

Economy of Untouchables in Manu Smruti.

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Abstract.

Structural inequality is the trademark of contemporary India. One of the sources of structural inequality in India is her age-old caste system. Manu Smruti, one of the most popular ancient Indian texts, throws light on the mysterious origin and development of castes and outcastes. It tells us how people are divided as castes and outcastes and how power and domination operate between them with the help of caste rules like a perfect machine oiled by coercion and violence. In this article we are analysing the characteristics of the socio-economic life of untouchables or outcastes in ancient India. We explore how social restrictions on occupational choices, spatial mobility and cultural participation shape the fate of outcastes in ancient India.

Keywords:

Structural Inequality, Anuloma and Pratiloma Marriage, Outcastes, Social mobility.

Many ancient civilizations emerged in different parts of the world but all of them except Indian civilization disappeared. Indian civilization survived because its roots were deeply fixed in spirituality. Ancient Indians seriously thought of their life and its onward course. To structure their life, they made two kinds of ways-ways of "Sruthy" and ways of "Smruti". Sruti includes the unchanging values of human life and the Smruti includes the changing rules and regulations which facilitate social life of human beings. The greatest and the most popular Smruti is Manu Smruti. Manu Smruti is believed to be composed around second or third century CE and its origin is attributed to a mythical sage, first man and lawgiver, Manu. Manu Smruti is the most authoritative text of Sanatan people of ancient India. Manu Smruti is otherwise known as Manava Dharma Sastra. Manu Smruti details the rules and regulations people to follow in accordance with their varna allegiance. Manu Smruti explains in details how caste and varna system in Indian culture function. In this article we are trying to throw light on the socio-economic life of untouchable castes portrayed in Manu Smruti.

Manu Smruti stands for a society built upon the varna principles and a caste system broadly flowered from the varna system. Purity of varnas and structural coherence of the caste system are held tight upon marriage or indirectly controlling the sexuality and sexual choices of women. In 10th chapter of Manu Smruti, Manu explains in detail the origin of mixed castes. In 16th verse of 10th chapter, Manu says, "From a Sudra Spring in the inverse order (by females of the higher castes) three base-born (sons, apasada), an Ayogava, a Kshattri, and a Kandala, the lowest of men". Chandala or untouchable is the lowest category of humans is called as an animal and excluded from the Aryan community [1]. Verse 30 says "Just as a Sudra begets on a Brahmana female a being excluded (from the Aryan community), even so (a person himself) excluded pro creates with (females of) the four castes (varna, sons) more (worthy of being) excluded (than he himself)". It is quite evident that those people who are born out of varna order are untouchable castes. They are products of illegitimate consummation in reverse order. So, such offsprings are excluded from the varna order and expelled

from caste villages. Here begins the extraordinary story of untouchable castes in India as per Manu Smriti. Indian villages were citadels of untouchability.

Foreigners viewed Indian villages as blessings of abundance and treasure of virtues. They portrayed Indian villages as sociological wonders. Sir Charles Metcalfe,[2] who was a revenue officer, in one of his Revenue Papers described the Indian village in the following terms. "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last when nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down, revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Moghul, Maratha, Sikh, English, all are masters in turn, but the village communities remain the same. In times of trouble, they arm and fortify themselves. A hostile army passes through the country, the village communities collect their cattle within their walls and let the enemy pass unprovoked. If plunder and devastation be directed against themselves, and the forces employed be irresistible, they flee to friendly villages at a distance; but when the storm has passed over, they return and resume their occupations. If a country remains for a series of years the scene of continued pillage and massacre so that the villages cannot be inhabited, the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the place of their fathers; the same site for the village, the same position for their houses, the same lands will be preoccupied by the descendants of those who were driven out when the village was repopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbances and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success. This union of the village communities, each one forming a little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India, through all the revolutions and changes which they have referred, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence."

About forty years later. Sir Henry Maine [3] revived the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Indian village: "For the most part, the Indian village communities have always submitted without resistance to oppression by monarchs surrounded by mercenary armies I have several times spoken of them as organised and self-acting. They, in fact, include a nearly complete establishment of occupations and trades for enabling them to continue their collective life without assistance from any person or body external to them". Karl Marx also followed the suite [4]. He writes "Under this form of municipal government, the inhabitants of the country have lived from time immemorial. The boundaries of the village have been but seldom altered, and though the villages themselves have been sometimes injured and even desolated by war, famine and disease, the same name, the same limits, the same interests, and even the same families have contributed for ages. The inhabitants gave themselves no trouble about the breaking up and the division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred or to what sovereign it devolves: its internal economy remains unchanged."

Ambedkar, the greatest critic of caste system, vividly describes the true nature of a typical Indian caste village in his own critical tongue [5]. He writes "The Indian village is not a single social unit. It consists of castes. But for our purposes, it is enough to say—The population in the village is divided into two sections—(i) Touchables and (ii) Untouchables. The touchable form the major community and the Untouchables a minor community. The Touchables live inside the village and the Untouchables live outside the village in separate quarters. Economically, the Touchables form a strong and powerful community, while the Untouchables are a poor and a dependent community. Socially, the Touchables occupy the position of a ruling race, while the Untouchables occupy the position of a subject race of hereditary bondsmen. What are the terms of associated life on which the Touchables and Untouchables live in an Indian village? In every village the Touchables have a code which the Untouchables are required to follow. This code lays down the acts of omissions and commissions which the Touchables treat as offences. The following is the list of such offences:

1. The Untouchables must live in separate quarters away from the habitation of the Hindus. It is an offence for the Untouchables to break or evade the rule of segregation.
2. The quarters of the Untouchables must be located towards the South, since the South is the most inauspicious of the four directions. A breach of this rule shall be deemed to be an offence.
3. The Untouchable must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow of pollution as the case may be. It is an offence to break the rule.
4. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to acquire wealth, such as land or cattle.
5. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to build a house with tiled roof.
6. It is an offence for a member of an Untouchable community to put on a clean dress, wear shoes, put on a watch or gold ornaments.
7. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to give high sounding names to their children. Their names be such as to indicate contempt.
8. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu.
9. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to ride on a horse or a palanquin through the village.
10. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to take a procession of Untouchables through the village.
11. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community not to salute a Hindu.
12. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to speak a cultured language.
13. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community, if he happens to come into the village on a sacred day which the Hindus treat as the day of fast and at or about the time of the breaking of fast; to go about speaking, on the ground that their breath is held to foul the air and the food of the Hindus.
14. It is an offence for an Untouchable to wear the outward marks of a Touchable and pass himself as a Touchable.
15. An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as—
 - (a) having a contemptible name.
 - (b) not wearing clean clothes.
 - (c) not having tiled roof.
 - (d) not wearing silver and gold ornaments. A contravention of any of these rules is an offence.

Next come the duties which the Code requires members of the Untouchable community to perform for the Touchable. Under this head the following may be mentioned:

1. A member of an Untouchable community must carry a message of any event in the house of a Hindu such as death or marriage to his relatives living in other villages no matter how distant these villages may be.
2. An Untouchable must work at the house of a Hindu when a marriage is taking place, such as breaking fuel, and going on errands.
3. An Untouchable must accompany a Hindu girl when she is going from her parent's house to her husband's village no matter how distant it is.

4. When the whole village community is engaged in celebrating a general festivity such as Holi or Dasara, the Untouchables must perform all menial acts which are preliminary to the main observance.

5. On certain festivities, the Untouchables must submit their women to members of the village community to be made the subject of indecent fun. These duties have to be performed without remuneration. To realise the significance of these duties, it is important to note why they have come into being. Every Hindu in the village regards himself as a superior person above the Untouchables. As an overlord, he feels it absolutely essential to maintain his prestige. This prestige he cannot maintain unless he has at his command a retinue to dance attendance on him. It is in the Untouchable that he finds a ready retinue which is at his command and for which he does not have to pay. The Untouchables by reason of their helplessness cannot refuse to perform these duties and the Hindu villager does not hesitate to exact them since they are so essential to the maintenance of his prestige. These offences are not to be found in the Penal Code, enacted by the British Government. Nonetheless so far as the Untouchables are concerned, they are real. A breach of any of them involves sure punishment for the Untouchables.

Untouchability has been here in India since time immemorial. Before the British authorities started caste census, we did not have fair understanding of untouchable population in India. Ambedkar writes "The first general census of India was taken in the year 1881. Beyond listing the different castes and creeds and adding up their numbers so as to arrive at the total figure of the population of India the Census of 1881 did nothing. The second general census of India was taken in the year 1891. It was at this census that an attempt to classify the population on the basis of caste and race and grade was made by the Census Commissioner for the first time. But it was only an attempt. The third general census of India was taken in 1901. At this census a new principle of classification was adopted namely "Classification by Social precedence as recognised by native public opinion". To this serious opposition was raised by high caste Hindus to the enumeration by caste in the Census Report. They insisted on the omission of the question regarding caste. This objection did not have any effect on the Census Commissioner. In the opinion of the Census Commissioner enumeration by caste was important and necessary. It was argued by the Census Commissioner that "whatever view may be taken of the advantages or disadvantages of caste as a social institution, it is impossible to conceive of any useful discussion of the population questions in India in which caste would not be an important element. Caste is still 'the foundation of the Indian social fabric' and the record of caste is still 'the best guide to the changes in the various social strata in the Indian Society'. This Census of 1901 did not result in fixing the total population of the Untouchables at any exact figure. This was due to two reasons. In the first place no exact tests were applied to determine who is an Untouchable. Secondly a class of the population which was economically and educationally backward but not Untouchable was mixed up with those who were actually Untouchables. In order to overcome these difficulties, the Census of 1911 went a step further and actually laid down ten tests to mark off the Untouchables from those who were Touchable. Under these, tests the Census Superintendents made a separate enumeration of castes and tribes who

- (1) denied the supremacy of the Brahmins.
- (2) did not receive the Mantra from Brahmana or another recognized Hindu Guru.
- (3) denied the authority of the Vedas.
- (4) did not worship the great Hindu Gods.
- (5) were not served by good Brahmanas.
- (6) have no Brahmin priests at all.
- (7) have no access to the interior of the ordinary Hindu temple.
- (8) cause pollution.
- (9) bury their dead.

(10) eat beef and do not reverence the cow.

We saw how census authorities fixed one's untouchability and how Indian villages treated untouchables. Next let us analyse some critical questions regarding untouchability and untouchables. How do the Untouchables live? How do they earn their living? Without a knowledge of the ways of earning a livelihood which are open to the Untouchables it would not be possible to have a clear idea of their place in the caste Society. Untouchable castes were excluded from the varna order and expelled from caste villages. Untouchable castes faced not only social exclusion but also economic exclusion. They were not allowed to have any profitable economic exchanges with the people of caste villages. They were not allowed to enter into caste villages. Caste villages did not consider untouchable people as human beings but animals. Caste villages used the manual labour of untouchable people in different forms like for removing dead animals from the village or manual scavenging.

Most of the discourses on caste and untouchability across the globe are primarily based on Homo Hierarchicus of Louis Dumont who favoured Brahminic views of caste and purity [6]. The caste system is usually described as a form of dividing people into different groups of occupations with variant degrees of social statuses which land on zones of purity and impurity- the degree of interaction among them in the form of inter-dining, inter marriage and participation in rituals and festivals on one hand and the other side how they share power, resources and enjoy rights and privileges. Every caste in India experiences certain degree of untouchability and impurity at certain levels temporarily. Contrary to this temporary impurity and mild level of untouchability, untouchable castes in India experience permanent untouchability and impurities. The impurity ascribed to the untouchables is frequently based on their jobs involving regular and permanent contact with polluted substances that result from the death and decomposition of human, animal, vegetable matter; that is refuse, excreta, animal and human cadavers, animal skins and bones. (Maria,2004). She continues" the organization of space emphasizes this logic. From time immemorial, the untouchables have been excluded from social and ritual space of other castes; firstly, from places of worship and water collection, and secondly from the administration of local bodies like panchayat, and from communal services such as schools, shops and transport. Though Manu Smriti clearly says that there is no fifth varna other than the four original varnas referred in Purusha Sukta – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra- characteristics of mixed castes in Manu Smriti indicate a distinct fifth varna. Let us go deep into the social and economic characteristics of this fifth category- Mixed Castes or Outcastes. Literatures show that certain castes might have become outcastes due to occupational impurity, racial inferiority and economic backwardness [7]. 10th chapter of Manu Smriti throws light on the origin and development of outcastes in the varna system.

Occupational position.

10.46. "Those who have been mentioned as the base-born (offspring, apasada) of Aryans, or as produced in consequence of a violation (of the law, apadhvamsaga), shall subsist by occupations reprehended by the twice born.

10.47. To Sutas (belongs) the management of horses and of chariots; to Ambashthas, the art of healing; to Vaidehakas, the service of women; to Magadhas, trade.

10.48. Killing fish to Nishadas; carpenters' work to the Ayogava; to Medas, Andhras, Kunkus, and Madgus, the slaughter of wild animals; To Kshattris, Ugras, and Pukkakas, catching and killing (animals) living in holes; to Dhigvanas, working in leather; to Venas, playing drums.

10.55. By day they may go about for the purpose of their work, distinguished by marks at the king's command, and they shall carry out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives; that is a settled rule.

10.56. By the king's order they shall always execute the criminals, in accordance with the law, and they shall take for themselves the clothes, the beds, and the ornaments of (such) criminals

10.57. A man of impure origin, who belongs not to any caste, (varna, but whose character is) not known, who, (though) not an Aryan, has the appearance of an Aryan, one may discover by his acts.

Spatial Segregation.

10.50. Near well-known trees and burial-grounds, on mountains and in groves, let these (tribes) dwell, known (by certain marks), and subsisting by their peculiar occupations.

10.51. But the dwellings of Kandalas and Svapakas shall be outside the village, they must be made Apapatras, and their wealth (shall be) dogs and donkeys.

10.52. Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place

Social backwardness.

10.25. I will (now) fully enumerate those (sons) of mixed origin, who are born of Anulomas and of Pratilomas, and (thus) are mutually connected.

10.45. All those tribes in this world, which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet (of Brahman), are called Dasyus, whether they speak the language of the Mlekkhas (barbarians) or that of the Aryans.

10.52. Their dress (shall be) the garments of the dead, (they shall eat) their food from broken dishes, black iron (shall be) their ornaments, and they must always wander from place to place.

10.53. A man who fulfils a religious duty, shall not seek intercourse with them; their transactions (shall be) among themselves, and their marriages with their equals.

10.54. Their food shall be given to them by others (than an Aryan giver) in a broken dish; at night they shall not walk about in villages and in towns.

10.55. By day they may go about for the purpose of their work, distinguished by marks at the king's command, and they shall carry out the corpses (of persons) who have no relatives; that is a settled rule.

10.57. A man of impure origin, who belongs not to any caste, (varna, but whose character is) not known, who, (though) not an Aryan, has the appearance of an Aryan, one may discover by his acts.

10.96. A man of low caste who through covetousness lives by the occupations of a higher one, the king shall deprive of his property and banish.

11.68. Killing a donkey, a horse, a camel, a deer, an elephant, a goat, a sheep, a fish, a snake, or a buffalo, must be known to degrade (the offender) to a mixed caste (Samkarikarana).

Manu Smruti gives us ample textual evidences of the origin and socio-economic conditions of mixed castes which lived outside the resourceful caste villages. The origin of outcastes as per Manu Smruti were the Anuloma and Pratiloma intercourses. Outcastes were completely segregated from the caste villages-socially and economically. They were not allowed to have any cultural exchange with the caste people in the villages. Only polluting jobs were reserved for the outcastes. Outcastes were denied unrestricted mobility and access to public facilities like schools, colleges, jobs and even wells and other public drinking facilities. They did not have any rights other than mere instrumental freedoms which were necessary for discharging their menial and ugly jobs. They were not part of the money economy of the ancient India. Structurally the caste system trapped the outcastes in the loop of barter system and within it too imposed social restrictions to deny them limited opportunities for social and economic upward movement. Structural denial of occupational and spatial mobility was integral component of caste system in India and it was effectively used for achieving social control and taming people. Placing a socio-economic cap upon each caste was the inner mechanism of Manu Smruti. Each caste was allowed to work and live within the socio-economic quarters which were structurally reserved for them. Any transgression was treated as social violation and in the case of untouchables, the price for their violations was death.

Conclusion.

Manu Smruti sheds light on the mysterious origin and development of castes in ancient India. It tells us how life in ancient India was economically and socially divided between castes and outcastes. Outcastes were meticulously separated from the caste people and their socio-economic and cultural power structures. Social control fixed in violence was the mechanism of caste system in India and any aberration from the fixed path of social control eventually led to death. Life of outcastes existed between the two extremities- slavery and death. Outcastes had no individual rights or liberties other than available for them as members of a class-outcastes. Individual merit of outcastes was not a matter of any concern in their social life. Naturally they did not have any individual self but animal existence. They did not enjoy any sort of choice in their life other than what is imposed upon them by the caste system. They were not part of any mobile and vibrant money economy so upward mobility by saving and capital accumulation was non-existent about outcastes. Untouchable castes were forced to lead a life of hunter-gatherer within the structural inequality strictly maintained in the caste system. Outcastes were absolutely separated from the mainstream caste societies by occupation, denial of mobility and exclusion from social exchanges. Socio-economic alienation was the distinct characteristic of untouchable castes in Manu Smruti. Their labour power was utilized by the dominant castes as slave form of labour and did not allow them to free themselves from the slavery creating social barriers before them and maintained those barriers with violence and coercion. Villages of untouchables were not fixed in population or geography. They were mobile and floating [8]. The economy of untouchable caste enshrined in Manu Smruti was underdeveloped, poor, little mobile and dynamic. Economy of the untouchables was outside the money economy and existed on the verge of barter economy with unequal terms of trade with little legal protections or safeguards. They had no bargaining power as labourers. They were slaves so enjoyed little choice of occupational and spatial mobility. They didn't have any dignified life rests on freedom and liberty. Manu Smruti is a law book which offered a life of lawlessness for the outcastes in ancient India is a historical irony. Let us safely conclude that the seeds of structural inequalities which still exist in modern India could be traceable in Manu Smruti.

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