Chapter II

INSPIRATION OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES ON DALITS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT
Chapter II

INSPIRATION OF GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES ON DALITS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The second decade of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of two personalities in the Indian political field who worked for the amelioration of the conditions of the untouchables. But there was a difference in their approach to the solution of the problems facing them. One of them was Mahatma Gandhi and the other was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Gandhiji personified, what Galanter says, the ‘evangelical’ approach, while Ambedkar represented the ‘secular’ approach. The ‘evangelical’ approach stresses the uplift of untouchables to higher Hindu standards and the penance of caste Hindus for the injustices of untouchability, which was seen not as an integral part of Hinduism but as some external impurity. Uplifted untouchables and repentant Hindus will join together in a purified and redeemed Hinduism.¹

Early Life of Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbander in Gujarat on 2nd October 1869. His father was Karamchand Gandhi and mother Putlibai. The Gandhi’s belonged to the Vaishyas or the Bania caste.

¹ The Scheduled Castes in India, “Effects of British Rule on the Caste System-II”, p. 203.
Mohandas was the youngest of the four children. He had his schooling in nearby Rajkot, where his father served as the adviser to the ruler of Rajkot, a princely state. At thirteen he was married to Kasturba, who was even younger. Gandhiji lost one year of study because of his marriage and he was given double promotion to a higher class as he was usually an industrious boy and the teacher thought that he should not loose one year. When he was 15 years of age, he had removed a bit of gold from his brother's armlet to clear a small debt of the latter. He felt so mortified about his act that he decided to make a confession to his father. He wrote a letter to his father. Parental forgiveness was granted him in the form of silent tears. The incident left a lasting mark on his mind. In Gandhiji's own words, it was an object lesson to him in the power of ahimsa.

Gandhiji passed the Matriculation examination in 1887. In 1888 he set sail for England, where he had decided to pursue a degree in law. His mother, a devout woman, made him promise that he would keep away from wine, women, and meat during his stay abroad. He was very faithful to the promises.

---

4 This letter written to his father in 1884 is considered Mahatma's first letter.
Mahatma got his degree from the Inner Temple, London. He was called to the bar in 1891, and even enrolled in the High Court of London; but later that year he left for India.

After one year of law practice in India, Gandhiji accepted an offer from an Indian businessman in South Africa, Dada Abdulla, to join him as legal adviser. This was an exceedingly lengthy stay, and altogether he was to stay in South Africa for over twenty years. The Indians who had been living in South Africa were without political rights, and were generally known by the derogatory name of 'coolies'. Gandhiji fought for their rights and won the battle.

From South Africa, Mahatma wrote to the leaders to Indian National Congress and had constant touch with them. Mahatma Gandhi wrote series of articles that dealt with Indian question in South Africa, in the 'Indian Opinion'. Due to the efforts of Mahatma, the permit system for Indians was liberalized.

In August 1906, the Transvaal Government Gazette printed the draft of an ordinance to be submitted to the State Legislature. According to the proposed ordinance, all Indian men, women and children over eight years of age were required to register with the authorities, to submit to fingerprinting and acquire a certificate which they were to carry with them at all

---

7 Ibid., p. 4.
8 Letter to Dadabhai Naoroji, Durban, October 8, 1900, CW-3, pp 167-168.
9 Letter to Dadabai Naoroji, Johannesburg, December 10, 1904, CW-4, p 311.
times. Every Indian who failed to apply for registration before a certain date was to forfeit his right of residence in the Transvaal.\textsuperscript{11}

Mahatma arranged a meeting of Indians in South Africa. The meeting was held on 11th September 1906. It was attended by delegates from various places in the Transvaal. They had planned a movement. None of them knew what name to give to their movement. Gandhiji then used the term 'passive resistance' in describing it. As the struggle advanced, the phrase 'passive resistance' gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name. A small prize was therefore announced in the journal 'Indian Opinion' to be awarded to the reader who invented the best designation for their struggle. They received a number of suggestions. The meaning of the struggle had been then fully discussed in 'Indian Opinion' and the competitors for the prize had fairly sufficient material to serve as a basis for their exploration. Shri Maganlal Gandhi was one of the competitors and he suggested the word 'Satyagraha', meaning 'firmness in a goal cause'. Gandhiji liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea he wished it to connote. He therefore corrected it to 'Satyagraha'. Truth (Satya) implied love and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore served as a synonym for force. He thus began to call the Indian movement 'Satyagraha', that was to say, the force which was born of Truth and Love or Non-Violence.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} M.K.Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1950, p 109
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, pp 109-110.
The Indians in South Africa, under the leadership of Mahatma protested the Asiatic ordinance. However the ordinance got into effect as the Asiatic Registration Act on 31 July 1907. Gandhiji called it the 'Black Act'. It occasioned the first campaign of non-violence as corporate action. A large number of Indians in South Africa had publicly pledged themselves, as early as 11 September 1906, to boycott the bill. So, when it became law, they refused to take the permits contemplated under its rules. Gandhiji’s technique of non-violent resistance or non-violence as corporate action was successful. For all these satyagraha programmes, the dalits of Individual, who were there is South Africa, helped Mahatma earnestly. R. Srinivasan, one of the greatest leader of dalits of Tamil Nadu was there in South Africa during Bapu’s Satyagraha programmes. They worked together.

After successfully implementing Satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhiji returned to India in early 1915. Over the next few years, he was to become involved in numerous local struggles, such as at Champaran in Bihar, where workers on indigo plantations complained of oppressive working conditions, and involved in Keda Satyagraha and intervened at Ahmedabad, where a dispute had broken out between management and

---

13 Cable to Lord Elgin, published in the Indian Opinion, dated 30-3-1907, CW-6, p 389.
16 Letter to Revenue Secretary, January 24, 1918, CW-14, pp 164-166.
workers at textile mills. The workers in these plantations and mills were mostly dalits. His interventions earned him a considerable reputation. Mahatma protested Rowlatt Bills and that led to unexpectedly sudden assumption of national leadership by him.

The basic Gandhian style involved careful training of disciplined cadres, non-violent satyagraha involving peaceful violation of specific laws, mass courting of arrests, and occasional hartals and spectacular marches. The net impact had a clear two-fold character: drawing-in the masses, while at the same time keeping mass activity strictly pegged down to certain forms pre-determined by the leader, and above all to the methods of non-violence. From 1919 he became the undisputed leader of Indian National Congress (INC). After Jalian Walabagh, Mahatma toured through cities of Punjab and consoled the people. Over the next two years, he initiated the non-cooperation movement. To include the dalits in the freedom struggle Mahatma felt strongly that untouchability should be removed.

**Mahatma's efforts to remove untouchability**

Mahatma regarded untouchability as the 'greatest blot on Hinduism'. To remove untouchability was a penance that caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required was not of
'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. He believed in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita.\(^{21}\) Mahatma insisted that untouchables should be allowed in the temples. They should be given admission in the educational institutions. They also should be appointed to the highest offices in the land.\(^{22}\)

Untouchability could not be removed by the force, even of law, considered Gandhiji. It could only be removed when the majority of Hindus realised that it was a crime against God and man and were ashamed of that. In other words, it was a process of conversion, i.e. purification of the Hindu heart. The aid of the law had to be invoked when it hindered or interfered with the progress of the reform as when, the trustees and the public were willing for the reform.\(^{23}\)

Mahatma supported the temple entry of the dalits. The removal of untouchability "is much more than building a temple of brick and mortar".\(^{24}\) Not the entry of Panchama into a temple but the brand of prohibition against him was an insult to religion and humanity said Mahatma.\(^{25}\) Temple entry was the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables and assure them that they were not

\(^{22}\) Young India, dated 22nd January 1925, p. 30.
\(^{23}\) Harijan, dated 23rd September 1939, p. 280.
\(^{24}\) Young India, dated 1st May 1924, p. 144.
\(^{25}\) Young India, dated 14th January 1926, p. 16.
outcastes before God.\textsuperscript{26} In a meeting held at Srirangam, Tamil Nadu, in February 1934, Mahatma said,

\begin{quote}
I have absolutely no desire that temple should be opened to Harijans until caste Hindu opinion is ripe for the opening. It is not a question of Harijans asserting their right of temple entry or claiming it. They may or may not want to enter that temple even when it is declared open to them. But it is the bounden duty of every caste Hindu to secure that opening for Harijans.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

While many leaders like Ayothidasar and B. R. Ambedkar suggested wholesale conversion of dalits to Islam or Christianity or Buddhism as a remedy for the removal of untouchability, Mahatma was against this view. Mahatma said,

\begin{quote}
If a change of religion could be justified for worldly betterment, I would advice it without hesitation. But religion is a matter of the heart. No physical inconvenience can warrant abandonment of one’s own religion. If the inhuman treatment of the Panchamas were a part of Hinduism, its rejection would be a paramount duty both for them and for those like me who would not make a fetish even of religion and condone every evil in its sacred name. But I believe that untouchability is no part of Hinduism. It is rather its excrescence to be removed by
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} Harijan, dated 11th February 1933, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{27} Harijan, dated 23rd February 1934, p. 10.
every effort. And there is quite an army of Hindu reformers who have set their heart upon ridding Hinduism of this blot. Conversion therefore, I hold, is no remedy whatsoever. When untouchability is rooted out, the caste distinctions would vanish and no one will consider himself superior to any other. Naturally, exploitation too will cease.

Mahatma considered that political participation of dalits was essential for their liberation as well as for the liberation of the country from foreign rule. He insisted dalits to join Indian National Congress and participate in the freedom struggle. Under the leadership of Mahatma the dalits joined the Congress and made it as a mass organisation. After their entry into the freedom struggle, the movement really became a national movement. The first large scale participation of dalits was in the non-cooperation movement organised by Mahatma.

**Non-Cooperation Movement**

Gandhiji decided to start Non-Cooperation Movement against the British rule. It was the first of its kind in the world. The political unrest created by World War-I and the failure of the reforms of 1919 made Gandhiji to start this movement. He made his proclamation on 10 March 1920, about this movement. The movement was launched formally on

---

28 Young India, dated 27th October 1920, p. 3.
1st August 1920. The Congress met in September at Calcutta and accepted non-cooperation as it own. Even though many Congress leaders opposed the programmes at the initial stages, by December, when the Congress met for its annual session at Nagpur, the opposition had melted away. The programme of non-cooperation included the surrender of titles and honour, boycott of government affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloth, and could be extended to include resignation from government service and mass civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes. National schools and colleges were to be set-up, Panchayats were to be established for settling disputes. Hand-spinning and weaving was to be encouraged. People were asked to maintain Hindu-Muslim unity, give up untouchability and observe strict non-violence.

Non-cooperation Movement in Tamil Nadu

Rajagopalachari headed this movement in Tamil Nadu. He was instructed by Gandhiji to accommodate dalits in the movement. C. Rajagopalachari affectionately called as Rajaji, earnestly implemented the principles of Mahatma. He included the dalits in the Congress and made it a mass organisation. So, when the non-cooperation movement was started in the Congress party, there were many dalit volunteers. Rajaji made a plea that Congress members should not take part in the 1920’s

As a result, out of ninety eight legislative seats, sixty three seats were bagged by Justice Party.

The Congress boycott of the elections of 1920 contributed to the low polling in Tiruchirappalli. The average polling in Tiruchirappalli was between fifteen and sixteen per cent. In the urban constituency of Madurai-Tiruchirappalli-cum-Srirangam, only 8.4 percent of the Muslims exercised their votes. In spite of the boycott programmes of the Congress, the elections were held in all the constituencies.

The Congress party led by Gandhiji did not get dismayed at that setback. The non-cooperation programme began to gain momentum in other ways. The students like Sadasivam, R. Krishnaswami, Thiagarajan, Venkataraman and Muhammad Usman left their college studies. Those who gave up their legal profession were N. Halsyam Ayyar, Thirunarayana Aiyar and Balakrishna Sastri. The leaders who actually left their professions and college careers were limited when compared to the number of people who continued in service. The latter indirectly sympathized with and supported the cause. In order to prepare the people for non-cooperation movement Gandhiji visited almost all the parts of India. The month of August was signalized by the arrival of Gandhiji and Shaukat Ali in Tamil

33 Ibid., p. 89.
35 L. Sabapathi, “India Suthanthira Por” (Tamil), Ariyalore, 1976, p. 715.
Nadu. The announcement that they were coming to Madras took the public as well as the Government by surprise. They arrived at Madras on 12th August and were given a big welcome at the station. A meeting was held the same evening on the beach at which the attendance was estimated to be about 20000.\textsuperscript{36} Twenty thousand men attending a conference was really a huge number. The crowd consisted of many mill workers, who were dalits. Many agricultural labourers were also there. Most of the agricultural labourers during that time were dalits. Gandhiji made a long speech explaining his ideas on non-cooperation. This was the first appearance of Gandhiji in Madras since the beginning of the non-cooperation campaign.\textsuperscript{37}

In his speech, Gandhiji proposed non-cooperation as a means to gain two specific objects - the redemption of the 'promise' given to Muhammadans in connection with the Khilafat and the redress of the 'Punjab wrongs'. While emphatically dissociating himself from doctrines of violence he hinted that Shaukat Ali was more than ready to plunge into war and war only restrained by his influence. In addition to the non-cooperation programme with its four stages he suggested –

1. Boycott of the councils.
2. Suspension of practice by lawyers for whom he suggested that occupation would be found in arbitration and swadeshi courts.

\textsuperscript{36} Confidential Report on the Non-Cooperation Movement, Madras Presidency, pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{37} Extract from the Speech by Mahatma Gandhi delivered at Madras on 12th August 1920 as reported in the HINDU of the 13th August 1920.
3. The withdrawal of children from Government schools which he stigmatized as factories of clerks and government servants.

It was characteristic that he based his claim to the attention of his audience not on his political but his spiritual experience, as evidenced by the following words:

I have gone through the most fiery ordeals that have fallen to the lot of man. I have understood the secret of my own sacred Hinduism.\(^{38}\)

The leaders required tangible proofs of the readiness of both Muhammadans and Hindus to non-cooperate. Gandhiji also insisted that the Caste Hindus should discourage untouchability and invite dalits in the meetings. It was accepted by leaders. Gandhiji’s appeals for funds were met by gifts of sums up to Rs.2000 and Rs.3000. There was an increase in the number of resignations of honorary offices and titles, which before the tour had been negligible.\(^{39}\)

He came to Tiruchirappalli in 1921 along with the Ali brothers. A rousing reception was given to them while they got down from the train. A procession was carried out on the evening of 30th March 1921 from Palakarai in Tiruchirappalli city with pomp and show. The procession passed through the Periyakadai street and assembled at the Municipal

\(^{38}\) The Non-cooperation Movement in the Madras Presidency, Confidential Report, pp. 4-5.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 5.
ground. People on the road side were rejoiced at seeing the Ali brothers. The shop-keepers offered garlands and purses to them.\(^{40}\) The Tiruchirappalli Khilafat Committee Secretary V.S. Muhammad Ibrahim in his welcome address praised the Ali brothers for their untiring efforts to oust the British from India.\(^{41}\)

Gandhiji planned to visit Madurai through Pudukkottai. But the Pudukkottai Durbar prohibited him to travel in its territory.\(^{42}\) At the same time when the Prince of Wales visited India a hartal was observed. The Tiruchirappalli Congress Committee took the lead and called upon the people to boycott the visit of the prince. There was a protest meeting on 17th September 1921 at Perampalor Taluk, Tiruchirappalli. It aroused public enthusiasm over the issue.\(^{43}\)

The Tiruchirappalli Congress sent a batch of volunteers under T.S.S. Rajan for boycott purpose.\(^{44}\) Rajan was also a great Gandhian and he encouraged the dalits to participate in the boycott programmes. Hence many number of dalits became members of the Congress and participated in its programmes. The Congress volunteers in Tiruchirappalli picketed cloth shops and colleges. There was a picketing in front of the National

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 290.
\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 292.
\(^{42}\) Public Department, Fortnightly Report (Confidential) 12th October 1921, p. 21
\(^{43}\) Public Department, G.O. No.823 (Confidential), 22nd November 1921, p. 14.
\(^{44}\) Public Department, Fortnightly Report (General), 15th March 1921, p. 9.
College. The Principal of the college gave cool-drinks to the arrested and indirectly supported the movement.\footnote{L. Sabapathi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 716.}

In many places the Congress volunteers defied orders under section 144 of the criminal procedure code. The volunteers were arrested. Many volunteers were dalits.\footnote{Saroja Soundararajan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 146-148.} The families of the arrested Congress workers, were financially assisted from party funds.\footnote{Public Department, Forthnightly Report (General), 17th March 1921, p. 14.} In 1922, there was a meeting at Uraiyyur, Tiruchirappalli in connection with the non-cooperation. The speaker Mr. Ignatius, a student of St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli was arrested. Consequently he was expelled from the college.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 719.} T.S.S. Rajan was the guiding force in all the activities of Tiruchirappalli Congress. He attempted to organize the ryots for the non-payment of taxes. The high assessment imposed by the government on the \textit{mirasidars} made them to join with the Congress.\footnote{Report of the Administration of the Madras Presidency (hereinafter referred to RAMP), during 1923-24, p. 12.} Though the 'no rent' campaign had a wider appeal in Tiruchirappalli, it ended in failure.\footnote{Public Department, G.O. No.893 (General), 7th September 1922, p. 12.}

**Imprisonment of dalit participants**

The government took a very strong action against the participants. Many volunteers were arrested and sentenced imprisonment.\footnote{NNPR, Swadesamitran, 25th August 1922.} Among the
arrested volunteers, many were dalits. As a part of non-cooperation movement, many labourers struck work. Buckingham Mill workers, under the auspices of Madras Labour Union struck work. Most of them belonged to Dalit Community. Many Toddy shops in Tamil Nadu were boycotted. Boycott was very intensive in Salem, Coimbatore and South Arcot districts. Many were arrested for their violation of ban order.  

Persons like I. P. Aranga Raja, Chinna Venkata Raja, Perumal Raja were some of the notable persons who strengthened the programmes of Mahatma Gandhi in Tamil Nadu. Their main aim was to create awakening among the dalit people in the rural areas. Because of their relentless efforts a factory for hand charkha was established. Glory of khaddar was propagated. Kumarasamy Raja was another prominent person who instilled fire of freedom among village masses. He was instrumental for many Dalits to take active part in the national level struggle for freedom. Violation of law and order resulted in the arrest of C. Rajagopalachariar, M. U. Subramania Iyer and others. In Coimbatore, E. V. Ramasamy Naicker was arrested in boycott agitation. Many dalit leaders were arrested. Santhanam was one among them.

Santhanam was born at Panangudi, Ramanathapuram district. He took active part in the boycott of foreign clothes, for which he was remanded to custody for three months.

Karu Mathalaimuthu was another dalit who got one year imprisonment under Indian Penal Code (IPC)126 for his participation in this movement. However, Dalit Christians expressed their hatredness against Indian nationalism, since the missionaries in which they belonged loathed this ideology. George Joseph and George Rathinam were two important notable persons who hate nationalist ideology.53

On the other hand, the nationalist ideology among Hindu dalits was kindled by caste Hindus. The caste Hindus forget their caste differences mingled freely with Harijans and inspired them throughout the period of the freedom movement. Hence, in spite of the arrests, the dalits continued their support. Though the participation of the dalits in 1920-21 was less, in 1922 they participated in large numbers. Kundu Samban, son of Marathan, born in 1877, participated in the non-cooperation movement in 1922 and he was arrested and sentenced to four months of imprisonment in 1922 under section IPC-188. He was kept in Tiruchirappalli Central Jail.

Though born in the lower state of the society with denied opportunities for education and social rights they evinced keen interest in the freedom struggle. The reason may be the staunch objectives of the Congress leaders towards the removal of untouchability and propagation of social equality among the Hindus.

53 Ibid., p. 121.
Role of Native Newspapers

Native newspapers rendered a great service in sustaining the spirit of nationalism among all the people, especially the dalits. Various papers highlighted the contribution of the dalits. The opinions of dalit leaders were published in these papers. The opinions of other leaders on dalit problems, their entry into councils, their participation in freedom movement and the need for the eradication of untouchability were highlighted.

The Adi-Dravidas firmly believe that their participation in the freedom movement would also serve the purpose of eradication of untouchability. In the Adi Dravida Congress also they stressed their support for freedom movement. Commenting on the observations in the address of Kandaswami Chettiyar at the Adi Dravida Congress at Chidambaram with regard to the work of the non-Brahman Movement, the Swadesamitran, of the 27th September says:

Mr. Chettiyar has tried to prove by quoting instances that the leaders of the non-Brahman movement have done no constructive work but only created a spirit of hatred between the non-Brahmans and the Brahmans and got the powers in their hands. We opined at the time this movement was started and those engaged in it began to work against the nationalist party as regards the Reforms, that the leaders thereof would fail to form a party but would only help the bureaucrats.
Swadesamitran stated that it could not agree with Mr. Chettiyar in his views regarding the measures to be adopted for the elevation of the Adi Dravidas. His proposal that all communities should be represented in the Ministry would not level down the existing differences but on the other had aggravated them. The only remedy that suggests itself to us was that all non-Brahmans should join the Congress as it had a political ideal. They would then become one party and could not but work for the welfare of the public.\(^{54}\)

Sukhodayam stated that the slavery of the Adi-Dravidas will not disappear until that of India also disappears and no foreign Government could uplift the condition of the former, by themselves; nor could these Adi-Dravidas attain any considerable progress merely by their getting seats in the Legislative Councils, local boards and municipalities. The Indian National Congress was labouring hard for getting rid of the slavery of the land. Hence, if the Adi-Dravidas join the Congress and cooperate therewith to remove the servility of India, the evil of ‘untouchability’ would surely disappear from the country.\(^{55}\) In commenting upon the speech of Kandaswami Chettiyar as the President of the Adi-Dravida Conference at Chidambaram, the *Sutandiran*, of the 8th October observes:

*This gentleman asked the Adi-Dravidas to rely upon Englishmen. This is a mistake. Self-confidence is the best*

---

\(^{54}\) NNPR, Swadeshamitran, 27th September 1922.

\(^{55}\) NNPR, Sukhodayam, 28th September 1922.
thing... Mr. Madurai Pillai stated at the conference held at Chingleput that the Adi-Dravidas could have salvation only if they relied upon the non-Brahmans. There is a wide gulf between democracy and the Justice party, which deems appointment under Government alone to be the end and aim of life. This party has not the heart and the principle to raise the glory of man and so the advice of Madurai Pillai cannot avail. Mr. Gandhi has demonstrated by his conduct that the Congress movement is a movement of the poor, being full of real love. The Adi-Dravidas should no longer stand out of the Congress in hesitation.\textsuperscript{56}

Many other native newspapers were also of the same opinion. They firmly believed that the support of dalits to Indian National Congress was essential for the removal of untouchability as well for the freedom of our country. These newspapers were widely read by the dalits and they continued their support to the Indian National Congress.

When the repressive measures against the \textit{satyagrahis} continued, on 1st February 1922, Gandhiji gave an ultimatum to Lord Reading, the Viceroy of India, to withdraw all repressive laws and give proof of his changed attitude within seven days or face the consequences of another \textit{Satyagraha} in the form of non-payment of taxes. But before the expiry of seven days notice, an unforeseen incident took place at Chauri Chaura in

\textsuperscript{56} NNPR, Sutantiran, 8th October 1922.
Uttar Pradesh. An excited mob attacked a police outpost on February 5, 1922 and killed a few constables. Apprehending similar troubles in other parts of the country, Mahatma announced the suspension of the movement.\(^5\)

The policy of retreat was the unilateral action of Mahatma and many leaders including Rajaji did not like it. His popularity suffered a setback. The government availed itself of the opportunity and arrested him. He was sentenced for six years, but was released earlier. Mahatma did not loose his heart because of all these incidents. He diverted his attention for constructive programmes. He took every opportunity to remove untouchability.\(^6\)

**The twin objectives of Dalit Liberation and National Independence**

Mahatma initiated the constructive programmes with the twin objectives of dalit liberation and national independence. He considered that only after the liberation of dalits, the freedom will be complete.

The Thirty-ninth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Belgaum on December 26 and 27, 1924 under the Presidentship of Gandhiji. In his presidential address, Gandhiji considered that the removal of untouchability was as essential as the attainment of Swaraj. This was an essentially Hindu question and Hindus could claim or take Swaraj till they

---


had restored the liberty of the suppressed classes. To remove untouchability was a penance that caste Hindus owed to Hinduism and to themselves. He also warned against the tendency or exploiting the suppressed classes for political end. At the end of the session a resolution on untouchability was adopted as follows:

The Congress notes with satisfaction the progress in Hindu opinion regarding the removal of untouchability, but is of opinion that much yet remains to be done and therefore appeals to the Hindu members of all Congress organisations to make a greater effort in the cause. The Congress hereby urges the Hindu members of Provincial Congress Committees to devote greater attention to the amelioration of the lot of the Depressed Classes by ascertaining their wants, such as in regard to wells, places of worship, facilities for education etc. and making provisions for meeting such wants. The Congress congratulates the Satyagrahis of Vaikom, who are engaged in asserting the right of way of untouchables through a thoroughfare which is open to caste Hindus, on their non-violence, patience, courage and endurance, and hopes that the State of Travancore which is regarded as enlightened will recognise the justice of the Satyagrahis' claim and grant speedy relief.

59 Indian Annual Register, 1924, Vol. II. p. 408.
60 Ibid., pp. 434-435.
The removal of untouchability was long confined to the platform of social or religious reform. By making it one of the items of constructive programme of the Congress, the attitude towards it of the educated classes and masses alike was changed perceptibly. In the subsequent Congress sessions held at Kanpur (December 26-28, 1925), Gauhati (December 26-28, 1926) and Calcutta (December 28, 1928 to January 1, 1929), this programme of work was discussed and resolutions were adopted including this task in its constructive programme of work 61.

Rajaji initiated constructive programmes in Tamil Nadu. As a part of constructive programme, Rajaji established the Gandhi Ashram at Tiruchencode. Rajaji giving up his lucrative legal practice at the behest of Gandhiji, thought the humanitarian services needed to the impoverished villagers should be given precedence over even the freedom movement. For that purpose, he settled down in a one-room tenement in the Ashram, which became a sort of pilgrim place for the frontline leaders of the freedom movement. Gandhiji, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Nehru, Lal Bahadur Sastri, Kamaraj are among the many illustrious persons who came to the Gandhi Ashram. Rajaji spent a soul-satisfying period of ten years in the Ashram improving the socio-economic conditions of the people and enhancing the quality of life in the villages. From the limelight of the Freedom Movement, Rajaji became an itinerant preacher in

an obscure village instead of hurling defiance at the British Raj from the centre of the Congress dias. He was now inveighing against the toddy mug from the back of bullock carts. He was not conscious of a loss of dignity or worth - and he was being tangibly effective. With this legacy of Rajaji, Gandhi ashram supports six thousand rural families through the Khadi and Village Industries, which would have otherwise migrated to towns as slum dwellers adding to the woes of the congested cities.\textsuperscript{62}

**Impact of the Movement on the dalits of Tamil Nadu and their entry into National Politics**

The non-cooperation movement created awakening among dalits. Many leaders emerged in the political field. Swami Sahajananda, one of the greatest leaders of dalits, emerged in the forefront during this time. It was the non-cooperation movement that created consciousness among the dalits, who were living in the rural areas. Swami Sahajananda, who was also from a rural middle class family, was directly influenced by non-cooperation movement.

He met Gandhi at Patna in December 1920 and it was that encounter which confirmed his determination to “plunge into politics, not because it would do any good for my country, but because it would be only then that I would realize the true meaning of service as a sannyasi.”\textsuperscript{63} His


\textsuperscript{63} Swami Sahajananda, “Mere Jeevan Sangharsh” (My Life Struggle), Patna, 1952, p. 185.
impressions of that meeting were to be reinforced by Sahajanand’s participation in the Nagpur session of the Congress later that month. Nagpur was in many ways the turning point in confirming Gandhi’s leadership and programme as the programme of the Congress and the nation. Sahajanand’s comment on Nagpur, though made in retrospect, captured much of the quality of that session and the direction in which Sahajanand’s own social and political views were developing. It was at Nagpur, he wrote, that the congress “forsook the time-honoured procedure of begging for something... and instead took to the path of self-respect. For the first time it was decided that on the refusal of government to fulfil the rightful demands of the country, we should throw out a challenge, and thus a fresh lease of life was given to India.”

The same enthusiasm and excitement pervaded the Ahmedabad session in 1921. “No one can describe the great enthusiasm which pervaded the Congress”, Sahajanand was to write, “wave after wave of enthusiasm was visible”. Again it was the Mahatma who by his words and very presence projected that universal sense of excitement and achievement that now infused the politics of freedom. “I listened to Gandhiji’s speech with rapt attention”, Sahajanand wrote:

Gandhiji was seated on a table as he spoke. His whole body, especially his face had a ruddy appearance. It seemed that

---

64 Ibid., p. 187.
65 Ibid., p. 212.
some power in the garb of a demon was throwing a determined challenge to government and warning that it should be on its guard. He spoke for hours. There was pindrop silence. Never again did I see him speak with such emotion. Every word that came out of his mouth was like a thunderbolt against the government. It seemed that Shiva, the god of Destruction, was raging and that soon the great deluge would follow.  

Many other leaders also emerged during this time. R. Srinivasan, who was associated with the Satyagraha programmes of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, returned to India and entered the Indian Politics in 1921. Because of the entry of dalit leaders in the politics, many of them got representation in the legislative councils and local boards. Along with Rao Bahadur H.M.Jaganathan and M.C.Raja, many others were nominated and elected to various Local Boards and Legislative Council. The following table will show the representation by the depressed class in the Legislative Council and Local Boards.

---

Table 1
Depressed Class Representation

I. Legislative Council (Nominated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Local Boards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District Board</th>
<th>Taluk Board</th>
<th>Municipalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Boards</td>
<td>No. of Depressed Class Members</td>
<td>No. of Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this way, the non-cooperation movement helped the dalits to enter into the main stream of politics. These dalits worked for the liberation of their motherland as well as for the liberation of their own community.