



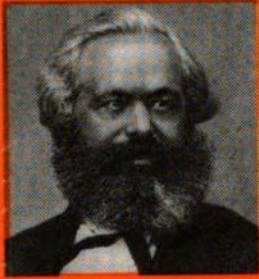
**For the solution  
of the 'Caste' question**



**Buddha is not enough**



**Ambedkar is not enough either**



**Marx is a Must**

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**Ranganayakamma**

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Buddha is not enough  
Ambedkar is not enough either  
Marx is a Must**

Telugu Original  
**Ranganayakamma**

English Translation  
B. R. BAPUJI

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**By Ranganayakamma**

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# Preface

## To the first Telugu edition

This is neither Buddha's biography nor Ambedkar's. Further, it is not Marx's biography either. This is a discussion concerning the 'Dalit' question based exclusively on Ambedkar's writings. However, I have confined myself only to those writings that deal with the 'Dalit' question and Caste system. Ambedkar had also discussed other issues like Division of labour, Division of Labourers, poverty, unemployment and economic exploitation. These issues are connected with the Dalit question and the Caste system. Hence all these issues find place in this book.

Ambedkar had also written on other themes like the 'Problem of the Rupee' and Large Scale Industry. But I have not included those issues which are not directly connected with the Dalit question. Even regarding Gandhi, I have not considered issues other than those Ambedkar cited in connection with the Dalit question.

For the purpose of this essay, I wanted to rely only on Ambedkar's writings. But, in couple of contexts where I could not find relevant information in Ambedkar's works, I had to turn to a few references from his biographies. I have given these details in the respective contexts.

This is, surely, a long essay. But its length is inevitable in view of the debatable issues.

**Ranganayakamma ★**

**13.10.2000**

★ **RANGANAYAKAMMA** (born 1939) is a writer of novels, short-stories and essays in Telugu. She published about 60 books that include *Andhakaaramloo*, *Sweet Home*, *Jaanaki Vimukti* (all novels), *Raamaayana Vishavruksham* (a critique of Raamaayana in the form of stories), *Marx 'Capital' parichayam* and *Intipanii Baitipanii* (essays). Apart from the present book, two other books of Ranganayakamma have been translated into English: *An Introduction to Marx's 'Capital'* (in 3 volumes) and *House Work and Outside Work*.



## Translator's Note

This translation is based on the third edition of the Telugu original. The original essay was first serialized in a Telugu weekly magazine, *Andhra Jyoti*, for about a year (3 December 1999-17 November 2000). It came out in the book form in November 2000, undergoing two more editions in December 2000 and January 2001.

A note on this translation is necessary since the source language, Telugu, and the receptor language, English, are *genetically* unrelated and *structurally* different. The differences in syntax (grammatical structure) and semantics (words and their meanings) of these two languages pose certain problems to a translator like me who knows English only as a second language and to a limited extent. However, I attempted to overcome these problems with the help of English language experts who went through my translation. Two persons have helped me in respect of overall language corrections (in grammar and vocabulary) without any reference to the source language text. They are: **Sudhakar Marathe**, Professor, Department of English, University of Hyderabad and **Meera Marathe**, who teaches English at Hyderabad. Both made useful corrections and suggestions to improve the quality of the translation. However I carried out those corrections and suggestions after discussing with the original authoress. I carried out almost all the grammatical and idiomatic corrections. But it was not possible to carry out some corrections concerning the style where the original writer thought such corrections might not represent her style.

Despite useful suggestions of the English language experts, the present translation may still have shortcomings due to either oversight or personal choice of the translator with regard to the suggestions made. Hence, the translator is responsible, not the language experts, for the shortcomings that may still remain.

A clarification on the quotations cited in this book is necessary. The original writer gave quotations from the Telugu translations of Ambedkar's writings (published by the Government of Andhra Pradesh). The quotations in this translation are taken from the English originals of Ambedkar's collected works (published by the Government of Maharashtra). The quotations are given in an indented form. The usual practice in English books is that quotation marks are not used when quotations are indented. However, for the sake of added clarity, we have used quotation marks along with the indented form. But, at some places, quotations are not given in indented form where they are intermittently followed by the writer's comments.

**B.R.Bapuji ★**

★ **B.R.Bapuji** is a Professor at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad. His other translations include Ranganayakamma's *An Introduction to Marx's 'Capital'* (in 3 volumes).

# **For the solution of the 'Caste' question**

## **Buddha is not enough**

## **Ambedkar is not enough either**

## **Marx is a Must**

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**I**t was about 35 years ago that I read for the first time about Ambedkar. I don't remember at all either the title of the book or its author. By the time I finished the book, I developed a liking for Ambedkar and anger for 'Mahatma Gandhi'. I have been reading books by Ambedkar and on Ambedkar now and then. My anger for Gandhi has strengthened. With Ambedkar, there began also 'criticism' along with 'liking'. There are reasons both for agreement on certain issues and rejection of certain other issues. When there are adequate reasons, both unity and criticism co-exist.

Ambedkar's style is very easily and smoothly understandable. Nowhere is it boring except where the translation is not at all good. His books read interesting since all the issues he discussed are worth knowing and discussing.

In the beginning, I used to think that Ambedkar wrote exclusively on the 'question of caste'. But it is not so. If we examine his volumes, it will be clear that he wrote on many other issues as well. The question of 'poverty', for instance, is also among the issues that he discussed. It appears that he wrote with great patience on many things: political problems, social problems, religious problems, linguistic states, the partition of India, etc.

Of all his work, research on the Hindu religious texts occupied, one might almost say 'gobbled up', most of his time. It appears that he researched into the entire ancient Hindu religious literature—without the exception of a single letter—Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Puranas, Smritis, Prabandhas and Kavyas. We would not realize this unless we go through all his volumes. No other expression except the 'drudgery' of the bullock drawing well-water is adequate to describe the toil that Ambedkar did for this purpose. This expression may in fact be inadequate to indicate that toil. It is such a great toil that we feel again and again: 'it is the

most futile activity to spend so much time on the dogmatic religious literature'. The patience with which a person does certain things is sometimes very necessary and laudable. But spending time on long discussion and argument on mythical stories and the prattling of the religious fools such as: 'when did 'Kaliyuga' begin? How many divisions or parts does a 'sacred thread' have? Are Brahma and Prajapati one and the same' and so on will not help to resolve any living problem. Such arguments and counter-arguments will in no way effectively influence the real lives of real people except for the relaxation and passing of time of one or two Sanskrit scholars among the millions of people in the country. But, research into Sanskrit scholarship was a matter of great interest for Ambedkar. His interest made possible for Ambedkar to perform such a heavy drudgery.

Another important aspect of Ambedkar's writings is the elaboration of Buddhism (Bouddha Dharma) with his own interpretations. Ambedkar has great reverence for Buddhism. Along with it he also harboured a great deal of opposition for Marxism. It is his deeply held belief that Buddhism is a greater theory than Marxism and that it is Buddhism that shows a real, illuminating path to human society. We find this discussion in his essays *Buddha and His Dhamma* and *Buddha or Karl Marx* and in some other contexts.

The world needs the theory that is powerful enough to illuminate the path. It is irrelevant whether that theoretician is Buddha, Marx, Ambedkar or someone else. That which remedies the disease alone is a medicine! That which emancipates from sufferings alone is the higher path. If it is Buddhism, we are obliged to follow it, to revere it. The question, however, is to ascertain which is the higher path! This is the thing, which we must ascertain. We are obliged to follow the thing which we ascertain to be the higher path.

We need to read Ambedkar's writings in order to arrive at a correct understanding of many issues which he discussed: the caste system, untouchability, poverty, Buddhism, Marxism, etc. We have to read them carefully and seriously. Whatever we read, we have to take everything that is useful. We have to follow it. We have to correct whatever needs correction. We have to abandon whatever is not useful. To do all this, however, we must first understand Ambedkar's ideas correctly.

Problems like castes and untouchability are not things that have arisen, so to speak, yesterday or today. They have been entrenched for thousands of years. But we don't have any written literature—other than religious texts and some inscriptions—that tells about them. The available sources may not be useful in many contexts. Yet they may be useful to some extent

in some contexts. When we don't find clear-cut bases for the problems, however, there is no way out except attempting to understand them by means of our own logic.

This does not mean that there were no other researchers who studied castes in India before Ambedkar. But the whole concern of our investigation here is entirely with Ambedkar; on his writings. Let us start with the 'caste question'.

# **1** ACCORDING TO AMBEDKAR, **HOW DID 'CASTES' ORIGINATE?**

All of us know what the religious texts say about 'castes'. Their explanation is as follows: This universe was originally in a long-drawn out sleep: every thing was fully dark, invisible and impossible to grasp. Then the Holy Soul (God) assumed a manifest form out of a latent form with his own power and created the five spirits by gradually ending darkness. The creator created Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras from his face, shoulders, thighs and feet respectively. He assigned the duty of reading the Vedas and performance of yajna and yaga to Brahmins, protection of the public to Kshatriyas, animal husbandry and cultivation to Vysyas and the duty of serving the first three Varnas was assigned to Shudras. The creator made this arrangement only for the sake of the welfare of the world. This is what the religious texts say. This crazy story that God alone created castes will continue further more. It is a futile exercise to talk about it further. When religious texts say with reference to any issue thus, 'God alone created this', it is enough if we ask a single question, namely, 'Then who created that God?' With this one question, that God, those religious texts and everything will fall asunder. Therefore, in order to find out the reason for any thing in the world, we have to search social reality instead of depending on the gimmicks which a creator does 'for the sake of the welfare of the world' and only then will we obtain fruitful result.

Some people who ponder over the 'caste question' say that 'the remnants of tribes might have transformed into castes'. Some others say that 'this is perhaps a question of division of labour; occupations themselves might have led to castes'. Many people are inclined toward the second opinion. There are, however, people who do not agree with this. Ambedkar too does not agree with this opinion. 'Don't we find division of labour in all countries? Then why did the caste system, which is absent in other countries, originate only in India?', this is how Ambedkar questions. This is, of course, a good question.

People who base their argument on the division of labour again say thus, Caste system did originate only in India because some special circumstances may have added themselves to the phenomenon of division of labour. Those special circumstances might have been absent in other countries'. But, they can't explain what those 'special circumstances' were. This argument does not conclude anything. We are left only with questions without answers.

Under these circumstances, Ambedkar declared that he had found 'the answer'. He stated that answer in his article "Castes in India", which he wrote in 1916. He reiterated it many a time in his article "The triumph of Brahminism" and in other contexts. In his first essay, "Castes in India", he explained that evil practices like Sati, girl-marriages, widowhood of women arose along with the problem of caste and that all these problems are in fact mutually interrelated.

We have to examine this explanation with a good deal of care since he claims to have discovered certain things which none had discovered until then.

Ambedkar's explanation of 'caste' begins like this:

"I need hardly remind you of the complexity of the subject I intend to handle. Subtler minds and abler pens than mine have been brought to the task of unraveling the mysteries of Caste; but unfortunately it still remains in the domain of the "unexplained", not to say of the "un-understood". I am quite alive to the complex intricacies of a hoary institution like Caste, but I am not so pessimistic as to relegate it to the region of the unknowable, for I believe it can be known. Theoretically, it has defied a great many scholars who have taken upon themselves, as a labour of love, to dig into its origin... I... limit myself to... the genesis, mechanism and spread of the caste system" (Vol. 1, pp.5-6).

After this, the contents of the article proceed as follows: According to ethnologists, the population of India is a mixture of Aryans, Dravidians, Mongolians and Scythians. All these stocks of people came into India from various directions and with various cultures, centuries ago, when they were in a tribal state. They all made their entry into the country by fighting with those who had come earlier than them. They settled down as peaceful neighbours after waging as many battles as they could. Through constant contact and mutual intercourse they evolved a common culture that superseded their own distinctive cultures. Thus,

"...Caste is a parcelling of an already homogeneous unit, and the explanation of the genesis of Caste is the explanation of this process of parcelling" (Vol.1, p.6).

What exactly does caste mean? What are its characteristics? Is there any essential characteristic? For although caste has such characteristics as pursuing the same occupation hereditarily, absence of inter-dining relations between one group and another, determination of membership in a group by birth in that group, these are not primary characteristics of caste. The essential characteristic is 'marriages that take place within the same group'. According to Ambedkar, this alone is the characteristic of the caste.

"...prohibition, or rather the absence of intermarriage —endogamy, to be concise—is the only one that can be called the essence of Caste when rightly understood" (Vol.1, p.8).

"Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy" (Vol. 1, p.9).

"...creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on exogamy...Thus the superposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste" (Vol. 1, p.9).

"If a group desires to make itself endogamous a formal injunction against intermarriage with outside groups will be of no avail, especially if prior to the introduction of endogamy, exogamy had been the rule in all matrimonial relations. Again, there is a tendency in all groups lying in close contact with one another to assimilate and amalgamate, and thus consolidate into a homogeneous society. If this tendency is to be strongly counteracted in the interest of Caste formation, it is absolutely necessary to circumscribe a circle outside which people should not contract marriages" (Vol. 1, p.10).

"...if we succeed in showing how endogamy is maintained, we shall practically have proved the genesis and also the mechanism of Caste" (Vol.1, p.9).

Let us express in our own words what we have observed so far. At one point of time in India's history, there existed groups of population that had become a homogeneous society. Marriages used to take place between those groups of population: from any side to any side. Let us call them inter-group marriages or 'exogamy'. However, exogamy began to transform into endogamy or intra-group marriages. The beginning of this endogamy itself is the beginning of the castes. If we understand how different groups in the population could maintain endogamy, it amounts to an understanding of the genesis of the castes—this is the point which we have observed in Ambedkar's explanation.

We have to examine this explanation much further. But, the beginning point of explanation itself is leading us to some doubts. How could that population still remain as different groups when intermarriages were taking

place without any restrictions? Could it (the population) remain so because of any other reason unconnected with marriages? Endogamy was meant to prevent the mixture of groups, wasn't it? Why were the groups not allowed to mix? For what purpose? Only if we are able to explain this will it amount to explaining the genesis of caste and not by explaining how different groups maintained endogamy. But, Ambedkar's analysis assumes that the explanation of how (instead of 'why') groups were not allowed to mix is the explanation of the genesis of castes. We have to understand this aspect properly since this is a discussion of 'the genesis of the caste'.

Ambedkar says:

"The question of origin is always an annoying question and in the study of caste it is sadly neglected; some have connived at it, while others have dodged it. Some are puzzled as to whether there could be such a thing as the origin of caste... As for myself I do not feel puzzled by the origin of caste in India for, as I have established before, endogamy is the only characteristic of caste and when I say *origin of caste* I mean the *origin of the mechanism for endogamy*" (Vol.1, p.14).

The two last mentioned observations are not mutually consistent. In one sentence, endogamy is the cause (origin) and 'caste' is its 'effect'. If we see the matter in this manner, the two (endogamy and caste) are not identical. But in the second sentence, Ambedkar said, 'whether you speak of origin of caste or origin of the mechanism of endogamy, both mean the same'. If we see the matter from this angle, both caste and endogamy are one and the same. What should we pick up as the opinion of the writer out of these mutually inconsistent opinions?

If he says 'endogamy is the basis of caste', his claim can not amount to finding the basis of caste. Then the question arises thus, "well, then what is the basis for endogamy? Why did exogamy transform itself into endogamy?" Unless we know the answer, the problem will not be resolved.

Or, if he says that 'both caste and endogamy mean the same', then we have to discover another, a third term as basis for both these phenomena. Yet this job remains to be done. This means, we have not found the 'basis' of caste by any means. The problem will not be solved if we take endogamy as the basis. It does not amount to finding the origin of the caste.

While this is so, Ambedkar's explanation of the caste begins elsewhere with 'four Varnas'.

## 1) 'Four Varnas'

According to Ambedkar, the characteristics of 'four Varnas' are as follows:

"We shall be well advised to recall at the outset that the Hindu society, in common with other societies, was composed of classes and the earliest known are the (1) Brahmins or the priestly class; (2) the Kshatriya, or the military class; (3) the Vaishya, or the merchant class and (4) the Shudra, or the artisan and menial class. Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel" (Vol.1, p.18).

Here, 'classes' do not mean 'classes that form due to exploitation of labour'. It is a common usage in language to refer different sections of society as 'classes'. In the same sense, Ambedkar is here referring to 'Varnas' as 'classes'.

According to Ambedkar's explanation, we need to notice the following aspects of the 'four Varnas':

(1) They are not yet 'castes'. 'Castes' are not yet formed. These are simply the earliest known 'classes'.

(2) These classes have formed on the basis of occupations. All the classes have 4 different kinds of occupations. A person is a Brahmin because he pursues a 'particular occupation'. Another person is a 'Shudra' because he pursues another kind of occupation. If we keep occupations aside, it is not possible to say that "this person is a Brahmin" and "that person is a Shudra". The class of a person has formed depending on the occupation that he pursues. This means, 'occupation' is the basis for 'class'.

(3) People in these classes can change their class in any direction. If a person who remained in the Shudra class for a certain period of time can change his class into that of a Brahmin or any other provided he improves his qualification. Similarly, a person in the Brahmin class will become a member of lower class if he lowers his qualification and returns again to Brahmin class if he improves qualification!

(4) It is these four Varnas that Ambedkar meant in terms of 'groups' in India that amalgamated into a 'homogeneous society'. He referred assimilation and amalgamation of groups despite the fact that one group existed as 'priestly class' and another as 'menial class'. Further, it is in this connection with these four Varnas that he referred to exogamous marriages that occurred in either direction.

These are the points which we have to remember concerning four Varnas.



The Varnas system transforms itself into the cast system. But, according to Ambedkar, the Varna system is much superior than the caste system because an individual in a Varna system could change his Varna. Moreover, marriages take place in either direction among Varnas. Because of these two features, Varna system is superior in his opinion.

Let us first discuss the issue of changing of the population of Varnas in either direction depending on qualification. Who was supposed to decide the qualifications if people wanted to change their Varnas? What are those qualifications? How will that process proceed?

While stating that officials holding the power to make such decisions as Manu and the Saptarishis, examine all the people once in four years and decide their Varna, Ambedkar elaborates the process of change as follows:

“That these are the stages by which Varna was converted into caste seems to have ample support from tradition as recorded in the religious literature. There is no reason why this tradition should not be accepted, as embodying something that is quite genuine. According to this tradition, the task of determining Varnas of a person was effected by a body of officers called Manu and Saptarishis. From the mass of people Manu selected those who were fit to be Kshatriyas and Vaishyas and the Saptarishis selected those who were fit to be Brahmins. After this selection was made by Manu and Saptarishis for being Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, the rest that were not selected were called Shudras. The Varnas arrangement so determined lasts for one *Yug*, i.e., a period of four years. Every fourth year a new body of officers known by the same designation Manu and Saptarishis were appointed for making a new selection. It happened that last time some of those who were left to be fit only for being Shudras were selected for being Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas while some of those who were, elected last time for being Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were left as being fit only of being Shudras. Thus the personnel of the Varna changed. It was a sort of a periodical shuffling and selection of men to take up according to their mental and physical aptitudes and occupations which were essential to the life of the community... According to ancient tradition as embodied in the Puranas the period for which the Varna of a person was fixed by Manu and Saptarishis was a period of four years and was called *Yug*. At the end of the period of four years there occurred the Manwanter whereby every fourth year the list was revised. Under the revision some changed their old Varna, some retained it, some lost it and some gained it” (Vol.3, p.286-7).

“Manu and Saptarishis was a sort of a Board of Interview which determined the Varna of a person from how he struck them at the interview” (Vol. 3, p.287).

Thus goes on the lengthy elaboration that suggests why this system of determination of Varnas of the individuals by officers based on the qualifications is a superior system.

Well then who will select those 'officers'? What are the qualifications based on which they become 'officers'? There are no such details forthcoming.

There are inequalities also among the four Varnas. The lowest of all the Varnas is 'Shudra' Varna. Shudras are those who do not have opportunities and qualifications to pursue those occupations which upper Varnas do. How does a 'Shudra' person improve his qualifications in order to change into the Brahmin Varna? What are the qualifications due to the loss of which a Brahmin becomes a Shudra? Suppose all people have good qualifications in a given 'yug' and none would become a Shudra. What would happen then? Will four years pass without the existence of Shudras? Who would perform service for the upper Varnas during that period? Would the upper Varnas perform service for themselves? No, they won't. Only Shudras have to exist to do service forever. This means that a portion of the population has to exist as Shudras always!

Interviewing each individual and changing of Varnas by officers! Abandoning of old Varnas and adopting new Varnas by people accordingly! This means, abandoning old occupations and pursuing new ones! Changing of occupations thus every four years! What sort of theory is this?

Do we have to accept the theory if someone adopts literally the 'Puranic' stories that Brahmins became Shudras and Shudras became Brahmins and argue that 'this is what had happened in the history of the people of India in the past'?

While this was presumably so, after a lapse of time there is supposed to have occurred some change in the procedure of determining Varnas. While observing that the old procedure was crude and while praising the new procedure, Ambedkar elaborates it as follows:

"The determination of the Varna (by Manu and Saptarishis) was done in a rough and tumble manner. This system seems to have gone into abeyance. A new system grew up in its place. It was known as the Gurukul system. The Gurukul was a school maintained by a Guru (teacher) also called Acharya (learned man). All children went to this Gurukul for their education. The period of education extended for twelve years. The child while at Gurukul was known as Brahmachari. After the period of education was over there was the Upanayan ceremony. It was a ceremony at which the Acharya determined the Varna of the student and sent him out in the world to perform the duties of that Varna. Upanayan by the Acharyas was the new method of determining Varna

which came into vogue in place of method of determination by Manu and Saptarishi. The new method was undoubtedly superior to the old method" (Vol.3, p.287).

Why is this new procedure superior? Because it provides a person training in a Gurukul before assigning Varna. It determines the Varna after knowing the individuality of the person. Hence, it is superior:

"...the only safe way to determine the Varna of a person is to know his individuality, the addition of this new feature was undoubtedly a great improvement" (Vol. 3, p.288).

A Gurukul distributing 'certificates of proficiency in the duties of a particular Varna'! The Guru used to confer 'degrees' on the students! This means, superior procedures such as these came into practice due to the system of Gurukul! All children in the society studying in Gurukuls! That is, including the children of Shudras! For about 12 years! 'Determination of Varna' only after the completion of the study! And in any case, after the completion of 12 years' training under great Gurus, some youth will invariably become 'Shudras'! Which means, all Shudras were those who received education for 12 years! We need to understand all this very carefully if we want to know what Ambedkar discovered about the 'genesis of castes'.

So far, we have reached his idea of the 'Gurukul' system. After determining a Varna to a student, he will remain in that Varna throughout the life instead of just for 4 years as in the old procedure. But this procedure does not make Varnas hereditary. The Varna assigned to person applies only to that person and no longer than the duration of his life. It will not apply to his offspring. This is what Ambedkar suggests at any rate:

"With the introduction of the Acharya Gurukul system, the duration of the Varna came to be altered. Varna instead of being Varna for a period became Varna for life. But it was not hereditary" (Vol. 3, p.288).

The Varna of an individual used to last only for 4 years in the case of the procedure prior to this Gurukul system. That individual had to prove his qualification afresh again and again. But, owing to this new Gurukul system, the Varna of an individual will last unchanged throughout life if a single Varna is assigned to that individual. The person who passes through the Gurukul with a degree qualifying him to be Brahmin would remain a Brahmin throughout life. Similarly, person who receives the degree of a Shudra will remain Shudra throughout life. In the old procedure, one could get rid of Shudra Varna at least after four years. There is no such scope in the new procedure. One has to remain in the menial Varna, for instance, throughout life. In that case, isn't the new procedure more harmful than the old one? Can any Shudra person call this new procedure

“undoubtedly superior” and “undoubtedly (an) improvement”? But, Ambedkar eulogised the new procedure with such words. For him, none of the following questions arose upon reading Puranic stories relating to Gurukul: Are not these ‘certificates of proficiency in the duties of a particular Varna’ non-sensical? Is not the conferring of ‘degrees’ just as non-sensical a notion? How nonsensical is the idea of education of the children of Shudras for twelve years in Gurukul! It appears that all Ambedkar’s doubts had dried up and everything had become ‘doubtless’ because of the miracle of Gurukul.

Will the research—which claims that Saptarishis or Gurukuls determine Varnas—have any value greater than that of fabricated or cock-and-bull stories? Of the matters that we have examined so far, is there anything worth considering as historical truth?

The Brahmin Varna could not have been satisfied despite such great assistance the Gurukul system rendered to it. For it would not obtain complete protection without Varna applying not only to an individual for his life but also to his offspring hereditarily. Hence Brahmin Varna began its attempts to achieve this further advantage:

“To achieve this Brahminism proceeded in the most audacious manner one can think of” (Vol. 3, p.288)

What was the ‘most audacious manner’ in which Brahmanism proceeded? This means, it proceeded in such an audacious manner that it dared to introduce castes. What did it do? It abolished the Gurukul system. It assigned the right to perform Upanayan of the children to the father instead of to the Guru. Further, it abandoned exogamy and introduced endogamy so that relations between the Brahmin Varna and the other Varnas would cease to exist.

If Gurukul system were in practice, the Varna of the elderly Brahmins of that time would have already become fixed as Brahmin Varna. It won’t change throughout their lives. But, the Varnas of children would form only after the completion of their education. There was in this the risk that the Guru might even categorize the children of Brahmins as Shudras. Then those children would remain Shudras throughout life. In order to escape from this danger, Varnas had to be assigned by birth. The Varna of the children would have to be that of their elders. For this purpose, Ambedkar argues, Brahmins had introduced endogamy and abandoned exogamy with other Varnas.

Well, what basis does Ambedkar have to say that exogamy existed among the Varnas in the first place? Only certain stories found in the religious texts. For example, Shantanu was a Kshatriya man. Ganga was

a Shudra woman. They gave birth to a son called 'Bhishma'. Parashar was a Brahmin man. Matsyagandhi was a Shudra woman. They gave birth to a son called Krishnadwaipayan. Relationships in such stories as these are, according to Ambedkar, exogamous marriages. But, can we, therefore, conclude that such relationships were marriages of the subsequent period? We find marriages and wife-husband relationships even in the religious texts. But in many stories those wives as well as husbands clearly have extra marital relations.

Wives give birth to children by means of their relations with other men even their husbands aware of liaisons. Even in the story which Ambedkar cited, of Matsyagandhi, who is a Shudra, with Shantanu who is a Kshatriya, gives birth to a son called Vichitravirya and with Parasharan, who is a Kshatriya, she brings forth a son called Krishnadwaipayana.

Do we have to conclude from these stories that a Shudra woman had different marriages: one with a Kshatriya and another with a Brahmin? Likewise, there are stories which say that Shantanu and Ganga had a son called Bhishma and Matsyagandhi brought forth to Vichitravirya. Would all these relationships also be marriages? How do we, in fact, know the nature of these relationships? Can we, based on half-known things, assume that 'marriages used to take place among all the Varnas of four-Varna system'? Ambedkar argues that we have to!

"I have said the Varna system had nothing to do with marriage. That males and females belonging to the different Varnas could marry and did marry. Law did not come in the way of inter-Varna marriage... All marriages between Varnas—irrespective of the question whether the bride-groom was of the higher Varna and the bride of the lower Varna—were valid" (Vol.3, p.307).

For Ambedkar, the Varna system is superior because all the relations in Puranic stories are 'legitimate' and because exogamy existed among Varnas. But the information which Ambedkar himself gave shows that there were 'higher Varnas' and 'lower Varnas'. When he says, "whether bride-groom was of the higher Varna and the bride of the lower-Varna", does it not mean that there were hierarchical differences among Varnas? Even according to Ambedkar, Brahmins were attempting to be Brahmins as a higher Varna and were not willing to change to the Shudra Varna. The very observation that 'Shudra Varna exists as menial Varna' proves that there is no superiority in the Varna system.

But, according to Ambedkar, the Varna system is superior to the caste system. None of the reasons that he pointed out to explain how it is superior is convincing. While exogamy was prevalent, the process of transformation of Varnas into castes apparently occurred in the Varna system, which was

'superior' according to Ambedkar. The Brahmin Varna initiated endogamy and changed the Varna into the Brahmin caste. The remaining Varnas too imitated Brahmin Varna, initiated endogamy, and changed into castes. This is how Ambedkar puts it:

"At sometime in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute groups. The Vaishya and Shudra classes were the original inchoate plasm, which formed the sources of the numerous castes of today" (Vol.1, p.18).

"Why did these sub-divisions or classes, if you please, industrial, religious or otherwise, become self-enclosed or endogamous? My answer is because the Brahmins were so. Endogamy or the closed-door system, was a fashion in the Hindu society, and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous castes. It is 'the infection of imitations' that caught all these sub-divisions on their onward march of differentiation and has turned them into castes" (Vol. 1, p. 18).

"This sub-division of a society is quite natural. But the unnatural thing about these sub-divisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-enclosed units called castes" (Vol.1, p.18).

Unrestricted open-door character of the class (=Varna) system! Even in the Varna system, all the upper castes were in a dominating position and the Shudra Varna was in menial service. Under such circumstances, how can he say that all Varnas had 'open-door character' in Varna system?

## **2) People had imposed Castes on themselves!**

If some one says that "somebody imposed castes on people", such words would make Ambedkar very angry. He might respond thus: "Are people fools to bear it if somebody imposes them? Will they keep quite if somebody does so?"

"Neither persons like Manu nor Brahmins imposed castes on people. They themselves introduced castes whole- heartedly", argues Ambedkar. But, must one not raise the question, "why do people introduce a bad thing for themselves? Especially if they realized that they should not tolerate it?" But such a question does not occur to Ambedkar. If you can't believe this, hear his own words:

"How did the institution of caste spread among the rest of the non-Brahmin population of the country? ... If the story that he gave the law of caste be credited, then Manu must have been a dare-devil fellow... It is unimaginable that the law of caste was *given*. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Manu could not have outlived his law, for what is that class that can submit to be degraded to the status of brutes by the pen of a man, and suffer him to raise another class to the pinnacle? ... One thing I want to impress upon you is that Manu did not *give the law* of Caste and that he could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He was not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu Society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of Caste *Dharma*. The spread and growth of the Caste system is too gigantic a task to be achieved by the power or cunning of an individual or of a class. Similar in argument is the theory that the Brahmins created the Caste. After what I have said regarding Manu, I need hardly say anything more, except to point out that it is incorrect in thought and malicious in intent. The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but the imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle. They may have helped the process by their glib philosophy, but they certainly could not have pushed their scheme beyond their own confines" (Vol.1, p.15-16).

This means, neither Manu nor Brahmins introduced caste. People had introduced it for themselves. Ambedkar has already said that "it was wholeheartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin subdivisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous castes". And "Manu could not have outlived his law", said Ambedkar. This means people would have realized the treachery of that law and would have killed Manu! But, the people imposed such a treacherous law on themselves! How strange it is!

Ambedkar himself asks another question, what is that class that can submit to be degraded to the status of brutes by the pen of a man? Which means, the people do not submit to the stroke of the pen of others but would submit to the strokes of their own pens! This means that the same people, who realised that it is stupidity to accept castes if others impose on them because it would degrade them, would impose on themselves the same foolishness and the same degradation! On the one hand he asks, "will the people let live those persons who impose castes on them." On the other hand he claims that "people have introduced something that harms them!" Is this illogical argumentation aimed at proving that 'commonsense diminishes if intellect exceeds'?

If the Brahmin class disconnects its relations with other classes and prevents them to mix with it, this amounts to imposing castes on those

other classes. Similarly, if all the upper classes cease to have relations with Shudras, this amounts to imposing castes on Shudras. Then endogamy will become obligatory to Shudras.

When there are inequalities between castes, a given caste would be bound to conduct marriages within its sphere or it would desire matrimonial relations with superior castes. It would oppose relations with inferior castes at any rate. Thus, though all castes observe the caste system, it is the upper castes that are responsible for the crime of introducing castes or practising castes rigidly. This means, it amounts to the fact that upper castes have themselves imposed the caste system. Therefore, the argument that "none had wholeheartedly imposed the caste system on the people of the lower castes" is not more creditable than any childish argument.

Some individual like Manu might not have, perhaps, introduced castes. No convention (whether it is good or bad) begins from any one individual. But it does not mean that no one is responsible for it. All those who attempt to retain a convention are responsible for it. Such people ought to acquire a good reputation if it is a good thing and disrepute if it is a bad thing.

In another context, Ambedkar explains the specialty of Manusmriti (Code of Manu) as follows:

"If Ethics and Morality are duties then there can be no doubt that Manu Smriti is a book of Ethics... Manu was the first to systematise and codify the duties to which a Hindu was bound. He distinguishes between *Varnashramadharms* and *Sadharandharms*. The *Varnashramadharms* are the specific duties relating to one's station in life i.e. one's station as determined by one's Varna or caste and one's Ashram or particular stage of life. The *Sadharandharms* are duties irrespective of one's age, caste or creed i.e. duties obligatory on man as man and not as a member of a particular community or social class or as being at a particular stage or period of life" (Vol. 3, p. 334).

This means that none had dictated earlier which caste should behave in what manner and which caste should perform what functions and it was only Manu who did that job for the first time. Doesn't this amount to introducing castes? Ambedkar elaborated on many occasions that Manusmritis dictated that Shudras should neither read nor hear Vedas; that they should not acquire property; that the tongue of a Shudra be cut and lead be poured in his ears if he engages in certain activities. If all these restrictions are laid down afresh on Shudra castes, doesn't this amount to introducing castes?

"People would not have let Manu live if he had introduced castes", Ambedkar himself says, doesn't he? People would be furious because



Manu introduced castes, wouldn't they? Won't people be furious because Manu defended the caste system and laid down new punishment for Shudras?

Manu might not be the fellow who introduced caste, yet he defended it, didn't he? Didn't Shudras let live the upper castes which ceased to have relations with Shudras? What is the use of dumping exaggerated words like "will the people let live the fellow who introduced castes?"—except that these words divert the main issue?

### 3) How did 'Sati' begin?

Ambedkar claims that he discovered the fact that—apart from the caste problem—problems such as 'Sati', restrictions on widows and girl-marriage (not child-marriages) cropped up due to the introduction of endogamy by the Brahmin class. His explanation, of the way in which these problems are connected with the caste system, proceeds as follows.

By endogamy we mean marriages within the caste. The number of women and the number of men in a given caste must tally. We find cases where husbands die while wives are alive and wives die while husbands are alive. If a wife dies and her husband is alive, he is a 'surplus man'. If a husband dies and wife is alive, that woman is a 'surplus woman'. These are the terms which Ambedkar coined. If those surplus women and surplus men are still in their youth or middle age, they have to marry again. Such marriages have to take place in the same caste, otherwise, those individuals may look at other castes for their remarriage. Then the caste system would be disturbed. What may be a solution for this problem of remarriages without such a risk?

Those who have understood the problem we have analysed so far may easily arrive at a solution: 'What is the problem here? It is enough if marriage takes place between a surplus woman and a surplus man. It will also be an endogamous marriage', they may say. But Ambedkar does not find such a solution. Moreover, for him, this problem of remarriage appeared to be a very difficult one. He gave an elaborate explanation in general, that all problems of woman such as 'Sati' had emerged due to this problem of remarriage:

"...this encircling to prevent marriages from without creates problems from within which are not very easy of solution... if endogamy is to be preserved conjugal rights from within have to be provided for, otherwise members of the group will be driven out of the circle to take care of themselves in any way they can. But in order that the conjugal rights be provided for from within, it is absolutely necessary to maintain a numerical equality between the marriageable units of the two sexes

within the group desirous of making itself into a Caste. It is only through the maintenance of such equality that the necessary endogamy of the group can be kept intact, and a very large disparity is sure to break it. *The problem of Caste, then, ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes within it...* The husband may die before the wife and create a *surplus woman*... In like manner the husband may survive his wife and be *surplus man*,... both the *surplus man* and the *surplus woman* constitute a menace to the Caste if not taken care of, for not finding suitable partners inside their prescribed circle (and left to themselves they cannot find any, for if the matter be not regulated there can only be just enough pairs to go round) very likely they will transgress the boundary, marry outside and import offspring that is foreign to the Caste" (Vol. 1, p.10).

Ambedkar's explanation continues as follows:

"...our task will be amply rewarded if we scrutinize the solution the Hindus arrived at to meet the problems of the *surplus man* and *surplus woman*.... Complex though it be in its general working the Hindu society, even to a superficial observer, presents three singular uxorial customs, namely: (I) *Sati* or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. (ii) Enforced widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry. (iii) Girl marriage. In addition, one also notes a great hankering after *Sanyasa* (renunciation) on the part of the widower, but this may in some cases be due purely to psychic disposition. So far as I know, no scientific explanation of the origin of these customs is forthcoming even today" (Vol. 1, p.13).

The 'scientific explanation' for those phenomena, which others did not offer so far and which Ambedkar has now discovered is, however, the following:

"Regarding the question as to why they arose, I submit that they were needed to create the structure of caste..." (Vol. 1, p. 14).

How are these customs needed to create the structure of Caste? Following Ambedkar's explanation, first let us discuss the problem of 'surplus woman'. If a surplus woman, for the sake of her remarriage, chooses an unmarried man, there would be a danger tomorrow that an unmarried woman won't find a husband. Or if that surplus woman chooses a man from another caste, the caste system itself would be ruined. Therefore, the risk of ruin of caste will be averted if that woman is killed along with her husband. Or, in case that woman is allowed to live, she should not be permitted to remarry. For if she wants to remarry, the same problems will arise. Hence, that woman should be assigned to existence as a widow. Thus customs called Sati and widowhood have come into existence to perpetuate the caste system!

Let us first observe these two customs in the words of Ambedkar:

"...the *surplus woman* (=widow), if not disposed of, remains in the group: but in her very existence lies a double danger. She may marry outside the Caste and violate endogamy, or she may marry within the Caste and through competition encroach upon the chances of marriage that must be reserved for the potential brides in the Caste. She is therefore a menace in any case, and something must be done to her if she cannot be burned along with her deceased husband. The second remedy is to enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life" (Vol. 1, p.11).

This is how Sati and widowhood came into existence according to Ambedkar.

Well, then, why didn't 'Pati' (like 'Sati') and 'widowhood of men' come into existence in the case of surplus men just as it happened in the case of surplus women and for the same reasons? It is because a man is a man, isn't he? There is male domination in society, isn't it? It is man who in fact imposes restrictions on women, doesn't he? He won't impose restrictions on himself, does he? Hence no such customs had arisen in the case of man. Ambedkar himself proposed the following explanation:

"The problem of *surplus man* (=widower) is much more important and much more difficult than that of the *surplus woman* in a group that desires to make itself into a Caste. From time immemorial man as compared with woman has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions is most often above them all" (Vol. 1, p.11).

There were no restrictions on the surplus man. His remarriage has to take place definitely. How should that remarriage take place if it has to be an endogamous marriage? If he chooses an unmarried young woman within the same caste, a situation would arise whereby an unmarried young man does not get a wife. Or if he selects a woman from another caste, the caste system will be ruined. Therefore, the remarriage of a surplus man has to take place with a very young girl instead of an unmarried grown-up woman. This is what we call 'girl-marriage' which is quite different from 'child-marriage'. In the case of 'child-marriage', both the bride and bridegroom are of young age. In the case of girl-marriage, the bride alone is younger while the bridegroom is (much) older. Thus the custom of 'girl-marriage' came into practice because of the problem of remarriage of surplus men. Look at this point as well in the words of Ambedkar:

"...in a caste thoroughly self-enclosed there are always just enough marriageable women to go round for the marriageable men. Under these circumstances the *surplus man* can be provided with a wife only by recruiting a bride from the ranks of those not yet marriageable in order to tie him down to the group. This is certainly the best of the possible solutions in the case of the *surplus man*. By this, he is kept within the Caste... by this endogamy morals are preserved" (Vol. 1, p.12).

But adverse questions will crop up concerning this argument as well. If a surplus man marries an unmarried grown-up woman, the balance between the numbers of young men and women will be disturbed, says Ambedkar. Well, then, won't the same thing happen when a surplus man marries a young girl? Won't a situation arise in which the young boys of that same time fail to find wives in future after they mature? The girl, whom a surplus man marries would have eventually become the wife of a young man had she not married to that surplus man. But, in Ambedkar's view, such a question does not arise. He has concluded right in the beginning that the balance between young men and women will be disturbed if a surplus older man marries a mature young woman. What remains then is marriage with a young girl. That's all. This appeared to him to be a very great argument.

At many places, Ambedkar's argument is fragmented. We don't find coherence between any two arguments. He did not at all feel any doubt whether girl-marriage would in no way solve the problem of remarriage of surplus men. Ambedkar says that some of the surplus men observe 'celibacy' while others 'renounce the world' and comments that there won't be any problem if they follow either path sincerely, otherwise it would be a menace to the preservation of caste morals. On the one hand he speaks of male domination and on the other he characterizes those men as if they have and should have morals! Because, 'the ruling ratio in a caste has to be one man to one woman' (Vol. 1, p.12). As if this moral principle, which has not become fact even today, was already implemented in the past!

Either in the past or in the present, don't men whose wives died remarry adult woman? Is this creating a situation in which unmarried young men fail to find wives? Aren't the men going for a second marriage, third marriage and marriage after marriage even while their wives are alive? In which caste and at what time did this 'ruling ratio' of 'one man to one woman' exist?

The custom of killing surplus women came into practice owing to the apprehension that they might go for inter-caste marriages, says Ambedkar, doesn't he? May that danger not arise through surplus women

or surplus unmarried young women? Won't those young women go for inter-caste marriages? Then the custom of killing young women clearly had to begin, didn't it?

What does this notion 'surplus women', in fact mean? What does the notion of 'surplus men' mean? How meaningless this argument is! Even if he imagines that kind of surplus people, why did their remarriage appear as such an insoluble a problem to Ambedkar? Why did marriages between those surplus women and surplus men not appear as a solution to Ambedkar? Amazing!

When this problem of surplus men and women itself is meaningless, how meaningless would be the argument that problems of women cropped up due to this problem? What Ambedkar did was to merely repeat his claim that he alone discovered the actual reason for problems like 'Sati' for the first time and that his argument alone is the correct one. He, however, does not seem to have realised how ridiculous his argument is at every step. For he says,

"I am justified in holding that, whether regarded as ends or as means, *Sati*, *enforced widowhood* and *girl marriage* are customs that were primarily intended to solve the problem of the *surplus man* and *surplus woman* in a caste and to maintain its endogamy. Strict endogamy could not be preserved without these customs, while caste without endogamy is a fake" (Vol. 1. p.14).

"This, in my opinion, is the general mechanism of a caste in a system of castes" (Vol. 1, p.13).

This means that all these customs will emerge if you want to perpetuate any caste.

Well then, are these customs found in the lower castes as well? Just as in the Brahmin caste, we surely find surplus women and surplus men in every caste. In order to perpetuate all the castes as castes, you would expect customs like Sati, widowhood and girl-marriage should occur in all the castes. Did they? Ambedkar's answer to this question is as follows:

"Those castes that are nearest to the Brahmins have imitated all the three customs and insist on the widowhood and girl marriage; others, a little further off, have only girl marriage and those furthest off have imitated only the belief in the caste principle. This imperfect imitation, I dare say, is due partly to what Tarde calls 'distance' and partly to the barbarous character of these customs" (Vol. 1, p.20).

Ambedkar is very fond of declaring his courage at every point. To appreciate his courage, first we should be free from doubts concerning what he proposes. Here, the first doubt is: what does it mean when he says

that a caste is 'nearer' or 'distant' to the Brahmin caste? On what basis do 'nearness' and 'distance' form? Based on occupations? Economic conditions? Dressing and speech habits? These details, however, are not found in Ambedkar's explanation.

The second doubt: To the question 'why some castes do not observe customs like 'Sati', will it be sufficient answer if we say, "because those customs are cruel"? Some castes observe those 'cruel customs'. Why did those castes like that cruelty? Why did other castes not like that cruelty?

The third doubt: Ambedkar maintains that customs like 'Sati' came into practice because of the problem of surplus women. But the fact that there are castes which do not observe such customs imply that those castes are able to solve the problem of surplus women without such customs and continue to exist as castes, don't they? Does this not prove the fact that such customs did not arise for the problem of caste and there is no connection between such customs and continuity of caste?

Can we satisfy ourselves with any explanation unless we find an answer that does not give scope to any doubt to such an important question, namely, 'how did castes emerge?'

#### **4) Distinction between 'Varnas' and Castes!**

At every opportune moment, Ambedkar criticizes, detests and rejects castes. This is clearly justified, natural and necessary. Any sensible person ought to do the same thing. He, however, praises 'the four Varnas' while seriously criticizing 'castes'. This certainly surprises us.

According to Ambedkar, there is considerable difference between the four Varnas and castes. We may observe that difference briefly as follows:

1) Under the caste system all the castes are hierarchically arranged like steps in a ladder. But there were no such hierarchical differences among Varnas under the Varna system.

2) Under the caste system, we find only endogamy but not exogamy. But, there was exogamy among all Varnas.

3) Within the caste system, it was not possible to change castes. But under the Varna system it was possible to change Varnas on the basis of qualifications.

4) Castes are hereditary; but Varnas are not hereditary.

Thus, according to Ambedkar, the four Varna system is superior though it has its defects. But, the information which Ambedkar considered shows that:

1) Hierarchical differences did not begin with the caste system but existed in the days of Varnas. The information which Ambedkar himself gave tells us that the Brahmin Varna is the highest Varna and the Shudra Varna is a servant Varna. Which means, the four Varnas are not of equal status.

2) Stories such as the tale of 'Shantanu and Ganga' are evidence that suggests to us that exogamy existed under the Varna system. We cannot, however, arrive at historical conclusions based on such puranas.

3) Such stories—which say that Manu and Saptarishis conduct oral interviews of all the people and change their Varnas—appear to be the only evidence to suggest that Varnas could be changed. If we analyse this aspect in greater detail, it would become clear how meaningless it is in actuality and how impossible it is in practice. It should be a sensible thing to reject such baseless puranas.

4) The 'Gurukul system' is the evidence which Ambedkar adduces in support of his argument that the Varnas were not hereditary. Under this system, Shudras were also supposed to receive education for 12 years in Gurukulas. Thereafter, the Guru (teacher) himself would determine Varna of each individual. That Varna, therefore, would relate to that individual person only.

It would be an intelligent thing to put an end to such folk tales after telling them to kids.

Based on which of these 4 aspects can we arrive at the conclusion that 'Varnas are superior' to a caste system? There is no such aspect. All the evil aspects of castes appear in the four Varnas also. If we go by the information which Ambedkar provided, we must ask why did the Brahmin Varna change into the Brahmin caste by introducing endogamy? Only to establish its domination permanently. If that is so, then it means that the Varna was already dominant! Isn't the servile Shudra caste the same as the servile Shudra Varna? What is the distinction between a Varna and a caste in essence in their case? There is no distinction. Both are identical. The difference lies only in their names. Moreover, when we speak of the 'four Varnas' only four appear, while many hundreds appear when we speak of 'castes'. This is because a division in Varnas occurred over a period of several thousands of years. It was Ambedkar himself who pointed out this division.

Implying that Varnas themselves evolved into Castes, Ambedkar makes the following observation regarding this proliferation of castes:

"The basic conception of social organization which prevails among the Hindus starts with the rise of four classes or Varnas into which Hindu society is believed to have become divided. These four classes were

named: (1) Brahmins, the priestly and the educated class, (2) The Kshatriyas, the military class, (3) The Vaishyas, the trading class and, (4) The Shudras, the servant class. For a time these were merely classes. After a time what were only Classes (Varnas) became Castes (Jatis) and the four castes became four thousand. In this way the modern Caste System was only the evolution of the ancient Varna System" (Vol. 5, p. 156).

After having taken his argument thus far Ambedkar, of course, says that although the castes emerged from the Varnas the two are not the same, that there is considerable difference between the two and that we have to understand the difference. That is his opinion, which is a different issue. The point with which we are concerned here is that it is Ambedkar who said that 'four Varnas themselves became divided into many castes'.

What does 'division' mean here? We have already noted that apparently 'occupations alone were the basis for the four Varnas'. Does 'division in Varnas' mean 'division in the occupations' or not? When the Brahmin Varna split into some branches, does it mean that the occupation of each sub-Varna became distinct branches? If occupations alone are the basis for Varnas, should that not mean that occupations alone ought to have been the basis for castes as well?

But in another context, Ambedkar says that the 'caste question is not the question of occupations'. We will consider this point later. Here, it is enough to note that 'the caste question is the question of occupations only' is not our conclusion. We are merely raising a pertinent question, namely, 'does the information which Ambedkar himself gave not lead to the same conclusion?' If we examine issues based on Ambedkar's explanation, will it not become evident that occupations alone ought to have been the basis for castes? This is the conclusion which must be derived from that information.

If some people say that division does not mean division in occupations, then they will have the onus of explanation of that aspect to which the division is related! Ambedkar had merely said that 'Varnas got divided into many castes' but he did not say, even subsequently which aspect of the situation caused that division.

When somebody says that 'castes might have emerged according to occupations', Ambedkar may indeed ask the following good question: 'don't occupations exist in other countries? Why don't castes exist there?' If we don't raise such a question, we assume that it is natural for castes to exist in India and continue to practise them. Therefore, it is obligatory on our part to raise the question 'why did castes originate in India at all (and nowhere else)?'



However, the main point here is, why did Ambedkar raise the same question concerning Varnas which he raised in relation to castes? We would have to raise the question 'why did Varnas come into being?' before we raise the question 'why do castes exist'. But Ambedkar raises the question only regarding castes but not where Varnas are concerned. It is because Varnas appeared to him natural divisions. He holds the view that it is natural to have different social divisions in any country; hence the four Varnas too existed in India and we need not further question the fact. Because of this view, he does not raise the question about Varnas. All his questions concern only caste. 'In other countries, the social divisions of the past gradually reconciled themselves and got united. But it did not happen so in India. Here the four Varnas, instead of becoming one, changed into castes. Such castes are not found anywhere', says Ambedkar.

But, when we say that the social divisions in other countries did not change into castes while the four Varnas of India alone had changed into castes' does it not mean that the reason for such change lies in the four Varnas only? Does it not mean that the nature of Varna is such that it leads to castes? It follows, in any case, that castes are a continuation of Varnas. Whatever is the basis for Varnas, the same must be the basis for castes. Whether that basis is occupations or something else is a separate matter. In any case castes could not have come into being from somewhere else without any connection with Varnas. Varnas have to be the basis for castes.

According to Ambedkar, however, the four Varnas and the castes are two different things. The basis for the Varnas is occupations only. But, the basis for castes is not occupations. It is something else. It is 'endogamy'. If it is true that Varnas emerged due to occupations and castes due to endogamy, then the situation in the society would be such that Varnas should appear on one side and castes on the other side independently and separately from one another. This means, in India in the life of every individual person there should be one Varna and one caste. While Varna should be in relation to occupation, caste should be in relation to the rules of endogamy. If it is a fact that Varna and caste emerged due to different reasons and not due to the same reason, then they have to exist separately. But, nowhere do they exist like that. Only one thing is present: either 'Varna' or 'caste'.

The term 'four Varnas' is, however, only found in the Sanskrit books of Hindu religious literature. Nobody uses this term in the real life. All people do use the word 'caste'.

Suppose, as a result of different kinds of discussions, it becomes evident that 'occupations alone are the basis for castes'. Even then the

problem will not be solved. The question, namely, 'why do castes exist only in India while occupations exist in all the countries', will remain as before. We have not moved forward even a single inch in our effort to find out the answer to this question. That effort has slid into confusion as we try to follow the path of Ambedkar.

There is another situation that leads to further confusion. It appears that instead of holding a single stable view, Ambedkar holds two kinds of views that are mutually inconsistent. Sometimes he depicts Varnas as good and sometimes as bad.

If others say that both Varnas and castes are bad and that they are identical, he opposes that view vehemently and argues that the two are not identical; that only Castes are bad; that Varnas are not bad; indeed, that they are superior.

If others say that 'four Varnas are superior; castes alone are bad and the two are not identical, he would vehemently oppose them as well and argues thus: 'Are the Varnas superior? How are they superior? Varnas too are bad like Castes. Both are the same'.

We have to consider Ambedkar's words themselves in order to understand as how he came to make such strange arguments.

**The first kind of argument that glorifies Varnas is as follows:**

"The principle underlying caste is fundamentally different from the principle underlying *Varna*. Not only are they fundamentally different but they are also fundamentally opposed. The former is based on worth" (Vol. 1, p.59).

"Varna is not hereditary either in status or occupation. On the other hand Caste implies a system in which status and occupation are hereditary and descend from father to son" (Vol. 3, p. 286).

Caste is 'bad'. Varna is contrary to Caste. Which means, Varna is 'good'. If caste is based on birth, Varna is based on 'worth'. Thus, Varna is a superior phenomenon. Another point that we have to remember here is that 'occupation' is the basis for Varna as well as caste according to Ambedkar! In the case of Varna, one can change one's occupation. In the case of caste, there is no scope to change the occupation. This is the only difference! Yet occupation alone is the basis for both the things.

**The second kind of argument that opposes 'Varna' runs as follows:**

"There cannot be a more degrading system of social organization than the Chaturvarnya. It is the system which deadens, paralyses and cripples the people from helpful activity. This is no exaggeration. History bears ample evidence" (Vol. 1, p.63).

"How can anybody who is not a congenital idiot accept Chaturvarnya as the ideal form of society? Individually and socially it is a folly and a crime. One class and one class alone to be entitled to education and learning! One class and one class alone to be entitled to arms! One class and one class alone to trade! One class and one class alone to serve!"  
(Vol. 1, p.219).

"The ordinary rule of *Chaturvarna*, was that a Shudra could never become a Brahmin. A Shudra was born a Shudra and could not be made a Brahmin" (Vol. 7, p.285).

"In the first place, the idea of *Varna* is the parent of the idea of *caste*. If the idea of *caste* is a pernicious idea it is entirely because of the viciousness of the idea of *Varna*. Both are evil ideas and it matters very little whether one believes in *Varna* or in *caste*. The idea of *Varna* was most mercilessly attacked by the Buddhists who did not believe in it"  
(Vol. 9, p. 289).

All these are examples opposing Varnas. Is it necessary to elaborate this point further? At some places he says that 'Varna and Caste are mutually contradictory' and at other places he says that they are the same, both are bad! In yet other places, Ambedkar says that Varna is 'vicious' and caste is 'pernicious'. If Varnas too are bad, why then did Ambedkar actually glorify them in certain other contexts?

'A Shudra in a Varna system dies as a Shudra and he cannot become a Brahmin', says Ambedkar, doesn't he? Then what about his investigation which concluded that Varnas depend on 'worth' and not on 'birth' and a Shudra can change into any Varna? The second argument is wrong according to the first one. The first argument is wrong according to the second one. Such inconsistent views on a single issue!

This situation has arisen, one suspects, because of his attitude of rejecting anything that others said without examining whether it is good or bad! When others say something is 'good', he would immediately say it is 'bad'! If others say that something is 'bad', he would say it is 'good'! It appears that Ambedkar is 'committed' to this theory. Not only here but also at many other places!

Two mutually inconsistent kinds of arguments regarding 'Varna' are readily available with Ambedkar. This is amazing! Whenever and whatever he says, it alone is right! For instance, 'Buddhists did not believe Varnas', Ambedkar himself has said this, hasn't he? Then why did he believe in Varnas at least in some contexts?

Well, what actually is the view of Ambedkar on the four Varnas? How to understand Ambedkar's study of the issue amidst this kind of confusion?

In his study of castes, too, Ambedkar raised the utterly meaningless question of 'surplus women' and 'surplus men'. Without following minimal logic, namely, 'what is the problem when those surplus men and women were ready to marry again?', Ambedkar linked those women with 'Sati' and those men with 'girl-marriages'. Which aspect is logical in this explanation which he claimed to be 'scientific'? Which aspect is acceptable?

What point did Ambedkar discover about castes while he criticized other researchers by belittling them with such expressions concerning their views such as 'the grand name without the grand thing', 'he does not very much advance our thought', 'it is a very poor discovery', 'the car has been shunted on wrong lines' and so on (Vol. 1, pp.17 & 22). Can't we reject his explanation—which at some places says that Varnas and Castes are one and the same and at other places that the two are not the same—as 'this is not at all an explanation'?

While claiming his explanation to be systematic and scientific through his essay, Ambedkar concludes as follows in the last para by exhibiting conventional modesty that he proposes thoughts which came to his mind.

"Apart from its practical importance the subject of Caste is an all absorbing problem and the interest aroused in me regarding its theoretical foundations has moved me to put before you some of the conclusions, which seem to me well founded, and the grounds upon which they may be supported. I am not, however, so presumptuous as to think them in any way final, or anything more than a contribution to a discussion of the subject. It seems to me that the car has been shunted on wrong lines, and the primary object of the paper is to arrive at a serviceable truth. We must, however, guard against approaching the subject with a bias. Sentiment must be outlawed from the domain of science and things should be judged from an objective standpoint. For myself I shall find as much pleasure in a positive destruction of my own ideology, as in a rational disagreement on a topic, which, notwithstanding many learned disquisitions is likely to remain controversial forever. To conclude, while I am ambitious to advance a Theory of Caste, if it can be shown to be untenable I shall be equally willing to give it up" (Vol. 1, p.22).

There is no consistency between what he says at the end (that he is offering his views for the sake of discussion) and the claim that he makes from the beginning (that he alone is offering a scientific explanation which no one else has offered so far).

If the writer believes that he alone has offered a scientific explanation of the caste question, he has to maintain the same stand for consistency. In other words, if he strongly believes that his understanding of castes is very logical, he should not say that he has put forward his views for

discussion. He ought to stand firm on his views, but with modesty!

However much people try to capture the origin of castes, they are not able to succeed. If we want to take occupations as the basis for the origin of castes, a fundamental question is already lurking against such assumption. Or, even if we want to take endogamy as the basis of castes, it too has its shortcomings. Wherever we look, we find only questions and no answers are available. Finally, we are not able to locate the basis.

As Ambedkar himself pointed out, certain issues 'remain controversial forever'!

## **2** ACCORDING TO AMBEDKAR, **HOW THE 'SHUDRA' VARNA CAME INTO EXISTENCE?**

**W**hat does ancient Hindu religious literature say about 'Shudras'? It says that Shudras were born from the feet of Brahma. So Shudras became the lowest of the four Varnas. The first three Varnas are considered the upper Varnas, though there are distinctions among them as well. The duty of Shudras is to serve the upper Varnas. The religious literature tells much more about Shudras: Shudras do not deserve respect; they do not need education; it is sin as well as crime to give them education; a Shudra should not possess property; he should not be allowed to acquire property even if he is capable of doing so. In case a Shudra acquires property, his Master can confiscate it. The right to acquire property belongs to persons who can become Masters. A Shudra should not do any job in the court of a king. He has to serve the upper Varnas and receive subsistence from them. He has to satisfy himself by consuming leftovers after the Master has consumed what he desires. A Brahmin can compel a Shudra to do service to him irrespective of whether the Brahmin purchased him or not, because the Shudra will obtain heavenly advantage (punya) performing service for the Brahmin. A Shudra should never leave his Master. Servitude is inborn to a Shudra. A Shudra must remain a servant always. The upper Varnas have two births; they are twice born. They have their second birth from the time they begin to wear the sacred thread (Yagnopavitha). Shudras have only one birth since they are forbidden the sacred thread.

The men of the upper Varnas can 'keep' Shudra women. But Shudra men cannot have relationships with women of the upper Varnas.

The names of persons of the upper Varnas should be chosen in accordance with their superiority and the names of Shudras should indicate their low status. As a Shudra is an unholy creature, one should not read Vedas or perform pious activities in the presence of a Shudra. If a Shudra happens to listen to Vedic recitations, one has to pour either boiled oil or lead or sealing wax into his ear. If a Shudra recites Vedas or preaches religious principles, his tongue must be cut out. If a Shudra assaults a person of the upper Varnas, one has to cut his limb with which he committed that crime. The life of a Shudra has no value. Anybody belonging to the upper Varnas can kill a Shudra without any compensation. At the most, one may pay a little in the case of a Shudra compared to heavy compensations due to a Brahmin or a Vysya. (These details are in Ambedkar, volume 7, pp. 43, 50, 52 & 55). This is what the religious texts tell us about Shudras: that Brahma created them for servitude.

Some Anthropologists explain the origin of the Shudra Varna as follows. In the ancient times, a race with fair complexion called 'Aryans' came from outside, invaded India, conquered the indigenous primitive tribal population with dark complexion called Dasas and Dasyus and made them their slaves. The defeated population gradually formed into the Shudra Varna. It was these Aryans who composed the entire literature such as the Vedas that constitutes Hindu religious scriptures. It is these scriptures that described Shudras thus.—This is what scholars say about Shudras.

Regarding the theory of birth from the feet of Brahma, none except fools will give it credence. There need not be any discussion of it at all. So, let us consider the theory of conquests of Aryan invasion. Some people oppose this theory also, Ambedkar being a very important opponent. According to him, this is false theory. It emerged out of the arrogance of western researchers. "The theory of the Aryan race is just an assumption and no more", says Ambedkar (Vol. 7, p.78). For the conclusion that 'there existed some thing called the Aryan race' is based on linguistic evidence. Bopp, in his book *Comparative Grammar* published in 1835, showed some facts concerning languages. His book demonstrated that a greater number of languages of Europe and some languages of Asia descended from one common ancestral language. Based on Bopp, those languages with common ancestry are called Indo-Germanic languages. They are also called 'Aryan languages' since there was a mention of Aryans in Vedic scriptures and Vedic language too was an Indo-Germanic language. Scholars assumed that all Aryan languages descended from the common ancestral speech and that there must have been a population which spoke that common ancestral speech as mother tongue and hence called that population the 'Aryan race'. It was assumed that contact between languages might have occurred since the arrival and settlement of the Aryan race in India.

**But Ambedkar rejects this argument. He says:**

“Knowing that nothing can prove the superiority of the Aryan race better than invasion and conquest of native races, the Western writers have proceeded to invent the story of the invasion of India by the Aryans and the conquest by them of the Dasas and Dasyus” (Vol. 7, p. 79).

The theory of Aryan race argues that it was Aryan race that composed Vedas. But Ambedkar says that there is no evidence in Vedas to support the theory. His conclusions are the following:

“(1) The Vedas do not know any such race as the Aryan race. (2) There is no evidence in the Vedas of any invasion of India by the Aryan race and its having conquered the Dasas and Dasyus supposed to be natives of India. (3) There is no evidence to show that the distinction between Aryans, Dasas and Dasyus was a racial distinction. (4) The Vedas do not support the contention that the Aryans were different in colour from the Dasas and Dasyus” (Vol. 7, p. 85).

Ambedkar observes that if it were Aryans who wrote Vedas, the books themselves suggest that these Aryans are of two types, that they were ‘opposed and inimical to each other’ and that the two communities ‘gradually became one’ (pp. 86-7). According to Ambedkar, in fact, there was no such race as ‘Aryans’, that population too was part of India and Dasas and Dasyus were not a primitive people:

“The Dasas and Dasyus were not primitive people. They were as civilized as the Aryans... [and] lived in cities... and under kings the names of many of whom are mentioned... The Dasyus were wealthy and owned property in the plains and on the hills. They were adorned with their array of gold and jewels. They owned many castles... The Dasyus owned chariots and used them in war like the Aryans... That the Dasas and Dasyus were the same as the Shudras is a pure figment of imagination. It is only a wild guess. It is tolerated because persons who make it are respectable scholars” (Vol. 7, pp. 105-6).

“From the foregoing statement of facts, it will be seen that there is a solid foundation in anthropometry and history, in support of the Rig Veda that there were in India two Aryan races and not one... The Western theory is thus in conflict with the Rig Veda on a major issue. The Rig Veda being the best evidence on the subject the theory which is in conflict with it must be rejected... As to the conquest of the native tribes, assuming it to be a fact,... It must also explain which of the two Aryans conquered the Dasas and Dasyus if they conquered them at all... The Western theory, it is clear, is only a hurried conclusion drawn from insufficient examination of facts and believed to be correct because it tallied with certain pre-conceived notions about the mentality of the ancient Aryans which they were supposed to have possessed on no other

grounds except that their alleged modern descendants, namely, the Indo Germanic races are known to possess. It is built on certain selected facts which are assumed to be the only facts. It is extraordinary that a theory with such a slender and insecure foundation in fact would have been propounded by Western scholars for serious scholars and should have held the field for such a long time. In the face of the discovery of new facts set out... the theory can no longer stand and must be thrown on the scrap heap" (Vol. 7, pp.99-100).

It is not only this much that Ambedkar discussed the theory of Aryan race. We cannot see all the things here. Ambedkar is so angry at the theory of 'conquest of India by Aryan race' that he insists thus: "Like the snake it must be killed" (Vol. 7, p.86).

Well, we shall let that pass. Whose opinion is correct regarding the theory of the Aryan race: the western researchers' or Ambedkar's? This is not something we can resolve here, nor do we need to. Here, we don't need it either. What we are concerned with is this: If the Shudra Varna was not formed as the theory of Aryan race suggests, how does Ambedkar explain its formation? This is the crucial question. Before that, we have to know at least in an outline the meaning of the restrictions imposed on Shudras in religious texts.

Consider the restriction, which says that 'Shudras should not acquire property'. What is 'property'? Property, during that period of time, was mainly land. In order to survive—to raise crops, rear animals or do any occupation—a person has to possess some land, certain kinds of implements. To say that 'Shudras should not possess these' implies that the 'upper castes alone should possess these'. Then, how should Shudras live? By doing service for the upper Varnas! What does 'service' mean? Shudras have to do all those chores, which are necessary for the upper Varnas to survive and which they do not want to do themselves. The Shudras, therefore, must cultivate the land under the possession of the upper Varnas. They must raise their cattle. They must make clothing, shoes and everything the upper Varnas want. They do all the domestic work. Shudras' service to the upper Varnas meant doing all chores at home and outside so that Masters need not work.

Then how will the upper Varnas occupy themselves if Shudras alone do all the work? Let us suppose that Brahmins perform worship, Khshatriyas prepare for and fight wars and Vysyas conduct business, as the religious texts suggest. None of these activities, however, gives them products necessary for their subsistence. Not a single blade of grass grows due to Vedic recitations and sacrificial activities (yagna and yaga). They produce not a single grain of corn. Not a single calf of a cow grows. Neither



a hand-breadth of cloth, a pair of shoes, a small stool or a winnowing basket may be conjured out of these activities. In contrast, many articles which Shudras produced will be consumed in activities related to worship. Similarly, due to wars that the Kshatriya Varna wages, products which Shudras produce will be consumed and new articles are not produced. Likewise, due to the business that the Vysya Varna conducts, products which the Shudras produce will be exchanged (bought and sold) and new articles are not produced.

Worship, war and business are not natural necessities of life. All the activities which religious texts describe and which the upper Varnas perform are utterly useless activities. They will not at all be help them to subsist. For all members of society to subsist, many kinds of labour—such as cultivation, animal husbandry, weaving and tailoring, all of which the Shudras had to perform—must take place. One can subsist very well without the activities which the upper Varnas perform; but not a single person can live without activities which the Shudra Varna performs.

This means, the Shudra Varna has to do work not only for its own subsistence but also for the subsistence of the upper Varnas. Let us call this work 'labour'. It is only the Shudra Varna which performs all kinds of labour necessary for all Varnas. Of the total labour which the Shudra Varna performs, only a small part is necessary for its own subsistence while the greater remaining part goes to support the upper Varnas! This is, surely, 'exploitation of labour'! That is, the upper Varnas live by exploiting the labour of Shudras. This is the advantage which the upper Varnas enjoy because of the existence of Shudras as servant class. Neither Shudras nor the upper Varnas know the fact that exploitation of labour is taking place between them. But the upper Varnas believe that they have a right to all services done by Shudras, that it is the duty of Shudras to serve the Masters because they are mere servants.

As Shudras would not do services to the upper Varnas if they themselves possessed property (land), the upper Varnas laid down restrictions that Shudras should not possess property, that the upper Varnas alone should possess all available property and Shudras should remain servants. Shudras are subservient to the upper Varnas because they already exist as propertyless slaves. The fact that Masters have the right even to kill Shudras clearly shows that the Shudra Varna is propertyless slave-class. One must therefore conclude that the upper Varnas started not only exploitation of labour but also created all the cruel codes that perpetuate it.

How did slavery of these Shudras begin in India?—This is the question which we need to discuss next. We know that it did not begin

from 'the feet of Brahma'. Also it is not a consequence of the conquest of Aryan race, says Ambedkar. Ambedkar, who rejected the theory of Aryan race, proposed a 'new thesis' as to how Shudra Varna originated. He said:

"After an examination of historical material and of theories suggested by various writers—orthodox as well as modern—I have put forth a new thesis."

Ambedkar's thesis begins from a time much earlier to the time of the ChaturVarnas. Then there were only the first three upper Varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vysyas. The Shudra Varna did not yet exist. Ambedkar proposes this by pointing to some contexts in Rig Veda:

"The first piece of evidence I rely upon is that of the Rig Veda itself. There are some scholars who maintain that the Varna system did not exist in the age of the Rig Veda... it is not possible to accept the statement that the Varna system did not exist in the time of the Rig Veda... For, the Rig Veda, apart from the Purusha Sukta, does mention Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas not once but many times... What is important is that the Rig Veda does not mention Shudra as a separate Varna. If Shudras were a separate *Varna* there is no reason why the Rig Veda should not have mentioned them. The true conclusion to be drawn from the Rig Veda is not that the Varna system did not exist, but that there were only three *Varnas* and that Shudras were not regarded as a fourth and a separate *Varna*... The second piece of evidence I rely on is the testimony of the two Brahmanas, the Satapatha and Taittiriya. Both speak of the creation of three *Varnas* only. They do not speak of the creation of the Shudras as separate Varna" (Vol.7, pp.132-3).

After proposing the new point that there were only three upper Varnas at the beginning of Varna system, Ambedkar's theory proceeds further as follows: There was a branch called 'Shudras' within the second Varna of Kshatriyas. These Shudras used to be ministers and kings just like other Kshatriyas. In other words, the Shudras too were an upper Varna at that time. But there was intense rivalry between the Shudras and the Brahmins because Brahmins possessed many special rights. Shudras were not able to tolerate the domination of Brahmins. Hence they used to come into conflict with Brahmins. Well, why did the Shudra branch of Kshatriyas come into conflict with Brahmins while the other Kshatriyas did not? It was because all the Kshatriyas of the Shudra branch belonged to the "Solar" race. The people of the Solar race were 'virile'. The remaining Kshatriyas were not so virile. That is why, only Shudras used to come into conflict with Brahmins. Owing to these conflicts, the Brahmins developed hatred towards Shudras and stopped performing Upanayanas for them. There is a connection between Upanayana and property rights. Owing to the denial of Upanayana, all the Shudras of this branch degraded from the upper Varna

to the fourth Varna, the servant Varna. Since then began the fourth Varna. Thus did the Shudra Varna emerge as a special Varna. In this manner, while proposing his new thesis on 'Shudra Varna', Ambedkar discussed many related issues in his book *Who were Shudras?* (Vol. 7).

## 1) Shudras were also Kshatriyas!

Now, let us examine the arguments of Ambedkar with regard to the question of the origin of the Shudra Varna. This is a question, incidentally, relating to some eighty per cent of the Indian population today.

Ambedkar shows the following evidence for his view that Shudras used to be a branch within the Kshatriya Varna:

“We have, however, direct evidence in support of the proposition that Shudra is a proper name of a tribe or a clan... The historians of Alexander’s invasion of India have described a number of republics as free, independent and autonomous whom Alexander encountered... Among these is mentioned a people called *Sodari*... Lassen identified them with the ancient *Shudras*. Patanjali at 1.2.3 of his *Mahabhashya* mentions Shudras and associates them with the Abhiras. The *Mahabharata* in chapter XXXII of the Sabha parvan speaks of the republic of the Shudras. The Vishnu Purana as well as the Markandeya Purana and the Brahma Purana refer to the Shudras as a separate tribe...” (Vol. 7, p. 103).

In the Shanti parva of Mahabharata, there is a story that a Shudra king named *Paijavana* performed ‘sacrifices’. Ambedkar informs his readers that this particular story is the primary source of his theory. While mentioning the writer of Mahabharata, Ambedkar says:

“Whether it is *Vyasa*, *Vaishampayana*, *Suta*, *Lomaharshana* or *Bhrigu* it is difficult to say. But whoever he was, he has rendered great service by giving a full description of *Paijavana*. If he had not described *Paijavana* as a *Shudra*, the clue to the origin of the *Shudra* would have been completely lost. I express my gratitude to the writer for having preserved so important a piece of information for posterity. Without it, this book (*Who were the Shudras?*) could not have been written” (Vol.7, pp. 18-19).

Ambedkar describes Shudra kings as follows:

“(1) The Shudras were Aryans. (2) The Shudras belonged to the Kshatriya class. (3) The Shudras were so important a class of Kshatriyas that some of the most eminent and powerful kings of the ancient Aryan communities were Shudras” (Vol. 7, p. 114).

After depicting Shudra kings as ‘the most eminent and powerful

kings', Ambedkar explains the reason for the conflict between these Shudra kings and the Brahmins. What sort of special rights did the Brahmin Varna have which infuriated the Shudras? The word 'Kshatriyas' in Ambedkar's explanation sometimes relates to only Shudras and sometimes to all Kshatriyas. We have to interpret it according to the context.

"It seems that ... a dispute was going on between Brahmins and Kshatriyas on the following points" (Vol. 7, p. 148).

The contention of the Brahmins was that they alone have the right to receive gifts without performing labour. Further, Kshatriyas have the right to study the Vedas but have no right to teach them. Similarly, Kshatriyas have the right to perform sacrifices but not the right to officiate at a sacrifice. But all these were privileges of the Brahmins. The dispute is connected with these privileges only.

Ambedkar did not explain what the Kshatriyas hoped for from these disputes. But we can understand it easily. The Kshatriyas were expecting to have the right to receive gifts without doing work just like the Brahmins. Similarly, they knew that they would get some 'contributions' (dakshina) if they had the right to teach the Vedas and officiate at sacrifices. This means Kshatriyas felt antagonistic towards Brahmins concerning the right to accumulate riches and wealth by means of the easy activities of worship and ritual without having to perform tasks such as cultivation, animal husbandry, weaving and sewing.

The above list of privileges of Brahmins is, incidentally, not complete. There are fourteen other kinds of privileges. Well, when did these privileges exist? During the period in which only three Varnas existed! The Brahmin Varna had so many privileges and superiority even before the rise of four Varnas! Moreover, these privileges included those rights which are hereditary.

What did Ambedkar say about the superiority of 'four Varnas'? How elaborately he described it: that nothing is hereditary in the four-Varna system; that the determination of the Varna of each individual person is entirely done on the basis of his ability and qualifications; that all Varnas exist uniformly and as equals; that it was the Brahmin Varna that initiated castes for privileges which had not been hereditary earlier; that castes, thus, became hereditary, whereas Varnas were not! But now he seems to be depicting the situation as if the Brahmin Varna had all these privileges even when the four-Varnas did not exist. This cannot be ignored as 'a minor mistake'. Grand theories relating to castes and Shudras have been built on this one point. If we conclude that hereditary privileges existed in the four-Varna system, we have also to conclude that Varnas are hereditary. Then the further conclusion will force itself upon us: that there

is no distinction between Varnas and castes. Only then will the correctness or incorrectness of the theory—which says that Brahmin Varna initiated castes for the sake of hereditary privileges—be settled. As all aspects of this point are so inter-connected, we should not treat any fundamental inconsistency of the arguments as 'a minor mistake'. We have to pay proper attention to the correctness and incorrectness of those arguments.

Now let us look at some other privileges of the Brahmin Varna. All these privileges existed during the days when there were only three Varnas. Observe whether or not hereditary privileges were present.

“(1) The Brahmin must be acknowledged to be the guru to all Varnas by the mere fact of his birth. (2) The Brahmin has the sole right of deciding upon the duties of all other classes, what conduct was proper to them and what should be their means of livelihood; and the other classes were to abide by his directions and the king was to rule in accordance with such directions. (3) The Brahmin is not subject to the authority of the king. The king was the ruler of all except the Brahmin. (4) The Brahmin is exempt from whipping; fetters being put on him; the imposition of fines; exile; censure and abandonment. (5) A Shrotriya (a Brahmin learned in Vedas) is free from taxes. (6) A Brahmin is entitled to claim the whole of the treasure trove if he found it. If the King found it he must give half to the Brahmin. (7) The property of a Brahmin dying without an heir shall not go to the king, but shall be distributed among Shrotriyas or Brahmins. (8) The king meeting a Shrotriya or a Brahmin on the road must give way to the Brahmin. (9) The Brahmin must be saluted first. (10) The person of a Brahmin is sacred. No death sentence would be passed against a Brahmin even if he is guilty of murder. (11) Threatening a Brahmin with assault, or striking him or drawing blood from his body is an offence. (12) For certain offences the Brahmin must receive a lesser punishment than members of other classes. (13) The king should not summon a Brahmin as a witness where the litigant is not a Brahmin. (14) Even when a woman has had ten former husbands who are not Brahmins, if a Brahmin marries such a woman, it is he alone who is her husband and not a Rajanya or a Vaishya to whom she may have been married” (Vol. 7, p.189-90).

Apart from these, many other privileges have been mentioned on the same page. All are of the same type. All of them indicate that a person can behave as he likes without any hurdle or control, if he is born a Brahmin. It is clear, therefore, that the Brahmins had these privileges even before the rise of four Varnas.

Is there any consistency between what Ambedkar says in other contexts and what he says in this context? Did not the question strike him: 'I said such and such there, so why am I saying thus here?' So haphazard

a manner of presentation of arguments by a person who has undertaken the burden of explaining such enormous problems as the 'origin of castes', the 'origin of Shudras' and so on! Arguments according to mere convenience! It is surprising!

After mentioning these fourteen privileges of the Brahmin Varna, Ambedkar observes that, though all these privileges of the Brahmins did not arise at one time, there is no doubt that some of the most annoying ones 'such as 1, 2, 3, 8 and 9' had already come into existence during the era of three-varna system. It was these privileges that infuriated Kshatriyas (Vol. 7, p. 190). In support of the Kshatriyas, one can say there is 'no doubt' that Brahmins had privileges by birth! Yet Ambedkar seems to say in another context, glorifying the four Varna system, that there is 'no doubt' that any Varna has any particular privilege! Readers have to go forward learning the historical knowledge in this manner!

Concerning privileges 1, 2, 3, 8 and 14 of the Brahmins had, Ambedkar himself further says this: "These were enough to infuriate any decent and self-respecting body of men" (p. 190). But, Kshatriyas got infuriated not due to decency and self-respect. The actual reason for their 'infuriation' is the Brahmin's birth right to accumulate riches without doing any work! The dispute between these two Varnas occurred only for the sake of such rights! This is what Ambedkar describes as the 'struggle for self-respect' by Kshatriyas.

Ambedkar cited some stories from the religious literature with reference to the conflict between these Varnas. There are stories like those of Trisanka, Harischandra, Ambarisha, Kalmashapada, etc. These indicate the conflict in which a Kshatriya called 'Viswamitra' was involved. Ambedkar also cited stories of many conflicts such as those between king Sudas and Vashista, king Pururava and Brahmins, king Nahashu and Brahmins, king Nimi and Brahmins, king Vena and Brahmins and so on.

The writers of religious texts describe conflicts of this kind as struggles over 'sainthood' and 'superiority'. Ambedkar, however, describes them as struggles of Kshatriyas for self-respect. But, in fact, the right way is to understand them as struggles for positions like priesthood and for a share in the wealth that may be obtained without difficulty and without doing labour.

What Ambedkar proposed afresh by citing these stories of conflict amounts only to this: that all the Kshatriyas in these stories belong to the 'Shudra branch' of Kshatriyas! Ambedkar's new and lengthy thesis proceeds as follows: That king Paijavana in Sabhaparva of Mahabharata was a Shudra, that king Paijavana and king Sudas are one and the same, that the descent (race) of Sudas was from Ikshvaku, that the descent of

all the remaining kings who struggled against Brahmins was also from Ikshvaku; hence all the kings who struggled in these stories against the Brahmins were Shudras. Moreover, Ambedkar greatly wonders as to why none of the other researchers have understood the fact that all the kings who struggled against Brahmins were Shudras.

“Unfortunately, the bearing of these cases on the position of the Shudra has not been realized as fully as it should have been. The reason is that nobody has realized that this conflict was a conflict between Brahmins and Shudras. Sudas definitely was a Shudra. The others although they have not been described as Shudras are described as having been descended from Ikshvaku. Sudas is also described as a descendant of Ikshvaku. There is nothing far-fetched in saying that they were all Shudras. Even Manu had no idea of this. He represents these cases as cases of conflict between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Dr. Muir has failed to realize that Sudas was a Shudra and has in recounting these stories represented that the parties to these conflicts were Brahmins on the one hand and the Kshatriyas on the other. In a sense, it is true that the conflict was between Brahmins and Kshatriyas because the Shudras were also a branch of the Kshatriyas. It would, however, have been far more illuminating if they had been described in more precise terms as conflicts between Brahmins and Shudras. The misunderstanding having been caused, it has remained and has continued to conceal the real nature of so important a part of the history of the Indo-Aryan society. It is to clear this misunderstanding that the heading given to this Chapter is ‘Brahmins *versus* Shudras’ and not ‘Brahmins *versus* Kshatriyas’. Understood as a history of conflict between Brahmins and Shudras, it helps one to understand how the Shudras came to be degraded from the second to the fourth Varna” (Vol.7, p.155).

In the course of learning the history of Indo-Aryans, we have so far gone up to the point of conflicts between Brahmins and the Shudra kings. But here the following question arises immediately: The domination of Brahmins affects all sections in the society of that time, and not merely the Shudras, doesn't it? Ambedkar himself said that this domination will infuriate any decent and self-respecting person, didn't he? Then, why did not others among Kshatriyas or Vysyas come into conflict with Brahmins but only the Shudras? We must seek an answer to this question. Further, we need to check whether Ambedkar has said anything elsewhere contrary to what he said earlier, namely, that all those who had conflicts with the Brahmins were Shudras and that they belonged to Ikshvaku lineage.

## 2) The Shudras belonged to Solar Line!

Ambedkar's explanation of this point proceeds as follows, as he describes the 'martial spirit' of the Shudras:

"These were enough to infuriate any decent and self-respecting body of men. On the side of the Kshatriya kings they could not be supposed to be willing to take things lying low. How could they? It must not be forgotten that most of the Kshatriya kings who came into conflict with the Brahmins, belonged to the solar line. They differed from the Kshatriyas of the lunar line in learning, in pride and in martial spirit. The Kshatriyas who belonged to the solar line were a virile people, while those who belonged to the lunar line were an imbecile lot without any self-respect. The former challenged the Brahmins. The latter succumbed to them and became their slaves. This was as it should be. For while the Kshatriyas of the lunar line were devoid of any learning, those belonging to the solar line were not merely the equals of Brahmins in the matter of learning, they were their superior. Several of them were the authors of the Vedic hymns and were known as Rajarishis. This was particularly true of those who came into conflict with the Brahmins" (Vol.7, pp. 190-91).

"The most famous Vedic hymn namely the Gayatri mantra is the production of Vishvamitra who was a Kshatriya. It was impossible for the Kshatriyas of this calibre not to take up this challenge of the Brahmins" (Vol. 7, p. 192).

Ambedkar had said earlier that all those who came into conflict with Brahmins were Shudras and that they had descended from Ikshvaku. But now he says that most of the Kshatriya kings who came into conflict with Brahmins belonged to solar line! If people of Ikshvaku descent are Shudras, the people belonging to solar line will be the other Kshatriyas who are not Shudras. This means, in fact, that if most of those who came into conflict with Brahmins belonged to one solar line, they did not belong to the Shudra branch of the Kshatriya Varna. Which of these propositions is correct? What he said earlier or what he is saying now? Which should we consider seriously?

The Kshatriyas of the solar line alone possess everything: learning, scholarship, martial spirit, pride and self-respect! It is pity that Kshatriyas who belonged to lunar line are devoid of all those characteristics. Why does the solar descent give the former their martial spirit? Why does lunar line not give that spirit? Where should we look for the reasons for this distinction? This is surely an intractable problem.

Let us leave the issue of Kshatriyas aside for the moment. What about Vyasyas? If domination by Brahmins will infuriate any decent and self-respecting person, why did it not infuriate Vysyas? The reason is obvious. Thus, we have got the answer to our first question fully. But our other question is, why did other Varnas except the Shudras not come into conflict with Brahmins? Because some of the Kshatriyas did not belong to either



Ikshvaku descent or solar line. Vysyas might not have fought because either they were not 'decent' or 'self-respecting'! Thus, this answer is very satisfactory!

But, now a doubt regarding Vysyas. Ambedkar says that there were Vysyas also among those who composed 'hymns' (Vol. 7, p.191). Well, that apparently doesn't matter! For, they might not be 'decent' persons despite the fact that they composed hymns! This is also true. Well, thus, this doubt is also cleared! But we have another doubt: Ambedkar said that Kshatriyas of solar line became Rajarishis, and some were even 'superior' to Brahmins, didn't he? When Kshatriyas also do whatever Brahmins do, they become the Brahmins' equals; but how can they be superior to Brahmins? In what way are they 'superior' to Brahmins?

A further doubt: If people of solar descent were incapable of fighting against Brahmin domination, how can the population of the present day lower castes who do not belong even to lunar line, fight against the still existing domination of the upper Varnas? Do they have education? Do they have scholarship? Did they compose Vedic hymns? What is the way for them to acquire a militant spirit, pride and self-respect? The conclusion seems unavoidable: that the low-caste population which do not belong to the solar line has no way to wage a conflict.

Further, a fourth doubt: There is a problem with regard to the 'descent of Shudras'. Ambedkar—who said earlier that Sudas was a Shudra, that he belonged to Ikshvaku lineage and all other militant kings too belonged to the same lineage—says at another place that "The Shudras were one of the Aryan communities of the solar race" (Vol. 7, p. 204). What is this? Do Shudras belong to Ikshvaku race or to the Solar race or to both? Are both the races identical? Or must we conclude that Shudras are great people regardless of their descent since the two races (Ikshvaku and Solar) are very great?

**S**o far, we have considered conflicts between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Apparently, the Kshatriyas caused the Brahmins great tribulation in these conflicts. This is how they did it, according to Ambedkar:

"Their pride which was born out of their prowess and their learning must have been so greatly wounded by the pretensions of the Brahmins that when they did take up the challenge of the Brahmins they did it in a ruthless spirit. They hit the Brahmins hip and thigh. Vena forced them to worship him and no other god; Pururavas looted their wealth. Nahusha yoked them to his chariot and made them drag it through the city. Nimi flouted the exclusive and hereditary right of a family priest to perform

all the ceremonies in the family and Sudas went to the length of burning alive the son of Vasishtha who was once his family priest. Surely, there cannot be greater cause to provoke the Brahmins to seek their vengeance upon the Shudras" (Vol. 7, p. 192).

Therefore the Brahmins sought vengeance against the violence of Kshatriyas:

"...the technique employed by the Brahmins for this purpose was to refuse to perform the Upanayana of the Shudras. I have no doubt that it is by this technique that the Brahmins accomplished their end and thereby wreaked their vengeance upon the Shudras" (Vol. 7, p.157).

What does 'Upanayana' mean? What does one lose if it is not performed? Was it being performed for all people at one time, then? Ambedkar discusses all these questions at length.

'Upanayana' once meant only teaching the Gayatri mantra. 'Sutradharana' (Yagnopavita) means putting the 'sacred' thread around the neck. Once these two activities used to take place separately. In later periods, they merged into a single ceremony. The religious literature tells that Upanayana was once performed in the case of all men and women of all the three Varnas:

"In addition to circumstantial evidence and the evidence of the authors mentioned before, the Sanskara Ganapati cited by Max Muller contains an express provision declaring the Shudra to be eligible for Upanayana" (Vol. 7, p. 169).

In subsequent ages, in the case of women, Upanayana ceased to exist as an independent ceremony and merged with marriage. But Upanayana was denied to Shudra because the Brahmins stopped performing it for them. According to the rules of Purva Mimamsa, the right to study the Vedas and the right to perform a sacrifice are open only to those persons who have undergone the Upanayana ceremony. Persons with these rights will also have the 'right to property'. If a person does not undergo Upanayana, he must lose his right to study and right to property. That is, surely, the loss of all privileges:

"Once the relation of Upanayana to education and property is grasped, all difficulty in accepting the thesis that the degradation of the Shudra was entirely due to loss of Upanayana must vanish... Without Upanayana, a person was doomed to social degradation, to ignorance and to poverty. The stoppage of Upanayana was a most deadly weapon discovered by the Brahmins to avenge themselves against the Shudras. It had the effect of an atomic bomb" (Vol. 7, p. 172).

"Once it was denied to the Shudras, its possession became a matter of honour and its denial a badge of servility....It made the Shudras look

up to the higher classes as their superiors and enabled the three higher classes to look down upon the Shudras as their inferiors" (Vol. 7, p.171).

Well, then, did any attempts of reconciliation take place between Brahmins and Shudras? Such attempts, if they did occur, obviously did not yield results.

To show that Brahmins had the right to perform or to deny Upanayanas, Ambedkar cited the example of Shivaji. Though the conflict that took place between Brahmins and Shivaji does not relate to ancient times, we can consider it as a piece of evidence:

"Shivaji after having established a Hindu independent kingdom in the western part of Maharashtra thought of proclaiming himself a king by having his coronation performed" (Vol. 7, p. 175).

But Brahmins refused to perform coronation on the ground that Shivaji was not a Kshatriya but a Shudra, that a Shudra is not qualified for Upanayana, and that they would not perform coronation for a person who has not undergone Upanayana. In response, Shivaji showed a genealogy to prove that he was a Kshatriya. A Brahmin named Gagabhat accepted a great deal of money and performed coronation for Shivaji. It seems easy enough to split Brahmins if you throw some money at them. In Ambedkar's own words:

"The support of the Brahmins for the performance of Upanayana need not be based on honest grounds. It could be purchased by money. Shivaji got the support of the Brahmin Gagabhat on payment of money" (Vol.7, p. 185).

Ambedkar cited the example from the recent past of Shivaji to show that one can imagine the nature of the domination of Brahmins in the ancient times. But this example raises a question: were the Shudras not able to obtain the services of any one section of the Brahmins by some means and make them perform Upanayana for them? Ambedkar raises a similar question and answers it thus:

"But it is clear that even in the times of the Rig Veda, Brahmins were a class by themselves, had developed class consciousness and were keen on maintaining class interests. In that event it would have been difficult for the Shudras to break up the conspiracy of the Brahmins" (Vol. 7, p. 202).

In one place, Ambedkar says that "the support of the Brahmins need not be based on honest grounds and it could be purchased by money"; and here he says that it would have been 'difficult for the Shudras to break up the conspiracy of the Brahmins!

What must have happened finally in the case of Shudras is this:

“Owing to the denial of *Upanayana*, the *Shudras* who were Kshatriyas became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the *Vaishyas* and thus came to form the fourth *Varna*” (Vol. 7, p. 12).

Shudras, who until then constituted a branch within Kshatriya Varna, lost all their rights including the right to property and became poor. The Shudra kings, the Shudra ministers, the Shudra rich—everyone became poor. Thus emerged the Shudra Varna. The three Varnas became four. This is the new theory which Ambedkar elaborated in his book titled *Who were the Shudras?*

At some places, Ambedkar says that it was Shudra branch of Kshatriyas who fought with Brahmins, and at other places he observes that the learned Kshatriyas could not tolerate the domination of Brahmins, that all Kshatriyas fought against Brahmins. Yet he concludes that the Shudra branch of Kshatriyas alone changed into Shudra Varna and all the remaining Kshatriyas remained the second Varna. How can one reconcile this inconsistency?

### 3) Those Shudras are different!

When we look at a book titled *Who were the Shudras?*, we expect that it will discuss the origin of the present-day Shudras also, don't we? In fact this essay begins with words that suggest such a possibility. But at the end it concluded that there is no relationship between the present-day Shudras and the Shudras of the past! Before looking at Ambedkar's conclusion, it is necessary to look at what the book proposes at the very beginning:

“Under the system of *Chaturvarnya*, the *Shudra* is not only placed at the bottom of the gradation but he is subjected to innumerable ignominies and disabilities so as to prevent him from rising above the condition fixed for him by law...the *Shudras* form about 75 to 80 per cent of the population of Hindus. A treatise which deals with so vast a population cannot be considered to be dealing with a trivial problem” (Vol. 7, p.9).

‘So vast a population’ means Shudras of the present day. This means that *Who were the Shudras?* must discuss the present day Shudras who constitute 80% of the population today. There was obviously a code that decreed their status. “How such a Code came into being, cannot therefore be regarded as of mere antiquarian interest to the Shudras of to-day” (Vol. 7, p. 11), says Ambedkar. This means, the present-day Shudras should not consider that they would not look at the argument of this book simply

out of historical curiosity. Surely, it is related to their present lives in fundamental ways. Ambedkar himself claims that

“the book is written for the ignorant and the uninformed *Shudras*, who do not know how they came to be what they are” (Vol. 7, p.18).

Thus this book begins with the promise that it would historically derive how the present day Shudra population have reached their present stage. Look at the conclusion we reach by the time we come to the end of the book:

“...the Shudras of the Indo-Aryan Society are absolutely different in race from the Shudras of the Hindu Society. The Shudras of the Hindu Society are not the racial descendants of the Shudras of the Indo-Aryan Society....In the Indo-Aryans the word Shudra was the proper name of one single people. It was the name of a people who belonged to a particular race. The word Shudra, as used in the Hindu society, is not a proper name at all. It is an epithet for a low uncultured class of people. It is a general cognomen of a miscellaneous and heterogeneous collection of tribes and groups, who have nothing in common except that they happen to be on a lower plane of culture. It is a pity that these innocent and backward people of later days have been rolled up with the original Shudras and subjected to the same penalties for which they had given no cause” (Vol. 7, 200-1).

How should we understand the statement that there is no connection between the Shudras of those days and the Shudras of the present-days? Now, Ambedkar says that there is no connection between those Shudras and these Shudras in terms of ‘descent’, ‘race’, ‘living conditions’ or ‘culture’. If there is no such link that transformed the Shudras of that time into contemporary Shudras, how can this book be concerned with the present day Shudras? Ambedkar claims, however, that this book does not simply constitute history but is written with a view to knowing how the vast population of contemporary Shudras came to their degraded status. But how can the degradation of the past Shudras be the basis for the degradation of the present-day Shudras if the past Shudras are not the ancestors of present-day Shudras? Well, this means, the Shudra Varna of the ancient system of four Varnas is not the ancestor of the present-day Shudras! This books then, does not really concern the origins of the present day Shudras. If that is so, how is this research useful to the present-day Shudras? What should the present-day Shudras learn from it? If they want to make the claim that their “ancestors ruled the kingdoms as kings and ministers”, there is no basis here whatsoever. Then why did the writer say that this book was written to enable present day Shudras to know ‘how they came to be what they are’?

So far, already, many unanswerable questions have arisen concerning Ambedkar's theory. There is still another question before which all other questions pale: 'Can the upper Varnas at least exist on their own?'

#### **4) Can the upper Varnas exist without a Servant Varna?**

In religious texts, we find restrictions that Shudras should not study Vedas, perform sacrifices and acquire property. But in the same texts we find descriptions that Shudras were kings, that they performed sacrifices and composed Vedic hymns. Does it mean that those who were forbidden to acquire property could rule kingdoms? Does it mean that those who were forbidden learning could contribute to the composition of Vedic literature? Ambedkar asks the same kind of questions: The religious texts said that Shudras were forbidden to study Vedas, didn't they? Then how could they say that Sudas, a Shudra king wrote hymns? They said that Shudras had no right to officiate at sacrifices, didn't they? Then how could they accept a Shudra to officiate sacrifices in Satapatha Brahmana? In these questions, Ambedkar implied to say that restrictions on Shudras did not exist at first. In the beginning, Shudras were part of three Varna system. That is why, there are examples in religious literature that Shudras were great people. Restrictions were introduced at some later time. Examples of restrictions were then added to literature. Hence we find two kinds of examples with reference to Shudras. Based on this reasoning, we are to understand that Shudras constituted an upper Varna at one time.

There is nothing to oppose the suggestion that there used to be rich persons even among Shudras just as there were rich persons among Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vysyas. But Ambedkar's theory does not stop at that point. With a view to say that 'Shudras were also part of upper Varna and not a servant class', he made a formulation that 'there were only three Varnas in the society at one time. All the three were the upper Varnas. There was no servant Varna'. But he was not bothered to note that it was odd and inconsistent not to find Servant Varna in a society where there were the 'upper' Varnas. The question is not into how many sections the society of the time was divided. If all the existing sections were of a superior level, who would perform the 'services' they needed? When there are such 'great' people as ministers, kings and Rajarishis who yet do not have servants, will they do their chores for themselves? Will his Royal Highness, the King, get down into the field and till the land for his food? Will his Excellency, the minister, graze the cows for himself for milk? Will the reverend Rajarishi makes himself a carriage for his travel and drive it for himself? Surely a numerous class of servants is needed

to carry on these services at home and outside for the sake of rich people who do not perform any labour? How will the propertied and wealthy classes form if there is no section that performs labour? In fact, 'wealth' means mass of labour exacted from labourers. Superior Varnas could not have formed if there were no labourers. Absence of section of servants is possible if there is some society where there is no such thing as 'upper Varna' and where the entire population performs labour. But it is utterly a non-sensible imagination to assume that there was no servant Varna in a society where there were such upper Varnas as Shudra kings, ministers, pundits and wealthy people whom Ambedkar describes. Therefore, existence of servant Varna is obligatory and invariable in any society where there are upper Varnas. The name of those servants would be something else if not 'Shudras'. If the upper Varnas are three and if we add servant Varna to it, there would be four Varnas in total.

Is a society which Ambedkar describes consisting exclusively of the upper Varnas meaningless or not?

## 5) Research that revolves around 'Genealogy'!

'Everybody says that Shudras do not have particular rights. Why doesn't any one think of the reasons why they don't have those rights?'— This is what Ambedkar asks. Well, then, what did Ambedkar himself think about it regardless of whether others thought or not? What did he discover? He discovered that Shudras lost all their rights due to the stoppage of Upanayanas for them.

But, even according to Ambedkar, Brahmins had special rights during the period in which Shudras also existed as part of the upper Varna system when all people were eligible for Upanayanas. Well, did Ambedkar think about this question? Though he said that Brahmins had particular privileges, did he think why they had those privileges?

When Shudras or other Varnas do not have equal rights, when Brahmins or some other class has privileges, and if someone then raises the cry: 'why do these people have privileges' or 'why do we have no privileges', the answer would simply be: 'because of the Varna system'! It would have to be the 'Varna system' or 'class system', which promote and perpetuate hierarchical differences among sections of society. Whatever be the name given to such a system! If the living conditions and rights or privileges of all Varnas are equal, it won't be Varna system. It would be a Varna-less system.

Whether we call a social subdivision 'Varna' or 'class', when we

raise the question as to 'when these distinctions began', we have to go back to the time when conflicts among ancient tribes began for the sake of natural resources. People of the subsequent periods may not be in a position to know which tribe fought with which tribe, when and in which region.' But such conflicts alone mark the beginning of human history. Victories and defeats inevitably follow such conflicts. Labour processes and labour relations too begin. Gradually slavery and masterhood begin. Property in land and exploitation of labour begin. Previously non-existing phenomenon called 'administration' meant to suppress class of slaves begins. Laws and punishments for slaves begin. Kings and kingdoms come into being. We have to imagine this ancient history that brought about these consequences. This is the process in which conflicting classes emerged. The basis of this process is 'exploitation of labour'.

Ownership of property under Varna system gives few masterhood over servants. It is natural, then, that servants should not have the rights which masters have. Thus the answer to the question 'why do the upper Varnas have privileges?' also provides the answer to the question 'why does the servant Varna not have rights?'

To the question, 'why do Varnas of owners have privileges, the answer is 'because those are Varnas of property owners'. It is a different issue if there are hierarchical differences within the Varnas of owners as well. To the question 'why does the servant Varna not have rights?' the answer is, 'because it is the labouring, propertyless servant Varna'!

The research takes a right direction only if we raise the question 'why do masters and servants exist or why do the upper Varnas and lower Varnas exist?'

The distinctions among Varnas are facts that are open for all to confirm. Research is not needed to allow us to mention that 'there are distinctions'. Research is needed only to find out why there are distinctions. This should be the task of any study of this subject. Ambedkar's study does recognize the distinctions between Varnas. But, it does not see the basis of the Varna distinctions in terms of 'labour relations'. He attempts to find it in terms of religious paraphernalia like Upanayanas, sacred threads and sacrifices. Though his work mentions the property right as well, this right depends on the privilege of Upanayanas only. Property, according to this research, does not have more power than that (dependence on Upanayanas). Even His Royal Highness the King too becomes a pauper if he does not undergo Upanayana. What happens to his land if he is deprived of the right to the sacred thread is beyond anybody's imagination. Ambedkar mentions mainly three textual sources as the basis for his explanation of the origin of the Shudra Varna.



1. Some religious texts mention only three Varnas and do not mention the Shudra Varna.
2. Some religious texts mention Shudra kings and ministers.
3. Some religious texts mention that, at one time, Shudras also underwent Upanayanas.

Owing to these sources, Ambedkar assumed and theorized that Shudras too must have existed as an upper Varna at one time and only later must have been deprived of the privilege of Upanayanas and hence turned into the servant Varna. Pointing to his theory, he says very confidently that even if a chain of his theory breaks down, the remaining chains are quite capable of sustaining the weight of his theory (Vol.7, p. 206).

But are these chains so strong?

1) Let us suppose that some religious texts mentioned only three upper Varnas and did not mention the servant Varna. Do we, based on this, come to the conclusion that there were only the upper Varnas and there was no servant Varna in society? If a person understands the matter in this way, it means that he does not have even common sense about the basic composition of any society. How can a servant Varna be absent in a society where there are kings, ministers and a few wealthy people? We can't blame little kids who do not raise this question but we have to blame persons who crossed ten years. One has to imagine some other reason if Shudra Varna does not appear in religious texts. That imagination too is of no use if it is like the present assumption. It should be a correct one. If we can't imagine anything, we have to leave it. Do we, therefore, conclude that the servant Varna did not exist at that time and propose it as a theory?

2) In some religious texts are mentioned Shudra kings and ministers. Will this, however, prove that Shudra kings alone were noble and capable kings and that they alone came into conflict with Brahmins?

3) Let us suppose that Shudras at one time were permitted to undergo Upanayanas. Why were they later deprived of Upanayanas? Because they had come into conflict with Brahmins. Why did Shudras alone engage in conflict? Because they belonged to the Solar race!

These are the chains that have to sustain the weight of Ambedkar's theory! Which of these chains is strong? No chain has the strength of a piece of a thread either.

But Ambedkar, while claiming that his theory is correct, is impatient with other researchers because none of them has correctly explained the origins of Shudra Varna.

Looking at the examples in religious texts which in certain contexts say that Shudras do not have rights and which in certain other contexts also say that Shudras were wealthy, Ambedkar does ask some questions with regard to the contradictory nature of religious texts. Ambedkar seriously marvels at other scholars' failure to raise such questions he raised; he is surprised that, given the information which religious texts provide, they could not catch the point that 'Shudras too were an upper Varna' at one time. Here is his argument:

"How can these riddles be explained? Neither the orthodox Hindu nor the modern scholar has attempted to explain them. Indeed they do not seem to be aware of the fact that such riddles exist. The orthodox Hindu does not bother about them. He is content with the divine explanation contained in the *Purusha Sukta* that the Shudra was born from the feet of the Purusha. The modern scholar is content with the assumption that the Shudra in his origin is a non-Aryan aboriginal, for whom the Aryan quite naturally prescribed a different code of laws. It is a pity that none of these classes of people have cared to acquaint themselves with the riddles which surround the problem of the Shudra, much less have they thought of suggesting a theory of the origin of the position of the Shudra capable of solving them. With regard to my thesis it will be seen that it can explain everyone of these riddles" (Vol. 7, p. 208).

We have seen in detail what his explanations are and how they solve the riddles.

While discussing any problem, Ambedkar talks about his discussion as something very special or to put it in other words in an exaggerated fashion. After summing up the essence of his theory in four or five sentences in the preface to his essay, *Who were Shudras?* and much before readers come to know about his theory in detail, Ambedkar claims:

"My critics will have to admit that the book is rich in fresh insights and new visions" (Vol. 7, p. 12).

He immediately dives into the realm of the imagination thus:

"I must of course await the verdict of scholars on these conclusions... Apart from scholars, how the Hindu public will react may be an interesting speculation" (Vol. 7, p.12).

All the doubts should be cleared before 'public' respond to it in any manner, one supposes. But Ambedkar continues to speculate before clearing these doubts:

"What the Orthodox Hindu will say about this book I can well imagine for I have been battling with him all these years" (Vol. 7, p. 14).

"The book treads heavily on the toes of the Arya Samajists. My conclusions have come in sharp conflict with their ideology at two most important points. The Arya Samajists believe that the four *Varnas* of the Indo-Aryan society have been in existence from the very beginning. The book shows that there was a time when there were only three *Varnas* in the Indo-Aryan society. The Arya Samajists believe that the *Vedas* are eternal and sacrosanct. The book shows that portions of the *Vedas* at any rate, particularly the *Purusha Sukta*, which is the mainstay of the Arya Samajists, are fabrications by *Brahmins* intended to serve their own purposes. Both these conclusions are bound to act like atomic bombs on the dogmas of the Arya Samajists" (Vol. 7, pp. 13-14).

Do you need atom bombs to answer those who praise Vedas? Aren't broomsticks enough to do that?

Recalling the 'newness' in his research, Ambedkar exclaims over it in the middle of his essay thus:

"What does Shudra signify? In the light of this new discovery that Sudas was a Shudra, the word now stands in a totally different light. To old scholars to whom the word was just the name of a servile and aboriginal class this new discovery must come as a surprise for which their past researches cannot possibly furnish an answer" (Vol.7, p. 130).

What is the new meaning that we have to give to the word 'Shudra'? Can we say that Shudra means a king? Even if the present day Shudras want to claim and feel happy that their ancestors too were kings, Ambedkar himself claimed that there was no connection between those Shudras and these Shudras! Then what new meaning do these Shudras attach to their current status?

Ambedkar himself tells us that

"a thesis which demands acceptance must not only suggest a solution, but must also show that the solution it proposes answers the riddles which surround the problem which it claims to have solved" (Vol. 7, p. 207).

This is, surely, true. But is this theory able to answer all the riddles connected with the question of Shudras? Has he been able to say anything enlightening about either the present-day Shudras or their ancestors? Can his proposition at all be called a theory of the origin of the present-day Shudras? Yet he can say:

"I am sure that my thesis cannot be discredited and demolished in such an easy manner" (Vol. 7, p. 205).

In so many ways, Ambedkar claims success with such confidence. Yet once again, suddenly, he remembers conventional modesty and obedience here and there; at one place, he says:

"As for myself I am in no better position" (Vol. 7, p. 130).

At another place:

"While I am convinced that my thesis is sound, it would be over confident to think that there will not be found persons who will not raise objections to it" (Vol. 7, p. 161).

At a third place he says:

"I do not claim absolute certainty for my thesis" (Vol. 7, p. 206).

When he is able to claim that his theory is capable of answering all the riddles, why does he not come out and say thus: 'I can prove what I say to be correct. Come on, let us discuss?'

In fact, Ambedkar must have suffered from doubt regarding the viability of his arguments! That is why he says that he too is in the same position, that it would be overconfident for to think that no one will raise objections to his theory. When he is not sure why should he start in a grand and clarion style right from the beginning? Even a person who has discovered a great theory, he need not make exaggerated claims. If he has some doubt about his theory, if he feels that adequate and sound proof is not available, his arguments should be expressed in measured language accordingly. He has to present his arguments thus: 'I am making the following assumptions. I have such and such evidence. You may think along these lines'.

If he says on the one hand that he won't claim absolute certainty for his thesis and on the other hand if he starts with a big noise that his 'book is rich in fresh insights and new visions' and that it would 'act like an atomic bomb' on so and so people, what value will that grand style have?

Having made exaggerated claims throughout the book and exhibited modesty here and there, he finally concluded thus:

"Indeed there is no riddle which the thesis does not solve. The thesis if I may say so, is a close and a perfect fit. Few theses can therefore have a better little deed than this" (Vol. 7, p. 209).

Aren't there riddles which this theory is unable to answer? What 'in fact' are the riddles which it has answered? What is the difference between the theory of Brahma's feet and theory of Solar race?

Is it a scientific research that revolves around Solar race, Lunar race and Ikshwaku race?

If the theory of victory of the Aryan race—which assumes that population of one region invaded the people of another region and turned

them into slaves—is useless and ‘must be thrown on the scrap heap’, is Ambedkar’s theory—which is based on notions like the victory of Solar race and Upanayanas—more worthy to be considered seriously? If we throw his theory too on to the same scrap heap beside the Aryan race theory, is it not its appropriate place?

### 3 ‘BRAHMINICAL’ LITERATURE OR ‘FEUDAL’ LITERATURE?

Vedas are the core of Hindu religious literature. While observing that Brahmins composed some parts of Vedas and Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras composed certain other parts, Ambedkar cites the following examples:

“...the following hymns are said to have been composed by the under mentioned kings” (Vol. 7, p. 191).

Here Ambedkar mentions the name of the Shudra king Sudas along with such other names as Bharadvaja and Sindhuvipa. Next,

“Manu Vaivasvata, Ida, king *Pururavas*, these are to be known as the eminent utterers of hymns among the Kshatriyas. Bhalanda, Vandya, and Sanskirti these are always to be known as the three eminent persons among the Vysyas who were composers of hymns. Thus ninety-one persons have been declared by whom hymns have been given birth to, Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas” (Vol. 7, p. 191).

Ambedkar, however, also adds the following:

“In the list of the authors of the Vedic hymns there are not only names of many Kshatriyas, there are names of many of the Kshatriyas who had come into conflict with the Brahmins. The Kshatriyas were the leaders among the Vedic hymn makers. The most famous Vedic hymn namely the Gayatri mantra is the production of Vishvamitra who was a Kshatriya. It was impossible for the Kshatriyas of this calibre not to take up this challenge of the Brahmins” (Vol. 7, P. 192).

We have already seen earlier that this Vishvamitra was a Shudra, that all the Kshatriyas who fought against Brahmins were also Shudras, that those became Rajarishis who composed Vedic hymns and that they had even surpassed Brahmins.

Now, the main feature of the four-Varna system is that the Shudras served the first three upper Varnas. Yet Ambedkar characterizes the

religious literature which the four-Varna system preaches as brahminical literature:

“It is a literature which is almost entirely the creation of the Brahmins. Secondly, its whole object is to sustain the superiority and privileges of the Brahmins as against the non-Brahmins... The *Brahmin* scholar has a two-fold interest in the maintenance of the sanctity of this literature. In the first place being the production of his forefathers his filial duty leads him to defend it even at the cost of truth” (Vol. 7, pp. 16-17).

The question here is: can we say that this literature is entirely a creation of Brahmins and it is production of their forefathers?

According to Ambedkar’s explanation, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras (when Shudras constituted a branch within the Kshatriya Varna) created this literature. Then how could it be “entirely a creation of the Brahmins?”

Another question: Is this scriptural literature aimed at sustaining the superiority and privileges of the Brahmins alone? No. After the formation of the Shudra Varna, the Shudras were expected to serve not only the Brahmin Varna but also the Kshatriya and Vysya Varnas. We have already seen, for instance, that these three Varnas could possess property but Shudras were denied property rights and that any upper Varna person could kill a Shudra without paying any compensation. This means that not the Brahmin Varna alone opposed the Shudra Varna but Kshatriya and Vysya Varnas did as well. Will the literature that supports the three upper Varnas be ‘upper Varna’ literature or simply Brahminical literature?

It was not the Brahmin Varna alone which created that literature. Nor is it the Brahmin Varna alone which benefits from that literature. Hence, Shudras would be able to correctly identify their opponents only when we characterize that literature as ‘upper Varna’ literature and not as ‘Brahminical’ literature.

It is a different issue if there are hierarchical differences among those upper Varnas. It is a problem connected with the lower Varnas within those upper Varnas. It is not a problem of Shudras.

All Varnas that stand as Masters over Shudras are essentially the same. We need not, in this case, excuse any one of them. The relation between the master and the servant is a relation in which the servant performs the labour necessary for the subsistence of the master. Any master is a master irrespective of whether he is a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya or even a Shudra master. If Ambedkar wanted to ‘educate’ “the ignorant and the uniformed Shudras, who do not know how they came to be what they are”, he has to introduce the concept of ‘upper Varna literature’.

Indeed, the term 'upper Varna literature' is not entirely appropriate either. Here we would need to make it a practice to use the term 'feudal literature'. Because the upper Varnas enjoy privileges due to their 'landed property'. A master is one who has such property. Those who do not possess that property are labourers under the master. All the rules found in scriptural literature that appears as Brahminical literature defend the relations of landed property. Owing to this fact, that literature becomes the 'literature of the feudal class' or 'feudal literature'. If we want to 'educate' Shudras, it is of no use to reiterate the inadequate and misleading term 'Brahminical literature!' It won't educate Shudras properly.

## 1) Fascination for religious rituals

Ambedkar, it appears, enjoyed elaborating upon religious rituals. To put it more aptly, he goes into a state of ecstasy while describing rituals. Keeping aside the fact that such details are more or less irrelevant to real life, they are not relevant to his investigation either. He could have confined himself to mention of such things very briefly according to context. But Ambedkar was not so easily satisfied. For example, if we look at the details that he gave while describing 'upanayanas', we would understand the extent of his obsession:

"The best way to give an idea of Upanayana is to give a description of the ceremony" (Vol. 7, p. 156).

The description of the ritual begins thus and continues for about 6 further pages (pp: 156-161 in Vol. 7).

"As a rite *Upanayana* was originally a very simple ceremony. The boy came to the teacher with a *samidh* (a grass blade) in his hand and told the teacher that he desired to become a Brahmachary (i.e. a student) and begged the teacher to allow him to stay with him for purposes of study. At a later date it became a very elaborate ceremony" (Vol. 7, p. 156).

Ambedkar points to this information in the *Ashvalayana Griha Sutra* and then begins to describe the process:

"Let him initiate the boy who is decked, whose hair (on the head) is shaved (and arranged), who wears a new garment or an antelope skin if a Brahmana, ruru skin if a Kshatriya, a goat's skin if a Vaishya; if they put on garments they should put on dyed ones, reddish-yellow, red and yellow (for a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya respectively); they should have girdles and staffs (as described above). While the boy takes hold of (the hand of) his teacher, the latter offers (a homa of clarified butter oblations) in the fire (as described above), and seats himself to the north of the fire with his face turned to the east, while the other one (the boy) stations himself in front (of the teacher) with his face turned

to the west. The teacher then fills the folded hands of both himself and of the boy with water and with the verse ‘we choose that of Savitri’ (Rg.V. 82.1) the teacher drops down the water in his own folded hands on to the water in the folded hands of the boy; having thus poured the water, he should seize with his own hand the boy’s hand together with the thumb (of the boy) with the formula ‘by the urge (or order) of the god Savitri, with the arms of the two Ashvins, with the hands of Pushan, I seize thy hand, oh so, and so,’ with the words ‘Savitri has seized thy hand, oh so and so’ a second time (the teacher seizes the boy’s hand) with the words ‘Agni is thy teacher oh so and so’ a third time. The teacher should cause (the boy) to look at the sun, while the teacher repeats ‘God savitri, this is thy brahmachari protect him...’ (Vol. 7, p.156-57).

Here we find a description of the chanting of another mantra:

“...(the teacher) should cause him to turn round to the right and with his two hands placed over (the boy’s) shoulders he should touch the place of the boy’s heart repeating the latter half (of Rg. III. 8.4). Having wiped the ground round the fire, the brahmachari should put (on the fire) a fuel stick silently,...” (Vol. 7, p. 157).

Again another mantra! The student ends it by saying ‘svaha’ and wipes his face thrice! Again a long mantra! The student bends his knees, embraces the teacher’s feet and says to him ‘recite, sir, recite, sir, the Savitri’. At this point, we find all such details as whether the teacher lays his hand with fingers upturned or reverse and how the student stands, how many fuel sticks he has to offer to Agni (the fire) and so on! Ambedkar also tells us that

“He (the student) should beg (food) in the evening and the morning; he should put a fuel stick (on fire) in the evening and morning. That (which he has received by begging) he should announce to the teacher; he should not sit down (but should be standing) the rest of the day” (Vol. 7, p. 158).

The Upanayana concludes only after such a long ritual. This is to initiate a person in the study of the Vedas.

The absence of any mention of thread called ‘*Yajnopavita*’ in this ceremony of Upanayana astonished all pundits: Why was it absent? This became a serious social problem for them! All of them participated in the discussion in their books with a variety of arguments. These mantras and those mantras, always mantras and more mantras, Upanayana, *Yajnopavita*, mantra, yanopavita, mantra!

These kinds of things excite our pundit Ambedkar a lot! He had ‘boiled and strained off’ the mantras and wars of mantras of all the pundits; that is, he had himself mastered the whole debate. He became an expert



in this matter. Ambedkar says that pundit Tilak had offered an explanation that *Yajnopavita* (the sacred thread) was non-existent at one time—If that is true, then let's be grateful to God for there were no threads around the necks of the Brahmin children at the time of their birth—that it came at a later time, that it came in a particular period of time and in a particular manner. Ambedkar was fascinated by that explanation but he was slightly dissatisfied with it: “[the] explanation by Mr. Tilak is no doubt very interesting. But it does not help to explain some of the difficulties”, saying thus Ambedkar claimed how skillfully and delicately he would solve these riddles. He did investigate many religious texts for the purpose. Finally, it appears, he got hold of the secret. For he himself concluded that the Upanayana came into existence to answer a certain need while *Yajnopavita* was invented for a different need. Well, we do not know whether all the Brahmin pundits felt happy over this explanation.

### (1) Yagnopavita

If we bend an ear close to the ‘holy’ words about *Yajnopavita*, we can understand how deep Ambedkar’s interest was in that study of such religious matters:

“The *Yajnopavita* should have three threads, each thread to be of nine strands well twisted. One *tantu* (strand) stands for one devata (deity). The *Yajnopavita* should reach as far as the navel, should not reach beyond the navel, nor should it be above the chest. A person could wear more than one *Yajnopavita*. A man must always wear *Yajnopavita*. If he took his meals without wearing the *Yajnopavita* placed on the right ear, he had to undergo *prayascitta*, viz., to bathe, to mutter prayers and fast. Wearing of another’s *Yajnopavita* along with several other things (such as shoes, ornament, garland and *kamandalu*) is forbidden. Three ways of wearing the *Yajnopavita* are recognized: (1) *nivita*, (2) *pracinavita* and (3) *upavita*. When the cord is carried over the neck, both shoulders and the chest and is held with both the thumbs (of the two hands) lower than the region of the heart and above the navel, it is called *nivita*. Suspending the cord over the left shoulder in such a way that it hangs down on his right side, it becomes *upavita*. Suspending it on his right shoulder in such a way that it hangs down on his left side, it becomes *pracinavita*” (Vol. 7, p. 158-9).

In this manner, details continue to arrive in his writing so regularly that they may put readers to sleep. This kind of clutter of details might be found in the religious texts themselves. Is it necessary, however, to gather all of them for the sake of Shudras? What will anyone learn from these details? Whose shelter is going to collapse if there are no sacred threads with three and nine strands? What harm will come to anybody if

there were no Yajnopavita at all? A person may require a string to tie round his waist in order to tighten the underwear but what is the utility of a Yajnopavita? And, in any case, how this become a weighty a social problem?

The Yajnopavita is merely a symbol of the superiority of the upper Varnas. Hence, any Shudra person should feel only contempt for it. One should create contempt also among those who believe it to be sacred. Even if we consider it for the sake of discussion, we must not overdo it. Or, if we have to tell the details, we have to talk about them critically thus: ‘Look, how useless these things are!’ But nowhere do we find in Ambedkar a critical attitude toward religious rituals. Nowhere do we find any logic or illuminating comments on them. Moreover, Ambedkar has lot of interest in and lot of attraction for the rituals and ceremonies which Brahmins describe!

In order to know how crazy are the contents in the religious texts, some one who is interested in them should do the job of reading them (since everyone cannot read all those things for themselves). At many places, we may even feel pity for Ambedkar, who performed that ‘drudgery’. It will be of some use to the reader if the writer narrates them with vehement opposition to the religious obscurantism; but what will the readers learn if the narrator is carried away by idle curiosity and enjoys describing these details, making no more than a few brief comments? In Ambedkar, we find such references not once or twice. We find similar discussion and similar research on all the aspects—all those senseless things—which are found in the Hindu religious texts!

## (2) Kaliyuga

Look, for example, at Ambedkar’s discussion of ‘Kali Yuga’ (Vol.4, pp: 288-322). When did Kali Yuga begin? How long will it last? When will it end? Such is the concern of the discussion! The able intellect of Ambedkar all focussed on this discussion! Here is an example:

“When did the present Kali Yuga begin? There are two different answers to the question. According to the Aitreya Brahmana it began with Nabhanedishta son of Vaivasvata Manu. According to the Puranas it began on the death of Krishna after the battle of Mahabharata. The first has been reduced to time term by Dr. Shyamshastry who says that Kali Yuga began in 3101 B.C. The second has been worked out by Mr. Gopal Aiyer with meticulous care. His view is that the Mahabharata War commenced on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October and ended in the night of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1194 B.C. He places the death of Krishna 16 years after the close of the war basing his conclusion on the ground that Parikshit was 16 when

he was installed on the throne and reading it with the connected facts namely that the Pandavas went of Mahaprasthan immediately after installing Parikshit on the throne and this they did on the very day Krishna died. This gives 1177 B.C. as the date of the commencement of the Kali Yuga. We have thus two different dates for the commencement of the Kali Yuga 3101 B.C. and 1177 B.C. This is the first riddle about the Kali Yuga" (Vol. 4, p. 291).

Should every one arrive at the same calculation with regard to 'Kali Yuga'? Has this anything to do with science? In the case of 'science', we find 'reason' and that reason will be the same whoever talks about it, if all people grasp that reason. But 'Kali Yuga' is a puranic myth. It consists of puranic language. People imagine what they like regarding such myths. Each person will have his own hobby-horse in such matters. How can estimates coincide in such matters? When we ask 'how many days are there in a year', calculations of all persons should be identical, being based on the time that takes for the earth to revolve around the sun. But what is the calculation according to which we may answer the question 'how many days does Kali Yuga consist of?' There, we don't find any 'reason'. Fictitious things which are not based on 'reason' occur with many variations. It is natural for them to exist like that. Hence, there is no 'riddle' if the calculations regarding the Kali Yuga are different.

There is another aspect of this issue: 'when is the Kali Yuga going to end?' Ambedkar conducts another discussion on this aspect:

"According to the Vishnu Purana: 'The Kritayuga comprises 4000 years, the Treta 3000; the Dwapara 2000 and the Kali 1000'" (Vol. 4, p. 293).

Will these Yugas repeat again and again after these 10 thousand years are over or will 'time' itself cease to exist? Scholars do not say anything about this. Nor does Ambedkar consider this question.

Ambedkar's attempt is to prove that 'Kali Yuga had ended a long time ago'. His argument is as follows: According to Vishnu Purana Kali Yuga comprises a thousand years only. According to the calculation of Gopal Aiyer, Kali Yuga started in 1177 B.C. However, this means that, by the time a thousand years passed, that is by the year 177 B.C, Kali Yuga had ended. Or, according to the calculation of Gargacharya, the Astronomer, the Kali Yuga ended by 165 B.C. Chapters 188 and 190 of Vana Parva of Mahabharata nearly confirm Gargacharya's calculation. Two transitional periods called Sandhya and Sandhyamsa are added before and after each Yuga. Thus, another period of 200 years may be added to Kali Yuga. Its total duration will be 1200 years. The Kali Yuga, may have, thus, ended in the first century A.D.

But, Vedic Brahmins argue that Kali Yuga is not yet over and it is still continuing. Showing all this, Ambedkar alleges that they say so for their selfish ends. Brahmins argue that ‘human’ calculation and ‘divine’ calculation of ‘time’ are not identical. One human year is equal to one divine day only. Which means, 360 human days are equal to 1 divine day. One divine year is equal to 360 human years. This means that Kali Yuga will end only when 1200 divine years are over! So,

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \text{ divine day} &= 1 \text{ human year.} \\ 1 \text{ divine year} &= 360 \text{ human years.} \\ 1200 \text{ divine years} &= 4,32,000 \text{ human years.} \end{aligned}$$

Following the calculations of Gopal Aiyer or Gargacharya, then, if we assume that Kali Yuga began around 1100 B.C, it will end later only after 4 lakh 32 thousand years! Hence, it means Kali Yuga has barely begun. All this is the calculation of Brahmins!

This way of calculating the duration of the Kali Yuga by Brahmins infuriated Ambedkar a lot. ‘Kali Yuga had ended a long time ago. Look how bullying are the Brahmins!’, says Ambedkar.

He becomes furious with the Brahmins:

“... a new innovation was made... the Vedic Brahmins instead of declaring the end of Kali Yuga in 165 B.C. as the astronomer had said, extended its life” (Vol. 4, p. 294).

What accusation is this? What logic is this? How can Brahmins, however great they may be, extend time? Can they, out of their selfishness or wickedness, change a year into 400 days instead of 360 days? Can they make the earth revolve around the sun 400 times in a year? How can they extend the Kali Yuga?

They said the Kali Yuga comprises 4 lakh years because the Puranas said it. Anybody can give any explanation in this fashion. Puranas say that ‘some fellow over there performed penance for a thousand years and some fellow over here ruled for 10 thousand years’. Do we dance with joy when we hear such things? This stupid calculation too is of the same kind.

Ambedkar considered ‘Kali Yuga’ as though it were a ‘scientific truth’. Hence he indulged in arguments about it. If Brahmins’ calculation of the period is a ‘myth’, isn’t ‘Kali Yuga’ itself a ‘myth’? Isn’t a myth if Vishnupurana says that Kali Yuga lasts for 1200 years? Will any astronomer, if he really has a brain, accept the concept of Kali Yuga? Will he make calculations for it? If the Brahmins accept astronomical calculations, will it become real?

If people claim that a human year is equal to one divine day, would we argue with them thus, 'No, it is not the way to calculate Kali Yuga; it should be like this'? Would we argue by referring to Puranas and mantras? Ambedkar's argument went on and on and on, eventually concluded thus:

"What was the object of the Vedic Brahmins in thus indefinitely extending the period of the Kali Yuga? Was it to blackmail some Shudra Kings that the theory of Kali Yuga was invented and made unending so as to destroy his subjects from having any faith in his rule?" (Vol.4, p. 306).

Ambedkar accuses the Brahmins of extending the Kali Yuga with a malicious intention to harm Shudras! This 'Kali Yuga' is a funny thing: its term increases if Brahmins increase it and it decreases if they reduce it! What is the benefit for the people if Kali Yuga ended a long time ago? What is the loss if it still continues? Will the stupidity grow or knowledge grows by such crazy discussion?

## 2) The riddle of 'Goddesses'

There are some stories in the religious literature to the effect that Goddesses like Durga and Kali fought wars against Asuras, even while there were male Gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva who did not. Ambedkar criticises severely the writers of such stories. For, according to Ambedkar, fabricating stories of Goddesses fighting wars even when there were male Gods to do the work amounts to depicting male Gods as 'cowards'!

"...while in the Vedic times the wars with the Asuras are left to be fought by the Gods, in the Puranic times they are left to be fought by the Goddesses. Why is that Puranic Goddesses had to do what the Gods in Vedic times did?... This is a riddle which requires explanation" (Vol.4, pp: 105-6).

How did Ambedkar explain this riddle? He said,

"...the Brahmins do not seem to have realized that by making Durga the heroine who alone was capable of destroying the Asuras, they were making their own Gods a set of miserable cowards" (Vol.4, pp:106-7).

Narrating the story of a Goddess named Mahamaya who killed a king of giants, Ambedkar comments as follows:

"How can such cowardly Gods have any prowess? If they had none, how can they give it to their wives?... Was it to put in a new commodity on the market that the Brahmins started the worship of the Goddesses and degraded the Gods?" (Vol. 4, p. 107).

When there are male-female differences among human beings, men may participate in some actions and women may participate in some actions. Such things do happen, don't they?

Of course, we have to search for an answer to the question as to how Goddesses attained special status subsequently, which they did not have during Vedic times. If we find the reason, we have to explain it. Otherwise, we have to raise a question and leave it like that. But, what did Ambedkar say? He did not say anything except that he criticised the Brahmins for making the male Gods a set of miserable cowards and defaming them.

If Goddesses perform some courageous deed, must it mean that the male Gods are miserable cowards? Does it amount to defaming them? This means that, according to Ambedkar, only men have to do courageous deeds always! Only men can do them! Well then does it not mean that women are miserable cowards? Perhaps, it is his opinion that women are miserable cowards anyway!

If we consider such stories and Ambedkar's criticism, the Brahmins who wrote these stories are nobler than Ambedkar. Claiming that he explained the riddle, Ambedkar did nothing except insulting women.

### **3) Is the poet of ‘Mahabharata’ truthful or ‘vainglorious’?**

On many occasions, as we have already seen, an important defect appears in Ambedkar's arguments relating to both religious matters and social matters. Often, they lack coherence between any two contexts. It is very surprising to note this even in very important contexts. Look at the case of Paijavana.

King Paijavana was a Shudra. We find this information in the Shanti Parva of Mahabharata. We find the name of Paijavana in Rig-Veda too but there we find no information that he was a Shudra. Ambedkar argues that we need not doubt what Mahabharata says just because Rig-Veda does not corroborate it, for the author of Mahabharata can hardly give false information. Ambedkar's argument on this question proceeds as follows:

“The author of the Mahabharata has no reason to give a false description. Writing after such a long time, no motive, no partiality could be attributed to him... The fact that Paijavana is not described as a Shudra in the Rig Veda does not militate against the truth of the statement which occurs in the Mahabharata” (Vol. 7, P. 205).

This passage occurs in the essay *Who were Shudras?* In the same essay, Ambedkar expressed gratitude to the author of Mahabharata. He said:

“Whether it is Vyasa, Vaishampayana, Suta, Lomaharshana or Bhrgu... whoever he was, he has rendered great service by giving a full description of Paijavana... I express my gratitude to the writer...” (Vol. 7, p. 18).

Thus, Ambedkar has expressed his gratitude and faith in the writer of Mahabharata in this context. But observe what sort of comment he made on the same writer at another place in the same essay!

It is the context in which he discusses the question whether reconciliation had taken place or not between Brahmins and Shudras. There are some stories of reconciliation in Mahabharata itself. But Ambedkar argues that we should not believe them since they were written in support of Brahmins.

He cited a story of reconciliation from Shanti Parva (Vol. 7, p.196). Kasyapa gave the earth to the Brahmins and went into the forest. Then Shudras and Vysyas began to act lawlessly towards the wives of the Brahmins. Then they cried out for “rule by the Kshatriyas, the guardians of justice”! Kasyapa returned and installed Kshatriyas in the kingly office. This story, thus, tells that reconciliation did occur between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. This story occurs in the same part of Mahabharata in which there is a mention of Paijavan. Besides this story, Ambedkar cited some more stories relating to the reconciliation. Citing all those stories, he says:

“Such is the evidence. Can anybody accept it as reliable? In my opinion, far from accepting it, one should beware of such evidence. In the first place, all these stories of reconciliation end, for the Kshatriyas, in peace without honour. In every case, the Kshatriyas are shown to have undergone an abject surrender...The stories are all doctored with a view to glorify the Brahmins and humiliate the Kshatriyas. Who can take such dirty, filthy, abominable and vainglorious stories of reconciliation as true historical facts? Only a supporter of Brahminism can do so” (Vol. 7, p.197).

Is it Ambedkar who said this about the writer of Mahabharata? How strange is this? He is the same person who argued at another place in the same essay thus:

“The author of the Mahabharata has no reason to give a false description. Writing after such a long time, no motive, no partiality could be attributed to him...The fact that Paijavana is not described as a Shudra in the Rig Veda does not militate against the truth of the statement which occurs in the Mahabharata” (Vol. 7, p. 205).

He is the same person who expressed his gratitude to the author! What does it mean if the same person says about the same author thus, “Who can take such dirty, filthy, abominable and vainglorious stories of reconciliation as true historical facts?” Why should Ambedkar have an objection to accepting the stories which tell that reconciliation took place between Brahmins and Kshatriyas? How does this argument stand alongside Ambedkar’s newly founded theory that Brahmins stopped officiating Upanayanas in order to take revenge against Kshatriyas? He really ought to give up that theory. It is because of this reason that he objected.

But, he can as well realize that his proposed theory is wrong and hence can give it up by adhering to his statement that the author tells truth only. The same author becomes a man of truth when he writes something that pleases Ambedkar: namely, that Paijavana is a Shudra king. The author is a ‘vainglorious’ ‘supporter of Brahminism’ when he writes something that displeases Ambedkar: namely that reconciliation took place between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. This is not merely a question of coherence between arguments. Clearly, it questions the honesty of these arguments.

It appears that the main principle that Ambedkar followed in any discussion is to argue in a manner that suits him. That is why we don’t find coherence between any two contexts. The reason for such a situation is that Ambedkar believes that the theories which he discovered are correct and goes on committing so many blunders just because he is excessively zealous to defend his theories at any cost however haphazard they are.

Another aspect of this discussion: “The author of the Mahabharata has no reason to give a false description. Writing after such a long time, no motive, no partiality could be attributed to him”, says Ambedkar, doesn’t he? Can we agree with this argument?

How does an author know an incident about which he writes after a long lapse of time? What the people of previous generations say on the subject may be his hearsay evidence. But, as time passes, individuals who really knew the incident and remnants concerning the incident disappear. Many additions and distortions will modify what originally happened. The original facts fade in transmission of the facts from one generation to another. In such a situation speculation must predominate. Thus, indeed, there may be little truth in what is written after a long lapse of time.

We need to understand this problem in a different manner as well. If a given incident relates to a conflict then there would be two opposite sides. Justice may reside on one side and injustice on the other. Even if it is an incident in which we find injustice on both the sides, there are bound to be crucial differences. While the people who take the side of ‘justice’ try to defend justice, those who oppose it try to demolish its basis.



People—whether they belong to the past or present—interpret an incident according to their 'interests'. They propagate their justifications accordingly. Therefore, it is not possible to argue that an author gives false description if he writes it simultaneously and tells truth invariably if he writes after a long gap of time following the conflict in question.

Whether one gives a false description or truth depends on the side to which the writer belongs concerning a given incident.

#### 4) Some critical comments on religious literature

In some contexts Ambedkar unhesitatingly criticized Hindu religious literature. For example, traditionalists say that it was God who created the Vedas and sent them down to the earth from the heavens, hence they are superhuman. To this kind of argument, Ambedkar gave the name 'mischievous dogma' (Vol. 4, p. 8). He says:

"Nobody has had the courage to ask why [we need]these worthless books which contain nothing but invocation to tribal Gods to destroy the Enemies, loot their property..." (Vol. 4, p. 9).

Nor did Ambedkar hesitate to call Shankaracharya a lunatic, because he taught that there is Brahma and this Brahma is real and it pervades all, while at the same time he upheld all the inequities which the caste system had created. Ambedkar unhesitatingly commented thus:

"only a lunatic could be happy with being the propounder of two such contradictions" (Vol. 4, p. 287).

But Ambedkar's comments on certain social issues are hardly appropriate. For example:

"Niyoga which is the Aryan name for a system under which a woman who is wedded can beget on herself a progeny from another who is not her husband... The Niyoga were [was just]another name for illicit intercourse between men and women which might last for one night or twelve years or more with the husband a willing and a sleeping partner in this trade of fornication" (Vol. 4, p. 299).

If we understand this situation in terms of 'illicit intercourse' and 'trade of fornication', will these meanings apply to those contexts? Presumably it was legitimate at that time. It was a period when a higher form of man-woman relationship involving 'one woman and one man' (Monogamy) had not yet begun. We should neither condemn it nor glorify it as a holy affair. We have to criticise the stupid conception that 'everything that religious texts contain is pious'.

Certain stories in the religious texts are amusing. Here and there they contain some facts. There is a story, for instance, that tells how Parvathi got the name ‘Gowri’. Parvathi and Shiva were wife and husband. They used to quarrel with each other during their sojourn on the Kailash Mountain. (Incidentally, this means wife and husband quarrel even when they are in ‘Kailas’ or ‘heaven’!). Shiva used to complain that Parvati looks dark. (Didn’t he notice this before their marriage?). Once Parvati got angry and left Shiva for a few days (only a few days?) and performed a rigorous penance. Brahma appeared to Parvati and gave her a golden complexion. Thus Parvati became ‘Gowri’ (=a woman with fair complexion). Then she returned to her husband (Vol. 4, p. 101). Well, it would have been better had she performed that penance before marriage, got golden complexion and then marry, isn’t it? The whole thing was, apparently, in her hands! Perhaps Shiva used to get angry, or to use a Telugu idiom his ‘body must be burning’ because Parvati was too lazy to do penance instead of going about with a dark complexion! Isn’t it natural for Shiva to scold Parvati?

Nowhere do we find the reason for so much attraction for ‘fair complexion’ even in the religious stories. Quarrels between wives and husbands relating to ‘complexion’, beauty and property are common in society. They seem to have, however, entered religious stories as well.

In volume 4, we find many riddles and discussions concerning the Hindu religion. They are also amusing to read.

# 4

## HINDUS AND UNTOUCHABLES

**U**n-touchability has been an evil practice of Hindu religion in India. The entire population belonging to the upper castes and Shudra castes treat the population of the lowest castes as ‘untouchables’. They believe that they are polluted (‘ceremonial defilement’) by contact with them and that they will be freed from that pollution only when they take bath. That is why they do not allow untouchables to enter their houses and stand at a distance even while talking to them.

Many kinds of superstitious notions relating to pollution prevail in Hindu society. For example, the belief that people are polluted if they touch a menstruating woman or one in parturition. Similarly there is a belief that when a person dies, all those with the same surname are polluted and even others who touch these persons will also be polluted. There are many more such superstitions! But the effect of all these forms of pollution lasts only

for a few days. Untouchability, on the other hand, is not a temporary form of pollution at all. That whole population in question remain untouchables throughout life. There won't be any change in this kind of pollution, namely, Untouchability.

This evil practice is not confined to any one particular region in the country. Until recently, it was quite widespread. It was more widespread in villages than in towns. Though the situation has changed to a considerable extent, Untouchability is still a reality in villages even today. Nobody knows when and why this evil practice started. Historians offer different reasons. None of the reasons appears correct or satisfactory.

Ambedkar too tried to identify the cause of this problem based on the evidence from Hindu religious texts and history. He discussed many aspects of Untouchability in *Who were the Shudras?* (Vol. 7) and some other essays. The entire fifth volume concerns Untouchability. The entire information given here is from that volume only.

Ambedkar himself was born and brought up in the untouchable Mahar caste of Maharashtra. He could not escape from the hardships and humiliation connected with Untouchability even after studying in foreign countries and receiving many degrees. The struggle against this evil practice became an important part of his personal life.

Although there were persons who fought against Untouchability prior to Ambedkar, the specialty of Ambedkar is that he also fought for the political rights of the untouchables, as we shall see later.

The first thing that Ambedkar says about Untouchability is that this kind of evil practice is unique to India. In other societies too, we find social inequalities, classification of people into superior vs. inferior people and free vs. unfree individuals: Slaves in Rome, Jews in Germany, Negroes in America, Vivians in Britain, and so on. Hierarchical differences of some sort have existed at every place in the past. Yet in no country do we find exact parallel caste system or Untouchability as we find in India.

Population figures were collected across India for the first time in 1881. Since then, census figures have been collected once in ten years. In 1891, an attempt was made to collect caste-wise figures. In 1930, it was declared that the population of untouchables was approximately four and half crores (44.6 millions). According to the 1951 census, the population of untouchables was 5 crores 13 lakhs. So many crores of people subjected to Untouchability!

It is a common practice that both natives as well as foreigners glorify or romanticize Indian villages thus: There is great purity of mind and innocence, beauty, unity and so on! As if there exists a great system of

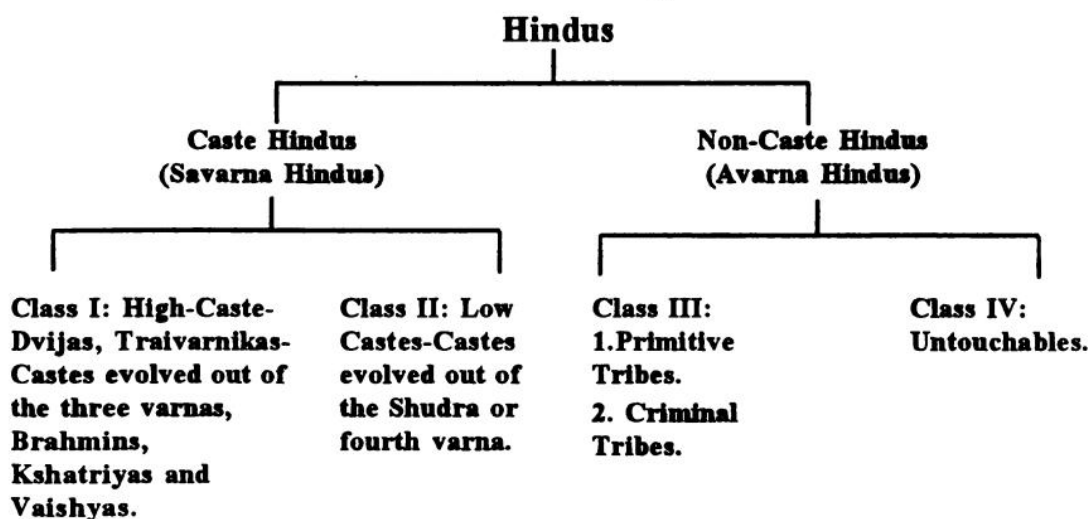
equality! In fact, the entire population there is actually split into castes. While people of the upper castes and Shudra castes live in the village, the untouchable castes live outside the village at its boarder. This is the case with most Indian villages.

If we have to divide the entire population of Hindus according to the system described in the Hindu religious texts, we may divide them into 4 classes (4 layers). This is not a division of Four varnas. The population of four varnas also comes under this division. The entire population belonging to the four varnas constitutes the 'caste Hindus' ('Savarna Hindus'). Those who do not have relationship with caste Hindus, are 'Non-caste Hindus' ('Avarna-Hindus'). These Non-caste Hindus have such other names also as Antya, Antyaja, Antyavasin and Bahya (Vol. 7, p. 359).

Showing the entire Hindu population in the form of a table, Ambedkar said:

"Perhaps a diagrammatic presentation may be helpful. I give below one which, in my judgement, facilitates the understanding of the social structure of the Hindus" (Vol. 5, p. 112).

### Ambedkar's Diagram:



Ambedkar explains his schematic representation as follows:

"The diagram shows that although there are innumerable castes among the Hindus, they can all be grouped under four classes. Of these four, Class I forms the *Herenfolk* or the Ruling Class, Classes III and IV form the subject people... Those in Class I form the privileged classes of the Hindu society. The Hindu social order was created by them. They alone benefit by it while the aim of these in Class I is to save it" (Vol. 5, p. 112-3).

Here we have to recall the term 'Brahminical literature' which we mentioned earlier. Now, we may take evidence from Ambedkar's words in order to grasp as to why the term 'upper caste literature' is more appropriate rather than 'Brahminical literature'. What is Ambedkar arguing here? In Hindu society, not only Brahmins but all the 3 upper castes have privileges. They themselves created the 'caste system'. It is not simply one class that benefitted from the caste system: all the 3 classes have benefited. They are the rulers. If we assume things like this, it will not be correct to consider every issue as the creation of Brahmins alone. It would be proper to view the issue in terms of how all the upper castes obtained privileges. Ambedkar's argument itself supports this point. As classified in the table, it is proper to show the first three Varnas—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vysyas—as one class and the remaining population as different classes.

When we looked at the four varnas, we thought that Shudras are the only occupants of the lowest stratum of society. But this classification shows us that in fact there are people who are at an even lower social level than Shudras. Let us first briefly consider 'primitive' and 'criminal' tribes and then return to the 'untouchables' (see Ambedkar, Vol.5, ch.15).

#### **Primitive tribes:**

"They live in small scattered huts in forests. They live on wild fruits, nuts and roots. Fishing and hunting are also resorted to for the purpose of securing food. Agriculture plays a very small part in their social economy. Food supplies being extremely precarious they lead a life of semi-starvation from which there is no escape. As to clothes they economize them to a vanishing point. They move almost in a state of complete nakedness... They have very little indeed in the way of material effects... a few cooking pots and a basket or two... They put cock's plumes and peacock's feathers in their turbans. Many girls are profusely tattooed, especially on their faces, and some of them on their legs as well... Witchcraft, sorcery, animal and human sacrifice make up their religion. Without education, with no idea of science or of the knowledge of the working of nature, steeped in ignorance and superstition, these Primitive tribes have been living on the outskirts and in close conformity with civilization in a savage stage which has been their lot for ages"  
(Vol. 5, p.130).

These primitive tribes did not face the condition of 'Untouchability'.

#### **The criminal tribes:**

"The Criminal Classes at one time included such well organized confederacies of Professional Criminals as the Pindharies and the Thugs.—The Pindharies were a predatory body of armed gangsters. Their

organization was an open military organization of freebooters who could muster 20,000 fine horses and even more. They were under the command of brigand chiefs. Chintu, one of the most powerful commanders had under his single command 10,000 horses, including 5,000 good cavalry, besides infantry and guns....They were subject of none. They rendered loyalty to none. They respected none and plundered all high and low, rich and poor without fear or compunction....The Thugs were a well organized body of professional assassins, who in gangs of from 10 to 200 traveled in various guises throughout India, worked themselves into the confidence of wayfarers of the wealthier class and, when a favourable opportunity occurred, strangled them by throwing a handkerchief or noose round their necks and then plundered and buried them...Assassination for gain was with them a religious duty, and was considered a holy and honourable profession...It was not until the British became rulers of the country that any attempt was made to suppress the Thugs. By 1835, 382 Thugs were hanged and 986 were transported or imprisoned for life. Even as late as 1879 the number of registered Thugs was 344..." (Vol. 5, p.131-2).

### **The Untouchables:**

These criminal tribes did not count as untouchables. These murders too treat untouchables as inferior to them.

Let us consider the untouchables themselves. These people are not primitive tribes who live in forests, nor criminals making a living out of crime. They are labourers who live entirely on their own labour. They do not generally possess either lands or other resources. When they do, it is very little. It is negligible. Their only means of survival is labour on the lands of the upper castes in return for whatever the upper castes are pleased to give.

Civilization is a gradually accumulated store of knowledge concerning nature, crafts and arts. Indians boast that their society had reached a very high degree of civilization in the ancient times itself when people of other societies in the world were leading a primitive life and moving naked.

The Hindu civilization kept some part of their population in the jungle like animals; turned some into bandits and murderers, and it gifted Untouchability to the labouring people.

Words like 'Chaturvarna' (four varnas), Savarnas (Caste varnas) and Avarnas (Non-caste varnas) to an extent represent archaic usage. It is not the language used in the present day society. The modern forms of the archaic classification are classes 'Hindus-Untouchables'. In Ambedkar's words:

“Those whom Manu included within the Chaturvarna correspond to the modern composite class called Hindus. Those whom Manu called Bahayas (outside the Chaturvarna) correspond to the present day untouchables of India. The dividing line between the four classes—Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra—included within Chaturvarna have in modern times become some what blurred and there has been some degree of amalgamation between them. But the line which Manu drew between those within the Chaturvarna from those outside the Chaturvarna is still clear and is not allowed to be effaced or crossed” (Vol. 5, p. 279).

This means that in this sense the Shudras became one with the first 3 varnas because they did not have to experience Untouchability. It also means that there is a wide gulf between the untouchables and others who do not experience Untouchability.

What do religious texts—which tell that Shudras emerged from the feet of Brahma—say about ‘untouchables’? They don’t tell anything with that label (‘Untouchable’). But, they call the children born of inter-varna relations ‘Avarnas’ (Non-caste Hindus). Untouchables come under ‘Avarnas’. This is what the religious texts say.

All those who worship Hindu gods and observe the Hindu religion in a general sense count as Hindus. If we see from this angle, untouchables too are Hindus. But Ambedkar calls non-untouchables ‘Hindus’ because Hindus do not consider untouchables as belonging to their religion. Hence it is Ambedkar’s opinion that untouchables should not consider themselves Hindus. According to him, the primary division in Hindu society is between Hindus and untouchables. There is nothing to differ with this opinion if we see from the angle of Untouchability!

However, when we see Hindu society in terms of ‘Savarnas and Avarnas’ or ‘Hindus and Untouchables’, the necessary link between the Shudras and untouchables does not seem to appear anywhere. Both the sections are labourers. Moreover, they are confined to manual labour. We are not concerned with the stupid explanations of the religious texts with reference to these sections. Some relationship must appear between Shudras and untouchables in our explanations. It would be rational to think if we understand that these two sections consist of labourers only.

## **1) This is how Hindus practice ‘Untouchability’!**

Now let us note some factual incidents that show how Hindus practice untouchability.

According to Ambedkar, the following is the state of affairs during the rule of Peshwas of Maharashtra in 18<sup>th</sup> century:

“Under the rule of Marathas and the Peshwas the Untouchables were not allowed within the gates of Poona City, the capital of the Peshwas between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. because, before nine and after three, their bodies cast too long a shadow; and whenever their shadow fell upon a Brahmin it polluted him, so that he dare not taste food or water until he had bathed and washed the impurity away. So also no untouchable was allowed to live in a walled town; cattle and dogs could freely enter but not the untouchables” (Vol. 12, p. 720).

“Under the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas the untouchables might not spit on the ground lest a Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to hang an earthen pot round his neck to hold his spittle. He was made to drag a thorny branch of a tree with him to brush out of his footsteps and when Brahman came by, had to lie at a distance on his face lest his shadow might fall on the Brahman” (Vol. 12, p. 720; Vol. 1, p. 39).

The following is a case that proceeded in the Madras court in 1901. Hindus wanted to conduct a procession from a temple but they did not conduct it because there were Pariahs (untouchables) standing in the street. They, later, filed a case against those Pariahs. The lower court sentenced the Pariahs but the high court set aside the conviction and sentence. Setting aside of the sentence is a different matter. But it indicates that Pariahs did not even have the right to stand in the street! (Vol. 5, p. 27-28).

A letter that appeared in the ‘Times of India’ in November 1928, described the plight of untouchables as follows: Once a teacher named Chunnibhai poured water into the bucket of a Bhangi woman directly. Then the Hindus there warned the teacher thus: ‘Master! We don’t allow such things here!’ There is a bamboo pipe fitted to a small cistern below the slope of the well. The untouchables have to keep their pots below that pipe. Hindus, who take water from the well, will pour some water into that tub if there is any left in the bucket after they have filled their pot. That water goes via the bamboo pipe into the pot of Untouchables. They cannot get even that water if no water is left in the bucket. More water may go into the cistern only when another Hindu comes to the well and has some left in his bucket. None can say as to how many hours it would take in that manner to fill a pot kept under that bamboo pipe. We cannot say when will the pot of the next untouchable be filled! (Vol. 5, p. 39).



**T**here is no date for this news item: "Chand Singh, an untouchable of village Katu, was made to go round the village on the back of a donkey with face blackened for the fault of having drunk water at the well of a high caste Zamindar" (Vol. 5, p. 61).

**A** news report in *Tej*, dated April 11, 1924: Swami Shraddhananda went to a nationalist school in Khatsayas. There were only three untouchable students. They were sitting in the verandah at a distance. Swami Shraddhananda requested the teachers to allow the untouchable students to sit inside the class room along with the other students. The teachers, on the advice of Swami Shraddhananda, called the untouchable students and allowed them to sit inside. But all the remaining students began to abstain to school from the next day. The school stands locked from that day! (Vol. 5, p. 40).

**A** news report in *Milap*, dated April 18, 1924: This is an incident that occurred at Hoshangabad. The district council sent a circular to all the schools asking them to allow untouchable boys and girls into the schools. The headmasters of the schools started to implement the circular. In one village the magistrate stopped sending his children to the school and the parents of other children too did the same. Then the school committee met and resolved that it 'cannot take the responsibility of admitting the untouchable children into the school since all the people are opposing the admission of untouchable children'. Thereafter the previous situation continued (Vol. 7, p.52).

**A**n untouchable, when he files a case, does not enter the court hall. He would stay in the premises outside the court hall. If he enters the court hall, he would face many problems with Hindus after he goes back to the village. His advocate alone will be in the court hall. There are no details whether they call the untouchable person while recording his deposition (Vol. 2, pp. 479-80).

**T**here are places where both Hindus and Untouchables fetch water from the same pond. But from different entry points! (Vol. 2, p. 481).

**A** report in '*Milap*' on 2-10-1925: In a village called 'Ruduurprayaga', in an evening, an untouchable came running to the gate of a 'dharmashala' (a monastery) and cried that a tiger was chasing him and requested the pastor to permit him to come inside. But the high caste

pastor of the dharmashala did not open the gate, as he is an untouchable. In the meantime, the tiger came behind and pounced upon him and he lost consciousness (Vol. 5, p. 96).

**A** letter published in '*Pratap*', dated June 23, 1926: On March 5, a Chamar-caste person conducted the marriage of his daughter. As the economic position of his family was little better, he entertained his guests in a better manner. Moreover, he gave three gold ornaments to his daughter. This infuriated the upper caste Jats. All the Jats assembled, discussed and resolved that Chamars were trying to be equal to them and hence their arrogance should be suppressed. On March 20, the upper caste people went in mobs and attacked Chamars. They looted their houses, destroyed their crops and boycotted them in general (Vol. 5, p. 50).

**A** report in '*Times of India*' dated January 4, 1928: Rajputs and Brahmins in the villages of Indore district laid down some restrictions on an untouchable-community called 'Balais' and issued written instructions. The restrictions were as follows: Balais should not wear clothes that have colour borders, lace borders and borders with fancy colours. Balai women too should not wear fancy garments. If any Hindu dies, Balais should go to the houses of their (Hindu) relatives—however distant they may be—and inform the death news. Balais should play drums in the marriages at the houses of Hindus. Balai women should compulsorily serve the Hindu women during the delivery time. Whenever Balais do any thing for Hindus, they should not do so without expecting any remuneration. They have to accept whatever Hindus give them. All those Balais who do not accept these restrictions should leave the village. This is the declaration of the  
Hindus!

Hindus compelled Balais to sign the stamped papers agreeing to these restrictions. But Balais refused to sign and complained to the Darbar of Indore. But they did not receive any help from Darbar. Hindus began to oppress Balais in various ways: not allowing Balais to walk along their fields; not allowing Balais to graze cattle in their vacant fields, driving their cattle into the fields of Balais; beating Balais on one pretext or the other and so on. Unable to bear these sufferings, Balais left their houses and migrated to distant villages along with their kith and kin (Vol. 5, p. 48-9).

**A** report in '*Pratap*' dated February 1928: At a place called Chandayal, in the state of Jodhpur, one untouchable family of Sargaroes caste prepared 'halva' in connection with a marriage in their house. By

the time, the guests were about to sit for the feast, Kanwar Sahib of Chandawala sent orders to the untouchable household. He declared that untouchables do not have the right to eat tasty foods like halva and hence they have to stop eating it. Some sycophants negotiated with the untouchable family that they would get permission if they pay Rs. 1,000 to Sahib. Sargaroes got angry, refused to pay and went ahead with the feast (Vol. 5, p. 52). But we can imagine how much did they suffer after this incident.

**A**ttacks on untouchables are invariable if they use palanquin, the band music or go on a procession over a horse during the marriage ceremony. Only upper castes are entitled for such fancies. In **June 1938**, Thakurs of Sevra village attacked the marriage party of Jatavs and mercilessly beaten them with spears and lathis. The reason was that the bridegroom of the untouchable family wore a glittering crown! (Vol. 5, p. 53).

**I**t is also a crime if untouchables utter the words, which upper caste people use. In November 1936, an untouchable belonging to Ezava caste in a village of Malabar area went to a shop and asked for 'uppu' (salt). The untouchables should use the word 'pulichatan' and they are not expected to utter the word 'uppu' as the upper caste people do. The shopkeeper became very wild and beat the untouchable so severely that the untouchable died (Vol. 5, p. 54-5).

**A** report in '*Young India*', in **December 1929**: An untouchable woman fell sick severely at the time of delivery. Her husband went to a doctor and requested him to come to his house to see his wife. The doctor refused to go and asked the husband of the patient to get her to another place. The husband took his wife who had just delivered and the newly born child to another place. Doctor came there but does not touch the patient. If he gives the thermometer to the hand of a Muslim, the Muslim gives it to the patient's husband and the husband in turn gives it to the wife. The thermometer comes back to the doctor in the same manner. The doctor looked at the meter from a distance, declared that the patient was suffering from pneumonia, collected the fee and left. That is the whole treatment, which an untouchable patient received when she was seriously ill. She died on the same day (Vol. 5, p. 29).

**I**n Navinipatti about two miles from a place called Melur of Madurai district, the village munsif took objection to two untouchable youth for

wearing decent dress on Pongal festival and made them remove their garments and do full prostration on the ground and go away in loin-cloth only (Vol. 5, p. 119).

**A**n incident that occurred in Madras presidency in **December 1930**. The upper caste Kallars declared some prohibitions against the untouchable 'Adi Dravida' community as follows: The Adi-Dravidas shall not wear ornaments of gold or silver. Their males should not wear coats or shirts or banyans. They should not wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips. They should not have their hair cropped. Their women should not cover the upper portion of their bodies by clothes. That they should not use flowers or saffron paste. They should not use other than earthenware vessels in their homes. They should not use umbrellas for protection against sun and rain nor should they wear sandals. But untouchables did not care to observe. Hence Tallars passed some more orders in June 1931 as follows: The Adi-Dravidas and Devendrakula vellalars should not wear clothes below their knees. The untouchable women should carry water only in earthen pots and not in copper or brass vessels. They should use straw only to carry the water pots and no clothes should be used for that purpose. Their children should not read and get themselves literate or educated. They have to tend the cattle of the Mirasdars. Untouchables should not lease the land from the Mirasdars. They should work in the lands of Mirasdars. Men should take four annas and women should take two annas only as wages. If untouchables want to sell their land they have to sell it at very cheap rate and if they don't do so, no water will be allowed to them to irrigate their lands. Even if they raise the crops with rainwater, Mirasidars will confiscate those crops when they are ripe for harvest (Vol. 5, pp.279-80).

**1932 December:** The government of Baroda had issued orders permitting children of untouchables in the schools. Since then the hardships of untouchables increased. Many incidents took place: burning of the houses and stacks of hay belonging to untouchables; sprinkling of kerosene oil in their wells; beating of untouchables children going to schools and boycotting the untouchables and so on (Vol. 5, p. 41).

**A** report in '*Bombay Samachar*' on **December 19, 1936**: A child fell into a well in Kaladi village of Calicut. None present dared to go down the well. A neighboring villager who was passing by jumped into the well and saved the child. When all those present there asked him about his caste, he said the truth. His was an untouchable caste. Then the people there, instead of thanking him for saving the child, assaulted him for polluting the well (Vol. 5, p. 30).

In Uttar Pradesh, the corn given to the untouchables as their wages is called 'Gobaraha'. 'Gobaraha' means privy corn or corn contained in the dung of an animal. When the crop is fully grown, reaped and dried, it is spread on the threshing floor. Bullocks are made to tread over the corn in order to take the corn out of husk by the pressure of their hooves. While treading over the corn, the bullocks swallow up the corn as well as the straw. As their intake is excessive they find it difficult to digest the corn. Next day, the same corn comes out of their stomach along with their dung. The untouchables have to wash the dung, separate the corn and receive the corn as their wages. The masters give those 'dung corn' too as per the calculation but do not give even a little more than the calculation. (There are no details as to when they used to pay wages like this). There won't be any greater example than this to depict the plight of untouchables (Vol. 5, p.23-24).

On March 6, 1938, a meeting of Bhangi caste people was held in Dadar area of Bombay. A Bhangi youth narrated his job experiences as follows. (Here I am giving a brief summary of the incident depicted in Vol. 5, pp. 30-33). I had passed school final in 1933. I studied English upto fourth standard. I applied for the post of a teacher but I did not get it. I got the job of a 'Talati' (village patwari). I went to join an office in Borsad taluka of Kheda district. Until then, I was not aware that people observe untouchability even in the government offices. I thought there won't be any problem for me since I mentioned my caste in the application. As soon as I went to the office, the clerk asked me about my caste and I told him what my caste is. He immediately began to abuse me: 'First get out of here. Stand at a distance! How dare you come close to me? You are in office, if you were outside I would have given you six kicks, what audacity to come here for the job!' Later he asked me to drop my papers on the ground and then he picked them up. I used to face lot of difficulty for water during my stay in that office. A peon used to give water to all the staff members in the office from the pot. Whenever he is absent, all people used to go to the pot and take water. But it was not permissible to me. There used to be a small earthen pot separately for me. The peon used to dislike to pour water into my pot. He used to slip away somewhere as if he was not aware when I go for water. I did not get drinking water for many days. Same thing happened in the case of residence. There nobody did rent a house to me. For some days, I used to sleep in the office verandah. I used to walk 11 kilometers daily to and fro. Later, I got a house in a village. After sometime, our Mamlatdar sent me to another place for training. There, they never allowed me to enter into the office. They did not teach me anything. The headman of the village was too much opposed to me. He used to say daily, "Do you sit in the

office chair as our equal while your father and your brothers live as sweepers. It is better if you leave this job at the earliest possible. Beware!' One day, I went to the office of the Talati in Saijpur in connection with the office work. The headman of the village and Talati were there in the office. I stood outside the entrance and saluted them. They pretended as if they had not noticed me. I stood like that for quite some time. Finally, I could not tolerate, went inside and sat in a chair. Immediately, both of them went out. After some time, people began to come into the office in large numbers. A big crowd surrounded me. I subsequently learnt that the chair on which I sat was that of the librarian. He began to shout, "Who allowed this dirty dog of Bhangi to sit on my chair?" I got up from the chair and sat on the floor. The crowd around me began to abuse me that they would kill me and cut me into pieces. I begged their pardon for sitting on the chair. They were not listening to me. I got the doubt that they would really kill me. I asked the peon there to give me a piece of paper and wrote a letter to the Mamaltdar of Borsad. "If they kill me here, you have to hand over my dead body to my parents", I wrote. I hoped that the crowd around me would hesitate after seeing my letter. Seeing that letter the librarian ordered me to tear it. I followed his order. The crowd was still abusing me: "Do you do the job of Talati? Do you come to the office and sit on the chair?" I told them that I would give up the job. The mob did not allow me to leave the place till the evening. The headman of the village and the Talati, who left the office before, did not come back to the office till then. Thereafter, I went to my village on leave (Vol. 5, pp. 30-33).

**A** reporter from Jaipur reported on June 25, 1953 as follows: The guinea worm disease is prevalent in the villages of Jaipur. It is a dreadful disease. It spreads only when water is not clean. 127 people of 57 untouchable families in Kopra village near Banwara are suffering from this disease. In a family of six, five people have this disease. The collector was shocked to know that the pond from which untouchables fetch water was full of guinea worms. He passed orders to close the pond immediately. There is a drinking well nearby which Savarnas (Caste-Hindus) use. The collector asked Savarnas to allow untouchables to take water from that well. They did not agree. The collector asked them: "will you drink the water containing guinea worms?". Yet they did not agree. The collector could not do anything (Vol. 5, p. 117).

**H**indus oppress untouchables in various ways if they try to assert their rights. The oppression takes many forms: Burning of their huts, destroying trees etc., in the backyards, impounding their cattle, fabricating

false cases, not calling them for wage labour, taking back the lands from them, creating false documents and confiscating the small properties of the untouchables, attaching their properties for the landlord's arrears of revenue. Needless to mention the assaults and murders (Vol. 1, p. 407).

**I**n Hindu society, there are more unfortunate people than untouchables. Just as there are 'untouchable' castes, there are also 'unapproachable' and 'unseeable' castes. Nayadis are the people who come under the category of unseeable. Begging is their occupation. These people receive alms only when the person who offers lays down something on the ground and only after he proceeds to a sufficient distance.

**T**here are 'unseeable' castes in Tinnevalley district of Madras presidency. Begging in the darkness is their occupation. It is not possible to imagine how all these people live (Vol. 5, p. 139).

**T**here is no distinction whatsoever in the case of practicing untouchability between one place and another: wells and ponds of drinking water, schools, hospitals, dharmashalas, roads, buses, trains, courts, police stations, banks, government offices, this place and that place. There is no place where there is any practice of untouchability. While the untouchables do not possess some rights, the upper caste people do not allow untouchables to make use of the available rights. If the untouchables complain to the police, the police too accuse untouchables. They do not accept complaints. They write in favour of upper castes. Such cases do not stand in the courts. Though other categories of poor people experience all these sufferings, the untouchables have an additional burden called 'untouchability'.

**W**hat is the total number of untouchable castes in India? The government of India declared this list (schedule) in 1935. At that time there were only 9 states in India: Madras, Bombay, Bengal, United Provinces (UP), Panjab, Bihar, Central Provinces (MP), Assam and Orissa. There have been untouchable castes in all these states: at one place with the tribe name and at another place with the race name. If we combine the sub-castes and sub-races within untouchables, the total number of untouchable castes is 429. Their population is 5 to 6 crores! So many human beings constitute 'untouchables'!

According to the government, these castes are 'scheduled castes'  
(Vol. 7, p. 259).

Of these,

Scheduled castes = SCs.

Scheduled tribes = STs.

We find numerous descriptions of brutality and oppression of untouchables by Hindus in the whole of volume 5. The care and love, which Ambedkar showed for untouchables in giving this information, create in us lot of respect for him.

## 5 ACCORDING TO AMBEDKAR, 'HOW' DID UNTOUCHABILITY BEGIN?

**H**ow and when did Untouchability begin? To this question, there are two or three kinds of responses: that the origins of Untouchability lie in racial differences; that it arose from performance of unclean work, and so on. Ambedkar does not accept any of these explanations. Regarding the first explanation, he says that there is no racial difference between Hindus and Untouchables. He argues that Untouchability is not something that resulted due to racial differences because racial differences are determined in terms of the shape of the heads and structure of the bones and it has been proved that such differences are not found in the Indian population. He discussed many aspects of this issue in his essay *Who were Untouchables?* His line of argument is as follows: Even assuming that there are racial differences between Hindus and Untouchables, Untouchability did not arise in other countries where there are racial differences.

Regarding the second argument, based on 'performance of unclean jobs', Ambedkar argues as follows: Are there not be unclean jobs in other countries as well? Are there not people in that population that performs such jobs? Yet nowhere did Untouchability exist, did it? Hence, even this cannot be the cause of Untouchability. Here, everybody has to agree with the questions which Ambedkar raised. Though nobody knows how Untouchability came into practice, the argument that it came due to racial differences or performance of unclean jobs is not convincing.

Similarly, the orthodox Hindus say that Untouchability has existed since time immemorial. Ambedkar, however, does not agree with this view either. He says that Untouchability cannot be said to have existed since time immemorial. There are no references either in the Vedas or in the Dharma Sutras. Hence, you cannot say that it has always existed. Thus,



Ambedkar rejected all the old arguments concerning Untouchability and claimed that he could propose "an altogether novel thesis". He put forward his 'novel thesis' in the essay *The Untouchables: who were they and why they became Untouchables?*

Now we must examine the 'novel thesis' and arguments which Ambedkar proposed with regard to the question: Why and when did Untouchability arise?

In India, the Untouchables in every village live outside the village at an end. Everybody is aware of this fact. Ambedkar describes the population that resides on the fringes of villages as 'Broken Men' (Many translations in Indian languages today use the term 'Dalits' as an equivalent to 'Broken Men'). Dalits did not have the problem of Untouchability. Even when there was no practice of Untouchability, they lived on the outskirts of villages for a 'different reason'. After a long time, Untouchability began due to 'another reason'. Thereafter, that marginal population continued to reside outside the village. This is how Ambedkar's explanation began:

"That those who are called Untouchables lived outside the village, from the very beginning even before they became Untouchables and that they continued to live outside the village because of the supervention of untouchability at a later stage is the only possibility worth consideration"  
(Vol. 7, p.273).

Well, why did that population reside outside the village in the first place? Who were the people residing within the village boundaries at that time? To these questions, Ambedkar offers the following answer: In the transition period when primitive society was evolving into a modern society, certain tribal communities learnt cultivation of the land along with animal husbandry, gave up nomadic life and began to settle down in fixed place. But some tribal communities continued in the nomadic way of life. There used to be conflicts between settled communities and nomadic communities. Nomadic communities would attack settled communities and loot their cattle, crop and women. Fights used to take place between different nomadic tribal communities as well. Owing to these conflicts two kinds of situation arose. On the one hand, the settled communities needed 'protection' from the nomadic communities. On the other hand, people who were defeated and scattered needed 'shelter'.

Since the basis for tribal communities is blood relationship (kinship), the victorious tribe would not accept the persons of defeated tribe as its members. The scattered persons would wander as lone beings. These persons are Broken Men (Dalits). Eventually, the settled communities would engage these Broken Men for their protection, allowing them to live outside the village.

In the words of Ambedkar,

"...the Broken Men agreed to do the work of watch and ward for the Settled tribes and the Settled tribes agreed to give them food and shelter.... The Broken men were aliens. They belonged to a tribe which was different from the settled tribe. That being so, they could not be permitted to live in the midst of the Settled tribe. From the strategic point of view also it was desirable that these Broken men should live on the border of the village so as to meet the raids of the hostile tribes. ... The same processes must have taken place in India when the Hindu Society was passing from Nomadic life to the life of a settled village community" (Vol. 7, p. 276).

"The Settled Community was a wealthy community with agriculture and cattle as means of livelihood. The Broken Men were a community of paupers with no means of livelihood and entirely dependent upon the Settled Community" (Vol. 7, p. 354).

Though such Broken Men lived outside the village, there were no quarrels or misunderstandings between them and the population inside the village. There were no hurdles in the way of mutual interaction. Untouchability had not yet begun.

"[The two communities] lived apart, the former inside the village and the latter outside it, there was no bar to social intercourse between the members of the Settled Community and the Broken Men" (Vol.7, p. 270).

This is how the residence of Broken Men (Dalits) outside of the village began.

Ambedkar informs us that we may find examples of such developments as these in Ireland and Wales but the Broken Men of those countries who lived on the outskirts of the village gradually mixed with the people in the village. But this did not happen in India because Untouchability emerged instead, and it did not allow the people mingle with each other.

Untouchability began only in India. This is the point which Ambedkar elaborates.

All those who lived inside the village were Hindus. The Four Varnas had already begun a long time ago. Both Hindus, who lived inside the village, as well as Dalits, who lived outside the village, accepted the Vedic standards of conduct of life which Brahmins preached. They believed that 'God had created this world and God exists'. They performed Yagnas and Yagas (Sacrificial ceremonies) and animal sacrifice. While this was so, Buddhism began as a rejection of Hindu religious practices. Buddhism

rejects the authority of Vedas and the validity of Yagnas, Yagas and animal sacrifice. It says that belief in the existence of God is illogical or irrational. In essence, Buddhism emerged as an opponent of Hindu religion.

All the Dalits who lived on the outskirts of the villages began to subscribe to Buddhism. They stopped worshipping Brahmins. This infuriated the Hindus. Thus began a conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism. In order to convince everyone that Hinduism is greater than Buddhism, Brahmins thought of doing some great thing which Buddhists did not do.

Now, Buddhism merely opposes violence in connection with sacrificial ceremonies (Yagnas and Yagas) but does not prohibit meat eating. Buddhist monks eat all kinds of meat including that of cow. (We will see these details elsewhere). Brahmins too used to eat all kinds of meat including that of cow's. But, in order to excel Buddhists, they stopped eating meat completely. As cows and bulls are the animals useful for cultivation, they became 'holy animals' in Hinduism. The other three Varnas including Shudras, imitated the Brahmins and, by and large, stopped eating beef.

Dalits, however, continued to eat beef as before. The reason for this was their utter poverty. It was the duty of the Dalits to dispose the dead cattle of the Hindus who lived inside the village. Since the beginning, it had been the practice of Dalits to consume the meat of the dead animals. Beef was the main part of their food. If they stopped eating it they would not have sufficient food. Hence, they could not give up beef. But beef-eating amounts to offending god in the view of Hindus. Consequently, Hindus began to treat Dalits as 'Untouchables'. Thus, Untouchability became an issue connected with anti-Buddhism and beef-eating. This is the explanation which Ambedkar offered with regard to the origin of Untouchability. In his own words:

"It is that the Broken Men were Buddhists. As such they did not revere the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure" (Vol. 7, p. 315)...

"To my mind, it was strategy which made the Brahmins give up beef-eating and start worshipping the cow... As a result of the spread of Buddhism, the Brahmins had lost all power and prestige at the Royal Court and among the people. They were smarting under the defeat they had suffered at the hands of Buddhism.... The Buddhists rejected the Brahmanical religion which consisted of Yajna and animal sacrifice, particularly of the cow. The objection to the sacrifice of the cow had taken a strong hold of the minds of the masses especially as they were an agricultural population and the cow was a very useful animal... the

Brahmins could do nothing to improve their position against the Buddhists except by giving up the Yajna as a form of worship and the sacrifice of the cow...What could the Brahmins do to recover the lost ground? To go one better than the Buddhist Bhikshus not only to give up meat-eating but to become vegetarians—which they did. That this was the object of the Brahmins in becoming vegetarians can be proved in various ways” (Vol. 7, p. 345-7).

“It is generally believed that the Buddhist Bhikshus eschewed animal food. This is an error” (Vol. 7, p. 347).

What is the need for Brahmins to become vegetarians when Buddhist monks themselves were non-vegetarians? Ambedkar raises the question and answers as follows:

“The only way to beat the Buddhists was to go a step further and be vegetarians” (Vol. 7, p. 348).

Beef-eating became a religion-related issue instead of merely worldly-practice.

“This happened because the Brahmins made the cow a sacred animal. This made beef-eating a sacrilege. The Broken Men being guilty of sacrilege necessarily became beyond the pale of society” (Vol. 7, p. 350).

“The Broken Men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmins imposed Untouchability upon the Broken Men because they would not leave Buddhism....Can we say that the Broken Men came to be treated as Untouchables because they ate beef? There need be no hesitation in returning an affirmative answer to this question....We may therefore conclude that the Broken Men were exposed to scorn and contempt on the ground that they were Buddhists the main cause of their Untouchability was beef-eating” (Vol. 7, p. 317-20).

“When the cow became sacred and beef-eating became taboo, society became divided into two—the Settled Community became a touchable community and Broken Men became an untouchable community” (Vol. 7, p. 370).

“This difficulty will vanish if it is borne in mind that there was a time when the ancestors of the present day Untouchables were not Untouchables *vis-à-vis* the villagers but were merely Broken Men, no more and no less, and the only difference between them and the villagers was that they belonged to different tribes” (Vol. 7, p. 280).

So far we have seen in Ambedkar's words, how he thought Untouchability had originated: that it had begun just because Dalits did not stop eating beef!

Beef-eating had been there in other countries as well. But Untouchability did not emerge there because there was no distinction between beef-eaters and non-beef eaters in those countries. They did not hold the view that the 'cow is a holy animal'. Moreover, Buddhism and the hatred of Hinduism toward it are specific to India. According to Ambedkar, Untouchability began owing to this specific situation.

## 1) All that glitters is not gold! All that appears to be 'research' is not research!

Here we need to examine a strange explanation of Ambedkar concerning Untouchables. Ambedkar observes that Untouchables, though experiencing Untouchability since a long time ago, do not consider their caste lower or the Brahmin caste higher. Moreover, they treat Brahmins as unholy and inauspicious. Informing us that some researchers had found this attitude among Untouchables, Ambedkar gives those details as follows:

"People are so much accustomed to thinking that the Brahmin is the superior of the Untouchables and the Untouchable accepts himself as his inferior; that this statement that the Untouchables look upon the Brahmin as an impure person is sure to come to them as a matter of great surprise. The fact has however been noted by many writers who have observed and examined the social customs of the Untouchables. To remove any doubt on the point, attention is drawn to the following extracts from their writings" (Vol. 7, p. 314).

"The Pariahs, on their part will under no circumstances, allow a Brahmin to pass through their *paracherries* (collection of Pariah huts) as they firmly believe it will lead to their ruin" (Vol. 7, p. 314).

"The castes (Parayan and Pallan or Chakkiyan castes of Tanjore District) strongly object to the entrance of a Brahmin into their quarters believing that harm will result to them therefrom" (Vol. 7, p. 314).

"Brahmins consider great luck will wait upon them if they can manage to pass through the Holigiri without being molested. To this Holiaris have a strong objection, and, should a Brahmin attempt to enter their quarters, they turn out in a body and slipper him, in former times, it is said, to death" (Vol. 7, p. 314-15).

"We must ask why the Brahmins refused to officiate at the religious ceremonies of the Broken Men? Is it the case that the Brahmins refused to officiate? Or is it that the Broken Men as impure? Why did the Broken Men regard the Brahmins as impure? What is the basis of this antipathy?"

(Vol. 7, p. 315).

By this Ambedkar means that Dalits themselves refused to call Brahmins to officiate ceremonies.

If this information is true, what does it tell? Brahmins used to try to visit the localities and houses of Untouchables! They used to try to officiate at ceremonies in the houses of Untouchables as well! But the Untouchables themselves used to assault Brahmins, kick them and chase them away! They used to even kill them in the past! Despite such incidents of killing, Brahmins did not stop visiting the localities of Untouchables! If they pass safely without any danger, Brahmins would leave those places thinking that they were very lucky.

What can Brahmins do if Untouchables reject them and more over kick them away despite their attempts to interact with Untouchables? What wrong do we find on the part of Brahmins? The fact that Brahmins visited the houses of Untouchables implies that they did not treat Untouchables as 'impure' or 'unholy'. If they had, they wouldn't have visited the houses of the Untouchables, would they? Is it that Untouchables themselves considered Brahmins 'impure'? All this tends to indicate that Brahmins were very good people and Untouchables indulged in cruelty.

Would the Untouchables not think that their castes are inferior and Brahmin caste is superior? Then, what is the problem? If Untouchables themselves think that there are no superior-inferior differences between untouchable castes and the Brahmin caste, why do we need to fight for annihilation of caste?

What is this? Why is this reversal in the whole situation? There is a reversal in the situation because Ambedkar considered some stupid investigation as 'great research'!

Some eminent stupid researcher might have stated that Untouchables did not treat Brahmin caste as superior but treat them as impure. He might have understood incidents in a mediocre fashion.

It is not necessary to treat everything that goes in the name of research as 'great research'. Some researchers claim that they have done great research. But if we examine them they contain cent percent worthless arguments. We ought to reject such researches altogether. We need not put on a pedestal every thing that is called 'research' or to use a Telugu idiom, should not put on our heads. But Ambedkar did this. As soon as somebody wrote that Untouchables did not consider their castes inferior and they kicked Brahmins, Ambedkar was overwhelmed and depicted that information with great joy.

But he could not think that it also proves the fact that Brahmins used to visit the localities of Untouchables. Moreover, if Untouchables thought

that they were not inferior and Brahmins were not superior, then it amounts to their ignorance. This means that Untouchables do not have minimum commonsense to realize that they are in the lowest situation in society! If people who are actually in a low situation cannot realize the fact of their situation, they will not be able to realize that they have to come out of the situation. They cannot make any effort to do so. This means, those who are under the illusion without realizing their situation will harm themselves! It would be a very sad thing if Untouchables remain in this situation. But Ambedkar is very happy about it. He even seems proud of it and says that there is a wrong notion among the people that Untouchables consider themselves inferior, that is not true.

If Untouchables are already equal to Brahmins, what else do they need? What for is the struggle of Ambedkar? Is it to excel Brahmins and make them inferior? Is it not, in fact, 'equality' that Ambedkar wants?

If one starts with a 'wrong' premise, it will lead to any number of wrong conclusions.

Now let us once again return to the question of how Untouchability began? Certain doubts arise concerning Ambedkar's explanation. Unless these doubts are clarified, we cannot accept his explanation.

**The first doubt:** why did Dalits become Buddhists? They lived in the outskirts of the village simply for the protection of insiders and they did not have any quarrels with those who lived inside the village. As there was no Untouchability, they did not have any problem arising from it. There was no social prohibition against them. It is Ambedkar who gave all these details. Then, why did Dalits leave Hinduism and embrace Buddhism? Did Dalits become Buddhists because they were poor? Does Buddhism show any path of liberation from poverty? Where did Ambedkar explain why Dalits became Buddhists? What change in their life did Dalits expect while joining Buddhism? Unless there was an appropriate reason for this, Ambedkar's theory will not stand.

**The second doubt:** Is there any evidence to show that Dalits became Buddhists? There is no such evidence.

"We have no direct evidence that the Broken Men were Buddhists. No evidence is as a matter of fact necessary when the majority of Hindus were Buddhists. We may take it that they were" (Vol. 7, p. 315).

"It is that the Broken Men were Buddhists" (Vol. 7, p. 315).

We need some 'logic' to build a theory. It is not enough to use such expressions as 'let us suppose' and 'it may be the case'. Ambedkar simply stated that 'Dalits became Buddhists' but he neither showed reasons nor evidence for his claim.

**The third doubt:** It is not Dalits alone who became Buddhists. 'Majority of Hindus' (p. 315) became Buddhists. There is no prohibition against beef-eating in Buddhism. It is Hinduism and not Buddhism that considered the cow a holy animal. Ambedkar says that even Ashoka who followed Buddhism did not prohibit cow slaughter. This means, there is no scope for the conclusion that all those who became Buddhists stopped eating beef. But it is only the Dalits, who did not stop eating beef, that became Untouchables while others (non-Dalits), who became Buddhists and yet continued to eat beef, did not become Untouchables. Why? Though we have many more questions, we can still consider this theory if we find answers at least to some of them. Otherwise it cannot be called a theory at all.

Let us next consider the period in which Untouchability began.

## 6 ACCORDING TO AMBEDKAR, 'WHEN' DID UNTOUCHABILITY BEGIN?

**W**hen did Untouchability, in fact, begin? Before Christ or after Christ? Approximately which century? Citing examples from the Vedas, Dharma Sutras and Smritis, Ambedkar made an elaborate discussion about this period. This he did in the essay *The Untouchables* (Vol. 7, pp: 359-79).

In the Vedas, there is a mention of certain 'lower castes'. Yet, there is no indication that they were untouchable.

"Thus in Vedic times there was no Untouchability" (Vol. 7, p. 371).

Scholars assume that Dharma Sutras belong to a time centuries before Christ. Vishnu Purana comes under the category of Dharma Sutras. We find the word 'Untouchability' in Vishnu Purana as well as in Katyana Smriti. Further, in some Dharma Sutras, we find the following:

"On touching... a Chandala... he shall purify himself by bathing dressed in his clothes" (Vol. 7, p. 366).

Ambedkar argues, however, that, though there are words like 'untouchable' and 'Chandala' in Dharma Sutras, we need not assume that Untouchability was prevalent during the period of the Dharma Sutras. He observes that people used to refer the offspring of parents belonging to separate Varnas as 'Chandalas'. People used to consider them 'impure' yet



not 'untouchable'. Clearly we can not assume that Untouchability was prevalent during that period.

Well, then why do we find the word 'untouchables' in addition to the word 'Chandala' in the Dharma Shastras? Further, would it not amount to Untouchability if there were a rule that one has to take a purifying bath if one touches a Chandala? But Ambedkar argues that it does not amount to Untouchability. Then, he ought to explain the meaning of the rule that 'on touching a Chandala, he shall purify himself by bathing dressed in his clothes'. But Ambedkar did not say anything about the term 'bathing' or 'untouchables'. Without saying anything about these words, Ambedkar simply referred to the word 'Chandala' in terms of 'offspring of parents of different Varnas'.

But we get a doubt with regard to the meaning which Ambedkar gave to the word 'Chandala'. He has told us earlier that under Chaturvarna, marriages occurred between all Varnas and the contemporary Shastras accepted them. Then how could 'violation of Varna system' occur? This means, his interpretation of 'Chandala' is not convincing. Moreover, the words 'untouchable', 'bathing' and 'purification' together suggest that 'Untouchability' was prevalent during the period of Dharma Sutras. But, Ambedkar, without accepting this, still concluded,

"As to the period to the period of the Dharma Sutras, we have seen that there was impurity but there was no Untouchability" (Vol. 7, p.371).

Next, the question of 'Manu Smriti'. Scholars assume the period of Manu Smriti to be 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Whether or not Untouchability was prevalent by 200 AD depends on the question whether or not Untouchability finds mention in Manu Smriti.

In Manu Smriti, words like Chandala, Antya, Antyaja, Antyavasin and Bahya do occur but not the word 'untouchable'. But there are many features which point to 'Untouchability'. For example, we find some descriptions as follows:

"...the dwellings of the *Chandalas* and the *Shvapakas* shall be outside the village, they must be made *Apapattras* and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.... Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments... their marriages with their equals.... at night they shall not walk about in villages and in towns. ... By day they may go about for the purpose of their work, distinguished by marks at king's command, and they shall carry out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives;... By the king's order they shall always execute the criminals, in accordance

with the law, and they shall take for themselves the clothes, the beds, and the ornaments of (such) criminals” (Vol. 7, pp: 271-2).

In addition, there are other details, there are other pointers as follows:

“When he (the Brahman) has touched a Chandala...he becomes pure by bathing” (Vol. 7, p. 36).

“He who, while carrying anything in any manner, is touched by an impure (person or thing), shall become pure, if he performs an ablution, without pulling down that object” (Vol. 7, p. 366).

It appears that all these descriptions relate to ‘Untouchability’. But Ambedkar does not think so. His argument proceeds as follows: This is not Untouchability; it is merely impurity. There is a difference between the two. It is the Brahmin who becomes impure if he touches a Chandala. Hence this is impurity. It amounts to Untouchability only if it causes impurity to all. This, therefore, implies that Untouchability was not present in Manu Smriti. He has not, however, explained the basis for the distinction between impurity and Untouchability.

Although Manu Smriti dictated that Chandalas should live outside the village, Ambedkar still did not consider it Untouchability.

Further, in Manu Smriti there is a question of ‘Panchama Varna’ (the fifth class). Scholars have debated this issue for hundreds of years. Some cite a sloka in Manu Smriti to the effect that only four Varnas and not five existed! There is no further information about it. They say, whether Untouchability existed during the period of Manu Smriti would become clear if we know the meaning of the statement that ‘there was no ‘fifth Varna’.

There are two interpretations of ‘Fifth Varna’ among scholars.

**The first interpretation:** All persons in the society come under 4 Varnas: Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya and Shudra. Persons at the lowest level come under the category of Shudra Varna. There are only 4 Varnas and no fifth Varna. This is the interpretation. This interpretation does not tell us whether Untouchability existed during that period.

**The second interpretation:** While there were basically four Varnas, there is a part of the population that does not belong to any of those Varnas. They have no Varna. They don’t have the name of a particular Varna. This means that still there are only four Varnas in the society and there is no fifth Varna. This is the second interpretation.

All the orthodox scholars give the second interpretation. They say: Untouchability existed during the period of Manu. The untouchables were

**Avarnas: those without any Varna. They did not have any Varna. As Untouchables did not have any Varna, Manu said there was no Panchama (fifth) Varna. Avarnas were none else but untouchables. This means that Untouchability existed at that time.**

**But Ambedkar opposes this interpretation: According to him, Manu's statement that there is no fifth Varna refers to slaves. This we can infer from Narada Smriti. Narada Smriti speaks of the slaves as the fifth class. Similarly, why can we not assume that the expression 'fifth class' in Manu Smriti too refers to slaves? There were slaves but they did not have the problem of Untouchability. Which means, Untouchability was not yet present at that time (Vol. 7, p. 372).**

**A doubt concerning this argument: there were slaves at that time. Narada Smriti called them 'Panchama Varna' (fifth class). If Manu Smriti too had used the expression Panchama Varna with reference to slaves, then one has to say that there was a Panchama Varna. Why does one say that there was no Panchama Varna? There were slaves, weren't they? Then how can Narada Smriti say 'no', when there was Panchama Varna?**

**Though no one has understood this 'cry' about 'Panchama Varna', one can easily understand that Ambedkar's argument is totally wrong.**

**Even if we discuss for hundreds of years, we cannot understand anything about two stray expressions whose meaning is not clear.**

**The essence of the matter is that, though Manu Smriti dictates that Chandalas should live outside the village, Ambedkar does not consider that 'Untouchability':**

**"In the first place, there was no Untouchability in the time of Manu. There was only Impurity. Even the Chandala for whom Manu has nothing but contempt is only an impure person. That being so, this passage cannot possibly have any reference to Untouchables" (Vol.7, p. 372).**

**This means Untouchability did not exist even during the period of Manu Smriti. This implies that Untouchability did not come into existence until after 200 AD.**

**But at another place we find Ambedkar mentioning a context which indicates that Untouchability may be found in Manu Smriti.**

**"Those whom Manu included within the Chaturvarna correspond to the modern composite class called Hindus. Those whom Manu called Bahayas (outside the Chaturvarna) correspond to the present day untouchables of India" (Vol. 5, p. 279).**

**If we compare Bahayas of that period with the present day untouchables, does it not mean that the Bahayas had the situation of present**

day Untouchability? Does it not amount that Untouchability existed at that period itself? But Ambedkar argues that Untouchability did not at all exist during the period of Manu Smriti.

Another source is Fah-Hian. This man came to India during the period of Gupta kings in 400 AD. One of his descriptions is as follows:

“Southward from this (Mathura) is the so-called middle-country (Madhyadesa). .. Throughout the country the people kill no living thing nor drink wine, nor do they eat garlic or onion, with the exception of Chandalas only. The Chandalas are named ‘evil men’ and dwell apart from others; if they enter a town or market, they sound a piece of wood in order to separate themselves; then, men knowing they are, avoid coming in contact with them... The Chandalas only hunt and sell flesh” (Vol. 7, p. 374-5).

Why do people, who do not resort to killing living things, buy ‘flesh’? Does it mean that they eat flesh but they don’t kill for themselves? Do they eat flesh although they don’t eat onion or garlic? Even if we keep these questions aside, we find Ambedkar acknowledging to some extent the fact that Untouchability existed here as per this description. But he says that it was not yet quite Untouchability:

“It is, therefore, quite possible that the conditions described by Fah-Hian, though bordering on Untouchability, may not be taken as amounting to Untouchability. It may only be extreme form of impurity...” (Vol. 7, p. 378).

It is very clear in Fah-Hian that Chandalas sound a piece of wood so that other caste-people avoid coming in contact with them. Yet, Ambedkar argues that it was not yet complete Untouchability. Why does he object to consider it as Untouchability. It is because he had refused to consider the same kind of features in Manu Smriti as Untouchability. Then, how can he consider the same features as Untouchability here? Hence, he called it ‘not full Untouchability but half Untouchability’. But, when we talk of Untouchability it involves one of two things: either touching a person or not touching a person. How can there be half touching or slight touching? ‘Half Untouchability’ is a meaningless thing. And yet, Ambedkar thinks, ‘yes, it is so. It is not yet full Untouchability’!

The period of the Gupta Kings was opposed to Buddhism. During this period, Brahmins achieved victory over Buddhism, said Ambedkar:

“...cow-killing was made a capital offence by the Gupta kings some time in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD” (Vol. 7, p. 379).

Since then, cow killing has been a crime and beef-eating-Dalits began to face the problem of Untouchability, opines Ambedkar. He also pointed

to evidence from another Chinese traveller. Yuan Chwang came to India in 629 AD. He too recorded the fact that Untouchability existed in India:

“Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and scavengers have their habitations marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and they sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets” (Vol. 7, p. 378).

In the account of Fah-Hian, we find reference to the Chandala caste alone. Here, in Yuan Chang's words, we find reference to many more castes.

What is the nature of the occupations of these untouchable castes? Cleaning the dirt (scavengers), cruel acts like execution and such other occupations. We find the same kind of occupations in Manu Smriti (Go back once again and see those details): that Chandalas have to carry the dead bodies of the destitutes and execute the punishments awarded to the offenders.

But Ambedkar, unwilling to consider such facts in Manu Smriti as Untouchability, acknowledges them here as Untouchability:

“Fa-Hian's description refers to the Chandalas only while the description given by Yuan Chwang applies to communities other than the Chandalas. This is a point of great importance. No such argument can be levelled against the acceptance of a description since it applies to communities other than the Chandalas. It is, therefore, just possible that when Yuan Chwang came to India, Untouchability had emerged... On the basis of what has been said above we can conclude that while Untouchability did not exist in 200 A.D., it had emerged by 600 A.D... We can, therefore, say with confidence that Untouchability was born some time about 400 A.D. It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism” (Vol. 7, p. 378-9).

This implies that according to Ambedkar, Untouchability began around 400 AD. What existed before this period is only 'impurity' but not Untouchability. Though there was clear-cut evidence with reference to the existence of Untouchability, Ambedkar did not at all acknowledge it. The entire evidence is in his essay *The Untouchables?* He wrote this in 1948.

How should readers respond if the writer of the same essay says, after 14 years, in 1956, in another book *Buddha and His Dhamma*, that Untouchability was already prevalent before Christ during Buddha's time itself? Do the readers have to petrify or become senseless? Of course, they will do whatever they have to! Most readers will respond in the same way as I did when I first read this, won't they?

*Buddha and his Dhamma* constitutes volume 11 of Ambedkar's writings. According to details, Ambedkar gave there, Buddha was born 2,500 years ago and died in the year 483 AD. If Untouchability was prevalent during his time itself, that would imply that it was prevalent before 500 B.C. Note that none else said this fact! It was Ambedkar himself who said this!

In *Buddha and his Dhamma*, Buddha himself converted some untouchables and turned them into Bhikkhus. Ambedkar cited these examples to explain that Buddha rejected caste distinctions and Untouchability, which Hinduism was observing.

In *Buddha and his Dhamma*, under the heading "Conversion of Sopaka and Suppiya, the untouchables", we find the following information concerning Buddha's conversion of the Untouchables:

"Sopaka was a pariah (untouchable) of Shravasti". Immediately after giving birth to Sopaka, his mother died. The watchman of a cemetery brought up Sopaka along with his own son Suppiya. Sopaka acquired the name of the community to which his mother belonged. "The Blessed Lord (Buddha) one day happened to pass by the cemetery. Sopaka, seeing the Lord, approached him. After saluting the Lord he asked his permission to join him as his disciple. Sopaka was then only seven years old. So the Lord asked him to obtain his father's consent". When Sopaka called his foster father, the father requested the Lord to admit his son to the Order. "Nothing withstanding that he belonged to the pariah community the Lord admitted him to the Order and instructed him in the doctrine and discipline." ... "...Suppiya learned the Lord's doctrine and discipline from his companion, Sopaka, and requested Sopaka to admit him to the Order, although Sopaka belonged to a community which was lower in rank than the community to which Suppiya belonged". (This means, while Sopaka's caste itself is an untouchable caste, Suppiya's caste is still lower than that!) "...Suppiya, a member who belonged to the despised community whose occupation was to perform the duties of watchmen in the cemetery, became a Bhikku" (Vol. 11, pp: 186-7).

"All of them sought from the Buddha permission to become Bhikkus and enter the Order. The Buddha without hesitation and without caring for their low birth or their previous condition, admitted them into the Order" (Vol. 11, p. 188).

Another incident: A young woman named 'Prakriti' belonged to the Chandala caste. She asked Buddha to admit her to the Order. Then Buddha applauded her enlightenment in seeking admission into the Order thus,

"Blessed art thou, Prakriti, for though you are a Chandalika you will be a model for noblemen and noblewomen. You are of low caste, but

Brahmins will learn a lesson from you.... Having expressed her wish she was admitted into it, though she belonged to the lowest class" (Vol. 11, p. 199-200).

It is not only in the book which he wrote in 1956 but also in another essay *Reformers and their future* which he appears to have written much earlier (we don't have the details of the date of composition of this essay) that Ambedkar observed that Untouchability already existed in Buddha's time. We find the following observations in that essay:

"In the Aryan Society the Shudra or low caste man could never become a Brahman. But Buddha not only preached against caste but admitted the Shudra and the low caste to the rank of a Bhikku who held the same rank in Buddhism as the Brahman did in Brahmanism... the percentage of low-born members of the Order was probably in fair proportion" (Vol.3, p. 220-21).

Thus we encounter totally different arguments even in the essays written in proximate periods! Mutually contradictory arguments!

Why does it happen so regularly in Ambedkar's writing? Is it merely because of 'forgetfulness'? Is it because that he forgets something he wrote in one essay by the time he wrote another essay? But is this something connected with forgetfulness? Can we find anywhere that a person forgets the theories which himself discovered?

The following is, surely, the essence of the matter. Ambedkar intended to propose a 'new theory' concerning 'Untouchability' that Untouchability came into existence due to the conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism. Hence, he has to reject every piece of evidence that indicates the existence of Untouchability before Buddha! In fact, Untouchability appears in Dharma Sutras which existed long before Buddha. But Ambedkar has to give up the theory if he acknowledges the fact that Untouchability had been there since Buddha's time. He is not willing to give it up. Hence whatever he found in Dharma Sutras is something other than Untouchability.

Well, what about Manu Smriti? Here, Ambedkar committed a much bigger blunder. It is he who gave the information that Manu Smriti belonged to 200 AD. Which means it came 700 years after Buddha. Ambedkar's new theory won't fail if he acknowledges the existence of Untouchability in Manu Smriti. He could accept without hesitation that Untouchability originated from out of the conflict with Buddhism and the same appears in Manu Smriti. But he did not.

This is because he has decided not to acknowledge the fact of Untouchability until the 'prohibition of cow killing' became a law. His

intention is to show the connection between the prohibition on cow-killing and Untouchability. He wanted to say that prohibition of cow-killing became a law in 400 AD during the period of the Gupta kings, that beef-eating became an offence and Untouchability came into practice because Dalits did not stop eating beef. Therefore, Ambedkar is not willing to acknowledge the fact of Untouchability until 400 AD. Though Manu Smriti is subsequent to Buddha, it came surely 200 years earlier than the prohibition on cow-killing? Hence, he refused to acknowledge the existence of Untouchability in Manu Smriti.

Well, that is fine. Then, why this person, who went on arguing like this, did say in *Buddha and His Dhamma* that Untouchability existed in 500 B.C? This is because he has to show how great Buddha is, doesn't he? In order to say that Buddha rejected Untouchability while Hinduism was observing it should we find Untouchability in Buddha's time or not? We should find it. He sticks to the point that suits the occasion! This is a fine way to conduct scholarship!

When a person considers an issue thoughtfully, there is nothing wrong to assume that 'perhaps things might have happened like this and hence this problem might have arisen'. So far there is nothing wrong in this assumption. If the empirical evidence contradicts that assumption, however, one must then abandon the assumption as untenable. But nowhere did Ambedkar do that. He proposed new theories concerning three issues, namely, origin of castes, origin of Shudra Varna and origin of Untouchability. But nowhere did these theories and facts really coincide. Yet he didn't care to note any of the facts, nor did he abandon his theories.

At every place, he exhibited a tendency to claim, 'I have discovered a new theory. Listen to whatever I say! That's all!' He was not concerned with any doubts that arise in connection with his theories. Observe what he says about his theory in his preface to the book *The Untouchables*.

"This book may therefore, be taken as a pioneer attempt in the exploration of a field so completely neglected by everybody. The book, if I may say so, deals not only with every aspect of the main question set out for inquiry, namely, the origin of Untouchability, but it also deals with almost all questions connected with it. Some of the questions are such that very few people are even aware of them; and those who are aware of them are puzzled by them and do not know how to answer them"

(Vol. 7, p. 243).

"In this sense the book is a work of art even more than of history"

(Vol. 7, p. 244).



Thus repeatedly glorifying the soundness of his theory throughout the 'foreword', Ambedkar finally shifted to conventional literary modesty and exhibited his humility as follows:

"I am not so vain as to claim any finality for my thesis. I do not ask them to accept it as the last word. I do not wish to influence their judgement. They are of course free to come to their own conclusion. All I say to them is to consider whether this thesis is not a workable and therefore, for the time being, a valid hypothesis if the test of a valid hypothesis is that it should fit in with all surrounding facts, explain them and give them a meaning which in its absence they do not appear to have. I do not want anything more from my critics than a fair and unbiased appraisal" (Vol. 7, p. 245).

If he really wanted 'unbiased appraisal', he ought to have abandoned this theory totally. Needless to say again as to why he has to abandon it.

Well, how should we understand the early days of Untouchability according to this essay? According to it, it came into existence in 400 AD. But according to *Buddha and his Dhamma*, it existed during the period of Buddha by 500 B.C. Both are Ambedkar's propositions! Which should we accept? What should we learn from this kind of theories? Are they worth the name theory at all?

The author has humbly asked us to say whether his theory is useful or not. Do we really need to state our view?

## **7 DO YOU WANT 'UNTOUCHABILITY' OR 'SLAVERY'?**

In its early days, the Congress party had to some extent an orientation to certain social reforms—abolition of untouchability and child-marriage and promotion of widow remarriage—along with the political movement opposed to the British rule in India. But gradually there developed a trend which argued that 'it is not time for social reforms. We have to organise political movements first because we have to achieve independence first'.

Ambedkar is totally opposed to this trend. According to him, social reforms like 'abolition of untouchability' must take place first and only then political movements should follow. 'We say that one country should not rule another country. Well then, can Savarna class rule another class in the name of Untouchability? We are furious about atrocities like

Jalianwala Bagh by British rulers. But, can one section of natives commit atrocities on another section of natives? Isn't there any injustice in it?' Ambedkar raises many such questions. All these questions are absolutely correct. We have to fully agree with these questions. There is no justice in supporting 'untouchability' or the 'caste system'.

However, whatever defect there is in the argument of the Congress, namely, 'political movements should take place first', the same defect is there in the argument of Ambedkar, namely, 'social movements should take place first'. If political movements are for the sake of freedom (whether it is real freedom or not is a different question) and if social reforms are for the sake of emancipation from evil practices, both things can happen simultaneously. Those who campaign for freedom can also campaign against untouchability. Similarly, those who campaign against untouchability can also campaign in favour of freedom. Or, they can do this once and do that at another time. Whether you believe that we should not raise the problem of untouchability until we achieve freedom or that we should not talk of freedom unless we abolish untouchability—neither of these assumptions are correct. If the two kinds of movements take place simultaneously to the extent possible, one would influence the other. The two changes would be mutually related. Therefore, the question which ought to come first and which is next becomes meaningless. Both are good. Both have to go together. Such simultaneity is possible.

Different thinkers look at society from different perspectives. They interpret any problem from their respective perspectives. Whatever their theory concerning society, it will have a 'foundation' and a 'superstructure', even if they do not use these terms or grasp this distinction. The 'foundation' of a theory is its 'fundamental' feature. Its 'superstructure' is its 'secondary' aspect. When society faces problems, we need movements concerning both the 'foundation' as well as the 'superstructure'.

Simultaneous occurrence of these movements does not imply that there is no distinction in society between its foundation and superstructure. We should not mix up the question, namely, 'which is primary and which is secondary in society' with the question, namely, 'which movement comes first and which movement comes next'. The two are different issues.

From the viewpoint of Congress leaders, political movements were fundamental and must take place first. The rest will follow. From the view point of Ambedkar, social movements are fundamental and must take place first. The rest will follow. Both these viewpoints are wrong. Whatever be the two perspectives regarding the question 'which is primary', the correct argument is: the two kinds of movements must take place simultaneously in their own way.

In the case of Untouchability, Ambedkar differs with the Congress leaders in another regard. Congress leaders spoke of Untouchability as if it were a very trivial problem. 'In other countries there are still bigger problems. Do you know that there used to be slavery? Is Untouchability a problem compared to such sufferings?'—This is how they argued. To this, Ambedkar answered, 'Untouchability is more oppressive than slavery. Slavery is, surely, less oppressive! His whole argument goes along this line.

But is it an answer? Both slavery and untouchability are oppressive. Both are cruel. The labouring class faces these two forms of oppression due to the class of Masters. Why should we compare the two in terms of 'which is greater and which is less'? Should we suffer a condition because it is 'less oppressive'? We need not tolerate something which is less oppressive, should we? Then why should we compare the two in terms of 'which is more oppressive and which is less oppressive?' Hence, Untouchables should reply as follows: 'should we have untouchability just because there is slavery elsewhere? Slaves over there will tackle their own problem of slavery. Here we will tackle our problem. The question whether untouchability is more oppressive or less oppressive is irrelevant to us. Even if it is proved that untouchability is less oppressive, none have the right to impose it on us'.— This is how untouchables should argue.

But Ambedkar's argument does not proceed along this line. All the time, he attempts to establish that 'untouchability is more oppressive and slavery is less oppressive' and tries to prove this argument. He says that slavery appears to be less oppressive even if we compare the worst period of slavery and the best period of untouchability.

"I am prepared to allow the comparison of the condition of the slaves in the Roman Empire to be made with the condition of the Untouchables of the present day. It is a comparison between the worst of one side and the best of the other, for the present times are supposed to be in the golden age for the Untouchables" (Vol. 5, p. 14).

According to Ambedkar, facts will prove that Roman slaves were happier than the present day Untouchables, even if we consider two entirely different periods of time. To demonstrate this, Ambedkar depicts sorrows as well as comforts under slavery and finally concludes, that slavery is indescribably comfortable compared to untouchability.

Although this comparison is wrong, we are obliged to examine its validity because Ambedkar's argument is based on such comparison.

We have seen earlier what the condition of untouchables in India is. If we also consider the condition of slaves, we will know whose condition is more oppressive. In order to see the conditions of slaves, we have to

look at the worst period in Roman times. In another context, Ambedkar gave much information concerning this period:

“As to the slaves there were millions of them. A single rich landholder might own hundreds and even thousands, and it was a poor man that did not have several at least. They were just things to be owned. They were not persons in the eye of the law and had therefore no rights. They received kind treatment from a few humane masters. But generally they were treated with the greatest cruelty. ‘If a slave coughs or sneezes during a meal, if he lets a key fall noisy to the floor, we fall into a great rage.... often we strike too hard and shatter a limb or break a tooth,’ said Seneca. A rich Roman used to punish his slaves for carelessness by casting them into a fish pond as food for lampreys. The slaves who displeased their masters were ordinarily sent to an underground prison. During the day, they had to work loaded with heavy iron chains. Many were branded with red hot iron. The mill where the slaves had to work is thus described by a Roman author; ‘Gods! What poor shrunken up men? With white skins striped with blows of the whip.... They were only the shreds of tunis; bent forward, head shaved, the feet held in a chain, the body deformed by the heat of the fire, the eyelids eaten away by the fumes, everything covered with grain dust.’ (Vol. 5, p. 76).

This is a small example which Ambedkar cited with reference to ancient Roman slaves. In this description, we don't find such examples as masters throwing slaves into the cages of lions and enjoying the carnage and compelling slaves to wrestle unto death. Next, Ambedkar narrates the plight of slaves exported to America in modern times:

“Neither the Europeans nor Asians can imagine the kind of sufferings which Negroes experienced. We may describe their sufferings under three heads: sufferings at the time of capture, during their transport and while working... Slave traders used to round up Negroes suddenly in the coastal areas. They used to do this with the help of slave dealers... The chiefs of the tribes used to act as slave dealers and hand over men in their tribe to the slave traders. Enslavement including those of women and children within a tribe became the penalty for less and less serious offences. While transporting Negroes to America, slave traders used to turn men, women, children and every one into a heap and tie them with fetters. The traders used to lock them in the ‘slave stick’—a long pole with a crutch at the end for fastening round the neck. They used to make slaves carry on their heads the loads of foodstuffs and ivory. They used to leave slaves to die or kill them if they fell sick during the journey. That is why, the tracks on which slaves walked used to be full of bones. As soon as they reached the coast, they were pushed into the ships specially meant for the slaves. They used to handcuff the slaves in pairs. They used to push the slaves into ships where it is so crowded that people

cannot turn their necks either... Slaves used to suffer a lot with sickness and ailments. Though instruments were provided for forcibly feeding those who refused to eat, about one-sixth of the slaves used to face death. The slave traders used to examine the slaves at the end and keep them ready for sale. The slave masters used to try to conceal the wounds caused due to guns or otherwise. When it was not possible to conceal, they used to give them medical treatment for the wounds. But the agents at the ports often complained that the 'parcels of Negroes' landed were 'bad' or 'mean' or 'much abused'. Finally, on ship board or in the public slave market, the slaves were put up for sale by 'scramble' or auction... Slaves, who some how passed through these hardships and got down to work in the plantations, used to face series of another set of problems. About one-third of the slaves used to die as they could not adjust with the new kind climate, new kind of food and new kind of work. What kind of life did these slaves lead after they withstood all this and survived? The Slave-Masters used to have two rights that were autocratic and indisputable. They were: the right to own and the right to punish..." The punishments inflicted on slaves in this island, are various and tormenting... Among which is the thumbcrew, a barbarious invention to fasten the thumbs together, which appears to cause excruciating pain. The 'iron necklace' is a ring, locked and rivetted about the neck; to these, collars are frequently added.... which prevent the wearers from laying down their heads with any degree of comfort. The 'boots' are strong iron rings, full four inches in circumference; closed just above the ankles; to these some owners prefix chain, which the miserable sufferers, if able to work, must manage as well as they can, and it is not infrequent to see in the streets of this town, at midday. Negroes chained together by these necklaces, as well as the boots... The 'spurs' are rings of iron, similar to the boots, to which are added spikes from three to four inches long, placed horizontally. A chain fastened about the body with a padlock is another mode of tormenting this oppressed race of beings" (Vol. 5, pp: 87-88).

This description of slaves continues for many pages. This kind of situation of modern Negro slaves or that of ancient Roman slaves, according to Ambedkar, is still better than the condition of the present day untouchables!

I wonder if any single untouchable person would agree with Ambedkar's assessment! Will any untouchable, in order to reduce his suffering, like to turn into a slave since it is an intelligent thing to shift from more miserable condition to less miserable condition? Will any untouchable say: "Yes, slavery is less painful than untouchability. I am prepared to become even a Roman slave. Let there be any number of tortures: iron chains around the whole body, iron rings around the neck as well as feet, lashes on the back, 'thumbcrew' punishments, becoming

a prey to the fish in the ponds if masters get angry, fighting with the lions for the entertainment of Masters, wrestling until death... let there be any number of sufferings! All these are petty things! I will definitely become a slave if I can get rid of untouchability'. Does any untouchable say so. Why any other untouchable? Will Ambedkar agree to become a Roman slave or Negro slave? None will agree to that. It is needless to say this specially.

So far we have seen the sufferings of slaves. Now let us see the comforts and joys of the slaves. It is Ambedkar himself who provides this information; it is the basis for his conclusion that 'the condition of slaves is better than that of untouchables'. This information fascinated him.

One Mr. Barrow (there is no information about the country of his origin) wrote a book *Slavery in the Roman Empire*. This book contains descriptions of the comforts and luxuries which the slaves enjoyed during that time. The source of his descriptions is information which a slave master named Pliny provided, who had the reputation of being a very kind hearted person. However, there is also a criticism of the book that 'Pliny's account does not genuinely reflect the existing reality'. The meaning of this criticism is that the information is not correct. But the author of the book (Mr. Barrow) did not care for the criticism: "There is no reason for this attitude". This means that 'we need not consider the information in the book as incorrect'. What else the author of the book would say if not so? Would he say, 'Yes, the information in my book is wrong'? But Ambedkar feels that we can still take the book into account since the author gave a fitting reply. Hence, Ambedkar took the book into consideration. Attaching value to a book which, according to critics, did not reflect reality, Ambedkar felt extremely happy over the comforts of the slaves depicted in the book.

Those comforts were the following: wealthy Masters used to provide training to their slaves in literature and Fine Arts. Some slaves were experts in language. Some slaves knew short-hand. Some worked as Notaries. Some of them were also Grammarians and Librarians. Among slaves, there were Sculptors, Philosophers, Physicians, Specialists, Dancers, Singers, Athletes and athletic Trainers and so on. Almost all the agents in trade were also slaves. Slaves could rent lands from Masters. They could charter banks and ships. They could earn profits and invest capital as well. They were able to buy their freedom. They used to work as secretaries and agents too. They also held government jobs except in the army. Among the slaves of those times, there were persons who held rights over money, land, houses and shops. In this manner, slaves enjoyed 'extraordinary social status'.

In modern times, a Negro, who studied at the Princeton University, ran a school for white students in a county in the state of North Carolina,

America. He used to give sermons at religious gatherings of white people. One of his disciples became a Governor of a state and another a Legislator. Even the whites used to eat in his house.

Thus, after elaborating the 'extraordinary social status of the slaves', Ambedkar notes: Can there be any comparison between the condition of these slaves and that of the untouchables in India? Like Roman slaves, how many untouchables are working as Librarians, Stenographers, Linguists, Grammarians, Tutors, Doctors, Artists and government employees? The doors of these occupations and positions, which were available to slaves, are completely closed to the untouchables even today.

Ambedkar made many other points to prove that 'slavery is better' too: That a master finds some work for the slave and gives him food, whereas an untouchable has to find work for himself; that slavery is obviously legal while untouchability does not appear so even though it is also a kind of slavery. Thus, Ambedkar made many points and finally concludes as follows:

"Of the two orders, untouchability is beyond doubt the worse... Neither slavery nor untouchability is a free social order. But if a distinction is to be made—and there is no doubt that there is distinction between the two—the test is whether education, virtue, happiness, culture, and wealth is possible within slavery or within untouchability. Judged by this test it is beyond controversy that slavery is hundred times better than untouchability. In slavery there is room for education, virtue, happiness, culture, or wealth. In untouchability there is none.... Neither the crushing of untouchability nor the refusal of personal growth was necessarily inherent in slavery, especially slavery as it existed in Roman empire.... The Untouchable, while he is a free individual, had neither fair start, nor equal opportunity nor square deal. From this point of view, untouchability is not only worse than slavery but is positively cruel as compared to slavery" (Vol. 5, pp: 15-17).

In this way, comparing the two states, the process of glorifying slavery continues for several pages. 'The untouchable has neither fair start nor equal opportunity'—True! Well, does a slave have either fair start or equal opportunity? What a futile argument!

If a human being says that slavery of Roman days too is hundred times better than untouchability, we cannot think of him in any other terms except that his mind is totally closed due to intoxication of vulgar logic. To prove the falsity of the argument that slaves were in a better position than untouchables, it is enough if Ambedkar does not find a single intelligent fellow who would go into slavery from untouchability for the sake of the good aspects of slavery like education, nobility, happiness, culture, wealth etc., which the slavery of Roman days would fetch him!

Ambedkar depicted that slaves take the lands of the masters for rent, hire ships and banks, earn profits and even invest capitals, didn't he? If this had happened, that might mean that a slave employed many slaves under him! It means that he earned profits by exploiting the 'surplus labour' of other slaves! Which means that 'wise' slave had turned into a Master! Ambedkar—who was fascinated by the slaves that earned profits, that invested capitals, that acquired lands, houses and shops—was not at all concerned about the plight of abject slaves who were ruined due to these properties.

Ambedkar gave many descriptions of great slaves. There might be some slaves who received education, who had acquaintance with the Arts and who had jobs involving intellectual labour. Those examples may not be false. But what is the percentage of such great examples in the whole of slave population?

Ambedkar too is not saying that all the slaves were in such a comfortable situation. If we assume that slaves in a better situation constitute 5% of the total slave population, what about the remaining 95%? Did not all those ordinary slaves live like living-dead persons with lashes all over their bodies, with slave-sticks around their necks and with heavy iron rings around their ankles? If all the slaves lived in riches and wealth, who bore the lashes? Should we consider certain conditions that are specific to one in a hundred or a million as general conditions?

Such specific conditions exist not only for slaves but also for untouchables. Didn't Ambedkar, who studied in America and Britain, hold higher positions? R. Srinivasan, who participated in the Round Table Conferences along with Ambedkar, was also an untouchable. Bahadur M.C. Raja was also an untouchable. Agni Bhoj, who was a Minister in the cabinet of Kher, was also an untouchable. M.M. Nandagalekar, who acted as the Deputy Chairman of a Municipality, was also an untouchable. Thus there were many untouchables who held high positions. There were untouchables who received education, who owned property and who were well versed in the Arts. Yet no matter how many specific examples are available, they cannot represent the condition of all the untouchable people. The condition of some people cannot be the condition of all people.

Every slave knows that under slavery the master himself would give him work, he need not look for it. Despite this slaves waged struggles to come out of slavery. They succeeded in getting rid of slavery. They certainly did not choose to remain in slavery just because they did not have to look for work. Will the untouchables agree to become slaves at least to escape from the problem of finding work? No, they won't. They will make their own attempts to find work.



After describing all the 'good qualities' of slavery, ask both untouchables and slaves whether they want their untouchability or slavery to continue? They will immediately say, 'we don't want either of these two! We don't want both! But they won't ask you which is less difficult. This aspect of Ambedkar's work regarding the comforts of slaves is utterly useless! Fools who support untouchability might have prattled. The reply to them can hardly be 'yes, untouchability is more oppressive than slavery. Slavery is less oppressive.' But one should not attempt to conclude which is more and which is less.

We must reject both the propositions equally! Why should there be the question 'which is better, which is worse?'

There is one feature we find in Ambedkar's writings consistently. And that is 'inconsistency'. Which means, none of the arguments meshes consistently with any other. The same thing has happened here. Having depicted repeatedly the comforts and joys of slavery, Ambedkar somehow suddenly hesitated a little and concluded thus:

"It is therefore overhasty to say that slavery is better than untouchability"  
(Vol. 5, p. 16).

Again, what is this? Is it 'hastiness' that whatever he argued so far? Does this amount to cancellation of his earlier argument? Well, which of his opinions should we then consider?

## 8. HINDU REFORMERS ON UNTOUCHABILITY

Untouchability is part of the 'caste system'. Caste system is itself an integral part of the Hindu religion (Hinduism). Thus, both untouchability and caste system are evil practices and superstitious notions relating to Hinduism.

The only correct solution for the problem of castes is to abandon castes altogether. Non-observance of castes is the only correct solution. Establishing new relationships in life where the word caste is never heard is the only solution. 'How is this possible' is a different question. But this alone is the solution.

The Caste system is an evil practice. For whom? Only for those lower castes who suffer its effect! For those upper castes that receive various 'services' from the people of the lower castes, caste system is not an evil practice but a good practice.

In the name of 'social reform', Intellectuals belonging to upper castes have been searching for a long time for ways which delude the people of the lower castes that the social reform would solve the caste question.

When people speak of Hinduism, there appear two 'great souls', who gained enormous reputation. They are Vivekananda and Gandhi! These persons are famous as great 'philosophers' and 'social reformers'! But both fully support caste system. They, however, propose some trivial and petty changes. They do so because they cannot satisfy the people belonging to lower castes if they don't propose at least such changes. It is enough to see briefly the arguments of these reformers in order to know how faulty, haphazard and meaningless their defence of the of caste system happens to be.

## 1) Vivekananda (1863-1902)

What we are going to see about this gentleman is not from Ambedkar's volumes. It is from Vivekananda's own book entitled *Caste, Culture and Socialism* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999).

Let us see the 'knowledge' of Vivekananda relating to caste system.

"The ideal at one end is the Brahmana, and the ideal at the other end is the Chandala; and the whole work is to raise the Chandala up to the Brahmana" (p. 27).

"...there are thousands of castes and some are even getting admission into Brahmanahood, for what prevents any caste from declaring they are Brahmanas? Thus, caste with all its rigour, has been created in that manner. Let us suppose that there are castes here with ten thousand people in each. If these put their heads together and say, 'We will call ourselves Brahmanas,' nothing can stop them;..." (p. 27-8).

This means, all the members of a given untouchable caste should declare, 'We are Brahmins!' It is enough if they actually come to think so; then they will become Brahmins! Which means, it is their fault for not having thought like that! 'It is in their hands to think so, isn't it? Why don't the low caste people change their caste?' This is what puzzles Swamiji! Well, let us suppose that all the members of Chandala caste declared thus, "We are Brahmins!" Will all the upper caste people recognize those Chandala caste people as Brahmins thereafter? Will they stop observing untouchability? Will they allow them to enter their houses? Will they begin to establish inter-community dining and marital relationships? Will all these things happen?

Even an insane person will know that none of these things will happen. Those untouchables will remain untouchables. If any untouchable person

says, "I too am a Brahmin", all the Brahmins will laugh and scold him thus, "Get out! Stupid fellow! Will you become a Brahmin merely on your say-so?" Does such a great Swamiji not know such a simple thing? What real service does a reformer do for untouchables if he advises them to consider themselves as Brahmins? If he at least says the same thing to Brahmins—that is if he says, "treat untouchables too as Brahmins like you"—there is some meaning. Though no change would take place, one could still believe that "this Swamiji, well, has said something in favour of untouchables." But advising untouchables to consider themselves Brahmins and criticising them for not considering amounts to shifting the blame on to them. It means that low caste people are themselves failing to get rid of their low caste status!

Hear some more sayings of Swamiji! "I do not propose any levelling of caste. Caste is a very good thing. Caste is the plan we want to follow. What caste really is, not one in a million understands."

Now let us know the real meaning of a 'very good thing', namely, caste, which 'not one in a million understands!'

"The Brahmana caste and the Brahmanya qualities are two distinct things. In India, one is held to be a Brahmana by one's caste; but in the West, one should be known as such by one's Brahmanya qualities. As there are three Gunas—Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas—so there are Gunas which show a man to be a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or a Shudra"

(p. 29-30).

So this is 'what caste really is'. This is the meaning which 'not one in a million understands'. A long time ago, the upper caste reformers began to sing this new song, namely, that caste has nothing to do with birth but with 'quality' (guna). These people do not say that 'there shouldn't be caste differences'. They in fact want caste distinctions. These reformers changed the meaning of caste and invented a new meaning for the term caste, namely, 'that the castes depend not on birth but on quality'—because the low caste people will oppose them if they say that castes should exist as before.

If it is on the basis of gunas (qualities), there has always been a practice in the world to talk about a person as a 'good person' if he is good and 'bad person' if he is bad! Why should one give again caste labels like 'Brahmanhood' for 'good quality' and 'Shudrahood' for bad quality?

If we want to treat castes on the basis of qualities, why don't the qualities of all people become good and castes of all people become one and the same? Why don't the castes disappear altogether then? But it is the strong belief of the reformers that all people do not become good and

bad people will necessarily exist in society! So 'caste is a very good thing', really, when there exist not only good people but also bad people.

"I do not propose any levelling of caste", says Swamiji! This means that Swamiji has no desire to make efforts to convert all human beings into good people!

He says that all the distinctions in the west are on the basis of qualities only. This means, if we summon slaves and slave masters before Swamiji and ask him the basis for these distinctions, he would say, "All bad people are slaves and all good people are masters. Hence these distinctions!" That's nice logic!

Here we are not concerned with the ultra-modern meanings which reformers attribute to the term caste. What we have before us is caste distinction based on the 'birth' of a person. This alone is the problem. What are we to do with such castes? A reformer ought to tell us to what should we do with such castes. He has to suggest a way out. But, Swamiji, leaving the actual problems aside, began to offer a strange depiction of the qualities of westerners:

"The qualities of being a Brahmana or a Kshatriya are dying out from the country; but in the West they have now attained to Kshatriyahood, from which the next step is Brahmanahood, and many there are who have qualified themselves for that" (p. 30).

In the western countries, people can climb one step more and all of them can become Brahmins. Whereas in India people with bad qualities will remain bad forever! For such people the 'Shudra' caste will remain forever!

Well, how to determine these good and bad qualities? Let us learn that 'science' here.

"...when he is engaged in serving another for pay, he is in Shudrahood; when he is busy transacting some piece of business for profit, on his own account, he is a Vaishya; when he fights to right wrongs, then the qualities of a Kshatriya come out in him; and when he meditates on God, or passes his time in conversation about Him, then he is Brahmana. Naturally, it is quite possible for one to be changed from one caste into another" (p. 33).

So, this is how we must determine the good and bad qualities!

Meditating on God constantly is the quality of a Brahmin. And it is the most superior quality. Engaging in the service of others for pay is Shudrahood! This is the worst quality. People choose these activities 'naturally' and due to qualities that are 'inherent in every man'. Owing

to the inherent qualities, castes form. If all people want to become Brahmins, all have to begin singing hymns. There should be no fool who will perform labour for pay. Then, indeed, all will eat 'grass'! For only grass grows on its own on the earth without anybody's labour!

This is the crudest ignorance of what a human society is, what performance of labour means, what earning of profits means and what human relations in actual reality are! How can a person, for whom hymns praising the God constitute science and good behaviour, understand the problems of society? How can he suggest solutions for the miseries of the sufferers?

Look at the solution which this Swamiji is suggesting to the lower castes!

'To the non-Brahmana castes I say, be not in a hurry, do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmana, because, as I have shown, you are suffering from your own fault. Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? What have you been doing all this time? Why have you been indifferent? Why do you now fret and fume because somebody else had more brains, more energy, more pluck and go, than you!' (p. 102).

'Why do you not become Sanskrit scholars? Why do you not spend millions to bring Sanskrit education to all the castes in India? That is the question. The moment you do these things, you are equal to the Brahmana. That is the secret of power in India. Sanskrit and prestige go together in India. The only safety, I tell you men who belong to the lower castes, the only way to raise your condition, is to study Sanskrit, and this fighting and writing and frothing against the higher castes is in vain; it does no good, and it creates fight and quarrel; and this race, unfortunately already divided, is going to be divided more and more. The only way to bring about the levelling of caste is to appropriate the culture, the education, which is the strength of the higher castes. That done, you have what you want' (p. 102-3).

What the people of lower castes should do is to acquire Sanskrit scholarship. Only then do they attain equality of caste. That is, only then may low caste people become equals of Brahmins! This is the trend in the entire book! He advises lower castes not to fight with higher castes. He says that the bases of the strength of the higher castes are culture and education.

What is the basis of that 'culture' and 'education'? How did Brahmins acquire them? Owing to the 'property' they possess! Owing to their riches! These things do not, however, concern Swamiji.

Should the paupers, who do not have a bellyful of food, become Sanskrit scholars? If they don't, it is their own fault? Is it the reason for their lack of prestige? 'Just because you have not learnt Sanskrit, you remain in the low caste position and face the consequence of your fault, says Swamiji. What a stupid courage!

Will the quality of this person—who suggests Sanskrit scholarship as the solution for lower castes—be that of a Brahman or Chandala? What would be the caste of this gentleman if we apply his own principle—that caste depends on quality—to himself?

## 2) Gandhi

Next, let us see the invaluable views of Mr. 'Mahatma' Gandhi on the caste system. This gentleman opposes only untouchability while totally defending the caste system. His reform implies that 'castes should remain as before but we ought to give up untouchability'.

"He said that though he was against untouchability he was not against caste. If at all, he was in favour of it and that he would not therefore carry his social reform beyond removing untouchability" (Ambedkar's volume 9, p. 113).

In fact 'Mahatma' was not opposed to untouchability either. But because Ambedkar was the leader of untouchables and in order to face him in the political field, that is, in order to make untouchables follow him rather than Ambedkar, it was obligatory for Gandhi to oppose untouchability. Only for this reason did Gandhi begin his propaganda against untouchability; otherwise he was not opposed to untouchability as well. We will see evidence for this later.

Here, for the moment, if we see the matter according to Gandhi's claim, he is totally favourable to the caste system. Further, he argued that everybody should practice their respective caste-occupation forever. Examine Gandhi's words as quoted by Ambedkar:

"It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. *Varna* and *Ashrama* are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of *Varna* teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmin—spiritual teacher—and a scavenger are equal,...Both were

entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law...I find too that real Brahmins are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures" (Vol. 1, p. 83).

In these few words, there are uncountable vulgar thoughts! On the one hand he says that caste is 'harmful both to spiritual and national growth' and on the other hand he says that he is not opposed to caste system but is in favour of it. When someone realizes that something is 'harmful', should he oppose it or defend it? For Gandhi, defending a harmful thing is justice!

'The Varna system defines not rights but duties', according to Gandhi. Why should we value it if it defines only our duties without touching the issue of our rights? For Gandhi, this is also justice!

Gandhi on the other hand eulogizes a Brahmin who lives on alms due to dire poverty as a 'real Brahmin'.

Describing all occupations as equal, he suggests that people should pursue their respective caste occupations!

If the work of a Brahmin and that of a scavenger are equal and if the two are the same, why should a Brahmin not perform scavenger's work? Why should a low caste person perform scavenging work throughout his life? Why shouldn't he teach that people should keep changing their occupations periodically and that all people should by turns, do the 'dirty' work? What is justice about a person leading his entire life as a scavenger?

Ambedkar himself, in fact, raised a very good question in response to Gandhi's preaching that 'people should live on their ancestral occupations'. 'You are a vaisya by birth, why didn't you pursue trade which is your ancestral calling? Why did you enter into politics?'—Thus goes Ambedkar's argument (Vol. 1, p. 90). Should somebody else ask this question? But couldn't Gandhi have asked it himself?

We shall examine the Mahatma's views on 'caste' and 'untouchability' further in subsequent contexts.

### 3) Radhakrishnan

Professor Radhakrishnan is the chief among that ilk of Hindu pundits who are so insensitive that caste distinctions and untouchability do not bother them even as much as an ant's bite. His eulogy of the glory of Hinduism is not measurable. His eulogy is about the greatness of Hinduism which has been keeping millions as untouchables and as low caste people

for millennia! This gentleman drowns Hinduism with eulogies that it has been flourishing for ages as a great civilization and a great culture and that it has been in eternal existence without being shaken even by innumerable foreign invasions. Thus spake this pundit in his book *Hindu View of Life*:

“Its historic records date back for over four thousand years and even then it had reached a stage of civilization which has continued its unbroken, though at times slow and static, course until the present day. It has stood the stress and strain of more than four or five millenniums of spiritual thought and experience. Though peoples of different races and cultures have been pouring into India from the dawn of History, Hinduism has been able to maintain its supremacy and even the proselytising creeds backed by political power have not been able to coerce the large majority of Hindus to their views. The Hindu culture possesses some vitality which seems to be denied to some other more forceful currents” (as cited in Ambedkar’s Vol. 1, p. 66).

Though Hinduism, which is shining with so much glory, has the ugly side of caste distinctions and the wickedness of untouchability, for which the pundit does not have any concern. ‘What is wrong in having castes? What loss has come to Hinduism due to the caste system? It has been in existence in supreme glory, hasn’t it?—This is the essence of Radhakrishnan’s argument.

But, does ‘vitality’ of a culture mean injustice and oppression? Does it mean lack of care and concern for fellow human beings? Does it mean oppressing, punishing and exploiting others? What are the higher castes doing to lower castes? Ambedkar expresses the same response to Radhakrishnan, the pundit:

“It seems to me that the question is not whether a community lives or dies; the question is on what plane does it live. There are different modes of survival. But all are not equally honourable... It is useless for a Hindu to take comfort in the fact that he and his people have survived. What he must consider is what is the quality of their survival... It is a mode of survival of which every right-minded Hindu, who is not afraid to own up the truth, will feel ashamed” (Vol. 1, p. 66).

Owing to the intoxication of their scholarship, these scholars do not know how to feel ashamed for the evils that they defend. Hence, chauvinism has become their way of life which claims that ‘our India is great. Our Hinduism is great. Our Sanskrit language is great. Nothing in the world is equal to us.’



## 4) Reformist Organizations

Not only in their individual capacity but also by establishing organizations, reformers belonging to upper castes resorted to the solution of 'upliftment to untouchables'. Arya Samaj is one such organization. They discovered a method of converting untouchables into Brahmins, namely, putting 'sacred thread' around them (Yagnopavitam)! While one fellow preaches learning of Sanskrit, another preaches wearing of sacred threads! Since wearing of the thread is much easier than learning Sanskrit, some untouchables began to hang sacred threads around their necks zealously and paraded around. Just as Brahmins didn't, the untouchables, who wanted to become Brahmins, did not raise the question either: 'why this thread across the body?' But those sacred threads, which they believed in, did not at all save them from untouchability. There were many incidents in which Brahmin goons attacked untouchables who wore threads and abused them, 'you too wear sacred threads as our equals, do you?' Here are some incidents which Ambedkar mentions:

"Some Arya Samajists managed to raise the caste of some Untouchables and gave them the sign of the cast, namely, the religious thread worn round the neck. But the mass of the Sanatanists could not bear even this because their religion does not allow the Untouchables to wear the thread. This is why thread-wearing Untouchables are daily persecuted by the high caste Hindus.... Bhagat Harichand of Moila, district Mirpur, Jammu State was purified by the Arya Samajists and given the thread to wear. The Hindu Jats of the place began to victimize him and ask him to put off the thread. Harichand however remained steadfast on his religion. At last one day when the Bhagat Harichand had finished the Gaitri Path, he was caught hold of by the Hindu Jats and severely beaten and his thread broken... The Hindu Rajputs of the village Ramani, near the town Berhampur, Distt. Gurdaspur, called the Untouchables of their villages from their homes and ordered them to cut off the holy thread at once and swear never to put it on again otherwise their lives were in danger. Upon this Untouchables calmly replied 'Maharaj why are you angry with us. Your own brothers, the Arya Samjists have very kindly put these thread round our necks and have ordered us to always protect them for they are the true symbols of the Hindu faith. If you take objection to them, you can tear them off our bodies with your own hands'. Upon this the Rajputs fell upon the poor men with their lathis and kept on thrashing them for a long time. The Untouchables put up with this persecution with great fortitude and refused to resist or protest. But their torments took no pity on their helpless condition and three or four Rajputs actually tore the holy thread off the body of a Harijan named Gor Ram and bruised his body with a hoe in mock imitation of the sign of the thread" (Vol. 5, pp. 45-6).

Untouchables not only began this movement of wearing sacred threads but also performing Sandhya rituals and chanting of mantras!

“They had taken the sacred thread and made it a part of their duty to perform ‘Sandhya’.” (Vol. 5, p. 45).

But none of these crazy and stupid practices had uplifted untouchables out of their problem. To people of the lower castes, imitating the upper castes in dress and speech appeared as one way to escape from their lowly social position, and changing their caste names into Sanskrit and adding the word ‘Brahmin’ to the caste names appeared as another way. While people belonging to the Barber caste became ‘Nayi Brahmins’, goldsmiths became ‘Vishwa Brahmins’. In Maharashtra, Sonars (goldsmiths) became ‘Daiwajna Brahmins’. While ‘washermen’ (dhobis) became Rajakas, others became something else. However much one may change lower caste names into Sanskrit and decorate them by adding Sanskrit words to them, Rajakas are bound to wash clothes, Nayis have to cut the hair of Brahmins. Call an occupation by any name, it is the people of the lower castes alone who perform it. Even if you give a Sanskrit name for the work of scavenging, what one actually does is dirty work.

No reformer thinks of the ‘labour’ which lower castes perform. Those castes have to perform all those labours as before. They have to remain in the same status forever; of course, wearing sacred threads!

Ambedkar did not oppose wearing of threads and performance of Sandhya by Untouchables. Nowhere does Ambedkar question untouchables thus, ‘what sort of reform is this? How do our lives change due to this reform?’

People facing any problem cannot go even one step forward if they depend on haphazard and vulgar reforms. They cannot live with self-respect even for a single hour of the day.

That is the case of the Untouchables! It is surprising that the leader of Untouchables does not know this plain, self-evident, glaring fact!

# 9

## BEWARE OF ‘MAHATMAS’!

Gandhi declared, “I am opposed to Untouchability”. But many incidents prove that he was in fact not opposed to Untouchability.

If we want to understand the movements of Untouchables or Ambedkar, we have to understand Gandhi. There are some incidents that

relate to both of them. The Congress party began in 1885 at Bombay. Its Calcutta convention of 1917 passed a resolution opposing Untouchability, but abandoned it later without even talking about it again.

The Congress party came under Gandhi's leadership by 1920. Leadership does not mean that Gandhi was either the president or the secretary of the party. He was an unofficial leader, teacher and prophet.

The Congress party actually began to pay attention to the question of Untouchability starting with its Bardoli Conference in February 1922. This conference resolved that the Congress must establish with its own funds separate wells and separate schools for the Untouchables. A part of the resolution was that it must conduct a campaign so as to enable Untouchables to use government schools and common wells.

What Untouchables need is the right to use common resources equally with Hindus. It is not the question of just fetching 'water' or just getting access to 'education'. Hence, campaign concerning the use of common resources should be the important issue in the fight against Untouchability. But, instead of concentrating on what it actually must do, the Congress party was making some separate arrangements here and there in an attempt to console Untouchables.

Separate arrangements for Untouchables, indeed, produced a strangely contrary result: the Congress party began to receive reports that Hindus, who until then had not observed Untouchability, began to tell Untouchables not to come to the common wells since "the congress people are arranging special wells for Untouchables"! So they advised them: "You too ask for such arrangements". Yet, neither Gandhi nor other leaders did learn anything from such reports.

Shraddhananda Swami, an Arya Samajist, was a member in the anti-Untouchability committee which the Congress party started. He was a staunch opponent of Untouchability. He asked the committee to sanction some money for his campaign against Untouchability. The Congress party, which was spending lavishly on many programmes the money which it collected in the name of 'Tilak Swaraj Fund', refused to give even the tenth part of the amount which Shraddhananda had asked for the sake of activities connected with Untouchability. Owing to this attitude, Shraddhananda resigned from the committee. Gandhi neither listened to Shraddhananda's complaint nor attempted to know about it by talking over with Shraddhananda.

Gradually, the Congress party handed over its anti-Untouchability struggle to its cultural organization 'Hindu Mahasabha'. This was a 'militant' organization of Hindus. Its aim was to sustain Hindu culture.

'Social reform' was something which did not find a place in its imagination either. Thus did the Congress party wash its hands of the subject by handing over the responsibility of fighting Untouchability to a communal organization.

The struggle of the Congress against Untouchability—which began with audacious and astounding declaration that it was not possible to achieve independence without eliminating the evil of Untouchability—dissipated itself very quickly under the auspices of Hindu Sabha. As Ambedkar put it,

“And even such a timid and mild programme the Congress was unable to carry through and which it gave up without remorse or shame” (Vol.9, p. 24. We find the relevant details in the book *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables?* There is also lot of information in chapters 24 & 25 “Under the providence of Mr. Gandhi” and “Gandhi and his fast” of volume 5).

## 1) Beginning of efforts for Reservations

'Depressed classes' held a meeting in Bombay on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917 under the chairmanship of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar (Vol. 9, p. 14). Ambedkar had not entered the field of politics at this time.

While declaring its loyalty to the British government, the meeting made an appeal. Pointing out that the depressed classes were facing the problem of Untouchability and leading miserable lives, the meeting appealed to the government to grant them the right to elect their own representatives to the legislative councils. Thus, the struggle for the reservation for Dalits, which began even before Ambedkar, reached an important stage by the time the Round Table Conference was held at London in 1930.

The British government arranged the Round Table Conference to discuss self-rule in India and invited some Indian representatives to London. Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan attended that conference as representatives of Dalits. Since the Congress party boycotted the conference, no one from the Congress participated in it at all.

In that Conference, the representatives of Dalits submitted a document concerning the rights of Dalits. It demanded equal civil rights for Untouchables on par with others before self-rule in India began. Demand for separate constituencies ('Separate electorates') for Untouchables was the main issue in the document.

The British government assured rights for Untouchables and minority religious communities under the label of 'Communal Award'.

According to the 'Communal Award', untouchable voters would have two votes each. They would be able to use one vote to elect an untouchable representative and another vote to elect a general representative. While electing an untouchable representative from a constituency, Untouchables alone would have votes. Hindus would have nothing to do with this election. The untouchable candidate would depend on the votes of Untouchables but not on Hindus' votes. The successful candidate would enter the legislative council as a person whom Untouchables alone have elected. When a general election took place in the same constituency, individuals from any caste would be able to contest as candidates. Voters may belong to any caste. An untouchable voter would participate in this 'general' election and elect either a Hindu candidate or an untouchable candidate of his choice. This means, he would use his second vote for this 'general' election. Thus, the Communal Award guaranteed special rights for Untouchables. This is something that pleases Untouchables.

Later, in 1931, Gandhi attended the Second Round Table Conference as the representative of the Congress Party since a compromise had been worked out between the Congress and the British government.

Every time he spoke, Gandhi, glorified himself and ridiculed other delegates. He depicted them as arm-chair politicians, as leaders without any followers and as dishonest persons. To the Muslim representatives, he said that he represented the Muslim masses better than they did. He claimed that the Depressed class delegates did not represent their class, but that he did. He made these claims repeatedly at the end of every speech (Vol.5, p. 288).

In the same conference, on September 15, 1931, Gandhi said: The Congress party has been concerned with the problem of Untouchability. It knows that unity of Hindus and Untouchables is as necessary as the unity of Hindus and Muslims. After listing such claims for some time, he referred to the question of the 'special electorates' and declared that he would oppose them. The interests of Untouchables are also like those of others. I don't accept the special treatment to any one particular group. I don't accept special treatment of the Untouchables either, said Gandhi.

Concerning the special treatment of Muslims and Sikhs, however, Gandhi's argument proceeded along the following lines: It is a different issue. They are two different religions. They are always different. That is not the case with Untouchables. They are also Hindus. If separate electorates are given to Untouchables, Hindus will split into two. I can not tolerate that.

What happened to this argument when Congress party proposed to provide separate wells and separate schools for Untouchables? Didn't

Hindus split at that time? Does observance of untouchability not mean division of Hindus into two sections already?

Gandhi says that he would not accept special treatment to Untouchables as if they are asking for privileges. Providing additional opportunities, while there are equal opportunity to all, would amount to privileges. But, when a group of people are far away from equality and when the government makes some provisions for their protection, one should not consider them privileges. They are merely 'protective measures'.

In the same conferences, Gandhi proclaimed himself the real representative of the vast masses of the Untouchables:

"I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchability, their vote, and that I would top the poll" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol.9, p. 68).

He further claims:

"But the separate electorates that he seeks will not give him social reform. He [Ambedkar] may himself mount to power and position but nothing good will accrue to the 'Untouchables'. I can say all this with authority, having lived with the 'Untouchables' and having shared their joys and sorrows all these years" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 353).

If Gandhi can speak 'with authority' about Untouchables, Ambedkar, is himself an untouchable, can surely speak with greater authority, can't he? In that case, Gandhi should follow Ambedkar in this matter, shouldn't he?

Gandhi put forward the following suggestion with regard to eradication of Untouchability:

"Let this Committee and let the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove this blot of Untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our census Untouchables classified as a separate class... I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism.... I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages" (Vol. 9, pp. 68-9).

This means, according to Gandhi, it is the committee of Hindu reformers that may undertake the job of eradicating Untouchability. Therefore, Untouchables need not raise the issue of 'reservations'. Gandhi cannot tolerate it! Thus there was no consensus on the question of reservations for Untouchability. Further, the question of separate electorates

to Muslims and Sikhs has not been settled either. "There is no question of independence to you unless you arrive at a consensus on all these issues", the British government made it clear. Which means, all the round table conferences had failed totally!

All participants in the conference considered that the mediation of a gentleman might work as a solution. Ambedkar recalls the situation as follows:

"The Chairman knowing that there was no hope of getting an agreed solution before adjourning the Minorities Committee *sine die* made a suggestion to the delegates. He said:- 'Will you, each of you, every member of this Committee, sign a request to me to settle the community question and pledge yourselves to accept my decision? That, I think, is a very fair offer... I do want any section, or any one man. Will the members of this Committee sign a declaration asking me to give a decision, even a temporary one, on the community question, and say that you will agree? I do not want it now. I say, will you put your names to it and give that to me, with the assurance that the decision come to will be accepted by you and will be worked by you to the best of your ability in the course of the working of the new constitution? I have asked several sections—at least, individuals—from time to time for that, and I have never got it. That would certainly straighten out the position..." (Vol. 9, p. 69).

Finally all delegates, including Gandhi, accepted the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald as the mediator and signed the declaration accordingly.

During the last days of the conference, Gandhi discussed with Ambedkar a wonderful scheme according to which Untouchables could participate in elections even without reservations.

"The scheme was as follows: Depressed Class candidates might stand in the general electorate as against other high caste Hindu candidates. If any Depressed Class Candidate was defeated in the election, he should file an election petition and obtain the verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable. If such a decision was obtained, the Mahatma said he would undertake to induce some Hindu members to resign and thus create a vacancy. There could be then another election in which the defeated Depressed Class candidate or any other Depressed Class candidate might again try his luck as against the Hindu candidates. Should he be defeated again, he should get similar verdict that he was defeated because he was an Untouchable and so on *ad infinitum*" (Vol.9, p. 315).

This is how the scheme goes! It is needless to say that Ambedkar did not accept the scheme.

While he was in London, Gandhi tried to enter into a pact with the Muslim leaders on the condition that they too oppose reservations for Untouchables. But things did not happen as Gandhi expected (Vol. 5, p. 320). Vexed with the Round Table Conference, and as had no supporters but only critics, Gandhi soon turned his face towards home. All the Congress leaders knew that he had totally failed in the Round Table Conference. Yet they made grand arrangements to welcome Gandhi upon his disembarkation in Bombay on December 28, 1931 by the time.

Let us see briefly what that felicitation was like in the words of Pattabhi Sitaramayya:

"There were gathered in Bombay representatives of all parts and Provinces in India to accord a fitting welcome to the Tribune of the people. Gandhi greeted the friends... There was a formal welcome in one of the Halls of Customs House and then a procession in the streets of Bombay which kings might envy in their own country" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 290).

While Gandhi received this 'grand welcome', thousands of Untouchables repudiated Gandhi with *grand insult* through their protest 'demonstrations'. They brought out a leaflet containing 10 questions. It contained the following statements:

"Our charge sheet against Gandhiji and Congress... Enough of patronising attitude and lip sympathy. We ask for justice and fair play... Attempts are being made to show that Gandhiji and the Congress alone represent the Depressed Classes by presenting addresses through a handful of hirelings and dupes. Is it not our duty to demonstrate the fact by coming out in thousands and proclaiming the truth? This is our charge sheet against Gandhiji and the Congress... This untouchable demonstration included men and women. The demonstrators numbered thousands, all waving Black Flags as a mark of repudiation of Mr. Gandhi. They were a determined crowd and, despite intimidation by the superior forces of the Congress assembled there to welcome Mr. Gandhi, were bent on showing that they repudiated Mr. Gandhi. This led to a clash and blood was spilt. There were forty casualties on each side. For the first time Mr. Gandhi was made aware that there could be black flags even against him. This must have come to him as a shock" (Vol. 5, pp. 293-23).

While returning to India from London, Gandhi, in an interview, told a reporter that he would start a movement of disobedience. After the felicitation functions were over, the government arrested Gandhi and put him in Yerawada jail.

Gandhi started writing letters to the British government from the jail asking it not to accept reservations for Untouchables. This he did ignoring



the fact that he had signed the declaration accepting the mediation of the Prime Minister!

Gandhi, in his letters, argued that Hindus would be angry with Untouchables if reservations were to be introduced, that they would not like to change, that Untouchability would not disappear and hence there shouldn't be any hurdles to the efforts of the Hindu reformers.

He argued thus:

"Do you realize that if your decision stands and the constitution comes into being, you arrest the marvellous growth of the work of Hindu reformers, who have dedicated themselves to the uplift of their suppressed brethren in every walk of life?" (Vol. 9, p. 87).

The real worry of Gandhi may not have been that reservations would harm Untouchables but would do good to them!

The government did not accept Gandhi's arrangement though he dumped many letters upon them. They made it clear that changing the assurances made in the communal award was not in their hands.

"If it is so, I shall commence fast unto death. I cannot tolerate division of Hindus", saying thus, Gandhi commenced his fast on September 20, 1932 in Yerawada jail.

What sort of fair play is this? One should counter a political problem politically, shouldn't one? If Gandhi really believed that reservations would harm Untouchables, he could propagate the idea among Untouchables. If Untouchables still refuse to give up their demand, he would then have to leave it to their decision. If that demand really harms them, the Untouchables would themselves realize thus, "we didn't heed the advice of Mr. Gandhi". Gandhi, therefore, should have simply propagated his idea among Untouchables. In the Round Table Conference he had loftily claimed that Untouchables would heed only his words, hadn't he? Therefore, he could have asked for an opinion poll of the Untouchables on the subject of reservations. That would have been somewhat reasonable. But, what sort of fair play is it to refuse to follow reasonable path but resort to a threat instead (I will stop eating and die if Untouchables ask for reservations)?

None of the Congress leaders remonstrated with Gandhi, 'This is meaningless'. Instead, they brought pressure on Ambedkar to give up the demand for reservations.

Ambedkar was the main representative of Untouchables. Unless he accepts, it would not be possible to change the provisions of the Communal Award. The whole problem fell on Ambedkar. Gandhi sat over there without taking food. Days were passing. To escape from this predicament

either Ambedkar would have to agree or Gandhi would have to end his fast. If none of these things would happen, Gandhi's death was certain.

"The situation at this time was tense. Gandhi's foreign friends began to glorify Gandhi's fast as a 'second crucifixion' and 'martyrdom'" (Vol.5, p. 356).

While this was going on, the leaders of Untouchables like M. C. Raja went up to Gandhi and began to say that they (the Untouchables) did not need separate electorates. This Raja was a staunch opponent of the Congress. But as the British government invited Srinivasan but not him to the Round Table Conference, Raja felt unhappy, became a follower of Gandhi and opposed reservations. He said:

"I contend that this privilege we have already enjoyed under the Montford reforms which have enabled us to get representation in numerous local bodies and in legislatures both provincial and central... we feel that the moral conscience of the Hindus has been roused to the extent that our salvation lies in bringing about a change from within the main body of Hindu society and not segregating ourselves from them" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, pp. 357-8).

Ambedkar's group alone was insisting on separate electorates.

Congress leaders were busy negotiating with Ambedkar. Ambedkar described the situation as follows:

"Of course I was held out as the villain of the piece. I had of course my own view of Gandhi's fast. I described it as a political stunt. His utterances had to me always the ring of falsity and even of insincerity. I had always the feeling that what actuated Mr. Gandhi to fast against the Communal Award was not any desire to liberate the Untouchables as to save the Hindus from disruption. He was prepared to do that at any cost, even at the cost of political enslavement of the Untouchables" (Vol. 5, p. 356).

"As to myself it is no exaggeration to say that no man was placed in a greater and graver dilemma than I was then. It was a baffling situation. I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty, which I owed as a part of common humanity, to save Gandhi from sure death" (Vol. 9, p. 88).

"No one except his own followers was convinced that Mr. Gandhi's fast had any moral basis and if Gandhi got a second lease of life, he owes it entirely to the generosity and goodwill shown towards him by the Untouchables" (Vol. 5, p. 343).

Though it appears outwardly as 'good will' and 'generosity', the real reason, however, was that there was no adequate fighting capacity and unity

among Untouchables. Showing mercy by Untouchables towards those who oppose their interests implies showing mercilessness towards themselves. It was not the responsibility of Untouchables to save 'Mr. Gandhi'. Gandhi himself was responsible for his political tactics. Or other Congress leaders were responsible. They should have remonstrated with Gandhi, made him withdraw his fast and save him. They, in fact, should have argued strongly with Gandhi before he started fast. If none of these things happened, were the Untouchables responsible for it? Instead of saying that 'Untouchables showed their good will and generosity toward Gandhi', it would have been realistic and self-critical if Ambedkar had said that 'the Untouchables did not have the strength to withstand the situation'.

On the whole, Ambedkar had 'compromised' with Gandhi with lot of agony and dissatisfaction. This is a fact.

The compromise was this: the Untouchables would have reserved seats. Though only Untouchables would contend for those seats, the voters would include not only Untouchables but also Hindus. This is a 'common electorate' system. Untouchable candidates could enter legislative assemblies through this system as well. But, in its essence, there was a great deal of difference between the election of an untouchable candidate exclusively by untouchable voters and by both untouchable as well as Hindu voters.

In the system where untouchable voters alone elect an untouchable candidate, the untouchable voters would definitely be able to elect only a person whom they trusted; who would be committed to their interests. As such a candidate depends exclusively on the votes of Untouchables, he would be favourable to the interests of Untouchables. But in the system of general electorates, Hindu voters would constitute the greater numbers. Since the untouchable candidate depends mainly on Hindu voters, he would be more favourable to the interests of Hindus.

If we suppose that two untouchable candidates contested for one reserved seat and voters were only Untouchables, a candidate who is favourable to the Untouchables would be elected. But, if there were Hindu voters as well, a candidate who is subservient to Hindus would get more votes. Thus, it is possible that common electorates would harm Untouchables and benefit Hindus.

Gandhi's original intention when he started his fast was to oppose the proposal of reservations in any form. But as the representatives of the Untouchables did not agree to give up the demand for reservations wholly, Gandhi had to accede to the demand of Untouchables for 'reserved seats' at least in order to save his life. And yet he could make it ineffective for Untouchables to the extent possible. Gandhi's heart did not break despite

splitting of Hindus due to the system of 'reserved seats'. It could remain intact.

(Here, the information concerning these constituencies is very brief and half baked. See collected volumes of Ambedkar for precise details!)

In lieu of his compromise in the demand for reservations, Ambedkar asked for more seats than prescribed in the Communal Award. And Gandhi had to oblige it.

Both Hindus and Untouchables arrived at a pact although Hindus did not like to give more seats to Untouchables and Untouchables did not like the common electorate. As they arrived at the pact in Poona, this is called the Poona Pact. They arrived at this pact on September 24, that is on the fifth day after Gandhi started his fast unto death.

Somehow, the Mahatma managed to go without food for four days, reduced the gain of the Untouchables to considerable extent, got up from the fast and consumed food once again with a happy feeling that he could benefit Hindus and cause loss to the Untouchables.

Ambedkar concluded the chapter 'Gandhi and his Fast' with the words:

"Beware of Gandhi!" (Vol. 5, p. 395).

The Congress party started with a big noise their social reforms for Untouchables only since Untouchables began to demand for 'reservations'. Temple entry for Untouchables is one such reform.

**Episode of Guruvayur temple:** (This information is in Vol. 9, pp. 115-117; Vol. 5, p. 388).

There is a temple of Krishna at Guruvayur in the Ponnani taluk of Malabar. The Zamorin of Calicut is the trustee of the temple. A Hindu by the name Kelappan, under the influence of Gandhi, began attempts to secure entry into the Krishna temple and asked the temple trustee for permission. But the trustee refused and made it clear that, according to law, he did not have the right to do so. In fact he did not have the right. Yet the trustee could have taken some initiative and given an opportunity to the Untouchables. But, as he himself did not like the idea, he expressed his inability under the pretext of law.

But Kelappan did not give up the issue and began a fast under the full glare of the sun in front of the temple on September 20, 1932. It was on the same day that Gandhi also began his fast at Yerawada jail. But Gandhi's fast ended on 24<sup>th</sup> while Kelappan's continued for 10 days. As

this became a headache to the trustee, he sought Gandhi's help in making Kelappan withdraw for the present. Gandhi at once sent a message to Kelappan asking him to stop the fast for the present and give the trustee some time! Kelappan respected Gandhi's advice, stopped his fast and gave the trustee 3 months' time.

All the three months had passed. The trustee remained tight lipped. Since Kelappan complained about this to him, Gandhi sent a telegram to the trustee informing him that he too would begin a hunger strike along with Kelappan if the trustee did not permit the Untouchables to enter the temple on or before the coming January 1<sup>st</sup>. But the trustee remained unmoved. He did not say anything other than what he said earlier, "I don't have the right to give such permission". Then Gandhi should have begun his fast, shouldn't he? But, instead, he put forward a new argument: we need to collect the opinions of Hindus in the taluk where the temple is located. I will not fast if the majority of Hindus do not agree for the entry of Untouchables. I would commence fast if the trustee does not agree even after the majority Hindus agree'.

Well, then, they held a referendum. They restricted voting only to those who visited the temple daily. They did not include all those who were not eligible to enter the temple, nor those who did not visit the temple despite being eligible to do so. Of those who were eligible to enter the temple, 73% participated in voting. Of these 56% voted in favour of temple entry for Untouchables, 9% against the entry and 8% remained neutral while 27% abstained from voting. This means that the majority of Hindus had agreed to the temple entry of Untouchables! And still the trustee did not agree! Then, Gandhi was expected to go on hunger strike. But the 'Mahatma' brought forth another argument: The Congress party is going to introduce a Bill on the temple entry of Untouchables in the Madras Assembly. We will come to know after January 15 whether the Viceroy permits the Bill or not. Hence, I am postponing indefinitely the fast which I have proposed to start on January 2. I postpone this at least until Viceroy declares his decision. (For actual quotation, see Ambedkar, Vol. 9, p.117).

The essence of that Bill on temple entry was meant to give the right to the trustees of the temples to permit temple entry of Untouchables since the trustees at the moment did not have such a right. But, even according to this proposed Bill, still a referendum has to be held in the temple area. The trustee would have the right to permit temple entry of Untouchables only if the majority of Hindus agreed. Temple entry for Untouchables only if the majority Hindus agree! Obviously, the proposed Bill depended on the mere kindness and mercy of Hindus!

Gandhi put all his hopes on the defeat of the Bill thinking that the

Bill won't get an entry in the Assembly and the threat of a fast would stop hanging over his head. But, the Viceroy permitted the entry of the Bill!

Then, Gandhi had no option left, had he? He ought to have started the fast. But, Gandhi did not utter a single word about it! It seems that his dreadful dream at Yerawada prison—where he did not take food for four days—was a great revelation for him. Perhaps he understood pretty well that one should simply make declarations about 'fast' but never actually commence one because that would endanger his life. Ambedkar had yielded to a four-day fast earlier; who knows whether the Zamarin of Calicut would yield at all? The proposed Act was in his favour and he had no need to yield. Gandhi, the man of wisdom, thought about all this and stopped talking about the fast! None could ask the Mahatma anything. Kelappan too was tired of Gandhi's behaviour and packed up his social reform.

Listen what Gandhi said during the same period when he was declaring that he would go on a fast for the entry of Untouchables into the Guruvayur temple,

"During certain hours of the day the Guruvayur Temple should be thrown open to the Harijans and other Hindus, who have no objection to the presence of the Harijans and during certain other hours it should be reserved for those, who have scruples against the entry of the Harijans" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 388).

Gandhi described a custom practised in the Guruvayur temple as follows:

"...in connection with the Krithikai Ekadashi festival in Guruvayur, the Harijans are allowed to enter side by side with the Hindus and then the temple or the idol undergoes purification" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 388).

"Asked if his suggestion was that the temple might undergo purification daily after the entry of the Harijans, Mr. Gandhi replied: "Personally, I am opposed to purification at all. But if that would satisfy the conscience of the objectors I would personally in this case, raise no objection to purification" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 388).

Gandhi further tells Untouchables: The Hindus are already allowing you into the temple on certain auspicious days, aren't they? So, you have to understand their objections to your entry on the remaining days.

Gandhi advises Untouchables how they must view the whole question:

"The Harijans' attitude should be this, 'if there is a person who objects

to my presence, I would like to respect his objection so long as he (the objector) does not deprive me of the right that belongs to me and so long as I am permitted to have my legitimate share of the days of offering worship side by side with those, who have no objection to my presence, I would be satisfied" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5; p. 388).

Hindus will have the right to enter the temple on any day and all days, whereas Untouchables would have the right on one or two days in a year; that too on the condition of subsequent purification of the temple. Pointing out such rights as these, Gandhi was trying to tell Untouchables that all people have equal rights in this matter. 'You have the right to go to the temple on some days; don't you? Let Hindus also have the right not to permit you into the temple', this is how Gandhi's argument goes. If Untouchables are able to stop Hindus entering the temple on some days just as Hindus did in the case of Untouchables, then one can think that all people have 'equal rights'. Should Untouchables remain satisfied with the right of temple entry for two days in a year and believe that they have 'legitimate' right? If Untouchables already enjoy such a legitimate right, then why all these temple entry movements and fasts?

## 2) Beware of 'Deputy Mahatmas'!

'Drama' of temple entry 'Bills': Ranga Iyer, a Congressman, introduced the Temple Bill in the central legislature on March 24, 1932. Gandhi entrusted the responsibility of securing the support for the Bill from other parties as well as the general public to Rajagopalachari and Birla. As that Bill was at the mercy of the majority Hindus, Ambedkar and other leaders of Untouchables refused to render their support. That Bill was in circulation for public opinion until August 1934.

"A strange thing happened. The Government of India decided to dissolve the Assembly and order new election. The result of this announcement was a sudden change in the attitude of the congress members in the Central Legislature towards Mr. Ranga's Bill. One and all stood out against it and refused to give any further support to the Bill. They were terrified of the electorates. Mr. Ranga Iyer's position was very pitiable" (Vol. 9, p. 120).

It was Rajagopalachari who originally started the campaign against the Bill! The reason that he gave was this: Since Hindu voters have been asking the Congress candidates whether they assure that the Congress would not interfere in the religious matters, it is inevitable to give up this Bill'.

Unable to bear this betrayal, Ranga Iyer gave a speech in the legislature abusing the Congress party as well as Rajagopalachari. He

described Rajagopalachary's stand as 'betrayal' and Congress as an organization of 'masqueraders'.

Well, how did Gandhi act in this context? We really must take note of this. Since the days of his fast at Yerawada jail, he had been claiming that he is deeply interested in the problems of Untouchables. In a statement issued on November 4, 1932, he had said:

"But if these vital conditions of the Pact are not carried out by caste-Hindus, could I possibly live to face god and man? I ventured even to tell Dr. Ambedkar, Rao Bahadur M.C. Raja and other friends belonging to the suppressed group that they should regard me as a hostage for the due fulfilment by caste-Hindus of the conditions of the Pact" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 9, p. 124).

What did this person who 'showered' love on Untouchables do in the case of this Bill? We may see it in Ambedkar's narration.

"Did he resent this betrayal by Mr. Rajagopalachari...? One would naturally expect Mr. Gandhi to denounce this betrayal...Quite the contrary. Instead of blaming Mr. Rajagopalachari, he blamed Mr. Ranga Iyer for his violent denunciation of the Congress Party for withdrawing its support to the Bill" (Vol. 9, p. 125).

**Gandhi said:**

"The ill-fated temple entry Bill deserved a more decent burial...there was hardly any occasion for the anger into which he [Ranga Iyer] allowed himself to be betrayed or the displeasure which he expressed towards congressmen... It was not a measure in which Congress Hindus were more interested than the other Hindus" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 9, p. 125).

Thus, ironically, Gandhi taught morals to Ranga Iyer.

This great lover of truth, who said, 'could I show my face to the god if this reform does not pass through', has abandoned the Bill without the least feeling and found fault with those who felt upset over its defeat. This he did with the over confidence that he could carry on the drama of the Bill after elections!

In fact, it happened exactly the same way! A Congress person named M.C. Raja did introduce afresh a Bill on temple entry in the Madras legislature in 1937. (See Vol. 5, pp. 356-62).

This Raja was himself an untouchable. He was once a staunch opponent of the Congress. But he became annoyed with the British, he had become the follower of Gandhi and made Gandhi happy by opposing the demand for separate electorates because the British government invited



Srinivasan and not Raja to the Round Table Conference. In his early days in the Congress, however, he sought clarification from Gandhi regarding 'what should be the stand of Untouchables who join the Congress with reference to the party discipline?' Gandhi said that the Untouchables were free to act in accordance with the interests of their caste and party discipline would not apply in that matter. Since then Raja had become a devotee of Gandhi.

Now, Gandhi gave his consent to the Temple Entry Bill which Rajagopalachari himself drafted and which Raja introduced. In July 1938, the Bill came up for discussion in the Madras legislature. Rajagopalachari once again began his campaign of opposition to the Bill. He issued a whip instructing all the representatives of Untouchables in the Congress party to oppose the Bill. Ambedkar does not explain as to why Rajagopalachari did this. They abandoned the Bill when Ranga Iyer introduced it because of the fear of losing votes of Hindus. What exactly happened when Raja introduced the Bill? Why did Rajagopalachari draft the Bill and opposed it himself? I have not found these details in Ambedkar.

Now, Rajagopalachari issued the whip stating that the legislators belonging to the untouchable communities in the Congress party have to oppose the Bill and opposing the Bill is observing party discipline. But Gandhi said earlier that Untouchables need not observe party discipline contrary to their caste interests. But now it is another order!

The Bill is for the temple entry of Untouchables! But the Untouchables themselves must oppose it! In such a situation, what should the untouchable legislators do? But they, too, were apparently satisfied with the singular good fortune of sitting in the legislature. They voted against the Bill.

Ambedkar says about this incident:

"It was a dilemma for the Untouchable members of the Madras Legislature. But they had no choice. The whip was applied and they in a body voted against the measure. The representatives of the Untouchables were supposed to be the watch-dogs of the Untouchables. But by reason of having joined the Congress they are muzzled dogs. Far from biting they are not even able to bark. This loss of freedom of speech and action by these Untouchable members is entirely due to their having joined the Congress and subjected themselves to the discipline of the Congress" (Vol. 5, p. 345).

Raja wrote a detailed letter to Gandhi regarding the betrayal by Rajagopalachari.

"This Bill had your blessing. It was drafted by Mr. Rajagopalachariar himself and approved by you. At a previous session of the Assembly

I introduced the Bill with the consent of Mr. Rajagopalachariar, who promised his full support to the measure. When I suggested that the Bill might be introduced by him as a Government measure, he wanted me to introduce it. When I met him last, on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1938 and informed him that I was giving notice of a motion for referring the Bill to a Select Committee he did not object. I do not know what happened in the meantime but two days before my motion for referring the Bill to the Select Committee came up before the house, Mr. Rajagopalachariar sent for me and quietly asked me to withdraw the Bill, which I refused to do. When in due course, I moved for the consideration of the Bill, Mr. Rajagopalachariar stood up and opposed the Bill and requested me to withdraw it, saying that he would introduce a Temple Entry Bill on the same lines, only for Malabar and not for other Districts" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 359).

Raja also wrote that Malabar was the most difficult region in which to implement temple entry; that the Bill would anyhow face defeat there. That is why Rajagopalachariar tactically had chosen that district (Vol. 5, p. 34).

Although Raja was now upset so much, he was the one who, at the time when all the Untouchables were demanding special electorates, took Gandhi's side and declared:

"I contend that this privilege we have already enjoyed under the Montford reforms which have enabled us to get representation in numerous local bodies and in legislatures both provincial and central...we feel that the moral conscience of the Hindus has been roused to the extent that our salvation lies in bringing about a change from within the main body of Hindu society and not segregating ourselves from them" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, pp. 357-8).

Just as this untouchable man then opposed the rights of Untouchables, the untouchable legislators have now opposed the temple entry. Both are the same. However, Raja's letter indicates that he has realized the issue at this stage to some extent.

Raja further wrote to Gandhi:

"The effect of Mr. Rajagopalachariar's speech was to defeat my motion with my own community men...I am forced to think that our entering the joint electorate with the caste Hindus under the leadership of the Congress, far from helping us, has enabled the Congress, led by Caste Hindu leaders to destroy our independence and to use us to cut our own throats... You have more than once said that temple entry is of the very essence of the removal of Untouchability... If we are not free to enter into Hindu Temples, we are no Hindus, and if we are not Hindus why should we be in a joint electorate with them? Is it for swelling their

numbers as against Muslims and other communities?... the rejection of the Temple Entry Bill is a gross betrayal of the Depressed Classes by the Congress government in Madras" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, pp.359-61).

Thus, Raja wrote to Gandhi again and again. Gandhi, however, replied only twice.

**1<sup>st</sup> reply:** "Dear friend, ...I wish you would trust C. Rajagopalachariar to do his best. He should be allowed to do the thing in his own way. If you cannot trust, naturally you will take the course which commends itself to you. All I know is that Harijans have no better friend than him" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 5, p. 360).

**2<sup>nd</sup> reply:** "Your last letter shows that you are in the wrong... he (Rajaji) is as firm on Untouchability as I am myself. I must, therefore, trust his judgment as to how to do the thing... This temple entry question is a mighty religious reform. I would like you to apply your religious mind to it. If you will, you will give your whole hearted support to Rajaji and make his move a thorough success" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol.5, p.362).

These are the replies received from Gandhi.

If Rajagopalachari opposed the Bill, would he do it without consulting Gandhi? It is their joint decision. Gandhi fully supported Rajagopalachari and scolded Raja.

**T**here are many strange things about this temple entry. In 1936, at Travancore, the Maharaja (the King) declared that he was granting temple entry to Untouchables. But he excluded the private temples of Maharani. Pannir Selvam, a legislator, questioned Rajagopalachari, the Prime Minister of Madras about this exclusion. Rajagopalachari did not answer the question. This means, it is true that some temples were not kept open for Untouchables even when it was propagated that temples were kept open for Untouchables! (Vol. 5, p. 391).

Ambedkar tells us that the Congress government made two laws for temple entry. (He does not provide dates).

"Since the new constitution came into operation two Acts have been passed in two Provinces by the Congress Governments. One in Bombay and another in Madras. There is no substance in the Acts. They do not declare the Temples to be open. They permit the Trustees of the Temples under their management if they desire and as there is nothing to compel the Trustees to do so the Acts are just scraps of paper and nothing more. But the Madras Act has a history which is somewhat puzzling. The Madras Prime Minister who got the Act passed is Mr. Rajagopalachari.

He occupies a very high place in the Congress, so high indeed that he is called Deputy Mahatma" (Vol. 5, p. 389).

This means there will be 'Deputy Mahatmas' behind the 'Mahatmas'!

### 3) More on 'Mahatma'!

Gandhi has lot of reverence for the 'caste system'. According to him, it has many virtues. For many years until he became old, he was not in a position to tolerate inter-caste dining either. He expressed his views on castes in the paper *Navajeevan* in 1922:

"I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste system.... Different castes are like different sections of military division. Each division is working for the good of the whole... A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique power of organization... I believe that interdining or intermarriage are not necessary for promoting national unity" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 9, p. 275-6)

According to Gandhi, interdining of different castes is also unnecessary. He says:

"That dining together creates friendship is contrary to experience. If this was true there would have been no war in Europe.... Taking food is as dirty an act as answering call of nature. The only difference is that after answering call of nature we get peace while after eating food we get discomfort. Just as we perform the act of answering the call of nature in seclusion so also the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol. 9, p. 276).

This is, then, the reason to oppose interdining between castes. If we follow the principle that the act of taking food must also be done in seclusion, then two persons of the same caste should not eat together either. Gandhi's argument proves the fact that a person prattles as he likes when there is no one to question him.

Glorifying the caste system and hereditary occupations, Gandhi finally says,

"I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the caste system... The best remedy is that small castes should fuse themselves into one big caste. There should be four such big castes so that we may reproduce the old system of four Varnas" (as cited in Ambedkar, Vol .9, p.276-7).

According to Gandhi, the Varna system, that consists of only four divisions and that perpetuates the caste occupations, is superior to the increasing numbers of castes unendingly. Here it is necessary to recall an

aspect of Ambedkar's views. Ambedkar too did the job of glorifying the four Varnas. His entire theory of 'origin of castes' is solely based on his assumption that the four Varnas are superior. But if Gandhi or Arya Samajists or others make the same assumption, Ambedkar would immediately contradict it by saying, "what is great in four Varnas?". We have seen before Ambedkar's characterization of four Varnas as follows: "If the idea of caste is a pernicious idea it is entirely because of the viciousness of the idea of Varna". This he said while responding to Gandhi. As Gandhi praised the four Varnas, Ambedkar contradicted Gandhi and says thus:

"That Mr. Gandhi changed over from the caste system to the Varna system does not make the slightest difference to the charge that Gandhism is opposed to democracy. In the first place, the idea of *Varna* is the parent of the idea of *caste*. If the idea of caste is a pernicious idea it is entirely because of the viciousness of the idea of *Varna*" (Vol. 9, p. 289).

Here Ambedkar does not at all remember that he had himself glorified the four Varnas. Neither Gandhi nor Arya Samajists have self-contradictory views on the four Varnas. They have a uniform view that 'Varnas are good'. For Ambedkar, however, Varnas are good at one time and bad at another! Owing to such arguments, Ambedkar has to face criticism.

## (1) Once again on Gandhi

Gandhi goes into ecstasy when he hears teachings concerning the four Varnas. Just as Varna system laid down that Shudras should not acquire property, Gandhi too emphasizes the same thing:

"The Shudra who only serves (the higher caste) as a matter of religious duty, and who will never own any property, who indeed has not even the ambition to own anything, is deserving of thousand obeisance... The very Gods will shower down flowers on him" (Vol.9, p. 291).

Owning property or anything is 'ambition'! These words are not meant to all, only for Shudras! The upper castes could own property! It is not ambition in case of propertied class. It is, however, 'ambition' if Shudras own property. They must serve the higher caste as a matter of religious duty! If they do so, Gods will shower flowers on them! This is the path which Mr. Gandhi showed to Shudras with great love!

See how mean is Gandhi's attempt to delude Untouchables who live on scavenging work compared to his attempt to delude Shudras!

"I do not want to attain *Moksha*. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them, in order

that I may endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an Atishudra... I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen year old Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram scavenger cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy... But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that, if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example," said Gandhi about the Brahmin lad. Later addressing the scavenging workers, he said, "You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu society" (Vol. 9, p. 292).

Hindus should clean Hindu society, why should non-Hindus clean it? Why should a single caste carry the responsibility of cleaning the urine and faeces of all persons in society? Didn't this Mahatma (the great soul) find any injustice in it? The Brahmin lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to allow the Ashram sweeper to do his work 'well', says Gandhi. He did not feel ashamed to say all this. That Brahmin lad would stop that work after few days. But the scavengers would have to do the same job throughout their lives, indeed for endless generations until Mahatma Gandhi is reborn as a scavenger and uplift all the scavengers! Why should Gandhi wait until he is reborn in order to uplift Untouchables? If he waits until then, who knows whether he may be reborn as the best Brahmin because of his many pious acts in this life? Therefore, why should he not start immediately in the present life itself the activity of uplifting Untouchables?

## (2) Mr. Gandhi's 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'

In December 1932, Mr. Gandhi started an association called the Servants of Untouchables Society and changed its name later to Harijan Sevak Sangh. The devotees of Vishnu liked the name Harijan but the devotees of Shiva did not like it because 'Hari' means Vishnu, whereas 'Hara' means Shiva! The devotees of Shiva were afraid that 'Hari' would become stronger if Untouchables are known as 'Hari's people' (Harijans). So they joined the camp of Hari. (Both the Gods would have protected Untouchables if they had the name 'Hari-Har-ja'). Mr. Gandhi, consoling the devotees of Shiva, explained that the term 'Harijans' mean 'children of god', that the term does not refer to the name of a particular god. If Harijans are the children of the 'God', whose children are those remaining people? This he did not clarify.

Regarding the term 'Harijans' Ambedkar says as follows:

"The Untouchables simply detest the name Harijan. Various grounds of

objection are urged against the name. In the first place it has not bettered their position. It has not elevated them in the eyes of the Hindus. The new name has become completely identified with the subject matter of the old. Everybody knows that Harijans are simply no other than the old Untouchables. The new name provides no escape to the Untouchables from the curse of Untouchability. With the new name they are damned as much as they were with the old. Secondly the Untouchables say that they prefer to be called Untouchables. They argue that it is better that the wrong should be called by its known name. It is better for the patient to know what he is suffering from. It is better for the wrong doer that the wrong is there still to be redressed. Any concealment will give a false sense of both as to existing facts. The new name in so far as it is a concealment is fraud upon the Untouchables and a false absolution to the Hindus... How great is the resentment of the Untouchables against this new name can be seen from the fact that whole body of the representatives of the Untouchables in the Bombay Legislative Assembly walked out of the House in protest when the Congress Government introduced a measure giving to the name Harijan the sanction of law... That it was forced upon the Untouchables and that it has done no good are however facts which cannot be disputed" (Vol. 5, p. 363-4).

In this context while stating that Untouchables do not like the term 'Harijans', Ambedkar, hastily added:

"The more manly among the Untouchables resent the degrading implications of this new name" (p. 364).

Does it not mean that women might accept the degrading implications of the new name? This would amount to degrading untouchable women. But, except at one or two places, this kind of trend does not appear in the writings of Ambedkar. We find, instead, a careful attitude toward women on many occasions. But expressions like 'the more manly' relate to a culture that degrades women. One must abandon such language as this.

Well, what are the objectives of the Harijan Sevak Sangh which Gandhi started? It is merely to make separate arrangements for Untouchables: separate wells, separate schools, separate hospitals, everything separate! There would be some provision of scholarships for the children of Untouchables who are favourable to the Congress party. The second objective is to preach peacefully among Hindus that they should not practice Untouchability. Gandhi, who says that he cannot tolerate a division among the Hindus, began his service of Untouchables with these separate arrangements. This Sangh did not even do the job of encouraging intercaste dining. Instead, it declared bluntly that it was not their job: "Social reforms like the abolition of the caste system and interdining are

kept outside the scope of the league" (Vol. 9, p. 141). Which means, this league will not even attempt to shake the foundations of Untouchability!

When they started this league (when they did not yet change its name as 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'), they took into the executive three Untouchables: Ambedkar, M.C.Raja and R. Srinivasan.

Ambedkar wrote a long letter to Thakkar, the secretary of the League, giving his suggestions with regard to the activities of the League. His suggestions included the following: The League should tell the Untouchables that they too, like Hindus, have the right to use all the public amenities and that they should boldly use them. This may even lead to bloodshed. Even if that happens, there is no other way in which we can achieve things. The League should assist Untouchables in court cases. It should teach Hindus that they should not practice Untouchability and should give Untouchables opportunity while engaging domestic workers and appointing employees in their businesses. Hindu doctors should treat Untouchables without any hesitation. The League should depend on the volunteers who work for the work of social reform. The only thing that can hold touchables and Untouchables together is love. Outside the family, justice alone can open the possibility of love and the League should see that the touchables do justice to Untouchables (Vol. 9, pp. 135-40). Thus Ambedkar expressed his views in that letter.

But neither Gandhi nor Thakkar relished these views. They did not even reply to Ambedkar's letter. Ambedkar resigned from the League as he thought that he could achieve little by continuing in the League when they did not care for his proposals. The other two Untouchable members also subsequently left the League.

The day after Gandhi ended his fast in Yerawada jail, on September 25, 1932 the Congress party held a meeting in Bombay on Untouchability. In that meeting, when leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya were lecturing to the effect that it was necessary to mobilize a large fund for driving out the evil of untouchability, one person from the audience remarked that no money was necessary to eliminate Untouchability, it was enough if Hindu men and women in that meeting receive Untouchables in their homes (Vol. 9, p. 132)!

Not a single paisa is required for the project in which Hindu men and women are to give up the practice of Untouchability. But, participants in the meeting did not like such a good suggestion. The leaders didn't like the suggestion at all! They did not care for the suggestion. They could have declared in the meeting thus, "Yes, let us receive Untouchables in our houses from today onwards". But they did not at all respond to the suggestion.



The leaders who started the League to fight against Untouchability surely ought to have laid down a condition that those desirous of membership in the League should not practice Untouchability. But there is no condition whatever in that League because all leaders have to first fulfil such a condition. How difficult it is to receive Untouchables into their houses! The devil of Untouchability must disappear without Hindus changing at all! Mobilization of a huge fund and establishing separate wells and separate schools would, apparently, themselves constitute a struggle against Untouchability!

There were no Untouchables in the League formed to uplift Untouchables. When some Untouchables questioned Gandhi about it, Gandhi gave different answers: This is a League for Untouchables and not of Untouchables; as Hindus are committing sin by practising Untouchability, Hindus alone have to work for its elimination; as Hindus alone are giving donations to this League and not Untouchables, Untouchables do not have the right to be in this League, and so on.

Will it do good or harm if Untouchables are present in a League which functions for the benefit of Untouchables? What is the disadvantage of Untouchables' presence in the League?

As Hindus are committing this sin, they alone have to work in this League, says Gandhi, doesn't he? But note carefully—it is not Hindu volunteers with a sense of social reform who carried out the activities of the League. It is Hindu employees who are doing that, as a salaried job!

Well, coming to 'donations', Untouchables too would definitely give whatever donations they could to the League if one were to ask them. But, as one would have to admit Untouchables as members in the League if they gave donations, Gandhi did not like the idea. If Untouchables were present in the League they might say that the League should fight with Hindus vigorously, might they not? Hence Gandhi did not like the idea of admitting Untouchables as members.

Hindus do not allow Untouchables to make any attempt to make use of Government Acts. Yet Gandhi is not angry with the Hindus. It is not Gandhi's method to encourage Untouchables to fight against Hindus. Gandhi's path is to appease and appeal to Hindus always thus: Why don't you change a little? Only if you like it? Change a little? Only if you like it! Otherwise you need not at all change! Why don't you allow Untouchable children to come to the schools? Only do this much, you need not do more than this! It is Gandhi's fear that Hindus might turn against the Congress party if he instructs them in stronger terms! It is his fear that Untouchables might turn against the Congress if he said anything at all to them! He has to remain on amicable terms with all groups if he has to hold his

leadership over them. That was his great political tactic! In other words, Gandhi's aim was to play the 'drama of service to Untouchables' without creating any difficulty for Hindus.

**Kavitha incident:** Some Untouchables in Kavitha village of Ahmedabad district joined their children in the school. On August 8, 1935 there was an Act allowing the children of the Untouchables to join the Government School. Since then the sufferings of Untouchables in that village increased. Hindus (including their women) started attacking their huts. They routed their huts, destroyed household articles, beat the inmates, poured kerosene oil in their wells, boycotted them and stopped selling goods to them. These kinds of atrocities went for days together. All this is because Untouchables joined their children in the school with the confidence that there was an Act of government allowing them to do so (vol. 5, pp. 41-42). Notwithstanding these long drawn out sufferings, the Untouchables approached the Harijan Sevak Sangh, established by Gandhi, enumerated all their sufferings, and informed them of their intention to leave that village.

This information reached Gandhi. Mahatma felt very happy over the decision of Untouchables. He advised them to go ahead with their plan. He said:

"There is no help like self-help. God helps those who help themselves. If the Harijans concerned will carry out their reported resolve to wipe the dust of Kavitha off their feet, they will not only be happy themselves but they will pave the way for others who may be similarly treated. If people migrate in search of employment how much more should they do so in search of self-respect? I hope that well-wishers of Harijans will help these poor families to vacate inhospitable Kavitha" (Vol. 9, pp.265-6).

Will there not be Hindus in the village to which the Untouchables migrate? Would they allow their children to join the schools? Did Gandhi not know that the same thing would happen there too? He knew every thing well, then shouldn't he tell the same thing? Shouldn't he give them courage thus, "Don't go anywhere! The same situation exists every where. You must continue wherever you are and fight. File cases against those who are torturing you! Stand united! The Harijan Sevak Sangh will assist you!"

But it was not Gandhi's objective to prepare Untouchables to conduct such a rebellion. Untouchables, without engaging in conflict, should depend on the kindness and mercy of Hindus and live obediently. They must keep emigrating from places where they suffer at the hands of Hindus. This was Gandhi's teaching of 'self-respect'!

But the Untouchables did not like this teaching. They gave up the idea of leaving Kavitha. They remained in the same village and filed cases against Hindus. Mr Vallabhai Patel, a lieutenant of Gandhi, entered the scene and visited the village. This gentleman brought pressure on the Untouchables and made them withdraw the cases filed against Hindus. This is the wonderful 'service' which the Harijan Sevak Sangh performed for the 'Harijans' (Vol.5, pp.41-42, Vol.9, pp:264-6).

**Khare Episode:** In 1938, there was crisis in the central provinces where there was a Congress ministry. Prime Minister Khare asked his old cabinet to resign and formed a new cabinet and took an untouchable called Agni Bhoj as a minister. With this, trouble began for Khare. The Congress party removed Khare from his Prime ministership on the ground that he did not consult the Congress parliamentary party on this issue and it was a breach of party discipline. The real charge against Khare was that he appointed an untouchable as a minister. Though Agni Bhoj was an untouchable, he was not a raw illiterate. He was a graduate, an orator and a strong party-man. Yet Gandhi could not tolerate making an untouchable a minister. Khare had been telling openly that Gandhi took him to task for including a Harijan in his cabinet implying that why he chose an untouchable fellow as minister?" Ambedkar asked Khare to put in writing what Gandhi had said to him. Khare's information is as follows:

"Mahatmaji took me to task for including a Harijan in my second cabinet. I retorted by saying that it was a Congress programme of uplift of Harijans for which Mahatmaji fasted unto death and that I did what I could in furtherance of that programme when opportunity offered itself and I think i have done nothing wrong in doing so. Thereupon Mahatmaji charged me of doing this for my selfish ambition. I repudiated this charge saying that any selfish motive is disproved by my resignation. Then Mahatmaji said that by my action I have thrown an apple of discord among the members of that simple community and have rendered disservice to the Congress cause by throwing this temptation in their way" (Vol. 5, p.377).

Dr. Khare also said that Mr. Gandhi told him that it was wrong on his part to have raised such aspirations and ambitions in the Untouchables and it was such an act of bad judgment that he would never forgive him. This statement was repeatedly made by Dr. Khare from platforms. Mr. Gandhi has never contradicted it (Vol. 9, p. 98).

We can believe what Khare said to be true because Agni Bhoj was not present in the new cabinet that formed after the resignation of Khare. They have not taken him as minister again.

"A crowd of Untouchables went to Shegaon to Mr. Gandhi for an explanation. Anticipating this Mr. Gandhi had started observing silence,

so that no explanation could be had. Then the Untouchables started Satyagraha against Mr. Gandhi for not including an Untouchable in the Central Provinces Congress Cabinet. To escape that embarrassment Mr. Gandhi left Shegaon and went on a tour to the North Western Frontier Provinces for teaching non-violence to the Pathans" (Vol. 5, p. 378).

**M**any Untouchables entered the Assembly through the Congress party. But none of them was ever made a minister. In 1942, an untouchable of the Congress party put five questions to Gandhi. One of those questions is:

"Will you advise the Congress and the leaders of the various majority parties in the legislatures in the provinces to nominate the Cabinet members from among the Scheduled Caste legislators who enjoy the confidence of the majority of Scheduled Caste members?" Gandhi's reply: "I cannot. The principle is dangerous. Protection of its neglected classes should not be carried to an extent which will harm them and harm the country. A cabinet minister should be a topmost man commanding universal confidence. A person after he has secured a seat in an elected body should depend upon his intrinsic merit and popularity to secure coveted positions" (Vol. 9, p. 99).

This principle applies only to Untouchables and not Hindus! For them, it is enough if they get elected to Assembly. They can become ministers. They possess merit and reputation by birth! An Untouchable, however educated he may be, does not possess those qualities. This is Gandhi's principle!

The essence of what Ambedkar said on the question of merit is this: true, 'competence' is necessary to carry out responsibilities. No one will deny this point. But one has to select competent people from among the available people. A person who becomes a minister is the people's representative. That representative will be as intelligent as those people. How can a representative, who comes from the people, possess superior intelligence to the people of the nation? So, opportunities be given to those who are available (Vol. 9, p. 415).

Ambedkar's charge was that 'it was a stage of fighting against the British. Indians would be able to achieve independence if they were united as much as possible. The attempt to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity is for that purpose only. The Congress party, however, did not wish to achieve unity with Untouchables even as a political tactic. All the incidents cited here prove this fact.

Had Ambedkar not written all these things on Gandhi, people would still be believing Gandhi's words only.

We notice a change in Gandhi by 1936. He was saying that he would agree to interdining and intercast marriages. In the *Harijan* of August 15, 1936, he said:

"...if *Shastras* support the existing Untouchability I should cease to call myself or remain a Hindu since I have no scruples about interdining or intermarriage" (Vol. 1, p. 85).

One would need to examine, carefully, however, whether this is a new development or merely a new political tactic. If you want to know how much Gandhi is really concerned with the eradication of Untouchability, read the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> volumes of Ambedkar! There are dozens of instructive incidents. Looking at the Mahatma's attitude, you will be extremely astonished.

In Volume 9 (pp. 251-4) of Ambedkar, there are 14 questions which Ambedkar asked about Gandhi. All of them are instances that expose the 'sincerity' of Gandhi.

In many contexts, Ambedkar, unhesitatingly and carelessly, criticises Gandhi and Gandhism with such expressions as: 'man with the greatest cunning', 'ambitious politician', 'purile and insincere', 'a worse person', 'elf', 'overdone the trick', 'stupid and revolting', 'a stab in the back', 'plot against Untouchables', 'treachery', 'illusory', and so on. (Vol. 9, pp: 57, 259, 268, 286, 287, 290, 295; Vol. 5, pp: 320, 322, 354, 376). All this criticism is apt in the respective contexts. All this criticism makes us feel happy if we understand what is fair and what is unfair. We don't know how many secrets are hidden concerning Mahatmas and Deputy Mahatmas!

# 10

## THE CONDITION OF UNTOUCHABLES

Contrary to the path which 'Swamis' like Vivekananda and 'Mahatmas' like Gandhi shown to the untouchable castes, the fight that Ambedkar started became a 'ray of hope' for the Untouchables.

Although Ambedkar discussed all aspects of the caste system, the main theme is eradication of untouchability. According to Ambedkar 'Depressed Classes' (Dalits) are 'Untouchables' (Vol. 2, p. 671).

Untouchables face the problem of untouchability in addition to all other kinds of problems which all the lower castes face. It is the Untouchables who experience more sufferings and more insults than the rest of the lower castes.

What is the economic condition of these Untouchables? What is their means of livelihood? How have they been living for generations? Ambedkar described these matters on many occasions. Though the economic condition of Untouchables is similar to that of other lower castes in some contexts, it is not the same in all the contexts. For example, the problem of 'landlessness' is, by and large, similar in the castes of both Untouchables as well as other lower castes. But the legal restriction that 'one should not buy land' is imposed on Untouchables at least in certain areas whereas the same restriction is not imposed on other lower castes. Similarly, it is not possible for Untouchables to engage in certain kinds of trade. People of other castes refuse to buy milk, curds, vegetables, etc., from Untouchables. Other lower castes do not face quite the same problem. Similarly, Untouchables alone do the work of scavenging and disposal of dead animals. Owing to these kinds of differences, the economic condition of Untouchables is more intolerable than that of other lower castes. Unless we understand this basic fact, we cannot understand the specific condition of the Untouchables.

**Let us see the information that Ambedkar gives with regard to the economic condition of Untouchables:**

"How do the Untouchables live? How do they earn their living? Without a knowledge of the ways of earning a livelihood which are open to the Untouchables it would not be possible to have a clear idea of their place in the Hindu Society. In an agricultural country, agriculture can be the main source of living. But this source of earning a living is generally not open to the Untouchables. This is so for a variety of reasons. In the first place purchase of land is beyond their means. Secondly even if an Untouchable has the money to purchase land he has no opportunity to do so. In most parts the Hindus would resent an Untouchable coming forward to purchase land and thereby trying to become the equal of the Touchable class of Hindus. Such an act of daring on the part of an Untouchable would not only be frowned upon but might easily invite punishment. In some parts they are disabled by law from purchasing land. For instance in the Province of Punjab there is a law called the Land Alienation Act. This law specifies the communities which can purchase land and the Untouchables are excluded from the list. The result is that in most parts the Untouchables are forced to be landless labourers. As labourers they cannot demand reasonable wages. They have to work for the Hindu farmer for such wages as their masters choose to give. On this issue the Hindu farmers can combine to keep the wages to the lowest

level possible for it is to their interest to do so. On the other hand the Untouchables have no holding power. They must earn or starve. Nor have they any bargaining power. They must submit to the rate fixed or suffer violence" (Vol. 5, p. 23).

"When the agricultural season is over the Untouchables have no employment and no means of earning a living. In such seasons they subsist by cutting grass and firewood from the jungle and sell it in a nearby town. Even when it is open it depends upon the forest guard. Only if he is bribed he will let them take some grass and firewood from the Government forest.... All these sources of earning are obviously precarious and fleeting... Every village has its machinery of administration. The Untouchables of the village are hereditary menials employed in the village administration. As part of their remuneration the whole body of Untouchables get a small parcel of land assigned in the ancient past which is fixed and is never increased and which the Untouchables prefer to leave uncultivated because of its excessive fragmentations. Coupled with this is given to them the right to beg for food.... This right to beg for food from the Touchables is now the principal means of livelihood for 60 millions of Untouchables in India" (Vol. 5, p. 24).

"Let me give a few illustrations. Take the Punjab of PEPSU. The Jats dominate the whole area. The Untouchables live in subordinate dependence on them. Take Andhra—there are two or three major communities spread over the linguistic area. They are either the Reddis or the Kammās and the Kapus. They hold all the land, all the offices, all the business. The Untouchables live in subordinate dependence on them. Take Maharashtra. The Marathas are a huge majority in every village in Maharashtra. The Brahmins, the Gujars, the Kolis and the Untouchables live in subordinate co-operation" (Vol. 1, p. 134).

"Castes are so distributed that in any given area there is one caste which is major and there are others which are small and are subservient to the major caste owing to their comparative smallness and their economic dependence upon the major caste which owns most land in the village" (Vol. 1, p. 167).

"The Depressed Classes have no economic independence in most parts of the Presidency. Some cultivate the lands of the orthodox classes as their tenants at will. Others live on their earnings as farm labourers employed by the orthodox classes and the rest subsist on the food or grain given to them by the orthodox classes in lieu of service rendered to them as village servants. We have heard of numerous instances where the orthodox classes have used their economic power as a weapon against those Depressed Classes in their villages, when the latter have dared to exercise their rights, and have evicted them from their lands, and stopped

their employment and discontinued their remuneration as village servants. This boycott is often planned on such an extensive scale as to include the prevention of the Depressed Classes from using the commonly used paths and the stoppage of the necessities of life by the village Bania. According to the evidence sometimes small causes suffice for the proclamation of a social boycott against the Depressed Classes" (Vol.2, p. 531).

"... the chief weapon in the armoury of the Hindus is economic power which they possess over the poor Untouchables living in the village" (Vol. 1, p. 426).

"... the economic position of the Untouchables... is most pitiable... They are a body of landless labourers..." (Vol. 1, p. 425).

"If the Untouchables have been living on carrion it is not because they like it. They eat carrion, because there is nothing else on which they can live. This will be clear to anyone who realizes that on account of untouchability they have no way left to earn a living. All professions have been closed to them. There is no land on the produce of which they can live. There is no trade which they can engage in. Their main stay is therefore the food they collect from the villagers and the carrion which is left to them. Without carrion they would literally die of starvation" (Vol. 5, p. 256).

"... the only field of service in which there is no discrimination against the Untouchables is scavenging. There is no need for discrimination in this field because the whole of it is made over to the Untouchables and there is no competition from the Hindus. Even here discrimination steps in the matter of higher posts. All unclean work is done by the Untouchables. But all supervisory posts which carry higher salary and which do not involve contact with filth are all filled by Hindus. In this situation rights of citizenship cannot mean the rights of the Untouchables. Government of the people and for the people cannot mean Government for the Untouchables" (Vol. 5, pp. 108-9).

"If the Untouchables skin and carry the dead animals of the Hindus, it is because the Untouchables have no choice. They are forced to do it. They would be penalized if they refused to do it. The penalty is legal. In some provinces the refusal to do this dirty work is a breach of contract. In other provinces it is a criminal offence involving fine... In Provinces like the United Provinces, refusal to do scavenging by sweeper is made an offence... Should a sweeper who has a customary right to do the house-scavenging of a house of building... fail to perform such scavenging in a proper way, the occupier of the house or building or the board may complain to a Magistrate" (Vol. 5, pp. 256-7).

"The Hindu Social Order is based upon a division of labour which



reserves for the Hindus clean and respectable jobs and assigns to the Untouchables dirty and mean jobs and thereby clothes the Hindus with dignity and heaps ignominy upon the Untouchables" (Vol. 5, p. 258).

"The population in the village is divided into two sections— (1) Touchables and (2) Untouchables... Economically, the Touchables form a strong and powerful community, while the Untouchables are a poor and a dependent community. Socially, the Touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the Untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsmen" (Vol. 5, pp.20-21).

**Now let us see how touchables force Untouchables to do unclean jobs free of remuneration (Vol. 5, pp: 55-61):**

Hindus behave as if Untouchables are born to serve them. They believe that they can forcibly make Untouchables serve them. They call such forced and free labour 'Begar'.

**A report in the paper 'Jeevan':** On November 29, 1938 Brahmins, Thakurs and Jats subjected Jatavs to torture because they refused to do Begar. Recently, Thakurs called Jatavs when a bull died. Jatavs, then, told Thakurs that they would dispose of the dead bull only if they pay remuneration. Hindus became furious and it led to a big fight.

**A report again in 'Jeevan' in February 1939:** When Jats, of Abhaypur in the Kidwali taluk of Agra district, ask poor people belonging to the scheduled castes to do forced labour (Begar), the poor Untouchables used to ask 'wage' and the Jats used to beat them.

**A report in 'Savadhan', dated June 3, 1945:** As Mehraji Kori, a scheduled caste woman refused to do Begar (forced free labour), three police constables went to her house in the night, took her to police station and violated her modesty. They filled charcoal and pieces of paper in her private part and put their private organs in her mouth. Her clothes were torn and saturated with blood. The following day her mother was forced to do begar work for the whole day and then both of them were left off in the night.

**A report in 'Hindusthan Times' of November 15, 1945:** Rajputs of Dukheri village in Ambala district went in groups and attacked Harijans who refused Begari. They killed two Harijans in this connection.

**Ambedkar's evidence before the Simon Commission:**

"The depressed classes have been dubbed to be unfit for association because of certain unclean habits. That is the allegation of the upper classes. That is to say, they eat the meat of the dead animals and they are not clean, and so on... [But] in the Colaba and Ratnagiri districts

the whole of the Mahar population have given up the eating of the meat of dead animals, but the tyranny and social oppression that is going on against them is simply unspeakable; there is a complete economic and social boycott. The lands they had been cultivating for years past have been taken away from them by their caste-Hindu landlords. Every sort of pressure, social and economic, has been brought to bear upon the depressed classes in order to compel them to resume their dirty habits”  
(Vol. 2, p. 484).

### **What does all this information indicate?**

It shows two kinds of conditions:

- (1) 'Poverty' due to lack of means of production.
- (2) 'Untouchability' due to 'division of labour' in the form of 'castes'.

These conditions are interlinked with each other. Yet we have to understand them separately as far as possible.

(1) **Poverty:** Untouchables do not own either land or other means of production. Even if they have, it is negligible. This situation applies to the other lower castes and some sections in the upper castes as well. Large part of the means of production will be under the control of upper castes and this is precisely the main weapon of those castes.

(2) **Untouchability:** The jobs of Untouchables include not only agriculture-related jobs but also sweeping of the streets, scavenging, burial of dead animals, toilet cleaning and such other jobs involving cleaning of dirt. These jobs are bottommost manual labours that are necessary for all people in society. Doing agriculture-related jobs apply not only to the Untouchables but also the Shudra population. But, doing unclean jobs is specific to Untouchables only. Though it is not possible to say that untouchability is due to unclean jobs, it is completely possible to say that 'Untouchables alone do unclean jobs'. This means, we find poverty and unclean jobs in the case of Untouchables. What could be the solution to these problems?

Since 'poverty' arises due to exploitation of labour, elimination of exploitation of labour will be the solution. This means, every individual in society must perform labour. There must not be a class that does not perform labour. Since performance of unclean jobs is specific to Untouchables, the solution will be elimination of wage system and the division of labour formed due to the relations of exploitation. This means performance of unclean jobs should not be limited to only one section. Every person should do those jobs as part of his/her duties. Thus, we must change the old division of labour.

If we consider other lower castes, we find the same problems in their case as well, namely, (1) poverty and (2) confinement to manual labour only. Poverty is the problem connected with exploitation of labour. Confining to manual labour is the problem of old division of labour. We, therefore, find the same solution here as well.

**T**he economic name of the means of production is 'property'. This includes both land and other resources.

Property, essentially, is of two types. (1) Property based on one's own labour and (2) Property based on exploitation.

**(1) Property based on one's own labour:** Let us suppose that a family has 4 acres of agricultural land. Crops do not grow on their own just because there is land. Many kinds of labour have to be performed for that. Let us suppose that men and women in a given family do various kinds of labour for cultivating the land, sell some portion of the crop, buy other necessities of life from others and lead their life like this. This means, the members of this family are living on their own labour. Here, there is no scope of engaging others as 'labourers'. Which means, there won't be a relationship of 'master and labourer' here. If this family owns 100 acres of land, it is not possible for the family members to cultivate the entire land by means of their own labour. In other words, either an individual or a family should possess only minimum number of means of production that makes it possible for them to do labour and live on their own labour. An individual would not live in 'poverty' if some portion of his labour does not go to others. Similarly, that person will not possess 'riches' if some portion of others' labour does not come to him. Which means, there will be neither poverty nor riches under a system where each person lives on his/her own labour. It is a situation where we don't find either riches or poverty. In such a situation, life will be natural because all the necessities of life are fulfilled and there will be neither shortage nor excess of anything. If we assume that all families live like this, none is a master or labourer to others and all human beings live in 'equal' relations of labour. Such society in which every person/family is separate is the 'society of individual producers'. This is a 'system of property of individual producers'.

If all these individuals merge their individual properties and perform labour as before, then it will be a society of 'associated producers.' In other words, it is a system of property of associated producers.

Since all individuals perform labour—either in the system of property of individual producers or the system of property of associated producers—there will not be exploitation of labour. No individual will live

in poverty. There will not be unequal labour relations of a master and labourers.

**(3) Property based on exploitation of labour:** This is totally opposite of the first mentioned system. To understand this, it is enough if we understand the first mentioned system in an inverted manner. In this system of property, a small minority of persons owns land and other means of production as private property. The large majority of persons does not possess them. The means of production do not produce things on their own and give to their owners. Necessities of life are produced only if many kinds of labour are performed by using the means of production. But in this system of property, those who own means of production do not perform any labour. They become masters and engage those who do not own means of production as labourers. It is obvious what happens then. A large portion of the labour of labourers daily goes to the class of masters. This is how that class lives. It is nothing but exploitation of labour. This takes place under different labels: property in 'land' gets 'rent', 'property' in 'capital' gets 'interest' and 'profit'. The entire secret of exploitation is embedded in three kinds of sources of income: rents, interest and profits. These sources of income are not related to one's own labour. Under this system of property, poverty for the entire labouring class and riches for the entire master's class constitute the living conditions.

This property exists either in the form of 'property of slave masters' or 'property of capitalists' or with the same character under some other name. Whatever be the form, essence is the same. When we speak of 'private property', it is important to make a distinction whether it is a property based on 'one's own labour' or 'exploitation'.

If we leave out the primitive times in the history of human society, the history of the entire subsequent period till today simply demonstrates different forms of relations of exploitation.

If we consider the 'caste system', the Untouchables and Shudras had been the labourers who served the upper castes. The labour which these sections perform is wholly manual. While a certain section in the upper castes do not perform any labour, certain other sections perform mental labour. The lower castes do not have opportunities to perform mental labour.

These are the conditions. We have to classify these conditions into the problem of 'poverty' and the problem of 'caste distinctions'.

The solution for the problem of 'poverty' is abolition of 'exploitation of labour'. In other words, every human being has to perform labour. That is, abolition of system of property based on exploitation.

The solution for the problem of 'caste distinction' lies in changing the exploitative division of labour. Which means, the division of labour must be changed in such a way that every individual does perform certain kinds of mental labour and certain kinds of manual labour (including unclean jobs). Superstructural changes like intercaste marriages are also part of this change.

Ambedkar had discussed all such problems as eradication of untouchability, annihilation of castes and eradication of poverty. Further, he included 'religion' as one of the goals of human society. We have to examine all these issues as we proceed further.

Any struggle begins in order to get rid of immediate sufferings; that is to get temporary relief. No struggle solves fundamental problems in the very first step. Ambedkar's struggle too, very naturally, begins in order to get relief from the violence of untouchability. We will first see the demands of Untouchables and some incidents relating to their movement.

# 11

## SOME 'DALIT' MOVEMENTS

The leaders of Untouchables were of the opinion that Untouchable castes alone be considered as Depressed Classes. But, there are objections among the Depressed Classes with reference to the label 'Depressed Classes' (hereafter 'Dalits'). The objection is that the name is 'degrading' and 'contemptuous'. But Untouchability is in fact 'degrading'. This means, the label—which indicates the degraded situations as degraded one—is able to express the real condition of Untouchables. In this sense, the label is a correct one.

As there were some objections over the name, Ambedkar suggested other names instead of Depressed Classes, namely, Non-caste Hindus, Protest Hindus or Non-conformist Hindus (Vol. 9, p. 306).

Concerning the movements of Dalits, Ambedkar informs:

"The movement of the Untouchables against the injustice of the Hindu Social Order has a long history behind it, especially in Maharashtra" (Vol.5, p. 247).

He narrated the history of these movements briefly as follows:

"[The British Government had declared that] all public institutions are open to all citizens including the Untouchables. The right to wear any

kind of clothes or ornaments are some of the rights which British Indian Law gives to the Untouchables along with the rest. To these were added the rights to the use of public utilities and institutions, such as wells, schools, buses, trams, Railways, Public offices, etc., were now put beyond the pale of doubt. But owing to the opposition of the Hindus the Untouchables cannot make any use of them. It is to meet the situation, the Untouchables decided to change the methods and to direct action to redress their wrongs. This change took place about 1920" (Vol. 5, p.247).

## 1) Struggle for using roads

In Vaicom in Travancore state, Hindus used to oppose the use of the road adjacent to the temple by Untouchables. "Ultimately as a result of Satyagraha, the temple compound was enlarged and the road was realigned so that there the Untouchables even if they used it were no longer within the polluting distance of the temple" (Vol. 5, p. 247). This happened in 1924. The Government made a change in such a way that Untouchables would walk at a distance from the temple. Only in this manner could the Untouchables use the road.

## 2) The case of the Chawdar tank

The Chawdar Tank is situated in the town of Mahad in the Kolaba district of Bombay Presidency. This was a big tank and it is not known when it was built. When the municipality of Mahad town came into existence in 1869, this tank came under the jurisdiction of the Municipality. This means that the Chawdar tank then became public property. Mahad was a commercial centre and headquarters of the taluk. Untouchables of the surrounding villages used to visit Mahad in connection with many transactions. But they were not allowed to use the tank. In 1923, the government made a law allowing Untouchables to use all government (public) properties. In January 1924, Mahad town municipality too declared that Untouchables could use Chawdar tank. There was held a meeting in Mahad town, with Ambedkar in the chair on March 19 & 20, 1927 to discuss the issue of using Chawdar tank by Untouchables. About 2,500 Untouchables attended the meeting. The organizers had to fetch water for those who attended the meeting by paying money to Hindus!

In that meeting, Ambedkar 'exhorted' Untouchables

"to fight for their rights, give up their dirty and vicious habits and rise to full manhood. Thereafter high caste Hindus who were present and, who held out that they were the friends of the Untouchables, addressed the gathering and told the Untouchables to be bold and exercise the right that is given to them by law" (Vol. 5, p. 249).

The next day the conference resolved to take water from the Chawdar tank immediately. The Untouchables rose up in enthusiasm. Now those Hindus who had until then exhorted Untouchables to be bold and begin fearlessly to exercise their rights "immediately ran away" from the meeting.

The Untouchables led by Ambedkar and his co-workers marched in a procession through the main streets.

"The Hindu inhabitants of the town saw the scene. They were taken by storm. They stood aghast witnessing this scene which they had never seen before. For the moment they seemed to be stunned and paralyzed. The procession in form of fours marched past and went to the Chawdar tank, and the Untouchables for the first time drank the water" (Vol. 5, p. 250).

It is needless to say that attacks on Untouchables in the villages continued as usual thereafter.

The Untouchables decided to conduct another conference in Mahad in the month of December. The Hindus filed a case in the Mahad court seeking a stay order prohibiting Untouchables who were again planning to enter the tank, and also to declare the tank as the property of the Hindus. The Hindus got the stay order at once. Now it is more appropriate to describe the problem as the problem of the government rather than that of Untouchables. The government itself had made a law permitting Untouchables to use the tank, had it not? Now the court gave a stay against that Act. It was the responsibility of the government to defend the Act. The conference of Untouchables decided to wait and see what the government would do. We have tried to enter the tank by virtue of the right which the law gave us. Now, the same law is preventing us from entering the tank. We have to follow the law instead of challenging it. We will be able to see to what extent the law would protect our right.—This is how the conference of Untouchables resolved and suspended their attempt of entering the tank again.

The case went up to the Bombay High Court.

"The occasion for civil disobedience never came because the Untouchables won the suit and the Hindus lost it" (Vol. 5, p. 252).

The Untouchables won the case. But they won the case not because the court said that 'it was wrong on the part of Hindus to practice Untouchability'. The court did not explicitly state this. The arguments went on along the following question: whether the custom of Untouchability has been in existence since time immemorial or not? While Ambedkar argued that Untouchability has not existed since time immemorial, the Hindus on the other hand were unable to prove that Untouchability existed there since

time immemorial. The court decided the case against the Hindus on the ground that they failed to prove that the custom alleged by them in respect of the tank had existed since time immemorial. This means, however, that the court would have decided the case in favour of Hindus if they had proved that the custom of Untouchability had existed since time immemorial.

In the words of Ambedkar:

“...the Bombay High Court did not decide the issue whether the custom of Untouchability was valid or not. They decided the case against the Hindus on the ground that they failed to prove that the custom alleged by them in respect of the tank was not immemorial. They held that the custom itself was not proved. The tank became open to the Untouchables. But the Untouchables cannot be said to have gained their point. The main issue was whether the custom of Untouchability was a legal custom. Unfortunately the High Court avoided to give judgement on that issue”  
(Vol. 5, p. 252).

There are no details as to how many years it took for the judgement to come.

### 3) Burning of Manu Smriti

On December 20, 1927, when the second conference in connection with the struggle for Chawdar Tank was held in Mahad, the Untouchables undertook the programme of burning Manu Smriti. The conference had explained the necessity of that programme thus:

“Taking into consideration the fact that the laws which are proclaimed in the name of Manu, the Hindu lawgiver, and which are contained in the Manu Smriti and which are recognized as the Code for the Hindus are insulting to persons of low caste, are calculated to deprive them of the rights of a human being and crush their personality. Comparing them in the light of the rights of men recognised all over the civilized world, this conference is of opinion that this Manu Smriti is not entitled to any respect and is undeserving of being called a sacred book to show its deep and profound contempt for it, the Conference resolves to burn a copy thereof, at the end of the proceedings, as a protest against the system of social inequality it embodies in the guise of religion” (Vol. 5, p. 254).

After this resolution the Holy Smriti of Hindus was burnt to ashes amidst joy.

### 4) Struggle for entry into Kalaram temple

“The next item in this history of direct action which is worthy of mention



relates to the entry in the famous Hindu Temple at Nasik known as the Kala Ram Temple" (Vol. 5, p. 252).

Except these 2 sentences in Vol. 5 depicting this incident, there are no other details elsewhere in Ambedkar's work on this matter. There is, however, a small piece of information on p.7 of volume 10. It tells that Untouchables staged Satyagraha in front of the Kalaram temple for about 5 years; yet they had not obtained entry into the temple by the time they ended Satyagraha. Incidentally, it is not Ambedkar but the editor of volume 10 has added an extract from an essay written by some other person. There is no name of the writer.

If we go by the narration which other books concerning Ambedkar provide, the information relating to the Kalaram temple is as follows: attempts to obtain entry into this temple began on March 2, 1930. The trustee refused entry. He closed the temple. Untouchables continued to sit in front of the temple. In a month's time, there occurred a compromise between Hindus and Untouchables. Hindus had agreed to participation of Untouchables in the Sri Rama Navami festival and to pulling the chariot together with Untouchables. But during the chariot festival, Hindus did not allow Untouchables and they alone drove the chariot. Untouchables tried to hold the chariot. There occurred physical fights and one untouchable youth died. Untouchables continued to do Satyagraha in front of the temple until 1935. (Did they do it daily or occasionally? No details. Also there are no details whether Untouchables got entry by the time they ended Satyagraha). The struggle for entry into temples went on in the states. But there is no information whether entry was allowed at any place.

## 5) Refusal to do unclean work

Society needs all the jobs that involve cleaning of dirt. But, it is the rule of Hindu society that Untouchables alone should do such jobs. The main source of living of Untouchables is cleaning of the streets and toilet, burial of dead animals. In some provinces there were laws that compel Untouchables to do these unclean jobs. In United Provinces, it was a legal offence for toilet cleaners to refuse to do their work. According to the Punjab City police Act of 1911, if a toilet cleaner wants to give up his job of toilet cleaning, he could make a representation to the High Court. That was the only recourse available to him. A toilet cleaner going to the high court! Anyway it is not possible; so he would be compelled to carry on doing the same job throughout his life!

Ambedkar summarises the history of Untouchables' refusal to do unclean work:

"The question whether the Untouchables can be accused of having invited the curse of Untouchability upon themselves for doing the dirty work of the Hindus is really beside the point. What is important to note is that the Conference of the Untouchables which met in Mahad resolved that no Untouchable shall skin the dead animals of the Hindus, shall carry it or eat the carrion. The object of these resolutions was two-fold. The one object was to foster among the Untouchables self-respect and self-esteem. This was a minor object. The major object was to strike a blow at the Hindu Social Order. The Hindu Social Order is based upon a division of labour which reserves for the Hindus clean and respectable jobs and assigns to the Untouchables dirty and mean jobs and thereby clothes the Hindus with dignity and heaps ignominy upon the Untouchables. The resolution was a revolt against this part of the Hindu Social Order. It aimed at making the Hindus do their dirty jobs themselves. This is a brief summary of the history of the revolt of the Untouchables against the established order of the Hindu. It originated in Bombay. But it has spread to all parts of India" (Vol. 5, p. 258).

There were, however, court cases against the burning of Manu Smriti and then refusal of Untouchables to do unclean jobs.

Ambedkar described all these struggles as direct actions "aimed at the demolition of the Hindu Social Order by applying dynamite to its very foundations" (Vol. 5, p. 252). But this description applies only to those struggles that involved refusal to do unclean jobs. It won't apply to the same extent to other struggles. No doubt all these incidents are 'movements'. Any struggle—struggle waged collectively for rights against injustices—is a movement. But, all these movements are hardly powerful enough to blow up the Hindu Social Order. Only those movements which refused to do unclean jobs and those which refused to do unclean jobs without remuneration are so powerful.

No attempt that fights against Untouchables is futile. Temple entry is also somewhat useful and not useless. It is useful in the sense that if Hindus agree Untouchables' entry into temples, it implies that to that extent the Hindus stopped practising Untouchability. If this happens, Untouchability would definitely recede. Hindus may, then, also, begin to engage Untouchables as domestic workers. Untouchables may be able to start trading in the sale of milk, curds and vegetables. Thus, temple entry too would be able to change the situation of Untouchables. But, even then all the unclean jobs would be the duty of Untouchables. No change will take place in this aspect.