Ambedkar was equipped with the teachings of Phooley. He put before him the ideal of a society which was based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. His education in England and U.S.A. and the broad social outlook showed him the way to free his community from the social slavery of the caste Hindus. He had to fight Brahminism and for that, he had to wage social battles against caste Hindus.

Ambedkar always made efforts to maintain a balance between thought and action. His principles of dynamism recognized that ‘there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing sanatan: that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society’.¹ He held that social environment was as much responsible for human sorrow as man himself was. His ideal was to establish a society based on liberty, equality
and fraternity. 'In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be social endosmosis'. For this he emphasised a social conscience which he regarded as the only safeguard of all rights, fundamental or non-fundamental. To him, social progress and social stability depended on 'fluidity' and 'equity' among the classes. According to him, stability is wanted but not at the cost of change when change is imperative. Adjustment is wanted but not at the sacrifice of social justice. Social stability meant to him negation of the caste system in Indian society.

The social struggles launched by Ambedkar were aimed at counteracting the unequal treatment meted out to the untouchables by the caste Hindus. His motive was to establish equal status in religious, social, economic and political matters to all classes, offering them an opportunity to rise in the scale of life and creating conditions for their advancement. These fundamental concepts were behind every social struggle that the untouchables under the leadership of Ambedkar launched against communal tyranny.

**BAHISHKRIT HITAKARINI SABHA**

The year 1924 was one of the most eventful years in Indian history. It witnessed the release of three great forces in the social field in India. After

*Mobility form higher to lower.*
undergoing a hellish jail life of over twelve years in the Andamans, Veer Savarkar was released and interned in Ratnagiri on January 6, 1924, from Yeravada Jail where he had been brought a few days before being interned. Gandhi was also released on February 11, 1924, on health grounds from the same jail after suffering jail life of nearly two years consequent on the debacle of his Khilafat-Swaraj movement. In their helplessness both Savarkar and Gandhi wanted to make the most of the situation. Both took a plunge into the social field. Savarkar started his work in April 1924 for the consolidation of Hindu society—which work was known as Hindu Sanghatan—and invariably for the uplift of the Depressed Classes for whose welfare and rights he had been fighting ever since his transportation to the Andamans. Gandhi applied his methods and herculean energy to the amelioration of the Depressed Classes.

Ambedkar prepared himself in March 1924 to launch his social movement for the uplift of the Untouchables. To achieve his objective he convened a meeting on March 9, 1924, at the Damodar Hall, Bombay, to consider the desirability of establishing a central institution for removing difficulties of the Untouchables and placing their grievances before Government. After much discussion and debate, it was resolved that an institution be established and accordingly it was founded on July 20, 1924, under the title ‘Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha’, and was registered under Act XXI of 1860. Its activities were confined to the Presidency of Bombay and
its head office was situated at Damodar Hall, Bombay 12. The aims and objects of the Sabha were as under:

To promote the spread of education among the Depressed Classes by opening Hostels or by employing such other means as may seem necessary or desirable.

To promote the spread of culture among the Depressed Classes by opening libraries, social centres and classes or study circles.

To advance and improve the economic condition of the Depressed Classes by starting Industrial and Agricultural schools.

To represent the grievances of the Depressed Classes.\(^5\)

The President of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha was Sir Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad L.L.D., and its Vice-Presidents were Meyer Nissim, J.P.; Rustomji Jinwala, Solicitor; G.K. Nariman, Dr.R.P.Paranjpye, Dr.V.P.Chavan and B.G.Kher, solicitor, who fifteen years later became the first Prime Minister of the Bombay Province. The Chairman of the managing committee was Ambedkar, its Secretary was S.N.Shivtarkar and its Treasurer, N.T.Jadhav.

This Central Organization devoted itself to raising the Depressed Classes from their down-trodden condition to a status of social and political equality with others in Indian society and to promoting their economic interests. It thus fulfilled in a way the need expressed in a resolution at the second Bombay Provincial Conference which was held at Barsi in Sholapur District by the Depressed Classes in the early part of the year 1924.

53
With the birth of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha dawned the age of self-respect. The Sabha began to find its feet. It started, on January 4, 1925, a hostel at Sholapur for High School students belonging to the Depressed Classes. The Sabha bore the expenses incurred by the students on clothes, stationery and boarding. The Sholapur Municipality sanctioned a grant of rupees forty towards the maintenance of the hostel. Jivappa Subha Aydale, a councillor from an untouchable caste, looked after the management of the hostel.

The Sabha started also an institution for the Depressed Class students with a view to inculcating a liking for knowledge and learning and a love for social service into the minds of the students. Under the direction of the Sabha the students conducted a monthly magazine named Saraswati Vilas. There were, in addition, a free reading room in Bombay and a Mahar Hockey Club, started in the hope of persuading the Untouchables to set their faces against gambling, drinking and other vices, and unhealthy ways of recreations.

The Depressed Classes were now being attracted to Ambedkar's personality. The first public meeting, he once recalled, held some days after his arrival from London as a bar-at-law, was not attended by any member of the Depressed Classes excepting the organizers themselves. Some persons were sitting on the doorsteps of the houses surrounding the meeting place; a few smoking and others chatting in the corners. Unsupported by the Press and unaided by any purse, he moved through the hamlets, villages and
towns to stir up his people, stinging them into protests and driving them to revolt. He attended and guided the first Provincial Depressed Classes Conference held at Nipani in the Bombay Presidency. He presided over the first conference of Untouchables at Malwan in Ratnagiri District in April 1925. From Malwan he went to Goa at the pressing request of an admirer. Shivtarkar was with him. They visited some places in Goa and returned to Bombay.

About this time the Governor of Bombay nominated Ambedkar to the Bombay Legislative Council. The Bombay Depressed Class Teachers called a meeting on February 2, 1927, and decided to celebrate this event by presenting a purse to their leader. Accordingly, two months later, on April 19, a meeting was held in Damodar Hall at Parel, Bombay, under the preseidentship of S.B.Pendurkar, a Muncipal educational supervisor, who took deep interest in the spread of education among the lower classes. On the occasion of presenting the purse to the leader, Pendurkar told the audience that he was confident that Ambedkar would discharge his heavy responsibilities efficiently, and he appealed to the Depressed Classes to make his mission a success by sharing the responsibility on their own part. Ambedkar thanked the Depressed Class Teachers for their grateful appreciation of his work and donated the purse to the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha.
BAHISHKRIT BHARAT

Now Ambedkar wanted a newspaper to propagate his work. He felt the need for a mouthpiece as never before. To represent the correct view and the ideal and to voice the grievances of his party, a newspaper is an inevitable necessity for a real leader in these days. A leader without a paper is like a bird without wings. So Ambedkar started his fortnightly Marathi paper, Bahishkrit Bharat, on April 3, 1927, in Bombay. Explaining the aim of the journal, he observed that he had taken to the profession of a lawyer because he felt that one's attempt at conducting a newspaper for the welfare of the people, should always be backed up by an independent profession for one's personal livelihood. Long before he had realized that financial independence facilitated the work of a public worker. It was true that the financial condition of newspaper concerns in India was not then good and is not still so.

Justifying the need for a mouthpiece for the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar said that in the ensuing political reforms, which he expected to be effected by 1930, if the Untouchables failed to secure representation in proportion of their population, they would be doomed. He further warned them that in fact their condition would be worse than it already was under the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms. To guard against this the Depressed Classes must be kept well informed about the happenings in the land and their grievances, views and reactions must be placed before Government and the people.
Ambedkar now began to explain his views, define his aims and reply to the critics of his movement through the new journal. He said that the temples and watercourses should be open to the Untouchables because the Untouchables were Hindus. He wrote editorial after editorial in his short, crisp and fearless style, asking Government to bring into force the 'Bole resolution'* and not to trust the good sense of the local bodies for its implementation as they were dominated by persons who were narrow-minded, old-fashioned, orthodox, reactionaries and antagonistic to the interests of the Depressed Classes. He also appealed through his paper to the Government to punish the wrong-doers and trespassers who opposed the execution of the above-cited resolution.

To those critics who contended that the Untouchables were denied those rights because they ate carcasses and beef, he asked why some of the untouchable communities who never touched meat were thrown into the untouchable category and why the beef-eating Muslims and Christians were regarded as touchables by them. Some said that the Tank was not a public property. Ambedkar hit back by saying that everything that was meant for the use of the public and controlled or conducted by Government or semi-Government institutions was public property whether it was used by some sections of the people or not. There were some who trampled the rights of the Untouchables under foot and yet asked the British Government in the

*Leader of the Non-Brahmins in Bombay Legislative Council

57
name of democracy to conduct Government in accordance with public opinion. Ambedkar asked this set of people whether those words—justice and democracy—lay in their mouths!

There were some Hindus who shrewdly cloaked their cowardice and failed to do justice to the Depressed Classes in these matters by saying that the people were not prepared for such a radical change in the society. Ambedkar flung their arguments back by asking them why they clamoured for the independence of the country when the people as a whole were neither prepared for it nor deserved it. One in a hundred, he said, understood the significance of national independence and even then Tilak rose for their deliverance. They criticized Ambedkar because he drove the Untouchables to adopt a militant policy. But what was he to do when the rights and self-respect of a whole people were daily crushed under the fierce power of religion? If Tilak had been born amongst the Untouchables Ambedkar proceeded, he would not have raised the slogan “Swaraj is my birthright”, but he would have raised the slogan: “Annihilation of Untouchability is my birth-right.”⁶ Ambedkar’s reading of Tilak is unchallengeable. A man of Tilak’s cast, volcanic force, iron will and boundless self-respect would have undoubtedly applied the dynamo of his resourceful brains to shell the strongholds of orthodoxy had he been born an Untouchable. He would have nurtured and inspired all social revolutionary
youths as he nursed and inspired the young political revolutionaries, to shell
the barriers of untouchability.

There were some who raised violent protests against the insulting
treatment meted out to the Indians in South Africa and to the Indian
students in Britain, and at the same time denied human rights to their
countrymen and co-religionists in India. Ambedkar exposed their
inconsistent attitude, selfishness, shamelessness and held them to ridicule!

Lastly, Ambedkar made a powerful appeal to all leaders and the public
at large, who favoured abolition of untouchability, to transform their
sympathies into practicality and bring the reform into reality in their day-to-
day life. It was sheer cruelty, he declared, to say that because the injustice
had been extended across centuries, it should be borne for some time more.
Only a cave-man, he added, could defend his sins in that way. It was his
earnest appeal, therefore to thoughtful men to act up to their views and
vows.

Ambedkar, the social revolutionary, knew well that the problem of
untouchability did not depend for its solutions so much on the spread of
education or on the rational appeal as on the abolition of the privileges,
selfishness and the peculiar frame of mind of the high caste Hindus. He,
therefore, urged the Depressed Classes to act in as forcible a way as to let
the caste Hindus know that to observe untouchability was a risk as
dangerous as to bear live coals on their tongues. These caste Hindus, he
said, would not understand paper resolutions, or appeals made at
conferences and would not realize the magnitude of their sins until they felt it unsafe to treat them as Untouchables. So he asked them to keep before their mind the struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims and said that it was a struggle for cultural predominance. The balance of power was, he asserted, in their hands and therefore he asked them to utilize their forces advantageously for the advancement of their own social and political rights.

"Lost rights are never regained," Ambedkar observed, "by begging, and by appeals to the conscience of the usurpers, but by relentless struggle." "Goats are used for sacrificial offerings and not lions," he concluded. 7

It is observed that Ambedkar started Bahishkrit Hitakarini Saba and Bahishkrit Bharat to create awareness among untouchables about social problems and social inequalities. Which were being prevailed in society and they were facing everyday. So he prepared them mentally to get their rights. In this way, he was preparing ground for future struggles.

MAHAD TANK SATYAGRAHA

S.K. Bole, leader of the non-Brahmin Party, had moved a resolution in Bombay Legislative Council which read as follows:--"The Council recommends that the untouchable classes be allowed to use all public water-places, wells, and dharmashalas which are built and maintained out of public funds or are administered by bodies appointed by Government or created by stature, as well as public schools, courts and offices and dispensaries". The Bombay Government directive of September 11, 1923,
was issued to give effect to the above Resolution. In spite of the Bole Resolution a good number of Local Boards and Municipalities did not grant civil rights to the Depressed Classes.

Bole moved another Resolution on August 5, 1926. It was directed towards not giving grants to those Municipalities and Local Boards which refused to give effect to the Resolution on the subject passed by the Council three years earlier. To implement the Bole Resolution the Mahad Municipal Borough threw the tank (which was famous for its tasty water and hence known as *chowder*) open to all communities. The caste Hindus in Mahad were hostile on this score.

At Mahad, a conference of untouchables on March 19 and 20, 1927 was attended by about 10,000 delegates. Delegates, workers and leaders of the Depressed Classes from almost all the districts of Maharashtra and Gujarat attended the Conference. Every care had been taken, every convenience was provided, and every means was adopted to make the Conference a success. Water worth rupees forty was purchased from the caste Hindus to satisfy the needs of the Conference, for water was not available to the Untouchables at the place of the Conference. The Conference commenced at noon in a pandal named after the local deity Veereshwar.

Ambedkar rose to deliver his presidential address to the half clad, embarrassed, earnest men and women and began it in his simple, short and forceful sentences. With a strange agitation in his voice he described the conditions of Dapoli where he had received the first rudiments of education.
and said that one was attracted to the place where one passed one’s childhood and the beautiful scenery surrounding it deepened one’s love for such a place. He recalled the days of his childhood and said: “There was a time when we, who are condemned as Untouchables, were much advanced, much ahead in education compared with communities other than the advanced classes. This part of the country was then pulsating with the action and authority of our people”

With great earnestness, he then delivered a message to his people which echoed throughout the hills, dales and villages of Maharashtra. Declaring that the demilitarization was one of the causes of their downfall, he said; “The military offered us unique opportunities of raising our standard of life and proving our merit and intellect, courage and brilliance as army officers. In those days Untouchables could also be headmasters of military schools and compulsory primary education in the military camps was very effective and wholesome.” “It is nothing less than a betrayal and a treachery,” he went on, “on the part of the British to have closed the doors of the army to the Untouchables who had helped them establish the Indian empire while their home Government was at grips with the French during the Napoleonic War.”

Then in an inspiring tone he said: “No lasting progress can be achieved unless we put ourselves through a three-fold process of purification. We must improve the general tone of our demeanour, re-tone our pronunciations and revitalize our thoughts. I, therefore, ask you now to
take a vow from this moment to renounce eating carrion. It is high time that we rooted out from our mind the ideas of highness and lowness among ourselves. Make an unflinching resolve not to eat the thrown-out crumbs. We will attain self-elevation only if we learn self-help, regain our self-respect, and gain self-knowledge."

He further urged his people to agitate against the Government ban on their entry into the Army, Navy and Police, and impressed upon them the importance of entering Government services and of education. Turning to the question of Mahars, he tweaked their self-respect by telling them that it was utterly disgraceful to sell their human rights for a few crumbs of bread and appealed to them fervently to do away with the humiliating, enslaving traditions, to abandon their Vatans and seek forest lands for agricultural pursuits. In conclusion he said in a moving tone: "There will be no difference between parents and animals if they will not desire to see their children in a better position than their own."

The conference passed resolutions on important subjects. By one resolution the conference appealed to the caste Hindus to help the Untouchables secure their civic rights, to employ them in services, offer food to untouchable students, and bury their dead animals themselves. Lastly, it appealed to Government to prohibit the Untouchables by special laws from eating carrion, enforce prohibition, provide them with free and compulsory primary education, give aid to the Depressed Classes hostels and make the "Bole Resolution" a living reality by enjoining upon the local
bodies, if necessary, to proclaim Section 144 of Indian Criminal Procedure Code at their places, for its enforcement.

On the first day, a few caste Hindu spokesmen, local as well as outsiders, made speeches justifying the rights of the Depressed Classes and promised them help. The subjects Committee, which met that night, decided, after taking the sense of the leaders of the upper classes who attended the Conference, that the Conference should go in a body to the Chowdar Tank and help the Depressed Classes to establish their right to take water. Next morning the Conference called upon two caste Hindu spokesmen to support the resolution regarding the duties and responsibilities of the caste Hindus. Excluding the clause regarding inter­caste marriage, they both supported the resolution. In pursuance of the resolution of the Mahad Municipality which in 1924 had declared to have thrown open its tank to the Depressed Classes, it was now decided to take water from the Tank to the Depressed Classes, it was now decided to take water from the Tank and establish the right of the Untouchables. The delegates accordingly began to march peacefully in a body to the Chowdar Tank to assert their right of taking water from the Tank.

There was a rumour that all the untouchables entered the Vireshwar temple. The caste Hindus came into the pandal of the Conference and attacked the delegates. Stray individuals were beaten. They had to run into Muslim houses for shelter. Ambedkar was forced to take shelter in a police station.
Thus ended a first public attempt to assert civic rights. The untouchables were compelled to face social boycott. They were dislodged from the land, and were assaulted in many villages. Ambedkar urged his followers to take aggressive steps and to wrest the right of drinking water at public water-courses and to force their entry into public temples. He thought of starting a *satyagraha* for vindication of his people’s rights. Javalkar and Jedhe, two prominent leaders of the Satyashodhak movement in Maharashtra, promised their whole-hearted support to the proposed struggle on condition that all the Brahmins should be weeded out from it and that the struggle should be non-violent on a mass scale. Ambedkar, however, declared that it was erroneous to treat all Brahmins as enemies of untouchables.⁸

At Mahad, a *Satyagraha* Conference was called on December 25, 1927. The site for the Conference was taken from a Muslim citizen. The local merchants non-cooperated fully. The Reception Committee had to purchase corn and other materials from outside. Ambedkar left Bombay with 200 delegates. About 3,000 *satyagrahis* were ready; but the District Magistrate requested Ambedkar to postpone the proposed struggle.

In his speech Ambedkar attacked the *varna* system as being at the root of inequality. He said that equality meant equal opportunity and making power dependent on inherent qualities.⁹ He emphasised that Hindu society should be organised on two principles: equality and absence of casteism.

This Conference was a great and momentous event, the opening of an epoch in the history of Hindustan. It was an event which changed both
Ambedkar’s personal life and the current of social and national reorganization. It was as significant in the history of India as were the proclamation of the partition of Bengal, Tilak’s role at the Surat Congress, the first bonfire of foreign cloth made by Savarkar, Khudiram Bose’s bomb at Muzaffarpur, Gandhi’s Dandi March of 1930 and Subhas Bose’s war of liberation of 1943.

It is very interesting to note from the viewpoint of history that both the Indian political and the socio-religious revolution had their origin in Maharashtra.

Under the leadership of their saviour, the down-trodden, the dehumanized and dumb millions opened a new chapter in the annals of India. They not only voiced their age-long grievances but also took on themselves energetically to mitigate them. They now summoned up courage and showed the right spirit in standing boldly and shaking off the dust from their feet, faces and future.

The struggle inaugurated by their educated leaders gripped their minds and enkindled the flame of self-respect and self-elevation. They now smarted under the insults and humiliations inflicted upon them at Mahad. They applied their minds to self-improvement and self-culture as never before. As a result of this Conference, the Untouchables gave up eating carrion, skinning carcasses, and stopped begging for crumbs.
For months the wave of protest against the unjust, shameful and inhuman conduct of the Mahad caste Hindus swept Hindustan. The topic became an important news-item all over India.

The claim of the untouchables to use the Chowdar Tank was finally accepted after a long drawn legal battle by the Bombay High Court in 1937. This is the achievement of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a rebel forever.

**MANUSMRITI**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar challenged every blind and illogical, and irrational tradition of Hinduism. The Conference declared that the *Manusmriti* which directed molten lead to be poured into the ears of such Shudras, as would hear or read the *Vedas*, and which decried the Shudras, stunted their growth, impaired their self-respect, and perpetuated their social, economic, religious and political slavery, be publicly burnt. On this resolution fiery speeches were made by Sahasrabudhe, Rajbhuj and Thorat. The *Manusmriti*, the most revered work of the caste Hindus, and the most hated work by the Depressed Classes, was thus ruthlessly condemned. The *Manusmriti* governs the law and life of the Hindus. Although compiled over one thousand and five hundred years ago, and although times are changed, it is considered by the orthodox to be good, all-pervading and omniscient even to this day.

Yet those who ruthlessly applied the doctrines of the Manusmriti to the non-Brahmins and the Atishudras contravened all its laws themselves and
still boasted of their superiority. The Brahmins are forbidden by the Manusmriti to trade in chemicals, liquids, coloured cloth, flowers, perfumery and arms. Yet no Brahmin loses his high and undefiled prestige in society even if he runs cloth-shops, medical pharmacies, dairies, hotels, perfumery and cutlery shops. Even Tilak, who had sponsored a textile mill, never upheld the right of the non-Brahmins to Vedic forms of worship, or the study of the Vedas by the non-Brahmins!

Sahasrabudhe, the mover of the foregoing resolution on the Manusmriti, condemning the holy scripture outright, said that it was a symbol of inequality, cruelty and injustice from the point of view of the Depresses Classes. All the speakers spoke of it with exceptional bitterness and roundly denounced its precepts. It was a furious onslaught on the scriptures. The wrath of the Conference did not stop at verbal condemnation. At nine o'clock that night the Manusmriti was placed on a pyre, in a specially dug pit, in front of the pandal, and was ceremoniously burnt at the hands of untouchable hermits!

This explosive deed rocked all the charlatans, pundits, Acharyas and Shankaracharyas in India, and, for a while, it spread a nervous brain-wave over such leaders as Bhaskarrao Jadhav, the bitterest enemy of Brahminism, who exclaimed that it was too outlandish an attack on the sacred Hindu scriptures which contained more good than evil.

One of the greatest iconoclasts for all times, Ambedkar was hammering out the false gods from their outworn sanctuaries. This act was one of the
greatest sacrilegious blows ever since the days of Luther upon the egoistic bigots, custom-mongers and non-changers on earth. December 25, 1927, is, therefore, a red letter day in the annals of India as it was on this day that Ambedkar burnt the old Smriti and demanded a new one in order to reshape the Hindu code governing the life of so vast a people.

By another resolution it was demanded that the present priestly profession should be democratised, allowing everyone who desired to have an opportunity to become a priest. The resolution on the proposed satyagraha was moved by Ambedkar himself. He maintained that in the present circumstances the Government should not be antagonized and put on the side of the opposition.

AMBEDKAR JUSTIFIED THE BURNING OF THE MANUSMRITI

Ambedkar himself revealed that it was not made for the sake of mere hatred. The Manusmriti has been indeed the charter of rights for the Caste Hindus and at the same time a Bible of slavery for the untouchables. He attacked the Manusmriti as it was symbol of unjust social laws. While speaking of this event later in 1938, in an interview with T.V.Parvate, affront-rank journalist, Ambedkar said: “The bonfire of Manusmriti was quite intentional. It was a very cautious and drastic step, but was taken with a view to forcing the attention of caste Hindus. At intervals such drastic remedies are a necessity. If you do not knock at the door, none opens it. It is not that all the parts of the Manusmriti are condemnable, that it does not
contain good principles and that Manu himself was not a sociologist and was a mere fool. We made a bonfire of it because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries. Because of its teachings we have been ground down under despicable poverty, and so we made the dash, staked all, took our lives in our hands and performed the deed.

**TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENTS**

Satyagraha for entering into the Kala Ram Mandir temple at Nasik was started in May, 1930. Ambedkar thought such a satyagraha might facilitate entry into other temples and create a change in the minds of Hindus. This peaceful satyagraha was directly under the leadership of Ambedkar. Bhaurao Gaekwad was the Secretary of the Satyagraha Committee. About 15,000 men volunteers and 500 female volunteers were ready. A mile-long procession was taken towards the Kala Rama Mandir in batches of four. Since the doors of the temple were closed the processionists proceeded to Ghats of the Godavari river. The caste Hindus pelted stones and shoes at the meetings. After a month's struggle a compromise between the caste Hindus and the untouchables was reached. It was settled that strong men from the untouchables and caste Hindus should draw the chariot of Ram on His birthday (Ram Navami) ceremony. This promise was broken by the caste Hindus. They drew the chariot without the help of the untouchables. The temple of Ram was closed for the
whole year. The agitation continued right up to the end of October, 1935. The news of the arrest of volunteers appeared in *The Times*, London. It added to the influence of Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference.

The Mahad Tank *Satyagraha*, the burning of *Manusmriti*, and the Kala Ram Mandir *Satyagraha* for temple entry were some of the movements launched by Ambedkar. He made clear the motives behind these social struggles. He said, ‘It is not that you can solve all your problems by *Satyagraha*. This is only a request to the upper-class Hindu mind'\(^{10}\).... . This *satyagraha* is to change the hearts of the Hindus.’ He was of opinion that the problems of the untouchables would never be solved by worship alone.\(^{11}\) He laid stress on a change in the attitude of caste Hindus.\(^{12}\)

Dr. Subbarayan, a leader from the South, introduced a Bill in the Central Assembly. It said that if a referendum favoured temple entry, temples should be thrown open to the untouchables, but the Bill said nothing of their right to worship the deity in the temples. Ambedkar flatly condemned the Bill as it did not condemn untouchability as a sin. In spite of Gandhiji’s request, he refused to give full support to this Bill and the Temple Entry Bill of Ranga Iyer. He regarded removal of untouchability more important than erection of temples.

**MAHAR WATAN**

According to the Hereditary Offices Act, the Mahars, holders of certain posts, were required to work all day and night, and in the absence of a
Mahar servant, his father or any other member of his family was required to work in the service of the government. For this hard work they got a piece of land as *watan*, some corn from the villagers and some negligible remuneration varying from annas two to a rupee and a half per mensem. The result of the *watan* system was that the Mahars lost self-respect, and they were tied down to these trifling jobs. The practice kept down the Mahar community. Ambedkar emphasised that it was no use to amend the Act. On the contrary the *watan* system must be abolished. He impressed upon the minds of his community that instead of living on small crumbs, his community should bring the waste land under cultivation and maintain itself.

On March 19, 1928, Ambedkar introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offices Act, 1874. At several meetings and Conferences he made clear the objects of this Bill. The first purpose of the Bill was to permit commutation of the *watan* at the option of the holder; the second, to provide better security for the payment of remuneration of certain classes of *watanders*, and the third purpose was to provide for specification, by rules, of the duties to be performed by *watanders*. While moving the Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council on August 3, 1928, he brought to the notice of the House that the lands were given to the Mahars by the ancient emperors of the country. The present government had neither increased the extent of the land nor paid any attention to the remuneration of these people and the income they were
getting was not even worth consideration. He proposed that *watan* lands should be given to the holders of these posts at the full rate of assessment and they should be relieved from the obligation to serve. He said that they should be paid from the revenue derived from the assessment levied on the lands of the Mahars and from the *baluta* (collection of grain made by *watander* Mahars from the villagers). He added, ‘...if the government refuses to liberate, on grounds of inconvenience, or any other grounds, then it will be a war between the Revenue Department and the Mahars. If this Bill does not pass..... I am going to spend the rest of my time in seeing that the Mahars organise a general strike...’\(^{13}\) He concluded that the *watans* were the greatest hindrance in the advancement of the Mahar community.

The bill was referred to a select committee of twenty-three members. The Committee was to report on the Bill by the beginning of June, 1929. The Select Committee changed the Bill beyond recognition. Ambedkar proposed to convert *baluta* into a money cess. The Committee opined that *watan* lands should not be given over to the *watanders* on payment of full assessment on their lands but should be given on half the proceeds of the lands. The representatives of the vested interests opposed the very essence of the Bill. At last, Ambedkar withdrew the Bill on July, 24, 1929.

The Mahars were excluded from land revenue because the lands were given to them as *watan* lands. But owing to the stringency of money, assessment on a small scale was recovered from the Mahars since the days of Peshwa rule. This revenue from the *watander* Mahars was known as...
Judi. This Judi was not recovered in cash but in the form of corn. The Mahar leaders probably wanted to change Judi into full assessment and desired to be paid monthly pay for services rendered to Government and to the villagers. The first Congress Ministry (1937-1939) in Bombay came to the conclusion that such a scheme must be opposed.

The Mahar leaders organised a Conference at Haregaon (Ahmednagar District) on December 16, 1939 and a statement was submitted to the Governor of Bombay. The Government of Bombay conferred with Ambedkar. The demands of the Mahars put forth were as follows: To transform the *watan* lands of Mahars into *ryotwari* (peasant proprietorship) lands, to pay monthly wages to the Mahars treating them as inferior servant and to make them do only the government jobs.

Ambedkar again introduced a Bill at the Poona Session of the Bombay Legislative Council on September 17, 1937. Its aim was to abolish Mahar *watan*. He wanted to solve the problem of Mahar *watans* by all legitimate and constitutional means. In a letter to Bhaurao Gaekwad he stated that he did not want the agitation against the *watan* system to turn into a *satyagraha*. It was suggested on behalf of the Government that in the war emergency, such a struggle by the Mahars was not desirable. When Ambedkar became a Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council (1942), he promised to withdraw the movement for he thought that he might be able to serve the cause of his community better as a Member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council than to conduct such a struggle. It was then promised on
behalf of the Government that no increase in *Judi* would be effected. To agitate against the *watan* system, Ambedkar established ‘the Bombay State Inferior Village’ *Watandar Association* on June 16, 1956. He became its Chairman. In a statement he made it clear that if Government did not solve the problem amicably then he might prosecute the Government. The villagers opposed such a measure by all means at their command. Ambedkar remarked that Government accepted the principle ‘land to the tiller’, but was not ready to include Government lands under the jurisdiction of the Act. He believed that the *Watan* Act and the *watan* system were contrary to the provisions of the Constitution of India. He was of the opinion that a *writ* petition should be filed in the High Court, and if it was rejected then it must be taken to the Supreme Court.

The Mahar *watan* was at last abolished under the Bombay Inferior Village *Watans Abolition Act* of 1959. It was an unfortunate thing that a man who struggled for more than 20 years for the abolition of the *watan* system did not see the Abolition Act on the statute Book.

**ATTITUDE IN SOCIAL STRUGGLES**

Ambedkar remarked many a time that *shastras* must be proscribed as they lowered the honour of a whole people. He held that it was not possible to abolish inequality unless the existing foundation of *Smriti* religion was removed. He justified the burning of the *Manusmriti*. He attacked the Government on the senseless distinction of martial and non-martial races.
and appealed to the British Government to keep faith in Mahars and not to disband them from the army after World War II was over. He gave the credit of work done by him to the Mahars. He said that he could do all this work on the strength of the Mahars alone. He stressed inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages for social harmony.

As the President of the first session of the All-India Depressed Classes Association on August 8, 1930, Ambedkar expressed great concern at the probability of the caste-ridden Hindu oligarchy being granted unrestricted power. He demanded safe-guards for the down-trodden untouchables in the Constitution (1935) and pleaded for direct representation in the Councils, commensurate with the strength of the depressed community.

The Bombay Government appointed the State Committee, following a resolution by Dr. P. G. Solanki, to inquire into the educational, social and economic conditions of the Depressed Classes and aboriginal tribes of the Presidency, and to recommend measures for their uplift. A. V. Thakkar, Ambedkar and Solanki were on the Committee. Although a Member of the Committee, Ambedkar himself experienced insulting treatment during his tours. A headmaster of a primary local board school did not allow him to enter the class-room. At Chalisgaon, tonga-drivers refused to carry him. The State Committee submitted its Report in March 1930. It recommended an increase in the number of scholarships and hostels for Depressed Classes students; provision of scholarships for the industrial training of apprentices in mills and railway workshops, a scholarship for studying abroad in
engineering works and the appointment of a special officer to look after these arrangements. It recommended that the Depressed Classes be recruited to police and military services. It stressed the urgency of establishing a strong social centre conducting social and cultural activities for the Depressed Classes.

The Congress movement for the removal of untouchability was broadened after Gandhiji’s fast which ended in the Poona Pact...the word ‘Harijan’ replaced the old ‘untouchable’ and Depressed Classes’. A bill was introduced in the Bombay Legislative Assembly to give the word ‘Harijan’ (men of God) statutory recognition. Ambedkar remarked that the name ‘Harijan’ became practically equivalent to the term Asprishya (Untouchable). It was an attempt to give the untouchable a sweet name.\(^{17}\) Referring to the Harijan Fund started by Gandhiji he said that its object was to enslave the untouchables to the camp of caste Hindus. He stressed the need for a special census and told Gandhiji that the activities of the Anti-untouchability League (inspired by him) should be mainly directed to the economic, educational and social improvement of the Depressed Classes, rather than to the problem of temple-entry and inter-dining. He urged the League to launch campaign for civic rights.

This Depressed Classes League was renamed the Harijan Sevak Sangh by Gandhiji. Ambedkar was on the Central Board but he soon severed his connections with the Sangh, as many Depressed Classes leaders thought that to Gandhiji removal of untouchability was a platform and not a
programme. The Harijan Sevak Sangh was humanitarian in its outlook, relied on the change of heart ideology of Gandhiji, and opposed the organisations of Ambedkar at every step. The Sangh worked for Harijans as a branch of the Congress.\footnote{18} Regarding the exclusion of the untouchables from the management of the Sangh, Gandhiji was of opinion that the welfare work of the Sangh was a penance which the Hindus had to do for the sin of untouchability. Ambedkar remarked that the Sangh was a political organisation the aim of which was to draw the untouchables into the Congress fold. The basis of his politics lay in the proposition that the untouchables were not a sub-section of the Hindus, but a distinct element in the national life of India, as separate and distinct as the Muslims, He wanted separate political rights as against the caste Hindus.

Ambedkar formed the Samata \textit{Sainik Dal} (social Equality Army). Its aim was to dislodge all those values which conserved and fostered anti-human elements in the name of traditional and cultural heritage.\footnote{19} Ambedkar remarked that the principle of social equality was the cornerstone of a stable society. After the assassination of Gandhiji in 1948, the \textit{Dal} was banned. Ambedkar was against disbanding the \textit{Dal} and remarked that to disband it was an act cowardice.

A.V.Thakkar published a letter to the press in which he accused Ambedkar of excessive favouritism for Harijans and contemptuous denial of justice to the Aboriginals. Ambedkar clarified his position that he had never claimed to be a universal leader of suffering humanity and remarked:
‘Weightage of aboriginals is possible only when scaling down the representation of Muslims will take place.’20 He tried his best to safeguard the interests of his community.

Ambedkar urged that it was the duty of the Scheduled Castes to defend India’s hard-won freedom. He asked his followers to forget the past differences with the Congress and other political parties. He hoped that work on India’s Constitution would help the Hindus to understand him and also show them how the accusations that he was anti-nationalist and pro-British were utterly untrue. While speaking on a Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Rajya Sabha, he put across a new two-nation theory: one is the ruling nation, and the other a subject nation.21 The thought that he was an untouchable by caste was always present in his mind. Giving details of life for ‘Who’s who’ he introduced the phrase ‘untouchable by caste.’ He then mentioned his marriage in 1948 to Dr. Sharda Kabir of Bombay and said that she was a Brahmin by caste.22 The thought of the future of his community always remained in his mind. In his last days he said, ‘what will be the condition of my brethren in the villages?’ and wept.23

Ambedkar asked Bhaurao Gaekwad to suspend the struggle for Mahar Watan Bill, because it antagonised the touchables. He emphasised that this struggle would jeopardise the interests of the Mahar community.24 He asked his men to change the attitude of his followers in respect of satyagraha; in a way he urged his followers to discard satyagraha as a
weapon; and to place the demands of the Scheduled Castes before the Government. He asked them to take care that the movement did not turn into a mass *satyagraha*. In his last speech in the Constituent Assembly he laid emphasis on constitutional means and warned that if these means failed, there would be nothing but anarchy.

In this way, Ambedkar achieved through his constant and continuous struggle and fight for the upliftment of untouchables in every aspect. He wanted to establish a society with social equality. In his view, every man should be honoured and respected in a status of equality. He made one bold attempt for the first time in the history of India.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid, Appendix p.38.


8. Keer, op cit., p.85


11. Ibid p.25

12. Navayug, p.33, special number.


15. Ibid, p.326.

16. Jayanti Number, p.6 (speech on 28-10-1954.)


20. The Times of India, 17-5-1945

21. The times of India, 7-9-1954.

23. Mahanirvan Number, p.34.


27. Ibid pp. 332-334.