Chapter Five

Ambedkar and ‘What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables’

Context of the text:

Every civilized society feels a need for dividing the works amongst its members for ensuring smooth working. Different societies have fulfilled it in different manner. Hinduism has also made a provision in its social structure to facilitate distribution of works to different sections of the society. This provision is known as caste system. The system devised in Hinduism for distributing work is peculiar in many ways. In other cultures the division is flexible, the person can change his job as and when he feels like doing it. The society does not interfere with the choice of its members. This flexibility is lacking in the caste system. The occupations were strictly hereditary. Person born in a particular caste had no choice but to engage in the occupation if his forefathers. He was abided, due to his birth, not only to follow the occupation but also to adhere to the code of conduct specific to his caste. Temptation of going contrary to the code of conduct was always there to lure the members. That is why there was always a danger of transgressors. In order to ensure the observance of caste discipline the society had made a provision. Commenting on it Desai says, “In fact the caste committees had quasi-legal powers to punish its offending members such as excommunication, fines and even corporal punishment. A member of caste owed allegiance first to his caste and then to the community. This naturally weakened the feeling of community solidarity in him.” (Desai 210: 229)

Each caste had its distinct way of dressing, peculiar food culture specified style of greeting and so on. This is what Nehru calls ‘diversity.’ Behind this apparent diversity there was embedded a deep feeling of otherness. This was not entertained only by people belonging to the upper caste for those belonging to the lowered caste or members of one caste against members of another caste, but the feeling was so deep rooted that people belonging to two different sub-castes of the same caste also harboured the same contempt for each others. So Ambedkar observes that, “Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious
of its existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence castes do not even form a federation. A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. On all other occasions each caste endeavours to segregate itself and to distinguish itself from other castes. Each caste not only dines among itself and marries among itself but each caste prescribes its own distinctive dress.” (Ambedkar 2013: 33-34)

Another feature of the division of labour devised in Hindu society is that all the castes are not looked upon as equals but there are distinctions of high and low. As a result of the gradation they envy the upper castes whereas look with contempt at the lower castes. In doing so, they maintain the status of each caste and frustrate the attempt of any caste to rise in the status. Ambedkar has narrated two incidents of such behavior. The first one is related to ‘Sonar’ a caste engaged in trading gold and ornaments. As a result of their occupation Sonars are financially quite well to do, but some customs in the caste underlined their inferiority to Brahmins. They decided to reform them. So they started to wear their dhotis with folds on, in the way Brahmins used to do and started greeting each other saying ‘Namaskar’ which was a peculiar Brahmin way of greeting. As these changes were limited to their caste only, there was not a possibility of having some adverse effect on the society. Still Brahmins saw their imitation as an act of transgression. Under the rule of Peshwas this attempt was crushed. Not only this, Brahmins went to the President of the Councils of the East India Company’s settlement in Bombay and obtained a prohibitive order against Sonar’s of Bombay who were trying to emulate them. Another incident is related to Pathare Prabhus a well to do community residing around Bombay. They had a custom of widow re-marriage unlike among Brahmins. Seeing this as the mark of their relative inferiority, some of them decided to modify it. The community was divided into two groups as some did not agree to it. The case went to the Peshwa and he sided with those who did not want to change the custom. Thus Pathare Prabhus were prevented from introduction of ban on widow-remarriage. (Ambedkar 2013: p.38)

Such rigid behavior leaves little scope for the members to develop amongst themselves such ideas which would lead to democratic or rational attitude. As the caste becomes an enclosed unit, strictly adhering to norms of caste, it isolates itself. This isolation naturally results into narrowness of concentrating on the interests of their caste only. That is why Ambedkar asserts that, “The Hindus, therefore, are not
merely an assortment of castes but they are so many warring groups each living for itself and for its selfish ideal.” (Ambedkar 2013:36) This mindset creates a social environment in which free interaction between individual becomes impossible. The impact of this system has been described by Ambedkar as,

“The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. 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 men of other caste…… my caste-man, right or wrong, my caste-man, good or bad. It is not the case of standing by virtue and not standing by vice. It is a case of standing or not standing by caste. Have not Hindus committed treason against their own country in the interest of their caste?” (Ambedkar 2013:42-43)

Pre colonial history of India is a result of this caste attitude. During the colonial period this picture was completely unjustifiable because it would not suit to the concept of nation which Indians were dreaming of. Taking in to account the divisive tendency of caste Ambedkar warns that one cannot build anything on the basis of caste and even if an attempt is made to do so, it is bound to crumble and collapse. Desai points the danger of maintaining caste in the context of the process of nation building and says, “Demanding the foremost fidelity to itself, the caste came in the way of paramount need of the people to subordinate every allegiance to the supreme allegiance nationalism”. (Desai 2010:236)

In order to create a nation out of Indian society, it was necessary to dissolve these identities which were incompatible with the concept of nationalism. Ambedkar had realized this fact better than any of his contemporaries. Having studied in Columbia offered him an opportunity to come in contact with John Dewy and others that proved to be an advantage which helped him to see through the society. Apart from that there were many things that influenced him. Born in an untouchable family he had to bear the brunt of social system. His engagement with caste was a result of
this fact. Influence of Buddhism developed in him rationality which was absent in most of the leaders of his time. He repeatedly states that the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity were inheritance which he received from Buddhism. Among other influences on his personality were Kabir, a medieval saint who launched a powerful attack on irrationality and ritualism in religion whether Hindu or Muslim. The most current and deep impact was of Jotirao Phule who exposed the disastrous effect of brahminical religion and led a revolt against it as we have seen earlier. This made him attack the foundation on which caste system was based and launch a struggle for a society based on the principles of inclusiveness along with persuasion of equal rights and equal opportunity. His conviction gave him courage to rebel against the oppressive social system.

**Appearance in the Public Life:**

The Secretary of State for India Lord Morley announced in the British Parliament that he was willing to give representation to natives in the legislative councils. This came as an alarm to the Muslims as being in a minority they might not be able to win in the contest against Hindus in joint electorates. So they sent a deputation to Viceroy, Lord Minto. The deputation asked for adequate representation for Muslims while reforming the constitution. The Viceroy assured them that, “political rights and interests will be safeguarded by any administrative re-organization with which I am concerned.” (Masselos2010 p.131) This resulted in a provision for separate electorates in the Morley Minto reforms of 1909. This also gave Muslims recognition as a separate community.

On 27th August 1917 the Secretary of State for India Montague declared in the parliament that the Government was contemplating wider representation for the natives in the councils. He came to India to study the political situation in India in order to decide the nature of the rights to be given. He toured India along with the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford. On his return he sent a committee to decide franchise. The committee was headed by Lord Southborough. It toured India in order to meet people and to know their views on the issue. They observed that people who were orthodox in social and religious matters had revolutionary views in political matters and they asked for home rule. They also proclaimed that instead of granting representation to ‘Depressed Classes’ the responsibility of protecting their interests should be entrusted
to them. Even V.R. Shinde and Sir Narayan Chandawarkar agreed to them. This whole episode annoyed Ambedkar and he wrote a letter entitled “A Mahar on Home rule” in ‘The Times of India’, under the pen name of ‘A Mahar’. It was published on 16th January 1919.” (Khairmode 2010: Vol.I: 256)

Depressed Classes Mission was founded by V.R. Shinde and Narayanrao Chandavarkar was the President of the Mission as well as a person who had weightage in the government. Their names were sure to be announced by the Government. Ambedkar was working as a professor in Sydneham College. He had a feeling that it was proper and effective that the grievances of ‘Depressed Classes’ should be represented by a person belonging to those classes. Though he was serving the Government, he started correspondence with the Governor to allow him to represent the ‘Depressed Classes’ and give evidence before the Southborough Commission. Accepting his request the Governor chose him along with Shinde as other representative. Ambedkar brought it to the notice of the commission caste wise number of voters and its proportion to the population of the caste in Bombay Province in relation to Local Boards group one and group two and pointed out that castes like Brahmans, Marathas and Lingayatys get share of representation but Mahars, though having a large population, the representation is negligible. So he asked for nine seats for the Depressed Classes in the Bombay Legislative Council of 100 members, and to be filled by separate communal election. (BAWS 2010, VOL I: 275) The evidence by Ambedkar had an impact on the Government of India Act 1919 is described as “Among the achievement were- Untouchables were a separate entity in India society, Untouchables were in desperate need of rights to protect them from discrimination, and Ambedkar was nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council that gave representation to the Untouchables.” (Thorat & Kumar 2009:61)

**Simon Commission:**

Government of India Act of 1919 had made a provision that after a lapse of ten years after its inception a committee would be constituted in order to study the effects of the Act on different activities of the Government. Indian groups had a feeling that the reforms of 1919 failed to fulfill the expectations of Indians. As a result of it demand for more participation of the natives intensified. According to the provision the committee was to be appointed after ten years but due to insistence of
The Government appointed a statutory commission before the stipulated period. It was headed by Sir John Simon. Indians were expecting the commission to be mixed in nature, but it consisted only of British people. Many parties including the Congress, the Liberals and many more boycotted it. Though others declared their boycott, Ambedkar saw Simon Commission as an opportunity to plead the case of Depressed Classes. Thorat while describing Ambedkar’s role in this regard says, “While repeating major arguments of his statements before the commission like treating DC’s as distinct minority and acknowledging their need for greater protection than any other community, he gave many instances of social ostracism of them in Poona, Ratnagiri, Collaba, through boycott by the shopkeepers, stopping them to perform their duties as village servants, denial of equal rights in using basic amenities like public dispensaries, taking away the lands cultivated by them so that they revert to their dirty and unclean jobs.” (Thorat & Kumar 2009:62) Sir John Simon wrote a letter to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald suggesting that after publication of the report of the commission the representatives of British India, Indian States and different communities be invited for a conference before making final decision regarding the reforms. This conference is known as the Round Table Conference. During this conference the issue of representation was raised. This conference on the one hand gave birth to many controversial issues and on the other ascertained Ambedkar’s place in Indian socio-political expense.

On this background Ambedkar wrote “What Congress and Gandhi have done to the untouchables.” We have seen Ambedkar reiterating that the social system of Hindus encouraged alienation. The graded system of inequality was not a division of labour but the division of labourers. This according to him was incompatible with the dream of building a nation.” Nationalism must be inclusive in its nature. One cannot build a nation with the help of fissipерous material like caste system of Hindus. In order to expose the hollowness of repeated proclamations of the Congress Party, the party had time and again stated that it aims at uniting all the sections of the society. The question that how were they going to do it was most pertinent. That is what Ambedkar points out. Whether they wanted to come together maintaining their age old identities or they desired to dissolve the old status and identities was a question. Ambedkar was for outright discarding of caste but when he saw a stiff oppose of the masses and procrastination on the part of the Congress leaders, he changed his course.
of action and strived for at least ascertaining some safeguards for them in the would be nation.

A Sudden Change in the Policy of the Congress:

Ambedkar tracks the history of speeches made by the Congress Presidents in its annual sessions from its beginning in connection with their attitude towards need for social reforms. He finds that in the beginning they took cognizance of need for social changes. In 1886 Dadabhai Nawroji was the president of the session at Calcutta. He stated that some people insist that the Congress must take up the problem of change in order to eradicate social evils, as the Congress did not pay attention so they have criticized. He also asserted that, “Certainly no member of this National Congress is more alive to the necessity of social reform than I am; but, Gentlemen, for everything there are proper times, proper circumstances, proper parties and proper places (cheers); we are met together as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations, not to discuss social reforms, and if you blame us for ignoring these, you should equally blame the House of Commons for not discussing the more abstruse problems of mathematics or metaphysic.” (BAWS 1991:Vol 9,7) Explaining the point further he said that there are castes and customs varying from one to another, there are various religious divisions so it is beyond the capacity of the Congress to deal with problems of each of them. He suggests that reforms could be brought in by the members of those castes themselves, because they are in a better position to judge that what reforms does a particular class need to bring in. He aggressively questions that, “Are we not fit for them (political reforms) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? Because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends? Because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge? (Cheers) (BAWS 1991:Vol 9,9)

In 1895 the Annual Session of the Congress was in Poona and Mr. Surendranath Bannerjee was the President. In his address he referred to the issue of social reforms. He was of the opinion that discussion of social reforms on the Congress platform would cause fragmentation in the Congress and he did not want this to happen. On the contrary he asserted that, “Here we stand upon a common platform—here we have all agreed to bury our social and religious differences and recognize the one common fact that being subjects of the same Soverign and living
under the same Government and the same political institutions, we have common rights and common grievances. “(BAWS 1991Vol IX:10) He also stated that the Congress was a political organization and so it was not meant to indulge in social reforms. He even cautioned that discussion of these matters would amount to sowing the seeds of wrangling and disagreement.

The Presidents referred to the persons who insisted on social reforms were a group of persons belonging to the same organization. When the Indian National Congress was constituted in 1885 it was decided that it should not devote itself entirely to political achievements but it should also endeavour for social reforms.

In 1887 Hon. Budruddin Tyabji was elected as the president of the Third Annual session of the Congress. He also touched upon the subject of social reforms. He asserted that the Congress was composed of the representatives of different classes, communities and parts of India and endorsed the view expressed by his predecessor that social reforms were class, caste and region specific and suggested that, “Gentlemen, it seems to me, that although we, Mussalmans, have our own social problems to solve, just as our Hindu and Parsi friends have theirs, yet these questions can be best dealt with by the leaders of the particular communities to which they relate (Applause).” (BAWS 1991Vol IX:8)

The issue of social reforms was not dealt with by the Presidents in every session. The next time the issue was discussed in the eighth session in 1892 and the Presidential address was delivered by Mr. W.C.Banerjee. He emphatically announced that, “I am one of those who have very little faith in the public discussion of the social matters; those are things which I think, ought to be left to the individuals of a community who belong to the same social organization to do what they can for its improvement.” (BAWS 1991Vol IX:8) He also reminded the audience that the Age of Consent Bill had generated a heated debate in the society. Not only he vehemently declares that he did not see a connection between political reforms and social reforms and reiterates that he did not have patience with those who believed that social reforms was a condition precedent for political reforms. Justice M.G.Ranade, Dewan Bahadur R. Raghunath Rao were in favour of this policy. Though this was discussed, the Congress did not do anything substantial in this regard. So the persons who favoured reforms decided to start an organization to cater to the needs of reforms. Its name was Indian Nation Social Conference. It was established in 1887. It decided to take up on issues like prohibition on distant sea-voyages, exorbitant expenses on
marriages, interdictions on remarriage of widows and so on. The reforms were not radical still no inclination was shown by majority of Congressmen. There were two sets of the Congress presidents. The first accepted the necessity of social reforms but believed that the Congress Session was not the proper platform for it. The second set declined the view that there cannot be political reforms without social reforms. In this way though there was a difference of opinion on the issue, there was a spirit of cooperation among the two camps. Annual Sessions of Social Conference were held immediately after the Congress session. The congress was accommodative to the social Conference. In 1895 during the congress session at Poona the situation changed. The session had become restless due to the opponents of social reforms. That section rebelled against the courtesy to let the Social Conference use the pendal of Congress session. They threatened to burn down the pendal if it was used for social conference. This hostility was fueled by Mr.Tilak, who was described by Ambedkar as, “one of those social Tories and political radicals with which India abounds....” (BAWS1991VolIX:13) After that neither the Congress Presidents referred to the social reforms nor that they had any relation with the Social Conference. Thus the Congress its relations with social reforms and severed became a purely political organization.

The year 1917 witnessed a sudden change in the policy of the Congress. The Congress passed a resolution that, “This Congress 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.” (BAWS1991VolIX:1) The president of the session was Mrs. Annie Besant. The change was so drastic that the Congressmen who were bent upon showing that there is no relation between political and social reforms and also belittled the social reforms and poked fun of them were instant on social change Mr. Rama Iyer of Madras, who moved the resolution said that, “you cannot be political democrat and at the same time social autocrats. Remember that a man, a social slave, cannot be politically a free man.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:2 ) Mr. Asif Ali from Delhi said, “It seemed a cruel irony of fate that those who were vociferously clamoring for the attainment or preservation of human rights themselves were so little mindful of the legitimate rights of others under them.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:3) President of the session believed that Depressed Classes were original inhabitants of the land conquered by Aryan Invaders. Those
classes, according to her, consisted of drunkards and unclean people, they were, “pathetically submissive, merry enough when not in actual want, with a bright though generally very limited intelligence ….” (BAWS 1991VolIX:4) She was of the firm opinion that if they are schooled tighter with children belonging to upper caste, instead of improving themselves, they would spoil the other students. So she insisted upon having separate schools for such students. Lady with such views giving concurrence was really revolutionary change.

The question that perturbed Ambedkar was that why was there such a drastic change in the attitude of the Congress? And he narrates some incidents before it. A meeting of the Depressed Classes was organised under the chairmanship of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar on 11th Nov. 1917. The resolutions this meeting passed included a resolution to support the scheme proposed by the All Indian National Congress and All-India Muslim League. It suggested reforms in Indian administration and the one which urged the Congress to adopt measures to remove the blemish of dishonor from the Depressed classes. Another meeting of Depressed Classes was organized in the same month under the chairmanship of Bapuji Namdeo Bagade, a leader of Non-Brahmin Party. It passed resolution denying support to Congress-League scheme which was declared in the earlier meeting but insisted that the congress should pass a resolution for removing the social impairment of the untouchables. It needs to be mentioned that Sir Chandavakar was former President of the Congress. The Congress manipulated the resolution of unconditional support to the Congress-League Scheme. That would have served triple purpose, it would have, firstly, ensured that the power rests in the hands of the elites either Hindu or Muslims, secondly it work have kept their servile class intact and thirdly that would have given the government a feeling that Indians are united. Due to Non-Brahmin Party leaders’ intervention this attempt was frustrated.

This makes amply clear that the changed in the attitude of the Congress was not because of its judiciousness but out of ulterior motive. Ambdkar views the actions of the Congress with a view to find out what it did thereafter and he comments, “Congress did not appear to be charged with any qualms of conscience or with any sense of righteous indignation against man’s inhumanity to man which is what Untouchability is. They forgot the Resolution the very day on which it was passed. The Resolution was a dead letter. Nothing came out of it.” (BAWS 1991VoIIIX:18)
This is how Ambedkar brings out it to the notice of all that the Congress was honest as far as it was concerned with Swaraj. But it was deceitful regarding removal of social evils existing in Hindu society. They neither felt sympathy for young widows nor for girls married as child. They poked fun of equal status of women their education and simply behaved exactly like a power hungry group.

In 1919 Gandhi emerged as a leader of the Congress. He transformed it beyond recognition. Old Congress did not give action plan unlike the old Congress it was not a gathering of intellectuals but was a mass organization. The Congress held a meeting at Bardoli In February 1922 in which it launched a programme of social amelioration which was also known as ‘The Constructive Programme.’ The programme planned included to enlist one crore members of the Congress, popularize spinning wheel to produce handspun cloth. To organize nation schools, it also included a plan to organize Depressed Classes in order for a letter life and important item on the agenda was to continue collecting Tilak Swaraj Fund.

Here Ambedkar is interested in showing that what happened to the resolution in Baroli Programme that was related to untouchables. He describes the process through which item was made ineffectual. First the All India Congress Committee confirmed the resolution and sent it to the Working Committee for action. It took up the matter in its Lucknow meeting in June 1922 and resolved that a committee consisting of Swami Shradhanandji, Mrs. Sarojini Naid, Mr. I.K.Yajnik and Mr. G.B.Deshpande to suggest the measures to improve the condition of the so-called Untouchables. For this they were expected to study the condition of Untouchables throughout the country and they were sanctioned a sum of rupees 2 lakhs. The resolution of the Working Committee was placed before the All-India Congress Committee in Lucknow meeting in June 1922. It accepted the resolution of the working committee after making an amendment regarding the financial assistance which was raised to 5 lakhs. Mean while Swami Shradhanandji tendered his resignation so in the same meeting Mr. G.B.Deshpande was appointed the convener of the Sub Committee. Next reference to this committee was found in the Congress Working Committee meeting held in Bombay on July 1922. It was resolved that the General Secretary should be asked to request Swami Shradhanandji to reconsider and withdraw his resignation as well as a sum of Rs. 500 was sanctioned to the convener, Mr. G.B.Deshpande. As nothing was done in order to improve the condition of the Untouchables the working Committee which met at Gaya in January 1923 passed a
resolution to form the committee with Mr.Yajnik as its convener. All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay in May 1923 and resolved that the question related to condition of the Untouchables should be referred to the working committee. Finally a resolution was passed in the Working Committee in Bombay in the same month as “Resolved that while some improvement has been effected in the condition of Untouchables in response of the policy of the congress, this Committee is conscious that much work remains yet to be done in this respect and in as much as this question of Untouchability concerns the Hindu community particularly, it requests the All India Hindu Maharashtra also to take up this matter and to make strenuous efforts to remove this evil from amidst the Hindu Community.” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX: 22)

The episode shows that the Congress had resolved to ameliorate the condition of the Untouchables as a part of Bardoli Programme which was taken very seriously by the Congress. As far as enrollment of members, popularization of spinning wheel and such items were concerned the action was in full swing but as regards to the Untouchables apart from meetings and resolutions nothing more concrete has happened. It was not only a case of deferred action but of no action at all. Its conclusion was more starting. To assign the task, which they had undertaken to Hindu Mahasabha was the severest blow to the programme. Commenting on the episode Ambedkar states that, “This shows that the Congress wanted somehow to get rid of an inconvenient problem and wash its hands of it. The Hindu Mahasabha of course did not come forth to undertake the work for it had no urge for it and also because the congress had merely passed a pious resolution recommending the work to them without making any promise for financial provision. So the project came to an inglorious and an ‘ignominious end.” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:23)

Gandhi had assured the Untouchables that there was quite in army of Hindu reformers who had set their heart on getting rid of this blemish on the Hinduism. He wrote in the Young India, “Untouchability cannot be given a secondary place on the programme. Without the removal of the taint Swaraj is a meaningless term. Workers should welcome social boycott and even public execration in the prosecution of their work. I consider the removal of untouchability as a most powerful factor in the process of attending Swaraj” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:36)

“Gandhi also told to the Hindus in an article published in Young India that, “The Hindus must realize that, if they wish to offer successful non-cooperation against
the government they must make common cause with the Panchamas, even as they have made common cause with the Musalmans.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:37)

Ambedkar then goes on to locate the reasons behind forsaking the programme. This is because Gandhi, time and again, proclaims the need to grapple with the issue of Untouchability. It is evident from his statements that there was no lack of desire. The other reason could be the dirth of funds. Ambedkar investigates the Congress Working Committee meeting minutes during that period and after going through the resolutions regarding grants voted he finds that the congress had collected a sum of one crore and thirty five lakh. Out of it they had sanctioned an amount of five lakh rupees by the All-India Congress Committee. The Working Committee reduced it to two lakh rupees. The population of untouchables was approximately sixty millions at that time. Two lakh rupees for the amelioration of sixty million people was ridiculous thing. The Congress spared a meagre amount, now Ambedkar tells us how much the Congress spent on this head. It actually spent forty three thousand three hundred and eighty one rupees! This amount was spent on managing the offices of the Depressed Classes Mission and Antyaja Karyalaya established at various places. Out of which Antyaja Karyalaya at Ahmedabad received a major share of twenty three thousand three hundred eighty one rupees. Commenting on this episode Ambedkar states, “Can there be a grosser instance of insincerity than this? Where is the love for the Untouchables which the Congress professed for the Untouchables? Where is the desire of the Congress to undertake the uplift of the Untouchables? Would it be wrong to say that the Bardoli resolution was a fraud in so far as it related to the Untouchables”? (BAWS 1991 VolIX:36)

Instead of implementing the programme chalked out to ameliorate the Untouchables, Gandhi was engaged in uttering spiritual stock hackneyed expressions. He did not raise objection to improper utilization of Tilak Swraj fund by his party colleagues. Instead of feeling compunction for his deeds he gives justification of his apathy to the cause and shifts the blame to the British rule. In Young India of 20th October 1920 he writes, “Should not we Hindus wash our bloodiest hands before we ask the English to wash theirs? This is a proper question reasonably put. And if a member of a slave nation could deliver the suppressed classes from their slavery, without freeing myself from my own I would do so today. But it is an impossible task. A slave has not the freedom even to do the right thing.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:38)
As we have seen earlier the Government of India act provided for appointing Royal Commission to investigate the working of the constitution and report about necessary changes. According a commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon. As the aftermath of this commission the Majority’s Government announced that representatives of Indians would be called together for discussing the new constitution of India. This is known as the Round Table Conference. This conference was different from the earlier ones in the character because for the first time the Untouchables were allowed to be represented by two delegates of their own. They were Dewan Bahadur R. Srinivasan and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. They were supposed to work out the safeguards for the Untouchables in order to protect them from the tyranny and exploitation by the Hindus. Ambedkar had prepared a memorandum in this regard. Among other provisions it included adequate representation in the Legislatures in which he also asked for separate electorates for the first ten years. He expressed his fears in the memorandum and said. “In view of the fact that the Majority Rule of the feature will be the rule of orthodox, the Depressed Classes fear that such majority rule will not be sympathetic to them and that the probability of prejudice to their interests and neglect of their vital needs cannot be over looked.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:48)

The Conference agreed that joint electorates would deprive the Untouchables of genuine representation. So there was unanimity on the point of separate electorates. Though there was lack of agreement on some issues they unanimously accepted that the Untouchables were entitled to recognition as separate entity for political and constitutional purposes. The Congress had declared boycott on the first Round Table Conference because it was engaged in civil disobedience movement. As a result it was the only party whose views in this regard were not clear. The Congress reached a compromise with this Majesty’s Government before the second session of the Round Table Conference, so the Congress agreed to attend the second session.

As the Congress was going to participate the delegates felt that there would be rapid progress in the transaction of the conference. This expectation proved to be without basis because the Congress chose Gandhi as its representative and Ambedkar describes his selection as, “A worse person could not have been chosen to guide India’s destiny. As a unifying force he was a failure. Mr. Gandhi presented himself as a man of full humility. But his behavior at the Round Table Conference showed that in the flush of victory Mr. Gandhi can be very petty minded. As a result of his
successful compromise with the Government just before he came, Mr. Gandhi treated the whole Non-Congress delegation with contempt. He insulted them whenever an occasion furnished him with an excuse by openly telling them that they were nobodies and that he alone, as the delegate of the Congress, represented the country.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:55)

When the Federal Structure Committee first met in that Conference, on the issue of Untouchables Gandhi said that the Congress had taken up the cause of the Untouchables from its beginning. Not only he claimed of having worked for the Untouchables, he also claimed to represent them in the Conference and opposed the proposal of separate electorates for the Untouchables. Ambedkar perceived it as, “nothing but a declaration of war by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress against the Untouchables.” (BAWS1991VolIX:57) This declaration by Mr. Gandhi gave Ambedkar an idea as to what would he do in the Minorities Committee, where the issue would come for discussion.

Next Mr. Gandhi endeavoured to bring about a settlement on the issue between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs privately leaving the Untouchables out, though the issue was related to them. Before the meeting of the Minorities Committee, he had negotiations with Muslims secretly. In the meeting His Highness the Agakhan disclosed that, “I believe that Mahatma Gandhi is going to see the Muslim Delegation to-night.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:58) Then Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya suggested that the meeting should be adjourned for a short period. Sensing the mischief behind this move Ambedkar rose to speak and stated that he was happy that negotiations were going to take place to settle the communal question. But at the same time he made it clear that those who were involved in it were not authorized by the Committee to negotiate the settlement. So the solution would not be a binding on him. He further stated that he was not going to give any seats to anybody out of his share.

The adjournment was announced and the Minorities Committee met again after a break. There were negotiations between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs during this period but the solution was not found. Then Gandhi asked for a week’s adjournment for consultations, and suggested to appoint a Sub-Committee. Ambedkar opposed the motion. Speaking on the occasion Gandhi expressed his views as follows. He said, “Who am I to deny political status to any single interest or class or even individual in India? As a representative of the Congress I should be unworthy of the trust that has been reposed in me by the Congress if I were guilty of sacrificing a single national
interest.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:62) Gandhi repeatedly stated that he had no authority behind him to carry his opinion against anybody but still affirmed that he had been giving expressions to his views in the national interest and reiterated that he would do the same whenever he finds an opportunity. This is how Gandhi sought to pit the safeguards of the Untouchables against the national interest and indirectly branded the demand of safeguards for the Untouchables as not in the interest of the nation, that is anti-national. This is the legacy of Tilak who branded people who talked of social reforms as anti-national.

Then His Highness Agakhan presented the document of minorities pact. It included Muslims, Depressed Classes, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and a big section of Christian groups as signatories. Gandhi was annoyed by this move and particularly infuriated because this pact had given recognition to Depressed Classes as a 'separate political entity.' He said, “I can understand the claims advanced by other minorities, but the claim advanced on behalf of the Untouchables, that time is the 'unkindest cut of all'. 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. I claim myself in my own person to represent that vast mass of the Untouchables.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:68)

The strategy adopted by Gandhi needs to be understood minutely. He was there to represent the Congress but at the same time he wanted to push aside the representatives of the Untouchables, who belonged to that same community and pose himself as the representative of the Untouchables. By saying that he would not sell the interests of Untouchables even for winning freedom, he did two things. On the one hand he declared that the persons who represent them did not have idea of their interests and, therefore, were, ignorant and the other hand he put forward the idea most detrimental to the interests of the Untouchables. That only can ameliorate their status.

Gandhi believed that by granting separate electorates to the Untouchables would be made to remain so perpetually, so he said, “Will Untouchable remain Untouchables for perpetuity? I would far rather that Hinduism died than that Untouchability lived.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:68) This statement indicates that Gandhi cared more for the Untouchables than Hindu. But in the same speech he asserts that “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 which I
cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there were two divisions set forth in villages.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:69) He also claimed that people who support political safeguards for the Untouchables are ignorant about Indian Society. He declared that even if he is the only person to hold such opinion he would not care and oppose the proposal even with his life.

Gandhi was of opinion that by granting separate electorates would be like furnishing one more reason for the orthodox and the Untouchables to contradict. Really speaking Ambedkar cites so many instances of the discord and rift between the aforesaid two communities. In fact they never lived as a single community. There was no communication between the two. Though they did similar activities, they were not common activities, which is prerequisite of forming a single, homogeneous society. That is why Gandhi’s arguments were aimed at protecting the interests of Hindus’ strength against that of Muslims and Christians. He had made it clear that if the Untouchables convert to the above faiths he does not care. But as long as they remain Hindu he would not concede them the political rights. This indicates that Gandhi was more concerned about Hindu religion and was interested in maintaining majority of Hindus for political gains.

When his attempts failed and he realized that the minorities were about to come to a agreement with the Untouchables, Gandhi felt troubled. He planned to isolate the Untouchables. Earlier Gandhi did not support the demands of the Muslims but now in order to single out the Untouchables he agreed to their fourteen demands. This was a conditional support, on the condition that they should oppose the demand of the Untouchables. This agreement is known as Gandhi-Muslim Pact.

Meanwhile seeing no hopes of finding a solution, the Chairman of Minorities Committee decided to adjourn the work for indefinite period and placed a proposal before the members that, if all the members gave him the declaration that he was authorized to find solution and they would abide by the decision, he would work on it. The only condition put by the Chairman was that every member must sign it. Accordingly everybody, including Gandhi, signed it. Gandhi’s pact with Muslims was, in fact, a breach of his promise to the Chairman which was a written promise, but Gandhi did not care for the word that he gave.
Afterwards a Committee under the leadership of Lord Luthian was appointed to devise a system of franchise. For this purpose the committee needed to know the demographic facts related to different communities and some individuals were the witnesses chosen for this purpose. Ambedkar observes that, “Witness after witness came forward to say that the Untouchables in his province were infinitesimally small. There were not wanting witnesses who said that there were no Untouchables at all!!” (BAWS 1991, vol.9:76) To his dismay in certain provinces the efforts of reducing the number was so dishonest that they showed the population which was almost nil. He compares the figures given by the witnesses to that of the census report of 1931 and points out the disparity between the two. According to census the population of the Untouchables in the United Provinces was estimated at 12.6 millions. Now the Provincial Government recorded it as 6.8 Millions and the Provincial Franchise Committee at .6 millions only. Census gave the figure in Bengal as 10.3millions Provincial Government said that it was 11.2 million, but Provincial Franchise Committee recorded only .07. On this Ambedkar states that, “The Hindus Had realized that to admit the existence of the Untouchables was detrimental to their interest. They did not mind sacrificing truth and decency and decided to adopt the safest course, namely, to deny that there were any Untouchables in India at all, and there by knock out the bottom of the political demands of the Untouchables and leave no room for arguments.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:77) It is evident from this incident that Hindus were not willing to part with power to which they were accustomed. The idea of sharing power with the Untouchables was an idea absolutely unacceptable to them and they could resort to a means, however unfair it may be, without any feeling of remorse.

Gandhi, then, returned to India. On his way back he talked to a newspaper correspondent. During the conversation he threatened to start the civil disobedience movement again. On his arrival in India Gandhi was arrested and kept in jail. From there he wrote a letter to the Secretary of state for India, stating that his declaration to resist the award of separate electorates with his life was not made without thought. It was a serious statement. Reiterating his views on separate electorates for depressed classes he stated in the same letter that, “But I hold that separate electorate is harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from the purely political standpoint. To appreciate the harm that separate electorate would do them, one has to know how they are distributed amongst the so-called caste-Hindus and how dependent they are
on the latter. So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorates would simply vivisect and disrupt it.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:78)

In reply to this letter the Secretary of State assured him that the decision would be taken only on the basis of the merits of the case. On 17th March 1932 Prime Minister’s decision of this issue was announced. It is known as ‘Communal Award’ which granted separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. It also stated the provision was made only for twenty years and it could also be withdrawn under general powers of electoral revision.

In response to this award Gandhi wrote a letter to the Prime Minister requesting him to arbitrate. Though he had signed delegation to the effect that he would abide by the decision, he did not care. He communicated the Prime Minister his decision to go on a fast. He also calls himself a ‘man of religion’ and being so had no other alternative but to fast unto death. He had so much concern about the religion that he states, “It may be that my judgment is wrapped and that I am wholly in error in regarding separate electorates for the Depressed Classes as harmful to them or to Hinduism.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:83)

In reply the Prime Minister said that they had taken care not to cause any split of community from Hindu religion. He stated that the special constituencies were only a provision for the Depressed Classes to enable them to speak for themselves as these classes suffer from ‘terrible disabilities’.

Gandhi reiterated the view that it was a religious matter and the provision, for him, was a statutory separation of the Depressed Classes from the Hindu fold. As declared repeatedly, he started his fast unto death in Yerwada jail. Irrespective of the fast the Prime Minister had made it clear in his letter that the British cabinet was not going to withdraw or alter the award in its own capacity. But they were ready to accept if an alternate scheme was devised by the caste Hindus and the Untouchables together. This way it happened to involve Ambedkar as the representative of the Untouchables. For Ambedkar it was a conflict between call of duty versus humanity. He chose to respond to humanity and save Gandhi’s life. The agreement between the two is known as the Poona Pact. The provision of separate constituencies was withdrawn in this pact. The Untouchables were offered 148 seats in Provincial Legislatures. These are the important features of the Pact apart from some more. Gandhi accepted the terms of the Pact and it was sent to the Government for incorporating it in the forthcoming Government of India Act. The reactions to the Pact
were mixed. The Untouchables had suffered a severe loss so it was natural for them to be unhappy. Even after this, some caste Hindus were not happy, because the Untouchables were now given 148 seats against 78 sanctioned in the communal Award. Ambedkar describes the response to the pact as, “The Hindus, although they did not celebrate the Poona Pact, did not like it. Throughout their commotion to save Mr. Gandhi’s life there was a definite current of conscious feeling that the cost of saving his life may be great. Therefore, when they saw the terms of the Pact they very definitely disliked it, although they had not the courage to reject it. Disliked by the Hindus and disfavoured by the Untouchables, the Poona Pact was given recognition by both parties and was embodied in the Government of India Act. (BAWS 1991 VolIX: 90-91)

As the Poona Pact was concluded in a hurry there were some things which remained unspecified. The Hindus started interpreting them in the way advantageous to them and to put the Untouchables in a disadvantageous position. This was the beginning by the Hindus to disregard the Poona Pact. What kind of voting system to use was the other issue that emerged. Hindus saw their advantage in choosing the distributive voting system. So they insisted on adopting it. The Untouchables realized the harm to them if the distributive voting system was adopted so they favoured cumulative voting system which ensured some safety to them.

Ambedkar stated in the Round Table Conference that wretchedness of the Untouchables is not due to bad laws but that is because of hostile attitude of caste Hindu people who hold the posts in the administration and carry their prejudices against the Untouchables with them. In order to avoid this he had suggested that the representatives of the Untouchables should be included in the higher Executives also. A provision was made through the Instrument of Instructions to the Governors.

The Congress was not prepared to include the Untouchable representatives in the cabinet. On the contrary they penalized the Prime Minister who tried to do so. Ambedkar cites the example of Dr. Khare who was the Prime Minister in the Congress Ministry of Central Provinces. Khare faced some dissidence from his cabinet colleagues. So he dissolved the Cabinet. The Governor then invited him to form Government. Accepting the invitation he constituted a new Cabinet excluding the unwanted colleagues. He had also inducted an Untouchable in the Cabinet. His name was Mr. Ag nibhoj. He was Member of the Congress Party and possessed the sufficient qualification to be a member of the cabinet. Though this was the case the
Congress Working Committee which met at Wardha passed a resolution condemning Dr. Khare for grave error of judgment and indiscipline in forming the new ministry. Dr. Khare claimed that inclusion of an Untouchable was the act of indiscipline according to Gandhi and added that, “Mr. Gandhi told him that it was wrong on his part to have raised such aspirations and ambitions in the Untouchables and it was such an act of bad judgment that he would never forgive him.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:98)

When some Untouchables members of the Congress party asked him about nominating Scheduled Caste Legislators to the cabinet, Gandhi’s answer was in negative in his characteristic style, he vehemently replied, “I cannot. The principle is dangerous. Protection of its neglected classes should not be carried to an extent which will harm them and harm the country. A cabinet minister should be a topmost man commanding universal confidence. A person after he was secured a seat in an elected body should depend upon his intrinsic merit and popularity to secure coveted position.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:99)

Thus Gandhi hints that nomination of an Untouchable to the cabinet would cause harm to the country and also lays down conditions like popularity which are impossible for an Untouchables to fulfill, as well as the phrase ‘intrinsic merit’ used to express his view that the Untouchables cannot be meritorious because they are born so. Gandhi’s views reflect in the process of selection of candidates for election. While choosing candidates from Brahmin and allied castes most educated were selected. Men with average educational qualifications were chosen from Non-Brahmins deliberately keeping aside the educated persons amongst them. In case of the Untouchable persons who were least educated or not educated were preferred to educated persons. This was the general tendency. This must be used to present before people a picture of society which fits their views.

This is how the Congress displayed a callous attitude throughout the process of Simon Commission, the Round Table Conferences, declaration of the Communal Award, the Poona Pact and after the Government of India Act of 1935. Gandhi and the Congress leadership stubbornly opposed the safeguards for the Untouchables and let them have an opportunity to share power. This was obviously an attempt to perpetuate the subjugation of the Depressed Classes so that they can keep them under their heels.
Abandonment of the Temple Entry Movement:

As a result of the Poona Pact there was an increase in the activities in Hindu society. The pact was signed on 24th September 1932. The very next day Hindus of Bombay organized meeting to declare their support to the pact. The meeting passed a resolution that no one shall be regarded as an Untouchable and declared that they shall also have equal rights to the use of all the public amenities. It was also decided that it will be among the first acts passed by the Swaraj Parliament. They also resolved that it would be the duty of the Hindu leaders to remove the restrictions on the temple entry of the Untouchables. After this resolution was passed there was a frenetic activity in the Hindu society to ensure the temple entry to the Untouchables. Gandhi’s English weekly the ‘Harijan’ used to publish the list of temples opened for the Untouchables in its column ‘Week to Week’. Though this was the situation at that time Gandhi was not in favour of temple entry from the beginning and he expressed his views in this regard candidly. He said, “How is it possible that the Antyajas (Untouchables) should have the right to enter all the existing temples? As long as the law of caste and ashram has the chief place in Hindu religion, to say that every Hindu can enter every temple is a thing that is not possible today.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:107) Against this background Gandhi’s support to temple entry movement was a surprising thing. Though some people were enthusiastic to open temples, the trustees of temples were not in its favour. In some such cases Hindu activists started satyagraha to compel the trustees to open the temples for the untouchablels. Not only this movement continued in the streets but Hindu legislators also introduced Bills asking the trustees of the temples to open their doors irrespective of caste. Gandhi even asked Ambedkdar to lend his support to the temple entry movement. In reply to the letter he issued a statement to put forth his views on the movement elaborately. He says in it, “Social evils can have no justification whatsoever in a civilized society. But nothing can be more odious and vile than that admitted social evils should be sought to be justified on the ground of religion.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:111) In fact Ambedkar had already started this movement in Kalaram temple of Nasik and even in some other places. He faced a stiff opposition from the Hindus. The Congress persons who were running the movement now also did not care to support the cause then. The pro temple entry people were not assuring Ambedkar that their support to the temple entry will not prevent them from demanding outright abolition of divisive social system
based on Chaturvarnya and caste. He asserts that what is the view of Gandhi on this issue and replies that he is in the camp of its opponents. So Ambedkar announces that he shall also remain in his own camp on the temple entry issue. On these grounds he refused support to the movement.

The enthusiasm shown by Hindus for temple entry did not continue for long. Soon it started receding. Ambedkar challenges the authenticity of the items published in the ‘Harijan’, he states. “As a matter of fact a large part of the news that appeared in the “week to week” was faked and was nothing but a lying propaganda engineered by Congressmen to deceive the world that the Hindus were determined to fight untouchability.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:115) He further admits that there were some temples which were opened for the Untouchables but the reality behind them was that those were in ruins and abandoned. Nobody used them except dogs and donkeys as shelters. This false propaganda infuriated Ambedkar so he says, “One of the evil effects of the Congress agitation is that it has made the political minded Hindus a lying squad which will not hesitate to tell any lie if it can help the Congress.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:115)

Ambedkar then goes on to expose the falsity of the propaganda by the Congress and Gandhi. He explains the episode of the Guruvayur temple satyagraha. This temple was situated in Ponnani taluk of Malbar. The trustee of the temple was the Zamorin of Calicut. The temple was not open for the Untouchables. Influenced by the movement and the campaign one Hindu person named Kelappan decided to start agitation against the practice. The Zamorin refused to do so citing Section 40 of the Hindu Religious Endowments Act, which was in favour of his decision. Kelappan started his fast on 20th Sept.1932 and declared that he would do so lying in front of the temple, in the sun, till Zamorin yields. In order to rescue himself from the troublesome situation Zamorin appealed Gandhi to request Kelappan to end his fast. Mean while Kelappan had completed ten days of his fast. Responding to Gandhi’s request the former agreed to suspend his agitation for three months. Gandhi sent a wire to Zamorin and asked him to sort out the matter and reminded him that Kelappan had suspended the fast on his request and warned that if the temple was not opened to the Untouchables he would commence fast long with Kelappan. The Zamorin refused to yield and reiterated that it was not in his capacity to open the temple. In this situation it had become obligatory on the part of Gandhi to actualize his threat of going on fast along with Kelappan. Instead of doing so Gandhi issued a statement to
press that the Viceregal decision on temple entry bill in Madras Legislative Council, introduced by Mr. Subba Royan was expected, so the fast that he announced would be postponed for indefinite period. He adds that Kelappan had also agreed to the proposal of postponement. Viceroy granted permission to introduce bill, still Gandhi did not commence his fact. Ambedkar adds that, “Not only he did not fast he completely forgot the matter as though it was of no moment! Since then nothing has been heard about Guruvayur temple satyagaraha though the temple remains closed to the Untouchables even to- day.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:117)

So far as the Temple Entry Bills in the Central and Provincial Legislatives, for which Gandhi was waiting for the Vice regal decision, were concerned Mr.Rangan Iyer’s bill was accepted in the Central Legislative. The rest of the bills were dropped. Ranga Iyer formally introduced the Bill in the assembly. As it was Gandhi’s program to open the temples for the Untouchables the Congress members were ready to support it. Gandhi had assigned the responsibility to Rajgopalachari and G.D. Birla to canvass on behalf of the Congress and to run a campaign to collect support for the Bill in order to ensure its self passage. There were some who argued against the bill. That was the last day of session and it was 5.00 pm. So the chairperson wanted the opinion to continue the business even after that time. When he put forward the proposal to that effect before the members, he did not find a prodigious support in favour of it. So he decided to adjourn and as it was the last day of the session of the Assembly.

In the next session of the Central Legislative assembly discussion on the issue continued. The government supported the widest circulation of the bill. Some members suggested that the bill be circulated among the temple going Hindus only. The Government on the other had expected that all the sections of Hindu society should participate in the discussion of the Bill. The bill was circulated and opinions were received. It was now ready to be moved for the appointment of the select Committee. Ranga Iyer also gave notice for that. All of a sudden The Government of India decided to dissolve the Assembly and have elections. This announcement changed the attitude of the Congress people radically. So far they were eager to support the Bill but now suddenly the Congress party members in the Central Legislature exhibited a sense of disfavor towards it. They denied support to the bill. They were frightened to face the votes. When Ranga Iyer rose to speake on the issue, his condition was pitiable. Pointing out the reason behind this situation he described the role played by Rajgopalachari who was appointed by Gandhi to campaign in
favour of the bill. He says, “Mr. Rajgopalachariar goes on to say that they asked to be returned ‘on no other issue’ that is to say, not on Temple Entry issue, but merely on a political Anglo-phobia issue... (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:122) He is so infuriated due to the change of stand by Rajgopalachari that he accused him as, “This man, who came screaming at our doors, begging us for support—these beggars in the cause of the Congress—who just begged of us to proceed with this Temple Entry Bill, are not only betraying the cause of the Untouchables, but they are betraying the principles of the Mahatma himself,...”(BAWS 1991 Vol IX:123) After this betrayal by his lieutenants, people expected Gandhi to take action against them. Instead of that Gandhi shifts the blame to the person who had initiated it and states in the issue of the Harijan dated 31st August 1934 that, “To have, therefore, dragged the Congress name into the discussion was unfortunate,” That is why Ambedkar describes it as a strange game of political acrobatics and comments on the episode as, “Mr. Gandhi begins as an opponent of Temple Entry. When the Untouchables put forth a demand for political rights, he changes his position and becomes a supporter of temple entry. When the Hindus threaten to defeat the Congress in the election, if it pursues the matter to a conclusion, Mr. Gandhi, in order to preserve political power in the hands of the Congress, gives up temple Entry! Is this sincerity? Does this show conviction? Was the “agony of soul” which Mr. Gandhi spoke of more than a phrase?” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:125) This is how Ambedkar describes that the shift in Gandhi’s policy was not in order to grant equal rights to the Untouchables but it was an attempt to avoid giving them something substantial as safeguards which would make them self-sufficient.

Harijan Sevak Sangh; A New Allurement:

On the 30th September 1932 a meeting of Hindus was organized in Cawasjee Jahangir Hall, Bombay. Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya presided over it. The meeting had resolved to start an organization to bring a change in the lives of the Untouchables. Name of the organization was All-India Anti-Untouchability League. Headquarter of the League was to be in Delhi and its branches in different provincial centers. The President of the league was G.D. Birla, a well known industrialist and a close associate of Gandhi. Another close associate A.V. Thakkar was secretary of the League. It was clearly Gandhi’s project. In December 1932 Gandhi declared that the name of the organization, thenceforth, would be Servants of Untouchables Society. Afterwards
this name was also changed and finally it became Harijan Sevak Sangh (henceforth the Sangh).

The President and the Secretary of the Sangh issued a joint statement announcing that most of the orthodox people are not against eradication of Untouchability as much as they are against inter-caste dining and marriages. The aim of the Sangh was to remove Untouchability and the educational, economic and social upliftment of the above sections. While defining the scope of the Sangh, they were careful enough to mention that, “Social reforms like the abolition of the caste system and inter-dining are kept outside the scope of the League.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:127)

For convenience of executing the program in effective manner the provinces were to be divided into many units which would be headed by paid workers. It was also decided that minimum two-thirds of the expenditure should be allocated to the proper work and one-third on the staff and the office. The guidelines for the paid workers were laid down. They were expected to undertake a tour of their area for fifteen to twenty nine days a month. The amount of estimated expenditure on the project was six lakh. For five years the budget was 400 lakh. In order to raise funds for this work Gandhi undertook an All-India tour on foot. It was also undertaken with an aim to kindle devotion among Hindus regarding the work of the Sangh. During the tour Gandhi succeeded in collecting Rs. 8 Lakh. Adding annual donations to it from Gandhi’s rich friends the organization started its work.

Annual report of the Sangh gives an idea as to what type of work it planned to do. There were some broader areas demarcated by the Sangh in which they had decided to work.

1. Education: In the field education the Sangh wanted to encourage higher education among the Untouchables. It had constituted scholarships in the streams of Arts, technical and professional course. It also decided to give scholarships to High School students and to run Hostels for college as well as school students. Another activity taken up by the Sangh was to start separate primary schools for the Untouchable students when there were no common schools around or they did not admit the Untouchables.

2. Next area chosen by the Sangh to work in was welfare activities. It included medical aid to the Untouchables. The activists were expected to go door to door, find sick and ailing people among the Untouchables and give them medicine. They had also planned to start some dispensaries for the targeted section. Water supply was
another important component of the welfare activity. They had decided to sink new wells, install tube wells and pumps, repairing the existing ones and persuading the Local Government and bodies to take up the aforesaid activities. These activities were meant for the Untouchables.

3. Economic activities also featured in the Sangh program. The Sangh claimed that it ran some industrial schools that had helped several Untouchables to stand on their feet as skilled workers trained in those institutions. The report also indicates that the Sangh had started and supervised co-operative societies of the Untouchablels.

Ambedkar investigates the actual amount the Sangh spent on the program. It had planned to spend Rs. 6 Lakh every year. The report published in May 1941 said that at the end of eight years it spent 27,67,307. It means that an expenditure of Rs. 3,45,888 was incurred every year, in other words they only spent 50 per cent. For a population of 50 million Untouchables this amount was really negligible. Ambedkar asks that whether this happened due to shortage of funds. He states that the response of Hindus to the working of the Sangh was not enthusiastic is evident from the contribution they made. The same Hindus had donated generously to the Tilak Swaraj Fund and also Kasturba Memorial Fund. They are ready to pay for political activities but unwilling to contribute to social activities. This could be the only inference drawn from the facts.

When the Board of the Sangh was formed there were in all eleven organizing members in it. Those included three members from the Untouchable class. They were Dr. B.R.Ambedkdar, Rao Bahadur M.C. Raja and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan. Ambedkar decided to co-operate with the Sangh because he had come to a conclusion to let the bygones be bygones. He also wanted to have a discussion with Gandhi about the programs of the Sangh, but went to London to attend the Third Round Table Conference. So he conveyed his views to the Secretary of the Sangh through a letter.

In the letter he stated that there were two ways of looking at the task of welfare of the Untouchables. The first category believed that the reason of its wretchedness and destitution was its own degenerate and unrighteous nature. People who believed so divert their efforts towards encouraging personal virtues. Another category believed that the fate of individual is controlled by the environment in which he lived. If a change is brought out in the environment, want and misery from which he suffers would also change. In Ambedkar’s view the second belief is reasonable. So he suggested to the Sangh that it should not concentrate on improving individuals but
should aim at changing the environment in which the Untouchables lived. With this discussion he made some concrete suggestions in regard to the activities of the Sangh. They were as follows:

1. **Campaign to Secure Civil Rights:**

   He suggested that the Sangh should start a campaign to enable the Untouchables to make use of the civic amenities like taking water from village water bodies, entry in Chawdi, village schools and access to public transportation. But he points out that when the Untouchables would assert their right to these things, caste Hindus would try to prevent them. This may result in violence and even bloodshed. But he insisted that it was unavoidable. Ambedkar further stated that, “The salvation of the Depressed Classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. For that you must create a crisis against his customary code of conduct. The crisis will compel him to think and once he begins to think he will be more ready to change than he is otherwise likely to be.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:136)

2. **Equality of opportunity:**

   Ambedkar stated that the reason behind poverty and wretchedness of the Untouchables was mainly lack of equality of opportunity resulting from untouchability. No caste Hindu would buy milk, vegetables or such things if an Untouchable starts selling them. The irony of the situation was that they would buy it from a non-Hindu but not from an untouchable. He narrates the situation faced by them in cotton mills as workers. They were employed in the departments where the wages were the lowest. However efficient and devoted an Untouchable may be but he was not promoted to be the boss. Where there was a system of piece work they suffered from discrimination. The Naikins who were in charge of distributing materials to the workers gave more to the caste-Hindu workers and gave either very little or no material to the Untouchable workers. As a result their earning remained on a marginal level. Private establishments managed by Hindus could do many things in order to put an end to the discrimination.

3. **Social Intercourse:**

   Ambedekar suggested to the Sangh that it should work to discontinue the nausea the caste-Hindus felt towards the Untouchables which had caused
disconnection between the two sections. He recommended that the Untouchables should be allowed in the houses of Hindus either as guests or servants. This would most effectively serve the purpose of bringing the two together. While stating that mere sympathy is not enough he says, “People in distress can have very little consolation from the fact they have sympathizers, and I may as well tell the League that the Depressed Classes will never be satisfied of bona fides of these caste Hindu sympathizers until it is proved that they are prepared go to the same length of fighting against their own kith and kin actual warfare if it came to that for the sake of the Depressed Classes as the Whites of the South for the sake of the emancipation of the Negro.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:138)

4. Agency To Be Employed:

Ambedkar asserted that the selection of the workers in order to achieve these result could perhaps be treated not as very serious issue. But he points out that the success of the plan depends only on the workers. There could be workers who look at it merely as a source of livelihood. Such a lot of workers would lead to sure failure. The League has to observe care while choosing the persons to work. He adds, “The touchables and the untouchables cannot be hold together by law-certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorates for separate electorates. The only thing that can hold them together is love. Outside the family justice alone in my opinion can open the possibility of love, and it should be the duty of the Anti-Untouchability League to do, justice to the Untouchable.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:140)

Ambedkar wrote this letter to the Secretary A.V.Thakkar, expecting him to give a thought to the proposals. Contrary to his expectations no cognizance was taken of it. Even no courtesy was shown to acknowledge the letter.

Birla and Thakkar were of the opinion that the upliftment of the Untouchables be achieved provided that no force is used in doing so and only ‘peaceful persuasion’ is adopted as a means to achieve the result. This was a nominal program according to Ambedkar. The change in the aims of the Sangh was in order to rescue Gandhi from inviting wrath of Hindus. He describes the nature of the program as intended to ‘kill Untouchables by kindness”. This is why Ambedkar thought it better to retire from the organization. Soon after him the other two members of Depressed Classes also retired. The Sangh was managed by caste Hindu persons only. So a person wrote a letter in Indian Social Reformer that they requested Gandhi to give representation to
Scheduled Castes on the Governing Body of the Sangh. It was reported that Gandhi refused it as the Sangh was not a Harijan organisation but an organization with an aim to help them. Ambedkar brings out the fallacy in the statement pointing out the fact that there were three such members on the organizing committee of the organization one being he himself. The change in the policy occurred later on. When asked about representation for the Untouchables, Gandhi said, “…the welfare work for the Untouchables is a penance which the Hindus have to do for the sin of Untouchability. The money that has been collected have been contributed by the Hindus. From both points of view the Hindus alone must run the Sangh. Neither ethics nor right would justify Untouchables in claiming a seat on the board of the Sangh.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:142) Thus no place was given to them on the board of the Sangh.

In the beginning a restriction was laid down on the paid workers of the Sangh to participate in political activities but it was being used as ‘political manufactory’ to recruit the workers in the Congress. But in the conference of the Sangh in 1939 a resolution was passed in connection with the voting system. It stated that distributive system of voting should be replaced by cumulative voting. This indicates what it was not neutral politically but insisted upon making political decisions which would protect the interests of the Hindus against that of the Untouchables.

Ambedkar also points out that the Sangh was particularly against the Untouchables who were politically aware and who had Anti-Congress attitude. Such was the case of the Mahar caste that resided in Bombay Province. Mr. Thakkar, the General Secretary of the Sangh was also a member of the Backward Classes Board of the Bombay Government. He proposed a resolution in the meeting of the board as a recommendation to the Government that the facilities started for the Untouchables should be denied to the students belonging to Mahar community because the community has become advanced in education and was appropriating the share of the funds meant for the other castes. This was in fact the punishment for not falling in line with the Congress. Due to this vindictive and prejudiced attitude of the persons at the helms of the affairs of the Sangh, Ambedkar questioned, “What does all this show? Does it not show that the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a charitable organization only in name, and that its real aim is to ensnare the Untouchables, to make them the camp-followers of the Hindus and the Congress and to scotch any movement by them the aim and object of which are to free themselves from the social, religious, economic and political domination of the Hindus? Is there any wonder if the Untouchables look
upon the Harijan Sevak Sangh as an abomination, the object of which is to kill them by kindness?" (BAWS 1991 Vol IX: 145)

**Refutation of the Congress Claims:**

During the Round Table Conferences Gandhi had repeatedly staked a claim to represent the Untouchables on the grounds of having worked for them for a long time. According to the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935 elections were held for Provincial Legislatures. Out of total 1,758 seats the Congress had won 777 seats in both the Houses Combined together. On the basis of election results the Congress started claiming that only it represented all the people of India. Ambedkar disagreed with the claim and tried to prove that how the claim was unfounded.

For his analysis Ambedkar has used the list of the victorious Congress candidates summoned to Delhi for a convention, and the list was published in a bulletin. He first described the position of the Congress regarding number of seats won. Then he goes to explain its position taking into account voting strength. He states that only ten per cent people out of the total population were enrolled as voters. There was not an equal distribution of voters in all the castes, so he says, “The high franchise made the electorate a hive of the middle and the intellectual classes, both of which were intensely pro-congress.” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX: 149). He also points out that the Congress was equipped with all the essential things including money and organization. The Congress candidates were favoured by the voters because they had stood against the British imperialism. While selecting the candidates it was seen that they must have suffered imprisonment, so the electoral was sympathetic to them. In their comparison the non-congress candidates suffered from the paucity of all these things. Moreover as they had worked for reforms the voters had a feeling of animosity against them. With all these favourable things, Ambedkar expects the Congress to sweep the polls, but they got only fifty percent of votes and even seats. Whereas, against all odds, the non-congress candidates succeeded in securing fifty percent votes and seats. This is one reason for which Ambedkar believes their claim to be hollow.

The Congress had claimed that it represents the Untouchables. In order to prove the falsity of this claim Ambedkar takes a review of the Electorates which were recognized by the Act of 1937. He undertakes a comparative study of the Joint Electorates and separate electorates, Joint Electorates with General Electorates and points out special features of Joint Electorates. Having discussed the things at length
he concludes that, “The result is that the system helps the Hindus to win the reserved seats and workers against the Scheduled Castes. (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:154)

He studied the results of the elections on this background to analyse the Congress claim that they represent the Untouchables. Out of 151 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Congress won 78. It means that the Untouchables bagged 73 seats. He states that this was not a clean sweep for the Congress but it was rather a neck to neck fight. He then furnishes details of voting pattern of the Untouchable voters and establishes the fact that eighteen percent Untouchables had cast their vote in favour of the Congress. It means that eighty-two percent of them had cast their vote against the Congress. On this count the claim by the Congress is meaningless.

Ambedkar further goes on to debunk the myth that the Congress won majority of seats. He judges the claim of their victory on three criteria, namely (1) Seats won with the help of Hindu votes. (2) Seats won due to split in votes because many non-congress candidates contesting and (3) Improper use of vote by the Untouchable voters. According to him the result is, “Judged by the test of seats, the Congress has only won 38 seats out of the total 151. The account shows that 73 seats it failed to win, it won by Hidu Votes, 8 as a result of split due to too many Untouchables standing against the Congress Untouchable candidate and 19 on account of the foolishness of the Untouchables in not taking sufficient interest in the election of the seats reserved for them.” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:158)

Ambedkar asserts that the non-congress candidates contested elections against all the odds on their side, whereas the Congress candidates had everything in their favour, still their victory was marginal. So Ambedkdar contends that the two claims staked by the congress were unfounded and false.

**Erroneous Accusation:**

After taking over the Congress Gandhi evolved some new methods against the Government as a weapon of the fight, they were. (1) Non co-operation, (2) Boycott, (3) Civil Disobedience and (4) Fast. The first three were collective methods, whereas the last one was an individual activity. Fasting unto death is also an individual method which was employed by Gandhi. These four methods have been used by the Congress from 1920 to 1942 for many times. With all this Muslims joined the movement only once during the Khilafat movement and then parted ways with it. Another major community was the Untouchables. They never participated in it on mass level. Some
stray individuals did join it but not community as a whole. This fact is puzzling to the
government. Almost half the population does not support such a sublime cause is
something which they fail to understand. Naturally they want to know the reason. The
Congress replies that as they are the tools of British imperialism they do not join the
movement. Many foreigners accept it as a truth because the argument is simple and
plausible. Ambedkar feels that it is easy to prove that the charge is erroneous. Saying
so he gives the correct reasons, “… if the Untouchables have not joined the ‘Fight for
Freedom’ it is not because they are the tools of the British Imperialism but because
they fear that freedom of India will establish Hindu dominion which is sure to close to
them and forever all prospects of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and that they
will be made the hewers of wood and drawers of water.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:168)

He further explains that why did the Untouchables refuse to join the freedom
struggle and adds that, “… they do not wish to be placed under Hindu Raj in which
the governing class would be the Bania and the Brahmin with low class Hindus as
their policemen, all of whom have been the hereditary enemies of the Untouchables.”
(BAWS 1991VolIX:168) Ambedkar admits that this language is offensive against
good taste but adds that the attitude has such a force behind it that one cannot make it
mild, but he himself translates it in to the language of political science and states that,
“ They mean that the Untouchables are not opposed to freedom from British
Imperialism. But they refuse to be content with mere freedom from British
Imperialism. What they insist upon is that free India is not enough. Free India should
be made safe for democracy. Stating with this aim, they say that on account of the
peculiar social formation in India there are minority communities pitted against a
Hindu Communal Majority, that if no provisions are made in the constitution to cut
the fangs of the Hindu Communal Majority, India will not be safe for democracy.”
(BAWS 1991VolX:169) In other words the Untouchables want provisions in the
constitution that will guarantee against the brutality of the caste Hindus.

Explaining the view of the Congress on this issue, Ambdkar states that it does
not feel that making the constitution of free India will pose any problem because for
them democracy is meresynonymous with adult franchise. They do not feel it
necessary to provide safeguards to the weaker section of the society. They think so
because they fear that such provisions might cause fragmentation of the nation. On
this argument Ambedkar remarks, “Asked, why this opposition to safeguards? The
Congress says that it is a vivisection of the nation-an argument the picturesqness of
which is intended to cover its stupidity and which has its origins in the genius of Mr. Gandhi, and for which the high class Hindus, who stand to lose by these safeguards, feel so grateful to him.” (BAWS 1991 Vol IX:169) In conclusion he states that for the Congress the ultimate aim of Indian nationalism is to free India from British Imperialism and that is all.

This conflict arises out of the social structure of Hinduism, which Ambedkar describes as graded inequality that governs the relationship among different castes. This principle is antagonistic to the principles of liberty and fraternity which is the basis of democracy. He also observes that the protagonists of freedom did not strive to do away with it, on the contrary covertly made efforts to perpetuate it. This is why the Untouchables are worried about their future in the Swaraj, but the Congress felt it the need of the nationalism to subvert any such demands. Ambedkar points out that by asking for the safeguards the Untouchables were striving to make this country safe for democracy, where as the Congress was creating conditions which were incompatible with democracy.

Ambedkar further states that the foreigner might ask a question that what is wrong in joining freedom movement, why put conditions for safeguards, because this question arise only after the attainment of freedom and answer them by posing a counter question by the Untouchables that what evil was where in granting their demands before- hand. If this was done there would be double benefit, it would assure the Untouchables against the fear of Hindu majority and after such assurance the way for their co-operation with the Congress would be paved.

He cited example of the Negros joining the whites in the civil war and finally they got noting for their co-operation. Fearing this he insisted that safeguards must be agreed upon before attainment of Swaraj.

He also stated that the fight for freedom was uncalled for at that moment, because attitude of the Government had underwent a sea change. There were constitutional developments, greater partnership in the governance. The British Government had laid a condition for freedom that was, to come to an agreement regarding the future constitution. The Congress was in a mood to fight instead of discussing the constitution. This attitude was difficult to understand.

Ambedkar enquires that why did the Congress do so and replies that the Congress was afraid that the Government was investing Untouchables with a power of veto. But he clarified that the Untouchables had never made unreasonable demands.
In spite of it the adamant behavior of the Congress made him suspect that, “In short, what the Congress wants is a free India with full, unrestricted freedom to the Hindus in a free India to dispose of the Untouchables in any way they liked.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:178) Ambedkar believed that the continuation of fight for freedom “... is nothing more than mere tactics, the object of which is to by-pass the necessity of an agreed constitution demanded by the Untouchables and made a condition precedent by the British Government for the grant of freedom.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:180)

**The Reason of the Controversy:**

The root cause of this dispute between the Congress and the Untouchables, according to Ambedkar, was the question that whether the Untouchables were an integral part of the national life of India or they were not. The two parties took opposite views. The Untouchables said that they were not, whereas the Congress insisted that they were.

The basis for the opinion of the Untouchables was that the test of finding the reality cannot be the dogmas of caste and Untouchability or following the same customs and worshipping the same gods. The social sense of indicating a member of the Hindu society can be the only valid test to judge the matter. Ambedkar asked a question that whether there were any human ties to bind the Untouchable to the Hindu society, and he answers it is negative. He also refers to the categorization in the Hindu society, in which the Hindus are called *Savarnas* and the Untouchables as known as *Avrnas*, Hindus are called *Chaturvarnikas* where as the latter are known as *Panchamas*. The reason these names have came in to existence was that they were two separate entities. He also states that the Untouchables profess Hindu religion was taken by the Congress to be the basis of their forming one single whole. Ambedkar states on this opinion that, “But the question is: Does it matter if they are Hindus? Can it come in the way of their being recognized as a separate element in the national life of India? It is difficult to understand how the mere fact that they might be called Hindus by religion in such a limited sense can be the basis of an argument that they are an integral part of the Hindu society.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:184) On this he further argued that there was a unity of thoughts, beliefs and worship among people belonging to different countries of Europe yet they were not a single social entity.
Negroes and Whites in U.S.A. had common religion still they were socially separated. In India Europeans, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indian were the followers of the same religion but they formed separate groups. Ramdasis and Majhabis were Sikhs but still they were different. In the same manner Hindus and Untouchables were also different and the separation was brought about by the religion itself. That is why Ambedkar says, “The language commonly used that Hinduism upholds caste and Untouchability perhaps disguises and conceals its real genius. The real genius of Hinduism is to divide. This is beyond dispute. For, what do caste and Untouchability stand for? Obviously for separation. For caste is another name for separation and Untouchability typifies the extremist form of separation of community from community.” (BAWS 1991 Vol.IX:186)

The Congress refused to recognize that the Untouchables were a separate element, according to Ambedkar, because if such recognition was given then there was a danger of losing seats in the Executive the Legislature and also in the public services, as they would be divided among the two. Another important factor was that the Congress, or the Hindus, used to get hold of share of the Untouchables and use it for themselves. If they had given recognition to the separateness of the latter they would be deprived of enjoying their share of power. The Congress argument was marked with insincerity so there was every possibility that they would continue with their discriminatory practices in the Swraj also.

Ambedkar further stated that till the arrival of the British the Untouchables had their position in the society fixed as the lowliest. The East India Company required soldiers and enrolled them. This gave them an opportunity to know their status. They felt that it was a social problem. Some Hindus joined in eradicating the social evils. The Congress discouraged them and the work came to an end. Now the Congress itself is saying that it is a social problem. This according to him is sheer hypocrisy.

The Congress view, that it was a social problem, was incorrect. It was a problem of securing liberty and equality from the Hindus who were inimical to them. That was why it was a political problem. Some said that the Untouchability was ebbing so there was no need for safeguards. Ambedkar said that, “But I am quite certain Untouchability as a propensity on the part of the Hindus will not vanish either in towns or in villages within an imaginable distance of time.” (BAWS1991 VolIX:195) He justified his statement by giving three reasons. The system will be
preserved because the existence of the Untouchables provided them an opportunity to cultivate a feeling of superiority, pride and dignity.

If it was abolished they would be deprived of this feeling. Another reason was that the Untouchables were available to Hindus as forced labour, they could compel to work for even no returns. This would be a great loss to them. The Untouchables worked as scavengers and sweepers. The responsibility of such jobs would fall upon Hindus if they abolished the Untouchability. Along with religious system Untouchability was also an economic system which was more wicked than slavery. Thus it had become a vested interest of the Hindus and the vested interests are never willingly surrendered. So Ambedkar concludes by saying. “On this analysis, Swaraj would make Hindus more powerful and Untouchables more helpless and it is quite possible that having regard to the economic advantage which it gives to the Hindus, Swaraj, instead of putting an end to Untouchability, may extend its life. That Untouchability is vanishing is therefore only wishful thinking and a calculated untruth. It would be most stupid – if not criminal- to take it in to account in considering the demands of the Untouchables for constitutional safeguards and ignore the hard facts of the present and their certainty to continue in the indefinite future.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:198)

**An Appeal to the Foreigners:**

Most of the foreigners who had interest in Indian politics supported the Congress. They did so because they believed that it represented all the sections of Indian society including the Untouchables. There were two factors responsible to forming that opinion. The first was Indian Press which stood behind the Congress firmly, which continuously published news related to the party. The second reason was absence of such means of making public opinion for the Untouchables. As a result they could not challenge the Congress propaganda and remained silent. After the results of elections in 1937 the hollowness of the claim by the Congress had been exposed. That they did not represent the Untouchables was quite clear. So the foreigners had access to the facts so they would correct their opinions.

The foreigners supported the Congress for one more reason. They believed that it was fighting against the British Government. This struggle against imperialism was, for them, a heroic deed, so they supported the Congress.
While supporting the Congress for its struggle for freedom the foreigners did not differentiate between the freedom of a country and the freedom of the people in the country. As they did not make the distinction they misunderstood the whole situation. Ambedkar then states that, “Philosophically it may be possible to consider a nation as a unit but sociologically it cannot but be regarded as consisting of many classes and the freedom of the nation if it is to be a reality must vouchsafe the freedom of the different classes comprised in it, particularly those who are treated as the servile classes.” (BAWS 1991 VolIX:202) This way he argued that the freedom of the country does not mean freedom unless it reaches to the last person of the society.

Then he asked a question that for whose freedom the struggle of the Congress was meant and argues that without finding answer to this question it would be wrong to support anybody. He then differentiates that self-government and constitutional form of government and says that the latter requires what the political scientists call ‘constitutional morality.’ Unless it was involved there could not be a true democratic government. He then describes the errors in the understanding of democracy by western writers. The first is that there was a governing class in every country which did not bother to follow constitutional morality and the servile classes also elected them. The second error is that they did not realize that the existence of the governing class was discordant with democracy. The third error is that democracy does not become real merely by providing adult franchise but it was essential that the governing class must lose its capacity to grab power. The fourth thing is that in some countries the servile class might succeed in dislodging the governing class with the help of adult suffrage, but in other countries could be more firmly settled to be removed with such tools. Lastly the social outlook and social philosophy of the governing class is a factor which needs to be properly understood. He then starts to answer the question asked by him in the light of above discussion.

He again asked a question that who was known as the governing class in India and replied that it was primarily constituted of Brahmans. Though they deny being the governing class, but the public sentiments and the control of administration indicate that they are. People in India regard Brahmans as gods on earth was an undeniable fact. Then Ambedkar gives data of the administrative services which supports his assumption. The figures show that among the 15 lakhs of Brahmin population out of 2,200 posts of gazetted officers 820 were Brahmans making 37 percent. In other posts out of 7,500 they had a share of 3,280 posts and the percentage is 43.73 whereas out
of 20,782 posts they captured 8812 amounting to 42.4 percent. In this comparison even forward non-brahmin castes fare quite poorly. So it is a fact that they control the administration. After establishing this fact he describes the nature of the governing class in India and states that, “Not only are they conscious of the fact that they belong to the governing class but some of them hold that the servile classes are a contemptible people, who must remain servile and who must never aspire to rule.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:209)

He believes that as a result of this attitude of the governing class, though they gave promise of bringing reforms, they would do nothing and the Swraj would not be a democratic government in true sense. Taking into account the programs declared by the Congress and its outcome Ambedkar’s conclusions are not unfounded. He reiterates that the servile classes in India are not worried about poverty and scarcity. They are worried about insult and humiliation. So he asked whether after capturing power they would strive for changing the oppressive social structure. After arguing the points in many ways he comments on the governing class in India that, “The freedom which the governing class in India is struggling for is a freedom to rule the servile classes. What it wants is the freedom for the master race to rule the subject race which is nothing but the Nazi or Nietzschean doctrine of freedom for superman to rule the common man.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:231)

**Reaction of the Untouchables:**

The Congress had tried to convince the Untouchables to believe that Gandhi was their only saviour. They went to such extent to tell them that Gandhi declared fast unto death for securing political rights to the Untouchables which was a blatant tie. In order to unearth the truth behind such false propaganda Ambedkar under took a study of Gandhi’s contribution to the issue of Untouchables.

He traced the Gandhi’s realization that Untouchability was an evil to its root. He found that in 1921 Gandhi narrated experiences of his childhood to show that he treated the Untouchables differently than the orthodox Hindus even as a child and told about Ukha, a scavenger who worked in his house. After this there is no reference to Gandhi’s sympathy for the Untouchables in his biographical sketch published by Tagore and co. in 1922 which covers events in his life right from his birth to the date of publication when he was imprisoned for six years. Bardoli Program was
announced, in which welfare of the Untouchables was included as one of the points. It
remained the most neglected part of that program. Then Gandhi had an opportunity to
work for the Untouchables in 1924 when he was released from the jail. He found that
the party was divided in two rival camps. In order to bridge the chasm he declared a
program that consisted of two points. Instead of four annas the fees for Congress
membership was two thousand yards of khaddar cloth which was to be spun by the
member himself. The members were expected to adhere to the principle of boycott of
foreign cloth, courts, schools and colleges as well as acceptance of the titles. Gandhi
could have added condition regarding Untouchability for membership of the
Congress. But he did not.

Ambedkar points out that the period between 1924 and 1930 was again
marked with no action against the Untouchability. Though Gandhi and the Congress
did not do anything the Untouchables themselves had started efforts for the
eradication. They had also started making use of the Satyagraha for establishing their
civic right to take water from public tanks and wells as well as for entry into the
temples. Satyagraha of Mahad for the former purpose and at Kala Ram Temple of
Nasik were the landmark movement by the Untouchables. Ambedkar expected that if
Gandhi could not do anything he should, at least, have lent his support to those
movements. Contrary to that Gandhi strongly criticized it. Ambedkar brings out the
contradiction in Gandhi’s attitude as he says, “Gandhi has put in to action this weapon
of Styagraha many a times against the British Government for the removal of political
wrongs. But Mr. Gandhi has never used the weapon of Satyagraha against Hindus to
get them to throw open wells and temples to the Untouchables.”(BAWS 1991VoIIIX:248) The same is the case with other weapon devised by Gandhi, that is
hunger strike. Ambedkar states that Gandhi in all undertook twenty-one fasts. Those
had different purposes behind them ranging from bringing Hindu-Muslim unity to
redemption for moral turpitude committed by the residents of the Ashramas. But he
never used this weapon for eradication for the Untouchability.

During the Round Table Conferences Gandhi participated in the consultations
in 1931 for framing the constitution. It was agreed that the government should be
democratic but with the society which was not only split in divisions but also hostile
to each other it was a challenge to form such a government. Taking into account this
fact, all had accepted that in order to realize the dream of such a government it was
necessary that the Legislature and the Executive should be formed on the principle of
communal representation. The division between the Hindus and the Untouchables was more severe than the division between Hindus and other religious. In this situation Ambedkar expected Gandhi to support the Untouchables. Instead of doing so the latter chose to frustrate their attempts. When the Communal Award was declared he announced to oppose it with his life. In order to force the Government to withdraw the Award he started his fast unto death at Yerwada about which Ambedkar says,” when the fast failed and Mr. Gandhi was obliged to sign a pact-called the Poona Pact- which conceded the political demands of the Untouchables he took his revenge by letting the Congress employ foul electioneering tactics to make their political rights of no avail.” (BAWS 199VolIX:249)

There after Gandhi engaged in two movements. The first one was the Temple-entry movement and the other one was to pass the Temple-entry bill. Regarding the previous, he had declared that if the temple is not opened within a stipulated period, he would start a fast against it. But he did not keep his promise. The other one was related to the Bill introduced by Ranga Iyer. Gandhi had made all the arrangements to see that the Bill is passed. But as the assembly was dissolved and the polls were announced. The Congress people felt that if they support the Bill, people might defeat them. Fearing the defeat, the leaders withdrew their support and they even defended the perfidious behavior.

Next Gandhi started the Harijan Sevak Sangh. There were no noteworthy efforts to achieve the objectives it had set before itself. When Gandhi undertook a tour for funds for this work he could collect a paltry sum. So he had to depend upon the wealthy friends for the funds. Hindus had shown their unwillingness for this work with its attitude towards the Untouchables. The Untouchables had also started showing no concern about the Sangh. Ambedkar states, “Here was an opportunity for Mr. Gandhi to make the Sangh a real bridge between the Hindus and the Untouchables. He could make it a virile institution by improving its program of work and by allowing the Untouchables to participate in its working. Mr. Gandhi has done nothing of the kind. He has allowed the Sangh to languish. It is dying peacefully and may perish even during the life-time of Mr. Gandhi.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:251)

Observing the shifts in Gandhi’s position, Ambedkar finds the behavior puzzling. So he puts some questions that would arise in the mind of the readers. He asks fourteen very relevant questions and expects Gandhi or his supporters to reply to them but neither responded and tried to kill the issue by neglect.
The Bardoli Program was completely indifferent to the issues of the Untouchables, so they had lost faith in Gandhi’s commitment to this cause. Had Gandhi made it compulsory to every member, there would have been some impact. Ambedkar says that, “It would have put the nationalism of the Congress men to test.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:255) Apart from this it would have led the Untouchables to believe that Gandhi’s commitment to the issue would not have been questioned by the Untouchables.

During the Round Table Conference Gandhi changed his position on minority issue many times. At one time he stated that except the Depressed Classes there was no minority that was not capable of taking care of itself. Still when time to concede safeguards to them came be strongly opposed it. He went to the extent of agreeing all fourteen demands of the Muslims under Jinha if they join him in opposing safeguards to the Untouchables. He signed in favour of settlement by the British Prime Minister and when he sensed that it might go contrary to his expectation sent a letter to the Prime Minister announcing to oppose the decision with his life if it would have not been in his favour. His mind did not pinch him for this breach of trust. After the award was declared he announced fast to oppose it. There was no heroism in that also. Referring to his fast Ambedkar comments, “There was nothing noble in the fast. It was a foul and filthy act. The fast was not for the benefit of the Untouchables. It was against a helpless people to give up the constitutional safeguards of which they had become possessd under the Prime Minister’s Award and agreed to live on the mercy of the Hindus. It was a vile and wicked act.”(BAWS 1991VolIX:259) This is why be believes that the Untouchables did not recognize him as an honest and sincere Man. Further when the Pact was signed Gandhi went on to undermine the provisions. He was neither the ally of the Untouchables nor even a sympathizer with their cause, there was no question of his being their champion.

The anti-untouchability movement had failed miserably was apparent from several examples. Gandhi’s own paper accepted that Untouchability was observed in the schools in Gujarat. The temples were not opened to them in spite of the movement. This leads Ambedkar to believe that Gandhi was not interested in emancipating the Untouchables, but he wanted to make them more dependent on the caste Hindus. His fears were not without grounds. The changes in Gandhi’s position only indicate that he wanted independence but he did not want to disorganize the social structure and so Ambedkar states, “He is not prepared for the political
emancipation of the Untouchables even if it was essential for winning Swraj” Mr. Gandhi’s attitude is let Swraj perish if the cost of it is the political freedom of the Untouchablels.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:271)

What is Gandhism?

Gandhi reaffirmed his belief in caste in Nav-Jivan that Hindu Society exists even today because of the caste system and states that the seeds of independence were to be found in it. Calling it a unique system he asserts that it has inherent provision of disseminating primary education. He praises every aspect of caste system which has been denounced by many on the ground that it in perpetuating slavery.

In 1925 He accolades Varna system. He does not only argue in favour of the ancient divisions in the society but also deals with the workers’ right to go on a strike in order to seek justice and sides with the mill owners. He comments on relations between zamindars and tenants and favours the former. On Gandhi’s attitude Ambedkar comments as, “Under Gandhism the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to the nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of people.” (BAWS 1991VolIX:284) Gandhi condemns the use of machines, Gandhi advocates caste and Varna, Ambedkar believed that it would hamper the would be nation seriously and so he deals with each issue elaborately.

Aspects Ambedkar’s Nationalism:

Ambedkar defines nationalism as, “Nationality is a feeling. It is a feeling of corporate sentiment of oneness which make those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin.(Ambedkar1990 Vol III:31)The text that we have discussed places the problem of representation for the Depressed Classes. The whole controversy is surrounded by that issue. Providing safeguards for them was most essential to ensure their place is decision making. Though this is the crux of the book it is not the only core of his idea of nationalism. Rather inclusion of all the marginalised, whether on the basis of caste, gender or economic status, was the idea central to his nationalism.
He asserts that caste system in India operates as an institution which exploits and also governs the society. As Ambedkar has put it, the governing class in this society was composed of two upper Varnas, which collaborated to exploit the masses. Phule analysed this system in relation with peasants and points out that it adopts a strategy of appropriating the surplus income of the peasants. (Bagade 2010:136) By doing so castes creates a situation in which the peasants are made dependent on the society. This helplessness works in two ways. Firstly it makes exploitation easy and secondly due to the dependence the peasants cannot dare to rebel against it.

Ambedkar had taken similar position. He offered fundamental explanation of the structure of caste order and the way it operates. His engagement with caste helped him to understand the complexities in the peasants’ exploitation. So he not only theorized the problem but tried to grapple with it. As an economist, Ambedkar was aware of the important position occupied by agriculture in Indian economy. In order to eradicate poverty it was necessary to study agriculture. This Ambedkar did thoroughly. This gave him an insight into the problems of population engaged in agriculture. He says, “India was caught between two sides of a pincer, the one side of which was progressive increase of population on land and the other was a progressive increase in deterioration of the soil. The result was that at the end of a decade we were left with a negative balance between population and production and a constant squeezing of standard of living. At every decade the negative balance between the population and production was increasing in alarming degree, leaving India with the inheritance of poverty, more poverty and chronic poverty…” (Thorat 1998:38)

Ambedkar points out that the population has recorded a growth of fifty two per cent during 1901 and 1951. Compared to that the working population engaged in agriculture was about seventy one percent in 1911 it came down to 68.2 percent in 1948. He studied the size of holding and recorded that there was a steady decline in the agricultural area sown per person. In 1911 the average holding was 0.88 acre, during 1941-42 it had decreased to 0.72 acres. This was a conclusive evidence of the fact that the land was shrinking and the population was increasing. (Thorat 2009:357)

Some misconceptions nurtured in Indian society had also resulted in hampering agriculture. Use of water suffers from such misconception. Ambedkar asserts that, “It is wrong to think water in excessive quantity is an evil. Water can never be so excessive to be an evil. Man suffers more from lack of water than from excess of it. The trouble is that nature is not only niggardly in the amount of water it
gives, it is also erratic in its distribution – altering between draught and storm. But this cannot alter the fact that water is wealth. Water being the wealth of the people and its distribution being uncertain, the correct approach is not to complain against nature but to conserve water.” (Thorat 1998:200) Ambedkar had realized the need to maintain ecological balance for the purpose of making agriculture profitable. He says, “The prosperity of the agriculturist must depend upon the maintenance of forest belts spread over the country. Without forest belts proper degree of rainfall will not be assured and agriculture in India will continue to be the gamble in rain as it has always been in the past. The Federation would urge for more and more afforestation of uncultivable waste land.” (Thorat 2009:359) Surprisingly this was an item in the election manifesto of the Scheduled Castes Federation, the party launched by Ambedkar. We hardly see a party paying so much attention to the peasants.

As far as population growth was concerned, Ambedkar reiterated the need to control it. He declared his support to Prof. R.D. Karve who invented contraceptives and requested people to use them. He also edited a magazine named ‘Samaj Swasthya.’ Condemning him of being obscene and perverse a complaint was filed against him. The society had in fact declared a boycott on him. When his wife died, no body participated in her cremation he had to do it all alone. Ambedkar stood behind such man because he believed that whatever he was doing would ensure a prosperous and happy future for the nation in general and for peasants workers and women in particular.

His struggle against exploitative ‘Khoti’ system in konkan, introduction of the Hindu Code Bill for the welfare of women and starting an Education society and opening its college in Marathwada region which was most backward, are other things that show his compassion for the marginalized even if it is a region.

**Critique of Ambedkar’s Position:**

Ambedkar wrote a speech to be delivered in the Annual Conference of the Jat Pat Todak Mandal which was scheduled in Lahore. He could not deliver the speech as the organizers found it to be very radical. He then published the speech and put the copies in the market. The speech naturally attracted attention of people. Gandhi also took cognizance of the speech and wrote articles criticizing it in the ‘Hajijan. Gandhi repeated his objections that many saints and other people are engaged in eradication
of Untouchability. Hinduism is not as bad as he had described it and so on. But he also insisted upon the view that everybody should do his ancestral job. Ambedkar gave a detailed answer to it which ended the controversy. Not because Gandhi was convinced but because he chose not to speak. This recurred on many occasions later on. His letter to A.V. Thakar giving some suggestions about the working of the Harijan Sevak Sangh went unacknowledged. As a result he resigned. In his book ‘What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables’ Ambedkar asks fourteen questions about the points on which he was dissatisfied with the work of Gandhi and the Congress. He had appealed Gandhi and his followers answer these questions. That too failed to revoke any response from Gandhi or the Congressman. It does not mean that they had nothing to say about Ambedkar but it was definite that they had nothing to say to him. As Ambedkar says, they had started the campaign that he and the section which followed were selling India’s interests for their own. This whispering campaign continued for a long time.

Ambedkar’s critics broadly fall among two categories. Either they were Gandhians or they were Hindu nationalists. After many decades Arun Shourie to offered a critique of Ambedkar’s views and actions.

**Shourie on Ambedkar:**

Arun Shourie contentnds with Ambedkar for three reasons. The most important was that the latter served as the member of Viceroy’s Executive. The next was his over emphasizing the problem of Untouchability and the last was the undue credit given to him as the father of Indian Constitution. Shourie accuses Ambedkar as a job hunter. He begins with saying that he remained aloof from freedom struggle and that, “There is not one instance, not one single instance in which Ambedkar participated in any activity connected with that struggle to free that country.” (Shourie 1997:3) Shourie continues to scrutinize him and adds, “The Maharashtra Government has by now published 14 volumes of the speeches and writings of Ambedkar. These cover 9996 pages. Volumes up to the 12th contain his speeches and writings up to 1946. These extend to 7371 pages you would be hard put to find one article, one speech, one passage in which Ambedkar can be seen even by inference to be arguing for India’s independence” (Shourie 1997:4)

His joining of the Executive is the climax of his being anti-national.
Regarding the first charge it could be said that there were many who did not participate in the struggle for freedom. Particularly colleagues of Shourie’s party which elevated him to the post of Cabinet Minister in the Central Government under Vajpayee’s leadership in 2003. There were many such with whom he rubbed shoulders.

About his writings Shouri says that there is no mention of the struggle. But avoids to considering that he had a different concept of freedom. Whether the freedom from British rule or that for the toiling, suffering masses was his question which nobody cared to answer. This way he was forced to make a separate list of priority for the masses.

Regarding joining the Executive of the Viceroy one could argue that right from the first executive after Morley-Minto reforms, several Muslims, Parsis and Hindus became the members. Satyendra Prasanno Sinha (1909-1914), P.S. Sivaswami Iyer (1912-17), Tej Bahadur Sapra (1920-1923), Satish Ranjan Das (1931-34), Brojendra Mitter (1931-34), Nripendra Nath Sircar (1934-1939), Bipin Behari Ghosh (1933), C. Sankaran Nair (1915-1919)B.N. Sarma 1920-1925), Bhupendra Nath Mitra, Narsimha Chintaman Kelkar (1924-29), C.P.Ramswami Iyer (1931-1942), Kurma Venkata Reddy Naidu (1934-1937), Arcot Ramswami Mudliar, Kunnur Sir Jagdish Prasad, Girija Shankar Bajpai were some Hindus which includes, N.C. Kelkar, an associate of Tilak and editor of ‘Kesari’ had the honour of working the Executive earlier.

When we read Shouri we have a feeling that Ambedkar was the only Indian or the only Hindu to join the Executive. Along with him there were several Hindus. Here is the list of Executive Members in which Ambedkar worked. Jwala Prasad Shrivastav, Ashok Kumar Roy, Arcot Ramsamy Mudliar, Nalini Ranjan Sarkar, Madhav Shrihari Auey, Narayan Bhaskar Khare, Gurunath Venkatesh Benoor and Ambedkar himself.

The question arises is that if Ambedkar becomes Anti-national by joining the Executive how about the others? What does Shourie think about it is not written in the book. On the contrary if we read the list we find that they all belonged to the upper castes which have been referred to by Ambedkar as the governing class in India. If this is the case Shourie being so selective to single out Ambedkar to criticize brings out his bias against latter. The reason is found in his own book.
Shourie asserts that illuminated persons like Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekanan, Lokmany Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and host of others had engaged in removing Untouchability. As they were engaged in removing the evil effects of colonial rule regarding religion and people were out there to find a solution Ambedkar spoiled the efforts in his hurry. Introduction of safeguards advocated by him were also condemned by Shourie as an evil. This way be completely misses the point of positive discrimination.

Shourie singles out Ambedkar for this purpose because his theory of Governing class in India. He states that Brahmin and Baniya form the governing class. The description given by Ambedkar is labled as, ‘…nothing but incitement and is calculated to sow enmity between groups,’ (Shourie 1997:17) for which he believes that he would be hauled up and prosecuted. Shourie says it in 1997 when Dalit massacres of Kilwamani in Tamilnadu, Pipra, Parasbigha, atrocities against Dalits for demand of remaining the University all had taken place. In spite of it if he wishes to tell that Hindus are compassionate to the Untouchables and there is no enmity between them, or there was no enmity between them before Ambedkar sowed it, is a betrayal of his ignorance. In fact Shourie is hurt because his description of the governing class and so singles out Ambedkar.

Gandhi’s fast unto death has been given a detailed treatment by Shourie quoting from Sushila Nayar’s diary. He condemns Ambedkar for his near death. In his attempt he forgets that Ambedkar did not incite the former to go on fast. Rather the former entered into the fray by chance as the Prime Minister declared to settle the matter amongst them- selves. This made Ambedkar a party to the episode.

Another important question that arise from Shourie’s concern for Gandhi. Shourie was a minister in the Bhartiya Janata Party led NDA Government. The party is a part of the Sangh Pariwar the Hindu nationalist organization which had its hand in Gandhi’s assassination and some of them glorify Nathuram Godse, the assassin as the martyr. His love for Gandhi is simply an excuse to thrash Ambedkar. This is in fact his dislike for ‘reservations’ and conferring of Bharat Ratna on Ambedkar by the V.P.Singh Government which also declared quota for ‘Mandal.’ This inspired him to paint Ambedkar in black otherwise even a child would not believe that Jagjivan Ram recommended his name to Gandhi.

Jafferlot comments on Shouri’s claim that Ambedkar was a job hunter and a puppet in the lands of British Government as, “It is true that, Ambedkar was plagued
by financial difficulties throughout his life, but does this allow Shourie to assert that he was prepared to betray his caste fellows and that his struggle to free Untouchables was not the reasons why Ambedkar supported the British? If his true motives had been careerist. Why then did he resign from Nehru’s Government is 1951?” (Jafferlot 2012:146) Shourie must be aware that Ambedkar did not resign for the Untouchables but for the Hindu Code Bill which was a means of safeguard for women and all the good people including Prasad and Nehru tried to delay its introduction.
References: