

## MANU'S VISION OF THE HINDU DHARMA

The socio-religious life of the Aryan people seems to have achieved a cultural maturity at the stage of the formation of the Dharma-Laws as promulgated by Manu, probably a mythical figure to whom the "Dharma-Laws" are attributed.<sup>1</sup> The Hindus who claim cultural lineage to the Aryan stalk of civilization respect *Manusmṛti* as their book of the "Rules of conduct" with respect to their socio-moral and religious life. The *Manusmṛti* presents in a systematic form the laws of Hindu Dharma. The Hindu Dharma is essentially a way of life to be lived following strict moral principles in view of realizing a great religious ideal, *moksha*, which is strongly founded on a philosophy of life.

### 1. "Dharma" as the Moral Ideal in *Manusmṛti*.

As the science of dharma (*Dharmasastra*), *Manusmṛti* deals with dharma in the most comprehensive and systematic way. The treatise of *Manusmṛti* begins with the request of the sages who approached Manu, for instruction in dharma, the "rules of conduct" of the four *varnas* (castes) and that of the intermediaries (Manu I:2). Here dharma is understood as the moral ideal to be followed by each individual as a member of a *varna*. Obviously dharma is treated not as an abstract concept but as the practical law of conduct of the social group to which an individual belongs.

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1. It is not easy to ascertain who composed the extant *Manusmṛti*. The extant text is introduced as an address given by Manu, through an interpreter *Bṛhigu*, the ninth successor of the 10 patriarchs of mankind (Manu I: 35). Actually only 58 verses of the I chapter "Introducing the Laws" constitute the address of Manu; the rest (M I: 59ff) belongs to *Bṛhigu* and, hence *Manusmṛti* as a whole is also known as *Bṛhigu-Samhitā*. In the light of this and other internal evidence, the authorship of *Manusmṛti* is "collective" while the authenticity of the text is "attributive" to the mythical person Manu: an eponym.

Manu compiled a moral code which was already existing in the sources of the Vedic oral traditions and followed in the moral life of the members of the Aryan society. So the pre-occupation of Manu was not to invent any law of conduct, and impose it on the individuals but to describe "in due order" the laws which governed the conduct of the four *varnas* as given and taught by *Svayambhu* (Self-existent) himself. Throughout his treatise, Manu uses the same term *dharma* to mean law, duty, sacred institutes, justice, eternal ordinance, the rule of conduct and transcendental law.<sup>2</sup> Though all these meanings have slightly different connotations in their respective contexts, our investigation concludes that Manu uses the word *dharma* strictly and technically in moral sense in his social system. Thus *dharma* is something like an "ideal" to be always had in mind and followed in the exercises of one's duties individually and socially. This, then, gives *dharma* the deep meaning of "Righteousness" as the "ethical imperative" in the whole of Aryan morality.

#### (a) The meaning of Dharma

Etymologically the word *dharma* is from the root *dhṛ*, which means "to support", "to carry", "to sustain" and to "project". This etymology is derived from the Vedic origin of the concept of *dharma*. The Vedic origin is primarily cosmic; we are reminded of such usages as the *dharmān* of the sky, meaning the firmament, which support those who are seated on it, hence the sky has the *dharmān* of supporting (Rg V:15, 2; I:187, 1). In similar context, *dharma* has been used in the same meaning as given to *Rtam* which meant the cosmic order that was "supported" by its own holy law (*Rtena rtam dharanam dharanātha*). In many similar contexts the words *Rta* and *dharma* are used interchangeably and the meaning is evidently the cosmic law which supports the creation in order, and keeps stability and cohesion in the universe. In other words *dharma* conveys the idea of the conservation of the world after its creation by *Brahmā*. This law is especially mentioned by Manu as the *dharma*; (XII:50) implying thereby a transcendental law for all things in the cosmic order.

The very same cosmic law is brought down to the social level by Manu and established as the "correct Rule of Conduct" (*sādacara*) of the *varnas*. It is in the social context that Manu attributes to *dharma* an ethical meaning properly so called.

2. M I : 2; 81-82; 108-110; II : 1; 6; 10; 13; VIII 4-14-16; XII: 350 etc.

This is logical because a law is meaningful only in its application to deal with human relationship in a society. Cosmic Law or Order is only a model or pattern according to which social laws are characterized and framed, while bringing it down from its theoretical ideal to the level of practice. This is the clear implication of the theory of *dharma* according to Manu as he speaks of its decadence in successive *yugas* (I:81-82).

#### (b) Dharma as the Key Concept of Manu's Ethics

Whatever be the meaning the ancient Vedic people gave to *dharma*,<sup>3</sup> by the time of *Manusmṛti* the word "*dharma*" assumed a very rich content which consisted of philosophical, religious and ethical implications when used in the context of the social scheme designed by Manu. Philosophically a thing is said to have "its" *dharma* (*svadharmā*) in the sense that it has its own "characteristic form" (*svabhava*) which in other words is called its "nature" or its "essence". This sense corresponds very well to the basic philological meaning of the root *dhṛ*, meaning, "to sustain" or "to support". Without being sustained continuously by the essence nothing could keep its own identity. Accordingly the *dharma* of a man should correspond to his own innate nature, or it should be his form; this seems to be the basic philosophical implication of Manu's usage of *dharma* in his social context of *varna-asrama*.

The natural characteristics and tendencies of a man determine to a great extent as to what he is doing or ought to do. Hence leaving aside the margin of concessions that could be given on the basis of practices already in force, Manu's usage of the word *dharma* is highly loaded with the implications of an "ethical ought" which sounds at the inner essence of man's social relationship. That is why *dharma* in Manu is primarily an ethical concept. It stands for morality.<sup>4</sup> Hence we may speak of an "ethical theory of Manu" centred around the concept of *dharma*.

3. In the Rigvedic hymns *dharmān* appears to have been used either as an adjective or a noun (in the form *dharmān*, generally neuter) and occurs, as calculated by P.V. Kane, about sixty times by itself (i.e., not preceded by a particle like *vi* or some words like *satya*), and about eighteen times in combination with a particle '*vi*' and fifty six times with the words '*sva*' and '*satva*'. Cf. P. V. Kane *History of Dharmasāstras*, Vol. I, Part. I (Poona : 1968) p. 1.

4. After having presented a historical sketch of the concept of *dharma* down through the Vedic and other scriptural traditions, P.V. Kane

Hence the entire book of Manu may be understood as the exposition of the ethical theory of **dharma**. Obliging to the request of the sages<sup>5</sup> who approached him for instruction on the "rules of conduct" of the **caturvarnas** (fourfold castes) and that of the "mixed castes" (1:2 f.), Manu consistently exposes the rules of **dharma**, first showing the origin of every rule. This is the significance of the creation narrative which links positive laws with the cosmic law of the order of creation. So the ethical **theory of dharma** is a corollary of the ethics of the order of creation, called the cosmic order, which implies also the social order as a part of it. Hence the ethical theory of Manu spontaneously corresponds to his Social theory. The pattern of the **laws of behaviour** corresponds with the pattern of the **laws of being**. This is the basic logic of the unequal application of the rules of conduct to **varnas** and that of the difference of punishments inflicted upon the individuals of different **varnas**.

As the key concept in the ethical theory of Manu the word **dharma**<sup>6</sup> in its usages covers a wide range of meaning rising from the qualities and characteristics of things to the highest virtue and spiritual effort of man. Dr. Bhagavandas puts the various implications of **dharma** in the **Dharmasastras** especially in **Manusmṛti** in the following summary way:

sums up that the word "**dharma**" ultimately came to man its most prominent significance as "*the privileges, duties, and obligations of a man, his standard of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life*" (op. cit., p.2).

5. Yajnavalkya also starts in an identical manner the introduction of his *Smṛti* (Yaj. I:1).
6. It is interesting here to note the descriptive exegesis of *dharma* given by the *Mīmāṃsā* school. The *Mīmāṃsā* school, following the Vedic tradition, explains *dharma* in terms of goal and happiness: "*That which is indicated by the Vedic injunction as conducive to welfare*", i.e., it is what is enjoined in the Veda and is conducive to desirable results *codanālakṣanordho dharmah*, (Jaimini, 1,2). And Kumarila comments as follows: "*Dharma* in this context does not stand for the merit that is obtained by the doing of good deed, by right conduct (which is the ordinary connotation of the term); it is used in a much wider sense of *what should be done*. i.e. Duty. This same definition of *dharma* also supposes the answer to the second question, regarding the *means of knowing dharma*, on which point the conclusion is that the *Vedic Injunction* is the only means of knowing *Dharma*; that is, a right knowledge of *Dharma* can be obtained only from the Veda. This also implies that the *Veda* is a valid means of knowledge of *Dharma*. (cf. *Purva Mimāṃsā* in

That which *holds* a thing *together*, makes it what it is, prevents it from breaking up and changing into something else, its characteristic function, its peculiar property, its fundamental attribute, its essential nature is its *dharma*, the law of *its being*, primarily. That which makes the world-process what it is and holds all its parts together as one whole, in a breakless all-binding chain of causes-and effects is *the law* (or totality of laws) of Nature or Nature's God, *dharma* in the largest sense is the "world order." That scheme or code of laws which binds together human beings in the bonds of mutual rights-and-duties, of causes-and-consequences of actions, arising out of their temperamental characters in relation to each other, and thus maintains society, is human law, *Manava dharma*..... Briefly *dharma* is "Characteristic property," scientifically; "duty" normally and legally; religion with all its proper implications, psycho-physically and spiritually; "and righteousness" and "law" generally; but "Duty" above all.<sup>7</sup>

Putting this same elaboration in the social scheme of Manu Dr. Bhagavandas relates that,

*Dharma* is that which uplifts to heights of honour and greatness. *Dharma* is that scheme, that network of the duty of each, which holds together all the children of Manu in organic cohesion, and prevents them from falling apart in pieces in ruin and destruction.<sup>8</sup>

From these summary statements, it is made clear that **Manu Samhita** as the book of instructions for the members of the **varnas** propounds the theory of **dharma** that includes in its details all that pertain to the civil, religious, spiritual, moral and hygienic rules of behaviour, as well as rules of good manners and civic consciousness. Thus the theory of **dharma** according to Manu

*its sources*, by Dr. Ganganath Jha, Banaras Hindu University, 2nd ed. 1964, pp. 152-53). We may specially note that in *Mīmāṃsā* the law of *dharma* is the other side of the coin of "Action". They are ethically so intimately connected that whatever one does should be an ethically right action which is conducive to the highest happiness; so action means *dharmic* action; and so every action is an injunction in the spirit and tradition of the Vedic practices, and hence *dharma* is the law of ethical action. (cf. *Mīmāṃsā*, translated by N. V. Thadani, Bharati Research Institute, Delhi, 1952, 1-3).

7. Dr. Bhagavandas, *The Science of Social Organisation* Vol. I. (Madras: 1932, 2nd ed), pp. 49-50.
8. *Ibid.* p. 48.

is not a theoretic speculation; speculations were presupposed as principles established and validly governing everything of the cosmic order from time immemorial; they were intuited upon by sages of old and so they are known as "revelations."

### (c) Dharma as the Criterion of Values.

Just as there are four levels in the social scheme of Manu, there are also four levels of value in the moral plane. The traditional nomenclature of these four value levels is **Purusharthas** which are said to be: **artha**, **kama**, **dharma** and **moksha**. They stand for the value of wealth, of pleasure (sexual and psychological gratification) of moral integrity (ethical perfection) and of **liberation** (spiritual enlightenment). According to Manu all these are important values of which only the last one is the ultimate good or "summum bonum". All three others are chief goods or values meant for a happy life. But man should not make a choice either of **artha** or **kama**, violating their inner relationship and subordination to **dharma**. This will be suicidal of the value itself, because **dharma** determines the proper value of the other good. So stating the problem of the preference of the three values as discussed by other teachers on **dharma**, Manu himself sums up in the following manner:

*Dharmarthavucyte sreyah kamarthau dharmā eva ca;*

*Artha eveha va sreyastrivarga iti tu sthiti.*

Some declare that the chief good consists in the acquisition of spiritual merit (**dharma**) and wealth (**artha**); (others place it) in (the gratification of) desire (**kama**) and the acquisition of wealth; (others) in (the acquisition of) spiritual merit alone; and still others say that the acquisition of wealth alone is the chief good here below; but the (correct) decision is that it consists of the harmony (aggregate) of (those) three (II:224).

Among the **trivargas** of the earthly values, Manu insists on harmony. Evaluating the discussion of his contemporaries or of the sages of old, Manu says that the chief good (**sreyah**) "consists in the aggregate of the three" (II:224). This is significant in the ethics of Manu; because Manu visualised an integral synthesis of all values; and they are to be realised step by step in the ongoing process of one's growth and maturity. One should take to the path of **moksha** only after going through the stage of householder and realising the values of **artha** and **kama** regulated by **dharma** and thus fulfilling the **svadharma** (duties of the individual) and **kula dharmā** (family duties) as parts of one's **varnasrama dharmas**.

In all these, **dharma** as a "moral ideal" is a unique criterion of judgement and action. In this sense, **dharma** has a synonym called **satyam** and **satyam** involves **ahimsa** (non-violence); all these three are to be taken into account in the exercise of **dharma**; only then is **dharma** a lasting value and eternal law. Hence Manu beautifully summarises his theory of **dharma** in the following stanza:

*Satyam bruyāt priyam bruyāt na  
bruyāt satyam aprīyam,  
Priyam ca nānrtam bruyāt eṣha dharmah  
sanātanaḥ.*

Let him say what is true, let him say what is pleasing, let him utter no disagreeable truth, and let him utter no agreeable falsehood; that is the eternal law (IV:136).

In the spirit of this golden rule of **dharma**, even concerning teaching **dharma**, Manu advises that it should be done without hurting people and by using sweet and gentle speech (II:159). At the same time with a strong accent on a positive outlook of life and its achievements and failures, Manu encourages everybody to face life with the greatest optimism:

Let him not despise himself on account of former failures; until death, let him seek fortune, nor think of it hard to attain (IV:137).

One has to bear in mind that **artha** and **kama** which are parts of one's earthly fortunes should be abandoned if they are barren of **dharma**; even acts of **dharma** which are lawful should be avoided if they cause pain in the future or are offensive to men (IV:176).

### (d) Dharma as the Moral Good.

Every good is philosophically relative either to a scale of values which are inferior to it or to another set of values which are superior to it. The case with "moral good" is not an exception to this general rule. We have already pointed out the scale of values from the moral point of view which are inferior to **dharma**. As criterion for all other values of **artha** and **kama**, **dharma** may be said to be the moral good or "the moral value". In this sense alone **dharma** seems to have an end in itself; it is absolute. This seems to be the implication of the harmonising function of **dharma** as judged by Manu (II:224). In this relative sense Manu seems to hold the 'deontological' character of **dharma**, i.e. **dharma** as an end in itself. But he never emphasises this aspect to the excess of diminishing the importance of

the other values which he rightly exalted at different places in his code.<sup>9</sup> The sole moral good in both cases is **dharma** and its principles of "Righteousness".

### (e) Dharma as a Positive Virtue.

A final and comprehensive meaning of **dharma** is virtue. Manu not only considers **dharma** to be the moral good, and moral criterion of other values, but also regards it as the most sublime positive virtue. The term **dharma** itself is used in this sense: it carries the meaning of merit also. In the following inspiring suggestions to a *snataka*, Manu brings out his integral view of **dharma** as richly and positively as possible: It means self-emancipation by means of spiritual merits acquiring from good conduct (**sukrtam**) which alone accompanies one to the other world:—

Giving no pain to any creature, let him slowly accumulate *spiritual* merit (*dharma*) for the sake (of acquiring) a companion to the next world, just as the white ant (gradually raises) its hill; For in the next world neither, father, nor mother, nor wife, nor sons, nor relations stay to be his companions; spiritual merit (*dharma*) alone remains with him;

Single is each being born; single it dies; single it enjoys its virtue (*sukrtam*); and single it suffers the sin (*dushkrtam*);

Leaving the dead body on the ground like a log of wood, or a clod of earth, the relatives depart with averted faces: but *spiritual merits* (*dharma*) follows him... This companion hurriedly conducts the man who is devoted to duty and effaces his sins by austerities, to the next world, radiant and clothed with an ethereal body (IV:238-243).

## 2. Thematical Scheme of the Laws of Dharma in Manusmṛti.

Manu proposes a definite thematical scheme of the "laws of **dharma**" interconnecting every aspect of ethical life. The fundamental feature of the scheme is that **dharma** is elaborated according to the pattern of the social and individual life of each member of the community. So there are different levels of **dharma** that are applicable to the different stations according to the stages of growth of the individual: The levels of **dharma** are those that pertain to **varna** and **asrama** (stages of maturity in life) respectively.

9. Cf. M. II:2-4, on *Kama*; IX: 329-333, on *Artha*.

Each **varna** has its own **dharma**; similarly each **asrama** has its own corresponding **dharma**. Even in the **varnas** there are special title holders like the king, ministers and judges. Thus Manu enunciates the rules of **dharma** as applicable differently to different classes of people and differently at each station of their life and again differently to men and women. The scheme is such that nobody is above **dharma**, even the king; everybody has to obey that aspect of the **dharma** prescribed for him. Yet the **dharma** is not the same for all except a few common rules of conduct (**sadharana dharma**).

The scheme given in the extent **Manusmṛti**, is so comprehensive that it incorporates as far as possible the "primeval laws of countries" (**desa-dharma**), of other castes (**jati-dharma**), and families (**kula-dharma**), and the rules concerning heretics and companies (guilds) of traders and the like" (I: 118). Laws governing situations of crisis, and those that are to be changed according to the change of time and age (**yuga-dharma**) and local customs of the vanquished peoples whose administration falls into the hands of the conquering kings are all given safeguards (VIII: 3; VIII: 41;46) in **Manusmṛti**. As Dr. V. Raghavan points out, the doctrine of **yuga-dharma**, which introduces an element of adaptation and adjustment, has a parallel in the concept of **apad-dharma** (X:98-118). Similarly concessions in the matter of adopting vocations not normally ordained for Brahmanas and others in emergencies point to the realism and liberalism granted in the scheme of Manu. This shows the broad outlook of Manu into the problems of man which he has to face always with a sense of realism.

Finally the most important part toward the end of his code is the scheme of the final level of value, **moksha**, in which Manu integrates with such logical sequence, the ideological orientation of all **dharms** towards the final spiritual purpose of man's life. It is here that his theory of ethics culminates with the theory of the "summum bonum" which is the final realisation of the self. In view of this ultimate goal of life the whole life of man and his activities are oriented and harmonised with the valuational criterion of **dharma**.

The valuational setting of **dharma** is a unique feature in the whole scheme of the ethical theory of Manu. **Dharma** is understood as the effect of correct adjustment of **gunas** in one's mode of existence. Hence that section of descriptions of the nature and composition of temperaments in man is also part of the laws of **dharma**. We may name this section as **guna dharma**.

Looking to the structure of the extant text of *Manusmṛti* one may easily notice that the treatment of topics are not clearly demarcated: There are so many incoherencies like overlapping, interpolations, displacement of identical topics, several groups of miscellaneous collections etc. This to some extent breaks the logical order of the laws. So a reconstruction of the laws of *Manusmṛti* according to the main categories of laws as suggested by Medhatithi and Vijnānesvara ("Mitakshara" on *Yājñavalkya*) is attempted here below:<sup>10</sup> The reconstruction naturally involves a regrouping of the scattered texts under identical sections and topics respectively. So the loci are given according to the present text; but the order of subjects are not chapter-wise as it is given by G. Bühler and others in their translations.<sup>11</sup> The main framework of the *Laws of Dharma* is the social structure and function of the sections of people. So the following scheme is a reconstruction of the *Manusmṛti* on its sociological basis: The civil and judiciary laws are grouped under the *Rajadharmā*, which is specially dealing with the profession of the *Kshatriyas*. Other duties of the same caste come under the *varna* and *asrama* respectively. In other respects the scheme is self explanatory.

## RECONSTRUCTED SCHEME OF THE LAWS OF DHARMA

### I. THE PROLOGUE

Appeal of the sages to Manu for the "Rules of conduct" of the *varnas* (M I: 1-4).

### II. THE PREAMBLE (The Contextual Explanations of *dharma*) (1:5-II:25).

#### (A) Introduction by Manu *Svayambhuva*:

The institution of the laws of *dharma* of the 'varnas', as related to the creation of the world: *Theory of origins*: World—Man—*Dharma* (1:5-59).

#### (B) Introduction by *Bhrigu*, Son of Manu:

Continuation of Manu's contextual explanations: (I:60-II:25):

10. Cf. P.V. Kane, op. cit. Vol. I. part I p. 4.  
11. G. Bühler, *Laws of Manu* (SBE XXV) and A.C. Burnell and E.W. Hopkins *The Ordinances of Manu*, (Oriental Reprint, New Delhi) maintain the traditional chapterwise divisions of the text and give their own subtitles which are not all thematically consistent.

- (1) The origin of time (*kala*) and the pattern of *dharma* in each *manvantara* (I:61-86).
- (2) The allotment of duties to *varnas* (I:87-91).
- (3) The superiority of the ideal *varna* (*Brahmana*) (I:92-101).
- (4) "Good conduct" as the transcendental *dharma* (I:102-110).
- (5) The synopsis of the laws of *dharma* (I:111-119).
- (6) 'Right desire' as the correct motivation for the observance of *dharma* (II:1-5).
- (7) The "Sources" of *dharma*, the supremacy of *Sruti* (II:6-13).
- (8) The validity of the conflicting texts of *Sruti* as a source of *dharma* laws (II:14-15).
- (9) The *varnas* privileged to study the Institute of *dharma* (II:16).
- (10) The geographical area of the settlement of the *dvijas* (*Aryavarta*) (II:17-22).

## III. LAWS OF DHARMA

### 1. VARNA DHARMA (Duties of the Castes):

- (i) General laws related to all *varnas* (II:25-IX:336).
- (ii) Specific *varna dharmas* of the *Vaisyas* (IX:325-333).
- (iii) Specific *varna dharmas* of the *Sudras* (IX:334-335 & X:122-131).
- (iv) *Varnasrama dharmas* in times of distress (IX:336b-X:1-131).
  - (a) Rules to safeguard the special rights and privileges of each *varna* (X:1-5).
  - (b) Rules concerning mixed castes (X:6-73).
  - (c) Rules governing occupations of each castes (X:74-115; 122-131a).
  - (d) Rules governing means of subsistence of each caste in times of distress (X:116-121).

### 2. ASRAMA DHARMA (Duties of the Stations of Life):

- (i) Duties of *Brahmacarin* (II:68b-249).
- (ii) Duties of *Grahasthah* (III:1-286; V:167-169).
  - (a) The duties of the husband (V:167-169).
  - (b) The duties of the wife (V:147-166).
- (iii) The duties of *Vanaprastha* (VI:1-32).
- (iv) The duties of the *Sanyasa* (VI:33-97).

3. SAMANYA DHARMA (Universal Duties):
  - (i) Common duties of all **varnas** (X:63).
  - (ii) Common duties of all **asramas** (VII:91-92).
  - (iii) Common rules for all the twice born (**dvijas**):
    - (a) Rules of Samskāras (II:25-68a; III:1-66).
    - (b) Rules of subsistence of **Brahmanas** (IV:1-12).
    - (c) Rules for a **Snataka** (IV:13-90; 128-260; XI:1-4).
    - (d) Rules for the continued study of the Vedas (IV:91-127).
    - (e) Rules regarding lawful and forbidden food: (V:1-56).
    - (f) Rules regarding purification of bodies and things (V:57-146).
4. RAJADHARMA (Duties of a King):
  - (i) The rights, privileges and duties of a King (VII:1-226).
  - (ii) Administration of Justice (VIII:1-420; IX:251-325)
  - (iii) The eighteen titles of law and their general rules of judicial procedure (VIII:3-46).
  - (iv) Judicial principles of judging the cases under the eighteen titles of law (VIII:47-385; IX:1-234)
  - (v) Miscellaneous rules on punishments of various crimes (VIII:386-420; IX:235-250).
  - (iv) Miscellaneous rules administering gifts, sacrifices etc. (XI:5-43).
5. NAIMITTIKA DHARMA (Occasional duties):
  - (i) General principles of penance (X:131b; XI:44-47; 54).
  - (ii) Rules on retributions of actions (XI:48-53).
  - (iii) Rules concerning classification of offences and sins: (XI:55-71).
  - (iv) Laws of Pences for **mahapatakas** (XI:72-107).
  - (v) Laws of Pences for minor offences (XI:108-180z).
  - (vi) Rules of excommunication and readmission (XI:180b-197).
  - (vii) Rules of expiation and purification of sins (XI:198-266).
6. GUNADHARMA (Rules of Retribution depending on Qualities):
  - (i) Rules of retribution proportionate to **gunas** and their actions (XII:1-8).
  - (ii) Rules concerning consequences (XII:9-23).
  - (iii) Rules concerning the nature of **gunas** (XII:24-38).

- (iv) Laws of transmigration depending on **gunas** (XII:39-82a).
- (v) The laws of supreme bliss (82b-107a).
- (vi) Rules concerning the interpretation of the doubtful points of dharma (XII:107b-115).
- (vii) The last law of life: Knowledge of the Self (XII:116-125).

#### IV. EPILOGUE

The final meaning of all laws:

A twice-born man who recites these Institutes revealed by Manu, will be always *virtuous in conduct*, and will reach whatever *condition he desires* (XII:126).

#### 3. The Ideological Implications of the Laws of Dharma

Since we have already discussed the meaning of **dharma** and drew out the "Thematical scheme of the Laws of Dharma" as presented by Manu, it is impractical and irrelevant to restate here all the rules of **dharma** in detail. It would be equal to reproducing the whole **Manusmṛti** as such. At the same time it is necessary to bring out some of the ideological implications of the **Laws of dharma** in order to point out the ethical characteristics of **Dharma** in general.

##### (a) The Sociological Bias of Dharma

The first striking point of the whole "Scheme of the Laws of **Dharma**" is the sociological bias of the moral code. The systematisation of Manu has a socio-moral framework. The theory of **dharma** which we have discussed earlier is a close-fitting in this framework. As the social structure is hierarchical so also is the moral structure. The formulations and the implementations of all laws are hierarchically construed (VIII:24; 68; 88). **This means that though all members of the society are bound by some law there is hardly any law which binds all the members of the varnasrama in the same way.** This means that Manu did not conceive of an egalitarian moral code. It is relative to the hierarchical social structure. This may be called the sociological bias of **dharma** in the Aryan tradition. This sociological bias gives a possibility of change of dharma according to the change of the social pattern which depends on the change of time. This is the basic reason for legislating regarding **yuga dharma** and **kalivarjya** (I:85-86; IV:176).

##### (b) Universal Aspects of Dharma (Samanya Dharma)

In spite of the sociological bias and hierarchial relativity of

the "Dharma-Laws" there are certain principles which Manu and many other *dharmasastrakar*as wanted to universalise and make them equally applicable in case of all *varnas* including even *candalas*.<sup>12</sup> While discussing on the rules of the "mixed castes", Manu interpolates five ethical principles of *dharma* as *samanya dharma* or *samasika dharma* to be practised by all members of the Aryan society:

Abstention from injuring creatures (*ahimsa*), veracity (*satyam*) abstention from unlawful appropriation of the goods of others (*asteyam*), purity (*saucam*), and control of organs (*indriyanigrahah*), have been declared by Manu to be the summary of the law (*sāmāsikam dharmam*) for the four castes (*caturvarnyeh*) (X:63).

Similarly Manu prescribes a set of ten ethical principles to be practised by the members of all the higher (*varnas* in all stages of their *asramas*) (VI:91).

Contentment (*dhr̥tīh*), forgiveness (*kshama*), selfcontrol (*dama*) abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything (*asteyam*), purification (*saucam*), control of the organs (*indriyanigrahah*), wisdom (*dhi*), knowledge (*vidya*), truthfulness (*satyam*), abstention from anger (*akrodham*), form the tenfold *dharma* (VI:92).

The universalistic outlook of Manu in giving *dharma* a certain transcendental dimension is evident from the above typical statements. It is true that there are not many such examples in Manu. Since the society is composed of all sorts of people in mutual interaction, yet not a homogeneous fraternity but a hierarchy of *varnāsrama*, Manu's ethical theory is fundamentally socially conditioned. However, all variations of laws sprout from the basic unity of *dharma*.

The universalistic implications of *dharma* are further extended to what is usually known as virtues and observances: *yamas* and *niyamas*. *Yamas* are practice of virtues and therefore they are more important than *niyamas* which are minor duties (IV:204). The *yamas* are continence, compassion, contemplation, truth, non-

12. Yanjnavalkya extends the application of *Samanya dharma* to all *varnas* including perhaps the *candalas* and other mixed and low castes (*sarvesham*) and his term is *Sadharana dharma*, and he adds four more universal ethical principles such as *danam*, *dama*, *daya*, and *kshanti* (Yaj I:122). Similarly Kautilya's *Arthasastra* prescribes for all men *ahimsa*, *satyam*, *saucha*, *anasuya*, *anrsamsya* and *kshama* (I:3, 13).

attachment, non-violence, not taking what is another's and sweetness of behaviour. All *snātakas* are advised to practise *yamas*. The observance of these will liberate him for heavenly bliss (IV:246) while the non-observance of *yamas* will gradually make him an outcaste (IV:204). Thus in Manu's view *yamas* are more obligatory than *niyamas*.

### (c) The Teleological Character.

In *Manusmṛti* there is a clear stress on the "teleological character" of *dharma*. Even though *dharma* has a certain end in itself (deontological) by the reason of its harmonising function related to other values (*purushārthas*) it is further related in a transcendental manner to the highest religious value which Manu enthrones over all ethical values. This highest religious value, the *purushārtha*, is *moksha*. Since Manu had a very keen perception of the psychology of man (XII:24 f.) he seems to presume that voluntary activity is impossible without an end in view. The theory of "being an end in itself" (*svayamprayojanabhūta*) in the case of *dharma* cannot be held so rigidly. This gave the right opening for Manu to set *moksha* (liberation) as the last value of human existence.

*Moksha*, liberation, is not merely the last and highest aim of life. It is the sole aim. Hence the teleological character of *dharma* is obvious. It is instrumental and relative to the supreme value of *moksha*. Man attains the fulness of all values only when he realises his final destiny. According to Manu, this final destiny is the realisation of the "self in the Self of the Supreme Brahṁā" (XII:125) or blissful union with Brahṁā (XII:84-91).

### (d) The Soteriological Value of Dharma

In view of the final happiness which is the attainment of union with Brahṁā, even *dharma* has only the value of *satvasuddhi*, "cleansing of one's being". This is called the "redemptive value", "soteriological function" of *dharma*. This function purges the self of man of all lower and selfish impulses. This is a process of purification of the total man. It needs morality. Only moral conduct releases one from the fetters of transmigration which is caused by evil actions and their *adr̥shṭaphala* (*karma*). This aim should be uppermost in the mind of man at every stage (*asrama*) of his life and in the midst of every activity of one's given historical and social existence (*varna*).

One need not transcend *varnāsrama* because one can attain liberation in the given status and situation, provided one is faithful to the actual performance of "the *dharma* of each station"



of life. Every action must be purposive in the sense that its ultimate goal is the attainment of the final freedom (**mukti**). It is therefore liberation in the true sense of the word. **Dharma** makes one conscious of his true self, imparts true knowledge; and true knowledge liberates man; this knowledge also implies his social responsibility for the liberation of others from social oppression. One cannot aim at a **mukti** for his own self at the expense of his "dharma to others". **Manusmṛti** definitely denies **mukti** to a person who thinks only of his own liberation and runs away from his duties in society (VI:36-37).

#### 4. "Spiritual Bliss" as the Theory of "Summum Bonum"

Our investigation into the nature of **dharma** finally leads us toward a judgement about the "summum bonum", which is an inevitable topic in the discussion of values. The fourth aim, **moksha**, has been found to be the highest value in life. But **moksha** or **mukti** according to **Manu** is an ethical ideal, and therefore it involves a programme of action (**pravṛtta mārga**) (XII:89-90). It is not a negative overcome of certain illusions (**nivṛtta mārga**). In this way **Manu's** ethics is a positive approach to life and its problems. Knowledge of the "Reality", namely the discovery of the self of man in the **Supreme Self** and in the selves of all living beings is but one of the means or ways of attaining this realisation. This means itself is a positive approach (**pravṛtta mārga**) to solve the problem of liberation. It is again an ideal to be realised by constant moral action in harmony with the following enlightenment:

Let everybody (*Brahmana*) concentrating his mind fully recognize in the Self all things, both the real and unreal, for he who recognizes the universe in the Self, does not give his heart to unrighteousness (XII: 118; cf. also XII:85;91).

Thus the final realisation of one's self is the goal of all moral actions: One has to perform ethical actions prescribed by the **Veda**: They are mainly six:

*Studying the Veda, practising austerities, true knowledge, the subjugation of organs, abstention from doing injury, and serving the Guru are the best means for attaining supreme bliss* (XII:83).

This supreme good (**summum bonum**) is **Spiritual Bliss**. This "Bliss" is a spiritual realisation. The tenfold **sādhāraṇa dharma** (VI:92-93) are necessarily to be practised; and those who practise them "enter the highest state" (**yānti paramam gatim**) (VI:93).

This ideal of spiritual realisation may be called **spiritual eudemonism** in the traditional ethical sense of the word. It also

receives a religious content when the life of man is lived by **dharma** in view of **moksha**:

In whatever order a man who knows the true meaning of the "Vedic science" may dwell, he becomes even while abiding in this world fit for the union with *Brahma*<sup>13</sup> (XII:102).

The union with **Brahma** is another expression of union with the **Supreme Self** (XII:125). But this acquisition of happiness in this world or in the next depends on one's choice of "**pravṛtta mārga**" or "**nivṛtta mārga**" (XII:88-90). This is a fundamental option. This option has relevance to the life in this world and to the one expected in the world to come. Thus the vision of **Manu** about the **Hindu Dharma** sets definite positive goals in the life of man and prescribes practical means to realise them. The ideal of **Dharma** is not merely ethical but religious in its deepest sense, in relation to the final goal of man, namely, the realisation of the existential intimacy of man with **Brahma**, the supreme Lord of Creation.

#### 13. *Brahmabhūyaya Kalpate*:

The translation, "union with Brahman", given by Georg Bühler in his *Laws of Manu*, SBE, XXV (xii: 102; cfr. also 198) is questionable. *Brahman* here does not mean the "Absolute" of the Upanishads. The Sanskrit text, here, is *Brahma* (with short 'a') meaning the essence of Brahman; it is neutral and is attributively used with respect to the one who observes the "Laws of Dharma"; in this context, therefore, the usage of "Brahma" might mean the state of emancipation which is intimacy with God in his supreme Lordship. i.e. *Moksha*.