

## **DECLARED AS UNTOUCABLE**

**Autobiography of M.H. Panhwar  
(First ten years of my life seventy chapters, 250 pages.)**

At age of eight, one summer morning, I was ready to go to school when, I saw a handsome man sitting with my grand fther on the edge of platform inside our buffalo barn. He was slim, tall, fair coloured and had a medium size black beard, finely trimmed. He wore spotless white shirt, trousers and turban, which was unusually wrapped on his head, giving him look of an educated and respectable man, Maulavi, Hafiz, Waiz, or a middle class gentleman. I went, shook hands with him, as I did with every guest, showing manners of a cultured boy. He had a smile and wished me good luck with my studies.

As soon as I left, my mother, uncle's wife and aunt (father's sister) called me and told me "You should not have shaken hands with him. He is a Balo or Bhangi. He sweeps streets, collects human excrete. Now wash your hands before you go to school." Ghulam Rasool boy of neighbouring house came to know and before I reached the school every one knew it. The boys forced me to sit on stool near the backwall. When the teacher came he snubbed all the boys, who said that I should take bath seven times to purity myself. During noon break, they took me to the watercourse, a familiar place where all boys took bath daily. I took bath on upstream side of watercourse, while they were on down stream side. I was loaned a towel to bathe come out, dry myself and re-enter water seven times. All done I ran home and told them that I had polluted all water and they were also impure, as they were on down streams side.

From that day onwards I thought about the whole affair. This man called Balo or Balishahi or sweeper or untouchable was a well-to-do person and had come to buy our best buffalo, which my grand father had sold him for rupees two hundreds and ten. I could not understand that he was infeiror to any one in the village at least physically or culturally. I came to know that he was a public servant incharge of Purano Dero sanitary works and was boss of dozens sweepers, employed in that port town.

This was my first rebellion against illtreatment of untouchables by both the Hindus and Muslims alike and since then I started believing in equality of man, irrespective of race or religion or social status. With such open talks, my colleagues in schools and colleges called me socialist, communist and infidel and smilignly, I never protested.

In post-Pakistan era, I have engaged untouchables (sweepers, Kohlis, Bhils and Menghawars) as my cooks, drivers, chawkidars and household servants, although many of my other employees won't eat or drink even from utensils used by them. I have benefitted as they are more docile, obedient, reliable, responsible, honest and respectful than Muslims labourers, and they are willing to work at lower wage-rates for longer working hours than the latter.

The hatred against labour class originated with Aryan classification of castes according to professions introduced around 800 BC. The educated people were Brahmans and they tried to monopolise on higher learning, which included religious texts, medicine, astronomy, astrology, magic, divine powers, witchcraft, snake charming, forecasting the future etc. The next to Brahman in Khatriyas, hierarchy were whose profession was to fight wars, protect and extend borders and control the state with help of Brahman ministers or advisors, administrators and petty official. The state employees for various functionaries were also Brahmans. The third category of people were the trading class and land owners were considered as the Vaishyas, who paid taxes, to run the Government. The last was labour class, who worked with their own hands as farmers, skilled and un-skilled workers. The castes may have come down from Mohenjo Daro Civilization and introduced by Aryans later on. The caste system has survived to this day. Before the British rule of Sindh, Syeds were the ones who got higher education to enter in ruling Mirs service. The Jagirdars mostly Balochis were Khatriyas, who fought wars for Mirs. Business class and zamindars were Vaishyas and rest were working class. If by chance any one from the lower class became Maulavi or learned person, he was immediately admitted and respected as Syed and was called Pir, Makhdoom, Pirzada and was involved in Government functionaries. Some was the case with Brahmans who had admitted learned Sudras to their class. British broke the monopoly of Brahmans, Syeds, Makhdooms and Pirs, by opening education to every one and employment without any regard to caste, creed and colour. The untouchability as I witnessed 20 years ago, is continuously being reduced due to the lingering British influence and there is no possibility returning to old system.