

and Aitareya Brāhmaṇas as evidence of a real growth in the priestly power: these books represent the views of the priests of what their own powers should be, and to some extent were in the Madhyadeśa. Another side of the picture is presented in the Pāli literature,⁸⁰ which, belonging to a later period than the Vedic, undoubtedly underestimates the position of the priests; while the Epic,⁸¹ more nearly contemporaneous with the later Vedic period, displays, despite all priestly redaction, the temporal superiority of the nobility in clear light.

Although clear distinctions were made between the different castes, there is little trace in Vedic literature of one of the leading characteristics of the later system, the impurity communicated by the touch or contact of the inferior castes,⁸² which is seen both directly in the purification rendered necessary in case of contact with a Śūdra, and indirectly in the prohibition of eating in company with men of lower caste.⁸³ It is true that prohibition of eating in company with others does appear,⁸⁴ but not in connexion with caste: its purpose is to preserve the peculiar sanctity of those who perform a certain rite or believe in a certain doctrine; for persons who eat of the same food together, according to primitive thought, acquire the same characteristics and enter into a sacramental communion. But Vedic literature does not yet show that to take food from an inferior caste was forbidden as destroying

⁸⁰ Fick, *Die sociale Gliederung*, 107 et seq.; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, 53 et seq.; 158.

⁸¹ Hopkins, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 13, 984 et seq.

⁸² See, e.g.; Manu, iii. 239; v. 85; Fick, *op. cit.*, 26 et seq.

⁸³ Vāsiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra, xiv. 1 et seq.; Gautama Dharma Sūtra, xvii. 17; Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra, i. 6, 18, 16 et seq.; ii. 4, 9, 7, with Bühler's note; Manu, iv. 210 et seq.; Viṣṇu, 41, 7 et seq.; Fick, *op. cit.*, 30-33, who points out that the Jātakas contain little evidence on the practice. Senart, *Les Castes dans l'Inde*, 48 et seq., 212 et seq., attributes great importance to the question of eating together, and compares the sacri-

ficial meals of the gens at Rome, where strangers were excluded (Fustel de Coulanges, *La Cité Antique*, 117). But this is not conclusive; a caste is not a gens, and the gens excluded strangers only at a solemn festival, when the whole gens renewed its blood kinship. If we have no evidence exactly establishing this for the Gotra in early Vedic literature, we need not hesitate to believe that in the earliest Vedic period the Gotra had solemn festivals of union, and of communication with the dead, but that again does not explain or amount to the caste prohibition of taking food from an inferior.

⁸⁴ E.g., Aitareya Āraṇyaka, v. 3, 3, with Keith's note.