CHAPTER -II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA
CHAPTER -II

BRIEF HISTORY OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

I. INTRODUCTION

Caste system in India is so universal, that no study of India as social, economic and political institutions, would be complete without a reference to it. Besides, caste constitutes the very basis of the structure of Backward classes. The problem of Backward classes viz. 'The scheduled castes', 'The scheduled Tribes', 'Other Backward classes' and 'De-notified communities' has arisen chiefly from the social structure of Hindu society. Hence a brief review of the caste system from different angles is imperative.

"A caste in India fairly definable as an endogamous group even as a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, whose members follow traditionally a single occupation or certain cognate occupations, have by fact or fiction a common origin and are generally deemed to form a homogeneous unit, whose constituent parts are more closely allied to one another than to any other section of society."¹

A.L. Kroeber defined caste as "an endogamous and hereditary subdivision of an ethnic unit occupying a post of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other such subdivision"²

"A caste is an organism of a lower type; it grows by fission, and each step in its growth detracts from its power to advance of even to preserve the art which it professes to practise"³
Caste has been variously defined by both Indian and Western scholars. The factors emphasized by scholars in their definitions centre round endogamy, hereditary professions, exclusive social classes with codified social distance, ritual ranking of society, etc. However, there is no unanimity among the scholars as regards the definition of the term 'caste' and its genesis. This is because, the complexity of the problem defies an important treatment of the subject.

Of late, Taya Zinkin has arrived at the conclusion, that caste is not class, it is not colour, it is not Aryan or non-Aryan, and it is not an occupation. But then what is it? She very humorously remarks. It is much easier to say what caste is not, than what caste is"⁴

II. ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA:

Origin of the caste system is a much discussed problem. Innumerable theories are advanced and the most outstanding among them are:

a) Code of Manu or Manu Dharmashastra;
b) Nesfield's Functional theory of caste;
c) Ibbeston’s theory of caste;
d) Senart’s theory of caste;
e) Resley’s explanation of caste; and
f) Modern theories of caste by Ghurye and Dutt.

In tracing the origin of caste, people are greatly influenced by the facts recorded about this institution in the ancient sacred works such as vedas upanishadas, puranas and Dhramshastras.⁵ The commonly known theory of
caste is 'Chaturvarna' or the fourfold division of society into Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. This ideal of chaturvarna is mentioned in purushasukta, a hymn in Rigveda. The names of the four orders are given as Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra who were created by the supreme soul for the prosperity of the world. Brahman was supposed to have been originated from the mouth of the creators, Kshatriya from his arms, Vaishya from his thighs and sudra from his feet. Just as all the organs are indispensable for the proper functioning of the human body so also the four divisions of society were indispensable for social harmony. Besides, the Brahman was entrusted to study, teach, perform sacrifice for the general good and receive all for livelihood. Kshatriya was bound to protect the people. Vaishya had to undertake business, cultivation of land, etc. Sudra was destined to render service to the three groups. This functional classification was considered important for the smooth running of administration.

According to the varna theory, 'Guna' or character was chiefly responsible for the classification of castes. But the varna theory can not be interpreted in the strict sense of colour theory. Physical colour was not so much emphasized as the intrinsic qualities of the people. The intrinsic qualities were symbolised in colour. The satvaguna of Brahmana was symbolised in white colour, 'Rajas' or 'passion' was symbolized with the red colour or valour for which stood the Kshatriyas. The Vaishyas were attributed to yellow colour, the lust for wealth and Shudras were supposed to be of a 'tamasic' nature of dark.16
Brahmans were exalted to the highest social status for the presence of virtues like self-sacrifice, self-control, self-less motives and profound thought. Then came the Kshatriyas for their heroic venture to put down anti-social elements. Next in order were the Vaishyas to maintain the moral standards in business as wealth constituted the social trust of the country; like wise, the menial services of the Sudras was never degraded but viewed mainly from the angle of spirituality.

Coming to the critical theories of caste, Nesfield was of the firm conviction that 'Function and function' only, as I think was the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up. His theory runs as follows;

Each caste or group of castes represents one or other of those progressive stages of culture which have marked the industrial development of mankind, not only in India, but in every other country in the world where in some advance has been made from primeval savagery to the arts and industries of civilised life. The rank of any caste as high or low depends upon whether the industry represented by the caste belongs to an advanced or backward stage of culture; and thus the natural history of the human industries affords the chief clue to the graduations as well as to the formation of Indian castes.

Senart emphasised the family or gentile theory as the basis of 'caste'. According to him the functional theory of caste system was superficial because, dislocation of the functional division, where members of the different communities performing functions contrary to their allotment by the caste rigidity was widely seen in the country. He opined that: "It would be an
exaggeration to imagine Hindu society as enclosed according to the occupation of its members in a chessboard of unchangeable and impassable squares”9 His theory of caste was based on usage and tradition. He remarked: “The social organism of India, the play of its motive forces, is moreover regulated infinitely more by custom, varying according to locality and baffling in its complexity, than legal formula laid down in authentic and easily accessible texts ”10 He argued that caste was but a normal development of ancient Aryan institutions adjusting it self to the conditions prevailing in India. The parallelism put forward in the development of his theory was, the close correspondence between the social organization of the Hindus and that of the Greeks and Romans. He further observed that the caste system;

"By the domination it claimed for the Brahmans it preserved a rigidity concerning religious scruples which was reflected in the severity of the caste rules; it served as a basis for that hierarchy which has become an integral part of the system and facilitated its establishment by lending peculiar force to the ideas of purity, generally speaking, determine the levels of the social scale”11

Sir Herbert Risley presented his theory of caste on “a basis of fact and a superstructure of fiction.” The basis of fact was, the inversion of the country by another instills the principle of racial distinctions. So caste system started with the fact of racial distinctions after the Aryan invasion of the indigenous Dravidians.

Once started in India, the principle was strengthened perpetuated and extended to all ranks of society by the fiction that people who speak a different
language, dwell in different districts, worship different Gods, eat different food, observe different social customs, follow a different profession or practice the same profession in a slightly different way must be so unmistakably aliens by blood that intermarriage with them in a thing not to be thought of.\textsuperscript{12}

The peculiar characteristics of the Indian intellect which contributed to the growth of the caste system according to Risley were;

Its lax hold of facts, its indifference to action, its absorption in dreams, its exaggerated reverence for tradition, its passion for endless division and sub-division, its acute sense of minute technical distinctions, its pedantic tendency to press a principle to its remarkable capacity for imitating and adapting social ideas and usages of what ever origin.\textsuperscript{13}

Modern theories of casts attribute racial factors to the genesis of caste system. The theory developed by G.S. Ghurrye reads as follows;

Basing my calculation on some of the physical measurement taken by anthropologists and using one of the statistical devices to gauge the nearness of distance of one caste from another in the totality of these measurements. I have established a general correspondence between finer physical type and high position in caste hierarchy.\textsuperscript{14}

The physical affinities of high castes and their marked separation from low castes are further illustrated in the caste hierarchy of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Bengal and Bombay. He further observes "This racial origin of the principal feature of the caste system is further supported by the early term Varna meaning colour, used to specify the orders in society".\textsuperscript{15}
Thus a number of theories have been advanced on the genesis of caste system. But unfortunately there is no unanimity among the scholars as regards the origin and nature of caste system. The complexity of the problem has influenced the scholars to emphasise one sided to the modern critical theories of caste, there is a great divergence of views. Some authors emphasise the religious aspects of caste, some describe caste as the functional division of society while others rely on racial factors, custom and usage, tradition, tribal divisions, etc. The conclusion arrived at by Herbert Risley after a detailed study of the problem is;

The origin of caste from the nature of the case is an insoluble problem. We can only frame more or less plausible conjectures, derived from the analogy of observed facts. The particular conjecture now put forward is based firstly, upon the correspondence that can be traced between certain caste gradations and certain variations of physical type; secondly on the development of mixed races from stocks of different colour and thirdly, on the influence of fiction."  

A detailed study of the social institution of the caste points to the direction that a number of factors have contributed to the genesis and growth of this institution at different intervals. Since the institution was subjected to several influences, the basis once accepted to be the origin ceased to be the sole factor with the transformation of the social institution. For instance, 'Guna' or character was emphasised in the varna theory of caste, which is incidentally the oldest and the widely accepted theory. But with the lapse of time, we find references being made to the factor of 'birth' as the sole
determinant of caste in Mahabharat about 700 B.C. With the Aryan invasion of the Dravidians, we find several theories springing up emphasising the functional division, racial distinction etc., constituting the origin of caste system. Modern practice has travelled very far from the early origins. Hence, from the above analysis it could be safety concluded that the genesis of caste system is attributable to a number of factors - 'Guna' or character, birth, occupation or guild tribal division, racial distinction, tradition and usage. To emphasise a single factor would be on the origin of caste system. The only consolation that the study of caste system has offered to the social scientist in the words of Herbert Risley is "The search for origins, like the quest of the sengreal, possesses endless fascination, and if it is does not yield any very tangible results, it atleast has the merit of encouraging research" 17

III. ANALYSIS OF CASTE SYSTEM:

Caste system is not a peculiar phenomenon found only in India. Analogous institutions are found in almost all the major civilizations of ancient times, even though they may vary in intricate details. Stratification of society is found even in the advanced countries of the world. Social distinctions and social distance are common in all societies. In democracy egalitarian ideology holds good in theory. It may even sound a basic reality before the court of law. But in actual practice inequality is an accepted social order in all countries of the world. Inequalities in income, wealth, social prestige, social standing, political power, intellectual abilities, etc. do exist and they cannot be ruled out absolutely. Ranking is therefore a common feature in all societies. But the social stratification of society in India stands out distinct because, the basis of stratification is 'hereditary' rather than 'individuality'.
Institutions similar to the caste system were found in the primitive societies of Egypt, Japan, China, Persia, Greece, Rome, Ceylon, Siam, South Africa, Burma, Germany and England, etc. In Egypt, the society was divided into three classes: land owners, serfs, and the slaves. Occupations were traditional and hereditary, particularly the artisans were prevented from professing any occupation other than their hereditary trade. Likewise, sacerdotal literature of ancient Persia makes a reference to the division of society into four classes: priests, warriors, cultivators, and artisans. In China, society was divided into Four orders: gentleman, agricultarists, artisans, and merchants. In Japan, the five distinct social divisions were hereditary soldiers, farmers, artisans, traders, and Etas. The Etas of Japan compare favourably with the Untouchables living in the outskirts of the cities and villages. Roman society was divided into the patricians, the plebeians, and the slaves. Similarly, Anglo-Saxon English society was marked with three social groups: the nobleman, the common free man, and the slaves. In Europe, occupations involving manual labour were rated very low in social estimation. But here, the option was given to the goldsmiths who, despite being grouped under the artisan class, were rated high, as their work involved brain work more than manual labour. German society of the eighteenth century was marked with five divisions: princes, nobles, burghers, peasants, and serfs.

A brief review of the social divisions which prevailed in different parts of the world helps us to demarcate the distinct features of the caste system. The notable distinction is that the term 'caste' is not found in any social stratification. Instead, we come across the term 'class'. This poses another problem as to whether 'caste' can be equated with 'class' are they synonymous.
? But this is only a hypothesis. Caste stands altogether on a different plane and it is a very remote comparison or correspondence to class. Yet another distinct trait is, the caste organisation as found in India is very comprehensive and all in all. It regulated not merely the vocational set up of different social orders but even catered to their moral behaviour. Apart from this, there was a social injunction, that the failure to observe caste rules would render people to be out castes. On the contrary, the scope of class organisation was limited in the sense, that it regulated only the professional behaviour of the people. It left untouched the social life of the people. Moreover, class distinctions in Western societies were based on race, language, rank and social status. But under the caste hierarchy 'birth' was made the determinant for social stratification. Social isolation among the people professing the same religious faith was the glaring feature of the caste system as contrasted with the class organisation. It is true, that in both class and caste organisation public service ranked high and menial jobs were rated low. Class hierarchy was found in all medieval civilizations, so also social stratification and certain taboos on eating, marriage, etc. But the practice of 'Untouchability' based on ceremonial purity was a peculiar trait found only in the Indian caste organisation.

IV. A SURVEY OF THE CASTE SYSTEM:

Caste as conceived by the Varna Theory had flexibility. Even though there was a fourfold classification of society, it rested on the basis of intrinsic qualities of individuals. There was some spirituality behind the caste structure rather than absurd rigidity. 'Guna' or character gave a way to 'birth' as the determinant of caste during the time of Mahabharata (700 B.C). With the
Aryan invasion functional classification became marked. But there was mobility of occupation. Even as remarked by Dr. Buhler"18, that occupations were not hereditary in vedic or Budhist times. The functional classification emphasised more the spirit of co-operation. But gradually there was functional disintegration with every fresh invasion of the country. The result was, a number of castes professing varied occupations came into existence. From the original fourfold division, there were as many as Fifty-seven mixed castes which were ethnic or functional in origin."19 But still the caste system aimed at a synthesis of the diverse social and cultural elements in the country. It was a sort of social security for racial groups of different types. It illustrated the comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the co-operation of cultures. 'Paradoxical as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust"20

Later, the stamping of occupation to particular caste of specific region became the order of the day. This specific allotment of functions was necessitated by the self-sufficiency principle. Every village was a self sufficient unit and so to avoid competition, caste groups on functional basis were formed. Rural India with agricultural economy was able to maintain an autonomous and compact system of functional division of society. The most important thing to be noticed in this context was castes acted as occupational guilds. There was united action on the part of the caste groups because of their dual membership to the caste on the one hand and occupation on the other. Thus caste system acted not only as a political establisher but also was responsible for the preservation of the cultural heritage of our hoary past.
Taya Zinkin has observed: In the long turmoil that was Indian history, caste held together the fabric of society; the integrity of the village was built round the framework of caste; the survival of Hinduism under Muslim and Christian onslaughts might well have been impossible without the devotion of peasant and scholar alike to caste customs and caste ritual.\textsuperscript{1,21}

Yet another unique feature to be noted is, the people opted social security and solidarity rather than equality. This was the keynote for the survival of functional classification of society. The lower castes were impressed by the Hindu philosophy, that whatever may be one's caste Brahman or Shudras, one can attain perfection by doing well the duties assigned to him and remaining within the fold of his caste. People were not induced to aspire for higher social status. The performance of duties rather than the demand for rights was emphasized. The sense of unity and social harmony regulated society. Functional classification of castes worked well for centuries chiefly because, of the social divisions were more conscious of their responsibilities and duties rather than rights and privileges.

Gradually, caste began by the principles of endogamy and traditional occupation, culminated in the vivisection of society with the ideas of purity and impurity. It sowed the seeds of segregation and exclusiveness in short the 'touch-me-notism' in Hindu society. In due course, the caste structure deteriorated beyond repair. It sealed society into water tight social divisions isolated from each other by imposing taboos on food, matrimony, social get-togethers etc. The social distance between the sub-divisions of the same caste was made so great, that a person born in a particular caste (sub-division)
had no mobility in occupation or mingling with other sub-divisions for purpose of marriage. The only mobility was found in the violation of caste rules which meant social boycott and extermination. A.B. Wadia has commented on this malady as: "the high metaphysics of the Upanishads and the ethics of the Gita have been reduced to mere words by the tyranny of caste".

The perverted motives of caste system which later took hold of Hindu society were the rigid concept of social hierarchy, the theory and practice of pollution, birth as the lever for selecting profession, and static social structure. Primary importance was given to a man's birth in a particular caste for deciding his 'be-all' and 'end-all'. As J.H. Hutton remarked:

From the point of view of the individual member of a caste, the system provides him from birth with a fixed social milieu from which neither wealth nor poverty, success nor disaster can remove him, unless of course he so violates the standards of behaviour laid down by his caste that it spews him forth temporarily or permanently."

The climax of the perverted motive of caste system culminated in propounding the theory of pollution to extremities. This social malady of India brought in its train a pandora's box. As Dr. A.R. Wadia rightly pointed out: "worst of all she has become the home of Untouchability and unapproachability which have branched her with the course of cain."

The theory and practice of pollution was exalted to the maximum. It was asserted that the touch and even sight of the untouchables caused pollution to members of high castes particularly the Brahmans. The
untouchables were deprived of all services of the community use of public wells, entry to temples, schools, medical aid and other facilities, for fear of contamination. Brahmanism was in due course attacked for creating rigid social distinctions. Dr. Ambedkar pointed out: "Inequality is the official doctrine of Brahmanism and the suppression of the lower classes aspiring to equality has been looked upon by them and carried out by them without remorse as their bounden duty." Dr. Ambedkar emphatically stated: "The outcaste is a by product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes."

Thus, caste system which was the outcome of trust and tolerance, cooperation and consolidation became an institution of discrimination and segregation repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism. As Radhakrishnan pointed out: 'Though it has now degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance, though it tends to perpetuate inequality and develop the spirit of exclusiveness, these unfortunate effects are not the central motives of the system.'

The notions of caste discrimination and social exclusiveness were repudiated from times immemorial. The principles of unity of human race and brotherhood of mankind were taught by the great religious thinkers from...
Buddha down to Vivekananda. Each of these thinkers bequeathed the message of universal brotherhood. Indian history is replete with social and religious movements starting with the Upanishads and followed by a number of isms (Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Shaivaism, Sikhism etc) working towards the eradication of caste system. These movements inspired in the people a liberal social philosophy preaching the gospel of equality. But it is our misfortune, that inspite of a rich cultural heritage and high ideals we fostered a rigid caste system.

Till the advent of the British rule, the Brahmans enjoyed high social status in caste hierarchy. But gradually the caste structure started showing signs of decay and disintegration. With the rapid industrialisation of the country, there was a further setback in the rigid observance of caste rules. The dwindling of cottage industries and handicrafts in the face of foreign competition and the destruction of village autonomy gave a rude shock to the caste structure necessitating some modifications. The establishment of a uniform British law throughout the country undermined the integrity of the caste structure. It deprived caste councils to decide civil and criminal cases concerned with the members of the particular castes. This put an end to legal inequalities arising out of the exercise of justice by different caste councils. Besides, they issued a warning to all educational institutions against the segregation of depressed class pupils. Grants were with drawn to schools which practiced segregation. The universalisation of education by the Britishers, gave a setback to Brahmanical supremacy in the field of education. As a result of this the passive submission of the lower orders to higher castes ceased to operate. It stirred the intelligentsia of the lower castes to organize
popular movements like the Non-Brahman Movement in south India, to cast off the domination of caste Hindus. The new class of intellectuals trained under the system of English education was chiefly responsible for weakening the rigidity of the caste system. The political writings of Rousseau, J.S. Mill and others infused ideas of liberty and equality among the educated classes. Naturally the newly educated sections who were denied the benefits of education for ages, felt the need for improving the social status of their communities. The emergence of a new class of intellectuals imbued with the spirit of liberty spontaneously found in the writings of Western thinkers realised the futility of Hindu orthodoxy. This influence of English literature on Democracy was far reaching. The principle of popular sovereignty left a lasting impression on the minds of the younger generations. There developed in the country, an urge to end caste superiority and substitute in its place the dignity of individual personality and the unity of the nation.

Here it is relevant to touch the debit side of the British impact on caste system. It is true that the British regime did many things to put down caste system. But they did not evince interest in shattering the caste institution root and branch. In the first place, the census enumeration on caste basis definitely produced opposite results. As remarked by the census superintendent Mr. Middleton:

Caste in itself was rigid among the higher castes, but malleable amongst the lower. We pigeon-holed everyone by caste, and if we could not find a true caste for them, labeled them with the name of an hereditary occupation. We deplore the caste system and its effects on social and economic problems, but we at largely responsible for the system we deplor."
They encouraged caste consciousness in states by way of reserving seats in the Legislature on caste basis. Electorates were divided on the basis of religion. They further divided the separate electorates by reserving certain seats in each constituency to Non-Mohammadans, as they were supposed to be underrepresented in the country's legislature. This method of reservation created cleavages between different communities, Brahmans Vs Non-Brahmans in Madras, Marathas with the rest of the population in Bombay etc. Caste vestige of this conflict is prevalent even to the present day. Thus, caste which was mainly a social institution entered the arena of Politics during the British regime. In course of time it became a problem to be tackled on the political and social plane at par. It would be no exaggeration if we remark that caste element was revived rather than eliminated during the British regime. Caste system was seen under a new garb in British rule.

Coming to the mobility of occupations in the caste system, Brahmans had the option of going in for any trade other than their own and meanwhile retain the same social status accorded to them. Mobility was strictly restricted in the case of lower orders. Even thinkers who refused to accept the rigidity of the functional theory of caste, admit that preferential treatment was given to Brahmans in the choice of occupation J.N.Bhattacharya, a firm believer in the social harmony of caste system admits: "caste is often described by European scholars as an iron chain which has fettered each class to the profession of their ancestors, and the rendered any improvement on their part impossible. This view may, to some extent, be regarded as correct so far as the lower classes are concerned." Emile senart also observed: "It is perhaps among the Brahmans that there occurs the most complicated mixture of
occupations and confusion of trades". By way of illustration he further remarked: "People who proudly bear the title of Brahman and to whom everywhere this assures great respect may be found engaged in all sorts of tasks, priests and ascetics, learned men and religious beggars, but also cooks and soldiers, soribes and merchants, cultivators and shepherds, even mansons and chair porters."

The change of social status was visibly found among Non-Brahmans in the course of the evolution of caste system. There were chances of the last three orders getting merged with each other by improving their social status. But birth was the sole criterion for classifying Brahmans. People born in Non-Brahman castes had no chance of calling themselves Brahmans or raising their social status at par with Brahmans by any means learning or wealth. Birth as the chief determinant of caste was markedly found among Brahmans.

We may quote as typical of the movement for consolidation of the desire of the artisan castes in many parts of India to appear under a common name; "thus carpenters, smiths, goldsmiths and some others of similar occupations desired in various parts of India to be returned by a common denomination such as viswakarma or Jangida, usually desiring to add a descriptive noun implying that they belonged to one of the two highest varnas of Hinduism, either Brahman or Rajput."  

The lower classes thus displayed the desire to rise in social estimation be attributing new designations to their caste groups.

Thus there was a tendency among lower castes to attribute Brahmanhood to their caste groups for purpose of social superiority. Such a
tendency is visible even today and this social imitation of the lower caste
groups has been termed by M.N. Srinivas as 'Sanskritisation'. The Brahmans
are becoming more and more westernised and the lower orders are aspiring
to be Sanskritised. The lower orders of the caste hierarchy are adopting new
customs and habits discarded by the Brahmans. Sanskritisation is therefore
supposed to be the preliminary step of westernisation. Economic advance,
political leadership and education are some of the relevant factors in
Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation in short means cultural and structural
changes in society. But at the same time as M.N. Srinivas remarks;
"Sanskritisation does not always result in higher status for Sanskritised caste,
and this is clearly exemplified by the untouchables."

Nineteenth century marked a notable change in traditional Hinduism.
The intelligentsia of the country sought to reorganise society on the basis of
reason rather than faith. They attributed difference in wealth and educational
attainments particularly to the unequal opportunities given to the people.
The emergence of a new middle class from among the lower orders who broke
away the barrier of hereditary occupation and took to business, was chiefly
responsible for undermining the domination of Brahmanical supremacy.
Hindu orthodoxy and religious conservatism were questioned by the lower
orders. The lower orders not only entered educational institutions but also
emerged as the ruling capitalists of the country by undertaking big enterprises
and managing agencies. Hence birth and caste were made figments of fancy.
On the contrary, wealth and education constituted the determinants of
individual social prestige. The concept of equality was emphasized. A
revision of the old social ideal in the context of social transformation was
urged. These ideas found expression in series of socio-religious movements, the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Ramakrishana Mission etc. These religious movements inspired in the people the value of universal brotherhood, rationality, liberalism and the concepts of equality and justice. Eradication of caste was felt indispensable for the dynamic evolution of society. They aimed at the establishment of society on the twin principles of catholicity and cosmopolitanism. The fact that caste system was a man made institution, rather than ordained by God was manifested to the people. These religious thinkers made a restatement of Hindu scriptures and convinced the people to work for the salvation of mankind rather than to parade under the banner of high and low. Vivekananda appealed to the Brahmans that:

"It is clearly the duty of the Brahmans of India to remember what real Brahmhood is. As Manu Says, all these privileges and honours are given to the Brahman because 'with him is the treasury of virtue' He must open that treasury and distribute its valuables to the world."34

Likewise, Gandhiji's entry into Politics constituted a landmark in the history of caste system. To him goes the credit for averting the danger that would have befallen the country be mass conversion of Untouchables to other religious beliefs. Commenting on the sin of Untouchability he remarked:

"Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to Untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the empire. Even the Mussulamans caught the sinful contagion from us and in South Africa, in East Africa and Canda the Mussulamans no less than the Hindus came to be regarded as Pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of Untouchability."35
He convinced the people the philosophy of vedantha, that every man is eternally free. He appealed to the moral regeneration of society to break away the shackles of Hindu orthodoxy. He fervently criticised caste system as; "caste today is in the crucible and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the Brahmins know the final result."36

Another outstanding personality who stood for the cause of Untouchables was, Dr. Ambedkar. He fought for their rights and carved for them a niche in the Republican Constitution of India. He emphatically stated that; "In a changing society there must be a constant revaluation of old values and the Hinuds must realise that if there must be standerd to measure the acts of men there also be readiness to revise these standards."37 He vowed to wean away Untouchability and observed; "If I fail to do away with abominable thraldom and human injustice under which, the class into which I was born has been groaning, I will put an end to my life with a bullet."38

The unflinching courage and daring efforts of a number of leaders of thought and action were chiefly responsible for the weakening of the caste system, if not its complete abolition. In the long run caste system underwent radical changes in its structure. Caste system begun with socio religious motives, turned a political issue under British regime and finally assumed constitutional importance.

The next phase in the transformation of the caste system started with the framing of the Indian Constitution. An increasing interest has been shown for helping the lower orders of the caste hierarchy. The down-trodden sections familiarly known as the 'Backward classes' received special attention of the
Constitution makers. The uplift of these sections has been recognised as an important responsibility of the Government. The circumstances necessitating the incorporation of certain articles in the Constitution for Backward classes have been explained by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee, that; "The Indian Constitution must provide safeguards to prevent castes 'with their own interests' from doing mischief to other helpless castes." He further explained the purpose behind this constitutional safeguard as:

"Where the spirit which actuates the various social groups is only non-social, their existence may not be taken into account framing a constitution. There is no cause for danger in a group which is only non-social. But where is actuated by an antisocial spirit towards another and to which alien is synonymous with enemy, the fact must be taken into account in framing the constitution and the class which has been the victim of antisocial spirit must be given protection by proper safeguards." 

Independent India has realised that freedom would be futile, if the fruits of freedom are not equally shared by all sections of society. The Democratic ideal emphasizes a footing of equality for all citizens irrespective of their caste affiliations. The aim is to bring about radical social and economic changes, to correct the imbalance in society caused by the caste structure. The aim is reflected in the following words: "JUSTICE, Social, Economic and Political
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

And to promote among them all, FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. 41

Part III of the Constitution guarantees a series of Fundamental Rights to the citizens. Hence specific provisions have been made to safeguard the special rights and interests of down-trodden. Part IV contains the Directive Principles of state Policy, wherein, a mention has also been made for protecting the weaker sections of society. Part XVI of the Constitution deals with special Provisions for Backward classes or down-trodden.

VARNA DHARMA

I. Social Organization of Varna Dharma

A. Four Varnas: Society is organized into four varnas, vis., Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. It is a definite hierarchy, the preceding varna being superior the succeeding. The distinctions of 'higher' and 'lower', 'superior' and 'inferior' have permeated into almost all branches of social life; no department of life is free from varna discrimination. The relations between the varnas were regulated strictly. The upshot of the whole range of rules and regulations is to stress the inviolability of the four-fold varna system. The whole society was sought to be organised into four permanent classes. At the outset (after enumerating the sources of dharma) Apastamba explicitly states that "amongst the four varnas, each preceding varna is superior by birth to the one following" 42
B. Functions of the four varnas: Each varna is assigned certain functions. The first three varnas have some common duties vis., studying the Veda, offering sacrifices and giving alms. Through the performance of these duties one pays the 'debts' he owes to the sages, Gods and men. Ritual and morality are not divorced, both are obligatory. Rituals are intended for gaining personal benefits from Gods, whereas the charitable deeds are to be done for the welfare of society. The additional duties of the Bhaman are teaching the veda, officiating at sacrifices and receiving alms. These are the occupations and privileges meant to gain livelihood (vritti). The additional duties of Kshatriya are governing and fighting. The occupations of a Vaishya are agriculture, trade, tending cattle and lending money at interest. The service of the three higher varnas is the duty of the Shudras. The functions prescribed for the four varnas are socially useful and they are necessary for the upkeep of society; the maintenance of social order depends on their performances. It is therefore that a great deal of emphasis is laid on the performance of sva-dharma i.e. the duties pertaining to a man as a member of a certain social class.

Society naturally organizes itself into the four classes outlined above. These classes broadly correspond to the intellectual, warrior, trading and working classes. The constitutional differences among people naturally lead to diversity of functions which are all necessary for social upkeep. Objectively considered, no mode of work or occupations is less respectable than the other. All the functions are equally valuable and necessary for social well-being.

C. Varna and Jati: It is doubtful if the four-fold varna system as depicted in the texts ever existed actually. It seems that it was only a theory and
historically, were many occupational groups and not four classes. The Hindu ethicists tried to organize society into four broad classes by integrating them. The sutras refer to several mixed castes arising as a result of inter-Varna marriages. But it is likely that the theory of mixed marriages is only to account for the existences of occupational groups outside the four-fold varna scheme. Vasistha says that "the caste of a person is to be known from his occupation and conduct. The several castes which existed outside the four-fold varna scheme were occupational groups and the diversity of occupations led to the multiplicity of castes; when the caste of a person was determined by birth, they become water tight compartments". The prohibition of inter-caste marriages led to the perpetuation of a bewildering mass of castes and sub-castes that characterize Indian social scene today.

D. Varna dharma and caste system:

There are three important characteristic features of caste system. They are prohibitions on inter-marriage, inter dining and change of occupations. These features which come to characterise the later caste system, can be traced to the rules of varna dharma. Varna dharma allows inter-varna marriage in a certain order. The men belonging to upper varna could marry women of lower varnas, whereas the marriage of men of lower varnas with women of higher varnas was severely reprobated. Gradually, however, even the marriage of men of higher varnas with women of sudra varna was looked down upon as in Vasishtha and inter varna marriages came to prohibited completely as in Apastamba The provision of inter varna marriages was associated with the rule of polygamy among the upper varnas. It is insisted
that the first wife should belong to one's own varna and the others to the varna below his own. Apastamba who looks upon polygamy as immoral forbid inter-varna marriages. He thus upholds the monogenic ideal of marriage but the prohibition of inter varna marriages had the delectations affect of regimenting the four fold social order. Thus the inter varna marriages among the four varnas were restricted to the three higher. Aryan varnas and it was later on prohibited even among them. The other feature of caste system viz, the prohibition of inter dining was not in vogue in most ancient times. This follows from reference to sudra cooks preparing the food offered by Shudras come to be forbidden of the higher varnas.\textsuperscript{47} But the accepting of food offered by Shudras came to be forbidden.\textsuperscript{48} The change of occupations was not allowed in normal times. Only in times of distress could the persons of higher varnas resort to the occupations of the varnas below their own. But the taking up of Ksahtriya occupations by the Brahmanas was not favoured. Apastamba\textsuperscript{49} says that a Brahmana should not take up arms even to examine them. Here again, persons belonging to lower varnas could not take up occupations specific to the higher varnas. Though these were flexibilities in the rules regarding these prohibitions, the tendency was to establish a rigid four fold structure.

\textbf{II. Principles of organization of society into varna}

The important issue that immediately crops up is the principles on the basis of which society was sought to be organised into four varnas. It is inconceivable that the work of social organization was attempted without any idea of the principles on the basis of which it could be done. This is not to
suggest the absence of any influence of the historical conditions of the period. The structure of varnas presented in the sutras is certainly a development of earlier forms; the varna organization that took shape in the sutra period must have been conceived on principles other than those on which it is explicitly commended and actually worked out in the sutras. The sutras, being the earliest extant works in the smriti literature, supply evidence as regards the original principles on which society was sought to be organized.

A. Psychological ethical: The fundamental principle of social organization is the constitutional differences that exist among individuals. Individuals differ in their nature and temperament, capacities and potentialities. The needs, and therefore the values of persons differ according to their psychological endowment and equipment; values cannot be the same for all people. Any ethical code if it is to be conducive to the growth and development of personality must organize society in such a way as to ensure the fulfillment of different capacities and potentialities of people. Maslow writes "any ethical code will have to deal with the fact of constitutional differences in men" He further writes "capacities clamor to be used and cease their clamor only when they are used sufficiently. That is to say, capacities are needs, and therefore are intrinsic values as well. To the extent that capacities differ, So will values also differ" Baudhayana says that "Braman placed its majesty strength, and power of work in their duties Brahamanas, Kashtriyas and Vaishyas respectively means that the dominant constitutional attribute of first three varnas is majesty strength and power of work and that their duties and occupations are the natural outcome of differences in their constitution".

50
51
The nature and temperament of man is determined by the predominance in him of one or the other modes of nature. There are three modes of nature which are all qualitative in their essence and are therefore of called gunas (qualities). The gunas are three viz. 'sattva', 'rajas' and 'tamas'. Each individual is cast in the mould of the three gunas which are inextricably intertwined: the gunas express themselves in the psychological make up of man. The 'satva guna' stands for purity, rajas for activity and tamas inertia. The gunas are to be known from the psychological endowment and abilities of man. Vasishtha says that the qualities by which a true Brahmana may be recognized are, the concentration of the mind, austerities, self-control, liberality, truthfulness, purity, sacred learning, compassion, worldly learning, intelligence and the acceptance of spiritual truth. These qualities of a Brahmana are his 'natural' capacities and potentialities; they are his higher needs or 'metaneeds' in the words of Marlow. Self-actualization consists in the fulfillment of these natural abilities. This requires the doing of these functions which are the proper field for bringing out the latent capacities; the avocation of a man should manifest hidden potentialities. Maslow says that the satisfaction of basic needs still leaves a man restless and discontent unless he is doing that for which he is most fitted. "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if no is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be." Thus the duties lawful for a brahmana are these that effectively express his innate capacity; they mould his character to the firmness of type.

The gunas produce four types of human nature which correspond to the four varnas; the functions of each varna are expressive of the type of
nature. This is the significance of Sri Krishana's saying that "the four-fold order was created by me according to diversions of quality and work." The Gita enumerates the duties of the four varnas as follows: serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance and uprightness, wisdom, knowledge and faith in religion, these are the duties of the Brahaman, born of his nature. Heroism, vigour, steadiness, resourcesfulness, not fleeing even in a battle, generosity and leadership, these are the qualities of Kshatriya born of his nature. Agriculture, tending cattle and trade are the duties of a Vaishys born of his nature; work of the character of services is the duty of a shudra born of his nature. Thus the functions of the four varna are proper to them by virtue of their inner nature and temperament (Svabhava) and not birth. The function of man should regulated from within; the inner nature should determine the outer function. The difference in the outer functions arise from differences in the nature and temperament of men. The division of labour is a natural consequence of the types of nature into which the gunas group themselves. He in whom sattva predominates is a Kshatriya; tamas is the dominating element in vaishyas; no one guna predominates in the shudra. The outer functions of the four varnas are means to the actualization of inner quality; they are the most suitable field for its expression and for moulding it into firmness of type.

The four fold structure is thus a 'natural hierarchy'. Then the varna of a person came to be determined by birth. What was a natural hierarchy turned out to be an unnatural 'hereditary hierarchy' in course of time. In so far as the functions specific to each varna coincided with the inborn abilities of a person belonging to that varna, there was no inner contradiction involved in
the insistence on following the duties of one's varna. The hereditary factor no doubt contributes in determining the nature and character of man. But it cannot be the sole criterion, for birth in a family is only a matter of secondary moment, are effective sign perhaps. The sutras proceed to lay down rules on the assumption that varna duties and inborn nature of a man coincide. That they also perceive antagonism between the two fellows from their insistence on the acquisition of learning and character. It is not mere birth in a varna that entitles a man to high status. What makes a man superior in status is his learning and character. Vasishtha says 'An elephant made of wood, an antelope made of leather' and Brahamans ignorant of the veda, these three have nothing but the name (of their kind). It is the possession of mental and moral qualities that is the true basis of varna. That the varnas represented an ethical hierarchy follows from the enumeration of moral qualities that characterise a Brahaman, and of the evil qualities that characterise a sudra. Vasistha says one may know that bearing grudges, envy, speaking untruths, speaking evil of Brahamas, backbiting and cruelty are the characteristics of a shudra. Thus psychological and ethical differences among men were the bases of organisation differences of society into varnas. Though psychological differences underly the varna organization, the nature and temperament, aptitudes and ability of each individual were not examined for assigning them suitable calling and fixing them to social placement and role, these being generally done by heredity. This does not mean that the natural endowment and ability of a man was ignored, but that heredity was used as a working principle. That the fitness of a person to perform a certain task was taken into consideration follows from the injunction to initiate that boy for vedic
study who is mentally and morally qualified i.e. who possesses intelligence and capable of self control. This must have been the case with all arts and occupations. Not only heredity was the criterion but also suitable training and education. The natures were sought to be combined and efforts were made to bring out the best in each individual. When the hereditary factor gained ascendancy and it alone determined the occupation and status, the four fold structure became not only rigid but also inimical to the development of personality and dignity of man. Instead of fostering the powers of man, it out at the root of human initiative and drive. It sealed the opportunity for lower classes in the hierarchy to rise above in the social scale. The degradation of a large mass of population as a result of religious, social and economic disabilities is a legacy of the denial of opportunities for personality development through the principles of heredity. The practice of untouchability is not only against the dignity and worth of man but also dehumanising and alienating in its effect.

B. Social, Political and Economic: The moral worth of a man cannot be the criterion of social organisation. People cannot be organized into classes on the basis of the possession of moral qualities, for they constitute the bedrock of any society i.e., of organized life. The morally good may be exalted and held in high esteem. Moreover the estimation of the moral worth of a person differs due to its subjective element. Therefore the organization of society is based on the more obvious functional differences among people. The different functions people perform are equally necessary for society. Therefore, there is no question of 'high' and 'low' in so far as the nature of work one does. All the works are socially beneficial, necessary and relevant. Varna dharma by
introducing the distinctions of 'high' and 'low' among the occupations has not recognized the dignity of labour. Social justice and equality demands that no stigma attaches to any man on account of his occupation and that he is free to take up occupations in accordance with his ability. That such a principle was, in fact, the basis of varna dharma follows from Gautama’s statement that “if Aryans and non-Aryans interchange their occupations and conduct (the one taking that of the other, there is) equality (between them).”

The inequality was in the occupations and conduct of people arising out of inequalities in their nature and temperament. But inequalities are not permanent feature of the social order. There was freedom to move up in the social ladder by taking up new occupations according to one's ability. There was always scope for moral advancement. The social esteem of a person depended on one's moral worth and not on birth in a certain varna.

The social necessity of various-functions is recognised in varna dharma. The disinterested performance of social duties is emphasized. The social order depends on the discharge of duties one owes to society; the social duties are obligatory and are to be performed of social duties, one rises above the narrow selfish interests and desires and promotes social good. At the same time, he will be serving and actualising his larger purpose or higher cause. The fulfillment of human life is in promoting social good through the faithful performance of social duties. It is because of the double benefit of social duties that they are invested with religious and spiritual significance. Though all the social duties were looked upon as equally necessary for the maintenance of social order, distinctions of high and low were introduced and sought to be perpetuated as an inevitable part of the system. That is, the necessity of
social functions was vehemently asserted but their consequent dignity was denied. The denial of dignity of labour combined with the hereditary determination of occupation and has on inter varna marriages led to the inequalities that characterize society. The hereditary criterion denied the opportunities for social mobility; the stigma of high and low that attached to the varnas and their occupations and the prohibition of inter varna marriages created permanent barriers between social classes and made impossible, meaningful inter course among them. It led to the atomization of Indian society and gave way to narrow group morality. The consciousness of the people came to be constricted. Spratt describes the caste system as "narcissistic consciousness of superiority institutionalized." The Hindu ethicists perceived an hierarchical order in society arising from natural differences among men. They intended to channelize the energies of people to the establishment of a just social order based on the recognition of individual differences in their natural endowment and abilities. It is not the consciousness of superiority that is behind varna conception, but the consciousness of a 'natural hierarchy'.

Society is conceived as an organism. It is to the health of the organism that attention was given and individual interests and abilities were directed to the betterment of society. This does not mean that the interests and accomplishments of individual are ignored or are subordinated to social interests. Man's true good lies in contributing his best to society. The capacities and potentialities of individuals were sought to be tapped for social benefit. The interests of society were not promoted by jeopardizing individual potentialities. There is a great deal of emphasis on discharging one's duties
(svadharma) the assertion of rights does not precede the performance of duties. The individual’s debt to society is in the forefront; the individual has his being and existence in society. The social duties of man does not follow from the desire to promote social good, but from the very fact of social existence.

Varna-dharma had a certain conception of political and economic organization. The four varnas pursued different functions. The Brahmanas were entrusted with the task of preservation and propagation of the knowledge and wisdom of the race. They devoted themselves to the pursuit of religious and spiritual matters. They also laid down laws for the governance of the country. The avocations of Brahmanas required that they be freed from the necessity of struggling to make a life in the world. They had to wear themselves away from attachment to worldly objects. It is therefore that political and economic powers are denied to them. Political powers vested in the Kshatriyas; the king was the executive head of the government. The basic legislative and judicial powers devolved on the Brahmanas; they laid down fundamental laws and rules and decided points of law in disputed cases. The Kshatriyas performed political and military functions. The king was under the advice and guidance of Brahmanas. Gautama says that ‘a king and a Brahman, deeply versed in the Vedas, these two, uphold the moral order in the world’ Haradatta, the commentator, adds that the king upholds order by punishing, and a learned Brahman by teaching. This sentiment is echoed in the concluding passage of the Gita; wherever there is Krishna, the lord of yoga, and partha (Arjun), the archer, (I think), there will surely be fortune, victory, welfare and morality. The men who are imbued with vision are to
direct the affairs of government which is to be ran by men of drive and initiations. The ideal is that one should combine in one self the vision of a seer and the strength of a solider. Our actions are to be inspired by moral and spiritual values. The significance of varna dharma is that the spiritual power is regarded as superior to political and economic powers.

The economic power is concentrated in the hands of the vaishyas. The occupations of the vaishyas are economically rewarding. They produce the goods necessary for the social life and engage in business and commercial activities. They are not left free to corner the benefits of their profession, i.e., to make huge profits and to take undue advantage of their incomes, and hold society to ransom. Their activities are suitably regulated. They could not levy exorbitant rates of interest; the rate of interest was fixed by the law codes. The weights and measures used in transacting business were to be accurate, their standard was ensured by the government. The taxes were levied at different rates for different commodities. These measures were meant to see that there is justice and far play in trade and business and that the fruits of production reach all people. The wealth that is produced is not meant to be enjoyed by a section or class of society, it is meant for social use, it has a social purpose, it is a trust placed in the hands of the trading community. The vaishyas, though they constituted the capitalist class of society, though did not wield the instruments of powers, they were kept out of political power. They sustained the economic life of society and contributed to its well-being.

It can broadly be said that the religious, political and economic powers were placed in the hands of the Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.
respectively. This division of powers among the three classes had the advantage of delineating their respective spheres of work and each class could discharge its work without interference from other classes. Of course 'dharma' in the sense of established rules and regulations was there to direct the conduct of life in all its aspects.

C. Religious spiritual: The social structure of four varnas was defended on the ground that it emanated from the head, arms, thighs, and feet of the supreme person (purusha). By tracing the origin of four varnas to a supreme source, a religious sanction was sought to be given to the four fold structure of society and emphasise its eternal validity. The implication of tracing the four varnas to the four parts of body is that they are mutually dependent and organically related. Society is an organism and the four classes are its parts. This precludes any distinction of 'high' and 'low' superior and inferior among the varnas. Just as the head is not high because it is at the top of the body and the feet low because it touches the ground, so also the Brahmaan is not superior because he occupies the first place in the hierarchy and the shudra low because he is at the bottom. That the implications of the organic conception of society were not consistently worked out follows from the distinctions of high and low, superior and inferior introduced into the varna structure.

The performance of duties incumbent on the varnas has spiritual basis. The duties of the four varnas are the result of their nature and temperament. The spirit dwells in all individuals. It is embodied and the nature of embodiment varies among individuals. The duties of individuals are determined by their nature. By performing the duties peculiar to their nature,
the individuals actualize their innate capacities and potentialities and through it the spirit within. This is the significance of Baudhayana’s saying that Brahman placed its majesty in the Brahmanas, strength in the Kshatriyas, and power of work in the vaishyas. Apastamba says that "men of all varnas if they fulfil their (assigned) duties, enjoy (in heaven) the highest, imperishable bliss." If all the works are equally efficacious for spiritual realization, then there is no question of superiority and inferiority among them. It recognizes the worth of man and dignity of labour. The introduction of high and low among the varnas and the works is incompatible with the assertion that spirit dwells in all beings and that all works are means to its actualization.

III. Varna Dharma and Gandhiji:

In the opinion of Mahatma Gandhi, varnashrama was a healthy division of work based on birth and it was rational, scientific fact. In it there was no warrant for belief in a fifth caste. The so-called untouchables were as much privileged labourers of society as other caste people. He made it clear that there was no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. Varnashrama Dharama was humility, taught that life was duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges and defined the duties of people belonging to different vocations. He was convinced that varnashrama was an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. It gave the labourer, the shudra the same status as the scholar, the thinker, the Brahamana. It provided the pure means for the accentuation of merit, the perfect methods for the elimination of demerit, the principle mode for transferring human ambition from the general wordly field to the permanent sphere of the spiritual and pointed out the mending
means and winding ways which would lead to the clear and cloudless, pure and proper path to be followed to reach the destination of Moksha. It thus laid down common aim for the Brahmana and the Shudra, viz., Moksha or self-realisation and not realization of fame, riches and power.

Gandhiji, being a firm believer in the inherent equality of all men, could not but fought the doctrine of superiority. He said that he who claimed superiority over others would, by the very nature of the claim, forfeit it. He went to the extent of saying that such a person would even forfeit the claim to be called a man. The meaning of Varnashrama was incredibly simple. “It simply means the following on the part of us all, of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as that traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one’s livelihood”\(^{61}\) But the members of the society could have the freedom of following other different callings. But they should follow them not for money, but for service. They should gain their livelihood by following their fathers professions. But they could do anything they liked so long as they did it for love of service. But those who would change profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth would degrade themselves and fall from varna.

He was pained to see that India was following not the pure Varnashrama Dharma, but only “a travesty and mockery of the original”\(^{62}\) It was the rigid caste system which kept the untouchable outside the pale of respectable society, hardly treated him as a human being, hurled him into an abyss of misery, ignorance and suffering, while keeping his fellow-belings on
the platform of happiness, comforts, rights, privileges and so on. The
difference, therefore was somewhat analogous to the difference between
heaven and hell. There is one thing more to remember about the caste system.
Gandhiji explained. "For me, it is not the same as the varnashrama Dharma,"
he continued whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need,
varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system.
While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming
into being), the varnas are, and have always been four. I am a firm believer
in Varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of
Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that Dharma is, so far as I have been
able to see it, a condition of spiritual growth. The four divisions are not a
vertical section but a horizontal place on which all stand on a footing of
equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. In the book of God,
the same number of marks are assigned to the Brahamana that has done his
task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise."

So he never hesitated to declare from housetops that a man’s caste was
no matter for pride, that no superiority or inferiority was attached to any of
the four divisions, that birth counted for noting, that a person must prove his
worth to establish his claim by birth through showing corresponding works
and character and therefore that scavenger’s profession could be in no way
regarded as inferior to clergyman’s and that he was worthy of his hire as a
lawyer, a doctor, even a president of the biggest nation. “Does untouchability
in the case of a cobbler or scavenger attach to birth or to occupation?” asked
Gandhiji. If attaches to birth it is hideous and must be rooted out,” he replied
“if it attaches to occupation it may be sanitary rule of great importance. It is
of universal application. A collier, whilst he is engaged in his work is practically untouchable. He himself refuses to shake the hand extended to him and says, 'I am too dirty'. But his work finished, he takes his bath, changes his dress and very properly mixes with the highest in the land. Immediately, therefore, we remove the taint of birth, i.e., the ideas of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth, we purify Varnashrama. The scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded and they will be no more considered untouchables than Brahmans.

Hence came his eager call to the people to join him in a fight against an arrogant assumption of superiority whether it was assumed by Brahmans or others, and against untouchability, followed by an earnest and warning appeal to combat the abuse of Varnashrama and not the thing itself, and sweep away the mockery and restore it to its pristine purity, grand glory, and discernible dignity. Forthwith flowed the convincing explanation of the desirable results that would accrue from this fight against untouchability and other abuses. "The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnasharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other." Forthright sprang an advice and an explanation "Fight by all means the monster that passes for Varnashrama to day, and you will find me working side by side with you. My Varnashrama enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, whatever he is. My Varnashrama accommodates a Pariah girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My Varnashrama
accommodates many Panchama families with whom I dine with greatest pleasure-to dine with whom is a privilege. My Varnashrama refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my Varnashrama compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face."

B. Varna Dharma and Dr. Ambedkar

In the analysis and understanding of the social history of the Indian society, it is essential to make a survey of its diverse dimension influencing the living of the Indians. Sociologists have characterised caste as one of the three components of the Indian social structure while the other two are being joint family and village community. The view that caste originated from Varna and subsequently multiplied in its number during the past few millennia and was raised from four to more than 2000 caste. Subcaste groups are by and large accepted by many scholars. They have termed this numerical growth as the dynamic aspect of caste. It is needless to mention that the caste is a social, economic, religious and political category. It functions almost as an institution in the Indian society. All castes of India constitute Hindu society. Hinduism as a religion appears to be the summation of all varieties of beliefs and rituals practised by caste members. It has Vedas, smritis, shrutos sadachars and Upanisheds as its scriptures. There scriptures have abounding control over the thought and deeds of individuals of all castes.

Historical evidences bring home the truth that caste from system has adversely affected the Indians right from the beginning. It has deleterious consequence on the healthy growth of an individual's mind and thinking.
The maintenance of caste system through the rituals decreed and supported by the scriptures resulted in establishing a social system which is non-competitive and closed. There are a few occasions when this system was criticised and protested. Jainism and Buddhism are the two religious streams of thinking which condemned the ritualism perpetrated by Hinduism. Later on in 12th century Basaveshwara's preachings were directed towards the eradication of evil practices of caste system.

CASTE AND Varna, Classes

Dr. Ambedkar’s speech prepared for the 1936 Annual conference of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore (but undelivered) is a monumental document which was later published under the title 'Annihilation of Caste' in 1936. The other works of Dr. Ambedkar on his theme were "Caste in India" who were sudras? and The 'Untouchables'. He had a good background of several social sciences such as economics, political science. Besides he had undergone a full experience of a deprived person and as an untouchable. He argued that Hindu religion has created chaturvama which provided the base for the caste system. Chaturvarna is based on hierarchically arranged and graded classes in Hindu Society. Purushasukta a hymn included afterwards in vedic texts contained in it all the characteristics of chaturvarna. The features of it have been summarised by Dr. Ambedkar as follows:

i. The real was elevated to the dignity of an ideal;
ii. an attempt was made to give the reality to the ideal by invoking the sanction of law;
iii. the purushasukta not only regarded class composition as natural and ideal, but also regarded as sacred and divine;
iv. the purushasukta made the division of society into four classes and a matter of dogma; and

the purushasukta had an official gradation of society laid down, fixed and permanent, with an ascending scale of contempt. 68

These were Veihemently criticized by Dr. Ambedkar as they resulted in creating a dogma and the four classes as ideal for Social organization the Hindu Society. Such a dogma did not result in the acceptance of the "principles of graded inequality among the four classes." 69 He made it abundantly clear that "the caste system does not embody the Eugenic of modern scientist... It is a social system which embodies the arrogance of selfishness of perverse sanction of Hindus who were superior enough in social Status to set it in fashion and who had authority to force it on their inferiours." 70 In this quest for tracing the origin and history of Varna and caste system. Dr. Ambedkar studied the ancient texts and has quoted frequently to prove his point in his book "Who Were the Shudras?". Today we may disagree with him on Several issues but the way he narrated the development of caste system in India is remarkable for its appeal to reason and Scientific spirit. As a strong protagonist of human Rights he felt that caste is harmful institution in as-much-as it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules." 71

For, Dr. Ambedkar has two aspects. The first is that it divides men into separate communities. The second aspect is that it places these communities in a hierarchical order. He found all as a slave of caste system. But he found that all slaves are not equal in the status. Therefore, he felt that it was difficult
to attack caste system. The members of each caste, he felt, guarded zealously the interest of their caste, status and prestige they held in the graded social orders. It is this fact that made him believe that Hindus are incapable of gorging unity against others. History is an evidence and provides sample evidence to prove that the Hindus did not put up resistance to foreign invasions as one group and one society. He treated that Hindu society as a myth and does not exist. The feelings that one is a Hindu rarely exhibited except whenever there is a Hindu-Muslim riots but on all other occasions each tried to be within the fold of caste dictates. Unity in diversity is not acceptable to Dr. Ambedkar. He maintained that the similar beliefs, ideas and thoughts do not make societies. The unity may be achieved only when “they have things in common which they possess in common.”

Dr. Ambedkar had his own views on the origin of shudras. He made a deep study of the sacred texts and found a deep conspiracy behind the creation of a fourth class to be known as shudras and/or Untouchables. His scholarly work on ‘who were the shudras?’ highlighted the conspiracy of Brahmins against Kshatryas who were in conflict with them to the fourth class i.e., below Vyshyas.

Searching for the facts for the origin of shudras, Dr. Ambedkar had to go through the Vedic texts available to him in their texts. He never agreed with the theory that Aryans constituted a race and it defeated the Dasuyas or Dasas. He was firm in his conviction that “the Aryan race theory of Western scholars is as good an illustration of how hypothesis can be the poison of Science as one can think of.”
He had treated the assumption of Western Scholars regarding Aryans as a race as devoid of supportive social facts. The assumptions were rejected by Dr. Ambedkar were; (i) Unity of race, (ii) that race being Aryan race, (iii) theory of invasion is an invention, (iv) Aryans were superior race, and (v) that the European races were white. He searched for four colors to describe the four varnas exist. There is a mention of only two colors namely white and dark. His examination of western theory can be submersed as follows:

1. The Vedas do not know any such race as the Aryan race.

2. There is no evidence in the vadas Aryan race and its having conquered the Dasas and Dasyus supported to be native of India.

3. There is no evidence to show that the distinction between Aryan, Dasas and Dasyus was a racial distinction.

4. The Vedas do not support the contention that the Aryan were different in color from Dasas and Dasyus.

Dr. Ambedkar has examined the question of Aryan invasion of India. He stated that there is no Aryan race. It means language 'and nothing but language'. He believed in the evidence which tried to prove that Aryans were indigenous people. Thus he never felt that there is a military conquest of any group of people. He treated invasion theory as an invention. Further, he held the view that there were two Aryans. This he accepted as a fact in support of which there is abundant evidence. Who fought against whom is a problem needs to be investigated. Hence he did not consider any truth in color factor in the origin of caste.

❖ ❖ ❖
REFERENCES

2. Encyclopedia of Social sciences, Vol-
3. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol-1, p.343, 1907.
4. Taya Zinkin, Caste Today, 1963, P.
5. Manu Smrti -III, 151, VIII. 1,2.
8. Ibid
10. Ibid, p. 2
15. Ibid, pp. 178-79.
17. Ibid, p.258.
22. A.R. Wadia: Contemporary Philosophy, p-368.
23. Caste in India, 1961, p-111
26. Ibid.
34. Selections from Swami Vivekananda, p-22.
35. M.K. Gandhi: Hindu Dharma, P-279
38. Dhananjay Keer: Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, 1954, p.446
41. Preamble to the Constitution of India.
(Buhler George : The sacred laws of the Aryas, Tra, Pt.1 Apstamba and Gautam.)

(Max Muller : (ed) The sacred Books of the East, pt. 2, Vasistha and Bundhaya, Vol-II, and XIV, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidas ,1965.)

42. Apasthamba Dharmasutras, Prasana-I, Patala-I, Skanda 1,Sutras 3-4.
44. Vashita Dharma Sutras - Chapter -XVIII, Verse-7
47. Apasthamba Dharma sutras,II,2,3,4
49. New knowledge in Human Values ed, Maslow, p.122
50. Bau. dh. S. I, 10,18, 2-4
51. Vas. Dha.S-VI, 23
52. Bhagavadgitha IV, 13,
53. Ibid, XIXX, 42-44.
54. Vas.Dh.S-III, 11 aslo Bud.dh.s.I, 1,1,10
55. Vas,Dh.s.VI,24
56. Gau.Dh.s. X. 67
57. P. Spratt, Hindu culture and personality, Delhi: Delhi printers Prakashan, 1977, p.144
58. Gau. Dh.S.VIII, 1
59. Bhagavadgita, XVIII, 78
60. Bau.dh.s I, 10,18,2-4
61. Young India, 20-10-1927
62. Young India, 11-5-1925
63. Harijan, 11-2-1933
64. Young India, 13-8-1925
65. Harijan, 11-2-1933
66. Young India, 22-9-1927
68. B.R. Ambedkar : Who were Sudras? Thakcers : Bombay 1970, P.P-7-8
71. Ibid, P.51
72. Ibid, P.P. 55-56
74. Ibid, P. 74