

CHAPTER – I

THE ORIGIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY IN THE HINDU RELIGIOUS SCRIPTURES

Before delving into the origin of untouchability, it is necessary to discuss about *Hinduism*, because the untouchables were the part of the *Hindu* social system. What then is *Hinduism*? Is *Hinduism* in its original form a religion? In fact, it is revealed that originally *Hinduism* was not a religion. It has no founder like *Christianity* and *Islam*. In the entire range of the ancient Indian literature the word *Hindu* does not appear. Even the word ‘Hindu’ does not appear in our vast ancient Indian literature. This name was given by the *Persians* and the later Western invaders to the people who were living on the side of the river *Sindhu* (Indus). They used to call them *Hindus*. In this regard Radhakrishnan said: “The *Hindu* civilization is so called, since its original founders or earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the *Sindhu* (the *Indus*) river system corresponding to the North-West Frontier Province of the Punjab. This is recorded in the *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the *Vedas*, the *Hindu* Scriptures which give their name to this period of Indian history. The people on the Indian side of the *Sindhu* were called *Hindu* by the *Persian* and the later Western invaders....The term ‘Hindu’ had originally a territorial and not a creedal significance. It implied residence in a well-defined geographical area....Aboriginal tribes, savage and half-civilized people, the cultured *Dravidians* and the *Vedic Aryans* were all *Hindus* as they were the sons of the same mother. The *Hindu* thinkers reckoned with the striking fact that the men and women dwelling in India belong to different communities, worshipped different gods and practiced different rites. As if this was not enough, outsiders have been powering into the country from the beginning of its history, and some have made for themselves a home in India....”⁵ It is true that *Hinduism* has been able to assimilate varieties of people, i.e., theist and atheist, skeptic and agnostic,

⁵ Radhakrishnan; *the Hindu View of Life*. Unwin Books, London (1965) P-12.

monotheist and polytheist, nature worshippers and idol worshippers etc. Not only Indians but also the foreign conquerors were welcomed by *Hinduism*. Though they were inhabitants but they were called as *Hindus*.

From ancient time, *Hindu* society had been divided into four parts. Actually the *Portuguese* were first to call *Jatis* as *Caste* and the system as the Caste system. *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras* - are the four *Jatis* or Castes. These were the original four castes in *Chaturvarna* system. Each and every caste had its own set of customs- '*Dharma* of the caste'. Every member of the caste was bound to follow the customs. Subsequently it is called a *Varna-dharma* or *caste-dharma*. Every member of the caste is serving their professions according to their own caste. Those who engaged in mental and spiritual work i.e. those who were working as teachers, priests, ministers and advisors of the government were regarded as *Brahmins*. Generally the *Brahmins* were expected to lead a serious and moral life than others. In general, *Kshatriyas* were the soldiers, the warriors and the ruling classes who were responsible for law and order within the state and for defence of the country from outside invasions. The king, his ministers, the nobility, the aristocracy and other functionaries of the government and the army belonged to this class. Courage and bravery were the chief virtues of the *Kshatriya*.

On the other hand, those who engaged in trade and commerce, industry and agriculture were called as *Vaishyas*. Generally they were the economic strength of the country. They formed a class of commoners and against priestly class and the nobility. They were required to consider their wealth as that of the nation at large. They were the producer of wealth and as such the richest-people as compared to the other three castes. They were doing a service to the society to producing the wealth. They used to spend a lot of money for public welfare works.

Lastly those, who were doing odd jobs and those having no capability, such as the trappers, the laborers, the unskilled workers, the fisherman etc. were known as *Shudras*.

It is true that in the early stages caste-system was quite flexible and not at all rigid. There were many instances through which one may come to know that with the change of profession anyone can change his or her caste. There are so many examples in favour of this: Parshuram, a *Brahmin*, became a *Kshatriya*, when he took to arms. Vishwamitra, a *Kshatriya*, became a *Brahmin* when he became a *rishi*. Some way Valmiki, the great author of the epic *Ramayana*, was a *Shudra* in his early life and became a *Brahmin* later. In this regard we would mention the famous hymn in the *Rig Veda*, which reads “I am a poet, my father is a doctor, and my mother is a grinder of corn”.⁶

But it cannot be said with absolute certainty because it is really unknown how and when caste system had been originated. Historians were trying to develop a few theories purely on the basis of guessing. It is argued that the constituents of *Hinduism* belonging to the various social groups, namely, the dark aboriginal tribes, the half civilized forest dweller, the sturdy *Dravidians*, and the highly civilized *Aryans* etc., are all coming with its own taboos, laws, customs and beliefs particularly with regard to food and marriage. They had created these for them. These different social groups were remaining in the fold of the same religion observing different laws and customs.

Now the question is that, if this theory has been taken into account then so many social groups from highly civilized to the hardly civilized would have given birth too many castes. But we come to know that *Hindu* religion accepts only four castes. Though it accepts four castes but the question of naming them i.e. the ground on which the names *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* were given to these castes, remain unanswered. Moreover, it

⁶ R.R.Sethi, K.S. Narang; *A History of Bharat*, Uttar Chand Kapur and Sons, Delhi, P-57.

would also remain to be unanswered how the functions of the various castes decided? Who became the *Brahmin* and who *Shudra* and why? Who made them so? If this theory does not answer these questions then it is difficult to accept it as a possible theory of the origin of caste system.

There we notice another view which states that the caste system was originated not on the basis of *guna* but on the basis of the *external complexion* of the individuals. Accordingly, it has presumed that the *colour of the body* was the deciding factor of determining castes. In fact on the basis of the colour of the body the ancient society was divided into various castes. It was revealed in the *Aryans* that the so-called fair complexion *Aryans* did not mix with the dark-skinned *Dasyus* in the *Rig-Veda* period. It is also important to point out here that superior-emperor class of the society even in the West was determined on the basis of the colour of the body of the individuals. In South Africa it was revealed during the era of Nelson Mandela and even in many parts the black-white conflict is being witnessed even in the present day scenario. Thus there we find a historical similarity between the western tradition and the *Rig-Vedian* tradition, where division in the society is made on the basis of the colour of the body. As the *Aryans* rejoiced the symbol of colour as the hallmark of *Varna*, the caste system during this period was divided on the basis of the colour of the body. As a result of that *Aryans* and non-*Aryans* were created out of the colour distinction of their bodies. Thus, as per as the colour of the body is concerned, *Aryans* were treated upper castes and non-*Aryans* were treated as lower castes, i.e., non-*Aryans* can't be born twice. Only the *Aryans*, the upper castes, known as *Dvijias* can born twice. In fact, the term *Dvijias* means twice-born. The conflict between *Aryans* and non-*Aryans* being the upper castes and lower castes were made because the upper castes always hatred lower castes. Non-*Aryans* were treated as the lower castes or non-*Dvijias* having no right to born twice.

However, this theory had not been accepted. Many substantive criticisms had been raised against the feasibility of this theory. This theory, in fact, goes against the theory of *Chaturvarna* developed in *Hinduism*. Instead of *Chaturvarna*, this theory affirms two *Varna* in terms of upper and lower castes. In *Chaturvarna* there are four different nameable castes and each castes was determined on the basis of specific functions bestowed on it. In fact, the word *Varna* appears to have a symbolic meaning. Accordingly, the four castes or *Jatis* of the *Hindu* society had been described in terms of four colours. This actually made the *Hindu* society beautiful. Here the term ‘colour’ was comprehended with regards to the quality not in terms of the complexion of body. Accordingly, every colour and castes was added its own particular types to the great field of *Hinduism* on the basis of their equality and quantity.

Many would say that the caste system is nothing but *division of labour* through which the efficiency of human beings can be reflected. But there are other sides where we have different interpretations of caste system. Even there is a section of opinion that caste system has its divine origin. In this regards they have depended their position by referring to *Purusa Sukta* from the *Rig Veda*. According to the *Rig Veda*:

*“Brahmanasya Mukhum Asid Bahu Rajanyah Kritah
Uru Tad Asya Vaishyo Padhhyam Sudra Ajayata.”⁷*

It is revealed from the above *Sutras* that at the time of creation, the *Brahmin* was born from the mouth of the *purusha* (the primeval man), the *Kshatriya* from his arms, and the *Vaishya* from his thighs and *Shudra* from his feet. Basically the *hymn* has a symbolic meaning which is not signifying the divinity. Although all castes had been differed in their functions but there we perceived an equal opportunity of the various castes. In this respect Dr. Radhakrishnan’s remarks are quite significant. According to him:

⁷ *Rig Veda* X90,12

“Caste on its social side is a product of human organizations and not a mystery of divine appointment. It is an attempt to regulate society with a view to actual differences and ideal unity. The first reference to it is in the *Purusa Sukta*, where the different sections of society are regarded as the limbs of the great self. Human society is an organic whole, the parts of which are naturally dependent in such a way that each part in fulfilling its distinctive function conditions the fulfillment of function by the rest, and is in turn conditioned by the fulfillment of its function by the rest. In this sense the whole is present in each part; while each part is indispensable to the whole....Each caste has its social purpose and function, in its own code and tradition. It is a close corporation equipped with a certain traditional and independent organization, observing certain usages regarding food and marriage. Each group is free to pursue its own aims free from interference by others. The functions of different castes were regarded as equal important to the well-being of the whole. The serenity of the teacher, the heroism of the warrior, the honesty of the businessman, and the patience and energy of the worker all contribute to the social growth. Each has its own perfection.”⁸

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be said that *Purusa Sukta* does not reflect the origin of caste system. Rather what has been revealed from it is that the caste system is not discriminatory. The *Hymn* does not discriminate between caste and caste or man and man. But all men and all castes were equally important in the eyes of laws of *Hindu Dharma* and society. Many would say that the *Brahmins* were exempted from taxation and even from capital punishment in ancient India. But this perception does not bear any sense. It is certainly wrong information and does not match with the literature available.

Now the question arises if there is no difference between various castes, then what is the necessity of this division and what is the basis of the *Chaturvarna*? How can we divide one

⁸ Radhakrishnan; *the Hindu view of life*, Unwin Books, London, p- 76-77.

Varna from others? Generally the *Varna* or caste of an individual is not determined by birth, but by psychological inclination and the profession enjoyed by the respective individual. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* this fact is classified by the great ‘*Yogin*’ Krishna, who by virtue of having true knowledge of *Brahman* identified himself with God. Krishna says:

“*Chaturvarna Maya sristam*
Gunakarma vibhagasha”⁹

If we carefully go through the inside meaning of the remarks of Krishna as stated above, we can assert the following:

1. The works of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras* would be determined on the basis of the three *Gunas* (three powers) possessed by them.
2. As the *Brahmins* are dominated by *Satta Guna*, accordingly the nature of the works of a *Brahmin* would be peaceful, self-harmonious, austerity, pure, loving-forgiveness and righteousness, vision and wisdom and faith.
3. As the *Kshatriyas* are dominated by *Raja Guna*, accordingly *Kshatriya* has played a role on the society with a heroic mind, inner fire, faithfulness, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity and noble leadership.
4. As the *Vaishyas* are dominated by *Raja* and *Tama Gunas*, accordingly they have done the work of trader, agriculture and the rearing of cattle etc.
5. As the *Shudras* are dominated by *Tama Gunas*, accordingly *Shudras* has served for the three *Varnas*.

Regarding this issue, there we notice another theory which is namely called occupational theory. According to this theory, peoples were categorized in different castes on the basis of their occupations. Today who has called as teachers and priests, in that time they were called

⁹ *Gita* 4/13

Brahmins. Instead of this, the warrior class and other functionaries of the government were called as *Kshatriyas* and the merchants, traders, the industrialists and the agriculturists were called the *Vaishyas*. On the other hand, those who have been doing odd jobs and the unskilled labourers were called the *Shudras*. So, it is clear from it that the necessity of this division was only a classification of the profession of the individuals. With the help of this classification an individual will engage in particular professions. That is why we have called a teacher as *Adhyapak* in Hindi, *Ustad* in Urdu and *Master* or *Professor* in English. But in those days they called them *Brahmin*. Accordingly, we called a business man as *Trader*, but in those days they called them *Vaishya*. Similarly, we have called the person, who has doing odd job as a *labour* or a *coolie*, but in those days they called them *Shudra*. Actually these professions were called *Jatis*, which was later came to be known as caste and the system was caste system. After that we can say the concept of caste system came into our society for the unethical practice of this division. Because caste system has neither a divine origin nor human origin, but it is an evolutionary process which is automatically started. After that this system has constantly practiced our society and makes the system hereditary. As per as the present day scenario is concerned, it is still continue and rigidly practice our society.

It is true that *Hinduism* was not only a religion which practiced this fourfold division of *Varna*. But it would be present in other religion in the same manners. That is why we could perceive such type of systems prevailed in the highly educated society in Europe. The Clergy, the Nobles, the Commons and the serf classes of European countries are regarded as the same position of the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras* of India. Accordingly, this type discrimination has played the key role for constituent of the Government in West Indies, China, Nepal, and Bangladesh etc.

It is true that *Shudras* were regarded as the lowest caste in *Chaturvarna* system and were ill-treated by the upper castes *Hindus*. Although all the *Jatis* or the castes stood at the same level

in *Rig Vedic* period, which has confirmed by *Purusa Sukta*, but there we perceived some differences in the financial status of the different castes. According to the earning capacity of the individuals in respective profession, their financial status differed from others. That is why in the ancient Indian society wealth was not regarded as determinative of the social status, but it was dedicated for the spiritual satisfaction. On the other hand, in *Vedic* period *Shudras* were not the only poor, but the *Brahmins* also belonged to the same class. Basically, the *Kshatriyas* were financially richer and the *Vaishyas* were the richest persons of the society. That is why; *Vaishyas* were regarded as the merchants, producers and controllers of the national wealth. But in spiritually, *Brahmins* were regarded as the top of the Society. So, in the initial stages there were not so much of differences in society. However, with the passage of time these differences did increase throughout the society and after that it was beginning of untouchability.

Having said this, it was remained unanswered from the above whether *Shudras* were untouchables or not? Because, economic status can not determine social status of the individuals, though both are important for execute the life. Some peoples hold that over the course of time *Shudras* were regarded as untouchables or were reduced to their status. But this is an erroneous view. It is true that at the beginning of caste system, *Shudras* were neither treated as untouchables nor at any stages subsequently. Actually, the social status of the *Shudra* did not change. In fact, they remained equal partners of *Chaturvarna* along with the other three castes. They still worked as farmers or skilled or unskilled labourers. That is why; we can say that they were never reduced to the status of untouchables. They had the rights to continue with their professions or to change according to their taste and aptitude. Not only *Shudras* but also the other three castes do the same.

There was another view regarding the origin of untouchability that the Out-castes became untouchable at the same stage. According to this view, *Non-Aryans* and the progeny of

Aryans were violated the laws of *Aryan* society. They were violated the laws with regard to food, matrimony and so on, which were usually imposed on them. In the name of punishment *Aryans* treated them untouchables. According to the testimony of *Manu*: “A *twice-born* man who knowingly eats mushrooms, a village pig, garlic, a village cock, onions or leeks, will become an out-caste.”¹⁰ In this respect Swami Bhaskarananda said: “out-castes, for obvious reasons, did not enjoy the same status as those belonging to the caste-system. They had lower status in the *Aryan* society, but there is no evidence to prove that they were ill treated or hated at that time. Much later, during the decent stage of the caste-system, out-caste were treated as inferior and given the name ‘Untouchables’.”¹¹

Stanley Rice may be regarded as the first, who studied about the origin of untouchability in India. He held that the *Dravidians* were mainly responsible for this inhuman and unethical practice. According to him, after defeating and subjugating the aboriginal tribes, the *Dravidians* reduced them to the position of serfs. They did not belong to the same race as the *Dravidians*. Naturally they assigned them the jobs which they felt beneath their own dignity to perform.

As far as racial difference of the origin of untouchability is concerned, Ambedkar in his book *The Untouchables* referred Stanley Rice. According to Rice, the origin of untouchability was founded in two circumstances, such as, race and occupation. The racial theory of Rice contained two elements, such as:

- (i) That the Untouchables are non-*Aryan*, non-*Dravidian* aboriginals.
- (ii) That they were conquered and subjugated by the *Dravidians*.

We think that this theory raised the whole question of the invasions of India by foreign invaders. In fact, there have been two invasions of India. First was the invasion of India by

¹⁰ Swami Bhaskarananda: *The Essentials of Hinduism*, Sri Ramkrishna Math, Chennai, 1998, P-25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, P-25.

the *Dravidians*. They conquered the non-*Dravidians* aborigines, i.e. the ancestors of the untouchables and made them untouchables. The second invasion was the invasion of India by the *Aryans*. The *Aryans* conquered the *Dravidians*, which ultimately turned into *Shudras*. In this regard, we got a chain of untouchability. When *Dravidians* invaded India and conquered the aborigines they then made them untouchables. After *Aryans* came and conquered the *Dravidians* and subsequently made them *Shudras*.

It is true that *Aryans* were not like a single homogeneous people. They were divided into two sections having different cultures. One of them may be called *Rig Vedic Aryans* and the other *Atharva Vedic Aryans*. The *Rig Vedic Aryans* believed in *Yajna* and the *Atharva Vedic Aryans* believed in *Magis*. However, their methodologies were different. The *Rig Vedic Aryans* believed in the deluge and the creation of their race from *Manu*. But the *Atharva Vedic Aryans* did not believe in deluge, they believed in their creation of their race from *Brahma* or *Prajapati*. They also differed on their literary developments. The *Rig Vedic Aryans* produced *Brahmans*, *Sutras* and *Aranyakas*. The *Artharva Vedic Aryans* produced the *Upanishads*. It was learnt that their culture was so great than the *Rig Vedic Aryans*. But the *Rig Vedic Aryans* would not admit the sanctity of the *Atharva Veda* or *Upanishads*.

Another notable aspect is that *Dravida* was not an original word. It was the *Sanskritized* form of the word *Tamil*. The original word *Tamil* imported from the Sanskrit word *Damila* and later *Damila* became *Dravida*. The word *Dravida* was the name of the language of the people and did not denote the race of the people. More importantly, *Tamil* or *Dravid* was not merely the language of South India, but before the *Aryans* came to India, it was the language of the whole of country.

But there was a third aboriginal race living in India before the arrival of the *Dravidians*. Can it be said that these pre-*Dravidian* aboriginals were the ancestors of the present day untouchables of India? It was, in fact, cleared that the nasal index of the *Chuhra* (the

untouchables) of Bihar was very much distinct from the *Brahmin* of Bihar. The nasal index of *Holiya* (an untouchable) of the Canaries was far higher than the *Brahmin* of Karnataka and that the nasal index of the *Cheruman* (an untouchable lower than the *Pariah*) of the Tamil belonged to the same race as the *Brahmin* of the Tamil Nadu. So, the question is by which to determine the race of the people. This negated that the Untouchables belong to a race different from the *Aryans* and the *Dravidians*. In fact, the measurements established that the *Brahmin* and the Untouchables belonged to the same race. So, it follows from the above that if the *Brahmins* were *Aryans*, then the Untouchables were also *Aryans*. Again if the *Brahmins* were *Dravidians*, then the Untouchables were also *Dravidians*. Similarly, if the *Brahmins* were *Nagas*, then the Untouchables were also *Nagas*.

Thus, my own observation is that the racial theory of Untouchability not only runs counter to the results of anthropometry but it was also very little support from such facts as we know about the ethnology of India. The people of India were once organized on tribal basis and subsequently tribes have become castes. Each tribe was divided into clans and the clans were composed of groups of families. Similarly, each group of families had a totem which has some object animate or inanimate. From the concept of totem we have the concept of *Gotra* or *Kula*. Families having a common *gotra* were not allowed to intermarry for they were supposed to be descended from the same ancestor having the same blood running in their veins. The *Hindu* family was primarily guided in the matter of marriage by consideration of *Kul* and *Gotra* and secondarily by consideration of caste and sub-caste. *Kul* and *Gotra* as *Hindus* were equivalents of the totem of the Primitive Society. This showed that the *Hindu* society was still tribal in its organization with the family at its base observing the rules of exogamy based on *Kul* and *Gotra*. If the same *Kul* and *Gotra* were found to exist in different castes and communities, then it would be possible to say that the castes though socially different were racially one. The Untouchables are racially different from the *Aryans* or the

Dravidians because the main extent of the population in Maharashtra was consists of *Marathas*. The *Mahars* were Untouchables of Maharashtra. However, the anthropological investigation showed that both have the same *Kul*. The identity was so great that there was hardly a *Kul* among the Marathas, which was not to be found among the *Mahars*. There was no *Kul* among the *Mahars*, which was not to be found among the Marathas. The same has happened in other castes as well. Given these facts how can it be argued that the Untouchables belong to a different race? According to Ambedkar, if totem, *kul* and *gotra* have any significance, it means that those who have the same totem must have been kindred. If they were kindred then they could not be persons of different race. Thus, on the basis of the above observation it can be said, after Ambedkar, that the racial theory of the origin of Untouchability is no longer relevant. It should therefore be neglected.

According to the historical investigation, it is quite clear that till the age of Harsha there was no untouchability in India. Even Chinese travelers like Fahien and Hieun Tsang did not mention the words untouchable or untouchability in their respective accounts. Some people, however, felt that Fahien who lived here from 399 A.D. to 414 A.D. has written about the existence of untouchability in India. When Fahien came and lived here the people in general did not observe rules of high morality. The people killed neither living thing nor drunken wine nor did they eat garlic or onion, with exception of *Chandalas* only. *Chandalas* were the only people who did not observe the high rules of morality. They were named 'evil man' and dwelt apart from others. According to the view of Fahien, the *Chandalas* only hunt and sell flesh. That means, though the people in general led a highly moral life would neither kill any living being nor eat meat, garlic or onion nor would drink wine. Yet there were some people who were non-vegetarian and ate flesh.

Thus from the above it is not very difficult to understand that the common messes giving way to the *Chandalas* for avoiding contact. After all, it was a society of vegetarians who

would not like to eat even garlic or onion, where *Chandalas* did opposite. In this regard a question arises, how could they touch them or look at flesh? For that matter even touch of a person was put in question who always carried flesh. At the approach of a *Chandala* carrying flesh, they would give him way to avoid contact.

It is true that there is nothing strange in *Chandala's* living outside the village or the town. It was the compulsion of their calling. They kept swine and fowls, which others would not keep. Their profession involved hunting, slaughtering animals and selling flesh. It was the nature of their work that compelled them to live away from the habitation of the people. In this regard today's effort is always and everywhere going on to keep the slaughter houses outside the towns or villages and away from the gaze of the masses.

Ambedkar argued that if the *Chandalas* could not be untouchables as they were rulers also at that time. Then the other communities living outside the village were neither *Broken Men* (Who performing watch and ward duties with swords in hands), nor the *Buddhists Monks* counting beads. On the other hand, there were ordinary men, who were busy in their daily chores to earn their living. They were living outside the village not because they were untouchables; rather it was the demand of their professions. They skinned the dead animals, sold flesh, fish and wine and mended their nets in spare time. Such profession demanded their doers to stay away from normal habitations. Even today such works are being done at places far away from towns and villages.

As per as the questions of cow-slaughter and beef-eating are concerned, those who broke the law must have suffered punishment at the hands of the lawful authority. Declaring them as untouchables could neither have been desirable nor feasible. No king or any other authority could ever declare a part of his subjects as Untouchables. Untouchability was certainly not an unexpected eruption, but a gradual process of evolutions. It did not occur for beef-eating or professing a religion offensive to another religion.

So, it is important to know, what is the historical analysis regarding the origin of untouchability? If we go through the historical investigation, we can see that there is no mention of untouchability anywhere in India at least at the end of Harsha's reign or even sometime after. Dr. Ambedkar, however, holds a different view that has been reflected in a passage from another Chinese traveler Hieun Tsang's *Si-yu-ki*. He comes to the conclusion that untouchability had come to India probably in 400 A.D.

Dr. Ambedkar who had doubted the hint thrown by Fahien, that untouchability had probably come to India sometimes in 400 A.D. *Chandalas* were also rulers during those days. That is why they could not be regarded as untouchables. Ambedkar has changed his opinions, after learnt Hieun Tsang's account that many other communities too had their dwelling outside the town or the village. Ambedkar concluded that untouchability came to India in 400 A.D. when he knows that the cow-killing and beef-eating had been made capital offences by the Gupta rulers in 4th century A.D. At this time there were a struggle for supremacy between *Buddhism* and *Brahmanism*.

Thus, it seems clear that there was no untouchability during the days of Harsha. We could not find any reason or proof of its emergence. But this is also a fact that the untouchability did exist in India till independence. After that it was abolished legally. It means untouchability must have emerged somewhere after Harsha's rule, may be even a few centuries after. We also know that the untouchables were neither the *Broken-Men*, nor those who has belonged to the despised callings, such as the *Chandalas*, the hunters, the trappers, the fishermen, the butchers, or the turners etc. They were not even the *Dasyus*, whom the Aryans had defeated a long time ago. So questioned arises who were they?

It was important to know that, when untouchability first appeared, how and when and under what circumstances it appeared and who the first untouchables became. In this regard it was said that untouchability came after Harsha's rule or a few centuries after that. It could not

have come in the entire country all at once. As the transport and communication, in these days were very slow, it might have been a gradual process. It spread the whole of the country gradually. Actually the reason for its emergence must be of great political and social importance. The impact of which is being very severely felt even to this day. Looking at the things from this point of view it may be easier to find out the reasons for its emergence.

On the other hand, we must know who actually the untouchables are. In this respect there is a long list, which was given by Dr. Ambedkar. All the scheduled castes and the untouchables are included in that list. Going through the list we find that only one class of people who are really untouchables. Those who clean the lavatories and carry the night soil over their heads and the scavengers who clean the roads, the streets, market places and all the public places and the residential house of people are untouchables. As we know such people were already there in the country. The filthy and unclean work was done by the slaves and the slaves were not untouchables, because they performed various other duties including the rubbing the master's limbs, when desired.

Now the question is: who performed this filthy and unclean work for the common man? The answer is none. Because this dirty and unclean job were sub-divided into two parts: The first is the cleaning the lavatories and carrying the night soil over one's head. The second is the scavenging the roads and the streets. Actually the dirtier of the two was cleaning of the lavatories carrying the night soil over one's head, which nobody would like to do. The other i.e. the scavenging the roads and the streets was not as dirty as to attract abhorrence of everyone. People could be found to do this work. There was no reason to treat them as untouchables. They could not be government servants or even slaves. Keeping in view the size of a village, a town, or even a city, in those days, one can easily imagine that not a large number of people were needed to do the job of scavenging.

It is well known to all of us that the Indian houses, in the pre or even post Harsha period for some time did not have latrines. Those who were belonging to the royalty or the high and mighty could afford the luxury of having slaves to do the filthy and unclean work. At the same time it is also clear that there was no untouchability at that time. So, in that time slaves were not untouchables. In this regard we highlight the *Yajnavalkya's* theory about slavery. The meaning of his theory is that a *Brahmin*, if he was a slave, a *Kshatriya* if he was a slave, a *Vaishya* if he was a slave and a *Shudra* if he was a slave did the filthy and unclean work of a scavenger. Only a *Brahmin* would not do scavenging in the house of a *Kshatriya*, a *Vaishya*, or a *Shudra*. But he would do scavenging in the house of a *Brahmin*. Similarly, a *Kshatriya* would do scavenging in the house of a *Brahmin* and a *Kshatriya* only. He would not do this dirty work in the house of a *Vaishya* or *Shudra*. A *Vaishya* would do scavenging in the house of a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, and a *Vaishya*. Only he would not do in the house of a *Shudra*. A *Shudra* slave would do this dirty and unclean work in the house of a *Brahmin*, a *Kshatriya*, a *Vaishya* and also a *Shudra*.

So, it is clear that the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishya* and *Shudras* who are admittedly the *Aryans* did the work of scavengers, which is the filthiest of the filthy occupations. Another important thing is that *Aryans* did the scavenging which is 'filthiest of the filthy' works. Even if a *Brahmin* slave did the dirty work in the house of *Brahmin* only and would not do it for any other castes, but he would do it for an *Aryan* only. A *Kshatriya* slave doing dirty work for his *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* master would be doing so for an *Aryan*. The same was the case with the *Vaishya* and *Shudra* slave. So, it is quite clear that slavery did exist among the *Aryans* and all caste of *Aryans* could be slave.

In this regard it is important to point out that the word 'Aryan' used here may be considered to have been used for the entire *Hindu* Society. At that time the *Aryans*, the aboriginal tribes, the *Dravidians*, as well as the foreigners who had been coming to India from time to time

were completely absorbed by the *Hindu* Society. All of them, along with the *Aryans* constituted the famous *Chaturvarna*. So, all of the four castes viz. *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* were the constituents of this composite *Hindu* Society.

Now the question arises, if a person, who belongs to any of the four castes, becomes a slave of any person, who were not belonging to *Chaturvarna* system and even not belonging to India itself, then what would be his position? Would he do the filthy and unclean work for his master? If he forced to do it on the pain of death, what would he do? Obviously under such circumstances some would prefer death and some would surrender to the pressure. In this circumstance the question arises: How would the society react to that? With the sympathies with them or take some strict action against them? This, in fact, is not a hypothetical question. This situation actually confronted the Indian society when the *Muslim* invasions started in India. The *Muslim* rulers and aristocracy needed someone to do this dirty and unclean work for them. Who would better fit the job than the enslaved people of their fallen enemy? All these men, women and children are belonging to all the four caste, who were enslaved by the victorious *Muslim* armies. They could be asked to perform this dirty job of scavenging for them. Many must have refused and preferred death to dishonor. The others, who were not so brave, they were compelled to do this work.

So, it may be argued that on behalf of the *Muslim* rulers the *Hindu* slaves have to do the dirty work for them, which were not entirely wrong. The *Hindu* slaves had already been doing this work for their masters before the *Muslim* rules. It is true that *Hindu* slaves did the dirty work for their masters in ancient India. But at this time the circumstances were different. It needs to be understood that the *Aryans* could do the dirty work only for the *Aryans* and that too with restrictions. The slaves belonging to the upper castes would not do the dirty work for a caste lower. During this time they had the full support and acceptance of the entire *Hindu* society. Under this circumstances how could *Hindu* slaves belong to all the

castes will do the dirty work for the *Muslim* masters, who did not belong to *Chaturvarna*? They were aliens and were considered even lower than the *Shudras*. This is how the curse of untouchability had first appeared in this country.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can easily say that there are three probable dates which can be considered the Origin of Untouchability. The first is the early eight century, when the Arabs invaded and occupied *sindh*. The second is the first quarter of the eleventh century, when Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India seventeen times. The third is the early thirteenth century, when Qutb-ud-din Aibek established himself as sultan of Delhi.

ORIGIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY: ACCORDING TO DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR

Generally Ambedkar's contribution in the case of finding the origin of untouchability and to procuring valuable material from the various sources is laudable. For these investigations Ambedkar comes across many missing links and solved the problem arbitrarily. He also takes the help of imagination and intuition for enquiry the origin of untouchability. But it is true that some methods are neither rational nor in accordance with the principle of objectivity. Ambedkar not only use the historical method, but also depends on rationality. In this respect he says: "...in the course of my investigations into the origin of untouchability and other inter-connected problems I have been confronted with many missing links. It is true that I am not the only one who has been confronted with them. All students of Indian history had to face them.....the question is: what is a student of history to do? Is he cry halt and stop his work until the link is discovered? I think not. I believed that in such cases it is permissible for him to use his imagination and intuition to bridge the gaps left in the chain of facts by links not yet discovered and to propound a working hypothesis suggesting how facts might have been inter-connected. I must admit that rather than hold up to work, I have

preferred to resort to this means to get over the difficulty created by the missing links which have come in my way.”¹²

This position of Ambedkar is not unfair and against the principle of objectivity. However, he makes his work suspect in the view of his anti-*Hindu* or anti-*Brahmin* stance. Generally Ambedkar is known as a *Hindu* or *Brahmin* baiter. According to him, *Brahmins* are responsible for generating untouchability in our society. He clearly understands that neither the criminal tribes nor the aboriginals or their poverty owe their existence to the *Hindu* Society. That is why, *Hinduism* lost its independence with the establishment of the *Muslim* rule in our country. So, the untouchables are not only the creation of *Hindu* society, but the *Muslim* rulers also responsible for these unhealthy practices. According to this view, the *chandalas*, the butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and the scavengers were not untouchables. Ambedkar also admits that they were not untouchables, because from ancient times all these classes of workers existed in India. There is no untouchability till the *Manu Smriti* appeared in its present form. This is why, Ambedkar said: “If *chandalas* were untouchables how an untouchable girl could enter the king’s palace? How could an untouchable be described in the superlative terms used by *Bana*? Far from being degraded the *chandalas* of *Bana*’s period had ruling families among them. For *Bana* speaks of the *chandala* girl as a *chandala* princess. *Bana* wrote some time about 600 A.D. and by 600 A.D. the *chandalas* had not come to be regarded as untouchables. It is, therefore, quite possible that the conditions described by Fa-Hian, though bordering on untouchability, may not be taken as amounting to untouchability.”¹³

¹² B.R. Ambedkar: *The Untouchables, who were they? And why they became Untouchables?* Amrit Book Co, New Delhi, 1948, P- IV.

¹³ *Ibid.*, P-153-54.

According to Ambedkar, the probable date when the untouchability entered into the Indian social system was 400 A.D. He arrived at this date by taking into consideration two date limits. Firstly, the upper date limit to which the untouchability was not there in the Indian society. Secondly the lower date limit to which the untouchability had entered into the Indian society. In this regard, he depended upon the *Manu Smriti*. In *Manu Smriti*, there is no mention of untouchability. That means till *Manu Smriti* appeared in written form, there was no untouchability in India. It is believed that *Manu Smriti* written somewhere in or after 185 B.C. On the other hand, the lower date i.e. the latest date of the coming of untouchability in Indian Society. In this regard Ambedkar first refers to the Chinese pilgrim Fahien who visited India from 399 A.D. to 414 A.D. Fahien wrote about India and her people:

“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. In this country they do not keep swine or fowls, and do not deal in cattle; they have no shambles or wine shops, in their market places. In selling they use cowrie’s shells. The *Chandalas* only hunt and sell flesh.”¹⁴

After that we can say that it is not clear from Fahien’s remark about India that untouchability existed in society or not. That is why; Ambedkar refers to another Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang or Yuan Chawang, who lived in India from 629 A.D. to 644 A.D. In his writing we saw the hint of untouchability. So, Ambedkar comes to the conclusion that untouchability did not exist in 200 A.D. but had emerged in 600 A.D. According to Ambedkar, an approximate date takes the help of the date of when cow-slaughter regarded a capital

¹⁴ A.S. Altekar; *state and Government in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsi Dass, Delhi, 1958. P-47.

offence. The date of cow-slaughter became a capital offence was somewhere in the 4th century A.D. So, Ambedkar takes the probable date of the origin of untouchability as 400 A.D. because it must be around this date that the *Broken Men* were declared Untouchables for their habit of beef- eating.

Generally, *Broken Men* theory is called the theory of the origin of untouchability, which has given by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In pre-historic days the people of the society was tribal and led nomadic life. Their main occupation has being the domestication of animals like horses, goats, sheep, cows and oxen etc. They were always moving in search of pastures green. When they learned the art of farming and cultivating the land, their nomadic character started giving way to settled life. It had developed their love for land in addition to that for the cattle. But the change over form the nomadic to settle life was running very slow. While some tribes took to a settled life, in the same time others continued to be the nomads. But, this brought the new types of problems for both the nomadic and the settled tribes.

The nomadic tribes had their own problem. It was the result of constant inter-tribal warfare. It happened that a tribe instead of being completely annihilated defeated and routed. In many cases it was broken into bits. Dr. Ambedkar calls them *Broken Men*, as they had broken from their original tribes. As a result they are always existed in primitive times. But the society has being tribal during those days and tribal organization being based on common blood and common kinship. If an individual are born in one tribe, then he could not join another tribe. The *Broken Men* therefore had to live as lost individuals. That is why; they are always in danger of being attacked. In this reason they needed shelter and protection for them. That is why; the settled tribes and the *Broken Men* came to each other's help. The settled tribes needed a body of men to protect them from the repeated invasions of the nomadic tribes, which *Broken Men* provided. They needed food and shelter, to save themselves from the attack of the nomadic tribes, which the settled tribes provided them. As a result, they became

regarded as a labour. Ambedkar says: “It explains why the untouchables regarded the *Brahmins* as inauspicious, do not employ them as their priests and do not even allow them to enter into their quarters. It also explains why the *Broken Men* came to be regarded as Untouchables. 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*.”¹⁵ So, according to Ambedkar, Untouchables were presented as descendants of *Buddhists* who regarded themselves as endowed with a separate identity.

From the pre-historic period these *Broken Men* were known as untouchables and they have been living outside the village. For Ambedkar, the untouchable had been living outside the village, even before they become Untouchables. That is why; they had been entitled as *Antya*, *Antyaja* and *Antyavasin*, which are given to certain communities by the *Hindu Shashtras*. According to Ambedkar, the word *Antya* means not the end of creation but end of the village. It is a name given to those people who lived on the border of the village. The word *Antya* has therefore a survival value. It tells us that there was a time when some people lived inside the village and some lived outside the village. Those who lived outside the village, i.e. on the *Antya* of the village are called *Antyaja*. Ambedkar puts forward to prove that untouchables were only the *Broken Men*; he puts the example of the *Mahar* community of Maharashtra. This is a community to which Ambedkar himself belonged. He described the relations between the *Mahars* and the touchable *Hindus*, which was existed during his days. So Ambedkar comes to the conclusion that *Broken Men* were living outside the village. They became the untouchables and that untouchables had always been living outside the village and that untouchability had nothing to do with their residence being outside the village.

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¹⁵ Private Papers of Moonje, NMML, letter of Moonje ti Malaviya, August 23, 1936.