

CHAPTER 4

Symbols of Hinduism

There are 37 pages under this title. The chapter seems incomplete. However this relates to the topic No. 7 of the original plan. All these pages are tagged along with the pages of "India and Communism" into One register. We are reproducing the text of this typed copy along with the table of contents written by Dr. Ambedkar.

A photo copy of the plan of a proposed book 'Can I be a Hindu ?' is also reproduced from the original (moth-eaten).—Editors

Is there anything peculiar in the social organization of the Hindus ? An unsophisticated Hindu who is unaware of investigations conducted by scholars will say that there is nothing peculiar, abnormal or unnatural in the organization of the Hindu society. This is quite natural. People who live their lives in isolation are seldom conscious of the peculiarities of their ways and manners. People have gone on from generation to generation without stopping to give themselves a name. But how does the social organization of the Hindus strike the outsiders, the non-Hindus ? Did it appear to them as normal and natural as it appears to the Hindus?

Megasthenese who came to India as the ambassador of the Greek King Seleukos Nicator to the Court of Chandragupta Maurya some time about the year 305 B.C. did feel that the social organization of the Hindus was of a very strange sort. Otherwise, he would not have taken such particular care to describe the peculiar features of the Hindu social organization. He has recorded:

“The population of India is divided into seven parts. The philosophers are first in rank, but form the smallest class in point of

number. Their services are employed privately by persons who wish to offer sacrifices or perform other sacred rites, and also publicly by the kings at what is called the Great Synod, wherein at the beginning of the new year all the philosophers are gathered together before the king at the gates, when any philosopher who may have committed any useful suggestion to writing, or observed any means for improving the crops and the cattle, or for promoting the public interests, declares it publicly. If anyone is detected giving false information thrice, the law condemns him to be silent for the rest of his life, but he who gives sound advice is exempted from paying any taxes or contributions. The second caste consists of the husbandmen, who form the bulk of the population, and are in disposition most mild and gentle. They are exempted from military service, and cultivate their lands undisturbed by fear. They never go to town, either to take part in its tumults, or for any other purpose. It therefore not unfrequently happens that at the same time, and in the same part of the country, men may be seen drawn up in array of battle, and fighting at risk of their lives, while other men close at hand are ploughing and digging in perfect security, having these soldiers to protect them. The whole of the land is the property of the king, and the husbandmen till it on condition of receiving one-fourth of the produce.

The third caste consists of herdsmen and hunters, who alone are allowed to hunt, and to keep cattle and to sell draught animals or let them out on hire. In return for clearing the land of wild beasts and fowls which devour the seeds sown in the fields, they receive an allowance of grain from the king. They lead wandering life and live under tents.

The fourth class, after herdsmen and hunters, consists of those who work at trades, of those who vend wares, and of those who are employed in bodily labour. Some of these pay tribute, and render to the state certain prescribed services. But the armourmakers and shipbuilders receive wages and their victuals from the king, for whom alone they work. The general in command of the army supplies the soldiers with weapons, and the admiral of the fleet lets out ships on hire for the transport both of passengers and merchandise.

The fifth class consists of fighting men, who when not engaged in active service, pass their time in idleness and drinking. They are maintained at the king's expense, and hence they are always ready, when occasion calls, to take the field, for they carry nothing of their own with them but their own bodies.

The sixth class consists of the overseers, to whom is assigned the duty of watching all that goes on, and making reports secretly to the king. Some are entrusted with the inspection of the city, and others with that of the army. The former employ as their coadjutors the courtezans of the city, and the latter the courtezans of the camp. The ablest and most trustworthy men are appointed to fill these offices.

The seventh class consists of the Councillors and assessors of the king. To them belong the highest posts of government, the tribunals of justice, and the general administration of public affairs.

No one is allowed to marry out of his own caste, or to exchange one profession or trade for another, or to follow more than one business. An exception is made in favour of the philosopher, who for his virtue is allowed this privilege."

Alberuni who wrote an account of his travels in India some time about 1030 AD must have been struck by the peculiarity of the Hindu social organization. For he too has not omitted to make a note of it in the record of impressions he made. He observed:—

"The Hindus call their castes *varna* i.e. colours, and from a genealogical point of view they call them *jataka* i.e., births. These castes are from the very beginning only four.

I. The highest caste are the Brahmins of whom the books of the Hindus tell that they were created from the head of Brahma. And a Brahma is only another name for the force called nature, and the head is the highest part of the animal body, the Brahmana are the choice part of the whole genus. Therefore the Hindus consider them as the very best of mankind.

II. The next caste are the Kshatriyas, who were created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahma. Their degree is not much below that of the Brahmana.

III. After them follow the Vaisyas, who were created from the thigh of Brahma.

IV. The Sudras, who were created from his feet.

Between the latter two classes there is no very great distance. Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings.

After the Sudra follow the people called Antyaja, who render various kinds of services, who are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. There are eight classes of them who freely intermarry with each other, except the fuller, shoemaker and weaver, for no others would condescend to

have anything to do with them. These eight guilds are the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them.

The people called Hadi, Doma (Domba), Candala, and Badhatau (sic) are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact, they are considered like illegitimate children; for according to general opinion they descend from a Sudra father and a Brahmani mother as the children of fornication; therefore they are degraded outcaste.

The Hindus give to every single man of the four castes characteristic names, according to their occupations and modes of life, eg., the Brahman is in general called by this name as long as he does his work staying at home. When he is busy with the service of one fire, he is called *ishtin*; if he serves three fires, he is called *Agnihotrin*; if he besides offers an offering to the fire, he is called *Dikshita*. And as it is with the Brahmana, so is it also with the other castes. Of the classes beneath the castes, the Hadi are the best spoken of, because they keep themselves free from everything unclean. Next follow the Doma, who play on the lute and sing. The still lower classes practise as a trade killing and the inflicting of judicial punishments. The worst of all are the Badhantan, who not only devour the flesh of dead animals, but even of dogs and other beasts.

Each of the four castes, when eating together, must form a group of themselves, one group not being allowed to comprise two men of different castes. If, further, in the group of the Brahman there are two men who live at enmity with each other, and the seat of the one is by the side of the other, they make a barrier between the two seats by placing a board between them, or by spreading a piece of dress, or in some other way; and if there is only a line drawn between them, they are considered as separated. Since it is forbidden to eat the remains of a meal, every single man must have his own food for himself, for if anyone of the party who are eating should take of the food from one and the same plate, that which remains in the plate becomes, after the first eater has taken part, to him who wants to take as the second, the remains of the meal as such is forbidden."

Alberuni did not merely content himself with recording what struck him as peculiar in the Hindu social organization. He went on to say:—

“Among the Hindus institutions of this kind abound. We Muslims, of course, stand entirely on the other side of the question, considering all men as equal, except in piety; and this is the greatest obstacle which prevents any approach or understanding between Hindus and Muslims.”

Duarte Barbosa who was a Portuguese official in the service of the Portuguese Government in India from 1500 to 1571 has left a record of his impressions of Hindu society. This is what struck him in. Speaking of the kingdom of Gujerat:

“And before this kingdom Guzerate fell into the hands of the Moors. A certain caste of Heathen whom the Moors called Resbutos (Rajputs) dwelt therein, who in those days were the knights and wardens of the land, and made war wheresoever it was needful. These men kill and eat sheep and fish and all other kinds of food; in the mountains there are yet many of the them, where they have great villages and obey not the king of Guzarate, but rather wage daily war against him; who, do what he may, is yet not able to prevail against them, nor will do so, for they are very fine horsemen, and good archers, and have besides divers other weapons to defend themselves withal against the Moors, on whom they make war without ceasing; yet have they no king nor lord over them. And in this kingdom there is another sort of Heathen whom they call Baneanes, who are great merchants and traders. They dwell among the Moors with whom they carry on all their trade. This people eat neither flesh nor fish nor anything subject to death; they slay nothing, nor are they willing even to see the slaughter of any animal; and thus they maintain their idolatry and hold it so firmly that it is a terrible thing. For often it is so that the Moors take to them live insects or small birds, and make as though to kill them in their presence, and the Baneanes buy these and ransom them, paying much more than they are worth, so that they may save their lives and let them go. And if the King or a Governor of the land has any man condemned to death, for any crime which he has committed, they gather themselves together and buy him from justice, if they are willing to sell him, that he may not die. And divers Moorish mendicants as well, when they wish to obtain alms from this people, take great stones wherewith they beat upon their shoulders and bellies as though they would slay themselves before them, to hinder which they give them great alms that they may depart in peace. Others carry knives with which they slash their arms and legs, and

to these too they give large alms that they may not kill themselves. Others go to their doors seeking to kill rats and snakes for them, and to them also they give much money that they may not do so. Thus they are much esteemed by the Moors. When these Baneanes meet with a swarm of ants on the road they shrink back and seek for some way to pass without crushing them. And in their houses they sup by daylight, for neither by night nor by day will they light a lamp, by reason of certain little flies which perish in the flame thereof; and if there is any great need of a light by night they have a lantern of varnished paper or cloth, so that no living thing may find its way in, and die in the flame. And if these men breed many lice they kill them not, but when they trouble them too much they send for certain men, also Heathen, who living among them and whom they hold to be men of a holy life, they are like hermits living with great abstinence through devotion to their gods. These men house them, and as many lice as they catch they place on their own heads and breed them on their own flesh, by which they say they do great service to their Idol. Thus one and all they maintain with great self restraint their law of not killing. On the other hand they are great usurers, falsifiers of weights and measures and many other goods and of coins; and great liars. These Heathen are tawny men, tall and well-looking gaily attired, delicate and moderate in their food. Their diet is of milk, butter, sugar and rice, and many conserves of divers sorts. They make much use of dishes of fruit and vegetables and pot herbs in their food. Wheresoever they dwell they have orchards and fruit gardens and many water tanks wherein they bathe twice a day, both men and women; and they say when they have finished bathing that they are clear of as many sins as they have committed up to that hour. These Baneanes grow very long hair, as women do with us, and wear it twisted up on the head and made into a knot, and over it a turban, that they may keep it always held together; and in their hair they put flowers and other sweet scented things.

They use to annoint themselves with white sandalwood mixed with saffron and other scents. They are very amorous people. They are clad in long cotton and silken shirts and are shod with pointed shoes of richly wrought cordwain; some of them wear short coats of silk and brocade. They carry no arms except certain very small knives ornamented with gold and silver, and this for two reasons; first because they are men who make but little use of weapons; and secondly, because the Moors defend them."

And there is here another class of Heathen whom they call Brahmenes, who are priests among them and persons who manage

and rule their houses of prayer and idol-worship, which are of great size and have great revenues; and many of them also are maintained by alms. In these houses are great numbers of wooden Idols, and others of stone and copper and in these houses or monasteries they celebrate great ceremonies in honour of these idols, entertaining them with great store of candles and oil lamps, and with bells after our fashion. These Brahmans and Heathen have in their creed many resemblances to the Holy Trinity, and hold in great honour the relation of the Triune Three, and always make their prayers to God, whom they confess and adore as the true God, Creator and maker of all things, who is three persons and one God, and they say that there are many other Gods who are rulers under him, in whom also they believe. These Brahmans and Heathen wheresoever they find our churches enter them and make prayers and adorations to our Images, always asking for Santa Maria, like men who have some knowledge and understanding of these matters and they honour the Church as is our manner, saying that between them and us there is little difference. These men never eat anything subject to death, nor do they slay anything. Bathing they hold to be a great ceremony and they say that by it they are saved."

Speaking of the Kingdom of Calicut, Barbosa says:—

"There is also in this same kingdom of Calicut a caste of people called Brahmenes who are priests among them (as are the clergy among us) of whom I have spoken in another place."

"These all speak the same tongue, nor can any be a Brahmene except he be the son of a Brahmene. When they are seven years of age they put over their shoulder a strip of two fingers in breadth of untanned skin with the hair on it of a certain wild beast which they call Cryvamergam, which resembles a wild ass. Then for seven years he must not eat betel for which time he continues to wear this strap. When he is fourteen years old they make him a Brahmene, and taking off their leather strip they invest him with the cord of three strands which he wears for the rest of his life as a token that he is a Brahmene. And this they do with great ceremonial and rejoicings, as we do here for a cleric when he sings his first mass. Thereafter he may eat betel, but no flesh or fish. They have great honour among the Indians, and as I have already said, they suffer death for no cause whatsoever, their own headman gives them a mild chastisement. They marry once only in our manner, and only the eldest son marries, he is treated like the head of an entailed estate. The other brothers remain single all their lives. These Brahmenes keep their wives well guarded, and greatly honoured, so that no

other man may sleep with them; if any of them die, they do not marry again, but if a woman wrongs her husband she is slain by poison. The brothers who remain bachelors sleep with the Nayre women, they hold it to be a great honour, and as they are Bramenes no woman refuses herself to them, yet they may not sleep with any woman older than themselves. They dwell in their own houses and cities, and serve as clergy in the houses of worship, whither they go to pray at certain hours of the day, performing their rituals and idolatries."

"Some of these Brahmenes serve the kings in every manner except in arms. No man may prepare any food for the King except a Brahmene or his own kin; they also serve as couriers to other countries with letters, money or merchandise, passing wherever they wish to go in safety and none does them any ill, even when the kings are at war. These Brahmenes are learned in their idolatry and possess many books thereof. The Kings hold them in high esteem."

"I have already spoken many times of the Naiyars and yet I have not hitherto told you what manner of men they are. You are to know that in this land of Malabar there is another caste of people called Nayars and among them are noble men who have no other duty than to serve in war, and they always carry their arms withersoever they go, some swords and shields, others bows and arrows, and yet others spears. They all live with the King, and the other great Lords; nevertheless all receive stipends from the King or from the great Lords with whom they dwell. None may become a Nayar, save only he who is of Nayar lineage. They are very free from stain in their nobility. They will not touch anyone of low caste. Nor eat nor drink save in the house of a Nayar. These men are not married, their nephews (sister's sons) are their heirs. The Nayar women of good birth are very independent, and dispose of themselves as they please with Brahmenes and Nayars, but they do not sleep with men of caste lower than their own under pain of death. When they reach the age of twelve years their mothers hold a great ceremony. When a mother perceives that her daughter has attained that age, she asks her kinsfolk and friends to make ready to honour her daughter, then she asks of the kindred and especially of one particular kinsman or great friend to marry her daughter; this he willingly promises and then he has a small jewel made, which would contain a half ducat of gold, long like a ribbon, with a hole through the middle which comes out on the other side, strung on a thread of white silk. The mother then on a fixed day is present with her daughter gaily decked with many rich jewels, making great rejoicings with music and singing, and

a great assembly of people. Then the kinsmen or friend comes bringing that jewel, and going through certain forms, throws it over the girl's neck. She wears it as a token all the rest of her life, and may then dispose of herself as she wills. The man departs without sleeping with her inasmuch as he is her kinsman; if he is not, he may sleep with her, but is not obliged to do so. Thenceforward the mother goes about searching and asking some young men to take her daughter's virginity; they must be Nayars and they regard it among themselves as a disgrace and a foul thing to take a woman's virginity. And when anyone has once slept with her, she is fit for association with men. Then the mother again goes about enquiring among other young Nayars if they wish to support her daughter, and take her as a Mistress so that three or four Nayars agree with her to keep her, and sleep with her, each paying her so much a day; the more lovers she has the greater is her honour. Each of one of them passes a day with her from midday on one day till midday on the next day and so they continue living quietly without any disturbance or quarrels among them. If any of them wishes to leave her, he leaves her, and takes another and she also if she is weary of a man, she tells him to go, and he does go, or makes terms with her. Any children they may have stay with the mother who has to bring them up, for they hold them not to be the children of any man, even if they bear his likeness, and they do not consider them their children, nor are they heirs to their estates, for as I have already stated their heirs are their nephews, sons of their sisters, (which rule whosoever will consider inwardly in his mind will find that it was established with a greater and deeper meaning than the common folk think) for they say that the Kings of the Nayars instituted it in order that the Nayars should not be held back from their service by the burden and labour of rearing children."

"In this kingdom of Malabar there is also another caste of people whom they call Biabares, Indian Merchants, natives of the land. They deal in goods of every kind both in the seaports and inland, wheresoever their trade is of most profit. They gather to themselves all the pepper and ginger from the Nayars and husbandmen and oftentimes they buy the new crops beforehand in exchange for cotton clothes and other goods which they keep at the seaports. Afterwards they sell them again and gain much money thereby. Their privileges are such that the king of the country in which they dwell cannot execute them by legal process."

"There is in this land yet another caste of folk known as Cuiavem. They do not differ from the Nayars, yet by reason of

a fault which they committed, they remain separate from them. Their business is to make pottery and bricks for roofing the houses of the Kings and idols, which are roofed with bricks instead of tiles; only these, for as I have already said, other houses are thatched with branches. They have their own sort of idolatry, and their separate idols."

"There is another Heathen caste which they call Mainatos, whose occupation is to wash clothes for the Kings, Brahmenes and Nayars. By this they live, and may not take up any other."

"There is another lower caste than these which they call Caletis, who are weavers who have no other way of earning save by weaving of cotton and silk clothes, but they are low caste folk and have but little money, so that they clothe the lower races. They are apart by themselves and have their own idolatry."

"Besides the castes mentioned above, there are eleven others lower than they with whom the others do not associate, nor do' they touch them under pain of death; and there are great distinctions between one and another of them, preserving them from mixture with one another. The purest of all these low, simple folk they call Tuias. Their work is mainly that of tending the palm-groves and gathering the fruit thereof, and carrying it away for wages on their backs, for there are no beasts of burden in the land."

"There is another caste still lower than these whom they call Manen (Mancu in the printed text) who neither associate with others nor touch them, nor do the other touch them. They are washermen for the common people, and makers of sleeping mats from which occupations all but they are barred; their sons must perforce follow the same trade; they have their own separate idolatry."

"There is another caste in this land still lower whom they call Canaquas. Their trade is making buckles and umbrellas. They learn letters for purposes of astronomy, they are great astrologers, and foretell with great truth things that are to come; there are some lords who maintain them for this cause."

"There is also another lower caste, also Heathens, called Ageres. They are masons, carpenters, smiths, metal workers and some are goldsmiths, all of whom are of a common descent, and a separate caste, and have their idols apart from other folk. They marry, and their sons inherit their property, and learn their fathers' trade."

"There is another caste still lower in this country called Mogeres, they are almost the same as the Tuias, but they do not touch one another. They work as carriers of all things belonging to the Royal

State when it moves from one place to another, but there are very few of them in this land; they are a separate caste; they have no marriage law; the most of them gain their living on the sea, they are sailors, and some of them fishers; they have no Idols. They are as well slaves of the Nayars:

“There is another caste yet lower whom they call Monquer, fishers who have no other work than fishing, yet some sail in the Moors’ ship and in those of other Heathens, and they are very expert seamen. This race is very rude, they are shameless thieves; they marry and their sons succeed them, their women are of loose character, they sleep with anyone whosoever and it is held no evil. They have their own idolatry.”

“In this land of Malabar there is another caste of Heathen even lower than those, whom, they call Betunes. Their business is salt-making and rice growing, they have no other livelihood.”

“They dwell in houses standing by themselves in the fields away from the roads, whither the gentlefolk do not walk. They have their own idolatry. They are slaves of the Kings and Nayars and pass their lives in poverty. The Nayars make them walk far away from them and speak to them from a far off. They hold no intercourse with any other caste.”

“There is another caste of Heathen, even lower and ruder, whom they call Paneens, who are great sorcerers and live by no other means.”

“There is another caste lower and ruder than they, named Revoleens a very poor folk, who live by carrying firewood and grass to the towns, they may touch none, nor may any touch them under pain of death. They go naked, covering only their private parts with scant and filthy rags,, the more part of them indeed with leaves of certain trees. Their women wear many brass rings in their ears; and on their necks, arms and legs, necklaces and bracelets of heads.”

“And there is yet another caste of Heathens lower than these whom they call Poleas, who among all the rest are held to be accursed and excommunicate; they dwell in the fields and open campaigns in secret lurking places, whither folk of good caste never go save by mischance, and live in huts very strait and mean. They are tillers of rice with buffaloes and oxen. They never speak to the Nayars save from a far off, shouting so that they may hear them, and when they go along the roads they utter loud cries that they may be let past, and whosoever hears them leaves the road, and stands in the wood till they have passed by; and if anyone whether man or woman, touches them, his kinsfolk slay them forthwith, and

in vengeance therefore they slay Poleas until they are weary without suffering any punishment.”

“Yet another caste there is even lower and baser called Parens, who dwell in the most desert places away from all other castes. They have no intercourse with any person nor anyone with them; they are held to be worse than devils, and to be damned. Even to see them is to be unclean and outcaste. They eat yams and other roots of wild plants. They cover their middles with leaves, they also eat the flesh of wild beasts.”

“With these end the distinctions between the castes of the Heathen, which are eighteen in all, each one separate and unable to touch others or marry with them; and besides these eighteen castes of the Heathen who are natives of Malabar, which I have now related to you, there are others of outlandish folk merchants and traders in the land, where they possess houses and estates, living like the natives yet with customs of their own.”

These foreigners were not able to give a full and detailed picture of caste. This is understandable. For to every foreigner the private life of the Hindu is veiled and it is not possible for him to penetrate it. The social organism of India, the play of its motive forces, is moreover, regulated infinitely more by custom, carrying according to locality and baffling in its complexity, than by any legal formula which can be picked out of a legal text book. But there is no doubt that caste did appear to the foreigner as the most singular and therefore the most distinguishing feature of Hindu society. Otherwise they would not have noted its existence in the record they made of what they observed when they came to India.

Caste therefore is something special in the Hindu social organization and marks off the Hindus from other peoples. Caste has been a growing institution. It has never been the same at all times. The shape and form of Caste as it existed when Megasthenes wrote his account was very different from what the shape and form it had taken when Alberuni came and the appearance it gave to the Portuguese was different from what it was in the time of Alberuni, But to understand caste one must have more exact idea of its nature than these foreigners are able to give.

To follow the discussion of the subject of caste it is necessary to familiarize the reader with some basic conceptions which underlie the Hindu Social Organization. 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) 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.

No doubt the caste system is an evolution of the Varna system. But one can get no idea of the caste system by a study of the Varna system. Caste must be studied apart from Varna.

II

An old agnostic is said to have summed up his philosophy in the following words:—

“The only thing I know is that I know nothing; and I am not quite sure that I know that”

Sir Denzil Ibbetson undertaking to write about caste in the Punjab said that the words of these agnostic about his philosophy expressed very exactly his own feelings regarding caste. It is no doubt true that owing to local circumstances there does appear a certain diversity about caste matters and that it is very difficult to make any statement regarding any one of the castes. Absolutely true as it may be, as regards one locality which will not be contradicted with equal truth as regards the same caste in some other area.

Although this may be true yet it cannot be difficult to separate the essential and fundamental features of caste from its non-essential and superficial features. An easy way to ascertain this is to ask what are the matters for which a person is liable to be excluded from caste. Mr. Bhattacharya has stated the following as causes for expulsion from caste. (1) Embracing Christianity or Islam (2) Going to Europe or America (3) Marrying a widow (4) Publicly throwing the sacred thread (5) Publicly eating beef, pork or fowl (6) Publicly eating *kachcha* food prepared by a Mahomedan, Christian or low caste Hindu (7) Officiating at the house of a very low caste Shudra (8) By a female going away from home for immoral purposes (9) By a widow becoming pregnant. This list is not exhaustive and omits the three most important causes which entail expulsion from caste. They are (10) Intermarrying outside caste (11) Interdining with persons of another caste and (12) Change of occupation. The second defect in the statement of Mr. Bhattacharya is that it does not make any distinction between essentials and non-essentials.

Of course, when a person is expelled from his caste the penalty is uniform. His friends, relatives and fellowmen refuse to partake of his hospitality. He is not invited to entertainments in their houses. He cannot obtain brides or bridegrooms for his children. Even his married daughters cannot visit him without running the risk of being excluded from caste. His priest, his barber and washerman refuse to serve him. His fellow castemen sever their connection with him so completely that they refuse to assist him even at the funeral of a member of his household. In some cases the man excluded from caste is debarred access to public temples and to the cremation or burial ground.

These reasons for expulsion from caste indirectly show the rules and regulations of the caste. But all regulations are not fundamental. There are many which are unessential. Caste can exist even without them. The essential and unessential can be distinguished by asking another question. When can a Hindu who has lost caste regain his caste? The Hindus have a system of *Prayaschitas* which are Penances and which a man who has been expelled from caste must perform before he can be admitted to caste fellowship. With regard to these *Prayaschitas* or Penances certain points must be remembered. In this first place, there are caste offences for which there is no *Prayaschita*. In the second place, the *Prayaschitas* vary according to the offence. In some cases the *Prayaschitas* involve a very small penalty. In other cases the penalty involved is a very severe one.

The existence of a *Prayaschita* and the absence of it have a significance which must be clearly understood. The absence of *Prayaschita* does not mean that anyone may commit the offence with impunity. On the contrary it means that the offence is of an immeasurable magnitude and the offender once expelled is beyond reclamation. There is no re-entry for him in the caste from which he is expelled. The existence of a *Prayaschita* means that the offence is compoundable. The offender can take the prescribed *Prayaschita* and obtain admission in the caste from which he is expelled.

There are two offences for which there is no penance. These are (1) change from Hindu Religion to another religion (2) Marriage with a person of another caste or another religion. It is obvious if a man loses caste for these offences he loses it permanently.

Of the other offences the *prayaschitas* prescribed are of the severest kind, are two—(1) interdining with a person of another caste or a non-Hindu and (2) Taking to occupation which is not the occupation of the caste. In the case of the other offences the penalty is a light one almost nominal.

The surest clue to find out what are the fundamental rules of caste and what caste consists it is furnished by the rules regarding prayaschitas. Those for the infringement of which there is no prayaschita constitute the very soul of caste and those for the infringement of which the prayaschita is of the severest kind make up the body of caste. It may therefore be said without any hesitation that there are four fundamental rules of caste. A caste may be defined as a social group having (a) belief in Hindu Religion and bound by certain regulations as to (b) marriage (c) food and (d) occupation. To this one more characteristic may be added namely a social group having a common name by which it is recognized.

In the matter of marriage the regulation lays down that the caste must be endogamous. There can be no intermarriage between members of different castes. This is the first and the most fundamental idea on which the whole fabric of the caste is built up.

In the matter of food the rule, is that a person cannot take food from and dine with any person who does not belong to his caste. This means that only those who can intermarry can also interdine. Those who cannot intermarry cannot interdine. In other words, caste is an endogamous unit and also a communal unit.

In the matter of occupation the regulation is that a person must follow the occupation which is the traditional occupation of his caste and if the caste has no occupation then he should follow the occupation of his father.

In the matter of status of a person it is fixed and is hereditary. It is fixed because a person's status is determined by the status of the caste to which he belongs. It is hereditary because a Hindu is stamped with the caste to which his parents belonged, a Hindu cannot change his status because he cannot change his caste. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies a member of the caste in which he is born. A Hindu may lose his status if he loses caste. But he cannot acquire a new or a better or different status.

What is the significance of a common name for a caste? The significance of this will be clear if we ask two questions which are very relevant and a correct answer to each is necessary for a complete idea of this institution of caste. Social groups are either organized or unorganized. When the membership of the group and the process of joining and leaving the groups, are the subject of definite social regulations and involve certain duties and privileges in relation to other members of the group then the group is an organized group. A group is a voluntary group in which members enter with a full knowledge of what they are doing and the aims which the association

is designed to fulfil. On the other hand, there are groups of which an individual person becomes a member without any act of volition, and becomes subject to social regulation and traditions over which he has no control of any kind.

Now it is hardly necessary to say that caste is a highly organized social grouping. It is not a loose or a floating body. Similarly, it is not necessary to say that caste is an involuntary grouping. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies as a member of that caste. There is no Hindu without caste, cannot escape caste and being bounded by caste from birth to death he becomes subject to social regulations and traditions of the caste over which he has no control.

The significance of a separate name for a caste lies in this—namely it makes caste an organized and an involuntary grouping. A separate and a distinctive name for a caste makes caste asking to a corporation with a perpetual existence and a seal of separate entity. The significance of separate names for separate castes has not been sufficiently realized by writers on caste. In doing that they have lost sight of a most distinctive feature of caste. Social groups there are and they are bound to be in every society. Many social groups in many countries can be equated to various castes in India and may be regarded as their equivalent. Potters, Washermen, Intellectuals as social groups are everywhere. But in other countries they have remained as unorganized and voluntary groups while in India they have become organized and involuntary i.e, they have become castes because in other countries the social groups were not given name while in India they did. It is the name which the caste bears which gives it fixity and continuity and individuality. It is the name which defines who are its members and in most cases a person born in a caste carries the name of the caste as a part of his surname. Again it is the name which makes it easy for the caste to enforce its rules and regulations. It makes it easy in two ways. In the first place, the name of the caste forming a surname of the individual prevents the offender in passing off as a person belonging to another caste and thus escape the jurisdiction of the caste. Secondly, it helps to identify the offending individual and the caste to whose jurisdiction he is subject so that he is easily handed up and punished for any breach of the caste rules.

This is what caste means. Now as to the caste system. This involves the study of the mutual relations between different castes. Looked at as a collection of caste, the caste system presents several features which at once strike the observer. In the first place there is no inter-connection between the various castes which form a system. Each caste is separate and distinct. It is independent and sovereign in the disposal of its

internal affairs and the enforcement of caste regulations. The castes touch but they do not interpenetrate. The second feature relates to the order in which one caste stands in relation to the other castes in the system. That order is vertical and not horizontal.

Such is the caste and such is the caste system. Question is, is this enough to know the Hindu social organization? For a static conception of the Hindu social organization an idea of the caste and the caste system is enough. One need not trouble to remember more than the facts that the Hindus are divided into castes and that the castes form a system in which all hang on a thread which runs through the system in such a way that while encircling and separating one caste from another it holds them all as though it was a string of tennis balls hanging one above the other. But this will not be enough to understand caste as a dynamic phenomenon. To follow the workings of caste in action it is necessary to note one other feature of caste besides the caste system, namely class-caste system.

The relationship between the ideas of caste and class has been a matter of lively controversy. Some say that caste is analogous to class and that there is no difference between the two. Others hold that the idea of castes is fundamentally opposed to that of class. This is an aspect of the subject of caste about which more will be said hereafter. For the present it is necessary to emphasize one feature of the caste system which has not been referred to hereinbefore. It is this. Although caste is different from and opposed to the notion of class yet the caste-system—as distinguished from caste—recognizes a class system which is somewhat different from the graded status referred to above. Just as the Hindus are divided into so many castes, castes are divided into different classes of castes. The Hindu is caste-conscious. He is also class conscious. Whether he is caste conscious or class conscious depends upon the caste with which he comes in conflict. If the caste with which he comes in conflict is a caste within the class to which he belongs he is caste conscious. If the caste is outside the class to which he belongs he is class conscious. Anyone who needs any evidence on this point may study the Non-Brahmin Movement in the Madras and the Bombay Presidency. Such a study will leave no doubt that to a Hindu caste periphery is as real as class periphery and caste consciousness is as real as class consciousness.

Caste, it is said, is an evolution of the Varna system. I will show later on that this is nonsense. Caste is a perversion of Varna. At any rate it is an evolution in the opposite direction. But while caste has completely perverted the Varna system it has borrowed the class

system from the Varna system. Indeed the Class-caste system follows closely the class cleavages of the Varna system.

Looking at the caste system from this point of view one comes across several lines of class cleavage which run through this pyramid of castes dividing the pyramid into blocks of castes. The first line of cleavage follows the line of division noticeable in the ancient Chaturvarna system. The old system of Chaturvarna made a distinction between the first three Varnas, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the fourth Varna namely the Shudra. The three former were classes as the Regenerate classes. The Shudra was held as the Unregenerate class. This distinction was based upon the fact that the former were entitled to wear the sacred thread and study the Vedas. The Shudra was entitled to neither and that is why he was regarded as the unregenerate class. This line of cleavage is still in existence and forms the basis of the present day class division separating the castes which have grown out of the vast class of Shudras from those which have grown out of the three classes of Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. This line of class cleavage is the one which is expressed by the terms High Castes and Low Castes and which are short forms for the High Class Castes and Low Class Castes.

Next after this line of cleavage there runs through the pyramid a second line of class cleavage. It runs just below the Low Class Castes. It sets above all the castes born out of the four Varnas i.e., the High Castes as well as the low castes above the remaining castes which I will merely describe as the 'rest'. This line of class cleavage is again a real one and follows the well-defined distinction which was a fundamental principle of the Chaturvarna system. The Chaturvarna system as is pointed out made a distinction between the four Varnas putting the three Varnas above the fourth. But it also made an equally clear distinction between those within the Chaturvarna and those outside the Chaturvarna. It had a terminology to express this distinction. Those within the Chaturvarna—high or low, Brahmin or Shudra were called *Savarna* i.e., those with the stamp of the Varna. Those outside the Chaturvarna were called *Avarna* i.e., those without the stamp of Varna. All the castes which have evolved out of the four varnas are called *Savarna Hindus*—which is rendered English by the term *Caste Hindus*—The 'rest' are the *A varnas* who in present parlance spoken of by Europeans as *Non-caste Hindus* i.e., those who are outside the four original castes or varnas.

Much that is written about the caste system has reference mostly to the caste-system among the *Savarna Hindus*. Very little is known about the *Avarna Hindus*. Who are these *Avarna Hindus*, what is their

position in Hindu Society, how are they related to the Savarna Hindus are questions to which no attention has so far been paid. I am sure that without considering these questions no one can get a true picture of the social structure the Hindus have built. To leave out the Class cleavage between the Savarna Hindus and the Avarna Hindus is to relate Grimm's Fairy Tale which leaves out the witches, the goblins and the orges.

The Avarna Hindus comprise three

(INCOMPLETE)

••

Part III

Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had proposed to write a treatise, i.e., 'Revolution and Counter' Revolution in Ancient India'. The table of contents has been printed in the chapter of schemes. He had originally planned to write seven books to be included under this broad title. The Committee was able to find some pages and few chapters in his collection. The chapters are also incomplete. After scrutiny, the Committee came to a decision that 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India' is to be presented in this volume with the available material though incomplete. Dr. Ambedkar considered the rise of Buddhism as revolution. The Counter-Revolution pioneered by Brahmins¹ resulted into decline and fall of Buddhism.

Contd. overleaf

As such the following chapters are included under this title.

- 1. Ancient India on Exhumation*
- 2. The Ancient Regime—The State of the Aryan Society*
- 3. A Sunken Priesthood*
- 4. Reformers and Their Fate*
- 5. The Decline and Fall of Buddhism*
- 6. The Literature of Brahminism*
- 7. Triumph of Brahminism*
- 8. The Morals of the House—Manusmruti or the Gospel of Counter-Revolution*
- 9. Philosophic Defence of Counter-Revolution (Krishna and his Gita)*
- 10. Analysis of Virat Parva and Uddyog Parva*
- 11. Brahmins V/s Kshatriyas*
- 12. The Shudras and the Counter-Revolution*
- 13. The Women and the Counter-Revolution*

The readers may compare these chapters with the proposed plan given in the last chapters of Schemes.—Editors