Prior to the advent of Gandhi on the Indian Political scene, Indian National Congress which was only a ‘body of intellectuals who did not believe in mass action’, did not pay adequate attention for removal of social disabilities imposed on the Depressed Classes (as scheduled castes were called at the time) except passing a resolution to that effect in 1917 at Calcutta. In that resolution the INC urged the Indian people to remove “all disabilities imposed by custom upon the depressed classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.”¹ However, beyond passing the resolution, no concrete steps were taken to remove the bolt of degradation from the depressed classes and thus the resolution remained a dead letter.

In 1919, Gandhi appeared like a shining star in the Indian Political horizon. The magnetic force in him attracted majority of those burning with zeal to win swaraj. The old Congress did not take any active interest in the social reform movement. Stalwarts like Justice M.G. Ranade, Dewan Bhadur R. Raghunath Roa, Narendranath Sen, Janakinath Ghosal and Raja Sir T. Madhava Roa did carry on the mission of social reform as a part of Congress Programme, but its impact was negligible. When the Anti-Social Reform movement had become a militant organisation under stewardship of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Congress had to give in and it was finally settled that Congress was not to deal with any issue of social reform irrespective of its importance and

urgency.

With the advent of Gandhi in Indian political scene, the Congress got a face lift and was converted into a mass organisation, adopted the policy of non-cooperation and civil resistance. This amazing transformation made the Congress vibrant and dynamic. One of its important charted constructive programme was social amelioration. The Working committee of the Congress had passed a resolution at Bardoli in February 1922 setting out a concrete constructive programme for social amelioration. Item (4) of the said resolution concerning the uplift of the depressed classes is reproduced below:

“(4) To organise the depressed classes for a better life, to improve their social, mental and moral condition, to induce them to send their children to national school and to provide for them the ordinary facilities which the other citizens enjoy.”

There was, however, a note appended to this item. The text of the note is as under:

“Whilst therefore in places, where the prejudice against the untouchable is still strong, separate schools and separate wells must be maintained out of Congress funds, every efforts should be made to draw such children to national schools and to persuade the people to allow the untouchables to use the common wells.”

The said resolution was duly approved by the All India Congress Committee and remitted it to the Working committee for necessary action. The Working committee had passed the following resolution in June 1922, the text of which is given as under:

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2 Ibid., p. 21.
3 Ibid., p. 24.
“The committee consisting of Swami Shardhanandji, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Messrs. I.K. Yagnik and G.B. Deshpande to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the so called untouchables throughout the country and to place it for consideration before the next meeting of this committee, the amount to be raised for the scheme to be Rs.2 lakhs for the present”⁴.

Before securing the approval of the AICC to the resolution appointing the said committee, the Bardoli programme received a severe set back as not satisfied with the draft (item 4 as quoted earlier), Swami Shardhanand tendered his resignation of the membership of the committee on June 3, 1922. The All India Congress committee taking into consideration the objections raised by Swami Shradhanandji, in its meeting in Bombay in May 1923 resolved to refer it to the Working committee for necessary action. But the Working committee fully conscious of the prevailing circumstances at that time passed the following resolution:

“Resolved that while some improvement has been affected in the treatment of the so-called untouchables in response to the policy of the Congress, this committee is conscious that much work remained yet to be done in this respect and in as much as this question of untouchability concerns the Hindu community particularly, it requires the All India Hindu Mahasabha also to take up this matter and to make strenuous effort to remove this evil from amidst the Hindu Community”⁵. Dr. Ambedkar in his book “What Gandhi and Congress have done to the Untouchables” commented over that, that the Congress thus washed its hands off the problem of untouchables. He further commented that the Congress added insult to injury by relegating it to the

⁴ Ibid., p. 21.
⁵ Ibid., p. 22.
Hindu Mahasabha, a militant Hindu organisation, most unsuited to take up the work of untouchables. For obvious reasons, the Hindu Mahasabha did not come forward to undertake this work. Thus, the Bardoli programme which remained on paper for sometime had come to “an inglorious and ignominious end.” The question was whether the Congress abandoned the Bardoli programme due to insufficient funds at its disposal. According to Dr. Ambedkar, it was not so. To him, “this is clear from the fact that about an amount little over Rs.1.30 crore was collected from the public as Tilak Swaraj Fund to finance the constructive programme as drafted by the Working committee at Bardoli. As against this, a total amount of Rs.39.50 lakhs was spent for carrying out all the items of the Bardoli constructive programme which included a paltry sum of Rs.42,381/- for item (4) of the programme concerning the uplift of the depressed classes. According to Dr. Ambedkar, that exhibited gross insincerity on the part of the Congress and utter disregard for the welfare of the untouchables. He went to the extent of saying that the “Bardoli resolution was a fraud in so far it related to untouchables.” He blamed Gandhi for remaining silent when fraud was being committed on the untouchables. As Gandhi was in full commend of the Congress, it was within his power to give proper direction, which according to Ambedkar, he failed miserably. Therefore, Ambedkar was constrained to observe, “The fact is that Mr. Gandhi, besides giving utterance to pious platitude, he did not take the slightest interest in the programme of their amelioration.”

Gandhi’s explanation was that as a member of the slave nation, his immediate

6 Ibid., p. 24.
7 Ibid., p. 36.
8 Ibid., p. 38.
task of freeing his own slave, namely, the untouchable was an impossible task, for a
slave has not the freedom even to do the right thing. He further added that he had to
pay exclusive attention to the task of national non-cooperation despite the cause of
depressed classes being dearer to him.

Gandhi was of firm belief that when the untouchables were permitted to enter
the temples, the blot of untouchability would vanish. It was this belief which prompted
Gandhi to incorporate temple entry as a part of his anti-untouchability campaign which
was intensified during the post Poona Pact period.

After his release from the Yervada prison, Gandhi made fervent appeals to the
orthodox and Santana Caste Hindus to open up their hearts and treat the untouchables
as their brothers and sisters. He decided to undertake an All India tour to create
awareness amongst the caste Hindus about the urgent need for such a social reform.
Accordingly, he undertook the tour which is commonly referred to as the Harijan tour
during the period from November 1933 to August 1934 and addressed the people at
161 places and covered a distance of 12650 miles.

The burden of song Gandhi at all these places was that the Hindu temples shall
be thrown open to the untouchables precisely on the same terms that were applicable
to the caste Hindus. In his view, one single act of opening temples would open up the
hearts of caste Hindus and untouchables and consequently purify Hinduism. In this
context Gandhi observed:

"Let me proclaim it, for thousandth time, that for me, as with my co-workers,
the removal of untouchability is an indispensable religious need and the opening of
Hindu temples to Harijans, being a pure spiritual act, is an indispensable test of that
removal. It is the one thing that if done can give new life and new hope to Harijans, as no mere economic uplift can do. Economic and all other uplift will follow temple-entry as light follows dawn."9

Gandhi who strongly advocated the temple entry movement to be pursued by the caste Hindus only as expression of atonement and self purification, was totally against the satyagraha by the untouchables in realisation of this goal. He said "untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must purify themselves, they must pay the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they purged themselves of the black sin. The silent loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the hearts of the millions of Hindus; but the suffering of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the untouchables will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well intentioned and generous it may be; it will not bring home to them the sense of guilt. On the contrary, they would probably hung the sin all the more for such interference. All reforms to be sincere and lasting must be from within."10

It is interesting to note that till 1920 Gandhi was a staunch protagonist of caste and strongly defended it by saying that he considered the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential. He further remarked that "the innumerable sub-castes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion, the

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Gandhi once clarified to Rev. Stanley Jones (a Christian Missionary) that caste system was a social institution which served many useful purpose and in due course of time certain undesirable restrictions were added to it. He, therefore, did not consider the caste system sinful at all. According to him, caste system was not same thing as Varnadharma. Gandhi said that whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnadharma is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system, while there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the *Varnas* are and have always been four.

Gandhi did not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from Varnasharma to be an odious and vicious dogma. According to him, it has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability, and if it is bye-product of the caste system it is wrong in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the outcaste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or a crop because of the weeds. The outcastness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this high and lowliness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to

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11 Young India, December 8, 1920, p 3.
12 CWMG, Volume LIII, p. 258.
13 Ibid.,
him, it will resolve itself into true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary to the other and non inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.\textsuperscript{14}

Gandhi equated caste with touch-me-not-ism and he firmly believed that once untouchability was removed, the touch-me-not-ism would automatically vanish. In this context, Gandhi observed:

"Caste is a touch-me-not-institution. If untouchability goes you will find that touch-me-not-ism will go… According to my meaning of it, Varnashram has not the slightest tinge of touch-me-not-ism. It is a spiritual law just as valid as any physical law."\textsuperscript{15}

In 1935, i.e. after fifteen years, there was a considerable rethinking on the issue and this time he became a critic of the caste system but continued to be a votary of Chaturvarna in Varnadharma. He observed that, "Varnashram of the Shastras (scriptures) is today non-existent in practice. The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashram. The sooner public abolish it, the better."\textsuperscript{16} In fact, he suggested that all Hindus should voluntarily call themselves shudras, the lowest in the social scale.

As is evident from above, it has to be admitted that Gandhi’s attitude towards caste system had undergone a gradual change. The change from the admiration to condemnation of the form in which he found the caste system. However, he emphasised the need for restoration of the \textit{Varnashrama dharma}. This puzzled many.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 261.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 356.
\textsuperscript{16} Harijan, November 16, 1935, p. 316.
They could not understand how a man who was condemning the caste system had become admirer and votary of the Varnadharma. In their views, restoration of Varnadharma was nothing but continuation of cancerous caste system. Explaining the factors responsible for Gandhi’s soft corner for Varnadharma, B.R. Nanda remarked:

“The Hindu epics had given him a romantic image of the Varnadharma in ancient India, the fundamental four-fold division, in which caste were equivalent of trade guilds and birth was not the sole determinant of status and privilege. It seemed to Gandhi that the system, despite its obvious faults had served as a cushion against external pressures during turbulent periods; he wondered whether it could be restored to its pristine purity and adapted to the changing needs of Hindu society. This was the background of some complimentary references he made to the caste system, which are often quoted against him. It must, however be borne in mind that all the kind words he ever said about the caste system were about what he believed to have been in the hoary past and not what it was in his own time. Close acquaintance with the Indian social scene convinced him that the system was so flawed by superstition; touch-me-not-ism, social inequality and discrimination, that it was past mending.”

As far as untouchability was concerned, Gandhi rejected the notion that untouchability was an essential element of Hinduism. He went to the extent of describing it as a plague which it is the bounding duty of every Hindu to combat. Gandhi found that the pernicious practice of untouchability was eating into the vitals of Hinduism and was squarely responsible for its decay. Gandhi described untouchability as a form of ‘slavery’ based upon supposed religious sanction and more poisonous then

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its worst fellow. However, he made a distinction between ‘slavery’ and ‘untouchability’ and held that the later was not a matter of contract. He observed, “untouchability cannot be bought and sold.”

Gandhi opined that the colour prejudice in South Africa was nothing but a form of untouchability. He, however, felt that Indians untouchability was far more worse than the colour prejudice in South Africa. In this context, he observed:

“It is, however, worth noting the distinction between the two untouchabilities. In South Africa, it is based upon colour prejudice and has no sanction, either in religion or in law. In India, unfortunately, it is claimed by a large number of Hindus to have religious sanction of law. The Indian untouchability is, therefore, much worse than the South African. Both are no doubt equally mischievous so far as the victim is concerned. Both deserve equal condemnation. Only in India, it seems that the fight is likely to be much more harder then in South Africa.”

According to Gandhi, untouchability was opposed to reason and sentiments. He considered it as a great crime. Gandhi had severely indicted the practice of untouchability which according to him, was ‘a patent evil’. He sounded a stern warning to the society that if they cling to untouchability “Hinduism and Hindus will be swept out of existence.”

Gandhi did not see any warrant for untouchability in the Shastras. In this connection he referred to Rig-Veda which taught that God was one and all life was

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18 CWMG, Volume LV, p. 317.
19 CWMG, Volume LVI, p. 90.
20 CWMG, Volume LV, p. 386.
21 CWMG, Volume LVI, p. 66.
22 Ibid., p. 290.
created by him and born in him. Untouchability that we practice today, Gandhi said, “is the very negation of this magnificent truth.” Gandhi chastised caste Hindus for treating untouchables worse than dogs. He was anxious that the untouchability the bar sinister, should be destroyed root and branch. Delay in doing so, said Gandhi, would be disastrous and Hinduism would perish. Gandhi visualised ‘civil strife’ if untouchability was not wiped out.

Gandhi advised the caste Hindus to remove untouchability in order to save Hinduism from the danger of it being perished. In this connection, he remarked; “untouchability is a gangrenous limb of Hindu society and if measures are not taken to remove it, the society would become crippled. And a crippled society cannot go on like that, so that it will ultimately perish.”

Gandhi advised the untouchables to get rid of their inferiority complex. According to him, this inferiority complex was taken advantage by the caste Hindus and induced untouchables themselves to accept the “humiliating and absolutely irrational status assigned to them (Harijan) in society by laying down.”

Gandhi in the heart of hearts desired that untouchability shall be removed before securing Swaraj. Unfortunately, he could not put it as a precondition for winning Swaraj as he knew that there was a bitter opposition from the orthodox Hindus whose support for Swaraj was also essential. He had to rest content with his own propaganda against the caste system and untouchability through his mouth piece Harijan weekly and innumerable speeches made by him at various places that he visited during the

23 CWMG, Volume LVII, p. 167.
24 Ibid., p. 66.
25 CWMG, Volume LVIII, p. 135.
26 Ibid., p. 38.
hurricane Harijan tour.

Gandhi’s personal commitment for removal of untouchability is quite evident from his reply to a correspondent which appeared in *Young India*. The said reply is reproduced below:

“I abhor with very whole soul the system which has reduced a large number of Hindus to a level less than that of beasts. The vexed problem would be solved if the poor Harijans not to use the word ‘untouchable’, was allowed to mind his own business. Unfortunately, he has no mind or business he can call his own. Has a beast any mind or business but that of his master’s? Has Harijan a place he can call his own? He may not walk on the very roads he cleans and pays for by the sweet of his brow. He may not dress as others do. The correspondent talks of toleration. It is an abuse of language to say that the Hindus extend any toleration towards our Harijan brothers. We have degraded them and then have the audacity to use their very degradation against them.”

*Swaraj* for Gandhi meant, freedom to the meanest of our countrymen. He held that ‘If the lot of the Harijans is not improved when we are all suffering, it is not likely to be better under the intoxication of *Swaraj*. If it is necessary for us to buy peace with the Musalman as a condition of *Swaraj*, it is equally necessary for us to give peace to the Harijans before we can, with any show of justice or self-respect, talk of *Swaraj*. I am not interested in freeing Indian merely from the English yoke, I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange king Log for king Stork. Hence for me the movement of *Swaraj* is a movement of self

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27 *Young India*, June 12, 1924, p.195.
The above reply reveals and reflects Gandhi’s mind with regard to untouchability and his concern for the untouchables. As mentioned earlier, he had to carry all section of people with him for the supreme task of winning Swaraj. In pursuit of that goal he did not mind underplaying the problems concerning the untouchables. This adequately explains why Gandhi had not chosen to put the removal of caste and untouchability as a condition precedent for winning Swaraj. Nevertheless, he threw his lot with the reformers who struggled for removal of untouchability, admission of untouchables in Hindu temples and restoration of Varnadharma by eradication of the present form of caste distinctions.

Gandhi had intensified anti-untouchability work with all seriousness when he felt that the Hindu society was in the danger of being split into two water tight compartments sequel to the communal award announced by the British Premier James Ramsay MacDonald. Gandhi’s fast unto death against the separate electorates in favour of the untouchables led to a political turmoil which eventually culminated into the Poona Pact between the caste Hindus and untouchables. When the catastrophe passed off leaving behind the trail of bitterness and heartburn, Gandhi thought it fit to concentrate his energies toward the anti untouchability work. The other reason was that he was free from the Swaraj struggle due to government’s ban on such activities. However, government had lifted restrictions in favour of Gandhi’s interviews and his carrying on propaganda in connection with anti-untouchability work. Gandhi described the anti-untouchability work as “The biggest religious reform movement in India, if not

28 CWMG, Volume XXIV, p. 227.
in the world, involving as it does the well being of nearly sixty million human beings living in serfdom."\textsuperscript{29}

Gandhi refuted the notion that the untouchability was an essential part of Hinduism. He went to the extent of describing it as a ‘plague which is the bounden duty to every Hindu to combat.’ However, in 1930s he was opposed to inter-dining and inter-marriage as he felt that such things should be left to the unfettered choice of the individual. In 1935, he was totally against creating artificial little groups which would neither inter-dine nor intermarry\textsuperscript{30}. However, by 1946 there was a complete volte-face in his approach. It was in this year Gandhi had made a startling announcement to the effect that in \textit{Sevagram}, his Ashram at Wardha, no marriage would be celebrated unless one of the parties was untouchable by birth.

Gandhi repeatedly said that if the untouchability was removed, the caste system would automatically vanish. In fact, Jawahar Lal Nehru wanted Gandhi to hit out the caste system directly. But Gandhi had chosen to tackle it by eradicating untouchability in the first instance. In his conversation with Tibor Mende in 1956, Jawahar Lal Nehru recalled:

“I spoke to Gandhi repeatedly; why don’t you hit out at the caste system directly? He said that he did not believe in the caste system except in some idealised form of occupations and all that; but that the present caste system is thoroughly bad and must go. I am undermining it completely, he said, ‘by my tackling untouchability’. You see…. he had a way of seizing one thing and concentrating on it, ‘if

\textsuperscript{29} CWMG, Volume LI, p. 367.
\textsuperscript{30} Harijan, November 16, 1935, p. 316.
untouchability goes, he said, ‘the caste system goes’.”31

Undoubtedly, Gandhi waged a relentless war ‘against untouchability and advocated removal of rigid caste system. His advice for eradication of untouchability and opening of the temples to the untouchables infuriated the orthodox and Sanatana Hindus and he became their bete noire. By defending the Varnadharma the foundation of the caste-system, Gandhi had also become persona-non grata and bete noire of the untouchables too. Despite of it, it must be said that Gandhi strained every nerve to stamp out the ugly stain of untouchability from face of the society.

Even after the termination of the Epic fast of September 1932, Gandhi’s detention in Yervada prison continued. The British Government had put restrictions on his freedom to guide his followers on the political issues. In view thereof, he abstained from expressing his opinion on the question whether the civil disobedience struggle should continue or not. He sought a specific permission to undertake anti-untouchability work which was granted by the British Government.

During the period from November, 1932 to December 30, 1932, Gandhi had issued in all thirteen statements on untouchability wherein he launched a tirade against untouchability and attempted to expose the hollowness of its protagonists. The bitter opposition of the orthodox Hindus to the Harijan work prompted Gandhi to undertake an extraordinary propaganda of penance. In fact, he issued a stern warning to them that either they remove untouchability or remove him from their midst.

The journal Young India was discontinued on January 14, 1932 after the arrest of Gandhi in that month. As the anti-untouchability propaganda grew stronger, Gandhi

needed a Journal to propagate his views on various facts of untouchability and disseminate the information on the Harijan work undertaken by the reformers at his instance. Accordingly, the first number of the English edition of Harijan was published on February 11, 1933 from Poona. It was published under the aegis of the Servants of the Untouchables Society (one of the earlier names of Harijan Sevak Sangh). A.N. Patwardhan of the Servants of Indian Society was declared as printer & publisher and R.V. Shastri was its first Editor. Mahadev Desai became its Editor on April 13, 1935. It may be mentioned that during the Civil Disobedience movement in 1940, the publication was suspended. However, from January 18, 1942, the publication of it was resumed, but this time from the Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, till the press was raided on August 21, 1942 and the Journal banned. When the ban was lifted on January 10, 1946, Harijan was revived on February 10, 1946 under the editorship of Pyarelal who remained in that capacity upto February 22, 1948. Thereafter, it was edited by Kishorelal G. Mashruwala and lastly by Magnabhai P. Desai till the Harijan stopped publication in March 1956.

Since the principal aim of Gandhi’s in publishing Harijan was to propagate the ideas on untouchability and to apprise the public of the progress made in anti-restrictions on Harijans, he declared that there is no copyright of Harijan. Thus the enterprising vernacular newspaper will publish their own edition of Harijan.

True to his resolve to make Harijan weekly the mouth piece of the anti-untouchability movement, Gandhi wrote several articles, gave clarification to various correspondents and published weekly progress report of the reform movement. A host of sympathetic scholars contributed articles refuting untouchability. Gandhi had
provided a forum to his critics in the Harijan weekly and patiently argued and pleaded. This was taken up by Gandhi with a single minded devotion and dedication.

As a part of anti-untouchability campaign, Gandhi commenced his famous hurricane Harijan tour on November 7, 1933 with a visit to Ram Mandir at Wardha which was thrown open to the Harijans (name given to the depressed classes by Gandhi) recently. On the same day Gandhi had declared open a private temple of Ramdeoji, a Marwari merchant, to the Harijans. In a speech at this function, Gandhi said,

"I hold it a blasphemy to say that the creator resides in a temple where a particular class of His devotees sharing the faith in it are excluded. This will be a true temple only from this very day when it is declared open to Harijans."32

Gandhi considered that the Harijan work was essentially religious in character. He clarified that he had not taken up this movement with the spirit of antagonism to any other religion or community and he was not interested in the numerical strength of the Hindus. He warned that the Hinduism would perish if the Hindu harbour the evil of untouchability. He remarked:

"This great Hindu religion itself will perish inspite of its so called millions of followers, if its votaries persist in harbouring the evil of untouchability. Not because Untouchables can be counted by the millions, it would perish even if they were handful. Milk is poisoned and has to be thrown away whether you put a little or much arsenic in it."33

33 Ibid., pp. 220-21.
The sole object of the Harijan tour was to place the reformer’s view point before the Santana Hindus who were saturated with the notion of untouchability, believing it to be desirable part of Hinduism. Gandhi was quite confident that the reformer would be able to melt the hearts of the orthodox Hindus through patience and gentleness. He, therefore, exhorted them to get rid of the notion of high or low and appealed to them not behold the view that untouchables themselves were responsible for their own degraded position.

The Harijan work, according to Gandhi, was a religious work and, therefore, shall be done with truth, peace and sacrifice. He firmly believed that the untouchables were on the lowest rung of the ladder not because of any inherent defects in them but because they were kept down by the so-called higher castes for centuries together. He was also of the view that God had bestowed on them the same talents as were given to the higher castes and, therefore, they ought to possess the same rights, privileges and opportunities for growth. The idea of hereditary superiority and inferiority, in the opinion of Gandhi, was repugnant to the spirit of Hinduism. He considered untouchability as ‘a many headed monster’ which appeared in many shapes and form, some of them were so subtle as not to be easily detected.

The burden of song of Gandhi during the entire Harijan tour was two-fold:

1. **An appeal to the orthodox and Santana Hindus.**
   a) to give up untouchability, and

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34 Ibid.
35 CWMG, Volume LVI, p. 238.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 290.
38 Ibid., p. 299.
2. An appeal to untouchables:
   a) to get rid of the vices like drink and drugs and to maintain cleanliness;
   b) not to undertake the reform work themselves as it was the job of caste Hindus, and abstain from using force in gaining entry into the temples.

A section of the society who believed orthodox values mounted a virulent attack on Gandhi’s anti-untouchability campaign and the temple entry movement. Gandhi made it clear to that section of the society that he had no intention to destroy Hinduism. He merely appealed to them to get rid of untouchability which, according to him, had no support of Shastras. As far as the temple entry was concerned, he would not like a single temple thrown open to Harijans if the majority of the temple goers opposed it. He made it clear that the temple opened by him during his entire tour had the approval of the majority of the temple-goers. He also made it clear that he was averse to the use of force in such matters and as such was opposed to violence. In his view, “violence is impatience and non-violence is patience. Great reform cannot be introduced without great patience. In violence lies the germ of failure.”

He was a firm believer in the idea that “a change of heart is possible only in a free atmosphere.” In his view “history is replete with instances of men who by dying with courage and compassion on their lips converted the hearts of the violent opponent.” He, therefore, repeatedly advised the Harijan workers to shun violence and touch the hearts of caste

39 CWMG, Volume LVIII, p. 27.
40 CWMG, Volume LVII, p. 439.
41 Tendulkar, D.G., op cit., Volume 3, p. 3.
Hindus by their love, goodwill and brotherhood. He had a great faith in his mission as he was an irresistible optimist. Gandhi ended his tour with an optimistic note that “untouchability is on its last legs” and “whatever happens, untouchability cannot survive many years.”

One of the aim of Gandhi in undertaking the Harijan tour during November 7, 1933 to August 1934 was to collect funds for the Harijan Sevak Sangh. An amount of Rs. 8,00,000 was collected. The money so collected was utilised for the educational and welfare activities of untouchables. A brief resume of these activities is given hereunder:

(1) In the field of education:
(i) scholarships were granted for pursuing education;
(ii) maintained hostels; and
(iii) maintained separate schools for primary stage children.

(2) Provided medical aids to the sick ailing people and maintained a few dispensaries.

(3) Drinking water was supplied by:
(I) sinking new wells or installing tube wells; and repairing old ones;
(ii) and repair wells for the untouchables.

(4) A few industrial schools were opened and imparted training in various industrial crafts.

(5) Organised and supervised co-operative societies.

On September 25, 1932 the representative of the caste Hindus from all over

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India held a meeting at Bombay under the presidency of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya wherein a resolution was passed to the following effects:

“No one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth. Those who have been regarded as untouchable, will have the same rights as the other Hindus in regard to the use of Public wells, public roads and other public institutions. Granting of the statutory recognition of such rights shall be the first act of the Swaraj Parliament. It shall be duty of all Hindu leaders to secure on early removal of all social disabilities imposed on untouchables including the bar in respect of admission to temples”.

A few days later i.e. on September 30, 1932 a public meeting was convened by the Hindu leaders from all parts of India at Cowasjee Jehangir Hall, Bombay, once again under the Presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. The following resolution was passed in the said meeting:

“This public meeting of the Hindus resolves that an All India Anti-Untouchability League, with its headquarters at Delhi and branches in different provincial centres, be established for the purpose of carrying on propaganda against untouchability and that for this purpose the following steps should be immediately taken:

a) All public wells, dharmsalas, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning-ghats etc. be declared open to depressed classes.

b) All public temples be opened to members of depressed classes.

Provided that no compulsion or force shall be used with regard to (a) and

44 CWMG, Volume LI, p. 139.
(b) but peaceful persuasion will be adopted as the only means.

The public meeting of Hindus appeals to the Hindu community to collect as large an amount as possible to be used for the removal of untouchability and cognate objects and for this purpose authorise the President and Secretary to take all necessary steps.”

In pursuance of the said resolutions a society named the All India Anti-Untouchablity League came into existence on October 26, 1932 at Delhi with branches at different Provinces. Seth Ghanshyamdas Birla and Amritlal V. Thakurdas were nominated to be its President and General Secretary respectively.

In about 10 days time, Gandhi changed the name of the league to Servants of Untouchable Society. It is interesting to note that C. Rajagopalachari was averse to the league being called All India Anti-Untouchablity League. He, in particular was against the use of the expression “anti-untouchablity”. Also he did not approve of the change of name that was effected. Rajagopalachari suggested:

“I do not quite like the change of name you have agreed to for the league. ‘Servants of Untouchables Society’ is good in itself, but it means continued recognition of untouchables as such….. I would have liked ‘Untouchability Abolition League or Society’.”

Having regard to the various suggestions received from his colleagues and correspondents, Gandhi finally selected the name Harijan Sevak Sangh.

The object of the Sangh and the course of action in furtherance to the said

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45 CWMG, Volume LIV, pp. 17-18.
46 Ibid.
objective were clearly set out on January 2, 1936 the draft of which was prepared by Mahadev Desai and duly vetted by Gandhi. The object and the course of action as set out are given below,\textsuperscript{48}

The Object:

“The object of the Sangh shall be the eradication, by truthful and non-violent means of untouchability in Hindu society with all its incidental evils and disabilities, suffered by the so-called untouchables hereinafter described as Harijans in all walks of life and to secure for them absolute equality of status with the rest of the Hindus.”

The course of Action:

“In furtherance of its object the Harijan Sevak Sangh will seek to establish contact with caste Hindus throughout India and show them that untouchability as it is prescribed in Hindu Society is repugnant to the Shastras and to the best instinct of humanity, and it will also seek to serve Harijans so as to promote their moral, social and material welfare.”

Gandhi poured the anguish of his soul, when he said, “I do not want to reborn, but if I have to reborn, I should be born as untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows and sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from the miserable conditions. I, therefore, pray that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatria, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an atishudra.\textsuperscript{49}

In fact, Gandhi devoted whole of his life for the upliftment of the down trodden irrespective of the consideration of a particular caste, creed or community. Perhaps this

\textsuperscript{48} CWMG, Volume LIV, pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{49} Young India, 4 May, 1921, p. 144.
was the main difference between his and Ambedkar’s approach to the problem, who had confined himself to the cause of a group of community. Ambedkar’s own statement reveals this fact, “But I have only one quarrel with you that is, you work for the so called national welfare and not for our interests alone. If you devote yourself entirely to the welfare of the depressed classes you would then become our hero.”

But Gandhi always worked for down trodden of any community. ‘Antyodaya’, the upliftment of the least developed of any caste, community, religion was his main concern. And from Antyodaya he wanted to move towards Sarvodaya ‘The upliftment of all.’ Gandhi was so sure of this approach that he rejected the claim of Ambedkar that he represented the whole body of untouchables. Earlier also, in the Second Round Table Conference, in his speech on 15 September 1931, Gandhi claimed that the Congress represented all Indian interests and classes. He maintained; “The Congress stands for the depressed classes more then Dr. Ambedkar or his colleagues.”

Ambedkar attended the Round Table Conference as a nominated member of the British Government. On the question that who represented the depressed masses of India, Gandhi remarked that, “If there was a referendum, he would top at the poll.”

Gandhi was particularly very severe against those using castes or downtroddens for their own political purpose. ‘Hypocrisy’ and the ‘political gimmick’ had absolutely no place in his scheme of things. He was not very enthusiastic about reservation and for that he was against spoon-feeding. In fact, he wanted the depressed classes to be self-sufficient so that they are not in need of any outside help. Reservation

50 Keer, Dhananjay, Dr. Ambedkar Life and Mission (Bombay:Popular Prakashan), 1954, p. 212.
52 CWMG, Volume XLVIII, pp. 12-20.
53 Ibid., p. 179.
was not only against his personal belief but also against his whole programme of social reconstruction and regeneration. Expressing his apprehension he said on December 5, 1931, “I could not possible be a party to such reservations........ But we are told there must be all these reservations and safeguards. It would not be liberty and responsible Government, but it would be all safeguards. Safeguards would eat away the whole of Government.”\(^5^4\) He was of the confirmed view that the very purpose of the justice will be forfeited if reservation is made on the caste basis. This should be for the weaker sections of society. To him, weaker sections included people in rural and urban areas leading a life of deprivation irrespective of caste or community. In his view the backward and weaker sections were not confined to scheduled and backward classes or scheduled tribes only; but also included the poor and oppressed population of the entire country. Thus if there is a section of people among the scheduled or backward classes, who are economically sound and are not backward in any other sense except that of their caste, giving the benefit of reservation to them is not justified. Rather these privileged few may actually exploit and usurp the rights of other hapless fellows in their own castes. In a way, there may thus develop some vested interests who instead of making any serious attempt in educating these classes for generations to come, continue to demand more and more concessions for them.

Indeed to avoid such a quagmire, Gandhi favoured to provide minimum needs such as food, shelter, clothing to each and every individual. His celebrated talisman was an apt and characteristic expression of his deep devotion for the downtrodden. As he put it in his own inimitable way:

\(^{54}\) CWMG, Volume XLVIII, p. 388.
"I will give you a talisman. Wherever you are in doubt or when the self become too much with you, apply the following text. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man (of any caste, creed or religion), whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for hungry and spiritually starving millions?"55

Gandhi’s views were thus his heart felt feelings towards the cause of the most poor and backward section of the society. He never used them as a political weapon or an ideological stance and wanted them to gain their own strength to stand on their own feet. This is the crux of Gandhi’s approach towards the welfare of depressed and downtrodden classes.

55 CWMG, Volume LXXXV, p. 56.