
UNIT 2 DALIT DISCRIMINATION IN INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to provide an overview of how the ancient Indian scriptures have treated the Dalits. It will try to examine whether and where these scriptures have adopted discriminatory approaches towards certain sections of people in the society. We will see that such discriminations were more visible in the post-*Vedic* texts, which we designate as the *Smriti* texts, which include social and political treatises like the *Dharmasastras* and the epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This unit will initially define who is a Dalit and will try to locate such groups in ancient India as described in the ancient scriptures. It will try to show that such discriminatory approaches were justified not only on the grounds of conventions and customs, but also with the aid of philosophical and metaphysical doctrines. Since the root of all such discriminations can be traced to the emergence of caste system, this unit will also begin with a discussion of caste system and will subsequently explore how the scriptures have promoted social exclusion, oppression and discrimination of a section of people in the society.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

“Dalit” is a Marathi word, which means ground, suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces and it was first used by Jyotirao Phule, who was one of the pioneers of the movement against untouchability and other caste-based and religion-based discriminations in India. Phule used the word to denote those people who were treated by upper caste Hindus as untouchables. Ambedkar also employed the word in his Marathi speeches and in 1973 the Dalit Panthers revived the term and sought to use it in order to denote all those who are oppressed in the name of caste and religion including the scheduled tribes, working people, landless and poor peasant women and all politically and economically exploited people.

The root cause of all such practices in the caste system and the discriminations based on it. Among the ancient Indian scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* hardly contain clear references to a rigid form of caste system based on a person's birth into a particular family or group. But the texts originated during the later period—the *Smriti* texts, the *Dharmasastras*—contain ample references to caste discriminations and they have legitimized it to a very great extent. The epics too have contributed to this.

2.2 THE CLASSIFICATION OF INDIAN SCRIPTURES

All the scriptures of ancient India do not belong to one single category, as their religious and social significance differ in important ways. For example, the *Vedas*, which are definitely the most ancient among them, were treated as more authentic and important by the orthodox *Hindu* traditions of religions and philosophies. The heterodox schools like the *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and the *Charvaka* School of materialism do not consider the *Vedas* as authority.

The *Vedas* can be dated back to 2000-1500 BC and are believed to be the documents produced by the ancient Indo-European people who came to India and settled down in the Northern parts of the sub continent by the end of 1000 BC. These people transmitted their knowledge of traditions from one generation to the next orally which constituted the *Vedic* scriptures and other various texts.

A broad division of the Indian scriptures may classify them into two groups: the *Sruti* and the *Smriti*. The *Sruti* refers exclusively to the *Vedas* which were orally transmitted from one generation to the next. The whole of the *Vedic* literature is divided into two parts; the *karma kanda*, which refers to the various actions and rituals to be performed and the *Jnana kanda* which are constituted by the *Upanishads*, which are deeply philosophical and metaphysical. The *Upanishads* specifically deal with knowledge, particularly the highest form of philosophical knowledge about the ultimate reality. The *Vedas* were treated as *apaurusheya*, implying that they were not composed by any particular individual author and are impersonal.

The *Smriti* literature, on the other hand, was composed by individual authors. The important *Smriti* texts are comprised of the various *Dharmasûtras*, their commentaries and the epics. All of them deal with the fundamentals of Hindu *dharma*, religion and law. The ancient among them are known as the *Dharmasûtras*, comprising of the four texts written by *Âpastamba*, *Gautama*, *Baudhâyana*, and *Vasishta*. The *Dharmasastras*, which were composed afterwards, include the important law books like the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc.

These texts claim to be representing the principles expressed in the *Vedas* and have contributed in establishing what would later be known as the *Hindu dharma*. They were both law books and religious texts. Though their authority was never treated as fundamental, practically they were treated as the final authority on the questions of religion and law.

The emergence of the caste system is probably the most important development in this period. More than any other sources, these texts provided the intellectual foundation and social justification for caste system in the Indian society. This has ultimately led to the creation of another group of people who were treated as untouchables, who can be conceived as the forefathers of the present day Dalits in India.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What is the basis on which the Indian scriptures are divided into *Sruti* and the *Smriti*?

2) What are *Dharmasutras*?

2.3 THE EMERGENCE OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The *Vedas* do not overtly contain any references to the caste system in the sense in which we understand it today. In the *Purushasukta*, which is the 90th *sukta* in the 10th *Mandala*, *Astaka* 8, *Adyaya* 4 of the *Rigveda*, there is a very clear reference to the classification of the society into four types of people. It says that the *Purusha* was divided into four portions, the Brahmin was his mouth, both his arms was the Râjanya, his thighs became the Vaiúya and from his feet the Úûdra was produced.

But this only says that there are four types of people and never assert that the four groups are identified on the basis of their birth into specific groups. In other words, this classification need not necessarily be interpreted as caste system, as it only classifies people into four groups and not necessarily suggest that the division is hereditary based. The Aryan people had a very peculiar form of classifying the society as well as everything in the universe. They had a mystic passion for the number three and everything in the universe was classified into three categories. Hence we have such concepts like the three *gunas* (*satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), the three *doshas* of *Ayurveda* (*vaata*, *pitta* and *kapha*) the three *lokas*, the three great Gods—the great Indian trinity, Brahma, the God of creation, Vishnu, the God responsible for sustenance and Siva, the God of destruction.

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Accordingly, the society was originally divided into three classes of people. The first group of people was known as the Brahmanas, who were responsible for the performance of the various rituals, which were integral to the lives of the *Vedic* people. The second class was the Kshatriyas or warriors, who were expected to protect the society from internal and external harm and finally they had the Vaisyas, who were the trading people who also took care of agricultural production. Later on one more class –the Sudras—was added to the fold. The Sudras were treated as people who were expected to serve the other three classes and were known as the servant class. According to some scholars, this fourth group was added to the original classification with the integration of the indigenous people (probably *Dravidians*) by the *Aryans* who conquered them and made their settlements in the northern part of the subcontinent. Another view affirms that the Sudras were part of the Aryans, as they were sections of the Aryans employed in servile work

Since we are trying to understand the origins of caste system and also the history of social oppressions on the basis of caste, a clear understanding of this is essential. As B.R.Ambedkar observes, what has later become a caste system was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class. But the complexities of historical changes in India converted the class system into a rigid form of caste system. Ambedkar adds that at some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute groups. Ambedkar is of the opinion that the occurrence of such minute sub castes would have happened from the Vaisya and the Sudra classes, as the military occupation does not very easily lend itself to very minute sub-divisions.

Such divisions and sub-divisions in India have gradually become self-enclosed and mutually excluding social units, not in the absolute sense, but relatively. Ambedkar here observes that they have thus lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes. What is characteristic of caste as opposed to class is that in the former the power relations of domination and submission are clearly visible. In this sense all the castes are not self-enclosed units. The system has operated in such a way that, while some of them closed themselves from others, certain others were taken away all the rights to decide their boundaries. They were treated as either outcastes or lower castes and were kept away from all decision making exercises of the society. The literary tradition in India played an important role in propelling these historical changes and establishing caste differences.

The caste system is related to many other religious and philosophical doctrines like the doctrine of *karma*, the belief in rebirth, the principle of *dharma* and the concept of *moksha* or higher spiritual emancipation. By classifying all people into four groups this system practices an internal system of hierarchy and discrimination. It is thus different from the *Varna* system which divides people on the basis of their inborn potentials and the actions they perform. The caste system classifies people on the basis of their birth and not worth. It emphasizes on parental calling. Each person's caste is therefore fixed based on one's birth. The Brahmins have the right to learn and teach the *Vedas* and they were the priests and teachers. The Kshatriyas and Vaisyas can only learn, but their learning is limited to certain specific fields of study. The Kshatriyas are expected to protect

the society from internal and external harms and hence have to learn the *Dhanurveda*, or the field of warfare and the Vaisyas are tradesmen and should learn the associated skills. But the Sudras were the servants of the above three and were not expected to learn the *Vedas*. The mixing of caste, known as *Varnasamkara*, was treated as a heinous crime and one of the primary responsibilities of the King was to prevent this from happening in order to ensure purity. Hence the internal discrimination of the caste system separates the first three classes of people from the Sudras. These first three classes of people were known as *dwijas*, meaning they are born twice; first their physical birth and second their initiation to the knowledge traditions with a ritual which is known as the *Upanayana*. The Sudras have only one birth and were never initiated into knowledge.

The caste system further makes an external discrimination. It distinguishes the four groups from all those people who are not part of the system. They are the *Panchamas* or the fifth group. In the ancient scriptures we may find derogatory references to such people as *Asuras*, *Mlechas*, *Vanaras*, *Chandalas* *Rakshasas* etc. In the *Mahabharata* Bhima's son Khatolkacha, in spite of being the son of a Prince, was treated as a *Rakshasa* as his mother Hidumbi belonged to the *Rakshasa* class. All such people were widely treated as *Panchamas* (the fifth castes) and outcastes and hence were untouchables. The tribal people who are largely forest dwellers are another group of people who were treated as outcastes by the ancient caste Hindus.

The very basis of caste system can be traced to the question related to the competency and the right over knowledge traditions and systems in the society. The question is; who have the right to learn. The caste Hinduism affirmed that only those who were twice born were eligible to learn and even among them, only the *Brahmins* were eligible to teach. In this way the caste system monopolized all knowledge systems and confined it to the twice born upper castes and prevented a vast majority of people for accessing important scientific and other forms of knowledge. These include all the eighteen interdependent disciplines which constitute the totality of the orthodox Hindu knowledge tradition. Apart from the four *Vedas*, we have the *Vedângas* or the limbs of the *Veda* that include phonetics (*siksha*), grammar (*vyakarana*), etymology (*niruktha*), metrics (*chandas*), calendrical astronomy (*jyotisha*) and rituals (*kalpa*). Again there are the four other constituents of the *Veda*, which are called the *Upanga*; *Mimamsa*, *Nyayasastra*, *Puranas* and *Dharmasastras*. Finally there are the *Upavedas*, constituted by *Ayurveda*, *dhanurveda*, *Gandharvaveda* and *Natyaveda*. The *Sudras* and other lower caste people were never allowed to learn them.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What do the Vedic scriptures say about different castes?

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2) What is the difference between class and caste?

2.4 THE SITUATION IN THE VEDAS AND THE UPANISHADS

As we have seen, the *Vedas* make a class division, but do not very clearly assert any hereditary hierarchy. The *Vedic* age advocated a peculiar religion which emphasized rituals and owing to this factor those who were competent to perform those rituals would have occupied a very high position of esteem in their society. This eventually would have led to the creation of the *Brahmin* class, which further would have evolved into a caste based on birth.

By the time of the composition of the *Upanishads*, the *Aryans* had established their clear supremacy in the Northern parts of the subcontinent. The *Upanishads* are texts which hardly deal with a person’s social status and they are not concerned with historical and other contingent factors that determine human lives. They are texts which are dedicated to the examination of deeper metaphysical truths and raise certain very fundamental questions concerning ultimate reality and the human self.

The self in the *Upanishads* is not a social self, but is the pure transcendental reality which is identical with the ultimate reality called *Brahman*. Hence the questions whether one is a *Brahmin* or a Kshatriya or a Vaisya or a Sudra or an outcaste are fundamentally meaningless. But the *Upanishads* along with other post-*Vedic* texts do refer to different castes, without necessarily referring to differentiations on the basis of caste. We have seen that one of the important ways in which caste discriminations manifested in the society was by monopolizing and confining the learning of the knowledge traditions to the twice born castes. But we find that such rigid distinctions were not present during the early Upanishad times. For instance, in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (II chapter, 1st Brahmana) we find that a Brahmin named Gargya learning from King Ajatasatru, who was a Kshatriya. Again, King Janaka’s reputation as a wise man who is an expert in *Vedanta* was a well known fact. All these show that teaching was not an exclusively Brahmin occupation.

Further, in *Chandogyopanishad* we find that a Sudra named Janasruti learning the Veda from a Brahmin named Raikwa. The *Eitareya Brahmana* (II *Panchika*, 3rd chapter) refers to a huntsman who has learned the Vedas and became a Rishi. Hence we may find that the *Upanishads*, though make references to different classes or casts of people, were not asserting a very strict and rigid system of practices which discriminates people on the basis of their class or caste. But the society at the time of the composition of many of the *Upanishads* would have already been ordered on the basis of caste and on many occasions we find

references to such an order. In the *Chandogyopanishad* there is an interesting story. Satyakama the son of Jabala approached the sage Gautama with a request to teach him. Gautama asked Satyakama about his ancestry to which Satyakama replied in the following way: “I do not know, Sir, of what ancestry I am. I asked my mother about it and she replied: ‘In my youth I was preoccupied with many household duties and with attending on guests when I conceived you. I do not know of what ancestry you are. I am Jabala by name and you are Satyakama.’ I am therefore, Sir, Satyakama Jabala.” Gautama was impressed by Satyakama’s honesty and told him that only a true *Brahmin* would thus speak out and since he has not departed from truth he would initiate Satyakama.

This above incident can be interpreted in two ways. We may conclude from this that only Brahmins were initiated during those days and caste hierarchical practices were prevalent in those days. Another way to understand this is to infer that the *Upanishadic* sages were not interested in the caste or other social conditions of the truth seeker. They were only interested to know whether the person who seeks truth possessed moral integrity.

We may conclude by observing that caste system was yet to get established during the *Vedic* age and also during the period when some of the early *Upanishads* were composed. The class differences that existed at one point of time in India cannot be equated with the caste differences. And of course, there would have been a period of transition, where we would see the elements of both. The *Upanishads* which contain references to caste differences may belong to such a transition period.

But it is a fact that by the time of the composition of the major *Smriti* texts—both the law books and the epics—caste discriminations were established in the Indian society. While the law books provided the theoretical and conceptual justification, the epics validated caste system through their repeated narratives that reached out the masses and exerted tremendous influences on their lives.

2.5 THE LEGAL WORKS

Most of these *Smriti* texts were composed after the *Vedic* age. The caste system in India was validated mainly by these post-*Vedic* texts. They not only vindicated the four-fold caste division, but also established that there were many people, groups and communities who remain outside of the four-fold caste system of the *Aryan* people. These people do not belong to the *varna* system and were known as “*avarnas*” and were treated as untouchables, as physical contact with them were considered to be contaminating. The *Smriti* texts played a very important role in creating the concept of untouchability, though many of them including the *Manusmriti*, which is the most influential among them, did not support the possibility of a fifth group. The Dalits are these people who were treated as untouchables by the caste Hindus.

Among the important law books, the *Manusmriti* is one single text whose influence is still significant. This book would have been composed during the 100–300 century AD. *Manusmriti* (10-1,2) says that people of the first three *varnas* should learn the *Vedas*, but it should be taught only by the *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* should know about their own duties and about the duties of others as well and they should advise others on their duties. Manu thus places the *Brahmins*

at a very high position, making them the complete authority of all knowledge in the society. But he affirms that there are only four castes and not a fifth one. Hence he never directly supported the concept of *avarna*, the fifth group of *Panchamas* who were outside the four-fold system. But the differentiations he made between each caste in general and among the twice-born and the Sudras have evidently supported a system of caste-discriminations which later on had given rise to untouchability and untouchables.

Underlying the idea of caste differences there is a notion of purity, a concept which has roots in the tribal heritage of the Indo-European people. Hence they regarded inter-marriage and inter-dining as polluting acts. *Manusmriti* (3.13) categorically prevents a Sudra man marrying a higher caste woman. Though Manu conditionally accepts a *Brahmin* man marrying women of the lower order. In 3.17 he says that the *Brahmin* who sleeps with a Sudra woman goes to hell. The prevention of the mixing of the *varnas* is considered as one of the main tasks of the society and the King has to ensure this. Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* too insists this aspect. The intermixing or *varnasamkara* is treated as a crime by all the *Smriti* texts. They all consider that the prevention of such a mixing is essential for the preservation of social and moral order.

Almost all the texts agree when it comes to the lower status of the *Sudra* in the society. They all prevent inter-marriage and inter-dining. Though some of them conditionally permit inter-marriage, inter-dining is prevented by all.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

 b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) What were Manu’s views about caste system?

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2.6 THE EPICS

There is a famous story associated with the great sage Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana*. Before composing his great work, which is hailed as the *Adikavya*, Valmiki was a *Chandala* and hence a Sudra or an outcaste. Valmiki later became a sage poet and is regarded as one of the great *Rishies* of ancient India. But paradoxically his major work *Ramayana* supports caste discriminations and asserts a concept of dharma which is rooted in the *varna* system.

Valmiki's Rama is the *maryada purusha*, the ideal man and the embodiment of *dharma*. But the *dharma* which Rama protected includes the *varnasramadharm*, which is not different from a social order based on caste hierarchies. This hierarchical order places the *Brahmins* at the top and the twice-born are always differentiated from the Sudras. In the *Uttarakanda* of *Ramayana* (73rd *Sarga*) a *Brahmin* approaches Rama complaining about the death of his 12 years old son. Rama called all his Ministers, particularly *Brahmins* like Vasishta and Vamadeva to discuss the matter. Among those who were present were many great sages including Narada who described the various duties of different castes. *Ramayana* here clearly affirms that the primary duty of the *Sudras* is to serve the upper castes. Narada says that the reason for the child's untimely death is the violation of caste duties by a Sudra. Somewhere in Rama's kingdom, a Sudra is performing penance, for which only Brahmins and other twice-born are eligible, is causing all the troubles. Rama went around and found that a Sudra named Sambuka was performing penance and annihilated him with his sword. *Ramayana* says that Rama was praised for this act by all the *Brahmins* and Gods and the *Brahmin* boy who died came back to life.

Here we can see the author of *Ramayana* echoing the views of Manu who considers the primary duty of a King as the prevention of mixing of *varnas* and establishing order in the society on the basis of caste hierarchies.

Another epic *Mahabharata* has the episode of Ekalavya, a *Nishada* Prince and hence member of a low caste. Drona, the royal teacher refused to teach Eakalavya, as according to caste system only Brahmins and Kshatriyas were eligible to learn archery. Ekalavya makes a clay image of Drona and in its presence learned and excelled archery on his own. Hearing about this Drona demanded Eklavya to amputate his archer's thumb and give it as *Gurudakshina* (teacherr's fee). The *Mahabharata* contains many such instances which testify casteism. Karna, in spite of being a great warrior was constantly humiliated by many people for being the son of a *Suta*, a charioteer who was a *Sudra*. Karna had faced many such problems throughout his life. Bhima's son, Katolkacha, who is a Rakshasa (probably an outcaste) was never given the status of a Prince in the Pandavas' family, a position which Abhimanyu, who was Arjuna's and Subhadra's son enjoyed.

In all the epics, the *Brahmins* were treated as highly respectable people and were even worshiped by the kings. This was not only the case with highly qualified and learned Brahmins, but the mere fact that one was born as a Brahmin was sufficient for him to be respected by others in the society. Killing of a Brahmin, *Brahmahatya*, is considered as an unpardonable sin, from which even kings are supposed to keep away. In another incident in *Ramayana*, finding that a Brahmin has committed a crime Rama sought the advice of his Ministers—comprising

mainly of Brahmins—regarding what punishment he should award the offender. All the learned Ministers were of the opinion that a *Brahmin* should not be punished. In another incident in Mahabharata, four people who have committed the same crime of murder were taken to Yudhishtira for deciding the punishment. Yudhishtira made enquiries about their respective castes and found that each of them belong to different castes; one was a *Brahmin*, the second one a Kshatriya, the third one a Vaisya and the Fourth one a Sudra. He ordered punishments for the last three without any difficulties and made it clear that he would not take any decision in the case of the *Brahmin*, as his caste is higher than his own. All such repeated narratives asserted the supremacy of the *Brahmin* caste over the rest.

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give an outline about the ways in which the way lower caste people are pasteurized in ancient Indian scriptures, primarily in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, Lawbooks, philosophical texts and the epics. We have seen that the roots of Dalit discriminations can be located in the caste system which has emerged in India during the post-Vedic age. Our analysis has shown that, except on one occasion, the Vedic scriptures do not refer to caste or class. But in later texts the references are ample. The Smriti texts occupy a unique place in this context. The texts like the *Manusmriti*, Arthasastra and others affirm that validity and necessity of dividing the society into four groups and all of them categorically place the Sudras outside the society of pure and twice-born people. We have also seen the ways in which the philosophical systems and schools approached the mater.

2.8 KEY WORDS

Class	:	this term refers to the class to which people belong on the basis of their abilities, skills, and actions.
Caste	:	caste is different from class in the sense that one cannot change one’s caste. It is fixed on the basis of the birth of the person. One is born as a Brahmin or a Sudra and under no circumstances can one change one’s caste.
Dalit	:	a word used by Jyotirao Phule to denote all those who are oppressed and exploitated. This Marati word literally means ground, suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces. The Dalit Panthers has revived this term during the 70s.
Sruti	:	refers to the Vedas. They are not written by any particular human beings and hence are transmitted from one generation to the next orally. The term <i>Sruti</i> literally means that which is heard. They are considered as <i>apaurusheya</i> or impersonal and all the orthodox philosophical and religious schools in India consider the Vedic scriptures as valid and infallible.
Smriti	:	literally, that which is remembered. They refer to the post-Vedic texts that mainly deal with ethical, religious, and legal issues. They are not infallible and may change from palce to place and time to time.

2.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Web Resources

Mahabharata: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/index.htm>

Works of B.R.Ambedkar: <http://www.ambedkar.org>

2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Ancient Indian scriptures, particularly those in the orthodox Hindu tradition are divided into *Sruti* and *Smriti*. *Sruti* is constituted of the Vedic scriptures and *Smriti* comprises of all those post-Vedic texts which include the *Dharmasutras*, their various commentaries, the epics and other social and political treatises originated in the post-Vedic era. These texts include the *Dharmasûtras* of Âpastamba, Gautama, Baudhâyana, and Vasishta, the *Dharmasastras* which include the *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc. and the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The Vedas constitute the basis of orthodox Hindu tradition and all philosophical schools, systems and approaches of this tradition accept the unquestionable validity of the Vedas. They are treated as impersonal or *apaurusheya*, which means they are now written by man. The *Smriti* texts on the other hand, are never treated as absolutely valid and we may find the influences of time and place on them. But they played a very important role in the making of the Hindu society based on caste system.

- 2) They are important post-Vedic texts which address the problem of dharma. The concept of dharma is understood in these texts not only as an ethical notion but also as religious and legal. Hence dharma is also the law from a social and political perspective, though its validity has been established on the basis of religious and spiritual convictions. The important Dharmastras include *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkyasmriti*, *Naradasmriti*, *Vishnusmriti*, *Brihaspatismriti*, *Katyayanasmriti* etc. Unlike other philosophical and spiritual texts these *Dharmasasttras* are more oriented towards regulating the day to day practical social lives of people.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) The Vedic scriptures do not say anything explicit about caste system in society. The 10th Mandala of the *Purushasukta*, which is part of the Rig Veda affirms that, when the Purusha was divided into four, the *Brahmins* came out from his head, the *Kshatriyas* from the hands, the *Vaisyas* from the thighs and there *Sudras* from the feet. But this only says that there are four types of people and never affirm that they are four castes, determined on the basis of a person's birth. In no other place the Vedas refer to different castes. There is also a view which argues that this section of the Rig Veda, the *Purushasukta* was never a part of the original Vedic scriptures and was interpolated.
- 2) The term class refers to a classification of people on the basis of their capabilities and potentialities. Here the worth of an individual is considered in order to decide his or her class. It is not necessarily ordered hierarchically. On the other hand, caste is a division based on hereditary belongingness. One is born into a caste by being born to parents belonging to a particular caste. This is more rigid and never permits a graduation from one to the next. It is fixed by birth. In the *Bhagavat Gita*, Lord Krishna affirms that the four classes are his creation based on the quality and actions of people. But later in India, this has become what is known as the caste system.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Manu considered the caste system as dharma. He equated the *varnasramadharma* with *dharma*. He insisted that all the four castes are different from each other and each caste has a duty or dharma to perform in the society. The Brahmins have to learn and teach, the Kshatriyas have to protect the society from harms, the Vaisyas have to engage in trading and the Sudras have to serve the other three castes. He insisted that the mixing of caste known as Varnasamkara needs to be avoided and hence intermarriage and interdining need to be avoided. Yet he recognizes inter-caste marriages but even in such occasions the order is important. The Brahmin women are not allowed to marry men from other castes and Kshatriya women not to marry men of Vaisyas and Sudras and the Vaisya women not to marry Sudra men. The opposite is conditionally permitted. He recognized the respectable position of the Brahmins in the society, but affirmed that the Sudras are the servants of all the other three. Another important feature of his views about the caste systems is that he never recognized a fifth caste which is known as panchamas, who were treated as untouchables.