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**Manusmriti: A Testimony To Indian Culture And Literature****Dr. Vartika Raj****Associate Professor****Department of English****JDVM PG College****Kanpur****(Received:1January2019/Revised:10 January2019/Accepted:20 January 2019/Published:30 January2019)****Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to study Manusmriti in the light of Indian culture and Literature. It also focuses on the various Dharmas an individual has to follow. The misuse and misinterpretation of Manusmriti have led to various evils in the society which in turn have given rise to various thinkers and reformers. Gradually, certain other religions came to the fore like Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. They had their own literature. Later on certain reformers and spiritual thinkers came together and gave rise to Bhakti Movement.

**Introduction**

India is a land of spirituality, religion, tradition and beliefs which have paved the ways of Indian life since time immemorial. The preceding and the supervening generations are tied together with the bondages of these beliefs. Religion holds an important place and spirituality, tradition and beliefs originate from it. They all combine and form Indian culture. This is true for all the cultures spread in various Nations across the world. The word Dharma which is the Hindi equivalent of Religion finds its origin in the Sanskrit language. Dharma means 'to wear', 'to follow', or 'to accept'. The meaning of Dharma varies depending on the conditions and circumstances when used as a noun, adjective, or when used for a particular gender. When we talk about the Dharmikkriya in Rig Veda we refer to wide range of processes. Similarly, when we name it as Dharmikvidhiya (practices), it refers to various procedures adopted while following Dharma. Likewise, Grihasta Dharma is applicable only to the married individuals. Similarly, the Bramhcharya Dharma refers to the rules followed by an individual during his unmarried student life. Raj Dharma is for the kings and the rulers; Stree Dharma is for the married women.

The Dharmopadesh in Shrimad Bhagavad gita mainly focuses on the spirituality and the importance of Karma(work). In other words, when we refer to Dharma in the Indian concept, it does not refer to any particularity, it has several connotations. Various

religious thinkers and philosophers have termed it as the Dharma-chakra which represents the various types of Dharma which are required to be followed by any human being during his life. According to Maharishi Ved Vyas an individual who is a staunch follower of the Dharma-chakra and adheres to all the institutions and rules set up by Dharma would gain (virtue) whereas any individual who deviates from Dharma and its practices is accumulating (sin). In this way Maharishi Ved Vyas replaces Dharma and Adharma with (virtue) and (sin). According to the Vedas and Manusmriti, it is the law of nature that an organism born among any of the 8.4 million (species) present in the universe wants to live a happy and comfortable life. Out of these, the human species alone has the capability to lead a happy life in a distinct way. But in order to be born under the human race one has to accumulate virtue. Happiness and sorrow, anger and desires are the distinctly cognizable characteristics only found in human race. The epic Mahabharata highlights the similarities and the differences between human beings and animals in the following manner:

Ahara-nidra-bhaya-maithunam cha:

Samanam\_etat\_pashubhir\_naranam I

Dharmo hi teshamadhiko vishesho;

Dharmena hinah pashubhih samanah II

The above-mentioned shloka beautifully deciphers the four similarities which are present amongst all the living creature viz. food, sleep, fear, and sex which is the common characteristic feature of both animals and human beings. It is, however, the path of Dharma that separates the human beings from animals. It further suggests that any human being who does not follow the path of Dharma is equivalent to an animal. Acharya Chanakya has replaced Dharma with Wisdom in the above-mentioned shloka and has given priority to knowledge, wisdom, and intellect. It is, therefore, that the human race is considered to be supreme amongst all other species in the universe. It is this Vedic concept which gives rise to the belief in rebirth Human beings, in order to be born again as human are inspired to follow the path of Dharma or hoard (virtue).

The above discussion gives rise to a very pertinent question as what should be considered as Dharma and what should be termed as Adharma? The answer to this question which has been accepted by all is a simple one and that is that the Karma (work) which has been

established in the Vedas and Smritis is Dharma. Likewise, the Karma which has been prohibited in the Vedas and Smritis is Adharma.

Indian culture and traditions are considered to be the most ancient ones which exist till date and are practiced with great reverence. The Indian Dharma is also known as the Sanātan Dharma. The term Sanātan basically means that it is eternal and its beginning is unknown and has been narrated by the God himself. As discussed above, Dharma is the Karma (work) as prescribed in the Vedas and Smritis. It is the Manusmriti which provides us with the details regarding Karma. Manusmriti is a testimony to the tradition and cultures followed by the Hindus all across the world. It is such a religious book which has guidelines for the society (Dharma), for the rulers – Rāj Dharma. It provides the procedures and rules for the deliverance of justice, etc. The original Manusmriti is not divided into chapters. It uses a unique technique of using “transitional verses” to mark the end of one subject and the beginning of the other. It can be broadly classified into four sub-sections: creation of world, source of Dharma, Dharma of the four social classes, and law of karma, final liberation and rebirth. There are about 50 manuscripts of Manusmriti present today, out of which the manuscript of Kullukabhata is considered to be the most authentic and most translated manuscript. The present era Manusmriti comprises 12 Adhyayas (chapters) leading to the attainment of Dharm (Religion), Artha (Economy), Kam (Desire) and Moksha (Salvation). The language of the book is simple and easy and can be understood by the common man. The principles elaborated in the Manusmriti also find a place in other religious books of the Hindus like the Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata.

The first chapter of Manusmriti deals with the creation of the universe and the Creator Bramha along with the origin of Bramha. It is here that Bramhais referred to that God particle which has recently been discovered by the scientists. In the same chapter, there is description of the four yugas – Satyuga, Treta, Dwapar, and Kaliyuga apart from the knowledge regarding day and night, Muhurat, ShuklaPaksha and Krishna Paksha. The chapter further deals with the origin of the four varnas (caste system) – the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra and the various duties assigned to each varna. The division is entirely based on the type of work assigned to each of the four varnas. It also provides us with the details of the Hindu Institution of marriage and its eight kinds along with the rules and regulations set up for married women.

The second chapter of Manusmriti is regarding the characteristics of Dharma, behaviour of the civilized men, concept of self. It also defines the political as well as the geographical description of boundaries of the country present at that time, birth of varna, and the detailed account of the 16 sankaras to be followed by the individuals of different varnas born as a Hindu. It further provides the rules and regulations for the Bramhcharis/students, the way and the type of (n.M) stick they should carry and use, methods and time prescribed for the prayers, and other moral characteristics to be adopted by the students. Likewise, it also provides a detailed structure regarding the rights and duties of a teacher.

The rules for the marriage after the completion of studies or the bramhcharya ashram are dealt with in the third chapter of the Manusmriti. The chapter also provides the knowledge regarding the controversial methods in the selection of a woman for the purpose of matrimony. The detailed account of the eight types of marriages (Bramh, Deva, Aarsh, Prajapatya, Asur, Gandharva, Rakshas, and Paisach) is also provided in the same chapter. In totality, the chapter forms the base for the Grihastha ashram both for men and women.

In the very next chapter i.e. chapter fourth, there are rules and regulations for the married couples. The chapter also deals with the importance of agriculture, cultivation of various crops and medicinal plants. It also advocates the use of vegetarian food and the concept of Ahimsa which is an integral part of the Hindu Dharma.

The fifth and the sixth chapter deal with the concept of Stree Dharma, the Vanprastha and the Sanyasa Ashram. It describes the way in which an individual should adopt Vanaprastha. While in Sanyasa, an individual has to leave behind all the worldly desires and make efforts for the attainment of Moksha.

The seventh chapter of Manusmriti provides the basic guidelines for the King for the purpose of administration. It also provides details regarding the handing over of the administrative power to the ministers in case the King is sick/bed-ridden or has gone out for the purpose of travelling or any other reason.

In the eighth and the ninth chapter Manu lays emphasis on the deliverance of justice according to the rules and regulations laid down by the Dharmashastra. The disputes of land, crime, marriages, work, salary and wages are to be solved as per the rules prescribed

by the Dharma. The chapter discusses the type of punishment to be rendered for a particular crime.

The Dharmamarga (the path of Dharma) is distinctly elaborated in the situation when a man and a woman are staying together or separately which are the basics discussed in the ninth chapter. The various laws about adoption, separation, divorce, widow remarriage, dowry, dealing with the impotency of the husband are the various aspect discussed in the chapter.

The next three chapters i.e. tenth, eleventh and the twelfth dwell upon Anulom – the situation when a man from a higher varna marries a woman from the lower varna; pratilom which the condition when the man belongs to the lower varna and gets married to a woman belonging to the higher varna. Accordingly, the place of their offspring is also decided in the society. The study of the tenth chapter reveals and discusses the conditions, circumstances and situations which arise due to the diversions in normal traditions and customs. It provides the guidelines regarding the path of Dharma to be followed during any kind of emergency. The eleventh chapter deals with the ways in which a person can get over his sins. The chapter lays down the rules and regulations for all the varnas, rulers, teachers, married men and women, etc in case they indulge in any kind of sinful (Adharmic) activity.

The last or the twelfth chapter is about the movement of the society and the world based upon the Karma. It further deals with the concept of Self and Self-revelation, attainment of Moksha. This chapter also makes us aware of the virtues and vice. It talks about the duties towards the Nation, society and community.

The detailed study of Manusmriti makes us understand the customs and traditions advocated to and followed by the Hindus. The Manusmriti was written and compiled somewhere in between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. It was present even before its compilation but in the form of memoirs. Therefore, there are possibilities of addition, deletion and deviation from the original shlokas. It may also be possible that there is a difference in the meaning, concept and the interpretation of these shlokas from editor to editor as well as from person to person. Out of the 50 manuscripts available, Kullukabhata's manuscript is considered to be the most authentic but there are changes that even Kullukabhata might have made variations according to his own interpretations, conceptions, and the way he wanted the society and traditions to exist. It is not necessary

for every individual of the society to have studied and embraced the traditions and culture revealed in the Manusmriti; in fact, the traditional values and culture prescribed in the Manusmriti have been passed on from generation to generation and are still being followed.

The tradition and culture followed by the Hindus are the same as they existed thousand centuries earlier. Even the festivals they celebrate originated during those days and are being celebrated in the same way without undergoing any basic change. It is these facts that provide a deep-rooted cultural identity to India.

The misuse and hypocrisy that prevailed in the Hindu Dharma gave rise to intolerance which resulted in the coming to prominence of various thinkers and religious cults, and in turn gave birth to social restructuring and rise of religions like Jainism and later on Buddhism and Sikhism. The detailed study of the Vedic Hindu religion of India reveals that Hinduism should not be considered as a religion but it is a way of life and a structural map of the society. It provides the individual's the liberty of worshipping anything or anybody whom he thinks to be beneficial for him and spiritually and morally encouraging for example, a Hindu worships Nature along with the Deities. Nature is the source of almost everything that a human being requires and, therefore, it needs to be worshipped. It is because of this that we have assigned shapes to the various forces of Nature as per the Vedic mythology — the sun god, the moon, the seas, the mountains, the planetary Gods like Jupiter (Guru Brihaspati), Indra, the God of rain, Pawan deva, the God of winds, Agni deva, the God of fire, etc. According to the Vedas, there are three prominent God in the Hindu mythology — the creator, Bramha, the Vishnu, and the annihilator, Lord Shiva.

Some people, mostly the teachers (Gurus) during and after the Vedic era started misusing this liberty. This encouraged the evil practices like untouchability; the single, divorced and the widows started living a pathetic life and were considered a bane in the society; the position of the normal woman deteriorated and her right became restricted. However, it did not mean that she lost her respect and dignity and became a commodity for the pleasure of man. It was due to such condition prevalent in the society that there was a movement that emerged which was meant to resuscitate the Vedic tradition and culture which later was termed as the Bhakti Movement. The origin of this movement is

considered to be the southern part of India during the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE and later it spread in the northern part and reached its zenith during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The Bhakti Movement greatly influenced the social reformation and provided an alternative path to spirituality and attainment of Moksha. The most important fact of this movement was that it was open for all irrespective of the caste one belonged to. According to the Vedas it was only the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas who were eligible for the attainment of Moksha. However, the Bhakti Movement incorporated the Shudras also and showed them the path of Moksha. This movement greatly affected the Hindu Literature. Some of the prominent writers of the Bhakti Movement who composed in the regional languages were Alvars, Nayanars, Nanak, Tulsidas, Ravidas, Ramananda, Jaidev, Meera Bai, Vallabh Acharya, Surdas, Rahim and Kabir. Bhakti movement also gave rise to the concepts of Seva, Daan, and Community Kitchen.

With the passage of time and the advancement of science and technology, the fame of India lured the western world to discover sea routes to India for the purpose of trade and commerce. However, the fame and the new routes also attracted the foreign invaders. Some of the invaders settled in India while the others returned carrying along its wealth. The various invaders and settlers brought with them their own culture and tradition. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. India saw the advent of the Muslim culture and traditions. Later on different cultures and traditions of Europe also made their way into India – the Dutch, the Portuguese, and the Christian. In this way, India became multi-cultural with different kinds of customs and traditions.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion it can be concluded that Manusmriti delivers the procedures that are to be followed by any Hindu family or the follower. With the passage of time these procedures became rituals and customs. The misuse and misinterpretation of Manusmriti gave rise to ill practices in the society like untouchability and gender discrimination. The changes in the society gave birth to reformers, thinkers and preachers. The founder of Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism are treated as God. The Literary work that developed during these periods are landmarks in themselves. In the same way, the Bhakti Movement brought forth writers like Tulsidas (writer of Ram Charit Manas), Kabir, and Raskhan. Hence, it can be firmly said that Manusmriti is the testimony to the Indian culture and literature.

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