

# CHAPTER – V

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

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This chapter is an humble attempt to present the concluding observations on the basis of the discussions made in the earlier chapters.

The word *Dharma* is derived from the root *dhṛ* meaning, ‘to uphold’, ‘to support’ to nourish’ etc. It is used in a number of senses such as nature, ordinance, usage, duty, right justice, morality, virtue, religion, good work, law etc.

The *Dharmasūtra* as a part of the Vedic Kalpasūtras, in some extant, it is different from the *Dharmaśāstras* or the *smṛti* works. Among the *Dharmasūtras* the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* is regarded as the letter one. This *Dharmasūtra* is the only *dharmasūtra* work belonging to the *Ṛgveda*. In the *Tantravārttika*, Kumārilabhaṭṭa says that the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* was studied by the followers of the *Ṛgveda*. Cf., *vasiṣṭham bahvṛcaireva*<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it can be said that traditionally, *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* has been associated with the *Ṛgveda*. Though the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* is included in the *Dharmasūtra* class of works, it bears some characteristic features which are fully contrasted with the same as the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* is an independent work, it does not show any relevance with the *Gṛhyasūtras* of *Ṛgveda*. It is composed in prose intermixed with verses. Even chapter 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, all these are written in verse. Therefore, this work can be designated as the *Dharmaśāstra*. *Vasiṣṭha* has also called his own work as *dharmasāstra* (XXIV.6). In this work, several verses and prose passages have been quoted from different *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas* and *Āraṇyakas*. Thus, it can be

stated that this work is originally an eclectic work of an independent character and it does not at first attach itself to the *Rgveda*.

Most of the laws determined by the Great Vasiṣṭha can be observed in the modern time also. He has proclaimed *dharma* which is common to all the classes of people belonging to different orders of life. These common duties (or *Dharma*) are - speaking the truth, refraining from anger, giving gifts, not killing living creatures, fathering children, to refrain from slander, envy, pride, egotism, disbelief, dishonesty, praising oneself, running down others, hypocrisy, greed, perplexity and jealousy<sup>2</sup>.

Vasiṣṭha has confirmed the duties of the four castes, viz - *Brāhmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśya* and *Śūdra*. Actually, the caste system introduced on the basis of the division of labour in society, promoted economic strength and efficiency in professions and functions. It helped to preserve the skilled labour by the transmitting vocational skill from generation to generation. But Vasiṣṭha does not mention the duties of the people of mixed classes. It means at that time the society does not accept such mixed classes of people.

Vasiṣṭha has determined the occupation of the four castes. But in the time of adversity there is an option, those who are unable to sustain themselves through the law proper to them may resort to the next worse livelihood, but never to the one is that superior.

At the time of Vasiṣṭha the education is provided in the *Gurukula* system. Education is regarded as essential part of the first stage of life of human beings.

According to the caste system, education is granted to individuals belonging to the classes of *Brahmaṇa*, *Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya*. Śūdras are not allowed to take any formal education from the teacher as they are regarded as a very lower class of people. The Śūdras have to serve the other three classes and it is the unrestricted means of their livelihood.

Vasiṣṭha has not only proclaimed the duties of the different caste and orders, but he also states the rights of the people of the society. He has categorized the rights in the areas of education, occupation, participating in administration, private property and in the justice.

In the society of the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*, women enjoy a very respectable position. They are more precious than wealth. On scale of social respect Vasiṣṭha accords the highest position to a mother who is hundred times greater than a father<sup>3</sup>. An outcast father should be forsaken, but a mother is never an outcaste to her son<sup>4</sup>.

In case of purification, for women, her monthly illness is the only way of her purification and in the monthly period she is impure for only three days<sup>5</sup>. Woman as a social being, she is central to the whole social structure in her bio-social role as mother.

Another meaning of the term 'Dharma' is 'Law'. Law is always integrated with crime and punishment. Crime means an offence against an individual or the state which is punishable by law. No country in the whole world could and make a list of crimes in which all the crimes are mentioned. It is an impossible task to

enlist all the civil and criminal cases. But our Dharmasūtrakāras ventured to do it. With high intellect, astounding talent, extra ordinary knowledge about human psychology, practical experience in human behaviour, depth in human conduct, deep studies in human activities, sound knowledge in penology, exact feelings about the need of society and rational thinking, among the Dharmasūtrakāras, Vasiṣṭha has also enlisted the courses of crimes and methods of punishment in his work.

There are some rules which are essential for the enrichment of the society as the human being, a king should govern such rules with the help of the court of learned people and should enforce them among the four varṇas<sup>6</sup>. Such rules may be called as customs as they are not propounded in the Vedas, but times demand.

Among the four stages of human life, the household is the important one. All the culture of a society is mainly focused through this stage. Ritual activities are the most part of the stage of householders.

Giving gift or *Dāna* is a very significant factor of a human life. There are three super gifts cows, land and knowledge. Among these the gift of knowledge is superior to all gifts and surpasses even those super gifts<sup>7</sup>.

By paying homage to a guest, the householder obtains peace and heaven. It is the great belief of Indian Culture. It is said that a Brāhmaṇa guest enters a house as the fire to all men. They bring water except during the rainy season and people call that a rite of appeasing<sup>8</sup>. If a guest arrives after he has made the offerings to all the gods, a householder should have food prepared specially for him.

The food habit in Hinduism is traditionally governed by the rules laid out in the Dharmasūtras. Vasiṣṭha, the great *dharmasūtrakāra* has dealt with the information about the article of food permitted or prohibited in the time represented by him. Among fish, there are some forbidden to be eaten, likewise, the Ceṭa, the Gavaya, the porpoise, the alligator and the crab<sup>9</sup>. In the age of the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*, meat eating appears to have been widely in vogue. To show hospitality towards the guests, the householder can kill the living creatures<sup>10</sup>.

In some aspects Vasiṣṭha's views are different and modern from those of early writers like Gautama and Baudhāyana. Like Āpastamba, he mentions only six forms of marriages<sup>11</sup>, *Brāhma*, *Daiva*, *Ārṣa*, *Gādhārva*, *Kṣatra* and *Mānuṣa*. Vasiṣṭha does not mention the Rākṣasa and Paisāsa forms of marriage. According to Vasiṣṭha, abduction does not constitute marriage. If a girl has been abducted by force, and not has been wedded with sacred texts, she may lawfully be given to another man; she is even like a maiden<sup>12</sup>. He allows *niyoga*<sup>13</sup> and the remarriage of child widow<sup>14</sup>. But Vasiṣṭha prohibits the marriage of a *Brāhmaṇa* with a *Śūdra* woman (I.25-26) which is mostly contradictory with the view of Baudhāyana (I.8.2). He elaborates rules of adoption in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter which are not found in Gautama, Baudhāyana and *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*. He speaks of documents as one of the three means of proof<sup>15</sup>, while Gautama, Āpastamba and Baudhāyana are silent on that point, but in the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* XIII.4, there appears to be a reference to documents. Taking all these things into consideration it may be said that Vasiṣṭha is later than Gautama, Āpastamba and Baudhāyana, but much earlier

than the beginning of the Christian era and may tentatively be assigned to the period between 300-100 B.C.<sup>16</sup>. Vasiṣṭha has also flourished some moral knowledge. He states humanity as the source of supreme pleasure. In the Vedic period a *Brāhmaṇa* attained his highest goal through performing the sacrifices. Thus Vasiṣṭha has compared the fire of a sacrifice with meditation, the firewood is truthfulness, the offering is patience, the *Sruva* spoon is modesty, the sacrificial cake is not causing injury to living beings and the priestly fee is the arduous gift of safety to all creatures<sup>17</sup>. So, we can say that Vasiṣṭha has analyzed the whole things of the Vedic sacrifices in a realistic point of view which is really beneficial at the time of the modern society also.

The most interesting point is that according to *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* (6.1), good conduct is the highest Law for all. Even Vasiṣṭha has clarified the fact of the generation of mixed classes by saying that all those who have been secretly conceived and who are tainted with the attribution rising from relationships in the inverse order of class, we can know by their actions, because they are devoid of virtue and good conduct<sup>18</sup>. It means at that time the society does not appreciate such mixed classes at any cost. Their rights and occupations are not mentioned in the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* also.

Vasiṣṭha is very conscious about the mental and physical hygiene. Because, he appreciates the Yoga practice. According to him, not by severe austerity, not by the daily recitation of the Veda, not even by sacrifice can a man attain the state that one obtains by the practice of Yoga. Cf., *VDS.*, 25.7

*na tām tīvrena tapasā na svādhyāyairna cejyayā |*

*gatiṃ gantum dvijāḥ śaktā yogātsamprānuvanti yām ||*

Through Yoga one can obtain knowledge, even Yoga is the earmark of the Law. It is designated as the highest austerity. Therefore, one should always be engaged in the yogic practice. On the other hand, through the Yoga one can control his breath repeatedly. By suppressing the breath air is generated, from air fire is generated and from fire water is generated (VDS.25.6). Through these three one is cleansed internally. Medical science also says that *vāyu* (air), *pitta* (fire) and cough (cold or water) are the three important elements which are directly responsible for our body balance. And Yoga is the appropriate way which makes people mentally and physically fit from everywhere.

From the above mentioned discussions it has been observed that the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* contains some notable ideas having relevance to the contemporary society too. The advice provided in the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* emphasized the formation of human being having human values.

‘Good conduct is the highest Law or Dharma. Dharma is not a part of religion; it is a part of our life which helps us to lead a healthy and progressive life’ – is the great advice of Vasiṣṭha, the Great ancient Indian lawgiver.

Finally, it can be said that humanity at present, has appeared in danger and become a great challenge before the civilized global human society. Hatred, disbelief, degradation of moral values, corruption in every aspect of human society, terrorism and crimes especially to women including girl children, which



inspite of protest from public and victims, have been increasing day by day. These crimes have been figuring the news items in the media every moment as the burning problems, all over the world, especially in India, our Motherland.

In view of the above, it can be said that the teachings offered by Vasiṣṭha in *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*, his monumental work, regarding human values can show the way to human society to get rid of such most undesired and painful crimes.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. *Mimāmsādarśana* with *Tantravārttika*, chp.2.1.
2. *VDS.*,IV.4; X.30.
3. *Ibid.*, XIII.48.
4. *Ibid.*, XIII.47.
5. *Ibid.*, V.6.
6. *Ibid.*, XIX.7.
7. *Ibid.*, XXIX.19.
8. *Ibid.*, XI.13.
9. *Ibid.*,XIV.41.
10. *Ibid.*, IV.8.
11. *Ibid.*, I.28-29.
12. *Ibid.*, XVII.73,  
*balācchetprahr̥tā kanyā mantrairyadi na samskr̥tā |*  
*anyasmai vidhivaddeyā yathā kanyā tathaiva sā ||*
13. *Ibid.*, XVII.56.
14. *Ibid.*, XVII.74.  
*pāñigrāhe mṛte bālā kevalam mantrasamskr̥tā |*  
*sā cedakṣatayoniḥ syātpunaḥ samskāramarhatīti ||*
15. *Ibid.*, *VDS.*XVI.10-15.
16. See Kane,P.V., *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol.I. p.105.

17. VDS.XXX.8.

*dhyānāhniḥ satyopacayanam kṣāntyāhutiḥ  
sruvam hṛīḥ puroḍāśamahimsā santoṣo |  
yūpaḥ kṛcchram bhūtebhyobhayadākṣiṇyamiti  
kṛtvā kratu mānasam yāti kṣayam budhaḥ ||*

18. Ibid., 18.7.

*chātrotpannaśca ye kecitprātilomyaguṇāśritāḥ |  
guṇācāraparibhramśātkarmabhistānvijānīyuriti ||*