

# **Democracy and the Persistence of Caste: Revisiting the Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate**

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To  
**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the  
**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

By

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**DECLARATION**

I, **Biplove Kumar**, hereby declare that the research work embodied in the thesis titled **“Democracy and the Persistence of Caste: Revisiting the Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate”** submitted to **Sikkim University** for the Award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is my original work. Any content or any part of this thesis has not been submitted to any other institutions or for any academic purposes.

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All assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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**Date:**

**Biplove Kumar**



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*निंदक नियरे राखिये, आँगन कुटी छवाय,  
बिन पानी, साबुन बिना निर्मल करे सुभाय।*

(Keep your critic close. You get to know your fault if someone criticizes you, and you have a chance to correct them. Give your critics shelter in your courtyard and listen to the criticism without annoyance, because critic is not your enemy, he is helping you to clean the rubbish from your life and thought processes without soap and water)

By

**Kabir Das**

(Medieval Indian poet and Bhakti movement Saint)

**DEDICATED TO  
BAPU, BABASAHEB AND INDIA'S ARGUMENTATIVE  
TRADITION.**

## Introduction

*“No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction” - Article 15 (2), The Constitution of India.<sup>1</sup>*

India is known for its democracy. But beyond the proffered understanding of India's political democracy, a perusal of Indian society generates a common view point that - the anathema of casteism has marred the idea justice and equality. From various episodes of social injustices to National Crimes Records Bureau's annual statistics, the victimisation and exclusion on the basis of caste remains a glaring reality of contemporary India. Both counter factual debates and facts support this hypothesis. It remains one of the biggest paradoxes of Indian democracy. And it sustains under the belly of much magnified and dignified epithet of the 'world's largest democracy'.

Historically, the founding fathers and mothers of India, not only shared apprehensions related to democratic institutions and its praxis; but also were fully aware of the fact that, addressing the caste issue, remained crucial towards building a cohesive nation, capable of fulfilling the needs and aspirations of a modern democratic society. The Republican Constitution of India formally through various Articles (14, 15, 17, 46 et al.), have abolished discrimination on the basis of caste. However, the canker of casteism with its vulgar phenomenon of untouchability has not only defied political and legal protections, but has also transformed itself under the new state apparatus. This phenomenon is being described in academic circles as the 'politicisation of caste'. The atrocities that gyrate around casteism and its magnitude have shown the limitations of constitutional and legal protections. It culminates into constitutional deficit. This particular deficit has been created by

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<sup>1</sup>Article 15 (2), Right To Equality (Part III, Fundamental Right). *The Constitution of India*, Retrieved From: [https://www.india.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/npi/files/coi\\_part\\_full.pdf](https://www.india.gov.in/sites/upload_files/npi/files/coi_part_full.pdf), Date: 03/01/2017.



behavioural pattern dipped into the institution of caste, which has duly blocked the constitutional morality. With the economic and political advances, caste has become more dynamic and the tools of domination and suppression have changed.

Both social and political revolutions were integral to India's struggle for independence. Social revolutions saw both reformist and revivalist movements and became the crucial part of modern India's historical discourse. But, the whole project of social reform was either put on hold or remained secondary during the struggle for freedom. The Constitution of India, with its promulgation, duly focussed on the idea of social and economic democracies and made them the 'prime concerns' of the nation. Notwithstanding the ideas and vision on paper and the promise attached to it, in the post-independent India apart from some crucial social engineering projects, the whole idea of socio – economic reforms has lost its edge. Caste has not only been politicised, but has also, democratically institutionalised itself. And together they have negated and nullified the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity which remained and remains crucial for equality and justice. Modernity and legality seem to have been overshadowed by 'traditional legitimacy' of caste mindedness. Precisely, the idea of social justice and equality remains a distant dream along with victimisation and exclusion based on the institution of caste.

As the source to institutions and legal protections, related to social justice and equality remains deeply rooted in India's constitution and the present remains questionable - the past events certainly provide lessons for consideration. Several questions like, is democracy only about just institutions and power politics or is it beyond that? Is the 'idea of India' only about political democracy? If the founding fathers vouched for social and economic democracies, can political democracy alone become an end in itself? If the Constitution of India promised equality, justice and

annihilation of caste through different tools, why does caste still persist with such magnitude? What were the apprehensions of India's law makers? How and in what way can constitutional values be revisited for the social transformative agendas? In what way the ideals and ideas of India's founding fathers can become a guiding light for social transformation? Et.al..

The crux of all these questions duly gyrate around the minds, who not only debated and developed the idea of India but also comprehended and apprehended the limitations attached to it. Colonialism played a key role in the democratisation process of India. Through its classical idea of 'civilizing burden or mission' it established the 'caste' as synonym to Indian 'civil society' in pre-independent India. Caste was also projected as an anathema towards India's democratising zeal and vis - a - vis towards a 'nation' in the modern sense of the term. This occidental discourse allowed several social reformers to reflect upon their inner domain. And they, through different roadmaps, proposed options for change and continuity. Their ideas and the argumentational discourse, time and again, challenged any linear or homogenous democratic framework sans socio- economic upliftment. In fact, the trajectory of India's democratic framework is immensely dominated by 'contestations of ideas' and different vocabularies.

Apart from the various heterogeneous ideas which contributed towards the 'ideal modern nation' in making, the discourse and the hermeneutic engagement between Ambedkar and Gandhi is regarded as the most prominent one. In all historical fairness, it was after the holistic debate between the two that the whole idea of reforms and upliftment of the oppressed gained momentum and primacy. They both became the conscience keepers of the political or the national revolution which transformed into India's independence. The two decades (1920's - 40's) not only

witnessed the holistic engagement between Gandhi and Ambedkar but also created space for the social reform agenda to stand in front of the political one. The twain also became and remained the catalyst for each other. The Constitution of India duly reflects the ideas and ideals of the two personalities in the context of caste and untouchability. What united them was the idea that, the political democracy should become a 'means' for social justice and equality and also apprehensions related to that process.

As the victimization and exclusion creates impasse in the context of social justice and equality – it often leads to re – interrogation of and re-examine the ideas and ideals which the Indian constitution has duly promised. It is because it reflects the promise and truth that came out due to the argumentational traditions of India's social and political revolution. And Ambedkar – Gandhi's holistic journey remains its strongest contributor. Beyond the ideological and political disagreements, both, through their different paradigms tried to eradicate manifest injustices around them. Their impact on the idea of India remains such that they remain the most revisited leaders of our times and their engagement not only dominates contemporary political and policy oriented discourses, but even the common public spaces.

To mould history in order to satisfy the political time and spaces and to polarise people is nothing more than an anti-intellectual act which leads to the denial of history. Today, Ambedkar and Gandhi has been reduced to the politics of whataboutery and false binaries. Their ideas and ideals remain in isolation or sustains on episodes from history. They have been iconized through polemics, politics and statues or debated through a basic question - as to who remains the greatest personality. This phenomenon dominates the contemporary discourse and has even frozen in their respective and dialogical historicity. Pitting Gandhi and Ambedkar

against each other has certainly benefited the political magnates to stand firmly under democratic umbrella; but the whole vision of social equality and justice, as propagated by the two visionaries, seems to have been betrayed. Ideas and ideals related to social transformation and justice have become 'weak and stagnant' because of standardized positioning of Gandhi and Ambedkar against each other.

The whole discourse of Gandhi and Ambedkar revolves around self – purification and self – respect respectively. They tried different trajectories to achieve justice and equality for the oppressed millions. A whole range of scholarly work and ideological perceptions firmly believed that, the twain can never meet or they are antithetical to each other. But these views have not benefited Indian social fabric and social injustice still prevails.

Although, social engineering projects after independence presented bold experiments in Indian history; politics and policies of social justice in India have reached a dead end. Law and various protections by the constitution gave, what Ambedkar, Gandhi and other radical leaders fought for, but the idea of a casteless society remains a distant dream. Questions that are being raised today needs serious attention. The persisting victimization and divisions need to be purged out in order to fill the vacuum, which has been created in the context of institutionalisation of India's institutions.

Associated living, social democracy, swaraj, fluidity among masses, idea of oneness, like mindedness, self-purification, self – respect, et.al, depend on the behavioural pattern and is much beyond politico- legal question. These all are the ingredients of social relationship, which defines the ideal contours of a democratic society sans any barriers of social anathema. Gandhi called it as love and morality



ingrained in humanity and for Ambedkar it was all about constitutional morality. And both believed it has to be cultivated among the masses for justice and equality in the real sense of the term. One of the leading contemporary scholars on justice, Dr. Amartya Sen, defines justice in terms of “*Niti*” (institutions like Constitution, Fundamental rights, rule of law et.al.) and “*Nyaya*”(how that institutions works in a long run to provide justice and equality). And this particular theory remains in similitude with Gandhi’s swaraj and Ambedkar’s idea of social democracy.

This study is an attempt to revisit the ideas and ideals of Ambedkar’s social democracy and Gandhi’s Swaraj and to go beyond the much debated existing theories and false binaries. The attempt explores how they both looked and envisaged the idea of India, which went beyond the prospects of *Niti* or political democracy. There can and had existed different trajectories towards justice and equality. The discourse of Ambedkar and Gandhi or their different paradigms stretch much more beyond their iconization and isolation of their personalities. The study thus focuses on the argumentative tradition of the Ambedkar - Gandhi and how it can show the way in our times; as both the leaders’ remains relevant in different ways devoid of their limitations. One can be selective with their arguments in order to divide the masses. But, as a whole, the Ambedkar- Gandhi debate sets the agenda for social justice and equality. It shows where we have failed and it also shows where we have to try to get to. It sums up for the transformative mission for social democracy and swaraj; which the democratic constitution of India has duly promised to its citizens.

## Literature Review:

Democracy has many connotations attached to it. If there is one true meaning then it is indeed, as Plato opined, ‘stored up in heaven’.<sup>2</sup> India adopted the Westminster style of Parliamentary democracy after its Independence. But, it also contributed its own genuine and syncretic ideas to it. Democratic India’s constitution remains one of the most advanced and forward looking documents of the twentieth century. The Constitution is basically a modernist document in its central concerns, conceptual framework and design of the state.<sup>3</sup> Dr Ambedkar defined democracy ‘as more than a form of government’, for him, ‘it is primarily a mode of associated living’.<sup>4</sup> Granville Austin writes, ‘India’s original contribution to the constitution making lies in its immense capacity of accommodation, the ability to reconcile, to harmonise and make work without changing their content apparently incompatible concepts’.<sup>5</sup>

Both social sensibilities and responsibilities were reflected in the churning process among leaders, right after India’s Independence. These were reflected in the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD) in a pronounced manner. The institution of caste (along with several other issues like the women’s question, Scheduled Tribes and minorities’ issues) was duly debated and concerns were raised in context of its eradication and how to tread on the path of social democracy. H.J Khandekar, an untouchable member from Berar in the Constituent Assembly, was of the opinion that

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<sup>2</sup> Crick, Bernard. *Democracy: A Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, 2015, p.32.

<sup>4</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe and Kumar, Narendra, Editors. *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*. Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018, p.241.

<sup>5</sup> Austin, Granville. *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.396.

“State law is one thing, social practise is another”.<sup>6</sup> The whole process reflected concerns related to the future of the oppressed people in the Republican Democracy of India. These apprehensions were also shared by the founding fathers who mapped out the idea of India. Dr Ambedkar, the chief architect of India’s Constitution, was of the view that, ‘political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it, social democracy’.<sup>7</sup> And Gandhi, who remained the supreme leader of India’s struggle for Independence, was of the view that, *Swaraj* is yet to be achieved.<sup>8</sup> It is because of these apprehensions related to the political independence, that, several legal and constitutional protections through various institutions were charted out for justice and equality. Indian state became a welfare state. Both national and social revolutions of pre – Independent India became the conscience of India’s constitution.<sup>9</sup> The document promised Justice through equality, liberty and fraternity.

James Manor views that post - Independence trajectories related to India’s politics, ‘have undergone significant changes, altering somewhat, the rules of engagement between politics and society’.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that social engineering projects hold an important place in India’s affirmative programmes,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.114

<sup>7</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS), Volume 13*. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p.1243. Retrieved From: <https://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 07/02/2016

<sup>8</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.107.

<sup>10</sup> Kothari, Rajni. Editor. *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, p. Xiii

<sup>11</sup> Yadav, Yogendra. *Rethinking Social Justice*. India Seminar, 2012. Retrieved From: [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601\\_yogendra\\_yadav.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_yogendra_yadav.htm). 03/01/2016

with the economic and political advances, the tools of domination and suppression have changed. Democracy in other words is related to the government with numbers. The whole project of social reform is dominated by political advancements and the power discourse. Caste remains a dynamic institution and adaptable to new changes. And with modern democracy, the new phenomenon of ‘sectional elevation’ of one caste or group has become the new feature of social reform movement. It is a process related to one caste or community, who with their numbers try to acquire economic and political privileges and change the vertical power base of caste into the horizontal segmentation of power.<sup>12</sup> Sectional elevations have certainly changed some relationships within the caste system; but it leaves the basis of caste unaltered.<sup>13</sup> The undeniable fact in the contemporary discourse is that politicians calculate their prospects on caste lines and leaders are too chosen on this basis.<sup>14</sup> Politics has also caught up with the upper and oppressed class people in a big way because it is seen as the means to secure state power.<sup>15</sup> The inherent contradictions among lower castes and segmentation of hierarchies have created a new class of oppressors. Despite of the motion set in by the state, regional and caste based political parties; Dalits have had to contend with a new kind of oppressive structure that could be described as “Neo –

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<sup>12</sup> As the institution of caste has institutionalised and politicise itself; the new approach of caste communities to gain power through political and democratic framework has been described by scholars and academicians as Horizontal segmentation (solidarity or Jati clusters) of power. Rammanohar Lohia in his work ‘*The Caste System*’ (1964); Dipankar Gupta in his work ‘*Interrogating Caste: understanding hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*’ (2000); Rajani Kothari (ed.) in his work ‘*Caste in Indian Politics*’ (2015); and M.N. Srinivas in his work ‘*Social Change in Modern India*’ (2016) – have studied and debated this phenomenon.

<sup>13</sup> Lohia, Rammanohar. *The Caste System*. Navahind Prakashan, 1964, pp.100-101.

<sup>14</sup> Gupta, Dipankar. *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society*, Penguin Books, Haryana, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Crisis of Ambedkarites and Future Challenges*. 2011. Counter Currents. Org. Retrieved From: <https://www.countercurrents.org/teltumbde220411.htm>. 03/01/2016



Brahminism”.<sup>16</sup> Anand Teltumbde targets this neo – Brahminism as a phenomenon among the Dalits also. He aptly opines; “even the current pseudo-intellectual trends like Dalit capitalism, Dalit bourgeois, etc. can also be seen as mere aping the models of larger societies.”<sup>17</sup> The canker of casteism with the concepts such as sanskritization, neo – Brahminism, sectional elevation, horizontal segmentation of power, caste groups and identity assertions, et al., have re – invented itself. Precisely, caste with modern institution and tools of politics has accommodated itself within the new framework and this has strengthened the clout of caste hegemony which is based upon the idea of graded inequalities.

Holistically, moving on to the facts, Caste remains the most overwhelming factor in Indian life. Those who deny it in principle also accept it in practise.<sup>18</sup> Empirical studies also quite clearly depict this regressive feature of Indian democracy. The latest Socio – Economic caste census data, released in July 2015, reveals that 1, 80,657 households are still engaged in the degrading work of manual Scavenging.<sup>19</sup> Manual Scavenging is a practise or rather a menial job that was assigned to untouchables (outcastes on the basis of pollution versus purity principles), under the domain of caste oppression. Flash points of obnoxious violence from Belchi to Khairlanji to Una depict the failure of the state and republican Constitution of India, which thrives under the much magnified and dignified success of political democracy.

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<sup>16</sup> Ananth, Krishna. V.. *Politics in the Times of Churning: A Journalist Perception*. Daya Publications, Madurai, 2014, p.2017

<sup>17</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Crisis of Ambedkarites and Future Challenges*. 2011. Counter Currents. Org. Retrieved From: <https://www.countercurrents.org/teltumbde220411.htm>. 03/01/2016

<sup>18</sup> Lohia, Rammanohar. *The Caste System*. Navahind Prakashan, 1964, p.79

<sup>19</sup> Venkat, Vidya. (2015, July 9). *Manual scavenging still a reality*. The Hindu. Retrieved from:<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manual-scavenging-still-a-reality-socioeconomic-caste-census/article7400578.ece>. 09/04/2016.

Casteism has become stronger with the *Jati* – clusters, often banded together to maximise their numerical strength in the hope of gaining advantages, in public sphere.<sup>20</sup> Caste also became the heated controversy that ran parallel to the politics from the 1970s to the 1990s. The rise of regional parties and the utilisation of caste as a platform in politics have become common. Beginning with the birth of the Dalit Panthers to the process Mandalisation, caste has entrenched itself everywhere as the unit of social action. Far from disappearing, caste continues to have a determining influence in and on Indian society.<sup>21</sup> This rising self-consciousness escalated caste conflicts and the Dalits usually remained on receiving end of this.<sup>22</sup> The whole idea of social justice was and remains fragmented.<sup>23</sup> Several laws have been passed during the course of the seventy plus years but the idea of a casteless and egalitarian society is yet to be realised.

Social Democracy or social justice in India is largely referred to connote the entire gamut of affirmative actions aimed at redressing caste inequalities. But policies and politics of social justice have reached a dead end in contemporary India.<sup>24</sup> One of the major paradoxes that the world's largest democracy faces is the manifest injustices that exist because of casteism.<sup>25</sup> Caste has politicised and been institutionalised with

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<sup>20</sup> Kothari, Rajni. Editor. *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, p. Xix.

<sup>21</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World's Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.606

<sup>22</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World's Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.616

<sup>23</sup> Yadav, Yogendra. Rethinking Social Justice. *India Seminar*, 2012. Retrieved From: [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601\\_yogendra\\_yadav.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_yogendra_yadav.htm). 03/01/2016

<sup>24</sup> Yadav, Yogendra. Rethinking Social Justice. *India Seminar*, 2012. Retrieved From: [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601\\_yogendra\\_yadav.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_yogendra_yadav.htm). 03/01/2016

<sup>25</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. *Indian Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.159- 163.

modernity and democracy and itself has become a political category.<sup>26</sup> Casteism has become the biggest debility towards the nation's agenda of social justice. Victimization and exclusion still remains a challenge. The question arises as to why and what went wrong, that still such exclusion and victimization prevails in spite of the constitutional provisions and institutional promises. Often when faced with an impasse or reaching a dead end, the state of affairs provides an opportunity to look back and consider the path which is being tracked and do a course of correction.<sup>27</sup> History, thus, presents and generates an opportunity to draw lessons for consideration.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout India, the very crux of caste or subaltern movements was to make constitutional promises a verity since the 1950s. To ask what has happened to all those movements and why it has lost its edge is a moot question. The Constitution of India remains the power house of the Indian state. It is this document around which the life of the Indian citizens revolves. And it is because of this that the Constitution has always been termed as 'living document'.<sup>29</sup> The document reflects the dreams and aspirations of the concerned society. It is because of this particular promise made to its citizens through this document that the subaltern caste movements, assertions and social transformations have, time and again, got its legitimacy and refuge in

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<sup>26</sup> Kothari, Rajni. Editor. *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, p.5.

<sup>27</sup>Yadav, Yogendra. *Rethinking Social Justice*. *India Seminar*, 2012. Retrieved From: [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601\\_yogendra\\_yadav.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_yogendra_yadav.htm). 03/01/2016

<sup>28</sup> Arnold, John H.. *History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Sen, Ronojoy. *India's Living Constitution* (23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2010), *Times Of India*, Retrieved From: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Indias-Living-Constitution/articleshow/5490343.cms>, 25/04/2016.

India's constitution. The ideals and ideas behind the Indian Constitution or the historical discourse of our founding fathers have played a key role in channelizing the subaltern assertions and their consciousness. The Ambedkarite assertion that started with the Dalit Panthers remains a perfect example. In fact the politics and policies have obtained its strength from the historical figures and their ideals and such history has duly become the driving force for subaltern caste movements. And Gandhi – Ambedkar's discourse and their different paradigms remain the prominent part of this particular phenomenon. As the politics and policies of subaltern caste movements and their vocabularies shifted from 'Harijan to Dalit', the historical engagement and the relevance of both personalities have remained intact in contemporary times. But as the idea of social justice and transformation of ground realities have lost its edge, so does the ideals and vision of the two personalities.

Ramchandra Guha opines, 'the history of Dalit's (oppressed people) emancipation is un-finished. It should, and will, find space for many heroes.'<sup>30</sup> It remains a noted fact that, both Gandhi and Ambedkar, through the politics of iconisation, have become the heroes in different time and spaces (suited to different political perceptions); but the whole trajectory has betrayed their ideas time and again.<sup>31</sup>

Colonialism played a key role in the democratisation process of India. In fact the promulgation of India's constitution remains a long journey and has a certain legacy which started with several democratic reforms initiated by the British rulers. Not only that caste was reinvented, objectified and ossified, but along with it socio-

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<sup>30</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> Kumar, Biplove. *The Evolution of Gandhi's Approach to Caste and Untouchability*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Sikkim University, 2016.

political heterogeneous narratives sprang up. Although, caste itself has a history and one can trace its origin to the Rigveda's *Purushukta* hymn,<sup>32</sup> the whole idea of water tight Varna system, social reform and revival movements, caste consciousness, justice, equality, liberty, fraternity et al. that came up with modernity and west were in fact the by-products of Colonialism.<sup>33</sup> In other words, notwithstanding its origin in the ancient past, the idea of caste, as we know it today in academic writings and popular imagination, began to be shaped only during the British colonial period.<sup>34</sup> Through its classical idea of 'civilizing white's man burden or mission' the British rulers established 'caste' as a synonym to Indian 'civil society' in pre-independent India.<sup>35</sup> Caste was also projected as an anathema towards India's democratising zeal and vis - a- vis towards a 'nation' in the modern sense of the term. This occidental discourse allowed several social reformers to reflect upon their inner and outer domain.<sup>36</sup>

The whole phenomenon and transformation associated with India's democracy and modernity was resolutely determined by its 'colonial raj' and both Ambedkar and Gandhi belonged to that discourse.

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<sup>32</sup> Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone Age to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century*. Pearson, 2016, p. 202.

<sup>33</sup> A number of scholars and writers on caste have firmly written about this process of ossification of caste under Colonialism. Nicholas B, Dirks in his work '*Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*' (2016); M.N Srinivas in his work '*Social Change in Modern India*' (2017); And Sashi Tharoor in his '*An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*' (2016) - defines the crucial relationship between colonialism and caste and how it was objectified and solidified.

<sup>34</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2016, p.5.

<sup>35</sup> Tharoor, Sashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph Publication, New Delhi, 2016, p. 124.

<sup>36</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.189.

While the process of social reformation was taken up by several reformers during the course of the independence movement, the discourse of Gandhi and Ambedkar proved to be a holistic one. It is because of their efforts that social reformation and movements not only gained momentum but ran parallel to the political one. It was Gandhi who made untouchability a national concern.<sup>37</sup> And it was Ambedkar who challenged Gandhi on the issues related to caste, Varna and the homogenous narrative of political democracy.<sup>38</sup> Amartya Sen<sup>39</sup> and Bhikhu Parekh<sup>40</sup> through their path breaking works have argued that the argumentative traditions and debating culture forged the idea of India. The two decades long debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi saw several verbal duels and they followed different paradigms; but what united them was their view to eradicate injustices around them. They, with their argumentative tradition, changed the idea of social transformation. In spite of their differences they transformed each other immensely.<sup>41</sup> It was Gandhi who vouched for Ambedkar's place in India's first cabinet.<sup>42</sup> And it was Ambedkar, who became the conscience keeper of the Mahatma.

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<sup>37</sup> Modern India's historians and academicians firmly accept the fact that, it was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who made untouchability a national concern. The argument is not only present in the works of Gandhian scholars, but right from Ambedkar to caste and Dalit historians. Christophe Jaffrelot in his work *'Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability'* (2015); Rajmohan Gandhi in his work *'Why Gandhi Still Matters'* (2017); and Joseph Lelyveld in work *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India'* (2011) et al. remains some of the example which duly mentions Gandhi as first leader to make untouchability a national concern.

<sup>38</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Annihilation of Caste*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p.42.

<sup>39</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative India: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*. Penguin Books, London, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p.2. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>42</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 118.

The concept of justice can follow a difference of opinions and theorists with their viewpoints and perspectives can have varied approaches towards its understanding. There can exist several distinct reasons of justice.<sup>43</sup> And beyond the limitations and change – which both Ambedkarite and Gandhian paradigm went through - the thought of justice and equality dominated their work and political spaces. Gandhi's Swaraj and Ambedkar's social democracy or social endosmosis remains similar at constitutive levels. And it is because of their holistic argumentational traditions that the Indian Constitution gave primacy and legitimacy to legal and constitutional protections which became the means towards justice.

Contemporary works have isolated both Ambedkar and Gandhi from their argumentational discourse. The two decades long debate that transformed the history of India as a nation have been reduced to episodes, whataboutery, statues or as to who remains the greatest among the two. D.R. Nagraj has termed the whole phenomenon as 'seductive charm of history'.<sup>44</sup> The contemporary discourse has either made Ambedkar and Gandhi's differences irreconcilable<sup>45</sup> or points out that both shall be heroes'.<sup>46</sup> But both the approaches remain problematic if looked from the lenses of history. The irony of ironies is that to understand the nature of Babasaheb's political

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<sup>43</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010,p.X

<sup>44</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>45</sup> Arundhati Roy with her introduction to '*Annihilation of Caste*' (*The Doctor and The Saint*), have reignited such kind of debate and approaches towards Ambedkar and Gandhi narratives. Ambedkar, B.R.. *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 16-141.

<sup>46</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, pp.92-100

career one has to place it along with Gandhiji's for the apparent divergence between the two will highlight the unique problems of the former.<sup>47</sup>

The era of iconization boosted the divisive politics and agendas to divide the masses. On the one hand, ruling classes needed some means to reconsolidate the independent masses and on the other masses were disillusioned by their leaders, nostalgically needed an icon to lean upon. These two processes resonated into the creation of Ambedkar icons, sourced from the persona of the historical Ambedkar sans complexity and profundity in latter, so as to have mass appeal.<sup>48</sup> And it is with this particular process, to project one as hero that Gandhi and Ambedkar became bogeyman to each other. With the subaltern caste leaders seeking to establish an exclusivist identity through articulation of new symbols and heroes, Ambedkar's name reappeared in the Indian political discourse in the 1980s.<sup>49</sup> For caste based parties, Ambedkar became the greatest social reformer to fight against the social inequalities. If Ambedkar was negated or marginalised from history till the 1980s, by Indian politics and Gandhi was personified; the whole process of Ambedkar's personification and iconisation witnessed a mollification of Gandhi's image as a social reformer.

Dalit scholars and Ambedkarites negated the works of Gandhi and termed him as a biggest anathema that blocked their development. Gandhi's work became paternalistic, as was perhaps expected of caste Hindu reformism.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 1. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>48</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Crisis of Ambedkarites and Future Challenges*. 2011. Counter Currents. Org. Retrieved From: <https://www.countercurrents.org/teltumbde220411.htm>. 03/01/2016

<sup>49</sup> Ananth, V. Krishna. *Politics in The Time of Churning*. Daya Publication, Chennai, 2014 p. 223

<sup>50</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards and Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004.



Time and again, the discourse of Gandhi – Ambedkar was interrogated to provide lifeline political manoeuvres. Ambedkar became the Dalit God although he considered himself as idol breaker and always stood against idol worship in politics.<sup>51</sup> It is clear that with all politics, flags and statues, Dalits have placed Ambedkar on top of the world.<sup>52</sup> A similar trend or approach was adopted by the Congress party after Independence in the context of Gandhi. As Ambedkar became the symbol of the political mobilization of the lower castes,<sup>53</sup> the campaign to malign Gandhi, the enemy within, also started. Social Democracy of Ambedkar and Swaraj of Gandhi was negated and was duly dominated by the cult of divisive politics and political propaganda. Several parties appropriated Ambedkar and feared that their defence of Gandhi would erode their vote banks. Analysing this particular phenomenon in its early stages, Madhu Limaye wrote, ‘the new mantle of Prophethood, conceals the inner core of power politics and hunger’.<sup>54</sup>

To mould history is an anti – intellectual strategy which leads to the denial of history. Partial views were utilised in the context of Gandhi and Ambedkar, which allowed the passionate forces to act. The discourse from the beginning of the Round Table Conferences and up to the Poona Pact became the final layout of Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s personality assessment. This assessment ignored the evolving spaces of both the leaders and narrowed down their visions. History, in all senses, became episodic and selective. But, we can no more hold Gandhi’s defence of *Varna* system

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<sup>51</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate. *Economic & Political Weekly*. 2011, Volume XLVI. No. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards and Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumabi, 2004, p.

<sup>53</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.616.

<sup>54</sup> Limaye, Madhu. *Manu, Gandhi and Ambedkar: And Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2016p, p.16-17.

in his early stages against him than we can hold Dr. Ambedkar's opposition to adult franchise and representation for *Adivasis* and so called criminal tribes in the period from 1928 to 1945 against him.<sup>55</sup> The fact remains that they both evolved with time and space.

The twain, never met in their lifetime, but, their visions did. Both worked as a catalyst upon each other. The importance of their discourse is that they both strived for an egalitarian society. Iconisation and politicisation have utilised Gandhi and Ambedkar for self-benefits. Whenever the question of Dalits and Caste comes, the debate of Gandhi and Ambedkar still tend to find important episodes. History pitted Gandhi and Ambedkar as adversaries. Their public exchanges were marked by acrimony.<sup>56</sup> But it is hard to negate that they were complementary to each other at a fundamental level.<sup>57</sup>

The trajectory of Gandhi changed, corrected and thus evolved over time. But there was one thing consistent with his path since his early years as a social reformer; Gandhi stressed on the idea of self –purification.<sup>58</sup> For Gandhi, the roots of the problem were not about the untouchables practising untouchability or the caste system; it is the *Savarna* or the upper castes doing this and hence they have to purify their minds and hearts. Gandhi wanted behavioural redemption to clean caste. But the whole epistemology and the discourse of Gandhi is today a topic of moot among

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<sup>55</sup> Limaye, Madhu. *Manu, Gandhi and Ambedkar: And Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2016p, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. (2014). *Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 1-19 Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015

<sup>58</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 10. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015

historians. His initial stand on *Varna* and caste has bestowed him a number of critics and as well as supporters.

Nishikant Kolge in his recent work, '*Gandhi against Caste*', defined three kinds of literature that seeks to explain Gandhi's attitude towards the caste system. The first of these, in his view, maintains the viewpoint that Gandhi believed in Caste System and wanted to build up Indian society on caste principles (this includes both Gandhian and Dalit scholars); The second group holds that Gandhi's views on caste evolved with time; and the third group argues that there was an inherent tactic or strategy involved in Gandhi's defence of caste in his early writings. Kolge views Gandhi's stand on Varna and Caste as a long term strategy.<sup>59</sup> All three expositions have their limitations and remain problematic. These expositions deny the 'human' in Gandhi, who did mistakes and was wrong in some of his views on caste and Varna, but duly changed with time.

Historians seek to comprehend people on their own terms, as products of particular times, places and spaces, and explain their actions and impacts on history. It is true that Gandhi revisited traditions, but, he tried to make them the bearers of interdependence, responsibility and freedom.<sup>60</sup> Gandhi never hesitated to change his stand if he is not satisfied with traditions. Gandhi knew how to risk his popularity.<sup>61</sup> It was the evolving progressive perception of Gandhi which allowed him to declare that "caste has to go".<sup>62</sup> The personality of Gandhi was enigmatic and the tragedy with

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<sup>59</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.25 -26.

<sup>60</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. *Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate*. Economic & Political Weekly. 2011, Volume XLVI. No. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Lohia, Rammanohar. *The Caste System*. Navahind Prakashan, 1964, p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. Caste Has To Go. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume No. 68, 16/11/1935.pp.151 -153. Retrived From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>. 08/09/2017.

Gandhi was that his colleagues in the national movement either did not understand his concern with caste and untouchability or even actively deplored it.<sup>63</sup>

One can point fingers at Gandhi and term his changes in perceptions as vacillations. But he himself opined that – “As my vision gets clearer, my views must grow clearer with daily practise. Where I have deliberately altered an opinion, the change should be obvious, only a careful eye would notice a gradual and imperceptible evolution.<sup>64</sup> The contemporary discourse criticises Gandhi as if abolition of caste system as a whole – lock, stock and barrel – was quite possible and ready at hand, and Gandhi alone stood on the way.<sup>65</sup> To negate Gandhi’s work as a political stunt is a naïve thought. He was the one who vouched for Ambedkar’s ministry India’s first interim cabinet.

The roots and branches of casteism still exist and have grown tremendously with political development. Gandhi’s vision of self – purification needs a detour because he reminded the leaders of future repercussions of what can happen if caste and untouchability is not erased from the minds and hearts of wrong doers.

Ramchandra Guha, in his recent biographical sketch of Gandhi, wrote, ‘The birth and subsequent career of B.R. Ambedkar had far greater impact on Gandhi than he was sometimes willing to acknowledge’.<sup>66</sup> Guha remains honest and to the point in his assessment of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar was a radical

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<sup>63</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, pp.99.

<sup>64</sup> Mukherjee, Rudrangshu. (ed). *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*. Penguin Group, Haryana, 1993, p. 215.

<sup>65</sup> Ray, Barren. *Gandhi’s Campaign against Untouchability: 1933-1934*. Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World 1914 -1948*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 447.

leader and his whole idea of emancipation gyrates around the idea of self – respect.<sup>67</sup> The moral and political frame work on which Ambedkar boarded himself and charted his political journey owed much to the European enlightenment paradigm of reason and human centric approaches.<sup>68</sup> The radicalisation that manifested in Ambedkar placed Dalit struggles on the forefront of the nationalist agenda.

Historically and factually, Ambedkar also evolved with time. Ambedkar explored different political and social strategies for socio- political reformation and never compromised with his rationality. He represented a heterogeneous narrative with full force. Ambedkar presented an alternate strategy and challenged the idealistic perception of Gandhi.<sup>69</sup> It was Ambedkar who through his reason and human centric approach challenged the ‘Mahatma’ of Indian politics.<sup>70</sup> Ambedkar remained a powerful radical figure contemporary to Gandhi, who questioned his views. Ambedkar, an admirer of Gandhi for some years in the 1920s, became openly critical of Gandhi’s ideas since August 1931, when Gandhi failed the test of reason in the eyes of Babasaheb.<sup>71</sup>

The political clashes and bonhomie between him and Gandhi changed the whole discourse of social reform. The initial political phase of Ambedkar was

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<sup>67</sup> Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 9. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>68</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. *Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate*. Economic & Political Weekly. 2011, Volume XLVI. No. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p.

<sup>70</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.29.

<sup>71</sup> Bhaskar, Anurag. This leader forced Mahatma Gandhi to change his views on caste. *The Print*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018. Retrieved From: <https://theprint.in/opinion/this-leader-forced-mahatma-gandhi-to-change-his-views-on-caste/128108/>

inspired by Gandhi and the Mahad Satyagraha was an example of it.<sup>72</sup> But the whole approach of Congress and Gandhi frustrated him. He realised that Gandhi was moving slow.<sup>73</sup> Ambedkar duly charted his independent path and became the visible leader of Dalits and tried to carve out a political arena for them. “We want to become the ruling community” was the view point of Ambedkar.<sup>74</sup> If at the end of their debate and holistic engagement, Gandhi rejected his conservative outlook, Ambedkar too evolved and pointed out that his ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity have not emanated from the French Revolution, but from his master, the Buddha; i.e., he found refuge in Indian traditions, on which he criticised Gandhi.<sup>75</sup>

Social actions based on modernity became essential tool for Ambedkar. Liberty, equality and fraternity to all the oppressed classes was the dream of Ambedkar. The contemporary discourse which carries the legacy of Ambedkar has limited his ideas to the political power and iconisation. It is true that Ambedkar had considered political action as one of the important instruments of emancipation. But one cannot nullify the fact he also wrote and opined that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social and economic democracy.<sup>76</sup> Ambedkar believed, ‘the existence of caste of caste system is a standing denial of the existence of those ideals

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<sup>72</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 20014, p.65.

<sup>73</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p.93

<sup>74</sup> Patnakar, Bharat. Omvedt, Gail. *The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*. Economic & Political Weekly, 1979, Volume 14. No. 7/8.

<sup>75</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe and Kumar, Narendra, Editors. *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*. Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018, p.238-239.

<sup>76</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Volume 13. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p.1216. Retrieved From: <https://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 07/02/2016

of society and therefore of democracy.<sup>77</sup> Moving beyond the attainment of political democracy, Ambedkar viewed the survival of democracy through the process known as social endosmosis. Beyond the radicalism, Ambedkar represented himself as a leader who asked both majority and minority communities to cultivate constitutional morality, for the political democracy to succeed.<sup>78</sup> But the contemporary reality have reduced him either to a leader of oppressed or a historical leader who opposed Gandhi. Ambedkar the statesman and man of action have often concealed Ambedkar the reflective thinker, which is unfortunate.<sup>79</sup>

Ambedkar searched for solutions, explored strategies and never blocked the channels of fluidity or argumentational traditions for change and continuity; because by associated living he meant both majority and minorities in a democracy.

Gandhi and Ambedkar differed in their understanding of modernity, in assessing traditions and in proposing the options for India and the world.<sup>80</sup> Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhi thought through different paradigms and spoke in different frameworks.<sup>81</sup> Three interrelated and overlapping issues constituted the core of their exchanges – the issue of representation of the depressed classes; removal of untouchability; and case of caste question. But all these culminated into the idea of justice and equality. If looked rationally, beyond their acrimonious discourse and

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<sup>77</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe and Kumar, Narendra, Editors. *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*. Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018, p.241.

<sup>78</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. *The Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 485.

<sup>79</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, p. 6..

<sup>80</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. *Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate*. Economic & Political Weekly. 2011, Volume XLVI. No. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. *Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation*. Economic and Political Weekly, 2015.

varied trajectories; the concern for oppressed masses and their emancipation was their final agenda. They through their respective domain contributed towards the growth of political consciousness; one through moral force and other through intellectual and political force.<sup>82</sup>

Ambedkarites and Gandhians dominate the present discourse. Ambedkarites ideology of political power and divisive agendas has negated the work of Ambedkar; they are not at all concerned about ‘annihilation of caste’. Anand Teltumbde opines if the Ambedkarite ideology is of annihilation of castes, there are number of Ambedkarites who proclaim to the contrary and still claim to be Ambedkarites.<sup>83</sup> On the contrary the travesty with Gandhities is that, they never supported his idea of self – purification in past and presently they have reduced his cult only to a political reformer not a social one, in fear of vote bank politics. Everyone wants Gandhi and Ambedkar as icons or gods but has negated their wisdom or profundity.

Any attempt to find a syncretic ground between the two leaders for future prospects either becomes a naive phenomenon or a “spontaneous Gandhian Argument”.<sup>84</sup> In spite of interrogating their ideas in a holistic manner, the whole issue of casteism thrives upon the fake and half-baked ideas about them, produced and reproduced among the masses. These divisive discourses have created stagnation and fragmentation, which in turn have created subversion in the politics and policies of

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<sup>82</sup> Kapoor, S.D.. On The Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate. *Economic and Political weekly*, March 5, 2016, Vol LI No 10, pp.75- 76.

<sup>83</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. Brahminical Arrogance. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, p. 145



social justice.<sup>85</sup> If politics is limited to elections, the policies for social justice are just related to the gamut reservations sans genuine social transformation.

The apprehensions of Ambedkar about political democracy before social and economic were reflected in his writings. He firmly believed that, Social and economic democracies are the tissues and the fibre of political democracy.<sup>86</sup> This was similar to the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi's inclusive society and Swaraj. Both the leaders firmly believed that democracy should thrive upon social fluidity and engagement. The roots of Democracy, as Ambedkar opined in his last days, are to be searched in social relationships. And for Gandhi, 'democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms, it requires change of hearts.'<sup>87</sup>

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar must have been aware of the reality that caste could not be destroyed with only one weapon. They both therefore, kept exploring multiple strategies and approaches to the issue of social change.<sup>88</sup> Gandhi and Ambedkar both worked as a catalyst on each other. It was not only Gandhi who evolved with time; Ambedkar's personality also witnessed several Ambedkars at any given space and time.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Yadav, Yogendra. *Rethinking Social Justice. India Seminar*, 2012. Retrieved From: [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601\\_yogendra\\_yadav.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/601/601_yogendra_yadav.htm). 03/01/2016

<sup>86</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. *The Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008, p. 62.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted In, Kumar, Ravindra. Dangwal, Kiran lata. *Gandhi: Democracy and Fundamental Rights*, Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/democracy.htm>, 10/12/2017.

<sup>88</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. *Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation. Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Crisis of Ambedkarites and Future Challenges*. 2011. Counter Currents. Org. Retrieved From: <https://www.countercurrents.org/teltumbde220411.htm>. 03/01/2016

Contemporary India today lacks the fluidity or free mobility among individuals without any social stratification. Ambedkar had defined this whole concept as social endosmosis in his writings. Ambedkar firmly believed that the endosmosis project is blocked because society is divided into privileged and subject class. He, through his constitutional and political project, wanted that endosmosis to be programmed for Indian society. Gandhi respected the sheer radicalism of Ambedkar and supported his ideas. But Gandhi firmly believed that without the Self – Purification, any such kind of endosmosis is impossible. His view on Article 17 of Indian constitution projects his deep understanding of Indian society. He appreciated the revolutionary step but also showed its limitations. He was of the understanding that - untouchability has to be purged out from the hearts and minds of the people.<sup>90</sup>

Impasse not only exists in the context social justice and equality; but also in the context of one of the greatest discourse and debate of last century. It was the Ambedkar – Gandhi's discourse that has guided India towards social justice and equality and as well as with the policies and politics attached to it. It is the need of the hour that contemporary political framework should turn back and analyse the argumentational tradition without polemics and separatism. Gandhi – Ambedkar's discourse has not only provided the hope for social justice in past; but it also defines the upliftment that Indian social movement has made till now. The intellectual energies of both should be utilised for comprehending and fighting against the on-going struggle. It should not be narrowed down for creating differences among the masses and dividing them into two separate blocs.

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<sup>90</sup> Mharana, Tapan (ed). *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*,. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1964, p.24. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>

Iconization of Ambedkar and Gandhi and the calcification of their ideas, has not only betrayed the whole idea of social justice and equality, but also created stagnation, subversion and fragmentation.

This study is an attempt to revisit Indian democracy and social justice through the lens of the Ambedkar - Gandhi debate. It comprehends the historical debate in a professional way and strives to move beyond the episodic histories and popular narratives, sans historical professionalism. The relationship and discourse between Gandhi and Ambedkar is one of the most fascinating episodes in Indian History. One can be selective with their arguments in order to divide masses. But as a whole it sets the agenda for social justice and equality. It shows where we have failed and it also shows where we have to try to get to. It sums up for the transformative mission that is of casteless egalitarian society. The whole idea that twain should meet or must be relocated in much dignified places as heterogeneous voices of India; needs a serious reconsideration.

## **Objectives:**

### **The Study has the following objectives:**

- The Ambedkar – Gandhi discourse duly belonged to and took forward the legacy of social reform and democratisation process, which started under colonised India. The first objective of the study is to map out how caste was reinvented, objectified, politicised and solidified under colonial framework.
- To comprehend the idea of Self – Respect and equality of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.
- To analyse the dynamics of Gandhi’s Self – Purification and his idea towards equality.
- To comprehend the holistic debate of Ambedkar and Gandhi and as well as expositions attached to their respective ideas on caste and untouchability.
- To comprehend the idea of justice through Ambedkar’s vision of social endosmosis and Gandhian Swaraj.
- Lastly, to analyse whether the twain shall meet or shall continue to remain irreconcilable? Or in what alternate way the history should analyse their discourse.

## **Methodology:**

The research has attempted analysing texts, both primary and secondary to make sense of the arguments between Gandhi and Ambedkar as well as between the Gandhians and the Ambedkarites. In relation to primary sources, the research has focused primarily on the original writings of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. In the context Ambedkar, *The Writings and Speeches of Babasaheb Ambedkar (BAWS)*, Volume 1 to 17 (2); have been taken up for intense reading and has been comprehended. It remains a digitalised source and is on the website Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, <https://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, which publishes the original writings and speeches of Dr Ambedkar – have also contributed to the primary source of this particular study.

For Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, 98 Volumes, has duly been followed up. It is also a digitalised source and the website followed up is of Gandhi Serve Foundation, <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

The digital library of Mahatma Gandhi Ashram, Sabarmati, Ahmadabad has been used extensively in this research for its primary sources. The website for this particular source is <https://www.gandhiashramsabarmati.org/en/>. Also the primary sources published by Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad; remains an important primary source.

Apart from all these, the *Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD)*, Newspaper/newsmagazine reports, Fact Finding reports, Census Reports (especially

of 1931), National Crimes Bureau Records forms an important part of primary sources for this particular thesis.

Secondary sources i.e., the whole lot of writings (Books, Articles, Newspapers and Journals et al.) on Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar as well Casteism and Indian democracy, et al. remains the important source materials for this thesis.

## **Chapters:**

### **Introduction**

- Introduction to the Research Problem
- Literature Review
- Objectives
- Methodology
- Chapters

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Colonialism, Caste and Social Consciousness: Provenance of Democratic India**

- Colonialism and the Objectification and Solidification of Caste
- Orientalising the Orient: Invention of the Morphological view of Caste
- Consciousness and Consent: Age of Social Reform and Revivalist Movements

### **Chapter 2**

#### **An Endeavour Towards Self Respect and Equality: Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Democracy**

- Rise of a Thinker: Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar
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## **Chapter 3**

### **Meliorist Gandhi and Self Purification: Gandhi's Incessant search for Swaraj**

- Mohandas and Early Life: Orthodoxy versus Orthopraxy
- Gandhi's Laboratory: The South African Discourse
- Revitalization of Indian Politics: Gandhi and Swaraj (1914 -1932)
- A Catalyst in Mahatma's Life: Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Beyond
- Vision of a Lone Meliorist: An Incessant search for Swaraj (1940 - 1948)

## **Chapter 4**

### **Democracy, Social Endosmosis and Swaraj: Trajectories Towards Justice and Equality**

- Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate: Episodic or Transcendental?
- The Sociology of Caste in Ambedkar – Gandhi debate
- Self – Purification and Self – Respect: Trajectories of Emancipation
- Democracy and the Ideas of Justice: Social Realisation, Swaraj and Social Endosmosis.

## **Conclusion**

- A detailed outcome of the study



## Chapter 1

### Colonialism, Caste and Social Consciousness: Provenance of Democratic India

*“No Colonialism could be complete unless it ‘universalised’ and enriched the ethnic stereotypes by appropriating the language of defiance of its victims” – Ashis Nandy<sup>1</sup>*

*“Colonialism made caste what it is today” – Nicholas B. Dirks.<sup>2</sup>*

India is known for its Democracy. In fact, it is the cornerstone of India’s existence as a nation. The promulgation of India’s Constitution on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1950 was indeed an audacious step. It was the moment when, “*Manucracy*” was replaced by Democracy. Audacious, because of the confidence with which our founding fathers dared to dream of such an idea; even with full knowledge of the many social schisms, which persisted on the fabric of this nation. India, in 1950, was in fact the first country outside the western world to choose a resolutely Democratic Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Both, the legacy of political and social narratives, which shaped India’s political independence became the conscience of the idea of India. The Constitution was not merely a political instrument or document, but rather, it was a doctrine, which envisaged both the political and social revolution of the new nation. Apart from the argumentative or loquacious tradition that was initiated with the ‘Objectives Resolution’ and reflected in debates in the assembly from December 1946 to November 1949, the whole phenomenon represented insight, intellect, passion and

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<sup>1</sup> Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2009, p.72-73

<sup>2</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Sen, Amrtya. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity*, Penguin Publishers, New Delhi, p. 12.

competing ideas as to what will be the “Idea of India”. It was an exercise towards transforming the idea of ‘*Poorna Swaraj*’ or complete independence into an article of faith.

The nationalist struggle, through its various stages, against colonial raj vouched for enlarging the democratic spectrum. And all these pre-independence experiences gave birth to the “Republic of India”. The opening pages of Indian constitution, envisaged a nation where equality, liberty and fraternity would be supreme. Drawn mostly from historical experience and cultural traditions of the West, these reflected a vision for liberal democracy and a modern society. It promised to ensure a dignified existence to each and every individual and endow them with certain fundamental rights vis - a -vis the state and fellow citizens. This whole approach towards equality and justice contradicted the very fundamental spirit of inequalities, which persisted in the Indian society; and the institution of caste dominated that arena.

The caste system, with its horrendous form of ‘vertical hierarchy’ and graded inequalities based upon the system of purity and pollution, was among the most tragic inequalities that ruled and dominated the lives of Indians. Casteism and its annihilation thus, became a serious concern for the leaders, who were committed to the view that such an odious practice has no place in a modern democratic framework. Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister and in many ways one of the prominent architect of our Republican Constitution, had laid this out even before the formation of Independent India’s Constitution. In his classic, ‘*Discovery of India*’ written from the Ahmednagar Fort, where Nehru was held between 9<sup>th</sup> August 1942 and March 1945, Nehru remained unambiguous on the canker of caste. He wrote:

In the context of society today, the caste system and much that goes with it are wholly incompatible, reactionary, restrictive, and barriers to progress. There can be no equality in

status and opportunity within its frame work, nor there can be a political democracy.....  
Between these two conceptions conflict is inherent and only one of them can survive.<sup>4</sup>

Many definitions are attached to the word ‘democracy’. If there is one true meaning then it is, indeed, as Plato might have said, ‘stored up in heaven’.<sup>5</sup> Although India adopted the ‘*Westminster model*’<sup>6</sup> of Parliamentary Democracy and was immensely inspired by the Euro–American models, there is no doubt that India’s own syncretic ideas were also internalised into the scheme. It reflected the deep churning, that began in Indian society partly occasioned by imperialistic politics and policies, but more substantively by historic interface between traditions and modernity. As Granville Austin writes, “India’s original contribution to constitution making lies in its immense capacity of accommodation, the ability to reconcile, to harmonize, and to make work without changing their content apparently incompatible concepts”.<sup>7</sup> One such ‘apparently incompatible’ concept was (and continues to remain that way in a large measure) that of ‘legal equality’ that defines all are equal under the rule of law and of compensatory or positive discrimination policies (more precisely affirmative action) for the people belonging to certain castes and tribes.

Precisely, the makers of modern India have vouched not only for equality in legal sense of term, but for substantive equality, through positive discrimination. Substantive equality rejects sameness doctrine, but favours oppressed castes and creates just society out of differentiation.

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<sup>4</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. Penguin Books, Gurgaon, 2004, p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Crick, Bernard. *Democracy: A Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>The Westminster system is a parliamentary system of government, modelled after, that which developed in The United Kingdom. This term comes from the Palace of Westminster, the seat of the British Parliament.

<sup>7</sup>Austin, Granville. *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.396

In general, democracy was, and is expected to be synonymous with good governance, political rights and equal access for the citizens to institutions of governance. In this sense, it is beyond the framework of political rights in the legalistic sense of the term. It must be stressed here that political rights, in the legalistic sense of the term is indeed pivotal to democracy, but Indian lawmakers visualised that it should not become an 'end' in itself. They firmly believed that political democracy should become the 'means' for the realisation of constitutional principles. The makers of our constitution were guided by the experiences, particularly that of the various strands of the 'socio - economic reform movements' in colonial India. And hence, resolved to ensure that the constitution was made into a tool to realise those. These guiding values emanated from the commitment towards liberty and resentment towards inequality and dominance. The roots of these ideas emanated from the shared experiences of the people and the leaders who fought against imperialism. The alternative was presented by 'history' and it remained prevalent in the thought process of the intelligentsia, whose representation in the Constituent Assembly was larger than their proportion to the population; but the majority of those elected to the Constituent Assembly, in many ways, were organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense of the term. And they remained true to their organic relationship with the history, which preceded the formation a new nation.

This was the context in which Nehru introduced the Objectives Resolution in the assembly, on December 13, 1946, and it played the role of a spark setting afire the idealism that was lying dormant. It was perhaps the initiation of India's "*tryst with future*" and a call to proclaim India as an 'Independent Sovereign Republic', guaranteeing its citizens 'justice, social, economic and political; equality of status; of opportunity, and before the law; freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith,

worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality and all these while assuring that ‘adequate safeguards shall be provided for minorities, backward and tribal areas, depressed and other backward classes.’<sup>8</sup> Nehru merely contextualised the commitment that the Indian National Congress had made in its Karachi session (March 1931) by the Fundamental Rights Resolution.

It is pertinent to note here, from the concerns of this thesis, that the Karachi session in March 1931 had preceded the McDonald’s award 1932 (proposing separate electorate to the Scheduled Castes) and the consequent rupture within the nationalist cause marked by the Ambedkar-Gandhi debate and the subsequent truce of sorts in the Poona pact. The members of the Constituent assembly did not shy away from addressing the rupture and to look for mechanisms to alter the reality of caste-based exclusion and oppression. Precisely it represented the heterogeneous vocabularies that existed and sustained with reason and rationality, through organic intellectuals.

Nehru’s speech and moving of the Objectives Resolution internalised all these and was an attempt at defining democracy, not merely in political terms, but in the social and economic sense. It provided the direction for India’s future and also justified the several legacies that went alongside India’s struggle for Independence. Among the legacies were the long experience of British rule itself and the range of western thoughts and ideas, practises, institutions, et al. Apart from the shared experience of the leaders, those who were part of the civil services and the judiciary set up by the colonial dispensation became the crucial part of that phenomenon. The Constituent Assembly, hence, was not a gathering of veteran freedom fighters alone; Bikhu Parekh writes:

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<sup>8</sup>Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal. *The Framing of India’s Constitution: Select Documents, Volume 2*. Edited by Shiva Rao, Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2010, pp. 3 -4.

Although the Assembly (Constituent) was formally in charge of drafting the constitution, the rest of the country was not a silent spectator. Minority communities, professional associations, chambers of commerce, and industry, private companies, political parties, and language associations made their views known to it. Thousands of individuals wrote to it on issues of great importance to them, such as language, fundamental rights, and minority protection.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, there was the great body of traditions and cultural practises which were pre-British and thus represented the continuity and change with all its complexities and diversities.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the constitution making represented the argumentative tradition of India. And it was in fact this argumentational tradition which became the foundation for the idea of India. The objective was to ensure primacy to social equality and justice as cardinal principles of governance.

Colonial minds highly doubted the readiness of the Indian leaders when they chose the path of Parliamentary democracy. It was commonly argued by them that the roadmap of post-colonial India as pronounced by the native leaders was bound to be fail. They marked out the schisms that existed, or one can say even created by them, through their policies of *Divide et Imperia* (Divide and Rule). Their opinion gyrated around views that a society intensely divided into religious and communal groupings, whose social structure was imbued with an ideology of hierarchy rather than equality cannot sustain under the umbrella of western democratic ideas.<sup>11</sup> Winston Churchill, in particular, had poured scorn on the idea of the Constituent Assembly, viewed it as dominated by “one major community in India”, i.e., the caste Hindus.<sup>12</sup> But, the

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<sup>9</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, 2015, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> Brass, Paul. *The Politics of India Since Independence*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1994,p.1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.,p.5

<sup>12</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of World's Largest Democracy*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2012, p. 104.

makers of the Indian constitution proceeded against such contempt or apprehensions and envisaged the constitution, which not only protected national unity but also facilitated socio – economic progressive changes.

The founding fathers and mothers of India did not have any apprehension about political democracy. But, this certainly was not the case with the socio – economic democracy, which they believed was the foundation of the strong political democracy. They were conscious of the fact that the promulgation of the Constitution was to be the starting point towards the attainment of constitutional ethos, hence equality and justice. The crisis of inequalities was a stark reality that stared in the face of the nation that was just born. On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1949, the day before the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (who steered the process of drafting the Constitution) reminded the whole nation that mere political democracy was not the “only” idea that their leaders fought for and urged Indians not to feel content with it only. He gave three warnings to the new nation and the third was (is) perhaps the remains the most pertinent one. He stated that:

India had got rid of alien rule, but it was still riven by inequality and hierarchy. Thus, once the country formally became a republic on 26 January 1950, it was going to enter a life of new contradictions. In Politics we will have equality and in social and economic life, we will have inequality. In Politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long we shall continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our Political democracy in peril.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ambedkar, B.R..*Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Volume 13. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, p.1243. Retrieved From: <https://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 07/02/2016

Democratic politics was indeed regarded as the ‘mode’ to achieve social and economic justice; in other words, a roadmap to annihilate caste. However, caste itself over the years has become the “mode of doing politics” and the politicisation of caste has ossified casteism. Democracy is all about numerical strength and power. Caste with the ideologies of identity, sectional elevation, neo – Brahminism, ethnicization, sanskritization et al., (which is described in introductory chapter in detail), have led to this caste politicisation. With growth and development, constitutional and institutional democracy in India has developed itself into a populist democracy. The paradox of caste persists and remains the key factor of the populist political discourse. Meanwhile, political scientists have described electoral politics, particularly after the 1990s (also the post- Mandal I days), as the second democratic upsurge. One can say that one way or other caste has become the mitochondria of the whole political and democratic phenomenon. Rajni Kothari describes this politicisation of caste in the following words:

Everyone recognises that the traditional social system in India was organised around caste structures and caste identities. In dealing with the relationship between castes and politics, however, the doctrinaire moderniser suffers from a serious xenophobia. He begins with the question: is caste disappearing? Now surely no social system disappears like that. A more useful departure would be: what form is politics taking in a caste oriented society.<sup>14</sup>

Politicisation of caste represents a kind of paradox to the ideas related to democratic ethos. But the whole phenomenon has its roots spread over the colonial era. Colonialism in India produced new forms of society and caste itself, as we now know it, is not a residual survival of ancient India but a specifically colonial form of (that is, substitute for) civil society that both justified and maintained an Orientalist

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<sup>14</sup> Kothari, Rajani. *Castes in Modern India*. Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2015, p.4.



vision.<sup>15</sup> The history of caste, as an institution, can be traced to the *Purushukta hymn* of the *Rig Veda*.<sup>16</sup> But the whole idea of a water tight Varna system, attempts to break it through social reforms and the revival movements in reaction to those, caste consciousness, justice, equality, liberty, fraternity came up with modernity and were inspired by ideas from the West; in that sense, they were by-products of Colonialism. In other words, notwithstanding its origin in the ancient past, the idea of caste, as we know it today, in academic writings and popular imagination as well, began to be shaped only during the colonial period.<sup>17</sup>

The Institution of caste was transformed into a contesting domain vis a vis, modernity and nation. It challenged both the inner and outer domains of the Indian intelligentsia. Hence, caste dominated both social and political reformation and narratives. With reformist and revivalist movements that ran parallel to the political movement, caste became both a factor for civilizational assertion and embarrassment. British policies for their legitimacy of colonial rule explored both the assertive and embarrassing aspects. Whether by accident (initial phases of orientalism) or by design (policy of divide and rule), the political and social narratives on caste was ossified and this led to both psychological and physical separation the masses. And when the demands of democratisation and self-governance arose in time, political and social fragmentation created the space for the heterogeneous vocabularies, which challenged the homogenous narratives of the nation in its making.

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<sup>15</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p.60.

<sup>16</sup>Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson India Education Services Pvt Ltd, Noida, 2016, p. 206.

<sup>17</sup>Jodhka, Surinder S. *Caste: Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p. 140

The Ambedkar – Gandhi discourse represents the dichotomy and collusion between homogenous and heterogeneous trajectories, both of which remain crucial for the idea of India. It is also pertinent to note that, they both participated in the democratisation process which preceded them and debated the popular narratives on caste, which was re – invented by collusion of colonial and Indian intelligentsia. Revisiting the colonial history of caste thus becomes important. It witnessed contestation of ideas, popular imaginations, mobilizations and different socio-political paradigms. And Ambedkar- Gandhi’s argumentational tradition belongs to that particular historical space.

Thus caste, as it is dealt with in this thesis, is not as in the sociological or ethnological sense of the concept. The concerns of this thesis are to locate the category of caste in a conceptual sense wherein it is located in the context of the constitutional scheme of equality, sense of justice and democracy. It is inevitable, then, to locate the concept of caste in the context of the modernity, which was set in motion by the colonial rulers and social reformers as well as with their visions of change and continuity. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were heirs of an intellectual legacy, which began as challenges to the colonial narratives and reflected upon one of the greatest anathema of Indian society. Hence, a brief idea of the antecedents that preceded Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s socio- political space and historicity sets the motion to analyse one of the greatest debates of the last century. To understand that whole dynamics and trajectories related to the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate and its huge impact on the politics and policies in India, one ought to see them as shoots that came up in the context of colonialism. It may even be seen as the creatures of the colonial system. And the rise of caste consciousness truly represents its substratum. The whole phenomenon and transformation associated with India’s democracy, caste

and modernity was resolutely determined by colonialism and its ideological frame - Orientalism. In the task of orientalising the Orient, a morphological view of caste was re-invented and was politicised for imperial designs.

The chapter will briefly analyse the socio - political history of caste that preceded the Ambedkar-Gandhi engagement. Section 1 of this chapter will delve briefly into Colonialism and the politicisation of caste. Section 2 will discuss the role of Indian agencies and their initial responses to the oriental framework. It will also analyse the rise of their consciousness and consent. Section 3 will discuss the various facets social reform and revivalist movements and its impact on society and India's struggle against colonial forces.

## **Section 1**

### **Colonialism and the Politicisation of Caste**

Just as any other institution of social life 'caste' was dynamic and transformative. Notwithstanding its origins in the ancient past – historians agree to the fact that, terms like Varnas, *Kula* and *Jatis* were used interchangeably and meant the same as caste.<sup>18</sup> 'Caste', as we know it today whether through academic discourse or through identity assertion or to say as a popular imagination - was shaped under the aegis of colonial rule. M.N. Srinivas points out that the institution of caste, marked as it is by the present rigidity which is integral to it or to be more precise the whole cult of 'varna system' (which includes categorization of 'Savarnas' and 'Avarnas' both and has become synonym to the whole caste system), was in fact introduced by the

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<sup>18</sup>Singh, Upinder. *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson India Education Services Pvt Ltd, Noida, 2016, p. 506.

Britishers.<sup>19</sup> India had castes, but not a rigid caste system in his view. At another level, we may invoke Devdutt Patnaik, a leading Indian mythologist, who describes the whole engagement of the Britishers with caste in following words:

The attempt by British to “force-fit” some 3000 Jatis (castes, or some say sub-castes, grouped around hereditary professions), into four Varnas established in *Dharamshastras*, has given us complex ‘caste System’ whose uneven persistence in Hindu society has been the source of both ‘iniquity and confusion.’<sup>20</sup>

The modernity attached to the institution of caste, in fact, can be perceived through the prism enunciated by Edward Said, where the “Orient” was being orientalised, using colonial power and knowledge as tools to serve the end of political imperialism.<sup>21</sup> Said uses Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘*Discourse*’ (as described by Foucault’s in his “*The Archaeology of knowledge and in Discipline and Punish*) to identify and locate his critique of “Orientalism”.<sup>22</sup> In Said’s own words:

My contention is that without examining orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and – even produce – the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post – enlightenment period.<sup>23</sup>

The transition from the East India Company as rulers to the direct take-over of India by the British (through the proclamation of 1858) was, indeed, the outcome of the transition in England from industrial capitalism to finance capitalism. This, per se, is not the concern of this thesis. However, it also marked a change in the premise that was set – orientalism – insofar as the colonial administrative policies were concerned.

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<sup>19</sup> Srinivas, M.N. (ed.). *Caste : Its Twentieth Century Avatar*. Penguin Publisher, New Delhi, 2015, p.X

<sup>20</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *Why I am a Hindu*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2018, p. 70

<sup>21</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 10

<sup>22</sup>Said, Edward W.. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*,Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

The systematic discipline (as discussed by Said) of European power was dynamic. It adapted and delved into the new circumstances which legitimised their rule in the foreign land. Colonialism won its great victories not so much through military and technological prowess as much through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with traditional order.<sup>24</sup> As caste became incompatible with the modern identities, colonialism exploited the fault lines for its legitimisation. History witnessed three phases of orientalism that ossified caste physically and psychologically.

## **Section 1.1**

### **Three phases of Oriental Discourse: Invention of a Morphological view of Caste**

One can trace three phases through which colonial oriental knowledge was produced and India was documented. First was of the ‘official orientalism’ of eighteenth century. It was marked by the policies initiated by Warren Hastings, the Governor General India (1773-1785). The second was of ‘aggressive civilizational mission’ under the domain of the Liberals, Utilitarians, Evangelists and those in favour of free trade policies, (a prominent feature of the British policies in India during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). And the third phase was dominated by ‘ethnographical discourse’ and followed more precisely after the rebellion of 1857. After these three phases, India was more or less fully documented by colonial knowledge producers. It not only served the political imperialistic designs of the British, but also invented traditions and identities. And these inventions continue to define India’s post-colonial discourse in myriad ways

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<sup>24</sup> Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2009, p.X

Cultural hegemony played a crucial role, along with the political one, which gave colonialism both the durability and strength. Said relates this cultural hegemony to the concept of “*Positional Superiority*”, which puts the westerners (Colonizers) in a whole series of possible powerful relationship with the orient without even losing it.<sup>25</sup> Both, theorisation and institutionalization of caste, also represents the importance of positional superiority in the colonial oriental discourse. Partha Chatterjee writes:

If there was one social institution that, to colonial mind, centrally and essentially characterized Indian society as radically different from western society, it was the institution of caste. All arguments about the rule of colonial difference, and hence about the inherent incapacity of Indian society to acquire the virtues of modernity and nationhood, tended to converge upon this supposedly unique Indian institution.<sup>26</sup>

The whole concept of positional superiority, in fact, became the core of the civilizational project of the colonisers, which in turn, produced an argument for their permanent existence in the ‘static land of darkness’. It laid the foundation for the doctrine of the ‘white man’s burden’ or a divine duty to civilize and rule the natives for their emancipation. The whole idea of the civilizational mission, in fact, was meant to legitimate colonial dominance. Asish Nandy holds, in this context, that “Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Said, Edward W.. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2001, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 82.

In the context British policies, crafted under Warren Hastings, the fundamental principle followed was that the conquered shall be ruled by their own laws.<sup>28</sup> The intention was to legitimise the British rule over India and desist from ruffling feathers. Thus, the colonial state set rolling the project to procure knowledge about the oriental land and its people. History became an influential tool or more precisely a guidebook towards proposing legitimate claims. And this was when the re-invention of history through colonial eyes started. It was through the policies and trajectories of the orientalist government that myriad, fuzzy and sectarian orders were begun to be categorized and solidified.

Hastings proposed regulations to do away with the Dual government of Robert Clive<sup>29</sup> and clearly stated that the '*Mahometan*' (Mohemedan) and the '*Gentoo*' (Hindu) inhabitants shall be subject only to their own laws.<sup>30</sup>

To comprehend the Indian laws and traditions, the stakeholders were searched upon and soon the priestly classes were acknowledged as one. The whole phenomenon represented the inceptive stage of '*Brahmanization*' and '*Islamization*'

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<sup>28</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey To Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 68

<sup>29</sup> THE DUAL GOVERNMENT OF BENGAL: Following the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), Robert Clive set up the infamous dual system of administration in Bengal wherein the Company acquired the real power, while the responsibility of administration rested on the Nawab of Bengal. Under the 'dual' or double government system, the Company got both the diwani (revenue) and nizamat (civil administration) functions of Bengal. As the diwan (gained through Mughal Firman), the Company was authorised to collect revenues of the province, while through the right to nominate the deputy subahdar it was in a position to control the nizamat or the police and judicial powers. The deputy subahdar could not be removed without the consent of the Company. However, at this point of time, the Company was neither willing nor able to collect the revenue directly. Retrieved From : <http://thebritishinindia.blogspot.in/2009/11/dual-government-of-bengal.html>, 20/02/2018

<sup>30</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 52.

of Indian customs and laws. The legitimate upholding of the priestly class on Indian traditions was also inspired by the existing official records. One such official British record was the treatise of Alexander Dow. An officer in the East India Company's Army, Dow had studied Persian and even wrote the history of India. Dow's work '*History of Hindostan*' was published in 1770.<sup>31</sup> Impressed by the erudite Brahmans, he relied upon their knowledge for his work. He discussed social life and caste in his work. It was the first colonial text to give a brief idea of Hinduism and that the Indian society gyrated around the four Varnas, which he defined as 'tribes'. He wrote:

The Hindoos have, from all antiquity, been divided into four great tribes, each of which comprehends a variety of inferior casts (castes). These tribes do not intermarry, eat, drink, or in any manner associate with one another, except when they worship at the temple of Jagganat in Orissa.....The first, and most noble tribe, are the Brahmans who alone can officiate in the priesthood like the Levites among Jews.<sup>32</sup>

Lack of knowledge and ignorance (based on the whole concept Abrahamic religion and their idea of the one sacred original text) consequently lead to the perpetual hunt for the 'religious text' or more appropriately the 'original text'. This occasioned a renaissance of '*shastras*' and Brahminism. The whole project intensified its dependence on Brahman Pundits, inspired by Dow's enlightenment. It was upheld, mistakenly, that all Brahmans were priests and they commanded 'natural' authority over the ecclesiastical law. The whole phenomenon witnessed the codification of Hindu laws that ran through the '*Anglo – Brahminical*' intellectual biases. With the coming of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's '*A Code of Gentoo Laws*' and William Jones's '*A Digest of Hindu Law on Contract and Succession*' (which was translated

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<sup>31</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 8



into English and published after his death by another orientalist Henry Thomas Colebrooke in 1796), India was *re*-discovered through the ethos of Brahminism. This was the beginning of the orientalist tradition which not only re-discovered India but also redefined the whole sociological history of caste through the Anglo-Brahminical prism.

Colonial knowledge started to become the reality and ‘the history’. The ‘Hindu Laws and identity’ and its codification was nothing, but a construct based on the appropriation of selective epistemology from the prescriptive, normative and moralistic tradition of the Dharmshastras, the smritis in particular.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the subjective reasoning, these texts lacked any semblance to objectivity of facts as well. The prime example of this was the translation of the original text known as in Sanskrit as “*Vivadarnavasetu*”. It was a text compiled by several Brahmans pundits through an arduous process to understand Hindu laws and customs. It literally meant ‘a bridge on the ocean of disputes’. This particular text was transformed, universalised and read as “*A Code of Gentoo Laws*”. Disputes and debates were glossed over and the bridge itself became history. This Anglo- Brahminical text arguably violated the spirit of the actual practises and diversities. This served the interests of British policy, which explicitly sought to ‘enumerate, categorise and assess their (colonial) populations and resources’ for administrative purposes.<sup>34</sup>

In south India, the writings of a French Jesuit Priest, Abbe Dubois (who also worked as an anthropologist), not only became an important source for colonial knowledge, but also served the purpose of governance. Although missionaries were

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<sup>33</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016, p. 126.

banned in India, because of their engagement with conversion and the consequent resistance towards it, the work of Dubois was not resented by the colonial administrators because he prescribed that the Indian society 'is to be left as it is for the sake of colonial rule'. Dubois' work was published in 1816 under the title '*Description of the Characters Manners, and Customs of the People of India, and of Their Institutions, Religion and Civil*'.<sup>35</sup>

It was the first extensive text that studied the caste system. He defined caste as a perfect system that had saved India not only from foreign attacks and influences but also from an inner state of anarchy and barbarism. He outlined the caste system on the lines of the Varna order as depicted in Dharmshastras, with the patronage from Brahmans. Dubois was impressed by the intellectual merits of the ancient 'Law givers', but was extremely critical of the contemporary Brahmans; both because he saw them as the chief impediment to Christianisation and because he viewed them as given over to sensual pleasures and pre-occupation.<sup>36</sup> Thus, a paradox can be seen in his writings - high regards for the past intellectuality and low esteem for the present morality. Dubois' work gained authority and acknowledgement because it not only justified the British policy of the time of less intervention - but also provided some kind of an empirical footing to their whole discourse. Writing much before the revolt of 1857, which resulted in a non-interventionist policy in native's religious and social policies, an important dimension of Queen Victoria's proclamation in 1858, Dubois had held that:

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<sup>35</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

It is in the nature of Hindus to cling to their civil and religious institutions (most importantly Caste), to their old customs and habits.....Let us leave them to their cherished laws and prejudices, since no human effort will persuade them to give them up, even in their own interests, and let us not risk making the gentlest and most submissive people in the world furious and indomitable by thwarting them. Let us take care lest we bring about, some hasty or imprudent course of action, catastrophes which would reduce the country to a state of anarchy, desolation, and ultimate ruin, for, in my humble opinion, the day when government attempts to interfere with any of the more important religious or civil usages of Hindus will be the last of its existence as a political power.<sup>37</sup>

The phase of orientalism that was started with Hastings policies led to the creation institutions like Calcutta Madrassa (1781), The Asiatic Society of Bengal (1794), The Sanskrit College in Banaras (1794) and Fort William College of Calcutta (1800). Orientalists like William Jones, William Carey and H.T Colebrooke also contributed and were part this phase. They showed respect towards the great ancient civilization of the Hindus, but scant regard for the later period; to them, the latter phase of degeneration legitimised their existence in the land of the Orient. ‘Respect and paternalism,’ paradoxical as it may be, went together in this discourse. History, here, was defined in terms of growth of civilizations (similar to Voltaire’s idea, which had indeed inspired many orientalists). The Orientalists created their own versions of Indian history and divided it into the classical Hindu civilization, the dark age of ‘barbarism and religion’ under the Muslim rule or tyranny followed by the modern era of colonial enlightenment.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 83.

These divisions, in fact, shaped the teaching of history in India for many decades, as for example, the '*Great Aryan Invasion Theory*'.<sup>39</sup> Apart from the division that was created by dividing the Hindu and Muslim phase in history, the whole idea of the classical Hindu age was nothing but a prop to revive and preserve Brahminism. This, in turn, created a 'Brahminical History of India'. It was evident from initial exercise that shastric codes were being codified and was also serving the need of the Britishers. In the process of categorization and codification, not only were the ideas of communities reified, but new communities were created by people who had not consciously thought of themselves as particularly different from others.<sup>40</sup>

As India was anthropologized in the colonial interest, a narrative about its social formation, its political capacity, and its civilizational inheritance began increasingly to tell the story of colonial inevitability and of permanence of British Imperial rule.<sup>41</sup> The second phase of Orientalism was based upon the forces of change and it led to the transition in policies and politics, which reflected a stark contrast from the first phase. Philosophic radicalism with Industrial revolution, need for raw materials and markets, protestant evangelism and aggressive imperialism contributed substantially to this change. A more effective administration was the demand of the times. Roads for high imperialistic gains were also cleared as the two mighty powers of the India – Tipu Sultan in Mysore, (1799) and the confederacy of Marathas (1818)

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<sup>39</sup>The scholars highlighted the classical glory of India – crafted by the Aryans, the distant kin – brothers of Europeans; but also subsequent degeneration of the once magnificent Aryan civilization. This legitimated authoritarian rule, as India needed to be rescued from the predicament of its own creation and elevated to a desired state of progress achieved by Europe. This particular theory also became and still remains a moot point for social reform movements in India.

<sup>40</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire In India*. Aleph Publication , New Delhi, p.122

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,p.122

- were defeated. Intellectual currents and Imperial necessity for the home country started to shape the policies and politics of colonised India.

The Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833 were not only watershed moments in the history of Indian economy, but also for its socio-cultural discourse. Keeping pace with the changes in the political economy in England, the Company rule in India was altered to act as an accessory, an instrument to ensure the 'law and order' and thus ensure the vast Indian market captive for British goods.<sup>42</sup> It was, by that time, established that to attain durability and stability, political imperialism cannot operate in vacuum. Cultural imperialism, with its hegemonic vision, had to be brought into place. This phenomenon was duly recognised by both the Evangelists and the Utilitarians. Notwithstanding the apparent differences in their approaches to the world – spiritual in the former and material in case of the latter - both held a common premise to their critique of the Indian society and the need to exercise cultural domination. The idea of the civilized west and the uncivilized east remained at the core of their governing philosophies. The point of rupture or a break with the orientalist of the earlier phase (who believed in not ruffling the feathers) was their unabated criticism of the east. Both held that Hinduism was an abomination that led to social depravity and the whole institution of caste followed suit.

Since their inception in India, the Christian missionaries attacked the caste system, calling it 'an unmitigated evil' and a sign of inferiority of the Hindu religion. Their contempt against caste also came through their frustration which holds that - 'the Gospel of light' was impossible due to caste (as conceived by them) which regulates Hinduism and its followers. To be precise caste was the chief impediment towards

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<sup>42</sup> Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 22.

conversion.<sup>43</sup> Evangelism, after the Charter Act of 1813, when Charles Grant and William Welibfroce forced the East India Company's administration to change its policy and allow missionary work in India, gave another chance to the missionaries. They argued that the British policy should be based upon the principle of assimilation and intervention. Assimilation would ensure the promotion of civilization and material prosperity in India, which in turn would benefit British Commerce.<sup>44</sup>

The whole project was slow and halting. Missionaries tried their best, but apart from converting some low caste people, they were unable to break the shackles of the centuries old casteism. They often debated whether caste is a 'civil or religious institution', but were unable to catch up with its totalizing power. A resolution by the Madras Missionary Conference in 1850, stated:

Caste is one of greatest obstacles to the progress of the Gospel in India...whatever it may have been its origin; it is now adopted as an essential part of Hindu religion.<sup>45</sup>

Although, the impact of the missionaries on the society in India was far less than what they expected, their discourse created tensions in the Indian society. Their attack on Hinduism and caste became one of leading causes of the revolt of 1857. Apart from political influences, its social impact was huge. Along with utilitarianism and liberalism, the evangelical project provided a distinct force to the whole process of the second phase of Orientalism. Their manifestations of divinity, critiques of puranic Hinduism, their critique of

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<sup>43</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 26

<sup>44</sup> Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 27.

the caste system and in particular, their attack on the Brahman's arrogance was soon to find strong resonance among some Indian intellectuals.<sup>46</sup>

Along with the project of the evangelists, this particular phase was also dominated by liberals and intellectuals, all Englishmen, who were inspired by the idea of Utilitarianism. Jeremy Bentham preached that the ideal of human civilisation was to achieve 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Good laws, efficient and enlightened administration, he argued, were the most effective agents of change; and that the rule of law was a necessary condition for improvement.<sup>47</sup> Philosophical radicalism of the nineteenth century, embodied with utilitarianism and liberalism, gave an intellectual grounding for an aggressive campaign on the need to change the social norms in India. The intellectual demigods of utilitarianism were Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Thomas B. Macaulay. The whole ideology was transformed into a '*militant faith*'; and the biggest crusader of this militant faith was James Mill. They firmly believed that with the triumph of science and reason, of political economy and of law and government, which had made west superior, India too will be able to strip herself off the shackles of despotism, custom and tradition.

Existence of oriental knowledge, which preceded them, became a key variable for their thought process; and they went beyond the paradox of 'respect and paternalism'. Aggressive domination through hegemony became the key variable of this phase. It must be stressed here that, their arguments revolved around the superiority of the West. They were convinced that the Orient in general and India in particular needed an effective school master to civilize them. James Mill's "*History of British India*," a voluminous text published in 1817, became the 'Bible' for this narrative. Mill questioned a whole set of works by the orientalist before him. It was a treatise on justifying the West's rule over the East. Although

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<sup>46</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 148.

<sup>47</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 72.

his writings were influenced by Sir William Jones (one of the earliest orientalist), James Mill went beyond Jones and stated unabashedly:

It was unfortunate that a mind so pure, so warm in pursuit of truth, and so devoted to oriental learning, as that of Sir William Jones, should have adopted the hypothesis of a high state of civilization in the principal countries of Asia.<sup>48</sup>

Edward Said locates this attitude most appropriately. One such defining feature of orientalism, in his view, is the ‘dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns’, shaped by the great empires – in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced.<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding the views of Mill, “*On Liberty and Representative Government*”, the larger political concern, as held by Said, produced an imperative for an inventive and imaginative writing about the Indians. India and its positive attributes were wilfully kept out of the epistemology of Mill. This age, as Eric Stokes opines, was characterised by the ‘passionate conviction that the ideals of altruism and strongest claims of self-interest, coincided’.<sup>50</sup> And to be more precise self-interests wrapped under the idea of colonialism overwhelmed altruism.

‘*Manu Dharma*’ or ‘*Manusmiriti*’, the law book which still remains the substratum to caste in India, actually went through a revival during this period. From William Jones to James Mill, the orientalist went about canonising the text of Manu. This, indeed, served as the most important document on India’s religion and society. The Orientalist dependence upon this particular text as a tool to understand the Indian society was very problematic. It is difficult to say as to whether the choice of the text was conscious a part of their design or not. It is, however, a fact that the choice served the colonial interest and also served as a gloss to cover naked exploitation.

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<sup>48</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Said, Edward W.. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2001, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.



As for the Indian experience, as Nicholas Dirks points out, ‘it was a significant break with the past’.<sup>51</sup> The Orientalists, post-Mill, not only tried to codify laws related to Hinduism but also all social relationship with an orthodox vision which indeed was dominated by the Brahmins. As Manusmriti became the central theme of Mills’ account of Hinduism and the decadent social structure, caste got its definition and the Varna system, ‘its legitimacy’. The civilizational mission needed a rooted critique to prosper; Manusmriti and the Brahminical ethos followed that. Mill created a primitive absurdity around the whole caste system and wrote:

As the greater part of life among Hindus is engrossed by the performance of an infinite and burdensome ritual, which extends to almost every hour of the day, and every function of nature and society, the Brahmins, who are the sole judges and directors in these complicated and endless duties, are rendered to uncontrollable masters of human life. Thus elevated in power and privileges, the ceremonial of society is no less remarkably in their favour. They are so much superior to the king, that the meanest Brahmin would account himself polluted by eating with him, and death itself would appear to him less dreadful than the degradation of permitting his daughter to unite herself in marriage with his sovereign.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, epithets related to casteism from endogamy to the concept of ‘purity and pollution’ to the notion of hierarchy were duly codified and got sanctioned by the new rulers. Utilitarianism and Evangelism, through their different trajectories, were able to ‘reinvent’ the ‘morphological’ view of casteism.

This aggressive intervention into the cultural life of the Indian people by the British, however, created an extreme crisis for the colonial project itself and it became one of the chief causes for the ‘Revolt of 1857’.<sup>53</sup> Max Muller, whose prominent

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<sup>51</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016,p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>53</sup> It must be stressed here that the historiography of the events of 1857 have moved from the simplistic ‘greased cartridges theory’ through the discontented princes leading the mutiny into one where the role of the peasantry playing a major role in the rebellion in response to the agrarian crisis brought about by

position in the pantheon of the Orientalist mind is without dispute, wrote about caste in 1858, just after the “Sepoy Mutiny”. Muller’s essay on the mutiny and its causes sought specifically to clarify the terms of the discussion around caste, as he put it:

Among the causes assigned for the Sepoy mutiny, caste has been made the most prominent. The rebellion led to the passionate debate about caste, a debate that licensed missionary denunciation of the company’s toleration to it, on one hand, and prompted severe criticisms of missionaries for their role in alarming Indian subjects about British intentions to make them lose caste altogether, on the other.<sup>54</sup>

All the philosophical radicalism (whether genuine or pretensions) and praxis attached to the Orientalist project or the civilizational mission, simply vanished with the revolt. It raised several questions on the modus operandi of the Imperial government. Their mode was challenged severely during and after the revolt of 1857 and colonialism needed a new kind of imperium from now. The major threat, in their perception now, was the unity of Indians and their loyalty towards their traditions and customs. Under such circumstances, argues Dirks, ‘political loyalty replaced landed statuses; and ‘knowledge of people and culture’ was given primacy in understanding the issues of loyalty.<sup>55</sup>

To decimate this unity and shift the loyalty towards them (the imperium), the colonial state, in its third phase of orientalism, became an ‘ethnographic state’. The increased interest was due to the urge to know more about the natives in order to administer them and thus ensure colonial dominance for perpetuity. Precise knowledge about the internal divisions in Indian society was a necessity for this

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the colonial land revenue policies and the consequent alienation of land. It is hence that I have sought to attribute the British interventions in the domain of culture as ‘among the causes’.

<sup>54</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.38

project. It rested upon forming alliances through dispensing favours, building a category of gate-keepers from among the ruled and thus equip the administrative system with capabilities to exert greater control'.<sup>56</sup>

It was realised by officials of the empire that, caste and religion, were the most important sociological keys towards understanding the Indian people and their customs. Despite the complexities, British ethnographers initiated their efforts of mapping the world of the colonised in totality. If they were to be governed, in the true sense of the term, then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion. Ethnic, social, caste and racial classifications were conducted as part of an imperial strategy more effectively to impose and maintain British control.<sup>57</sup> From late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their works had slowly marked out caste and religion as 'natural' categories, so that by the second half of the nineteenth century, ethnographers began to 'emblematised' it as 'sociological keys' to the understanding of the Indian people.<sup>58</sup> The new epistemology followed the trajectory of objective science. Caste was duly 'objectified' as Bernard Cohn views it. The impetus to collect information on caste went way beyond that of a mere intellectual curiosity.

Bernard Cohn points this out with clarity in his words that: 'Ideas about – caste – its origins and functions – played much the same role in shaping policy in the latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century that ideas about the village community and the nature of

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<sup>56</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire In India*. Aleph Publication, New Delhi, p.122

<sup>58</sup> Cohn, Bernard. *The Census, Social Structure, and objectification in South Asia*. In *An anthropologist Among The Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987, pp.224- 252 .

property played in the first half nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> The underlying assumption that Indian society was traditional meant that the attempts to know were directed towards an exploration of ‘primordial religious identities and communities’. The whole objective created an epistemological space for an ethnographic colonial state, which in turn not only rediscovered identities but also created the ‘new ones’.

The census determined the consensus behind this exercise. Attempts were made, in the first census of 1871 – 72, to collect information on caste. The principle of organization was to try and place castes (Jatis) into the four Varnas or in categories of outcastes and aborigines. The writers of the individual provincial census reports tried to classify the castes in blocks.<sup>60</sup> By the next census and statistical survey, the colonial government had worked out a set of practises, that would allow it to list not just the names of ‘every person in India’ but also to gather information about age, sex, caste, religion, literacy, current residence, et al. Extensive knowledge and narratives were compiled and codified. Of greater significance is the fact that the census takers were given special keys for converting ‘unsuitable responses’ into officially formulated census categories.<sup>61</sup> This whole process clearly explains that the identity creation was an integral part of the colonial epistemology. And knowingly or unknowingly it remained a planned one.

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<sup>59</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. Sarkar Tankia. (ed.). *Caste In Modern India: Volume I*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, New Delhi, p.332

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.,p.332

<sup>61</sup>Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 144.

Bernard Cohn viewed census as the best illustration of the Victorian encyclopaedic quest for total knowledge.<sup>62</sup> But, to force fit more than three thousand 'Jatis' into a fourfold Varna created problems for the British officials. This prompted them to go for a detailed ethnographic study of the institution itself. The whole confusion and chaos culminated into the "*Survey of India Project*", which started in 1878.

The details of each caste, sect and tribe were codified under this project. This not only included a group's productive capacity, traditional occupation, its competence or the lack of it, but also its 'criminality, military powers, truthfulness, litigious tendencies and so on.'<sup>63</sup>

Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, caste had become the core concern of political imperialism. It was the most important tool to study Indian society and had gained the status of being the fundamental unit of India's social fabric. But to official circles, certain questions continued to hound them. One such question was about the 'social precedence' of the caste system. If James Mill and his epistemology dominated the second phase of orientalism, it was the work of Herbert Hope Risley that dominated the ethnographic phase. Risley, through his scientific intellect, established precedence for such categories in the 1901 census and caste became politicised all over again.<sup>64</sup>

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62Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 144.

63 Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992. p.68.

64 Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 49.

Risley had begun his career as Assistant Director of Statistics in W. W. Hunter's 'Survey of India' project in the 1870s; he rose rapidly in the profession to become Director of Ethnographic Survey of Bengal in 1885, the census commissioner in 1899 and finally the Director of Ethnography of India, in 1901.<sup>65</sup> Risley's classic work "*The People of India*" gave huge importance to the institution of caste. It was perhaps the huge official experience and knowledge about India that Risley defines the sociology of caste institution as:

Caste forms the cement, that holds together the myriads of Indian society...Were it cohesive power withdrawn or its essential ties relaxed, it is difficult to form any idea of the probable consequences. Such a change will be more than a revolution; it would resemble the withdrawal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction. Order would vanish and chaos would supervene.<sup>66</sup>

The branch of 'anthropometry' was combined with ethnography under the aegis of Risley. It not only strengthened theories related to caste, but also enabled him or the colonial mandarins to assert that the caste classification or the "Varna model" reflects "the" scientific truth. Risley also boldly stated that the caste based population of India could be classified in terms of race, into the Aryans and the Aborigines.<sup>67</sup> Few observations were taken and were made available to prove this theory. The Aryan race theory not only repeated the language of the Eighteenth century Orientalists, like William Jones (who tried to prove this on the basis of linguistic theories), but also entrenched itself in the minds of the colonised. In fact, it is still an

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<sup>65</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 146.

<sup>66</sup> Risley, H.H.. Quoted in - Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> Risley, H.H. *The peoples of India*, Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta and Shimla, 1915,pp.20-21. Retrieved from:<https://ia800208.us.archive.org/25/items/cu31924024114773/cu31924024114773.pdf> , 18/01/2018

important part of ancient history syllabuses in Indian universities and a subject matter of debate in academic as well as political circles.

As the institution of caste gathered strength and power, caste consciousness and caste based associations began to spring up and it served as platforms to articulate and represent grievances and demands for official enlistments. One such example is of *Mahtons* community of Punjab. “Thomas Kessinger found a file in a District Record Office in Jullundur district of Punjab, which was a petition from a group called “Mahtons” who wanted to be recorded in the census of 1911 as “*Rajputs*”. They based their claim on history and to the fact that they followed Rajputs custom. Their claim was rejected at the district level as being too vague”.<sup>68</sup> Caste became the form of civil society and began to replace the role of the village or the guild communities. It became the political tool for conflicting ideas, assertions, imaginations, mobilisations and identity politics; which changed its structure over the years. The whole discourse of the census, wherein caste was entered as a category, led to the immense objectification of caste like never before. G.S Ghurye captures this objectification in following words:

The conclusion is unavoidable that the intellectual curiosity of some of the early officials is mostly responsible for the treatment of caste given in census, which has been progressively elaborate in each successive census since 1872. The total result has been as we have seen a livening up of the caste system. It might be said that the historical role which Indian rulers had played as the final arbiters of ranking castes within their jurisdiction, including the ability to promote as well as demote castes, was now transferred by the people to new rulers; and the ranks accorded to caste census reports became equivalent of traditional copper – plate grants declaring the status, rank and privileges of a particular caste or castes.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Cohn, Bernard S. *Castes in Modern India*. Edited by Sumit Sarkar and Tankia Sarkar, Permanent Black, 2014, New Delhi. P. 333.

<sup>69</sup> Ghurye, G.S.. *Caste and Race In India*. Sage Publication India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi. p.158.

With a growing caste consciousness and the objectification, a stratified structure of caste gained validation and longevity. Apart from the legacy of the Orientalists, the whole process was also strengthened by the colonized people. Whether it was the Anglo- Brahmin nexus in the first phase or the people's participation in the ethnographic phase; the colonized world participated and played a crucial role in this process. Compulsions between tradition and modernity created a consciousness among the educated and learned minds.

Both the reformist and the revivalist movements contributed towards the politicisation of caste. The whole trajectory played a key role in its ossification on Varna lines. Caste was to become one of the central themes of social and economic struggle, which ran parallel with political struggle for independence. It is important to note that institutionalised caste carried forward both civilizational 'assertion and embarrassment'. And both led to the emergence of 'responsive consciousness' when traditions collided with the idea of modernity. The whole phenomenon changed the social history of modern India.



## Section 2

### Consciousness and Consent: Indian Agencies and Continuum of Politicisation of Caste

Antonio Gramsci's concept of Hegemonic power<sup>70</sup> entails two important elements i.e., "*Domino*" (Coercion) and "*Direzione*" (Consensus).<sup>71</sup> These two elements according to Gramsci are essential for any power or state to sustain its dominance. Colonialism or post – coloniality (as pointed by Nandy, Dirks, Said, Cohn, Bandyopadhyay, Ray and other scholars), is not just about political dominance by the state in order to sustain, it rests upon cultural hegemony as well. According to the epistemology of hegemony, the state has two types of society – political and civil respectively. In political society 'coercion' (*Domino*) is the key and the system rests upon the political institutions like the police, army, constitution, et. al., whereas the civil society is defined by the very idea of 'consensus' (*Direzione*) and rests upon trade unions, associations, universities, et.al.. Gramscian thought also views consensus as a mechanism, which 'pre-dominates' the coercion mechanism. It is the cultural hegemony that gives the occident a sense of superiority over the East, which is the core of Said's idea of "positional superiority". Hence, the consent of the colonized defines the acquiescence on their part for providing legitimacy to the 'civilizational mission' of colonial rule. In short, colonial hegemony is a rule by consent.

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<sup>70</sup> Antonio Francesco Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher and politician. His '*Prison Notebooks*' are considered a highly original contribution to 20th century political theory. Gramsci is best known for his theory of cultural hegemony.

<sup>71</sup> Valeriano Ramos, Jr.. *The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci's Marxism*, Retrived From: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/1982301.html>, 17/01/2018.

One of the most important outcomes of the colonial regime in India was that it also served as the womb from where nationalism took birth and grew substantially. Awareness of the democratic rights and modern human values developed through the various institutions of colonial administration and policies such as western (modern) education, job recruitments under the colonial regime, the development of the press, et.al.. It all led to the growth of political and social consciousness.

Partha Chatterjee argues that, 'long before the political struggle for power began, the Indian society was imagining its nation in a private cultural sphere, even though the state was in the hands of the colonisers. This early phase of social reform and imagining of the nation was carried out through the agency of colonial power'.<sup>72</sup> It was here they imagined their domain of sovereignty and constructed an Indian modernity that was modern but not western.<sup>73</sup> In its initial phases, the issues and marking out of the arena of struggles were defined and channelized through the rule of colonial agency and newly generated public opinions; but as nationalist and political consciousness gained momentum, the nationalists were not prepared to allow the colonial state to legislate reform in a traditional society.<sup>74</sup> This whole imagination resisted the civilizational critique of the colonisers and rested upon the 'high traditional values'. The active participation of important sections of the Indian literati (mostly Brahmins) gave a critical edge to the discourse of orientalism, but within the colonial epistemology. Placed between the rich traditional values or culture and the

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<sup>72</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, p.206.

<sup>74</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 9.

appeal of the new western ideas of reformation, most Indian men tried to strike a balance between tradition and modernity for forging a united nation.

Ironically, it became the historical task of nationalism (as political struggle for independence became more predominant), which insisted on its own marks of cultural difference with the west, but, demanded that there be no rule of difference in the domain of state.<sup>75</sup> It certainly represented a paradox. As caste was institutionalised and ossified, it remains the deep rooted fact that amidst this particular dichotomy, caste was both reformed and politicised. And it is under this dichotomous relationship that both the Colonial agency and various strands of generated public opinion, i.e, the Indian agencies (at different time and space), worked in tandem and showed both consensus and dissent.

## **Section 2.1**

### **Seeds of Awakening and the Phenomenon of Consent and Consciousness**

As discussed in Section 1, the oriental discourse through various stages codified and canonised India. The colonial apparatus, through various ideas, talked about positional superiority and an urge to reform Indian society. They stressed on the fact that it is the dogmatic religion and the caste divisions which define India's political and social inferiority, as compared to the West. Thus, the key variable of cultural hegemony was imposed upon the ignorant masses, depicting it as the whole discourse of white man's burden.

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<sup>75</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 10.

The Britishers had a particular talent for creating and exaggerating the superior and inferior identities. The knowledge gained through the study of history and ethnography of India, made the Britishers use caste divisions in order to disrupt the unity of among colonised masses. But the whole politics of divide and rule also rested upon the different Indian agencies. These agencies, from time to time, were utilised by the Britishers and they also collaborated with them. The Indian agencies, in a certain time and space, worked as a civil society; this, then ensured consent or consensus to their hegemonic colonial rule. While the Utilitarians began to talk of appropriate social engineering and authoritarian reforms, the Evangelists argued for the government's intervention to liberate Indians from their dogmatic religions that were full of superstitions, idolatry and the tyranny of the priests. The Company Raj was tentative about all these philosophical radicalism and waited for the consent to emerge from the colonised people. The consent, then, was provided passionately which complemented the white man's urge to bring in changes. The whole process culminated in the 'age of social reforms'. Western education acted as the most important variable, which in turn gave rise to the socio – political consciousness.

The Charter Act of 1813, which opened the gates for English education and modern sciences in India, also got the support of Indian intellectuals like Raja Rammohan Roy, who represented a generation of Indians who believed that modernisation of India would come through English education and dissemination of knowledge of western sciences.<sup>76</sup> Balance and boost was provided towards the Anglicisation of India through the natives' positive responsiveness. This phase culminated in the minutes, by T.B. Macaulay, on the imperatives for modern

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<sup>76</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009, p.141.

education in India in 1835. The English mode of education was the core of Thomas Babington Macaulay's minute. He not only talked about the importance of English education (as against Sanskrit and Arabic learning) but also legitimised his arguments by citing the petitions by the natives for change. He said in his famous speech:

A petition was presented last year to the committee by several ex-students of the Sanscrit College. The petitioners stated that they had studied in the college ten or twelve years, that they had made themselves acquainted with Hindoo literature and science, that they had received certificates of proficiency. And what is the fruit of all this? "Notwithstanding such testimonials," they say, "we have but little prospect of bettering our condition without the kind assistance of your honourable committee, the indifference with which we are generally looked upon by our countrymen leaving no hope of encouragement and assistance from them." They therefore beg that they may be recommended to the Governor-General for places under the Government-- not places of high dignity or emolument, but such as may just enable them to exist. "We want means," they say, "for a decent living, and for our progressive improvement, which, however, we cannot obtain without the assistance of Government, by whom we have been educated and maintained from childhood." They conclude by representing very pathetically that they are sure that it was never the intention of Government, after behaving so liberally to them during their education, to abandon them to destitution and neglect.<sup>77</sup>

The whole statement smacked of cultural imperialism and allows itself to become a legitimate theory with support from the Indian intelligentsia. This whole project led to the famous 'Downward filtration' theory of English education to civilise the 'uncivilised masses'. Macaulay further held:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed

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<sup>77</sup> Macaulay, Thomas B. *Macaulay's Minute*, dated the 2nd February 1835, Retrieved From: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html), 02/02/2017

from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.<sup>78</sup>

The whole phenomenon represented a new education system, as Sabyasachi Bhattacharya defines it as a “task of producing knowledge which was assigned to the metropolitan country, while its reproduction, replication and dissemination were left for the colonised people”.<sup>79</sup>

English education represented itself as an important imperative while analysing the politicisation of caste under colonial domain. This particular interface between the Anglicisation of education and the Indian intellect led to the beginning of the “new modernisation project of India”. The pedagogic enterprise of imperialism was to inculcate a spirit of loyalty among Indians, who would believe in its providential nature and civilizing mission. Indians accepted the formulae of orientalist, but not in totality. Education brought a section of the Indian people in contact with the body of thoughts that gave rise to a civil society. And that civil society, to which they belonged to, according to the colonial masters, represented a ‘decadent ancient order’. Colonial agency was destined never to fulfil the normalising mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the ‘alien-ness’ of ruling group.<sup>80</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that, the idea of democracy, constituted by liberty, equality

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<sup>78</sup> Macaulay, Thomas B. *Macaulay's Minute, dated the 2nd February 1835*, Retrieved From: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html), 02/02/2017

<sup>79</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan. New Delhi, 2009, p.142.

<sup>80</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 10.

and fraternity and most importantly freedom, owed itself to western education, the resistance too came from the same source of western epistemology.

As for the stigmatisation of the Indian civilization, the educated Indians soon began taking it up as a challenge to locate their traditional identity in the light of enlightenment and modernity. They started to represent a ‘nation’ of a remote past, under the Britons. They defended their rights and modernity while locating themselves with the whole discourse in Indian traditions. In other words, the evil features of the religious and social domain were seen to be corrected using the tool of enlightenment as readymade “panacea” for all backwardness; and this, without losing the cultural heritage and past. Ambivalence and contradictions were integral to this ideology of reform; the disease was to be cured but without attacking the problematic roots. The growing objectification of traditional culture assumed different dimensions for the colonial and the colonised.

If the Benthamite traditions resulted in growth of racial tensions, positional superiority, conversion, et. al., it also pushed the educated Indians into analysing their sociological domain. This led to the launch of new cultural projects by the educated Indian minds. The whole phenomenon led to the reformation of socio – religious belief systems. The initial outcome of this was the Bengal or the Indian Renaissance.<sup>81</sup> It led to the rediscovery of India’s past to confront the challenges posed by the colonial world. The important point here is that colonialism and cultural hegemony became the catalyst for reformation and revivalist social movements.

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<sup>81</sup>The use of the term Renaissance, to describe or define the social reforms movement in Bengal may raise debates in the present. This, however, is not central to the concerns of this thesis. It is used here in as much as the same sense as a rebirth as in the case of Western Europe.

Caste was a category and a feature of the Indian society, which duly made its mark and concerned the minds of the modern Indian intelligentsia. As much as it did on the Britons in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who transformed it as anathema, the colonised world responded to this charge. Along with gender inequalities, caste as an institution became the core concerns of the social reforms movement in India. Caste divisions and evils, after all, were being used by the colonial masters to define their political and social supremacy over the Indians. Indeed the antipathy of caste towards the 'nationhood' and 'modernity' was also a common assumption among Indians, which motivated many aspects of social reform movements from early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup> Looked from the traditional perspective it called for a revivification of its worthier attributes and through the eyes of modernity, it was regarded as one's duty to eradicate it lock, stock and barrel. Thus, the two streams of thoughts emerged and also engaged with the society simultaneously in the context of caste reformation. For many, caste had to be discarded altogether while the revivalists like Radhakanta Deb and Swami Dayanand Saraswati stressed on looking at caste as a cultural inheritance; that it could be a part of glorious ancient civilization in its originality. The whole phenomenon, in the long run, resulted into the socialisation and politicisation of caste.

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<sup>82</sup>Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 232.



## Section 3

### Social Reform and Revivalist Movements

Raja Rammohan Roy initiated the reform movement in India with founding the Brahmo Samaj in 1828. Caste was criticised with full radical faith by the Brahmo Samaj. When Keshub Chandra Sen became an important leader of the movement more radicalism was thrown into the campaign against caste inequalities. As western education and consciousness became part of life in western India (the Bombay province) with dissemination of Maratha power, the ideas of Keshub Chandra Sen spread and led to the formation of Prathana Samaj in 1867. Reformists like Atmaram Pandurang, Mahadev Gobind Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were attached to these movements. Branches of the Samaj were opened in Poona, Surat, Ahmedabad, Karachi, Kirkee, Kolhapur and Satara. Its activities were taken up in south India by Veersalingam Pantulu. By the beginning of the twentieth century, eighteen branches of the Samaj were opened in the Madras presidency too.

Apart from the reformist tendencies, the revivalist tendencies also contributed to social change. It began with the Arya Samaj (1875) whose leaders located their attack on the caste system from the Vedic texts. Its founder, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, invoked the authorities of Vedas to revive the ethos of Hinduism. Casteism and untouchability was attacked by Dayanand but the 'Varna system' was sought to be reserved in its organic form, thus retaining the core of the Indian social organisation. He refused to recognize the hereditary basis of the caste system, and as an organic division of society, sought to create an "*open social system*"- where women and shudras received a measure of learning and made education and not birth as the determinant of status. Anshu Malhotra holds that though Dayanand Saraswati

tried the open society scheme, his insistence on preserving the Varnas scheme led to a situation where the caste divisions were preserved and at times sharpened the existing hierarchies.<sup>83</sup>

Historically, these movements initiated the caste reforms but it contained several limitations. Firstly, these were confined to the narrow social space of educated elites, who were the economic and cultural beneficiaries of colonial rule. Secondly, these organisations were mostly dominated by those from the upper caste Hindus, who tried to keep radical approaches out of their ambit and also from the ambit of the early nationalist thoughts. And thirdly because of their preoccupation with the higher castes, there existed a relative silence on the question of caste and untouchability. Last and the most important point, in this regard is that – it was striking that the critiques condemned caste for its divisive nature, just by portraying it as a barrier in the road to nationhood. Hence, the zeal was missing. The subject of oppression and exclusion were indeed secondary one or a matter of inner domain sans outer one.

Thus, a nation was being imagined, either by ignoring caste inequalities or by valorising them. There existed little or no consciousness to create a reformist ideal at the grass roots level. Indian nationalists, writes Partha Chatterjee, while contesting the theory that caste defines the inherent incapacity of Indian society to acquire the virtues of modernity and nationhood - duly adopted two strategies:

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<sup>83</sup>Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 101

The first is to deny the suggestion that caste is essential to the characterisation of Indian society. The second strategy seeks to avoid these difficulties by retaining caste as an essential element of Indian society. The presence of a caste system, as the assertion goes, makes Indian society essentially different from the western.<sup>84</sup>

In other words, enlightening and strengthening of the masses, was not undertaken as an agenda. It was because of these limitations and the domination of the status quoists that Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar later noted in his classic work, “*Annihilation of Caste*”, that:

Social reform India has few friends and many critics.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, with the passage of the several Councils Acts since 1861<sup>86</sup> and the opening up of the space for representation (or self-governance) for the Indians - made it an imperative for the leaders of the Indian opinion to be concerned about achieving the unity of the Indian people. Gradually the two big questions of gender and caste ended up as concerns of the social reformers alone. The political leadership began to perceive that raising these will cause disunity among the Indian people and hence best left without being addressed. It was firmly believed that both political unity and nationalistic cause should transcend the socio – economic challenges, for advancement of India as a nation. The late Social Conference, which came up along Indian National Congress (1885) and transformed into the social reform party; substantiates as to how political reform gained importance. It is in this particular

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<sup>84</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 172-73.

<sup>85</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Annihilation of caste*. Nvayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2013, p. 210.

<sup>86</sup> The Indian Councils Act 1861 was passed by British Parliament on 1st August 1861 to make substantial changes in the composition of the Governor General’s council for Executive & Legislative purposes. The most significant feature of this Act was the association of Indians with the Legislation work.

context, Sumit Sarkar observes that, “social injustice argument, while not absent, remained secondary”.<sup>87</sup>

## **Section 3.I**

### **Alternative Voices from Below: Beyond Modernists and Critical Traditionalists**

As political narratives of nationhood gained momentum, the suppressed voices of oppressed castes and untouchables gained consciousness too, and they came up with the heterogeneous vocabularies. Western education, caste objectification and various social reform and revivalist movements; generated a sense of consciousness among oppressed castes too. Jotiba Phule, Naryana Guru, Ramaswamy Naicker, Iyothee Thass, B. R. Ambedkar et al., became the chief proponents of this particular consciousness. The limitations and fault lines that existed in the modernist and critical traditionalist coincided with the enlarging democratic spectrums under colonial domain. The dormant oppressed castes and class had little sympathy with much of the traditional Indian thought because of casteism and oppressive principles, hierarchal orientation, complacency, lack of concern for the poor and religiosity.<sup>88</sup>

The whole trajectory to assimilate and push the divisions and inequalities under the carpet caused the rise of ‘cultural and political separatism’. Colonial epistemology and especially the “census,” not only gave each and every Indian an identity, but also was a starting point political and social mobilisation. It caused ruptures and challenged the narratives and trajectories followed by the nationalist

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<sup>87</sup> Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India: 1885 to 1947*. Pearson Publishing House, Noida, 2017. p.47.

<sup>88</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, 2015, p.26.

camp. Eugene F. Irschick, writing about the non – Brahmins movement in Madras, defines this in the following words:

The passing of the old order and establishment of a modern society are bound to undermine relations based on ascription and position in society which those ascriptive rights imply.<sup>89</sup>

The whole phenomenon of identification, the urge to sanskritise and the formation of caste associations gave rise to what is popularly known as ‘politicisation of caste’. Caste associations and social mobilisation on exclusivist lines demanding specific shares in the institutions sprang across the expanse of colonial India. But, the most radical movements sprang up in Maharashtra and Madras. Although most of their radical ideas were based on the colonial knowledge of contemporary times, their agitations and audacity changed the whole history and dynamics of social justice and equality.

The arrival of Jotirao or Jyotiba Phule (1826- 1890), as a radical lower caste intellectual and reformer, was a decisive break in the existing social reforms movement, particularly in the Western Province of Bombay; which was the stronghold of casteist Maratha empire under Peshwas. His early efforts to educate the untouchables and lower castes as well as the women challenged the educational supremacy of upper castes. He outrightly rejected the sanskritization and reformation programmes led by the Brahmins and caste parameters. To forge an identity of the Shudras and the ati-shudras, he rested his ideas of radical philosophy on the premise of accepting the oriental view or theory of Aryan Invasion.<sup>90</sup> Phule’s perception

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<sup>89</sup> Irschick, Eugene F.. *Politics And Social Conflict in South India: The Non – Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism 1916 – 1926*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969.

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the most heated controversy in the recent historiography of India has been that about the Aryan invasion theory. In its classical textbook version, this theory claims that a Sanskrit speaking Aryan people entered India around (or before) 1500 BC and spread its language, religion and social

remains the classic example of the psychological pull, which was created by the colonisers in the context of caste institution. Phule rejected the idea of casteism whether it was inorganic or organic as proposed by modernists and critical traditionalist.

By the time Phule established his Satyashodhak Samaj, in 1873, he was convinced that the Brahman's monopoly was solely responsible for the predicament of the Sudras and the Ati shudras. Appearing before the Hunter Commission, in 1884, Phule argued that it was the ignorance of the British Government, which duly allowed it to give into Brahmanic strictures and laws; conferring on them even more authority than they had.<sup>91</sup> Although there existed a good dose of radicalism in Phule's trajectory, it also represented an elite phenomenon of sanskritization. M.N. Srinivas, while describing sanskritization, makes it clear that "it does not only mean to emulate Brahmins per se".<sup>92</sup> Phule utilised the temperament of sanskritization in a different way and claimed Kshatriya origin for the oppressed. He also accorded the untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs, the original inhabitants of Maharashtra, a glorious past in which they had offered a strong resistance to the Aryan Invaders.<sup>93</sup> But beyond its limitations, Phule, with his radicalism not only challenged the Brahminical ethos; but also created an alternate vocabulary and a legacy in the context of social history of India.

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structure among the indigenous population. More sophisticated versions speak of a gradual immigration of groups carrying Indo-Aryan language and civilisation into the Indian subcontinent. Orientalist postulated this particular theory to gain positional superiority and consent to Divide colonised masses for imperial gains.

<sup>91</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 237.

<sup>92</sup> Srinivas, M.N.. *Social Change in Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, pp.6-8.

<sup>93</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 150

If the colonial discourse of Aryan theory and the Brahmans as a social regulator of Indian society, precipitated Jotirao Phule and his movements; it was the philological and racial theories of Robert Caldwell that completely changed caste narratives in Madras province. It was naturalized in both local political discourse and in colonial sociology by the late nineteenth century. As the 1891 census report put it:

With the exception of the Brahmans and Marathi and Musalman immigrants, the population of Madras is usually considered to be entirely Dravidian, though it has been contented that a many of the lower servile castes belong to a pre – Dravidian people. The arguments for and against this theory are carefully stated by Dr. Caldwell, and the conclusion he arrived is that these lower castes are also Dravidian and that they were reduced by the conquest to the condition of serfs and wandering jungle tribes. Dr. Caldwell’s opinion has been adopted by the compiler of the Manual of the administration and by Dr. Gustav Oppert, and , although it is a question on which the last word has not yet been said, there is at present but little to add to the arguments stated by Dr. Caldwell.<sup>94</sup>

Before analysing the impact of this theory, as something new invented by the colonial power, it is important to find out why such an exercise was necessary for the colonial census officials, who propagated this theory? The timing of the report assumes significance. With Moderates, the Indian National Congress was pressing hard for constitutional reforms. The colonial rulers were under pressure to find another ‘client’ to replace the existing ones in their ‘patron – client’ hegemonic discourse. The existing division thus assumes centre stage for ‘Divide and rule’

Several factors went along to naturalize the Dravidian identity and its historicity. From history to ethnographic study to census, it all created a sense of unique identity among the people of Madras; which they assumed remained divorced from the northern identities. With emphasis given by Census commissioner on

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<sup>94</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 238.

Caldwell's report, the whole idea of *Manusmriti*, Aryan people and Brahminical dominance became a foreign concept.

Casteism, in the Madras province, went together with the rigid concept of untouchability, unapproachability and temple entry manifestations. Throughout the nineteenth century colonial records gives evidence of several caste conflicts. Language, race and supremacy (of imperialism and Brahminism) created both politically and socially - an environment where the non – Brahmins realised that they have to fight against the 'Brahminical Hegemony' for their existence in the new emerging nation. Psychologically and theoretically Dravidian ideology provided refuge and a voice of dissent to the Non - Brahmins of Madras presidency. With their demographic strength, the whole Concept of Dravidian race and the language Tamil which was attached Dravidian community; became the wheels of protest.<sup>95</sup> Political and cultural separatism was garnered by the official reports and this led to the politicisation of caste, which became the mode of representation. Press and education played an important role too.

The whole trajectory of agitation led to the establishment of the 'Justice Party' (1916) by Non – Brahmin group. They challenged the overwhelmingly unipolar character of Indian nationalism. T.M. Nair and Tyagraja Chetti, were among the most prominent leaders of Non – Brahmin Movement. They published the Non- Brahmin Manifesto on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1916. The manifesto not only asserted the rights of the non-Brahmin caste Hindus, but also made a point that India's upcoming semi-democratic or self-governing status should not be dominated by any single class or

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<sup>95</sup>Irschick, Eugene F.. *Politics And Social Conflict in South India: The Non – Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916 – 1926*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969.



caste.<sup>96</sup> Caste thus started to institutionalise itself more prominently in both social and political domain.

The manifesto was a thesis, which sought to prove the hegemonic role of the Brahmins in each and every field of government, and how this undermined the interest of other castes. The manifesto asserted:

For our part we deprecate, as we have suggested, the introduction of changes not warranted by the present conditions. We cannot too strongly condemn caste or class rule. We are of those who think that in the truest and best interests of India, its government should continue to be conducted on true British principles of justice and equality of opportunity. We are deeply devoted and loyally attached to the British rule. For that rule in spite of its many shortcomings and occasional aberrations, is, in the main, just and sympathetic. We Indeed, hope that our rulers will, as their knowledge of country expands, be more readily responsive to public feeling when, of course, that feeling is clearly manifest and decidedly unambiguous, and that before they take any action they will examine the interests and wishes of each caste, class and community with more anxious care than heretofore and in less conventional manner. When the spirit of social exclusiveness and the rigidity of class and caste begin to disappear, the progress toward self-government will unquestionably be more satisfactory. But for the present the practical politician has to concern himself with what lies in front of him.<sup>97</sup>

Through the Dravidian theory, Justice Party and the Non – Brahman movement gained tremendous success in the form of first and second Communal Government Orders in 1921 and 1922. These orders stated that appointments to government jobs will take communal divisions in considerations. The interests of the Non – Brahmins and the backward classes, it held, will not be diluted under one class

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<sup>96</sup> The Indian Home Rule movement was a movement in British India, on the lines of Irish Home Rule movement and other home rule movements. In India it was initiated by Annie Besant and B.G. Tilak.

<sup>97</sup> Irschick, Eugene F.. *Politics And Social Conflict in South India: The Non – Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916 – 1926*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp.365 -66.

or caste supremacy. For the first time, official records kept the record of communal distribution of government appointments and promotions.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the radicalism and success in terms of gathering mass against the Brahmin domination, the Justice Party failed to strategize or rather refused to strategize an agenda involving the untouchables. Even if caste was objectified and stratified into four Varnas, psychology of graded inequalities flourished in its inner domain. It was because of this particular limitation, that the Party soon lost its influence and power. And it was only revived under E. V Ramaswamy, or Periyar. And it was Periyar who gave momentum to Non- Brahman movements after 1925.

### **Summary of the arguments:**

Apart from the realities that caste was politicised, the most pertinent point to reflect upon, in the context of new voices that emerged in Madras and Bombay provinces is that – it not only deepened the democratisation process, but also unveiled the dormant realities of casteism. In different ways, these and other modes of discourse laid the foundations of the modern Indian political discourse with all its internal varieties, consciousness and crude realities.<sup>99</sup> It decoded a fact that the course to India's struggle for independence was not just about the political independence. By the early twentieth century, it was becoming clear that the caste divisions, exclusions, injustices and representations cannot be glossed over. In other words, there was realisation that modernity and nationalistic designs were not going to ensure the social agenda, particularly that of the discriminative caste system. Notwithstanding the fact, that

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<sup>98</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B.. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and The Making of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Delhi, 2016, p. 243.

<sup>99</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, 2015, p.27.

colonial policies made, what is caste today in the modern sense of term; it also allowed and gave space to subaltern consciousness to fight against the hegemonic psychology of caste, either by accident or by design. Thus, by early twentieth century both caste and subaltern consciousness marked out its spaces in dominant narratives of the new emerging nation.

Indian nationalism has always remained and still remains a contested terrain, both in its imagination and articulation. With the weakening of the nationalist agenda in the wake of the moderate phase losing its relevance, the ‘extremists’ in the Indian National Congress represented an antipode towards radical leaders like Jotiba Phule and the subaltern consciousness. Extremist leaders like Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak even considered education to women and Dalits as a loss of nationality. The rise of the Non – Brahman voices and Dalit voices thus, was not a moment without context and a linear pattern.

If the nationalist framework was dominated by the voices that channeled their energies for political representation and power, the colonial officials were engaged in their search for new ‘loyal Indians’ to gain consensus for their hegemonic rule. This led to fragmentation of the socio- political voices of Indian leaders. Apart from the Hindu – Muslim divide, Britishers took the caste divisions seriously for their imperialistic designs. A sharp shift was witnessed with the Colonial masters’ sudden sympathy towards the minorities. British now perpetuated the caste institutions by underlining the inequities without any logical conclusion to eradicate them. Of course Indians were always categorised as ‘subjects’ to rule for imperial benefits, but not as English ‘citizens’; towards whom they have a sacred duty of genuine upliftment.

Both nationalistic antipathy and colonial sympathy towards the caste neglected the whole idea of justice and equality. In one way or another Indian masses were divided and that itself became anathema towards the whole round developmental paradigm. Several voices that ran parallel to the political struggle were in search of the leadership to accommodate them - in order to a forge a nation in real sense. In fact a holistic study of the Non – Brahman Manifesto of 1916, depicts this huge vacuum in the nationalistic leadership. It states:

In the early days of the Indian National Congress, when that movement was directed and controlled on the spot by such sagacious and thoughtful men as the late Messrs' A.O Hume, W.C Banerjee, Budruddin Tyabji, S. Ramaswami Mudaliar, Rangiah Naidu, Rao Bhadr Sabhapathi Mudaliar, and Sri Sankaran Nair, enlightened Non – Brahmins all over the presidency gave it their hearty and loyal support. It was then, though not in form and name, but in spirit and method, a truly, national institution. Some of the old ideals are still there. But the spirit in which, the method by which, and the persons by whom, it is at present worked, cannot, all of them, commend themselves to the thinking and self – respecting section of the non – Brahmin public of this Presidency. The social reactionary and the impatient political idealist, who seldom has his foot on solid earth, have now taken almost complete possession of the Congress. Democratic in aims, an irresponsible bureaucracy now manipulates its wires. We sincerely hope that sane and sober politicians, who know the country and its people, and who feel their responsibility to both, will soon reassert their mastery over the Congress machine, and direct it in strict accordance with the living realities of the present.<sup>100</sup>

The task of blending the two – the social and the political, was indeed attempted subsequently in the course of the Indian national movement. The arrival of Gandhi and Ambedkar transformed the contours of the struggle. It was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar who filled that vacuum, which existed in the leadership; in relation to country and its people. They duly combined both socio – political paradigms and transformed it into a mass

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<sup>100</sup>Irschick, Eugene F.. *Politics And Social Conflict in South India: The Non – Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916 – 1926*. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp.365.

consciousness. Their respective political discourse and holistic engagement started a new chapter in the social history of India's struggle for Independence.

The idea of India remains a history of debating differences through of argumentative traditions. The concern of this study emanates from the present democratic discourse and the caste paradox (which was re-invented during colonial era) attached to it. As future remains opaque and past presents an opportunity to draw lessons for consideration.<sup>101</sup> The idea is then to revisit the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate, which remains one the important pillar towards the formation of Indian Republic; which duly promised equality and justice. Hence, the following chapters will relocate the historicity of Ambedkar and Gandhi as well as their engagement through the prism of present discourses attached to it.

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<sup>101</sup> Arnold, John H.. *History: A very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 120.

## Chapter 2

### **An Endeavour towards Self – Respect and Equality: Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Democracy**

*“Democracy is more than a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living.” –*

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar <sup>1</sup>

Caste remains the worst kept public secret of democratic India. The abhorrent and abominable victimization and exclusion of the lower castes mark out the regressive realities of the world’s largest democracy. It is common and more intense where the lower castes assert themselves for their constitutional rights or protest against repression by the upper caste groups. Apart from the ground realities, there is no denial that the constitutional institutions of independent India too are caught in the rigmarole. Be it the election of the India’s President<sup>2</sup> or the discourse during the campaign of any election, the politics of caste represents itself as key variable. The centrality of caste in Indian political discourse remains the biggest paradox. Indian politics and its quest for ensuring representation to members of different castes, including those who were excluded over the ages, in the institutions of constitutional democracy, has enlarged the political space and have helped in enlarging the democratic values (at the political level); but at the same time it has betrayed the social and economic dimensions of democracy.

The depressed castes continue to strive for self – respect, in other words, equality and justice. To borrow a concept from Ram Manohar Lohia, casteism still

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<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. *Annihilation Of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, p.50.

<sup>2</sup> Ramnath Kovind became the fourteenth President of India. The politics of caste not only dominated his educational qualification of Law and passing of the toughest exam of Union Public Service Commission; but also his work as a Governor of Bihar state. He was fielded as “Dalit” candidate; seen as a “Dalit” and selected as a “Dalit” President of India. The tokenism of caste in populism dominated the rationality and wisdom.

provides 'debility' to this nation.<sup>3</sup> Participatory democracy (where the elite and the lower castes are represented in elected institutions) has not upturned the socio-economic order as such.

The contemporary discourse and power relations in India represents a glaring hypothesis i.e., "modernity and legality, cannot compete with the traditional legitimacy".<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, the reformative agenda of 'social engineering' or 'positive discrimination' projects, which was taken up by India's political parties and was duly documented in Constitution, politics has ceased to become the carrier of transformative cult. There is indeed a serious crisis of sorts. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report on caste atrocities, released on 20th November 2016 (Appendix 1), exposed that caste stratification and oppression is a reality and dispelled a myth that this is only confined to rural or backward areas.<sup>5</sup> The NCRB, for the first time, took up for its reports, data on caste atrocities and stratification from nineteen metropolitan cities. The report, which captured substantial incidence of atrocities on the members of the Dalit community in the metropolis, deflates the theory that, with urbanisation and modern values caste will 'surely annihilate'. It certainly captured the anomalies which sustain caste based oppression and discrimination.

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<sup>3</sup>Lohia, Rammanohar. *The Caste System*. Navahind Prakashan, 1964, p.99.

<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on the basis of caste stratification and prohibits it by law; but data with each passing year a huge difference in theory and praxis have created a paradox. Traditional values still dominates the legality of Indian Constitution.

<sup>5</sup> Tiwary, Deeptiman. "NCRB Data, 2016: Most atrocities against Dalits involve crimes against women, most cases in Bengaluru". *The Indian Express*, Dated: 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017. Retrieved from: <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ncrb-data-2016-most-atrocities-against-dalits-involve-crimes-against-women-most-cases-in-bengaluru-4962457/>, 03/12/2017.

India's democratisation can be understood as a gradual, long term, multifaceted process operating since independence. India's liberal democracy with its written constitution and parliamentary system has duly enriched the whole process; and it has provided both individual rights and group rights (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward groups) to its citizens. The future course (after political independence) was meant to be a path of gradual socio- economic transformation, which sought to combine the goals of growth and redistribution, while avoiding the violent disruption and regimentation of revolutionary change.<sup>6</sup> Hence, political democracy through state's apparatus or institutions and legalities ensured politicisation of caste; but then, its intention was to ensure annihilation. The mapped trajectory of Indian democracy, however, represents an incomplete "politicisation of caste". It can be argued that the higher levels of representation of the oppressed castes in Parliament and Legislative assemblies vis a vis the ground realities in terms of their socio- economic status - is inversely proportional. To be precise, it showcases the dichotomous relationship between traditions and democratic values.

The founding fathers of India's Constitution did not vouch for the annihilation of India's traditions (in totality) in the face of western values; neither did they agree to or demand the glorification of a paleocentric India (centuries old Varna system that has apparently provided stability to great civilization of India). They were convinced that both of these suffer from the extremism and remain antithetical to progress. The "universalistic ethos" or "constitutional principles" of our secular democratic constitution should become a part of Indian traditions, remained the crux of their thoughts. Rajni Kothari's terms this particular phenomenon as "*Traditionalisation of*

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<sup>6</sup> Pai, Sudha. Dalit Assertion. Oxford University Press. Delhi, 2013, p. XIV



*Modernity*”, which represents a strategy for social change.<sup>7</sup> Annihilation of caste, as perceived by our law makers, not only sought for the demolition of the caste edifice through laws but also for the annihilation of caste from the minds of the people. It was premised on the interaction between deep-rooted traditions and modern democratic values and hence social development.

Ideologically, the edifice of caste represents itself as a rigid structure. But, historically, it has been dynamic. It has survived the revolutions and counter revolutions as Ambedkar has viewed Indian social history.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a serious philosophical engagement is required in the context of its changing contours. Beyond the idea of Varna, the discrete character of caste (segmentation of caste hierarchy represented by Jatis) and its response to electoral politics becomes very important in order to understand the caste conflicts, ground realities, politics and mobilizations today. Traditional forms of thoughts yielded new meanings in order to legitimise and utilise the powers provided by the modern state. M.N. Srinivas, through his theory of westernisation, highlights this phenomenon. Srinivas while discussing caste, sanskritization<sup>9</sup> and westernisation writes:

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<sup>7</sup> Kothari, Rajani. *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016, p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. B. R Ambedkar views the course of Indian History through the exposition of “Revolution and Counter Revolution”. For example, he compares the rise of Buddhism as a more powerful Revolution than French; but its values were again eroded by the Counter revolution of Brahminism through the Manusmiriti and its legitimisation. Ambedkar, B.R.. *Revolution and Counter – Revolution in Ancient India*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> The concept ‘Sanskritization’ was first introduced by Prof. M.N. Srinivas the famous Indian sociologist. He explained the concept of sanskritization in his book “Religion and society among the coorgs of South India” to describe the cultural mobility in the traditional caste structure of Indian society. In his study of the Coorgs of Mysore, he came to know that the lower castes were trying to raise their status in their caste hierarchy by adopting some cultural ideals of the Brahmins. As a result they left some of their ideals which are considered to be impure by the Brahmins. To explain this process of mobility, Srinivas used the term ‘Brahminization’. Later on he called it ‘Sanskritization’ in a

The acceleration in westernization does not necessarily slow down the process of Sanskritization'. Westernization, is defined as 'a process through which west's revolutionary ideas (equality, secularism, democracy, and humanitarianism et. al.), interacted with the east'. It does not necessarily leads to the eradication of traditional values and culture. In fact it shows continuity, change and an accommodative phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

Srinivas's theory shows, how caste, with its graded psychology of sanskritization, works under modernity. One could probably relocate through this that, as to why and how the whole project of western universal values changes the political or outer domain of democratic framework; but traditional or inner domain of caste remains unchanged.

The task of emancipation of the subaltern casts remains unfinished. But it will be unhistorical to view that it has not started yet. The whole journey from the Depressed Castes to the Scheduled Castes to *Harijan* and to becoming of the Dalit<sup>11</sup>, in independent India becomes vital to understanding the dynamics of lower caste assertions and their fight for equality and justice. It is also important here to bear that things are not exactly where they were in 1947. Since, last few decades, the growing radical consciousness, assertion and movements of caste subalterns have represented itself as a strong wave. It is regarded as the product of an upsurge from below. It manifests itself in the socio- economic, cultural, and political realm and has taken

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broad sense. Defining Sanskritization Srinivas writes, "Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste." Retrieved From: <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sanskritisation/sanskritization-meaning-characteristics-models-and-effects/47756>

<sup>10</sup> Srinivas, M.N.. *Social Change in Modern India*. Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2017, pp.58 -59

<sup>11</sup> 'Dalit' is defined as a broken person is often used as an epithet to describe scheduled Caste or Avarna people. It is a term mostly used for the castes in India that have been or is subjected to untouchability.

many different forms, such as political parties, protest literature, a variety of grassroots assertions, and more recently middle class activism.<sup>12</sup>

The clout of the caste subaltern movements, since its inception, is based upon different ideological strands. As caste was politicised under the colonial domain, distinct ideological strands and movements emerged during the colonial period. Sudha Pai writes:

Starting from the colonial period and continuing in the post-independence period, Dalit movements can be classified on the basis of three major ideological strands: Dravidians, Ambedkarite, and Gandhian, which emerged at different points of time.<sup>13</sup>

But, the contemporary discourse remains dominated by the ideological strand influenced by the cult of Ambedkar. After having been on fringes of the political process for about nearly four decades after of freedom, the Dalits have started to assert themselves independently since the late 1970s and this assertion has changed the dynamics of Indian politics. And this whole phenomenon revolves around the legacy and historical journey of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.

The entire Dalit universe revolves around its only sun, Ambedkar.<sup>14</sup> He remains the biggest driving force uniting the oppressed, which cut across the different party lines and ideologies. In fact his symbolisation in Indian politics has become synonymous with the oppressed voices. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, ‘Dalit’s political consolidation began with Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’.<sup>15</sup> In the arena of electoral democracy, Dalits and the oppressed masses represent a larger and

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<sup>12</sup> Pai, Sudha. *Dalit Assertion*. Oxford University Press. Delhi, 2013, p.XIV

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>14</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p.131.

<sup>15</sup> Ananth, Krishna. V.. *Politics in the Times of Churning: A Journalist’s Perception*. Daya Publication, Chennai, 2014, p.208

valuable vote share and the leaders know that without demonstrating allegiance to Ambedkar, they cannot exist.<sup>16</sup> The appropriation of his legacy even by the revivalist political platforms, who all firmly believe in the idea of ‘Varnashramadharma’ or caste institution and represent the right wing in Indian Democracy, underlines the ‘political’ importance of Ambedkar in contemporary India.<sup>17</sup>

Although as the chief architect of India’s constitution, Ambedkar had laid the roadmap for the political consolidation of the oppressed castes in independent India, the consolidation of his legacy remained on the fringes of socio- political spaces for many years after his demise. It was rejuvenated and became important with the arrival and the meteoric rise of the Dalit Panthers (1972) in Maharashtra. Until the 1970s the political aspirations of the lower castes in Maharashtra were sought to be met by the Republican Party of India. The Republican Party was an off shoot of Ambedkar’s legacy and his party, The Scheduled Caste Federation. The Party, as such, emerged after the demise of Ambedkar (on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1957) but was unable to secure a substantive foothold among the lower castes. Two reasons in particular - factionalism and co-optation of the Dalits into the mainstream political parties (particularly by the Congress) - left the RPI without any clout. The Dalit Panthers, meanwhile, represented itself as an alternative trajectory and even a reaction against the clientistic politics, which the mainstream parties had set up through leaders like

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<sup>16</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p.131.

<sup>17</sup> The right wing in Indian politics is being dominated by Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and its political wing, the Bhartiya Janta Party. They have ideological affinities with the Manusmriti, but because of political expediency have cultivated their interest in Ambedkar – who outrightly rejected their ideology during his lifetime.

Jagjivan Ram, B.P Maurya and others; these arrangements, in fact, represented a “coalition of extremes”.<sup>18</sup>

The lower castes, especially the youth (in the land of Ambedkar) were hopelessly splintered, because of the pathetic state of affairs of Dalits in Maharashtra and politics of intellectual and moral bankruptcy. Inspired by the Black Panther’s movement in the United States of America and Africa and the vacuum created by the Republican Party, the Avarna youth of Maharashtra started a revolutionary journey and this marked the beginning of the Dalit Panthers. Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Arjun Dangle and J.V Pawar formed the Dalit Panthers on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1974 to resist the dominance of the upper castes (the Panthers identified the non-Brahman sections of the Hindu community too as their adversaries in this, specially the Marathas).<sup>19</sup> The Panthers, from the beginning positioned themselves as radicals and outside the electoral arena and their movement was militant in nature.

It was with the advent of the Dalit Panthers that “*Dalitisation*” of Indian politics around Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar as the icon started. Gail Omvedt writes: ‘the Panthers been the starting point of Dalit ferment and their thrust was to universalize the Dalit Identity.’<sup>20</sup> But again because of factionalism and differences,

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<sup>18</sup> Brass, Paul. *The Politics of India Since Independence*. Foundation Books, New Delhi, 1999, p.36.

<sup>19</sup> Pawar, J.V. and Jadhav Sumedh. “The Rise and Fall of the Dalit Panther Movement”. Interview on Dalit Panthers. *Scroll.in*, Retrieved From: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0zcXHRHlx8>, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar And Beyond*. Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2016. P.74.

the Panthers disbanded their organization in 1977. Dalit Panthers was stroked by the same affliction and disease, which had earlier created the split in the RPI faction.

Notwithstanding the decline of Panthers, the two defining proponents of their legacy stayed permanently in Indian politics. Firstly, they replaced their myriad identities or Jatis of lower castes into one and gave it the name “Dalit” or broken people. Since then, the name got permanently attached with each and every lower caste politics and movements. And second was the “legacy and name of Ambedkar”. These two aspects, indeed, not only became the moral and ideological force for Dalits in their struggle; but also have defined their political discourse in Indian Democracy. In fact the rise of nationalistic party *Bhaujan Samaj Party under Kanshiram and Mayaywati*; saw its upsurge under the whole tokenism of Dalit identity dipped in Ambedkar. But concerns of this thesis remain quite different from the mapping out the history political parties and movements, which succeeded or failed on the basis of their icon Ambedkar. The whole idea is to look into the how and in what ways the legacy of Ambedkar was carried forward through and from history; which surpassed his profundity ( views on caste, democracy, argumentational tradition with Gandhi and pragmatic philosophy) and has reduced him to a mere cult of symbolism..

What united Dalits across India was struggle and life of their icon Dr. Ambedkar and still does. Divided by parties, states, organisation, leaders, activists’ et al. Dalits today are united by violence and hope; later comes from the legacy Ambedkar. Politics soon accommodated the icon and public nostalgia of Ambedkar within their respective domain. Wherever there are Dalits today – which is almost every district in India – Ambedkar is remembered and more importantly, revered.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of The World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador, 2007, p.616.

Ambedkar was both exemplar and icon, the man who breached the upper caste citadel including Gandhi's (the most powerful one) and encouraged his fellows to do likewise. It was clear in amidst of factionalism and clientistic politics, that, the discourse of Dalits needed a pan Indian hero to consolidate the masses in the age of populism and Babasaheb became one. And this phenomenon has also created an anti-Gandhi narrative where Mahatma becomes villain. It's a classic case of placing God in opposition to a Demon or *Rakshasha* and inventing a historical consciousness; to ensure and legitimise the former's heroism. Icon and symbolic politics have reduced both Ambedkar and Gandhi just to demigods, in the temples of history; whose invocation and due seasonal pilgrimages remains necessary for political benefits. This particular trajectory will be dealt in the chapter four after analysing their respective historical trajectories.

Today, no stones are being left unturned by any political party to appropriate the legacy of Ambedkar and Dalit's politicisation. From parliament to village streets, it is clear with the politics of flags and statutes, Dalits have placed Ambedkar at the top of the world.<sup>22</sup> But reflecting upon the present crisis, question remains – does this kind of democratic revolution was imagined by Ambedkar? Is it viable to reduce the universalistic Ambedkar to particularistic one? Is the upsurge of Dalit assertion through politics, duly follows the ethos of its Demi – god? Isn't the whole politicisation and appropriation of Ambedkar for political benefits sans his pragmatism, leads to a denial of Ambedkar's legacy? How it had helped this nation to gain social- economic Democracies envisaged by Ambedkar? In what ways placing and isolating Ambedkar – Gandhi discourse have benefited the idea of social justice

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<sup>22</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*, Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.XIV.

and equality, apart from divisive agendas and symbolic politics? Is not the conscious victimisation and exclusion despite of vibrant politics in the name of Ambedkar is against the historicity and legacy of Ambedkar? Et. al..

Reflecting on the caste atrocities and paradoxical discourse of Indian democracy, Anand Teltumbde writes, ‘Ambedkar is dead. The innumerable Ambedkarisms of Ambedkarite continue to thrive, hurrying past the Dalit masses engulfed in misery’.<sup>23</sup> The questions are many, but, the reality is – ideas, ideals and the legacy of Ambedkar have been neglected, transformed, re-invented and negated for political greed and need. It is not only that caste have been politicised as pointed out by eminent thinker Rajani Kothari, but, in order to make a break point from the analysis of Kothari; even the thinkers and their ideals have been politicised. Ambedkar and Gandhi’s politicisation for personal benefits dominates and negation of their struggles and ideals; substantiates this theory. Often the events that led to a decentralisation of Indian politics and deepening of its democracy (both Mandalisation and rise of Bhaujan and Dalit masses) called as a “Second Democratic Revolution” and it owes its allegiance to Ambedkar. But technically it depicts the colours of failure, compared to the first one. Writing on Ambedkar, Ambedkarites and Ambedkarism, Anand Teltumbde further writes:

Following Ambedkar does not necessitate fabricating the identity of an Ambedkarite. It does not mean that we idolise or worship him. Following him may be inspired by his vision of liberty, Equality and fraternity; critically engaging with the contemporary world devising strategies to realise changes in it. Following Ambedkar means being enlightened and not willingly blind,, hymn singing devotees. It means not taking anything as a fact just because some great person had held so. Following Ambedkar means dissecting his ideas and legacy in

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<sup>23</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p.150.



order to understand - why, despite the adulation paid to him, the relative condition of ordinary Dalits as remain pathetic as ever.<sup>24</sup>

Ambedkar was an organic intellectual and pragmatic philosopher. He through his journey became a concise keeper of this nation. Through his pertinent views he challenged the popular narrative - that political independence should not be an end; but the means to attain Swaraj. In this perspective he came very closer to his political opponent Gandhi. Historiography of Ambedkar is complex and not linear (as Dalit and can be contained into 'ism' as some other literature project it to be for political benefit) and needs a serious engagement. Histories do play a decisive role when it is prominently engaged with the present discourse. But the processes that resonated into the creation of Ambedkar as a symbol or icon, sourced from the historicity of his legacy - have duly neglected the complexity and profundity of Ambedkar. And that has created a deficit in the context of social justice and equality. Political discourse to attain power and sectional elevation has certainly created the icon of Ambedkar, but had destroyed the thinker in him; who vouched for liberty, equality and fraternity.

The desire through the idea of India was not only to protect the rights of the people, but to eliminate several schisms and to bring socio – economic changes. Republics are easy to form and hard to sustain.<sup>25</sup> Our founding fathers and mothers gave us a republican constitution, but, all they could hope was that a civic virtue and morality. As Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar pointed out:

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<sup>24</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p.146.

<sup>25</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. "Do we want to keep the Republic?". Indian Express, Date: 25th January 2018. Retrieved From: <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/keeping-the-republic-indian-constitution-democracy-5039524/> 28/01/2018.

Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is the only a top dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic.<sup>26</sup>

“Essentially undemocratic” in the words of Ambedkar represented a ‘gulf’ between theory and praxis. The apprehensions of Ambedkar about political democracies, which block the whole idea equality, have certainly become the realities of world’s largest democracy.

The Non – Brahman manifesto (as discussed in chapter 1) certainly represented a crisis in the leadership. The rise of Ambedkar along with Gandhi and Periyar filled that vacuum and he went on to become the concise keeper of Gandhi vis - a - vis Indian nation. Democracy remains the key in our understanding of Dr. Ambedkar and his contribution to India’s socio- political history. It also defines his stand in each phase of his struggle for the depressed people. As the post-independence crisis continues and hopes are related to the cult and icon of B. R Ambedkar; it becomes an engaging exercise to deal with the ideals of Babasaheb and his idea of Democracy.

Section 1 of this chapter will deal with the rise of Ambedkar as political and social leader. This part will trace his initial career and struggles. This will analyse the transformation Ambedkar towards his dynamic statesmanship and how he became the emerging leader of Dalits. Section 2 will be an engaging exercise within the context of his relationship with Gandhi and transformations in his personality. Gandhi remains an important figure in his journey and they both transform each other tremendously. It was because of their engagement that socio- economic issues of depressed ran parallel to political struggle; and became a mass concern Their debate

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<sup>26</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed). Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2005, p. 485.

still dominates the political discourse and academic circles ( this chapter in particular will highlight the Ambedkar's political life and the holistic debate will form the part of a later chapter). Section 3 will deal with his forage towards electoral strategies for depressed masses. This part will also comprehend radical phase in his life. Section 4 will be the Conclusion. The whole chapter will trace the thinker and constitutionalist in Ambedkar. The purpose of this particular chapter is to analyse the teleological narrative of Indian democracy and how Ambedkar thought it to be; as he became India's leading political thinker and statesman.

## **Section 1:**

### **Rise of a 'Thinker': Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**

The Mahad Conferences<sup>27</sup> which began in the year 1927 (March 19<sup>th</sup>), after passing of famous Bole Resolution<sup>28</sup> in the Bombay Legislative Council; is still regarded as the beginning of political unity and awakening of depressed masses, under the name of 'Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar'. The public response to two Mahad conferences and Satyagraha attached to it remains the inconvertible proof of the successes of emergent associational forms that sprouted from the caste consciousness; which emerged in colonial era and was channelized through the critiques of outcaste stigma. By the 1920s, identity based collectives and associations raising sectorial demands

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<sup>27</sup> Mahad is a big town in Raigad district situated in the North Konkan region of Maharashtra state, India. Mahad, a town in Konkan, was selected for the event because it had a nucleus of support from 'caste Hindus'. These included A.V.Chitre, an activist from the Marathi Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu (CKP) community; G.N.Sahasrabudhe, a Chitpavan Brahmin of the Social Service League and Surendranath Tipnis, a CKP who was president of the Mahad municipality

<sup>28</sup> Resolution passed on August 4 1923 by S.K Bole (a social reformer turned politician) in Bombay Legislative Assembly. It stipulated that Untouchables were authorised to use well, *dharamshalas*, schools, courts, administrative offices and public dispensaries.

started to play an important role in the socio-political discourses across the country. These worked, sometimes in tandem with and at times parallel to the nationalistic discourse of political struggle against British. At Mahad, the outcastes, along with their leaders (this represented a combination of reformers from all castes), fought for what is considered today as “basic human rights” or “civic equality”.

Social exclusion and oppression became open to criticisms with the social and political reforms that preceded Mahad Satyagraha. But whether it was a symbolic gesture to ‘drink water’ from ‘Chowdar/ Chavdar Tank’<sup>29</sup> or the symbolic gesture of sacrilege, i.e., burning down the “*Manusmiriti*”; after second Mahad Conference - a departure was being witnessed from previous socio - political reforms and movements. Social upliftment programmes, after the arrival of Ambedkar, even while continuing with the earlier tradition of raising arguments in the public domain - was based on reasoning and rationality. The departure was that, these were now far more ‘human centric’ than ‘religious or ethical’. It was here that, Ambedkar infused the ethos of revolutionary ideas crafted through the ‘French Revolution’<sup>30</sup>, in the depressed masses and even compared the Mahad Conference to the *Etats Generaux de Versailles*; where, for the first time the ‘*Third Estate*’ had revolted in collective and formal fashion.<sup>31</sup> Ambedkar, with his intellect and radicalism gave a fiery speech at second Mahad conference (26<sup>th</sup> December 1927) and called for the abolition of the caste system from its roots:

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<sup>29</sup> Chowdar or Chavdar tank represented a horrendous form of casteism, which stipulated that untouchables cannot drink water from the tank as it is a sin under caste rules and will impure other castes.

<sup>30</sup> Ambedkar was highly inspired by the *French Revolution* and ideas of *Equality, liberty and Fraternity* became an important and integral part of his personal and political struggles.

<sup>31</sup> Shahare, M.L., Anil, Nalani. *Dr B.R Ambedkar Struggles and Message*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p.122

At the outset, let me tell those who oppose us that we did not perish because we would not drink water from this Chowdar Tank. We now want to go to the tank only to prove that, like others, we are also human beings (...). This Conference has been called to inaugurate an era of equality in this Land. Removal of untouchability and inter castes dinners alone will not put an end to our ills. All departments of services such as courts, military, police and commerce should be thrown open to us (...). Hindu society should be reorganised on two main principles – equality and absence of casteism.<sup>32</sup>

The spectacular challenge to the orthodoxy by the depressed masses, where civic inclusion threatened the religious sanctions or exclusion; represented a kind of vital movement. Equality challenged the orthodoxy. It was a political and social departure from the unitary movements, which dominated both time and space and at its outset challenged the existing 'hollow narratives'. With Ambedkar, an alternate narrative started to contest the existing and the emerging idea of India. But his final and proper departure can be located only in the 1930's. The significance of Mahad is that it was from there that Ambedkar started to chart a new political paradigm from below. Ambedkar's speech and his four resolutions (through which he concluded the conference) sent out a clear message: That something went wrong in constitutive aspect and not in the regulative one. The conference four resolutions demand an attention in the wake of horrendous casteism prevalent in our times. These resolutions still find places in the genuine demands made by the depressed classes in democratic India. The four resolutions were - declaration of Human Rights; repudiation of Manusmriti; a demand that Hindu society to be considered as one Varna or class; and a vocation that priestly profession be open to all.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the whole episode of the Mahad Satyagraha envisaged the road map for socio-economic democracy,

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<sup>32</sup>Jaffrelot, *Christophe. Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.47.

<sup>33</sup>Shahare, M.L., Anil, Nalani. *Dr B.R Ambedkar Struggles and Message*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, pp.148 -149

which became the core of the 'Idea of India'. The intellect and thinker in Ambedkar enabled the depressed classes to have a voice for self-respect and pride.<sup>34</sup> No doubt he became the first untouchable leader of 'India'.<sup>35</sup>

But was Mahad a spontaneous movement or the rise of Ambedkar as the political leader of depressed classes in itself a part of that spontaneity; perhaps not. In the words of Antonio Gramsci, "It must be stressed that 'pure' spontaneity does not exist in history: it would come to the same thing as 'pure' mechanicity."<sup>36</sup> Ambedkar was a traditional heir of socio – economic and political churning that preceded him in the form of reform and revival movements. Eleanor Zelliot attributes the four on-going currents that led to the rise of Babasaheb and had profoundly affected the depressed masses, in particular the Mahars (caste of Ambedkar). These were – the bhakti cult, the Maratha expansion (and visibility of caste oppression), the coming of the British rule, and the Non – Brahman movements.<sup>37</sup>

The cult of Bhakti saints like Chokhmela, Kabir, Tukaram, et al. created a sense of pride among the depressed masses in western India, especially in Maharashtra. The Mahars were particularly influenced by the Bhakti traditions; Ambedkar's family, incidentally, followed the Kabirpanthi sect.<sup>38</sup> The fact that the

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<sup>34</sup>Shahare, M.L., Anil, Nalani. *Dr B.R Ambedkar Struggles and Message*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, pp.160

<sup>35</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.08.

<sup>36</sup> Bambery, Chris. *Gramsci on spontaneity, organisation and leadership* , Counter Fire, Date:30<sup>th</sup> August 2012, Retrieved From: <http://www.counterfire.org/theory/79-gramsci/15990-gramsci-on-spontaneity-organisation-and-leadership->

<sup>37</sup> Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Kabirpanthis*: An Indian community comprising of either Muslim or Hindu ancestry which recognises *Kabir* (a 15<sup>th</sup> century Bhakti saint) as their Prophet. It claims to be a spiritual organization

thirteenth century saint “*Chokhmela*”<sup>39</sup> belonged to the Mahar community created a sense of pride among them. Bhakti, have constantly based itself on the theory of ‘equality’ before the god, challenged caste hierarchies. The Mahars also joined sects like the Mahanubhava who, like the Kabirpanthis shunned Hinduism because of its caste distinction.<sup>40</sup> But the most problematic limitation of the Bhakti tradition, which Ambedkar also emphasised, is related to its concept of salvation in another life and world and not political or social equality in this very world and life. Notwithstanding its limitations, an inherent approach to challenge casteism through the bhakti discourse presented itself as key vehicle for political movements.

Secondly, the Maratha expansion - under the tutelage of the Peshwa rulers strengthened the process of sanskritization and casteism. Graded inequalities were visible and caste domination was rampant. The most dominant among untouchables, the Mahars, have a peculiar position; although they held *baluta* under *Balutedari system*<sup>41</sup>; the stigma of untouchability raised a conflict between them and the others in the day to day life. They were obliged to wear earthenware around the necks so that their spit did not defile the ground on which the Brahmins walked.<sup>42</sup> But what

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dedicated to unite Hindu and Muslim traditions and sustain peace between them. They follow all the synthetic teachings of Kabir.

<sup>39</sup>*Chokhmela* was a saint in Maharashtra, India in the 14th century. He belonged to the Mahar caste, considered "untouchable" in India in that era. He wrote many *Abhangas*. He was one of the first Dalit poets in India. He remains an inspiring figure among untouchables.

<sup>40</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.20.

<sup>41</sup> In Maharashtra region and Bombay Province there used to be a system named as "12 *Balutedar*" i.e. 12 types of people doing different types of work; based on their caste. So the type of work they used to do got stuck with them as their surname. Even now, many people in rural Maharashtra are known by their work or position. Mahars though untouchable was part of this *Balutedari system*.

<sup>42</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.21.

changed the dynamics in western India and challenged such stratification was demography; which was quite different from northern states, particularly the Gangetic valley and the cradle of the Vedic civilization. It provided strength for mass movements.

Demography, as discussed by Christophe Jaffrelot, Anupama Rao and Eleanor Zelliott, Nicholas Dirks, et al. of western and southern India played a key role in the emergence of the Non – Brahman and Depressed class movements.<sup>43</sup> Caste population played a key variable in associational forms and movements, which was invented and imagined after the orientalist policies and caste census by the Britons. Facts suggest that in 1931, the Mahars constituted 68.9 percent of untouchables in the Bombay Presidency (compared to 16.2% of Chambhars and 14.9% of Mangs). Although their proportion of the population was not numerous as the Marathas (20.2%), their numbers were far higher than that of the Brahmins.<sup>44</sup> The Marathi proverb “*jethe gao, tethe maharwada* – illustrates both the pervasiveness of the Mahar caste and its low status in the caste hierarchy.<sup>45</sup>

This particular demographic setup played a crucial role, in the wake of the opportunities, that were provided in the colonial set up and this also exposed the Mahars to the ideas of west. A Similar trend, as to what South India had witnessed in the form of the Dravidian movements based on their demography, was witnessed in the western regions. Collective identities responded to the socio – economic and

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<sup>43</sup> Demography and its impact on associational forms and movements under colonial era depicted a unique phenomenon in southern and western India. According to scholars and historians it led to vigorous social reform movements.

<sup>44</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.19

<sup>45</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 24.



political developments. The emerging leaders from the Mahar community like Gopal Baba Walangkar, Kisan Faoji Bansode, G.A. Gawai, et al., represented the phase of political ferment that started before Ambedkar. So, although caste with graded inequalities became anathema towards any revolution or reformation, demographically the dominant caste among the castes presented itself as a driving force to shun that anathema. No doubt, the Mahars were the most important driving force behind the rise of Ambedkar.

The third important aspect behind the rise of the Mahars and Ambedkar was the window of opportunities that came with the commercial policies of British. With industrial revolution and the legitimisation of colonialism, the depressed classes, the Mahars in particular, responded to the economic opportunities. Urban life and lesser humiliation attracted them and on the other hand the Britons peacefully got their labour force and men for the imperialist needs. In 1921, only 13 per cent of the working Mahars were engaged in their traditional professions as against the 55 per cent of Chambhars and 33.2 per cent of Mangs. Many migrated to Bombay, where, where they often found a post in police, work in the factories or in the coaling area of the docks. According to the census of 1921, 12 per cent of population of Bombay and its factory workers were untouchables (mostly Mahars) while they accounted for only four per cent of population of Bombay in 1864 and 1 per cent of factory workers in 1872.<sup>46</sup>

But apart from all these occupations, their recruitment to the Army remained the most decisive influences on the making of the untouchable movement. Mahars military history duly became á significant part of its caste élan and mythology. And

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<sup>46</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.23

the hundred – year period of Mahar recruitment into British army may well become the single most important factor, aside from economic reasons, in the making of the Mahar movement.<sup>47</sup>

As an aside, it may be worthwhile pointing out that this aspect – the Mahars as soldiers in the British-Indian army and the legacy – turned out into a debate in the context of the Dalit groups observing the anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle. After a spate of violence inflicted upon the Dalits who gathered to observe the centenary of the battle in December-January 2017-18, Indian academia and press debated the Bhīma – Koregaon celebrations. While the Dalit organisations saw it as their regular custom of celebration, the right wing and the upper castes constructed the celebrations as an anti-national act.<sup>48</sup> However, British policies towards the untouchables changed in due course and particularly with the invention by colonial ethnographers of what came to be known as the “martial races” since about 1895, closed the doors to the Mahars into the army. This too contributed to the Mahars organising as a group and bitterly resenting the colonial policy. A plea for restoring the old and opening up of the army jobs to them was part of almost all Mahar petitions from the earliest days of the movement until the Mahar Regiment was re-established in 1942; this was clearly under the guidance of Ambedkar.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> The Koregaon pillar commemorates the Mahar soldiers of British Army who fell during one of the decisive battles in 1818 against the Peshwas of Maratha Empire. It's a monument that was used as a gathering place for Mahar meetings in the 1920's and 1930's. It holds the memorial to Mahar soldiers who had fought on the sides of the colonial generals a victorious battle against the Peshwa and served as an inspiration then and now.

<sup>49</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 49

The first attempt to organise for some sort of political action and movement, thus, came as a result of closing recruitment. The importance of the protest movement against the colonial policy of exclusion, can be traced by the fact that Gopal Baba Walangkar, a retired army man, not only started the first untouchable newspaper, *Vital Vidhvansak* in 1888, but also threatened ‘conversion through his petition’; a trajectory that Ambedkar was destined to follow in 1955. Walangkar was ahead of his times and in true sense was the forerunner to Ambedkar. In one of his petitions, Walagkar stated this in such clear terms:

We are about to adopt that religion of one God in which there is not high or low (...).<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the Army and how it played a crucial role in the Dalit resurgence was later stressed by Ambedkar while critiquing the Indian National Congress and its attitude towards the Dalits. He wrote:

Until the advent of British, the untouchables were content to remain untouchables. It was a destiny preordained by Hindu god and enforced by Hindu state. As such there was no escape from it. Fortunately or unfortunately, the East India Company needed soldiers for their Army in India and it could find none but the untouchables. The East India Company’s army consisted, at any rate in the early part of its history, of the untouchables and although the untouchables are now included among the non-marital classes and are therefore excluded from the army; it is with the help of an army composed of untouchables that British conquered India. In the army of East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory education for Indian soldiers and their children, both male and female. The education received by untouchables in the army while it was open to them gave them one advantage which they never had before. It gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest, they felt the shame of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of it.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *What Congress and Gandhi Have done to Untouchables*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015, p.189.

Lastly, two variants of social reform, one led by the Non – Brahmins and other by Brahmins elite, started to evolve and change the contours of the age long tradition of oppression based on caste. Most importantly, from the concerns of this study, these touched upon the lives of the oppressed masses. Educational opportunities and its access, channelized through the reformists and the evangelists, led opening of schools and colleges. For depressed masses, these changes provided them the space to shun the traditional degrading work attributes. Army recruitments and Christian missionaries thus played a significant role in the making of a new social consciousness and thus rendered a new dimension to reforms. As discussed earlier (in chapter I), the whole discourse of ‘orientalising the orient’ and the reactions to it, in the form of reform and revivalist movements, also created a huge impact in Bombay presidency.

The importance of modern education and its implications for the emancipation of the depressed classes was central to the thoughts and campaign by reformers like Jotirao Phule, Ramakrishna Bhandarkar, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Vitthal Ramji Shinde and others. Vitthal Ramji Shinde’s network of schools and hostels numbered thirty at the peak of the movement, which began in 1906. Its importance can be seen in the 1916 educational statistics for Bombay city. Of the 1, 600 Depressed Class children in the schools in Bombay city, nearly a third of that number, five hundred, were enrolled in Shinde’s Depressed Classes Mission School.<sup>52</sup> Such initiatives, interestingly, were not just initiated by the reformers and colonial masters alone. The rulers too took this path. As for instance, the Gaikwad of Baroda opened eighteen schools for untouchables in his own state and

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<sup>52</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 41

so did the Maharaja of Kolhapur (interestingly they became patron to Ambedkar also). Among the Non – Brahman movements the most radical of the reformers was Jotirao Phule. Phule was not only a social reformer but was an educator too. Considered to be among the founding fathers of social reforms in Western India, Phule held that: “without education knowledge is lost; without knowledge development is lost; without development wealth is lost; without wealth Shudras are ruined.”<sup>53</sup> It may be stressed here that Phule held this out in 1890, a year before Ambedkar was born.

Thus, when Ambedkar appeared on the public scene, the ground was prepared, thanks to efforts by a whole lot of reformers, for the emergence of social and political movements. Consciousness among the untouchables was cultivated and collective identities were created.<sup>54</sup> The associational organizations and the movement were in need of a leader and thinker. Ambedkar, himself a part and a product of this reality and consciousness, filled the vacuum with his educational credentials and statesmanship.

## **Section 1.1**

### **Towards an Enlightened Mind: Education, Untouchability and Ambedkar**

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1952, Columbia University presented Ambedkar with an honorary degree of Doctorate of Law, at a special convocation and hailed him as not only ‘the framer

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<sup>53</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.18

of the Indian Constitution<sup>55</sup>, but also recognised his service as "a great social reformer and a valiant upholder of human rights."<sup>56</sup>

The life journey of this great social reformer often represents itself as an enigmatic one. He was, since childhood, a victim of what today can be described as a victim of Human rights violation. It may, hence, have influenced him formulate the idea of democracy resting upon equality. Ambedkar believed that democracy meant equality and ought to be the foundation on which Liberty and Fraternity to be built.<sup>57</sup> It was obvious for someone who had experienced inequality based on caste in his own life, to hold on to such a view. Books and education were seen by him as a liberator. Nanak Chand Rattu, his close associate for seventeen years and personal secretary for six years, wrote:

Reading and writing was the greatest joy of Dr. Ambedkar's life. It was directed to some purpose in life. It was his aim to arm himself with every possible missile, make himself master of a repository of knowledge and develop the power of his mind to prepare himself for higher attainments and the new life that was to open the portals and possibilities of great career.<sup>58</sup>

Both his personal and professional travails culminated in the rise of a leader and thinker in Ambedkar. A brief foray into the life of Ambedkar will not only help gather the context in which he continuously strived for the humanistic and rational ethos; but also how and why he has emerged into an icon of the Dalit movement, (particularly in times after his demise).

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<sup>55</sup> Rattu, Nanak Chand. *Little Known Facets of Dr. Ambedkar. Focus Impressions*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 9

<sup>56</sup> Information collected on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018, Retrieved from: Columbia University Website [http://c250.columbia.edu/c250\\_celebrates/remarkable\\_columbians/bhimrao\\_ambedkar.html](http://c250.columbia.edu/c250_celebrates/remarkable_columbians/bhimrao_ambedkar.html)

<sup>57</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed). Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2005, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> Rattu, Nanak Chand. *Little Known Facets of Dr. Ambedkar. Focus Impressions*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 68

Both His grandfather Malojirav Sakpal and father Ramji Sakpal were part of the army and hence liberated, in a limited sense of the term, from the fellow Mahars of their own times. This, however, did not help Ambedkar to come out from the stigma of being treated an untouchable.

Ambedkar or Bhīma was born in April 14<sup>th</sup> 1891 in Mhow, a small town in central India and was one of the 14 children to his parents; seven of those had died in infancy (a common fate of the time). Ambedkar was the fourteenth child and was named Bhīma and called by diminutive Bhiva.<sup>59</sup> His father rose to the rank of an officer and was a Subehdar when he retired.<sup>60</sup> After retirement, he took up the job of a cashier and storekeeper in the services of the colonial government and settled in Goregaon in Satara district in the then Bombay Presidency. Ambedkar completed his primary education from Dapoli and Satara. It was in Satara that a Brahmin teacher, highly impressed by his credentials, gave him the name “Ambedkar”, which he was to use rest of his life. The traditional family name, Sakpal (a totem name), or a name derived from his ancestral village, Ambavadekar, might well have been used according to the pattern developed, as Maharashtrians entered a world where last names were required.<sup>61</sup> But the teacher, who evidently loved the young Bhiva, gave his name Ambedkar to him. And Ambedkar duly honoured him as a Guru.<sup>62</sup>

Caste stratification and orthopraxy attached to it, which was capable of monitoring the whole life of a human as well as beyond, duly affected Ambedkar’s life. He witnessed oppression and exclusion. From wanting to learn Sanskrit, to sit in

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<sup>59</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.3.

<sup>60</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Waiting For A visa*. Samayk Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 67

<sup>62</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.4.

the class room and even to drink water freely; all was denied on the basis of his caste. These incidents are mentioned in one of Ambedkar's seminal works, '*Waiting for A Visa*'; visa here remains the personified version of exclusion and harsh realities of casteism. He writes:

...I was an untouchable and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations. For instance, I knew that in school I could not sit in the midst of my class students according to my rank but that I was to have in corner by myself. I knew that in school I was to have a separate piece of gunny cloth for me to squat on in the classroom and the servant employed to clean the school would not touch the gunny cloth used by me. I was required to carry the gunny cloth home in the evening and bring it back the next day. While in school I knew that children of the touchable classes, when they fell thirsty, could go out to the water tap, open it quench the thirst. All that was necessary was the permission of the teacher. But my position was separate. I could not touch the tap unless it was opened by the touchable person; it was not possible for me to quench my thirst. In my case permission of teacher was not enough. The presence of the school peon was necessary, for, he was the only person whom the class teacher could use for such purpose. If the peon was not available I had to go without water. The situation can be summed in a statement – no peon, no water.<sup>63</sup>

There is no clarity as to whether this condition of his school life was in Goregaon or elsewhere. That, however, is immaterial for our research. The point is that untouchability and segregation were a norm in schools where Ambedkar grew up.

After few years the family moved to Bombay and Ambedkar completed his matriculation in 1907. Before matriculation he was married to Ramabai Walangkar. Her family connection also included army men. The early Mahar leader Gopal Baba Walangkar was a relative of Ambedkar's young bride. With the help of a stipend from the Gaikwad of Baroda, Sayajiro Gaikwad, Ambedkar completed his B.A in English and Persian from Eliphinstone College, Bombay in 1913. He was denied his first

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<sup>63</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Waiting For A visa*. Samayk Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 16.



choice – Sanskrit studies -even there.<sup>64</sup> After completion of his graduation in 1913, he went on to serve the Gaikwad of Baroda. But then because of his lower caste status, there too he faced difficulties in the caste ridden Baroda. Ambedkar could not find a residence except the Arya Samaj office quarters. Destiny or circumstances called Ambedkar back to Bombay on his father's demise and he chose to stay back.

Help came again from the Gaikwad of Bombay and Ambedkar got the scholarship for Columbia University; the place which in the words Ambedkar 'awakened his potential'.<sup>65</sup> He would stress, many times later on that his stay in America help extinguish the thought that he was an "untouchable".<sup>66</sup> Ambedkar firmly believed that, "ideas needs propagation as much as plant needs watering" and it was in was in Columbia University that the ideas of western philosophy from equality to democracy came to influence his thoughts in a structured manner. He became a serious thinker and scholar. He connected western thoughts with Indian society at large.

It was in Columbia that Ambedkar came in contact with some great scholars and professors like John Dewey, James Shortwell, Edwin Seligman and James Harvey Robinson. It was under the guidance of Professor Seligman, an economist, that he was awarded his M.A. in 1915 and submitted his dissertation for his P.hD in 1916.<sup>67</sup>

It may be noted that Ambedkar did express on the concept of sanskritization long before M.N.Srinivas did; when he spoke and wrote about the "*Infection of*

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<sup>64</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 68

<sup>65</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 69

<sup>66</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Waiting For A visa*. Samayk Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 17

<sup>67</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.30

*Imitation*".<sup>68</sup> Its detailed analysis underlines the core of what Srinivas's sanskritization is all about. Being a student of Economics, his interest in other subjects was magnetic. He took several courses on sociology, history, politics, philosophy and a yearlong seminar in Anthropology with Alexander Goldenweiser.<sup>69</sup> It was in this process that Ambedkar forayed into analysing caste and this took a shape of one of his engaging texts, titled "*Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*". The thinker in Ambedkar challenged the western views on caste and he took over authors like Emile Senart, H.H. Risley, J.C.Nesfield and Denzil Ibbeston – for having defined 'caste as a unit by itself and not as one within the system of castes'<sup>70</sup>.

He also demolished the then existing racial theories of Aryan invasion (as discussed in chapter one) propounded by the western thinkers and made an audacious statement in the process and wrote:

European students of Caste have unduly emphasised the role of colour in the caste system. Themselves impregnated by the colour prejudices, they very readily imagined it to be the chief factor in the caste.<sup>71</sup>

Ambedkar not only destroyed the on-going occidental theories, but also provided his viewpoints with deep study and with conclusive arguments. His concepts such as infection of imitation, graded inequalities, negation of racial theories, to look casteism based on castes (Jatis), endogamy and how casteism provides cultural

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<sup>68</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Castes In India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 28

<sup>69</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>70</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Castes In India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Castes In India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016. P. 33

homogeneity to heterogeneous India et al., continue to command attention from academics and considered to be the relevant gateways in order to understand casteism. But the two most important highlights of his paper were – one, India represents a cultural homogeneity through the exposition of human institution and second, the case of endogamy and how it perpetuates casteism.<sup>72</sup> On cultural unity (through human institution of caste) which contemporary India still adheres and follows, he wrote:

Ethnically all people are heterogeneous. It is the unity of culture that is the basis of homogeneity. Taking this for granted, I venture to say that there is no country that can rival the Indian peninsula with respect to the unity of its culture. It has not only the geographic unity, but it has over and above all a deeper and much more fundamental unity – the indubitable cultural unity that covers the land from end to end.<sup>73</sup>

Ambedkar's stint in America, in several ways redefined him. With a post graduate degree and with thesis submitted for doctorate degree, he left America. But American phase of his life stayed with him. It was there that, under the guidance of special professors and his most favourite John Dewey, a strong unwavering belief in the power of Human centric values and democratic ideals (equality, Liberty and Fraternity), became part of his thought process. In all capacity it was similar to Gandhian experience of South Africa.

The intellectual hunger of Ambedkar and urge to study more took him to London. In spite of objection from the diwan of Baroda, a direct intervention from Maharaja gained him a scholarship. With a reference from his previous teacher and guide, Edwin Seligman to Sidney Webb; Ambedkar joined London School of Economics. He also got enrolled himself in Grey's Inn to study law. Ambedkar

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<sup>72</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 69

<sup>73</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Castes In India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016. P. 11.

unable to get extension for his scholarship had to return back from England and went to Baroda again for the fulfilment of his indebted employment. But again the burden of caste became heavy on his personality and education. He had to face again one of the most troubling situations of his life.

Back in Baroda, Ambedkar could not find a home to stay and had to impersonate himself as Parsi to stay in a Parsi Inn. But his impersonation was short lived and on 11<sup>th</sup> day he had to leave what he described as a prisoners cell<sup>74</sup>. Many years later, Ambedkar recorded the incident and gave a conclusive remark that: “a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi”. The horrifying incident on the 11<sup>th</sup> day, in Ambedkar’s own words, is worth reciting here:

As I was picking up some books, which I had borrowed overnight for returning them to the library I heard the footsteps of a considerable number of people coming up the staircase. I thought they were tourists who had come to stay and was therefore looking out to see who these friends were. Instantly I saw a dozen angry looking, tall, sturdy Parsis, each armed with a stick, coming towards my room. I realised that they were not fellow tourists and they gave proof immediately. They lined up in front of my room and fired a volley of questions. Who are you? Why did you come here? How dare you to take a Parsi name? You scoundrel! You have polluted the Parsi Inn! I stood silent. I could give no answer. I could not persist in impersonation. It was in fact a fraud and fraud was discovered, and I am sure if I had persisted in the game I was playing I would have been assaulted by a mob of angry and fanatic Parsis and probably doomed to death. My meekness and my silence averted that doom.... (.) But the Parsis were in no mood to listen. They issued an ultimatum. They must not see me in the inn the evening. I must pack off. They held out dire consequences and left. I was bewildered. My heart sank within me. I cursed all and wept bitterly. After all I was deprived of my precious possession – namely a shelter. It was no better than a prisoner’s cell. But it was to me very precious.<sup>75</sup>

Caste, once again, defeated Ambedkar and he left Baroda after being not entertained by his friends also. After a year and half of tutoring in Parsi families,

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<sup>74</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Waiting For A visa*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Waiting For A visa*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 21.

attempting to run a stock and shares advising agency, and teaching at Dharwar College, Ambedkar finally secured a two year appointment as professor at Sydenham College of Commerce Bombay.<sup>76</sup> Ambedkar taught there from 1918 to 1920 and earned enough money to complete his studies. Shahu Maharaja of Kolhapur, meanwhile, impressed by his intellect supported his further studies. Back to London and Ambedkar finished his M.Sc. and his thesis was on “*Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India*” as well his D.Sc. with the thesis on “*Problem of the Rupee*”. He also completed his Law.

On his return to Bombay, again in 1923, Ambedkar began his dual work of reform and organization of the depressed classes and their representation in the government.

## **Section 1.2**

### **Emergence of a Depressed Class Leader: A rational voice from Below (1919:1930)**

Ambedkar’s political roadmap was distinct in the sense that, it was marked by his lifelong effort to find a language into which existential realities of the depressed and their deprivations can be placed. The existential entity as humans, which was denied to the depressed historically, needed a rational approach both sociologically and politically. Bhimrao, an educated youth, followed a two way trajectory in channelizing the self-determination and respect among the depressed. The struggle for religious and social rights continued, but, the whole process of democratisation of India through different Council Reforms and Indian Acts (which became the core of

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<sup>76</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 71

India's democratic system) by the Colonial government - added an intense political dimension to Ambedkar's movement.

Apart from the ground level social mobilisation and political awakening among the untouchables, Ambedkar foregrounded their cause even in the limited sense of responsible government institutions; which the colonial government brought into place at various points of time. He duly participated in it as their 'independent' representative. In a socio-legal vein, Ambedkar constantly prepared the ground or rather trained his thoughts and actions through a comprehensive critique of casteism and through the on-going social reforms programme. His deep reasoning towards the structural realities of casteism and ethos attached to it, often determined his political boundaries on rational ground. This approach provided uniqueness to his personality as compared to several others and it was because, as his views remained pertinent towards one agency - defined as Human.

Ambedkar the reformist and astute politician challenged the very possibilities of using liberal's models (most important among them, the Congress elites) of commensuration to equalize depressed (Dalits).<sup>77</sup> He criticised the whole policy and trajectory of co- option without any substantial change. He went ahead and challenged the Congress version of emancipation and compared their design of political radicalism similar to that of '*Social Tories*'. Whether it was the Mahad Satyagraha or his half-hearted approach towards 'temple Satyagrahas', he made human institutions and expositions related to it, as his core. Ambedkar firmly believed that it's not the religious or metaphysical realities, that have created and legitimised caste structure, but, behind the veil of all these exists a deep human conspiracy. The break point in

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<sup>77</sup> Rao, Anupama. *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2019, pp.124-125.

Ambedkar's leadership as reformer and politician was his 'Indianisation of western learning' or to use 'rational lens' to critique the existing realities.

Conferences, Sabhas, Newspaper, Satyagraha, organisations, political awareness, associations' et al., became the tool for Ambedkar in the initial years of his transformation as leader. The phase between World War I to India's independence, the mainstream Indian politics was dominated by two major activities, one was related to the increasing democratisation of India through participation of Indians in the in parliamentary bodies, the other represented and was dominated by the cult of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his mass movements. Both of these had a huge impact on the depressed classes' political and social consciousness. Ambedkar himself was part of that consciousness and utilised the tools related to it for mobilising the mass consciousness.

Notwithstanding literature on Ambedkar and his works, presenting him and Gandhi as trenchant opponents; there is evidence to suggest that Ambedkar remained a "young Gandhian" in many ways and to be precise a follower. Whether it was the Mahad Satyagraha or the temple entry programmes, which he directed in Amroti, Poona and Nasik; Satyagraha and non-violence came from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>78</sup> But it shall remain clear, that in context to Ambedkar's reasoning and protest ideologies (in which he took inspiration from previous reformers and scholars), he never hesitated to change his stance when faced with hard realities. This made him, in a later phase, to become the 'conscience keeper of Gandhi 'and an ardent critic of Gandhian discourse of emancipation.

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<sup>78</sup> Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 83.

Ambedkar's vision of humanity went beyond the idea of caste unity and identification. From the choice of the names of the conferences he organised, to the newspapers he steered, he never let the title to denote a certain caste or community; but depressed as a whole. Zelliott writes that, this made him a towering personality over others of his times, like Kisan Faogji Bnsode and Shiram Janba Kamble.<sup>79</sup> To arouse public opinion among the masses Ambedkar started '*Mooknayak*', a newspaper with the patronage of Shahu of Kolhapur in 1920; *Bahishkrut Bharat* in 1927; and *Janta* in 1929.

Conferences with common masses along with key speeches from Ambedkar also played a key role in associations and mobilisation. Shahu of Kolhapur met Ambedkar in 1920, (himself a champion of Non - Brahman cause) realised the capabilities of young Bhimrao and organised a two day sponsored conference on untouchables, at Mangaon Kolhapur. He went ahead stated in the conference which ultimately became a prophecy for India:

“You have found your saviour in Ambedkar”.<sup>80</sup>

Later, in 1920 All India Conference of Boycotted (*Akhil Bhartiya Bahishkrut Parishad*) at Nagpur was held. Dhanjay Keer writes that ‘Nagpur conference was the first All India Conference convened by Dalits’.<sup>81</sup> Here, Ambedkar spoke and targeted the reformer Vithhal Shinde and others who ran ‘Depressed Classes Mission’. Ambedkar went ahead and criticised the on-going reforming agendas and how it betrays the mindset and entity of Dalits.

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<sup>79</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 65.

<sup>80</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towrds an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mubai, 2004, p.25.

<sup>81</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, New Delhi. 2015.



S. Natrajan, an astute historian of social reform writes that, in 1930, “by a process of repeated conferences on ‘depressed classes’, the oppressed were led into the camps of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.”<sup>82</sup> Conferences and public speaking also became a crucial part of the various Satyagraha campaigns, which Ambedkar launched. Whether it was the Mahad Satyagraha for human rights or the temple entry programme at Nasik (Kala Ram Temple), public conferences on socio – political issues became part of it. A consistent approach towards the depressed masses that persisted among the colonisers and political leaders was that they were ignorant and illiterate, hence needed an agency for their representation. The genesis of this particular thought process negated the voice of the untouchables and depressed classes. Ambedkar’s approach, however, was distinctly different from this and based on the premise that democracy is not just for the people but it is also by the people.

As India was being institutionalised and given power by the colonial masters for self-governance; Ambedkar became sceptical to the existing process of transformation of the ‘other self’ under the patronage of ruling elites. He maintained that it will transfer the power from ‘bureaucracy to oligarchy’, but not to ‘Democracy’. This particular theme became the crux of the arguments when he presented himself before the Simon Commission.<sup>83</sup> Ambedkar also established Depressed Class institutions for education. For example, he established Bahishkrut Hitkarkani Sabha in 1924. Ambedkar’s new approach to the existing pattern of organizations was to broaden the conscious base among the untouchables and to extend the function of the organization to all areas of depressed classes and their

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<sup>82</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 74

<sup>83</sup> The Indian Statutory Commission, Commonly known as Simon Commission arrived in British India in 1928 to study and take recommendations on further Constitutional reforms.

life.<sup>84</sup> Previous groups seem to have been confined to the Mahar caste or particular entities. The servants of Somvanshi Samaj, Mahar Sevak Samaj, and The Chokhmela reform society and others, represents such groups. One organisation namely ‘The Depressed Class Mission begun in 1919 in Nagpur may have included other castes, but the names of its leaders seem to be all Mahar or English and its function primarily political.’<sup>85</sup> But Ambedkar’s organisation represented no such distinction. It represented all untouchables’ caste and upper castes were also included in reformation programmes. The founders of Sabha have been conscious that without their cooperation and sympathy it would not be possible for the depressed Classes to work out their salvation.<sup>86</sup> One can sense the ambivalence in Ambedkar’s position on elite upper castes social reformers and their inclusion in his group. But, he remained steadfast on accounting for the institutional policies rather than the personal attributes of the leaders and that made him to appreciate Gokhale, Ranade and specially Gandhi in the early phase of his public life. Not to deny the fact that, in this phase Ambedkar also thought that reforms can be achieved collectively under democratic institutions.<sup>87</sup> The Bahishkrut Hitkarkani Sabha’s motto was to Educate, Mobilise and Organise.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*, Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.46.

<sup>87</sup> Until 1930’s before his engagement with Gandhi and Roundtable Conference; Ambedkar did not opted for radicalism as he did in his later part of his career. He in fact through his rationality and reasoning appreciated the steps of several upper caste reformers and even used their techniques like Satyagrha. He left opened all windows of opportunity which can help and emancipate the Untouchables and thus create equality.

<sup>88</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.45.

Apart from all these mobilising and political awakening tools, Ambedkar the strategist knew that the real challenge is to transform the whole process into the domain of politics and representation. Ambedkar, while comparing the Mahad conference to the epic Third Estate of French Revolution, made one thing clear that the real emancipation will be achieved through democratic ideals and institutions. He carried rationality behind every approach. The most significant Temple Satyagraha in which Ambedkar himself was associated was at the Kalaram Temple Satyagraha, 1930, in Nasik. The Satyagraha saw the sporadic act of violence and continued for years. But it was in 1934 that Ambedkar summarised his rational views.

One can locate the time period in the context of post Round table Conference and Ambedkar's engagement with Gandhi over Ramsay McDonald's Communal Award (the details of this will be discussed in long detail later in this chapter and more in Chapter IV of this thesis). But that itself will be ahistorical to his previous testimonies and writings. It will suffice here to mention the point of transition in Ambedkar's thinking. When asked by B.K Gaikwad (one of the prominent personalities attached to the Satyagraha at Nashik) on the utility of continuing with the Satyagraha, Ambedkar response was bitter and strange; but represented rationality and a long walk towards freedom:

It is very kind of you to ask me for my views on propriety of the Depressed Classes launching upon the Satyagraha at Kala Ram temple Nasik on coming of Ram Navami Day. I have no hesitation in saying that such a move would be quite uncalled for and should not merely be suspended but should be stopped altogether. This may appear strange and surprising coming as it does from one who was the author of Satyagraha. But I am (not) afraid to declare this change of front. I did not launch temple entry movements because I wanted the depressed class to become worshippers of idols which they were prevented from worshipping or because I believed that temple entry would make them equal members in an integral part of Hindu society. So far as this aspect is concerned I would advise depressed class to insist upon a complete overhauling of Hindu society and Hindu theology before they consent to become an

integral part of Hindu society. I started Temple Entry Satyagraha only because I felt that was the best way of energising the depressed class and making them conscious of their position. As I believe I have achieved that therefore I have no more use for Temple entry. I want depressed class to concentrate their energy and resources on politics and Education and hope they will realise the importance of both.<sup>89</sup>

Ambedkar, influenced by the ethos of enlightenment and humanism, was clear in his mind that - it is the political self-determination and education which can provide respect and emancipate the downtrodden. Keeping this perception in mind, Apart from the associational and socio – political movements among the masses, Ambedkar duly followed the nationalistic politics. As early as in 1919, Ambedkar offered an idea of Democracy in a testimony to government and what it should be in the Indian context. His testimony before ‘the Southborough Committee’ and ‘the Simon Commission’ remains a signature of his visionary outlook. He concluded his Southborough testimony in following words (which marks the rise of a leader and statesman in him):

Here is disclosed a patent disharmony within a nation and therefore proper field for application of the principle of self – determination.<sup>90</sup>

The choice of words not only becomes important but also represents Ambedkar’s intellect. It is representative of the way he challenged the very idea of nation defined in the political circles of that time and space.

After the Morley - Minto Reforms<sup>91</sup>, the second wave of reforms came in India under the name of Montagu Chelmsford Reforms or Montford Reforms. The

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<sup>89</sup> Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, quoted in: Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 93.

<sup>90</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*, VOL. 1, p. 294. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 4/5/2107.

<sup>91</sup> A Morley-Minto Reform was another name of Indian Council Act of 1909, which was named after the secretary of state and the Viceroy. It was instituted to placate the moderates. According to this act,

Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 was an opportunity for Ambedkar to express himself on the complex mosaic made by colonialism, anti-colonial movements, predominantly the Indian National Congress and the idea of liberation of the Dalits. Twenty one presentations were made to the touring group by the low caste groups.<sup>92</sup> South India under Dravidian Movement resisted any reform, as they presumed it will lead to more towards Brahminical domination. From Bombay, Depressed Class Mission under the leadership of N.G. Chadavarkar and Vitthal Ramji Shinde sided with Congress and passed a resolution on this. Specific recommendations for the political rights of the Depressed Classes do not appear until the Franchise Committee, with Chairman Lord Southborough, toured India in 1918 – 19, to determine the nature of electorate. Ambedkar who testified to the Commission in Bombay without any organizational affiliation, spoke both as an adviser to British on total matter of Bombay Franchise and pleader for the right of untouchable.<sup>93</sup>

Ambedkar went ahead and criticised the testimony on untouchables by Depressed Class Mission. Through his criticism, he not only criticised the working of association but also duly testified his position as the leader of Untouchables. He, in his testimony opined:

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the membership of the central and provincial legislative councils was enlarged. However, the number of elected members in these councils was less than half of their total membership. It may also be remembered that the elected members were not elected by the people but by landlords, organizations or traders and industrialists, universities and local bodies. The British also introduced communal electorates as a part of these reforms. This was meant to create disunity between Hindus and Muslims. Some seats in the councils were reserved for Muslims to be elected by Muslim voters.

<sup>92</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 110.

<sup>93</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 114.

Recently there is brought into forefront a rival scheme for the representation of the untouchables by the Depressed Class Mission. The scheme is known as co – option. The scheme proposes that untouchables should be nominated by the co –option of the elected members of the Council. Whether one should laugh or cry at the solicitude of the mission for the untouchables is rather difficult to decide..... (.) From the scheme it can be easily seen that what is sometimes called benevolent interest in others may be an unwilling mask for an attempt to dictate to them what their good shall be, instead of an endeavour to agree with them so that they may seek and find good of their own choice.<sup>94</sup>

Ambedkar through his arguments, not only challenged the workings of the Mission but also the Congress party which was dominated by the upper caste elites. Ambedkar was critical of Congress and its workings. He several times in his writings defined that how Congress under their authoritarianism killed Social Conference Party.<sup>95</sup> Ambedkar further went ahead and challenged the premises and workings of Depressed Class Mission. He wrote:

The Mission, it must be said, was started with an intention of improving the condition of the depressed classes by emancipating them from the social tyranny of their high caste masters. But the Mission has fallen on such bad times that it is forced to advocate a scheme by which its wards or their representatives will be bounden slaves of their past masters. The masters and the mission have thus made an evolved scheme which will keep the depressed classes eternally depressed without any hope of deliverance. Such tactics do not deceive the untouchables ignorant as they are; much less will deceive the Franchise Committee.<sup>96</sup>

The testimony holds its importance and remains relevant in a sense by which Ambedkar defined both sociological and political aspects of Democracy. Reading of testimony becomes important when compared to Ambedkar's long journey towards equality, liberty and fraternity i.e., India's Constitution. It was his first public appearance, but he consistently upheld his ideas on Democracy, which he believed

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<sup>94</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 1. p. 289. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

<sup>96</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 1. p. 289. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

and testified. An evolution can be seen when his journey as a political leader is mapped out but as a scholar he remained persistent to his many views in his long journey. Concepts related to the crude meaning of democracy to social endosmosis, to associated living, representation of untouchables, like mindedness, casteism as slavery, resocialisation through political reforms, citizenship and self-determination et al. constituted the part of his long ten page testimony.<sup>97</sup> Ambedkar criticised the whole conundrum upon which the untouchables were denied the basic political right of representation. Ambedkar depicted through his testimony, the real social division that persisted in India and not that one which is popularly conceived. Ambedkar divided Hindus into two sub- divisions, just like other separable entities. The real social divisions of India he wrote are:<sup>98</sup>

1. Touchable Hindus
2. Untouchable Hindus
3. Mohammedans
4. Christian
5. Parses
6. Jews

Ambedkar then went on to criticise those who were busy devising schemes for proper and adequate representations, but were driven by caste mindedness not by like mindedness. He challenged the very conception of exclusive democracy and wrote:

A government for the people, but not by the people, is sure to educate some into masters and others into subjects; because it is by the reflex effects of association that one can feel and measure the growth of personality. The growth of personality is the highest aim of society.

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<sup>97</sup> These all ideas remained with him. Although his political stance changed with time and space; but his theoretical understanding towards democracy and emancipation remained more or less same.

<sup>98</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)* Vol. 1. p. 274. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

Social arrangement must secure free initiative and opportunity to every individual to assume any role he is capable of assuming provided it is socially desirable. A new rule is a renewal and growth of personality. But when an association – and a Government is after all an association – is such that in it every role cannot be assumed by all, it tends to develop the personality of the few at the cost of the many – a result scrupulously to be avoided in the interest of Democracy. To be specific, it is not enough to be electors only. It is necessary to be law makers; otherwise who can be law makers will be masters of those who can only be electors.<sup>99</sup>

Democracy, in Ambedkar's terms stood on two legs: associated living and electors as law makers. This was a consistent theme in his discourse and this is evident in Ambedkar's interventions during the debates in the Constituent Assembly, some three decades later. Meanwhile, In spite of testimonies from untouchables, the Franchise Committee did not granted elected representation to the Depressed Classes in newly reformed legislatures. But with the consistent demands to the Muddiman Committee (1924), Depressed Class representation was increased from one to two in Bombay and rest of provinces. This allowed the Depressed Classes to have nominated members in the Central Legislative Council. M.C. Rajah from Madras filled this seat. With an increase in Bombay Legislature, Ambedkar entered the Provincial Legislative Assembly, and became representative twice (from 1924 – 30).<sup>100</sup>

Even while the Indian National Congress had grown into a mass organisation and its spread was far wider and deeper in the 1920s as compared to a decade before, the visit by the Simon Commission (1927) also threw up evidence of fissures within the people of India. Clement Atlee, remembering his work as member of Simon Commission thirty years later, spoke of bombardment of requests: “Everywhere we went the minority always claimed they would be oppressed unless they had special

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<sup>99</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. DR. *BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 1. p. 275. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

<sup>100</sup>Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.42



representation. By the time you added up all the special representation they wanted, the majority ended up with about five per cent.”<sup>101</sup> Out of twenty Depressed Class associations, sixteen asked for separate electorates and a *Namshudras* representative from Bengal even went ahead and asked for the British rule as against Home rule.<sup>102</sup>

This was also followed up by the All India Depressed Class Conference at New Delhi, organised and called by M.C. Rajah. The conference was emphatic in its denial of the need for India’s Independence. Ambedkar restrained himself from attending such conferences for he knew that it was the nexus of both foreigners and Indians; which caused and legitimised deprivation of the Depressed Classes. Further, the reasoning of the conference which was dominated by Ad- Dharmis and Aryan race theology was rejected by Ambedkar at least a decade before. Both political and ideological difference made Ambedkar to carve out his own path.

Ambedkar through his belief in democratic ethos and reasoning outdid his testimony from others. His testimony in front of Indian Statutory Commission marked more forward looking agendas in terms of visualising India’s future. He pertinently demanded the role of untouchables in it. Urgency and limitations attached to the concept such as - Joint electorates with reserved seats, adult franchise, communal electorate, et al., in the context of India’s democratisation; all were defined by Ambedkar in his testimony. It was quite clear from his testimonial that, by this time Ambedkar was in favour of adult suffrage and not communal electorates.

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<sup>101</sup>Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 125

<sup>102</sup> Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*., Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 125.

The document becomes important because it reflects Ambedkar's views with a lot of clarity on a whole lot of issues of democracy. On the issue of adult suffrage, for instance, he stated:

I hold communal electorates to be an evil and adult suffrage to be good. Those who agree with me will admit that adult suffrage should be introduced not only because of its inherent good but also because it can enable us to get rid of the evil of communal electorates. But even those whose political faith does not include a belief in adult suffrage, will, I am sure, find no difficulty in accepting this view, for it is only common sense to say that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater evil and there is no doubt that adult suffrage, if it is at all an evil, is lesser than communal electorates.<sup>103</sup>

Although, Ambedkar stands out here, in his testimony against the separate or communal electorates in democratic set up, but he never denies its utilisation when joint electorates with reserved seats are being negated. Ambedkar could be seen constantly changing his views, or to use better word, evolving for the larger cause of humankind's emancipation; through particularistic emancipation of Dalits. He testifies that:

... I am against the representation through separate electorates. Territorial electorates and separate electorates are two extremes which must be avoided (emphasis added) in any scheme of representation that may be devised for the introduction of democratic form of government in this most undemocratic country. The golden mean (emphasis added) is the system of joint electorates with reserved seats. Less than that would be insufficient, more than that would defeat the ends of government (emphasis added).<sup>104</sup>

Ambedkar did play a dual role through his testimony. He represented himself as a statesman while analysing the contours of parliamentary bodies, representation and democratisation procedures. On another hand he also championed the cause of

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<sup>103</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 1. p. 362. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 05/06/2017

<sup>104</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 2. p. 381. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 3/02/2017

untouchables and their participation in that process. On the issue of franchise and elections, he vehemently criticised the principles notably illiteracy and property qualifications attached to franchising the masses; propagated by the colonial rulers and political elites. He viewed the whole phenomenon as perpetuation of slavery through modern means and wrote:

... If franchise is considered a privilege to given or withheld by those in political power according to their own estimate of the use likely to be made of it, then it is manifest that the political emancipation of unfranchised will be entirely at the mercy of those that are enfranchised. To accept such a conclusion is to accept slavery is no wrong. For slavery too, involves the hypothesis that men have no right but what those in power choose to give them. A theory which leads to such a conclusion must be deemed to be fatal to any form of popular government, and as such I reject in toto.<sup>105</sup>

The early phase of Ambedkar as a politician was dominated by the fact that, he firmly believed in the institutions of modern state for self-determination and emancipation. But he never compromised his stand, whenever the on-going institutions, started to undermine the process towards inclusive policies. The statesman and social reformer in Ambedkar, thus, made an uncompromising stand on his values towards emancipation and self – respect. The two roles which Ambedkar started to devise for himself, under the larger domain of leadership were never dichotomous - but ran parallel. The profundity which was attached to his radical leadership made even the colonial masters to acknowledge his stature. Such interventions rendered Ambedkar eligible to be called to represent the Depressed Classes for the Round Table Conferences (1930 – 1932). It was at the Round Table Conference that, Ambedkar and Gandhi entered into a holistic debate, on the question of depressed classes.

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<sup>105</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 2. p. 361. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 3/02/2017

## **Section 2**

### **Dr. Ambedkar and Radicalism: Riddles in Popular Narrative of an Emerging Nation:**

If the social stratification based on the theory of casteism, existent in India is to be pulled down or it crumbles under the modern definition of a democratic state - what type of society shall come up under its domain and how the new order should do away with graded forms of inequalities? These two questions became the core to Ambedkar's quest from the time he began to emerge into a popular leader of the oppressed classes. He delved deep into these and tried relentlessly to overcome it in totality. Needless to say that, his audacity to resolve the issues related to caste inequalities and to put untouchables into the body politic of the nation that was emerging, indeed, defines his courage and conviction.

He never hesitated to channelize his cause and gave precedence to it over any other on-going narratives, and this he did even if it challenged the popular ideas of his own time and space. Perhaps this remains the reason as to why his contemporaries saw in him – a sign of radicalism, anguish partisanship and separatist. But his conviction made him unique and allowed him to pitch himself against the iconic leader which includes M.K. Gandhi, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, and Jawaharlal Nehru. Ambedkar did not pull back his criticism of these leaders and went ahead to challenge their visions and ideas. Precisely, Ambedkar redefined the 'audacity' to stand alone for justice and equality.

The Simon commission, in its report recommended reserved seats to the Depressed Classes, with the proviso that the candidates' competence would have to be

endorsed by the provincial governors; the caveat incensed by Ambedkar himself.<sup>106</sup> The report itself remained a dead letter as the key player in anything to do with the Indians – the Indian National Congress – stayed out of the whole affair. Unlike the Congress, the three Depressed Class members of Provincial Councils, under the guidance of M. C. Rajah (who was an untouchable and was appointed to the Central legislative Council), were appointed to a committee - designated to cooperate with the Simon Commission; Ambedkar from Bombay, N. Shivraj of Madras and Rama Charna of United Province, duly made up the trio.<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, as these representatives of the depressed class presented themselves before the Simon Commission, colonial rulers categorised them as other parties. Ambedkar was thus invited to the Round Table Conference – a conference at London to deal with the dead lock, after the Congress boycotted the Simon Commission; which was marked by mass protests wherever the Commission went and at the same time showing the schism within the Indian people. Congress boycotted the London conference too. However, it was attended by the Muslims, the Sikhs and the depressed class representatives. Ambedkar, hitherto a part, sometimes in a passive sense, of the nationalist movement, ended up joining the Round Table Conference, even while the Indian National Congress boycotted it.

Just before leaving for London, he addressed a conference and gave a presidential speech. The demands were similar to that of his testimony before the Simon Commission, blown up with full of nationalistic overtones. He strongly argued for 'swaraj' in terms of dominion Status, but his proviso that there must be

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<sup>106</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.55.

<sup>107</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 129.

safeguards; was equally firm. Ambedkar attended the first Round Table Conference with Rao Bahadur Rettamallai Srinivasan, a Dalit member of Legislative Council of Madras. In London, in his maiden speech before plenary session of the First Round Table Conference on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1931, Ambedkar with nationalistic zeal opined:

The bureaucratic form of government in India should be replaced by a government which will be the government of the people, by the people and for the people...The Government of India does realise the necessity of removing the social evils which are eating into the vitals of Indian society and which have blighted the lives of downtrodden classes for years. The Government of India does realize that the landlords are squeezing the masses dry and the capitalists are not giving the leaders living wage and decent conditions of labour. Yet it is a most painful thing that it has not dared to touch any of these evils...we feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our own hands. No share of this political power can evidently come to us as long as the British Government remains as it is . It is only in Swaraj constitution that we stand any chance of getting the political power in our own hands....we know that political power is passing from British into the hands of those who wield such tremendous economic, social and religious sway over our existence. We are willing that it may happen.<sup>108</sup>

It may be recalled that Ambedkar, in his testimony (before Simon Commission), had defined that if joint electorates were to be worked out it had to be under the principle of adult suffrage. For, it provides mutual support and respect among communities. But if that is denied, the unavoidable greater evil of separate electorates had to be worked out for India's democratisation process. As the clause for adult suffrage was not available under the scheme of the proposed constitutional mechanism, Ambedkar began to change his stance. As the unshakable request for separate electorates appeared from other communities in the Minorities Sub – Committees, Ambedkar and Srinivasan began to move from a demand for reserved seats in joint electorates under adult suffrage to reserved seats and separate electorates

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<sup>108</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 2. p. 531 -32. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm> 3/02/2017.

for a limited period.<sup>109</sup> The shift remained inevitable to Ambedkar's prime concern of socio – political emancipation of the Depressed.

However, the First Round Table Conference, held as it was without the participation of Congress, ended up without reaching any end. In other words, it was impossible to work an arrangement for India without the Indian National Congress participating in it. It was, as Bipan Chandra explains, akin to “staging *Ramlila without Rama*.”<sup>110</sup> In the meanwhile, the Gandhi – Irwin pact brought an end to the Civil Disobedience movement and created the space for a meaningful consultation among the various stakeholders, among whom the Indian National Congress was foremost. This led to the second Round Table Conference.

## **Section 2.1**

### **Second Round Table Conference and Poona Pact: Emergence of Ambedkar as the Pan – Indian leader**

Electors should be the law maker was one of the core principles on which Ambedkar approached democracy. This, along with the centrality of self-respect and self – determination in Ambedkar's scheme, defined his stand on freedom. The second session of Round Table Conference was held from 7<sup>th</sup> of September to 1<sup>st</sup> of November, however, the stage for that was set in the meeting between Ambedkar and Gandhi on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1931. This can be said with the benefit of hindsight given the outcome of the conference, particularly the communal award. It was in this meeting as Ambedkar argued his case for separate electorates, a proposal that had gathered mass in the First Round Table Conference; and Gandhi's response was firm: “I am

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<sup>109</sup> Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 130

<sup>110</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *History of Modern India*. Orient blackSwan, New Delhi, 2014, p. 151.

against any political separation of untouchables from Hindus. That would be absolute suicidal.”<sup>111</sup>

Respective views led to a distressful meeting. The whole arguments between the two were upsetting on their respective parts, but it emanated from their respective experiences. If it was for Gandhi an established domain that Hindus were an indivisible part; for Ambedkar it has always remained as “a part apart”. Ambedkar’s response was “Gandhiji I have no homeland” and he went ahead and further added:

You say I have got a homeland, but still I repeat that I am without it. How can I call this land my own homeland and this religion my own wherein we are treated worse than cats and dogs, wherein we cannot get water to drink? No self-respecting Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land.<sup>112</sup>

Ambedkar’s rationality and reasoning in front of Gandhi, whom he followed and gave respect remained intact. Ambedkar conscience always strove for an emancipation of depressed and this has allowed him to surpass the aura of Gandhi’s leadership. He further spoke:

... If my endeavour to secure human rights for my people , who have been trampled upon in this country for ages, I do any disservice to this country, it would not be a sin; and if any harm does not come to this country through my action, it may be due to my conscience. Owing to the promptings of my conscience. I have been striving to win human rights for my people without meaning or doing any harm to this country.<sup>113</sup>

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were part of the Minorities Committee, to whom was left the task of discussing and resolving the debate about ensuring adequate representation for the Muslims and the untouchables within the new institutions, that

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<sup>111</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan., New Delhi, 2015,p.165

<sup>112</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan., New Delhi, 2015,p.167

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.167.



the British had proposed to establish. The scheme, in the end, would unfold as the Government of India Act, 1935. Gandhi, with its stature asked for adjournment of meeting in order to discuss key outcomes with minorities' leaders. The leader failed to engineer any solution towards his reservations. Ambedkar was adamant by this time on separate electorates and as the work of Minorities Committee proceeded, settlement of the Communal Problem was presented and signed by - Aga Khan for the Muslims; Ambedkar for the Depressed Classes; Rao Bhadur Pannir Selvan representing a portion of Christians; Sir Henry Gidney for Anglo Indians; And Sir Hubert Carr for the Europeans.<sup>114</sup> When the draft memorandum was ready and presented before the Minorities Committee, the conscience of the Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi, was shaken. For Gandhi, untouchables were not different from the touchable and this became the crux of his arguments and initiated a heated debate. He went ahead and explained his position:

I can understand the claims advanced by the other minorities, but the claims advanced on behalf of the untouchables, that to me is the unkindest 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. 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.... Will Untouchables remain Untouchables in perpetuity?... I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to establish the whole of the untouchables of India...I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages..... If I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 132.

<sup>115</sup>Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015,p.190

Ambedkar too was equally adamant. His argument was that such divisions within the Hindu fold existed and was not his creation. In the words of Gail Omvedt, “Gandhi was speaking in religious terms, not for Indian interests; but as a Hindu and not a national leader”.<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, the point that came out of the second Round table Conference was not so much over the need to emancipate the depressed classes and ensure them their due in a democracy; but over who was their true representative and their genuine leader. Ambedkar was an adamant democrat and a parliamentarian and most importantly does not represent any party or organization. Gandhi was engrossed in totality with Congress. Congress has denounced their social emancipation programme long back and their adherence to Gandhi’s untouchability programme has never attained a “genuine” interest from any block of it. The honesty and audacity, through which Ambedkar placed him in front of Gandhi - was far too independent to suit him.<sup>117</sup>

There was no time for rebuttals. The Chairman of Minorities Committee, Ramsay MacDonald, asked every member of the Committee to sign a request to him to settle the community question and to pledge themselves to accept his decision. The stage was thus set for the two perspectives – Gandhi’s and Ambedkar’s – to battle out in the public domain, which in due course changed the grammar of social reform movements.

Because of the stature and involvement of Gandhi in the whole scenario several other leaders hitherto on the side of separate electorates changed their stand. M.C.Rajah was among them and even challenged Ambedkar’s claims to represent the

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<sup>116</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*, Penguin Books. Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.45.

<sup>117</sup> Ahir, D.C.. *The Legacy of Dr Ambedkar*. D.K Publisher, New Delhi, p. 50.

untouchable people. The Mahatma was arrested on his return and held in the Yervada jail at Poona. Ambedkar returned after one month and again returned to England in early 1931 for his persistent demand. .M.C. Rajah, who changed his stance in other direction or to say more towards congress, challenged the authority of Ambedkar. He claimed that his Depressed Classes Association is the only all India association of the depressed classes and was in favour of joint electorates.<sup>118</sup> M.S. Moonje associated with the right wing Hindu Mahasabha, under the guidance of Madan Mohan Malaviya, created a pact with Rajah. Sabha channelized the view point - that the emancipation is now a national concern and hence the idea separate electorate shall cease to exist. Ambedkar, indeed, was in a minority of one among the cross section of the political leadership to insist on separate electorate.

This was when the Communal Award was finally announced, on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1932. The award contained a window of opening for a compromise; the voters from the Depressed Classes were given two votes -- one in special constituency for their own representative and one in the general electorate -- together with modest number of reserved seats.<sup>119</sup> This satisfied Ambedkar. Gandhi, however, held out against this formula. In his inimitable way, Gandhi wrote to Ramsay MacDonald conveying his position. MacDonald responded citing the agreement at London at the end of the Round Table Conference -that all arrangements in context to electorate can be changed after a collective action from Indian parties. It did not help and Gandhi embarked upon his fast from inside the Yervada jail on September 20, 1932. Ambedkar was now at the centre stage of entire political universe of colonial India, as

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<sup>118</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 135.

<sup>119</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 136.

Gandhi's fast (Bapu of the Nation) and his life was now connected to his perception.

Dhanjay Keer narrates how the situation unfolded:

It was cruel irony of the fate that the leaders and the press that had refused to recognise Ambedkar as the leader of Depressed Classes were now compelled to recognise his leadership for the Depressed Classes. He now became the cynosure of the whole country.<sup>120</sup>

The fast rendered a new complexion to the issue and again the emancipatory project became a secondary issue. The discourse soon shifted to the life of the Mahatma.

An all party conference was convened under the name of "*Conference of Hindu and Untouchables leaders*" (emphasis added). The name itself brings out the paradox. It brought out the division within the Hindu fold as the touchable and the untouchable. Ambedkar was proven right; but to no avail. The conference, on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1932, was attended by a host of leaders from across the spectrum that existed then. Tej Bhadur Sapru, Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari, M.C Rajah, P. Baloo, A. V. Thakkar, Dr. B.S. Moonje, Ambedkar himself and others. Meanwhile, Gandhi changed his stance and was in favour of reserved seats with joint electorates; if it remains the only way out against separate electorates.<sup>121</sup> Through meetings and promise of proper arrangements Ambedkar was pacified and he met Gandhi for a solution. The conversation between Ambedkar and Gandhi, as reported by Dhananjay Keer gives a glimpse of the two minds. Keer writes:

.....Sapru narrated to Gandhi the whole story. Malaviya put the Hindu point of view. Then in a soft, slow flow Ambedkar began. He said in a low voice: "Mahatmaji, you have been very unfair to us". "It is my lot to appear to be unfair," replied Gandhi. "I cannot help it". Then

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<sup>120</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015,p.206.

<sup>121</sup> Guha, Ramachandra. *Gandhi:The Years that Changed the World 1914-1948*. Allen Lane, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 423

Ambedkar explained the whole situation and his viewpoints. The sober Biblical language had its visible effect upon Gandhi; he was convinced of the justice of Ambedkar's demands. At length Gandhi replied: "you have my fullest sympathy". I am with you. Doctor in most of the things you say. But you say you are interested in my life". "Yes Mahatmaji, in the hope that if you devote solely to the cause of my people, you would become our hero too", said Ambedkar in reply.<sup>122</sup>

The Poona Pact, signed on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1931, was subsequently accepted by British Government on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1932 and Gandhi broke his fast then. By the agreement, the number of Depressed Class seats in provincial legislature went up from seventy eight as given in the Communal Award to one hundred and forty eight, and instead of Communal electorates a system of primary election for Depressed Class voters alone was put in place.<sup>123</sup> The system of reserved seats, as we have at present, came into existence.

Ambedkar seemed satisfied for a brief period of time and believed in the promises made by Gandhi. Ambedkar's hostility was in fact mollified. Ambedkar started to praise Gandhi and went to the Third Round Table Conference. He even wrote to his colleagues about this change in his views and how Gandhi was correct. In one of these letters, he indicated, in a very Gandhian manner:

The touchables and untouchables cannot be held together by law, certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorates for separate electorates. The only thing that can hold together is love.<sup>124</sup>

The significance of the Poona Pact lay not in the contents. Ambedkar, indeed, was forced to climb down from his position and this has led to comments, in the

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<sup>122</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015, p.211.

<sup>123</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 138

<sup>124</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.68

present, leading to a picture that Gandhi won the match through blackmail. That aside, it is significant to note that it brought Ambedkar to a position where he began to be treated the sole representative of the Untouchables and a national leader. Signing a pact with Gandhi, who was at helm of Indian political domain, truly attests this fact. But, Ambedkar's fascination towards the leadership of Gandhi did not sustain for long. Pact was an ideological truce, But did the ideological war which had been declared at Manibhavan on August 14, 1931, came to an end? Or was it a second battle and the war was to continue even after the truce?<sup>125</sup> It certainly did and continued with full force.

## Section 2.2

### Conversion Declaration: “I will not Die as a Hindu”

The ideal democratic society for Ambedkar was based upon the ideals of ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’. Equality represents itself as a key variable and in fact remains a starting point for social – endosmosis, which remains the prerequisite for liberty and fraternity. He wrote about ‘equality’ in his classic work *Annihilation of Caste*:

The doctrine of equality is glaringly fallacious but, taking all in all, it is the only way a statesman can proceed in politics – which is a severely practical affair and which demands a severely practical test.<sup>126</sup>

The bonhomie of sorts between Ambedkar on the one side, Gandhi on the other and all the political organisations that prevailed at the time coming on board, that seemed to emerge, however ended in a pipe dream, soon after the pact was signed

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<sup>125</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015, p.216.

<sup>126</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p.41.

and this frustrated Ambedkar for sure. For Ambedkar, political reform in the context of untouchables - can only sustain and to survive if it was achieved through social and economic reforms. The fear of the politics of co- option or clientele politics, which Ambedkar had critiqued in his testimony long back, in the Southborough Committee, became reality after the Poona Pact. Ambedkar had called this scheme as nothing but an “unwilling mask” through which the oppressor can dictate his terms. The events that followed the Poona Pact, in fact, showed how under the *‘mask of Gandhi’*, the elite and popular leaders betrayed the cause of emancipation.

Ambedkar realised that caste mindedness has again overpowered the hope for the like mindedness, which he was given to believe was a precursor to the ethos of equality and democracy.

The ideological debate soon ensued between the two leaders in the context of casteism and its expositions and the pivot of this debate was the edifice of the Varna system. This will be dealt with in extensive detail in Chapter IV of this thesis. Suffice it to note here that the slow pace of the change sought for, which marked the Gandhian approach, in Ambedkar’s view hindered his plans for the political self-determination and the quest for self-respect among the untouchables. Abolishment of Untouchability was the programme taken up by some radical groups including Gandhi for the emancipation. Gandhi also advised Ambedkar to support the Bill proposed by Ranga Iyer, Gayaprasad Singh and B. C Mitra, in the Central Legislative Assembly, which talked about ‘abolishing untouchability in different assemblies’. But Ambedkar stood firm on his radicalism that - it’s not untouchability but the whole edifice of caste which has to go.

The apprehensions of Ambedkar also became clear when Hindu conservatives like Madan Mohan Malaviya opposed the “Temple Entry Bill” of Ranga Iyer presented on March 24, 1933; but was never put to vote.<sup>127</sup> Ambedkar must have realised and sensed deception there.

Hopes from the cult and honesty of Gandhi soon turned into despair. While Gandhi was to realise, only in 1936, that “caste has to go”, the few years between the pact and this radical position of the Mahatma was wrapped in riddles. It widened the gulf between the two personalities and even took things to a state of binaries.

Ambedkar initially professed interest in Gandhi’s Anti – Untouchability League which later was transformed into ‘*Harijan Sevak Sangh*’. But his views were rejected on various issues. He wanted that the committees of the league be guided and channelized by untouchables themselves; but Gandhi wanted that caste Hindus should commit to that job for their self-purification. Thus, the league remained dominated by the upper caste Hindus. But again the core issue upon which Ambedkar resigned from the organization was of the concept of ‘Varnashrama Dharma’ and its preservation. Ambedkar wrote a letter to its secretary, Amritlal Thakkar, (a Gandhian) suggesting that ‘league should campaign for the eradication of caste system and promotion of inter caste marriages and inter dining’.<sup>128</sup> But like all his requests and radical thoughts, it remained a cry in wilderness. In disgust, Ambedkar resigned from the league.

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<sup>127</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.65.

<sup>128</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.66.



Later on, in his work “*What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables*”, Ambedkar defined the whole strategy of Gandhi and his associates - as a roadmap to transform “ati – shudras” into “shudras”<sup>129</sup>; hence perseverance of Varna system.

Persistent Satyagraha, human rights movements, petitions, political engagement and nationalistic outlook must have created a deep impact on Ambedkar’s values and ideals. He believed and was in fact made to believe in the concept that his movement and discourse remains similar to that of other caste leaders. But, the post pact events shattered his assumptions and conceptions. Reasonable signs of radicalism that has always persisted in the thoughts of Ambedkar, thus gathered mass. The post pact events channelized and reformed this radicalism into the language of politics, on which Ambedkar persisted till his last breath. The first stirrings of this were to be seen on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1935, at Yeola where he made the famous speech calling for conversion. Speaking at the Depressed Class Conference, Ambedkar declared:

Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we were members of another faith, none would dare to treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our mistake now. I had a misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *What Congress and Gandhi Have done to the untouchables*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 147.

### Section 3

#### **Ambedkar's foray into Electoral Politics: The Independent Labour Party and the Scheduled Castes Federation**

The Parliamentarian and Democrat in Ambedkar had always led him to believe that political power cannot be separated from the social and the economic. He always believed in a democratic evolution and revolution not in a bloody revolution. He had negated the idea of a violent revolution throughout. Arguing for the installation of a representative government in India during the Round Table Conference, Ambedkar observed:

We are often reminded of the fact that Depressed Classes is a social problem and that its solution lies elsewhere than politics. We take strong exception to this view. We hold that the problem of the Depressed Classes will never be solved unless they get political power in their own hands; if this is true....the problem must be treated as such.<sup>131</sup>

The Round Table Conferences and the Government of India Act of 1935 were followed by elections to the Provincial Assemblies in 1937. Ambedkar's announcement to convert had already created a stir in the political circles, although his decision to embrace Buddhism had to wait for more twenty years. Politically, one of the possible reasons, presumably, is that he saw the elections as a strategy to push his agenda for ending untouchability to the hilt. New opportunities retained all energies of Ambedkar and he went into forage for electoral strategies to place depressed into the body politic of India.

He announced formation of a political party in 1936. This phase represented an all-encompassing socio – economic radicalism. The formation of the Independent

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<sup>131</sup> Roy, Ramashray. *Gandhi and Ambedkar: A study in Contrast*. Shipra Publications, 2016, p. 87.

Labour Party was announced and as the name suggests, it certainly carried a Marxist touch of radicalism. But Ambedkar's initial writings did not show much affinity towards the ideas of Marxism. On the contrary, he had argued quite often, that international exposition of material objects does not define the Indian civilization; rather it is defined by the expositions related to human institutions.<sup>132</sup>

One can look this whole episode through the prism of 'pragmatism', as the the situation must have demanded. Apart from the demographic strength of the untouchables among working class, Ambedkar knew that elections are all about numbers. Thus, under the democratic and parliamentary form of institution, he was ready for an experiment of alliance with the socialists and the communists. These political groups, by that time, were strong among the workers and the labourers. But soon the ideological differences among this possible coalition on the one hand and the popularity of the Indian National Congress foreclosed this alliance materialising into a force.

The day Ambedkar formed the party; *The Times of India* published an article based on an interview with Ambedkar. In reply to a question on the rationale behind the name of his party, Ambedkar said:

... ..the Party would be independent of every other political organisation, although it would be ready to co-operate with any other political party where co-operation was possible. The Party was a labour organisation in the sense that its programme was mainly to advance the welfare of the labouring classes. The Party believes in having correct ideology suited to the section of the people whose interests it regards as paramount. The word 'Labour' is used instead of the words 'Depressed Classes', because labour includes the Depressed Classes as well.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Castes In India*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS). Vol. 17 (part-II). p. 437. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

Ambedkar's argument then was that the untouchables or the depressed classes were the victims of both Brahminism and Capitalism. Eleanor Zelliott points out that - the programme of the new party was socialist in nature and its aim was mainly to advance the welfare of the labouring classes.<sup>134</sup> Ambedkar's party was determined to work under the new constitution, although they did had some reservations about it. This, it may be noted, was at variance with the Left-leaning trade unions, by now a powerful section, had taken anti-British agitation as central to their political line and consistent with the anti-imperialist united front strategy put forth by the Communist International.

Ambedkar, meanwhile, had also foregrounded a position that revolved around state management to state ownership and to protection of agricultural farmers, and in this sense, the party was committed to socialistic ideas in the realm of economic policy. Welfare of the Scheduled Castes was either combined with this larger project or occupied a little space as a separate item in party programme. No intention to legislate against untouchability was announced.<sup>135</sup>

Dalit literature often tries to make out some cleavages in this to put forward the claims that this phase was less about Ambedkar's leaning towards Marxism and more about social transformation. But the fact remains this phase can be seen as a phase of 'oscillation' between Ambedkar's self-contradictory ideologies. The contradiction or paradox was reflected in the philosophy of ILP (which he supported)

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<sup>134</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 178.

<sup>135</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement.*, Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 180.

and the writings and speeches of Ambedkar justifying his rejection of Marxism and its class analysis of caste.<sup>136</sup>

In the Bombay presidency alone, the ILP fielded seventeen candidates, thirteen in the constituencies reserved for the scheduled castes, from where they recorded eleven victories, and only four - upper caste candidates - in general constituencies where it had gained three seats. The results were clearly on the side of Ambedkar and established his popularity; but only in Maharashtra. Although Ambedkar was projected as the national leader of untouchables after the Poona Pact, the results of the elections in 1937 revealed that the Indian National Congress remained the most popular platform at the national level and its hold over the depressed classes was significant across India. It also revealed that Gandhi and not Ambedkar was the popular face. The elections also revealed that the Mahars constituted the biggest support base for the ILP.<sup>137</sup>

With ten seats, the ILP was the second largest party among the opposition to the Indian National Congress in the Bombay Legislative Assembly; the Muslim League emerged the largest opposition to the Congress. Through the ILP's stand in the assembly on legislations as the abolition of *vatan* and the *Khoti* system or an organised protest against Industrial Dispute Bill, Ambedkar established himself as the leader of the oppressed and worked within the framework of economic radicalism. Ambedkar also joined the struggles launched around demands of the peasantry and joined ranks with the communist leaders like S. A Dange and Indulal Yagnik. The agitation against the Khoti system was massive and on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1938, nearly 20,

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<sup>136</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.78.

<sup>137</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.76

000 peasants marched to the Bombay Council Hall. It was one of the biggest marches under colonial rule. Ambedkar's speech illustrated his radicalism and inclination towards the left. His speech was published in the *Janta* issue on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1938 and defines his rational stand at that point of time. Ambedkar stated:

I have definitely read seriously more books on the communist philosophy than all the communist leaders here. However the beautiful the Communist philosophy is in those books...the test of this philosophy has to be given in practise. And if work is done from that perspective, I feel that labour and length of time needed to win success in Russia will not be so much in India. And so in regard to toilers' class struggle, I feel Communist philosophy is so close to us.<sup>138</sup>

The irony, however, was that the left movement did not hold caste as the primary concern and held on to its position of class being the point of contradiction. The communists held that caste in its oppressive form will be dealt with and annihilated alongside the struggle for socialism. Ambedkar, then, was considered as petty bourgeois. This, indeed, was the approach of Jawaharlal Nehru, whose views at that point of time was closer to the Left. In his reply to a question about caste, in an interview on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1936 in London, Nehru said:

Take the depressed classes, they really are the proletariat in economic sense; the others are the better off people. All these matters are to be converted into economic terms, and then we can understand the position better.<sup>139</sup>

Ambedkar, on the contrary, looked at this kind of approach as misleading and related it to the theoretical understanding and assumptions of Marxism. Ambedkar wrote about this in his newspaper *Janta* in 1936 and it was reprinted in 1938. He attacked the base-superstructure analogy of Marxism:

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<sup>138</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.81.

<sup>139</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.87.

The base is not the building. On the basis of economic relations a building is erected of religious, social and political institutions. This building has just as much as reality as the base. If we want to change the base, then first building that has been constructed on it has to be knocked down. In the same way, if we want to change the economic relations of the society, then first the existing social, political and other institutions will have to be destroyed.<sup>140</sup>

However, in his efforts to build an alternative and broad political front against the Indian National Congress, Ambedkar tried to overlook all these genuine differences. But with the struggle for national independence and the legacy of political co- option (in which Ambedkar terribly failed), the Indian National Congress dominated all other parties and organizations. Non- Brahman thrust by this time moved towards the Congress and Dalit leaders like Jagjivan Ram changed the dynamics of national politics of the Depressed within the framework of Congress.

The socialists, for instance, had been on the side of the Congress since their birth in the early 1930s while the communist oscillated between a joint front with the Congress and an all-out opposition. With the founding of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), 1934, which was officially a part of Congress, Ambedkar lost his ground for any kind of such an alliance.

Meanwhile political pragmatism and issues of existence allowed Ambedkar to position himself against Congress. This led Ambedkar to celebrating the resignation of the Congress ministries in September 1939 (with the outbreak of the World War II and the Congress registering its protest over non-consultation before involving India in the War) He ended up being on the same side as M.A.Jinnah then. However, Ambedkar, unlike Jinnah, failed to utilise the masses on his side during this phase. One can argue that it was the popularity of Congress under Gandhi – Nehru axis that

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 84.

denied such an opportunity to Ambedkar. Dhanjay Keer points this out with clarity.

Keer argues:

Ambedkar did not try to organise his political party on modern lines. He had no taste for Individual organization. There were no regular annual Conferences or General meetings of organizations with which he was connected. Where and when he sat was the venue of conference and the time for decision....When he wanted his people to assemble under his banner, he simply gave them a clarion call and the organization sprang up like the crop in the rainy season. In the summer there would be nothing in the field, the banner resting in his study corner and the people at home.<sup>141</sup>

Although the flag of the Independent Labour Party was red in colour, with eleven stars on it symbolising the presidencies and states of colonial India, the fact remained that the party had a following in only one Province, Bombay

The decade after the 1930s can be called as “tumultuous forties”. This decade was marked by the intensification of the struggle for independence and marked by fast developments and aggressive policies of the leaders. The responses from the colonial masters were also one that swung like a pendulum insofar as their attitude towards the struggle. The post-war developments and new proposals gave Ambedkar a fresh chance to represent his movement towards the Colonial masters in a new way. Although the Cripps mission remained a failure and was neglected by the major Indian stakeholders, it certainly aroused a lot of interest. Ambedkar’s decision to set up a new party with blue flag named Scheduled Castes Federation – was part of that interest.

It gave him opportunity to revive his struggle and radicalism with new vigour and pace. Ambedkar and other Dalit parties duly rejected the Cripps proposals and they feared that - the proposals did not confer any rights on them and will leave them

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<sup>141</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, Popular Prakashan. New Delhi, 2015,p. 477.



to the mercy of caste Hindus.<sup>142</sup> In reaction to the proposals, the All India Depressed Classes Conference took place at Nagpur. About 70,000 delegates gathered there from different parts of India. As the transfer of power now seemed inevitable, three resolutions were passed. First, demanded separate electorate for the untouchables; second was more radical in nature (perhaps inspired by the two – nation theory, or Dravidsthan) demanded separate village territories for untouchables; Third announced the creation of the party named, Scheduled Castes Federation.<sup>143</sup>

The creation of the SCF reflected a new mood, a new sense of identity among the untouchables.<sup>144</sup> The demands reflected that they wanted to be treated at par with other minority communities, especially the Muslims. The Constitution of the SCF talked about organising the Scheduled Castes for their rights and dues. In its aims and objectives, it mentioned:

To organise the Scheduled Castes of India, to educate them and to agitate for their social, economic and political freedom and to make them strive for their well-being and advancement; to secure for them equality of opportunity and thereby enable them to achieve equal status with their fellow citizens in all walks of life.<sup>145</sup>

But the magic and dominance of Congress not only remained constant but also expanded after the Quit India Movement.<sup>146</sup> The elections of 1945 -46 revealed that Ambedkar, although popular among the Scheduled Castes, was not good in

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<sup>142</sup> Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2015,p.392

<sup>143</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015,p. 350

<sup>144</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.81.

<sup>145</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. DR. *BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 17 (part-II). p. 479. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>

<sup>146</sup> The Quit India Movement or *Bharat Chodo Andolan*, was a movement launched at the Bombay session of the All-India Congress Committee by Mahatma Gandhi on 8 August 1942, during World War II, demanding an end to British Rule of India.

comparison to Gandhi and his aura. The results doomed the prospects of the Scheduled Castes Federation becoming a strong voice in India's upcoming Constituent Assembly. The party gained only two seats in provincial assemblies; one in Bengal and the other in the Central provinces and Berar. Even Ambedkar lost his election from Bombay.

This defeat was worse than that suffered by the Independent Labour party, less than a decade ago. Ambedkar duly blamed the unfair voting system and went to England to present his views in this regard.<sup>147</sup> When the Cabinet Mission came to India, Ambedkar tried to enlighten them on what went wrong. Ambedkar showed with figures that in primary elections, in which Scheduled Caste alone voted, the Federation received more votes than Congress in Madras, Bombay and Central Provinces – areas where he was well known.<sup>148</sup> However, the fact was Ambedkar was far behind the strategies of Congress in terms of his popularity and lacked organisational skills like Congress and Muslim League. Eleanor Zelliott points out that his other duties took his time. He was engrossed in his academic life and wrote “*What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables*”. He also remained very busy after he was appointed as Member of National Defence Council in July 1941 and was also appointed to the viceroy's Executive Council as Member of Labour, 1942.<sup>149</sup>

After the elections, events took a different turn. Ambedkar lost his place in the Executive Council, when the interim ministry, with Jagjivan Ram, the Scheduled

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<sup>147</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006, p.82.

<sup>148</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 190

<sup>149</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 188-90

Caste leader, was formed in 1946. Ambedkar protested and argued that one minister was not enough for the representation of Depressed Classes. This particular argument became null and void when the Muslim League nominated Jogendra Nath Mandal, a scheduled caste leader, to the Interim Ministry on its behalf. Ambedkar, however, could enter the assembly from Bengal on behalf of the Muslim League.<sup>150</sup> This too changed after partition and the constituency from where Ambedkar was elected went to East Pakistan and Ambedkar again lost his seat.

A good will gesture, respect that he gained for his work and the resignation of M.Jayakar of Bombay allowed him to be appointed as the member of Constituent Assembly again. And in August 1947, Ambedkar became Law Minister of Independent India and part of India's first Independent Cabinet. This time it was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who ensured his nomination and who pertinently knew the value of the statesmanship and intellect of Bhimrao.

This particular incident reflected, writes D.C Ahir, the healthy and appreciative mood of the emerging nation.<sup>151</sup> Ambedkar went on to become the chief architect of the Indian Constitution.

One can define this particular phase of his life, till his election to India's first cabinet, as a phase where he swung from extreme radicalism and being against India's political independence, in favour of Pakistan and Dravidsthan<sup>152</sup> (as proposed by Periyar), an agent of Britons (as he joined Executive Council) et al.. But the whole journey in spite of his drastic failures in this particular phase represents practicality

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<sup>150</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 191

<sup>151</sup> Ahir. D.C. *The Legacy of Dr Ambedkar*. D.K Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p.52.

<sup>152</sup> South India under their radical leader of Periyar postulated the theory of *Dravidsthan* or a new nation for Dravidas

and hope. It will be ahistorical to credit only one trajectory or narrative that defined or to say was responsible for India as a Nation to come up. There were many pathways towards it. However, it may be held that Ambedkar, all the while, only wanted to liberate the oppressed masses so that they may share the fruits of freedom along with the fellow countrymen.<sup>153</sup>

Ambedkar was a firm believer in the idea of democracy. If he would have submitted or stopped his political trajectory after a single failure, that would have been a betrayal to his hard earned education and to the depressed Classes. And this was evident, without ambiguity, in his first speech at Constituent Assembly (17<sup>th</sup> December, 1946), when he was suddenly asked to place his views on the *Objectives Resolution*. Surprised by the Assembly decision and of Nehru's vis -a -vis congress Ambedkar spoke with a belief and hope, He said:

Now Sir, I have got not the slightest doubt in my mind as to the future evolution and the ultimate shape of social, political and economic structure of this great country. I know to-day we are divided politically, socially and economically. We are a group of warring camps and I may even go the extent of confessing (emphasis added) that I am may probably one of the leaders of such camp. But, sir, with all this, I am quite convinced that given time and circumstances nothing in this world will prevent this country from becoming one. (applause): With all our caste and creeds, I have not a slightest hesitation that we shall in some form be united people (cheers).....So far as the ultimate goal is concerned, I think none of us need to have any apprehensions. None of us need have any doubt. Our difficulty is not about ultimate future. Our difficulty is how to make heterogeneous mass that we may have today take a decision in common and march on the way which leads us to unit. Our difficulty is not with regard to the ultimate; our difficulty is regard to the beginning.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Ahir. D.C. *The Legacy of Dr Ambedkar*. D.K Publishers, New Delhi, 1990, p.49.

<sup>154</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. DR. *BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS)*. Vol. 13. p. 1127. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 03/03/2017

## Section 3.1

### The Constitution and Ambedkar

A close look at the Constitution and the debates that went into its making, it is evident that Ambedkar was worried about the regulative aspects of the upcoming institutions. He was never against the constitutive aspect, which according to him was parliamentary democracy with strong a centre and nothing short of that. Ever since his first public appearance, before the Southborough Committee in 1919, Ambedkar cherished the desire for free India. As mentioned by Ambedkar, the difficult task of “beginning” was given to the “Drafting Committee”<sup>155</sup> that worked for nearly three years to produce a document; one that defined, with precision, the “idea of India”. The chief of that drafting committee was Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar himself. His first intervention during the debate on the ‘*Objectives Resolution*’ made a deep impact on all the leaders (as mentioned above on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1946). The nationalist leaders, then, must have prepared themselves to listen to him in trepidation; but his actual comments were encouraging and inspiring. Even the then famous trinity of the Indian National Congress -- Nehru, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad -- felt that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi intervention to draft in Ambedkar into the assembly was in the right direction. It would not be an exaggeration to point out that with Ambedkar’s appointment as the Chairman of Drafting Committee, his statesmanship achieved an “apotheosis”. And as the democratisation process began - *the law of Manu was replaced by law of a Mahar*.

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<sup>155</sup> Drafting committee was assign with the responsibility to prepare the Draft constitution. Drafting committee was set up on 29Aug, 1947 in India under the chairmanship of Dr .B. R Ambedkar to prepare a draft constitution for India. Our constitution is unique. It took a long time of long time of 2 years, 11 months and 18 days.

The Constitution of India sought to promote both national unity and socio-economic change. The assembly met between December 1946 and November 1949; it met in the larger backdrop of food scarcity, communal riots, the humongous task of refugee resettlement, class war and intransigence. The whole process represented a phase and as Ramachandra Guha put it, “Fundamental Rights were to be framed amidst the carnage of Fundamental wrong.”<sup>156</sup>

As, discussed in chapter one, the Constitution reflected Ambedkar’s vision of Equality, liberty and fraternity. Since the inception of the process, marked by the framing and adoption of the Objectives Resolution, the task of framing the constitution was marked by a consistent battle against any compromise with liberal humanistic values. It provided for the protection of the minorities and the depressed classes and this was done after extensive debates and discussion. The document represented and gave its due to both social and political revolutions that preceded it and even made way for its futuristic framework.

In the context of untouchability and the caste question it provided provisions for the protection of the oppressed and also remedies for change. The Constitution adopted a twin line of action to deal with the problem of untouchability (i) through the abolition of untouchability, emphatically declaring that the odious practice stands abolished and criminalised; and (ii) through promoting the interests of untouchables by way of affirmative action. Precisely, it not only gave equality, but ensured that a roadmap towards substantive equality must be taken up. With Article 17 of Indian

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<sup>156</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of World’s Largest Democracy*. Picador India, New Delhi, p.105

Constitution<sup>157</sup> untouchability was abolished and became a Criminal offence. And again through various Fundamental rights (Article 14 to 17) and protection of the interests (for example reservations in public services, education and politics), the interests of the Scheduled castes and Tribes were promoted and hence enhanced. And when it was found inadequate, the Constituent Assembly met again to effect the First amendment even before the process of democratic elections was held.

There was no longer any talk of separate electorates, but then it had always been Ambedkar's position that 'if there were adult suffrage and safe guards, reservations would suffice'.<sup>158</sup> Political Democracy was achieved when on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950, the Constitution was brought into effect and India declared a Republic. Its survival, however, depended on its praxis in near future, which according to Ambedkar - must deal with socio- economic equality. For Ambedkar:

Social and economic democracies are the tissues and fibres of political democracy. The tougher the tissues and fibres. the greater the strength of the body. Democracy is another name for equality.<sup>159</sup>

Ambedkar knew that the job of purging inequalities was only left to be done and that depended on the society accepting the law morally. He was clear that the fundamental rights will just become a legal theocracy if not applied at ground level. On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1949, just a day before the Assembly wound up its work and adopted the Constitution, Ambedkar gave three warnings to nation. The last one in

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<sup>157</sup> "Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. *Constitution Of India*, Retrieved from [https://www.india.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/npi/files/coi\\_part\\_full.pdf](https://www.india.gov.in/sites/upload_files/npi/files/coi_part_full.pdf) The Constitution of India

<sup>158</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, Navi Mumbai, 2004, p.121

<sup>159</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed). Oxford India Paperbacks, 2005,p.65.

this was where he urged Indians not to be content with what he called ‘mere political democracy’. According to Ambedkar, although India had gotten rid of alien rule, it was still riven by inequality and hierarchy. In his own words:

The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. Liberty cannot be divorced from equality, equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them. We must begin by acknowledging the fact that there is complete absence of two things in Indian Society. One of these is equality. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on the principle of graded inequality which means elevation for some and degradation for others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against many who live in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In Politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR WRITINGS AND SPEECHES (BAWS). Vol. 13. p. 1216. Retrieved From: <http://www.mea.gov.in/books-writings-of-ambedkar.htm>. 03/03/2017



## Conclusion

The “Idea of India,” as it emerged over the years of a mass agitation against colonial rule signified neither a complete break with the past, nor did it consist of a return to the past. In its essence was an argument against Indian society as a monolith in the cultural sense and hence rooted in the principle of plurality and yet modern. It resembles incrustations of several thought processes and in that way a palimpsest, so to say. Both tradition and modernity played a crucial role in it. It is a strange phenomenon of intermingling of the old with new or syncretic ideas - which can transform the society as a whole. Ambedkar himself connected the teachings of Buddha with the idea of equality, liberty and fraternity or precisely the modern state.

This chapter indeed began with the contemporary discussion on caste – its existence and politics attached to it. In doing so, it became evident that the apprehensions of Babasaheb were not unfounded or merely visceral. Even while saying so, it is as much a concern that the contemporary discourse has turned Ambedkar into an icon and his ideas have been replaced by a scurry to erect his statues. He has been, to a large extent, turned into a symbol of dividing people on caste lines and his ideas on democracy have been ripped out of his persona. The processes of *Mandalisation* and *Dalitisation*, time and again is being considered as deepening of democracy or ‘second democratic revolution’ and has mediated upon Ambedkar as its driving force. But, the socio- economic revolution, which Ambedkar vouched for - continues to remain a pipe dream.

A study into the iconization of Ambedkar in contemporary India also presents a unique phenomenon of hero - worship. This particular discourse has installed Ambedkar in a temple and the dominant premise of this project is to posit his debate

with Gandhi as a conflict and not an engagement. This project, indeed, also rests upon inventions and fabrication of facts; as is the case with all such projects in all times. The holistic engagement of Ambedkar and Gandhi has just being reduced to an acrimonious debate. The space in history writing has met the same fate and their time period has been reduced to mere episodes.

The incrustation of layers in the context of the Idea of India remains in a conflict zone and thus tends to crass efforts to find, construct and manufacture particularistic episodes for partisan and sectarian political benefit. These tendencies do not allow either alternate history or one idea to persist against another. It is a kind of ‘epistemological hegemony’ which transforms into politics and policies. And this has happened to the legacy of Ambedkar and Gandhi. Not only in politics but in academia also division and domination persist.

It was Gandhi who not only represented a break from previous social reformers, but also brought eradication of untouchability into the nationalistic domain. And without any exaggeration, it was Ambedkar, through his engagement with Gandhi, who made it an important concern in the course of political freedom. Ambedkar’s fight for self – respect and self – determination certainly got an extra edge with Gandhi’s persistent fight for Self- purification. Both worked as a catalyst for each other. Ambedkar not only became the conscience keeper of Gandhi, but also pushed Gandhi into transforming his views on caste. Gandhi firmly believed that law alone cannot remove untouchability or caste system. Ambedkar’s insistence on social and economic democracies after the attainment of political democracy makes him very close to Gandhi, rather than someone who represented Gandhi’s opposite binary.

The evidence of the holistic debate of both the personalities can be noted from an anecdote - when the Constituent Assembly approved a provision, among the Fundamental Rights, abolishing untouchability on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1948 (nine months after the death of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi). The house approved it with resounding cries of *Mahatma Gandhi Ki jai – Victory to Mahatma Gandhi* – a tribute to Gandhi's efforts, in the last decade and half of his life, to remove untouchability.<sup>161</sup> B.R. Ambedkar was present at that session in his capacity as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. The moment captured the irony of ironies, which culminated into the historical reality that - their discourse cannot be divorced nor it can be subjected to isolation. In a way their engagement has outlived the barriers of the time and the space of the Poona pact or Ambedkar's declaration to convert. They not only transformed each other, but also have duly enriched the social revolution and reformative programmes of this nation and proposed options for future.

The next chapter will follow up the discourse of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as a social reformer. The chapter will also relocate the circumstances as to why and how Ambedkar's self-respect movement which culminated in the making of the Constitution remains an unfinished movement and probably because it did not factor in the need for self-purification of Gandhi. Or somewhere in the midst of isolation and binaries, the culture argumentational tradition of Ambedkar – Gandhi, which completed the arc of social reform through constitution - has lost its historical credibility of transformation.

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<sup>161</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on The Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2015, p. 150.

## Chapter 3

### Meliorist Gandhi and Self – Purification: Gandhi’s Incessant search for Swaraj

*“Real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused” – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi<sup>1</sup>*

A large chunk of the literature on Gandhi’s approach or his struggle against caste and untouchability tends either to present Gandhi as the apostle or the saint (as holy as was the Christ) or show him as a defender of the discriminative caste institution. In other words, it is Gandhi or Ambedkar and in more recent times it is Gandhi versus Ambedkar. Such binaries are not unusual and scholarship of personalities, particularly biographical studies are prone to present such a dilemma. History, however, cannot follow this track and at the same time seek to stay clear of subjective preferences of the historian. A way out of this would be to seek to locate persons, where they are subject matters. As Historians seek to comprehend people in the context of particular time and places that they lived and explain their actions and impacts. In that sense, history remains the set of events, that happened in past; but to understand it, is the duty of present<sup>2</sup>

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi an inordinate opponent of British Colonial Raj remains one of the greatest figures of last century. His moral philosophy and message of non – violence, peace, self – realization, communal harmony, truth et al. for socio - political change, is being venerated and celebrated not only in India, but across world.

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Young India, 29-01-1925, Volume 30, p 159. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>. 10/09/2017

<sup>2</sup> Tharoor, Shashi. *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016, p. 276.

Gandhi's stature as socio-political leader as India's struggle for independence, has remained unchallenged for many decades. But the contemporary discourse of Dalit literature and their assertions through alternate history has challenged this popular narrative. With the rise of Dalit assertion and fierce Ambedkarism, which certainly and duly have provided an alternate voice to the oppressed; the mollification of Gandhi in itself has become a critical and important part of that discourse. Dalit writers, politicians, academicians, activists, hagiographers and pamphleteers generally seek to elevate Ambedkar by diminishing Gandhi or by totally divorcing their ideologies as antipodes. D.R. Nagraj has pointed out that: 'the whole discourse represents fight between hero and villain; the writer's caste position generally determines as to who will get the particular roles'.<sup>3</sup> This epistemological deconstruction of Gandhi as a social reformer is also being channelized through political discourse and remains in continuity.

Any attempt to study Gandhi's approach to the eradication of caste and untouchability (which is the concern here in this chapter), and also to locate the debate or interaction which Gandhi had with Ambedkar on this; had to be necessarily located with larger discourse of India's struggle for Independence. In other words, the idea of a world free from the practice of untouchability in Gandhian sense ought to be located in his approach towards freedom or swaraj more particularly. It should not be looked in the same way as the nineteenth century social reformers in India comprehended caste or the various other forms of discrimination including gender. In other words, Gandhi's approach and activities cannot be seen in the same way as history has treated the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Young Derozians

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<sup>3</sup> Nagraj, D. R.. *The Flaming Feet and Other Essays: Dalit Movement in India*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 1993, p.2. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

Movement et al.. And this is also the case with any such attempt to understand Ambedkar's paradigm, as we saw in Chapter 2 before this.

Louis Fischer while writing about the last days of Gandhi noted that 'The verdict of history cannot be anticipated by those who make it'.<sup>4</sup> Fischer was right; Gandhi remains the victim of the 'ism' that emanated from the episodic or ahistorical phenomenon. Travesty to social transformative agendas is that, it has been reduced to a cult of brinkmanship in politics. Indian political parties have just appropriated and deconstructed leaders, sans their profundity, for mere political benefits. Hence, it is imperative that the discourse on caste and Gandhi's approach to the eradication of untouchability ought to be examined in a holistic manner and should be taken beyond the polemics and politics; to which many contemporary discourses has been subjected or thrown into. The binaries are created and are anchored with the fabrication of half-truths or even post ones. Far from creating an inclusive society, the whole phenomenon has created ideological hatred and schisms. It persists not only in academia but also among the masses. There remains evident propaganda and misrepresentation against Gandhi, as if the abolition of caste system a whole - lock, stock and barrel – was quite possible and ready; and Gandhi alone stood on its way.<sup>5</sup> The whole narrative has not only betrayed the course of history, but, have done a great disservice to both Gandhi's and Ambedkar's legacies. It is pertinent, in this context, to invoke Madhu Limaye, an Indian socialist, (who had noted this tendency to create binaries and iconize one or the other in its initial stages) who in his text *Manu, Gandhi Ambedkar and Other Essays* noted that: 'there remains the need of

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<sup>4</sup> Fischer, Louis. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Harper Collins, Noida, 2016, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> Ray, Barren. *Gandhi's Campaign against Untouchability: 1933- 1934*. Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p.2.

movements for social justice and equality; but it cannot be built upon by abusing Gandhi (utilised for the same)'.<sup>6</sup> Limaye further writes:

Ambedkar was a highly literate leader and a great votary of knowledge. He accorded education the highest priority. But these neo – Ambedkarites exult in their ignorance and prejudice. The false prophets and spurious champions of social justice amongst us have deliberately ignored this campaign for they fear that their defence of Gandhi would erode their vote banks. Their new mantle of Prophethood conceals the inner core of power politics and power hunger. But truth must prevail.<sup>7</sup>

The course and history of Dalit emancipation remains unfinished and as long as the caste will survive, so will the legacies of the reformers who tried to reform or annihilate it. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the first leader who made 'eradication of untouchability' a national concern along with India's political independence. Even Ambedkar ratified this fact and so do the historians who wrote about social reform movements. Counterfactual arguments for political benefits can sometimes take the aura of post-truth; but cannot negate the historical events and its authenticity. The facts clearly dismantle the ahistorical popular narratives towards Gandhi.

It will be appropriate, in this context, to locate Gandhi's approach to the campaign against untouchability as being integral to the idea of freedom, or 'swaraj'. 'Swaraj', in the Gandhian sense, was not restricted to the attainment of political freedom and democracy. For Gandhi, political freedom and institutions attached to it, was not an 'end' to his concept of Swaraj. It's beyond that. Gandhi viewed political freedom just as a 'means' to proceed towards real swaraj. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1931, he wrote:

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<sup>6</sup> Limaye, Madhu. *Manu, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, , p.3.

<sup>7</sup>Limaye, Madhu. *Manu, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 16 -17

To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi's scholarship has always been overshadowed by his stature of modern saint as proposed by different schools of thought. Even his idea of state, institutions, justice, equality, freedom et al. is often narrowed down to utopia or anarchy.<sup>9</sup> Akeel Bilgrami writes "Gandhi's thought and his ideas about specific political strategies in specific context flowed from ideas that were very remote from politics; instead they flowed from and integrated to the most abstract epistemological and methodological commitments. The qualities of his thoughts has sometime been lost because of other images of Gandhi evolves – a shrewd politician and a deeply spiritual figure"<sup>10</sup>.

In his classic work *Hind Swaraj*; Gandhi defines: "real home rule as self – rule or self – control".<sup>11</sup> The concept of self which becomes almost an indistinguishable part of Gandhi's Swaraj and also defines his trajectory towards justice and equality. He asserted the idea of self – purification as a tool to eradicate caste and untouchability among Hindus. This whole concept of self- purification depends upon morality, conscience, inner awakening and behavioural pattern of an individual and collectively of the masses. Throughout his life Gandhi remained a meliorist, who believed that human efforts can change the world. It is important here to note that, it

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<sup>8</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG., Young India, 2- 07- 1931, Volume 53,* p 4. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>. 06/07/2016.

<sup>9</sup>Kumar, Biplove. "Meliorist Gandhi and Champaran Satyagraha: A conscious Idea of Justice".*Research Guru: Online Journal of Multidisciplinary Subjects*, Volume 12, Issue 2, September 2018, p.11. Retrieved From:

<http://www.researchguru.net/volume/Volume%2012/Issue%202/RG20.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Bilgrami, Akeel. "Gandhi, the Philosopher". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2003,p.4159

<sup>11</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K. Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip (ed). Orient BlackSwan, Noida, 2010, p.98.



was because of his meliorism that - Gandhi's views on Casteism changed at various points of time.

Nishikant Kolge in his recent work '*Gandhi against Caste*' - defined three kinds of literature that seeks to explain Gandhi's attitude towards caste system. First group, maintains the viewpoint that Gandhi believed in caste system and wanted to build up Indian society on caste principles (this includes both Gandhian and Dalit scholars); second group holds that Gandhi views on caste evolved with time; and the third group argues that there was an inherent tactic or strategy (this view is also testified by Kolge in his work) involved in Gandhi's defence of caste in his early writings in India.<sup>12</sup> But all these three views remains problematic, all these arguments largely thrives upon certain episodes of Gandhi's life and working. The First discourse can be out rightly rejected when Gandhi's whole life and practises are being reflected very closely. The evolving discourse comes close to Gandhian views but evolution can always be positive and hence discard Gandhi's conservative stance of caste- South African stand when compared to his initial years in Indian politics. It remains the fact, Gandhi in this period acted more in conservative way and not in an evolutionary one. The third one of tactics and strategy can be utilised for aura and appeasement of Gandhian philosophy, but again it betrays Gandhi's own urge to change, if he believed that - he was wrong. It neglects, to be precise, 'the human' in Gandhi which can do mistakes, in his choices of ideas and intellect at certain point of time. Gandhi named his autobiography as "*The story of My Experiments with Truth*". The name itself upholds his lifelong experiments. The experiments through which Gandhi gained the vocation of his life and its purpose, and which changed his inner and outer domain. Now, experiments cannot be regarded as covered strategy or tactic.

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<sup>12</sup>Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*.Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.25 -26.

The strategical argument to which Kolge himself adheres to and compares it with Buddhism's philosophy of '*Skilful means*'<sup>13</sup>; negates Gandhi's honest experiments with his experiences, after which he never shied to change his stand. Gandhi On his experiments wrote in his autobiography's introduction that:

Far be it me to claim any degree of perfection for these experiments. I claim for them nothing more than a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self- introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final. For if they were not, I should base no action on them. But at every step I have carried out process of acceptance or rejection and acted accordingly. And as long as my acts satisfy my reason and my heart, I must firmly adhere to my original conclusions.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Gandhi's acceptance or rejection of any idea or stand on caste and untouchability can be looked through - his prism of experiences and 'times' in which he worked. History of a leader and ideas attached to his life cannot be episodic. Having stated this, it is as important to stress that Gandhi never hesitated to own up his mistakes as human and never hesitated to risk his aura of a mass leader in the cause of reason and rationality. Ramanhoar Lohia, a Gandhian and Socialist, explains this idea in the following words:

Mahatma Gandhi knew how to risk his popularity....even it brought calumny and danger to him.<sup>15</sup>

Negation of Gandhi's work as a mere political stunt for benefitting Savarnas and to enhance their sole dominance, remains a politically incorrect view and a naïve

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<sup>13</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.XIII

<sup>15</sup> Lohia, Rammanohar. *Wheel of History*. Navahind Prakashan, Hydrabad, 1963, pp. 82-83

phenomenon. Gandhi never imagined swaraj without the emancipation of Panchamas.<sup>16</sup> Gandhi not only understood the magnitude of the task but also came to conclusion that: his colleagues in national movement either did not understand his concern (against untouchability) or even actively deplored it.<sup>17</sup> He even made removal of untouchability as desired subject under his “constructive programme” and instructed volunteers and workers to work for that; in order to attain complete independence.<sup>18</sup> Gandhi remained a social reformer and a visionary leader. He was the one who wisely understood the pluralistic nature of the caste problem. He realised that political upliftment of untouchables should match the moral upliftment of caste Hindus. Sadly, with strong tinge of sanskritization, moral upliftment remains due and so does the existence caste discrimination.

Political brinkmanship and eye on vote banks have restricted or thrown the ideas of Gandhi to a casteist bloc, in opposition to Ambedkar. What exist today are several episodic Gandhis which is being utilised by different political parties for their assertion to exist, organise and legitimise struggle; by creating false and half narratives. It is not easy to asses Gandhi, to understand his trials and tribulations, or to indentify his successes and failures. He set high, almost impossible goals during his life, ranging from freedom of India to wiping out tear from every eye. But Gandhi, the meliorist fought for an inclusive society until his last breath. In spite of political

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<sup>16</sup> The out - caste people - outside the pale of Sarvans or Four Varnas is known traditionally as Panchamas or Untouchables.

<sup>17</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among The Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Gandhi writes about Constructive programme that: ‘The constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *Poorna Swaraj* or complete Independence, by truthful and non-violent means’; Gandhi, M.K.. *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 5.

freedom and constitutional protections the rights and claims of Avarnas are divorced from justice and equality. It is necessary to relook into the epistemological understanding and Gandhian journey of to Swaraj - through which he tried to connect laws with morality. Mere political democracy is not what our leaders fought for. Democracy needs a constant development on the basis of high human values to achieve Swaraj of Gandhi or social and economic democracies of Babasaheb. As Gandhi opined:

The spirit of Democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires change of hearts.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi remains a “practical idealist”. Before moving onto the holistic debate of Gandhi and Ambedkar and its repercussions on history and present; this chapter will analyse the Gandhian journey as a social reformer in context to caste and untouchability. It’s very important to understand the Gandhian meaning of democracy which he termed as Swaraj, where he never imagined caste to exist. But still his whole discourse is being side-lined under the contemporary domain.

The organization of this chapter will follow Gandhi’s whole life and how he, at different phases of his life, reacted to the expositions related to the institution of caste and untouchability. Section 1 of this chapter will deal with the early phase of Gandhi’s life, his upbringing and educational journey. This portion will discuss how Gandhi faced a phase of religious fermentation (as caste remains inseparable from religious institution) in his early life and how he came out of it. Section 2 will comprehend his journey to and in South Africa and how a barrister was evolved into a political leader and a social reformer. Section 3 (1916- 32) will analyse his initial

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<sup>19</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. Quoted In *Gandhi : Democracy and Fundamental Rights*, Kumar, Ravindra. Dangwal, Kiran lata.. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/democracy.htm>. 12/12/2016.

years in Indian politics. This section will also discuss his crusade against untouchability as well as a ‘conservative Gandhi’ who uphold the firm belief in the institutions of caste and Varna. Section 4 (1932-39) will deal with his holistic engagement with Ambedkar and how this engagement worked a catalyst in the making of Gandhi. This section will also delve into his Anti – Untouchability tour of 1933 and the changes in his thought processes and workings after that. Section 5 (1940 -48) will analyse the radicalism in his approach during the last few years of his life. This section will also highlight his lonely crusade for his pillars of Swaraj.

## **Section 1**

### **Mohandas and Early life: Orthodoxy versus Orthopraxy**

As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, India had witnessed a number of socio - religious reform and revivalist movements even before Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born. These reformers concentrated their whole energy towards an ‘enlightened transformation’, that can substitute the challenging versions on religion and civilization; which was conceived and presented by occidentals. It will be fair enough to hold that the whole gamut of the social reform and revivalist movements of this period majorly gyrated around the women and the caste question. The reformers started to search and invent facts from historical literature (Myths, Shastras, Upanishads and Vedas) and started to profess and propagate orthopraxy or correct conduct. Constitutive aspects were highlighted as something traditionally rich, sacred and morally right for the society. The reasons they gave for India’s stagnation came from the regulative aspect. The active participation of an important section of the Indian literati gave a critical edge to the age of these reform movements. Placed between the idea of rich cultures that sustained and the appeal of new ‘western’ ideas;

most of the Indian men tried to strike a balance between reform and tradition. Partha Chatterjee's insightful and influential analysis of nationalist discourse has demonstrated how debates and controversy over social reform (specially over the condition of women) enabled Indian men to slowly mark out their inner domain – the interior frontier – a national life from outer, the private from public, the spiritual from material; rearticulating them in novel ways.<sup>20</sup> This whole argument of Chatterjee also defines the dynamics of the intellectual reasoning related to several other socio – religious movements. Reformist ideals such as Suddhi movement<sup>21</sup> of Arya Samaj remain one of them. Without a shadow of doubt, conflict of inner and outer domain still dominates the Indian society.

The early life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi also represents the dichotomous relationship between the inner and outer domain, which the society of his time provided him with. One can view sometimes that he remained conformist or casteist and but one cannot negate the 'raison d'être' in him, which represented a unique phenomenon. But on the whole, Gandhi's early life in India and England can be defined as a phase of religious fermentation. Although he often challenged the dichotomy between the inner and the outer domains - whether it was to do with his family or conservative caste community of his own, but, in totality he was unable to come out of it completely. This conflict, in the end, took him to oblige the orthodoxy even without finding any substantial reasons for their orthopraxis.

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<sup>20</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Suddhi movement* was a revivalist movement of Arya Samaj (1875) and had led to re- conversions or bring back those Hindu people back to their religion, who had converted themselves to Islam and Christianity. It has been discussed briefly in chapter one.

Religion is generally defined by one of the two things: belief (orthodoxy) or practise (orthopraxy). Orthopraxy, as the name suggests, involves a question of praxis which carries an implication of subjective assertion as against ‘*doxa*’; which literally translates as received wisdom. Thus, orthopraxy involves self –assertive comprehension of ethical import of the religious opinion unlike orthodoxy which involves complicity with received codes of conduct and mores of religious behaviour; without a reflective venture on part of religious subject. The subjective assertion of Gandhi against orthodoxy allowed him to challenge the codified conduct of conservatives which defines his phase of religious fermentation.<sup>22</sup> It allowed him to challenge the conventions of his time even while he chose to remain a conformist or orthodox on many aspects of life. This subjective assertion grew with time (especially during his South Africa days) and also channelized the grammar of his religious, political and social life.

## **Section 1.1**

### **Early life and Phase of Religious Fermentation:**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2nd October 1869 at Porbandar<sup>23</sup>, south west of Kathiawar peninsula now in Gujarat. His caste Bania (or precisely Modh Bania), occupies a place of third stratum in Varna system. Although the Gandhis - meaning grocers, were merchants by caste, they had risen to important political positions.<sup>24</sup> The first Gandhi in public service, named Lalji, migrated from Junagadh

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<sup>22</sup> Kumar, Biplove. *The Evolution of Gandhi's Approach to Caste and Untouchability*. Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Sikkim University, 2016, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Porbandar, Gandhi's birthplace, is on the south – west of Kathiawar Peninsula (currently in Gujarat State of Indian Union). It was one of some seventy chiefdoms in Kathiawar.

<sup>24</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 1

state to work in Porbandar. Lalji Gandhi served as a *Diwan*<sup>25</sup> as did his son Uttamchand Gandhi (*Ota Bapa*) and Karamchand Gandhi (*Kaba*).<sup>26</sup> This break from the ‘traditional calling’ of business (as often channelized through Varna system under Hindu orthodoxy) represented their outer life. This particular outer domain did not reflect any change in the behavioural pattern towards casteism or Varna order i.e., inner domain.

Putlibai was Karamchand’s fourth wife<sup>27</sup> and Mohandas was their fourth child. Gandhi grew up in an eclectic religious environment. Although their *Kul Devta* or family deity was Ram, the Porbandar region was steeped in the traditions of *Vaishnavism* (the worship of *Vishnu* and especially his avatars *Ram and Krishna*). And apart from the dominant Hindu faith, Muslims, Jains, Parsees and Christians contributed to the heterodox environment of Kathiawar peninsula. Gandhi’s religious pluralism that transcended his conservatism, gained its ground in his childhood. To entertain any idea of social equality among Indians one has to have an understanding of religions, through which the tools of inequality emanated. It was through Putlibai, that Gandhi was introduced to the mysteries of faith. She was devout, but not dogmatic. Being a Vaishnavite, she was attracted towards the Pranami Sect founded by a Kshatriya named Pran Nath who lived in Kathiawar in eighteenth century. The Pranamis incorporated the teachings of Islam into their domain and their *Haveli* or Temple had no icons or images, they only had the writings from different religious

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<sup>25</sup> Porbandar’s ruler was known by the title of Rana. During those days in Hindu States, the second most important person was the Diwan, or chief minister. Although, this particular post is always given to higher castes; Kathiwar represented a unique feature of appointing Bania caste as their Diwan.

<sup>26</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books. New Delhi, 2014, p.19

<sup>27</sup> Gandhi’s father Karamchand Gandhi or Kaba, got married four times in his life. His first two wives died early and third marriage proved childless. So with the permission of his third wife, he got married to Putlibai, who became his fourth wife.



sect. Putlibai's ecumenism extended even further, for among the regular visitors to her home were Jain monks.<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding the religious syncretism, that society presented and the atmosphere of eclecticism at his home, the horrendous caste institution with untouchability prevailed. Gandhi's first acquaintance with untouchability was when Putlibai chided her son for brushing shoulders with a young Bhangi named 'Uka' and insisted that he undergoes a ritual purification.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, apart from Putlibai, Gandhi also acknowledges his father's attitudes and acquaintances that transformed his religious quest. It was through the books in his library that Gandhi read the *Manusmiriti*, which did not impress him at all. Gandhi recalls that reading the *Manusmriti*, which took him towards atheism.<sup>30</sup> Young Gandhi informs us that the teachings of *Manusmiriti* were antithetical to morality and reason; attributes which had already started to take deep roots in Gandhi's own intellect. Syncretic thoughts of oneness appealed and attracted him more. In his autobiography he writes about how his father's acquaintances and religious syncretic environment changed his thought process:

In Rajkot, However, I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions..... He (Karamchand) had besides, Musalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often

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<sup>28</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books. New Delhi, 2014, p.24.

<sup>29</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.32

with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me toleration for all faiths.<sup>31</sup>

Gandhi completed his education from Porbandar and Rajkot. He was a shy and mediocre student and completed his education with average results. More distractions came with the marriage at the age of thirteen in the year 1883 with Kasturba aka Ba. Gandhi completed his Matriculation in 1888. From the accounts of Mohandas himself, socio – religious questions attracted him more than the grades or textbooks. Outside school, Mohandas education was enriched by his growing exposure to Gujarati literature. Narmadasankar Lalshankar (1833-66) or Narmad, Narsing Mehta (Vaishnava preacher and a poet) and Govardhan Tripathi (1855 – 1907), created a huge impact on his young mind. Mohandas read closely to Narmad and Tripathi. Both were reformers who saw British rule as challenge to Gujratis, alerting them to their own faults and weakness. Narmad was against caste, against religious dogmatism, and for the remarriage of widows. Govardhan Tripathi similarly deplored the tribalism of caste and the oppression of women, like Narmad, he thought British rule would shame Indians into discarding outmoded social practises and institutions.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps, the courage of becoming an outcaste,<sup>33</sup> which Gandhi defined in his autobiography, comes from the environment in which Gandhi was brought up. Mohandas's quest, growing rationality, heterodox religious environment, English education and the impact of social reformers like Narmad and Tripathi allowed him to become an outcaste. All factors culminated in his first challenge towards orthodoxy.

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<sup>31</sup>Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.32

<sup>32</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 31

<sup>33</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.37

By the standards education existed at Gandhi's time, the Bombay Matriculation and his performance in it was undistinguishable.<sup>34</sup> Prospects for seeking high office in British India or indeed in the native states now seemed positive to his family. Mohandas was exception in his family in relation to education and was expected to acquire more certificates.<sup>35</sup> In January 1888 he got enrolled in BA degree in Samaldas College, Bhavnagar (currently in the state of Maharashtra, under Bombay University). But with an intervention of a family friend and a learned Brahmin named Mavji Dave; the 'idea of Law' became more accessible towards the bright prospect of Diwanship. With the Barrister's certificate from London, said Mavji Dave to Putlibai, 'he could get the Diwanship (Porbandar) for the asking'.<sup>36</sup> 'Had Gandhi's father been alive', writes Ramchandra Guha 'the idea of going London might never have occurred to him, for his successful matriculation had already made Mohandas one of the best educated young men in peninsula'.<sup>37</sup>

Putlibai initially did not want her son to pursue his study in a foreign land. But young Mohandas himself found the idea compelling. He himself pressed Putlibai to agree. Putlibai a devout consulted a holy man she trusted - a Modh Bania turned Jain monk named Becharji Swami. Swami gave the green signal but with some preconditions. These were to which even Mohandas agreed and gave promise to her mother. The three promises or vows to be kept in foreign land were: he would not eat meat or drink wine or be unfaithful to his wife.<sup>38</sup> After this particular covenant between son and Putlibai - Mohandas got his desired permission. With economy,

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<sup>34</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 31

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 31

<sup>36</sup> Ibid ., p.32

<sup>37</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 32

<sup>38</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.36

towards his expensive education was handled by his elder brother Laxmidas and through home assets; Mohandas proceeded to Bombay en route towards London. It was in between getting the berth in a ship to London from Bombay, that Gandhi became an outcaste.

There existed, a conservative custom channelized through the orthodox elements among Savarnas or higher castes. A journey to abroad can lead to the situation of losing one's caste as he/ she has to cross *Kaala Paani* or polluted ocean. Among Modh Baniyas this prejudice was intense and Gandhi faced it at Bombay. Laxmidas and his brother Mohandas had attracted the ire of their caste community at Bombay. The head of that community who was in acquaintance with Kramchand Gandhi, warned Mohandas of consequences of crossing Kaala Paani. To settle the matter a 'caste Panchayat' was held and prominent members of caste were being called. Mohandas remained the accused of caste transgression. Gandhi mustered up his courage and challenged the view of the headman, who accosted Gandhi in the name of religion and caste. Seth or headman spoke:

In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids Voyages abroad.<sup>39</sup>

Gandhi saw no reason in the argument of the Seth. He challenged the orthodoxy of headmen through his subjective assertion (orthopraxy) in following words:

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<sup>39</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.37

I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have already solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from three things you fear most. I am sure vows will keep me safe.<sup>40</sup>

The accused Mohandas became outcaste after the debate between Seth and him. Later, Gandhi wrote: ‘The order had no effect on me’.<sup>41</sup> The audacity shown by Gandhi against his own caste conservatives marks a historic break in his personality. This personifies the language of rationality that he started to cultivate in him. The whole episode can be seen as subjective assertion with utmost reasoning. Although he did not go against the constitutive elements of caste, but the step in itself can be progressively justified; when compared to the environment to which he belonged. The outcaste left the shores to discover the west in 1888.

## **Section 1.2**

### **Gandhi and London: The Phase Continues...**

Gandhi, like many other Indian intellectuals of his time discovered the west and the east more or less at the same time; and the discovery of one was through the other.<sup>42</sup> In his autobiography, Gandhi wrote: ‘I have remained, forever; indebted to them (Christian friends) for the religious quest that they have awakened in me’.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the quest was formulated in England. And it was because of the continuance of that quest and reasoning that he termed untouchability as a rotten part of Hinduism.<sup>44</sup> Reverence for all religions, the desire to understand the best in each and almost

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<sup>40</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.37.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.128.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p.127.

intuitive realization of essential unity of them, all were planted in his mind during his early life. It is significant that an awareness and understanding of the heritage of his own land and religion came to him in England and through the English language.<sup>45</sup>

London, the imperial capital, was a great industrial and international city even in 1888. No city in the world had more people - about 6 million in all, twice the number as in Paris – or more nationalities and all these had an impact on the making of Gandhi's thoughts.<sup>46</sup> Destined to be the great political thinker, Gandhi was not interested in politics during his London days. Imperial and socialist politics (Fabian socialism was an emerging trend) left him cold. His autobiography talks about the popular Indian politician Dadabhai Naoroji and radical Britain's Charles Bradlaugh (whose funeral Gandhi attended); but he seems less interested in any political domain. The life in London was marked more by religious and social experiences. Gandhi the cultivator of friendships across racial and religious boundaries; Gandhi the organizer and mobilizer; Gandhi the writer, thinker and propagandist – all these Gandhis were first displayed in and through his membership of famously obscure body, 'The vegetarian society of England'.<sup>47</sup> It was through the book of Henry Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism*; Gandhi came across London Vegetarian society. Gandhi duly started to attend the meetings of the society. It was in these weekly meetings, the shy chap from India found cause, refuge and first English friends. Gandhi an outcaste again violated his caste rules and shared room with a Christian Josiah Oldfield. Oldfield was studying medicine was an active member of London Vegetarian society. As his friends circles enlarged, Gandhi was asked about Bhagvat Gita and this, indeed, led Gandhi to read Edwin Arnold's *The Song Celestial* (an English version of The Gita).

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<sup>45</sup> Kripalani, Krishna. *Gandhi: A life.*, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, 1968, p.10

<sup>46</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 38

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.50.

Gandhi also interacted with the Theosophists and met Madam Blavatsky and Annie Besant, a firebrand socialist and suffragette who had recently abandoned those creeds to embrace Theosophy.<sup>48</sup>

Moving beyond his faith, Gandhi came to know Christianity through his friends. *The Book of Genesis* had fared less impact on him but the *New Testament* enlightened him. The *Sermon on the Mount*, in particular, Gandhi himself wrote: ‘It went straight to my heart’. Comparing it to the Gita, he concluded that both taught that ‘renunciation was the highest form of religion.’<sup>49</sup>

Gandhi’s involvement with the vegetarians of London remains an important episode of his life. Had he not joined their society, he would have kept himself to his compatriots. These first, close friendships with English people expanded his mind and personality. He learnt to relate to people of different races and religious beliefs, to mix, mingle and eat with them, and even to share a home with them.<sup>50</sup> His religious quest and understanding started to shape during this period of time. The text New Testament and the Bhagvat Gita became an integral part of his socio- political journey. Mahadev Desai later wrote that, ‘every moment of (Gandhi’s) life is a conscious effort to live the message of the Gita’.<sup>51</sup>

The next, in that order in terms of time, to influence Gandhi was Raychandbhai or Rajchandra, a relative of Dr. Pranjivan Mehta, Gandhi’s fellow student at London who helped Gandhi in his initial days. However, Gandhi got in touch with Raychandbhai only on his return to India after his studies in 1891. The

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<sup>48</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p.62 -63

<sup>50</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 49

<sup>51</sup> Fischer, Louis. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Harper Collins, Noida, 2016, p.45.

impact of Raychandbhai on Gandhi was huge and this will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Meanwhile, the law degree could have provided a good job to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; but it was least sufficient to equip him to even sneak into the walls of the discriminative aspects of the caste institutions. Gandhi's return to India was followed by a purification ceremony in the Godavari River, near Nasik and a ritual dinner at Rajkot. All these were done to placate the Modh Baniyas. His fellow Modh Baniyas had not forgiven him for travelling to London. Gandhi acted like a conformist at this point of time, but going by his words he did all these for his brother's sake. Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, published in 1924:

The storm in my caste over my foreign voyage was still brewing. It had divided caste into two camps, one which immediately readmitted me, while the other was bent on keeping me out. To please the former my brother took me to Nasik before going to Rajkot, gave me a bath in sacred river and, on reaching Rajkot, gave a caste dinner. I did not like all this. But my brother's love for me was boundless, and my devotion to him was in proportion to it, and so I mechanically acted as he wished, taking his will to be Law. The trouble about readmission to caste was thus practically over. I never tried to seek admission to the section that had refused it.<sup>52</sup>

The fact is although Gandhi did not find any practical reasons towards conforming to these caste regulations, he did not try, at this point, to challenge it radically. Gandhi noted his conduct towards the caste conservatives as a 'scrupulous one'. It allowed him to evade any confrontation with the caste members directly and also fulfilled his convictions. Gandhi was neither a social or political reformer at that point of time. Although his sense of reasoning had made him audacious, his economic

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<sup>52</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 84.



priorities seemed larger than his intellectual urge. Gandhi recalled, about a decade and half later:

The result of scrupulous conduct was that I never had occasion to be troubled by the caste; nay, I have experienced nothing but affection and generosity from general body of the section that still regards me excommunicated. They have helped me in my work, without ever expecting me to do anything for caste. It is my conviction that all these good things are due to my non- resistance.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, Laxmidas's acts, involving the state and its finances ruined any chances of Mohandas to work in Porbandar.<sup>54</sup> Faced with the crisis Gandhi proceeded to Bombay and got enrolled himself at Bombay High Court. But the short interlude at Bombay ended in despair. The logic demanded that he shall return to Rajkot and settle with his brother. Gandhi thus closed his little establishment, after a stay of six months, in Bombay. The despair was also related to the caste opposition which Gandhi faced yet again at Bombay while working. In a letter to a friend, Gandhi complains of the lack of work and also complains that the caste opposition was great as ever. His bonhomie that was built up due to his non- resistance to caste conservatives was duly shattered at Bombay; where he was declared an outcaste again. . A section of the Modh Baniyas was still holding out against Gandhi for crossing Kala Paani. Mohandas thus wrote to his friend:

Everything depends upon one man who will try his best never to allow me to enter the caste. I am not so very sorry for myself as I am for caste fellows who follow the authority of one man like a sheep. They have been passing some meaningless resolutions and betraying their malice clearly in overdoing their part. Religion of course, finds no place in their argument. It is not

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<sup>53</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 84

<sup>54</sup> Gandhi informs us through his own autobiography that -his brother had been secretary and adviser to the late Ranasaheb of Porbandar before he was installed on his gadi.(throne). His brother was charged for having given wrong advice while holding the office. This incident has ruined chances of employment not only for his brother Laxmidas , but also Gandhi. Ibid, p. 91-92.

almost better not to have anything to do with such fellows than to fawn upon them and wheedle their fame so that I might be considered one of them.<sup>55</sup>

As Gandhi's prospects of becoming a lawyer was beginning to end in despair and failures, opportunity beckoned in South Africa. A family of Muslim traders had established their business in South Africa, under the domain name of Abdullah and Sons. They were in search of a lawyer who could understand both Gujarati and English. Abdullah wrote a letter to Laxmidas Gandhi asking about his brother. Laxmidas discussed the proposal with his brother and it appealed to Gandhi. Gandhi, who was in search of opportunities, away from socio- economic and political bondages agreed. Gandhi recalls this in his autobiography that 'he wanted somehow to leave India. There was also the tempting opportunity of seeing a new country and having new experiences'.<sup>56</sup>

These new experiences, which even Gandhi had never thought about, took the shape of experiments in South Africa and these experiments not only changed the course of his life but also India's history.

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<sup>55</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 61

<sup>56</sup>Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 85

## Section 2

### Gandhi's Laboratory: The South African Discourse

It took a couple of decades and a few more years after his arrival in South Africa (in 1893), as Attorney and with briefs from the Gujarati business firm, before Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India for good and join the political affairs of his homeland in 1916. Ever since he landed in India, Gandhi set about mapping the road to swaraj of India. The map he drafted rested on the four pillars he had identified and specified: Eradication of untouchability; Hindu – Muslim unity; the principle of Non – violence for freedom; and transformation of villages by spinning and other self – sustaining methods.

Gandhi's four pillars constituted and covered all aspects of India's struggle for political independence and beyond. These pillars, along with the Gandhian mode of politics (Satyagraha, mass movements, civil disobedience et al.), were destined to set a new paradigm in the historical discourse of India. This particular paradigm (Gandhian discourse), without any shadow of doubt, was canvassed and primed in South Africa. South Africa remains a turning point in Gandhi's life. It confronted him with many unusual experiences and challenges.<sup>57</sup> The rational but conformist barrister was transformed, through his own experiments, during his twenty one year stay in South Africa and so did his ideological expositions. The journey from '*Mohandas to Bhai to Mahatma*' witnessed the provenience of a socio- political leader and a progressive reformer. Writing about the history of political struggle in South Africa; Gandhi in his book '*Satyagraha in South Africa*' wrote:

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<sup>57</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 5.

South Africa, Where I had passed twenty one years of my life sharing to the full in sweets and bitters of human experience, and where I had realized my vocation of life.<sup>58</sup>

In his comprehensive account of Gandhi in South Africa, B.R. Nanda writes, ‘what Gandhi did to South Africa was less important than what South Africa did to him’.<sup>59</sup> Living in Britain towards the end of the Victorian age, did young Mohandas Gandhi experience discrimination on account of his race or ethnicity? It appears not.<sup>60</sup> Gandhi’s own version of London and his life there suggests the inclusive and accommodating nature of the English people and its culture. The circles in which Gandhi accommodated himself – vegetarians, Theosophists and his friends, showed no prejudice towards his colour or origin. Englishman in England was less prejudiced than a colonial Englishman in different colonies. This, perhaps, was what led Dadabhai Naorji to criticise the British rule as: ‘un – British’ rule in India.<sup>61</sup>

The positive experiences and Englishness indeed, influenced Gandhi, when he landed in South Africa, to believe in the Queen’s Proclamation (1858) - which defined all Indians, as ‘Imperial Subjects’. But it was in Africa that, he only found, much to his shock, that he was an ‘untouchable imperial subject’. South Africa welcomed the young barrister as ‘*coolie*, swamy and *Kafir*’.<sup>62</sup> Gandhi reached Durban on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1893, becoming an outcaste once again, by crossing ‘Kaala Paani’, which was against

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<sup>58</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2015, p. 309

<sup>59</sup> Nanda, B.R.. *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography Complete and Unabridged*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 121.

<sup>60</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji’s remains one of the first nationalist who criticised Colonial policies. His critical analysis of British Economic policies in context to Colonial India, was published under the name of ‘Poverty and Unbritish Rule in India’. Dadabhai Naoroji’s work focused on the drain of wealth from India into England during colonial rule of British in India.

<sup>62</sup> These all terms were related to the derogative identification for Indians, emanated from the theory of racism, superiority and colonialism

the caste conventions. He breached his caste rule by sharing a room with a Muslim Dada Abdullah Seth; for whose case Gandhi went to South Africa. The particular case of Dada Abdullah and company was being heard in Pretoria, the capital of the Boer controlled South African Republic.<sup>63</sup> Gandhi proceeded to Pretoria by train and with a first class ticket. The inferior Kafir was duly thrown out of his first class coach, after two hours of journey, at Pietermaritzburg Station.<sup>64</sup> Louis Fischer writes: ‘On that bitter night at Martizburg the germ of social protest was born in Gandhi’.<sup>65</sup> But Gandhi proceeded again to his work and the germ had to wait. The racial discrimination did not end here - it continued at the stagecoach onto which he got at Pretoria and while getting an accommodation after reaching Pretoria. All these experiences, as Gandhi observed, ‘sank in him’.<sup>66</sup>

The protagonist Gandhi realized the higher calling of his duty and moral obligation he had against the racial prejudice that existed in South Africa. Recalling the events Gandhi wrote in his autobiography:

I began to think of my duty..... The hardship to which I subjected was superficial – only a symptom of deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process.<sup>67</sup>

The moral obligation and duty towards suffering duly channelized the struggle of Gandhi, for twenty one years in Africa. Barrister duration was about one year, but

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<sup>63</sup> The Boer Republics (sometimes also referred to as Boer states) were independent, self-governed republics in the last half of the nineteenth century, created by the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the Cape Colony and their descendants, variously named Trekboers, Boers and Voortrekkers in mainly the middle, northern and north eastern and eastern parts of what is now the country of South Africa.

<sup>64</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>65</sup> Fischer, Louis. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Harper Collins, Noida, 2016, p.59.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>67</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 104.

the struggle that was initiated at Martizburg station engaged him there until the 1913 – 14 Satyagraha campaign. It is pertinent to summarise the long story of his experiments in South Africa in as brief a manner as possible. Gandhi's brief with Abdullah, after all was only for a year and yet he stayed on there for two decades more.

In 1894, when Gandhi was about to return India after the case of Abdullah, the legislature of Natal was debating Indian Franchise Bill, which would have led to the en-masse disenfranchisement of all the Indians there. Gandhi's return was stopped by his Muslim employer who urged him to stay and lead the fight. Gandhi agreed and founded the 'Natal Indian Congress' and his campaign was met with a partial success. After his initial success, he increasingly began to complain that constitutional pressures, petition, and rational persuasion were making no impact on the prejudiced minds and wondered what else he should do.<sup>68</sup> The philosophy and practise of 'Satyagraha', which he started against the Transvaal law (requiring registration and fingerprint of all Indians and giving police power to raid their houses with draconian laws), provided him, as to what shall be the grammar of rightful protest in 1907. Eight years of Satyagraha movements, which duly provided weapon to weaker sections of society in Africa, made Gandhi the most famous leader in Africa. By 1913 – 14, Gandhi represented not only the Indians but a heterogeneous community cutting across colour and race. There is evidence that Gandhi's ambit had extended beyond the Asians in South Africa and had begun to encompass the rights of the African people too and this indeed would mature into the anti – apartheid struggle even after

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<sup>68</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 6.

Gandhi left the South African shores to India, prodded by his Rajguru – Gopal Krishna Gokhale.<sup>69</sup>

The relevant aspect of this long story of Gandhi in South Africa, from the scope of this study, is that he invented himself through his experiments in Africa. Had he not lived in South Africa, he might never have come out of his conventional, confined and traditional views of Indian men of his generation and class. A series of humiliating experiences broke his self-conceived notions about traditions, progressive modernity and faith in the Englishness or imperial culture. Apart from the political reformer, a social reformer was also born in South Africa. Gandhi's experiments allowed him to surpass the inner and outer dichotomy. The transformation was born out of his experiences, his practises and also the shared experiences of the Indians and the African people. His fight against racial discrimination forced him to develop strategies in order to run his political mass movements.<sup>70</sup>

The radical idea of eradication of untouchability which was included in Gandhi's four pillars to Swaraj was developed from his days in South Africa. Joseph Lelyveld in his *Great Soul* writes: 'He had struggled for equality of Indians and whites. This had led him, inevitably, to the issue of equality between Indian and Indian. He crossed the caste boundary before he crossed the class boundary'.<sup>71</sup> With all objective rationality and urge to unite the masses against the colonial masters, Gandhi was quick to realise the fault lines. He firmly concluded that swaraj, with these fault lines, shall remain a pipe dream. Thus, for Gandhi, physical unity ought to

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<sup>69</sup> Kumar, Biplove. *The Evolution of Gandhi's Approach to Caste and Untouchability*. Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Sikkim University, 2016, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.62.

<sup>71</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, pp.24-25.

be achieved through 'soul unity' or 'mental preparedness' for any mass struggle. But, to unite the Indian people under one domain was, in his own times and even contemporary times; remains one of the most challenging task for any political leader. Social schisms emanated not only from religious pattern but also from social hierarchies based on caste and sex.

Gandhi's inclination to towards the study of theology and his phase of religious fermentation continued in South Africa too. Religious and moral attitudes found its roots in India and London; but initially he went on a quest to see the links between religious beliefs and dietary practises. He does not appear to have given any thought at all to political questions before his direct involvement with the problems of Indian community in Natal.<sup>72</sup> Rational and syncretic lens which Gandhi used in order to understand religion must have allowed him to understand caste and untouchability with same perspectives. Gandhi must have realised the similitude between the racial injustices and inequalities emanated from caste institutions. The philosophical longings for unity, oneness, brotherhood and all deeper issues of life was shaped through South African experiments, which was varied and intense. He garnered the epistemological understandings as to what divided or united human beings in general and Indians in particular.

The philosophical expositions of Gandhi which emanated from his thoughts and life experiences in fact became inseparable for him. Thoughts came to have no meaning for him, unless it was lived out and life was shallow, unless, it was reflected in a carefully thought out vision of life. Bikhu Parekh writes:

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<sup>72</sup> Dalton, Dennis. *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi's Power*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.16.



Every time Gandhi came across a new idea, he asked if it was worth living up to. If not, he took no further interest in it. But if the answer was in affirmative, he integrated it into his way of life, 'experimented' with its 'truth', and explored its moral logic.<sup>73</sup>

Gandhi's understanding of truth based on his personal experiments and moral reasoning was not limited to Indian traditional thoughts. The practical ideology which defines the praxis of Gandhi was an amalgamation of both eastern and western thought processes. He was deeply influenced by moral and religious literature. Eastern thinkers prominently Raychandbhai and Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Western thinkers Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin - deeply influenced in socio- political thoughts. Gandhi not only tried to live up to the ideas of these people and intellect, which inspired and changed his life; but also tried to carve it out into a mass reality. Without any shadow of doubt these were applied and testified on African soil. Thus, in order to understand Gandhi as a social reformer and his views on equality and justice, one cannot negate the philosophical expositions; which inspired his socio- political trajectory towards India's struggle for Swaraj.

## **Section 2.1**

### **Eastern Thinkers and their influence on Gandhi: Raychandbhai and Gopal Krishna Gokhale**

Jaina teacher and poet Raychand or Rajchandra was the son in law of the elder brother of Dr. Pranjivan Mehta (friend and benefactor of Gandhi). He was also the Mehta's family partner of the firm of jewellers conducted in the name of Revashankar

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<sup>73</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 6.

Jagjivan.<sup>74</sup> The teachings of Raychand bhai left a deep impression on Gandhi. Raychandbhai had a mystical experience at a young age and had acquired the reputation as a poet and student of Jaina scriptures.<sup>75</sup> Gandhi was introduced to Raychandbhai when he returned from England. The young barrister faced on his return, both an outer storm in the form caste confrontation and inner storm when he came to know his mother Putlibai passed away. It was at this moment, the company of Raychandbhai came as a refuge to Gandhi.

Raychandbhai dismissed orthodox Jaina religion, as the religion of mouth covering (*muh Patti*), rather than soul. Apart from his business, Raychandbhai engrossed himself exhaustively in different religious and moral literature. The centre for this passion was to see 'God face to face'.<sup>76</sup> Gandhi's phase of religious fermentation was in fact stabilised when he came across Raychandbhai. Thirty years later, Gandhi wrote in his autobiography:

I have since met many religious leader and teacher. I have tried to meet the heads of various faiths, and I must say that no one else has ever made on me the impression that Raychandbhai did. His words went straight home to me. His intellect compelled as a great regard from me as his moral earnestness, and deep down in me was the conviction that he would never willingly lead me astray and would always confide to me his innermost thoughts. In the moments of spiritual crisis, therefore he was my refuge.<sup>77</sup>

Estranged by the caste-community consciousness, which affected his work as a lawyer at Bombay, it was Raychandbhai who told Gandhi to look beyond the conventional practices of caste. Although the Bania's sphere was business, said

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<sup>74</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 82.

<sup>75</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Raychand, he must also possess the qualities of other castes, learning hard work from the Sudra, fearlessness from the Kshatriya and the love for learning from the Brahmin.<sup>78</sup> The teachings of Raychandbhai were also incorporated by Gandhi into his life practices in Africa. Gandhi engaged with Raychandbhai, writing letters and debating on the challenges posed to him through his Christian friends in South Africa. Sometime in late summer of 1894, he wrote a series of letters to his friend and mentor Raychandbhai, outlining his confusions and chaos in his thoughts. He posed more than two dozen questions, asking among other things, about the functions of the soul, the existence of God, the antiquity of the Vedas, the divinity of Christ and the treatment of animals.<sup>79</sup> A question asked emanating from his experiences in Natal was: ‘Will there ever develop an equitable order out of inequities of today?’ The Jain teacher’s answer upheld a reformist anti – utopianism. He responded that it was ‘most desirable that we should try to adopt equity and give up immoral and unjust ways of life’, at the same time, Raychandbhai stressed, it was inconceivable that all living beings will give up their inequities one day and equity will prevail everywhere’.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Gandhi’s theological experiments continued and so does Raychandbhai’s rational guidance in its course.

In May 1901 the moral guide of Gandhi, Raychand bhai passed away at the age of thirty one. Raychandbhai, as Gandhi defined, followed no narrow creed and was a ‘universalist’. Dharma, said the seer, did not ‘mean reading or learning by rote books known as shastras or even believing all that they say’. It was a combination of

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<sup>78</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Raychandbhai. *Shrimad Rajchandra’s Reply to Gandhiji’s Question*, Shrimad Rajchandra Ashram, Anand, Gujarat, 1999, pp.1-32.

<sup>80</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 86 -87

theoretical and practical knowledge. After a certain level of religious instruction, the scriptures could help no further; but one's own experience certainly do.<sup>81</sup>

Gandhi applied the teachings of Raychandbhai while comprehending the religious texts and traditions. The personal experiences or precisely 'experiments' in Gandhian terminology helped Gandhi come out of a conformist phase. Caste institutions, with their abhorring phenomenon, were deeply attached with shastras, myths, vedas and religion. It was because of the preceptor's views that Gandhi challenged the orthodox elements that prevailed in the praxis of orthodox Hinduism. For an equitable order of society it was necessary for Gandhi to understand the dynamics of Hinduism and conservativeness attached to it. Gandhi with the help of Raychandbhai not only rose above the caste and religious boundaries but also duly tested the long standing traditions through his own experiments. Thus, the mentor played a huge role in moulding the thought processes in Gandhi.

In spite of the high regards he had for Raychandbhai, Gandhi wrote in his autobiography, 'I could not enthrone him in my heart as my *Guru*'.<sup>82</sup> Gandhi was in search for perfect *gnani* (a wise one, a seer).<sup>83</sup> For Gandhi discipleship was second birth. It was a voluntary surrender.<sup>84</sup> In due course of his life, Mohandas surrendered himself and became the disciple of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who became his political mentor and Rajguru.

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<sup>81</sup> Raychdbhai. *Shrimad Rajchandra's Reply to Gandhiji's Question*, Shrimad Rajchandra Ashram, Anand, Gujarat, 1999, pp.14 -15.

<sup>82</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 83.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Young India, 2- 07- 1931, Volume 23 , Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

An ardent follower of Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866 – 1915) was an educationalist, a socio – political reformer, economist and a moderate leader of the Indian National Congress. It was in 1896 that, Gandhi was in India and met Gokhale for the first time. After meeting an array of big leaders of that time in order to raise public opinion on South African issues, Gandhi met Gokhale and the first impression of him left an indelible mark on him. Although it took some time for Gandhi himself to realise that his search for Guru has ended with Gokhale. Gandhi penned down his experiences of the first meeting in following words:

...Next I met Gokhale. I found him on the Fergusson College grounds. He gave me an affectionate welcome, and his manner immediately won my heart. With him too this was my first meeting, and let it seemed as though we were renewing an old friendship. Sir Pherozeshah had seemed to me like the Himalaya, the Lokamanya like the ocean. But Gokhale was as the Ganges. One could have a refreshing bath in the holy river. The Himalaya was unscaleable, and one could not easily launch forth on the sea, but the Ganges invited one to its bosom. It was a joy to be on it with a boat and an oar. Gokhale closely examined me, as a schoolmaster would examine a candidate seeking admission to a school. He told me whom to approach and how to approach them. He asked to have a look at my speech. He showed me over the college, assured me that he was always at my disposal, asked me to let him know the result of the interview with Dr. Bhandarkar, and sent me away exultantly happy. In the sphere of politics the place that Gokhale occupied in my heart during his lifetime and occupies even now was and is absolutely unique.<sup>85</sup>

Gandhi, after a brief span of time, visited India again in 1902 and spent a month with Gokhale. It was during this time of the annual session of the Indian National Congress, in December 1902 (Calcutta) that - Gandhi fully became conscious of him having become Gokhale's disciple.<sup>86</sup> During the month's stay, Gandhi closely watched Gokhale working and allowed himself to become his disciple.

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<sup>85</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Gokhale: My Political Guru*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1955, p. 14. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale\\_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf).

<sup>86</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Gokhale: My Political Guru*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1955, p. 45. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale\\_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf).

Both Gokhale and Gandhi were impressed by each other's attributes. Gokhale's political career served him as an ideal.<sup>87</sup> One can see clear imprints of Gokhale in the political career of Gandhi. Writing about the legacy of Gokhale, Gandhi wrote:

It is true we cannot rise until our political condition is reformed. But it is not true that we shall be able to progress if our political condition undergoes a change by any means and in any manner. If the means employed is impure the change will not be in the direction of progress but very likely in the opposite direction. Only a change brought about in our political condition by pure means, which is by peaceful and legitimate means, can lead us to real progress. Gokhale not merely perceived this truth right from the beginning of his public life but also began practising it. He believed that political activities could lead to salvation and freedom only if they were based on religion or in other words spiritualized. So he placed this great ideal before his 'Servants of India Society' and before the whole nation. He firmly declared that unless our political movement was informed by the spirit of religion it would be barren.<sup>88</sup>

The concept of 'means and end' intertwined with spiritualism and morality also became the core of Gandhian philosophy of Swaraj. Gandhi penned these views in his classical text, *Hind Swaraj*. Gokhale's views on religious issues, caste and untouchability, political movements' et al., inspired the Gandhian discourse. But it was not only Gandhi who was inspired by his Guru, but also Gokhale was quick to acknowledge the credentials of a leader in his disciple. Gokhale not only fought for the indentured labour system, but also paid a due visit to South Africa in 1912. He not only became a part of the struggle, but also, in his capacity tried his best to reconcile the issues with English masters. Gandhi's distinct combination of saintliness, perseverance and meliorism impressed Gokhale. In South Africa, Gandhi has successfully reached out to compatriots of other religions and linguistic communities,

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<sup>87</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Gokhale: My Political Guru*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1955, p. 37. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale\\_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Gokhale: My Political Guru*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1955, p. 45. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale\\_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gokhale_MyPoliticalGuru.pdf)

and to the disadvantaged sections of society as a whole.<sup>89</sup> All these attributes made Gokhale realise the importance of Gandhi as a mass leader and it was as a consequence that he told Gandhi: ‘You must return to India in a year’.<sup>90</sup> Gokhale after a short visit left South Africa in November 1912. Gandhi and his friend Kallenbach accompanied him in a steamer till Zanzibar. They had several conversations on issues confined to India. Through his talk and information Gokhale trained his disciple. According to Gandhi:

On the steamer we had ample time to talk to our hearts’ content. In these conversations, Gokhale prepared me for India. He analysed for me the characters of all leaders in India and his analyses was so accurate, that I have hardly perceived any difference between Gokhale’s estimate and my own personal experience for them.<sup>91</sup>

It was the legacy of Gokhale in Indian politics that made Gandhi realise the integral nature of politics, religion and the cause for reforms in India. Historian Mukul Kesvan writes:

Gokhale was politically the most important figure in Indian nationalism till 1915. If there is something called pluralist nationalism in India and I think there is, then it’s because of the likes of Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji.<sup>92</sup>

Gandhi, thus, became the heir to that particular tradition, what Kesavan has written about Gokhale. Education should channelize itself towards emancipation of millions uneducated and Gokhale saw that in educated barrister. He was made up of his education and experiments. While talking about the educated minds attitudes

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<sup>89</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 534.

<sup>90</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2015, p. 247.

<sup>91</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Satyagraha in South Africa*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2015, p. 248.

<sup>92</sup> Venkatesh, H.R.. “On His Birth Anniversary, Here’s Why We Still Need Gokhale”, *The Quint*, 90-05-2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/on-his-150th-birthday-we-need-gokhale-more-than-ever-before>

towards the institution of caste at Dharwar or Dharwad Social Conference held in April 1903; Gokhale opined:

The condition of low castes – it is painful to call them low castes – is not only unsatisfactory as the resolution says – it is so deeply deplorable that it constitutes a grave blot on our social arrangements; and, further, the attitude of our educated men towards this class is profoundly painful and humiliating.<sup>93</sup>

Gokhale's *Servants of India's Society*, apart from its active political participation represented the particular vision of socio- economic reforms. Members of the society were required to work for the advancement of all (Indians), regardless of caste and creed.<sup>94</sup> The major objectives of society were: Selfless service and sacrifice towards the motherland, communal harmony, advancement of women folk, eradication of caste inequalities through elevation of the depressed class and educational movements.

When Gandhi returned to India, Gokhale advised him to know India first - its society and people. Gandhi then travelled across the whole subcontinent for a year after his arrival and then entered into Indian political arena. The mentor and guru showed the path to Gandhi because he knew Gandhi's strength and limitations. And India was a different land from South Africa. Gandhi had written the text of the *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, in 1909, after years of his experiments in Africa and it remains the store house of his intellect and how he saw Indian politics and its discourses to be. It was in this text that Gandhi debated and pointed out his views on several topics, from *Satyagraha* to *Swaraj*. Some of the core aspects of the text were at variance with Gokhale's approach. And Gokhale had read through the text and

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<sup>93</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Makers of Modern India*. Belk nap Press, New Delhi, 2011, p.148.

<sup>94</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 385



analysed Gandhi's views, but very passionately made a remark that, 'after you have stayed a year in India, your views will correct themselves'.<sup>95</sup>

After the demise of Gokhale, the teachings of his guru always stayed with him. Gokhale was a 'reflexive nationalist' and wanted Gandhi to become one. He died at the age of forty eight and was just three years older to Gandhi at the time of his death. But as a political mentor he gave Gandhi lessons for the lifetime to come. It will be appropriate here to stress that the pillars to Gandhian swaraj carried the imprints of Gokhale's understanding of socio- political dynamics of India.

## **Section 2.2**

### **Gandhi and Western Thinkers: Leo Tolstoy and John Ruskin**

Gandhi, through his own writings, enlightens us that three modern thinkers have had deep impression on his life and captivated him. They were: Raychandbhai by his living contact; Leo Tolstoy with his book, '*The kingdom of God is within You*' (1893); and John Ruskin, with his work '*Unto the Last*' (1862).<sup>96</sup> Gandhi's encounter with western philosophy and its subjective reflection in his thoughts and workings started when he first came across in London, Henry Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism*. He read little and what was practically relevant, but when a book gripped his imagination, he mediated on it, brooded over its message, put its central ideas into action, and grew from (what he considered) 'truth to truth'.<sup>97</sup> He was mainly inspired by the three

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<sup>95</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 352.

<sup>96</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*., Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 83.

<sup>97</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, pp.6-7.

books during his stay in South Africa and channelized their thoughts into action. These were: Henry Thoreau's *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1847), Leo Tolstoy's and John Ruskin's works mentioned above. The thoughts of Thoreau were incorporated in his political expositions and works. But the works of Tolstoy and Ruskin inspired his thoughts as a socio - economic reformer and in the making of the praxis attached to it. These thoughts then moulded the thoughts of the leader in making. Gandhi applied these thoughts in his experiments and also succeeded in it. Love, Non- violence, equality, service and humility were the ideas that left an indelible impact on the young Gandhi's thought process and especially on his sense of the Idea of Justice. Gandhi's rationality allowed him to experiment and syncretised the ideas which suited his time, space and community. It was the uniqueness of Gandhi's genius that the western heritage impacted upon him in such a manner that, it did not come into conflict with what he had inherited from the traditions of the east.<sup>98</sup>

Apart from the racial injustices and inequalities, Gandhi also came across orthodox Christianity in that light. The phase of religious fermentation too continued on African soil. Prospects of conversion into Christianity stared at Gandhi and it came from his friends who came from what was considered then from the superior races. These came from not just his Christian friends but from those who were Muslims too. Gandhi points out the behaviour of Abdullah Seth in this context.<sup>99</sup> The rationality in Gandhi and inputs from Raychandbhai saved him from indulging to these discourses of orthodoxy, without having any counter reflection to Hinduism. He writes:

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<sup>98</sup> Ramna Murthi, V.V.. "Influence of Western Traditions on Gandhian Thoughts", *Philosophy of East and West*, Vol.18, University of Hawai'i Press, 1968, p.65.

<sup>99</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 127.

Thus if I could not accept Christianity either as perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could but a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'être* of multitude of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying that Vedas were the inspired Word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?<sup>100</sup>

It is interesting to note here that, Gandhi did experiments with the ideals of his own religion. He also became critical towards Hinduism and its evils. In South African Gandhi, one can see a progress from the previous Gandhi - who although reasoned but remained conformist towards orthodoxy.

Gandhi came across the orthodox elements of Christianity in Africa, but the heterodox elements of same faith created a deep impact on him. Gandhi for his enquiries communicated with Christian friends in England. One of them introduced him to Edward Maitland, with whom he opened correspondence. *The Perfect Way* by Maitland and Anna Kingsford and *The New Interpretation of Bible* was initially sent by Maitland to Gandhi, which he defines was repudiation of current Christian belief.<sup>101</sup> But the book which overwhelmed Gandhi and left deep impression was Tolstoy's book *Kingdom of God Is Within You*. Independent Thinking, profound morality and truthfulness of the book stuck into the chords in Gandhi's conscience. Gandhi found similitude between Tolstoy's works and with Hinduism. The central theme of the book was that a good Christian follows his conscience rather than the laws imposed by the Tsars, the Bishops and the Generals. The value given to one's conscience was directly related to Gandhi's own emerging concepts of self and soul.

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<sup>100</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 127.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.127.

Tolstoy was both a novelist and moralist. Gandhi was attracted towards the latter aspect.<sup>102</sup> Tolstoy's teaching contrasted with not only with the practises of the established Church, but also defined that it was against the principles of Christ himself. The political philosophy that inspired Gandhi, particularly in all the movements he led, can be traced to the view of society and state that he upheld as a devout follower of Tolstoy.<sup>103</sup> Reading Tolstoy remained an educating and epiphanic experience for Gandhi. Gandhi had come to see his legal practise more as a moral duty than as career. He would attend to the cases of discrimination, but his heart lay (as did Tolstoy's) in the personal improvement of human beings life and social reform.<sup>104</sup> Tolstoy's approaches that 'hate the sin not the sinner' became the core to Gandhian philosophy of self – purification. This particular idea of self – purification was used by Gandhi time and again in his socio – political discourse and became core to his meliorism.

After ten years of Tolstoy's work Gandhi came across the work of John Ruskin's *Unto the last*. It was after reading Ruskin's work Gandhi realised that the basis to human society is not wealth but love, morality and human relationship. It was through his friend, Henry Polak that Gandhi came across the work of Ruskin. If the Tolstoy's impact on Gandhi was religious and political; Ruskin moulded Gandhi socio- economic principles. Ruskin views fell on the soil that had been earlier

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<sup>102</sup> Kumar, Biplove. *The Evolution of Gandhi's Approach to Caste and Untouchability*. Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Sikkim University, 2016, p. 31.

<sup>103</sup> Ramna Murthi, V.V.. "Influence of Western Traditions on Gandhian Thoughts, Philosophy of East and West", Vol.18, *University of Hawai'i Press*, 1968, p.65.

<sup>104</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi Before India*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2014, p. 287

fertilised by reading and internalisation of Tolstoy.<sup>105</sup> After reading the whole book Gandhi wrote in his autobiography:

I could not get sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.<sup>106</sup>

Through Ruskin's work Gandhi discovered some of his deepest convictions.<sup>107</sup>

The book provided the future roadmap to Gandhi. He summarised the teachings into three aspects. They were:

- That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all
- The lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's in as much as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work.
- That a life of labour, i.e., the life of tiller of the soil and handicraftsman, is the life of worth living.<sup>108</sup>

It was in the Phoenix and Tolstoy farms, which Gandhi established as community villages in South Africa, which he experimented with the teachings of Ruskin and was successful. There remained no social, religious or economic barriers or distinctions in Gandhi's farm or ashram. He founded four ashrams in his life time and opined that, 'the Ashram is the measuring rod by which people can judge me'.<sup>109</sup> Ideas of Ruskin helped Gandhi to come out of the conservative outlook as to what divided humans economically and socially. Equality and justice was not dependent

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<sup>105</sup> M.duToit, Brian. "The Mahatma Gandhi and South Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1996, p. 647.

<sup>106</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 274.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.275.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p.275.

<sup>109</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. 13 -02- 1933, Volume 59 , pp. 255 - 256. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

upon any constitution or state in these farms; it emanated from the spiritual and moral understanding of oneness. It was through Ruskin that Gandhi eroded every distinction that became a stumbling block towards universal progress of human soul.

## Section 2.3

### Provenience of a Social Reformer:

Gandhi's experiences in South Africa changed his life and thought processes. These changes occurred both in his public and personal life. He became both the subject and object of his own experiments. These experiments also helped him to break the dichotomy of the inner and outer spaces. A stark contrast can be seen in his views and approaches before and after his life in South Africa. Before leaving the African shores he attended a reception hosted by Dheds (untouchables by Caste) and said:

To regard them (Dheds) with the slightest disrespect not only argues our own unworthiness but morally wrong, for it is contrary wrong to the teaching of Bhagvat Gita.<sup>110</sup>

Even while in South Africa, Gandhi's approach to freedom, presented with clarity in the *Hind Swaraj* was unambiguous that swaraj was not merely a political concept and that it included social equality. As Gandhi's experiments took shape of mass movements and were becoming successful; Gandhi penned down his concepts in his classical work *Hind Swaraj* (1908-09). Gandhi defined Swaraj as 'self-realization'. The document also formulated his philosophical expositions on ideal society, ideal governance, and human nature and so on. These views to him remained final and to which he remained committed to his life.<sup>111</sup> The whole idea of morality and self-realization (as to what remains wrong and unjust) became the founding stone

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<sup>110</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Volume 12 , p 454. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>111</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.63.

for his ideology self – purification. Gandhi was quick to realise the horrendous inequalities and injustices based upon caste and untouchability, was no less than any other evils of division and hatred. He targeted the Savarnas and urged to purify their conscience. Through Hind Swaraj, Gandhi gives a message that gaining ‘political swaraj’ is no swaraj at all. Gandhi was quick to realise that, until and unless all divisions are purged out; real swaraj remains a distant dream. Gandhi came to the conclusion that political swaraj sans socio- economic one is bound to fail.

The heterodox society of Gandhi’s South Africa, was a melting pot of cultures and civilization. Gandhi made this alien land as his laboratory. He was succeeded in uniting people of different religion, caste, creed, races, and culture et al.; for his different political movements against injustice and inequalities. For some his method or progress took time and was slow. But for Gandhi once the progress is underway - he never remained static and predictable. He was self-reflexive political leader, a trait which he shared with his political guru Gokhale and never saw human freedom and development through one dimension. His politics was not separated from the socio-economic dimension. It became means for all round development of human beings. It was this attribute of Gandhi that led him, when he joined Indian politics, to attach social reform to the idea of freedom and he never let that be separated from the struggle. Right from the establishment of his first Ashram (Kochrab) on Indian soil to making untouchability a national concern, Gandhi started a crusade against caste institutions. But the divisions in India were more rigid and complex. Gandhi tried to comprehend it through his own lenses. The whole discourse of his crusade against caste and untouchability, witnessed both negative and positive progress. But on whole the progress continued for equality and justice till his last breath.

### Section 3

#### Revitalization of Indian Politics: Gandhi and Swaraj

As mentioned above, Gandhi first spoke of ‘Swaraj’ in his text *Hind Swaraj*, translated as Indian Home Rule in English. It was from this text that the philosophical expositions of Gandhi emanated and despite the discontinuities that marked his political travails, the issues he raised in the *Hind Swaraj* remained central to his concerns. Gandhi’s political Guru Gopal Krishna Gokhale and his political heir Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru both shared sceptical reviews on *Hind Swaraj*. On the question and importance of villages (which included masses) to which Gandhi intertwined his question of Swaraj; Jawaharlal his political heir viewed it as unreal. Both when he read it for the first time and again through his correspondence with Babu (Gandhi) in the year 1945.<sup>112</sup> Sharma and Suhrud conclude that: ‘Nehru viewed Gandhi’s ideas as romantic mythology of backwardness’.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps, an instance of this inspection was witnessed during the Congress Session in Madras (1927), when Nehru sought to persuade Gandhi that the word ‘swaraj’ in Congress creed should be replaced with the expression ‘complete Independence’, because the ‘world’ could make no sense of it. Gandhi clarified that he was for ‘complete independence’, but as a ‘means’ to “swaraj for all”.<sup>114</sup> This includes, Gandhi stressed, the ‘dumb millions’. It is in this particular context, of making political struggle and independence as a means toward Swaraj (socio – economic independence), that Gandhi initiated his journey on Indian soil.

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<sup>112</sup> Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru’s letter to Mahatma Gandhi, 4<sup>TH</sup> October 1945; *Selected Works Of Jawaharlal Nehru* Volume 14, p. 554 -557. Retrieved From: <http://nehruportal.nic.in/writings>

<sup>113</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K. Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip (ed). Orient BlackSwan, Noida, 2010, p.XVIII

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.XVI.



Swaraj comes from the two words, 'swa' referring to the self as an individual as much as a collective and 'raj' meaning to rule or control.<sup>115</sup> Gandhi defined the sole trajectory towards it shall be soul force or love- force.<sup>116</sup> The force through which self- realization of just and unjust duties as humans will lead to all round development of human beings. Gandhi also realized, through his own experiments in Africa and during the yearlong travel he did across India, as to what divided and united the Indian masses. Apart from his South African experiences, his arduous journey of Indian subcontinent to know its people - added a deep texture to these thoughts. This was the basis on which Gandhi contemplated his four pillars towards swaraj. A firm believe that freedom remains the agency of individual and collective as nation, Gandhi talked about mass movements; so that the knowledge of agency should reach to everyone. For Gandhian Swaraj 'mass' which constitute the nation needs to wake up from a deep slumber and that 'mass' also included the leaders of his time.

One of Gandhi's first public appearances after coming to India was at the opening ceremony of Benares Hindu University (1916). Those attending the ceremony were, invariably the elite among the Indian people. From the Raja of Dharbhanga (*Tirhut*) to Lord Hardinge and then the elite leadership of the Indian National Congress and other parties of the time; all were attending the ceremony. It was here that Gandhi laid down his roadmap of Swaraj and how the attitude of Indian political framework needs a transcendental change. It was an audacious speech. He challenged the empire in front of their mandarins and also criticised the people who only vouched for India's political future. Gandhi spoke:

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<sup>115</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K. Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. Sharma,Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip (ed). Orient BlackSwan, Noida, 2010, p.XXIV.

<sup>116</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K. Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*. Sharma,Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip (ed). Orient BlackSwan, Noida, 2010, p.98

The congress has passed a resolution about Self Government and I have no doubt that the all India Congress Committee and Muslim League will do their duty and come forward with tangible suggestions. But I, for one must frankly confess that I am not so much interested in what they will able to produce as I am interested in anything that student world is going to produce or masses are going to produce. No paper contribution will ever give us Self Government. No amount of speeches will ever make us fit for Swaraj....if we are to receive self-government; we shall have to take it. We shall never be granted self-government.<sup>117</sup>

Gandhi's whole discourse of political struggle as a leader can be defined from various aspects - such as his fight for Hindu – Muslim unity, his mass movements, promotion of self-sustained industries, Non – Violence, peaceful protest et al.. The central line of for his social reform movements can be understood through his struggles against untouchability and caste. Among Gandhi's four pillars to Swaraj, Eradication of Untouchability was one of them and till his tragic assassination on 30th January, 1948 he fought for that cause. '*Sarvodaya through Antodaya*'<sup>118</sup> remained the core principle to his Swaraj and he never imagined it without Panchama or one seventh of India's population. Their remains both conservative and rational stand of Gandhi in the context of caste and untouchability; but he rationally accepted his mistakes and came out of conservatism. He refused to imagine that justice, equality and fraternity would survive until the discriminative caste order prevailed. The central line of enquiry of this thesis remains the social democracy and caste and it is in this context, Gandhi's political journey, which remains a multi-layered one, will be mapped out.

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<sup>117</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Gandhi's first public speech at Benares Hindu University; Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Volume 15 , 06-02-1916 p 151.

<sup>118</sup>*Antyodaya*, means uplifting of the weakest section of the society and *Sarvodaya*, is a broader term, which means development of all.

## Section 3.1

### **Gandhi's Crusade against Untouchability: Continuum of South African Legacy on Indian Soil (1915 – 1932):**

Theory and the praxis of Gandhi, in relation to the practise of untouchability remained unequivocal, even after his return to India. Gandhi's intervention in the discourse of caste and untouchability, (a discourse that was already prevalent even before his arrival in India) was his integration of the social agenda into that of the struggle for independence. He placed this on record in so many words and through various activities. In an article he wrote in *Young India* as early as on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1921, he without mincing words wrote:

I have put the removal of Untouchability as an indispensable condition for the attainment of Swaraj.<sup>119</sup>

Whether it was the ethos of the new Ashram, which he opened on Indian soil in 1915 at Kochrab (Ahmedabad, Gujarat), or his first Satyagraha campaign at Champaran<sup>120</sup>; Gandhi gave no room to untouchability. As early as in September 1915, Gandhi admitted an untouchable family (Dudabhai Malji Dafda, his wife Danibehn and their daughter Lakshmi) into the Ashram at Kochrab. The Ashram's inmates were basically the members of Gandhi's Phoenix Farm back in South Africa,

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<sup>119</sup> Mharana, Tapan (ed). *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1964, p.18. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>. 04/09/2017.

<sup>120</sup> In the Champaran district of Bihar, the Britishers had imposed a system called tinkathia. Under this system, the tenant farmers were forced to grow indigo (a blue dye) in three kathas of every bigha (three out of twenty parts of their land). Gandhi not only led his first Satyagraha movement on Indian soil at Champaran but also established an ashram in Champaran. Ashram remained for a less span of time but still he made tried to infuse his idea of eradication of untouchability among the masses.

who had worked, eaten and lived together with untouchables in South Africa.<sup>121</sup> But conservatism prevailed more strongly in their homeland and they succumbed under societal pressure. Scarcely four months after starting the Ashram, Gandhi had to face a virtual walkout by his disciples over the presence of so called untouchable family of Dafda in Ashram<sup>122</sup> The crisis became acute when monetary support to the ashram began to stop and there was the threat of a societal boycott of the Ashram. Gandhi recalled this in his autobiography and in his own words:

With the stopping of monetary help came the proposed rumours of social boycott. We were prepared for all this. I had told my companions that, if we were boycotted and denied the usual facilities, we would not leave Ahmedabad. We would rather go and stay in the untouchable's quarter and live on whatever we could get by manual labour.<sup>123</sup>

The tide of hatred and exclusion was beginning to be directed against those in the Ashram and even while Gandhi was thinking to move out to the Untouchables' settlement himself, industrialist Ambalal Sarabhai, quietly drove up, handed monetary help to Gandhi, and left.<sup>124</sup>

With legacy of Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad movements by 1919, Gandhi became a strong and a popular name in Indian politics. In December 1919, at Amritsar Congress Session, he was appointed a member along with two other leaders of subcommittee formed by Congress to rewrite the party's entire Constitution.<sup>125</sup> Gandhi not only changed the 'old elite' constitution of Congress, but also through

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<sup>121</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 106

<sup>122</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 150

<sup>123</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 365

<sup>124</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 104

<sup>125</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 109

reducing its membership fees and opening up its various regional centres - he changed the organizational structure of congress from elite institution to the institution of masses. And by 1920 he became the unquestioned leader and rested his power and popularity in and from the masses. As colonial India embraced itself for its first mass movement, Gandhi tried to imbibe the idea of Swaraj in the masses and eradication of untouchability became one of the programmes of Non- Cooperation movement. At one level, the movement remained 'non - cooperation' against the Britishers, but at another, it remained a cooperation movement among Indians. Gandhi at the helm of the affairs seized the opportunity to transform his ideas into reality. In the context of Untouchability, he wrote in *Young India*, on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1920 that:

Non - cooperation against the government means co - operation among the governed, and if Hindus do not remove the sin of untouchability there will be no swaraj whether in one year or in one hundred years. If I invite the depressed classes to join the movement of Non-Cooperation, I do so because I want them to realise strength. Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu- Muslim unity.<sup>126</sup>

Although Gandhi called off the movement, because of an unwanted incident at *Chauri Chura*, that totally went against his principles. But by this time he has not only transformed the structure of congress, but, also gave a clarion call, that swaraj is not just a political entity but a social and economic one too. The disciple of Gopal Krishna Gokhale reinvented the dynamics of Indian politics. The social reformation was completely negated and undermined by the radical and elite Congressmen. The best example to support this argument remains the mockery and closure of 'The

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<sup>126</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. 29-12- 1920, Volume 15, p 149. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

Indian National Social Conference Party<sup>127</sup>; which came along with Indian National Congress; but completely lost its ground under fierce criticisms.<sup>128</sup>

The Gandhian discourse against untouchability which represents continuity can be seen as working simultaneously on two fronts and both the fronts treated with equal importance. Gandhi intertwined the eradication with the crisis in Hinduism which challenged the inner or traditional domain of the masses as well as he connected the whole idea to Swaraj which challenged the outer domain. In 1920, he lamented:

We may not cling to the putrid customs and claim the pure boon of Swaraj. Untouchability, I hold, is a custom, not an integral part of Hinduism. The world has advanced in though it is still barbarous in action. And no religion can stand that which is not based on fundamental truths. Any glorification of error will destroy a religion as surely as disregard of a disease is bound to destroy a body.<sup>129</sup>

Barren Ray, whose focus on Gandhi's approach to eradication of untouchability is substantive among scholars, writes:

At one level, the emphasis was led on the change of heart of caste Hindus, calling them to become sensitive to the most extreme wretchedness of the victims of untouchability, to atone for the centuries – long misery that Hindu custom have imposed and heaped upon a great part

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<sup>127</sup> The Indian National Social Conference was founded by Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842 – 1901) in 1887, two years after the founding of Indian National Congress. It was meant to serve as the social arm of the congress, and it focussed mainly on Caste and women's question. Conservative leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak were staunchly opposed to its concept. And even the mild reforms suggested by the votaries of the social conference were negated in the light of Political movement. Finally, Social Conference was diluted in midst of tensions between the Moderates and Extremists leaders of Colonial India.

<sup>128</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Navayana Publishing House, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 210- 221

<sup>129</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG). 24-11- 1920, Volume 22 , pp. 6- 7. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

of its adherents. At another level and concurrently, he knew that the question of untouchability is related to religion and had sanctions from the law keeps of the society. In this front, he categorically denied that untouchability was ever sanctified by original Hinduism.<sup>130</sup>

The meliorism and saintliness of Gandhi had long back attracted Gokhale in Africa and the same was shown by Gandhi in India. Gandhi left no stone unturned to propagate his ideas among the masses. The year of 1926 marks the year of political silence in Gandhi's life. But again from 1927, Gandhi started an extensive tour to spread his message about the four pillars of his swaraj and what India actually needed. The two great movements in the 1920s -- Mahad Satyagraha and Vaikom Satyagraha (1924 -25) -- marks a watershed moment in Indian history. These two movements, indeed, had the stamp of Gandhi and were duly inspired by his ideas. This clearly informs us that, his modus operandi was reaching to the masses. The political discourse, by this time, also saw him moving more aggressively towards conveying his messages to the masses. At the time of the Simon Commission's visit, as discussed in previous chapter, more than eighteen organisations of the untouchables came up and asked for separate electorates.<sup>131</sup> Gandhi in this context, as one of the most critical audiences of colonial theatrical politics of *divide et imperia*; came up more strongly with his messages. He now emphasised on schools, offices, public places of use and temples to be opened for untouchables. He moved out of the political circles and from 1927 – 1929 started constructive programmes and urged everyone to do the same. Message against untouchability never eclipsed from his thoughts and workings even he was engrossed in other political issues. Gandhi

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<sup>130</sup> Ray, Barren. *Gandhi's Campaign against Untouchability: 1933- 1934*. Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p.24.

<sup>131</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 109.

ensured that the message against untouchability was made explicit even while he marched to Dandi, in 1930, to break the salt law. Jad Adams later wrote:

Gandhi made the march the occasion for promoting the messages in favour of spinning and against untouchability. At Village of Dabhan he walked past the temple to untouchable's quarter, where he drew water from untouchables and bathed. He then persuaded the high caste Hindus of welcoming committee to allow untouchables to join the gathering.<sup>132</sup>

The point, however, is that, 'his colleagues in the national movement either did not understand his concerns with untouchability or even actively deplored it'.<sup>133</sup> The orthodox elements on the other hand (both inside the party and outside) thought Gandhi was moving very fast and in the wrong direction. At the forty first session of Congress, in 1926 at Guwahati, its President Mr S. Srinivas Aiyengar, even while paying rich tributes to Gandhi, criticised his attempt to establish the nexus between abolition of untouchability and Swaraj.<sup>134</sup> Orthodox elements accosted Gandhi for being a champion of western values and Christianity and held his views influenced by the western theological understanding. Gandhi, meanwhile, did not budge and held:

I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. The idea was not brought home to me by bitter experiences during South African struggle. It was not due to the fact that I was once an agnostic. It is equally wrong to think – as some people do – that I have taken my view from my study of Christian religious literature. These views date as far back as the time when I was neither enamoured of, nor was acquainted with, the Bible or followers of Bible.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Jad Adams, Gandhi, p. 190; Quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 136

<sup>133</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among The Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p. 93.

<sup>134</sup> Dalton, Dennis. *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi's Power*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.55.

<sup>135</sup> Mharana, Tapan (ed). *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1964, p.16. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>



Notwithstanding such a stance, Gandhi's agenda in the context of caste and untouchability had limited impact on the discourse. It had to do with Gandhi's celebration, at least in the early years, of the Varna system and his considered view that it has helped in ensuring stability in the society for long. This aspect became one of the greatest challenges to his political and personal life; as this audacious challenge came from Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. But even before that Gandhi's conservative outlook of ideal society based on Varna system, got challenged in the Vaikom Satyagraha. This was the first instance when the confusion and limitedness in Gandhi's thoughts got a huge set back. Vaikom represented a clash between thoughts and praxis. It remains an important part of Gandhian discourse on caste and untouchability. Gandhi remained very close to the movement since its inception and yet miles away from the movement.

## **Section 3.2**

### **Confused Soul of Mahatma and Vaikom Satyagraha:**

After the Non – cooperation movement, several socio – political movements for the rights of the untouchables were launched in Western and Southern India. Whether it was the temple entry programmes under G.A Gavai in Maharashtra or the Mahad Satyagraha by Ambedkar, there exists ample evidence of the rise in consciousness among the depressed classes. This, indeed, was inspired by the cult and politics of Gandhi. One can recall that a portrait of Gandhi was placed at the venue of the Mahad Satyagraha. But it was the Vaikom Satyagraha, which happened in the Travancore princely state, which tested and scrutinised the Mahatma.

Travancore state was under Varma dynastic rule (under British sovereignty) and with a fairly good record in literacy levels. Forty one per cent of the males were

literate as early as in 1931.<sup>136</sup> This education has helped majority among the lower caste Ezhavas, which constituted 16.5 percentage of population to get enlighten with rational ideas and opportunities. T. K Madhavan, the leader of Ezhavas community was highly inspired by Gandhi's Non – cooperation movement. He took blessings from Gandhi before starting the Vaikom movement and Mahatma through his writings supported it.

In many ways, Vaikom was a crusade against the hegemonic caste institutions dominated and regulated by the upper castes Namboodiri and Nair castes. Caste institution in the state has surpassed the horrendous practises of untouchability and along with that they practised – unapproachability and unseeability. From April 1924 to November 1925 Vaikom witnessed a non – violent campaign by untouchable communities against upper castes demanding the right to access the roads around the outer walls of the Shiva Temple in the town. Gandhi from a distance ran his campaign in support of the struggle in the pages of *Young India*, and had duly kept it under his thumb.<sup>137</sup>

The twenty months long Satyagraha saw all the attributes of Gandhian struggle: courting arrest, peaceful agitations met with a strong animosity from the orthodox and even violence against the agitators causing the death of two Satyagrahis. The outcome of Vaikom too had many shades of Gandhi's political strategy in it. The Satyagraha was brought to an end after a few concessions or a compromise agreement at a meeting between Gandhi, *the Maharani* (queen) of Travancore, the *Shastries* (priestly caste) and J.W.Pitt (the police commissioner of Travancore). To make a

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<sup>136</sup> Jeffery, Robin. "Temple Entry Movement in Travancore, 1860 – 1940". *Social Scientist. Volume No. 8*, 1976, p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 178.

utilitarian argument for the sake of evaluation, notwithstanding its unsteady course and relatively high human cost – at least two lives were lost – and the individual suffering underwent by Satyagrahis, the negotiated pact could be said to have accommodated both sides; face saving for the Namboodiri Brahmans and a shorter distance for those without caste had to traverse to enter the temple.<sup>138</sup> The proposed settlement provided an alternate road to the Avarnas whereas their demand was access to the temple as it was to the higher castes.

Gandhi faced a lot of criticism in the end. One of the important leaders of the Satyagraha and the one who led the march from its day one, E.V Ramasamy Naicker had even called Vaikom a betrayal.<sup>139</sup> Criticisms such as Gandhi made the movement a local and a Hindu affair, that he did not enlarge the movement on a national scale and thus lost an opportunity to lead a direct attack on the institution of caste, were raised then and continue to be raised. Notwithstanding these, the Vaikom Satyagraha represents a point in the evolution of the strategic discourse that had been essential to Gandhi in the past and also in the times after that.

In that sense, two propositions can be made out of this historical moment. One is of what Joseph Lelyveld writes in his work: ‘Gandhi represented himself as having come not as a crusader but as a mediator’.<sup>140</sup> The authority in Travancore, against whom the Satyagrahis were doing struggle, could not have been the same as was the colonial state in all other agitations, that Gandhi had led hitherto and hence

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<sup>138</sup> King, Mary Elizabeth. *Gandhi Non Violent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: the 1924-25 Vykam Satyagraha and Mechanisms of Change*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.228.

<sup>139</sup> King, Mary Elizabeth. *Gandhi Non Violent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: the 1924-25 Vykam Satyagraha and Mechanisms of Change*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.231.

<sup>140</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 189.

warranted a nuanced approach. In other words, the Princely State's rulers, even if they existed as agents of the colonial system could not have been seen as the 'other' in Vaikom. Gandhi could not afford to cause a schism in the Indian people on account of Vaikom and particularly so after the non-cooperation movement was withdrawn and the vacuum that had set in the political arena then. The compromise that ended the twenty months deadlock, which certainly was an effect of Gandhi's intervention, can be seen as an expression of this limitation or the context.

Gandhi's limitation as mediator was deeply reflected. He along with Commissioner J.W Pitt was just the third and fourth party. Going through Gandhi's own account a decade later, it reflects that the sole authority in princely state rested upon the ruling dynasty. He wrote in Harijan on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1937 that:

As I was negotiating through the then commissioner of Police and with the senior Maharani, I just asked the question, supposing as a result of the negotiations the Maharani issued orders to open the roads to Avarnas Hindus, what would be their attitude to them? Then without the slightest hesitation they said: 'oh! That is a different thing altogether; a Hindu Prince or Princess has every right to issue an order which has the authority of Simirti'. They said that was implied in Hinduism a Hindu Kings are repositories of Hindu faith and they have every right to issue orders which are inconsistent to simirtis. I asked them whether the same thing applied to the opening of the temples. They said, 'most decidedly.' Let me tell you that these Shastries were not the only Shastries that gave this reply. I put the same question to Shastries in Cochin and Tamilnadu and they gave the same answer.<sup>141</sup>

The Second proposition, remains beyond the purview of strategy and evolutionary personification of Gandhi's struggle. It represents an ideological failure of Gandhi to understand the institution of caste as a whole. Gandhi's benevolent view and firm belief in institution of caste or Varna (as he often used them interchangeably

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<sup>141</sup>Mharana, Tapan (ed). *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1964, p.38. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>

during this time) turned his whole approach as ‘casteist’ and when viewed from contemporary phraseology. His whole approach looked utterly confused and his ambivalent attitudes towards untouchability and caste made his engagement a chaotic and conservative one.

The factual representation of this can be seen during his dialogue with Indanturuttill Namboodiri, in the midst of the struggle. He remained entangled with his own views. The contradictions between his own positions came out clear in this dialogue, as he spoke: ‘Untouchables are what they are because of misdeeds in previous lives, still, high and low must be considered equal.’<sup>142</sup> The whole idea that emanated from Gandhi’s own words represented his firm believe in the philosophy of *Karmasidhanta*, which becomes the core to priestly class’ epistemological understanding and legitimisation of caste. N.N Pillai and K.P Kesava Menon placed the whole in perspective that: ‘Vaikom was where the theory and practise of Satyagraha (philosophical engagement) received its experimental early refinement and development.’<sup>143</sup>

Historically, there happened to be a substantial difference between the Gandhi between 1916 and 1934, particularly with regard to his approach to caste as an institution. Gandhi’s next visit to Travancore in 1934 represents a much more progressive Gandhi. But the phase from 1915 – 32 represents both a rational and a conservative Gandhi. The transition in Gandhi’s expositions, indeed, can be located in the event of his debate with B.R.Ambedkar over the McDonalds Award and the

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<sup>142</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 189.

<sup>143</sup> King, Mary Elizabeth. *Gandhi Non Violent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: the 1924-25 Vykom Satyagraha and Mechanisms of Change*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.233.

Poona Pact. But before analysing this interaction and the transition, it makes sense to discuss the conservative Gandhi and his views on caste and Varna here.

### **Section 3.3**

#### **Caste and Varna Hierarchy: A ‘Conservative’ Gandhi (1915 – 32)**

Notwithstanding the fact that, Gandhi remains the first among the leaders who articulated the need to eradicate untouchability as integral to the nationalist project, it is as much a fact that there was a phase during his emergence as the leader of the national movement wherein his conservatism led to his support to an idea of preserving the institution of caste. Gandhi refrained from any direct criticism of caste after he started his journey on Indian soil; or it will be appropriate to state that he went on to openly speak for its preservation and even celebrated its role in preserving the stability of the society. There were times between the mid – 1920s and mid 1930s, when Gandhi professed to see virtue in an ideal caste system.<sup>144</sup> . And to this date, this particular phase of his historical journey remains the crux of matter for his opponents, while evaluating his discourse against caste and untouchability. It must be noted that this phase, indeed, was in opposition to his attitude to caste while in South Africa. And this would shift only after 1936, when he returned to his stance on the issue in the Indian context.

It would have been a strategy, as Rajmohan Gandhi writes: ‘he seems to have done this to retain caste Hindu backing, which he needed for Swaraj’<sup>145</sup> or as Kolge puts it, as part of a long term strategy.<sup>146</sup> The point, however, is that Gandhi

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<sup>144</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 105

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>146</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017.

intensified his struggle against caste post the Poona Pact. Gandhi's anti – untouchable tour remains an outstanding testimony as to how Gandhi progressed with his views and went against the caste Hindus directly; who also then for the first time, tried to assassinate him.

The larger question remains how to comprehend this particular phase of Gandhi? The quest for an answer to this should begin with an attempt to underscore the point that he was stuck in an 'ideological wrong'; in his assessment of making caste or Varna institution as an ideal form of benevolent society that he imagined. Epistemologically, he failed to understand the underpinnings of the Varna hierarchy for example the '*infection of imitation*'<sup>147</sup>; which Ambedkar clearly understood and it still remains the core to Sanskritization. A rational reading of *Hind Swaraj* leads to conclude that Gandhi was in search for a suitable system that can lead to a peaceful human progress and co – existence. The text also brings out Gandhi's trenchant critique of modern civilization and society and how it is based on a self-destructive premise. It is in this context one can see a break in Gandhi's idea from his own South African discourse, in 1909 he publicly decried the caste system and opined that:

Hypocritical distinctions of high low and caste tyranny which had made India turn her back on truth and embrace falsehood.<sup>148</sup>

However, it was his search for an alternative that seem to have led Gandhi to relook into Indian traditions, which then in turn 'traditionalised' him in a wrong way. And he tried to simplify the horrendous caste system through an ideal Varna system. This phase of conservatism in the evolution of Gandhi's ideas on caste and

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<sup>147</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Castes In India*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2016, p.60.

<sup>148</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume 9 , pp. 180 -89 . Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

untouchability can be divided into two: In the first phase (1916 – 1926), Gandhi dilutes the distinction between caste and Varna, claims himself as ‘*Sanatani Hindu*’, vouches for hereditary calling and caste rules on inter – dining and marriage. It is in the second phase (1927 – 32), that we see Gandhi drawing a clear distinction between caste and Varnas and here he begins to refrain using the term *Sanatani Hindu* for himself and moves towards *Advaita philosophy*; it is important to add here that he remains steadfastly holding on to his views on the Varna. His dilemma, so to say, is evident when he writes (a stark contrast from his 1909 views) in support of the orthodoxy in 1920:

I am inclined to think that law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead us, as it has before led, to utter confusion.<sup>149</sup>

Gandhi clearly supports the hereditary calling and iterates that ‘one acquires one’s caste by birth’.<sup>150</sup> Caste prohibition that regulates inter – dining and marriages, acquires the mode of self – control and restraint in Gandhi’s writings. Gandhi regarded caste and inheritance of caste by birth in itself as a system beneficial to the society and a natural institution.<sup>151</sup> Gandhi’s claim to represent himself as *Sanatani Hindu* seems to have channelized his thought process completely. One cannot negate the fact that his crusade against untouchability is being termed as pro-western or Christian, which might have allowed him to claim as such. But in totality it remains an orthodox subjective reflection and against his own phase of religious fermentation and teachings of his religious preceptor Raychandbhai.

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<sup>149</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *The Caste System* (8<sup>th</sup> December 1920); Quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 127.

<sup>150</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. 06-02-1921, Volume 19, p.329. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>151</sup> Dalton, Dennis. *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi’s Power*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.49



It was clear that Gandhi got himself stuck in the mud of orthodoxy and this overpowered his rationality. If his crusade against untouchability was a step forward, his support to caste institution remained a way more backward step.

After a year of silence on this throughout 1926, one does witness a qualitative change in his thought process. There is evidence of Gandhi, post-1926, seeking to underscore a distinction between Varnashrama of the past and the caste system that prevailed and this, perhaps, is where he begins to call himself a Sanatani Hindu. This too begins to change soon after. One can notice that as early as from 1927, caste becomes an ‘odious’ entity in Gandhi’s thought and alongside this transition we find him launching a scathing attack on caste as against the ideal of Varna. He categorically says:

Varna has nothing to do with caste. Caste is excrescence, just like untouchability, upon Hinduism. All excrescences that emphasised today were never part of Hinduism.<sup>152</sup>

Bayly’s argument that Gandhi’s critic of caste rested upon the ideal of *Varnashramadharma*, an idea that was not based on the idea of superiority and inferiority explains this phase adequately.<sup>153</sup> What Gandhi insisted by this time is that the ‘traditions of *Varnashramadharma* and *Karmasidhanta* can become the bearers of principles related to interdependence, responsibility and freedom.’<sup>154</sup> For Gandhi, the basic values and insights of traditions were valid and binding, not because their age or certification by an individual, but because they have survived the rigorous test of lived

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<sup>152</sup>Gandhi, M.K. Quoted In- Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 140.

<sup>153</sup> Bayly, Susan. *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From Eighteenth Century to Modern Age*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 252.

<sup>154</sup> Kumar, Biplove. *The Evolution of Gandhi’s Approach to Caste and Untouchability*. Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, Sikkim University, 2016, p. 42.

experience and scrutiny of critics.<sup>155</sup> Gandhi also was of the firm view that the Varna system could provide social stability to the Indian society in the midst of chaos and the crisis thrown in by modernity.

Gandhi's progress, which suggests a positive shift from the position he took in defence of the Varna order as found in the first phase, also witnessed his emphasis on the idea of *Advaita*. Dennis Dalton testifies that a progressive movement began to be seen from the beginning 1927, in Gandhi's thoughts, and this process continued till 1947.<sup>156</sup> Historical movements like the Mahad, Vaikom and assertion of low castes in political domain might have led to this shift. And it is certainly possible to argue that Gandhi moved on from the domain of Sanatani Hindu towards spiritual oneness of all beings or *Advaita*. And slowly his thoughts on inter – marriage and dining also changed from a stubborn opposition to those to accepting them as nothing wrong.

Like any other political leader operating in the context of colonialism, Gandhi took some pride in India's past and glorified it too. And the search for an alternate ideology might have led him towards glorifying the ideal system of Caste or *Chaturvarnaya* system. But instead of falsely glorifying the past, Gandhi tried to decipher the past with his modern ideas of truth, justice, freedom, dignity of individual et al.; values which he thought were essential for the revivification of the ancient but also a decadent society.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. "Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar\_ Gandhi Debate". *Economic and Political Weekly*. Volume No. XLVI. 2, 2011.

<sup>156</sup> Dalton, Dennis. *Nonviolence in Action: Gandhi's Power*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.52.

<sup>157</sup> Ray, Barren. *Gandhi's Campaign against Untouchability: 1933- 1934*. Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p.2.

Gandhi remained a learner throughout his life. As Lohia, (perhaps one of the few who sought to theorise Gandhi as much as Gandhism in the context of the struggle for liberation of the oppressed in the post-colonial times) says, Gandhi knew to risk his personality and never hesitated to change his stance; if his consciousness is enlightened with truth. Gandhi's idea and crusade against untouchability was in itself can be defined as rational epiphany and this was even accepted by his critics. But his stand on Varnashramadharma and the caste remains a dark spot in his own times and after him. It was in this context that Ambedkar, who may be addressed to as a young Gandhian influenced the change in Gandhi's thoughts. One may even hold it as that he became the 'conscience keeper of conservative Mahatma.'<sup>158</sup>

## **Section 4**

### **A Catalyst in Mahatma's Life: Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and Beyond**

The Mahatma, who stood up in support of the institution of caste and laboured hard to validate and legitimise it, began speaking out against his own stand in 1934 -35. In a response to an open letter from a former judge of the Bombay High Court, who appealed to Gandhi and other Hindu leaders to muster courage and give a clear and courageous lead on the caste issue; Gandhi responded through an article in his mouthpiece '*Harijan*'. The title of the article was emphatic enough to foretell its content: '*Caste Has to Go*'.<sup>159</sup> And in that Gandhi was categorical. In his own words:

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<sup>158</sup> Limaye, Madhu. *Manu Gandhi and Ambedkar and Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2016, p.20.

<sup>159</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. 16- 11-1935, Quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 140.

The present caste system is a very antithesis of Varnaashrama dharma. The sooner the public opinion abolishes it the better.<sup>160</sup>

The whole argument not only represented a transcendental as much a radical change. It also represented a sharp epistemological break in Gandhi's understanding. This particular serious engagement and negation of caste as an institution, apart from all other historical events, gyrates around the holistic partaking of the debate and the engagement between Gandhi and Ambedkar. This engagement, indeed, changed the course of the social reform movements in India, particularly so, in the context of caste and untouchability. After the 1930s, caste reformation became important to the whole nationalistic project. The body politic of caste movements got the momentum and started to gyrate around these two personalities. However, rather than taking place in tandem with each other, it tended to drift them apart and took the shape of two binaries representing conflicting trajectories.

After the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 (the second mass movement after Non – Cooperation that Gandhi steered), Gandhi was at the helm of nationalistic politics. The stature of Gandhi can be realised from the fact that when the Simon Commission was unable to end a deadlock between the nationalist forces represented by the Indian National Congress and the colonial dispensation on India's future governance; there was the call of the Round Table Conference. And the absence of Gandhi in the first Round Table conference (which meant the Congress not being there) created another deadlock. In the assessment of Bipan Chandra, the situation was: 'An Indian affair without Congress (Gandhi) was like staging Ramlila without Rama'.<sup>161</sup> Gandhi, meanwhile, participated in the Second Round Table Conference

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<sup>160</sup> Gandhi, M.K. 16<sup>th</sup> November 1935, Quoted In: Mukherjee, Rudrangshu (ed). *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, Penguin Books, Haryana, 1993, p. 222.

<sup>161</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p.307

(and thereby involving the Congress), where he ended up having to stare, face to face, at Ambedkar, who was one to the most educated minds of his times.

Ambedkar not only challenged the political ecumenism of Gandhi, but went beyond and challenged his expositions in the context of caste and untouchability. The essence of their verbal duels that started even before their meeting at London, their socio- political clashes and their different philosophical expositions, continue to dominate the ideological framework of the social movements and beyond. Till date, whenever the caste question is being debated or the question of social justice and equality comes up for engagement, their argumentative traditions occupy an important place. History pitted Gandhi and Ambedkar as adversaries. Their public exchanges were marked by acrimony.<sup>162</sup> This, however, was notwithstanding the fact that the two, wedded to distinct and differing world views, acted as a catalyst in the making of their ideas on caste and untouchability. In the long run, they transformed and scrutinized each other. As the historical events were closely discussed in the previous chapter, this particular section will deal with the changes in Gandhi's thought processes after the Second Round Table Conference.

After the clash with Ambedkar, Gandhi became more radical in his social reform programmes and his workings and writings witnessed a progressive change. The Mahatma's conscience needed a course correction for progressing in a right way. And Ambedkar, with his pitch on rationality and struggles tried to impact the thought of Gandhi. Perhaps, none other than Ambedkar could comprehend Gandhi and this is equally true of Gandhi's comprehension of Ambedkar. This holistic relationship will be comprehended and analysed in the next chapter. The remaining section of this

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<sup>162</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. "Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation", Economic and Political Weekly, Volume No. 50, Issue No. 15, 2015

chapter will analyse the positive changes in Gandhi as a social reformer from his earlier stance coming out of his conservative retrogression.

## **Section 4.1**

### **Contending Views: From the Round Table Conference to the Poona Pact**

Gandhi and Ambedkar had a direct clash at the Second Round Table Conference in London in December 1931. Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for the depressed classes and it challenged the views of Gandhi on the subject. Gandhi treated untouchability as a social problem of self and of the collective Hindu self as a whole.<sup>163</sup> He wanted the upper caste Hindus to atone for themselves through the act of self – purification and change of hearts. According to Gandhi untouchability remained a blot on Hinduism and this blot had led to a corruption of the ‘purity ‘of the faith and erasure of community.<sup>164</sup>

But before delving into the various stands of two counter parts, it is necessary to understand the nature of the conference to locate the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate with full rationality, especially the stand of Gandhi. If the dynamics of separate electorates should be looked into by the same lens through which it was given to the Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo – Indian et al, it will legally and practically have resulted into a formation of a distinct caste in the legal or juridical sense. The Conference was not about social reform but about a fight for separate political representation.

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<sup>163</sup>Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet. A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p.10. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>164</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 198.

Although, Ambedkar was inspired by Gandhi early in his career and as discussed above the Mahad Satyagraha (1927) remains an evidence to this; but the first public comment on Gandhi by Ambedkar came during the course of the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924 -25). During the public meeting of *Bahishkrut Hitakarni Sabha*, Ambedkar had underlined the political importance of untouchables and how it had not accorded much attention to caste Hindu sympathies.<sup>165</sup> Ambedkar's petitions and programmes before the conference also carried this particular imprint, which Patnakar and Omvedt have mentioned in their work that Ambedkar thought of 'we (depressed classes) want to become a ruling community'.<sup>166</sup> The first personal meeting between Gandhi and Ambedkar, few months before the Conference in Bombay ended in a fiasco. Gandhi, then, was unaware that Ambedkar was a Dalit and treated him rudely on the issue of special representation. Gandhi thought Ambedkar to be a Brahman and doing a humble job to protect the rights of the untouchables (a common social trait of reformation during Gandhi's time and space) from injustices and inequalities. Gandhi, while discussing the issues that came up at First Round Table Conference (that he had not attended), replied to Ambedkar that:

I am against political separation of untouchables from Hindus. That would be absolute suicidal.<sup>167</sup>

The talks ended with Ambedkar saying: 'Mahatmaji I have no homeland'<sup>168</sup> and this particular dialogic engagement has set the tone for Second Round Table Conference.

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<sup>165</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. Navayana Publication, New Delhi, 2004, p. 199

<sup>166</sup> Patanakar, Bharat. Omvedt, Gail. "*The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 14. No.7/8, 1979.

<sup>167</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015 p - 160

At the floor of the second conference, both Gandhi and Ambedkar articulated their own respective views charged with emotions, eloquence, self-assurance and facts to establish, who among them, was the true representative of the Depressed Classes. In respect to the political claims and separation (as vouched by Gandhi's opposition) Gandhi negated the view of Ambedkar and held:

I can understand the claims advanced by other minorities but the claims advanced on behalf of the untouchables, that to me 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 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.<sup>169</sup>

Gandhi had serious doubts over the politicisation of the problem and the time or the context. Describing untouchability as essentially a social problem, he saw the politicisation and the idea of separate electorate for the Depressed Classes as yet another colonial plot to divide India. This remains the core to his criticism of Ambedkar, who was willing to take state help for the emancipation of these classes. The colonial state, after all, had a history of ruling India with the theological exposition of *divide et imperia*. And Gandhi, as a more nuanced audience of the Raj's political theology, suspected their generous support to the demand for separate electorate.

'Those who speak of political rights of untouchables' Gandhi held, 'do not know their India.' He also narrated the whole history of reformers who wanted to

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<sup>168</sup> Keer, Dhanjay. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission., Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2015 p - 160

<sup>169</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Volume 54*, pp. 159-60. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>



eradicate the blot of untouchability and went on to assert that: 'I would far rather hold that Hinduism die than untouchability lives'.<sup>170</sup> The whole argument moved further and took the form of verbal duel. Joseph Lelyveld describes the whole conference was not about Dalit emancipation, either politically or socially - but was reduced to 'as to who really was the father of the Dalits was and their truer representative'<sup>171</sup> Gandhi, who realised that his claim and legacy had been challenged, went ahead and opined that:

Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and claim that I would get, if there was referendum of untouchables, their vote, and I would top the pool.<sup>172</sup>

Gandhi, in London, remained adamant with his view that the untouchables were an 'indivisible part' of the Hindus and a separate-electorate remains a tool for dividing the masses. To many Dalit scholars and Gandhi's critics, this was evidence that Gandhi acted as a staunch Hindu at the Conference. Gail Omvedt writes:

Gandhi was not speaking from a national perspective and he was not even speaking from the perspective of Congress; he was speaking as Hindu in his appearance at Second Round Table Conference.<sup>173</sup>

If Gandhi was sceptical about the colonial bonhomie, Ambedkar was critical of the Congress' betrayal time and again. Both wanted emancipation but through different trajectories. Ambedkar clearly pitched for a separate electorate after he sensed a betrayal, realising that he had no other option. Gandhi's first meeting with

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<sup>170</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Volume 54*, pp. 159-60. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>.

<sup>171</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 217.

<sup>172</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Volume 54*, pp. 159-60. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>173</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p. 172

Ambedkar, as talked about earlier in this section and before the Second Round Table Conference, at Bombay seemed to have played a role in the making of Ambedkar's stand. He asked the delegates of Conference: 'If the Raj could provide separate electorates for Sikhs, Muslims and India's Europeans, why not separate Dalits electorate?'<sup>174</sup> Gandhi unequivocally opposed it and responded:

Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Mohammedans, so may Europeans. Will untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity?<sup>175</sup>

With the impasse persisting thus, the Conference came to an end. But Gandhi drew the line for his final thoughts and held that if his views were not accepted and if separate electorates remained on the cards, he was going to resist it with his life. As soon as Gandhi landed in India he was taken into custody and placed in the Yervada Jail. Writing from the prison, in March 1932, Gandhi reminded the British Premier, Ramsay MacDonald, of his oath (against separate electorates).<sup>176</sup> The British Government, true to its creed of divide and rule, announced Communal Award on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1932. Through this award separate electorates was granted to the Muslims, the Sikhs and several other religious minorities, including the few thousand European expatriates and 'the Depressed Classes'.

The depressed classes were to have a fixed separate quota of seats to be filled only by the members belonging to untouchable's castes. They were also to have right to vote for the candidates via the general electorate, that is, they were to have double

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<sup>174</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. "Independence and Social Justice: The Ambedkar Gandhi Debate", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, p. 38.

<sup>175</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Volume 54, pp. 159-60. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>176</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *The Good Boatman: A portrait of Gandhi*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1995, p. 251

vote.<sup>177</sup> Gandhi, true to his word, announced his decision to do Satyagraha against the Award. Many sent telegrams pleading Gandhi not to fast but, Gandhi started a fast on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1932. This added another element to the discourse on Indian nationalism and laid the foundations for a new course on the political representation and emancipation of the Dalits, not merely in colonial times; but in free India too.

Gandhi, through his fast, trained his guns at the caste Hindus as well as their practises and the whole idea of separate electorates merely offered the context. Immediately the '*Caste Hindu Conference*' was convened at Bombay and on lines similar to the Karachi Resolution of March 1931, it was resolved that 'one of the earliest Acts of Swaraj Parliament would be to assure to the untouchables equal access to public wells, public schools, public roads and all other public institutions'.<sup>178</sup> As the most influential leader was on fast, shaming and blaming the upper castes for swaraj- temples were thrown open to the lower castes, inter-dining was started. And the Colonial empire on its part opened the Yervada prisons gates for negotiation.

Padmaja Naidu described the fast as a kind of 'catharsis' in order to clean Hinduism of its corruption; Rabindranath Tagore spoke of the 'wonder' that was happening before our eyes<sup>179</sup> and Pyarelal called it an 'Epic Fast'.<sup>180</sup> But the fast was also seen as a stumbling block or deviation from the trajectory of political independence. Notwithstanding the fact that fast remains a classical act of

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<sup>177</sup> Banerjee –Dube, Ishita. *A History of Modern Indi.*, Cambridge University Press, Noida, 2015, p. 361.

<sup>178</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matter.*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 109

<sup>179</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *The Good Boatman: A portrait of Gandhi.* Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1995, p. 252.

<sup>180</sup> Pyarelal. *The Epic Fast.* Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1932. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/epic\\_fast.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/epic_fast.pdf)

blackmailing or betrayal by Gandhi (as pointed out by Ambedkar and his pupils till date); Gandhi's fast came in for trenchant criticism from his own supporters too. Jawaharlal Nehru, his about to be political-heir, reacted strongly from the Dehradun jail and expressed his annoyance with Gandhi in following words:

...for choosing a side - issue for his final sacrifice – just a question of electorate. What would be the result on our own freedom movement? Would not the larger issues fade into the background, for the time being at least? And was not his action recognition, and in part an acceptance, of the Communal Award... After so much sacrifice and brave endeavour, was our movement to tail off into something insignificant.<sup>181</sup>

Apart from Nehru many others too held a similar view of Gandhi's 'epic fast'. E.M.S Namboodiripad, who had converted himself to Marxism after an initial phase as a Gandhian, also saw it as diversion from the original goal of political independence.<sup>182</sup> But Gandhi never saw Swaraj as just an entity or idea related only to the political domain. Through the whole discourse of the Round Table Conference and the separate electorate proposal – the communal award - Gandhi seemed to realise the urgency called for on the issue of untouchables and its eradication. Gandhi continued his fast and an agreement were reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

The Poona pact, indeed, had elements that were distinctly a departure from Gandhi's earlier stand and there were improvisations to ensure representation for the depressed classes without having to go for separate electorates. Gandhi not only agreed to the reserved seats or quotas for Dalits in the legislatures but also stressed that they should have seats in those in proportion to their population. Ambedkar agreed on giving up the demand for separate electorates and on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1932,

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<sup>181</sup> Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on Gandhi's Epic Fast (1932); Quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. Gandhi Against Caste, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 171.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p 171

what came to be known as Poona Pact was signed.<sup>183</sup> The number of seats for the depressed classes in the legislature was nearly doubled from 78 to 148. Ambedkar remained satisfied with the agreement and even predicted, as discussed in previous chapter, that, ‘Gandhi can become their hero; if he would dedicate entirely himself to the works of Depressed Classes.’<sup>184</sup>

However, the historiography of the communal award and the Poona pact would take a different course. The fact is Gandhi remains the crux of criticism for having prevailed against Ambedkar and forcing the Poona pact on his terms. It is important to note here that the seeds of this discourse were sown by Ambedkar himself not immediately after the pact, but, thirteen years later. In his book ‘*What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables*’ written in 1945, he expressed a sense of regret over the pact he had signed with Gandhi. It is also necessary to state here that the prelude and the immediate aftermath of the pact and the betrayal by most of those who egged on Ambedkar to agree to Gandhi and help end the fast – justified both Ambedkar’s ambivalent and pragmatic stand. The fact is that Ambedkar was in favour either for separate electorates or reserved seats in joint electorates and this is evident from records of his struggles; but was never in favour of political deception.

In the same way, the political positioning of Ambedkar’s writing and the context in 1945 cannot be negated while comparing it to the 1930s. Meanwhile, Dalit writers have pitched the Poona pact as an instance of great injustice done towards their community by Gandhi. The whole debate will be comprehended in the next

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<sup>183</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 109

<sup>184</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *The Good Boatman: A portrait of Gandhi*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1995, p. 253.

chapter. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to briefly clarify the contours of pact at this stage.

As held by Rajmohan Gandhi, as late as in 2017:

Seventeen years later, the essence of this pact was incorporated into free India's constitution. Every subsequent Indian Election in the eighty two years since the pact – whether nationwide or in a state, town or village – has been conducted on its basis, with reserved seats for Dalits but without a separate electorate.<sup>185</sup>

As for an assessment on the pact and Gandhi's insistence on having it on his terms, Gandhian scholars such as Louis Fischer, B.R Nanda, Ravinder Kumar, Krishna Kriplani et al. point out that - Gandhi's fast was an epic one to save the Hindus from division and their conclusion is on the lines that it was an intervention that altered the course of history. But these studies remain incomplete in their understanding of Gandhi's fast as such. The whole discourse of political separation might have given Gandhi a food for thought at Round Table Conference; but he remained aware of the 'means' which had culminated in such demands for a separate electorate. It was through Ambedkar and the special representatives of the depressed classes present at the conference, that Gandhi realised the emerging consciousness of the depressed and that it cannot be suppressed. Yet another aspect that Gandhi seemed to realise then was that of the failures of his party men and caste Hindus to work for social reforms in general and the eradication of the evil of untouchability.

Gandhi started his anti – untouchability programmes along with its first mass movement, but, Round Table Conference came as a fierce reality check for his idea of Swaraj; which also meant eradication of untouchability. Gandhi has witnessed how through Morley - Minto Reforms, Britishers have deeply affected his one of the pillars to Swaraj. Gandhi did not want Britishers to utilise another fault line and create deep divisions among the masses. In his classic *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi had identified with

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<sup>185</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 109

clarity on how the Indians had thrown themselves to be colonised by Britishers. A similar thought seemed to have hovered over Gandhi, when he tried to negate any separation which might have led towards further subjugation. Hence, through his fast, apart from vouching political unity Gandhi was shaming the caste Hindus for their conduct; which to him remained an unsuitable conduct for swaraj. Gandhi realised the necessity of self – purification among caste Hindus for swaraj and articulated it more vigorously in 1932. In a letter to Kedarnath Kulkarni, he discusses his decision about the fast and what were his real intentions. He wrote:

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.<sup>186</sup>

Thus, a sense of political and legal division among Hindus by ruling elites remained the immediate cause for Gandhi's fast. Meanwhile, he also sought to eradicate the roots of this social division, through which every division emanated. It was, in a sense, in continuity of Gandhi's long trajectory which was started in South Africa and was dissolved for the time being, into the stream of the mass movements he had led. But Ambedkar's criticisms and the politics of the raj made it imperative for Gandhi to redraw his priorities. C.F. Andrews, one of Gandhi's close friends, urged Gandhi in 1933 to concentrate solely on the removal of untouchability, for the whole remainder of his life, without turning to right or left.<sup>187</sup> To this Gandhi replied:

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<sup>186</sup> M.K. Gandhi's letter to Kedarnath Kulkarni; Gandhi, *M.K.. Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, 20-08-1932, Volume 57, p. 92. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>187</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 102.

...Now for your important argument about untouchability. But there is this initial flaw about it. My life is one indivisible whole. It is not built after the compartmental system – Satyagraha, civil resistance, untouchability, Hindu – Muslim unity....are indivisible parts of whole...You will find at one time in my life an emphasis on one thing, at another time on another. But that is just like a pianist, now emphasizing one note and now (an) other. But they are related to each other.<sup>188</sup>

This, indeed, captures the core of Gandhi's attitude to untouchability and the sense of urgency and relevance he accorded to its eradication as necessarily central to the idea of freedom from colonial rule. In other words, freedom to Gandhi was not just a political idea of transfer of power from the colonial to the nationalist leaders but a complete over-hauling of the society and the decadent caste system was seen by him as the core to be over-hauled and rooted out.

## **Section 4.2**

### **Gandhi's Anti – Untouchability Tour and a new Epiphany**

It had been always a kind of epiphany or realization of truth, which allowed Gandhi to change his thought processes and act towards it in a certain time and space. His Engagement with Ambedkar and trajectories after that made Gandhi realised that - he should focus more vigorously on the issue of depressed classes. If Gandhi's all India tour, way back in 1915 -16, helped him to understand India in a more nuanced way than the leaders of nationalism before him, which resulted in his formulation of the four pillars to swaraj; his anti – untouchability tour (1933- 34) exposed him to the dynamics of caste institutions and the limitations of his own earlier understanding on that. His acts and his writings after the tour reflect more rationality and radical thinking. As his engagement with Ambedkar in this transformation cannot be denied,

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<sup>188</sup> M.K Gandhi's letter to C.F. Andrews; Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume 61, p. 163-66 Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>



his personal experiences during and after the tour, remains equally important in the making of his progressive views on caste and untouchability. Joseph Lelyveld, who has rightly used the word ‘epiphany’ for progressive changes in Gandhi, also defines his experiences after pact and tour - as an experience through which Gandhi gathered a truer picture of casteism. He notes that it was during *Harijan Yatra* when Gandhi learnt the extent to which the orthodox castes Hindus were critical of his stand against Untouchability. Lelyveld further writes:

Soon it became routine for batteries of orthodox Hindus to intercept him at his rallies or along his route, zealously chanting anti – Gandhi slogans and waving black flags. In Nagpur, where the tour started, eggs were thrown from the balcony of the hall in which he was speaking; in Benares, where it ended, orthodox Hindus, called Satanists, burned his picture. A bomb went off in Poona, and attempt was made to derail the train on which he travelled from Poona to Bombay.<sup>189</sup>

A question that arises here is as to why, in spite of such difficulties, Gandhi continued his tour? The answer perhaps remains buried in his concept of Swaraj, which Gandhi thought can be thwarted and denied in free India; a truth that Gandhi was oblivious of at the time of the Round Table Conference. It could even be that he had a hint of this even while he dictated the Poona pact, given the fact that he insisted that the pact was preceded by declarations committing for the end of untouchability from almost all organisations that mattered in the political arena then. Hence, one may argue, that Gandhi undertook the programme of self –purification and crusade against untouchability from jail itself.

Having witnessed the rising tide of consciousness among depressed classes and the pronounced apathy towards this agenda among the Congressmen; Gandhi set up a new Organization ‘All India Anti Untouchability League’ which later came to be

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<sup>189</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 243.

known as the '*Harijan Sevak Sangh*'. Gandhi gave prominent roles of the Sangh to upper castes like Ghanshyamdas Birla (President) and Amritlal Thakkar or Thakkar Bapa (secretary).<sup>190</sup> Gandhi, true to his principles against untouchability, wanted the work to be done solely by the upper castes (self – purification). In February 1933, Gandhi launched *Harijan* – a weekly journal from prison. Through *Harijan* and its regional versions, Gandhi continued to voice his stand against the curse of untouchability. Gandhi also suddenly announced his twenty one days fast against untouchability (from 8<sup>th</sup> of May to 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1933) for self – purification of his own and his associates.

This fast of Gandhi was very enigmatic in nature. But if looked closely through his own writings, he did this for untouchability. Five years and more after this fast, specifically on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1938, he wrote about it in *Harijan* that:

One experience stands out quite distinctly in my memory. It related to my 21 days' fast for the removal of untouchability. I had gone to sleep the night before without the slightest idea of having to declare a fast the next morning. At about 12 o' clock in the night something wakes me up suddenly, and some voice – within or without, I cannot say whispers, 'Thou must go on a fast,' 'How many days?' I ask. This voice again says, 'Twenty – one days.' .... That kind of experience has never in my life happened before or after that date.<sup>191</sup>

One can perhaps assume, that Gandhi, through this fast was not only purifying himself but also shaming the nationalists who remained loyal to him but not to his principles. Gandhi was released, in the middle of this fast, but was again taken into captivity and sent back to the Yervada jail after the fast was called off. Gandhi asked authorities to permit him continue his anti – untouchability programme from jail, but

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<sup>190</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 176.

<sup>191</sup> Gandhi. M. K.. *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Mharana, Tapan (ed). , Government of India, New Delhi, 1964, p.24. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>

was denied permission for that, only to be released on threat that he will fast again. After his unconditional release, Gandhi started his anti – untouchability crusade through his Harijan Yatra. The Yatra began on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1933 and was completed on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1934. Gandhi travelled across the country, a distance of 12,500 miles speaking all over the places expressing himself against untouchability and its eradication as central to the idea of Swaraj and also collected money for the further campaign towards eradication of untouchability. The orthodoxy came up with two attempts to kill Gandhi - one at Jasidih in Bihar and another in Poona. But Gandhi knew that it was the frustration of the orthodox and conservative elements to stop his crusade.

Even before the Harijan Yatra began, Gandhi was facing the tinge of hatred from the conservative minds. He wrote to his political heir, Jawaharlal Nehru, on February 1933, where he said:

The fight against the sanatanists is becoming more and more interesting if also increasingly difficult...the abuses they are hurling at me are wonderfully refreshing. I am all that is bad and corrupt on this earth. But the storm will subside.... [I]t is the death dance of moth round a lamp.<sup>192</sup>

Gandhi's assumptions about the magnitude of casteism were shaken after his tour. Gandhi's own experience enlightened him that eradication of the evil remained a humongous task to deal with. Kolge writes: 'it is difficult to say how far Gandhi's Harijan Yatra was successful in removing from Hindu society the caste prejudices and hierarchies based on the ideas of purity and pollution, but it certainly made Gandhi acutely aware of the gravity of the issue'.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume 53, pp. 309- 310 Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>193</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 177.

One of the core themes in Ambedkar's expositions at and after Round Table Conference was his trenchant critic of the Congress's dual behaviour against the depressed classes. The argument, that the Congress has always denied the emancipation project or kept it as a secondary project was also now evident to Gandhi after the tour. Gandhi realised that the Congress and his associates elsewhere had only provided 'lip service' to his vision of Swaraj. The last decades of his life can be termed as a 'life of the lone meliorist'. But before analysing that phase of Gandhi's life, it remains important to track the changes in Gandhi's perception over caste and Varna institutions.

### **Section 4.3**

## **Caste and Varna: A radical Progression in Gandhi's Epistemological Understanding**

The Mahatma of Indian politics have duly supported and validated the caste system with Varna hierarchies during 1920's. Gandhi tried to infuse his ideas with rationality and scientific truth; for which he delves into the long history of Indian civilization. No matter how much Gandhi tried to defend his stand, facts says that it remains a period of retrogression in Gandhi's life. Until the 1930s, Gandhi used caste and Varna as synonyms and presented Varna as an ideal form of humanity and society. But, after the Poona Pact and especially after his anti – untouchability tour, Gandhi changed his stand. Gandhi's own writing suggests that caste became an excrescence similar to untouchability that persisted in Hindu society of the day and attacked it for several reasons.<sup>194</sup> He began, thus, highlighting the difference between caste and Varna and

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<sup>194</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 190.

also rejected the institution of caste in toto. On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1935, he wrote on the caste system, spelling out his stand forthrightly:

The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashramadharma. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.<sup>195</sup>

Meanwhile, Ambedkar published his undelivered lecture *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936. Gandhi's response now was by way of the rejection of caste and he now held that he saw caste as harmful to both the spiritual and national growth.<sup>196</sup> The crux of the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate turned out, by this time of Ambedkar's critique of Gandhi's view on the Varna system. Even while rejecting caste, Gandhi vouched for his ideal society based on the Varna order. In other words, Ambedkar found holes again in Gandhi's arguments - that by holding out that the caste system as it prevailed was a distortion of the Varnashramadharma, was yet again an effort to preserve the odious past and not anything to liberate the depressed castes. Nevertheless, Gandhi was unwilling to condemn the Varna system and seek its consignment to the bins. The Varnashramadharma, to Gandhi, was a way to a utopian ideal society. However, it is also necessary to point out that for Gandhi - the constitutive aspect of the Varna system (his subjective dimensions) changed and during this period it became more scientific; particularly when he began hold against the centrality of hereditary calling in the present. With progression and estimation of existing truth, Gandhi with time denounced the Varna order of his time (which he felt was antithetical to his own understanding) and called everyone to consider themselves as a shudras. He wrote:

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<sup>195</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Volume 68*. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>196</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 115.

I have come to see now clearly, namely, that the four Varnas are no longer in actual working order, even as the four ashrams are not. Hence at present moment there is only one Varna in existence. We are all Shudras and if we can bring ourselves to believe this, the merger of the Harijans in Savarna Hindus becomes incredibly simple.<sup>197</sup>

It is important to stress here that this was not a mere cosmetic change in the trajectory of Gandhi's views on caste and Varna. This had implications on the praxis too. His views on inter dining and inter-caste marriage also underwent a change from opposition to those to active support to such acts. He now considered these as warranted. From marrying his own son, Devdas to Lakshmi, who belonged to another community<sup>198</sup> to his message to the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Gandhi propagated his changed views on inter marriage and dining.

As Gandhi views were changing, the dynamics of political movement were also changing after Round Table Conferences. With the coming of the Government of India Act 1935, a roadmap towards Constitutional and political progress was already drawn. By this time Gandhi clearly realised that a lot of work was needed in the villages and among the masses in order to attain real swaraj. In 1934, Gandhi went to Bombay and participated in the annual session of the Indian National Congress. Several other leaders debated as to what should be the next step for the political independence and constitutional progress. Gandhi, meanwhile, insisted that constructive work in villages shall remain the primary concern of the Congress; based primarily on the experiences that he gained from his anti – untouchability tour. This he did even while he was convinced that a chunk of the congressmen had their priority elsewhere. They sustained and cherished the domain of electoral power and politics.

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<sup>197</sup> Gandhi. M.K.. *M.K. Gandhi letter to Motilal Roy, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1932*; Quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 192.

<sup>198</sup> It may be stressed here that Lakshmi was born to Brahmin parents and yet the marriage was significant seen from Gandhi's earlier views against such marriages too.

This was the moment when Gandhi took retirement from active politics after the session and resigned from the primary membership of the Indian National Congress, an organisation whose course was charted by him, right from the front, since 1920. .

He had opened an ashram near Wardha in Seagaon village (mainly populated by untouchables) even earlier and began working on the idea of constructive programmes right away. At the Sevagram ashram, Gandhi adopted a local Dalit boy, Govind, as his son. Gandhi set up the ashram in accordance with his settlements in South Africa and Ahmedabad. All -round development of the masses through constructive programme was Gandhi's message through his working at Sevagram. Gandhi spent eight years in Wardha. His need and urgency for constructive programme defined two things: at one level he was shaming his professed followers and at another level, he was refusing to give up on his deepest commitment towards Swaraj (his four pillars).<sup>199</sup> Gandhi firmly believed that political swaraj alone cannot provide equality and justice to the masses. A fact that stands out in this phase was a reply he had to a question on what was his formula to solve untouchability: 'Silent Plodding' was the response of Mahatma. In 1939, while spreading the importance of the Constructive programme, Gandhi wrote:

Untouchability will not be removed by the force even of law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion, i.e. self – purification, of Hindu heart. The aid of law has to be invoked when it hinders or interferes with the progress of reform as when, in spite of the willingness of the trustees and temple – going public, the law prohibits the opening of a particular temple.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 254.

<sup>200</sup> Gandhi. M.K.. *All Are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi's Writings*, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Mharana, Tapan (ed). New Delhi, 1964, p.24. Retrieved From: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/All-Are-Equal-in-the-Eyes-of-God.pdf>

As, the colonial India headed towards its tryst with destiny; Gandhi was unable to set in tune with it. From 1940's till his assassination Gandhi strived for real swaraj. Although side-lined by the new heirs of independent India, Gandhi never shied to become a lone meliorist; even if situation remained against his views. His incessant search for Swaraj was in continuum.

## **Section 5**

### **A Vision of a Lone Meliorist: An incessant search for Swaraj (1940 -48)**

Before analysing Gandhi's radical and vigorous drive against caste and untouchability, it is necessary to delve into the historical narrative of his last decade. The decade which saw the crumbling of one of the four pillars of his idea of Swaraj – Hindu-Muslim unity - and his determination to fight, against all odds, to make a world better place. The whole narrative becomes important because one failure filled the old Gandhi, frailer than he was in the 1930s, to work harder in saving another of the four pillars. Hence, this section will attempt to comprehend his journey from wariness to hope.

The old yet hopeful eyes of Mahatma, in the last decade of life had duly acknowledged the bitter truth that - his followers and own party members had not followed his precepts to Swaraj. Gandhi was never more elusive or complex than he is in the last decade of his life. Even as he strained to balance between his own precepts, values, and self-imposed rules with the strategic needs of the movement; the strain increased as power came to be seen to be within its grasp.<sup>201</sup> Although Gandhi stayed

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<sup>201</sup>Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 283 - 84



away from politics (at the Sevagram ashram for eight years) and scholars have termed this period as a period of political 'Sanyas' or 'retirement'; Wardha or technically Seagaon remained the 'de-facto nationalist capital of colonia India'.

In 1936, Gandhi persuaded the Congress to hold its annual session in a village and it happened at Faizpur (Maharashtra). Gandhi wanted that Congress should know the importance of his village service. When the Congress formed its government in several provinces in 1937, Gandhi duly influenced their education and health programmes. It was under his influence that 'All India Education Conference' took place in Wardha (22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1937).<sup>202</sup> Gandhi had always believed that education can become a tool to eradicate caste and untouchability.<sup>203</sup> But, apart from all these steps from the side lines, Gandhi's views on politics were rendered to the margins by the congress leadership. In September 1939, the Congress rejected the declaration drafted by Gandhi on issue of Viceroy's declaration of a war (World War II). It was for the first time in the twenty two years that such a thing happened. He viewed it as 'conclusive defeat'.<sup>204</sup> But, as the Viceroy brushed aside any formal declaration towards India's freedom, the Indian National Congress leaders were again at Gandhi's doors. Gandhi was still the biggest name among the masses and Congress was still defined by Gandhi. At the Ramgarh Session in 1940, the Congress laid its arms at Gandhi and looked for a strategy and advice from him. As the war became aggressive and the Japanese were knocking at our doors in the North East, the Congress Working Committee decided to meet at Bardoli in December 1941. Gandhi

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<sup>202</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 182

<sup>203</sup> M.K. Gandhi's Letter to Shyamlal, 23 July 145; quoted in: Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 199.

<sup>204</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 285

was called upon and Mahatma, true to its values wrote another piece or draft during his travel after *Hind Swaraj* (1909); where he talked about his lexical meaning of ‘Poorna Swaraj’. The draft was later published, in 1945, under the title, ‘Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place’. The eighteen programmes towards Swaraj also included ‘removal of untouchability’ and several other propositions. Moving beyond the idea of political independence, Gandhi now talked about ‘Poorna Swaraj’. The first two lines of his introduction are:

The Constructive Programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of Poorna Swaraj or Complete Independence by truthful and non – violence means.<sup>205</sup>

Meanwhile, the deadlock between the Indian National Congress and the colonial rulers was becoming acute. After the failure of the Cripps Mission (1942), the Congress leaders were again at Wardha. Gandhi went to Bombay for the AICC that began on 8th August 1942. And the following day, Gandhi led the call for the British to ‘Quit India’, and it became his last mass movement. Along with Quit India Gandhi also asked the masses to ‘Do or Die’ for their freedom and termed this as his final battle.<sup>206</sup> On 9<sup>th</sup> August Gandhi and all Congress top leaders were thrown behind the bars. As the news of the Quit India became loud and clear the reactions were immediate and spontaneous. Gandhi called to the ‘men and women’ to behave ‘like free individuals’ - if leaders were put in jail. It was according to Gyanendra Pandey, a moment that gave people ‘a tremendous psychological break’.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Constructive Programme and Its Meaning and Place*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 5

<sup>206</sup> Banerjee –Dube, Ishita. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press., Noida, 2015, p. 393.

<sup>207</sup> Gyanendra Pandey on Quit India Movement 1942; Quoted in: Banerjee –Dube, Ishita. *A History of Modern India*, Cambridge University Press. Noida, 2015, p. 395.

As the Labour party came into power in Britain after the war (1945), India's political independence seemed nearer. The new Viceroy, Lord Wavell, wanted a political stability and opened negotiations after the war. Gandhi was released way back on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1944; but the whole Congress leadership was behind the bars. So, for next thirteen months, Gandhi remained active on national issues. Gandhi entered into negotiations with the Muslim League's Mohamed Ali Jinnah, whose party had set out on the demand for a separate state for the Muslims, i.e., Pakistan. Gandhi slowly started to see destruction of one of his pillars to Swaraj which was Hindu – Muslim Unity. Gandhi wanted to utilise the moment to bridge the divide between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Gandhi met Jinnah on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1944 at the latter's residence and thereafter on fourteen more occasions in eighteen days; the meetings did not reach anywhere near a solution and Jinnah remained firm on his demand of partition.<sup>208</sup>

The Congress leaders were soon released and the chasm between Congress and League deepened with the set of events that followed. The Shimla Conference, where an attempt was made to reconcile for a united India ended in a failure. And then came the elections, the second under the Government of India Act, 1935, in the month of August 1945. Both the Congress and the Muslim League emerged as important entities in their own way in different provinces and in the Central Legislative Assembly elected by the Provincial Councils.

The elections were then followed by the Cabinet Mission Plan which was accepted by both Congress and League. The tussle of power between Jinnah and Nehru overpowered the Mission and Jinnah walked out from Cabinet's plan. Gandhi's

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<sup>208</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 289.

dream to Swaraj received its blow when, on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1946, Jinnah announced the ‘Direct Action Day’. What happened then for four days came to be known as the ‘Great Calcutta Killing’. The carnage continued for four days; 4000 people were killed and 10,000 were injured.<sup>209</sup> If the Muslims were the initial aggressors, the Hindu response was no less organized or less brutal.<sup>210</sup> Slowly, Gandhi lost the battle against the brutal actions that continued after 16<sup>th</sup> August and stabilised only with his own killing.<sup>211</sup>

The political trajectories towards Swaraj, meanwhile, were moving forward. The Constituent Assembly met for the first time on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1946. Wavell persuaded the League to join the Assembly but in vain. Nehru and other Congressmen now wanted to end the carnage that went along with political progression. To, Gandhi, the idea of high level bargain for attaining quick power by Congress at the cost of partition, along religious lines, seemed shocking and unimaginable. However, persisting deadlock and continued bloodshed finally led the Congress Working Committee (CWC) to accept partition on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1947.

Nehru, Gandhi’s heir, before placing his views on Pakistan before the Congress Working Committee, travelled to Srirampur (Bengal) and informed Gandhi about Partition.<sup>212</sup> The darkness continued. Gandhi accepted partition, but remained convinced that the two nations will merge again after realization of the truth or his message of communal harmony and peace; this never happened. ‘Vivisection’, as

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<sup>209</sup> Banerjee –Dube, Ishita. *A History of Modern India*. Cambridge University Press, Noida, 2015, p. 423.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>211</sup> Gandhi did succeed in bringing an end to the spate of violence in *Naokhali* with his fast. But then it was merely a temporary end and the canker of communalism would haunt India ever since.

<sup>212</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 309.

Gandhi often described partition, remained deep and unimaginable. ‘The country was partitioned in order to avoid Hindu – Muslim rioting’, Rammanohar Lohia (a socialist and Gandhian), later wrote: “partition produced that which it was intended to avoid in such abundance that one may forever despair of man’s intelligence or integrity”.<sup>213</sup>

Although, the major task in which Gandhi was involved in his last decade was his incessant urge for communal harmony and peace, ; but he did not abandon his focus on the other pillars to Swaraj and that went in hand with his other priorities. India witnessed Great Calcutta killing (1946) to Great Calcutta Miracle (1947), under the reins of Gandhi. Still, the old voice was unable to prevent India’s vivisection. But Gandhi, the meliorist, never lost hope. He became more radical on his position on caste and untouchability. From Noakahli (1946 -47) to his last day of his life; Gandhi tried to abridge all gaps between Sarvans and Avarnas. Gandhi never missed an opportunity to criticise the institution of caste and untouchability during his journey for communal peace and harmony. The valid reason to this urge of Gandhi can perhaps be looked from the point that, he did not want any further division or vivisection of his idea to swaraj. Writing about his Noakahli journey, Payerlal wrote:

He had told us time and again, that the Hindu – Muslim question had its roots in Untouchability.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup>Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 322.

<sup>214</sup> Payrelal. Qouted in: Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*., Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 316.

## Section 5.1

### Radical crusade for Self Purification and Swaraj

As independence became imminent, Gandhi felt freer to be openly radical. He intertwined his whole idea of self – purification with Swaraj. And his writings, speeches and actions provide ample glimpses of that. Few days before the Direct Action day, which created havoc throughout the nation, on 1st August 1946, Gandhi wrote to Vallabhbhai Patel (the future home minister) asking:

Who are the people who beat up Harijans, murder them, prevent them from using wells, drive them out of schools and refuse them entry into their homes? They are Congressmen. Aren't they? It is very necessary to have a clear picture of this.<sup>215</sup>

Gandhi had always firmly believed that if untouchability and caste distinctions had to get eradicated, the Savarnas must purify their mind and souls. This particular argument of self – purification remained very different from the others reformers of his age. The events that led up to the last decades of his life made Gandhi more radical and more critical of his own partners in politics and their workings for Swaraj. Gandhi's emphasis on constructive village programmes, which became his hope for Swaraj, depended upon the workers and the activists. It is true, that on one hand he was shaming the congressmen and was not in tune with their political agenda; but on the other hand, he was laying another road to swaraj which was different and beyond the political one. In his enunciation of the Constructive Programme, Gandhi noted

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<sup>215</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG). Volume 85, p.102.* Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

that, ‘Congressmen have looked upon this item (untouchability issue) as a mere political necessity and not something indispensable’.<sup>216</sup>

Three months after writing the letter to Vallabhbhai, Gandhi was at Noakhali (undivided Bengal) and was visiting villages to attain communal peace and harmony. Joseph Lelyveld notes that in the fifty seven days, Gandhi visited forty seven villages in Noakhali, trudging 116 miles, barefoot all the way, in order to touch hearts through the personal demonstration of his own openheartedness and simplicity. He called it a pilgrimage.<sup>217</sup> During his tour, his followers sang the religious songs, which always included one by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore’s Bengali poem – *Ekla Chalo* (walk alone). The song perhaps was a metaphor which his followers chose to signify his lone crusade for Swaraj. Gandhi even while he was engaged with the idea of communal peace never forgot to mention about the curse of untouchability. He even made collection for his Harijan funds. He stayed, during his tour, with the Namshudras (an untouchable community) and invoked caste Hindus to do the same. During his tour in a village called Chandipur he gave a radical advice to Hindu women and said:

Invite a Harijan every day to dine with you. Or at least ask the Harijan to touch the food or water before you consume it. Do penance for your sins.<sup>218</sup>

Gandhi had always led the way towards his social reformation programmes. As he moved from truth to truth, he first did experiments upon himself and urged the masses to follow it. As Gandhi shifted his base from Noakhali to Delhi, a Bhangi

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<sup>216</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Constructive Programme and Its Meaning and Place*. Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>217</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 312.

<sup>218</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Volume 93, p.229. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

settlement on the outskirts of the capital city became his chosen place of residence. He lived there on August 15, 1947 and refused to partake with the celebrations on the grounds of the Red Fort that day. On 24<sup>th</sup> April 1947, he said in Patna, that sometime he had “made it a rule not to be present or give blessings for any wedding unless one of the parties was a Harijan”.<sup>219</sup> C. B Khairmode, one of the biographers of Ambedkar, also informs us that how Gandhi made sure that Ambedkar must be included in India’s first cabinet.<sup>220</sup> Gandhi’s radicalism in his last days was such that he wanted a Dalit man or woman to run the Indian state as President.

Apart from the workings of Gandhi, Gandhi’s writings also provide the same wit and radicalism and this remained in progression. During the last years of his life, Gandhi was advocating education, economic development and political power for the upliftment of the untouchables and the depressed classes. In doing this, he gradually came to accept what was proposed by Ambedkar.<sup>221</sup> But Gandhi remained very clear that these rights or upliftment did not mean “acceptance” by the society. Gandhi was also very critical of constitutional rights and protections which Independent India was about to provide.

The genesis of Gandhi’s argument about self – purification and eradication of casteism can be seen by his response to a question, in his piece in the Harijan on May 18<sup>th</sup> 1947. The Draft Constitution, had by this time, discussed the idea of abolition of Untouchability, through a provision among the Fundamental Rights, which would later be enshrined in it as Article 17. Asked by a reader as to whether this particular step was a great reform or not, Gandhi responded:

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<sup>219</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. “*Independence and Social Justice: The Ambedkar Gandhi Debate*” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, p.43

<sup>220</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 118.

<sup>221</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 202.



No. That clause does not represent a great reform. It registers the fact a great revolutionary reform has taken place in Hindu society. I confess that untouchability has not yet been pulled out of root and branch from the soil. Like the evil effects of the British connection, those of untouchability, a much older institution, do not disappear in a flash. It may take some years, perhaps, before a stranger coming to India can say there is no untouchability in any shape or form.<sup>222</sup>

The most substantive of the changes that occurred in Gandhi's thoughts was on Varnashramadharma. Gandhi, by this time, did not abandon his faith on the ideal Varna system which he had conceived. But, he by this time he also firmly realized that - it remains a kind of utopian system and was not in tune with his time and space. The concepts of hereditary callings, the four fold Varna system, inter dining and marriage, fusion of all castes into the four fold Varna system et al.; went out of his writings. The radical and progressive Gandhi, by this time, urges every human being to consider himself as a member of '*shudras or ati – shudras.*' While writing the foreword to his old write up, '*Varnavayvastha*' on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1945, Gandhi writes:

I have said that, the Varnas and the Ashrama are the gifts of Hinduism to the world; I still adhere to that view. But today neither the Varnas nor the Ashrama of my conception are existence anywhere.... But there prevails only one Varna today, that is, of shudras or you may call it Atishudras.<sup>223</sup>

During his village service days, at Seagaon or the Sevagram ashram, Gandhi gave a message to his workers and told them: 'we cannot command results, we can only strive'.<sup>224</sup> Gandhi, all his life, strived to build a temple of Swaraj for his people. His crusade against casteism and untouchability had begun when he was twelve and

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<sup>222</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Volume 95, p.312. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>223</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume 87, 31-05-195, p.414. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

<sup>224</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p. 277.

witnessed both a negative and positive progression. But Gandhi, till his last breath, vouched for justice and equality of the downtrodden masses. In the afternoon on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948, when Congress leaders from East Punjab called him at Birla House in New Delhi, Gandhi asked ‘How are Harijans?’<sup>225</sup> He was shot dead in a mere two hours after that call. The man who killed Gandhi was an upper caste Brahmin Hindu, Nathuram Godse. This time he was not lucky enough to escape death as he could during his anti-untouchability tour back in Poona in 1934. The whole world mourned the death of the frail leader who not only challenged the imperial power through non-violence but also provided a lasting message to humanity. The message from his political heir Jawaharlal Nehru (first prime minister of India), after his demise did justice to his legacy. Speaking extemporaneously, driving back tears and choking with emotion, he said:

The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere and I do not quite know what to tell and how to say it.....the light has gone out, I said and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illuminated this country for these many years will illuminate this country for many years.<sup>226</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Conventional wisdom assumes that equality and justice under democracy can be imparted through institutional arrangements. If this would have been the case, casteism in India must have ceased to exist. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who himself was a lawyer, however, remained a ‘counter player’. Gandhi’s success does not rest upon the fact that he accepted the dominant paradigms of his time and space; but rather dared to challenge it. The tenacity with which caste and the discrimination

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<sup>225</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 122.

<sup>226</sup> Fischer, Louis. *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. Harper Collins, Noida, 2016, p.18- 19.

on its basis persists in independent India is evidence that it is a state of mind, which prevails in the upper castes and thus dominates Indian society. And law duly depends upon the behavioural pattern and acceptance of what is wrong and right.

Gandhi, through his experiments with self-purification tried to put forward this dichotomous relationship between law and legitimacy. Gandhi understood that the conflict between right and claims can be resolved only by appeal to the moral basis of society and the moral basis of society can be tested to the extent it upholds rights.

Debates on caste expositions today represent Gandhi as a casteist who tried to enhance Brahminical hegemony. This dominant discourse exists in Dalit literature and historiography today. It does not provide any space for historical arguments. Even if it does, the argument itself becomes a spontaneous ‘Gandhian (casteist) argument’. On the other hand, an epistemological understanding of Gandhi by Gandhian scholars have either glorified the journey of his as a social reformer or have provided epithets like strategy, evolution, sugar coating, crusade for unity, et al. They duly neglected the failures of Gandhi as a human and his conservatism. Perhaps, it is an aura of his other facets (leader of mass movement, saintliness, secular leader et al.) that denies such rationality or understanding. Their argument remains a denial of Gandhi’s journey as a human soul in which he progressed from truth to truth and this he did regardless of his failures. This, indeed, is similar to the episodic history by Dalit and historical epigones, which nullify Gandhi’s crusade against untouchability and caste.

The Mahatma was a staunch meliorist and he himself was aware of his failure and successes. He gave the most honest accounts of his life whether through his autobiography or through his Collected works. Writing about his views on caste expositions, he wrote on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1945 that:

In my opinion a man daily moves either forward or backward. He never stands still. The whole world is moving. There is no exception to it. I will be making wrong statement if I say that I am today what I was yesterday and will remain same in future. In fact I should not have even such desire.<sup>227</sup>

It is this spirit of practical pragmatism which gyrates around a human being known as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. It is through this practicality that one can comprehend his ideas of self – purification, journey from truth to truth, his views on caste and untouchability and finally Swaraj. And this chapter has duly followed a similar trajectory. The next chapter will highlight the contours of the holistic debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi and what they meant by ‘social democracy and swaraj’. The contours of their respective ideals and profundity will allow us to comprehend that - how far India has succeeded and has done justice to their incessant struggle and legacies.

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<sup>227</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Volume 87, 31-05-1945, *FOREWORD TO "VARNAVYAVASTHA"*, p.22. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/e/cwmg/cwmg.htm>

## Chapter 4

### Democracy, Social Endosmosis and Swaraj: Trajectories towards Justice and Equality

*“Indian Democracy remains imperfect and flawed in different ways; the ways and means of overcoming those faults can draw powerfully on argumentational traditions”*: Dr Amrtya Sen.<sup>1</sup>

For the founding fathers and mothers of India, the whole phenomenon of attaining the political democracy was not an ‘end’ in itself; rather, they firmly believed that it should become the ‘means’ towards social and economic democracies. The new society was to be achieved through a social- economic revolution pursued with a democratic spirit using constitutional, democratic institution.<sup>2</sup> The conceptual framework of Democracy has many connotations and it is not monochromatic. But the defining contours that describe democracy (a general view) gyrate around liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, dignity, self-respect et.al., and an idea that it is the ‘*demos* or people’ who should remain at the centre stage of politics and policies; which not only emanates from them but also serves them in a progressive way. India’s democratic enterprise which started to shape itself under colonial rule was firmly established through Constituent Assembly Debates (1946 - 1949) and was duly documented in its Constitution. And with the promulgation of India’s Constitution, a new dawn of democratic rule came into place. ‘The Constitution of India’ has always remained the fountain authority to ensure democracy. It has almost become the anthem of democracy in India.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative India: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*. Penguin Books, London, 2006, p. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Austin, Granville. *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018 (Classic Issue), p. XI.

<sup>3</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. *Indian Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 15.

The epistemology of liberal democracy in India is often evaluated and understood, predominantly, in terms of the experiences gained from European and North American countries. This approach indeed, is flawed. The dynamics and issues related to Indian democracy must be seen as historical and an integral aspect of a process as unique as nationalism in India was. The whole logic of this particular break point in epistemological discourse assumes importance because - India represents a paradigmatic example of deep diversity along the lines of religion, language, castes and tribes.<sup>4</sup> The libertarian norms that guided the nation building process was intertwined with the long history of ‘contestations of ideas’ such as secularism, group and minority rights, affirmative action, equality, social justice, et al.; this meant forging the nation with the fragmented bricks that were on the block. The Constituent Assembly, in fact, was the crucible where the pot was moulded.

As India marched towards independence, the minority questions itself represented through several definitions, events and facets, which needed an immediate attention. The whole trajectory that led to the alienation of Muslims and the catastrophe of partition was a serious blow to the progressive ideas and nationalistic politics. But Muslims were not the only minorities, which existed and were worried about their future discourse in Independent nation, several other minorities thought in a similar way. The space and seriousness with which the Constituent Assembly debated questions related to untouchability, backward classes, women representations, issues of the tribal people, the Anglo Indians, Sikhs, et al., warrant serious observations to understand the varied themes of Indian democracy. The whole process represented the dual process of accommodating the vocabularies of minority claims

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<sup>4</sup> Bajpai, Rochna. *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, p.6.

(that was forged and cemented under the colonial legacy and the concurrent social reform movements) and intertwined the same with the idea of India or national unity. The baffling heterogeneous claims had to be accommodated within the four corners of constitutional democracy. The end-game, hence, was to ensure justice to socio – political struggles that either predominated or ran parallel to India’s struggle for freedom.

Apart from the issues related to religious minorities, the question in relation to caste and untouchability was duly debated by the Constituent Assembly. The oppression that emanated from the social stratification of casteism was not only antithetical to the nation building process, but also to the rudiments of political freedom itself. The lower castes or the untouchable were not the minority in the literal sense (religious or racial) of the term, but rather, they were politically, socially and economically marginalised groups, that needed serious attention. The constitution, through Article 17, not only abolished untouchability and defined its practice a crime, but also contained other provisions - Articles 15, 16 and 340 – to formulate laws for affirmative action to ensure the upliftment of the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBCs). These groups incidentally, constituted one sixth of India’s population then. Social justice and Equality were thus guaranteed as fundamental rights, especially through Articles 15, 16 and 17 of the Constitution and this immunised special measures involving positive discrimination from a mechanical application, which hovered around, of the Right to Equality as guaranteed by Article 14. In other words, Articles 15, 16 and 17 were intended to make equality, as guaranteed by Article 14 a reality. Hence, in legal terms it can be termed as the idea of ‘substantive equality’.

Notwithstanding these constitutional and legal protections, there are issues that continue to hound the body politic in contemporary India. The moot point is related to law and its praxis in real sense of term. The concept of morality, dignity, self-respect and acceptance do form the basis of justice and equality and they are not just political – legal questions. Dakshayani Velayudhan (Congress), the only female Untouchable representative in the Constituent Assembly put this forthright before the body, when she pleaded:

What we want is not all kinds of safeguards....I refuse to believe that seventy million Harijans are to be considered as a minority... what we want is the immediate removal of our social disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

It is been more than seventy years of India's independence and it had become world largest democracy and many positive attributes are attached to this historical discourse. Without any shadow of doubt the 'social engineering projects' remains one of the most transformative projects of Indian Constitution and politics. It is a fact that both the Backward castes and the Scheduled Castes have marked their existence in the body politic, especially after the rise of the regional and caste based parties and the partial implementation of the recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission (popularly known as the Mandal Commission) in our short history after independence. India not only saw a Dalit woman, who became chief minister of its largest state, but today even the Indian Parliament remains dominated by Other Backward classes/castes. Apart from a certain kind of romanticism that influences one's intellect to see these phenomenon as positive and progressive, there is indeed an equally large space and scope to cynicism and even foreground the paradoxes in this

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<sup>5</sup> Velayudhan, Dakshayani. *Constituent Assembly Debates*; Qquoted in: Bajpai, Rochna. *Debating Difference: Group Rights and Liberal Democracy in India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, p.111.



development, especially in the context of caste and untouchability. Theories of Indian democracy can be counterfactually debated, but facts are what they are.

As per the Socio – Economic Caste Census 2011- there are 182,505 families in rural India engaged in Manual Scavenging, a practice that is not only prohibited by the apex court of India but is also a reminder of the persistence of a horrendous face of the caste system. It is horrendous because this task is exclusively reserved to the Dalits or the Scheduled castes.<sup>6</sup> The Caste data of any region (whether urban or rural) shatters the proffered understanding of India's development and freedom. Amartya Sen, in his '*Development as Freedom*', not only revisits the idea of the makers of modern India, but, also urge to testify development through evaluative and effective reasoning.<sup>7</sup> Castes have overreached the constitutional authority and real deficit have arisen from the constitutional praxis.<sup>8</sup>

The whole existent phenomenon has resulted in a condition, where the political parties that represent the lower castes too have been conditioned to a discourse that ends up in perpetuating caste as a category.

In the course of its democratic discourse India had witnessed strong subaltern caste movements, expressing in various forms: movements against caste domination, protest literature, a variety of grass root assertions and more recently middle class activism. These assertions, along with the mobilisation in the electoral arena, has increased the political participation of the disadvantaged sections and helped to create a subaltern space under the democratic umbrella. This, on the one hand has led to the

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<sup>6</sup>Venkat, Vidya. "*Manual Scavenging still a Reality*",*The Hindu*, Dated: 07th April 2016. Retrieved From: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manual-scavenging-still-a-reality-socioeconomic-caste-census/article7400578.ece> (accessed on 05-11-2018)

<sup>7</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Palshikar, Suhas. *Indian Democracy*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 30.

deepening and strengthening of democracy and on the other, the graded inequalities, which define the victimization of ground realities have challenged the positive narratives; related to the very idea deepening of democracy. Dalit assertion and anti-caste movements (1970's 90's) showed a great promise and a break away from previous discourse, mostly dominated by Congress and other mainstream parties. This however, has not changed the ground realities and is yet a long distance away from social transformation. Ghanshyam Shah upholds that such a disconnect, 'is perceptible in both struggle of agitation and parliamentary politics, including elections, and holding offices in various decision making institutions'.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond the paradoxes and dichotomies the assertions and struggle by lower castes are also defined by various ideological strands. At any point of the history - Ideas, Ideals and ideologies have always emerged as an inspiration or driving forces for progressive movements in a society or human civilization as a whole. Whether it was Buddha in ancient India or Kabir in medieval era - their modus operandi has become inspiration for many generations to come. Even Ambedkar mediated upon Buddha for his struggles and philosophy. And in contemporary times also they hold prominence in different pockets of India.

In the context of modern Indian history, (as discussed in previous chapters) ideas of Raja Rammohan Roy, Mahatma Phule, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and others have duly carried the same legacy against casteism; which had steered humanity to coherent and realistic future. Although there was no pan Indian social movement during the colonial era that foregrounded the liberation of the lower castes; the particular movements carried forward by E.V Ramasamy (Periyar), Bhimrao Ramji

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<sup>9</sup> Pai, Sudha. *Dalit Assertion*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013, Pp. XXXV-VI.

Ambedkar and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi have influenced the masses and their struggles at times gathered mass to confront one another and shown signs, at times, of achieving ruptured unity.

The point, however, is that Gandhi's approach was perhaps the most substantial one, which attempted to weld the social emancipation with political freedom. It is equally important to stress here that Ambedkar, in spite of his arguments against Gandhi, which at times turned into non-negotiable disagreements, had remained Gandhi's conscience keeper. The relationship and political legacy of Gandhi and Ambedkar, in this way, not only changed the course of social history of India, it also led to the metamorphosis of Indian society from '*Manucracy to Democracy*'. If Gandhi thought that his idea of *Swaraj* is impossible without the upliftment of the *Panchama*, Ambedkar defined Caste as an 'anti- national'<sup>10</sup> entity and anathema for a nation in the long run.

Without any shadow of doubt, the post-independence discourses of political struggle and social justice have consistently and continuously revolved around the Gandhi – Ambedkar debate on caste institution and their respective prescriptions or strategies towards its end; in order to carve out substantive equality. The public spaces of caste debates from tea stall to university buildings to political rhetoric of Indian leaders - duly carries the essence of their discourse. Rajmohan Gandhi in his work '*Understanding the Founding Fathers*'<sup>11</sup> and Badri Naryan in his work '*The Making*

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<sup>10</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*, Jaffrelot, Christophe. Kumar, Narendra. (ed.). Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018. P. 198

<sup>11</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Understanding The Founding Fathers*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 1-30.

*of Dalit Public in Northern India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950 to Present*<sup>12</sup>, by using oral history have established that - while the Gandhian idea of equality and justice had inspired struggles in the immediate wake of independence and until the 1970s, the decades since then have been the rise of Ambedkar's legacy. In other words, while the Congress, with the leaders like Pandit Nehru and Jagjivan Ram had managed to co-opt personalities from among the Scheduled Castes and iconized Gandhi in a manner to contain caste exclusivist movements; platforms or political parties such as the Republican Party of India, Dalit Panthers, the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh and the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) in Tamil Nadu had managed to carve out an exclusivist space by way of iconizing Ambedkar.

However, far from achieving the annihilation of caste, politics today has re-modified caste and has ended up, with all the space to be taken by identity politics. In this, both Ambedkar and Gandhi have been reduced to cult of symbolism. The genesis of their struggle should have redefined the ideas of equality, justice, dignity, empowerment et al., but the recent history and politics have betrayed their vision. These two have been caricatured and deliberately frozen in perpetual battle. Every political party have promised and still promises to fight for the casteless society, but, only behind the veil of political power and icons. They have utilised history, moulded it and injected an alternate history, which has duly satisfied their vote banks politics and have fragmented the struggles and societal framework more. Knowingly or unknowingly the whole trajectories have legitimised caste divisions, hatred and victimisation. If in post-independence the mainstream parties betrayed the idea of

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<sup>12</sup> Naryan, Badri. *The Making of Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950 – Present*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2011.

Gandhi, Dalit parties are struggling hard to compete and even overcome them. Sudha Pai writes:

Dalits parties have emphasised more on political empowerment, with less stress on social status, removal of discrimination and economic improvement. They have often failed to change the structure of social base of Indian system. Rather it had made compromises with the mainstream parties for political power and priorities. The benefits have yet to reach the subaltern Dalit groups that remain poor, marginalised and without a voice in democratic system.<sup>13</sup>

Historically and ideologically, the two personalities converged very less, but, it was through the 'argumentative traditions' between them - that the whole discourse of social reformation programmes witnessed major changes, at the time when political struggle for independence dominated both time and space. It was through their dialogic engagement that Indians realised that social and economic democracies or Swaraj remains an important entity towards and beyond freedom.

Essentially, today they remain in exclusive water tight camps as trenchant enemies. In fact, perceptions have been created that Gandhi, who made untouchability a national concern, is a leader for the Savarnas and Ambedkar who vouched for social endosmosis in society remains the demi god for the Avarnas. And both, Iconolatry and calcification go hand in hand.<sup>14</sup> Rajni Kothari, have captured this paradox and writes:

It is not part of Indian traditions to make heroes out of history except to make gods and deities out of them and add to the pluralistic pantheon that has imbued in masses and sentiments that have made them resist monolithic interpretations of either culture or politics. But it has at the

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<sup>13</sup>Pai, Sudha. *Dalit Assertion*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013, P. 109.

<sup>14</sup>Deshpande, Pushpraj. "Revisiting Ambedkar, Gandhi and India's Unfinished War", *The Wire*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016. Retrieved From: <https://thewire.in/politics/revisiting-ambedkar-gandhi-indias-unfinished-war>

same time pluralised deprivation and suffering and, apart from periodic and fragmentary outbursts of defiance kept them disunited in the arena of power.<sup>15</sup>

Heterogeneity and contested visions has always been the core of Indian democracy. In fact it all started under the aegis of Colonialism and continued and thrived. It was also reflected in Constituent Assembly Debates and Indian constitution. Gandhi and Ambedkar often remained in opposite camps but their goal was one - eradication of caste and untouchability. Apart from the common method that has gained momentum of analysing and shaming of personalities based on episodic histories; the whole discourse of Ambedkar and Gandhi is much larger and even transcends their own space and time. One can be selective in their hypothesis and arguments, but, together their ideas represent a transformative vision and urge to annihilate the caste system in totality.

The whole programme related to India's social Justice and equality under the Liberal democratic regime was designed to eradicate the baneful caste hierarchies. But today from matrimonial ads in every newspaper to horrendous crimes based on caste - defines that Law of Land (Constitution) is still dominated by existence of Law in Land (Manusmiriti). It remains a critical time for the nation. Impasse exists but not the intent or ideas for change. Striving towards the end of social justice and equality as proposed by our founding fathers and mothers needs some serious reconsiderations. To be effective in people's hand, any philosophy, in whatever shape it was propounded by its originators, needs to be reshaped through struggle.<sup>16</sup> This, then, throws open the possibility as well as the imperative for an attempt to reconceptualise

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<sup>15</sup> Kothari, Rajani. *Themes in Indian Politics: State and Politics in India*, Chatterjee, Partha. (ed.). Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 451.

<sup>16</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p. 148.

Ambedkar's idea social endosmosis and Gandhi's idea of swaraj, keeping aside their divergences, in the political and social culture of India's democratic experience.

This chapter will revisit the ideological strands which define the core of the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate. Based on the analysis of the social struggles and movements that the two personalities led and influenced, as elaborated in Chapters 2 and 3 earlier, the organization of this chapter will define their evolving political ideals and argumentative traditions. Section 1 of this chapter will comprehend the starting point of the two decades long debate. This section will look into the initial views of the two that started with the Round Table conference and track it to its culmination in the Poona pact. The debate went beyond the Poona pact on the issues of caste and untouchability and its annihilation. Section 2 will comprehend and revisit the epistemological and the sociological understanding of Ambedkar and Gandhi on the institution of Caste and Varna system and its annihilation; which transformed in the end to the whole popular narrative of democratisation under colonial era. Section 3 will comprehend and analyse the different trajectories of Self- Purification of Gandhi and Self- Respect of Ambedkar as Bapu and Babasaheb used these trajectories to eradicate the manifest injustices based on casteism. Section 4 will look into the ideas of Swaraj and Social Endosmosis of Gandhi and Ambedkar respectively and how the two connected these with their respective idea of justice. This section will also comprehend the essence and relevance of their ideas in the light of Amartya Sen's *Idea of justice*.

## Section 1

### **Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate: Episodic or Transcendental?**

Justice or precisely social Justice is far from blind in contemporary India. It is very much attentive towards power structure and vote bank politics. As the whole idea of struggle against inequalities and injustices has its roots spread over the period of colonial history, the ideas and struggles of different social reformers of the times are revisited time and again. It not only provides strength to tree of Indian democracy, but also rebuilds faith in the whole concept of ‘idea of India’. History through its course and struggles often drives the present and in the long run channelize its future.

In the context of eradicating the baneful hierarchies of casteism, the dialogic engagement between Ambedkar and Gandhi, their ideas and legacy remains an important part of subaltern consciousness. It is because of their contribution towards the caste subaltern movements, in the context of colonialism and beyond, that, they remain the most revisited leaders (in many different ways). To ensure that the promise of India is accorded to all, it is imperative to pay heed to Gandhi’s insistence on socio – political revolution to affect organic transformation in India’s social consciousness and Ambedkar’s faith in the state as a means to guarantee not only equality of opportunity but also outcome.<sup>17</sup> But just as the concept of social justice their ideas remains limited towards symbolic politics and popular rhetoric. Post Independent democratic politics have not only calcified their spaces but have also restricted the fluidity of conversation between them. These particular discourses of appropriation, iconization and patronisation have not only betrayed the transformative culture, but

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<sup>17</sup> Deshpande, Pushpraj. “Revisiting Ambedkar, Gandhi and India’s Unfinished War”, *The Wire*, 14th April 2016. Retrieved From: <https://thewire.in/politics/revisiting-ambedkar-gandhi-indias-unfinished-war>



also its larger historical discourse of argumentative traditions; to which the divergences and convergences of Gandhi and Ambedkar belonged. Precisely they have been ghettoized both by academicians and their so called electoral blocs.

In the contemporary socio – political understanding most narratives of Dalit or caste movements reflect certain kinds of stereotypes, fixed notions and preconceived monochromatic history. Badri Naryan has captured this particular understanding, he writes:

Whenever we start thinking about Dalit narratives, about nation and its history, we expect that all Dalits would analyse Nehru, Gandhi, and the Indian national struggle from Ambedkarite's perspectives, most of which were reconstructed by the Republican Party of India (RPI) and Dalit activists of Ambedkar Mission in post Ambedkar era.<sup>18</sup>

The subject matter and progress in the epistemology of history is defined by the inevitability of constructions and re - constructions. But the new developments had to be reviewed and updated. The whole project of social justice and equality is remains unfinished as promised by the constitution of India. And as long as subaltern struggle continues; the space will be provided for an alternate history, which will redefine these struggles and movements.<sup>19</sup> The Caste movements in ways more than one owes its existence to the idea of constructions and reconstructions. It has led to the creation of an alternate social history, different from the mainstream socio – political narratives and schools. In fact in last few decades it has become the life blood for assertions of group and individual rights.

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<sup>18</sup>Naryan, Badri. *The Making of Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950 – Present*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2011p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essays*. Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p.100.

If the Congress or more precisely the Nehruvian phase in its history patronised the construction and consumption of a Gandhi centric public imagination insofar as caste reforms and the abolition of untouchability is concerned (where Ambedkar was ignored); the new social movement or Dalit politics rested entirely on the reconstruction of a public imagination and a history of social reforms around Babasaheb and even posing Gandhi as the other.

Notwithstanding some genuine contributions, the whole process duly created an alternate history with all stereotypes and fixed notions, to satisfy the needs and public imagination. They in turn either divided the history into just ‘episodes’ or made the ideas of Gandhi and Ambedkar irreconcilable for eternity. The semantics related to the historical texts and literature, along with the political legitimisation has played a wider role in defining the zones and camps of Gandhi and Ambedkar. One of the leading Ambedkarites scholars Gail Omvedt writes:

If Gandhi was Bapu, the ‘father’ of a society in which he tried to inject equality while maintaining the ‘Hindu’ framework; Ambedkar was ‘Baba’ to his people and the great liberator from that framework.<sup>20</sup>

The statement made Omvedt if once read, it looks justifiable. But if it is comprehended properly, it defines the ground realities and divisions. These divisions have become an anathema for social justice and equality. The whole semantics, thus, reduces all the movements and the struggles that were associated with Gandhi into a ‘Hindu frame work’ and poses Babasaheb remains ‘*Baba*’ to only ‘his people’. It is true that history pitted Ambedkar and Gandhi against each other, but, appropriation and negation remains the new dynamics of the Gandhi – Ambedkar debate. The premise to this frozen alternate history happens to be based upon the episodes from

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<sup>20</sup> Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. XV.

life of the two personalities. The new semantics have reached to the roots and have redefined the subaltern consciousness.

The whole consciousness of appropriation and exclusivism was channelized at different levels to obtain and expand the whole idea of social justice. But as vertical caste hierarchies started to diminish and subaltern castes became an important entity for Indian electoral politics; these appropriation and exclusivism itself became the liabilities for the movements and political parties to survive. The institution of caste modified itself and graded inequalities not only created horizontal zones of caste power blocs, but duly defeated the idea of Justice and equality. With caste now defined by the horizontal segmentation – the politics and the language of various social groups and minorities communities started to articulate in isolation and through their own exclusive idols and symbols.

Although Gandhi and Ambedkar dominate the whole phenomenon, Jyotiba Phule, E.V. Ramasamy, Rammanohar Lohia, Birsa Munda and Sardar Patel (with the invention of a new history) have joined the constellation of symbolism. The only thing common that connects them is not history, but, the exclusion of others and the appropriation of legacies (real and fabricated) - which is and shall be utilised for political benefits.

Apart from the ideal of justice and equality, which truly remains a fragmented idea or a distant dream in contemporary India; the whole culture of iconization and episodic history has done great disservice to the lives and struggle of Ambedkar and Gandhi. Although their respective histories and struggles remains a driving force for subaltern movements (not only in India but around the world); it is ironical and surprising that their ideas are being traded of and commercialised for political

benefits. It is from this concern that it is imperative for us to raise the following questions:

- Can the argumentational traditions between Ambedkar and Gandhi help us to negotiate the dilemma of politics and policies of social justice in contemporary India?
- To what extent their views are reconcilable without any implication and reductions?
- How can the reopening of dialogue between the two can help us to revisit the idea of justice and equality vis - a - vis Indian constitutional ethos?
- Does the attainment of political democracy define the end motives of Ambedkar – Gandhi debate or was it a means in itself?
- And last but not the least, if the epistemology of the Ambedkar - Gandhi debate have redefined the idea of Indian nation and transcended even beyond their life spans; can that debate just be termed as episodic?

A short answer to these questions could be that history pitted Gandhi – Ambedkar as adversaries and their public exchanges were intense and varied; but often marked by acrimony.<sup>21</sup> The whole dialogic and holistic engagement becomes important because by the end of their engagement, they not only transformed each other<sup>22</sup>; but also redefined the contours of social justice and democracy of for the oppressed masses and it still remains relevant.

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<sup>21</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. “*Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

<sup>22</sup> Nagraj, D.R..*The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 2. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

## Section 1.1

### The Holistic Debate: Revisiting the Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate

Socio – political time and space in which the leader conceptualise his/ her epistemological outlook and way of doing things, cannot be divorced from the leader’s history. An episode remains an important part to historical events, but, as Antonio Gramsci has said nothing remains spontaneous in history.<sup>23</sup> The rivalry between Gandhi and Ambedkar lives on through the polemics, in street – corner debates, newspaper columns, blogs, books, documentaries, films and so on, often marked by aggressive insults between the pro Ambedkar, anti – Gandhi segments and the pro – Gandhi, anti Ambedkar groups.<sup>24</sup> But the problematic affair that underlines the polemics and aggressive insults is that – they are just being defined by either on the basis of one or other episodes from the two decades long debate (Poona Pact, Debate around the text *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar’s relationship with the colonial raj, Gandhi’s dichotomous views on Varna and untouchability et al.). Although the paradigms and socio – political history of Gandhi and Ambedkar differed immensely; but they were much closer to each other on fundamental issues. One can become the captives of contemporary discourse, which can be defined as ‘seductive charm of history’; which pronounce judgements, but certainly provides no solutions. Defining the contours of the isolated episodic histories or the ‘seductive charm of history’ (which has or is redefining the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate), D. R. Nagraj stated (in context of Ambedkar and Gandhi) that:

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<sup>23</sup>Guha , Ranajit. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.

<sup>24</sup> Singh, Akash. “Gandhi and Ambedkar: Irreconcilable Differences?”, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Springer, 2014, pp. 413 -414

Well, that is the seductive charm of history; she convinces one that a partial view is the total view and drives the passionate to act. One who waits for the total view will never act or take plunge into history and here lies, precisely, the liberative potential of history.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the interrelated and overlapping socio – political issues such as of depressed classes representation, removal of social stigma and the whole understanding of caste question, the Gandhi – Ambedkar debate, on a larger context, contributed to the idea of a new nation. Partha Chatterjee, in his work *Politics of the Governed*, describes the legacy of Gandhi through a homogenous spectrum and Ambedkar's through a heterogeneous one. In Chatterjee's opinion, Ambedkar, through his heterogeneity, challenges the whole idea of dominant narratives of the nation.<sup>26</sup> For Ambedkar, the whole idea of nation and citizenship primarily depends upon the socio- political justice of the depressed classes and their particularistic rights; and this, for him cannot be undermined or negated. For Gandhi, meanwhile, the unity and homogeneity (even with differences, which he thought, like other congressmen did, can be resolved after gaining political swaraj) remains the key factor in the formation of the nation.

It is from this vantage point that both leaders engage in a holistic battle for justice and equality, that not only challenged the dominant narratives that prevailed within that particular time and space, but, in the long run, transformed them also. Zelliott points out that:

Gandhi may be described as a dominant group leader working for a national goal who was concerned, both from moral standpoint and from a realization of the need of unity, about injustices to a low status group within the nation. Ambedkar's correlative role was that of a

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<sup>25</sup>Nagraj, D.R..*The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 2.Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>26</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

militant leader of politically conscious segment of the same depressed groups. Seen in this light, the conflict between these two men has some parallels with certain aspects of Black Power movement versus “white Liberals” in America of 1960’s.<sup>27</sup>

Through his stress on heterogeneity and alternate strategy,<sup>28</sup> Ambedkar challenged the strategy presented by Gandhi. Gandhi, meanwhile, challenged Ambedkar’s deep ideological belief (extreme radicalism) on the potential for change in the framework of the enlightenment and the west. If at the end of their debate, Gandhi rejected his conservative ideas on Caste and Varna, Ambedkar did move out of his beliefs related to his ideas and its origin to the pattern drawn by the French Revolution. It is important to stress here that Ambedkar remained firm on his commitment to the framework of liberty, equality and fraternity and only shifted their origins from the *French Revolution* to his master Buddha (quite peacefully accepting the solace and refuge, under the domain of religion and Indian traditions, like Gandhi did).<sup>29</sup> They, through their respective domains, contributed towards the growth of political consciousness; one through moral force and other through intellectual and political force.<sup>30</sup>

Before analysing or comprehending the dynamics of debate, let us revisit two substantive statements - one by Ambedkar in the 1920s and another by Gandhi in the

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<sup>27</sup> Zelliott, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001, P.151.

<sup>28</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> Ambedkar Speech On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1956 at The BBC, “*Why I like Buddhism: Critique of Marxism and Relevance of Buddhism*”. Quoted In: Jaffrelot, Christophe. Kumar, Narendra. (ed.). *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*, Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018. Pp.238 -39

<sup>30</sup> Kapoor, S.D..”On the Ambedkar- Gandhi Debate”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. no.10, 2015, Pp.75 -76.

1940s, for, these captures the holistic engagement of both and why they clashed bitterly in the 1930's. In a speech in 1925, Ambedkar, a young Gandhian stated:

Before Mahatma Gandhi, no politician in this country maintained that it is necessary to remove social justice here in order to do away with tension and conflict, and that every Indian should consider it his sacred duty to do so...However, if one looks closely, one finds there is a slight disharmony...for he does not insist on the removal of untouchability as much as he insists on the propagation of Khaddar (home – spun cloth) or Hindu – Muslim Unity. If he had, he would have made the removal of untouchability a pre-condition of voting in the party. Well, be that as it may, when one is spurned by everyone, even the sympathy shown by Mahatma Gandhi is of no little importance.<sup>31</sup>

One can see traces of both hope and disharmony in the views of Ambedkar in the 1920s. While hope in this led Ambedkar to utilise the tool of Gandhian Satyagraha at the Mahad struggle in 1927, the disharmony was indeed fallout of the political narratives of the times that led him to challenge Gandhi soon after and most pronouncedly at the Round Table Conference. It must be mentioned here that the managers of the colonial establishment made use of this context to split the two leaders too and Sir Ramsay McDonald simply articulated this scheme. The acrimony and the harsh debate followed and dominated the discourse for at least a decade and half after that.

Similarly, Gandhi's relationship with Ambedkar was very different from that of other Congress leaders or any other leadership of his own times. It was uncomplicated, turbulent and much more straightforward. In a letter written to Ambedkar on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1944, Gandhi not only accepts the question of disharmony mentioned by Ambedkar in one of his speeches on Gandhi, but also talks about differences and the possible meeting ground between them. Gandhi writes:

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<sup>31</sup> Ambedkar Comments on Vaikom Satyagraha; Quoted in: Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*. Harper Collins, 2011, p.212.



The Hindu Muslim question is for me a lifelong question. There was a time when I used to think that when that question was solved India's political troubles would be over. Experience has taught me that it was only partly true. Untouchability I began to abhor when I was in my teens, but it was a question with me of religious and social reform. And though it has attained a great political importance its religious and social value is for me is much greater. But I know to my cost that you and I hold different views on this important question. And I know too, that on broad politics of the country we see things from different angles. I would love to find meeting grounds between us on both the questions. I know your great ability and I would love to own you as colleague and co – worker. But I must admit my failure to come closure to you. If you can show me the common meeting ground between us I would like to see it. Meanwhile, I must reconcile myself to the present unfortunate difference.<sup>32</sup>

The point here is that the letter from Gandhi captures the change, experience and most importantly their argumentative tradition. It is this dialogic engagement, which determines the holism and defines their respective stand for a transformative mission. And it cannot be calcified separately. It is necessary to stress here that there was a quest, then, to identify the meeting grounds and explore various subjective arguments with the objective being achieving social justice and equality of oppressed and depressed classes.

## **Section 1.2**

### **Inception of Argumentational Tradition: Question of Separate Electorates and Poona Pact:**

Few months before Ambedkar – Gandhi first met to discuss the issues related to depressed classes at Second Round Table Conference (Manibhavan, August 14, 1931); Congress under the Presidential tenure of Vallabhbhai Patel passed the famous Karachi Resolution. The Karachi session became memorable for its resolution on the Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Programs. It was the document

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<sup>32</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG), Letter to Dr B. R. Ambedkar*, 6th August 1944, Vol. 84 p.272. Retrieved From:<http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL084.PDF>.

designed for free India or India after Swaraj. The resolution guaranteed basic civil rights of free speech, free press, free assembly and freedom of association, equality before law irrespective of caste, creed or sex, neutrality of state in regard to all religions, elections on basis of universal adult franchise, and free and compulsory education. Nineteen years later, the pledge was enshrined in free India's constitution of which Ambedkar became the principal architect.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding, the Gandhi and Congress' claims and promises, Ambedkar choose a different path and challenged the leadership of Gandhi at second Round Table Conference. The questions arises here is why did Ambedkar changed his course of struggle, even though he was involved in a positive, if impersonal relationship with Gandhi during 1920's.<sup>34</sup> The answer to this could be found in the priority that Ambedkar began to accord to social revolution as condition precedent to the political one.

Ambedkar firmly believed that, 'there is no use of Swaraj, if you cannot defend it'.<sup>35</sup> For Gandhi, Swaraj in the political sense could not be abandoned, and the solution he prescribed was to attack untouchability while asking for swaraj.<sup>36</sup> Ambedkar not only compared Congress and Britons as standing on the same platform in the first meeting with Gandhi, but also went ahead and said, 'Gandhiji I have no homeland'.<sup>37</sup> Ambedkar firmly believed that in a land where the depressed classes

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<sup>33</sup>Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 107

<sup>34</sup>Gandhi, Rajmohan. "*Independence and Social Justice: The Ambedkar Gandhi Debate*", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2015, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p.81

<sup>36</sup>Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 107

<sup>37</sup> Keer, Dhananjay, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 2015, p.167

were treated worse than cats and dogs,<sup>38</sup> a document like the Karachi resolution was nothing but another step to perpetuating the vicious practice of slavery sans colonial raj. This friction or rupture between the priorities that the two positions attached to freedom in the social – economic sense and the political idea of freedom caused the two decades of long debate between a meliorist and a constitutionalist.

If, the momentum was set up by the first meeting between the two leaders, the second Round Table Conference saw acrimonious moves over the issue of separate versus joint electorates. The whole rivalry between the two was crystallised over the issue of separate electorates.<sup>39</sup> Ambedkar after analysing the Congress's stand on the issue transferred his representational demands from joint electorates to the separate one; whereas Gandhi negated any separation among the 'Hindus'. As the factual understanding and respective viewpoints were discussed in the previous chapters, it is very much necessary to grasp the subjectiveness in their respective stand. As Suhas Palshikar holds, 'It remains much more rewarding if ideas and thinkers are studied through interpretative lenses.'<sup>40</sup> And it is such an analysis that allows us to choose between the argumentative traditions and closure of ideas.

The arguments right from the first meeting between the two leaders culminated in what is famously known as 'Poona – Pact'. The echoes and trajectories of the whole pact still remains relevant because, its essence was not only included in free India's constitution but also that Indian elections since 1951-52 has been conducted on its basis, with reserved seats for Depressed classes (Dalits). The Pact

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<sup>38</sup> Keer, Dhananjay, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 2015, p.167.

<sup>39</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.64

<sup>40</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. "Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

also remains important in the course of Gandhi – Ambedkar debate, as historical judgements are made on the two personalities with this particular episode. It is this episode that allows Arun Shourie to pass the judgement that – Ambedkar wanted to collaborate with colonial power<sup>41</sup> or that he was a British stooge. In a similar way it is this very episode that has led to categorise Gandhi as a Brahminical, casteist agent as recently categorised by Arundhati Roy. Gandhi, in her view, had remained a stumbling block for the emancipation of Dalits and is even held guilty by her for wanting to perpetuate Brahminical hegemony.<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding these judgements based on particular phase of the two leaders, the whole discourse of their incessant struggle not only falsify these judgements but remains as an anti – intellectual strategies and precisely leads to the denial of history.

History tells us that the second Round Table Conference created a deadlock on the constitutional arrangements towards the depressed class as the views of Gandhi and Ambedkar remained irreconcilable. Ambedkar was of the view that if the Empire can provide separate electorates to Muslims, Sikhs and Anglo Indians why not to the Depressed classes? Gandhi, meanwhile, not only claimed himself as the leader of the untouchables and the whole of the Hindu community and held out against separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar’s demand for separate electorates was backed many delegates in London, most of them were backed by the Empire. Gandhi therein threatened that if separate electorates were on the cards he might fast unto death.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Shourie, Arun. *Worshipping False Gods*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Arundhati Roy’s introduction to *Annihilation of Caste*; Ambedkar, B.R... *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Nvayana, New Delhi, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 108.

The failure of Round Table Conference was rejoiced by the colonial mandarins. In the process they hoped that they were successful in creating fissures and fault lines in Hindu community, which will not only scuttle the political uprisings, but also slow down the demand for constitutional progress. The new viceroy Lord Willingdon belonged to the school of colonial masters who deeply thought that, Indians were incapable of ruling by themselves.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an old audience of Raj. He lived both in England and South Africa – which has unveiled him the '*Janus face*' of the benevolent colonial empire. He deeply understood the dynamics of '*Divide et imperia*' of Raj. But at the Round Table Conference he was unable to grasp the epistemological understanding that was present in Ambedkar's argument. But, slowly he realised that his moral authority and political authority was rightfully challenged by Ambedkar. Gandhi had told Indian students at Oxford, that, 'he had the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter'.<sup>44</sup> Ambedkar's criticisms rendered Gandhi's claims more and more problematic.

As soon as Gandhi returned to India, the uneasiness on his workings and thought processes were visible. He met a spiritual leader Meher Baba in Mani Bhavan. On hearing that he was on his way to Nasik, the town that Ambedkar often visited, Gandhi asked that the two of them should meet and discuss issues of representation. The secretaries' recorded the meetings and Gandhi asked Meher Baba:

I know you can influence the Depressed classes as you have been working for their uplift. Dr. Ambedkar personally is a very considerate and reasonable, and if a personality like you can persuade him to view the question of depressed classes from a broader outlook of national unity and the consequent moral and spiritual strength accruing the reform, I am sure he would

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<sup>44</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 405.

accept the joint electorates, and save seventy millions of our brethren from drifting away from the religious fold for paltry political gain at the cost of national disintegration. I am sure Ambedkar will listen to you.’

‘I will do my best’, answered Meher Baba.<sup>45</sup>

There is no record of the Baba following up with this. But the whole statement of Gandhi highlights the concern, ideas and most importantly his views on the depressed classes and their emancipation; which was perhaps even not recorded during the Round Table Conference. Gandhi, by this statement, not only expresses his full support for spiritual and moral reform but also talks about joint electorates; which became the heart of Poona – Pact. Gandhi, till this time, was more concerned about political unity and that separate electorates will disunite the seventy million people just like the previous manoeuvres of Raj have divided Hindus- Muslims. Gandhi thought separation of the depressed classes is nothing, but, a tool to puncture the idea of nation. The Empire announced the Ramsay MC Donald Communal Award in September 1932 and Gandhi, true to his words against any political separation of Hindus went on a fast, which Payerlal calls the ‘Epic Fast’.<sup>46</sup>

Gandhian Scholars view the fast as a heroic act that has changed the hearts of Hindus. Bikhu Parekh has argued the fast was an instance showing both the conscious morality and political standpoint of Gandhi. Parekh compares Gandhi’s fast as similar to the ‘crucifixion’ of Christ<sup>47</sup> and on the political strategy, he writes:

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<sup>45</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928.*, Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 424.

<sup>46</sup>Pyarelal. *The Epic Fast.* Navjivan Publishing House, Ahemdabad, 1932. Retrieved From: [https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/epic\\_fast.pdf](https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/epic_fast.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. “*The Logic Behind Gandhi’s Fast Unto Death (1932)*”. *Sikkim University National Seminar paper*, 2014, unpublished.

Political calculations were not far from Gandhi mind either, for separate electorate would have reduced the numerical strength of the Hindu majority, encouraged minority alliances against it, and fragmented the country yet further. Gandhi did not mind reserved seats for the untouchables, for which all including the caste Hindus were able to vote, but he could not countenance separate electorates for them.<sup>48</sup>

However, Gandhi's comrades in the Indian National Congress were not impressed by his act of fast unto death. Nehru and Patel visualised it as diversion from the goal of political independence. Similarly, Marxists like E.M.S Namboodiripad thought the same way as did Nehru and Patel; and the conservatives within and outside the Congress were not in tune with Gandhi's decision.<sup>49</sup> But Gandhi, who saw the spark in Ambedkar and the way the Raj delivered the Communal Award realised that it warranted a response and the fast was his response.

If Gandhi was an old audience of Raj, Ambedkar holds the same experiences in context to congress and their work for untouchables. Babasaheb knew the inner and outer domain of Congress. And through his classic text *Annihilation of caste*, he showcases that he remained a serious scholar of Congress's history and its workings. It is necessary to note here that Ambedkar remains the only Indian politician whom Gandhi contested by resorting to a fast.<sup>50</sup> Ambedkar not only challenged the whole homogenising project of Gandhi and Congress, but also made them realise that political unity cannot sustain if social and economic inequalities were overlooked. Here, Ambedkar through his outstanding manoeuvres challenges the dichotomy between the inner and outer domain of social and political leaders of his times. However, as Upendra Baxi writes, 'In 1932 Gandhi gambled on Ambedkar's self-

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<sup>48</sup> Parekh, Bikhu. *Gandhi*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 171 – 173.

<sup>50</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.65

restraint and won.<sup>51</sup> Ambedkar knew that the politics and power dynamics are related to social and economic upliftment of the depressed classes, and those who are deeply vaccinated by the graded inequalities of caste system will turn out to be just another master. The political and social journey of Ambedkar defines that he was not only fighting for dignity, but also for self- respect, which without political power remains a myth. This, he spelt out, in his memorandum to Southborough Committee where he stated:

With the growth of Political agitation, the agitation for social reform has subsidised and has even vanished....The future has few things in store. The growth of education if it is confined into one class, will not necessarily lead to liberalism. It may lead to the justification and conversation of class interest; and instead of creating the liberators of the downtrodden; it may create champions of the past and the supporters to f the status quo. Isn't this the effect of education so far? That it will take a new course in future citreous paribus, there is no ground to believe. Therefore, instead of leaving the untouchables at the mercy of higher castes, the wiser policy would be to give power to the untouchables themselves who are anxious, not like others, to usurp power but only to assert their natural place in society.<sup>52</sup>

Ambedkar firmly believed that the democracy or process of democratization is not just confined to a form of government and the state apparatus; instead, he believed that it embraces social governance, and hence he did not want bureaucracy to be replaced by caste oligarchies.<sup>53</sup>

It is not only the Congress, Communists or Sanatanists – that attacked Ambedkar's radicalism and his stand on separate electorates, but also Depressed

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<sup>51</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability.*, Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.65

<sup>52</sup>Ambedkar, B.R..*Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Vol. 1, p.292. Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

<sup>53</sup>Ambedkar, B.R..*Dr Babashaeb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Vol. 2, p.368. Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_02.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_02.pdf)



Classes leaders from South India, M.C. Rajah, saw separate electorates as suicidal.<sup>54</sup> But Ambedkar since his early years of career had no difficulties in being alone or exceptional.<sup>55</sup> If experiences made Gandhi to fight for the cause of untouchability; birth and circumstances made Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar a genuine political and social reformer. It was due to these experiences he was radical and bitter, but his scholastic and legalistic understanding turned that bitterness and radicalism into rationality; which even Mahatma of Indian politics was unable to ignore and went on a fast.

The British Government response to Gandhi's fast was to declare that the solution to the problems involving the representation of the Depressed Classes had to be settled within the Hindu Community. Consequently, writes Zelliott that, 'the man whose leadership of depressed classes was challenged by Gandhi in London - became the arbiter of Gandhi's fate'.<sup>56</sup> The Colonial Raj, meanwhile, had recognised Ambedkar as a leader by making him as one of the representatives of the Indian people at the Round Table Conferences. He too duly placed himself against Gandhi and as Gandhi started his fast; the importance of Ambedkar as a leader for the oppressed now got a national zeal and transformation. Although, Ambedkar did not have a mirror idea of representation; but he has to let go the claim of separate

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<sup>54</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 427.

<sup>55</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 435.

<sup>56</sup>Zelliott, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001, P.167

electorates in front of Gandhi. As Dhanjay Keer points out, ‘Gandhi has hurled most dangerous and fatal weapon at him (Ambedkar)’.<sup>57</sup>

As the fast began, Ambedkar was at the centre stage of Indian politics. For Ambedkar Gandhi’s fast not only presented an ‘ambivalent Gandhi’ to him, but the whole purpose remained as patronizing and robbing the untouchables of their agencies. Meanwhile, most leaders began rallying behind Gandhi during the fast and this included even the depressed classes’ leaders. Ramchandra Guha writes of the impact of this on Ambedkar, in following words:

‘He felt far more isolated than ever before. And perhaps he felt coerced as well’.<sup>58</sup>

Ambedkar felt the pressure with each passing day of Gandhi’s fast and the thought of living with the burden of Gandhi’s death on his head and on his conscience, Ambedkar agreed to leaders like Tej Bhadur Sapru, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Rajagopalachari and some others. On 24<sup>th</sup> September, the Poona Pact was signed and Ambedkar was satisfied with the course taken by Mahatma and company.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September a meeting was held at the Indian Merchants Chambers, Speeches were made by the prominent leaders like Malaviya, Sapru, Rajagopalachari, and M.C Rajah and Ambedkar said:

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 the 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 safeguards the interests of the community which in my humble way I was trying to do... I am happy to be able to say that it has become (possible) through the co –operation of all of us to find a solution so as to save the life of Mahatma and at the same time consistent with such protection as is necessary

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<sup>57</sup>Keer, Dhananjay, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 2015, p.206.

<sup>58</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 436.

for the interests of the depressed classes in the future. I think in all these negotiations a large part of the credit must be attributed to Mahatma Gandhi himself. I must confess that I was surprised, immensely surprised, when I met him that there was so much in common between him and me. (Cheers).<sup>59</sup>

Under the Poona – pact, leaders agreed for a separate primary election and a substantial increase in the number of seats reserved for the untouchables – from seventy eight to one hundred and forty eight. It was in tune with Ambedkar’s demand for adequate representation of the depressed classes. Contemporary polemics and politics of today criticises the whole pact in order to negate historicity of Gandhi or Ambedkar is being criticised for becoming an anathema for political freedom. But it was Gandhi’s observance that made the cause and expositions’ of Ambedkar important in the realm of Indian history and it was Ambedkar’s grit and determination to challenge the Gandhi with full rationality; which allowed Mahatma to ponder upon ground realities. In his book, Ambedkar wrote thirteen years later after the fast and Poona Pact (*‘What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables’*),<sup>60</sup> he attacked Gandhi’s act of resorting to the fast that led to pact but not the pact as such. He, in fact called the terms of the pact a victory.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, Ambedkar took part in the Third Round Table Conference and hence the Pact was duly settled and legitimised through the India Act of 1935.

The bonhomie between Ambedkar and Gandhi lasted not for long. Gandhi through his Harijan Sevak Sangh and Ant- Untouchability tour (as discussed in chapter 3), realised the gravity of the situation and workings of his own party men and

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<sup>59</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 439.

<sup>60</sup> Ambedkar, B.R..*What Congress and M.K. Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*. Treasure of Ambedkar Series 4, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2017

<sup>61</sup>Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 111.

their behavioural pattern. The tragedy, from Gandhi's point of view is that his colleagues in the national movement either did not understand his concern with untouchability or even actively deplored it.<sup>62</sup> And conservatives thought that he was moving very fast and threat to India's traditions. Notwithstanding, Gandhi's stand on Untouchability, Ambedkar thought Gandhi was moving very slowly.<sup>63</sup> Ambedkar was a steadfast constitutionalist and wanted results in the process of India's democratisation. He was deeply dismayed and disappointed by the workings and ideas of Congress vis- a - vis - Mohandas Kramchand Gandhi. Like Gandhi, the travesty with Ambedkar was that nobody understood the idea of freedom and democracy beyond its prime political manifestations. The Congress, as an organisation, thought he was too radical and being played into the hands of the colonial rulers, while the other leaders of the depressed classes thought he went very fast.

The fact however is that the contours of the Gandhi – Ambedkar did not remain restricted to the issue of representation and reserved seats and it went beyond the scope of the Poona pact, from where it began. If Gandhi through his anti – untouchability programme realised the magnitude of the problem, Ambedkar's bonhomie with Gandhi and Congress was diluted for several reasons. Ambedkar realised that graded inequality in its totality had to be targeted with more force, in order to place principles of pact on literal terms. The turbulent 1930s also provoked a larger debate on the theoretical principles that lay in understanding the structure of casteism. This took the shape of a battle between tradition and modernity. Whether caste should go in toto or its principles of Varnashrmadhharma should remain was the

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<sup>62</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *An Anthropologist Among Marxists and Other Essay.*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p.93.

<sup>63</sup>Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability.* Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.71.

issue, which brought the two confronting leaders against each other in the public domain or at the centre stage of nationalistic politics. Both wanted to alter the social fabric, preferred social justice to be foregrounded in the struggle for liberation; but their trajectories went parallel with each other. Themes like annihilation of caste, tradition versus modernity, religion and self – respect versus self – purification, dominated the next phase of their debate. And this continued till their last breath. The following section will analyse these discourses of their larger and transformative debate.

## **Section 2**

### **The Sociology of Caste in the Gandhi – Ambedkar debate**

Gandhi was aware that his victory at Poona against Ambedkar was based on a shaky ground. The anti – untouchability campaign tour he undertook soon after, is the evidence that - he saw some glimpses of truths in Ambedkar’s arguments. Ambedkar too realised that the pact was just eyewash. He cherished the idea of coming closer to Gandhi on the representation of the depressed classes, but soon realised that the caste Hindu’s mind was also irrational. He saw that the institution of caste has overpowered human reason. Much before the famous Yeola Conference and Ambedkar leading the en-masse conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar had told Gandhi that, he will leave the Hindu fold. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1933 Ambedkar went to Yervada jail to meet Gandhi. The conversation is recorded by Mahadev Desai and it was related to Ranga Iyer’s two bills on Temple entry.<sup>64</sup> Although the prospects of the Bill becoming law were discussed; the two exchanged their views on the Poona pact, about Hindu Religion

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<sup>64</sup> Ambedkar, B. R.. *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*. Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2017, p. 107.

and the issue of emancipation. The records show that issues between the two leaders remained unresolved and their thought processes remained different. Ambedkar went ahead and said:

. . . We want our social status raised in the eyes of the savarna Hindus. There is another point of view also. The object of this effort could be that you want the depressed classes to be retained in the Hindu religion, in which case I am inclined to believe that it is not sufficient in the present awakened state of the depressed classes. . . . If I call myself a Hindu I am obliged to accept that by birth I belong to a low caste. Hence, I think I must ask the Hindus to show me some sacred authority which would rule out this feeling of lowliness. If it cannot be I should say goodbye to Hinduism. . . . I am not going to be satisfied with measures which would merely bring some relief. . . . I don't want to be crushed by your charity.<sup>65</sup>

Gandhi responded to this saying: 'In accepting the terms of the pact you (Ambedkar) have justified your position of being Hindu', to which Ambedkar's retort was: 'I have accepted only the political aspect it'.<sup>66</sup>

The conversation, recorded, by Mahadev Desai becomes important because - these views on one hand suggest that, the two still followed not only the different trajectories, but also in what ways they want to follow their future discourse. Hindu religion provided legitimacy to the structure of caste (texts and traditions) and hence for Ambedkar it had to be tested upon with the tools of reason and human agency; and where they fail, principles ought to be rejected in totality. But for Gandhi, the history and course of Indian civilization have survived under the light of religion, texts and traditions, and although can be tested and should be tested under the light of reason, because of little dogmatism here and there, a new church cannot take over the old one.

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<sup>65</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Vol. 59 p.509. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL059.PDF>

<sup>66</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Vol. 59 p.509. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL059.PDF>

It was in this meeting that Gandhi asked Ambedkar for a message to be published in his new mouthpiece *Harijan*. Ambedkar's message was published on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1933 (Appendix 2). The message was an outward critic of the entire edifice of caste and this turned out to be the start of a new course of acrimonious debate between the two leaders. This time, however, the debate was not around the political representation, but around annihilation of caste and therein the institution of Varnashramadharma and most prominently of Hindu religion itself. Ambedkar's message remains important because it served as a roadmap for their future debate as well as the foundation of the Dalit movement (post-colonial also) in India.<sup>67</sup>

Ambedkar wrote:

The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of caste system. Nothing can help to save Hinduism...except the purging of Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma'.<sup>68</sup>

Ambedkar, through his message this time challenged the epistemological foundation of Gandhi's on Casteism. Gandhi firmly believed in his idealisation of Varnashramadharma or the caste structure and wanted to challenge modernity through this ideal structure. The whole message unnerved Gandhi. For Gandhi, untouchability was excrescence and had to be removed, but, that did not amount to annihilation of caste altogether. Gandhi responded to Ambedkar and concluded his counter with a message to all reformers to come on (as they believed), on a common platform for the eradication of untouchability and firmly believed that at the end they will find

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<sup>67</sup>Nagraj, D.R.. *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 12. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

<sup>68</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Harijan*. Aryabhushan Press, Poona, 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1933. pp.1- 08. Retrieved From: <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/journals-by-gandhiji/harijan> Date: 06/11/2017

nothing ‘ill’ against the idea of Varnashramadharma; this message was directed to Ambedkar too.<sup>69</sup>

The contesting arguments, immediately in the aftermath of the pact, eroded the little hope which Ambedkar still had in Gandhi.<sup>70</sup> He soon charted his own independent path through different political and social strategies. And although Gandhi was not in tune with Ambedkar’s radicalism - the zeal with which Gandhi channelized his roadmap for untouchability and caste; shows that his priorities saw a revision. It was marked by an intention to let politics take the backseat and foreground social reform as the priority.<sup>71</sup>

## **Section 2.1**

### **Religion and Annihilation of Caste: Tradition versus Modernity**

The socio- political movements in colonial India, which transformed into the nationalist project and the idea of carving out a nation, was also related to the process of understanding the self and the inner domain. The process was started in order to change the dynamics of outer the domain when modernity and western ideas, under the chains of colonialism, not only questioned the inner domain, but, through the orientalist discourse provided legitimatisation to the argument of the white man’s burden. Briefly discussed in the first chapter, these movements created two parallel

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<sup>69</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 451

<sup>70</sup>Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.71

<sup>71</sup>Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*. Penguin Random House India, Gurgaon, 2018, p. 456



streams of thoughts - the modernist and critical traditionalist<sup>72</sup>. Social reformers and political leaders deployed their different visions of modernity vis –a –vis the traditions and modern nation. Further Bikhu Parekh writes, ‘ in addition to the modernist and critical traditionalist, other forms of discourse sprang up, of which was developed by Dalits and more generally by the long oppressed lower castes - was the most vocal and articulate’.<sup>73</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, undoubtedly represent himself as the most promising thinker and leader of Dalit discourse. These heterogeneous narratives or visions in turn, have enriched the knowledge and the argumentational tradition of the Indian subcontinent and this certainly sustains the nation and its polity to this day.

The varied thoughts were complex and cannot be quarantined into neat pigeon holes.<sup>74</sup> Ambedkar and Gandhi also belonged to this very legacy, their approach remains different because they nationalised the awakening and multiple sides of exclusion. To a certain extent, they tried and to some extent, succeeded in bridging the gaps between the inner and the outer domains. Their approach to social and political reforms redefined the idea of Indian nationalism and critically pointed out that a nationalist project will remain unfinished without *Swaraj* and Social Endosmosis.

Thus, the holistic debate, and engagement, that was started for political representation at Round Table Conferences led to the emergence of a new phase. This phase revolved around the ‘sociology of caste’ and both, Ambedkar and Gandhi,

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<sup>72</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 24

<sup>73</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 26.

<sup>74</sup>Rodrigues, Valerian. “Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

proposed different trajectories for the emancipation of the depressed classes. And this phase witnessed the most achromatic and straight-forward debate between the two. Both differed in their understanding of modernity, assessing traditions, proposing options for India and world.<sup>75</sup>

Both went back to the texts and traditions and duly provided their subjective understanding towards it. If Gandhi went ahead and said, ‘Dr. Ambedkar is a Challenge to Hinduism’.<sup>76</sup> Ambedkar’s response was couched in a similar tone and he responded by saying that, ‘He (Gandhi) is the worst enemy of Hindus’.<sup>77</sup>

Although, Gandhi in November 1935, came around to declare that ‘Caste *Has to Go*’; it is necessary to perceive that this radical shift evolved over time. Ambedkar, meanwhile, published an undelivered lecture of his, in 1936, titled as ‘*Annihilation of Caste*’.<sup>78</sup> Ambedkar prepared this lecture for reformist group ‘*Jat Pat Todak Mandal*’ of Lahore. As the address proved to be too radical for the audience it was cancelled by the Mandal group. Ambedkar then published the whole lecture at his own cost. The pages of *Harijan*, which started with a dialogic engagement with its first issue, between Mahatma and Doctor - was again filled up with the Gandhi’s response to Ambedkar’s radical view and Ambedkar’s response to Mahatma of Indian politics.

The debate around the text *Annihilation of Caste* remains vital to our understanding of the two leaders and their expositions on caste. These expositions did

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<sup>75</sup>Rodrigues, Valerian. “Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

<sup>76</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. *Samyak Prakashan*, New Delhi, 2013, p.83

<sup>77</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*, *Samyak Prakashan*, New Delhi, 2013, p.100.

<sup>78</sup> This text was the basis of a recent annotated re-print with a long preface by Arundhati Roy and turned into an occasion to revive the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar in our own times and with connotations of the times.

not remain rigid but changed with their experiences and mobility of ideas. If Gandhi accepted the materialistic features of casteism sans his idealisation, Ambedkar, the pragmatic philosopher found his salvation in Indian traditions and religion, which he had out rightly rejected in his text *Annihilation of caste*.

Mohandas Kramchand Gandhi time and again criticised the manifestation related to untouchability and also brought it up as a national concern. But for Gandhi the problem itself is basically a religious and spiritual matter and hence, it is related to self and it is the duty of ‘collective Hindu self’ to purge this evil out. Gandhi always connected caste and untouchability to the religious domain of the Hindu self and remained quite ambivalent on his stand on caste and Varna. Suhas Palshikar writes, ‘Gandhi does not have a theory of the caste system. He satisfies himself by arguing that caste is a distortion of the Varna system, the latter a pure form and former degeneration’.<sup>79</sup> The roots to Gandhi’s idealisation of Varnashramadharma (also his views on caste and its beneficial aspects, in early days) can be traced in his classic text *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi who conceptualised his experiences of England and South Africa in this text was very critical of how modern civilisation has marked its trajectory; which is defined by self-destruction. For Gandhi, ‘it was civilisation by only in name. Under it, nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day’.<sup>80</sup> Gandhi was in search of hope and a civilisation that can heal the humanity, which was suffering from the disease of *‘modern satanic civilization’*. Gandhi

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<sup>79</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. “*Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

<sup>80</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K.Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*, Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip. (ed.),. Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2010, p.29.

believed that civilisation was not an incurable disease.<sup>81</sup> For Gandhi, immorality in the Satanist modern civilisation can be cured by the options proposed by India. Raghvan Iyer writes, ‘Gandhi’s profound discontent led him to a daringly sanguine view of how politics may be purified, how absolute standards may be upheld in all human relationships and how individual conscience may be combined with the heroism of society’.<sup>82</sup>

The whole exposition of Gandhi of Varnashramadharma, hence have its roots in his search for an ‘alternate strategy’ to cure and propose options for the world afflicted by the chains of modernity. It was because of this perception that Gandhi, even while accepting that there were evils at regulative level of caste and Varna institutions, but, supported with full vigour its constitutive aspects. Ironically, he ignored the bedrock for regulative phenomenon.

Gandhi throughout his life moved from truth to truth and never hesitated to let his views evolve and detested them being frozen in time. This also culminates into the view possession of absolute truth cannot become a reality. If there are serious disagreements, reason is an aid to know why each party saw truth differently.<sup>83</sup> Gandhi’s expositions emanated from such truth which he himself took all liberty to test through his experiments. His views on caste or Varna (which he often used interchangeably) and untouchability; emanated from his own reason and experiments. But that does not resemble the whole as a proponent as absolute truth and his views

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<sup>81</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *M.K.Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*, Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip. (ed.),. Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2010, p.33.

<sup>82</sup> Iyer, Raghavan..*The Moral and Political Thought of Gandhi*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p.36.

<sup>83</sup>Rodrigues, Valerian. “*Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

were challenged by the alternate truth, practicality presented by his conscience keeper Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.

Gandhi duly visited the traditional doctrines and made them as an alternative options and bearers to interdependence, responsibility and hence Swaraj. Gandhi's attitudes towards traditions were ambivalent.<sup>84</sup> Their remains both noble and ignoble facets of caste reformation programmes. Gandhi could deeply respond to the spiritual beauty of the revolt (removal of untouchability), but recoiled utter embarrassment when faced with the material form (degradation emanated from Varnashramadharma that provided structures of graded inequalities and hatred).<sup>85</sup> Gandhi adhered to a partial truth on caste and was morally wrong on his exposition towards caste.

Ambedkar, meanwhile, had worked on the sociology of caste and this was evident in his paper, *Castes in India*, presented in a seminar at Columbia University. In *Annihilation of Caste*, years later, Ambedkar combined his sociological understanding with history, politics and future related to the social reform movements, to present what Swaraj meant for the depressed classes. It had the polemic zeal combined with a scholarly rigour and legalistic élan. Ambedkar not only defined and challenged the politics of the day, but, also opined that caste had got its theological legitimisation from Hindu religion and texts; hence both need to be separated. Ambedkar pointed out that social emancipation should precede the political one and caste has to go for that. He thus argued that social reformers must delegitimize and destroy shastras, from which caste is virtually imposed something as

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<sup>84</sup> Rodrigues, Valerian. "Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

<sup>85</sup> Nagraj, D.R..*The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 5. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet> . 05/09/2015.

a metaphysical reality. With any standards, arguments presented by Ambedkar remain quite impressive.

Apart from his intellect and statesmanship, Ambedkar could be seen constantly changing, or to be use a better world evolving.<sup>86</sup> If Gandhi grew from truth to truth in the light of his experiments; Ambedkar never shied away from growing in light of reason. When facts warranted Babasaheb never hesitated to change. It is this idea to place reason, intellect, facts and truth on forefront that not only united Gandhi and Ambedkar; but also provided space and legitimacy for their argumentational traditions. Isolation and calcification of expositions were not in their socio-political dictionary of justice and equality. It started with the idea to challenge manifest injustices around them and ended in that note only.

Meanwhile, Gandhi did not miss the text (Annihilation of Caste) and responded to Ambedkar in *Harijan*. Gandhi initiated the discussion. He not only declared Ambedkar a challenge to Hinduism, but went ahead and wrote:

No Hindu who prizes his faith above life itself can afford to underrate the importance of this indictment. Dr Ambedkar is not alone in his disgust. He is its most uncompromising exponent and one of the ablest among them. Thank god, in the front rank of the leaders he is singularly alone and as yet but the representative of very small minority.<sup>87</sup>

Gandhi response to Ambedkar's text came in two sessions in *Harijan* pages. The next session of Gandhi's writings connected reason and acceptance to the conscience (as basic validity to and for text and traditions) and vehemently criticised Ambedkar's approach towards it. But the basic moot point revolved around Varna and its relationship to religion and traditions. Because of this moot point Ambedkar's

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<sup>86</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2018, p. 141.

<sup>87</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 83

response to Gandhi became more personal. Gandhi defined his standpoints in the following words:

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know it's harmful to both spiritual and national growth. Varnaashrama are the institutions which has nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It follows there is no calling too low and none too high.....Arrogation of superior status by and of a Varna over another is denial of law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism contained in its enunciation of one and only God truth and its bold acceptance of Ahimsa as the law of human faith).<sup>88</sup>

Mahatma of Indian politics, who was a human too showed a sheer ignorance and dichotomies in his views. Gandhi was wrong in his expositions related to casteism while Ambedkar responded with full scholastic and personal remarks. He made Gandhi a 'prisoner of his own expositions'. Rajmohan Gandhi writes: 'Ambedkar easily picked holes in Gandhi's defence of Varna'.<sup>89</sup> However, Rajmohan Gandhi denies the historical sense prevalent in the debate itself to rest his case on a premise that Gandhi was morally on a wrong footing in his debate with Ambedkar.

Perhaps, no one had captured and criticised Gandhi in a way that Rammanohar Lohia did. Lohia, who had called himself an outcaste Gandhi among Gandhians<sup>90</sup>, wrote:

Gandhiji in his dislike of dehumanising tendencies of Modern civilization became somewhat soft towards the equally dangerous structures of caste system.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p.84

<sup>89</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. 115.

<sup>90</sup> Yadav, Yogendra. "Lohia Questioned Nehru's Expenditure : Yogendra Yadav". *The Quint*, October 12, 2017. Retrived From: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSCZywwuX\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSCZywwuX_g) Date: 12/10/2017.

Historically, it was Gandhi who made untouchability a national concern, but the ingredients of the actual social revolution and radicalism to that concern was infused by Ambedkar. Ambedkar's role, writes Ramchandra Guha, 'had far a greater impact on Gandhi than he was willing to acknowledge'.<sup>92</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to point out that the exposition of Ambedkar on the sociology of caste did the same thing on Gandhi what Raychandbhai's expositions of religion did to him in his early life. Gandhi, in response to the Classic text *Annihilation of Caste*, wrote, 'whatever label he wears in future, Dr Ambedkar is not the man to allow himself to be forgotten'.<sup>93</sup> The Mahatma's prophecy was absolutely right and was turned into reality by himself. Although Gandhi wrote these in criticism of Ambedkar, but, himself pushed Nehru and Patel to include Ambedkar in India's first cabinet. Ambedkar went on to become the architect of India's constitution and whose name will never be forgotten in history.

*Annihilation of caste* is not just a text; it is a living document. It can be compared to Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*. The insights presented by Ambedkar in the text not only hold an historical importance, it also remains valid and inspiring for contemporary times. Christophe Jaffrelot opines, 'Ambedkar, the statesman and a man of action has often concealed Ambedkar the reflective thinker, which is unfortunate because his many publications are those of a true intellectual'.<sup>94</sup>

Ambedkar's views on the scriptures and traditions were quite different from Gandhi. He did not romanticise the traditions. It is because in spite of his capabilities

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<sup>91</sup>Nagraj, D.R..*The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*. South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 12. . Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015

<sup>92</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *Gandhi: The Years That Changed The World: 1914 -1928*, Penguin Random House India. Gurgaon, 2018, p. 417

<sup>93</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 82.

<sup>94</sup> Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.6



and education, he was unable to overcome the humiliations he faced by the caste system. For Gandhi, however, the search for an alternative to modern civilization, his experiences beyond Indian shores played an important part. In a similar manner if Ambedkar followed the path of anti – romanticism (towards traditions), pro – mechanistic and pro – enlightenment modernism - his personal experience on Indian and foreign soil itself played an important part.

Ambedkar shares his horrific experience in his text '*Waiting for Visa*', which reflect that no matter how much he was educated and progressive, he remained an untouchable. Having faced humiliation at a Baroda shelter home just because of his caste, he writes, 'My five years of staying in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable, and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem for himself and to others'.<sup>95</sup> Ambedkar was never allowed to feel at home in his homeland. Thus, for Ambedkar, the modern society was a saviour and he wanted to establish as one such society here based on the ideals of French Revolution. He was a class by himself, plainly destined for leadership.<sup>96</sup> And the struggles and the exclusion he faced at home made Ambedkar more inclined to western ideals and modernity.

Ambedkar, thus, was inspired by the western enlightenment paradigm. He clearly saw modernity from different historical epochs and rested his views on reason and human centric arguments. Ambedkar connected this idea of reason to assert the political and social rights of the depressed and connected the whole idea of liberty, equality and fraternity to self – respect and dignity. For the doctor, ideas that are not

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<sup>95</sup> Yusufji, Salim (ed.). *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*. Navayana, New Delhi, 2017, p.156.

<sup>96</sup> Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*. Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2011, p.208.

and cannot be tested on the grounds of reason are not tenable and had to be rejected. Ambedkar defined his ideal society and mode of doing politics on the basis of the trinity presented by French Revolution. Even the cultural contestations had to be tested on its parameters and if it remains unable to pass such test it has to be discarded. They constitute the criteria to judge prevailing social relations (institutions) as well as lay down benchmarks for social practises in present (and also for future).<sup>97</sup> And as a result they create social endosmosis or fluidity, an essential ingredient for the nation to survive and progress. Ambedkar not only connected his ideas to the whole argument with casteism, but also declared Hindu society as myth<sup>98</sup> which has killed public spirit<sup>99</sup>. And has taken away from them the two most important weapons in the armoury of social reformer i.e., reason and morality.<sup>100</sup>

Ambedkar connected untouchability, caste and varna to the state of mind and religion. Although the workings and later writings of Ambedkar provide us with ample evidence that just like Gandhi's view on traditions, his knowledge on religion too evolved over time. But in his text he defined Hinduism not as a religion but a set of laws and legalised class – ethics.<sup>101</sup> And Varna or caste is duly legalised through these laws, hence not only the source of religion (Shastras), but also religion should be destroyed. He wrote:

Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of physical barrier. It means a notional change. Caste may be bad. Caste may lead to conduct so gross as to be called man's inhumanity to man. All the same, it must be recognised that Hindus observe caste not because they are inhuman or wrongheaded. They

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<sup>97</sup>Rodrigues, Valerian. "Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

<sup>98</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 41

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p.75.

observe caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe caste, but the shastras which teach them this religion of caste...the real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras.<sup>102</sup>

Gandhi left many facets in *Annihilation of Caste*, but challenged Ambedkar's view on Varna and religion. Gandhi firmly believed that parameters of Ambedkar to test religion were drastically wrong. Ambedkar in response accepted that he has no authority on the matter of religion. But have taken inspiration from Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak, who was a recognised authority on Sanskrit language and religion.<sup>103</sup>

The most paradoxical, ambivalent or dichotomous part in Ambedkar's own writing in response to Gandhi was the name of Tilak - as source of his understanding of traditions. In his main text of *Annihilation of Caste*, Bal Gangadhar Tilak represented the notion of conservatism and he explained how Tilak dynamically played an important role in the demise of Social Conference (organisation that came up with Congress to work for social reforms).<sup>104</sup> Yet, he uses Tilak's views to pass final judgements on the Hindu religion. It was a sheer ignorance on Ambedkar's part and till today this particular ignorance is overlooked by his camp followers and even by several historians. Academically the idea of Gandhi on Caste and Varna was wrong. But Gandhi was right in pointing out that the scale of Ambedkar to measure Hindu texts and traditions in itself represent the biggest fallacy.

But morally, practically and theoretically – Ambedkar's views on caste or Varna were to the point and Gandhi was captured in his own words; when Ambedkar

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<sup>102</sup>Ambedkar, *B.R. Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 65.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.* 89

<sup>104</sup>Ambedkar, *B.R. Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 24-32.

adopted a personal polemical tone in challenging Gandhi. In one place he criticised the profession of Gandhi, which he took in spite of his idealisation of Varna. In another, he criticised Gandhi of ‘the double role half saint and half politician’.<sup>105</sup> On Gandhi’s firm believe on Varna and his own praxis he went ahead and said, ‘he is not only guilty of terminological in exactitude, but he is causing confusion worst confounded’.<sup>106</sup> Before completing his response Ambedkar not only challenge the hollowness of the Mahatma but also his mode of doing politics, he wrote:

As a Mahatma, he may be trying to spiritualise politics. Whether he has succeeded in or not, politics have commercialised him. A politician must know that society cannot bear the whole truth, and that he must not speak the whole truth; if he is speaking the whole truth is bad for his politics. The reason why the Mahatma is always supporting caste and Varna is because he is afraid that if he opposed them he would lose his place in politics. Whatever may be the source of his confusion the mahatma must be told that he is deceiving himself, and also deceiving the people, by preaching caste under the name of Varna.<sup>107</sup>

Debate around Annihilation of caste which represents Ambedkar – Gandhi’s second major engagement of 1930’s, cannot be frozen into a watertight compartments for pass judgements on either of them. Neither, did the history has forgot Ambedkar, which Mahatma duly prophesied and nor the Mahatma lost his position in Indian politics; even though he changed his stance and came closer to Ambedkar’s version of truth. They evolved and transformed each other through their engagement and respective discourses. And history duly recorded it.

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<sup>105</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 42.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>107</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 98.

## Section 3

### Self-Purification and Self - Respect: Trajectories of Emancipation

As noted earlier, social reform movements, by and large, tried to strike a balance between traditions, modernity and reform. Hence, with all the diversification and objectification of traditions - several reformers applied their different trajectories; to purge out the evils that existed in the social fabric of India. As the principles of caste were interlinked and intertwined with the Hindu religion; the diverse facets of religion itself legitimised several reforms. Unlike the Abrahamic religions, Hinduism was not constructed around one 'Holy book' or word of 'one God'. This created myriad puzzles not only for the reformers but also for the masses. Social reformers searched for a universal order or regulation to propound an exact definition or codes to religion and social customs, and often placed their divergent views from the same source – the shastras and the Vedas.

The debate between the father of modern India Raja Rammohan Roy (one of the first reformer of modern India) and his adversaries like Radhakanta Deb and conservatives needs a close attention here. Both the groups were debating the *Sati Pratha*<sup>108</sup> based on Indian text and traditions; but one group was against the custom

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<sup>108</sup> Sati literally means 'a pure and virtuous woman'. Sati Pratha or tradition of widow burning at the funeral pyre of her husband has been a shameful social evil and an age old practice in Indian society. A widow was burned either with her tacit consent or most of the times forcefully by her in-laws after the death of her husband. This practice shows a dark and evil side of Hindu society, especially of ancient and medieval India.

The practice of Sati or self-immolation by the widow was associated with a kind of virtue. The 'virtue' of this practice was defined by a religious logic that it was inauspicious for widow to live after the death of her husband. A widow who agreed to self-immolate herself at the funeral pyre of her husband was considered to be very virtuous and attained to the status of Sati Mata or Sati Goddess.

and another supported it. And their sources were the same – texts and traditions of India. Orientalists faced the same dilemma too.

Gandhi (in his time and space) also felt equivocated between traditions and modernity and also saw a phase religious fermentation in his life several times; but came rationally out of it. And as he evolved he discarded several notions of texts and traditions. Ambedkar faced the same dilemma too. He in his text *Annihilation of caste* has cavilled against the religion of shastras and Vedas; but at the same time cited the importance of religion in society. He also provided measures to reform Hindu religion. Ambedkar's first solution was to replace the utter confusion created by loquacious texts and traditions and replace it with one standard book for Hindus.<sup>109</sup> But in the end despite of his lifelong protest against traditions - he adopted 'one' out of many versions of Buddhism and took all the liberty to interpret texts and traditions in his own way.

Apart from the dynamics of religion and traditions that defined the roots and legitimacy of caste hegemony and graded inequalities, the underlying universal factor was both oppressed and oppressors were deeply inflicted by the disease. The social reform movements and struggle for the rights and dues also required the changes in the mindset of the oppressor. It was a two way process because untouchability and casteism was not practised by the Avarnas, but by the Savarnas. And the social fluidity depended upon the acceptance not just outer adherence to laws. It remains a classic case of 'law versus morality' and still defines the contours raising caste violence in India. Suhas Palshikar in his study of Ambedkar – Gandhi discourse aptly

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<sup>109</sup> Ambedkar, *B.R. Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 76.

captures the dynamics and opines, ‘both Gandhi and Ambedkar must have been aware of the reality that caste could not be destroyed with only weapon’.<sup>110</sup>

One of the major differences that aroused in the post Poona – Pact years between Gandhi and Ambedkar was in relation to Gandhi’s Anti -untouchability league or Harijan Sevak Sangh. At the outset Ambedkar professed interest in Gandhi’s Anti untouchability league.<sup>111</sup> But the differences arose on the issue that who should regulate it - upper castes or lower Avarna castes. For Gandhi the organisation should be regulated by upper caste people, who all continue to remain the pertinent sinner and should purify them. Ambedkar and contemporary Dalit scholars call the whole idea as a paternalistic one. So do the Ambedkarites. Gail Omvedt points out that, ‘Gandhi’s entire approach was paternalistic, as perhaps to be expected of caste Hindu reformism’.<sup>112</sup>

But apart from the criticism, Gandhi throughout his life believed that it was only through self – purification that roots of casteism can go. For Gandhi, caste and untouchability is the problem of self and it was his take off point. Mahatma then transformed it into the idea of collective Hindu self. He saw the movement to eradicate untouchability as a sacred ritual of self – purification.<sup>113</sup> The trajectory of self-purification remained constant in Gandhi’s political and social career, even if he changed his views on caste and Varna. On 26<sup>th</sup> December 1924 in his mouth piece *Young India* he wrote, ‘to remove untouchability is a penance that caste Hindus owe

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<sup>110</sup>Palshikar, Suhas. “*Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation*”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

<sup>111</sup>Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Analysing and Fighting Caste: Dr Ambedkar and Untouchability*. Permanent Black, London, 2016, p.69

<sup>112</sup>Omvedt, Gail. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India*. Penguin Books, London, 2008, p. 52.

<sup>113</sup>Nagraj, D.R..*The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement in India*, South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 10. Retrieved from: <https://archive.org/details/TheFlamingFeet>. 05/09/2015.

to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of untouchables but of superior castes'.<sup>114</sup> This was the time when the exposition of Gandhi was not against casteism in totality. But he retained similar perceptions till his last breath on the issue. After discarding the idea of caste altogether, on September 23, 1939, Gandhi wrote:

Untouchability will not be removed by the force even of law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against god and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion, i.e., purification, of Hindu heart.<sup>115</sup>

Gandhi firmly believed that what caste has done is that it has created a false consciousness of purity and pollution and both Savarnas and Avarnas are victimized by it. Gandhi was a student modern law and has practised the profession in South Africa; he was not against the apparatus of the state and recourse of the modern law. But in the context of casteism and age old fossilised traditions he knew the limitations of discipline. He knew in the case of caste justice is linked with and dependent upon conscience, soul – force, morality and behavioural pattern of masses.<sup>116</sup> Gandhi through his previous struggle from South Africa to Champaran to Civil Disobedience movements knew that - legitimisation of state laws can only be secured through the will and transformation of masses and in the case of caste – from the vantage point of both tormentor and tormented.

For Gandhi, the Indian philosophical concept of 'Dharma', which is closer to duties of self or soul rather than religion provides stability even to the modern state. Anthony J Parel, while defining different facets of Gandhi's Dharma, opined that:

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<sup>114</sup> Gandhi, M.K..*Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. Vol. 29 pp.481-83 Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL029.PDF>

<sup>115</sup> Maharana, Tapan. (ed)., *All are Equal in the Eyes of God: Selections from Mahatma Gandhi Writings*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1964.

<sup>116</sup> Kumar, Biplove.*Gandhi and Champaran Satyagraha: A conscious Idea of Justice*, Research Guru, Volume no. 12, September Issue, 2018, pp. 151-159.



The stability of social order depends on the sense of duty with which the members of society carried out their activities. In the sense of duty were guaranteed by the sources superior to human will, the stability of social order would be even greater. And Dharma had such guarantee. It was guaranteed by the principle that sustained the cosmic order itself.<sup>117</sup>

One should not connect the idea of Gandhi's Dharma with religion or supernatural theories. His idea evolved from the oneness of the soul that defined human existence. In his introduction to a biography of his spiritual preceptor Raychandbhai, Gandhi defines his actual meaning of dharma and from where it originates and what he meant by duty that emanates from Dharma. He wrote:

Dharma is a quality of the soul and is present, visibly or invisibly, in every human being. Through it we know the duty in human life and our true relation with other soul.<sup>118</sup>

It was through this idea of 'Dharma' and 'natural duties', from which the whole idea of Gandhi's soul force in Satyagraha, Ahimsa and soul purification emanated. Gandhi had rejected the ethic of caste and had replaced it with the ethic of rights and duties. And although he never negated the idea of state intervention and modern law, he saw its limitations very clearly.<sup>119</sup>

Unlike Gandhi, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was a steadfast constitutionalist who worked within the state and sought solutions to social problems with the aid of the state. He was a reflective modernist thinker and firmly believed that recourse of modern law can bring the change.<sup>120</sup> For Ambedkar caste system does not only represent the structural and cultural values or certain mindset, but underneath all lays

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<sup>117</sup> Parel, Anthony J. *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p.87

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.92

<sup>119</sup> Parel, Anthony J. *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.93-98.

<sup>120</sup> Palshikar, Suhas. Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

the system of power structure that defines inequality and graded divisions. Ambedkar believed that the caste mindedness has defeated morality and rationality in the Hindu masses and this mentality has to be changed through the idea of self – respect. Doctor held the view that - what depressed class needs is the constitutional support and protection to be assured and defeat the fear psychosis of the ages; not the continuity of that in the name of democratisation. Ambedkar wanted the depressed classes to take their ‘own agency’ and become ‘drivers’ to their reformation and mobility.

Ambedkar’s experience both personal and political accentuated this particular view in him. Being on the receiving ends of oppression himself, Babasaheb worked out a different and viable trajectory for him and his people. He not only adopted a reasonably academic and intellectual style of writing and arguments which required less interpretative skills, but also had little patience for Gandhi’s convoluted and evocative pleas and claims based on ideas of moral judgement and normative appeals.<sup>121</sup>

Inspired by the idea of his teacher John Dewey, Babasaheb firmly believed that democracy is more than a form of government. He saw it as primarily a mode of associated living.<sup>122</sup> And this, Ambedkar found, was impossible in the Indian situation where caste laid the foundations for disunion, and hence the idea of nation that is defined by like mindedness is only a mere chimera.<sup>123</sup> Ambedkar saw caste is an ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. This feature of caste

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<sup>121</sup>Palshikar, Suhas. “Ambedkar and Gandhi: Limits of Divergence and Possibilities of Conversation”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No 15, pp.45- 50.

<sup>122</sup>Ambedkar, B.R.. *Dr Ambedkar and Democracy: An Anthology*, Jaffrelot, Christophe. Kumar, Narendra. (ed.), Indian Institute of Dalit Studies and Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2018. P. 241.

<sup>123</sup>*Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* (BAWS), Vol. 1, Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

system has most pernicious contempt. It (has) will destroy willing and helpful cooperation.<sup>124</sup> According to Ramashray Roy, for Ambedkar, the commonality between upper caste Hindus and the untouchables was non-existent.<sup>125</sup> And so, their upliftment cannot depend on the paternalistic acts of the upper castes.

Babasaheb not only differed with Gandhi and Congress on the issues that were defining the contours of democratisation process of the new emerging nation, but never hesitated to even to work with the Britishers for the depressed classes. This also led to the severe criticism of Babasaheb, as if he worked as a stooge of British Empire. But the politics which Ambedkar was following not only tested him but also his adversaries and supporters in different political space and time. To this particular criticism the apt response was given by Babasaheb time and again. One of his long term associate and who also converted into Buddhism along with him, Vansant Moon has recorded one such response. In the year 1952, Columbia University decided to felicitate Ambedkar. A dinner party was arranged in his honour at the Cricket Club of India, Bombay (Mumbai). Youths were eager to know- as to why not any university in India have given him such a respect and what are his views on India as nation? Answering them, Ambedkar went ahead and spoke:

Do not harbour any notion that I will speak against my country there (Columbia). I have always fought for the interest of the nation. I have not entertained any anti – national ideas even for a moment. At Round Table Conference in respect of patriotism, I was 200 miles ahead of Gandhiji.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* (BAWS), Vol. 1, Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

<sup>125</sup> Kolge, Nishikant. *Gandhi Against Caste*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p.241

<sup>126</sup> Yusufji, Salim (ed.). *Ambedkar: The Attendant Details*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2017, p.59.

Ambedkar's first testimonial in front of the British Empire in 1919 determined his course of struggle. He concluded the testimonial by citing it as a 'patent disharmony' within a nation and therefore a proper field for the application of the principle of 'self – determination'.<sup>127</sup> This patent disharmony and idea of self – determination was enclosed with the statement as follows, which set the precedent for the idea of self – respect of Ambedkar:

A government for the people, but not by the people, is sure to educate some into masters and others into subject; because it is by the reflex effects of association that one can feel and measure the growth of personality. The growth of personality is the highest aim of the society. Social arrangement must secure free initiative and opportunity to every individual to assume any role he is capable of assuming provided socially desirable.....to be specific, it is not enough to be electors only, it is necessary to be law – makers; otherwise who can be law – makers will be masters of those who can only be electors.<sup>128</sup>

Ambedkar's patent disharmony was not only with the Colonial Raj, but also with the elitist Indian leaders who were engaged in the democratisation process with Raj. Without acknowledging the fact that democracy also meant that, it is 'by the people' and not just 'for'; Ambedkar doubted the intention of Congress dominated by upper caste people. Gandhi did provide hope and radicalism to Ambedkar by going against untouchability directly, but his ambivalent attitudes or his vacillations on caste and Varna made his young follower to challenge Mahatma of Indian politics.

Self – respect was not just a patent disharmony against the homogenising political narratives; but also Ambedkar's trajectory towards eradication of caste and untouchability. It was a creation of alternate strategy and political identity, which Babasaheb firmly believed will start fluidity among the leaders and various

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<sup>127</sup>*Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Vol. 1, pp.270-303 Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, Vol. 1, 270-303 Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

institutions like legislative assembly. And this will start a new cycle of participation in which the representatives of various castes who were erstwhile isolated and therefore antisocial will be thrown into an associated life.<sup>129</sup> Babasaheb hoped and believed that Congress and other parties will start the process of accommodation and fluidity with all reason and rationality; by doing away the caste mindedness. But what he wanted through this was respect and not a mere charity of through reform or purification movements; which in itself for him remains enigmatic.

This dilemma was evident when Ambedkar praised the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in his text *Annihilation of Caste*, and how people of different caste follow his leadership,<sup>130</sup> by doing away the caste mindedness. But he was against the approach of Gandhi and the trajectory of self-purification through which he envisioned his nation and freedom. Ambedkar further wrote:

You cannot mobilise the community either for defence or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation, you cannot build up morality. Anything you will build on the foundation of caste will crack, and will never be a whole.<sup>131</sup>

Self- Purification and Self- Respect were different trajectories applied to the masses that were affected by the disease of casteism. But both the trajectories were similar or even if they are not - they intersected on the idea of Justice. Both trajectories were the ‘means’ to a larger ‘end’ namely Swaraj of Gandhi and Social endosmosis of Ambedkar. Apart from the binaries and divisions, historical facts duly suggest that both the leaders through their respective discourse had awakened a light of consciousness in multiple ways.

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<sup>129</sup>Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS), Vol. 1, Retrieved From: [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume\\_01.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf)

<sup>130</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 49.

## Section 4

### Democracy and the Idea of Justice: Social Realisation, Swaraj and Social Endosmosis

History of ideas and struggles related to it, has produced revolutions and counter revolutions to eradicate the injustices, which not only manifested in different times and space; but it also proposed trajectories for future. To be precisely correct the discourse of such ideas reasonably does not gyrate around the hypothesis to achieve a world which shall be perfectly just (apart from some utopian ideas that neglected human subjectivity, heterogeneity and changing contours of human civilization), but rather to eliminate ‘visible remediable injustices’. Ambedkar in his work *Annihilation of caste* duly writes that, ‘nowhere is human society is single whole’.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Gandhi’s incessant urge to look every divisions and profession in society with respect and without inferiority complex, remains in tune with Ambedkar’s idea. What they both firmly believed is that, institution of caste and untouchability was anathema for the human progress and society as a whole. Both firmly believed that the manifest injustices created by the institutions of caste were remediable and hence proposed different trajectories towards its eradication. Apart from their visible differences and understanding of the sociology of caste – both duly realised that political democracy or independence can only become ‘means’ and not ‘end’, towards justice and equality. Gandhi’s idea of Swaraj and Ambedkar’s vision of Social endosmosis represented such ‘means’.

The heterogeneous domain of social reform movements and the claims by minorities for rights and dues was largely intertwined with the concept of Justice. And

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<sup>132</sup>Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 60.

as political and social revolutions culminated into the Constituent Assembly Debates, Justice (political, economic and social); formed the bedrock of the idea of India. And this particular discourse was not just about political and legal questions, it was also about dignity, honour, behavioural pattern and social realisation of the essence of political freedom. Suhas Palshikar in his study of Indian democracy has noted that, 'Indian Democracy and politics of social justice have a close and symbiotic relationship'.<sup>133</sup> As the scope and epistemology of Democracy and theories attached to it, have duly widened its discourse through post-colonial studies; the ideas and theories related to justice too have witnessed a serious engagement.

The path breaking studies like Edward Said's '*Orientalism*', and Ranajit Guha's '*Subaltern studies*' have not only challenged the hegemonic or transcendental occidental approaches, but also has redefined the contours related to Asian and African societies and its historical journey. The reflection of such interventions resulted in new social movements across the world and India witnessed it too.<sup>134</sup> The whole idea of humanitarian concepts and its relations to European enlightenment was challenged and reasonable reasons were provided by the long history of civilizations and how it perceives or had perceived the same notions through different lenses; depending upon its heterogeneous cultures and experiences. In fact the whole phenomenon also culminated into the second democratic revolution (as discussed in previous chapters) in Indian context, which revitalised the Ambedkar- Gandhi debate and their ideas of Swaraj and social Endosmosis, which duly carries the imprints of western philosophy but was deeply inspired by Indian traditions.

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<sup>133</sup>Palshikar, Suhas. *Indian Democracy* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p. 97.

<sup>134</sup> Guha, Ramchandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of World's Largest Democracy* Picador India, London, 2008, pp. 605-632

As the west centric approach was challenged in the light of new emerging epistemological expositions, the theories and praxis related to justice also saw several such interventions. One such path breaking intervention was by Nobel Laureate Dr. Amrtya Sen. Sen's work (2009), *'The Idea of Justice'* owes much to and departs from the approach and content of its illustrious predecessor, John Rawls' *'A Theory of Justice'*<sup>135</sup>. Rawls remains one of most influential thinkers on Justice. Following the school of social contractarian view and line of reasoning<sup>136</sup> Rawls wrote *A Theory of Justice* (1971) dealing with the requirements of domestic justice and *The Law of Peoples* (1999) that deals with the principles of international justice. Sen's basic disagreement with Rawls is based upon his idea of 'Transcendental Institutionalism' through which Rawls argued that justice can be delivered. Rawls invests his energy on the particular notion of Justice - 'Justice as Fairness'- which can be achieved through 'just institutions'. Rawls firmly believed that an ideal concept can provide justice, which can be used everywhere.

Amartya Sen, meanwhile, bases his arguments on the 'social choice theory' to analyse justice not as a transcendental phenomenon through ideal concepts, but as a comparative phenomenon. Sen's engagement with the experiences of Asian societies (*Poverty and Famines: An Essay in Entitlements and Deprivation; Development as Freedom; Argumentative Indian, et al.*) should be taken into the account as factors that took him beyond Rawls.<sup>137</sup> For Sen, manifest injustices of different forms and

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<sup>135</sup> Subramanian, S.. "Thinking Through Justice", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. 45, 2010, pp.33-42

<sup>136</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. XV

<sup>137</sup> Brown, Chris. "On Amrtya Sen and The Idea of Justice", *Ethics and International Affairs, The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2011, pp.309-318.,



under varied circumstances forces one to reconsider his/ her firm belief in the concept of an ideal theory or transcendental institutionalism.

Sen's break point to be precise revolves around Rawls' obsession with transcendental institutions and just societies. For Sen, it should be redefined through an alternative approach or alternate view towards justice, which emphasise on practical solutions for manifest injustices. An ideal has to be translated into a viable practice to eliminate the inequalities that persist in the system. Sen defines that Justice is ultimately related and connected with social realisation of the institutions and with the way peoples' lives go. Sen further writes:

The principal theories of justice concentrate overwhelmingly on how to establish just institutions and give some derivative and subsidiary role to behavioural features. For example, John Rawls's rightly celebrated approach of Justice that are exclusively concerned with setting up the just institutions (to constitute basic structure of society), while requiring that people's behaviour complies entirely with the demands of proper functioning of these institutions.....it is argued that there are some crucial inadequacies in this overpowering concentration on institutions (where behaviour is assumed to be appropriately compliant), rather than on the lives that people are able to lead. The focus on actual lives in the assessment of justice has far – reaching implication for the nature and reach of idea of justice.<sup>138</sup>

Reasoning and impartial scrutiny for Sen remains the vital elements of justice. He through his idea pronounces that there can be many theories to justice and sometimes there is simply 'plurality of right answers'. The idea that there is only one kind of just society – a liberal society defined by principles set out in Rawls' model – and that all others represent a falling off from this ideal; does not seem a plausible response to pluralism that undoubtedly exists in the modern world.<sup>139</sup> Sen connects his arguments of social realisation, reasoning and plurality of competing ideas and

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<sup>138</sup>Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. XI

<sup>139</sup> Brown Chris. "On Amrtya Sen and The Idea of Justice", *Ethics and International Affairs, The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2011, pp.309-318.,

most importantly views of public reasoning to democracy. Democracy, therefore, remains an intimate part of Sen's idea of justice.<sup>140</sup> Sen argues that contemporary debates around democracy remain or can be seen as government by discussions and the demands of public reasoning is constitutively related to the idea of democracy, which in turn connect intimately the whole process of democracy to justice.<sup>141</sup>

The most pertinent point to be noted in Sen's analysis of Justice or more precisely his break from Rawlsian concept of justice is that, 'he did not in totality negate the idea of institutions, but questions its regulative aspects of homogenous transcendentalism and its application to entire globe in a similar manner. Sen defines his contours of Justice based on his twin concept of *Niti and Nyaya*, which he borrows from ancient philosophical school or *Darshansahitya*. He then connects the whole idea of democracy vis – a- vis justice to these twin concepts. Sen defines the twin concept in the following terms:

In understanding the contrast between an arrangement – focused and realization focused view of justice, it is useful to invoke an old distinction from Sanskrit literature on ethics and jurisprudence. Consider two different words – *Niti* and *Nyaya* – both of which stand for justice in classical Sanskrit. Among the principal uses of the term *Niti* are organizational propriety and behavioural correctness. In contrast with *Niti*, the term *Nyaya* stands for a comprehensive concept of realized justice. In that line of vision, the roles of institutions, rules and organization, important as they are, have to be assessed in broader and more inclusive perspective of *Nyaya*, which is inescapably linked with the world that actually emerges, not just institution or rules we happen to have.<sup>142</sup>

A much 'realized focus' concept of democracy and issues of justice not only brought Sen closer to the ideas of Gandhi and Ambedkar's understanding of Swaraj or

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<sup>140</sup>Subramanian, S.. "Thinking Through Justice", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. 45, 2010, pp.33-42

<sup>141</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010, pp.325-326.

<sup>142</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 20.

Democracy; but also defines the biggest paradox of Indian Democracy i.e., political success of Indian democracy versus its socio- economic progress. Sen's concludes:

The Success of democracy is not merely a matter of having the most perfect institutional structure that we can think of. It depends inescapably on our actual behaviour patterns and the working of political and social institutions. There is no chance of resting the matter in the safe hands of purely institutional virtuosity. The Working of democratic institutions depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities or reasonable realization.<sup>143</sup>

## Section 4.1

### **Ethics and Constitutional Morality: Justice through Swaraj and Social Endosmosis**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1909, which is exactly a century before the Sen's *Idea of Justice* published, wrote *Hind Swaraj*. He defined as discussed in previous chapter *Hind Swaraj* as his seed text and continued his faith in his text till his last breath. It was in this text that Gandhi underlines the basic contours of what he meant by *Swaraj* and how to achieve it. Gandhi's idea of swaraj remains in tune with the Sen's idea of Nyaya i.e., related to the realization of Niti.

Declared as the 'romantic mythology of backwardness',<sup>144</sup> even by Gandhi's political heir (Jawaharlal Nehru, who profoundly believed that modernity has all the viable solutions), Suhrud and Sharma, hold that 'the engagement with the text gained momentum in the 1970's for two reasons – first is related to environment and ecology and another is related to the searing sense of freedom lost under the emergency dispensation, which virtually abolished the constitutional framework that held and

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<sup>143</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. 254.

<sup>144</sup> Gandhi, M.K..*M.K.Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*, Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip. (ed.), Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2010, P.XVII

sustained *Parliamentary Swaraj*'.<sup>145</sup> The idea of justice, equality and freedom that Gandhi envisioned under his domain of Swaraj went much beyond the idea of political democracy or Parliamentary Swaraj. This should not be contained into the idea, which remains very popular to this day that, Gandhi was an anarchist and wanted no state at all. This analogy has been created upon his direct attacks on the concept of a soulless state.<sup>146</sup> The whole analogy in fact betrays his own struggle against the colonial Raj and his political career towards freedom of Indian masses. On 26<sup>th</sup> January 1921 in *Young India* he clarified his relationship with *Hind Swaraj* and his association with Congress and wrote:

I would warn leader against thinking that I am aiming at Swaraj described therein. I know India is not ripe for it. It may seem an impertinence to say so. But such is my conviction. I am individually working for self-pictured therein. But today my corporate activity is undoubtedly devoted to the attainment of Parliamentary Swaraj, in accordance with the wishes of people of India.<sup>147</sup>

Central to Gandhi was that the idea that parliamentary democracy is not an end in itself but as a means to attain '*Organic Swaraj*'. Parel in his writing have differentiated it with '*Constitutional Swaraj*'. Gandhi wrote:

There is no human institution but has its dangers. The greater the institution, the greater the chances of abuse. Democracy is a great institution and therefore it is liable to be greatly

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<sup>145</sup>Gandhi, M.K..*M.K.Gandhi's Hind Swaraj: A Critical Edition*, Sharma, Suresh. Suhrud, Tridip. (ed.), Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2010, P.XVII

<sup>146</sup> Parel, Anthony J.. *Gandhi's Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p 52.

<sup>147</sup>Gandhi, M.K.. *Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 22. p.268 Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL022.PDF>

abused. The remedy, therefore, is not the avoidance of democracy but reduction of possibility of abuse to minimum.<sup>148</sup>

Gandhi saw a deep bond across human beings cutting across traditions, cultures and nations. These bonds had its foundations in shared humanity, which, in turn related to the nature and universe.<sup>149</sup> It is through these ideals of shared humanity that, Gandhi talks about the unity of tormented and tormentor and propagates his idea of soul force or Satyagraha. Gandhi connects the manifest injustices to the idea of Dharma and duty and places it above state and constitutionalism. In the classic debate between the law and morality, for Gandhi morality and natural duties gains the supreme force and Parliamentary Swaraj or to state either becomes the means or depend upon the ethics, morality, love, and acceptance, which remains arbiters of Swaraj in real sense of term. Gandhi saw far from requiring human rights begotten by law; one should see it through different lenses that - law itself being begotten by prior acknowledgement of existence of morality and sense of justice. It is in this particular sense the whole idea of Gandhi's self- purification and Swaraj for not only the depressed and oppressed classes, but for the oppressors also – ought to be seen. Literally means self-rule through idea of soul force and purification and as well as natural duties as human beings, Gandhian Swaraj has four modes writes Anthony J Parel and they are:

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<sup>148</sup>Gandhi, M.K..*Collected Works Of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, Vol. 52. p. Retrieved From: <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL022.PDF> (Young India may 7 1931)

<sup>149</sup>Rodrigues, Valerian. “*Reading Texts and Traditions: The Ambedkar – Gandhi Debate*”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.no. 2, 2011, pp. 56-66.

...Political independence of the country from foreign domination or hegemony, the political liberties of citizens, economic liberties of citizens, and, pursuit of spiritual liberty or self-realization. What is original in Gandhi is the claim that these should be taken as one package – because of their interconnectedness.<sup>150</sup>

It is this particular interconnectedness which allows Gandhi to have faith in Nehru, Ambedkar and others; and have full faith in their respective trajectories for the creation of modern apparatus named Independent India. But at the same time he gives more importance to workers and volunteers related to constructive programme - through which Gandhi believed that Poorna Swaraj can be attained. In modern sense of term it is related to the workings of and importance of civil societies across the world. Apart from his critical comments on Article 17 and Congressmen; Gandhi wanted the constructive workers to break ‘the isolation’ in which Harijans were placed in and should befriend them. Gandhi connected this whole concept to *Swaraj* to a road, which for him was steep and narrow.<sup>151</sup>

One of India’s most important thinker and leading Jurist Fali Sam Nariman has recently wrote a foreword of a book named *Democracy in India*. Notwithstanding his serious engagement is with law, while describing the paradoxes of Indian politics and state he wrote, ‘we cannot work out any system unless we reinstate some degree of morality into politics.’<sup>152</sup> Today the whole domain of Human rights also includes victimisation and remedies related to caste injustices. Nariman duly cites an example related to Gandhi and social injustices in the context of Human Rights. He revisits an episode between the United Nations and Gandhi. After the Second World War, the

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<sup>150</sup> Parel, Anthony J.. *Gandhi’s Philosophy and the Quest for Harmony*. Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2017, p 52.

<sup>151</sup> Gandhi, M.K.. *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1941, p.8.

<sup>152</sup> Nariman, Fali S. *Democracy in India: Current Debates and Emerging Challenges*, Lobo, Lancy and Shah, Jayesh (ed.). Primus Books, Delhi, 2017, p. XVII.

Human Rights Commission of the United Nations carried out an enquiry into the theoretical problems raised by then proposed Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ‘Questionnaires’ was duly sent to the leading philosophers, thinkers and politician of that era. Gandhi was also asked his perception on this particular matter. Gandhi true to his engagement with every letter which he has received in his lifetime responded. He wrote to the then Director of United Nations Dr. Julian Huxley on May 1947, in a moving train (as Nariman quotes the letter pointing out the words as profound and true):

I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done. The very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world. From this one fundamental statement, perhaps it is easy enough to define the duties of men and women and correlate every right to someone corresponding duty to be first performed. Every other right can be shown to be an usurpation hardly worth fighting for.<sup>153</sup>

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, through his idea of social endosmosis also wanted the social and economic isolation created by caste to be broken. One of the biggest fundamental expositional unities between Ambedkar and Gandhi was related to the question of ‘means’ and ‘end’ of political democracy. Ambedkar was very critical of political freedom and duly opined that it is not the end but should become the ‘means’. Sen’s concept of Nyaya, in that sense, unites Ambedkar and Gandhi.

But to be factually correct the trajectories and ideological underpinnings of Ambedkar from Gandhi was quite different. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar intertwined his idea of Nyaya to constitutional morality and not just simply to natural duties and morality. Ambedkar also opines that how the constitutional morality should not only

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<sup>153</sup> Nariman, Fali S. *Democracy in India: Current Debates and Emerging Challenges*, Lobo, Lancy and Shah, Jayesh (ed.). Primus Books, Delhi, 2017, p. XX.

be cultivated among the majority (or caste oppressors) but also among the minorities (oppressed). He further wrote:

It is for the majority to realise its duty not to discriminate against the minorities. Whether the minorities will continue or will vanish must depend upon this habit of majority. The moment majority loses the habit of discriminating against the minority; the minorities can have no ground to exist, they will vanish.<sup>154</sup>

The whole idea of Ambedkar sense of duty is based upon the social choice and realisation theory of western enlightenment ideas and thoughts. During Constitutional Assembly Debates, He defined his idea of constitutional morality and engagement of majority and minorities towards it in the words of Greek historian Grote and said on the floor:

A paramount reverence for the forms of constitution, enforcing obedience to authority acting under and within these forms yet combined with the habit of open speech, of action subject only to define legal control, and unrestrained censure of those very authorities as to all their public acts combined too with a perfect confidence in bosom of every citizen amidst bitterness of party contest that the forms of constitution will not be less sacred in the eyes of his opponents than in his own.<sup>155</sup>

Ambedkar duly believe that democracy is a form of associated living and not just a form of government. But society ridden with the horrendous form of caste needed a two way solution both - at political and socio- economic level. The reason remains that caste has not only killed the whole idea of reason, but also of morality.<sup>156</sup> The idea to break the political hegemony of upper castes through participation of lower caste in the process of democratisation i.e., self-respect - remains the first tool of Ambedkar towards equality and justice. But this self-respect gained through political fight and struggle had to transform or should come out of the temples of democracy, so that caste morality should be defeated and this remains the second tool

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<sup>154</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed.). Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 487.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 484.

<sup>156</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013,



of Ambedkar for the transformation of society. The second phase will transform the society where justice, liberty, equality and fraternity can flourish. The core principle related to the democratic society based upon the channels of like mindedness, communication and fluidity among masses, which culminates into the Ambedkar's idea of social endosmosis, which for him is the base towards his ideal society.

Babasaheb's framework in the context of democracy and society was highly inspired by his teacher at Columbia University and the American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey. Ambedkar not only visited Indian culture and traditions through the eyes of Dewey, but also proposed options for India's democratic society through Deweyan school of thought. Concepts like mindedness, associated life or living, channels of distribution, annihilation of isolation, change as fundamental concept to life, self-respect, and social endosmosis et al. remains central to both Dewey and his student Ambedkar. In short, Dewey's work became major conceptual tools for Ambedkar to decode Indian society and to organise a plan of action to change it.<sup>157</sup> Ambedkar took down every word that the great teacher has uttered in his teaching. Ambedkar used to tell his friends that, 'if Dewey died I could reproduce every lecture verbatim.'<sup>158</sup>

Ambedkar serious engagement with Dewey can be noticed from the fact that since his first testimonial of *Southborough Committee* to his lecture on 'Prospects of Indian Democracy' (20<sup>th</sup> May 1956) - carries the imprints of his teacher. Ambedkar borrows the ideal of John Dewey mentioned in his work '*Democracy and Education*' and transforms it for India's struggle for justice and equality. Ambedkar is often

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<sup>157</sup> Mukherjee, Arun P.. "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey and the Meaning of Democracy", *New Literary History, The John Hopkins University Press*, Vol. No. 40, 2009, pp. 345 -370.

<sup>158</sup> Mukherjee, Arun P.. "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey and the Meaning of Democracy", *New Literary History, The John Hopkins University Press*, Vol. No. 40, 2009, pp. 347.

criticised for his high believes in western thoughts and this has also led to the questioning of his patriotism by traditionalist and conservatives. A quite similar charge was thrown upon Ambedkar when conservatives criticised the Indian constitution as a mere document copied from the west and Government of India Act 1935. The reply of Ambedkar needs a serious consideration here to understand his firm believe and serious engagement with Dewey. In reply to the accusations Ambedkar went ahead and said:

As to the accusation that the Draft Constitution has produced a good part of the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, I make no apologies. There is nothing to be ashamed of in borrowing. It involves no plagiarism. Nobody holds any patent rights in the fundamental ideas of a Constitution.<sup>159</sup>

Ambedkar with the ideas of universality in human centric approach and reasoning, utilised Dewey and his concept of social endosmosis for real sense of justice. Writing about Democracy and Education and praxis attached to it, Dewey describes that, ‘the isolation and exclusiveness created by the stratification of society, divided into privileged and subject class blocks the channels of fluidity and communication, which prevent social endosmosis’.<sup>160</sup> An ideal democratic society according to Dewey is marked by its mobility, which is full of the distribution of change occurring anywhere.<sup>161</sup> Defining the ideal democratic society in context of democracy and education, Dewey writes:

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<sup>159</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed.). Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 487.

<sup>160</sup> Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2017, p. 90.

<sup>161</sup>Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2017, p. 90.

It means not only freer interaction between the social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up separation) but change in social habit – its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse....a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education. But there is deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.<sup>162</sup>

Babasaheb takes the body of Dewey arguments and transplant its heart with the struggle of oppressed castes. He not only vouches for annihilation of caste but also resist an external or religious or spiritual entity in its process. He firmly viewed that anything build on the institution of caste (which he interchangeably connect to Hindu traditions) – is bound to crack, and will never be a whole.<sup>163</sup> For Ambedkar this process and epistemological understanding is based upon the agency of reasoning and hence self- respect is a prior condition for to re - socialisation Indian society in order to create a voluntary institution and democracy ‘by the government’.

This whole idea of institutions and change based on the enlightenment idea, allowed Ambedkar to out rightly reject the ‘self – purification’ of Mahatma (which was based on traditions and natural duties); during the process that led to India’s democratisation. But Ambedkar also knew that ideal institutions like constitution and fundamental rights are not only ‘the ends’ towards the Democracy, which he in tune with Dewey defined more than government and form of an associated living. It is in this concept Ambedkar utilises the concept of Social Endosmosis to achieve social

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<sup>162</sup> Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2017, p. 93.

<sup>163</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 63.

and economic democracies, which for him are the tissues and fibres of political democracy.<sup>164</sup> He further writes:

Democracy is another name of equality. Parliamentary democracy developed passion for liberty. It never made even a nodding acquaintance with equality. It failed to realise the significance of equality and did not endeavour to strike a balance between liberty and equality, with the result that liberty swallowed equality and has made democracy a name and farce.<sup>165</sup>

The concept of Nyaya in Ambedkar finds expressions in the idea of social endosmosis and dichotomous relationships between political and socio-economic democracies. The social realisation of arranged institutions remains a common thread between Gandhi, Ambedkar and Sen. What bind them together is some kind of morality and behavioural pattern without which, any manifest injustices will not be eradicated. Defining his ideal society based upon the trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity, Ambedkar wrote about the necessity of social endosmosis and democracy.

He stated:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only other name of democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellow men.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed.). Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 62.

<sup>165</sup> Ambedkar, B.R.. *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, Rodrigues, Valerian (ed.). Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 487.

<sup>166</sup> Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 50.

## Conclusion

As discussed above, an undesirable society, writes John Dewey, 'is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience.'<sup>167</sup> Both Gandhi and Ambedkar debated with each other with their respective stands and never created any barriers among themselves. The idea of justice and equality can have several viewpoints. If Ambedkar wanted that constitutional morality had to be cultivated among both majority and minorities; Gandhi too talked about oneness of tormentor and tormented and unification of souls through the realization that in the struggle other was human too. Their holistic debate and different trajectories not only represented different paradigms; but remains one of the most valued 'communications of experience' for justice.

Many comparative questions of justice can be successfully resolved – agreed upon in reasoned arguments – there could well be other comparisons in which conflicting considerations are not fully resolved. It is argued here that there can exist several distinct reasons of justice, each of which survives critical scrutiny, but yields divergent conclusions.<sup>168</sup> The diagnosis of caste problem and options proposed by Gandhi and Ambedkar can represent a different paradigm, but they were about justice and equality.

Symbolic politics, iconization and pitting Ambedkar and Gandhi against each other remain serious betrayal to the argumentative tradition of Indian democracy. It has created isolation and has also stopped the communication and fluidity of ideas. Precisely, it has blocked the idea of Swaraj and Social endosmosis; which was the key

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<sup>167</sup>Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2017, p.106.

<sup>168</sup>Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*, Penguin Books, London, 2010, p. X

component for justice and equality in Ambedkar – Gandhi debate. Indian politics no doubt have been benefited by the creation of statues and vote banks in the name of *Bapu* and *Babasaheb*; but very tactfully they have eradicated their intellectual existence. The biggest resultant of this phenomenon is that ‘caste has become a mode of doing politics’ and this has not only created and legitimised caste oppression; but also allowed the second democratic revolution based on social justice to fail. Impasse exists, but, not the intent to change and transform, which remains deep rooted in the idea of India’s legacy and was channelized through its founding fathers and mothers.. As Dr. Amartya Sen has argued in ‘Argumentative *Indian*’ that:

Indian Democracy remains imperfect and flawed in different ways; the ways and means of overcoming those faults can draw powerfully on argumentational traditions.<sup>169</sup>

Hence, the debate shall continue. There remains many pathways to the Idea of India.

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<sup>169</sup>Sen, Amartya. *The Argumentative India: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, p. XIII.

## Conclusion

*वादे वादे जायते तत्त्वबोधः* (Truth is discovered and assimilated or realized by debates and discussions) –

Ancient Indian Philosophy of *Vadashastra*.<sup>1</sup>

The whole idea of an impasse in the context of social justice and equality or in other words, when confronted with the horrendous realities of casteism - we often tend to question the legalities and the basic principles of Indian democracy. Under the belly of the much magnified and dignified electoral politics of democracy, the anathema of caste represents the deep rooted paradoxes. These paradoxes remain visible through the lenses of history, which had duly promised certain ideals to become the genesis for the idea of India.

Similarly, this particular study in each of its chapters has followed a certain trajectory of delving into the present (facts and praxis) and connecting it to the past. As all history, to borrow Benedetto Croce's formulation, is contemporary history, the attempt in this thesis was to reflect onto the promise made by the Constitution of India in the context of caste and untouchability. The Constitution, after all, was not merely a legal document; it was a reflection of the vision of leaders who were behind social and political revolutions and in that sense a 'tool' to realise the 'idea of India'.

Though the drafting process as such was carried out between December 1946 and November 1949, it will be wrong to hold that the Constitution was merely the product of such drafting. It is, instead the outcome of decades' long debates and discussions, which started from Nehru Report (1928), the Karachi Resolution (1931), the Government of India Act (1935), et al., and transformed into a living document.

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<sup>1</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 33

As the Constitution remains the powerhouse of India, the engineers who carried or initiated the political and social engineering projects, remain the most revisited personalities. And the Ambedkar – Gandhi engagement remains an important part of it.

The experiment with constitutional democracy in India remains a continuous process and in the six decades and half of its working it has indeed deepened in many parts. The moot point of this particular study gyrates around the relevance of the Ambedkar – Gandhi debate, their holistic argumentative tradition and how it has transformed the democratic Indian society through politics and policies in contemporary times.

Although social reforms and revivalist movements started long back and at least a century before both Gandhi and Ambedkar came to the fore in society, their legacy made social democracy or swaraj a national concern. Self – purification of Gandhi and self – respect of Ambedkar, although remained parallel lines of thought, did meet into a promise or a commitment in the Constitution to eradicate caste and untouchability. In the India after independence the relevance of both the leaders remains important, because, social democracy remains a distant dream. Here again in this study, the process of comprehending or the relevance of the two personalities is related to their ideas on social justice and equality. Rajmohan Gandhi has written on the relevance of any historical personality in following words, which remains quite apt for both the personalities:



A person becomes relevant not by solving all contemporary and future problems (which even God seems unable or unwilling to do) but by offering hints for making life more bearable or interesting, or by showing a way out of a forest.<sup>2</sup>

It is beyond the shadow of doubt that the two personalities remain one of the most written and revisited personalities from modern India's historical discourse. Quite apart from that, their vision and ideas remains dormant. The whole idea of swaraj and social democracy does define a way in a dark forest - where caste atrocities and victimization persists. But if the politics and policies of social transformation have remained confined to reservations and mere legal protections; Ambedkar's social endosmosis and Gandhi's swaraj have been reduced to statues and politics of whataboutery, sans their profundity. Episodic histories and reinvention of histories have not only segregated and isolated the discourse of Ambedkar and Gandhi, but also the masses. The solidification of divisions at the political level for mere partisan gains has affected the cultural and social spaces and betrayed or buried the ideas of Ambedkar and Gandhi.

Notwithstanding the fact that, rise of subaltern caste movements in post-independence era, time and again, were reinvented through the ideas and ideals of either Gandhi or Ambedkar, both have become bogeyman to each other. Their history and spaces have been isolated and calcified. Professional history has been overpowered by popular culture and this phenomenon has created a vacuum.

Sectional elevation, transformation of vertical caste hierarchies into horizontal segmentation, isolation and fear among the different caste groups, identity politics based on caste, vote bank politics, et al., have institutionalised caste in India's democratic framework. Politically, social endosmosis or fluidity exists, but that only

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<sup>2</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Why Gandhi Still Matters: An Appraisal of Mahatma's Legacy*. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2017, p. X.

revolves around political motives to wrest institutions of political power. No doubt, hopes of social transformation that emerged from the rise of Nehruvian state, Lohia's Socialist Party to Dalit Panthers to caste parties (RPI, BSP) to Mandal Commission have lost its edge.

As in multiple ways history of subaltern class assertions and their political upsurge was or is either based upon Gandhi or Ambedkar. Their respective philosophies still grips the masses. But to be effective in people's hands, any philosophy, in whatever shape it was propounded by its originators, needs to be reshaped through struggles.<sup>3</sup> On contrary both of them have been ghettoised in their sectarian temples as irreconcilable gods. To be precise, along with caste, the discourse of Ambedkar and Gandhi is being institutionalised separately, for political benefits. And these trajectories itself have become anathema for social transformation.

Historically, sharp differences did exist between Ambedkar and Gandhi in their outlook. But both, in their own way, were the greatest benefactors of the masses and knew how to risk their personalities for the good of the common folk. If Gandhi was a reflexive thinker, Ambedkar was a pragmatic philosopher and both of them never shied away from transformation; as their respective journey went ahead. They were humans who wanted to eradicate manifest injustices around them and never hesitated to change their stance - even if it went against their own party members or group. To them, political power was not an end; rather it was a means for the larger cause. If looked beyond the episodic or seductive charm of history, what we notice is change in the thought processes of both the personalities, as they moved from truth to truth. Madhu Limaye writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva*. Navayana Publishing Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2018, p.148.

...just as Gandhi discarded his old views on Varna system, so later Dr Ambedkar too modified his stand on the issue of scheduled tribes.<sup>4</sup>

Amartya Sen in his approach to justice holds that, ‘there can exist several distinct reason of justice, each of which survives critical scrutiny, but yields divergent conclusions’.<sup>5</sup> Keeping Sen’s argument as the vantage point, both Gandhi and Ambedkar followed different paradigms. But, they out rightly focussed on the oppression and practises carried out by the *Savarna* and *Avarna* people who were involved in the practise of casteism. They also knew that the ‘transcendental idea of justice’ cannot eradicate the idea of ‘graded inequalities’, because of its complexities. And it is because of this phenomenon that they engaged and diverged, time and again; but never worked in isolation or with frozen identities. It is because of this fluidity between them, that their engagement became holistic and they cannot be divorced from each other. Beyond the frozen identities, their historic engagement defines the contours of preservation and change which has duly redefined Indian democracy.

### **Swaraj, Social Endosmosis and Psychology of Caste**

Ambedkar and Gandhi shared a view that political independence or democracy is not and cannot be an end for social justice. The whole logic behind the apprehensions of Ambedkar and Gandhi in legalities and protections, given by the new independent state in the context of casteism, was deeply attached to the psychology of caste. One cannot ignore the fact that caste is both moral and legal philosophy. It is a behavioural pattern, which both Ambedkar and Gandhi firmly believed it to be. Ambedkar’s idea that democracy is nothing but a form of associated living and Gandhi’s vision of

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<sup>4</sup> Limaye, Madhu. *Manu, Gandhi and Ambedkar and Other Essays*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2016, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2010, p. IX.

‘*Sarvodaya* through *Antodaya*’ *precisely* reflects that change should come at the psychological level.

Both of them believed that the ideas related to *Niti* (institutions) were not enough for justice and equality. But, it does not mean that they were against the state initiatives. What they precisely knew was the limitations of the state. And what united their different vocabularies is the concept of *Nayaya* (realizations of institutions), as discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis.

Factually, it is because of this particular deficit between the *Niti* and *Nayaya* - that caste has not only been institutionalised, but has also defeated the constitutional morality. The deficit acquires its strength from the caste psychology. Several counterfactual arguments can be produced to show that strict laws, modernity and market have led to eradication of caste and rendered it irrelevant. But facts are what they are. One of the best examples of caste psychology can be understood through the dynamics in relation to the ‘*Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989*’, which provides legal safeguards to lower caste people against victimisation by the upper castes. As victimisation of lower castes continued after independence, the Government of India came up with the more legal protections and safeguards. *The Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989)* was one of them. The Act provides safeguards to untouchables and lower castes against the ‘violent behaviour’ by the upper castes. Initially it covered ‘thirty five behaviours’, but the amendment that took place in 2015 covered more ‘behaviours’ and enforced it with more strength. Now, the whole concept of ‘behaviours’ is related to the psychology of caste. Extra effort by the state to move beyond Article 15, Article 17, Article 46, Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles; redefines the relevance of Ambedkar’s and Gandhi’s

apprehensions about political democracy. Writing about the legal safeguards and their limitations, Sukhadeo Thorat says:

Our main focus has been on laws and to some extension economic empowerment, which is the right way, but very little focus is accorded to the transformation of norms and beliefs of the people in favour of equality, which is equally important, as important as legal safeguards and economic independence. In the absence of this, traditional beliefs continue to influence the behaviour of higher castes towards untouchables, which results denial of equal rights.<sup>6</sup>

With all facts and arguments, it remains clear that justice remains more than just a politico- legal phenomenon. Behavioural pattern or psychology also needs to be purified in the Gandhian sense or constitutional morality should become a part of one's life in Ambedkarite sense. And this remains the base of this particular study, which revisits Gandhi and Ambedkar beyond the diatribe and politicisation of distorted or episodic history.

## **History and Holistic Debate: The Idea of Constellation**

Bipan Chandra in his work '*The Making of Indian Nation*' defines Nation, 'as a product of concrete historical process,'<sup>7</sup> he further writes:

To study their (nation) evolution is to study the economic, political, social and ideological development of Indian people. India has been, since the beginning of nineteenth century, a nation in making. This was both an objective and a subjective process.<sup>8</sup>

Colonial mandarins who objectified and solidified Indian society was in the view that, 'India was not capable of becoming a nation'.<sup>9</sup> Britons to carry out the legitimacy of this particular argument targeted both 'inner and outer domains' of

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<sup>6</sup> Thorat, Sukhadeo. *The Radical in Ambedkar*, Teltumbde, Anand. Yengde, Suraj. (ed.). Penguin Random House, Gurgaon, 2018, p.270.

<sup>7</sup> Chandra, Bipan. *The Writings of Bipan Chandra, The Making of Modern India: From Marx to Gandhi*. Orient Black Swan, Delhi, 2015, p. 214.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.214.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

colonised people. This particular framework became the driving force among the intellectuals, who accepted that the divisions and rigidities were present in both inner and outer domain of their lives; but that can be resolved and India and its people can forge a nation. It is this particular urge that initiated the zeal among 'Indian ideologues' to imagine a nation. And hence, the ideological development as Bipan Chandra mentions started among the Indians and also an evolution - as to what kind of nation should be imagined.

Various intellectual energies followed up and contributed towards the nation in making. The whole process remained a contested terrain - both in its imagination and articulation. Both outer and inner domain and spaces (as discussed in previous chapters) were debated, discussed and reformed. Annihilation of Caste and untouchability, along with the question of women, was related to the inner domain.

The whole idea of caste was also contested and multiple voices and trajectories emerged, which vouched for justice and equality. From Raja Rammohan Roy to Ramanhoar Lohia – every reformer and revivalist proposed options for the new nation and society. Ambedkar – Gandhi duly belonged to such loquacious tradition of multiple configurations; who all proposed various paradigms of change and continuity.

Scholars and thinkers like Amartya Sen and Bikhu Parekh have outlined and studied the 'idea of India' through a culture of debates and discussions and how these argumentative traditions have shaped the contours of the new nation. They have duly pointed out that, it was not a linear or a homogenous idea, which became the core of India's struggle for Independence and beyond. Rather the whole sense of democracy

was in fact, came out of the heterogeneous ideas and vocabularies which has shaped the political and historical discourses. Bikhu Parekh writes:

Thanks to its multilingualism, the Indian political discourse has an on-going dialogue built into its very structure, and it is open, self – critical, and not in the grip of one particular mode of thought. Its limitations lie in the fact that participants sometimes talk past each other, give different meanings to same terms, fail to formulate their differences in mutually intelligible common language, or think that they disagree in their substantive views simply because they use different languages.<sup>10</sup>

Ambedkar - Gandhi spoke and thought in a different vocabulary and time and again became trenchant critics of each other. But their engagement also saw several instances of bonhomie and they worked together too. Together they represented a legacy of profound churning of certain time and space, which was marked by great argumentative traditions and the quest, was to carve out a better world. Even though Gandhi was at the commanding political presence from the early 1920's and was sacralised (*Mahatma*) and seen as head of the national family (*Bapu*), neither his ideas nor his actions went unchallenged. Indeed the greater his hold over his countrymen, the greater was the scrutiny to which they were subjected.<sup>11</sup>

Historically, Ambedkar through his scrutiny and criticisms became his conscience keeper. And Gandhi, by providing space to Ambedkar's ideas and trenchant criticism allowed him to become the Babasaheb. They both duly redefined culture of argumentative world and politics of change and transformation.

The whole discourse of Ambedkar – Gandhi debate has served the idea of India with utmost dedication and integrity by providing legal and constitutional

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<sup>10</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu. *Debating India: Essays on Indian Political Discourse*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2015, p. 29.

protections to the subaltern castes. But as discussed above, both viewed it as the means and not an end for their *Swaraj* and social democracy. But the question remains that - How far we have succeeded in the attainment or swaraj or social democracy? The answer remains that we have not succeeded and the impasse remains in the context of its attainment.

But, often reaching at the dead end, history provides us an opportunity to draw lessons for consideration. The most indispensable consideration is how the post – independence discourses have epistemologically dealt with this particular holistic debate. From the reconciliation to the idea of irreconcilability of Ambedkar and Gandhi dominates the academic circles and public spaces. Particularly, four schools of thoughts or theories on their historical engagement have emerged in the recent past. They are:

- Whether the twain shall meet or not?
- Irreconcilable differences and perpetual calcification of ideas.
- Ambedkar - the leader of Dalits or Avarnas; Gandhi – The leader of Savarnas or higher castes
- Historically, both shall be heroes!

This research finds these four ways to comprehend the Ambedkar- Gandhi discourse as problematic. Why the twain should meet or their ideas or argumentative traditions should be divorced from each other? How come the man named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who was the first leader to make untouchability a national concern and to put Ambedkar in India's first cabinet, is termed as Savarna leader? Or is it historically correct to term Ambedkar as the leader Avarna, when he wrote the Indian constitution for both majority and minorities, and asked both to instil



constitutional morality in them? And why should we call or consider them as heroes, as they were both against any kind of iconization?

The larger question that should be asked and debated is the ideas and ideals of the two leaders, their argumentative tradition, their grammar of politics and their respective paradigms. The purpose of this study is beyond reconciliation or irreconcilability, creation of false and unhistorical binaries, homogenisation of Ambedkar or Gandhi, freezing them in a perpetual battle or to make gods and heroes out of history. Gandhi and Ambedkar's paradigms represent the ideas preservation and change for justice and equality. They represent fluidity of ideas through their argumentative world. And the heterogeneous vocabularies of India's struggle for Independence cannot be just reduced to false binaries – as to who is great or greatest and remain more relevant. The study proposes 'constellation of ideas' and 'argumentative traditions' to continue. The political and social revolutions which became the concise keeper of the democratic nation known as Republic India, remains a huge tree. Every branch and leaves through their ideas and sacrifices have contributed towards it. And that is why it still grows, in spite of its limitations. The discourse of Ambedkar – Gandhi remains one of the most important parts of that process. But that tree should not be converted into a log and kept in isolation. As Rabindranath Tagore has written:

Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living flowers and fruit.<sup>12</sup>

Caste has both legal and psychological aspects and it involves both *Savarnas* and *Avarnas*. Hence, to attain swaraj or social democracy; both Gandhi's self – purification and Ambedkar's self-respect holds the key. One can be selective to their

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<sup>12</sup> Tagore, Rabindranath. *Nationalism.*, Finger Print Classics Prakash Books, New Delhi, 2017, p.77.

argument in order to divide masses or to attain political mileage. But as a whole the holistic debate of Ambedkar and Gandhi, sets the agenda for social justice and equality. It shows where we have failed and it also shows where we have to try to get to.

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## Appendix 1

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09/10/2016

### CRIMES AGAINST DALITS

#### METROS

Rank	Cities	Total Number of Crimes(%)	Murder	Crime against Women	SC/ST <sup>^</sup>	Minor IPC Crimes*
1	Lucknow	262 (16%)	8	88	23	117
2	Patna	241 (15%)	1	1	0	239
3	Jaipur	219 (14%)	1	43	3	174
4	Bengaluru	207 (13%)	5	7	190	4
5	Hyderabad	139 (9%)	1	12	92	34

<sup>^</sup> (Prevention of Atrocities) Act only (without IPC)

\*May Include cases under Simple hurt, Trespass, Mischief, Use of Abuse Language/Act and Criminal Intimidation, etc.

#### STATES

Rank	States	Total Number of Crimes(%)	Murder	Crime against Women	SC/ST <sup>^</sup>	Minor IPC Crimes*
1	Uttar Pradesh	10426 (26%)	271	3117	1065	5401
2	Bihar	5701 (14%)	54	45	253	5080
3	Rajasthan	5134 (13%)	66	641	106	4353
4	MP	4922 (12%)	81	1833	4	3369
5	Andhra Pradesh	2335 (6%)	25	748	446	1320

<sup>^</sup> (Prevention of Atrocities) Act only (without IPC)

\*May Include cases under Simple hurt, Trespass, Mischief, Use of Abuse Language/Act and Criminal Intimidation etc.

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## THE CLEANSER.

( A free rendering, from the Bengali, of Satyendranath Datta's "Scavenger" . )

Why do they shun your touch, my friend, and call you unclean  
Whom cleanliness follows at every step, making the earth and  
air sweet for our dwelling, and ever luring us back from  
return to the wild ?

You help us, like a mother her child, into freshness, and uphold  
the truth, that disgust is never for man.

The holy stream of your ministry carries pollutions away and  
ever remains pure.

Once Lord Shiva had saved the world from a deluge of poison  
by taking it himself,

And you save it every day from filth with the same divine  
sufferance.

Come friend, come my hero, give us courage to serve man,  
even while bearing the brand of infamy from him.

*Rabindranath Tagore*

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEEK TO WEEK</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Servants of Untouchables Society</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>During the fortnight ending the 31st Jan'y. 1933</i></p> <p><b>Temples thrown open</b></p> <p>One Shri Raghunath Swami temple at Berhampur, district Ganjam, Madras.</p> <p>One Kali temple at Charmuguria, Murshidabad district, Bengal.</p> <p>One Vithalnathaji temple at Ode village, Karia district, Gujarat.</p> <p>One Shri Amreshwar Swami temple at Angalur, Gudivada, Krishna district, Madras.</p> <p>One Shiva temple ( newly constructed ) near Kingsway, New Delhi.</p> <p>Fifteen State Temples in Baroda.</p> <p>One Shiva temple at Juda, Benares district, U. P.</p> <p><b>Wells opened</b></p> <p>One well of Messrs. Santaram Anantram-Bhatia of Sultanwind gate, Amritsar, Punjab.</p> <p>Four wells at Ladpur and Kanjhawala villages, Delhi Province.</p> <p>One newly constructed well of Chaudhry Nanakram, near Kingsway, New Delhi.</p>	<p><b>Schools started</b></p> <p>Two night schools in Angul and Jajpur talukas, Orissa.</p> <p>Two night schools in Mody Street, Fort, Bombay.</p> <p>One night school at Royapettah, Madras City.</p> <p>One night school at Jhansi, U. P.</p> <p><b>General</b></p> <p>1. The Utkal Board has started a free hostel in Cuttack for ten Harijan boys receiving secondary education. Besides this, the Board has sanctioned sixteen scholarships of Rs. 3/- each p. m. to Harijan boys studying in High Schools of Angul, a most backward district of Orissa.</p> <p>A new boarding house, called 'Kaivalya Kutir', has been opened at Cuttack, Orissa, for Harijan students. The caste students are also allowed admission there. This was opened by Prof. P. K. Parija.</p> <p>2. Under the auspices of the Dayanand Dalitod-dhar Mandal, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, a " purohit " class has been started for the children of the Harijans to train them as priests to officiate at Sanskaras.</p> <p>3. A Hindu Ashram has been started at Ganda-singh-wala, a suburb of Amritsar, for the education of Harijan boys.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">( Continued on page 3 col. 2 )</p>
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Gandhi Heritage Portal

## ITS IMPLICATIONS

REV. Stanley Jones paid me a visit the other day before sailing for America. He said that in America he would be asked many questions about the campaign against untouchability and had, therefore, some questions which he wanted me to answer. I was glad of the visit and I readily answered his questions. I do not propose to reproduce the whole of our conversation and all his questions and cross-questions, but I propose to give to the readers the main questions and the substance of my answers.

His first question, then, was:—Why do you restrict the movement to the removal of untouchability only? Why not do away with the caste system altogether? If there is a difference between caste and caste, and caste and untouchability, is it not one only of degree?

Answer: Untouchability as it is practised in Hinduism to-day is, in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. In my opinion, it has no sanction whatsoever in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole. Untouchability of a healthy kind is undoubtedly to be found in the Shastras and it is universal in all religions. It is a rule of sanitation. That will exist to the end of time; but untouchability as we are observing to-day in India is a hideous thing and wears various forms in various provinces, even in districts. It has degraded both the untouchables and the touchables. It has stunted the growth of nearly 40 million human beings. They are denied even the ordinary amenities of life. The sooner, therefore, it is ended, the better for Hinduism, the better for India and, perhaps, better for mankind in general.

Not so the caste system. There are innumerable castes in India. They are a social institution. They are so many trade guilds, as was well said by the late Sir William Wilson Hunter. And at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even now doing to a certain extent. This institution has superadded to it restrictions which, in my opinion, are undesirable and are bound to go in course of time. There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to the spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between 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 out-caste 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 Varnashram Dharma. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnashram 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 Varnashram. 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 it, a condition of spiritual growth. But I may not here elaborate my view of these four famous divisions in Hinduism. Their consideration is irrelevant to the present purpose. But I may make this admission that to-day this Varnashram Dharma is not being observed in its purity. There is an utter confusion of Varna and, if Hinduism is to become a living force in the world, we have to understand its real purpose and revive it; but we cannot do so, unless the canker of untouchability is destroyed. The idea of inferiority and superiority has to be demolished. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. A life of religion is not a life of privileges but of duty. Privileges may come, as they do come to all, from a due fulfilment of duty. 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.

The second question was:—Why do you want temple entry for Harijans? Are not temples the lowest thing in Hinduism?

Answer: I do not think so for one moment. Temples are to Hindus what Churches are to Christians. In my opinion, we are all idolaters; that in Hinduism we have images of stone or metal inside temples makes to me no difference. Thousands of Hindus who visit temples in simple faith derive precisely the same spiritual benefit that Christians visiting churches in simple faith do. Deprive a Hindu of his temple, and you deprive him of the thing he generally prizes most in life. That superstition and even evil have grown round many Hindu temples is but too true. That, however, is an argument for temple reform, not for lowering their value for Harijans or any Hindu. It is my certain conviction that temples are an integral part of Hinduism.

His third question was:—Was not your fast pure coercion?

Answer: If it is agreed that my fast sprang from love, then it was coercion, only if love of parents for their children or of the latter for the former, or love of husband for wife and wife for husband, or, to take a sweeping illustration, love of Jesus for those who own Him as their all, is coercion. It is the implicit and sacred belief of millions of Christians that love of Jesus keeps them from falling and that it does against themselves. His love binds the reason and the emotion of thousands of His votaries to His love. I know that, in my childhood, love of my parents kept me from sinning, and, even after fifty years of age, love of my children and friends kept me positively from going to perdition, which I would have done most assuredly but for the definite and overwhelming influence of that love. And, if all this love could be regarded as coercion, then the love that prompted my fast and, therefore, my fast, was coercion, but it was that in no other sense. Fasting is a great institution in Hinduism, as perhaps in no other religion, and, though it has been abused by people not entitled to fast, it has, on the whole, done the greatest good to Hinduism. I believe that there is no prayer without fasting and there is no real fast without prayer. My fast was the prayer of a soul in agony.

M. K. GANDHI.

## DR. AMBEDKAR &amp; CASTE

The following has just been received from Dr. Ambedkar:—

“AT the end of our conversation on Saturday last you asked me to send a message for insertion in the first issue of your new weekly ‘Harijan’. I feel I cannot give a message. For I believe it will be a most unwarranted presumption on my part to suppose that I have sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from me with respect. I can only speak as man to man. As such it may be desirable that the Hindus should know my views on the momentous issue of Hindu Social organization with which you have chosen to occupy yourself. I am therefore sending you the accompanying statement for publication in your ‘Harijan’.”

## Statement.

“The Out-caste is a bye-product of the Caste-system. There will be outcastes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the Out-caste except the destruction of the Caste-system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of the Hindu Faith of this odious and vicious dogma.”

Damodar Hall,  
Parel, Bombay, 13,  
7th February, 1933.

B. R. AMBEDKAR.

Dr. Ambedkar is bitter. He has every reason to feel so. He has received a liberal education. He has more than the talents of the average educated Indian. Outside India he is received with honour and affection, but, in India, among Hindus, at every step he is reminded that he is one of the out-castes of Hindu society. It is nothing to his shame, for, he has done no wrong to Hindu society. His exterior is as clean as that of the cleanest and the proudest brahmin. Of his interior, the world knows as little as of that of any of us. In spite of all this, he “believes that it will be a most unwarranted presumption on his part to suppose that he has sufficient worth in the eyes of the Hindus which would make them treat any message from him with respect.” This is the caste Hindus’ shame, not his, but I would like him to feel that there are to-day thousands of caste Hindus who would listen to his message with the same respect and consideration that they would give to that of any other leader and that in their estimation there is no person high and no person low. I would like him, too, to know that ‘Harijan’ is not *my* weekly. So far as the proprietary rights are concerned, it belongs to the Servants of Untouchables Society and, therefore, I would like him to feel that it is as much his as of any other Hindu.

As to the burden of his message, the opinion he holds about the caste system is shared by many educated Hindus. I have not, however, been able to share that opinion. I do not believe the caste system, even as distinguished from Varnashram, to be an ‘odious and vicious dogma.’ It has its limitations and its defects, but there is nothing sinful about it, as there is about untouchability,

and, if it is a bye-product of the caste system it is only in the same sense that an ugly growth is of a body, or weeds of a crop. It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the out-caste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth in it, or of a crop because of the weeds. The outcaste-ness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether. It is an excess to be removed, if the whole system is not to perish. Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this ‘high-and-low’ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other. How it can be and what that Varnashram is, it is not necessary to examine here. But, such being my faith, I have always respectfully differed from those distinguished countrymen, Dr. Ambedkar among them, who have held that untouchability will not go without the destruction of Varnashramdharma. They have made no distinction between caste and Varna. But that is another story. At the present moment, it is the untouchable, the outcaste, with whom all Hindu reformers, whether they believe in Varnashram or not, have agreed to deal. The opposition to untouchability is common to both. Therefore, the present joint fight is restricted to the removal of untouchability, and I would invite Dr. Ambedkar and those who think with him to throw themselves, heart and soul, into the campaign against the monster of untouchability. It is highly likely that at the end of it we shall all find that there is nothing to fight against in Varnashram. If, however, Varnashram even then looks an ugly thing, the whole of Hindu Society will fight it. For this campaign against untouchability is not one of compulsion, but of conversion. At the end of the chapter, I hope that we shall all find ourselves in the same camp. Should it prove otherwise, it will be time enough to consider how and by whom Varnashram is to be fought.

M. K. GANDHI.

## WEEK TO WEEK

(Continued from Page 1)

4. Under the auspices of the Valmik Achhut Mandal, Jullundur, Punjab, a well attended meeting of caste Hindus and Harijans was held at Basti Sheikh with Chaudhri Daulatram, a Harijan, in the chair. Master Shadiram, a well educated Harijan, exhorted his brother Harijans to keep clean and give up drink and other bad habits.

5. Bhagat Dhanna Mal, a prominent congressman of Ferozepore, Punjab, has taken a vow to remove the evil practice of untouchability, as far as it lies in his power to do so. He will gladly respond at his own expense to any call for help from Harijans in any part of India.

(Continued on page 8 col. 1)

Gandhi Heritage Portal



# HARIJAN

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1933.

## UNTOUCHABILITY

**U**NTOUCHABILITY as at present practised is the greatest blot on Hinduism. It is (with apologies to Sanatanists) against the Shastras. It is against the fundamental principles of humanity, it is against the dictates of reason that a man should, by mere reason of birth, be for ever regarded as an untouchable, even unapproachable and unseeable. These adjectives do not convey the full meaning of the thing itself. It is a crime for certain men, women and their children to touch, or to approach within stated distances, or to be seen by those who are called caste-Hindus. The tragedy is that millions of Hindus believe in this institution as if it was enjoined by the Hindu religion.

Happily, Hindu reformers have recoiled with horror from this practice. They have come to the conclusion that it has no support in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole. Isolated texts torn from their context and considered by themselves can no doubt be produced in support of this practice, as of any evil known to mankind. But there is abundant authority in the Shastras to warrant the summary rejection, as being un-Hindu, of anything or any practice that is manifestly against the fundamental principles of humanity or morality, of *Ahimsa* or *Satya*.

This movement against untouchability has been daily gathering strength. It was in last September that leading Hindus, claiming to represent the whole of Hindu India, met together and unanimously passed a resolution, condemning untouchability and pledging themselves to abolish it by law, if possible even during the existing regime, and, failing that, when India had a Parliament of her own.

Among the marks of untouchability to be removed was the prohibition against temple entry by Harijans. In the course of the struggle, it was discovered that the British Courts in India had recognised this evil custom, so much so that certain acts done by untouchables as such came to be offences under the British Indian Penal Code. Thus, the entry by an untouchable into a Hindu temple would be punishable as a crime under the I. P. C.

Before, therefore, the movement of temple entry can make headway, it has become imperative to have this anomaly removed. It is for this purpose that Sjt. Ranga Iyer has given notice of two bills to be introduced in the Central Legislature. After ascertaining the opinion of the Provincial Governments, H. E. the Viceroy has sanctioned the introduction of these Bills. But, being private Bills, they have a poor chance of becoming the law of the land, unless the Government and the members of the Assembly refrain from obstructing its consideration. It may be argued that, being pledged to neutrality in matters of religion, the Government are bound to facilitate the passage of the first Bill at any rate, inasmuch as it merely seeks to undo the effect produced

by the decisions of British Indian Courts, and this it does by withdrawing legal recognition from untouchability.

There are practices in various religions professed by the inhabitants of this land whose breach is not regarded as criminal, though it would be regarded as very serious by the respective religious codes. Thus, beef-eating by a Hindu is an offence in the eye of the Hindu religious code, but rightly not punishable as a crime under the Indian Penal Code. Is there, then, any reason why the common law of India should punish a breach of the custom of untouchability? If there are many Hindus learned in the Hindu scriptures who find support in them for the present practice of untouchability, there are quite a number of equally learned Hindus holding the opposite view. Though this opinion of the Pundits has already appeared in the press, it is reproduced elsewhere for ready reference. Let it be noted that the signatories are all orthodox Hindus, as much lovers of their faith as are the learned men of the opposite school. On the 25th of January 1933 was held the session of the All-India Sanatan Dharma Sabha, presided over by Pundit Malaviyaji and attended by over one hundred learned men. It passed a resolution to the effect that Harijans were as much entitled to temple entry as the rest of Hindus.

If the bills are not passed, it is obvious that the central part of the reform will be hung up almost indefinitely. Neutrality in matters of religion ought not to mean religious stagnation and hindrance to reform.

With due regard to the Sanatanists, it is difficult to understand the cry of 'religion in danger.' Under neither bill will a single temple be opened against the will of the majority of temple goers in question. The second bill expressly says so. The first bill takes up a neutral attitude. It does not help a Harijan to force his way into a temple. The reformers do not seek to compel the opponents to their will. They desire, by the fairest means possible, to convert the majority or the minority, as the case may be, to their view of untouchability.

It is said that the Harijans themselves do not want temple entry and that they want only betterment of their economic and political condition. The reformer, too, wants the latter, but he believes that this betterment will be much quicker brought about, if religious equality is attained. The reformer denies that the Harijans do not want temple entry. But it may be that they are so disgusted with caste Hindus and Hindu religion itself as to want nothing from them. They may in sullen discontent choose to remain outside the religious pale. Any penance on the part of caste Hindus may be too late.

Nevertheless, the caste Hindus who recognise that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism have to atone for the sin of untouchability. Whether, therefore, Harijans desire temple entry or not, caste Hindus have to open their temples to Harijans, precisely on the same terms as the other Hindus. For a caste Hindu with any sense of honour, temple prohibition is a continuous breach of the pledge

taken at the Bombay meeting of September last. Those, who gave their word to the world and to God that they would have the temples opened for the Harijans, have to sacrifice their all, if need be, for redeeming the pledge. It may be that they did not represent the Hindu mind. They have, then, to own defeat and do the proper penance. Temple entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the untouchables and assure them that they are not outcasts before God.

M. K. GANDHI

*To the Reader*

The English edition of 'Harijan' is being published by and for the Servants of Untouchables Society at my request and, therefore, in accordance with the views I have long held regarding reform journals.

It is being published on the assumption that

1. unfortunately, the Hindi edition cannot as yet serve the South and, probably, Bengal,
2. it is necessary for the people in the different provinces to know the progress of the reform from week to week in the provinces other than their own,
3. since the movement, though essentially Hindu, has a world wide significance and seeks the sympathy, if possible, of the whole of humanity, it is necessary to keep the world acquainted with its implications and progress.

If these assumptions are correct, 'Harijan' will supply a felt want and should, therefore, become self-supporting. If it does not, it must stop publication. If it is published at a loss, it will mean so much money taken from the mouths of Harijans. An endeavour is being made to expend every pice of subscription received on behalf of the Society for the sole service of Harijans and the advance of the movement for the removal of untouchability.

You will note that no advertisements are being taken for the upkeep of the paper. It has to depend solely upon the subscriptions received.

You can send the subscription for yourself or your friends, Indian or foreign, or for institutions, such as libraries, or for poor and deserving Harijans.

Ten thousand copies are being printed for the time being. Some copies will be sent free, either by way of compliment or exchange, but the list can only be limited. It is possible for you to extend it. I would like every English-knowing Harijan student and every untouchability worker to have a free copy on a certified application. This is possible only through the active co-operation of the reader who can afford to pay more than his own subscription.

The provincial organizations should send sad pay for their own copies, of which they should send advice in time, accompanying it with cheques or money orders.

So much for the financial part of this appeal.

That part of your obligation I know you will fulfil, if you are a reformer. But the harder is the necessary consequence of your fulfilment of that part. By paying subscriptions for yourself or others,

you buy the right of, and recognise the duty of, serving the great cause in every legitimate manner possible for you. Thus, you can become an active helper in spreading the message of 'Harijan' among those who are opposing the reform. This requires special qualifications. You need to have self-restraint. The opponents are in a state of rage just now. Some of them believe that Sanatan Dharma is in danger, as it has never been before. They imagine much more than the reform means and, therefore, do not hesitate to ascribe motives to reformers. You have, by your gentleness and gentlemanliness, to disarm suspicions and enable them to understand what the reform means.

If you will diligently study 'Harijan', it will equip you for the delicate task. It will give you an epitome of the week's doings in the various parts of India in connection with the campaign against untouchability. It will also tell you what the others are doing and what the opponents are saying. It will also lay bare the weaknesses and mistakes of workers. Will you become a fellow-worker in this movement of liberating over forty million human beings from an intolerable yoke and of purifying Hinduism?

But I do not despair of even some opponents subscribing to 'Harijan.' I am an irrepressible optimist. I have no quarrel with the opponents. These pages will be written as much for them as for the reformers. If 'Harijan' stands for truth and if the reformers have patience, the opponents of today will be the reformers of to-morrow.

M. K. GANDHI.

**TO SUBSCRIBERS :**

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All those who intend to become subscribers are requested to send their subscriptions by money order or postage (not revenue) stamps. No copy will be sent by V. P. Post.

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	\$ 2/-
Single copy	Anna 1/-

Complaints about non-delivery or late delivery of the paper should be made at once and will be promptly attended to.

All business communications should be addressed as under:—

MANAGER, 'Harijan',

Aryabhushan Press,

POONA 2.

## PUNDITS' OPINION ON UNTOUCHABILITY

THREE kinds of "Untouchables" are mentioned in the Hindu Dharma Shastras:-

1. Persons classed as Untouchables by birth, i. e., progeny of the union of a Shudra with a Brahman woman.
2. Persons guilty of any of the Five heinous sins or of certain practices condemned in Hinduism.
3. Persons whilst they are in a polluted state.

There is nothing to show that any of the communities now classed as untouchables come under the first category. Therefore, the rules governing untouchability and excommunication under the first head are inapplicable to them. Assuming that any of these communities can be brought under the first head, they can be free from their untouchability and have all the privileges enjoyed in common by the four *varnas*, by clean living, initiation into the Shaiva or Vaishnava worship, and the like.

The second kind of untouchability obviously cannot attach exclusively to any class or community as a whole. It may apply to individuals in any and every community. The untouchability of the untouchables so called is not due to their fallen state under the second head; nor can they be shown to be descendants of such fallen parents. Persons guilty of heinous sins referred to under the second head become fully purified by the performance of appropriate purificatory ceremonies. The progeny of such fallen persons as have not become thus purified cannot be classed as untouchables. Some Smritikaras, who regard such progeny as untouchables, prescribe very slight purificatory ceremonial for their restoration. And persons who are guilty of practices rendering them untouchable can also be free from untouchability by giving up such practices.

The third kind of untouchability due to one's being in a polluted state obtains among all classes, whether regarded as untouchables or not. There is no warrant in the Shastras for considering tanners, bhangis and others as permanent untouchables, merely by reason of their occupation. Their untouchability is due to the external uncleanness caused by the nature of their work. All untouchability under the third head is cured by a bath and a change of clean clothes at the due time.

Thus it is necessary that rights common to the four *varnas*, e. g., of entry into temples, educational institutions, of use of public wells, ghats, tanks, rivers &c., should equally accrue to the untouchables so called; and it is wrong to deprive them of such common rights. This is provable from the texts, the fundamental principles and the spirit of the Dharma Shastras.

(Sd.) Swami Kevalanand (Narayan Shastri Marathe)

(Sd.) Laxman Shastri Joshi

(Sd.) Bhagwandas

(Sd.) Anandshanker Dhruva

(Sd.) Indiraman Sastri

(Sd.) Keshav Laxman Daftari

(Sd.) P. H. Purandara

[ Apart from these, valuable opinions have been received in support of temple entry from Mahamahopadhyaya Pramathanath Tarkabhushan, Pandit Shreedhar Shastri Pathak, Sree Krishna Tanasukh Misra, Sjt. C. V. Vaidya, and Shri Narasimhachar of Tirupati.

*Ed. Harijan.* ]

## HARIJANS WANT TEMPLE ENTRY

The Editor, "Harijan".

Sir,

ONE argument advanced by the Sanatanists for denying permission for Harijans to enter temples is that the Harijans themselves have not demanded temple entry. This is not true. The Harijans have been for a long time conducting a vigorous agitation and even Satyagraha in several places for securing the right of Temple Entry. If they are now quiet, it is because they are watching the vigorous efforts that the reformers are making to have the temples thrown open to them. Some even say that Harijans are not Hindus. The Hindu religion is not the monopoly of the Sanatanists. The Harijans have a right to call themselves Hindus. From time immemorial, they have followed Hindu customs and manners, believed in Hindu Shastras, worshipped the same gods and even copied the evil of untouchability among themselves. If several of them have lost their faith in Hinduism and gone over to other religions, it is because of the cruel treatment which they received from high caste people. If they still remain in the Hindu fold, it is not because they are satisfied with their miserable position, but because they believe that the efforts of great reformers will bear fruit some day or other and that they will get their legitimate rights.

The Harijans want temple entry for the following reasons:-

1. The Harijans will become God-fearing through religious education afforded by the bhajans, kirtans &c. of the temples, if they are thrown open to them.
2. Temples are the citadels of orthodoxy and, if we manage to get admission there, the cruel and inhuman practice of untouchability will be exterminated from our land once for all and we will be enabled to use all other public institutions, roads, wells and tanks.
3. If untouchability is completely removed through temple entry, our economic condition will be improved as we will be getting work in Hindu quarters.
4. When the Harijans come in contact with the educated and cultured people in temples and other public places, their habits will become more clean and their elevation will become easier.
5. However educated and independent some of the Harijans are at present, they have to undergo several inconveniences owing to the practice of untouchability among the Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar and myself have to pocket several insults from the caste Hindus.

207, Ghorpade,  
Poona, 2.  
6th February, 1933.

I am, yours sincerely,

P. N. RAJBHOJ

## WHY 'HARIJAN' ?

SEVERAL correspondents have asked me why I have adopted the name 'Harijan' for 'untouchables'.

Some English friends have asked me for its meaning. It is not a name of my coining. Some years ago, several 'untouchable' correspondents complained that I used the word 'asprisyā' in the pages of 'Navjivan'. 'Asprisyā' means literally untouchable. I then invited them to suggest a better name, and one of the 'untouchable' correspondents suggested the adoption of the name 'Harijan', on the strength of its having been used by the first known poet-saint of Gujarat. Though the quotation he sent me did not exactly fit the case he wanted to make out for the adoption, I thought that it was a good word. Harijan means 'a man of God.' All the religions of the world describe God preeminently as the Friend of the friendless, Help of the helpless and Protector of the weak. The rest of the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as untouchables? If, therefore, any body of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence, in the pages of 'Navjivan', since the correspondence, I have always adopted Harijan as the name signifying untouchables. And, when God chose to entrust me with their service even whilst undergoing imprisonment, I could not use any other word for describing them. I recoil with horror from that word and all it implies. Not that the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of a term which is itself one of reproach. When caste Hindus have of their own inner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily, got rid of the present day untouchability, we shall all be called Harijans, for, according to my humble opinion, caste-Hindus will then have found favour with God and may, therefore, be fitly described as His men.

M. K. GANDHI.

## SEEKING OR GIVING ?

Several friends have written to me letters asking me in substance the following question:—

“WHY is it that you, who have always sworn by non-coöperation with the Government and Legislatures, are now carrying on propaganda for the passage of untouchability bills by the present Legislatures, and are thus coöperating with both the Government and the Legislatures?” Newspaper reporters also have been plying me with the same question. I have evaded both by saying that I cannot, consistently with my obligation as a prisoner, deal with this question as fully as I would like to. But I can say this much, that there is no doctrine in the world which admits of the same kind of application under every variety of circumstance. Different circumstances evoke different applications of the same doctrine. Thus, my love for a starving man would require me to feed him. My love for my overfed child would require me to starve him, even though he may be crying for food. I am to-day non-coöperat-

ing with Sanstanist friends, but I would like my questioners to analyse my non-coöperation, and they will find that in the very act of non-coöperation I am seeking their coöperation in my campaign. Exactly in the same manner, I may non-coöperate as much as I like with Government or any institution, but I would be a very foolish man, if I did not know that I was non-coöperating in order to secure coöperation from them. Thus, I am now seeking the coöperation of the Government and the Legislature in order to further my purpose, which I hold to be very sacred and altogether good. Beyond this I may not go, for the reason I have already stated and which the reader should respect.

M. K. GANDHI.

## AN OVERDUE CIVIC REFORM

Sr. Hiralal A. Shah writes:—

“THE rules and regulations found in our Shastras regarding the routine of daily observances are evidence of the stress that has always been laid on personal cleanliness for individuals as well as in home life, and there is no doubt that great progress had been attained in these directions. But similar care has evidently not been paid to cleanliness in corporate life, with the result that street hygiene has not received the attention it deserves. In villages as well as in cities, refuse, garbage, dirt and filth are thrown anyhow and all over, and street sanitation is nobody's concern.

This neglect has affected the class of workers who have to do the street cleaning. Nobody has a thought for the worker's condition. In the course of his work, he naturally becomes dirty. He is very poorly paid and, in many, if not most, cases, he cannot obtain enough water for washing purposes. The result of all this is that, even when he returns home after work, he remains dirty and, as no one takes the trouble of coming to his help, he is content to remain in that unclean state day after day. As this has gone on generation after generation, there is a distinct class of workers kept practically out of the social pale, with little or no scope for selection of any other vocation in life and left severely alone in poverty, bad habits, and disease.

As this class exists, however, only because the other classes of society are not prepared to do the work themselves, it is but fair that society should recognise its obligation to the former by providing facilities for becoming clean after work, so as to be indistinguishable from, and to be fit for mixing with, the rest. In the first place, then, society should ensure to these workers a supply of washing water adequate to their needs near the centres of their work. Secondly, arrangements should be made for the provision, in the same localities, of places in which they can change their clean clothes for their working suits and in which they can deposit the latter and their implements of work when their work for the day is over. If this is done and the workers are thus helped to keep themselves clean, they will go on im-



proving till cleanliness becomes a matter of habit with them.

This is a much needed reform in which all classes should interest themselves; and, as the work is done for all sections of society, the burden of the reform should be borne by the Society as a whole, that is to say, by Municipalities, Local Boards and other representative bodies, and, where these do not exist or function, by the Government. That this duty towards the worker has been neglected so long is only an argument for its being taken up without further loss of time.

The expenses required for the reform can only be small and, if it was held indispensable for the well-being of society, must be found by the bodies concerned."

The suggestion made by Sjt. Shah is certainly worthy of consideration as well by municipalities and local bodies as by individuals, but particularly by the former. Corporate cleanliness can only be ensured, if there is a corporate conscience and a corporate insistence on cleanliness in public places. Untouchability has a great deal to answer for the insanitation of our streets and our latrines, whether private or public. In its inception, untouchability was a rule of sanitation, and still is in all parts of the world outside India. That is to say, an unclean person or thing is untouchable, but immediately his or its uncleanness is shed, he or it is no longer untouchable. Therefore, a person who is to attend to scavenging, whether it is a paid bhangi or an unpaid mother, ~~they~~ are unclean until they have washed themselves clean of their unclean work. If, instead of being regarded as untouchable for ever, the bhangi was treated as a brother and was given an opportunity and even made to become clean after performing an unclean service for society, he should be as acceptable as any other member of that society. Corporations can, therefore, lead the way in this matter, but they will not, unless the citizens insist. It is truly said that Corporations have no souls, that is, apart from the souls of the citizens. Whilst, therefore, commending Sjt. Shah's suggestion to all concerned, I would advise him to concentrate his energy upon one single spot and there agitate, both amongst the public and their corporation, for the much needed reform. Let him, therefore, devote every ounce of his spare energy to educating public opinion in Bombay, where he has his habitation, evolve concrete suggestions and get them accepted by the people in the different wards, and he will soon find that his labours are crowned with success.

M. K. GANDHI

### WEEK TO WEEK

(Concluded from page 3).

6. A municipal scavenger has been employed at Dohad, Gujarat, as a clerk by Mr. Manilal Durlabbji, a high caste Bania and trader in betel-nut, pan, etc.

7. It has been decided by the Harijan Shiksha Pracharak Mandal of Bombay to start an Industrial School in Bombay to teach Harijan children carpen-

try, tailoring, painting and give such other vocational training as may be possible from time to time.

8. The Secretary of the Bihar Branch of the Servants of Untouchables Society has issued a circular to parents or guardians of depressed class students, desirous of having secondary or higher education, to apply to him or to the secretaries of district committees for necessary stipends and other aid.

9. The Municipal Board of Moradabad, U. P., have issued orders to teachers of all the local municipal schools to admit Harijan boys in their schools.

10. A resolution moved by Rai Sahib B. J. Pujari in the C. P. Council, recommending to the Government the desirability of taking steps to introduce a Bill immediately for throwing open to all Hindus, including Harijans, all Hindu temples maintained by funds subscribed by the public, was carried (by 37 votes to 15).

11. The Central Provinces Public Places User Bill of 1931 introduced by Mr. G. A. Gavai in the C. P. Council passed the third reading.

12. The Harijan Sabha of Bhagalpur (Bihar) has started new schools in some places where none existed before. The schools are held mostly in the centre of Harijan colonies and it is to be noted that caste Hindus are also sending their children to these schools.

13. It was decided by the Kaira District Gujarat Anti-Untouchability League that scholarships should be given to Harijan students (amounting to Rs. 100/ every month) in order to encourage primary education.

14. The open session of the All India Sanatandharma Mahasabha, called by Pt. M. M. Mslaviya and held on the banks of the Ganges at Allahabad, has passed a resolution, on the temple entry question, that the untouchables are undisputably Sanatandharma followers and, therefore, have the right of 'Devadarshan' (worship of god) in temples and, that, wherever they do not enjoy such 'darshan', they should be allowed the same, subject to the rules which all worshippers are expected to observe. The conference, therefore, urged the managers of temples, where 'darshan' is not allowed to the untouchables, to provide the same to them without further loss of time.

15. The Harijan Seva Sangha of Amritsar, Punjab, have decided to open an Ashram for the education of untouchable boys. The Ashram will start from the 8th of February. Boarding and lodging will be free.

A. V. THAKKAR  
General Secretary,

2-2-33.

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