1. **Question: Write an essay on Manu’s views on caste. (2016)**

**Answer:**

**Introduction**

Manu was a famous philosopher of ancient India. According to the Matsya Purana, sage Manu was the first ma created by God. Manusmriti was the first book written on the law in the world, which deals with social and moral conduct of a person. Manusmriti is also known as Dharmasutras of Manava. Manusmriti does not talk about caste but it talks about Varna viz. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra. There is no mention of Varna system according to birth but it advocates the system based on the qualities of a person. There are 12 chapters and 2690 Slokas in Manusmriti. It was first translated into English in 1794 by Sir William Jones.

**Caste**

The caste system or the Varna system was an essential part of the social fabric of the ancient Hindu society. Manu thought that there are four Major castes i.e. the Varnas which is divine origin. There are some Slokas in Maunsmriti where the existence of caste system is recognized. Manu Believed that the society is like a human body. The human body performs its function with the co-operation of its different organs. Like human body society also performs its duty with the co-operation of different castes. Manu classified the human body into four parts – head, arms, chest and feet. The head of the body thinks gives suggestion and take decision. The arms protect the body. The chest takes the responsibility of food and the feet helps to walk and move. Like the functions of these organs in society also there are four sections- the Brahmins, Kshtriya, Vaishyas and Sudra. The Brahmins represents the head of the body and performs the functions of intellects, give advice the king and take decision. The Kshtriya represent the arms of who protect the territory of the state. The represents the Vaishyas chest and performs the function of producers and the Sudra which is the lower part of body should provide service to other three castes.

**Migration within Caste (Varnas)**

According to Manu, the caste system is not based on birth. Therefore, there may be migration of caste. That means there may be caste mobility in caste system. Some of important aspects regarding caste migration are described as follows:

1. Manusmriti asserts that Brahmin can become Shudra and Shudra can become Brahmin. Similarly Kshtariyas and Vaishyas can also change their Varnas.
2. If a Shudra (uneducated) serves the educated ones, is polite, devoid of ego and stays in respectful company of knowledgeable ones, he/ she is considered as having a noble birth and stature.
3. There are several shlokas in Manusmriti that state that a person belonging to high Varna falls down to level of a Shudra (uneducated) if he does not conduct noble deeds. For example, A person who does not worship the Supreme Lord twice daily should be considered a Shudra.
4. A Brahmin acquires brilliance through company of noble persons and avoiding bad company. On contrary, if he indulges in bad company, he becomes a Shudra.
5. A Brahmin, Kshatriya or Vaishya who puts efforts in other areas except understanding and following the Vedic precepts becomes a Shudra and his future generations also suffer from ignorance of Vedas.
6. One becomes Brahmin only if he completes the education and not merely by taking birth in a Brahmin family or taking admission in Brahmin course of a gurukul. A Brahmin devoid of education is equivalent to an elephant made of wood or a deer made of leather. They are merely namesake and not real.
7. As per Manu, actual birth happens after completion of education. All human beings are Shudras or uneducated when born. Those who complete their education are supposed to have a new birth. Thus, they are called Dwija or Twice Born. Those who were unable to complete the education remain Shudra. This has nothing to do with birth or heredity. This is pure meritocracy.

**Criticism**

The caste system as viewed by Manu can be criticized from different angles. These criticisms are mentioned as follows;

1. Manu’s views regarding the classification of people on the basis of varnas are totally unscientific. He mentioned that the God, i.e. the Brhamma has created the people from his four Wings i.e. the Brahmins from his head, the Kshatriyas from arms or shoulders, the Vaishyas from chest and the Sudras from his feet is totally irrational.
2. Manu always tried to give privileges to and posed some restrictions on the lower caste, the Sudras.
3. The tendency of Manu’s was to establish the slavery system in society and he treated the lower caste as slaves of the upper caste, the Brahmins.
4. The view of Manu regarding the caste system was fully contradictory. On the one hand his desire was to establish hegemony of upper caste; on the other hand he supported the caste mobility or migration of castes from one caste to another.
5. One of the important virtues of Brahmins was to take education and by this they can intact their existing position in the society. Again he said that education should be open for all castes and by taking education the lower castes can reach to the position of upper castes. But, in his social stratification he imposed some restrictions for the lower castes for which it is no possible for the lower caste people to reach the position of upper caste.
6. Manu said that if a Brahmin did not performs his duty assigned by Vedas he was considered as the Sudra, the lower caste people. But, in actual practice it did not happened. Once he got the status of upper caste he never gave up this to the lower caste.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be said that the Varna system as said by Manu is not rigid. It is flexible and changes according to functions performed by the castes in their day to day life. He viewed that caste system should not be based on birth. He farther said that it is acquiring knowledge is the criteria of caste. The Brahmins can fall down to the Sudras if he takes liquor and again the Sudras can achieve the position of Brahmins through his noble deeds.