

In Defense of *Manu-saṁhitā*

By Shyamasundara Dāsa ACBSP, Jyotiṣa-vidvān
On behalf of the Śāstra-cakṣuḥ-pariṣat

No person, even if he be very learned, should express a decisive opinion all by himself, in regard to the disputed points of Dharma. The way of Dharma is very subtle. It has many loopholes and is inscrutable. Excepting Svayambhuva Manu, none of the Devas and sages can pronounce a judgment on Dharma.

Vāyu-purāna 2.57.112

Since we have quoted from *Manu-saṁhitā* we thought it necessary to defend its authority against those within ISKCON who deprecate and dismiss it.¹

Starting in the late 1990s after the rise of feminism in ISKCON there began serious pushback against this Neo-Marxist doctrine. It was naively assumed that if we quoted an authority it would be accepted and this nonsense would stop. It didn't. A pattern of behavior was observed. When the *pūrvapakṣa* realised they had no credible arguments their main tactic became “reputation demolition.” If you quoted a previously universally accepted authority they would attempt to undermine it as an excuse to reject it.

For example, if you quoted *Cāṇakya Paṇḍita* they said he was bogus because, “We are Kṛṣṇa Conscious, not *Cāṇakya* Conscious.” But anyone who has studied sastras in depth will know that *Cāṇakya Paṇḍita* was just taking gems from the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, and *Itihāsas* and putting them in his own words and not making things up. His was the Vedic version. That is why he is considered an authority and quoted by *ācāryas*.

The *Bhāgavatam*, they argued, was for a different age, and not applicable in modern times, although, at the beginning of the text, it states it is meant for the current age.

But, we thought that surely they would accept what Śrīla Prabhupāda said. No, they didn't, they began to criticize Śrīla Prabhupāda saying that he was materially conditioned. That there was a “Spiritual Prabhupāda” who could give us Kṛṣṇa and a “Material Prabhupāda” who made mistakes and was out of touch with modernity. The gory details can be found [here](#).

Manu-saṁhitā also suffered the same fate. If you search the VedaBase for *Manu-saṁhitā* or *Manu-smṛiti* you will get about 250 hits depending on which documents you search. All of these references are favorable. But the *pūrvapakṣa* searched through all these references to find the only negative comment (below) and used it as a club in an attempt to nullify the credibility of any

¹ Much of the following text is quoted from emails, the internet, and other people's writings. They do not all follow standard spellings. We tried to standardize the spellings but gave up midway as it became time-consuming. Your indulgence in the minor inconsistencies is requested.

quote from *Manu-saṁhitā*.

We do not want all these rituals. Chanting Hare Krishna is our only business. According to *Manu-saṁhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-saṁhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-saṁhitā* then you'll become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.

Letter to Madhusudana dasa (written by Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary on his behalf) May 19, 1977

What kind of person skips over the hundreds of positive references about Manu by Śrīla Prabhupāda and focuses on the only negative one? (Hint see [Bhagavad-gītā 16.7p](#))

An unbiased person will try to reconcile this apparent contradiction by trying to find out the context. I thought that there must have been some special reason for Śrīla Prabhupāda's actions so I contacted the late Madhusudana Prabhu and he told me the backstory thus resolving the (apparent) contradiction. Our email exchange follows (emphasis added):

From: Shyamasundara Dasa
Sent: Monday, October 13, 2003 12:26 PM
To: Michael Blumert [<mailto:mb@jiaogulan.net>]
Subject: Manu-saṁhitā

Dear Madhusudana Prabhu,

PAMHO AGTSP

Recently there has been a bit of controversy regarding Śrīla Prabhupāda, Vedic culture, and *Manu-saṁhitā*. Considering that every time SP mentions the *Manu-saṁhitā* he has done so in glowing terms the following text seems contradictory. Could you please explain the context surrounding this text? What did you ask SP and why did he answer like this?

Your humble servant
Shyamasundara Dasa

<http://www.ShyamasundaraDasa.com>

"krsnas tu bhagavan svayam"

“We do not want all these rituals. Chanting Hare Krishna is our only business. According to *Manu-saṁhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-saṁhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-saṁhitā* then you'll become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.”

Letter to Madhusudana dasa (written by Śrīla Prabhupāda's secretary on

his behalf) May 19, 1977

From: Michael Blumert [<mailto:mb@jiaogulan.net>]
Sent: Monday, October 13, 2003 4:27 PM
To: Shyamasundara Dasa
Subject: RE: Manu-saṁhitā

At the time, my wife and I were having trouble conceiving a child for many years. Various sanskritists were beginning to recommend following the many rituals for auspicious conception etc. So I had asked Prabhupada if I should do those things and that was his response. Of course, Prabhupad's instruction was to simply chant 50 rounds before trying to conceive.

My understanding is that the 50 rounds of chanting should not be minimized as being less effective than the *Manu-saṁhitā* rituals. Also, it's clear that I and many others were (I still am) mlecchas and yavanas (which became all too obvious when we screwed up the movement as we did), so how could we know how and when to apply the *Manu-saṁhitā*. **I think Prabhupada answered based on the time, place, and recipient.**

That probably clears it up for you.

ys
Madhusudan

Negative comments by Hari Parshad Prabhu

On July 7, 2013 Hari Parshad Prabhu posted the following article² on Dandavats wherein he provides a multi-commentary edition of *Manu-saṁhitā*, but with a serious caveat.

Dear Devotees,

Please accept my humble obeisances. All glories to Śrīla Prabhupāda.

For those who are adept at reading Sanskrit and wish to study the *Manu-saṁhitā* (in parts or in entirety), I've managed to find and upload the entire *Manu-saṁhitā* with Six Commentaries in Devanagari Script.

Download Link: <https://archive.org/details/manusmriti>

If this link is not working for any reason, I have uploaded the same file to

² <http://www.dandavats.com/?p=11722>

another location:

Alternate Link:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/fkyvu5wqd8591jw/manusmriti_six_commentaries.pdf (84.41 MB)

Kindly Note:

For those who are ISKCON devotees, there is sometimes a tendency to pick out principles out of the *Manu-saṁhitā* and try to think of applying them in our society. This is at many times discouraged by Śrīla Prabhupāda and other acharyas of our Sampradaya, who state often that the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* is the de-facto smṛiti literature for a vaishnava society. The application of the *Manu-saṁhitā* has been discouraged many times by our acharyas as seen in the following quotes:

(a) “Yes, but we do not keep him shudra. A devotee is no longer shudra. We are creating *brāhmaṇas*. Just like these Europeans and Americans. They, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, are mlecchas, yavanas. But we are not keeping them mlecchas and yavanas. They are *brāhmaṇas*.” (Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Room Conversation, 5 June 1974)

(b) “It is to be understood that the propagation of Mayavada philosophy by Sri Mahadeva and the propagation through Manu of social religious scriptures by Lord Brahma were both meant for bewildering unqualified people.” — (Appendix to ‘*brāhmaṇa and Vaishava*’ of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Thākura)

(c) “The varnashrama system continued purely for a long time, until Jamadagni and his son Parashuram, of kshatriya natures, claimed themselves as *brāhmaṇas*. By following a varna contrary to their nature out of self interest, they created friction between the *brāhmaṇa* and ksatriya classes. Because of this seed of enmity between the two classes, the judging varna by birth became fixed. In time, this system of varnas without reference to nature entered covertly in the *Manu-saṁhitā* and other scriptures.” (*Sri Krishna Samhita* of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura)

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura has clearly said in his quote (above) that the social principles in *Manu-saṁhitā* are for bewildering unqualified people. Therefore, the uploader humbly suggests devotees that this literature be seen only from the point of view of study and not from the point of view of social application.

This upload is now made available for the pleasure of the devotees of Lord

Hari by, their servant,

hari parshad das.

To which I responded thusly (reformatted for easier reading):

This text has many problems. First of all if *Manu-saṁhitā* is so bad why is he sharing it with us?

Hari Parshad says: “who state often that the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* is the de-facto smṛiti literature for a vaishnava society.”

Hari Bhakti Vilasa is not a substitute for *Manu-saṁhitā*. *Manu-saṁhitā* is a dharma sastra, while *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* is a Pancaratrika text. They serve two different purposes and are not interchangeable.

Hari Parshad says: “The application of the *Manu Smṛiti* has been discouraged many times by our acharyas as seen in the following quotes:”

This is simply not true. There are about 53 hits in the Veda base to the word “*Manu-saṁhitā*” all of them positive. Hari Parshad mistakenly says that Śrīla Prabhupāda and other acaryas say that we should not implement them in society but this is the exact opposite of what Śrīla Prabhupāda says. In the purport to *Bhagavad-gīta* (2.21) SP states that it is “**the lawbook for mankind.**” Laws are meant to be followed not just studied.

In *Bhagavad-gīta* 3.21 purport SP writes:

“A teacher must follow the principles of sastra (scripture) to reach the common man. The teacher cannot manufacture rules against the principles of revealed scriptures. The revealed scriptures, like ***Manu-saṁhitā*** and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society. Thus the leader’s teaching should be based on the principles of the standard rules as they are practiced by the great teachers.” Here again SP says that they are to be followed, which means to apply the rules of Manu. And specifically in his purport to BG 16.7 SP describes the modern concept of womanly life (feminism) as demonic and instead we should follow the dictates of ***Manu-saṁhitā***.

In his purport to SB 1.9.27 SP writes “Actually the qualified brāhmaṇas are meant to give direction to the kings for proper administration in terms of the scriptures like the ***Manu-saṁhitā*** and Dharma-sastras of Parasara.” In purport to SB 2.1.36 SP writes “The *Manu-saṁhitā* is the standard lawbook for humanity, and every human being is advised to follow this great book of social knowledge.”

“Thus there is no peace in the world. The conclusion is that if we want real peace and order in the human society, we must follow the principles laid down by the *Manu-saṁhitā* and confirmed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.” SB7.8.48 purport

There are numerous similar statements that are in direct contradiction to what Hari Parshad stated.

Regarding other acaryas like Srila Bhakti Siddhanta and Bhaktivinode Thakura we understand through Śrīla Prabhupāda if we want to get the right understanding. And since it clear that Śrīla Prabhupāda often quoted *Manu-saṁhitā* as the Law Books for mankind that his stand is the same as the previous acaryas.

Still, we would like to point out that Hari Parshad has taken the quote of Srila Bhakti Siddhanta from the appendix of the Brāhmaṇa and Vaisnava debate out of context. First, we should note that Srila Bhakti Siddhanta quotes or mentions Manu 24 times in that text mostly as supporting evidence to substantiate his position. If Manu is wrong why would Srila Bhakti Siddhanta use it as supporting evidence? When we read the text surrounding the small snippet provided by Hari Parshad the true meaning manifests itself. This text is in regards to Sukadeva Gosvami who was a paramahansa and not obliged to follow *Manu-saṁhitā* and Varnashrama dharma. Others who are bewildered by the material energy, that means us, do have to follow it.

“According to the injunction *na prakatatvam iha bhakta janasya paśyēt*—“a devotee should not be seen from a materialistic point of view,” the disciplic succession from Vyasadeva does not consider that spiritual masters are burnt in the blazing fire of material existence. The nature of the material world is that whether one’s son is honest or dishonest, everyone should give up the worship of Hari, cry out “O my son!” and forget Kṛṣṇa. But the similar expression displayed by Vyasa is simply to increase the ignorance of the mundane fruitive workers and bewilder them. Actually Sukadeva was a great Vaisnava and a renounced paramahansa. Remaining aloof from his association is not acceptable to Vyasa and his descendants. In order to convince the materialists of this fact, such a pastime was enacted by Sri Vyasadeva. The pastimes of Sri Sanatana Gosvami suffering pain from boils and Sri Kṛṣṇacandra being hit by the arrow of a hunter named Uddhava were both enacted to increase the illusion of ignorant people. It is to be understood that the propagation of Mayavada philosophy by Sri Mahadeva and the propagation through Manu of social religious scriptures by Lord Brahmā were both meant for bewildering unqualified people. Sri Sukadeva was an ideal personality and spiritual master of the entire

world. As soon as he completed his study with Vyasadeva, he set out to bestow mercy on all living entities. From the external point of view the return of paramahansa Sri Sukadeva to the royal assembly of Pariksit and his association with Suta Gosvami may create apparent contradictions, but according to the considerations of paramahamsas, these were pure standards of behavior. One who does not accept this commits an offence at the feet of the spiritual master.”

And when we read the whole of the *Brāhmaṇa Vaisnava* debate Srila Bhakti Siddhanta is not condemning dharma sastras like Manu nor is he advocating that we not follow dharma. Srila Bhakti Siddhanta himself was a very moral and upright person who strictly followed dharma and was the one who pushed the principle that “purity is the force.”

There is a concordance that shows verses from Manu that are found in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* for example MS 2.215 and SB 9.19.17.

Baladeva Vidya Bhusana says:

“If matter were accepted as the original cause of creation, all the authorized scriptures in the world would be useless, for in every scripture, especially the Vedic scriptures like the *Manu-smṛti*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead is said to be the ultimate creator. The ***Manu-smṛti* is considered the highest Vedic direction to humanity.** Manu is the giver of law to mankind, and in the *Manu-smṛti* it is clearly stated that before the creation the entire universal space was darkness, without information and without variety, and was in a state of complete suspension, like a dream. Everything was darkness. The Supreme Personality of Godhead then entered the universal space, and although He is invisible, He created the visible cosmic manifestation. In the material world the Supreme Personality of Godhead is not manifested by His personal presence, but the presence of the cosmic manifestation in different varieties is the proof that everything has been created under His direction. He entered the universe with all creative potencies, and thus He removed the darkness of the unlimited space. ... If one tries to nullify the conclusions of the Vedas by accepting an unauthorized scripture or so-called scripture, it will be very hard for him to come to the right conclusion about the Absolute Truth. The system for adjusting two contradictory scriptures is to refer to the Vedas, for references from the Vedas are accepted as final judgments. When we refer to a particular scripture, it must be authorized, and for this authority it must strictly follow the Vedic injunctions. If someone presents an alternative doctrine he himself has manufactured, that doctrine will prove itself useless, for any doctrine that tries to prove that Vedic evidence is meaningless immediately proves itself meaningless. **The followers of the Vedas unanimously accept the authority of Manu** and Parasara in the

disciplic succession.” CC 1.6.14-15 purport

Regarding Bhaktivinode’s *Kṛṣṇa Samhitā*, if any text needs to be approached with great caution it is not *Manu-samhitā* but *Kṛṣṇa Samhitā*. This text was written for a very specific audience, the Bhadrалока of late 19th century Bengal. It was an experiment by BVT in his earliest preaching days and he never repeated it. So to take a quote from this text without seeing what else BVT wrote on the subject is a formula for disaster.

Bhaktivinode wrote:

“The ***Manu-samhitā*** and other dharma-sastras written down by other great sages are *smṛti-sastras*, corollaries written in pursuance of the original *śruti-sastras* known as the Vedas, which are eternal transcendental sound directly manifested from the Supreme Lord, Sri Kṛṣṇa, and are thus absolutely self-perfected and free of mundane defect. Being corollaries in pursuance of the directions of the Vedas, the dharma-sastras are held in high esteem, just as the law books defining authorized and unauthorized actions in human society are similarly highly regarded throughout civilized society.” *Jaiva Dharma* chapter 3

“The *sattvika-vaisnava-puranas*, the religious laws of **Manu**, the six schools of Vedic philosophy, and the entire literature and medical science of the Vedas are the four perfected subjects directly spoken by the Supreme Lord. In an attempt to distort their clear and primary purport no one must challenge or debate upon these topics.” *Jaiva Dharma* chapter 18

“Are the conclusions of a bona fide acarya and an unauthorized acarya the same?”

“After carefully discussing the Vedas and the Vedanta-sutras, the acaryas have drawn two kinds of conclusions. Srimat Sankaracarya preached the philosophy of monism based on the conclusions put forth by the sages like Dattatreya, Astavakra, and Durvasa. This is one kind of conclusion. The Vaisnava acaryas preach the science of pure devotional service based on the conclusion put forth by the great souls like Narada, Prahlada, Dhruva, and **Manu**. This is other kind of conclusion.”

Sri Manah-sikṣa Chapter 9

Bhaktivinode continued:

“What is the difference between *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* and the smṛti composed by the karmis?”

“To protect the constitutional duties of the devotees, Srimad Gopala Bhatta

Gosvami composed the book *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika*. According to Vedic injunctions, Aniruddha Bhatta, Bhima Bhatta, and Srimad Govindananda Bhatta wrote separate smrtis for the karmis. Sri Narayana Bhatta also wrote a book about the injunctions of the smrtis for the karmis, and Sri Bhavadeva Bhatta wrote a similar book for persons who are fond of Vedic rituals. The *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* was composed from authentic statements of the Vedas, Puranas, and dharma-sastras, headed by the **Manu-samhitā**. After carefully considering the subject of nama-aparadha, and rejecting the process of worshipping the forefathers and the demigods, Srimad Gopala Bhatta Gosvami wrote *Sat-kriya-sara-dipika* for the benefit of the devotees of Govinda who are either outcastes or situated on the platform of varnasrama.” (Bhaktivinode *Vani Vaibhava* 36)

Jiva Gosvami in his *Tattva Sandharba* (12.2) quotes *Manu* and *Mahabharata* as major authorities.

“This is why the *Mahabharata* (Adi-parva 1.267) and **Manu-samhitā** state, ‘One should complement one’s understanding of the Vedas with the help of the Itihasas and Puranas.’ And elsewhere it is stated, ‘The Puranas are called by that name because they complete.’ It is not possible to ‘complete’ or explain the meaning of the Vedas with something that is not Vedic in nature, just as it is improper to finish an incomplete gold bracelet with lead.”

In conclusion is clear that we are supposed to apply Manu-samhitā to our life.

If one is concerned that some texts in Manu regarding caste by birth have been interpolated then as Vallabhacarya has suggested one should resort to the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* and if there is a contradiction then the later texts should be accepted.

In his essay “An analysis of the paper ‘Some Evidence Regarding Education and Guruship for Vaishnavis’”³ Gokula Ranjana Prabhu addresses several criticisms of *Manu-samhitā* made by the authors; that it was full of contradictions, interpolations, not applicable in Kali-yuga, and not a principal authority. The *purvapaksa* is in red.

MANU-SAMHITA

Śrīla Prabhupāda often quoted the following selections from *Manu-samhitā*:

na strī svātantryam-arhati (9.3)

Women should not be given independence.

³ <https://archive.org/details/analysis-of-education-and-guruship-vaisnavis/page/16/mode/1up>

And also,

pravṛttir eṣa bhūtānām nivṛttis tu mahā-phalaḥ (5.56)

Everyone in material life is attracted to furthering the way of attachment (*pravṛtti-mārga*), but the greatest treasure is to be gained by following the path of detachment (*nivṛtti-mārga*).

However, Śrīla Prabhupāda did not always support the conclusions of this literature:

Yes, but we do not keep him *sūdra*. A devotee is no longer *sūdra*. We are creating *brāhmaṇas*. Just like these Europeans and Americans. They, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, are *mlecchas*, *yavanas*. But we are not keeping them *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. Just like these European and American boys. They are accepting the Vedic regulative principles: no illicit sex, no meat-eating, no intoxication, no gambling. So they are no more *sūdras* or *caṇḍālas*. They are *brāhmaṇas*. (Room Conversation, 5, June 1974.)

According to the *Manu-saṁhitā* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-saṁhitā*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-saṁhitā* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished. (Secretary's letter to Madhusudana, 19 May 1977.) [I (Shyamasundara Dasa) have personally addressed this letter at the [beginning](#) of this text.]

Śrīla Prabhupāda may have not always supported **all** the conclusions of the *Manu-saṁhitā* (although this is debatable), but he definitely supported at least its conclusions regarding the duties of women by repeatedly referring to *Manu-saṁhitā* in this regard.

CONTRADICTIONS

Manu-saṁhitā says different things about women. Sometimes its thrust is to speak highly of them:

prajānārthaṁ mahā-bhāgāḥ pūjārḥā gṛha-dīptayaḥ (9.26)

Women are to be worshipped. They are extremely auspicious. They are the illuminators of the home.

*yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ
yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvās-tatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ (3.56)*

Wherever women are worshipped, the demigods reside, and wherever they are not worshiped, all activities end in failure.

While some other sections speak derogatorily:

paum̐scalyāc cala cittāc ca naisnehyāc ca svabhāvataḥ (9.15)

Women are by nature adulterous, fickle-hearted, and devoid of all love.

nirindriyā hy amantrās ca striyo ʼṅtam iti sthitih (9.18)

Women are to be considered as devoid of all sense, devoid of all mantras, and full of falsity.

Sometimes we even find both kinds of statements in the same chapter — Chapter 9. No statement is offered directly in *Manu-saṁhitā* that resolves this incongruity.

But *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* also “speak derogatorily”, for example:

kvāpi sakhyam na vai strīṅām vṛkāṅām hṛdayam yathā

...you should know that the heart of a woman is like that of a fox. There is no use making friendship with women. (9.14.36)

*striyo hy akaruṅāḥ krūrā durmarṣāḥ priya-sāhasāḥ
ghnanty alpārthe ʼpi viśrabdham patim bhrātaram apy uta*

Women as a class are merciless and cunning. They cannot tolerate even a slight offense. For their own pleasure they can do anything irreligious, and therefore they do not fear killing even a faithful husband or brother.
(9.14.37)

Should we also reject *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* because of that? Of course not. Rather, we should see that there is an agreement between the *Manu-saṁhitā* and the *Bhāgavatam*. These statements may seem “derogatory” but actually they are not—no spiritual authority (*ācārya* or *śāstra*) will ever speak of women derogatorily.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gives us the proper perspective on how to resolve this “apparent incongruity”:

Good population in human society is the basic principle for peace, prosperity and spiritual progress in life. The *varṇāśrama* religion's principles were so designed that the good population would prevail in society for the general spiritual progress of state and community. Such population depends on the chastity and faithfulness of its womanhood. As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation. Therefore, both children and women require protection by the elder members of the family. By being engaged in various religious practices,

women will not be misled into adultery. According to Cāṇakya Paṇḍita, women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy. So the different family traditions of religious activities should always engage them, and thus their chastity and devotion will give birth to a good population eligible for participating in the *varṇāśrama* system. On the failure of such *varṇāśrama-dharma*, naturally the women become free to act and mix with men, and thus adultery is indulged in at the risk of unwanted population. Irresponsible men also provoke adultery in society, and thus unwanted children flood the human race at the risk of war and pestilence. (Purport to *Bhagavad-gītā* 1.40).

And:

A woman's nature has been particularly well studied by Kaśyapa Muni. Women are self-interested by nature, and therefore they should be protected by all means so that their natural inclination to be too self-interested will not be manifested. Women need to be protected by men. A woman should be cared for by her father in her childhood, by her husband in her youth and by her grown sons in her old age. This is the injunction of Manu, who says that a woman should not be given independence at any stage. Women must be cared for so that they will not be free to manifest their natural tendency for gross selfishness. There have been many cases, even in the present day, in which women have killed their husbands to take advantage of their insurance policies. This is not a criticism of women but a practical study of their nature. Such natural instincts of a woman or a man are manifested only in the bodily conception of life. When either a man or a woman is advanced in spiritual consciousness, the bodily conception of life practically vanishes. We should see all women as spiritual units (*aham brahmāsmi*), whose only duty is to satisfy Kṛṣṇa. Then the influences of the different modes of material nature, which result from one's possessing a material body, will not act. (Purport to *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* 6.18.42).

As for different kinds of statements in the *Manu-saṁhitā*—that alone is not a solid reason to altogether reject it as non-authoritative. One may easily understand and relate to the praise of women—they should be protected and respected, at the same time one may not so easily relate to the negative statements. However, such negative statements about women are present in many Vedic scriptures (sometimes even word for word). As we understand from Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport quoted above all these statements are meant to ensure women's protection.

We do not want to focus on these statements, however just to give an example we will reproduce some of them here:

tasmāt striyo nirindriyā adāyādīr api pāpāt puṁsa upastitaram (Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, Tāittirīya-saṁhitā, 6.5.8.10)

Therefore women are powerless, have no inheritance, and speak more humbly than even a bad man.⁴ (Compare with the *Manu-smṛti*, 9.18 cited above.)

Such “derogatory” statements about women are also there in the *Ṛg-veda*, which has many hymns composed by the female *Ṛṣis*. If the contradictory statements about women are sound reasons for a scripture to be considered interpolated then we will also have to put the *Ṛg-veda*, which has been accepted by the authors as authoritative, in the same category. The authors quoted two verses from the 10th *Maṇḍala* of *Ṛg-veda* to show that women have qualification to speak on transcendental topics, however the same 10th *Maṇḍala* also says the following “derogatory” things about women:

*na vai straiṇāni sakhyāni santi sālāvṛkāṇām hṛdayānyetā (Ṛg-veda, 10.95.15)*⁵

With women there can be no lasting friendship: hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women. (Compare with the verses from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (9.14.36-37) quoted above.)

This is a hymn composed by *Urvaśī* (the *Ṛṣi* of this *sūkta*), who is a woman herself and thus she probably knows what she is speaking about. Also, according to the authors, she must have “taught and initiated others in these hymns, for only the creator of a hymn or those coming in the creator’s disciplic succession can initiate others,” so we can safely assume that *Manu-smṛti* and similar works got this knowledge from such *śrutis*. A few other examples:

*abhrātaro na yoṣaṇo vyantaḥ patirīpo na janayo durevāḥ
pāpāsah santo anṛtā asatyā idam padam ajanatā gabhīram (Ṛg-veda, 4.5.5)*

“Like youthful women without brothers, straying, like dames who hate their lords, of evil conduct, They who are full of sin, untrue, unfaithful, they have engendered this abysmal station.”

*indraś cid ghā tad abravīt striyā aśāsyam manaḥ
uto aha kratum raghum (Ṛg-veda, 8.33.17)*

“Indra himself hath said, The mind of woman brooks not discipline, Her intellect hath little weight.”

strīr eva tad-anugāḥ kurute tasmāt striyaḥ pumso ’nuwartmāno bhāvukāḥ (Śukla

⁴ *The Veda Of The Black Yajus School Entitled Taittirīya Sanhita*, translated from the original Sanskrit prose and verse by Arthur Berriedale Keith, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1914.

⁵ In this section about *Ṛgveda*:

- Sanskrit text is taken from: *Ṛgveda-sanhita with the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya*, Vaidika Samsodhana Mandala, Poona, in 4 Vols, 1936-1946”

- English translation is from: *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, translated with the popular commentary by R.T.H. Griffith, Second Edition, Benares, 1897.

Yajurveda, Śatapatha- brāhmaṇa, 13.2.2.4)

“He thereby makes women to be dependent, whence women are sure to be attendant upon man.”⁶

So, nothing wrong with Manu on this.

INTERPOLATIONS

Taking note of this and other points, various scholars have opined that the *Manu-saṁhitā* we see today has suffered from considerable interpolation.

Again, we are not told who those “various scholars” are. Śrīla Prabhupāda or any other previous ācārya never said this. A scholar named Patrick Olivelle, who is a famous authority on the *Dharma-śāstra* in the secular world, prepared the Critical Edition of the *Manu-smṛti*. He discusses there possible contradictions and interpolations and here is what he says about Chapter Nine that has both kinds of statements (“derogatory” and “high”):

Chapter Nine: This chapter addresses the last three grounds for litigation: marital law, inheritance, and gambling. The sections on marital law and inheritance are remarkably free of obvious redactional interventions. (Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.51).

There of course might have been some cases of interpolation, but as we shall see below, it certainly wasn't that “considerable”.

In the introduction to the earliest known commentary on the *Manu-saṁhitā* by Medhatithi, we find the following verse written by the scribe of the commentary:

*mānyā kāpi manu-smṛtis-tad-ucitā vyākhyāpi medhātithēḥ
sā luptaiva vidher-vaśād kvacid-āpi prāpyam na tat-pustakam
kṣoṇīndro madanaḥ sahāraṇa-suto deśāntarād-āhṛtaiḥ
jīṛṇoddhāram-acīkarat tata itas-tat-pustakair likhyate*

Earlier, there was another *Manu-saṁhitā* with a suitable commentary by Medhatithi. That is, however, lost now due to the influence of providence and is no longer available. The king named *Madana*, the son of *Sahāraṇa*, procured some scattered portions from various places and the remaining book was rewritten.

First, this verse does not say at all that “there was another *Manu-saṁhitā*.” It simply says that *Manu-smṛti* is “*mānyā*” - venerable.

⁶ *The Satapatha-Brahmana*, translated by J.Eggeling, Oxford, 1900, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.44, p.300.

Second, Medhatithi's commentary with most certainty is not the earliest commentary—it was preceded by Bhāruci's commentary (see below).

This section of the paper offers an interesting methodology—no *ācārya*, no authority has ever said that present *Manu-saṃhitā* is different from the original version and only because some scribe in some manuscript says that, and we are now obliged to accept that without question, as if it were a Vedic injunction. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that current editions of *Manu-smṛiti* have changed little over time if they have changed at all.

This issue is also addressed by Prof. V.P. Kane in his “*History of the Dharma-śāstra*”, Vol.1, p.269:

In several Mss. of the *bhāṣya* at the end of several *adhyāyas* occurs a verse which says that a king named Madana, son of Sahāraṇa, brought copies of Medhātithi's commentary from another country and effected a restoration (*jṛṃoddhāra*). This does not refer to the restoration of the text of Medhātithi, but to the completion of the library of the king, who was Madanapāla, son of Sadhāraṇa and flourished, as we shall see later on, in the latter half of the 14th century.

“Later on” means on the p.381-389 of the same Vol.1. The Madanapāla, son of Sadhāraṇa (Sahāraṇa in Prakrit) was the king and a great patron of learned men and is attributed with several works, many of which were actually composed by his protegee Viśveśvara Bhaṭṭa, the most famous of them is *Madana-pārijāta*—which is a work on smṛti. Madanapāla also compiled an Ayurvedic work called “*Madana-vinoda-nighaṇṭu*”, which is a dictionary of drugs. Besides that he also wrote several works on astronomy, among which - a commentary on *Sūrya-siddhānta* “*Sūrya-siddhānta-viveka*” completed in 1402 AD.

It is established that Medhātithi lived not earlier than 820 AD and not later than 1050 AD (Kane, Vol.1, p.275). So even if we still doubt that Medhātithi's commentary and his version of *Manu-smṛiti* is different from the present version, such doubts have no ground whatsoever because besides Medhātithi there were many other old commentators of the *Manu-smṛiti*, like for example:

- Bhāruci, 7th-9th AD, who is identified as one of the proponents of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* philosophy before Rāmānuja.⁷
- Govindarāja, ca. 1050-1100 AD;
- Kullūka Bhaṭṭa, ca. 1150-1300 AD;

Their readings almost entirely agree with Medhātithi's (except for several verses that are not commented upon by Medhātithi), and Kullūka Bhaṭṭa usually follows Medhātithi in his commentary while Medhatithī in many ways follows Bhāruci. None of them mention that previously there was another, different version of the *Manu-saṃhitā*. So if their versions agree

⁷ See: –Kane, Vol.1, p.264-268

–J.Duncan, P.Derrett (ed.), *Bharuci's Commentary on the Manusmṛiti*, Vol.1, Wiesbaden, 1975; pp.4-17.

–P.Olivel, *Dharmaśāstra: a textual history*, in “Hinduism and Law: An Introduction”, Edited by Timothy Lubin, Donald R. Davis and Jayanth K. Krishnan. Cambridge University Press: 2010, pp.52-54.

with that of Medhātithi, then how could Madanapāla arrange “rewriting the remaining book” in 14th century AD?

Or, in the words of Prof. Kane (Vol.1, p.273): “From Medhātithi's bhāṣya it is perfectly clear that the text of Manu on which he commented was practically the same that we have now.”

Another proof is that there is another very famous *dharma-śāstra* called *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* which, according to scholars (Kane, Olivelle) was “written” not later than 9th century AD. Here is what they say about it:

Yājñavalkya (1.4) places Manu at the head of his list of the authors of *Dharmaśāstras*, the first such list in existence. Yājñavalkya's dependence on the MDh has been considered in detail by Kane (1960-75, I: 430) and I agree fully with his conclusion: “The correspondence of Yājñavalkya's words with the text of Manu is in most cases very close, so much so that one cannot help feeling that Yāj. had the *Manusmṛti* before him and purposely made an attempt to abridge some loose expressions of Manu.” Indeed, the abridgment and the tighter organization of the material are the main features of Yājñavalkya. He has between 1003 and 1010 verses depending on the recension, as opposed to the 2680 in the MDh. We have clear examples of Yājñavalkya's making a single pithy verse out of several prolix ones of Manu.” (Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.67).

Manu-smṛti did not deserve such attack and criticism by the authors of the paper we are critiquing. No one in ISKCON seems to try to introduce its teachings about *prayascittas*, *śrāddha* etc. But we just cannot deny that Śrīla Prabhupāda referred to Manu almost every time he spoke about women's duties. A mere search in the Vedabase among his *vāñī* for the words *Manu-smṛti* or *Manu-saṁhitā* returns more than fifty references, and the great majority of them are related to the protection of women and, less, to the capital punishment of murderers and general praise of *Manu-saṁhitā*. For instance:

The revealed scriptures, like *Manu-saṁhitā* and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society. BG, 3.21p.

As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the *Manu-saṁhitā*, which is the law of the human race. Even up to today, those who are Hindu follow the *Manu-saṁhitā*. Laws of inheritance and other legalities are derived from this book. Now, in the *Manu-saṁhitā* it is clearly stated that a woman should not be given freedom. That does not mean that women are to be kept as slaves, but they are like children. Children are not given freedom, but that does not mean that they are kept as slaves. The **demons** have now neglected such injunctions, and they think that women should be given as much freedom as men. However, this has not improved the social condition of the world. Actually, a woman should be given protection at every stage of life. She should be given

protection by the father in her younger days, by the husband in her youth, and by the grown-up sons in her old age. This is proper social behavior according to the *Manu-saṁhitā*. But modern education has artificially devised a puffed-up concept of womanly life, and therefore marriage is practically now an imagination in human society. The social condition of women is thus not very good now, although those who are married are in a better condition than those who are proclaiming their so-called freedom. The **demons**, therefore, do not accept any instruction which is good for society, and because they do not follow the experience of great sages and the rules and regulations laid down by the sages, the social condition of the demoniac people is very miserable. BG16.7p.

The *Manu-saṁhitā* is the standard lawbook for humanity, and every human being is advised to follow this great book of social knowledge. SB2.1.36p.

The conclusion is that if we want real peace and order in the human society, we must follow the principles laid down by the *Manu-saṁhitā* and confirmed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. SB7.8.48p.

And this one is especially relevant here:

As we learn from the history of the *Mahābhārata*, or "Greater India," the wives and daughters of the ruling class, the *kṣatriyas*, knew the political game, but we never find that a woman was given the post of chief executive. This is in accordance with the injunctions of *Manu-saṁhitā*, but unfortunately *Manu-saṁhitā* is now being insulted, and the *āryans*, the members of Vedic society, cannot do anything. Such is the nature of Kali-yuga. (SB10.4.5p).

So this is what is most important for us—Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke many times from *Manu-saṁhitā* and especially in relation to the protection of women. One cannot prove that *Manu-saṁhitā* is entirely non bona-fide simply by juxtaposing quotations about *mlecchas* and women.

NOT APPLICABLE IN KALI YUGA

Even if one were to believe that the *Manu-saṁhitā* that is found today is not an interpolated version of the original one, one would still be discouraged to accept it as a current authority by the following statement of the *Parāśara-smṛti*

*kṛte tu mānavā dharmās tretāyām gautamāḥ smṛtāḥ
dvāpare śāṅkhalikhitāḥ kalau pārāśarāḥ smṛtāḥ (1.24)*

The *Manu-saṁhitā* is applicable in Satya-yuga, the *Gautama-smṛti* is applicable in Tretā-yuga, the *Śāṅkha-likhita-smṛti* is applicable in Dvāpara-yuga and the

Parāśara-smṛti is applicable in Kali-yuga.

Unfortunately, we are not provided here with any examples from the *Parāśara-smṛti* to see how it is different from *Manu-saṁhitā* and what exactly makes it applicable in Kali-yuga to the extent that it becomes even more applicable than the *Manu-smṛti*. In fact, although stating that *Mānava-dharma* is for Kali-yuga, *Parāśara-smṛti* refers to Manu so many times that one cannot help but think that Manu is the foremost authority on *Dharma* that Parāśara encourages us to follow. (For some examples of such quotes— see the “History of Dharma-sastra”, Vol.1, p.194).

Besides that, *Parāśara-smṛti*⁸ (9.51) calls Manu “the knower of all scriptures”:

*manunā caivam ekena sarvaśāstrāṇi jānatā
prāyaścittam tu tenoktam goghnaś cāndrāyaṇam caret*

The performance of a Chandrayana has been enjoined by Manu, **the only one who knew all the scriptures**, as an expiation, under any circumstance, for the sin of cow killing. [emphasis added]

As for the *Parāśara-smṛti* being the main *dharma-śāstra* for the Kali-yuga—it is in fact debatable, considering that *Manu-smṛti* is highly comprehensive and fully describes all the details of different divisions of *dharma*, while *Parāśara-smṛti* is much lesser and does not describe all the intricacies of *dharma*. In fact the section on *Vyavahāra*, which must describe legal procedures, is entirely absent from the *Parāśara-smṛti* (this was analyzed as early as 1830 by T.Strange in the Preface to his book “Hindu Law”⁹).

So, here are some relevant quotes from the *Parāśara-smṛti*:

It also sometimes “speak highly” about women:

striyo vṛddhās ca bālās ca na dusyanti kadācana (7.35)

Women, old people and children are never contaminated.

And it also prescribes their dependence on the husband:

*daridram vyādhitam mūrkham bhartāram yāvamanyate sā śunī jāyate mṛtvā sūkarī ca
punaḥ punaḥ* (4.16)

That wife who disrespects her husband because of his poverty, disease or ignorance, after death again and again becomes a female dog and a pig.

*patyau jīvati yā nārī uḥosya vratam ācaret
āyuṣyam harate bhartuḥ sā nārī narakam vrajet* (4.17)

⁸ *Parāśara-dharma-saṁhitā* with the commentary of Sāyaṇa Mādhavācārya, edited by V.S. Islampurkar, in 6 volumes, Mumbai, 1893-1919.

⁹ T.A.Strange, *Hindu Law*, London, 1830, p.xii.

That woman who undertakes a fasting vow when her husband is still living takes away the life span of her husband and goes to hell.¹⁰

*apṛṣṭvā caiva bhartāraṃ yā nārī kurute vratam
sarvaṃ tad rākṣasān gacched ity evaṃ **manur abravīt** (4.18)*

If a woman without asking permission from her husband took up a vow, all the results of such vow go to the rākṣasas, **thus Manu said.**

And it seems that *Parāśara-smṛti* is similarly “not so broad in its outlook”:

*prāpte tu dvādaśe varṣe yaḥ kanyāṃ na prayacchati māsi māsi rajas tasyāḥ pibanti
pitarāḥ svayam (7.5)*

If the girls has reached the age of twelve and the parents have not yet given her in marriage, they should personally drink her menstrual liquid month after month.

*mātā caiva pitā caiva jyeṣṭho bhrātā tathaiva ca
trayaḥ te narakāṃ yānti dṛṣṭvā kanyāṃ rajasvalām (7.6)*

The mother, father, elder brother of the girl—all these three go to hell if they see that her menstruation began.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once mentioned this injunctions from the *Parāśara-smṛti*:

I do not know exactly what is that śāstra, but they say that if the girl before marriage has menstruation, then the father has to eat that menstrual liquid. (Morning Walk -- Māyāpur, February 9, 1976).

So the words of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura are very much relevant here:

Moreover, the rules and regulations of a particular *Dharma-śāstra* were followed according to the particular place. In the opinion of some persons, at the beginning of the Kali age the *Manu Dharma-śāstra* and the doctrine of *Parāśara Muni* were prominently accepted, while the other twenty *Dharma-śāstras* were neglected. Others say that the doctrine of *Hārīta* was prominent and the activities prescribed by the other *Dharma-śāstras* were neglected.

Generally, whatever one found convenient was accepted, without regard for other's consent and liking. [bold emphasis added]

¹⁰ In his *Dig-darśini-tīkā* commentary to *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (12.73-74) Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes this verse along with a verse from the *Manu-smṛti* (5.155): *nāsti strīṇāṃ pṛthag yajño na vratāṃ nāpyuṣaṇam, patīm śusṛṣate yena tena svarge mahīyate*—“No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women apart from their husbands; if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven”. He explains that this verse refers to those who did not ask permission from their husbands or to those women who are not *vaiṣṇavas*.

(Brāhmaṇa and Vaiṣṇava, Prakṛti-jana-kāṇḍa¹¹).

NOT A PRINCIPAL AUTHORITY

A similar point is made by Srila Madhvācārya in his work *Mahābhārata-tātparya-nirṇaya*:

*vaiṣṇavāni purāṇāni pañcarātrātmakatvataḥ
pramāṇāny eva manvādyaḥ smṛtayo 'py anukūlataḥ*

Purāṇas which establish the supremacy of Vishnu are authority as they convey what is stated in *Pañcarātra*. *Smṛti śāstras* like those of Manu and others are also authority so far as they are consistent with these. (Part I)

As we have already shown above, *Manu-saṁhitā* is very much consistent with the best among the Vaiṣṇava *Purāṇas* – the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Thus it is remarkably the only *smṛti* named by Madhvācārya (*manv-ādyaḥ*, but not “*parāśara-ādyaḥ*”, although Parāśara was the father of Vyāsa, Madhvācārya's guru, or *hārīta-ādyaḥ*). So, this also indirectly shows the preeminence of the *Manu-smṛti* over all other *smṛtis*.

Not only Śrī Madhva but many other *ācāryas* also mention and laud *Manu-saṁhitā*. Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes it many times in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* (e.g. 1.92, 3.213, 3.310, 4.84, 4.351, 9.274, 11.796); Jīva Gosvāmī quotes it in his *Tattva-* and *Bhakti-sandarbhās*, as well as in his *Gopāla-campū* and Śrīdhara Svāmī even states in his commentary on the *Śrīmad-bhāgavatam* that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma Themselves studied *Manu-smṛti* from Sandīpani Muni (*'dharmān' manv-ādī-dharma-śāstrāṇi* – commentary to 10.45.34).

Citing *śruti* (*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* from the *Kṛṣṇa-Yajur-veda*), Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa also defends the authority of Manu in his *Govinda-bhāṣya* (2.1.1):

*manor āptatvaṁ tu taittirīyāḥ paṭhanti— “yad vai kiṁ ca manur avadat tad-bheṣajam”
iti*

However, Manu is authoritative because it is said in the *Taittirīya-saṁhitā* (2.2.10.2) “whatever Manu has declared is a cure.”

The authors previously told us that Jaimini's *Pūrva-mīmāṁsā sūtras* are “a valid and acceptable authority” because “they have been referred to by many *ācāryas* in their works, e.g. Srila Jiva Goswami in his *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā* and Srila Baladeva Vidyabhushan in his *Govinda-bhāṣya*”, but here we see that those very *ācāryas* also refer to the *Manu-saṁhitā*, then why the authors want us to reject it?

So, we just cannot dismiss the words of our Founder-*Ācārya*:

As we learn from the history of the *Mahābhārata*, or "Greater India," the

¹¹ Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, *Brahmana and Vaishnava*, translated by Bhumipati dasa, Vrajraja Press, 1999.

wives and daughters of the ruling class, the *kṣatriyas*, knew the political game, but we never find that a woman was given the post of chief executive. This is in accordance with the injunctions of *Manu-saṁhitā*, but unfortunately *Manu-saṁhitā* is now being insulted, and the *āryans*, the members of Vedic society, cannot do anything. Such is the nature of Kali-yuga. SB10.4.5p.

Another *smṛti* says:

vedārtha-pratibaddhatvāt prāmānyaṃ tu manoh smṛtam manv-ārtha-viṣarītā yā smṛtiḥ sā na praśasyate

Manu, however, is the authority, the tradition declares, because he is firmly anchored to the meanings of the Vedas. Any *smṛti* opposed to the tenor of Manu is not approved. (*Bṛhaspati-smṛti* as quoted in “Olivelle, Patrick. 2004. *The Law Code of Manu*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.69”).

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