-level, it is due in an absolute sense to what one might have altered in the past, but cannot hope to now. One's birth, though one's own doing, is, on the occasion and after death, a foregone thing.

How, on the other hand, one then chooses to behave is a wholly other matter. I have argued the view that jāti is rock-hard through any specific life, in no way part of the Classical metaphysic, and, if Hindu at all, a later, likely self-seeking addition. There can be

little doubt about this. It flies in the face of the entire thinking, otherwise. And, when put to the test, it is normally true teaching which triumphs. There have, for instance, been more than one instance of so-called "Untouchables" exerting so great an improving-tapas during one lifetime, that, despite their lowly origins, they achieved a veneration from others given only to realized saints.

There have also been socially "high-born" Brahmins (so-called) who find it appropriate, for their own improvement, to cohort, even to venerate, socially "low-born" others. The fifteenth century Bengali poet Chandīdās betook himself to an "Untouchable" mistress, a certain Sahajīyā, avowing his salvation to lie only in this liaison. I see no reason to esteem him disingenuous, though sexual matters are notoriously prone to quite this thing. I rather, though, see this a case of a person finding his own level in another person socially branded "lower", and she, hers, in a person labelled "higher", and hence, in a cluster of complex ways, vindicating true-teaching. For I see here a case of a person recognizing high development in a person supposedly, and no doubt in some senses, actually born low.

(iii) But if lower castes have little to no spiritual initiative, how can they hope to develop higher?
How can they achieve jīvan-mukti?

The answer to this is quite plain, though twofold: by, in the first place, doing what one's unmolested present understanding makes clear as patently appropriate, which, at the start, usually means, the caste-deeds of the family one is born into. Naturally, whether these caste-deeds coincide with those imposed on it from without, will be another matter. There is nothing to guarantee they will be. Nor is

there any real way of safeguarding pure-jāti these days, things being so intermingled and vitiated by so much; where by "pure-jāti" I merely mean, "proper office".

Basically, the problem at this level is ever having an understanding of one's proper office which is ever unmolested by alien influences, instructing one awrong about one's proper station. These pluralistic days, in much that is good, have seen a shattering of boundaries of all kinds. And among these have been, clear boundaries between appropriate office accruing to varying jātis.

For this reason, one's basic natural insight into proper station, even should one believe it had at all, would be much depleted these days by insinuating counter-influences, especially dangerous when they occasion coveting another's office, so lead one to tackle what is presently beyond one's powers. Which makes the second source for guidance here doubly important - namely, the advice of those one has good reason to accept as of superior insight in these matters. I don't say finding one's guru is easy. Few things are more difficult these days, due to these counter-influences making immediately attractive alternatives to depth-wisdom which simply are fleeting, and unlasting. They endorse appearance, and not the real. We can, however, go on only what we have to go on; we can merely use the powers we have to assess our advisors - and follow, or not, accordingly.

In other words, this problem today is one we all share, where we no longer have any clearly approved guidelines to authority.

The point here is, speaking now of the lesser enlightened, that the spiritual initiative it is argued should for the good of all be withheld is of one single order - namely, teaching, or initiating

moves to uphold, promote, or preserve dharma - or, enlightenment-cum-moksa oriented society - other than those initiatives enjoined in doing what one's viably-chosen gurus enjoin. The reason here is clear - that being shown more spiritual initiative in dictating social policy and organizing the lives and liberties of others, would be a foolhardy peril for all. For only those whose insight in these matters is more enlightened than less can fashion policy without being prey to this danger.

(iv) But couldn't this then be used as a political weapon by the power-hungry to deny opportunity and basic liberty to those of lower-caste?

Swiftly, of course it could be. And without any doubt, sometimes it has. The iniquities and needless suffering in India due in part to just this are clear to see. For the plain fact is, people in power - anywhere, under any regime, about (almost) anything - often use their power to secure their position, or those of their party, class, religion (or whatever), at the often brutal expense of others.

But - again, as swiftly - how the varna:jāti teaching is misused by wicked or misguided people for their own ends, is one thing; how it should be used to be true to itself, is quite another, by no means even remotely related, thing. With jāti, we have a way of classifying groups of people in terms of individual abilities (or their lack), reflecting individual levels of enlightenment. And far from repression, denying some people opportunity altogether, and giving all, or most, to some others, unjustly, equity is its very keynote. It is, the argument has suggested, the only way adequately to ensure, in the hectic hurly-burly of Modern people together, (and especially in such vast numbers), that each gets exactly what's needed to vouchsafe his

specific development; that each, in other words, is given exactly those opportunities needed to develop his specific talents, sofar as these lead him closer to mokṣa.

This simply is why we have jāti-dividings. Otherwise, at its very most general, there would seem to be two basic possibilities:

- (1) that all get lumped together in a laissez-faire, "everyone-gets-what-he-can", system; or,
- (2) that all are forced to behave in terms of ideals, wants, or needs of just one social group, or class (the Aristocracy; the Proletariat).

The former could seem to typify Modern Liberal Democracy, and the latter, much Marxist Communism of the day. Typify only, perhaps, not "define" or "essentially characterize" - though I do believe a case might be made to show these too. For now, though, let us simply note the point that both are patently unjust; for both promote the interests of some groups having some special abilities, at the expense of all others.

In marked contrast, the Hindu alternative - not that it's merely Hindu, or need be - is simply, in essence and definitively, structured to address each individual, in his present needs regarding proper betterment, and formulate policy accordingly to meet them. How well it ever has done this is another matter. As is, how well it might have, had it not been subject to so many centuries of anti-Hindu influencings (basically Semitic - Jewish, Parsee, Moslem, Christian), and left merely to its original inspirings. There is perhaps little reason to believe it would have fared better; though it may have fared "purer". Hinduism itself teaches that "time" can only decay, and, of its essence, encourage the rot to set in. Which isn't to say "the truth" decays, or

goes rotten. Only that man's management of himself in light of truth, gets less able as time moves on, than more so. Till, some would say, we dwell in the darkest of eras, the Kali-Yuga (lit: "dark-age"), characterized by a breakdown in all cohering mores instructing proper-office.

If things are at a pretty pass, this is quite as Hinduism would believe (or at least appear to many to believe) it must be. That development through time is "progress" is a Western myth, fathered by its Judaeo-Christian fosterings; even more, that it must be "progress".

- (v) But what guarantees, or how do you establish as fact, that just this individual is born into just this family just because of his past karma; that is, so that he's not properly thought of as a mere victim of unjust circumstance?

But this is the wrong question. For this guarantee follows necessarily from a prior acceptance of the teachings of karma and samsāra. These accepted, and varṇa:jāti follow in their wake, such that, whilst this acceptance is a prior matter to the varṇa:jāti teaching, the latter could make little sense without it. The two teachings - that of karma and its correlate samsāra, and varṇa-jāti - so intimately interweave, being defined in terms of each other, that whilst the former might in some logical way come before the latter, it scarcely could subsist without giving rise to it, nor the latter without the former's being true.

We might in passing note one rejoinder to the cry of "unjust circumstance" - that, in ways already argued, its intimacy with the karma:samsāra teaching enables the varṇa:jāti teaching to make much better sense of inborn inequalities of power and circumstance, than most other theories on offer. So far as this is not clear, we must leave it not

being so, as clearly the case, strong or otherwise, already has been made: briefly, that how we enter the world on any occasion, laden with benefit or wretchedness, simply reflects how we were before (and before; and before), such that, how we are now is how we deserve to be, given the lives we then lived. Perhaps that condenses a host of things which need a close look; but that must wait another time. For all we wish now to have clear is how the case to cater for inequalities in our beginnings, justly, is to be made out. This should now be plain.

- (vi) But surely this will encourage indolence, complacency, and a general tendency not to try to "better-one's-station", by encouraging a "clinging-to-one's jāti" mentality.

But this again is misguided. For jāti-dharma is, in its very essence, only what is needed for this individual to effect betterment of station. That's how it's arrived at; what it means. Of course people can be lazy; about this as about much besides. Of course people do tend to "cling" to what's familiar; again, about all manner of things. But these are other matters, neither encouraged nor necessitated by varṇa:jāti teaching.

- (vii) But this must be unjust, because it forces some people to do the uncongenial.

Again, wrongheaded, for a number of reasons. Firstly, being forced to do the uncongenial is by no means always unjust, or clearly ever so. The entire penal-code, for instance, amounts to doing justice, sofar as it is, precisely by imposing the uncongenial on offenders.

Secondly, varṇa:jāti teaching doesn't "force" anything. It is merely a teaching, a theory. Nor is it, when in practice, any form

of penal servitude, but merely a way of grouping people in terms of abilities whose development will improve them, and their community; that's all.

Thirdly, the term "uncongenial" is clearly, in most cases, a relative one whose connotations might vary much from person to person. What I don't like doing may differ very much from what you don't like doing. But even were it true that some tasks are such that most people don't like doing them, should there be those esteemed best fitted to do them as a matter of proper office, that, far from showing some twisted form of injustice, rather would be because, karmically, these tasks meet the requirements of their present enlightenment-level, whereas certain other tasks do not. There is no suggestion here of some people imposing or forcing others to do things they don't want to do themselves (though in real-life this may prove true); but merely that karma has made these tasks appropriate. Nor is there here any guarantee that those who do these tasks are those who should be doing them. There are likely more śūdras among us than we can admit; and likely more doing śūdra-tasks, than those who, among these, should be doing so. To sort this all out needs radical change of a sort our world is scarcely ready for; nor, I daresay, would admit desirable.

Briefly, the varṇa-jāti teaching gives a metaphysical-cum-moral justification for the social necessity for division of labour where some are bound by their own dharma to do tasks thought uncongenial by others, and which others are not bound to do by theirs. What are the alternatives, or seemingly such, to such a system? Three bare mention. Firstly, that all do everything, equally. But this would be a shameful waste of talents, for some are better at some tasks than others. It would also

be socially ruinous; for some tasks - the more complex, skilled, intellectual or spiritual - are such that some have no aptitude for them at all. Were they to do them in equal measure with those who should, chaos would reign.

The second alternative is that of Marxism, where one "class" (the "workers"; an odd term - as though others didn't work) is set to dominate all others, for reasons of a strange form of "Historical Necessity". Which again would be a sheer waste of inborn talents, and ruinous at least in that degree. For, put at its very briefest, "Historical Necessity", even were there some such, could not of itself ensure a division of labour in terms of talents; still less, if this necessity is said to be because one "class" of economically-determined people is given power over all other such classes, simply because they are so determined. The only way to divide people in terms of talents is in terms of talents. To that, "history" and its coursing is wholly irrelevant. Unless it could be shown that at certain times in history, certain groups of otherwise-determined people in fact do have certain talents, and others, others, or anyway, not these ones; which never has even remotely been shown. And even should it be, it would then be their talents and not this other determinant which in fact determined them for us; that is, sofar as the demands of proper social organization were concerned.

The third alternative, or seeming one, is one with which we might well have much sympathy - that all should in some measure share in at least some uncongenial tasks or ones so seeming to many. An alternative of this nature, where so-called "uncongenial" tasks were shared on a broader basis, could well prove both plausible and laudatory,

provided it were properly managed, and fostered no intolerable wastage of talent.

Even so, two facts remain: (i) that nothing in this suggestion is incompatible with varna:jāti teaching, as much, I suspect is with Marxist orthodoxy; and (ii) that many higher-tasks would still remain the province of but a few, for quite as many tasks would still be limited only to those with the ability.

(viii) But surely it is clear that varna:jāti teaching, whether right or not, must do psychological harm.

I think this an important criticism; though let us be clear about one thing - that "teachings" can't harm, only people's use of them. I don't think this a mere quibble. For it's crucially important, in dealing with "the truth", to be clear about this; and in being so, also be clear that one is not, then, merely clear about what some people have thought to be "the truth". The truth is what it is. People use or misuse, read or misread, this thing it is in ways that are fearfully many. And in this very sensitive area, I take this to be especially true. Hence, the need to say in some pointed way that we are dealing in the truth of these teachings, and not primarily in any other thing at all.

But the query could be rephrased: Is not the varna:jāti teaching such that, psychologically speaking, people get intimidated by it? A belief of this kind naturally motivated, or in part did so, the Buddhist and later the Sikh breakaway movements from within Hinduism. For Gotama the Buddha on the one hand, and Guru Nanak on the other, both were moved to denounce the excesses of "caste" as a social phenomenon, and its hold on the psyches of people.

I have no doubt whatever that these great sages were correct in denouncing what they denounced; and it also seems to me that the suggested hold on the minds of people by the mere presence to them of certain misconstruals of this teaching, such that, often, they are paralyzed of initiative and inhibited of zest for real improvement, is, on occasion, a very real hold. There seems to me no doubt that in much the mere presence to many of the teaching, as history has misshapen its face and lineaments, till, like many legal structures, it simply became a vice to hold some in their place and others in power, was a most real happening. Nor would I wish to diminish, either this fact, or the crying need to deal promptly with it, by noting that this, the teaching's distorted face and shape, is not our concern.

Certainly, from this it in no way follows, either that (a) the teaching is other than true (sofar as it makes truth-claims about facts), or (b), not needed (sofar as it gives a picture, enjoining what would be ideal society, as distinct, perhaps, from any present way society is).

Moreover, it is well to note that, at least as often (I suspect, far more often, for I suspect what I'm about to say to be universally true) as any intimidatory paralysis based (at least) upon the teaching, misconstrued, its presence to mind can do positive (if you wish) "psychological" good, in ways not always likely under other schemes. How so? By stressing that one is responsible oneself for what one is, and hence, for the conditions one is born into in this world. Which is a good of this psyche-kind in two clear ways. Firstly, because it removes the tendency to waste time and energy in railing against other people and things for one's fate, a tendency which, psychologically

speaking, hinders growth by placing irrelevant blockages in its way. Secondly, it helps by encouraging one to direct energies and effort to where they should in the first instance be directed, as well as for a long time thereafter - to one's own person and situation.

In the simplest of ways, then, the mere presence to mind of properly expressed and understood varṇa:jāti teaching aids one's approach to wisdom, and hence to betterment: by in the first instance, removing hindrances (or negative influences) from the psyche, and, in the second, putting helps (or positive influences) there. This, I think, must always prove true of its presence, when properly expressed and understood. So, the chances are, its mere presence functions in this good way more often than any bad way: for even when misconstrued, it debilitates only sometimes, and not always.

IV: Conclusion

In concluding, I want, rather than summarize the story of this piece, to go to its heart by stressing at some length a single point. It is this: though one is responsible oneself for the conditions one is born into, the "conditions" we are here speaking of, it is absolutely crucial to stress, are one's spiritual conditions, or those pertaining to the quest for self-transcendence in striving to grasp true-nature, and not in the slightest any economic or material conditions (except in the event of their proving intrinsic to the former). We are so deeply confused these days over this, that I want to devote all of our final words to this single, really rather simple point.

So much are our values these days, East increasingly as much as West, those of matter and of quantity, that we often seem scarcely able to see beyond the surface. And where we see slums, or squalor, or

indigence, we, as it were, "automatically" conclude - "materially impoverished, so in other ways backward". Which strikes me as the most arrant arrogance imaginable. As if the only places you might likely find advanced development of soul could be among the prosperous churches of the American mid-west - quite as much the imperialist fallacy as any suggestion (and there are plenty) that the only places you will find wise men are prosperous seats of "higher learning". I venture to suggest that something like the converse is closer the truth in each case, these very secular days. The commerce of an age is very much fashioned by its popular theses, one of which today is that the seeably measurable outside of things sufficiently indicates their inside.

Briefly, there is utterly no reason whatever why there should be some correlation between spiritual prosperity, and that of material things. So quite as little reason to accept that poverty in one area reflects poverty in the other. In fact, most great religions of our world tend to teach that spiritual riches cannot cohabit with material wealth; and in a way which is such that, where there is the latter, there cannot be the former. To enter His "Kingdom", or that of His "Father", Jesus repeatedly said, and more than once to rich people, one must be poor in material possessions, no matter how largely present-day Christendom seems to have forgotten this. Both Hinduism and Buddhism, in quite the same vein, teach the need to detach oneself from all worldly things, as such things, in any way to hope for full wisdom (the mokṣa of nirvāṇa). Nothing is plainer than this very simple, very crucial, very much forgotten fact about matters of the spirit and those of this world.

Accordingly, where we find grinding material poverty, and

economic backwardness, there we by no means are entitled to "see" the conditions of low-caste. Among many of the most impoverished in India I venture to suggest will be found great riches and depth of soul lacking among many of "the wealthy"; if only because, the former in no way, or in fewer ways, are trammelled by the bonds of possessions, whilst the latter are bound to be. To label as "sūdras" all those found cast in worldly poverty is bound to be quite as imperious an error, as using some single jāti-label for all who are "wealthy".

In this regard, we might note what I think is the misconstrued Christian bias, influenced much these days by what is called "the Social Gospel", that the worst, most pressing form of poverty somehow must be economic or material in kind. Hence, the doing of good-works must, first and foremost, always be giving people, usually arrogantly labelled "developing", food and clothing, and other things: normally also accompanied in some way by the trappings (a delightfully ambiguous word) of a Western understanding of "the good life", and even more insidiously, by this understanding itself.

Than this, I want to say there can be no doubt that poverty of soul is far more to be lamented than poverty of purse; and whilst one might feel you can't abolish the former without first abolishing the latter, there is in the first place no reason whatever to believe this true (with an exception I'll shortly note), and, in the second, the entire weight of spiritual traditions suggesting it false. We have noted the words of Jesus and Hindu and Buddhist teaching on the matter. We might merely in the context of this chapter further note that the tendency to type-caste people (to use a deliberate pun), socially, so that marks other than enlightenment levels of genuine wisdom are used,

on the occasion, to assess jāti, is always a nefarious tendency, since it precisely clouds the very facts we want clear, properly to structure society. The phenomenon Sociologists study, and Hindus themselves often call "caste", is often, and in much, the product of this nefarious tendency.

Naturally, this in no way speaks against the clear need often to abolish poverty, when this amounts to such as war on want. An exception to the above rule about material poverty not being the first thing to attack - and this seems to me the only clear exception - is clearly that of people so debilitated by poverty that's abject, as not even to be able sanely to disport themselves. Under these conditions - and I have the facts of malnutrition and starvation much in mind - it would of course be silly, even shameful, to say that this is not the lack that must first be met.

Apart, though, from these very extreme conditions, it seems to me wholly debateable that one is doing another a good and not a very mixed-ill in giving material things, rather than aid in the ways of enlightened growing; that is to say, teaching of a helpful kind. For once one has spiritual wealth, all other forms of poverty quite literally don't matter at all. Naturally, giving the latter is far more difficult than giving the former, which is rather easy, and in one way, rather undemanding (for it means just giving things, and not oneself); and doubly difficult today, both because "things" are thought so important, so that much harder to give away, and because, what could be meant by "enlightened growing" if not getting more things of some kind, is not an issue about which there is either much agreement or, in the conscious hearts of many, more than passing interest.

Part of the Hindu venture, as of all true wisdom-systems, is to reckon this "passing interest" as of paramount import, and organize its teaching programme such that, not only is this said so, but the aid needed clearly to see why it should be so gets effected in this teaching. For the central teachings of Hinduism don't mean merely to tell you things whose grasp might make you more clever. Far rather do they try to do those things meant to make you, in everything, more wise.

FOOTNOTES

1. brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya-vaiśya-sūdra, iti catvāro varṇāḥ. Vajrasūcikā Upanisad II.
2. The words, which, it should be noted, are Arjuna's, not Kṛṣṇa's, are these.

"In family-slaying, perish

the everlasting family-laws (kula-dharmāḥ);

on loss of dharma, the whole family

adhama overcomes also." (40)

"Through adhama's overcoming, Kṛṣṇa,

the family's women are defiled;

through women being defiled, O Vṛṣṇi-clansman,

arises varṇa-saṅkara (varṇa- "mixing up")." (41)

"Mingling leads to naraka indeed

for family-slayers and for the family;

for their pitaras fall

because their offerings of piṇḍa and water are disrupted. "

(42)

"By these dosair of kula-killers
varna-mingling which cause,
are destroyed jāti-dharmāh,
and eternal kula-dharmāh." (43)

The surface meaning of this is clear: that where the bonds binding the family together shatter, there is intermarriage with families, not just of other castes but of other kinds, and so a failure to maintain that purity of male-line needed to do the rites demanded by the pitaras (ancestors) in order to maintain their cosmic-stability, and hence the stableness of the Cosmos in general, so that the laws governing social-stability - jāti-laws - are shattered also.

Beyond this, the more abstract, generally applicable meaning here, clearly is as I have given earlier: that where, through the advent of adharmā, you inherit varna-saṅkara, there do you in consequence also inherit a breakdown of jāti-dharma, or the laws governing jāti.

3. S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, p. 73.
4. See, Śaṅkara, Vivekachūḍāmaṇi, and the later tiny classic, Sadānanda, Vedāntasāra.
5. Robert Lingat, The Classical Law of India, University of California Press, 1973; p.32.
6. See, Bhagavadgītā II:35, XVIII:47.
7. See, Bṛhadāraṇyaka II:I:20, and Maitrī VI:32.
8. samo damas tapah saucam
ksāntir ārjavam eva ca
jñānam vijñānam āstikyam

brahmakarma svabhāvajam - Bhagavadgītā XVIII:42

9. śauryaṃ tejo dhṛtir dākṣyaṃ

yuddhe cā'py apalāyanam

dānam īśvarabhāvas ca

ksātram karma svabhāvajam - Bhagavadgītā XVIII:43

10. kr̥ṣṇa-gaurakṣya-vāṇijyam

vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam

paricaryātmakaṃ karma

śūdrasyā'pi svabhāvajam - Bhagavadgītā XVIII:44