

THE UNTOUCHABLES' LIBERATION MOVEMENT

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REPRINT FROM
"THE ECONOMICS OF PEACE"
(J. C. KUMARAPPA 60th BIRTHDAY)
COMMEMORATION VOLUME.

II

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A

GANDHIJ'S CHALLENGE

In the whole story of mankind, no social problem was so intimately bound up with, or so vitally related to, the political life of a country as the problem of Untouchability in India, and no statesman or political leader of note had ever staked his life upon a satisfactory solution of such a social problem as Mahatma Gandhi.

When the question of the future political set up in India and the granting of Swaraj to her was being deliberated on in London by British statesmen and Indian leaders at the Round Table Conference in 1931, our leaders had to negotiate many a hurdle, one of them being the hurdle of untouchability. The leaders of the so-called Depressed Classes who attended the Round Table Conference, entered

into a pact known as the Minorities Pact, which provided for separate electorates and reservation of seats for the Depressed Classes. The Prime Minister of England welcomed the Pact. But Mahatma Gandhi, who was attending the Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress, was greatly disturbed over it, in as much as to him it meant the vivisection of the Hindu Community and he characterized the claim advanced on behalf of the untouchables by the Premier as the unkindest cut of all. He declared, addressing the Minorities Committee of the R. T. C.,: "Let this Committee and let the whole world know that to-day there is a body of Hindu reformers who feel that this is a shame not of the Untouchables, but of orthodox Hinduism, and they are, therefore, pledged to remove the blot. We do not want on our register and on our Census 'untouchables' classified as a separate class. I would rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived". Gandhiji's intense feeling on this question can be realized when he further observed, "The cause of the 'untouchables' is dear to me as life itself. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world.....Those who speak of the political rights of the 'untouchables' do not know how the Indian Society is to-day constructed" and concluded by saying that even if he was the only person to resist the thing, (meaning separate electorates and reservation of seats for 'untouchables') he would resist it with his life.

And this was no new interest that he had developed, with political strings attached to it. Questioned as to his right to speak on behalf of the Depressed Classes, during the same visit to England already referred to, he avowed the priority of his dedication to the cause of the Untouchables to any of his other devotions. "I was wedded to the work for the extinction of untouchability", he declared on that occasion, "long before I was wedded to my wife". In fact, he tells us in his autobiography that twice his relations with his wife came almost to the breaking point, over the issue of serving the untouchables; though on both occasions the crisis was averted by the wife conceding his principle of making no distinctions between man and man.

CREATIVE REVOL

He was a pioneer among C ocating
the total abolition of untouchability. Though deeply devoted to his religion, he went to the extent of saying that if he discovered that the scriptures which are known as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-gita, the Smritis, etc., clearly showed that they claimed divine authority for untouchability, nothing on earth thereafter, would hold him to Hinduism. The religious significance that he attached to this problem alone explains the fervour of his devotion to the cause and the lengths to which he was prepared to go in eradicating the evil.

When Gandhiji returned to India, he was arrested by the British Government on the 4th of January, 1932, and a ruthless rule of repression followed. From the prison Gandhiji conveyed to Sir Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, his resolve to fast unto death in case the Government stuck to their decision to create separate electorates for 'untouchables'. The British Cabinet was unyielding and on the 17th of August, 1932, the Premier announced his decision known as the Premier's Communal Award with separate electorates to the 'untouchables'. Gandhiji wrote again from prison, on the 18th of August, 1932, stating that the only way by which he could resist the Premier's Award would be by undertaking "a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda," and that he would commence his fast on the 20th of September, 1932.

The Premier wrote to Gandhiji on the 8th of September questioning Gandhiji's bonafides and intentions towards the Depressed Classes! Gandhiji in reply wrote back to the Premier stating that "without arguing let me affirm that for me the matter is one of pure religion. In the establishment of a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, I sense the injection of a poison that is calculated to destroy Hinduism and do no good whatever to the Depressed Classes."

Fortunately for the country and for Hinduism and the Depressed Classes themselves, leaders of the Depressed classes, like the late Mr. M. C. Rajah, openly condemned the policy of the Government to segregate the Depressed Classes through a system of separate

electorates and appealed to all sections to stand by Gandhiji and save his life. Leaders of public opinion, like Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, demanded the immediate release of Gandhiji and hoped that no wise Government would take any risks with the life of one who alone could make any contribution to the communal problem by mutual agreement.

At the suggestion of prominent Hindu leaders like Seth G. D. Birla, Pandit Malaviya, Dr. M. R. Jaykar and Sri Rajaji, the 20th of September was observed all over India as a day of fasting and prayer for the success of Gandhiji's mission. On that day several temples were thrown open all over India and practical service to Harijans was undertaken by caste Hindus in a spirit of humility and service. The tense suspense created by the delay in receiving a reply to Gandhiji's letter from the Premier made several leaders of light and leading in the country to interview Gandhiji in jail to know his views on separate electorates in some more detail. Gandhiji, in all his talks, insisted on heart unity and joint electorates and wanted untouchability to go once for all.

Meanwhile Shri A. V. Thakkar met Dr. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes and a signatory to the Minorities Pact at the R. T. C. The learned Doctor was prepared to agree to any alternate and reasonable proposal in spite of the Minorities Pact if one such was suggested to him. This was a silver lining to the cloud.

On the 19th of September the Hindu leaders met at Bombay under the Chairmanship of Pandit Malaviya and they all agreed that Gandhiji's life must be saved and the shame of untouchability removed from Hindu society at the earliest moment. They all signed a manifesto, at the instance of the late Mr. M. C. Rajah, pledging themselves to fight untouchability till it was completely eradicated.

The Hindu Leaders' Conference met again at Bombay on the 20th afternoon when Sir Chunilal Mehta, who had interviewed Gandhiji at Poona, told them that Gandhiji would raise no objection to the reservation of seats on the basis of joint electorates if the Hindu leaders thought that it was necessary.

While the leaders were deliberating at Bombay, Gandhiji entered on his fast at 12 noon on the 20th at Poona, inside the

Yeravada Prison. In a statement that he issued soon after, he said that the "fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity."

At the Hindu Leaders' Conference held on the same day at Bombay, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru suggested a new formula to which Dr. Ambedkar agreed. The formula was the adoption of a system of primary and secondary election for a limited number of seats. The merit claimed for this proposal was that it maintained the principle of joint electorates and enabled, at the same time, the Depressed Classes to choose their own candidates. While Dr. Ambedkar welcomed the proposal, he demanded more seats than were given to the Depressed Classes under the British Premier's Award.

The scheme was placed before Gandhiji at Poona on the 21st morning. The deputation consisted of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sri Rajaji, Dr. M. R. Jaykar, Seth G. D. Birla and Sri. Rajen Babu. After listening to the scheme, which was propounded by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Gandhiji reacted to it favourably but wanted to meet both Dr. Ambedkar and Mr. Rajah and have a talk with them before saying anything about it. Accordingly Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Solanki saw Gandhiji, Mr. M. C. Rajah not being available then; and after a great deal of heart to heart, open and frank discussion, Dr. Ambedkar agreed to the joint electorates and the primary election for all the seats.

Following this change for the better in the attitude of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers, Pandit Malaviya cabled to the Premier communicating to him the feelings in the country in favour of joint electorates with reservation of seats for Harijans. Meanwhile the Hindu leaders were busy meeting and considering all the points involved in the scheme agreed to by Dr. Ambedkar. They discussed the number of seats, the basis on which it was to be fixed, the number of candidates to be elected to the panel, representation to the Central Legislature, duration of the system of primary election, duration of reserved seats, distribution of posts, etc. Dr. Ambedkar took a leading part in the discussion and he demanded 197 seats for the Depressed Classes as against the 71 given to them under the British Premier's Award. But the demand made by Dr. Ambedkar was arbitrary. Finally the leaders agreed to allot 148 seats on the basis of the population figures of the Depressed Classes supplied to

them both by Shri A. V. Thakkar and Mr. Bakhale of the Servants of India Society to which Dr. Ambedkar assented.

Dr. Ambedkar's proposal provided a clause that the question of continuing reserved seats was to be decided by a referendum by the Depressed Classes at the end of a further period of fifteen years. Dr. Ambedkar himself admitted that the referendum proposed by him was a "Sword of Damocles", which would compel the caste Hindus to change their behaviour towards the Depressed classes. When Dr. Ambedkar met Gandhiji in jail he asked Gandhiji to bless his proposal for a referendum. There was a frank and full discussion on this subject and those interested in having fuller knowledge of the discussion may turn to the pages of "*The Epic Fast*" by Sri Pyarelal. Suffice it to say that Gandhiji was not in favour of Dr. Ambedkar's proposal for such a referendum. Gandhiji's argument against it was that Dr. Ambedkar should "not deprive Hinduism of a last chance to make a *voluntary* expiation for its sinful past". However Gandhiji agreed to a five year limit. In regard to the referendum, he finally said: "Five years or my life". This news of Gandhiji's reply to the claim and demand for a referendum by Dr. Ambedkar on behalf of the Depressed Classes spread like wild fire and the Depressed Classes leaders, much to the chagrin of Dr. Ambedkar, accepted Gandhiji's proposal for the five year limit for a referendum. Meanwhile, Sri Rajaji, who was known to be able to disentangle many a complicated knot with his keen political sagacity and statesmanship, met Dr. Ambedkar and in the course of his discussion persuaded him to agree to leave the question of the referendum to be decided by mutual adjustment in the future. When this news was conveyed to Gandhiji by Sri Rajaji, he exclaimed, "Excellent," and welcomed it. Meanwhile on the basis of the agreements reached between the Hindu leaders and the leaders of the Depressed Classes the "Yervada Pact" was formally drafted. Gandhiji cabled the agreement to Mr. Andrews, who was in London, informing him that he would break his fast if the Cabinet accepted the Yervada Pact in toto. And leaders like Sri Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr. Ambedkar, Mr. M. C. Rajah, Pandit Malaviya and others sent urgent cables to the Premier appealing to him to accept the Pact and thus enable Gandhiji to break his fast.

On the 26th of September, the British Cabinet simultaneously published a statement in England and in India accepting the Yervada Pact in full. Even after the British Cabinet had accepted the Yervada Pact, Gandhiji was in no hurry to break his fast. He wanted to study it carefully and consult again the leaders of the Depressed Classes like Dr. Ambedkar and others. Every one in Gandhiji's camp was taken aback at this attitude of Gandhiji, as the Pact embodied all that the leaders of the Depressed Classes wanted, with the full assent of the Hindu leaders. It also meant further delay, as all the leaders had gone back to Bombay. At last Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, then Vice-President of the Servants of India Society, assured Gandhiji that the Government statement contained the complete acceptance of the Yervada Pact and said "that even we, who are co-operating with you in this matter and are anxious to save your life, even we, had we been in the Government's position, could not have issued a different Communique". Fortunately enough Sri Rajaji, who was present, concurred with Pandit Kunzru and Gandhiji broke his fast on the 26th of September, at 5.15 p. m., in the Yervada prison.

Thus five days after Gandhiji entered on his fast a complete agreement was reached between the four parties, namely the Hindu leaders, the leaders of the Depressed Classes, the British Government and lastly Mahatma Gandhi. This is now historically known as the "Yervada Pact", as it was signed inside the Yervada prison in Poona.

Below is given the Yervada Pact as agreed to by the parties to it with their signatures:—

1. There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorates. Seats in the Provincial Legislatures shall be as follows:

Ma tras	30
Bombay with Sind	15
Punjab	8
Bihar & Orissa	18
Central Provinces	20
Assam	7
Bengal	30
United Provinces	20
Total	148

2. Election to these seats shall be by joint electorates subject however to the following procedure:

All members of the Depressed Classes registered in the general electoral roll of a constituency, will form an electoral college which will elect a panel of four candidates belonging to the Depressed Classes for each of such reserved seats, by the method of single vote, and four persons getting the highest number of votes in such primary election shall be the candidates for election by the general electorate.

3. Representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of joint electorates and reserved seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in Clause 2 above for their representation in Provincial Legislatures.

4. In the Central Legislature, 18 per cent of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes.

5. The system of primary election to the panel of candidates for election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, as herein before mentioned, shall come to an end after the first ten years unless terminated sooner by mutual agreement under the provision of Clause 6 below.

6. The system of representation of the Depressed Classes by reserved seats in the Provincial and Central, Legislatures, as provided for in Clause 1 and 4, shall continue until determined by mutual agreement between the communities concerned in this settlement.

7. The Franchise for the Central and Provincial Legislatures for the Depressed Classes shall be as indicated in the Lothian Committee report.

8. There shall be no disabilities attaching to anyone on the ground of his being a member of the Depressed Classes in regard to any elections to local bodies or appointment to public service.

Every endeavour shall be made to secure a fair representation to the Depressed Classes in these respects subject to such educational qualifications as may be laid down for appointment to public services.

9. In every province, out of the educational grant, an adequate sum shall be earmarked for providing educational facilities to members of the Depressed Classes.

The Pact was signed in all by forty one leaders belonging to the Hindu Community and the Depressed Classes, drawn from the different provinces with different political ideologies.

THE YERVADA PACT AND AFTER

The day following the signing of the Yervada Pact, happened to be Gandhiji's birthday that year, and it was decided to celebrate the period from the 27th of September till the 2nd of October, as the "Untouchability Abolition Week".

Hindu leaders, who had assembled at Bombay to have consultation with each other to concert measures for the removal of untouchability, met again at another conference on the 25th of September at Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, soon after they had news of the Yervada agreement.

The conference confirmed the Poona agreement and appealed to the leaders of the Hindu and the Depressed Class communities to realize the implications of the Yervada Pact and to make earnest attempts to fulfil the terms of the agreement. The conference further declared, that "No one shall henceforth be regarded as an untouchable by reason of birth and that those who have been regarded as untouchables will, hereafter, have the same rights as other Hindus in regard to the use of public wells, public roads, and other public institutions; and that the first Swaraj Parliament will provide the necessary statutory safeguards if such rights did not receive the recognition at the hands of the Government of the country before the first Swaraj Parliament came into being." The next resolution was an "exhortation to the Hindu leaders to secure by every legitimate and peaceful means the removal of all social disabilities under which the Depressed Classes were suffering and of the bar in respect of Temple Entry." Pandit Malaviya suggested the raising of a sum of Rs. 25 lakhs to carry on a campaign against untouchability all over the country.

With a view to taking concrete steps to implement the Yervada Pact, the Hindu leaders again met at Bombay on the

30th of September under the Chairmanship of Pandit Malaviya and set up the All-India Anti-Untouchability League for the purpose of carrying on propaganda against the observance of untouchability, *i. e.* for throwing open all public wells, dharmasalas, roads, schools, crematoriums, burning ghats, institutions and public temples to Harijans and for undertaking ameliorative work among Harijans. The meeting appointed Seth G. D. Birla as the President and the late Shri A. V. Thakkar as the General Secretary. The All-India Anti-Untouchability League was renamed first 'The Servants of the Untouchable Society' and finally as the 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'. This literally meant the Society for the Service of the Harijans. It was Gandhiji who gave the new name 'Harijans' to the 'Untouchables'. It meant the Children of God. Gandhiji wanted to convey the idea that the suppressed Harijans were nearer to God than all others.

The work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh required an army of volunteers and plenty of money. Gandhiji felt that both these were not forthcoming as quickly as needed. He wanted to quicken the conscience of the Hindu community and to give them a sense of urgency in regard to the whole work. He, therefore, undertook another fast early in May 1933. On the eve of this new fast, he stated, "Since September last I have been studying the correspondence and the literature, holding prolonged discussions with men and women, learned and ignorant, Harijans and Non-Harijans. The evil is far greater than even I had thought it to be. It will not be eradicated by money, external organizations and even political power for Harijans, though all these are necessary. But to be effective, they must follow or at least accompany inward wealth, inward organization and inward power, in other words, self-purification. This can only come by fasting and prayer. We may not approach God or Truth in the arrogance of strength but in the meekness of the weak and the helpless."

After the fast Gandhiji undertook an All-India tour of nine months for the Harijan cause from November 1933 to July 1934, covering provinces like Andhra Desa, Madras City, Malabar, Cochin, Travancore, Tamilnad, Orissa, Bengal, Assam, Bihar, U. P., Punjab, Rajputana, Ahmedabad, Gujerat, Kathiawar, Bombay City, Maharashtra, Hyderabad, Deccan and Karnatak. Thakkar Bapa followed

Gandhiji through the major part of his Harijan tour. The total amount collected by Gandhiji in this tour amounted to Rs. 8,61,000, which was handed over to the Harijan Sevak Sangh for carrying on their work in the different provinces of India. Thakkar Bapa, while touring with Gandhiji, organized the Provincial Boards of the Sangh; and side by side with the propaganda carried on by Gandhiji the Provincial Boards also began to take up active Harijan welfare work.

Each Provincial Board consisted of some outstanding Harijan representatives and several other Hindu leaders. Each Provincial Board drew up a careful and comprehensive programme of work itself. The work was divided generally into two parts. The first part consisted of rousing the conscience of caste Hindus against the evil of untouchability and firing them with the determination to get rid of untouchability in every shape and form. The second part consisted of intensive and extensive welfare work among Harijans in many directions. Naturally the first item was taken up by Hindu leaders belonging to the so-called higher castes in order to carry conviction to the minds of the general caste Hindu sections of the community. It was of significance that numerous Brahmin leaders and other Hindu leaders belonging to the so-called higher castes came forward in response to Gandhiji's call to take up this work against the fierce opposition of the other sections, who still wanted to cling on to caste and untouchability. At many places the reformers themselves were subjected to much persecution, but they withstood this bravely and carried the work of the liberation of the Harijans fearlessly forward. This, in turn, created courage and confidence among the masses till then considered untouchables. The result was a great awakening among the Harijans, who picked up courage to stand up against the oppressors. Harijans everywhere raised their own voice in protest and refused to submit to the old tyrants. The old oppressors and the long oppressed thus found themselves working together, shoulder to shoulder, in a movement of liberation of the oppressors' minds from an evil superstition and of the oppressed from their slavery.

Welfare work among the Harijans was naturally spread out over many items. It practically covered every aspect of

their life. The Harijans had suffered for many centuries from religious, social, economic, educational and political disabilities. It would be a long story to relate in detail the nature of these disabilities. To begin with they had to live segregated from the rest of the community. Wells, roads, schools, conveyances, eating houses and most public institutions were closed to them. They could not of course even think of going into the Hindu temples, the doors of which had remained closed to them for at least two thousand years. They were Hindus and at the same time treated as out-castes. Social disabilities took on different shapes and forms in different places. In some places they could not cover the upper parts of their bodies with any clothes. In other places they could not use metal vessels but only mud ones. In many other places the use of umbrellas, sandals or ornaments or the use of carts or cycles were taboo. The use of sugar and ghee could not be thought of in other places. Any Harijan who dared to defy any of these prohibitions would be beaten up by the caste Hindus of the locality. Harijan children could not be easily admitted in common schools and even if admitted had to sit apart from the rest of the children. Thus everywhere and at all times they were made to feel that they were despised outcastes who must live, work and die as a segregated section of the community. Their economic status was one of double-distilled slavery. Often they were bought and sold along with the land on which they worked. Wages were paid or not paid, and increased or lowered, according to the sweet will and pleasure of the higher castes who owned the land. Harijans in general were not only prevented from taking advantage of all education, but were almost completely illiterate. Political rights, they had none. In fact, they did not even know the meaning of political rights or civic rights. Welfare work among them, therefore, had to begin with elementary sanitation and then cover the whole field of health, education, civic rights, economic uplift and political training. This was a tremendous task. But the Harijan Sevak Sangh under the leadership of Gandhiji and many well-known leaders of the Indian National Congress and of other organizations, plunged into this task with revolutionary enthusiasm. Everywhere caste Hindu leaders and volunteers went among the

Harijans to undertake the above many-sided welfare work among them. One remarkable feature of the whole work was that innumerable women workers, belonging to the so-called upper castes, came forward enthusiastically to do this work. The whole process was a mental revolution in the life of the people which daily registered itself in material changes affecting every aspect of their life. In many places Harijans were the traditional scavengers. Gandhiji, therefore, made participation in scavenging work a test for his followers and so thousands of high caste leaders and volunteers plunged into this work, thus taking off with one stroke the superstition that Harijans alone should be made to do such work. As soon as a caste Hindu participated in scavenging work he no longer cared for any caste distinctions. Caste itself was thus completely shaken and doomed through the momentum generated by anti-untouchability work.

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THE HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH'S WORK

The Harijan Sevak Sangh was started on the 30th September 1932, with Shri Ghanshyam Das Birla as the President and the late Shri A. V. Thakkar of the Servants of India Society as its General Secretary. The Headquarters of the Sangh is in Kingsway in Delhi. The President and the Secretary are assisted by a Board consisting of members from the different parts of India, nominated by the President. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is something like the Trusteeship Council of the U. N. O. which, out of humanitarian considerations, takes upon itself the responsibility for the removal of all those social, political and economic injustices which are imposed upon weaker nations, colonies and communities in the world by the more powerful ones. Thus the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a trusteeship organization consisting of caste Hindus and Harijans who are in full sympathy with the programme and policy of the Sangh. No individual, either Hindu or Harijan,

can, as a matter of right, become a member of the organization by paying, as in the case of other organizations, some nominal subscription. The qualification for membership of this organization is different. A member to be nominated to the Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh should perform some definite service to the Harijan cause. He must either have a Harijan as a member of his household or employ him for domestic work or teach a Harijan or pay regular visits to Harijan quarters or render some practical service or other to Harijans. More than all, he must be one who does not countenance untouchability in any form or shape.

Thus the Harijan Sevak Sangh is a Trust and the members of the Board—Harijans and other Hindus—are not only the Trustees of the Funds of the Sangh for the social, economic, moral and political uplift of Harijans but the joint custodians and watchful guardians of the honour of the whole Hindu community.

The nature of the programmes before the Sangh, the great uphill task that it had to face to liquidate untouchability and above all the obligations that the Hindu community owed to Harijans for age-long neglect and tyranny, made Gandhi give the Sangh a constitution which has stood the test of time. Harijan work, according to it, must be taken up mainly by caste Hindus in a spirit of atonement for past sins against Harijans.

AIMS AND OBJECTS

The object of the Sangh is the abolition of untouchability, lock, stock and barrel from Hinduism by truthful and non-violent means. To achieve this ideal the Sangh must establish close contact with caste Hindus and convince them that untouchability is un-Hindu and repugnant to the fundamental principles of Hinduism and opposed to all principles of humanity, equity and justice. The Sangh must be also alive to the need for promoting the moral, social and material welfare of Harijans as well.

The Sangh is an All-India Body, with a Central Board and as many as 22 Provincial or State Branches, carrying on the work of the Sangh within their own respective regions.

The Harijan Sevak Sangh must also befriend the Harijans and remove every trace of untouchability from every walk of life, with a view to ultimately establishing universal brotherhood

among all those who belong to the Hindu and other communities as well.

GENERAL PROGRAMME

From its inception the Sangh had a clear-cut programme for a two pronged attack on the demon of untouchability, firstly to bring about a radical change in the attitude of the caste Hindus towards untouchability, through a whirlwind campaign against untouchability, and secondly to carry on intense welfare activities among Harijans for their social, moral and material advancement.

Gandhiji was a master in the art of educative publicity and propaganda. He used his pen and tongue vigorously and fearlessly in giving expression to his views on untouchability in the columns of his weekly *Harijan* and on innumerable platforms from which he addressed public meetings. In fact he was the greatest publicity agent of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He faced every opposition from the orthodox Hindus with such frankness and firmness, coupled with truth, non-violence and love that those who came to scoff remained to pray.

The Sangh itself had a well-organized programme of publicity to focus public attention against untouchability. Meetings were organized, conferences were held, and joint celebrations of Hindu festivals and ceremonies were arranged at which Harijans and Caste Hindus participated on equal terms. Processions with placards and slogans were taken out from place to place bringing to the people in villages the new message of freedom to the Harijans.

A large mass of literature, bearing on the sin of untouchability and the need for purifying Hinduism of that sin, was published in the different languages of the country and broadcast widely so as to reach every nook and corner of rural India. Provincial branches of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and private organizations surveyed the conditions of Harijans in different parts of the country and published their reports which were eye-openers to those who were till then ignorant of the detailed conditions of Harijans. These reports publicised numerous disabilities of Harijans resulting in Harijan Sevaks seeking appropriate remedies for their removal.

House to house visits were organized in Harijan localities to enquire into their conditions, and this in itself wrought such a revolution in the minds of the public that the age-long prejudice against untouchability began to crumble. The organization, of exhibitions containing literature and posters dealing with the Harijan problem, of industrial museums displaying articles made by Harijans and for marketing them, the securing of employment to Harijans and several other means were adopted by the Sangh to create public opinion in favour of the removal of untouchability.

CONSTRUCTIVE WORK

The Sangh devoted great attention to promoting the social, economic and material well-being of Harijans by securing for them, wherever possible, better housing, better environment and better sanitation and by persuading Harijans to give up drink, carrion-eating and grades of untouchability among their own sub-sections. Harijans were everywhere encouraged to stand up for their rights and to shed their fear of the oppressors.

EDUCATION

The Sangh's workers everywhere paid particular attention to the education of Harijan children, both boys and girls. They got them admitted into the public schools in the teeth of orthodox opposition and, wherever particularly needed, started separate schools for Harijan children. Hostels and Ashrams were also run where children were fed, clothed and educated free.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The Sangh was, from the very beginning, interested in higher and also vocational education for Harijans. In several important centres of India, Industrial Schools were started for the benefit of Harijans where they were given training in carpentry, agriculture, weaving, tailoring, black-smithy, rattan work, tanning, leather work, paper making and book binding etc. Many were helped to prosecute their studies in the public technological schools or polytechnics. The Sangh helped thousands of deserving Harijan young men and women to take to higher education.

RAISING THE SOCIAL STATUS OF HARIJANS

To raise the social status of Harijans, the Sangh helped Harijans to shed many of their old habits like those of

uncleanliness, drink, carrion-eating, eating others' leavings etc. Harijan Sevaks, by frequent visits to Harijan localities and by their friendly and helpful work, were able to bring about a change in their outlook and way of life.

The majority of Harijans were employed as scavengers and sweepers in Municipalities and Local Bodies and the Sevaks put pressure on these Bodies to provide their Harijan employees with suitable housing accommodation and civic and sanitary amenities. Wherever Harijans were suffering from social and civil disabilities, and were prevented from using public roads, wells, tanks, schools and public places and wherever Harijans were harassed by caste Hindus, the Sangh's workers took up their cause.

The Sevaks started Cottage Industries to give them employment and Co-operative Credit Societies for giving them loans at cheap rates of interest to rescue them from the clutches of cruel money lenders. Several Harijans were employed in domestic service with caste Hindus, and Harijan young men and women were persuaded to take to professions and trades till then prohibited to them.

The last item in the programme of the Sangh was securing Temple entry for Harijans by all non-violent and truthful means.

ACHIEVEMENTS

There is no gainsaying the fact that public opinion is now completely in favour of the removal of untouchability. As a result of the propaganda carried on by the Sangh and Gandhiji's own appeal, the saner sections among the caste Hindus have responded nobly to the call. Twenty years ago it would have been unbelievable that a Harijan could be invited to functions and festivals in caste Hindu houses and treated just like other Hindus. Caste Hindu Sevaks interdining with Harijans, washing Harijan children, dressing their sores, clothing them and playing with them, would have been unthinkable twenty years ago. It has now become a common feature.

Gandhiji understood the psychology of untouchability. He was right in thinking that Harijans were treated as untouchables because they did such jobs as scavenging, sweeping, flaying and

burying dead animals and tanning their skins. Gandhiji felt, with Ruskin, that all jobs were equally respectable and to set the example, he himself did scavenging work. Gandhiji and his followers demonstrated that a man did not fall in status because he carried the carcass of an animal or skinned and tanned its leather or because he did scavenging work. In fact every follower of Gandhiji received his first initiation in Gandhism by learning to clean latrines and sweeping Harijan quarters. Thousands joined in this work all over India. What was happening was nothing less than a mental revolution among the people of India.

EDUCATION

The Sangh paid special attention to the education of Harijan children. They faced the opposition of caste Hindus in securing admission to Harijan boys and girls into the public schools. Where no schools were in existence the Sevaks either persuaded the local authorities, like Municipalities and Local Boards, to start them or the Sangh itself started schools, day or night schools, as the case may be. One special feature of the activities of the Sangh was the starting of Ashrams for Harijan children where the teacher and the taught lived together as a family.

Apart from this, the Sangh gave numerous scholarships for the higher education of Harijan boys and girls. Thus several hundreds of boys and girls have been helped in their higher education with these funds. Among those, who have thus received help from the Sangh, are now to be found Harijan Cabinet Ministers and M. L. As in the several States, lawyers, doctors, engineers, and numerous Government officials, holding gazetted ranks.

The work of the Sangh in this direction was reinforced by the various States' Governments by a series of concessions in fees, grant of scholarships and other facilities for all Harijan children from the elementary stage to the University course. Ten per cent of seats in all schools and colleges have now been set apart for Harijan students in the Madras State, and more are being admitted as they seek admission.

To enable a Harijan to be economically independent and earn his living through a craft, facilities for training in carpentry, smithy,

weaving, rattan work, printing, book-binding, tailoring etc., were given in the special schools run by the Sangh such as the Harijan Udyog Shala at Kingsway, Delhi, the Harijan Ashram, Sabarmati, Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya, T. Nagar, Madras, Harijan Ashram, Allahabad and others, too numerous to mention.

Social status is achieved through one's own economic position, ways of life and by the cultivation of those virtues which make social contacts pleasant and congenial. Any Harijan, who is clean of body and dress, who is of pleasant speech and good manners and who has given up eating carrion, can now certainly attain a status in society which any other normal individual enjoys. He is not put to social or civil disability as before.

Harijans are heavily indebted and improvident, partly because they are addicted to drink and secondly because they borrow freely paying very heavy interest on the principal year after year. In the place of cruel money lenders, the Sevaks tried to provide Harijans with co-operative societies for credit, thrift, better living and for purchasing their daily requirements. The economic benefits of the co-operative movement are being slowly realized by the Harijans themselves everywhere.

Among the innumerable flots of untouchability, the prohibition against temple entry was the blackest. The demand for temple entry, which was made by the Ezhavas of Travancore as far back as 1919, was kept up till Gandhiji took it up seriously and appealed to Hindus to permit Harijans to enter into Hindu temples and offer worship just like other Hindus. He declared, times without number, that the test for the abolition of untouchability was the free entry for Harijans into temples. He pleaded for temple entry for Harijans by and with the consent of other Hindus. The Harijan Sevaks were also engaged in doing propaganda everywhere in favour of temple entry for Harijans. But there were several legal difficulties in the way of securing entry for Harijans into temples, and leaders of public opinion sponsored Bills in the various States' Legislatures to remove them. In the Travancore State, the Maharaja issued a proclamation on the 12th of November, 1936, abolishing untouchability and throwing open all the temples in the

State to Harijans. This was one of the greatest events in the social and religious history of India and generated tremendous enthusiasm in favour of temple entry all over the country. Next in importance was the entry of Harijans into the great and ancient Meenakshi temple in Madura. Following this, the Madras Government passed the Temple Entry Indemnity Act to protect the officers of the temple, who had not prevented Harijans from entering it, and later on Temple Entry Legislation, called the Madras Temple Entry Authorization Act, was passed. Now almost every State has passed a Social and Civil Disabilities Removal Act and a Temple Entry Act, and the age-old disabilities of Harijans have been removed by law.

The Madras State was the earliest to take keen interest in Harijan Welfare work. During the year 1949-50, the Madras Government spent 54 lakhs of rupees on Harijan education, and there were 1293 schools with 2834 teachers and nearly a lakh of Harijan children. Mid-day meals for Harijan children were supplied at a cost of Rs. 12.5 lakhs in 1949-50. Fee concessions were given to Harijans studying in schools and colleges. In 1949-50, a sum of Rs. 5.47 lakhs was spent on this head. The Universities of Madras, Annamalai and Andhra have exempted Harijan students from payment of examination fees. In addition to the 19 hostels maintained by the Madras Government, 356 hostels with 8594 students were given a subsidy of Rs. 11 lakhs. Till the end of 1949-50, as many as 49,208 house sites were assigned to Harijans at a cost of Rs. 24.2 lakhs of rupees. 8978 wells were constructed or repaired at a cost of Rs. 47.4 lakhs. Besides the Government have reserved 827,923 lakhs of acres of land for assignment to Harijans for cultivation, out of which so far 374,788 acres have been assigned and 201,649 acres have been brought under cultivation. The Harijan Welfare Department runs several types of co-operative societies for the benefit of Harijans. Harijans have been exempted from payment of fee while enrolling as advocates, and in respect of recruitment to Government Services age limit restrictions have also been relaxed in their favour. The Harijan Welfare Department has constructed in the city of Madras some tenements for Harijans and provided them with lighting and other facilities. It may be noted here that the Madras Government has provided for an expenditure

of 104 lakhs on Harijan welfare excluding an expenditure of Rs. 6 lakhs on staff in the year 1950-51.

True to the promise given by Gandhiji, the first Parliament of Free India has done away with untouchability by incorporating in the Constitution of India a clause making the observance of untouchability punishable by law. In the chapter on Fundamental Rights, clause 15 (a) states that the State as such shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. The Constitution also declares (Cl. 15. 2) that no citizen of India shall be subjected to any disability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public entertainments, or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads, and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public. Slavery and forced labour are also prohibited, and they are made offences punishable by law. The reservation of seats for Harijans, on the basis of joint electorates, has been statutorily provided in the Constitution and the manner and method of elections are also laid down. The special provisions relating to reservation of seats in the Legislatures will, however, cease to be operative after ten years from the date on which the Constitution came into force. A further important provision in the Constitution is that the welfare of Harijans all over India will be ensured by the Central Government by the appointment of a Special Officer by the President of the Union of India.

Special representation of Harijans in the Parliament and in the State Legislatures will cease to be in force after a period of ten years, and it is expected that within the next ten years the Harijans will have been pulled up to equality with the general mass of the rest of the people. This means very hard work still ahead. The various Governments and the Harijan Sevak Sangh and other similar organizations will have to do everything necessary to change the social, economic, educational, and political conditions of the Harijans effectively and speedily. It is that process which is now going on, and none dare relax the efforts being made. In fact we must finally reach the state when the Harijans will be completely

merged in the rest of the Hindu community. Thanks to the tremendous impetus which Gandhiji gave to the whole movement of liberation of the Harijans, we can look forward to such a consummation with hope and certainty.

The Harijan Movement is undoubtedly one of the most significant in the history of the modern world. In it we see the emancipation of some sixty million people achieved without violence and hate. Under Gandhiji the oppressors themselves, *i. e.* the higher castes of Hindus, came forward as the leaders of the liberation movement, willing to face up to all the sacrifices and sufferings necessary in a grim fight with their own people and against a terrific evil inside the heart of their own vast community. In any other country such a movement would have led to a violent civil war. That did not happen in India because the revolution under Gandhiji was a non-violent one. Gandhiji was able to touch the conscience of the oppressors to repentance and to active atonement. Equally, he generated courage and freedom and the strength to stand up to oppression in the minds of millions of Harijans. He brought down the mighty from their heights of arrogance and pulled up the lowly and the down-trodden to the heights of their own liberation. He was able to do this because he was at the same time a moral and a political revolutionary. Within about 25 years, Gandhiji uprooted a tradition and an evil which were at least two thousand years old and which had poisoned the whole life of the community from the very roots. Looking back upon what has happened, the student of history can only marvel at the speed and magnitude of the achievement.
