CHAPTER – III

GANDHI’S VIEWS ON RESERVATION

Inequalities prevail in all societies. What strongly characterizes inequality in Indian society is the phenomenon of extreme inequality marked by a caste-based hierarchy and ascriptive values and norms. Perpetuated through time and rationalized by Hindu ideology it disadvantages between 14 to 15% of the total population, socially, economically, and politically. For the democratic process to be operational, it is axiomatic that no section of the population be crippling disadvantages in the exercise of political participation in its various forms - as members of the electorate; and as members participating in legislative, executive and judicial functions. Hence, to accord with the value systems of industrialization and democratic institutions, and (consistent with these value systems) the goal of economic growth, an attempt was made to free this section from crippling disabilities.

Under the device formulated, this section was accorded countervailing discrimination. This discrimination is supposed to have two effects, viz., a current or short-term effect, and a long-term effect. The short-term effect is compensatory in nature. It is to compensate for disadvantages in order to overcome incapacitating disabilities which prevent this section from participating in the political process. In the long run, it is hoped that the participation permitted to this section on a political plane would enable it permanently to overcome these disabilities, thereby automatically removing the need for the continued use of compensatory discriminatory measures. This development, needless to say, is not to operate in isolation but in consonance with the forces of economic growth and political development. Even so, these countervailing measures are intended to accelerate the process of upliftment of this strata of the population.
Discrimination is a word which has definitely a negative connotation of being against somebody or something. It means to separate, to create differences, to act in a way that is unfair to others, etc. Discriminatory practices are usually rooted in the constitutive principles of social organization and, as a result of this, certain groups in society become the systematic perennial victims of these practices. These practices give rise to a pattern of differential endowment of privileges and power and are, in turn, supported and reinforced by them. Since normative elements and institutional arrangements reinforce each other, the escape of the disadvantaged groups from these discriminatory practices becomes difficult, if not impossible. With the change in the normative system, social practices come to seriously questioned and sought to be changed in the light new norms. With the relegation of society to back seat modern times, the responsibility of changing these practices devolves on the state. One more factor aids in this process. The normal process of politics, which is supposed to redress the balance of power in favour of the numerous underprivileged or unprivileged and, through it, change the iniquitous character of the distribution of societal resources in the long run, itself gets entangled in the prevailing patterns of power distribution. It, therefore, proves incapable of eradicating discriminatory practices. The state has, then, to intervene to redress this balance in a way that frees the disadvantaged groups from their disabilities--disabilities that hamper them in taking part in the competition for access to and control over societal resources on a footing of quality.

Indian society is divided into hundreds of castes neatly placed upon one another in a three-layered hierarchy: (a) high castes; (ii) low castes (touchables); and (iii) low castes (untouchables), based on (a) power, or ability to control people's lives including their own; (b) economic position, i.e., income, wealth, and access to means to produce it; and (c) privileges, like
education, security, leisure, luxury, and other valued things and experiences.\(^1\)

In other words, in this peculiar division, people who have power, property, and privileges have usurped the top position in the society, those who have a part of the trio have got the second rung and those who have nothing with them are accorded the third or the lowest position.

In this peculiar system, the lower caste untouchables, who are relevant for this study, are, to use Frantz Fanon’s phrase, “the wretched of the earth” suffering in some way or the other, in some degree, from all the three badly despised social diseases, i.e., slavery, indenture, and a kind of apartheid. Mere were efforts made by the suffering people to improve their lot which took various forms on different occasions, like “individual escape or artful manipulation of the situation, overt challenge, or revolt,”\(^2\) although the history we read today does not record it; for, it is the hunter and not the lion who writes the history of hunting. The efforts of the weak against their oppression by the powerful have, for reasons too well-known to be enumerated here, more often than not ended in favour of the latter. And almost the same was the result of the endeavours of the well-meaning outside agencies, like the Bhakti movement of the medieval times or the Satya Shodhak Samaj (1873) of Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890), the Arya Samaj movement (1875) of Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), the Bombay Social Conference (1882) of N.G. Chandrakar (1855-1923), and the Depressed Classes Mission (1906) of V.R. Shinde (1873-1944) etc.\(^3\) In sum, here is that despite efforts from various quarters, the life of the dalits was pretty miserable when Gandhi emerged on the scene towards the end of the second decade of the present century.

In the beginning of his autobiography Gandhi identifies his caste as Bania (merchant) and states that for three generations his forefathers had not

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3. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
practiced the caste occupation, but had served as prime ministers in several princely states of the Kathiawad peninsula (now Gujarat). This was, and is, an essentially conservative region in its adherence to traditional patterns of social relations. Hindu and Jain merchant groups constitute an influential segment of the population. Vaishya, or Bania, castes are third in the traditional four-fold division of Hindu society, included with Brahmans and Kshatriyas among the twice-born. However, in Gujarat, probably more than in any other part of India, Banias are without peer in wealth, influence, and piety. They tend toward orthodoxy. Gandhi's jati, the Modh Banias, outcasted him in 1888 upon hearing of his proposed trip to London for study, and evidently never rescinded the proscription.

Gandhi's autobiography, which covers his life up to 1921, when he was fifty-two, contains only a few references to Untouchables or untouchability. The most striking reference is the story of his insistence on the admission of an Untouchable family to the ashram he had established near Ahmedabad in 1915. At the time of his assumption of leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920, Gandhi made what seem to be his first strong public statements on untouchability. They reflect his dual role as Mahatma and politician in Indian life, already apparent at that time. As politician, Gandhi said: "Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity." As Mahatma, Gandhi said: "I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an Untouchable..." As both Mahatma and politician, Gandhi sought to weave the divergent interests in India into a unified opposition to the British, at the same time trying to pursue a course of reform without rending the social fabric of Indian society. In Dalton's words, "Indian society saw Gandhi, and

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4 Young India, 29-12-1920, pp. 2-3.
5 Ibid., 4-5-1921, p. 144.
Gandhi regarded himself, as occupying the peculiar position of a figure above the discord around him, and uniquely capable of harmonizing it.\footnote{Dalton, Dennis, Gandhi's Power: Non-Violence Action (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1993, p. 170.}

The word 'Harijans' Gandhi used for the 'Shudra', the 'Chandalas', the poor depressed untouchables of India. The word 'Harijan' was first used by the great Saint Narasinha Mehta, a Nagar Brahaman, who defied the whole community and claimed the 'untouchables' as his own. Gandhiji wrote "The 'untouchable', to me, is, compared to us, really a Harijan a man of God, and we are Durjan (men of evil). For while the untouchable has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we lay at the door of these 'untouchables'. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them."\footnote{Young India, 6-8-31, p. 204.}

Gandhiji made a clear distinction here between a Harijan and a Durjan. Our own fellow beings have become 'untouchables'; because of evil in us. The evil does not lie in them lies in those who have reduced them to a poor miserable beastly life. Those responsible for bringing about this sorry scheme of affairs should repent and atone for their sins.

Untouchability, according to Gandhi "is a snake with a thousand mouths through each of which it shows its poisonous fangs. It defies definition. It needs no sanction from Manu or the other ancient law-givers. It has its own local Smriti. Thus in Almora a whole class of people, whose occupation is, even according to the Sanatana Dharma so-called innocent, are untouchables. They are all cultivators owning, their own holdings. They are called Shilpi, i.e. farmers. Another similar class of people called Boras suffer in the same manner although they do not even eat carrion or take liquor and observe all the rules of sanitation as well as any. Tradition has condemned
them as untouchables. Hinduism that refuses to think accepts the tradition unquestioningly and exposes itself to merited ridicule and worse. Reformers are trying to cope with the evil. I feel, however, that much drastic methods are needed than are employed to rid Hinduism of the blot. We are needlessly afraid to wound the susceptibilities of orthodoxy. We have to shed the fear, if we expect to end the evil in our own generation. This untouchability naturally recoils on the heads of those who are responsible for it. In Almora the choka-untouchability at the time of dining-has worked its insidious way even among castes and sub-castes till at last every mail makes himself an untouchable. This choka exercises its evil sway even in national institutions like Prem Vidyalaya. I was considerably relieved when, upon enquiry, I found that none of the trustees believed in the choka, and that they were tolerating it so as not to scare the parents of the boys attending the institution."

"The difference, therefore, between the caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. An 'untouchable' is outside the pale of respectable society. He is hardly treated as a human being. He is an outcaste hurled into an abyss by his fellow-beings occupying the same platform. The difference, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the difference between heaven and hell.

"There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as Varnashrama. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not, so the, caste system. While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the Varnas are, and have always been, four. I am a firm believer in Varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that Dharma is, so far as I have been able to see, a condition of spiritual growth. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane, on which all stand on a footing of

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8 Young India, 11-7-1929, pp. 226-229.
equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. In the Book of God, the same number of marks are assigned to the Brahmin that has done his task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise.⁹

The 'touch-me-not'-ism that disfigures the present day Hinduism is a morbid growth. It only betrays a woodenness of mind, a blind self-conceit. It is abhorrent alike to the spirit of religion and morality.¹⁰ The verses in the Smritis about Shudras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.¹¹

It is also to be pointed out that when Gandhi was in South Africa he had to suffer much humiliation at the hands of the white ruling class there. He found that Indians there were called 'Coolies' and he himself became a 'Coolie barrister'. Indians were 'untouchables' there and suffered all insults much in the same way as the 'untouchables' in India suffered at the hands of their own brethren. This to Gandhiji was a just punishment to Indians South Africa for their sins in India. Indians were segregated.

"It can be truly said that there is no difference between these locations and the untouchable's quarters in India. Just as the Hindus believe that touching Dhedhs - or residence in their neighbourhood would lead to pollution, so did the Europeans in the Transvaal believe for all practical purposes that physical contact with the Indians or living near them would defile them."¹² He staged a non-violent Satyagraha movement there and won for his Indian brethren position of self-respect. When he came to India he first studied the social, economic, political and religious situation in the country. He had to light at several fronts. And every front was almost a war front. In South Africa, Gandhi had developed his own weapons of warfare.

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⁹ Harijan, 11-2-1933, p. 4.
¹⁰ Ibid., 20-4-1934, p. 73.
According to Gandhi, Hinduism will reach its perfection only when the 'untouchables' become not only touchable but thoroughly merged into the main Hindu stream. The problem could not be left to the Harijans. They were too ignorant and suppressed to raise their head or voice. "In tackling the problem of untouchability Gandhi did not call upon the untouchables to join in the struggle for the assertion of their human rights. They were even incapable then of doing so. They took their lowly position as having been ordained by God." Kripalani pointed out that if the High-caste social workers asked the untouchables for water, they were refused as it would be 'adharma' for them to offer water to high-class people. So, Gandhi was right in calling upon the caste Hindus to make all the sacrifices necessary to render only belated justice for the grievous injury inflicted by their ancestors on the untouchables through the centuries. "To remove untouchability is a penance that caste-Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of 'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the 'untouchables', not even dirt and insanitation. It is our arrogance which blinds us, superior Hindus to our own blemishes and which magnifies sham of our downtrodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression." Gandhi inherited the Congress position on Untouchability first recorded in a resolution in 1917 which urged "upon the people of India the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed upon the Depressed Classes". The Congress resolution seems to have been made in response to a meeting of the Depressed Classes in Bombay earlier in 1917 which asked for such a resolution, in almost the same wording, in exchange

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14 Ibid.
15 Young India, 26-12-24, p. 423.
for support of the 1916 Congress-Muslim League constitutional scheme. Gandhi's contribution to the position was to personalize it. Volunteers for the Non-cooperation Campaign in 1921 signed a pledge which placed responsibility on the individual: "As a Hindu I believe in the justice and necessity of removing the evil of untouchability and shall on all possible occasions seek personal contact with and endeavour to render service to the submerged classes." This emphasis on the caste Hindu's obligations to the Untouchables remained a major tenet of Gandhi's teaching.

Gandhi's statements on the evil of untouchability were unequivocal from the first, although his views regarding other caste-based practices changed and grew less orthodox with the years. He made it his life's mission to work for the Harijans. In this way he will be restoring the true faith to its pristine glory and doing something for the suffering humanity. He could never believe that 'untouchability' was a part of Hinduism. He wrote as early as 1921, "I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence in Hinduism. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day." He admitted that evil practices like untouchability, dedication of girls to virtual prostitution and sacrificing goals to Kali had become religious practices. These practices were irreligious and must go.

The only way with Gandhi to eradicate the evils of untouchability was the non-violent way. He does not want that there should remain or crop up any feeling of hatred or ill-will between the high caste and the low caste people. Moreover, he did not want any political gain for himself. So the only means open for the purpose are those of Ahimsa and Truth. He was a man who practised first and then preached. He could put his ideals to practice and that he did:

18 Young India, 6-10-21, pp. 317-318.
“I have adopted an 'untouchable' child as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to love her as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger. I can do so only by love. If any of my people have done you any wrong, I ask your forgiveness for it. Some members of the 'untouchable' class said that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them. Can Untouchability be removed by force? Can the amelioration of the 'untouchables' come through 'these methods'? The only way, by which you and I can wean Orthodox Hindus from their bigotry is by patient argument and correct conduct. So long as they are not converted, I can only ask you to put up with your lot with patience. I am willing to stand by you, to share your sufferings with you. You must have the right of worship in any temple in which members of other castes are admitted." You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes, without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office, in the land....That is my definition of the removal of untouchability."¹⁹

This removal of untouchability is much more, than building a temple of brick and mortar. Hindus must bleed for it, must pay for it. They must be prepared to forsake wife, children and all for the sake of removing the curse.²⁰ Therefore to remove untouchability is a penance that caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of 'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the 'untouchables', not even dirt and insanitation. "It is our arrogance which blinds us, superior Hindus, to our own blemishes and which magnifies those of our down-trodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression. Religions like nations are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 222-25.
²⁰ Ibid., 1-5-1924, pp. 141-146.
blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is light, not darkness, God is Love, not hate, God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is great. We His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion.  

According to Gandhi “I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same dharma for the Brahmin as for the Bhangi. But it insists that the latter shall be, entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning.”

Interdining and intermarriage issues were very complicated and deep-rooted. Even in one and the same Brahmana family all the members will not sit and eat together. Brahmans have their own sub-castes almost all over the country and interdining and intermarriage are practically avoided. Gandhi new all these things so he did not want to make fetish of outward observances. Religion is not just a matter of eating, drinking or marrying; it is something deeper. Hindus are doomed, he said, if they attach undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. Gandhi did not advocate an international or cosmopolitan dinner for the simple reason that such functions do not necessarily promote friendship of goodwill. "It is possible today to organize a dinner party between Hindus and Musalmans but I dare to say that such a dinner will no more bring the two communities together than the absence of it keeps them apart.” The self-imposed restrictions, he found, had a sanitary as well as a spiritual value. Then, he stated that marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. Later on he found that these things have a great communal and social significance. By the year 1946, there was great

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21 Ibid., 26-12-1924, p. 423.
22 Ibid., 22-1-1925, pp. 29-30.
23 Ibid., 30-4-1925, p. 153.
change in his thinking. He started advocating that interdining and intermarriage were very helpful in removing untouchability and fostering communal harmony. He wrote: "At one time I did say that interdining was not essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability." Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further." Personally, he was already in favour of interdining. By the change of time, he felt the necessity of interdining as it removes social stigma attached to certain persons. Moreover, it removes inhibitions and brings persons closer. He went even further and approved of recommended inter-caste marriage. It was another difficult problem quite vital to the removal of untouchability. If it happened that an educated Harijan girl married a caste-Hindu, she would be cut off from her caste and thus it will be a loss to the family as well as to the whole community.

If an educated Harijan girl married a Caste Hindu, Gandhi noted, the couple should devote themselves to the service of Harijans. "Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu with a high character it will do good to both the Harijans and Caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If the children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability." As a matter of fact there were few Harijan girls educated enough to be chosen as brides by Caste Hindu husbands. There were practically more caste Hindu girls well educated to work amidst the Harijan families. Gandhi advised such girls to select Harijan husbands. He contended that the marriage of a caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. "If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One

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24 Ibid., 8-12-1920, p. 4.
cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience."25 The aim of such marriages should not be indulgence. It defeats the very purpose.

Underlying Gandhi's change in attitude toward social practices was an unchanging belief in varnashramadharma, the divinely ordained division of society into four groups defined according to duty: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. Although Gandhi castigated the Indian caste system of his day with its superior and inferior divisions, he held to the end a belief in the traditional ordering of society for the preservation of harmony and the growth of the soul, and with it, traditional duties. "The Law of Varna prescribes that a person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers," but with the understanding that all occupations are equally honourable: "A scavenger has the same status as a Brahmin."26

Scavenging is a fine art. Not only must the cleaning be perfect, but the manner of doing it and the instruments used must be clean and not revolting to one's sanitary sense. You have only to see the privy I use. It is spotlessly clean without a trace of smell. That is so because I clean it myself. The municipal Bhangi pours out the contents of the night-soil wagons over a cliff converting a beauty spot into a plague spot. If you become your own Bhangis, not only will you insure perfect sanitation for yourself, but you will make your surroundings clean and relieve the Bhangis of the weight of oppression which today crushes them. Do not imagine that thereby you would deprive them of their living. Today we have reduced them to the level of the beast. They earn a few coppers but only at the expense of their human dignity. The same Bhangi serves in the municipality as well as in your bungalow, with the result that he can do, justice to neither. Look at him as he eats his food, cowering under the shadow of the latrine wall, surrounded by filth. It is enough to break one's

25 Harijan, 7-7-1946, p. 212.
26 Young India, 17-11-1927, pp. 387-388.
According to Gandhi, untouchability had no part in this divine ordering - the treatment of castes below the Shudra level as unclean was not only inhumane, but harmful to Hinduism. Gandhi described it at various times as a curse, an excrescence on Hinduism, a poison, a snake, a canker, a hydra-headed monster, a great blot, a device of Satan, a hideous untruth, Dyerism and O'Dwyerism, and the bar sinister. An Untouchable, wrote Gandhi, "should be regarded as a Shudra because there is no wart-ant for belief in a fifth caste."28 While Shudras were created to serve the other three castes, their work was honourable. All varnas possess equality of status, but not equality of opportunity. "One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism."29

Other early reformers, including Vivekananda and Dayanand Saraswati, espoused a similar conception of the ideal society as one composed of equal, harmoniously integrated varnas. The belief that untouchability was a perversion of true Hinduism, and a view of the Untouchable as one deserving of Shudra status, was acceptable even to such an orthodox Hindu leader as B. G. Tilak. Shortly before Gandhi's assumption of leadership in Congress, Tilak wrote, "It is a sin against God to say that a person is untouchable, who is not so to God Himself.... Hinduism absorbed the Shudras, can it not also absorb the untouchables?"30

With his gift for symbolism, Gandhi selected the Bhangi, a scavenger caste of North India, to represent the problem of untouchability. Gandhi's abhorrence of untouchability, and his association of such practices with the

27 Harijan, 11-8-1946, p. 254.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 6-3-1937, pp. 6-7.
30 Athalye, D. V., Life of Lokmanya Tilak (Poona: Sadashiv Peth), 1921, pp. 55-60.
Sweeper caste, appear rooted in childhood experience. Although not mentioned in his autobiography, Gandhi's reactions to his family's sweeper at the age of twelve are recorded in an article that he wrote in Young India.

"A Scavenger named Uka, an "untouchable," used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering contact with Uka as sinful."\(^{31}\)

Uka remained the symbol for Untouchables in Gandhi's mind. Scavenging and the Bhangi figure prominently in many of Gandhi's pronouncements and actions. He himself cleaned a dirty latrine at the Calcutta Congress of 1901 and records it in his autobiography. He often used the metaphor of the mother's cleansing work for her child as a counterpart to the Bhangi's work for society. Sanitation work at Gandhi's ashrams was done by all members as a means for demonstrating the honourable nature of these essential duties. In later years Gandhi stayed sometimes in suitably cleaned Bhangi colonies. During the last days of his life, Gandhi even declared: "I would rejoice to think that we had a sweeper girl of a stout heart, incorruptible and of crystal purity to be our first President . . . assisted in the discharge of her duties by a person like Pandit Nehru."\(^{32}\)

Although Gandhi was not the first to cry out against untouchability, he was the most prominent caste Hindu to proclaim that it was harmful to Hinduism, to make its removal a personal responsibility of the caste Hindu, to keep it before the public eye with passionate oratory and vivid imagery, and to

\(^{31}\) Young India, 27-4-1921, p. 135.
\(^{32}\) Pyarelal, The Epic Fast (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House), 1933, p. 228
found an organization for service to Untouchables. Perhaps as important as his ideology and his pronouncements was his personal example, from the beginning, of touching the Untouchable.

Gandhi was, as is well-known, a highly religious person. He believed in the Sanatanist strand of Hinduism. He had infinite faith in its scriptures—Vedas, Puranas, Epics, and Bhagavadgita, its avatars (incarnations of God); modes of worship;33 and social divisions—the old varna system, and the fourfold division of the society determined by birth. "One born of Brahmana parents," believed the Mahatma, "will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana. He will have fallen from Brahmanahood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as Brahmana."34 About casteism, he said: "I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap in progress... A sort of hierarchy has been evolved in the caste system. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, so far as it connotes distinction in status, is an evil."35 He saw the untouchability aspect of this division as the worst:

"I have always regarded [caste] as an excrescence. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day... Love of the people brought the problem of untouchability early into my life. My mother said, "you must not touch this boy, he is untouchable." "Why not?", I questioned back, and from that day my revolt began."36

Gandhi had infinite faith in God, so much so that he considered the living without faith in Him as useless, serving no purpose at all. He "always

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 145.
followed the path shown by Him" and "heard Him speak to him as a man speaks to man on difficult occasions." He had equally great faith in truth and ahimsa.37

Gandhi was a Sanatanist Hindu. But his Hinduism was clearly different from the Hinduism as one would usually take it to be in the ordinary course. It had its roots firm in ancient Hinduism, but it had grown and flowered in the present. Thus it was not a haphazard, old, wild growth. Rather it was a well-pruned thing which had its irrelevant, dead parts replaced by new, useful things, thus making it youthful with a lot of blood, energy and refreshing spirit. It would not be wrong if one said that "his [Gandhi's] Hinduism was his own."38

His political ideas were also as novel as his socio-religious beliefs were. He stood for a democratic form of political structure, established on the basis of nonviolence where there was equal freedom for all. The government was hardly visible there governing, in Thoreau's classical fashion, "the least." People in such a set-up were their own masters. Life would not be "a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom." It would be "an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villagers, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majority of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units."39

In the realm of economy, Gandhi stood for economics of justice. The resources and riches of a nation should be shared by everyone, he said, which in simple terms meant "each man having the wherewithal to supply all his natural wants and no more." This was a pretty difficult job, Gandhi knew, and, therefore, he suggested: "One should not be despaired by the failure here. One must bear in mind one's goal and work unceasingly to near it." But if despite

37 Ibid., pp. 75-78 and 101-103.
38 Ibid.
39 Harijan, 28-7-1946, p. 236.
that "there was no improvement in the situation and the rich people crushed the poor so much that they died of hunger, then the poor should fight the rich but only through nonviolent non-cooperation and civil disobedience" Surely the rich "cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society." 40

This is what in short constituted the Gandhian blueprint for a "New India." 41 A careful perusal of the blueprint shows, however, that except for the socio-religious sphere where Gandhi talks of abolishing untouchability and treating the dalits as equal to savarnas, the dalits are not conspicuously visible anywhere. Have they not been taken care of, one might argue, in the arrangement that guarantees equal political and economic opportunities to one and all? Not really. The dalits in their subhuman state of existence were not capable of being benefited in Gandhi's political and economic scheme of things without any special help. This fact was very well known to the great leader. Therefore he wanted the whole issue to be taken up by the "reforms" to be done "by patient argument and correct conduct." 42

In consequence, a lot of the dalits hardly experienced any improvement. Understandably, there was dissatisfaction among the sufferers which soon turned, under the inspiring leadership of a fiery activist, Dr B.R. Ambedkar, 43 into a group of people representing militant upsurge. They burnt the Manusmriti (1927), 44 launched the Kalaram Temple Satyagraha (1930). 45

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44 The Manusmriti was burnt on 25 December 1927. Ibid., p. 101.
opened the temple entry agitation (1930), and made a demand for separate electorates (1930-31) and reservation of posts in civil and military services (1931). There was a talk of the dalits being a separate entity for matters political and economic in and outside India.

The latter thing, i.e. the talk of treating the dalits as a separate entity for matters political and economic, stiffed Gandhi, more so because it was being seriously considered then by the powers that be in London, in its roundtable conferences, committee meetings, etc. Gandhi saw a big conspiracy around to harm the dalits in particular and the Indian nation in general. To begin with, he warned the conspirators that he would not allow it to happen. Addressing the minority Committee on 13 November 1931 during the Second Roundtable Conference in London, he said in no uncertain terms:

"I would like to repeat what I have said before, that, while the Congres, will always accept any solution that may be acceptable to the Hindus, the Muhammadans and the Sikhs, the Congress will be no party to the special electorates for any other minorities. One word more as to the so-called untouchables. I can understand the claims advanced by other minorities, but the claims advanced on behalf of the untouchables is the unkindest cut of all. It means the perpetual bar-sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end of India to the other to tell the Untouchables that separate electorates and separate reservation is not the way to remove this bar-sinister, which is the shame, not of them but of orthodox, Hinduism.

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
“Let this committee and let the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove this blot of untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our census untouchables classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Muhammadans, so may Europeans. Will untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? I would rather prefer that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. Therefore, with all my regards for Dr Ambedkar and for his desire to see the untouchables uplifted, with all my regards for his ability, I must say in all humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgement. It hurts me to have to say this, but I would be untrue to the cause of untouchables, which is as dear to me as life itself, if I did not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility, and I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing, I should resist it with my life.”

Like its predecessor, the Second Round Table Conference, which ended on December 1, proved sterile. It seethed with intrigues and backdoor manoeuvres. The presence of Mahatma Gandhiji, the supreme representative of India's disfranchised humanity, ought to have been used by Whitehall to make a significant transfer of responsible government even if it fell short of

Dominion Status. No such gesture was made because the British government was determined not to depart from the thesis propounded by imperialists like Lord Creamer. Did not this man say that the foundation stone of Indian reform must be the steadfast maintenance of British supremacy?

In his customary grandiloquent style, Churchill attacked the Round Table Conference on December 14: "Day by day, inch by inch, we see the R.T.C. crawling towards its destruction". He further observed: "We seem to be riding steadily towards an unclimbable fence".\(^{50}\)

The Communal question was the rock on which the Indian Round Table Conference suffered a shipwreck. The Conference broke up as there could be no agreement between the majority and minority communities. Dr. Ambedkar insisted that the position of minorities under Swaraj should be safeguarded by allowing them special representation in the legislatures. Gandhiji was not prepared to recognise such a claim except in the case of the Muslims and the Sikhs.

There was a complete deadlock. As there was no possibility of an agreement, the hope lay in arbitration. On this everybody was agreed except Dr. Ambedkar, and it was left to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, to decide upon the issue.

On his return to India from the Round Table Conference Gandhiji was put behind bars and lodged in Yervada Jail by the British government. Gandhiji took the earliest opportunity to be in communication with the British government.

On 11 March 1932, he addressed the following letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India: "You will perhaps recollect that at the end of my speech at the Round Table Conference when the minorities claim was presented, I had said that I should resist with my life the grant of separate electorates to the depressed classes. This was not said in the heat of

\(^{50}\) The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, op. cit., Vol. 58, pp. 200-204, 209, 216.
the moment nor by way of rhetoric. It was meant to be a serious statement. In pursuance of the statement, I had hoped on my return to India to mobilise public opinion against separate electorates, at any rate, for the depressed classes, but it was not to be. From the newspapers I am permitted to read, I observe that at any moment, His Majesty's government may declare their decision. At first I had thought, if the decision was found to create separate electorates for the depressed classes, I should take such steps as I might then consider necessary to give effect to my vow. But I feel it would be unfair to the British government or me to act without giving previous notice. Naturally, they could not attach the significance I give to my statement. I need hardly reiterate all the objections I have to the creation of separate electorates for the depressed classes. I feel as if I was one of them. Their case stands on a wholly different footing from that of others. I am not against their representation in the legislatures. I should favour every one of their adults, male and female, being registered as voters irrespective of education or property qualification, even though the franchise test may be stricter for others. But I hold that separate electorate is harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from the purely a separate electorates would do them one has to know how they are distributed amongst the so-called Caste Hindus and how dependent they are on the latter. So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorates would simply vivisect and disrupt it.

"For me the question of these classes is predominantly moral and religious. The political aspect, important though it is, dwindles into significance compared to the moral and religious issue.

"You will have to appreciate my feelings in this matter by remembering that I have been interested in the condition of these classes from my boyhood and have more than once staked my all for their sake. I say this not to pride myself in anyway. For, I feel that no penance that the Hindus may do can in any way compensate for the calculated degradation to which they have consigned the depressed classes for centuries.
"But I know that separate electorate is neither a penance nor any remedy for the crushing degradation they have groaned under. I, therefore, respectfully inform His Majesty's government, that in the event of their decision creating separate electorate for the depressed classes, I must fast unto death.

"I am painfully conscious of the fact that such a step, whilst I am a prisoner, must cause grave embarrassment to His Majesty's government, and that it will be regarded by, many as highly improper on the part of one holding my position to introduce into the political field methods which they would describe as hysterical if not much worse. All I can urge in defence is that for me the contemplated step is not method, it is part of my being. It is the call of conscience which I dare not disobey, even though it may cost whatever reputation for sanity I may possess. So far as I can see now, my discharge from imprisonment would not make the duty of fasting any the less imperative. I am hoping, however, all my fears are wholly unjustified and the British government have no intention whatever of creating separate electorate for the depressed classes".\textsuperscript{51}

Sir Samuel Hoare Sent the following reply to Gandhiji vide his letter dated 13 April 1932: "I write this in answer to your letter of 11th March, and I say at once I realise fully the strength of your feeling upon the question of separate electorates for the depressed classes. I can only say that we intend to give any decision that may be necessary solely and only upon the merits of the case. As you are aware, Lord Lothian's Committee has not yet completed its tour and it must be some weeks before we can receive any conclusions at which it may have arrived. When we receive that report we shall have to give most careful consideration to its recommendations, and we shall not give a decision until we have taken into account, in addition to the view expressed by the Committee, the views that you and those who think with you have so forcibly expressed. I feel sure if you were in our position you would be taking

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., Vol. 49, pp. 190-193.
exactly the same action we intend to take. You would await the Committee's report, you would then give it your fullest consideration, and before arriving at a final decision you would take into account the views that have been expressed on both sides of the controversy. More than this I cannot say. Indeed I do not imagine you would expect me to say more".\footnote{The Bombay Chronicle, pp. 190-3 and 391-2.}

The British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, gave, through the Communal Award of 17 August 1932, separate electorate to the dalits.\footnote{Ambedkar, B. R., Poona Pact (Jullender: Bheem Publishers), pp. 120-27.} The terms of the decision in so far as they related to the untouchables were as follows: "In the statement made by the Prime Minister on the 1st December last on behalf of His Majesty's government at the close of the second session of the Round Table Conference, which was immediately afterwards endorsed by both Houses of Parliament, it was made plain that if the communities in India were unable to reach a settlement acceptable to all parties on the communal questions which the Conference had failed to solve, His Majesty's government were determined that India's constitutional advance should not on that account be frustrated, and that they would remove this obstacle by devising and applying themselves a provisional scheme.

"On the 19th of March last His Majesty's government, having been informed that the continued failure of the communities to reach agreement was blocking the progress of the plans for the framing of a new Constitution, stated that they were engaged upon a careful re-examination of the difficult and controversial question which arose. They are now satisfied that without a decision of at least some aspects of the problems connected with the position of minorities under the new Constitution, no further progress can be made with the framing of the Constitution.

"His Majesty's government have accordingly decided that they will include provisions to give effect to the scheme set out below in the proposals relating to the Indian Constitution to be laid in due course before Parliament.
The scope of this scheme is purposely confined to the arrangements to be made for the representation of the British Indian communities in the Provincial Legislatures, consideration of representation in the Legislature at the Centre being deferred. The decision to limit the scope of the scheme implies no failure to realise that the framing of the Constitution will necessitate the decision of a number of other problems of great importance to minorities, but has been taken in the hope that once a pronouncement has been made upon the basic question of method and proportions of representation the communities themselves may find it possible to arrive at modus vivendi on other communal problems, which have not received the examination they require.

"His Majesty's government wish it to be most clearly understood that they themselves can be no parties to any negotiations which may be initiated with a view to, the revision of their decision, and will not be prepared to give consideration to any representation aimed at securing the modification of it which is not supported by all the parties affected. But they are most desirous to close no door to an agreed settlement should such happily be forthcoming. If, therefore, before a new Government of India Act has passed into law, they are satisfied that the communities who are concerned are mutually agreed upon a practicable alternative scheme, either in respect of any one or more of the governor's Provinces or in respect of the whole of the British India, they will be prepared to recommend to Parliament that alternative should be substituted for the provisions now outlined.

"Members of the "depressed classes" qualified to vote will vote in a general constituency. In view of the fact that for a considerable period these classes would be unlikely, by this means alone, to secure any adequate representation in the legislature, a number of special seats will be assigned to them. These seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only members of the "depressed classes" electorally qualified will be entitled to vote. Any person voting in such a special constituency will, as stated above, be also entitled to vote in a general constituency. It is intended
that these constituencies should be formed in selected areas where the depressed classes are most numerous, and that, except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the Province.

"In Bengal it seems possible that in some general constituencies a majority of the voters will belong to the depressed classes. Accordingly, pending further investigation no number has been fixed for the members to be returned from the special depressed class constituencies in that Province. It is intended to secure that the depressed classes should obtain not less than 10 seats in the Bengal Legislature. The precise definition in each Province of those who (if electorally qualified) will be entitled to vote in the special depressed class constituencies has not yet been finally determined. It will be based as a rule on the general principles advocated in the Franchise necessary in some Provinces in Northern India where the application of the general criteria of untouchability might result in a definition unsuitable in some respects to the special conditions of the Province.

"His Majesty's government do not consider that these special depressed classes constituencies will be required for more than the limited time. They intend that the Constitution shall provide that they shall come to an end after 20 years if they have not previously been abolished under the general powers of electoral revision".54

The Prime Minister's Communal Award was announced simultaneously from London and Simla. As a background to it, a government communique stated as follows: "The minorities committee had failed to solve the communal problem at the Second Round Table Conference. The Premier had offered to give an award himself, but this was not unanimously acceptable to the members. In the final plenary session, therefore, he declared that, in view of the R.T.C. members' continued failure to bring about a communal

54 Ibid.
settlement, the government might have to frame and provide one". This was the rationale for the Award according to the communique.

"The substance of the Communal Award was to fractionalise the entire electorate by giving separate recognition to the number of minorities including the depressed classes and assigning separate electorates to them. It was a clever way of demonstrating that Indian unity was a myth. It was indeed a great blow to the conception of Indian nationhood which had grown up and had been nurtured through a common struggle and common suffering for about a century past. But if the British wanted to break this national unity or prove that it was non-existent, some sections of the people themselves played no less part in strengthening the hands of the rulers by placing their sectional interests above those of the common motherland.

The British government's attempt to cause disarray in Indian ranks in order to weaken the demand for national freedom were best illustrated by British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald's so-called Communal Award. It was a revealing document which fully confirmed the widely-held belief that the Indian separatists and dissidents could always get more than what they wanted by cooperating with the Raj in its campaign against the nationalists. The Award accepted the principle of separate electorates for the Muslim, Sikh, Indian Christian, Anglo-Indian and European communities, besides confirming the traditional policy of weightage for the minorities.

When the terms of the Communal Award were announced Gandhiji found that his letter to Samuel Hoare had failed to have any effect. He first tried to get terms of the Communal Award revised. He wrote a letter from Yervada Prison on August 18, 1932 to the Prime Minister.

"There can be no doubt that Sir Samuel Hoare has shown you and the Cabinet my letter to him of 11th March on the question of the representation of the depressed classes. That letter should be treated as part of this letter and be read together with this. I have read the British governments' decision on the

55 Ibid.
representation of Minorities and have slept over it. In pursuance of my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare and my declaration at the meeting of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference on 13 November, 1931, at St. James Palace, I have to resist your decision with my life. The only way I can do so is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda. This fast will cease if during its progress the British government, of its own motion or under pressure of public opinion, revise their decision and withdraw their scheme of communal electorates for the depressed classes, whose representatives should be elected by the general electorate under the common franchise, no matter how wide it is.

"The proposed fast will come into operation in the ordinary course from the noon of 20th September next, unless the said decision is in the meanwhile revised in the manner suggested above. I am asking the authorities here to cable the text of this letter to you so as to give you ample notice. But in any case I am leaving sufficient time for this letter to reach you in time by the slowest route. I also ask that this letter and my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare already referred to be published at the earliest possible moment. On my part, I have scrupulously observed the rule of the jail and have communicated my desire or the contents of the two letters to no one, save my two companions, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Mr. Mahadev Desai. But I want, if you make it possible, public opinion to be affected by my letters. Hence my request for their early publication.

"I regret the decision I have taken. But as a man of religion that I hold myself to be, I have no other course left open to me. As I have said in my letter to Sir Samuel Hoare, even if His Majesty's government decided to release me in order to save themselves from embarrassment, my fast will have to continue. For, I cannot now hope to resist - the decision by any other means; and I have no desire whatsoever to compass my release by any means other than honourable. It may be that my judgement is warped and that I am wholly in error in regarding separate electorates for depressed classes as
harmful to them or to Hinduism. If so, I am not likely to be in the right with reference to other parts of my philosophy of life. In that case my death by fasting will be at once a penance for my error and a lifting of a weight from off these numberless men and women who have childlike faith in my wisdom. Whereas if my judgement is right as I have little doubt it is, the contemplated step is but due to the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success.\textsuperscript{56}

Gandhi opposed it with his, well known fast unto death\textsuperscript{57} which moved the entire Indian nation and compelled one and all, including Dr Ambedkar, to annul the Communal Award by the Poona Pact (or Yeravada Pact) of 26 September 1932.\textsuperscript{58} The separate entity of the dalits in the legislature was gone. They had their "separate representatives" sent there by the entire Hindu electorate of which they were very much a part and parcel. This development betrayed the seriousness of the problem to Gandhi. He effected, as noted above, changes in this political content of his blue-print. He asked the Congress to take care of the economic problems of the dalits seriously. He launched a fiercer attack on untouchability and he became more active in his dalit work thereafter. This helped in keeping things under control till 15 August 1947.

The Communal Award was based on the British theory that India was not a nation but a congeries of racial, religious, and cultural groups, castes, and interests. Morley and Minto in 1909, Montagu and Chelmsford in 1919 and the Simon Commission report of 1930 built the structure of Indian Constitution on the foundation of this assumed multiplicity. The Award provided for the Government's recognition to be accorded to the following minorities: (i) Muhammadans; (ii) Depressed Classes; (iii) Backward Classes;

\textsuperscript{57} Pyarelal, The Epic Fast, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., pp. 153-55.
(iv) Indian Christians; (v) Anglo-Indians; (vi) Europeans; (viii) Commercial and Industrial Classes; (viii) Landholders; (ix) Labour; (x) Universities; and (xi) Sikhs.59

A fixed number of seats were allocated to each minority and special electorates were assigned to each of them. Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians had already been treated as minorities. The Award declared the depressed classes also to be a minority community entitled to separate electorate and thus they were separated from the rest of the Hindus. The Congress was opposed to a separate electorate for Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians as it encouraged the communal notion that they formed separate groups and communities having interests separate from those of the general body of Indians. The inevitable result would be to divide the Indian people and prevent the growth of a common national consciousness. The idea of a separate electorate for Muslims had been accepted by the Congress as far back as 1916 as a part of the compromise with the Muslim League. But the efforts to separate depressed classes from the rest of Hindus by treating them as a separate political entity was vehemently opposed by all the nationalists.

Thus the policy of "divide and rule" clearly found another expression in the Award. If, however, the British believed that life is not all logic and perceived that the trend of social valuation in India was towards nationhood, it appears even more surprising that, instead of strengthening the trend, they should have adumbrated an electoral scheme which they themselves stigmatized as destructive of the growth of national unity. Whatever that may be, whether the road was blocked deliberately or because the rulers of India were in a state of such puzzlement as to be unable to find a proper solution, no greater disservice could have been done to India's aspirations than the decision of Ramsay MacDonald on the communal problem in India.

B. R. Ambedkar was the supporter of the Award. The accumulated bitterness against Hindus perpetuated by age long cruelty to the depressed classes found expression in his stand. He called Gandhi's fast a "political stunt." When Gandhi declared his intention to fast unto death, Ambedkar had issued a statement in which he totally rejected Gandhi's case stating "I, however, put that the Mahatma will not drive me to the necessity of making a choice between his life and the rights of his people."60

Earlier also, in the Second Round Table Conference, in his speech on 15 September 1931, Gandhi had claimed that the Congress represented all Indian interests and classes. He then claimed: "The Congress stands for the depressed classes more than Dr Ambedkar or his colleagues."61 Ambedkar attended the Round Table Conference as a nominated member of the British government. He remarked that "if there was a referendum, he would top at the poll and wanted that separate electorate and separate reservations were not the way to remove that bar sinister. The bitter experience that Ambedkar had undergone has for the moment wrapped his judgement."62 He rejected the claim of Ambedkar that he represented the whole body of untouchables. The Mahatma was of the confirmed opinion that the attitude of Ambedkar would create a division among Hindus. Therefore he declared: "I would not bargain their rights for the kingdom of the whole world." To him, "untouchability was a stigma on Hindu religion. In the near future it would vanish but separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma."63

Gandhi was particularly against the attempts to recognise untouchables as a separate political entity. "I can understand the claims advanced by other communities but the claims advanced on behalf of untouchables is the "unkindest cut of all." It means the perpetual bar sinister. I would not sell the

62 Ibid., p. 179.
63 Ibid., pp. 258-59.
vital interests of untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India.64

He demanded that the representatives of the depressed classes should be elected by general electorate under a wide, if possible universal, common franchise. At the same time, he did not object to the demand for a larger number of reserved seats for the depressed classes. As earlier decided, he went on his fast unto death on 20 September 1932 to enforce his demand. In a statement to the Press he said: "My life, I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith."65

The stunning news of the fast threw the country into consternation. Mass meetings took place almost everywhere. 20 September was observed as a day of fasting and prayer. Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan felt as if "a shadow is darkening today over India like a shadow cast by an eclipsed sun," and he explained: "The people of a whole country are suffering from a poignant pain of anxiety, the universality of which carried in it a great dignity of consolation. Mahatma, who through his life of dedication has made his own in truth, has commenced his vow of extreme self-sacrifice."66

Jawaharlal Nehru, who was in jail said: “Our peaceful and monotonous routine in jail was suddenly upset in the middle of September 1932 by a bombshell. News came that Gandhi had decided to 'Fast Unto Death' in disapproval of separate electorates given by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Communal award to the depressed classes. I felt angry with him at his religious and sentimental approach to a political question, and his frequent references to God in connection with it. He even seemed to suggest that God had indicated the very date of the fast. What a terrible example to set. And

64 Ibid., pp. 12-20.
65 Ibid.
66 The Indian Annual Register, 1932, Vol. 2, p. 146.
then a strange thing happened to me. I had quite an emotional crisis and at the end of it I felt calmer, and the future seemed not so dark. Bapu had a curious knack of doing the right thing at the psychological moment, and it might be that his action would lead to great results not only in the narrow field in which it was confined but in the wider aspects of our national struggle. Then came news of the tremendous upheaval all over the country, a magic wave of enthusiasm running through Hindu Society, and untouchability appeared to be doomed. What a magician, I thought, was this little man, sitting in Yervada Prison, and how well he knew how to pull the strings that move people's hearts". 67

The British Premier and his advisers were unable to appreciate Gandhiji's deeply emotional and religious approach to the problem. Their first impulse was to scent a political motive in the fast: "Gandhiji was trying a stunt to recover the prestige he had lost through the decline of civil disobedience. If the British Ministers failed to fathom the depth of Gandhiji's feeling on this subject they were even less able to see the ethics of fasting for the solution of what was to them a political problem. Fasting struck them as a thinly-disguised method of coercion". 68 The British reaction to Gandhiji's fast was well exemplified in Low's cartoon as a 'Prophecy for 1933', in which Lord Willingdon was shown going on hunger strike at the instance of 10, Downing Street to force Mr. Gandhi to admit the new constitution as touchable.

P. N. Rajbhoj sought Gandhiji's views on the Award and his fast. In reply Gandhiji informed Rajbhoj: "My fast has reference only to separate electorate. As soon as that is withdrawn the letter - of the vow will be satisfied and I would be bound to call off the fast. But a very heavy responsibility will then lie upon me of having a substitute that is infinitely superior to separate

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67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
electorate".69 Rajbhoj also asked Gandhiji about the formula which leaders like Rajah and others had been favouring, that is, joint electorates with statutory reservations for the depressed classes. Gandhiji said, "Looking at the matter in this light (that is, as a person who though a 'touchable' by birth was an 'untouchable' by choice) I must say that I am not in love with the idea of statutory reservation. Whilst it is not open to the same objection that separate electorate is, I have not a shadow of a doubt that it will prevent the natural growth of the suppressed classes and will remove the incentive to honourable amends from the suppressers. What I am aiming at is a heart understanding between the two, the greatest opportunity of repentance and reparation on the part of the suppressers. I am certain that the movement is ripe for the change of the heart among them. I would therefore favour widest possible franchise for the suppressed and establish a convention between the two sections for securing proper election of representatives of the suppressed".70

Gandhiji made it clear to Rajbhoj, "Nothing will satisfy me till the last vestige of untouchability is gone. I would therefore, insist on a statutory declaration that all public places of worship, wells, schools, etc., should be open to the suppressed precisely on the same terms as the suppressers. This is roughly my idea. If, however, the representatives of suppressed classes will not look at my idea, they are at liberty to have statutory reservation of seats. I should not fast against it but you will not expect me to bless any such scheme. Nor is my blessing essential to its acceptance by the government. If I get the opportunity, I should certainly try to create public opinion among the suppressed against statutory reservation". Gandhiji further said to Rajbhoj that if the position he had set out was not clear or not satisfactory, he would be delighted to meet him, Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Rajah. He pinpointed his ultimate goal in yet another letter he wrote that day to an associate who had

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70 Ibid.

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remonstrated with him that his decision to fast was contrary to both reason and Dharma. Gandhiji wrote, "My step has not been dictated by reason; it was inspired by my inner voice. My reason, however, told me: 'Hundreds of persons like you will probably have to die in order to remove the blot of untouchability.' Fasting is a very common practice in Hinduism. I have always loved it. My decision is the cry of my heart. The Prime Minister's decision was only the immediate cause. It provided me with an opportunity to undertake the fast. However, the aim of my fast is not merely to get the decision changed but to bring about the awakening and self-purification which are bound to result from the effort to get the decision changed. In other words, this was an opportunity to strike at the very root of untouchability."71

He also had a talk with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in which he said: "The possible consequence of separate electorates for all other communities will still leave room for me to deal with them, but I have no other means to deal with untouchables. These poor fellows will ask why I who claim to be their friend should offer fast unto death simply because they were granted some privileges. They do not realise that the separate electorates will create division among Hindus so much that it would lead to bloodshed. Untouchable hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus".72

The Times of India representative in Ahmedabad reported on 15 September: "The news of Mr. Gandhi's resolve to fast unto death has caused a stir among local depressed classes over whom Mr. Gandhi has a strong hold by championing their cause for the last 15 years and founding a labour union for the millhands, most of whom are drawn from the depressed classes. The men have joined the union in large numbers. Some of the prominent leaders met last night and sent a deputation to Bombay in order to interview Dr. Ambedkar and request him to come to terms with Mr. Gandhi so that he may

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
give up his decision to fast. They have also requested Mr. A. V. Thakkar, a member of the Servants of India Society, who is believed to have some influence over Dr. Ambedkar, to proceed to Bombay in order to interview Dr. Ambedkar with the same purpose. . . .73

In Calcutta a meeting of eleven different organisations of the depressed classes was held that very day. It passed a resolution disapproving the grant of separate electorates to the depressed classes, saying that while these did not secure sufficient representation for the depressed classes, they brought about a statutory separation of these classes from the rest of Hindu society-this in turn would disrupt Hindu society on the one hand, and perpetuate the humiliations that were heaped on the depressed classes on the other. It appealed to Gandhiji to give up or at least postpone his decision to fast, and to the British government to withdraw this provision of the Award and leave the matter entirely to the affected classes to settle among themselves.

On 16 September, Gandhiji sent another statement from the jail to the Bombay government with the request that it be released to the press. Reiterating the reasons which had led him to decide on a fast-unto-death, he emphasised that his real target was untouchability itself, that the withdrawal of separate electorates would just be the first step towards this goal.

The gist of Gandhiji's statement is as follows: "The fast is intended to sting Hindu conscience into right religious action. The contemplated fast is not mere appeal to emotion. By the fast I want to throw the whole of my weight in the scales of justice pure and simple. Therefore, there need be no undue haste or feverish anxiety to save my life... The separate electorate is merely the last straw. No patched-up agreement between caste Hindu leaders and rival 'depressed' class leaders will answer the purpose. The agreement to be valid must be real. If the Hindu mass mind is not yet prepared to banish untouchability root and branch, it must sacrifice me without the slightest hesitation. No compromise which does not ensure the fullest freedom to the

73 The Times of India, 15th September 1932
'depressed classes' inside the Hindu fold can be an adequate substitute for the contemplated separation. Any betrayal of the trust can merely postpone the day of immolation for me and henceforth for those who think with me. The problem before responsible Hindus is to consider whether in the vent of social, civil or political persecution of the 'depressed classes' they are prepared to face satyagraha in the shape of perpetual fast, not by one reformer like me, but an increasing army of reformers whom I believe to exist today in India and who will count their lives of no cost to achieve the liberation of these classes and there through (rid) Hinduism of an age-long superstition. Since there appears to be a misunderstanding as to the application of my fast", Gandhiji concluded, "I may repeat that it is aimed at a statutory separate electorate, in any shape or form, for the 'depressed' classes. Immediately that threat is removed once and for all, my fast will end. I hold strong views about reservation of seats, as also about the most proper method of dealing with the whole question. But I consider myself unfit as a prisoner to set forth my proposals. I should however abide by an agreement on the basis of joint electorate that may be arrived at between the responsible leaders of caste Hindus and the depressed classes and which has been accepted by mass meetings of all Hindus".74

Each country has its own inner geography where her spirit dwells, and where physical force can never conquer even an inch of ground. Those rulers who come from outside the gate, and directly they are called away from the cloud topping tower of their foreign possessions, the stupendous fabric of unreality vanishes in the void. But the great soul, who achieves victory through the power of truth, continues his dominion even when he is physically no longer present. And we all know such achievement belongs to Mahatmaji. The fact that he has staked his life to a further and final realisation of his hope fills up with awe and makes us think. Our leaders have requested us to observe fasting for this day, and there is no harm. But here is the risk of some

unthinking people putting it in the same category with the fasting that Mahatmaji has begun to observe. Nothing can be more disastrous for us than the utter lessening of the value of a heroic expression of truth by paying it the homage of a mere ceremonial expression of feeling by people emotionally inclined. The penance which Mahatmaji has taken upon himself is not a ritual but a message to all India and to the world. If we must make that message our own, we should accept it in the right manner through a proper process of realisation. The gift of sacrifice has to be received in a spirit of sacrifice.

Mahatmaji has repeatedly pointed out the danger of those divisions in our country that are permanent insults to humanity, but our attention has not been drawn to the importance of its ratification with the same force as it has been to the importance of Khaddar. The social inequities upon which all our enemies found their principal support have our time-honoured loyalty, making it for us to uproot them. Against that deep-seated moral weakness in our society Mahatmaji has pronounced his ultimatum, and though it may be our misfortune to lose him in the battlefield, the fight will be passed on every one of us to be carried on to the final end. It is the gift of the fight which he is going to offer to us, and if we do not know how to accept it humbly and yet with proud determination, if we cheaply dismiss it with some ceremonials to which we are accustomed and allow the noble life to be wasted with its great meaning missed, then our people will passively roll down the slope of degradation to the blankness of utter futility.

"We have observed that the English people are puzzled at the step that Mahatmaji has been compelled to take. They confess that they fail to understand it. I believe that the reason of their failure is mainly owing to the fact that the language of Mahatmaji is fundamentally different from their own. His method of protest is not in accord with the method which they usually follow in cases of grave political crisis. I ask them to remember the terrible days of atrocities that reddened in blood at their door when dismemberment was being forced between Ireland and the rest of Great Britain. Those
Englishmen, who imagined it be disastrous to the integrity of their Empire, did not scruple to kill and be killed, even to tear into shreds the decency of civilised codes of honour. The West is accustomed to such violent outbursts in times of desperation and, therefore, such a procedure did not seem strange to them, though to some of them it must have appeared wrong. Equally, the dismemberment of a large portion of Hindu society is certainly fatal to its wholeness, and when all our appeals are stubbornly dismissed the reason should not be incomprehensible to other people as to why Mahatmaji is voicing the extreme form of protest on behalf of India. I ask them to imagine what would have happened when the Roman Catholic community of England suffered from a forcible deprivation of its common rights, if some foreign power had come and with efficient benevolence alienated them from the rest of the nation. Very likely the people would like to resort to the method of protest which they consider as honourable in its red fury of violence. In our case the feeling may be similar, though Mahatmaji has made use of its expression which is his own. The message of non-violence, so often expressed by him in words and in deeds, finds today its final exposition in a great language which should be easiest to understand".  

M.R. Jayakar declared in a statement issued by him on 21 August: "The so-called Award is deplorably reactionary. It bears the clearest indication that the Prime Minister had to yield to Tory pressure. It strengthens the communal virus and extends its mischievous operation to regions which had so far remained free". He appealed to the rulers of states to ensure that the communal poison was not introduced into territories which had so far remained constitutionally free from its deadly effects.

The Home Department sent a secret note to all provincial governments on 27 August 1932 in which it was emphasised that "the government of India attaches the greatest importance to prompt and vigorous counter propaganda
particularly in the districts, the point that it is not a question between Gandhi and His Majesty's government; but between Gandhi and the depressed classes".  

In a meeting on 19 September 1932, the nationalist leaders including Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, M.R. Jayakar, and C. Rajagopalachari tried to persuade Dr Ambedkar to withdraw the demands for separate electorate, but he refused to do so even without knowing Gandhi's terms. When Dr Ambedkar refused to give in, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru suggested a scheme of primary and secondary elections for a limited number of seats which, while maintaining the principle of joint electorate, would enable the depressed classes to choose their own candidates. Dr Ambedkar accepted the proposal. Then came the question of period after which the system of primary and secondary elections would come to an end. Dr Ambedkar suggested a referendum at the end of 15 years but the other leaders rejected it. Meanwhile, Gandhi's condition had been deteriorating rapidly. After some discussion on this issue, Gandhi suggested a period of 5 years for referendum but Ambedkar did not agree. Gandhi's condition deteriorated further. Ambedkar offered to reduce the period in question to ten years. Ambedkar met Gandhi again and argued his case. But Gandhi replied: "Your logic is irrefutable. But let the referendum be at the end of 5 years. Surely 5 years is a sufficient period to prove the bonafides of the caste Hindus. But if you insist on postponing the referendum further, I would begin to suspect that what you want is not to test the bonafides of the caste Hindus but time only to organize the Depressed Classes for an adverse referendum." Ambedkar, however, remained adamant on the ten-year period, until Gandhi terminated the interview by saying, "There you are, five years or my life." Gandhi's condition had now become extremely critical. On the same evening after the

78 Ibid., Vol. 50, pp. 458-60.
79 Ibid.
interview, Ambedkar had a prolonged discussion with his associates, at the end of which he declared that he was unable, to change his position regarding the ten-year period.

Nocturnal discussions with the caste Hindu leaders followed, until finally Ambedkar responded to the appeal of the latter in the small hours of the morning to postpone the question of the period concerned until a future date when it would be decided by a mutual agreement. Gandhi expressed his satisfaction over this. On 25 September, a conference of the leaders took place at Poona, where the famous Poona Pact was signed. Gandhi informed the British government telegraphically that he would break the fast if the latter would accept the Poona pact in toto. The British government did so promptly, and in the evening of 26 September, Gandhi broke his fast.

The facts of the case briefly narrated above indicate that Ambedkar was most reluctant to change his position throughout the negotiations, that Gandhi very definitely placed before him the clear alternatives of accepting his terms or the responsibility of his death and the former made each concession most reluctantly with the progressive deterioration of Gandhi's condition. Long afterwards, Ambedkar still maintained that he had signed the Poona Pact against his best judgement. In his famous work, "What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables?" he recorded: "I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty, which I owed as a part of common humanity, to save Gandhi from sure death. There was also before me the problem of saving for the untouchables, the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi."\(^80\) Several other explanations can also be given which influenced Dr Ambedkar's decision to sign the pact. It was almost clear that if Ambedkar had not altered his stand,

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\(^{80}\) Ambedkar, B. R., What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables?, op. cit., p. 88.
Gandhi would have died. The death of Gandhi would have completely eclipsed the political career of Dr Ambedkar since he would have been held responsible for the death of the Mahatma. Ambedkar had clearly anticipated the likely election on the death of Gandhi.81

There was a flurry of hectic activity among the top leadership. Their anxious concern was to devise some solution so that Gandhiji's life could be saved. Madan Mohan Malaviya appealed to both the Hindu and the depressed class leaders to bury their differences and come to a settlement which would be acceptable to Gandhiji. Sapru and Jayakar, immediately bestirred themselves and carried on behind the scene conciliatory moves.

A deputation with Sapru among others met Gandhiji more than once to discuss a new scheme based on joint electorates with adequate safeguards to the depressed classes. For a time Yeravada Prison became a venue of hurried conference and consultations. Sapru, Jayakar, Birla, Rajendra Prasad, and Rajagopalachari explained the new scheme to Gandhiji. There was a prolonged conference in the jail among Hindu and depressed class leaders with Sapru playing a key role.82

Both the caste Hindu and the depressed class leaders rose to their fullest stature by coming to an agreement, and the terms were reported to Gandhiji. He accorded his approval. Sapru drafted a cable to the Prime Minister to that effect, urging him to withdraw the separate electorates for the depressed classes.

The agreement was signed by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, M. R. Jayakar, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Chunilal Mehta, B. R. Ambedkar, M. C. Rajah, P. G. Solanki, Rajagopalachari, G. D. Birla and twenty others. Rajaji and Ambedkar exchanged the pens with which they had signed the agreement.

82 The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, op. cit., Vol. 49, pp. 94.
Dr. Ambedkar, after meeting Gandhiji, stated: "The situation is hopeful. Differences of crucial character are few, and there are chances of agreement. Gandhiji is feeling weak owing to the fast, but carried on the conversation with us for over fifteen minutes".

Dr Ambedkar made an interesting speech at the Bombay Conference on 25 September 1932, which ratified the Poona Pact. Praising Gandhi's conciliatory attitude, he said: "I must confess that I was surprised, immensely surprised, when I met him, that there was so much in common between him and me. In fact, whenever any disputes were carried to him, I was astounded to see that the man who held such divergent views from mine at the Round Table Conference came immediately to my resuce and not to the resuce of other side. I am grateful to Mahatamaji for having extricated me from what might have been a very difficult situation."

"My only regret is, why did not Mahatma take this attitude at the Round Table Conference? If he had shown the same consideration to my point of view, it would not have been necessary for him to go through this ordeal. However, these are things of the past. I am, glad that I am here now to support this resolution".

In support of the resolution confirming the Poona Pact, Dr. Ambedkar declared: "I believe it is no exaggeration for me to say that no man a few days ago was placed in a greater dilemma than I was. There was placed before me a difficult situation in which I had to make a choice between two difficult alternatives. There was the life of the greatest man in India to be saved. There was also before me the problem to try and safeguard the interests of the community which I was in my humble way trying to do at the Round Table Conference according to my light. I am happy to be able to say that it has become possible through the cooperation of all of us to find a solution so as to save the life of the Mahatma and at the same time consistence with such

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protection as is necessary for the interest of the depressed classes in the
futures. I think in all these negotiations a large part of the credit must be
attributed to Mahatma Gandhi himself."

This was not only a polite tribute at a moment of relaxation after hectic
days but also a correct description of Gandhi's attitude. Gandhi did favour the
Harijan position over the caste Hindu position. Indeed, Gandhi had gone so far
in his desire to meet the Harijans 100 per cent. He had accepted the idea of
reserved seats as an unavoidable passing evil, as something infinitely
preferable to the segregation that may arise out of the separate electorate
which MacDonald wanted to introduce.

The threat of the Mahatma's death also won over the Hindu leaders for
Gandhi's policies. Suppose, however, the leaders had adopted reservation of
seats before the fast. Would the fast have been superfluous? Was the
Mahatma's torment unnecessary?

The answer to the question is crucial to an understanding of Gandhi's
role in India's history. By the criterion of cold logic and arid legalism, Gandhi
need not have fasted to reach an agreement with Ambedkar. But Gandhi's
relationship with the Indian people was not based on logic and legalism. It was
a highly emotional relationship. For the masses he was "Mahatma, the Great
soul." The moment the fast began, text, constitutions, awards, elections, etc.
lost their significance. "Gandhi's life has to be saved" was the cry. From the
date, when the fast was announced to the afternoon of 26 September when
Gandhi drank his fist orange juice, every change in his physical condition,
every word pronounced by everyone who had seen him was broadcast to the
every comer of the country. As Louis Fischer puts it: "A mother hovering over
the crib of a tender child during a high temperature crisis could be no more
anxious than the Indian that watched the white cot of the sinking Mahatma. No
mystic himself, Gandhi affected others mystically. They became one with him,

84 Moon, Vasant, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches (Bombay:
as one as mother and babe. Reason withdrew: passionately, frantically, because the end might have come at any instant, masses were reacting to a single throbbing wish: The Mahatma must not die."

Gandhi had made each Hindu personally responsible for his life. On 15 September, in a statement he said: "No patched-up agreement between caste Hindus and rival depressed classes leaders will answer the purpose. The agreement to be valid has to be real. If the Hindu mass mind is not yet prepared to banish untouchability root and branch, it must sacrifice me without the slightest hesitation."86

During the negotiations period the Hindu community experienced a religious emotional upheaval. Thousands of temples were opened for the untouchables. A spirit of reform, penance, and self-purification swept across the land.

A cold political agreement between Gandhi and Ambedkar, without a fast would not have had such effect on the nation, it might have redressed a legal Harijan grievance, but it would have remained a dead-letter as far as the Hindus' personal treatment of untouchables was concerned. Though the fast could not kill the cause of untouchability, which is thousands of years old, yet it forfeited its public approval, the belief in it was destroyed. In retrospect, the wrestling with Ambedkar over seats, primaries, and referendum seems like that years' melted snow on the Himalayas.

Some scholars are of the view that Indian history would have been written differently and with it destinies of the downtrodden untouchables, if Ambedkar had responded to Gandhi's threat to fast unto death, by himself, offering similar self-immolation as a strategy of persuading the Mahatma. But self-sacrifice as a technique of political action requires a courage determination and conviction to the cause of the highest order. Here, instead of causing any harm to the opponent, one sacrifices himself. This technique is

85 Ibid.
based on the domestic principle of love. Family matters are by and large solved by this principle. Being a moral substitute of other political actions for achieving the same purpose, what is being sought in those actions by inflicting sufferings on the opponent is sought by Gandhi by inviting suffering on himself.\textsuperscript{87}

Dr Ambedkar refrained from taking such an action. Instead, he chose the strategy of compromise and denunciation. He derived satisfaction from calling Gandhi's fast as "unheroic" and as an "adventure" saying that there was nothing noble about it and that it was a foul and filthy act. These angry and bitter words of Ambedkar reveal the depth of his anguish and also outright frustration. He found himself at the bitter end of a stick. He must have foreseen that if Gandhi died at that critical juncture, he will never be forgiven, not just by the caste Hindus but by a vast majority of untouchables and other Indians. The death of Gandhi could completely eclipse the political career of Ambedkar. Hence he clearly anticipated the reaction of the death of Gandhi and so in order to save his own skin he signed the pact.

Whatever may be the reason that weighed for Ambedkar for signing the pact, it forced on the Indian conscience the problem of untouchability as an issue of national concern. Earlier in response to Gandhi's claim that the proposals for limited electoral separation would arrest the marvelous work of Hindu reformers, Ambedkar answer was blunt and cold. He said: "There have been many Mahatmas in India whose sole object was to remove untouchability and to elevate and absorb the Depressed Classes, but everyone of them has failed in his mission. Mahatmas have come and Mahatmas have gone. But the untouchables have remained a untouchables."\textsuperscript{88}

But the fact that Gandhi had undertaken the fast was in itself a refutation of everything that Ambedkar said and could have said. It was not a

\textsuperscript{87} Jai Narain, Gandhi's View of Political Power, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

refutation based on reasons but on sentiments and moral coercion. The result was inevitably a compromise. Gandhi won on separate electorates; there were to be none. The rest of the terms of the Poona Pact show that Ambedkar made the best of bargain. 89

Ambedkar accepted a total of 148 reserved seats in all legislatures. Gandhi agreed to a collegiate procedure for election to reserved seats whereby a panel of four candidates belonging to the depressed classes will be the candidates for election by a general electorate: a kind of primary election procedure. This system was to continue for ten years, unless terminated by mutual agreement. The pact also provided that there shall be no disabilities to anyone, by reason of his being a member of the Depressed Classes, for election of local bodies or appointment to a public service. There was further agreement that an adequate sum of money shall be made available for providing educational facilities to the members of the Depressed Classes in every province.

Whatever be the merits of the pact, Gandhi’s victory represented, for him and others, the victory of the idea that the problem of untouchability was a social problem and not a political one and that it was a problem of Hindu religion and not of Hindu economy. Gandhi was of a very determined opinion that the social problems should be tackled socially, otherwise a lot of disgruntled political leaders would like to take political advantage from a social problem. The so-called messiahs of the Dalits in the present-day India belong to the same category and are not the genuine well-wishers of the depressed classes but take only the political benefit out of it. A mere glance at their aristocratic lifestyles, their palaces, bank balances, both in India and abroad, schooling of their children, and the like is sufficient to prove the veracity of the above observation.

The Mahatma was far ahead of his time and foresaw all these outcomes. Perhaps this was also one of the reasons that he advocated the social solution of this problem and did not allow any political advantage to any one. Human sufferings and disabilities, according to Gandhi, should not be used for mundane political purposes, rather genuine efforts should be made to ameliorate them.

The Communal award of 4th August gave the depressed classes in the eight provinces (all except N. W. F. P.) 71 seats in provincial councils in their own separate constituencies together with the right of contesting further seats in the Hindu or so-called 'general' constituencies. This latter right would have proved shadowy, frankly speaking. We use the word shadowy deliberately, without meaning any offence to the caste Hindus. In place of these 71 seats, plus a few more doubtful seats, the depressed classes get under the Agreement 148 seats reserved for them. This is a great service that Dr. Ambedkar has done to his own section of the Hindu community, and let us add to the whole Hindu community. If the caste Hindus have given away 25 seats, in addition to the 123 seats that Dr. Ambedkar could have fairly demanded on the population basis, i.e., in the ratio of depressed population to total Hindu population, it is but a poor recompense for the disabilities that have been imposed upon the oppressed classes for centuries past. If the whip of the Mahatma’s fast has made the comparatively advanced sections of the Hindu community give away a few more seats in councils, provincial as well as central, to the depressed classes and stirred them to undertake the collection and expenditure of a fund of 25 lakhs of rupees for their uplift, as the venerable Pandit Malaviya proclaimed in the Hindu leaders’ conference in Bombay, we cannot say that they have done an over-generous act, but only an act that ought to have been done years ago. But it is better late than never.

"Some people are likely to enquire why the proportion of depressed classes seats to Hindu seats in the Central Legislature was fixed by the Poona Agreement, when it did not form part of the Premier's Award, which was
sought to be modified. It may also be asked why franchise matters were discussed and agreed upon, before anything in that direction was decided by the R. T. C. or the British government. The wisdom of going generally into other questions of representation in local bodies and in services, as well as of educational grants, may be questioned by other. The reply is that, once the questions were raised by Ambedkar, it would have been very impolitic on the part of Hindu leaders to refuse to consider these questions on the merely technical ground that they were outside the scope of the Premier's award. The caste Hindus, in order to show their bona fides and their perfect good faith, had to consider them and meet the wishes of the depressed classes. This has been done, and the British government has taken note of these clauses as definite pledges of the intention of the caste Hindus towards the depressed classes. This is as it should be.\textsuperscript{90}

The Premier has now ratified the Poona Agreement and has agreed to substitute relevant parts of it for similar parts in his own Award. The Mahatma's fast has been broken, and the whole community-suppressing and suppressed sections together-is overjoyed at the result achieved so far. Let us in all humility put in a word of warning. The Mahatma is not a man to be easily satisfied with small results obtained at a moment of national crisis and threatened disaster. He will exact strenuous and thorough work of a constructive nature from the Hindu reformers. There is more in common between Mahatma Gandhi and me than with any of you gathered here', was said on two occasions by Dr. Ambedkar while addressing the Hindu leaders at Bombay and Poona Conferences. This is so true. The Hindu community will now be put on trial, and a very crucial trial, by the man of whom Sastri said at Coimbatore only on Saturday last: “His life, it would be presumptuous to say, is lived as few lived in history or fable have been lived.”\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{90} The Servant of India, September 29, 1932
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
Dr. Ambedkar, however, subsequently changed his mind and said that signing the Poona Pact was a sentimental blunder and he can never forgive himself for this blunder. He described his feelings in the following words: "The terms of the Poona Pact were accepted by Mr. Gandhi and given effect to by government by embodying them in the government of India Act. The Poona Pact had produced different reactions. The untouchables were sad. They had every reason to be. There are, however, people who do not accept this. They never fail to point out that the Poona Pact gave the untouchables larger number of seats than what was given to them by the Prime Minister in his Communal Award. It is true that the Poona Pact gave the untouchables 148 seats, while the Award had only given them 78. But to conclude from this that the Poona Pact gave them more than what was given by the Award is to ignore what the Award had in fact given to the untouchables.

As Dr Ambedkar himself put it, its increase in seats could never compensate for the priceless privilege of the second vote given to untouchables. The value of such a vote as a political weapon was beyond reckoning. The 1937 elections under the Poona Pact gave only 73 victorious candidates, the true and independent representatives, since 78 untouchable candidates elected were Congress Party members. Ambedkar could not help saying that the Congress made, through the Poona pact, a handsome profit on its political transactions. The grudge of Dr Ambedkar was very clear and unambiguous. As an untouchable he was of the very definite opinion that he should alone get the political advantage from such a situation and if some other party gets that advantage, it was not acceptable to him.

But what Dr Ambedkar could not foresee was the truth that he was more successful when in league with the nationalist forces. Whenever he tried to align himself with someone else or formed his own political outfit, he was a big failure. He himself could not, in one of the most enigmatic electoral

reversals in India, return himself from Bombay in opposition to the Congress nominee, N.S. Kajorolkar, who was a political light weight. He forfeited his security deposits and lost with a huge margin. With the efforts of his wife and the tacit support of Morarji Desai, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952.93

But Gandhi was much above such calculations. He intensified his efforts to eliminate untouchability during the next two decades. He sought to change the hearts of caste Hindus by moral pressure within the framework of Hindu traditions.

Among Gandhi's activities was the organisation of a group devoted to the removal of untouchability. Formed in Bombay on 30 September 1932, it was called the All India Untouchability League. Madan Mohan Malaviya presided at the first meeting. The industrialist G.D. Birla was named President and the Secretary was Amritlal V. Thakkar, a social worker among the tribes. Several untouchables were on the Central Board, including M.C. Rajah of Madras, named in 1927 as the first untouchable to serve in the Central Legislative Assembly, Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasna of Madras, Ambedkar's fellow delegate to the Round Table Conference. From his prison cell Gandhi issued a series of press statements and a stream of letters to numerous correspondents to educate the public on the evils of untouchability.

Gandhi was of the very definite opinion that untouchability was rather a plague and it was the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat it and warned that if untouchability lives, Hinduism must die.94 On resuming the publication of Young India, the Mahatma renamed it "Harijan" on 11 February 1933 as a measure to stress the urgency of the need to eradicate untouchability. For equating untouchables with the other sections of society, he started calling them "Harijan." The word means a "Man of God." He poured out the anguish of his soul when he said: "I do not want to be reborn, but if I have to be

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93 Keer, Dhanajay, Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission, op. cit., p. 437.
reborn, I should be born an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from the miserable conditions. I therefore pray that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.\footnote{Young India, 4-5-1921, p. 144.}

As Gandhi threw himself into the movement, he discovered that the evil was of a much greater magnitude than he had thought it first. The task before the reformer was stupendous. How was he to convince his coworkers to fight this age old evil? Gandhi’s anguish was brought to an end by a “call from within” to embark on a twenty-one-day fast in May 1933. In September 1933, he moved to Wardha and announced the gift of the Sabarmati Ashram to the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He set out on a countrywide tour to promote the Harijan cause. He called on caste Hindus to urge themselves of their prejudice against the Harijans, and he urged the Harijans to shake off the vices (drugs and drink) which hindered their absorption into Hindu society. He pleaded for the opening of temples to Harijans. Temples are for sinners, not for saints; but who is to judge whether no man is without sin? He ridiculed the superstitions that anybody could be unclean by birth, or that the shadow or touch of one human being could defile another human being.

Rabindranath delivered a speech on 27 September, in which he said:

“We know that, the Upanishads, the God who ever dwells in the hearts of all men has been mentioned as Mahatma. The epithet is rightly given to the Man of God whom we are honouring today, for his dwelling is not within a narrow enclosure of individual consciousness. His dwelling is in the heart of untold multitude who are born today in India and who are yet to come, and this greatness of his soul, which has power to comprehend other souls, has made possible what never has yet happened in our history, when even masses have been roused to the great fact that India is not merely a geographical entity but is a living truth in which they live and move and have their being.
"Today in our determined effort let us join Mahatmaji in his noble task of removing the burden of ages, the burden of disrespect upon the bent back of those who have been stigmatised for the accident of their birth, and the sin of wilful denial, to a large body of our countrymen, of sympathy which is the birthright of all human beings. We are not only casting off the chain of India's moral enslavement but indicating the path for all humanity. We are challenging the victimisation, wherever and in whatever form it may exist, to stand the test of relentless questioning of the conscience which Mahatmaji has brought to bear upon our day. When Mahatmaji began his penance there were cynics in our country and abroad who mocked and jeered at him, and yet before our very eyes the wonder has happened. Hard rocks of tradition have been blasted. Irrational prohibitions, cramping our national life, are already showing signs of tottering. Great has been the achievement due to his penance, but it will be a greater glory to him and to us if we can fulfil his vow by fighting to finish the evils of untouchability of intolerance, of all that hinders the comradeship of man and man and obstructs our path to freedom and righteousness. My friends, I appeal to you, do not betray your Great Man and your own humanity by any deviation of your initiative from the pursuit of justice and love towards your fellow men who have suffered humiliation for ages and remained dumb in a pathetic apathy of resignation, never even blaming providence and their own cruel destiny. But the angry voice has at last come from the Divine Guide of our history with its warning message that they cut at the root of freedom who, in their unreasoning pride, obstruct the freedom of social communication among own kindreds".

Jawaharlal Nehru sent the following telegram to Gandhiji: "Your telegram and brief news that some settlement reached filled me with relief and joy. First news of your decision to fast caused mental agony and confusion, but ultimately optimism triumphed and I regained peace of mind. No sacrifice is too great for suppressed downtrodden classes. Freedom must be judged by

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96 Pyarelal, op. cit., pp. 92-94.
freedom of the lowest but feel danger of other issues obscuring only goal. I am unable to judge from a religious viewpoint any danger of your methods being exploited by others but how can I presume to advise a magician Love".

J. B. Kripalani said: "Gandhiji's success in this matter raised the sagging morale of the people and infused new hope in them. Out of this crisis, India emerged morally superior to her opponents". N. B. Ranga said: "Ambedkar's attack upon Gandhiji's insistence upon keeping Harijans within the fold of Hindus, i.e., within the joint electorates, was intemperate, unkind and unjust. His insistence upon his pound of flesh, during Gandhiji’s Poona fast against Ramsay MacDonald's Award in favour of separate electorates for Scheduled Castes, hurt the feelings of the nationalists although it forced the orthodox leaders of Hindus to yield to his demands for protection of Scheduled Castes through reservation of seats within joint electorates. In the end, he won the generous approval of Gandhiji and political admiration of Rajaji, to whom he presented the pen with which he signed the famous Poona Pact. I had quite a painful time in defending his basic stand to my political fellows in Vellore Jail. In the end Gandhiji's life was saved and joint electorates were accepted. All were pleased with that powerful champion of the Harijans".

In his article entitled "The Revolution is Over," C. Rajagopalachari wrote: "Untouchability is not yet gone. But the revolution is really over and what remains is but the removal of the debris." This was probably an optimistic verdict but there is no doubt that the reformists had made a good beginning. The Congress Ministers in 1937-39 removed some of the legal disabilities of the Harijans and untouchability itself became illegal in the Constitution of free India. The Constituent Assembly of independent India enacted a provision legally abolishing untouchability on 29 November 1948,

97 Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, p. 8
that is, nine months after the death of Mahatma Gandhi. As the measure was opposed, the house resounded with the cries of "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" (Victory to Mahatma Gandhi), "a tribute to Gandhi's thirty years' efforts to remove the practice of untouchability from the Indian scene. Present at the session of the Constituent Assembly as Chairman of the drafting Committee for the Constitution was Dr B.R. Ambedkar, an untouchable. Three years before, he had ended his book "What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables" with the bitter words, "The Untouchables ... have ground to say: Good God: Is this man Gandhi our saviour?"  

To summarize, we can safely conclude that Gandhi was not very much enthusiastic about reservation. He was against spoon-feeding. Rather he wanted to make them self-sufficient so that they are not in the need of any outside help. Reservation was not only against his personal belief but also against his whole programme of social reconstruction and regeneration. Expressing his apprehension he said on December 5, 1931, "I could not possibly be a party to such reservations... But we are told there must be all these reservations and safeguards. It would not be liberty and responsible government, but it would be all safeguards. Safeguards would eat away the whole of Government.

Gandhi strongly opposed the demand for the separate representation of the untouchables and had to resort to fast unto death in September 1932 to oppose the Communal Award. He reluctantly agreed, in the words of Pyare Lal his Secretary, 'not to make reservation of seats an issue of the fast' and only insisted that the separate electorates were to be replaced by joint electorates.

He was of the confirmed view that the very purpose of the social justice will be forfeited if the reservation is made on caste basis. This should be for the weaker sections of society. To him, weaker sections included people

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99 Ambedkar, B. R., What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables?, op. cit., p. 89.
in rural and urban areas leading a life of deprivation irrespective of caste or communities. In his view the backward and weaker sections were not confined to scheduled and backward classes or scheduled tribes only but included the poor and oppressed population of the entire country. If there is a section of people among the scheduled or backward classes, who is economically sound and are not backward in any other sense except their caste, giving the benefit of reservation to them is not at all justified. Rather these privileged few are exploiting their own deprived fellows in their own castes.

It is in the interest of this category not to make any particular attempt in educating the generations to come, but at the same time continue demanding more concessions.

Gandhi would like to provide minimum needs such as food, shelter, and clothing to each and every individual. His celebrated talisman was an apt and characteristic expression of his deep devotion for the down trodden. As he put it in his own inimitable way:

“\(\text{I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following text. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man (of any caste, creed or religion), whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions”)\n
Nor were his views a political weapon or an ideological stance. As Gurudev Tagore aptly said of him:

“He stopped at the threshold of the huts of the thousands of dispossessed dressed like one of their own. He spoke to them in their own language. Here was living truth at last, not only quotations from books. For this reason the Mahatma, the name given to him by the people of India, is his real name. Who else felt like him that all Indians are his own flesh and blood? When love come to the door of India, that door was opened wide. At Gandhi’s
call India blossomed forth to new greatness, just as once before, in earlier times, when Buddha proclaimed the truth of fellow feeling and compassion among all his living creatures".  

His heart used to bleed to see the sufferings of these people and he did whatever he could do to ameliorate their sufferings. He went to the extent of saying that though he did not wish to have rebirth, but if at all he was to take a birth again, he should be reborn as a Harijan so that he may have an firsthand experience of their lots and sufferings and what it mean to be a Harijan.

Apart from the heart felt feelings and concern for them the Mahatma had a definite approach towards upliftment of Harijans. His efforts were to make them self-sufficient and not parasites, so that they may stand on their own feet and compete on equal footing with the other section of the society. He was not in favour of any kind of doles, reservations etc. for Scheduled Castes, as we see today.

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