Organizing Society as per the *Varnashrama* system

**Overview**

In the ‘60s many young people of America were forced into the Vietnam War. Not all of them had the desire for or the capability of participating in a war. Why were these people drafted even when they wanted to dodge it and would have clearly been a misfit in the army? They were drafted because their intrinsic properties and attributes were not taken into account while categorizing them as “war” material and “non-war” material. Largely, a single property - age - was used to determine if a person was eligible to be drafted. This single-property use for creating a system of classification led to unrest amongst the people in general and uproar in the society at large. The ancient Vedic texts of India elaborate a system of classifying human beings into four social orders called *varnas* and four spiritual orders called *ashramas* on the basis of their inherent qualities, behavior, and training called as the *Varnashrama* system and the “duties” that they perform within the framework of *Varnashrama* is called their *Varnashrama Dharma*. In the last few centuries however, an abominable perverted form of the original *Varnashrama* system had existed as the “caste system” in India wherein individuals were classified into the four social orders on the basis of their birth alone and not on the basis of their qualities. The original *Varnashrama* system is a practical way of classifying people considering their psychophysical nature to engage them in meaningful interactions with the society which delivers a sense of contribution and purpose to the individual.

**What is being organized?**

People living in the society are being organized - they are classified into categories dynamically as per their qualities and the training that they have received, so that people have engagements in society that are closely aligned with their abilities and nature. It promotes a well-balanced society where people are engaged as per their nature and it ensures that the right people are engaged in the right job. The four social orders (*varnas*) are (1) *brahmanas* (intellectuals and priests), (2) *kshatriyas* (warriors and administrators), (3) *vaishyas* (farmers and business people), and (4) *shudras* (manual laborers and general assistants). Most people exhibit qualities that reflect an overlapping of these categories, but one occupational inclination will eventually predominate. The four spiritual stages (*ashramas*) are (1) *brahmacharya* (celibate student life), (2) *grihastha* (married life), (3) *vanaprastha* (retired life), and (4) *sannyasa* (renunciation and complete dedication to the Absolute). The goal of the *Varnashrama* system is to place people on the progressive path towards liberation by cooperating with each other and making their work an offering to God and society.

**Why is it being organized?**

Individuals are classified into the four categories so that they can be effective contributors to the society in whatever position and domain they are most fit to create an impact towards the progress of the society. As per the *Varnashrama* system, all social orders work in cooperation with each other to engage in the loving devotional service of Krishna, the Supreme Lord, service to whom is of absolute nature and hence the work of a carpenter is treated with equal respect.
with the work of a teacher, because ultimately both are being offered in service to Krishna. Each individual is engaged in “doing what they love”, which was the norm and not the exception in Vedic times, so that every person is inspired to make their contribution towards the society. The Varnashrama system was organized so that people are motivated to be on the “progressive path of life” and have organized their lives to engage themselves in the loving devotional service of Lord Krishna, the ultimate goal of the Vedic civilization and Varnashrama Dharma.

**How much is it being organized?**

Based on their individual characteristics, interests, and natural proclivities, people are being classified into four categories or social orders - Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras i.e. the intellectual class, the warrior class, the mercantile class and the labor class respectively. It is a high level categorization scheme. The specific kind of occupations that people engage in may differ in the details, but overall the nature of the function of all the individuals in a particular category is the same. The nature and qualities that define each category are also described by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita as follows:

1. The brahmans are characterized by the qualities of "Peacefulness, self-control, austerity, purity, tolerance, honesty, wisdom, knowledge, and religiousness--these are the qualities by which the brahmans work" (Bhagavad-Gita 18.42) and they are the intellectual class who may engage within the society as teachers and advisors to the king or the administration.

2. The qualities that are characteristic of the kshatriyas are "Heroism, power, determination, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity, and leadership are the qualities of work for the kshatriyas" (Bhagavad-Gita 18.43) and they are the administrative class who function as military personnel and benevolent saintly rulers of the society and they are counselled by the brahmans.

3. "Farming, cow protection and business are the qualities of work for the vaisyas, and for the sudras there is labor and service to others." (Bhagavad-Gita 18.44) Vaisyas are the mercantile class who possess good trading and farming skills and they should be the traders (business owners), farmers, and cow protectors.

4. Sudras are those who do not possess the qualities of the other three classes and they should be the general workers and assistants.

**When is it being organized?**

The Varnashrama system of organizing human society existed since ancient times. Once the natural proclivities of a person are found, they are placed in that category. If at a certain point of time in the future, their nature changes, they may be reclassified into another category and may perform their duties as per their social order. The classification in Varnashrama system is not on the basis of birth, but on the nature and qualities of the individual.

**How (or by Whom) is it being organized?**

The Varnashrama system of classification was created by Lord Krishna Himself as He states in the Bhagavad Gita 4.13 - "According to the three modes of material nature and the work associated with them, the four divisions of human society are created by Me. And although I am the creator of this system, you should know that I am yet the nondoer, being unchangeable." The classification of a person into social orders, however, is a natural outcome of the training and qualifications of a person. Every person is born a common man - a Sudra - and can change
his or her category by undergoing the requisite training program and acquiring the qualities of a particular social order.