CHAPTER - VI

GANDHI’S CONCEPT OF HARIJAN AND DURJAN

Indian social structure always tends for a change due to the emerging new trends in caste system. In each society the social structure is kept intact due to the stratification of the society. The structure of Indian society consists of many elements, among which caste system is the most important. Many sociologist opined that caste is rooted in the culture of the society and therefore caste is rooted in the informal social control of ‘mores’.

The ‘Mores’ are regulators of behaviour. The mores represent the norms of modes of behaviour in society. The term ‘Mores’ is derived from the Latin word ‘mos’, which stands for customs. And just as customs cannot be violated by any individual, there is a great feeling of horror about violating a ‘more’. Mores have no universal character but at the same time are conservative and have been called as the agents of conservatism.

In ancient India untouchability was socially approved. Untouchability is a common example for ‘mores’. The practice of untouchability is constitutionally abolished by Article 17 and prohibited. Yet the caste Hindus practice it in some forms in many places. In India we have not yet been able to abolish untouchability which is fixed in the mores.

The constitution of India provides for equality of status and the principle of social, economic and political justice to all citizens irrespective of caste, creed, sex etc. In fact, these are given through an Article in the fundamental rights which are justiciable. Untouchability
was abolished by Article 17 and made this practice punishable according to law. According to Articles 14 and 15 the equality before law was a fundamental right. The Act was passed in 1955 providing for punishment against the practice of untouchability.

**Gandhi’s Approach to Untouchability:**

Even in his childhood Gandhi had realised that untouchability was curse and a blot on Hindu society. In Gandhi’s period, the traditional Hindu society involved the Six basic caste distinctions:

1. To follow parents occupation.
2. To marry within caste, sub-caste.
3. Not to eat together with anyone who is lower in caste than himself.
4. People who are not touched by the caste Hindus.
5. People who are not allowed to participate in political affairs.
6. People who are not permitted to enter Hindu temples all over India.

The social life of the Harijans differs from place to place in India. Generally they are in degraded position in the Hindu way of social life. Traditionally social avoidance and distance is maintained between Harijans and caste Hindus. Thus they suffer from the following serious social disabilities:

- They are denied access to wells, roads, schools, hotels and such other public utilities.
- They are not permitted to read religious books, perform worship in temples and participate in religious functions.
- They are handicapped in political activities.
- They have no freedom to choose their occupation according to their wishes.
Harijans suffered from disabilities of social, religious, economic, and other political problems. Numerous early social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Sri Narayana Guru, E.V.R. Periyar and Bharathiyar etc., have attempted to give upliftment to the Harijans. Some Hindu social reform movements and Christian Mission organisations had undertaken the welfare of Harijans.

‘The All India depressed class league’ and ‘scheduled caste federation’, manned purely by Harijans themselves, struggled for the legislative measures demanding equal political and economic rights and social privileges for the Harijans. They have attempted to get reservation of seats in services and public organisations and separate electorates for Harijans. The British government also paid heed to these demands of special privileges in Government services and other institutions.

The following resolution was unanimously passed on behalf of Gandhi in the meeting of his representatives held in Bombay on 25th September 1932, Pandit Malaviyaji being in the Chair: “This conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and that those who have been so regarded hitherto will have the same right as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and all other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest Acts of the Swaraj parliament if it shall not have received such recognition before that time”. “It is further agreed that it shall be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities now imposed by custom upon the so-called
untouchable classes, including the bar in respect to admission to temples”¹.

“Harijan Day” observed, according to Gandhi, “should be wound up by a general meeting of both savarnas and Harijans to pass resolutions, pledging the meeting to the removal of untouchability and emphasizing the desirability of permissive legislation regarding temple entry. Where public opinion is favourable, public wells and private temples should be opened to Harijans”².

Despite his conservativism about Indian social structure in general, even as a youngster Gandhi never accepted untouchability. In a letter to a Christian friend, he outlined briefly the history of his feelings about it.

Before he came under the Christian influences in South Africa, when he was yet a child, he used to laugh at his mother for making him bath if he touched any untouchable. Then in Durban he was prepared to turn Mrs.Gandhi away from the house because she would ill treat his untouchable friend Lawrence³.

When Gandhi was practicing law in Durban, one of his clerks, an untouchable Christian was also his room-mate. The pots used by him was cleaned by Gandhi himself because his wife who used to clean the pots of others, considered filthy to do so for that particular untouchable clerk. Mrs. Gandhi even chided Gandhi with tears, for all such Gandhi’s activities⁴.

It had been said that Gandhi wrote and spoke more about untouchability than any other subject. Many of his statements about it
are available in a series of topical volumes issued by his publishing house in Ahmedabad. The one that appeared within his lifetime are entitled “The Bleeding Wound (1932), “My souls Agony” (1932), and “Untouchability” (1944). Those published after his death – “The Removal of Untouchability” (1954) and “For workers against Untouchability” (1954).

Almost throughout his political career in India, Gandhi used strong and characteristically eloquent language on this subject. In 1920, he considered untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity, and an arrogant assumption of superiority. It has served no useful purpose and it has suppressed a vast numbers of the human race, for no sin or fault of them. Gandhi also rejected the scriptural authority that untouchability claimed to have.

Though untouchability is now a thing of past except in some very remote places; it prevailed throughout India when Gandhi arrived India from SouthAfrica in 1915. “On the Anvil”, a chapter entitled in his Autobiography gives valuable points against Gandhi’s anti-untouchability mind-set. A few excerpts:

Gandhi on receiving a letter from an enlightened Hindu social worker seeking Gandhi’s permission to admit a honest untouchable in his Ashram, counselled his friends and gave admission to that untouchable family that included Dudabhais his wife Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi, then as a toddling babe.

The ashram was founded in order to serve and if necessary to die in the service of Truth. Within a month of the foundation of the ashram, Dudhabhai and his family arrived at the Ashram, that led to the signal
for a storm breaking upon the placid atmosphere of the ashram. Things came to such a pass that Kasturba (Gandhi’s wife) had to leave the ashram for protesting against the admission of an untouchable Dudhabhai.

Gandhi could endure to be separated from all the world besides, but not from Magenlal, Gandhi’s nephew. He too packed up his things. On Gandhi’s suggestion, Magenlal and his family went to Madras (Chennai) and learned more of weaving from an untouchable for six months. They mastered the art of weaving and after mature consideration also washed their hearts clean of untouchability.

Thus the internal storm blew over. But there was an external storm of the discontinuation of financial assistance from the chief patron. A sum of rupees 13,000 came from an unexpected source. Thus keeping Dudhabhai in the ashram was not so severe-ordeal as it might well have been. Then ‘Untouchable’ families came to the ashram freely and lived in it. Dudhabhai’s daughter Lakshmi became the full member of the family.

Having Lakshmi in his mind for his own adoption, Gandhi in 1933 recommended that reform-minded Hindus adopt Harijan children. But normal religious beliefs were however very different. When in 1925, Gandhi asked a temple trustee that it is fair to exclude a whole section of Hindus, because of their supposed lower birth, from public roads that can be used by non-Hindus, by criminals and bad characters, and even by dogs and cattle?, the temple trustee replied in the negative that, they are reaping the reward of their karma. “Okay!”, said Gandhi and asked whether they (the untouchable) are worse than even criminals and
beasts?... the trustee replied again, they must be so, for otherwise God
would not condemn them to be born untouchable.

Gandhi scolded Desai and asked him to repair his folly of visiting
Puri temple by going to the temple with a band of Harijan Satyagrahi
Pilgrims. In 1932, Gandhi said that the caste Hindus are responsible for
whatever bad habits are to be observed among the Harijans. The so
called higher castes have deprived them of the facilities for keeping
themselves clean and also the incentive for doing so. Scavenging and
tanning are no more dirty than other occupations. But they are carried
on in a dirty manner. Both these occupations can be done in a perfectly
healthy and clean manner.

The noble aspect in the profession of scavenging is stressed in
Gandhi’s words, “Every mother is a scavenger in regard to her own
children... only a ceaseless effort can raise these downtrodden from
degradation and Hinduism purified.”

In 1934, without Gandhi knowledge, Kasturba, his wife visited
Jaganath Temple at Puri, and Gandhi undertook fast for three days.
When Gandhi came to learn that his secretary Mahadev Desai and his
wife were visiting and worshipping in a such discriminating temple, he
fell ill and told Desai what was the use of writing articles on
untouchability and not carrying the message to his own home?

In 1934, Nearly 20,000 people died in an earth quake and
Gandhi tried to explain the reason for the calamity thus, “that it may
because of the wrong that we have done in the name of religion
declaring thousands of our countrymen are born untouchables.”
In 1938, Gandhi prayed and requested others to pray that untouchability get perished. If this doesn’t happen, it is far better that Hinduism perished\textsuperscript{12}.

For many centuries, untouchables have not been allowed access to the public temples. This claimed right of the majority to override the intention of the founder (of the temple) was not understood by correspondent (1933). Thanking for this letter Gandhi appreciated that argument and said Hinduism has never been a rigid faith\textsuperscript{13}.

When three social workers who were ostracized for allowing the ‘untouchables’ to drink water from their glasses, sought legal redress against the fellow villagers in 1933, Gandhi said that what the villagers have condemned as a sin was a meritorious deed for him. so, it was the duty of the three young men to change the hearts of those villagers lost in darkness and at the same to teach the Harijans the habits of cleanliness. They should not under no circumstances took the matter to a court of law\textsuperscript{14}.

In 1934, for a question from a Sanatanist that is it still advisable even if a minority of single man’s objection is overlooked to make the Harijan-temple entry and will it not be an undue interference with the right of worship which belongs to the sanatanists from time immemorial? Gandhi replied that like the one solitary sanatanist having the right, the majority also have rights. The minority is free to build a temple for itself. Or otherwise a special hour may be set apart so as to enable it to offer worship free from the intrusion, whether of reformers or of Harijans\textsuperscript{15}.  

152
Discussing with a Harijan worker at Bardoli in 1942, on the question of seeking the co-operation of the Harijans, and if so, up to what extent, Harijans should not be allowed to invade the residence of the Varna members, Gandhi said all the Harijans should invariably be asked to observe all the ordinary rules of cleanliness and they should be taught to assert themselves firmly and non-violently, and the Varna members may be gently reminded that injustice cannot last for ever.

On a question of admission of Harijan boys to student hostel, where all Non-Harijan Hindu boys are also admitted, Gandhi replied that care must be taken to see that the hostel is not exclusively for a particular community or section of Hindus.

In 1931, Gandhi claimed himself to be the sole representative of the vast mass of the untouchables, and disputed Dr. Ambedkar’s claim to speak for the whole of the untouchables of India.

Gandhi and Ambedkar had differed on the issue, whether separate constituencies should be established for the untouchables, as had already been done for the Muslims in 1909 and the sikhs in 1919. In 1932 Gandhi went for a “fast unto death” in prison to protest against the ‘separate constituency’ proposal and practice of untouchability. His fast was ended after a compromise was worked out with Ambedkar and a group of conservative Hindu leaders signed a document saying that henceforth the untouchables will have the same right as other Hindus to the use of public wells, public schools, public roads and other public institutions. This initiatives led to opening of public road and temples etc. for Harijans.
In the “Poona pact” Gandhi and Ambedkar worked out a compromise about the rules for the elections. During Gandhi’s prison term around 1932, his political journal, ‘Young India’ had ceased publication. Later he founded a new journal, entitled ‘Harijan’, a term which he used thereafter instead of ‘untouchable’. Then in 1933, he underwent a nationwide campaign for ‘Harijan uplift’. This was a multipurpose tour having Poona pact’s substance of outwardly abolition of untouchability in mind, partly of fund raising to pay for schools and student hostels, and partly of keeping the Harijans within the national anti-imperialist movement. Having ‘Poona pact’ as the beginning followed by launch of the ‘Harijan’ journal, Harijan Sevak Sangh and Harijan tour, Gandhi pursued his passionate goal of emancipation of Harijans.

In 1931, he said the ‘untouchables’ should... be regarded as honoured members of society, and should belong to the Varna for which their occupation fits them. In 1933 Gandhi said that his goal was clear. It was not to have Harijans as a separate body to Hinduism or outside it. And he shall be satisfied with nothing less than complete removal of untouchability. And again in 1937, Gandhi said that one born as a scavenger, must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever he likes. For, a scavenger is as worthy as a lawyer or president and that is Hinduism.

In 1933, Gandhi, recommended the reform – minded Hindus to adopt Harijan children. When he said this he had Lakshmi in his mind for his own adoption. A temple trustee’s remark that the untouchables are reaping the reward of their Karma, made Gandhi further thoughtful towards this issue.
In 1933, Gandhi said that his goal was clear. It was not to have Harijan as a separate body of Hinduism or outside it. And he shall be satisfied with nothing less than complete removal of untouchability. On January 27, 1935 Gandhi urged the removal of untouchability by legislation. In 1948, when the constituent assembly adopted the Article 17, which stated that untouchability was abolished and its practice in any form was forbidden, shouts of Mahatma Gandhi Gi Jai! (i.e. victory of Mahatma Gandhi) reverberated the Assembly Hall.

**Harijan Sevak Sangh:**

The word ‘Harijan’ was spiritual form of ‘untouchable’ coined by Mahatma Gandhi. ‘Harijan’ means “children of God.” He believed that, God was the friend of the friendless, help of the helpless, and the protector of the weak.

The ‘**Harijan Sevak Sangh**’ was founded on September 1932 in the wake of Gandhi’s epic fast at Yeravada Prison, Pune resulting in the historic Poona Pact. The history also gives an account of the rehabilitation work done by Gandhi and the Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Despite Gandhi’s strong opposition the British Government made a "Communal Award" published on the 17.8.32 providing for Separate Electorate for the Depressed Classes (Untouchable). Gandhi immediately wrote to Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister that he had proposed to undertake a "Fast unto death". Later Gandhi in Yeravada, Pune began his fast on the 20th Sept, 1932, for a supreme sacrifice. An agreement was reached amongst the contending leaders of both side proposing Joint Electorates by the Caste-Hindus and Depressed Classes. And the number of seats allocated to the Depressed Classes was raised from 71 in the British Award to 148
seats. This New electoral agreement which the British Government was forced to accept came to be known as the Poona Pact. Finally, the Poona Pact was signed between Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, as the principal signatory on behalf of Caste-Hindus and B.R. Ambedkar on behalf of the untouchables. Many other eminent leaders did also sign. Gandhi broke his fast on 26th Sept.1932 in the presence of the great poet Rabindranath, Parchur Shastri and others. Since then Sept’-24 is being observed as ‘Harijan Day’ as this was the day the Poona pact was signed.

The Poona Pact was followed by a Conference of Caste-Hindus in Bombay on 25 Sept. 1932 that passed a resolution with contents as: "This conference resolves that henceforth, amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and those who have been so regarded hitherto shall have the same rights as the other Hindus in regards to the use of public wells, public roads and other public institutions. This right shall have statutory recognition at the first opportunity and shall be one of the earliest acts of the Swaraj Parliament, if it shall not have received such recognition before that time."

In 1933, Nov-7, Gandhi started his historic ‘All India Harijan Tour’ from Wardha and ended in Varanasi on 2.8.34. It covered 20,000 Kms (12,500 Miles). During Gandhi’s Harijan Tour for Nine months, around 600 Temples were thrown open to the untouchables. Besides some New Temples were built for the worship of Harijans.

As a result, Harijan welfare made great progress in several provinces. The caste Hindus helped in the removal of disabilities and
the newly formed provincial Government passed legislation giving Harijans the equal rights.

Harijan Sevak Sangh was the organization that was born in the sequence of such historical events. The organization formed immediately after the Poona Pact was first known as "Anti untouchability League" and the "Servants of untouchables’ society". But afterwards, the name was changed finally to ‘Harijan Sevak Sangh’ with a constitution prepared by Mahatma Gandhi himself. In 1932, H.S.S was founded in the wake of Gandhi’s epic fast at Yeravada jail, Pune, resulting in the historic Poona Pact. The H.S.S, Delhi was registered in 1934 - 35 as a Society under the Societies Registration act of 1860 (Act 21 of 1860). Some of the State branches were also like wise registered under the Society Registration act of the respective States.

All affairs of the Sangh was managed by a Central Board which included representatives from the state or Regional Boards. The president of the Central Boards played the pivotal role in the affairs of the H.S.S. The ad-hoc Boards of the Sangh met in Bombay on 9.10.32 attended by G.D. Birla as president and Thakker Bapa as secretary. The Central Board was constituted with G.D.Birla, Lala Sriram, Purushothamdas Thakurdas, Lalubhai, Somaldas, Dr.Ambedkar, M.C.Rajah, Ambalal Sarabbai and Thakkar Bapa. The first formal meeting was held in Poona on 3.12.32 and the second meeting too was held in Poona on 2.7.1933. Besides the members, the meeting was attended by Rajaji, Shrimathi. Rameshwari Nehru, Mathurdas Tirkamdas and others. This was prior to Harijan Tour. Then the Central Board met in Delhi amidst the ‘Harijan Tour’ of Gandhi during 11-13 Dec-1933. The Head Office of the Sangh was located for some time in
the Birla Mill in Delhi. In 1935 it was shifted to Harijan Niwas at the present campus.

The Campus of H.S.S. at Kingway camp, Delhi was given the name of Harijan Niwas by Mahatma Gandhi. This is the most important place associated with the life of Mahatma Gandhi. He used to stay in the campus of H.S.S. whenever he was in Delhi from 1932 to 1947. Hence people were used to call this 'Gandhi Ashram'.

The H.S.S. established a number of Primary Schools throughout the country where Harijan children were groomed for entry into regular institutions. By the year 1934 the number of such schools rose from 497 in the previous year to 909. The total strength reaching 24,824. By the next year 1935, the number of schools increased from 909 to 1298. The number of students went upto 34,273 boys and 2816 girls. In the field of vocational training too, the sangh established a number of institutions in different parts of the country. After 1937 when Congress Governments were installed in various provinces of India the educational work for Harijans was taken over by the Provincial Governments for sustainable growth.

At present, the H.S.S runs 21 Ashram schools and hostels for specialized service for Harijan children throughout the country aided by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment Government of India. The idea of Mahatma Gandhi was to relieve the Harijans, who were engaged in unclean jobs like carrying night soil by head load, by providing them with modern tools and apparatus, so that the job does not remain unclean any more. This was known as the Bhangi Kasht Mukti programme.
Now - a - days, some Harijans also successfully has contested in general seat in some provinces. Harijan MLA'S were appointed as Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries. Sri Jagjeevan Ram, an ardent worker of H.S.S from the very begining of his career, ultimately rose to the position of the Deputy Prime Minister of India. Sri.K.R.Narayanan, then president of India, himself availed of the munificence of H.S.S. in his childhood, which gave him the opportunity to stand on his own legs.

According to Gandhi the name "Harijan", which is a substitute for Asprishya (untouchable), dalita (depressed) or for other untouchables, has sacred associations. Gandhi felt that the real remedy for this curse lies in chasing away the feeling of inferiority. If only every Hindu would deliberately shed his superiority and in practice becomes a Harijan, then all shall become true "Children of God", as the word "Harijan" really meant. Gandhi said, earlier he had adopted the word ' Suppressed' to represent the untouchables. Then he found a good Indian (Hindu) word in 'Harijan' as suggested by his friend Swami Narasingh Mehta, taken from the song of one of the best of our saints. And the adoption of the name 'Harijan' was not a matter of choice, it was one of compulsion. Gandhi said that so long as the suppressed classes exist, it will be neccessary to have some designation for them. Gandhi said Indians in South Africa were popularly distinguished from the rest as "Coolies" or "Sammies" which were more degrading. On the contrary the word 'Harijan' is a honourable and fitting name to designate the untouchables.

Gandhi further said that if it was open to anyone to be classified as untouchables, he should, most decidedly advise caste Hindus to declare themselves as such and to live also as such. And that will be a substantial and organic method of amalgamating the caste - Hindus and
Harijans into one body. Gandhi said about a suggestion that was made by one of his Harijan friend who advised Harijans to adopt names that will never signify an untouchable, and this as the best way of getting rid of untouchability.

According to Gandhi no nation can really progress without religion. He cannot believe that there can be any religion that regards it a sin to touch any particular community. Gandhi asked that if removing excreta is a sinful act, then what it will be if the same is done by one's mother.

Gandhi said that even the sinners who commit it secretly are not treated as untouchables. Even the secret sinners should not be despised, but pitied and helped to rid themselves of their sinfulness. And untouchability among Hindus is a denial of the doctrine of Ahimsa. And the caste - Hindus are responsible for the evils among the untouchables.

Gandhi termed untouchability as a ‘hydra - headed monster’. Not all the stories told in the Puranas are good. There are some most dangerous also. According to Gandhi it is not necessary to follow even all the sinful activities executed by the characters of Purnas. The fact that there is untouchability even amongst untouchables reveals its all pervading effect. Gandhi viewed that the occupation of untouchables was not only desirable but a necessity for the well-being of the Society.

According to Gandhi rendering justice to the untouchables does mean nothing less than redeeming a over due debt. Gandhi also believed that India achieving freedom without removing this stain of untouchability will make the untouchables for worse under that Swaraj.
Gandhi did not believe in the mere removal of physical untouchability, but in the removal of all distinctions of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth. Gandhi said the word ‘Daridranarayan’ is a larger form that includes all Harijans. But the word Harijan does not include all the poor of all other caste - Hindus, who are not branded as out - caste. And so the priority and focus are given for the emancipation of the Harijans, who are branded as out castes.

In January-27, 1935, Gandhi addressed a meeting organised under the auspices of All India Harijan Sevak Sangh in Delhi. He spoke at the meeting of central assembly members. In his speech he urged removable of untouchability by legislation.

**Harijan Welfare after Gandhi:**

After Ambedkar becoming the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the constitution, Article 17 was effectively formulated by Ambedkar, Munshi and others in 1948 stated that, ‘untouchability’ is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. The constituent assembly adopted this article amidst shouts of Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai! (i.e Victory to Mahatma Gandhi).

After the conclusion of framing our Indian constitution, in his concluding speech Dr. Ambedkar said: “In this day of January 26th 1950, we are entering into a life of contradictions. There will be equality in our constitution or policy. But there will be no social & economic equality”. This is the real trend that is continuing till now.
The constitution of India adopted in 1950, banned observance of untouchability in any form and declared it an offence. One cannot forget the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar in having these provisions (Article 17, 46, 220, 332 and 335) incorporated in the constitution.

In 1950, Untouchability was legally abolished. And how the downtrodden was given equal rights in temple entry and all other rights can be ascertained by the following chronological facts:

1833 - The social disabilities removal Act
1925 - Abolition of untouchability declaration by Travancore government.
1933 - The untouchability Abolition Bill
1935 - M.C. Rajah Bill for removal of disabilities
1936 - Travancore proclamation
1938 - The Bombay Harijan Temple workshop etc.
1939 - Temple entry law implemented.
1950 - Untouchability abolition Act.

All these Act / Bills rendered justice to untouchables by enforcing certain ‘anti-untouchability’ laws. Despite the passing of all these stringent laws, they remained in the need of a sincere and proper implementation. And this resulted in the prevalence of untouchability continuously. In this context, to reprieve the untouchables a new law was passed in 1989 - Protection of Civil Right & Prevention of atrocities Act.

The ‘Bhoodan’ and ‘Gramdan’ movement of Vinoba Bhave, a disciple of Gandhi contributed to some extent for the upliftment of the Harijans. Gandhian institutions at present are the hub of a social uplift
movement participated by a host of affiliated organizations throughout the country.

Through the 73 and 74 constitutional amendment Act – 1992, efforts have been particularly directed towards increasing the facilities for social welfare and ensuring adequate representation of women and SC/ST people in the public services. In some states SC/ST have been able to assert themselves and they hold appreciable position in village panchayats.

The constructive programme and Gandhian approach based on Ahimsa and Satya need to be continued till untouchability ceases to exist on the face of India.

**New forms of Untouchability:**

Here a preliminary attempt is made to list out some of the areas where new forms of untouchability is still practised in some way or other.

1) Though in certain departments like railways and postal and telegraphs as well as in parliament and State assembly seats the Reservation policy has been carried out in full, there are number of significant areas where Reservation policy has not been implemented even partially.

2) As in government (public) sector, there is no binding rule for reservation in private and other sectors. With increasing privatization and decreasing government employment opportunities, Reservation policy is loosing its meaning. This is true about Religious institutions, Non governmental voluntary sectors, Mass media, etc.,
3) Reservation policy is only a way and method to include all, at all levels. The spirit of Reservation policy is not there in many cases.

4) The oppressed and depressed classes need positive support, nourishment, encouragement and care. But the upper caste oriented Schooling, Privatization and other systems directly or indirectly discourage them enforcing further oppression on them.

5) The police system lacks neutrality and it tends to be discriminatory towards the SC & ST people. The police tend to treat the SC & ST people violently and without human dignity. Caste bias of the police system needs to be noted. Cases are not booked, even against the oppressors’ atrocious acts.

6) Separate and alienating housing schemes for the SC & ST people only reinforce the process of discrimination further.

7) Exploitation, misuse and abuse of SC & ST children and young people seem to be widely prevalent.

8) SC & ST people are often associated with lower level, mean, filthy and low paid jobs.

9) SC & ST people face innumerable problems to get houses on rent or for purchase. Their meager land holding are under threat. They face difficulties while buying land.

10) They are not often allowed to participate in public auction on par with others. In Electoral Politics SCs & STs are prevented by caste–Hindu politicians from contesting in general constituencies. Even in reserved panchayats oppressed group representatives are not allowed to perform independently. In some cases after elections they were even
eliminated. The 1997 Mela Valavu Murder is a case in point. Sabotaging of the election process for ten years in reserved panchayats like Pappapatti, Keeripatti, Nattarmangala and Kottakaatchiyendal of Madurai and Virudhunagar District are also the relevant points that should be taken in to consideration

11) In some reserved panchayats meant for SC & ST women, even after such women becoming elected representatives, they are made to dance to the oppressing or dominant caste – Hindus’ tunes.

12) Even the little property of the SC & ST people are drowning by their habit of drinking, heavy interests and the vicious cycle of poverty etc.,

13) The financial schemes to help the SC & ST people are not implemented in the true spirit or otherwise it is availed & enjoyed by binamis.

The new forms of untouchability practices continuous to be a major problem in India. It manifests in the form of psychological violence and SC & ST atrocities etc., Though untouchability has been removed officially and legally, it continues in many forms and it is major aspect of structural violence in India.

To understand the contemporary dynamics of untouchability, we need to identify and understand its new forms. Some of the old forms of untouchability such as open discrimination in temples and other public places have gone to some extent. Reservation policy, SC/ST upliftment programmes such as educational support, employment opportunities etc have helped the Harijan. But the problems of untouchability yet to be solved in its full.
To Sum Up:

Gandhi would say in all humility but with perfect confidence that he has taken up this Harijan movement in no spirit of antagonism to any other religion or community. He has never believed anyone to be his enemy. He believed that the removal to untouchability from Hindus’ heart will have an inevitable influence not only in India but on the whole world. Gandhi believed that God of Truth and Justice can never create distinctions of high and low among his own children.

Gandhi said that he and his fellow reformers firmly believed untouchability an evil. In these great movement there cannot be room for compulsion or violence; patience and gentleness should be exercised until the Sanatanists hearts melt.

For Gandhi in his own words, Harijan service will be the heart and breath of his life. He said that he could live even without the daily bread, but could not live without doing Harijan service for one single minute.

Gandhi believed that by means of lifting the Harijans from their abject position, he could also lift himself. Further he said that if Hindus were freed from the evil of untouchability, all the corroding distinctions, not only between Hindus, but also between Hindus and Non-Hindus, will disappear as if by a magic touch (Miracle).

Gandhi applauded the ‘Bhangis’ service to the society for centuries uncomplainingly. This service also went unrecognized by the caste-Hindus. Gandhi said that they (caste-Hindus and himself) should behave "even unto these last" members of the society as they would behave to themselves.
“Every one should be his own scavenger”, said Gandhi for the removal of the social evil and curse of untouchability. Gandhi compared the service of Bhangi with that of a mother’s. A Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. Further Gandhi said that a Bhangi can exist without a Brahmin but a Brahmin cannot exist without a Bhangi. If the Bangis had been given due recognition as equal to that of a Brahmin, their (Bhangis) inhabitants would have freed themselves from the ravages of a host of diseases caused by uncleanliness.

In Gandhi’s opinion an ‘ideal’ Bhangi should have a thorough knowledge of the principles of sanitation, that presupposes a scientific knowledge of the requirements of his profession. He should consider it only as a sacred duty and should not dream of amassing wealth out of it. Bhangi is probably the most useful member of society. Theirs is a noble profession. Nobler than the professions known as "honourable". Even the 'so-called' "honourable" profession may easily become dishonourable but that of Bhangi will never become dishonourable. In Gandhi's opinion the sweepers and scavengers hold the key of the health of every area (City) in their pockets.

Gandhi made an analogy between the Bihar calamity and calamity caused by untouchability. The former damaged the body and latter damaged the soul. And the Bihar calamity is a reminder at least to purify oneself. Gandhi said that, if anyone looks upon the Harijans with contempt he does the same to me. Gandhi requested the Gujaratis to admit Harijans into their fold and so that only he can consider them capable of maintaining Swaraj.

Gandhi said that the Gujarat incidents of preventing Harijans from having access to temples and wells had made him to think of shifting his
residence to Harijan quarters. Gandhi said that there is no political motive behind his Harijan work. If this issue is approached with a political motive the Harijan service would fail and Hinduism would get damaged. Gandhi further said that the only motive that guides him in working for the Harijan cause is to see Hinduism purified of the curse of untouchability.

Gandhi took pains to explain the reason for adopting the word 'Harijan' to indicate the 'untouchables'. He had its root from a poet saint of Gujarat forwarded to him by a correspondent. As all the religions of the world described God pre-eminently as the friend of the deprived groups, Gandhi considered untouchables, the most deprived group in India, to be rightly called as ‘the children of God-Harijan.’ Gandhi said that he is a rationalist in spirit and as the untouchables have to be separately designated, at least for a short-term, he chose this inoffensive name of ‘Harijan’. This shall continue until the extinction of untouchability, then the word 'Harijan' too will disappear.

According to Gandhi the name “Harijan”, which is a substitute for Asprishya (untouchable), dalita (depressed) or for other untouchables, has sacred associations. Gandhi felt that the real remedy for this curse lies in chasing away the feeling of inferiority. If only every Hindu would deliberately shed his superiority and in practice becomes a Harijan, then all shall become true “Children of God” as the word, “Harijan” really meant. Gandhi said earlier he had adopted the word ‘Suppressed’ to represent these untouchables. But this word Harijan was suggested by his friend Swami Narasingh Mehta, taken from the song of one of the best of our saints. And the adoption of the name ‘Harijan’ was not a matter of choice, it was one of compulsion. Gandhi said that so long as the suppressed classes exist, it will be necessary to have some
designation for them. Gandhi said Indians in South Africa a popularly distinguished from the rest as “Coolies” or “Sammies” which are more degrading. On the contrary the word ‘Harijan’ is a honourable and fitting name to designate the untouchables.

Gandhi further said that if it is open to anyone to be classified as untouchables, he should most decidedly advise caste Hindus to declare themselves as such and to live also as such. And that will be a substantial and organic method of amalgamating the caste – Hindus and Harijans into one body. Gandhi said about a suggestion that was made by one of his Harijan friend, who advised Harijans to adopt names that will never signify an untouchable, and this as the best way of getting rid of untouchability.

According to Gandhi no nation can really progress without religion. He cannot believe that there can be any religion that regards it a sin to touch any particular community. Gandhi asked that if removing excreta is a sinful act, what it will be if the same is done by one’s mother.

Gandhi said that even the sinners who commit it secretly are not treated as untouchables. Even the secret sinners should not be despised, but pitied and helped to reform themselves of their sinfulness. And untouchability among Hindus is a denial of the doctrine of Ahimsa. And the caste – Hindu are responsible for the evils among the untouchables.

Gandhi termed untouchability as a hydra–headed monster. Not all the stories told in the Puranas are good. There are some most dangerous also. According to Gandhi it is not necessary to follow even
all the sinful activities executed by the characters of Puranas. The fact that there is untouchability even amongst untouchables reveals its all pervading effect. Gandhi viewed that the occupation of untouchables is not only desirable but a necessity for the well-being of the Society.

According to Gandhi rendering justice to the untouchables does mean nothing less than redeeming a overdue debt. Gandhi also believed that India achieving freedom without removing this stain of untouchability will make the untouchables for worse under that Swaraj. Gandhi did not believe in the mere removal of physical untouchability, but in the removal of all distinctions of superiority and inferiority attached to birth. Gandhi said the word ‘Daridranarayan’ is a larger form that includes all Harijans. But the word Harijan does not include all the poor of all other caste – Hindus, who are not branded as out – caste. And so the priority and focus are given for the emancipation of the Harijans, who are branded as out castes.
In 1931, Gandhi wrote, “The ‘untouchable’ to me is, compared to us, really a ‘Harijan’ – a man of God, and we are ‘Durjana’ (men of evil). For whilst the ‘untouchable’ has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the short comings and faults that we lay at the door of these untouchables. It is still open to us to be Harijana ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them”

So, around 1946, in order to make the caste-Hindus realize their sin against untouchables, Gandhi advocated inter-caste marriage as a tool and also as the only way to achieve his goal of ‘all become Harijans’

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