CHAPTER IV
ARE THE UNTOUCHABLES BROKEN MEN ?

TO the question : Are the Untouchables in their origin only Broken Men, my answer is in the affirmative. An affirmative answer is bound to be followed by a call for evidence. Direct evidence on this issue could be had if the totems of the Touchables and the Untouchables in the Hindu villages had been studied. Unfortunately the study of the totemic organization of the Hindus and the Untouchables has not yet been undertaken by students of anthropology. When such data is collected it would enable us to give a decisive opinion on the question raised in this Chapter. For the present, I am satisfied from such inquiries as I have made that the totems of the Untouchables of a particular village differ from the totems of the Hindus of the village.

Difference in totems between Hindus and Untouchables would be the best evidence in support of the thesis that the Untouchables are Broken Men belonging to a tribe different from the tribe comprising the village community. It may, however, be admitted that such direct evidence as has a bearing on the question remains to be collected. But facts have survived which serve as pointers and from which it can be said that the Untouchables were Broken men. There are two sets of such evidentiary facts.

One set of facts comprise the names *Antya, Antyaja* and *Antyavasin* given to certain communities by the Hindu Shastras. They have come down from very ancient past. Why were these names used to indicate a certain class of people? There seem to be some meaning behind these terms. The words are undoubtedly derivative. They are derived from the root *Anta*. What does the word *Anta* mean? Hindus learned in the Shastras argue that it means one who is born last and as the Untouchable according to the Hindu order of Divine creation is held to be born last, the word *Antya* means an Untouchable. The argument is absurd and does not accord with the

Hindu theory of the order of creation. According to it, it is the Shudra who is born last. The Untouchable is outside the scheme of creation. The Shudra is *Savarna.* As against him the Untouchable is *Avarna, i.e* outside the *Varna* system. The Hindu theory of priority in creation does not and cannot apply to the Untouchable. In my view, the word *Antya* means not end of creation but end of the village. It is a name given to those people who lived on the outskirts 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 and that those who lived outside the village, *i.e.* on the *Antya* of the village, were called *Antyaja.*

Why did some people live on the border of the village? Can there be any other reason than that they were Broken Men who were aliens and who belonged to tribes different from those who lived inside the village? I cannot see any. That this is the real reason is to be found in the use of these particular words to designate them. The use of the words *Antya, Antyaja* and *Antyavasin* has thus double significance. In the first place, it shows that living in separate quarters was such a peculiar phenomenon that a new terminology had to be invented to give expression to it. Secondly, the words chosen express in exact terms the conditions of the people to whom it applied namely that they were aliens.

The second set of facts which shows that the Untouchables were Broken men relates to the position of a community called the Mahars. The Mahar community is a principal Untouchable community in Maharashtra. It is the single largest Untouchable community found in Maharashtra. The following facts showing the relations between the Mahars and the Touchable Hindus are worthy of note: (1) The Mahars are to be found in every village; (2) Every village in Maharashtra has a wall and the Mahars have their quarters outside the wall; (3) The Mahars by turn do the duty of watch and ward on behalf of the village; and (4) The Mahars claim 52 rights against the Hindu villagers. Among these 52 rights the most important are:-

(i) The right to collect food from the villagers;

(ii) The right to collect corn from each villager at the harvest season; and

(iii) The right to appropriate the dead animal belonging to the villagers.

The evidence arising from the position of the Mahars is of course confined to Maharashtra. Whether similar cases are to be found in other parts of India has yet to be investigated. But if the Mahars case

can be taken as typical of the Untouchables throughout India it will be accepted that there was a stage in the history of India when Broken Men belonging to other tribes came to the Settled tribes and made a bargain whereby the Broken men were allowed to settle on the border of the village, were required to do certain duties and in return were given certain rights. The Mahars have a tradition that the 52 rights claimed by them against the villagers were given to them by the Muslim kings of Bedar. This can only mean that these rights were very ancient and that the kings of Bedar only confirmed them.

These facts although meagre do furnish some evidence in support of the theory that the Untouchables lived outside the village from the very beginning. They were not deported and made to live outside the village *because* they were declared Untouchables. They lived outside the village from the beginning *because* they were Broken Men who belonged to a tribe different from the one to which the Settled tribe belonged.

The difficulty in accepting this explanation arises largely from the notion that the Untouchables were always Untouchables. This difficulty will vanish if it is borne in mind that there was a time when the ancestors of the present day Untouchables were not Untouchables *vis-a-vis* the villagers but were merely Broken Men, no more and no less, and the only difference between them and the villagers was that they belonged to different tribes.

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