

APPENDIX—I

BRUTE FORCE WILL NOT SUSTAIN UNTOUCHABILITY

—MAHATMA GANDHI

This is the article that appeared in *Young India* regarding the Mahad *Satyagraha*.

“UNTOUCHABILITY AND UNREASON

A correspondent from Mahad writes :

It gives me much sorrow to let you know that there was riot on the 20th of March last between touchables and Untouchables at Mahad. There was held a conference of the Colaba District Depressed Classes on the 19th and 20th ultimo. The meeting was quite successful. But whilst the crowd was dispersing, Mr. A. V. Chitre of the Social Service League of Bombay told the people as they were thirsty and as the sun was very hot that they could go to the public tank and drink water. There were some who tried to dissuade the men from going to the tank. But Dr. Ambedkar, the President decided to march the men to the tank. Even the police inspector could not feel the gravity of the situation, and instead of stopping the crowd from proceeding to the tank, went with them. The tank is situated in the midst of the Brahmin locality. As however no one was aware that the Untouchables were going to the tank there was no disturbance, and hundreds of them quenched their thirst at the tank with cries of “*Hara Hara Mahadev*”. Meanwhile the touchables came to the scene and they watched the incident with rage. The crowd of Untouchables then went back to the pandal for their meals. Within an hour of this the Mahad public was suddenly awakened by the wild cry of *Gurava* and they were told that the Untouchables were thinking of entering the temple of Vireshwar.

It was a false cry; but in no time the temple was filled by an infuriated mob of touchables who had sticks in their hands. The poor Untouchables had no intention whatsoever of going to the temple. But the touchables finding no

Untouchable attempting to enter the temple practically ran amuck, went to the bazar and began to beat any Untouchable they came across in the street. All the while this beating was going on the part of the touchables, not one Untouchable offered any resistance. A few touchables who sympathized with the Untouchables tried to protect them; but the furious mob would not be checked. They even rushed into the huts of shoe-makers and such others and beat them severely. The helpless Untouchables ran wildly for help; but none was offered by the shopkeepers. The Untouchables who were in the pandal were derided by the touchables for not coming out in the open to fight. There were nearly 1,500 of the former in the pandal and if they had offered to fight there would have been a great calamity and Hinduism would have been disgraced. Dr. Ambedkar justified the advice that he had given on the strength of the resolution that was passed in the Bombay Legislative Council and on the opinion expressed by the Mahad Municipality that the Untouchables were lawfully entitled to take water from public tanks and wells.

Mahatma Gandhi expressed his views on *Satyagraha* and the problem of Untouchability in the Hindu Society, thus :

I have omitted from the correspondent's letter several passages giving further details. But the letter appears to me to be genuine and does not in any way appears to be an over-estimate. Assuming then that the incident is correctly reported there can be no question about the unprovoked lawlessness on the part of the so-called higher classes. For, it should be remembered that it was not the drinking of water at the tank which had brought together the "touchables" to the temple but the false report that the Untouchables were wanting to enter the temple. But one can hardly expect sanity to exist side by side with unreason. Untouchability itself has no reason behind it. It is an inhuman institution. It is tottering and it is sought to be supported by the so-called orthodox party by sheer brute force.

The so-called Untouchables have brought the question a step nearer solution by their exemplary self-restraint under most provoking circumstances. Had they retaliated it would have been perhaps difficult to distribute the blame. As it is, the blame is all on the side of the "touchables." Brute force will not sustain Untouchability. It will bring about a revulsion of feeling in favour of the suppressed classes. It is a sign of the times that there were at least some "touchables" who tried to defend the poor Untouchables. One could wish that there were many more in Mahad. Silent sympathy on such occasions is not of much use. Every Hindu, who considers the removal of Untouchability to be of paramount importance, should on such occasions prove his sympathy by publicly defending the suppressed classes and having his own head broken in defending the helpless and the downtrodden.

I cannot help thinking that Dr. Ambedkar was fully justified in putting to test the resolutions of the Bombay Legislative Council and the Mahad Municipality by advising the so-called Untouchables to go to the tank to quench their thirst. No incident of this character should pass by unnoticed on the part of associations like the Hindu Mahasabha interested in this reform. Let them investigate the statements made by my correspondent and if they can be substantiated, let them condemn the action of the "touchables." There is nothing like the growth of enlightened public opinion for eradicating everything evil, which Untouchability undoubtedly is."

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¹ : Young India, dated 28th April 1927.

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