



## On Bashing Manu Smriti, Or Flogging A Dead Horse Riding A Blind Ass

By BS Murthy

None knows when Manu Smriti had its last sway, if at all, over the Indian polity but still the Hindu castes that it slighted lazily hold it against the Brahmins that it once exalted, and ominously, the evangelists cynically bash Hinduism with it to lure the former into their Semitic fold. However, this essay is not an exercise to endorse the extinct Smriti per se but an attempt to expose the perceptive vacuity and the intellectual dishonesty, as the case may be, of its debunkers.

No denying that Manu unambiguously upheld the Brahmanical supremacy albeit with an austere life-style that is self-denying to say the least, and even otherwise which society in history has been egalitarian in its concept and construct. But then, to cite but two examples, what about the Islamic bigotry that negates the kafirs and the White racism that rendered blacks into slavery. Why the Muslims have not been able to shed their ill-founded kafir antipathy even in the multi-cultural settings they happen to live. When was it that the racial segregation in the U.S. trains and buses in the Land of Liberty did end but in 1956! So, on the discriminatory note, the Manuwad decry, a euphemism for ant-Brahminism, is a far cry from the 'Black Lives Matter' cry.

Besides, Manu's detractors tend to smear him by amplifying his restrain-female tunes and muting his woman-exalted notes. But then, what was his Smriti's woman-denial compared to Sharia's savagery of the fair sex; for that matter, when it was that woman's vote began to count in the first full-fledged democracy in the modern world but in 1920! And for the starters, democracy took birth in India that is Bharat of yore.

Be that as it may, there's no historical evidence that the law of Arya Varta was ever based on the Manu Smriti for it was not mandatory,

8.309. Know that a king who heeds not the rules (of the law), who is an atheist, and rapacious, who does not protect (his subjects, but) devours them, will sink low (after death).

*This and the excerpts that follow are derived from 'The Laws of Manu' by G. Buhler, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1886, available at the Internet Archive.*

Whatever, a tangible expostulation of Manu Smriti would be in order, and to start with, it's the King, not the Brahmin, above all,

7.5. Because a king has been formed of particles of those lords of the gods, he therefore surpasses all created beings in lustre;

7.8. Even an infant king must not be despised, (from an idea) that he is a (mere) mortal; for he is a great deity in human form.

Besides, belying the perceived oppression of the so-called lower castes, apparently there were rulers among them, never mind Manu is said to have disregarded them -

4.61. Let him not dwell in a country where the rulers are Sudras, nor in one which is surrounded by unrighteous men, nor in one which has become subject to heretics, nor in one swarming with men of the lowest castes.

Just the same, no denying that the Brahmins, nay the pious among them, were invariably posited on the social pedestal -

3.212. But if no (sacred) fire (is available), he shall place (the offerings) into the hand of a Brahmana; for Brahmanas who know the sacred texts declare, 'What fire is, even such is a Brahmana'.

But that entailed quite a spiritual rigour,

2.162. A Brahmana should always fear homage as if it were poison; and constantly desire (to suffer) scorn as (he would long for) nectar.

Besides a curtailed material means,

3.109. A Brahmana shall not name his family and (Vedic) gotra in order to obtain a meal; for he who boasts of them for the sake of a meal, is called by the wise a foul feeder (vantasin).

8.102. Brahmanas who tend cattle, who trade, who are mechanics, actors (or singers), menial servants or usurers, the (judge) shall treat like Sudras.

Nevertheless, the Brahmin-incapacitating Manu dharma was not meant for lesser but freer souls.

4.80. Let him not give to a Sudra advice, nor the remnants (of his meal), nor food offered to the gods; nor let him explain the sacred law (to such a man), nor impose (upon him) a penance.

4.81. For he who explains the sacred law (to a Sudra) or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that (man) into the hell (called) Asamvrita.

However, in case of transgressions,

5.140. Sudras who live according to the law, shall each month shave (their heads); their mode of purification (shall be) the same as that of Vaisyas, and their food the fragments of an Aryan's meal.

Now coming to women under Manu's yoke,

5.147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

5.148. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

5.149. She must not seek to separate herself from her father, husband, or sons; by leaving them she would make both (her own and her husband's) families contemptible.

No denying that male protectiveness is at odds with women's lib but then while Manu Smriti, so to say was consigned to flames in the remotest past, the Sharia is still kicking and alive to oppress and suppress the second sex in many parts of the wide world.

But then what is not conceded is that Manu had valued women more than any at any time in human history,

3.55. Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who desire (their own) welfare.

3.56. Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards.

3.57. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy ever prospers.

8.28. In like manner care must be taken of barren women (by the King), of those who have no sons, of those whose family is extinct, of wives and widows faithful to their lords, and of women afflicted with diseases.

8.29. A righteous king must punish like thieves those relatives who appropriate the property of such females during their lifetime.

8.364. He who violates an unwilling maiden shall instantly suffer corporal punishment; but a man who enjoys a willing maiden shall not suffer corporal punishment, if (his caste be) the same (as hers).

9.90. Three years let a damsel wait, though she be marriageable; but after that time let her choose for herself a bridegroom (of) equal (caste and rank).

9.91. If, being not given in marriage, she herself seeks a husband, she incurs no guilt, nor (does) he whom she weds.

However, with the rider,

9.92. A maiden who chooses for herself, shall not take with her any ornaments, given by her father or her mother, or her brothers; if she carries them away, it will be theft.

More relevant to our times, mixed with much of chaff is plenty of all-season grain in Manu's 2,684-mound granary such as -

4.12. He who desires happiness must strive after a perfectly contented disposition and control himself; for happiness has contentment for its root, the root of unhappiness is the contrary (disposition).

4.137. Let him not despise himself on account of former failures; until death let him seek fortune, nor despair of gaining it.

4.141. Let him not insult those who have redundant limbs or are deficient in limbs, nor those destitute of knowledge, nor very aged men, nor those who have no beauty or wealth, nor those who are of low birth.

4.159. Let him carefully avoid all undertakings (the success of) which depends on others; but let him eagerly pursue that (the accomplishment of) which depends on himself.

4.160. Everything that depends on others (gives) pain, everything that depends on oneself (gives) pleasure; know that this is the short definition of pleasure and pain.

4.161. When the performance of an act gladdens his heart, let him perform it with diligence; but let him avoid the opposite.

5.109. The body is cleansed by water, the internal organ is purified by truthfulness, the individual soul by sacred learning and austerities, the intellect by (true) knowledge.

7.139. Let him not cut up his own root (by levying no taxes), nor the root of other (men) by excessive greed; for by cutting up his own root (or theirs), he makes himself or them wretched.

But the crown of the Smriti is earmarked for justice and justness,

8.17. The only friend who follows men even after death is justice; for everything else is lost at the same time when the body (perishes).

8.18. One quarter of (the guilt of) an unjust (decision) falls on him who committed (the crime), one quarter on the (false) witness, one quarter on all the judges, one quarter on the king.

8.128. A king who punishes those who do not deserve it, and punishes not those who deserve it, brings great infamy on himself and (after death) sinks into hell.

8.129. Let him punish first by (gentle) admonition, afterwards by (harsh) reproof, thirdly by a fine, after that by corporal chastisement.

8.164. That agreement which has been made contrary to the law or to the settled usage (of the virtuous), can have no legal force, though it be established (by proofs).

8.165. A fraudulent mortgage or sale, a fraudulent gift or acceptance, and (any transaction) where he detects fraud, the (judge) shall declare null and void.

However, the moot point is whether or not Manu can be exonerated on the grounds that his original composition was subsequently fouled by caste prejudices and vested interests, and it seems to be the case.

It all began thus:

1.1. The great sages approached Manu, who was seated with a collected mind, and, having duly worshipped him, spoke as follows:

1.2. *'Deign, divine one, to declare to us precisely and in due order the sacred laws of each of the (four chief) castes (varna) and of the intermediate ones.'*

1.3. *'For thou, O Lord, alone knowest the purport, (i.e.) the rites, and the knowledge of the soul, (taught) in this whole ordinance of the Self-existent (Svayambhu), which is unknowable and unfathomable.'*

1.4. He, whose power is measureless, being thus asked by the high-minded great sages, duly honoured them, and answered, 'Listen!'

1.5. This (universe) existed in the shape of Darkness, unperceived, destitute of distinctive marks, unattainable by reasoning, unknowable, wholly immersed, as it were, in deep sleep.

As would be evident from the following, 1.2 was a later-day interpolation intended to drag the discourse onto the four caste track from 1.31 onwards with many more insertions, albeit intermittently, though fatally.

1.25. Austerity, speech, pleasure, desire, and anger, this whole creation he likewise produced, as he desired to call these beings into existence.

1.28. But to whatever course of action the Lord at first appointed each (kind of beings), that alone it has spontaneously adopted in each succeeding creation.

1.29. Whatever he assigned to each at the (first) creation, noxiousness or harmlessness, gentleness or ferocity, virtue or sin, truth or falsehood, that clung (afterwards) spontaneously to it.

1.30. As at the change of the seasons each season of its own accord assumes its distinctive marks, even so corporeal beings (resume in new births) their (appointed) course of action.

*1.31. But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds he caused the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet.*

And intriguingly, much later in the Smriti it is said,

9.67. That chief of royal sages who formerly possessed the whole world, caused a confusion of the castes (varna), his intellect being destroyed by lust.

However, the true give away of the fouling of the original Smriti that apparently originated before the advent of Atharva veda (1.23) is the mention of Upanishads in it that succeeded the same (6.29)

1.23. But from fire, wind, and the sun he drew forth the threefold eternal Veda, called Rik, Yagus, and Saman, for the due performance of the sacrifice.

6.29. These and other observances must a Brahmana who dwells in the forest diligently practise, and in order to attain complete (union with) the (supreme) Soul, (he must study) the various sacred texts contained in the Upanishads.

So, instead of bashing the Manu Smriti a la flogging the dead horse riding a blind ass, it pays the mankind to discard the redundant chaff to nourish itself on the pristine grain in Manu's ancient granary.