

CHAPTER III
WHY DO THE UNTOUCHABLES LIVE
OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE ?

THAT the Untouchables live outside the village is so notorious a fact that it must be taken to be within the cognizance even of those whose knowledge about them is not very profound. Yet, nobody has thought that this was a serious question calling for satisfactory answer. How did the Untouchables come to live outside the village? Were they declared to be Untouchables first and then deported out of the village and made to live outside? Or were they from the very beginning living outside the village and were subsequently declared to be Untouchables? If the answer is that they were living outside the village from the very beginning, there arises a further question, namely, what can be the reason for it ?

As the question of the separate settlement of the Untouchables has never been raised before, naturally there exists no theory as to how the Untouchables came to live outside the village. There is, of course, the view of the Hindu Shastras and if one wants to dignify it by calling it a theory one may do so. The Shastras of course say that the *Antyajas* should live and have their abode outside the village. For instance, Manu says :

- “X. 51. But the dwellings of the *Chandalas* and the *Shvapakas* shall be outside the village, they must be made *Apapratras* and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.
- X. 52. Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments and they must always wander from place to place.
- X. 53. A man who fulfils a religious duty, shall not seek intercourse with them; their transactions (shall be) among themselves and their marriages with their equals.

- X. 54. Their food shall be given to them by others (than an Aryan giver) in a broken dish; at night they shall not walk about in village and in towns.
- X. 55. By day they may go about for the purpose of their work, distinguished by marks at king's command, and they shall carry out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives; that is a settled rule.
- X. 56. By the King's order they shall always execute the criminals, in accordance with the law, and they shall take for themselves the clothes, the beds, and the ornaments of (such) criminals."

But what conclusion can one draw from these statements of the Shastras? They are capable of double interpretation. When the Shastras say that the Untouchables should stay outside the village, they may be purporting to say no more than that the Untouchables should stay where they have been staying, i.e. outside the village. This is one interpretation. The second interpretation is that those who are declared Untouchables should not be allowed to stay inside the village but should be required to go out of the village and live outside. Following up the alternate interpretations of the Shastras there are two different possibilities which call for consideration. One is that the Untouchability has nothing to do with the Untouchables living outside the village. From the very beginning they lived outside the village. Thereafter when the stigma of Untouchability fell on them they were prohibited from coming to live inside the village. The other possibility is that Untouchability has everything to do with the Untouchables, living outside the village. In other words, the Untouchables originally lived inside the village and that thereafter when the stigma of untouchability fell on them they were forced to vacate and live outside the village.

Which of the two possibilities is more acceptable?

The second possibility is on the face of it absurd and fantastic. One argument is quite enough to expose its absurdity. The phenomenon we are discussing is not confined to a single village or single area. It exists all over India. The transplantation of the Untouchables from within, the village to outside the village is a vast operation. How and who could have carried on an operation of such colossal dimensions? It could not have been carried out except by the command of an Emperor having his sway over the whole of India. Even to him such

a transplantation would have been impossible. But possible and impossible it can only be the work of an Emperor. Who is the Emperor to whom the credit or discredit of this task can be assigned? Obviously, India had no Emperor to perform this task. If there was no Emperor to do the transplantation, then the second possibility must be abandoned.

That those who are called Untouchables lived outside the village from the very beginning even before they became Untouchables and that they continued to live outside the village because of the supervention of untouchability at a later stage is the only possibility worth consideration. But this raises a very difficult question: Why did they live outside the village? What made them or forced them to do so? The answer is that having regard to the factors which are known to students of Sociology to have influenced the transformation of Primitive Society into Modern Society all over the world it is only natural to suppose that the Untouchables should have from the beginning lived outside the village.

Not many will realise why this is natural without some explanation of the factors which have affected the condition of Primitive Society into Modern Society. For a clear understanding of the matter it is necessary to bear in mind that Modern Society differs from Primitive Society in two respects. Primitive Society consisted of nomadic communities while Modern Society consists of settled communities. Secondly, Primitive Society consisted of tribal communities based on blood relationship. Modern Society consists of local communities based on territorial affiliation. In other words there are two lines of evolution along which Primitive Society has proceeded before it became transformed into Modern Society. One line of evolution has led the Primitive Society to become a territorial community from being a tribal community. There can be no doubt that such a change has taken place. Clear traces of the change are to be seen in the official style of kings. Take the style of the English kings. King John was the first to call himself the king of England. His predecessors commonly called themselves kings of the English. The former represent a territorial community. The latter represent a tribal community. England was once the country which Englishmen inhabited. Englishmen are now the people who inhabit England. The same transformation can be seen to have taken place in the style of the French kings who were once called kings of the Franks and later as kings of France. The second line of evolution had led Primitive

Society to become a settled community instead of the Nomadic community which it was. Here again, the change is so definite and so impressive that no illustration is required to convince anybody of its reality.

For the purpose in hand all we need is to confine ourselves to a consideration of the second line of evolution. How did Primitive Society become a settled community? The story of how Primitive Society became a settled community is too long to be detailed in a chapter- much too long to be compressed in a section thereof. It is enough to note two things. The first thing to understand is what made Primitive Society give up its nomadic life and secondly what happened in the transition from nomadic to settled life.

Primitive Society was no doubt nomadic. But it was nomadic not because of any migratory instinct. Nor was it due to any mental trait peculiar to it. It was the result of the fact that the earliest form of the wealth held by Primitive Society was cattle. Primitive Society was migratory because its wealth, namely the cattle, was migratory. Cattle went after new pastures. Primitive Society by reason of its love for cattle, therefore, went wherever its cattle carried it. Primitive Society became fixed in its abode, in other words became a settled-community, when a new species of wealth was discovered. This new species of wealth was land. This happened when Primitive Society learned the art of farming and of cultivating land. Wealth became fixed at one place when it changed its form from cattle to land. With this change Primitive Society also became settled at the same place.

This explains why Primitive Society was at one time nomadic and what led it take to settled life.

The next thing is to note the events that have happened when Primitive Society was on the road to becoming a Settled Society. The problems which faced Primitive Society in its transition from Nomadic life to Settled life were mainly two. One confronted the Settled Community. The other confronted the Broken men. The problem that confronted the Settled community was that of its defence against the Nomadic tribes. The problem which confronted the Broken men was that of the protection and shelter. It may be desirable to elucidate how and why these problems arose.

For an understanding of the problem which confronted the Settled tribes, it is necessary to bear in mind the following facts. All tribes did not take to settled life at one and the same time. Some became settled and some remained nomadic. The second thing to remember

is that the tribes were never at peace with one another. They were always at war. When all tribes were in a Nomadic state the chief causes for intra-tribal warfare were (1) stealing cattle, (2) stealing women, and (3) stealthily grazing of cattle in the pastures belonging to other tribes. When some tribes became settled, the tribes that remained nomadic found it more advantageous to concentrate their fight against the settled tribes. It was more paying than a war against other Nomadic tribes. The Nomadic tribes had come to realize that the Settled tribes were doubly wealthy. Like the Nomadic tribes, they had cattle. But in addition to cattle, they had corn which the Nomadic tribes had not and which they greatly coveted. The Nomadic tribes systematically organized raids on the Settled tribes with the object of stealing the wealth belonging to the Settled tribes. The third fact is that the Settled tribes were greatly handicapped in defending themselves against these raiders. Being engaged in more gainful occupation, the Settled tribes could not always convert their ploughs into swords. Nor could they leave their homes and go in pursuit of the raiding tribes. There is nothing strange in this. History shows that peoples with civilization but no means of defence are not able to withstand the attacks of the barbarians. This explains how and why during the transition period the Settled tribes were faced with the problem of their defence.

How the problem of the Broken men arose is not difficult to understand. It is the result of the continuous tribal warfare which was the normal life of the tribes in their primitive condition. In a tribal war it often happened that a tribe instead of being completely annihilated was defeated and routed. In many cases a defeated tribe became broken into bits. As a consequence of this there always existed in Primitive times a floating population consisting of groups of Broken tribesmen roaming in all directions. To understand what gave rise to the problem of the Broken men it is necessary to realize that Primitive Society was fundamentally tribal in its organization. That Primitive Society was fundamentally tribal meant two things. Firstly, every individual in Primitive Society belonged to a tribe. Nay, he must belong to the tribe. Outside the tribe no individual had any existence. He could have none. Secondly tribal organization being based on common blood and common kinship an individual born in one tribe could not join another tribe and become a member of it. The Broken Men had, therefore, to live as stray individuals. In Primitive Society where tribe was fighting against tribe a stray

collection of Broken Men was always in danger of being attacked. They did not know where to go for shelter. They did not know who would attack them and to whom they could go for protection. That is why shelter and protection became the problem of the Broken Men.

The foregoing summary of the evolution of Primitive Society shows that there was a time in the life of Primitive Society when there existed two groups— one group consisting of Settled tribes faced with the problem of finding a body of men who would do the work of watch and ward against the raiders belonging to Nomadic tribes and the other group consisting of Broken Men from defeated tribes with the problem of finding patrons who would give them food and shelter.

The next question is: How did these two groups solve their problems? Although we have no written text of a contract coming down to us from antiquity we can say that the two struck a bargain whereby the Broken Men agreed to do the work of watch and ward for the Settled tribes and the Settled tribes agreed to give them food and shelter. Indeed, it would have been unnatural if such an arrangement had not been made between the two especially when the interest of the one required the co-operation of the other.

One difficulty, however, must have arisen in the completion of the bargain, that of shelter. Where were the Broken Men to live? In the midst of the settled community or outside the Settled community? In deciding this question two considerations must have played a decisive part. One consideration is that of blood relationship. The second consideration is that of strategy. According to Primitive notions only persons of the same tribe, i.e.. of the same blood, could live together. An alien could not be admitted inside the area occupied by the homesteads belonging to the tribe. The Broken men were aliens. They belonged to a tribe which was different from the Settled tribe. That being so, they could not be permitted to live in the midst of the Settled tribe. From the strategic point of view also it was desirable that these Broken men should live on the border of the village so as to meet the raids of the hostile tribes. Both these considerations were decisive in favour of placing their quarters outside the village.

We can now return to the main question, namely, why do the Untouchables live outside the village? The answer to the question can be sought along the lines indicated above. The same processes must have taken place in India when the Hindu Society was passing from

Nomadic life to the life of a settled village community. There must have been in Primitive Hindu society, Settled tribes and Broken Men. The Settled tribes founded the village and formed the village community and the Broken Men lived in separate quarters outside the village for the reason that they belonged to a different tribe and, therefore, to different blood. To put it definitely, the Untouchables were originally only Broken Men. It is because they were Broken Men that they lived outside the village.

This explains why it is natural to suppose that the Untouchables from the very beginning lived outside and that Untouchability has nothing to do with their living outside the village.

The theory is so novel that critics may not feel satisfied without further questioning. They will ask:

- (1) Is there any factual evidence to suggest that the Untouchables are Broken Men?
- (2) Is there evidence that the process of settlement suggested above has actually taken place in any country?
- (3) If Broken Men living outside the village is a universal feature of all societies, how is it that the separate quarters of the Broken Men have disappeared outside India but not in India?

