

**TRANSFORMATION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM
AND
THE DALIT MOVEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATION OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE DALIT MOVEMENT

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This thesis analyzes the history of caste system and explains the theories of the birth of caste in Indian civilization. After defining the caste system in historical and cultural manner, examines the birth and spreading of Dalit movement or low caste mass movements during the 19th and 20th century with the influence of British rule.

Keywords: History, India, Caste, Dalit, Phule, Ambedkar

ÖZ

**KAST SİSTEMİNİN DÖNÜŞÜMÜ
VE
DALİT HAREKETİ**

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Bu çalışma, kast sisteminin tarihini analiz ederken, Hint Medeniyetinde kast sisteminin doğuşu hakkındaki teorileri açıklamaktadır. Kast sisteminin tarihsel ve kültürel bağlamda açıkladıktan sonar, Dalit ya da alt kast hareketlerinin İngiliz yönetimi altında doğuşunu ve yayılışını 19’uncu ve 20’inci yüzyıllar bağlamında açıklamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarih, Hindistan, Kast, Dalit, Phule, Ambedkar

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
PREFACE.....	ix

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION	1
 2. SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND THE CASTE SYSTEM	4
2.1. Society and Social Hierarchy	4
2.1.1. Society.....	4
2.1.2 The Social Structure.....	6
2.1.3 Social Hierarchy.....	10
2.2. Indian sub-continent and Indian civilization.....	14
2.2.1. The Geography of the Sub-Continent	14
2.3. The Caste System	17
2.3.1 Description	17
2.3.2 The Beginning.....	21
2.3.3 The Organization.....	32
2.3.3.1 Varna and Jats	32
2.3.3.1.1 Hierarchy between the Varnas	32
2.3.3.1.2 Marriages.....	34
2.3.3.1.3 Diets depending on religion.....	35
2.3.3.1.4 Jat as a social status	36
2.3.3.2 The Sub-castes	37

3. SOCIAL CHANGE DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD	40
3.1 Facing the West.....	41
3.2 Pre-British era and caste conflicts.....	46
3.3 The first demands for reform	48
3.3.1 Jotirao Phule and the very beginning of the Dalit movement.....	50
3.3.1.1 The rise of the Dalit Movement	54
 4.THE FORMATION OF DALIT IDENTITY	56
4.1. Social and Political Background of Dalit Movement	56
4.1.1. Politics and the Dalit Movement:Satyashodhak Samaj	58
4.1.2. Satyashodhak Samaj and Identity	59
4.2. An overview of the Social Change during the 19 th century	60
4.3. Reformation of the Dalit Movement at the beginning of the 20 th century.....	65
4.4 Legal Ebolishment of the Caste System	66
4.4.1. Dr. Ambedkar.....	66
4.4.2.The Second Dalit Generation	68
4.4.3. Childhood and Education of Ambedkar.....	69
4.4.4 Ambedkar's Ideological Stand.....	71
4.4.5 What Path Freedom?	72
CONCLUSION.....	74
REFERENCES.....	79
APPENDICES.....	82
APPENDICE 1 Indo-European Migrations.....	82
APPENDICE 2: Hunter Gatherer Population within total human population in history.....	83
APPENDICE 3: Photograph of an untouchable.....	84
APPENDICE 4: A Brahman Family.....	85

PREFACE

“Unless the sexual discrimination and untouchability are wiped out;
our society will be nothing more than a palace build over a pile of cowpat”

K.R. Narayanan

President of the Republic of

India

(1997-2002)

Everything created under the sky, has to face the fact that change is imminent. The human societies too had to change voluntarily or involuntarily. This change is visible during the whole life cycle of a society, even within a single person's life. And history is our tool to track those changes within the societies or other institutions established by the man.

In modern times the term “change” became more important. The ideal of modernization is based on the term “change”. In history human societies had always been in close contact, exchanging not only goods and persons but also ideas and experiences. This had been one of the biggest motivator for change. Within the previous century just like it had been for us, the whole world had been put under a pressure for change by the winds of blowing from West and India is not an exception. Since the times of the beginning of colonialism India became the main target of Europe, a promised land for the wonderers. And one of the first places where European colonies were established. It was the Portuguese who first found the road to India and established a commercial link. But that was before the times of enlightenment in which Europe itself faced a rapid change. Those

were the British who was ruling India and who carried the new ideas into the Indian mind.

India is usually regarded as a society which does not change. Considering the social and religious institutions which are as old as three thousand years, at first look it would come to mind that India is not changing. What we can say is that, this prejudice is not completely true.

The subject of this thesis, is the heart of the Indian social system and customs which is the caste system. And our goal will be to shed light on the caste system regarding the historical roots and the force of change under the colonial rule. Caste system is the key to enter the world of India. But we have to keep in mind that it is not the one and only face of Indian civilization.

Just at the beginning, one has to say that India is like an unexplored ocean for historians. The land is as big as Europe but more than two thousand years old regarding the written history and had always been much more populated than Europe. So it is impossible to tell the whole story within the limits of a master thesis.

Regarding the subject of the thesis, the caste system which is as old as the Indian civilization; it becomes much harder to draw the limits in order to build a study. So we started with the social definitions of caste system and later tracking its roots down to Indus Valley Civilization in the 2nd millennium B.C. While doing this we tried to be careful in order not to spread the subject. So we did not enter the subjects like the establishment of states and empires, as well as the religious change which gave birth to a universal religion which is Buddhism.

After trying to catch a glimpse of the environment where caste system was born, we tried to explain briefly the complicated system within caste structure. It was vital for us to understand the implications put on the lower castes by the caste system and the need for change within the low caste society.

The Dalit movement or the low caste movement is a modern fact of India, a factor forcing Indian society into change. And its beginning goes back to the British times to the colonial society in the beginning of the 19th century. It is a modernization story at the same time when we think of the factor that the low castes were prohibited from learning to write and read for thousands of years. With the birth and spread of the Dalit intelligentsia today there are tens of thousands of educated Dalit which have modern professions and bearing the title doctor, engineer, scientist etc.

In this study the subject of social change will be kept within the borders of the great characters of the Dalit movement in the figures of Joitaro Phule and Dr. Ambedkar in order to keep the limits considering the borders of a master thesis.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The sub-continent or India is a huge part of Asia. Although it is separated from the rest of the continent by the Himalayan mountain range in the north and big deserts in the west, it is also an important part of the continental history. At a time when Mesopotamian cultures were at their peak, as literary and urban culture, India, too had a literal and urban society. Because of its suitable environment for human life it had always been a center for civilization. A civilization, which had an important effect directly or indirectly over the other civilizations. Its effects are visible over every other culture. It might be because of the mystic environment of the society it had always been the birth place of beliefs and religions.

These beliefs also had a great effect over the entire human population. Brahmanism, Jainism, Sikhism are all originated from this sub-continent. Perhaps the most important of all Buddhism is originated from India. If one mentions those populations who believe in these religions, one would interestingly be able to see that, nearly half of the human population believes in religions which originated in India. And the other half of the human population believe in Judeo-Christian beliefs like Christianity, Islam and Jew. Even this example shows us the importance of India. Because of its importance it had always been the subject of interest of other societies. From the very beginning of the written history there was a continuous flow of population to India. The Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Muslims, Portuguese and other Europeans made their way to India. Most of them were foreign conquerors that were in search of the endless fortunes of the country.

On the other hand for non-Indians the most striking point of Indian society is its caste system. Caste, which is a Portuguese word in origin, is a social structure whose origins lie of three and a half millennia ago. Besides,

the most striking specification of the caste system is not its age. The most striking point is the structure itself. Caste system is a social structure where virtually little social mobility exists. The castes are closed to outer castes so much that every one of them has its own language version which others do not understand, considering they speak mostly the same language.

The Caste system is a unique structure, but it is not the only social structure which divides the society between priests, noble, soldiers and craftsmen. Before the enlightenment and industrialization ages it was common for the whole world societies to have such social divisions. What makes the caste system unique is its system of inter-class relations.

Because of its unique structure and being like a time machine which shows us the old times, caste system is a big source of knowledge for today's researchers of social sciences be it history, sociology or anthropology.

The other important point about the caste system for historians is its reactions to the modernization process or better say the westernization. It is a very unique example where reform movements flourish under the British order but against the British rulers. An eastern country under the western rule, where new ideas like nationalism, equality, social rights etc. flourish. Because of this unique position India and the caste system is like laboratory for the researchers who are in search of the "west-east" image and question. It is also important for our country who also had lived the same modernization process in a different way.

The key point of the caste system and the reform movements in question is the Dalits or untouchables who had virtually no right under the caste system. The Dalit movement was like the inner circle of the Indian reformation and modernization. A growing idea of national identity within another growing idea of nationality. A reform movement within another reform movement.

Regarding these key factors when we look at the caste system, what is seen is not only a social structure. The Caste system became the very heart of Hindu religion not at first but perhaps in time. So it is a religious subject as well as being a social structure. In Hindu religion life is not linear but instead circular. Regarding the famous reincarnation belief, man is reborn after death. If he had a bad reputation in its former life, in the next he will be in a lower state. This belief was perhaps the legalizing factor in the name of caste system for the lower castes where they hoped a salvation in their next lives.

Caste is on the other hand an economical concept besides being religious and social. Under the big umbrella of the four castes the Brahmans (priests), the Kshatriya (nobles, soldiers) , the Vaishyas (craftsmen, merchants) and the Shudras (labor force) there are hundreds and hundreds of sub-castes. Interestingly the separation system within the sub-castes is totally different from the separation system of upper castes. Those sub castes are in reality groups of professions where the job is inherited from father to the son. These lower separation system is called Jati where the upper separation is called Varna.

Varna is an interesting word used within Sanskrit to define the caste. Interestingly this word means color where it reminds the colors of the races when the first Aryan tribes arrived in India. The Shudra caste, the fourth and lowest caste is obliged to another separation within the four castes where the first three castes Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya are called twice born, making the Shudra the lowest caste in the separation.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND THE CASTE SYSTEM

2.1. Society and Social Hierarchy

2.1.1. Society

It would not be wrong if one begins the thesis with defining the word, society. Although our approach to the caste system will be more historical than sociological, this is inevitable. The very heart of the things we have learned from our past is that humans or Homo sapiens prefer to live in groups. Humans do not live alone. They gather and form groups, which we call societies.

A definition of society can be given as “The totality of social relationships among humans; A group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interests, participation in characteristic relationships, shared institutions, and a common culture; an extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization; The institutions and culture of a distinct self-perpetuating group. *Biology* A colony or community of organisms, usually of the same species.”¹

Where also social is defined as “animals tending to move or live together in groups or colonies of the same kind”².

The science again created by human mind is sociology to cope with the problems and the questions of social groups. As the one who established the sociology as a discipline, Durkheim tells that the importance of social facts

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000)

² <http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn?stage=1&word=social>

was that they constitute a domain of phenomena that fall outside the scientific purview of biology and psychology. In comparison to the phenomena studied by biology and psychology, social facts constitute a class by themselves, or *sui generis*, as Durkheim referred to them. Thus according to Durkheim, the study of social facts requires an autonomous scientific discipline -- namely, the discipline of sociology.³

What we know in certain is that as a species, human being lives in groups or what we call societies. And the science of history is the past experiences of those societies formed by different groups of people. As Fernand Braudel states:

Society, scattered, can be seen every where and sometimes containing just like the air we breathe but we don't feel, it permeates and direct our whole life. Young Marx wrote, as "What is thinking in me is the society itself". Then most of the time the historian is just being charmed by the illusion that when looking to the past there are only individuals which he can judge about their responsibilities. But his real duty is not finding the 'human' that is a misused formula, but to define social groups which have responsibilities to other groups.⁴

According to Durkheim, social facts are properties that can be attributed only to human groups and not to the human individuals who make up those groups. Ordinary language is another example of a social fact. Ordinary languages such as English, French, and Chinese are products of groups rather than of individuals. More important, languages can be attributed only to whole groups rather than to single individuals. As Wittgenstein (1889-1951) has demonstrated, it makes no sense to say that a single individual has a private language that only he or she can speak.⁵

³ Douglas V. Porpora, *The Concept of Social Structure* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), p. iii

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *Maddi Uygarlık, Mübadele Oyunları* (Ankara: İmge Yayıncılık, 2004), p.409

⁵ Douglas V. Porpora, *op.cit.*, p.iii.

So, in this thesis we will try to take a photograph of a period of one of those human societies, the Indian society, a society, which has roots down to the time of the Pharaohs.

2.1.2 The Social Structure

After defining the word society in a basic manner, we have to define some main types of societies. Especially when the subject is the caste system, we find a timeline of civilization inside India, which was built on the mainstreams of social life; the nomadic and the sedentary. Indian civilization is one of the oldest sedentary civilizations. But just like others it was not sedentary at the beginning. And it is clear for us to see that the whole story of the formation of a social system, which we call the caste system, is at the same time the history of the formation of a new civilization.

The known predecessors of today's Hindu culture were the Aryans. **Arya** is an English word derived from the Vedic Sanskrit and Avestan (language of old Iran) term *arya*, meaning **noble**.⁶ They are believed to have been a nomadic society, which came to the Indian sub-continent from northwest. The migration of the Aryans to the subcontinent is dated as early as the 15th century BC. But we must acknowledge that this dating was not build on historical or archeological proofs. In reality the whole Aryan Migration theory is based on philological proofs, tracking the similarities between the proto Indo-European languages such as Persian, Greek, Armenian to Vedic Indic, the latter which was later called Sanskrit. (see APPENDICE 1)

So it is hard to make the whole theory dependant on philological evidences and give exact dates of migration of societies. The main evidence of Aryan migrations is the warfare stories of an ancient text, which is called

⁶ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryan>

the “Rigveda”.⁷ The manner of this scripture is mostly religious and literary and it is a very valuable historical source. However, examining the scripture, historians believe that the geographical names used are defining the geography of northern India or the Punjab, and their fierce struggling with their enemies, the Dasas gives evidence.

Until the first decades of the 20th century, the Dasas told in the Vedas had no meaning than a myth. But with the re-discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization city, called Harappa in Pakistan the late 19th century by the explorers Charles Masson and Alexander Burnes, and the archaeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham in the 1870's, we came to know that the Dāsa of the Vedas could have been a reality. The word Dāsa later became the usual word for ‘slave’. After the re-discovery of ancient cities of an unknown culture led to the the first excavations in the early 20th century at Harappa by Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni, and by R.D. Banerji at another Indus Valley city, Mohenjo-daro. Romila Thapar also mentions the possibility that the Dāsas were the descendants of the Indus Valley Civilization.⁸

One of the main differences between the Aryans and the Indus Valley civilization is their way of life. Aryans were migrants and that meant that they were probably a nomadic society. The philological links between the Iranian and Aryan languages shows us that at some time in their history Iranian and Aryan tribes were living together and then they were separated. So we can assume that Aryans migrated into India. The nomadic character of the Aryans can also be observed with the religious ritual of horse sacrifice where horse breeding is linked to nomadic life.

⁷ The **Rig Veda** (Sanskrit *ṛc* 'praise' + *veda* 'knowledge') is the earliest of the four Hindu religious scriptures known as the Vedas. It consists of 1,017 hymns (1,028 including the apocryphal *valakhilya* hymns 8.49-8.59) composed in Vedic Sanskrit, many of which are intended for various sacrificial rituals). These are contained in 10 books, known as *Mandalas*. This long collection of short hymns is mostly devoted to the praise of the gods. However, it also contains fragmentary references to historical events, notably the struggle between the early Vedic peoples (known as Aryans) and their enemies, the Dāsa.

⁸ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, (Londoni: Sangam Books Ltd, 1996),p.137

“He who desires cattle should offer to *Tvāstr* a horse.”⁹

The other evidence, which makes one think that the Aryans were nomads that the Vedas were first born as, hymns where the society was illiterate. It is believed that the writing down of Vedas were nearly a thousand years later from they were first composed. Before the arrival of Aryans into the subcontinent, the Indus Valley culture had already produced a scripture and literal civilization. So it would be right to think that the Aryans were a semi-nomadic society at the very beginning of their arrival into India.

On the other hand the Indus Valley civilization was a well-developed civilization with well-established cities with a population of 50,000 individuals. They had their own scripture (which is still not deciphered) and operational harbors making commerce with the antique Mesopotamian cultures such as Sumerians.

The pattern of a nomadic society invading a sedentary civilization in general does not match the story of Aryans and the Indus Valley civilization. Although it is stated that some of the verses of the RigVeda points to the destruction of the cities:

"In aid of Abhyavartin Cayamana, Indra destroyed the seed of Virasakha.
At *Hariyupiyah*¹⁰ he smote the vanguard of the Vrcivans, and the rear fled
frighted."
-- [Rg.V. XXVII.5]

The name Indra indicated here was the god in Vedic times. He was the leader of the Devas, the god of war, the god of thunder and storms, and the greatest of all warriors, the strongest of all beings. It is assumed that he was

⁹ Yajur-Veda, Kanda II, Prapathaka 1, The Special Animal Sacrifices, ii.1.8

¹⁰ It is stated by some of the Dalit intellectuals that this “Hariyupiyah” indicates the city which we call Harappa today.

the king of the first Aryan tribes who seized ancient India.¹¹ As it is also stated that the place called Hariyupiyap is the famous lost city of Harappa that indicates that the Aryans destroyed the Indus Valley civilization.¹² But it is a statement without sufficient evidence. Most possibly the Aryans never had the chance to see the glimmering cities of the Indus Valley Civilization.

What they had found was perhaps the remnants of those cities and probably people who were living just as they did in a tribal nomadic society or at least villages. This is why for half a millennium and more was needed for the flourishing of Aryan cities and also why they were unable to inherit the famous Indus Valley script and develop a literary culture. The Aryans were the usual nomadic people who had the knowledge of horse breeding, iron casted weapons and war chariots.

We can assume that after invading north India, they captured the whole native society and turned them into semi-slaves. This process, which began with the mixture of two completely different cultures, Aryans as the invaders on the one hand, and possibly the native Dravidian, Munda speaking people as the slaves on the other, must be the very first establishment of the “Caste System”. It is just adding a new group into the society whether they are slaves or not. And with the process of urbanization and the rise of civilization, this position of slavery turned into a much more meaningful concept, first religiously and then socially since a time when nobody remembered why things were like this way. So the cause of the caste system cannot only be the Aryans but also the native people of India though in an indirect way. They were not capable to overcome the invaders and they did not have the cultural sedentary environment to swallow the large flow of Aryan speaking nomadic people.

¹¹Stephen T. Naylor, *Indra*, (Encyclopedia Mythica, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/indra.html>)

¹² Prof. Uthaya Naidu, *The Bible of Aryan Invasions*, (<http://www.dalitstan.org/books/bibai/bibai2.html>), Vol. II,

Romila Thapar also mentions this anomaly and explains the overwhelming power on the possibly civilized people with the technology of iron against the technology of copper.¹³

The last thing to remember about the Hindu social structure is its dependence on religion. From the very beginning the Hindu society was shaped within the rules of religion, which also caused the birth of the caste system.

However, Brahmanism had already defined the worldly authority according to the religious rules and turned the Brahmins and Kshatriyas into the very upper classes of society as a part of its caste system.¹⁴

This is a brief description of the social structure of India well before the birth of Christ, which gave rise to Hindu civilization and its important part the caste system that is the subject of this study.

Later on, based on this structure we will try to explain the birth of caste system.

2.1.3 Social Hierarchy

Social hierarchy whether in the singular or the plural form, indicates the real meaning of the word society. The word “hierarchy” can be applied to the history of the societies with big population as a whole and without any effort. None of these societies grow horizontally in the means of equality. They grow vertically.¹⁵

Just as Braudel states and just as we have mentioned before; humans had always been a social creature, living in groups. Social groups are

¹³ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.138

¹⁴ Mustafa Soykut, *Dinler Tarihi Perspektifinden Hindistan Kökenli ve İdeolojik Çalışmalar, (Doğu Batı)*, p.91

¹⁵ Fernand Braudel, *op.cit.*, p.413

consisted of individuals and social groups forms social systems. Every individual or group forming a social system is interdependent.¹⁶ This kind of social system is applicable to any kind of species besides humans, which form societies. So it is a general and a universal rule that every member of a system has to follow the rules of nature and the rules formed in time in that system. Because of this there is always a system of relations within the groups or societies. And another inevitable rule of the societies or groups is that there had always been a hierarchical system within the members of the system.

There had always been individuals that were much more privileged than others. So we can say that human societies are build upon hierarchies that are unequal in its character. The inequalities can be based on gender, age, physical appearance, race or any other kind of difference that can form subgroups within the big groups. Again as Braudel says:

But a village is an order of grouping. Even the societies build in utopias are hierarchical in their nature. Even the Greek Gods of the Olympos live in hierarchical order. As a conclusion: there is no society without a skeleton and structure.¹⁷

And as Anthony GIDDENS have emphasized, whether it is modern or primitive there had always been inequalities. Even in societies where there is no wealth or power differences do exist, we can observe inequalities between man and woman, young and olds and etc.¹⁸

Sociologists, use the term *social hierarchy* to define those social inequalities. Hierarchies are inequalities between different human groups those are established and institutionalized within the society.¹⁹

¹⁶ David M. MANDELBAUM, *Society in India*, (London: University of California Press, 1972), p.4

¹⁷ Fernand Braudel, op.cit., p.413

¹⁸ Anthony GIDDENS, *Sosyoloji*, (Ankara: Ayraç Yayınevi, 2000), p.256

¹⁹ Ibid., p.256

And all of the social inequalities or to say social hierarchies takes place in a hierarchy from the most privileged to the less privileged. This means that social classes are not formed in a shape where they are all at the same level and equal, but in a vertical form where each one is above another.

Classes and hierarchical systems became much more complicated during the process of alteration from first the hunter-gatherer life, then into agricultural village life and at last into sedentary life where today millions of people call groups what we call city today. To understand this we have to take a look on the diagram (see annex, Figure 1) which shows the percentage of the hunter-gatherer population inside the general human population. Tens of thousands of years ago the whole human population that was a few million was hunter-gatherers. It is understandable for 10 million people to be nomadic and hunter where there were endless lands unpopulated. With the rise of the population, humans began forming bigger groups and with the help of technology they have produced villages were established first.

One must admit that this process of change is not linear and the same for the whole human population. It was different for each of the societies living in different parts of the world. Even if history is based on selected data, the data selected need not be entirely arbitrary. They assume that all societies change and that in a period stretching from 2500 B.C. to A.D. 1000 Indian society and its institutions must have undergone change; it is the work of the historian to study the nature of this change. The idea of a static society is no longer reliable.²⁰

As it is accepted within the social sciences that, there had always been hierarchical systems within human societies. These hierarchical systems themselves were also different from each other according to time and place. Before the formation of the hierarchical system of our modern world, which

²⁰ Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History*, p.19

we call *the class system*, the main stream of social hierarchy was a little bit different. Again changing from time to place societies was divided into subclasses like the nobles and soldiers, the priests and people who had professions.

The subject of this thesis which is caste system is just one of those hierarchical systems which is a famous but example. It is not very different from the others but unique enough to left its name in history.

There was an observant Greek ambassador in India about 300 B.C., Megasthenes, whose account of the country and its people gives us our first general view of India as seen by a visitor. He observed that the people divided themselves into a number of occupationally specialized groups, that a person could only marry within his own group, and that no one could change affiliation from one group to another. Many other voyagers to India after Megasthenes remarked upon this distinctive social order. It regulated a large part of public and private behavior; it was a most important concern of the people of the land. It seemed both familiar and quite unfamiliar to a visitor. It was familiar in that like tended to marry like elsewhere; sons followed their father's occupation in the voyager's homeland; a hierarchy of society and privileges of rank were not strange to anyone. What did strike observers as unfamiliar was the rigor of the social divisions, the bases on which the divisions were made, and the thoroughgoing way in which they were applied to all aspects of life.²¹

The caste system is unique enough to become the main concept of the Hindu image world wide. As told by Mandelbaum, every individual who was interested somehow with India was stunned in the concept throughout history.

But at the same time caste system is one of the hardest social systems to understand and solve especially for non-Indians like us. As an Indian low caste member emphasizes about the caste system:

²¹ David M. MANDELBAUM, *Society in India*, p.3

It is a truism that an outsider cannot really know the inside story. However the outsider does possess some degree of objectivity although this it may be conditioned by his background.²²

Born in an illiterate society and managed to survive for nearly 3,000 years without changing its mainframe, the caste system deserves to be studied. But what makes caste system so interesting does also include many problems for the researchers. Because of illiteracy of the people in which the caste system is born much of the social system and the history of the founders of the society are still unknown. The very few evidences about the born of caste system lies mostly in the sacred books of the Hindus, the Vedas, which are literary, religious and social treatises which do not enter into the category of hard-core historical evidence.

2.2. Indian sub-continent and Indian civilization

2.2.1. The Geography of the Sub-Continent

The **Indian subcontinent** is the peninsular region of larger South Asia in which the nations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka as well as parts of Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and some currently controlled by China, namely Tibet are located. It is also known as the "*Indian Subcontinent*" and, primarily in Pakistan, as the "*Indo-Pak Subcontinent*". Being the only region in the world that is commonly described as a subcontinent, "*The Subcontinent*" is also a very common characterization and often the preferred term, especially in Pakistan.

Geologically, the notion of a subcontinent is based on the fact that this region rests on a tectonic plate of its own, separate from the rest of Asia. The southern region of the subcontinent forms an enormous peninsula, while in the north it is separated from the colder regions of China and Mongolia by

²² A. Shukra, Mary Searle-Chatterjee & Ursula Sharma (ed.), *Contextualising Caste; Caste: A personal perspective*, (London: T.J.Press Ltd., 1994), p.174

the Himalaya mountain range, which also acts as a cultural and geographical barrier between it and the rest of Asia.²³

The main character of the region we call India is that, it is quite insular from the rest of Asia. The Himalaya mountain range as being the highest geographical boundaries all over the world cuts the whole subcontinent from Asia. While the north of the subcontinent is impossible to pass, western direction is also not so friendly, where there are deserts in the west and again mountains as high as 3000 meters in the northwest where famous Khaybar Pass to be found. There is also the famous Indus river and its branches dividing the western planes. On the East the other famous river of India, the Ganges, pours into the Indian Ocean, forming an enormous Delta where modern Bangladesh is founded.

Being nearly 10 million square kilometers, India²⁴ is as big as Europe. We have to admit again that considering the geographical isolation and the largeness India is more like a continent than Europe.

The subcontinent shows an isolated position not only in geography but also in history. Although beginning with the known history of Aryan invasions, there had always been migrations from the northwest into the subcontinent; still India is a more isolated part of the old world than other places like Mesopotamia or Europe.

As we have said India is a very huge country. And it contains every kind of climate from dry deserts to the rain forests and cold and high mountains surrounded by a big and warm ocean. It has all the evens for the human

²³ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent

²⁴ It would be usefull to mention again that Indian subcontinent consist of Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, SriLanka, India, Bhutan and Myanmar. So for the continuing pages it would be kept in mind that wheneved the word India is used, it does not only represent the lands of one state but also the other six states.

beings to form high-grade civilizations. For thousands of years it has been a vast country, out of the human imagination to capture and control. When we think of the few million people populating India, ten thousands of years ago, we can assume that tribes or clans were far apart from each other, surrounded with enough and more supplies they need, preventing them to fight for sources.

When we take into consideration that the Indus Valley Civilization –as it can be understood from its name- was a river civilization. Rivers are the other main geographical factors that shaped the destiny of the subcontinent. They provided the tribes with an environment where they were able to produce their own crops, just like cities built in Mesopotamia. The most famous and biggest of these rivers are the Indus which in the northwest region of subcontinent, and Ganges in the northern region of the subcontinent. Both of these mega rivers are born from the Himalayan mountain range.

The remnant sites of the Indus Valley civilization are all found near the main and secondary branches of the Indus river. And as some historians state the Aryan culture spread to the east following the river Ganges, before it spread all over the subcontinent. It is logical not for us today, but also for the ancient man, to settle around the endless sources of those great rivers. Southern India was also suitable with its endless plains for the humans to spread.

Within these geographical situation the ecosystem allowed humans to reach big numbers and through out the whole history India had always contained a great portion of the whole human population as it is today²⁵. And as Romila Thapar states that,

²⁵ 25% the of human population lives in the sub-continent.

“It also led to the recognition of the fact that an area as large as the Indian sub-continent will show evidence of regional variations in the cultural pattern and this historical change in the sub-continent need not to be identical nor occur simultaneously.”²⁶

2.3. The Caste System

2.3.1 Description

The title we use here seems problematic, because it is a fact that the caste system, considering its old age, is a really complicated social system with its four castes (plus the untouchables) and hundreds of sub-castes. The ‘caste’ as a definition is not a native one but a description that was used first by the Portuguese who appeared on the subcontinent from the end of the 15th century. It is just a mispronunciation of the Indian word ‘Jat’, which means class divided according to professions. After the decline of the Portuguese naval power; other Europeans filled the gap and the British who arrived to India much later after the Portuguese also used the word caste. The British used the word Caste instead of Jat and Varna, which is the classical word used to denote caste and which means, “color” in Sanskrit.

Just as other social researches the first investigations on the ancient Indian society and the Europeans made its structure. Their approach was likely to be related with their interpretations with the supremacy of Western culture. Especially after they understood that Sanskrit was very essence of the Indo-European languages. And it turned into a tool for the approval of the racist supremacy of Indo-European nations that were also speaking versions of the same language. In Keshab Chunder Sen’s words:

The Aryans it was argued were implicitly superior to the non-Aryans as they were the initial conquerors that have founded

²⁶ Romila Thapar, op.cit., p.14

civilizations in Europe and Asia. In India, the arrival of the Aryans was associated with the compilation of the Rig Veda and this was believed to be the bedrock of Indian civilization, the excavation of the Indus civilization not as yet having taken place. By the late nineteenth century, the fallacy of equating language with race had been clearly demonstrated. Nevertheless, the theory remained established in European thought with reference to India. It also became acceptable to the new middle-class elite in India as it could call itself Aryan, differentiate itself from the lower castes believed to be non-Aryan and even seek a connection with the British rulers who represented European aryanism.²⁷

So, since the birth of nationalism in the 18th century in Europe, Aryandom as Mr. Keshab defines had become the center for the new ideologies of supremacy of the West, which also legalized the patronage of the West over the rest of the world.

In reality there are two concepts that has to be understood to have an idea on the whole caste system, which are “Jat” and “Varna”. As in most of the societies of the world, so in India, profession is inherited from father to the son. And so in India there developed families, who professed the same family profession for generation in which, the son continued his father's profession. Later on as these families became larger, they were seen as communities or as they are called in Indian languages, Jat. The Indians use the word 'Jat' for any community who has something common like religion, language, origin, similar geographical background and so on. At the same time they also use the word 'Jat' for Varna.²⁸ Different families who professed the same profession developed social relations between them and organized as a common community, meaning Jat.²⁹ Sometimes in English the word caste is used for Varna and the word sub-caste for Jat.³⁰

As regards the structure of the Hindu society, it comprised four varnas or orders, functionally differentiated –the Brahmana, acting as the custodian of

²⁷ Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, (Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1992), p.29

²⁸ <http://tanmoy.tripod.com/bengal/caste.html> (accessed October 20, 2004)

²⁹ Aharon Daniel, “Caste System: The Beginning of Caste System”, <http://adaniel.tripod.com/origin.htm> (accessed October 15, 2004).

³⁰ This explanation of the word “Jat” also gives us the imprints of the birth of the caste system, which we will talk about later.

the sacred lore and performing priestly function; the Kshatriya responsible for governance and maintenance of peace; the Vaishya, engaged in agriculture, industry and trade and the Sudra rendering general services to the whole community.³¹ This is the functional definition of the caste system.

The main division in the caste system is the varna of the people. Varna, means color in the Sanskrit. Basic caste is called *varna*, or "color" Subcaste, or *jāti*, "birth, life, rank," is a traditional subdivision of *varna*. And the question which comes into mind is if the varna division had something to do with the skin color of the ancient Indians. And after varna, the society is divided into "Jat"s as we tried to introduce above. Varna is the most famous division of the caste system that is divided into four castes, which are the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Shudras. And there is another group that is not included in this division, which is called "the untouchables". Or to say the ones who are outcastes.³² Although they are called outcastes, it can be thought as if they are a little portions of the society that had been excluded from the society. But today there are hundreds of millions of outcastes in the Indian society.

We do not know the skin color of the Aryans of the 15th century B.C., but it can be assumed that the color of the native people were much more darker than the Aryans. Aryans classified the native people as Dasas and put them into the lowest class of society to be used in the labor. Even today the people who are called Shudras and untouchables are estimated as much as 150 million in populations and most of them have darker skin colors.³³

³¹ S.V. Desika Char, *Caste, Religion and Country*, (New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1993),p. 15

³² Pariah, is another word used for the untouchables and became famous to define people who are not wanted by their own society in the West.

³³ Tom O'Neill, "Dokunulmazlar", *National Geographic Türkiye*, Haziran (2003), p. 14.

In the “Laws of Manu” -which are estimated to be written in the 4th century B.C.- the differences between the Shudras, untouchables and the upper castes are well described:

“But he who does not (worship) standing in the morning, nor sitting in the evening, shall be excluded, just like a Shudra, from all the duties and rights of an Aryan.”³⁴

There are various theories trying to explain the caste system in their own point of view. One can be called the biological theory which claims that all existing things, animated and unanimated, inherent three qualities in different apportionment. Sattva qualities include wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities. Rajas include qualities like passion, pride, valor and other passionate qualities. Tamas qualities include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. People with different doses of these inherent qualities adopted different types of occupation.

According to this theory the Brahmans inherent Sattva qualities. Kshatrias and Vaisias inherent Rajas qualities and the Shudras inherent Tamas qualities.

A man who is in search of the understanding of the caste system will come to an end where he understands that although the caste system is a very strict social hierarchy which limits the social mobility is also a system that has endless exceptions. This kind of relation is similar to the one between the order and chaos, an endless loop just like the Hindu belief of life, a circle that has no beginning and no end.

³⁴ tr. George Bühler, *Sacred Books of the East: The Laws of Manu*, (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu.htm>), v.25, II/103

2.3.2 The Beginning

To understand the establishment of the caste system which is nearly 3.000 years old, we must first understand the social environment it was build in. As we have mentioned before what we know about ancient India during the 3rd and 2nd millenniums A.D. is limited. But what we know for sure is that there existed a great civilization in northern India before the questionable migration of Aryans during the 1500 B.C. A civilization that was as developed as other civilizations like Sumers or Egyptians of its age. But as we have mentioned before in Chapter 1.3 (Social Hierarchy), social hierarchy is a concept that we can observe in every society from the most primitive to the most advanced, and which means the Indus Valley Civilization had to have a social hierarchy of its own. We can only make assumptions about the daily life of the ordinary people living in Harappa, Mohenjodaro or other developed cities, where we do not have solid proofs. These assumptions have to be generalizations of social and historical facts. For example the most obvious evidence about this lost cultures is the remnant of their cities itself. So we can assume that they were a developed and sedentary culture, but not nomadic or underdeveloped. So we have to build our assumption over other observations about other urban societies that we know better. Another thing we know is the fact that 2.500 A.D. was a time where currency and money were unknown even to the urban societies. This means that there was possibly no exchange tool for the goods to change hands. And what is more possible that goods were exchanged with other goods. Exchange mechanisms of a society are the basic factor that affects the daily life. Without money or something similar, the main exchange instrument must be the exchange of goods and services. In an economic structure like this one, it must be important what profession did the individuals had concerning the goods or services they were able to present to the economy.

In old times, there was no concept of money or cash. People produced things and bartered (traded) them for other goods and services. A producer or trader belonging to Vaishya would include people such as farmer producing grains and milk etc., blacksmith (Lohar) making iron implements, leather-worker (Charmar or Chamar, charm meaning leather) manufacturing shoes, and so on. Thus, for subsistence, a Brahmin would do worship (puja) in a 'Vaishya' farmer's house and get grains and milk in return. Similarly, a Chamar would exchange shoes for food items from a farmer, iron implements from a Lohar, and so on. Similarly, a 'Shudra' servant might work or help in a farmer's field for food in return. If he were to help a Lohar, then a Lohar would provide him with food items. Moreover, all these people would give a share of their goods (produced) and services to the Kshatriya (tribal chief) for administration of Visha (tribe or society). Society was basically managed through bartering system.³⁵

As Dr. Sharma states in his article, social hierarchy in the pro-money societies had to be very important. But we have to admit that it should not have happened so easily. It is questionable that people were giving their goods and services to the tribal chief because of the administrative service he was offering. First of all, in the pro-Aryan society we have no proof of castes like Kshatriya, Brahmin or Vaishya. They were all names used in the Aryan tribal and nomadic society and in a nomadic society distinction of professions should not be as advanced as in an urban society. But it can be true for an urban society like the Indus Valley Civilization to have a social hierarchy based on professions.

As it is known caste system consists of the infamous castes the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (the rulers), the Vaishyas (people with profession), Shudras (people doing low-level and dirty jobs), and again as you can see this division is a division of profession in reality. And there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of sub-castes again mainly defined with the job done.

³⁵ Subhash C. Sharma, "Hindu Caste System & Hinduism...", <http://www.geocities.com/lamberdar/caste.html> (accessed October 12, 2004).

Yet we have to make a second distinction between the first three castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas) and the last one (Shudras). Because Shudras are not accepted as Aryans from the very first Vedas chanted in the second millennium B.C.. They are not noble in the meaning. The first three castes are called as twice-borns that we will explain later. It looks like that Shudra caste is an implementation of the non-Aryan population into the Aryan society and legalizing the bad conditions dictated over them as the conquered and an explanation why they are low.

Although the caste system is based on the Brahmanic religious myths, it is not unusual for a human society to have a social hierarchy like the caste system. First of all this division of ruler, priest and people depending on mainly professions, can be observed almost in every society of its time to the time of modernization where we were introduced with the classes as the social hierarchy. From the very early civilizations like the Sumerians and Egyptians to the comparatively modern societies like the Ottomans or the pre-enlightenment Europe this social division was usual. Because of this the travelers who made their way to India, beginning from the antique Greek and Roman times, to the Chinese, Muslims and colonial European powers were not surprised to see a social structure like this. What they were surprised of was the strict inter-caste rules that prohibited the social mobility in an unseen way. One of the biggest scholars of his time, the 10th century Al-Biruni is one of those, who describes the Indian caste system and depending on the antique customs which are later forgotten.³⁶ He also mentions that antique social hierarchy was based on the distinction of professions.

When we turn back to the roots of the caste system and its link with the Indus Valley civilization, we have look for evidences. First of all it must be proved that the migrating and occupying Aryan tribes must have come face to face with those cities of Harappan culture. There are some theories

³⁶ Al Biruni, Ainslie T. EMBREE (ed.), *Alberuni's India*, (New York: The Norton Library, 1971), p. 99-100

that the Indus Valley civilization was destroyed by the invading Aryans, which we had talked about previously in the first chapter. But there is no solid proof for that theory to be proved. And we have to underline that this theory of Aryans destroying the Indus Valley civilization is put forward by the famous Indian character of the 20th century Dr. Ambedkar, who was one of the founders and leaders of the “Dalit Movement” which demanded equal rights with the upper castes.

The decline and disappear of the Indus Valley civilization still has to be proved. So we can assume that the theory that Indus Valley people and the Aryans never met before. When the Aryans first invaded the continent the Dasas they fought were other native people, perhaps the descendants of the Indus Valley civilization but not themselves. Whatever the truth is we can guess that at least there should be some remnants of the Indus Valley civilization when the Aryans came and in some way they must be in contact where two cultures effect each other. Although the glamorous cities were deserted, the knowledge produced in those cities must somehow prevail. But this fact does not give us the extent of the cultural interaction and also does not mean that caste system had its roots inside the Indus Valley civilization. Rhys Davis also thinks likely, telling us:

It is a common error, vitiating all conclusions as to the early history of India, to suppose that the tribes, with whom the Aryans, in their gradual conquest of India, came into contact, were savages. Some were so. There were hill tribes, gypsies, and bands of hunters in the woods. But there were also settled communities with highly developed social organization, wealthy enough to excite the cupidity of the invaders, and in many cases too much addicted to the activities of peace to be able to offer.³⁷

³⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1999), p.44

As we have explained there are different theories trying to give meaning to the caste system. One of them was biological theory or let's better call it biological approach. And there are religious-mystical theories.

The religious theory explaining how the four Varnas were founded, but they do not explain how the Jats in each Varna or the untouchables were founded. According to the Rig Veda, the ancient Hindu book, the primal man - Purush - destroyed himself to create a human society. The different Varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmans were created from his head; the Kshatriyas from his hands; the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varnas were created. Other religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from the body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

Al-Biruni had also his own theory about the creation of the caste system, which also seeks the roots of this social system not inside the Hindu society, but somewhere else.

If a new order of things in political or social life is created by a man naturally ambitious of ruling, who by his character and capacity really deserves to be a ruler, a man of firm convictions and unshaken determination, who even in times of reverses is supported by good luck, in so far as people then side with him in recognition of former merits of his, such an order is likely to become consolidated among those for whom it was created, and to continue as firm as the deeply rooted mountains. It will remain among them as a generally recognised rule in all generations through the course of time and the flight of ages. If, then, this new form of state or society rests in some degree on religion, these twins, state and religion, are in perfect harmony, and their union represents the highest development of human society, all that men can possibly desire.

The kings of antiquity, who were industriously devoted to the duties of their office, spent most of their care on the division of their subjects into different classes and orders, which they tried to preserve from intermixture and disorder. Therefore they

forbade people of different classes to have intercourse with each other, and laid upon each class a particular kind of work or art and handicraft. They did not allow anybody to transgress the limits of his class, and even punishend those who would not be content with their class.

All this is well illustrated by the history of the ancient Chosroes (Khusrau), for they had created great institutions of this kind, which could not be broken through by the special merits of any individual nor by bribery. When Ardashin bin Babak restored the Persian Empire, he also restored the classe or castes of the population in the following way:

The first class were the knights and princes,

The second class were the monks, the fire-priests, and the lawyers,

The third class were the physicians, astronomers and other men of science,

The fourth class were the husbandmen and artisans.

And within these classe there were subdivisios, distinct from each other, like the species within a genus. All institutions of this kind are like a pedigree, as long as their origin is remembered; but when once their origin has been forgotten, they become, as it were, the stabel property of the whole nation, nobody any more questioning its origin. And forgetting is the necessary result of any long period of time, of a long succession of centuries and generations.

Among the Hindus institutions of this kind abound. We Muslims, of course, stand entirely on the other side of the question, considering all men as equal, except in piety; and this is the greatest obstacle which prevents any approach or understanding between Hindus and Muslims.³⁸

Like human beings, food also inherent different dosage of these qualities and it affects its eater's intelligence. The Brahmans and the Vaisias have Sattvic diet, which includes fruits, milk, honey, roots and vegetables. Most of the meats are considered to have Tamasic qualities. Many Shudra

³⁸ Al Biruni, Ainslie T. EMBREE (ed.), *Alberuni's India*, pp. 99-100

communities eat different kinds of meat (but not beef) and other Tamasic food. But the Kshatrias who had Rajasic diet eat some kinds of meat like deer meat that is considered to have Rajasic qualities. Many Marathas who claim to be Kshatrias eat mutton. The drawback of this theory is that in different parts of India the same food was sometimes qualified to have different dosage of inherent qualities. For example there were Brahmans who eat meat that is considered Tamasic food.

Another explanation of the caste system is a social historical theory explains the creation of the Varnas, Jats and of the untouchables, which we have mentioned before. According to this theory, the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India. Before the Aryans there were other communities in India of other origins, where Negrito, Mongoloid, Austroloid and Dravidian are among them. The Negritos have physical features similar to people of Africa. The Mongoloid have Chinese features. The Austroloids have features similar the aboriginals of Australia. The Dravidians originate from the Mediterranean and they were the largest community in India. When the Aryans arrived in India their main contact was with the Dravidians and the Austroloids. The Aryans disregarded the local cultures. They began conquering and taking control over regions in north India and at the same time pushed the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India.

All these religious, biological, or socio-historical theories contain a piece of truth inside. We must be sure that just like every action made by man, the formation of caste system also has to be religious, social, biological and even economical faces. As we know from the Vedas that Aryans were fierce enemies of the native Indians, which they won a certain victory against this ended with enslaving. Aryans had a simple social hierarchy within them. But when they turned out to be conquerors of a massive land, leaving no serious threat to their hegemony, they became something much more than nomadic tribes. They found a land to rule. So just as it is said in

the socio-historical approach, the remnant population of the Aryan invasion was enslaved. Slavery was not an uncommon concept in those times where most of the world economies were dependent on slave labor. Four hundred years before the Aryans invaded India, a society called Amorites captured the ancient Sumerian lands and established the Babylonian Empire. At the time of Aryan invasion they were in charge of the ruling of the Mesopotamia with a glamorous and developed city life. And the Babylon society was also had a social hierarchy of its own composed of classes called:

- Awilu (a free person of upper class)
- Mushkenu, (a free person of middle or lower class)
- Wardu, (a slave)³⁹

Babylonian society was well differentiated. At the basis of it lay the slave population, the necessary condition of all economic activity in antiquity. Slaves were employed upon the farms, by the manufacturers and in the temples. The sources of the supply were various. War furnished many; others had fallen from the position of free laborers; still others were purchased from abroad, or were children of native bondsmen. Rich private owners or temple corporations made a business of hiring them out as laborers. They were humanely treated; the law protected them from injury; they could earn money, hold property, and thus purchase their freedom. Laws exist which suggest that young children could not be separated from their slave-parents in case of the sale of the latter.⁴⁰

Most of the communities that were in India before the arrival of the Aryans were integrated in the Shudra Varna or were made outcast depending on the professions of these communities. Communities who professed non-polluting jobs were integrated in Shudra Varna. And communities who professed polluting professions were made outcasts. The Brahmans are very

³⁹ Belteshazzar, "The Ancient City of Babylon", <http://www.belteshazzar.com/article.php?id=65> (accessed November, 12 2004)

⁴⁰ Babylonia A history of ancient Babylon (Babylonia), The International History Project 2004, <http://ragz-international.com/babylonia.htm>, p.70 (accessed October 21, 2004)

strict about cleanliness. In the past people believed that diseases can also spread also through air and not only through physical touch. Perhaps because of this reason the untouchables were not only disallowed to touch the high caste communities but they also had to stand at a certain distance from the high castes.⁴¹

But in India the acceptance of the ideology of the ruling categories by the general population was ensured by a neat integration of religion into the social structure. The cleverly contrived theory of **cycles of rebirth**, with the possibility of birth in a higher caste being linked to faithfully carrying out one's duties as per caste rules. The fatalistic acceptance of the membership of a particular caste as a result of deeds in past life. The pseudo-religious practices of untouchability and endogamy which segregated one caste from another, apart from the various social privileges and also laws as provided in our Dharmashastras drilled into the minds of people that caste is a pre-ordained and hereditary institution which has divine sanction.⁴²

The Aryans organized among themselves in three groups. The first group was of the warriors and they were called Rajayana, later they changed their name Rajayana to Kshatria. The second group was of the priests and they were called Brahmins. These two groups struggled politically for leadership among the Aryans. In this struggle the Brahmins got to be the leaders of the Aryan society. The third group was of the farmers and craftsmen and they were called Vaisya. The Aryans who conquered and took control over parts of north India subdued the locals and made them their servants. In this process the Vaisyas who were the farmers and the craftsmen became the landlords and the businessmen of the society and the locals became the peasants and the craftsmen of the society.

⁴¹ Aharon Daniel, "Caste System: The Beginning of Caste System", <http://adaniel.tripod.com/origin.htm> (accessed October 18, 2004).

⁴² Sudheer Birodkar, "Hindu History - A Search for Our Present in History", http://www.hindubooks.org/sudheer_birodkar/hindu_history/castejati-varna.html (accessed November 14, 2004)

In order to secure their status the Aryans resolved some social and religious rules that allowed only them to be the priests, warriors and the businessmen of the society. For example take Maharashtra. Maharashtra is in west India. This region is known by this name for hundreds of years. Many think that the meaning of the name Maharashtra is in its name, Great Land. But there are some who claim that the name, Maharashtra, is derived from the Jat called Mahar who is considered to be the original people of this region. In the caste hierarchy the dark skinned Mahars were outcasts. The skin color was an important factor in the caste system. The meaning of the word "Varna" is not class or status but color.

Associated with each varna there is a traditional color. These sound suspiciously like skin colors; and, indeed, there is an expectation in India that higher caste people will have lighter skin -- although there are plenty of exceptions (especially in the South of India). This all probably goes back to the original invasion of the Arya, who came from Central Asia and so were undoubtedly light skinned. The people already in India were quite dark, even as today many people in India seem positively black. Apart from skin color, Indians otherwise have "Caucasian" features -- narrow noses, thin lips, etc. -- and recent genetic mapping studies seem to show that Indians are more closely related to the people of the Middle East and Europe than to anyone else. Because Untouchables are not a varna, they do not have a traditional color.

43

Between the outcasts and the three Aryan Varnas there is the Shudra Varna who are the simple workers of the society. The Shudras consisted of two communities. One community was of the locals who were subdued by

⁴³ Kelley L. Ross, "The Caste System and the Stages of Life in Hinduism", The Proceedings of the Friesian School, *Fourth Series*, <http://www.friesian.com/caste.htm> (accessed November 21, 2004)

the Aryans and the other were the descendants of Aryans with locals. In Hindu religious stories there are many wars between the good Aryans and the dark skinned demons and devils. The different Gods also have dark skinned slaves. There are stories of demon women trying to seduce good Aryan men in deceptive ways. There were also marriages between Aryan heroes and demon women. Many believe that these incidences really occurred in which, the gods and the positive heroes were people of Aryan origin. And the demons, the devils and the dark skinned slaves were in fact the original residence of India whom the Aryans coined as monsters, devil, demons and slaves.

Later on the Aryans who created the caste system, added to their system non-Aryans. Different Jats who professed different professions were integrated in different Varnas according to their profession. Other foreign invaders of ancient India - Greeks, Huns, Scythians and others - who conquered parts of India and created kingdoms, were integrated in the Kshatria Varna (warrior castes). But probably the Aryan policy was not to integrate original Indian communities within them and therefore many aristocratic and warrior communities that were in India before the Aryans did not get the Kshatria status.

So at first just like it is else where on earth, the conquered people must have been enslaved. But what makes the difference between the Aryan society and Mesopotamia or other places of world is the legalization of the slavery. In Babylon slavery was a judicial subject that had strict rules, but only related with the state and the judiciary system. But in ancient Aryans it did not work this way. Most probably, because of the illiteracy of the nomadic Aryan tribes that had no scripture and eventually a written code system had only their religion to explain and define things. This situation caused the birth of a social system described earlier in the religious theory, which placed the conquered people in the context of a religious myth. As we have said it is believed that Shudras were created from the feet of the primal

man, Purush. And as Al-Biruni indicates in a time of a millennium and a half, as the social foundation of a system was completely forgotten and where only an illiterate mythology of religion were left, the separation of caste system became rock hard. And it took three more milleniums before the low castes began asking questions about their position. In short, Shudras and untouchables were the slaves of the society; unfortunately who had no judicial rights who began to believe a religion that did not want them.

2.3.3 The Organization

To understand the caste system that we stated being mind confusing, we have to make a more detailed explanation. As this is the technical part of the study, we will refer to some texts that explain it in detail.

2.3.3.1 Varna and Jats

Each Varna consists of many communities called Jats. Each Varna does consist of different Jats but many of these Jats break up into more communities and each such community refers to itself as different or unique Jat. There are different reasons for these different communities within each Jat. One reason can be the different occupations each community within the Jat professes. Other reasons can be inter-Jat political reasons. Many Jats consists of millions of people and it also causes break up of the larger community into smaller communities. There are also Jats that originate from different parts of India and profess the same profession and therefore get a common name, even though they are not one single community. For example the Jats that profess cloth washing are called collectively as Dhobi. For non-Dhobis the Dhobis are one Jat but within them they are not one community.

2.3.3.1.1 Hierarchy between the Varnas

All the Jats accept that, the Brahman Varna is the highest Varna in the hierarchy and the untouchables are outcast and are the lowest in the

hierarchy. But most of the Jats in different Varnas claim to be superior and higher than other Jats. Some of the Jats as stated earlier break up into smaller communities or Jats. In these Jats that break up into different communities, there are communities that look at themselves as superior as or higher in hierarchy than other communities. Some of the Brahman Jats break up into smaller communities, and between these communities within the Jat there also exist a hierarchy.

Among the other Varnas there also exists hierarchy phenomenon. Different Jats claim to be superior to the other Jats in their Varna. Some Jats in the Vaishya and Shudra Varnas also claim to be closer or equal in hierarchy to the Brahman Varna. These Jats that claim this status adopted Brahman customs like vegetarian diet and strict observance of purity and cleanliness. Some Jats claim to be closer to Kshatria, which is the warrior class of the Indian society.

Each Jat professes an occupation worthy of its Varna status. In most of the cases there was a connection between a person's profession and his Varna. Among the different Varnas there also developed guilds based on Jat lines, professing specific professions. In west India the Jat that professed oil pressing were called Somwar Teli. Other Jat members were the shepherds of the society and they were called Dhangar.⁴⁴

Here we have to say that Jats do not always overlap with the Varna castes. We don't have to forget the size of the sub-continent where traditions changes from place to place. For example Dhobis (washers) in north India were seen as untouchables. While in west India they had Shudra status.

⁴⁴ Daniel, "Caste System: The Beginning of Caste System", <http://adaniel.tripod.com/origin.htm> (accessed October 18, 2004).

And vice versa sometimes Jat members did not profess occupation worthy of their Varna. Many Brahmans, who are supposed to be the priest and learned of the society, did not find jobs as priests or did not manage to feed their families as priests and therefore worked as simple farmers. On the other hand there were many Brahmans who were landlords and businessmen, professions supposed to belong to the Vaisia Varna.

These examples prove that even the caste system which became a might with its unchanging pattern in thousands of years, is subject to change under the laws of nature and society. Access to resources, the growth of population and the limits of the social structure forced the castes for a change.

Also among the other Varnas not all professed the occupations worthy of their Varna. In west India the Maratha were the warriors and the aristocracy. Originally the Marathas belonged to the different Jats in west India. Most of these Jats were in Shudra level. But the Marathas who became the aristocracy of west India claimed and acquired the Kshatria status. In the 17th and the 18th century the Marathas even established an empire that ruled large parts of India. During the Maratha reign members of a Brahman Jat, Kokanastha Brahman, were ministers. From 1750 these Brahmans became the rulers of the Maratha Empire. But we have to say that they did not feel an inclination to their Shudra roots. Instead they were adapted to their new caste.

2.3.3.1.2 Marriages

Marriages occur within the Jat according to the religious principles. The different Jats members almost always respected this rule and people who dared break this rule were outcasted. But this rule also had exceptions. Usually the higher Varnas were very strict about this custom. But in some of the higher level Jats of the society, they used to have polygamy. In these

cases, because of scarcity of women, men use to marry women from the lower levels of the society. Here we can observe the natural limitations of the caste system.

In some Indian societies between-jat marriage was even an acceptable feature. One such example of marriages existed in Kerala, in south India. In Kerala, Nayar women (aristocracy community) married men from Numbodiri Brahman community.

2.3.3.1.3 Diets depending on religion

Diet is a very important sign of purity in Brahmanism. Those who eat forbidden foods are accepted as impure and diets mostly decide the level of the person inside society. Eating cattle meat means to be excommunicated from the religion and turning into an outcast. This had been perhaps the most strict rule. Each Varna had different diet. Hinduism has many strict dietary rules. In general the higher Jats are stricter about their dietary customs than the lower Jats. The Brahmins have the strictest dietary customs. They will not eat in lower Jats homes or even with lower Jats (because of this reason many restaurants hired Brahman cooks). In his book “*Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*” Pierre J. A. Dubois tells the story of a few Brahmins who found a deserted lower caste village and because of the conditions that had to eat from a pot which was left by the lower castes. The story ends with the excommunication of those Brahmins as soon as their secret was discovered.

The Brahman diet is supposed to include only vegetarian food. Jats who claimed Brahman status also adopted vegetarian diet of the Brahmins. But there are some Brahman Jats who traditionally eat meat, fish, chicken and egg (which is considered non-vegetarian). Some Brahman Jats in Kashmir, Orissa, Bengal and Maharashtra traditionally eat meat. But this meat was never cattle meat.

The subject of those religious diets later became a decisive tool for some of the 19th century social reformers, who saw eating meat and breaking the rules of religious diets as the way to ignite reform movements. There were groups who were revolting against religious customs like meeting secretly for the purpose of eating cattle meat.

2.3.3.1.4 Jat as a social status

Jat is determined by birth and it cannot be changed. In the beginning the caste system was not a strict system and people could move from one Varna to another. Indologists give different dates to this period of change. Some claim the change occurred around 500 B. C. and other claim 500 A. D. Until then, communities and even singular person moved from one Varna to another Varna, because of their desire to adopt different occupations as we have told before.

There were some kings who belonged to the Kshatria (warrior castes) and changed their status to become Brahmans. There were also who changed their status to become warriors. And even after the caste system was organized in a more strict manner there were many communities who did not always follow their status occupations. There was a case of a Jat that lost its high status because they did not profess the profession worthy of their Varna.

Jats like Kayastha, Reddy, Maratha, Nayar and others changed the basic four-fold hierarchy caste system. These Jats had high status but their exact status is not clear and different communities give different interpretations to their status of different Jats. As stated earlier different Jats claim theirs to be the superior than the other Jats and therefore the caste system even today is not always interpreted objectively by Indians but subjectively. Among the Marathas the confusion is even greater. In the narrow sense the Jat of Maratha applies to 96 clans who ruled and governed the parts of west India. Originally the Maratha clans belonged to different levels of Indian hierarchy. They mostly belonged to different Jats of Shudra. But many Jats of west Maharashtra claim that they are Marathas too. Sometimes the Kokanastha Brahmans (who were ministers of Maratha empire in 18th century and later on continued the Maratha Empire and their reign)

are also introduced as Marathas causing a greater confusion in Maratha definition.⁴⁵

2.3.3.2 The Sub-castes

As we have been telling since the beginning that caste system is a really complicated system. Besides the main four castes and plus outcastes there are literally thousands of subcastes in India. often with particular geographical ranges, occupational specializations, and an administrative or corporate structure. When Mahâtmâ Gandhi wanted to go to England to study law, he had to ask his subcaste, the Modh Bania, for permission to leave India. ("Bania", means "merchant," and "Gandhi" means "greengrocer" -- from *gandha*, "smell, fragrance," in Sanskrit -- and that should be enough for a good guess that Gandhi was a Vaishya.)

Sometimes it is denied that the varnas are "castes" because, while "true" castes, the jâtis, are based on birth, the varnas are based on the theory of the gunas (the "three powers" mentioned in the Gita). This is no more than a rationalization: the varnas came first, and they *are* based on birth. The gunas came later, and provide a poor explanation anyway, since the guna *tamas* is associated with both twice born and once born, caste and outcaste, overlapping the most important religious and social divisions in the system. Nevertheless, the varnas are now divisions at a theoretical level, while the jâtis are the way in which caste is embodied for most practical purposes.

The first three varnas are called the *twice born*. Being "twice born" means that you *come of age* religiously, making you a member of the Vedic religion, eligible to learn Sanskrit, study the Vedas, and perform Vedic rituals. The "second birth" is thus like Confirmation or a Bar Mitzvah. According to the *Laws of Manu* (whose requirements may not always be

⁴⁵ Daniel, "Caste System: The Beginning of Caste System", <http://adaniel.tripod.com/origin.htm> (accessed October 18, 2004).

observed in modern life), boys are "born again" at specific ages: 8 for Brahmins; 11 for Ksatriyas; and 12 for Vaishyas. A thread is bestowed at the coming of age to be worn around the waist as the symbol of being twice born. The equivalent of coming of age for girls is marriage. The bestowal of the thread is part of the wedding ceremony.

Ancient Iran also had a coming of age ceremony that involved a thread. That and other evidence lead to the speculation that the *three* classes of the twice born are from the original Indo-European social system -- the theory of George Dumézil. Even the distant Celts believed in three social classes. The three classes of Plato's *Republic* thus may not have been entirely his idea. Although there must have been a great deal of early intermarriage in India, nowhere did such an Indo-European social system become as rigid a system of *birth* as there. The rigidity may well be due to the influence of the idea of *karma*, that poor birth is morally deserved.⁴⁶

We are suspicious that these three class systems have its roots back in the pro Indo-European clans. The classical social structure as we have mentioned before is much older than the Persians, where we can observe a similar system in the Babylonian society.

According to the *Laws of Manu*, when the twice born come of age, they enter into the four *âshramas* or "stages of life."

1. The first is the *brahmacarya*, or the stage of the student (*brahmacârin*). For boys, the student is supposed to go live with a teacher (*guru*), who is a Brahmin, to learn about Sanskrit, the Vedas, rituals, etc. Since the boys are supposed to be celibate while students, Gandhi used the term *brahmacâri* to mean the celibate practitioner that he thought made the best *Satyagrahi*, the best non-violent activist.

2. The second stage is the *gârhastya*, or the stage of the householder, which is taken far more seriously in Hinduism than in Jainism or Buddhism and is usually regarded as mandatory, like student hood, although debate continued over the centuries

⁴⁶ Kelley L. Ross, "The Caste System and the Stages of Life in Hinduism", The Proceedings of the Friesian School, *Fourth Series*, <http://www.friesian.com/caste.htm> (accessed November 21, 2004)

whether or not this stage could be skipped in favor of a later one. This is the stage where the principal *dharma* of the person is performed, whether as priest, warrior, etc., or for women mainly as wife and mother.

3. The third stage is the *vânaprastya*, or the stage of the forest dweller. This may be entered into optionally if (ideally) one's hair has become gray, one's skin wrinkled, and grandchildren exist to carry on the family. Husbands and wives may leave their affairs and possessions with their children and retire together to the forest as hermits. This does not involve the complete renunciation of the world.

4. The fourth stage is the *sannyâsa*, or the stage of the wandering ascetic, the *sannyâsin* (or *sâdhu*). If a man desires, he may continue on to this stage, but his wife will need to return home; traditionally she cannot stay alone as a forest dweller or wander the highways as an ascetic. The *sannyâsin* has renounced the world completely, is regarded as dead by his family (the funeral is held), and is finally beyond all *dharma* and caste.

The twice born may account for as much as 18% of Hindus. The Shudras (58% of Hindus) may represent the institutional provision that the Arya made for the people they already found in India. The Shudras thus remain once born, and traditionally were not allowed to learn Sanskrit or study the Vedas -- on pain of death. Their *dharma* is to work for the twice born. But even below the Shudras are the Untouchables (24% of Hindus), who are literally "outcastes," without a varna, and were regarded as "untouchable" because they are ritually polluting for caste Hindus. Some Untouchable subcastes are regarded as so polluted that members are supposed to keep out of sight and do their work at night: They are called "Unseeables."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Kelley L. Ross, "The Caste System and the Stages of Life in Hinduism", The Proceedings of the Friesian School, *Fourth Series*, <http://www.friesian.com/caste.htm> (accessed November 21, 2004)

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL CHANGE DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

In the previous chapter we tried to give a definition and the early history of caste system as a social structure. We tried to determine the environment where the caste system was born into and tried to track its changes from the birth to the Laws of Manu 2nd century B.C. Where it turned into a much more solid structure and gained its form -as we know it today-; a structure which divides the society into hundreds of social groups and which prohibited a relation between them.

It is a question which we don't have the exact answer, which is if the caste system solely had been dependant on the religion which is Hinduism in this case. What we know is whether it was a religious motivation which started the mechanism or not, in time of two thousand years it turned into becoming the very heart of the religion itself. After 2 millenniums from the establishment of the "Rules of Manu" and 3 millenniums from the so-called Arian invasion, the question of how the caste system is interpreted by the Indian population as a religious question.

Again getting the information from the previous chapter, we -the non-Indians- are very suspicious about the virtue of this social system, regarding especially the position of the fourth caste the Shudras and additionally the untouchables. But we are not alone on this subject where a handful of the Indian intellectuals are against too. During this second chapter we will try to depict the birth and rise of opposition against the social defects of the Indian society beginning as early as the 18th century. We will also see how the caste system challenged against the modernity of the British Empire forcing the minds of Hindus with more universal ideas. We will see the struggle of a classic society under Westernization pressure

and again the birth of a nation as it was conceptualized by the Westerners. Our main approach will be using some eye-catching characters of the period beginning from the start of the 19th century with Rām Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to Dr. Ambedkar of the 1950's.

The 19th century is the environment where the ideas of nationalism, independence, radicalism, liberalism and etc. were first began to grow on Indian soil. So it is very important to study this period in order to see the caste system against the test of time and against its strongest opponent the modernism and westernization.

As K.N. Panikkar has written “the nineteenth century intellectuals were firm believers in the efficiency of enlightenment as a panacea. They traced the source of all ills in Indian society, including religious superstition and social obscurantism, to the general ignorance of the people.” In science they saw a great possibility. Rammohun wanted it. Akshay Kumar Dutt rejected the traditional system of education. Vidyasager ridiculed those who believed that the shastras contained all scientific truth.⁴⁸

3.1 Facing the West

Until now, what we have learned gives the image of Indians as a society that virtually never changes. Even a system like the caste system can stand the test of time for nearly three millenniums. This view has become a common image of India. As early as the first decades of the 19th century, the famous Abbé J. A. Dubois, who spent a lifetime to write his book “Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies”, also, mentions this idea.

Apparently there is no existing institution older than the caste system of the Hindus. Greek and Latin authors who have written about India concur in thinking that it has been in force from time immemorial; and certainly the unswerving observance of its rules seems to me an almost incontestable proof of its antiquity. Under

⁴⁸ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities*, (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 42

a solemn and unceasing obligation as the Hindus are to respect its usages, new and strange customs are things unheard of in their country. Any person who attempted to introduce such innovations would excite universal resentment and opposition, and would be branded as a dangerous person. The task, however, would be such a difficult one that one can hardly believe that any proposal of the kind would ever enter an intelligent person's head. Everything is always done in exactly the same way; ... Indeed, there is not another nation on earth which can pride itself on having so long preserved intact its social customs and regulations.⁴⁹

These words are coming from a man of "Revolution" who witnessed the French Revolution and worked as missionary for nearly 30 years sharing the life of Indian society, living inside them as if he was one of them, but who was also under the influence of new ideas.

It would be hard to say that Indian society never changed, if we don't get the word "change" as becoming westernized. But even when Dubois was inside the Indian society a change had already begun within. Those were the days of the famous social reformist Rām Mohan Roy began building his interpretation of India. He was a Brahman Raja from Calcutta who witnessed his sister's death as a *satī* (widow burning herself in her husband's funeral) and whose aim began to correct the defects within Hinduism like *satī*, child marriage etc. and to build an eclectic roof to gather the Hindu nation.⁵⁰ So it can be easily said that Mr. Dubois was underestimating the force of change within Indian society.

It is for sure that the biggest factor for the motivation of this change was the British rule over India. J.T.F. JORDENS asks the same question:

How did this transformation come about? Many interrelated factors were involved. First we have the total impact of the British Raj. It influenced Indian life through many channels: administration, legislation, trade, the creation of a network of

⁴⁹ Abbé J.A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2002), pp.45,46

⁵⁰ Mustafa Soykut, *Dinler Tarihi Perspektifinden Hindistan Kökenli Dinler ve İdeolojik Çatışmalar (Doğu Batı: 2004/05)*, p.103

communications, inchoative industrialization and urbanization, all had great influence not only on the many Indians who became directly involved in them, but also on society as a whole, because every measure in some way interfered with some traditional patterns of life. In the cultural field too the British exerted pressure through the work of scholars, educators, and missionaries, orientalist, utilitarian, or evangelical. The sum total of this influence acted on the life and ideas of the people in multiple ways, forcing them to adjust their patterns of life to the new circumstances and thus affecting a continuum of social change.⁵¹

As we have said the impact of the British rule can be easily observed. But we also have to see the trend of the 19th century where Western hegemony all across the world was firmly established and spread of the new ideas were a matter of fact whether over the colonized countries or independent countries like the Ottoman Empire. What we mean is that 19th century non-Western world had already accepted the Western ideals and systems as a blueprint. But without British occupation the spread of new ideas and the need for a social reform would be much slower for the Indian sub-continent. We can say that British rule made the process much faster, giving the Indians possibility to face the Western way of life, personally.

With the advent of the British as the political head of society things were bound to take on a different aspect. The British brought with them their own traditional form of government, and as Christians they could not have much sympathy with the institutions of the Hindus. As prudent foreigners wishing the consolidate their power over a strange land and people they decided to leave the peculiar institutions of the country severely alone except where they egregiously violated their cherished ideas of government. They introduced a system of education which did not demand of the learners any change of religion.⁵²

⁵¹ A. L. Basham (ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 365

⁵² G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1990), p. 270

Another factor that has to be considered is the practical reason that made British rulers to educate Indians. India was as huge as it is today making it very hard to govern. To avoid this; British rulers had to teach locals to be employed in administration in lower ranks as well as military services. The army which helped the British to control the sub-continent was more than half in percent of locals. This is not a unique solution, where the Moghuls and other Muslim rulers which conquered India found the same solution. Because of the need which the British administration felt, a class of educated Indians was born and became much bigger in number and also stronger within the Indian society.

The need for administration was the primary motivating factor in British educational policy. The bureaucracy had to be staffed by Indians, and the need for a class of clerks to help govern the Empire was what lay behind, Macaulay's famous 1852 "Minute in Education" which called for the creation of a class of Indian intermediaries who would be "English in manner and moral". Consequently, the colleges that developed overwhelmingly emphasized a classical and arts curriculum, designed indeed not to teach science or technology but to pass on English morals."⁵³

The need for change was first felt by those early social reformers like the Rām Mohan Roy and others following, who were all educated by British educational system and learned to think like Westerners. J.T.F. JORDENS underlines the importance of those reformers continuing his words as:

Standing out as landmarks in this gradual adaptation to new conditions are the reformers. These are the Indians who consciously reacted to the new situation and advocated deliberate changes in social and religious attitudes and customs, involving a break with tradition itself. They saw change not as a slow adaptive process, but as a positive value in itself, and contrasted it with the negativity of existing patterns. As a group they had a

⁵³ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976), p.76

great impact on nineteenth-century India, though they were not by far the only factor in effecting change.⁵⁴

Those reformist who put their marks on the nineteenth century India, were not backed by the British administration itself. Most of the nationalist Indians claim that British do nothing to change the social defects of Indian culture. This might not be hundred percent true. But we can say that those reformists were the ones who were charmed by the ideas of equality, nationalism and other ideologies. Those reform demands were not realized by the British rulers but by the Indian intellectual themselves. During the nineteenth century and under the British rule the position of the low caste Hindus did not witness a real change that can be called a reform.

Let us think about this from only your limited perspective. Before the British came your condition was extremely miserable due to untouchability. Has the British government done anything to remove your untouchability? Before the British came you could not take water from village wells. Has the British government made any effort to give you that right? Before the British came you could not enter temples. Can you do that today? Before the coming of the British you could not be employed in police service. Does the British government give you employment now? Before the British came you had no permission to be in the army. Is this opportunity open to you now? Gentlemen, you cannot give a positive answer to any of these questions. Those who have ruled this country for such a long period could have done many good things. But there has definitely not been a single fundamental change in your situation During the British period the faults of the social structure and the patches of the varna system have been kept as they were.⁵⁵

In this speech 20th century Dalit reformist Dr. Ambedkar claims the British government being tolerable to the old social structure that kept Dalits at the bottom of the hierarchy. On the other hand we have to accept that voluntarily or not, British rule, paved the way for the Shudra and

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.365

⁵⁵ Gail OMVEDT, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), p. 81

untouchable children to get education and become intellectuals who were keen on demanding equal rights with upper castes. And it was a time for the Indian sub-continent to enter the world economics via the British.

The movements against the caste system can be defined within the struggle of tradition and modernism when we consider the 19th century. But that does not mean that there had been no struggle between castes before.

3.2 Pre-British era and caste conflicts

Although it can be supposed that the caste system was a solid rock which faced no change and no challenge at all, we would be very wrong. Although some of the nationalist and religious Hindu writers claim that caste system was in reality a perfect system of division of labor conceptualized by the perfect religion of Hinduism, which also satisfied one and the all;⁵⁶ in reality throughout the history there were challenges within the Indian society to the existence and validity of the caste system.

The motivation for challenging the caste system had been various. Caste system was a system that was integrative and stabilizing just like other social orders; but at the same time included and produced movements that aimed to reform or destroy it. Who had this motivation included the groups assigned to a low status within the system had most interest in participating in movements against it, and such movements tended to take their most radical form in the more outlying region of India, the last to be "Aryanized", that is, southern and eastern India, well as in the northwestern regions open to continuing migration and new cultural influences. Finally, these movements can be partially understood in ten of the potential lines of "dichotomization" within the caste system itself. The most basic of these

⁵⁶ Subhash C. Sharma, *Hindu Caste System & Hinduism: Vedic Vocations (Hindu Castes) were not related to heredity (birth)*, http://www.geocities.com/lamberdar/_caste.html, (accessed December 5, 2004)

were the division between Brahman and Kshatriya, sacred priest-and secular ruler, on the one hand; and even more important, division between "twice-born " Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, and remainder of the population, which are Shudras and untouchables.

Just like any other place on earth, the rulers had to build good relations with the priest class. Because the legitimizing force within the society was the holy men at those time. It is interesting to see that the two major movements against the classical Brahmanism were the ones lead by Buddha and Mahavir, which were the founders of Buddhism and Jainism. These two men were both from the ruler class.

We can claim that most of the revolts against the Brahmanic priestly rule were coming from the rulers. The rulers had not to be a specific caste, where we can count a handful of rulers from the Shudras. In the 18th century, under the impact of a vigorous trade, particularly in pepper, the rule of Travancore in southwestern India led a "modernizing " political in which he smashed the power of feudatory nobles allied with Brahman councilors of the biggest temple in his kingdom, annexed (not simply conquered) surrounding territory, and established a genuinely bureaucratic state manned with officials who were " gifted commoners " paid by and loyal to the king.

This is an interesting example about the upper and lower caste relations in India. A Shudra king claiming for the authority but besides claiming for being an upper caste. The king displayed a massive effort to build up the picture of the himself as a father to his subjects and a servant to God. Martanda Varma, In fact dedicated his entire kingdom to his tutelary deity, Shri Padmana Swami. The King of Travancore was declared to be the vassal or agent of the deity. In the thirties the powerful temple organization had been smashed. This gesture, which came in 1750, marshalled religion behind the monarchy.

What must be emphasized is that while it was not revolutionary at all, but simply a Sanskritizing process for rulers to claim a high or Kshatriya status, it did represent a revolutionary opposition to the system for then to claim superiority in terms of *sacred* values.

While this did not very frequently occur within traditional India, the case of Travancore's creative response to European commercial penetration indicates that forces of modernization and revolt against caste hierarchy did exist within pre-British India. Finally, it may be noted that when after British conquest a "Kshatriya ideology" emerged in Maharashtra as a conservative form of anti-Brahmanism, it did present a tradition of Kshatriya opposition that contained elements undermining the whole hierarchy and its opposition of pure-priesthood to secular kingship.⁵⁷

If it is to be said that economic and political revolution in India required, in the process, a religion-based revolution against caste, it is undeniable that such - revolutions have been attempted throughout Indian history. These were the great *bhakti*, or religious devotional movements, spread over at least fourteen centuries. They had the common characteristics of asserting an anti-caste equalitarianism (including greater equality for women), a monotheism which emphasized the devotional relationship between the worshipper and deity as opposed to Vedantic monism and priestly ritualism, and of being based primarily among low caste peasants and artisans with foundations in outlying regions such as the south (Tamilnad and later Maharashtra), the east (Bengal), and the northwest (Panjab).⁵⁸

3.3 The first demands for reform

As was mentioned, the influence of the western educational institutions including the missionary schools was very strong over the sub-continent. We have to remember that British colonialists had not yet full control over the whole sub-continent when those demands for reform first introduced to society. Within the previous centuries where there was no real occupation but mostly commercial colonization, a mutual cultural exchange

⁵⁷ See A. Das Gupta, *Malabar in the Asian Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp.20-23,47-52

⁵⁸ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, pp.44-45

had already begun. 19th century is the period for the products to be harvested.

We mentioned that first reformist's demands did not come from the low castes of the society. Although there had been a hard pressure on them for almost three millenniums the first reform ideas came from the upper castes namely Brahmins and Kshatriyas. This position can be easily understood when we think that at those times not a letter were to be passed to the low castes considering them as impure and teaching them words meant insult to the sacred religion of Hinduism. Words could only be instructed to the holy people the Brahmins who were created from the head of the god Indra. So India had to wait for some low caste pupils to get through the barriers put forward by the Brahmins and reach the knowledge. And it was the western influence and newly established western schools which gave them this chance of learning. So we had to wait for half a century to see the Dalits in action, demanding equal rights.

One other reason for the upper castes to move first was the fact that they were in close connection with the westerners and facing them in their daily lives. This opportunity gave them the ability to exchange ideas and experience the western look to the problems. They were the first who felt a reform within Indian society, some triggered by the loss of his relatives to strange religious customs like the example of Rām Mohan Roy who lost his own sister. Because of the fact that the upper castes were the first ones who felt the need for a cultural reform, the issues put in the context of reform had nothing to do with the abolishment of the caste system and giving equal rights to the lower castes. What they demanded were abolishing the customs such as *sāti*⁵⁹ or equality for women.

As we are bound to the story of Dalit movement; from now on we will focus on the Dalits more than other upper caste reformers and talk

⁵⁹ The custom of burning the widows alive with the body of their dead husband

about them restricting their stories within their relations and effects over Dalit movement.

3.3.1 Jotirao Phule and the very beginning of the Dalit movement

Three factors were to assume importance for the growth of Untouchable movements as the 19th century progressed. The first was the attitude and influence of British officials. The second was the effect of missionary activities on local Untouchable communities. The third was a growing realization among all Indians, including Untouchables that in education lay the key to future political power, as the British government prepared to extend limited representative institutions to Indians themselves.⁶⁰

These were the factors for the start of the Dalit movement, but they were also the reasons or causes for the great Dalit leaders to emerge like Jotirao Phule.

In the biography of Phule written for his famous book "Slavery: In the Civilized British Government under the Cloak of Brahmanism" by Dr. Y. D. Phadke, Phule is described as:

Jotirao Govindrao PHULE occupies a unique position among the social reformers of Maharashtra⁶¹ in the nineteenth century. While other reformers concentrated more on reforming the social institutions of family and marriage with special emphasis on the status and right of women, Jotirao Phule revolted against the unjust caste system under which millions of people had suffered for centuries. In particular, he courageously upheld the cause of the untouchables and took up the cudgels for the poorer peasants. He was a militant advocate of their right.⁶²

⁶⁰ Barbara R. JOSHI (ed.), *Untouchable voices of the Dalit liberation Movement*, (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 17

⁶¹ A state of the Republic of India on the west coast with Mumbai as her capital

⁶² Jotirao Govindrao Phule, *Slavery: In The Civilized British Government Under The Cloak Of Brahmanism* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra Mantralaya), p. xxii

Phule was the first low caste reformist within India. The book we have indicated above was a book written in a drama style to inform the uneducated low caste population and it was published in 1873.⁶³

Phule was born in 1827 as the son of a gardener in Poona. Originally Jotirao's family known as Gorhays, came from Katgun, a village in the Satara district of Maharashtra. Since Jotirao's father and two uncles served as florists under the last of the Peshwas, they came to be known as 'Phule'. Jotirao had to leave his education after finishing the primary school to help his family work. But by the encouragement of his neighbors who were also teachers, his father accepted to send him to a Scottish Missionary School to continue his secondary school education. He was married in the age as early as thirteen. It was in his this school that he met Sadashiv Ballal Govande, a Brahmin, who remained a close friend throughout his life. Both Jotirao and Govande were greatly influenced by Thomas Paine's ideas and they read with great interest Paine's famous book 'The Rights of Man.' Moro Vithal Valvekar and Sakharam Yashwant Paranjapye were two other Brahmin friends of Jotirao who in later years stood by him in all his activities.⁶⁴

We can track the social changes in the Indian society just looking at the life of this reformist figure. The eye-catching things here are his education in a Scottish Missionary School and his Brahman friends who shared same ideals with him throughout his life. During those days liberalism was also a trend within Brahmin society demanding a change in the Hindu social structure. As we have seen Rām Mohan Roy and Brahmin reformists following him were demanding to clean the society from the defections of the Hindu religious and social system. In it is not a surprise to see dozens of reformists emerging from every level of society during this

⁶³ Mustafa Soykut, *Dinler Tarihi Perspektifinden Hindistan Kökenli Dinler ve İdeolojik Çatışmalar (Doğu Batı: 2004/05)*, p.104

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.xxii

period. Those reformists were the ones who build the base for the real social change throughout the whole 19th and 20th century.

The first period, in which the reformation movements began, Phule was not alone as a low caste member. As we have said he had close friends from the Brahmin caste. Naturally those Brahmans who tended to become his friends or to work with him were not orthodox Brahmins. They were Brahman reformers who also had interests for changing the society. This close connection made these two groups, Brahman reformers and Dalit reformers to cooperate and sometimes to work together. Phule himself protected those Brahman reformers with his followers when they fell under orthodox pressure in various cases.

Phule's main role was to be an educator before being a political leader. He established various schools one after another to encourage education within the Dalits, a right that was prohibited by the Brahmans for thousands of years. He was also in favor of women whose position was much more problematic than the Dalit man. The first school he established was a school for girls in 1848. This school was followed by two others, which were established in 1851 and 1852. He established another school for the untouchables in 1852. During these educational efforts he saw an important help from those Brahman reformers. But in time this support faded away with the rise of Hindu orthodoxy.⁶⁵

Phule as a reformer stand against the cultural values of the Hindu society very clearly. Naturally his main concern was equality as a low caste member. As we have seen in the previous chapter the problem of equality was not same in the beginning when the first verses of Vedas were chanted long before the birth of Christ. This is not an exact knowledge but it is what we can understand from within the verses. What we know certain is the establishment of Laws of Manu a few centuries before the Christ. That was

⁶⁵ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, p.106

the turning point which defined the destiny of low castes as semi-slaves and cemented the structure of the Indian society. The caste problem became the very heart of the Indian culture from this point.

And thousands of years later this problem became the main point of political and cultural discussions and the whole reform movements. It was so well established in people's mind that the upper caste reformers who encouraged the destruction of caste system, could not stand the pressures forced on them by their own caste members. So 19th century is a period where we can observe this gradual change from liberalism to extremism within the Brahman and upper caste society.

From the point of view of equality, the entire caste system and the authoritarian family structure was to be condemned. From the point of view of rationality, the whole system of superstition and religious traditionalism was to be overthrown, the whole corpus of religious writings stripped of authority. With this as his beginning point, Phule was saved from a good deal of unnecessary arguments, qualifications, compromises and logical inconsistencies. He did not, for instance, waste much breath arguing over the relative merits of different parts of the Hindu sacred scriptures. He simply treated them as legends, which may offer some insight into past Indian history, and as products of a group (Brahmans, Aryans) seeking to establish control over the minds of the people.⁶⁶

As the caste system interpreted as the main factor of Hindu religion there was no way for Dalit reformers to dismiss the dominant religious tradition. Although Phule accepted the assumption that something had to be put in its place: even a revolutionary culture required a moral-religious center. At that point we can observe the affects of Semitic religions Christianity and Islam. With the inspirations of Semitic ideas most of the 19th century reformers interpreted the Hindu religion once more to clean it from deficits. Phule was not an exception just like Rām Mohan Roy.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.107

In his efforts to rationalize the religion, Phule did not reject the idea of *dharma* but rather attempted to establish a universalistic one. *Sarvajanik Satya Dhanrma* (" Public Religion of Truth ") expresses this concept completely; the moral basis of society had to be centered on truth, or rationality, and it had to be one that unified all men and women as equals rather than fragmenting and dividing them into separate social groups with separate responsibilities and rights (as the traditional idea of *dharma* did in separating the castes). The world was seen as good and holy, in contradiction to the Vedantic idea of it as an illusion, because it is God's creation; and God as is seen in simple terms as the loving parent (in the Indian expression which avoids Semitic patriarchalism, *ma-bap*) of all humans who are thus equally valued as his children. Orthodox opponents claiming him to become Christian regarding his education in a missionary over expressed this point of Phule.

3.3.2. The rise of the Dalit Movement

Phule was something more than being a mentor or philosopher. He was also a man of action, organizing the people and establishing a new movement. We have talked about the school he founded before, which are not his only efforts to build a new Dalit society. He also became the pioneer of Dalit political movement with the establishment of Satyasdohak Samaj in 1873.

The break down of Indian intelligentsia under orthodox pressure, which saw the caste system as Baburao Bagul a Dalit writer criticized the very heart of religion:

The intelligentsia, that is the Indian national leadership, divided the national liberation movement... into two warring factions: a political movement and a social movement. They also declared those who organized social movements, those who theorized on agriculture and industry, to be stooges of the British and traitors. The national movement was turned into a form of mythological movement and ancestor worship... Those who propounded inequality and did not wish society to be democratic, started

eulogizing and sublimating history, mythology and ages gone by because, in those mythological and historical ages, they were the supreme victors and leaders... The Indian intelligentsias do not wish to accept the present with its revolutionary potential.⁶⁷

The revival of Vedic Hinduism within the minds of upper castes regarding a modern ideology, which is nationalism, concluded with a political movement that was nationalist, religious and of course anti-Dalit. It should be thought differently at the beginning of the reform movements that India should be a nation where equality between races, sexes and of course social classes was established. But in time it turned out to be totally different.

But as the disillusionment with the British rule began to grow, the liberals lost their importance and militant nationalists like Tilak, Aurobindo and Lajpat Rai emerged as new leaders. Tilak or Aurobindo, unlike the liberals, drew inspiration from India's past. Not solely that. With the emergence of the militants, swaraj or self-governance became the primary agenda. Politics was becoming more and more intense. And finally, with the emergence of Gandhi (1869-1948), politics acquired an altogether different meaning. Gandhi succeeded in mobilizing various sections of the people – workers, peasants, capitalists, students, lawyers and above all, women- in the nationalist movement.⁶⁸

In this process of alienation within the reform movements between Dalit and upper caste intelligentsia Phule was the one who build a political movement to advocate lower caste rights. Other followers continued the movement he established where Dr. Ambedkar became a striking figure in the first half of the 20th century.

⁶⁷ Gail Omvedt, op.cit., p. 88

⁶⁸ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities*, p. 51

CHAPTER 4

THE FORMATION OF A DALIT IDENTITY

4.1 Social and Political Background of the Dalit Movement

As we have mentioned Jotirao Phule's first activities were completely based on education of the lower class masses. He was for sure aware of the reason of the backwardness of his people, which have been held away from any form of education for thousands of years. Modern teaching was first established in the Mesopotamian area 4 millenniums before Christ. But the lower castes of Hindu society were intentionally kept illiterate with the help of peoples' religious beliefs.

The change was to come through education. In the beginning, as told earlier, Mahars tried to push their children into the public schools run by the government or by the missions. When they realized that this was not enough, they started establishing their own schools.⁶⁹

Being aware of this fact Jotirao Phule knew that to overcome the millenniums long Brahman superiority the only way was to create a literate society and also Dalit intellectuals.

Phule had begun his social service activity with schools for Untouchables and women; had founded the Satyashodhak Samaj with backing from the well-to-do non-Brahmans, primarily contractors and a few professionals; and had moved fairly quickly to establish a peasant base.⁷⁰

When it is considered that the low castes had always been the majority of the over populated India (Shudras 58%, untouchables 24% apprx.) , we have to assume that those movements were a drop in the ocean.

⁶⁹ Barbara R. JOSHI(ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1986), p.24

⁷⁰ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, p. 148

Because of the completely ignorance of the low castes against any intellectual human ideology whether coming from West or India, the organizational and institutional besides cultural development of the low caste society was too slow, when compared to the literate Brahman society. Following the struggle put forward by Phule, there were still only two or three newspapers were being published by the Dalit society. This is an indication of the poor environment for the ideas to flourish and the low number of people who were really capable of intellectual communication.

But for the Brahmans the situation was different. Phule mentions this situation in his famous book “Slavery: (Under the Cloak of Brahmanism)”.

All the editors of the Marathi papers in Poona are Brahmins and they naturally do not want to write anything against their own caste-men. The Chairman of the Municipality was an Englishman and he would not allow the trickery of the Bhat⁷¹. All the Bhats then raised a chorus of criticism (a hue and cry) against him to the effect that his policies were harmful to the interests of the riots, which were totally untrue; they ganged up against him and troubled him a lot. Finally he was so disgusted with the shabby situation that he resigned his chairmanship in sheer exasperation and washed his hands of the Municipal Committee thenceforth.⁷²

What we learn from Phule is the strength of Brahman bureaucracy inside the British administration and also the intellectual environment where all of the editors of the papers are Brahmins.

The harsh reality, which is the illiteracy of the non-Brahman people, made the whole Dalit movement mostly a peasant movement rather than an urban and intellectual movement from the very beginning. It was not easy to produce thousands of intellectual in one day, but it was possible to talk to

⁷¹ A word used to describe the Brahmins

⁷² Jotirao Govindrao Phule, *Slavery in the civilized British Government Under the Cloak of Brahmanism*, part 15

crowds and tell them what situation they were in. Because of this fact the political Dalit movement had easily found ground over the non-Brahman masses.

The work of Phule and his colleagues has to be understood in this context. Phule's own writings reflect its sporadic nature of non-Brahman organizational development: they are unsystematic, sporadic, pictorial rather than discursive, hard-hitting but designed more to shock people into an awareness of the situation than to provide an extensive analysis. And he notes in the introduction to *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma* he had wanted to write a more thorough book but felt it was more important for the book to be useful to the daily life of the people. Non-Brahman leaders it was more important to speak to the masses than to engage in finely spun analysis.⁷³

4.1.1 Politics and the Dalit Movement : Satyashodhak Samaj

Phule's movement became an institution when he established '**Satyashodhak Samaj**' on 24th September 1873 in order to institutionalise social education, and have a continuous follow up. In order to destroy social and religious slavery, the Satyashodhak Samaj established by Jotirao, emphasised & re-emphasised the following :

- Humans are great by their qualities.
- Incantations, penance, rituals, rebirth- do not have any reality.
- Bhat (Brahmins) or middlemen are not at all necessary for the worship of the Almighty.

Satyashodhak Samaj was a suitable tool for Phule's mass movement to spread the ideals of equality, brotherhood, non-requirement of middlemen in religious matters. Satyashodhak movement did not have the chance to become a political movement until the 1920's. Because most of the time, Samaj was felt short of the

⁷³ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, p.117

support of aristocratic non-Brahmans as well as the support of educated and professional non-Brahmans. Most of the educated non-Brahmans became part of Brahman social classes after they managed to enter the British administration. Even during the 1910's where some of the educated non-Brahmans used the movement for their very political purposes without becoming a member. The elite support did not come from the educated non-Brahmans but it came from the wealthy non-Brahman businessman.

With the process of the forming of Indian identity Satyashodhak Samaj slowly disintegrated and later in the 1930's completely disappeared. And new actors entered the scene as the protector of the lower castes and one of them was Dr. Ambedkar.

4.1.2. Satyashodhak Samaj and identity

Identity had been defined within caste context in India for the last two and a half millenniums. But within the intellectual environment of enlightenment, new definitions had to be accepted. The lower castes and especially untouchables began feeling the need for an escape from the cruel realities created by the Brahmanic social system. They were also trapped in the new situation created by the West where an Indian and Hindu identity was forming against the British imperia.

The Aryan theory was not first established in India and it was not for the Indians. It was a tool for some of the new powerful nations of Europe to legalize their existence and power historically. This need will later give the birth to the fascist and national socialistic ideologies all over the continent. With the Aryan theory it was possible to for the Europeans to claim that their rule over the world was natural and this happened to be a historical fact which was also in close connection to the idea of superiority. Especially Friedrich Max Muller, a man who spend his whole career for the search of Eastern studies, was one of the most important figure who proved the link between the Sanskrit and modern European

languages. Suddenly Europeans and Indians realized that the two societies were cousins.

The superiority of the Europeans or the British in our case was a fact during the 19th century. And as we have seen most of the Brahmins find their ways into the British imperial society by getting Western education. This feeling was improved with the glamouring Aryan theory linking them directly to the rulers of the country.

But we have to say that, British Government was not on the side of caste discrimination, at least officially. British Government had laid down a policy of imparting education to low castes, one sharply at variance with earlier Peshwa rule. Section 591 of the Education Commissioner's Report said "that the principle has been laid down by the Court of Directors in their letter of 5th May, 1854, and in a subsequent reply to Government's letter dated 20.5.1857." According to these letters, "nobody should be refused admission to a Government college or school merely on the ground of caste". This principle was reaffirmed in 1863. It was applicable to all institutions which were maintained at the cost of public funds, provincial or local.⁷⁴

Ironically this attitude of British Government should be one of the reasons for the rise of religionist nationalism within upper caste Hindus, where they always strongly opposed the abolishment of the castes.

It is interesting to find that all of the Hindu press, excepting only a few non-Brahmin newspapers, was critical of the government's action permitting low-caste boys into the public schools.⁷⁵

4.2 An overview of the Social Change during the 19th century

It can be said that the reformation of the Indian population was as confusing as its thousand years social structure. But we can say that the first motivation of the reforms came from the need to become like the British imperials. This is very ironic when it is considered that the foreigners or non-

⁷⁴ Barbara R. JOSHI (ed), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, p.21

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 23

Hindus are accepted as worse than even the untouchables being accepted as a polluting existence for the Brahman religion. But history proves that this rule becomes obsolete if the foreigner is an invader capable of displaying his force. This time the difference was that the new rulers were thinking that the occupied people were backward and in need of teaching. Whether it is true or not this approach was accepted by the occupied nation too.

The British rule showed the way for the breaking of some thousand year rituals which were somehow unacceptable to the ordinary people. Sati or widow burning is one of them. And when we remember that Ram Mohan Roy's first motivation was the loss of his sister in one of those rituals. Equality and justice had always been a reason for the Hindus to change their religion. This can also be verified with the fact that nearly half of the Indian population (including the Muslim states of Pakistan and Bengaldesh) is Muslim. And it is possibly true that most of their ancestors were from lower classes who seeked for equality and justice.

Christianity were unable to achieve this status within the Hindu society. It was for sure that the Western invasion collided with a period where the religion itself was under question at its homeland. The church was under a great pressure which was never seen before. The 16th century witnessed the emergence of new Christian sects other than Catholicism and Orthodoxy. In nearly two centuries religions' importance in the western societies passed away, leaving its place to new ideals.

And it is also interesting to see that most of the modern Christian population of India lives around Goa today, the famous Portuguese port where Jesuit missionaries preached Christianity in its medieval form. British never became neither succesfull in spreading the religion and nor they were interested to do so.

The period when the British became the major foreign force in the sub-continent it was the time for new ideas. Equality, justice and nationalism. The first

two were also preached by the major religions. But this time the ideals of enlightenment carried these ideals especially after the French revolution in 1789.

India as we have seen had always been a very complex society with dozens of religions, sects and thousands of jatis. Most of these social groups can be observed in any society as we have mentioned. But in India with the effect of Brahmanism this social groups became concrete and independant entities within the society. So the reactions of these concrete social groups were completely different from each other.

The Indian society who accepted the Muslim influence a millennium ago was again ready for a change during the 19th century. We have also be rightfull to say that Hinduism was also another factor for the society to be effected from the foreign ideals. The loose structure of Hinduism where every clan can take their old deities with them to the religion and where no prophecy or a religious authority exist must have had an important role.

Within the borders drawn by these factors and with the immergence of self consciousness as it is defined within 19th century natinalist context, a new Indian society became to be established. The new institutions demanding for reform were in reality western like institutions. And probably first time in history a social consciousness of being Indian was born. It is much more visible when we look at the big picture of social change in India from the beginning of 19th century to the midst of 20th century.

First of all at the beginning the change began with the demands of people who felt pressure under the traditions and religion and also who wanted to be like their British masters. And than we saw more demands especially from the lower castes and a caste consciousness linked to the daily reality of being humiliated by the upper castes. It is also interesting to see that the intellectuals and movements which began with a more liberal mannor, turned into a much more religious one in

time. This was parallel to the rise nation consciousness especially against the British.

The lower castes who were in favour of abolishment of the religious traditions which put them under two millenniums of pains, were also effected from this process. Because the upper caste movements which began liberally turned into a religious one. Religion must have been the easiest way to be defined as different from the colonialists. And also Brahmans had no problem with the religion. Some of the problems were already been solved under the British rule (for example Sati).

19th century or simply the British must not be seen as the only way of social revolt against the harsh rule of the Brahmans over the rest of the society. There had been various clashes before. Most of them were between the Kshatriyas and the Brahmans for the control of the power. But without the help of the lower castes the Kshatriyas probably would not have the chance to stand against the Brahmanic power.

The more basic opposition, however, was not that between the Kshatriyas and Brahmans who divided power and status at the top of the system, but between the "twice-born" castes (Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) and the Shudras, tribal people and Untouchables, who generally had neither power nor status. These had both a status interest in revolts that promised to negate the caste hierarchy as well "as economic motives for discontent since they were mostly poor peasant and artisan groups. Without a "Shudra" basis, in fact, no "Kshatriya" revolt had a chance of succeeding. Thus for example, the King of Travancore had sought to build up a populist basis for his rule, and the right-left divisions of south India had developed first among middle-level castes: Brahman and the top Vellarar (the most powerful ruling group) had attempted at first to remain above it but were drawn in later. Similarly, it was in south India, where no "true Kshatriyas" were said to exist and even very powerful groups were considered to be of the Shudra *varna*, that the strongest movements of cultural revolt existed; here the "Kshatriya-Brahman" and " Shudra-twice born" oppositions tended to merge.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ See A. Das Gupta, *Malabar in the Asian Trade*, pp.20-23,47-52

We can say that in the process of Indian social change, religion became a primary step to build a virtually united nation. Later followed the nationalism. Here it would not be hard to find the same pattern, considering the western and middle eastern examples. In that regions, religion was a much more organized institution for thousands of years. So we can say that reformists movements and the parties including Satyashodhak Samaj should also be accepted as some kind of religious organizations gathering masses under their umbrella. We know that even the Dalit movement, whatever complaints they had about Hinduism, utilized some of the Hindu gods. This shows that religion was important for the people to legalize their movements.

Because of this process the Indian nationalism became so much related to the religion as it is today. And this must also be the cause of the Muslim-Hindu seperation where a religion meant a nation. So two nations were born from one society. The interesting point is the fact that lower castes with their much more rooted opposition to the Brahman religion were never be able to form another nation, although they tried.

Here we must remember that beginning with the Phule, Dalit intelligentsia tended to accept themselves as the others, the people who were enslaved during the raids of the Aryans. Because of that belief Phule defined the lower castes as non-Aryans just as Ambedkar. So during the 19th century they tried to establish a new national identity against the ruling classes. They claimed that during the Aryan invasion which was probably 3500 years ago, the native people of India – who were also a mixture of various races like mongoloids, aborigins etc.- were enslaved and forced to become the foot of the god Brahma.

The reality of these theories are highly arguable as they were mostly depending on the emotional needs for the masses who felt pressure. This was true for the Dalits who were feeling Brahmin pressure, but also true for the upper

classes who felt the superiority of the British Empire. So the Aryan theory was a good tool to be manipulated by each side of the story where the Europeans find a three thousands of historical background to legalize their control over the world, the Brahmins to find a way to overcome the superiority of the ruling British by claiming that they were relatives and the Dalits who find an answer to how they became such a humiliated class for such a long time.

Also these efforts of searching for historical links, spent by the various classes of Indian society shows us how a classical society reacts to redefine itself in modern terms. This was the major change and also challenge the Indian society was passing through. All of these arguments about the identity based on religion, caste system and nationalism formed the 20th century India.

4.3 Reformation of the Dalit Movement at the beginning of the 20th century

Although Satyashodhak Samaj was still an effective power in the Maharashtra, the province where it all began, it is hard to say that the newly emerging leader of the untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar was effected or get into connection with it.

As mentioned above, Satyashodhak Samaj was slowly disintegrating when Dr. Ambedkar first appeared. So the intelligent environment from which Dr. Ambedkar had been benefiting was completely different from the environment of Jotirao Phule's one.

Being represented in a national congress was not even considered by the Dalits. Phule defined the first Poona political organization Sarvajanik Sabha, as a bath (Brahmin) sabha. He saw little difference in the Indian National Congress:

These cunning Aryabhat Brahmans regard all the world's people as insignificant and hold scorn and envy of them in their minds... Even if these Aryans people establish hundreds of national congresses in counterfeit imitation of the religiously united Americans or French, still I

can say with assurance that Shudras and Atishudras will never be members of their National Congress.⁷⁷

And it happened as he said when the first Indian National Congress was established in 1885. In its first session 80% of the Madras delegates and 100% of the Poona delegates were Brahmans, and this dominance continued to be maintained.⁷⁸

At that time the Indian Congress was being accepted by the non-Brahman community as the representative of the upper castes. And they had good reasons to believe this.

4.4 Legal Eabolishment of the Caste System

The borders of this study is not enough to define the social politics within the Indian society during the 19th and 20th centuries. But in order to draw a picture of the last century, a method had to be chosen, and in this case we choose to build the subject over the great figures or lets say the corner stones of the lower caste movements who were Ram Mohan Roy, Jotirao Phule and Dr. Ambedkar.

In previous chapters we tried to give a brief story of the social changes of the 19th century considering the upper and lower caste relations and also the effects of the colonializm over the country. With the help of the photograhps which we have taken from the antiquity and later 19th and 20th century, we hope that an image of India should be formed within the readers mind. But it must be mentioned that the complexity of the subject causes a need for further reading.

4.4.1. Dr. Ambedkar

The last figure that must be mentioned to complete the greater and historical picture of the position and movements of the lower castes is Dr.

⁷⁷ Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, p.181

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.181

Ambedkar. To start the subject we found it more helpful to tell the beginning of the story of Ambedkar from an Indian writer, Dhananjay Keer. The manner of the writing will also help us to understand what Ambedkar meant for some Indians.

The Ambedkars come from Konkar, a region which provided India with great brains and great fighters, men like Tilak, Karve and Paranjpye. Ambedkar's ancestral village is Ambavade, five miles off Mandangad, a small town in the Rantnagiri District. The family was of some consequence in that village. It enjoyed the honour of keeping the palanquin of the village goddess and naturally the yearly festival was a great occasion for the family to attract the attention of the whole village. Ambedkar's grandfather Maloji Sakpal came of a good Mahar family. Of all the untouchable communities in the fold of Hindu society the Mahars are the most robust, adaptable, intelligent, fighting, brave, virile and leading community.⁷⁹

From the beginning the writer readies us for an epic story. A story which he believes in the heart. The interesting thing about the above text is, it's reflection of how the caste system has entered the Indian mind. The writer tells us that Dr. Ambedkar, as a figure that he is a fan, comes from a good family and even a good caste which is called Mahar. Now we learn that there are more brave, adaptable, intelligent, fighting, virile and leading communities within the untouchables as well. And this small text also reminds us of a man who was born a leader within his own community with the help of being a member of a good family. Keer continues:

The family belonged to the devotional Kabir school of thought. This Bhakti school of thought found consolation in the human attributes like compassion, benevolence and resignation to God. These devotees sought and found moral and spiritual broadening effect upon their mind was that the followers of this Bhakti school had abolished the rigidity of the caste system, as Kabir, the founder of the school, had roundly condemned it. This was one of the reasons why some Untouchable

⁷⁹ Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar's life and mission*, (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1990), p.8

families turned to the Kabir cult. To the followers of the Kabir anybody who worshipped God belonged to God irrespective of caste and birth.⁸⁰

4.4.2. The Second Dalit Generation

It looks like that the soul of resistance which Ambedkar had within was a hereditary from his family. The interesting point about Ambedkar is the job of his father, where he was a member of the British military force. We know that most of the military personnel of the British colonial army was not British at all, but members of the lower castes. The higher castes preferred to work with the civil bureaucracy rather than the military one. And this must be another clue of the British effect over the Indian society. Because Ambedkar's father was a literate person despite his caste. He usually read the national epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to his children. He was also able to speak and read in English where he was able to teach his children the language. And within this environment Ambedkar was enrolled to school when he was only five years old.

There is an interesting case of a similar battle, though with one important difference. In this event, the persons who carried through the war were Mahars themselves. They were retired British Army personnel. Ratnagiri District was the chief recruiting ground of the British Bombay Army, and a large portion of men enlisting there for service in infantry regiments were from the Untouchable Mahar and Chambar castes. After completion of their service, or retirement, they settled in some central or favourite village or town with some piece of land, cultivating their crops and bringing up their children, leading a peaceful quiet life. Of such men, a few commissioned and non-commissioned officers settled at Dapoli. This is the place where Dr. Ambedkar, the emancipator of the Untouchables, spent his early childhood and received his primary education.

Subhedar Major Gagnak and nine other military pensioners, including Ambedkar's father, sent a petition on 1 July 1892 to the president of Dapoli Municipality asking that their sons be admitted into the Municipal school and taught along with other boys. They stated that this arrangement would induce their boys to study hard and to emulate

⁸⁰ As it is mentioned before there had been various movements to abolish the caste system in Indian History.

the example of the boys of other castes in the hope of attaining a high rank in their class.⁸¹

The environment where Bhim (Dr. Ambedkar) grew shows us the great change within the life of the lower castes thanks to the improvements achieved by the leaders of the 19th century such as Jotirao Phule and also the British rule, although they did not ask for this conclusion. Ambedkar was born in 1891 when the efficiency of the untouchable and non-Brahman movement was on the rise.

Ideas and behaviour patterns, very different from those to which the people were accustomed, were thus presented as isolated from religion. The policy of comparative non-interference naturally gave scope for the revolt of the castes that were not quite comfortable under the Brahmin supremacy. Later on, with the incoming of industrial cities, large numbers of peoples congregated in cities of mixed populations, away from the influence of their homes and unobserved by their caste or village people. This is the background of the picture of the contemporary caste.⁸²

So we can observe the rise of the second generation of literate Untouchables, where the first generation saw education as a tool to break the unfortunate destiny of their kids. And Dr. Ambedkar was of that second generation who find the chance to get a better education what ever the conditions were.

But we have to say that there are no physical links between the schools or other institutions of the non-Brahman movement lead by Phule and the new born Ambedkar. But later Ambedkar would call Phule as his teacher.

4.4.3. Childhood and Education of Ambedkar

Bhim as a child who were genius and full of desire to learn soon realized the fact that he was not an ordinary student. Because he did not belong to the upper castes. He was just an untouchable, nobody desired to touch, speak or even

⁸¹ Barbara R. JOSHI (ed.), op.cit., p.20

⁸² G.S. Ghurye, op.cit., p.270

see. He felt the harsh reality of discrimination in every level of his education. Not only by his school fellows, but also from his Brahmin teacher.

Bhim and his brother were usually made to squat in a corner of the class on a piece of gunny cloth which they carried to school. The teachers would not touch their note books, nor did some of them even ask them to recite poems or put questions to them for fear of being polluted! When these two boys felt thirsty in the school they turned their mouths upwards and then somebody would kindly pour drinking water into their mouths as if through a funnel.⁸³

These examples shows us although most of the upper classes were well educated within the British education system, they felt no pity to behave the lower classes as if they were beasts. And it is for sure that this behaviours must have sharpened Bhim for his later struggle against the upper classes. The only teacher who treated Bhim well was also a Brahmin teacher. A teacher who Bhim decided to carry his surname and become famous as Ambedkar.

Ambedkar, after finishing his primary education, found support from the non-Brahman Maharaja of Baroda to continue his education in the U.S.A and with this scholarship he left India in 1913.

Ambedkar turned to India in 1923 after nearly ten years of study in the United States and England. He was a highly educated man; his degrees B.A., M.A., Ph.D., M.Sc., D.Sc., Barrister-at-Law are sung in a sort of incantation in one of the Mahar songs about him. He was a highly political person, practical and pragmatic. Still, for personal as well as public reasons, he had to come to terms with the Mahar myths.⁸⁴

At the end Ambedkar became an important figure not only for the Untouchables but also for the whole India as a modern country.

By 1930 the British authorities had recognized the right of the Depressed Classes to representation through special electorates which their associations and spokesmen had been demanding

⁸³ Dhananjay Keer, op.cit., p.14

⁸⁴ Eleanor Zelliot, From Untouchable to Dalit- Essay on the Ambedkar Movement, (Delhi: Manohar, 1992), p.58

since 1917. While the Statutory Commission had already recommended for them reservation of seats in joint electorates, the British Government nominated two of their spokesmen, namely B.R. Ambedkar and R. Srinivasan, to the Indian Round Table Conference which commenced its work in London on 21 November 1930 so as to enunciate their status in the future constitutional set-up of India.⁸⁵

4.4.4. Ambedkar's ideological stand

Ambedkar became a respectful person in the eyes of other castes, who became to be a member of the council, which prepared the Indian constitution after the independence of the country. And he was the man who managed to abolish the term of untouchable at least in front of the Law.

He was also a reformist who led his community to point of rejection of the Hinduism as a religion and acceptance of Buddhism. After the long struggles with the masters of the Hindu religion the Brahmins, he decided to completely throw away a religion, which simply turned out to be ignoring them as humans.

Naturally no account of Buddhism in the Sub-Continent would be complete without mentioning the still extremely controversial figure of Dr. Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement which he started with his mass conversion of Dalits or the ex-untouchables. Today, more than 90% of all Buddhists in India (only 6.5 millions according to the 1991 census) are the so-called neo-Buddhists converted by Ambedkar, a lawyer by profession, who was one of the founders by modern Indian constitution. This is quite remarkable, considering that from the 11th-12th centuries until the mass conversion (including Ambedkar who officially renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism) which took place in October 1956 in Nagpur, Maharashtra, Buddhism had almost completely disappeared in India, its land of birth.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Atul Chandra Pradhan, *The Emergence of the Depressed Classes*, (Shovan: Bookland International, 1986), p.148

⁸⁶ Mustafa Soykut, "Two Cases of Heresy" in *Ad Est Dell'Europa, Storia, Cultura e Societa, Tra Eta Moderna e contemporanea*, edited by Giuseppe Motta Sette Citta, 2004, p.33

To understand what was the Dalits were demanding we have to look what Ambedkar says. We believe that there are no clearer examples than Ambedkar's own words to draw the picture of Dalit problem in India.

4.4.5. What Path Freedom?⁸⁷

D. B. R. Ambedkar (trans. Vasant W. Moon)

... There are two aspects of conversion. Social as well as religious; material as well as spiritual. Whatever may be the aspect, or line of thinking, it is necessary to understand the beginning, the nature of untouchability and how it is practiced. Without this understanding, you will not be able to realize the real meaning underlying my declaration of conversion.

In order to have a clear understanding of untouchability and its practice in real life, I want you to recall the stories of the atrocities perpetrated against you. The instances of beating by caste Hindus for the simple reason that you have claimed the right to enroll your children in government schools, or the right to draw water from public well, or the right to take a marriage procession with the groom on horseback, are very common. You all know such instances, as they happen before your eyes. But there are several other causes for which atrocities are committed on the Untouchables by the caste Hindus that, if revealed, surprise foreigners. The Untouchables are beaten for putting on clothes of good quality. They have been whipped because they used utensils made of metal like copper, etc. Their houses are burnt because they have brought land under cultivation. They are beaten for putting on the sacred thread.⁸⁸ They are beaten for refusing to carry dead animals and eat carrion, or for walking through the village with socks and shoes on, or for not bowing down before the caste Hindus, for taking water in a copper pot while going out to the fields to ease themselves. Recently an instance has been noted where the Untouchables were beaten for serving chapattis at a dinner party.

You must have heard and some of you must have experienced such atrocities. Where beating is not possible, you are aware of how the weapon of boycott is used against us. You all know how the caste Hindus has made daily life unbearable by prohibiting your men from entering the village. But very few of

⁸⁷ Barbara R. Joshi, op.cit., p. 29-31

⁸⁸ A visible symbol worn by high-caste Hindus

you have realized why all this happens. What is the root of their tyranny? To me, it is very necessary that we understand it.

The instances cited above have nothing to do with the virtues and vices of an individual. This is not a feud between two rival men. The problem of untouchability is a matter of class struggle. It is a struggle between caste Hindus and the Untouchables. This is not a matter of doing injustice against one man. This is a matter of injustice being done by one class against another. This struggle is related to social status. This struggle indicates how one class should keep its relationship with another class of people. The struggle starts as soon as you start claiming equal treatment with others. Had it not been so, there would have been no struggle over simple reasons like serving chapatis, wearing good quality clothes, putting on the sacred thread, fetching water in a metal pot, sitting the bridegroom on the back of a horse, etc. In these cases you spend your own money. Why then do the high-caste Hindus get irritated? The reason for their anger is very simple. Your behaving on par with them insults them. Your status in their eyes is low; you are impure, you must remain at the lowest rung. Then along will they allow you to live happily? The moment you cross your level the struggle starts.

The instances given above also prove one more fact. Untouchability is not a short or temporary feature; it is a permanent one. To put it straight, it can be said that the struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomenon. It is eternal, because the high-caste people believe that the religion, which has placed you at the lowest level of the society, is itself eternal. No change according to time and circumstances is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest forever.

This means the struggle between Hindus and Untouchables shall continue forever. How you will survive through this struggle is the main question. And unless you think it over, there is no way out. Those who desire to live in obedience to the dictates of the Hindus, those who wish to remain their slaves, they do not need to think over the problem. But those who wish to live a life of self-respect and equality will have to think over this.

CONCLUSION

*We have begun a new life
We have found our own temples
Regained our lost faith
All are equal here⁸⁹*

Harish Bansode, Dalit poet

India, as being the motherland of various cultures had always been interesting to the outer people. Her mysticism and traditions which found to be weird for us made it more interesting. We, as human beings, are likely to think that the others –as we call them- is so much different from us. But vice versa the 6 billion of humans are more closer than it is thought. Every society and every culture have links with others. Considering this point when most of the people think that most of the Indian traditions are strange, we can easily claim that they have their traces in our own cultures. Caste system is such a tradition where we –the others- all think that it is unique and standing the test of time. Most of us think it as an inhuman tradition which puts hundreds of millions of people under slavery. But when with a little bit reading we should easily understand that our societies had similar applications in history and at the moment. And this study we have been doing for a year and a half lead the way to for me to understand the structure of societies and track the change of a society in history.

As we have said caste system is a little bit complex structure to draw a bright line. It had been a hard route for me to begin on such a remote subject which is also so complex. But as we went further and deeper and as the complexity of the subject grew, it showed to turn into a vortex needing more and more research in time. While writing the conclusion of this thesis, we are still not convinced that have been able to make enough research to uncover the whole story of the caste system. Instead my studies made me just open it.

⁸⁹ Barbara R. Joshi, *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, p.85

At the end there comes the question what is the usage of such knowledge? Why do we express our interest in such a remote subject to our own history and society? With this thesis we believe that at a place where history means just the Turkish history and no more and as a person educated under this idea, we made a personal achievement for me to break the barriers. History is not the story telling of our grand fathers. Much more from that it is the lacework of billions of people, thousands of societies and civilizations and the connections between them.

Hopefully that one can see how interesting similarities can be observed when the caste system is studied in detail. With the help of the caste system, we can have a wider look on the class structures and class relations and how they affect the course of history.

On the other hand with the help of caste system, we can observe an outstanding demand for change from the depressed people and classes. We can understand the nature of relations between upper and depressed classes of society.

Also we can track the path of the people, whether from the upper or lower castes on their way to freedom and independence. Besides we can better understand the 19th century non-Western intellectual movements, where we lived a version of our own. Just as we did Indians were also forced to reinterpret the world around them. This is very important especially when we consider that our non-Western social structures were formed within this long century. We can also track the changing force within a society that is stuck between the modern life and the identity.

One can find hundreds of reasons like those to make a study on India and one can find no point in doing so. But there is the “Road of Kins” before us, build by Western science which defines the world around us according to their minds, a road which is a must to follow. But also a great obstacle which forces us to build our own roads, stone by stone, to reinterpret the history of the human kind. As we have seen in this study, most of the time history is interpreted by the people to suit their own needs

to define themselves, like it is in the Aryan Invasion Theory. A theory where the conqueror, the conquered and the depressed all find a way to define themselves in a modern way.

At the beginning of my studies we was naturally focused on the past of the caste system. The beginning went as far as the 15. century BC. Considering the birth of caste system we saw that it was first introduced to India by the Aryan invasions 1.500 B.C. Yet we are not sure whether there had been any social structure in India alike the caste structure before the Aryanic times. But it can be assumed that the lost Indus Valley civilization had its own social structure build on professions regarding the complex urban life they were living.

When we come to the invaders, the Aryans, we have a nomadic tribal society. From the old Vedic texts we know that the first three castes, which are Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya, had their very first versions within the Aryanic society. After the loss of the urban and literal civilization, nearly another millennium was needed to build another urban and literal civilization. Possibly in the process of the nomadic and illiterate Aryanic tribes ruling over the native and newly conquered population, turning into a urban and literal society, the very first roots of the caste system as we know it today were established. And possibly at the stage where the famous “Laws of Manu” was introduced to the society the caste system gained its new and concrete form.

During the middle Ages, which we were not able to include in this study, it is for sure there had been a change within the Indian society. But due to the limiting of the subject to the past and present of the caste system we preferred not to include them in this text.

Coming to the 19th century we saw the rise of a new intelligentsia class within various castes of India. Naturally, it was the Brahmans who were introduced to the new ideas flowing from Europe to the rest of the world, as they were the literal part of the society. It was a class below the English rulers but also who were sharing the same structure and life style

with the ruling class. This newborn class produced its first demands for reform in order to tune the society to the lives they were living. A Brahman, who lost his sister because of the s̄ati custom that obliged the widow to be burned besides the corpse of her husband, became the first reformer within the Hindu society, namely Rām Mohan Roy. When we consider that the lower castes were not allowed to learn to read or write, it looked impossible for the lower castes to produce their reformers. But with the fact of European style missionary or state schools gave the chance to the sons of lower castes to educate themselves firstly in three millenniums time.

One of the first Dalit (low caste) reformer was Jotirao Phule born in the first half of the 19th century. He was aware of the necessity to educate his caste members in order to demand social equality and rights where they were regarded as semi-slaves. Although at first Brahman and Dalit reformers were on the same side who were trying to abolish the old Hindu lifestyle based on the Hindu religion, soon they had to be separated.

The change within the Indian society was ignited with the new ideas carried to India by the British. Their education system let the lower castes and untouchables to become literate and caused the birth of social awareness. As we have said Phule was the first generation who was able to be educated. But the real change came with the second generation. Under the image of the great Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar we can see a new generation whose fathers are literate and willing their sons to be better educated. At the dawn of the 20th century, the lower castes slowly became able to express themselves against the depression of the Brahman caste. They gave birth to great leaders who were intelligent and well educated; leaders who had the chance to know and study in the West. This process can not be restricted to the lower castes. Gandhi was a good example for the upper caste Indians who had the chance to be educated in the West. So the change which began in the 19th century and which gain acceleration during the first half of the 20th century was inevitable. We have also to keep in mind the forces of social change were in charge in every way. The period

witnessed the birth of an industrial working class, as well as the migration from village to the cities. It is for sure that this process also affected the social change deeply and let the lower classes become much more conscious in the society. Thousands of rules of the Manu became impossible to be applied to the city life and in time lost their importance. It is a fact that social processes goes parallel with their leaders, most of the time making the environment suitable for a leader to be born.

Today India is a secular country where virtually caste system no longer exists. But as we have seen the system is still alive especially in the rural areas. Although caste separation is prohibited by the Indian constitution that was interestingly Dr. Ambedkar as an untouchable was a part of the preparation in the 1940's, it cannot be told easily that the police and the judges are able to put the legislation into effect completely.

As Ambedkar said during the first half of the 20th century, especially in the rural areas Dalits are facing brutal behaviors, being beaten, whipped and even killed.

But at the end we also have to admit that India passed a long way in the means of human freedom, and hopefully continue for more.

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APPENDICES

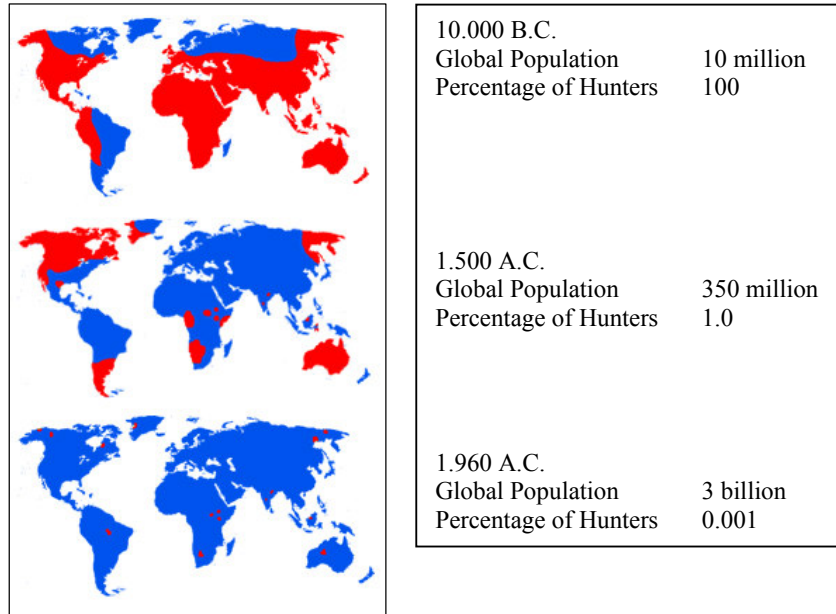
APPENDICE 1 INDO-EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS



Indo-European Migrations, c. 4.000 BCE – 1000 BCE according to the
Aryan Migration Theory

APPENDICE 2

HUNTER-GATHERER POPULATION WITHIN TOTAL HUMAN POPULATION IN HISTORY



The reverse proportion of the drop of the population of hunter-gatherer societies while the general human population rises.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Richard B. Lee ve Irven de Vore (ed.), *Man the Hunter* (Aldine Gruyter, 1968)

APPENDICE 3
PHOTOGRAPH OF AN UNTOUCHABLE



A member of Bhangi caste of Untouchables doing the dirty work,
cleaning the drain with his own body and hands (snapped in 2003)⁹¹

⁹¹ Photograph by : William Albert Allard, National Geographic

APPENDICE 4
A BRAHMAN FAMILY

