

## CHAPTER 16

# THE HOUSE THE HINDUS HAVE BUILT

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Is there any thing peculiar in the social organization of the Hindus? An unsophisticated Hindu who is unaware of investigations conducted by scholars will say that there is nothing peculiar, abnormal or unnatural in the organization of the society to which he belongs. This is quite natural. People who live their lives in isolation are seldom conscious of the peculiarities of their ways and manners. People have gone on from generation to generation without stopping to give themselves a name. But how does the social organization of the Hindu strike the outsiders, non-Hindus? Did it appear to them as normal and natural?

Megasthenese who came to India as the ambassador of the Greek King Seleukos Nicator to the Court of Chandragupta Maurya some time about the year 305 B.C. did feel that the social organization of the Hindus was of a very strange sort. Otherwise he would not have taken such particular care to describe the peculiar features of the Hindu social organization. He has recorded :

“The population of India is divided into seven parts. The philosophers are first in rank, but form the smallest class in point of number. Their services are employed privately by persons who wish to offer sacrifices or perform other sacred rites, and also publicly by the kings at what is called the Great Synod, wherein at the beginning of the new year all the philosophers are gathered together before the King at the gates, when any philosopher who may have committed any useful suggestion to writing, or observed any means for improving the crops and the cattle, or for promoting the public interests, declares it publicly. If any one is detected giving false information thrice, the law condemns him to be silent for the rest of his life, but he who gives sound advice is exempted from paying any taxes or contributions.

“The second caste consists of the husbandmen, who form the bulk of the population, and are in disposition most mild and gentle. They are exempted from military service, and cultivate their lands undisturbed by fear. They never go to town, either to take part in its tumults, or for any other purpose. It therefore not unfrequently happens that at the same time, and in the same part of the country, men may be seen drawn up in array of battle, and fighting at risk of their lives, while other men close at hand are ploughing and digging in perfect security, having these soldiers to protect them. The whole of the land is the property of the King, and the husbandmen till it on condition of receiving one-fourth of the produce.

“The third caste consists of herdsmen and hunters, who alone are allowed to hunt, and to keep cattle, and to sell draught animals or let them out on hire. In return for clearing the land of wild beasts and fowls which devour the seeds sown in the fields, they receive an allowance of grain from the king. They lead a wandering life and live under tents.

“The fourth class, after herdsmen and hunters, consists of those who work at trades, of those who vend wares, and of those who are employed in bodily labour. Some of these pay tribute, and render to the State certain prescribed services. But the armour-makers and shipbuilders receive wages and their victuals from the king, for whom alone they work. The general in command of the army supplies the soldiers with weapons, and the admiral of the fleet lets out ships on hire for the transport both of passengers and merchandise.

“The fifth class consists of fighting men, who when not engaged in active service, pass their time in idleness and drinking. They are maintained at the King’s expense, and hence they are always ready, when occasion calls, to take the field, for they carry nothing of their own with them but their own bodies.

“The sixth class consists of the overseers, to whom is assigned the duty of watching all that goes on, and making reports secretly to the King. Some are entrusted with the inspection of the city, and others with that of the army. The former employ as their coadjutors the courtezans of the city, and the latter the courtezans of the camp. The ablest and most trustworthy men are appointed to fill these offices.

“The seventh class consists of the councillors and assessors of the king. To them belong the highest posts of government, the tribunals of justice, and the general administration of public affairs. No one is allowed to marry out of his own caste, or to exchange one

profession or trade for another, or to follow more than one business. An exception is made in favour of the philosopher, who for his virtue is allowed this privilege.”

Alberuni who wrote an account of his travels in India some time about 1030 A.D. must have been struck by the peculiarity of the Hindu Social Organization. For he too has not omitted to make a note of it. He observed:

“The Hindus call their castes varna, i.e. colours, and from a genealogical point of view they call them jataka, i.e. births. These castes are from the very beginning only four.

- I. The highest caste are the Brahmana, of whom the books of the Hindus tell that they were created from the head of Brahman. And a Brahman is only another name for the force called nature, and the head is the highest part of the animal body, the Brahmana are the choice part of the whole genus. Therefore the Hindus consider them as the very best mankind.
- II. The next caste are the Kshatriya, who were created, as they say, from the shoulders and hands of Brahman. Their degree is not much below that of the Brahmana.
- III. After them follow the Vaisya, who were created from the thigh of Brahman.
- IV. The Sudra, who were created from his feet.

“Between the latter two classes there is no very great distance. Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings.

“After the Sudra follow the people called Antyaja, who render various kinds of services, who are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. There are eight classes of them who freely intermarry with each other, except the fuller, shoemaker and weaver, for no others would condescend to have anything to do with them. These eight guilds are the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them.

“The people called Hadi, Doma (Domba), Candala and Badhatau (sic) are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact, they are considered like illegitimate

children; for according to general opinion they descend from a Sudra father and a Brahmani mother as the children of fornication; therefore they are degraded outcaste.

“The Hindus give to every single man of the four castes characteristic names, according to their occupations and modes of life, e.g. the Brahman is in general called by this name as long as he does his work staying at home. When he is busy with the service of one fire, he is called Ishtin; if he serves three fires, he is called Agnihotrin; if he besides offers an offering to the fire, he is called Dikshita. And as it is with the Brahmana, so is it also with the other castes. Of the classes beneath the castes, the Hadi are the best spoken of, because they keep themselves free from everything unclean. Next follow the Doma, who play on the lute and sing. The still lower classes practise as a trade killing and the inflicting of judicial punishments. The worst of all are the Badhatau, who not only devour the flesh of dead animals, but even of dogs and other beasts.

“Each of the four castes, when eating together, must form a group of themselves, one group not being allowed to comprise two men of different castes. If, further, in the group of the Brahmana there are two men who live at enmity with each other, and the seat of the one is by the side of the other, they make a barrier between the two seats by placing a board between them, or by spreading a piece of dress, or in some other way; and if there is only a line drawn between them, they are considered as separated. Since it is forbidden to eat the remains of a meal, every single man must have his own food for himself; for if any one of the party who are eating should take of the food from one and the same plate, that which remains in the plate becomes, after the first eater has taken part, to him who wants to take as the second, the remains of the meal, and such is forbidden.”

Alberuni did not merely content himself with recording what struck him as peculiar in the Hindu Social organization. He went on to say:

“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.”

Duarte Barbosa who was Portuguese official in the service of the Portuguese Government in India from 1500 to 1517 has left a record of his impressions of Hindu Society. This is what struck him:

“And before this kingdom of Guzerate fell into the hands of the Moors, a certain race of Heathen whom the Moors called Resbutos

dwelt therein, who in those days were the knights and wardens of the land, and made war wheresoever it was needful. These men kill and eat sheep and fish and all other kinds of food; in the mountains there are yet many of them, where they have great villages and obey not the king of Guzerate, but rather wage daily war against him: who, do what he may, is yet not able to prevail against them, nor will do so, for they are very fine horsemen, and good archers, and have besides divers other weapons to defend themselves withal against the Moors, on whom they make war without ceasing; yet have they no king nor lord over them.

“And in this kingdom there is another sort of Heathen whom they call Baneanes, who are great merchants and traders. They dwell among the Moors with whom they carry on all their trade. This people eat neither flesh nor fish, nor anything subject to death; they slay nothing, nor are they willing even to see the slaughter of any animal; and thus they maintain their idolatry and hold it so firmly that it is a terrible thing. For often it is so that the Moors take to them live insects or small birds, and make as though to kill them in their presence, and the Baneanes buy these and ransom them, paying much more than they are worth, so that they may save their lives and let them go. And if the King or a Governor of the land has any man condemned to death, for any crime which he has committed, they gather themselves together and buy him from justice, if they are willing to sell him, that he may not die. And divers Moorish mendicants as well, when they wish to obtain alms from this people, take great stones wherewith they beat upon their shoulders and bellies as though they would slay themselves before them, to hinder which they give them great alms that they may depart in peace. Others carry knives with which they slash their arms and legs, and to these too they give large alms that they may not kill themselves. Others go to their doors seeking to kill rats and snakes for them, and to them also they give much money that they may not do so. Thus they are much esteemed by the Moors !

“When these Baneanes meet with a swarm of ants on the road they shrink back and seek for some way to pass without crushing them. And in their houses they sup by daylight, for neither by night nor by day will they light a lamp, by reason of certain little flies which perish in the flame thereof; and if there is any great need of a light by night they have a lantern of varnished paper or cloth, so that no living thing may find its way in, and die in the flame. And if these men breed many lice they kill them not, but when they trouble them too much they send for certain men, also Heathen, who live

among them and whom they hold to be men of a holy life; they are like hermits living with great abstinence through devotion to their gods. These men louse them, and as many lice as they catch they place on their own heads and breed them on their own flesh, by which they say they do great service to their Idol. Thus one and all they maintain with great self-restraint their law of not killing. On the other hand they are great usurers, falsifiers of weights and measures and many other goods and of coins; and great liars. These heathen are tawny men, tall and well looking, gaily attired, delicate and moderate in their food. Their diet is of milk, butter, sugar and rice, and many conserves of divers sorts. They make much use of dishes of fruit and vegetables and pot herbs in their food. Wheresoever they dwell they have orchards and fruit gardens and many water tanks wherein they bathe twice a day, both men and women; and they say when they have finished bathing that they are clear of as many sins as they have committed up to that hour. These Baneanes grow very long hair, as women do with us, and wear it twisted up on the head and made into a knot, and over it a turban, that they may keep it always held together; and in their hair they put flowers and other sweet scented things.

“They use to annoint themselves with white sandalwood mixed with saffron and other scents. They are very amorous people. They are clad in long cotton and silken shirts and are shod with pointed shoes of richly wrought cordwain; some of them wear short coats of silk and brocade. They carry no arms except certain very small knives ornamented with gold and silver, and this for two reasons: First, because they are men who make but little use of weapons; and secondly, because the Moors defend them.

“Bramenes. And there is here another class of Heathen whom they call Bramenes, who are priests among them and persons who manage and rule their houses of prayers and idol-worship, which are of great size and have great revenues; and many of them also are maintained by alms. In these houses are great numbers of wooden Idols, and others of stone and copper and in these houses or monasteries they celebrate great ceremonies in honour of these idols, entertaining them with great store of candles and oil lamps, and with bells after our fashion. These Bramenes and Heathen have in their creed many resemblances to the Holy Trinity, and hold in great honour the relation of the Triune Three, and always make their prayers to God, whom they confess and adore as the true God, Creator and maker of all things, who is three persons and one God and they say that there are many other gods who are rulers under

him, in whom also they believe. These Bramenes and heathen wheresoever they find our churches enter them and make prayers and adorations to our Images, always asking for Santa Maria, like men who have some knowledge and understanding of these matters; and they honour the Church as is our manner, saying that between them and us there is little difference. These men never eat anything subject to death, nor do they slay anything. Bathing they hold to be a great ceremony and they say that by it they are saved.

“There is also in this same Kingdom of Calicut a caste of people called Bramenes who are priests among them (as are the clergy among us) of whom I have spoken in another place.

“These all speak the same tongue, nor can any be a Bramene except he be the son of a Bramene. When they are seven years of age they put over their shoulder a strip of two fingers in breadth of untanned skin with the hair on it of a certain wild beast which they call Cryvamergam, which resembles a wild ass. Then for seven years he must not eat betel for which time he continues to wear this strap. When he is fourteen years old they make him a Bramene, and taking off their leather strap they invest him with the cord of three strands which he wears for the rest of his life as a token that he is a Bramene. And this they do with great ceremonial and rejoicings, as we do here for a cleric when he sings his first mass. Thereafter he may eat betel, but not flesh or fish. They have great honour among the Indians, and as I have already said, they suffer death for no cause whatsoever, their own headman gives them a mild chastisement. They marry once only in our manner, and only the eldest son marries, he is treated like the head of an entailed estate. The other brothers remain single all their lives. These Bramenes keep their wives well guarded, and greatly honoured, so that no other men may sleep with them; if any of them die, they do not marry again, but if a woman wrongs her husband she is slain by poison. The brothers who remain bachelors sleep with the Nayre women, they hold it to be a great honour, and as they are Bramenes no woman refuses herself to them, yet they may not sleep with any woman older than themselves. They dwell in their own houses and cities, and serve as clergy in the houses of worship, whither they go to pray at certain hours of the day, performing their rituals and idolatries.

“Some of these Bramenes serve the Kings in every manner except in arms. No man may prepare any food for the King except a Bramene or his own kin; they also serve as couriers to other countries with letters, money or merchandise, passing wherever they

wish to go in safety, and none does them any ill, even when the Kings are at war. These Bramenes are learned in their idolatry, and possess many books thereof. The Kings hold them in high esteem.

“I have already spoken many times of the Nayres, and yet I have not hitherto told you what manner of men they are. You are to know that in this land of Malbar there is another caste of people, called Nayres, and among them are noble men who have no other duty than to serve in war, and they always carry their arms whithersoever they go, some swords and shields, others bows and arrows, and yet others spears. They all live with the King, and the other great Lords; nevertheless all receive stipends from the King or from the great Lords with whom they dwell. None may become a Nayre, save only he who is of Nayre lineage. They are very free from stain in their nobility. They will not touch any one of low caste, nor eat, nor drink save in the house of a Nayre.

“These men are not married, their nephews (sisters’ sons) are their heirs. The Nayre women of good birth are very independent, and dispose of themselves as they please with Bramenes and Nayres, but they do not sleep with men of caste lower than their own under pain of death. When they reach the age of twelve years their mothers hold a great ceremony. When a mother perceives that her daughter has attained that age, she asks her kinsfolk and friends to make ready to honour her daughter, then she asks of the kindred and especially of one particular kinsman or great friend to marry her daughter; this he willingly promises and then he has a small jewel made, which would contain a half ducat of gold, long like a ribbon, with a hole through the middle which comes out on the other side, string on thread of white silk. The mother then on a fixed day is present with her daughter gaily decked with many rich jewels, making great rejoicings with music and singing, and a great assembly of people. Then the Kinsman or friend comes bringing that jewel, and going through certain forms, throws it over the girl’s neck. She wears it as a token all the rest of her life, and may then dispose of herself as she will. The man departs without sleeping with her inasmuch as he is her kinsman; if he is not, he may sleep with her, but is not obliged to do so. Thenceforward the mother goes about searching and asking some young man to take her daughter’s virginity; they must be Nayres and they regard it among themselves as a disgrace and a foul thing to take a woman’s virginity. And when any one has once slept with her, she is fit for association with men. Then the mother again goes about enquiring among other young Nayres if they wish to support her daughter, and take her as



a Mistress so that three or four Nayres agree with her to keep her, and sleep with her, each paying her so much a day; the more lovers she has the greater is her honour. Each one of them passes a day with her from midday on one day, till midday on the next day and so they continue living quietly without any disturbance nor quarrels among them. If any of them wishes to leave her, he leaves her, and takes another, and she also if she is weary of a man, she tells him to go, and he does so, or makes terms with her. Any children they may have stay with the mother who has to bring them up, for they hold them not to be the children of any man, even if they bear his likeness, and they do not consider them their children, nor are they heirs to their estates, for as I have already stated their heirs are their nephews, sons of their sisters, (which rule whosoever will consider inwardly in his mind will find that it was established with a greater and deeper meaning than the common folk think) for they say that the Kings of the Nayres instituted it in order that the Nayres should not be held back from their service by the burden and labour of rearing children.

“In this Kingdom of Malabar there is also another caste of people whom they call Biabares, Indian Merchants, natives of the land. They were there ere foreign nations had sailed to India. They deal in goods of every kind both in the seaports and inland, wheresoever their trade is of most profit. They gather to themselves all the pepper and ginger from the Nayres and husbandmen, and oftentimes they buy the new crops beforehand in exchange for cotton clothes and other goods which they keep at the seaports. Afterwards they sell them again and gain much money thereby. Their privileges are such that the King of the country in which they dwell cannot execute them by legal process.

“There is in this land yet another caste of folk known as Cuiavem. They do not differ from the Nayres, yet by reason of a fault which they committed, they remain separate from them. Their business is to make pottery and bricks for roofing the houses of the Kings and idols, which are roofed with bricks instead of tiles; only these, for as I have already said, other houses are thatched with branches. They have their own sort of idolatry, and their separate idols.

“There is another Heathen caste which they call Mainatos, whose occupation is to wash clothes for the Kings, Bramenes and Nayres. By this they live, and may not take up any other.

“There is another lower caste than these which they call Caletis, who are weavers who have no other way of earning save by weaving

of cotton and silk cloths, but they are low caste folk and have but little money, so that they clothe the lower races. They are apart by themselves and have their own idolatry.

“Besides the castes mentioned above, there are eleven others lower than they within whom the others do not associate, nor do they touch them under pain of death; and there are great distinctions between one and another of them, preserving them from mixture with one another. The purest of all these low, simple folk they call Tuias. Their work is mainly that of tending the palm-groves, and gathering the fruit thereof, and carrying it away for wages on their backs, for there are no beasts of burden in the land.

“There is another caste still lower than these whom they call Manen (Mancu in the printed text) who neither associate with others nor touch them, nor do the others touch them. They are washermen for the common people, and makers of sleeping mats, from which occupations all but they are barred; their sons must perforce follow the same trade; they have their own separate idolatry.

“There is another caste in this land still lower whom they call Canaquis. Their trade is making buckles and umbrellas. They learn letters for purposes of astronomy, they are great astrologers, and foretell with great truth things that are to come; there are some lords who maintain them for this cause.

“There is also another lower caste, also Heathens, called Ageres. They are masons, carpenters, smiths, metal workers and some are goldsmiths, all of whom are of a common descent, and a separate caste, and have their idols apart from other folk. They marry, and their sons inherit their property, and learn their fathers’ trade.

“There is another caste still lower in this country called Mogerres, they are almost the same as the Tuias, but they do not touch one another. They work as carriers of things belonging to the Royal State when it moves from one place to another, but there are very few of them in this land; they are a separate caste; they have no marriage law; the most of them gain their living on the sea, they are sailors, and some of them fishers; they have no idols. They are as well slaves of the Nayres.

“There is another caste yet lower whom they call Monquer, fishers who have no other work than fishing, yet some sail in the Moors’ ships and in those of other heathens, and they are very expert seamen. This race is very rude. They are shameless thieves; they marry and their sons succeed them, their women are of loose character, they sleep with any one-soever, and it is held no evil. They have thier own idolatry.

“In this land of Malabar there is another caste of Heathen even lower than these, whom they call Betunes. Their business is salt making and rice growing, they have no other livelihood.

“They dwell in houses standing by themselves in the fields away from the roads, whither the gentlefolk do not walk. They have their own idolatry. They are slaves of the Kings and Nayres and pass their lives in poverty. The Nayres make them walk far away from them and speak to them from afar off. They hold no intercourse with any other caste.

“There is another caste of Heathen, even lower and ruder, whom they call Paneens, who are great sorcerers, and live by no other means.

“There is another caste lower and ruder than they, named Revoleens, a very poor folk, who live by carrying firewood and grass to the towns, they may touch none, nor may any touch them under pain of death. They go naked, covering only their private parts with scant and filthy rags, the more part of them indeed with leaves of certain trees. Their women wear many brass rings in their ears; and on their necks, arms and legs necklaces and bracelets of heads.

“And there is yet another caste of Heathens lower than these whom they call Poleas, who among all the rest are held to be accursed and excommunicate; they dwell in the fields and open campaigns in secret lurking places, whither folk of good caste never go save by mischance, and live in huts very strait and mean. They are tillers of rice with buffaloes and oxen. They never speak to the Nayres save from off, shouting so that they may hear them, and when they go along the roads they utter loud cries, that they may be let past, and whosoever hears them leaves the road, and stands in the wood till they have passed by: and if any one, whether man or woman, touches them his kinsfolk slay them forthwith, and in vengeance therefore they slay Poleas until they are weary without suffering any punishment.

“Yet another caste there is even lower and baser called Pareens, who dwell in the most desert places away from all other castes. They have no intercourse with any person nor any one with them they are held to be worse than devils, and to be damned. Even to see them is to be unclean and out-caste. They eat yams and other roots of wild plants. They cover their middles with leaves, they also eat the flesh of wild beasts.

“With these end the distinctions between the castes of the Heathen, which are eighteen in all, each one separate and unable to

touch others or marry with them; and besides these eighteen castes of the Heathen who are natives of Malabar, which I have now related to you, there are others of outlandish folk, merchants and traders in the land, where they possess houses and estates, living like the natives, yet with customs of their own.”

These foreigners were not able to give a full and detailed picture of caste. This is understandable. For to every foreigner the private life of the Hindu is veiled and it is not possible for him to penetrate it. The social organism of India, the play of its motive forces, is moreover, regulated infinitely more by custom, varying according to locality and baffling in its complexity, than by any legal formula which can be picked out of a legal text book. But there is no doubt that caste did appear to the foreigners as the most singular and therefore the most distinguishing feature of Hindu Society. Otherwise they would not have noted its existence in the record they made of what they observed when they came to India.

Caste therefore is something special in the Hindu Social organization and marks off the Hindus from other peoples. Caste has been a growing institution. It has never been the same at all time. The shape and form of caste as it existed when Magasthenes wrote his account was very different from what the shape and form it has taken when Alberuni came and the appearance it gave to the Portuguese was different from what it was in the time of Alberuni. But to understand caste one must have more exact idea of its nature than these foreigners are able to give.

To follow the discussion of the subject of caste it is necessary to familiarize the readers with some basic conceptions which underlie the Hindu Social organization. The basic conception of social organization which prevails among the Hindus starts with the rise of our classes or varnas into which Hindu society is believed to have become divided. These four classes were named: (1) Brahmins, the priestly and the educated class, (2) The Kshatriyas, the Military Class, (3) The Vaishyas, the trading class and, (4) The Shudras, the servant class. For a time these were merely classes. After a time what were only Classes (Varnas) became Castes (Jatis) and the four castes became four thousand. In this way the modern Caste System was only the evolution of the ancient Varna System.

No doubt the caste system is an evolution of the Varna System. But one can get no idea of the caste system by a study of the Varna System. Caste must be studied apart from Varna.

## 2

An old agnostic is said to have summed up his philosophy in the following words:

“The only thing I know is that I know nothing; and I am not quite sure that I know that”

Sir Denzil Ibbetson undertaking to write about caste in the Punjab said that the words of these agnostic about his philosophy expressed very exactly his own feelings regarding caste. It is no doubt true that owing to local circumstances there does appear a certain diversity about caste matters and that it is very difficult to make any statement regarding any one of the castes absolutely true as it may be as regards one locality which will not be contradicted with equal truth as regards the same caste in some other area.

Although this may be true yet it cannot be difficult to separate the essential and fundamental features of caste from its non-essential superficial features. For easy approach to this to ascertain by asking what are the matters for which a person is liable to be excluded from caste. Mr. Bhattacharya has stated the following as causes for expulsion from caste: (1) Embracing Christianity or Islam, (2) Going to Europe or America, (3) Marrying a widow, (4) Publicly throwing the sacred thread, (5) Publicly eating beef, pork or fowl, (6) Publicly eating *Kaccha* food prepared by a Mahomedan, Christian or low caste Hindu, (7) Officiating at the house of a very low caste Sudra, (8) By a female going away from home for immoral purposes and (9) By a widow becoming pregnant. This list is not exhaustive and omits the two most important causes which entail expulsion from caste. They are (10) intermarrying outside caste, (11) Interdining with persons of another caste, (12) Change of occupation. The second defect in the statement of Mr. Bhattacharya is that it does not make any distinction between essentials and (un)\*essentials. Of course when a person is expelled from his caste the penalty is uniform. His friends, relatives, and fellow men refuse to partake of his hospitality. He is not invited to entertainments in their houses. He cannot obtain brides or bridegrooms for his children. Even his married daughters cannot visit him without running the risk of being excluded from caste. His priest, his barber and washerman refuse to serve him. His fellow castemen sever their connection with him so completely that they refuse to assist him even at the funeral of a member of his household. In some cases the man excluded from caste is debarred access to public temples and to the cremation or burial ground.

\* *The original word in the MS was 'essentials'. The editors felt it to be 'unessentials' and therefore corrected it accordingly.* — Ed.

These reasons for expulsion from caste indirectly show the rules and regulations of the caste. But all regulations are not fundamental. There are many which are unessential. Caste can exist even without them. The essential and unessential can be distinguished by asking another question. When can a Hindu who has lost caste regain his caste. The Hindus have a system of *Prayaschitas* which are penances and which a man who has been expelled from caste must perform before he can be admitted to caste fellowship. With regard to these *Prayaschitas* or Penances certain points must be remembered. In the first place there are caste offences for which there is no *Prayaschita*. In the second place the *Prayaschitas* vary according to the offence. In some cases the *Prayaschita* involves a very small penalty. In other cases the penalty involved is a very severe one.

The existing of a *Prayaschita* and its absence have a significance which must be clearly understood. The absence of *Prayaschita* does not mean that any one may commit the offence with impunity. On the contrary it means that the offence is of an immeasurable magnitude and the offender once expelled is beyond reclamation. There is no reentry for him in the caste from which he is expelled. The existence of a *Prayaschita* means that the offence is compoundable. The offender can take the prescribed *Prayaschita* and obtain admission in the caste from which he is expelled.

There are two offences for which there is no penance. These are (1) change from Hindu Religion to another religion, (2) Marriage with a person of another caste or another religion. It is obvious if a man loses, caste for these offences he loses it permanently.

Of the other offences the *Prayaschitas* prescribed are of the severest kind are two: (1) Interdining with a person of another caste or a non-Hindu and (2) Taking to occupations which is not the occupation of the caste. In the case of the other offences the penalty is a light one almost nominal.

The surest clue to find out what are the fundamental rules of caste and what caste consists in is furnished by the rules regarding *Prayaschitas*. Those for the infringement of which there is no *Prayaschita* constitute the very soul of caste and those for the infringement of which the *Prayaschita* is of the severest kind make up the body of caste. It may therefore be said without any hesitation that there are four fundamental rules of caste. A caste may be defined as a social group having (a) belief in Hindu Religion and bound by certain regulations as to, (b) marriage, (c) food and (d) occupation. To this one more characteristic may be added namely a social group having a common name by which it is recognized.

In the matter of marriage the regulation lays down that the caste must be endogamous. There can be no intermarriage between members of different castes. This is the first and the most fundamental idea on which the whole fabric of the caste is built up.

In the matter of food the rule is that a person cannot take food from and dine with any person who does not belong to his caste. This means that only those who can intermarry can also interdine. Those who cannot intermarry cannot interdine. In other words caste is an endogamous unit and also a communal unit.

In the matter of occupation the regulation is that a person must follow the occupation which is the traditional occupation of his caste and if the caste has no occupation then he should follow the occupation of his father.

In the matter of status of a person it is fixed and is hereditary. It is fixed because a person's status is determined by the status of the caste to which he belongs. It is hereditary because a Hindu is stamped with the caste to which his parents belonged, a Hindu cannot change his status because he cannot change his caste. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies a member of the caste in which he is born. A Hindu may lose his status if he loses caste. But he cannot acquire a new or a better or different status.

What is the significance of a common name for a caste? The significance of this will be clear if we ask two questions which are very relevant and a correct answer to each is necessary for a complete idea of this institution of caste. Social groups are either organized or unorganized. When the membership of the group and the process of joining and leaving the groups, are the subject of definite social regulations and involve certain duties and privileges in relation to other members of the group then the group is an organized group. A group is a voluntary group in which members enter with a full knowledge of what they are doing and the aims which the association is designed to fulfil. On the other hand there are groups of which an individual person becomes a member without any act of volition, and becomes subject to social regulation and traditions over which he has no control of any kind.

Now it is hardly necessary to say that caste is a highly organized social grouping. It is not a loose or a floating body. Similarly it is not necessary to say that caste is an involuntary grouping. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies as a member of that caste. There is no Hindu without caste, cannot escape caste and being bounded by caste from birth to death he becomes subject to social regulations and traditions of the caste over which he has no control.

The significance of a separate name for a caste lies in this — namely it makes caste an organized and an involuntary grouping. A separate and a distinctive name for a caste makes caste asking to a corporation with a perpetual existence and a seal of separate entity. The significance of separate names for separate castes has not been sufficiently realized by writers on caste. In doing that they have lost sight of a most distinctive feature of caste social groups there are and there are bound to be in every society. Many social groups in many countries can be equated to various castes in India and may be regarded as their equivalent. Potters, Washermen, Intellectuals as social groups are every where. But in other countries they have remained as unorganized and voluntary groups while in India they have become organized and involuntary i.e. they have become castes is because in other countries the social groups were not given name while in India they did. It is the name which the caste bears which gives it fixity and continuity and individuality. It is the name which defines who are its members and in most cases a person born in a caste carries the name of the caste as a part of his surname. Again it is the name which makes it easy for the caste to enforce its rules and regulations. It makes it easy in two ways. In the first place, the name of the caste forming a surname of the individual prevents the offender in passing off as a person belonging to another caste and thus escape the jurisdiction of the caste. Secondly, it helps to identify the offending individual and the caste to whose jurisdiction he is subject so that he is easily handed up and punished for any breach of the caste rules.

This is what caste means. Now as to the caste system. This involves the study of the mutual relations between different castes. Looked at as a collection of caste the caste system presents several features which at once strike the observer. In the first place there is no inter-connection between the various castes which form a system. Each caste is separate and distinct. It is independent and sovereign in the disposal of its internal affairs and the endorcement of caste Regulations. The castes touch but they do not interpenetrate. The second feature relates to the order in which one caste stands in relation to the other castes in the system. That order is vertical and not horizontal.

In other words castes are not equal in status. Their order is based on inequality. One caste is higher or lower in relation to another. Castes form an hierarchy in which one caste is at the top and is the highest, another at the bottom and it is the lowest and in between there are castes every one of which is at once above some caste and below some caste. The caste system is a system of gradation in which every caste



except the highest and the lowest has a priority and precedence over some other caste.

How is this precedence or this superiority determined? This order of superiority and inferiority or this insubordination is determined by Rules (1) which are connected with religious rites and (2) which are connected with commensality.

Religion as a basis of Rules of precedence manifests itself in three ways. Firstly through religious ceremonies, secondly through incantations that accompany the religious ceremonies and thirdly through the position of the priest.

Beginning with the ceremonies as a source of rules of precedence it should be noted that the Hindu Scriptures prescribe sixteen religious ceremonies. Although those are Hindu ceremonies every Hindu Caste cannot by right claim to perform all the sixteen ceremonies. Few can claim the right to perform all. Some are allowed to perform certain ceremonies, some are not allowed to perform certain of the ceremonies. For instance take the ceremony of Upanayan, wearing the sacred thread. Some castes can't. Precedence follows this distinction in the matters of right to perform the ceremonies. A caste which can claim to perform all the ceremonies is higher in status than the caste which has a right to perform a few.

Turning to the Mantras it is another source for rules of precedence. According to the Hindu Religion the same ceremony can be performed in three different ways: (1) Vedokta, (2) Shastrokta and (3) Puranokta. In the Vedokta form the ceremony is performed with Mantras (incantations) from the Vedas. In the Shastrokta form the ceremony is performed with Mantras (incantations) from the Shastras. In the Puranokta form the ceremony is performed with Mantras (incantations) from the Puranas. Hindu Religious Scriptures fall into three distinct categories: (1) The Vedas which are four, (2) The Shastras which are six and (3) The Puranas which are eighteen. Although they are all respected as scriptures they do not all have the same sanctity. The Vedas have the highest sanctity. The Shastras stand next in order of sanctity and the Puranas have the lowest sanctity. The way the Mantras give rise to social precedence will be obvious if it is borne in mind that not every caste is entitled to have the ceremony performed in the Vedokta form. Three castes may well claim the right to the performance of one of the sixteen ceremonies. But it will be that one of it is entitled to perform it in the Vedokta form, another in the Shastrokta form and the third only in the Puranokta form. Precedence goes with the kind of Mantra that a caste is entitled to use in the performance of a religious ceremony. A caste which is entitled to use

Vedic Mantra is superior to a caste which is entitled to use Shastrik Mantra and a caste which is entitled to use Shastrik Mantras is higher than a caste which is entitled to use only Puranokta Mantras.

Taking the priest as third source of precedence connected with Religion Hinduism requires the instrumentality of a priest for the derivation of the full benefit from the performance of a religious ceremony. The priest appointed by the scriptures is the Brahmin. A Brahmin therefore is indispensable. But the scriptures do not require that a Brahmin shall accept the invitation of any and every Hindu irrespective of his caste to officiate at a religious ceremony. The invitation of which caste he will accept and of which he will refuse is a matter left to the wishes of the Brahmin. By long and well established custom it is now settled at which caste he will officiate and at which caste he will not. This fact has become the basis of precedence as between castes. The caste at which a Brahmin will officiate is held as superior to a caste at whose religious functions a Brahmin will not officiate.

The second source for rules of precedence is commensality. It will be noticed that rules of marriage have not given rise to rules of precedence as rules of commensality have. The reason lies in the distinction between the rules prohibiting intermarriage and interdining. That difference is obvious. The prohibition on intermarriage is such that it can not only be respected but it can be carried out quite strictly. But the prohibition of interdining creates difficulties. It cannot be carried out quite strictly in all places and under all circumstances. Man migrates and must migrate from place to place. In every place he happens to go he may not find his castemen. He may find himself landed in the midst of strangers. Marriage is not a matter of urgency but food is. He can wait for getting himself married till he returns to the society of his castemen. But he cannot wait for his food. He must find it from somewhere and from someone. Question arises from which caste he can take food if he has to. The rule is that he will take food from a caste above his but will not take food from a caste which is below his. There is no way of finding how it came to be decided that a Hindu can take food from one caste and not from another. By long series of precedent every Hindu knows from what caste he can take food and from what caste he cannot. This is determined chiefly by the rule followed by the Brahmin. A caste is higher or lower according as the Brahmin takes from it food or not. In this connection the Brahmin has a very elaborate set of rules in the matter of food and water. (1) He will take only water from some and not from others. (2) A Brahmin will not take food cooked in water by any caste. (3) He will take only

food cooked in oil from some castes. Again he has as a set of rules in the matter of the vessel, in which he will accept food and water. He will take food or water in an earthen vessel from some caste, only in metallic vessel from some and only in glass vessel from others. This goes to determine the level of the caste. If he takes food cooked in oil from a caste its status is higher than the caste from which he will not. If he takes water from a caste it is higher than the caste from which he will not. If he takes water in a metallic vessel that caste is higher than the caste from which he will take water in an earthen vessel and the caste from which he will take water in an earthen vessel is higher than the caste from which he will take water in a glass vessel. Glass is a substance which is called *Nirlep* (which conserves no stain) therefore a Brahmin can take water in it even from the lowest. But other metals do conserve stains. Contaminating character of the stain depends upon the status of the person who has used it. That status depends upon the Brahmin's will to accept water in that vessel.

These are some of the factors which determine the place and status of a caste in this Hindu hierarchial system of castes.

Such is caste and such is caste system. Question is, is this enough to know the Hindu Social Organization. For a static conception of the Hindu Social Organization an idea of the caste and the caste system is enough. One need not trouble to remember more than the facts that the Hindus are divided into castes and that the castes form a system in which all hang on a thread which runs through the system in such a way that while encircling and separating one caste from another it holds them all as though as it was a string of tennis balls hanging one above the other. But this will not be enough to understand caste as a dynamic phenomenon. To follow the workings of caste in action it is necessary to note one other feature of caste besides the caste system, namely class-caste system.

The relationship between the ideas of caste and class has been a matter of lively controversy. Some say that caste is analogous to class. Others hold that the idea of caste is analogous to class and that there is no difference between the two. Others hold that the idea of caste is fundamentally opposed to that of class. This is an aspect of the subject of caste about which more will be said hereafter. For the present it is necessary to emphasize one feature of the caste system which has not been referred to hereinbefore. It is this. Although caste is different from and opposed to the notion of class yet the caste-system as distinguished from caste—recognizes a class system which is somewhat different from the graded status referred to above. Just as the Hindus are divided into so many castes, castes are divided into different classes

of castes. The Hindu is caste conscious. He is also class conscious. Whether he is caste conscious or class conscious depends upon the caste with which he comes in conflict. If the caste with which he comes in conflict is a caste within the class to which he belongs he is caste conscious. If the caste is outside the class to which he belongs he is class conscious. Any one who needs any evidence on this point may study the Non-Brahmin Movement in the Madras and Bombay Presidency. Such a study will leave no doubt that to a Hindu caste periphery is as real as class periphery and caste consciousness is as real as class consciousness.

Caste, it is said, is an evolution of the Varna System. I will show later on that this is nonsense. Caste is a perversion of Varna, at any rate it is an evolution in the opposite direction. But while Caste has completely perverted the Varna System it has borrowed the class system from the Varna System. Indeed the Class-Caste System follows closely the class cleavages of the Varna System.

Looking at the caste system from this point of view one comes across several lines of class cleavage which run through this pyramid of castes dividing the pyramid into blocks of castes. The first line of cleavage follows the line of division noticeable in the ancient Chaturvarna system. The old system of Chaturvarna made a distinction between the first three Varnas, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the fourth Varna namely the Shudras. The three former were classes as the Regenerate classes. The Shudra was held as the unregenerate class: This distinction was based upon the fact that the former were entitled to wear the sacred thread and study the Vedas. The Shudra was entitled to neither and that is why he was regarded as the unregenerate class. This line of cleavage is still in existence and forms the basis of the present day class division separating the castes which have grown out of the vast class of Shudras from those which have grown out of the three classes of Brahmins, the Kashatriyas and Vaishyas. This line of class cleavage is the one which is expressed by the terms High Castes and Low Castes and which are short forms for High Class Castes and Low Class Castes.

Next after this line of cleavage there runs through the pyramid a second line of class cleavage. It runs just below the Low Class Castes. It sets above all the castes born out of the four Varnas i.e. The High Castes as well as the Low Castes above the remaining Castes which I will merely describe as the 'rest', This line of class cleavage is again a real one and follows the well defined distinction which was a fundamental principle of the Chaturvarna System. The Chaturvarna System as is pointed out made a distinction between the four Varnas

putting the three Varnas above the fourth. But it also made an equally clear distinction between those within the Chaturvarna and those outside the Chaturvarna. It had a terminology to express this distinction. Those within the Chaturvarna—high or low, Brahmins or Shudras were called *Savarna* i.e. those with the stamp of the Varna. Those outside the Chaturvarna were called *Avarna* i.e. those without the stamp of Varna. All the Castes which have evolved out of the four Varnas are called *Savarna Hindus*—which is rendered in English by the term caste Hindus. The 'rest' are the *Avarnas* who in present parlance spoken of by Europeans as Non-Caste Hindus i.e. those who are outside the 4 original castes or Varnas.

Much that is written about the Caste System has reference mostly to the Caste-System, among the *Savarna Hindus*. Very little is known about the *Avarna Hindus*. Who are these *Avarna Hindus*, what is their position in Hindu Society, how are they related to the *Savarna Hindus*, are questions to which no attention has so far been paid. I am sure that without considering these questions no one can get a true picture of the social structure the Hindus have built. To leave out the Class cleavage between the *Savarna Hindus* and the *Avarna Hindus* is to relate Grimm's Fairy Tale which leaves out the witches, the goblins and the ogres.

The *Avarna Hindus* comprise three divisions (1) Primitive Castes, (2) Criminal Castes and (3) The Untouchable Castes. The total population of persons comprising these three classes is by no means small. The population of the Primitive Tribes in India according to the Census of 1931 is stated to be about 25 millions. The total population of persons listed as Criminal is somewhere about 4½ millions. The total population of Untouchables in 1931 was about 50 millions. The grand total of these three comes to 79½ millions.

What is the relation of the *Savarna Castes* to the *Avarna Castes*? The cleavage between the *Savarna Castes* and the *Avarna Castes* is not uniform in its consequences with the result that the position created is not easy to grasp. The line of the cleavage running between the *Savarna Castes* and the *Avarna Castes* produces a relationship between the *Savarna Castes* and the two *Avarna Castes*—the Primitive and the Criminal Castes which is different from the relationship which it produces between the *Savarna Castes* and the last of the *Avarna Castes* namely the Untouchables. This line of cleavage between the *Savarna Castes* and the first two of the *Avarna Castes* is a cleavage between kindred and friends. It does not make intercourse on respectful terms between the two impossible. The cleavage between the *Savarna Castes* and the Untouchables is of a different kind. It is

a cleavage between two non-kindred and hostile groups. There is no possibility of friendly intercourse on respectable terms.

What is the significance of this line of cleavage? On what is it based? Although the cleavage is definite the basis of it has not been defined. But it seems that the basis of cleavage is the same as that which exists between the Dwijas and the Shudras. Like the Shudras the Avarna Castes are composed of unregenerate people. They are not twice born and have no right to wear the sacred thread. This also brings out two facts which otherwise are lost sight of. The first fact is that the difference between the Shudra Castes of the Savarna division of castes and the Primitive and the Criminal Castes of the Avarna division is very thin. Both are touchables and both are unregenerate. The difference is one of cultural development. But although the cultural difference between the two sections is great—as great as there is between a highly cultured and the unmitigated barbarian—from the point of view of the orthodox Hindu, the difference between them is one of degree. It is to mark this difference in culture that the Hindus invented a new terminology which recognized two classes of Shudras, (1) Sat-Shudras and (2) Shudras. Calling the old body of Shudras as Sat Shudras or cultured Shudras and using the term Shudras to those comprizing the Primitive Castes who had come within the pale of Hindu Civilization. The new terminology did not mean any difference in the rights and duties of Shudras. The distinction pointed out those Shudras who were fit for associated life with the Dwijas and those who were less fitted for it.

What is the relation of Avarna Castes to one another? Do they exist as mere collection of castes or have they any class cleavages? They are certainly mere collection of Castes. There are certainly lines of class cleavages running through this block of Avarna Castes. Whether there is a line of class cleavage running between the Primitive Castes and the Criminal Castes may be a matter of some doubt. Perhaps the line is faint. But there is no doubt that there is a very definite a very broad and a very emphatic line of cleavage between the Primitive Castes and the Criminal Castes and the Untouchables. The former two have a very clear notion that they are the higher classes and the Untouchables are the lower classes within this block of Avarna Castes.

The discussion carried on so far reveals three characteristic features of Hindu Social Organization: (1) Caste, (2) A hierarchial System of Castes and (3) A Class System cutting into the Caste System. Undoubtedly the structure is a very complicated one and it is perhaps difficult for one who has not been woven into it to form a true mental picture of the same. Perhaps a diagramatic presentation may be

helpful. I give below one such representation which in my judgment is calculated to give the idea of this social structure of the Hindus.

A Caste Hindus Savarna Castes	C Caste Hindus Savarna Castes	E Non-Caste Hindus Avarna Castes	G Non-caste Hindus
<p style="text-align: center;">Class I</p> <p>High Castes</p> <p>Dwijas—Castes evolved out of the three Varnas, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishas.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Class II</p> <p>Low Caste</p> <p>Shudras—Castes evolved out of the 4th Varna namely Shudras.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Class III</p> <p>Primitive Castes</p> <p>Criminal Castes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Class IV</p> <p>Untouchables</p>
B	D	F	H


*This diagram is left blank in the MS.—Ed.*

This diagram presents a Class-Caste-System of the Hindus and is so drawn as to give a true and a complete picture of their social

organization. This diagram brings out several of its important features. It shows that there are two divisions of Hindus (I) Savarna Hindus and (II) Avarna Hindus. It shows that within the first division there are two classes of Castes (I) Dwijas and (2) Shudras and within the second division there are two Classes of castes (1) Primitive and Criminal Castes and (2) The Untouchable Castes. The next thing to note is that each caste is enclosed and separated from the rest—a fact which is not shown in the diagram—each of the four classes of Castes is grouped together and placed within a class enclosure. This enclosure segregates a class of a Caste and marks it off from another class. A class of Castes is not as organized as a Caste is. But a feeling of Class is there. The third thing to note is the nature of partitions used for the enclosures. They are of various strengths, some are permanent, some are temporary. The partition between the Dwijas Castes and the Shudras Castes is not a partition at all. It is only a curtain. It is not a partition at all. It is intended to keep them aloof. It is not intended to cut them as under. The line of cleavage between the Shudra Castes and the first two of the Avarna Castes is a regular partition. But it is both thin and small. It can be jumped over. The partition separates but does not cause severance. But the partition between these three classes and the Untouchables is a real and irremovable partition. It is a barbed wire fence and its intention is to mark a severance. To express the same thing in a different way the first three enclosures are so placed that they are one within the other. The first partition between the Dwijas and the Shudra Castes may be removed the two become the occupants of one enclosure instead of two separate enclosures. Similarly the second partition may be removed in which case the Castes which are Dwija, Shudra, Primitive and Criminal form one whole—if not a single whole—occupying one single enclosure. But the third partition can never be removed. Because all three Classes of Castes are united on one issue namely that they shall not be *one* (*This space is left blank in the typed copy of MS. The word 'one' is introduced by us.—Ed.*) with the Untouchables as one united body of people. There is a bar sinister, which serves the Untouchables from the rest and compells them to be apart and outside.

The diagram shows the different Classes of Castes one above the other. This is done to mark the hierarchy which is an important feature of the Caste System. I have described the two classes of the Savarna Castes as High Class Castes and Low Class Castes. But I have not described the other two classes of Avarna Castes as lower Class Castes and lowest Class Castes. In a sense this would have been correct. In general social esteem they are no doubt lower and lowest in



status. But in another sense this would not be appropriate. The terminology of high, low, lower and lowest assumes that they are parts of one whole. But are the Avarna Castes and the Savarna Castes parts of one whole? They were not. The Primitive and the Criminal Castes were not in contemplation when the plan of the Varna System, the parent of the present caste system, was laid. Consequently nothing is said about their status and position in the rules of the Varna System. But that is not the case with the Untouchables. They were within the contemplation of the Varna System and the Rule of the Varna System with regard to the Untouchables is very clear and very definite. The rule as laid down by Manu the Hindu Law giver is that there are only four Varnas and that there is not to be a fifth Varna. The reformers who are friends of Mr. Gandhi in his campaign for removal of Untouchability are endeavouring to give a new meaning to the statement of Manu. They say that Manu has been misunderstood. According to Manu there is no fifth Varna and therefore he intended to include the Untouchables into the 4th Varna namely the Shudras. But this is an obvious perversion. What Manu meant was there were originally four Varnas and four they must remain. He was not going to admit the Untouchables into the House the ancient Hindus had built by enlarging the Varna System to consist of five Varnas. That is what he meant when he said that there is not to be a fifth Varna. That he wanted the Untouchables to remain out of the Hindu social structure is clear from the name by which he describes the Untouchables. He speaks of them as Varna—Bahyas (those outside the Varna System). That is the difference between the Primitive and Criminal Castes and the Untouchables. There being no positive injunction against their admission in Hindu Society they may in course of time become members of it. At present they are linked to Hindu Society and hereafter they may become integrated into it and become part of it. But the case of the Untouchables is different. There is positive injunction against their incorporation in Hindu Society. There is no room for reform. They must remain separate and segregated without being a part of the Hindu Society. The Untouchables are not a part of the Hindu Society. And if they are a part they are a part but not of the whole. The idea showing the connection between the Hindus and the Untouchables was accurately expressed by Ainapure Shastri the leader of the orthodox Hindus at a Conference held in Bombay. He said that the Untouchables were related to the Hindus as a man is to his shoe. A man wears a shoe. In that sense it is attached to man and may be said to be a part of the man. But it is not part of the whole for two things that can be attached and detached can't be said to form parts of one whole. The analogy though is none the less accurate.