Early history of social institutions holds out instances of social distinctions and stratifications of different kinds and degrees. One comes across discriminatory treatment directed out to a class of people and, hence, treated as inferior or sometimes even as out-castes. The different classes may have been formed on grounds of race, religion and such other factors. In India the problem of classes is seen primarily in the form of castes. According to John Gunther: "Caste is as old as India. It is the inner citadel of Hinduism. It is the institution which makes India unique, the device breaking up Indians into fixed categories that has no approximation elsewhere in the world. Every Hindu, says a recent Census report, is born into a caste and his caste determines his religious, social, economic, domestic life from the cradle to the grave." No man may leave his caste, except to be expelled. It is impossible to progress from caste to caste."¹ So "Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through

¹ Inside Asia, 1939; pp. 435-436.
the custom of endogamy." 2 The Hindu society, as pointed out earlier, is composed of four classes, which have come to be looked upon as the principle caste groups. As the legend has it, the Brahmans rose from the mouth of Brahma - the creator; the Kshatriyas from his shoulders; the Vaisyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. Such an explanation, though imaginary, indicates the relative positions of these castes. Each one of these principal caste-groups has been a 'self-enclosed unit', with a closed-door character about it. Such a character of these caste-groups could be explained only as a mechanistic process, coupled with a psychological process. Since 'caste in the singular number is an unreality' and 'castes exist only in the plural number', the Brahmans while making themselves into a caste created a non-Brahman caste.' 3 Ambedkar elucidates this statement thus:

"Castes are enclosed units and it is their conspiracy with clear conscience that compels the excommunicated to make themselves into a caste. The logic of this abdurute circumstance is merciless, and it is inobedience to its force that some unfortunate groups find themselves enclosed, because others in enclosing, themselves have closed them out, with

3. Ibid.
the result new groups ... by a mechanical law are constantly being converted into castes to a bewildering multiplicity ... " 4

He believes that in India classes have become castes through 'imitation' and 'excommunication'. The essential principles of caste in India, therefore, are "(1) unchangeable inequality based on birth, (2) the gradation of professions and their inequality; and (3) restrictions on marriage outside one's own group." 5

The caste, thereby, is a parcelling of the society into bits, whose number may go on increasing. They have also been taken as units that formed the basis in determining relations between the individuals belonging to a different group, with the accompanying social and economic ramifications. Among the several points of such relationship, the notion of 'pollution' that follows the 'touch' or 'physical contact' of a person of one group with that of the other is relevant to our purpose. This is clear from the 'Manu smriti', the chief source for understanding some of the practices which constitute an integral part of the Hindu caste arrangement. Manu, ancient Hindu law giver, must have merely codified the prevailing caste system.

4. Ibid.
The Manu Smriti refers to different kinds of 'defilements'. According to Manu, even the most normal and frequent occurrences in a family such as birth, death and menstruation and cohabitation were the chief sources of impurity. 6 To Manu, such pollution was not merely notional but was real. This idea of individual pollution in the Hindu belief is extended also to the territorial and communal pollution, for which also purificatory remedies are suggested as in the case of individual pollution. Hence the origin of the idea that the very physical contact of a person, belonging to one's own group or even family, under certain defined circumstances would lead to pollution, which would, of course, and by adopting certain purificatory remedies. No wonder the Hindu society, with such practices and beliefs, at its base, developed in itself a more serious form of Untouchability in the course of its evolution. "It is the hereditary Untouchability of certain communities." 7

The Untouchability of a number of communities within the Hindu religion is an unique institution without a parallel anywhere. The impurity that they have around them is something which cannot be remedied at all. It is of a permanent character. The Hindus who become polluted

by their touch can become pure by adopting purificatory
prescriptions. But the Untouchables as such can never
be made pure. According to this belief the Untouchables
* are born impure, they are impure while they live, they
die the death of the impure, and they give birth to children
who are born with the stigma of Untouchability affixed
to them. It is a case of permanent, hereditary stain
which nothing can cleanse. * 8

This is in contrast to the form of Untouchability
that was practiced in the non-Hindu communities elsewhere,
which was temporary and could be remedied. It was not
hereditary and a stigma that was inherited by succeeding
generations. On the other hand the Untouchability as
practiced by the Hindus, for centuries, has lead to the
virtual 'isolation' and 'segregation' of a large number
of people of their own religion. The places where the
Untouchables lived were cordoned off. They lived, not in
the same places where the Hindus lived, but in those
places meant for impure people like the Untouchables.
Gradually it led to the creation of a 'ghetto' in each
village. If the caste-Hindus lived in the village, the
Untouchables lived in the ghetto. This meant that the
Untouchable carried the badge of inferior status forever,
without any remission or redemption, either in this
world or in the next.

ORIGIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY:

It is necessary to examine the origin of this evil practice of Untouchability briefly, if we are to assess its manifestations in our national life. To a student of sociology such practices as are seen in the Hindu society pose a real challenge. Where can he find the answer to the question as to what made some people impure while some others were pure? The traditional explanation given by the Shastras is that those who are treated as Untouchables today were the Antyajas - those born or created last. An Antyaja is naturally to be an Antyavasin. So the Shastras put their abode outside the village. This was so according to the Manu Smriti also. Granting this theory to be true, it follows that it is the Shudra who is born last, whereas the Untouchable is outside the scheme of creation, accepted in the Shastras. The Antyajas were also Avarnas - those not belonging to any of the four Varnas or Castes. So the Shudra is a Savarna while the Untouchable is an Avarna, i.e., outside the Varna or the Caste system. Ambedkar does not believe that they were born last. But they were the people who lived in the Antya or at the end of the village. Hence they were called Antyajas or Antyavasins. Those who were outside the four Varnas of Manu would not live along with the Savarna people, not even with the Shudras, as Untouchables were called the Atishudras. This theory presupposed that
certain people were born Untouchables. Such a belief receives its sanction from the Hindu tenets of 'Karma'. 'Karma' is a divine process ordained as a means by which a man can expiate for his commission and omission in the previous birth and so qualify himself to be born in a better status in the next life. This belief seems to conveniently obscure the principle of social justice in the here and now, and safely relegates it to the responsibility of the 'Divine Dispenser'. Whatever station or status to which a man is born, is so because it is according to the divine ordination. Hence the Varnas were fixtures and so was the outcaste. This precluded any mobility from one caste to the one above or even a total merger or diffusion of all castes into one. This is actually a throw-back of the earlier tribal beliefs. If there is a large section of people left out of the arrangement of Manu, it is to be concluded that these Untouchables came to be treated as such only at a later stage, and they must have been once a part of the Varnas themselves. It is pointed out that the issues of the sexual union between a Shudra male with a Brahmin female become Chandalas — the impure class of the early period. As such an union violated the prescribed varna system, such issues were kept outside the varna. They were the degraded ones and hence Unapproachable and Untouchable. However, the explanation given by the Shastras is neither
scientific nor convincing. It is really a contradiction in terms, for, in the process of excluding one section of people from the recognised four varnas, one additional non-caste caste was created. It is, therefore, illogical to call them as outside the pale.

Ambedkar has his own study of the problem and comes to certain conclusions of his own, which are completely original, although it may seem novel or even speculative to others. Obviously, he does not accept the explanation of the Shastras on the point. He has examined this problem with a view to explaining the origin of Untouchability among the Hindus in his work: The Untouchables—Who were they and why they became Untouchables? The book also deals with such connected problems, as why the Untouchables lived outside the village, why did beef-eating give rise to Untouchability? etc.

Ambedkar was completely conscious of the paucity of historical evidence to establish his theory, as there were many missing links in the history of mankind, particularly in regard to the social institutions. What should an investigator do when he is confronted with the problem of the missing links? And there are quite a number of such missing links in Indian history— as testified to by Mount Stuart Elphinstone. 9 In such situations, instead

of holding up the work, believed Ambedkar, "it is permissible for him to use his imagination and intuition to bridge the gaps left in the chain of facts by links not yet discovered; and to propound a working hypothesis suggesting facts, which cannot be connected by known facts. "I must admit", says Ambedkar, "that rather than hold up the work, I have preferred to resort to this means to get over the difficulty created by the missing links which have come in my way." His arguments, however, seem to be warranted by plausibility.

The 'Broken Men':

To Ambedkar, the origin of Untouchability is to be found in the primitive tribal society, somewhere in the process of the Hindu society passing from the nomadic life to the life of a settled village community. It appears to him that while some groups had settled down with ownership of land in preference to nomadic life, there were yet others who were still nomads. The settled tribes founded the village community, which was in constant danger of attack from the nomads. In order to protect themselves against such attacks, the settled communities had to hire people who could do the duty of watch and ward. Those persons, who had not settled down, were the 'broken Men' according to Ambedkar. They were 'broken' away

10. Ibid.
from their tribe, which was a serious thing in itself. For, in the primitive society every individual "belonged to a tribe. Nay, he must belong to the tribe. Outside the tribe no individual had any existence. He could have none. Secondly, tribal organization being based on common blood and common kinship an individual born in one tribe could not join another tribe and become a member of it. The Broken Men had, therefore, to live as stray individuals ..." 11 It is these 'stray individuals' — the 'Broken Men' — who were in need of food and shelter, that were hired by the village communities to render them protection. In return for this service, the Broken Men got food and shelter from the village. They were made to live outside the village and not inside for two reasons. According to Ambedkar they lived outside the village because:

1. "According to the primitive notions only persons of the same tribe, i.e., of the same blood, could live together. An alien could not be admitted inside the area occupied by the homesteads belonging to the tribe. The Broken Men were aliens..."

2. "From the strategic point of view also it was desirable that these Broken Men should live on the border of the village so as to meet the raids of the hostile tribes. " 12

These Broken Men were not a peculiarity in India alone. They were found in other countries also, with varying degrees of disabilities. According to Ambedkar in Ireland and Wales, for example, there were such men who lived outside the villages. They were called the 'Fuidhrei' and 'Altitudes' respectively. But in other countries these 'separate quarters' of the 'Broken Men' disappeared gradually; whereas in India they did not, though they could have. In India the differences between the 'Kindred' and 'non-kindred,' 'tribesmen' and 'non-tribesmen' was perpetuated with greater emphasis and in a new form 'Touchables and Untouchables'. "It is this new factor which," according to Ambedkar, "prevented amalgamation taking place in the way in which it took place in Ireland and Wales, with the result that the system of separate quarters has become a perpetual and a permanent feature of the Indian village." 13 The Broken Men, therefore, gradually became Untouchables in India.

While discussing the origin of Untouchability in India, two important circumstances are referred to usually. They are, the 'Race' and 'Occupation', as referred to by Mr. Stanley Rice, for example. 14 Ambedkar is not prepared to accept them as valid. He believes that

in the first place, the Untouchables are not different racially from the Aryans or the Dravidians in view of the explanations given, based on the science of anthropometry and ethnology of India. Secondly, he thinks that they have not come to be treated as Untouchables, just because they performed filthy jobs. He depends upon the verses of Narada Sariti, and on the statements made in the Mitakshara of Vijnaneshwar wherein impure works, including scavenging, were assigned to the slaves. Any person, not necessarily a Shudra alone, could be a slave then. Slavery could be, of course, "in the descending order of the Varnas and not in the ascending order. " On the basis of these evidences Ambedkar asks: "If scavenging was not loathsome to an Aryan how can it be said that engaging in filthy occupations was the cause of Untouchability. The theory of filthy occupation as an explanation of Untouchability is, therefore, not tenable. " The undertaking of filthy occupations by the Untouchables and the attendant un-cleanness, became just a pretext for those who were engaged in cleaner and superior jobs to treat them as Untouchables. So they were not the source of Untouchability but only the consequences.

On the contrary, Ambedkar holds that the origin of Untouchability lies in: (a) contempt for Buddhism, and

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15. The Untouchables - who were they? pp. 67-68.
(b) contempt for beef-eating persons among the Hindus.

It seems the Broken Men were Buddhists, and on this score they were not liked by the Brahmins, and the Broken Men also hated the Brahmins in turn. As to beef-eating, the Broken Men continued to be eaters of meat including beef, when, in the course of a long evolution, the Brahmins and the non-brahmins, who were also eaters of meat including beef, gave up eating them. This radical change in the food-habits of the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins—excluding the Broken Men—was a part of the strategy adopted by these classes to establish their superiority over the Buddhists, who were also eating meat and beef then. The Brahmins did not want to put themselves merely on the same footing in the eyes of the public as the Buddhist Bhikshus. 16 So the only way for the Brahmins to beat the Buddhists was to go a step further and become Vegetarians. They not only gave up beef-eating, but made the cow a sacred animal and therefore, according to Ambedkar, "the worship of the cow is the result of the struggle between Buddhism and Brahminism. It was a means adopted by the Brahmins to regain their lost position." 17

But the Broken Men continued to be beef-eaters.

17. Ibid, p. 121.
It was not only necessary for their living, but also it was a part of their obligation to remove, and a right to get for themselves the dead cows from the Brahmins. They were, therefore, not killing a cow but were eating the dead cow which, of course, was in complete conformity with the rule of *Ahimsa*. So they were allowed to continue to eat beef, which made them guilty of sacrilege in view of the fact that the cow had come to be looked upon by Brahmins as a sacred animal, whether dead or living. As beef-eaters, the *Broken Men* came to be treated as impure, and hence Untouchables.

Ambedkar also ventured to fix the approximate date for the origin of Untouchability - in the form it came to be practiced later on - a complicated task indeed. It is a difficult task because as a social evil, besides being a religious discrimination, it was a part of the social psychology - "a sort of social nausea of one group against another group" - it must have taken a long time to come into being. On an examination of the *Manu Smriti* and the Travelogues of *Fa-hien* and *Yuan Chwang*, the Chinese travellers who came to India, Ambedkar roughly fixes the date of the origin of Untouchability in India at about 400 A.D., which must be a very rough
approximation. He emphatically holds that "It (Untouchability) is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahminism which has so completely moulded the history of India and the study of which is so woefully neglected by students of Indian history."

The following are the main conclusions he draws on the origin of Untouchability, as a result of his research into our history:

"(1) There is no racial difference between the Hindus and the Untouchables;

(2) The distinction between the Hindus and Untouchables in its original form, before the advent of untouchability, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien Tribes. It is the Broken Men who subsequently came to be treated as Untouchables;

(3) Just as untouchability has no racial basis so also has it no occupational basis;

(4) There are two roots from which untouchability has sprung:
(a) Contempt and hatred of the Broken Men as of Buddhists by the Brahmins;
(b) Continuation of beef-eating by the Broken Men after it had been given up by others;

"(5) In searching for the origin of Untouchability care must be taken to distinguish the Untouchables from the Impure. All orthodox Hindu writers have identified the Impure with the Untouchables. This is an error. Untouchables are distinct from the Impure;

"(6) While the Impure as a class came into existence at the time of the Dharma Sutras the Untouchables came into being much later than 400 A.D. (19

However, it is surprising that the argument for food-habit, left over by the so-called caste Hindu, should constitute the ground for the practice of Untouchability. It does not supply a convincing answer and justification for the practice of Untouchability. Although this might have been a fact and a contributory reason, we may still have to probe deeper for the real reason. This essentially seems to stem from the philosophy of the early Aryan and his view of the nature of man. A rigid social structure with the accepted four varnas having been first established and sanctified duly by religion and safeguarded also by deterrent sanctions for any breach, they had to stabilise these divisions by

certain prohibitive practices. We know there were prescriptive punishments, wherever and whenever the accepted caste-code was violated or breached. But for the religious sanctions against such infractions of the code, the perpetuation of the stratified society would never have been possible. Vested interests of the Caste must have played a prominent part in this scheme. If such was not the case, we could not have understood the genesis of the Caste called Chandala. Chandala, as we know, originated as a subsidiary group, outside the pale of caste comprising those who were the offsprings of prohibited union of a Brahmin woman and a Shudra man. Even the natural act of cohabitation of the sexual act between the two could constitute a serious breach of the social code. But what emerges from this is, that it is not just the personal habits of food, sex, etc., which together built-up these prohibitions of caste. Vested interests of the caste-Hindus certainly were the prime motives, which had to be protected at any cost, even if it meant that a whole section of people were to be treated as less than humans. Hence, having segregated one section of people as beyond the pale, for the reasons given by Ambedkar, they had perforce to find a religious ground to justify such a segregation. Further, impurity and pollution are not as a rule terms associated with secular ideas and profane practices. They definitely belong to the sacred or
religious domain. The very fact that a contact with a
called Untouchable was sufficient ground for pollution
or impurity confirms this. We, therefore, have to presume
that the raison d'être of the Untouchable has to be
sought in the religion and philosophy as to the nature
and view of man. It is only the force of religion which
could give permanence to a social habit for, no social
custom or practice can be immutable. They constantly
undergo changes. By building up a more scientific expla-
nation to the origin of Untouchability and by pointing
out that it has no racial basis, Ambedkar tried to
convince those who had objections for its abolition on
such grounds. He argued that Untouchability as a social
practice could be completely eradicated, once this point
was understood by its opponents. Hence the significance
and value of his study and thoughts on the origin of
Untouchability.

UNTOWHABILITY - a religious taboo

Untouchability was a disability of a religious
nature, and not just or solely a social aberration.
Religion was fully impressed to support and justify this
practice. This is further clear when we view it again t
the principle of Dharma. Dharma was essentially a
religious doctrine, translated into social action. It is
the social action or conduct or a way of life by which the
individual works out his salvation and destiny in society.
The concept of Dharma implies the principle of justice mediated equally to all men in a community, because it predicates that God is 'Just', and that all men are equal in his sight. Because it is so, it had to be qualified by Chaturvarnya, or else there would be no justification for the practice of Untouchability. Even now, with all deference to Mahatma Gandhi, the definition of Varnashrama with its acceptance of stratified society and at the same time seeking a reconciliation with social justice, remains an unconvincing exercise in logic.

It is much simpler to call a spade a spade. This is a further evidence that Untouchability could be explained only within a religious framework. It was, therefore, necessary for the Mahatma to label the community as 'HARIJANS' or 'Children of God', although in the manner of speaking he has only added to the already stratified society by one more caste namely the Harijans. Gandhi's point of view was to make the Untouchables touchable i.e., to create a new fifth caste, perhaps. John Gunther believes that "Untouchability hinges in essence on the Hindu doctrine of pollution. A Hindu is defiled, and must go through a complicated ritual of ablutions, if any person whom he considers 'unclean' touches him or his food or water; this derives from fear that such uncleanliness impedes his possibility of successful re-incarnation." 20 One more proof of this is that,

although Untouchability is forbidden by Article 17 of the Constitution of India, why does it still persist? Legal prohibitions, as we know, cannot easily wipe out religious taboos. If it were a mere social evil or aberration, a legal prohibition could have been the remedy, as even otherwise they die a natural death under the impact of social changes brought about by environment, circumstances etc. This contention is further supported by Mr. L.P. Rush Brook Williams when he says: "Yet the caste system is so deep-rooted, so adaptable and so bound up with the Hindu outlook on life that it is unlikely to disappear quickly - especially if Untouchability, the aspect on which it has been most vulnerable to attack, steadily yields to liberal ideas backed by legal sanctions." It is usual for the Indian leaders to point out to the apartheid as practiced by the West in South Africa, as if it was a justification for Untouchability in India. But the apartheid was a social phenomena for political reasons, whereas Untouchability is on a different ground. It is "Jimcrowism on a fantastic scale ", as John Gunther describes it. When we consider the sudden upsurge of the interest of the Depressed Classes, as expressed through the spokesman, Dr. Ambedkar, so vocally in the post-independence years, it is clear that on the lines of the World Religions

such as Christianity and Islam, that Ambedkar must have realised that the issue was truly religious, and hence the remedy had to be sought only in a religion. Christianity and Islam teach the 'brotherhood of man and equality of all men before God.' It was this principle of equality for the Untouchables that Ambedkar was striving at all his life, and he should have been sadly disillusioned that it still remained a far cry, in spite of writing it into the Constitution, of which he was the principal architect. No wonder, he began to survey and scrutinise which faith, consistent with the Indian political set-up, would provide the way of 'fulfilment' for the Untouchable. His natural choice was Buddhism - a faith which arose not only as a reformist movement from within the Hindu society but as a strident criticism of the Hindu religion and society.

In this context it may be worthwhile speculating fruitfully on Ambedkar's contention that the 'Broken Men' were Buddhists in those early times. Did they also, in the manner that we have been discussing, seek accommodation in the Buddhist faith finding desperately that they were up against a blank wall as long as they clung to Hinduism?
The Hindu religion and its teachings are amenable to be understood in different ways at different levels of understanding. It is mainly due to the fact that for the Hindus, religion is a matter of personal faith allowing individual practices. It has remained a matter of personal faith. It has no set of dogmas, no orthodox or accepted tradition. For example, in its Vedanta form it stresses human equality and unity of all mankind. But, on the other hand, popular Hinduism clings passionately to caste. It can speak of renunciation in one breath, as if things of this real world such as property etc., should not be pursued, being a hindrance to following the faith devoutly. But in actuality, property and power are also pursued relentlessly for profit and gain by the same devout Hindus. Hence in the very nature of the faith, there seems to inhere many contradictions, which make it difficult always to take even public utterances by prominent Hindu leaders on their face value. There always seems to be a good deal of mental reservation, same as the proverbial iceberg with one-seventh of its proportion only being visible above the surface. It is, therefore, difficult to apply any definite standard to understand political judgments.

of some of them, since they are largely conditioned by religious beliefs with all their inner contradictions. This must have been pretty obvious to Ambedkar, for he must have experienced how hard it was to deal with them since they were inconsistent in their approach to this issue every time it was posed. Political formulae formed and crystallised according to Western pattern on definite lines were, of course, quite intelligible to Ambedkar. But here he was encountering a new situation, which would not conform to well-recognised political tenets, for the simple reason that any political order or organisation for the Indian society has to take note of, not a cohesive society but a divisive and fragmental one, capable of straining even the astute political thinker.

Unity and cohesion in such a society for building up an over-arching just political society, in such a context, was, of course, unthinkable. Freedom, as a principle of empowering the different sections, would neither be equal nor uniform, especially with the outcaste, who was already burdened by disabilities of a religious nature. Therefore, the Hindu leaders, realising this inner contradiction, were only prepared for limited concessions to the Untouchable, in so far as it would still maintain the traditional society. They were activated, there is reason to believe, by the bogey that once caste
was disturbed, they would be shattering the bed-rock of Hinduism. Herein we see how Ambedkar, and the Indian National Congress were at cross-purposes in their approach.

The Hindu society within limits, despite its caste sections, had achieved a workable cohesion in so far as the secondary castes had accepted the hegemony or the primacy of the Brahmin, from which was derived the status of others. But it was, perhaps rightly feared, that the intrusion of the Untouchable would be so revolutionary as to shake the old faith to its very foundation. They would, no doubt, accept that politics was the instrument to work out justice by empowering all sections with equal freedom. But a society, which from times immemorial had denied freedom to the outcaste had come to believe smugly that such a denial of freedom to the outcaste, was consistent with justice because of the entrenched religious motives.

From this it is easy to see that while Ambedkar was ardently working for justice to the Untouchable in a just society, mainly through the instrumentality of politics; Gandhiji and others were making a religious-political approach to the problem. The sad upshot of it all was that the dream of a social revolution which Ambedkar had hoped for to set off to rights, which were
long over due, did not come off. In this way this could be construed as a national loss, since a divisive society could hardly qualify for a nationality, still less for nationalism. For, according to Prof. John MacMurray, the state is essentially territorial. It is a material entity. Nationalism is a conception which identifies the idea of state with the idea of nationalism. Nationality, on the other hand, bears no reference to territory being based primarily upon natural kinship. Thus, a nation is a group of human beings bound together by a sense of kinship and a feeling of spiritual togetherness. Nationality, therefore, as a unifying force in human association, is a psychological and not a geographical fact. Essentially, it is made up by the consciousness of all that they share—a common life, a common experience, a common tradition. This is what we call national consciousness of which a common religion is the most powerful bond. Applying this principle to the Indian society, which excluded the Untouchables, it could not but be considered as considerably abbreviated. Where freedom is genuine and experience alike by one and all in the polity, can nationalism be true. By the same token nor can democracy be genuine with the truncating of freedom and, therefore, the justice to one section of the community. In fact it is difficult to speak of the Indian community as such, since the

religious motive, which is the basis for building a common life, has become the very principle which divided one section from the other.

Ambedkar was, therefore, fully exercised over the fact of dealing with the question of the Untouchable as a political minority, who had no chance of ever participating in political power, despite the democratic claim for India. Congress, on the other hand, was prepared to treat the Untouchables as a religious caste-group, whose interests had only a political bearing, but was not prepared to consider it as fundamental to national politics. Ambedkar was convinced, beyond doubt, that the interests of his men cannot be safe, if they were to be considered only as a religious caste-group. So he took the earliest opportunity to demand their recognition as a distinct political minority, in the political life of the Country, entitled for safeguards in any constitutional arrangement. He insisted that they should be given political safeguards as to the Muslims. In a Memorandum he submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission on 29th May 1928, on behalf of the Bakhshkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Depressed Classes Institute) of Bombay, he laid down his views on the theory of minority representation, vital for an open society. He said in it: "Many people in the world have fallen low by force of circumstances. But having fallen they are free to rise. The Depressed Classes, on the other hand, form a solitary case of a people who have remained fallen because of a religious
notions of the majority of their countrymen." In the circumstances the police power of the State could come to their rescue. Since that was not available to them, the only way to enable them to rise was to give them adequate 'protection by way of special safeguards'.

The Memorandum submitted by Ambedkar was a brilliant thesis on the theory of minority protection in general, and of the Depressed Classes in particular. Unlike the Congress, the Depressed Classes did not choose the path of war and hostility to the Statutory Commission. They were not agitated over the non-inclusion of Indians on the Commission. It was a blessing in disguise for them, as they were saved from the possible prejudices of the Indian Members against their cause. The Memorandum drew the attention of the Commission to the provisions in the Montagu Chelmsford Report (paras 151 to 153), and the Muddiman Committee Report (pp. 64), which had recognised the need for safeguarding the interests of the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar pointed out that the number of seats in the Legislatures should be increased. While fixing the number of seats for any community, he suggested, "... the strength of the community cannot be taken as the sole factor ... The standing of a community is no less an important factor to be taken into account in determining its quota of representation. The standing of
the community must mean its power to protect itself in the social struggle. That power would obviously depend upon the educational and economic status of that community. The representation of a minority, if it is to protect the minority, must also be effective. If not, it would be a farce... the effectiveness of a minority representation depends upon its being large enough to have the sense of not being entirely overwhelmed. "The Depressed Classes were entitled to invoke this principle in their favour as other minorities in the country. Ambedkar was totally opposed to giving protection in terms of the political importance of a minority, as laid down in the Report of the Southborough Committee. Such an 'invidious distinction was at the root of all the communal troubles and is destructive of the principle of equal representation," he said.

Having provided the criteria for an adequate and effective representation for a minority, he also examined the mode of representation, which would be by election and never by nomination. For, "election is not only correct in principle from the standpoint of responsible Government, but is also necessary in practice from the standpoint of political education..." The principle of election cannot be denied to the Depressed Classes on grounds of imaginary difficulties, such as framing constituencies and getting an adequate electorate. These
should not be difficulties at all when there could be asymmetrical constituencies for the Muslims and others, why not for the Depressed Classes? If 'franchise means the right to determine the terms of associated life', as it should mean, "then it follows that it should be given to those who by reason of their weak power of bargaining are exposed to the risk of having the terms of associated life fixed by superior forces in a manner unfavourable to them ..."

The system of election that was demanded by Ambedkar was in general constituencies with reserved seats for the Depressed Classes. He also demanded guaranteeing of certain rights to the Depressed Classes in the form of educational, political and other rights. Representative Government cannot do away with the necessity of such guarantees to protect the interests of the minorities. This had the support of political philosophers like J.S. Mill. It was also recognised that the introduction of representative government, without a system of guarantees for minorities, would be a dangerous experiment, as illustrated by post-war history of Europe. The Memorandum said: "the peace treaties between the allied powers and Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania and the Polish-German convention relating to Upper Silesia with their guarantee classes for the benefit of the minorities bear
eloquent testimony to the fact that the minorities cannot but depend upon the representative form of government to seek protection in the form of guarantees of their rights."

Ambedkar posed the most fundamental question in this connection when he asked: "If representative government is so weak when operating among European peoples, where the secularisation of politics has gone far further, how much weaker must it be in India where politics is nothing but theology in action. It is this theology against which the Depressed Classes must seek to be protected ..."

He also drew attention to a Note by the Hon'ble Sir Alexander Cardew to the Government of India, contained in the letter No. 1148 (Reforms) dated 31st December, 1918; in which Sir Cardew said: "... surely, the first essential of any scheme of reform is that adequate safeguard should be provided for the good government of the inarticulate masses of population ..." The Memorandum by Ambedkar concluded with this appeal: "Nothing can allay such fears as the system of guarantees can do. Government is based upon faith and not reason. If the Depressed Classes can have no faith in the new Constitution (of 1919) it is statesmanship to buy that faith if it can be done so with the concession of guarantees herein demanded."

24. Statement submitted by the Babishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, Bombay to the Statutory Commission on 29-5-1928; from Ambedkar's private papers collections; No. K.B. 33; Bombay University Library.
In his maiden speech at the Plenary Meeting of the First Round Table Conference, Ambedkar declared:

"The depressed classes form a group by themselves which is distinct and separate from the Muhammadans, and although they are included among the Hindus, they in no sense form an integral part of that community. Not only have they a separate existence, but they have also assigned to them a status which is invidiously distinct from the status occupied by any other community in India ... It is one which is midway between that of the serf and the slave, and which may, for convenience, be called servile - with this difference, that the serf and the slave were permitted to have physical contact, from which the depressed classes are debarred. What is worse is that this enforced servility and bar to human intercourse, due to their untouchability, involves not merely the possibility of discrimination in public life, but works out as a positive denial of all equality of opportunity and the denial of those most elementary of civic rights on which all human existence depends. I am sure that the point of view of such a community as large as the population of England or France, and so heavily handicapped in the struggle for existence, cannot but have some bearing on the right sort of solution of the political problem, and I am anxious that this Conference should be placed in possession of that point of view at the very start. " 25

Ambedkar vehemently refuted the claim made that the problem of depressed classes is a social problem and not a political problem. So its solution lies elsewhere than in politics. He said:

we hold that the problem of the depressed classes will never be solved unless they got political power in their own hands ... the problem of the depressed classes is, I submit, eminently a political problem and must be treated as such ... I think it would be just and proper for us to insist that the best guarantee for the settlement of our problem is the adjustment of the political machine itself so as to give us a hold on it, and not the will of those who are contriving to be left in unfettered control of that machine. He said further ...

Depressed by the Government, suppressed by the Hindu and disregarded by the Muslim, we are left in a most intolerable position of utter helplessness to which I am sure there is no parallel and to which I was bound to call attention. 26

Ambedkar was pleading vehemently for a due share in the political power of the country for the depressed classes through separate and special representation.

Moreover, the record of the Congress Party's approach to the problem and performance made Ambedkar feel sceptical of the Congress policy. It is a well-known fact that the Indian National Congress, in the beginning, was looked upon by the British as a body for social reform and was encouraged as such. But the Congress on its part refused to restrict itself to such a limited field of activity. As Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee, the President for the Annual Session of the Congress of 1892, declared:

"... Others more timid still would allow social problems to solve themselves... the Congress commenced and has since remained, and will, I sincerely trust, always remain as a purely political organization devoting its energies to political matters and political matters only."

Such an emphatic assertion for the Congress was understandable as a counter to the moves of the British Government to keep the Indian National Congress as a social reform platform exclusively. But it is also indicative of its reluctance to take up social reform work. By Poona Session of 1895 the "Congress had become a purely political body with no interest and no concern in the removal or mitigation of social wrongs." 27 It was customary to hold a separate session for social reform immediately

after the Congress in the same pandal. Even this was objected to by the 'political radicals and social tones' like Tilak and others in the Congress, was threatened to burn the pandal if allowed to be used by the Social conference. In a letter to Mr. Nanade, Mr. Surendranath Banerjee wrote:

The raison d'être for excluding social questions from our deliberations is that were we to take up such questions it might lead to serious differences ultimately culminating in a schism, and it is a matter of the first importance that we should prevent a split... 28

In view of this, it was incumbent upon those pro-social-reformists in the Congress not to press for it, further.

But strangely enough, the Indian National Congress passed a Resolution at its Calcutta Session of 1917 under the Presidencies of Mrs Annie Besant. The Resolution urges upon "the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing 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.". Such a sympathy was expressed by the Congress to the cause of the Depressed Classes suddenly because the Congress was anxious to enlist the support of these people to the Congress-League Scheme of

1916 (The Lucknow Pact). The Depressed Classes, along with the other non-brahmins, had refused their support to the Pact. But the Congress was anxious to give the character of a 'National Plan' to the Pact. Hence the motive behind the resolution of 1917 was clearly 'political'.

The next important phase in the handling of the problem of Untouchables by the Congress was 'the Bardoli Programme' of February 1922, in which a reference was made to the Depressed Classes. The Bardoli Programme was intended "to organise the Depressed Classes for a better life, to improve their social, mental and moral conditions, to induce them to send their children to national schools and to provide for them the ordinary facilities which the other citizens enjoy."

This programme of constructive activity of the Congress was inspired by Gandhiji, who had established himself as the leader and the guiding force of the Congress Party. In persuasion to this resolution, a sub-committee of the Congress was set up "to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the conditions of the so-called untouchables throughout the country ..." A sum of Rs. 2 lakhs was set as the

target for collection, for this work. Later on it was raised to Rs. 5 lakhs. Swami Shradhanandaji who was the convener of the committee had to resign later due to differences of opinion. Though there was Rs. 1 crore and 30 lakhs in the Tilak-Swaraj Fund, only 2 lakhs were set apart for the work. Out of this paltry amount, considering the magnitude of the problem, only Rs. 43,381/- were actually appropriated for the removal of Untouchability.

In the light of these facts "would it be wrong to say," asks Ambedkar, "that the Wardoli resolution was a fraud in so far as it related to the Untouchables?" 30 On the other hand, Gandhiji was himself writing in his paper, stressing upon the important and intimate relation between the winning of Swaraj and the abolition of untouchability, 31 which he reiterated in the Second Round Table Conference. As if this was not enough the Congress passed a resolution at its working committee meeting of May 1923 at Bombay, entrusting the work of social amelioration of the Untouchables to the Hindu Mahasabha — a body which "is quite unfit for addressing itself to the problem of the Untouchables ... it is a militant Hindu organization ... whose main object and aim are to combat the influence of the Muslims in Indian politics ... The Congress thus washed its hands off the problem of the Untouchables. How can the Congress, which

30. Ibid, p. 36.
was not out for the abolition of untouchability, and which had accepted the policy of separate schools and separate wells, as supported by Mrs Annie Besant in her article, "The uplift of the Depressed Classes" in the Indian Review, Feb. 1909, be entrusted with such work?

While Mahatma Gandhi, participating in the deliberations of the Federal Structure and Minorities sub-committee of the Second Round Table Conference, took a position that was completely opposed to that of Ambedkar. Speaking in the Minorities sub-committee, Mahatma Gandhi explained his position on the question of special representation to Untouchables thus:

...I am opposed to their special representation, I am convinced that it can do them no good, and may do much harm; but the Congress is wedded to adult franchise. Therefore, millions of them can be placed on the Voters' Roll. It is impossible to conceive that, with untouchability fast disappearing, nominees of these voters can be boycotted by the others; but what these people need more than election to the Legislatures is protection from social and religious persecution. Custom, which is often more powerful than law, has brought them to a degradation of which every thinking Hindu has need to feel ashamed and to do penance. I should, therefore, have the most drastic legislation rendering criminal all the special persecutions to which these fellow-

countrymen of mine are subjected by
the so-called superior classes. Thank
God, the conscience of Hindus has been
stirred, and untouchability will soon be a
relic of our sinful past. 33

It was inevitable therefore, in such a political morass
to seek for political remedies. Social remedies, Ambedkar
feared, would not be yielded to by an intractable Hindu
society.

In this task Ambedkar was in reality fighting
a battle on two fronts. The Indian National Congress
with its encrusted and unyielding stand on the one side;
and on the other with his own people, who could not be
easily roused to see their own degradation and hope for
a better and fuller life as a free citizen. His fellow-
men were highly oblivious to their own conditions. Speaking
of the harijans in South India, a foreign observer
remarks:

... notwithstanding the miserable condition
of these wretched Harijans, they are never heard
to murmur, or to complain of their low caste.
still less do they ever dream of trying to
improve their lot, by combining together,
and forcing the other classes to treat them
with that common respect which one man owes

33. Second Round Table Conference: Proceedings of
the Federal Structure and Minorities Sub-Committee,
Vol. III; p. 1349.
to another. The idea that he was born to be in subjection to the other castes is so much ingrained in his mind that it never occurs to the Pariah to think that his fate is anything but irrevocable. Nothing will ever persuade him that men are all made of the same clay, or that he has the right to insist on better treatment than that which is meted out to him. 34

Such an attitude among the Pariahs being true of all Untouchables in general, it must have been some time a very discouraging experience for Ambedkar to realise how difficult it was to make his people who, through centuries of ostracism, had come to smugly accept their lot for granted. They had first to be politically educated through political leadership, before they could realise what was at stake. There was a great paucity of leaders among the Untouchables, who could spread Ambedkar’s views amongst this section of people throughout the length and breadth of the country. At the same time there was a huge chasm between this great leader and his people, because of his intellectual stature. It was difficult for them to truly appreciate the values he was fighting for. No wonder, sometimes he was even suspected by his own community, perhaps due to their inability to fully grasp

34. Dubois And Beauchamp: Hindu Manners: Customs and Ceremonies; 1908, page-50.
his method, his vision and approach. They might have feared that the known lot was better than the unknown paradise he was promising them. The wilderness they were in was preferable to the promised land which was to be and which really looked far and remote against the conservative Hindu society.

The genesis and the subsequent progress of his campaign to espouse the cause of the Untouchables, both in political forums as well as in his speeches and writings, bore out his convictions, crystalised through several phases of his campaign.

At this juncture it is useful to speculate as to the religio-political atmosphere prevailing at that time in the country. It is against this that we will have to consider as to how this important issue was engaged. The Hindu society, it would appear from the foregoing, was an insular society trying to perpetuate the tribal, feudalistic and traditional nature, even though it implied denying justice on the human principle to over 50 million Untouchables. It was rather surprising that while the Indian National Congress, representing the Hindu majority, was eulogising democracy and democratic values, could have failed to appreciate that such a denial would be incongruant with the democratic principle. My inference one naturally wonders how seriously the Congress
leaders subscribed to democracy or whether it was not an article of faith with them, but only a case of political expediency. Perhaps in accepting democracy they had done so with a great deal of reservation. In essence, what they were out for was a closed society with all the trappings of it, while assuming that democracy reduced to that pattern could be worked into this scheme. It should be clear to any objective thinker that taken by and large, the Hindu view of society could never completely yield ground to a fully democratic society. The democratic idea itself poses a view of man which will be contrary to that espoused by Hinduism. It is here that the conflict between the two approaches, namely, of the Congress on one side; and that of Ambedkar on the other, is seen. The latter, as we know, in pleading for the uplift of the Harijan was in reality advocating an open society which would truly accord with the principles of democracy. This is what Reinhold Niebuhr means when he states: "The ultimate virtue of the open society transcends the political virtue of making governments possible in which no group can claim a monopoly of power and no centre of power and prestige is immune to criticism and review." 35

This virtue, according to Niebuhr, will save men from the pretensions of omnipotence and omniscience of

traditional societies. It is based upon a modesty on the part of the political group, which realises that it wields or possesses political power only for the time being, as is the case in the true democracy. Perhaps here one may justifiably speculate from the attitudes of the Congress that it was not tenaciously hankering after power by the way it was indifferent to or even prepared to suppress other groups who, perhaps, hold other notions of truth and justice, which might be inconvenient to its own. Naturally, as a consequence, the democratic progress towards a truly viable and just society becomes a distant dream. Ambedkar being an inveterate non-conformist to the conceptions and political ideas of the Congress had to seriously question such an attitude, which essentially lacked the principle of tolerance.

We should here consider another significant factor, which strengthens our assumption further. It goes fully to the credit of Mahatma Gandhi, that having realised that a purely political method would not succeed with the British, who were past-masters in the political game, had to fashion an instrument which would touch their vulnerable underside. His slow but clear study of the British must have convinced Gandhiji, that as a nation the British would always seek for a moral justification

36. Ibid.
for whatever they did as political action in their colonies. He had perforce fashioned his method to suit this purpose, namely to wear them down in their own characteristic. The 'Sermon on the Mount', with many seminal Christian insights which praised meekness against strength, poverty against riches etc., were to become his principal armour in fighting the British. Hence non-violence, satyagraha, etc., were fashioned to disarray, not only the British approach to politics but also convince the West with its Christian culture that the Indian freedom struggle was essentially a vindication of a Christian virtue or principle. No doubt, this approach was telling. The British were left without an answer when they were posed with the problem of showing the other cheek. There was also no lack of sifting out appropriate teachings from the Vedas to support his method in order to show to the Hindu compatriots that what he was doing was really in consonance with the Hindu scriptures such as the Gita. This very same process was to result in making Gandhiji emerge as not merely a super-politician but also a sage or near saint, who could give his political views a spiritual expression. But Gandhiji's religious view was circumscribed by his inflexible adherence to Hinduism only. Perhaps Gunther's comments on this aspect of Gandhiji explicates more interesting aspects. John Gunther refers to Gandhiji as "at once a saint and a politician, a prophet and a superb opportunist, defies
ordinary categories." 37 He continues, Gandhiji's
"approach to everything is religious, but aside from
Hinduism it is difficult to tell what his religion is. 38
Having achieved this 'halo', Gandhiji could not but keep
to this role consistently. Evidence of this became more
and more clear in his subsequent life whenever he had to
provide justification for drawing sustenance from such
doctrines as 'Varnashramadharma'; reward and duty from
the Veda etc. It is not surprising, therefore, that his
naming the untouchables, who were outcastes, as 'HARIJANS'
(the children of God) belongs to this genre. From the
standpoint of philosopher-kings Gandhiji's image fully
met the bill. The appellation 'reformer', although
personally he did not relish it, nevertheless came to stay
as one fully merited and conferred by a grateful people.
Incidentally, this was to generate a new species in
politics in India which is obtaining even to-day which
western observers call as 'saintly Politics.' 39

It is not difficult to surmise that even the
Scheduled Castes, who were after all conditioned in the

37. Inside Asia: 1939; p. 302.
38. Ibid, p. 386.
39. M.Horris-Jones: The Government and
Politics of India: 1904; p. 52.
typical Hindu outlook, might have been led to believe that their salvation was properly to be sought only through a religious approach and through the leadership in the person of the Mahatma, who claimed not only a paternalism for them as well as lifted them to the status of children of God; How could they doubt that their interests were not in safe hands when the Mahatma loomed so large as a national saviour, whom even the powerful British rulers had to take note of?

On the other hand, however genuine Ambedkar's concern for his people might have been he was still an Untouchable with the traditional badge of contempt; and who was, in comparison against Gandhiji, diminutive as a national figure. But we do know that as a 'nationalist' and a true one at that, Ambedkar consistently remained so, although he espoused only a lost cause. It was not to mix up Hindu teachings in his political approach to support his cause, which was plain as a pyre staff for any objective politician. After all, he was an Untouchable and there was no knowing whether he was not also sharing with the rest of his community the same animus and prejudices in a subjective manner and, therefore, he might advocate methods which might be far in excess of what the situation demanded. Should they believe Ambedkar or follow Gandhiji, was the dilemma in the minds of the Untouchables. Nevertheless, he did resort to debunk religious tenets, whenever he
suspected there was clear case of prevarication to prop up a meretricious political claim in the name of religion. But to the vast majority of unlettered outcastes the glamorised personality of the Mahatma overwhelmingly overshadowed Ambedkar’s contentions on their behalf. There were even cases of backsliding from the ranks of the Untouchables and fears whether there was going to be vindictive measures taken by the caste-Hindus against them for fighting for their cause. The prevalence of such a fear in the minds of the Untouchables is supported by the findings of several committees. The Report of the Committee appointed by the Government of Bombay in 1928 "to enquire into the educational, economic and social conditions of the Depressed Classes (Untouchables) and of the Aboriginal Tribes in the Presidency and to recommend measures for their uplift" opined as follows:

Although we have recommended various remedies to secure to the Depressed Classes their rights to all public utilities we fear that there will be difficulties in the way of their exercising them for a long time to come. The first difficulty is the fear of open violence against them by the orthodox classes. It must be noted that the Depressed Classes form a small minority in every village, opposed to which is a great majority of the orthodox who are bent on protecting their interests and dignity, from any supposed invasion by the Depressed Classes at any cost. The danger of prosecution by the police has put a
limitation upon the use of violence by the orthodox classes and consequently such cases are rare.

The second difficulty arises from the economic position in which the Depressed Classes are found to-day. The Depressed Classes have no economic independence in most parts of the Presidency. Some cultivate the lands of the orthodox classes as their tenants at will. Others live on their earnings as farm labourers employed by the orthodox classes and the rest subsist on the food or grain given to them by the orthodox classes in lieu of service rendered to them as village servants. We have heard of numerous instances where the orthodox classes have used their economic power as a weapon against those Depressed Classes in their villages, when the latter have dared to exercise their rights, and have evicted them from their land, and stopped their employment and discontinued their remuneration as village servants. This boycott is often planned on such an extensive scale as to include the prevention of the Depressed Classes from using the commonly used paths and the stoppage of sale of the necessaries of life by the village menia ... cases have been by no means rare where a stringent boycott has been proclaimed simply because a Depressed Classes man has put on the scared thread, has bought a piece of land, has put on good clothes or ornaments, or has carried a marriage procession with the bridegroom on the horse through the public street.
"We do not know of any weapon" wrote the Commission, "more effective than this social boycott which could have been invented for the expression of the Depressed Classes. The method of open violence pales away before it, for it has the most far-reaching and deadening effects. It is the more dangerous because it passes as a lawful method consistent with the theory of freedom of contract. We agree that this tyranny of the majority must be put down with a firm hand if we are to guarantee the Depressed Classes the freedom of speech and action necessary for their uplift. 40

In such circumstances of fear of social boycott by caste-Hindus, the untouchables were mortally afraid of, and reluctant to take steps that were revolutionary in character. On the aggregate, one wonders what odds Ambedkar was pitted against and his role was far from being enviable. He was quick to realise that he was up against a situation which might have even menaced or even questioned his claim to be the leader of the outcastes.

No less a person than the Mahatma himself challenged Ambedkar's claims. Speaking on the 'Minorities Pact' in the Minorities Committee of the Second Round Table Conference, Gandhiji described the Pact as the 'unkindest cut of all'. He continued:

It means the perpetual bar-sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. Claiming to himself the spokesmanship of the untouchables, he said "... I would get, if there was a referendum of the untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll... I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. Therefore, with all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar, and for his desire to see the untouchables uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say in all humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgement... I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism... I do not mind untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity... Those who speak of the political right of untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is to-day constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I
can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life. 41

The Communal Award:

Mahatma Gandhi meant this seriously. That time was not far off, when he had to put his life at stake to retain the Harijans within the fold of Hinduism. When the Second Round Table Conference was dissolved, the delegates to the Minorities Sub-Committee agreed to the proposal of the British Prime Minister to put-in a signed requisition, authorising him to arbitrate and give his decision on the communal issue as they had failed to come to an agreement amongst themselves. All the members including Gandhiji signed such a requisition. But it was Ambedkar who did not sign it, as he was convinced and confident "... that the demands of the untouchables were so reasonable that no arbitration was necessary." 42

The decision of the British Prime Minister was announced on the 17th August 1932. Despite the 'mis-representations' by the Congress of the total population of the Untouchables in British India before the Lothian Committee on franchise, the Communal Award provided for the separate electorates to the untouchables. The Award provided for voting by the Depressed Classes voters in

41. Ibid, pp. 1384-85.
42. What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables, p. 74.
the general constituency; and a number of special seats to be assigned to them. These special seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only members of the Depressed Classes are entitled to vote, besides their voting in general constituencies. Such special constituencies were to be created only in those selected areas where the Depressed Classes were most numerous, and except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the provinces. This arrangement was to continue for 20 years if they had not previously been abolished under the general powers of electoral revision.

Gandhiji, as could be expected, read into this the mischievous hand of the British to further vivisect the Hindu society and the Indian people. In his letter of 10th August to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald - the Prime Minister, he repeated his earlier resolve to fast unto death to resist the Communal Award. He informed the Prime Minister, the fast would start from the noon of September 30, 1932, if the communal or separate electorates to the Depressed Classes was not changed. The "contemplated step", he wrote, "is but due to the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success."

Mr. MacDonald, in his reply, conveyed the impression that Gandhiji's decision to fast was under a 'misappro-
The British Prime Minister could not help the situation without the parties concerned, i.e., the Depressed Classes and Gandhiji, coming to an agreement as provided for in the Award. Ambedkar, in a statement, deplored the adamant attitude of the Mahatma when the Communal Award satisfied both those who want separate electorates and those who want joint electorates. He assured the Mahatma:

"We mean no harm to the Hindu society when we demand separate electorates. If we choose separate electorates, we do so in order to avoid the total dependence on the sweet will of the caste Hindus in matters affecting our destiny..." He appealed to the Mahatma to realise the likely consequences of his contemplated step on the Untouchables. He also declared that he was willing to talk over the matter with Gandhiji and said: "I however trust the Mahatma will not drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of my people. For I can never consent

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43. Ibid; p. 327.
to deliver my people bound hand and foot to the caste Hindus for generations to come."  

Nothing short of a reversal of the separate electorates for the Depressed Classes could prevent Gandhiji from sticking to his resolve, which was a matter of principle and value of his life. As the desired solution was not anywhere in sight, Gandhiji started his fast as per the schedule in the Yeravada Prison, where he was imprisoned since his return from the Second Round Table Conference. This 'Epic fast' (of 20th September 1932) as it was called by Pyarelal, set afloat anxiety everywhere and the only way to save him was by the Depressed Classes agreeing to alter the communal Award to Gandhiji's desires. So the whole nation looked to their leader Ambedkar, who was 'the man of the moment or rather .. the villain of the piece'. At least now his leadership of the Untouchables was accepted as a fact. But to Ambedkar it was a diplomatic situation. As he expressed it:

...I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty, which I owed as a part of common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. There was before me the problem of saving for the untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of

44. Ibid, p. 326.
humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. 45

According to the Poona Pact the Depressed Classes got more seats, i.e., 148 instead of 78 as per the Award. The election was to be by joint electorates following the procedure prescribed, i.e., the Depressed Class voters will elect a panel of 4 candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each such reserved seats, who will be candidates for election by the general electorate. So also for the Central Legislature where 18% of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature, shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

The reactions to the Poona Pact were mixed in nature. Some thought that it was a gain for the Depressed Classes and to others it was a loss. But Ambedkar was not prepared to agree with this. He thought, while giving more seats to the Depressed Classes, the Pact took away the right to the double vote. He said: "... The second vote given by the Communal Award was a priceless privilege. Its value as a political weapon was beyond reckoning... on this voting strength (which was 1 to 10) free to be used in the election of caste Hindu candidates, the Untouchables would have been in a position to determine, if not to dictate, the issue of the General Election. No

45. Ibid, p. 88.
 caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the untouchable in his constituency or be hostile to their interest, if he was made dependent upon the votes of the untouchables." 46 Such a position of privilege which was taken away by the Poona Pact was a great loss to the Depressed Classes indeed. The Poona Pact was thus a peculiar arrangement, which was liked neither by the Hindus nor by the Depressed Classes. It was, at the same time, accepted by both the parties, perhaps to respect the sentiments of the Mahatma, and embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935. In fact, if one examines the communal Award as it related to the Depressed Classes, it was quite reasonable and fair. The alleged separatist tendency in it was more the result of sentimental apprehensions than a reality. How the occasional act of voting in separate constituencies, that too after voting in a general constituency, by a Depressed Class voter would take him away from the Hindu fold passes ones comprehension. There was, as such, no need for Gandhiji to oppose it with his life. It was too drastic a step that the Mahatma choose, particularly in the light of the arrangement for reservation of seats to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the new Constitution of India.

The Poona Pact - Its aftermath:

The immediate outcome of the Poona Pact was a

46. Ibid; p. 90.
meeting of the Hindus at Bombay to throw open temples to the Untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi gave his support and started a column in the 'Harijan' weekly with the caption 'Week to Week', with a view to giving a detailed account of the temples, schools, wells etc., thrown open to the Untouchables in different places. Bills were introduced in the Legislatures to throw open the temples for Harijans. Ambedkar complained that only some 'dilapidated and deserted' temples were thrown open for them, and hence the effort of the Hindus was not a sincere one.

A more concrete result of the Poona Pact was the formation of the 'All-India anti-untouchability League' under Gandhiji's inspiration at Bombay on 30th Sept., 1932, which was later called the 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'. Its aim was for carrying propaganda against Untouchability and taking immediate steps to secure, as early as practicable, that all public wells, dharmashalas, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning ghats and all public temples be declared open to the Depressed Classes, provided that no compulsion or force shall be used and that only peaceful persuasion shall be adopted towards this end. To provide funds for the work of the Sangh, Gandhiji toured the country mostly on foot and collected Rs. 8 lakhs. The Sangh had an uphill task in achieving its objectives in view of the natural resistance from the caste-Hindus for social mingling. The Sangh's platform did not include an effort
for securing a place of political importance to the Harijans, as Ambedkar would like it to have. So he dis-associated himself from the activities of the Sangh, though he welcomed it as a first step to achieve a very limited objective - the welfare of the Harijans.

It would thus be clear beyond any doubt to even a casual observer, that while Jandhi's leadership of the Untouchables was 'sentimental' and 'assumed', the leadership of Ambedkar was natural and real. Jandhi, an established national figure, whose image was also that of a spiritual leader, including that of the Harijans, could not but naturally bring down Ambedkar's leadership under serious question from his own people. He carried no spiritual halo, but spoke pure politics and used terms such as democracy, equality and justice. Whereas the Congress was freely zigzagging between religion and politics, whenever each demanded a prop from the other, surely the unreality of the situation was itself perhaps a conspiracy to bog down the legitimate cause Ambedkar was fighting for. Of course, from the point of view of the Untouchable masses, it must have been a situation completely confusing. In any case, for those who have never known what it was to be free, how could they be expected to appreciate the struggle for their rights, when they did not know what was at stake? They never and
freedom ever to know what it is to lose it, and much less to gain it. An elaboration of the situation has been attempted at length, in the foregoing, only in order to bring out the nature and extent of the task Ambedkar had undertaken, and the difficulties that beset this task. That is the reason why Ambedkar decided upon a purely political approach to the problem and sought remedies through the political mechanism itself. He put the demands, on behalf of his people, in concrete form right from the days of the Round Table Conferences. The 'Scheme of political safeguards for the protection of the Depressed Classes in the Future Constitution of self-governing India' that he submitted to the Minorities sub-committee of the second Round Table Conference in collaboration with Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan, was in the form of a constitution in itself. It was in the form of terms and conditions on which the Depressed Classes will consent to place themselves under a majority rule in a self-governing India. The provisions of this scheme were largely modelled on the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the J.S.A., and the Amendments to it. Almost a parallel was worked out in it. Ambedkar laid down eight conditions in all, which covered claims for Equal Citizenship; Fundamental Rights; Free enjoyment of Equal rights; Protection against boycott and discrimination; Adequate representation in the legislatures and in the Services; Redress against prejudicial action or neglect of interests; special depart-
-mental care, and the reservation of a seat for the Depressed Classes in the Cabinet. He also demanded that in the Instrument of Instruction an obligation to be placed upon the Governors and the Governor-General to endeavour to secure the representation of the Depressed Classes in the Cabinet. 47

Ambedkar was fully convinced that without an effective and due participation in the political process and life of the country, the Untouchables cannot have any justice. He soon abandoned demands and movements for temple-entry and the like through persuasive methods as satyagraha, which formed part of Gandhiji's plan for abolition of Untouchability. Whenever he had an occasion to speak to his people, Ambedkar exhorted them to this approach and task, instead of depending entirely on the good sense and the morals of the caste-Hindus. In his Presidential Address to the All-India Depressed Classes Congress in August 1930, he said: "I am afraid that the British chose our unfortunate conditions, not with the object of removing them but only because such a course serves well as an excuse for retarding the political progress of India ... Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can, and you cannot remove them unless you get political power in your hands. No share of this political power can come to you as long as the British Government remains as it is. It is only in a Swaraj Constitution..."

47. First Round Table Conference, Proceedings of Sub-Committees; Vol.III, Appendix II, pp. 165-176.
that you stand any chance of getting the political power into your hands without which you cannot bring salvation to your people. This exhortation was patriotic, first and last, and brings forth the basic and most essential difference in the approach to the problem of Untouchability of Dr. Ambedkar and the Congress.

At this juncture, we may do well to pause in order to evaluate the approach made by the Muslim Leader Mr. M.A. Jinnah for his people against the claims of the Hindu majority. John Gunther has this to say on the problem:

"Caste is, of course, profoundly, devastatingly, undemocratic. Muslims especially (who have no caste) say that the basis of the Hindu system is discrimination, and that as long as Hinduism retains caste a modern political development bestowing equal rights to all sections of a community will be impossible to India. Obviously, too caste impedes Indian nationalism. Like the Chinese belief in ancestor worship, it divides man's loyalties, it inhibits freedom of choice, it promotes rigid sectional attributes."

Mr. Jinnah was quick to see that the religio-political approach of the Congress could only be met on the grounds of religion. Is there any wonder, therefore, that the Muslims being of a different faith constituted a

different nation, although in so doing they were brazenly flying in the face of other realities which would contradict it. This was really a calculated strategy, perhaps, in order to meet the Congress which also claimed to speak for the Muslims. Mr. Jinnah's two-nation theory looked ridiculous. But when we realise that the fate of the minorities was forever to be beholden to the favour and good pleasure of the majority what else is there as an alternative for a well-defined minority? It is always an accepted political dogma that the health of a polity depends on the well-being of the minorities same as the strength of a chain depends on its weakest link. As students of history, we also know the sad state of Greek polity which begrudged equal status to all and relegated a vast section to second class citizenship; and slaves had none. It is easy to see that in pursuing the cause of justice for the Untouchables Ambedkar was truly enunciating a democratic principle. This is abundantly clear from the definition of Democracy which Ambedkar gave in a speech on 'the conditions precedent for the successful working of Democracy' at Poona on December 22, 1952. He defined Democracy as "a form and method of Government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people are brought about without bloodshed." His vision of a democratic society was one in which there will be neither an oppressor class, nor a suppressed class; equality before law and in administration and functioning
of moral order in society. He wrote elsewhere that a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity should be the only alternative to a caste-society. It should be full of channels for conveying a change, taking place in one part, to other parts. It should be mobile. There must be 'social endosmosis'. This is fraternity which is only another name for democracy. "Democracy" writes Ambedkar, "is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen." He was also aware of the fact that 'equality' is a fiction and is glaringly fallacious. But we cannot escape it. We can give most to the people by "making them (every one) equal as far as possible at the very start of the race." 49 From this it is abundantly clear that the approach of Ambedkar was purely secular and he believed in democracy that is complete and real. We see in him a genuine interest and a burning desire for building India into a strong and real democracy, in which his stature also would rise to that of a national leader, in every sense. It would, therefore, be doing him an injustice if his political action is to be narrowed down to merely to the cause of the Untouchables, though it was underroot in his mind and action. He would not sacrifice democracy and freedom for the sake of his people. He had realised fully, that

only under a self-governing constitution and a free India

the Depressed Classes can hope to attain equality and get justice.

Untouchables and Caste-politics:

The Hindu society being communal; communalism is naturally a part and parcel of the political structure of the Hindu society. Even to this day some political parties are having a largely communal bias and votes are canvassed in the same manner for the candidates of specific communities, even though communal and religious appeal is illegal. It is this communalism which Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was to brand as 'casteism'. Communal politics, in the main, is caste politics: and pressure groups develop, therefore, only ultimately on these caste lines. Against the formidable built-in structure of caste politics, what earthly chance would a powerless outcaste people have, lacking in organisation, and other resources? Ambedkar was particularly aware of the lack of a Press to voice the grievances of these people. That is why in the course of his activities he helped the birth of nearly four papers one after the other. His first newspaper was 

**Havak** - the leader of the dumb; the second was named 

**the Bhishkrit Bharat** - the excluded India; the third was called **Equality**; and the fourth **Janata** - the people; all periodicals. Dhananjay Keer, the biographer of Ambedkar, reads into this journalistic effort: "a strange evolution of Ambedkar's role in the social as well as political sphere of India... The leader of the 'dumb' made a stir
and described the sufferings of the 'outcastes'. In the third stage he gave expression to their aspirations for 'equality' and in the fourth he expressed the desire of his people for assimilation into the Hindu society on the basis of equality, liberty, fraternity."

With the same purpose he also helped starting a number of organizations of the Untouchables. The first among them was the Bohishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, in July 1924. The activities of this body were restricted to the erstwhile Bombay Presidency. It started hostels, supplied clothes, books etc., to the Untouchable students. The 'Samata Sangha' or the Social Equality Society was founded to create the spirit and outlook of equality among the Untouchables. The wearing of the sacred thread and holding of community dinners were encouraged. Ambedkar founded a new political party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), in August 1936 on the eve of the General Elections of 1937. Once again its activities were restricted to the Bombay Presidency. The All-India Scheduled Castes Federation was the other party which was founded by Ambedkar in 1942. In his last days he had proposed the formation of the Republican Party to bring new blood into politics. This he had proposed to be the party under the banner of which he would fight the Second General Elections in 1937. His

end came before he could do so. But the Republican Party was founded after his death on the eve of the Second General Elections. It was nothing but a convention of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation. Ambedkar also founded the Peoples Education Society at Bombay and the Vidya Maha Vidyalaya at Aurangabad to propagate higher education. Another interesting venture of his was the setting up of a Training School for the potential legislators and politicians and to invigorate the democratic forces in India. The School, the first of its kind in the country, worked with 15 students on rolls from July 1, 1960 to March 1967. In this also, he had realised, is another instance where democracy is made unreal by the rampant communalism and lack of effective public opinion. Communalism retards national integration. We are not surprised, therefore, that Mr. Nehru, being truly seised of this problem of casteism, had to resort to a radical remedy of secularising politics, with opting for a secular state and thereby provide an anti-dote to this vicious virus.

The mark of a caste society is its stagnation. By perpetuating the traditional elite, it will naturally exclude perpetually excellence and personal merit from the suppressed groups such as the outcastes. To Ambedkar casteism is in fact opposed to social progress and political stability. Casteism " has killed public spirit. Caste
has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made", wrote he, "public opinion impossible ... There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for the men of other caste..." 51

In principle, this kind of deprivation and exclusion from rewards for effort and merit, can only be justified on the score of ingrained injustice based only on birth. What we notice in casteism is not only a denial of vertical mobility based on merit, but also a horizontal recognition of a rewarding status which would help the outstanding individual merge with the higher recognised groups. The lack of this process leads to the out-caste and the denied people the only source of seeking spiritual solace from 'Karma' or fatalism. This "doctrine of Karma", says Jutther, "has considerable political consequence. Obviously it embodies an extreme form of fatalism, which impedes abolition. Obviously too, if man thinks that his present life is merely an interlude between other lives which may be vastly more important, the spur to such a mundane consideration as nationalism is lacking. Then too it gives us a clue to such phenomena as Mr. Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence, since it destroys man's inclination to resist..." 52

It is bound, therefore,

52. Inside Asia: 1939; p. 433.
to create malcontents and when the process gathers momentum, it would threaten to become a formidable force to cause social rupture.

In a Press Statement issued by Ambedkar on the question of Temple entry for Harijans and the Temple entry Bill of Mr. Ranga Iyengar (14th Feb. 1933), he said that the Untouchables cannot support the Bill as it was drafted, and both from the materialistic and the spiritual point of view 'the Depressed Classes need not spend their resources on such an empty thing as Temple entry.' Temple entry is not an end in itself. It may be a first step. "If the Hindu religion is to be a religion of social equality then an amendment of its code to provide temple entry is not enough. What is required is to purge it of the doctrine of Chaturvarna... Unless it is done not only will the Depressed Classes reject Temple entry, they will also reject the Hindu faith" he said.

This basic philosophy of Ambedkar was to find expression later in the Hindu Code Bill, which he introduced in the Parliament of free India but was strangled by the delaying tactics of some groups... .

**Conclusion**

We can sum up the two approaches to the problem of Untouchability, at this stage, as follows: Gandhiji seems to have argued on the assumption that the so called
Untouchables are a part and parcel of the Hindu society. Hindus are mainly responsible for the position of the Untouchables. It is, therefore, the moral responsibility of the Hindus to set it right, and wipe out this sin on their part. So in whatever that was proposed to be done for rehabilitating the Untouchables should be within the Hindu fold, and in mutual co-operation. Hence, Gandhiji's advocacy of the Joint Electorate for them instead of the Separate Electorate and not the Harijans. The position of the Untouchables is different from those of the Muslims and others because they are not separate and cannot be separated from the Hindus under any circumstance.

Dr. Ambedkar, on the other hand, agreed with Gandhiji to the extent of Hindu's responsibility for the position of the Untouchables. Historically, the caste-Hindus have come to perpetuate misery and degradation upon the Untouchables. The responsibility is to be squarely laid at the doors of the Hindus. But Ambedkar did not have faith in the caste-Hindu effort, including that of Gandhiji and the Congress, to ameliorate and emancipate the Harijans. He was convinced that the caste-Hindu effort was insincere and sinister, and it would never be

53. Ambedkar, B.R.: *What Congress and Gandhiji have done to the Untouchables*, 1940.
an effective remedy. So he wanted his men to get all constitutional and statutory safeguards that are necessary for their emancipation, instead of depending upon the good will of others. Therefore, he thought, they must be placed in such a position with the required electoral safeguards and facilities as to enable them to participate effectively in the political power. He held the view that instead of wasting their time and energy in demanding for their entry into temples, the Untouchables should strive to capture political power. Given this political power, they can get all other things in their favour. The Muslims grew from strength to strength as a minority because they were sheltered under the system of separate electorates. The Untouchables, who got the same under the Communal Award, had to give it up under the Poona Pact to save the life of Gandhiji. This was a great sacrifice on their part. Though they got more seats than they would have got under the Communal Award, the disadvantage under which they had to contest the elections were too many, as explained by Ambedkar. His assumption was that those representatives, elected with the Hindu votes and Congress support defeating non-Congress Harijan candidates, can never serve the interests of their fellowmen. So the difference between Gandhiji and Ambedkar was on the agency; or who should be entrusted with the work of emancipating the Harijans and the path to be adopted. Gandhi said it should be done by the Hindus within the Hindu
society. Ambedkar said it should be done by the Untouchables themselves under direct constitutional safeguards, and outside the Hindu society, if necessary. The basic difference between these two approaches brings into relief the core of the contention between Ambedkar and Gandhiji. According to the Mahatma, if a salvation is to be worked through the framework of the Hindu fold any advantage that he could get cannot go beyond what would still be derivative concessions yielded to the Untouchables from the caste sections, whereas what Ambedkar aimed at was: elevating the status of the Untouchable as a matter of right upheld by law and statute, thus becoming an equal citizen with others. Gandhian approach was conservative and limited; whereas Ambedkar's approach was radical and emancipative.

The difference between the two approaches is significant and fundamental, when we visualise the status of the Untouchables in a democratic set-up which was to be ushered in with Indian Independence. The Socialistic Pattern of Society, as enunciated by Mr. Nehru, is no doubt bound to remove the edge of such discrimination, perhaps by stages. In its nature socialism may perhaps achieve this end through a long and tortuous route, however, as industrialism is the inevitable handmaid of socialism, it is bound to spread improved means of livelihood and distribute rewards for merit and efficiency, wherever it
may arise. For, a machine-civilization cannot recognize caste but only the machine-minder. In that way, the process of equality through this impersonal means may enter through the back-door, what is openly denied by religion.

It may be further noted that economic factor alone is not responsible for the ills of our society. To bring about a socialistic order, in which liberty and justice are enjoyed by one and all in India, economic reform is of course necessary but it can be only one kind of reform that must be taken up. It should be realised that "Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority, which one man has, to control the liberty of another ..." 54 Equalization of property must be preceded by a reform in the social order in India, if there is to be a socialistic pattern of society. One socialist is on record to have written: "I do not believe that we can build up a free society in India so long as there is a trace of this ill-treatment and suppression of one class by another. Believing as I do in a socialist ideal inevitably I believe in perfect equality in the treatment of various classes and groups. I think that socialism offers only true remedy for this as well as other problems." 55 It is not enough if socialists

just believe in social reform. It should actually precede economic and political revolution. Generally speaking, as Ambedkar thinks: "History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious Reformation started by Luther was the precursor of the political emancipation of the European people ... The same is true of the Muslim Empire ... Even Indian history supports the same conclusion..." 56 Even granting the socialist argument that when once the revolution of the proletariat takes place, they will still have to grapple with the problem of the distinctions of caste or creed, high or low. To Ambedkar the socialist state in India, that was to come, will not be able to function even "for a second without having to grapple with the problems created by the prejudices which make Indian people observe the distinction of high and low, clean and unclean ... if the Socialists wish to make Socialism a definite reality then they must recognize that the problem of social reform is fundamental and that for them there is no escape from it ..." 57 So the Indian socialists should realize the monster of caste that crosses their path. There cannot be economic and political reform

56. Ibid., p. 13.
57. Ibid., p. 19.
unless this 'monster' is killed. Dr. Nehru was all the more alive to this reality when he was envisaging the Sociological Pattern of Society for India. Ambedkar had the vision of a realist and a prophet when he made these utterances as early as 1936. Only a secular India in which the death-knell of 'casteism' is sounded that can be fit for a socialistic pattern, based on equity and justice. Perhaps, it was the hand of destiny that gave him an opportunity to write the Constitution of free India, ushering in a socialist democratic society with safeguards for the Minorities.