Chapter - V
CHAPTER -V

HECTIC POLITICS: FROM RESURGENCE TO RESERVATION ISSUE

The Justice Party emerged as a non-Brahmin political party in mid 1910s. It acted against the policies and programmes of the Brahmins dominated Congress and Home-Rule League. The newspapers of the Justice Party highly criticized the demand for home rule thus: "Home Rule is Brahman Rule. Let the Dravidians Beware"\(^1\) and the non-Brahmins branded Annie Besant as an "Irish Brahmin" as she was backed mostly by the Brahmins of Madras. To mobilize mass support, the non-Brahmin leaders supported the civic rights demands of the Depressed Class people and participated in their conferences. The non-Brahmin Manifesto, the aims and objectives of the non-Brahmin movement highlighted the prevailing political situation in Madras Presidency and also served as guidelines for the justice party.\(^2\)

Failure of Justice Party

The Justice Party won the election of 1920 with the support of Depressed Classes. This fact was indicated in an address by M.C.Rajah, a prominent leader of the Depressed Classes thus: "It was we the Depressed Class people who helped the caste-Hindus to secure communal representation. It was our hearty co-operation with them that they were able to convince the democratic people of England of the undemocratic nature of political and social Brahmins. Let not the caste-Hindus forget the simple formula that the caste-Hindus with the Depressed Classes form the non-Brahmin community and Democratic Party and that the caste-Hindus without the Depressed Classes form

\(^1\) Dravidan, Madras, 23 November 1917, p.3

\(^2\) Frontline, Chennai, 20 June 2003, p.98.
a mere oligarchy". However, the sad factor was that when the Justicites assumed power, the social movement initiated by them was relegated. Those veterans, who fought for civic rights to the Depressed people hitherto now settled themselves in arm chair politics. The death of T.M.Nair was a great loss in 1919 to the Depressed Class people. His death also left the Justice Party without a proper leader who was acknowledged by all. The party was almost in the hands of the power mongers. Owing to the prevailing illiteracy among the backward and Depressed sections, the caste-Hindus benefited much from the communal reservations of jobs initiated by the Justice Ministry. While the reservation of jobs and other recruitment policies of the ministries were done secretly in the Secretariat in Madras, unnoticed by the majority of the population. There were a few leaders among them who highlighted the non-beneficiary nature of the Communal Government Orders for the Depressed Classes. Realising these handicaps, when the Depressed Class leaders represented the Madras Government, the Governor of Madras initiated a number of administrative, economic and social measures for the uplift of the Depressed Classes through the office of the Labour Commissioner. However, the British were afraid to involve in the issues related to civic rights, for such measures were considered equal to affect the interest of the caste-Hindu non-Brahmins who constituted their power bases in Madras. The predominance of the non-Brahmins in the Justice Party, made M.C.Rajah and R.Srinivasan to leave the Justice Party and took along with them a large number of Depressed class people. Also the resolution of the Justice Party for the admission of the Brahmins into it was against the principles of the non-Brahmin Movement.


5. The executive meeting of the Justice Party passed a resolution regarding the admission of the Brahmins into it. (*Dravidan*, Madras, 5 July 1930, p.3.)
Depressed Class Legislators

Afterwards, the Depressed Class leaders began to fight even independently or collectively if it is necessary in the legislative forms. In the beginning there were five nominated Depressed Class members in the Madras Legislative Council M.C.Rajah, L.C.Gurusami, M.P.Kesava Pillai, M.C.Madurai Pillai and G.Vandhanam. Still the membership in the legislative council was not done in proportion to the population of the Depressed Classes who were in 1921 estimated at 6.4 million in the Madras Presidency as a whole. The well wishers and sympathizers of the Depressed Class welfare were not fully satisfied with the nomination of a few Depressed Class representatives as members of Legislative Council. They all lamented that after getting nomination too they could not achieve civic rights. In 1923, M.C.Rajah demanded a maximum number of twenty seats to be allotted to the Depressed Classes in the Legislative Council as that would, to some extent, fulfill the proportional representation to their population in the Province.\(^6\)

Due to the repeated appeals to the Governor-General to increase the seats, he sanctioned ten seats to represent the nine specified communities which were regarded 'Depressed' – N.Devendrude and L.C.Gurusami for Arundatiyas, G.Premaiyya for Adi-Andhras, P.Raman for Thiyas, M.C.Rajah, M.C.Madurai Pillai, R.Srinivasan, P.V.S.Sundaramurty and R.Veeraiyan for Adi-Dravidas. This changed environment steadily increased the interest of the Depressed Classes in Madras politics, and the conviction grew in them that political power was necessary if the injustices they had suffered were to be eliminated.\(^7\) The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha also demanded the Government of Madras to send in their members to Legislative Council as elected and not as nominated because the elected members would do more justice to their community than others. All the depressed class legislative members

\(^6\) Government of Madras, G.O. No. 1070, Law (General) Department, 27 March, 1924.

unanimously worked for the civic rights issues related to education, house-site allotments and public health of the Depressed Class people in the Legislature.

On 24 August 1924, R. Srinivasan brought a resolution in Madras Legislative Council that demanded for the Government’s announcement over the accession of Depressed people to the public pathways or roads, wells, tanks and buildings. In this regard, he wanted the Government to proclaim “by beat of tom-tom in every village in all vernacular languages that there was no objection to any persons belonging to the ‘Depressed Classes’ walking through any public road, or having access to the premises of any public office, well, tank etc.” Subsequently, the Government of Madras passed two orders, one in September 1924 and the other in January 1925. These orders declared that all the communities had the right of walking along the public roads. Corresponding to these orders, the Local Boards and District Municipalities Acts were amended to the level that those who were attempting to block the Depressed people from using public places were liable to pay Rs.100/- as penalty. Following this, in 1925, R. Veeraiyan, an M.L.C. and an effective orator and one of the spokesmen of the Depressed Classes raised a question in the Council pertaining to the denial of right to Depressed Classes to enter the Brahmin quarters in spite of the government order to permit the former to enter all the public streets. He also brought to the notice of the government in 1926 the court’s favourable verdict regarding the use of public streets, tanks and wells built and managed by Panchayats and Municipalities, by everybody irrespective of caste or religion. In spite of this court direction and in spite of pamphlets being distributed by R. Srinivasan to all members of the Council and other judgments favouring the cause of the Depressed Classes, he asked what had


prevented the government from punishing the violators of these orders.¹¹ R.Veerian also criticized the government in the Council with the statement that the government remained a silent spectator all along when the witnesses, belonging to Depressed Class, being made to stand outside the court premises regularly in Vadigapalayam village court, Pollachi.¹² Again, at the same forum, he pleaded with the government to allot a separate burial ground and provide a well for drinking water to the Depressed Class people living in a village called Madigapalayam in Wallajah taluk, North Arcot district, because the caste-Hindus in the village had refused their access to them. On another occasion, R.Veerian complained to the government that it had not taken any action against a petition given by the Depressed people of a village in North Arcot district to its District Collector, regarding the caste-Hindus refusal to the entry of Depressed people along the public pathways.¹³ The government had either replied, “no information” or “will look into the matter” to the most of such complaints. Reluctantly pursuing it, the Justice Ministry was not prepared to earn the displeasure of especially the non-Brahmin caste-Hindus who represented an important political support-base for them. The government also realized that the enforcement of such orders would be possible only with the co-operation of and change of heart among the caste-Hindus. When the government failed to enforce the orders, it seemed very easy to place the accusation on the caste-Hindus.

In 1926, the Depressed Classes in Madras came to understand that neither the British nor the Justice Party were interested in granting their demands. R.Veerian in his Presidential address given at Tenth Session of the Provincial Depressed People’s Conference held in Madras in 1926 appealed to his people not to join any party in political matter and advised them to stand on

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¹² Ibid., p.737.

their own legs and work. The Depressed Classes had been disappointed by the Justice Party, and against a background of political uncertainty that prevailed, the Madras Presidency jumped into yet another election to the Legislative Council in 1926. Unlike the two previous elections the Depressed Classes did not extend their full support to the Justice Party in 1926 election. The results of the election therefore proved unfavourable to the Justice Party. Thus, of all the Provinces of India, it was at the Madras Presidency the socio-political awakening among the Depressed Classes emerged earlier.

Corresponding to the emerging new trend, in 1926 the Government of Madras set up the Depressed Class Advisory Committee for securing the rights for the Depressed Class candidates for political and other purposes. R. Veerian, however, preferred to see the whole committee be constituted with the Depressed Class leaders for the proper functioning of the Committee.

When the 1926 election was over, eleven Depressed Class representatives were given the opportunity of being members in the Madras Legislative Council which had a total strength of 135 members. Subsequently, to the happiness of the Depressed Classes in Tamil Nadu, a long standing desire of them was fulfilled with the Government of Madras in their nomination of M.C. Rajah as a member of the Imperial Legislative Assembly in 1927. He was the first representative from South India representing the Depressed Classes in the apex legislative body of the country.

**Role of Self-Respectors**

The era of E.V.R witnessed a movement against the practice of caste system, untouchability, and evil customs. He championed the cause of the Depressed Classes. His Self-Respect Movement (SRM) and his followers while


advocating the cause of the Depressed Classes practiced whatever ideals they cherished. The media organ of SRM, *Kudi Arasu* gave a total coverage to the meeting of the Depressed Class people. Even the names of the Congress and Brahmin reformers, who worked for the Depressed people, were referred to in Kudi Arasu. On 2 January 1927, at Nagapattinam in Thanjavur district, an inter-dining social-meal gathering was convened under the auspices of the Nagapattinam Self-Respect Youth Association. About a hundred people from different communities assembled and dined together. The Depressed class people served meals to the participants. Further, the Self-Respectors urged the Subbarayan ministry to initiate many social measures. As a result, facilities were made for water source to the Depressed Class residential quarters. An amount for the education of Depressed Classes was allotted to the tune of Rs.18,00,000 for two years. Public roads were laid in order to remove disabilities borne by Depressed Classes who were not allowed to use private lands. Above all, every effort was made to appoint qualified persons belonging to the Depressed Classes in the public services and in the sphere of administration wherever possible with the aim to secure jobs. In order to achieve these social measures the Self-Respectors clashed with Justicites at many critical stages. Thus, the SRM cultivated a sense of pride among the Depressed Classes which also meant a denial of superiority to the Brahmins.

The South Arcot Depressed People Conference was held in June 1929 where EVR exhorted the Depressed Classes thus: “Like you (Depressed people) the bulk of the non-Brahmins also suffer the social indignities at the hands of the Brahmins. For Brahmins, we are untouchables. So defy, deny and confront the Brahmins and Brahminism.” He said that the motto of his struggle


was “No religion, no god, no paapaan (Brahmin) and no Congress”. On 13 July 1929 under the leadership of EVR the Self-Respect Conference of the Depressed Classes was held at Neppiar Park, Madras. The SRM under his leadership considered conversion of Depressed Classes into other religions would prove to be a solution to stamp out untouchability from society. On 6 October 1929 at Cheelayampatti, in Madurai district, sixty-nine Kudumbars embraced Islam. In March 1930, near Dindigul in a village called Nambadi, 104 Depressed Class members had converted to Christianity. These events were focused in the Kudi Arasu. The SRM took such a stand that since the Hindu religion had no provision to reform itself, the Depressed Classes would not derive any benefit by remaining as Hindus. When the Second Provincial Self-Respect Conference was held at Erode on 30 May 1930 under the leadership of M.R. Jayakar, a prominent all India Harijan sympathizer, resolutions were passed in favour of equal civic rights of the Depressed Classes, free use of public tanks and temples by all, and redistribution of wealth.

**Resurgence and Confrontation**

The activities of EVR contributed for the elevation of the Depressed Classes which made a great headway upon the Depressed Classes. As a consequential outburst, resurgence took place among them to get away from the traditional caste and religious binds. The caste-Hindu non-Brahmins used to take a confrontation course frequently with the Depressed Classes when the latter asked for civic rights in violation of the existing traditions and caste restrictions. This led to outbreak of violence between them at some places in Tirunelveli, Tiruchi and Ramnad districts of Tamil Nadu. When compared to other districts of Tamil Nadu, caste prejudice and consequent oppression was

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rampant in Ramnad district. The Depressed Classes in the district were even denied permission to travel in the buses owned by caste-Hindus. In 1930, W.P.A. Soundarapandian, Ramnad District Board President and one of the front-rank leaders of the SRM had sent the following circular to all the service bus owners in the district. "It is learnt from the reliable sources that several private bus owners in the district do not permit Depressed classes People to travel in their buses. Moreover, it is believed in the fare of the tickets a condition to the effect that "tickets will not be issued to the Depressed classes people" is made and this is highly reprehensible, hence anti-social. If such practices continue in these buses unabated, the licenses to the concerned bus-owners will not be issued. Within a week after receiving this circular, the concerned bus owners should produce a sample ticket for verification in this office. On failure the bus license will be cancelled".

The veteran Depressed Class leader, V.I. Muniswami Pillai, M.L.C. alleged the British government in Madras that it had no intention to help the Depressed Classes. He reminded the government of a memorandum sent by the President of the Ramnad District Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha to the District Magistrate of Ramnad in 1930. The memorandum explained in detail that how the caste-Hindus in the district heaped repression on the Depressed Classes when they asked for minimum civic rights. It was eight months since the memorandum was submitted, but the government had not taken any action. V.I. Muniswami Pillai lamented that the Depressed Classes had enough of such experience under the hegemony of caste-Hindus of Ramnad. He criticized saying that the British government was no different from other native governments that ruled Ramnad.

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Taking every occasion, the Depressed Class representatives, strongly demanded immediate attention from the government whenever the Depressed classes people suffered ill-treatment at the hands of caste-Hindus. A.S. Sahajanandam, another veteran leader complained in the Madras Legislative Council in 1931 thus: “In 1930 at Ezhuvankottai village in Devakottai taluk, Ramnad district the caste-Hindus convened a conference; in the village the Depressed Class males should not wear clothes below their knees, desist from wearing banians, shirts, chappals and using umbrellas – the Depressed Class females should not wear upper cloth to cover their bosoms, use only earthenware utensils and not wear any ornaments made of gold and silver”.

The Depressed class people who disobeyed these orders were tied down to the trees and thrashed with tamarind sticks. Their community gathering had also been fined. Some of their cattle were taken away by them. These resolutions manifested in the murder of one Depressed Class member in March 1931 in the village. The atrocities on the helpless people spread to other districts in the absence of any governmental efforts to prevent them. M. Devadasan, another Depressed Class leader also brought to the notice of the Legislative Council, a few such incidents. He said: “The Depressed Classes in Tiruchiurappalli and Tirunelveli were not left alone. Two days before I left for Madras, I heard similar instances in which the Depressed class people were forced to put off their sandals and upper cloth and not for doing so, they were assaulted and mercilessly confined for a few days”. Such expositions made the Depressed Class members like A.S. Sahajanandam and N. Sivaraj to stress for the constitution of an impartial committee to enquire into the whole matter. Subsequently, Daniel Thomas, a member had spoken that the cruelties of the caste-Hindus were open day-light violation in the twentieth century. He recommended to the government that for preventing the recurrence of such incidents in Ramnad and other places in the Madras State, an independent
investigation should be made without any second thought. The columns of the newspapers viewed to the Government in 1931 thus: "The Government of Madras should not remain a silent spectator when the Depressed Class people's efforts to secure their rights were threatened, instead without any delay it should take severe action against the concerned faulters". Further they viewed: "All those who are born in India are entitled to secure equal civic rights under the civil and criminal law. But we cannot help remarking that in practice, the Government makes distinctions between the low caste and the high caste, more than the high caste people themselves, when the Depressed Classes are fighting for their legitimate rights and maintain justice. But when a struggle is commencing for securing such rights, the officials do not hesitate to order the Depressed Classes behave in the usual manner and refrain from demanding rights and to put them down. We wish to say that it is cruel on the part of the government to side with the high castes and prevent the Depressed Classes from securing their rights." 

At last the Government constituted a fact-finding team of council members consisting of V.I.Muniswami Pillai, Daniel Thomas and M.Devadasan to the Devakottai division to study the situation and furnish a detailed report. On the acquaintance of the real state of affairs in the Ramnad district through a field enquiry, the team submitted an elaborate report of nearly forty pages, which recommended to strengthen all castes in all affected villages; to conduct vigorous prosecutions against the caste-Hindus over all pending cases; to enforce punitive police in all affected villages; to transfer all the government officials who encouraged violence; the District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police to keep watch on the affected areas; and to open

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labour schools and refugee homes through Labour Commissioner in Devakottai division.  

On getting the report, the Government instructed Gadsen, the new District Magistrate to take prompt action. However, Gadsen effected a compromise between the two groups, whereby the caste-Hindus agreed not to insist upon any of the previous customs except the non-wearing of shirts by the Depressed class people at religious, marriage and funeral functions. As it seemed temporary measure, problem had erupted once again in 1932 and 1934. This time the American missionaries were charged by the reactionaries, that it was all because of the teachings and conversion activities, a conflict arose between the Depressed Classes and caste-Hindus living in the area. The American missionaries while converting some of the Depressed Class people in Devakottai taught them to do away with all caste rules and traditions that kept them as slaves under the tutelage of caste-Hindus. This new social development challenged the traditional attitudes and hegemonic tendencies of caste-Hindus. When problems erupted in the locality, the government, some Depressed Class leaders and their associations and also other caste-Hindus rose to the occasion.

**Intervention of Gandhi and Congress Leaders**

Frequent problems erupted between the caste-Hindus and the Depressed people at Devakottai division, over the issue of asserting civic rights. In the meantime, Gandhi as a part of his Harijan tour visited Devakottai division on 28 January 1934 and met all the people there. He apprehended that the Christian missionaries might convert the Depressed class people to Christianity and therefore he urged the Congress leaders to resolve the problem

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in Ramnad district. A.V. Thakkar, the General Secretary of All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, visited the areas. Babu Rajendra Prasad, another important Congress dignitary from Bihar also visited these places. As a next step, leaders like M.C. Rajah, T.S.S. Rajan, A. Rangasami Iyengar, L.N. Gopalasami and Kamala Sivasubramanian representing Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh tried to prevail on the better senses of the two groups. The leaders of Tamil Nadu cutting across different castes and political stands, for the first time joined together for a common purpose and goal to achieve. Ultimately, the caste-Hindus were made to agree for living together with the Depressed Classes happily as co-citizens and co-Hindus.29

M.C. Rajah, in order to safeguard the interests of the Depressed Classes, introduced a Bill in the Central Legislature in 1933. This was called “the Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act of 1933”. The Bill was intended to remove the danger of provision of section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure being used to prevent the exercise of lawful rights as members of the public or persons coming under the description of Depressed class. Unfortunately the bill was not passed, for the Government thought that the existing government orders would suffice to punish the guilty and safeguard the civic rights of the Depressed people.30 M.C. Rajah again decided to move a bill in the Central Legislative Assembly. He moved a new, modified bill known as ‘Removal of Civic Disabilities Bill’ on 31 May 1935. It sought for the repugnant of adjudication of rights and duties in civil and criminal proceedings against the Depressed people. This bill sought that no Depressed Class member should be prevented or disabled from being appointed to any public office or enjoying or having access to any stream, river, public well, tank, pathway, convenience or transport or any other service which the general public had the right to enjoy or had access to what was dedicated or maintained or licensed for


the use of general public or maintained or paid out of the funds of the state or local statutory authority.\textsuperscript{31}

**Central Legislative Bills**

As in the Central Legislature, no bill could materialize into law on the social aspect, the Tamil Nadu Congressmen determined to pilot such bills in the Madras Legislature. For this purpose, the Congress was prepared well to contest the election in order to send more Congressmen to Provincial Madras Legislature. In 1937 in the provincial election, the Congress won a resounding victory and formed ministry in Madras under the premiership of C.Rajagopalachari. The ministry showed keen interest in the welfare activities of Depressed Classes. M.C.Rajah’s private bill to remove Civil Disabilities arising out of untouchability was passed by the Legislature under the title: “The Removal of Civil Disabilities Act” on 17 August 1938.\textsuperscript{32} The Act provided equality in the social and administrative set up and provided for the removal of social disabilities among the Depressed Classes. It also declared certain social customs unjust, anti-social and irreligious. Therefore, it required that no penalty should be imposed on the Depressed class people. For the first time in the history of the Depressed Classes and in the history of legislation in Madras, violations of provisions of the Act were considered to be cognizable offences, punishment ranging from fine to imprisonment or both. The passing of this Act was really a shot in the arm of the Depressed Class’ cause.\textsuperscript{33} Eventually, the Congress government in Madras got the credit of proving itself, a saviour of the Depressed Class, not withstanding its effectiveness in enforcing the provisions of the Act. Therefore, V.I.Munisami Pillai in the second session of the South Indian Harijan Sevak Sangh’s Conference held on 20 August 1938 appealed to

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp.25.


the Government to see the provisions of the Act, were put into action. During the ministry of O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar, V. Kurmayya, the minister of Harijans affairs brought 'Madras Act XI of 1947' on 1 June 1947. It prohibited all discriminations against the Depressed class people in secular institutions like refreshment rooms, hotels, boarding and lodging, houses, laundries, hair dressing saloons and other public utility. This also prevented all dealers from refusing to sell to the Depressed class people any goods kept for sale. These two acts emboldened the Depressed Classes to assert themselves against any kind of caste-Hindu oppression thereafter. As a result, there was a phenomenal improvement in the social position of the Depressed class people on the whole.34

Thus the life of the Depressed Classes was one of ignorance, misery and long servitude. Due to the refusal of the civic rights to them their daily life and living conditions were extremely difficult. The western educated leaders of the Depressed Classes took up their cause and attempted to achieve their civic rights inch by inch. They properly utilized all the opportunities which crossed on their way to attain their utmost goal of social equality. Though the alien British officials granted them boon, the caste-Hindus stood as deadlock. It led to their prolonged struggle for civic rights, in which all the well-wishers of the down-trodden people extended their co-operation. The struggle was waged through the platform speeches, expression of sensitive thoughts through the journals and in the form of violating traditional restrictions.

Although, theoretically, civic rights had been universally acclaimed as the bed-rock of a viable socio-political system, they had been observed more in their breach than in their application. A review of human history reveals that the same was the case with all groups of civilized people from very early times. In spite of the universal recognition of civic rights, the

ideological imbecility of the ideologues who act as the advocates of competing ideologies had been obstructing the natural growth of the polity. Despite the clear and unambiguous guarantee of civic rights they remained a mirage to macroscopic majority.\textsuperscript{35}

**The Simon Commission**

In November 1927 the Conservative party Government in Britain appointed the Indian Statutory Commission comprising seven members of Parliament. This Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon, was to inquire into the working of the 1919 Constitution and to make recommendations for a future Constitution of India. The choice of an exclusively British Commission for this task and its justification on the grounds that Indians were incapable of drawing up a Constitution satisfactory to all sections of Indian society, set the stage for the political parties. It was boycotted by not only the Congress but also the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the National Liberal Federation. An All Parties Conference was convened in February 1928, in response to the British challenge, for the purpose of preparing a Constitution which would represent the national demand. The Depressed Classes were not included in the All-Parties Conference. However, they presented their views to the Simon Commission. Their representation provided valuable insights into political situation at that time.

The appointment of the Simon Commission stimulated considerable political activity of the Depressed Class organizations. Those organizations which appeared before the Simon Commission placed important demands. They are (i) the grant of effective and adequate representation to the Depressed class people in the provincial and central legislatures and in the various local self governing bodies such as the panchayats, taluk boards, union

boards, district boards, municipalities; (ii) the provision for their representation in the ministries and the Executive Councils of the Governors and the Viceroy; (iii) the extension of franchise; (iv) the necessity of political safeguards and statutory guarantees with regard to proper political safeguards of their education, their recruitment in civil and military services, and the unrestricted enjoyment of the civic rights.  

Behind this broad consensus there were notable differences. Ambedkar and the Depressed Classes Institute in Bombay considered Depressed Class to be a distinct minority and entirely separate entity from the Hindu community. They also wanted to receive reserved seats in a general electorate provided an adult franchise was granted. If it were not, then separate electorates would be necessary. On the other hand, M.C.Rajah and the All-India Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha in Madras did not draw a sharp line separating Depressed Class from caste-Hindus, and downplayed caste divisions among the Depressed Classes. They also advocated separate electorate as well as a combination of elections and nomination in order to get "the best" representatives for the Depressed people and insisted that only the Depressed class people, rather than interested or concerned members of other communities, be allowed to represent the Depressed class.

Christians took somewhat similar stands. They viewed thus: "---- in the first place we would advocate that communal elections be entirely abolished without any reservation of seats. Our second submission is that in case that is not done, and if seats are to be reserved, then we should want some indirect method of

36. Gupta, S.K., op.cit., p.244.


representation". \(^3^9\) This stance, however, was challenged in Madras where the Indian Christian Association of Madras changed its earlier position by coming out in favour of continuing the existing system of separate electorates, a position it now shared with the Catholic Indian Association of South India. \(^4^0\) They also wanted education to be considered along with property in determining who would get the franchise. \(^4^1\) However, a “Deputation from the Christian Depressed Classes” in Madras led by S.M.Gnana Prakasam wanted the Christian electorate to be merged with the general electorate, so as they might receive the same privileges as Depressed Class Hindus. \(^4^2\)

It was during the Simon Commission's inquiry that the identity of Depressed Class Christians was first raised as a political issue. In Delhi, during the All India Conference of Indian Christians (AICIC) hearing both the AICIC deputation and M.C. Rajah, took the view that Depressed Class Christians were Christians and should therefore be included in the Christian constituencies. While one member of the deputation stated that "there is no such thing, sir, as an Indian Christian Depressed Class", another pointed out that the Census Commissioner Classes them all as Indian Christians, and we do not admit any caste distinction within our community. But the tendency is that other people still Class them at any rate in the first generation has members of the Depressed Class, and sometimes enumerators too persist in putting them down as members of the Depressed Class other than Indian Christians. \(^4^3\)

The All-India Adi Dravida Mahajana Sabha and Madras Arundhati

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\(^3^9\) *Ibid.*, Sixth Meeting, Delhi, 26 November 1928, p.8.

\(^4^0\) *Ibid.*, Thirteenth Meeting, Madras, 1 March 1929, A17-A29; Fourteenth Meeting, Madras, 1 March 1929, pp.2-13.

\(^4^1\) *Ibid.*, Sixth Meeting, Delhi, 1 November 1929, A21-A26.


\(^4^3\) *Ibid.*, Sixth Meeting, Delhi, 26 November 1928, p.11.
Mahajana Sabha were in basic agreement. In their view, a Depressed Class member upon conversion ceases to be untouchable and "becomes a touchable" even in the eyes of caste-Hindus. They also denied that the same differences between caste and non-caste and Christians prevail as among caste and non-caste Hindus. On the other hand, the Depressed Class Christian deputation considered their Depressed Class identity primary, for Christian Depressed Classes live side by side with Hindu Depressed people and are treated as Depressed people by caste-Hindus and caste-Christian alike. Both were Depressed Classes and religion was not a criterion.

Behind these definitions lay some significant political choices. The AICIC and other Christian bodies in this discussion chose for their community both numerical size and the image of being a caste-free community, a more valid image in some parts of the country and within some churches than in other. M.C. Rajah and his Depressed Class associates opted to distance themselves from the Christian Depressed people rather than increase their constituency. Their only explicit reason for doing so was to discourage the British from nominating Christians to represent them. Perhaps also they, unlike Ambedkar's followers, saw themselves as Hindus and they did not wish to share what benefits the Government did offer to Depressed people with the better-off Christian Depressed people who had "The missionaries to take up their cause". On the other hand, the Depressed Class Christian deputation decided that Depressed Class benefits were more desirable than some extra seats in the legislature and seem to have assumed that representative in general constituencies would be better able to secure those privileges for them than

44. Ibid., Tenth Meeting, Madras, 26 February 1929, p.19.

45. Ibid., Fourteenth Meeting, Madras, 1 March 1929, pp.14-20.

46. Ibid., Tenth Meeting, Madras, 26 February 1929, p.19.

47. Ibid., A-7.
Christian representatives had been. In his testimony V.S. Azariah, Anglican bishop of Dornakal, a major mass movement area, indicated that while caste discrimination in the churches varied, the Depressed Class Christians' real grievance was that the Education and Labour departments of the Madras Government had been denying them scholarship aid on the grounds that as Christians, they belonged to an educationally "forward" community. "Of course these people (the Depressed Class Christians deputation) maintain, and I maintain, that religion should not become a disqualification. It is the social and economic condition that ought to determine it".

**Nehru Report**

In July 1928 the drafting committee headed by Motilal Nehru recommended his reports to the All-Parties Conference that there be no separate electorates and that only Muslims be granted reserved seats. For the Depressed people they offered no political safeguards, but an adult franchise, a declaration of rights, and special educational benefits instead. The Christian leadership, while concerned about safeguarding minority interests, was in general agreement with these recommendations, whereas the Depressed Class leadership definitely was not. The Simon Commission, which worked more slowly and issued its report only in May 1930, granted separate electorates to various minorities, including Christians. After noting that most of the Depressed Class deputation it met had favored separate electorate, it nonetheless recommended that the Depressed class people have reserved seats in the general constituency in proportion to three-quarters of the population ratio and that in special cases Governors could nominate non-Depressed Classes to represent them. However, by the time these recommendations were published, the political situation had changed considerably.

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At its annual meeting in December 1928 the INC had accepted Nehru's Report's dominion status constitution only as a compromise. If the British did not concede dominion status within a year, the Congress would then demand complete independence. When the year was up, and the British were not forthcoming, the Congress abandoned the Nehru Report with an assurance to the minorities that it would not make a constitution without satisfying them and, on 26 January 1930, took the independence pledge. In March, Gandhi began his "march to the sea" and on 6 April 1930 inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement by making salt from sea water. Others followed. Depressed class people, however, did not participate in the movement and many Depressed Class organizations condemned it. For many educated Christians it marked an important turning point, as they now moved into the nationalist camp. The British met widespread civil disobedience with both the carrot and the stick. The stick they used was stern repression. The carrot they offered was the Round Table Conference recommended by the Simon Commission. This met in London from 11 November 1930 to 19 January 1931.

**Round Table Conferences**

The First Round Table Conference was an important milestone in the history of the Depressed Class Movement, for it conferred upon Depressed class people the political recognition they had been seeking. They were represented by two of their own delegates, R.Srinivasan of Madras and B.R.Ambedkar of Bombay. Moreover, Ambedkar in particular was able to use the conference as a platform from which to make the Depressed class people's cause a national issue of major importance. He did this first in his opening speech by aligning the Depressed class people with the national demand for

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53. It is noted that the Government chose Srinivasan over the more prominent M. C. Rajah because the latter's persistent denunciation of the Civil Disobedience Movement had made him very unpopular in India. (Trilok Nath, *op.cit.*, p.120.)
responsible government, a reversal of their earlier position considered necessary because the British bureaucracy had failed to be a significant help to the Depressed people. Then he presented to the Minorities Committee a memorandum in which he listed the political safeguards be considered necessary for the Depressed class people’s protection; equality of citizenship; free enjoyment of equal rights; social boycott to become a punishable offense; adequate representation in the legislatures, services and cabinet; provision for "redress against prejudicial action or neglect of interest;" and special departmental care. The Conference, upon adjournment, agreed that under the new Constitution there would be a federation of British India and Princely States, an executive responsible to the legislature, full responsible government at the provincial level and at the centre reserved powers for the Governor-General in defence, foreign affairs, law and order, emergencies, and protection of minority rights. However, the Conference could not agree on the matter of minority representation. On this question Ambedkar and Srinivasan had been pushed from their opening position of an adult franchise and reserved seats within a joint electorate to separate electorate for Depressed people. In other respects they got most of what they had wanted at the first session of the Round Table Conference.

The Second Round Table Conference met in London from 7 September to 1 December 1931. By that time Congress had suspended civil disobedience, agreed to participate in the Conference, and selected Mahatma Gandhi as its sole representative. Prior to leaving for London, Gandhi had indicated that he would recognize only the Muslims and Sikhs, but not the Christians or the Depressed class people as separate entities. Moreover, upon the suspension of civil disobedience


Congress leaders issued statements and were engaged in activities opposing untouchability in order to validate the Congress claim to represent the best interests of the Depressed class people. This, of course, posed a direct challenge to the Depressed class people political organizations which had been trying to gain political recognition for Depressed class people as a separate and distinct group deserving of its own representatives. This conflict came out in the open at the Second Round Table Conference.

Gandhi considered India to be one nation; of which the Congress was the legitimate spokesperson. He was willing to recognize the Muslims and Sikhs as separate entities and to grant them their own representatives not as a matter of principle but as "a necessary evil". He could not do the same for the Depressed class people for two basic reasons. First, it would "create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever." Second, it would perpetuate rather than remove untouchability. Gandhi viewed thus: "Separate electorate to the 'untouchables' will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the 'untouchables' to remain 'untouchables' for ever? Well, the separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability, and when you have done it, the bar-sinister which has been imposed by an insolent 'superior' Class upon an 'inferior' Class will be destroyed. When you have destroyed the bar-sinister to whom will you give the separate electorate?"

Ambedkar, on the other hand, shared with the British the view that India was made up of diverse groups, each of which needed its own representatives. In one of his many exchanges with Gandhi, he remarked thus: "... We are not anxious for the transfer of power, but if the British Government is unable to resist the forces that have been set up in the country which do


clamour for transference of political power... and we know the Depressed Classes in their present circumstances are not in a position to resist that... then our submission is that if you make that transfer, that transfer will be accompanied by such conditions and by such provisions that the power shall not fall into the hands of a clique, into the hands of an oligarchy, or into the hands of a group of people, whether Muhammadans or Hindus; but that the solution shall be such that the power shall be shared by all communities in their respective proportions". 60

Moreover, it was quite clear from all of Ambedkar's remarks and from the resolutions of Depressed Class organisations over the past decade that Depressed people were not prepared to trust others to represent them, for others (Congress included) had done virtually nothing to warrant such confidence. Depressed class people were committed instead to self help through their own chosen representatives.

No attempt was made to work through these differences or to find a mutually acceptable solution. Gandhi offered the Depressed class people little except "trust me" or "trust Congress"; he did not even endorse Ambedkar's earliest position of reserved seats within joint electorates. 61 Instead he sought to present himself and the Congress as 'the authentic representative of the "the vast mass of the Depressed class people," first by claiming that he and Congress shared this with Ambedkar and Srinivasan: then by questioning in the Minorities Committee whether the other delegates, all nominated by the Government, in fact represented the views of their respective communities; and finally by asserting, after publication of the Minorities Pact which called for separate electorates, that "I would get .....If there was a referendum of the

60. Ibid., p.66.

61. Trilok Nath, op.cit., p.68.
Depressed people, their vote, and that I would top the poll." To all of this Ambedkar took exception. In the end the Conference adjourned and left the Prime Minister to make a decision on the communal question.

In this clash between reformist solicitude and self-assertion of Depressed Classes, Christians took independent positions. Both *The Guardian* and *The Indian Witness* opposed separate electorates for Depressed class people not only because they were opposed to communal electorates as a matter of principle but also because they, like the Hindu reformers and the Simon Commission, believed that such a separation within the Hindu-fold would perpetuate untouchability as well as diminish political influence of the Depressed Classes. K.T. Paul, the AICIC representative at the First Round Table Conference, opposed communal electorates and suggested administrative safeguards in the form of a ministerial portfolio or a statutory commission to deal with the Depressed class people and religious minorities. S.K. Datta, in his replacement at the Second Round Table Conference, also opposed communal electorates on principle and denounced the Minorities Pact. As alternatives he proposed a common electorate among all minorities, which would vary from province to province depending on who the majority in that province was, or according to shared economic interests within those minorities. On the other hand, Pannir Selvam, the Roman Catholic delegate at both conferences, favoured communal electorates and was one of the five drafters of the Minorities Pact. Bishop Azariah opposed communal electorate. Depressed Class Christians had no say at the Round Table Conferences and were not consulted by either Depressed class or Christian delegates.

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Communal Award

The British Prime Minister's Ramsay Mac Donald announcement of the 'Communal Award' on 17 August 1932 set in motion a chain of events in and through which Gandhi was able to seize and maintain the initiative as champion of the Depressed class people. The Prime Minister's solution to the problem of minority representation left over from the Round Table Conference was, like its predecessors, based on the recognition of distinct interests which would be represented through separate electorates. With regard to the Depressed class people, however, it made a special arrangement whereby they would not be separated from the Hindu community; on the one hand and yet have their own elected representatives on the other. Depressed class people eligible to vote would vote in the general constituency and then, in certain selected areas where they were most numerous, vote again in seventy-one separate constituencies of their own. This arrangement would continue for the next twenty years. Initially, the reaction of the Depressed class people to this decision was unfavorable, but their unhappiness was completely overshadowed by that of Gandhi who on 18 August 1932 wrote a letter informing the Prime Minister that he would "fast unto death" unless that provision of the reward were revoked. Since the Prime Minister was agreeable to any adjustment accepted by the Parties concerned, he left the matter to be negotiated by caste-Hindu and Depressed Class leaders.67

Poona Pact

The decision of Gandhi to undertake fast highlighted the issue over the separate electorate and joint electorate in Madras. The Forward Youth League, Madras, Adi-Dravidas of Palayamkottai, Adi-Dravida Citizens of Chidambaram, Adi-Dravidas of Nilgris, Adi-Dravidas of Mannarkudi, Adi-Dravidas of Mangalore, Adi-Dravidas of Nellore, Adi-Andhras of Guntur and Adi-Andhras of Narasapur passed resolutions

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favouring ‘Separate Electorate’ and regretted the attitude of Gandhi. In Madras, the Depressed Class people and the Adi-Dravida Mahajana sabha urged the necessity of separate electorate to the Depressed Classes.

A special meeting of the Depressed Classes was held at Palayamkottai on 18 September 1932 near the church at Samathanapuram, under the Presidentship of Devadasan. Strongly worded resolutions were passed favouring separate electorate for Depressed Classes and the attitude of Gandhi was condemned.  

Amidst strong opposition from the side of Depressed Class leaders, Gandhi ensured his fast and his fast begun on 20 September 1932 in Yerwada Jail, Poona, which was quite dramatic in its impact. Gandhi told the Hindu leaders before he began the fast that he wanted the end of untouchability and not simply a political agreement. Thus while the leaders negotiated, caste Hindus opened hundreds of temples, wells and other public places to the Depressed class people and sponsored inter-caste meals with them. It seemed that untouchability had lost its moral acceptability, a deathblow from which it could not recover. The Poona Pact was signed on 24 September 1932. The leaders like Pandit Malaviya, B.R.Ambedkar, Solanki, Srinivasan, Tej Bahadur Sapru, M.R. Jayakar, M.C.Rajah, P.Baloo, Rajboj and N.Sivaraj have signed the Poona pact with Gandhi’s consent and approved by the British on 26 September 1932, provided Depressed class people with 148 reserved seats in the Provincial legislatures and eighteen per cent of those in the Central legislatures from the general constituency. Moreover, in order to ensure that these Depressed class people chosen through joint electorates were acceptable to Depressed class people themselves. Depressed people on the electoral rolls in each reserved constituency would first elect a panel of four Depressed Class candidates from which the joint electorate would then elect one. The pact thus gave access to the Depressed class people to political power, but not the autonomy they sought.

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68. U.S.S.F. No. 804, 16 December 1932, p.35


revision of the Communal Award in hand, Gandhi ended his fast and began his anti-untouchability campaign in earnest.

C. Rajaji arrived in Madras and in response to a telegram from Malaviya, he was engaged in gathering the representatives of Depressed Classes of this province to attend the proposed conference of Hindus and Depressed Class leaders, to be held at Delhi in 1932.

In his connection, he approached N. Sivaraj, the General Secretary of the Madras Provincial Depressed Classes Federation, through N. S. Varadachari, a schoolmate of Sivaraj. As an Executive Committee meeting of this society was to be held that evening, to elect the All-India Depressed Class Federation to be held at Allahabad on the 24th, Sivaraj viewed Rajagopalachari that the matter would be placed before the committee to elicit unanimous opinion. N. Sivaraj also asked some of the Depressed class members to attend the conference.

Among those who were present at the committee meeting which was held at Srinivasan’s residence were the following; Rao Baha, R. Srinivasan, Dharmalingam Pillai, N. Sivaraj, Muthuswami pillai, C. Manikkaraj, Ponraj and Prahaspathi of Burma.

After some discussion, it was resolved that there was no objection to send some representatives in response to the invitation in order to learn the view-point of Hindu leaders on Gandhi’s decision, but that federation should not give them a mandate to accept the decision of the conference. Finally it was decided to send a message to Malaviya thanking him for the invitation, and regretting their inability to attend the conference at such short notice, and to await results. C. R who came to the meeting shortly before it ended, was informed of those decisions. He left Madras through Bombay Express on that morning.


At a public meeting in Bombay on 30 September 1932, several of the signatories of the Poona Pact formed the Anti-Untouchability League. Gandhi also received permission to carry on correspondence from jail in connection with the anti-untouchability campaign. From this correspondence and from his columns in *Harijan*, begun on 11 February 1933 under the auspices of the Servants of Untouchables Society, the ideology and programme of Gandhi in regard to the Depressed class people was focused.

What Gandhi sought was the purification of Hinduism and Hindus by the removal of untouchability. Gandhi said many times that if Hinduism was to live, then untouchability must go. Since the roots of untouchability lay in the minds and hearts of caste-Hindus, they would have to repent of this sin and atone for it through acts of love and service for the Depressed class people. Thus, as Gandhi pointed out on several occasions, Hindus were to remove untouchability not for the sake of the Depressed class people but for their own sake.73

This purely religious view of the issue had some important implications. One was that since repentance could only be a voluntary act, it must be brought on by persuasion and not by coercion. This meant that Gandhi had to place great emphasis upon propaganda. In particular, Gandhi felt he had to convince the orthodox (*sanatani*) Hindus that untouchability, as currently being practiced, was not sanctioned by the *Shastras* and was therefore a corruption rather than an integral of Hinduism. There were in the early issues of *Harijan* an unusually large number of commentaries by Gandhi and others on the relevant portions of scripture written for this purpose.74 A second implication was that temple entry received top priority in the Gandhian programme. To Gandhi, temple entry was symbolic of religious equality and

73 *Harijan*, 11 February 1933, p.2 and 12 August 1933, p.4.

solidarity from which all other forms of equality would flow. A third and very significant implication was that since this was an act of contrition, it could be performed only by Hindus towards Hindu Depressed class people. The Anti-Uncountability League which began with both a Hindu and Depressed Class membership, with Ambedkar, Srinivasan and M.C. Rajah on the Executive, had as its aim the complete removal of untouchability or any other bar in civic matters which operates to the detriment of the downtrodden people. The League will work to bring such a radical change in the outlook and mentality of the caste-Hindus that they will, as a matter of course, treat the Depressed Classes as their equal.

However, it became the Servants of Untouchability Society which Gandhi described as "a society of repentant Hindus" and from which the three Depressed Class leaders resigned. In like manner, members of other communities were discouraged from joining and service was to be confined to Hindu Depressed class people; this was in keeping with the overall aim in view and would also prevent communal misunderstandings. A final implication worth noting is that the Society stressed on attitudinal rather than structural change. In Gandhi's view, untouchability was a sin whereas the caste system was a social institution. Thus he left the caste system alone and defended varnasrama dharma; what he attacked was the notion of hierarchy and its concomitant attitudes of "high-and-lowness" and "touch-me-not-ism".

Gandhi's campaign had two major foci, the first of which involved temple entry legislation. While Gandhi was still in prison, Kelappan began fasting outside the Guruvayar Temple in Malabar in order to get it opened to Depressed class people. Gandhi persuaded him to call off the fast on the understanding that he himself would join Kelappan if the temple was not...

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75. Ibid., 2 September 1933, p.4 and 16 March 1934, p.36.


77. Harijan, 12 August 1933, p.4.
opened within three months. The temple authorities viewed their inability to open the temples to Depressed class people and stated that they were bound by law to adhere to traditional custom and so P.Subbaroyan introduced a Temple Entry Bill in the Madras Legislature which would have allowed the temple trustee to open temples provided that the majority of voters on the temple rolls approved. The question was referred to Delhi which ruled that this was an all-India matter. Thus in March 1933, S. Ranga Iyer introduced a similar bill into the Central Legislative Assembly, where it languished until 23 August 1934 when it was finally withdrawn for lack of support. The government had canvassed for opinions and by July 1934 it had received 863 opposed and only forty in favour, while the opinions of the provincial governments were unanimously opposed, mainly because they anticipated serious law and order problems if it were passed. The main objection to the bill from Hindus like Pandit Malviya, who otherwise supported temple entry, was that it constituted governmental interference in religion.

This charge Gandhi tried to refute but he also insisted that the bill should be passed only if favored by a majority of the Hindu members, upon whom he refused to bring any pressure other than persuasion to bear. It was a significant defeat but at least it had the value of inspiring similar efforts elsewhere. The Travancore government appointed a commission to look into the matter, while the Cochin Assembly passed a motion favouring entry despite

78. The Indian Social Reformer, Bombay, 1 September 1934, p.835.


80. The Indian Social Reformer, 8 September 1934, pp.24-25.


82. Harijan, 17 November 1933, p.5 and 29 June 1934, pp.164-166.

83. Indian Social Reformer, 4 August, 1934, pp.778-779. Also Harijan, 31 August 1934, p.220.
government opposition.84

The other major focus of Gandhi's campaign was the Harijan Sevak Sangh (HSS) of which he was the chief advisor and for which he was the chief propagandist. In its efforts to remove untouchability and its attendant evils, the HSS tried not only to change caste-Hindu attitudes but also to provide Depressed class people with such amenities as entry into temples, the use of wells, educational facilities and other forms of largely economic uplift. The early issues of Harijan gave a regular account of temples thrown open, wells either opened or constructed, schools either integrated or begun, and the like. The HSS also provided opportunities for Hindus to serve the cause of the Depressed class people in a variety of ways in either on honorary capacity or at a very low salary, since Gandhi tried to keep the overheads down to ten percent of receipts.85 Gandhi also indicated that gifts to the HSS were being spent on the welfare of the Depressed class people rather than on the temple entry agitation.86

These activities received a tremendous boost when Gandhi's tour began on the Sangh's behalf at Wardha on 8 November 1933 and ending, more than 20,000 km later, at Varanasi on 31 July 1934. Gandhi placed major emphasis during this tour upon winning over caste-Hindus, getting them to contribute to the work of the Sangh at least financially, and providing help as well as encouragement to those engaged in the service of the Depressed class people. In addition, he sought to convince the Depressed class people of his commitment to their well-being and to win their support for his reformist

86. Harijan, 16 March 1934, p.36.
solution to their problems, in the face of the other options available to them. His own estimation of the tour was optimistic: in spite of efforts to prejudice people against his campaign, untouchability was now on its last legs, Rs.8,00,000 had been collected for the cause of the Depressed class people, and the campaign had created increased awakening among the Depressed class people themselves.

This assessment of the situation, however, was much too optimistic. Opposition had been mounting ever since the Poona Pact. Caste-Hindus were very angry at the increased representation given to Depressed people at their expense. Moreover, as The Guardian noted at the time and more recent historians have confirmed, Gandhi's campaign had also stimulated the sanatanists to organize considerable opposition. It was they, and not the Gandhians, who won the battle over the Temple Entry Bill just a few weeks after Gandhi completed his tour. Among the Depressed class people there was little enthusiasm over the Poona Pact. Many Depressed Class members met Gandhi on his tour and tried to use his presence to good advantage. M.C. Rajah was supportive but Ambedkar and others remained critical: Gandhi's priorities were wrong (education, economic uplift and civic rights were far more important than temple entry); his methods were paternalistic and patronizing


93. *Harijan*, 16 March 1934, p.36.
(Depressed class people, not caste-Hindus, should control the expenditure of funds);\textsuperscript{94} he was not getting at the heart of the problem which was the caste system itself.\textsuperscript{95}

Christians were generally supportive of Gandhi's efforts to change Hindu attitudes to remove the disabilities from which the Depressed class people suffered.\textsuperscript{96} However, they were also convinced that Gandhi's solution did not go deep enough. On the one hand, they believed, along with Ambedkar and \textit{The Indian Social Reformer}; that only when the caste system went would untouchability disappear.\textsuperscript{97} Thus attitudinal change was not enough; structural change was also necessary. The second difference concerned the matter of religious faith. Gandhi believed that because all religions are equally true and equally false, one should stay with the religion in which one is born. Christians, on the other hand, saw religions as distinctive and thus different. While some Christians were aggressive in asserting the superiority of Christianity over other religions, others were more modest, insisting only that it had something important to offer which should not be ruled out a priori. Moreover, there was the question as to whether Gandhi's metaphor about religious faith being an indissoluble like the marriage relationship was applicable to the Depressed class people who were neither steeped in the Hindu tradition nor capable of remedying its shortcomings.\textsuperscript{98}

Both Gandhi and A.V. Thakkar, who were strongly opposed to conversion, insisted that the aim was to purify Hinduism and not to maintain

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, 22 December 1933, p.2.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Ibid.}, 11 February 1933, p.3

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{National Christian Council Review}, Delhi, August 1933, pp.395-397; \textit{The Indian Witness}, Weekly, Lucknow, 29 September 1932, p.610.

\textsuperscript{97} John. C.B., Webster, \textit{op. cit.}, p.103.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid.}, p.104.
the numerical strength of Hinduism. Therefore, they blamed conversion not so much on the Christian evangelists as on the caste-Hindus who oppressed Depressed class people or treated Hindu Depressed class people with far less respect than they showed to Depressed Class converts.\textsuperscript{99} In fact during this period, \textit{The Indian Social Reformer} sounded more combative on the conversion question than did Gandhi or A.V.Thakkar.\textsuperscript{100}

Gandhi's campaign did far more than stimulate discussion in the churches; it also forced them to face the fact that their own Depressed class converts faced disabilities similar to those of their Hindu counterparts. While still in jail Gandhi had received a letter from some "Christian Depressed class people" in Malabar who sought his help in removing the disabilities from which they suffered. In reply, Gandhi expressed his sympathy and, assured them that his movement would help drive untouchability from the churches. He also took the occasion to point out that "Christian Harijans" was a contradiction in terms.\textsuperscript{101} The same thing happened again when he was on tour in South India. The \textit{Guardian} was stung by this indictment and urged its readers more than once to combat caste in the churches.\textsuperscript{102} Other Depressed Class Christians, particularly the Roman Catholic Christians in the Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts of the Madras Presidency, held meetings to intensify their earlier demand for separate electorates within the Christian constituency, while Roman Catholic Bishops and organizations, in response to this and to the inroads the atheistic 'self-respect' movement was making among the faithful, issued statements pleading for the end of untouchability within the Church.\textsuperscript{103}

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{99} \textit{Harijan}, 22 April 1933, p.3, and 22 March 1935, p.42.
  \item \textsuperscript{100} \textit{The Indian Social Reformer}, 24 August 1935, pp.817-818.
  \item \textsuperscript{101} \textit{Guardian}, 23 March, 1933, pp.133-144.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, 15 February 1934, p.108 and 1 March 1934, p.130.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}, 27 April 1933, p.194 and 30 July 1933, p.14.
\end{itemize}
Christian leaders also requested the government to make available to Depressed Class Christians the same benefits to which other Depressed people were entitled. In this they achieved some success, especially in Madras.\(^{104}\)

Since the announcement of his fast Mahatma Gandhi had held the initiative in seeking solutions to the problems of the Depressed people. Others, Depressed Class leaders and Christian leaders inclusive, tended to respond to his initiatives by opposing, questioning, or supporting him. Gandhi had broadened his protest against what he considered an unacceptable development in the politics of numbers into a crusade for the removal of untouchability. On 4 August 1935 the Government of India Act of 1935, embodying the provisions of the Poona Pact, was passed into law and Depressed class people then had an assured share of political power. How well his crusade had succeeded was, however, by no means clear. His had been, at best, a movement for rather than of Depressed people; among caste Hindus it had both changed hearts and provoked organized opposition. Several provincial governments had issued orders to their officers which prohibited sanctioning caste disabilities.\(^{105}\) In 1934 after the end of his All Indian Harijan Tour and the withdrawal of the Temple Entry Bill, Gandhi's attention began to move towards village uplift. Thereafter, in Harijan less and less space was being devoted to the removal of untouchability and in April 1935 The Indian Social Reformer reported that the HSS anti-untouchability campaign was being merged with Gandhi's rural uplift programs.\(^{106}\)

Thus there prevailed active political activities at all India level over the issues connected with the Depressed Classes and it had its tremendous impact in the Tamil Nadu political scenario as well. The Depressed Class people realized that they had to confront the caste-Hindus for their basic rights. To attain it their leaders found that the only way was to attain proper and adequate representation in the legally constituted legislative bodies. Ambedkar and Srinivasan stood for separate electorate while Gandhi

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\(^{104}\) John C.B., Webster, \textit{op cit.}, p.106.

\(^{105}\) \textit{Ibid.}

\(^{106}\) \textit{The Indian Social Reformer}, 6 April 1935, p.501.
advocated joint electorate. The ideological struggle between Gandhi and Ambedkar was responsible for the various political events in the Indian political scenario in the early 1930s. Due to the mounting political pressure from various political quarters at last Ambedkar bowed to the Gandhian stand for joint electorate. To fulfil his promise, Gandhi made Harijan tour and supported the temple entry of the Depressed Class people.