MANU AND THE SHUDRAS

[This is a 31 page hand written Ms. of Dr. Ambedkar. The chapter has no title. It is also left incomplete. The title is suggested—editor.]

I

The reader is now aware that in the Scheme of Manu there were two principal social divisions : those outside the Chaturvarna and those inside the Chaturvarna. The reader also knows that the present day Untouchables are the counterpart of those outside the Chaturvarna and that those inside the Chaturvarna were contrasted with those outside. They were a composite body made up of four different classes, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The Hindu social system is not only a system in which the idea of classes is more dominant than the idea of community but it is a system which is based on inequality between classes and therefore between individuals. To put it concretely, the classes i. e. the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and Antyajas (Untouchables) are not horizontal, all on the same level. They are vertical i.e. one above the other. No Hindu will controvert this statement. Every Indian knows it. If there is any person who would have any doubt about it he can only be a foreigner. But any doubt which a foreigner might have will be dissolved if he is referred to the law of Manu who is the chief architect of the Hindu society and whose law has formed the foundations on which it is built. For his benefit I reproduce such texts from the Manu Smriti as go to prove that Hindu society is based on the principle of inequality.

II

It might be argued that the inequality prescribed by Manu in his Smriti is after all of historical importance. It is past history and cannot be supposed to have any bearing on the present conduct of the Hindu. I am sure nothing can be greater error than this. Manu is not a matter of the past. It is even more than a past of the present. It is a ‘living past’ and therefore as really present as any present can be.

That the inequality laid down by Manu was the law of the land under the pre-British days may not be known to many foreigners. Only a few instances will show that such was the case.

Under the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas the Untouchables were not allowed within the gates of Poona city, the capital of the Peshwas between 3 p. m. and 9 a. m. because, before nine and after three, their bodies cast too long a shadow; and whenever their shadow fell upon a Brahmin it polluted him, so that he dare not taste food or water until he had bathed and washed the impurity away. So

also no Untouchable was allowed to live in a walled town ; cattle and dogs could freely enter but not the Untouchables[f1]

Under the rule of the Marathas and the Peshwas the Untouchables might not spit on the ground lest a Hindu should be polluted by touching it with his foot, but had to hang an earthen pot round his neck to hold his spittle. He was made to drag a thorny branch of a tree with him to brush out his footsteps and when a Brahman came by, had to lie at a distance on his face lest his shadow might fall on the Brahman[f2]

In Maharashtra an Untouchable was required to wear a black thread either in his neck or on his wrist for the purpose of ready identification.

In Gujarat the Untouchables were compelled to wear a horn as their distinguishing mark[f3].

In the Punjab a sweeper was required while walking through streets in towns to carry a broom in his hand or under his armpit as a mark of his being a scavenger[f4].

In Bombay the Untouchables were not permitted to wear clean or untorn clothes. In fact the shopkeepers took the precaution to see that before cloth was sold to the Untouchable it was torn & soiled.

In Malabar the Untouchables were not allowed to build houses above one storey in height[f5] and not allowed to cremate their dead[f6].

In Malabar the Untouchables were not permitted to carry umbrellas, to wear shoes or golden ornaments, to milk cows or even to use the ordinary language of the country[f7].

In South India Untouchables were expressly forbidden to cover the upper part of their body above the waist and in the case of women of the Untouchables they were compelled to go with the upper part of their bodies quite bare[f8].

In the Bombay Presidency so high a caste as that of Sonars (gold- smiths) was forbidden to wear their Dhoties with folds[f9] and prohibited to use *Namaskar* as the word of salutation#.

The following letter will be interesting to the reader as it throws a flood of light as to whether the Dhamia prescribed by Manu was or was not the law of the land-

" To

Damulsett Trimbucksett

Head of the Caste of Goldsmiths.

" The Hon 'ble the President in Council having thought proper to prohibit the Caste of Goldsmiths from making use of the form of salutation termed Namaskar, you are hereby pre-emptorily enjoined to make known this order and resolution to the whole caste and to take care that the same be strictly observed.

By order

Secretary to Government

sig. W. Page

Bombay

9th August 1779.

Resolution of Government

Dated 28th July 1779.

" Frequent disputes having arisen for some time between the Brahmins and Goldsmiths respecting a mode of salutation termed " Namaskar " made use of by the latter, and which the Brahmins allege they have no right to perform, and that the exercise of such ceremony by the Goldsmiths is a great breach and profanation of the rights of the Gentoo {Hindu] Religion, and repeated complaints having been made to us by the Brahmins, and the Peishwa also having several times written to the President, requesting the use of the Namaskar might be prohibited to the Goldsmiths-Resolved as it i« necessary. This matter should be decided by us in order that the dispute between the two castes may be put an end to, and the Brahmins appear to have reason *for* their complaint, that the Goldsmiths be forbidden the use of the Namaskar, and this being a matter wherein the Company's interest is not concerned, our Resolution may be put on the footing of a compliment to the Peishwa whom the President is desired to make acquainted with our determination."

Under the Maratha rule any one other than a Brahmin uttering a Veda Mantra was liable to have his tongue cut off and as a matter of fact the tongues of several Sonars (goldsmiths) were actually cut off by the order of the Peshwa for their daring to utter the Vedas contrary to law.

All over India Brahmin was exempt from capital punishment. He could not be hanged even if he committed murder.

Under the Peshwas distinction was observed in the punishment of the criminals according to the caste. Hard labour and death were punishments mostly visited on the Untouchables[f10].

Under the Peshwas Brahmin clerks had the privilege of their goods being exempted from certain duties and their imported corn being carried to them without any ferry charges; and Brahmin landlords had their lands assessed at distinctly lower rates than those levied from other classes. In Bengal the amount of rent for land varied with the caste of the occupant and if the tenant was an Untouchable he had to pay the highest rent.

These facts will show that Manu though born some time before B. C. or sometime after A. D. is not dead and while the Hindu Kings reigned, justice between Hindu and Hindu, touchable and untouchable was rendered according to the Law of Manu and that law was avowedly based on inequality.

This is the dharma laid down by Manu. It is called Manav Dharma i. e. Dharma which by its inherent goodness can be applied to all men in all times and in all places. Whether the fact that it has not had any force outside India is a blessing or a curse I do not stop to inquire. It is important to note that this Manav Dharma is based upon the theory that the Brahman is to have all the privileges and the Shudra is not to have even the rights of a human being, that the Brahman is to be above everybody in all things merely by reason of his high birth and the Shudra is to be below everybody and is to have none of the things no matter how great may be his worth.

Nothing can show the shamelessness and absurdity of this Manava Dharma better than turning it upside down. I know of no better attempt in this behalf than that of Dr. R. P. Pranjape agreat Educationist, Politician and Social reformer and I make no apology for reproducing it in full—

Peep Into the Future[f11]

This piece Was written against the Non-Brahmin Parties which were then in power in the Bombay and Madras Presidency and in the Central Provinces. The Non-Brahmin parties were founded with the express object of not allowing a single community to have a monopoly in State Service. The Brahmins have a more or less complete monopoly in the State services in all provinces in India and in all departments of State. The Non-Brahmin parties had therefore laid down the principle, known as the principle of communal ratio, that given minimum qualifications candidates belonging to non-Brahmin communities should be given preference over Brahmin candidates when making appointments in the public services. In my view there was nothing wrong in this principle. It was undoubtedly wrong that the administration of the country should be in the hands of a single community however clever such a community might be.

The Non-Brahmin Party held the view that good Government was better than efficient Government was not a principle to be confined only to the composition of the Legislature & the Executive. But that it must also be made applicable to the field of administration. It was through administration that the State came directly in contact with the masses. No administration could do any good unless it was sympathetic. No administration could be sympathetic if it was manned by the Brahmins alone. How can the Brahmin who holds himself superior to the masses, despises the rest as low caste and Shudras, is opposed to their aspiration, is instinctively led to be partial to his community and being uninterested in the masses is open to corruption be a good administrator ? He is as much an alien to the Indian masses as any foreigner can be. As against this the Brahmins have been taking their stand on efficiency pure & simple. They know that this is the only card they can

play successfully by reason of their advanced position in education. But they forget that if efficiency was the only criterion then in all probability there would be very little chance for them to monopolise State service in the way and to the extent they have done. For if efficiency was made the only criterion there would be nothing wrong in employing Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans & Turks instead of the Brahmins of India. Be that as it may, the Non-Brahmin Parties refused to make a fetish to efficiency and insisted that there must be introduced the principle of communal ratio in the public services in order to introduce into the administration an admixture of all castes & creeds and thereby make it a good administration. In carrying out this principle the Non-Brahmin Parties in their eagerness to cleanse the administration of Brahmindom while they were in power, did often forget the principle that in redressing the balance between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the public services they were limited by the rule of minimum efficiency. But that does not mean that the principle they adopted for their guidance was not commendable in the interests of the masses.

This policy no doubt set the teeth of many Brahmins on edge. They were vehement in their anger. This piece by Dr. Paranjpe is the finest satire on the policy of the non-Brahmin Party. It caricatures the principle of the non-Brahman party in a manner which is inimitable and at the time when it came out, I know many non-Brahmin leaders were not only furious but also speechless. My complaint against Dr. Paranjpe is that he did not see the humour of it. The non-Brahmin Party was doing nothing new. It was merely turning Manu Smriti upside down. It was turning the tables. It was putting the Brahmin in the position in which Manu had placed the Shudra. Did not Manu give privileges to Brahmin merely because he was a Brahmin ? Did not Manu deny any right to the Shudra even though he deserved it ? Can there be much complaint if now the Shudra is given some privileges because he is a Shudra ? It may sound absurd but the rule is not without precedent and that precedent is the Manu Smriti itself. And who can throw stones at the non-Brahmin Party ? The Brahmins may if they are without sin. But can the authors and worshippers, upholders of Manu Smriti claim that they are without sin? Dr. Paranjpe's piece is the finest condemnation of the inquity that underlies this Manav Dharma. It shows as nothing else does what a Brahmin feels when he is placed in the position of a Shudra.

IV

Inequality is not confined to Hindus. It prevailed elsewhere also and was responsible for dividing society into higher and lower free and servile classes. (Left incomplete in Ms—ed.)