

## INTRODUCTION

It is well known to all of us that before 1950s, the untouchables were divided into three categories – Untouchables, Unapproachables, and Unseables. Out of three hundred million *Hindus*, they were only sixty million peoples who were regarded as Untouchables. That means almost twenty percent of *Hindus* were treated as Untouchable in India. They had been identified in different names in different parts of the country. They were called Outcastes, Untouchables, Pariahs, Panchamas, Atishudras, Avarnas, Antyajas and Namashudras etc. Actually their social disabilities were specific, severe and numerous. Their touch, shadow and even voice were polluted the caste *Hindus*. They have no right to keep certain domestic animal, to use certain ornaments etc. They were bound to wear a particular dress, to eat particular type of food. They were forced to live in dirty, dingy and unhygienic outskirts of villages or town. They have no right to use the public wells. Along with the caste *Hindu* children, they were not admitted in the school.

Now the question is: who or which is responsible for this? What is the origin of this unhealthy system? Generally the answer occurs that Hinduism is responsible for it and the division of *Varna* and caste system of Hinduism is the origin of this unhealthy system in our society. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his book *Annihilation of Caste* insists that the *Varna* division is the root cause of Untouchability and caste system is the final cause of spreading these unhealthy practices. So, it is important to discuss about the trio-concepts of Hinduism: *Varna*, Caste and Untouchability.

The triangular form of Hinduism, such as, *Varna*, Caste and Untouchability, is only one of the maladies afflicting India, the ancient *Bharat*. It is an illness, a serious disease like cancer, spreading slowly but steadily in the whole body of India. These days, all the three forms of sickness have been working and affecting the minds of the people of all shades, yet to many of the Indians. So, this triangular appears to be non-existent entities. Is it true? No, not at all,

the afflicted persons, like scheduled caste and the weaker sections, know the intricacies as to how these maladies function minutely and maliciously to despise and degrade them. To say these ills have disappeared and are non-functional is to ignore the facts and afflictions. That is why; they create for the downtrodden, the weak and the lowly of our society. It is an illusion, because, if anyone thinks that *Varna*, caste and untouchability have become non-functional these days, then it is important to examine the modus operandi of each one separately.

### VARNA

The *Purusha Sukta* contains the theory of *Chaturvarna*, which was created by *Prajapati*, God – the Creator, not only of the universe, but also the creator of *Chaturvarna*. The constitution of society has divided into four classes (Varnas), i.e., the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*. They were created from the *Prajapati*'s mouth, his arms, his thighs, and the feet, respectively. In other words, the *Brahmins* were the priests, the *Kshatriyas* were the soldiers, the *Vaishyas* were the traders, and the *Shudras* were the menials or the servants of the people of three upper *varnas*. Thus, the constitution of society prescribed by the *Purusha Sukta* was known as *Chaturvarnya*. All the *Veda-Shastras*, including *Manusmriti*, confirmed such an ideal to be divine and infallible, because it was God-given for ideal social governance.

According to *Manu*, the four *Varnas* *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* were created for the prosperity of the world. The first three of them were called twice-born (*Dvijas*), i.e. the first was the natural birth. The second birth happened only after *Upanayana* ceremony of offering the sacred girdle or thread (*Janeyu*) to the boy. That is why; they were called twice-born. But this was denied to the *Shudras* and thus, they had only one birth. The role of *Manusmriti* was two-fold – (i) giving to the *Purusha Sukta* a divine injunction, and (ii) declaring the Veda as the only and ultimate sanction for *Varnashrama Dharma*. Thus, the

social ideal of *Chaturvarnya* was adorned with a degree of divinity and infallibility, which means that no one could challenge its original and functioning. What was, then the basis of *Chaturvarnya*'s organization and functioning? The theory of *guna* and *karma* was applied to each individual according to Varna. Every individual would be placed in a *Varna* according to his worth and merits. This was confirmed by *Vedas, Brahmanas, Dharmashastras, Smritis, Mahabharat* and the *Bhagavada Gita*.

*Varna* has its own *guna* (worth) and *Karma* (duty). The *Brahmins guna* was purity to know the *Veda-Shastras* and to teach others as a duty. The *Kshatriyas guna* was valour and his duty was to defend the society and the country from disorder and invasion. The *Vaishyas guna* was to learn trade and his duty was to manage economic affairs. Lastly, the *Shudras guna* was nothing but to serve the three varnas people with all devotion and without asking wages except some food, eatables and tattered clothes. Now the problem is: who belongs to the *Varna* and how he carries on their respective functions or duties. Who was responsible to maintain and place the individuals into each *Varna* according to their worth and merits? Why did the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* fail in *Hindu* life? It is a riddle to know, exactly.

An answer may be given in the words of Dr. Ambedkar who observed thus: "*Chaturvarnya* presupposes that you can classify people into four definite classes. Is this possible? In this respect, the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* has close affinity to the platonic ideal. To Plato, men fell by nature into three classes. In some individuals, he believed mere appetites dominated. He assigned them to the labouring and trading classes. Others revealed to him that over and above appetites, they have a courageous disposition. He classed them as defenders in war and guardians of internal peace. Others showed a capacity to grasp the universal reason underlying things. He made them the law-givers of the people. The chief criticism against Plato is that his idea of lumping of individuals into a sharply marked-off class is a very superficial view of man and his powers. Plato had no perception of the uniqueness of every

individual, of his incommensurability with others, of each individual forming a class of his own. He had no recognition of the infinite diversity of active tendencies and combination of tendencies of which an individual is capable. To him, there were other types of faculties or powers in the individual constitution. All this is obviously wrong. Modern science has shown that lumping together of individuals into a few sharply marked-off classes is a superficial view of man not worthy of serious consideration. Consequently, the utilization of the qualities of individuals is incompatible with their stratification by classes, since the qualities of individuals are so variable. *Chaturvarnya* must fail for the very reason for which Plato's Republic must fail, namely that it is not possible to pigeon men into holes, according as he belongs to one class or the other. That is impossible to accurately classify people into four definite classes is proved by the fact that the original four classes have now become four thousand castes.”<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for the failure of *Chaturvarnya* is the meaning of *Varna*. The term 'Varna' also stands for one's 'colour', i.e., the colour of the upper three *Varna*'s, who must be fair (*gora*) and not black (black). It was so presumed when the *Varna* system was initially propounded. But it could not be possible as it was not in the hands of the profounder of *Varna* theory. In the long run, it was also found that the progeny of the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and the *Vaishyas* failed to acquire the *guna* (worth or the merits) and also could not carry on the prescribed duties of teaching *Veda-shastras*, defending the country and the trade marketing. Their progeny has come out to be non-possession of worth and fair colour; but found to be duffers and black. The *Brahmins* are realized that the classification of men into four definite classes was not based on heredity. The basis of *Chaturvarnya*'s *guna-karma* was replaced by birth, i.e., the progeny of each person would be *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*

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<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar, B.R., *Annihilation of Caste*, 1994, PP.43-44.

and *Shudra*, on the basis of birth, not worth, if born in the same *Varna*. Thus, the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* was shifted from worth to the birth of an individual. It was a tragedy in the history of the *Varna Vyavastha*.

### CASTE

*Varna* then arose and assumed a new name, i.e., 'caste' that means, if a boy or a girl born to a *Brahmin* family, *Kshatriya* or a *Vaishya's* family, he or she would be the same caste whatever his or her worth or merits. He or she may be a stupid or a duffer, illiterate, deformed, blind or lunatic, but he would be regarded as the same caste. The difference between *Varna* and caste may be summed up thus:

“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. How are you going to compel people who have acquired a higher status based on birth without reference to their worth to vacate that status. How are you going to compel people to recognize the status due to a man in accordance with his worth, who is occupying a lower status based on his birth?”<sup>2</sup>

Now the question is: why the worth was replaced by birth? It was, undoubtedly, a conspiracy on the part of *Brahmanism* which stood for social inequality and degradation of the *Shudras*. The *Shudras* were denied the right to education, arms and trade in order to keep them under subjugation for serving the so called higher castes' people. The *Varna* still works in matters of superiority of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas*, irrespective of the fact that they are divided into several castes one over the other. The *Varna* superiority exists mentally, but the caste's behavior or bias exists everywhere and works openly in terms of discrimination,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.42.

groupies, alienation, atrocities on the weaker section of our society. “I am a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya* or a *Vaishya*”, indicates the mental state of these people. But the caste feelings alienate them from one another. It is the caste-ridden society that ails India today, much more than the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* which is now practically extinct, but mentally prevails in matters of inter-caste marriages and party-politics in India.

The effects of caste system may be seen not only in society but also in Indian politics and management, in elections and administrative matters. The role of caste is some time hidden and sometimes open, afflicting the minds of rationalists and humanist of our country. The life of *Hindus* has been a life of continuous defeatism and what appears to them to be life everlasting is not ever-lastingly. But is really a life which is afflicting them for centuries long. The caste system of *Hindus* has been a continuous headache to entrap them into narrow-walls. The right-minded *Hindus* have distaste for it. But the majority of *Hindus* believes in its authority. Probably most of them believed that the caste system is profitable because of its close link with priesthood and certain benefits or privileges by way of manifold ceremonies among *Hindus*.

These days caste has entrapped everyone, whether belonging to the higher caste or to lower one. In view of the fact that the people, being the members of a particular caste, they are busy in seeking their origin from a *Sage* or a *Rishi* as a progeny of him. By this way all the castes people feel to be proud of being the progeny of a great *Sage* or *Rishi*. This keeps them confined to a particular caste. They called it ‘*Samaj*’ (society or community). The word ‘caste’ is something mentally bad, but the term ‘*Samaj*’ gives them an emotional satisfaction. Ambedkar contends that the transmission from *Varna* to caste and from caste to *Samaj* may not be the end. According to him, they declare their *Samaj* a ‘nation’, like during the freedom movement, the *Muslims* claimed themselves to be a ‘nation’, the *Sikhs* did the same and the *Jains* too endeavored to be a ‘nation’. The *Scheduled Caste* also demanded that they be

recognized as a separate among the *Hindus*. What would be the result or repercussion, no one thought of it.

Instead of the annihilation of caste system, it has now emerged as a powerful weapon for fighting in favors of reservation to their caste-people. This way caste has been openly vitiating the environment of this country and in the minds of the higher castes people. The caste-based distribution of partly tickets, while holding elections, and the selection of candidates on the basis of caste population is an unfortunate process that has gripped the mentality of our leader. This affects the democratic system of governance as well as the unity of the nation. What ought to be done, has become a riddle to many of us. The caste role does not stop here. It also influenced *Sikhs, Jainas, Muslims, Christians* and other religious groups to demand reservations to their respective communities. Thus, *Varna* and Caste have become the enemies of Indian political right from ancient to these days. The *Varna* mentality and caste- ridden social system have been ailing India; this can not be denied by any nationalist. How the Indian society could become a 'caste-less society'? Could it be abolished in future? It seems to me a dream for ever, because the *Varna* or the caste is a part and parcel of Hinduism, being the sacred and infallible aspect of it.

#### UNTOUCHABILITY

An untouchable is a name that has generally been applied to a person who belongs to the lowest class of *Hindu* society. It first appeared in the year of 1909. The word is a literal translation of the *Hindu* word *Achhut*, it also means *depressed classes* which has not begun to appear and *lower castes*. The Webster's dictionary vividly describes untouchable as a member of a large hereditary group in India having traditional *Hindu* belief and quality of defiling by contact the person, food or drink of a member of a higher caste and formerly being strictly degraded and restricted to menial work.

How the disease of untouchability emerged as a byproduct of *Varna* and caste has been studied well seriously and historically by the well-educated scholars. It may be noted here that untouchability is more harmful and ruinous than *Varna* and caste in terms of its sharp and inhuman treatment of the untouchables who were the part and parcel of India. That is why the *Indian Constitution*, without any hitch and hesitation, first of all came forward to abolish it. The Constitution, in its Article 17, declares: “Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.”<sup>3</sup>

However, the Indian Constitution anyhow does not abolish ‘Varna’ or ‘Caste’. Despite of the abolition of untouchability, its practice continues unabatedly less incites but more in rural areas, especially in remote villages. The fact, however, is that untouchability exists in subtle varied forms in both urban and rural areas. Here it is necessary to ask: who were the Untouchables? By whom untouchability afflicted, severely and sharply? The answer may be found in these lines:

“*Savarna* is generally contrasted with *Avarana*. *Savarna* means one who belongs to one of the four *Varnas*. *Avarana* is one who does not belong to any one of the four *Varnas*. The *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are *Savaranas*. The Untouchables or *Ati-Shudras* are called *Avaranas*, those who have no *Varna* logically, the Untouchables or the *Ati-Shudras* are outside the *Chaturvarnya*. *Dvija* is generally contrasted with non-*Dvija*. *Dvija* literally means twice born and non-*Dvija* means one who is born only once.”<sup>4</sup>

This distinction was made on account of the ceremony of *Upanayana* which means the offering of the ‘Sacred Thread’ (*Janeyu*) and the boy of anyone belonging to the upper three *Varnas* after this ceremony was called *Dvija*. The right to *Upanayana* was limited to the

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<sup>3</sup> The Constitution, Article 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Who were the Shudras?*, Thacker & Co., Bombay, 1947, PP.1-6

*Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas*, but not to the *Shudras*. This way the *Shudras* were denied the privileges to have education, arms and wealth etc. A section of the *Shudras* suffered so much that they became '*Ati-Shudras*', also called as *Antyajyas*, or the most degraded class of *Hindus*. It was the *Ati-Shudras* who became 'Untouchables', the *Avaranas* or the *Antyajyas*. In due course of time, the Untouchables were hated and were subjected to severe indignities such as their mere touching seeing and shadow, could pollute the *Swavarnas* except the *Shudras*. The *Traivanikas*, thus, conspired to degrade the lot of *Ati-Shudras* or *Antyajyas* to the maximum extent and denied to them the rights to education, arms and wealth. The notion of untouchability came into existence, declaring the *Ati-Shudras* or the Untouchables as 'impure' or 'unholy'.

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