

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN DID BROKEN MEN BECOME UNTOUCHABLES?

THE foregoing researches and discussions have proved that there was a time when the village in India consisted of a Settled Community and Broken Men and that though both lived apart, the former inside the village and the latter outside it, there was no bar to social intercourse between the members of the Settled Community and the Broken Men. When the cow became sacred and beef-eating became taboo, society became divided into two — the Settled Community became a touchable community and Broken Men became an untouchable community. When did the Broken Men come to be regarded as Untouchables? That is the last question that remains to be considered. There are obvious difficulties in the way of fixing a precise date for the birth of Untouchability. Untouchability is an aspect of social psychology. It is a sort of social nausea of one group against another group. Being an outgrowth of social psychology which must have taken some time to acquire form and shape, nobody can venture to fix a precise date to a phenomenon which probably began as a cloud no bigger than man's hand and grew till it took its final all-pervading shape as we know it today. When could the seed of Untouchability be said to have been sown? If it is not possible to fix an exact date, is it possible to fix an approximate date?

An exact date is not possible. But it is possible to give an approximate date. For this the first thing to do is to begin by fixing the upper time-limit at which Untouchability did not exist and the lower time-limit at which it had come into operation.

To begin with the question of fixing the upper limit the first thing to note is that those who are called Antyajās are mentioned in the Vedas. But they were not only not regarded as Untouchables but they were not even regarded as Impure. The following extract from Kane

may be quoted in support of this conclusion. Says Kane¹

“In the early Vedic literature several of the names of castes that are spoken of in the Smritis as Antyajās occur. We have Carmanna (a tanner of hides) in the Rig Veda (VIII.8,38) the Chandala and Paulkasa occur in Vaj. S., the Vepa or Vapta (barber) even in the Rig., the Vidalakara or Bidalakar (corresponding to the Buruda of the Smritis) occurs in the Vaj.S. and the Tai.Br.Vasahpalpuli (washer woman) corresponding to the Rajakas of the Smritis in Vaj.S. But there is no indication in these passages whether they, even if they formed castes, were at all Untouchables.”

Thus in Vedic times there was no Untouchability. As to the period of the Dharma Sutras, we have seen that there was Impurity but there was no Untouchability.

Was there Untouchability in the time of Manu? This question cannot be answered offhand. There is a passage² in which he says that there are only four varnas and that there is no fifth varna. The passage is enigmatical. It is difficult to make out what it means. Quite obviously the statement by Manu is an attempt by him to settle a controversy that must have been going on at the time he wrote. Quite obviously the controversy was about the status of a certain class in relation to the system of Chaturvarnya. Equally obvious is the point which was the centre of the controversy. To put briefly, the point was whether this class was to be deemed to be included within the Chaturvarnya or whether it was to be a fifth varna quite distinct from The original four varnas. All this is quite clear. What is, however, not clear is the class to which it refers. This is because Manu makes no specific mention of the class involved in the controversy.

The verse is also enigmatical because of the ambiguity in the decision given by Manu. Manu's decision is that there is no fifth Varna. As a general proposition it has a meaning which everybody can understand. But what does this decision mean in the concrete application to the class whose status was the subject-matter of controversy. Obviously it is capable of two interpretations. It may mean that as according to the scheme of Chaturvarna there is no fifth varna the class in question must be deemed to belong to one of the four recognized varnas. But it may also mean that as in the original Varna System there is no provision for a fifth varna the class in question must be deemed to be outside the Varna System altogether.

The traditional interpretation adopted by the orthodox Hindu is that the statement in Manu refers to the Untouchables, that it was the

1. Dharma Shastra Vol II. Part I. p. 165

2. Manu X. 4

Untouchables whose status was in controversy and that it was then-status which is the subject-matter of Manu's decision. This interpretation is so firmly established that it has given rise to a division of Hindus into two classes called by different names, *Savarnas* or Hindus (those included in the Chaturvarna) and *Avarnas* or Untouchables (those excluded from the Chaturvarna). The question is, is this view correct? To whom does the text refer? Does it refer to the Untouchables? A discussion of this question may appear to be out of place and remote from the question under consideration. But it is not so. For if the text does refer to the Untouchables then it follows that Untouchability did exist in the time of Manu— a conclusion which touches the very heart of the question under consideration. The matter must, therefore, be thrashed out.

I am sure this interpretation is wrong. I hold that the passage does not refer to the Untouchables at all. Manu does not say which was the fifth class whose status was in controversy and about whose status he has given a decision in this passage. Was it the class of Untouchables or was it some other class? In support of my conclusion that the passage does not refer to Untouchables at all I rely on two circumstances. In the first place, there was no Untouchability in the time of Manu. There was only Impurity. Even the Chandala for whom Manu has nothing but contempt is only an impure person. That being so, this passage cannot possibly have any 'reference to Untouchables. In the second place, there is evidence to support the view that this passage has reference to slaves and not to Untouchables. This view is based on the language of the passage quoted from the Narada Smriti in the chapter on the Occupational Theory of Untouchability. It will be noticed that the Narada Smritis speaks of the slaves as the fifth class. If the expression fifth class in the Narada Smriti refers to slaves, I see no reason why the expression fifth class in Manu Smriti should not be taken to have reference to slaves. If this reasoning is correct, it cuts at the very root of the contention that Untouchability existed in the time of Manu and that Manu was not prepared to include them as part of the Varna System. For the reasons stated, the passage does not refer to Untouchability and there is, therefore, no reason to conclude that there was Untouchability in the time of Manu.

Thus we can be sure of fixing the upper limit for the date of the birth of Untouchability. We can definitely say that Manu Smriti did not enjoin Untouchability. There, however, remains one important

question. What is the date of Manu Smriti? Without an answer to this question it would not be possible for the average to relate the existence or non-existence of Untouchability to any particular point in time. There is no unanimity among savants regarding the date of Manu Smriti. Some regard it as very ancient and some regard it as very recent. After taking all facts into consideration Prof. Buhler has fixed a date which appears to strike the truth. According to Buhler, Manu Smriti in the shape in which it exists now, came into existence in the Second Century A.D.¹ In assigning so recent a date to the Manu Smriti Prof. Buhler is not quite alone. Mr. Daphtary has also come to the same conclusion. According to him Manu Smriti came into being after the year 185 B.C. and not before. The reason given by Mr. Daphtary is that Manu Smriti has a close connection with the murder of the Buddhist Emperor Brihadratha of the Maurya dynasty by his Brahmin Commander-in-Chief Pushyamitra Sunga and as even that took place in 185 B.C., he concludes that Manu Smriti must have been written after 185 B.C. To give support to so important a conclusion it is necessary to establish a nexus between the murder of Brihadratha Maurya by Pushyamitra and the writing of Manu Smriti by strong and convincing evidence. Mr. Daphtary has unfortunately omitted to do so. Consequently his conclusion appears to hang in the air. The establishment of such a nexus is absolutely essential. Fortunately there is no want of evidence for the purpose.

The murder of Brihadratha Maurya by Pushyamitra has unfortunately passed unnoticed. At any rate it has not received the attention it deserves. It is treated by historians as an ordinary incident between two individuals as though its origin lay in some personal quarrel between the two. Having regard to its consequences it was an epoch-making event. Its significance cannot be measured by treating it as a change of dynasty—the Sungas succeeding the Mauryas. It was a political revolution as great as the French Revolution, if not greater. It was a revolution—a bloody revolution—engineered by the Brahmins to overthrow the rule of the Buddhist Kings. That, is what the murder of Brihadratha by Pushyamitra means.

This triumphant Brahmanism was in need of many things. It of course needed to make Chaturvarna the law of the land the validity of which, was denied by the Buddhists. It needed to make animal sacrifice, which was abolished by the Buddhists, legal. But it needed

1. Buhler—Laws of Manu (S.B.E.) Vol. XXV. Int. CXN.

more than this. Brahmanism in bringing about this revolution against the rule of the Buddhist Kings had transgressed two rules of the customary law of the land which were accepted by all as sacrosanct and inviolable. The first rule made it a sin for a Brahmin even to touch a weapon. The second made the King's person sacred and regicide a sin. Triumphant Brahmanism wanted a sacred text, infallible in its authority, to justify their transgressions. A striking feature of the *Manu Smriti* is that it not only makes *Chaturvarna* the law of the land, it not only makes animal sacrifice legal but it goes to state when a Brahmin could justifiably resort to arms and when he could justifiably kill the King. In this the *Manu Smriti* has done what no prior *Smriti* has done. It is a complete departure. It is a new thesis. Why should the *Manu Smriti* do this? The only answer is, it had to strengthen the revolutionary deeds committed by Pushyamitra by propounding philosophic justification. This interconnection between Pushyamitra and the new thesis propounded by *Manu* shows that the *Manu Smriti* came into being some time after 185 B.C., a date not far removed from the date assigned by Prof. Buhler. Having got the date of the *Manu Smriti* we can say that in the Second Century A.D., there was no Untouchability.

Now to turn to the possibility of determining the lower limit to the birth of Untouchability. For this we must go to the Chinese travellers who are known to have visited India and placed on record what they saw of the modes and manners of the Indian people. Of these Chinese travellers Fah-Hian has something very interesting to say. He came to India in 400 A.D. In the course of his observations occurs the following passage¹ :—

“Southward from this (Mathura) is the so-called middle-country (Madhyadesa). The climate of this country is warm and equable, without frost or snow. The people are very well off, without poll-tax or official restrictions. Only those who till the royal lands return a portion of profit of the land. If they desire to go, they go; if they like to stop they stop. The kings govern without corporal punishment; criminals are fined, according to circumstances, lightly or heavily. Even in cases of repeated rebellion they only cut off the right hand. The King's personal attendants, who guard him on the right and left, have fixed salaries. 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

1. *Buddhist Records in Western India* by Beal. Introduction p. xxxviii.

do not keep swine nor fowls, and do not deal in cattle; they have no shambles or wine shops in their market-places. In selling they use cowrie shells. The Chandalas only hunt and sell flesh.”

Can this passage be taken as evidence of the prevalence of Untouchability at the time of Fah-Hian? Certain parts of his description of the treatment given to the Chandalas do seem to lend support to the conclusion, that is, a case of Untouchability.

There is, however, one difficulty in the way of accepting this conclusion. The difficulty arises because the facts relate to the Chandalas. The Chandala is not a good case to determine the existence or non-existence of Untouchability. The Brahmins have regarded the Chandalas as their hereditary enemies and are prone to attribute to them abominable conduct; hurl at them low epithets and manufacture towards them a mode of behaviour which is utterly artificial to suit their venom against them. Whatever, therefore, is said against the Chandalas must be taken with considerable reservations.

This argument is not based on mere speculation. Those who doubt its cogency may consider the evidence of Bana's *Kadambari* for a different description of the treatment accorded to the Chandalas.

The story of *Kadambari* is a very complex one and we are really not concerned with it. It is enough for our purpose to note that the story is told to King Shudraka by a parrot named Vaishampayana who was the pet of a Chandala girl. The following passages from the *Kadambari* are important for our purpose. It is better to begin with Bana's description of a Chandala settlement. It is in the following terms' :—

“I beheld the barbarian settlement, a very market-place of evil deeds. It was surrounded on all sides by boys engaged in the chase, unleashing their hounds, teaching their falcons, mending snares, carrying weapons, and fishing, horrible in their attire, like demoniacs. Here and there the entrance to their dwellings, hidden by thick bamboo forests, was to be inferred, from the rising of smoke of orpiment. On all sides the enclosures were made with skulls; (627) the dust-heaps on the roads were filled with bones; the yards of the huts were miry with blood, fat, and meat chopped up. The life there consisted of hunting; the food, of flesh; the ointment, of fat; the garments, of coarse silk; the couches, of dried skins; the household attendants, of dogs; the animals for riding, of cows; the men's employment, of wine and women; the oblation to the gods, of blood; the sacrifice, of cattle. The place was the image of all hells.”

It is from such a settlement that the Chandala girl starts with her parrot to the palace of King Shudraka. King Shudraka is sitting in the Hall of Audience with his Chieftains. A portress enters the Hall and makes the following announcement¹ :—

“Sire, there stands at the gate a Chandala maiden from the South, a royal glory of the race of that Tricamku who climbed the sky, but fell from it at the order of wrathful Indra. She bears a parrot in a cage, and bids me thus hail your majesty: “Sire, thou, like the ocean, art alone worthy to receive the treasures of whole earth. In the thought that this bird is a marvel and the treasure of the whole earth, I bring it to lay at thy feet, and desire to behold thee. Thou, O king, hast heard her message, and must decide!” so saying, she ended her speech. The king, whose curiosity was aroused, looked at the chiefs around him, and with the words ‘Why not? Bid her enter’ gave his permission.

Then the portress, immediately on the king’s order ushered in the Candala maiden. And she entered.”

The King and the Chieftains did not at first take notice of her. To attract attention she struck a bamboo on the mosaic floor to arouse the King. Bana then proceeds to describe her personal appearance.²

“Then the king, with the words, ‘Look yonder’ to his suite, gazed steadily upon the Candala maiden, as she was pointed out by the portress; Before her went a man, whose hair was hoary with age, whose eyes were the colour of the red lotus, whose joints, despite the loss of youth, were firm from incessant labour, whose form, though that of Matanga, was not to be despised, and who wore the white raiment meet for a court. Behind her went a Candala boy, with locks falling on either shoulder, bearing a cage, the bars of which, though of gold, shone like emerald from the reflection of the parrot’s plumage. She herself seemed by the darkness of her hue to imitate Krishna when he guilefully assumed a woman’s attire to take away the amrita seized by the demons. She was, as it were, a doll of sapphire walking alone; and over the blue garment, which reached to her ankle, there fell a veil of red silk, like evening sunshine falling on blue lotuses. The circle of her cheek was whitened by the ear-ring that hung from one ear, like the face of night inlaid with the rays of the rising moon; she had a tawny tilaka of gorocana, as if it were a third eye, like Parvati in mountaineer’s attire, after the fashion of the garb of Civa.

She was like Cri. darkened by the sapphire glory of Narayana reflected on the robe on her breast; or like Rati, stained by smoke which rose as Madana was burnt by the fire of wrathful Civa; or like Yamuna, fleeing in fear of being drawn along by the ploughshare of wild Balarama; or, from the rich lac that turned her lotus feet into budding shoots, like Durga, with her feet crimsoned by the blood of the Asura Mahisha she had just trampled upon.

Her nails were rosy from the pink glow of her fingers; the mosaic pavement seemed too hard for her touch, and she came forward, placing her feet like tender twigs upon the ground.

1. Kadambari (Ridding’s Translation) p. 6.

2. Ibid pp. 8-10.

The rays of her anklets, rising in flame-colour, seemed to encircle her as with the arms of Agni, as though,, by his love for her beauty, he would purify the strain of her birth, and so set the Creator at naught.

Her girdle was like the stars wreathed on the brow of the elephant of Love; and her necklace was a rope of large bright pearls, like the stream of Ganga just tinged by Yamuna.

Like autumn, she opened her lotus eyes; like the rainy season, she had cloudy tresses; like the circle of the Malaya Hills, she was wreathed with sandal; like the zodiac, she was decked with starry gems; like Cri, she had the fairness of a lotus in her hand; like a swoon, she entranced the heart; like a forest, she was endowed with living beauty; like the child of a goddess, she was claimed by no tribe; like sleep, she charmed the eyes; as a lotus-pool in a wood is troubled by elephants, so was she dimmed by her Matanga birth; like spirit, she might not be touched; like a letter, she gladdened the eyes alone; like the blossoms of spring she lacked the jati flower; her slender waist, like the line of Love's bow, could be spanned by the hands; with her curly hair, she was like the Lakshmi of the Yaksha king in Alaka. She had but reached the flower of her youth, and was beautiful exceedingly. And the king was amazed; and the thought arose in his mind, 'Ill-placed was the labour of the Creator in producing this beauty! For if she has been created as though in mockery of her Candala form, such that all the world's wealth of loveliness is laughed to scorn by her own, why was she born in a race with which none can mate? Surely by thought alone did Prajapati create her, fearing the penalties of contact with the Matanga race, else whence this unsullied radiance, a grace that belongs not to limbs sullied by touch? Moreover, though fair in form, by the baseness of her birth, whereby she, like a Lakshmi of the lower world, is a perpetual reproach to the gods, she, lovely as she is, causes fear in Brahma, the maker of so strange a union.' While the king was thus thinking the maiden, garlanded with flowers, that fell over her ears, bowed herself before him with a confidence beyond her years. And when she had made her reverence and stepped on to the mosaic floor, her attendant, taking the parrot, which had just entered the cage, advanced a few steps, and, showing it to the King, said: 'Sire, this parrot, by name Vaicampayana, knows the meaning of all the castras, is expert in the practice of royal policy, skilled in tales, history, and Puranas, and acquainted with songs and with musical intervals. He recites, and himself composes graceful and incomparable modern romances, love-stories, plays, and poems, and the like; he is versed in witticisms and is an unrivalled disciple of the vina, flute, and drum. He is skilled in displaying the different movements of dancing, dextrous in painting, very bold in play, ready in resources to calm a maiden angered in a lover's quarrel, and familiar with the characteristics of elephants, horses, men, and women. He is the gem of the whole earth; and in the thought that treasures belong to thee, as pearls to the ocean, the daughter of my lord has brought him hither to thy feet, O king! Let him be accepted as thine.'

On reading this description of a Chandala girl many questions arise. Firstly, how different it is from the description given by FaHian? Secondly Bana is a Vatsyayana Brahmin. This Vatsyayana Brahmin, after giving a description of the Chandala Settlement, finds

no compunction in using such eloquent and gorgeous language to describe the Chandala girl. Is this description compatible with the sentiments of utter scorn and contempt associated with Untouchability? If the Chandalas were Untouchables how could an Untouchable girl enter the King's palace? How could an Untouchable be described in the superb 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 princess¹ 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. It may only be extreme form of impurity practised by the Brahmins who are always in the habit of indulging in overdoing their part in sacerdotalism. This becomes more than plausible if we remember that when Fa-Hian came to India it was the reign of the Gupta Kings. The Gupta Kings were patrons of Brahmanism. It was a period of the triumph and revival of Brahmanism. It is quite possible that what Fa-Hian describes is not Untouchability but an extremity to which the Brahmins were prepared to carry the ceremonial impurity which had become attached to some community, particularly to the Chandalas.

The next Chinese traveller who came into India was Yuan Chwang. He came to India in 629 A.D. He stayed in India for 16 years and has left most accurate records of journeys up and down the country and of the manners and customs of the people. In the course of his description of general characters of the cities and buildings of India, he says² :—

“As to their inhabited towns and cities the quadrangular walls of the cities (or according to one text, of the various regions) are broad and high, while the thoroughfares are narrow tortuous passages. The shops are on the highways and booths, or (inns) line the roads. Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioners, and scavengers have their habitations marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and they sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets.”

The above passage is too short and too brief for founding a definite conclusion thereon. There is, however, one point about it which is worthy of note. Fa-Hian's description refers to the Chandalas only while the description given by Yuan Chwang applies to communities

1. Kadambari (Ridding's Translation) p. 204.

2. Wallers-Yuan Chwang Vol.I.p. 147.

other than the Chandalas. This is a point of great importance. No such argument can be levelled against the acceptance of a description since it applies to communities other than the Chandalas. It is, therefore, just possible that when Yuan Chwang came to India, Untouchability had emerged.

On the basis of what has been said above we can conclude that while Untouchability did not exist in 200 A.D., it had emerged by 600 A.D.

These are the two limits, upper and lower, for determining the birth of Untouchability. Can we fix an approximate date for the birth of Untouchability? I think we can, if we take beef-eating, which is the root of Untouchability, as the point to start from. Taking the ban on beef-eating as a point to reconnoitre from, it follows that the date of the birth of Untouchability must be intimately connected with the ban on cow-killing and on eating beef. If we can answer when cow-killing became an offence and beef-eating became a sin, we can fix an approximate date for the birth of Untouchability.

When did cow-killing become an offence?

We know that Manu did not prohibit the eating of beef nor did he make cow-killing an offence. When did it become an offence? As has been shown by Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, cow killing was made a capital offence by the Gupta kings some time in the 4th Century A.D.

We can, therefore, say with some confidence that Untouchability was born some time about 400 A.D. It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism which has so completely moulded the history of India and the study of which is so woefully neglected by students of Indian history.

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