**Question: Discuss Social Laws of Manu as prescribed in Manusmriti.**

**Answer**

**Manu and his Social Law**

The term Manu is found with various meanings in Hinduism. In early texts, it refers to the archetypal man, or to the first man in the earth. The Sanskrit term Manu means, 'human'. In later texts, Manu is the title or name of fourteen Kshatriya rulers of earth.He is the first teacher according to legends. He revealed the essence of humanity to mankind and was the first legislator to prescribe norms of social life and practices, later incorporated in various Dharmashastra and Samhitas, premised on a moral view of history. Manu’s social lawis explained as follows;

**The Contents of Social Law:**

In social laws origin of the world is described in mythological ways. Here, mythological figure of Shyambhu (Brhamma or God) is the main creator of the world. All things the earth, human being universal, heaven, hell etc. originated from him. Besides this, sources of the law and Dharma, Dharma of social classes, rules relating marriages, inheritance, food (dietary), pollution and purification, rules for women and wives, rules relating to crimes, punishments, dispensation of justice**,** rules of action in normal times and times of adversity, Dharma of a Brahmin, rules of action for a King, Vaisyas and Sudras, rules relating to fasting and penance, fruits of action and actions for supreme good contained in social laws.

**Aim or purpose of Manu’s Social laws Prescribed in Manusmriti:**

1. Firstly, aim of social law of Manu is make people virtuous. Manusmriti prescribes some ‘codes of social conduct’ for both individual and society for virtuous life and attainment of supreme individual good. That means, if the principles of Manusmriti are followed it will bring an ideal life for both individual and society and so it is called supreme individual good. Here, there are some similarities between Plato and Manu. Both of them said that individual should attain some virtues to establish an ideal society.
2. Secondly, Manu desired to make a particular social structure in society and he considered it as just and virtuous. It is similar to the Platonic ideal state. In Platonic hierarchical system the top position of was occupied by the guardians and next was the soldiers and in the bottom the workers. But, Hierarchical, and Patriarchal social order of Manu was based on Varna system as prescribed in Vedas. The sequences from the top position of Manu’s hierarchical system was the Brahmin, Khastrya, Vaysa and in the bottom the Sudra. Probably, at his period the social order was not good and therefore, he made a social hierarchical system on the basis of Varna to make the people virtuous and maintain social order and to fulfill a social life as mentioned above.
3. Thirdly, the aim of Manu was to maintain the traditional social order of Hindu religion through Manusmriti. He was not the lone sage who said about the social order based on Veda. He just attempted to prescribe laws and to maintain the order and attainment of highest personal and social Good.

**Basis or Sources of Manu’s Social laws**

Manu prescribed four bases of social laws and these are

1. According to Manu the main basis of social order was the Shrutis as prescribed in Vedas, and Upanishads.
2. Other basis is social practices, traditions, conventions and conduct of virtuous people, sages and of wise persons.
3. Self satisfaction is another important basis of social law. Individual should not follow the social law blindly. If his conscience allows him he should follow the social laws, otherwise not.
4. There are three scales - Inferences, Perception and Authority through which the social laws can be proved and it was called Pramanas (proof). To justify the social laws no logic and reason should be applied. Because according to Manu all laws are given by God through His Vedas and therefore, it is not possible for people to justify these on the basis logic and reasons. These are the basis of social laws.

**Social Structure based on social laws**

Manu’s Views regarding society and its structure is multi-fold and these are explained as point wise as follows;

1. Society, for Manu, is the creation and manifestation of the self existing supreme Brahma, i.e. the creator who created the universe, air land, heave, hell etc.
2. According to Manu society is an organic whole. The four Varnas or social classes as its limbs. The organs of human body have no any existence if it is separated from the body. The body can perform functions with co-operation of different parts. Likewise, the society can perform its function with the co-operations with different Varna. This is similar to Plato’s ideas.
3. There are four fold divisions in society – Brahmans, Khastrya, Vaisya and Sudra. According to Manu this division of society is not just functional. It supposes a specific social hierarchy in society. The position of each Varna in the social hierarchy depends on the limb from which the Varna is said to have originated. It is assumed the four fold divisions are created from different parts of Brahma.
4. Unity of personal and common good Common good depends on proper discharge of duties by all the members of society. Similarly, personal good depends on the functioning of society as a whole, just like the health of body and of its limp are identified. It leads to the common good of society.

**Question: Discuss the Varna (Caste) System of Manu**

**Answer:**

**Varna (Caste) System**

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

1. **Brahmins (The priestly Class):** Brahmanasor the priestly class is predominantly spiritual class in society. The large portions of Slokas in Manusmriti are written onBrahmanas. Because, the Brahmin are on the top position of social hierarchy and it is absolute right of this caste to acquire knowledge of Veda. This caste is the treasure of knowledge and therefore, it is spiritually is the gate of knowledge. In modern terms they are like the scientists and research scholars. Among the twice born Brahmanas is the first importance. Brahmanas are considered gods on earth. The main functions of Brahmanas are – teaching and studying Veda, scarifying of their own benefits for others and giving and accepting aid. For special position in society they are also called privilege caste in society and as privilege caste they found some special facilities and these are – no tax, free lands and gifts, no capital punishment and lesser amount of punishment other than theft.
2. **Kshatriyas (administrators and army men):** The second important Varna is Kshatriyas, the military class. This caste enjoys the political powers. Its chief function is to protect people, territory of the country and maintain law and order in society. Other functions of this caste are to bestow gifts to Brahmanas, to offer sacrifices, like Brahmanas to study Veda and abstaining from sensual pleasures. Along with protecting the people and maintaining social order and peace it is also is to protect the King. The king isDivine origin. The creator created a king for the protection of whole world by drawing particle from the essence of *Anil* (wind), *Yam* (god of justice), *Surya* (sun), *Agni* (fire), *Varuna, Chandra* (moon) and *Kuber* (God of wealth). Therefore, the Kshatriyas are to protect the King because he is the head of the state.A king even though a child must not contempt by Kshatriyas.
3. **Vaishyas (traders, farmers and herdsmen):** Vaisyas are the agricultural traders, farmers and herdsmen who constitute the third eminent Dvija class. The economic conditions of state most depend on this class.

Vaisyas were to tend cattle, to bestow gifts to Brahmanas, to offer sacrifices, to study Veda, to lend money and to cultivate land. They are usually wealthy with rights on land and property. The state takes care to protect their property and trade from internal disturbances and external invasions. They form the taxpaying lot who finance the political and religious operations in the state. The prosperity and stability of the state mainly depends on agricultural production and trade. So, Vaisyas are very prominent class in the society and therefore, like Brhamanas and Kshatriyas they also enjoyed the privileges of being a Dvija (double born).

1. **Sudras (The Serving Class):** Sudras form the fourth Varna whose function is service to Dvijas i.e. Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. They were not considered Dvijas. (Double born) they are or once born. They have no access to Veda and other purificatory rites which are exclusive for the Dvijas. **Sudras** are even denied collection of wealth. Except for theft, they get maximum punishment for same offence. A Sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude. They are designated as outcaste and it happens due to their bad deed done in their early birth. Again a Brahmin does the bad deed in his present position he will born as Sudra in next birth. At present they are known as Dalits.

**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.

**Short Note**

**Manusmriti**

Manusmriti or Manava Dharmashartha is a mythical book of Hindu religion. It wasprobably Compiled in 220 BCE to 400 CE by mythical first man and lawgiver, Manu and his disciple Bhrigu. Manusmriti was a Compilation on moral, social, and religious code of Brahminical Hinduism of that time dealt mainly on dharma duties, righteousness, moral obligations, laws, conduct, virtues etc. for attainment of supreme personal and social Good. These codes are not secular code but based on only Hindu religion. Manusmriti is based on Shruti and Smriti. Shruti is the voice of God and the sages hear these voice and it’s remembered formed by the sages are called Smriti. The sages give religious teaching on the basis of Smritis. These Smritis are highest version of God so there is nothing above these Smritis. There are 12 chapters 2694 Shlokas. 1034 verses are related to Dharma of Brahmins and how to conduct and 971 verses for Dharma for Kshatriyas. It gave more importance on these upper Castes. Only few verses are found on Vysas and Sudras. Original text of Manusmriti is not available. There are only some interpretations and commentaries and these are also done from their own of interpreters. Over the fifty manuscripts; one by kullka Bhatta of Kolkata School of fifteen century and it was taken up by European scholars and now considered most authentic. First Sanskrit text has been translated into English in 1794, by Sir William. Jones, and on the basis of it, the British colonial government formulate the Hindu personal law. Some Indian scholars commented on the Vivekananda, Amebedkar and Gandhi did accept the script whole heartedly. Vivekananda thought Manusmriti is outdated and therefore, new Manusmriti is to written. Amebedkar was deadly against Manusmriti and he therefore, burnt in a bonfire on December 25, 1925. On the other hand**,** Gandhi accepted it as part of Shastra, but didn’t agree to contradicting and dehumanizing parts done against the lower castes of Hindu society. But, some other scholars admired the script and among them Swami Dayanand saraswati, Annie Besent, Friedrich Nietsche. Friedrich Nietsch even commented that the Bible should be replaced by Manusmriti.