CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF DIVISION OF INDIAN SOCIETY
AND CULMINATION INTO IRATIONAL RIGID CASTE-SYSTEM
AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF UNTOUCHABLES

3.1 ORIGIN OF VARNAS

The origin of caste system is in the Varnashrama Dharma, the division of society into four Varnas\(^1\)
(four castes.) viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. It was believed and preached that for the pros-
perity of the world the creator created the four Varnas. The creator created these Varnas from different parts
of his body i.e., the Brahmin was born from his thighs and the Sudra from his feet. He created Brahmins with
Gayotri (metre); the Kshatriyas with Trishtubh; the Vaishyas with Jagati and the Sudras without any metre.\(^2\)

1. Manu Smriti, Chapter I, Verse 31.
2. Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sutras, Chapter IV, Verse 3.
The first three Varnas are twice born (Dwiji), the first birth being from the mother and the second from the investiture with the sacred girdle. In the second birth Savitri is the mother and the teacher is the father because he gives instruction in the Vedas. Therefore, the first three Varnas are born twice while the Sudra is born only once. Among the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Sudra Varnas, each preceding Varna (Caste) is superior by birth to the one following. It is popularly held that in the beginning there were only three Varnas and the fourth Varna of the Sudra is an outcome of the fight between Brahmins and Kshatriyas for the supremacy in the Varna (Caste) hierarchy.

3.2 STATUS OF THE SUDRA

Many restrictions were imposed on the Sudras of which a few could be mentioned in brief. The Sudra was prohibited from milking a cow whose milk was to be

1. Ibid., Chapter II, Verses 1-4.
used for Agnihotro, from witnessing performance of sacrifice, from taking Soma drink, from initiation (Upanayana or the wearing of the sacred thread), from studying the Vedas, and from kindling the sacred fire (right of sacrifice).  

If a Vaishya comes as a guest to Brahmin's house he should be served food along with the servants.  

If a Sudra comes as a guest to a Brahmin's house, he shall be given work because the Sudra is not worthy of respect on the ground of his age or wealth or knowledge, however considerable these may be. He cannot be anything else but a servant even if Sudra is elder to a Brahmin. The Sudras were not only prohibited from learning the Vedas, the Vedas could not even be recited before the Sudras by law. The recitation of the Vedas be interrupted merely by a look at the Sudra woman.

The food touched by the first three Varnas is impure but not unfit for eating, while if it is touched

by the impure Sudra it should not be eaten. If a Brahmin dines with a Sudra at a Shraadh ceremony (Ceremony of worshiping dead ancestors) all merits of the dinner will be destroyed. 1 If a Brahmin dies of food given by a Sudra he is reborn as a village pig or in a sudra family. After the food if he indulges in sexual intercourse with a Sudra woman and a child is born, it becomes a Sudra and shall not ascend to the heaven. 2

Neither the Sudras are carried by the twice born nor the twice born are carried by the Sudras. 3 A Brahmin may not dwell in the kingdom of a Sudra or invader or low born men 4 . Such was the discrimination among the Varnas. Most of the rules were to the advantage of the higher Varnas. The higher was the position of a Varna in the social hierarchy, the more was the advantage to that Varna from these rules. It is, therefore the Sudra had few privileges because of his lowest position in the Varna system.

1. Manu Smriti, Chapter IX, Verse 175.
3. Vishnu Smriti, Chapter XIX, Sutras 1.4.
3.3 CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

UNTUCHABILITY, BARAKUMIN, ROMANY AND NEGRO

According to the Hindu religion caste system was firmly established at the time of the creation. The high caste, Brahmin were almost god like, while the untouchable Sudras were so impure that the mere passing of their shadow was enough to make other people feel defiled.

3.31 JAPANESE BARAKUMIN

Every one in modern India knew of the discrimination against untouchables, but very few people had heard about the Barakumin, Japan’s outcastes. The present estimate is that they constitute at least 1 percent of the population of Japan\(^1\). Condemned as they are to the outcaste jobs dealing with blood and death, the Barakumin are often assumed to do dull, disorderly, rude

1. Ian Mc Gregor, Human Rights, p.81.
and dirty works. There is an old legend that they are born with a bluish birthmark under each arm. At school it is difficult for the young Barakumin to settle confidently to work, aware as he is that even academic success cannot overcome prejudice when it comes applying for a job. Many Barakumin school children try to conceal their ancestry, and will get off the school bus some distance away from where they live. White collar workers often cut all links with their out caste family and friends in an attempt to escape their ancestry.

Both Hindu out castes and Japanese Barakumin which are condemned to do work every body also finds unpleasant, such as road sweeping and carrying night soil.

3.32 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - ROMANIES

There is an intricate connection between the stories spread around about the people, and the manner in which the society tends to treat them. The story or Myth may matter more than the reality in causing injustice, so that whether or not a Brahmin actually
does suffer injury by shaking hands with an untouchable or a Barakumin really does have a blue birth mark, may be much less important than that people believe it to be so. For centuries gypsies have suffered from the legends which branded them as house thieves and baby snatchers, leading up the very name 'gypsy', with such a stigma that many scholars now prefer the less familiar term Romany or Rom^1.

3.33 U.S.A. AND SOUTH AFRICA - NEGROES

In the United States of America and South Africa the Negroes are condemned to utter suppression.

The unequal status of the Negroes is due to the fact that "whites" have greater access to economic privileges and political power. It appears to be some what similar to the low status conferred to Harijans (untouchables) in India. This practice is not divinely ordained anywhere. The higher class have manipulated

political power and economic privileges and that is why they dominate and exercise authority over those who do not have these privileges. And this amounts to social suppression of certain categories of people.

The contemporary practice is intended to know social discrimination being practised in different parts of the world. The problem of untouchability is to be viewed in a global context rather than a parochial context. A negro or a barakumin or a Romani or an untouchable share deprivation of equality of social status, privileges and power. The degree of deprivation of privileges may vary from category to category depending upon the country in which these groups are situated.

3.4 THE DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING CASTE

Every body knows that caste is the name given to groups of certain kind into which Hindu Society is divided; but it is not easy to define the term precisely. Castes are not all built on the same model. The system
has grown up slowly and gradually and castes which are of different origin are also of different nature. They all have, as a common characteristic, a spirit of exclusiveness, which has the effect of restricting the intercourse of their members both with each other and with members of other castes. But that will not carry us very far. One caste forbids the remarriage of widows another permits it; one permits its members to accept food from certain outsiders, another forbids such acceptance from any body except a caste fellow. "In some parts of India some castes are regarded as conveying pollution not only by touch, but by mere proximity - in other words the people belonging to these lower castes are called as untouchables"¹.

The Hindu Society is divided into four classes or vernas namely: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra and for certain purposes these are still maintained. But for most purposes vague classifications are adopted which

vary according to the object in view. Sometimes the classifications are made as twice born and once born.
The latter corresponds to the Sudra the old dispersion, the former to other three varnas. At other times the classification will be into the very vague 'touchable' and Untouchable.

1.5 EARLY FUNCTIONAL DIVISION OF HINDU SOCIETY AND ITS IRRATIONAL CONTINUATION

The Hindu Social order was immemorially established on the foundations of four tiered varna caste system culminating into irrational rigid stratification. The varna-castes are as follows:

1. Brahmin
2. Kshatriya
3. Vaisya and
4. Sudra

This four-fold division was by certain Brahmin rishis, deemed as of divine origin, having been established by Emuna, the God of creation, to ensure the progress of society. The Lord declared the assigned roles, functions and obligations of men belonging to different
varna castes. The varnas karma order was thus a rank order of social status. Men were by nature unequal in rank; and there was a natural order among them. All were not equal, and social inequality was natural.

Brahmin was ordained to study, to teach, to do yajna and to defend dharma. Kshatriya was ordained to protect and to make donations. Vaisya was asked to do cultivation, to protect the cattle, to trade and establish industry, to lend money and to make donations. Sudra was obliged to show respect to those who were his superior by caste and to serve men of those higher castes. Neither castes classification was secular, nor its casual factor was private property or vocation. Instead, the caste division ranked in accordance with the Brahmin’s intellect, the Kshatriya’s political and military power, the Vaisya’s wealth and the Sudra’s labour. The Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaisya are called as dwija - twice born and undergo thread ceremony. In the pyramidsical caste hierarchy they enjoyed the highest imperishable bliss, if they fulfilled their assigned duties.
A Sudra subsisted by serving the twice born classes but certainly was not a slave of any one of the Higher caste Hindus. Any existing traces of slavery dating since the Muslim period of the Indian history and latter of the European was abolished on enactment of the Indian Penal Code in 1860.

In the Varna system Brahmin is placed at the apex, and the Sudra at the base. The brahmin read Vedas, he inherited scared learning and sacred science has to be learnt under him. Subject to his not falling off from the ordinances of law he could be a teacher and a preacher, and would command respect and reverence from persons of other castes. The Brahmin was considered to be the only one endowed with learning and intellect. They can deny knowledge to a Sudra. Dronacharya, the great guru of Mahabharata refused to admit Ekalavya as his student and thus denied him to learn and practice archery in his ashram, as he was considered to be Sudra. The brahmins were considered to be sacred. They were deemed worth more than what could be compensated. The brahmin would not intercourse, interdine and intermarry
with non-brahmins and more particularly with Sudras. They avoid food offered by a Sudra and consider sudras as impure. They avoid even to eat along with a Sudra and more over if a sudra touches him while eating they will leave off. "They keep always the untouchables at a distance". 1

The Kshatriya will come next in the hierarchy of caste system. The Kshatriyas were the rulers and they belonged to the warrior class. The Kshatriya shows respect towards a brahmin and consider him as guru. The main duty of a kshatriya was to defend the territory, protection of the subjects belonging to his territory. He organises the government and administers justice.

The Vaisyas along with brahmin and kshatriya was included in the dwija and they were entitled to under go thread ceremony (Upanyya Samskar) and study of Veda. He cultivates the land and establishes industry, trade and business. He controls economic

power and lends money. The vaisya co-operates with kshatriya to maintain his hold on means of production and land ownership.

The Sudras are the lowliest and last in the caste hierarchy. His duty is to show respect to the superior castes. His duty is only to serve them and not to reason for anything. He is an unskilled manual labourer, and even not receives the worth of his labour. The sudras are landless poor and afflicted with dependence upon the higher castes. The Sudras would not kindle sacred fire or do works productive of rewards. No teacher initiated and allowed a Sudra to reside in Asharam. The sudras were segregated from men of the higher castes in matters of residence, food, education and in many other social activities. The Sudras should not enter the areas inhabited by men of higher castes, except while on work. Thus the Sudras were considered as untouchables and even their presence would pollute the sacredness of the higher castes. The stigma of Untouchability could not be shed or washed off. Born as an untouchable, he should die as such. According to his jati (sub-caste) and avocation he would be a bhangi,
jamadar (sweeper), chamar (shoe maker), dhobi (washer-
man), kasal (butcher), Thoti, Yanadi etc., "The low
caste men were entrusted with different low occupa-
tions viz., leather-tanning and shoe making, toddy
rapping, clothe washing, lavatory cleaning, sweeping
etc.," The sudras were to be as servants or unskilled
landless labourers without any human value. It is also
thought that in the early stages of development of
Hindu Society caste was not founded wholly on heredi-
tary principle of varna divisions but basing on chara-
ccter and occupation to which the individuals accustomed.

However, the present social phenomena is not,
as simple as described in Dharma Shastras. The actual
state of affairs are very much complex, and confused,
because, the existence of any number of intracaste
Jatis (sub-castes) that is, intracaste endogamous
groups practising traditional rituals and occupations.
The jatis and not castes constituted the real social units.
The processes of division were often accompanied by pro-
cess of the slow imperceptible approximation of men in

1. R.C. Jain, The Origin and growth of untouchability,
one caste with the men in next higher caste, and also
slow sanskritization. Intracaste movement was meant
movement of men of one jati to another jati in the
higher tier in the society in any given linguistic
division or area. For instance, Vishwamitra, a dis-
tinguished sage and his clan were said to be non-brah-
min kshatriyas, but because of the learning, knowledge
and higher qualities of mind and heart were admitted
in the Brahminical fold in face of stiff resistance
from certain quarters. The rigid caste divisions were
not without intra-social conflicts, rivalries and con-
vulsions.

The progressive social groups, including the
Buddhists and jains stood opposed to caste divisions
and caste scale hierarchies, and propagated the ideals
of a casteless society based on human dignity and equal-
lity on one hand, and the unity of the social order on
the other. However, the bulk of the Hindu society re-
mained caste ridden. Men are placed unequally according
to the varna. So every Hindu according to this varna

system would be born with his varna and into his jati (sub-caste). Jati was not of his own choosing. The varna and jati was a matter of hereditary and origin but not a thing of his choice or acquisition. Everyone has to follow the norms of his jati to live as a caste man, and as such his status in social order was involuntarily and unalterably fixed. His mode of living, profession and avocation were determined inexorably by his sub-caste. His children belong to his own caste and jati, and the traditions and norms of every caste and jati will have their influence even from childhood. This varnajati classification is a crude social fact, traditionally recognised and enforced by general customs or usages. These customs and usages are also having the force of law. If any one violates these customs and usages he will be ex-communicated.

"The text of Dharmastra expressly recognised the caste rigidities, superiorities and privileges of the higher castes, and disabilities, disqualifications, incapacities and indignities of the lower caste divisions in general and of the lowest caste sudras in
Particular. For all practical purposes of law the society was taken to consist of two classes namely (1) the twice born of the higher castes entitled to superiority over Sudras; and (ii) Sudras and untouchables. So in its application the untouchable castes have disability to perform sacrifices or homa. They are prohibited in respect of entry into places of worship or assembly. The varna caste caused rigid social divisions and class hierarchies.

The legal rules derived from the written texts of Dhrama Sastras, recognised and enforced caste inequalities and provided for discrimination and segregation at caste levels. In addition to these rules the customs sanctions from violations of caste injunctions in respect of marriage, inheritance, adoption, maintenance, property relations, taxation, law administration etc., The penal law and procedure for trial thereby established varied with the caste of the accused. The protection of the law too was unequal. The punishment for

1. Kegzi, op.cit., p.197
similar offences was dissimilar, and procedure for punishment was fixed variously for men of different castes. People were treated unequally before the law, because the law was the caste-law, there was no general law of the land. There were no general equal laws for all. Protection was of the caste-law which prescribed social injunctions, prohibitions and obligations, ordained intracaste social intercourse, and prohibited violations of caste prohibitions.

Manu prescribed intra-caste savarna and sajatiya (endogamous) marriages for higher caste men, although did not entirely deem a marriage between a higher caste man and a lower caste woman invalid. But, on the contrary, the practice of lower caste man marrying a higher caste woman was almost prohibited. One who married a Sudra woman became a sudra, and his children would also suffer the same fate. They were to be excommunicated. The higher caste women were required to be saved from being polluted of inter-course with sudra men. "Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fight the righteous war of Mahabharat for the reason among others protection of Kshatriya
women because the clan and caste family status would be lost, if the women became polluted with caste degradation.

Even if prohibition of hypergamy, inter-caste-marriage was directory in the beginning, it hardened later into a rule of hard rigid custom. The Mitakshara and the Dayabhaga the two works of the uncodified Hindu law prohibited inter-caste marriage between a man of a inferior caste and a woman of a higher caste, for instance, marriage of a "dome" with a girl of a 'narce' caste; or a 'Khatri' with a 'brahmin' girl. The doubts, disputes and caste claims could be raised in caste courts manned by caste and village elders. In the earlier days the caste offences were being punished with fine and in serious cases with ex-communication. Later, the courts established in British India decided the caste matters in accordance with the law of the defendant.

Dr. Ambedkar has presented in the book "The untouchables" the origin of untouchability and other

1. Ibid., p.198.
baffling problems connected with its continuance up to the present day. The origin of untouchability he says buried in a dead past which no body knows. To make it alive is like an attempt to reclaim to history a city which has been dead since ages past and present it as it was in its original condition.¹

Untouchability is an aspect of extreme poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and physical and economic dependence and is a stigma by caste and is carried by a person from the time of his birth. "Due to number of causes untouchables were kept quite aloof from the rest of the population and the sin of being born in the house of an untouchable had no social expiation and atonement"². In South India, casteism is practised in its most rigid form. The idea of untouchability conveys a sense of defilement and pollution existed in India from very ancient times. Manu says that the dwelling of the 'Chandalas' shall be outside the village, they must be made

1. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, The Untouchables - who were they and why they became untouchables, 1977, p.28.
'appatras' and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys. This segregation had its origin in the fact that the conquerers wanted to preserve their purity and to save their race from gradual degradation as the conquered was ceremonially unclean. Dr. Ambedkar, was of the opinion that untouchability was born some time about 400 A.D. It was born out of the struggle for the supremacy between Buddhism and Brahminism. Ambedkar pointed out that the ideal of Chatur Varna was born when the mind of man was primitive and was without rich endowment of varied thought available in modern times.

Thus, the traditional Hindu social system was a unique system of inequality sustained by religious and ritual conceptions of purity and pollution. The traditional model of social stratification was that of status-summation in which one's caste position in a ritually determined status of hierarchy summed up his total life---his occupation, his education, his commensal relations and other rights. In this kind of social organisation inequality was accepted as a fundamental value.

and there was no "rank-disequilibrium", that is there was no caste which was very high on social power but very low on economic power or very high on economic power but low on ritual status.¹ There is a close relationship between caste and socio-economic position of a person.

Numerous castes came into existence due to the interbreeding among higher castes with lower castes and vice versa. It is hard to trace the origins of the scheduled Castes but it is widely believed that the "offsprings of the Shudra father and Brahmin mother in different combinations, fell under the category of unspeakers, unspeakables and untouchables"². The untouchables were the lower castes in the Shudra category and their socio-economic conditions are deplorable.

3.6 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF UNTOUCHABLES

That the untouchables live outside the village is a notorious fact. "They lived outside the village

². R.N. Sampath, Scheduled Castes, A Hindu Law Perspective, 1982, p.299

from the very beginning even before they became untouchables and that they continued to live outside the village because of the supervision of untouchability at a later stage is the only possibility worth consideration". Primitive society was no doubt nomadic, all tribes did not take to settled life at once and the same time. The origin of untouchability is to be found in the unclean and filthy occupations of the untouchables. Beef-eating was also considered as the cause of untouchability, but this view was criticised.

"The Chamars are also regarded as the untouchables. The word Chamar is derived from the sanskrit word Chormakar which means a maker of leather". The chamars have a variety of occupations. Primarily they are skinners, tanners, shoe makers, and musical instrument makers. They practise also the weaving of cotton clothes, and mats of reed for their livelihood. They serve as agriculturer labourers and workers. They supply the bands of instrumental musicians to every Hindu at the time of religious ceremonies of a joyful nature.

"After the Sepoy Mutiny an attempt was made to recruit the native army from the ranks of the chamars instead of from the higher castes like the Brahmins and Rajputs. But this attempt did not prove successful. 1

Thus these lower castes are considered as unclean castes. Their very touch renders it necessary for a higher caste man to bathe with all his clothes on. So they are kept in a distant place. When their services are required by a higher caste Hindu, he will allow them to enter the other enclosures of his house, but not into the interior of any building used as a dwelling house. "Similarly the Mahar was a Jack-of-all menial work in a village. The mahars and the Manga are the two great untouchables castes" 2. These castes comprise of lower artisans and hereditary village servants. The duties of these castes to the village are to cut firewood, carry letters, sweep and clean the yards in front of the house, carry cowdung cakes to the cremation grounds and to dig graves. These untouchables are the hereditary village servants.

They have had a monopoly on dead animals. They are employed as domestic servants. They played on musical

1. Ibid., p.213.
2. Sunanda Patwardhan, Change among Indian Harijans, 1963, p.33
instruments. The Harijans and other untouchable castes live outside the villages in isolated areas namely the Harijanwada. "Their houses, made of mud and stone, are generally untidy and ill-cared for".  

These Harijan castes have suffered from ritual, social and economic disabilities through the centuries. They could not enter temples; no priest officiated for them and they are denied access to wells; their children are denied education, the barber and dhobi would not serve them. They make all types of ropes. In olden days and even now they supply the ropes needed. Broom-making was still another occupation. Some of these untouchable castes cut and dry skins, make shoes, sandals and water bags and also do tanning where a 'Dhor' population is not to be found. "Some of them are relatively well off economically and are rated the highest in the ritual hierarchy among the Harijans".  

The DHORS are tanners. Their tanneries are situated outside village as their habitations were

popularly though to omit foul smell. The Dhors lived nearer to the touchable castes in villages, unlike the Mahars, Chamars, Harijans etc., whose habitation areas are outside the village frontier. In the caste hierarchy they are superior to the Mahars and are next in the line to them.

There is a certain ambiguity regarding their social position. Their rank is held at the head of the "impure" classes below the kunbia and Malia and they will not accept food from the hands of classes reckoned impure. This does not establish a higher claim because the chamars refuse to eat from the hands of Dhor. The Holars in Maharashtra seem to be repairers of shoes and makers of footwear. Bhat\(^1\) mentions them as doing the work of cobblers. It is their hereditary occupation. Valunjkar mentions them as shoe-makers for the Harijan Castes\(^2\). They also play on musical instruments such as Dehp like the Mahar or Mang community. Unlike the Holer, the Holayes hold land in Karnataka, worked as agricultural labourers and handloom weavers.

3.61 STATUS OF WOMEN AMONG SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES

The status of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Women depend upon the kind of taboos associated with their roles and duties—within the family or outside. They have to work for their livelihood. Change of status in the family can occur on account of improvements in the educational level of the family members. The most important factor in effecting change in the status of an individual is the migration of a person to an urban area. This presupposes changes in the income level on occupation status or both. Migrations can be from rural to urban areas.

In rural areas the working force in a family primarily consisted of the husband and wife. They have no work in the agricultural fields. "The female members in a Harijan family are considered to be important asset as any other male members". In spite of the willingness on the part of Harijan couple to earn their livelihood

by honest and earnest labour an daily wages, they found it difficult to get regular employment. Uncertain conditions compelled them to borrow money from the rich landlords to meet expenses at the time of sickness, death or marriage. This lead them to mortgage or sell their total man-hours to repay the amount of loan. Thus they were enslaved and being exploited due to their poverty and ignorance.

Stephen Fuch¹ studied Balahi chamars in Madhya Pradesh and has thrown valuable light on the conditions of the Harijans. Traditionally the Balahi were the untouchables working as menial servants with Rajputs. Their main occupation was skinning the dead animals and deeling in hides. They consider themselves higher than other chamars in the region. Women in a joint family with some cultivable land had to contribute their share of work in the field over and above doing all the domestic work. "The burden of work in a Balahi joint-family is so heavy that the daughter-in-law was heavily taxed if she did not accompany along with other

women in the family". "The daughters even if they are married, who might be visiting their parents, were required to work to contribute towards the expenses of the family. They worked outside in the fields during their stay with the parents and handed over their earnings to them".

"A married Belahi woman had the right of inheritance in the property of her deceased husband. She had equal share in the property with her grownup sons. In case, she wanted to stay with a particular son, she was free to do so, and the son became the inheritor of her share after her death".

Some of the lower caste women in rural areas also enjoyed equal status in making decisions concerning younger members of the joint-family. But, they had to abide by a number of taboos which indicates that women did not enjoy complete freedom and equality with men in all walks of life.

3. Trivedi, op.cit., p.38.
A Balahi woman was not supposed to talk to the men-folk outside the house. This was born out of the customary avoidance and respect that women were supposed to pay to men in general. "If a woman wanted to express special respects to a man, she had to turn her back or to cover her bosom or cover her face." When she happened to meet a respectable person in the family or in the community, she was supposed to pay regards by removing her shoes, however, this was done particularly during her visit to a village different from her own. "Majority of the woman of untouchable castes are not entirely free to seek divorce from her husband. The village elders had to be consulted and the views of both the husband's and wife's families had to be secured."

The tendency among the scheduled castes of emulating high caste practices for raising the status of their community is reported to be a matter of historical continuity. Briggs, writing on chamaras of the United Provinces in 1920, said that the well to do families of the chamaras were making all efforts to esclude

2. Trivedi, op.cit., p.39.
woman from working outside and from mixing freely with strangers. They also tried to bring about a number of so-called social reforms by prohibiting widow remarriage or by discouraging the practice of eating pork etc., which was deprived by the high Caste Hindus. "However, they were reported to have shown leniency towards illicit sexual relations by unmarried girls or married or widowed women. These offences were taken seriously and punished only when they were publicly known. Otherwise both the parties were given warnings but allowed to go scot-free for initial lapses."¹ "Cohn who had first visited Madhopur village in Uttar Pradesh in 1952-53, re-studied the conditions and status of chamars in 1958. He had thrown valuable light on the changes which had taken place in the conditions of chamars."² He indicated, within a period of six years, between his first visit and the second visit number of persons working outside the village had nearly doubled. Some families of chamars had permanently migrated to cities. The condition of chamars was no doubt deteriorating rapidly.

They had lost a good deal of cultivable land and had no other steady source of income or occupation in the village. "It was found that the chamar brides had run away because their husbands could not provide them enough food and for the simple economics reason—there was no work available in the village. This happened after 1953 on account of economic and political crisis in the life of the Thakurs the village Land Lords".¹

Majority of the Chamars, Harijans and other untouchables castes being landless and depressed were naturally under great strain. Their life was also complex, because of a number of social, economic and cultural factors interacting with one another. "This complexity was related to a variety of family types: (1) Nuclear (2) Joint, or (3) extended. A nuclear family consisted of either a single adult man or a man with his wife and unmarried children, or a woman with unmarried children. In the joint or extended families

¹. Cohn, Chamar family in a North Indian Village, Economic Weekly, July, 1961, p.1051.
the representative composition was - man and his wife, sons and son's wife and latter's grownup children, or brothers and their wives with children, or a man with his wife, and daughter with her husband and children".  

The kinship in some of the chamars and other untouchable castes was becoming flexible and was loose at the time of quarrel in the family. A married man would not mind leaving his ancestral village and settle down with his father-in-law, particularly, if the latter had cultivable land and no children. Some of the disputes may also arise in a joint-family on food portions, also particularly, on account of differences of opinion on some issues between a brother's wife and between wives and their husband's mother. "It was found that on such occasion a woman would not mind leaving her husband, if he did not take her side in the dispute". This happened because economically a chamar or other untouchable caste woman in rural areas has been fully self reliant and independent. "The economic roles of both the husband

1. Ibid., p.1053-55.  
2. Trivedi, op.cit., 1977, p.40
and the wife were in brief inter-changeable and so long as the earning ability was concerned there was very little direct weight of authority from the head of the family who may be a man or woman". "The Chamar woman is helpful and active economic contributor to her house-hold and she may demand separation of the joint family house-hold if she feels it would be to her benefit".

3.62 SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG HARIJANS

"The untouchable caste families who were engaged in urban occupations, permanently or temporarily, were either tempted to form or to consolidate a joint family or to break away from an existing one". Alexander studied social mobility in Kerala with special reference to the Pulaya Harijans in 1968. He found that the married Pulaya couples had a tendency to get separated from the joint family of the parents. Also there was no sex discrimination between children in a small

1. Ibid., p.41.
3. Ibid., p.1052.
family. They socialised the children differently according to their sex, so that in adulthood the children could perform different social roles according to the set pattern of their social norms. Besides the high caste children with rich family backgrounds were not made to work outside the family in order to contribute to the family income. Obviously this was not the case with Puleya boys and girls coming from poorer families. The pattern of marriage among the Puleya was probably similar to the one prevalent among the high castes Hindus. The crosscousin marriages were also becoming unpopular as in the higher castes. "The educated Puleya felt that the practice of crosscousin marriages led to in-breeding and was not healthy for the future progeny. The practice of polygamy which was prevalent disappeared and monogamy became more popular"1.

Regarding rules of marriage the principles of territoriality and endogamy seemed to have prevailed. Mahara did not inter-marry and also marriage was prohibited within three degrees of relationship. "A brahmin

1. Ibid., p.155.
was asked to fix the marriage date, and the marriage will be conducted either by a Brahmin priest standing at a distance or by the same caste-men.\textsuperscript{1}

Sunanda Patwardhan throws valuable light on inter-caste marriages between caste Hindus and the Harijans in the twelve districts of Maharashtra covered by his study between 1963-70\textsuperscript{2}. From 1974 onwards the Government of Andhra Pradesh is providing monetary incentive to a high caste man or woman, who prepared to marry a Harijan partner. This was no doubt an incentive towards removal of untouchability and also purports to improve the status of lower castes who are perpetually being in the danger of being violated by caste Hindu. "The Annual Reports of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes throw a valuable light on the consciousness and awareness of these women of their rights"\textsuperscript{3}.

1. Sunanda Patwardhan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.37
3.61 LIFE-CYCLE CEREMONIES OF HARIJANS

The religious life of the Harijans includes the life cycle ceremonies performed at various stages in an individual's life, from birth to death, as well as other folk customs, beliefs, superstitions and magical practices. Some of these castes are Shaivas and others Vaishnavas. They professed Hinduism. The Mahara are the guardians of the Goddess Mariam who is worshipped by Harijans as well as non-Harijans. Mariam is to be found in many parts of India. For example, she is known as Mariamma in Tamil Nadu. The spread of Mariam in Maharashtra indicates her acceptance by the elite section of the Indo-Aryan culture to a certain extent; the mutual rapprochement of the folk and elite cultures is demonstrated explicitly in Mari being equated with Chandi in the Sanskrit lexicon called Ratnamala.\(^1\)

The social structure with its rituals and magical beliefs of the Meng closely resembled that of

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the Mahars. Professing Hinduism they are mainly shaivites, whose deities were local gods and goddesses. Because of shaivism, jangam played an important part in their wedding and other ritual ceremonies. The behaviours of chamars also did not differ from those of the Mahars.

The census reports, District Gazetteers descriptive notes by writers like, Shinde, B.R. Ambedkar, and Kharat deal with the patterns of the life-cycle ceremonies performed and relevant behaviour.

3.64 UNTOUCHABILITY AMONG THE UNTOUCHABLES THEMSELVES

The practice of untouchability is a two-tier affair. The scheduled castes are discriminated against by the higher caste Hindus. At the same time the lower untouchables groups are discriminated against by other untouchable groups who consider themselves as higher in the social hierarchy. The ideas of low and high status of the groups is linked with the functional aspects – that is the major occupations performed by these groups.
"The Bhangis are considered the lowest because their occupation involve sweeping and removing the night soil"\(^1\).

The higher caste Hindus while showing their contempt for the untouchables, say, their occupations are such. They are dirty. The same answer is given by a chamar or Harijan when asked why he discriminates against the Bhangi. This practice by the untouchables is harmful to themselves and gives rise to serious problems, as it provides a justification, though unconvincing, to higher caste Hindu to continue the practice of untouchability. The whole Hindu social system and its values, beliefs forms the basis of untouchability. In the fight against it, the untouchables have to fight first untouchability amongst themselves. A movement among themselves to fight untouchability will strengthen their fight against Hindu orthodoxy, and then only their social, political and economic disabilities can be removed and they can prevent themselves from being exploited by the higher caste Hindus.

Thus the ancient Hindu Society created some horrible anomalies namely touchables and untouchables through the caste system. Mainly, it is their social and economic conditions that led to the identification of these lower groups as untouchables.

Hence a social reformatory movement against the practice of untouchability and to better the socio-economic conditions of untouchables was launched during the freedom struggle by the various political leaders and social reformers which is studied in the next chapter.
"One forgets that each of the tens or hundreds of thousands of societies that have coexisted or succeeded one another on this earth since man first appeared has made use of a moral certitude—like that which we ourselves can invoke—to proclaim that even if it were nothing more than a small nomadic band or a hamlet lost in the midst of a forest, it nonetheless embodied all the meaning and dignity of which human life is capable."

CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS.