Commenting on the Indian social fabric Gandhiji declared that there is no sanction of untouchability in the Vedas, Puranas and other Hindu Shastras.\(^1\) However in the caste-ridden Hindu society, the down-trodden people engaging with menial works were treated as untouchables. Due to the impact of Western education and their cultural influences on Indian society, socio-religious reform movements were started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (A.D. 1779-1883) Swami Dayanand Saraswathi (1824-1883) Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and others to eliminate all sorts of discriminations in the name of religion and caste.\(^2\) Eventhough the reformers were successful to some extent for the abolition of untouchability, still it is a major factor in the Hindu society. In the beginning of the 20th C, the people belonged to particular nine castes.\(^3\)

3. The untouchable castes in the Madras Presidency were Pallas, Parayas, Valluvans, Malas, Madigas, Chakkiliyans, Velliyans, Cherumans and Holeyas.
were considered as untouchables. A section of this category in the northern districts of the Presidency described themselves as **Panchamas** (fifth category). But the people of this category in southern districts described themselves by their traditional caste name. However, despite their low status in the society, the people of these castes played a large as well as important part in the life of the Presidency. Since most of these castes were engaging agriculture as their main occupation, they had been the victims of an agrestic serfdom. Hence some attempts were made by the leading nationalist leaders to uplift the position of these castes. On 16th March 1916, **Dadabhai Naoroji**, the '**Grant Old Man of India**' moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council seeking to take some ameliorative measures for the untouchable communities in all the Presidencies of India. In response to the resolution, a Commission was constituted by the Madras Government under the chairmanship of **Sir George Paddison** in 1919 to conduct a


thorough study on the conditions of the down-trodden and to find out remedial measures for their upliftment.\textsuperscript{6} In 1920, he submitted his report on which a Labour Department was newly created under his commissionership to look after the welfare of the down-trodden.\textsuperscript{7} A separate fund was also allotted every year for the provision of wells, schools and house-sites for them. Since the Brahmins were in power both in the British administration as well as in the Congress party, the non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency formed a new political party popularly known as \textbf{Justice Party} in 1916.\textsuperscript{8} Under the provisions of the Indian Councils Act of 1919, elections were held in 1920 for the Madras Legislative Council.\textsuperscript{9} As per the agenda of the Non Co-operation Movement, the Congress party boycotted the elections, and the newly emerged Justice Party formed the ministry by capturing majority seats in the election.\textsuperscript{10} According to the Act of 1919, voting right was given

\begin{itemize}
\item[6.] G.O. No.748, Revenue, dated 29th March 1919.
\item[7.] G.O. No.271, Revenue, dated 22nd February 1920.
\end{itemize}
on the basis of property or taxes remitted to the government. So it was a difficult task for the down-trodden people to contest in the election. As there was no representation from this people in the Madras Legislative Council, the Governor Lord Willington nominated five members to the council from the Depressed classes.\textsuperscript{11} As a result of this arrangement, ample opportunities were provided to the Depressed class members to express their grievances in the Council and to pass some resolutions for their benefits.\textsuperscript{12}

Meanwhile, in the Census Report of 1921 the socalled untouchables were described as "Depressed Classes".\textsuperscript{13} Thereafter all the down-trodden communities were clubbed together and generally branded as Depressed Classes by the Government of Madras. This terminology was changed as Harijans - Sons of God by Gandhiji in 1932.\textsuperscript{14}

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\textsuperscript{11.} G.O. No.1276, Public (Service) Department, dated 31st December 1925.


of the Labour Department in 1920, and the nomination of the members from depressed classes to the Legislative Council created somewhat a favourable climate for their developments in various fields. Besides, in 1920's the educated people from the depressed classes formed their own welfare associations like Depressed Class Federation, Devendrakula Velala Sangam, Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sangam, Arunthathiyar Mahajana Sangam, etc. to fight for their welfare.\textsuperscript{15} Gandhiji, after his complete involvement in the active politics, also had criticised the Hindus for practising the sin of untouchability.\textsuperscript{16} He continuously wrote a number of columns in \textit{Young India} regarding this and appealed the Hindus to work for the removal of untouchability in order to protect Hinduism from its perish.\textsuperscript{17} So Gandhiji's fight against untouchability was a routine one in 1920's. But he got further awakening and became more furious in this field, when B.R.Ambedkar demanded separate electorate for the

\begin{itemize}
  \item [15.] Annual Report of the Tamil Nadu Servants of Untouchable Society, Madras for the year 1932-33, p.10.
  \item [17.] \textit{All are Equal} (New Delhi : Government of India Publications, 1994), p.60.
\end{itemize}
depressed classes in the elections for the Central and Provincial Legislatures.

The end of the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact opened a new era in the socio-political history of India. As agreed by the Pact, Indian National Congress had accepted to participate in the Second Round Table Conference.\(^{18}\) When the First Round Table Conference was held in the midst of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhiji and Congress leaders did not attend the conference.\(^{19}\) But now Gandhiji participated the Second Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress. At that conference, a **Minorities Committee** was formed by the members representing various communities including **Gandhiji, Jinnah** and **Ambedkar** to discuss the future constitutional structure and the representation of minorities in the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils. Ambedkar boldly demanded for **Separate Electorate** to the depressed classes. Gandhiji sharply disagreed

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to accept the demand of Ambedkar. As a result, without finding any solution to the problem of communal representation to the depressed classes, the conference was closed on 1st December 1931. But the task of solving the communal tangle was entrusted with the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac Donald. Finally the Prime Minister, by stating that to safeguard and protect the minorities and depressed classes from the majority community, declared his famous 'Communal Award' on 16th August 1932. The Communal Award (sanctioning separate electorate for the depressed classes) came as a rude shock to Gandhiji. So the latter strongly opposed the award. In a letter to the British Prime Minister, Gandhiji stated that he was not against the representation to the depressed classes in the Legislatures but against the decision of creating separate electorates for the depressed classes. Gandhiji suspected that the 'communal award' was a planned conspiracy


to separate the depressed classes from the main stream of Hinduism.\textsuperscript{23} Further he said that he would resist the communal award by scarifying his own life. So, Gandhiji started his historic \textbf{Fast Unto Death}\textsuperscript{24} on 20th September 1932. It brought the leaders of the caste-Hindus and Depressed Classes together at a conference held in Bombay.

The leading figures of the Conference were Pandit Madan Mohan Malavaya, leader of the caste-Hindus and Ambedkar, the leader of the depressed classes. After hectic discussions and continual visits to the Poona Yeravada Jail where Gandhiji was imprisoned, they finally signed a historic agreement known as \textbf{Poona Pact} on 24th September 1932.\textsuperscript{25} It paved the way for Gandhiji to break his fast. The leaders of the depressed classes accepted the formula for Joint-electorates to the Central and Provincial Legislatures.


\textsuperscript{24} Pyarelal, \textit{The Epic Fast} (Ahmedabad : Navajivan Karyalaya, 1932, pp.18-21.

\textsuperscript{25} CWMG, Vol. LI, pp.462 - 466.
Immediately after the Poona Pact, the caste-Hindu leaders assembled in a conference in Bombay on 25th September 1932.\(^{26}\) It was resolved in the conference that thereafter no one should be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and should have the same rights as other Hindus with regard to use of public wells, roads, schools, temples and other public institutions; these rights should have statutory recognition at the first instance and should be one of the earliest objectives of the conference. It was further agreed that it should be the duty of all Hindu leaders to secure, by every legitimate and peaceful means, an early removal of all social disabilities imposed by customs upon the depressed classes.\(^{27}\) With a view to implement the resolution passed in the conference the leaders of the caste-Hindus again convened a conference in Bombay under the Presidentship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya on 30th September 1932 to carry on propaganda for the abolition of untouchability.


\(^{27}\) S.N. Busi, *op.cit.*, pp.248-250.
As the first step towards the abolition of untouchability and for the removal of all sorts of social disabilities, an **All India Anti-Untouchability League** was inaugurated in the conference itself with the blessings of Gandhiji who was then in the prison.\(^{28}\) The League adopted for the time being a temporary constitution and fixed its headquarters at Delhi with branches all over India. **Seth Ghanshyamdas Birla** and **Amritlal V.Thakkar** were nominated as its President and General Secretary respectively.\(^{29}\) The objectives of the League were carrying propaganda against untouchability and taking immediate steps to secure as early as possible that all public wells, dharmashalas, roads, schools, crematoriums and all public temples be declared open to the depressed classes; provided that no compulsion or force should be used and that only peaceful persuasion should be adopted towards that end.\(^{30}\)

\(^{28}\) *CWMG*, Vol. LIV, p.17.


Addressing on a programme of the League on 3rd November 1932, G.D.Birla, the President stated that "the aim of the League was to free the Hindu community as a whole from the evils springing from the institution of untouchability by all peaceful means; it had its aim at the complete removal of any bar in civic matters which operated to the detriment of the down-trodden people; the League would work to bring about such a radical change in the very mentality of caste-Hindus that they would treat the people of the depressed classes as equal; the League should carry on it's works on a non party basis."31 This issue was discussed in the British Parliament. 

Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, said in the House of Commons that the interest of many Congress workers had been diverted to Gandhiji's campaign against untouchability. In the meantime the conservative orthodox Hindus got alarmed at the rapid growth of anti-untouchability ideas and started their counter propaganda.32


32. G.O. No.93, Public Department, dated 24th January 1933.
From his confinement in prison, Gandhiji wanted to carry on an arduous campaign against untouchability and for the general social upliftment of the depressed classes whom he called Harijans. In an article in Young India, he narrated the origin of the name Harijan. Though the word Harijan was first used by Narasinha Mehta, a great Brahmin saint in Gujarat, Gandhiji further elaborated that he was delighted to adopt that word because it had reposed him a deeper meaning than anybody imagines. The "untouchable" to him, was really a Harijan - Son of God and others were Durjans (men of evil), he added. At the same time, the word 'Harijan' was disliked by some leaders of the depressed classes. Incidentally in responding to a question, Gandhiji said that it was his ambition to call the untouchables as Harijans but he added that there was no compulsion on others to call them so.

34. Young India, 6th August 1931.
37. E.S. Yurlova, Scheduled Castes in India (Delhi : Patriot Publishers, 1990), pp.4-5.
38. CWMG, Vol. LVII, pp.42-44.
To carry on the campaign against untouchability, Gandhiji started a weekly journal namely Harijan. The first issue was released on 11th February 1933 from Poona. About ten workers with English knowledge were given the journal free of cost. So the word Harijan became very popular among the public. Significantly even the name Anti-Untouchability League was also changed into Harijan Sevak Sangh by a decision taken in the Central Board meeting of the League on 11th December 1932 without changing its constitution.39

Harijan Sevak Sangh is an organisation of the Sevaks (workers) doing services to the Harijans. Even today most of the Harijan Sevaks are non-Harijans. Replying to a question asked by a Harijan leader regarding due representation was not given so far to the Harijans in the administration and services of Harijan Sevak Sangh, Gandhiji said that Harijans were the creditors and the caste-Hindus who introduced the sin of untouchability were debtors. Therefore it was the duty of the debtors to work for the removal of untouchability and for the upliftment of the Harijans.40


Soon the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh was expanded with branches all over the country. Following were the founding as well as organising members of the Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh as indicated in its constitution:

1. Shri. Seth Ghanshyamdas Birla - President
2. Shri. Amritlal. V. Thakkar - General Secretary
3. Shri. J.P. Mandalia - Treasurer
4. Shri Purushottamdas Thakurdas, Bombay
5. Shri Lalubhai Samaladas, Bombay
6. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Bombay.
7. Shri. Seth Ambalal Sarabhai, Ahmedabad
8. Dr. Bidan Chandra Roy, Calcutta
9. Shri. Lala Lachamandas, Delhi
10. Rao Bahadur M.C. Raja, Madras
11. Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan, Madras
12. Dr. T.S.S. Rajan, Trichinopoly
13. Shri. Baloo P. Palwankar, Bombay
14. Shri D.P. Khaitan, Calcutta and
15. Shrimati Rameswari Nehru, Lahore

41. CWMG, Vol. LIV, pp.18-19.
It may be observed that along with others the Central Board had four members who belonged to the depressed classes namely Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan, Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah and Shri. Baloo P. Palwankar. In the regional level also constant efforts were undertaken to establish their own provincial branches of the Sangh. As far as South India was concerned, Rajaji played a significant role for the upliftment of the depressed class people. Even well before Gandhiji and the Congressmen who started their campaign for the eradication of untouchability, Rajaji was the pioneer in the field of Harijan upliftment in 1920’s. As the Chairman of Salem Municipality, Rajaji introduced a number of reforms by admitting Harijan boys in the Municipal schools, opening of public streets, wells and other public establishments to Harijans and also giving employment to Harijan youth in the Municipality also. After the Poona Pact, Rajaji further


strengthened his efforts for the removal of untouchability and the upliftment of Harijans. Eventhough all the Congress leaders in Tamil Nadu had soft approach towards the Harijans, Rajaji choose a few to do the Harijan work. As a result, he convened a State level Anti Untouchability Conference at Trichi on 20th November, 1932. The leaders of both Harijans and caste Hindus attended the Conference in large number. At the end of that conference, Tamil Nadu Servants of Untouchable Society was formed with T.S.S. Rajan as its President, G. Ramachandran and N. Halasyaim as Secretaries and Trichi was announced as the headquarters of it. As the Madras Presidency stood first in all the Gandhian Movements at national level, the Tamil Nadu Servants of Untouchable Society played a significant role in the Harijan upliftment works.

With the able guidance of Rajaji, T.S.S. Rajan worked hard for the abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of


Harijans in Tamil Nadu. The Provincial Executive Committee of Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh started its functions with the following members:

1. Shri. T.S.S. Rajan - President
2. Shri. G. Ramachandran - Secretary
3. Shri. N. Halasyaim - Secretary
4. Rao Bahadur R. Srinivasan - Member
5. Swami Sahajananda - Member
6. Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah - Member
7. Dr. P. Subbarayan - Member
8. Shri. S.S. Bharathi - Member
9. Shri. A.R. Rangachari - Member
10. Shri. T.R. Venkatarama Shastri - Member
11. Shri. C. Rajagopalachari - Member
12. Shri. R.T. Kesavalu - Member

Since the Harijan Sevak Sangh was an organisation to work for the eradication of untouchability and for the Harijan upliftment,

Gandhiji had prescribed some basic qualification for those interested in the mission. Regarding the qualifications, every Sevak must be fired with a passion to purify Hinduism and must be ready to lay down his life in that attempt. He should be ready to sacrifice all his family connections, social advantages and the life itself in order to wipeout the blot on Hinduism.\(^{48}\) Further he should devote all his energy to the following ideals:

1. To promote cleanliness and hygiene among the Harijans,
2. To introduce the improved methods of carrying on what is known as unclean occupation, eg. scavenging and tanning,
3. To give up of carrion and beef eating altogether,
4. To give up of intoxicating liquors,
5. To educate the parents to send their children to day-schools wherever they were available and parents themselves to attend night schools; and
6. To abolish untouchability among themselves.

Like Gandhiji who choose G.D. Birla as the President of All India Harijan Sevak Sangh, Rajaji too was equally clever.

and nominated T.S.S. Rajan as the President of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh. Educated at England as a physician, T.S.S. Rajan was a broad minded social worker and had real sympathy over the Harijans even well before the origin of the Sangh. Rajaji further instructed T.S.S. Rajan to utilise the good services of G. Ramachandran of Madras, A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman both from Madurai, T.S.Avinashilingam Chettiyar of Coimbatore, Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai of Vedaranyam, P.S.Krishnasamy Iyengar of Manamadurai and Bhasyam Iyengar of Madras for the removal of untouchability and for the upliftment of Harijans. Dr.P.Subbarayan, the then Premier of Madras Presidency was also brought into the Sangh as the member of the Provincial Executive Committee. He was not a Congressman at the beginning but had extraordinary curiosity to work for the


upliftment of Harijans.\textsuperscript{52} Since the Sangh was the organisation of the Debtors as described by Gandhiji, some Harijan leaders like M.C. Rajah, R. Srinivasan and Swami Sahajananda, the creditors were also picked up by T.S.S. Rajan by the way of encouraging the Harijans to co-operate with the Sangh in implementing it's programmes.

The leaders and the Sevaks rendered their services on voluntary basis. No salary was given to them. Despite that, the Sangh started to work vigorously for the abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of the Harijans. The Sevaks of the Sangh were periodically sent to \textit{Wardha Ashram} to get training\textsuperscript{53} in the fields of sanitation, scavenging, etc. They were also equipped with sufficient knowledge to enable them to organise Harijan work. The Sevaks were also trained for teaching, welfare works and also in the field of village industries. Some qualifications were prescribed for the Sevaks to attend the training.

\textsuperscript{52} Dr. P. Subbarayan, the then Premier of the Madras Presidency introduced the Madras Temple Entry Bill in the Madras Legislative Council on 1st November 1932. This Bill was the first of its kind in India and was passed in the Council, but was rejected by the Governor-General of India on 23rd January 1933.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Harijan}, Vol. IV, 15th March 1936, p.166.
1. The Sevaks should be above 18 and below 35 years of age.

2. A good knowledge of their mother tongue, elementary mathematics and a smattering of Hindi and English were necessary.

3. Preference was given to Sevaks who were already in service.

Certain additional qualifications were also prescribed for the members of the Central and Provincial Executive Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Accordingly, no one should be allowed to be the member of the Board unless he:

1. Believes in the uttermost removal of untouchability;

2. Pays something to the Board according to his capacity;

3. Does some definite Harijan service, for example, having a Harijan in his home as a member of the family, or at least as a domestic servant, or teaching a Harijan or paying a regular visit to Harijan quarters and cleaning them and if he is a doctor to treat the Harijan patients free of cost, etc.

4. Sends to the Board a diary containing a record of his services from month to month.

Gandhiji often said that there would be no Swaraj in India along with untouchability.\textsuperscript{55} So even though the Harijan Sevak Sangh had no formal affiliation with the Congress, all the Congress leaders and workers voluntarily came forward to scrap the sin of untouchability from the Hindu society with the help of Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Immediately after the formation of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh, its branches were also established in 12 districts which had its own President, Secretary and members. The following list deals about the President and Secretaries of the various districts of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{56}

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\textsuperscript{56} M. Muthukrishnan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.8.
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The List of the Districts with Presidents and Secretaries

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<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Chengalput</td>
<td>M.K. Reddi</td>
<td>Dr. P.S. Srinivasan</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
<td>T.S. Ramalingam Chettiar</td>
<td>Kandasamy Pillai</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Dindigul</td>
<td>T. Amirthalingam Iyer</td>
<td>P.A. Ramasamy Chettiar</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Karaikudi</td>
<td>A. Rengasamy Iyengar</td>
<td>Lakshminathan Bharathi</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>N.M.R. Subbaraman</td>
<td>P.K. Ramachary</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Ramnad</td>
<td>Rajaram Pandiyan</td>
<td>Sathaiya</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>G. Ramachandra Naidu</td>
<td>Kandasamy Pillai</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
<td>Rajarathna Mudaliar</td>
<td>P. Thanikachalam</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Tanjore</td>
<td>Ramalingaswami</td>
<td>T.R. Venkatarama Iyer</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Tirunelveli</td>
<td>Kuthanayanar</td>
<td>Shunmugasundaram Pillai</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Trichirapalli</td>
<td>T.V. Swaminatha Shastri</td>
<td>P. Sangilia Pillai</td>
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</table>

In addition to its district branches, taluk and village level teams were also formed to work for the Harijan upliftment. Since the Congress leaders like Rajaji showed keen interest in the Harijan service, almost all other Congress leaders

and volunteers voluntarily came forward for the removal of untouchability and the upliftment of Harijans. As a result, the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh had a wider network at village level and carried out its objectives effectively.\textsuperscript{58} As far as Tamil Nadu was concerned, the Sangh had done six types of works among the Harijans.\textsuperscript{59}

i) Imparting religious knowledge;

ii) Providing education;

iii) Economic development;

iv) Sanitation;

v) Abstaining from alcoholic drinks and carrion eating; and

vi) General improvement.

Gandhiji categorically denied that there was no place for untouchability in the Hindu Shastras.\textsuperscript{60} But untouchability was practiced from time immemorial and a section of people in the Hindu society had been treated as untouchables. They were not

\textsuperscript{58} Harijan Vol. I, 19th August 1933, p.8.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 25th March 1933, p.5.
\textsuperscript{60} Rameshwari Nehru, \textit{Gandhi is my Star} (Patna : Pustakbhandar, 1950), pp.94-96.
permitted to worship the God and Goddesses in the Hindu temples. When Gandhiji conducted a national level tour for collecting funds for the Harijan cause, he repeatedly appealed the people in the public meetings to work for opening the temples for Harijans.\textsuperscript{61} Because of the denial of the right to worship in the temples, the Harijans seldom had the knowledge of Hindu Shastras. So the Harijan Sevak Sangh wanted to cultivate religious knowledge in the minds of the Harijans. As a result, the Sangh organised Bhajans and prayer meeting in the Harijan villages and Cheris\textsuperscript{62} (newly created Harijan settlements). Within six months of the formation of the Sangh, about 37 Bhajans and prayer meetings were organised and hundreds of Harijans participated in it. In the month of March 1933, 33 Bhajan meetings were held in various districts of Tamil Nadu. Nearly 25 meetings were held in rural areas alone for the dissemination of religious knowledge among the Harijans. In the month of April 1933, both Caste-Hindus and Harijans

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Harijan}, Vol.I 25th March 1933, p.5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
jointly organised 83 Bhajans in several districts. Of these, 56 Bhajans were conducted on 30th April 1933, on the All India Harijan Day.\(^6^3\) In the months of May and June, in addition to 27 Bhajans held throughout the Province, Samabandhi Bhojanams (inter-communal dinings) were also organised in all the temple cities like Madurai, Srirangam, Palani, etc. From October 1933 to March 1934 nearly 98 Bhajans were organised and a Bhajan Mutt was also built at Coimbatore in the Mettupalayam Road.\(^6^4\)

The Sangh continuously approached the well wishers of the caste-Hindus and organised a number of Bhajans every day in different parts of Tamil Nadu. The joint Bhajans yielded expected result of giving religious knowledge to the Harijans. Day by day, the number of Harijan participants in Bhajans was increasing. On 14th July 1934, a Bhajan Mutt was built at Arani in North Arcot District and every sunday, Bhajan was conducted. Another Bhajan Mutt was constructed at Cuddalore in South Arcot District and periodical Bhajans were held there.


Ramakrishna Mutt of Madras also carried on with the programmes of organising a number of Bhajan meetings in the northern districts of Tamilnadu. In Madurai, under the presidency of N.M.R. Subbaraman, a Bhajan party visited many villages of the district and carried on religious propaganda among the Harijans. With the view to celebrate Gandhi Jeyanthi for one week from 2nd October to 9th October, the Sangh organised daily Bhajans and religious meetings in North Arcot, Tirunelveli and Madurai Districts. In the Bhajan meetings, the Harijans were also appealed not to embrace any other religion. As a result, in Tamil Nadu particularly in Ramnad District, some Harijan families gave up their plan of religious conversion to Islam. The Bhajan meetings not only gave religious knowledge to the Harijans but also created some changes in the hearts of the caste-Hindus to treat the Harijans

65. Annual Report of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh for the year, 1933-1934, Madras, p.3.
as their own brothers and sisters and to open the temples for them. For mobilising the public support in favour of temple-entry, the Bhajan meetings were quite useful and it produced a favourable climate to the leaders of the Sangh to achieve their aim of temple-entry.

One of the main reasons for the rigidity of casteism and untouchability was the lack of education among the Harijans. The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh and the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh realised it. As a result, a national level campaign was started by them by way of extending liberal financial support to the provincial Sanghs to give education to Harijans in the means of opening of schools and student hostels. In response to this campaign, substantial efforts were taken for the admission of Harijan children in primary schools at Trichirapalli, Madras, Tirunelveli, Dindigul and Tiruvennainallur in South Arcot District. Besides, for imparting education to the Harijan adults, night schools were opened in all the districts by the Sangh. Regarding the night schools, two in Coimbatore,

two in Madurai and Trichirapalli and one in Tiruvennainallur and Dindigul were immediately opened. In the month of March 1934, 13 new schools were started for Harijan boys and girls by the provincial Sangh in Madras, Madurai, Trichirapalli and Tirunelveli Districts. In the year 1935, about 3580 Harijan children were admitted in 65 schools throughout Tamil Nadu. To speed up the literacy campaign among the Harijans, more schools and hostels were started. Besides these schools in 1935, 16 balwadis, 10 creches and 15 hostels were started by the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh.

A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and N.M.R. Subbaraman the pioneering leaders of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh exhibited their extraordinary talents in establishing a number of schools, hostels, balwadis and creches for the Harijans. Both leaders had done a lot for the Harijans well before the formation of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. For the creation of a school or a hostel for the Harijan children, both leaders worked hard and invested their huge energy in it. For

72. For more details, please see Appendix I.
example, the Harijans of Gohilapuram in Madurai District planned for embracing Islam in order to escape from the tyranny of Hinduism. On hearing the news, N.M.R. Subbaraman rushed to the village and pacified the people to give up their plan. The villagers demanded a school for their children and other amenities. Immediately Subbaraman purchased a land and constructed a school which was later named as N.M.R. Subbaraman Middle School. When Subbaraman was the Madurai Municipal Chairman, he donated a land for a Harijan hostel at Shenai Nagar. He also donated Rs.16,000/- for constructing the buildings. Rajaji, the then Premier of Madras Presidency, laid the foundation stone for the building on 26th June 1938. Almost all the fifteen hostels were started due to the sacrifice and dedication of the leaders of the Sangh.

Economy was the backbone of any development. Economic backwardness was one of the main reasons for the Harijans to live in poverty. Since most of the Harijans were

73. P.S. Chandra Prabhu, op.cit., p.83.

74. Akkur Anandachari, Rajaji (Tamil) (Madras : Sakthi Kariyalayam, 1941), pp. 29-35.
landless labourers, their standard of living was pitiably poor. In order to divert them into agri-based small scale or cottage industries to make them economically self-reliant, the Sangh organised a Co-operative Society at Vellore in March 1933 for the benefit of the scavengers who involved in shoe-making industry.\textsuperscript{75} In April 1933, a Co-operative Society and a Store were organised in the Scavengers Colony, Tirunelveli with the assistance of District Co-operative Banking Union, Tirunelveli. Four Co-operative Societies in Karur taluk and two in Kulittalai taluk entirely for the use of Harijans, were started in August 1933. Another Co-operative Society was started in Ramnad. In September 1933, three Co-operative Societies at Salem and one at Madurai were opened for Harijans. The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh run an informal Co-operative Society in Madras with the view of safeguarding the Harijans who borrowed money for doing petty business on heavy interest from the money lenders. Further, Harijan Youth were liberally admitted in Gandhi Ashrams in Tamil Nadu to learn technical education in the field of shoe-making, soap-making, etc. In the Tiruchengodu

\textsuperscript{75} Harijan, Vol.I, 1933, dated 20th May 1933, p.4-7.
Gandhi Ashram, one shoe-making unit was opened exclusively for Harijans to bring them to the technical line.\(^{76}\) Moreover the efforts were taken to inculcate the knowledge of small savings among the Harijans who were living in the cities. For those who were living in rural areas, the Sangh arranged private loans with interest free to be repaid in the harvest season. This was done in Coimbatore District successfully. The Mirasdars and landlords positively responded to the request by the Sangh to enhance the wages of Harijan labourers. In July 1934, a carpentry workshop at Ramnad and a Leather Industrial School at Vellore were opened to provide work for the Harijans.

The sweepers and scavengers who were responsible for keeping the cities and towns clean, lived in the slums with poor environmental conditions. Their employers in the Municipalities paid practically no attention to their need of housing, sanitation, health and education.\(^{77}\) Because of their drinking habits, they borrowed money on heavy interest, so their

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entire earnings went to the pocket of the money lenders. In order to uplift these sweepers and scavengers from their miserable conditions, the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh appealed the Municipalities to provide them housing facilities by the way of constructing residential colonies and to start co-operative societies to improve their savings capacity. N.M.R. Subbaraman, Municipal Chairman and also President, Madurai District Harijan Sevak Sangh initiated his efforts first in Tamil Nadu to construct a colony for scavengers. As a result a separate fund was allotted by Madurai Municipality and multi-storeyed quarters were constructed at Subramaniapuram, Madurai exclusively for the scavengers. Moreover, Scavengers Welfare Association and Scavengers Co-operative Store were formed under the Presidentship of N.M.R. Subbaraman to look into their professional and personal problems. With the view to convert their earnings which was going to the pockets of money lenders, they were not paid with money but in the form of materials like rice, groceries, dress materials, etc; through

Scavengers Co-operative Store. The system of constructing Housing Colonies and formation of Scavengers Co-operative Store were followed by other Municipalities later. These were some of the ways in which Harijan Sevaks had been working to improve the economic condition of the Harijans particularly the scavengers in the pre-independence days. After independence, the Sangh has been extending its support to the effective implementation of the welfare schemes of the State Government to improve the economic condition of the Harijans.

As already mentioned during the pre-independence days, the Harijans especially the scavengers who were living with poor sanitary conditions in the Cheris. The lack of sanitation created a number of health problems particularly the Cheri children were severely affected with notorious diseases. In order to improve the sanitations in the Harijan Cheries and Colonies, the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh charted out a special programme of visiting and cleaning the Cheries and colonies and to impart the importance of sanitation to the

inhabitants. As a result, Harijan workers of the cities were formed into different teams to carry out the work of cleaning the Cheries. The teams not only cleaned the Cheries but also bathing the Harijan children and gave them new Khadi dresses and school books. The Sangh gave adequate importance to do these works in Cheries. For doing these works effectively, the Sevaks were sent to different Gandhi Ashrams like Wardha Ashram and Sevagram Ashram for getting training in the field of sanitation. Sri.K.Arunachalam, who later became the President of All India Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, got his training at Wardha Ashram and returned to Madurai to do the sanitation work in Harijan Cheries. Later, he was appointed as Warden to Sevalayam, a students' hostel in Madurai.

Since the beginning of 1933, the sanitation teams were functioning in Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Kumbakonam, Coimbatore, Dindigul, Nagapatnam, Chidambaram and Salem.

These teams were also formed in other cities and towns within a short period. In addition to the cleaning operation, efforts were made to provide adequate water facilities to the Cheries.\footnote{M.K. Gandhi, \textit{Constructive Programme Its Meaning and Place} (Ahmedabad : Navajivan Publishing House, 1941), pp.15-20.}

On the request of the Sangh, the Municipalities in Coimbatore, Kumbakonam, Madurai, Tiruchirapalli and Dindigul had agreed to give adequate water supply to them. On 30th April 1933, the Sangh celebrated All India Harijan Day and the Sevaks visited and cleaned 128 Cheries throughout the Presidency. Oil and bath soaps were given to thousands of Harijan boys and girls, all of whom were treated to light refreshment after the bath. The Sangh leaders encouraged the general public to come forward to do the cleaning works in Cheries. As a result, some voluntary organisations like Gandhi Harijan Service Corps were formed to do voluntary services in the Cheries.\footnote{A.C. Pradhan, \textit{The Emergence of Depressed Classes} (Delhi : Book Land International, 1986), pp.249-251.}

By the end of 1933, a campaign for intensive sanitation work was started in 13 districts. By it, 104 Cheries were cleaned and about 3000 children were taken care of in various ways. The main reason for the lack of sanitation was that the Cheries
were situated on low-ground areas. The Sangh also studied their problems and appealed the Government to provide suitable lands to shift the Cheries from the low-ground areas. As a result, the Government empowered the District Labour Officers to allot suitable lands on high ground areas for Harijan inhabitations. On witnessing the wonderful services of the Sangh, some of the Sanathanists (believers in Varnashrama Dharma) who had been opposing temple-entry, had come forward and co-operated with the Harijan Sevaks for doing sanitation works in the Cheries. Moreover, schools and colleges were directed to organise student camps in Cheries to do the cleaning work, making drainage facilities, planting tree saplings and creating awareness for temple-entry etc. Prizes were given to clean houses in the Cheries as a token of encouragement.

The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh organised a number of public meetings in various towns and cities to motivate the people to convert dry latrines into water borne


latrines in the houses and public places. This conversion process was named as Bhangi Kasht Mukti Programme. Under this programme, the Sevaks were sent to the Sanitation Institute, Ahmedabad to get special training in Modern Latrine System.\textsuperscript{89} The modern latrine system simplified the job of the scavengers. This system was implemented in various Municipalities with the co-operation of the Sevaks. Madurai Municipality was the first in Tamil Nadu in introducing the Modern Latrine System.\textsuperscript{90}

The consumption of intoxicating drinks is dangerous to both body and mind. The habit of drinking was common among the public particularly among the Harijans who were doing sanitation works.\textsuperscript{91} The influence of this evil leads to the destruction of moral as well as economic values. From the inception of the Sangh, due importance was given to liberate the Harijans from the clutches of the evils of drinking. Anti-alcoholic propaganda was started by the Sangh throughout

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Tamil Nadu. Under this propaganda, the Harijans were appealed not only to abstain from drinking but also from eating carrion of dead animals. This propaganda was carried out through public meetings and pamphlets. From January to March 1933, about 60 public meetings both in rural and urban areas were conducted by the Sangh in connection with it. Further the Harijans were appealed to bury the dead animals. Anti-alcoholic, Anti-carrion declarations were taken in 16 villages in March 1933. Prohibition pictures were shown in different villages to promote the awareness against the drinking of liquor. In some villages the Sevaks paid personal visits to the houses of the confirmed addicts and took pledges to give up the drink. According to the reports of the Harijan Sevak Sangh atleast 30 anti-alcoholic, and anti-carrion meetings were organised during every month in various villages of Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh adopted different methods of propaganda against drinking of liquor and eating of carrion. As one of its methods, the Sangh opened Prohibition Propaganda Stalls in the public exhibitions organised by the

92. The Hindu, 25th May 1933.
district authorities. Prohibition pictures prepared by Gandhi Ashram, Tiruchengodu\(^93\) were shown in the propaganda stalls and the defects of carrion-eating was also explained to the people. Rajaji showed special interest in the anti-alcoholic propaganda in Tamil Nadu. After assuming office as the Premier of Madras Presidency in the year 1937, Rajaji introduced the Prohibition Bill in the Madras Legislative Assembly and enacted it into force in the Presidency.\(^94\) As a member of Provincial Executive Committee of the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh, Rajaji was fighting against the evils of drinking until his last.\(^95\)

Removal of social disabilities was another major work of Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh. The work for opening the public streets and wells was geared up in all the districts with the co-operation of the public. In order to convince the public to open the public places for Harijans, hundreds of

\(^{93}\) S. Mahadevan, _op.cit._, pp.129-130.


public meetings were organised by the Sangh both in rural and in urban areas. Pamphlets and books on different topics like Temple Entry - Need for Legislation, Shastric Sanction, Mahatmaji's Statement on Untouchability and the celebrated book ie. Anti Untouchability Bhajan were printed and distributed to the people at free of cost. Effective propaganda for social justice was carried out in various parts of the Province with the support of some social organisations. The following are some of the social organisations which extended its co-operation to the Sangh to fight against untouchability.

1. Nandanar Kalvi Kazhaham, Chidambaram,
2. Depressed Class Federation, Madras,
3. Pothujana Ooliya Sangam, Trichi,
4. Devendrakula Velalar Sangam, in all districts,
5. International Fellowship Association, Vellore,
6. Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sangam, Madras,
7. Arunthathiyar Mahajana Sangam, Madras, and
8. Samarasa Sanmarga Sabha, Vellore,

96. M. Muthukrihnan, op.cit., p.60.
To liquidate the rigidity of caste differences among the people, public meetings, religious conferences and birth day celebrations of Gandhiji and other national leaders were organised. Moreover friendship sport events, Samabandi Bhojanam (communal inter-dining) and common meetings were conducted to enable the caste-Hindus and the Harijans to mingle with each other to develop a sense of fraternity among themselves.98 Besides, with a view to develop a sense of unity among the youth and labourers and to improve their skill for overall personality development, organisations like Harijan Youth Associations, Harijan Labour Leagues99 etc. were formed not only in cities and towns but also in villages. With the support of the youth of Harijan organizations, the Sangh conducted free medical camps in rural areas.

Untouchability could be abolished only by the social, economical and educational developments among the Harijans.100


For the overall development of the Harijans, the Sangh had worked hard with dedicated leaders and Sevaks. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been extending its helping hand to the Sangh for achieving its aims and goals since 1932. The Ministries of P. Subbarayan, Rajaji, T. Prakasam, O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar and P.S.Kumarasamy Raja brought a number of legislations for the abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of Harijans.\textsuperscript{101}

In addition to all these works, the Sangh had worked for reducing the gap between the Harijans and the non-Harijans in the day to day life. Every year, in the month of October, \textit{Harijan Week} has been celebrated by arranging public meetings, conducting competitions to the students, giving prizes to those who kept their houses clean and distributing sweets to all. The people who involved in the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh had a real interest over the welfare of Harijans and had a commitment to abolish untouchability root and branch.

In response to the clarion call of Gandhiji, the Congress leaders and sympathisers with high academic and professional backgrounds, unmindfully attached themselves with the Harijan Sevak Sangh in its services for the upliftment of the downtrodden people. There was a cardial friendship and mutual understanding between the Harijan Sevak Singh and the Harijans in Tamil Nadu. The "right of temple-entry by the Harijans" was given top priority in the agenda of the Harijan Sevak Sangh at the national level. In Tamil Nadu, also the Harijan Sevak Sangh under the able guidance of Rajaji, was moving from pillar to post to achieve temple-entry at an earlier date. Tamil Nadu is known for a number of temple cities where the Sangh had organised public meetings and conferences for mobilising the public support exclusively for the opening of temples to Harijans. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Devadoss Gandhi, Rameshwari Nehru and some other national leaders had toured the State, and appealed the public to admit Harijans into the temples. Thus the role played by the Tamil Nadu Harijan Sevak Sangh and its leaders for the removal of all sorts of social disabilities resulted in the historic Temple Entry Movement in
Tamil Nadu. To mobilise the popular will in favour of the temple-entry movement, Gandhiji undertook a Harijan Tour all over India and that tour too led to an awakening to open temples to the non-caste Hindus particularly the down-trodden people.